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Real Estate 2022

Ireland: Law & Practice
and
Ireland: Trends & Developments

Diarmuid Mawe, Craig Kenny and Katelin Toomey
Maples Group

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Law and Practice

Contributed by:

Diarmuid Mawe, Craig Kenny and Katelin Toomey
Maples Group see p.22



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1. GENERAL

1.1 Main Sources of Law

The main source of Irish real estate law is statute. The key legislative provisions are set out in the Land and Conveyancing Law Reform Act 2009 (the 2009 Act), the Registration of Title Act, 1964 (the 1964 Act), the Registration of Deeds and Title Act, 2006, the Landlord and Tenant Acts, 1967-2019 (LTA) and the Residential Tenancies Acts, 2004–2021 (the RTA).

The other main source of Irish real estate law is case law, derived from judgments of the Irish courts.

1.2 Main Market Trends and Deals

The focus throughout 2021 was on the recovery of the Irish real estate sector from the impact of COVID-19. Activity in the sector increased quarter on quarter throughout 2021 and surpassed all expectations with over EUR5.5 billion invested in Irish real estate in 2021. This year has started strongly and with most COVID-19 restrictions lifted by February 2022, the outlook for the remainder of 2022 is positive. In fact, January and February were considerably busier than usual given the freedom for investors and occupiers to travel to Ireland to view assets. 2022 promises to be a very active year for Irish real estate. Investor appetite remains strong with particular interest in environmentally conscious and alternative assets. Ireland remains an excellent place to invest and do business and offers a high degree of economic and political stability with the benefit of a common-law legal system and favourable tax structure that is relatively easy to understand. Ireland is strongly aligned with the EU and benefits from the common trade area and access to talent from across Europe. For a more detailed analysis on market trends and deals, please see the separate Trends & Developments chapter.

1.3 Impact of Disruptive Technologies

The most significant obstruction to the use of blockchain technology, decentralised finance, PropTech and other technologies in the legal sector in Ireland is the absence of regulation and the fact that these technologies have no fixed jurisdiction.

While blockchain and PropTech should result in increased efficiencies in many areas of the Irish commercial real estate market and in the registration of title, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on the Irish real estate market in the next 12 months, given the absence of regulation.

1.4 Proposals for Reform

There are no current proposals for reform that would significantly impact real estate investment, ownership or development in Ireland. There has been a move towards the use of electronic signatures for the acquisition of real estate, however, procedures to deal with electronic signatures have not yet been implemented by the Land Registry so it remains the case that original wet ink signatures are required for most documents dealing with real estate. See **2.3 Effecting Lawful and Proper Transfer of Title** for further detail on the use of electronic signatures.

2. SALE AND PURCHASE

2.1 Categories of Property Rights

The categories of property rights that can be acquired in Ireland are freehold title, which confers absolute ownership, or leasehold title, which confers ownership for the period of years granted by the relevant lease.

2.2 Laws Applicable to Transfer of Title

Historically, Irish law was based on legislation predating the establishment of the Irish State. The 2009 Act replaced much of the old law and

modernised conveyancing practice. The 2009 Act is the main statute applicable to the transfer of title in Ireland and applies to all asset classes, including residential, commercial, industrial, offices, retail and hotels. The RTA govern the residential landlord and tenant sector and the LTA govern the commercial landlord and tenant sector.

2.3 Effecting Lawful and Proper Transfer of Title

The Land Registry was established in 1892. When ownership of a property is registered in the Land Registry, the deeds are filed with the Land Registry and all relevant particulars concerning the property and its ownership are entered on folios that form the registers maintained by the Land Registry. In conjunction with folios, the Land Registry also maintains maps (referred to as filed plans). Both folios and filed plans are maintained in electronic form.

The Registry of Deeds was established in 1707 to provide a system of voluntary registration for deeds which affect property. The purpose was to give priority to registered deeds over unregistered but “registrable” deeds. There is no statutory obligation to register a deed in the Registry of Deeds but failure to do so may result in a loss of priority.

Title insurance is used in property transactions in Ireland but is not widespread.

While the use of electronic signatures has become more widespread in Ireland since 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the transfer of Irish real estate is still required to be effected by way of original wet ink signature. The Electronic Commerce Act 2000 (the E-Commerce Act) governs the use of electronic or digital signatures in Ireland. Previously interests in land were specifically excluded from the ambit of the E-Commerce Act. However, the Electronic Com-

merce Act 2000 (Application of sections 12 to 23 to Registered Land) Regulations 2022 (the Regulations) amended the E-Commerce Act by providing that it shall apply to the law governing the manner in which an interest in registered land may be created, acquired, disposed of or registered. This amendment allows for the legal recognition of the electronic execution of documents dealing with interests in registered land. Notwithstanding the Regulations, practice has not yet changed in Ireland as the Land Registry, while welcoming the introduction of the Regulations, has clarified that it is not currently in a position to accept electronic or digital signatures on documents submitted to it for registration. Ultimately Land Registry practice will dictate whether electronic signatures are acceptable on documents relating to real estate interests.

2.4 Real Estate Due Diligence

A buyer’s lawyer will investigate the seller’s title to the property to ensure a buyer will acquire a good marketable title. The underlying principle is one of caveat emptor (buyer beware). The buyer must satisfy itself as to the seller’s title pre-contract.

The Law Society of Ireland produces a template contract for sale for property transactions.

This contract requires the seller to list the documentation and searches to be provided in relation to the property and incorporates the Law Society of Ireland General Conditions of Sale (the General Conditions). The General Conditions make a number of assumptions about the property and place certain disclosure obligations on a seller, which the seller can only exclude by inserting a bespoke special condition in the contract for sale. In this way, the buyer should be on notice of any deviations from the template. In commercial property transactions, it is normal for the seller to seek to limit the warranties being provided in the General Conditions. Where the

seller's knowledge of the property is limited, eg, in an enforcement sale, it is usual to limit many of the warranties.

The buyer's lawyer also carries out a number of searches against both the seller and the property.

2.5 Typical Representations and Warranties

The principle of caveat emptor is diluted somewhat by the General Conditions, which place a number of warranties and disclosure requirements on the seller. For instance, the General Conditions include numerous warranties relating to matters such as notices, planning compliance, boundaries, easements and identity. These warranties can be excluded or amended by way of special condition by agreement between the parties. In addition to any specific disclosures, sellers often limit the warranty provided in respect of planning and building control compliance by reference to documentation and opinions/certificates of compliance with planning and building regulations in the seller's possession and provided to the buyer. Where the property is being sold in an enforcement scenario (ie, by a receiver, a liquidator or by a mortgagee), it is usual that many of the warranties contained in the General Conditions are expressly excluded or varied/limited by reference to knowledge. While parties are free to negotiate the terms and warranties provided in a Contract for Sale, generally speaking the COVID-19 pandemic has not resulted in new warranties or representations being provided.

There are also implied covenants as to ownership on the part of the seller, which are detailed in the 2009 Act.

A seller can be liable for misrepresentation. General Condition 29 of the General Conditions provides that a buyer shall be entitled to compensation for any loss suffered by the buyer as a result

of an error which includes any non-disclosure, misstatement, omission or misrepresentation made in a contract for sale. However, as outlined above, a seller may seek to exclude or vary this condition by inserting an appropriate special condition in the contract for sale, stating that the buyer shall not rely on any representations made by the seller.

