



Mary Murrell

speaks to

Tony Mathe



Backing

Tony Mathe, a director of Hillside Contracts, is a strong supporter of the Contract Flooring Association:

TONY, who has worked in the flooring industry for 25 years, joined the CFA Council six months ago. He comments: 'The CFA does some very good work for the industry, and I am pleased that I can use my expertise to make a meaningful contribution.'

'The Council's remit covers everything to do with flooring contract work. We scrutinise applications from companies wishing to join the association, discuss how to settle contract disputes, look at training issues, etc.'

Training plays a major part at Hillside Contracts. 'Traditionally it's been done in-house. Sons have been trained by their parents, and that makes for a loyal workforce. In addition, fitters now go on two or three week courses, or have day release, to ensure that everyone reaches the standard for CSCS certification. All contracts managers are qualified to SMSTS and site supervisors to SSSTS.'

'The main contractors we work with are extremely strict and I don't imagine any of them allowing non-qualified people on site.'

'Currently margins are so tight that finding money to put into training is very hard, especially for smaller organisations.'

'Accessibility to training can be an issue, depending on where a company is based.'

'Luckily, we always manage to ensure our fitters are well trained,' says Tony.

Hillside Contracts was set up in 1997 by Chris Hinsley, Andrew Lee and Mary Sillitoe, md, who are all at its headquarters in Leicester. In 2001 it opened a second office in Mansfield, then three years ago moved to Nottingham where Tony Mathe is based.

'As we bought the property, this new unit represents a major investment. It is double the size of the old building, and has enabled us to increase the numbers of people in our labour force and staff,' says Tony.

the CFA

Overall, the company has 50 directly employed fitters, all CSCS certified. Additionally there are four estimators, four contract managers and a small works manager as well as admin staff.

'We also have a full time Health & Safety officer and NEBOSH safety advisor to ensure we adhere to all the regulations, both in our own buildings and on sites, and that our staff are well trained in these very important issues.'

The catchment area includes the counties surrounding Bedford, Birmingham, Cambridge, Derby, Leicester, Lincoln, Northampton, Nottingham, Stafford, Warwick and York.

Work is undertaken in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals and for local authorities and main contractors and involves subfloor preparation, surface dpms, acoustic underlays, vinyl, linoleum, rubber, PVC and covered and capped skirtings, carpet, accessories, entrance matting and shaped aluminium mats and sports floors including the undercarriage.

Projects listed on the company's website include: £650,000 for Costain for the Nottingham Treatment PFI, QMC; £500,000 for Galliford Try Construction for Northampton PFI schools; £330,000 Marriott Construction Care Homes in Northampton; £300,000 for GF Tomlinson Building for A&E and Maternity, QMC Nottingham; and many others.

A recent contract was at Nottingham prison where £100,000 of Nora rubber with Tarkett vinyl and Marlings carpet tiles were installed.

'We have become an Altro Whiterock premier installer which has enabled us to diversify into the market for clean rooms and other sectors where hygiene is a key requirement.'

'Over 90% of our £5.4m annual turnover is for main contractors,' says Tony, 'and some £650,000 is for small repair contracts. We are one of the largest flooring contractors in the East Midlands.'

'As most of our work is in the specified market we don't have much leeway to suggest alternative



Hillside's Nottingham premises

products, and therefore don't need to worry about promoting or stocking specific flooring products.

'We have, however, built up good relationships with suppliers of screeds, dpms, adhesives etc, to ensure that we buy at the best prices.'

'At the moment it is very difficult to plan ahead. New build has died, unless it is government grant type work, and even that is becoming very unpredictable.'

'Retentions on large orders remain a constant battle, as so many organisations employ delaying

tactics. It is the bane of the industry. We have very efficient accounting procedures, and we chase hard for payment, the same as for normal invoices, and just keep pushing and pushing. What other industry would put up with the inability of main contractors and quantity surveyors to agree final accounts!'

'Other perennial problems are poor site conditions, and unrealistic schedules. But our aim is to overcome these to provide high quality work, and we do.'

CFJ

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