

NASC

# Scaffolding Insider

NEWS | FEATURES | COMMERCIAL | HEALTH & SAFETY

JUNE 2024

## ELECTRIC DREAMS

Is time up for diesel vehicles?



### MARKET MOVEMENT

Where next for system scaffolding?

### X MARKS THE SPOT

Parties chase the business vote

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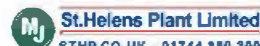


ICC BELFAST

## SCHEDULE:

- ◆ 8:00am – 4:00pm EXPO
- ◆ 9:00am – 4:30pm CONFERENCE
- ◆ 6:30pm – 01:00am BALL & AWARDS

## SPONSORS & EXHIBITORS 2024



## From the Editor

This issue, we take a deep dive into the issue of electric and alternative fuel vehicles – specifically whether it's time to switch to electric vans and trucks. The sustainability issue has been with us for as long as we can remember and we are rushing headlong towards the deadline for ceasing production of internal combustion engines that use fossil fuel – but still, the light commercial and HGV markets are almost entirely diesel.

Just 0.3% of vans in the UK run on electric, compared to 15% of cars. It's hard to see the scaffolding industry leading the charge though, with such heavy materials to carry and the need to often travel some distance to jobs. No-one wants a gang who end up at the side of the road, out of charge, or desperately searching around for a public charger that works and then waiting while it charges their vehicle up.

I spoke to a number of people in the industry to take the temperature of the situation and while there are a range of views, there is also a consistent message that we're not yet close to electric being the answer. Read all about it on pages 7-10.

It was also good to speak to several people in the industry about the system vs tube and fitting debate. The article on pages 13-14 is less about rehearsing all the usual discussions around advantages and disadvantages, but rather is more about exploring why companies might switch to system – or why not, as well as exploring if this is the way the UK scaffolding industry is moving. Have a read of the article and see if you agree. Feel free to get in touch with your views, whether you agree or not, or if you have another angle on it. Contact details are on the right.

I don't know if you've noticed but we seem to have a General Election coming up very soon, so on page 11, we take a whistle-stop tour of some of the policies outlined in the main parties' manifestos, just to help you make your judgement of where to put your X on 4 July. It'll be a fascinating period immediately after the election and I know NASC will be moving quickly to gain the ear of the new government as soon as they're in office, in order to address the issues that matter most to NASC members.

We have our usual news round-up from NASC and the broader industry on page 12 and pages 4-6 respectively. This includes news that actor James Nesbitt will be hosting the Gala Dinner and Awards this year – a name that immediately makes those of a certain vintage think of the ITV series Cold Feet from the 1990s. You'll also see that there's been a bit of a shake-up regarding the Scaffolding Excellence Awards this year – have a look at the categories available to you and enter if you can: you've absolutely nothing to lose and much to gain.

I hope you enjoy the issue.



**Nick Campion**  
Editor

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# BROGAN GROUP ACQUIRES CONSTRUCTION ACCESS SYSTEMS

Access specialist Brogan Group has acquired CAS (Construction Access Systems), purchasing 100% of the shares.

Founded in 2010, CAS has established itself as a leading designer and manufacturer of the Common Tower. The system has been used worldwide on high-rise buildings where several hoists are arranged around a central access tower. The tower and footprint significantly reduces the amount of cladding that has to be left out during construction and provides a central point for all vertical access to the building, including the option of an integrated staircase.

Projects where the Common Tower has been used include



One Park Drive Tower in Canary Wharf, London.

CAS founding director Tony Faulkner will take on a worldwide sales promotional role for Brogan Group, which provides hoisting and other access solutions in the UK and around the world. Brogan Group is actively seeking further acquisitions and international partners in specialist high rise access.

## Two Become One

The National Federation of Builders (NFB) and the Scottish Building Federation (SBF) have announced that they plan to become one organisation.

Following a meeting of delegations from the two organisations' boards in Glasgow on 6 June, NFB and SBF have said that they plan to become a single organisation in the next 18-24 months. The announcement follows over two years of dedicated joint working and the publication of a partnership accord in 2023.

Commenting on the announcement, Chief Executive of NFB Richard Beresford said: "We have long considered SBF to be our sister organisation and have enjoyed many decades of cordial relations, culminating in a significant level of partnership working in recent years. As the construction sector continually adapts and changes, so too must those who represent it. Our two teams have worked hard together to get to this point, so we are delighted to announce that we now intend to become one. Our members will enjoy a greater range of services, a louder share of voice and a bigger network of like-minded colleagues."

Paul Mitchell, Operations Director at the Scottish Building Federation, added: "Through our ongoing partnership work, it is clear that SBF and NFB share similar goals and ambitions for the construction industry. The construction industry can suffer at times due to fragmentation or divisions that make it harder to secure the support we need. By joining together, we can maximise our influence on critical policy areas whilst also delivering significantly enhanced services and benefits to our combined membership."



## Hill submits £800m East London estate rebuild plan

One of the largest estate regenerations in London has moved a step closer with the submission of plans. Over 1,900 new homes will be built in a development partnership between house builder Hill and housing association Poplar HARCA at the £800m Treviot Estate redevelopment scheme in the Borough of Tower Hamlets.

The partnership has submitted an outline planning application for all five phases of the masterplan, including detailed proposals for phase 1, which is set to deliver 475 homes, 45% of which will be affordable.

Subject to approvals, the project is scheduled to start on site in April 2025, with the first homes expected to be completed by 2028.



