

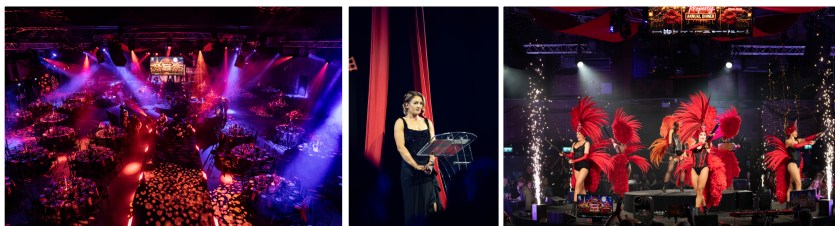
North West Branch Newsletter

October 2026 | Issue 20

North West Annual Dinner 2026

The curtains rose, the lights sparkled and the spirit of the Moulin Rouge arrived in Manchester as Women in Property North West welcomed guests to its highly anticipated Annual Dinner.

From the moment guests arrived, the evening delivered all the energy, elegance and showmanship that the famous Parisian cabaret is known for. Rich colours, sparkling entertainment and an atmosphere of celebration provided the perfect backdrop for one of the North West property sector's most anticipated events.



A highlight of the evening was the address from North West Chair, Louise, who reflected on another successful year for Women in Property and the importance of championing talent, supporting one another and creating opportunities for future generations entering the industry.

This year's event proudly supported Maggie's, the cancer support charity that provides free practical, emotional and social support for people living with cancer and their families. Through the generosity of attendees, sponsors and supporters, the event raised valuable funds to help Maggie's continue its life-changing work.

The success of the evening would not have been possible without the incredible support of our sponsors. Women in Property North West extends its sincere thanks to BTP Architects, Material Source Studio, Kellen Homes, Primas Law, PMP, Langtree, NJL Consulting, Wallace Whittle, LK Group, Project Furniture Residential, Campbell Consult, Connectin Events and Victoria Warehouse for their generosity and commitment in making the event such a memorable occasion.

As the final curtain fell, guests left with lasting memories, strengthened connections and the knowledge that their support will help make a real difference to those who rely on Maggie's services. Together we raised more than £11,500 for charity!

Thank you to everyone who attended, sponsored, supported and contributed to making the 2026 Women in Property North West Annual Dinner such an outstanding success.

The North West Branch is kindly supported by:

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Upcoming Events

- **Build, Grow and Protect your Wealth Breakfast**
21st October, 8.30am - Manchester
- **Planning for Growth: The Future of Barrow**
21st October, 12.00pm - Virtual
- **Exploring How Inclusive Design Can Move Beyond Accessibility Checklists**
29th October, 12.30pm - Virtual
- **Your Time to Shine – Workshop 3**
3rd November, 12.00pm - Virtual
- **Diwali Arts & Crafts Evening**
4th November, 5.00pm - Manchester
- **Wine Tasting at Fogo de Chao**
12th November, 4.30pm - Liverpool
- **Successfully Communicating the Benefits of New Development**
18th November, 8.30am - Manchester
- **Kendal Wine Tasting**
19th November, 6.00pm - Kendal
- **Present with Impact: Presentation Skills**
24th November, 9.00am - Manchester
- **Glue, Glitter & Questionable Results – Christmas Crafts**
25th November, 6.00pm - Manchester
- **North Wales Festive Craft & Networking**
26th November, 5.00pm - Caernarfan
- **Your Time to Shine – Workshop 4**
1st December, 12.00pm - Virtual
- **North West Christmas Celebrations**
1st December, 5.30pm - Manchester
- **Festive Curry & Networking**
3rd December, 5.00pm - Liverpool

What Stands Between Us and a Balanced Work Life?

Editorial by Dr Catalina Ionita, Urban Design Studio Director Planit



Is work-life balance real, or is it just another thing we feel guilty for getting wrong? Not enough at work, not enough at home, not enough for our friends, families or ourselves.

That tension sat at the heart of Women in Property North West's Building Balance event, hosted by our sponsors Material Source on 16 September.

The event was organised in response to Women in Property's wider [Building Balance](#) campaign and member survey, which explored childcare, flexibility and work-life balance across the property and construction industry. The findings were striking: 50% of respondents had considered leaving the industry because of work-life imbalance, while 42% said they regularly worked beyond their contracted hours. But the conversation was much broader than childcare or parenting. It was about the realities of modern working life and whether our workplaces are flexible enough to reflect them.

Chaired by David Smalley, the panel brought together Ciaron Wilkinson of Manchester Museum, Raluca-Diana Anghelina of RIBA, Jessica Spencer of Urbanistas and Cartwright Pickard, and Jade Anderson of Male Allies UK. The discussion was open, honest and refreshingly free of easy answers. One message came through clearly: there is no universal version of balance.

For some, flexibility means school pick-ups or caring for elderly relatives. For others, it means studying, managing health, pursuing interests outside work or simply protecting enough time and energy to have a life beyond the office. None of those needs is more valid than another.

That point resonated with me personally. I completed my PhD alongside a full-time job, which for several years meant squeezing research, interviews and writing around a conventional 9-to-5. It required relentless organisation and constant adjustment, mostly from me rather than from the system around me. It was a reminder that flexibility is not only about parenting or caring; sometimes it is simply about giving people enough space to grow alongside their main role.

Ashley Taylor-Watts, Director of Define Architects reflected that although balance sounds simple, it is deeply personal. Understanding and inclusivity are fundamental, and people are more able to show up at their best when they feel at their best. In an industry that can still be all-consuming, open and honest conversations matter.

Lisa Sawyer, Director of Land Studio challenged the phrase "work-life balance" itself. Does it create the wrong frame: work on one side, life on the other, permanently competing for space? Perhaps "work-life harmony" is more useful. Her key words from the evening were simple: flexibility, trust and communication.

