

Managing the Risk: Industry Interview with Tony Lawther, New MD of BriggsAmasco

Earlier this year Tony Lawther took over from Dave Maginnis as the new managing director of BriggsAmasco. They're considerable shoes to fill: Dave is a well-known personality in the roofing industry, who remains in the company as Chair.

So, what will Tony's approach be as the new MD? Speaking to him a few months into the role, his watchword seems to be risk: its elimination, its mitigation, and its accommodation.

Tony is very well-placed indeed to assess risk for BriggsAmasco's operations: he's been with the company for 38 years, since he started in Scotland as an apprentice school leaver, "making tea and running to the bookies".

"The guys that I started work with were old school," says Tony. "They would have been in their forties (although they seemed much older to me), and they took the time to show me what to do."

Assessing the Risk

After a spell studying construction management, and also gaining a NEBOSH, Tony went on to read construction law, all sponsored by BriggsAmasco. It honed what is a critical skill in his leadership role, as he explains: "At BriggsAmasco we'll take a risk, but I need to know what that risk is; I won't take it unless I know the detail and then I can put measures in place to deal with it."

"My construction law training taught me the basics really, and built on my experience and mentoring from others. Control over what's in the contract can be limited, however a mature review and discussion can unlock contentious issues. If something's apparently unreasonable but unlikely to happen, then yes, I might accept that risk, or more likely seek to amend that part of the contract."

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For Tony, negotiating and re-writing the contract is worth taking time over. To be successful, it has to be an open and fair process where the risks and rewards are fairly balanced between contractor and client. Only when this has been achieved can a spade be put into the ground, or rather a scaffold up to the roof.

Tony explains, "It can take months to finalise a contract with all the stakeholders involved but it all goes back to assessing the risk. We need to get to a happy medium where the risk is shared with the best person to deal with it. For example, we can't always deal with the weather. But then program compliance, material specification and design is within our control."

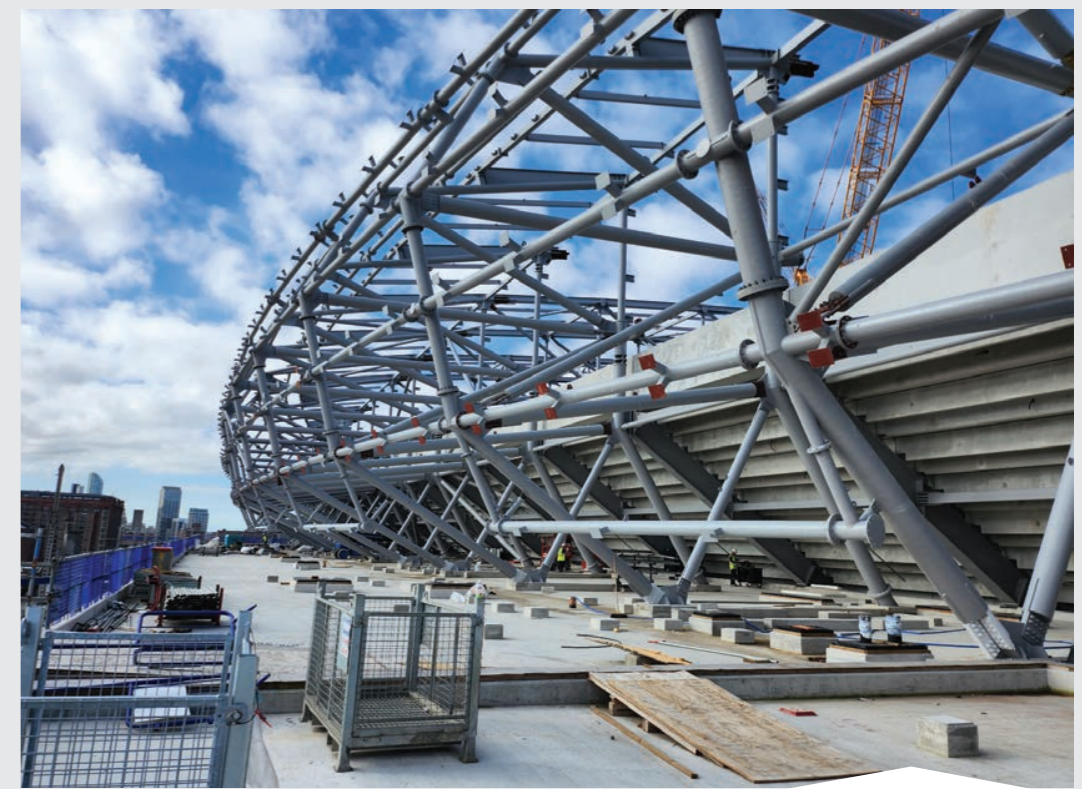
"It's critical that you put in a contract how the site's going to be managed and run, you are setting the parameters and they are out in the open. If they're questioned by the main contractor, we tell them it's all about achieving the outcome and quality they want. For example, is it reasonable that the site team is working in water every day? I certainly don't think



BriggsAmasco is laying over 1000 tonnes of mastic asphalt across the 20,000m² first-level perimeter roof of Everton Football Club's new £555 million stadium being built at the former Bramley-Moore dock site on Liverpool's waterfront.

