

The Dutch design and build company has been building and operating successful ports and leisure facilities for years. We talk to director Richard van Emmerik.



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BUSINESS in the UK is thriving for the Dutch design and build specialist Pellikaan Construction. Set to hand over the new Tadworth Leisure & Community Centre and the Phoenix Youth Centre to Reigate and Banstead Borough Council this month, the company is working on a number of leisure projects across the UK in both the public and private sector.

"The UK market is currently very strong, along with Belgium; it is more active than Germany and the Netherlands, our other key markets," says director, Richard van Emmerik.

The family-run company has been building sports and leisure facilities in the UK since the 1980s. Formed in 1947 as a regional construction company serving the housing, education and industrial sectors, Pellikaan found its way into the leisure market after the founder, Henk Pellikaan, a keen tennis player, built an indoor tennis court behind the office.

"It was just a one court hall, but an indoor tennis court was quite a rarity in those days and he was soon being asked to build more of them," says Van Emmerik.

By the mid 1970s, Pellikaan was

operating as well as building sports and leisure facilities in the Netherlands, Belgium and Germany. But it was a chance encounter with tennis player David Lloyd that introduced the company to the UK.

"An international tennis tournament was being held at a Pellikaan Tennis Centre. David Lloyd was so impressed with the facility that he got in touch afterwards and asked if we could build a health and racquets club in the UK," says Van Emmerik.

The company has been working for David Lloyd Leisure and other private and public clients in the UK since then. Throughout Europe, Pellikaan has now completed more than 900 projects.

The company is currently working on David Lloyd Leisure's £9.3m club in Newbury, Berkshire. Due to open in December, the 3,300sq m facility will offer

extensive tennis and sports facilities including outdoor tennis courts with all-weather bubble protection; two squash courts; indoor and outdoor heated pools; a 600sq m gym; three group exercise studios with one dedicated to indoor cycling; a club room, café bar and adult lounge, and a DL Kids zone. The club will also feature a spa with a hydropool, steam room and saunas, ice feature, relaxation areas and an outdoor hydropool.

Other current David Lloyd Leisure projects include a site in Antwerp, due to complete next spring, with work starting on a David Lloyd Club in Glasgow in September.

Efficient design and build

"We have a very good relationship with David Lloyd Leisure and our other clients and we know what they want for their clubs,



Glass Mill Leisure Centre, Lewisham (also above)

Pellikaan Construction



Banstead Leisure & Community Centre, Tadworth

which has allowed us to develop a very efficient design and build process. On all our projects, we work with limited partners and select them at the beginning of the project, sometimes even before we agree the contract sum. This means we have people in place who can start on design at the earliest possible stages, which results in greater efficiency and shorter construction times," explains Van Emmerik.

Efficiency is a word that crops up time and time again in our conversation, thanks in no small part to Pellikaan's conversion to the practice of lean construction. All staff are trained in the philosophy and its relevant tools including pull planning, concurrent engineering and BIM design.

"It's all about improving teamwork and collaboration; effective and efficient teamwork can save money for all. Our

experience of BIM in The Netherlands is a great benefit to our UK division: we implement practices that we have tried and tested ourselves," says Van Emmerik.

"Value engineering is absolutely fundamental to our success and we are always looking at how we can rationalise the design of a scheme without comprising on quality."

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This approach inevitably involves negotiations with architects about their designs, but ultimately results in a better deal for the client. For example, Pellikaan was able to shave £1.4m off the Tadworth Leisure Centre project. Pellikaan proposed to remove unnecessary floor space and to rationalise some of the technical specifications. For example, the combined concrete and steel structure was changed to a singular steel structure, the roof was brought back to just one level reducing the number of difficult connections, and the company worked with its M&E partners to



David Lloyd, Exeter (also top right)



rationalise the installations design. The architectural performance of the design however remained unaffected.

“Employers can save themselves so much money. Clients often invest a lot in getting hundreds of architectural drawings done pre-tender, but that’s not necessary if you have an experienced design and build contractor. To understand the quality of facility that a client wants, we only need limited information such as floor plans, elevations, images of reference projects and details of the site investigation. That way, we can work with the architect and design team to find optimum working



methods, and efficient technical and aesthetic solutions.

