

Homing-in

PHPD meets Sandhurst Newhomes' Managing Director, Brian Strickland, and the close-knit team behind the Southend-based company's success.



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PHPD: How did the business start?

BS: We started with refurb projects in 1991. I was originally a management consultant, specialising in outsourcing, and one of my friends was an NHBC builder, and we started working on redevelopment projects together. Initially I was a portfolio landlord and the company expanded into the new-build market in 1999.

PHPD: How many people do you employ?

BS: There's only four of us so we work closely together. Adam Shapiro is the Land Director, Stephen Cook is Projects Director and Kelly Beman is our PA. My daughter Lorna is responsible for marketing. Everything else is outsourced.

PHPD: Do you focus on one market sector?

BS: We have positioned ourselves into the first-time buyer market. There is no chain and as the costs are relatively low, this removes a lot of the risk.

PHPD: What is the best thing about your job?

BS: I work because I enjoy it. And I can't play golf! Seriously, I've always been in a profession with tangible results, where you have to stand up and be counted.

PHPD: And the worst?

BS: Dealing with civil servants. The average time for a planning application here is two to three

years. The last time Sandhurst Newhomes got planning permission through the local council, without going to a public planning enquiry, was 2004. When you consider that last year Southend Council lost something like 19 out of 20 of these planning appeals, you can see what an unnecessary use of resources this is. [At this point, other members of the Sandhurst Newhomes team joined in and the discussion on planning lasted at least 30 minutes, with nobody convinced Caroline Flint's promised reforms would make any difference.]

PHPD: Where do you see Sandhurst Newhomes in five years?

BS: The company organically wants to grow. We are already expanding within East Anglia, as Southend has already met its housing target, and I expect this to continue. We are a regional developer slowly spreading its wings into new areas.

PHPD: What are your hobbies?

BS: I hold a pilot's licence and have a TBM 700 jet, which is an expensive hobby. It's also useful for spotting possible plots of land! Sandhurst Newhomes is very involved with a local charity – Little Haven's Children's Hospice – and we've used my aircraft for various events for them, including auctioning a flight. We also donate £50 for every flat or house we sell.

PHPD: Apart from family and pets, what would you save if your house was burning down?

BS: My pilot's licence! And wine from my cellar.

PHPD: What useful kit could you not do without?

BS: The whole team had different answers to this question, ranging from a Blackberry to ProMap and views from Brian's aircraft!

Brian Strickland (far right) with his TBM 700 jet.



PHPD: What do you think of the Code for Sustainable Homes?

BS: We are very sensitive to any increase in costs to the house buyer and codes increase costs. I believe first-time buyers would prefer to buy a house at a cheaper initial cost than save a few pounds on their bills in the long-term.

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■ If you would like to chat to PHPD about your life as a developer e-mail: jwright@hamerville.co.uk or write to: Homing-in, Professional Housebuilder & Property Developer, Regal House, Regal Way, Watford WD24 4YF