

Editor's choice

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RICS JOURNALS

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(June 2022 – August 2022)

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RICS back Diane Dumashie for FIG presidency

LAND JOURNAL

First published 26 August 2022



With the forthcoming FIG Congress due to select a new president to take the federation beyond the pandemic, we explain why RICS is endorsing Dr Diane Dumashie FRICS

By James Kavanagh

Change and adaptation to achieve sustainability and resilience are the main themes of her candidacy, which has been endorsed by RICS. Dr Dumashie believes that to build professional relevance, all surveying professionals have a part to play in rising to the challenges ranging from climate change and resource use to urbanisation, technological development and demographic shifts.

To navigate what she describes as a 'decade of transformation', she is certain that the profession must act together. Her overall goal is for FIG to advocate surveyors' professional relevance by responding to the global challenges by promoting professional development, influencing institutional policy to assist its national member associations.



Sustaining the relevance of surveying

If elected to the presidency, Dumashie's main goals for the four-year term are:

- tackling climate change and helping achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- engaging the profession more closely in the development of digital infrastructure
- ensuring greater diversity and inclusion in the surveying professions
- maintaining good land governance and professional standards.

Sustainable development is, she argues, central to achieving net-zero emissions and resilience to climate change. But to accomplish this, the profession must collaborate on immediate action. This is key to planetary sustainability: the 2030 deadline for achieving the SDGs will soon be on us. Meeting the SDGs will demand ambition, leadership and a clear, pragmatic plan. The environmental, social and governance agenda could offer an operational framework for a sustainable approach alongside the goals themselves; further Dumashie points out that innovative technology is providing exciting possibilities to support this effort.

Successful collaboration will depend on making the best use of that technology. When it comes to digital transformation, Dumashie remarked: 'Our profession has been in transition for some time; but we can't stand still, we must be prepared for the future by adapting now.' Given 'increasing convergence between our sector and tech', surveyors should be advancing the role of geospatial knowledge infrastructure in society and the economy, and providing user-friendly, low-cost systems for land and property administration. This way, the profession will be able to stake its claim to continued relevance.

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To continue to provide leadership in society, we must be ready to innovate, to adapt and to lead the response to change."

So Diane Dumashie told GIM International in May as she outlined her manifesto for the presidency of FIG – International Federation of Surveyors.

Likewise crucial to the profession's relevance will be ensuring a more diverse, representative and inclusive community. Surveying needs to attract new recruits, encourage succession plans and upskill all generations. As Dumashie observed in GIM International, 'Our profession crosses four generations,' adding that 'those of us already in the workforce are now employed in ways we could have hardly imagined.' Importantly, all four generations will shape professionals' approach to the skills needed to thrive after the pandemic. But surveying needs to appeal to young talent in particular, so they can serve as ambassadors for the profession and take up leadership roles in the future.

Underpinning this all, Dumashie aims to maintain a high standard of governance in FIG as an organisation, strengthening communication and collaboration with members. It is imperative that FIG leadership not only steers the organisation with purpose but also benefits society. Having chaired a 2021 Task Force on FIG Governance, she has heard directly from members and understands the need for resilience and sustainability in the profession. If surveying remains an influential voice at all levels, Dumashie contends it can then continue to benefit society.

Combining expertise and experience

FIG represents the range of surveying disciplines and, as a skilled advocate for change, Dumashie maintains that her own experience in senior roles at the organisation – including vice-president, member of the Advisory Committee of Commission Chairs, and roles on other commissions and task forces – puts her in an excellent position to listen, collaborate and take action as its president.

Her [campaign video](#) elaborates that, as a profession, 'We reflect the world – and to talk effectively to that world, we need to take on technical skills and leadership skills.'

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In the face of global forces, we must be trusted by our stakeholders and society as a sustainable, 21st-century professional body,'

Diane told GIM International

Her professional experience shows she has practised what she preaches, developing her own skills through practice and research alike. As a chartered surveyor for more than 30 years, she has worked across the public, private and NGO sectors, including strategic and property development for Allied Lyons, Marks & Spencer, regional development agencies and the NHS. She has also worked with international donor agencies, including as an adviser to the UN on securing gender equality in land tenure.

Since 1999 she has also been the director of her own firm, Dumashie Ltd. She focuses on strategic projects in the UK and internationally with a clear social and economic agenda linked to land. As an accredited mediator, Dumashie is adept at bringing stakeholders and resources together to complete projects. She leads and innovates to resolve complex issues in land management, land administration, gender rights, and land and coastal property regeneration.

Specialising in coastal policy and business for her PhD, she has provided consultancy to businesses such as port and paper mill operators. She has also followed her passion to advise on protecting access rights for coastal communities in Africa, where the cross-cultural experience of her British-Ghanian heritage has stood her in good stead.

