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# On the edge of parkland offices are all tenants need

**If every cloud has a silver lining, the new Riverside Business Centre, River Lawn Road, Tonbridge, Kent is positively sparkling in the current climate.**

Businesses looking to cut costs, reduce overheads, avoid travelling to London, boost the image of their company or simply improve the view out of their office window can do all that at Riverside.

The Penhurst Group has spent £1m providing 50 state-of-the-art offices at Riverside, completely renovating one building and adding an extension.

The fact that 60 per cent of the space has already been let, despite the difficult business conditions at the moment, should not come as a surprise.

“Before we began the renovation and extension work the offices had been fully let for many years,” said Penhurst Group chief executive John Crofts Elkington.

“This is a modern office suite close to Tonbridge town centre, just five minutes from a main-line station and on the edge of parkland,” added chairman Stuart Wells. “It really couldn’t be any better situated.”

Building company Elkingtons was founded by the original John Crofts Elkington in 1879. The company moved to River

Lawn Road in 1931 and the current scheme saw the original Elkington workshop building converted into business units and then linked to a new build scheme on the site of the original family home.

Jonathan Dunn Architects followed the lines of the existing building and used tile-hung walls and mansard roofs to unify the new development.

“The new building is linked to the existing office block with a suspended suite of offices and a new second floor that has been added to form three floors of serviced offices,” explained Jonathan Dunn.

“The interiors have been designed to a modern and high quality finish with maximum natural light in this quiet location by the River Medway. The Gale & Dunn Partnership carried out the planning stages.”

John and his team set out to create a special

atmosphere at Riverside Business Centre and they understand that an office needs to be comfortable as well as businesslike.

Group business centres manager Susan Hook makes sure that businesses get the best of both worlds at Riverside. While she keeps the office services running smoothly – and acts as the unofficial first line of support for IT issues – she has also introduced some softer touches, like the flowers that brighten up the building.

Susan makes sure that she is on hand at all times, talking to tenants to make sure that Riverside is providing what they want.

“I don’t have an office; my job is to keep talking to tenants. It’s much easier to keep people happy if you just drop in and chat to them now and again – and I have been known to solve quite a few of their IT problems at the same time.”

Susan joined Penhurst as a receptionist

at Riverside in 1997 and moved into the administration side of the business before being made manager. In her new role she is also responsible for Penhurst’s Battersea operation.

Susan believes that, on balance, the recession has helped by giving hard-hit businesses a more cost-effective alternative to their own premises.

“We have suffered a little bit from larger firms cutting back on space, but over all we have benefited from clients moving out of larger premises or relocating from London. “We are also providing low-cost accommodation for a number of people who have decided to invest their redundancy pay into their own businesses.

“Because these units are fully serviced, tenants don’t have to worry about separate heating, lighting or broadband bills, for instance,” Susan explained.

“Riverside’s one-bill facility which includes rent, rates, maintenance, cleaning, electricity, heating, water and telephone charges makes setting business plans and budgeting for business outgoings much less of a headache.”

In addition, Penhurst can provide all the secretarial support that companies need, from receptionists to help with typing and filing.

“It means new companies, in particular,



Susan Hook



Stuart Wells

don’t need to take on extra staff from day one. We can meet and greet customers and do everything that a firm’s own staff would do, and because we never operate as a call centre, tenants can be sure that their customers will only ever speak to one of our four regular receptionists; it’s just like having your own, top quality, office staff.”

The service is so good that while the building at Riverside can house 50 companies, it actually serves far more than that.

“We also house 40 virtual companies, people who just need a mailing address and someone to answer the phones,” Susan explained. “Our phone system is so sophisticated that they can keep their own number, and we have virtual tenants based in places as far away as Sweden, Finland and Germany.”

For those who do need a physical office, Riverside offers units from 73 sq ft up to 457 sq ft, many of them offering a view over the nearby park and the River Medway.

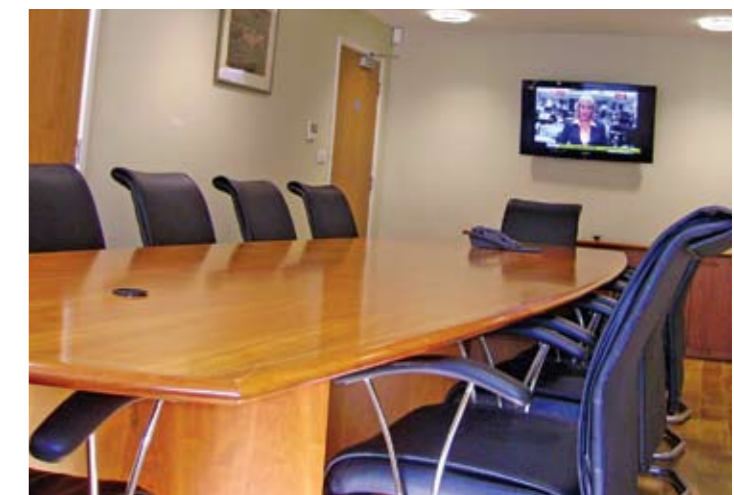
Penhurst was advised by Bill Owen, managing partner at the Tunbridge Wells office of accountants and advisers Baker Tilly. He explained that his company specialised in delivering a complete package to the individuals and teams behind owner-managed businesses.

“We are here to give owner managers like John the advice they need so that they can structure their affairs in a tax-efficient way and run their businesses successfully.

“The people behind owner-managed businesses need to make sure their company operates in a sustainable way that makes them a reasonable living as well as complying with the rules and regulations. We work as a team with a company’s solicitors and other advisers to help people achieve their dreams.”

Bill Owen also believes business centres such as the new development at Riverside will flourish despite the recession by offering companies a chance to reduce their own overheads by using lower-cost, shared facilities.

For further details contact Susan Hook on 01732 783500.



## Jonathan Dunn Architects

Jonathan Dunn Architects is an established RIBA chartered practice, based in Rye and London, with over 25 years experience and a substantial portfolio of work in East Sussex and London

Projects include private houses and country homes, commercial developments, hotels, restaurants, retail units as well as schools, community projects and rural developments. Whether within a city or a rural location the architecture of each project is developed by a response to the specific needs and aspirations of the client and the nature and character of the site.

We have extensive experience of working with listed buildings and we enjoy working with a varied client base ranging from private clients through to investors and other interest groups and are able to lead constructive negotiations with the statutory authorities and liaise with associated design teams to produce good design and good value for money.



Rye Pottery, East Sussex. New residential development of town houses and flats on riverside location in historic town of Rye.



Penhurst House, Battersea Park Road, London. New development of flats and business centre on prominent site in south west London.



Whites Farm, West Sussex. Extension and refurbishment of grade 2 listed house with restoration of historic timber frame building.

Projects carried out by the Gale & Dunn Partnership Ltd.

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