

# 167

Spring 2019

For everyone at Willmott Dixon's family of companies

 WILLMOTT DIXON  
SINCE 1852

**Feeling the fourth** We reach new heights in the Sunday Times' Best Companies list **P8**

**Flexing our brains** Why the future of training is digital, flexible and interactive **P14**



# THE INSIDE TRACK

INTERIORS IS TRANSFORMING LONDON LANDMARKS AND RACING TO THE TOP OF THE FIT-OUT MARKET

# 167 NEWS

## QUEEN'S AWARD MAKES IT A HAT-TRICK!

Our company has secured Britain's most prestigious business title for a record third time.

Just a year after winning one for Promoting Opportunity for our work giving back to the community, we've again been recognised with a Queen's Award for Enterprise, this time for Sustainable Development.

It's our third such accolade in five years, after we won our first Queen's Award, also for Sustainable Development, in 2014. These titles help to differentiate our company from our peers, and we join a very exclusive group of privately-owned companies with

**"This is a real honour that helps define our approach to being a responsible business and makes us unique among our peer group."**

**Rick Willmott**



turnover in excess of £1bn to have won the title three times.

The latest award follows a series of sustainable milestones that include reducing carbon emissions relative to turnover by over 40 percent since 2010. We've also led the way in waste diversion, including the reuse of unwanted timber, with over 4,000 tonnes of unused wood being segregated and collected by the Community Wood Recycling teams.



As well as being the UK's only carbon-neutral construction company since 2012, we set the benchmark last year for responsible business by ensuring all offices and sites are powered by 100 percent clean, renewable energy. Another factor that drew praise from the judges was our use of Wildlife Trusts: in return for access to their ecology services, our payments to the Trusts are reinvested in biodiversity schemes.



Group chief executive Rick Willmott, said: "This is a real honour that helps define our company's approach to being a responsible business and makes us unique among our peer group. Our purpose-beyond-profit ethos is about leaving a positive, sustainable legacy for future generations, and this latest Queen's Award is a timely reminder that we should all be proud of our individual part in doing this."

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Three people explain what a "career of a lifetime" with Willmott Dixon means to them.

## MDL PROGRAMME GETS A REVAMP

Director for organisational development and learning, Kate Jansen, is planning an exciting refresh of the Management Development Learning (MDL) programme to embrace techniques like immersive learning.

Kate says: "We've listened to lots of feedback from across the business to help shape our new MDL programme. This includes bringing in specialists and using venues that will excite, challenge our thinking, unlock potential and create a memorable learning experience."

In March, MDL3 was relaunched, designed for our experienced managers and

developing leaders, and in June we'll relaunch MDL1, which will be renamed MDL Fundamentals. The same month will also see a new MDL2, which provides a toolkit for new and developing managers.

In 2020 comes a completely new programme, MDL5, designed for our existing directors who will lead our business into the future, so they have the tools to ensure they are equipped to help continue to make our company a success.

Read more about Kate's plans for learning on page 14. If you would like to help us further improve the MDL programme with feedback, drop the team a line at [learning@willmottdixon.co.uk](mailto:learning@willmottdixon.co.uk)



**From left:** Kim Salour, Rebecca Eaton and Megan Wrighton are part of the Learning team responsible for administering our MDL programme.



#### Rockin' in Littlehampton

Our own version of the fab four celebrated completion of the Littlehampton Wave leisure centre. "This project started as a bit of a dream in 2011," says Nigel Lynn, chief executive of Arun District Council. "There wasn't a lot of life left in the leisure centre we had then. We wanted to offer something better for the community, and here we are after a lot of hard work!"

**From left:** Joe Conway, operations manager; Martin Solomon, senior planning engineer; Nigel Lynn, CEO at Arun District Council; and Ivan Horsfall-Turner, MD at Freedom Leisure



#### Pontypridd's big day

Cardiff (Wales and the West) managing director Neal Stephens shows off our new updated logo at the topping out of our Taff Vale regeneration, which will bring a thriving mixed-use development to this town in the Welsh valleys. Read on page 30 how our regeneration experts are helping to bring bright new futures to both Pontypridd and Rochdale.

# PRODUCTIVE THINKING

Meet the National Product Team: a group of innovators out to discover the best ideas from the fields of digital design, off-site manufacture and component standardisation. Committed to finding better ways to build, they're already transforming the way we work.



**O**ur industry has to fill 168,000 new roles by 2021 if we are to meet the demands placed on it, according to a recent Construction Industry Training Board forecast.

That means a larger proportion of people, especially those leaving education, choosing construction as their career – which is hard when we're competing with every other sector to attract the best talent.

So being a cutting-edge, sustainable industry that uses the latest technology is essential if we are to attract tech-savvy young people brought up in the digital age.

We also need to address construction's relative lack of productivity to meet this capacity challenge – reducing the resources required and using our time better to deliver projects without any detrimental effect on quality. That again involves embracing new technology. In this space, companies such as Legal & General and Berkeley have made significant investments in facilities capable of delivering sections of buildings off-site to reduce on-site resource.

Understanding the behaviours, technology and processes that can increase productivity and shape our future will define our ability to deliver an even better product.

## A team of innovators

The responsibility for navigating the company's way through the best technology and ideas falls to our National Product Team, led by Tim Carey.

Set up nearly 18 months ago within the Construction business, Tim's team are developing blueprints for new ways of building that embrace digital technology, component standardisation, collaborative planning and off-site manufacturing, and finding better ways to plan and control our time – all harnessing the many ideas from within the company.

## Tackling the skills drain

Tim says: "It's been estimated that for every one person that joins the construction industry, five leave. So with that kind of pressure, we need to find better ways to design, procure and build to ensure we continue to deliver a quality, defect-free end product in a timely manner with improved productivity."

The first element of delivering more with less is improving consistency. Tim's team has been capturing best practice from all LCOs, measuring these processes and rolling them out nationally.

In order to effect this change,

there are, so far, two online guidance portals. The first is The Yellow Book – Willmott Dixon's manual for efficient design. "It helps us promote true value, ensure buildability, and design out defects before they ever occur by capturing lessons learned from completed projects. By enshrining our best commercial deals it also defines the products we should specify whenever we are in control of the design," says Tim.

"Our next step has been to develop a complementary platform for workmanship and installation, Platform Two, which launches in May," he adds. "Together, these provide a suitable home for all relevant learning, which will ultimately be reflected in an improved end-quality of our projects, and the continued reduction in our cost of error."

## No more value engineering

Tim cites an example to illustrate how a standard approach to design and construction gets results.

"Take our cost of error associated with flat roofing. Previously, we faced challenges because we had numerous suppliers and products. We were often inadvertently putting the wrong product in the wrong place, or putting the right

**From left:** Tim Carey, national product director; Garry Fannon, head of digital; Christine Murray, national quality assurance manager; Chloe Barber, National Product Team administrator; Mark Elliott, national quality advisor; Scott Worthington, national planner; Stuart Gray, national planner; Diane Alexander, administrator; Iain Clark, national product design manager; Russell Lane, national quality advisor; Paul Hoskins, national planning manager; Simon Pearce, national quality advisor; Rumana Shaukat, quality delivery manager; Steve Cook, product improvement and innovation manager; Graeme Whitty, director, Quality Improvement.

## Our own Eureka! moments

The Eureka! research and development programme was set up to capture ideas from our people that take the company or supply chain forward.

With 12 ideas approved since it was launched in May 2018, the scheme is certainly doing that. Proposals that have already been "green lit" range from technology to prevent utility mains being accidentally hit by diggers on building sites, to trialling new applications for drones. There's an idea too for a kind of WD-eBay: a company web portal that will enable prelim-type items such as security turnstiles, fire extinguishers or fencing, to be tracked and reused.

Steve Cook, product improvement and innovation manager, who facilitates the programme, says: "We don't have a specific pot of money. There is no limit to what the board might fund, if it is a very good idea. The key is that ideas must be national and they must be scalable – not specific to one region."



### Making a bionic investment

One recipient of Eureka funding is a “bionic” vest that helps to prevent strain and exertion while doing repetitive tasks. Since September, drylining and M&E supply chain partners in Cardiff (Wales and The West) have been using the EksoVest. This is a lightweight upper body exoskeleton that supports weight on the arms when they are raised for periods of time. It is now touring other LCOs.

The idea to trial the EksoVest came from design manager Chris Townsend who saw it on the news on holiday in the USA. He successfully pitched for £6,000 to purchase one from Ekso Bionics in California.

Chris likes to point out that it isn't a robot – and contains no electronics. Instead it works off a spring-based assistance system that when activated will provide physical support to the arm. “It's not meant to help people to lift heavier objects – and that's something we have to be careful of. It's meant to provide assistance so at the end of a shift people feel less exerted, leading to improved wellbeing.

“We've had a great response, such as from dryliners using it to fit plasterboard to the ceiling,” he says. “They've told us their spatial awareness has had to change, and they would like the vest to be fitted with a tool belt – feedback we can pass on to Ekso Bionics.”

The vest has been rolled out to 15 Ford factories in America. Willmott Dixon is not only the first UK contractor to trial it – but the first in the world. The next step is for a distribution company to buy the vests to hire out.

**“Our desired endgame is to be able to deliver all of our products from the same library of digitally designed components, enabling us to drive efficiencies through volume.”**

**Tim Carey, national product director, National Product Team**

**Left:** Trainee Abbi Smith checks out the new EksoVest being trialled using Eureka funding. The EksoVest is a lightweight exoskeleton that supports weight on the arms.

product in and then not protecting it properly, so it got damaged after installation. Or we changed one element of a roof build-up for another without realising that, by doing so, we were invalidating our suppliers' warranties and exposing our business to risk.”

