



Park Hall (top) and Archbishop Grimshaw

partnerships for schools

This case study looks at the ways in which BAM construction has engaged with Solihull Council to increase and promote local business as part of their commitment to local regeneration.

Over three months a local supply chain database was created and now over £10.2m of the £27m of the Solihull contract has been procured locally with more to come.

Key project information

- Local authority:** Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council
- No. of schools:** Four in Wave 1
- Project type:** Rebuild and refurbishment
- Project cost:** £87.5m
- Project timescale:** Construction commenced May 2007. The last of the four BSF schools, Smith's Wood, opened in August 2009
- Other organisations involved:** Solihull Chamber of Commerce; Solihull BSF; Interserve Engineering Ltd

# Effective local procurement: the experience of the 'Buying a Better Solihull' programme

## Project description

Reaching financial close in May 2007 and with construction starting in the same month, four schools have been built by BAM under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) project in Solihull. Wave 1 saw the development of sports and arts colleges (Park Hall Academy and Lanchester and Archbishop Grimshaw schools) as well as a dual campus devoted to teaching pupils with emotional, social and behavioural difficulties (Forest Oak and Merstone Special Educational Needs schools). The final school, Smith's Wood Sports College, which opened in August 2009, was built in just 48 weeks.

Each school is unique and elegant in design allowing a safe and secure learning environment for its pupils. These conceptual designs reflect the strong partnership that was built between BAM and local suppliers over three years resulting in four schools that integrate perfectly with their surroundings. Varied recreational areas mix with educational strongholds to create an environment that is designed to inspire students and teachers alike for the generations to come. The wide range of facilities included in the new schools - including sports halls, dance studios,

swimming pools, assembly halls and superb grounds all built in partnership with local companies - mean that the buildings are not simply a place of education or for young people, but a part of the community.

From an early stage in the construction of the Solihull schools, it was evident that the current supply chain database was insufficient for the amount of work that was going to take place. As BAM was also keen to continue with their existing local regeneration programme, they decided that there was a need to create a larger database of regional small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that would help major contractors find partners and suppliers in the local area. This would also benefit the companies greatly in promoting their services to future contractors.

Over a period of three months, BAM's regional supply chain manager worked with the council to design a database that would help major contractors find local partners and suppliers which was then named the 'Buying a Better Solihull' programme.

As part of the scheme, BAM delivered a local procurement conference at the NEC in Birmingham which saw over 200 companies attend a mix of formal and informal meetings along with presentations. Here

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BAM outlined the high standards that would be expected of them including stringent adherence to health and safety regulations, as well as service and delivery goals. It was then decided that as well as the 'Buying a Better Solihull' programme it was equally necessary to ensure that the chosen companies gained the support of BAM to help them become 'fit to compete' in the BSF construction market.

At times it proved very difficult to construct new buildings alongside the existing school sites during term time. Not only did the large numbers of pupils in close proximity demand vigorous attention to health and safety, but the constant influx of people on a daily basis meant that some of the constructions had to be split into several stages meaning local procurement was more important than ever if the schools were to be finished on time.

Acknowledging this, BAM worked with six companies on the 'fit to compete' programme which helped them meet the strict requirements expected on BSF projects, including health and safety guidelines and fire regulations. One of the businesses BAM worked with was Water Orton Roofing who, with the support of BAM, managed to secure a roofing contract at Smith's Wood Sports College.

Throughout the duration of the two-year construction period, the three main contractors working on the Solihull regeneration programme all used the new database to complete tender lists. Over 22 companies were used or considered on the programme, meaning all of the schools were delivered on time and within budget. Lower travel and transport costs not only meant quicker construction, but was also far kinder to the environment.

The four schools have been a hit with both students and teachers alike. Rob Hawkins, Principal at Smith's Wood College, said: "The self esteem of the whole school has been raised, a feeling that has been shared by our wider community. It is clear from the reaction of first time visitors that our new college makes a deep and abiding impression. Pupils now tell us that they 'can't wait' to get to school in the morning. Literally, it makes them feel good.

