

Straight Talking BIM - Digital Built Environment Conference 2018



The RICS held its Digital Built Environment Conference on 21 June in London. Other than your reporter, there was one other chartered land surveyor in attendance. It is not difficult to see why geomatics professionals are cautious. Too often an event that looks good on paper turns out to be an expensive disappointment. This conference was however well worth the effort.

BIM Insights

The first session of the day was a panel discussion with the theme “Why surveyors must use new technologies to survive and thrive”. The panellists, David Throssell from Skanska,

Jeff Belk from University Hospital Southampton NHS Trust and David Stapleton from Tenderspace, came up with plenty of wisdom. There were sacrilegious moments, “COBie will be superseded!” said Belk, who runs a CAD / BIM team at the hospital. Throssell said that the Employer Information Requirements (EIR) documents should be set up properly to deliver the information that is required and data should be collected during construction, not left till handover. A disturbing aspect of BIM as currently practised is that it tends to result in less discussion rather than more, said one panellist. On the subject of interoperability the panel asked “Why can’t any BIM software open a BIM model?”

Moving on to cost, the panel suggested that BIM is perceived as expensive because it is usually started too late and the ‘supply chain’ should be involved in the design phase. They urged early involvement but said that often the data they received was not in a form that they could use. But Southampton had a success story to tell – an £18 million development with only 18 changes to the design.

Facilities management has not yet configured itself to use BIM and it was suggested that as soon as one FM system can accept BIM, facilities managers will drive BIM as a requirement.

Future Skills

On the question of skills, the thought was that the most important requirement is to communicate well and be able to analyse data for different audiences. At Skanska, the aim is for experts to be coaches. BIM and 3D modelling should be something that everyone can use to a basic level, in the same way that everyone today types documents, which thirty years ago would have been handwritten and given to a typist. Later in the day, a speaker from Arup said that they have joined forces with five universities to develop an undergraduate ‘trans-disciplinary’ course covering all the skills that a BIM engineer / surveyor / architect will need.

BIM BAM and Hadrian

The rest of the day never quite surpassed the first session, although there were some interesting points. A speaker from Grosvenor Estates said that his organisation had decided there was no business case for BIM, but one got the impression that someone had quoted a very large sum for scanning their entire estate. Another speaker gave the lowdown on robotics. We were told about ‘Hadrian’ who could lay 1,000 bricks per hour! The speaker suggested that the brickie would be handing bricks to Hadrian. But seriously, the message was that companies, some of which are “in stealth mode”, were getting to grips with prefabrication (3D printing) and automated construction. There was a talk about AR/VR in BAM Construction. They see it as inevitable and not expensive, because if there is already a REVIT model, the only expense is the glasses.

And Finally Matterport and Drones

No tech conference is worth its salt without UAVs and this input was provided by John Cusack from Qubic Aerial System. His company seems to specialise in survey work for insurers and uses a Matterport camera for internal building surveys. They use drones for the great outdoors. Like all good salesmen his talk of technology wooed and wowed the audience and went up to and then just over the wire, so there was no time for questions.

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