She is a former RICS Governing Council member and presently sits on the organisation's Standards and Regulation Board and the Global Land and Resources Board, as well as being a trustee of LionHeart, the charity for RICS members and their families. As vice-president of FIG, she has also been the head of RICS' delegation to the federation.

Altogether, this organisational experience makes her an excellent candidate for FIG president.

What is FIG?

FIG was founded in 1878 and is an UN-recognised NGO representing surveying organisations, national professional institutions and universities from more than 120 countries.

Its [remit](#) covers land management, cadastre and administration, spatial planning, valuation, construction cost management, geospatial information – including geodesy and engineering – education and training, research, hydrography, standards and technology.

It encourages surveyors to work sustainably, and maintains close links with the UN and World Bank as well as supporting the Young Surveyors Network, including the important [Volunteer Community Surveyor Program](#).

A new president and two new vice-presidents will be elected at the [27th FIG Congress](#) in Warsaw, Poland on 11–15 September, and serve a four-year term from January 2023 to December 2026. Each national body represents its own membership base, and will vote online for their chosen candidate.

Committing to clarity and collaboration

Dr Dumashie believes that, above all, the profession needs to remain relevant, serve the public interest and leave no one behind. To continue to provide leadership in society, she will ensure FIG is ready to innovate, adapt and lead the response to change.

As president, she promises to foster:

- **clarity and collaboration:** listening to members and taking an active leadership approach
- **purpose and reliability:** advocating for the continued relevance of surveying to ensure a benefit to society.

Serving as a steady hand to move FIG forward, she pledges to be accessible and action-oriented to inform leadership decision-making.

No FIG president has been an RICS member since 1996, and Dumashie would be honoured to represent RICS at this global level – bringing the worldwide surveying community together to make a strong statement for the future of the profession.

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By Claire Buxton and Israel Taiwo

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Supporting the UK's low-carbon transition

LAND JOURNAL

First published 15 July 2022



Decarbonising the UK energy market will involve innovation and collaboration across the sector. Energy Systems Catapult explains its role in this

By Dr Danial Sturge

LJ: What does Energy Systems Catapult (ESC) do?

Danial Sturge: Our remit is to accelerate the transformation of the UK's energy system, ensuring that businesses and consumers capture the opportunities of clean growth in the transition to net zero. We're an independent, not-for-profit organisation, bridging the gap between innovators with industry, government, and academia.

Our USP is that we take a whole systems approach to the challenges of decarbonising the energy sector. I sit in the Markets, Policy and Regulation team and lead on our carbon policy and industrial decarbonisation policy work, but we also have experts on electricity and buildings policy.

As well as policy, we have a whole host of other teams all working towards the same goal. For example, we have specialists in infrastructure and engineering that look at all the various technologies; a data and digitalisation team, a key component of achieving net zero, especially from an energy perspective; a consumer insights team that helps us understand what consumers need and want from decarbonisation; and many more.

We can model the future energy system from the national level right down to the type of heating systems and energy used in individual households. This work helps stakeholders such as government, local authorities, industry, and consumers understand and plan for net zero.

For instance, we do a lot of work around local area energy planning – working with local or combined authorities or local enterprise partnerships to help them plan for and deliver on their climate emergency declarations and net zero goals.

We also give wider consideration to infrastructure; for instance, as part of the government's EV energy taskforce, we collaborated with key transport sector partners to model what will be required of the UK's public charging network to meet the future needs of drivers, investors, and the energy system.

Another example of our work is the Modern Energy Partners project, in conjunction with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, Parliamentary Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy Committee and the Cabinet Office. This project looks at how to decarbonise the public sector, ranging from hospitals through to military bases and prisons.

It's these important areas of work that – as well as contributing to and challenging the developing energy policy landscape – have been a focus for the Catapult as the UK's transition towards net zero gathers pace.

LJ: What can you tell us about carbon pricing?

DS: I lead on our carbon policy work, which includes carbon pricing. Our focus is on developing policy proposals that ensure its implementation not only seeks to resolve the challenges of individual sectors, but does so in a way that joins up various parts of the economy. Moving away from the largely siloed approach taken to decarbonisation in the past will be key for the success of net zero.

At ESC, our main remit is to support innovators, to get low-carbon and zero-carbon technologies, business models, and service offerings into the market. But this requires a coherent carbon policy framework that works in favour of a low-carbon rather than a high-carbon economy.

In some cases, policy still tilts in favour of the high-carbon choices. For example, heating your home using electricity is far more expensive than gas, but gas is the high-carbon option that we want to move people away from. While we see households beginning to shift away from gas, for the majority change will only occur when the incentives are aligned with our emissions reduction targets.