Representation and warranty insurance is available in the Irish market; however, it is not frequently used as part of real estate transactions, save where real estate is being acquired by way of a corporate rather than an asset acquisition.

2.6 Important Areas of Law for Investors

An investor should ensure that the title to the property is good and marketable, that the property complies with the Planning and Development Acts 2000–2021 (the Planning Acts) and environmental laws, and that the property has all necessary easements for access and services. Investors will also need to ensure they understand the application of Irish tax law.

2.7 Soil Pollution or Environmental Contamination

The buyer may have secondary liability for soil pollution or environmental contamination. If the person or entity which caused the pollution or contamination cannot be identified, the current owner or occupier of the property could become liable under the applicable environmental legislation for remediation. For this reason, it is important that environmental due diligence is carried out by a buyer where compliance with environmental laws is a concern.

2.8 Permitted Uses of Real Estate under Zoning or Planning Law

The Planning Acts govern planning and zoning matters in Ireland and regulate the zoning and permitted uses of areas through a variety of

development, sustainability, landscape conservation and special amenity plans.

Each local authority has a development plan that sets out the planning policy of the local authority for a six-year period.

A buyer's solicitor should carry out a planning search as part of the planning due diligence and this search should specify the zoning applicable to the property.

The State Authorities (Public Private Partnership Arrangements) Act, 2002 (the 2002 Act) enables local authorities to enter into joint-venture Public Private Partnership (PPP) arrangements with the private sector. A PPP is an arrangement between the public and private sector for the provision of infrastructure or services.

Under this model, contractors in the private sector become long-term providers of a service, rather than merely building an asset upfront. This allows local authorities to plan resources and monitor services, rather than provide them directly.

2.9 Condemnation, Expropriation or Compulsory Purchase

Local authorities, the National Asset Management Agency (a body established by the Irish government in 2009 to function as a "bad bank" acquiring property loans from Irish Banks) (NAMA) and the Industrial Development Agency (Ireland's inward investment promotion agency) (IDA) all have the ability to purchase lands compulsorily in connection with their statutory functions.

Local authorities can compulsorily acquire lands in the following circumstances:

- where property is derelict and poses a danger in the community;

- for the purpose of developing infrastructure; and
- for conservation/preservation purposes.

NAMA has extensive statutory powers to acquire land compulsorily where it is necessary to allow NAMA to fulfil its statutory function and derive the best value from the property assets secured to it.

The IDA also has the ability to acquire property compulsorily for the purpose of industrial development. A key function of the IDA's role is acquiring land for development purposes and, as a result, the IDA's statutory power to acquire land compulsorily is quite broad.

2.10 Taxes Applicable to a Transaction

Any transfer of Irish real estate and certain other property, including shares, is liable to stamp duty payable to the Revenue Commissioners. Stamp duty is charged on the consideration payable for the property, or the market value in certain instances. Usually, the buyer is liable for payment of stamp duty, although in certain transactions, such as voluntary transfers, both parties can be liable.

Where an instrument is liable to stamp duty, a stamp duty return must be filed online via the Revenue Commissioner's e-stamping system within 44 days. Failure to file and pay within this period will result in late filing and interest charges.

The rate of stamp duty payable on the transfer of non-residential (commercial) property is currently 7.5%.

The rate of stamp duty on transfers of residential property is 1% on consideration up to EUR1,000,000 and 2% on consideration over this threshold. Since May 2021 where ten or more residential units are acquired in a twelve-

month period, an increased rate of 10% stamp duty applies to all units acquired. This measure was enacted to discourage large scale residential acquisitions. The increased rate applies both where the units are in one development/area and where the units are located in different areas throughout the country. This does not apply to apartment units.

Where non-residential property is transferred and subsequently utilised for the construction of residential accommodation, a stamp duty refund is available, which effectively reduces the rate from 7.5% to 2%. The budget in 2021 extended the time allowed to commence construction work to avail of this refund to 31 December 2022. This scheme is subject to a number of conditions.

Stamp duty on the transfer of Irish shares is generally charged at 1% of their value. Transfers of shares or interests of corporate entities (which includes Irish and non-Irish incorporated companies) and partnerships can be subject to 7.5% duty where the entity derives over 50% of its value from Irish land intended for development, held as trading stock, or held with the sole or main object of realising a gain on disposal. This provision is subject to a number of conditions, including that the transfer is one which transfers control of the land. Transfers of minority holdings may not be impacted. Transfers of entities holding certain residential property may also be subject to the 10% rate of stamp duty outlined above.

2.11 Legal Restrictions on Foreign Investors

There are no restrictions on foreign investors acquiring real estate in Ireland. All investors, including foreign investors, need to comply with anti-money laundering legislation.

3. REAL ESTATE FINANCE

3.1 Financing Acquisitions of Commercial Real Estate

Acquisitions have traditionally been financed by banks, but recently there has been an increase in the number of non-bank lenders in the Irish market advancing both senior and mezzanine debt to fund the acquisition and development of commercial property.

The choice between bank financing or financing by alternative lenders is influenced by the commercial terms on offer. Alternative lenders are not subject to the regulatory restraints imposed on banks, and, as a result have a different appetite for risk. There is a trend towards alternative lenders providing development finance at much higher loan-to-value ratios than banks. Such financing is usually made available at a higher margin with prepayment, arrangement and exit-fee mechanisms, as well as equity interests in the transactions.

3.2 Typical Security Created by Commercial Investors

A lender will provide finance secured over the relevant property that will be registered as first-ranking in the appropriate property register, thereby securing priority of the security for the benefit of the lender. Where a lender is providing finance for development purposes, it would be normal for the lender to receive collateral warranties from the members of the professional team, such as architects, designers and engineers, as well as step-in rights.

3.3 Restrictions on Granting Security over Real Estate to Foreign Lenders

There are no restrictions on the granting of security over real estate to foreign lenders or repayments to foreign lenders; lending to an Irish company is not a regulated financial services activity and, pursuant to the Companies Act 2014 (the

CA), the directors of an Irish company have the authority to exercise the company's power to borrow and to mortgage or charge its property, subject to Irish law and its constitutional documents.

3.4 Taxes or Fees Relating to the Granting and Enforcement of Security

A fee of EUR40 is payable in respect of the registration of security with the Companies Registration Office (the CRO). It is a statutory requirement for security created by an Irish company to be registered with the CRO within 21 days. This registration must be completed electronically. Failure to comply with this timeframe for registration may only be remedied by a costly court application.

The creation of security does not attract tax, although a written notification must be made to the Revenue Commissioners by both the charge-holder and any subsequent transferee of that charge where a company creates a fixed charge over its book debts.

Where repayments under a security document or loan agreement include interest payments and that interest has an Irish source, a 20% withholding tax must be applied to the payments in Ireland. There are a wide range of exemptions available to companies who make payments of Irish-source interest to foreign lenders. Foreign lenders, which are "qualifying lenders", should be entitled to receive Irish-source interest payments free from the withholding tax; qualifying lenders include certain foreign banks, companies' resident for tax purposes in the EU or jurisdictions with a double tax treaty agreement with Ireland and certain treaty lenders.

The sale of Irish real estate, or of unquoted shares in companies deriving the greater part of their value from Irish real estate, will be subject to Irish capital gains tax. The gain is calculated

on the proceeds of sale minus acquisition and enhancement costs, and minus the incidental costs of acquisition and the incidental costs of disposal.

