



Contractors Mechanical Plant Engineers

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER



Welcome to another edition of your National Newsletter.

CMPE BRANCH NEWS

Preston & Fylde Branch

Conlon Group has been sold to an employee-ownership trust.



The five Conlon brothers – Mick, John, Pat, Vincent and Malachy – set up Conlon Brothers (Preston) Ltd in 1961 after working together on the Preston bypass, the road that became the M6 motorway.

It has remained in the ownership of the Conlon family until now, with the sale of the business to an employee-ownership trust (EOT).

Day-to-day management and operations of the business, however, remain unchanged.

In the year to 31st October 2023 Conlon Holdings turned over £39.7m and made a pre-tax profit of £2.0m. It has 72 employees.

Chairman Michael Conlon explained: “What we’re doing is completely aligned with our company ethos. From the outset, our founders, those five young Conlon brothers, put people at the heart of the company. By implementing this transition now, the family believes it is the best outcome for the business and, most importantly, for all of our colleagues. The current board of directors will remain and will still have responsibility for running the business. The directors will now be accountable to a trustee board, which will include two elected employee trustees.



INDUSTRY NEWS

Water companies face huge fines.



The industry regulator has proposed fines totalling £168m against three water companies that are persistent polluters.

Ofwat has today proposed that Thames, Yorkshire and Northumbrian will be fined a total of £168m for failing to manage their sewage treatment works and networks, as part of the first batch of outcomes from its biggest ever investigation.

These are the first three cases Ofwat has open as part of a wider investigation.

Eight other water companies are still be investigated.

The penalties proposed will see Thames Water fined £104m, Yorkshire Water fined £47m and Northumbrian Water fined £17m.

The fines, which are now subject to consultation under the regulatory system, represent 9%, 7% and 5% of each company's turnover, respectively. The maximum fine that Ofwat can impose is 10% of turnover.

The penalties relate to their management of wastewater treatment works and wider sewer networks including their operation of storm overflows. These are designed to release water in exceptional circumstances, when the sewerage system is at risk of being overwhelmed, such as during unusually heavy downpours or snowfall, to prevent sewage flooding into people's homes.

Ofwat found that all three companies, to varying extents, have:

- Failed to ensure that discharges of untreated wastewater from storm overflows occur only in exceptional circumstances, which has resulted in harm to the environment and customers.
- Shown a strong correlation between high spill levels and operational issues at wastewater treatment sites, indicating that these companies are properly operating and maintaining their wastewater treatment works.
- Failed to upgrade assets, where necessary, to ensure they meet the changing needs of the area they serve.
- Been slow to understand the scope of their obligations relating to limiting pollution from storm overflows and failed to ensure that they had in place the necessary information, processes and oversight to enable them to properly comply with those requirements.

Therefore, in addition to the proposed financial penalties, Ofwat is also consulting on proposed enforcement orders which will require each company

to rectify the problems Ofwat has identified to ensure that they comply with their legal and regulatory obligations.

Companies will not be able to recover the money for any proposed penalties from customers and Ofwat will ensure that customers are not charged twice where additional maintenance is required, it said.

Ofwat chief executive David Black said: “Ofwat has uncovered a catalogue of failure by Thames Water, Yorkshire Water and Northumbrian Water in how they ran their sewage works and this resulted in excessive spills from storm overflows. Our investigation has shown how they routinely released sewage into our rivers and seas, rather than ensuring that this only happens in exceptional circumstances as the law intends.

“The level of penalties we intend to impose signals both the severity of the failings and our determination to take action to ensure water companies do more to deliver cleaner rivers and seas.

“These companies need to move at pace to put things right and meet their obligations to protect customers and the environment. They also need to transform how they look after the environment and to focus on doing better in the future.

“Looking to the future we want transform companies' performance under our new price control that starts in April next year, so we reduce spills from sewage overflows by 44% by 2030 compared to 2021 levels.”



Engcon launches new finger grab.

Swedish tiltrotator manufacturer Engcon has brought out a lightweight finger grab.



