

# Constructing a strong foundation on which to build

In today's highly competitive market, Managing Director of Gentoo Construction, Allan Thompson explains how being an Art of Living business differentiates Gentoo Construction from the rest of the industry.

Gentoo Construction is growing from strength to strength as a leading contractor in the North East and Yorkshire and stands as a new breed of construction company. The company has a commitment to making a positive impact on people, planet and property alongside a range of traditional and specialised services. These include new build, refurbishment, asbestos, sustainable solutions and supported living facilities for both residential and commercial properties across many sectors including health, care and education.

**What is an Art of Living construction business?** This encompasses the thought process behind what we build, who we build it with and how we build it. This means using more efficient and sustainable building techniques, investing in new innovations and ensuring we think about protecting resources for future generations. This includes involving communities, getting children engaged and enthused about the built environment and also investing in and caring about the health and wellbeing of our team.

**We can also prove through our social accounting process that for every £1 invested with Gentoo Construction we can forecast an estimated social return of £2.74, highlighting the added value of working with us.**

**So why do we do it?** Giving back to society is important to us. As part of Gentoo Group, our mission is to 'generate wealth by improving the lives of our customers and re-invest it through passionate people to create a



A community event on a Gentoo Construction site in Durham building the new HQ for the Durham Diocese. The event celebrated the laying of a Foundation Stone that Gentoo Construction donated and local school children buried a time capsule, attended by the Bishop of Durham.

climate for personal and collective opportunity.' We have won national awards that showcase the diverse ways in which our people achieve this including Stonewall Workplace Equality Index 2014 1st Place, Sunday Times 100 Best Not-For-Profit Organisations to Work for 2014 and BITC National Big Tick Workwell Engagement and Wellbeing Award 2014. As a construction business we translate these values through winning highly accredited industry awards. Accolades include MCS accreditation; ARCA accreditation; retaining the RoSPA Gold Award since 2009; Considerate Constructors Silver Awards; several Constructing Excellence and RICS awards and recognition of our innovation in building the first and largest residential development of Passivhaus in the UK. From new and repeat contract wins ranging between £1m to £12m and from as far north as Berwick down to Yorkshire, we are proving our credentials to new, existing and potential clients every day. Our attitude to any project is 'if you

want it, we can do it.' Whether this be through financial solutions, safety issues, recruiting local labour or community engagement, the diverse workforce we nurture and train ensure we can deliver on all levels.

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**A sustainable approach to construction**

One of our most recent and exciting contract wins to date is a £9m contract from Carlillion-Igloo to build 76 new low-energy homes in the Ouseburn Valley. The first of at least four phases, this development is delivering around 250 homes, offices, leisure and retail accommodation and is a truly spectacular regeneration project in Newcastle. The stand out factor that enabled us to secure this contract was our expertise and experience in low carbon refurbishment and



**ACHIEVING TARGETS**

A great example of how we are achieving HCA targets is on The Malings site. As this current phase comes to an end we can already see the impact we've had on the area:

- 50% of all labour used on site came from a NE postcode
- 49 children have been engaged with the site including site visits and health and safety talks
- 7 Gentoo apprentices undertook NVQ Level 2 qualification on this site
- 2 work experience opportunities have been provided including a French student
- Provided 1 career opportunity for someone who had been unemployed for less than six months

sustainable solutions. For us sustainability is not just about offering low carbon construction and bespoke PV solutions, but generating a sustainable supply chain. We still operate 30 day payment terms with our suppliers and deliver extra value that comes from being part of Gentoo including volunteering and wellbeing activities and events. To ensure consistency and high service levels we ask our supply chain partners to comply with our code of conduct and mirror our values in return. One ask of our supply chain is to work with us to maximise the social return on the programme, working to the Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) targets where required. We have adopted an employment and skills matrix to bring added value to all our contracts and demonstrate the difference we bring to the community in which we work. To do this we need our supply chain and subcontractors to buy into our values and help us deliver this, and our responsibility is therefore to provide them with the support they need to do this. I know from my own experience of talking to different people, that there is a misconceived perception that Gentoo Construction just deliver housing association refurb. This is certainly not the case! We deliver a wide range of contract activity to a diverse client base and each contract receives our full Art of Living customer offer. Our approach is founded on client choice. It's all about how they want to work with us, our job is to



An unveiling ceremony in Berwick to showcase the community hoardings, in partnership with Four Housing. Gentoo Construction entered the site into the Ivor Goodsite hoardings competition from Considerate Constructors which saw local community groups, schools and even the emergency services get involved to decorate.

complete the project with an expert team, on time and in budget. Through awards, reputation, contract wins, client feedback and a strong customer focus, we are continuing to show that we are now so much more than a social housing provider. In fact we are harnessing the experience of working within the social housing and affordable housing sector to our advantage. Understanding the demands and requirements for the build as well as a long history of tenancy engagement and after care services, only increases our offer to customers.

- These now include:
- Refurbishment – residential and commercial
  - New build – residential and commercial
  - Asbestos – commercial
  - Sustainable solutions – PV residential and commercial
  - Supported living facilities for elderly and various care dependencies

Of course we still operate with the basics of any other construction company in that we have turnover targets to reach but the key thing for us is that we deliver on so much more than just reaching that target.

My view is that if we concentrate on supporting sustainable communities, leadership and culture, working with our supply chain, innovation, staff wellbeing and a big push on customer focus, our turnover targets should pretty much take care of themselves.



Allan Thompson

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