

THE OOHS AND THE AAHS HAVE IT

Construction Voice prepares for the election

by Miranda Birch, Miranda Birch Media



I remember it well. I heard gasps to my left and a couple of "oohs". Eighty pairs of eyes were glued to the images of beautiful tall buildings. Not grey concrete monstrosities from another century; sleek, light buildings that fitted in with their surroundings.

Then the President said, "This looks lovely. I've already bought my penthouse flat. But how much will they cost? I'm not on a seven figure salary yet."

At this point there was another ripple of noise and nodding of heads. I heard a few sober "aaahs", acknowledging that she had a point. 'She' is Julia Chanteray, President of the Brighton and Hove Chamber Of Commerce, which hosts Construction Voice.

Construction voice is a forum which brings together anyone involved in the city's property and construction sector. Each event focuses on a particular issue with a panel of speakers to start

the debate. The most recent evening discussed the city's 'growing pains'. How on earth will it find space for between 18,000 to 24,000 new homes over the next 15 years?

Which brings me back to the audible response to the images on Paul Zara's slides. Paul Zara is a Director at Conran and Partners in Brighton, the design company which led the restoration of Embassy Court. He was also one of the panellists, presenting the case for Brighton and Hove to build 'up'.

"The city is a vibrant place but it's not a precious place in the same way that Bath is a precious place. It can take tall buildings as long as they are in the right place and as long as they are well designed. If they're with the right clusters of buildings – say, all the way alongside Preston Park, where you get all those ropey office buildings - imagine if there were a series of lovely, elegant towers as you come into

Brighton. They could be an advert for the city."

So those are the ingredients of Construction Voice: relevant and pressing issues, a panel of speakers who know their subject inside out and an audience who also know their stuff because it works in the sector.

Sean Clemons, Partner at Robinson Low Francis (RLF), is a founder member of Construction Voice: "People come with a view that you're going to have an adult conversation about some of the challenges facing the city and the region and about how we can try as an industry to overcome them."

Having an adult conversation means that views will differ. That's all to the good. Just pity the poor person who is juggling the audience's questions, the panellists' answers and the ticking clock. Oh, that's me. The Chair.

Of course, if time runs out you can carry on the discussion over a glass of something restorative. Using your Construction Voice is a rewarding business but it can make you a bit parched.

The next Construction Voice event on Wednesday 15th April is Pre-Election Question Time. It's a chance to explore key development issues - housing, employment space, retail and tourism – with local politicians.

If your business is involved in construction, property or development and you'd like to book a place, please contact the Chamber on 01273 719 097 or book online at www.businessinbrighton.org.uk



Photos: Simon Callaghan Photography