

NON-VERBATIM MINUTES

DATE: Thursday 24 October

TIME: 16:00 - 17:00

METHOD: Zoom Meeting

CHAIR: Alison Thewliss MP (SNP, Glasgow Central), Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Working at Height

SPEAKERS:

Cllr Fraser Tinsley, Chartered Town Planner & Former Vice-Chair of Planning for Durham County Council

Peter Bennett OBE, PASMA

Jason Carter, PASMA

Gail Hounslea, Ladder Association

Paul Roddis, IPAF

Tony Seddon, FASET and SAEMA

Dennis Braithwaite, NASC

Maarten de Vries, PASMA

MINUTES

The Chair welcomed everyone and began the conversation by noting that falls from height account for the highest number of accidents in the workplace. She stated that technology has supported the lifestyle change that has been brought about since the pandemic and stressed that digital technology could also support the working at height sector.

1. Fraser Tinsley, Chartered Town Planner and former Vice Chair of Planning for Durham County Council

Fraser Tinsley introduced himself, and his role as a County Councillor in Durham and former Vice-Chair of the planning committee, holding the qualification of chartered town planner. Outlining the topics he would cover, he stated that design was at the beginning of the planning process and there was space to include the issues of working at height within the designing stages.

Speaking more widely of the planning sector, Fraser spoke of the Government's plan to deliver a quarter of a million homes and the changes within the retail sector that were leading to many new construction and infrastructure projects. In terms of the planning system, the Government set the agenda through legislation but there is currently a delay to planning reforms. Government currently provides guidance and legislation which would be the groundwork on which local authorities could then act.

Fraser spoke of planning permission and conditions that may be attached to an approved application. There can be conditions on things like permitted working times or hours or noise levels and he suggested the APPG could explore whether safety compliance, or the adoption of the principles of the No Falls Charter, for example, could be added as a condition to applications seeking planning permission.

Fraser spoke of the importance of design and the increased focus on design and beautiful places. He suggested that it was now possible for planners to design out things beyond aesthetics, such

as designing out crime. As this is now an accepted part of planning, Fraser suggested that integrating safety measures, for example with points for scaffolding and ladder access, could also be considered at the design stage.

Finally, turning to digitisation within the planning sector, Fraser said that the public now have more information than ever about what is happening in terms of development and that people are more likely to engage in the planning process. He asked that within the development system, where engagement is enhanced, why could similar technology not be used to help with engagement in the construction sector? This could allow for greater information sharing and input on safety from the wider public. For example, feedback is currently received on planning permission and design but what about safety in construction?

The Chair, Alison Thewliss MP, thanked Fraser for his comments and echoed the point about the practical needs for design being as important as the aesthetic reasons.

2. Access Industry Forum – Led by Peter Bennett OBE

Introducing the Access Industry Forum (AIF), Peter Bennett OBE stressed that working at height was not mainly about the construction industry but that it was about the whole built environment sector. He also mentioned the No Falls Charter which could potentially be adopted to further help with reducing risk for those working at height.

Following, he said that it was recommended that a digital technology strategy should be adopted to help to improve safety measures and that he would discuss what AIF members were already doing to adopt the use of innovative technology in the sector. He said that the AIF provided a platform for everyone to work together to discuss issues around working at height and that most of the group mandate training on safety process, to which e-learning can support learning remotely.

Gail Hounslea, speaking on behalf of the Ladder Association, spoke about their online training courses. She said that because of the pandemic the e-learning scheme had gathered momentum which previously was not the case. The association were able to swap the classroom learning environment for an online course which meant people could go at their own pace, repeat parts of the course they weren't sure of. This results in a more accessible experience for different styles of learning. She said that the practical element was kept for parts of the learning too to ensure safety.

Tony Seddon, speaking on behalf of FASET and SAEMA, said that they had recently developed the SIMA part one software for users of cradles on high buildings. He said that previously, candidates had been sent straight to site to learn but with e-learning they are able to be prepared for safety on site. He also emphasised how this was a more cost-effective method with a lower carbon footprint.

Jason Carlton, speaking on behalf of PASMA, said that they had also achieved a lot with e-learning. He referenced the gamification that PASMA has driven which would be of interest to this session.

Paul Roddis, speaking on behalf of IPAF, spoke of how they had made use of facial recognition software. He said there were concerns around remote learning as people may not be who they say they are which could lead to safety issues down the line. This removes uncertainty over whether the correct person is taking the exam when they've been learning remotely.

Jason then elaborated further on PASMA's Tower Game which is a training game which allows students to assemble and disassemble scaffolding using a computer programme. The programme also offers guided learning which teaches individuals about towers. He said that students were more prepared for practical tasks following the use of the game.

PASMA also has a virtual reality (VR) fault finding tool that allows delegates to experience and evaluate risks without being in a dangerous environment. He said that with every fault that is

identified there is further information provided and any faults that were missed were flagged to the delegate, so that they could learn from their error. He said that in real life it would be impossible to build unsafe towers, whereas using technology it was possible.

