

# SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Issue 8

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## RESTORATION OF A SKYSCRAPER

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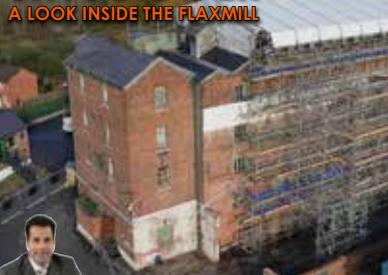


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**PLUS: MILLIONAIRE MO:**  
HOW SHROPSHIRE SET ME ON THE PATH TO RICHES

# Set course for a

**L**ife is either a daring adventure, or nothing at all. Nearly a century on, this meaningful message from trailblazing author and activist Helen Keller seems more relevant than ever.

As the clock ticks down to Brexit, in whatever form it will eventually take, 2018 is certainly going to be an adventure for Shropshire businesses.

There is across-the-board consensus that any further delays to discussions on an EU-UK trade deal could have damaging consequences for investment and trade, as firms are forced to review investment plans and strategies.

And that means quite a few bold decisions are going to be required around boardroom tables along the way.

We've trawled the county to bring

you a broad cross-section of opinion gauging the mood of the local business community at the start of 2018, from manufacturers and exporters to IT experts and retailers.

And this issue is littered with stories of companies which are shrugging aside uncertainties by expanding, and winning lucrative new contracts both at home and overseas.

Whatever the mood, and whatever the sector, bosses certainly shouldn't be afraid to make mistakes this year – because that's when they learn the most about themselves, and their businesses.

Who says? Millionaire leisure industry entrepreneur Mo Chaudry, who tells us why he credits Shropshire for setting him on the road to riches, and reveals how he got his life on track after making his fair share of mistakes in his early years in Telford.

When it comes to amazing

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# year of adventure



adventures, though, few stories in Shropshire can match the world's first iron-framed skyscraper.

After 100 years as a flaxmill, and another 100 years as a maltings, restoration work is now well under way to give the Ditherington landmark another 100 years of life as a home to creative companies.

We go inside the famous Shrewsbury building to discover just how close it came to collapse, and meet the team who are now lavishing it with a very specialised dose of TLC.

I'm sure I'm not in the minority when I own up to over-indulging over the festive period, so we also turn the spotlight on the importance of a healthy

workforce, which usually equals a happy workforce. And, to drag you away from the dark, dank nights and chilled winter air, a south Shropshire woman opens a window on her horseriding holiday business which has taken her to some truly stunning parts of the world.



There's a bumper helping of awards coverage this time too, including the second Dyslexia Awards, the 11th Energize Awards, and a look

at the finalists lining up for the 2018 Businesses For Children Awards.

We also dropped in to the launch of a brand new professionals network for the county, which has been borne

from the merger of Telford and Shropshire business partnerships.

And last but not least, we must say a happy 50th birthday to Telford, remembering some of the trailblazing businesses which have helped to make it one of the economic powerhouses of the West Midlands.

But this is your magazine. If there's a story you feel we should be celebrating, an issue we should be tackling, or a difficult question we should be asking, please drop us a line.

And remember, while our magazine is bi-monthly, our website is being constantly updated. If you're a Shropshire business with a story to tell, we want to help you to tell it.

**Carl Jones, Editor**



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*Brexit negotiations and the ongoing discussion of potential impact remain as uncertain today as they did 12 months ago*

# What does 2018 have in store for businesses?

By Carl Jones

**A**nyone seen the classic 1993 film *Groundhog Day*? Bill Murray stars as an ordinary working bloke who finds himself inexplicably living the same day over and over again.

Well we seem to be trapped in one of those scenarios right now. This time last year, we were speculating about what Brexit would mean for the Shropshire economy, coming to the conclusion it was too early to say, and we'd doubtless know much more in 12 months.

Yet here we are, a year on, and it seems we are really not much the wiser.

Talks are still yet to begin about what our trading partnership is going to look like when (or indeed if) we do leave the EU in April next year.

And this lack of a coherent direction with Brexit trade talks is being seen as far more serious in 2018 than it was a year earlier. The clock is ticking, and businesses need to know what the trading climate is going to look like when D-Day arrives.

Will we get tariff-free access to the European market? Will it be a Canadian or Norwegian-style package? Or might we run out of time, and pull out with no deal at all, relying on World Trade Organisation rules? For the many companies in Shropshire which import or export goods and services, there is a huge difference. Uncertainty is the enemy of business.



*Chris Greenough*

Nevertheless, Chris Greenough, commercial director at Salop Design & Engineering in Shrewsbury, is among many local bosses who have entered 2018 with a mood of optimism.

He says: "Not only have we seen one of the best years in terms of enquiries, sales and potential for UK manufacturing, but we have a renewed optimism and enthusiasm for the years to come.

"Brexit is a positive for us, and the only uncertainty is this current government and their ability to get the right deal. They need to unite, and get better at doing the day job,



*Nicole Gunter*

and with this will come a stronger position in the negotiations with Europe. We have, as a business, invested in our facility, people, and indeed the region.

"The new Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology in Bridgnorth is an employer-led, £4 million training hub that will allow businesses in our region to grow, allow us to raise GVA and help us truly tackle the skills gap.

"We are committed to our region and sector, and look forward to 2018 with a great sense of achievement and excitement."



*Raw material costs could put pressure on manufacturers as the Brexit situation continues to dominate the business landscape*



*Farmers might want to consider selling land as the year goes on*

International trade expert Nicole Gunter, managing director of Global Freight at Halesfield, Telford, believes a new export strategy for the UK must focus on investment to support smaller businesses in the post-Brexit era.

She is calling for the Government to review the practical and financial support on offer for SMEs in its export strategy, which is expected to be published in the coming weeks.

She is concerned that the Government's commitment to deliver 'better support for medium and larger business' could see smaller companies missing out.

"This review is urgently needed and I'm delighted to see promises in the industrial strategy to work with the private sector to ensure that the advice being given to exporters is good advice.

"This guidance will be vital as we leave the EU and while negotiations on new trade deals continue. But there is a swathe of small companies right across the country that are already exporting and they will also need better support to access high quality good advice and, of course, new markets too."

Nicole adds: "There's no doubt that businesses are already preparing for what

comes next, looking at developing new export markets outside of the EU, particularly with China, America and Australia.

"What we're also seeing is a shift in supply chain work. Where customers may previously have imported components from Europe, they are now looking for alternative suppliers. They are either developing new relationships outside of Europe or focusing on building a local supply chain, which is obviously an opportunity for those supply chain businesses in the UK."

Richard Sheehan, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, believes much of the business landscape for 2018 is likely to be a mirror image of 2017.

**“Where customers may previously have imported components from Europe, they are now looking for alternative suppliers”**

"With the ongoing sparring between the UK and the EU set to run and run, we can expect continued uncertainty which will directly impact on business confidence, investment decisions and economic growth," he says.

"However, we must say that we have witnessed on many occasions the amazing resilience and 'roll your sleeves up' mentality of our business community, as they make the most of what is available. It's just what business people do.

"As we passed through 2017 we were delighted to see and provide support for the significant amount of Shropshire goods and services being exported around the world. Many have gone to new markets outside the EU with the Middle East and Americas high on the activity lists."

He continues: "It is widely expected that business will come under increasing cost pressures through 2018 with the pound still weak against the Dollar and Euro. ▶

◀ “Raw material costs are high on the list of concerns for our businesses; as an example, paper costs have increased by 30% in the last 12 months, impacting on profitability and leading to price increases.”

With unemployment levels low and ongoing uncertainty for EU nationals impacting on recruitment of skilled labour, Mr Sheehan says it is highly likely that we will experience pressures on wage demands, further compounded by potential staff churn, all leading to higher business costs and impacting on inflation.

“We can expect our 2018 journey to deliver continued challenges around productivity. Government must do more to incentivise the use and development of technology to combat the expected deferred business investment fuelled by uncertainty.

“As the county’s chamber, we are well aware of the need for connectivity and collaboration. We will continue to be the catalyst that brings our businesses together as they seek out new opportunities and relationships.

“We have expanded our focus to sector specific events with our Manufacturing and Professionals Partnerships going from strength to strength, and 2018 will see us launch a number of technology-based projects that will enhance our offering and create economic wealth.

“Our policy work has never been more important, with our Quarterly Economic Survey feeding into Westminster making sure the voice of Shropshire business is heard, helping to shape Government policy of the future.

“Brexit - whatever the outcome of our



Richard Sheehan



Chris Pallett

negotiations - will significantly shape our economy for the foreseeable future, and the 52 accredited Chambers of Commerce are ready, willing and able to ensure Government doesn't lose sight of the unintended consequences on business that the wrong type of agreement can have. Accountability is key in this.

“We are committed to supporting the work of the Marches LEP and other contributors to our economy. Working in collaboration for the good of Shropshire and our economy, we will make sure that

we profile opportunities for support to our wider business community, making sure if it's available and if you need it you know about it.”

Many of the measures mentioned in Philip Hammond's November budget will have implications on the business community this year.

Valerie Hulme, group manager for apT, Telford & Wrekin Council's in-house commercial development consultancy, says: “The Chancellor said there would be new pressure to make land holders develop

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Amy Henson

sites, by deallocating sites in local plans, and a review of build outs, which is good news.

“We also think first-time buyer-led developments, where consent can be granted outside of local plans on the condition of a high proportion of homes offered for discounted sale or affordable rent, is an interesting approach which could bear fruit.

“There was an announcement that minimum housing densities, in urban areas are coming back, which can be a double-



IT will continue to drive business

edged sword because they don't always account for the subtleties of individual development schemes.

