

CANVAS

SOCIAL HOUSING & THE BUILT
ENVIRONMENT EDITION 2023

BY *Saxton Bampfylde*

BRINGING PURPOSE TO PLACE

BUILDING SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENTS
FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW





CANVAS

SOCIAL HOUSING & THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT EDITION 2023
BY SAXTON BAMPFYLDE

Welcome to our latest edition of CANVAS, the insights update from Saxton Bampfylde and its global partners.

Through CANVAS we share the thoughts and perspectives from senior leaders on topics and issues that are relevant and current in organisations that are committed to making where we live, work and play sustainable and thriving communities. We have also shared our own insights and experience of leadership thinking and executive search in this space.

We want to hear from the sector, and we want our approach to be relevant and helpful to you so we welcome thoughts, comments, or inputs you would like to share.



EDITION OVERVIEW

Vidhu Sood-Nicholls
Partner, Head of Social Housing
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Having taken a collective sigh of relief in early 2022, those leading organisations in 2023 continue to find themselves being challenged by factors beyond their control. Double digit inflation; political instability; restricted liquidity; pressure on supply chains and a continued focus on sustainability; delivery of high quality services with customers and users at the heart of them - the priorities are numerous. Despite these challenges, leaders across our sector have shown us time and again the opportunity to build on the positive connections and the focus on our local environments that were developed during the pandemic.

Our Social Housing and Built Environment practice group is committed to finding and supporting excellent and authentic leaders across infrastructure, local and regional development, housing and transport to deliver tangibly positive benefits for existing, emerging and new communities across the UK.

If the recent months have taught us anything it is that as leaders our capacity for resilience needs to be boundless, our ability to solve problems ongoing, our optimism about the future never ending, and through all of this our recognition of self-care high. We must learn lessons, but we must also embrace change and the ability to evolve, especially where it can bring positive outcomes in society at local and national level. We are delighted to be able to demonstrate this with two very capable and compassionate leaders operating in very different organisations. Both these individuals are great examples of leaders who have led in multiple sectors and they show the value of taking experience from one sector and using it sensitively to solve problems in another.


We were privileged to speak to **Anna Swaithes**, in a newly created role as Head of Sustainability for the Crown Estates. Anna shares how she is embedding an organisational wide approach to sustainability, to bring impact across all its assets over the

longer term and support how it engages with communities around the United Kingdom. As custodians of the long-term prosperity of the nation, The Crown Estate is a unique organisation in this country. Anna's new role highlights the importance of sustaining the environment, communities and individuals, whilst balancing it with everyday priorities such as feeding and fuelling our daily lives.

We are also delighted to chat to **Neil Sachdev** MBE, sharing his wide-ranging experience and particularly in his current non-executive roles at the Houses of Parliament, East West Railway Company, Energy Savings Trust and LCR Property. Neil's pedigree of property and infrastructure experience is augmented by his long executive career across the retail sector. Neil's belief in a positive change delivered through partnership working is evident, and balanced with a need for looking beyond our island to look and learn from others to help sustain our future community-development and placemaking potential.

Saxton Bampfylde's Leadership Services team works as an extension of organisations across the UK to help them recruit and develop the very best leadership. We are therefore delighted to include insights from Business Psychologist and Partner, **Cassandra Woolgar** as she considers the power of cross sector leaders grounded in values, respect and approach for executive and non-executive leaders in today's society.

Our own Partner community is what makes us different in the marketplace and in each edition of CANVAS we like to share some further personal and professional insights, so I stepped up to the podium or riverside here (it is called View from the River) to talk about more about why leading the Social Housing and Built Environment practice is important to me and the sorts of leaders the industry is looking for as we move ahead.

We do hope you enjoy this edition and welcome any feedback you may have 

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Our future in our hands

Creating lasting and shared prosperity for the nation



Interview with **Anna Swaites**,
Head of Sustainability at
The Crown Estate



In a newly created role for the Crown Estate, Saxton Bampfylde was delighted to have been involved in Anna's appointment. We were really pleased to have the chance to interview Anna as she works through her first year as Head of Sustainability. Her background includes a strong mix of public and private sector senior experience focused on sustainability and social value which combines to offer a whole organisational approach for the Crown Estate as it moves forward. Anna's experience and commitment to partnership working to build, support and enhance communities is very clear and promises to bring new perspectives at Group and wider organisational level.

As the world focuses, rightly on the climate and sustainability, there are wider economic and political pressures at play, and we welcome Anna's insight; sustainability must be embraced and progressed: it is not an option.

Can you tell us about your role within The Crown Estate?

