

**CEO Report for the 2018 AGM**

Once again, I am pleased to be able to report that during the past year, AR has continued to work hard and successfully on behalf of its members.

Membership has remained steady at over 1100, nearly half of which comprises owners and occupiers with the rest made up of agents, advisors, planners and other technical specialists. A sound and healthy membership constitutes an important pool of talent and experience on which AR and the Board can draw on when needed.

We have undertaken a busy schedule of our four principal activities – charitable fund raising, professional development and networking events and lobbying supported when needed by the commissioning of new, independent research.

I start with lobbying. At the 2017 AGM, I reported a much narrower focus of Government legislative activity due to the preoccupation with Brexit – this has changed – Brexit is still with us, but AR has responded to a growing number of initiatives from the UK, Welsh and Scottish Governments.

Business rates figured in all three with consultations on appeals, revaluations and most recently, the Barclay Review in Scotland which included the controversial proposal to levy a supplementary rate only on out of town retailers. Changes to the planning system have also been advanced in each of the three jurisdictions and all have been responded to by AR. Other issues dealt with include a plan for strategic infrastructure in Wales and a raft of proposals regarding ‘green’ buildings including carbon reporting, Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards and Clean Growth.

In addition to the above work, AR has continued to regularly review planning appeals and court decisions, announcements by regulatory bodies, emerging trends in the retail industry and economic and employment metrics, so as to identify issues of concern to our sector.

Due to the steadily increasing number of consultations, AR is continuing to review the data it needs to underline the importance of our sector to the economy and employment. A matrix has been produced identifying essential and desirable data sets which exemplify our sector’s contribution in two main areas - the economy and employment and our share of the retail industry.

In addition we have identified key data sets in a third area - online retailing - to help us in our on-going lobbying to persuade Government to create a level tax playing field between online and traditional ‘bricks and mortar’ retailers. We have not commissioned any other new research this year.

Turning to professional development and networking, we have held a full programme of well attended seminars and events including recently a joint CPD seminar on the future of the sector with the IPF. Also, recently, we held another successful and well attended annual conference held at the Royal Institution with a theme of ‘The Challenge of Change’.

‘Regarding our charitable work, this continues also with AR having presented its 56th Sunshine coach to the Variety Club.

In summary, a solid year of performance in all our four principal activities creating a sound platform for moving forward in 2019.

Will McKee

Accessible Retail

Chief Executive