

Case study: Bloor Homes



Custom ERP integration helps Bloor Homes drive nation-wide transparency and efficiency

Summary: Bloor Homes is one of the UK's largest family-run house-builders, with operations in seven regions around the country. With thousands of home plots to manage, spread across up to 80 sites at any time, it needed both transparency and confidence in the accuracy of its progress information from across the business.



It has chosen Powerproject coupled with Site Progress Mobile for that, specifically with the goal of achieving tight integration with its existing Eque2 ERP financials. A custom integration and close working relationship with Elecosoft delivered on that aim. The benefits have included significant administrative time savings, planning efficiencies and reporting accuracies, and helped the company to hit a record level of homes delivered.

Whenever a company decides it is time to shake up and improve a fundamental process with new software, selecting that solution carefully is essential. So, when Bloor Homes realised it needed to significantly change its programme and process management, it evaluated its options very carefully.

The company had previously used Project Commander to run each of its housing development projects individually.

"As you'd expect, we have found the licensing to be flexible, and the charges for professional fees are really reasonable. The financial gain we've had for what we've paid for this process with Elecosoft has delivered value."

However, Bloor Homes' executive management team wanted much greater visibility of activities across its sites, which were spread across seven regions, with up to 80 sites in operation at any point in time, many of which had hundreds of plots.

Nick Farrington, business systems analyst, took on the responsibility to facilitate and implement a project to deliver this. When he started the task in late 2017, discussions with Elecosoft were underway, with most requirements-gathering complete – but there remained an important barrier to resolve. Although Powerproject was known to be an industry standard for construction programming, it did not connect with Bloor Homes' Eque2 ERP solution, long-established as its financial management and forecasting system.

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Elecosoft committed to build a bespoke web-based integration for Eque2, building on its existing COINS integration. Rapidly delivered, this enabled a successful pilot programme to be created for March 2018, followed by a smart rollout across the business so that all programmes were ready and running for the start of a new financial year in July.

Meeting the business needs

The desire from the top for better transparency and visibility across the business is now being fulfilled with the help of Powerproject. Bloor Homes now has 36 standalone Powerproject licences and four network licences, as well as 100 Site Progress Mobile licences. Construction directors in each of its seven regions are trained on and using the software, as are several contracts managers. Site Progress Mobile is also being used by site managers on all sites across the country.

Nick explained what had spurred the change. "Our leadership required a single version of the truth, and this was a major driver alongside the need to integrate with our ERP system (Eque2).

"Our consultant went out of his way to help me through big decisions... The conversation with the actual developer has been incredible too... Without these relationships the project could never have been successful in the tight timeframe we needed."

With Project Commander, each time a new project was planned people had to start from scratch, creating a new plan for each plot and then duplicating it however many times required. We needed a better way of doing that, as well as a web-based link between project planning and our financial systems."

This has transformed the efficiency of the financial and practical planning of the many individual plots on each site: "With the integration between our ERP and Powerproject, we can simply push a button to automatically provision an entire site project plan. The construction team can then manipulate the plots where required" Nick continued.

Now that the company's senior team has a deeper understanding of each site's operations, it has enabled other efficiencies to be realised. "Before we had Powerproject, the construction team fed through basic information such as starting dates, spend and work in progress updates. We never had full visibility of what was happening, but now we have the information at our fingertips that has enabled things like a new order management system to be developed."

Making progress

The significantly easier progress reporting and management that was enabled by coupling Powerproject and its Site Progress Mobile app was a welcome revelation: "The introduction of Site Progress Mobile's field data capture ability was a massive bonus, saving time across the group."

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Powerproject: The power behind successful projects

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"Site Progress Mobile and Powerproject saves over 100 hours of admin time each month."

Previously, the process of capturing, communicating and reporting on progress was a manual and time-consuming task requiring significant efforts by construction secretaries in every region, as Nick related. "Before Powerproject the progression of information into Eque2 was laborious. Site managers would capture their progress in Word or Excel – some even wrote it out longhand and scanned it in. They emailed it in to their construction secretary who would then have to interpret and manually type that information into Eque2 – along with 8 or 10 similar items from other site managers. There were inevitable variations in how people recorded things, as well as accuracy issues."

That administrative burden was lifted at a stroke when the company rolled out Site Progress Mobile to every site manager. "Now, Site Progress Mobile is our main pipe for progress management. It is a huge compliment to the software that people found they could pick it up and use it straight away – if something is difficult it is a hardship to get it implemented, but it has been intuitive."

The use of Site Progress Mobile has created time-efficiencies also. "On site it has also eliminated delays because site managers can capture information straight onto their mobile instead of having to wait until they return to a site cabin" said Nick.

It has also speeded things up for secretaries who would often take a full day to get progression data loaded. Now they export it from Powerproject with a click and import it into Eque2 in minutes. "With seven secretaries each saving a full day every week, the time benefits have quickly added up. Site Progress Mobile and Powerproject saves over 100 hours of admin time each month."

Benefits for all

Nick feels there are benefits at every level, including for regional management as well as the company's executive.

"It's now quick and easy for our construction directors not just to generate a programme and customise it, but one that can be organic and evolve week by week as it is progressed. We can always see how far we are ahead, or behind, using a jagged progress line which is easy to understand."



More accurate progress management has ensured that project programmes are themselves more accurate as a basis for communicating with home-buyers and enabling their decision-making. "Because our progression is now far more accurate, sales staff can trust the status of the build. They won't accidentally sell extras at times when they can no longer be delivered or a finish can no longer be changed, so there's no risk of disappointing the customer."

Positive experiences

Elecosoft's commitment to shaping the product to meet Bloor Homes' specific need for Eque2 integration is not the only positive aspect of the experience the companies have had working together. The quality of the relationship was excellent, as Nick described: "You will sometimes get good service with a large vendor, but with Elecosoft being a bit smaller it was far more personal. Our consultant went out of his way to help me through big decisions and helped me understand some complexities. The conversation with the actual developer has been incredible too, with very quick and clearly pragmatic responses that show real understanding. Without these relationships the project could never have been successful in the tight timeframe we needed and would have taken much more effort."

That responsiveness is ongoing, now that the project is rolled out. Nick said that "the training we did was of a high standard, and I still email both my contacts about small things. They always answer fast – you can't pay enough for that reaction time. I've also called the helpdesk, who either provide answers on the spot or come back to me quickly."

Nick is wholly confident that the project has delivered a strong return on investment: "As you'd expect, we have found the licensing to be flexible, and the charges for professional fees are really reasonable. The financial gain we've had for what we've paid for this process with Elecosoft has delivered value."

Bloor Homes is building a bright future. It hit a new target milestone in the last fiscal year, delivering 400 more plots than in any previous year. The efficiencies that Powerproject has enabled has been a contributor to that success and a foundation for its confidence it will hit another stretch goal of 3600 homes delivered this year.



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