

They back Open Plan. Do you?

■ Leading names in property debated the diversity issue last week at *Property Week's* first Open Plan roundtable. **Felicity Francis** reports

Since *Property Week* launched Open Plan on 6 June, support from the industry has been overwhelming. People from every sector, at every level, have emailed, called and tweeted their views on the issue and asked how they can get involved in the campaign.

Drawn from this wave of support, a group of 18 industry figureheads gathered on 10 July to debate the way forward. The roundtable, hosted by JLL, was the first step towards reworking the Open Plan Manifesto to provide a robust, focused and achievable campaign to increase diversity in the built environment sector.

The debate focused on actions to tackle the five strands of diversity at the heart of the Open Plan campaign: gender, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and socio-economic background. Below are five of the key issues participants identified as needing urgent action – which will be used to inform the development of Open Plan 2.0 and the steps needed to effect widespread change.

The business case

Of course, there's a moral imperative to embrace diversity, which more and more senior industry figures are proactively doing, as opposed to simply paying lip service to it. But there's also a commercial imperative. Put simply, a more diverse workforce improves the performance of a business. Moreover, clients increasingly expect property companies to reflect the diversity of their own businesses.

The reality is that many still don't. Where to start? By looking to the precedents set by accountancy, banking and law, all of which have strategies in place that the property sector can learn from, suggested participants. "Very early on, accountants recognised our business is about people," noted Craig Hughes, head of real estate at PwC. "And how do you get the best people? If you rule anyone out you're limiting yourself. It's about business rationale. A customer wants us because we

have fantastic people in front of them, and that's because we have a wider pool to draw from."

Saleem Fazal, partner at Taylor Wessing, also believes a lot can be learned from other industries. "I've seen the law profession improve in terms of mid-career support in the past 20 years," he said. "Part of that is down to training, but a lot of it came from changing the culture from within. When someone starts a family it doesn't mean their career is over, it's about making sure the career continues."

A cohesive approach

One of the main aims of Open Plan is to draw together the positive initiatives already in place throughout the industry and create a set of unified goals. The approach has been too piecemeal, agreed participants, and property would not achieve the pace of industry-wide change needed unless the disparate strands were pulled together.

It is also vital the campaign reaches everyone in real estate, whatever their discipline or location. A challenge for the property profession is that unlike accountancy or law, it encompasses so many types of career and different-sized businesses.

"The challenge in addressing diversity in the built environment industry is the vast range and sizes of organisations it encompasses, as well as the involvement of several professional governing bodies," said Brian Bickell, chief executive of Shaftesbury and member of Freehold, the industry's LGBT network. "This fragmentation is a challenge for industry-wide groups such as Freehold."

Accountable, not just transparent

The industry also needs to move from transparency to accountability in order to encourage real change. Participants noted that one of the reasons the financial services started to embrace diversity far earlier is that in the 1980s, a number of pension funds decided it was unacceptable to do business with those >>





OPEN PLAN

INCREASING DIVERSITY IN PROPERTY

« that didn't. Questionnaires were sent out and if a business did not meet quotas then they lost the business. The impact was felt overnight and participants felt that a similarly proactive stance – coupled with greater accountability – would produce tangible results in property too.

Another important distinction between property and other professions was the behaviour deemed acceptable. Participants recalled phrases used by employees and behaviour that would have cost them their jobs in other industries.

The consensus was that financial metrics should not be the only measure by which a company is measured. A culture change is needed, argued Guy Grainger, UK chief executive of JLL, and it needs to be led from the top. "It's all about leadership," he said. "Engaging leadership in these discussions is very important. They need to realise they're doing this for a very valid reason."

Make the industry accessible

One of those reasons is making the industry fit for the future by attracting the candidates that should be working in it in the future. Far more needs to be done to engage schoolchildren – and soon, says Rebecca Gee, professor in real estate at Oxford Brookes. "The 12 to 14 age bracket will be looking at the industry today for a future career. We need to put things in place quickly. If they think they'll be discriminated against they won't want to join."

The recruitment process also needs to be fairer. Training should be given to those on interview panels and blind CVs used to counter the inevitable unconscious bias, suggested participants.