“The Yellow Book and Platform Two are about making sure we work consistently. If we have some great learning from a live site, or innovation that we've trialled, we capture it. If it relates to design, it goes in The Yellow Book, and if it's installation, it's in Platform Two.”

Tim says our strategic desire is to make value engineering redundant. “In construction, value engineering is typically carried out solely to cut costs through product replacement or specification reduction. It usually occurs late in the design process, often with unintended consequences and seldom adds any value. As a result, it is responsible for a whole host of legacy problems. We should not call cost-cutting by any other name.”

### Peer reviews

By engineering in certainty from the start using standardised products, says Tim, construction teams stand a better chance of delivering the original plans.

In a further effort to facilitate this best practice, the National Product Team has set up “The Design Board” – a group of design leads from each LCO – to act as a peer review group for material that might go into The Yellow Book, with a similar group recently established for quality.

“We want our people to help shape the journey. Through collaboration we will ensure a better end result because it has been peer-tested, and also ownership, as they take advocacy of what's recommended,” says Tim.

Innovation is also being encouraged at LCO level with a new research and development (R&D) programme, where colleagues can pitch for funding to develop an idea. The Eureka! Fund is unearthing a gamut of exciting developments, from the bionic vest to an internal eBay for used site kit (see boxes, left and previous page).

Another way in which the team is aiming to improve productivity and quality is through the adoption of more off-site manufacturing and pre-manufactured components wherever beneficial. It is in discussions with a number of suppliers, including Legal & General Modular, Eco Modular, Ilke Homes and McAvoys, with a view to agreeing an off-site supply chain framework.

Meanwhile, membership of the Manufacturing Technology Centre in Warwickshire provides the team with access to industry-leading R&D facilities, as well as the opportunity to share learning with global companies such as Boeing and Airbus. “It is opening us up to new thinking,” says Tim.

### When standard is anything but

The use of standardisation in designs by our company is not new. The launch of Sunesis in 2010 has led to over 35 schools and 20,000 new primary school places

being delivered using one of a suite of designs.

This concept has been mirrored in other sectors: Cura for community healthcare, CORE+ for leisure facilities, CODE+ for custody suites and the Concord 'kit of parts' solution for schools funded by the Department for Education.

The next focus for our National Product Team is to harmonise the components used across these ranges to deliver what is called a “platform” approach – a bit like IKEA using the same components for a suite of kitchen ranges.

“Our desired endgame is to be able to deliver all of our products from the same library of digitally designed components, enabling us to drive efficiencies through volume. In the future one of our wall panels will be the same whether it's in a CODE or a Concord project or a Sunesis school – that's the game changer,” says Tim. “Then all we do is keep our kit of parts up to date and it will cascade down throughout our projects. It's exciting times, but it's also just what most manufacturers do as common practice outside construction, so again it's not new, it's just us embracing it.”

Tim senses a real appetite for moving the industry forward: “It's a fantastic time. I know we've seen these cycles before, with modern methods of construction promoted and then, when market conditions become tougher, the industry reverting to what it's always done. The only way to achieve permanent positive change is to ensure we do the same thing time and again to get the benefits of scale and measure those benefits. I'm passionate about breaking that cycle – we have to.”

**“We want our people to help shape the journey. Through collaboration we will ensure a better end result because it has been peer-tested.”**

**Tim Carey, national product director, National Product Team**

# BUILDING PLACES, BUILDING LIVES

One year in, our Academies have already transformed over 100 young lives.



**W**hat started as an idea by Danny Corley and Steve Kitchen at an MDL4 course is quickly becoming a movement.

Our Building Lives Academy initiative was born in April last year at our New Addington project in Croydon, and it has gone on to provide more than 100 young people with basic construction skills to help them get their foot on the career ladder.

We have now opened versions in Kingston upon Thames in Surrey at our project for the university, and recently at HMP Elmley in Kent, where we equip offenders preparing for release with skills to help them find jobs. More are set to follow as customers line up to use our concept to support their local skills needs.

So what is a Building Lives Academy? Richard Pickett, head of legacy for Cobham (South London and South East), explains: “It's a construction skills

training academy to tackle social exclusion by providing entry-level qualifications, work experience and a gateway into our industry for anyone who is economically inactive. The academies are set up in partnership with local training providers, councils, customers and ourselves – so they are self-funded.” In the case of New Addington, we are working with Croydon Council and its job brokerage service, Croydon Works.

Typically an academy delivers training to 10-15 local residents every six weeks. Those who attend gain qualifications such as a Level 1 Certificate in Construction Operations, Level 1 Certificate in Health and Safety at Work, plus a CSCS card, which is required by all site workers. Newly qualified candidates are supported in work placements with us, our supply chain partners or other construction jobs advertised by the local employment service.

**Above:** Our team celebrate the opening of a second Building Lives Academy, this time in Kingston.

Michèle Chandler, senior social impact manager, explains how it works: “If the customer can provide the space, then our investment covers items like PPE and signage. All we need is classroom space suitable for 15 desks, whether that be a cabin like New Addington or a fixed space like Kingston. Then we are ready to get started!”

What next? Sarah Fraser, head of the Willmott Dixon Foundation, says: “Future iterations of Building Lives Academies don't just have to focus on construction skills. If we are building a leisure centre, wouldn't it be great if it up-skilled people to work in it? We have some really exciting options as this important initiative develops.”

# WE'RE FEELING THE FOURTH!



Our fourth-place finish in the Sunday Times' Best Companies rankings is a testament to the quality of our people.

**W**hat better way to showcase our industry to a new generation than to be named as one of best companies to work for? The annual Sunday Times 100 Best Companies to Work For list placed our company in fourth – the first time a contractor has appeared in the top 10.

This is important as a recent Construction Industry Training Board report predicted that 168,000 construction jobs will be created in the UK over the next five years. To meet this demand requires a larger proportion of young people choosing construction as their career, which is a tough task when we're

**"This was an amazing achievement for our company, a milestone in our 167 years."**

**Rick Willmott**

competing with other sectors to attract the best talent. So achieving such a high place in the Best Companies list has really put construction in the shop window.

We also stood out in the regional lists of best companies (see table), securing top 10 places in all eight areas and being crowned the best place to work in both Wales and the South West, and second-best in the Midlands and North East.

**People feedback**

The Best Companies list is based on employee feedback, and judges were impressed with our people's strong desire to build a successful career with us, their pride in

working for a company that has a "purpose beyond profit", as well as our focus on training.

This determination to contribute to strengthening society's wellbeing saw us win the Developing Potential accolade for our work in helping those from disadvantaged backgrounds to find work in the construction industry.

Rick Willmott says: "This was an amazing achievement for our company, a milestone in our 167 years. Our growth is only possible thanks to the quality of our people, and this exceptional position out of thousands of companies underlines just how special our team is."

**Above:** Teams from across the country celebrate our strong national and regional showing in the Best Companies list.

**Best companies to work for: our position by region**

Region	Place
South West	1
Wales	1
Midlands	2
North East	2
East of England	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	4
North West	6
South East	9



**On site: nhow Hotel**

**Location:** Shoreditch, London  
**Facilities:** Nine-storey building in a new Foster + Partners-designed, mixed-use development to create a 190-room hotel, including restaurant, bar, gym and meeting rooms  
**Value:** £19m  
**Customer:** nhow Hotel  
**Completion:** Summer 2019



**Above:** Interiors' Graham Shaw (left) and Noel DeBruin.  
**Left:** nhow that's what I call a team! Interiors delivering the UK's first nhow Hotel in Shoreditch. From left: Glen Smith, Michael Rock, Nick Wood, Jubinul Hye, Nellie Secan, Stewart Kelly, Connor Lambourne and Harry Cockerill.

# INNER VISIONS

Interiors' latest crop of high-profile central London projects demonstrates how the business has evolved to become a top-five contender in the fit-out market.

A survey of the financial performance of the UK's top fit-out firms by the Construction Index late last year put Interiors at number five in terms of turnover and in the top three in terms of financial results.

That's a good result, but it's not good enough for managing director Graham Shaw. "Our ambition is to be number one by reputation and in the top three in terms of size, while maintaining our financial results," he says.

Interiors is certainly a very different business today compared to five years ago. A clue is its average contract size: £10m now, compared to £4m then. "The perception in the market is that we are one of the big players now," says Noel DeBruin, Interiors'

frameworks director.

Interiors is tackling jobs that are more challenging from both a technical and programme perspective, which in turn is leading to higher-value contracts. "The opportunities we are now getting are a lot more varied and more complex," says Ian Spence, who was promoted to procurement director just over a year ago.

These varied projects often involve delivering complex refurbishments, where technically challenging structural alterations come alongside sensitive treatment of older, and sometimes heritage, buildings.

"We can do the clean stuff, but also the gritty stuff," says Graham. "That's been a key part of our growth and something

that the marketplace has been keen to embrace, as it's a differentiator from many of our competitors." Where structural works, such as infilling atria or adding lift shafts, account for up to 20 percent of the contract value, Interiors will consider a bid; above that proportion, the contracts fall under Construction's jurisdiction.

**London landmarks**

Current projects that demonstrate this capacity are: Page Hotel in St Martins Place, where Interiors is converting a five-storey office block into a 136-room boutique hotel; the London Screen Academy, which will transform a former factory into a specialist school; and the National Gallery where

the team must both create new and refurbish existing space while respecting both the art and the day-to-day activity in the building (see box, overleaf).

Alongside the tricky repurposing of existing buildings come the fast-track, high-end finishes, epitomised by Interiors' £19m fit-out of the UK's first nhow Hotel in Shoreditch. This nine-storey, 190-room hotel will have a unique interior, more art than finishes, with the aim of attracting visitors as a destination in its own right.

**Being the best**

How has Interiors transformed itself into a top-five player? And how will it move even higher up the leader board? It's all about people, says Graham.

