

## Taking high road to success with £3.3m BGF investment

High Access Maintenance, the 'working-at-height' expert, secured investment from BGF to pursue further growth across the UK. The MEN's Shelina Begum spoke to Niel Bethell, CEO of High Access, and Neil Inskip from BGF.

### High Access CEO, Niel Bethell says...

I started High Access in 1999 while working as an electrician. I was installing neon lights on large buildings but found the scaffolding was costing too much. Then I saw someone abseiling from a building.

I asked a former military man to teach me abseiling and the business started from there.

Our first large customer win was following the 1996 Manchester bomb.

We were called in to service the new M&S building and on the back of that we started growing and winning new clients.

The growth of the business has always been steady and today we employ more than 100 staff and carry out at-height work for major property management firms including, CBRE, Savills and Allied London.

What makes us stand out from the market place is that our staff are joiners, glaziers, roofers, cleaners, and we have our own in-house fleet with in excess of 59 vehicles.

That means if someone calls us we can be there in four hours and do the work. We're not relying on a third party, which makes us fast and efficient.

Growth in the last few years has been phenomenal. We launched a help-desk in Hale and a London office 18 months ago. That site now employs 20 staff and has gone from a standing start to £2m revenues.

There is demand for our services in other parts of the UK and that's when we started considering an institutional investor.

We approached a number of

organisations, but I wanted an investor to help me grow and take us forward.

BGF was the right fit for us from the start.

They understood the business and the marketplace we are operating in.

Within four months of initial contact, we received an investment of £3.3m.

Our aim is to grow through excellent customer service and acquisitions, while investing in the infrastructure of the business.

With a focus on technology, we have since invested £250,000 on a new CRM system, which has been important to improve the way we work and manage our time much more efficiently. We're already seeing the benefits of that.

We are in the process of launching a Birmingham site with plans to move into Leeds and Liverpool and I'm pleased to announce that we are making our first acquisition.

The investment has meant we have been able to plan our growth while having that extra support from BGF investor Neil Inskip, and Stuart Lees, who was appointed as a non-executive chairman.

They are both accessible when I need to speak to them about plans, and that's what I like about BGF.

Neil isn't just an investor, he's also a friend and we have the same vision for the business.

I want a company that is built on solid foundations that could be here in another 50 years' time.

### BGF Investor, Neil Inskip says...

Before we met Niel, we'd already looked into the buildings



Niel Bethell, CEO of High Access (left), and Neil Inskip from BGF

maintenance market and knew it was a good space for a fast-growing company.

We could see what High Access had achieved in the North West. They'd built a strong business throughout the recession and the opportunity to expand further was really exciting.

Niel was able to convey his vision for the business really well, but he was also able to demonstrate a strong track record. High Access was in a good market position in the North West, and could very feasibly replicate that success elsewhere.

The investment in High Access was completed in a relatively short space of time because we understood the business and the market, but importantly because of the relationship we developed with Niel.

We share Niel's ambition for High Access and it's rewarding to see the opportunities that our investments can help create.

Already the business has hit a number of milestones since the investment in June 2016.

It's developing its south-east base and launching a site in Birmingham.

The investment in infrastructure has been really important and has helped the company to take on more work and bigger contracts. We can see it working well.

There's an acute focus on health and safety across the company which is evident in everything they do.

The resources dedicated to this aren't insignificant but, as a partner, knowing that the business is maintaining robust standards is high on our agenda too.

Niel is a great leader and has a

very genuine interest in nurturing and promoting staff - many employees have grown with the business.

The management team are very ambitious but they're very strategic too - and that makes for a great investment partnership.

It was obvious from our first meeting that one of Niel's biggest passions is making sure that his teams, across all areas of operation, feel part of the business.

When we invested in High Access, we were backing a plan to grow its infrastructure and expand geographically.

But we knew that new opportunities could arise at any moment.

We've increased our investment in the business to support its first acquisition. Niel identified the opportunity earlier this year and we could see its potential to add further scale.

Because we're flexible in how we provide capital and support, we're able to support businesses beyond the original growth plan.

We definitely share Niel's view that there's still plenty more opportunity out there for High Access.

**BGF is the most active and influential investor in growing companies across the UK. BGF provides long-term capital for a minority stake, from earlier stage investments to established, private and AIM-listed companies.**