

# SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Issue 3

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High Stakes  
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# Lessons for us all

**A**re CVs worth the paper they're written on these days? They can certainly be mightily misleading.

A young job-seeker might be armed to the gullews with degrees, diplomas, and spectacular accolades – but can they pass the time of day by networking with a stranger, work out how to boil the office kettle, or rewire a plug?

The disconnect between academic qualifications, and the sort of basic practical social skills which the typical Shropshire company requires as a bare minimum from staff, has been concerning bosses for years.

Happily, the county is on the case. Schools and colleges are getting students out of classrooms into real-world environments to learn by doing, and slowly but surely the message seems to be getting across that university isn't for everyone.

Maybe the huge debts which many students are saddled with when they leave is giving the campaign a helping hand...

This issue celebrates the work being done across all corners of Shropshire to nurture the next generation, and make sure they graduate from the most important academy of all . . . the University of Life.

It's fantastic to see schools, colleges, universities, training organisations and



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# via University of Life



**Carl Jones,**  
Editor

businesses themselves thinking outside the box, and taking the initiative. It's making learning more exciting, more relevant, and far more beneficial for our economy.

So, a big tick in the box there. But our business community is not without its challenges right now.

Changes to business rates look set to leave many small retailers out of pocket – indeed, some say it could tip them into the abyss.

But the FSB's Shropshire chairman acknowledges, in his new column, that the current system was 'archaic, unfair, and unfit for purpose'.

How is your business affected?

We'd love to help share your views. There

are other challenges right now for our town centres, but high street champion Sally Themans tells us why they can still thrive, if they are open to the idea of a little creative thinking.

And on the subject of creativity, it's a case of lights, cameras, and plenty of action for Amanda Murray, the Telford-based movie maker who lifts the lid on her fascinating life as an up-and-coming producer.

We really have got the lot in this news-packed edition . . . export excellence, manufacturing milestones, technology tricks of the trade, and a special feature on the benevolence of Shropshire's business community, which donates huge sums to worthy causes.

Why? Because you'll travel a long way to find such a supportive business community, which sees the bigger picture, and believes in giving something back . . . or paying it forward, as they say.



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# Education, education, education for the next generation of leaders

Tomorrow's boardroom members are currently passing through the classrooms of schools and colleges across the educational spectrum. A look around some of these seats of learning suggests that the future of the Shropshire business community looks in rude health.

By Chris Austin

**F**or months now, pupils and staff at Moreton Hall – and many others associated with the school – have been looking forward to March 17 with keen anticipation.

One of the most prominent politicians of modern times, Lord Hague of Richmond, former leader of the Conservative Party, has been inked in as guest speaker at Moreton Hall's annual business lunch.

Hundreds of Shropshire and regional business leaders have booked their places to listen to Lord Hague – whose roles have also included Foreign Secretary, Leader of the House as well as a historian and biographer – give an address following the theme of 'The Post-Brexit World'.

It won't just be Lord Hague addressing the guests. Moreton Enterprises, the unique business venture run by the Year 12 girls, will also give their annual business presentation outlining their sales strategy for the year.

According to Melissa Evans, the school's marketing development officer,



*Moreton Enterprises, the unique business venture run by Year 12 girls of Moreton Hall*

Moreton Enterprises is acknowledged by a generation of Old Moretonians for successfully providing them with the tools to go confidently into the world of business and entrepreneurship.

This is clearly a school with a keen eye for the future.

"The group was established over 30



*Lord Hague – guest speaker at Moreton Hall*





years ago and although unrecognisable today by those pioneering girls, the aim is still the same: to challenge and inspire young women by nurturing a culture of enterprise and entrepreneurship in the heart of the school," she explains.

"The businesses, all managed by the Lower Sixth girls, have previously achieved a turnover of £50,000.

"The centre includes four retail businesses – Tuck, Boost, Ryman and Essentials – as well as three service-based businesses, Barclays Bank, Marketing and Events Management, and a Finance team.

**Moreton Enterprises, the unique business venture run by the Year 12 girls, will give their annual business presentation outlining their sales strategy for the year**

"Each year, a new team of girls try to beat these impressive sales figures.

"The businesses are all managed by the Lower Sixth girls and are housed in a shopping mall which was built through funding raised by students."

It must be something about this part of Shropshire, because a school-cum-business environment every bit as authentic as Moreton Hall's is just a stone's throw away at a college at Gobowen. ▶



*There are four businesses at Moreton Hall, managed by the Lower Sixth*



*Working in the Tuck Box at Moreton Hall*

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◀ Indeed, walk down the corridor at Derwen College, which celebrates its 90th birthday this year, and you may be mistaken for thinking that you have walked into a Premier Inn hotel.

And that's because Derwen College is being used as a new training centre for the hotel chain.

A replica reception area has been created on the campus, along with three en-suite bedrooms and a linen room, creating a real-life work setting for students to learn housekeeping skills.



*Derwen College celebrates its 90th anniversary this year, and how things have changed*

**Derwen College is being used as a new training centre for the hotel chain**

They also have access to work experience placements at a range of local Premier Inn hotels.

The partnership work that has been behind the development has involved a team from Derwen College, Premier Inn and Novus Property Solutions, which build and fitted out the Premier Inn rooms free of charge.

Derwen College principal Meryl Green says: "This amazing training facility will enable increased numbers of students to access industry standard training in hospitality and, ultimately, to improve their chances of gaining employment after college.

"We are very proud of the unique partnership we have developed with Premier Inn over the years, and would like to thank them and Novus for their generosity and genuine commitment to this project." ▶



*A replica reception area has been created on the campus, along with three en-suite bedrooms and a linen room, creating a real-life work setting for students to learn housekeeping skills*

**Choose a path to success that's right for you**

Youngsters need a dose of tough love as they prepare for a successful business career – that was the message as the wraps were taken off a Shropshire college's new £1.2 million business school.

Tim Firth, headmaster of Wrekin College, said university should no longer be seen as the ultimate path to success, even for the most gifted of pupils.

He said soaring tuition fees and a changing jobs market meant headteachers had to look at alternatives for even the brightest pupils, uni-versity no longer the automatic choice.

Mr Firth said the new facility, which marked the school's biggest single in-vestment in a project, would welcome business leaders to help teach workplace skills in a setting which resembled the corporate world, rather than the classroom.

The facility, opened by Ludlow-born retail entrepreneur Nick Wheeler who founded shirt company Charles Tyrwhitt, features a boardroom, breakout area for collaborations, hot-desking and a lecture theatre.

Mr Firth said it was answering concerns from business leaders that the 'snowflake generation' was producing graduates not fit for the workplace – having failed to acquire key skills to create resilience and a can-do attitude.

"Young people today live in a very different world to the one we did and the challenges are new, but they are such that we as schools need to think even more about how we prepare them for the world outside of the academic arena.

"University is not the only option. It has become a buyer's market and too often it has placed too much unnecessary pressure on youngsters includ-ing the most gifted and able academically to suggest there is only one path for them.

"We need to look at how we educate and nurture the whole



*Shropshire entrepreneur Nick Wheeler talks to guests at the opening of the Wrekin College business school*

child. Along-side the academic drive and the push for A-stars we need to be looking at how we give children the skills to cope with real life which are necessary even for those who do choose university.

"The business school will see school and the corporate world blended on a daily basis.

"We need to go back to putting value on apprenticeships, to creating good entrepreneurs, bosses and employees, key skills for the workplace rather than just great scholars."



*Striking a deal, hopefully, at Third Form Enterprise Day. Lidon pitch their idea to the Oswestry School Dragons.*



*Opening of OsBiz Hub by Headmaster Julian Noad*

◀ Not to be outdone, a neighbour of both schools, Oswestry School, has its own business ventures organisation, OsBiz.

The initiative began in September 2015 when Sixth Form business students were tasked with setting up and running their own venture.

“Having had a successful start in 2015 the OsBiz committee pitched a bid to the Headmaster to obtain funding for a hub – a multi-functional space to launch and run various OsBiz ventures in a previously unused area of the school,” explains Vicky Evans from Oswestry School.

“It became clear that the enterprise needed a base to work from and after much research, discussion and debate a detailed proposal was presented.

“The idea was approved and with students’ hard work and determination the idea turned into a reality.

“Students are required to identify a gap in the market for a good or service at the school and draw up a detailed business plan in which they must carefully consider their costings and pricing.

“This idea is then pitched to a panel of investors, with successful pitches then having the chance to set up and run their business from the new ‘Hub’ facility within the school.

“Along with learning from their own mistakes as they progress, students select a charity to support with the proceeds of their business venture and last year raised more than £500.”



*Wonderful Waffles with Victoria Raffle and Maxi Praschinger*



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It's not just schools who have an eye on helping forge young people into successful business people, with many companies operating apprenticeship schemes which can benefit all involved.

For instance, motor dealer Furrows is also helping to build the workforce of the future by joining forces with a school local to Oswestry.

The team at Furrows of Oswestry are working with the Marches School to give students the opportunity to take part in extended work placements at their dealership that could lead to a career in the industry.

Richard Pettener, for the dealership, says the first candidate has already signed up to the scheme – Thomas Simmonds who is aged 14.

“The aim is to support students who are considering a career in the motor industry by giving them the chance to spend a day a week with us over a period of two years, working alongside our team.

“This way they get the chance to learn about the practicalities of the industry and to take part in hands-on experience to help them prepare for their future career.

“It's a great opportunity for the students and for our industry too, as there is a real need for apprentices and technicians so this is an arrangement that benefits both partners.”

Another case in point is Shifnal businesswoman Jamie-Leigh Bird who is helping beauty gurus of the future embark on a career.

Jamie-Leigh, from the House of Beauty, explains: “There are many advantages



*Sophie Jones, Chantelle Borlase, Jame-Leigh Bird and Alice Treharne of House of Beauty in Shifnal (above) and Thomas Simmonds, 14, working at Furrows (below)*

to having an apprentice, especially in the beauty industry.

“If people have worked in salons before they tend to do things a specific way, but if you get someone in fresh you can train them in exactly how you do things.

“It's also progression for you while you're training them, learning their strengths and incorporating them into the salon.

“We find our customers are really willing to act as models for the apprentices to let them learn new techniques, and at the end of their course we know they've been trained to our high standards.” ▶



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*University Centre Shrewsbury, Shropshire’s newest university, has been developed with a clear set of objectives: to support the people of the county to meet their potential; to enhance Shropshire’s economic development, and to offer a rich seam of talent and skills for employers.*

◀ Educational seats in Shropshire all recognise the need to react to change in order to ensure their students are best placed to take their first step onto a career path.

A new apprenticeship levy comes into force this year, whereby employers will begin to increase the opportunities available at all levels.

This is very much on the radar of Gemma Parish, head of careers and UCAS at Shrewsbury High School, who explains that today’s careers education and guidance needs to react to the fast pace of change in the labour market.

Furthermore, she says, students need to be more aware of what skills and knowledge employers are looking for and what they can do to help themselves to stand out from the crowd.

“We want students to start thinking and preparing for the workplace earlier,” says Gemma.

“A couple of exciting joint projects with the Prep School boys in Years 7 and 8 mean that the culture of considering employability skills development and evidencing will start early.

“Students are challenged to think like entrepreneurs, become adept at problem solving and verbal reasoning skills, and able to present to their peers and an invited audience.

“These are all skills employers want to see.

“Work experience and internships will allow students to gain a valuable insight into the field of work they are interested in.

“No longer is work experience to be seen as a break from school and learning, but instead allows students to reflect on what they have seen and done and how they can learn from that.”



*Finding the right career is very much on the radar at Shrewsbury High School*

The standard of teaching professional is key to help set up young people for a prosperous future.

It is perhaps even more important to provide our educators with the tools they need to ensure education is managed and delivered effectively – or at least that is the view of University Centre Shrewsbury.

**Students need to be more aware of what skills and knowledge employers are looking for and what they can do to help themselves to stand out from the crowd**

Shropshire’s newest university has been developed with a clear set of objectives: to support the people of the county to meet their potential; to enhance Shropshire’s economic development; and to offer a rich

seam of talent and skills into which our county’s employers can tap. And, though UCS says it will always major on providing undergraduates with an education that’s tailored to the county’s economic needs, it also delivers postgraduate courses aimed at improving the delivery of education in the county, at primary, secondary and further education level.

Education lead at UCS, Lynn Sampson, explains: “There are a number of opportunities for those working in and around Shropshire to study for postgraduate qualifications right in the centre of Shrewsbury.

“Our programmes in Educational Leadership, Educational Practice or Special Educational Needs are designed for busy individuals and recognise the experience you already have, building upon this through professional knowledge and reflective learning.”

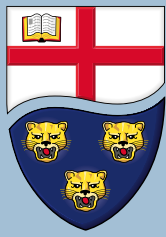
One postgraduate student who has benefited from the specialist training offered by UCS is Chris Ogden, a teaching and learning specialist team leader and Ofsted inspector.

Chris says the impact of his Master’s Degree upon his own professional development has been significant: “I’ve gained a deeper personal understanding of the academic research that underpins leadership decisions and actions.”

UCS also offers an MA in Educational Practice, which draws upon the experience of participants to critically reflect on their own performance, and develop confidence to share good practice.

Lynn Sampson concludes: “We want to equip the young people of Shropshire for an increasingly competitive future – and we’re providing the foundation to ensure that happens.”





# University Centre Shrewsbury

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The coal-fired and latterly biomass power station has been one of the most recognisable features on the Shropshire skyline for decades

# End of an era with power station sale

**W**hat next for Shropshire's iconic Ironbridge Power Station site? That's the question, after its owners officially hung up the 'For Sale' sign.

Energy company Uniper, the owner of the former Buildwas power station, says it reached a decision to sell the 141 hectare site after considering a number of options.

The coal-fired and latterly biomass power station, which has been one of the most recognisable features on the Shropshire skyline for decades, ceased operations nearly 18 months ago.

"We thought long and hard about the site but after concluding it wasn't suitable for any future conventional power generation projects, decided that the best option would be to seek a suitable investor who could help realise its potential," says Neil Riley, head of development at Uniper UK.

"The power station here performed a sterling role in generating electricity for almost half a century, but it's time now for the site to look to a different future.

"We're looking forward to working with our appointed agents, Cushman & Wakefield, who will market the site on our behalf and help us find the right buyer."



Energy company Uniper, owner of the former Buildwas power station, is selling the site

The plans were revealed at a special meeting comprising representatives from local councils.

"We've been talking to council representatives about the site for some time and welcomed the opportunity to set out our plans," said Neil.

"We intend to continue these important

conversations as the sale process progresses."

Malcolm Pate, leader of Shropshire Council, adds: "We welcome Uniper's continued dialogue with Shropshire Council and their willingness to work with us as part of their plans to dispose of Buildwas power station.

"This will ensure that we can get the maximum benefit from the redevelopment of the site to support the county's economic growth."

Decommissioning work at Buildwas is now in its final stages, and demolition plans are being drawn up in parallel with the site sale process.

"We will look to work with a buyer depending on their experience of taking on industrial sites of this nature," says Uniper UK's head of assets, Adam Archer.

There has been keen interest in the future of the former power station since its shut-down 15 months ago, according to the owners, and Uniper recognises that this will continue now that news of the site sale has been revealed.

"We fully appreciate the potential of the site and will engage with potential purchasers who have the resources and energy to help open a new chapter for the area," adds Adam.

"We're sure that any prospective purchaser will want to continue positive discussions with local authorities."





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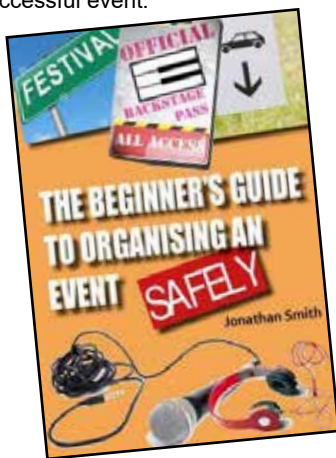
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# Safety first for author

**S**hropshire-based risk and safety management consultant Jonathan Smith travels the world providing advice and guidance – from showbiz and sports stars, to the military, and even the Royal Family.

And he's now put pen to paper to publish his first book, passing on top tips for organising a safe and successful event.



Jonathan runs Online Safety Solutions Limited, based near Shifnal, and his seven-strong team have just enjoyed a record-breaking year of sales.

He has worked on projects involving the likes of X Factor supremo Simon Cowell, Formula One boss Bernie Ecclestone, and the team behind the Egyptian Museum in Cairo.

He also has royal customers on his books, and closer to home has provided risk and safety back-up to events such as Ludlow and Shrewsbury food festivals.

He says: "It doesn't matter whether your event is a low-key get-together for friends and family, or a giant festival drawing in tens of thousands of frenzied fans, the secret to success is the same . . . proper planning.

"A well planned event is a safe and successful event. In my jargon-free book, you can learn from people who have been there and done it, and pick up top tips to avoid the most common pitfalls.

"From the earliest planning stages through to budgeting, safety and risk management, it is a step-by-step guide to organising the perfect event for maximum impact, with the minimum of stress."

● The Beginner's Guide To Organising An Event Safely, (ISBN: 9781910469040) is on sale through Amazon and Waterstones websites, priced £12.50



Jonathan Smith provides risk and safety advice all over the world, from festival venues to military zones

## Manufacturer to build site at T54 Technology Park

Austrian automotive parts supplier Polytec Group is to build another manufacturing site at the T54 technology park in Telford.

The new facility will be built over three phases, with the first phase alone creating up to 100 jobs.

It is a direct result of the Land Deal between the Homes and Communities Agency and Telford & Wrekin Council, secured as part of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership's Growth Deal.

Polytec is a leading developer and manufacturer of high quality plastic parts, a full service provider in the field of injection moulding and a specialist in fibre-reinforced plastics supply.

Their UK base is currently at Bromyard in Herefordshire. However, Polytec has won several major new contracts with a number of vehicle manufacturers which they cannot service from their current facility.

Polytec's plans incorporate three stages of development starting with the new paint plant and assembly hall then progressing to manufacturing facility and finally an additional assembly hall. Detailed planning permission for the site has already been submitted.

Councillor Shaun Davies, Telford & Wrekin Council leader, said: "This is fantastic news for the borough and is another victory for our business winning and business supporting approach.



How the finished Polytec site might look

"This builds on last year's announcement of Magna International's plans to build their aluminium casting facility at T54.

"I confidently expect that there will be more positive news for Telford as a result of the Land Deal with the Homes and Communities Agency in the coming months."

A spokesman for Polytec said: "We are very excited about this investment as it will allow us to both increase our capacity and introduce the latest technologies specifically in the painting process."

The land deal will see a percentage of receipts generated from the sale of HCA land in Telford go to the Marches LEP's new Marches Investment Fund – which will support growth projects in Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.



In this issue's big interview we meet **AMANDA MURRAY**. Four years ago, she followed her long-held ambition of becoming a film producer, setting up Shropshire-based production company, Ghost Dog Films

# LIGHTS, CAMERAS . . . AND PLENTY OF ACTION!



By Carl Jones

**A**manda Murray is no stranger to multi-tasking, or managing multi-million pound corporate campaigns.

With a background in fashion, marketing and business development, she's held some seriously big purse-strings during her time at several blue-chip London companies, and nine years as business development co-ordinator at Shropshire Council.

But just how does this mixture of financial acumen, organisational skills and creativity translate into the notoriously unpredictable business of movie-making?

Well, Amanda decided there was only one way to find out...

Four years ago, she changed career direction to follow her long-held ambition of becoming a film producer, setting up Shropshire-based production company, Ghost Dog Films, with writer-director Iain Ross-McNamee.

And ever since then, it's been a full-on case of lights, cameras . . . and Amanda right in the thick of the action.

She says: "We made our first feature film in 2014, *The Singing Bird Will Come* for a tiny budget.

"This was only the first step of a long term, hugely ambitious plan. Like any new business we had a clear vision of what we wanted to do, where we wanted to go. Our strategy of how we could achieve our goals was mapped out from the onset." ►



Neil Morrissey with leading lady Katie Goldfinch in a scene from *Crucible of the Vampire*

◀ The producer is the engine that drives any film project. They'll be involved in all the five stages of the process – raising funds, pre-production, production, post-production and then the selling and marketing of the film. Typically this can span a two or three-year period.

Amanda says: "All stages have their challenges. Raising money to make an independent film is tough, and is often the first hurdle at which most people fall."

Ghost Dog Films' second feature, *Crucible of the Vampire*, has just been completed, and got the red carpet treatment at a glitzy premiere, held at Shrewsbury's Theatre Severn – with investors on hand to see how their money had been spent.

