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MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

The economic climate has proven volatile over the past 12 months, certainly in the UK, which has undoubtedly had some bearing on the demolition profession, believes Richard Vann of RVA Group. But what other factors have influenced demolition in 2018 and where might opportunities have been missed? He offers his thoughts in this exclusive feature for the magazine.

1. Skills stagnation - It would be wrong to claim the industry doesn't care about continued professional development – on the contrary; we see some fantastic examples of learning in practice, via official bodies such as the Institute of Demolition Engineers, National Demolition Training Group and the CITB, as well as via firms' own in-house training programmes. But there appears to be a reluctance to invest in specialist areas such as explosives engineering practitioners. In the UK, there is a definite generational gap, with many talented engineers fast approaching retirement age. The issue of new blood coming into the discipline is something that has been worrying for some time, but I fear 2018 is another year of potential progress lost, in this respect.

2. Heavy industry - There is limited enthusiasm for companies to set up to tackle the 'big target' area of heavy industrial demolition. Admittedly power station demolition is complex, but so too are most other sector opportunities, in the absence of the right skill-set or approach. Does it just come down to mindset? There are enough skilled practitioners in the industry, to form

collaborative, expertise-rich teams that can tackle these types of large, high-hazard jobs safely and effectively. A few contractors are experiencing success by entering this sector but there is still room for more to compete in what promises to be a rich pool of potential, longer-term.

3. EU borders - The EU remains the logical place for forward-looking UK contractors to focus their sights. Whilst home-spun opportunities are still arising, working in Europe should be high on the agenda for those who are forecasting 10+ years ahead, even if considering only factors such as the size of the market and the variety of industry-wide assets reaching their end of life. Naturally there could perhaps be an argument for sitting on the fence until Barnier and May finally reach a Brexit agreement but is this just an excuse? Opportunities in the industrial heartlands of the EU have been open for many years and yet the signs of an influx of interest from UK firms have never been apparent. The work exists and it will need to be done by someone.
4. A resistance to sharing - The exchange of information – whether it be the sharing of best practice or learnings from a non-conforming/failed event – still seems to be a mechanism from which the demolition world shies away. There may be those who don't view this practice as important, and of course there will be scenarios where confidentiality or commercial sensitivity would preclude release of the fine details of an uncontrolled collapse or a loss of containment, for instance. But it is only by exchange of experiences that the industry can learn and improve. Most civil engineering disciplines share both good and bad. Demolition's fear of disclosure needs to be overcome.
5. A reluctance to champion - Ours is an industry that never appears to champion its own, and I don't think this is due to a sense of bashfulness. Rather than applauding peers for their innovative methodology, the completion of a successful contract or even the winning of tender, many are quick to claim that it must have been lucky or unfair; or to declare "they can't make money at that price". Perhaps a more supportive and mature culture could be something to work towards over the next 12 months?