



## **Integrating environmental benefit and social value**

**By George Adams, Director of Energy and Engineering at SPIE**

Organisations are learning that industry cannot grow and improve if it does not behave as part of a community. Therefore, it is inevitable that organisations need to respect the locations they are based in.

Although businesses must make a profit to survive and to remain competitive, it is fundamental that they give back and contribute to society. Hence, creating harmful emissions that pollute the air we breathe is not a sustainable business, but one that becomes more carbon-efficient is.

There is no doubt that the COVID pandemic has accelerated the need for leadership teams to deliver more sustainable financial, societal, and environmental value for the benefit of all stakeholders, while investors are also voicing concerns about sustainability. Consequently, action must be taken especially as corporate leaders will soon be held accountable by shareholders for Environmental, Social and Corporate Governance (ESG) performance.

The environment requires corporations to have greater integration with people and the natural world; fundamentally, leading businesses will need to transform into truly sustainable organisations.

Certain organisations are already taking steps in this direction, such as SPIE, which encourages staff to engage in socially beneficial activities, such as volunteer work or fundraising events for various charities, through initiatives like 'Time for Society'. SPIE also engages with industry professional and trade bodies where innovation, learning, research, and ethical behaviours are increasingly important.

However, there is a vital need for the Built Environment to collaborate more through these bodies because of the UK industry's ever-expanding skills gap; with nearly 60,000 people short entering the industry each year!

An essential way of bridging this gap is to offer young people apprenticeships and training to encourage them to consider a career in the Built Environment. Furthermore, it is important to engage with society via local schools and universities, which SPIE has been involved in for many years. This has included presenting on the environment, engineering solutions, training and apprenticeships.

The challenges the Built Environment faces over the next 30 years will require skilled people to deliver solutions and applications to a new breed of buildings and technologies, but the largest challenge will be to make some 80% of existing buildings net zero by 2035 to align with UK targets. This will depend on the supply chain to collaborate to a greater degree than ever before, which is why SPIE is moving towards being more of the integrator, embracing the expertise of the supply chain and assisting with innovation and applications developments to better support our clients in their sustainability journey.

This route of travel requires more action on climate change globally, as the world faces a hotter planet, rising sea levels, dangerous air quality and extreme weather conditions that threaten many forms of life and significant loss of global GDP.



However, the UK has already made progress in cutting emissions compared to the levels released in 1990, and in 2019, emissions were 40% less. Additionally, the government has recently announced a strategy to address emissions from the UK's 30 million buildings, which is a significant opportunity for a more sustainable economy.

