Commercial Property Writer

Megan Kelly, *Construction News*

With just six months of professional experience under her belt, Megan has quickly established herself as an outstanding reporter with a keen nose for news as well as the ability to step back and analyse the impact of events. She writes about the commercial property sector that is part of her beat with insight and assurance well beyond her years.

The first of the three articles submitted for this award demonstrates her ability to write a persuasive call for action. Writing for the opinion section of *Construction News*, she deftly draws together external sources to create a compelling argument, setting out both the moral and businesses cases for improving the energy efficiency of commercial properties.

The second article showcases Megan's talent for storytelling, in which her account of resurfacing work at the Silverstone circuit takes on a flavour of the urgency of a high-speed race. The story also demonstrates her ability to draw out a story from on-site, face-to-face interviews, and to weave both the technical and business challenges she explores into a satisfying narrative.

Finally, Megan's comment article about the prospects for the Irish construction sector demonstrates her ability to add value and drive readers towards existing content, to the benefit of the brand, by spotting and explaining the trends that link together individual news stories. She uses the insights she has assembled as the foundation for some modest but useful forecasting.

Megan deserved recognition for the quality of work she has produced, which goes well beyond expectations for any journalist so new to the job and the sector.

CN Construction News

Commercial's climate crisis – here it comes, ready or not

30 JUL, 2019 | BY MEGAN KELLY

With all the anxiety-inducing, impending-doom warnings about the climate crisis, it may be tempting to cover our eyes and ears, and just try to live out the remainder of our days in ignorant bliss.

But if we block out the noise and shut ourselves off as an industry, we're going to be left behind.

And the commercial sector specifically could be in for a shock if it doesn't pay heed to new warnings.

Separate research by both the Urban Land Institute and Northumbria University predicts that commercial buildings could be a casualty of climate change if problems aren't rectified now.

Northumbria real estate professors Kevin Muldoon-Smith and Paul Michael Greenhalgh

recently published a report stressing the importance of retrofitting existing buildings to make them more energy efficient.

Their research suggests that around 10 per cent of all residential property in England and Wales, worth £570bn, does not meet the minimum standards required to be deemed energy efficient.

About 18 per cent of commercial buildings, worth £157bn, are in the same boat.

If these buildings are not renovated now, they will be rendered 'obsolete' by new net-zero policies, and decrease in worth as they become less appealing to companies that wish to rent or buy them and to insurance firms who may not be able to provide cover for them.

Essentially, this means that it will cost owners and developers more in the long run to leave these buildings as they are than to retrofit them now.

Looking ahead to new-builds, the Urban Land Institute has highlighted that investors and insurance companies may back away from the sector if new developments do not include climate-risk planning, such as flood defences and ensuring buildings do not have glass

cladding that can overheat as temperatures rise.

And the consultant's research also pointed out that entire metropolitan areas of the UK could become worthless in terms of development value and opportunities, due to hazards such as flooding, drought and overheating.

However, it's not all doom and gloom, as long as we take action now.

Existing builds can be retrofitted to reduce their carbon output by removing gas boilers and replacing them with renewable energy, adding environmentally friendly insulation and making the grids and electric green by using low carbon or nuclear sources.

New-builds are even easier to make carbon neutral, by ensuring plans for developments include heat pumps, solar panels, and lots and lots of trees (the Committee on Climate Change has now stated that the UK needs to plant 30,000 ha every year until 2050).

As these reports show, contractors are going to be affected by the climate emergency, whether they want to hear it or not.

So, isn't it time we did something about it?

CN Construction News

Lights out and away as Tarmac races to resurface Silverstone

09 JUL, 2019 | BY MEGAN KELLY

Ahead of this weekend's British Formula 1 Grand Prix, *Construction News* reporter Megan Kelly visits the iconic Silverstone circuit to hear how the contractor beat the clock to lay a new track

As every motorsports fan knows, speed and accuracy are essential ingredients for success.

And the same is true for Tarmac – the contractor had less than three months to resurface the Silverstone racetrack in time for this year's Formula 1 British Grand Prix.

Following the cancellation of MotoGP at the track last August due to surface-drainage problems, organisers set out to ensure no issues hampered proceedings at this weekend's meeting.

After winning the work in April, Tarmac, along with track designer Dromo, had a small window of time in which to

plan, prepare and complete the work for track testing in early July ahead of the race this weekend.

Wet weather

Dromo project manager Jarno Zaffelli says because they had planned for weather limitations, the project managed to stay on schedule amid an especially rainy month, despite some delays in laying down the track.

“In the original plan we allocated four days of bad weather to allow for delays so that we would finished by the 21st [June]. Before we even started paving, we’d had two [wet days],” he says. “The most difficult part was actually planning and trying to get the measurements right before we laid anything down.”