I am Head of Sustainability, which is a role created last year to help establish The Crown Estate as a leader on sustainability, from an environmental, social and ethical perspective. Of course, sustainability isn't new, but the impetus for creating this role now is that The Crown Estate is seeking to join up different parts of the portfolio in a more integrated way. Our new strategy – launched in 2021 – has three objectives: anchored in our contribution to the UK's net zero goal; our contribution to thriving communities, urban renewal; and our role in tackling biodiversity loss as stewards of the natural environment.

My job is to 'bring the outside in', challenge the level of ambition, and transform how the business approaches sustainability – so that we live up to our purpose of creating lasting and shared prosperity for the nation. To me a sustainability team has to be the focal point for building wider capability and commitment, so I am keen to create a sustainability community, as well as a team.

In my view sustainability has several horizons from near-term action to very long-term considerations, and it needs to be embedded across so many people's roles. These horizons are cyclical and sustainability needs to keep evolving as a response to what is happening externally, as well as internally, and what the organisational or business needs are.

How do you identify good sustainability talent?

The Crown Estate's purpose is to deliver benefit to the nation, and I already see how this is a major factor in attracting good people. The market for good

“Our ultimate stakeholder is the nation, which is a very different starting point from a public or privately owned company.”

people with sustainability experience is extremely constrained, but we are better placed than many, and I am a big fan of thinking laterally when building a team.

Finding people who are passionate about what we are trying to achieve is not hard. We may need to build up the sustainability knowledge as part of the skill set, rather than taking a binary approach where we must find people who have only worked in sustainability. In the past I have worked with many brilliant people who have developed sustainability knowledge and skill sets having come from a completely different background.

This is being demonstrated currently as we work to address our net zero goal, which was set at the end of 2020. A lot of work has been undertaken internally to set the trajectory and targets required, as well as identify key enabling roles. We need to build the right capabilities and responsibilities into a range of job roles, and that is less about my team doing things themselves and

“I think it is really, really important that we don’t get into a sustainability versus security debate, whether it is energy, food or income security.”



more about them supporting and skilling up other people appropriately. We play a very strong coaching and challenging role across the organisation to achieve the scale of change needed to achieve this goal.

How does The Crown Estate consider social, environmental and financial value?

The Crown Estate exists to create lasting and shared prosperity for the nation and our role as custodians is to take a broad view of how that value is defined. When we think about social, environmental and financial value, it is through that lens of ‘lasting and shared prosperity’. Our ultimate stakeholder is the nation, which is a very different starting point from a public or privately owned company.

We have to be financially sustainable and successful to function and we need to generate returns to the public purse and to reinvest, both in the long-term value of our assets and to keep them healthy in the shorter term. It is an interesting model undertaking many of the same activities as private sector companies, but with genuine purpose of public value. We have the ability to take a longer-term, more patient view and therefore be able to contribute to the kind of transitions that need to happen in markets to make them fit for the future.

With a vast portfolio of assets around the UK, how important is partnership working?

Partnership is absolutely key and will only become more so. For example, if you consider the marine space we are the manager of the seabed and much

of the foreshore around England, Wales and Northern Ireland. However, we are far from the only decision makers on the marine environment, so need to work closely with commercial and regulatory bodies. Much of what happens is influenced by the organisations that we award rights and leases to - for renewables and habitat creation, but also for things like aggregates and cables. How we work with them through commercial relationships, and with communities and stakeholder groups who have a perspective or local interest is essential.

How do you work to balance partnership needs?

When you think about land and sea there are an enormous number of competing demands for that space to meet many human needs - food, energy, wellbeing, environmental services, public access - and also the needs of nature and planet like sequestering carbon. When it comes to balancing competing demands - for example sequestering carbon versus producing food versus protecting nature - there are big questions. We have the responsibility of carving a path which meets each of these needs and most importantly protects the natural environment for future generations.

To find this balance we need to engage with a diverse group of interests. There can be a complex mix of different stakeholders, but successful engagement is ultimately about relationships and about transparency

- creating the space for competing and sometimes complementary points of view to be aired in order to arrive at an approach that different interest groups can support. We do often think about partnerships between organisations, but of course trust happens between individuals - so I find this whole dynamic quite fascinating - individuals nested in organisations, which in turn are nested in systems, all aligning to effect change. It sounds complex and slow, and it can be, but when the alignment happens, real change is unleashed.

The issue of ‘greenwashing’ is being reportedly increasingly. What impact does this have on the sustainability agenda?

