



Insight on

**Savoy opens after extensive restoration**

**John Coombs shows us around**

# INSIGHT 1

The John Rowan & Partners magazine

Spring edition 2011



**John Rowan & Partners**  
Construction Consultants  
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QUOTE  
OF THE  
MONTH

“Anything that frees up resources to build up affordable housing has got to be welcomed in the light that supply is going to be so constrained because of public expenditure cuts.”  
Brendan Nevin,  
Housing Professor  
and Regeneration  
Expert

Send us your views on the 'quote of the month.' Email: [ichisholm@jrp.co.uk](mailto:ichisholm@jrp.co.uk)

STAT OF  
THE MONTH

£80bn capital could be released in equity from appreciation in value of existing housing association and local authority stock. Based on published research



**John Rowan & Partners**  
Construction Consultants

John Rowan & Partners are construction consultants specialising in the delivery of cost management, project management, building surveying, health and safety, planning, sustainability advice, information systems and asset management services to all areas of the construction and property industry.

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# STEPHENGEE ON THE SPOT

INDUSTRY NEWS/  
VIEWS/OPINIONS



7% of graduates  
regret choosing a  
construction-related  
degree. **Make them  
part of a brighter  
future.**



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step in safeguarding  
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2010 was certainly a very interesting year, we had the first coalition Government since the second world war, public sector cut backs on an unprecedented scale and let's not even mention those vuvuzelas!

However throughout these testing times, the construction industry is still building. The Government may be shutting up shop at the moment but there are still projects coming through, even if they are becoming more about efficiency and purpose and less about prestige.

Our work takes us across the full breadth of the industry and part of the reason that we have created this new company magazine is to give our clients and partners an insight into the positivity that we see and experience across the sector.

Projects in the affordable housing market, hotel and commercial sectors have allowed us to continue to grow our family at John Rowan & Partners and the company has expanded by 17% adding 13 new people to the team during the last financial year. For those of you that know us, you will understand when I say that it is testament to the commitment and performance of our staff that has allowed us to not only take on new people but to also increase turnover by 24% and pre tax profits by 10%. This year will be challenging as public sector cuts bite, but I'm sure as an industry we can rise to the challenge.

Many of you following us in the press may have seen that we launched an internship initiative with Building magazine called The Pledge. While the sector may be facing testing times it is clearly evident that we are not doing enough for our graduates, it is clear that employment opportunities are scarce but we still must look to the long term and protect the future talent of our industry by encouraging companies to sign up to take on paid internships. If not, when the sector does recover we will be set to repeat the mistakes of the past and be unable to respond to market demands.

Over the past few months the reaction we have received from the industry has been fantastic, with organisations and companies such as the CIOB, Constructing Excellence, G4C, the Construction Clients Group, Construction Skills, VINCI and MACE all signing up. However with fresh graduates entering the market it's important that we push on and secure as many companies as possible to sign up to The Pledge and show the industry's young professionals just why they chose this sector to work in.

**STEPHENGEE**  
MANAGINGPARTNER

**Duncan is a proven industry professional with a track record of devising, delivering and operating innovative restaurants and catering businesses.** From his early years as an award winning restaurateur in Australia with a portfolio of four restaurants, Duncan has a wealth of experience. He built and developed Tate Catering from a fledgling base into a well respected catering business. It went on to win many awards especially for its innovative approach to wine. Duncan joined the Alternative Hotel Group (AHG) in January 2007, being appointed Food and Beverage Director for DeVere and Village Hotels.



# interview

# INSIGHT TALKS TO DUNCAN ACKERY

Duncan Ackery has been in the restaurant business for many years and certainly knows what works. In September 2007 he took up the role as Chief Executive of Searcys the catering company that operates restaurants in places such as the Gherkin, St Pancras International Station, and Bath's Pump Rooms. With his help Searcys has had great success delivering good food in interesting locations.

Duncan has since left Searcys to follow his own ambitions and now runs Ackery Consulting. Insight met up with Duncan to find out more about what he is doing now and his thoughts on how the market is evolving...