Part of my work is to help government think about how to design the necessary policies to help the transition. And it's not just energy; you also have to consider the knock-on effects, for example, what does it mean for the way we use land or the way people travel?

At the start of 2021, the UK had set up its own emissions trading system having left the EU's, which presents an opportunity to bolster policy towards net zero. But the UK Emissions Trading Scheme (UK ETS) currently only covers a third of UK emissions. It covers the big emitters, namely power generators, heavy industry, and domestic aviation. These are arguably the easiest sectors to put a carbon price on because there are relatively few operators.

Where things get difficult is how to turn the discussion towards heat and buildings, road transport, and eventually land use and agriculture. This would potentially involve millions of people going about their lives who have no interest in participating in a carbon market.

How do you ensure that citizens and businesses see the incentives to make that switch to low-carbon options? When we first started thinking about this more than four years ago, we looked at existing carbon policy in the UK, as well as what other jurisdictions around the world had done. What we learned can be broken down into three areas:

Firstly, a blanket carbon tax does not work. While this approach is ideal in theory, in reality it is not politically salient. A great example of this is fuel duty, which has been frozen for the past ten years and more recently reduced: so if you attempted to put a carbon price on road transport the chances are it would not rise in line with what is required to meet carbon budgets. It is politically unpopular, particularly in the context of current cost of living crisis.

Therefore, you need a more nuanced approach. For example, when it comes to heat and buildings, you've got to consider wider impacts such as fuel poverty and personal decisions related to people's homes. Our proposal to tackling such challenges is by taking a sector-led approach, through designing policies that deal with the specific challenges unique to each sector.

Sector-specific carbon policies can be supported by complementary policies that deal with challenges such as fuel poverty. They can also enable access to finance, innovation support, and everything necessary to get us over those initial barriers to decarbonisation.

This would potentially involve millions of people going about their lives who have no interest in participating in a carbon market

Finally, in the longer term, you can start thinking about linking sectors. We think the UK ETS could be an important policy to enable that. Instead of just expanding the UK ETS to cover all sectors, as is currently under discussion, we can develop sectoral approaches that then link with the ETS as it continues to evolve, when they're ready.

We are already seeing this approach used internationally, for example, Germany recently introduced a separate trading scheme for road transport and heating buildings. Its longer-term ambitions are to link with the EU's wider carbon market. This enables the transition in a way that is not only politically feasible, but deals with those challenges and opportunities. Policymakers must recognise that we do not live in an ideal economy and decisions are not always made rationally.

LJ: How can carbon policy work in agricultural land use?

DS: From a policy perspective, we've been thinking how to leverage the new Environmental Land Management Scheme (ELMS) that replaces the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and how to link it with the wider sector-led approach I've mentioned.

When Michael Gove was Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, he proposed that we should be rewarding the provision of public goods, which importantly for net zero includes carbon sequestration and the general decarbonisation of land use.

Because not all sectors will be able to decarbonise by 2050, including farmers, it is important to understand how can we support and give them incentives to do so? For example, we think there are potential ways to create a market for removing greenhouse gases that allows farmers to be subsidised by the government to plant trees or grow crops for bioenergy and carbon capture and storage (BECCS).

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By Jon Bloomfield

The negative emissions that can be realised from land use could then be sold as credits into a greenhouse gas removals (GGRs) marketplace, which over time will become an enduring source of income over and above these farmers' usual agricultural business.

Ultimately, this could be linked to the UK ETS, where heavy industry and aviation are the other two main sectors that will still be emitting in 2050 and will need access to negative emission credits. As a result, there is going to be a consistent demand to 2050 and beyond for landowners and farmers to provide these credits.

Of course, planting trees and growing energy crops are not the only options. The challenge for all land use options is that measuring, reporting and verifying emissions reduction or removal is incredibly difficult to do well. Soil management, for instance, can in theory be done in a way that reduces its overall carbon footprint, and sequesters carbon, but how can that be quantified? That's the immediate challenge.

Therefore, the final part of the jigsaw of a sector-led approach, in which these markets can be connected, will be a carbon regulator. This may be one body, or multiple parties working together, but it will ensure the emissions from, for example, growing energy crops or tree planting are truly additional, and measured, reported and verified coherently across the economy then accounted for appropriately.

It's fine to be seen reducing emissions on a spreadsheet, but it's meaningless if it's not happening in the real world. When all these sectors are accounting emissions in the same way, investors will have the confidence that emissions reductions and removals are being achieved and that they're doing so in line with carbon budgets.

LJ: What is the role for surveyors in carbon budgeting?