Mr Zaffelli explains that the 25-year-old surface had to be completely lifted and all bumps eradicated before laying the new surface at the exact same level as before. This meant working to a standard deviation of just 2.5 mm.

Mr Zaffelli mapped out the whole circuit using technology that displayed the topography like a heat map, with patches of green to indicate where the surface needed to be raised; red to show where it should be lowered; and white to display where the track was at its original level.

Meticulous planning was needed to achieve a 4 per cent increase in the speed of water drainage from the surface.

“Once you pull up the track, it will never be the same,” says Mr Zaffelli, “so you’d better make sure you’re doing it right the first time.

“We [used] three Wirtgen autonomous driving [rollers] overnight and in every kind of weather to try to [deliver] the design of the track.

“It was difficult to translate the design because this is something that contractors aren’t used to doing, as its more of an engineering approach.”

Three-hour turnaround

The biggest race was to get asphalt to the Northamptonshire circuit in time from two Tarmac sites, one in Radlett, Hertfordshire, and the other in Elstow, Bedfordshire – both of which are about an hour-and-a-half’s drive away.

“The shelf life of asphalt is about three hours after mixing,” explains Tarmac regional technical manager Tim Smith.

“Because it’s a very high-performance material, as it cools down it hardens, which means we wouldn’t be able to compact it properly [if there was a delay] and it would cause differences in the surface of the track.

“Considering that we have to mix it on the plant, load it into lorries, check it before it leaves the plant, get it here, get it in position on site and then lay it all within three hours, it’s quite a challenge.”

> “Once you pull up the track, it will never be the same, so you’d better make sure you’re doing it right the first time"
>
> Jarno Zaffelli, Dromo

Mr Smith says a team was set up on site specifically to coordinate the transport of asphalt to the circuit.

“We relied heavily on our logistics team who have been researching and looking at Google traffic data constantly, so that if there was a delay or accident on the M1, we would have four other routes planned to get the material here on time,” he adds.

If the asphalt exceeded the three-hour time limit due to traffic delays, Mr Smith says the team had a policy to “dump it”.

But all unused materials, and even the materials from the old surface of the track, have been reheated with new bitumen and recycled for use elsewhere at the Silverstone site.

And, according to Mr Smith, there have even been talks with Highways England about using the old Silverstone track surface on public motorways.

Now, with the work completed, Silverstone is gearing up for Formula 1 season, perhaps with a dash of trepidation since the real test is to come, when the eyes of the world will be watching.

CN Construction News

Ireland eyes exports to avoid boom-and-bust

12 JUN, 2019 | BY MEGAN KELLY

It's no industry secret that the Irish construction market is booming.

Dublin has been taken over by the construction of data centres and the development of hotels and offices and development is on the up across the country.

The likes of Mace and Sisk have been building bases for global firms such as Google, Facebook and AirBnB in previous years, and have driven the construction boom which saw Ireland's largest 50 contractors secure €8.4bn in revenue for 2018.

However, a boom is usually followed with a bust, and more than ten years after the Irish recession, there is natural concern about overheating.

While Irish firms are continuing to experience growth and confidence in the sector is returning, forecasts by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in May predicted a slowdown, despite an expected 3.9 per cent growth this year and 3.3 per cent next year.

Possibly catastrophic results from a "disorderly" Brexit were also a risk-factor identified by the OECD that could plunge the Irish economy back into a recession.

The forecasts identified the property sector as the main risk factor in inducing another nationwide bust, due to rising residential and commercial prices.

There may be a solution, though.

According to the Construction Industry Federation, the way to prevent another boom-and-bust cycle in Ireland is to increase the exports of Irish construction businesses to the UK.

Shane Dempsey of the CIF explained that construction exports helped the Irish construction industry during the last recession. When the industry dropped from nearly 20 per cent GDP to 2 per cent, 165,000 people lost their jobs and around 100,000 construction workers emigrated, but construction exports increased five-fold.

Mr Dempsey said: “The lesson is well learned by the Irish industry, that diversifying into other export markets is sensible and builds resilience.”

The CIF highlighted the UK as a target for Irish construction companies looking to find more stable work and suggested making the most of contacts and clients with “global networks of corporations” such as Facebook and Amazon.

However, the reputations of contractors in both Ireland and the UK are under the spotlight, from the recent problems and delays with Crossrail and the collapse of Carillion in the UK, to the controversy surrounding Bam Ireland’s planned National Children’s Hospital in Dublin where costs have almost doubled.

Exporting construction work may be plausible as a preventative measure to a market crash on paper, and companies like John Sisk & Son are an example of a contractor with healthy pipelines in both markets.

But the prospect of economic turbulence and a push to export construction work could exacerbate Ireland's current struggles to recruit skilled workers to the construction industry.

The Irish government and construction industry must now apply lessons from the booms-and-busts of the past to build a sustainable future.