## **Q1: What have you been doing since you left Searcys?**

A mixture of things within the hospitality and retail sectors, pursuing and developing a number of my own business ventures in addition to providing high level support to Corinthia Hotels and V&A Enterprises, the commercial side of the Museum. The project with the V&A, called the Reading Rooms, is an interesting one. Situated in South Kensington it is the combination of a bookshop alongside a wine bar – this is a new concept in the hospitality sector.

## **Q2: What are the unique challenges of running a restaurant, which is an intrinsic part of a building that is a unique destination in its own right?**

I think the challenges are two-fold, take the Westfield Champagne Bar for example where the logistics were incredibly challenging due to the sheer volume of people on this major construction site, all doing different things concurrently through a very tight funnel. Good project management is crucial – the Champagne Bar demonstrated this, where we had just seven weeks to get a high specification, bespoke bar built and operational.

There's also the challenge associated with the wider property strategy in finding a good site and getting a good property for a reasonable rate. Rents can be very high and unless you have extraordinary footfall they can be difficult to maintain. Herein lies the balancing act; it's difficult there's no doubt about it – it's one of the main barriers to entry. It is in this respect that new concepts are so risky because new concepts require a point of difference which often hinges on high quality food. Behind the quality food are more expensive raw materials; thus creating an immediate tension between delivering high food quality and paying the rent. If the financial balance between delivering quality of food and drink is compromised by high rents, and the offer homogenised to meet the financial obligations, the balance tips in the wrong direction and the point of difference is lost.

You might have lots of great ideas but if the rent is high and you can't deliver a product that 'zings' then you're living on borrowed time.

## **Q3: What do you think the future holds for the restaurant market?**

At the top end it's driven by brand enhancement i.e. Ramsay, where it underpins a media career or supporting hotel brands allowing them to drive room rates. But the market is moving towards fast casual dining. There are a number of reasons for this; costs have risen and customers are demanding more value.

Add to this the ascending cost of raw materials, a high rental market and a savvy consumer that is demanding a better service experience. For these reasons making a new concept work in a way that is financially viable and sustainable, isn't always easy.

**Q4: Where is money being invested in the sector – new build or refurbishments?**

Despite the economic climate there's a good level of investment still going on. There's something about the sector that investors quite like; its tangible, you can taste and smell it and there's something exciting about it. There's impatience amongst investors. If a business plan stacks up and is well calculated then there's no trouble making money, but finding property may be tricky. People are looking for sites. The forward looking foresaw what was going to happen in the market and there was a general feel that more businesses would fall by the wayside, increasing the number of properties that could be picked up at good rates. But this hasn't really happened.



**Q5: Do you think the industry has been changed by the recession?**

I've worked in retail and catering for some time since setting up my own restaurant in Sydney when I was just 24. The market has changed a lot. People are very confident now about food; they want something different. As consumers we make much more sophisticated choices today; we have simply become more discerning. Once difficult to find ingredients are now readily available within major supermarkets and people understand how good food can be made within the home. But the hospitality sector is entering a new era now, with a shift towards fast casual dining. I was once involved in staging big events when I founded the business Tate Entertaining. This market literally collapsed as the culture that once supported big budget high profile events disappeared overnight and was replaced with this age of austerity.

**Q6: What advice would you give to companies looking to differentiate themselves in the current economic climate?**

It's all about the product. There's often an over reliance on design and this spells trouble. With a good brief you can find a good designer, but you can't outsource the product development. You have to focus hard on this and in understanding what the market wants; finding a way of doing it better than anyone else. Itsu, created by John Metcalfe, is a good example of a good product at a good price. It raised the market standard when it opened the world's first, all original, healthy, fast food shop in Hanover Square.

**Q7: What's your favourite meal?**

I grew up in Sydney and rode the Asian food wave a decade before it came to the UK. I've also spent a lot of time working in Asia and love South East Asian food. I like high end places such as Yauatcha as well as Royal China – where you can share food and it comes quickly.



