

ALPHA FEMALES

■ Five of property's most powerful women shared their highs and lows at the Young Norwood annual dinner and awards. **Sarah Stewart** reports

The Young Norwood seventh annual awards dinner was held at the Hilton London Metropole hotel on 18 February, and recognised the talent of young professionals in the property industry today.

The event was preceded by a discussion between five of the most powerful women in property, who candidly shared the highs and lows of their property careers.

The panel was made up of Deirdre Foley, founder and CEO of D2 Private, Susan Freeman, real estate

group business development partner at Mishcon de Roy, Lynda Shillaw, head of real estate at Scottish Widows Investment Partnership, and Lisa Ronson, commercial director of Heron International.

Liz Peace, chief executive of the British Property Federation, led the discussion, which was designed, she joked, "to be more Graham Norton Show than Question Time".

Later on in the evening, the Young Norwood awards were presented by Property Week's acting editor, Mike Phillips (box, opposite). ■



Women on property

Liz Peace Let us start at the beginning, what made you go into property?

Deirdre Foley About 15 years ago I was working at GE Capital [as a chartered accountant] and met a guy called Derek Quinlan, and it developed from there. Being Irish, I like bricks and mortar. We like building up and selling on.

LP Lisa, your father famously drove around all of his petrol stations on a Saturday.

Lisa Ronson Yes, I was exposed to property and petrol stations through my father [Gerald Ronson, chief executive of Heron International] at a young age. I remember going on business trips to the States when I was 16.

I went to work at BZWI Investment Bank in London and New York, specialising in south-east Asian equity sales, covering financial institutions in the UK, Europe and America.

After eight years, I joined Heron International in 1999 as marketing director managing the leisure portfolio. Early on I really wanted independence first. I have always had other interests outside of property: designing and selling jewellery, being creative. [Lisa and her friend, Lucy Alexander, set up an online jewellery boutique, Joyell in 2004.]

LP What have been your worst moments during your careers?

Lynda Shillaw I wouldn't have got to where I am today without having bad experiences, but I am like the Duracell bunny. I get knocked down, I get up and I keep on running. I have worked hard to be credible.

The scarier moment for me was my encounter with "Middle England". The attitude is that they don't want anything built anywhere near them. I attended a planning meeting [as property director at BT] and had to have security.

I received hate mail, and there was a bonfire

in the Midlands with my face on it. In fact, up until recently, there was a YouTube video of my burning effigy. There isn't much you can do to scare me. I'm from Yorkshire and I don't scare easily, but that experience is up there.

Susan Freeman Things do go wrong, but the important thing to remember is that you can sort them out. My worst experience was early on when I was made a partner. I was confident I know how to register transactions of goods. I remember having to tell a client one day: "The good news is that we have bought the property. The bad news is that someone else has an option to buy it." That wasn't great.

LP Where do you predict growth in the market?

LS I think that there will be growth in residential,

especially within the private-leased sector.

LR High-end residential will see continued demand. There will always be foreign interest in London but I think people will start to expand their horizons to other locations, which could affect that. For London, high-end residential, quality and location will be key drivers.

DF Residential development around transport hubs will become a growth area because young people have a different view of the work-life balance. I think there will be regeneration around affordable accommodation in good locations.

LP Now, some of the panel are mothers [Peace and Freeman have two children and Shillaw has three] and one [Ronson] is soon to be a mother. Would you recommend a career in property to your children?

LS I sort of fell into it and have been in it for 20 years. What I would say is that a career in property presents a diverse array of career options.

LP But it isn't an easy industry to get into, is it?

LR Property is like any industry at the moment: it is difficult and there are not many jobs around. Internships and work placement schemes are great and we do operate them in my company. Not everyone is set up to go to college. There are other options out there.

LS Getting young people into property has a lot to do with raising the profile of the industry. Schools and colleges must work on raising awareness that it is an option.

SF The profile of the industry has to be raised. People think that property is a dinosaur industry – and that is why the industry misses out on securing colourful characters.

LP The property industry is very diverse. It is made up of different types of people and there are plenty of characters, even if they do happen to be male!





Power players
(from left): Foley,
Freeman, Rensson,
Shillow and Peace

Questions from the floor

Question Forty per cent of men admit that they don't buy their own clothes. Why is it that the design of shopping centres and retail units is not led by women?

LR Girls really need to be encouraged to get into that field.

LS You do find that women are leaders in architectural teams.

LP I do have a feeling that if women were more

involved in retail design, then shopping centres would be a much more pleasurable experiential

Question Is the high street dead? What can we do to revive it?

DF I do not think that the high street is dead. It will evolve and adapt, perhaps [residential will become a strategy] and people will move closer to retail schemes.

LR It will change. It will have to change.

LS I think that planners will have to change their attitude to development. I think that they will have to work really actively and with purpose to revive the high street. ■

View more pictures from the dinner and awards at

PropertyWeek.com

AND THE YOUNG NORWOOD PROPERTY AWARDS WINNERS WERE ...



Property professional of the year: Coline Thompson, head of leasing, Derwent London

Thompson played a pivotal role in Derwent London's 150,000 sq ft letting to Burberry in Page Street, Victoria, at ESM a year.

Property rising star, sponsored by Knight Frank: Jonathan Armst, chief operating officer, Capital A Finance

Armst left Investec Private Bank last year and co-founded a specialist real estate debt provider.



Property company of the year, sponsored by Investec Specialist Bank: Burlington Partners

David Silver and Adam Velleman set up Burlington Partners in February 2012, specialising in the central London market.



Agent of the year: Michael Davis, associate, Cushman & Wakefield

Davis is partner in the central London occupier team, and EMEA media and tech representative.

