

# GROWTH AND STABILITY



“Chambers and Partners noted, rather succinctly: ‘This is a top firm!’ It’s nice to hear the legal profession speak in plain English!”

“Unlike many law firms, we don’t indulge in ‘lawyer speak’. We talk your language. We’ll explain the benefits – or disadvantages – clearly and simply. So you will get the best legal advice, based on sound commercial principles.”

“I have no plans for dramatic change – it is very much business as usual, helped by a planned 6 months transition. We’re not going to throw the strategy on its head. There will inevitably be a change of style rather than substance, as you’d expect with a new person at the helm. But I’m working with the same management team, so we have continuity.”

Our business has grown quickly over the last 18 months, with turnover in the last financial year up to £19m and profits up by 29% year on year. Next year the core business will grow again; with the AWB merger in Guildford we will exceed £21m. With core costs under control and an innovative Management Team who are acutely aware of the rapidly changing legal landscape, we expect profitability to accelerate fast. That in turn gives us more options. The core regional business remains a driver for the firm, and we would look at merging with firms in the region if it helped us accelerate growth and services.

“We are looking to grow in Surrey, and our recent merger with AWB, will consolidate our position there. The plan is to transfer our Farnham operation over to Surrey within 12 months into a brand new office. We will continue to look for quality merger partners

as we consolidate our position in the Surrey marketplace.”

How much of your business is London-orientated? “London is an extremely important part of our business. Our London office has a level of expertise which complements our regional presence very nicely and distinguishes us in the region. In the last 12 months we have completed 13 capital market (Aim) transactions with a combined deal value of over £165 million,

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closed our role in a hotel refinancing project in Africa, and acted for a number of infrastructure investment funds. Those are projects you only win with a quality London office.

One of the great things we learnt during the recession is that by working together we

can weather any storm effectively, and we can transfer staff between the two offices to help on a particular project. Having that flexibility works really well, but it means the type of lawyers we’re looking for have to be quite flexible and forward thinking. London adds some real quality and deals we would not otherwise access, but our largest and most valuable deals for corporate and real estate are still in the region.”

With 53 partners and a turnover in excess of £21m, it is clearly a job that will be demanding. Is there still time for direct client work?

“It’s a full-time job and I will miss working on transactions with the key clients of the firm. But I’ll continue to work with them in my new role as Managing Partner.”

Richard is well aware that the effective use of social media is vital for the firm’s future. “Historically, law has always embraced technology at quite a late stage, and solicitors are by their very nature fairly conservative. I think professional services, generally, are a bit behind the times because the partners are at a certain age where, perhaps, they haven’t grown up with social media. But a lot of our younger staff coming through, as well as many of our clients, are using social media pretty effectively as part of their day-to-day lives. It’s quite a change, and it’s inconceivable to think that over the next five years we as professionals won’t be using social media more effectively to win new work, spread the word about the firm’s activity, and to secure new business.”

Over the years **DMH Stallard** has established itself as a leading law firm in the region. For the last 18 years, the former Managing Partner, Tim Aspinall, has successfully steered the firm through change and challenges. Now **Richard Pollins** has taken over the reins, and he speaks to Ian Trevett about his ambitions and plans for **DMH Stallard**.

After 24 years at the firm, Richard Pollins was appointed Managing Partner at the start of 2015. “I think I am what you will call a lifer,” says Richard. “But I am not alone. Three members of the current management team were all in the same trainee intake together back in 1990. Our Chairman, Rustom Tata, our senior litigation partner, Tim Ashdown, and I all trained together and grew up through the ranks. Simon Elcock, who is our regional

Head of Dispute Resolution, and Tina George, Head of our Real Estate department, were also both trainees. The firm has an excellent track record of attracting and retaining good people.”

The combination of key staff retention and controlled growth has generated impressive results, with recognition demonstrated by accolades from both within the industry and the business community. DMH Stallard won Corporate Law Firm of the Year at the South

East Insider Dealmakers Awards in 2012 and 2014. The practice is annually recognised as one of the leading national law firms by the independent legal research directories, Legal 500 and Chambers and Partners. The latter noted, rather succinctly: ‘This is a top firm!’ It’s nice to hear the legal profession speak in plain English!”

Richard himself is an advocate of plain speaking, as he declares on his web profile.

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local businesses. This is central to the way we support and work in partnership with our clients. We have built a reputation as a law firm that supports organisations in a commercial way – it's not just legal expertise. We want to help our clients to become more successful. Whether it be through ensuring they are best equipped to operate effectively in their chosen sector or making sure they have taken steps to minimise potential risks, our aim is to help them improve their bottom line.

"Pushing out into the market has also been a key part of our external recruitment and we've needed to do this to satisfy growing client demand. We recruited Jonathan Grant, who is our Head of Corporate in 2007 from asb law. In the last six months we have recruited five new partners, including Abigail Owen, who was named Corporate Lawyer of the year in 2013 and 14. Other partners have been recruited from the likes of CMS Cameron McKenna and Bircham Dyson Bell – City firms with pedigree, and I think this underlines our commitment to bringing in serious talent.

"I'd like us to be seen as the firm of choice for ambitious, commercially-minded lawyers and to continue to build on our success."

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What percentage of your work is private to commercial? "With the AWB merger, private client work will rise to around 20 per cent. One of the reasons we did the merger with AWB is to enhance our private client offering. Private client is an area we are keen to grow, and there is a clear opportunity for us to win more work from private individuals who value a quality service from a firm they can trust.

DMH Stallard plays a vital role behind the scenes in many of the region's big developments, whether infrastructure improvements, tourism attractions or housing/business schemes. A proud Brightonian ("Born 1967, Brighton General"), Richard is passionate about recent developments in the city.

DMH Stallard have been advising Coast to Capital on the exciting i360 development in Brighton. "It's a tremendous project, very exciting, and one which I'm sure will deliver long-term benefits to the region. Brighton and Hove remains an exciting area, and we've been involved in several regeneration projects in the city: Jubilee Square, New England Quarter,

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and of course the Brighton and Hove Albion Community Stadium at Falmer, where the firm managed the Planning process. I'm a life-long Brighton & Hove Albion fan, and we go to games as a family. As a fan, I'm very proud to be Managing Partner of a firm that represents Brighton and Hove Albion football club.

"I love living on the south coast. I've lived in Saltdean for over 12 years and am delighted that we were asked last year by the community interest company to assist with the redevelopment project for Saltdean Lido"

For the wider region, Richard is hopeful that Gatwick will get the green light for an extra runway. "I think it would be a brilliant thing for the region, absolutely. It makes perfect sense. It's a nonsense to have any further expansion in and around Heathrow. Anyone who has used Gatwick Airport as a passenger over the last few years will have seen a massive improvement in terms of the infrastructure. The owners are clearly committed to enhancing the passenger experience, and that can only be good for business."

**"I want all our partners to be very much part of the regional business community, taking up non-executive directorships where appropriate and supporting local businesses"**

Exciting times are ahead for DMH Stallard, and Richard is clearly proud to be part of the story. "I believe it is a great firm to work for and it has been a big success story for Sussex.

"One of the other key messages I would like to get across is how we're really keen for our partners to be more visible in the region. I think if there was any criticism about our firm over the last few years it is that, despite our continuing success, we've been perhaps less visible compared with much smaller firms in Sussex.

That has been due in part to a very conscious decision to focus our efforts on existing clients, particularly during the recession, and make sure we looked after them. In hindsight, it has meant that some of our partners have become less engaged with the local business community, and as a new Managing Partner, this is something I want to address.

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