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Building business during the slump

Tuesday, December 01, 2009, 08:30

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While the recession has dealt a blow to developers and put many regeneration projects on hold, Lee Staniforth sees it as a blessing in disguise for his business.

The managing director of Staniforth Architects, who started the practice in Leicester four years ago, said the downturn had allowed his young firm to expand at the right pace.

He has seen larger rivals having to make redundancies as workloads have dwindled, while he has been able to concentrate on building the business by working on a range of projects.

It now employs eight people and two months ago moved from its home at Leicester Creative Business (LCB) Depot, in Rutland Street, to larger offices in Stamford Street.

The company is now busy working on plans – as reported in the Leicester Mercury last month – for a hotel, residential and retail development on the site of the Southgates bus depot, in Peacock Lane, Leicester.

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Mr Staniforth, 38, said: "While we've certainly seen the effects of the recession on our clients, and many projects have halted or are just dead in the water, we're small enough to be shielded from it.

"I think it's worked well for us because we've grown steadily – you never want to be growing too quickly."

Mr Staniforth, who lives in Billesdon and grew up in Leicestershire, started his career 20 years ago at John Ward Associates, in Clipston, Northamptonshire, where he trained and worked for seven years.

He went on to work for practices including Stephen George and Partners, in Leicester, and Maber Associates, in Nottingham, where he was part of a team which designed the National Ice Centre.

Eventually, he set up as a freelance consultant before starting Staniforth Architects as one-man operation in 2005.



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He said: "The LCB Depot was a great place to start because it gave us the space to grow.

"We were able to build up a steady portfolio of work and we're now doing work not just in Leicester but around the country.

"What makes us different is that we're becoming more of a multi-disciplinary practice – we've got very good sustainability consultants in the office, so we can offer an all-round service.

"We do a host of different types of architecture, from domestic right through to multi-million-pound mixed-use schemes."

Some of the firm's biggest projects have included the design of the £3m Hemingford Abbots Golf Complex, in Cambridgeshire, which opened two years ago.

It has worked on extensions to schools around the country, several care homes in Leicestershire and hotels in Bristol and Manchester.

The business recently saw its designs for a £1.5m 33-bed block of student flats in Ashford Road, off Welford Road, Leicester, approved by the city council.

Mr Staniforth said there were promising signs that halted regeneration projects in Leicester were going to move forward in the near future.

Recently, detailed plans were submitted for the first phase of a 1,200-home and park development at the former British United Shoe Machinery site in Ross Walk, Belgrave, while a £200m plan to convert the old Corah factory site, between Burleys Way and Abbey Park, to leisure, retail and residential use was approved by the city council.

He said: "There definitely appears to be more movement now.

"I don't think it's anything that's going to happen very quickly, but that's not necessarily a bad thing.

"For obvious reasons, we're excited by what's happening at the old Arriva bus depot and the city council's plans for the nearby area outside the cathedral.

"I think that area has a lot of exciting prospects."

He said the city council's plans for a £67m new bus station in the city could be an important part of cutting congestion.

He said: "I think that's going to be a slow development and we'll have to see how it works out.

"The council is striving for a car-free city centre, and it's a lovely ideal, but the problem is that everyone still wants to drive – it's a tough cookie to crack."

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