

Building a diverse workforce

WHILE Black, Minority, Ethnic (BME) people make up almost 8% of the UK population, the construction industry appears to remain overwhelmingly white and male.

Nationally, according to the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment, only 3% of employees in construction-related professions are drawn from the BME community and outside London even fewer construction sector workers have an ethnic background.

So why is the construction industry failing to attract employees from the BME community?

At its root, the problem is one of image. Because the construction industry is seen as the preserve of white men, this demographic is proving hard to displace. Understandably there is a reluctance from individuals from within the BME community to accept a role in an environment where all their colleagues will be white, so breaking the chicken and egg cycle of creating a diverse workforce is extremely challenging.

Traditionally the construction industry also suffers from perceptions of being low status and poorly paid and these are misconceptions that we need to tackle head on if we

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want to achieve a greater diversity in the workforce.

In fact, construction-related sectors offer both competitive salaries and excellent prospects for career development, with a significant commitment to training from both private and public sectors.

Against the backdrop of this urgent need for an image makeover, the construction industry also needs to find ways of embracing the cultural differences between its own structure and the career aspirations of BME groups.

Often the skills needed are available from the BME community but those skilled workers would prefer to remain self-employed and build their own businesses than to work for a main contractor, so construction-related sectors need to work harder to incorporate small-scale subcontractors into their workforce.

Given the challenges of creating a more diverse workforce, why is it so important

that we persevere with recruiting more BME personnel? The simple answer is that we can gain both economically and culturally from doing so.

A survey completed by the Construction Industry Training Board concluded that here in South Yorkshire the construction industry will need to employ at least twice as many people as are currently employed in the sector to complete all the work required in the region over the next few years.

In the Social Housing and Refurbishment Maintenance sector alone, we have a shortfall of around 400 plumbers in the Yorkshire area.

At Gleeson AssetCare we have first hand experience of how companies can benefit from actively seeking employees from a BME background.

Not only does our proactive BME recruitment policy enable us to broaden the skills pool from which we recruit, it gives us access to a better understanding of the BME tenants we deal with so that our whole team can respect cultural differences in our day-to-day dealings with customers.

As an industry we are aware that there is

a huge job to be done in achieving our recruitment goals amongst BME communities.

The good news is that the private and public sectors are already working together to address the challenges. Agencies including Sheffield Chamber of Commerce and Business Link are working with forward-looking companies to generate initiatives that will remedy the industry's image problem amongst key groups, generate contact between employers and potential employees and provide training opportunities.

For example, we are currently seeking to recruit from the BME community and, by partnering with agencies such as Sheffield Chamber of Commerce, we are able to hold informal recruitment open days and provide training at our in-house training facility to ensure we deliver on our diversity goals.

It may not alter the statistics overnight, but it is a positive step towards building a workforce that is both representative of the region in which we operate and able to keep pace with demands on the sector.



Steve Mordue

One unit remaining at Drake Business Park

DRAKE Business Park is proving a hit in Sheffield, with just one 5,658 sq ft unit remaining to be let as a whole or in part.

Rebecca Schofield, from the Sheffield office of joint agent Lambert Smith Hampton, said: "This area hasn't always been considered an office location but this development is changing those perceptions."

"The accommodation could suit a number of different occupiers providing modern office space for up to 60 staff."

"There are already some well-known occupiers in the area including Sheafmoor Brokers and Torex

Retail and this is a chance to be a part of a development that promises even bigger and better things."

The recently completed two-storey brick building, close to bus and supertram services, as well as Crystal Peaks shopping centre and Drake Retail Park, has a glazed feature entrance, comfort cooling, suspended ceiling with recessed category two lighting, raised floors and a passenger lift as well as extensive on site car parking.

Lane Walker are joint agents with Lambert Smith Hampton for the unit, which has easy access to the M1 at junction 31.



Rebecca Schofield



The proposed Hillsborough Riverside – 'all 24 apartments have fantastic views of the river'

Developers offered a rare chance by the riverside

RESIDENTIAL developers are being offered a rare opportunity to develop a river frontage site in the centre of Hillsborough.

The scheme has been designed by Sheffield-based Andromeda Architects and the site is being marketed by Gerald Duniec Chartered Surveyors.

Gerald Duniec said: "Hillsborough has seen little in the way of apartment development and we anticipate a substantial amount of interest from developers."

"This is a quality scheme designed by

a local architectural practice who have already been responsible for another very successful residential apartment development in Hillsborough."

There has been public criticism of many residential blocks elsewhere in Sheffield but both the architect and agents are sure the design, praised by both the planning department and board, will be well received.

The development is adjacent to the largest suburban shopping centre in the city and there are excellent bus and tram connections close by.

The development is also close to leisure facilities and the Peak District is only minutes away by car.

Brian Marsh of Andromeda said: "This prominent site demanded a very high quality design and we believe that Hillsborough Riverside will become a landmark very quickly."

"We have taken full advantage of its wonderful location and all of the 24 apartments have fantastic views of the river – every apartment has a balcony and a conservatory overlooking the weir."

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