

Project management- some questions and answers



How much of the planning do you want to see?

Those of us used to project managing in other sectors could be driven to distraction by the landscaping industry. Suppliers, contractors and of course the weather, are unpredictable. This is structural, and the unpredictability can be minimised but not ironed out completely. Our experience over 10 years is that our project management must be fluid to respond. Rest assured that we are good at it, but we cannot promise that plates will never drop. As a rule, the later in the project that something unexpected happens (think snow or a missing delivery) the greater the chance of it impacting on our finishing time. It will help us to best tailor to your needs if you can guide us clearly as to your requirements.

Do you need us to finish for a specific date or can we manage the project to maximise cost effectiveness and quality?

We think that even on the largest and highest specification projects, good cost control is part of what you expect from us. Because of the unpredictability of the industry and weather, being sure to hit an absolutely fixed deadline costs us a great deal more than just aiming for it. The difference may seem semantic but it drives a very different approach.



When the completion date is your priority we are happy to commit to deliver. If this requires us to make some changes to the plans, bring in more people, pay for couriers, or work through the night under lights, then we will arrange this. It is easier to deliver in full if we know at the start, and we should agree how we will manage any cost issues if they arise. Sometimes some hard prioritisation will be needed. Our quotes **do not** assume a fixed deadline unless expressly stated. Some specifics of what this approach might mean are in the box below.

We will:

- Work hard to get the work done promptly and effectively
- Deal with bad weather, late deliveries, illness, breakdowns, changes of mind, and wild horses (!) as best we can
- Sometimes have to wait for a change in site conditions to allow us to crack on
- Always keep you informed

We will not:

- Compromise on quality or incur significant additional costs without agreement with you
- (As a rule) proceed with jobs that would run more smoothly and produce a better finish if carried out in more clement weather (think painting in the rain). Where we can swap people around, we do, otherwise we have to wait.
- (As a rule) hire extra people to catch up unforeseen delays, use lights and overtime to work late, or to put people on site when circumstances mean they cannot work reasonably efficiently (an electrician costs around £450 a day- this adds up very fast if he can only work for a small part of it due to rain or other issues)

What is everyone up to?



We love talking about our work, and you should feel free to ask any of the team about what they are doing. Just be aware that what they plan to do on any one day may change (for all the reasons above) and that we allocate a variable team according to the work that needs to be done.

Sometimes you will be inundated with people, machines, deliveries and materials. Occasionally nobody will be there (others may be collecting materials, or we may be waiting on a key delivery). We will always keep you informed, and remember that we always have a clear economic and personal incentive to finish the work as quickly as possible.

Working on site is also not the only work that needs to be done- most projects require literally hundreds of items to be ordered from tens of suppliers. Materials need to be viewed, sourced, checked, collected and delivered. Even when we are not all on site we are always keeping your project moving forward.



While you are there...?

Our people are great, but there is only so much they can do at once. While the team will be helpful over any little jobs they can, they are already fully allocated to work on the main project, so we do need to charge to take on extra work. Painting in particular can be quite time-consuming and some clients prefer to do this themselves.

We assume extra will be charged on our standard day rates plus materials unless we agree to the contrary. We know you will want to keep control of costs, so anything significant will be agreed in writing, and we provide regular update sheets on those projects where the scope is changing significantly.

Where is my stuff?

Most of our basic supplies come from large companies and deliveries are broadly reliable. All bespoke items need to be sourced and suppliers cajoled into action. In our experience anything involving an “artist” is likely to be slow. We order promptly and chase hard on your behalf. With the sheer range of suppliers involved, particularly for specialist items, we have to be honest and say that once in a while we are let down. We explore alternative suppliers where we can as you would expect, and otherwise sometimes just have to wait-albeit impatiently.

Will all my plants be ok?

Plants can sometimes be cussed things. We select plants from a list and style agreed with you and to a specific budget. We generally get you more than we agree up front as we love planting, and wherever we can find a good addition or a deal from a grower we will put extra in. We also usually bring far more plants to site than we expect to use, so some will go away again if we don't find a suitable place or if you don't like them all. This is all factored into the pricing.



There are often a few failures in the first year- we aim to slightly overplant to allow for this, but sometimes some shuffling around is needed. Whilst we do not offer a guarantee on the plants as standard, we can often pop in a few replacements if you lose a few although we can't guarantee to use the same species, and sometimes that would be ill-advised. Whilst we would love to be in charge of the weather, we sadly haven't managed it yet. If we have 4 weeks of

snow and arctic conditions, or a drought and blistering heat, all gardens will struggle and the failures will be higher. Many of our clients call on us to come and replant/shuffle/top-up planting in the years after a more major make-over and we offer good value on this service.

Larger specimens rarely fail if properly looked after, but it can happen occasionally. As these are the more expensive items, our standard costings do not assume that we will replace if the unthinkable happens, although we can offer a guarantee on all the specimen shrub planting if you would prefer complete peace of mind- just ask for a quotation.

What about the watering?

New planting always needs watering, particularly new turf and especially when it is dry. Even if we are putting in an irrigation system for you, it may need some help at first, and the timing of its completion may not match the planting coming in. The last bits of an irrigation system are typically installed after the planting goes in so this is almost by definition a slight gap. We will always be happy to take this



on whilst on site, but our default position is to assume you will be ok to do it at weekends (we can rig up a sprinkler for you) and when we are not there. Do please let us know if this is not your preference and we will make arrangements to pick it up.

A family wedding- case study



The plan: Our client was preparing for a family wedding, and asked Cool Gardens to design and create a level lawn area to site the marquee. The plans were agreed and with 6 months to the big day, there was plenty of time to complete the job. As the work got underway, the client was beginning to get into his garden, and we were also asked to create an orchard, a water garden with 2 streams and a boardwalk, bring in standing stones, a garden

building, many huge trees and shrubs, and to install extensive lighting and irrigation systems. Whilst the changes were substantial (effectively trebling the size of the project), at each stage we reviewed the time available and switched around the works order to ensure they were completed in time. All was going well....

The unexpected: During the rather dismal summer, rain akin to a monsoon hit the already sodden garden before the banks of the water gardens were stabilised with planting, causing a small landslide into the pond at the bottom. The rain continued, making the turf delivery 3 weeks late and turning the ground into a quagmire. A little later, once the lawns were laid and looking wonderful, 17 horses broke into the garden and careered over it with very damaging results. In the final run-up to the wedding, the marquee team took out the main lighting cable with a stake, and put another through an irrigation pipe.

The solutions: The original plan was adjusted each time a change in scope required it. We hired heavy-duty pumps to pump out the pond, and added an extra team of people to work on restoring the banking and the additional ground preparation ahead of the turf delivery. We brought in an extra 100 tonnes of sand to spread on the ground to make it suitable for the turf despite the water logging, and arranged for the electrician to be on site for the whole week prior to the wedding. In their quieter moments our people helped the marquee team, moved planters, and restored the decorative planting after the marquee team had accidentally trampled on it.

The results: The wedding was delightful, the garden the star of the day (after the bride of course). The client was over the moon with the results. The costs had increased significantly in the final weeks, an investment our client felt was a good one given the results.

The learning: While the details vary, this case is a simple demonstration that much can happen that we cannot plan for in advance. In the simplest example, whilst it is reasonable to expect bad weather at some point in all projects, exactly when it falls can be the difference between it having no impact at all, and causing significant delays or cost increases. Which it is, is up to you.