“Our biggest concern would be over the creation of a permitted development right to allow commercial buildings to be demolished and replaced by homes.

“There are a lot of factors around which can give rise to future problems if they are not dealt with appropriately, such as infrastructure and amenities, context and character and neighbouring property uses, which should be carefully considered.

“The loss of sites can also have a more strategic impact on the plan delivery, putting pressure on other locations to accommodate commercial sites. We eagerly await the consultations.”

Confidence is high at IT company Bespoke Computing, which has its headquarters at Stafford Park in Telford.

Managing director Chris Pallett says: “We have lots of project work booked into the first quarter of 2018 with a really good pipeline of business to follow that is building on a very successful 2017. Our team is expanding too with a new starter coming on board early in the new year, with plans to recruit for several new posts soon afterwards.”

Elsewhere, landowners and farmers in Shropshire with land or redundant farm buildings in rural areas are being urged to consider putting forward sites for employment development this year.

Shropshire Council is looking for an additional 156 hectares of employment land, and Amy Henson, a planning consultant with Berrys of Shrewsbury, says: “This is a massive opportunity for farmers and landowners to maximise property values.”

The preferred employment land requirement for Shropshire from 2016 to 2036 is for the development of around 300 hectares of employment development. Only around half of this is so far committed.

The suggested locations for employment development include 50 hectares in Shrewsbury, 14 in Shifnal, four each in Bridgnorth, and Ludlow, five in Albrighton, two each in Broseley, Wem and Church Stretton, one in Highley and Cleobury Mortimer, half a hectare in Much Wenlock – and a further 71 in rural areas. 



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# Try a bitesize course

**M**anufacturers across Shropshire are being urged to take advantage of a major upskilling opportunity that will help improve productivity and deliver more efficient workforces.

In-Comm Training is inviting firms to benefit from more than 50 bitesize courses that will be delivered at its academy in Shrewsbury.

Companies can save up to £1,500 per employee by taking part in short courses in lean manufacturing, maintenance diagnostics, electrical engineering, CNC Machining, the three disciplines of welding and Six Sigma.

There are also funded RTITB Forklift refresher licenses - with a bolt on NVQ - that are proving popular with employers, as the drivers can gain access to the National Operator Register for three years.

All of the courses will be delivered by a team of 20 experienced trainers, who have more than 300 years' combined experience in industry and access to some of the latest machinery, technology and automated solutions.

"We are continually talking about generating the pipeline of future engineers, but that's a dangerous game if we are not taking the same approach with upskilling our current employees," explained Gareth Jones, managing director of In-Comm Training.

"This is why we are really excited to be offering one of the largest selection of bite size courses in the UK...and better still our clients can tap into them without having to spend any money.

"The uptake in the first few weeks has been impressive and I'm sure this will grow as more and more manufacturers find out about it."

He continued: "It shouldn't be seen as something to do because it is free. Management teams need to ask themselves...do you want multi-skilled maintenance engineers? How can you



Gareth Jones (front middle) with the In-Comm trainers

embed a continuous improvement culture? Do your staff understand value stream mapping and process flow analysis for example?"

In-Comm is one of a select number of approved providers that can deliver the short courses, which are funded by the European Social Fund, through Skills Support for the Workforce. Funding is restricted to

companies employing under 250 employees and there is no maximum number of workers that can be put through the courses that tend to be 3.5 hours or half a day and delivered at the Shrewsbury academy.

In-Comm has also been a pivotal part of the launch of the £4 million Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology in Bridgnorth.

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# Haulage firm acquired

Whitchurch-based Grocontinental has been acquired by AGRO Merchants Group, Amsterdam

**S**hropshire haulage giant Grocontinental has been taken over by a fast-expanding Dutch organisation for an undisclosed sum.

The Whitchurch-based business is now owned by Amsterdam-based AGRO Merchants Group, which operates 63 facilities in 11 countries in Europe, North America, Latin America and Asia Pacific.

David Grocott and Linda Grocott, third generation owners of Grocontinental, continue to lead the business as joint managing directors.

"This transaction is the culmination of a process that for me began more than three years ago," said Carlos Rodriguez, chief executive of AGRO Merchants Group.

"When we founded AGRO in 2013, I quickly identified Grocontinental as the ideal potential partner in England to join our network. This is not just due to its market leading position, high-quality assets, and deep commodity expertise.

"I was most drawn to the culture and values of the Grocott family, their commitment to the local community, and the long-standing relationships with customers and employees. We could not be more pleased to welcome

Linda, David and the entire Grocontinental team to AGRO Merchants Group."

Grocontinental is the third significant investment by AGRO in the UK/Ireland, following the 2014 purchase of Castlecool and 2015 acquisition of the Sawyers Group.

In a statement, Linda Grocott and David Grocott said: "Joining AGRO Merchants Group is great news for Grocontinental. We are very proud of the progression and success we have achieved over the years and now we have an excellent opportunity to take the company into a new and exciting era.

"To move Grocontinental into a larger group is not a decision we have taken lightly. We have been very impressed with AGRO's ambitions, the strength and depth of its structure and expertise; and its respect for our 76-year family-owned business heritage. We are looking forward to being part of the future success of the group and continuing to grow our business at Grocontinental."

Established in 1941, Grocontinental provides cold storage and logistics services to the food industry with a particular expertise in the dairy and meat sectors.

It operates from a purpose-built 35-acre complex with a warehouse capacity of 197,000 pallets.



Linda and David Grocott believe the deal is a positive move and an 'opportunity to take the company into a new era'



Grocontinental's purpose-built 35-acre complex, providing a base for its cold storage and logistics services

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# Helping companies stay healthy, wealthy and wise



Andy Rigby of Posturite demonstrates stand-up desks at a seminar organised by Energize

As we move into another year with the usual resolutions to improve our health and fitness, **Chris Austin** talks to Shropshire employers who believe that the physical and mental wellbeing of staff is key to productivity and success

**Every Tuesday, at 9am, staff at Iscoyd Park gather for their weekly 'boot camp'.**

This lasts an hour and is run by a personal trainer friend of Phil and Susie Godsal, who own and operate the wedding and private hire venue near Whitchurch.

It is undeniably quite gruelling work, says wedding co-ordinator Will Jackson, but the gains are enormous. The group members are put through their paces with circuits and exercise routines, punctuated with little boxing sessions.

"The trainer is quite demanding, and it is definitely knacker, but it is a great way to stay healthy and have some fun in the process," says Will.

"It's good exercise, we all feel healthier and fitter as a result, and it is also fun for us all to do and therefore good for the spirit of the team.

"It is really a thank you from Phil and Susie to the staff but we all benefit from it."

The Godsal's are just one of many employers around the county who recognise the value of health and wellbeing in the workplace.

One of the largest employers in the region is Lyreco, the workplace solutions provider whose head office and national distribution centre is in Telford.

Peter Hradisky, is the managing director of Lyreco in the UK and Ireland, and he is no doubt as to the importance of a workforce which is fit of mind and body.

"Our people are undoubtedly our biggest asset and we know that a happy workforce is a productive one," he explains.

"It's critical that we provide our employees with as much assistance as possible to enable them to perform effectively for the business and help them to feel supported and valued individuals.

"While we can influence what happens at work, we understand that issues outside of work can affect their performance which is why we have created such a wide-ranging package of benefits and support.

"The social side of Lyreco is also very

important – it helps to build the community within the workplace and engage people as well as giving them an opportunity to socialise with colleagues outside of work and strengthen those relationships.

"People spend a large portion of their life at work and it's only right, as a responsible employer, that we do everything we can to invest in and support our workforce. Ultimately it pays dividends in retention, recruitment and staff commitment to the business."

So, what exactly do the bosses at Lyreco lay on for their staff in order to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of the workforce?

The answer is: a lot.

It starts with corporate gym memberships, private medical insurance, flu jabs and eye tests. Wellbeing days are organised whereby staff can get advice and guidance on diet, exercise and lifestyle choices, they can have mini health checks for blood pressure, BMI, and have discussions with health professionals on leading a healthy lifestyle.



*Pleydell Smithyman of Ironbridge taking part in the Active Advent challenge, pictured above and below*

Every new starter undergoes an assessment to ensure their desk set-up is appropriate for their needs with new equipment such as wrist supports purchased if necessary. Stress risk assessments are carried out where individuals highlight concerns at work.

Lyreco also has a network of occupational health providers who can assess an individual's personal and work related circumstances, and make suggestions on any supportive measures that the company can offer in easing an employee's feelings of stress.

But Lyreco takes a holistic approach to their employees' wellbeing, recognising that issues outside the workplace can affect productivity so it takes an active approach to helping staff through, say, difficult personal circumstances.

Productivity is a buzzword when it comes to this issue of wellbeing, and statistically the average worker has 6.6 days off sick every year, costing hundreds of pounds in lost output.

So claims Ben Harper, senior sports manager at Shropshire's county sports and physical activity partnership Energize.

"By supporting the health and wellbeing of employees, studies show that staff perform better at work, are more motivated, have increased job satisfaction and are less

likely to look for other jobs," says Ben.

"The key message we're trying to get across to businesses is if you're not doing any activity, do something . . . or if you're currently doing something, do a little more!"

One of December's initiatives was the Active Advent challenge when, instead of opening a chocolate-filled calendar, Energize presented a daily series of tasks aimed at local companies. It became quite competitive on social media as businesses took up the challenge.

**Wellbeing days are organised whereby staff can get advice and guidance on diet, exercise and lifestyle choices, they can have mini health checks for blood pressure, BMI, and have discussions with health professionals**

The Energize team, based in Shrewsbury, has also been funded by Shropshire Council's Help2Change to develop gentle exercise classes which improve balance and 'core stability' in older people, helping to reduce the risk of trips and falls.

