

MANIFESTO

2023



*Delivering a safe, innovative, resilient
and globally competitive built
environment sector in the Midlands.*

Foreword CEO

Following the launch of ACE's three-year Blueprint and publication our UK Manifesto, I am pleased to introduce ACE's Manifesto for the Midlands, outlining the Built Environment sector's policy aspirations for 2023 and beyond.

The region is home to some of the most talented and innovative engineers and consultants in the UK, and we are committed to harnessing their expertise and ingenuity to drive progress and deliver real benefits to communities.

The Midlands has a rich history of engineering excellence, and we are determined to build on this legacy and continue to push the boundaries of what is possible. Our manifesto sets out the essential elements of a competitive business environment for achieving this, with a focus on promoting innovation, collaboration, and sustainability in everything we do.

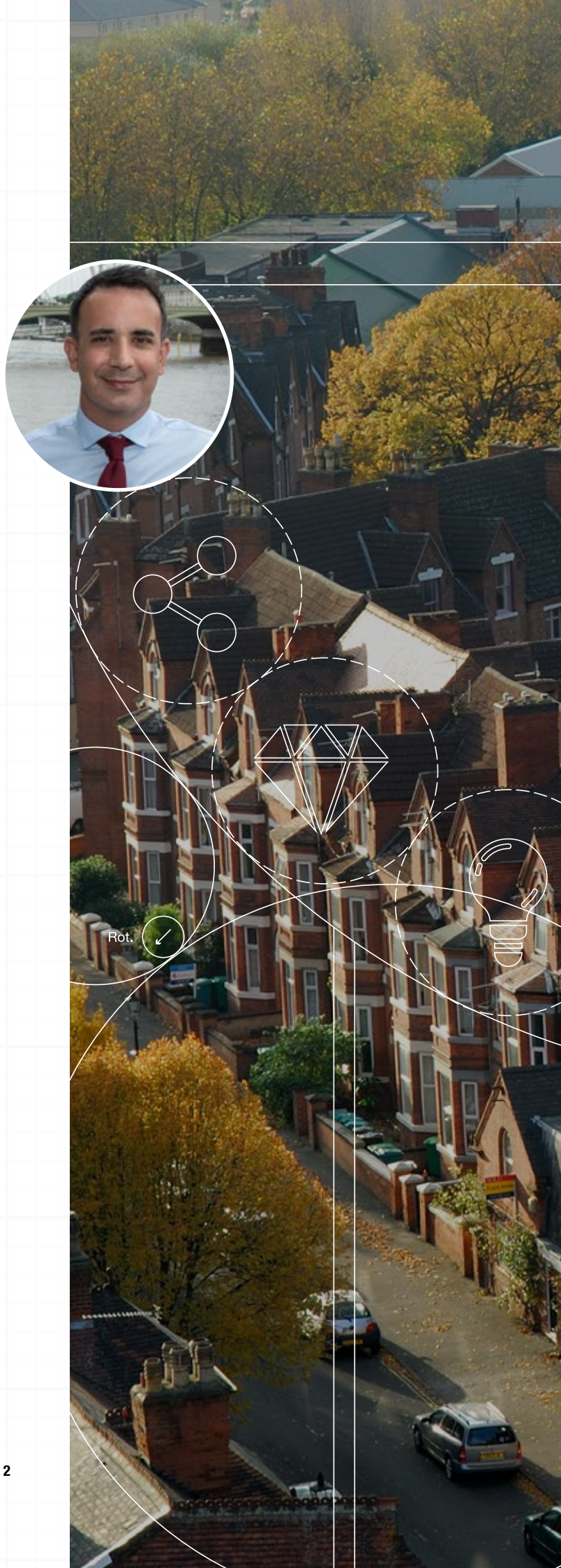
We understand that our industry faces a range of challenges, from the need to transition to a low-carbon economy to the ongoing demand for skilled professionals. That is why our manifesto suggests practical and proactive solutions that will help us navigate these challenges and emerge stronger and more resilient as a sector than ever before. From investing in our workforce to nurturing closer partnerships with clients and other stakeholders, we are committed to building a sector that is fit for the future.