The Gothic vampire thriller is set in present-day Shropshire, and was filmed entirely in the county, using locations such as Rowley's House in Shrewsbury, The Nag's Head pub in Pontesbury, and the Isle Estate on the banks of the river Severn.

It also followed in the footsteps of one of the county's all-time classic films, *Gone To Earth*, by shooting some of its opening scenes in the atmospheric Shropshire hills.

This was a step up for Amanda and her team in every respect – the 'named' cast includes Men Behaving Badly star Neil Morrissey, with action scenes choreographed by stunt co-ordinator Justin Pearson, who has worked on the *Star Wars*, *007*, *Fast & Furious*, and *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchises.

"Our second feature was fully budgeted and took advantage of the generous tax schemes the Government have in place for high-risk ventures such as films," Amanda continues.

"Grants are no longer available for film-makers, so raising money through private investment enables independent projects to get made, while providing a financial safety net for investors.

"Working with legal and accountancy companies that specialise in the film industry was crucial. It meant I also had to have a good understanding of the legal and financial parameters when pitching to investors."

For *Crucible*, well over a dozen associate producers were on board, while Howard Thorne of Shropshire Homes is among the executive producers.



Licence to thrill – stunt co-ordinator Justin Pearson on the red carpet with actresses Katie Goldfinch and Florence Cady





*Amanda Murray and business partner Iain Ross-McNamee look at rushes on the set of Crucible of the Vampire*

Amanda says: "Getting a good team together who you trust and who can advise you is paramount. We have since gone on to raise money for our third project, scheduled for release in 2018, which proved more cost-effective and straightforward second time around – because we'd all been through the process already."

Amanda says the business skills she has learned during her earlier career have proved to be extremely valuable in her new venture.

"Networking and presenting to potential investors can be daunting.

"Selling your film project is no mean feat. And really at the end of the day, people invest in an idea as much as they'll invest in you as a person or a team.

"Investors have to feel confident that you're able to deliver on the things you've promised.

"Gritty determination, dedication and an unswerving belief in what you're doing is essential. There's always a lot of knocking on doors with the expectation that most doors will be slammed in your face.

"But for every 100 people that say no, there'll be one person who says yes. You can't afford to fear failure, and you have to be able to withstand the knocks."

Stressful, then? And expensive?

Amanda says: "Oh, yes. Running a film project requires a multitude of skills such as managing people, budgeting, being super organised, negotiating locations and being to deal with problems in a controlled and resourceful way.

"Production is an expensive and stressful part of the process. The hours are



*Leading lady Katie Goldfinch in a haunted Shropshire house, in Crucible of the Vampire*

long, often up to 14 hours a day. So much can go wrong, even if you think you've planned for every eventuality.

"Weather can impact on your outdoor scenes, crew and cast get ill, in all

probability you'll have to fire someone in the team at some point during filming, then you'll have to find a replacement, accidents happen on set, equipment fails, the list goes on." ▶



*And action . . . former EastEnders star Brian Croucher films his scenes under the watchful eyes of the Ghost Dog Films crew*

◀ And a movie producer needs to remain calm under fire. Unforeseen problems and unavoidable delays can send the pound signs rocketing, and being able to negotiate and collaborate really can make a difference especially when you need to claw back an over spend.

Diplomacy is a crucial quality in a film producer, then. But so is creativity.

Amanda says: “At our cast and investor premiere for *Crucible of the Vampire*, I raised sponsorship money from a number of Shropshire businesses in exchange for marketing and promotion.

“Henshalls Insurance, Hatfields Jaguar Land Rover, Shropshire Homes and Wace Morgan were some of the companies that supported us.

“Collaborating in this way with large local organisations was also the perfect way to promote Ghost Dog Films and showcase what we are doing. It always pays off to think laterally and network with successful organisations.

“We were also sponsored and have been working with The Department for International Trade. Their expert trade advice and market know-how is designed to support companies like us, achieve success in global markets.”

The creative industries have been the fastest growing part of the UK economy over the past decade, contributing almost £90 billion net to GDP.

And Amanda is looking to ride the crest of this wave, with her sights set on selling to an international audience.

She wants to tap in to their contacts and expertise, to open doors that might otherwise remain shut.

“As Ghost Dog Films moves forward, our business ethos very much reflects James Cameron’s attitude. He said ‘Hope is not a strategy. Luck is not a factor. Fear is not an option’.”



*Planning the location shoots, and ensuring it is carefully costed, is a crucial part of the producer’s job*

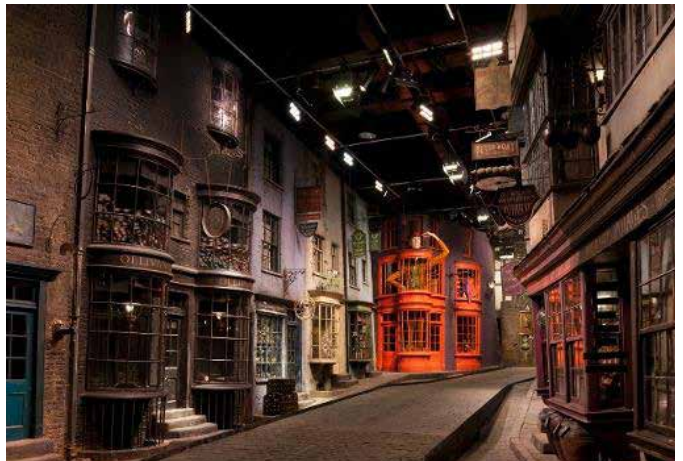


*Florence Cady on location in Shropshire – the London-based actress said she fell in love with the county*





*The Making of Harry Potter at Warner Bros Studio Tour*



*Fans of Potter and his magical friends can experience the sets*

# May the tours be with you

**S**hropshire construction and landscaping specialist Crown Group is playing a leading role in the expansion of Warner Bros studios – home to blockbusters including the Harry Potter and Star Wars franchises.

The Upton Magna company has secured a major landscaping project at the sprawling 150-acre Hertfordshire site as part of the latest instalment of the multi-million pound studio expansion.

Warner Bros is building additional sound stages, workshops, a multi-storey car park and a state-of-the-art graphics and design space at Leavesden.

A Landscape Planting Strategy, which includes substantial new planting along the western edge of the backlot and in and around the Studio Tour car park extension,

will be delivered by Crown Group. Managing director Gareth Emberton said the contract was the latest in a string of business wins for the sub-contractor, which has doubled in size in the last year.

“We are passionate about construction and horticulture working hand in hand and we’ve delivered commercial landscaping schemes successfully across the UK for some time. The contract at Warner Bros supports the master plan for the next ten years for the site which attracts more than five million visitors a year.”



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Shropshire manufacturers are doing well – but are finding it difficult to recruit the right staff

# Firms remain resilient

**The availability and use of business intelligence is a vital ingredient when business planning is underway.**

The Chamber Quarterly Economic Survey work is one of the most up to date sources of business sentiment available, presenting Shropshire Businesses with an opportunity to have their voice heard within Westminster.

The results of our final survey of 2016 have been analysed and as such we can share some key findings that make interesting reading, covering the service and manufacturing sectors.

- Overall, the figures for both sectors indicate continued expansion, but at a lower level for the services sector than before the EU referendum
- There was a considerable rise in the balance of firms in both sectors expecting the prices of their goods and services to increase over the next three months, with the balance for manufacturers rising from +31% to +52% and service firms from +20% to +30%. This is the highest on record in the manufacturing sector, and the highest since Q1 2011 for service firms. This pressure is predominately as a result of an increase in raw material prices following the post-referendum devaluation of Sterling
- In the manufacturing sector, the balance of firms reporting improved export sales remained broadly steady, slightly decreasing from +17% in Q3 2016, to +16. The balance for export orders is +13%,



**Richard SHEEHAN**

similar to +12% in the previous quarter. Both balances are up from +1% in the same quarter last year.

- Domestically, the balance of manufacturers reporting increased sales rose to +15% from +13%, and those reporting increased advance orders remained level at +7%. The balance for services firms rebounded slightly, after falling considerably in the last quarter. Domestic sales were up from +9% to +15% and orders rose from +8% to +13%. In Q2 2016, to compare, they had been +24% and +20% respectively
- The percentage of manufacturing firms reporting recruitment difficulties increased considerably from 64% to 76%
- In the last three months, the balance of manufacturers hiring more staff rose from +15% to +23%, and services rose from +14% to +16%
- Having dipped in the last quarter, both sectors are reporting higher balances of firms investing in plant and machinery, with the balance of manufacturing firms increasing the balance of firms from +8% to +19%

- More firms in both sectors are reporting confidence that their turnover will increase. The balance of manufacturers rose from +36% to +43%, while services increased from +28% to +35%. While confidence in profitability remained static at +22% among manufacturers since last quarter, it rose from +15% to +21% in the services sector. However, both profit and turnover confidence are still relatively low compared to results from the past three years.

Businesses are continuing to trade through the uncertainty, and are looking to seize opportunities as they arise.

Our findings suggest that business communities across the UK remain resilient, and many firms are expecting continued growth in the months ahead.

Inflation has emerged as a rising concern for many businesses.

Both manufacturing and services firms say they are under pressure, particularly from the rising cost of inputs, which is squeezing margins and may weaken future investment.

Overall, the findings suggest growth will continue in 2017, albeit at a more modest pace.

But the Government must act strongly this year to support investment and improve the business environment – both of which are crucial to boosting business confidence, and therefore further growth.

• *Richard Sheehan is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. Visit [www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk](http://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk)*



# Is your business planning to **diversify, expand** or **innovate** in 2017?



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**Enterprise Telford is Telford & Wrekin Council's 'business winning, business supporting' campaign.** Through the Marches Growth Hub, we offer enterprises of all sectors and sizes a single point of access to information, guidance and business support. **0345 6000 727** [www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/about-us/telford/](http://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk/about-us/telford/)



# New grants up to £200,000 on offer from growth hub

**T**he Marches Growth Hub is your single point of access to information on the vast range of support available to businesses in the region.

Whether you're interested in grant funding of up to £200,000, want to know what business networks are in your area or need help to start exporting, the business-friendly site, [www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk) or helpline on 0345 6000 727 should be your first port of call.

Thousands of businesses have already taken advantage of the help on offer via the virtual hub, which offers up to date information on a range of issues from high

speed broadband and accessing finance to launching international trade programmes or finding commercial premises.

There's also information on the region's business networks, case studies from Marches' businesses which have taken advantage of some of the schemes and products on offer and a packed calendar of events aimed at supporting business growth.

The virtual hub's Support Finder tool is a great way to find specific business support products and services which apply to your business – wherever in the Marches you're based, and whatever sector you operate in. It's all about finding the relevant support for YOUR business.

As well as the virtual hub, hub sites operate in Shrewsbury and Telford, offering

a range of services, from face-to-face meetings with business advisors, hot desking facilities and meeting rooms for hire.

Marches Growth Hub Shropshire is co-located with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce at the Food Enterprise Centre at Battlefield Enterprise Park.

And Marches Growth Hub Telford & Wrekin is based at the University of Wolverhampton's Innovation Campus in Priorslee.

So whether you're thinking about starting-up, or if you're already running a business, no matter how small or large, or whatever size or sector you operate in, the Marches Growth Hub, developed by The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, is Your Gateway to Business Support.



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## Water result for firm



Mark North and Paul Delves celebrate the deal

**M**ontgomery Waters Ltd, based on the west Shropshire border at Churchstoke, is increasing capacity after unveiling its latest bottling line.

The expansion will allow the firm to meet demand for its range of spring and mineral waters, under brand names such as Celtic Spring, AquaVit & Aquaroma. The £6 million investment will allow capacity to exceed 120 million litres per year, delivering state of the art robotic technology and increasing turnover to £24 million next year.

The spring and mineral water is infused with a host of essential minerals by virtue of its passage through ancient rock formations in the rural area. Managing director Paul Delves, said: "The new investment now allows us to have five bottling lines to achieve our ambitious growth plans, to double turnover in five years."

"We are already one of the top five independently owned water suppliers in the UK and you will already see our product in many of the leading supermarket and convenience store groups as own brand labels, combined with our growing own product range of Celtic Spring, AquaVit and Aquaroma."

The investment has been supported by Barclays. Mark North, the bank's corporate relationship manager, says: "This is a significant investment in a highly competitive market and paints a very bright future for the business."

"Barclays has been able to deliver a funding package to support Montgomery Waters throughout this exciting development. A major investment like this demonstrates both Barclays and the management team's confidence in the success of the business. The investment has already secured employment for the 55 strong workforce and will ensure production targets can be achieved to meet growing demand for the entire product suite."

## In brief . . .

- A new company has been launched in Telford, supplying 3D printing materials. The team at [www.3dprintz.co.uk](http://www.3dprintz.co.uk) say: "We wanted to make great parts from our printers, but were frustrated at the range of materials and filaments available. Some were cheap and we brought them with terrible results, some were very expensive. The expensive were good – but they were expensive. So we decided to make our own, with the goal of producing high quality filament at a sensible price."



- Midlands workers have had their say on the office of the future - and called for flexible working and flexible hours ahead of perks such as an on-site gym or high-tech sleep pods. A

survey commissioned by Crown Workplace Relocations polled workers on what they really want from their employers in the future. Flexible hours came out top of the wish list with 73 per cent, even beating bonuses (68%). A holiday buy-back scheme (50%) and access to work emails on a smart phone (53%) also proved more popular than an on-site gym.

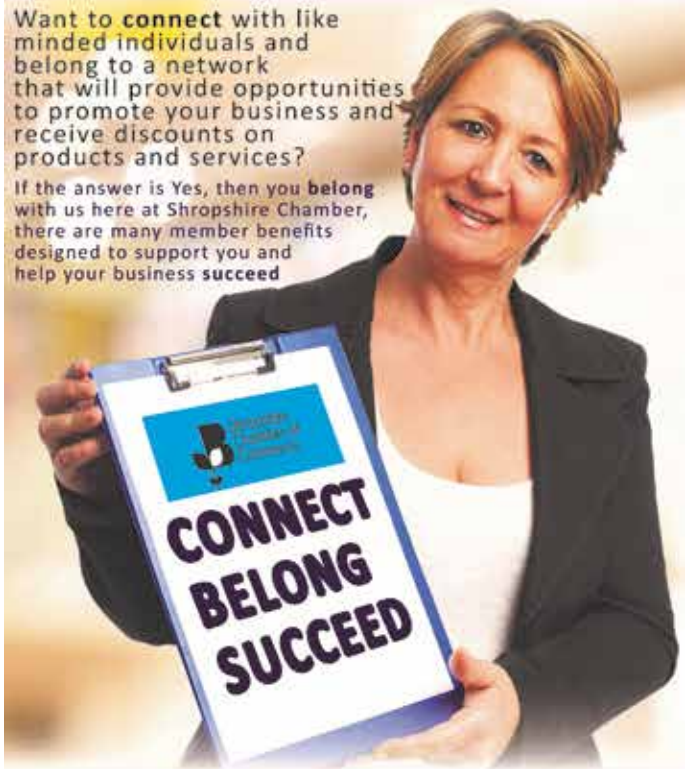
- Unique Copiers, based at St Georges in Telford, has been named UK Business Professional Services Supplier of the Year by The Best Of UK and recognised among the top 100 businesses across the UK. Regional sales manager Adam Wagstaff said: "We have a huge amount of pride in what we do and to receive accolades such as this is most rewarding. Our staff are pivotal in our success."

In business for business

## Would you like to develop and improve your business?

Want to connect with like minded individuals and belong to a network that will provide opportunities to promote your business and receive discounts on products and services?

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# Helping to develop your staff

**B**usinesses across Shropshire will be able to access expert advice on staffing, employment law and HR all in one place through a law firm's new service.

Progressive HR aims to break down barriers to business growth by helping companies to maximise the potential of the people they employ. It has been developed by the legal team at FBC Manby Bowdler.

Employment team partner Julia Fitzsimmons said: "Progressive HR is a direct result of the work we do with businesses on a daily basis.

"We know how difficult it can be for employers to find and develop the right people; we know the headaches and the red-tape involved in taking on staff and the issues which regularly arise for companies.

"Research last year revealed that one in ten SMEs are spending up to 15 hours a week managing HR issues, negatively impacting on areas of business development.

"We want to help organisations to better manage how they deal with staff and comply with HR regulation so they can concentrate on building their business.

"Employment law can also be a minefield.

"Sometimes business owners just need the reassurance that the correct path



*The Progressive HR team, from left HR Consultant Kim Barker, employment solicitor Amber Simms, Partner Julia Fitzsimmons, and head of employment law Tracy Worthington.*

has been followed, that their policies and procedures for staff are in order and of course, that should they need legal support as a result of employment tribunals or health and safety matters involving staff, it is immediately available to them without breaking the bank.

"This new service has been designed to bring together HR strategy and expertise, employment law assistance and additional value through our partners including health and safety audits and courses, healthcare

cash plans and consultancy for business growth."

FBC Manby Bowdler HR consultant Kim Barker added: "Progressive HR offers employers a new comprehensive service at a competitive price, but it is very much part of FBC Manby Bowdler's strategy to support employers with growth ambitions. The service will be delivered with the same stellar customer service we're known for, by our experienced and expert people who are leaders in their field."

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*Each year in March, crowds gather to eat, drink, socialise, watch the races, and have a flutter, bid for exciting auction lots and donate in other ways for the benefit of the chosen good cause at Ludlow Charity Race Day*

# Causes benefit – it's a racing cert

By Henry Carpenter

**L**udlow Charity Race Day is now up there with daffodils, newborn lambs and the Chancellor's Budget as one of the cast iron springtime constants.

Each year in March, hordes of racing enthusiasts – as well as a few with not the slightest interest in the horses – gather to eat, drink, socialise, watch the races, have a flutter, bid for exciting auction lots and donate in other ways for the benefit of the event's chosen charity.

Several causes have benefited over the years, with the likes of HELP Appeal, Robert Jones & Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital, Severn Hospice and Severn Valley Railway among the recent charities which have seen their coffers swell thanks to the race day.

The sums involved are far from insignificant either, with many tens of thousands of pounds – sometimes nudging a six-figure sum – raised at each event.

It has become an institution in the

Shropshire racing and social calendar and this year, on March 23, it is the turn of Ludlow Assembly Rooms, the much-loved south Shropshire arts and community centre whose ongoing development will surely be bolstered by the proceeds of the race day.

**Nowhere is the generosity more forthcoming than from Shropshire's business community**

While the annual race day is something of a rarity in that such high profile and similarly productive fundraising events in Shropshire are relatively few and far between, that is not to say for one instant that there is any lack of generosity in the county.

Far from it. There are so many charities and not-for-profit organisations which depend on the largesse of donors – and nowhere is the generosity more forthcoming than from Shropshire's business community.

With that in mind, we speak to a selection of philanthropic business people from around the county who, either as individuals or through their organisations, are moved to donate to a wide selection of differing charities.

We discover their motivations – whether for instance, they have personal attachments to certain charities – and also their charitable targets, defined by both geography and sector.

It is not all about the willingness and ability to write a cheque though; as the following case studies would be quick to acknowledge, every bit as important is the tireless work which goes on behind the scenes, often on a completely voluntary basis.

Of course, this is just the tiniest selection from an enormous army of charitable people who give so generously of their time and money.

But it does at least give a flavour of how various donors resolve to spend their funds - and thank heavens for them and all those thousands of others whose generosity touches the lives of those less fortunate than themselves. ▶

# Backing for book festival



*Pictured at the launch of the sponsorship deal are, from left, Daisy Hogarth, Danielle Goffe-Wood of Galliers Homes, Christopher Novelli-Cain, Elsie Wilson, Morgan Hogarth, Rose Hogarth, Joanna Hughes of the Bookfest and Thomas Hughes*

A Shropshire building company has again stepped forward to become headline sponsor of Shrewsbury Bookfest's annual children's literary festival in 2017.

Galliers Homes has renewed its position as main backer of Shrewsbury Bookfest's May Festival, the town's annual children's literary event.

Marketing manager Danielle Goffe-Wood said: "Galliers is very proud of its links to Shrewsbury and is keen to get involved in community events, charities and activities – our sponsorship of Shrewsbury Bookfest is an ideal opportunity for us to support one of the town's great festivals."

Some of the biggest names in the world of children's books, including award winning broadcaster, journalist and author, Clare Balding, will take part in the festival, which will take place in venues across the town from Friday 28th April to Monday 1st May.



*"I would say that over the last 10 years Marches Care has donated a six-figure sum to local charities" – Mandy Thorn of Marches Care*

## Care is the word

**M**andy Thorn is the managing director of Marches Care, a family-run company which operates the Uplands at Oxon care home, and Uplands Day Centre on the same site in Bicton Heath, Shrewsbury.

