

## The Accessible Retail Conference – 10 October 2019



### **Sustainable Partnerships**

There was a feeling in the Royal Institution of Great Britain Lecture Hall that the AR membership might not learn much from a conference with Sustainable Partnerships as its title, but the range of subjects and reference to real examples kept the audience involved throughout. It also led to some lively discussions during the lunch afterwards, and before there was a chance to meet the retailers.

The new AR Chair, Ben Whittle, and CEO, Will McKee, gave an update on AR before introducing the speakers.

Jonathan Hirst, the Chief Operating Officer of Dreams, gave an update on the company's fortunes following the administration in 2013. The business is now in robust health and they believe that their business model is sustainable. Dave Frost, from architects Urban Edge, outlined the instruction he was given by Nando's in Cambridge to build them a sustainable restaurant. He outlined the energy required to build a standard restaurant, (or any commercial and residential building), and to design and specify a carbon neutral building is difficult. Under questioning later he confirmed that it was also expensive (double standard costs) but that unit cost might reduce if more were built in a similar way.

Ian Johnson of Engenie made a compelling case for the fact that electric cars will be the norm in the future, but that over the next few years there will be a land grab by companies providing space for cars to be charged. They are targeting commercial sites, and out of town would be a convenient and sustainable location. Daniel French of legal firm Gateley questioned in the title of his talk whether "CVAs - here to stay?" before giving compelling reasons why they have been carried out. He appreciated that the mood of the lecture theatre was that "Landlord's CVAs" need to "fair". The courts had

recently considered such matters in the challenge against the Debenhams CVA and while the only one of the landlord's arguments was upheld, he underlined my thoughts that the most recent process and outcome of the most CVAs are suggesting that they have run out of steam.

Richard Walker of Iceland had the most sustainable credentials of all the speakers, having removed palm oil from any of the Iceland products. He gave some of the history of the company's (founded by his father) involvement with Greenpeace many years ago, and to producing a 2018 Christmas advert that was "watched" by many millions of people without it ever being shown on television because its message was banned.

Rob Arthur is a consultant on cinema development and via his company The Big Picture showed examples of where he has been advising throughout the world. Cinema takings are still going up, and there was more flexibility now in which buildings could contain a digital cinema. It was the reuse of buildings that got members' attention in a sustainable way.

One or two of us were interviewed afterwards for a scrolling video for the AR lunch, but whether my comments will be used remains to be seen.

