

Working with the Community

Building better relationships with the community at Tesco and Taylor Woodrow's development in Beverley

Introduction

'Working with the community' is a BRE research project, commissioned by the DTI under its respect for people agenda. The objectives of the project are to identify the impacts of construction projects on local communities and to develop guidance for the industry on how to address the concerns of local people and businesses.



The two-year study began in July 2000 with initial research based on five case study construction projects around the country. Focus groups and interviews were held with local residents, business representatives, contractors and design teams to discuss the local communities' concerns and the measures taken to address them.

The project team identified a number of gaps in the provision of tools and guidance to support best practice in working with the community. In particular there was felt to be little guidance for the industry in the area of communication and provision of information - despite the fact that both local people and the industry regarded this as critical.

The team therefore developed a package of communication guidance and supporting tools that could be used by the

construction industry to deliver better community relations. The Tesco development in Beverley, East Yorkshire was chosen as a test bed for the new guidance. Both Tesco and the main contractor, Taylor Woodrow, were very happy to support the initiative which reinforced their customer focused approach.

The Beverley project

The new Tesco store in Beverley, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, is situated close to the centre of the town on the site of a former cattle market. It is a two storey building, faced in brick and glass, with a gross area of approximately 60,000 sq ft. In addition to the construction of the store itself, the work included the demolition of the existing cattle market, the resiting of a car park and substantial highway improvements.

Construction of the store commenced in November 2001 and the building was opened to the public on 22nd July 2002.

The development was ideal for the needs of the BRE research team. It was a town centre site, surrounded by homes and existing retail and commercial properties. Pilot study hosts, Tesco and Taylor Woodrow, had already done a considerable amount of work in terms of community liaison. This included:

- An introductory letter to 80 local residents informing them of the works and introducing the site manager together with his photograph and contact details.
- The appointment of a dedicated public relations consultant to oversee relations with the community during the planning stages.
- The establishment of monthly liaison meetings between the

project team and the council and local community representatives.

- An established complaints procedure including the logging of complaints.
- Additional traffic light pedestrian crossings manned by project staff.
- Providing escorts for school children around areas adjacent to the site

The start of the BRE pilot study coincided with the first stages of construction of the new supermarket, in January 2002.

BRE's initiatives

The BRE research team with the co-operation of the project sponsors developed the following initiatives for piloting at the Beverley site.

- Awareness-raising workshops for site personnel.
- Information leaflets to provide guidance for the local community.
- Questionnaires to monitor the attitudes of the local community towards the site and provide feedback on site performance in terms of consideration of local people and businesses.

Although for the purposes of the pilot, these were tailored to the specific needs of the Beverley development, they have been designed as easily adaptable generic templates that will be available for later use by the industry in general.

Building on good work

“Tesco is a completely customer focused company and we understand that the residents living around our construction sites are our future neighbours. The initiative included workshops for site personnel, which explored the impact of construction activity on local residents. By making them aware of that impact, the workshops help to improve their customer focus,” Paul Feehan, Tesco.

Workshops for site personnel

In the course of the case studies the researchers had found that the personnel working on site were the main focal point for the local community, as they tend to be the visible face of the development. However those personnel felt they did not necessarily have the skills to deal with the concerns of the general public. To address this, the project team developed a programme of workshops under the title *Dealing with the Public*, and delivered two half-day workshops on the site in February 2002.



The objectives of the workshops were:

- To raise awareness of the impacts of a site on the local community and the issues that concern local people.
- To encourage the development of the communication skills needed to deal with these issues by providing participants with strategies for dealing with the public.

The course content focused on both technical issues with examples of best practice from the five previous case studies, and communication skills, using role-play exercises. Participants were encouraged to share experiences and make suggestions for improvement.

The twenty participants were nominated by Taylor Woodrow and represented a variety of roles on site from site manager, foreman and engineer to drivers and security staff. Each participant received a

certificate of attendance. Their reactions to the sessions were very favourable; both immediately after the session and later on during follow up.

