

Innovative manufacturer's North East investment set to create 'global success story'

The boss of an innovative manufacturer bringing more than 100 jobs to County Durham says his company is drawing talent from across the world to the North East and is on course to become a global success story.

Alastair Hanlon, who is chief commercial officer of PragmatIC Semiconductor and originally from the North East, said work is progressing on [£68m plans to bring a new factory employing 125](#) to the former site [Wavin pipeworks](#) at Meadowfield for production of the firm's innovative flexible semiconductors that are thinner than a human hair and can be applied to thousands of everyday products and devices.

The firm's ambition is not only to set expand itself in the region but to draw other industry-affiliated suppliers and start-ups to County Durham to work alongside it, drawing on what Mr Hanlon calls the "huge intellectual horsepower" of the North East.

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PragmatIC Semiconductor, which also has offices in Cambridge, already runs a production line at nearby NETPark but is preparing the 175,000 sqft facility following several rounds of investment, with more expected to be announced in the coming months.

Mr Hanlon said there are challenges in remodelling an older building but that regenerating a brownfield site is important to the business, which he says is the most environmentally sustainable semiconductor manufacturer in the world.



PragmatIC Semiconductor's existing FlexLogIC fab production line at NETPark in County Durham.

(Image: Supplied by PragmatIC Semiconductor)

Recruitment is now ongoing for highly skilled roles at the new site – called PragmatIC Park – which is expected to take delivery of equipment this summer before production ramps up next year.

Speaking to Business Live he said: "The North East has had a long history of semiconductor manufacturing so there's a talent pool of very experienced people."

"We've been hiring like no tomorrow," he added. "By the end of this year we'll have doubled in size. We've got more open roles available, and not just in the North East, but that is very much our focus. We're looking to pull in talent from around the world. Quite a lot of our people are moving to base themselves in the North East. One of our newest joiners is a very senior guy from the semiconductor industry and he's coming from Singapore to the North East."

The market for PragmatIC's FlexIC chips is wide but the firm has found particular interest among brands and retailers using a process known as radio frequency identification tagging (RFID) which uses radio waves to transfer data that can be used to monitor goods in transit and stock levels.



The FlexIC chips that PragmatIC Semiconductor manufactures.
(Image: Supplied by PragmatIC Semiconductor)

Mr Hanlon PragmatIC's production process is "world leading" and the firm already has hundreds of patents filed, including for intellectual property developed in the North East. Early in its 11-year background, the business used the North East's Centre for Process Industry when developing its technology.

He explained: "We make semiconductor chips in a totally new

way. We don't use silicone – and if you've heard anything in the news about the semiconductor industry there is a world shortage of silicone semiconductor chips, which is caused by Covid and other global events.

“Although our technology is not as sophisticated as those chips, availability of them is challenging which has prompted a lot of interest in our chips across Europe, Asia and the US.”

PragmatIC's products are said to be fundamentally cheaper and faster to produce than their silicone counterparts and environment-conscious customers are interested in the much smaller energy and water usage in the manufacturing process. Mr Hanlon says the firm is several years ahead of a handful of competitors globally who have not been able to scale at the same pace.

On plans to open PragmatIC Park to other firms, he said: “Our vision is that we can create an innovation hub on the site where we can invite partner companies – start-ups and so on – who are related to us in the electronics industry or similar industries. We see benefits in shared communications between teams on site, as well as inviting universities who are doing research that's relevant to host facilities at the site.”

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