The company specialises in the provision of top level care for older adults and those with dementia.

As well as sitting on numerous boards relating to the social care sector, and regional business and local enterprise boards, Mandy is currently the Chair of the Lingen Davies Trust, and President of Shrewsbury & Darwin Rotary Club. She is also a Trustee of Shrewsbury Town in the Community, a community development programme working with Shrewsbury Town FC, and is a Dementia Champion, an Alzheimer's Society initiative.

**Over the years, how much do you estimate that you as an individual, or your business, has contributed to charity?**

I would say that over the last 10 years Marches Care has donated a six-figure sum to local charities. We just feel very lucky that we are in a position to be able to support a wide variety of charities to greater or lesser degrees. On a personal level, my husband Mark and I enjoy contributing to charities via the endeavour of individuals we know.

**Do you donate to specific charities or is it done more on an 'ad hoc' basis?**

A bit of both. There are some charities which we support annually, including

Severn Hospice, which is situated next to the Uplands, the RSH League of Friends and County Air Ambulance. However, we also contribute to charities and not-for-profit projects which we hear about through acquaintances and word of mouth, some of which we had never heard of. Our staff are continually undertaking fundraising activities, often raising hundreds of pounds at the very least.

**Do you tend to donate to local, regional, national or even international charities, or does it vary?**

Our focus tends to be very much on local charities.

**What is your main motivation to support specific charities?**

All causes do resonate for a certain reason. Like so many others my life has been touched by cancer and so there is a natural inclination to support charities helping those suffering from the disease. But I know I speak for the Marches Care board when I say we feel very privileged to be able to help some really amazing causes, and have a duty to do so.

**Are there any particular projects which have come to fruition, largely or at least partly through your benevolence?**

I believe we have enabled several arts projects to take place, though that is not to say that another donor wouldn't have stepped in! I know, for instance, that our funding towards the staging of Silhouette in Shrewsbury was matched by the Arts Council, allowing it to be staged – and it was a huge success. Marches Care also sponsored Shakespeare's Wife, a one-woman stage production, last year and this year we are supporting the Shropshire Youth Theatre's production of The Importance of Being Earnest at Theatre Severn in April.



# Programme benefits pupils

More than 2,300 primary school pupils in Shropshire have benefitted from a pioneering education programme to boost youngsters' computing skills.

The Barefoot Computing project, which has now reached more than one million pupils UK-wide, helps teachers get to grips with computing so they can better help their pupils.

Led by BT and the British Computing Society, Barefoot offers free teaching-resources and volunteer-led training workshops.

It is making a big impact across the UK with over 130,000 resources downloaded, and more than 35,000 teachers using those resources.

Colin Bannon, chairman of BT's West Midlands regional board, said: "Computing is a vital skill for the future of Shropshire and the wider West Midlands.

For the individual, it opens the door to a world of possibilities.

"Businesses and organisations of all types and sizes rely on this technology, whilst households use it for online learning, research and entertainment.

"BT volunteers are running workshops at schools the length and breadth of the region, giving teachers the confidence to teach computing to young people. Those skills will undoubtedly be used to successfully navigate a whole host of real-world challenges as they go through life."

Barefoot was created in response to concerns that many young people today are passive consumers rather than active creators of technology – and risk being left behind.

It is part of BT's Tech Literacy ambition and forms part of the long-term commitment by BT to help build a culture of tech literacy for the nation, reaching five million young people by 2020.



Colin Bannon, chairman of BT's West Midlands regional board

# Commitment shown to local community

## Mark Freeman is a director of Henshalls Insurance Brokers.

Henshalls Insurance Brokers is celebrating 50 years in business this year and has its head office in the heart of Newport town centre, as well as another branch in Shrewsbury.

The company is the current holder of the Business in the Community Award title from the Shropshire Business Awards, and is totally committed to being part of the local community, with many of its 30-strong staff living in and around the Newport area.

Henshalls are committed to supporting the local economy wherever they can, and every year they put thousands of pounds back into the local area through both fundraising and volunteering.

**Over the years, how much do you estimate that you as an individual, or your business, has contributed to charity?**

The company has donated in the region of £3,000 per annum and £5,000 per annum in charities/sponsorship.

**Do you donate to specific charities, or is it done more on an 'ad hoc' basis?**

The staff choose two or three main charities for each calendar year to whom donations are made from any staff fundraising events.

We are also one of the first places local people come to for help, whether it is a raffle prize for a fund-raising dinner, sponsoring an event, donating to someone's own fundraising efforts or funding kit or equipment for local groups.

**Do you tend to donate to local, regional, national or even international charities, or does it vary?**



Henshalls donates cash to the Newport Cottage Care centre – Mark Freeman is pictured with Jill Munslow and Aneta Allcock

Donations are invariably local for local organisations or they're motivated by local people (e.g. The staff may choose a national charity because of personal circumstances such as the loss of a friend of Henshalls).

**What is your main motivation to support specific charities?**

Very often it is personal, such as following the loss of a member of staff. For example, Severn Hospice looked after one of our colleagues in her final days. Or there might be a direct link to someone close to us.

A case in point is Harry Johnson, whose death led to the formation of the

Harry Johnson Trust, was related to someone in our team. Or we would be happy to support if it's a cause that many of us care about such as Newport Cottage Care Trust or The Dogs Trust.

**Are there any particular projects which have come to fruition, largely or at least partly through your benevolence?**

Digging over the vegetable patch at Severn Hospice; headline sponsors of the 2017 Shropshire Businesses for Children Awards; raising £4,000 for Newport First Responders for new equipment; paying for public defibrillators for the village of Edmond.

# Man who built a medical centre

## Ray Grocott is the owner of Shropshire firm Grocontinental.

Ray Grocott has put as much drive, energy and passion into supporting his local community as he has into making his business – storage and distribution company, Grocontinental – one of the most successful in Shropshire. The company was founded 75 years ago by Ray's mother, Nellie, and today the company's turnover is in excess of £35 million.

At the age of 16, Ray joined his mother to help run her cattle haulage business. Nellie Grocott was a pioneering lady of her day who, after the untimely death of her husband and with seven young children in tow, took on the family business in wartime Britain and sowed the seeds for success.

There is no doubt that Ray Grocott applied the strong values his mother instilled in him to build Grocontinental into the success it is today.

And at the age of 83, he's still seen in the business seven days a week.

Over the years, how much has Ray as an **individual, or his business, contributed to charity?**

Over £3 million (see details of specific projects below).

**Does he donate to specific charities or is it done more on an 'ad hoc' basis?**

Both. Over recent years, Grocontinental has made regular donations to the Severn Hospice and Whitchurch Community Hospital, but the company has also contributed to many charities and community projects.

Recent donations to ad-hoc charities/ community projects include donation of a minibus to the Bradbury Care Centre in Whitchurch to transport older people and people with disabilities to the centre for daily support; £6,000 to the Queensway Playing Fields Association in Whitchurch – a cash injection to guarantee that the park remains open for local residents over the next three years; and sponsorship partnerships with Sir John Talbot's School, Whitchurch Rugby



Ray Grocott pictured outside The Grocott Medical Centre

Club and Whitchurch Whippets' Community Relay. Added to this is a host of donations to support charities and local community events.

**Does Grocontinental tend to donate to local, regional, national or even international charities, or does it vary?**

Primarily to local charities close to Grocontinental's headquarters in Whitchurch and to support charity events connected with employees, together with other prominent Shropshire-based charities, for example, Severn Hospice and Age UK Shropshire Telford & Wrekin. However, through staff fundraising initiatives, the company supports national charities too such as Macmillan, Parkinson's UK and Breakthrough Breast Cancer.

**What is Ray's main motivation to support specific charities?**

Mostly to support local charities and community projects (see above). Ray also holds the philanthropic view that he really has all he needs in life and that it's all about giving something back.

**Are there any particular projects which have come to fruition, largely or at least partly through Ray's benevolence?**

Always close to Ray's heart is the village he grew up in North Shropshire, Prees, and where he still lives today with his wife Rose. In recent years, Ray has been the driving force behind the regeneration of

the village's sports club. As Chairman of Prees Cricket and Recreation Club, Ray campaigned to raise funds and leverage Government funding, as well as contributing personal funds. The club is now one of the finest community clubs in the county.

But in 2015 he did something truly exceptional for his village.

Through his family's charitable trust, Ray financed the build of a state-of-the-art £1 million medical centre to save his local GP practice.

Working with staff at Wem and Prees Medical Practice, he cut through difficult negotiations with the NHS, got the very best contractors on board, kept his uncompromising eye on progress, and in less than a year The Grocott Medical Centre was officially opened.

Ray is now onto his next project.

This year he is building eight new bungalows in Prees for local people aged 75 and over to rent. The new development is costing around £800,000 and Ray's vision is to provide high-quality, economical to run, affordable bungalows for older people. Properties will be available to residents of Prees and the surrounding area and for those who have strong links to the village.

Speaking about the new development Ray's daughter, Linda, said: "Although our charitable donations are arranged through our Family Trust, this is really a personal donation by my dad who, rather than choosing to spend his pension savings himself, decided he wanted to donate them to the village he grew up in and which he really cares about."

"The £1 million donation he made to fund the new Medical Centre in Prees, which opened in 2015, was also a personal donation. It is a very special and generous legacy and as a family, we are hugely proud of what Dad is doing to improve things for people who live in the village."

The development will be named Rose Court, after Ray's wife Rose.

## Grants received by 12 organisations

A group of 12 organisations across Shrewsbury have received grants totalling over £6,000 from The Midcounties Co-operative.

The grants were awarded to organisations that applied to The Midcounties Co-operative's Community Fund.

The society presented all 12 charities and community groups with the funds at a special event on at Bicton Heath Village Hall.

Amongst the groups that benefited were Fairtrade Town Shrewsbury, who used the funds to promote the annual Fairtrade Festival Fortnight, and the Confide Counselling Service, which helps people suffering from mental health issues.

Alison Holmes, leadership team ambassador for Shrewsbury at The Midcounties Co-operative, said: "These organisations make an immeasurable difference to our community and it was great to bring them all together."



Community groups at the presentation, at Bicton village hall



## New kit for football team

A new training kit for the under 14's Dynamos has been presented to Oswestry Boys and Girls Football Club by sponsors Arthurs Vauxhall of Oswestry.

The award-winning Vauxhall dealership is continuing its long-standing association with the club. Sales manager William Edwards said: "Arthurs has a reputation for supporting local clubs including the Oswestry Boys and Girls.

"It is a natural progression of Vauxhall's long association with the Home Nations football teams."

## Funds for blood cancer charity

Sentinel Care Services in Telford raised more than £1,000 for blood cancer charity, Bloodwise with a prize draw and cake sale. It is a particularly important charity for managing director, Steve Harris.

He said: "Bloodwise is a charity especially close to my heart, as I was diagnosed with

Myelodysplasia syndrome, a blood cancer known as MDS which causes a drop in the number of healthy blood cells, about five years ago.

"I have been lucky to be able to continue to work despite the disease, and although I will need a bone marrow transplant I am hoping to make a full recovery."

# Supporting a wide variety of initiatives

## Robin Morris is the chairman of Morris & Company.

As a fifth-generation family-run business group, Morris & Company has been shaped through a blend of enterprise and entrepreneurial spirit with a healthy respect for what has gone before – dating back to 1869 when Robin's great great grandfather opened a grocery store in Frankwell which was to be the beginning of the business story.

Today the family remains actively involved at the helm of each of its three key trading businesses, namely: property – commercial and residential property investment and development; care – a collection of nursing homes built, owned and run by the family across Shropshire and Cheshire; and site machinery where the business trades nationally and increasingly internationally.

### Do you donate to specific charities or is it done more on an 'ad hoc' basis?

We have an active corporate social responsibility (CSR) group which comprises members from all aspects of our businesses whose role is to ensure that our staff lead elements of our CSR programme and are involved in many of its actions. This past year we supported 23 different charitable causes and fundraising activities.

Our CSR policy is based around three principles of people, participation and planet and each year we canvas staff to decide sectors, charities or activities to support.

All requests to the company and those put forward by our staff are carefully considered and a plan is prepared to include financial donations and sponsorships plus events and activities in which staff are given time to become involved with, together with our own Stepping Stone charitable initiative (see below).

So each year we may support a number of different charities. For example, this year we committed to donate £10,000 per annum to Shrewsbury Drapers Company Charity until 2026 in support of their provision of almshouses. Another year it could include supporting national organisations such as Macmillan Cancer Support or the Red Cross but it will always be with an emphasis on



*Robin Morris, chairman of Morris & Company*

supporting those branches in our locality. We equally like to support small local initiatives relevant to our working lives such as Hospice fundraising or supporting the League of Friends at Royal Shrewsbury Hospital.

### Do you tend to donate to local, regional, national or even international charities, or does it vary?

As a business, we have always tried to devote time, resource and charitable funds to causes close to our hearts and for many years that has primarily been in Shropshire. With over 148 years' heritage within the county, it is hardly surprising that we believe in investing in the communities in which we live and serve. This may be a local, regional or national charity but it will always be to benefit the local community.

### What is your main motivation to support specific charities?

As a rule, our motivation to support a charity will have come from staff within our businesses. However, this is not always the case, for example we have recently supported a number of educational and sports activities with both funds and our

time, as they have benefited the Shropshire youth community at large. It really depends.

### Are there any particular projects which have come to fruition, largely or at least partly through your benevolence?

One initiative which our CSR group helped found and set up is our annual 'Stepping Stone' Project. The purpose of Stepping Stone is to invite staff to nominate enthusiastic individuals who they know and think would benefit from a six-month paid work placement within the Morris business as a stepping stone into or back into work.

We invite staff to nominate someone they know who deserves a chance like this. There are no specific skill sets required for the two placements as roles are created to suit the individuals selected, rather than fitting an existing business need.

It is a commitment for the business over and above the salary costs, as it involves creating special roles and our staff becoming mentors, ensuring their time with us is positive, fruitful and makes a genuine difference to them.

# Hub of information for funding and financing your business



**A**fter spending many years in the field of business support, it's no surprise to me that finance and funding is the most searched section on the Marches Growth Hub website or that it's the subject most people want to know about when they call the helpline too.

Businesses want to grow, they want to scale up – but they need support, advice and yes, often funding, to be able to fulfil their ambitions.

The Marches LEP region has been awarded around £95 million of European Union funding for projects running between now and 2020. And some of these projects include grants of up to £200,000 for eligible businesses.

**Businesses in the Marches have secured more than £600,000 in the last year alone through EU-funded support schemes**

Here at The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership and The Marches Growth Hub, we want to help businesses access this money. The Brexit debate aside, this funding is available now.

The LEP chairman, Graham Wynn has also had confirmation from Sajid Javid, the Secretary of State for Community and Local Government, that current EU funding for projects signed up to the point at which the UK departs, even when these projects continue after we have left the EU, is guaranteed.

Businesses in the Marches have secured more than £600,000 in the last year alone through EU-funded support schemes – so what is available to your business?

There are 11 live projects, essentially funding streams for businesses, with another eight in the pipeline. Most recently launched is the Marches Business Investment Grant, a £2.5 million pot available to help businesses extend or renovate their commercial premises. They need to create jobs to get hold of the funding and there are conditions over what types of business can apply.



*Every penny counts when it comes to financing a business*

Last year saw the introduction of the Business Growth Programme (BGP) – this is a £33 million funding scheme launched for small and medium-sized businesses with grants of between £20,000 and £200,000 available.

The BGP includes the Business Development Programme, the Business Innovation Programme, the Green Bridge Supply Chain Programme and the HS2 Supply Chain Programme.

And funding is available for ambitious, innovative and enterprising companies, whether they are looking to take advantage of supply chain opportunities for HS2 or develop new products to gain a foothold in a growing low carbon sector.

For our manufacturing businesses in Shropshire, the new Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP) provides free advice and support as well as covering 35 per cent of the cost of implementing plans through a growth or improvement grant. Experts

are on hand to help manufacturing SMEs identify opportunities and create plans for growth.

There are also Innovation Vouchers; collaborative research funding and free energy efficiency assessments.

If you'd like to know more about what funding is available to support your business, the business support helpline at the Marches Growth Hub on 0345 6000 727 can guide you through the options. Or you can log on to [www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk) and search our Support Finder which has information and links to not only EU funded schemes but other sources of funding as well.

- Gill Hamer is the Director of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, the private-sector led organisation which includes the councils of Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin, tasked with delivering economic growth across the region.



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## Work beyond 65

Shropshire businesses are being urged to embrace the rising number of people who want to remain in work beyond their scheduled retirement age.

There are now 1.1 million people working beyond the age of 65 – more than double the figure in 2001.

And accountancy firm Dyke Yaxley, which has offices in Shrewsbury and Telford, is urging employers to recognise the value which these people continue to bring to the local economy.

Keith Higgins says: “There are now more than 9.4 million people aged 50 and above who are working in the UK, compared with just 5.7 million in 1996.



Keith Higgins

“It is clear that people are no longer looking to slow down after the age of 50 to contemplate retirement, so it is important that businesses find ways of accommodating them.

“As our population continues to grow older, many elderly people are finding themselves caring for frail relatives. These people want to keep on working, but many are being forced out of work because their employers will not allow them flexible hours, or part-time contracts.”

Latest figures from the Department for Work and Pensions show that the percentage of women aged 55-59 in employment is approaching 70 per cent. And nearly 60 per cent of men are still working between the ages of 60 and 65 – a rise of 13 per cent since 1996.

Keith says: “All the evidence points to the fact that working into your seventies will become increasingly normal, as life expectancy edges into the nineties, so it’s important for companies to address what is going to become an increasingly frequent issue.”

# Acquisition coup

DKL Rubber Ltd of Wem, which has been making rubber mouldings for almost 30 years, has acquired a Cambridgeshire-based specialist rubber engineering business.

Early stage discussions with Medcraft Bryden began in 2015, but it wasn’t until last year that those conversations really moved forward.

DKL director Robert Oakes explains: “We had known of Medcraft Bryden for a while and were impressed with the range of services that they offered, believing that these would be a good fit with the work we already carried out at DKL.

“However, as two relatively small enterprises with day to day business commitments to focus on, it took until earlier this year for those conversations to really start focusing on the desired result.”

Both the Wem and Cambridgeshire sites will be maintained for the time being, and the management team says two additional members of staff have already been appointed to work from the Shropshire base as a result of the deal.

Stuart Rea from FBC Manby Bowdler who oversaw the legal side of the negotiations, added: “The acquisition of a small business



Robert Oakes and Stuart Rea

needs to be handled with care and sensitivity given that the firm is often the vendor’s life work and often a family concern as well.

“Robert and fellow director Ian Oakes were mindful of this and approached the transaction with the necessary time it takes to ensure that all parties were comfortable with how things progressed.

“Their acquisition of Medcraft Bryden, a firm three times their own size, places them in a very favourable position to not only extend the reach of each businesses’ distinct product and service portfolios, but also prepares them for further growth which I don’t doubt we’ll see from them in the coming years.”



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## Work-life balance drives the rise in county's freelancers

Record numbers of people are 'going freelance' in Shropshire, further fuelling the already buoyant small business sector across all corners of the county.

But experts have handed down a word of warning to those who decide to strike out on their own – freelancers are officially earning less than they were 20 years ago.

Ed Molyneux, co-founder of FreeAgent which provides cloud accounting software, said that whilst it was disappointing to hear freelancers are earning less than they

once were, the vast majority were still more content with their work-life balance.

A survey of freelancers and micro-business owners carried out by FreeAgent found that 74 per cent of respondents are content with their work life balance.

Ed Molyneux says: "Those who decide to go it alone often do so in order to gain a more positive balance between work and their personal life. The majority find they are happier than they were when employed by somebody else.

"That said, with self-employed people earning less than they did 20 years ago, it's never been more important to streamline processes, work efficiently and reduce admin time.

"With the right tools in place to help ease the admin burden, freelancers can spend less time on the fiddly parts of running their finances and free up valuable time to concentrate on doing what they love – and invariably making a positive difference to their bottom line in the process."

## Stability for employees, NOT zero hours contracts

**A** businesswoman at the helm of two cleaning companies has spoken out against a practice which sees nearly a million workers in the UK not guaranteed regular hours.

Telford-based Marie McCreadie, managing director of MR Cleaning Supplies and Cleveland Cleaning, does not offer zero hours contracts to any of her staff and has pledged to keep this policy in place.

A total of 900,000 people are on zero hours contracts across the UK, according to latest figures – an increase of 20 per cent in just a year.

These contracts mean an employer is not obliged to provide a minimum amount of working hours each week – something which sees workers losing out on around £1,000 annually compared to employees on set contracts according to a Resolution Foundation study.