As the business association for the built environment sector, we will continue to champion the impact of our members' work and ensure all political voices understand that our sector is central to unlocking economic growth, creating jobs, and nurturing opportunity for all no matter where they live.

ACE Midlands looks forward to working with you to make this happen.



Stephen Marcos Jones
CEO



Foreword ACE Chair



As Chair of the ACE Midlands committee, I am proud to represent a region that is at the forefront of the built environment sector in the UK. The Midlands has a rich history of engineering excellence, and our committee is made up of individuals who are dedicated to building on this legacy and creating a better future for all.

Our work in 2023 is focused on leveraging the latest technologies and approaches to deliver projects more effectively, while also ensuring that we remain true to our core values of sustainability, innovation, and social responsibility. Whether it's developing new transport links to connect communities, building state-of-the-art healthcare facilities, or designing cutting-edge industrial and commercial facilities, our work is making a real difference in people's lives.

We are also acutely aware of the challenges facing our industry, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. That's why we are working closely with clients and other stakeholders to strengthen the pipeline of projects and raise awareness of the many opportunities that exist in our sector. We believe that by working together and sharing our expertise and experience, we can overcome these challenges and create a stronger, more resilient industry for the future.

This manifesto represents a vital roadmap for the future of our industry, and I am honoured to be part of a committee that is dedicated to its delivery. We look forward to working with all of our key stakeholders, including clients, policymakers, and other industry bodies, to turn this vision into a reality. Together, we can build a better future for the Midlands and for the UK as a whole.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ruth Jeffs". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Ruth Jeffs
Chair, ACE Midlands

Introduction

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) champions infrastructure and the built environment to government, industry and other stakeholders.

Our members employ over 60,000 in UK and 250,000 worldwide, contributing more than £15 billion to the UK economy. However, the buildings and structures they deliver actively contribute over £570 billion a year of GVA. Our members operate right across the Midlands and contribute significantly to the region's economy.

Our **2023 Midlands Manifesto** provides a foundation for working with Combined Authorities in the Region, and others for ACE to deliver a safe, innovative, resilient and globally competitive built environment sector on behalf of its members – against a backdrop of economic uncertainty.

Whether building a diverse and inclusive workforce, delivering social value, improving procurement practices, rethinking risk, or encouraging new technology and innovation, this Manifesto provides realistic recommendations and an overarching ambition for greater collaboration to achieve these goals.

These are increasingly turbulent political and economic times, yet all recent administrations have committed to supporting infrastructure delivery. This Manifesto provides a basis for the current and future administration to support the sector in unlocking the potential in transport, energy, flood resilience, water, waste, and digital networks.

Innovation, people, and social value

If we are to grow and transition our economy, innovation will play a critical part in making that happen. However, the current reality is of a fragmented and inconsistent approach to innovation, increasing challenges over IP, cost, awareness and adoption. We must also recognise that the international market poses both an opportunity and a risk to the sector right across the Midlands.

Our manifesto recommendations aim to drive best practice in innovation and ensure that the Combined Authorities in the region play an active role in creating the conditions to support the sector to be a strong player in an internationally competitive marketplace.





The built environment is not alone with challenges around **people and skills**. We know of the recruitment and retention challenges, the lack of sector-specific data, and inconsistent workplace cultures. Recommendations from across our advocacy groups are aimed at ensuring government can support the delivery of a reliable and diverse talent pool to serve both the immediate and future needs of our industry.

At the heart of all our members' projects is the positive impact it has on local communities in all parts of the region. We also know that **social value** can be an ambiguous concept – difficult to measure, and there continues to be low community engagement in too many areas.

At this current moment in time, many public and private procurement opportunities are focused on price rather than value. Our members in the Midlands have supported the development of practical solutions as part of this Manifesto, agreeing to develop a set of metrics, language and approaches which will deliver social value.

Finally, to deliver any project, **excellence** and **risk** need to be carefully considered as part of the procurement process. In practice, quality tends to be measured by cost rather than value.

It is also difficult for new companies to attain recognition on the project frameworks of major clients, and the perception of risk has not evolved with the current industry reality – leading to a disproportionate burden on companies. Some of the practical solutions outlined in this Manifesto will ensure continuous quality improvements across the supply chain, support procurement activities, and promote a competitive market.