## Discussions over huge new nuclear build

The UK government is seeking to engage with nuclear developers interested in a gigawatt-scale new build project at Wylfa on the Welsh island of Anglesey.

The exercise follows the acquisition by Great British Nuclear of development sites at Wylfa and also Oldbury in Gloucestershire. Both sites were previously owned by Horizon Nuclear Power, which suspended development in 2019.

The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero has now confirmed that Wylfa is its preferred site for a third gigawatt-scale nuclear power plant, following EDF's new build projects at Hinkley Point C and Sizewell C.



PICTURE CREDIT: NAMRC

*"Wylfa is the best site in Europe for a big nuclear project: it has an existing grid connection, the hard bedrock ideal for a nuclear power station, superior cooling water access, and some work to clear the site for large-scale construction was already done by the previous developer," commented Tom Greatrex, CEO of the Nuclear Industry Association. "A large-scale project at Wylfa would be the single biggest inward investment in Welsh history, and a huge step towards both energy security and net zero for the whole country."*

## Parliament tries to make amends

Parliamentary authorities expect to spend nearly £2m on procuring a contractor to repair the Palace of Westminster's tallest structure, the Victoria Tower, after the original tender for the £95m job had to be re-run after errors were made in documents used in the first round.

Under the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act, Construction News found out that the re-run process has an estimated cost to the taxpayer of £600,000 plus VAT. The first, scrapped, round of procurement cost £1m plus VAT.

## Peter Pallett

NASC is sad to learn of the death of Peter Pallett. Peter was a giant within the temporary works industry for many years and was a much-valued member of the NASC Technical Committee, where he was involved as a technical writer and consultant. Peter helped in the production of numerous guidance notes, most notably TG20-05 and TG20-08, which provided the essential foundations for the current document which has now become the industry standard for tube and fitting scaffolding. Peter will be greatly missed and NASC sends its condolences to his family and friends.



## Ambitious plans approved in Birmingham

Ambitious plans to build more than 3,000 homes, offices and shops in the heart of Birmingham have been approved. The £1.9bn Birmingham Smithfield scheme, which is being developed by Lendlease in a joint venture with Birmingham City Council, aims to regenerate a 17-hectare site around the historic Bullring Markets.

The plan to create a new city centre destination in the Smithfield area will be delivered in four phases over 15 years.

Colin Murphy, project lead on Smithfield Birmingham for Lendlease, said: "This is a major milestone for the Smithfield project and important step forward in Birmingham's transformation as an international city."

"We look forward to continuing our engagement with tenants, residents and everyone else connected to this once in a generation opportunity."

Councillor John Cotton, Leader of Birmingham City Council, said: "Obtaining planning approval is a significant step in delivering the Council's ambitions for Smithfield Birmingham in partnership with Lendlease."

"This £1.9bn development will transform the area, creating a new community in the heart of our city, generating thousands of new jobs and training opportunities, and delivering over 3,000 new homes. We are delighted to see these exciting proposals moving forward."

More than 50 new buildings form part of the masterplan drawn up by architect Prior + Partners, along with other architects working up detailed building plans in phase one. Plans include two public squares, which will form a new connection between the Bullring, Digbeth and the Chinese Quarter.

## Output falls again

Construction output fell sharply in April, marking the third consecutive monthly fall. The 1.4% contraction in activity was caused by decreases in both new work (-1.9%) and repair and maintenance (-0.8%).

The results of the Office of National Statistics survey suggest that heavy rainfall and strong winds dampened activity during April.

At the sector level, seven out of the nine sectors saw a fall in April. The main contributors to the monthly decrease were private housing new work, and private housing repair and maintenance, which fell by 4.4% and 2.5% respectively.

In the three months to April, the industry has seen construction output fall 2.2%, mainly due to a 2.8% fall in new work brought on by project delays.



## Definitely Mabey

Mabey Hire Ltd, a prominent UK-based provider of construction solutions, has officially joined the PERI Group, a global leader in formwork and scaffolding systems.

The acquisition signifies a strategic move for both companies, enhancing their ability to serve the construction industry with a broader range of services and products.

PERI, headquartered in Weissenhorn, Germany, is a family-owned enterprise with approximately 9,000 employees and a presence in over 160 locations worldwide. The company reported a turnover of €1.9 billion in 2023.

Mabey Hire, based in Dewsbury, UK, is well regarded for its innovative solutions in infrastructure and renovation projects. The company's portfolio includes ground shoring for excavations, propping and jacking for renovation projects and temporary bridges for access.



Temporary works. Trusted solutions.

## CIOB's nature focus

The Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) is partnering with Content With Purpose (CWP) to produce an extensive digital series

exploring the intricate relationship between construction and nature, and the essential need for the industry to respond to the biodiversity crisis.

WWF's Living Planet Report 2022 revealed that global wildlife populations have plummeted by a staggering 69% on average since 1970. In the UK, the State of Nature Report 2023 concluded that nearly one in six species are threatened with national extinction. This serves as a stark reminder to accelerate progress in responding to the interconnected emergencies of human-induced climate change and biodiversity loss.

Featuring a diverse array of future-focused content, The Nature of Building: Biodiversity & the Built Environment will examine the impact of the built environment on nature and biodiversity, and the measures in place to mitigate negative impact from construction operations.

