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In the shadow of Grenfell

What next for building control and fire safety?



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IN THIS ISSUE

The likely impact of the £2.3bn Housing Infrastructure Fund, Augmented Reality in construction, the growing importance of flood resilience and why accessibility matters for everyone. This issue also covers energy performance, the growth of green roofs and the dangers of cyberattacks for construction firms.

Martin Conlon – Chair of the Building Control Alliance

Alex Goodfellow – Chairman of the Structural Timber Association

Keith MacGillivray – Chief Executive of BAFSA

Do we need to retrofit fire sprinkler systems in social housing?

Following the Grenfell Tower disaster, there have been widespread calls to retrofit fire sprinkler systems in social housing. BAFSA supports this principle – but Chief Executive Keith MacGillivray cautions against a rush to install systems that do not meet British Standards

BAFSA has worked tirelessly for more than 40 years to ensure that automatic fire sprinklers are properly designed and installed in all types of occupancies across the United Kingdom.

The UK sprinkler industry, through this association, has invested heavily in research to ensure we can produce evidence-based data for use by local and national governments. It was BAFSA-backed research in 2011-2012 (The Callow Mount Sprinkler Retrofit Project) which proved that retrofit fire sprinkler systems in social housing were indeed feasible and cost-effective.

A primary objective of this Sheffield high-rise sprinkler project was to determine the practicality of installing a complete system without the need for residents to decamp.

During the early stage of planning, it was recognised that it was vital residents were happy with the proposals to retrofit fire sprinkler systems in their homes and many meetings were held, before and during the project, to ensure they were kept fully informed and that their concerns were properly taken into consideration.

Residents were invited to attend an initial meeting with all partners which explained how fire sprinklers worked and included a myth-busting session to address commonly found fears.

To allow the installation team to test, and refine, their approach without impacting on any of the residents, installation commenced in a vacant flat kept for respite

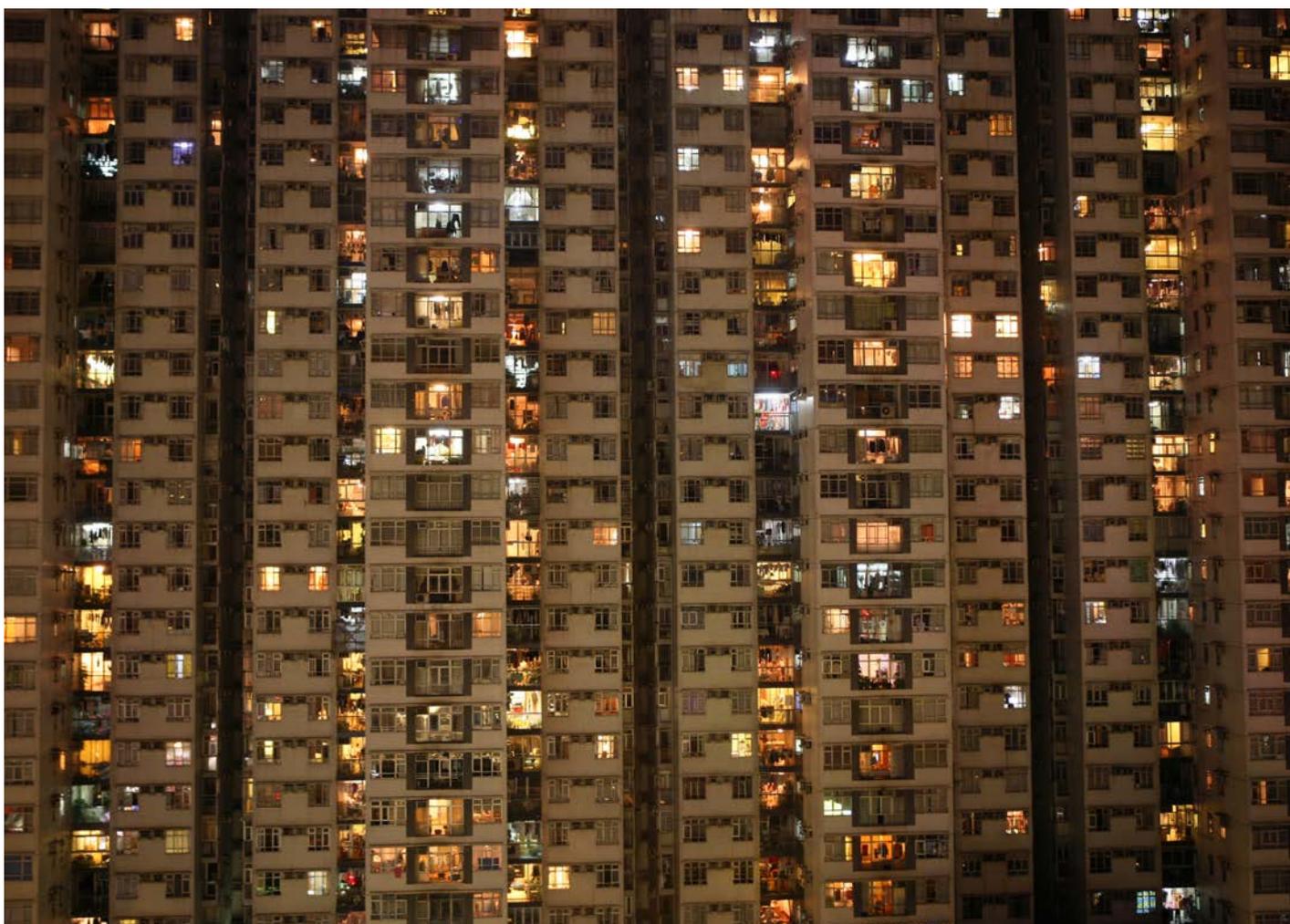
use. Systems were then installed in three additional flats. This included some that were occupied – at the request of the residents. In the light of this initial experience, the programme was slightly amended. The whole scheme, covering 48 flats including lobbies, boiler rooms and bin stores, commissioning and snagging was completed in four weeks.