TUC general secretary Frances O'Grady said zero hours workers



Marie and Nikki McCreadie

were suffering the 'double whammy of low pay and fewer rights at work' and called for employment law to be 'dragged into the 21st century'.

But Mrs McCreadie, who set up Cleveland Cleaning almost two decades ago and launched MR Cleaning Supplies based at Court Works Industrial Estate on Bridgnorth Road at the end of 2016, is bucking the growing trend and none of her 84-strong workforce have a zero hours contract.

"For us it's about stability: for our employees, our clients and the company as a whole. People working for us need stable hours for things like mortgages and their family life, I also think employees feel more valued if they have a contract specifying the minimum hours they'll be offered.

"We are realistic about the hours we offer to our staff and we know we can move them to other areas of the business if necessary as the workload fluctuates.

"I know of quite a few cleaning companies who have got people on zero hours, so I think we're fairly unique within the industry. Because of that we get a low turnover of staff, which again is beneficial for everybody."

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S O L I C I T O R S





*Robert Bland is the Trust chairman at SYST*



*Situated in Brodie House Telford, the SYST Enterprise Centre*

# Assistance on hand for business start-ups

**I**t doesn't matter who you are, starting your own business can be every bit as daunting a prospect as it is exciting.

You can have the vision for a commercial enterprise and a detailed business plan in place, but the next step, putting it all into practice, inevitably holds more worries for some than it does for others.

The more fortunate budding entrepreneurs find financial backing easier to come by, and have ready access to advice and support from experienced mentors. They almost certainly have a decently kitted-out office from where to start.

Some have none of these crutches to lean on and, for them, being a business owner is scary and bewildering.

This is precisely the reason why Shropshire Youth Support Trust was set up. This charity was brought to Shropshire by a handful of businessmen who recognise the need of many for a helping hand as they start their business career.

Although the Trust's official launch was in Ironbridge at the tail end of 2016, the organisation was conceived several months earlier and its Telford premises firmly established. Brodie House, which could hardly be more central - it is actually in Central Square - has acted as a hub for young business people, where they have access to their own subsidised office, advice and an environment where they can interact with other entrepreneurs.

There are several central figures



*Richard Nuttall is centre manager at SYST in Brodie House, Telford*

involved in SYST's formation, none more central than Trust chairman Robert Bland and the centre's manager, Richard Nuttall.

Mr Bland, a former chair of the Prince's Trust in Shropshire, explains how SYST was conceived.

"One of the final things I did in my role with the prince's Trust was to get Michael Stoddart involved," he says.

At this point it should be worth noting that Mr Stoddart, who lives on the eastern fringes of the county, is one of the region's

biggest hitters in the financial world, having started his career as a financier in the 1950s.

"I believe Michael thoroughly enjoyed working with the Prince's Trust and recognised the important work it did, and it was through that role that he met someone from London Youth Support Trust.

"Michael was sufficiently impressed with what the London group had to offer that he begged the question, why don't we set one up in Shropshire?" ▶



Face of the organisation – Richard Nuttall has been manager of SYST since its inception

## Case study:

Performing arts professional Rebecca Nuttall is the brains behind Fusion. The organisation aims to provide a fresh outlook for youngsters with the X Factor.

And that's down to the lessons that Rebecca has learned along the way. She trained at a professional performing arts college in Liverpool and has since enjoyed a performance career while also principaling a top northern theatre school.

During her principalship Rebecca nurtured students to perform in several West End productions and worked with a number of production companies including Disney, Emmerdale, BBC, ITV, Shed Productions, Waterloo Road, Radio 4 and Paramount pictures.

Fusion hosts workshops for children aged 5-18 every Saturday during term time from 9am to 12pm or 12.30pm to 3.30pm at the Telford Langley School Dawley. A Theatre Tots workshop also runs for those aged 2-4.

Rebecca said: "Main school children are split according to age and ability into three groups our Juniors, Midz and Seniors. Each Saturday workshops consists of an hour of each Dance, Drama and Singing.

"Fusion creates an environment like no other.

"Where our students can feel safe



*Fusion hosts workshops for 5-18 year olds secure and relaxed to enjoy themselves and flourish as individuals. We teach performance techniques, build social skills and have lots of fun."*

Rebecca said she couldn't have managed it without SYST. "SYST provides us with fantastic business guidance and support as well as affordable business premises which has enabled us to focus on developing our business in a professional and friendly environment."



And action – filming at a Fusion workshop

◀ A team of trustees was assembled, all offering different experiences and skills sets, but with one common denominator: they believed passionately in the importance of giving young people with talent and ambition the opportunity to see their projects come to fruition.

The Prince's Trust and the youth support trusts – there are several regional branches – share many similarities but there are also some notable differences.

As Mr Bland points out, the idea is that they complement each other.

Richard Nuttall, who has been manager of SYST since its inception and is very much the day-to-day face of the organisation, goes further.

"A key difference is that we offer subsidised accommodation," says Mr Nuttall, a former professional actor with many years of experience helping and advising businesses.

"There is desk space and several computers in the downstairs hub, while there is a network of furnished offices upstairs which are available at subsidised cost.

"We don't give out loans but, like the Prince's Trust, we provide mentors.

One of SYST's greatest benefits is that because the enthusiasm between the young business people sharing the same space rubs off on each other, this gives them even greater motivation.

It is an inspiring place to work.





Sharing ideas – young entrepreneurs inspire each other at SYST

“Even in the short space of time that we’ve been up and running as a charity, some real success stories are starting to emerge which is incredibly rewarding for all involved.

“Every bit as valuable as any financial contributions which might come our way is the expertise and time people with experience in business are able to provide.”

While SYST in Telford has slowly but surely seen more and more young business people use its facilities and benefits, the Trustees identified a need for the same model in the northern part of the county.

The North Shropshire Youth Support Trust is based at the British Ironworks Centre just outside Oswestry and it is, according to Mr Nuttall, “a superb venue offering excellent accommodation”.

It looks set fair to make the difference to the lives of yet more Shropshire folk who have a plan but just need a break to make the next step in their career path.

● SYST is appealing to business leaders to offer their skills as mentors and/or financial sponsorship to help young people forge a successful career.

If you feel you have something to offer please contact SYST by telephone on 01952 299214 or email [hello@systbusiness.co.uk](mailto:hello@systbusiness.co.uk)

## Case study:

Football crazy George Hounsell has realised some of his dreams thanks to kicking off with SYST.

He left school with only sports qualifications but after coaching for AFC Telford United, Crossbar Coaching and We Love Football, he started The Little Sports Club. George also practices what he preaches by turning out regularly for Shifnal Town and Shifnal United.

The sportsman is currently Head of Youth Development at West Midlands Premier League Side Wellington Amateurs. A youth team coach and manager at Conference North side AFC Telford United, he also coaches Telford league team Wenlock Warriors.

George is proud of The Little Sports Club: “We pride ourselves on being dedicated and reliable coaches. We’re passionate on getting children active through sporting, creative and performing arts activities.

“Our main ethos is to develop positive attitudes around ‘fair play’ and respect for others.

“We offer tailored and personalised sport and art programmes that are specifically designed to meet the needs of each and every school, care home and holiday resort we work with.

“All of our coaches and teachers are



Football crazy George Hounsell has realised sporting dreams thanks to SYST experienced, offering bespoke high quality provision to all.”

SYST has been a huge help. “Having support from an organisation like SYST has been invaluable,” adds George. “Having access to experienced mentors, support and having the space to work in to develop my business has been incredible. Thank you to Richard and the SYST team.”



George is particularly proud of The Little Sports Club

## Bright idea saves £7,000 per annum

A Telford business is reaping rewards from the first Business Energy Efficiency Programme Grant round, set up to help lower running costs and promote energy efficient businesses.

TSI Packing, based at Halesfield, was awarded £10,408 to install LED lighting and sensors, which it says will save around £7,000 per year.

"We are committed to supporting local businesses and the environment, and with the Grant we have been able to do both and improve our own working environment," said managing director Victoria Watson-Smith.



Victoria Watson-Smith and Kate Duffy of TSI Packing

Worcestershire County Council, along with its partners including Telford & Wrekin Council, and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, were awarded £1.45 million from the Department for Communities and Local Government's European Regional Development Fund to help small and medium-sized businesses.

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet lead for energy generation, said: "I would encourage all businesses in the borough to look into the Business Energy Efficiency Programme, both to benefit from the support available and to consider ways in which they can be more energy efficient."

# Food glorious food

**H**ow's this for a tasty example of business growth?

Five years ago, Coopers Gourmet Sausage Rolls employed just a couple of people. Now, it has a workforce of 25, and sights set on smashing through the £1 million turnover barrier this year.

The company, which has since been rebranded as Coopers Gourmet Foods, has come a long way from its early days working out of a deli and coffee shop, and now has a growing base at Roden.

Managing director Ivan Watkiss and his wife Sue said they saw a gap in the market for good food, sourced locally and carefully crafted, and have grown every year.

Ivan said: "We have managed to grow Coopers significantly since its inception, starting with just two members of staff five years ago to employing 25 people now and heading for a turnover of over £1 million this year.

"We have received a lot of support from the business support team at Telford & Wrekin Council in terms of grant funding; they have helped us to get



The Coopers Gourmet Foods base at Roden

our production facility at Roden to the state that it is in today.

"We have been able to create a high spec food manufacturing facility by utilising a £45,000 grant which they helped us secure.

"We have now just written our next four-year growth plan, and to help us achieve our growth ambitions, the business support team are now looking to support a further funding bid, and also work with us on our skills requirements."

Coopers, a past finalist in the Shropshire Business Awards, uses as many locally-sourced ingredients as possible in its products.

The range began purely with gourmet sausage rolls, but the company has since increased the product range to include Scotch eggs, and most recently pork pies.



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# The perfect tonic

**W**hat does a glass of gin have to do with diversity in the workplace?

This was the question posed by Teresa Boughey, founder and chief executive of Shropshire-based Jungle HR when she gave a talk on diversity to a group of 30 HR directors at The Gin Vault in Birmingham.

"The gender pay gap is likely to be something which is currently very much at the forefront of many HR professional minds," said Teresa, a UK Female Entrepreneur Ambassador, and working party member of the All Party Parliamentary Group for Women in Enterprise.



Teresa Boughey

"However, without effectively tackling such areas as creating working environments that value productively versus presentism, the gender pay gap will not be eliminated.

"To achieve a workforce that is truly diverse requires commitment and role modelling from the top. It often requires a

change in mind-set, a break in tradition, new behaviours, and inclusive language woven into all forms of communication used across the entire workforce."

Whilst there have been great strides made in increasing the presence of women in leadership positions, Teresa feels the pace continues to be slow.

That's why there has never been a more important time, in her view, to embrace diversity and maximise talent across an organisation, particularly given the current economic landscape.

Those organisations that create inclusive environments where difference is recognised and valued, where individuals can achieve their true potential, will thrive and reap the benefits that a truly inclusive workforce can bring, she says.

"The gin industry has certainly embraced diversity. It has recognised the need to reinvigorate itself within the wines and spirits industry, revive its popularity and meet the needs of its consumers of all generations.

"We're not advocating gin by the way, or encouraging the consumption of alcohol, but we believe that we could learn a thing or two from the gin industry, diversity matters and makes great business sense."

Jungle Diversity have created an A-Z essential guide to creating a diverse and inclusive organisation. To receive a copy email [samantha@junglehr.com](mailto:samantha@junglehr.com)

# Climb the ladder

Apprentices at one of Shropshire's biggest food companies are building skills and climbing the career ladder, with help from Telford College of Arts and Technology.

ABP Food Group has just put another four students through the level two ILM Team Leading apprenticeship programme – and they are now following this up by moving onto the level three Management programme. The company has also committed to sending another group of apprentices to TCAT, before the Government's new apprenticeship levy scheme comes into force in May.

Graeme MacLeod, technical manager at ABP which has bases in Shrewsbury and Ellesmere, said:

"We can see the skills learnt at TCAT coming through in the work the students are doing at our company."

The four ABP apprentices who have achieved their level two ILM certificate, with a helping hand from TCAT, are Aneta Obacz from Wellington, Shrewsbury trio Wojciech Orzel, Tadas Savickas, and Johnnie Ashley, pictured above.

TCAT tutor Paul Yeomans said: "The ILM course is for aspiring, new or existing team leaders who want to develop themselves. It provides the opportunity to learn and implement core skills needed in today's business environment, whilst also building knowledge in ICT, Mathematics and English – so important within the 21st century management profession."



Apprentices pictured with ABPs Kevin Goodall, Graeme MacLeod, and Paul Yeomans from TCAT

'Happiness is not the absence of problems but the ability to deal with them'

Anonymous



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# More to China than Beijing

**Shropshire companies are being urged to seize growing export opportunities with the world's second largest economy – China.**

James Westwood, adviser at the China-Britain Business Council in the West Midlands, has been working closely with the Department for International Trade for the West Midlands.

And he says that the last 12 months have seen a steady flow of new businesses interested in exporting their goods, services, technology or brand name to China. In 2015, the West Midlands exported £2.3 billion to China, the bulk of which was in the machinery and transport equipment sector.

James said: "As the Chinese economy is transitioning into a more consumer goods and services-oriented economy, the offerings of many UK companies are very well suited to fill those niches.

"Now is the best time to deal with China, as the UK is very strong in services and offers high quality but affordable consumer goods.

"China remains the second largest economy in the world and is the largest single-country market in the world. Its economy continues to grow and the great.gov.uk site shows just how much demand there is for British products and services, from beauty products and food to technology and engineering opportunities."

James has drawn up some advice for first-time and experienced exporters that want to sell into China in the Year of the Rooster:



*There's more to China for potential Shropshire exporters than the sprawling city of Beijing*

**1. Look Beyond Beijing:** China's first tier cities are Beijing (North), Shanghai (East), Guangzhou and Shenzhen (both South). While they are the natural places to start when breaking into China, there are more than 300 cities – more than 100 of which have over one million residents. By targeting a second or third tier city, companies have the opportunity to test the market.

**2. Use Chinese ambassadors:** Many businesses have a limited budget when it comes to research, so approach the Chinese foreign student population to gather opinions on how your brand, product or service would fare in their home market. Another idea is to recruit Chinese students as interns.

**3. E-commerce first:** Setting up an e-shop – using sites such as Alibaba or Tmall Global – before setting up shop is a good way of testing the water in China.

**4. Social media: China has its own social media platforms and these are worth using as part of any marketing strategy. WeChat is one of the most popular apps there.**

**5. The right people for the job:** Select the right person to head up operations – that means an experienced and/or senior executive based in the UK or China.

**6. Protect your business interests:** Businesses are often afraid that their intellectual property would be at risk if they traded with China. However, you can legally protect those parts of the business that are at risk. Decide which parts of your offering, if copied, will hurt your business interests and take robust action to legally protect those aspects – China's IP laws broadly reflect those of the United Kingdom and other international markets and infringements can be successfully pursued through courts.

## It's a GREAT way to do business



We hear a lot from the Government about export – how they want to increase exports, boost exports, support exporting companies and yes, they even have a campaign called Export is GREAT!

The Government isn't wrong, but by focusing on just export, thousands of SMEs may miss out on the opportunity to boost their own businesses.

For many smaller companies, an element of import is vital if they are to compete on a global stage.

Actually, International Trade is GREAT. Companies which both import and export, or are considering it, will be the ones which flourish in a post-Brexit era.

As a freight forwarder working at a time when decisions are being made about the

manner of the UK's exit from the EU, the movement of trade and what customs will look like - we are more aware than most of the potential effects on companies trading internationally.

We have already seen many of our manufacturing clients look to new markets, and emerging markets, amid uncertainty. They are looking for new suppliers, importing more components and exporting more finished goods.

Additional trade barriers in Europe could see more UK imports sourced from non-EU suppliers, especially if lower tariffs apply.

The most recent HSBC Global Connections report once again highlighted that UK import demand would be influenced by the 'increased specialisation permitted by the integration of manufacturing supply chains' with transport equipment and industrial machinery both forecast to account for close to a fifth of total import growth over the period 2021-30.

Given the new Industrial Strategy currently under consultation - it's not hard to work out that for UK plc, our manufacturers will want the final strategy to address how two-way international trade can further

boost growth. What is reassuring amid uncertainty is that a number of businesses seem more willing to take a first dip in the international trade waters.

Export isn't all about shipping containers around the world, it could be a few pallets on a plane or a parcel sent by courier to Ireland!

We've many clients who started small with one shipment to a single location, and now sell to multiple markets across the globe.

Also increasing in popularity is cross trade - where a product moves between two non-EU countries but is controlled by a UK company.

Our message to customers is that as Britain shouts that it is 'open for business', businesses should be open to international trade - both ways!

In a post Brexit world, where the uncertainty of trade deals and working relationships is likely to continue some time, it will be down to the backbone of Britain's economy, our SME business base, to drive economic growth.

● Nicole Gunter is managing director of Telford company Global Freight



# Japanese trade is first for a food firm

**A** Shropshire food manufacturer is celebrating its first major export deal to Japan – just months after visiting the country on an international trade mission.

Helen Graham, co-owner of the Ludlow Nut Company, has secured an order for 2,400 units of its luxury fruit, nut and seed muesli from Minato Shokai Co Ltd.

To mark the occasion, Mr Masahiko Sugiyama, the company's president, visited the Ludlow factory.

The export win comes after Helen Graham joined a market visit to Japan in March last year. Organised by the Department for International Trade West Midlands, the mission enabled her and others to meet potential buyers and to network with Japanese companies looking for British food and drink products.

Since the first meeting with Minato Shokai Co Ltd, Helen, who has worked with international trade advisers in Shropshire for the last three years, has hosted a number of visits from the company as they negotiated the trade deal.

Helen said: "Before we went on the visit, we had no knowledge of the Japanese market, let alone any contacts. But while we were there, DIT set up appointments for us, one of which was with Minato Shokai.

"We also received valuable cultural information and had excellent help on the ground that has helped us to secure this contract. We are delighted to add Japan to our portfolio of export markets and is excellent news for the business as we aim to continue growing."

Gerald Whitworth, international trade adviser for DIT Shropshire, said after The Ludlow Nut Company completed one of DIT's export training programmes last year, it saw its business grow to about £4,000 of exports every month.



*Masahiko Sugiyama, president of Minato Shokai; Helen Graham, of the Ludlow Nut Company; Shoji Watanabe, general manager of Minato Shokai*

He said: "Helen and her team are excellent examples of what can be achieved when you do the right research and make an effort to understand your target market.

"There is demand for premium products in Japan and The Ludlow Nut Company's success demonstrates that even a small company in rural Shropshire can make its mark on the global business stage."

The eight-strong company, which is co-owned by Helen's husband Bob Graham, already exports to Hong Kong, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Estonia and Spain, and is now building a new larger home at Foldgate Lane, Ludlow, which will give it 8,000 sq ft of space. It is also hoping to take on additional staff once they move into their new premises and is targeting new markets over the next 12-18 months.

## Bonjour to better business

Sprechen Sie Deutsch? Parlez-vous Français?

English may well be the global language, but export experts are encouraging businesses in Shropshire that want to broaden their horizons to loosen their tongues.

It is estimated that the UK economy loses contracts worth about £50 billion a year because of the lack of language skills among the workforce.

Christine Hamilton, interim regional director of the Department for International

Trade West Midlands, said: "Making the effort to learn key phrases and even the basics of another language can go a long way in breaking down barriers.

"Communication is key when trading overseas and being able to do so either face-to-face or online makes you more competitive and speaking another language makes you stand out from the rest of the crowd.

"Languages are the foundation for cultural heritage, so if you want to do business with other markets, speaking their

language gives you an insight into their culture.

"Having a deeper understanding of the culture of the people you plan to do business with is rewarding and it will undoubtedly help building trust and respect."

On the Exporting is GREAT website, there are export opportunities in many countries, and The Department for International Trade West Midlands hosts a number of language and culture masterclasses each year for businesses.

# Are our business rates in a state?



**R**ecent news coverage has highlighted the fact that this year's business rates revaluation is causing considerable concern, with some small businesses facing a doubling or even trebling of their rates bill.

Even if the Government's own assertions are correct, about 3 out of 4 businesses being unaffected or seeing their rates reduced, that still leaves 1 in 4 or 25 per cent seeing an increase. And large increases could lead some businesses to consider laying off staff or, in the worst case scenario, closing down.

These problems stem from the current system being based on subjective valuations of business premises. It basically looks at the value of bricks and mortar rather than the value of the business within.

So, huge, profitable out of town or on line businesses might see their rates fall, while a struggling, small high street retailer, local garage, pub or restaurant could face massive rises simply because they are in a city centre or other location where rateable values are higher.

