

CEO VIEWPOINT



It doesn't seem that long ago that the mineral products industry was pushed to capacity trying to meet the post-covid demand for essential materials. Now we're facing the opposite challenge; the economic forecast is grim and there are mixed views on when recovery will kick off, the short-term outlook is subdued to say the least.

So what happens in an essential sector like ours when the market is shrinking? Producing construction materials and industrial minerals requires strategic thinking, calculated investment and long-term planning – something that's extremely difficult when there's pressure to cut cost fast.

So MPA members have to strike a fine balance – to drive down their expenditure without slashing costs to the degree that they risk shrinking their businesses in the long-term, and to 'sweat the assets', the production facilities they are able to keep running, to maximise efficiency and squeeze out every ounce of value.

Why do I tell you this? Because as a trade association, representing the interests of the industry in central and devolved Government as well as among local authorities and non-government organisations nationwide, the MPA itself can be considered one of the key assets to be 'sweated' during times like these (although the team here at MPA might not wholly agree!)

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Within the MPA and across our membership there's an unrivalled breadth and depth of knowledge and understanding about what it takes to sustain the country's in excess of 1-million-tonne-a-day demand for mineral products, the challenges of meeting that need and the solutions to address those challenges.

As we head towards an election, there is never a more important time to challenge, the current Government and its likely/potential successor to set long-term policies that encourage investment and ensure the UK minerals sector remains competitive. As election manifestos are being drafted, now is the time to drive out the inefficiencies, such as the disconnect between the planning system and the environmental permitting system that burdens operators, planners and regulators alike. And there's never been a more opportune moment to align these systems to the supply chain that meets the demand for the UK's essential minerals – the whole reason we do what we do in the first place.

The thing is, improving efficiency and getting aligned shouldn't even be that hard. From an industry perspective, it's clear what needs to happen, and I suspect it's the same for others involved in policy-making, planning and permitting. But progress relies on all parties developing their basic understanding of how minerals flow in our economy, from source to end-

use in construction and manufacturing. And then applying that understanding, alongside that gained in other sectors such as paper, chemicals and glass, to create an industrial strategy for the nation that joins up policy and supports long-term decision making in the wider national interest.

In the post-covid digital age it's all too easy for people to lull themselves into the false belief that the need for minerals is somehow reducing. Nothing could be further from the truth. Because, although right now there's a short-term dip in demand for construction materials and industrial minerals, we know that long-term need will be stronger than ever, especially as the country seeks to build the infrastructure required for energy security, climate adaptation and the transition to net zero. And that is before we consider transport improvements, urban regeneration schemes and, of course, the need for more homes.

"The long-term need for minerals will be stronger than ever - for energy security, climate adaptation and the transition to net zero"

The UK mineral products industry has a critical role to play in all of this, sourcing and supplying essential raw materials, making efficient reuse of wastes from other industries, delivering innovative solutions such as low carbon concretes, and leaving a legacy of restored land that achieves social and biodiversity gain that other sectors can only dream of.

Meeting society's demand using domestically sourced raw materials from a responsible, forward-looking industry is a sure-fire recipe for UK competitiveness, growth and prosperity, and that is a message that we should all be proud to share with the wider community that we serve.

Jon Prichard
Chief Executive