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partnerships for schools
building schools for the future

This case study from an early BSF project focuses on the first three schools built through the Waltham Forest BSF. It looks at how capacity and confidence was built in both the council's client team and within schools to help them identify, and insist upon, good design. It also looks at the role of the CABE enabler in the process.

Key project information

Number of schools in estate: 22 (including 5 SEN)
Wave 1 BSF programme began: 2005
Number of schools in first phase: 3
Schools completed 2008: Frederick Bremer School (new build), Kelmscott School (refurbishment)
School to be completed 2009: Waltham Forest School for Girls (refurbishment)

Understanding opportunities and enabling design quality in BSF: Waltham Forest

Project description

Waltham Forest is one of the 33 London boroughs. Its key challenge is to help its young people to appreciate the unique advantages and opportunities available to them as residents of a global city. The council has sought to use the BSF programme to reorganise the schools estate into more sustainable and operationally efficient institutions that are better equipped to offer young people a range of learning opportunities. Before BSF, the council had undertaken some new school and school refurbishment procurement using PFI delivery.

Role of the enabler

Both the council BSF project manager and the CABE (Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment) enabler agreed together on the main ways in which the enabling process benefited the programme. These were:

- building capacity and confidence in both the client team and schools to identify and insist on good quality design at all stages;
- presenting exemplars of good (and not so good) design and introducing techniques for balancing and reviewing design/value options;

- supporting the project team in the assessment and selection of the bidders' design proposals and their design teams and the selection of the preferred bidder;
- supporting the client design advisers and client team in reviewing the three bidder design proposals (this was before CABE's schools design panel was set up);
- leaving a legacy of high-quality design aspiration and a high level of school participation, which the local authority project team will be able to use in the next, larger Wave 5 programme for 17 schools (currently at 'strategy for change' stage).

Developing the vision

The London Borough of Waltham Forest had a well-developed vision and set of objectives for its BSF schools project ready for enabling. Its vision for its schools transformation programme is ambitious. It includes proposals for leadership and governance through the establishment of trust arrangements in line with the government's Every Child Matters programme, networked learning (schools learning from each other) and, where possible, all-through (all age groups) schools to transform learning and outcomes for children and young people.

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Key strategic educational objectives driven by the authority are shared by the schools, and were developed further in the design brief for each of the first three schools in the programme. The briefs were developed before the requirement for schools to produce a formal school 'strategy for change' document. However, through a process of consultation and engagement with stakeholders, including pupil consultation facilitated by the schools design initiative School Works, a school vision for each project was established. This set the context for the technical and design aspirations that followed in the remainder of each brief.

Translating the vision into building design

The council had assembled a strong technical and educational team to deliver its transformational vision. The enabler was particularly able to help in the more intangible areas such as architectural possibilities and impacts, internal and external environmental quality, site organisation, visual perception and sustainability value.

Consultation

Unusually for school design at the time, an adapted design quality indicator (DQI) methodology was used to assess the design quality of bid proposals. The schools DQI process was not yet in full use and was moderated (reduced to 70 criteria) to pioneer its use as

an assessment tool. It was weighted to comprise the majority element of the formal bid design evaluation.

Procurement

Three bidders were invited to submit tenders on each of the three school designs. The bidders were required to consider the adapted DQI criteria in their submissions. On the presentation day, 'juries' made up of senior representatives of each of the three schools and the project team assessed the presentations of the three bidding teams.

After two bidders were shortlisted, the enabler's advice on the submitted designs and build scopes was considered very influential. The enabler worked with the bidders and the council's team to refine the submitted designs for the new Frederick Bremer School, as this was thought to be the key design challenge in Wave 1. The scrutiny and selection of the final submissions of the consortium contractors and their proposed school designs were especially important, as the successful bidder was expected to deliver the further 17 schools of Waltham Forest's BSF Wave 5 programme.

The Bouygues UK consortium was awarded the contract using a design team led by Penoyre and Prasad for the Frederick Bremer School and by Architecture plb for Kelmscott School and Waltham Forest School for Girls.

Key design aspects of the schools

Kelmscott School

- Refurbishment and extension, design and build project for 900 students occupying 7,413 square metres, costing £11 million
- Complex nine-phase project with the school population in place throughout construction
- Design of the learning resource centre and the spaces around it are very well considered
- The relationship between the school and the street has been transformed by a new extension housing the reception, assembly, dining halls, ICT suite and café
- Partnerships for Schools award for 'best design for a remodelled school', November 2008.

Frederick Bremer School

- New-build PFI project for 900 students occupying 9,519 square metres, costing £21 million
- New community secondary school with engineering specialism formed from the merger of Warwick Boys School and Aveling Park School, located on a new site
- Design successfully responds to considerable site constraints, to the school's requirements and to design advice received during the bidding process
- Dramatic atrium space is a spine that leads from the entrance into the depths of the site, with a first and second floor library projecting above
- Internally, the building functions well and has spacious circulation spaces, good levels of daylight and well thought-out catering spaces.

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Lessons learned

Design teams in Wave 5 will be widened to deliver the greatly increased number of schools.

The conclusions from the first phase of Waltham Forest's BSF programme are:

- Building the confidence and capacity of the project team helped identify and demand high-quality design and high-quality design teams.
- Allowing wide, divergent and strategic thinking at the start of the programme paid dividends later in the option assessment and procurement selection.
- Early enabling included the dissemination of good practice from elsewhere and user-friendly publications by CABE, School Works and others.
- Building a strong relationship between the enabler with the senior project team, the schools, the project champion and the stakeholders was important.
- According to the BSF programme project manager, the key stages that most benefited from enabling time were:
 - widening the design knowledge of the project team and the schools themselves
 - commenting on the control designs and strategic layouts and consultation with schools
 - involvement in the formulation of the design brief from the 'strategy for change' and 'outline business case' documents
 - involvement in the DQI process reviewing designs at the critical bidder stages.
 - Using established design indicators and/or criteria (for example, the design quality indicators and CABE's 10 points for good school design) as requirements and evaluation methods for the design quality of bids was very efficient, maintained consistency of quality standards and helped preparation for formal reviews like CABE's schools design panel.
 - Setting up and maintaining a local design review panel incorporating enabling techniques for subsequent phases and waves of schools is recommended.

Key contact

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Further information

This case study was supplied by CABE. Since the CABE schools design panel was set up in 2007 to assess BSF sample and non-sample schemes, the role of the enabler has changed. It is the client design adviser, rather than the enabler who works with the sample schools and bidding teams, and who comments on design. This scheme was delivered under the old arrangement. For more information see: www.cabe.org.uk/schools