The robust roof covering is perfect for the super-exposed site, facing, as it does, on to the River Mersey and out to the Irish Sea. It's also ideal for the density of plant the roof will need to accommodate to provide services for the 54,000+ fans the stadium will seat.

Set to open at the beginning of the 2024/25 season, Tony Lawther, MD of BriggsAmasco says "It's a major project for us and it's quite a tight programme,



but I know we can do it. We've got Keith Melling who is our operations director who alternates weekly visits with me to the

site. I served my time doing that work, I know exactly what I'm looking for, so we can ensure the highest quality roof."

It's hard to appreciate the sheer scale of the new Everton stadium site. As subcontractors to the main contractor Laing O'Rourke, BriggsAmasco will be on site from May to October 2023, joining up to 1,000 construction workers present on the 9 acre site at any one time.

BriggsAmasco Mastic Asphalt Roofs at Everton FC's New Dockside Stadium



Everton's new stadium site is built on Bramley-Moore dock, which until 2021 was filled with seawater the same as the other docks on the Merseyside riverfront.

Over 450,000 m³ of sand was dredged from the Irish sea beyond the Mersey rivermouth to fill the 15m dock to a depth of 9m, taking 4 months. The sand was installed over about 1m of silt left in the dock once the water was removed, and which has taken about a year to fully settle. The sand was then compacted before the piling process continued into 2022, dropping 2,500 piles into the sandstone bedrock below the river level.

An artist's impression of the finished Everton stadium designed by Meis architects.

Taking its inspiration from the brick, steel and glass designs of the historic maritime and warehouse buildings nearby, the brick frontage of the stadium echoes the adjacent Stanley Dock Tobacco warehouse, reputedly the largest brick built structure in Liverpool.

The design features a 'fan plaza' for pre- and post-match entertainment. The site is orientated south-north to create the best sunshine and shadow on the pitch.



“If it is, it results in poor working conditions, reduced productivity and of course quality; we insist that all areas are free from standing water prior to commencement.”

“But we mainly work for Tier 1 contractors - Hinkley Point, LOR, Mace, Skanska, Galliford Try – they know what they’re doing. We aim for no confrontation onsite and the easiest way to manage it is to set your stall out early and then you’ve got something to reference back to.”

That’s not to say Tony goes about putting red lines through clauses or ripping up contracts; in fact, his approach is centred on the exact opposite: discussion and negotiation no matter how entrenched the issues.

“It can be easier to object to something in the contract than try to talk to someone about it, such as the main contractor’s lawyer, quantity surveyor or commercial director. I had a meeting last week where the main contractor’s team were all there. It can be intimidating but we have a knowledgeable and strong team behind us to assist in getting the right provisions of contract,” Tony says.

Mitigating the Risk

The increasing industry focus on building safety and compliance is heartily welcomed by Tony because it helps to strengthen the contract and design out the risk. Tony cites one such case from the past few months: “People still design to back falls, despite BS6229: 2018. We had a recent project ... where we had to charge an extra £100,000 to add in the falls. If they hadn’t allowed that and we’d left it, that wouldn’t comply with BS6229 and therefore would not be contract compliant.”

Any construction business’s nightmare – roof fire - is one of the highest priorities on the risk agenda at BriggsAmasco. Being an exclusively flat roofing and waterproofing contractor, the firm is a fully signed up member of NFRC’s Safe To Torch campaign, which replaces open flame, propane-fuelled tools with

electric ones, and BriggsAmasco has committed to a huge investment to tackle the issue.

“One of our biggest risks is fire and we’re trying to move to eliminating it altogether”, Tony explains. “We’ve got 18 hot melt electrically heated machines costing around £27,000 each, but that means we can do without propane gas. We also use high powered electric heaters to dry the deck, but, again, the investment is huge: £9,000 versus around £250 for the propane gas version. We have just had to get on and make that investment because it’s the right thing to do and has considerable environmental benefits.”

Complex negotiations and calculations also underlie the requirement for liability and indemnity insurance, an increasingly difficult area of procurement for the construction industry in recent years. Premiums are assessed according to the project’s risks and the company’s record – and they can be adjusted through excess levels – all of which requires careful mapping out. “We’ll have several meetings and I’ll write a paper showing how we control risks, what the design points are, where we’re liable and where we’re not,” says Tony. He explains that the company has several insurers to spread their risk exposure, adding, “I think it helps to be open, whether it’s negotiating a contract, a specification or insurance.”

