



# Bardsley Construction Limited



## Company profile

Bardsley Construction Limited is a medium-sized building company based in the North West of England. It operates in the development (private housing), social housing and public sectors. Of these, it is particularly active in the education sector, with the main area of specialism being colleges and universities.

Geographically, Bardsley works from its Dukinfield Head Office in East Manchester on projects currently as far afield as West Yorkshire and South Cheshire. It controls an average of 15 projects at any one time and employs approximately 100 joiners, bricklayers and labourers directly to work on these. In addition, they are usually managing approximately 300 contractor-employed workers across many disciplines on these projects.

An experienced project manager/site manager supported by a site engineer typically manages the projects, with the support of a contracts manager, foreman and site co-ordinator.

The Health and Safety Department, led by the Health and Safety Director, provides advice, guidance and support for the work activities as well as continuous monitoring of health and safety in the form of frequent and detailed Site Safety Audits.

Since the current Health and Safety Director, John Thorley, joined Bardsley in 2007, the management of health and safety within the organisation has become a source of pride for the company. A new Safety Management System and a number of forward thinking initiatives have been implemented that have helped cement the Bardsley reputation as a noteworthy operator amongst SME's in the construction sector, and this in turn has played a significant part in ensuring continuity of work in these testing times.

## The challenge

Since 2007, the frequency of accidents and their severity have notably decreased and although there have been challenges along the way, the company is demonstrating how changing attitudes to the management of health and safety are key factors in both securing work and improving productivity at site level. John notes, "the benefits are visible in that we are securing work in spite of the current climate, which in part, is due to our exemplary safety culture."

As a result, it has been noticed by members of the senior management team that there are real spin-off benefits, for example, the efficient use of plant and machinery on-site due to the culture of good housekeeping that flows from good health and safety practices. Rates of materials wastage are reduced, and previously concealed inefficiencies are revealed, which all goes to help in meeting time and monetary targets.



However, traditionally the question of consultation with the workforce had always been a difficult one to answer. In the past, the management of the organisation was resistant to the idea of worker involvement in policy making and suspicious of any perceived dilution of its authority. John Thorley was aware of these barriers but determined that the organisation could not afford to ignore the benefits that effective consultation could bring. The opportunity to explore the consultation process came following changes at Board level.

L-R: Back row: H&S Advisor Neil Taylor, Construction Director Peter Godfrey, Paul Cook (HSE Worker Involvement Team), HR Manager Jane Pickston, Safety Reps Daniel Pieterse, Murray Green, Simon Whitfield, Chairman Roly Bardsley, Safety Reps Craig Chester, Stuart Waugh, H&S Director John Thorley, Safety Reps John Vettors, Paul Jackson, Managing Director (Construction) Paul Strutt, Billy Baldwin (UCATT), Rachel Anderson (H&S Co-ordinator).  
Front Row: Safety Reps Tom Hill, Neil Evans, Mick Howarth, Steve Saxon, Chris O'Leary and Karl Stringfellow.

"The new Board of Directors understood what we wanted to do and were happy to support the idea of worker engagement/consultation," he said. "This meant that we had a 'blank canvas' on which to place whatever engagement/consultation mechanism we felt was most appropriate, so obviously it was important to get this right."

However, before the initial discussions could even take place, an accident occurred on one of the company's flagship projects that was serious enough for the company to have to take a hard look at itself. Fortunately, the injury sustained was relatively minor, but the accident had the potential to have been much more serious.

From that incident, the culture of health and safety, although already good, became the absolute number one concern at Board level and the plans to institute a formal process for consultation were now priority.

### Getting the workforce on board

John enlisted the help of UCATT Safety Advisor, Billy Baldwin, whom he had recently met by chance at a WWT (Working Well Together) SHAD in Haydock. From those discussions a framework was constructed that utilised the best ideas from the HSE '*Safe and sound at work – Do your bit*' campaign and the experience of other organisations, taking into account the specific profile and culture of the company.

John has huge respect for Billy, who, he says, brings a wealth of useful practical experience to the project gleaned from his involvement with projects including the Bovis Lend Lease Manchester Joint Hospitals Project.

Billy was instrumental in helping to devise a constitution for a Health and Safety Consultation Committee and John was determined that the committee would have the remit to secure change where required.

## Working with health and safety representatives

Suitable individuals were asked to consider involvement with the Consultation Committee and these were equally representative of both the frontline workforce, office based employees and management. A basic structure was agreed around a quorum of committee officers, ie:

- chair;
- secretary;
- co-opted members from the Health and Safety Department;
- project managers;
- quantity surveyors;
- contract managers;
- site labourers;
- the HR manager;
- sustainability co-ordinator;
- hire desk controller; and
- Billy himself, who is always on hand to advise where required.

The first meeting of the Consultation Committee was called in May 2010 and at that meeting it was agreed that the company would elect representatives of employee safety at site level to liaise between the on-site workforce and management, via the committee.



