



Vimmi Hayes  
of the SDA.

### What makes Babergh special for business?

While there's no escaping the global economic down turn it's not all doom and gloom. According to the SDA's Inward Investment database, a number of companies are either looking to expand their operations or relocate their businesses strategically within Suffolk. This is especially pertinent for Babergh with PIX Europe's successful long-term commitment to the area a particular case in point. Then there's the growing popularity of Sudbury now cited as the 3rd most 'searched' area in the quarter in the last quarter. So what makes Babergh such a compelling business proposition?

**Location:** Close to London and mainland Europe and with easy access to the M25 and London, with the A14 to the west accessing the M1, M6 and Midlands. Stansted Airport is only an hour from the district's employment areas and the nearby ports of Felixstowe and Harwich provide excellent communication links.

**Money:** Babergh has some of the most competitive commercial property prices in the region.

**Lifestyle:** Babergh is an attractive and prosperous part of South Suffolk boasting a plethora of historic towns and villages. Mixing business with pleasure has never been easier.

Fancy a closer look? Contact either Vimmi Hayes at SDA: vimmi@sda.org.uk or Neil Henry at Babergh District Council ecoddev@babergh.gov.uk



Pix Europe headquarters in Ipswich.

# Supplying the building blocks of industry

Pix Europe distributes belts, hose and other power transmission components across the UK and Europe from its headquarters in Suffolk. The company moved its distribution hub to Ipswich in 2000 to be close to the Port of Felixstowe but has since found that the biggest benefit of its location is the calibre of the staff it attracts. **Sheline Clarke** spoke to operations director **Stewart Booth** about why his company is committed to Suffolk's county town

**P**IX EUROPE LTD was established in 1999 as a subsidiary of Pix Transmissions Ltd of India to develop and promote the sale of Pix products throughout the UK and Europe. With manufacturing plants in India and China, producing rubber and metal components respectively, Pix is the world's fastest growing manufacturer of high quality belts and hose for onward sale in over 50 countries worldwide.

Pix Europe is led by three executive directors – joint managing directors Rishipal Sethi and Joe Deacon and operations director Stewart Booth – who saw the huge potential of introducing Pix products to the European market.

"Before the launch of Pix Europe, Pix Transmissions had been dominant in the Indian domestic market and certain other Export markets, but had only a modest presence in Europe," explained Stewart.

"We could see the huge opportunity; there is a massive market for these products and

we have already enjoyed significant growth."

Based on the Farthing Road Industrial Estate, Pix Europe headquarters employs 24 people and is home to the Pix's main warehouse and distribution centre, as well as sales, IT and technical support office, making it the central hub for the delivery of goods

**"One of the reasons we have grown quickly is because of the fantastic people who work for us here."**

throughout the UK and Europe. A year ago the company expanded its warehousing capacity after a dramatic period of growth, partly due to the acquisition of Flexequip Hydraulics Ltd, which also brought with it offices and warehouses in Belfast and Cardiff and boosted the headcount to more than 60.

In 2004 it established a wholly owned subsidiary in Germany and has plans to set up in Italy

in the next 12 months. It also hopes to springboard into Eastern Europe, at some stage in the future. And whilst there is a good chance that the German operation in particular will in time grow to be bigger than Ipswich, Stewart remains adamant that Pix Europe will retain a strong presence here.

"We have got a massive market in the UK, and are supplying many 'blue-chip' OEMs (original equipment manufacturers), and support a strong network of authorised distributors in the MRO (maintenance repair operations) sector," he said.

"Added to that Ipswich has been very good to us in terms of the team we have built up. I think one of the reasons we have grown quickly is because of the fantastic people who work for us here in Ipswich, so it is unlikely we would contemplate moving for that very reason, unless we could guarantee that they would all come with us, and that's unlikely. So, it looks as if we are here for the long term."



The directors of Pix Europe, from left, Stewart Booth, Joe Deacon and Rishpal Sethi.