DS: If we think about how to monitor, report and verify emissions across the sector, do we just send people around with clipboards to every farm and measure every single tree?

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This doesn't seem feasible, although we will need to have spot checks in the same way we do for industry.

Perhaps there's a role for surveyors to support the verification process for a carbon regulator. Once we understand how we are going to do it, and the processes, the framework, and the science have been updated to ensure they are robust, then we will need people to enact those processes and ensure the information is transferred to the regulator. And that may be a role for some surveyors.

At the moment the Environment Agency is the regulator for the UK ETS. But the agency contracts accredited verifiers to ensure reporting is correct. Maybe surveyors could fill that gap.

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UK mineral sector demands renewed attention

LAND JOURNAL

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The electric vehicle revolution and the geopolitical situation mean that the UK's rare metal resources, mineral processing capacity and mining education should all rise up the agenda

Face drilling with a single boom drill jumbo at South Crofty. © Cornish Metals/Steve Tarrant

By Kim Moreton MRICS

LJ: What is the current capacity of rare metals in the UK?

Kim Moreton: The question should really be: how much exploration are we doing? Any exploration programme requires some target or certainty for those funding it.

Greater awareness among landowners and the owners of large estates could advance minerals exploration. People imagine that mineral exploration on estates would be for coal, sand and gravel, which were the traditional markets. But we're seeing more and more exploration for metals. It will be a whole other issue to set up exploration programmes that can identify what else is under the ground, and establish whether it is there in quantities that are currently commercially viable.

A lot of British expertise is deployed overseas, but exploration is being carried out across the west country, in areas of Wales and in parts of Scotland. The UK has significant known reserves of gold that continue to be mined, and more projects are in the pipeline.

Global resource availability and global supply chains have come under even greater scrutiny since the war in Ukraine, and focused attention on the UK's own resources. One critical mineral is [tungsten](#): the hardest metal with the highest melting point, it is used in many sectors of the economy such as automotive, technology, energy and manufacturing. It is classified as a conflict mineral – mined by forced labour in certain parts of the world – and the EU and the US have identified a significant risk to supply of tungsten concentrates in the near future.

Meanwhile, the overhaul of the UK's electricity distribution system to accommodate renewable generation and mass-market electric vehicle (EV) ownership – cornerstones of the energy revolution – will require significantly greater quantities of copper, tin, nickel and other metalliferous minerals, far in excess of those currently available. The UK is therefore seeing a return to exploration and resource assessments.

And you can't mention rare metal capacity without thinking about the planning regime's capacity to handle mineral applications. Planning authorities are under huge pressure because of budgetary cuts.

Planning departments do their best. They're often faced with seriously complex, multi-layered information: water tables, complex ownership rights, long-term restoration plans and biodiversity net gain (BNG). For instance, where the site can be repurposed and restored after extraction it is possible to secure BNG in the long term. However, the pathways to achieving this are complex and require a matrix of skills.

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There are skills issues too, because of the issues that a mineral proposal or developments such as the gigafactories in Sunderland and the West Midlands, which will make EV batteries, pose.

To sum it up, rare metal capacity is a multidisciplinary challenge. But it can be met, and can be an intrinsic part of the revival of the UK's primary production and resource efficiency.

Chartered minerals surveyors are at the heart of the process, from identifying rights and ownership, feasibility studies and initial exploration permitting through to operations, environmental planning, royalties, closure planning and restoration. Mineral surveyors are in demand, and it's probably the most exciting time for our discipline in decades, with lots of opportunity ahead.

LJ: What are the global geopolitical issues for minerals?

KM: Rare earth metals aren't actually very rare. They're quite well distributed across the planet's crust. Where they are in concentrations that are currently viable to extract happens to be in China: but China doesn't have the same environmental protections and planning considerations around extraction that we have in the UK.

Your hi-tech vehicle might have begun its life in China, with some young people digging in a giant wet, open pit to bring up tons and tons of material to process. By comparison, it typically takes a minimum of six years for an application for mineral extraction in the UK – and that's just the planning.

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LJ: How are all these issues affecting the UK minerals sector?

KM: To get a perspective on this, we need to look at how everything is related. One of the side effects of the ongoing electrification of vehicles has been a lively debate about the amount of energy that's needed to extract and create new battery storage infrastructure. Some people believe that means there is no net green advantage in the short to medium term. But you need to consider the global emission scenario as well as local emissions.

One school of thought suggests the UK should retain all the rare earth elements extracted here because we produce very little of these. The EVs built in the UK aren't super-sexy Teslas, they're down-to-earth, affordable, reliable vehicles such as the Nissan Leaf. UK-built EVs currently rely on power packs and power plants manufactured elsewhere using materials sourced elsewhere. There is a huge opportunity to localise production of both.

