

County Financial Ltd



Andrew Hounsell, managing director

From the moment County Financial Ltd was established over 30 years ago in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire, their fundamental aim was to make clear the purpose of money. They recognised that money without a purpose has no value. This idea of “making sense of money” started with Peter Green, the founder of County Financial. Peter, a committed Christian, sought to establish a business that put people in control of their money, rather than the other way around. This ethos developed further as the business grew, with County Financial not only wanting to make a real difference to their clients’ lives, but also for the most underprivileged and marginalised people in the world. His business partner and County Financial’s managing director, Andrew Hounsell, expands here.

As a result of this philosophy, we now have a financial planning firm which we believe stands in stark contrast to businesses which do little more than advising clients on what products to buy. We aspire to make a profound difference to our clients’ lives; this means investing a disproportionate amount of time discussing the specific and heartfelt aspirations and goals of clients. We make it clear that we are not in the business of making as much money as we can for our clients, but rather helping them to understand and recognise that it isn’t how much money they have, but what they can do with it that matters.

History and context

When I joined County Financial in 2013, I was immediately struck by the incredible ethos of the business and its potential to impact many lives. Our work, after all, either contributes to, or detracts from making the world a better place. I worked alongside Peter for a couple years preparing to become the company’s managing director in July 2015.

Once the baton was passed to me, I embraced an opportunity to expand and develop the culture of the business further. I started with some internal changes, moving towards a slightly different culture in the business; I insisted that everyone at County was referred to as a team, rather than simply as staff. I feel that it is my responsibility to release the full potential within each team member to develop and grow; Peter and I share the same faith and both believe that God is as interested in the financial markets as He is creation.

Ethical specialism

As financial planners, it is our belief that specialist services should be outsourced as far as possible to qualified professionals. For investment purposes, we favour the expertise of discretionary investment managers. Their activities include selecting stocks and shares and funds from across the market, which includes ethical funds if they fall in line with clients’ preferences. We, however, believe that it is the purpose of the investment that can really make a difference to people’s lives.

AT A GLANCE COUNTY FINANCIAL LTD

- » Managing director: Andrew Hounsell
- » Established in 1985
- » Based in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire
- » Services: Financial planning
- » No of employees: 10
- » 250 planning clients
- » Guided by Christian and biblical principles
- » county.org.uk

With this in mind, we established County Trust, aiming to commit a significant proportion of our profits every year to the charitable arm of the business. In turn, the funds within the Trust would provide financial support for projects that were specifically aimed at providing relief, value and dignity to those who were economically, socially and institutionally poor and oppressed.

Last year, we gave away over 55 per cent of County Financial's net profits to the County Trust. These funds were used to support a variety of projects including: a UK education charity which has an intervention programme to prevent teenagers being excluded from school, the funding of a development project in a remote village in Burundi and corrective orthopaedic surgery for 96 children in Kenya.

Driving excellence

An example of a subtle but powerful initiative that has cultivated our team culture has been the introduction of monthly lunches, where I invite the whole team to my home and we informally discuss any changes they think may benefit the business. Honest feedback from everyone is highly valued, even if this proves to be challenging at times. As part of our team meetings, we regularly review and discuss our statement of purpose and values, as I want everyone to recognise they are central to our DNA.

I often remind the team that we are to strive for excellence in all that we do. I believe that the difference between good and excellent needs to be worked at constantly across every level of the business.

This has included a commitment to administrative excellence. I have reviewed and updated processes and overseen an overhaul of our client management software. The considerable time and resources we invest in cloud-based technology have been essential to improving efficiencies, and an optional system of home-based working provides a more productive and sustainable working week for whom it is required.



County Trust funds development project in Burundi

Continual aspiration

We also run a monthly blog entitled Health plus Wealth for our clients. This provides a new dimension as we focus on lifestyle and wellbeing rather than just financial updates. We see clients as people with needs and fears, hopes and aspirations. I want to demonstrate that we are interested in their whole lives, not just the money they have to invest.

I want County Financial to become a beacon of light in our industry. I believe that we can do this by continuing our activities as a God-honouring financial planning business. We have seen our funds under management increase to £200 million by focusing on what we can give, rather than what we can earn. This applies to each member of our team, every client that comes through our doors and even the local area in which we work. Once a year, I encourage the team to get involved in a community project; last year, we had great fun helping One Can Trust with a food drive for Wycombe Food Bank, to boost diminishing supplies of specific items so these could be distributed to those who are in crisis.

Considering the evolution of the business over time, I'm proud to be part of a team that wants to be an exemplar of best practice, modelling the highest standards of ethics and excellence. It has been equally rewarding to see an increase in profitability over the past five years and the annual contribution made to the charitable trust grow by 50 per cent. I will continue to challenge myself, my team and my clients to believe that money without a purpose has no value.

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