The materials will unveil efforts that are underway to prioritise nature across every aspect of construction, from the sourcing and processing of materials to new methods of construction. The Nature of Building: Biodiversity & the Built Environment will launch on World Habitat Day on 7 October 2024. Organisations interested in contributing to the series should contact Millie Gallagher, Series Development Lead at CWP to learn more: [millie@contentwithpurpose.co.uk](mailto:millie@contentwithpurpose.co.uk)



## Harness fine

A scaffolder has been fined £750 and ordered to pay costs of £643 for not wearing a harness while working at height. His client, Giant Scaffolding Ltd, was fined £15,000 plus £5,000 in costs.

Gary Roser, a self-employed scaffolder, was working for Giant on a four-storey scaffold in Hastings last October when he was observed by a passing Health & Safety Executive (HSE) inspector balancing on scaffolding tubes approximately 8 metres above the ground without a harness.

During the hearing at Hastings Magistrates' Court, it was revealed that although harnesses were available in a van for the workers, they were not used. NASC's flagship guidance on work at height 'SG4 Preventing Falls in Scaffolding Operations' strongly recommends that harnesses are issued to all scaffolders, worn at all times when working at height, and used in accordance with SG4 and the training and instruction received.

The court heard that Giant Scaffolding had repeatedly failed to respond to written inquiries from the inspector, despite numerous warnings.

HSE inspector Melvyn Stancliffe said: "The simple measure of wearing a harness can save scaffolders from death or serious injury. A basic common-sense approach to work is all that's needed to prevent a possible tragedy. In many cases, harnesses are available but some workmen just cannot be bothered to wear them. They should take a moment to think about the consequences."

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### Osborne owes

Construction firm Geoffrey Osborne went under owing subcontractors and suppliers £25.86m. More than 500 firms were left holding unpaid invoices when the famous industry name went into administration last month. Total debts at the time of Osborne's collapse were £45m, with cash also outstanding to HMRC, sister companies and Osborne employees.

### Edinburgh arena

Plans to build an 8,500-capacity indoor arena on the outskirts of Edinburgh have been given the go-ahead by planners. Entertainment company AEG estimate the project to be built at Edinburgh Park will cost around £80m. Once an external contractor has been appointed and finance raised, construction is proposed to begin in 2025, with the aim of delivering the first event in 2027.

### Crestfallen

The discovery of more build problems across legacy sites has badly affected Crest Nicholson's latest results. After the house builder confirmed £15m of legacy contract problems in March from its now closed Regeneration division, further problems have resulted in the provision being increased to £31.4m. This has sent the company into the red with results for the half year to April 2024 showing a pre-tax loss of £30.9m.

### TRAD positive

TRAD Scaffolding, part of ALTRAD Group, posted a 15% increase in its pre-tax profit for the year ending 31 August 2023, alongside a positive outlook for the coming months. According to Construction News, the company's latest financial accounts reveal a pre-tax profit of £3.27 million, up from £2.84 million in 2022. The company's strategic report highlights ongoing challenges in the construction market, particularly labour shortages, so TRAD's directors are focusing on recruitment and training strategies to ensure the company can meet demand and maintain service quality.

## 4% Pay Rise Agreed

After the Construction Industry Joint Council (CIJC) announced new pay rates applicable from 1 April 2024, the Building and Allied Trades Joint Industrial Council (BATJIC) have agreed a 4% pay rise for construction workers, which came into effect from Monday 17 June 2024.

The voluntary agreement states that:

- The adult general operative rate increases to £12.05 per hour
- The NVQ3 advanced craft rate increases to £15.70 per hour
- BATJIC holiday entitlement is 23 days holiday plus all bank holidays

# ELECTRIC DREAMS

Moving labour and materials from the yard to the job in vans and trucks is a fundamental part of running a scaffolding business. These businesses, like yours, are always looking for the most efficient way to do this and now there is a new imperative to account for – the environment.

Yes, sustainability has been on the agenda for years – in fact, decades. But as the deadline dates creep closer for the end of production of internal combustion engines, it seems little is changing in the light commercial and HGV vehicle markets.

For example, UK van ownership has risen to 4.6 million, but just 0.3% run on electric. If you have one, then you have one of just 14,021 battery electric (BEV) and plug-in hybrid (PHEV) vans in operation. By contrast, there are over one million electric cars on the road now, which is around 15% of cars.

There are plenty of reasons to buy electric. The principal reason, of course, is that they are zero-emissions, so the local environment and the planet benefits from the lack of air pollution. Electric vehicles (EVs) also have reasonable running costs, low noise levels and are easy to drive.

So why hasn't the scaffolding industry embraced the technology?

## Not up to speed

"We've moved all office staffs to EVs," says James Attridge, Director of Attridge Scaffolding, "and that works fine as we have charging stations at the offices. There can still be problems with the charging network for non-Teslas, which is somewhat fragmented. I've experienced it myself, chasing around after chargers that work."

"But when it comes to vans, the range just doesn't work. You can't get out and work every day and get back again on just one charge. The lads would have to leave early to charge their vehicle on the way home – and then there's the complication of reimbursing any charging done at home, especially while electricity prices are high and changeable."

"It's the same with trucks, which just don't have the charge capacity – and they're expensive. The power required for an electric HGV is such that it feels like there's little chance of an electric HGV that's going to work and meet all the industry's requirements."



"On top of that, the charging infrastructure is improving but is still not up to the task. Even when you find a charger, there are so many that don't work. The advantage of Teslas is that they have a good range, a good charging network and they plan all your routes for you – but their build quality is poor."

