



SUSTAINABILITY:

*driving innovation in
our built environment
and beyond*

Sustainability has been on the global agenda for the best part of twenty years, but there has been an observable recent local movement towards a sustainable future for UK businesses. In fact, 53% of UK businesses are now pledging to increase their focus on sustainability. Localised adoption of sustainability agendas was an inevitable necessity, likely accelerated by COVID, but that doesn't guarantee the change of focus will be easy or, ironically, sustainable.

For DJB, sustainability is not just a focus for the company but also for the sector we work in. The real estate sector is responsible for more than 20% of the world's carbon emissions and combined with the byproducts of waste production, pollution, water usage and consumption of natural resources consequent of the sector's activities, the sector has no option but to prioritise sustainability. We believe green, sustainable building will undoubtedly be a dominant characteristic of the post-COVID office market and the logistics sector.

DJB Client Director **Yvonne Hills** (YH) recently interviewed **Amell Amatino** (AA), to explore the changes required to ensure a sustainable future and how this can be achieved at an individual, profession-wide, local and global level. Amell is the founder of **MAINTENANT**, an organisation

established to support executives and business owners in building proven sustainable strategies to embed the values of environmental and social ethos coupled with good governance. They provide practical training and guidance to ensure that companies thrive through the adoption of sustainable practices. Her business has received accolades and she was personally shortlisted for the IEMA Sustainability Impact Awards in the category of Future Sustainability Leader 2020.

YH: In your view, what are the key environmental and sustainability challenges that we are facing?

AA: Our planet does not support the infinite harnessing of resources; it is a complex system that has been damaged by human activities. The two major disruptions inflicted to the Earth System are Climate breakdown and Biodiversity collapse.

Climate breakdown is epitomised by the increase in the levels of atmospheric carbon dioxide from below 300 ppm (parts per million) before the industrial revolution to over 410 ppm now. This induces a global heating worsened by other greenhouse gases such as methane or water vapour. Global heating makes more water evaporate, which accelerates the heating and so on. We see symptoms of this climate runaway in extreme weather conditions across the globe including this year's Australian megafire, where

an area almost the size of England was destroyed.

The second concern is the biosphere, which constitutes all living organisms on planet earth. The impact we are having on our biosphere impacts us just as much as any other living organism. The intensity and widespread loss of biodiversity is being referred to as the 6th wave of mass extinction.

This ecocide is largely being caused by the destruction of wildlife habitat as a consequence of the land being used to fuel the growth of cities, to grow crops and graze livestock. Reduced biodiversity lacks resilience and can cause widespread contamination between species. An example, perhaps a little too close to home right now, being the spread of COVID-19 from animals to humans.

YH: I would be interested to explore with you these two concerns you have raised and what we can do to make the way we operate more sustainable as a society, within the real estate sector and perhaps even within the legal profession. As a starting point, what lifestyle changes do you think are required at an individual level?

AA: The climate and biodiversity emergencies are without a doubt relatable to individual lifestyles and more broadly to the whole of society, politics, corporate practices as well as the influence of media and social media. At an individual level, we need to be mindful and frugal – we need to reduce our energy consumption, walk and cycle, and modify our food habits with a preference for plant-rich diets. My key message would be that there is no trade-off between our health and the environment. If something is good for you biologically it is also good for the planet.

At an industry and corporate level, a circular economy is the way forward. Companies should embrace responsible and circular business models avoiding fast consumption models (like fast fashion and single use products, especially plastic ones). These changes need to be supported by strong measures at a national level through legislation and appropriate support schemes.

At an international level, the global plans for the environment and sustainability have been endorsed by most countries in the world, 197 countries have signed the various agreements. However, most of them are not on track for global targets such as carbon neutrality by 2030. For instance, the UK has just granted permission to open a [new coalmine in Cumbria](#), contradicting its climate pledge.

