



Awards 2013 Case Study

Award Winner

Sustainability - Our Legacy

Leadbitter Construction

Getting to grips with all that 'sustainability' represents is not easy. Sustainability has been described as 'a dialogue of values that defies consensual definition'. In other words, it means different things to different people.



In 1987, the Brundtland Commission of the UN produced their definition of sustainable development as 'development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

But Leadbitter Construction, winners of the CEW Award for Sustainability 2013, wanted to go further. In delivering their contract at The Works in Ebbw Vale, they decided not to merely 'avoid compromising' future generations but to actively empower them.

They achieved this by taking on all three 'pillars' of sustainability – the economy, environment and society – and considering specifically what they meant for the Ebbw Vale area.

Their task was to build The Learning Zone, a further education campus for Coleg Gwent, and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community, a primary school, special educational needs school and children's centre.

They comprised one of the earliest projects within the wider scheme to regenerate the former steelworks and, as such, Leadbitter aimed to set a benchmark for the other construction projects.

Historically, this is an area that relied on mining and related manufacturing industries. When these went into decline, culminating in the closure of the steelworks in 2002, they left a legacy of high unemployment, and economic and social hardship.

The Works is being heralded as the catalyst for the reinvigoration of the valley, bringing with it investment and the opportunities for retraining and employment. The £350m joint venture between Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council and the Welsh Government aims to transform a neglected 80 hectare site into a vibrant and distinctive development, with long-term sustainable benefits for the area. To this end, all stakeholders work within a sustainable development framework. It has already won the accolade of being the first scheme in the UK to achieve exemplary rating under the BRE's GreenPrint planning tool for creating sustainable communities, with the Leadbitter projects awarded maximum points.

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Leigh Hughes

Leadbitter Business Development Director

Leadbitter concentrated on ensuring the projects maximised local employment with targeted recruitment and training (TR&T). More than 75% of staff and workforce lived in Wales and more than 5,000 new entrant and trainee weeks were facilitated across the two projects.

Local procurement was prioritised to the point of changing materials in the original design to incorporate wood and concrete panels sourced within 20 miles of the site. Subcontract expenditure within Blaenau Gwent totalled £1.65m, rising to £19.8m within a 20 mile radius and £31.19m in Wales as a whole.

In terms of their responsibilities to the community, the team helped manage the challenge of the merger of three schools and the relocation of Coleg Gwent's provision for 16-18-year olds. During the project, more than 1,800 newsletters were issued to local residents, as well as considerable interaction taking place with local schools and involvement in community events, co-ordinated by a community manager.

Environmental sustainability was tackled through extensive use of measures such as photovoltaic panels, green roof systems, passive solar shading, biomass boiler for heating backup, rainwater harvesting and use of A or A+ rated BRE Green Guide materials. Both The Learning Zone and Ebbw Fawr Learning Community were awarded an Excellent BREEAM rating.

The Leadbitter team's aim was to ensure the building design and performance improved the natural environment by enhancing biodiversity, landscape, the built environment and by producing a long term strategy to reduce the carbon footprint and energy use. They took into account the valley location, with its strong winds and wet weather conditions, and responded with a design that was simple, efficient and easy to maintain.

A collaborative, open book approach ensured that all parties worked together to achieve the project objectives. All stakeholders were engaged from concept to completion and post-occupancy use, a process facilitated by a highly effective communication strategy.

With the complexity of several construction works proceeding simultaneously, Leadbitter took a proactive approach to developing a safety culture on site, asking supply chain supervisors to wear black hard hats, to visually demonstrate their commitment to the health and safety goals of the site. These 'black hats' attended daily safety briefings from which they could pass key information to the workforce.

The company's commitment to all aspects of sustainability hugely impressed the judges, who also noted the innovation, involvement, impact and value demonstrated by Leadbitter's projects. Their conclusion was that the combined outcome is an exemplar for the wider programme, a yardstick by which the other construction projects at The Works can be measured.

Leigh Hughes, Business Development Director for Leadbitter, said: “The concept of sustainability is evolving in a very positive way. We are far more aware of the huge potential benefits to the communities in which we work, and the significant impact it can have on economic development. It has driven us to take our sustainability response to a new level within the business: it's all about the legacy you leave behind – and it's extremely rewarding.”