It creates a credibility issue and without effective mechanisms for the public to distinguish between what is and what isn’t greenwash it makes it even harder. It can be very difficult even for someone who has worked in sustainability for a long time to make a call on whether something is genuine or not. It would be great if we could presume positive intent from all and that action always followed public commitment, but that just isn’t the case.

The more we have accountability mechanisms the better able we will be to call out greenwashing but also, very importantly, highlight good practice. There are mechanisms such as the World Benchmarking Alliance, as well as other benchmarking approaches, but they are often issue-specific.

“Sustainability needs to keep evolving as a response to what is happening externally, as well as internally.”



There are also a number of media outlets trying to provide an evidence-based view, such as Tortoise media, and that is really needed. Negative headlines provide a skewed view which is not always helpful, as the greenwashing stories tend to be better news hooks than the stories of genuine progress.

As the economy faces increasing pressure can we retain a focus on sustainability or does this risk slipping down the agenda?

There is a risk, but I think it is really, really important that we don't get into a sustainability versus security debate, whether it is energy, food or income security. Ultimately many of the root causes of sustainability and security issues are the same, and of course the climate crisis and biodiversity crisis are no longer future problems. They are playing out now alongside other pressures are, so

we need to look for pathways that tackle multiple challenges. This will mean having the courage to make some big changes to how societies and economies work.

How does your previous experience with large FMCG businesses feed into your Crown Estate role?

Fundamentally all organisations are agents in bigger systems, so the questions I am asking are the same: 'What are those systems that we operate within? Which levers can we pull to transition ourselves and support wider change? Who do we have to work with?'

Much of the context I am thinking about is the same - but the levers I am thinking about now are very different ones because of the sector as well as the governance and ownership **6**

“When the alignment happens, real change is unleashed.”