Recommendations in this Manifesto have been formulated following discussions at the ACE Midlands Committee. The Committee feeds into the delivery of ACE's three-year Blueprint and ACE will be working with Combined Authorities in the region and other policymakers to make the ambitions in this Manifesto a reality. In a noisy policymaking and political space, it will ensure we have a distinct voice in debates around Net Zero, regional development and regional growth, and skills.



People

A reliable and diverse talent pool to serve the future needs of our industry.



Social value

A common language and approach to delivering social value across the sector which understands and meets the needs of communities.



Excellence

Continuous quality improvement across the supply chain supporting procurement activities and promoting a competitive market.



Risk

A transparent, fair and proportionate appraisal of risk that supports and drives the use and uptake of standard tools.



Innovation

The right conditions to support the UK sector to be a stronger player in an internationally competitive market for new technology.



Association

A relevant, resilient and sustainable business association dedicated to serving its members regionally, nationally and internationally.

Blueprint (2022-2025)

[Click here to view the ACE's Blueprint.](#)





Innovation

Current reality

- A fragmented and inconsistent approach to innovation
- Challenges over IP, cost, awareness and adoption.
- International market a risk.

2025 Ambition

The right conditions to support the sector to be a stronger player in an internationally competitive market for new technology.

Challenge

The industry has demonstrated great examples of innovation in the midlands, but due to resources constraints, not much of it not being scaled up. Our clients are telling us that the additional cost of innovative solutions can be a barrier to rolling these out.

Recommendation 1: Seek clarity from government on project pipeline, with published timescales for project implementation.

Recommendation 2: Work with government agencies and the ONS to develop a measurement of placemaking and its link to productivity of a community and/or contribution to GDP.



Excellence

Current reality

- Quality measurement tends to be eclipsed by cost rather than value.
- Difficult for new companies to attain recognition on project frameworks of major clients.

2025 Ambition

Continuous quality improvement across the supply chain supporting procurement activities and promoting a competitive market.

Challenge

Our industry champions excellence, but with the focus still in many parts being on lowering costs, it is challenging to deliver this excellence. ACE is uniquely placed to showcase what excellence looks like and build an industry wide approach. There is a challenge to change perceptions of excellence in the industry and designers within central government and combined authorities.

Recommendation 1: Work with combined authorities to secure greater investment in R&D as part of the levelling up agenda.

Recommendation 2: Work with government agencies and the ONS to develop a measurement of placemaking and its link to productivity of a community and/or contribution to GDP.

Recommendation 3: That procurement opportunities can limit excellence due to the way tenders are structured.

Recommendation 4: Develop a series of exemplar net zero projects across sectors and to champion excellence with members and clients.



Social Value

Current reality

- Social value is an ambiguous concept, and difficult to measure.
- Low community engagement continues.
- Focus still on price vs. value.

2025 Ambition

An agreed set of metrics, language, and approaches to delivering social value across the sector.

Challenge

Social value is increasingly important to our clients in the region. Social value exists on many frameworks in the Midlands, with a series of charities to work with. The industry has stated that here's an increasing need for dedicated focus within organisations in the supply chain, such as social value leads.

Recommendation 1: Agree a Social Value charter with the combined authorities, aimed at supporting the sector and other industries.

Recommendation 2: Champion best practice in social value with regional and local government





People

Current reality

- Severe challenges in recruitment and retention.
- A lack of sector-specific data.
- Inconsistent workplace cultures.

2025 Ambition

A reliable and diverse talent pool to serve the future needs of our industry.

Challenge

Ongoing uncertainty about large and global projects are having an impact on recruiting staff in the region. That salary inflation is impacting regional companies, particularly SMEs. Companies in the sector stand ready to support others in the supply chain with meeting their diversity objectives.

Recommendation 1: Leverage insight gained from ACE's ED&I campaign to champion diversity in the sector.

Recommendation 2: Encourage the government to ensure that successful levelling up bids are focused on driving up skills in left behind places, boosting opportunities for the sector.

