WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Rob Manning welcomed members to the meeting, explaining that the Board had important decisions to make on the development and funding of the Knowledge Portal, and stressing the importance of consultation with Council. He also drew attention to the Chief Executive’s report, which was included in the papers.

CIBSE KNOWLEDGE PORTAL

Jacqueline Balian introduced the concept of the Portal, explaining its development following an initiative proposed by Brian Moss. Members faced many challenges in the industry, and the opportunities for the future involved new ways of working and new risks. The KP was designed to help members in tackling these opportunities, by supplying the information they needed when and where they needed it and at the speed they needed it. All CIBSE information would be available online, with full searching facilities to allow it to be accessed easily.

All CIBSE’s publications were included, including Guides and TMs, and there would also be links to other information including BSI and government. Members, particularly younger members, increasingly looked for online information, and there was a paramount need to disseminate CIBSE’s knowledge in a form that people could use easily. The KP would also be a great benefit to overseas members, who had previously been disadvantaged by postage costs and waiting times; the Portal would be immediately available to them.

Following the demonstration to Council, there would be further bug testing by small groups, before a larger user groups would be asked to use the Portal and to provide feedback. There would be a single sign-on for the Portal and the CIBSE Website, which would allow members access from wherever they were.

Jacqueline Balian then introduced Nick Peake and Anastasia Mylona, who demonstrated the operation of the Portal to Council.

Particular attention was drawn to the searching capabilities, which worked by publication search, by topic search and by browsing the publications catalogue.

Following the demonstration, Jacqueline Balian referred to the range of other publications that could be purchased through the Portal, and the opportunity to purchase hard copies of CIBSE publications as well as view and download PDFs.

Work was ongoing to provide manually created links, which would reflect connections that could not be generated automatically. Many more links would also be developed to government and planning information and other sources of information. Initial versions of publications on the KP would in time be archived, so that in the future users would be able to refer back to see what standards were in place at previous times.

Plans were also being developed to include directories of products and suppliers and to link these into the KP, which it was hoped would add further value.

Members welcomed the development and asked whether there would be an opportunity to provide input and a response to the information presented. Jacqueline Balian explained that the User Group would be asked to provide input not only on bugs, but on other options and possibilities that could be explored. The ability to provide feedback could be a possible development.
Regarding previous documents, which may not be in print but could still be of value, this could also be considered, although many publishers had exclusive agreements elsewhere which might prevent this.

It was pointed out that the Universities had much untapped information that was not generally available, and it was suggested that links could be incorporated to such materials.

Rob Manning then went on to give his view on the Portal, based on discussions with others including on overseas trips. The potential for UK and Ireland membership growth and CIBSE Services business was there, although there was a challenge because of the economic circumstances. There were however opportunities overseas, and to develop there it was important to be a credible rival, and a potential partner, with ASHRAE. The delivery of information delivery was vital, and regional and overseas relevance was needed. Some lessons might be learned from ASHRAE on the delivery of publications and research funding. The KP was a vital mechanism through which information could be delivered, particularly overseas, to move forward the Institution’s development, membership growth and influence.

Council then divided into breakout groups for hands on testing of the Knowledge Portal system.

Nick Mead then introduced the financial background to the Knowledge Portal. He drew attention to the development costs already incurred, which would of course continue in the future. The KP would also be likely to impact considerably on hard copy publication sales, which were a substantial source of income to the Institution. There was the option of a pay as you go system, but this was difficult to manage and it was felt that a better option would be to make the portal available to members as part of their membership subscription. This then also raised the question of whether it should be available to all grades, and whether it should be financed by percentage increase across all grades, or by a flat rate representing the fact that it was of equal value to different grades, but possibly with some variation to the flat rate for some grades.

Members discussed the implications, noting that the cost of publication development would continue, but the income from hard copy sales was likely to reduce dramatically. It was also noted that with an electronic format, people would expect more frequent updating.

It was noted that large companies were likely to continue to use TI, and members would not wish CIBSE to remove its information from that system. Regarding security, it had been felt that watermarking documents with the member’s name would be the best approach, given the ease with which security systems were hacked; this was to be reviewed however with more thought being given to other security options.

It was noted there would also be some royalty income from BSI for sales referred through CIBSE.

It was noted that there was further potential for the development and integration of directories, the first of which were being worked on this year. There was huge potential for future benefit.

Members asked about the level of cost increase involved, and the various possible approaches were described. It was suggested that an increase of the order of 10% would be acceptable given the benefits involved. Regarding the inclusion of grades, it was felt that all grades should be given access. There were differing views on the position for students, as to what increase if any should be considered. It was suggested that accredited CIBSE courses could incorporate the KP into their curriculum, with all students becoming student members of CIBSE, with some arrangement to meet the costs. Some members favoured making student membership free. It was noted that some students already had online access to CIBSE publications.

It was suggested that rather than tying subscription increases purely to the Portal, they could be justified in terms of the overall package of benefits, including the Portal, thus addressing possible concerns of those members who may not see a direct benefit from the Portal.
Members referred to the flexibility of the system, and the amount of relevant information communicated. Additional feedback from Council members would be welcomed, as there was a need to promote and market the Portal to members and more widely.

It was agreed that a flat rate approach, although with some variation between grades, was more appropriate than a standard percentage increase across all grades. There was support for an increase and for the approach of selling the subscription level in terms of the overall package, including the Portal. It was also noted that it was seen as a very positive selling point for membership, and that effective searching and cross referencing function would be a major advantage over the other products currently available.

Stephen Matthews referred to the team work involved in developing the Portal, and welcomed the input from all members. He went on to thank Rob Manning for his Chairmanship of Council during his year as President. Rob Manning expressed his thanks to Council for their support, and declared the meeting closed.