

NURTURE  FUTURE

Towards Zero-Carbon Schools

LON
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Major contractor of the year (over £300m)

Building Awards 2010

Wates has pulled off the rare feat of winning this category for the second year in a row, thanks to an equally rare combination of commercial and management skills

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Winner

Wates Group

Wates ended the decade with five years of consistent profit growth and year-on-year improvements in customer loyalty – which goes a long way to explaining why it scooped this award for the second year in a row. A combination of good commercial performance (it made a profit of £50.5m last year) and a committed approach to sustainability and customer service resulted in some truly great buildings, 98% of which were delivered on time and to budget. Just some examples are the £45m refurbishment of the former Allders building in Leeds' city centre, a £7m flagship Waitrose store in Altrincham and the refurbishment of six 22-storey tower blocks in Westminster. Customers clearly appreciate these qualities too, as 80% of Wates' business is for existing clients such as John Lewis and Marks & Spencer, and £400m of its projects last year were procured through public sector frameworks. Furthermore, Wates is the first UK company to make innovative use of risk management insurance to give customers and the supply chain greater protection and security. It also invests nearly £6m every year on new technology and processes to improve the quality of its products, and ensure its clients are constantly receiving the best service. In each sector it works in – from construction and housing to retail and interiors – it demonstrates excellence and is a formidable force for any rivals to contend with.

Runners-up

Bovis Lend lease

Bovis Lend Lease is known for its exceptional project teams, collaborative style of working and long-term relationships with clients. These are values it has maintained during the recession, while others have let partnering fall by the wayside. Some projects it worked on last year included the £500m MediaCity in Salford, the conversion of a grade A-listed building in Edinburgh into a hotel and £500m of hospitals in Manchester.

Costain Group

Innovation is a way of life at Costain, perhaps because of the varied skills of its staff. This contractor brings together its building, civil engineering and energy divisions to deliver complex building in a range of sectors. It has used this expertise to construct Europe's largest waste contract for the Greater Manchester Waste Authority and to provide solutions for BAA. But the area where its scientific expertise is most reassuring is the nuclear sector. While working on an evaporator at Sellafield, it developed innovations that improved safety, quality and programme assurance.

Kier

Kier responded swiftly to the collapse of the housing market by taking a range of prompt measures. This meant that its construction profit actually rose 8%, and its revenue remained within 3% of its 2008 peak. Its balance sheet was further strengthened by the diverse nature of its work. It operates in the marine, education, health, energy and infrastructure sectors, which is why its forward order book is up 10% to £4.5bn.

Leadbitter Group

It has been an excellent year for Leadbitter. Working predominantly in the public sector, it has built an impressive range of sustainable projects, including Newport High School, the first BREEAM "excellent" secondary school in Wales, One Brighton, the UK's first commercially viable zero-carbon development, Mariners Quay, the largest sustainable housing development in Wales and the National Pollen and Aerobiology Research Unit at the University of Worcester.

Osborne

Osborne grew for the 16th successive year, making a turnover of £334m and a pre-tax profit of £2.45m. Not a bad position for David Fison, its new chief executive, to inherit. The business has also been prepared by a thoroughgoing restructuring that took it from five divisions (civil engineering, construction, homes, property services and rail) to two (projects, and rail and services). This has reduced overheads by £4.6m, which means we may see more impressive figures next year.

Sir Robert McAlpine

If you're looking for a firm in which to pursue a varied and exciting career, Sir Robert McAlpine might be the one to choose. No doubt, this is why more than a third of its staff stay with the company for 10 years or more. A chance to gain some tailor-made technical training is just one of the perks of the job, and a major reason why this £960m-turnover contractor is able continually to offer an exceptional standard of work and innovative solutions to clients' problems.

Willmott Dixon

Willmott Dixon this year saw off stiff competition to win the sole place on the £350m Scape National Contractors Framework for the second time in a row, which means it will now act as delivery partner for any new-build and refurbishment projects that local authorities procure through the deal. It grew turnover 62% and profit 67% last year, but this came with an enviable set of other contract wins that should ensure that it remains on an upward trajectory for the foreseeable future.