Irish capital gains tax is subject to a withholding procedure applicable to the seller's capital gains tax liability. The procedure requires the buyer to withhold 15% of the consideration and pay this amount to the Revenue Commissioners unless the seller provides a clearance certificate from the Revenue Commissioners. A capital gains clearance certificate is automatically available on application to the Revenue Commissioners if the seller is resident in Ireland for tax purposes. A non-resident seller will need to agree and discharge its capital gains tax liability in order to obtain a clearance certificate. This withholding procedure only applies to a buyer where the consideration payable to the seller exceeds the relevant threshold at the date of the transfer agreement (currently EUR500,000 or EUR1,000,000 if the asset disposed of is a house or an apartment).

The current rate of capital gains tax is 33%.

A registration fee of EUR175 is payable to register security in the Land Registry and EUR50 to register security in the Registry of Deeds.

3.5 Legal Requirements before an Entity Can Give Valid Security

The CA prohibits the provision of financial assistance by an Irish company in the form of a guarantee, security or otherwise to a person that is purchasing, or subscribing for shares in the company or its holding company. There is a validation procedure by which financial assistance may be approved in advance and the approving documentation must be filed by the company with the CRO within the prescribed time.

The CA contains a prohibition on Irish companies providing guarantees or security in relation to the debts or obligations of its directors (or directors of its holding company) or persons connected to those directors (including family members and spouses). There is an exemption from this prohibition if the debts or obligations relate to another group company.

There is a general requirement that Irish companies derive benefit from transactions into which they enter.

3.6 Formalities when a Borrower Is in Default

A receiver is typically appointed by a secured creditor under contractual powers granted by the debtor under the terms of the security document. The receiver's function is to take possession of the secured assets (including any real estate) and discharge any unpaid indebtedness from the realisation proceeds.

The CA provides that a receiver of the property of a company can do all things necessary or convenient to be done for, or in connection with, or as incidental to, the attainment of the objectives for which the receiver was appointed, and the CA then specifies powers which that receiver may exercise (in addition to the powers conferred on them by the order or instrument pursuant to which they were appointed or any other law).

It is also possible to apply to the High Court to have a receiver appointed over assets, if, eg, a trigger event set out in the security document for the appointment of a receiver has not yet occurred, but the secured assets are in jeopardy.

Before certain security interests created by a company will be valid, effective and have priority over subsequent security interests, they must be registered in the CRO within strict time periods,

or the charge may be rendered void as against the liquidator and any creditor of the company and priority will be lost. Where a certificate of charge has been issued by the Registrar, it is conclusive evidence that the charge has been registered. The priority of charges runs from the date of filing and not from the date of creation of the charge.

The rules on the priority of charges take effect subject to the rules on priority contained in any other enactment governing the priority of such charges. Consequently, the priority of charges created by companies over real estate will be determined in accordance with the order in which they are registered in the Irish Land Registry or the Irish Registry of Deeds, as the case may be.

The government has not sought to restrict a lender's ability to foreclose as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.7 Subordinating Existing Debt to Newly Created Debt

As set out in **3.6 Formalities when a Borrower Is in Default**, a real estate lender must register the charge/mortgage with the CRO to perfect security. Once the security is perfected, newly created debt cannot obtain priority over existing debt, other than by agreement.

The priority of debt can also be structured through the following:

- contractual subordination;
- structural subordination; or
- inter-creditor arrangements.

3.8 Lenders' Liability under Environmental Laws

Lenders may be reluctant to enforce security in circumstances where the borrower has environmental liabilities due to the application of the

principle of strict liability under Irish environmental legislation. There is a risk in these circumstances that a lender may be liable under environmental laws for environmental contamination despite not causing the contamination.

3.9 Effects of a Borrower Becoming Insolvent

Under Irish law, both the creation of security and making of payments by a company within six months prior to it being placed in an insolvent liquidation will be liable to be set aside as an unfair preference if the company intended to prefer the creditor benefiting from the transaction over its other creditors. In the case of a connected person, the period is extended to two years and the transaction is deemed, unless shown to the contrary, to have been done to give that person preference over other creditors, and to be an unfair preference and invalid accordingly.

Where a company is being wound up, a floating charge on the undertaking or property of the company created within 12 months before the date of commencement of the winding-up (or two years if the floating charge is created in favour of a connected person) shall, unless it is proved that the company immediately after the creation of the charge was solvent, be invalid. This provision does not apply to:

- money actually advanced or paid, or the actual price or value of goods or services sold or supplied, to the company at the time of or subsequent to the creation of, and in consideration for, the charge; or
- interest on that amount at the appropriate rate.

3.10 Consequences of LIBOR Index Expiry

The use of LIBOR ended on 31 December 2021 for most contracts (some US LIBOR deadlines

have been extended to July 2023) and there has been a move to Risk Free Rates (RFR).

Borrowers should ensure that a replacement rate for LIBOR is agreed with the lender and documented in the loan documents. SONIA is now frequently used in place of LIBOR. In addition, it would be prudent to include a mechanism in the documents for another rate to be used should SONIA (or any other rate chosen) expire or be unavailable.

The key consequence for a borrower is uncertainty regarding the interest rate payable as RFRs are backward looking, which presents practical and operational difficulties and may impact the borrower's ability to manage cash-flow as pre-notification of the interest rate at the start of the interest period is not possible. This is because the interest rate will change on a daily basis. In order to manage this, borrowers should pay close attention to the cash position at the end of an interest period as they no longer have the certainty of look forward LIBOR. Borrowers who require certainty around cash flows and repayment amounts may opt for a loan with a fixed repayment schedule or a fixed rate loan.

4. PLANNING AND ZONING

4.1 Legislative and Governmental Controls Applicable to Strategic Planning and Zoning

The Planning Acts apply to strategic planning and zoning and regulate the zoning and permitted use of areas.

The relevant local authority is the entity responsible for controlling land use and occupation. An independent third-party appeals board, An Bord Pleanála (the Bord), is responsible for the determination of planning appeals.

4.2 Legislative and Governmental Controls Applicable to Design, Appearance and Method of Construction

The design and construction of buildings is regulated by the Building Control Acts 1990–2020, the Building Regulations 1997–2014 and the Building Control Regulations 1997–2021 (together: Building Regulations). The Building Regulations provide for proper building standards, fire safety, workmanship, conservation of energy and access for people with disabilities.

4.3 Regulatory Authorities

The relevant local authority is the entity responsible for controlling land, building use and occupation.

The Bord is responsible for the determination of planning appeals.

Planning permission is required for any development of land or property, unless the development is exempt from this requirement under legislation.

Planning permission may not be required for certain non-structural works to the interior of a building or for works that do not materially affect the external appearance of the structure. However, an application to the local authority for a Fire Safety Certificate may be required in accordance with the Building Regulations.

The Building Regulations require a commencement notice to be lodged with the building control authority prior to commencing works, together with plans and specifications, a preliminary inspection plan and various certificates and notices. It is an offence not to submit a commencement notice and failure to do so cannot be rectified at a later date. A Certificate of Compliance on Completion must be submitted to and registered by the building control authority

before the building or works may be opened, occupied or used.

In addition, certain licences may be required depending on the type of property and the type of development proposed.

