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Firm set to expand

A Shropshire manufacturer is set to begin 2012 with expansion into new offices following a six-figure investment.

The investment is the latest move in a strategic plan to grow Telford-based Fabweld Steel Products by 35 per cent over the next five years, as demand for its innovative manhole covers increases.

The company, which specialises in designing and developing access covers and drainage equipment, this year pumped more than £300,000 into its company to improve production times and quality of work.

The new purpose-built offices will provide accommodation for 20 office staff, currently working on three different sites at FSP's Madeley headquarters.

Difficult

Managing director Richard Hilton said: "We know that the last 12 months has been difficult for many in the manufacturing sector, especially those with a reliance on European exports. Of course, we are not immune to the Eurozone crisis, the volatility of the financial markets or the cutback in public sector spending.

"However, by focusing our development on innovative products and targeting new markets overseas in growing economies, we are able to invest in the future of both the company, our product range and our staff."

The new offices have been designed with input from low carbon solution specialists Pro Enviro, of Rugby, to ensure that the offices are energy efficient.



The Fabweld Steel Products team at work in Ironbridge

The company this year launched a new product, the Solo Slide manhole cover, a recessed cover made from mild steel which blends in with its surrounding area. It can be operated by just one person using a key, eliminating health and safety lifting concerns.

Mr Hilton said: "The Solo Slide has been installed in city centre locations across the country including in Trafalgar Square and outside the London Eye. And with the investment of £250,000 in 2011 in a new laser cutting machine reducing production times, we are becoming the first choice for customers who need our products quickly.

"We are always developing our staff, we run numeracy and literacy programmes and have completed Knowledge Transfer Partnerships with the University of Wolverhampton, which gives us top-class in-house design expertise.

"When you combine that with investment in capital equipment, including a £50,000 press brake to keep up with the laser, we're already

ahead of the curve for when the economy gets back on its feet.

"We've taken on two new apprentices and will hopefully take on more throughout 2012, as we look to boost not only our workforce but also our order book."

The company is also helping to boost the manufacturing sector in the region, offering spare capacity on the new £250,000 Trumpf laser machine to firms without the hi-tech capability.

Mr Hilton added: "We're are working with a number of companies from across Shropshire, the Midlands and further afield.

"This was a decision taken not just to ensure the most efficient use of expensive equipment but also to help other small manufacturers.

"Some of them want to create high quality parts but can't justify the expense of their own machine, and others simply need occasional or smaller projects completed on an ad hoc basis. All of this helps to contribute to the growth of the manufacturing sector in the area."

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