Laura Kerrigan, senior business manager, explains: "We are working with local providers to create a wider range of appealing activities that will help maintain fitness, but will also be social and enjoyable."

"An enthusiastic network of instructors are in training, and they are looking forward to starting the classes in the spring."

Professor John Buckley, at University Centre Shrewsbury, is a leading academic in exercise, sedentary behaviour and cardiovascular health.

"Inactivity is now the most prevalent risk of heart disease, above other factors such as high blood pressure, diabetes, smoking, obesity, and high cholesterol," he says.

Even back in 1890, Shropshire's Olympic pioneer Dr William Penny Brookes was writing about the importance of workers allocating at least half an hour a day to 'bodily training'.

And Professor Buckley says: "Nothing has really changed. It is still advocated that we spend 150 minutes of exercise every week, to burn an extra 1,500 calories."

The message from experts and employers alike is clear – a healthy workforce is a happy and productive workforce, and no corner should be cut in achieving that goal . . . even if it does mean generating some perspiration along the way!



# Superfast business solution

**A** south Shropshire business which specialises in construction and facilities management services says it is reaping the commercial benefits of an upgrade to superfast fibre broadband.

Robin Guest, IT support at GPC74 Ltd, based near Cleobury Mortimer, said the new technology has transformed the way they work, enabling them to share information more easily and complete jobs more quickly.

As a result, the family-run business, which currently employs 13 people at its Upper Baveney Park headquarters, and a further 18 staff out and about serving rural client sites, is set for further expansion.

Mr Guest said: "Today's businesses are primarily concerned with communication and data, and being able to move that data around freely is a huge bonus. We believe having superfast broadband has the potential to open new doors and markets for us.

"We upgraded following the roll-out of the Fibre-to-the-Premises technology by Openreach, which meant we had the option of choosing a service with download speeds of between 80 and 300 megabits per second (Mbps)."



*Robin Guest, IT support at GPC74 Ltd, near Cleobury Mortimer, said the new technology has transformed the way they work, completing jobs more quickly*

The company, which offers secure industrial and office accommodation within its grounds for lease, is confident the availability of ultrafast fibre broadband at the site will encourage business and provide more jobs.

Steve Haines, managing director of next generation access for Openreach, said: "Fibre-to-the-premises technology is just one of the ways we can overcome

the challenges of reaching more rural businesses in remote areas like Cleobury Mortimer.

"High-speed broadband breaks down the barriers to doing business in the digital world.

"This helps to empower small businesses to find new markets, sell new products, try new models and compete on an equal footing with larger businesses."



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# Book is judged well by its cover

**R**ead all about it. A county firm of bookbinders played a key role in the production of a 2017 Book of the Year winner.

Ludlow Bookbinders, based at the Lower Barns Business Park in Ludford, bound the winning entry at the British Book Design and Production Awards – a publication called Havana.

The family-run company has been in business for 11 years, specialising in hand bound, limited edition cloth or leather bound books, with an international client base.

Havana was bound by the Shropshire firm



for the publishers, Leslie Gerry Editions.

Benedict Gosling, who handles sales and marketing, said: "There were 664 entries from publishers all over the country, who have their books produced by the best printers and binders all over the world, so to win was a tremendous achievement."

The judges said: "The beautifully crafted Havana book is in a class of its own. The dedication, time and effort put into producing this stunning book is what sets it apart...pure elegance."

## Dealership deals



*Hugh Strickland*

Shrewsbury law firm Aaron & Partners has supported Holdcroft Motor Group in the acquisition of a series of motor dealerships in the north of England.

Holdcroft has taken over Stockport and Oldham Hyundai and Oldham Mazda from the Vantage Motor Group.

Hugh Strickland, a partner in the Aaron & Partners corporate finance team, acted for Holdcroft in the deal, together with Aaron Vandermark and Iwan Williams.

He said: "This is incredibly exciting and significant both for Holdcroft and for the motor industry."

"We were delighted to be able to play a role yet again in extending the Holdcroft Motor Group's growing portfolio and helping the team work towards realising the company's fantastic growth potential."

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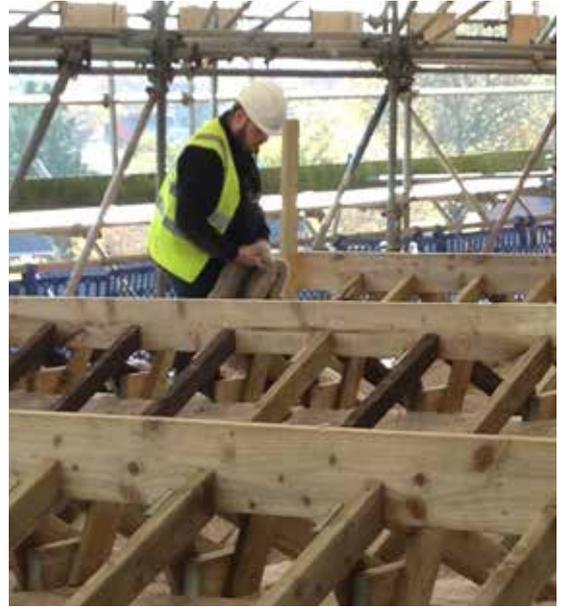
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*It's hard to imagine now, but the likes of the Empire State Building and the Burj Khalifa are descendants of Shrewsbury's historic flaxmill*



*A workman carries out remedial work on the roof of the historically important Ditherington structure*

# Holding on to a glorious past

By Carl Jones

**T**here's scaffolding everywhere. And I really do mean everywhere.

Miles of it. It's propping up external walls, internal walls, window frames, doorways, floorboards, stairways, and lots more besides . . . like the world's biggest Meccano kit.

And thank goodness that it is. For had the team at Historic England not stepped in when they did, Shrewsbury's historic flaxmill maltings might well have crumbled to dust by now.

From the outside looking in, not much seems to have changed over the past decade, but as soon as you don a hard hat and hi-vis jacket to step inside, you find a hive of so far largely unseen activity.

Some conservationists argue that this landmark building, which has towered over Ditherington since 1797, is more important to the industrial heritage of Shropshire than the Iron Bridge.

It is, after all, the world's first iron-framed 'skyscraper' which blazed a trail that the likes of the Empire State Building in New York, and the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, have since spectacularly followed.

And yet, for the past three decades, it has been the main player in a sad and sorry tale of abandonment, neglect, and spluttering false-starts. ▶



*A cross section of how the flaxmill could look when works are complete (above) and a concept for third floor office space (below)*





*Miles of scaffolding is propping up external walls, internal walls, window frames, doorways, floorboards, stairways and lots more besides*

◀ Now, thankfully, it seems to be umpteenth-time lucky, with a £28 million renovation project under way to turn it into a £1 million ground floor visitor centre, plus 24,000 sq ft of luxury office space above.

The five-storey mill was built at the end of the 18th century for visionary owners John Marshall, Thomas Benyon and Benjamin Benyon.

Back then, despite pushing the boundaries of established construction etiquette, it cost just £17,000.

For its first 90 years, it operated as a thriving flaxmill, bringing in flax from the fields of Shropshire and turning it into thread to be used for clothing.

Then, after a 10-year hiatus, it was reborn as an equally successful maltings, this time taking barley from the countryside to turn into ingredients for local breweries.

But since 1987, when the maltings closed down, the seven acre complex – which is home to no fewer than seven listed buildings – has stood derelict.

After a series of false starts from private investors, the site was bought back into public ownership around 2005 by what was then English Heritage.

Historic England has now taken over the freehold of the site, and is working closely with the Friends of the Flaxmill Maltings, and Shropshire Council, to give it a new lease of life.

Which brings us to why I'm standing above the roof trusses, with hard hat and fluorescent jacket, on a Shropshire Chamber of Commerce guided tour inside the grandfather of global skyscrapers. And why it's taken so long for restoration work to swing into action.



*An old marketing sticker from the early days of Marshall & Co's thriving flaxmill*

Since internal shoring up and renovation work began in June last year, much has been achieved, and the team have been keen to show off what they've been doing.

Alastair Godfrey the project lead on behalf of Historic England, says: "To put it politely, over the past 30-odd years, this building has had a history of failure.

"And yet to me, maybe rather controversially, I believe it is more important almost than the Iron Bridge.

"The bridge was the first to use iron on a very vast industrial scale, but what we have at the flaxmill is a quantum leap – from looking to use iron merely as a structural member, to using it for the construction of a whole building.

"Iron had been used for smaller components and individual columns of

previous buildings, but this was the first time someone had looked to create an entire building out of what was then a new material.

"It's completely home-grown; commissioned and designed here in Shrewsbury, and yet massively under-sold nationally.

"In fact, the flax mill is better known internationally than it is here in the UK."

He adds: "I'm well aware that since the site became redundant there have been a number of false dawns, and that people drive by and can't see anything has really happened for 10 years other than scaffolding holding up the external walls.

"There were three failed development attempts throughout the 1990s, and this was because developers who bought the site didn't realise the complexity of restoring such a building.

"This major restoration project, beginning with the main grade one listed mill, is now well and truly in progress."

So how is it all going to work, and what's the timescale?

Alastair says: "We are carrying out the work in two phases.

"The first phase is the structural repairs which will be completed by the end of 2018, and the second is the fit out of the main building.

"That will include an international quality interpretation and learning centre, plus a café, on the ground floor, which we will be giving to the Friends."

Historic England's vision is to see the upper four floors turned into a centre of excellence and collaborative hub for use by local creative businesses.



