

Vercity

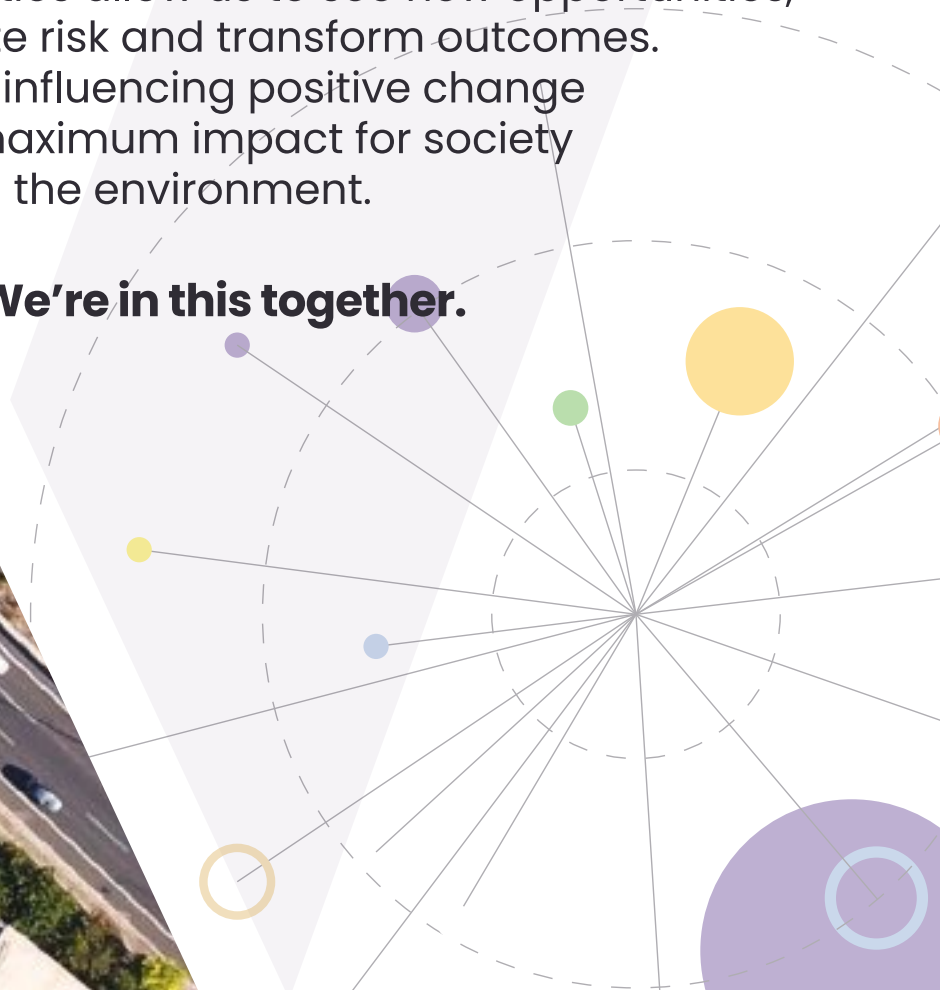


Introducing **Vercity** The new name for HCP

As Vercity we'll continue to deliver award winning infrastructure and real estate project leadership. From inception to exit, we'll join all the dots to deliver exceptional value and client confidence.

Our multi sector experience and multidisciplinary capabilities allow us to see new opportunities, mitigate risk and transform outcomes. We're influencing positive change for maximum impact for society and the environment.

We're in this together.



BRAND NEW

In April, infrastructure and real estate manager HCP rebranded as Vercity. Chief executive **Stuart Yeatman** talks to **Paul Jarvis** about the next phase for the company

“HCP had evolved over 25 years from being a developer and bidder on PFI and PPP healthcare projects to become a provider of specialist services across much wider PPP sectors,” begins Stuart Yeatman, chief executive of the firm that is now known as Vercity.

“In parallel to improving our service to existing customers, we are now mapping our development over the next 25 years.” The rebrand and refresh of the company’s identity is part of that process. “The rebranding is a positive statement of our long-term intent,” he adds.

Yeatman joined Vercity (or HCP as it then was) in December 2016, when he led the transition of the former John Laing Management Services business into the company. Prior to that, he has enjoyed a long career in the infrastructure and development space, working in public sector roles with local government as well as on the private side at John Laing.

“I am edging towards the 40-year mark in my career in the wider built environment world,” he says. “I worked in railway operations and related development, which eventually brought me into the PFI space.”

Over that time, Yeatman has watched the market evolve,



particularly the move towards economic infrastructure and the focus on developing clean energy solutions – something he believes will continue and which Vercity will be well placed to support.

Since March 2019, Yeatman has been group chief executive of the company, a position he describes as “hugely enjoyable”. In particular, he cites the fact he is working day-in, day-out with “committed, enthusiastic and talented people, who are all committed to the development of the business and success of our clients”.

