

# Wise move has paid dividends

MIKE GREEN believes Scotland is a land of opportunity . . . and he's working hard to make the most of it.

Green, a Leeds-born quantity surveyor and managing director of WiseBuild Ltd, settled north of the border a decade ago and while working for a number of national companies identified a gap in the market for a quality contractor to take on projects valued between £1m and £5m. In 2005, he decided he could plug that gap and set up WiseBuild Ltd. But he admits it was something of a slow start.

"Although I had identified the market it was a difficult one to penetrate and we spent our first year undertaking small refurbishment projects and large bespoke extensions. We were working on jobs around the £200,000 bracket during that time."

He goes on: "The central belt of Scotland is a relatively small place and that can work for or against you. But fortunately we've been presented with a number of opportunities and it's been up to us to prove ourselves."

That initial slow-burn process did have its advantages, however, allowing the Wisebuild team the time to identify quality sub-contractors and to create good credit ratings with suppliers. Mike adds that it then felt like quite an organic process when opportunities came along that gave the firm the security to move on to larger projects.

He says his 20 years of commercial experience has taught him what not to do in terms of project management and importantly, has enabled him to create something of a recipe for success.

"We ensure that a lot of time is spent preparing the tender which means that we fully understand what we're going to build and how we're going to build it. We also partner up with good sub-contractors and get them involved in the process early on."

Paying a premium for



WiseBuild is nearing completion on a £1.5m project in Balerno.



Mike Green is pleased with progress.

quality sub-contractors is, he says, reciprocated by the input, commitment and quality finish brought to the job.

"It means that it is properly costed and managed from the outset and the client is happy because he's got a job that we have completed to his satisfaction."

"The majority of our work is negotiated with clients with whom we have worked with in the past or have been recommended to us. We work hard on the tender to identify savings for the client and that also ensures as short a completion period as possible."

Mike also contends that a "paramount" ingredient for growth is to bring together a core group of key staff. WiseBuild employs 10 managerial staff, complemented by 25 directly-employed operatives such as joiners, bricklayers and general labourers.

The company undertakes contracts throughout the central belt and beyond and current workload includes contracts in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth and the Borders.

Wisebuild bought its office building in Linlithgow a year ago and the new headquarters now also provide a permanent base for Mike's two other ventures – Safety First (a hire company for specialist safety equipment, particularly for use in confined spaces) and Site Solutions (supplying grouts, tanking membranes, gas membranes

and other specialist construction products). Another benefit of the new set-up is that the office is located around an hour's drive from all of the company's working sites and there is some land attached with potential for further development.

In Balerno, Edinburgh, work is nearing completion on a £1.5m project to construct 10 semi-detached houses as part of a larger project that includes flats and townhouses, and

in West Dron near Perth, a £3.75m contract to construct 12 new-build steadings for GSK Developments is on programme. Steady progress is also being made at an £8.5m mixed development at Hopetoun Street in Edinburgh, the biggest contract so far won by the firm. The development, designed by Ian Springford Architects, is for 49 flats and an office block. Work began in August 2006 and is due for completion in March 2008.

The order book is also looking in good shape for the year ahead with negotiations already underway on several projects while turnover figures ahead of the company's five-year plan.

"My business plan was to grow the company to about a £10m turnover in five years and then to integrate a development arm to that," explains Mike.

Turnover figures for the first full trading year to the end of August 2006 were £1m and that leapt to £6m in August this year. Secured turnover for the year to Au-



This £8.5m mixed development at Hopetoun Street in Edinburgh is the company's biggest contract to date.

gust 2008 currently sits at £7.5m and Mike says that the aim is to target a further £2.5m to bring the total in line with his projections.

Meeting his own expectations for the company ahead of schedule would allow the management team a chance to "take stock" before moving up to the next level, he says, but adds that the focus on quality will remain.

"I want to keep the company relatively small and tight. My aim is to continue to work with clients that want to work with me and with whom I want to work."

"We look at each job that comes up or that we're offered and see if it fits within our over-all business plan. My motivation is to produce

a good product and not to chase turnover."

The firm's early success has also enabled a move into the development sector earlier than originally planned. Work has started on a conversion project at Woodlands Terrace in Glasgow's west end and marks the first project for WiseBuild Developments – the newly-formed development arm.

"Although it's a relatively small project it's a nice one for us to gain experience as the next developments we are looking at are far larger than this." Woodlands Terrace has three flats and three duplexes with a mews at the rear and Mike says the location is "second to none".

The sale of the develop-

ment will also help to boost turnover figures for the year by a further £3m, which should then bring the total turnover for the two companies to £13m for the year-end August 2008.

Using the development arm of the company to help build overall success is a key plank of the business plan and Mike already has plans to strengthen its impact further.

"There are a number of other opportunities that we are working on. Moving forward to spring next year, I'd like to see the development arm reaching an even split of the business – just now it's around an 80:20 split between the construction side and development."

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