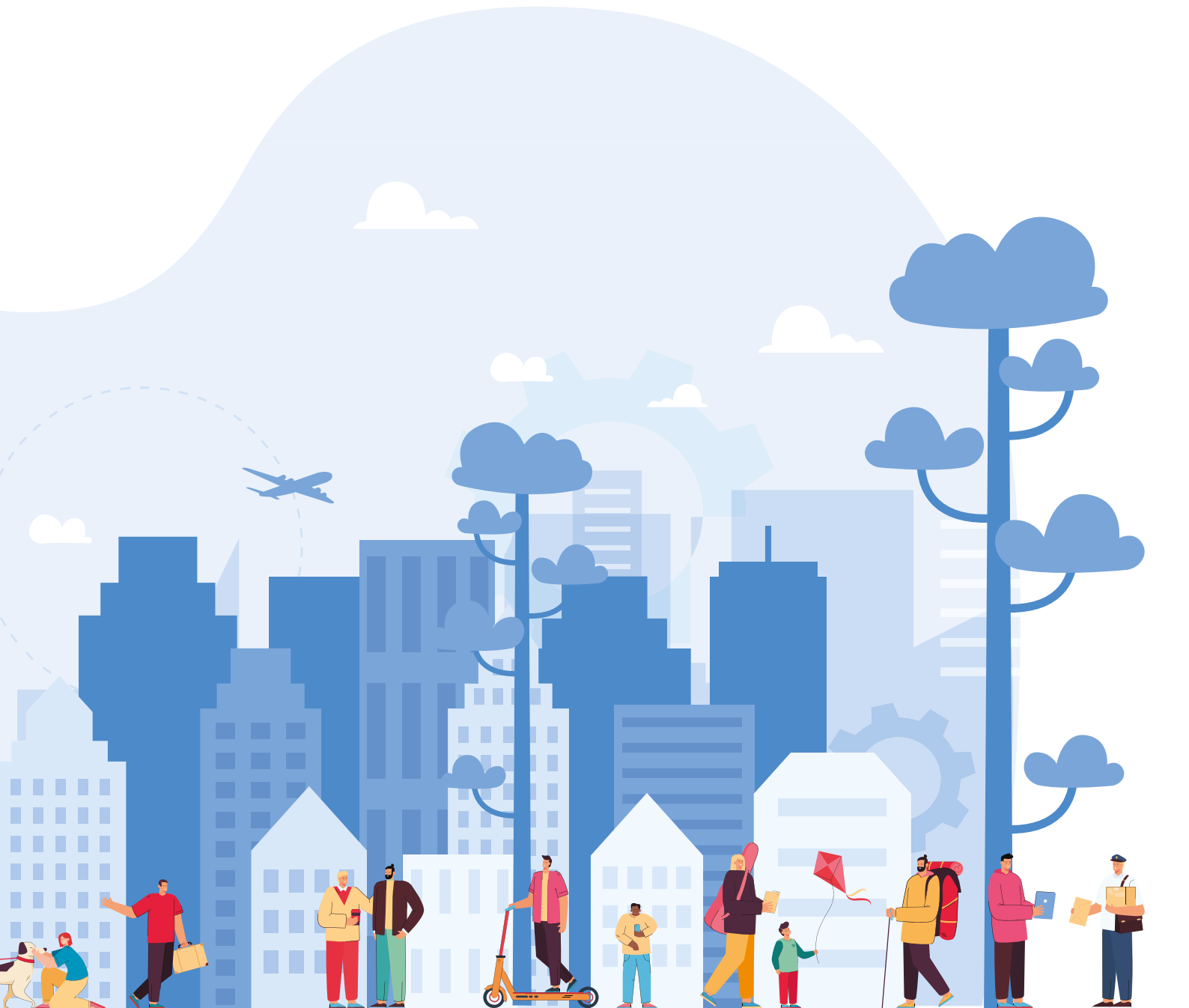
**Anna Swaites
Biography**

Anna joined The Crown Estate as Head of Sustainability in February 2022. In this role she was selected to develop and drive an ambitious sustainability agenda and position the Crown Estate. Her goal is to help establish The Crown Estate as a leader on sustainability, from an environmental, social and ethical perspective and to share in the vision to create lasting and shared prosperity for the nation.

Most recently Anna worked for the UK government leading the Inclusive Economy Unit, which pioneered new ways for government to work with the private sector to deliver social value.

Anna's broader background spans sustainability, strategy and partnership building. She was Sustainable Development Director for SABMiller, the global brewer, with a focus on integrating sustainable development into core business and aligning their approach with the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris climate agreement.

Build better places with people at the core





Interview with **Neil Sachdev**, Permanent Chair of East West Railway Company; Chair of Energy Savings Trust

Neil Sachdev's roles have traversed the public and private sectors throughout his executive and non-executive career. At the heart of his work have been major property, transport and infrastructure developments – which makes him significantly well placed to talk about the importance of place and how to build communities.

At Saxton Bampfylde we worked with Neil in his appointment as a Non-Executive Director, Delivery Authority for the Houses of Parliament Renewal and Restoration Programme. He acknowledges the importance of working collaboratively to create places and communities and the strengths and benefits which can be brought to bear by both public and private sector partnerships to transform the built environment where people can live and thrive. However, what we must also consider, he says, is that we need to be continuously asking how we can do things better and look to other regions and countries to learn and improve.

We are delighted that Neil took the time to talk to us and share his views and experiences with such candour and clarity.

Can you share your view of what placemaking is and why it is important?

Placemaking in my view is the reality of a place where people work, live and play. It is also now a place of wellbeing for people. It is about creating a sustainable area where communities thrive. I don't think there is an art or science in this – it is more about a philosophy of what we mean when we bring a community together, what do we need them to have to be able to thrive and prosper both in terms of wellbeing, environmentally and financially.

Good placemaking requires partnership and the coming together of public and private sector to enable this. There is more and more of that happening, but I believe we need to look more closely at the results it is delivering and how we determine success.

Has placemaking become more or less relevant in the past 10-15 years and why?

In recent years there has been more focus on the term placemaking but really people have been 'placemaking' forever. There is a greater understanding of what it means and can bring as well as a recognition of the philosophy of what we are trying to create in places. I still think that 'placemaking' might be the wrong term. We have to think in the longer term and I would suggest that 'sustainability' has a stronger connotation of longevity with communities than placemaking does.

What are the dominant drivers and requirements to ensure placemaking, through development and infrastructure is done properly?

When we talk about dominant drivers we need to start with Maslow's theory of

“It doesn't need to be about reinventing the wheel, but it can be about improving it. We need to be open about it and stop being so risk averse.”

needs: what do people need to be happy and have a fulfilled life? It is not just about a good quality house; it is about how they live their lives completely. We need to think about places where people can stay and don't feel they need to leave it to enjoy life, work, study and be with family and friends.

It is about access and openness and making sure that that is available to all sectors of our community so we don't create communes of one demographic. The most effective placemaking and sustainable communities come about when we bring all parts of community together so they can afford to live together and meet their individual needs. These places must have the right infrastructure, from having decent broadband to quality hospitals and transport links to education.

There have been great examples over the years – one such one is Milton Keynes.



“It is about access and openness and making sure that that is available to all sectors of our community so we don’t create communes of one demographic.”