Information for the local community

The initial research had found that local communities felt they would benefit from guidance on what is involved at all stages of a construction project. As well as developing their understanding, it would help them cope better with issues that might arise. They also reported frequent difficulties in tracking down the appropriate person to deal with complaints.

The research team therefore produced a short information leaflet for local residents and businesses written in clear, non-technical language. The leaflet included:

- General information about what to expect when a new development takes place in a neighbourhood including a construction timeline and a glossary of terms
- Site-specific information including timescales and names and contact details of key personnel, eg site manager, Building Control and a short description of their roles.



The leaflet template can be tailored to the needs of a particular site. It is intended that copies of the leaflet should be widely distributed at an early stage of a project so that local people can keep it for reference. The Beverley leaflet was piloted on a sample of local residents via face-to-face interviews and was thought to be very

helpful. Not only did it provide an explanation of processes they knew little about, eg planning, but it also gave them key names and contact details to refer to when needed.

Keeping people informed

“If the public are happy then everything runs smoothly. The best thing is to keep people informed. The worst is when people are passed around the houses before they find someone who knows what is going on – so we always let local people know who the site manager is. Leaflets give general information - and a contact in case anyone has a grievance. It’s all about keeping people informed.”
Nick Shaw, Taylor Woodrow

Performance Feedback Questionnaire

The research team had found that although there is much good practice in working with the community on individual sites, there is little monitoring or feedback on the success of these measures. This performance feedback questionnaire provided a method of independent monitoring of the impacts of construction site operation, the success of mitigation measures and the satisfaction of local residents and businesses.

The questionnaire focused on general issues derived from the earlier research findings (rather than areas specific to the Beverley development) including:

- Communication
- Impacts of the site in general
- Specific impacts on local businesses
- Dealing with complaints

Site personnel distributed the questionnaire to 200 local residents and business premises in February 2002, an early stage of the development, to provide a baseline measure of local attitudes and opinions. It was distributed again upon completion of the project at the end of July 2002 to monitor any changes. To encourage participation, all respondents

were given the opportunity to enter a prize draw. This resulted in very acceptable response rates of 33% in February and 26% in July.

The results were reported to the project sponsors together with recommendations and suggestions. The main findings include:

- The most commonly used source of information about the development was the local paper.
- Awareness of information about the development increased considerably from February to July 2002.
- Perceived helpfulness of people on site in dealing with concerns rose by over 20% over the same period, possibly as a result of the increased efforts of the site personnel.
- If people had any concerns they tended to take them to the site manager who was the focus for the local community.
- There were many positive messages - behaviour of workmen, security and access factors were very highly rated.

The results can be used in two ways. During the course of a long-term project the questionnaire raises awareness of issues that are causing concern within the local community and enables an effective response. At the end of a project it can be used to provide feedback for the client and construction company to gather learning points for future developments and to support a system of continuous improvement via benchmarking.

Way forward

Better consideration of the needs of the local community is being seen as increasingly important in the construction industry. It saves time and money in the long run because complaints are reduced and PR improves. The key to better relationships with local residents and businesses lies in improved

communication and more effective information provision. The guidance and tools that have been trialled at Beverley provide a framework for a communication strategy, however to be successful a communication strategy must be ongoing from the earliest stages of a construction project until after completion. It also requires a commitment from all parties involved. The case study provides an excellent example of this. From the outset Tesco, Taylor Woodrow and the rest of the project team placed great emphasis on providing a coordinated approach to maintaining good relations with local people.

For further information about the project and guidance contact Mindy Hadi at BRE (hadim@bre.co.uk) or visit the BRE website www.bre.co.uk



In the light of the innovative work carried out, the Beverley project has been included as a best practice example in the Movement for Innovation portfolio of demonstration projects that promote better working practices in the construction industry. (see www.m4i.org.uk)

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