

GBI-CEO REINER NITTKA

„Wir beschäftigen uns intensiv mit größeren Developments“



Dem schwierigen Marktumfeld zum Trotz plant Projektentwickler GBI neue und größere Projekte. Die Übernahme durch den britischen Finanzinvestor Henderson Park ändere nichts an der Ausrichtung des Unternehmens auf gefördertes und bezahlbares Wohnen, sagt CEO Nittka. [Mehr...](#) Von Katja Bühren

WILLKOMMEN BEI HANDELSBLATT INSIDE ENERGIE & IMMOBILIEN

Hier finden Sie die Inhalte aus unserem Fachbriefing über die **Trend - Themen im Immobilien- und Energiesektor** - exklusiv für **Handelsblatt Premium Inside Abonnenten!** Ein eigenes Redaktionsteam berichtet darin für Sie vertieft und nutzwertig über die bedeutenden Aspekte beider Bereiche, bildet aktuell relevante Diskussionen ab und stellt Best-Practice-Beispiele vor, von denen sich etwas lernen lässt.

Eine Beispielausgabe finden Sie [hier](#).

"We are intensively engaged in larger developments".

Despite the difficult market environment, project developer GBI is planning new and larger projects. The takeover by the British financial investor Henderson Park does not change the company's focus on subsidised and affordable housing, says CEO Reiner Nittka.

Insolvencies, an unusually high number of cancelled projects, increased construction prices, great uncertainty about new construction subsidies - the situation on the housing markets is tense. Reiner Nittka, head of the project developer GBI, which specialises in the construction of subsidised and affordable housing, also reports on "horror scenarios" and "difficult phases" that the industry faced in 2022.

Nevertheless, the GBI continues to build, he says in an interview with Handelsblatt Inside Energie & Immobilien. And at least with regard to construction costs, an easing is now foreseeable.

Some new project developments are likely to be larger than before. Because at the end of 2022, the British financial investor Henderson Park has taken over almost 90 per cent of GBI and is providing the developer with fresh capital. "It is the goal of our capital partner that we intensively deal with larger developments," says Nittka. So far, the project developer has put the annual project development volume at around 200 million euros; in future, it is to increase to 500 million euros. The Moses Mendelssohn Foundation, until now the sole owner of GBI, is withdrawing from the company with the completion of the current projects.

Despite the takeover by the British financial investor, nothing will change in the GBI's orientation, Nittka emphasises. "So we continue to put a big focus on privately financed and subsidised housing, with the clear target of affordability." Currently, he says, the construction of subsidised housing is possible in principle, but only under certain conditions.

[Read the full interview here:](#)

Mr Nittka, Vonovia does not want to start any more new construction projects this year. Many other companies have also put projects on hold, and some project developers have already filed for insolvency. How is the GBI getting through the crisis so far?

Reiner Nittka:

We continue to build. Certainly, there were more difficult phases twelve to six months ago, when we were confronted with the sharp rise in construction costs and horror scenarios. However, the GBI builds - this is a key advantage over many of our competitors - with its own planning and construction team, almost

always in individual contracts. That's why no construction sites came to a standstill, for example because the general contractor demanded 30 percent more overnight, or because he said: I can't go on building without a contract award'.

So you got through the crisis year of 2022 all right?

Reiner Nittka:

Of course, there were also shifts in individual trades. But we were able to manage it well.

How did you manage that?

Reiner Nittka:

For example, we divided up tender packages that were not yet on the market. An example: If drywall was included in a package that was not supposed to start for another six months, contractors in the panic of 2022 added various and also massive security and fear surcharges. That's why we said: we really don't award the contract until we can - I'm exaggerating a bit now - call it off the next day. That has helped us a lot.

What is the current situation?

Reiner Nittka:

In the meantime, the market is turning again, companies and services are coming back. We are also very grateful. One or two years ago, we were like a call centre, phoning after the construction companies like a supplicant. Now the companies are asking us again whether they can still participate in a tender. In some cases we have restarted tenders because we have discovered that companies that still want to be included in the bidding are up to ten percent below the previous best bidder. In such cases, of course, you have to set off the burdens of construction delays and longer interest payments.

Will the GBI start new projects this year?

Reiner Nittka:

Yes, anything else would also run a bit counter to the DNA of a project

developer. Vonovia, to take up the example from the beginning, certainly also has other issues as a large portfolio holder at the same time. This does not affect us because we resell the completed projects. Thus, we receive capital and can deal with new projects.