Whether you love or loathe it, it was beautifully thought through as people can walk everywhere with reasonably good access to public transport. It was designed to have trams – it is an American grid system – and the roads are all straight and wide, but they ran out of money. It has a large road network too but as we look beyond cars, it shows the placemaking has not been sustainable in the longer term as the final investment wasn’t there.

Are we truly taking a sustainable enough approach to development and infrastructure?

No, we are not. There is still too much emphasis on the speed of getting something up, rather than thinking about the impact that will have and the whole lifecycle of a development. I don’t think there is a measure for that lifecycle and we need to do more research into this.

Sustainability isn’t simply about using less carbon or less water in development, it has also got to be something that is easy to maintain. Most buildings and infrastructure degrade from the day they are built so we need to think about what good maintenance looks like. There are modern methods of construction that would enable us to create more lasting properties as we go that are easier to improve and not degrade as time passes and we need to consider this much more carefully.

Massive infrastructure projects like East West Rail – what benefits does this bring to the economy, the environment and the community?

The rail connectivity across England is an issue – we don’t currently connect East to West properly at the moment. There are pockets of good connectivity, but it is not comprehensive enough. The East West line is sometimes referred to as the Oxford to Cambridge line but that doesn’t highlight the much wider connections that come from it. Across that corridor are the two bastions of the best academic institutions in the world, producing large numbers of expanding SMEs and lots of life science research and development. We have the potential to create the next Silicon Valley in this region, which means high net worth jobs for many people, spilling much wider benefits into the immediate area.

Modelling shows that connecting Bedford to Cambridge will create 80,000 good, well paid jobs. Cambridge doesn’t have room for more housing, but it does need ways to bring in more employees. The risk of us not putting money into infrastructure is that business will go elsewhere. We are already facing a significant ‘brain drain’ in that region and we need to find a way to stem this. People need to find it easier to

get to Cambridge. Rail does allow people to move around, plan lives and travel when they want to. It enables mass transit on a very low carbon option with a greater potential for productivity versus car travel.

We need to always think with the customer in mind and that is how we need to move forward and think about what the customer needs from the infrastructure and design it from there. I have been with the East West Rail project for 12 months now and am excited to see it develop as we move forward.

Are large infrastructure projects too focused in metropolitan areas – should more be done to enhance connectivity in a wider geography?

There is much PR with strong visuals on certain lines, such as Crossrail, but to be honest I think there is a lot happening cross-country. We have the Cross Pennine and East West Rail projects happening, for example, and a lot was done on electrifying the Great Western Line. We don’t get enough profile for some of these projects but there is a lot of money going into other areas, not just in the metropolitan regions; we just need to speed it up.

How can success be achieved through public and private partnership in development and infrastructure works? Can you please share examples?

We need to consider how we play to each other’s strengths. Public sector organisations on the whole don’t do big developments but the private sector does. The achievements of development at Kings Cross by LCR or the Stratford post-Olympic redevelopment was all done through public and private partnership.

“We need to always think with the customer in mind and that is how we need to move forward and think about what the customer needs from the infrastructure and design it from there.”

The private sector had the vision to create something and the public sector released the land and granted the permissions to make that development possible. There are many exciting opportunities where similar development is being planned for the future – such as Manchester Mayfield, Leeds and potentially York.

There has to be a clear building of trust between partners, as there is often an expectation that the private sector will take more out of it than the public sector, but it is important that each understands the benefits being brought by both elements.

Can (and do) we learn from other countries in their approach to development and infrastructure?

I believe we must learn more about what is going on in other countries so we can adapt it to our sector. We are generally an insular nation and sometimes take the view that if it is not invented here then it can't be good.


There is a lot of opportunity and a lot of good examples in the UK, but I do struggle to see why we can't fix the housing crisis. The world is addressing these issues and innovations in modular building technologies being used in housing, particularly in the US, are having great success. We need to think about how that can be utilised and improved here. There are those doing it really well in the UK, but change has taken us too long to start making real impacts on areas like housing.

It doesn't need to be about reinventing the wheel, but it can be about improving it. We need to be open about it and stop being so risk averse. We need to look at how others are building and are delivering better and more sustainable results.

Pressures on supply chains, utilities and other resources (including people) – what impact is this having on our approach to purposeful placemaking or sustainable living?

Society and general economic pressures are going to be around for 2-3 years, and a lot of businesses will feel that same pressure during that time. With sustainable placemaking I view it that we are planning for the longer term. Whatever we do today is not going to be delivered for 3-5 years, maybe even longer, and that allows us time to think through how we can do things in a different way, be more productive and address challenges properly.