Japanese manufacturers have always paid attention to vehicle recycling and reuse. There's a well-trodden recycling path, but there's no single manufacturing standard yet, and the variety of battery formats is a hurdle to the profitability of mass-market recycling.

The BSI has introduced [PAS 7062](#) to promote good design, manufacturing and handling practices. EV battery pack geometry is a major consideration in mass-market automobile manufacturing, recycling and end of life, but as yet there is no convergence between global manufacturers.

Recycling is also critical in renewable energy. Many wind turbines installed over the past two decades are reaching the end of their lives, but recycling them is not easy. The greatest difficulty seems to be with the turbine blades, vast pieces of complex, composite fibre structures.



© Royal Mint/Huw Evans Agency

Recovery plant can boost UK skills

The Royal Mint is developing a processing plant in South Wales where the skills, infrastructure and environment favour commercial recovery of viable quantities of gold from waste electronics. This is encouraging, as the UK not only needs to protect and nurture its mineral and mining skill base, but also foster new talent in mineral processing, metallurgy and electrochemistry.

For now, the market hasn't found the best way to monetise recycling them. Capital prefers a quick return, and this part of the material cycle is not yet well understood by investors – and of course there has been easier money to be made elsewhere.

Compliance and regulation are the usual incentives for these advances. However, UK governance has proven – I choose my words carefully – somewhat haphazard and unfocused in recent years. Of course, RICS members can and should step up to the plate. I see a growing appetite from our land and mineral estate clients and operators for innovation and options to make investments and changes to meet these new challenges, despite the triple whammy of Brexit, COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine.

Another issue is whether or not the government has planned a sustainable financial model, where those who are benefiting from various tax breaks and revenues can continue to do so. There seems to be a shift in government sentiment away from onshore wind and solar, with news stories claiming that the technology is unpopular with the public. Whether this is a manoeuvre to placate rural voters remains to be seen.

The announcements about the Sunderland and West Midlands gigafactory developments are good news, though, because this builds the capacity, knowledge and skills to process materials and supply primary automotive manufacture. This hasn't really been done at scale in the UK before, except at one or two companies that until now have brought the finished components in to the country. Mineral processing to support such endeavours needs to be part of this strategy. In terms of bulk metals production, the UK has a single aluminium smelter at Fort William and a mothballed facility at Lynemouth.

LJ: Lithium has been in the news recently. What is it used for and why is it critical for a tech economy?

KM: Lithium's characteristics offer high-charge density, other battery compounds are in development, but lithium is tried and tested and is the contemporary mass production preferred solution.

It's the key element of contemporary portable power storage. There is some suggestion that the current EV market is simply allowing drivers to pay for the privilege to pollute elsewhere, and some manufacturers haven't done much to counter that. As with any new technology, EVs are expensive at the moment, and their cost is a divisive issue at a time when we're seeing huge drops in living standards.

The wider issue is whether or not there is sufficient capacity to rapidly enable all the households with EVs to charge them at home. There are probably plenty of people with a very efficient EV parked outside a large old house that costs them hundreds of pounds a month to heat.

It is key because it's the bridge between the internal combustion engine, skills, knowledge distribution centres, distribution points and EVs.

The UK's first cars were imported in the 19th century, and then produced under licence. In some ways the evolution of the UK's EV industry is following that pattern.

Based on the current trajectory of policy and investment, everyone's going to get an electric car, and lithium is an essential resource for this. The processing, manufacturing and recycling is well understood. These operations can be easily fitted into our existing automotive industry, which in turn encourages developments in mass-market energy storage technology.

There are also already healthy markets for used batteries from Toyota's Prius and Nissan's Leaf models, which are being repurposed for domestic energy storage.

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By Eva Topham

LJ: What is the future of UK mineral extraction and exploitation?

KM: Demand for construction materials is increasing at the same time as the value of surface interests is going up. Surface interests are a major consideration in the exploration and development of resource extraction and of vital resource development value.

Mineral planning in the early part of this century has led to safeguarding of significant quantities of sand and aggregates in particular. Development pressures also continue to pose challenges for operators, and the lead times for planning applications aren't getting any shorter.

Mineral planning is, by necessity, complex and it requires a broad skill set. Planning departments have faced budgetary, skills and recruitment issues, so good mineral surveyors are essential to projects.

The UK government is also trying to secure the continued supply of UK fossil fuels from existing sources. The life of coal power plant is being extended and North Sea oil extraction is being reviewed to ensure energy security. A significant return to nuclear energy has been announced in the UK, in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. It's focused attention not only on where our gas, coal and oil come from, but also our sources of uranium.

