

ONE CONSTRUCTION COMPANY PROVES IT IS NOT JUST ABOUT BUILDING HOUSES BUT HELPING TO BUILD SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES THAT COUNTS

Putting a roof over someone's head is a relatively easy task for any construction company – or one would assume so. However, that's not what counts, claims one leading industry player in the social housing sector.

According to leading fitout, housing and maintenance providers, Morris & Spottiswood, it is not simply a question of delivering decent quality homes, it's much more about contributing to the building of and sustaining the communities in which they work.

“Companies who believe it's their remit to make a house windproof and water tight, or to provide rendering and rough casting services and then walk away are taking a very naive and short sighted view” says Dougie Bennett, Managing Director of Morris & Spottiswood's housing division. “Today I think it's fair to say more contractors are looking to see how they can add value over and above the fundamental specifications of the contract.”

Dougie Bennett is well placed to know what he's talking about. Since being awarded the contract with the Glasgow Housing Association, Morris & Spottiswood, which has offices in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Manchester, have completed 5,000 roofing and rendering renewals, bringing the value of home refurbishments arising from the firm's partnering agreements with local housing organisations throughout Scotland, to in excess of £70million.

“We try as much as possible to go the extra mile not only for the client but also for tenants and homeowners, such as giving a donation to the residents Christmas party. On a micro level, it's about applying common sense and courtesy in, for example, writing to all the householders to inform them our team will be on site and to expect some level of disruption. Mostly, however, we try to identify how we can contribute long-term benefits to the community.

“Housing organisations are under pressure to meet the Government's stringent regional and national targets to build more affordable housing in the UK and to help regenerate communities. We believe it is the job of the appointed contractor to help them deliver on this and this is what we aim to do with each project we take on.

“Last year for example we delivered a roofing and insulated render programme to over 270 properties in the Yoker area of Glasgow on behalf of Garscadden Speirs Local Housing Organisation. While carrying out the work, we were approached by representatives from Yoker Primary School who said the school was badly in need of sports facilities. We therefore offered to refurbish the sports pitch, repair fences, landscape the surrounding areas of the school, and contribute to the purchase of new sportswear, goalposts, nets, balls. We also provided library facilities for the school and stocked it with books at the same time.

Another good example is Morris & Spottiswood’s adult apprenticeship scheme which was created in partnership with Glasgow Housing Association, and their desire to promote employment for local young people and long-term unemployed.

The company implemented a 12 to 16 week training programme with Glasgow City Council’s Queenslie Training Centre, which specialises in providing vocational training for long-term unemployed, and sourced trainee candidates through Castlemilk Economic Development Agency (CEDA).

Morris & Spottiswood, which invests £500,000 in its apprenticeship programme, subsequently offered adult apprenticeships to 4 trainees from CEDA bringing the number of apprentices employed by the firm to 54.

“By bringing people into employment from the local community, we’re demonstrating that we’re not just creating or improving housing in their area, but also fulfilling our social responsibility as an organisation to employ people in and around the areas where we’re working. If the skills aren’t there, how do we get them? That’s where the apprenticeships come in. We believe our work in the housing sector will undoubtedly lead to new apprenticeship opportunities for both school leavers and adult trainees.”

Dougie continued, “There are many good examples like these that we can demonstrate as a firm, which extend beyond the remit of improving the fabric of the building and are much more to do with improving the surrounding environment and transforming the lives of people living in such communities. That is where we believe construction companies operating in the affordable housing sector need to be moving towards or they simply won’t be in the game.”

Ends

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Editor's Note: *Morris and Spottiswood is a leading regional provider of new build, fit out, refurbishment and maintenance services to the social housing sector. The company has a growing portfolio of social housing projects arising from partnering agreements with local housing organisations throughout Scotland. Morris and Spottiswood is also a leading provider of fit out and maintenance services to the retail, banking, commercial, education and healthcare sectors across North West England and Scotland. Established in 1925, the company is Britain's third largest shopfitter.*