

April 2019

BLUESTONE BLUES

We need to start work on a new access road to our henge project. The budget for design fees for the road divides neatly into 60% for the engineers and 40% for the environmentalists. This is a sign of the times which I am comfortable with so far as the importance given to environmental issues is concerned. Respect for the environment is now regarded as standard practice, well some of the time, and the wellbeing of the natives is becoming increasingly important. As part of paying attention to wellbeing the henge is some kind of a cultural thing I think.

We need to get on with the new road urgently. It's an addition to the original scope and is needed because we now have to haul large stones to the site and floating them by sea only gets us from coast to coast so we need at least a couple of sections of purpose-designed road as well as loading and unloading quays. Of course the completion date, sometime in the summer a few years ahead is fixed, goodness knows why. It might be something to do with an immoveable feast involving maidens.

But before we can make a start on actually doing the work there is a problem in that there are now so many people who are involved in assessing and approving what is proposed. This seems to take an inordinately long time. Before site surveys and assessments as well as method statements are started screening and scoping analyses and reports have to be submitted and approved. We also have to generate a register of our decisions that have had an impact on future wellbeing. Everything has to be set down in stone, this takes for ever and is driven by those in authority who always seem to want more and more but are reluctant to make decisions. The client needs to avoid uncertainties and challenges and his reputation is at stake so he has to go along with it. Everybody is complaining but what is one to do?

The impact of the delays is compounded of course when appropriate seasons for surveys are missed and work is then delayed by perhaps a whole year. A job can end up requiring more work in winter and less in summer. The financial and environmental impact of the delay can be enormous, and what about our own wellbeing?

Weather sensitive works can be badly affected in winter and believe me nothing is more weather sensitive than a mammoth despite his woolly coat. Winter work is more risky and fraught with problems such as soils rendered unsuitable and silt control becoming a real concern. Hauling Bluestones all the way from the western edge of the world is no fun. In the long run I suppose a road could be really useful but those in authority want us to remove all trace of it at the end of the job. You couldn't make it up.

Sometimes the will to live just escapes me.

Far too many activities are now driven by process rather than content. People tell me that some things will never change but surely we can't go on like this.

The long winters don't help but generally I think things seem to be getting warmer. I wonder what is going on.

Idris the caveman

Chief ranter and problem solver

I thought that I would provide you with a brief update on the current and future local and national policies and plans for Wales – LDP's, NDF's & SDP's.

1. Current status of Local Development Plans (LDP) and the proposed National Development Framework (NDF)

The primary role of all LDP's is to set out planning policies and proposals for a period of ten to fifteen years, in the context of Wales' national planning policies. Currently, these include the Wales Spatial Plan, but this is to be replaced by a National Development Framework in 2020, i.e. next year.

LDP key facts:

- The National Assembly for Wales has confirmed that, as at 1 September 2018, 22 out of the 25 Local Planning Authorities (LPA) had an adopted LDP. Gwynedd and Anglesey have a joint LDP.
- Currently the Swansea, Flintshire and Wrexham authorities do not have an adopted LDP in place. Significantly this has contributed to the tasks and challenges for these LPA's. In Flintshire and Wrexham we are aware that the Planning Inspectorate has increasingly allowed a number of key residential developments on appeal, citing the lack of an adopted plan. A significant factor is that local planning authorities must ensure that sufficient land is genuinely available to provide a 5-year supply of land for housing. The lack of demonstrated supply of housing land provides the evidence for the Planning Inspectorate to repeat a 'popular' planning appeal conclusion, quoted below:

The Council does not have a 5 year supply of residential land as required by PPW. Clearly the lack of a 5 year supply is a significant material consideration that weighs in favour of the proposal. TAN 1¹, states that the need to increase supply should be given considerable weight when dealing with planning applications provided that the development would otherwise comply with the development plan and national policies.

- A number of planning authorities have also undertaken a review of their adopted LDP's and are progressing towards a replacement LDP as shown in the table.

Information taken from local planning authority websites, as at January 2019.

Planning authority	LDP progress
Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council	LDP adopted November 2012. Review published in September 2017 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Brecon Beacons National Park Authority	LDP adopted December 2013. Review published in April 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Bridgend County Borough Council	LDP adopted September 2013. Review published in June 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Caerphilly County Borough Council	LDP adopted November 2010. Preparation of a replacement LDP began but was formally withdrawn in October 2016 .
Carmarthenshire County Council	LDP adopted December 2014. Review published in February 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Ceredigion County Council	LDP adopted April 2013. Review published in November 2017 and replacement LDP being prepared.
City and County of Swansea	Deposit LDP under independent examination.
City of Cardiff Council	LDP adopted January 2016.
Conwy County Borough Council	LDP adopted October 2013. Review published in April 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Denbighshire County Council	LDP adopted in June 2013. Review published in December 2017 and replacement LDP being prepared.

