



Gildredge House

Andrew Harrison

Andrew Harrison was the EFA Project Manager of the Gildredge House Free School project in Eastbourne and we worked with him in the capacity of founding Head Teacher and Director of Finance and Administration. From the first planning meeting with him in November 2012 through to the official opening of the school in July 2015, Andrew was a committed and highly professional Project Manager who went well beyond our expectations in terms of the support he offered. He was a trusted mentor to us through the challenging process of setting up a new school: we trusted his judgement and respected his quiet, calm authoritative approach to whatever we happened to be discussing. It was clear that he also had the respect of everyone around the table who participated in our meetings, whether they were from the construction company Willmott Dixon, the technical advisers, Jacobs, or from the Gildredge House Free school staff and Governors.

Andrew attended all the major Client Engagement Meetings (CEMs) which took place between the school as clients and the builders and the technical team. These were typically one month apart. Andrew was very much one of the team around the table and we all got along with each other in spite of the numerous challenges which were presented by the project. At these meetings he always approached the issues in hand in a fair and balanced way.

Andrew had immense knowledge which enabled him to take a common sense approach to issues. He was always on hand to provide us as clients with advice about what we were allowed to do and what could be achieved, in line with EFA guidelines. He carefully considered the direction the project was taking and always gently brought us back into line if he felt that things were going slightly off track. If we had questions about the project, he always took the time to go away and find out what was expected. As such he always appeared either knowledgeable or willing to improve his knowledge in order to move the project along in the right direction. At our regular meetings he always knew how to ask just the right questions, which helped us as clients to understand the challenging process. He had an exceptional ability to translate the needs of the school (usually expressed in 'lay' terms) into construction or contractual terminology. In turn he also helped us to interpret the jargon-loaded terminology of the builders and technical team.

As a confident and capable Project Manager, Andrew took us through every step of the way and handled difficult matters with sensitivity and understanding. We always got the sense that he was going the extra mile, particularly when the project encountered difficulties, such as the value engineering (VE) exercise and the issues surrounding Gross Internal Floor Area (GIFA). He understood our concerns and wanted to find ways to help us understand why certain things needed to be done. He more than fulfilled his responsibility in steering the project to ensure that it came in on budget with money appropriately spent and without wasted resources time. He provided support and challenge, particularly regarding the decisions being made by the construction company and the school. We were all made to think carefully about our priorities. Andrew was always very solutions-focused, particularly when things became challenging. He was reflective, calm and knowledgeable which meant that he was a pillar of strength to us in the more challenging times. His support was invaluable. He understood our passionate commitment to the school and at the same time found ways of dealing with, and balancing, this with the more technical business-driven approach taken by the builders.

Andrew was never just a face around the meeting table. By the end of the process he was part of the school to us and we had developed a respectful and fond relationship with him. This was because he took the time to get to know the school and understand its needs. He was empathetic to what we were trying to achieve as a proposing group. He embraced the school's unique vision and ethos and totally understood how this manifested itself in the realisation of the building. He seemed to care genuinely about the project. He demonstrated this by taking the time on a weekend to attend the grand opening of the school.

The Gildredge House Free School project featured in the Construction Manager of the Year Awards 2015, where the Willmott Dixon Construction Manager was recognised with a Gold Medal in the 12-20m category. This was an amazing achievement, but this I am sure was due in no small part to Andrew Harrison, who steered the project to completion and on many levels had a hand in its success.



Mrs Lea Gilbert
Head Teacher

pp Mrs Janice Logan
Director of Finance and Administration