

May 2017

THE DAY OF THE PAGE IS RETURNING

I commented to some friends in a committee meeting a little while ago that I felt that “The day of the page is returning”. The friends all smiled sweetly and I could sense their brains clunking along the familiar route, “What is the old f**t talking about now?” and then in The Times I read an article saying that emails are going out of favour in a big way. Some firms feel that traffic has become so intense that they are having to restrict and manage time spent by staff receiving and sending emails. I have heard that people are reverting to real books too.

At RML we have relaxed a little about the frequency of our twice-weekly newsletters because of my feelings about everyone being over loaded, perhaps you have noticed, but I am pleased to say that our ‘click’ rate is still encouraging us to keep writing. There are about 10 newsletters in the pipeline that deal with topics like Creativity, The reliability of design, How to win tenders, and Data Collection. It does seem to me that what we are saying in our newsletters is of interest to many of you. On the basis that if something is worth saying it is well worth repeating I would say that our newsletters with a particular technical slant are worth putting in front of people several times over. In this respect friends in my livery company consider that I am single minded and persistent in putting forward my ideas and I have pleaded guilty as charged. As Master I did not waste any opportunity to remind my fellow liverymen of the aims and purpose of our Company. I understood that that is what Masters of Livery Companies were supposed to do. So although I want to repeat our messages I want to introduce some freshness in how we present ourselves by way of a change of method and mode and mood.

What I have done is collected a bundle of 14 newsletters that Steve and I wrote most of in 2015. These newsletters deal with various aspects of soil and vegetation and they will be grouped, printed and bound together. I hope that something that arrives as a hard copy on good quality paper will be welcome.

I will be getting these edited, but only lightly, and then printed with the intention of issuing them as something that can go on your shelf and perhaps be picked up more frequently than you would scroll down old emails. Watch this space for news about progress.

Kind regards

Ivor

Managing Director

Richards, Moorehead & Laing Ltd.

CAN YOU RELY ON VEGETATION?

In an earlier newsletter (Jan 2016), I discussed reliability of vegetation and the significance of its reliability if vegetation is to have a prescribed role in a project. I have also indicated in newsletters that the successful development of a surface covering of vegetation demands a multidisciplinary approach at the design stage, - seeing the whole of it - as John Ruskin so succinctly put it. Remembering ‘the whole of it’ in all aspects of a design is significant too, especially when the design and construction involves several distinct disciplines.

I hope that I have made it clear in those earlier newsletters that vegetation can be relied upon to perform certain functions in certain situations. In so many cases where vegetation has failed it is the poor application of scientific knowledge through prescriptive designs that has been the cause of failure.

The important element of the thinking behind a design is that the design must be pragmatic and not prescriptive. A design brief that is prescriptive is perfectly acceptable, indeed a brief should be prescriptive, telling the design team what is the required result. However a prescriptive design is quite a different matter and can lead one into all kinds of trouble. At the design stage I would look approvingly on a design that leads seamlessly into construction and post-construction management and reminds one that basic science has not been overlooked. The design must be based on a practical appreciation of what the brief has called for. Far too often I have seen designs that are based on prescriptive ideas which have been drawn from a text book. My dissatisfaction with this quality of work is that such projects end up wasting resources and worse still they can fail to meet the requirements of the brief.

Perhaps you can remember Idris's rant in December 2014 about environmental specialists insisting that soil infected with Japanese Knotweed should be removed from a site when we said that the soil could be used under a proposed sports field. We said that removal and replacement with imported soil was a total waste of money and unsustainable since if the existing soil was used on site subsequent mowing of the pitch would exhaust any knotweed that pushed through to the surface. In addition we would avoid having to import soil which could contain unwelcome weeds anyway. We won the day but this example underlines the point that I am making. Many people forget the basic knowledge which they should apply in their daily work. In this case we were talking about plant growth as a response to plant management, what we were saying was that regular cutting would soon exhaust any knotweed that did push through to the surface. And anyway, if any did push through and was mown would that seriously affect the quality of the playing surface?



A very frequent approach that I find disappointing is the prescribed use of top soil when it is not necessary. Unnecessary not only because top soil is a valuable resource that should be used wisely but because it can make heavy demands on the management team and management costs on account of its fertility and the seed bank of unwelcome constituents. From a management and cost perspective infertile even man-made 'soil' should be preferred when the brief just calls for a vegetative cover. We know that if the fertility is controlled then the quality and character of the vegetative cover can be controlled by the judicious application of designed seed mixes, fertilisers and management. I discussed this in 'Low cost landscapes are not fake news'. Grass which requires expensive mowing and the 'wrong kind of grass' is often what one gets if this approach is ignored.

For good design one must remember and apply the whole of your science and yes if you do then you can rely on vegetation to perform as required by the brief.

Kind regards

Ivor

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