Some conservationists argue that this landmark building is more important to the industrial heritage of Shropshire than the Iron Bridge

Alastair points to statistics which show that eight million working hours a year are currently being lost by Shrewsbury people who are travelling to work in surrounding towns and cities such as Birmingham, Manchester, and Telford.

"If we were simply to create a co-working space here at the flaxmill which people were able to use just one day a week, that's still a massive 1.5 million of lost hours we could save.

"We see this very much as a plan to create a new business hub for Shrewsbury. It's not pie in the sky any more, it's actually going to happen. The keys should be handed over by the beginning of 2021."

Inside the building, the original cast iron pillars are still in an excellent state of repair, despite more than two centuries of diligent service. The same can't be said, though, about the cast iron horizontal beams which sit between each of the floors.

Richard Benjamin, administrator and support officer for the Friends of the Flaxmill Maltings, explains: "Cracks can be seen in many of the beams. Engineers think these cracks are historical – they probably came about in the first 10 or 20 years of the life of the building. However, they have still got to be dealt with."

Despite its reputation for cast iron innovation, there is also a lot of timber in the flax mill too. And this is another big problem for the renovation team.

Richard says: "There is a timber ring beam in the walls, and after 90 years of the wet maltings process, this has rotted. As a result, it is deflecting the weight to the outside of the walls, which is why you are able to see a lot of bulging. This is

happening quite a lot, and is why the whole building is scaffolded. The scaffolding is holding it up. Each side ties to the other, with metal needles taking the weight of the building while all of the repairs are going on.

"It has been presenting something of a nightmare to the builders, who are having to work in quite claustrophobic conditions."

Much of the strengthening work is concentrated, unsurprisingly, on the ground floor which bears most of the weight. All of the upper floor plates are being kept clear – apart from their trademark iron pillars – to meet listed building regulations. The original open-plan flavour of the building cannot be altered.

**“We see this very much as a plan to create a new business hub for Shrewsbury. It's not pie in the sky any more”**

A close look at the exterior of the main mill reveals signs of its dual identity.

When it was converted into a maltings, many of the original flaxmill windows were bricked up, and others were made smaller.

As part of the renovation, many of the bricked-up windows are being opened up – revealing some spectacular views - so that the completed scheme recognises both parts of the building's industrial past.

And matching the past with the present is no mean feat, because the bricks in the flax mill are all over sized. Why, I asked?

"Because back then, developers were taxed by the number of bricks they used in a new-build, so opted for bigger, and fewer."



Richard Benjamin, administrator and support officer for the Friends of the Flaxmill Maltings

◀ Even in the late 1700s, it seems sneaky tax dodges were clearly commonplace.

The kiln from its maltings days which sits at the end of the mill will be retained and restored as part of the restoration project, and the building's highest point – the tower and coronet created to mark Queen Victoria's diamond jubilee in 1887 – will be a public viewing point, offering spectacular views of Shrewsbury, The Wrekin, the Welsh hills and far beyond.

Steam engines were once housed at each end of the site, and the track where they used to run can still clearly be seen. Like all the historic storytelling quirks around the building, they will be retained.

Alastair Godfrey says: "The DNA of all the world's iron framed buildings comes right back to this site and we have to celebrate it. This should be a marketing person's dream.

"Our master plan for this whole seven-acre site is pretty much fixed. We are looking at a combination of commercial use in the main mill, residential use in the cross mill, and more residential space to the front and back of the site.

"But we are not talking about a high density residential scheme here. There are three Grade One listed buildings here, so what we do has to be of top quality, leaving a legacy for both Shrewsbury, and Historic England."

Back in the day, of course, most of the goods were shipped into the mill by water. The Shrewsbury and Newport Canal ran right alongside the building, and in a nod to this heritage, the route of this waterway will remain undeveloped.

**“The DNA of all the world's iron framed buildings comes right back to this site and we have to celebrate it”**

Who knows, if the canals trust succeeds in its ambitious bid to reopen the route, the way could be clear for water to again be flowing past the mill one day.

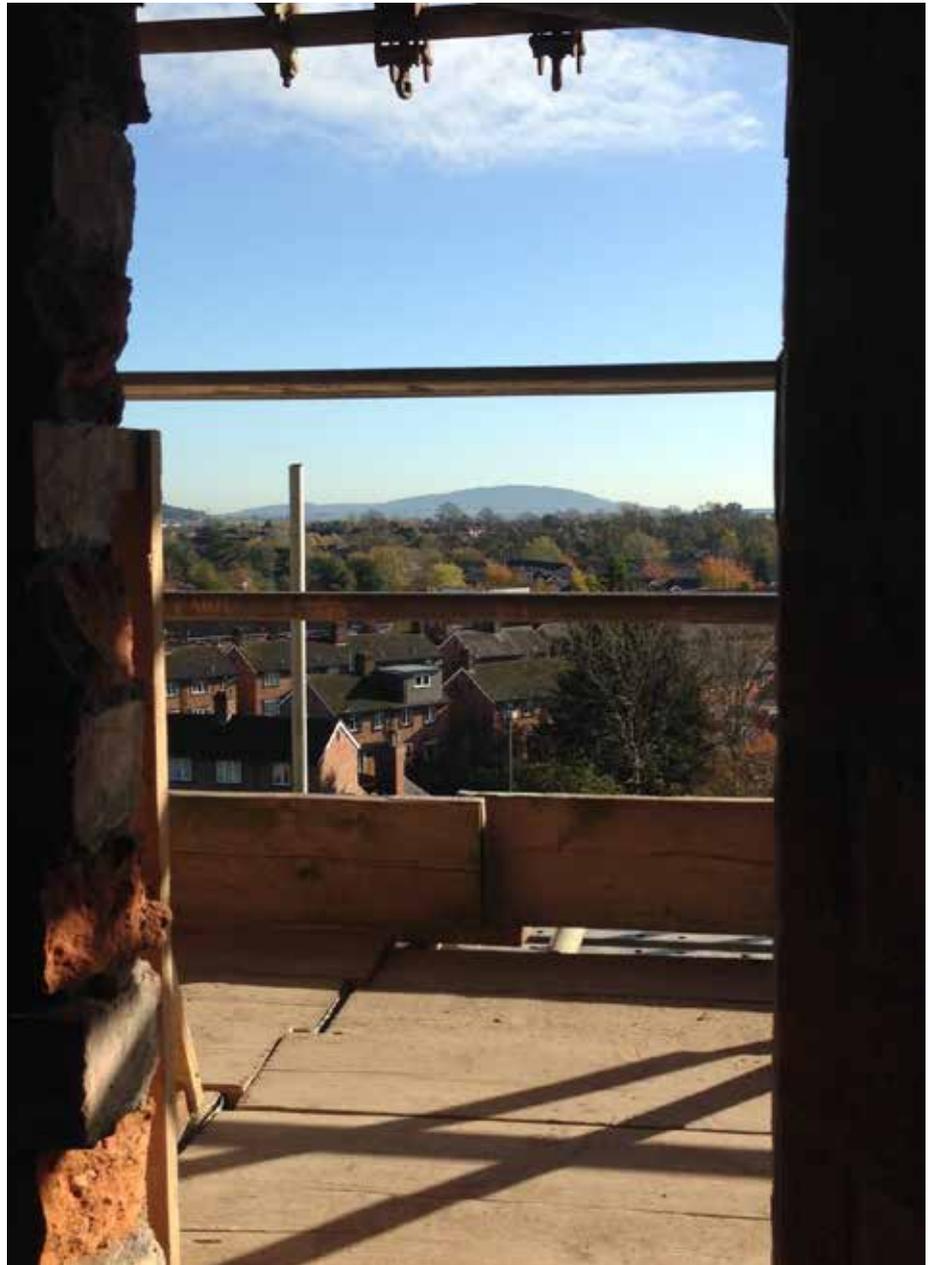
This year, though, the focus remains on making the main building stable, fitting fresh beams on the ground floor, and ensuring the external walls – which seem surprisingly slight when you see them up close, given the scale of the construction – are all safe and sound.

The team say there have already been a number of expressions of interest from companies looking to reserve office space in the office floors, but they're not marketing it yet. It's expected to be the second half of this year before they get round to appointing an official development partner.

For the Friends of the Flaxmill and Maltings, it's as if they've won the lottery. Indeed, Lottery money makes up much of the financial support package.

But for Richard Benjamin, there's one last thing which would be the cherry on top of the cake.

"As far as old photographs go, we only have them going back to its time as a maltings – nothing from its use as a flax mill. This is our Holy Grail; we can't believe they don't exist somewhere in an attic. Find one of those for us to provide the missing piece of the jigsaw, and you might just get a floor of the building named after you!"



Spectacular views are being restored when the once bricked-up windows are re-opened



A proud history – the building's various uses are celebrated at the flaxmill in Ditherington

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Richard Timmis and Jennifer Jones from Easyflow Ltd

# Shrewsbury Food Hub depot opens

**S**hrewsbury Food Hub, the charity which distributes unwanted food from supermarkets to the needy, has opened a new depot on the town's Centurion Business Park.

Organisers say it will allow the hub to double the number of people it helps.

The hub collected around 28 tonnes of food in 2017, and was in desperate need of larger premises.

Following a plea to local businesses, Morris & Company came forward to offer an empty industrial unit.

EasyFlow fitted a new floor and specialist printing company CMYUK offered to decorate the building.

Food Hub co-founder Katy Anderson said the support from local companies had been 'really heartwarming'.



