

# Imagining how Irish construction can build on the new possibilities ahead

Creative energy was in the air at the recent CIF Southern Construction Summit at Páirc Uí Chaoimh in Cork, with discussions on developing technology, the prospects of green energy and the use of data to help solve the housing crisis. **Quinton O'Reilly reports**

A lot can change in a year, and this observation was more accurate than ever for the Construction Industry Federation of Ireland's (CIF) Southern Construction Summit and Exhibition 2022.

Páirc Uí Chaoimh, the home of Cork GAA, became the home of the best and brightest in the industry earlier this month on September 8, with a much-expanded format to reflect the growing diversity in the sector.

The summit and exhibition spanned two floors with exhibitors, companies and speakers all showcasing the depth of the sector, including digitalisation, financial services, training and virtual reality experiences.

Leading companies from across the industry showcased their technologies and findings in the morning's demonstration stage, ranging from 360-degree reality capture to the Build Digital Project.

The diversity didn't end there with participants and visitors ranging from those with 40+ years of experience in the field to secondary school students exploring what's on offer.

There was a creative energy in the air and was something the chair of the summit, broadcaster Jonathan Healy, commented on in his opening remarks.

"What blew me away was the amount of talent and ability in this indigenous sector, which is something to behold," he said. "The range of companies on display from hemp concrete blocks to incredible technologies developed by Irish companies."

The construction industry has seen no shortage of challenges thrown at it. Yet, as many speakers mentioned throughout the afternoon, the industry overcame challenges in the past and will continue to do so going forward.

Welcoming those attending was Ger O'Leary, the chairman of CIF's Cork branch, who praised the industry for showing the future of the industry as well as the industry's robust ecosystem.

"We possess a unique skill set in planning, design, and construction for building and maintaining world-class facilities for pharma, life sciences, energy and other sectors," he said. "It's excellent for us all to see the modern-day construction industry that's

on its way." Michael McGrath TD, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, who took time out of his busy schedule to attend the event. Spending significant time at the venue, he was an hour and a half exploring the exhibition and visited the many stands and companies showcasing there.

In his address, he provided a wide-ranging overview of what projects and plans the government has in the works. He mentioned the government's commitment to the industry in collaborating on major objectives like housing, the National Development Plan, delivering critical infrastructure and the climate action plan.

This tied in with the first panel analysing the housing output in Cork city and county, involved Conor O'Connell, director of housing for CIF, Parag Joglekar, head of development at Respond, Stephen McCarthy, director at Astra Construction and Michael O'Flynn, managing director at O'Flynn Construction.

Previous years' complications had significantly impacted the sector, yet few are shying away from the challenge.

"To be a builder, you have to be a risk taker and you have to be a positive person, otherwise you wouldn't survive a week in it," said Stephen McCarthy. "Whether we like it or not, house building is a high-risk business so we have to be positive and stick at it."

"In relative terms, the market is strong. A lot of these challenges are outside our control but as a group and industry, we've proven time and time again that we do overcome challenges."

Michael O'Flynn added that to be a positive person, you have to "also be a realistic person and one thing we're not going to fix unless we face up to some of the challenges [like planning]."

Three talks followed, concerning key construction projects in the region, including medicine, transport and capital portfolios.

The first was on sustainable growth to meet patient needs delivered by Stephen Griffin, director of facilities at Boston Scientific Cork, who highlighted the growing developments of its Cork campus and making it more sustainable, including electrifying its head loads by 2026.

Joe Seymour, head of active travel and public transport investment at the National Transport Authority, spoke about enhancing Ireland's sustainable transport net-



Kelly Gartland, marketing manager UK & Ireland, Etage Fixings Ireland; Tamas Borodi, regional manager, OpenSpace; Elizabeth Price, sales manager, OpenSpace; Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; David Purdon, technical director, Autodesk Division, Diatec Group; Clare Cashin, construction law partner, Philip Lee; Ger O'Leary, chairman, Construction Industry Federation of Ireland, Cork Branch, and Simon Crowhen, sales manager, Topcon Positioning Ireland

Pictures: Maura Hickey



Stephen McCarthy, director, Astra Construction; Parag Joglekar, head of development, Respond; Michael O'Flynn, managing director, O'Flynn Construction, and Conor O'Connell, director of housing, Construction Industry Federation of Ireland



Fearghal Reidy, director of service, Cork City Council; Clare Cashin, construction law partner, Philip Lee; Dave Coakley, director, Coakley O'Neill Town Planning and Michael Lynch, director of strategic and economic development, Cork County Council



Jonathan Reinhardt, senior technical consultant, Diatec; Jim Barrett, sales director, Diatec; Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform and Ger O'Leary, chairman, Construction Industry Federation of Ireland (CIF) Cork Branch



Tom Parlon, director general, Construction Industry Federation; Michael McGrath TD, Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform; Liz Carroll, network manager, Construction Professionals Skillnet and Ger O'Leary, chairman, Construction Industry Federation of Ireland (CIF) Cork Branch

works through projects like BusConnects, and the opportunities there are for the construction industry.

"The main message is there's a lot of investment secured for contractors in this area, and we want you to be bidding for this work to deliver it because it will transform where we live," he said.

The last talk before the break focused on transforming how capital portfolios are delivered with Noel Crowley, director of Project Delivery GES, MSD, who said that the journey isn't about squeezing cost or profit but delivering value.

"We need you to be part of that journey, to collaborate and work with us, to identify and share what you've done with clients," he said. "It's a relationship; it's about collaboration."