Accommodating the Risk

This principle of openness was certainly put to the test during the challenges of recent years. BriggsAmasco was not immune from the pandemic-period problems posed by material shortages, long lead times and price inflation. At the time, the company was in the middle of the enormous Battersea Power Station Redevelopment Project. Tony explains how the business mitigated the particular perils presented: “We bought a lot of product upfront to hedge prices because it was difficult to get a long-term fix and the client didn’t want to take the risk on



BriggsAmasco is laying around a 1,000 tonnes of mastic asphalt on the first level perimeter roof of the new Bramley-Moore Dock Everton stadium. Once the company is finished in October 2023, the huge steelwork structure will be clad covering most of the roof area and the huge quantities of plant it will house to provide services for the up to 62,000 fans the stadium is designed to seat.

fluctuation. The commercial director of the Development Company grew up about a mile from where I did, so we understood each other; he could see that we could share the risk. So, we put it in a storage facility and said ‘look here it is, now we both know it’s here’, and so we effectively capped the risk, with the client paying under a vesting agreement.”

For Tony, as MD, the best approach is to go into a partnership to deal with such problems as inflation. As he says, “It’s the manufacturer who is best placed to understand the risk of their products rising in price, not me as the contractor. They should know what bitumen is likely to do, or insulation, or what they’ve hedged. Some manufacturers just seek to add an arbitrary increase without any science behind it.”

“Thankfully,” he continues, “inflation is dying away now to

around 6-8% which is much more manageable and we can build that in for our client and suppliers so that no one is exposed to risk, but, again, it pays to read the small print.”

Tony is confident that the outlook is good in roofing. Nevertheless, the legacy of the past few years means the current trend is to procure major projects early to get price certainty. Now the company seeks fixed prices from manufacturers and an expiry date, and that date goes into the contract. As Tony says, “You used to have a price from manufacturers from January to December. It’s not reasonable to have that now. So, we agree a price with them, and they’ll agree a price further down the line with their suppliers, who’ll agree a price further down with their suppliers, so no one should be at risk.

“But everyone still has to win work”, Tony ends. III



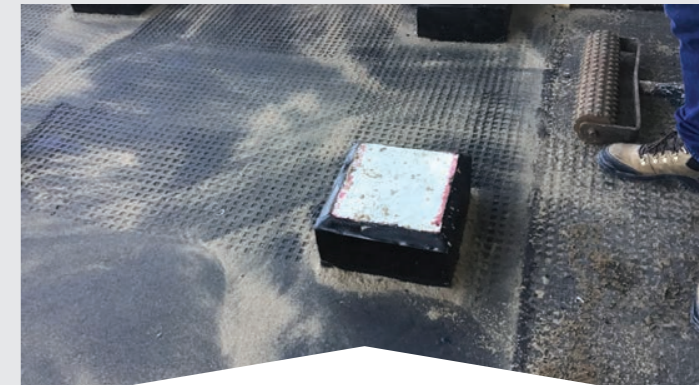
The mastic asphalt roof on the stadium’s east side is well underway. The roof consists of three layers: an isolation layer is laid on the concrete deck before the first 10mm layer of mastic asphalt is applied. A final 10mm top layer is finished with a white, solar-reflective coating to help minimise the roof-temperature and thermal movement across the stadium’s roofs.



Tony is visiting the Everton site every week to check on progress and quality. As a time-served mastic asphalt roofer who worked on the tools for 15 years, his knowledge comes from practical experience as well as from his years in management.



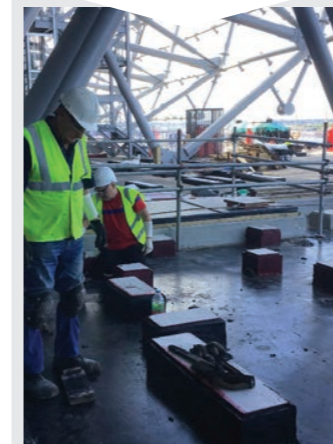
The molten mastic asphalt is wheelbarrowed from the nearby hot boiler to the stadium’s west side roof area where it’s poured. The waiting roofers have to work quickly before the 180°C asphalt cools. It’s a highly-skilled job to ensure the asphalt is laid level, to the correct depth and the joints are watertight.



Once laying is complete, the mastic asphalt roof is finished with a crimping pattern and sand to create a safe surface for follow-on trades to install the huge quantities of plant being installed on the numerous rooftop plinths. Crimping is hot, heavy work done by hand using a 80kg crimper roller and has to be performed while the mastic asphalt is still warm, before it cools and sets.

Jack Ashworth IKO’s Technical Field Engineer joins Tony in his quality assurance visits to the Everton site in order for IKO to guarantee the work.

Each of the numerous rooftop column and plinth details are being finished with liquid waterproofing by BriggsAmasco to ensure a watertight finish.



The 13-row concrete seating of the stadium is now in place, covered by a 45m high cantilevered roof structure.