Mark Walker from Booker with Katy Anderson and Simon Thompson of SFH



Julie Butcher from Morris & Co was among the guests at the official opening of the new depot



Sarah Neate CMYUK Ltd, Rob Shelley of Shelley Signs, Katy Anderson, Liz Lowe and Mayor Jane Mackenzie



Clare Weaden, Katy Anderson, Mayor Jane Mackenzie, Tony Parsons and Liz Lowe from Morris Property



*Anne Ost from Memorial Hall with Ali Thomas of Shrewsbury Food Hub*



*Elaine Newsom and Mike Paterson of Sainsburys pictured with Katy Anderson of Shrewsbury Food Hub*



*Liz Lowe from Morris Property with Katy Anderson from Shrewsbury Food Hub*



*Tesco Express Ditherington's Annable Crutchley, pictured here with Lisa Farley and Katy Anderson*



*From Memorial Hall John Morris, Katy Anderson, Robert Mills, Ali Thomas and Anne Ost*



*Rob Shelley of Shelley Signs, Katy Anderson, Sarah Neate and Kate Taylor of CMYUK Ltd*



*Liz Lowe with Rev Alex Aldous at the opening of the Shrewsbury Food Hub depot*



An artist's impression of the new Magna plant, just one success story in the investment scheme

The Craemer Group has benefitted

# Land of investment

**The Telford Land Deal, an investment scheme run by Telford & Wrekin Council, has attracted £236 million of investment to the area since April 2016.**

The initiative has sold £23 million worth of land in deals set to create 988 new jobs, as well as stimulating the construction of over 86,000 square metres of commercial floor space.

The council manages and invests in sites on behalf of landowner, the Homes and Communities Agency, acting to remove barriers to development and attract potential investors.

The team provides logistical assistance in improving site access, utility provisions and drainage, as well as helping to secure planning certainty prior to sale.

The Land Deal has proved instrumental in helping the region to secure record levels of Foreign Direct Investment, most notably a

multimillion pound injection from Magna International, a supplier of aluminium castings to nearby Jaguar Land Rover.

The firm's 250,000 square metre plant is due to open this spring, creating 300 jobs, and is thought to be one of the biggest, new overseas investments in the UK in the last ten years.

Other businesses supported through the deal include Austrian reinforced plastics supplier Polytec and German plastics and polymer specialist Craemer Group as well as expanding Telford businesses such as Wrekin Pneumatics and Midlands-based company Rosewood Pet Products which is moving into the borough.

Aside from supporting commercial sites, the Land Deal is also speeding up development of residential property, releasing six sites which are due to produce 597 new homes.

Shaun Davies, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council and ambassador for Enterprise Telford, the council's investment and business support service, said: "Our work with the Homes and Communities Agency has enabled us to prepare and sell sites direct to businesses, offering logistical assistance and advice that differentiates the borough from other potential destinations.

"We're building on our strengths in the automotive supply chain, polymers and manufacturing arenas, and seeing new specialisms emerging, particularly in areas such as digital and agritech.

"The huge increase in investment we've experienced from both UK and overseas firms is a clear sign of the strength of and growing confidence in Telford as a business destination. For local people this means more jobs, more homes and building a better borough for the future."

Karl Tupling, general manager for the Midlands for the HCA added: "The Telford Land Deal is giving Telford & Wrekin Council the opportunity to take responsibility for the marketing and disposal of remaining HCA land holdings.

"It has been fantastic to see the series of investments made helping to secure jobs and the development of housing in Telford. By building such a strong track record, the town has positioned itself as leading location for future investment."

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An aerial view of the new Rosewood Pet Products site

# Dust busting firm



*Nigel Hubbard, Peter Dawson, Ed Spires, James Stansfield, Di Spires and Bill Moran*

## Telford based industrial air filtration specialist Filtermist International has acquired dust removal expert Dustcheck Limited in a deal worth £2.3 million.

Dustcheck makes industrial dust collectors and industrial air filtration systems at its premises in Stoke-on-Trent.

Filtermist managing director James Stansfield said: "The deal will further strengthen our dust extraction offering –

particularly in large, centralised extraction systems. Filtermist has an extremely ambitious growth strategy and we are confident that this latest acquisition will play a key role in ensuring the company meets its targets."

Part of the Swedish Absolent Group, Filtermist International sees acquisitions are a key factor in planned growth.

"Finding a suitable business with a similar ethos to Filtermist's was very important," said Mr Stansfield. "When we started looking at Dustcheck as a potential acquisition for Filtermist it became apparent that there are a number of synergies."

## A prestigious appointment helps cement links overseas

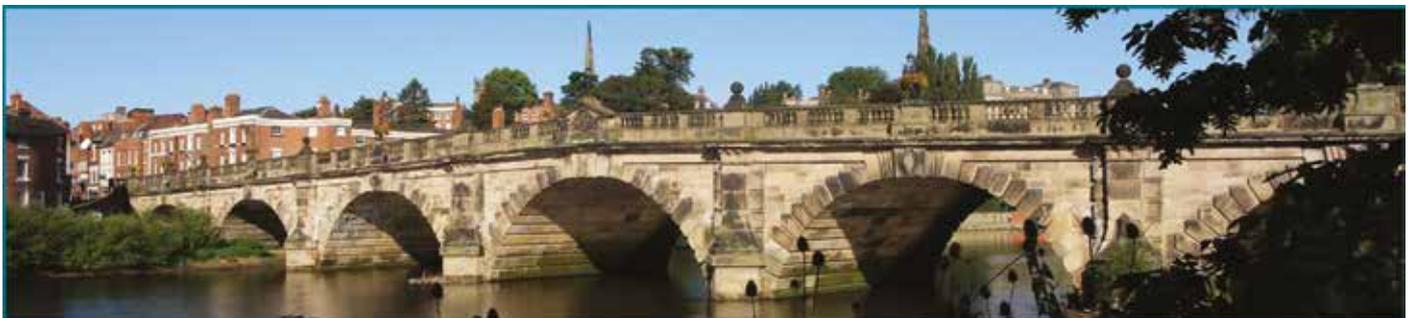
The director of Shrewsbury-based fine art auction house Halls has been appointed chairman of an association that has established strong links between regional auctioneers in the UK and the Asian art market in China.

Jeremy Lamond is a founder member and former secretary of the Association of Accredited Auctioneers (AAA), which brings together 20 regional auction houses from across the country.

It has opened channels for the sale of antiques from the UK to the East by increasing trust and confidence and working together to overcome language barriers and streamline bidding and paying procedures.

"It is a privilege and honour to be elected chairman of this prestigious group of regional auctioneers," said Mr Lamond.

"By building links with China through the AAA, we aim to develop the Asian art market, ensuring that our sellers reach the widest possible audience and achieve the optimum price for their items."



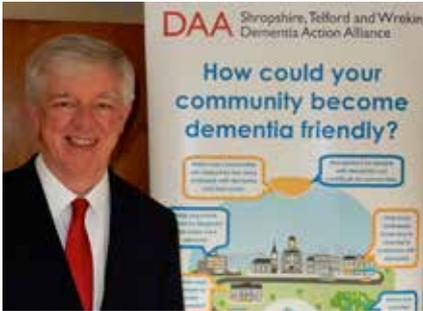
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Information worker for the Alzheimer's Society, Phil Gillam, has been raising awareness in Newport

## An awareness of dementia

Newport has been nominated to become the first Dementia Friendly Town in Shropshire, by the Alzheimer's Society.

A number of councillors attended a presentation by Phil Gillam to gain a better understanding of the proposition.

"We now have more than 60 Newport shops and businesses on board," says Phil who is an information worker for Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Alzheimer's Society.

"I'm recruiting shops and businesses at the rate of about five or six each week, which is wonderful as I am only in town one day a week."

Newport Town Council is supporting the aspiration of the Alzheimer's Society to create in Newport a Dementia Alliance Association (DAA).

# Join forces to grow business

Members of the **M**Thomas Telford Arm of Business Network International (BNI) passed £240,000 of referrals in the past 12 months.

BNI was set up with the intention of providing a positive, supportive, and structured environment for the development and exchange of quality business referrals. It does so by helping individuals build personal relationships with other qualified business professionals.

"BNI Thomas Telford is a dynamic, committed group of business people who know how to refer business to each other," says Zoe Day of the The Small Marketing Company, one of its current members.

"It has open categories for individuals who will bring enthusiasm and integrity to the weekly meetings, taking place Thursday mornings from 6.45am at the Ramada Hotel, Telford.

"Just one person per professional



Roger Ashford, current president of Thomas Telford BNI welcomes new member Suzie Oulton to the group

specialty is allowed in each group. If your category isn't currently represented, then visit a meeting and lock out the competition! Go along for the meeting and stay for the referrals!"

Latest members to join the group of widely varying businesses are Gail McKillop from business development specialist Good2Great and Suzie Oulton of utilities sales specialist Utility Warehouse Discount Club.

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**In the latest of our Big Interview series, we talk to **MO CHAUDRY** about the valuable lessons life threw his way...**

# MIGHTY MO - THE PATH TO SUCCESS

By Carl Jones

**I**t was when Mo Chaudry was sweeping floors at the GKN factory in Telford that he had his big lightbulb moment.

"I thought, I don't want to be doing hard manual work for the next 30 or 40 years. I need to make a life for myself, and the only way to achieve that is to buck up my ideas."

At that stage, teenage Mo had failed most of his exams at Wellington Grammar School, and watched as his father's grocery business in Bank Road had run into financial trouble.

As a result, the family had to give up the shop and downsize into a two-up two-down mid terraced house in Watling Street, with no inside toilet, and Mo remembers: "It was all a bit of a shock to the system."

"Dad got a job at GKN in the wheel shop, and my elder brother also worked there as a forklift driver. They got me an industrial cleaning job there, and that summer I worked pretty much full time in the wheel shop."

"It's not an exaggeration to say that it really changed my life. I decided that I needed to move on to sixth form, take my education more seriously and have a go at making something of myself."

