All planned out

Lake District CAD 'expert' William Sutherland swears by the Allplan FT package, and is happy to share his knowledge

BY RUTH SLAVID

If an expert is simply somebody who knows more than you do, then in certain circumstances we could all find ourselves to be experts. Nevertheless, sole practitioner William Sutherland is taken aback to be treated as an expert in CAD and, in particular, in Allplan FE the specific package that he uses.
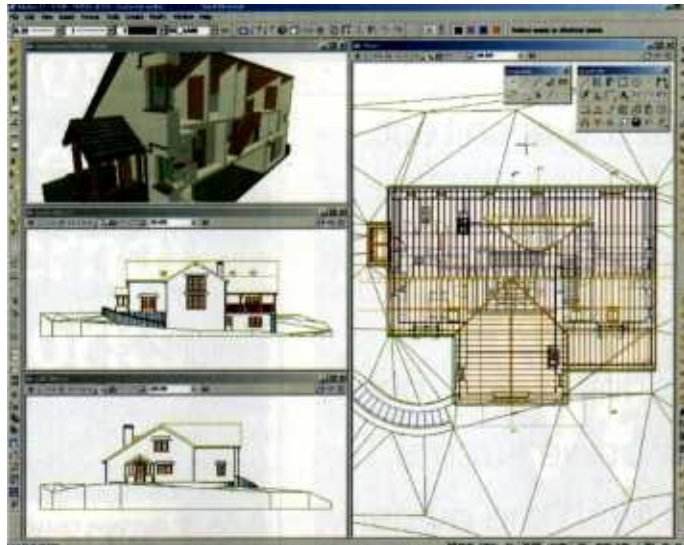
'If architects using Allplan can't get through on the helplines:: he explains, 'they e-mail me' 'A lot of this may be due to his website, where he has posted an enormous number of tips and comments. In addition to IT, Sutherland posts information on the planning system and on getting projects built in the Lake District, where he is based. He does not seem to realise how unusual his attitude is. 'There are so few people who give away information; he says bemusedly.

The Lakes are hardly at the forefront of the employment of technology. Sutherland says of his fellow architects: 'Principals of practices are quite happy to let technicians run their CAD systems. Practices have been to me for advice, I have done demonstrations and they have paid me for it. Then they completely ignored my advice, bought the cheapest system they could find, and it sat in the corner and did nothing:

How odd, then, that the area should be home to such a fearless pioneer. Sutherland, whose business is mostly the design of second homes in the Lake District National Park, has always been keen on IT. For years he used Drawing Express from Trial Systems ('the service is second to none') until he decided he wanted 3D. 'I went through everything I could think of,' he says. 'I tried to buy MicroStation but they weren't interested. I have never liked Autodesk products - I couldn't get to grips with them. I don't like ArchiCAD, it is clunky compared to Allplan: With all the big players dismissed, and parent company Nemetschek launching in the US 'to rave reviews, Sutherland decided that Allplan was the platform for him. So

he signed up, and was unperturbed when he went on training courses to discover that he was doing so alongside the first of the UK dealers.

Setting off as somebody who knew as much as anybody in the UK, Sutherland started his learning process, adding material to his website as he went along. Indeed, if you search on Google for Allplan, the fourth and fifth English language websites to come up (after the US Allplan site, back issues of *CAD User* and Nemetschek world-wide) direct you to Sutherland's site. Still, he was

Sutherland's website provides invaluable material on the Allplan FT

surprised to learn how closely his site was monitored. He posted up some dissatisfaction with the service he was receiving, and the next day was rung by Nemetschek's then dealer in the UK who said he had just received 'a bollocking' from Nemetschek. Apparently head office monitors Sutherland's site daily. Now, he says, 'I'm really careful what I write.'

Sutherland sees Allplan as a great selling point with his clients. 'It's the only package,, says Sutherland,'where you can just pick an image up and turn it over. The reaction of clients is amazing, they love it:

Originally, he says, he took on Allplan 'as a bit of a hobby: He

thought of 3D as purely a presentation tool, and expected he would continue to do all his drafting in 2D. Instead he found it is 'a complete environment'. He says: 'I spent about six months doing everything in 3D. Then I came back to 2D. And latterly I have come back to deciding that 3D is the best approach. He admits that Revit is more three-dimensional but says: 'I don't care for it. It is a bit of a young package.

He is under no illusions that learning to use 3D is easy. 'You have to acquire the skills to use it,' he says. 'It takes a year with any CAD package. It's a complete nightmare. It's complete hell: The switch to 3D requires an entirely new way of thinking, he believes. 'I found it very painful. There is no easy way.'

He says that Allplan is focusing more towards the English-speaking market. 'In the early days, there were all those DIN things. They have removed all that. We are now getting the package they use in America:

As a small practitioner, he has an unusual slant on certain issues. For instance, although he finds Allplan flexible in terms of exchanging information with other formats, he is not too bothered because he rarely works with other professionals. Conversely, he is keen on its ability to deal with curves and non-orthogonal design, not because he sees himself as the next Frank Gehry but because it is helpful when dealing with the bowed walls of old cottages.

Sutherland's enthusiasm for Allplan will not be the answer for everybody. But if his attitude, a combination of research, enthusiasm, boldness and generosity of spirit, was more widespread, he would have less reason to be despondent:'I feel we are getting left behind in the UK,' he says. 'The level of ignorance about basic computer issues is staggering:

The first step to counteracting this would be to have a few more'experts' like Sutherland.

William Sutherland's website is at www.lakedistrict-architect.co.uk