With such a sorry state of affairs, there are three options: retain the existing system, reform the system or replace it with something better.

Retaining the existing system is not tenable. As the past few days have shown us, some businesses – especially small businesses, are facing huge and unexpected rises in their business rates and operating costs.

Reforming the system is possible and here FSB has made progress in some areas – for example securing an increase in business rate thresholds which has taken 600,000 small firms out of the rates system all together.

In addition, we welcomed Theresa May's comments in the Commons, where the Prime Minister acknowledged that some businesses would be "particularly adversely affected" by the changes and said that the Chancellor and Business Secretary had



*The FSB welcomed Theresa May's comments in the Commons, where the Prime Minister acknowledged that some businesses would be "particularly adversely affected" by the changes to business rates and said that the Chancellor and Business Secretary had been tasked by her to make sure there was "appropriate relief" for them.*



*The FSB says it is in favour of replacing business rates with a fairer system*

been tasked by her to make sure there was "appropriate relief" for them.

Many of our members have contacted us to say that they are facing completely unfair and disproportionate increases in their tax bills, with some considering whether to close or scale back their business. That would clearly be in no one's interest.

While previous interventions by the Government, backed by FSB, have resulted in 600,000 small businesses receiving 100% relief and therefore protection from the current business rate changes,

the extent of loss faced by some small businesses who are still in scope has created an unacceptable situation.

Ultimately however, our position remains in favour of replacing business rates with a system that is fairer, less prone to massive and unexpected increases in cost and which reflects a business's ability to pay.

After all, why would you keep the current system of business rates when it's so obviously archaic, unfair and unfit for purpose?

● *Ray Hickinbottom is the FSB Shropshire and regional chairman*



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## Kevin's 40 years of loyal service

A divisional manager who has given nearly four decades of service to a family-owned Shropshire firm is retiring from his role.

Kevin Gardner leaves Tudor Griffiths Group after 38 years, having played a key role in establishing the group as a major player in the builders' merchants sector.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths said Kevin would be a real loss to the team. "When Kevin

joined, we had just two builders' merchants' branches in Ellesmere and Tattenhall. Since then, under Kevin's guidance, we have added branches in Northwich, Oswestry, Nantwich, Welshpool, Kidderminster, and our latest in Bridgnorth.



Kevin Gardner (right) with Tudor Griffiths (centre) and Mark Evans

"Kevin has successfully managed the business over this period of sustained growth to take us to our current position as a significant regional player in the builders' merchants' sector with a flourishing network of eight branches.

"I am very grateful for all the hard work and dedication that Kevin has put in to achieve this. He will be a tough act to follow and will be missed throughout the group."

Kevin said: "I've been privileged to have had the opportunity to help build up the builders' merchants' side of the business from its humble beginnings to the thriving network we now have in place,

## BID hello to director

The new director of Shrewsbury's Business

Improvement District says he is looking to encourage greater collaboration and bring new ideas to raise the town's local, regional and national profile.



Seb Slater of BID

Seb Slater has moved from London, where he was development manager for a charity and worked with business and the community on regeneration projects, to take up the role.

He said: "I see this as a great opportunity for the BID to build on the considerable success of my predecessor Kirsten Henly and the team, delivering the BID's ambitious plans and supporting Shrewsbury to become a greater place to live, work and visit.

"I am looking forward to meeting more of the business community, partners and stakeholders. I am very impressed by how much partnership work is already taking place in the town."

His short-term plans include a Shrewsbury BID Survey to gauge opinion and invite ideas from BID

members and interested parties on the further positive changes they want to see.

The former development manager and marketing manager at the Royal Foundation of St Katharine has experience in consultation and engagement and in targeted and creative promotional activity.

BID chairman Mike Matthews said: "It's great to have Seb on board. He brings with him relevant expertise and marketing experience, both of which are important assets

in our drive to champion the town and deliver projects that will make a difference."

Seb, who has relatives in Shrewsbury before moving to the town, added: "Shrewsbury has so much to offer and I'm keen to spread the word to new audiences to benefit businesses and the wider community.

"We're expecting our first child in June and my fiancée Julia and I believe this to be a wonderful family-friendly town in which to bring up a child."

Shrewsbury BID represents more than 500 businesses in the town centre. It became operational in April 2014 with a £1.6 million budget and a five-year mandate to deliver improvements, cost savings and destination marketing for a flourishing town centre.



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With well-publicised soaring rates and dwindling retail figures, is the high street as a shopping and social centre doomed? Not if retailers adopt the right attitude, according to high street champion **Sally Themans**



*The market town of Newport, with its traditional high street, where independent stores and businesses are urged to listen to the shopper*

# We need our high streets as much as they need us

## It's a tough time for high street retailers, make no mistake.

High rents, high rates and an ever-marching onslaught from increasingly sophisticated online retailers is making life uncomfortable for Shropshire's high street butchers bakers and candlestick makers (or rather scented candle sellers).

But all is not lost; provided retailers have a keen eye to understanding and listening to what exactly it is that customers want, and adapt and tailor their product and service accordingly there is still an appetite for shopping locally.

I have been involved with both Bridgnorth's successful Great British High Street entry and Telford and Wrekin's Pride in Your High Street programme and what I see is more and more people recognising that their high street is the beating heart of their community. Furthermore they attach value to the expertise, friendliness and individual service they receive there which is inevitably missing from online or large store shopping.

Shoppers want to use local services, but often the retailers do not respond in the way want, and at times there are some harsh realities to face up to.

This focus on the customer is the answer to survival in the high street.

There are plenty of examples of high streets which are thriving, and sadly, plenty that are not.

Those that are winning the battle include retailers who have adopted and learnt new



*Geoff Davies, Bridgnorth Town Councillor, Anne Wilson, Bridgnorth Town Clerk, Sally Themans, Love Bridgnorth, Steve Robbins, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Sarah Stevens, Buy Big in Bridgnorth, and Brian Davies, Bridgnorth Promotions*

skills, possibly embracing new technologies to communicate better with a new generation of shoppers, whilst maintaining that good old fashioned excellence and attention to detail. They are led by champions of the local cause who promote 'shop local' campaigns such as Bridgnorth's Buy Big in Bridgnorth or Newport's Town Team.

Large chains and shopping centre shops are not as well placed to be able to

adapt and respond to customers as quickly as independents so a canny retailer can steal a march on the competition even if at times they just feel overwhelmed by the 'big guns' with their lean margins.

Telford & Wrekin Council attached priority to the borough's high streets in its Pride in Your Community scheme and introduced its High Street Fund. Money was made available for projects to improve the fortunes of high streets. ►





The team from The Cook Shop, Newport, with samples at the ready for shoppers to try

◀ By helping retailers focus on excellence and sustainability by getting them to concentrate on what their customers want rather than what they want to sell – or perhaps doing what they’ve always done – and improving their offer, raises the overall standard of a high street’s retail opportunities through a ripple effect and which in turn attracts incoming retailers.

As part of the project we canvassed a number of retailers about what made their high streets stand out and overwhelmingly it was about individual customer service and friendliness.

Some also felt they had been left behind when it came to skills training, so one of the ways we responded was by offering free training in social media to connect more effectively with the local community and communicating with potential customers. We referred to it as simply as ‘having a conversation’ more easily with customers.

One of the retailers who has felt the positive effect is Hannah Tranter from The Cook Shop in Newport.

“We had dabbled in social media but not really done it properly,” she said.

“We’ve now had extensive coaching through the Pride in Your High Street programme with Good2Great and are finding that slowly but surely we’re able to communicate with a much larger number of potential customers and draw them into our shop – particularly for special shopping events or sales – so the reach of our clientele has expanded.

“We can also engage with them more easily so we have a greater understanding of their needs and trends. That in turn helps us stock the right products which has reduced our stockholding – making us more financially efficient.”

To help retailers and promote high streets is precisely why there are competitions like the Great British High Street, a nationwide initiative run by the Department for Communities and Local Government, to champion not just pretty ‘chocolate box’ market towns, but real-life,



Hannah Tranter from The Cook Shop in Newport



Alex Nicol of the White Hart in Ironbridge which has been a training venue for PIYHS

sometimes small inner-city parades of shops and retail centres who have adapted and changed to meet the changes in shopping habits.

The competition aims to seek out and share examples of good practice – and one

of the things that Bridgnorth, this year’s overall winner in the large market town category, scored highly on was local groups working with the local council and retailers to achieve outcomes which encourage footfall to the High Street.





*Crowds gather to enjoy Bridgnorth carnival - a community at its most vibrant*

Those retailers that have done well have recognised the high street as a venue at the centre of the community, not just a shopping area, by putting on events such as specialist markets, carnivals and street fayres.

Bridgnorth has continental markets, a music festival and its award winning Christmas Lighting up event; Newport has just staged a Food Frenzy and has just changed its carnival route to linger longer on the high street; Wellington will be looking forward to its Charter Day Market later this month.

Such events serve two purposes by bringing people into the towns. They attract inquisitive visitors who, if they like the feel of the town, will revisit in the future. Such events also remind local residents what they have on their doorstep.

"It's a fantastic opportunity for retailers to showcase what they do and what they have to offer," says retail expert Carmel Allen, commercial director of the Linley Group and Homes & Gardens Retailer of the year. "I know in Bridgnorth for example such events see thousands visiting the high street."

But disappointingly not all retailers see such events as a bonus, despite the increased footfall passing their doorways.

If we delve a little deeper we find many are closed or simply haven't put on anything special to embrace the visitors and just expect them to enter their shops.

Those that do – such as the local butcher selling hot baps or the café handing out vouchers or even small tempting goodies – or those that merchandise outside their shop are justly rewarded on such occasions.

Local retailer Kirstie Hurst-Knight of Boutique No. 7 in Bridgnorth is one retailer who takes full advantage of the increased footfall.

"These events are a real boon for us," she says.

"We're not obvious on the high street because we have a small window and limited signage, but people tend to discover us at these events, we see lots of new faces



*Kirstie Hurst-Knight of Boutique No. 7 in Bridgnorth*

who we're pleased to welcome again as they become future customers."

One of the things that has become clear in this work with so many retailers is that attention to detail is absolutely key. It's an old adage but still true today. Carmel

advises: "Think of it as entertaining. Think of your shop as your home. You'd make sure the front doorstep is clean, the window and signage is immaculate. You'd welcome your guests and talk to them and find out what they want and make them comfortable." ►





Butcher Mike Pearce says business has picked up considerably since Bridgnorth's Great British High Street win



Good2Great have been able to engage directly with High Street retailers in Wellington

◀ It's an effective analogy, as is the advice from Dan Comes, commercial director for the 18 award-winning St Richards hospice shops in Worcestershire.

"Make it easy to for customers to give you money. And never ignore them – get off your phones and welcome them.

"Try to see your premises with fresh eyes every morning."

I, like so many local champions who work hard for their high streets up and down the county, have a real love for my home town of Bridgnorth, and, together with Sarah Stevens who was the co-entrant for our GB High Street bid, am on a mission to promote the positive and encourage people to use and celebrate our town and our high street.



Sally Themans, left, and Sarah Stevens of Buy Big

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Staff from The Forge in Ironbridge





Tina Pound from Telford Florist, Wellington

Yes, we have one or two vacant shops, yes there are some 'grumblers' – it's far from perfect and we know that - but we have a healthy balance of chains and independents, of older established and new and innovative retailers.

We recognise that if our high street is thriving, then our town is thriving. And that's worth shouting about – and changing your shopping habits for.

Or, if you don't have someone who's fighting for your high street, making it your mission.

● *Sally Themans is a respected business coach and community and high street champion. She is also a published writer and editor, a local magistrate and founder of the 'Love Bridgnorth' website, Facebook and Twitter sites.*



Bridgnorth town crier John James and Mayor Vanessa Voysey

## THE CHANGING FACE OF THE BRITISH HIGH STREET

### DECLINE Retail units from the high street

- £ **Banks:** Around 12,000 banks have closed over the past 30 years and around 1500 towns currently have no bank.
- ▶ **Physical entertainment:** HMV and Blockbuster went into administration in 2013. Blockbuster has since closed all stores and HMV has closed 70 stores.
- ✉ **Post offices:** A net figure of around 35 post offices each year are closing.
- 👕 **Fashion retailers:** A net figure of 184 fashion retailers shut in the first 6 months of 2016.
- ✈️ **Travel agencies:** Thomas Cook closed 28 stores last year, and Thompson had to close 100 stores.

### GROWTH Retail units on the high street

- ☕ **Coffee shops:** There was a 6% growth in 2015 and a predicted 26% increase by 2020.
- 🚬 **E-cigarette shops:** 2 e-cigarette shops are opening each day. More than 1700 shops have opened, half of these in 2016.
- 🏠 **Estate agents:** There are more estate agents in London than independent butchers, fishmongers and grocers put together. 200+ opened in 2016 alone.
- ✂️ **Beauty salons:** Female spend is up 19% and male 23%. 90% of salon owners are optimistic about business prospects in 2017.
- 😊 **Convenience shops:** Around 50,000 exist in the UK and store opening growth is up 16%.



# Don't BYOD (bring your own disaster)



*IT departments find themselves faced with hordes of 'unregulated' and 'unmaintained' devices wanting access to their networks. Networks that in many cases they've spent time, energy and effort securing . . . and this can very quickly become Bring Your Own Disaster.*

## **B**ring Your Own Device looks like it's here to stay. But do you know how to protect yourself against the risks it presents?

Almost anyone that works in IT has complained about BYOD – or Bring Your Own Device – at some point. But what it is and the real implications to your business's security aren't always clear.

Essentially, BYOD refers to the policy of permitting employees to bring personally-owned devices (such as laptops, tablets and smart phones) into the workplace, and using those devices to access company information, applications and networks.

IT departments find themselves faced with hordes of 'unregulated' and 'unmaintained' devices wanting access to their networks. Networks that in many cases they've spent time, energy and effort securing . . . and this can very quickly become Bring Your Own Disaster.

This is because if people are using these devices for work, they're attaching them to the network and transferring all types of data onto them – from security codes and client details to company correspondence and other confidential



**Matt**  
**SANDFORD**

information. These devices are then taken home, connected together and goodness knows what else.

So important company data can quickly, and unintentionally, be spread all over a series of devices owned by a range of people with no controls whatsoever.

Imagine what would happen if any of those devices were lost or stolen? There's a big market for retrieving data from lost and stolen devices.

And this is before we get into the problems that can be caused by infected machines being attached to company networks.

Individuals don't always keep their devices updated, patched or even as tidy as work machines. On top of this, there's little control over the websites they visit.

Combine that with an unpatched machine and you have a potential security nightmare.

Once an infected device is connected to your network, malware will quickly find its way onto your systems.

So how do you avoid disaster? Set strict policies and stick to them – see below. Each device used to access company networks, data and applications should be approved before it's used and access in some circumstances should be limited.

- **Clear statements** – make sure your people know exactly what's involved when they BYOD and explain the consequences if anything goes wrong.

- **Training programmes** – educate your staff with best practise policies to protect themselves and your data.

- **Security compliance** – make sure you have all the requisite security measures in place, especially if you're handling customer data.

- **Insurance** – check that you're fully covered, just in case the worst happens.

It may sound like you're being a killjoy, but the implications to your business of not controlling personal devices should far outweigh any such concerns.

- *Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom in Shrewsbury*





*Informing friends which Star Wars character you most resemble sounds like a bit of fun, but the long term effects could be far from special*

# Why you shouldn't give away a galaxy of data

**W**hen was the last time you filled in one of those light-hearted quizzes on Facebook? The ones which ask something like: “Which Star Wars character are you?”.

It all seems like great fun and it's mildly amusing to share with your Facebook friends that you came out as Chewbacca... But did you stop to think what you might have just given away?

There are companies out there which reckon on being able to create a profile of you based on your Facebook 'likes' which knows you better than your significant other does.

Once you've hit that reaction icon on 150 or so items, they've got a great picture of you. Of course you then connect with other people, follow other pages, share pictures of where you've been and what you're doing. That makes for a massive bank of highly personal, targetable data.

For advertisers, this is a treasure trove if they know how to mine it. It really comes into its own when you have the computing resources and mathematical expertise to exploit it. That doesn't lie in the hands of your everyday ad agency, but it does in



some rather shadowy 'data companies' which have been getting involved in global politics.

And that's where it gets really scary, because it is now believed by many researchers that this very approach was used to boost Donald Trump's election and to drive the EU leave vote.

Whatever you think of those outcomes, it's concerning to consider they were influenced by factors other than genuine debate and that we're all feeding the beast with our social media habit.

The approach is the same as that used in psychological warfare by militaries and governments the world over.

On the surface this all sounds a bit like a conspiracy theory, but most of us already know what happens when we research that holiday the Caribbean or type in the name of a major car brand while pondering the next set of wheels; related ads will start

appearing wherever we then visit online.

That's harmless enough when it might help you to make a purchasing decision, but what about if it's pushing political content in front of you that's designed to appeal to the profile you've revealed already and to subtly influence what you do next? We all like to think we're too savvy for that, but there's a whole industry that will tell you otherwise.

One of those 'harmless' personality tests on Facebook recently went viral and reached six million people. That's six million folks who have willingly profiled themselves in a questionnaire that was based on well-known psychometric testing techniques.

What's most concerning is that legislation hasn't kept up with this intelligence gathering revolution, so the authorities around the world have a very hard time keeping tabs on who has what data and how it's being used.

So next time you're invited to fill in a 'quiz' that reveals which of the Seven Dwarfs you would be, it might be worth taking a brief pause to wonder if you might not just be giving away a little more than you intended (and indeed so might your kids on Instagram, Snapchat and the like).

And I don't mind if you want to call me Grumpy for saying so.

● *Mark Waugh is managing director of Be Bold Media Ltd, based in Newport.*

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Gareth Jones of In-Comm Training is pictured here with Salop Design & Engineering trio Richard Homden, Lee Pearson and Christopher Greenough

# Adding to investment

**D**ozens of new apprenticeship opportunities have been created after a Shropshire training academy invested a further £200,000 into new manufacturing facilities.

The In-Comm Training Academy Shrewsbury, which is being run in partnership with Salop Design & Engineering, is set to benefit from new TIG, MIG and ARC welding bays, as well as a new fluid power section that will cater for students looking for a career in hydraulics and pneumatics.

Bosses have also just signed off a new cell that will specialise in pro-logic controls and electrics meaning young engineers in the county will be able to choose from more than 15 different industry apprenticeships pathways.

"It has been a very encouraging first year for ITAS, with 28 apprentices currently in their advanced second year with view to having a positive impact at more than 10 local employers," explained Richard Homden, managing director at Salop Design & Engineering.

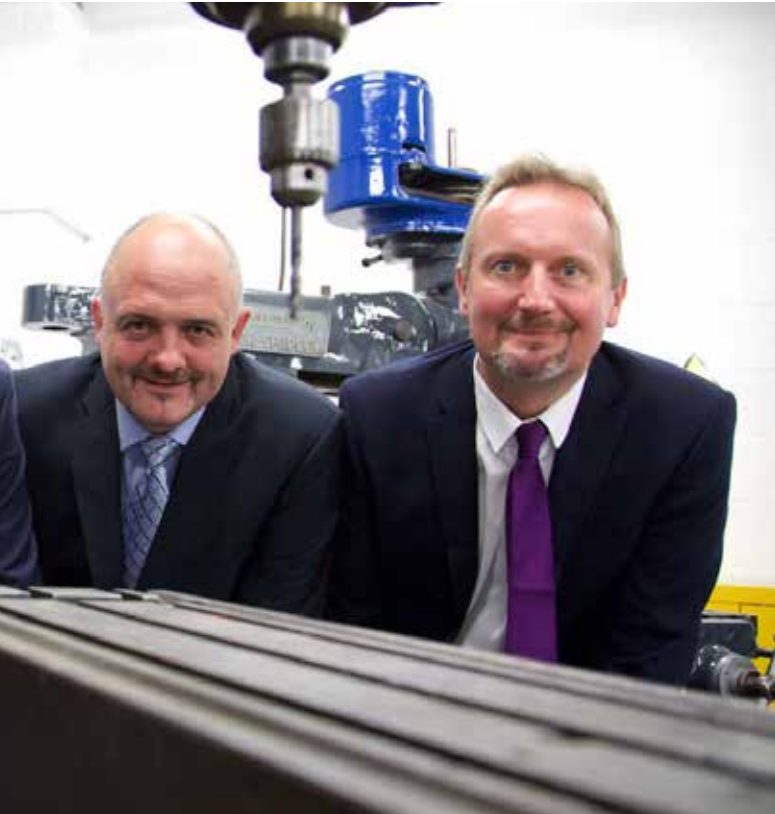
"The skills gap is real and affecting thousands of manufacturing businesses in the UK...we knew we wanted to do something about it and not just rely on the Government to come up with the answers.

