MASON HAYES & CURRAN

BUILT ENVIRONMENT

SUMMIT 2026

Your key takeaways

MASON HAYES & CURRAN

BUILT ENVIRONMENT SUMMIT 2026

Welcome

BUILT ENVIRONMENT
SUMMIT
2026

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Ireland's built environment sector is under pressure to deliver at greater speed and scale.

Our 2026 Built Environment Summit examined what that means for infrastructure and commercial property. Held recently at The Round Room at the Mansion House, Dublin, the event brought together senior industry stakeholders to discuss the barriers to delivery and the conditions needed to support future development.

Professor Ronan Lyons, lecturer and economist at Trinity College Dublin, delivered an insightful keynote on the housing market and economic trends. Expert panel discussions considered how Ireland can achieve its infrastructure ambitions, and how funding and viability are shaping commercial property decisions.

CONTENTS

01

Ireland's infrastructure deficit

From problem to opportunity

SPEAKERS

DAVID GUNN
Consulting Partner, Construction, Infrastructure & Utilities, Mason Hayes & Curran

SEAN O'DRISCOLL
Chair of the Economic and Social Research Institute

ALASDAIR HENDERSON
Executive Director, BAM UK & Ireland

PAUL MITCHELL
Director, Mitchell McDermott Construction Consultants

MATTHEW BIVIANO
Executive Director, Plenary

The first panel examined why Ireland's infrastructure deficit is now a serious constraint on housing and long-term growth.

Discussion focused on whether the Government's Accelerating Infrastructure Report and Action Plan can shift the system from diagnosis to delivery. The strongest message was that Ireland has a clearer understanding of the problem and a plan to fix it. The test is whether this is supported by a credible pipeline and a delivery culture that gives the market confidence.

The infrastructure deficit

The panel set out the scale of Ireland's infrastructure challenge, visible in housing shortages, deficits in public transport and social infrastructure which puts pressure on quality of life. These were treated as symptoms of a deeper failure to provide for a growing economy and population. Continued delay could damage competitiveness and make Ireland less attractive to live and work in, particularly for younger people.

The panel noted that Ireland has delivered major infrastructure before, including the Port Tunnel and the motorway network. The issue is not inability but pace. With strong public finances and increased funding allocated in the National Development Plan, Ireland should be more ambitious. Infrastructure should be treated as a foundation for future growth.

Creating clearer ownership

The Action Plan was seen as bringing clearer ownership to a system that had often lacked accountability. Its 138 sub-actions are assigned to lead departments and timelines, with responsibility sitting with the relevant Minister and Secretary General. This makes progress more visible and causes of delays more transparent.

Progress was described as encouraging. Of the 46 actions due to be completed by the end of Q1 2026, 45 were finished on time with the remaining action completed shortly after. A further 39 actions were due in Q2 and all were expected to be completed in that time. Almost all sub-actions are due by the end of 2026.

The panel welcomed the Action Plan's honesty. It acknowledged that Ireland's infrastructure delivery system is broken, despite it having broad political and public sector support. Future alignment is seen as essential if reforms are to last beyond the announcement phase.

> *"Ireland's infrastructure delivery system is broken, despite it having broad political and public sector support.*

01 Continued

Ireland's infrastructure deficit

From problem to opportunity

Faster consenting and better sequencing

The North Dublin drainage scheme showed how process reform can produce real savings. Previously, licensing and consenting was expected to take about 2 years because 12 agencies were involved with approvals being handled sequentially. The Action Plan, however, now requires relevant processes to run in parallel.

This change brought the expected commissioning date forward from the end of 2032 to the end of 2031, saving an estimated €60 million. Each month of delay costs about €5 million on the project. The example showed that better coordination can save time and money.

Procurement reform must now move from rules to delivery

The panel welcomed the Action Plan's focus on legal and procurement reform, but stressed that the next phase must be delivery. The Plan has exposed layers of over-complication. The real test is whether projects move through procurement and into construction without returning to old habits.

Past cancellations of public-private partnership projects, including during the financial crisis and even more recently, were said to have weakened market confidence. International contractors and investors need to believe that Ireland's pipeline will be delivered, not just announced.

Procurement was described as improving but still not where it needs to be. Ireland must deliver projects of different size and complexity, so one model only will not work. The panel favoured a more balanced, collaborative approach rather than simply pushing risk down the chain.

Attracting capital and capacity

Pipeline certainty was central to the discussion. International developers and contractors need a credible 5-10 year programme instead of a list of possible projects. They need to know which projects are likely to proceed and how risk will be managed.

Other jurisdictions were used as comparators. Parts of Australia offer greater certainty that approved infrastructure has a pathway through planning. New Zealand, which has a similar population size and infrastructure gap to Ireland, has used a more structured pipeline to attract international investors.