Women in Property North West Chair and Kingsdene MD Louise Emmott echoed that there can be no one-size-fits-all solution. Trust has to work both ways. Communication matters. Empathy matters. People have different responsibilities, priorities and even different times of day when they do their best work.

Sometimes the changes needed are small. If you send an email outside the traditional 9-to-5 and do not expect an immediate response, say so. If someone needs flexibility for caring responsibilities, do not make them feel they have to justify their commitment. And flexibility should not be framed solely as a women's issue. Men have caring responsibilities too, while parents, non-parents and carers all benefit from workplaces where they can be honest about what they need.



The wider Building Balance campaign makes the same point: flexibility works best when it is embedded in workplace culture rather than treated as a favour, with greater emphasis on trust and outcomes rather than presenteeism.

The event also moved beyond discussion and into practical action. Jessica Spencer's work with UrbanistasNW is a good example. [The Careers, Kids and Caring Responsibilities Toolkit](#), published through RIBA, was developed to help employers and employees navigate conversations that can often feel difficult or deeply personal. It covers parental leave, returning to work, childcare, caring for relatives, fertility treatment, pregnancy loss and adoption.

Its strength is that it sits between policy and real life. Policies matter, but they cannot anticipate every circumstance. People's lives are rarely neat, and support often depends on the quality of the conversation as much as the wording of the policy.

The toolkit also connects work-life balance to a bigger issue: retention and progression. If people cannot make work fit around changing responsibilities, the risk is not simply that they feel stressed. They may reduce hours, stall their careers or leave the profession altogether. That makes this a leadership issue as much as a personal one.

The evening also highlighted the value of creating space for new voices, with Jade Anderson of Male Allies UK taking part in her first speaking engagement and bringing confidence, honesty and energy to the discussion.

Perhaps the problem is that we still treat work-life balance as something individuals are expected to solve themselves: manage your diary better, set stronger boundaries, be more resilient, learn to say no. Those things can help, but they only go so far.

We are working in an era where AI, technology and new ways of communicating are changing how we design, collaborate and do business, yet many workplaces remain organised around rigid ideas of when, where and how good work happens. That rigidity does not affect everyone equally.



If organisations genuinely want healthier, more fulfilled and more effective people, the conversation has to move beyond personal resilience. It needs realistic expectations, meaningful flexibility, clear boundaries, trust, empathy and leaders prepared to create the conditions in which different people can thrive.

Perhaps balance is not something we achieve once and keep forever. Perhaps it is something we continually renegotiate as careers, families, responsibilities and priorities change.

The workplace needs to be flexible enough to renegotiate with us.

Behind the Regs Podcast

One of the highlights of the summer was seeing Stephanie Cox, Gwenno Jones and Helen Hesketh feature on the [Behind the Regs](#) podcast for an open and honest discussion about careers and the built environment.

The conversation explored the very different paths each panellist has taken into property and construction, from environmental consultancy and architecture, to teaching, finance, networking and business ownership. Together, they reflected on the value of transferable skills, the importance of confidence and visibility and why diverse perspectives make our industry stronger.

A key theme throughout was that successful careers are relatively linear. The built environment needs a wide range of skills and experiences, and there is no single blueprint for success. The discussion also highlighted the important role that Women in Property continues to play in supporting professional development, building networks and creating opportunities for the next generation.

The episode was a powerful reminder that our industry is at its best when it welcomes different voices, different background and different routes to success and we would welcome you to give it a listen [here](#).



Summer Social Roundup

Family Network – Moel Famau



Our North Wales Hub enjoyed a fantastic family network walk to Moel Famau, near Mold, during the summer holidays. After a cloudy and rainy Thursday, we were rewarded with glorious sunshine and breathtaking views across to Yr Wyddfa (Snowdonia) and Liverpool.

The 2.5km walk provided a wonderful opportunity to connect with fellow members and their families in a relaxed setting, while enjoying the many wellbeing benefits that come from spending time outdoors. It was a great example of how networking doesn't always have to happen in a meeting room, with conversations flowing naturally along the trail.

The event was a huge success, and we're already looking forward to organising another family-friendly walk next year.

Summer Run Club

We were delighted to see such a fantastic turnout for the first Women in Property North West Summer Run Club. The route took participants through Islington and Ancoats before finishing at Manchester's newest green space, St Catherine's Wood in Red Bank.

A huge thank you to FEC UK for the post-run coffees, and to committee members Gwenno Jones and Rachel Hollins for organising the route and leading the groups.

The feedback has been fantastic, and we're already looking forward to future run club events. Watch this space!



Cyan Lines Walking Tour



Inspired by the popularity of the Cyan Lines tour at the Women in Property People Innovation Place Summit, a group of members took the opportunity over the summer to rediscover Manchester from a fresh perspective.

Led by the ever-entertaining Jonathan Schofield, the route showcased some of the city's architecture, hidden stories, waterways and green spaces, reminding us just how much there is to uncover right on our doorstep. Despite a little Manchester drizzle, spirits remained high and the afternoon was filled with interesting insights, plenty of laughs and great conversation.

North West Summer Social

Our annual Summer Social was the perfect way to celebrate the season, bringing together members and guests for an evening of networking, conversation and a few well-deserved spritzes at Federico's.

The venue was full of energy, with attendees enjoying great company, delicious canapes and the chance to connect with colleagues from across the property and construction sector in a relaxed setting.

A huge thank you to our event sponsor, Material Source, for their continued support of Women in Property North West. Based on Federation Street in Manchester, Material Source has become a valuable hub for built environment professionals, providing collaborative space to discover products, attend events and connect with industry