"We had space in our factory in Shrewsbury to house an academy and used our relationship with In-Comm to install the machinery and adopt some of the best training courses in industry. The first cohort is really excelling and I'm delighted to say we'll be taking a further 40 budding engineers on in March and September.

"There is no doubt we are seeing more youngsters looking to the apprenticeship route as a real chance to earn and learn."

In order to cope with the expected growth, ITAS has made two key appointments with experienced engineering instructor Dave Vickers and a welding specialist from the RAF joining its ranks.





They strengthen a six strong-team of trainers who are all committed to bridging the 'competency gap', where training is immediately applied to real world situations.

Gareth Jones, managing director of In-Comm Training, commented: "The popularity of apprenticeships is growing rapidly and we are starting to see the first big employers look to partner with us at ITAS to make the most of the soon to be introduced levy.

"GKN Land Systems in Telford was one of the first participants and we are currently in discussions with another twenty businesses across Shropshire. ITAS is a fantastic resource for manufacturers and the further £200,000 investment, combined with the highly skilled team we have at our disposal, will make it even better."

He said: "In addition to the foundation courses, we deliver advanced and higher craft/technical apprenticeships in maintenance, design, tool making, quality and machining."



*Apprentices at work in the In-Comm Training Academy Shrewsbury*

GKN Land Systems' Graeme Howe added his support: "Working with ITAS has been a good experience, supporting us with the recruitment of candidates and guiding us in course selection to best suit the needs of our business. Feedback has been clear, quick and reliable and we are able to visit the well-equipped academy any time we like."

ITAS, which is currently working with Thomas Adams School in Wem to offer day releases to Year 10 and 11 students, is closely aligned to the recently launched £3 million Marches Centre of Manufacturing and Technology in Bridgnorth.

As part of the hub and spoke approach, the academy is able to access all of the facilities at the MCMT.



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# Taking STEPS towards improvements

Grants of up to £5,000 are available for infrastructure improvement and land management changes in Severn Trent Water target areas.

The Severn Trent Environmental Protection Scheme is funded by STW and grants are awarded via a scoring system. Applicants demonstrating a clear water quality benefit to the issues of concern in that area are most likely to be successful.

Kathryn Williams, land agents with Davis Meade Property Consultants at Oswestry, said that to qualify for the scheme farmers must comply with the following basic criteria:

- You must farm within a Severn Trent drinking water abstraction catchment and/

or farm within one of ST 'priority source protection zones'

- You must farm a minimum of three hectares grassland or five hectares of arable land. This can be either owned or leased land.

- You must display a minimum level of farming activity as detailed in the STEPS handbook.

"These are the basic requirements and we are advising farmers to check with us or their local STW agricultural advisor to see if they are within a target area and eligible to claim," she said.

STEPS runs until 2020 and the current application period closes in March.

"Applicants demonstrating a clear water

quality benefit to the issues of concern in that area and who have engaged with their local ST agricultural advisor are most likely to be successful," Kathryn added.

STEPS will pay a fixed grant price per capital item, as shown in the handbook, up to a maximum of £5000. The fixed grant price represents an estimated 50 per cent of the total cost of the capital item.

Capital items listed in the handbook include: post and wire fencing; water troughs; pasture pumps; roofing for sprayer wash down areas or existing slurry stores; roofing of existing manure storage and livestock holding area; arable grass margins; field drainage etc. Other innovative ideas will be considered.

# Diversification could help cash-strapped

**F**armers have to continually struggle against the odds, with falling crop and livestock prices, increasing burden and costs through new rules and regulations – not to mention the never-ending challenge of the British weather.

If like many farmers, you are asset-rich but cash poor, you may want to consider diversifying your farm to create another business in order to maximise its profitability and utilise the assets held within the family.

Planning the new venture is the key to success and this must involve all members of the family and also professional advisers such as solicitors, land agents, banks and accountants.

Whether you're thinking about a tried-and-tested option such as a self-catering cottage, or something more unusual and novel, here are some considerations that need to be addressed:



1. Consider what trading structure will be used:

- Sole Trader
- Partnership
- Limited Company
- Unlimited Company

2. In whose name will the business trade?:

- Existing Partnership, Limited Company, etc
- Next Generations and sons/daughters

3. What is the impact of the new business upon existing Inheritance Tax planning? Such as the effect of Agricultural Property Relief (APR) or Business Property Relief (BPR) – you should consider this

before the planning application is made.

4. What is the effect of the new venture upon your existing Wills? It would be worth speaking to your solicitor for further advice before any action is taken.

5. Do you understand the VAT implications of the new trading entity?

Many diversification projects are very different to the usual farming incomes that are mainly zero rated. A 20% VAT charge on your outputs can be the difference between success and failure.

6. How will the business be funded?

Advice from your accountant will assist you not only in sourcing the finance and preparing cash flow forecasts but also making the funds Income Tax and Inheritance Tax efficient.

Diversification could make the difference between survival and failure for some businesses and proper planning is crucial. Remember, if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail!

The Government has a website on diversification that you may find useful, go to [gov.uk/guidance/diversifying-farming-businesses](http://gov.uk/guidance/diversifying-farming-businesses)

- *Graham Bennett is a partner at accountancy firm Whittingham Riddell*

## Consultation phase for proposed new electricity line

North Shropshire landowners are being encouraged to seek professional advice before signing any documents relating to the route of the proposed Oswestry to Wem 132kv electricity line, which is planned for 2020.

The call comes from Shaun Jones, a rural professional director at auctioneers, valuers, estate agents and surveyors Halls, based in Shrewsbury, who says it's important that landowners protect their interests.

He revealed that Scottish Power

Energy Networks would soon be contacting landowners about the precise locations of proposed wooden pylons for the new line. This consultation phase will be followed by a formal application in 2018 for government consent for the route.

"SPEN will wish to discuss precise pole locations on land with individual landowners," he added. "They will subsequently be asking landowners to sign an option agreement to secure their co-operation to the principle of the new power lines along the route.

"Landowners should carefully consider the proximity of the proposed routes to houses and buildings and the long-term impact upon their businesses. Whilst SPEN will ask for an option agreement to be signed, that document does not detail the compensation provisions for the poles.

"We have had direct discussion with SPEN on compensation principles, so we are aware of its proposal. As appointed valuers on the NFU Rural Surveyors Panel, Halls is involved in close discussion with the NFU on the details of the proposed route."



# Check statements

## Farmers are being urged to check their Basic Payment claim statement carefully before making their 2017 Basic Payment application.

Sarah Reece, chartered surveyor at the Shrewsbury office of Berrys, says that more than 95 per cent of farmers have already received their 2016 payment and according to The Rural Payments Agency, payments are ongoing.

"Claim statements are now also being sent out so it is vitally important that you check through your statement carefully as inaccuracies are being found," said Sarah.

"We have seen instances of the RPA not paying the full amount, making mistakes on the number of entitlements recorded and the amount of area being claimed on and challenging the amount being claimed.

"You should check if you have had a penalty for over declaration/under declaration or greening.

"Look at the area you claimed and compare it to the area that the RPA found eligible as this is where the main problems lie. If the RPA system thinks that the land cover as registered in the mapping system LPIS doesn't tally with the land use code on your application it will flag up an error.

"For example, if a land use code is permanent pasture online but the land use code on the application is an arable code then the system will refuse the parcel from your application and subsequent payment."

Farmers should check that their entitlements are correct and that any entitlement transfers have been recorded correctly as often they have not. The new online entitlement checker system may not always be working, so keep trying.

"If you do find an error you must report it to the RPA so that a Post Payment Adjustment can be made," Sarah said.

"You will need to submit an investigation request to the RPA immediately or contact us to help as ideally these discrepancies should be resolved before the 2017 claim deadline so the errors don't move into another year.

"Going forward, the major change to note for 2017 is that buffers strips against water courses have to be available in ALL fields, including fields of less than two hectares, as these are no longer exempt from that cross compliance rule," she added.

## Tractor with pulling power



*Ice Bear driven by team founder Mike Simmons in action in the European Championships 2016*

The Bear Essentials team, which competes in the high horsepower motorsport of tractor pulling, has called on the expertise of Morris Lubricants to keep their 2,000hp tractor, Ice Bear, running smoothly in competitions across the UK and Europe.

Ice Bear was totally rebuilt last season, returning to its original colour scheme from when it was first built in 1996.

Based on a production 160hp Valtra tractor, with wheel speeds of up to 90kmh, Ice Bear was unbeaten in UK competition last season and finished fourth in the European Championship.

Ice Bear competes in the Prostock category for production based tractors running on diesel fuel with a single turbocharger.

The goal of tractor pulling is simple. Take one skilfully modified tractor and try to drag an increasingly heavy sledge as far as possible. In the Prostock category, a weight of up to 60 tonnes is hauled down a 100m track in about 10 seconds!

To get over the line, every inch of the tractor must perform to its maximum, which is where Morris Lubricants comes in. The family-owned, Shrewsbury-based company supplies the oils and lubricants to keep the cogs turning.

"The link-up with Morris Lubricants is key to the team," said Bear Essentials team manager Andy Miller. "The main product that we use is the Versimax HD3 20W-50 diesel engine oil. No-one else in the top level of the Prostock class in tractor pulling uses Morris Lubricants' oils, so we carried out tests to compare it with other racing oils made by some of the so-called bigger names in the business."

Andrew Goddard, Morris Lubricants' managing director, said: "It's incredible to see the sheer power of the tractor, a real achievement of human endeavour.

"This is another example of how well our products perform in the agricultural market, one of our key sectors, especially when they are put to the ultimate test like this."

## £650k for farmhouse on two acres

A six-bedroom, period farmhouse with two acres of land is on the market with Berrys in north Shropshire

Hatton Farmhouse, Hatton Road, Market Drayton is for sale with a guide price of £650,000 which includes a large garden, yard, two outbuildings and a modern barn adjacent to a two-acre paddock. A further 14 acres is available by separate negotiation.

"This attractive and traditional farmhouse isn't listed and offers an ideal opportunity for a new owner to refurbish a substantial property into a comfortable, family home," said Philip Robinson,

residential agency manager with Berrys at Shrewsbury.

"In addition, two traditional outbuildings in the adjacent yard could be renovated to provide storage, stables, garaging or possibly additional accommodation, subject to obtaining necessary consents."

A more modern farm building is next to the access to the two acres of land lying south of the house that is also included in the sale. A further 14 acres with a natural pond lying to the east of the house and beside the entrance drive are available by separate negotiation.



*Contact Berrys for more information*

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*Allie Renison, head of Europe and trade policy at the Institute of Directors, speaking at the NFU conference debate*

# Preparing for Brexit

**T**he Government must start acting now to ensure the farming industry is equipped to profit from whatever trade deals are in place when the UK finally exits the European Union.

That's the view of Allie Renison, head of Europe and trade policy at the Institute of Directors.

Without predicting whether there will be complete free trade access, trade with tariffs or trade liberalisation, Ms Renison told NFU conference delegates there was likely to be a phased implementation of any deal post-Brexit.

Echoing secretary of state Andrea Leadsom's earlier comment, she said: "We want tariff-free and frictionless cross-border trade with Europe. So, with zero tariffs and zero non-tariff barriers as our starting point, we are striving for the best possible access for our farmers and food exporters."

Trade policy, she said, had a serious impact – sometimes for good, sometimes for worse – on agriculture.

"The Prime Minister has said that once a deal is reached, we will have a phased implementation process. But the whole divorce process might stretch on.

"What happens if we reach the two year mark: are you going to be able to extend it or not? Moving back to World Trade Organisations and 'most favoured nation rules' between the UK and EU are highly undesirable," Ms Renison said.

"It is not just a question of tariffs as to why that is undesirable. There is a big incentive that, once Article 50 is triggered, to make sure we get it right on content rather than just focusing on doing it at lightning



*Farming is expected to be one of the sectors most affected by Brexit*



*NFU president Meurig Raymond*

speed. It has to be a balance of those two priorities."

The NFU president called on Andrea Leadsom to clarify Government commitments to the farming sector, which he described as one of the most affected sectors post-Brexit.

Meurig Raymond highlighted three areas Government needed to take action on if Brexit is to be successful for the country's food and farming industry:

- The right trade deals
- Access to a competent and reliable workforce
- A domestic agricultural policy that works for the country.

British farmers produce the raw ingredients for the UK's largest manufacturing sector, food and drink, worth £108 billion.

Farming provides jobs for 3.9 million people, and has the potential to deliver much more for the country.

The NFU says the industry now needs certainty and firm commitments from government if the country is to feel the benefits of a thriving food and farming industry.

# Rent a Space has big ideas

A new £3 million business incubator and self-storage facility, which aims to have more than 500 customers within five years, has opened in Shrewsbury.

Rent a Space, based at Battlefield Road, already houses 15 tenant businesses and around 90 domestic and commercial customers.

Business tenants range from a dog groomer, florist and furniture restorer to a photographer and fire risk assessor.

Rent a Space has engaged commercial agents Halls to let a variety of business units, which range from 250 to 2,500 sq ft, with leases from six months.

The four-storey Rent a Space property currently offers around 50,000 sq ft of space with potential to grow to 80,000 sq ft.

"Businesses can come here for six months on a low cost rent rather than be tied to an expensive two-year tenancy and we can offer them space to grow," said Leah

Whitley, sales director for Rent a Space.

"Normally, growing businesses are with us for four or five years before they outgrow us and need to find bigger premises."

She explained that the directors had run similar successful ventures in North West England.

A building in Chester, which was smaller than the one in Shrewsbury, reached a peak of 91 per cent occupancy and had 560 customers.

# Trump's plans for the US impact on our county



**Nick  
JONES**

**B**usiness owners should keep an eye on Corporation Tax this year, as cuts could give them cause to reallocate capital.

In an interview with a German newspaper recently, Philip Hammond warned that an end to single market access might oblige the UK to change its economic model – and resort to a far lower level of Corporation Tax.

Donald Trump has proposed lowering the Federal corporation tax rate to 15% from 35% in an effort to put more money into the hands of businesses to hire, innovate and expand.

Donald Trump's plans matter in the UK too. Ahead of the Autumn Statement, Prime Minister Theresa May stated she was committed to keeping the UK's Corporation Tax rate the lowest in the G20, despite Trump's pledge.

If Trump keeps his pledge of a 15% rate, then Theresa May would need to drop the UK rate (currently 20%) by at least five percentage points in order to keep hers. For UK business owners, such a steep drop could have major implications for financial decision-making.

It is worth noting that the UK rate is already around ten percentage points lower than the corporation tax rates in Germany, Japan and France – and further still below the current US rate.

For UK business owners, a further lowering of Corporation Tax rates would be a useful counter to the increased tax on dividends.



*Donald Trump's economic plans matter to Shropshire businesses*

Self-evidently, the lower the Corporation Tax rate falls compared with personal tax (and National Insurance contributions), the more attractive trading through a company looks to reasonably successful businesses.

Investing and extracting corporate funds in the most tax-efficient manner will require both prudence and expertise, especially in light of the changes. Moreover, while business and personal financial planning

are distinct, they also need to be considered together, especially in relation to funds not needed for the business.

Informed advice on how to best deploy these funds will undoubtedly be of considerable value.

● *Nick Jones is the Principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management.*



# Current housing crisis can be solved

**The Government should be commended for acknowledging the crisis in the housing market and taking steps to reconcile it, according to a Shropshire planning expert.**

David Brammer, head of planning at Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors, was speaking following a debate with the Housing and Planning minister, Gavin Barwell MP, in Birmingham.

During the discussion with representatives from local government, the housing and planning industry, the minister said there was a real need for everyone to work together to ensure people had more chance to buy their own home in the future.

David said: "It was a very stimulating and useful debate about the issues which arise from the recent White Paper regarding housing policy.

"White papers are policy documents produced by the Government that set out their proposals for future legislation and this exercise could be seen as a fact-finding mission by civil servants and the Minister, both of whom demonstrated a very good understanding of the brief they had and the issues involved.

"The minister was exceptionally candid and upfront about the crisis the Government and the country is facing



*David Brammer of Lanyon Bowdler*

in providing housing, whilst at the same time many local authorities have still not managed to put Local Plans with a sufficient five-year housing supply to address the housing needs in their areas.

"Controversial issues such as green belt policy are at the forefront of the debate and the current government guidance is constantly being scrutinised to clarify the relevant tests.

"The Minister recognised that there is no 'quick fix' to the issue but he is to be

commended for taking this as a roadshow around the country because there are different issues in all of the regions of the UK.

"He expressed a willingness to work with all parties and authorities to try to find solutions and political consensus - recognising that governments of the past 30 or 40 years have singularly failed to do this."

He added: "It is quite common for proposed housing development to meet objections locally about infrastructure, affordability and design, but there does seem to be an attitude change in society towards the provision of housing.

"This involves a recognition that the right sort of housing can provide sustainable development.

"It does appear as though local communities are now more likely to support housing in their area than previously, and this is also a recognition of the benefits that housing can bring in keeping local facilities such as local pubs, schools and shops open.

"Locally, Shropshire Council is currently undertaking a 'Call for Sites' to encourage landowners to bring sites forward for development and to provide more housing numbers."

David said that this consultation into potential new sites for housing was a good example of opportunities to provide the 'right kind of housing in the right place' in the county.

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The bridal open day at Iscoyd Park, near Whitchurch – held earlier this year – ended with a pyrotechnic display, featuring a stunning phoenix

# Phoenix heralds a new beginning

**A**t the beginning of the year, Iscoyd Park hosted a truly unique bridal open day.

The grounds of this Georgian stately home and wedding venue near Whitchurch were lit up by a spectacular pyrotechnic display, the centrepiece of which was a massive flaming phoenix.

“The phoenix was meant to represent a new dawn for the house,” explains Phil Godsai, who co-owns and runs Iscoyd Park with his wife Susie.

“We spent many years gradually restoring parts which had remained unused for decades and the final room to be completed was the library, which was finished at the beginning of the year.”

One month later – just before this magazine went to print – the team at Iscoyd Park heard the news that the venue had been announced as the national winner of Wedding Venue of the Year in the Bridebook Wedding Awards 2017.

If this heralded the beginning of a new dawn for Iscoyd Park, the future looks rosy indeed.

The calendar for wedding bookings is thick with ink for the next two years but sometimes an independently judged award can remind a business that not only is it on the right track, but also that it is one of the very best at what it does in the country.

“Bridebook.co.uk is a highly thought-of directory of suppliers of some of the most high-profile names in the wedding industry,” continues Phil. ▶



Iscoyd Park has been named the National Wedding Venue of the Year in the Bridebook Wedding Awards 2017. Susie and Phil Godsai co-own and run Iscoyd





*There's photo shoots and there's dramatic photo shoots – Shropshire stuntman Justin Pearson on fire at Iscoyd Park*

◀ “To have been named as the national winner is all the more gratifying because the judging system is a two-stage process, with the public voting us onto the shortlist and then the judges picking the overall winner.

“Just to have won the award in the regional category would have been a major feather in our cap so to have won the national competition is something we are enormously proud of.”

But Iscoyd Park is more than a wedding venue; it is also available for high-end corporate and private hire events, and has acted as a setting for photo shoots, films and fashion shows. Corporate and other guests are treated to all the benefits available to wedding parties – the same luxury accommodation, the same a la carte food, and the exclusive use of the house and the estate.

It is fast moving towards a seven-days-a-week enterprise, and to that end the Godsals are embarking on their next commercial project: to bring the catering in house (it was previously contracted out to the acclaimed Fine Dining Company near Chester) and are currently scouring the country for a top-quality chef to head up the brand new kitchens.

Susie, herself a trained chef, explains: “The Fine Dining Company have been wonderful and I can’t think of a wedding passing without reference from the bridal party about the amazing food.

“But we’ve installed a brand new kitchen with the intention of taking on a chef of the very highest standard on a full-time basis. We then feel we will have all the elements on site for any corporate or private hire party to leave them feeling they’ve visited somewhere quite special.

“We will be able to offer the complete package, all within the confines of the estate which is something we’ve been striving to



*After stunning renovation work, the bar area is a firm favourite*



*The house is breathtaking by day or night achieve for a while. It is all very exciting.”*

If we go back 10 years ago the situation was very different. Back in 2008 the Godsals family had a crucial decision to make with regards to Iscoyd, their much loved ancestral home. Parts of it had been



*The marquee makes for a beautiful reception*

unused for decades and its future as a family home was uncertain.

The Godsals concluded that without an ambitious and large-scale restoration operation this Grade II Georgian house would most likely have been lost to them.