## Infrastructure obstacle

There are different challenges depending on the work a company delivers and where it is based. Sarah Klieve is Business Director at High Peak Scaffolding in Buxton and she reflects: "The infrastructure is perhaps the biggest obstacle, alongside the nature of our industry. We rely on our vehicles to get the materials we need to the job and any downtime while charging means you've got a gang sat in a vehicle not working. A few more charging points might be appearing



PICTURE CREDIT: Paul Brennan



in car parks and supermarkets but there's no infrastructure that would support our business sufficiently to run an EV fleet.

*"Sustainability has been on the radar for some time and we're always looking for ways to develop. We know diesel has both a large cost and a large impact, and we've converted our smaller fleet to electric or hybrid. But a transition to EVs only would also be a massive investment. These vehicles are expensive and we currently have nine vans, one artic, and 14 wagons..."*

## Sustainability focus

In a different position is GKR Scaffolding, which operates in and around London. Paul Hersey, Commercial Director, explains their journey into more sustainable vehicles: "We had been looking into sustainability for a number of years and it came to a head in 2017, when we wanted to do something with the fleet. I wanted to do it for my kids and their generation – and we knew we'd have to do something eventually and we wanted to lead on it.

*"We did an emissions check as a baseline in 2020, recording 321 tonnes of carbon emissions. In April 2023, that had come down to just 18 tonnes and I know we can get that into single figures by changing our two remaining diesel forklifts to electric.*

*"Only now are electric trucks even getting close to being useable for getting in and out of London with a decent amount of weight on the back on one charge – no manufacturer has really managed this so far. And even if they do, will it be financially viable? And will that vehicle still be an asset in 5-7 years' time or will the country have gone down a different sustainability route?"*

*"When we were looking at alternatives to diesel, we considered hydrogen but that wasn't practical, but when we trialled an HVO (Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil) low cab truck in 2018 and learnt that any diesel engine would take HVO, this is the route we decided to go down."*

## Electric vans: key challenges

**Cost:** The high price tag of an EV is still the main issue. Until there is a breakthrough in EV technology or a surge in demand, costs are unlikely to change significantly.

**Range/Charging Anxiety:** Further advancements in EV technology and in charging networks will be needed before drivers will lose the fear of running out of battery. The provision of an EV charging infrastructure has not kept pace with increasing ownership of EVs.

**Electricity Demands:** Widespread adoption of EVs would create an extra demand for power that the UK's current energy grid cannot support. The upgrades needed would come at a significant cost.

## HVO

HVO is a diesel-type fuel made from sustainable and renewable material instead of crude oil.

Most HVO currently imported into the UK is made from used cooking oil, while some includes small quantities of post-industrial waste like tall oil, tallow and other fats, oils and greases. These waste products are treated with hydrogen in a refinery to produce a clear, bright, odourless fuel that can replace diesel with no modification in most applications. Most major manufacturers have approved HVO's use across a range of applications. The consumption rate of HVO is very similar to conventional diesel, if not better as it is a cleaner burning alternative to fossil diesel. This typically results in the need for less frequent fuel filter changes.

Biodiesel, also known as FAME diesel (Fatty Acid Methyl Ester), was a first-generation biofuel. It is known for its poor performance, especially in storage and in cold weather. HVO







is a second-generation biofuel. It can be stored for up to 10 years with no problems.

The great advantage is that it requires no up-front investment to change any infrastructure within your company.

Paul Hersey continues: "We looked at the cost and HVO was about 20p/litre more than diesel so we had to budget for that. We decided to get a 20,000 litre tank on site and then it was all about finding suppliers, which we did. When tax was changing on red diesel, some clients started pushing for HVO and I was concerned that everyone would start changing and supply would become an issue – so I entered into a contract for 100,000 litres a year at a fixed price, just to guarantee we'd get what we needed. We renewed the contract just as we hit the energy crisis so we probably saved around £35,000 that year. Now we're back to getting our supplies month by month as there are far more suppliers in the market and a bit more movement on price, so we keep an eye on about five suppliers and take the best price each month.

"Our drivers don't tend to get caught out without HVO but if they ever do, you can just drop diesel straight in. We haven't had to do that yet but it's good to know we can.

"I do see HVO as a temporary fix though, to see us through to fully electric – or whatever it's going to be."

On the subject of HVO, James Attridge adds: "We use HVO in the yard for the forklifts but decided it wasn't worth the upheaval – and extra cost – to use it for all our bigger vehicles. But we've never had a problem using it and if there was a good HVO infrastructure in place, a lot more companies would adopt it."

## Hydrogen development

The uncertainty expressed by Paul Hersey around which way to go regarding alternative fuel is widespread and not helpful to company owners who want to do the right thing and make investments in sustainable vehicles. Earlier this year, the Government launched a consultation about the use of hydrogen-powered vehicles being used on building sites and in agricultural businesses. In March, the Technology and Decarbonisation Minister, Anthony Browne, said:

"Allowing hydrogen-powered tractors, diggers and forklifts to use our roads is a common-sense move to help reduce emissions. These proposals are an important part of our plan to decarbonise transport in the UK, with skilled jobs in British companies helping roll out this cutting-edge hydrogen technology, making it more affordable and commonplace.

"Hydrogen-powered construction and farming vehicles can improve the sustainability of the sector by reducing emissions from the tailpipe."

