

John Sisk & Son



An overview of Wembley Park



Managing Director, North & Major Projects Guy Fowler

Celebrating 160 years in operation this year, John Sisk & Son has established itself as a leading construction company across Europe. With an annual turnover of 1.2 billion euros, Sisk is currently working on a variety of projects, ranging from the redevelopment of the old BBC studios in Manchester to the phase-four contract for Great Ormond Street Hospital in London. Guy Fowler, the Managing Director of the North & Major Projects Business Unit in the UK, tells *The Parliamentary Review* about their focus on transparency and how they have attempted to close the widening skills gap.

Established in Cork in 1859, we are a family-owned business, with the fifth generation of our family currently working across the company. Formed as a construction business, we have been operating in the UK since the early 1980s, and construction remains our core focus to this day. While some of our large competitors have diversified into other areas, we have remained focussed on our core business.

We are the biggest contractor in Ireland and are committed to providing the best value for our UK customers. Our focus in the UK market is centred on developing these customer relationships. We work on a variety of projects, all of which contribute to our one billion euro annual turnover. These range from huge infrastructure projects, supporting the likes of Quintain at Wembley Park who we have worked with for 12 years, and the major redevelopment and restoration of the Royal Academy of Arts in London, to smaller specialised jobs. We are currently working on the redevelopment of the old BBC site in Manchester, one of the largest development schemes in the northwest. In 2017, we were awarded the

FACTS ABOUT JOHN SISK & SON

- » Managing Director, North & Major Projects: Guy Fowler
- » Established in 1859
- » Based in Dublin with three operation hubs across the UK in St Albans, Birmingham and Warrington
- » Services: Construction
- » No. of employees: 1,400
- » www.johnsiskandson.com

“We always work transparently with our customers”

phase-four contract for Great Ormond Street Hospital, securing this in a contractor-led design competition. We have recently completed the A19 project for Highways England in the northeast and we are active on a number of civil engineering projects across the country. Our project range is mirrored in the diversity of our clients.

A focus on transparency

We have a very honest approach to how we do things and we always work transparently with our customers. This involves finding tailored solutions and making sure these plans add value for the client. We have never failed to convert a two-stage project from initial tendering into a final building project, and this is testament to both our transparency and our reliability.

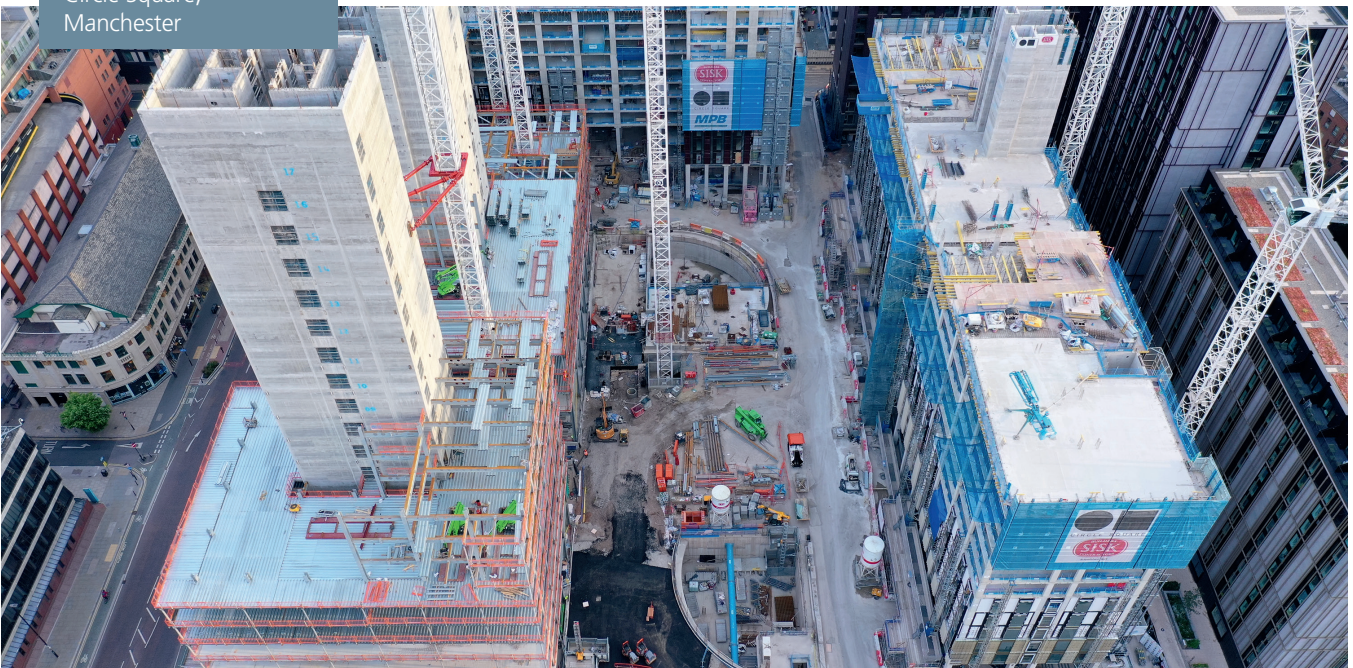
Finding the right solution for each client means staying adaptable. If a modern, technological solution is needed, we will fulfil the requirements; if a project requires a traditional approach, we are equally able. We have a concerted focus on digital technology and what we call our “digital project delivery”. We use digital platforms to show our customers what we have planned before working with them to bring these plans to