*Rooms throughout the property have been sympathetically improved, reflecting on the history of the country house*



*Phil and son Hector relax together at Iscoyd Park*



*What house of such stature would be without a library?*

Phil, a former art dealer in London, and Susie were recently married and the couple, by Phil's father Philip, a respected land agent and heritage expert, and the rest of the family to modernise it and run it as a high-end wedding and private hire venue.

The word 'family' is pivotal to the evolution of Iscoyd Park. It has been in the same family since 1857 when it was bought by a Godsal, a horse-drawn carriage tycoon. Phil and Susie are the current family in charge, with their children, Poppy, Hector or Cecily growing up and showing similar enthusiasm and love for the property.

All of which has a huge bearing on how they want to operate their business.

"We wanted to create a warm, welcoming and charismatic family home, the very antithesis of a wedding conveyor belt," Susie continues.

"The only way this could be achieved was through significant financial investment. No corners were cut and no expense

spared in ensuring a successful restoration.

"We employed a leading conservation architect, Clare Craven, to draw up the plans to transform a wing of the house into a series of rooms which would be suitable as reception spaces, and bring the property into the 21st century.

"We have been incredibly lucky to have a specialist team of builders, Applejacks, who have put so much effort and skill into helping us realise our vision."

First of all, a number of reception rooms were installed - a series of light and airy spaces combining classical and contemporary elements, very much a trait of Iscoyd's interiors.

The bedrooms were created by acclaimed interior designer Suzy Hoodless, who has been described as "Britain's brightest tastemaker" and whose clients include several high-profile individuals as well as various hotels and other well known properties. ▶



*Poppy Godsal with spaniel puppy Mabel*



◀ Bit by bit the house was transformed, with the penultimate project completed a year ago: the restoration of a whole wing of bedroom suites which had last been used 40 years ago.

As Susie explains: “The rooms are set in a wing which for centuries housed generations of Godsal children, with various nurseries, playrooms and bedrooms laid out over two floors.

“We wanted to create a legacy, a look and a feel which will be every bit as attractive in decades to come as it is now – time will tell, but we would like to think we have been successful.”

They certainly have, if the comments of the Daily Telegraph’s head of travel are anything to go by.

After staying at the house with his family he wrote that Iscoyd Park offers “a style and sense of individuality that would put most five-star hotels to shame”.

For a wedding and private hire venue to run as successfully as Iscoyd does it needs more than fine accommodation and attractive interiors. And to win national awards, considerably more.

So what did catch the eyes of the Bridebook judges? It’s in the details, Phil suggests.

“While we are lucky enough to have a lovely Georgian house and landscaped gardens for guests to feel is theirs, for us it’s about the little details that we believe make the biggest difference for a wedding party’s experience,” he says.

“We are constantly seeking to add to our supply list to enhance the whole experience beyond what might be expected.

“For instance, we have introduced a delicious own-brand Champagne, made by Jacques Copinet as well as an own-brand chocolate, made by the award-winning chocolatier, Forever Cacao. Later this year we will be launching Iscoyd Park own-brand honey, produced by bees in hives on the estate.

“Guests can benefit from an acclaimed reiki master to help nervous brides to de-stress before their big day, and we also offer an on-site creche and beauty spa.

“But above all there is in an amazing team who work here and who put their heart and soul into every event and making this the place it is.

“Jen and Charlie are absolutely superb wedding managers, but there is also a fabulous team of housekeepers, gardeners and office staff without whose efforts Iscoyd would not function as it does.”

Iscoyd Park now hosts almost 100 weddings each year, and is a founder member of Canvas & Stone, a country house collective set up to offer the very best in corporate and private events.

Phil and Susie have performed wonders at Iscoyd and no one who has seen what they have achieved while bringing up a young family could begrudge them the accolades and awards which have been coming their way.

No pressure on their kids then!



*The team at Iscoyd Park, responsible for organising weddings and corporate events*



*Every last detail has been thought of including this stunning ceremony room*



*Hector selects his next book from the library*



*Phil and Susie have achieved so much*



*What a wonderful backdrop for a cricket match. Iscoyd hosts all manner of events.*





*Four out of five restaurants fail within the first year – we need to ask why*

# Why strategic marketing should be at the heart of your business

**P**oliticians and business leaders regularly state that small businesses are the backbone of the UK economy.

They point out that the majority of the UK's workforce is employed in a business with fewer than 250 employees. It is therefore extremely worrying that the attrition rate amongst small businesses is currently so high.

The Office of National Statistics 2016 business survey shows that the number of small business start-ups is growing. However, it also shows that only 41% of businesses registered in 2011 are still in existence today. Some sectors show startling failure rates - for example, it is estimated that over 80% of new restaurant businesses fail within twelve months.

Issues with finance and cashflow are regularly given as the reason, as business owners complain their costs exceed their earnings. However, when failed businesses are investigated, cashflow is often found to be a symptom of deeper problems; that the business is not acting in a strategic manner, it is not planning effectively or it is not giving sufficient priority to the needs of its consumers.

Many small businesses begin with



a product idea. This leads to a product orientation; the idea that if you can make a really good product, you need to do little more to have consumers rushing to buy it. This turns the strategic marketing process on its head.

Rather than designing a product to meet consumer needs, the business develops a product and then tries to find a market for it. This can be a very dangerous approach as the majority of a business's efforts are related to product development and little thought is applied to what consumers actually want.

Many small businesses have a sales focus where sales volume is seen as the determinant of success. Resources are focused on aggressive selling. Sales targets dominate management thinking. A sales focus is often reliant on short-term customer relationships and not long-term survival.

Strategic marketing planning should

be at the heart of any business. It is the transformation of corporate goals into a competitive market position. It is the process of analysing the market environment, segmenting that market and targeting those consumers who are best equipped to help a firm meet its goals.

It is the process of identifying areas of competitive advantage. It is understanding and meeting consumer needs. It is strategically using customer demand to build long-term profitable relationships. Strategic marketing planning is the development of a sustained market focus.

Strategic marketing should not be confined to your marketing department or seen as a function of your sales team. It is not developing websites or designing advertisements.

Strategic marketing is an activity which affects every function and every person in an organisation.

It may involve fundamental changes to both the culture and structure of an organisation. Strategic marketing should be on the agenda of every business owner to help ensure long-term business survival.

- *Pippa Musgrave is a director of Philmus Consulting Ltd, a business consultancy based in Shropshire specialising in strategic marketing planning and trading standards regulatory compliance.*



Sansaw provides the opportunity to do business in a rural setting



Sansaw Business Park is a landmark development near Shrewsbury

# Escape to the country



Situated just outside Hadnall, Sansaw Business Park sees the latest 21st-century design set within a Victorian walled garden

**Shropshire firms fleeing cramped town centres and sky-high car parking fees are finding solace in a county business park near Shrewsbury which is reporting record occupancy.**

Sansaw Business Park is a landmark development on Sansaw Estate, just outside Hadnall, which sees the latest 21st-century design set within the confines of a Victorian walled garden.

"It's clear that firms have fallen out of love with town centre locations because of the issues they pose to their staff," said MD James Thompson.

"Whether it's high rents or problems with car parking, the issues are many and varied.

"What we've done at Sansaw is alleviate this by not only providing car parking in abundance alongside statement offices, we've clung on to our unique rural setting and use it as a selling point. As a result, we're seeing record levels of interest.

"We believe we are providing unique

office space in unrivalled surroundings.

From the small start-up to the multi-national, businesses of all sizes have converged on this historic site just north of Shrewsbury to ply their trade in the most inspired of settings.

"The roomy car parking, hi-tech facilities and tranquil rural setting were all factors behind the move for firms such as Dechra, Espire and EDP."

Sansaw Business Park boasts two developments on the site, less than 200 yards apart – The Pavilions and The Stables.

The former was opened by the Duke of Westminster in November 2008 and has lost none of its appeal of charm in the following years. Indeed, the £3 million development was handed a coveted RIBA award thanks to the vision of both James and architect Ross Sharpe.

Constructed from wood steel and glass and using ground-source heat exchangers, natural resources and rainwater harvesting, the building has a low carbon footprint and a minimal impact on the environment.

"Our vision was to create an inspirational office building which not only stood out from an architectural point of view

but made as little impact on the environment as possible," said James.

"We not only have a landmark which puts our business park on the map but we are also able to offer tenants significantly reduced running costs as well as the latest ICT infrastructure. All of this within the calm and serenity of a wooded estate.

Alongside The Pavilions sits The Stables, a sympathetic conversion of historic farm buildings which houses some of the county's most progressive firms.

Smaller in size but equally impressive, there is a rare opportunity for two units within this development.

James continued: "We have had many of our tenants in situ for years, so it's very rare that any of the offices come on the market. However, in recent days two units have become available and offer what we think is the ultimate working environment."

Benefitting from high-speed fibre broadband and ground-source heating, and being within striking distance of the motorway network, Sansaw Business Park is the natural choice for many.

● If you are interested in office space at The Stables please call the estate team on 01939 211100.



# Communications firm relocates

Marketing agency Provoke Brand Communications has relocated to new offices at Park View Business Centre in Whitchurch.

The move from Crewe Hall Farm in Cheshire marks a period of expansion for the company, which has rebranded from a digital production house to a creative, full-service brand communications agency, with expertise in the food and drink, property, legal and financial and technology sectors.

The company has welcomed new members to the team, including a communications director, marketing & PR executive, and graphic designer.

Founder Daren Bach said: "The office's rural location is ideal to facilitate creative thinking, and gives us the opportunity to introduce new working practices that benefit our staff and clients alike."



Provoke Brand Communications has relocated to Park View Business Centre in Whitchurch

# Grants available to boost your premises

**B**usinesses across Shropshire looking to revamp their buildings and create new jobs can apply for grants of up to £100,000 thanks to a new £2.5 million fund launched by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

The Marches Building Investment Grant is available for eligible businesses to fund extensions, renovations or reconfigurations of commercial premises across Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

Part-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the scheme is expected to attract up to £3m in private sector investment in the region and lead to the creation of 130 jobs.

Open to businesses which primarily trade with other businesses, the scheme will award grants of up to 45% of the total project costs (up to a maximum £100,000) and are intended to cover costs directly associated with the conversion or alteration of a building.



Programme manager Caroline Cattle

They cannot be used towards the cost of purchasing the property, equipment, or 'excessive' landscaping, nor can applications be made retrospectively.

Programme manager Caroline Cattle said: "We enjoyed considerable success with our previous redundant building scheme and whilst this new one is focused at a different target market, its aims are largely complimentary to that.

"We'll again be funding the transformation of buildings to provide them

with a new economically fruitful future, whilst also ensuring that new jobs are created.

"Within four months of completion all projects which have received funds should have created at least one full time job and we'll be paying particular consideration to the projected job creation figures when assessing applications."

Applicants to the Marches Building Investment Grant can be either owner-occupiers or tenants although for the latter, they must have a fixed term lease with at least 6 years unexpired.

The conversion or refurbishment of residential property is exempt from the scheme and buildings which will be used for agricultural, horticultural, retail or hospitality purposes cannot apply either.

LEP director Gill Hamer said: "The difference that schemes such as this can make shouldn't be underestimated. Our previous Redundant Buildings Grant Scheme saw a rich and diverse range of buildings across the Marches transformed and brought back in to useful economic use.

"We're very much looking forward to seeing how businesses plan to make a similar impact with support from this latest fund."

# Check and double check card

In a recent Construction Industry Training Board report produced by a leading market researcher in Market Drayton, the CITB urged employers to be vigilant when checking Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards.

The organisation warned that it will actively seek to prosecute where technical or factual evidence suggests that fraud has occurred.

The CSCS was established as a means of enabling employees who work on construction sites to demonstrate that they possess the requisite skills and competencies to work on site.

Worryingly, the report concluded that abuse of the system is rife and many of those who claimed to be qualified in construction were in fact working illegally – often through lack of training or failure



to maintain certification. A CSCS card is issued where an individual possesses the appropriate construction-related qualifications and, subject to some exemptions, have passed the CITB Health, Safety and Environment Test within the past twenty four months.

With developers heavily reliant on sub-contractors, CSCS cards are intended to

enable site managers to enjoy a legitimate expectation that those operating on site are competent to do so.

The problem of fraudulent certification cards poses a major risk to business, to individuals and their properties.

Using unqualified or incompetent staff can lead to poor quality construction resulting in financial loss and a risk to health and safety, both now and in future.

The welfare of all workers including both the unqualified staff and other legitimate workers on site is also a major concern. The Construction Industry Training Board website provides eight recommendations as to what an employer should do if faced with potentially fraudulent cards.

● *Ian Bowker is a commercial property lawyer, based at the Telford office of Terry Jones Solicitors*



*Craven Arms Business Park was on offer at £615,000*



*Waymills Industrial Estate, Whitchurch, situated on a 1.5-acre site*

# £4 million for sale of industrial estates

**F**ive business estates across Shropshire have changed hands in a deal worth nearly £4 million. The deal was completed by Halls, which is not disclosing the buyer.

Radford's Field Industrial Estate, Oswestry, with 15 units on a total site of 2.118 acres, was on offer for £1.2 million.

The Mynd Industrial Estate, Church Stretton, which had an asking price of £875,000, has 11 units in two separate courtyard areas on a 2.081-acre site, and a plot of vacant land with potential to develop further units, subject to planning consent.

Also located in South Shropshire is Craven Arms Business Park, which was on offer at £615,000 with nine commercial units split in four detached blocks on a site of nearly four acres.

Netherton Workshops, Highley, near Bridgnorth, which was on offer for £275,000, has nine units in two blocks on a 1.594-acre site.

And Waymills Industrial Estate, Whitchurch, which had an asking price of £275,000, comprises five industrial units, situated within one building on a 1.5-acre site.



*Radford's Field Industrial Estate, Oswestry, with 15 units on a total site of 2.118 acres, was on offer for £1.2 million*



# Relocation of training specialist

A Shropshire-based training provider, which was founded in Whitchurch 35 years ago, is relocating into new Shrewsbury premises.

SBC Training is about to move into new-build offices on Vanguard Way, and managing director Colin Thaw says it can't come quickly enough.

"We offer training across business management, health and social care and across technical areas too, and it's been the growth in demand, in particular, for training in engineering, manufacturing and electrical skills that has led to our phenomenal growth in recent years.

"We recently invested in two specialist CNC machines for the training workshop, but these put additional strain on the space available in our existing base. We were, therefore, delighted to

discover the new build unit nearby on Vanguard Way after looking into alternative sites for a while."

Legal advice on the lease of the premises – which includes mezzanine office space away from the training and workshops area - was provided by David Raymont of FBC Manby Bowdler's commercial property team.

He said: "The quality of the training delivered by SBC is evident in the rate at which they've grown and their vision to continuing expanding and investing in modern and market-leading equipment meant that larger premises were vital. It wasn't, however, until the high specification unit on Vanguard Park became available that all their boxes were ticked."



Colin Thaw and David Raymont celebrate

# First year success leads to expansion

**M**otor dealer Shukers has expanded its Telford site in Holyhead Road, Ketley after a highly successful first year.

"We are delighted to announce that we are further developing the Shukers in Telford dealership in order to meet the growing demand for our Subaru, SsangYong & Isuzu brands," said Samantha Haydon on behalf of Shukers.

"Our base at Vanguard Way in Shrewsbury has outgrown its current facility and so for various reasons, including increased vehicle parking requirements and the expansion of our service and parts facilities, we needed to re-locate to a much larger site."

All brands have been transferred to an enhanced Shukers at Holyhead Road for services, sales, aftersales and parts.

Samantha, added: "This will be an exciting year for Shukers in Telford and we



From left, Gary Bell (parts and service manager), Laura Canning (service reception), Will Heslop (vehicle technician) and Carrie Schmidt (sales administrator)

look forward to welcoming customers to the hospitality area at our newly refurbished showrooms."

# Food for thought on our parks

Food chain Greggs is raising its profile on industrial sites across Shropshire.

After opening a new base at Stafford Park in Telford, it has now moved onto Shrewsbury Business Park, creating five new jobs.

The shop forms part of the support retail scheme developed by Alaska Property Group in partnership with Shropshire Council. Greggs has taken a unit of about 1,250 sq ft on a new lease, in a deal handled by Cooper Green Pooks.

Alan Hay of Alaska Property Group said: "We are delighted to welcome Greggs to Shrewsbury Business Park, as we know they have a very popular offer which will provide long-awaited food and drink facilities to the park and surrounding area."



Greggs makes its mark on our business parks

# Old and new in harmony



Johnson Design Partnership team members prepare for their Shrewsbury show. Architectural assistant Munir Shaikh, Matt Spinks, director and senior architect and Kim Chesters, practice manager.

An exhibition showcasing how new developments can be successfully planned and built in historic towns such as Shrewsbury was staged at the Shirehall.

The event was hosted in the town by county architects Johnson Design Partnership, focusing on how buildings in conservation areas can be sympathetically constructed and extended.

"Shrewsbury is an amazing place to live and work, with some impressive medieval structures and a range of other significant features - we hope the exhibition demonstrated how careful, bespoke design can enhance its environment," said Vic Johnson of the architectural practice.

A team of staff from the Bridgnorth-based business was on hand, and a range of architectural models, visuals, drawings and videos were on show.



Dale Kynaston, Justine Vaughan and Peter Guy



Amy Bould, Richard Sheehan and Roy Williams

# Shropshire Business Awards Launch

**T**hey've become known as the 'Oscars' of the local economy – and this year's Shropshire Business Awards look set to be another sparkling occasion.

The starting gun was officially fired on the 17th year of the competition with a reception for supporters, plus past and present winners and sponsors, at Rybrook BMW in Shrewsbury.

The awards are run by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, and chief executive Richard Sheehan was joined by master of ceremonies Carl Jones to speak about what's in store on the awards night, which will be held once again at Telford's International Centre, on June 23.

Mr Sheehan said: "Over the last 17 years of these ceremonies, it has become very clear that it's not just about businesses being recognised as success stories – it's about business owners recognising the success that their employees bring. We urge every Shropshire business to get involved."

This year's award categories include Company of the Year, Customer Service, Online Business, Technology Enterprise and Innovation, Best Small Business, Best New Business, Travel Tourism and Hospitality, Business In The Community, Apprenticeships, International Trade, and Manufacturing Excellence.

For a third year, there will also be a special award named after the late Chamber president John Clayton, which will be presented to someone who has made an outstanding contribution to the Shropshire business community.

Entries for the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards are now open, and close on Friday May 5. Shortlisted companies will be visited by the judging panel during week commencing May 22.

The Shropshire Business Awards is backed by a string of top-name businesses and organisations, including Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council, Telford College of Arts and Technology, Barclays, TTC Group, Global Freight, Rockford IT, Good 2 Great, Rybrook Shrewsbury, the University of Wolverhampton, Lanyon Bowdler, E-Careers, Nick Jones Wealth Planning . . . and Shropshire Business magazine.

Find out everything you need to know about the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards online at [www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk](http://www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk)

● PICTURES: Tony Adams PR



The 17th year of the awards was launched at Rybrook BMW in Shrewsbury



Steve Oliver, Gareth Thomas and Anton Gunter





*Carl Jones, Graham Wynn, Nick Jones, Mandy Thorn and Mark Thorn*



*Catherine Armstrong, Laura Kerrigan, Nicky Kent and Judith Webster*



*Entries for the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards are now open, closing May 5. Shortlisted companies will be judged week commencing May 22*



*Beth Heath, Rachel Davey, Mark Allsop and Kelly Pugh*



*Mike Webb, Philip Robinson and Barbara Webb*



*Andrew Evans, Sarah Offland, Beth Harrison and Dave Grattenge*



*Rachel Owen, Teresa Rowe and Ruth Ross promote the launch*





Furrows joint managing director Dave Farthing (left) and chairman and managing director of Ford of Britain, Andy Barratt



The FordStore event at Furrows, Telford was attended by members of the public and VIPs



Tony Ellams and family attended the event



Steve, Jenny and Chelsea Gater at Furrows, Telford

# Furrows holds celebration event

**M**ore than 200 customers attended a launch event to mark the Furrows dealership in Telford, being named as a flagship 'FordStore' branch – one of only a handful in the UK.

Guests and VIPs had the chance to tour the new-look dealership on Haybridge Road and take a closer look at a display of iconic Ford vehicles.

Guests were joined by the chairman and managing director of Ford of Britain, Andy Barratt.



Simon, Rachel and Sophie Hughes raise a glass



Rally drivers James Williams and Rob Jones



Katie and Kris Sadler pictured on the evening





*Simon Edwards, Hugh Strickland and Paul Bennett*



*Adrian Barker with Zoe Sherwin of Aaron & Partners*

# Aaron and Partners Expansion

**M**ore than 70 members of the Shropshire business community joined legal firm Aaron & Partners in celebrating its latest expansion.