# REGENERATION FOR GREEN

NEWS

## MAN LANE: UPDATE



Courtesy of Conran & Partners

**Outline planning permission has been granted for a 706-home development in west London. Under the £136 million scheme, a total of 464 homes on the Green Man Lane estate in Ealing will be demolished and replaced by 706 new apartments and houses.**

As employer's agent, party wall surveyors and CDM Coordinator John Rowan & Partners is managing the partnership, which consists of local Registered Provider the A2Dominion Group, regeneration specialists Rydon, and renowned architects Conran & Partners. Working closely with the team John Rowan & Partners will ensure the scheme runs on time, to budget, meeting the necessary needs of the residents as well as achieving high standards in safety and build quality.

Planners gave the estate's regeneration team detailed permission for phase one of the development which will provide 168 homes.

The development will provide homes for social rent, shared ownership and outright sale. It will also include a community cafe, offices, and a children's play area.

Nicholas Yeeles, executive director at the A2Dominion Group, said: 'Our aim is to create a place where people feel proud and safe to be, and we feel confident that the regeneration will achieve this.'

# ASSET OPTIMISATION

**With Decent Homes programmes coming to an end and a well documented cut in public sector spending, ALMOs and Local Authorities are looking at ways to improve efficiencies and source new funding opportunities.**

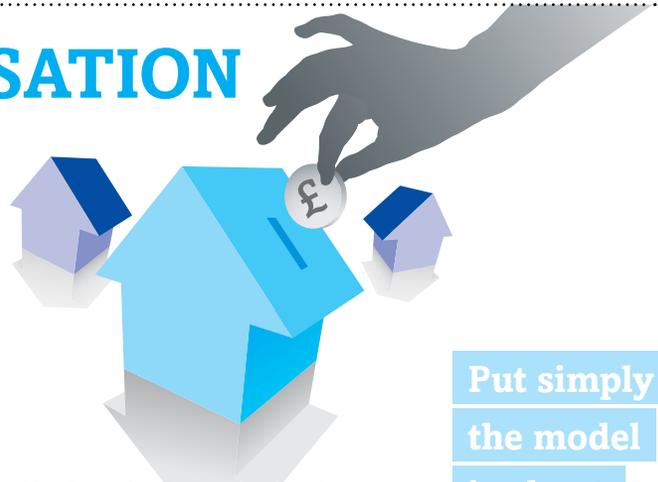
In response to the changing political and economic landscape John Rowan & Partners is using its Asset Optimisation Model to help affordable housing providers free up equity, increase revenue and deliver more value for tenants.

Ken Morgan, head of the Existing Affordable Housing team at John Rowan & Partners, explains how it works: "The effective management of property assets plays a key role in determining the operational performance and profitability of companies that have large portfolios as part of their core business.

Put simply the model is about helping clients with all aspects of retrofit, reactive and planned maintenance, compliance, strategic management and asset utilisation."

He adds: "By undertaking a structured approach to asset management, affordable housing providers are better placed to identify risks, become less reliant on public funding, ensure a sustainable portfolio in the future, and most importantly create a better quality of life for residents."

The Asset Optimisation Model is split into three main areas, which work in a continuous cycle and can be applied at any stage of an assets lifecycle. It is already being used effectively by Circle Anglia to great success.



Put simply  
the model  
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decisions

# INSIGHT TALKS TO JOHN COOMBS, PARTNER AT JOHN ROWAN & PARTNERS, ABOUT HIS EXPERIENCE OF WORKING ON THE RESTORATION OF THE SAVOY HOTEL LONDON.

**Q1: So what have you been up to for the past few years?**

I've been on site at the Savoy since March 2006 where I started as cost manager for a period of six months, I then moved onto project management working primarily on the exterior of the hotel. I've also been involved with the fixtures, fittings and equipment (FF&E) work for all the rooms working closely with the interior designers, which has been a very interesting experience. The hotel opened in early October and there are now 257 rooms completed, we are currently still working on putting the finishing touches to a further 11 rooms.

**Q2: Tell us more about the hotel**

The hotel was built at the turn of the century and is split between a traditional Edwardian style in the south block and an Art Deco style in the north block. The restoration created nine new rooms from the old staff accommodation and offices.



