

## INTRODUCTION

When Council last met in October few of us would have thought that so much geo-political uncertainty would mark the end of 2016 and the beginning of 2017. From a UK perspective the media are full of the issues around a hard/soft BREXIT, the impact of leaving the European single market and yet, contrary to so many pundits, the UK economy has seen robust growth and the latest IMF forecasts are suggesting 1.5% growth in 2017 and Britain is currently the fastest growing economy in the G7 group of industrialised nations. Meanwhile, as I write this introduction, the FTSE 100 has reached a ten-year high and yet, in comparison, the value of the Pound is at its lowest level against the Dollar for 32 years. In comparison, when I commute into work, I have a “Platform 3 Fraternity” and while we await expectantly for the train our conversations are currently dominated by the latest reporting on President Trump and the ripples of anxiety and in some cases anger that are reverberating around the globe. Perhaps our parents and grandparents had similar concerns when the dark clouds were gathering over Europe in the 1930s and, in my opinion; there are again dark clouds gathering but this time of economic and political uncertainty and unrest. Of course for many, going about their daily tasks, this has little impact, but for engineers who by definition are well-educated, wish to understand how “*systems work*” and represent in general terms the “professional middle class”, we have a responsibility to Society to serve it for the good of humanity in the widest sense.

While it may be intellectually interesting to evaluate, speculate and even forecast, our role is to be predominately pragmatic and indeed, I would argue, this very much plays to our strengths; the ability to adapt, survive, make-do, understand no plan survives contact with the contractor and I believe this is what we are doing right now. While there is no doubt that the sector is tough at the moment and margins are as slender as ever there is opportunity to innovate, excite and do things differently. Surely these are the very opportunities we crave for. I note that right now nearly all of our events are oversubscribed, the thirst for knowledge and networking almost insatiable, to share and exchange ideas and experiences is even more important while there is uncertainty there is equally opportunity to be seized. The world order may be changing and we may not fully understand the levers that are being pulled, but the need for engineering solutions, excelling in the delivery of the built environment is even more important. The great thing about being an engineer is that we design and create, maintain and fix things that benefit so many in so many tangible ways.

Our President, John Field, has been visiting the Regions to hear the views and gauge your views. While email and texting has become the communication channel of choice, there remains the vital aspect of spending time together and listening. I know John has not only very much enjoyed these visits but has found it very beneficial to hear the views from the Regions; he still has some more visits to make but if John is coming to your region I would encourage you to make the very best of his visit. One of the outcomes of these visits is to try and create a clear plan for the Regions both domestic and international; what is true is that all our regions are very different and have a unique personality of their own. We are intending to examine this very issue at the Board Away Day at Cumberland Lodge in May; it is not a trivial exercise as we seek to balance the growth and investment and support across a very diverse spectrum of regions. While membership growth is a very desirable outcome the truth is that the becoming a qualified and professionally recognised engineer takes a very long time and that the benefits of membership may be very different depending where you are on your professional journey; and if you are working in Clerkenwell, Qatar or Canberra, for example, then you add the spread, diversity and depth of our members interests and requirements plus the changing requirements of engineering profession to the

geographic, regulatory, business and social realities. Thus creating a credible plan that covers so many diverse factors to create clarity is a challenge in itself.

**Engineering Professional Review.** While on the subject of change and reflecting that some facets of our profession change very quickly, others move at a slower pace. We understood that John Uff's report on the future of the engineering profession would be shared with the "stakeholder community" in early November. As I write there has been "no white smoke" over the IET, IMechE and ICE buildings. It is reported that draft recommendations have been produced which are currently being reviewed. You will recall this has generated a huge amount of interest and also concern. We wait with interest; I do think this illustrates the importance of CIBSE as, along with the IStructE, IOM3 for example; we try and keep the balance within the 36 Professional Engineering Institutions (PEIs). At this stage it is almost impossible to determine what the conclusions and opportunities may be; meanwhile I sense that many of the larger engineering companies are getting frustrated at the lack of progress on some of the strategic issues facing the profession, i.e. BREXIT, skills shortages, promoting engineering in our schools for example. I would commend the Royal Academy Report on BREXIT to you – I think it is an excellent piece of work titled "Engineering a future outside Europe securing the best outcome for UK". CIBSE is still involved in an initiative within the building service sector, primarily but not exclusively Building Engineering Services Association (BESA), BSRIA, FETA & ECA, to try and create a "single voice" for the Building Services Sector so that market related research and views on such issues as skills and training could be argued have the support of the whole sector.

