

# U+I PROJECTS CAPITAL REGENERATION

UK development company U+I describes itself as a specialist regeneration developer and investor. And now with a number of ambitious investment and regeneration projects in Dublin, its newly-appointed Dublin Development Director Arlene Van Bosch talks to Lorraine Courtney about bringing their experience of Public Private Partnership to the fore as part of their plans to work and engage with local authorities here.

**T**he dynamic company has, to its credit, an €8bn portfolio of complex, community-focused regeneration projects, primarily in what it likes to refer to as “underappreciated parts of cities”.

Many of its developments are mixed-use projects, and it has close relationships with public bodies such as local councils in the United Kingdom.

In Dublin U+I has undertaken some high-spec office refurbishment projects in recent years but now the company is focused on bringing its substantial regeneration expertise to Dublin City, where it believes there is lots of untapped potential for the right developer with a true appreciation for innovation, heritage and community.

And Public Private Partnership (PPP) is U+I’s speciality in the UK, where the company has recently been appointed to the London Development Panel and the Transport for London Panel. From years of experience, U+I has a particular perspective on how to do PPP well and to deliver long-term socio-economic value to sites.

And now with an eye firmly focused on the Irish market, Arlene Van Bosch has recently been appointed as U+I’s Dublin Development Director. A planning and development surveyor working in London for



*The complete refurbishment of the landmark 69,000 sq. ft Donnybrook House in Dublin 4 – one of several successful U+I joint ventures – exemplifies the company’s belief in the potential of the market in Dublin.*

## REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP



*'The Workshop' at 8 Albert Embankment is a temporary community and events space in the heart of Lambeth. Alongside the London Fire Brigade pop-up museum, the space is home to charities, social and start-up enterprises and artists (including the Institute of Imagination and The Migration Museum).*

15 years, she has been with U+I since 2010, working across a wide variety of different projects.

### IRELAND'S LINEAR APPROACH

"I was quite fortunate to be given this opportunity to lead the company's ambitious plans within the Dublin market. I've been here two months. I'm leading a growing team and we will expand further as we acquire more sites.

"In Ireland it's typically a relatively linear approach that's taken to PPP, but U+I takes a more flexible, open book policy from the very beginning. It's a much more collaborative approach to PPP – including through the master planning phase," she says.

U+I has a significant amount of experience working with local authorities and public bodies in delivering regeneration projects and its strategic approach centres on a number of strands. These include the provision of innovative housing solutions; community-led urban regeneration and public partnership projects.

"We would like to work with local authorities here in Dublin now. We're ready to start engaging and understanding where there are sites in distress that would allow us to bring our experience of PPP to the fore," says Van Bosch.

### LOCAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

U+I's approach is quite unique. "We make sure we have an immediate impact in the community and are always looking to

see where we could add value. We know it's important to get people in to talk to us – engaging with the local community only enriches the design process," she says.

"Community involvement is really key to sustainable developments. U+I want to create places where people can work, sleep, socialise, that whole 24-hour culture. But we also really want to improve the quality of life that people have so we try to encourage neighbourly relations, and make sure that new businesses are in regular dialogues with each other.

"If we were a developer that just parachuted in, it just wouldn't be a success. People would be mistrustful of that approach. It's only when you engage properly with local community that you create trust and we genuinely believe that we learn so much from this too," she says.

"Yes, we're a business and have to drive a profit, but it is people in the community that will go and buy a loaf of bread in the new shop etc, so we always have to have residents in mind."

### LONDON PARTNERSHIPS

Van Bosch worked on the Deptford Project in London in partnership with the London Borough of Lewisham. Located next door to Deptford Train Station, the multi-award-winning project has been transformed from a derelict two-acre site into a new space for the local community.

Deptford was a neglected corner of London, overlooked by developers and blighted by social problems. Where others saw decay and decline, U+I saw potential. A plan was conceived for a

## REGENERATION PARTNERSHIP



*The Old Tree Café at FIELD in Brighton - the diverse workspace unites like-minded people, organisations and businesses to create a community that thrives on the free exchange of ideas between creative innovators and inventors.*



*The 'Deptford Project Café' is a 1960s converted train carriage, which involved cleaning up a series of railway arches and letting them out on temporary license to a group of creative business start-ups and curating community activity around a temporary market place.*

mixed-use community that would celebrate the unique character of Deptford and, thereby, be a catalyst for regeneration.

The completion of the scheme is the product of an ambitious partnership with Lewisham Council to breathe new life into the historical railway arches, which over 100 years ago stored passengers' carriages and horses. What was previously an unused area of Deptford has now become a new destination for independent retail in London.

"It contained the oldest surviving railway in the UK but the derelict site was a bit of a blight on the high street," says Van Bosch. "We opened it up and turned one of the train carriages into a café. We then invited locals to come and talk about our plans, taking a very grassroots approach."