Pix Europe supplies high quality belts and hoses.

Stewart describes the products his company manufactures and sells as the “building blocks of industry.”

“When we tell people what we do it is often difficult for them to comprehend the scale of the application,” he said.

“Basically, the world runs on power transmission. What we aim to do is give a complete offering in the field of mechanical and fluid power transmission, with the exception of bearings. So we supply belts, pulleys, chains, sprockets, couplings and every kind of belt you can imagine, so it’s a complete industrial components package.

“The belts we manufacture are used everywhere, from the fan belt on your car to the belts that drive all your domestic appliances at home and your lawn mower right through to agricultural and industrial machinery, quarrying equipment and air-conditioning. Even the cash point machine is operated with a timing belt drive; everything that moves has got drive components in it and we supply all the little bits inside that make them move.”

And the market is not only huge but in every conceivable industry. Pix belts will be found in the most unlikely places, such as The Stock Exchange, where all the building services and the air-conditioning are driven by hundreds of belts and pulleys which are replaced in a strict planned maintenance cycle.

“They simply can’t afford even the remote possibility of a breakdown,” said Stewart, “so they use top quality components, purchased from

our distributor in London – City Belts and Bearings. CBB also supply Pix products to customers such as the Bank of England, the Tate Galleries, the new Reuters building and the London Underground to service their buildings and facilities.”

When Pix Transmission diversified into hose production in response to customer demand, it found another massive market.

**“We do love being here and wouldn’t want to move away from the area - it has served us very well, and provided the foundation for our business.”**

“The hose and fitting business has grown so quickly that it is close to overtaking the belt production volume at the factories; the market is absolutely vast.”

Crucially, Pix produces components of the highest quality aimed firmly at the upper end of the market.

“We have pitched at the top and within that sector we are very competitive, partly because we have production facilities in Asia and because we are a very lean organisation. We like to think that if we can get into someone in that market then we can win the business.

“There are a lot of cheap imports coming in, and if we know that a potential client is contemplating going down that route and are not particularly interested in quality, then we

would probably not pitch for the business, there’s no point.

“It’s the same with our operation in China. Lots of people are bringing in container loads of metal products, purchased “at a distance”, and have huge problems with quality and consistency.

“We employ 15 people in the office in Shanghai alone, and we have our own factory, and everything we manufacture or

subcontract is quality tested before it leaves the country.

“That’s the sector of the market we aim to be in and we couldn’t deal with the major OEMs if we were doing anything differently because their quality testing regimes are highly stringent. Our first significant contract was with Perkins Engines, one of the biggest manufacturers of diesel engines in the world and they operate in every sector – marine diesel, agricultural and truck engines and they are highly respected in terms of quality. We were a new and emerging brand and so, understandably, the testing and trialling procedure was extensive and rigorous.”

And it is Pix reputation for quality and the diverse spread of its customers that will see it through the current economic uncertainty which Stewart

believes brings opportunities for those ready to seize them.

“The economic downturn is impacting, and I think it will get worse before it gets better; but there are some positives,” he said. “As a business it encourages you to look inwards, at your costs, and outwardly to our credit vetting and processing functions – it is a time for care!

“It is also a great time to capitalise on new opportunities. When times are good, many customers tend to stay with the supplier they have always had, but when times are hard they start to look at what they are getting for their money, and that’s where we come in – we can offer the same high quality, often at significant savings. If your price is competitive and you are good at what you do I think change in the market has to be viewed as an opportunity.

So what next for Pix Europe?

“We have had a lot of high profile activity in the last couple of years and I think we need a period of consolidation,” said Stewart. “We need to grow the group infrastructure, and build a highly efficient platform for the next stage of our growth.”

At current growth levels, it is clear that the Farthing Road site will be out-grown within a few years, and Pix already have an eye on the commercial property situation in the area.

“We do love being here and wouldn’t want to move away from the area – it has served us very well, and provided the foundation for our business.”

[www.pixeuro.com](http://www.pixeuro.com)