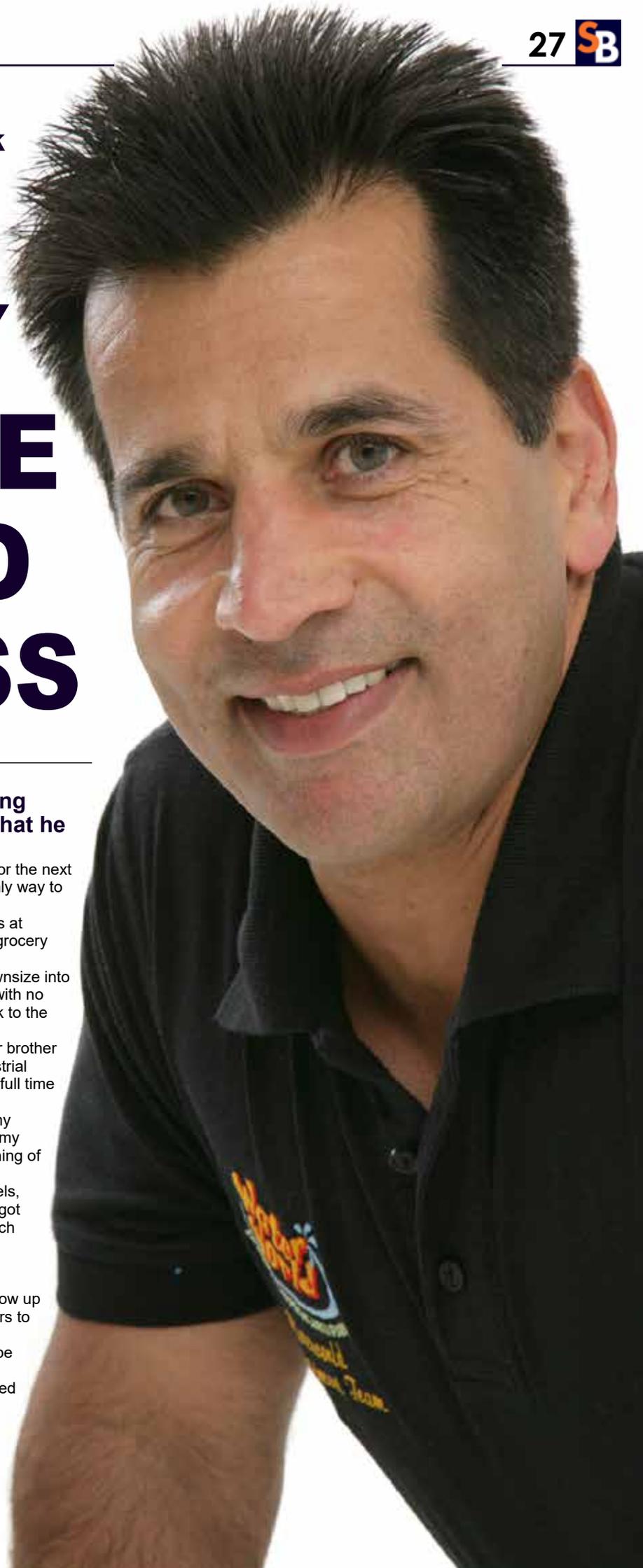
And have a go is what he did. After retaking his O Levels, and taking A Levels at New College Telford, he eventually got the offer of a sports degree at Staffordshire University, which set him on his way.

"Moving away from home, I grew up very quickly, both emotionally and academically," he remembers.

"Mixing with different people gave me the chance to grow up and assess what I was all about. I needed those three years to grow emotionally."

"It made me realise I had to work for things; you can't be a victim, you have to fight for what you want and fend for yourself. My time at university gave me all the tools I needed to do the things I've done."

In 1983, Mo met Ann, the woman who was to become his wife, when he was living in a £10-a-week bedsit in Tunstall, struggling to find enough 50p pieces to keep the electric meter running. They have been happily married since 1987. ▶





*This year certainly looks set to be a milestone for Mo. His flagship Waterworld complex in Stoke on Trent is being upgraded and expanded.*

◀ He says: “I was doing door work at nightclubs at this time to earn some extra money in places like Shrewsbury and Stoke, and I told her when I met her ‘I’m going to make a fortune for us, watch this space’. Deep down I wanted to make a big name for myself. I had a hunger for it.”

By the age of 30, Mo Chaudry had indeed made his first million as a financial adviser and property investor, and has since expanded into the health and fitness, leisure and tourism sectors.

He’s also the mentor and manager of the current World’s Strongest Man, Eddie Hall. In fact, Mo was the man who sponsored him to become full time, allowing him to focus on achieving his ambitions.

At the age of 57, he is now one of the richest and best known Asian businessmen in the UK, with an estimated fortune of around £100 million. But he’s by no means done yet.

“I feel like I’m really on the cusp of something right now,” he says. “I’m more ambitious than I’ve ever been. It’s not just about money any more – it’s not been for a long time. It’s about success, fulfilment, and feeling that I am reaching my full potential and helping others along the way.”

This year certainly looks set to be a milestone for Mo. His flagship Waterworld complex in Stoke on Trent is being upgraded and expanded in a £10 million investment to include two new rides, indoor golf, a fitness club, and trampoline park.



*Mentor and manager – current World’s Strongest Man, Eddie Hall, was sponsored by Mo, allowing him to focus on achieving his ambitions full time*



Mo's newly acquired indoor golf brand, Adventure Golf, is expanding across the United Kingdom

He bought it from The Rank Group in 1999, and turned the loss-making operation into a thriving and profitable business which attracts some 400,000 visitors a year. That figure is expected to rise to 750,000 when the expansion is complete.

Elsewhere, his newly acquired indoor golf brand, Adventure Golf, is expanding across the UK. Mo plans to plough £20 million over the next five years into launching 20 new centres across the UK, in key towns and cities.

He already also owns and operates the highly successful M Club Spa & Fitness Clubs in Staffordshire, plus significant property interests via investment firm M.I.C Investment Group.

But that's not all. Mo has just announced a new equity investment to take a majority stake in a major UK fitness company with a global reach, which runs football and leisure centres as well as building public leisure facilities and manufacturing gym kit. Combined, all of Mo's interests employ around 550 people, with a turnover heading towards £60 million.

Mo says: "My hope, and my target, is that we will be able to merge these groups very soon, and then work towards a stock market listing within the next five years."

It's all a far cry from the day, in the early 1970s, when a young Mo first arrived in Shropshire with his parents, and three siblings, looking to make a life for themselves.



The highly successful M Club Spa & Fitness Clubs in Staffordshire are owned by Mo

◀ “When we moved to the UK from Pakistan, we originally set up home in Luton, but my father had the opportunity to buy into a business, so we packed up and headed to Telford.

“My parents were stereotypical immigrants, energetic and ambitious, wanting to prove themselves and make a good life for themselves and their family.

“I remember my first sight of Shropshire as we drove along the old A5 towards Wellington. It just looked like a collection of old factories, like something out of Peaky Blinders. I thought to myself, what the heck have we come to?

“But we set up what seemed to be a very successful family business, Iqbal and Sons, and we lived above the grocery shop. It was a real family affair, with mum making the samosas and me and my brothers working there too.

“I was naturally good with numbers, so even though I wasn't the oldest child, I was first in the pecking order when it came to running the tills.

“At that time, there were very few Asian people in Shropshire, and it was tough to fit in. I was bullied in my younger years, but our family wasn't the sort to turn the other cheek – I believe you have to fight for what you get.”

On his schooling at that time, he recalls: “When I was at the grammar school, I was deluded. I thought I was cleverer than I was, and didn't do well because I didn't knuckle down like I should have done.

“I remember starting in top maths class, where the standard was too high for me.

“To this day I don't know how a slide rule works, but I didn't have the bottle to tell the teacher I didn't know how to use it. So although I was rebellious in some ways at that time, I was timid in others.”

Mo credits that time he spent doing a different kind of maths – totting up prices behind the till at the family business - for teaching him one of his most important lessons.

“Everything we do is about people. If you can connect with people, it will set you in good stead for business, and life. Dealing with different people in the shop at the age of just 13 or 14 gave me a very early opportunity to discover customer relations. I managed to develop that skill-set, and it set me up for life.

“Emotional intelligence is essential in business. My generation had it, this generation doesn't, so if you do find a young person that does have it, they are a gold nugget.

“Getting to know someone's name and paying attention to the person, not just the job they are doing, is vital in my opinion.”

Mo has never forgotten the role Shropshire played in making him the success story he is today – and he's now keen to put something back.

His mother still lives in Wellington, and Mo is a sponsor of the town's boxing club, helping to support and mentor up-and-coming Team GB hopefuls.

He's also offered his services as a mentor for students at the new 7th Form at Telford College, where he studied all those years ago.

Sport has always been a big part of Mo's life. He played cricket for Shropshire, and had trials with first-class county Warwickshire. You sense it's a source of frustration that he never quite made it at the very top level – after all, he's not accustomed to failure.

*Mo Chaudry says emotional intelligence is essential in business*





*"It is very difficult to appreciate how difficult it was for an Asian person making their way in a place like Shropshire in the 1970s" – Mo*

He appeared on Channel 4's intriguing Secret Millionaire series some years ago, where a rich business person goes under cover, living on benefits, in the hope of finding people they wish to help.

Mo ended up handing out £30,000 to deserving causes in Leeds who just needed a lucky break – and despite the meagre allowance he was given to live on during the experiment, he still managed to save a few pennies. A sign of that shrewd business sense coming through again.

"We are all human; we learn from our mistakes and experiences, and sometimes just need a chance" he says.