"Our key focus has been to create the right culture for people to become their best selves," he says. "Our mantra is 'everything completed with pride' and we are trying to get people who truly believe that. We want people with a growth mindset who want to constantly improve themselves."

There have been a number of recruits to the business, including people from the wider Willmott Dixon family, such as Phil Crowther and Jo Weston. Staff turnover is low, says Graham, at just over 10 percent.

The way in which people tackle problems and the way that they communicate with customers is absolutely crucial in delivering these larger and more complex projects, says Graham. "We have

**On site: St Martins Place Hotel**

**Location:** Charing Cross, London  
**Facilities:** conversion of an existing five-storey office block into a 136-room hotel, complete with a fifth floor restaurant and additional floor for a new rooftop bar  
**Value:** £23m  
**Customer:** Best Effort Ventures



an ethos of working closely with customers to get over issues. You always have discoverables; there are always changes and delays on site due to the nature of the change, so these matters have to be dealt with in a clear but sensitive manner.

“Our people must have a mindset that allows them to have a straight conversation about technically difficult situations early, and they must be solutions-focused,” he adds.

One of the tools that has aided the preconstruction and construction teams to find ingenious solutions is 3D

modelling or BIM, says Noel. Having first started employing it around three-and-a-half years ago, Interiors ramped up its use 18 months ago and it is now considered “business as usual”.

“Our team are looking at projects in a different way now because of that,” says Noel. “The 3D model helps to inform how we can approach the project. And it also allows the customer to see the project in a different light.”

This approach helps to win bids, explains Noel. For instance, 3D modelling helped the combined preconstruction and construction team tackle issues such as clash detection and logistics at Riverside House in Southwark, which is constrained by the River Thames, Southwark Bridge and neighbouring buildings.

**Minor works, major impact**

Though it may seem counter-intuitive, Graham will be looking to his Minor Works team – which handles projects below £2m – to

help continue Interiors’ growth in both financial and reputational terms. “This is an area we are keen to grow significantly because there is immense potential in it.”

Graham wants Minor Works to maintain and nourish good relationships created by Interiors – and Construction – on small jobs so that when larger projects come up again, Willmott Dixon is at the top of clients’ minds. Minor Works could also be sent in to create new relationships with potential customers with whom Interiors would like to work on bigger jobs down the line.

“They deliver the same scope as us but have a supply chain approach that is even more agile,” says Graham of the Minor Works team, which is headed up by Jo Weston, who worked for 26 years in Homes before coming to Interiors last year. “They can mobilise quickly, work out of hours and are very customer-focused in terms of change and alterations.”

In terms of important sectors

**Above:** Best foot forward – our team at St Martins Place. From left: Bill Caufield, Terry Holliday, Steve Johnson, Kieran Legg, Ashleigh Crowley, Daryl Hardy, Phil O’Brien, Brian Wilsher, Nicholas Brayshaw and Lewis Blake. **Right:** Work at the National Gallery involves the refurbishment of Room 32 and the construction of new office spaces.

for Interiors, it is seeing success across a broad spread: commercial, education, hotels and leisure are all strong. The team would like to see more health projects in the mix and this is an area receiving renewed focus, says Noel.

Ian reports that £150m of tenders were submitted in the last four months, with £125m coming up in the next two. All told, there are some £3.2bn-worth

**Gently does it at the National Gallery**

Interiors’ work for the National Gallery combines the refurbishment of the building’s largest gallery, the ornate Room 32, and parts of its basement and ground floor, with the construction of new office spaces within two interior courtyards. Situated in London’s busy Trafalgar Square, the project is both a fantastic opportunity to raise Interiors’ profile and a potential logistics challenge: more than 5.5m visitors come to the gallery each year and will continue to do so during the work.

All central London projects require detailed planning and booking systems to enable deliveries to arrive exactly when needed, explains operations director Jason Wellard (pictured right). “Our people are particularly focused on it. They know it’s really important for their projects.”

The National Gallery has just one entrance for the delivery of materials, and that will be shared with the gallery and the National Portrait Gallery next door. At certain times, this entrance will be out-of-bounds for Interiors.

“We can’t interrupt their daily business,” says Jason. The other important element of the works is that the priceless – and hence uninsurable – artworks must not suffer due to the project. “We have been speaking with the curators and art scientists to understand how important it is to control the environment for these paintings,” says Jason. “We cannot do anything that will be detrimental to them.”

Interiors and its – mostly Category A – supply chain have



had to carefully plan methods of demolition and construction. For instance, demolition of a ground-floor slab where the courtyards will be infilled will involve diamond cutting, and the piles to support the new five-storey structures will be bored rather than driven. Extremely sensitive vibration monitoring will alert Interiors well before maximum levels are approached.

Equally sensitive is the refurbishment of Room 32 itself, requiring specialist attention, such as the restoration of gold leaf on the ceiling’s cornices. The decoration was part of architect Edward Barry’s original interior for Room 32, which opened in 1876. It has been altered over the years, but the plan is to restore it to its former splendour.

The project will also create the spectacle of a large mobile crane in Trafalgar Square, to lift steel work and concrete slabs into the courtyards. “That will be really carefully planned,” says Jason, who is working closely with Westminster City Council to consider every angle.



**“Our customers need a higher degree of certainty now before they start on site. We are looking to give that early certainty as much as we can.”**

**Ian Spence, procurement director, Interiors**



**Meet the team, from left:**

Janette Welton-Pai, group funding and learning manager; Natasha Shaw, training facilitator; Judith Wright, learning knowledge manager; Kate Jansen, director for organisational development & learning; Kim Salour, learning coordinator; Fiona Doran-Smith, training facilitator; Helen Greening, learning manager; Megan Wroughton, learning administrator; Clare Francis, head of recruitment and learning operations; and Rebecca Eaton, senior learning coordinator.

**Fresh thinking**

The team's focus has been twofold. First, looking at current methods of training to see what could be modernised in order to ensure content is up-to-date, aligned to current and future needs. This is about making learning even more inspiring and exciting.

Kate says: "Our ethos to promote from within is a reason people choose to develop long careers with us. At the same time, we have to provide 'fit for purpose' learning that empowers people to thrive. I think previously we'd maintained learning that had stayed the same for a few years. Well, that's all changing."

It's changing because the company is adding a cutting-edge digital learning environment, currently in the pilot stage, to its learning repertoire. This is based on the concept of immersive learning, where colleagues are "immersed" in online material that is highly interactive and personalised to them.

"We have challenged ourselves to create the training that's going to have the most impact. Bringing in immersive learning helps do that by allowing our people to benefit from techniques that support their work routine," says Kate.

**Agile learning**

Adding a digital platform gives greater scope to enjoy learning in a self-paced, self-guided and – crucially – independent manner. The platform gives access to curated materials, from book recommendations to the latest literature and videos that support the training module itself. A mobile app will allow our people to access these materials whenever and wherever they like – perfect for agile working. "We're creating a rich learning environment," adds Kate.

It is also, she adds, great value. Delivering training is a significant investment, not just in terms of the teaching but also venue hire and taking people away from

# THE TRAIN GANG

Equipping our people with the skills to succeed is part of the company's DNA. Now we are enhancing our training offer with cutting-edge digital tools.

**W**e spend over £2.5m a year on learning and it is central to our "career of a lifetime" ethos, allowing people to feel they can grow, develop and achieve all of their ambitions for a successful career with us. So standing still is not an option with training.

167 met Kate Jansen, who heads our Learning team, to hear about some exciting plans for the future. Since becoming director for organisational development & learning in March 2018, Kate has been casting an eye over the way learning is delivered across our business.

And the feedback? Be more flexible.

Kate, who is part of Rick Lee's people team, explains: "People have a hunger to learn in our business and to do so in a variety of ways that embrace new techniques and technology. So we are going to supplement traditional vehicles with new ways like immersive learning that connect with lifestyles and work commitments.

"We needed to refresh things – to think about what the business and our people need now. And that means new content and processes fit for our needs in a digital age."

**"We needed to refresh things – to think about what the business and our people need now. And that means new content and processes fit for our needs in a digital age."**

**Kate Jansen, director for organisational development & learning**



**Left:** Kate Jansen: "We want our people to call our team and say they want this or that type of learning, and we provide it."

**'It is much more relatable'**

**Alpana Popat, finance manager**

"I recently did the Coaching for Empowerment course and I found it really useful. It was a different way of teaching. Things have shifted away from traditional methods. On the courses I have done before it felt like being talked at, with a few slides to go with it. This one was memorable because of the way it was delivered: interacting with an external actor, and the roleplays we did. It is much more relatable, and it worked for me."

**Rob Clasby, head of design, Cobham (South London and South East)**

"We are the first cohort to do the new MDL3. A lot of people want flexibility in their working hours; as an industry we need to adjust to that. So the MDL3 has been geared to that. I've done two days so far; it has been varied, and I think it was well-considered, and well put-together. It feels like the business is really investing in it. The immersive learning aspect hasn't been part of it yet, but our cohort will get to use the new online portal where we can interact with each other, so if we see an interesting article for example we could share that, or share our views on the training and help each other along. That portal will give us an opportunity to be invested in each other's learning."

their jobs. This blended approach supplements training and deepens the learning using resources we can share at no extra cost.

These changes are afoot already. The learning team has just launched a new MDL3 senior management programme geared around these new priorities and ways of working – and feedback has been positive (see box, above).

**Delivering value**

There is more in the pipeline, with a focus on far more in-house, rather than external, training. "We want our people to call our team and say they want this or that type of learning, and we provide it. We are also geared to provide in-house coaching from one of three accredited professional coaches, delivering bespoke management training, as well as facilitated events with senior leadership teams and a number of team building and management development activities in venues such as the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, as well as a resilience-building

outdoor programme deep in the New Forest."

