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Proptech has a social role to play



Tech talk Savannah de Savary



The human element is one of the most fundamental factors at the heart of real estate, whether it be understanding how occupiers utilise a space, how residents choose a home or how office space attracts and retains talent.

One of the elements all these factors have in common is social inclusion - essentially building communities that work as a cohesive ecosystem, which has a positive impact on wellbeing, productivity and mental health.

A consistent theme among the 30,000 people who have shared feedback on our community engagement platform is an overriding concern about the increase in social isolation. This can lead to a desire for new development to play a role in facilitating community integration. There is an increasingly symbiotic relationship building between real

estate and tech, with social value sitting at its heart. This opportunity for tech to be used to create real social change and promote community cohesion has opened the door to an exciting new facet of the property sector.

A 2018 report from The Challenge reported that one third of primary and one quarter of secondary schools are segregated along socio-economic lines. The resultant loss of a sense of community that disenfranchised groups face can be one that is intensified by the built environment. This has manifested itself in the backlash against so-called 'poor doors'. In our divided society, which faces a growing wealth gap, tech has an important part to play in creating spaces that bring community members together, irrespective of social strata.

Despite much of the fearmongering around technology

and its place in the future of our society, we can see the positive impact it has: the democratisation of media and reporting through the rise, and accessibility, of the internet, for example. Technology can bring the same sense of democratisation and inclusivity to the world of real estate.

When communal space is free and accessible, increased use of it has the potential to reduce isolation and foster a real sense of community. While mobile software platforms that connect tenants with smart buildings and wider facilities around them are fantastic for bringing internal communities together, there is huge potential for landlords also using these apps to connect their buildings with the wider community around them.

District Tech, Equiem and Office App all provide the capability to bring people together, connecting them with local events, independent businesses and space for coming together. The power for social integration, when these tools are used to connect all demographics within a local community to the regenerated buildings within, is immense.

Far from the dystopian visions usually summoned up by the thought of a society that finds meaning through tech, the sector has shown how pivotal it can be in combating social isolation. In a world of social rifts and divisive populism, the time to provide both the tech and real estate industries with a human face is now. **Savannah de Savary is founder and chief executive of Built-ID**