The \$64,000 moral question is: how do we maintain some balance between where we pollute at home and where we buy our energy from? It's the dilemma of our times, and it's far too important for virtue signalling. In my opinion, there needs to be much more honest dialogue about this. Consumers are already paying a penalty for decades of heel-dragging by governments of both parties on energy supply, and the scramble to return to fossil fuels demonstrates the urgency of the situation.

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LJ: What does the sector need to be wary of?

KM: Environmental issues. Unfortunately, as with any major asset ownership, any type of extractive operation comes with a best-before date in terms of finding the balance between good stewardship and the practicalities of investment.

While there's a lot of excitement around minerals and metals at the moment – and a lot of exploration is planned – it's possible that in ten or 15 years, let's say, some other mass energy technology may come in, such as nuclear fusion or other ways of generating hydrogen. Then, unfortunately, that best-before date is up, for some investors.

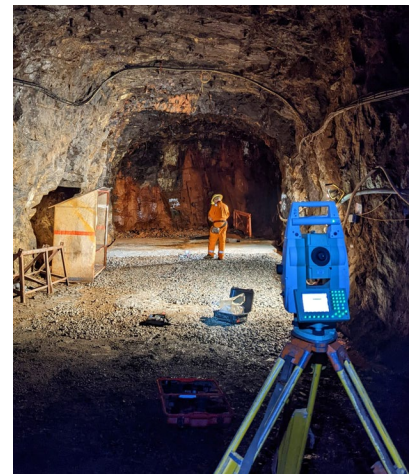
While the spotlight is on our domestic resources, we need to ensure we nurture a culture that supports exploration licences for metals. We need to invest so we correctly manage extraction, communicating with all stakeholders, and making sure there are sufficient resources for meaningful restoration of sites.

Professional capacity is another issue. Degree apprenticeships and other models of learning and assessment that blend practical, academic and professional experience are so important. The UK's final cohort of mining engineering students graduate in 2024, and at the moment that's it. Even if a new programme is available from 2023, the UK will not produce mining engineers or mineral processing graduates until 2027 at the earliest. Unfortunately, universities don't seem to be interested in these disciplines – they prefer mass-participation degree programmes that attract hundreds of students in a cohort.

Meanwhile, as teaching staff from these minority disciplines retire, no one is replacing them. At Camborne School of Mines we're hoping that the University of Exeter is successful in bidding for the degree apprenticeship in mining engineering in England. We don't want the profession, or the discipline, to become invisible. The UK punches way above its weight in the global minerals industry, but the neglect of our sector's skills is damaging that.



Face drilling with a single boom drill jumbo on a development heading underground at South Crofty. © Cornish Metals/Steve Tarrant



Underground surveying at South Crofty, marking up new diamond drill hole collar locations. © Cornish Metals/Steve Tarrant

Mineral surveying is varied, it's interesting. Few other professions include the variety of tasks and skills such as contact with your clients, the need to negotiate and be intellectually nimble, personable and persuasive, as well as the mix of technical and legal knowledge that includes not only land rights, valuation, ratings, planning and development, ground engineering, geology, but gets you out of the office on a regular basis talking to clients from an extraordinary range of backgrounds. There's nothing quite like it.

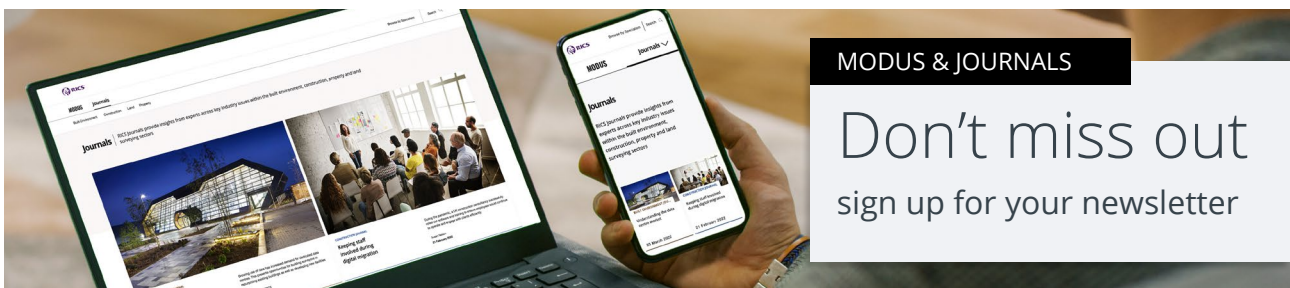
I hope at the very least we might see some master's programmes in the near future that would allow people from diverse backgrounds to qualify. One of the problems is that messaging about the career opportunities needs to be there for 13–15-year-olds, and it's difficult to find one voice to represent the sector.