## Developing opportunities

After the break, discussions concerned opportunities in the global energy transition, beginning with a panel session on building a sustainable future for the region.

Contributors included David Purdon, technical director of Autodesk Division at Diatec Group, Ronan Murphy, construction manager at Amarenco, Barry McDermott, director of sustainability at PM Group, and Dr Mary Moloney, lecturer and researcher at MTU.

When asked about how to avoid past mistakes, Moloney mentioned how much of it comes down to data, its availability and how it is used.

"We peaked at 70,000 houses [built in a year]; people forget that, so the

question is where they were being used, what was the investment they attracted," she said. "We have to start with the housing system, rezone the land, see what needs to be serviced, so it's the interconnectedness and joint-up thinking of all of the bodies of what we want to deliver next."

Purdon added: "The fundamental thing is you need to understand the data, not only that but use the data in a multitude of different ways. We've seen examples [in the expo] of VR, AR, but the reality is that's an important visual point. That's our industry and marketplace in the next ten to fifteen years."

Following this were two spotlight sessions on renew-



Catherine Sheridan, chief operations officer, EI22 presenting at the summit

ables. The first saw Eamon Judge, senior director of global engineering for Eli Lilly talk about its flagship solar panel project in the region. While solar is dependent upon weather conditions – a day in June will produce significantly more than in December – the benefits were clear with 6.3GWh (Gigawatt hours) produced from that site that very morning.

Judge said the flexibility to export surplus power will be crucial in Ireland's zero carbon efforts. So too will offshore wind and hydrogen, as discussed by Catherine Sheridan, chief operations officer of EI22.

Ireland has significant potential to be an exporter of renewable energy to the rest of Europe – it could generate up to 70GWh of offshore energy and 10GWh onshore, eight times more than the island of Ireland needs – but faces a broken energy system which relies too heavily on fossil fuels.

"The great news is Ireland's energy can play a crucial role in net zero 2050," Sheridan said. "We tend to think of Ireland as the landmass that we have, but we also have a tremendous amount of our country that's out in the sea."

Later, David Skene, procurement lead of capital delivery programmes at the Department of Education, addressed school building programmes before leading to the final panel discussion on how best to collaborate to advance policy and investment in regional infrastructure.

Taking part in this discussion were Clare Cashin, construction law partner at Philip Lee, Fearghal Reidy, director of service at Cork City Council, Dave Coakley, director at Coakley O'Neill Town Planning, and Michael Lynch, director of strategic and economic development at Cork County Council.

Cashin mentioned that one of the more obvious opportunities to improve things is to use the correct procurement processes and contractual options suitable to the project.

"This is not trying to generate something new; all of these processes exist," she said. "Both industry and government need to consider the processes that are there. Simple things like sitting down and ensuring the scope is developed."

"Once you start digging a hole, it's expensive to fill it, so to sit down beforehand and ensure that the scope is developed, it's correctly evaluated, what your team is, the evaluation of weighting and performance so it's not just price-focused. It's to develop those policies and use the procedures that are there appropriately."

Overall, there is optimism for the region and with numerous projects in the works and with the right choices, the future is bright.

"There's a phenomenal amount of money earmarked for the southern region," said Cashin. "A huge amount of investment, there are good government plans and with realism and pragmatic planning, it's a rosy picture."

The closing remarks on a packed summit came from Frank Kelly, president of CIF, who reflected on where the industry was twelve months ago and what it's facing now.

"Having arrived early this morning and walked through the expo, it demonstrated how much the industry is evolving," he said. "Sustainable materials are being used and it was heartening to see the number of second-level students here."

"And we need to build and develop on the message of how viable our sector is... with the right investment in the right place at the right time, we can plan for what is in front of us and develop the industry."

## The CIF Southern Construct Expo

For the first time in its history, the CIF Southern Construction Summit hosted its very first Expo. Featuring more than 40 companies across the industry over two floors, it showcased the best of the modern construction industry, with products and services from across the sector on display.

Those attending also got to experience live demonstrations, presentations, and interactive exhibits from the following companies and organisations: Bath Fitter, Build Digital Project, Circle Voluntary Housing Association (VHA), Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Construction Professionals Skillnet, Construction – Official Magazine of the Construction Industry Federation (CIF), Contech Specialist Building Products, Cork Education and Training Board, Cygnus Building Offsite, Diatec Group, Enterprise Ireland, Etage Fixings Ireland, Evercam, Future Cast, Grant Engineering, Halt NFR, Hempbuild, Hitechniques, Home Building Finance Ireland (HBFi), Industry Training Services (ITS), Initiative Ireland, Irish Water, KORE Insulation, Korec Group, Levelling Equipment Services, Lighthouse Construction Industry Charity, Limerick 2030, Masonry Fixings, Molloy (Precast) Environmental Systems, OpenSpace, Philip Lee, Portwest, Randox Testing Services, Respond Housing Association, Survey Instrument Services (SIS), Tier3Tech, Topcon Positioning Ireland, Trimble, Ward Personnel, Waterford and Wexford ETB and Xiratherm.



Seamus Costello, technical sales specialist, Topcon Positioning Ireland; Jonathan Argue, technical sales specialist, Topcon Positioning Ireland; Simon Crowhen, sales manager, Topcon Positioning Ireland; Craig England, technical support specialist, Topcon Positioning Ireland



Students, apprentices and team members from Cork Education and Training Board with Tom Parlon, director general, CIF (centre) showcasing brick and stonelaying skills