



Demolition at social housing project for London Borough of Hackney

Going Public

Tim Clifford, Managing Director of demolition firm Clifford Devlin, explains how their strategy to target the public sector has provided an alternative source of business during the slump in private property development.

For over forty years we have specialised in inner-city demolition. A typical project would involve the careful floor-by-floor dismantling of a medium-rise office block to make way for a new development comprising mixed-use commercial/retail space or luxury residential accommodation. The vast majority of these developments have been funded by private equity. However, a couple of years ago we made a strategic decision to diversify and actively seek more publicly-funded work. Our reasoning was partly driven by a desire to limit our exposure and 'spread-the-risk' but also the appeal of working in structured 'framework agreements' that characterise a lot of public-sector construction projects with greater collaboration within the supply chain.

Approaching the public-sector however, involves much more than browsing OJEU (Official Journal of the European Union), identifying projects with a demolition element and submitting our interest. The, structured and systematic tendering process involved in publicly-funded projects required us to think carefully about what

clients were expecting of us and make the necessary adjustments to our internal processes.

One of the minimum requirements of the public-sector tendering process is certification to management systems. Although our quality management system had been audited and certificated to ISO 9001 since 1994 and we had developed in-house systems for managing health and safety and our environment performance we decided to invest the time and effort to make the necessary adjustments to submit them to the rigour of audit. We successfully achieved certification to OHSAS 18001 in 2007 and ISO 14001 a year later. However, the public-sector has taken a lead in implementing sustainability into the construction process and the increasing use of environmental targets in Planning Consents meant that submitting an ISO 14001 certificate would not be sufficient to establish our environmental credentials – we had to demonstrate our ability to achieve compliance with environmental standards such as the Code for Sustainable Homes. Fortunately, our experience of working in inner-city locations, in which methods to minimise disruption to the local community are an important factor, meant we had already developed sophisticated pollution control techniques which gave us a head start.

We also had considerable experience of the cost-saving benefits of managing the waste generated by the demolition process. Our ability to prepare a Site Waste Management Plan (which has subsequently become mandatory for construction projects that exceed £300,000 in value) and demonstrate our ability to recover and recycle 85% of the demolition arisings enabled us to successfully achieve a framework agreement with ALMO Hackney Homes and make our first significant move into the social housing market.

Our first project under the agreement was to the demolition of part of the housing stock at Kings Crescent Estate in Hackney. The project was part of a major programme to renew or refurbish all of the London Borough's housing stock and had coincidentally been selected by the BRE as an exemplar in their Construction Research Efficiency (CoRE) programme. Our methods for recovering and re-using or recycling the 3,000 tonnes of waste generated on the project where therefore independently observed, verified and reported by the BRE. Demonstrating our environmental and sustainability credentials was also a key factor in gaining a formalised trading agreement with another affordable housing contractor, Wates Living Space. Our experience of gaining credits for the Code's commercial counterpart, BREEAM (Building



The ability to reuse and recycle waste is fundamental to winning public sector work

Research Establishment's Environmental Assessment Method) in previous projects has also been instrumental in gaining access to the education sector and, specifically, the company winning several bids this year for demolition work on BSF (Building Schools for the Future) projects. Unlike the Code for Sustainable Homes, BREEAM requires contractors to calculate and set targets for the CO2 emissions created as a result of site activities. This is not an exact science but we have developed and refined our methodology for determining our carbon footprint over the last three years which has helped contractors to demonstrate compliance with BREEAM targets.

Last year, we turned our attention to the infrastructure industries and looked closely at the preparatory work we would need to make to approach this sector. In order to carry out work on utilities sites we are obliged to register with "UVDB Verify", a benchmarking scheme managed by supplier evaluation company, Achilles, that approves contractors to work on sites involving the water, telecoms, gas and other energy industries. Registration involves completing a supplier pre-qualification questionnaire via Achilles online portal. Although we had experience of working in rail environments, having carried out some demolition work at London Underground stations, our first step towards a more systematic approach to this sector was to register with the rail industry standard Link-Up, which is also managed by Achilles. Like

UVDB, this initially involved submitting an online questionnaire.

However, although this gave us access to the rail supplier process proper, in order to work 'track-side' and participate fully in rail-related construction work we needed to apply for Part 2 which involves an audit of our relevant management systems. Significant time was invested to adapt our existing documentation and procedures to create a management system for rail-related work.

Following an audit by Achilles in February 2009 we received Part 2 accreditation which allowed us to start bidding for 'line-side' demolition projects. In September we started work on our first rail project involving track-side work at London Bridge – part of the Thameslink programme to widen Borough Viaduct.

Not only have these publicly-funded projects, which would have fallen outside our traditional comfort zone, have provided some compensation for the loss of private-sector work which has dried up in the last 12 months, the additional rigour and discipline which we have implemented into our systems to enable us to approach the education, housing and infrastructure sectors, has put us in a stronger position to tender for larger, more complex commercial work when the private equity market eventually recovers."

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