

# IS BIM READY TO STAND ALONE?

The industry has made great strides in adopting BIM since the government said it would be a compulsory part of public sector work by 2016. However, news the task group driving uptake is soon to be wound down is shaking confidence the deadline will be hit. **Iain Withers** reports

While the construction industry may have gripes with the coalition government, one area of policy tends to attract widespread acclaim - its commitment to rolling out building information modelling (BIM) level two across all public projects by 2016.

BIM level two involves a project team digitally modelling a building collaboratively in a virtual environment to make construction on site quicker and more efficient. It is three years since former chief construction adviser Paul Morrell, as part of a bid to cut building costs by 20% by 2016, put BIM level two at the heart of the government's construction strategy - and in that time a technology revolution has taken place in the industry. Last month's NBS BIM survey found that 54% of construction firms have now used BIM on projects, up from just 13% in 2010. Government policy has also been a catalyst for private sector clients to adopt BIM, attracted by the expected efficiency savings. For an industry that is notorious for its lack of investment in research and development, the impact of the government's BIM policy has been remarkable.

But there is still a long way to go. Few BIM level two projects have been completed - so valuable lessons have yet to be learned - while almost half of construction firms have not used it at all.

This is why industry experts were concerned to read in *Building* last week about government plans to wind down the BIM Task Group, which is overseeing the policy and driving it across the public sector from next year. Central funding for

BIM is also due to run out in March 2016. So is government support for BIM faltering when it is needed most? Or can the momentum built behind BIM be maintained regardless of whether it has central government support?

## Where we're going

Mark Bew, chairman of the government's BIM Task Group, confirmed last week that the group will be wound down from the end of this year. There will be a "managed handover" during 2015 to a newly-created legacy group designed to ensure BIM level two adoption. But funding for central government oversight of BIM policy will stop in March 2016, for both task group and legacy. However, the group may get a new lease of life and funding if the government approves a bid, led by Bew, for adoption of a BIM level three target. A decision is expected this autumn.

Bew hopes the government will adopt a BIM level three target and commit more central government funds to further BIM policy development and oversight. But even if these funds are not forthcoming, Bew is confident that central government's planned phasing »

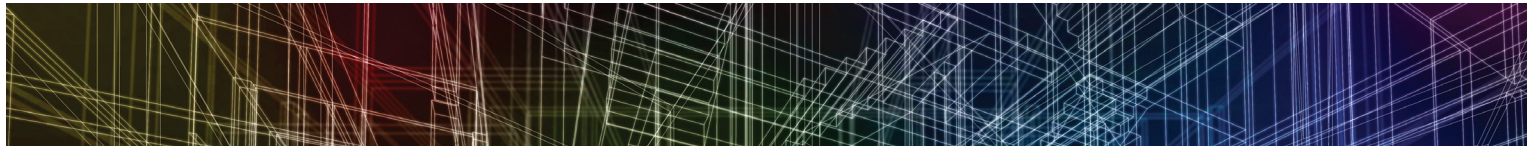




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» out of support for BIM will not derail the group's progress. He argues that the task group is "laying the groundwork" for BIM level two to be self-supporting from March 2016. He points out that much of this work has already been done, including the formulation of BIM strategy, the launch of a suite of standards and guidance, and deployment of trainers and mentors across government departments. "The task group can't carry on forever," Bew says. "Otherwise it would be a cost rather than a benefit."

The group's roll-out of BIM level two guidance and standards is well advanced. These include contractual standards in the BIM Protocol, developed with the Construction Industry Council (CIC); technical standards in PAS 1192-2, developed with the British Standards Institute (BSI); and standards for supplying clients with asset information, Construction Operations Building Information Exchange (COBie). The task group is procuring the final piece of level two standards - a supplier to develop a digital plan of works and a free-to-use online tool describing who does what and when on a project - as well as classifying 3,000 building elements. The Technology Strategy Board will give the winning supplier up to £1.5m to develop the product, which is expected to be available from next year.

