



# We must unlock Wales' infrastructure potential

**A**S WE await the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales' (NICW) first annual report, we as a sector have come together to take stock of the current state of Wales' infrastructure sector and what the commission has done for us so far.

NICW is a non-statutory body set up to advise Welsh Government ministers on future infrastructure needs. It was established about a year ago following a lengthy period of consultation and stakeholder lobbying. As the Welsh Infrastructure Alliance (WIA), we supported the proposal, but had hoped that it would have a wider remit and more teeth. Now, a year on, it's apparent that NICW is not doing the job we had hoped for and that it has made little progress. This is hugely frustrating and seen as a missed opportunity. Nevertheless, it's here and we must work with it to shape Wales' future.

To move things on, WIA has developed its own report on the future of Wales' infrastructure. It's a short and simple report and offers some initial thoughts across a range of infrastructure "sub-sectors" such as transport, water, energy, digital connectivity, the circular economy and sustainable communities.

It's designed to stimulate dialogue both within NICW and between the

Director of CECA (Civil Engineering Contractors Association) Wales and member of the Welsh Infrastructure Alliance, Ed Evans, assesses the impact and performance of the National Infrastructure Commission for Wales

commission and infrastructure stakeholders. It also demonstrates the broad range of infrastructure knowledge across alliance partners and our ability to provide expert advice. It sets out, in simple terms, the current environment, some of the challenges faced within each "sub-sector", the opportunities to meet future needs and how they could support future wellbeing and alignment with the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act.

To make the report inclusive, we recently held debates in north and south Wales to get as many views as possible. We were joined by the chair of the commission, John Lloyd Jones, who responded to our report and to the views and observations of both audiences. It's a start, but the message needs to get out far and wide that we need good infrastructure to support our future.

Following NICW's first annual report at the end of November, we need to kick on rapidly in 2020 so that we see real progress. WIA is

pushing the debate, we now need to see the commission step up to the plate.

In an ideal world we would have more clarity and a common understanding of how we could live our lives in future - and the infrastructure we need to fulfil that vision.

In reality, things are not that simple, but Wales needs that visionary thinking from a commission that views the world from the perspective of "the art of the possible".

It's difficult to envisage what the future will look like but by considering potential technological advances in infrastructure, we know our sector has a vital role to play in supporting and enhancing our wellbeing as a nation. We can identify the opportunities to align and link up different forms of infrastructure to maximise value whichever options we go for, whether it's linking up our digital infrastructure with improvements to our energy grid or transport network or joining up farming practices and financial support with improved

water quality. And we know that infrastructure will best support wellbeing and inclusivity when it's aligned with the country's economic, social, environmental and cultural priorities with the Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFG) Act presenting us with a unique opportunity in Wales to shape our future infrastructure needs against the 7 wellbeing goals set out in the Act and the ways of working. Alongside this is the imperative to create a resilient infrastructure; capable of withstanding and responding, shocks and stresses.

For example, climate change and the need to decarbonise our activities, disruptive technology with positive and negative implications, increased automation with implications for current livelihoods, demographic changes with people living longer, pursuing different lifestyles but also, in many cases, struggling with wellbeing issues.

All this requires supportive adaptable infrastructure. And requires a clear vision for the future to deliver it.

There are real opportunities for our communities, our economy and our environment if we unlock the potential of Welsh infrastructure. We need a clear vision for the future and we're ready and willing to support the commission to deliver it.