The launch of the consultation comes after the government issued JCB with a vehicle special order last year, giving the company permission to test its hydrogen-powered diggers on UK roads.

## Electric vans: key benefits

**Environmental Sustainability:** electric vans do not run on oil products and have no tailpipe, meaning they produce no carbon dioxide emissions or greenhouse gases when driving.

These vehicles have CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of less than 50g/km due to the electricity needed to charge them. This is compared to the 170.5g produced per km by the average petrol car.

**Cost Savings and Operational Efficiency:** there may be cost-saving opportunities: fuel costs are significantly lower than for petrol or diesel vehicles: charging costs a fraction of what you would spend on conventional fuel.

Maintenance costs are lower with electric vans because there are fewer components to service and replace.

It is more likely there will be government grants and other cost-saving measures when you invest in electric vans, such as the plug-in grant from the UK government.

In UK cities, electric vans are not liable for congestion charges.

## Alternative fuels: at a glance

The main alternative fuels for the future for commercial vehicles include:

### Electric Vehicles (EVs)

- + Zero emissions, lower operating costs, energy efficiency
- Range anxiety, charging infrastructure, battery issues

### Hybrid Electric Vehicles (HEVs)

- + Fuel efficiency, reduced emissions, no range anxiety
- Higher initial cost, maintenance, still fossil fuel

### Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicles (PHEVs)

- + Dual power sources, reduced emissions, extended range
- Cost, charging requirement, still fossil fuel

### Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) Vehicles

- + Lower emissions, cost-effective, performance
- Fuelling infrastructure, range, storage

### Hydrogen Fuel Cell Vehicles (FCVs)

- + Zero emissions, quick refuelling, high efficiency
- Hydrogen infrastructure, production and storage, cost

### Compressed Natural Gas (CNG) Vehicles

- + Lower emissions, abundant supply, safety
- Fuelling infrastructure, range, storage

### Hydrotreated Vegetable Oil (HVO)

- + Renewable and sustainable, compatibility, storage
- Supply, infrastructure, cost

JCB decided to explore how to replace fossil fuels with a zero-carbon alternative that still allows heavy machines to do heavy work for up to 12 hours a day, every day. It deemed batteries as impractical for equipment with high power demands and for machines that work in remote locations: they would weigh too much, cost too much and there would not be enough time to charge them.

So engineers at JCB Power Systems developed the first hydrogen motor in their industry. Using and adapting



established engine technology with readily available components, hydrogen is combusted and power is delivered in exactly the same way as a diesel engine. The technology is far less complicated than hydrogen fuel-cell technology. Nothing but steam is emitted from the tailpipe, meaning zero CO2 at point of use.

JCB says hydrogen makes a lot of sense: it's the most abundant element in the universe, a hydrogen motor uses similar technology to existing propulsion systems. It's robust, cost-effective and it could be integrated into all forms of powertrain.

## At a crossroads

But will this translate more broadly into the commercial vehicle sector? This is the problem: nobody knows. Sarah Klieve adds: *"Which route will the industry go down? What infrastructure will be invested in? As a scaffolding company, investing in a truck is a significant investment and you don't want to be stuck with a vehicle that can only be used in limited places and on limited jobs."*

It feels like time for the Government to take a strong lead on this as the indications are that the market alone won't dictate a firm direction in terms of alternative fuel type in time to meet zero carbon targets. This is evidenced by the situation in Germany, whose Government incentivised alternative fuel vehicles for a period, which led to a sharp rise in 2023 but the incentive was removed this year and already numbers are dropping. In the EU, even with more proactive policies like this, the medium truck market is still 91.7% diesel, 5.2% electric, 2.6% other. The numbers don't add up. The wait continues.



Sarah Klieve





# ELECTION 2024: WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE INDUSTRY?

As this edition of Scaffolding Insider goes live, it will be just a matter of days before the General Election. But what will sway your vote?

Each of the main parties has now released its manifesto, which contains important pledges that may well affect the scaffolding and access industry.

When it comes to infrastructure, the Conservatives have committed a further £12bn to Northern Powerhouse rail work between Liverpool and Manchester, while Labour commits to bringing the railways into public ownership and improving rail connectivity in the north of England. The LibDems commit to increased devolution to give local authorities the power to upgrade local infrastructure.

On housing, the Conservatives pledge:

- Building 1.6m homes in England through the next Parliament
- A new Help to Buy scheme
- Fast-tracking brownfield residential developments in cities
- Making the 2022 Stamp Duty threshold permanent.

Meanwhile, Labour say they will:

- Deliver 1.5m new homes in England over the next five years
- Immediately update the National Policy Planning Framework to restore mandatory housing targets
- Fast-track approval of urban brownfield sites and prioritise the release of lower quality 'grey belt' land
- Introduce a permanent, comprehensive mortgage guarantee scheme for first time buyers.

The Liberal Democrats commit to:

- Increasing building of new homes to 380,000 a year across the UK, including 150,000 social homes a year
- Abolishing residential leaseholds and capping ground rents to a nominal fee
- Introducing 'use-it-or-lose-it' planning permission for developers who refuse to build.

And the Green Party says it would:

- Build 150,000 new social homes every year
- Ensure that all new homes meet Passivhaus or equivalent standards and house builders include solar panels and heat pumps on all new homes, where appropriate.