**CIBSE Journal** Some of our more observant members will have noticed that the CIBSE Journal has a new layout this month as part of a "re-fresh". It is now seven years since the Journal broke away from United Business Media (UBM) and we went on our own with our advertising partner, Redactive, and publishing partner, Cambridge Publishing Ltd (CPL). The CIBSE Journal not only has editorial freedom but also is free to pursue its own agenda; this is, in my opinion, entirely healthy. I believe this is reflected in our member's views – as the Journal is considered the No1 membership benefit, the Journal also makes a significant contribution, which in membership organisations is very unusual. If you do have views please make them known to either myself, or our indomitable editor, Alex Smith. Our aim is to keep the Journal as the market leader and a significant membership benefit.

**IT/CRM** In October I wrote that "*While still on the subject of momentous change I need to turn to our new IT system; the new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system went live at the end of July. The human disposition is to believe that when we achieve the next goal/target "all will be well"; of course, it is a deception for the reality is that even more goals/targets are ahead.*" Unfortunately it also turned out to be prophetic too, while the new CRM is definitely a huge step forward and the integration into our Content Management System (CMS) essential, we have faced two significant and very frustrating challenges; First, getting the data across in usable form into the new CRM, Sales Force, is hugely complicated and just getting the salutation and address right should be simple but has to include all the various sub-sections of membership and interests has been stressful. Second, getting Direct Debits (DDs) right, which could easily take a whole afternoon to explain, has also been fraught as the United States does not operate DDs and using our app "Member Nation" to automatically create and process DDs has caused considerable distraction. We always planned to send out our subscription renewals in a different way, mainly by email to use the new system effectively. All of the issues above caused around six to eight weeks delay and many late nights as we solved one problem then found another. All of the renewal notifications have now gone out by email and indeed many members have already chosen to renew on-line. The next big step, as I write, is the DDs and this is due in the same week as the Council meeting, fingers-crossed! I am sure some of our volunteers have found the new IT system frustrating and challenging too – for which I apologise but we have to make

progress and we are all sure that we will have an outstanding IT system, we just have another hill or two to climb yet.

**Premises** I have previously reported that while we continue to reflect and consider what the future options are for the CIBSE HQ and staff in terms of accommodation, we await decisions on Crossrail 2. Just after the Board had rightly decided to delay any decision on premises until the future was clearer, then another idea popped-up. As I write, we anticipate an assessment of the premises to establish what are the credible options, and can a preferred affordable solution be identified?

**Events** Those of us who were fortunate to attend the Building Performance Conference at the QE2 Centre, 17-18 November. “*Boosting Performance through Cooperation*”, had a real treat. In my opinion the content of the two days was outstanding and many of our exhibitors were also very positive. Just over 500 delegates attended and we had 36 exhibitors, in this our third year, at the QE2 Centre. The questions around re-locating the Palace of Westminster have made our commitment to the QE2 Centre questionable and in, I hope, a very exciting way are moving to the newly refurbished Olympia, and a re-titled event “**Build2Perform LIVE!**” **21-22 Nov 2017**. May I really encourage you to attend – we are trying a whole host of new things including a special “CIBSE Volunteers” area, so as they say “watch this space”. As I write we are also gearing-up for our prestigious “Building Performance Awards” at the Grosvenor House on Tuesday 7<sup>th</sup> February we have guests and projects from across the world. We deliberately decided that to win a CIBSE Award there needs to be hard evidence of performance but in that one sentence you immediately rail against the current perceived logic of Awards; so we not only have to deliver a strong message about the importance of performance in our sector, but the audience also wants “entertainment” for a good night out. We do have high hopes of being able to grow this event and develop the concept outside UK, as with so many things the germinating of the idea to first fruits seems to take a very long time but there are signs that those seeds planted may be just poking their heads out of the soil. I really do hope so!

**Staff** I must also congratulate Clare Bott on being appointed as our Director of Marketing, this marks another step in supporting and delivering our 2020 Vision, a key element of which is the marketing plan for both Services and Membership.

**Conclusion** This has been a very challenging period for the staff as we get a grip on the new IT systems. I must say thank you to so many of them who have worked so hard to get it right. We are not there yet but we are optimistic that we soon will be. There are many new things for CIBSE in 2017 and we are not short of opportunities but equally we have to ensure our current members are looked after and well supported – as always it is a balancing act but there is also palpable excitement too. Overlaid is the political uncertainty ahead but what is needed is a sense of clear purpose, underpinned by knowledge and professional excellence: This is our task in 2017.