The [Mining Association](#) of the UK, [ABMEC](#) the British Mining Trade Association [Mining Education Trusts](#), the [Institute of Materials](#), Minerals & Mining and industry partners have recently formed the [UK Mining Education Forum](#), which is trying to plug that gap.

We need a wider discussion, one that doesn't stop at 'We don't want mining.' Everyone who wants a better future has a responsibility to be aware of, and to engage with, the dialogue.

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What is involved in a land acquisition manager's role?

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Communication, decision-making and an eye to the future are useful skills for a career in land management, says RICS Matrics UK chair – who also believes the UK planning system needs an overhaul

By Theo Till MRICS

Land Journal: Can you tell us how you started in the sector, and what your job is now?

Theo Till: I studied part-time at university, which I would recommend to anyone else considering the profession. This allowed me to gain valuable experience that I could relate to my studies, begin building a network, and cut my teeth in the sector. I worked as an assistant surveyor to Peter Milner, an RICS fellow and leading planning and development (P&D) specialist.

During this time, I developed a passion for such work myself, and took an opportunity that came up in the P&D team at Savills. In this role, I advised clients on the sale and acquisition of development land, provided development consultancy advice, and prepared valuation reports, predominantly to banks.

I learned that each client selling a site has different goals. They do not all want to sell for the highest value: timing might be an issue, or they might want to take a joint venture partnership agreement with the developer. I went on to work for two other national consultancies before moving to Wheeldon Brothers Ltd in 2017 on the acquisition side.

Wheeldon is a Derbyshire-based housebuilder that constructs about 180 new homes a year across the East Midlands. My role as land acquisition manager is to acquire development sites for us to build much-needed homes.

This involves several stages. First, I monitor housing supply and demand, which helps identify need. Second, I review planning policy and competing planning applications to assess a site's potential for achieving planning permission. Third and finally, I value residential development land to assess the financial viability of a scheme. If it is viable, I negotiate the purchase and manage the acquisition through the legal process.

Risk analysis and economic future-gazing are two important functions in a land acquisition role. Interest rates are rising steadily at present, with recent hikes by the Bank of England and further increases forecasted. Despite high-street banks tightening their criteria, most lending institutions still seem happy to provide debt finance.

Because Wheeldon sells its homes to the private market, we must be vigilant about drop-offs in mortgage approval rates, and alert to any risk this might have for our order book. The ongoing cost-of-living crisis also presents new risks in terms of mortgage affordability.

As a company we are facing challenges. Materials shortages and build costs are soaring, and seriously affecting our build programmes and overall development viability. Furthermore, our supply chain is strained, and is demanding considerable management.

The land market is also exceptionally volatile at the moment. Transactional values are far beyond anything I've ever experienced. Again, we are back to simple economics: supply and demand. Most private housebuilders stopped purchasing land during the pandemic, and that has stunted their growth. But because house sales have continued to accelerate and the larger builders are desperately chasing volume to meet financial targets, they must continue to source a rare commodity: consented development land.

LJ: How do you think that the UK planning system, and the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill in particular, can help deal with these issues?

TT: Like many others in the development industry, I believe the planning system in this country is not fit for purpose. There's an abundance of archaic policy that restricts development. It often feels as if the answer is no, even before the question has been asked.

Green belt policy is one roadblock and is often heavily debated in the industry. It was introduced in the Town and Country Planning Act 1947, effectively to stop the sprawl of settlements and protect green spaces. But we live in a wholly different way now, and there is huge pressure on local planning authorities to review their green belt to accommodate population growth. I appreciate the value of green spaces, which we have all recognised during lockdown. However, careful masterplanning can easily accommodate fantastic open spaces for people to enjoy.

Another policy commitment that is challenging, although for completely different reasons, is the target to build 300,000 new homes per year. This is a massive figure and current delivery of net additional dwellings is about 215,000 per year.

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We're also failing to deal with the huge shortage of skilled planners at local authorities. Decisions made by qualified planning officers are often being overturned at planning committees by ill-informed councillors on political grounds. Planners are also leaving the public sector for corporate roles, away from the bureaucracy and political point-scoring.

Lack of staff and resources at local authorities together lead to delays with the validation of planning applications. I can't remember a single application I've dealt with over the past ten years that has been determined within the statutory time period, specifically eight weeks for a minor application or 13 for a major application.

If we submitted a planning application tomorrow and knew we could get a decision within 13 weeks, that would motivate us. But it's more like 13 months – at an absolute minimum – with huge financial risk and uncertainty, given the elected members' form of overturning a recommendation for approval at planning committee and the application being refused. Such refusals can be appealed and often there are cost implications for councils when an application for costs is granted. Somehow the same elected members continue to overturn planning applications and in turn increase their council's exposure to cost awards.

