As your constituent, I am writing to highlight a number of issues which I believe should be considered by the next Government in Northern Ireland. I hope that you will raise awareness of these issues during your election campaign.

The Northern Irish construction industry is the fourth largest employer in Northern Ireland, directly providing over 50,000 jobs and contributing approximately 7% of Northern Ireland’ GDP. Construction is a key economic driver, and adequate future investment in both repair and maintenance of existing buildings and the construction of new ones will be vital to rebuilding the Northern Irish economy, implementing building safety reform and reaching net zero.

However, the industry faces significant systemic and cultural difficulties, which have only been made worse by the impacts of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. At the same time, the climate emergency demands urgent action to improve the sustainability of our built environment.

Quality, or rather the failure of quality, is arguably the most important issue facing the construction industry today, and only an industry-wide shift in culture will be enough to address this. The future Northern Irish Government must create a stable policy environment for the construction sector with long term strategies for housing and retrofit, a national development plan, and accompanying financial commitments.

The construction industry in Northern Ireland has long suffered from significant skills shortages, and difficulty in attracting a diverse range of entrants. The Northern Irish Government must work closely with the industry if it is to address these issues and deliver the skills required to deliver Northern Ireland’s future built environment.

The creation of an A-Level in construction is a key mechanism CIOB has identified to ensure Northern Ireland is in a position to develop a strong pipeline of talent, equipped to meet the digital and low-carbon skills needs of the future, and to encourage girls into the industry, addressing the gender imbalance, and contributing towards Northern Ireland’s STEM agenda

If the ambitious retrofit targets in Northern Ireland are to be met, there must be enough qualified individuals who can specify, design, install, manage, and maintain this work. At the same time, it is vital to educate the users on the correct use of the retrofit solutions if we are all to benefit from this massive remit.

The next Government should develop an accelerated and coordinated retrofit education and training programme in colleges and universities, as well as the private sector, to train construction technicians and professionals in the skills they will need to decarbonise our existing building stock. This will help to effectively deliver the urgent action needed to reach net zero and demonstrate that Northern Ireland is at the forefront of UK nations in leading climate action ahead of the UK’s hosting of COP26.

Public procurement is an important element of the economy in Northern Ireland, with central and local government spending upwards of £3 billion annually on the purchase of supplies, services and construction works. This level of expenditure offers real potential in terms of maximising the economic and social outcomes for the local community. Procurement offers the opportunity for public bodies to actively add value to the wider national interest. The construction industry has an ongoing issues with equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), which the CIOB has sought to address with the publication of a charter aimed at helping construction firms to start their EDI journey. From a policy perspective, they are asking the next assembly to introduce measures in public procurement that require employers to sign-up to sector-led Equality Diversity and Inclusion Charters.

These issues are highlighted in detail by the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) in their 2022 Northern Ireland Election Manifesto. This document also includes a number of other policy priorities related to build quality and safety; education, skills and training; and tackling net zero.

As a construction professional in Northern Ireland, I believe that the industry has the attitude and commitment needed to address these issues both now, and in the future. However, the nature and scale of these challenges means they can only be tackled with strong political will and collaboration with industry. If you could raise these points throughout the campaign and within your party, it would be much appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Name

Address 1

Address 2

City

Postcode