

March 2018

WORKING FOR NATURE

Adding a new dimension

Sir David Attenborough has said that nature only needs space to exploit, if we happen to provide some space it will do the rest. So it is up to people to create these spaces and let nature get on with things. Urban areas prove his point since many animals and plants, including naturalised exotic garden species, survive quite happily alongside us in the densest urban agglomerations.

One of our guiding principles at RML, driven partly by self-interest, is that we work with nature to improve the quality of the product that civil engineering and construction in general produces. Our focus has been on adjusting our designs, including the character of soils, drainage, species choice, as well as landscape management and aftercare to take account of a detailed assessment of the site conditions and finite natural resources. We work with and respect the nature of the site, 'Working for nature' simply adds another dimension to our thinking.

What we have created in most cases is a space which nature can occupy. What we have found is that nature will occupy any space even ones that only pioneer species can exploit. When these inhospitable conditions are ameliorated nature in all of its forms will move in relatively quickly.

What we have demonstrated is that this amelioration need not be complicated or expensive. So I am quite happy for us to talk about working for nature as well as with nature, since in our early reclamation projects which are now approaching 40 years of age, we have seen the development of diversity increase rapidly as the years have gone by.





Parc Lead Mine reclamation in the Conwy Valley was a scheme that took a devastated landscape of lead waste and tailings and created this much more natural setting which has been enriched by the invasion of native species from the surrounding woods.

The image below shows how self-sown coniferous seedlings native herbaceous woodland plants are forming new woodland on previously unseeded inert rock spoil.



An important element of our work is that we believe that we can help nature along by giving as much thought to the preparation and implementation of management programmes of surface materials, substrate and aftercare. All of which are important elements of 'Home Place'.

In an article in The Times of 30th December 2017, entitled 'The garden square can reshape our cities'' Mr Clive Aslet, a former editor of Country Life, made a plea for us to re-discover the merits in town squares. He made a plea that new developments should incorporate the garden square to enhance the quality of life of residents and visitors even in a higher urban density than can be achieved in modern housing estates and high-rise blocks. Garden squares were designed to fit in with the generous 'Golden Mean', a fundamental rule of classic proportions, which gave generous road space, wide pedestrian routes, life-enriching greenspace and comfortable, but dense housing layouts. They were also built quickly and speculatively by 18th century builders who needed to attract quick sales to recover costs. Developers please note.



In response to the proposed resurrection of the gardens square, by Mr Aslet “Hooray, at long, long last” I say. Whilst getting trees to grow to maturity alongside modern highways is fraught with problems due to the over-compaction of soil this kind of thing can be addressed by a combination of good engineering practice and an understanding of what trees actually require if they are to succeed. Blocks of space, i.e. town squares, would be one answer; separating vehicles from less heavily trafficked areas where the roots of trees and shrubs could develop unhindered and support good top growth. We have talked about ‘place’ before and it figures in all of our thinking. Turn back to ‘Habitat, home place and landscape’ put out by me in January 2016 and a few more that year on the same topic.

Kind regards

Andrew

Principal Landscape Architect
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

IT TAKES 20 YEARS TO BUILD A REPUTATION AND FIVE MINUTES TO RUIN IT.

‘It takes 20 years to build a reputation and five minutes to ruin it. If you think about that, you’ll do things differently.’ Warren Buffett

Warren Buffet is quoted in so many ways about business practices. Well he has much to say after so many years in running businesses successfully. Unquestionably he is well worth listening to. Many thousands of people attend his annual Berkshire Hathaway shareholders’ meetings, you can’t blame them when many of them have been made millionaires.

At RML we have been building a reputation of sorts for 34 years and, whatever our standing is,



we do guard it quite jealously. Incidentally we are now compliant with ISO9001:2015 which requires us to measure many aspects of the business, and how we are considered by our clients is one aspect that we will be addressing. I am pleased to say that we get several compliments every year from clients who are pleased with the services that we provide, but these are all unsolicited. In compliance with the new standard we have to measure clients' satisfaction. I find it interesting that in order to comply with the new standard we have to just ask the question. Whether we get any answers and what they are is irrelevant so far as our compliance with the standard is concerned. I do hope that we will get some responses from you.

I dare say that it may be instructive if we ask all the readers of the newsletters what they think of RML. Our purpose in writing and issuing the newsletters is to expose ourselves and we value the responses that some of you make.

Quality is something strange, difficult to define but as is the case with an elephant, immediately recognisable when you come across it. The people who prepared ISO9001:2015 considered that client satisfaction, as a component of quality, is so important that we should try to measure it.

Kind regards

Ivor

Managing Director
Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd

ACCOUNTANTS ARE THE SCOURGE OF CREATIVITY.

So says Dominic Dromgoole who was the leader of the famous Globe Company in London and he says this because he believes that accountants always look for 100 percent future proofing in ventures. This is almost as harsh as the opinion expressed by Professor Rutherford that Ivor likes to quote about most scientists being little better than stamp collectors. Dominic says that in the artistic world these people, accountants, are risk averse, lethargic and frightened and that his world needs a re-balancing of direction by committees or cabals. Is it the same in business? One can well understand that a lot of people think this way.

I have been told by a banker friend that bankers are no different from accountants.



But accountants are important because running a business involves cash and cash is king, there is no doubt about that. Better than most of us accountants deal with and understand the importance of cash in one form or another.

Ivor has a friend who is an accountant and as well as being enthused about doing things differently he keeps the organisation in which they are both involved moving forward, on the right side of the law and viable. So I am sorry that Dominic's experience of working with accountants is not so good. I suppose one needs to take care in appointing an accountant. Perhaps that is a lesson that needs to be well learnt.

In the construction industry Ivor feels that the 'bean counters' are dominant especially since he and I have witnessed the introduction of 'design and build' contracts. Today it seems that design as a part of the process of building something is a little way down the order of priorities. Water supply organisations used to be run by engineers, Taf Fechan Water Board was run by one person 'The Engineer and Chief Executive'. I guess the other utilities used to be the same, but not anymore. I have a feeling, just a feeling, that the super-sized consultancies have suffered the same fate. The engineer is now just one of a crowd of managers at a relatively subordinate level. OK, I know that I am biased, you know that I am biased, and my feeling regarding the importance of innovation is well understood. Usually innovations involve a degree of risk and this is where faith and trust come into how things are run. Try telling that to most accountants!

To prove that I am right there is of course a notable exception to what I have been going on about and that is that the Chief Executive of one of our biggest construction firms, Mr Leo Quinn of Balfour Beatty, is an engineer. He is very much in the news these days.

Dominic is of the opinion that those opposed to risk taking have begun to dominate the arts and that artists have a problem in that the industry is overstaffed in governance areas with people from the financial world. Other professions are finding this to be the case, I dare say that you can think of one or two examples

Of course in my days bean counters really did count beans, and when things got really tough they were often eaten, well the beans anyway.

Kind regards

Idris

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