

Major investment paves way for continued expansion at Arran Chemical Company

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"The work that we have done in the last five years set us in a very great place for the next five years for the future expansion"

Monksland-based Arran Chemical Company is continuing to expand on the back of a €14m investment over the last number of years.

The company based at the Monksland Industrial Estate was purchased in 2015 by Almac Group, a Northern Ireland-headquartered global contract pharmaceutical development and manufacturing organisation.

Since then, revenues have trebled and staff numbers have risen from 45 to a planned 125 this year.

The total investment has been €14m – part of the company's ADAPT strategy (Arran deploys advanced production technologies), which has been supported by the IDA.

And with Almac Group announcing in late 2021 that it plans to create 1,800 new jobs, of which 1,000 will be on the island of Ireland, there is scope for further expansion in Athlone.

Almac Group's Vice President of Technology and Commercialisation Professor Tom Moody envisages that staff numbers in the Monksland facility will grow by 10 to 15 personnel each year.

Arran Chemical Company was acquired in 2015, after Almac had initially outsourced production process to the Monksland company.

"We started to transfer processes from Craigavon down into Athlone in 2010, and that relationship grew and matured to the point where we developed the business case to purchase Arran Chemical Company and we purchased it in 2015," Prof Moody explained.

Arran Chemical Company site manager Martin McCabe explained that with Arran Chemical Company having a strong reputation as a development company worldwide, it was felt beneficial to retain the name.



Figure 1: Martin McCabe, site manager Arran Chemical Company Ltd. Photo by Keith Arkins

He said the resources of Almac have since allowed Arran to attract further business.

Arran Chemical Company specialises in manufacturing products for pharmaceutical and health care, flavour/ fragrance, personal care, and other specialised chemical and industrial applications.

Arran Chemical Company is one of two Almac Group operations in Athlone. The company purchased BioClin in the IDA Business and Technology Park in Garrycastle in 2017, and it is now known as Almac Sciences (Ireland) Ltd.

Professor Moody says the significance of the work of a company like Arran is not fully understood.

"Sometimes people say 'chemistry? What does chemistry do?'. The products that we make, they change people's lives," he explained.

In fact, Arran Chemical Company is a named manufacturer of key building blocks that go into 33 different commercial drugs, ranging from products that are used to treat hypertension, cardiovascular problems, renal problems and epilepsy among others.

The products from Arran Chemicals are then shipped to the customer to make the final drug.

Arran exports 99% of its product and, as Martin McCabe explained, the company is registered on the master files submitted to regulators for these drugs – something which required significant effort to achieve and of which Arran is understandably proud.

It means too, as Prof Moody explained, the processes at Arran have to pass the scrutiny of the customer.

Mr McCabe confirmed: "We are working with all the big players in the pharmaceutical sector, many, many well-known names."

As well as life-changing pharmaceutical products, Arran also helps in the production of

significant products in the healthcare sector, including manufacturing fragrances used in five or six "high-end perfumes".

Professor Moody said it makes flavours that go into coffee, coffee enhancers that are shipped into the United States, and key elements that are used in disposable contact lenses.



Figure 1: Almac Group's Vice President of Technology and Commercialisation Professor Tom Moody Photo by Food Photography by Geoff Telford

"We make people smell good, we make people see and we help people have a good quality of life with the medicines we help to support."

A significant part of the company's future is a new drug by Alcresta Therapeutics which involved Arran bringing the product from zero to commercialisation in 18 months.

The Alcresta Therapeutics product is a medical device that's used to hydrolyse food outside of the body which allows patients to easier digest food and put on weight.

Mr McCabe said it could be used for premature babies that might be lacking the enzyme which performs digestion and enables the digestion to take place before the food enters the body.

Arran has also been involved in the fight against Covid, said Prof. Moody. "We've been a significant manufacturer of building blocks that are going into medicinal Covid treatments.

"We are actually a named manufacturer of an oral drug that's going to be launched by one of the big players. We will have made 20 metric tonnes of this key building block by the summer of this year."

It is also involved in the production of a new treatment for insomnia.

Arran Chemical Company was named on an environmental action list for a number of years by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and was prosecuted last year for failing to comply with conditions attached to its then EPA licence.

The company came off the list in the middle of 2021, following a €4m investment in its abatement systems, which are now operational.

"We did the €4m investment and our new [EPA] licence is through and fully operational and we are compliant," Prof. Moody commented.

The company also recently completed work on a new distillation unit and batching unit, which should be operational before Easter.

In recent times, the company has focused attentions on enzymatic chemistry.

"What we have been doing over the last five years is developing new technology, using enzymatic technology. This is green, renewable and environmentally-friendly technology where we are doing chemical process in water rather than in solvent," he explained.

The move is designed to future proof the company and to beat off competition from Asia, where traditional chemistry methods are more regularly deployed.

"The work that we have done in the last five years set us in a very great place for the next five years and for future expansion," Prof. Moody concluded.

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