“It is BAFSA’s opinion that since reliability and efficacy is a paramount issue, only systems designed and installed to the British Standards should be specified for residential and domestic premises.”

The experience revealed that the installation in each flat could be completed in less than one day without evacuating residents and the adopted approach ably illustrated how significant improvement in life and building safety can be readily achieved with minimal disruption.

This was smoothly realised through the cooperation of all concerned and clearly if the adopted approach could be fully integrated with other refurbishment work programmes, additional cost and time benefits would be achieved.

In the light of the Grenfell Tower disaster, while housing providers appear eager to provide more robust fire protection for tenants – especially those in high-rise blocks – BAFSA members report growing fears that a ‘rush to install something quickly’ may result in retrofit fire sprinkler systems being provided that are not fit for purpose.



Those specifying systems and authorities having jurisdiction (eg building control and fire & rescue authorities) must therefore appreciate the risks – and possible liabilities – involved.

There are available on the market a number of automatic fire suppression systems that purport to comply with or ‘provide an equivalent degree of protection’ as those installed to British Standards. Such products may be designed to other standards – or to none – but it is BAFSA’s belief that these are unlikely to provide the same degree of certainty of reliable operation and levels of protection as systems designed and installed in accordance with established codes of practice.

Such non-standard-compliant or innovative systems include ‘low-cost sprinkler protection’ where the sprinkler heads are fed directly from the property’s internal cold water distribution system, ‘pre-action’ or ‘double-knock’ sprinkler systems.

Recent developments in the provision of standalone ‘personal protection’ systems, which provide a free-standing fire suppression system covering a small room or part of a larger room, can now be used with confidence for the safety of immobile people, provided equipment certificated to LPS 1655 by the LPCB is used. The scope for this equipment will be covered in a future British Standard.

One particular product, growing in popularity with building control officers, comes with the claim that it meets the performance standards of BS 92521 and BS 84582. On the face of it, this looks impressive; however, these tests only relate to the nozzle – not the system. It therefore seems bizarre that something installed in a building to protect life can obtain approval simply on the basis that a single component has passed a laboratory test.

It is BAFSA’s opinion that since reliability and efficacy is a paramount issue, only systems designed and

installed to the British Standards should be specified for residential and domestic premises.

Furthermore, owners and responsible persons should seek to employ competent contractors with the appropriate third-party accreditation to both design and install sprinklers or watermist systems and ensure that arrangements are put in place for future servicing and maintenance. Where component standards exist then these should also be complied with.