According to Engcon, its new finger grab “takes the handling and lifting of twigs, branches and logs to a whole new level”.

It is equipped with EC-Oil as standard, for changing hydraulic attachments or disconnecting the tiltrotator.

Developed in collaboration with Hultdins, a Swedish manufacturer of grapples and saws, the finger grab opens smoothly and

softly for handling debris, Engcon promises.

"The finger grab is a good addition to our range of tools," says product manager Martin Engström. "Thanks to our close dialogue with our end customers, we can develop products that we know there is a need for on the market, and the finger grab in combination with EC-Oil is an excellent example of this."



New skills quango raises CITB questions.

The government has announced plans for a new organisation to oversee skills training in England.



According to the prime minister, Skills England will fix a system that is broken.

However, the Federation of Master Builders says that the future of the Construction Industry Training Board remains unanswered.

Prime minister Keir Starmer said: "Our skills system is in a mess, which is why we are transforming our approach to meet skills needs over the coming decades.

"They will help to deliver our number one mission as a government, to kickstart economic growth, by opening up new opportunities for young people and enabling British businesses to recruit more home-grown talent.

"From construction to IT, healthcare to engineering, our success as a country depends on delivering highly skilled workforces for the long-term. Skills England will put in place the framework needed to achieve that goal while reducing our reliance on workers from overseas."

The government expects Skills England to bring together central and local government, businesses, training providers and unions to meet the skills needs of the next decade and provide strategic oversight of the post-16 skills training regime.

Construction is cited as a particular priority. Skills England will work with the Migration Advisory Committee to help reduce reliance on overseas workers, the government said.

The Skills England Bill will transfer functions from the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE) to Skills England.

Skills England will hold responsibility for maintaining a list of levy-eligible training to ensure value for money, and that the mix of government-funded training available to learners and employers aligns with the identified skills needs.

Former Co-operative Group chief executive Richard Pennycook, the lead non-executive director at the Department for Education, has been named as interim chair of Skills England. A permanent board, chair and chief executive will be appointed in due course.

Federation of Master Builders chief executive Brian Berry said that it sounded like good news but it remained unclear how the Construction Industry Training Board would fit into the new regime

“Over recent weeks the new government has set out ambitious plans to get Britain building again, but this can only be achieved if the skills crisis is tackled,” Berry said. “There is a serious shortage of all trades in the construction industry, with the result that we need additional 240,000+ workers over the next four years. The prime minister’s announcement to set up Skill England recognises the seriousness of the problem, but details about how Skills England will operate remain light. It will be vital that future delivery focuses on a long-term skills plan being put in place, and that plans to allow up to 50% of the apprenticeship levy to be redirected into other forms of training don’t result in a fall in the number of construction apprenticeships available.”

Berry continued: “As part of the prime minister’s announcement that the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education will be amalgamated into the new Skills England, maintaining current skill levels, and increasing numbers further, must remain a key focus. It raises a question about what role the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) will play in this new system. We’re still awaiting publication of the Mark Framer performance review of CITB, which may help provide some clarity. The secretary of state for education should publish the report as soon as possible to ensure the industry has stability about its future training needs.”

Last year, the CITB’s National Construction College (NCC) was labelled as "requiring improvement" following an inspection from Ofsted, highlighting six areas for improvement across four themes:

- Subcontracting and apprenticeship development coaches
- Marked work and feedback
- English and mathematics
- Careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG).

A recent monitoring visit last month found that the first three of these themes had seen "significant progress", with the final theme seeing "reasonable progress".

Education secretary Bridget Phillipson said: “Our first mission in government is to grow the economy, and for that we need to harness the talents of all our people to unlock growth and break down the barriers to opportunity.

“The skills system we inherited is fragmented and broken. Employers want to invest in their workers but for too long have been held back from accessing the training they need.



McAlpine lands lead role on Somerset battery factory.

Sir Robert McAlpine has signed a preconstruction services agreement for the first phase of the Agratas battery factory in Somerset.



