

'WE ARE TRYING TO GET PEOPLE TO LOOK AT FABRIC FIRST'

Changing client demands for green technology on building projects led Bicester-based Sporn Construction to establish a Building Green arm to the business, writes Tom Fitzpatrick.

Director Robin Sporn says the company has adapted to meet the demands of green construction that have changed utterly in the past few years. He says it is the latest example of the firm evolving and implementing new techniques since its establishment 50 years ago.

The firm's average contract is valued from £300,000 to £1.3 million and while it carries out work in new build, a lot of the work comes in renovation of listed buildings.

An advocate of PassivHaus principles, Mr Sporn said that while clients approach the company looking for renewable technologies such as heat pumps, his firm try to advocate a fabric-first solution.

"We promote ourselves primarily as a quality builder but if clients have green aspirations we can provide them with the right solutions. People are a lot more aware of green issues now and we are getting enquiries that we certainly weren't getting three or four years ago," he says.

"Everything we seem to be getting enquiries about involves the likes of heat pumps, but we are trying to drive and advise people to look at a fabric-first approach."

Sporn Construction employees are trained in best low-carbon construction practices and the firm's new Building Green division is already



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delivering innovative projects like timber-frame housing insulated with hempcrete.

Mr Sporn says: "We are not directly targeting green work, we don't do our own developments but we are being driven by the developments that are coming to us and try to work with the clients for the right solution."

or that they export to the grid.

Support for commercial, industry and public sector (non-residential) installations will begin about July 2011. SMEs who prepare by getting the skills and qualifications to install technologies to generate biomass heat, geothermal and ground-source heat and biogas and solar thermal below 200 kW will be able to secure work.

Feed-in tariffs give project owners a fixed income if they generate electricity and use it in their property, generate electricity and sell it back to the grid.

Warm Front is a government-

funded scheme which provides a package of insulation and heating improvements up to the value of £6,000. The scheme will start accepting applications again at a given date after 1 April 2011.

The Arbed programme, established in 2009, is designed to bring environmental, social and economic benefits to Wales. It will co-ordinate investment into the energy performance of Welsh homes and is the largest programme of its type under way in the UK.

Companies working in Scotland can find out more about grants at www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/SustainableDevelopment/funding.

Find out what clients want

How interested are clients in getting low-carbon products and services from suppliers? Research by ConstructionSkills suggests its importance is growing.

Concerns about the cost of energy is driving it. The research found that three-quarters of public sector clients have a carbon reduction strategy in action and about half think it will be business-critical within the next five years (compared with less than a fifth who think so now). Policies about supporting local economies will mean many will be assessing SMEs for their ability to deliver.

Construction companies aren't the only ones who have to comply with onerous regulation; your clients do as well. The research found that although cost was the most important reason for taking action on carbon reduction, the need to meet legislative targets is also a big issue.

Across the public sector, main contractors and corporate clients, 36 per cent regard low-carbon capabilities as essential in procurement decisions, while only 5 per cent say it doesn't influence it at all.

Use new techniques and new materials

Caledonian Building Systems business development director Ian Kemp says: "For contractors such as ourselves that recognise growing client pressure to deliver,

ACCIDENTAL AGENDA



When GML Sustainability opened its doors in 1991, being a green business might not have been its intention, but today the company focuses on sustainable technologies, writes Kara Segedin.

Specialising in renewable energy solutions, managing director Alan Proto (above) says GML began providing second-hand modular buildings because they were cheap, but soon discovered they were also environmentally friendly.

"From day one the business, almost accidentally, had a green agenda," says Mr Proto.

In 2003, the Mr Proto says the company was looking to branch out into other areas of environmental building and decided to focus on timber-frame construction.

He says at the time timber frame was largely out of fashion in the UK. "If you buy timber from sustainable sources the carbon footprint of your building is much lower than if you use traditional materials," he says.

GML then started to think more about the kinds of products it was offering its customers and felt it could go further. "We were very early into grass-roof approach and using timber-framed windows," says Mr Proto. He says the final part of the puzzle came 18 months ago when the company set up its solar PV business.

Now the fastest growing solar PV business in Kent, Mr Proto says using them to reduce energy bills is about as green as you can get. GML now offers to install solar panels free of charge for all of its customers.

"We give them the electricity that those panels produce, but we keep the feed-in tariff," he says.

The company is working towards becoming completely carbon-neutral and believes it will meet this target sometime this year.

including the Welsh Assembly's Green Jobs Strategy and the Arbed retrofitting programme.

This year management of Building Regulations passes to the Assembly and next year all social housing stock is due to meet the Welsh Housing Quality Standard. Meanwhile, Scotland introduced a raft of plans two years ago, dominated by the Climate Change (Scotland) Act.

The Renewable Heat Incentive is a government initiative to incentivise people to install equipment that means they can earn money for every kilowatt hour of heat they produce and use,