### FACTFILE – ARLENE VAN BOSCH

*In her new role as Development Director for Dublin, Arlene Van Bosch will oversee the planning and execution of U+I's vision for Dublin city. In this role, she will drive the company's significant Irish commercial and partnership-led developments from a new base in Dublin, which has been expanding since U+I arrived here in 2012.*

*Hailing from Northern Ireland, she has worked with U+I in London for almost a decade and will now bring both her industry experience and local knowledge to drive U+I's presence and projects in the Dublin market. Arlene will be responsible for translating concept into reality on a number of major mixed-use projects in the city.*

*As a member of U+I's Executive Committee, Arlene has been the driving force behind several major development and regeneration schemes in the UK; most notably the major €108m St Mark's Square project in Bromley, where she was instrumental in leading the significant funding and planning efforts.*

*A 'Woman of the Year' nominee at the 2016 Building Awards in the UK, Arlene is recognised by her peers throughout the industry for her work with local communities and local authorities throughout the development process, along with her skills in communication and delivery, something she looks forward to bringing to the Dublin market.*



### HELPING LOCAL BUSINESS

“We worked to bring the site up to standard and relocated entrepreneurial businesses within the arches. We then provided 132 homes on the site; on the ground floor of the residential building we set up commercial spaces, and also provided a new public realm around the entrance.

“If we made above a certain profit we agreed to share with local authority, and at any point in time they could ask us to run over the figures with them,” she says. “We’re a trustworthy partner and we’re always upfront.

“The development had a ripple effect on the high street but we knew that it wasn’t the place for high street chains. Instead we put in local retailers and only let the units to people who lived within three-mile radius.”

U+I, she says, subsidised rents on commercial units and helped businesses with the skills to get up and running. “It was very successful, unlocking the value of the public land and delivering real benefit to the local area. It’s a good example of what we can do very well,” says Van Bosch.

### FOOTPRINT IN DUBLIN EXPANDED

Eoin Condren is Director of Joint Ventures for Dublin and the pair will work closely together. Having expanded the company’s Dublin footprint significantly since 2012, U+I have a number of investment and regeneration projects ongoing, such as Donnybrook House, and ‘The Hive’ in Sandymount Industrial Estate.

They have also just received confirmation from An Bord Pleanála for the Carrisbrook House site on Haddington Road in Ballsbridge. “Between the three live projects and picking up new opportunities, we’re quite busy and active in the market at the moment.

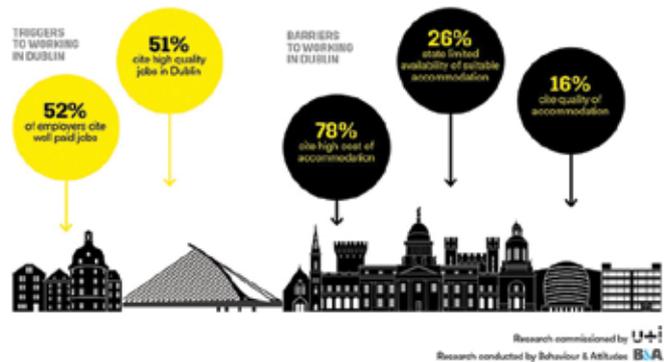
“My day-to-day focus is on acquisitions, bringing our creativity and audacity to the fore and pushing boundaries. When we genuinely believe that an area needs a more radical approach to design, we’re not afraid of that,” says Van Bosch.

## DUBLIN’S HOUSING CRISIS HAMPERS EFFORTS TO RECRUIT AND RETAIN TALENT

**Dublin’s housing crisis is seriously hampering efforts by the business sector to recruit and retain talent in the city, according to recent research commissioned by U+I, which surveyed over 100 senior hiring managers representing large national and international employers in the capital.**

### LIVING + WORKING IN DUBLIN

Research examines the triggers and barriers that impact employers’ ability to recruit and retain talent in Dublin



Despite the majority saying that well paid, high-quality jobs are the main attraction to working and living in Dublin, 78% of respondents claimed that the high cost of accommodation was the single greatest obstacle in attracting talent to the city.

According to the *Housing Availability, Recruitment and Retention in Dublin* research, three quarters of those surveyed said that the limited availability of accommodation was hindering their efforts to recruit, as many young professionals and single middle-income earners are priced out of the Dublin market. For the first time, this new research quantifies the challenges posed by the housing crisis to Dublin’s position as an attractive location for international talent.

As attracting and retaining talent is the number one issue, U+I chief executive Matthew Weiner said the findings of the research were a real concern. “Diversity, next generation talent and creativity are essential ingredients for a thriving modern city and the housing market needs to adapt and respond to ensure that Dublin maintains a competitive labour market and vibrant culture,” he added.

To address this issue, U+I’s Compact Living model proposes purpose-built, self-contained, rental-only homes to maximise available space and cater to the needs of single-person households. “Compact living is just one example of a broader suite of solutions, alongside mixed-use regeneration, which we believe is required to tackle the housing supply challenges faced by Dublin.”

Compact Living homes are 24 sq. m. apartment homes, which are purpose-built, self-contained and rental-only. These homes are designed to maximise the available space, containing everything required to allow residents to live in comfort and in privacy including kitchen, en-suite facilities, washing machines and storage.

They contain the benefit of access to shared spaces when required, such as private dining rooms, laundromats, onsite gym and workspaces. According to Weiner, these homes cater primarily for young professionals, keyworkers and individual middle-income earners looking for a foothold in a thriving capital city, and can play a key role, alongside wider mixed-use developments, in solving Dublin’s housing crisis.

When briefed on U+I’s compact living development proposals, more than three in four believe that these apartments would be attractive to potential employees. While the concept is yet to be rolled out fully on the ground, equipped and functioning units have been constructed in prototype form at U+I’s London offices.

The research reports are available at [www.uandiplc.com/](http://www.uandiplc.com/)