



Sandyford Business District

Innovation Summit 2024 - Event Capture

**Roadmap for Sandyford: “a Premier European
Innovation District”**

Prepared by: Sandyford Business District

Executive Summary

Over two days in November 2024, Sandyford Business District hosted its annual Innovation Summit, but this time with a difference. It was not about the number of attendees; it was about the calibre of participants, the quality of the dialogue, and the potential impact of the outcomes.

We were privileged to welcome local dignitaries, regional experts, national politicians, and international leaders. Attendees included Ministers Neale Richmond and Ossian Smyth, Matjaž Rakovec, Mayor of Kranj, Frank Curran, CEO of Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council, Pablo García-Vigón Gonzalez, President of the Federation of Business Areas of Asturias, Ger Corbett, CEO of Sandyford Business District, and many more. The event was formally opened by An Cathaoirleach Cllr Jim O’Leary, an honour we deeply appreciated.



*Front Row: L To R: Matjaž Rakovec, Mayor of Kranj, Shelia Moore, Deputy Chairperson of SBD, Minister Neale Richmond, An Cathaoirleach Jim O’Leary, Minister Ossian Smyth, Arantxa Herrero Yuste of Asemposil, Frank Curran, CEO of DLR CoCo, Paul Kennedy, Director of Climate Change & Infrastructure at DLR CoCo
Back Row: Gašper Kleč, Head of the Office for Economic Activities and Transport, City of Kranj, Ger Corbett, CEO of Sandyford BID, Pablo García-Vigón Gonzalez, President of the Federation of Business Areas of Asturias, Aidan Blighe, Director of Planning and Economic Development, DLR CoCo, Graham Colclough, MC of Innovation Summit.*

The purpose of the gathering was to start to “*imagine if...*” and stimulate the building of **Sandyford’s Roadmap to be a Premier European Innovation District**. This was based on a 4-pillar innovation framework, that was then focused on 4 priority topics.

- **Day 1 focused on setting the ambition, building local commitment, and learning internationally.** It was broadly built around the innovation framework.
- **Day 2 focused on moving to action**, through developing practical plans for step-change improvement within the priority themes of circularity, mobility, social innovation, and digitalisation.

The overall event output provided an initial **Roadmap** to support collaboration at all levels to deliver the ambition. This included a number of potential game-changing ideas and initiatives.



These will be shared with participants and progressively discussed with key stakeholders in the near-term to grow momentum for action, and further developed and managed from there on in.

Day 1 – Framing Innovation Ambitions

Day one was structured around the enabling innovation framework, involving leadership keynotes to set the ambition, with two interactive panel discussions to consolidate the commitment. Day 2 focused on the practical aspects of building actionable plans for the priority themes.



Our MC was Graham Colclough, an international leader with a wealth of cities and innovation experience, who is driving the global smart cities agenda through positions within the EC Smart Cities Marketplace, various major EU innovation programmes, key projects in other developed and developing continents, and formative work on financing and codifying solutions and practices for scale market adoption to achieve climate goals.

Key Notes



The focus of the local and national political and council leaders emphasised:

- The need for the summit and the need for innovation
- The importance of Sandyford Business District as a place of innovation
- The next logical step in SBD’s journey
- Support for the ‘big idea’ of a European Innovation District Association, linking progressive collaborative ambitious locations
- Intrigue in Irish involvement in the imminent European manifesto for a very large-scale cities climate impact investment fund.

Panel 1: Building Local Commitment

The panellists brought diverse roles and experiences to the discussion, including local public sector representatives, regional transport experts, banking professionals,



academics, and members of local businesses. Their introductions emphasised their relevance to the agenda and highlighted how they could contribute to the SBD ambition.