Having spent only 12 months in post before the Covid-19 pandemic hit the UK and forced the country into lockdown, Yeatman has spent much of his time leading the company at home, rather than in the office. However, as has been the case for many companies over the past year, the enforced change is likely to lead to some permanent adjustments to the work-life balance of employees.

“Internal communications have radically improved,” he says. “For example, I am now doing monthly briefings to all our teams. The communication between colleagues in our operations in the UK and Canada has also improved. And our communication with clients has been maintained throughout lockdown.”

As Vercity moves into its next phase, these learnings will be embedded in how it operates. Not that the company was on the back foot when it comes to the ‘new normal’. “We were already set up to support agile working through investment in IT,” says Yeatman. “We have been able to continue supporting projects during the lockdowns, with some staff going into buildings where necessary but otherwise people have been working

from home wherever they can.

“As lockdowns lift, we will continue to rely on a hybrid model of working,” he explains. “The lesson that many of us have learned from the lockdowns is that a blend of home and office working improves people’s work-life balance and that is supported by our employees in the UK and Canada.”

The emphasis that Yeatman and his team place on their staff is one of the reasons Vercity won Silver Awards for ESG and Culture & Diversity at last year’s Partnerships Awards. Those categories in particular go to the heart of an organisation’s culture.

“The company has always made collaborative working a priority,” explains Yeatman. “That was a great legacy that I inherited. We extend that into our relationships with our clients, too. As part of our progress, we are now members of the Institute of Collaborative Working.”

Yeatman says that the work to ensure strong collaboration between colleagues and at a client level is vital to what Vercity does, and of course is an essential part of how the organisation positions itself as a manager of real estate and infrastructure, often working at the point at which competing demands meet – for example the requirements of a private investor and the public authority it is serving.

As part of this ongoing effort to improve its collaboration, Vercity has embedded the so-called FREDIE principles of fairness, respect, equality, diversity, inclusion and engagement. A steering group has been created within the company to support the management board and ensure it adopts those principles and drives them through into practice.

Furthermore, Yeatman says the company will produce its first ESG report this year, in which Vercity’s performance will be measured against the World Economic Forum’s four key ESG indicators of ‘people, planet, prosperity and principles of governance’.

Exciting times

As Yeatman drives the collaborative culture within the organisation, he also has one eye firmly on the opportunities for growth across the PPP market. “It is a really exciting time,” he says. Suggesting the market holds “huge potential”, he points to the rise of new public sector frameworks in the UK as an example of where the public sector is “reaching out to the private sector to support the management of public infrastructure”.

As he looks to the future, Yeatman sees great opportunity stemming from the Net Zero agenda, for example through retrofitting existing buildings with low carbon solutions. “There is definitely a role for investors to participate in the Net Zero drive,” he adds.

Alongside the energy sector, as climate change becomes more of an issue for more communities, water infrastructure will

also come under greater pressure and need for improvement. Yeatman highlights this sector as another where governments may look to the private sector to capture, manage and supply water, and help support projects like flood defences.

And of course, the long-term fallout from the pandemic on all our lives remains to be seen, but Yeatman knows Vercity will not be the only company switching to a more ‘hybrid’ approach to working and living. “To what extent will commercial real estate and town centres be repurposed?” he wonders. “There will also be more investments in broadband.”

On that latter issue, he highlights a recent project launched in Manitoba, where the Canadian Infrastructure Bank (CIB) has joined forces with Dutch investor DIF plus broadband provider Valley Fiber to significantly expand access to broadband in the south of the province. “That is a good example of trying to get good quality fibre into deep rural communities,” he says. “It is something we will see more of.”

In the UK, one of the hot topics right now is the issue of handback and what happens to assets when they come to the end of their PFI contracts. While the UK is grappling with this now, it will be closely watched by other countries with PPP programmes as they seek to determine best practice for their own projects.

Yeatman believes Vercity can be part of the solution here, in particular ensuring that assets being prepared for handback are in good shape to meet the challenges of the mid-21st century. “Our focus is on helping our existing SPV clients to achieve the best possible handback,” he explains.

However, he also believes that there will be a role for Vercity and others in the private sector to play in ensuring those assets being handed over to the public sector remain in good condition and are properly managed long after the original contract ends.

“Conversations have started about long-term lifecycle planning and how we may have a role in that,” he says. “We have all got a role to play.”

Yeatman believes that, under its new name and brand, Vercity has a strong future in the market, not least because whatever follows at the end of PPP contracts, there will still be a large number of public facilities that need to be properly managed and maintained. The public sector has got used to the professional services being provided by the likes of Vercity, and recognises the importance of this.

“On PPP more broadly, I think it will be a case of more of the same in the future,” says Yeatman. “There will be a focus on economic infrastructure: energy, transport, and water, where PPP can play a huge role. There is also the opportunity around retrofitting of existing assets. For example, the existing housing stock is an area where the surface has barely been scratched.”

Yeatman and his team will therefore have plenty of opportunity for further growth under the firm’s new name. 