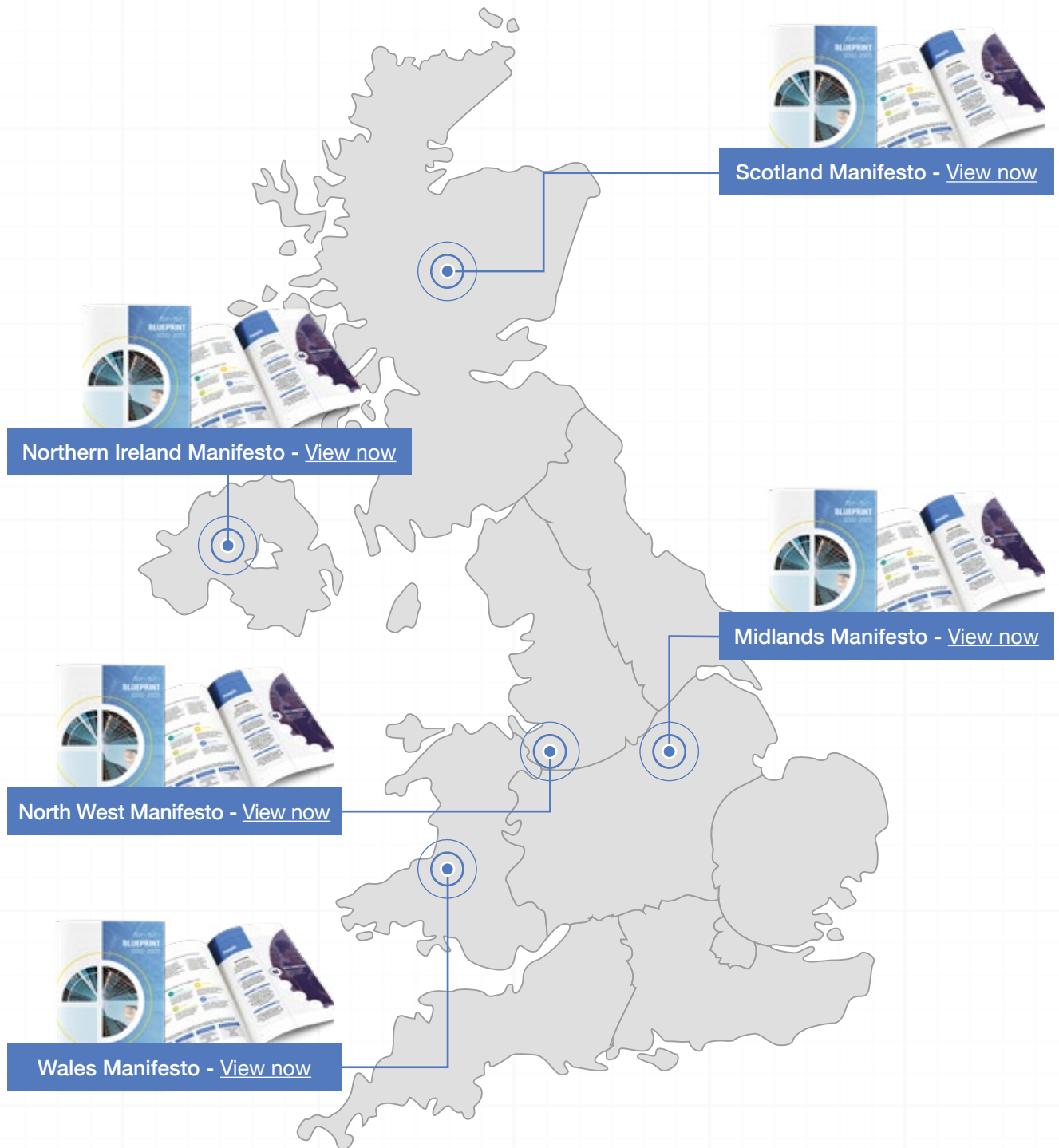
Recommendation 2: Ensure that project outputs from National Infrastructure Bank activity are linked into increases into regional skills. This will be crucial for the Bank in achieving its goals and maximising its impact.