Dr. Aodhan Newsholme, Lecturer in Circular Economy and Sustainability at MTU, Felipe Muñoz, SWAPPSI, Alan Hicks, CTO of Manna, Declan Shortall, Terminal Standards and Planning at Dublin Airport, Aidan Blighe, Director of Planning and Economic Development at DLR CoCo, Orla McGovern, Head of SME Strategy and Propositions at AIB,

Aidan Blighe, Director of Planning and Economic Development, DLR CoCo, expressed his immense excitement about the future of SBD, stating, “Why should we not dream big? We might not have all the answers, but through collaboration, we can find them.” He wholeheartedly supported the development of international relationships spearheaded by SBD CEO Ger Corbett. DLR is actively planning numerous improvements to establish Sandyford Business District as a premier destination for living, working, and socialising.

Orla McGovern of AIB highlighted the significance of this impactful summit organised by Sandyford Business District. She emphasised AIB's commitment to supporting business owners by facilitating access to finance for investment. AIB collaborates closely with the Strategic Banking Corporation of Ireland to expand financial opportunities and simplify the process of securing funding for businesses.

Declan Shortall of Dublin Airport discussed the anticipated lifting of the airport cap, noting that accommodating 40 million passengers annually would be facilitated by leveraging Irish-developed technology to create a more inclusive airport. He also emphasised the critical role of international connectivity in supporting locally represented businesses.

Dr. Aodhan Newsholme underscored the importance of circularity and advancing the Circular Economy, drawing attention to the significant comparative gaps between Dublin and Amsterdam. He noted Amsterdam's greater regulatory control over city operations and highlighted the stark performance gap in second-use, second-life resources, with Ireland at 2.5% compared to the Netherlands' 29%. This disparity serves as a wake-up call for Ireland, presenting substantial opportunities for improvement and growth.



Aidan Blighe further announced a unified branding initiative for Dublin, bringing together the four Dublin Council areas to attract tourism and businesses. DLR CoCo is conducting studies, expected to take approximately a year, which will inform a future Sandyford Urban Framework Plan aimed at fostering innovation in business.

Felipe Muñoz (SWAPPSI) and Alan Hicks (Manna), representing innovative businesses based in SBD, responded enthusiastically to the Summit's emphasis on innovation and its priority themes.

Innovation Inspiration: Dr Lollie Mancey



Lollie is an educational provocateur with a wealth of entrepreneurial experience. She leads UCD's 'Centre for Innovation', Postgraduate Certificate in Creativity, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, and Graduate Certificate in Digital Transformation, Technology & Resilience, preparing students for the future.

Lollie discussed the significant population growth projected for Ireland, expected to reach 7 million by 2040, as highlighted in her recent RTÉ TV programme *Futureville*. She emphasised the need for a diverse representation across all sectors of society, stating, "Proper connectivity is required; you need proper spaces for innovation to occur, and you can't do it as part of your day job. That is why events like this are important." She stressed that innovation thrives on in-person conversations, fostering connections between big tech companies, SMEs—the backbone of the Irish economy—and the wider community.

Lollie highlighted the importance of nurturing innovative thinking from secondary school level, focusing on critical thinking rather than rote learning for exams like the Leaving Certificate. She also underscored the need to embed residents and the local community into innovation programmes to ensure a more inclusive and collaborative approach.

Panel 2: The International Perspective



Matjaž Rakovec Mayor of Kranj, Ciaran Cuffe, Former MEP, Marta Morillo, Co-Founder of CircularAI, Barry Brown, Director IBM, Pablo García-Vigón Gonzalez, President of the Federation of Business Areas of Asturias, Ger Corbett, SBD CEO.

Matjaž Rakovec, Mayor of Kranj, discussed the importance of setting high ambitions, stressing that it doesn't matter if everyone believes in them—strong leadership drives progress and ensures goals are achieved.

Ciaran Cuffe, former MEP, discussed recent key EC reports, such as the Draghi report, and how Europe is conducting a reality check on the single market, emphasising the need to focus on competitiveness. He stressed the importance of innovation and fostering collaboration between businesses and academia to ensure cohesive thinking. He also called for consolidation in the telecoms sector. Ciaran highlighted that Sandyford Business District has the potential to be a model of sustainability and a place where families can thrive for generations. He posed the question, "How can we make the District a cultural zone, a space for diversity, where people who wouldn't normally meet come together, as this sparks innovation?"

