

CEW AWARDS 2012

Blaenavon Community Campus – COMMUNITY BENEFITS

INTRODUCTION/OVERVIEW

Blaenavon, once a thriving hub of industrial activity in South Wales but now economically disadvantaged, was awarded World Heritage status in 2000. One of the area's most pressing needs was for an upgrade in its educational provision to help and inspire more young people to achieve good academic qualifications. Torfaen County Borough Council decided to amalgamate three existing education facilities into a new £13 million community campus, including a 450-place primary school, a 130-place nursery and integrated community facilities.

The project was delivered by the single contractor framework established in 2005 by Torfaen Council with Kier Construction. The project team was faced with a number of challenges, not least the constraints imposed by building on a World Heritage site. But most importantly, it was essential that the project fully engaged with the surrounding community to ensure that the resulting facilities met local needs and aspirations, delivered significant benefits and added real value to the local economy.

[PROCESS]

As a Torfaen single contractor framework project, Blaenavon Community Campus benefited enormously from the accumulated lessons learned from previous framework projects. The framework team was able to apply best practice solutions through established relationships formed with Kier's framework partners. This was all the more invaluable given the practical difficulties posed by sloping ground, heritage considerations and poor weather.

But what really impressed the judges was the committed, strategic approach to community involvement. Right at the start an integrated community engagement plan was created, setting up forums for discussion with stakeholders, end users, local community groups and third-sector organisations. Targets were agreed and progress was monitored monthly by both client and contractor, while regular meetings with community representatives ensured that the strategy stayed on target. Central to the plan was effective and continuous communication with the community through such means as a website, newsletters and open evenings, allowing local people to be kept informed of developments such as unscheduled works.

The strategy delivered significant social and economic benefits. Eighty-seven per cent of the total contract value was spent with Welsh-based suppliers, 61% of them in the Torfaen area. Three

apprenticeships, two work experience placements and four graduate placements were provided, and five local unemployed people were given jobs following upskilling, training and mentoring. During the course of the project 7280 hours of local employment was provided in partnership with third-sector organisations such as Communities First.

But what is most striking is the way the project team got involved in the daily life of the community, lending a hand here, donating materials there, providing time, labour and expertise where it would make a difference. Kier became sponsors of Blaenavon Rugby Football Club, providing rugby kits for the under-16 and senior teams. Graduation day at a local nursery school was enlivened by the appearance of the youngsters in miniature academic caps and gowns provided by Kier. Team members helped with local church repairs, got involved in the regeneration of Blaenavon Park, provided fencing for the village fete and donated tools to a local BTEC course.

Through actions like these the project team demonstrated genuine engagement with the community, reassuring local people that their needs and interests were paramount. Alan Jones, chairman of Blaenavon RFC, told Kier: 'The great attention to detail by your team was nothing less than superior. I also want to mention the high level of integrity exhibited by your company in all aspects of the operation.'

[RESULTS]

The finished development provides facilities whose quality and innovative design should galvanise learning for new generations of pupils, as well as benefiting the rest of the community through the integration of amenities such as a sports hall, dance studio, fitness suite and outdoor multi-use games area. For every £1 spent on the project, £1.83 was generated in the local area.

The project was completed ahead of schedule, on budget, with zero defects and no reportable accidents. It also scored in environmental terms, achieving a BREEAM Excellent rating. Torfaen council was impressed: 'This has been a first-class project from the start, well managed and community focused,' said Cllr Bob Wellington, Council Leader.

The judges agreed that the Blaenavon Community Campus development is an excellent example for other schemes to follow. Success was ascribed to the strong partnering ethos and open and honest working relationships, as well as the application of lessons learned from other framework projects. Above all, the existence of a coherent strategy to involve the community helped ensure this was truly a project with a shared vision that delivered exactly what was needed.