





# The Human League

Driving to Sheffield we were thinking about Germany. Well, more precisely, we were thinking about economists and how stunningly useless they are. To explain: our mid-August visit to Sheffield coincided with the publication of Germany's outstanding second quarter growth numbers. All those City grandees, armed with every possible statistic had, as usual, got their predictions spectacularly wrong.

There was a league table published in The Sunday Times at the end of last year. It charted the results of about 50 economists' forecasts from the cream of the UK banking industry. Every single one was way out of kilter, many vastly wide of the mark.

What these people don't understand, as they pore over historical data and extrapolate trends, is places like Sheffield.

Merely to describe Sheffield as vibrant does it a disservice. Sheffield is the new economy writ large. It's full of digital media companies▶▶▶▶

Case Study



companies either – IT services and financial services are other major growing sectors in Sheffield. Open just a matter of weeks, Velocity House is rapidly filling with new businesses, while elsewhere in the building large established companies such as Capita Symonds have taken whole floors.

This is part of an impressive development by Velocity Estates. The company's Andrew Town explains the background and the thinking.

'This is the jewel in our portfolio. We're in Velocity House, which is part of our mixed use scheme known as Velocity Village. Apart from about 500 apartments there is a major commercial development too, with tenants such as PlusNet and Capita Symonds as well as a host of start-ups and new businesses. It's a four acre site which has been in our portfolio for some time. We've developed in five phases around a central courtyard. There's even a 'San Francisco' style multi-storey car park.'

'Historically, the area was home to the traditional Sheffield metals industry,' adds Ben Otter of Axis Architects, the designers of the Velocity Village scheme. 'It's really well located, right on the edge of Sheffield's central shopping area.'

'We built the Village in phases, following the market in terms of the split between residential and commercial as time went by,' continues Andrew. 'It was never a turnkey scheme; we always ensured there was a healthy income as we progressed through the five phases.'

'Velocity House is 67,000 sq ft spread over seven floors, with some major tenants taking up complete floors. The first and second floors are dedicated to about 50 small independent offices – there are nine more across the courtyard. What we've done is create a top notch serviced office – but with a difference that's perfect for Sheffield's new young businesses. Financially, it's really affordable for new or breakaway business, with minimal contractual hassle or long term commitment.'

'It's modern, not pompous – with all the facilities that a young business could want from a serviced office, including plenty of giveaways!' smiles Andrew.

'The whole image is very crisp, clean and modern,' adds Axis' Nick Fenton. 'There are really good facilities and a high standard of specification – I reckon others could have spent four times as much without looking as good as this.'

'The businesses working here get a big look,' confirms Ben. 'The whole space has achieved a certain level.'



from start-ups to majors. It's an incubator. This is a city stuffed with young entrepreneurs – and it's growing faster than anywhere else in the UK in terms of specialist companies and new jobs. Interactive media companies, combining computing, the web, mobiles and gaming are at the vanguard of this media revolution – the likes of Quba and Desq are establishing an international reputation.

Sheffield's Digital Square Mile is home to high performing home grown businesses such as Zoo Digital, PlusNet, Sumo, Technophobia and Jennic. Let's not start making lists, but let's namecheck a few others that help move us forward. A few other entrepreneurs that make a nonsense

of macroeconomic analysis: Distinctive Developments, Chemistry, Just:b and Tuna Technologies.

You know what? All of those named above started from scratch. A couple of young go-getters maybe, with not a lot of cash but plenty of brain and even more entrepreneurial energy. And you know something else? It's start-ups like these that will always make economists look like fools. They think in the future not in the past.

We're visiting a brand new home for these entrepreneurs – Velocity House in the heart of Sheffield. Our tour revealed a whole bunch of companies ranging from two-person start-ups to second phase firms of around 12 people. Not just digital media



Case Study



Velocity House's crisp colour scheme is driven by a combination of Velocity's brand colours and accents within the carpet. 'I met with Sarah Ludlam at Burmatex who came up with the design we wanted...and it works well. There are neutral grey fine ribbed tiles laid broadloom in the corridors, but with multi-coloured borders – hot pinks, oranges and green in particular – which help identify individual offices just outside the glazing. In the meeting rooms, reception and coffee area we echoed the multi-coloured strips to delineate the informal breakout spaces.'

To use a word unknown to economists, it's zesty!

The combination of Burmatex ranges Cordiale and Axis is complemented by the use of Senator and Allermuir pieces throughout the space, from stools at the touchdown points through to workstations. Picked out in greens and pinks, the accents in the furniture's upholstery create a subtle, modern aura to the space.

It turns out that the specification process was as local as possible, chiming with Velocity's proud local roots. 'It's important to us to buy locally wherever possible,' explains Andrew. 'We like to support the regional economy by working with local suppliers. It makes good business sense from a cost, service and sustainability perspective. For example, the main furniture supplier was SIS, while HML made the bespoke reception pieces – both are Sheffield based. Burmatex are just up the road, and Senator are a short hop over the Pennines. Even our architects are only a stone's throw away, by the Cathedral.'

'And us at Velocity Estates? We're Sheffield through and through. We've got a number of developments in Sheffield; apart from Velocity Village there are notable other sites such as the Globeworks and Globe 2 schemes.'

We're impressed by what we've seen and heard, and enjoyed the work of a company so clearly in tune with new, forward thinking business. So we ask about expansion to other northern cities, such as Leeds or Manchester, for example?

'Why would we want to be anywhere but Sheffield?' grins Andrew ●

▶▶▶▶▶ Our tour of Velocity House confirms that a great deal of time has been invested in creating a really impressive result. There's a good deal of glazing – in fact, there's floor to ceiling glass on all four sides of the building.

The result is a really good light level – so good in fact that even internal offices at the floorplate core benefit from excellent light. This is enhanced by skilful and judicious

use of glazed partitioning – complete with thoughtfully executed manifestations for excellent visual privacy. Internal corridors are notably higher and wider than the norm, further contributing to the impressive specification.

Nice touches like the simple clear signage, mini-breakouts with TVs and excellent catering provision all add up to a place that ticks all the right boxes.



essential ingredients |

Client • **Velocity Estates** [www.velocityestates.co.uk](http://www.velocityestates.co.uk)

Architect • **Axis Architecture** [www.axis-architecture.co.uk](http://www.axis-architecture.co.uk)

Systems Furniture • **Senator** [www.senator.co.uk](http://www.senator.co.uk)

Flooring • **Burmatex** [www.burmatex.co.uk](http://www.burmatex.co.uk)

Bespoke Joinery • **SIS Workspace** [www.made-to-fit-furniture.co.uk](http://www.made-to-fit-furniture.co.uk)