

Terence O'Rourke Ltd



Managing projects: early engagement with communities central to work approach

Bournemouth-based Terence O'Rourke Ltd celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2010. Over that period, it has been at the forefront of sustainable development practice with projects such as Kings Hill in Kent, the McLaren Technology Centre in Woking and the regeneration of Brent's Stonebridge estate.

Now it is rising to new challenges on high-profile projects such as Warner Bros' refurbishment and extension of Leavesden Studios in Hertfordshire, Cambridge's Trumpington Meadows urban extension, the Clay Country eco-town in Cornwall and Morgan Sindall Investments' plans for regeneration of its home town's central area.

Terence O'Rourke's research and analytical skills allow it to contribute imaginative solutions and comprehensive place-making strategies. The firm prides itself on an ethical approach that highlights respect, honesty and trust. "We don't undertake projects we are not comfortable being associated with," says director Ann Bartaby.

The company's 32 planners take lead roles in managing multidisciplinary projects. They work with design and environmental experts in integrated teams selected to meet clients' demands across a spectrum of sectors. The firm has a high ratio of senior to junior positions among its 95 staff. Almost half the planners have local authority experience, which helps

forge good working relationships with councils and consultees. It records a 90 per cent success rate on applications without recourse to appeal.

As an RTPI Learning Partner, the practice recognises staff expertise as the key to its success. Learning is promoted through staff-led training and sharing know-how, providing speakers for events and conference attendance. Conference presentations, seminars, networking and talks to university students promote good planning practice more widely.

Early engagement with communities and council officers is central to Terence O'Rourke's approach. It typically carries out at least two stages of consultation on major schemes and always goes back to stakeholders and the public to explain how issues have been tackled before formal submission. "We start with a blank sheet to work out the problems and issues and who to consult. If we don't know the right people we hunt them out," says managing director Tim Hancock.

Hancock cites "measurable added value for clients" as the practice's key selling point. "We have high standards and constantly challenge our teams. We look at the environmental impact of our projects from the outset and apply what we learn to all our work. It's a collaborative partnership with clients. Many of them come back and involve us in all aspects of their business."

JUDGES' COMMENTS

"Clarity of thought is reflected in the direct way in which Terence O'Rourke addressed the awards criteria and its approach to some difficult projects. It is a cohesive team, engaged and empowered. Purposeful community engagement has produced positive outcomes. The challenges of implementation are convincingly addressed. Clients benefit from long-term involvement across their business, with sustainability principles embedded in sound advice. The firm's response to the economic and political climate includes streamlining processes and developing new partnerships and skill sets."