In addition, Kate's team is keen to provide training to our suppliers, recently developing a site management programme, which is underpinned by values and technical expertise from within the business.

Another focus is ensuring that the company is future-proofing the business with the right skills to address the changes in digital construction. This is about equipping colleagues with the skills for now and tomorrow, which are evolving so quickly. The workplace of tomorrow will be agile, flexible and fluid thanks to technological advances. Kate's strategy for learning is to embrace this change now rather than adapt to it afterwards.

**Rethinking apprenticeships**

The Learning team is also focusing on another area they feel is ripe for improvement. "We are underutilising the grants and learning funds available – we are not seizing the opportunities out there," says Kate.

A new addition to the team, funding and projects manager Janette Welton-Pai, brings to bear 20 years of experience working in construction and 11 at the Construction Industry Training Board on maximising the opportunities available in terms of funding from the CITB and for apprenticeships.

Part of the challenge, Kate says, is to challenge traditional perceptions about what an apprenticeship should involve. "People think apprenticeships

are just about a youngster going into a trade," she says. "But that has changed. Today you can go all the way to obtaining a Masters through the apprenticeship route, paid for by the apprenticeship levy. There are opportunities we are not taking for our people, and to have someone with Janette's knowledge is invaluable to us."

Along with the new digital platform and fresh approach to training delivery, this focus on apprenticeships is part of a holistic quest to build a suite of training programmes and learning opportunities that help make our people the very best.

Want to arrange some training? Call Kim Salour, Megan Wrighton or Rebecca Eaton at our Spirella 2 office.

**"People think apprenticeships are just about a youngster going into a trade. But that has changed. Today you can go all the way to obtaining a Masters through the apprenticeship route, paid for by the apprenticeship levy. There are opportunities we are not taking for our people."**

**Kate Jansen, director for organisational development & learning**

# GOING FOR GOLD

Fifteen construction managers from a wide range of projects are in the running for top awards.

This year's Construction Manager of the Year awards has another fine list of contenders from all our LCOs vying to be crowned best in their field (see box).

These awards, which are run by the Chartered Institute of Building, are unique in that they recognise an individual's performance leading a project rather than a team's effort. For our people, it is hard to say "I" when we naturally talk about "we", meaning our team, but judges are looking to find the standout personal performances.

It is a tough judging process, with a detailed submission followed by a site tour and a one-hour interview in the summer. Candidates then find out if they have made the cut for the awards night in September.

Gold medal winners have certainly earned their accolade, as Sean McNicholas, who won last year for leading a huge revamp at Darlington Hippodrome theatre, explains: "It is a rigorous but fair process, as judges seek to get under the skin of your management qualities. The feeling when they announce your name as a winner is immense – a career highlight for me. As someone who has grown my career here, it highlights what I can achieve at Willmott Dixon."

What they underline is the

**"It is a rigorous but fair process, as judges seek to get under the skin of your management qualities. The feeling when they announce your name as a winner is immense."**

**Sean McNicholas, 2018 gold medal winner**



**Above:** Anthony Dowling looks up at his Alexandra Palace project. In September the industry will be looking up at him at the Construction Manager awards.

rich variety of our projects, and the high-calibre people we have to deliver them. This is a key reason why so much of our work is repeat business – customers want our people to deliver their capital projects.

LCO	Nominee	Project
Farnborough (South Central)	Ollie Caunt	Village Hotel, Bristol
Interiors	Phil O' Brien Rob Brown	Twickenham East Stand refurbishment, London Imperial College Library, London
Cardiff (Wales and the West)	Gareth Williams Rhodri Bowen	Aurora, Bristol Withybush, Pembrokeshire
Birmingham (Midlands)	Nick Preedy	University of Warwick Sports Hub
Cobham (South London and South East)	Andrew Pritchard Luke Page	Woodmansterne School, London Gatwick Nexus, Surrey
Hitchin (North London and the East)	Jon Allworth Tony Dowling	St Albans Museum and Gallery Alexandra Palace refurbishment, London
Manchester (North)	Martin Middleton Mark Wolverson Colin Tilley Graham Leigh Matt Littlewood	Blackpool Police HQ Gateshead Heights South Bank Custody Suite, Grimsby Bolton Museum refurbishment Sterile Services, Broadgreen Hospital, Liverpool

# 'WE'RE IN A GOOD PLACE'

The economy is facing a potentially difficult period as Brexit creates uncertainty for business. However, with a record order book and a strong network of frameworks providing a good pipeline of work, we are ready for whatever challenges the year brings. 167 spoke to Rick Willmott about our plans and why he's excited about the future.



## How does 2019 look so far?

We're in pretty good shape right now, with just over £1bn of workload secured and a further £1bn of work identified from existing customers. Though some projects slip in terms of decision-making, there are plenty of opportunities through our national and regional frameworks to secure sufficient volume for the foreseeable future. There are not many companies with better access to frameworks than us, which creates a fantastic platform.

## How do you feel about our ranking at fourth in the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For list?

It was absolutely fantastic news as the entire report is based on feedback from our people, the result confirms that we are delivering on our ambition to be the best place to work, not only in our sector but pan-industry. The story will have been picked up by customers, peers, people who work for us, and people who might be interested in joining us. It's a great calling card.

It will help with next-generation recruitment too. What comes across in the write-up for the awards is our ambition to cater for the needs of all genders.

## Are we prepared for Brexit?

As prepared as we can be. We have to go back to the things we know make a difference. The first thing is having access to the best supply chain, and that means creating the situation where valued partners choose to work with us rather than someone else. Part of that is paying them properly and we are the best payers in the industry. That is now certified and reported.

To protect ourselves against contractual issues, we are incorporating Brexit clauses in order to protect ourselves if we cannot finish on time because we are unable to get certain supplies or products.

On those contracts we have in place with our supply chain partners, we assume that fixed-price contracts will remain fixed-price. We are reliant on our supply chain to think themselves through all of this and deliver for us.

If there is a material shift in the exchange rate between the pound and the euro, it will no longer make sense for some Eastern European workers to stay here, and there will be a fight for skills. By making ourselves the most attractive place to work, for the supply chain and for our own people, we have a good chance of attracting more of what is left.

## Why does social value matter?

'Purpose beyond profit' has long been our philosophy – to make a material difference to the wellbeing of people and their lives. This was why we won the Developing Potential award from Best Companies. Our people value the opportunity to contribute to and strengthen the communities they work in.

The way we care for communities and the environment is also valued by the next generation – [Swedish student and climate change activist] Greta Thunberg's speech at Davos showed that. It is really important that we as a business do something about these issues in a considered and structured way.

Customers, particularly public sector ones, are more and more interested in social value. It is becoming a requirement to demonstrate what we are doing from a return-on-investment perspective. We're not reacting to this agenda, but leading it.

We have worked incredibly hard, particularly on Scape framework projects, to create a process and a mechanism for customers to demonstrate what they have achieved from the capital project they have just procured. Our in-house portal to measure social value for our Scape customers is proving so popular that we may consider licensing it to our peers.

If shareholders were to challenge me, I would say, "Yes, we could maximise profits, but to do so would require us to turn away from the moral obligations and cultural beliefs that define the way that we have always done business – it is not all about making more money."

## Why do we want people to have the "career of a lifetime" with us?

If anyone was to look back on their time working here, I want them to see it as the best years of their career. We have very low staff turnover and we want it to stay that way. We have 452 people who have been with the business for over 10 years, many

**"If anyone was to look back on their time working here, I want them to see it as the best years of their career. We have very low staff turnover and we want it to stay that way."**

for much longer, with 7,063 years of service between them.

There are generations of families working in the company. Of our 150 current trainees, 33 are second, third, or even sixth-generation Willmott Dixon people, including my son Jack. That's part of how we engender a family feel, because there are generations of families throughout the business.

Some people say you need staff turnover because people get stale and complacent. I prefer to think that they become more efficient, with greater loyalty and commitment that makes them prouder of what they do. The best companies have a high level of training investment, promote to the highest levels internally, and benefit from low people turnover.

Having people who really care takes a huge amount of risk out of our business. We know that when people plan strategy, win work and report about programme, project, cashflow, turnover, it is done with the best intentions. They are part of our journey and believe in what we are trying to achieve.

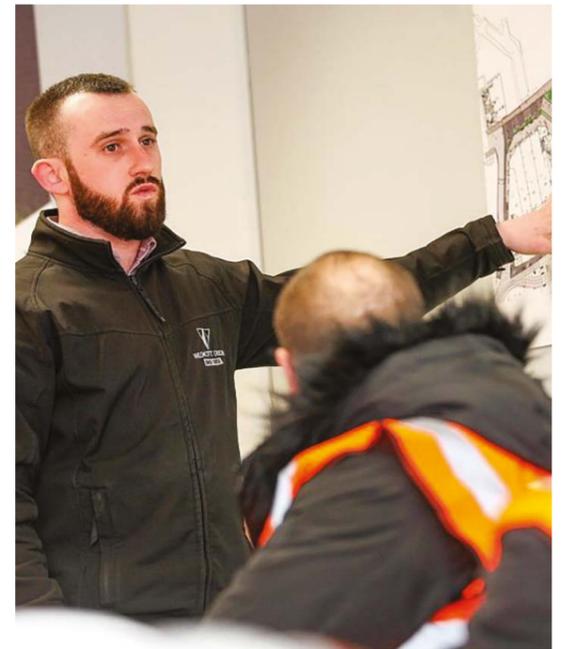
## What is your message for Team Willmott Dixon?

I want to say how much I appreciate what everyone has done in 2018 and for 2019 so far, for how the business has performed as a direct result of all our input. We're in a good place, but with that is a plea not to become complacent.

We are well-positioned to have a good year and I want us all to enjoy doing what we do. But I also want us to take nothing for granted and find new ways to work smarter, helped by the latest technology we are investing in.

