

HELEN GORDON

Chartered Surveyors' Company

Court & Livery Dinner | Speech

Tuesday 21 January 2020

Master, Sheriff, Wardens, Liverymen, Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the Guests, thank you for a splendid evening. It is uplifting to hear the Master speak of diversity and inclusion and the Sheriff speak of the organisation of the City and his agenda to keep the City's reputation of having a pure legal system.

The Surveyors' Livery has always exemplified the good work many in the real estate industry undertake and the quiet delivery of life changing opportunities for many less fortunate.

The Surveyors' Livery is a force for good.

But the real estate industry as a whole is not seen as a force for good.

Last year the BPF commissioned the research house Populus to undertake the largest even perception audit of our industry.

The Populus audit was sobering and revealed four very significant perceptions of our industry.

Many of you will have heard these before, but for those that haven't, there were four main findings:

- Firstly, who we are and what we do is not well known and there is little understanding of the social value we create
- Secondly, we are perceived to be an elitist male-dominated group with a lack of diversity and a London-bias
- Thirdly, there is a lack of trust in our industry, and especially in the development process
- Fourthly, people are likely to see us as net takers, not net givers to local communities.

This is not the image of the industry that we should accept. The property industry is a force for good and we must make sure that that message is broadcast loudly and clearly at every opportunity.

We are fundamental to people's lives.

The real estate industry creates the built environment around us, and delivers projects everyday across the UK that build our country's future and enhance people's lives.

The world in which we operate is changing and our industry is changing too.

We are increasingly under challenge to be, and to be held accountable as, a force for good.

Moreover our ability to support local communities depends on their **trust**, and on creating effective partnerships and collaborations.

Our response to the Populus audit must **not** just be about changing perception – it's about stepping up.

That's why my predecessor Rob Noel, David Partridge and I, as the BPF's Presidential team, launched **Redefining Real Estate**.

This **program** commits the BPF and its members to make a greater contribution to the UK's communities and to improve trust in what we do in partnership with national and local governments.

The response – from our members, partners and stakeholders has been good.

There is a real appetite for action.

The Redefining Real Estate Programme has four key themes and I will touch on them briefly.

The **first** theme is **creating wealth and contributing to a productive economy**.

In July this year, the Government announced that it wanted to enter into negotiations with our industry to create a built environment sector deal.

Whilst Ministers have been understandably distracted over the last few months, the concept of a **formal** partnership between our industry and the government is long overdue given our central importance to delivering solutions to many of the key social challenges of our time.

The **second** theme is a diverse and skilled workforce.

We have put the creation of a more diverse and inclusive property industry at the top of the BPF's agenda over the last three years and worked with a range of partners to drive change.

There are many fantastic initiatives going on within our member companies and across the industry, as described this evening.

I am particularly proud of the cohort we have created with BPF Futures – 1400 of the brightest young people in our industry and diverse in every possible way.

And as a diverse group of young people build their careers we need to make sure that they continue to feel welcome and valued. It's time to make sure that we have **the right values and culture** throughout our industry and that the way in which we **recognise** and **reward** people reflects the values that as leaders we espouse and aspire to.

We also need to make sure that we live our **values** in the way in which we inter-act with our supply chain partners and with the communities we seek to serve.

The BPF will be leading action in all of these areas, asking our members to commit to the actions that will ensure that we have the right culture within our industry and that this is recognised.

The **third** theme is **reinvigorating and strengthening communities**.

The BPF has long been involved in supporting the reimagining of our high streets and town centres.

We are committed to supporting the work of the High Streets Task Force and to supporting efforts to ensure **transparency of ownership** of the high street, and to bringing empty premises back into use including innovative **meanwhile uses**.

Our industry has a proud record of philanthropy and charitable support and the Surveyors' Livery is a wonderful example of this as is LandAid, the industry's charity, dedicated to helping to end youth homelessness – one of the blights on communities across the country.

The **fourth** theme is - **safeguarding the environment**.

No-one can doubt the importance of our industry taking action to tackle carbon emissions, to use resources more sustainably and to protect and promote biodiversity.

Industry bodies the UK Green Building Council and the Better Buildings Partnership are showing great leadership in this area and the BPF work with them to build on this and to support members to take action within their businesses.

Now is the time to turn ambition and good intentions into meaningful action.

At the BPF we consider it is essential to Redefine Real Estate to ensure a vibrant and successful future for our fantastic industry.

After the political turmoil of the last few years many like me will have entered the roaring 'twenties' welcoming some stability.

The reality is the challenge we face to **build** a resilient country, to prevent civil unrest, to narrow the gulf between the have and the have nots and to help protect our environment, these are challenges that the property industry will have an important role to play in.

We all have a great deal to contribute and the Surveyors' Livery is an exemplar of the force for good, and the Master and the whole Livery will be a source of inspiration for the agenda of Redefining Real Estate.

On behalf of the guests, thank you.

Thank you.