“BAFSA members report growing fears that a ‘rush to install something quickly’ may result in systems being provided that are not fit for purpose.”

By choosing a third-party certificated contractor with certification from a UKAS-accredited certification body, clients have the confidence that in addition to the contractor having been competence assessed in their activities by the certification body, the certification body are themselves subject to assessment of their competence and abilities by UKAS.

Currently, there are three accredited bodies that operate such certification schemes for sprinkler installations: The Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB), Exova Warrington and IFC Certification.

Specifiers, or those involved in providing guidance on the procurement of non-standard systems (including the fire & rescue services), should also be aware that at the time of writing, none of these UKAS-accredited fire certification bodies will allow a certificate of compliance or conformity to be issued for a non-compliant system. Those who propose or support the use of systems that do not comply with an appropriate standard should understand that they may incur an assumption of liability should such a system be discovered to be unfit for the purpose for which it was installed.

It should also be noted that at the time of writing, only the LPCB maintains schemes for testing the components of automatic fire suppression systems.

Seven years ago, BAFSA instigated the development of the first National Occupational Standards for the Mechanical Fire Sector, which state what is required of a worker in terms of performance and knowledge. These provided the building blocks for the IQ Level 2 Certificate in Fire Sprinkler Installation – the first nationally recognised qualification for sprinkler installers, which was designed, developed and launched by BAFSA. To acquire this qualification, launched in 2015, students must achieve seven mandatory units, which reflect the knowledge and competencies necessary to meet the industry standards for the installation role.

BAFSA is urging the government to take immediate action to actively promote, through legislation and regulation, retrofitting of automatic fire sprinklers in high-rise housing throughout the UK as the only effective measure to compensate for single staircases, combustibile external cladding and poor standards of fire compartmentation. It is also essential that housing providers only install automatic fire sprinklers to the appropriate British Standard using third-party accredited installers and approved components.

We are also calling for a coordinated approach to the provision of financial and technical support to ensure that all housing bodies are able to carry out this work.

Action to prevent the needless number of fire deaths in the UK continuing is needed now. ■

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Keith MacGillivray
Chief Executive

BAFSA

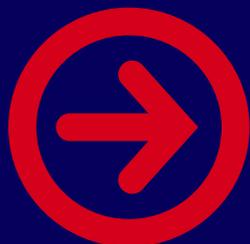
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www.bafsa.org.uk

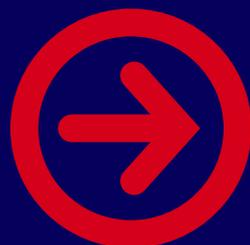
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Fire Industry Association

Heart of the matter: Why architects need a key role in the construction process

With recent events, including the Grenfell Tower disaster, raising concerns about independent scrutiny of the construction process, Russell Curtis of RCKa Architects argues it is time for his profession to return to the heart of the design and build process

To find an architect lamenting the erosion of the profession's role within the construction process may elicit from many little more than crocodile tears or, to others, smack of a futile act of self-preservation when faced with challenging financial targets, shrinking capital budgets and the avoidance of risk. But while architects' railing at the demotion of quality in favour of 'certainty' is hardly new, events of the last year have suddenly thrust our concerns into the spotlight.

It is still far too early to apportion culpability for the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in June, but it is possible that this may emerge as the latest, and most tragic, manifestation of decreasing oversight that architects have been warning about for so long. At the very least, there is clear evidence that a lack of professional, independent scrutiny has resulted directly in catastrophic failures elsewhere that could – had circumstances been only very slightly different – have resulted in tragedies of their own.

One example is the Edinburgh Schools fiasco, where [Professor John Cole's extensive inquiry](#) into the collapse of a masonry wall at Oxbgangs School in Edinburgh identified clear areas where a lack of oversight during the construction process phase had allowed poor workmanship to creep, unchecked, into the works.

Crucially, it became apparent that this was not an isolated incident, but one which was found to be endemic in the wider schools delivery programme, with a further four collapses directly attributed to workmanship not in accordance with the consultant's designs. Professor Cole determined that independent scrutiny would likely have prevented such incidents occurring.