Don't drop the ball, keep focused on the things that make a difference: relationships with customers; delivering everything with health and safety at the front of mind; remember that quality is everything; plus supporting customers through everything they need from us.

It's about having that thought for the customer, the supply chain, the communities we work for and the business. We want to deliver the best results for everybody, all the time, in all our endeavours.



# PUTTING US IN THE CAREERS SHOP WINDOW

For Open Doors week, our sites across the country took the chance to show young people what a career in construction can offer.

**N**early 30 of our sites welcomed thousands of people to take a look behind the hoardings during Open Doors week.

The week-long event – from 18-23 March this year – sought to inspire young people and career-changers to consider a career in construction. At a time when the Construction Industry Training Board is predicting that we need to create 168,000 jobs in three years, this is far more than just a PR exercise.

It was a great effort by all of our LCOs and site teams, who made sure our industry once again reached out to the next generation. We even opened up our BIM cave in the Snowhill office in Birmingham, which was packed out with people keen to learn how we embrace Building Information Modelling.

As you can see from the pictures, it was another success as we opened more sites than any other contractor!

**“It was a great effort by all of our LCOs and site teams, who made sure our industry once again reached out to the next generation.”**

**Top left:** Matt Patel from Interiors takes centre stage as groups of pupils get a unique perspective on our National Gallery project. We are refurbishing Room 32, as well as parts of the ground floor to deliver a modern work environment.

**Top middle:** Karl Crisp gives pupils a glimpse behind the scenes at our latest University of Kent project, this time to build a new home for its Department of Economics.

**Top right:** Josh Heavens welcomes visitors to our Rochdale Riverside development, outlining plans for the town’s biggest mixed-use scheme in a generation.

**Middle:** Richard Stowell, left, gives a group of visitors in Doncaster the lowdown on plans to build the new Central Library and Museum, our sixth project in Doncaster in three years.

**Right:** Lee Mullet leads the line at our University of Birmingham project where we are creating the Teaching and Learning Building. The team welcomed over 100 visitors and was even able to demonstrate our EksoVest – the future of construction?



# BEING NO 1 IN THE NO 2 CITY

Ten years ago our construction activity in central Birmingham was minimal. How times change! In the space of a decade we have become the most prolific construction company in the UK's second city. 167 went to find out how we achieved this rapid growth, and how we'll sustain it.



In 2009, the thought of delivering more than £250m of work in Birmingham in the space of a few years would have seemed optimistic. Yet thanks to a number of factors, we're now a key driver in shaping the city's future ambitions by delivering a wide array of projects that are attracting new inward investment.

So how did this come about? Pure determination by our team and following the maxim: when opportunities arise, you take them!

That was the case when Birmingham City University appointed us in 2011 to deliver the first stage of its huge campus relocation to the Millennium Quarter in central Birmingham. The £60m Parkside Building put us in the heart of the city and paved the way for more work with the Curzon Building and its subsequent extension.

Suddenly we had a huge presence in the city with more than £120m of development.

#### Statement of intent

Managing director Peter Owen says: "Before this, our value range in the city had been smaller. With Parkside, we entered a field occupied by larger, more established contractors at that time. Our reputation grew as more

customers could see what we were capable of and wanted us on their tender lists. After we successfully completed Parkside – a landmark for Birmingham and a huge statement of intent for us – we never looked back."

Indeed fast-forward eight years and some of those larger rivals, such as Carillion, no longer exist, while others have left the market and ceased to be a force in the city.

Another key factor was frameworks. Our presence on Scape and the West Midlands Construction frameworks gave us access to a swath of big opportunities, such as the National College for High Speed Rail and West Midlands Police's custody suite reorganisation. Soon our hoardings were a common sight across Birmingham as customers from different sectors wanted our

teams for their projects.

Peter adds: "We were building up a good track record across sectors, including our residential work for the city council. Then the University of Birmingham wanted us, on the back of our work for Birmingham City University, to play a key role in their campus transformation. We've now delivered over five projects for them and rising – a credit to the calibre of our team."

#### Beyond campus

Other highlights have included refurbishing West Midlands Police's head office – in addition to those two new custody suites. We also fitted out HS2's head office, built hundreds of homes for the council and refurbished the famous Lewis department store into Grade-A office space.

All have helped to make us the "go to" construction firm for many customers.

But it is the universities work that has turbo-charged our growth in Birmingham and across the West Midlands, as evident at Warwick (see overleaf).

On sustaining this in the future, Peter says: "Opening a new office in Snowhill last year was an important next step in our expansion and we are working closely with Interiors to help establish them in the city. Looking ahead, we are focusing on some big opportunities, including being well-placed to deliver part of the Athletes' Village for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, and working on a range of housing opportunities, alongside our universities work. The future is looking very exciting indeed."



**Above:** Showing our energy at the University of Birmingham, where we're playing a key role in the campus transformation.

**Left:** Our universities work has stretched across the West Midlands to include the University of Warwick's Sports Hub (see overleaf).



## GREEN HEART, GREAT FACILITIES AT BIRMINGHAM

The University of Birmingham was ranked 14th in the UK and 79th in the world in the QS World University Rankings for 2019. This followed being named University of the Year 2014 in the Times Higher Education awards.

Nowadays, universities cannot stand still; they need to keep investing in their estates if they are to maintain growth. The University of Birmingham typifies that approach with its plans to invest nearly £1bn in transforming its campus between 2016 and 2026.

The list of projects included in this £1bn programme is amazing. From a state-of-the-art library, dedicated student hub and world-class sports club to the Green Heart in the centre of campus, it is a huge period of change and we are playing a big part in it.

Senior operations manager Nick Proverbs says: "We first worked with the university on its school – Britain's first

secondary school to be based in a university – which gives students work experience as teachers. It established our relationship just as they were rolling out a huge investment plan and since then it has gone from strength-to-strength as we give the university the benefit of a team it can work with from one job to the next."

So far we are delivering five projects worth over £100m: the Green Heart, a new data centre, the Teaching and Learning building, the School of Engineering and the Old Gym.

Each is a crucial element in the university's masterplan to upgrade facilities so that they are fit for the 21st century and attract students, academics and third-party collaboration. For example the Green Heart provides parkland that opens up the centre of campus for students, staff and the local community to enjoy. It includes a Pavegen walkway, the

**"Our relationship has gone from strength-to-strength as we give the university the benefit of a team it can work with from one job to the next."**

**Nick Proverbs, senior operations manager**

**Above:** Nick Proverbs outside the Teaching and Learning building.

**Opposite:** The £37m Sports Hub at the University of Warwick.

first at a UK university, which generates data and off-grid electricity by the motion of people walking on it.

The Teaching and Learning building will provide a state-of-the-art teaching and social study space at the university. Also, the School of Engineering, our largest project at around £47m, will be home to specialist research in digital railway engineering, focusing on railway control and simulation, cybersecurity, condition monitoring and improved methods for technology introduction.

Nick adds: "Our two organisations share so many common values through our beliefs in sustainable development, digital construction and giving something back to the community. Each of our projects use BIM to ensure success and they like our approach to integrating digital technology as standard into the process – not a 'bolt on' to tick a box."

## BRINGING THE 'WOW' TO WARWICK

The University of Warwick is another educational establishment benefiting from a repeat business relationship with our Birmingham (Midlands) team to deliver its own campus transformation.

What started with the award-winning Oculus Building around five years ago has now seen close to £100m of work being awarded, with the latest completion being the £37m Sports Hub, handed over defect-free at the beginning of March.

The Sports Hub is one of the best sports facilities at a UK university and ties in with Warwick's goal of becoming the "most physically active campus community by 2020". The "huge, world-class sports facility" is set to draw visitors from across the Midlands, including future Olympians, explains construction manager Nick Preedy, who joined as a trainee and is now overseeing our work on the campus.

The Sports Hub showcases the best of smart building technology in a leisure context. For example,

the use of coolant technology allows the right temperature for any given sport and the right lighting for certain rooms at specific times of the day, such as wellness rooms for yoga.

"This has the 'wow' factor – visitors will walk in and see the breadth of the space," says Nick. "The sports hall is multifunctional, allowing a large array of sports, both traditional and non-traditional. The gym is the biggest in the higher education sector with 250 machines and space for 80 more."

The Sports Hub's 49-line climbing centre has one of the UK's only speed walls. "It's a 15-metre-high wall, which climbers run up like Spiderman," explains Nick. The state-of-the-art facility is set to be used by Team GB's climbing team, as Sport Climbing makes its Olympic debut at Tokyo 2020.

### Setting the mark

Our role at the Sports Hub followed Nick and the team's delivery of the University of Warwick's first flagship building, The Oculus – a teaching and



**"The sports hall is multifunctional, allowing a large array of sports, both traditional and non-traditional. The gym is the biggest in the higher education sector."**

**Nick Preedy, construction manager**

learning building, completed in August 2016. This two-storey building achieved the university's vision for multi-faculty facilities, including two large, tiered lecture theatres, 12 flexible teaching spaces, study areas and a cafe. With its arched timber roof, it was shortlisted for a RIBA West Midlands Award in 2017.

With The Oculus and now Sports Hub being used by thousands of students, they also show what is possible when the same team moves from one project to the next with a customer.

"We're maintaining the customer relationship by keeping the same faces on campus," says Nick. This approach has led to our team now starting two equally pivotal schemes for Warwick's future.

The largest is the £35m Interdisciplinary Biomedical Research Building (IBRB). This will provide a five-storey laboratory, lecture theatre, cafe and open learning centre. Having previously worked on BioCity in Nottingham, Nick says the Birmingham (Midlands) team will bring a lot of learning to IBRB. Twenty companies already want labs in IBRB, he adds. "It can't come quickly enough for the university."