Unlike most modern hotels the Savoy has no two rooms alike, with each room having a different design and feel. An interesting fact about the construction of the hotel was that in order to add bathrooms to the hotel a curtain wall was added in the 19th century to the side of the hotel. Whilst this provided en-suite bathrooms it also meant that to appreciate the river views you would have to take a bath!

In order to rectify this, the whole side of the hotel had to be lifted in order to insert a new steel frame before being lowered again. We also uncovered some previously undiscovered areas including an old archive store which had been bricked up along with a disused well in the basement; this would have been the original source of water for the hotel.

**Q3: What do you think makes the Savoy so special?**

The Savoy definitely has a place in the hearts of many of the local people around here; ex managers and local residents still have an interest in the building and its history. It was used in the 1940's for live broadcasts during the war and is associated with famous names such as Monet, Oscar Wilde, Charlie Chaplin, Marilyn Monroe and Richard Harris to name but a few.

The hotel certainly has a very loyal clientele and in 2007 they held an auction of furniture and fittings from the hotel to reduce the amount that would be needed to be put into storage. It was amazing to see what was bought, I think a lot of people just wanted to feel like they owned a small bit of the history of the hotel.

**Q4: What were your favourite bits of the project?**

While doing the FF&E work I worked with many of the interior designers employed on the project, it was very interesting to walk around the hotel with them while they explained their vision and then watch their final designs come together. I remember wondering about some of their concepts as single pieces were being put in place, but upon completion you can really see how they bring it all together to make some really stunning rooms. The construction and design of the hotel really is amazing and it has been very interesting to understand how the hotel was originally put together and to see the modern methods of construction being applied to the same building over a century later.

**Q5: What challenges have you faced?**

There have been a couple of challenges we've had to tackle. We've found that the old construction methods used in the original build weren't necessarily the best and that some areas of the hotel needed more modern methods of construction to be applied to them. We have also had to install a dome over the south block to let in more light, as it was a very dark area before the restoration.

Overall the biggest challenge was to maintain the level of detail on every aspect of the project, due to the bespoke nature of every area and room. It has been essential to ensure that the interior designers, contractors and architects work very closely together to ensure that no details were missed.



The construction and design of the hotel really is amazing and it has been very interesting to understand how the hotel was originally put together

# FIRE SAFETY



With a number of high profile fires in retail stores and affordable housing tower blocks within the last year, the need for correct fire prevention systems should be at the top of the policy agenda. **Guralp Virdee**, head of the Building Surveying team, talks about the new systems being developed at John Rowan & Partners to ensure clients don't fall foul of fire regulations.

In 2009 alone, businesses and individuals in London were fined a total of £1m for breaching fire safety laws – a record figure for the capital. A number of high profile cases made the headlines, the most prominent involving Shell, fined £300,000, and high street retailer New Look, paying over £500,000 – the largest fine ever imposed following a serious fire at its Oxford Street store in 2007.

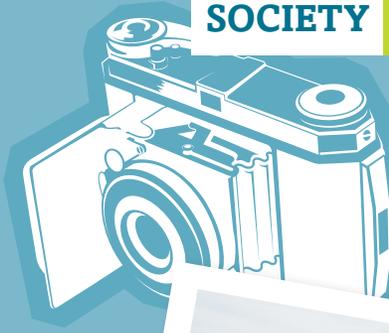
Add to this fines of £119,000 to Tesco and £210,000 to the Co-op and it's easy to see that the courts are taking fire safety very seriously. In the majority of these cases it's found that the affected premises had inadequate fire risk assessments, staff were poorly trained, escape routes blocked and flammable materials stored by fire escapes.

All too often businesses assume they have adequate procedures in place. However, as the fines suggest, many do not. You can be certain the companies fined do not take the health and safety of their staff and customers lightly, but while they may have the policies in place they did not have the systems to ensure they were carried out. This is something we see quite often.

Our Building Surveying team, which specialises in Fire Risk Assessments, has developed an online system to help clients ensure all properties are compliant with fire safety regulations. It facilitates the management process so assessments are undertaken regularly, are made accessible and any risk items addressed and tracked so that properties are safe for occupiers and future inspections passed.