Flintshire County Council	LDP being prepared. Consultation on Deposit LDP was due to begin in November 2018.
Gwynedd Council	Joint LDP with Anglesey. Adopted July 2017.
Isle of Anglesey County Council	Joint LDP with Gwynedd. Adopted July 2017.
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	LDP adopted May 2011. Review published in April 2016 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Monmouthshire County Council	LDP adopted March 2014. Review published in March 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Neath Port Talbot County Borough Council	LDP adopted January 2016.
Newport City Council	LDP adopted January 2015.
Pembrokeshire Coast National Park Authority	LDP adopted September 2010. Review published in June 2016 and replacement LDP being prepared
Pembrokeshire County Council	LDP adopted February 2013. Review published in February 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Powys County Council	LDP adopted April 2018.
Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council	LDP adopted March 2011.
Snowdonia National Park Authority	LDP adopted July 2011. Review published July 2016 . Short form revision underway.
Torfaen County Borough Council	LDP adopted December 2013. Review published in April 2018 and replacement LDP being prepared.
Vale of Glamorgan Council	LDP adopted June 2017.

Wrexham County Borough Council	LDP being prepared. Adoption target date: Spring 2019.
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A LUMPY BUSINESS PART 2

The friend who I mentioned in my July 2017 newsletter when I talked about ‘Lumpy’ businesses was telling me a while back that the received wisdom in respect of managing the flow of work in any business is to outsource or purchase some services. I agree that this is the way that most businesses operate, RML included, but some businesses take things to an extreme because that is the business world that they live in. The Specialist Engineering Contractors Group reported that 85% of work on construction projects is done by sub-contractors.

As the government keeps telling us, self-employment is much more common now. One-man-bands are everywhere offering a valuable resource and specialist expertise. I see that our very special archaeologist Fiona Gale is often in the office for meetings about our highway projects. We are employing geophysical specialists for archaeological surveys on our current highway projects and Andrew tells me that he finds this aspect exciting because it reveals hidden treasures.

Consulting engineers have seen their work load change since multi-disciplined services have become the norm. In many consultancies I would think that traditionally out-sourcing might have only represented perhaps 5% of their business but offering a multidisciplinary service has changed that. The range of activities that engineers are now expected to control and be responsible for is mind boggling.

Our focus at RML was to be multi-disciplined starting from an engineering base. We have changed over the years and have focussed on those areas of work where our experience is relevant, makes business sense and is interesting. Do you remember the cartoon on the front of the New Civil Engineer many years ago when two people were discussing the fact that they had lost a bid because they were second lowest and one of them was saying "But we bid a zero fee". Not only is this a crazy approach to business but it is unprofessional and indeed dangerous. Our insurers, Griffiths and Armour commented on this only recently and I mentioned it in a March newsletter.

Business models have changed enormously. Rolls Royce now earns much more from leasing and maintaining their engines rather than making them. I certainly believe that the long term management of landscapes is more important to us than is their basic design and is in many respects more rewarding professionally too. Having a long term interest enables you to add value by monitoring the progress made towards your design objectives. To my mind that is being the complete professional.

Outsourcing is an effective management tool, there is no doubt about that but recent events in the business world have made it clear that it needs to be managed carefully. Outsourcing carries risks too when you are in a design environment rather than a manufacturing one. Too often it is one's approach that guides the design and allowing outsiders to share in this and benefit from it dilutes your own specialisation. So sub-letting part of the design work is not always good practice. I have talked before about stamp collecting or the gathering of information. Sub-letting 'stamp collecting' poses no risks to one's intellectual property so this is something that can be done without much danger.

Using one's imagination and an innovative approach to problem-solving is where value is added and these aspects of your business should be protected wherever possible.

Ivor

BATS ACCOMMODATED – AND A STITCH IN TIME PERHAPS

Last year I mentioned that a client had had to take account of a resident bat when he wanted to demolish an old timber frame garage and then replace it with a brick built one. The necessary licenses and permissions were granted so that the bat roost could be demolished. A wooden bat box was placed in a nearby tree in case the bat had to be re-housed during the demolition.

Well the work is nearly complete and I just have to show you the new accommodation that has been provided for the bat!

In both gable ends of the new garage a purpose made clay bat box that matches the brickwork has been installed. The client is delighted with the effect as well as the quality of the brickwork and I must say that I am too on both counts. The whole thing looks right and I am a firm believer of the adage that if it looks right then it is right.

Both the client and I now hope that the bat or its relatives will return. Each 'box' can accommodate bats in three separate chambers. I am guessing that each chamber will house a single bat but we will have to wait and see.

What is also significant is that if the client needs to do further work on his adjacent house at some time in the future then these boxes will provide the mitigation measures necessary for any bats that might be encountered on that occasion? A stitch in time that will save on costs and time spent in advance of doing any work.

Surveys for the presence of bats have to be done at so many locations these days and involve specialists with the appropriate experience. The time involved in acquiring all of the necessary legal permits can be significant to say nothing of the costs. So it is gratifying to be pleased with the result but it will be even better when some new tenants take up residence.

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