Looking at energy, the Conservatives say they will deliver net zero by 2050, scale up nuclear power with two new fleets of Small Modular Reactors and establish Great British Nuclear, and invest £1.1bn into the Green Industries Growth Accelerator. By contrast, Labour says it will reach clean energy by 2030, with net zero to follow; bring Hinkley Point C to completion, as well as increasing rollout of small modular reactors; and invest nearly £5bn in gigafactories, carbon capture and green hydrogen. The Liberal Democrats



will invest in renewable power so that 90% of the UK's electricity is generated from renewables by 2030 and they will upgrade the National Grid to meet growing energy demand.

Regarding the economy, the Conservatives say they will abolish the main rate of National Insurance entirely by the next Parliament, will not raise corporation tax, and will create a business rates support package worth £4.3bn over the next five years to support small businesses. Labour has made the same pledge on corporation tax and is committing to "Securonomics" – a financial approach "that understands sustainable growth relies on a broad base and resilient foundations"; and it will create a £7.3bn National Wealth Fund, with a target to attract "three pounds of private investment for every one pound of public investment" in growth and clean energy.

There are, of course, numerous other relevant themes covered by all manifestos and there are differences between the parties in a range of critical areas, including planning, apprenticeships, procurement, industrial relations, and restoring certainty to the economy.

Clive Dickin, NASC CEO, comments: "I would urge all members to have a look at the parties' manifestos before they put their cross in the box on the fourth of July. As well as the headline policies, there are a range of pledges that will affect our industry and the companies and individuals in it.

"Whichever party or parties form the next Government, I would urge a real focus on greater fiscal stability, a restoration of confidence in the planning system, a reduction in interest rates, investment in the public sector, and a commitment to an economy based on skills – and this must include a major investment in FE.

"As soon as the new Government is formed, NASC will resume its public affairs work and seek to help the new regime to understand the importance of the scaffolding and access sector to the nation as a whole, and how Government can help it operate efficiently and effectively in a growing economy."

# JAMES NESBITT TO HOST THE SCAFFOLDING EXCELLENCE AWARDS



James Nesbitt

One of the key events of ScaffEx24, The Scaffolding Excellence Awards and Gala Dinner, will be hosted by film and television actor James Nesbitt. James has been on our screens for three decades, with his breakthrough role being when he shot to fame as Adam Williams in Cold Feet. He won the Best Actor award at the British Comedy Awards and quickly became

– and stayed – one of the UK's best loved stars. Always an engaging speaker, James will keep guests entertained and informed through the Awards and Gala Dinner.

James will be joined on the night of the Awards by ScaffEx24 host, David Meade, plus other celebrity guests, who will be announced soon.

## Awards revamp

It is a new era for the renamed Scaffolding Excellence Awards, which have a new format and a new Chair.

The Awards have been redesigned to encourage as many companies and individuals to enter as possible, and a new, independent judging process will ensure maximum independence and transparency. The Chair of the Judging Panel will be Dr James MacFadden, Senior Responsible CSA Engineer, Sellafeld Sites. The full panel will be announced shortly.

The revised Award categories are:

- Project of the Year – Small – <£250k
- Project of the Year – Medium – £250k – £1m
- Project of the Year – Large – £1m – £2m
- Project of the Year – Major – >£2m
- Apprentice of the Year
- Product of the Year
- Service of the Year
- Design of the Year
- Lifetime Achievement Award

There is more information available on both entering the Awards and booking your tickets for the Gala Dinner at [www.nasc.org.uk/2024-nasc-ball-awards-information/](http://www.nasc.org.uk/2024-nasc-ball-awards-information/)

## CISRS Safety Test heads online

Before the issue or renewal of CISRS cards, it is necessary to pass the CITB Health, Safety and Environment Test.

Until now, this required an operative to first read a health & safety book, then to visit a physical test centre, which was often not a great experience and one that many found intimidating and not conducive to performing well.

Now an online course has been created that operatives can take at their computer which combines the learning and testing process, and has been explicitly developed to have the highest quality learning content possible, which also takes into account neurodiversity as many people as possible can understand the content, pass the test and subsequently operate safely.

The online test delivers advantages such as:

- A user-friendly platform and hassle-free booking
- Study and take the test whenever and wherever suits you
- Operatives spend less time away from work, saving them time and the company money
- No risk of being late because of traffic or travel issues
- No extra expenses for travelling
- Ensures operatives have the relevant level of health, safety and environmental knowledge

The test will improve skills and knowledge across the full range of topics needed to operate safely.

For more information, go to <https://cisrs.org.uk/operatives-health-safety-and-environment-test/>



## New guidance added

Five important new guidance documents have been added to the NASC ePortal and to the NASC website and are available to download. NASC's guidance documents are widely recognised as the industry standard. The new documents are:

- TG5:24 Timber scaffold boards to BS 2482:2009
- PG8:24 Purchasing guidelines for ancillary scaffolding components
- SG46:24 Adverse Weather
- CG8:24 Preparation of Quotations
- CG14:24 Pre-Contract Meetings

## Let's talk

NASC always aim to make membership an invaluable resource for any scaffolding and access company, and is encouraging members to take advantage of two opportunities to hear from the organisation – as well as to give your own views in return.