"When I was working as a doorman at places like Tiffanys in Shrewsbury, I would be the only Asian bouncer, so some people targeted me.

"On one occasion I retaliated. I felt I was only defending my position, but ended up spending a night in the cells, and being charged with causing actual bodily harm.

"In the end, the case collapsed because they were thugs and I'd never been in trouble.

"But my name got into the paper, the university found out, and there was a concern that my antics could bring the organisation into disrepute."

Mo could have been expelled. The reason he wasn't was down to one man; the principal at the time, Keith Thompson.

"He told me he had the power to make or break me, but felt that I had all that energy and potential which I was just misdirecting. He decided to give me a chance to redeem myself. Who knows what would have happened if he had made a different call."

A quarter of a century later, in 2008, Mo received an honorary degree from the university, and among the dignitaries on stage was the very same Keith Thompson.

"He stood up and applauded, saying he remembered everything about me because of the way I was - always challenging things and pushing everything to the limit. He told me he was so proud of what I had done with my life. I'll always be grateful to him for giving me the benefit of the doubt."

Mo adds: "It is very difficult to appreciate how difficult it was for an Asian person making their way in a place like Shropshire in the 1970s.

"For every one of me there were 97 or 98 others who would fall by the wayside, even though they had just the same capabilities. It's to do with mindset. Change that, and you can change your life.

"I believe that it's very important for people like me to tell our stories and to the current generation, which is why I'm keen to share my experience with my old Telford College now.

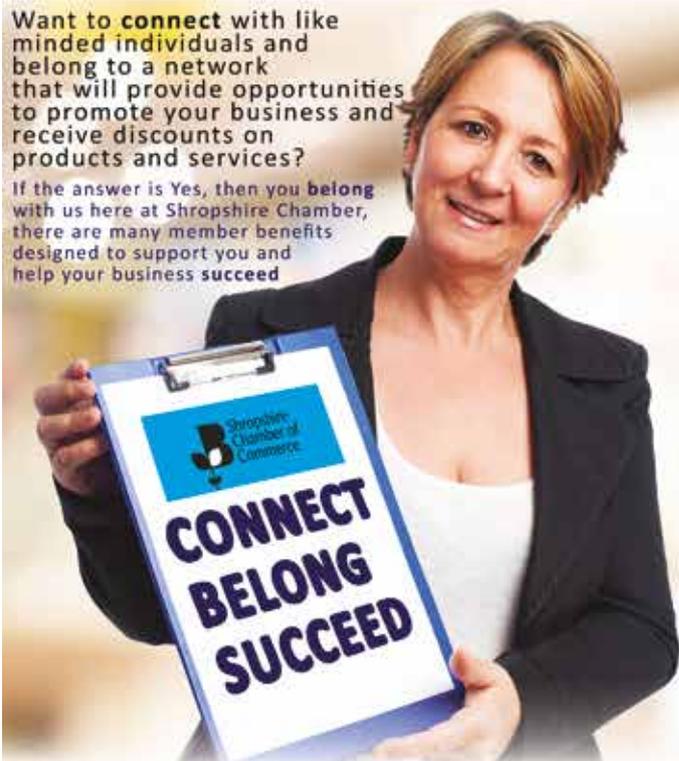
"If I was a young man today, white, black or brown, and thought 'this guy was us, once upon a time' that has real gravitas. You don't get more powerful than that." 

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# New year brings fresh challenges



**P**ersonally - and on behalf of the Federation of Small Businesses - I would like to take this opportunity to wish you all a happy and prosperous new year.

Though while we welcome in the new year, I am conscious that we also usher in a number of challenges, and opportunities. All of which need to be addressed as a matter of increasing urgency.

By way of context, figures from the Office for National Statistics show that the number of small non-financial firms grew 9% to 2.4 million during 2017. This serves as a timely reminder that the success of the UK economy depends on its small businesses.

So now that we are into 2018, I hope that we will see new actions to support this growing community of wealth creators. After all, against a backdrop of rising prices, flagging consumer demand and Brexit uncertainty, small business owners are in need of all the support they can get.

For example, small firms are looking for an end to the business rates chaos that's engulfed them last year.

Inflation is running above target at around 3%, so we need support for the UK's small firms as they battle rising costs and flagging consumer demand.

The Bank of England is now starting to increase interest rates, so firms could become even more reluctant to seek finance for growth, hampering their long-term output.

It is also worrying that confidence among small retailers has been in negative territory for some time.

Meanwhile, the continuing trade deficit also shows that work needs to be done to encourage the UK's small businesses to trade overseas. In fact, Federation of Small Businesses research shows that just one in five small businesses currently exports – but that with the right support that figure could double.

Plus, of course, we have Brexit to deal with. The focus must now shift to the UK's future trading relationship with the EU and the rest of the world.



*Just one in five small businesses currently exports – but with the right support that could double*



*The Bank of England is now starting to increase interest rates, so firms could become even more reluctant to seek finance for growth, hampering their long-term output*



*Transition is key to a successful Brexit*

There must be no cliff-edge moment on Brexit day, but instead an orderly, time-limited transition period so that small firms only have one set of rule changes.

The final deal must have as few barriers to trade as possible. That includes clarity about the rights of EU citizens in the UK and vice-versa.

FSB has pushed both the UK and EU to agree a low-cost, simple registration system, because as we leave the EU, small businesses will need to continue to be able to find the workers and skills that they require now and in the future.

These are all, but by no means the only, big issues that need to be tackled in 2018 and beyond.

I am pleased to report that FSB has the ear of Government and we will continue to be a constructive, if challenging partner as the UK determines its domestic and overseas business and trade policies.

The 5.7 million small businesses that make up more than 99 per cent of the UK's business stock rightly expect this to be the case. I am determined that we will not let them down

● *Ray Hickinbottom is the FSB Shropshire and Regional Chairman*

# Global deals for firm

**B**ulldog Security Products of Much Wenlock has gone truly global, with its most recent deals being completed with companies in Romania, Canada and Tanzania.

The company is a market leader in providing security products across commercial leisure and domestic sectors, to keep both people and property safe.

Managing director Ian Jordan said:

"Crime knows no borders and as the ingenuity of the criminal continues to develop then so does the call for our help and we have to ensure we remain a step ahead in this never-ending battle.

"We are in the enviable position of having a full order book and an increasing number of enquiries are coming from abroad.

"Some of the countries we have exported to include France, Belgium, Holland, Malta, Italy, Ireland, Canada and the United States. We have also supplied to Saudi Arabia and Dubai, and most recently to Romania and Tanzania.

"Our products have been used in Dubai and Saudi to prevent unauthorised parking outside shopping malls and the like. We have also supplied to the naval bases."

Closer to home, Bulldog says it has also



*Managing director Ian Jordan of Bulldog Security Products*

seen a boom in sales of GPS trackers after a spate of thefts of sought-after vehicles including Land Rover Defenders across the country.

Mr Jordan said: "Last year a Defender was stolen from the car park of Newport Show and we had people coming to us then and a recent appeal went viral on social

media about a Defender being stolen, and we had another spike in sales.

"The tracker allows the owner to see in real time where that vehicle is.

"It can also be moved around so unlike ones fitted at time of manufacture the thieves won't know where to find it to attempt to remove it."

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

Anonymous



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*A design from one of the feasibility studies for a hospital retail area*

# Architect has designs on healthcare sector

**C**reating nuclear hot labs and a 'James Bond' style HDU unit to keep infection out are just two of the projects driving a Bridgnorth architect's growth in the healthcare sector.

Johnson Design Partnership, which employs eight people at its Station Lane headquarters, has completed over £6 million of high profile medical contracts in the last 18 months by making historically sterile places more welcoming to the public.

The firm has been brought in by NHS Trusts, hospitals and private medical surgeries across the UK to help them create spaces that deliver much more than just functionality, including upgrading the patient experience, developing revenue-generating retail units and reassuring waiting rooms.

Founder Vic Johnson, says: "You have to really get under the skin of the healthcare sector if you are going to be truly successful within it and that's something we've tried really hard to do.

"Our team spends a lot of time finding out exactly what is needed to fulfil their operational requirements, such as infection control and simple ways of how we can help them do their jobs more easily.

"We've listened, questioned and taken all of this information in and then put it into what we do best...creating unique designs that bring buildings to life. It's an approach that seems to be working."



*At the new housing scheme, from left Robert Davies of Bridgnorth Housing Trust, Matt Spinks and Richard Coufts of architects Johnson Design Partnership*

Johnson Design Partnership has been selected for a variety of contracts, including a feasibility study for a groundbreaking garden route at a hospital in the capital.

The design involved used stack travelators to transport people to 'airport style departure lounge' waiting spaces and tapping into nature to evoke a sense of calm and well-being.

"Healthcare projects carry a lot of technical, stringent requirements; a bit like the normal rules we adhere to but with 'bells on'," added director Matt Spinks.

"The next big opportunity we see is to reinvent more historically sterile places into

health campuses that guide, reassure and facilitate, rather than merely locations that just function."

Meanwhile, a £2 million affordable housing scheme, which has been 30 years in the pipeline, has been completed in Bridgnorth.

Spinners Court has been handed over from Johnson Design Partnership to owners Bridgnorth Housing Trust.

Matt Spinks said: "As a Bridgnorth firm we were delighted to be able to design such a desperately needed development, providing high quality, affordable homes for local people."



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S O L I C I T O R S

# New town celebrates its golden anniversary



**It's a golden year for Telford, as Shropshire's 'new town' celebrates its 50th birthday.**

From Teletubbies to tanks, polymers to printers, and the world famous Aga Rayburn ovens, the diverse and dynamic business community has been the beating heart of its success.