“We have been developing sports and leisure facilities for so long, that we’ve amassed a huge library of information and references that we can refer to - there’s no need to reinvent the wheel each time we build a leisure centre.”

Operator experience

Pellikaan has successfully operated large multi-purpose leisure centres for some 40 years - Club Pellikaan was named Dutch Fitness Club of the Year 2014/2015. This unusual combination of operational and design and build experience is particularly useful when working with clients and architects who have little experience in the design and build of leisure centres.

“Gerard Pellikaan, our second generation CEO, says that we have talked more square metres out of buildings than we’ve actually built. These metres that were never built do not need to be paid for; they don’t need to be heated, cleaned or maintained and it means less staff are needed,” says Van Emmerik.

Routing in and around the building is another area where the company will typically have input, improving lines of sight in ways that inspire users and at the same time, again, can reduce the number of staff required for operation. Ill-considered plant

rooms – too big, too small or just in the wrong location – is another familiar issue.

“In design and build projects we can input this experience from the start and the projects benefit in the best possible way. Whether we work with private clients, operating trusts or local councils, early cooperation and involvement always improve the end result.”

Being able to work closely with the client, builder and other key members of the team such as the architect, structural engineer and M&E engineer right from the start is where he believes the company can add most value, which is why he is such a fan of design and build projects like Washington Leisure Centre, which launched earlier this year.

“We won the tender with Watson Batty Architects, who are great to work with, and by working so closely together we were able to learn a lot from each other. Washington Leisure Centre is an outstanding example of how to strike a balance value for money and aesthetic performance,” says Van Emmerik.

The leisure centre comprises two water flumes together with a six lane 25m swimming pool and learner pool with interactive water features; a multi-purpose sports hall that can accommodate trampoline training to an international standard; a soft play area across two levels and a gym. In



Horley Leisure Centre, Surrey (also right)





Wyre Forest Leisure Centre, Worcestershire

addition, it has a four court sports hall, two glass backed squash courts and a health suite with a sauna and steam rooms.

Partnering up

“That same balance and efficiency is found in PPP projects that we work on. In the UK and The Netherlands, it’s increasingly popular for local authorities to take operational and maintenance costs into account when developing a new building. This is a very sensible. Rather than reducing construction costs and then finding out you have to pay vast amounts for energy use, maintenance, cleaning etc over the next 30 to 40 years, these aspects are taken into account from the start,” say Van Emmerik.

“Like design and build projects, these projects offer great possibilities for cooperation between the various parties involved. And because operation and maintenance are part of the contract, the

process of finding the best balance is that more interesting.”

One of the largest operators of local authority leisure centres in the UK is Places for People Leisure (formerly DC Leisure).

“They have built a very successful team of experts for their PPP projects, which we are proud to have been part of for several projects now,” he says.

West Bromwich Leisure Centre, which opened last year, has just received a Built in Quality Award. Places for People Leisure was chosen to design, build, run and maintain the centre for Sandwell council. Designed by Roberts Limbrick Architects, it offers a 25m pool, learner pool, sauna and steam room, a four-court sports hall, fitness suite, dance studios, a children’s adventure area and a café.

“Because of the early cooperation, a very appealing building could be realised here as well, at a very economic price,”

says Van Emmerik.

Working with the same Places for People Leisure team, Pellikann is also currently part of the DBMO team for leisure centres for Wyre Forest and Hinckley Councils.

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“As with other return clients, the repeated cooperation means improvement of the process on every project. Without reinventing the wheel every time, it’s important to keep raising the standard. For example, the use of heat recovery systems, CHP units and energy efficient lighting is now common practice because of their proven efficiency, but working internationally means that we work with a wide variety of innovative technology. We have used German Passivhaus principles on several international projects, and have just handed over a building in Holland that uses thermal storage in its construction piles,” says Van Emmerik.

The continued search for improvements also applies to the Places for People projects, he says, always investigating possibilities to enhance the user experience and provide councils with added value. That means that the focus is not only on construction, but also the facility mix and possible community benefits.

“It’s a very busy time for us in the UK, which is great. I’m really proud of what the team and our partners have achieved so far and if things continue as they are, I’m very positive about our future here.” ■

www.pellikaan.co.uk



West Bromwich Leisure Centre, West Midlands