Ireland does not currently have enough domestic capacity, either in professional expertise or site workers, for the programme envisaged. International contractors will come if the opportunity is credible, but they will compare Ireland with other markets. A believable pipeline and fair risk allocation are essential.

Private capital will be needed

The revised National Development Plan was presented as a major step up, with €275 billion identified for public investment to 2035. Funding to 2030 was described as stronger, with over €100 billion identified and ring-fenced, including €5.5 billion for Uisce Éireann, ESB Networks and EirGrid. The full €275 billion is not yet secured.

Private and international capital will therefore be needed. Investors and contractors need confidence that projects will proceed and avoidable delays will not derail them. Ireland must rebuild trust after years of capital spending cuts during downturns and longer delivery times for major projects.

The panel cautioned against designing every solution from scratch. Denmark was cited as a strong example in renewable electricity and project delivery. In 2022, Ireland undertook 255 environmental impact assessments, compared with 217 in Germany and 8 in Denmark. The point was not to weaken assessment but to question whether the Irish process creates avoidable delay.

MASON HAYES & CURRAN

01 Continued

Ireland's infrastructure deficit

From problem to opportunity

Risk allocation and bid costs

The panel called for a more mature approach to risk allocation. Passing too much risk to contractors may appear to protect the public side, but it can increase costs and deter strong bidders. Risks should sit with the party best able to manage them while preserving value for the taxpayer.

Bid costs were also raised as a practical barrier. Major procurements require significant investment before any contract is awarded. Other jurisdictions sometimes provide stipends to shortlisted bidders. This does not cover full costs but can help keep high-quality competitors engaged.

Labour shortages

The revised National Development Plan estimates that Ireland may need up to 80,000 additional construction workers. The panel said this cannot be left to chance. Ireland is losing construction talent to mainland Europe, including specialist data centre workers, and needs a deliberate plan to attract skills back.

Ideas included relocation support, targeted tax measures and accommodation for construction workers. Labour planning must match the actual pipeline, because different projects need different skills at different times. Workers are more likely to return if they can see a long-term future.

Public communication

The panel said infrastructure delivery also depends on public support. Compulsory purchase order (CPO) powers were discussed because local authorities and State agencies often avoid using them, preferring negotiation as less confrontational. The Action Plan includes work to standardise CPO powers through a national model.

The North-South Interconnector showed the cost of delayed public support. It could have been delivered 15 years ago, but delay is estimated to cost taxpayers €100 million a year through higher electricity charges. Business and civic leaders must explain why infrastructure matters for housing and the wider economy.

Cost inflation is likely

The panel accepted that cost inflation will be a serious issue. Input costs and uncertainty will affect pricing. Contractors will also factor difficult contract terms or doubts about whether projects will proceed into their pricing. Bringing too many similar projects to market at once could weaken competition and value for money.

Inflation was not seen as a reason to slow down. Delay itself adds cost, while time saved in planning or procurement reduces exposure to inflation and direct delay costs. The conclusion was that Ireland must deliver the planned infrastructure across all sectors including housing to support growth. The issue now is delivery pace and public confidence.

> *"Delay itself adds cost, while time saved in planning or procurement reduces exposure to inflation...*

02

Funding and viability of commercial property

Insights and market trends

SPEAKERS

ALAN BURNS
Partner, Financial Services, Mason Hayes & Curran

DANIEL LOCKLEY
Partner, Head of Real Estate, Deloitte Ireland

MICHAEL GRIFFITH
Chief Investment Officer, Hibernia Real Estate Group

PETER ROWE
Executive Director, Morgan Stanley

COLLEY CASEY
Head of Living Investment, Real Estate Finance, AIB

The second panel focused on how capital is flowing into Irish real estate, and how stakeholders are responding to a more uncertain environment.

The market is active, but more cautious. Capital is available, but it is selective and slower to deploy.

Global uncertainty

Ireland's underlying performance remains strong. GDP growth and continued demand for space are central factors which support the market. These fundamentals have helped projects come to fruition, particularly from late 2025 into early 2026.

At the same time, however, global factors are creating uncertainty. Energy disruption and inflation are feeding into construction costs and financing. Material price increases are already affecting viability. Interest rate expectations have also shifted, with the potential for further increases weighing on sentiment.

The result is a market that is functioning but moving more slowly. Transactions are progressing with greater focus on downside risk.

Investor appetite has shifted

Investor demand remains, but it has moved across sectors. The private rental sector previously attracted strong international capital, supported by rental growth. That weakened after the pandemic as interest rates and construction costs increased.

The State stepped in to support delivery, particularly in social and affordable housing. This support has provided stability and long-term income but it has ultimately changed the balance of capital in the market.