Don't forget the middle

It's not just at the start of people's careers that diversity needs to be encouraged. Interventions need to be made at each point in a person's working life to ensure they don't fall out of the profession. While not all roles lend themselves to flexible working, the industry needs to work harder to create roles that do – so people don't feel the only option when they have a family, say, is to leave.

"There are three points to this," says Colin Wilson, head of UK and Ireland at DTZ. "First, we need to make employees aware of what they're entitled to. Second, we've got to start walking the walk, and enable people to do what they're entitled to [such as take their full parental leave]. Thirdly, which will take time, is role modelling, actually talking about it and giving examples for how people have taken their rightful entitlement and applauding this."

The idea of mentoring is one the sector is keen to adopt. As Sandi Rhys-Jones, founder of RhysJones Consulting and head of Women in Property's mentoring scheme, says: "Mentoring schemes bring people together, and at mid-career it's important to be in an environment where you're reminded what you're good at and the opportunities you can step into is incredibly powerful."

If people are encouraged to make the industry work around their own diverse requirements, real change can and will happen.



Industry leaders leading the way

The business case



Ailish Christian, head of shopping centres at Land Securities:

"Diversity is about attracting the best talent into the industry. The more diverse the industry becomes, the wider the talent pool it can draw from, enabling us to attract and retain the very best people."



Helen Gordon, global head of RBS real estate asset management: "This

comes back to business rationale. 65% of discretionary spend in the UK is by women, which is important in banking. 31% of executive level jobs at banks go to women, which is so different in the built

environment. The difficulty we have is breaking that circle."

A cohesive approach



Louise Brooke-Smith, president of RICS: "If you look at the RICS

membership, the majority are SMEs, which is where the diversity challenge can hit hardest. If we don't support change in that bulk of our membership, we'll be talking about this for a long time, but I do think we are having an impact."



Joanna Embling, a member of DCLG's private-rented

taskforce: "Shedding light on what's good in the industry

already and what we applaud as good would be excellent."

Accountable



Guy Grainger, UK chief executive of JLL: "As we've been addressing

diversity, we've realised that beyond male and female our information is very poor. If I'm honest the industry has been scared to ask the questions in the past, and now we want to ask for a very valid reason. But we need to ask the questions in the right way."



Alan Froggatt, principal at Touchstone

Advisors: "The behavioural changes we are seeking need to be underpinned



The attendees: 1. Yolande Barnes, Chris Grigg, Rebecca Gee; 2. Alan Froggatt; 3. Saleem Fazal; 4. Colin Willson; 5. Amanda Harris Keane, Helen Gordon; 6. Sandi Rhys-Jones; 7. Craig Hughes, Joanna Averley; 8. Jane Duncan; 9. Guy Grainger; 10. Nalin Seneviratne



by the appraisal system, making them meaningful, rather than having a set of six measures, one of which is financial and it's the only one that counts."



Chris Grigg, chief executive of British Land: "When I came into this industry, it was apparent that we were behind many other sectors in terms of diversity. We need to look at best practice elsewhere, otherwise there's a danger that we're all trying to reinvent a set of behaviours."



Craig Hughes, head of real estate at PwC: "If you're willing to demonstrate openness in a leadership position, it will have an effect. There is a tone that we

need to start to set, and a huge amount we can do just by sharing our own stories."

Accessible to all



Jane Duncan, founder of Jane Duncan Architects: "We need to approach the wider media about how real estate is portrayed, and look at all documentation that we use. For example, can we look at images we use on CGIs; who are we representing?"



Yolande Barnes, head of residential research at Savills: "More diverse role models in the industry will impact the number and quality of people we attract

to pursue their career in the sector. We therefore need a multi-pronged approach, to do something significant about diversity at board level while providing mid-career support and looking to attract new entrants to begin a career in the built environment."

Whole career



Nalin Seneviratne, director of capital and major projects at Sheffield City Council:

"Training throughout an organisation is so important so people understand what diversity is all about and realise we need a slow culture change. It's about diversity in its true sense, showing that everyone does have an equal opportunity."

THE NEXT STEP

In September, Open Plan will launch an industry-wide research project to collect information about how diverse property really is. This will set a benchmark to measure progress against, and along with further focus groups and roundtables will inform the development of the Open Plan Manifesto 2.0, to be published in November. We will then embark on an action plan to reach the heart of the industry.

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