It is often a frustrating process. We've got a willing seller who's prepared to sell us the site; we've agreed a price; we have the financial backing, the skills and the materials to build. There's just a blockage in the system.

What I have read of the Levelling Up and Regeneration Bill doesn't fill me with excitement. We are also back to political point-scoring between the two final candidates for the Conservative leadership and the different ways they want to fix the broken planning system. Both seem to want a presumption in favour of brownfield sites. However, one wants planning reforms at a community level and the other at a national level, going back to the zonal system that was mooted before the introduction of the levelling-up agenda.

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By Abigail Jones MRICS

We've also got a homelessness crisis, and we need to be doing more about affordable housing. And while sustainability is rightly high on the agenda, the government would still welcome houses in an isolated village provided these were built sustainably. There's no joined-up thinking. The system just seems to be broken, and it's up to the government to deal with that through its levelling-up agenda.

LJ: Alongside your day job you're also chair of RICS Matrics. Could you tell us how you got involved, and what you get out of it?

TT: I joined my local RICS Matrics committee in Derbyshire in 2011. I found the network was somewhere I could meet like-minded people and understand what was happening locally in the market, particularly interesting projects, and discuss business opportunities.

It has also been a huge help because I've developed interpersonal and professional skills through Matrics. I've had a platform to establish who I am professionally, and speak to others at the same level. It has given me confidence.

After stepping down as Chair of Derbyshire Matrics, I joined the UK and Ireland Matrics board in 2017, which effectively sets the strategy for the network, works with RICS to implement its agenda and is accountable to the UK and Ireland World Regional Board. We provide finance and best practice advice, and support close to 30 local groups across the British Isles.

In November 2021, I became chair of our board of ten surveyors in the UK and Ireland, which is a huge honour. I ensure we perform to the best of our collective ability, fulfil the objectives set for us by RICS and work with it to implement the Matrics strategy. At present, this strategy focuses on inspiring, supporting and engaging with the next generation of professionals. One particular area we are looking at is empowering local groups to recommence in-person events as we recover from the pandemic.



From left to right: Nicola Forest, chair of Matrics London, Theo Till, RICS Matrics UK chair and Mirona Tomala, RICS Young Surveyor of the Year 2021

I want to leave Matrics in a better place than I found it – which is a challenge, considering the great work that’s been done in the past. So I’d like to continue to provide support, inspire future generations and raise the profile of careers in surveying. I’m pleased to say we’ve recently secured more funding from RICS, as this had been significantly constrained during the pandemic.

Matrics has more than 90,000 members at the moment, and we want to increase that number. We also want to ensure that when people become chartered members they stay involved with RICS. We don’t want to lose that talent – whether people want to become part of a professional group, engage with the communications team, or sit on a disciplinary panel or Governing Council. Lord Bichard’s review concluded that RICS Matrics should be reinvigorated to give younger members a stronger voice in the organisation and I look forward to working with RICS and Matrics to implement this.

I’m a big believer in diversity and inclusion, and my priority is to ensure that everybody feels welcome. Matrics isn’t a secret society. It’s open to all, and there’s something for everyone.

LJ: What would you tell someone coming into P&D about the skills that are most useful?

TT: Effective interpersonal and decision-making skills are crucial to the work of a land acquisition manager. You need to understand the expectations of the company you work for – what is the land acquisition strategy? How many plots do we need to secure annually? Across how many sites? In which locations? What are the expectations of our landowners?

Numeracy skills are important too. I often need to analyse and sense-check figures and carry out financial forecasting.

One must also understand that the whole development process is about risk – the business of building houses is fuelled by accepting that risk. As a housebuilder, we need to know what we can do to minimise risk on any site before we buy it and start development.

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LJ: And with your experience of Matrics, what issues do you find your peers are facing?

TT: The economy is a major issue at the moment, as I mentioned. But quite rightly sustainability is also at the heart of a lot of decision-making. We're becoming more environmentally conscious, trying to understand what we do with the buildings we're developing and how people live in them sustainably. Job satisfaction is also critical. Particularly during COVID-19, a few of my peers were wondering: 'Am I living the life I want to?' They also asked, 'I want more flexibility – will my company give me that?'

Planning's at the heart of what we do, so it's critical that the system in this country is fit for purpose. But until political infiltration is reduced, I don't think anything will change. The other point I'd like to make is that nimbyism is continuing to play an unwelcome role in planning. I'd go so far as to say it's reached the 'banana' stage; that is, 'build absolutely nothing anywhere near anyone'. This is another issue I'd like to see addressed. But given the political angle and the shift back to localism, I just can't see that happening.

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