4.4 Obtaining Entitlements to Develop a New Project

If the planning authority consents to an application for planning permission, it will issue a decision to grant planning permission and notify the relevant parties of its decision. An appeal of the decision can be submitted to the Bord within four weeks (such an appeal may be submitted by the parties involved or by third parties). The Bord has a statutory timeframe to determine appeals within 18 weeks of the receipt of an appeal.

The previous legislation dealing with “strategic housing developments” expired at the end of 2021. A new planning process has been introduced in 2022 for Large Scale Residential Developments that restores decision-making powers to local authorities and continues to expedite the supply of residential housing. Increased housing supply is a focus of the Irish government under its Housing for All plan.

4.5 Right of Appeal against an Authority’s Decision

Anyone applying for planning permission or who has made written submissions or observations to the planning authority on a planning application can appeal a subsequent planning decision to the Bord. See **4.4 Obtaining Entitlements to Develop a New Project** for further detail.

4.6 Agreements with Local or Governmental Authorities

As outlined in **2.8 Permitted Uses of Real Estate under Zoning or Planning Law**, the 2002 Act enables local authorities to enter into PPP arrangements with the private sector. Types

of PPPs include Design-Build-Finance-Maintain PPP (this may be used to provide schools and similar infrastructure where the public sector has use of the asset but does not require the private partner to provide the service, ie, in the case of a school, the public sector employs the teaching staff) and Design-Build-Finance-Operate-Maintain PPP (this may be used in the case of a water-treatment plant where the private sector staffs the plant to ensure service delivery on behalf of the public-sector contractor).

4.7 Enforcement of Restrictions on Development and Designated Use

The Planning Acts govern restrictions on development and permitted use. The procedure for planning offences is as follows:

- issue a warning letter;
- serve an enforcement notice; and
- institute legal proceedings.

The warning letter, which must be served within six weeks of receiving a complaint, allows a developer up to four weeks to rectify or make a submission in respect of the issue.

Regard must be had to any submission received from a developer or owner when deciding whether or not to serve an enforcement notice. An enforcement notice sets out the requirements of the local authority to rectify the issue and contains a timeframe within which the work must be completed. Non-compliance with an enforcement notice is an offence and the local authority may institute legal proceedings in the District Court.

In urgent cases, the local authority may apply to the Circuit or High Court for an order directing that particular actions take place or cease, as the case may be. The statute of limitations applies to planning enforcement for unauthorised development. Typically, this means that

the period during which enforcement action for breach of a condition of a planning permission is limited to seven years from the life of the planning permission (usually five years).

5. INVESTMENT VEHICLES

5.1 Types of Entities Available to Investors to Hold Real Estate Assets

Irish companies and non-Irish companies, limited partnerships, as well as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REIT) and Irish-regulated funds (or Qualifying Investor Alternative Investment Funds (QIAIFs)) are used by investors to acquire real estate assets.

A REIT is a type of public limited company (PLC) subject to meeting certain criteria; it will not be liable to either corporation/income tax on its property rental income or profits, or capital gains tax on disposals of assets of its property rental business. The Finance Act 2019 provides that a REIT may only avoid any latent capital gains tax exposures when it ceases to be within the regime where it has been in operation for a minimum of 15 years.

In recent years, non-resident and institutional investors have most commonly used QIAIFs to acquire Irish real estate. QIAIFs are regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland (the CB) and may be established as Irish Collective Asset-management Vehicles (ICAVs), unit trusts, investment companies, common contractual funds or investment limited partnerships. The ICAV has been the most popular corporate structure for a QIAIF investing in real estate. Previously ICAVs offered some tax advantages to investors but the position has changed. ICAVs are now subject to a 20% withholding tax on profit distributions to investors and are exposed to a deemed income tax charge of 20% if they have debt costs above certain thresholds. Although ICAVs remain com-

mon in the Irish market, the tax advantages of such structures have eroded.

5.2 Main Features of the Constitution of Each Type of Entity

The ICAV is a corporate vehicle similar to an investment company and may be structured as an umbrella fund with segregation of liability between sub-funds.

The Instrument of Incorporation is the ICAV's constitutional document.

Unregulated Structures

Irish companies

A Private Company Limited by Shares (LTD) is a simplified entity that has the capacity of a natural person. The constitution of an LTD comprises one document. The LTD does not have an objects clause and has full unlimited capacity to carry on any legal business, subject to any restrictions in other legislation.

An Irish company may also be formed as a Designated Activity Company (DAC). The DAC is a private limited company. The constitution of a DAC comprises a memorandum of association and articles of association. The memorandum of association sets out the objects of the DAC and the DAC can do any act or thing stated in the objects.

A PLC is another type of Irish company. The liability of members is limited to the amount, if any, unpaid on shares held by them. Similar to a DAC, the constitution of a PLC comprises a memorandum of association and articles of association. The memorandum of association sets out the objects of the PLC and the PLC has the capacity to do any act or thing stated in the objects.

REITs

A REIT is a type of Irish PLC aimed at facilitating collective investment in real estate. The consti-

tution of a REIT comprises a memorandum of association and articles of association with provisions typical of an Irish public limited company. The articles of association will impose certain restrictions and obligations on the shareholders of the company to enable the company to qualify as an Irish REIT.

5.3 Minimum Capital Requirement

There is no mandatory minimum capital requirement for Irish private companies.

The CB does not apply a minimum capital requirement for QIAIF ICAVs, which are externally managed by an AIFM. However, an internally managed QIAIF ICAV must have a minimum paid-up share capital equivalent to EUR300,000.

Additionally, ICAVs structured as QIAIFs must apply a minimum initial subscription requirement of EUR100,000 per investor. Exemptions from this minimum subscription requirement can be sought by certain categories of knowledgeable investors, including the directors of the QIAIF, the investment manager and its senior employees.

5.4 Applicable Governance Requirements

REITs

REITs must comply with the corporate governance provisions set out in the CA applicable to PLCs. In addition, any market on which a REIT's shares are admitted to trade will have regulatory, listing and other relevant rules, as applicable.

The UK Corporate Governance Code 2018 issued by the UK Financial Reporting Council (the UK Code) sets out standards of good practice in relation to board leadership and effectiveness, remuneration, accountability and relations with shareholders. Irish REITs listed on the London Stock Exchange and/or Irish Stock Exchange (ISE) are required to report on how

they have applied the main principles of the UK Code. The Irish Corporate Governance Annex to the UK Code published by the ISE contains additional requirements applicable to Irish REITs listed on the ISE.

Regulation (EU) No 596/2014 on market abuse and the Transparency (Directive 2004/109/EC) Regulations 2007 apply in respect of Irish REITs listed on EU-regulated markets.

ICAVs

An ICAV is represented by its board of directors (the Board), at least two of whom must be Irish-resident. The appointment of directors is subject to the prior approval of the CB under its fitness and probity regime. The Board has a general fiduciary duty to ensure that the requirements of the ICAV Act 2015 are complied with and remain ultimately responsible for the management of the ICAV and the supervision of all delegates thereof.

The Board must observe Irish Funds' Industry's Corporate Governance Code (the Code). The Code aims to ensure that the board performs effective oversight of the ICAV's activities. Among other subjects, the Code contains recommendations in relation to board composition, which include the requirement for at least one representative of the AIFM/investment manager and at least one director to be fully independent of all service-providers to the ICAV.

