

# CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS TALKS TO AISLING MCNULTY, DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR AT BRUNTWOOD

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## What inspired you to begin a career in development?

I have always had an interest in buildings and how they are constructed, which led me to a Planning and Development degree at Herriot Watt University. The construction stage of a project still fascinates me and I love seeing the fundamentals of the building, such as the cores and frame, before they are encased in the facade.

## Bruntwood have reported a boost in profits of 62% over the last year. What is the key to successful and continued growth in a challenging market?

As a business everything we do relates back to our core purpose of Creating Thriving Cities – whether it's: creating a new city centre neighbourhood at Circle Square; championing the success of the North via the Northern Powerhouse initiative; or supporting the arts via the Bruntwood Prize for Playwriting. It is our focus and long term investment in our cities which is key and our success is directly linked to their success. It is vital that we continue to support cities such as Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds and Birmingham to drive growth in their economies and improve the quality of life of those who live in these cities.

## What do you predict will be the main challenge to the construction and development industry over the next few years?

Development procurement will continue to be a challenge. The construction industry has a skills shortage and this needs to be addressed to ensure we have the right skilled labour force to support the expanding construction market. A skills gap will result in the industry being constricted and unable to grow to support the demands on it. The development and uptake of smart technology will be a challenge. Construction projects carry risk and whilst technology could be used to reduce risk, the challenge is early adoption and proof of success to help stimulate investment in this area. The other big challenge for me is supply chain security and stability. Brexit and its unknown impact on the supply chain in Europe is a huge risk. Maintaining access to these markets is vital but currently there are a lot of unknowns (such as the impact on tariffs and imports) which could impact on costs and programme. Fundamentally as developers we need to continue to ensure that we are evolving our product offering to ensure we stay at the forefront of the market, not just in terms the physical product but also the occupational offer.

## Can you offer any top "lessons learned" from your recent projects?

The most important part of any project is having the right team of experts - these include internal colleagues as well as the design and professional team. Having a trusted and experienced team who can effectively communicate with one another is hugely important, allowing key principles to be debated and to help formulate the most effective strategy for a site from the outset.

## What can we expect from Bruntwood in 2019?

This year there will be a focus on smart building technology, wellbeing and communities. Smart technology in our homes is now quite common place and we are starting to see that technology move across to office spaces providing environmental personalisation. We currently offer connected building solutions. If a customer chooses connectivity in their suite, they can access their secure network from the lounge, meeting room or on the roof terrace and we will continue to develop this in 2019. Our buildings are also evolving to reflect the way in which working habits are changing. We provide amenities and co-working

spaces that put people at their heart, which are key to supporting the creation of a community, further supported and nurtured with wellbeing and business support programmes.

## What do you find are the greatest challenges in your role?

Development projects are challenging due to their scale and complexity and managing the risks that these bring for the life of the project, from original master planning through to on site delivery. At Circle Square we had the added challenge of a site with multiple owners, which resulted in a complex series of interlinked development agreements across the site to document the delivery of the site masterplan by a number of different parties, and construction contracts, and to agreed timescales.

## Do you have a particular career highlight?

Starting construction of 400,000 sq ft of commercial space and the green central public space at Circle Square in March 2018 was very exciting. It is the biggest development project in Bruntwood's history and was the culmination of a lot of hard work to get to that point - a real team effort. Watching the speed at which Sisk are delivering the buildings is great. We are about 12 months into the works and the cores are pretty much complete and the steel frame will soon be visible above the hoarding line.

## What personal qualities do you think are needed for a successful career as a developer?

Determination is really important - development is complex, challenging and rewarding, but a lot of the work that goes on behind the scenes to get a development to site can be mundane and you need a personality which is compatible with that.

## About Aisling

Aisling qualified as a Chartered Surveyor in 2008. She worked in Asset Management and Professional Services for the first half of her career before moving into Development. Her role as Development Director includes the identification of investment and development opportunities, securing their acquisition, and taking these opportunities to their maximum potential and value, working on them from conception through to delivery.

## About Circle Square

A landmark new neighbourhood in the heart of Manchester's Oxford Road Corridor innovation district, Circle Square is a diverse 2.4m sq ft urban destination, a unique location to live, learn and relax, a place where science, technology and the arts meet and mix to enable the extraordinary. Construction is currently underway, with two thirds expected to be complete in 2020 including 400,000 sq ft of commercial space, over 1,000 new homes, retail and leisure and the majority of the public realm.

Website: <http://circlesquaremanchester.com/>

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