



BSF IS DEAD. SO NOW WHAT?

Regardless of who won the election, Building Schools for the Future was doomed. But it can adapt into something new – and so can the architects that do it, says **Pascale Scheurer**

PERHAPS WE SHOULD BE SHOUTING: 'GO AHEAD AND SLASH THIS WASTEFUL BSF PROGRAMME. IT'S ABOUT TIME!' PERHAPS IT'S ABOUT TIME TO DESIGN A NEW BSF, WITH A FOCUS ON MAKE DO AND MEND

As a member of Building's Gloomwatch panel who works mainly on Building Schools for the Future projects, there's plenty to be gloomy about this week.

We are in a "new economic reality" of global financial upheaval, and massive cuts are on the cards whichever party forms a government. The Conservatives may slash deepest and fastest, but the BSF programme (particularly the new-build element) is threatened by all parties. The hung parliament may bring a stay of execution, but at the price of instability for another six to 18 months.

Architects have had a rough time of it recently. Michael Gove acknowledged this in last week's apology to the profession, after he accused it of "creaming off" BSF cash. Several established practices have cut 70% of their staff, and many firms rely on BSF for 70-90% of their work. Up to now, they have been the lucky ones – their luck may be about to run out. Gloom indeed.

But where's the fun in that? Haven't we had enough gloom? I believe necessity mothers invention. What fabulous school design omelette might come out of these broken BSF eggs? I'm not underestimating the pain the axing of BSF would cause, but perhaps rapid change would be a good thing in the long run. Perhaps we should be shouting: "Go ahead and slash this wasteful BSF programme.

It's about time!" Perhaps it's about time to design a new BSF, with a focus on make do and mend and perhaps 15% new build. Time to come up with only-put-the-sandpaper-on-one-side-of-the-matchbox-type savings (for example, get one architect to design the school once, rather than three designing it three times).

Change brings opportunity. Architects, local authorities, schools and contractors – we all need to adapt and survive. Schools will still need building work as policies change – vocational courses, raising the school-leaving age to 18, Gove's smaller class sizes, parent-led schools, the exclusion of disruptive pupils (we're going to need plenty of Pupil Referral Unit sinbins, Michael), teacher training facilities and solutions for NEETS.

Intelligent, cost-effective design solutions will emerge. Architects who can help schools, councils and the private sector to find strategic solutions and draw down funding streams will find work. This is Architecture 2.0 – architect as facilitator of the client's objectives rather than design auteur. Architecture 2.0 incorporates process and programme design, creates strategic solutions in tandem with building the client team. Sometimes the solution won't be a building – but it will always be about wise choices, setting priorities and proving value for money.

There are plenty of examples of remodelling and refurbishment out there. We are compiling a book of these, including advice on estate and funding, as well as exemplar solutions for everything from Victorian boarding schools to fifties system-built estates. This will be a companion piece for 2003's BSF New Build Exemplars, for the new austerity landscape.

Babies, bathwater. For all its faults, BSF had a lot of positive aspects, not least its heroic scale: "one school completed every 36 hours, for 13 years". Our research suggests the following top five best and worst of BSF for consideration by the incoming education secretary: first, the five things to keep:

- **Ambition.** A bold programme with transforming education as its goal, not replacing old schools.
- **No school left behind.** All schools in an authority should be brought to the same standard. A council's whole estate should be put to use, for example its sport and vocational facilities.
- **Clear linking of educational objectives to design principles:** this was weak in the early days, although it was strengthened by the introduction of client design advisers in 2006.
- **BB98,** the official government guidance on secondary school design, set out key design principles: we should keep the concept of flexible, clustered layouts to allow for future changes in pedagogy and curriculum and integration of new learning technologies.
- **Integrating ICT, fixtures, furniture and equipment:** early consideration leads to stronger, more flexible design solutions.

The five things to improve:

- **Procurement.** Competitive dialogue wastes money and places high demands on schools' senior leaders, as three schemes are developed and two discarded. The best design solution may not come with the best overall bid.
- **Economies of scale.** Despite its scale, BSF did not generate savings, even within authorities or across common building types.
- **Sustainability.** By focusing on buildings, BSF lags behind other schemes for integrating curriculum, campus and community, such as Eight Doorways and Eco-Schools.
- **Overly focused on new build.** Refurbishment is the real challenge.
- **Behaviour management.** There is no firm policy for children with behavioural and learning difficulties in mainstream schools.

I will be presenting these findings to a cross-party audience at the Westminster Education Forum on 20 July. I invite you to send me your top five best and worst of BSF for inclusion: p.scheurer@surface-to-air.com. Pascale Scheurer is a founding director of Surface to Air Architects and WIRED Architects