YH: A lot of developers are looking at their development strategies and net zero carbon commitments. What is driving the innovation at the heart of our cities?

AA: Innovation is really driven to the local and city level. There are 3 main factors for this:

1. Firstly, the willingness of its residents and urban stakeholders including town planners, town halls, neighbourhood groups, local charities, businesses and academia to embrace change. They often work together to resolve issues like poverty and security but are also now having to rethink and improve living and working spaces due to the pandemic. This willingness for change is an urgent necessity and a matter of survival in the face of the disruption to the Earth System.
2. A second key influence is that of strong local leadership and sustainability champions such as the Italian town planner Stefano Boeri. With his iconic “Bosco Verticale” (green residential forest in Milan), he has shown how to bring together urban actors with innovative solutions driven by a common compelling vision.
3. The third driver is money. Financial institutions, banks and insurance sectors know that financial stability can only be achieved in a sustainable world. This pandemic is the perfect example of how unsustainability can break the economy. This is why the finance sector is investing and lending more and more to organisations with high performance Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) indicators. Indeed, huge investment is driving innovation into the heart of our cities. For instance, the European Commission is releasing this year 1 billion euros to boost innovation and resilience in cities.

YH: What role can cities take on to embrace ecological transitions or rather what role should they take on?

AA: Cities are of high strategic importance and, thanks to their multi-faceted role as consumer, provider, regulator and coordinator, they can act to drive the necessary radical transformations. While some issues are global, solutions can best be applied at city level.

Many municipalities are experimenting with new methods and processes with the collaboration and inclusion of all stakeholders: private and public sectors, start-ups, civil society, academia, investors and policy makers.

A bold example is Anne Hidalgo, mayor of Paris, and her architectural program “Reinventing Paris”. Innovation centres, referred to as urban labs, are found all over Paris

unveiling outstanding achievements like “La Ferme du Rail” (brownfield site transformed into an agriculture and solidarity space). By greening her city and boosting its circular economy, Anne Hidalgo and many other sustainability champions have inspired other cities and more importantly, have pushed national policies, laws and standards.

Cities are indeed drivers of ecological transition and I invite you to read [my article on this topic](#) on the SPRINGER NATURE community blog.

YH: As lawyers in the real estate sector, what changes should we be looking out for?

AA: Lawyers in the real estate sector should make sustainability and resilience a core part of your strategy and you should encourage your clients to do the same. For example, some current trends in construction involve:

1. Compact living, which is clever town planning that rethinks living, shopping and working spaces where all you need is within 15 / 20 minutes walking or cycling.
2. It is important to hold genuine consultations with all the stakeholders. They bring valuable input, and their early engagement ensures full success of your regeneration and development projects.
3. The last trend, but not the least, is to embed nature into the city using NBS. NBS, or nature-based solutions, such as green walls or rooftops, improve biodiversity and sequester carbon. They are cost-effective responses to many urban challenges including well-being and health issues. According to the Environment Agency, NBS will soon be supported by the UK government with new schemes and funding opportunities. We, in MAINTENANT, are watching this space closely!

All of these approaches for tackling climate and biodiversity emergencies provide amazing opportunities for companies to prosper and happy cities to be built. MAINTENANT supports organisations to identify these opportunities through a consultative approach. We enable organisations to deliver fundamental change to drive sustainability and thrive.

Thank you, Yvonne, for inviting me and giving me this opportunity to remind us of the capital role of the construction sector in tackling sustainability challenges.

YH: Thank you Amell. This has been a great insight and I'm sure will give readers food for thought. Sustainability is a key consideration when making investment decisions and a sustainable approach can deliver value. It will be worth bearing in mind that guiding market decisions towards sustainable, climate-friendly outcomes will actually generate financial and economic payoffs for the real estate industry and for investors, especially in the medium and long terms.

We hope this Q&A has highlighted the importance of the issues and the need for positive change. If you want to get in touch with Yvonne or Amell, their contact details are as follows:



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