



DBFL CONSULTING ENGINEERS

Registered Office

Ormond House
Upper Ormond Quay
Dublin 7 Ireland
D07 W704

+ 353 1 400 4000
info@dbfl.ie
www.dbfl.ie

Cork Office

14 South Mall
Cork Ireland
T12 CT91

+ 353 21 202 4538
info@dbfl.ie
www.dbfl.ie

Galway Office

Odeon House
7 Eyre Square
Galway Ireland
H91 YNC8

+353 91 335599
info@dbfl.ie
www.dbfl.ie

Waterford Office

Suite 8b The Atrium
Maritana Gate Canada Street
Waterford Ireland
X91 W028

+ 353 51 309 500
info@dbfl.ie
www.dbfl.ie

Oireachtas Joint Committee on Housing, Local Government and Heritage General Scheme of the Remediation of Dwellings Damaged by Defective Concrete Blocks Bill 2022

Opening Statement by Paul Forde, DBFL Consulting Engineers, Chair of the Expert Group

Tuesday 27th June 2023

Good afternoon Cathaoirleach and members. I'm Paul Forde and I am Director and Chairman of DBFL Consulting Engineers. In January of last year I was appointed by the Department to Chair the Expert Group on the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme. I am happy to be here today with my colleague from that Expert Group, Martin Lynch, General Manager of the Pyrite Remediation Scheme.

We'd like to thank the Committee for inviting us here to assist in its discussions and deliberations on the General Scheme.

I am in practice as a consulting engineer for over 43 years and I am a founding partner of DBFL Consulting Engineers.

The Committee has previously been furnished with my qualifications and professional memberships among which is Fellow of Engineers Ireland and Fellow of the Institution of Structural Engineers.



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I have extensive experience – over 15 years – in investigating and resolving pryrite problems in a wide range of buildings and I have acted as expert witness on several occasions.

I was appointed a member of the original Pyrite Resolution Board. I chaired the technical committee in drafting the Irish Standard (IS 398:2013: Part 2). Of particular relevance here is the fact that this part of the Standard deals with ‘Methodology for remediation works’.

In January 2022 I was asked by the Minister to chair the Expert Group to advise on the proposed Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme.

The Expert Group was established to consider and advise the Minister on the technical issues which needed to be resolved. These included issues such as:

- The Damage Threshold for Entry to the Scheme
- The Parameters around a Second Grant Application
- An Independent Appeals Process
- A Review of the Certificate of Remediation, and to consider the
- Rebuild costs prepared by the Society of Chartered Surveyors of Ireland.

Establishment of Expert Group/Meetings with Homeowners’ Representatives

The Expert Group met for the first time on 27th January 2022.

At the beginning of March 2022, myself and another member of the Expert Group, John O’Connor, met with the representatives of the Mayo and Donegal homeowners and we discussed the terms of reference of the Expert Group. We met again on 9th March during



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which the homeowners’ views on all relevant issues were discussed. In each meeting we were impressed by their representations, and understood their concerns.

The Expert Group issued its first report on the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme on 16th March 2022. This report dealt with the short-term technical issues in respect of which the Minister required immediate recommendations. On 29th April 2022, the Expert Group issued its Addendum Report in respect of the SCSi rebuild costs.

On 30th September 2022 the Department requested that I set up a Sub-Committee of Expert Group members in order to review some of the ‘Table 1’ : Short Terms Issues’ as set out below.

Short Term Issues for the enhanced DCB Scheme which require updating

	Item
1.1	Damage Threshold for Entry to the DCB Grant Scheme
1.2	Building Condition Assessment Report
3.1	Remedial Works Plan
3.2	Certificate of Remediation

This request followed from the hearings during the passage of the Remediation of Dwellings Damaged by the Use of Defective Concrete Blocks Act 2022. During this process the Minister indicated that he would ask the Chairs of the original Expert Group Working Groups, and Housing Agency representatives, to review the previously issued advices in relation to the above four ‘Short Term Issues’. The Minister also requested that this group



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consider the various contributions to the Joint Oireachtas Committee hearings, and the learnings since the original Report of the Expert Group was issued on 16th March 2022. The Minister further requested that advices be provided in respect of an appropriate definition of damage for the purposes of the proposed Regulations.

The Expert Group Addendum Sub-Committee comprised the following:-

Chair : Paul Forde (DBFL Consulting Engineers)

Members: John O'Connor (Former CE Housing Agency / Chair of the Commission on Housing)

Fiona Fleming (Housing Agency)

Peadar Espey (Housing Agency)

Martin Lynch (General Manager of the Pyrite Remediation Scheme).

The Addendum Sub-Committee met on a number of occasions between 10th October and 10th November 2022. The Addendum Report was issued on 20th December 2022.

On 23rd February 2023, the Minister requested that I reconstitute the Expert Group and undertake an updating of the Expert Group's Addendum Report 'Report of the Expert Group on the Enhanced Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme (Addendum in respect of 3.0 Development of Short Term Items (Table 1 Items) 3(5) Engagement with SCSi on Rebuild Costs : Options 1-5)' dated 29th April 2022.



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The updating of the Expert Group's 29th April 2022 Report was required following the issuing by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) of updated rebuild costs. These updated rebuild costs are set out in the SCSI's letter to the Department 'Defective Concrete Block Scheme – Average Rebuilding Rates for Northwest Region February 2023' dated 28th February 2023.

The Expert Group's updated Advices to the Minister were issued on 6th April 2023.

Subsequently, on 3rd May 2023, the Minister requested that the Expert Group undertake a further updating of the Expert Group's Addendum Report.

This further updating of the Expert Group's Addendum Report was required following the issuing by the Society of Chartered Surveyors Ireland (SCSI) of rebuild costs for the Midwest Region. These rebuild costs are set out in the SCSI's letter to the Department 'Defective Concrete Block Scheme – Average Rebuilding Rates for Midwest Region April 2023' dated 18th April 2023.

The Expert Group's updated Advices to the Minister were issued on 9th May 2023.

The Expert Group's recommendations for the Minister's consideration are set out in each of these 5 reports. I understand that these reports have all been made available to the Members.

Thank you Cathaoirleach.

Martin and I are happy to answer any questions which the Members may have.