



# JOINED-UP THINKING

## DAVID T BINKS

### David T Binks explains why creative collaboration is so important to the future of the landscaping industry

As part of a recent tender bid, we were asked to explain how we could improve efficiencies on a project through 'innovation'. The prospect of a contract being awarded on merit as well as cost piqued my interest. I'm not sure whether this is major civil companies paying lip service to government initiatives, but this forward-thinking approach seems to be gaining traction. If you look at the mission statement for the HS2 scheme, it says that it is "committed to collaboration: it is a client principle that together with innovation and sustainability, it is at the heart of our way of working and contributes to a high performing team".

This idea of 'joined up thinking' is slowly permeating our industry. Perhaps the most exciting prospect is Building Information Modelling (BIM), which is like SketchUp on steroids. The transition to BIM has been glacial, despite the government issuing a mandate that by 2016 all businesses bidding for 'centrally procured projects' worth more than £5m must be BIM Level 2-ready. This directive has seen some firms embrace change quicker than others in order to be ahead of the curve or almost leading the charge, but there are many that are still dragging their heels. The upsides of working on a BIM platform are huge: it is design collaboration at its purest, with multiple users

able to simultaneously work on different elements of the same 3D model. It ensures there are no design conflicts between the various disciplines on a build, as the entire construction process has been built virtually in a 3D model. The information from the model is collated into a schema called COBie, which can then be used by project managers to control costs and build programmes, and upon project completion it also provides all necessary information for facilities management.

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This idea of collaboration seems to be cropping up increasingly, not only on £6.6bn construction schemes – where working together helps obtain greater resources, recognition and rewards when facing competition – but also within the fields of landscape design and landscaping. We recently attended a 'co-creation workshop', where the steer of the event was to create engaging public realm installations. In attendance were a whole gamut of creatives, from scientists to sculptors, landscape

architects to environmental musicians – a real cross-section of free thinkers.

Once we were given our remit, the process started a little bit like speed dating. You got five-10 minutes to chat with potential collaborators to discuss what you did and how you could work together, and then you had to move on to the next prospect. At the end of this intense process, you decided on who you'd like to 'hook up' with and then see if the feeling was mutual – a little bit like asking someone on a date, rather than 'strategically choosing a party to cooperate with in order to achieve shared or overlapping objectives'. Following this, the next 36 hours became something akin to a 'hackathon'. I'm not saying that we wrote an algorithm to create a new social networking app, but a fairly small room was buzzing with people who were full of ideas, working together to deliver something inspiring for the public to interact with and get excited by. The concept of cross-pollinating ideas was almost tangible in this instance, with people getting outside their comfort zone and their normal circle of ideators, advisers, and creatives; a greater diversity of ideas was hit upon by collaborating with a mix of creative people who we would not normally have worked with.

In a commercially driven industry, the prospect of sharing ideas with someone who you may typically regard as competition may seem counter-intuitive, but this leap of faith can be eye-opening, thought-provoking and ultimately rewarding for all parties concerned.

#### ABOUT DAVID T BINKS

David T Binks is managing director of Cheshire-based Landstruction, which was set up in 2010 and now has 30 employees. It has won Gold medals at RHS Chelsea and RHS Tatton Park. David also launched the Big Hedge Co., which supplies and installs mature hedging and topiary nationwide.

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