

Merger involves East Lothian's biggest law firm

Friends Legal completes acquisition of East Lothian's biggest law firm, Garden Stirling Burnet

Thriving modern law practice Friends Legal has acquired the biggest firm of solicitors and estate agents in East Lothian.

The takeover of Garden Stirling Burnet – widely known as GSB – creates a new business with more than £7 million a year turnover and 60 staff in six offices across Scotland. It gives Glasgow-headquartered Friends Legal a significant platform to create one of the biggest specialist private client firms in Scotland.

As the largest and one of the oldest legal firms in East Lothian, the Garden Stirling Burnet name will be retained, while becoming part of the Friends Legal network.

Rapid investment into the East Lothian firm's 22-strong team in its four offices in Dunbar, Haddington, North Berwick and Tranent, will underpin ambitions to double the headcount and turnover in three years.

Tony O'Malley, Managing Partner of Friends Legal, said: "GSB is a great business with a brilliant reputation, fantastic people and an unmatched footprint across East Lothian. We will re-establish GSB in the local market by investing in its people, infrastructure and brand.

"It's the largest legal practice by footprint and headcount in the county but has perhaps lost market share in recent years. Our aim is to put it firmly back on the map by offering

premium services at a fair price. That is our over-riding priority and we will need to recruit to achieve these aims.”

While Garden, Stirling and Burnet is best known for its estate agency, executry and conveyancing work, a priority will be to unlock the potential of its whole private client team including family law and its letting business.

Friends Legal already offers direct to consumer executry, wills and power of attorney work via its By Your Side service – which won the Best Use of Marketing and Social Media Award at the British Wills and Probate Awards 2021.

The acquisition will also enable Friends Legal to explore further consumer legal services, particularly in conveyancing and remortgaging. From its Glasgow HQ and another office in Edinburgh, it already provides volume personal injury and medical negligence services.

Mr O’Malley, who founded the Friends Legal brand in 2016, is delighted that GSB Directors Alan Borrowman, Angela Craig and Ian Philp will remain with the firm for at least a year. New consultancy roles will free them up to focus on work they enjoy while improving work-life balance.

Alan Borrowman added: “We would also like to wholeheartedly thank our loyal clients for their ongoing support and to reassure them that this merger will mean that Garden Stirling Burnet continues to be a leading legal presence here in East Lothian. Indeed, by becoming part of the Friends Legal network, our range of legal services to clients will become even more specialist yet accessible.

“This is the right deal at the right time and will be fantastic for the dedicated and hard-working team we’ve established at GSB over many years. As directors, that is so important to us and we are thrilled with the long-term plans and prospects for the business and the role that we play in the community.”



L-R Tony O'Malley and Allan Borrowman