**Regional meetings**, attendance at which is a requirement of NASC membership, are opportunities for NASC members to hear all the latest news from NASC, including about important new industry guidance, training, education and a wide range of other issues that directly affect your business. Each meeting also has two speakers addressing relevant issues, such as the Common Assessment Standard and updated NASC Guidance. The next meetings are:

Thursday 4 July: Scotland & NI – DoubleTree Hotel, Strathclyde

Tuesday 17 September: Northern and North West – Radisson Blu Hotel, Manchester Airport

Thursday 24 October: London and South East – PERI Group

Thursday 12 December: Midlands – MTC, Coventry

**CEO Surgeries** have been a popular addition as they represent an opportunity for members to speak directly with NASC CEO Clive Dickin, ask him questions about what NASC is doing and its plans, and convey to him the challenges their businesses face and which NASC needs to consider. For example, the guidance on VAT which was recently published by NASC came about as a direct result of a member raising this issue with Clive at a CEO Surgery. You can book an appointment with Clive by emailing [ceo@nasc.org.uk](mailto:ceo@nasc.org.uk).



# ALL SYSTEMS GO?

Discussion around whether system scaffolding is the future of scaffolding have been around for as long as system has been around itself. But where are we now and what should we expect to happen in the coming years regarding the System versus tube & fitting markets?

System scaffolding accounts for approximately 30% of the scaffolding market in the UK, with notable penetration in various sectors. system scaffolding is favoured for its versatility, safety features, and efficiency in both construction and maintenance projects.

Industry expert, and former CEO of the TRAD Group, Des Moore comments: *"It's a good investment – if you can manage the capital cost, you will get measurable value from investing in system scaffolding and have a valuable asset that will provide you with many years of service. It is generally faster to erect and dismantle, and in the majority of instances, much easier and quicker to adapt, and it makes it possible to reduce the quantity of highly-skilled labour required. If you invest in system, in ten years' time, you'll still have your stock. With tube and fitting, tubes will have been cut down, some will have been skipped, boards will have been replaced five times, half your fittings will have been lost or stolen, and labour costs are higher every time you use it."*

*"I'd say most companies that have moved to system still use a combination of system and tube and fitting – and I think having some tube and fitting stock makes sense. While the benefits of system are great, the initial outlay is high and for a new scaffolding company, the capital cost makes it hard to start with system. I was MD of Trad Scaffolding for years and invested heavily in system but still retained 30% tube and fitting, which was well used."*

*"Anything can be built in either but if it's very intricate then it will require special components in system and the*

***"A lot more developers are now asking for system because of the improved aesthetics, advertising opportunities, unobstructed access and speed of erection and dismantling."***

*competitive advantage is lost – but those jobs are few and far between.*

*"I know scaffolders sometimes fear that system is deskilling the trade because, for example, in a gang of six tube and fitting scaffolders, you'd have four scaffolders and two labourers but for system, probably two scaffolders and four labourers – but in the current environment of such skills shortages in the industry, this more efficient use of skilled labour could be seen as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. On top of that, with system being somewhat less physically demanding compared to tube and fitting, it can encourage career longevity."*

Des adds, *"A lot more developers are now asking for system because of the improved aesthetics, advertising opportunities, unobstructed access and speed of erection and dismantling."*



Forth Road Bridge - Lyndon SGB





PHD and Layher at the Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben), London

One multinational scaffolding manufacturer and supplier, who asked not to be named – thus clearly indicating the sensitivities around this issue – picks up the point regarding scaffolders themselves:

*“Sometimes operatives do resist the move to system but after a period of time, there is often a change of opinion and some don’t want to look back.”*

*“There will always be a place for tube and fitting – it’s widely established and readily available. We still have some tube and fitting in our rental fleet, and sometimes clients will still opt for a traditional solution in part as they transition to system.”*

*“England and Wales are still predominantly tube and fitting markets – while Scotland and the rest of Europe lean heavily towards system. With Scotland, I believe this was driven by large contractors who were also manufacturers of system scaffold – and similarly there are pockets in England and Wales that reflect a local influence, especially around Bristol and the South-west.”*

Asked what it is that persuades users of tube and fitting to make the switch to system these days, the supplier says: *“Construction programmes are quicker than ever and there are so many different kinds of construction methods being introduced – both these factors point to the advantages of quicker scaffold erection needs and the use of system. There is also a training and skills element. Every scaffolding company is finding recruitment hard at the moment. Companies need to find a way to maintain productivity in the face of this skills shortage and system can be a big part of the answer.”*

*“The main counter-argument to switching to system is the initial investment. If system was the same price as tube and fitting, most would probably take it, but there are many companies out there with millions of pounds invested in tube and fitting and they’re not just going to switch overnight. Thankfully the availability of a rental product and the long term savings achievable from using system can help clients realise switching over a period of time.”*

Michael Lloyd, Managing Director of LTC Scaffolding, points out a further reason that tube and fitting maintains a hold over the industry:

*“Our safety standards in the UK compared to other nations mean that tube and fitting often remains the best option for dealing with the gap between the building and the scaffold. This is a fundamental reason why tube and fitting will remain a major player in the UK – unless clients embrace that there could be an inside guard rail. Also, system is very hard to use*

## At a glance

### System Scaffolding:

- System scaffolding consists of prefabricated components that allow for faster and easier assembly without the need for nuts, bolts or clamps. This modular approach increases efficiency on-site, reducing labour costs and time.
- Although more expensive up front compared to tube and fitting, system scaffolding’s efficiency and reduced labour costs can make it cost-effective for larger-scale projects.
- The prefabricated nature of system ensures a reduction in the chance of human error and therefore high safety standards.

