

# Circumstances alter cases

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**2 April 2019**

## **RICS hosted the first Built Environment Leaders Forum at Parliament Square in July 2018 where key stakeholders debated how to effect much-needed change in the industry**

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The Grenfell Tower fire and the demise of Carillion are two key events that have highlighted recurring challenges in the built environment: productivity, fragmentation, delivery and process waste, and communication. Combine this with globalisation and technological advances, and the demand for change is reaching a crescendo. But it is proving difficult to harmonise fragmented and polarised perspectives from key stakeholders in order to begin addressing these challenges.

There is hope for change given the huge potential in technological developments, opportunities to learn from other industries and some of the changes proposed in the [Industrial Strategy: Construction Sector Deal](#) ? but will this be enough? The objective of the Built Environment Leaders Forum was to enable wide and insightful debate and in turn share that insight to provide thought leadership and guide the development of standards.

?Digitisation and industrialisation are just the latest construction industry management [attempts at] panaceas: what is really needed is structural transformation of the industry, including new concepts of being a client, professionalism and contracting? was the proposition for debate.

### **Structural transformation**

The argument in support of the proposition stated that while digital developments are important, they cannot flourish without structural transformation. It was argued that to achieve this, seamless communication is required, as is a change in attitude towards the concept of cost, allowing digitisation and industrialised building to thrive.

The end users are key to the structural transformation of the industry. Clients must lead the change and in turn create a more holistic system. Heathrow Airport is one example: it is using off-site construction hubs around the UK to reduce the cost and environmental impacts of work on its third runway. The outcomes for the client should be our focus: integration, communication and commercial management are key. The industry is fundamentally broken, we must disrupt it ourselves to ensure change.

### **Digitisation**

Against the proposition, it was argued that digitisation and industrialisation are key to improving productivity, creating skills, and acting as the enabler for the future. To do so, it was claimed, a new blueprint for the built environment is needed, driven within the UK by the government's commitment to increase research and development spending to 2.4 per cent of GDP.

The key question is whether our industry can move faster than its clients and the demands of the market. In reality, the architecture, engineering and construction industry is sheltered from change, partly by its own inertia and partly by its clients.

The world is demanding change, as we are in danger of becoming an industry that is outstripped by emerging technologies. We must act to integrate digital technology into all of our processes, rather than evolving in a fragmented fashion. Digital tools will bring us greater transparency and predictability, as they have in the manufacturing and automotive industries.

## **Moving forward**

Despite differing views on the proposition, the forum agreed on a number of points:

- all elements of the proposition are linked
- the client needs to be the driver of change and
- the industry lacks leadership and thus responsibility, as the Grenfell Tower fire inquiry and the Hackitt Review indicate.

In terms of professional development, we need new minds with new thinking, professionals with better-developed soft skills to enable better management and integration, and recognition of a longer tail of specialisms to cover the challenges of new technology and industrialisation. This forum will therefore lead to a greater consideration of RICS standards, behavioural and collaborative, to better guide the industry professional.

What was clear in the first Built Environment Leaders Forum was the industry's commitment to find a way to overcome the issues we are facing. With so much change to effect such commitment is key, and RICS will continue to facilitate these conversations through future forums. We'd welcome your contribution.

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## **Further information**

- This feature is taken from the [RICS Built Environment Journal](#)