What is BIM?

The acronym 'BIM' has caused much confusion, incorrect assumptions, hype and panic.

Initially, it is easier to confirm what it ISN'T: it is NOT a new technology, it is not software, it is not going to kill off small practices.

BIM is not a piece of software it is a process that can be supported by a range of software.

Building Information Modelling (BIM) is an integrated process built on coordinated, reliable information about a project from design through construction and into operations. It will help improve coordination, enhance accuracy, reduce waste and enable better-informed decisions earlier in the process. A BIM project would typically model all data relating to design, costings, build ability and clash detection, scheduling and procurement, sustainability impact, life cycle and facilities management factors as well as in use predictions.

BIM is not new technology but a continuation of collaborative working within the built environment sector. BIM will demand real collaborative working and sharing of data, knowledge and costings across project parties. The key to collaborative working being effective and open communications, coupled with trust and importantly being comfortable with sharing within a digital environment.

BIM is actually a poor acronym, something the government readily acknowledges. The first word 'Building' is in reality a verb; 'to build'. To build a model of information. The 'I' is the important part - information. It is not information about a building, not entirely anyway.

BIM is the exchange of 'Information' amongst all parties involved in a project. Therefore, BIM will impact business management and operations. It will change the way we work and create closer relationships between all construction professionals. It will bring design teams together with construction teams.

Remember the ultimate objective of BIM - to SAVE in cost and reduce waste.

What do I have to do?

BIM may not be for everyone. Level 2 BIM will only be required on all public works over £5m (at present, this may change) and for landscape architects much of their work will not require BIM. The decision on adopting BIM is a business decision down to the individual practices.

In a nutshell, to become 'BIM compliant you will have to document everything you need to complete your part of the project. The more detailed technicalities will be dealt with later on but what you will have to do is to supply your data in a

format which can be shareable with other professionals in the design chain. If you supply trees and shrubs to a project, all the information pertaining to those trees and shrubs need to be documented - and that is nothing new! Software can help with that, but for some there will be no need for new software but they will have to alter some of their work processes.

However, should the client (the government) demand you use specific software then you will need to decide if you wish to adopt, adapt or flee. You could either buy the software required and train your staff to use it, and this may in turn generate more work. You could find a workaround with your existing technology and processes; employ a consultant specialising in this software and type of work, or you may decide not to bid at all and look for alternative work streams. It is your decision, no one else's.

If I adopt, how do I provide data without expensive software?

Think of a BIM data set as an instruction booklet from, say, IKEA or a Haynes car manual. It tells you how many parts make up whatever it is you are making or fixing, the sizes of those parts, where each part goes and, if you're really lucky, where you can order replacement parts from. There is no waste, they only supply the correct amount of each part and you can't put the wrong part with another wrong part, it just won't fit.

Your data can be entered into a spreadsheet. If you do that, you are well on the way to being 'Level 2 compliant'. Painless?

You may have heard of COBie, which has become the accepted format for storing data for projects. This is what you will use with your BIM data.

COBie is a spreadsheet data format that contains digital information in as complete and as useful a form as possible. In short, COBie is a Building Information Model (BIM). For much more detailed information on COBie, please refer to the excellent BIM Task Group website:http://www.bimtaskgroup.org/cobie-uk-2012/