



Tool and Plastic Industries' gleaming new plant on the outskirts of Longford is a clear beacon of confidence in the future of custom injection moulding in Ireland as well as in the future of the business run and owned by the dynamic pairing of Declan O'Rourke and Colm Cuffe.

Indeed, they believe that the 3,600 sq metre facility is the first greenfield investment in the sector for many years, competitors having expanded existing sites rather than setting up new ones while other recent investments, notably at Quinn Packaging and Holfeld Plastics, are in different sectors.

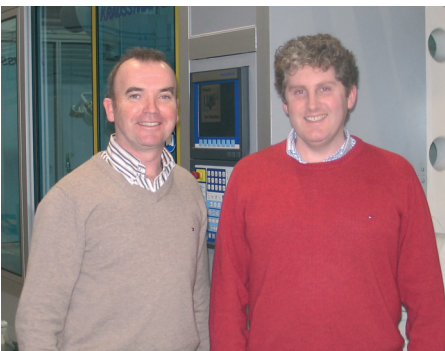
Plans outlined to *PRW* by the duo two years ago at the rather cramped original site, a few metres from the centre of the Midlands town, have been confidently executed and the former base switched to an inevitable retail purpose.

Spacious

Now, the business is housed in a purpose built, brand new factory where its 30 machines and 50 employees enjoy a spacious environment. Unusually, the company moulds on two storeys, using a 600 sq metre mezzanine floor for this purpose, and has plans to extend this approach in the next phase of its build-up.

The plant's configuration results in very high levels of interior light with the 1,000 Lux level regarded as typical for standard inspection comfortably exceeded with readings of 1,300/1,400.

Equipment was moved from the previous plant during the summer of 2007 in what was necessarily a complex project as customers still had to be supplied during this period.



Declan O'Rourke (left) and Colm Cuffe

New plant lights up moulder's way ahead

Customers will be impressed with the new factory set up by Tool & Plastic Industries in Longford, but this is not the only investment the firm is making

Most management teams would probably have felt that they had enough on their plate implementing such a demanding schedule. But O'Rourke and Cuffe clearly felt no such inhibitions, running in parallel plans to move the business they had established in the Czech Republic three years ago into a new plant.

Automotive

The strategy for this new facility, which is located at Ostrava, "is to replicate what we have here, with ISO 13485 and a Class 100 000 Clean Room. We aim to move in at the end of March," explains O'Rourke. Operating as InnovaPlast sro, the company will have 30 employees and a strong automotive bias, reflecting the industry's build-up in the country with major OEMs such as Hyundai moving in to join the already lengthy list of names already present.

Mindful of their mushrooming responsibilities, the Tool and Plastic team have brought in a new general manager to run the business day-to-day in the person of Mary Nash, formerly of TechGroup. They have also bought out the 15% holding in the company held by this company, at which both Tool and Plastic's owners were also once employed.

Given the nature of the business carried out by the Longford plant's customers, with 75% of its sales generated from the healthcare

business, the new plant will make a highly positive impression when they come to visit. It is equally beneficial for the company's workforce, retention of whom was one of the key reasons for choosing a site in the same town where Tool and Plastic Industries has been located since its original formation.

From the bright and airy lay out of the plant with its multi polymer materials handling system ensuring minimal intrusion into the production space, the unit is the epitome of the modern moulding facility. The investment has also enabled the company to add new functions, including a real time monitoring system and a coordinate measuring machine.

The largest of the 30 machines is an 800 tonne machine from long standing supplier Krauss Maffei, previously squeezed into the old plant on its arrival in 2006, but now enjoying a much more spacious position.

All-electric machines from two suppliers are in full scale production and further re-equipping of the facility features among the plans of the pair, whose enthusiasm for future expansion is undimmed by the completion of the move and the expenditure of close to €8m on the two new plants.

With the industry's focus increasingly on Asia, they are already active in ensuring that this priority is not overlooked, says O'Rourke, who heads up the commercial function while Cuffe looks after operations.