

The challenge



Dr Justin Furness – presenting a technical update at the regional members' March meeting in Leeds

The way we create buildings has not essentially changed in over 40 years. While other sectors such as automotive and aerospace have changed radically and invested heavily in new technologies such as digitisation, the construction sector is often accused of lagging behind. This government has set out in its industrial strategy a vision to increase productivity and jobs in the wider UK economy by investing in skills, industries and infrastructure. This includes encouraging the UK to be the world's most innovative economy and building long-term strategic partnerships with businesses through the sector deals. Construction is recognised as an important sector to UK plc, and through the current round of the Transforming Construction Challenge Fund, government will invest up to £170m, matched by £250m from industry, to create new construction processes and techniques.

Unsurprisingly, increased use of modular construction, linked to digitalisation, is high on this agenda. From this perspective, this is an exciting time to be part of the construction sector and our opportunity to be part of the changes that are so urgently needed. However, given that these messages are not necessarily new, some remain sceptical. Despite the desire to fund smaller projects, how much of that £170m will you or I actually see? Why does change seem particularly challenging in our sector? Part of it must be down to the extended and complex nature of our supply chains. On any given project, how far removed from the client or designer could the actual window installer be? In the drive to increase productivity, we have seen rationalisation of the supply chain in many sectors, and construction is not immune to this. No doubt we will also see increased investment in modular and offsite construction, which may nibble at your market. But what if a new entrant really does transform construction and bring technologies together to create new buildings without any need for the traditional supply chain? Perhaps Halloween is closer than we think. □

Justin Furness

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