ICAVs are required to be audited annually and must also submit their annual reports and monthly statistical returns to the CB.

Each ICAV is required to appoint numerous regulated service-providers to carry out various governance roles. Most significantly, The AIFM Directive requires that each QIAIF must identify an AIFM, which is the entity primarily responsible for the investment and risk management of the

QIAIF, subject to the overall supervision of the Board.

It is also possible for an ICAV to be authorised as an internally managed QIAIF, whereby the Board assumes the responsibility as the AIFM.

Every ICAV must appoint an independent Irish-regulated depositary. The depositary carries out multiple functions, including the safekeeping of assets, regulatory oversight and cash-flow monitoring obligations. In addition, the depositary must enquire into the conduct and management of the ICAV in each financial year and report to the shareholders.

5.5 Annual Entity Maintenance and Accounting Compliance

Annual maintenance and accounting compliance costs vary from structure to structure.

6. COMMERCIAL LEASES

6.1 Types of Arrangements Allowing the Use of Real Estate for a Limited Period of Time

A person or entity may enter into either a lease or a licence with the owner of a property to occupy and use the property, without needing to acquire the property outright.

A licence is more suitable for shorter-term arrangements and a licensee under a licence does not obtain exclusive possession of the property, but rather has a mere permission from the owner to enter the property.

In contrast, a lease confers a legal interest in the property to the tenant and typically this interest may be assigned or transferred, subject to the requirement to obtain consent from the landlord.

6.2 Types of Commercial Leases

There are two main categories of commercial leases, a lease on a short-term basis for a term of up to five years, or a lease on a medium- to long-term basis, usually for ten years to 25 years.

6.3 Regulation of Rents or Lease Terms

Commercial leases are freely negotiable, subject only to statutory provisions. Recent Irish case law has emphasised that a court will not imply terms into a lease where it has been freely negotiated, even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Generally, any rent arrears remain payable unless an alternative agreement is reached between the landlord and tenant.

The Residential Tenancies and Valuation Act 2020 (2020 Act) provided protection for residential tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing notice periods in respect of tenancy terminations for non-payment of rent and prohibiting an increase in rents on tenancies between the period commencing 2 August 2020 up to 12 April 2021.

There was an increase in the number of notices to quit served in relation to residential tenancies in the last quarter of 2021 with some landlords seeking to put the property on the market and others having a family member move into the property.

6.4 Typical Terms of a Lease

Recent legislation and market conditions have resulted in most leases having shorter terms, with the maximum term now usually ten to 15 years.

Generally, commercial leases in Ireland are full repairing and insuring leases and a tenant will have full repairing obligations. The obligations are either imposed directly by a repair covenant in the lease or, in the case of a multi-let development such as an office block, shopping centre or

business park, the obligations may be imposed indirectly through a service charge that imposes an obligation on the tenant to reimburse the landlord for repair works carried out to the structure and common areas of the development.

Rent is normally payable quarterly in advance.

Throughout 2020 and 2021, many tenants of retail premises sought to agree side letters with their landlords providing for a rent abatement or standstill arrangements relating to rent-free periods where the premises were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, most landlords will not agree to such clauses being included in new leases in 2022. For the most part, such side letters were limited to the COVID-19 pandemic and did not refer to future pandemics or forced government closures generally.

6.5 Rent Variation

Usually, a commercial lease will provide for a rent review periodically throughout the lease, generally at five-yearly intervals. The rent may be either increased or decreased (the 2009 Act prohibits “upward-only” rent-review clauses, but not with retrospective effect). Commercial landlords and tenants employ certain mechanics on occasion to control the variation in the rent. For example, a fixed or stepped rent over the term of a lease may be provided for or the rent may be linked to the variation in the Consumer Price Index.

6.6 Determination of New Rent

Usually, rent is reviewed upwards or downwards to market rent and agreed between the landlord and tenant. If agreement cannot be reached between the parties, the lease may provide for referral to an expert or an arbitrator for determination.

6.7 Payment of VAT

In the case of a commercial/business lease, a landlord may elect (but is not obliged) to charge VAT on the rents, in which case VAT applies at the relevant rate (currently 23%).

6.8 Costs Payable by a Tenant at the Start of a Lease

Stamp duty is payable on commercial leases at 1% of the average annual rent. It is the tenant's responsibility to discharge the stamp duty. A tenant may also be obliged to pay insurance rent and any initial service-charge contribution and, if commercially agreed, a deposit.

6.9 Payment of Maintenance and Repair

A landlord or management company will normally maintain common areas in a multi-let building or estate and recoup the costs from the tenants through a service charge.

6.10 Payment of Utilities and Telecommunications

Normally, a tenant is responsible for all outgoings consumed on the premises and usually these are metered and paid directly by the tenant to the provider. Utilities and telecommunications consumed on the common areas are normally paid by the landlord and recouped from the tenants via a service charge.

6.11 Insurance Issues

Normally, the landlord will insure the property and the tenant will refund the amount of the premium to the landlord as insurance rent under the lease. Typical risks insured against for property damage are fire, flooding, storm, malicious damage, subsidence and lightning. Terrorism insurance is also available in the Irish market. Some tenants and businesses have recovered costs under business interruption insurance depending on the terms of the relevant insurance policy. The High Court ruled in favour of a group of publicans who took a case against FBD insurance

for failure to pay out under business interruption insurance in February 2021.

6.12 Restrictions on the Use of Real Estate

The lease will contain a user clause outlining the permitted use of the property by the tenant. If a tenant wishes to change the permitted use, they normally need the consent of the landlord (legislation provides that such consent may not be unreasonably withheld).

6.13 Tenant's Ability to Alter and Improve Real Estate

Depending on the provisions of the lease, a tenant may be permitted to alter or improve the property, usually subject to the landlord's consent and the tenant's obligations on yield-up of the premises, which normally oblige the tenant to return the property to its original condition. Structural alterations are generally prohibited, with internal non-structural alterations permitted subject to the prior written consent of the landlord.

6.14 Specific Regulations

The RTA govern leases of residential property in Ireland, provided the term does not exceed 35 years. Any residential property for lease must meet certain standards under the Housing (Standards for Rented Houses) Regulations 2019. The LTA govern leases of industrial, office, retail or hotel space.

6.15 Effect of the Tenant's Insolvency

Commercial leases usually include a provision entitling a landlord to terminate a lease by way of forfeiture if the tenant becomes insolvent. If the obligations of the tenant under the lease are guaranteed by a guarantor, the guarantor may be required to take a new lease on the same terms as the previous lease for the length of the term remaining.

6.16 Forms of Security to Protect against a Failure of the Tenant to Meet Its Obligations

Normally, where a tenant's covenant strength is less than that required by a landlord, the landlord will seek a guarantor of the obligations of the tenant (or a bank guarantee or cash deposit).

6.17 Right to Occupy after Termination or Expiry of a Lease

Where a commercial tenant has been in continuous occupation for a minimum period of five years, it will obtain a statutory right to a new tenancy unless it has renounced its statutory rights. A lease term will expire automatically and so, while a landlord is not required to serve notice on a tenant to ensure the tenant vacates a premises, in practice, where a deed of renunciation has not been executed by a tenant, a landlord will be in contact with the tenant to arrange an orderly yield-up of the premises and ensure compliance by the tenant with the covenants in the lease and, in particular, with the repair and yield-up obligations.

