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Wood to the core

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Bovis: a certified success?

IS BOVIS AS GREEN AS IT CLAIMS WHEN PROCURING TIMBER? ROSS MACMILLAN REPORTS.

WITH MORE sustainable building targets than you can wave a stick at, the construction industry is so keen on being green that it is now more guilty than any other sector, in dragging the definition of sustainable into the realms of unmeaning.

So when I travelled to London to meet the head of sustainability at Bovis Lend Lease to talk about its sustainable timber strategy – I kept an open mind.

Bovis: FSC only

It announced in March it had become the first major contractor to achieve Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) Chain of Custody certification.

In short, it means Bovis can guarantee to its clients that it has the mechanisms in place to deliver FSC certified buildings.

It follows its delivery of the first FSC certified commercial property in the world at London's One Wood Street – a city office block near St Paul's Cathedral.

The FSC forest certification is one of four schemes recognised under the government's Central Point of Expertise on Timber procurement to ensure the timber procured is both legal and sustainable.

Bovis has been one of the few frontrunners in procuring sustainable timber over the last four years.

"They're definitely one of the good guys," says Belinda Fletcher, head of Greenpeace's forest campaign.

It is a glowing endorsement by a group renowned for breaking into construction sites to expose illegally sourced timber.

As a member of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature's (WWF) Forest Trade Network, Bovis has a duty to report on its timber use annually.

In 2004 it used 676m³ of timber – of which, 74% was from FSC and recycled sources. The figure is somewhat misconstrued as it was reporting on between 2% and 5% of the timber it used.

Today 95% of the business is reporting its timber use on 39,000m³ of timber. Its FSC content is 68%.

"That's pretty good going," says Fletcher.

The work it started in 2004 was given a boost last year with the appointment of Dr Paul Toyne, an environmental scientist to head its

sustainability unit.

But with no construction background, what exactly has he brought?

Neela Bettridge, director of Article 13 – a business-risk consultancy for SMEs Dr Toyne co-founded, has described him as having a lot of credibility within environmental circles. "He is very well regarded and really knows his stuff," she adds.

But what does that do for a big commercial contractor like Bovis? "In a sense I'm able to put a few things in a clean way," he says.

And he's shown he's not afraid to use the heavy-handed approach to get results. Before joining Bovis, Dr Toyne was involved in a campaign that got multi-national mining company, Rio Tinto kicked-out of a National Park in Ecuador, where it was working illegally.

And in regards to timber, his credentials are second to none. He previously headed up the WWF's forest management programme and has helped pushed central government to have a timber procurement policy.

His work with SMEs has also helped engage Bovis' supply chain – the most important factor in ensuring that only FSC timber enters its projects.

CHAIN OF COMMAND

How Bovis ensures the timber that enters its sites is FSC certified:

- Tender documents – specifications in the contract.
- Booking in system – contractors working for Bovis can't book in deliveries without proving the load is FSC certified.
- Site check – Bovis has a man on the gate trained in what to look for. If the driver can't prove it is FSC-certified, it will be sent away.

Supply chain work

Currently it works with five timber suppliers, including Kingspan, PJ Johnson, Taymax Independent Plywood and Timbmet, which have all achieved FSC certification through the FSC's Achilles process, which Bovis has integrated into its procurement strategy. ▶

Dr Paul Toyne: "I want excellence across the business."



Woodrow explains FSC will be revising the standard and it will go up to 70%, but as yet, no date has been set.

Client or contractor demand?

So where is the drive coming from for contractors to ensure their timber is from certified sources?

Jackson Civil Engineering, Balfour Beatty Civil Engineering and Morrison Civil Engineering have also achieved FSC Chain of Custody accreditation.

“Most of the time it is down to who their clients are,” says Woodrow. “In the case of Jackson’s and Morrison’s they both carry out huge amounts of work for the Environment Agency, which has a very clear policy of ensuring its contractors have a Chain of Custody accreditation,” she says

But this is a complete contrast to Bovis, she adds. “That was led by themselves. At times they’ve had to persuade clients or educate them about it.”

But with approximately only 7% of forests world wide under any scheme – Dr Toyne explains that on some occasions it hasn’t been possible to buy FSC. “Then we look at reused and recycled timber,” he says, “and if we

can’t do it that way we then go to another certification scheme.”

Woodrow explains that a lot of suppliers who have gone to the lengths to get FSC certification have got plenty available.

When it hasn’t been able to get an FSC product Bovis has gone back to the client to offer alternatives, Dr Toyne explains.

Improving standards

Currently 20% of the 39,000m³ of timber Bovis use is certified to the Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC), 68% is from FSC, and the rest is from unknown sources.

Bovis now has a specification in its contracts with suppliers to ensure they only supply FSC. “They only get the work if they can prove they supply FSC certified timber,” says Dr Toyne. “If others want to win our business then they’ve got to raise their game.”

The Chain of Custody certification follows its delivery of the first FSC certified commercial property in the world at One Wood Street and follows Balfour Beatty’s FSC project certification for the construction of Barkantine Care Centre.

But to achieve this coveted label – only

50% of the timber used has to come from FSC sources.

Is that enough? Beck Woodrow, FSC UK’s construction advisor says that at least 50% has to be from FSC and the rest of it has to meet FSC’s controlled wood standard – avoiding procuring timber from controversial sources. “The project certification has been a good starting point,” says Woodrow. “That figure was brought in as a trial run. I know from the experience of places built both under Chain of Custody certification and project certification that some projects have achieved far higher – some, even 90%.”



