Does the company get a lot of repeat business?
We don't lose clients much and I enjoy picking them up from my competitors.

What advice would you give to anyone starting out in the industry?
Most of the problem is people just not being aware of what it is as a profession. Everyone knows what an architect is, but few people knows what a landscape architect is. I think that's a huge problem. The role of a landscape architect is very clear, but getting that across to young people who might be choosing a career is a hard one.

You need to have a head for engineering, but you don't need to be an engineer. You need to understand physics, plant and soil science, hydrology and you also need to have a design flair and understand the planning system. There is clearly a gritty, commercial side of it so that if you were purely an artist you might think: "it's not for me".

Although there are a lot of female landscape architects in the UK, there are not many women at the helm of companies. Why do you think that may be?
There used to be several big practices with women, at least, co-directing. It's interesting because more than half of qualified landscape architects are women, but they don't head the companies – I don't know why. I think landscape architects suffer from a certain lack of ambition; it tends to be a bit of a lifestyle degree, so there's that.

So, it's not like there's a plethora of female landscape architects frustrated to get ahead – I think a lot of them are comfortable. They're on a decent salary and have maybe got a part-time position. Just because not too many women are running the show, does not mean that landscape architects are inherently sexist, but the building industry generally is very male-dominated. Design team meetings are usually one or two women to eight men, and that hasn't changed much.

What advice, if any, would you give specifically to women in the industry?
The thing that is difficult, and the advice I give to younger women, is you've got to be tough. You've got to be tougher than you want to be because you're getting value engineered all the time by clients. You've got to be able to be direct. I think one of the biggest problems I've had with junior staff is telling clients no. They just don't want to, and I say don't be afraid to be direct. You'd be surprised how the client will then come around to your point of view.

It's all about being a good negotiator. You've got to make a living, you've got to have aspirations for a business, you have to make your mark so you've got to play a tough game.

Finally, what is the next step for the company?
My next step is to get all the staff to understand and promote innovation as well as biodiversity enhancement. For example, the Biodiversity Impact Assessment Calculation (BIAC) is emerging as a requirement for planning permission. We do a lot of work in Hertfordshire – which now requires it – so we are familiar with the methodology. There's a technical algorithm that you have to use, and we're quite comfortable with it. We're well ahead of almost all the other practices in that regard.

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4 Wick Lane Illustrative ©DRMM and Taylor Wimpey East London
5 Athlone House
6 Bat barn, Hellingly
7 Medway Gate
8 Hellingly orchid
9 Newt at Aylesford Quarry

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