Pablo García-Vigón Gonzalez discussed the recent national congress in Spain, where Ger Corbett, SBD CEO, Greg Brennan, Chairman of SBD, and Aidan Blighe of DLR CoCo represented SBD and DLR. He noted that many business parks and districts face similar challenges, and that collaboration can lead to greater achievements and solutions. Business parks in Spain contribute over 50% of the country's GDP. Pablo expressed his support for the idea of establishing a European association.

Barry Brown, Technical Director of IBM Cloud, discussed how Sandyford Business District can distinguish itself from other districts by defining its unique identity and enhancing its international reputation. He emphasised the great opportunity to seize this moment. As a large business, he fully supported the idea of linking innovation districts, benefiting both large enterprises and their SME ecosystems.

Ger Corbett, SBD CEO, spoke about the exciting opportunities arising from twinning with Palo Alto, a project he is currently working on with DLR. As part of this initiative, UCD has been twinned with Stanford University. While European initiatives tend to progress more



slowly, Ger noted that through these projects, SBD has connected with partners eager to accelerate progress. Both Ger and Pablo committed to collaborating on the launch of a European Business Park Association in the coming months.

Marta Morillo, Co-Founder of CircularAI, expressed her excitement about the innovation summit and discussed how CircularAI can contribute by promoting sustainability and circularity, focusing on creating a vision for the future.

The panel discussed various locations in Europe and beyond, highlighting their agility in actively collaborating toward an innovative future.



Day 2 – Moving to Action and a Roadmap

Day 2 took place at Explorium, the national sport and science centre—an ideal setting to foster collaboration and innovative thinking. Additional participants were in attendance, enriching the priority theme action planning discussions.

After a brief recap of Day 1's sessions, which focused on the systemic enabling innovation framework, attendees divided into groups to concentrate on the four priority themes: **Mobility, Circularity, Digitisation and Social Innovation**. The goal was to align with the scope and challenges of each theme and brainstorm potential initiatives to contribute to the roadmap. The facilitated discussions were "high-touch, low-tech" in nature, with ideas captured on brown paper and flipcharts, then filtered, aligned, and prioritised for their respective portions of the roadmap.



Sandyford Business District Innovation Summit 2024 - Day 2



The day concluded with a plenary session, where the outcomes of all four working groups were reviewed, showcasing the key ideas and initiatives that emerged.

Championing the themes were:

- **Mobility** – Ger Corbett, SBD CEO, who is involved in several European projects on mobility and currently working with the ESB/DLR on mobility islands in the District.
- **Circularity** – Led by Dr. Aodhan Newsholme (MTU) and Justin O’Keefe (Gen Phoenix), both esteemed experts in this field, who actively teach and work in circularity respectively. They emphasised the importance of establishing a clear baseline and defining goals to guide progress.
- **Digitalisation** – Led by Leo McBride, CEO of DigitalX and DCaaS, both of which are driving innovation in the AV and digital industries.
- **Social Innovation** – Led by John Sommers, Chair of Naomh Ólaf and SBD board member, this session focused on leveraging ground-up local experience to foster community engagement. John highlighted the importance of Sandyford Business District “up-branding” to enhance its reputation as a hub for both businesses and the communities it seeks to support and connect with.

Participants were then shown how each theme would be integrated into the emerging overall Roadmap, blending actions from the innovation framework, which establishes the





enabling environment, with practical steps for implementation within each theme. This approach aims to achieve a more impactful and systemic method of driving innovation.

Our Key Action points

- 1) Publish the roadmap, strengthen collective ownership of it, and further develop the key initiatives – start January 2025.
- 2) Develop a Governance Mechanism to lift innovation to the next level – Q1'25; set tangible goals and ensure delivery of them – ongoing
- 3) Appoint a Programme Director for Sandyford Innovation initiatives – Q1'25
- 4) Actively progress the European Business District Association, and engage candidate locations – Q1'25