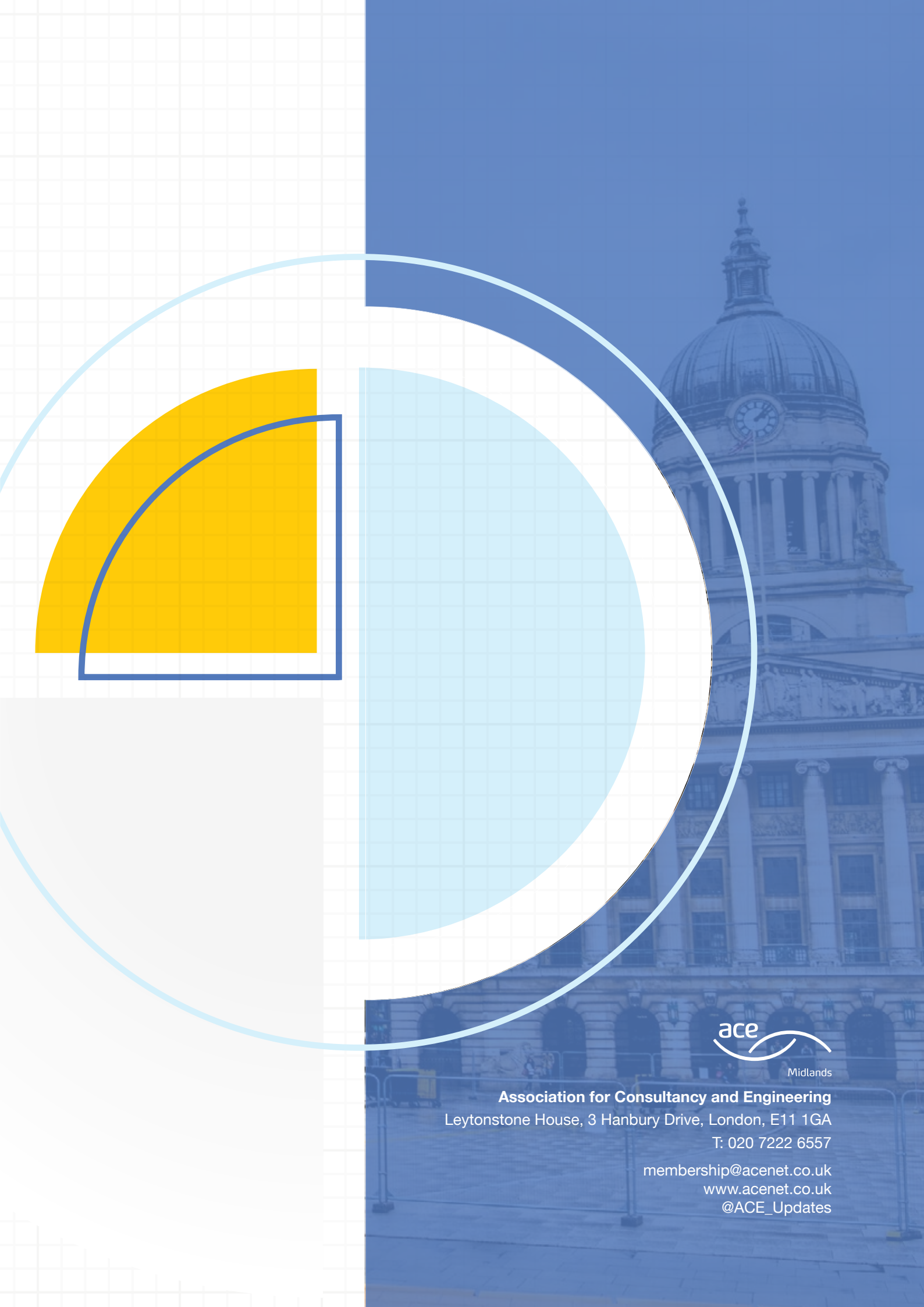


ACE Policy

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering (ACE) is a UK professional organisation that advocates for the interests of consulting and engineering companies. As part of its advocacy efforts, the ACE has published a series of manifestos across the UK that promote the importance of investing in infrastructure to improve the economy.

These manifestos typically include recommendations for policymakers and analysis of trends and challenges in the infrastructure sector. To coincide with this manifesto, ACE has published a [UK-wide manifesto](#).





Midlands

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