6.18 Right to Assign a Leasehold Interest

Usually, the provisions of a commercial lease contain restrictions on a tenant's right to assign or sublet the lease without the landlord's prior written consent. Under the LTA, a landlord cannot unreasonably withhold consent to the assignment or subletting of the entirety of a premises; this provision overrides the contractual terms of any business lease. The assignment or subletting of part of a premises is usually prohibited under the terms of a commercial lease.

6.19 Right to Terminate a Lease

Generally, a commercial lease is terminated by the expiry of the term or the exercise of a break option or by agreement between the landlord and the tenant.

Usually, a commercial lease contains a re-entry clause, which entitles a landlord to forfeit the lease where the tenant breaches an obligation. Forfeiture is an equitable remedy. Forfeiture can be effected without a court order, if done peaceably; however, forcible re-entry is a criminal offence. The landlord should seek an ejection order from the court if the tenant remains in occupation and resists re-entry by the landlord.

6.20 Registration Requirements

Leases are required to be executed as deeds.

Leases can be registered in the Registry of Deeds, albeit the practice is no longer widespread.

Leases with a term in excess of 21 years should be registered with the Land Registry and a new leasehold folio will be opened in respect of the lease, provided that the term of the residue of the lease at the time of registration exceeds 21 years.

Leases for a term not exceeding 21 years do not need to be registered and can affect registered land without registration.

6.21 Forced Eviction

As previously stated, a commercial lease may be terminated by forfeiture. While this can be effected without a court order, in some circumstances a court order will be required, if, eg, the tenant refuses to vacate the property. A court application can take from six to 12 months.

6.22 Termination by a Third Party

A commercial lease may not typically be terminated by a third party and can only be terminated by the parties to the lease.

7. CONSTRUCTION

7.1 Common Structures Used to Price Construction Projects

The most common basis for the pricing of construction contracts is a fixed-price lump sum, where the price includes the risks associated with the construction of the works, except to the extent excluded under the contract. Other forms of pricing such as re-measurable contracts (where the client takes the risk for the quantities needed for the works) or target-cost contracts (an open-book system where the client takes the risks for quantities up to a certain target price, subject to a set pain/gain share allocation with the contractor, depending on whether the out-turn contract price is below or above the target price) are also used.

7.2 Assigning Responsibility for the Design and Construction of a Project

The most common method for assigning responsibility for the design and construction of a project is for the client to award a design-and-build contract (D&B) to a main contractor whereby it takes full responsibility for both, including the work of its external professional team and subcontractors. Alternatively, a client may appoint its own design team and enter a build-only construction contract with a contractor where the client wishes to maintain more control over the design of the development. The D&B model is preferred by funders for projects as there is a sole point of responsibility for design and construction.

7.3 Management of Construction Risk

A contractor normally provides warranties and indemnities to the client as part of the construction contract. Recently, contractors have sought to limit their liability by setting a cap on their general liability under the contract and excluding certain damages, such as indirect and consequential damages and losses. Such exclusions

have not become the market norm, but more and more contractors are pushing for such concessions in light of the strong market demand for experienced and capable contractors.

7.4 Management of Schedule-Related Risk

Most forms of construction contracts in Ireland make provision for the application of liquidated damages in the event that the contractor does not reach completion by the agreed date. The liquidated damages must be based on a pre-genuine estimate of the losses to be incurred by the client if the works do not complete on time and are often capped at a percentage of the contract value. In the event of delay due to the default of the contractor, the client is entitled to set off the liquidated damages against payments due to the contractor.

7.5 Additional Forms of Security to Guarantee a Contractor's Performance

It is normal for a client to seek the provision of a performance bond from the contractor as a form of security for the proper performance of the works and this would typically be in addition to the retention by the client of a set percentage (normally 5%) of the payments to the contractor during the construction of the works. Depending on the financial robustness of the contractor, a parent-company guarantee may also be required.

7.6 Liens or Encumbrances in the Event of Non-payment

The creation of liens and encumbrances is not usual. However, under the Construction Contracts Act 2013, contractors and subcontractors are entitled to suspend their works or refer a payment dispute to statutory adjudication in the event of non-payment of a due payment.

7.7 Requirements before Use or Inhabitation

Under the Building Regulations, a building cannot be occupied or used until prescribed compliance documentation has been submitted to the relevant building-control authority.

8. TAX

8.1 VAT

Sales of commercial property can be divided into two categories – sale of new and old property.

In relation to new buildings, VAT must be charged at the rate of 13.5%.

A property is considered “new” where it has been developed in the previous 20 years, or buildings on it have been developed or redeveloped in the previous five years. The first sale of residential property by the person who developed the property is always subject to VAT.

Sales of old properties are exempt from VAT. In a VAT-exempt sale of property, to avoid a claw-back of VAT that the seller may have previously recovered, the seller and buyer may agree to make an exempt sale VAT-able and jointly opt to tax the sale of the property.

Exemptions

Transfer of Business applies to the sale of a property that has been let in the past, on the basis that the buyer intends to carry on the same sort of business as the seller (ie, letting the property) and will only apply provided the sale is to an accountable person for VAT purposes (ie, a person who is obliged to register and account for VAT).

Where the transfer of business relief applies to the sale of an “old” property, no VAT adjustment (known as a Capital Goods Scheme Adjustment)

should arise for the seller and the buyer will take over the property’s obligations under the capital goods scheme from the seller.

Where the transfer of business relief applies to the sale of a “new” property, the seller may be able to claim further VAT input credit where it was not entitled to recover the VAT incurred on the acquisition or development of the property.

8.2 Mitigation of Tax Liability

As previously mentioned, where non-residential property is transferred and subsequently utilised for the construction of residential accommodation, a stamp-duty refund is available, which effectively reduces the rate from 7.5% to 2%.

Stamp duty on the transfer of Irish shares is generally charged at 1% of their value. Previously, stamp duty was mitigated on large-scale acquisitions through selling a corporate vehicle, holding the property; however, transfers of corporate entities and partnerships can be subject to 7.5% duty where the entity derives over 50% of its value from Irish land intended for development, held as trading stock, or held with the sole or main object of realising a gain on disposal. This provision is subject to a number of conditions, including that the transfer is one which transfers control of the land. Minority holdings may not be impacted. There are stamp-duty exemptions for intra-group transfers of real estate.

8.3 Municipal Taxes

Commercial rates are imposed by local authorities against businesses premises and the local authority determines the level of rates.

An exemption from the payment of commercial rates can be sought where the property is vacant, by making an application to the local authority.

8.4 Income Tax Withholding for Foreign Investors

Tenants of non-resident owners of Irish property are obliged to withhold tax at the standard income tax rate of 20% from rental income prior to remitting overseas. This can be avoided if the landlord has employed an Irish agent to collect the rents.

Non-resident individuals investing in Irish property are charged Irish income tax on taxable rental profits, on a fiscal-year basis. A non-resident individual or partnership is subject to rental income tax at between 20-41%. A non-resident company is subject to 25% tax on rental income less deductible rental expenses.

Capital gains tax is applicable at a rate of 33% on the gains made on a disposal of property in Ireland. If the seller is non-resident, this will only relate to the sale of specified assets.

8.5 Tax Benefits

Tax benefits from owning real estate are as follows:

- legal and accounting and management/agent fees are tax-deductible;
- insurance policies relating to rental properties are tax-deductible;
- essential repairs and maintenance are tax-deductible, provided they are not for capital gain.