The digital plan of works aside, the BIM Task Group's focus has shifted to driving adoption. It has recruited Terry Stocks from the Ministry of Justice to run BIM level two adoption. The MoJ developed some of the first public sector BIM level two trials, including the extension of Cookham Wood prison in Borstal, Kent. Stocks is using this experience in his new role, which includes taking over a departmental stewardship group for BIM. The overall BIM Task Group acts as a resource for departments struggling to implement BIM procurement, but Bew says Stocks' sub-group is training government departments to ensure they are all "self-supporting in BIM over the next 14-18 months". If central government funding for BIM dries up, the idea is departments will draw investment from their own capital expenditure budgets and, when required, turn to private sector providers for training or technical support rather than central government.

### Insiders' concerns

Despite Bew's confidence, many BIM experts are concerned by the planned wind-down of the BIM Task Group next year. "The government's plan is in its infancy in terms of adoption and implementation," says Peter Trebilcock, BIM director at Balfour Beatty. Trebilcock says a lot of public sector clients have not got to grips with

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procuring BIM level two projects, which is clear from the employer's information requirements (EIR) forms produced with appointment and tender documents. He says "an awful lot of public sector clients ask us for help" with tendering BIM projects, and while Balfour Beatty is "delighted" to assist, they should be able to go to government for help as well. He adds: "The BIM Task Group has set a high level strategy, but there's a lot of detail still to be worked through and a lot of issues. Unless you have someone in central government with the resource to commit to this you'll have fragmentation and inconsistency."

David Frise, chair of the BIM Group at the Joint Specialist Engineering Contractors & National Specialist Contractor Council, shares Trebilcock's concerns. "It would be great if the task group can hang on - it gives the BIM push a focus. You need someone [in central government] to pull all the strands together. If individual departments are left to their own devices they do their own thing.

"This would lose the momentum of the BIM push and could threaten the 2016 target. There are issues with that target, particularly on adoption down the supply chain, but this won't help."

Graham Watts, chief executive of the Construction Industry Council, says that since technology is a key focus of construction's industrial strategy, there "has to be" a BIM Task Group or an equivalent. But he agrees with Bew that the private sector could take on many of its functions. "This should be part of a fundamental and fairly radical rethink of the way the construction industry operates," he says. "The industry should be able to look after these matters on its own and fund a structure [like the task group] that can make it more efficient."

Bew hopes that, come March 2016, the public sector will still be playing its part in funding BIM policy and driving adoption. "I expect BIM level three will be ramping up and the legacy programme [for level two] will be in full flight," he says. Many in the industry will be keeping their fingers crossed that this turns out to be the case.

## VITAL INFRASTRUCTURE FOR THE COST OF A FEW METRES OF HS2



So the government has decided that the BIM Task Group should be wound down from the end of the current financial year in March 2015. That is a year

before level two becomes mandatory. It is apparently considering a bid to retain a Level 3 Task Group to work up the definition of Level 3.

When I wrote my report, Growth through BIM, in 2013 I said that the government had been pleased to find that its level two policy and toolkit had won admirers around the world and that this opened doors for British consultants and contractors to win work on the basis of advanced BIM working. Since then a standing conference of interested EU countries has formed, to learn from UK BIM and contribute to progress across Europe.

The EU rules have been changed to encourage use of BIM and work has started on converting PAS 1192-2 into an ISO standard. The final parts of the level two toolkit are in development. Early-adopter projects are running on both level two and three ideas. BuildingSmart International, the begetter of BIM, has declared that the UK is carrying the ball and that it should run with it.

So it would be foolish in the extreme for the UK government to assume that now is the time to drop the task group and leave the industry to press on by itself to level three. The UK construction industry doesn't work like that. No firm will invest in R&D if it raises overheads and makes it less competitive in the short term. And the government wants "digital built Britain", a virtual doppelganger of the built environment, to allow us to optimise national performance and wellbeing. It's to be a national asset.

This is one for the new Construction Leadership Council. It must persuade its government members that the 2025 Strategy requires continuity of leadership past the election and that Britain must not give up its role as the leading country on BIM for want of resources. This is infrastructure investment of the greatest importance, for the cost of a few metres of HS2. Let us press our industry and government leaders to do the right thing at or before the Government Construction Summit on 2 July.

**Richard Saxon CBE is a member of the executive board of the CIC, publisher of Growth through BIM**