

Fairway Hotel

case study

No rest for determined hotelier

Alan O'Sullivan had been dreaming of running his own hotel since he was 16 – and in 2016, a broker set up a meeting with Royal Bank of Scotland, which helped him do just that.

The town of Bathgate in West Lothian is a survivor, a bustling little place between Edinburgh and Glasgow that's had to dust itself off on multiple occasions as industries ranging from paraffin production to international telecoms set up shop and then fizzled out.

The true heart of Bathgate is its town centre, and right in the midst of this lively community is the Fairway Hotel. The hotel started life in the 1970s and is a place much loved by tourists and commuters – as well as large numbers of locals who have made the its popular restaurant their go-to place to eat.

For owner Alan O'Sullivan, running this successful hotel is a dream come true – the top rung on a career ladder that began when he was just 16 and setting out to learn the ropes in the hospitality sector.

"My family has always been in hotels," he says, "and I've worked as a hall porter, a waiter, behind the bar, on reception – all the different departments."

Having trained at the Shannon College of Hotel Management in Galway, Ireland, O'Sullivan worked as a chef in Switzerland and also as a manager for two large hotel chains before setting up his own company in 2009. His first venture was a pub in Penicuik, Midlothian, but he always planned to have his own hotel.

Clicked at first meeting

To finance his long-term business goal, O'Sullivan enlisted the help of David Grant of White Oak UK, who put him in touch with RBS Broker Development Manager Sarah Delo. O'Sullivan recalls that all-important first encounter with local RBS business banking relationship manager, Stuart Bell. "We just clicked," he says. "We met in a coffee shop, and we got on great."

Fast-forward to today and some serious financial commitment and improvements to customer service have seen the Fairway Hotel team grow to 28. There are bigger plans in the pipeline. Keen to capitalise on Bathgate's location in the Glasgow-Edinburgh corridor – and the fact its train station, which serves the two cities, is barely a five-minute walk from the Fairway's front door – O'Sullivan aims to grow the business from five to 30 bedrooms in the not-too-distant future.

Expansion doesn't faze him; he says everything in his life so far has arguably been leading to this.

"My thinking is that you should learn every part of the industry you're in before starting your own business," he says, "and that's what I would advise anyone. You need to be confident you can do things better, cheaper and faster than the competition."

If you can manage that, then you're off to a flying start. "Go for it," adds O'Sullivan. "Because owning your own business really is an amazing experience."

For more information contact Business Development Manager Sarah Delo at Sarah.Delo@rbs.co.uk

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