Everything can't happen today, it will take time, but we do have the desire and skills to innovate and reinvent to find the right solutions. For example, if we did more modular building it would require less resources and less people, and more skilled people who would be paid better.

In the end most of these placemaking projects are not about making money out of the development – it is about the value they create in society and nearby, which will all end up in the taxpayers' coffers eventually 

Neil Sachdev MBE
Biography



Neil is an Independent Chair, Non-Executive Director and FTSE/AIM Director with a wide-ranging portfolio and a strong track record of corporate governance, strategy, change management and climate-change sustainability.

Most recently, Neil was appointed Chair of the East West Rail Co Board and Non-Executive Director for the LCR Property Board. Neil is also a Non-Executive Director, Delivery Authority, Houses of Parliament Renewal and Restoration Programme and Chair of the Defence Infrastructure Organisation Board for the Ministry of Defence.

Neil holds a number of public sector and Chair positions including Chair for Cake Box Holdings plc and Energy Savings Trust. As independent Formal Council member at the University of Warwick, Neil Chairs the Warwick Business School Board and is a Governor of the Board with Nuffield Health.

Previously, Neil was Group Property Director of J Sainsbury and before that served for 28 years with Tesco, where he was Stores Board Director, responsible for property and operations for the UK business.

Neil was awarded an MBE for his work in relation to Energy Efficiency & Sustainability and an MBA from Stirling University which he studied part time whilst starting his career at Tesco.



The true value(s) of a good leader



By **Cassandra Woolgar**,
Business Psychologist and Partner,
Leadership Services Practice

The idea of a single-industry-specific career is very rare in today's society. At executive and especially non-executive level there is much more traversing of sectors than ever before as skills and experience become increasingly interchangeable. In the built environment and housing sectors this is certainly the case, as more diverse perspectives and backgrounds are sought. This provides a real opportunity to bring in a diversity of leadership styles and approaches allowing sectors and organisations to grow and evolve.

However, what is really important in any cross-sector transition is a marriage of organisational values. Regardless of sectoral experience or skill, there must be a connection with the core purpose of the organisation. We work very closely with our clients to ensure this, and our in-house team of business psychologists are expert in supporting this work. We have shared some key areas for consideration below.

Culture is king

Culture, working environment and values are more important than ever in recruitment. It can be the difference between retaining top talent, satisfaction in a role and crucially the culture and tone set by leaders for the rest of the organisation.

What matters to me

When we look for the right candidates we assess personality and key values. This helps us to understand what is important to an individual and the type of leader they will be and therefore the culture they may promote for their people.

When we are coaching individuals and they talk about leaving a role due to it 'not feeling right' we can often trace it back to a mis-match of their own values and the values or culture of the organisation.

In our exploration of values and key drivers of leaders we consider their need for recognition and responsibility, work-life balance and enjoyment of a role, how much they value tradition, how important a sense of security is to them and the commercial aspects of work. This is significant to ensure we align the role, the organisation and the leader to find the right match.

Impact to the organisation

A leader who values people taking on responsibilities, receiving recognition for their work, traditional hierarchies and commercial aspects of work can create a very different working environment for others, compared to a leader who values making a difference to others, helping people feel part of something bigger than themselves and an openness to innovation.

We take account of how much a leader focuses on people, helping others and feeling part of a team, how open they are to innovations, how likely they are to respect other people's judgements and what importance they place on data and evidence or gut instinct in decision making.

“When we are coaching individuals and they talk about leaving a role due to it ‘not feeling right’ we can often trace it back to a mis-match of their own values and the values or culture of the organisation.”

Sector satisfaction is essential

When moving sectors leaders often have transferable practical skills to help the transition, but to make a real success of it we often find that a value alignment with the new sector or organisation is key. It can help an individual to find their feet in the role and to apply those pre-existing skills in the right context for the organisation.

Often people move sectors in order to put their skills to better use in terms of making a difference to others and having a positive impact. We tend to see such leaders with profiles indicating a willingness to take on leadership roles and responsibilities but underpinned by a drive to make a difference rather than a drive for their own status, ego or progression.