### Tube and Fitting Scaffolding:

- Tube and fitting scaffolding remains widely used due to its versatility: it can be configured to fit complex or irregular structures, making it ideal for projects with unique challenges.
- This method requires more time and labour to assemble since each joint needs to be individually clamped and secured.
- Tube and fitting is generally cheaper in terms of materials compared to system scaffolding but higher labour costs can offset these savings.

*on curves and balconies and ornate buildings.*

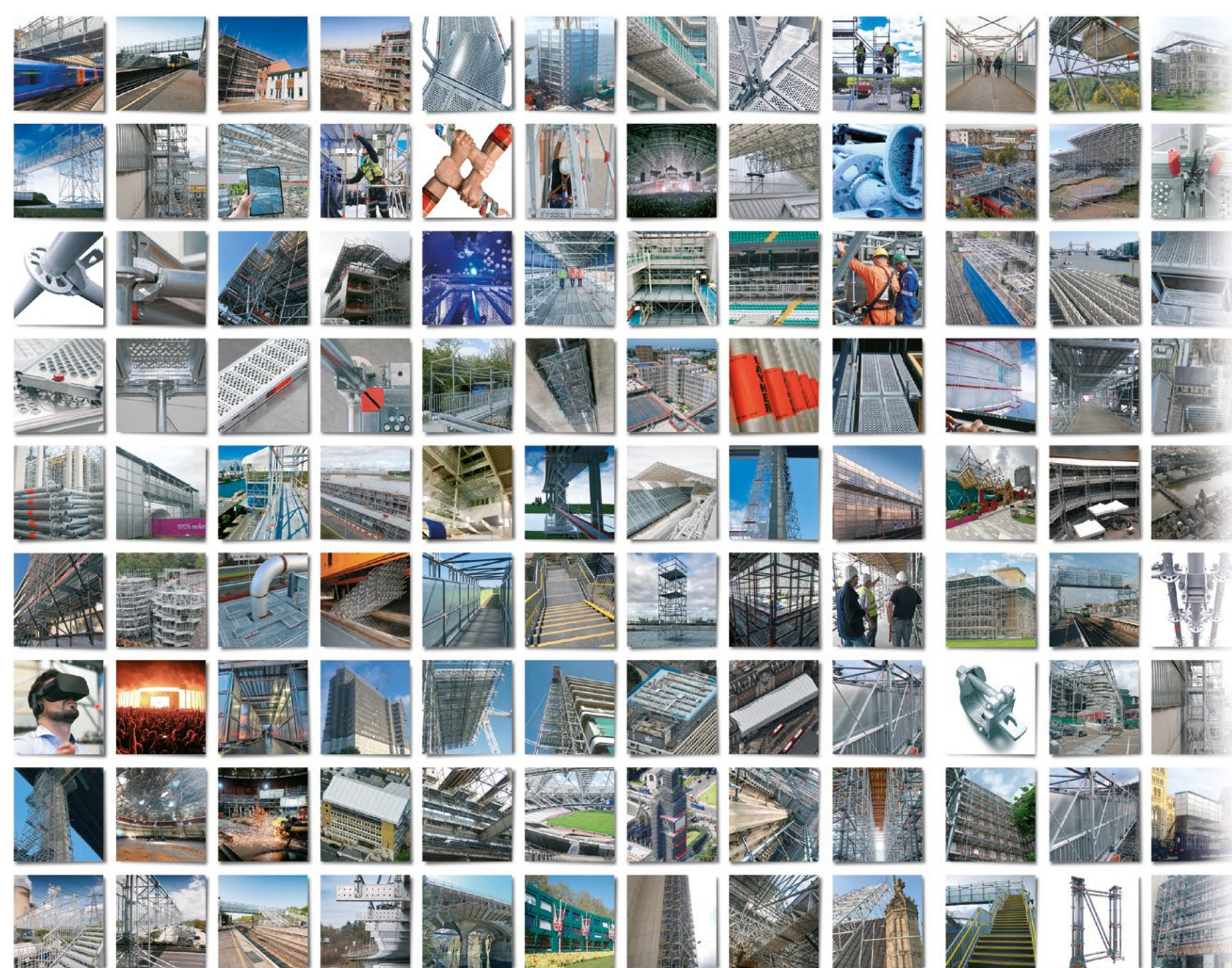
*“Tube and fitting is also much simpler to store – if you operate system, you need to have a yard that can accommodate all the components and you have to be super-organised. And of course you have to train your scaffolders in using the system.”*

*“One change that would help develop the use of system in the industry is to change the current scenario where all the manufacturers have their own training for their own equipment and they discourage mixing systems. At NASC, we’re looking at introducing technical guidance for system that takes the onus away from the manufacturer and also exploring the possibility of training that covers all manufacturers.”*

This could be a useful approach, especially if clients on larger projects demand system scaffolding, as they increasingly seem to be doing for the aforementioned reasons of the aesthetics, promotional opportunities and speed. A number of developers and house builders in particular now insist on system scaffolding in their tenders.

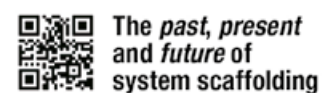
Companies looking to introduce system would be well advised to hire, so they can try before they buy. There are a number of options and it’s important to do the research to see what will suit your company, the markets it works in and the scaffolders who will need to learn how to use it. Part of that learning process will be understanding the crucial nature of the assessment of materials for the work that needs to be done before any material leaves the premises.





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