Paul went on to speak of IPAF's extended reality strategy which identified that VR simulators could be good for qualified individuals to continue to test their ongoing competency. He said that it took 2-3 years to get the software to the right place to mirror real life experience. As a tool, it was important to separate gamification from these virtual tools as it is intended to mirror reality. He said they have now authorised this technology for those to renew their existing operator license.

Peter then spoke of the development of user-friendly mobile apps to access safety alerts, safety guidance or information with ease on site and with ease.

Paul continued to speak of ePAL which IPAF uses which is a digital card and logbook that allows IPAF to send information directly to users. He said there was the option to report incidents instantly which could immediately feed into safety information.

Adding, Jason said that PASMA had made an app which made it easy to check that towers complied with safety guidance. He said it offered a step-by-step inspection checklist which can also feature photographs. This would give the manager complete visibility of all towers and capture evidence remotely which could be stored in case it was later needed.

Further, Gail said that the Ladder Association put their code of practice online to make it more easily available. Tony spoke of the virtual card system for FASET and SAEMA which also allows safety information to be sent out in real-time if needs be.

Peter spoke of how previously membership cards or competency cards had been physical and spoke of the advantages of digital versions including the environmental benefits.

Tony added that these virtual cards were easy to check on-site and that multiple qualifications can be logged on one card with one expiry date instead of having physical cards that need to be renewed in accordance with qualifications expiry date.

Paul then spoke of IPAF's epal card which also had a built-in logbook to allow people to determine the competencies of an individual.

Peter spoke of the adoption of new technologies helping with safety, both through wearable technology and through technology such as drones. Maarten spoke of regulation from the CAA allowing anyone to legally fly a drone making the technology more available to support those working at height. It is possible to render highly accurate 3D models using the images collected by a drone, and therefore assess risk from a distance. He also spoke of the potential of planning to avoid falls from height using such information.

Following, Peter referenced the TG:20 scaffolding design software that allows compliant standard scaffolding to be designed virtually. Dennis stressed that every scaffolding structure needs to be designed outlining that there were 10,000 scaffolding structures that were being erected every day. This programme allows users to design the vast majority of these structures. The software produces a compliance sheet based on the requirements of the scaffolding, the location and the wind loading. This sheet contains all the information required to build the structure, including a rough design of how the structure will look. This software can be accessed by most devices including tablets and mobile phones and is extremely easy to use.

Peter said he hoped that the examples discussed in the meeting would demonstrate how the sector is trying to innovate to prevent falls from height.

3. Question and Answer Session

The Chair, Alison Thewliss MP, opened the floor to questions from attendees..

John McDonnell MP asked about accessibility to these technologies and methodologies. He asked how we could improve the access as his concern was small firms may be unable to keep up with this best practice.

Tony Seddon responded saying that the trade associations were already picking up on this activity and were taking the lead on spreading the awareness of this technology. He said that this way smaller organisations would have access to the technology when they may not be able to generate this technology alone.

Following, John McDonnell MP asked how comprehensive the coverage of trade associations was in this sector.

Tony said that trade associations cover all the areas of working at height including varying sizes of organisations.

Peter Bennett OBE said that this technology was transformative in that it could communicate directly with those working on the ground without people needing to attend seminars or actively trying to engage with safety measures.

Following, Peter discussed drones and said that some were concerned that it could take business from those that work at height. He said that drones could remove risks that an individual may face from working at height.

Robert Candy referenced that sometimes there were examples where planning permission is dependent on a feature which may be a risk in the future for maintenance. Fraser Tinsley responded saying that aesthetic was what was driving the design but that from the operational stage forwards there was no consideration of the safety measures or the need to work at height and therefore that could be considered too.

Edwin Thomas spoke of high-rise buildings and renovations in cities such as London and asked whether tethered tools should be considered by councils outside of the capital.

Fraser said that planning applications consider issues outside of the development but there was no reason why safety of those within the development in the construction phase could not be considered too in the planning application.

Peter stressed that they hoped that the No Falls Charter be taken as a minimum standard going forwards which would account for this issue.

David Thomas spoke of the Government's digital strategy and said that every structure will be built electronically before construction can begin. He suggested that this building information modelling could be shared or used to further improve safety in other schemes.

Fraser said that it was worth considering if there was anything in the planning phase that could be fed back from the construction phase in terms of safety.

Noting the context of planning discussion was based on the construction process, Peter stressed that it is important to remember working at height covers all aspects of work where workers operate at height.

4. Closing Remarks

Alison thanked everyone for their attendance and said that the level at which organisations were working and the technologies that were being developed were very interesting.

Fraser closed by saying there was no reason why legislation could not force safety measures to be considered within the planning and design stage. He raised concerns over the resources for local authorities to do this in practise.

Peter said that risks of working at height came from design and conversations that had been had with architects on this issue. He said that the sector is aware of the solutions that digital technologies present. He called for organisations not switched on to the issue to become aware of the problem and consider digital solutions as a way of making progress.