The Consultation Committee

“Learning lessons from experience of others, it was obvious that the representatives would have to be involved voluntarily, as coerced employees, by definition, cannot be considered to be ‘engaged’.” *Rachel Anderson – Health and Safety Co-ordinator.*

“I recently became a Health and Safety Representative to learn more about what is involved in health and safety, and also so that I can relay the information that I receive to all operatives out on site. I am also part of the Bardsley Consultation Committee which allows us to give our opinions and receive any information.” *Craig Chester, Foreman bricklayer/Committee Member and representative of employee safety.*

“One of the most important aspects of engaging workers in health and safety activities is to gain their trust and understanding of the subject and how it will affect them. We achieved this in this instance by clearly stating beforehand our aims and that this was fully supported by senior management. We also explained that their role and subsequent activities would be agreed with them and not imposed.” *Billy Baldwin.*

The site-based workers were invited to put themselves forward for the role of representative. Approximately 14 people did and after individual consideration, they were duly confirmed as representatives ‘elect’. “In practice, many of the reps are members of the committee”, John says, “because both groups draw from a pool of like-minded individuals that are keen to be part of the company’s vision for a fully engaged workforce and its benefits.”

These volunteer representatives attended HSE’s two-day IOSH accredited Worker Involvement training course and were presented with their certificates in a formal presentation, attended by the Bardsley Board of Directors, UCATT and HSE’s Workforce and Leadership Team.

It had been agreed at Board level that a financial remuneration would be paid to them to reflect the importance of the role and the value Bardsley places on it. The representatives can be easily identified on site by their hi-vis jackets, which have their title printed on the back.

## **Raising awareness**

Consultation Committee meetings have been held monthly since the first one in May 2010, minus breaks over the summer and the traditional Christmas construction industry shutdown. Meetings are held on the construction projects by rotation.

“We decided to do this for several reasons,” says John, “firstly to give Bardsley project managers an opportunity to ‘show off’ their sites and more importantly to share good practice with their peers. In addition, we find that people not used to participating in meetings are much more comfortable on their own territory.”

Meetings are informal and enjoyable. “We have tea and coffee and refreshments – lots of banter, alongside the serious discussions keeps the atmosphere informal and this is crucial to participation.”

Local HSE Inspectors have been welcomed at most of the meetings to see the committee in action and the response to this has been favourable. In addition, there have also been a few guest speakers – Bardsley’s Insurance Company came to talk about fire precautions and they have also had scaffolding consultants there to talk about updated Codes of Practice – SG4:10.

“Partnership working between management and staff is crucial in helping companies realise health and safety benefits, often leading to real business benefits as well as reducing injuries to workers. HSE’s *‘Safe and sound at work – Do your bit’* initiative helps train representatives to work collaboratively with management,” Paul Cook, HSE Lead Policy Adviser – Workforce and Leadership

## **Benefits**

There are advantages for office based committee members too. They gain a valuable insight into the dynamics of a construction site and this helps them understand how their own role complements that of others. Hire Desk Controller, Dot Oldham enjoys her site visits enormously and admits that it has revitalised the way she views her own job. She explains the benefits of being a committee member.

“It keeps me up to date with the current health and safety requirements I need to do my job efficiently. It helps me to understand some of the problems on site first hand, and putting names to faces I talk to everyday when visiting projects, means I can now relate to people from a different perspective.”

John Thorley is the first to admit that the success of the Consultation Committee has been largely because the committee belongs to the workforce and not the management. Directors, other than the Health and Safety Director, are barred from the meetings and the agenda is set by the workforce. Every person in the company is asked on a monthly basis to think about any issues that they would like to raise through their committee, and some of the issues raised have resulted in real improvements to working practices and have quite possibly prevented accidents.

The installation of the committee has created a strong link between the management of the company and the worker on the front line. This relationship has numerous benefits for both parties, reducing accidents and complying with legislation, promoting a sense of worth and pride in the representatives and empowering the workforce in ways that could not have been imagined only a short while ago.

### Final word from John Thorley:

“Bardsley fully embraces worker consultation and the creation of the committee and the appointment of the representatives have given us a strong foundation to build upon.”

### Consultation in practice

Representative and Hod carrier, Dan Nolan, raised the issue of how much can be loaded onto working platforms.

He explained that even though Hod carriers know in principle the maximum weights allowed on platforms, they don't know what that weight looks like in real terms.

The committee discussed this and it was agreed that the Health and Safety Department would produce signage for the platforms, which would simplify the loading process and ensure that platforms are not inadvertently overloaded.

Dan was commended for this useful idea and awarded a voucher for his contribution.

**Safe Working Load of Platforms**

**2kN/m<sup>2</sup> = 200kg**      **Person = 84kg (ave)**

**2kN/m<sup>2</sup> / 200kg = Person + 6 (20kg Block)**

**2kN/m<sup>2</sup> / 200kg = Person + 46 (2.5kg Brick)**

**1m<sup>2</sup>**

Diagram of a platform with a 1m<sup>2</sup> area highlighted in yellow.