This will use a pre-cast frame very similar to the one being used at the Town House for Kingston University. Nick is confident the work done off-site will "reduce the number of hours on-site, and its carbon footprint, while increasing quality".

In addition, there is the demolition of the existing steel-framed Warwick Arts Centre to make way for a new £23m centre, to be delivered shortly before Christmas 2020.

Warwick, just like Birmingham, has ambitions to be a higher education world leader. And we are their trusted partner in realising a plan that will create a solid platform for generations to come.



1

**One Central Square**  
We set the standard for office space in Cardiff with this 135,000-square-foot, Grade A, BREEAM Excellent building. Phase one of Central Square, a 1 million-square-foot development in Cardiff Enterprise Zone, it was crowned RICS Wales commercial project of the year for 2017!

2

**Cardiff and Vale College**  
We created Cardiff and Vale College's new city centre campus, the biggest education project in Cardiff for a generation. Larger in size than the nearby Millennium Stadium, the campus has one of Europe's largest arrays of photovoltaics, with 1,875 square metres on the roof.

3

**Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama**  
The Guardian University Guide 2019 ranks the Royal Welsh College of Music & Drama as the UK's leading drama school for the fourth time, holding on to the top spot for the second year running. The facility we built included a 450-seat concert hall and 160-seat courtyard theatre.

4

**Cardiff West Community High School**  
As part of the city's 21st Century Schools Programme, our team created a new school for 1,200 secondary students and 300 sixth-formers that's transformed education in this part of Cardiff. It includes a full-size 3G sports pitch and gym, a £150,000 fully equipped "cyber-security" classroom and 320-seat hall for school productions.

5

**Ronald McDonald House**  
Our second Ronald McDonald House, and first in Wales, this provides free "home away from home" accommodation for families in South Wales who have children being treated at the Noah's Ark Children's Hospital and neo-natal intensive care unit at University Hospital of Wales.

6

**Cardiff School of Art & Design**  
One of five schools that comprise Cardiff Metropolitan University, we built this within its Llandaff Campus to provide extensive studios and workshops, including a foundry and ceramics facilities. These studios are unique in that every student has personal studio space to work in.

7

**WJEC building**  
We turned the location of a former television studio into a four-storey office block for the Welsh Joint Education Committee, which processes GCSE and A-level exams. Our building, catering for around 220 staff, includes meeting rooms, recording facilities, an exhibition hall and a bookshop.

8

**St Teilo's Church in Wales High School**  
This new 1,440-pupil school in the north of Cardiff was the city's first BREEAM Excellent school thanks to a range of features such as lighting controls sympathetic to the visual requirements of teaching and a passive design approach that saw natural daylight and ventilation.

9

**Cardiff School of Management**  
This was another part of Cardiff Metropolitan University's redevelopment masterplan for Llandaff Campus. It provides space for 160 staff and over 2,000 students. Since completion, student applications have risen 25% against a national average of 4% for similar courses, with the university topping UK league tables for student satisfaction.

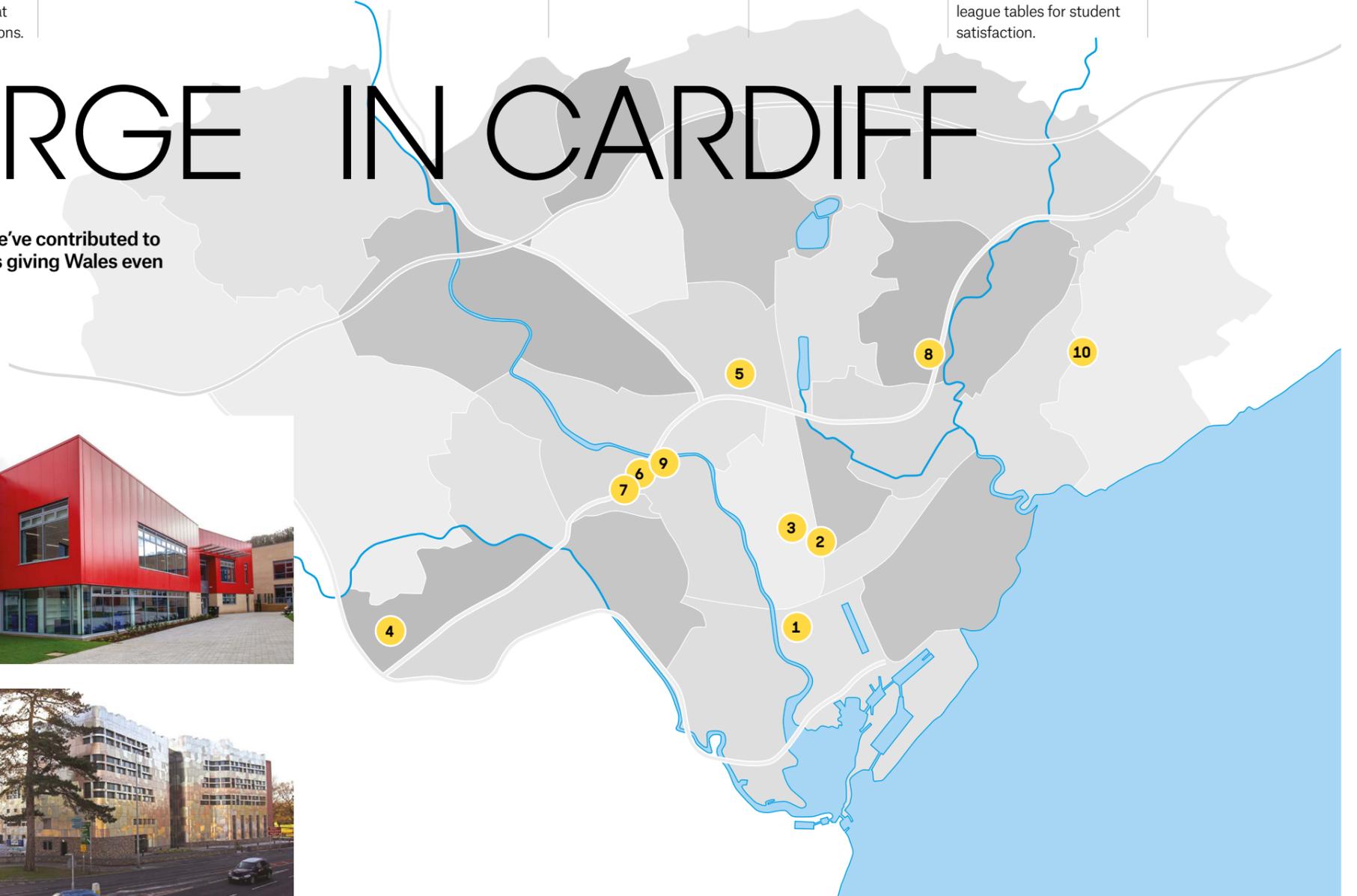
10

**Eastern Community Campus**  
We built the environmentally friendly Eastern High School in Cardiff for 1,520 pupils to replace Rumney and Llanrumney High Schools. The building is shared with Cardiff and Vale College which offers a range of A-levels and level 2 and 3 vocational courses.

# ON THE CHARGE IN CARDIFF

Wales deservedly won this year's Six Nations Championship after some outstanding performances against the other Home Nations. Yet it's not just the rugby team that's excelling west of the River Severn - our colleagues in South Wales are having a huge impact in Cardiff, reshaping the city's future.

**Our map gives a glimpse of how much we've contributed to Cardiff's future over the past 10 years. It's giving Wales even more to shout about!**



# WARMING UP THE RESIDENTS

Sensitive liaison proved crucial during an 18-month energy overhaul of six Gateshead towers.

**W**hen our Manchester (North) team was approached to work on six blocks of flats as part of Gateshead Council and Gateshead Housing Company's High-rise Energy Infrastructure for Gateshead Housing Tenants (HEIGHTs) Project, Clare Lewis put herself forward for the massive job of liaising with residents living in 621 homes.

The much-needed £20m programme of energy improvements focused on making the properties easier and more affordable to heat.

"Residents were living in fuel poverty," recalls site administrator Clare, who stepped up to be resident liaison officer throughout the course of the 18-month project. "Their homes were windy inside even when it wasn't windy outside."

The Gateshead HEIGHTs project involved connecting the tower blocks to a new district heating scheme, operated via ground-source heat pumps. The roofs of the blocks were insulated, all the draughty timber-framed windows were replaced with double-glazed PVC, and new radiators were fitted throughout.

"This was about giving people a better standard of living," says Clare. "They were relying on



electric night storage heaters and had no real ability to regulate the temperature in their homes. Heating was expensive, so residents were choosing to go without in order to save money."

#### Back to basics

Although Clare knew that working with more than 600 households was going to be "a challenge", she was certain she could do it. Having previously worked as a resident liaison officer, she was aware that this job was going to require "going back to basics".

Indeed, she and the rest of the team – fellow resident liaison manager Gina White, specifically hired apprentices Connie Cross and Russell Craigie, and construction manager Mark Wolverson found residents to be "standoffish" at first.

"They were suspicious of an external contractor being brought in," says Clare. Also, they had previously been given a lot of inaccurate information, so our team needed to focus on countering this with clear and concise details about the work that was to be done.

#### Face-to-face contact

The project began in May 2017, with the first six months taken up with Clare and the team being on site, gathering the information needed for the improvement work to begin in January 2018.

First of all, the liaison team needed to address resident resistance to aspects of the proposed work. Tenants were concerned that the new heating system would cost them more money, and that the work would create disruption and not be finished on time. Meanwhile, many leaseholders were unhappy about the costs involved. To deal with this, Clare and the team set up

**Left:** The project involved connecting six tower blocks to a new district heating scheme, insulating the roofs and replacing the timber-framed windows and radiators.



