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IBM closes its last Greenock offices with 170 jobs lost



IBM are closing their office in Pottery Street and leaving Inverclyde after around 70 years here. *(Image: Duncan Bryceland)*

GLOBAL firm IBM is closing its last base in Inverclyde and bringing an end to its 70 year link with the district..

The *Telegraph* can reveal today that bosses have taken the decision to shut their last offices at the Pottery Street business park and move all 170 jobs to Glasgow.

It is the latest bitter blow to the area's economy, only weeks after Amazon's exit.

IBM, which came to Inverclyde in the 1950s, will move out of its premises in a month's time.

The company's sprawling plant at Spango Valley on the A78 corridor enjoyed decades of growth.

It employed over 5,000 people on site at its peak but supported thousands more posts across Inverclyde.

But as the global giants gradually switched operations elsewhere the workforce steadily reduced and the firm began demolishing Spango buildings around 2008-09, with a property firm moving in and attempting to market the site.

It is now earmarked for a major housing development.

IBM had moved the last remaining staff working at the landmark site to the new Pottery Street offices ten years ago.

Now that final link with the area is to be severed, marking the end of an era.

An IBM spokesman said: "Following a review of IBM's real estate footprint, and in recognition of changing working patterns, the company's Greenock office will close next month due to an expiring lease.

"Employees will be relocated to new offices in Glasgow.

"IBM has a proud history in Inverclyde and for more than 70 years the Greenock location has made a significant contribution to the company's success."

Council leader Stephen McCabe says the closure is a bodyblow, but he hopes new tenants can be attracted to the site becoming vacant.

Mr McCabe said: "It is a significant loss in terms of the long history that IBM has with Inverclyde which is now coming to an end.

"I am not sure that there was much the council or anyone could do when they had made the decision. But we will continue to work with all businesses to support the local economy.

"At a recent Inverclyde Taskforce we were told there is not enough suitable office space, so maybe this will be an opportunity for another business to come in."

The council leader believes the pandemic helped put paid to IBM's presence locally.

He said: "I think this is a legacy of Covid and the changes it brought about to the workforce - more people are working from home and we see that even within the council."

IBM first came to Greenock in the early 1950s and pioneered the 'Silicon Glen' revolution, bringing prosperity to the area as the first personal computer was built.

Secretary of State for Scotland William Ross officially opened a £350,000 extension to IBM's Spango Valley plant on October 9, 1967 and it grew substantially over the next three decades.

During the late 1990s numbers started to drop as production moved elsewhere and by 2013 IBM had left the site completely.

Former Gourock councillor Ronnie Ahlfeld was once the company's regional communications manager.

He says he is saddened by IBM's exit.

Mr Ahlfeld told the Tele: "There was a whole community built around IBM.

"There are a lot of families who owe an awful lot to IBM, they company gave Inverclyde a lot and put us on the map. I worked there for 36 years and it was a great job and gave me great opportunities."

Another former manager, George Wall, who retired six years ago, said: "It gave me a lot and it was important to so many people. It is such a shame that it has closed. The jobs at IBM just seemed to dwindle away every year until there was nothing left.

"I don't understand why more wasn't done by the UK or Scottish governments over the years to stop that.

"It gave me a great life like many other people my age in Inverclyde - I got an education, went to university and travelled the world."