The system helps to extract actionable items into easy to read lists so that completion dates can be assigned and accountable persons identified. Without the proper systems to back up your policies and certifications you could find yourself at risk.

**the courts  
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**JP Morgan Chase**

For the sixth year running we turned out to run the JP Morgan Chase, this year in aid of Radio Lollipop – an international children’s charity whose volunteers provide a care, comfort, play and entertainment service on the wards of children’s hospitals. Rubbing shoulders with over 12,000 people and 300 companies we set off across the start line with great pace albeit five minutes after the starting gun had sounded!

We had a fantastic turn out with over half the firm running and 53 confirmed finishers who raised a total of £3,975 for our chosen charity. Much needed motivation came from Hedley Finn, the founder of Radio Lollipop and some of his volunteers who turned up to cheer us on.



**Dragon Boat Racing**

The Oxford and Cambridge University boat race may have over 150 years of duelling history but it had nothing on the competitiveness that was seen between the two John Rowan & Partners teams entered into this year’s Construction Industry Dragon Boat Challenge.

This was the first year that we have entered this long running industry event which raises money for CRASH the construction industry charity for the homeless. 28 members joined over 40 teams to battle around the 250m course on the West Reservoir in London.

Spurred on by several hundred spectators our teams missed out on a semi final place by 0.7 seconds! While we are still waiting the results of a stewards’ enquiry we were delighted to be involved in the day which raised at least £11,000.



**King Sturge Property Triathlon**

After a summer of boat racing and gruelling runs we thought we would take it easy and combine our experience to enter ourselves into a simple race of swimming, cycling and running! 18 staff entered the triathlon on what turned out to be a very hot and challenging day. While some may have liked to take the opportunity to enjoy the weather, in the usual John Rowan & Partners style, competitive spirit won over and our staff pitted themselves against each other to deliver some fantastic times.



# IANBLACKER THE LAST WORD

INDUSTRY NEWS/  
VIEWS/OPINIONS

**Ian Blacker**, our head of Planning Advisory Services, urges clients to adapt quickly to the Localism Bill, or else fall foul of it.

Whether you believe the Government's changes are a long overdue empowering of local communities or a naïve political experiment, understanding how to respond to the new planning requirements is key.

The Coalition Government has now published the Localism Bill – the most radical planning reforms we've seen in 30 years. The proposals have been widely trailed and the Bill contains few surprises, but even though it will take a year to become law, the impact will have immediate effect. For a development industry still in a delicate state and subjected to continuous planning reform since 2000, adapting to these changes – and fast – is critical.

The key word to pay attention to – and respond to – is “localism”. The concept discards the pretence that consultation on plans and applications is a partnership of equals, and puts responsibility firmly in the hands of local residents.

In this new world the Local Plan will be produced “bottom up”, with residents delivering a shared vision for the form, scale, location and rate of delivery of all types of development. Provided the Plan does not conflict with national planning objectives, its content will be determined solely at local level.

For planning applications, decisions can be based on the views of a “significant majority” of neighbours. All “significant local projects” will have to be designed through a collaborative process that has involved the local neighbourhood.

Developers will no longer be able to rely on local councillors, the Planning Inspectorate or the Secretary of State to approve schemes which do not carry local support to the extent that they currently do. It's no longer about making your scheme “challenge proof” but “majority friendly”. Active engagement of the local community early and consistently is no longer going to be central to a scheme's chance of success, it is going to be everything. The current system has often managed to both stymie development and marginalise local residents, so any move to re-engage people with the future of their community is a positive step. But community engagement is very hard to get right.

Applicants will have to invest significantly more time and money educating communities in the benefits of development and the trade off necessary to bring schemes forward. They will need to be prepared to take on board changes sought by those residents. This all makes the early identification, minimisation and management of risk in the planning process and establishing the correct planning strategy at the outset absolutely critical to the successful delivery of development projects.

Following the renewable energy consultant and the viability expert, the planning consultant is about to become the developer's best friend again.

For further advice on any planning issue contact Ian on 020 8567 6995 or [iblacker@jrp.co.uk](mailto:iblacker@jrp.co.uk)