Get in touch with Cassandra

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LEADERSHIP APPOINTMENTS

A selection of recent appointments in the Built Environment sector advised by Saxton Bampfylde



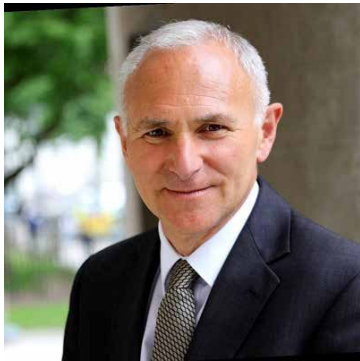
Anna Swaithes
Crown Estate, Head of Sustainability



Bill Eyres
Crown Estate, Environmental Sustainability Director



Carolyn Bisset
MTR Elizabeth Line, Head of L&D



David Goldstone
Houses of Parliament Restoration & Renewal, CEO of the Delivery Authority



David Montague
Heylo, Board Member



David Weaver
Orbit Housing, Chair



Diego Oliva
National Highways, Non-Executive Director



Doris Olulode
Clarion, Group Board Member



Elly Hout
Peabody Executive Director Change, Innovation & Sustainability



Emma Haddad
St Mungo's, CEO



Lord Adonis
Heylo, Board Member



Mark Jaggard
Houses of Parliament Restoration & Renewal, Health, Safety & Wellbeing Director



Mary Thorogood
Crown Estate, External Affairs



Matthew Higham
Costain, Chief Digital Officer



Mike Brown
Houses of Parliament Restoration & Renewal, Chair



Nicholas Holt
RESAM, Director



Philippa Charles
The Barratt Foundation, Trustee



Rachel Fletcher
Clarion, Group Board Member



Rebecca Williams
Crown Estate, External Affairs Director (Wales)



Suki Kalirai
PA Housing, Chair



Ugo Ikokwu
The Barratt Foundation, Trustee



VIEW FROM THE RIVER: TEAM INSIGHT

Vidhu Sood-Nicholls, Head of Social Housing and the Built Environment practice

Vidhu Sood-Nicholls has recently been appointed Head of Social Housing and the Built Environment practice. Her focus is on building on our great work to date in the Social Housing sector and cohering our approach to construction, infrastructure and development so we are better able to serve our clients and ultimately have brilliant communities where all those who live, work and play in them can thrive. We are very proud of our team and enjoy this opportunity to share a closer glimpse into our Partner community at Saxton Bampfylde.

With a broad portfolio of sectors in your career, you are now leading the Social Housing & Built Environment practice. How do you see that working?

My role involves bringing coherence to the existing excellent work that we do with clients across the built environment spectrum which includes social housing, infrastructure, development, and design and engineering excellence. Common amongst these clients is a commitment to purposeful placemaking and the ambition to deliver an excellent living, working and social experience. We want to enhance the opportunity for our clients and our business to bring those ambitions to the fore with the best leadership and people talent now and in the longer term. That plays well to my cross-sector experience and understanding I have built over the years of what exceptional leadership looks like, what makes good teams, how to manage multiple competing priorities and how as a leader you make decisions that are in the best interest of the communities that we are all part of.

Does purpose have a strong enough presence across the leadership talent you meet?

This is something that is hugely important to our clients and resonates very closely with the ethos of Saxton Bampfylde. As a

purpose-led and values-driven organisation which believes in being commercial, we work with similar organisations. Those who also want to be commercial but want to do it in a responsible and meaningful way. Our mission as a firm is that 'we exist to change the world by changing leaders in interesting and important organisations. At the same time we aim to create an environment wherein all members of our community can grow to their fullest extent emotionally, intellectually and spiritually'. That is a mission that my colleagues and I stand behind and is one that our clients buy into.

In the built environment space purpose is at the heart of our work – as Anna and Neil's interview show they and the organisations are motivated by more than financial returns, their work is bigger than money it is about value to society, now and crucially for future generations. That is the sort of leader Saxton Bampfylde works with – those who appreciate that decisions made today can have an impact for generations to come.

Is sustainability experience, ambition or commitment a priority when identifying senior talent in this area?

I don't think you can choose between the three; sustainability is an area of real interest for all clients in all contexts, and particularly in the built environment space. The issues that leaders deal with are very real and often immediate. Ambition is critical because without it leaders in these sectors will reinvent the wheel, and as we grapple with the impact of climate change, growing populations and shrinking resources we know that what we were doing 5, 10, 15 years ago won't work for us 5, 10, 15 years from now so ambition in today's leaders is critical. And without commitment we wouldn't have so many brilliant leaders still here – a global pandemic, a global cost of living crisis and no stability at the very top – if leaders weren't committed, they wouldn't still be here, keeping some of our country's most critical projects going.

Our approach to finding leaders is to listen, listen long and listen hard to the things that clients are saying, and also just as

“Our approach to finding leaders is to listen, listen long and listen hard to the things that clients are saying, and also just as important what they aren't saying.”

important what they aren't saying. Based on what we hear we challenge, and we kick the tyres together, so we are clear what success looks like for the organisations we work with. Yes there are multiple challenges that leaders in Social Housing and the Built Environment are grappling with – but other leaders are facing the same elsewhere. What can we learn from them, how can they contribute to this sector? As someone who has been in industry and had to make tough decisions on what to prioritise, and who has learned from one industry and applied that in others, I am really interested in where and how we find the best people to make decisions about where we live, work and play – these are decisions that impact us all.