Agratas, Tata Group's global battery business, is preparing to build a £4bn battery cell manufacturing facility across 300 acres of the Gravity Smart Campus in Puriton, near Bridgwater. The site is a former Royal Ordnance Factory.

Sir Robert McAlpine has been lined up as main contractor for the first of the three buildings that are planned.

Agratas said that McAlpine had performed well across the board in the tender process in relation to cost, capability, experience, sustainability and collaborative working and therefore has been awarded a pre-construction services agreement for Building One.

Building One and ancillary development comprises 244,710 sqm GEA of built area (more than 35% bigger than Wembley Stadium).

McAlpine will now start preparations for the development, which is scheduled to be operational in 2026. Preparatory works have been under way at the site for several months already, with piling for Building One expected to commence in the coming weeks. Back in February Kelston Sparks was awarded a two-year contract for groundworks, earthworks and piling mat installation contract.

Stantec will provide architecture, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, structural, and civil engineering services, as well as risk management, planning compliance, BIM management and landscape architecture.

Once all phases of construction are complete, the facility is set to be the biggest of its kind in the UK and by the early 2030s should contribute almost half of the projected battery manufacturing capacity required for the UK automotive sector.



JCB claims credit for towing regs reform.

A change in the towing regulations means that it is now possible to get permission to tow a trailer behind construction plant.

According to JCB, which has been pressing for a change in the regulations, being able to tow trailers could save plant operating companies thousands of pounds a year.

The Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) has create a new vehicle special order (VSO) that can be applied for in Great Britain. Under the new regulation, it will be possible for customers to get a permit to use wheeled engineering plant, such as backhoe loaders and wheeled excavators, to tow a trailer on the highway, for the purposes of construction, maintenance, and repair of roads.

Under the new order, construction plant will be permitted to tow a trailer that is unladen, or that is carrying material or tools to and from a road construction, repair, or maintenance site. The machines will be allowed to tow on all types of roads, other than motorways, at speeds of up to 20mph. The wheeled engineering plant must be road-registered and comply with all applicable aspects of the Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986. The overall length of the combined machine and trailer cannot exceed eight metres and the trailer must bear the same number plate as the towing machine.

Richard Brooks, JCB's group product innovation director said: "Recognition by the VCA of the benefits of safely towing a trailer behind these types of wheeled machines will be welcomed by contractors and equipment owners.

"We have been pushing for this change in legislation, as it will greatly increase the versatility and productivity of this type of wheeled machine. By towing a trailer to and from site, customers will reduce the need for additional vehicles to carry materials and tools, cutting emissions and unnecessary traffic, while increasing efficiency in road construction maintenance and repair."

JCB said that it has spent years trying to persuade the Department for Transport (DfT) and VCA that this was an effective and efficient use of machinery. While this is only a temporary derogation to The Road Vehicles (Authorisation of Special Types) General Order 2003, JCB continues to press for a permanent change.

Operators wanting to take advantage of this change in the law, can apply in writing to the VCA, advising that they wish to use a machine, or a number of machines, to tow on the road. Applications should be submitted to vso@vca.gov.uk and must include the name of the person or organisation making the application.



TC Harrison completes Gunn JCB takeover.

TC Harrison Group has completed the acquisition of neighbouring JCB dealer Gunn JCB.

Two of the longest-standing JCB dealerships in the UK are now under the same ownership.

The deal was first announced in April although the terms of the transaction have still not been disclosed.

William Harrison, deputy chairman of TC Harrison Group, said: “We are committed to ensuring a seamless transition for Gunn JCB customers. The Gunn JCB name will remain unchanged, and the team will continue to provide the exceptional service our Gunn JCB customers have come to expect.

“The acquisition will allow us to further strengthen our JCB presence and offer Gunn JCB customers a continued comprehensive range of products and services. We look forward to a bright future together, building on the combined strengths of both organisations as they deliver unparalleled JCB experience for their own individual customer base.”



TC Harrison’s JCB operation has six regional depots covering Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Derbyshire, Humberside and the northeast.

Gunn JCB has dealerships in Altrincham, Shrewsbury, Ruthin, Preston, Marchington and the Isle of Man.





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