

Edinburgh architects become employee-owned

One of Scotland's most highly regarded architectural practices has set out its blueprint for the future by entering into an employee ownership trust (EOT) with its staff as the beneficiaries.

Allan Murray Architects (AMA), is behind many of Scotland's most impressive new buildings and masterplans and has arguably played a bigger role in Edinburgh's recent architectural renaissance than any other single firm.

Founded in 1992, it is behind famous projects including The Tun, the new Boroughmuir High School, Edinburgh St James Centre, Missoni Hotel and the Edinburgh BioQuarter masterplan.

Directors Conor Pittman and Kenny McNally will continue to lead the practice with the support of an experienced team, enabling Allan to fully retire, after being supported through the journey into an EOT by Ownership Associates.

Conor, Managing Director, said: "Unlike many firms entering employee-ownership, for us it is all about continuity and showing the market that – while we are evolving – we are as well placed as ever before to deliver the cutting-edge and landmark projects we're known. This includes exciting schemes like Abbey Lane – where we've been granted planning approval to accommodate 298 students.

"We have Allan's incredible legacy and a team that has

absorbed so much knowledge and acclaim over the last few decades – and now we want to knit together and come out of the challenges that the entire sector has experienced over the last year.

“Employee ownership will help us grow and develop – and take on new tests with increased ingenuity and accountability. It will ensure our team is fully rewarded for its brilliant work too.”

With 100% of AMA’s shares transferred to the EOT, the business will annually split an agreed share of any profits between employees, regardless of their position.

Kenny, who is overseeing the masterplan of the £1 billion St James Quarter, said: “Employee ownership is a natural route for us as the business goes into its next chapter.

“The business is now mature and responsibility for continuing to grow our reputation is shared between all of us, the beginning of a new era that we are all looking forward to.

“Thanks to Ownership Associates for guiding us as seamlessly as possible through the succession.”

Office Manager, Ellen Wilson, was elected by the team to become Trustee, and has been with the practice more than 20 years. The Trustee’s prime responsibility is to ensure the company is run in the best interests of the employees.

Ellen said: “I’m fascinated to see the impact employee ownership has, though I’m certain it will give us all an increased drive to come out of the current difficult climate as well prepared as possible – and ready to take on new challenges.”

AMA joins Scottish firms Page\Park, Collective Architecture, Anderson Bell Christie and Archetype in the growing number of architectural practices choosing the employee ownership

business model, with 20% of the UK's AJ top 100 firms owned by their employees, highlighting the sector's clear fit.

Ownership Associates, founded by Carole Leslie, provides full support for a business seeking to go through the employee-ownership journey. Carole also liaises with accountants and lawyers bringing in trusted experts to deliver the best possible transition. With demand for the succession model growing year on year, Carole has now helped more than 60 businesses achieve their goal.

Carole said: "Few firms can match AMA's impact on the fabric of Edinburgh – though that is not to take away from the team's projects throughout the country and further afield.

"It's been personally rewarding to see them make that step into employee ownership and choose a route that works in the interest of its team – which for years has been fundamental to its success.

Anderson Strathern provided legal support for the transaction. Bruce Farquhar, Chair, said: "We were delighted to support AMA's move to employee ownership. It's good to see such a respected practice joining Scotland's growing employee ownership community. Anderson Strathern has advised on many EOT transitions and has several more in the pipeline."

Accountancy guidance was provided by EQ Accountancy.



L-R Conor Pittman and Kenny McNally