Maples Group advises global financial, institutional, business and private clients on the laws of the British Virgin Islands, the Cayman Islands, Ireland, Jersey, Luxembourg and the Marshall Islands through its leading international law firm, Maples and Calder. With offices in key jurisdictions worldwide, the Maples Group has specific

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AUTHORS



Diarmuid Mawe is head of the commercial property group at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin, and advises on all types of commercial property

transactions. He has extensive experience advising institutional clients on all property law aspects involved in the acquisition, management and disposal of real estate assets. Diarmuid also specialises in commercial landlord and tenant law, advising some of the country's largest landlords and tenants on their commercial property portfolios. He has many years of experience advising leading private equity and institutional clients on their respective property portfolios across all sectors of the Irish real estate market, including office, retail, PRS/BTR and industrial assets.



Craig Kenny is a partner in the commercial property team at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin, specialising in all aspects of commercial property

work, including the acquisition and disposal of investment property, commercial landlord and tenant, property finance, PRS and BTR schemes and the property aspects of corporate transactions. He has also acted on loan portfolio transactions, where loans are secured over commercial property. Craig recently advised on the acquisition, development and disposal of PRS/BTR schemes on a forward-funded and forward-purchase basis. Craig has also advised institutions, lenders, private equity investors, insolvency practitioners and landlord and tenant clients.

*Contributed by: Diarmuid Mawe, Craig Kenny and Katelin Toomey, **Maples Group***



Katelin Toomey is a knowledge lawyer in the commercial property team at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin.

Katelin has valuable experience as a commercial property transactions lawyer and has advised on all aspects of commercial property transactions, including on the acquisition, financing and disposal of various real estate assets. She has also advised on the negotiation of commercial leases, from both a landlord and tenant perspective. As a knowledge lawyer, she provides specialist support in all aspects of commercial property, including commercial conveyancing, commercial landlord and tenant and property finance.

Maples Group

75 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2
D02 PR50
Ireland

Tel: +353 1 619 2000
Fax: +353 1 619 2001
Email: dublininfo@maples.com
Web: www.maples.com



Trends and Developments

Contributed by:

*Diarmuid Mawe, Craig Kenny and Katelin Toomey
Maples Group see p.28*

Overview

Despite extraordinary challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns in Ireland throughout 2021, activity in the Irish real estate market exceeded all expectations, particularly in Q3 and Q4 once lockdown restrictions eased, and investors were able to travel freely. In fact, over EUR5.5 billion was invested in the Irish real estate market in 2021, up from EUR3 billion in 2020. Dublin represented 83% of turnover in 2021, however, activity in Cork increased significantly in 2021 and this has continued into 2022, particularly in the office, industrial and logistics sectors. Ireland was the fifth most active real estate market in 2021 according to a PWC report, which is particularly impressive given the lockdowns and forced government closures in place throughout 2021.

Momentum has continued into 2022 and the lifting of all remaining COVID-19 restrictions in February 2022 provided a significant stimulus to all sectors of the Irish real estate market, particularly for the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors that were hardest hit by lockdown restrictions.

Rising building and labour costs as well as elevated inflation remain a concern especially given the current geopolitical uncertainty caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, however the appetite for investment in Irish real estate remains strong. Foreign investors see Ireland as a stable, low-risk destination offering good value, strong liquidity and attractive credit conditions. Ireland is expected to remain a strong choice for foreign investors in the EU due to its status as a native English-speaking EU Member State, its favourable tax regime and its open and transparent legal system.

Focus on Environment, Social and Governance (ESG)

There is an increased focus on ESG issues as well as wellness considerations in the Irish real estate sector in 2022. Investors are seeking high quality sustainable buildings that are energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Investors are willing to pay a premium, a so-called "greenium", for such buildings. ESG is now a criterion that valuers must consider along with sustainability. As a result, a significant difference is emerging between the pricing of new and secondary buildings. As well as being environmentally friendly, investors are also focused on ESG considerations to protect the value of their investment into the future and for brand reputation and corporate social responsibility reasons.

Various initiatives are in place in Ireland to promote energy efficiencies. Since 2006, a building energy rating (BER) certificate and advisory report must be provided by all sellers and landlords to buyers and tenants when a building is constructed, sold or rented. These requirements apply to both residential and commercial buildings with the exception of certain categories of building, such as protected structures or national monuments. A BER certificate rates the building from "A1" (most efficient) to "G" (least efficient).

Since December 2020 under EU law, all EU Member States, including Ireland, must ensure that all new buildings (both commercial and residential buildings) are "nearly zero-energy buildings" (NZEB). An NZEB is a building with a very high energy performance requiring "nearly zero" or a very low amount of energy to operate. A significant part of such a building's energy requirements should be met by renewable sources, ideally pro-

duced on site or nearby. The Directive requires EU countries to develop long-term renovation strategies that aim to facilitate the cost-effective transformation of existing buildings into NZEBs. The EU Commission published a proposal in December 2021 to revise the directive to provide for zero-emission buildings (ZEB) in place of NZEBs, the ZEB requirement (once enacted) would apply from 1 January 2030 to all new buildings. A ZEB is defined as a building with a very high energy performance, with the very low amount of energy still required fully covered by energy from renewable sources and without on-site carbon emissions from fossil fuels.

One of the requirements under EU law is that all new homes must have a BER of A2, be 70% more energy efficient than 2005 performance levels and emit 70% less carbon dioxide than 2005 performance levels.

There has also been increased interest in “green leases” in Ireland, which are leases containing obligations in relation to sustainability and environmental performance of the demised premises. With the advent of global building standards, such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), the Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) and WELL Building Standard certification, buildings are being designed and built at a quality and specification that can be understood and valued by global occupiers and investors alike. While ESG will undoubtedly have an impact on all sectors of the Irish real estate market it is likely that the most significant impact will be on offices.

Sustainable finance has become increasingly important, and the EU is intent on creating a financial system which supports a low-carbon, more resource-efficient and sustainable economy, which, in turn, should lead to increased investment in longer-term sustainable activities.

When it comes to climate change, real estate is often viewed as a major offender, with the industry challenged to place a greater emphasis on greener, more sustainable, carbon-neutral buildings, in order to satisfy demand from society, regulators and investors. As a result, ESG is now firmly in the sight of investors as they position their portfolios for the post-COVID-19 world.

Resilience of the Physical Office

Prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic the Dublin office market was benefiting from numerous relocations of multinationals seeking to move their European headquarters due to Brexit. Ireland is in a unique position as the only native English-speaking EU Member State following Brexit and this trend of office relocation is expected to continue in 2022. Demand for office accommodation in the city centre increased significantly throughout 2021 and concerns around the future of the office appear to be unfounded with many global employers seeking office space in the capital. TikTok recently agreed terms for two Dublin docklands offices having also entered into a lease of The Sorting Office in Dublin 4 in December 2021. An Post (Ireland’s post service) is relocating its head office to the Exo building (the tallest building in Ireland) and has entered into a lease for a 15-year term. This represents the largest office letting to date in 2022. The Exo building has targeted the highest sustainability credentials, having achieved LEED Platinum, NZEB, Wired Platinum and a BER of A3.

BNP Paribas Real Estate anticipates that 2022 will be the biggest year for new office delivery since the financial crisis, as projects delayed in 2021 come to completion and new projects progress.

