



Request for Site Control?

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Over the holiday period, whilst rummaging around in the loft for another set of lights, I came across a box of old work folders from my early career in the Property Services Agency (PSA), where I had the privilege of working on the Crown Estate developing my knowledge of the construction industry and honing my skills as a future Chartered Surveyor. Whatever ones thoughts of the PSA, it was a fabulous training ground for a budding property professional.

Flicking through one of a number of ring-bound folders, I found several W1429 forms, which was what a Superintending Officer (SO) would complete to requisition the services of a Site Control Officer. Site Control attendance, or Clerk of Works as is commonly known, would have been anticipated for all projects undertaken across the Crown Estate, from circa £50k upwards and invariably this would necessitate both building and civil engineering (B&CE) and mechanical and electrical (M&E) expertise.

A formal application would be made to the Regional Site Control Office and form W1429 would be completed to set out the project particulars, project officers, site control officer(s) B&CE/M&E etc.; estimated cost (split by B&CE and M&E); target start and finish dates; scope of contract; areas requiring special attention and the site control fee.

The importance placed upon effective site control was well understood at that time and this was reflected in whether this would require full time, or part time attendance and the fee applicable for this service. As example, the construction of the Prince of Wales Village Hall, a new-build facility at the Royal Hospital Chelsea (1984), attracted a site control fee of £16.5k for the

B&CE elements and £3.3k for M&E. This represented 7.6% of the estimated construction value of £258k. There were other examples I came across at 11% of £69k; 4.45% of £148k and 6.6% against a CV of £160k. With fees at these levels, for the Regional Site Control Office, these were happy days.

However, what this reinforces is that historically site control was recognised as important and intrinsic part of the construction process and an absolute necessity to provide assurance. Yes, it was expensive and yes one could legitimately question whether this offered value for money, but the loss of this important service to our industry has to be questioned also.

As I write investigations are underway in respect of the Grenfell Tower incident. I'm not suggesting for a minute that more robust site control would have prevented this tragic fire, but ascertaining whether the necessary checks were in place and that the required sign-offs were provided would be of assistance to the investigation team as this would be evidenced in site control site attendance reports and correspondence logs with the SO/PM and contractors.

Would the outcome have been different if the cladding was detailed as an "area requiring special attention"? Perhaps these were and the controls were in place, only time will tell? It's all too easy to comment with hindsight, but maybe, just maybe it is time for us to revisit some of the controls of the past and to reintroduce some of these for the projects of the future and make that request for site control?