Past, Present and Future – can you give us a brief history of you and how you came to be at Saxton Bampfylde?

The reason I joined Saxton Bampfylde is based on a firm belief that all people should be able to lead full and happy lives and a restless curiosity about why this isn't the case. Growing up in Zambia, very early on in my childhood I had this sense that the world wasn't fair. I wanted to understand why and have a distinct memory of



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asking my mother that question when I was about eight or nine and getting an answer that I wasn't entirely satisfied with. She did say that it is within all of us to do something about it, and I think for me that was quite a defining moment.

I have a degree in law, spent time at the UN, taught in an inner-city school, worked in banking and then in a charity including in a senior fundraising role. And, now I am here at Saxton Bampfylde. As my career has progressed, I have become more acutely aware of the impact that the right leaders and leadership can make in an organisation and on the people that organisation seeks to serve. The reason I am here is because I am excited about the prospect of finding people who will accelerate the pace and impact of some of the most significant organisations in society. Since joining Saxton Bampfylde in 2021 I have met with and spoken to some of the best leaders in this country and if I can put them in organisations where their thinking and their actions will have a positive impact on our lives that is pretty exciting.

Your leadership experience is wide-ranging, if not always in Executive search. How does your experience bring a different perspective to candidates and clients?

I wouldn't describe myself as a fundraiser, but I lead a successful fundraising team; I wouldn't call myself a teacher, but I would like to think I changed a few lives along the way; I wouldn't call myself a banker, but I enjoyed working in financial services. I have had all those jobs, thoroughly enjoyed them and learned how to and equally how not to lead along the way. I think that does give me a different view of leadership, finding the things that have emboldened me and the things that have surprised me. I have led sizeable teams, been responsible for securing income, had to make difficult decisions

that impact people – this is all experience that serves me well in my current role. I don't have to imagine what it is like to be a leader juggling multiple priorities, I have been that leader, so when clients ask us to help them find exceptional people I am able to step into their shoes, think about what they need and use my experience to help support them.

I like to think about what I can add. What do I offer that brings a new way of looking at something or someone's experience. I have a natural sense of curiosity, and it is one of things I have thoroughly enjoyed in this job. I have met so many fascinating people. I get to ask them interesting questions about themselves and what makes them tick and I have a say in whether they are right for an organisation at a given point in time. It is a huge privilege. I don't believe in always appointing the obvious candidates. As someone who has successfully navigated multiple sectors I like to think about candidates in a different way, and ask what they can bring to an organisation that isn't obvious. I have been able to challenge my clients thinking this past year. I have enjoyed doing so and look forward to doing this more in the future.

What in your view makes the best leader?

While I know and don't underestimate the importance of technical knowledge and skills, my belief is that these can be deepened and honed in a job. The values, behaviours and characteristics of leaders are much harder to learn. I was once given advice to hire for values and behaviors over technical skills; it is advice that has served me well.

Leadership at its very heart is about people. It is also about progress, and in leadership there is something about collectively lifting the world. That is where the concepts of sustainability, ambition

and commitment come to play. I think it is about people who lead for the world rather than achieving the status of a leader. Fundamentally a good leader will help people thrive. Being kind is such an understated value. Kindness is being able to say well done, and giving feedback when things aren't going right. It is vital that leaders are able to articulate the direction of an organisation and keep people on that path. They also need to be able to be honest when people veer off the path and work to bring them back.

There is certainly an importance of timing and finding the right leader at the right moment in an organisation's lifecycle, which will not always remain constant nor the same person. That is the joy of my work now – working with clients to understand who is right for their organisation at this point in time and then being mildly obsessed with finding the person who is going to accelerate the pace and impact of that organisation.

With the choice – pop on a podcast or bury your nose in a book? And please share any good recommendations...

I love podcasts, and I listen to meditation ones regularly too, but for me it is always going to be a book. I am a fan of a challenging subject matter – my favourites are those that have me in tears until two in the morning!

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Saxton Bampfylde

OUR MISSION STATEMENT

We exist to change the world by changing leaders in interesting and important organisations. At the same time we aim to create an environment wherein all members of our community can grow to their fullest extent emotionally, intellectually and spiritually.

Saxton Bampfylde is an employee-owned business.

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