Most Irish businesses returned to the office on a phased basis in early 2022, with most employees working on a hybrid basis with a mix of office and remote working, depending on both

the requirements of the employer and the preferences of the employee. The shift to a hybrid working model may benefit flexible office providers where companies may have part of their office space on a flexible basis to accommodate hybrid/remote working.

It is expected that despite the shift to a hybrid working model the importance of the physical office will remain as there is a renewed appreciation of the role of offices in corporate culture and their importance as spaces for collaboration, communication and community. These elements are difficult to recreate or support remotely, and as a result, it is expected that the physical office will continue to be a driver of business success in the post-pandemic world.

The Future for Retail and the High Street

While initially much of this sector was significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Irish retail sector has demonstrated its resilience in 2021 with consumer confidence, retail sales and footfall all increasing quarter on quarter throughout the year. Several new international entrants to the Irish market are seeking retail space, eg, with Lululemon having opened its first Irish store on Grafton Street in Dublin in December 2021 and Pret A Manger due to open its first store on Dawson Street in Dublin in 2022. Premium fashion group Flannels is due to open its second Irish store at the Blanchardstown Centre following a major EUR17 million mall refurbishment and Brown Thomas has opened a new store at Dundrum Town Centre. A large number of other businesses including Lego, IKEA Home Service Point, Fresh the Good Food Kitchen and Sky have plans to roll out new stores to the Irish market.

Going forward investors may favour certain retail assets over others as the sector continues to recover with neighbourhood schemes, grocery-anchored schemes, retail parks and high-end shopping centres likely to be popular choices.

Prime retail locations such as the Blanchardstown Centre have performed very strongly throughout the pandemic, and this is expected to continue. The high street was more severely affected by the pandemic restrictions; however, we are now seeing the return of workers and tourists to cities and towns that will boost activity on the high streets and urban locations. Overall, the outlook for the retail sector in 2022 is very positive with consumer confidence, spending and footfall set to continue to increase.

The Private Rented Sector (PRS)

The PRS in Ireland has shown its resilience throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to attract strong interest from investors. Residential investments accounted for 40% of total investment in the Irish real estate market in 2021. Against the volatile backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the residential sector solidified itself as a safe and defensive long-term investment.

The shortage of high-quality residential accommodation in Ireland is a focus of the current government with its “Housing for All” plan. A housing budget of EUR5.5 billion was announced as part of Budget 2022. Key areas for the housing budget include building on the commitments in Budget 2021 in relation to social housing, homelessness provisions and rental measures. Energy efficiency improvements to social housing are also on the agenda. In order to deal with the current demand, a minimum of 35,000 new residential units are required every year for the next number of years.

The government has also introduced other incentives in relation to the construction of residential accommodation in recent years including the following.

- A fast-track planning procedure for the construction of residential accommodation

where the time limits for approval of planning permission have been greatly reduced.

- A stamp duty refund is available where non-residential property is transferred and subsequently utilised for construction of residential accommodation; the refund effectively reduces the stamp duty rate from 7.5% to 2%. Budget 2021 has extended the time allowed to commence construction work to 31 December 2022 in order to be eligible for this refund. This scheme is subject to a number of conditions.
- The 'Help to Buy' scheme for first-time buyers of new homes has been extended by Budget 2022 to 31 December 2022.

This asset class remains attractive for investors due to its high yields and stability. One of the strengths of this sector currently is its low correlation to economic downturns, as the strong need for housing supply means the residential sector is relatively insulated from the business cycle and geopolitical crises, unlike other property classes.

Record Levels of Investment in the Industrial and Logistics Sector

2021 was the strongest year on record for industrial investment in Ireland with almost EUR1 billion of assets traded, accounting for 18% of turnover in the real estate market in 2021. This momentum has continued unabated into 2022 and an increase in forward funding transactions is expected as investors consider all methods to secure assets in this highly sought-after sector. Ireland's specialisation in pharmaceuticals and information technology has been a significant factor in the demand for industrial and logistics space. Activity is also being led by demand from occupiers like ASOS and Amazon who seek to respond to the impact of Brexit and COVID-19 by localising their supply chains.

Outlook

It is anticipated that both the logistics and the PRS sectors will remain strong due to the current demand for high-quality residential accommodation and logistics space and that demand for retail and office space will continue to increase as the economy continues to recover and society learns to live with COVID-19.

It is also expected that demand for some alternative investments such as film studios, life sciences, healthcare and data centres will increase as investors seek varied opportunities.

The Irish real estate sector will continue to strengthen its commitment to investing in ESG-positive assets and working towards achieving net-zero goals. It is now widely recognised by the sector that failure to incorporate ESG factors into financial or investment decisions creates substantial risks for both businesses and society. ESG is now a driver in all aspects of the real estate industry and the wider Irish economy. It will impact the ability to raise finance, attract investment, attract and retain employees and secure regulatory consents.

Ireland is expected to remain an attractive choice for foreign investors as it offers a high degree of economic and political stability with the benefit of a common-law legal system and favourable tax structure that is relatively easy to understand. Ireland is strongly aligned with the EU and benefits from the common trade area and access to talent from across Europe. Ireland also had the fastest growing economy in the developed world in 2021. The climate is temperate and is generally spared from natural disaster and Ireland consistently ranks highly on the Global Peace Index, making it one of the world's safest countries in which to live. This marks Dublin out as the optimal place for investors seeking to minimise uncertainties from external global and geopolitical risks.

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AUTHORS



Diarmuid Mawe is head of the commercial property group at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin, and advises on all types of commercial property

transactions. He has extensive experience advising institutional clients on all property law aspects involved in the acquisition, management and disposal of real estate assets. Diarmuid also specialises in commercial landlord and tenant law, advising some of the country's largest landlords and tenants on their commercial property portfolios. He has many years of experience advising leading private equity and institutional clients on their respective property portfolios across all sectors of the Irish real estate market, including office, retail, PRS/BTR and industrial assets.



Craig Kenny is a partner in the commercial property team at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin, specialising in all aspects of commercial property

work, including the acquisition and disposal of investment property, commercial landlord and tenant, property finance, PRS and BTR schemes and the property aspects of corporate transactions. He has also acted on loan portfolio transactions, where loans are secured over commercial property. Craig recently advised on the acquisition, development and disposal of PRS/BTR schemes on a forward-funded and forward-purchase basis. He has also advised institutions, lenders, private equity investors, insolvency practitioners and landlord and tenant clients.

*Contributed by: Diarmuid Mawe, Craig Kenny and Katelin Toomey, **Maples Group***



Katelin Toomey is a knowledge lawyer in the commercial property team at Maples and Calder (Ireland) LLP, the Maples Group's law firm in Dublin.

Katelin has valuable experience as a commercial property transactions lawyer and has advised on all aspects of commercial property transactions, including on the acquisition, financing and disposal of various real estate assets. She has also advised on the negotiation of commercial leases from both a landlord and tenant perspective. As a knowledge lawyer, she provides specialist support in all aspects of commercial property, including commercial conveyancing, commercial landlord and tenant and property finance.

Maples Group

75 St. Stephen's Green
Dublin 2
D02 PR50
Ireland

Tel: +353 1 619 2000
Fax: +353 1 619 2001
Email: dublininfo@maples.com
Web: www.maples.com





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