As well as the obvious risk to life, such events have had a dramatic financial and personal impact, with hugely expensive rectification work and extensive disruption to the education of students the new buildings were supposed to enhance.

“Our concern extends not only to the needs of the commissioning client but also those who will ultimately occupy those buildings we design...”

There are innumerable, less spectacular, examples to be found throughout the country, many resulting in minor irritations but others which dramatically affect the enjoyment of buildings by those who inhabit them; in some cases, such as the Orchard Estate in east London, the result of a poor quality construction process and a lack of oversight has had a detrimental effect on residents' quality of life.

It is a criticism often levelled at architects (and one not entirely without merit) that we have allowed ourselves to be pushed to the margins of the construction process, becoming adept at piloting complex schemes through an increasingly tortuous planning process, but superfluous when it comes to putting the thing together on site. One consequence of a decade of austerity is the presence of many young architects rising through the ranks of the profession for whom an understanding of construction techniques remains an abstract concept; lines on a drawing that have no analogue on a muddy building site.

While there's some truth in this, in reality our marginalisation extends back far further than the recent financial crisis, with our traditional role at the heart of the construction process having diminished



gradually as contractors, and other professionals, stepped into a void that we only had a small part in creating.

“Contractors would look to save money within the parameters laid down by the contract information in the desperate hope of widening excruciatingly narrow margins. Something had to give, and the sacrifice was quality.”

A shift away from what came to be known as ‘traditional’ contracting and the adoption of so-called ‘collaborative’ forms of contract, exemplified by design and build, were conceived as a way of reducing the adversarial nature of construction in the hope that by working together the entire team could focus on delivering projects to programme and budget.

It was expected that D&B would magically reconcile the elusive triumvirate of cost, quality and time. What really happened was a transfer of risk, with the balance of power shifting from the contract administrator (a role most often fulfilled by the architect) to the builder.

With the architect no longer acting on behalf of the client, and often taking their place as just another subbie within the builder’s extensive supply chain, the custody of quality was left up to those consultants, often from a cost background, remaining by the client’s side.

The benefit was obvious: a contract could be signed – often much sooner than would previously been possible – and the cost was fixed, with the risk of cost overruns now the responsibility of the contractor. It was up to the builder how to deliver the project within the sum agreed and any unexpected increases would be down them to resolve. This arrangement was so compelling it became the default choice for most public sector projects of any significance. The inevitable consequence was, however, that contractors would look to save money within the parameters laid down by the contract information in the desperate hope of widening excruciatingly narrow margins. Something had to give, and the sacrifice was quality.

There’s a perception in some sectors that our obsession with quality is simply a demonstration of our



Russell Curtis of RCKa Architects

detachment from the realities of modern contracting. Why spend £50 on a tap when we could spend £500 and have it in gold? This is nonsense, of course. Our concern extends not only to the needs of the commissioning client but also those who will ultimately occupy those buildings we design; rarely are these the same, particularly in the public sphere.

“It is still far too early to apportion culpability for the horrific fire at Grenfell Tower in June, but it is possible that this may emerge as the latest, and most tragic, manifestation of decreasing oversight that architects have been warning about for so long.”

We care about the contribution our buildings make to wider society; the effect on those who live and work around them, too. We understand that decisions made during the design stage can have a profound effect on longevity, enjoyment and quality of life. Quality extends not only to the thoughtfulness of a building’s design, the selection of materials and how

they are put together, but to the enjoyment of those that live, love, work and sometimes die in it.

The impact our buildings have on the lives of the people that inhabit them can be profound and success cannot simply be assessed on the day the building is handed over, but only after months, years or even decades have passed. Architects understand that the construction process itself is only a brief excursion within a far greater journey. By retaking our position at the heart of the process, we can concentrate our efforts on arriving at the right destination. ■

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Russell Curtis

Director

RCKa Architects

Tel: +44 (0)207 831 7002

russell@rcka.co.uk

www.rcka.co.uk

@russellcurtis

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Coverage (M2) By 1 Nozzle	12 m2	16 m2	16 m2
Water Damage After 1 Minute of Activation	5mm/min	2.5mm/min	0.75mm/min

iMist is a more environmentally friendly solution to fire suppression than traditional fire sprinklers.