fruition. These platforms also help us to determine the most efficient solutions and streamline our processes.

We measure everything that we do. We understand the outputs of our supply chain and work closely with them. By treating them as partners, we have been able to develop mutual understanding. While, like many other main contractors, we sublet much of our work, the ethos of the business means that we remain a very hands-on organisation and are very much engaged in the building process.

We do not have a revenue growth strategy and instead concentrate on driving sustainable profit and attracting quality customers. Our expansion has been forged by key customers and the reputation we have developed within the industry. This empowering approach means we focus on finding repeat customers and ensures that if something is not right for the customer, we are not afraid of saying so. Our expansion into Europe has been based on these repeat customers, and our partnerships with major companies, such as Johnson & Johnson and Primark, have taken us around the world. By paying attention to our customers, we have been able to complete projects across the globe.

Circle Square,
Manchester



Driving innovation

We are continually innovating and have recently begun to focus on increasing the social value contribution from our projects. For example, we are working alongside a charity in Manchester that aims to get homeless and unemployed people back into work. We are supporting this through training programmes and direct employment.

We also have an apprenticeship programme that rotates apprentices within our business and other similar business. This ensures the individuals receive a wealth of experience and enables them to choose a sustainable career path within the industry, and it is a model we are expanding across other regions. Beyond merely attracting young people, it is essential that employers do not force them into roles. We endeavour to be flexible and show them the breadth of possibilities open to them. In terms of innovating our construction techniques, we have started to use a lot of drone technology to perform cloud-point surveys and are trialling robotics on a number of projects.

Addressing the major skills gap

One of the major challenges we face is the skills gap and the fall in productivity associated with this. The two phenomena feed off one another and we have noticed, in certain parts of the country, that rising wages have been associated with falling productivity. Many short-term fixes have been employed but longer-term solutions are desperately needed. The right sentiment lies behind the apprenticeship levy but it encourages companies to push recruits through the process very quickly. Construction is a complex sector and one that requires extensive experience, and so longer-term solutions need to be found.



Royal Academy of Arts,
London

Another issue that affects us is the procurement process for public projects. These processes often require extensive experience in the public sector but this presents a catch-22 scenario: as we have primarily worked in the private sector in the UK, we do not have this experience and we cannot gain this experience unless we secure these contracts. The current processes are often structured in a way that excludes SMEs and new entrants. The design-led approach adopted by Great Ormond Street, for example, was really innovative and served to level the playing field, measuring each applicant on what they could do rather than on what they have done.

We aim to continue to deliver great value and great service for customers. We want to create a sustainable business that will support the future generations of the Sisk family. Sustainability is now a key goal of ours and this means we have to adapt and change, making sure we are matching the development of automation and incorporating these new technologies into our processes.

“We aim to continue to deliver great value and great service for customers”