



## Bettws and Hartridge High Schools

**When Newport City Council developed a strategy and plans for the redevelopment of the city's secondary schools the council was determined that the mistakes that had seen the 1960's and 1970's built schools deteriorate to such an extent that they were no longer fit for purpose would not be repeated.**

The first two schools to be replaced under the redevelopment programme, Bettws and Hartridge High Schools, were opened over thirty years ago. In order to be fit for purpose, school buildings of the 21st century must facilitate and engender improved standards for the learners who learn within them. When Estyn reports in 2001 and 2004 highlighted that shortcomings in the buildings at Bettws and Hartridge were having a detrimental effect on their ability to deliver the level of education required, Newport City Council recognised it had to act.

Repair and maintenance programmes were becoming increasingly expensive and the local authority realised that the only way to curb this regime in the long term was to create new, high quality, well designed schools that are attractive, secure, fit for purpose, accessible and help provide the basis for an inspirational culture and ethos within them.

And as part of its bid to deliver them the client team recognised it needed to focus on delivering quality as a key driver almost at the very start of the procurement phase. Other demonstration themes such as consultation between the different members of the project teams and how the final project addressed sustainability and environmental issues were equally important but the immediate focus on quality has seen these follow on as a result. The two stage tendering process under NEC Professional Services and NEC Option C Target contracts has helped deliver the quality team.

*"We have gone through a thorough procurement process," says Haydn Ames, Secondary Schools Redevelopment Client Project Manager at Newport City Council, "But what we did differently was to place an emphasis during the tender process on the quality rating. Obviously cost was still an important consideration but it was heavily weighted toward the quality side."*

The hope is that by placing the emphasis on quality and contractor input at the very beginning of the entire delivery process whole life cost options will be considered rather than the more narrow capital cost. The final running costs of both schools are an important driver and are reflected in the targets to achieve a BREEAM 'excellent' rating and go beyond the requirements



set down in Building Bulletin 101 for the natural ventilation and internal temperatures of classrooms as well as exceed the minimum requirements for energy consumption as set out by Part L of the building Regulations. These tough targets are a feature which the project team hopes will help drive down the schools carbon footprint and whole life costs.

The detailed procurement process has helped ensure the project team could achieve a cost certainty over the project of more than 80 per cent. Such a high degree of certainty meant the council could plan its future capital programme with a degree of confidence.

*"Throughout that procurement process everyone was communicating with everyone else from the end user to statutory bodies to contractors to designers. If you have that level of commitment from day one then it makes it easier to make value engineering decisions. Being able to pin down the costs so accurately gives everyone peace of mind,"* continues Haydn Ames.

But despite their best laid plans the delivery team has been hit by a number of unforeseen circumstances. The first at Bettws came just as the on-site project team, headed by main contractor Leadbitter Construction, was forced to stall the project just as enabling works began on site in February 2008. Preservation body the Twentieth Century Society tabled a bid to win listed status for the existing Bettws School building which forced a two month delay in proceedings while the

request was investigated. The application was rejected and the new school building topped out in October last year and is well on course for completion by October 2009.

Hartridge too has encountered problems. Initially intended to start on site in July 2008 it has now been delayed with a site start not expected until July 2010. Most of this delay can be blamed on the global economic downturn, but with the design completed and final cost certainty achieved in August 2008, it gained planning permission in September last year.

This delay will enable the project team to use the Bettws development as a learning curve and fine tune some design constraints and delivery issues the team may come across so that they are not repeated either at Hartridge or on any other future projects.

By ensuring that as many as 50 per cent of the sub-contractors that work on the projects are from the local area will enhance the sense of teamwork and buy-in from residents but ultimately it is the strength of the project delivery team and the communication and openness within it that is key to the overall project delivery. And it is a delivery method that Newport City Council will use on any future major projects it may have.

*"It is absolutely the way forward,"* says Mr Ames, *"the openness of communication means that everyone is kept informed of key decisions. It is easier to make value engineering decisions and we get greater cost certainty."*