

Here's to the next 150 years

IT'S THE Chamber's 150th anniversary year in a few months time and we will be honouring it in many different ways.

But it won't be a celebration of our past, illustrious thought it might be. It will be more a celebration of what Sheffield has become and what we hope it will be in the future.

It is important that we look ahead, rather than back, because the next few years hold an abundance of hope and opportunity for our city region.

Indeed, it is enticing to wonder where we will be in, say, 15 years' time when all the energy, expertise and enterprise being poured into its transformation by organisations such as Creative Sheffield have taken effect.

I think that many of us – and that includes the Chamber – involved in the hard-working partnerships steering the city towards a new vision share the expectation that, by then, we will be strongly challenging “creative producer” European cities such as Turin and Toulouse.

Pie in the sky? I don't think so. We are



By NIGEL TOMLINSON
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well on course towards achieving some of our objectives which will make that possible, such as a skilled workforce, economic diversity and innovation in our businesses.

I am sure we all realise, though, that so far we have only made a recovery and not achieved a transformation. We've

had a revival in our economic competitiveness and now we need a transformation to become a high performing player.

I believe that economic diversity is one of the key elements which will drive that transformation forward and Sheffield's richness in this respect is reflected in the wide range of the Chamber's almost 2,000 member businesses and the many sectors they represent, including IT, digital, retail, financial services, construction, utilities, consultancy, transport and tourism.

None of us, I am sure, would want to return to the old days when all our eggs were in two baskets – coal and steel. The lack of diversity cost us dearly but we were not alone in that because many of the UK's cities had become dependent on just one or two main industries.

I said earlier that our celebrations were more about looking forward than back but that doesn't mean the last 150 years haven't been significant. We should always be mindful of our past and the role we have played in the development of Sheffield business.

Another important aspect of our area's transformation is neighbourhood renewal and, as an integral part of the community, the Chamber is playing its full part in supporting the Government's Local Enterprise Growth Initiative bid.

It is vital that the more deprived areas of the city should come alive, with suitable housing needs being met and new businesses bringing much needed vigour and confidence.

In this respect, the Chamber is ideally equipped, through its Sheffield Enterprise Agency (SENTA) to stimulate business growth where it is needed most.

SENTA's philosophy is that new businesses enliven and regenerate cities and help to maintain a healthy, functioning economy and all of its initiatives are geared towards that.

In the same way that Sheffield's economy is, happily, becoming more diverse, it is also becoming more global. Gone are the days when we can live off each other in a local village economy – internationalisation is now the way to busi-

ness success with local companies striking out to place their products in world markets.

I am pleased to say that many of them are succeeding in developing overseas trade and strengthening international trade links, thanks mainly to the South Yorkshire International Trade Centre (SYITC), of which the Chamber has been the lead partner for six years.

During the next few months, the Chamber will be driving forward its own overseas contracts and assembling portfolios of not just what the Chamber can bring to these contracts but what Sheffield can bring, such as legal and professional services and recruitment advice.

Nearer home, the emphasis will be on developing and launching an enhanced package to give added value to our membership.

And I am proud to say that, in our 150-year history, we have never wavered from our original mission – to maximise the business success and prosperity of our members.



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