The firm has relocated for a third time in four years by moving to larger premises at Oxon Business Park to effectively meet the demand for its services, and the celebration event was held to mark the move.

Guests enjoyed drinks and canapes, while partner Simon Edwards outlined how the firm had evolved since its inception, and looked forward to the Shrewsbury office continuing to expand into the future.



*Hugh Strickland, Nick Clarke, Simon Edwards, Trish Randles and Paul Bennett*



*James Neame with John Devoy of Aaron & Partners and Anne-Marie Brettell*



*Dr Jean Challiner with Ben Mason of Aaron & Partners*



*Simon Edwards addresses the guests*





The weak pound not only hits overseas spending, but hotels, car hire and more, so Martin Lewis offers 10 top tips for keeping costs down

# Ten top tips for keeping foreign travel costs low

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



**Martin  
LEWIS**

It's been cold, wet, and miserable these past few weeks, so no wonder this has been the peak summer holiday booking period.

However, with the pound recently at a 32-year low against the dollar, and matching the awful rates of 2013 against the euro, this year it's likely to be a challenge to get a decent price – whether you're travelling on business, or for pleasure.

The weak pound not only hits overseas spending, but hotels, car hire and more, so here are my 10 top tips for keeping costs down.

1. Pocket the perfect plastic to make the pound perform. Spend abroad and most credit cards add a 3% 'non sterling transaction fee' which means £100 of euros costs £103 and some then load other charges on top.



The [www.creation.co.uk](http://www.creation.co.uk) Everyday card has good exchange rates and low cash fees

However, there are a range of specialist cards that don't add that fee. So you get that day's same near-perfect rate that the banks do, in every country.

My top two long term picks, as well as good exchange rates, have low cash fees – the [www.creation.co.uk](http://www.creation.co.uk) Everyday card and [www.halifax.co.uk](http://www.halifax.co.uk) Clarity. Spending on these is super cheap, usually easily smashing the best bureau de change rates.

Yet only do this if you'll repay the card

IN FULL each month, to avoid the 18.9% ish representative APR. It's worth noting if instead of spending on the card you withdraw foreign cash and spend that, you will pay interest even if you clear in full, but even with that added they're still not that costly.

For full info on top cards, and an eligibility calculator so you can see which you're most likely to be accepted for go to [www.mse.me/payabroad](http://www.mse.me/payabroad).



- Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of MoneySavingExpert. To join the 12 million people who get his free Money Tips weekly email, go to [www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip)



*Don't forget the good old fashioned package holiday. Package holidays are where you usually get flights, hotels and transfers in one.*

2. One hotel room can have hundreds of prices. Once you know what hotel you want, always check to see if it's being sold cheaper elsewhere, use comparison sites [www.trivago.co.uk](http://www.trivago.co.uk) and [www.travelsupermarket.com](http://www.travelsupermarket.com) for a wide ranging search (and always call the hotel to see if it'll beat the price). The difference can be £100s.

3. With car hire, book it early and buy insurance elsewhere. If hiring abroad, generally early booking is cheaper, what costs £10 a day now can be £40 a day when you get there. Here's the three key steps:

a) Do a comparison to find your cheapest. I'd try [www.kayak.co.uk](http://www.kayak.co.uk), [www.carrentals.co.uk](http://www.carrentals.co.uk) and if needed [www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net) too.

b) Check stealth fuel charges. Some try and make you pay for a full tank and return it empty – adding £80ish if you don't drive far. The above, apart from Kayak, let you filter by fuel policy.

c) Don't fall for their insurance up-sell. When you pick up a car they'll often try and fear sell you up to £25/day insurance on top – to cover the large excess if you have any claims. If you'll pay for this, instead use excess insurance comparison site [www.moneymaxim.co.uk](http://www.moneymaxim.co.uk) before you go and you can often find a policy from £2 a day. Yet if you do this, or don't get the insurance, the car hire firm will ask you to leave a deposit on a credit (not debit) card which can be €1,000+.

4. Find best holiday cash in seconds. Just use my [www.travelmoneymax.com](http://www.travelmoneymax.com) site which compares 30 online bureaux to find which gives you the best rates in seconds, factoring all fees.

5. Speedily find the cheapest flights. The obvious start point again are comparison sites. My top picks are [www.skyscanner.net](http://www.skyscanner.net), [www.kayak.co.uk](http://www.kayak.co.uk) and [www.momondo.co.uk](http://www.momondo.co.uk) which include most airlines and booking sites like Expedia and ebookers. Yet if you really want

to slash flight costs you need to get clever, such as using ethnic specialist travel agents and checking out airline code sharing deals. For full help see [www.mse.me/cheapflights](http://www.mse.me/cheapflights).

6. Don't forget the good old fashioned package holiday. Package holidays are where you usually get flights, hotels and transfers in one. They can still be the cheapest especially if you're going away for 7, 10 or 14 days in a traditional holiday destination like Benidorm.

Both [www.travelsupermarket.com](http://www.travelsupermarket.com) and [www.icelolly.com](http://www.icelolly.com) have comparison sites. Then once you've got up a price, if you want to shave a little off, you can call up other agents to see if they'll sell you the same holiday at a cheaper price.

7. Book travel insurance AS SOON as you book the holiday. Every year people email me saying something sadly akin to, "I'm due on holiday in a few months, but I've just been given a cancer diagnosis and can't go, the airline won't let me cancel, what can I do?" The answer is 'that's what travel insurance is for'. Yet many people only book it just before they go.

Waiting defeats half the point of having the cover – which is to protect you in the event cancellation is needed due to illness, a death in the family or something else. Full help on the cheapest policies, including for over 65s in [www.mse.me/travelinsurance](http://www.mse.me/travelinsurance).

8. Booked Easyjet? – Keep checking the price. If your Easyjet price drops after you've booked it – excluding in a sale – you can just call it up to ask for the difference back in vouchers. Jo emailed: "We got an £803 voucher... all thanks to you."

9. Check if your European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) is still valid. The free EHIC means if you're in an EU (and a few others) country you can use a state GP or hospital for the same price as a local, so if it's free for them, it's free for you. It's valuable extra protection (alongside travel insurance). Yet it's not valid for millions, this is nothing to do with Brexit, but simply that it has a valid until date and 5.3 million expired in the last year. Check yours, if it is, go to [www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC](http://www.nhs.uk/NHSEngland/Healthcareabroad/EHIC) to get a new one for FREE (don't Google this, you'll find shyster sites trying to charge you to do it who add nothing to the process).

10. Be careful boozing on holiday. A final thought. If you're going to drink on holiday (and let's be honest, for many people that's half what it's about), remember this may invalidate your travel insurance claim. So take it easy, and if you won't take it easy, at least think about what belongings you're taking with you!







*The expanded JDP Team, Michael Daw, Kim Chesters, Adam Reed, Vic Johnson, Munir Shaikh, Matt Spinks and Richard Coutts*

## Architects team now expanded

**A** Bridgnorth firm of independent architects has expanded its team after recording its best ever year, securing a string of new projects across healthcare, residential and with listed buildings.

Johnson Design Partnership has seen demand for its technical expertise and latest design techniques hit an all-time high, with turnover passing £500,000 for the first time in its 14-year history.

The firm, is currently managing 80 live projects and has had to recruit three new specialists in Richard Coutts (Senior Architect), Adam Reed (Architectural Technician) and Michael Daw (Architectural Assistant). This takes the team up to eight people and gives JDP the capacity to work with even more clients, including those involved in rolling out high-tech dental surgeries and individuals interested in developing some of the UK's first ever passive houses.

## Trainee broker's scholarship joy

A trainee insurance broker from Shropshire has won a place on a coveted industry scholarship scheme.

Lucy Sutton, from Newport, joined Henshalls Insurance Brokers in the town as an apprentice, and she has now been named as part of the latest intake on the award-winning Allianz Scholarship Programme.

The programme is designed to provide outstanding learning and networking opportunities, and actively supports brokers to help them achieve their Chartered Institute of Insurance Diploma in 18 months.

Henshalls director Mark Freeman said: "This is an incredible opportunity for Lucy and we couldn't be more proud of her – it's a stepping stone towards a high-flying career in our industry, and we know she'll make the most of everything that comes her way."



*Lucy Sutton*



*Frances Peake and Claire Moore of Peakes Travel Elite*

## Future-proofing a travel agency

Long term manager Claire Moore has joined owner Frances Peake as a joint partner at Shrewsbury's independent travel agency, Peakes Travel Elite.

Frances said: "I am absolutely delighted that Claire is now a full partner in the business as we have worked together ever since she joined us in 2001 and this would seem to be a natural progression.

"I feel that the future of Peakes Travel is in safe hands as Claire has a wealth of experience in all aspects of the travel industry and has an award winning team of staff to back her up."

Claire added: "These are very exciting times within the travel industry as people are becoming more discerning and adventurous, with far flung places now becoming more easily available."

## Account managers



*Leigh Buttrey and Zoe Ashbridge*

Shrewsbury-based design, digital and marketing communications agency Clear has appointed new account managers – Leigh Buttrey and Zoe Ashbridge.

Leigh graduated from the University of Wolverhampton with a BA Honours degree in Business and Marketing Management.

During her studies, she completed a year's digital

marketing internship with international brand Bauer Media where she helped create the foundations of O2's 'Go Think Big'.

Zoe has a BA Honours degree in English Language and Literature. She has since worked in marketing and research where, where tasks included supporting Eastern Cheshire CCG with their research into mental health services.



# Board directors



Val Beint

Not-for-profit care provider, Coverage Care Services, has further strengthened its board with two key appointments.

The company, which runs 14 residential and nursing homes in the county, has announced Val Beint and Debbie Price as new board directors.

Val Beint, a qualified social worker, takes up a new non-executive role.

Val is a former corporate director for community health and

well being at Shropshire Council and assistant director of adult services at Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council.

Debbie Price was previously chief officer of Shropshire Partners in Care, a not for profit organisation that represents more than 200 independent nursing, residential and domiciliary care companies, for five years.

Prior to that, she was the organisation's Care Liaison Officer for five years.



Debbie Price

## Partners for firm of accountants

**A**ccountancy firm Whittingham Riddell has strengthened its team with the addition of two new Partners.

Simon Baker and Allison Beer have joined the partnership to work alongside Graham Worton in the Business Services Team.

The 30-strong team based at the Shrewsbury office work with owner-managed businesses, including; sole traders, partnerships and audit exempt companies.

Simon joined WR from school, over 18 years ago, and has gained his accounting qualifications whilst at the firm.

He has considerable experience in all areas of accounts and taxation, working with a varied group of commercial based clients, professional service firms and healthcare providers.

Allison is a new addition to the firm having relocated to Shropshire from London where she was a partner in another firm. She is a qualified Chartered Accountant,



Whittingham Riddell team. Back – Simon Baker & Allison Beer. Front – Helen Spencer, Phil Lane and Graham Worton.

Chartered Company Secretary and Chartered Tax Adviser.

Phil Lane, Whittingham Riddell's managing partner says: "We are very proud to have expanded and strengthened the Partnership and welcome both Allison and Simon. They both have a wealth of experience and knowledge and will play a key part in the development of the firm."

## NAEA role is a real honour



Russell Griffin

The National Association of Estate Agents has appointed a well-known Shropshire man as regional executive for the Midlands, covering Shropshire and all its neighbouring counties.

Russell Griffin, 47, is a partner in the countywide firm of Samuel Wood & Company, who have offices in Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow, as well as an affiliation to a Mayfair Office in London.

He joins the NAEA Executive Board with immediate effect. Russell, who lives near Shrewsbury said: "This is a great honour and recognition of the efforts put in not only by myself, but also the whole team at Samuel Wood."

## Sister joins brother in telecoms

Arabella Rose has joined Ocean Telecom to support the technical team based on Mile Oak Industrial Estate, Oswestry.

Arabella, 21, the sister of managing director Jeremy Rose, has recently graduated from the University of Chester.

"It's great to be part of a family-owned company," she said. Jeremy Rose added: "We are expanding both in terms of new customers and the services we are offering to existing customers, particularly as demand grows for data and hosting."



Arabella and Jeremy Rose

# PR role for Sundeeep



Sundeeep Sehijpal of Star Public Relations

A new director has been appointed to lead Star Public Relations, the Telford-based agency launched by the Midland News Association.

Sundeeep Sehijpal joins the company with 14 years of media experience, including over 10 years as a PR consultant, most recently at Birmingham-based WAA Chosen. Prior to his career in PR, Sundeeep was a reporter at the Worcester News.

Sundeeep said: "My aim is to grow the agency and establish it as a high quality, reputable agency, which delivers a first-class PR service for clients. To achieve this, I will be drawing upon my experience of promoting leading national B2B and consumer brands."



Steve Oliver is welcomed to the team by Nick Jones

# Strengthening of a practice

Nick Jones, principal of Shrewsbury-based Nick Jones Wealth Planning and chair of the Shropshire Chamber Patron Members, has made another key appointment.

Steve Oliver joins the team as workplace pensions consultant.

Well known and respected throughout Shropshire, Steve has a wealth of experience in the corporate sector.

Nick said: "Every employer needs to comply with new Auto Enrolment rules at a given date between now and 2018, and we are strengthening our practice further to be able to help existing and prospective business-owning clients."



Paul Callingham has been appointed associate trade director

# Three directors for dealership

**C**aravan, motorhome and campervan dealership Salop Leisure has strengthened its management team by appointing three new associate directors.

Justin Edwards, 45, moves up from sales manager to associate director of the touring and motorhome division.

In the holiday homes division, Paul Callingham, 37, has been promoted from area sales manager to associate trade director while Chris Jones, 38, steps up from business development manager to associate retail director.

The promotions come as Salop Leisure is in the process of developing a new £4 million Love2Stay touring and glamping resort on 22 acres of land adjoining the company's Emstrey headquarters.

The new resort is scheduled to open at Easter. Chairman Tony Bywater said: "We continue to invest in our business and are delighted to have quality people like Paul, Justin and Chris working for us, as they represent the future."



Justin Edwards



Chris Jones



Paul Hinkins and Ian Clinton join the TCAT management team

# Top-level team managing TCAT

Telford College of Arts and Technology has announced two new appointments to its top-level management team. Ian Clinton is interim principal, and Paul Hinkins is the new chairman of the college's board.

Mr Clinton, who has an OBE for services to Further Education and previously served as interim principal at colleges in Stockport and Stafford, will guide TCAT

towards its merger with neighbouring New College Telford which he says should be completed by August.

Paul Hinkins, who is also chairman of the Marches Growth Hub's Telford business board and managing director of Business Watch Guarding in Telford, says he is delighted to have taken over the college chairmanship at 'such an exciting time'.



# Family law provision grows



Julie Meredith, Daisy Shelley and Louise Hill

Law firm Wright, McMillan Bennett, based at Stafford Court in Telford, has welcomed three new faces to its family law team.

Experienced solicitor Jackie Meredith, who grew up locally and lives in Telford, said: "I am a member of several Law Society family and resolution panels.

"I am also a member of the Law Society Children Panel, often working with local authorities on issues such as child in need, case conferences and care proceedings."

Former county swimming champion Louise Hill, from Telford, has been awarded a training contract and becomes a trainee solicitor in the department.

Louise held a managerial role in customer service after gaining her degree, and has over a decade gaining experience in criminal law through public service. Completing the new trio is former Idsall School student Daisy Shelley, 18, from Little Dawley, who has been taken on as an apprentice.

## Jason's role

**S**hrewsbury construction company Morris Property has appointed Jason Postans to the newly created post of buyer to support its business growth.

He is responsible for the procurement of all materials and plant for the company's construction projects and assisting with preparing tenders and placing subcontracts orders. Shrewsbury-born Jason, 29, has extensive experience in the industry.

He has worked in construction since he was 18, including the last four years as lead buyer at a construction company in Leominster. He was previously at Shropshire Building Supplies and spent six years in Scotland with an independent builders merchants.

The company's current construction projects include the Beaufort Ridge housing development on The Mount, extension works at sister company Morris Care's Oldbury Grange nursing home in Bridgnorth, plus the development of industrial units at Vanguard Way in Shrewsbury and at Hortonwood West in Telford.



Jason Postans has been appointed buyer at Morris Property

## Associate solicitor appointed



Stephen Scully of Lanyon Bowdler

Shropshire law firm Lanyon Bowdler has announced the appointment of a new associate solicitor.

Stephen Scully has been with the firm since 2008. He covers all aspects of criminal law ranging from summary to indictable-only offences, and has a particular specialism in motoring offences. Stephen is based at the firm's office in Shrewsbury.

Adrian Roberts, head of the criminal team at Lanyon Bowdler, said he was delighted Stephen had been appointed to associate solicitor status.

Adrian said: "Stephen has Higher Rights of Audience, allowing him to appear in the Crown Court as a solicitor advocate.

"In 2005 he won the accolade of being named Criminal Lawyers Legal Aid Lawyer of the Year.

"Stephen has proved an extremely hard-working and valuable member of the Lanyon Bowdler team, and we are delighted to see him achieve this status."

## Federation chairman

Ray Hickinbottom is the new chairman of the Federation of Small Businesses for Shropshire, Herefordshire & Worcestershire.

Ray, who runs his own sales training academy, said: "There are many exciting developments in the pipeline for 2017,

including new FSB membership categories, new FSB member services, and new FSB events.

"In my new role, I hope to meet as many small businesses as possible.

"To do so, we will continue to host a broad range of quality events."



Ray Hickinbottom

## Changing lanes



Joanne Aird joins Arthurs of Oswestry

Award-winning Vauxhall dealer Arthurs of Oswestry has appointed a new customer relations manager.

For Joanne Aird, it is her first experience of the motor industry, though she has previously worked for a national company and ran her own business.

Joanne, 46, is responsible for sales and service customers of the dealership receiving follow-up calls for feedback on their experience of dealing with Arthurs Vauxhall.

Prior to joining Arthurs of Oswestry, Joanne spent nine years with M&S Money where she was travel desk manager.

She has also been a team manager in customer services and telesales and also completed a call centre management course - an IDM course - whilst working there.

# Fighting financial crime

Is your organisation an unwitting participant in financial crime?

Organised crime costs the UK at least £24bn a year, according to the Home Office. Tackling financial crime and ‘trade-based money laundering’ (TBML) – an all-encompassing term for the wide range of schemes used by criminals to disguise the origins of money and integrate it into the formal economy – is a major concern for governments globally.

Because of the magnitude of the problem, your organisation must be vigilant and report any suspicious activity, to avoid risking reputational damage and potentially facing criminal proceedings.

## What’s being done about it?

The UK Prime Minister recently hosted an anti-corruption summit, gathering world governments, law enforcement agencies and businesses where they announced a global plan to recover assets lost to financial crime. Although the first of its kind, the summit will reconvene each year to continue the global fight against corruption.

As well as this, a number of organisations have been set up in partnership with banks including Barclays to combat money laundering and tackle the use of the financial system for terrorist financing and other crimes. These include the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT).

The JMLIT has found that global corporations exporting dual-use goods – those that can be used for both civil and military purposes such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, and raw materials – are particularly vulnerable to trade-based money laundering.

If you are a tech business and you receive an order for 300 laptops from a contact in the Turkey-Syria border area, you would be right to raise your eyebrows – and indeed it is your responsibility under EU law.

But financial crime is often harder to spot than that – especially as no single activity on its own is a clear indication of illegal activity.

## Put on your investigator’s hat



To make sure your organisation doesn’t inadvertently get caught up in this type of activity, it’s vital to carry out regular reviews of who you’re doing business with.

Try putting on your ‘financial crime investigator’s hat’ for just five minutes every day. Have a look at recent business transactions and find out where they are coming from. In a normal trade transaction there’s a clear connection between the payment and the buyer, so consider whether there is anything strange about the relationship. Although it’s worth remembering that for genuine tax efficiency some businesses will use different parts of their business to buy goods, and may structure supply through subsidiaries, sometimes it pays to be suspicious.

## What to do if you’re concerned

Take a look at the National Crime Agency resources website – [www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk](http://www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk) or visit [www.barclayscorporate.com](http://www.barclayscorporate.com) for additional hints and tips.



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## People



### Seb to raise Shrewsbury's profile

New boss of Shrewsbury BID lays out plans to

benefit town



### Kevin leaves builders merchants after 38 years

Tudor Griffiths Group says goodbye to long-serving

manager



### Management team strengthened at leisure firm

Salop Leisure names three new appointments

## Blog



### With change comes opportunity

UCS professor on the challenges facing business leaders of the

future




### Is electric the way forward?

Motor insurance specialist to embark on test drive



### What does 2017 hold in store for manufacturing?

Sector thriving - though plenty of work ahead,



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