

NOT EVERYONE IS SCALING UP. AND THAT'S OK.

GRAHAM MARLEY is Chief Executive of Let's Do Business Group, the South East's leading social enterprise for business support and responsible finance. With a background in finance and over 25 years' experience in business development, Graham has helped thousands of small businesses and start-ups across Sussex and the wider region to access advice, finance and growth opportunities.

Graham has helped thousands of small businesses and start-ups across Sussex and the wider region to access advice, finance and growth opportunities. He established **Let's Do Business Finance** as a mission-led alternative to high street banks - now the most active responsible finance lenders in the South East and East of England. Under his leadership, the Group was named Natwest SE100 Growth Champion in 2016 and has remained a key player in inclusive economic growth.

Graham has held several non-executive and advisory roles, including Chair of the National Enterprise Network, and is a passionate advocate for practical, joined-up support for the businesses that don't always shout the loudest - but make up the backbone of our local economies.



WITH A NEW MAYOR, COMES NEW OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES RIGHT ACROSS SUSSEX TO GROW.

There's been a lot of talk about the scale-up agenda - and that's fine - but it doesn't really touch places like Hastings, Bexhill, Lewes or Eastbourne. And I think we've got to be really aware of that.

In some parts of Sussex, it's not about high-growth or hockey-stick curves. It's about helping the majority of businesses just increase steadily. Because if all the non scale-ups in an area grow by 5% a year - that's actually a pretty significant impact on the economy. But it's not something that tends to get the same attention.

At Let's Do Business Finance, we work with businesses that can't access conventional bank finance - from small startups to more established companies. And I have to say, demand has grown a lot since COVID. That probably tells you something about where the real need is.

One thing that's coming down the line is the British Business Bank's new South East Fund. It's been a long time coming, to be honest. Arguably 10 years late - we could have had this at the same time as the Midlands Engine or the Northern Powerhouse funds. But still, better late than never.

It might open up more options, particularly on the venture capital side, which we've not really had much access to down here. But, we do need to make sure we've got the businesses who are ready - or at least thinking about - those kind of growth opportunities. That's not always the case.

The other thing we need is a proper inward investment service for the county - ideally at Sussex-wide level, supported by a mayoral structure. We ran the East Sussex service for 20 years, so we've seen how important it is. But you've got to think about both sides of the equation.

Yes, you want to attract new businesses in. But if you don't have the space for them to go, it doesn't work. Far too often, inward investment is just seen as "who can we bring in?" - but unless the supply side is there, it falls flat.

Brighton's pretty much full, and it's constrained by its geography. So you've got to start looking elsewhere. Hastings, too, is also geographically tight - it's by the sea - but there's a lot of council-owned commercial buildings that, frankly, are at the end of their life.

It would be great to knock some of those down and start again. That sort of holistic look at commercial space really matters.

Because in the end, if you want inward investment to work - or any kind of meaningful local economic growth - you've got to have the conditions right. Not just the ambition.



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