3200 Bewerber für 100 Wohnungen: Die geförderten Einheiten im GBI-Projekt Seetor in Nürnberg waren laut CEO Reiner Nittka sehr begehrt. (Foto Carsten Bunnemann / GBI Group)

However, many investors are not in a buying mood at the moment.

Reiner Nittka:

In principle, however, the money is there. Pension funds are ringing the cash register every month, and the large open-ended funds recorded an investment plus in 2022 compared to the previous year. In this situation, we can calculate the projects so that they are coherent. Then investors have to consider when it is the right time to get in.

Don't you then lack the capital to start new projects?

Reiner Nittka:

The situation is okay for us at the moment. But it would be nice if in the next quarter or the quarter after investors gave up their reluctance. Mipim is just

around the corner. There we will perhaps see the first signs. But I think it will take until Expo Real for the turnaround.

At the end of 2022, you brought a new main shareholder on board, the British financial investor Henderson Park. What is the background to this?

Reiner Nittka:

Henderson Park has taken over about 90 percent of the existing GBI, the rest is still held by the previous parent, the Moses Mendelssohn Foundation. There, all projects that are still in planning or under construction will be completed properly and successfully. Everything that we acquire and start anew goes to GBI-Neu. For this purpose, we have founded a holding company in the same structure as before, the GBI Group. All the companies we had before have been taken over completely. The management has also remained. Nothing will change for the partners who acquire our properties.

The Moses Mendelssohn Foundation was previously the sole owner of the GBI, so topics such as impact investing and the social benefits of real estate projects were important. These are topics that are not necessarily attributed to a British financial investor. Does the takeover change the GBI's orientation?

Reiner Nittka:

The question is obvious at first. But it was very important for us to find a partner who understands what makes the GBI tick. Because looking at the social benefit of a project is our DNA. We therefore continue to place a strong focus on privately financed and subsidised housing, with the clear objective of affordability. Here we will grow significantly with Henderson Park in Germany and Austria over the next few years. It would also be irritating if we suddenly developed large office properties or industrial parks. In the same way, it would be surprising to build high-priced condominiums.

What will Henderson Park's capital be used for in concrete terms?

Reiner Nittka:

In addition to capitalising the company, Henderson Park provides us with the equity we need for properties we acquire. It is the aim of our capital partner that we deal intensively with larger developments.

What do you mean by larger developments?

Reiner Nittka:

We are already looking in the direction of 400 to 800 million euros. But then we are also open to doing this with partners who have known us for years in order to share the risk.

With this scale, you are probably considering district developments with several types of use. Is that why you also want to bring in partners who then develop offices, logistics or retail properties?

Reiner Nittka:

Yes, exactly. We are looking for partners who will go along with the investment and also develop sub-areas that we do not focus on.

Will Henderson Park take over the completed properties?

Reiner Nittka:

It is not intended that our parent company will take over all project developments. On the investment side, we will continue to work with our existing partners. For example, we will continue to manage the funds for Bayerische Versorgungskammer and Hanse Merkur Grundvermögen and work with other partners such as Catella, Commerz Real, DWS or Union Investment. Possibly even more strongly than before.

Are you already planning the first projects in the new shareholder constellation?

Reiner Nittka:

Yes, for example a quarter in southern Germany. It is being built entirely in timber modular construction with the Sustainable Building Quality Seal. 70 percent of the flats are subsidised. With the current high demand, it is important that the flats are available quickly. Modular construction can help here. Our projects are - I like to use this old German term in this context - gilt-edged. One example: In Nuremberg we built 100 subsidised flats. We had 3,200 eligible applicants for them. So the risk of vacancies is only theoretical. The

moment the subsidy conditions fit, such products can be sold. The new KfN subsidy for climate-friendly new buildings also helps us here.

Even without privately financed housing construction?

Reiner Nittka:

Of course we want to complement this in many developments, for example with our SMARTments, i.e. business flats, senior living or microliving. In addition to the mixed calculation that would then be possible, this also has other advantages: The neighbourhoods become livelier and more attractive.

Is it possible to develop subsidised or affordable housing attractively under the current framework conditions?

Reiner Nittka:

Basically yes. That depends above all on affordable land. For affordable housing, these can currently only be found beyond the seven top cities or in individual city district locations. Another important question is what subsidies are available and how they can be used. This varies greatly from one federal state to the next. It is essential to have a legal regulation that the subsidy claim can be transferred to the buyer or investor and that the product is thus eligible for investment. In contrast, I would no longer see the construction costs as the central factor. They are still well above the level of the time before the war against Ukraine, but they are no longer out of range.

Thank you very much for the interview.

The questions were asked by Katja Bühren.