

## Invitation to innovate, October 2013

Given that I have heard this word thrown around our great industry for some time, I thought it was worth reflecting upon.

First of all, what *is* innovation? It is generally described as “a new method, idea, product; or application of better solutions that meet new requirements”. It is accepted as a different way of doing things to achieve a better result.

As I ponder this blog I am reminded of a recent TV commercial featuring the great Dick Fosbury, Olympic gold medallist and creator of the Fosbury Flop high jump technique. For those not familiar, Fosbury decided to jump backwards when everyone else jumped forwards. Fosbury “dared to change the rules” and, as we know, everyone now jumps backwards and this way is considered to be the only way to jump if you are to set new standards.

In our industry, current innovations that are quick to be quoted include the use of prefabrication and the much talked about BIM. There are, naturally, other examples of innovation but wouldn't it be fantastic if the extent and pace of innovation in our industry stepped up a gear?

So why hasn't it so far? Do we need more Dick Fosburys to “dare to change the rules”? Or do we need more players to follow our industry innovators? Or do we need a good enough reason to be bothered? I certainly don't have all the answers but let me respond to the last point.

On 27 September 2013 the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued their findings on the physical scientific basis of climate change. The report showed with 95% certainty that humans have been the dominant cause of the changing climate. Atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> has reached unprecedented levels in the last 800,000 years and this has committed us to global warming by the late 21st century and beyond.

As part of the Climate Change Act 2008, the UK is committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050 (against 1990 levels). Buildings are responsible for about half of the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, with over 80% of this

coming from heating, cooling and lighting. So, not being bothered isn't really an option!

In this respect, and being slightly cynical, I often see a cycle of inaction in my day-to-day business. Imagine the conversation.

Occupier: “We'd like to have more sustainable buildings but there is too little choice”.

Builder: “We can build more sustainable buildings but the developers don't ask for them”.

Developer: “We would ask for sustainable buildings but the investors won't pay for them”.

Investor: “We would fund sustainable buildings but there is no occupier demand for them”.

And round and round we go .....

I paint this slightly controversial picture not to offend, but to make the point that human behaviour and psychology attributable to most of us is not, necessarily, a natural enabler to innovate!

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