Minister announces sites for 450 social housing units

The Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, Simon Coveney TD, announced last Thursday (21 July) that sites had been approved for over 450 social housing units. These units will have a cost of approximately €100m and will be delivered under the public private partnership (PPP) programme. This is a part of the Ministers new Action Plan for Housing and Homelessness. The local authorities in the areas concerned will work with builders to supply these housing units.

Three of the approved sites are in Cork; there is one each in Clare, Galway, Kildare, Roscommon and Waterford. The sites will be located at:

- Ballyburke, Galway City (73 units);
- Butterstream, Clane, Co. Kildare (80 units);
- Oakwood, Macroom, Co. Cork (50–60 units);
- Poundhill, Skibbereen, Co. Cork (50 units);
- Shannon East, Co. Clare (50–60 units);
- Sliveokeale, Waterford City (50 units);
- The Miles, Clonakilty, Co. Cork (50 units); and
- The Walk, Roscommon Town, Co. Roscommon (53 units).

The PPP programme has been allocated €300m in total to deliver 1,500 social housing units. This will be rolled out in three lots, to ensure the speedy development of these sites. The first lot of sites were announced for the Dublin region late last year. The sites approved last week make up the second bundle. Before the end of 2016, the Minister will announce the location of the next bundle of development sites, to the value of the remaining €100m.

Central Bank’s Quinn Inquiry under way

The Central Bank’s preliminary hearings regarding the suspected breaches of insurance regulation by former executives of Quinn Insurance are now under way. The Inquiry will seek to establish whether the two named ex-executives took part in “suspected prescribed contravention”.

This inquiry was initiated under the Central Bank Act 1942 (P.III s.C). All hearings will be conducted in private.

In 2010, the Central Bank placed Quinn Insurance Ltd, an arm of the Quinn Group, under administration, due to an €800m shortfall in its reserves. Upon investigating the Insurance company while under administration, a report found that there were “reasonable grounds” to suspect that “certain persons who were concerned in the management of Quinn Insurance participated in the commission of a suspected prescribed contravention” of EU non-life insurance regulations.

If the hearings find against the two businessmen, they could face fines of up to €500,000.

The two former executives launched judicial review proceedings in March 2015, in an attempt to stop the inquiry. A motion to add new grounds to their claim was also heard in the High Court last Tuesday.
The new system of penalty points has led to a spike in the number of drivers taken off the road. Two years ago, it was decided that the penalty points awarded for speeding should be increased from two to three. A maximum of 12 penalty points in a three-year period can lead to a driving ban. This means that, if caught speeding four times within a three-year period, drivers can be taken off the road.

Since the introduction of the three-point penalty for speeding, the number of banned drivers has almost tripled. In 2014, 233 drivers accrued twelve or more penalty points. This year (2016), 640 drivers have passed the 12-point mark.

Road Safety Authority (RSA) figures show that some 75.26% of all penalty point notices served, up until last May, were issued for speeding offences (575,000 out of 764,000).

The RSA are currently working on the possibility of including a register of banned drivers in their website, and are currently working with the Courts Service, the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner and the Department of Transport on developing and delivering this.

Ibec and CBI call for investment in Ireland’s “backbone” — infrastructure

Ibec and CBI, in a report entitled “Connected: A prosperous island of 10 million people”, have laid out an investment plan which would target the whole island of Ireland. The plan examines the All-Ireland transport network, and suggests investment opportunities that will benefit both North and South. With the population of both areas on the increase, the business groups call for immediate investment that “support exports, job creation and business development”.

In the wake of Brexit, as an island, we are faced with great new problems, and we must address them with policy changes that will mitigate the risk to cross-border all-island travel and transport, according to the report.

The priorities of the groups, as set out in the report are:

- A major upgrade of the island’s road network: The road network will remain the most important means of connecting key urban centres.
- A proposal mapping the completed Network: So that 85% of the island’s population live within 10km of their nearest inter-urban route.
- Planning for this Network to start now: So contracting and construction can get underway at the end of this decade.
- The immediate priorities to include: completing routes already in development such as A5 and A6 upgrades to Derry/ Londonderry and the entire north west and the M1/A1 Sprucefield bypass to better link Dublin and Belfast and major upgrades to the N20 from Cork to Limerick; the capacity of the M50; the N15 linking Letterkenny to Sligo and the A5 route extension to Letterkenny.
- New funding streams for this vital investment: The cost to upgrade the transport network is affordable, but the funding sources need to be agreed and sources other than public investment are needed.
- All possible financing options are explored: including off-balance sheet financing from strategic investment funds, EB loans and European Commission funding via the Junker Fund.

In a press release by Ibec, Mary Rose Burke, Ibec’s Director of Corporate, Strategic and International Affairs, said: “Inadequacies in infrastructure are quickly felt by almost everyone ... The result [of the suggested actions] will be a much improved transport ‘backbone’ that measurably improves everyday life and boosts economic activity.”
This week at Public Affairs Ireland

On the Blog

On Brexit: IMF forecasts slower economic growth
Tom Ferris
Read here

Publicly-Funded Higher Education was the only Viable Option the Cassells Report Suggested
Annie Hoey
Read here

Who Governs Ireland?
Michael Williams
Read here

Fiscal Advisory Council Delivers Some Unpopular Advice
Tom Ferris
Read here

Futures Trading: Brexit and All-Island Trade
Martin McTaggart
Read here

Upcoming Training

Speed reading
Tuesday 26 July
Book here

Dealing with Difficult Customers
Tuesday 26 July
Book here
In the wake of the British vote to leave the EU, there is a lot of confusion, speculation and concern over the policy implications it has on both the Republic of Ireland and Ireland as a whole.

This half day conference will look at the policy implications on four main areas, the “Four Freedoms” as defined in the Treaty of Rome – goods, services, capital and persons.

Leading experts in these areas will discuss what the impending Brexit will mean, in an Irish context.
Adjourned until 2.00pm on Tuesday 27 September 2016
This week in Seanad Éireann

Adjourned until 2.00pm on Tuesday 27 September 2016
This week’s Committee Meetings

Tuesday 26 July
Budgetary Oversight (Select)
CR3, LH 2000 2 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Implementation of the Good Friday Agreement (Joint)
CR4, LH 2000 4 p.m.
AGENDA: Private Meeting

Wednesday 27 July
No Committee Meetings scheduled.

Thursday 28 July
Foreign Affairs and Trade, and Defence (Joint)
CR1, LH 2000 11 a.m. (T)
AGENDA: Discussion on migration in advance of the UN migration Summit in September [Representatives from Oxfam]