There are now signs that international capital is returning. Competition for existing assets is strong. The main gap remains the availability of funding for new development. Increasing supply, particularly in residential, is still the central challenge.

The office market faces structural questions

The office sector presents a more mixed picture. Occupancy has recovered since the pandemic but remains below previous levels. Hybrid working patterns are now well embedded, with demand concentrated midweek.

Occupier demand remains relatively strong. Vacancy is tightening in some areas and the forward pipeline is limited. This points towards rental growth.

02 Continued

Funding and viability of commercial property

Insights and market trends

The main uncertainty is the impact of AI on employment and space demand. Some firms are reducing hiring, while others are expanding. Dublin is seen as relatively well positioned, but the long-term effect is still unclear.

Capital is increasingly selective

The debt market is highly competitive for the right assets. Strong projects continue to attract multiple lenders. Direct lenders are now a major part of the market and compete directly with banks.

Raising equity has become more difficult. Fundraising timelines have lengthened, which is affecting deployment. As a result, there is greater use of joint ventures and asset-level partnerships.

There is also a shift in how capital is being used. Some investors have moved back towards equity as opportunities emerge. In industries like housebuilding, there is strong demand for equity, including preferred structures that do not dilute control.

Importance of scale and visibility

Ireland continues to be viewed positively by international observers. Strong economic fundamentals, population growth and recent leasing activity support the investment case. The effort to promote Ireland internationally has also improved sentiment.

Scale, however, remains a constraint. Ireland is a smaller market than many European peers, and not all investors will commit the time required to understand it. For those that do, there is an opportunity to access deals with less competition.

Platform investments are important. Investors are more likely to commit where they can achieve scale and work with experienced local partners.

Delivery risk and development viability

A consistent theme was the persistent challenge of delivering new supply. Rising construction costs and tighter financing conditions are putting pressure on development viability. This is particularly acute on the residential side.

Without sustained delivery, the housing deficit is projected to worsen. Addressing this central policy issue requires alignment across planning, infrastructure and funding. The industry is willing to scale but needs the right conditions.

Risk is being managed more conservatively

There is a clear shift towards more conservative assumptions. Lenders are focusing on downside scenarios, including higher interest rates and weaker exit values. The emphasis is on repayment capacity rather than upside.

Relationships are also more important. In a more uncertain environment, the ability to work constructively with partners matters. Early communication is seen as critical.

A disconnect remains between fundamentals and investment decisions

In some markets, particularly office space, there is a gap between underlying conditions and investor behaviour. Occupier demand and supply dynamics are relatively supportive, but investment committees remain cautious.

This reflects wider global factors rather than Ireland-specific issues. Capital is still being allocated to sectors that have already performed well. This creates potential opportunities where pricing does not reflect fundamentals.

The outlook

The panel struck a balanced tone. There are reasons for optimism, including improving transaction activity and strong demand drivers.

Risks remain, however. Inflation, interest rates and geopolitical developments could continue to disrupt progress. There is also uncertainty around structural change in the office market.

The overall message was that the market is moving forward with more discipline. Capital is available and opportunities exist but outcomes will depend on careful underwriting and realistic assumptions.

MASON HAYES & CURRAN

ABOUT US

The growth of our cities has resulted in the Government and other stakeholders adopting more innovative approaches to building, urban development and infrastructure projects.

A more holistic view is being taken on how all the elements of the built environment work together from planning and construction to real estate and amenities. Our Built Environment team is uniquely positioned to advise across the full range of legal services required.

In tailoring our advice for this rapidly evolving sector, we apply all areas of law that interact with the whole range of human activities affecting the structure, management and use of the built environment. We work together with our clients to provide a comprehensive suite of services to individuals and companies ranging from shopping centre development and roads to major urban regeneration projects.

MARKET RECOGNITION

"The team's advice often reflects an in-depth knowledge of both legal and commercial realities in the property sector."

LEGAL 500

"Technical expertise and excellent market knowledge."

LEGAL 500

"... a deep bench of quality partners and associates. Advice is always practical and commercially considered and we have found the team to be exceptionally responsive."

CHAMBERS & PARTNERS

KEY CONTACTS

DAVID GUNN
Consulting Partner, Construction, Infrastructure & Utilities
dgunn@mhc.ie
+353 86 035 9526

ALAN BURNS
Partner, Financial Services
aburns@mhc.ie
+353 86 361 2381

VANESSA BYRNE
Partner, Co-Head of Real Estate
vbyrne@mhc.ie
+353 86 238 8436

MICHAEL DORAN
Partner, Co-Head of Real Estate
mdoran@mhc.ie
+353 87 418 4230

JAMIE FITZMAURICE
Partner, Real Estate
jfitzmaurice@mhc.ie
+353 86 108 5012

For more information and expert advice, visit:

MHC.ie/BuiltEnvironment