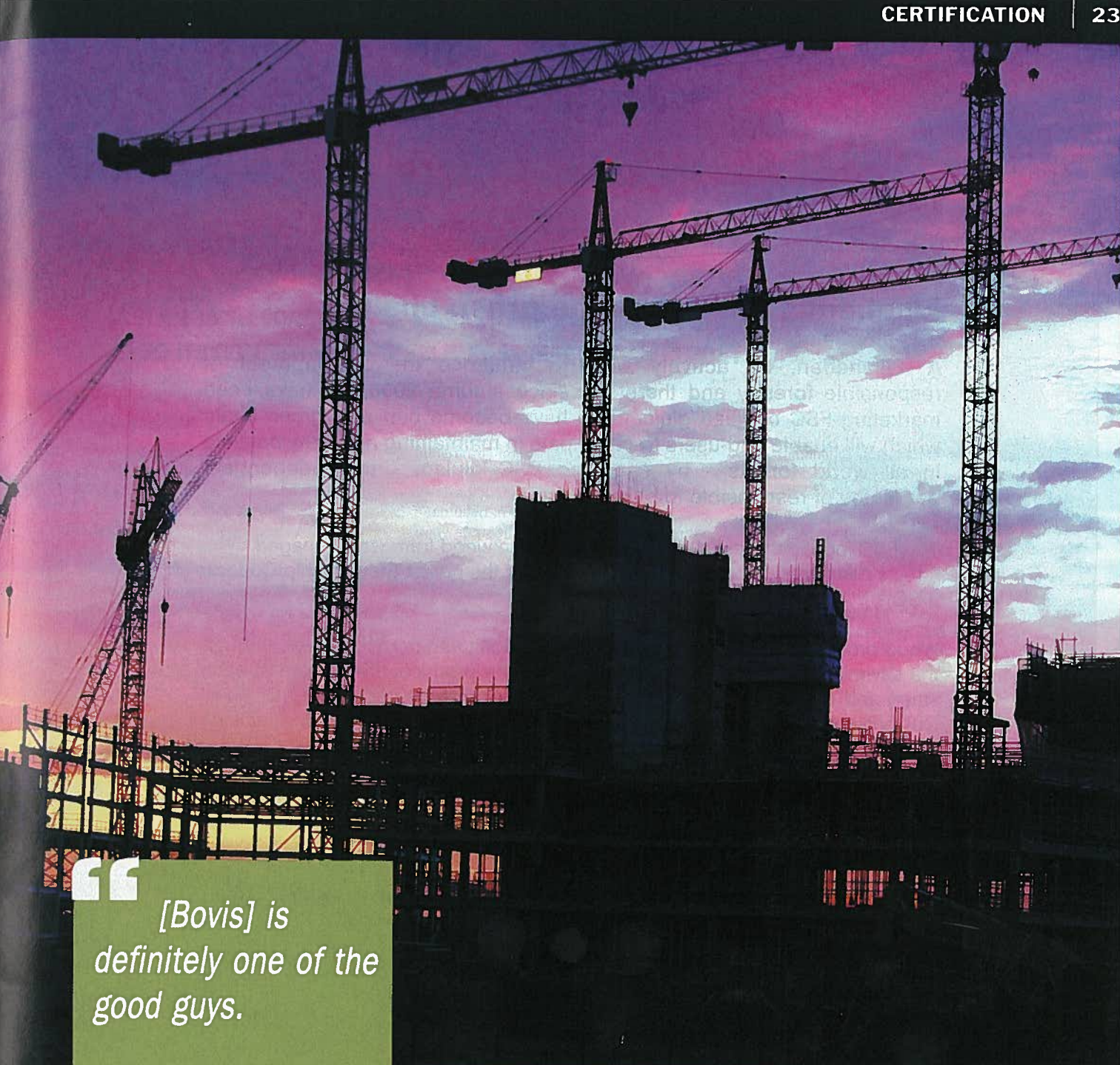
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“ [Bovis] is definitely one of the good guys. ”

*Belinda Fletcher,
Greenpeace*

In 2006 Bovis reported that more than 500m³ of timber from unknown sources was making its way into its superstructures. “That’s the bit we need to work on,” says Dr Toyne.

Julia Young, WWF-UK’s forest and trade manager believes that FSC is the best certification scheme for contractors. “We find there are variable standards in performance in forests across the PEFC scheme,” she says. “But that doesn’t mean it can’t achieve the same status if they take appropriate measures to improve their standards.”

Illegally sourced timber is still making its

Certified pledge: Bovis is going for FSC project certification on Media City in Salford Quays

way into construction projects through products like plywood, flooring products, such as the hardwood merbau and joinery products, such as lamin. “We are now at a stage where we’re able to analyse what products we are getting to FSC standards and which one’s we aren’t,” says Dr Toyne. “We can now start to make informed choices and say, ‘Why haven’t we got FSC timber for a certain type of product?’

Media City and the Athletes’ Village

Bovis is aiming for full FSC project certification on two of its biggest current developments to date – the 200-acre Media City development in Salford Quays for the BBC and the Athletes’ Village for the 2012 Olympic games.

To date, 482.3m³ of timber has been used in Media City, but for the Athletes’ Village, it is

expected that a large volume of timber frame will be used for the apartment blocks.

The Olympic Delivery Authority is fast approaching a panel of 20 firms to supply the games with certified timber recognised under local authority guidelines.

Local authority guidelines recognise timber certified under FSC and PEFC schemes, which incorporates the Canadian Standards Association and the US-based Sustainable Forestry Initiative.

“Ten months ago we were doing things at project level,” adds Toyne, before getting up to dash off to another meeting. “But what we didn’t have was a consistent approach. I don’t want excellence at project level; I want excellence across the business.” **TIC**