"One factor that has contributed significantly to the success of the project has been the excellent working relationship between the college, local authority and the BAM teams."

## Apprenticeship opportunities

A sharp increase in demand for local suppliers then led to a further initiative that would greatly improve the employability of local students in an ongoing partnership with Solihull College.

While the construction apprenticeship course at the college provided an academic platform, organisers were finding it difficult to establish the necessary links with local employers to provide vocational work placements. There was also a noticeable difference between the curriculum and the reality of the construction industry which included safety practice and a lack of protective equipment.

To combat this, BAM donated a collection of Personal Protective Equipment to the college and set about ensuring the apprentices knew of the importance surrounding health and safety guidelines. In order for them to see this in practice, BAM arranged site visits and safety inductions as well as providing lectures and demonstrations from different subcontractors working on site such as plastering, bricklaying and carpentry.

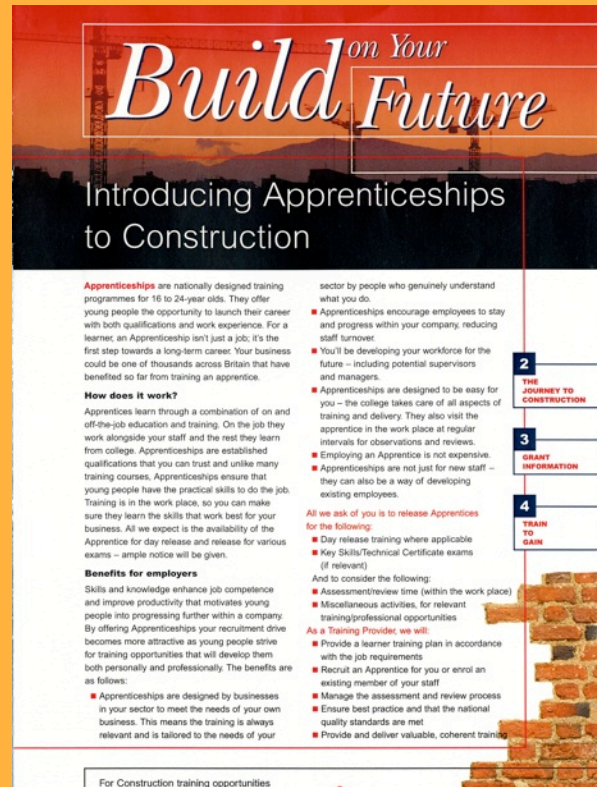
Newly informed, the apprentices were ready to embark upon a placement in their specific trade. However it soon became apparent that locating work for the apprentices, with a trade specialism and certificate in construction, was proving challenging. As a major contractor, BAM does not employ direct labour and was unable to offer any placements but knew that support could be offered through its own knowledge and contacts within the supply chain.

Along with his appreciation of local firms, the supply chain manager worked with the college to develop a 'Build Your Future' brochure which would appeal to those employers. The regional director was asked to write a cover letter and send out the brochure along with a list of apprentices, their trades and further information of the placements they were looking for. Marketing the apprentices and college in this way has radically changed the ease with which students find placements. It has proved to be such a success that many other projects across the country will be using it to encourage links between local business and

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## Top Tips

- **Build lasting partnerships:** The key to success in the Solihull case study is the excellent working relationships between all of the companies involved, whether big or small. This also does not necessarily mean that it has to be with ones you have already worked with—some of the best partnerships have been the most unexpected. Organise a conference where potential companies can network.
- **Don't dismiss too early:** A company which has never worked on a large scale project before is not necessarily unfit to compete at any stage. Workshops can give SMEs the boost to enter the world of construction.
- **Work together:** Communication is the most important tool to success, so working together on site can only improve this.



## Key contact

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## Further information

More information on Solihull's BSF project can be found at [www.solihull.gov.uk/bsf/](http://www.solihull.gov.uk/bsf/)

More information about BAM can be found at [www.bam.co.uk](http://www.bam.co.uk)