**"One guy, who from day one was against the whole thing because he was paying for it, wrote to me to say, 'You've done everything with a smile on your face, you've answered questions, you've become a friend'."**

**Clare Lewis, resident liaison officer**

monthly clinics in order to address concerns.

The team also needed to know about vulnerable residents who would need additional support while work took place. "We visited each property individually as we had to know what we would be dealing with," says Clare. "We did our own profiling exercise, identifying where there were issues we needed to approach sensitively, such as a support need."

What they found was a diverse group of people, including individuals who were immobile, disabled or had a mental illness.

To make these residents more comfortable, the team set up three respite flats, where they could go while work was being carried out in their properties.

"There were elderly residents with no family, who needed a hand to hold. In those cases, we either sat with them while the work was

being done, or organised for them to be moved to a respite property for the day," explains Clare.

#### Each home different

Although, in theory, the jobs to be carried out in each home would be "one size fits all", the reality was very different. "Different people had their flats set up in different ways, with different fitted units and furniture," recalls Clare.

The resident liaison team visited every property with a mechanical contractor from H Malone & Sons, and created bespoke designs. "It was timely, but between us and the supplier, we gave residents the control they needed in their own properties," says Clare.

Next, the team visited all residents 21 days, seven days and one day before work was to begin in their homes. After just over a year of going through this process, all six blocks were handed back to the housing company in February 2019. The project was a great success – completed a week early, within budget and defect-free.

#### Happy customers

Most residents are "over the moon with being able to have heating and hot water on-demand". In fact, some of the leaseholders who had been the project's most vocal critics were the most impressed with the work delivered.

"One guy, who from day one was against the whole thing because he was paying for it, wrote to me to say, 'You've done everything with a smile on your face, you've answered questions, you've become a friend'," says Clare. "Proof that, while you can't keep 100% of the residents happy all of the time, you can try your damndest."

Now back in her administrator role, Clare keeps in touch with some of the residents. She says she learned so much working with the wider Gateshead HEIGHTs team, she's planning to start an HNC in the built environment.

And if we win more work that involves complex resident liaison in the North East, there's definitely one person who will be up for the challenge.

#### In numbers: Gateshead HEIGHTs

**621**  
flats

**6**  
tower blocks

**£20m**  
investment in energy-efficiency improvements

**2,484 visits**  
to residents' homes

**0**  
defects

# TOWN CENTRE GAME CHANGERS

Though 200 miles apart, Rochdale and Pontypridd have something big in common: transformations that are bringing new life to their urban centres, courtesy of our people.

Driving along the A470 from Cardiff up through central Wales, the Taff Vale Redevelopment in Pontypridd is clearly visible. The two tower cranes dominating the skyline are a statement of intent for a town embracing regeneration.

Over 200 miles away in northern England, Rochdale's town centre is undergoing a profound change of the same magnitude. A retail and leisure scheme, vital to the council's wider regeneration programme, promises to bring new life to the daytime and evening economies, setting the stage for new housing to be built there too.

Both projects are long-awaited, on sites where other developers have come and gone. Both enjoy a huge profile locally, carrying the hopes and expectations of local politicians, businesses and communities.

## Making a mark in Wales

"You don't get projects such as this in the Valleys!" says senior operations manager Dave John in Pontypridd. "This is a £40m project – the biggest we've done in Wales. All our competitors showed an interest but the customer wanted our team."

Recently renamed as Llys Cadwyn – which translates as

Chain Court to reflect the area's industrial heritage – the Taff Vale scheme comprises two office blocks and a third, curved building which will be home to the library, cafe and council-run gym.

It was the first project to receive funding from the Welsh Government's Building for the Future Programme, which in turn receives funding from the European Regional Development Fund. Some £10m of the budget came from the government.

## Rochdale's big vision

Rochdale may have been in the headlines for other reasons in recent times, but the town is moving on and we're playing a big part in making this happen.

The Rochdale Riverside is also going to make a difference. It will be home to a six-screen Reel cinema, restaurants, retail anchored by Marks & Spencer

**"I put a dedicated manager, Jamie Beard, on the service diversions and utilities to ensure that all eventualities were dealt with."**

**Andy Howarth, construction manager, Rochdale**

and Next and a multi-storey car park. The developers of the 61,000-square-metre scheme, which is funded by M&G Investments, are a Genr8 and Kajima joint venture. M&G has agreed a 250-year lease on the site from Rochdale Council and will then sublet it back for 35 years, with the council using rental income from the occupiers to pay for the sublease.

## Risks below

Typical of any brownfield, urban scheme, both projects faced challenges in the ground. Often these unknown ground risks derail developments because they are hard to price and add cost, which can break a developer's budget.

At Pontypridd, the site of a former shopping centre and council office right by the River Taff and near to the town's historic old bridges, the land came with its own basement walls, previously part of the old shopping centre. "We had a site that was a big hole in the ground, with an existing retaining wall to support a busy town centre road that runs next to the site," explains Dave. One of the first tasks for our team in March 2018 was to create a podium at ground-floor level supported through columns by 680 piles.



**Above:** The regenerators – Andy Howarth, right, and his team at Rochdale show the sheer scale of the site.

**Right:** Matt Walsh, left, and Jarrad Owen are helping to realise plans for Pontypridd's renewal.

In Rochdale, where the site was once a bus station and an old council block, the legacy was obstacles in the ground, such as foundations, piles and old concrete subways. Our team's proposal for dealing with these obstructions was to dig down over the whole site for three or four metres, remove obstructions where necessary and re-engineer the ground so that a ground-bearing slab and foundation solution could be used. This eliminated the need for piling, bringing the scheme within the customer's budget.

There was a raft of diversions to deal with too, including a road that ran through the M&S plot and every utility imaginable. That work

took 25 weeks and was one of the biggest risks to the schedule, says construction manager Andy Howarth. "I put a dedicated manager, Jamie Beard, on the service diversions and utilities to ensure that all eventualities were dealt with," he says.

## Logistics jigsaws

While just-in-time deliveries and sensitive lorry movements may be second nature for big-city sites, they aren't the norm in smaller towns where recent developments have been few and far between.

"The logistics takes a lot more managing by the supply chain and ourselves than it normally would," says Dave. "There's been a bit of



**On site: Rochdale Riverside**

**Cinema, retail and restaurants**

**Customer:** Genr8 and Kajima joint venture, in partnership with Rochdale Council and Rochdale Development Agency

**Value:** £39m

**Contract:** Design and build

**On site:** February 2018 – June 2020

**On site: Taff Vale  
Redevelopment**

Two office blocks, library,  
community gym, cafe

**Customer:** Rhondda Cynon Taf  
County Borough Council  
**Value:** £40m  
**Contract:** JCT Design and build  
**On site:** March 2018 –  
Spring 2020



a learning curve for some of the supply chain.”

The Pontypridd site has the ancient bridges to its northern end, the River Taff to the east, a car park to the south and the busy town centre to the west. Deliveries come through the town centre.

Rochdale is similarly constrained, located right next to a new Metrolink stop and the Wheatsheaf shopping centre.

The other important aspect which both Dave and Andy flag up is the need to protect the interests of local shops and businesses so that the regeneration doesn't damage their income in the process. For instance, Andy talks about keeping a footpath across the site open to allow access from the Metrolink stop to shops.

Both projects have team members who are in constant dialogue with neighbours. In Rochdale it is site administrator Danielle Whitworth. “She has worked wonders with the local community,” says Andy. “She is in regular contact with the adjacent shopping centre to make sure they are happy – as well as all the other jobs she does.”

In Pontypridd, site neighbours include small shops and food outlets, a museum and an Iceland supermarket. One of our new

entrants to the industry, gateman Rob Jones, has taken up a liaison role, says Dave: “He goes and checks everything is OK with them. I think they can see we are trying our best to minimise the disruption.”

Beyond logistics, there are other challenges too. The pebble-shaped library and gym building in Pontypridd, with distinctive double-curving walls, has been technically interesting says Dave. “We’ve never built anything quite like that before, so there have been some challenges around learning new techniques.”

The biggest challenge for Andy and his team in Rochdale is the volume and variety of the scheme's six buildings. Not only must they programme and feed the activities for each building, there is also the design process to go through for each one. “In terms of the logistics on such a tight site and the design for each building, this is a complex job,” says Andy.

**Good news locally**

Newspaper headlines have been kind to both schemes. Local journalists, businesses and communities are positive about investment into their towns after years, if not decades, of aborted plans and promises.

The Rochdale Observer ran an article praising the local investment on the project, with 40 percent of spend so far going to firms within a 10-mile radius of the site and 80 percent within 40 miles. Though it isn't a requirement of our contract with Gen8 and Kajima, it is a priority for the project, says Andy: “It's important to Willmott Dixon and it's important to Rochdale Council.”

Pontypridd, on the other hand, where the council is developing the scheme, has a huge contractual target when it comes to adding social value: 2,280 weeks of targeted recruitment and training. The project is well on the way, says Dave, with over 1,400 weeks already under its belt involving work experience, apprentices and long-term unemployed people. Over 75 percent of the project spend on supply chain will be within South Wales.

**Halfway there**

Both projects are around halfway through in terms of programme and are taking shape nicely.

The concrete cores for all three buildings in Taff Vale are in place, and all have their steel frames wrapped around them. Number 2 Llys Cadwyn, the speculative office building, which will be

**“We’ve never built anything quite like that before, so there have been some challenges around learning new techniques.”**

**Dave John, senior operations manager, Pontypridd**

**Left:** The new library features distinctive double-curving walls.

handed over in March 2020, is ahead of 1 Llys Cadwyn, which will be home to Transport for Wales with a handover of April 2020.

In Rochdale, the cinema, which wasn't impacted by the diversions, with drylining and M&E works underway. When finished, one elevation will have a kinetic wall to give it the “wow” factor, says Andy.