The iMist nozzles are discreet, available in a colour to suit your decor and can be applied to almost any domestic and residential setting.

The iMist STX12 system has been independently tested and is fully compliant to BS8458 – 2015. The STX12 system has also passed the 80mtr2 open plan test.

Why Choose iMist Fire Protection Systems?



Rapid Suppression

Rapid fire suppression and control



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Minimal damage on activation (water and smoke damage)



Low Cost

Low cost reinstatement after activation and low maintenance cost



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Efficiency

Low water consumption



Easy to install

Neat, discreet installation reducing damage and easy to Retrofit

iMIST STX12 Water Mist Fire Protection System Features

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BS 8458 - 2015 Independently tested and fully compliant



Electrical safety checks in the wake of Grenfell

Phil Buckle, Chief Executive of Electrical Safety First, explains how the Grenfell Tower tragedy is a wake-up call for electrical safety checks and building regulations

While the media has noted various concerns around the remit of its Public Inquiry, there's no doubt the Grenfell Tower fire will have a significant impact on social housing – and a range of safety issues that this tragic event has dramatically highlighted.

Although many questions around Grenfell remain unanswered, we do know that, while the fire spread rapidly because of the block's external cladding, the source of ignition was a faulty fridge-freezer on the fourth floor.

Electricity is so much a part of modern life, it's easy to forget how dangerous it can be. But last year, almost two thousand fires – 1,878, to be exact – were caused by white goods (domestic electricals, such as fridge-freezers, washing machines and dishwashers). And while it is important to note that the item that instigated the Grenfell fire had not been subject to a product recall or safety notice, over the past six years, data from England's fire and rescue services shows an average of four fires a week being caused by faulty fridge-freezers alone.

Since our inception, Electrical Safety First has been passionately committed to improving electrical safety in the home. In addition to our major consumer education and media campaigns, we also engage with key stakeholders and government to influence relevant policy developments.

We have, for example, successfully lobbied for improved electrical safety checks in the private rented sector. Today, legislation requiring private landlords to ensure regular electrical safety checks in their properties is now operating in Scotland, with Wales and Northern Ireland set to follow suit. In England, we await

ministerial sign-off for a similar requirement to be incorporated into the Housing Act, which gained Royal Assent last May.

So we are hopeful that government will respond to our call for housing associations and local authorities to be required to provide free electrical safety checks – for both fixed electrical installations and electrical appliances – for all tenants. Initially, this would only cover tower blocks, as a range of issues (not least population density), make this form of housing a priority for electrical safety.

Current government policy states that there is only an “expectation” on social landlords to keep electrical installations safe. On this basis, electrical installations and appliances contained within the sector could go unchecked for many years and remain dangerous until action is taken. So we are also calling for such checks to eventually encompass all social housing and we would like to see social landlords compile a register of white goods located in their tower blocks – regardless of tenure.

In the meantime, we have launched a [microsite](#) to advise people on white goods safety, including how to register an appliance and find out if an electrical item they own has been recalled.

In recent years, there has been a tsunami of media coverage around a range of unsafe electrical products, from exploding chargers to washing machines. With the limited success of recalls (only an estimated 10%-20% actually manage to engage with the end consumer) and the fact that domestic electrical fires are increasing – most notably illustrated by Grenfell – we consider it essential that the product safety system be improved.



Phil Buckle, Chief Executive

Many people were disappointed by the government's muted response to Lynn Faulds Woods' independent review of the UK's System for the Recall of Unsafe Products. However, a Working Group on Product Recalls and Safety, which we are members of, was set up by the government. The group finally issued its [report](#) in July and we were pleased that it incorporated a number of recommendations we considered essential to improve recall rates, enhance consumer safety and ensure sustainable business.

The report's recommendations included the development of a recall code of practice, a call for research into consumer behaviour, the promotion of product registration and greater coordination of product recalls and enforcement. In response to the report, the government has already launched a new website, [Product Recall](#), to act as a centralised resource for consumer information.

“Although many questions around Grenfell remain unanswered, we do know that, while the fire spread rapidly because of the block's external cladding, the source of ignition was a faulty fridge-freezer on the fourth floor.”