By late March, the steel was going up for the fourth of Rochdale's six buildings with the multi-storey car park and small hub building yet to build. Handover will be in a staggered phasing, beginning with the cinema, which will go to Reel for fit-out at the end of September this year.

Hot on the heels of that handover will be M&S in early November, with all the buildings, except the car park, before Christmas. The goal is for the whole shopping centre to be open in time for Easter 2020 and, though not contractually committed, Andy and his team are keen to make it happen.

“The important thing to our customer is that M&S move in on the date they want to,” says Andy. “But we have to be flexible as well. It's as important that we get as many tenants in as possible and we need to accommodate their requirements where we can.”

Both projects will change people's lives and improve their region's outlook for the better. Both need us to make it happen, and both are getting the full value that only Willmott Dixon brings to town centre regenerations.

# HELPING OUR PEOPLE ACHIEVE THEIR 'COAL'

We want our people to enjoy a ‘career of a lifetime’ with us. Here, three reflect on how working with us became far more than just a job.

**O**ur goal is to be a company where you literally have a “career of a lifetime”, or COAL – to grow, develop and achieve amazing things that help contribute to us being a successful company.

COAL is about ensuring that everything you want from a career – development, training, challenge, stimulation, career progression, friendships, pride and reward – can be achieved right here.

Our longest-serving 452 people have 7,063 years of service between them – a longevity that is a reason customers like working with us. 167 caught up with three people who illustrate what COAL has meant to them: Ian Edwards, Graham Dundas and Jo Weston.



**“You have to work hard in our industry, and it can be challenging – but the one thing that keeps everyone doing it is that sense of achievement as a team. Otherwise none of us would do it!”**

**Ian Edwards, operations director**

**When and why did you join us?**  
I joined in 1998. When I left college I joined AMEC, and after about nine months I was made redundant along with all the other trainees. Fair play to them though, they found us all places elsewhere and I joined Willmott Dixon as a management trainee. I met the head of HR at a service station somewhere up the A1.

I remember it distinctly because the World Cup was on and England were playing. I wanted to get somewhere and watch the game so was a bit distracted, if I'm honest!

**When did you realise that this was somewhere you could build a career?**

Very early on. First of all it was about the people I worked with, and then the values the company upholds. They want to treat people the right way, whether that's our people or the supply chain.

**What has your career journey been since joining?**

I joined the management trainee scheme as a

trainee site manager. Back in the day I ran my first job on my own while I was still a trainee – health and safety rules mean that wouldn't be allowed today! Then I became an assistant building manager, worked my way up to construction manager, operations manager and then became a director.

**Was it always your aim to be a director?**

To be honest, this is something I like to discuss with new trainees. They want to be a director almost straight away whereas our ethos is always this – do the best in the job you are doing and the rest will follow. I have never asked for a promotion, I found if I did a really good job in what was required, it led to a better job soon after. That's what I try to instill in the younger people coming through.

**What do you enjoy about the job?**

First, the variety of the projects we deliver. It's bit more distant now being a director,

because you are not so hands-on, but that pride is still there.

And then there is watching people develop. You have to work hard in our industry, and it can be challenging – but the one thing that keeps everyone doing it is that sense of achievement as a team. Otherwise none of us would do it!

**What have been your career highlights to date?**

Building the grandstand at Epsom racecourse. Seeing it every year when the Derby is on, seeing the building you have built – there was a buzz around the job. Everyone had a real zest about the project; they knew what it was for.

**What advice would you give to younger colleagues?**

Work hard, do the best you can at the role you are doing, focus on the job in hand, don't think too far ahead and things will sort themselves out. And if you want a goal to aim for, change the way we do things. Make it better.



**“When you’re 19, you don’t tend to look any further ahead than the next few years. But very early in my career I developed a great attachment to the business, to the people I work with and the culture.”**

Graham Dundas, chief financial officer

**What do you like most about your job?**

Definitely the people I work with. It’s always the people you work with and the culture of the business that keeps you somewhere. That’s why I have enjoyed getting out of bed in the morning for the past 20 years; I have always worked with people I like and respect, and that’s all that matters, isn’t it?

**What is so appealing about the culture?**

Everyone has great respect for each other, and there is a culture of doing the right thing. We have always had a purpose beyond profit. Being a private company we always take decisions for the long-term good of the business – we are not driven by short-term targets. Everyone has a great degree of professionalism and is always keen to do the right thing.

**Is there anything you dislike?**

If there is, I should try and change it, shouldn’t I? There are always things that could be improved but Willmott Dixon has always been looking to grow and innovate. It has never stood still and that is part of the attraction.

**What have been your career highlights so far?**

I won the company’s trainee of the year award back in 2001 – that is a great accolade in the business. I have been fortunate enough to lead teams from quite a young age, and being promoted to chief financial officer last year is something I have worked towards and had hoped to achieve for 20 years.

**What is your advice for others starting out in the business?**

Say yes to every opportunity, because there is no substitute for experience. I have been lucky enough to work in different parts of the business and on different projects, and that has been invaluable. In the same vein, learn as much as possible from those around you who are more experienced. And be patient. Look for step changes in your career.

I could see it was an industry that would offer a lot of variety – and this firm felt like somewhere I could build my career. When you’re 19 years old, you don’t tend to look any further ahead than the next few years. But very early in my career I developed a great attachment to the business, to the people I work with and the culture.

**Describe your career journey so far.**

I have benefited more than anyone from the group’s culture of promoting from within. I started as a trainee accountant in 1998, and probably had seven or eight roles before I was promoted to the main board as chief financial officer last year. It was a proud moment, but I always felt if I showed I had the ability, I would be given the opportunity.

**When did you join us, and why?**

I joined as a trainee accountant in 1998 – more than half my life ago. I was looking for a management training scheme that would allow me to complete my professional qualifications at a company that seemed like it would offer a lot of interest and variety.

Without having any prior knowledge of it, and looking at Willmott Dixon, I thought the construction industry would be a good industry to work in. The company immediately appealed – I sensed I would be valued and allowed to develop my potential.

**What was it that appealed?**

The variety. In finance terms, every year and every project is different. It’s not like working in a manufacturing plant that churns out widgets.



**“The company has really supported me with agile working. When I had a young family I was able to work flexibly. People’s lives are busy, and there is no point putting obstacles in their way.”**

Jo Weston, operations director, Interiors

**Why and when did you join us?**

I joined in 1992 as a trainee quantity surveyor. I was interested in accountancy, but I realised I didn’t want to spend my whole life sitting in an office. My aunt was a quantity surveyor for a developer up in the Midlands. I spoke to her about the role and decided to look for an opportunity – the job was advertised in my local careers office, so I went for an interview and was offered the job later the same day. Never looked back.

**What has your career journey been since then?**

After training I became an assistant surveyor, then I worked my way up to senior surveyor. I was looking after various projects in Camden, Bury St Edmunds, Hertfordshire – all over the place. Then I had my first child in 2000 and I came back to work on a part-time basis as a finance manager. I carried on in that role after had my second child in 2003.

In 2005 I was asked to be head of customer service for Homes, which I did for 10 years. Then I became responsible for commercial and quality and aftercare in the building services team, and since October 2018 I have worked in Interiors as an operations director. I am now responsible for rollouts, frameworks and projects below £2m.

**What do you enjoy about the job?**

In construction you are always learning something new – you never get bored. There is a challenge every day in terms of decisions to be made or taking different approaches to different types of projects with different customers. I love the variety and the technical elements – working something from an idea into a final product.

**What has kept you at this company?**

Willmott Dixon is a great employer – they treat their people exceptionally well. And because it is a company that doesn’t stand still, there are always opportunities. We are constantly evolving. And the company has really supported me with agile working. When I had a young family I was able to work flexibly. People’s lives are busy, and there is no point putting obstacles in their way. They are very good like that.

**What have been your career highlights so far?**

This role I am doing now! I love it. And to have the opportunity to move within our business, from residential to Interiors, and learn something new. Interiors really is going places in terms of growth – I’m excited to be part of that journey.

**What advice would you give to someone coming up through the ranks now?**

Embrace any learning, and don’t be afraid to ask questions. And they should explore the variation of roles on offer. There is so much opportunity in various roles, whether technical or people-based roles, social value and sustainability – the industry is filled with opportunity. But you have to work hard and you have to take that opportunity into your own hands. Don’t sit back and wait for it to come to you. Make sure you have a clear development plan to learn and expose yourself to new learning.

# RIDE TO GLORY

More than 150 of our people, customers and suppliers  
broke out the lycra to raise money for Action Medical  
Research at the annual Willmott Dixon Classic

**A**fter wind postponed the annual Willmott Dixon Classic last September, it was game on this time as more than 150 cyclists descended on Turweston Aerodrome in Northamptonshire to raise money for Acton Medical Research.

There was a choice of three routes – 30, 60 or 84 miles – and our people were joined by many customers and suppliers on the day to complete a demanding but fun course. Conditions were cloudy with a moderate breeze, while the odd hill made sure everyone knew they had been on a ride.

However, those who went through the pain barrier used the words of Sarah Stevenson from Action Medical Research to spur them on. Before the ride, Sarah praised the Classic for raising over £150,000 in the last three years and said: “Thanks to your support we’ve made huge progress on the ‘sticky hands’ research programme to create learning aids for prematurely born babies. The Classic has basically funded that whole project, and I would like you to hold that thought as you cycle the course.”

The 2020 ride will be in September – details will be announced later this year.

**“The Classic has basically funded our whole project to create learning aids for prematurely born babies.”**

**Sarah Stevenson,  
Action Medical Research**



**Above:** Rick Willmott, left, and Neal Stephens lead the charge at the start.

**Left:** Interiors’ Taleisha Donaldson took on the 60-mile route.

**Below:** Marie Lakin from Wales and the West and Alex Tebbs from Via check out their times at the end.