But it will need political will to ensure that all of the report's recommendations are put into practice and to provide the support required for the effective enforcement of product safety. Given the fact that there have been 112 recalls of electrical products since July 2015, it is clear that product safety is an issue that can no longer be ignored. If it is, more lives will be put at risk. Be assured that we are working on it. ■

Electrical Safety First hosts an annual Product Safety Conference, which offers updates on the changing legislative landscape impacting on electrical safety. The next conference will be held on **Thursday 23 November 2017 at Church House, Dean's Yard, Westminster, London SW1P 3NZ**. For further information, please contact Neelam Sheemar at: Neelam.sheemar@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk. Or Tel: 020 3463 5111 | Mobile: 07813814527

Electrical Safety First

The UK's electrical safety experts

.....
Phil Buckle

Chief Executive

Electrical Safety First

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 5111

enquiries@electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

www.electricalsafetyfirst.org.uk

www.twitter.com/ElecSafetyFirst

Mick George Ltd gunning for vehicle leasing success

Mick George Ltd explains why it has taken on the challenge of adding vehicle leasing to its portfolio of services

At first glance, a construction company may not seem the obvious choice when seeking to purchase or lease a vehicle, regardless of its purpose, private or business. However, when you delve a little deeper and recognise that said operation already runs – and relies on – a fleet in excess of 400 different vehicle types, vehicle leasing starts to become visibly clearer.

That said, for an organisation that functions in a completely different market to have the foresight, let alone knowledge, to suitably add this service to its portfolio is another challenge altogether. For many, such concepts are ditched at the first sight of an obstacle, but not at Mick George Ltd.

So how does an organisation manage to get vehicle leasing off the ground? Put simply, it activates a longstanding relationship with one of its vehicle suppliers. OK, so it may not be quite as easy as suggested, but fortunately this supplier shares a vision and ethos matched by the business, which has consequently accelerated the launch.

The engine behind the new vehicle leasing division at Mick George Ltd is Steve Howell, and although he may not quite have reached the sales echelons as world-renowned Joe Girard, Chevrolet's top salesman, he certainly boasts strong credentials in this particular industry.

Having started out in car sales back in 1981, taking on car demo, cleaning and panel beating roles along the way, Steve became part-owner of Neva Consultants in 1992,

where he played an integral role in building a £40m revenue, turning over up to 2,000 cars a year to satisfied clients, in the 25 years that he worked for the company.

Steve's association with Mick George Ltd dates back to the early 1990s, when he was approached by Finance Director Jon Stump about the possibility of tracking down the much sought-after BMW 323SE in Boston Green. You read that correctly: Boston Green. It was once a popular choice! Having accomplished that challenge, Steve became a close acquaintance of Jon's, with many stories to tell over the years.

From here, personal relationships blossomed, and Steve's procurement experienced naturally progressed to him sourcing company cars, vans, lorries and tipper trucks in large volumes for Mick George Ltd.

Given the close allegiance of the two, you may be surprised why the decision to introduce a vehicle leasing service has taken as long as it has, which in itself highlights many of the complexities involved.

As we all know, the car trading industry is littered with a stigma that to this day still exists. However, this is where Steve's genuine passion, hunger and desire have come into their own. His personable qualities are one of his critical attributes, going against the grain of the traditional perception of the industry.

Steve's mantra, if you like, without sounding to much of a cliché, is "to go the extra mile", providing an unrivalled service and experience.

This differs tremendously to some national competitors, brokers and manufacturers in the domain, who are merely in it for the short-haul, sealing one-off deals in volume while making a quick buck by way of false advertising – one of Steve's principle irritations.

And this is where the collaboration seems to dovetail nicely. Not only is the Mick George brand a reputable one that is likely to withstand any negative coverage connected with the car industry, but its emphasis on quality and service will be replicated within yet another field.

If the early signs are anything to go by, it already appears to be a match made in heaven. Two clients were secured after being established for less than a week, providing in one instance 25 Citroen Berlingos and in the other, 20 Mercedes C350E hybrid vehicles for company car use.



Sean Feeley

Communications Manager

Mick George Ltd

Tel: 01480 499 158

news@mickgeorge.co.uk

www.mickgeorge.co.uk

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