Named after the famous civil engineer Thomas Telford, the town celebrates its official golden anniversary on November 29, but there are lots of commemorative events going on throughout the whole year.

They include a Big Top in Telford Town Park in August, with two weeks of five star entertainment including Russell Watson, Dara O'Briain, Al Murray, and Britain's Got Talent winners Collabro.

**“The first big Japanese company in town was photocopier giant Ricoh, in 1987. Others soon followed including Epson, Makita, and Denso.”**

It's all a far cry from the day, back in 1968, when the Government declared that Dawley New Town, as it was then known, was to have its boundary extended to create a 'new town' taking in the likes of Oakengates and Wellington.

With much of the land made up of reclaimed mining sites, construction began on building a central shopping area, and in 1973 the first big name retailers moved in. Hands up who remembers the arrival of the French hypermarket Carrefour?

Business wise, three major industrial estates sprung up. First, Halesfield, then Stafford Park, followed in the early 1990s by Hortonwood, and the town became a focal point for the polymer sector. As a growing town taking in overspill from the West Midlands, and new housing estates



*Telford as it was (above), and Telford as it is now (below). Pictures: [www.telford50.co.uk](http://www.telford50.co.uk)*



springing up rapidly, the ready availability of labour was a big plus for manufacturers.

With the help of some significant grant aid as an enticing carrot, international businesses were also quick to recognise the benefits of Telford's central location for their UK base.

The first big Japanese company in town was photocopier giant Ricoh, in 1987. Others soon followed including Epson, Makita, and Denso. Today, the town still has one of the largest concentrations of Japanese and Taiwanese businesses in the UK, sitting alongside long established names like GKN.

Some of Telford's flagship businesses from those early years have sadly fallen by the wayside, like the old Ever Ready factory in Dawley, and just a few weeks ago the Coalbrookdale Company foundry in the Ironbridge Gorge.

But exciting new investments are still

coming in. The new 225,000 sq ft factory for Cosmas Castings, part of Magna International, at the T54 park is one of the largest new manufacturing projects in the town for years.

So there's much to celebrate. Telford & Wrekin Council is driving a series of commemorative events for the golden anniversary, and has set up a dedicated website. [www.telford50.co.uk](http://www.telford50.co.uk), and a Telford50 facebook page.

The council says: "Telford is an ever evolving and developing town in the West Midlands which continues to make its mark as a place of innovation, invention and technology harking back to its industrial heritage and significant history.

"Telford has drive, ambition and energy and we want to highlight and celebrate the town's exceptional momentum and our exciting future as a great place to live, work in or to visit."



*A stunning vista from an unusual viewing platform, in the Azores*



*Botswana Macatoo - splashing through exotic landscapes*

# Thrilling adventures taken on horseback

By Gill Guest

**W**hen the hedges tower over the lane and a bristle of grass appears between your wheels like the dorsal stripe on a donkey, you know you're heading into deepest, darkest Shropshire.

To Neen Savage, to be precise, the south Shropshire home of successful holiday business 'In The Saddle'.

The lane plunges beneath an old railway arch, stone built and trailing ivy, and shudders over the River Rea on a bridge that looks as if it came out of a Meccano set. A large barn conversion, otherwise known as 'the office', appears on the far side of two pony paddocks.

Company founder, Olwen Law, is in the barn's glass walled conference room. To one side of her, an entire wall is papered with an enormous map of the world. The map gives a clue to the scope of the company's current operations: 39 countries, 85 destinations, customers spread across the globe.

Olwen, just back from a family wedding in New Zealand, is looking tanned and relaxed. She started In The Saddle single-handedly, way back in the winter of 1996.

"I took a stand at the Adventure Travel Show," she recalls, and grimaces. It seems all did not go according to plan.

The fledgling company's holiday brochures – then a simple four-page A4 leaflet – had been printed in Olwen's home country of Ireland and got stuck in the snow. ▶



*Olwen Law at the Shropshire base of holiday business In The Saddle, situated in Neen Savage*



*Iceland has become a popular destination for holidaymakers travelling with In The Saddle*

◀ “So I had an expensive stand booked, and no brochures,” she explains. A tense moment.

Her new business venture might have met with a snowy end right there. However, she displayed the tenacious spirit necessary for any successful new business owner, battled to get the brochures out of the snowbound warehouse, and to the show.

After handing out the brochures, she took 20 bookings. *In The Saddle* was up and running.

It had not been Olwen’s lifelong ambition to run a riding holiday company. Raised on a farm outside Belfast, her first pony was a Dun Connemara called Seamus. That might seem idyllic, but she grew up at a time when Belfast was considered one of the most dangerous cities in the world, in the midst of the Troubles.

After studying economics at the university there, she joined Arthur Andersen, then one of the premier accountancy firms in the UK, moving first to Dublin, then London.

After a masters degree in organisational behaviour, in which she studied the psychology of why people work, she became responsible for career development and staff retention at Arthur Andersen. She loved this job. But ...

“One of the courses I used to teach was a one-day programme on career development.

“We used to get people in to think about what it was they wanted to do with their lives. And they would draw pictures, and do lots of imaging, and try to imagine themselves in five years’, 10 years’ time.

“The idea being that if they could see where they wanted to go, and could make a plan for that, they would stay with the company for a couple more years.

“And the more I did that course, the more I realised that I wasn’t doing what I really wanted to do.

“I would put some imaging together, and



*The offices in Neen Savage, buried deep in beautiful south Shropshire countryside*

think about the things that I really liked, and it came down to three things. One was that I liked riding and horses.

“The second was that I liked to travel – I always did like to get on a plane and go somewhere – and the third thing was photography.

“I couldn’t really see what I was going to do using those three things. And literally, one day, on a train I remember, in Manchester going somewhere, I just decided I would set up a travel business.”

Olwen was pretty certain it would be a riding holiday business, but since this was in the days before the internet, researching this idea meant getting on a plane.

Her first research trip took her to Montana, a place that she’d always wanted to visit, and to a variety of ranches.

“They were extremely generous – I had my niece with me – and we stayed in quite a few places.

“Some of them, who we met that summer, we still work with now,” she says, proud to have established back then what would turn out to be a long-term business relationship.

Ireland ... Iceland ... Spain ... destinations were added, thick and fast. After meeting and marrying her geologist husband James Sales, the pair spent an idyllic three weeks honeymooning in South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana.

“We visited Ant’s Lodge, which was merely a concept at that time, and spent time at Macatoo in the Okavango Delta in Botswana. It was there that I really fell in love with horseback safaris,” Olwen explains.

With the addition of James, the business now had four employees. It was rapidly growing out of the converted garage they were using at their home in Hampshire. They began to search for new premises.



*Prior to the internet, Olwen would travel all over the world, researching potential trips*

"We had signed up with agents all over the country. We'd been looking from Devon to Staffordshire, and we'd come to Shropshire for the weekend to view a number of properties," Olwen says.

"This one was last on the list. It was after 6pm, it was quite dark, and we were tired, and we nearly didn't bother."

She laughs, horrified.

They're so settled here now, with Reaside Farm home for three generations – Olwen and James, their two children and James's mother as well. The idea, that they might have 'not bothered', and missed such a gem, is unthinkable.

"We came up the drive and fell in love with the place immediately," Olwen says.

A large barn was converted to house the office.

With more space, the business continued to grow. More destinations, and more employees. They now employ 14 staff.

"We were at 12 but we've just taken on two new people." They only advertised one vacancy but Olwen thought: "It's such a lot of work, interviewing, that if you get two good people, just go for two!"

"We've probably taken on somebody every two years and we haven't lost many. We need a flow through, so that everyone can progress a little bit more."

Olwen is still applying the career development principles she learned back at Arthur Andersen. "It's the way we find it works best, for a couple of reasons really. One is that if you were doing the same job forever, you'd get very bored.

"And the other is, the senior consultants, who have more experience and more knowledge of a wide range of destinations – I want them talking to the client who's doing a very complicated itinerary, or who's maybe taking a big group or organising a high profile holiday.

"But the only way they can do that is if their time is freed up in other ways. So



*Bahia beach, Brazil, is perfect for a gallop across the sand*

I need new people coming in, learning the ropes and doing the straightforward bookings, which they do with 10 times more enthusiasm because for them it's all new.

"We find that everyone stays more energetic and enthusiastic, when there is this range of responsibilities."

Every customer is given the opportunity to provide comprehensive feedback on their holiday experience. And many do, describing everything from how much they valued talking to staff who had experienced the rides and destinations they were considering, to the standard of the food on the trip, the instructors, the horses ... or the state of their backside after their riding experience!

All this, sore bottoms included, is uploaded to the website.

Webdata reveals that it's this 'reviews' section which is the most visited area of the website.

Prospective clients, it seems, are enormously keen to read about the thoughts and experiences of previous clients, especially returning clients, and almost certainly then use that data to inform their choice.

These days, they can choose all manner of riding experiences with In The Saddle, from beginner weeks in the Azores, to riding Arabian Stallions across the Namib Desert. They can join the Icelandic horse round up, ride across Rajasthan, or trek the silk route through Kyrgyzstan.

The company still offers those original cowboy ranch experiences in Montana, and Olwen's beloved horseback safaris to Africa, where you can gallop alongside giraffes, but they've come a long way from those few sheets of snowbound A4.

Now, they're a Shropshire company at the top of their game. And what's more, they're still growing. 

# Keeping lines clear

**L**udlow farm machinery specialist **McConnel** is lending a helping hand to one of the toughest vegetation clearance tasks in Ireland.

Every year Thomas and Jim Moloney of Moloney Agri and Tree Care in county Tipperary have just eight weeks to clear miles of overgrowth along the country's busiest railway – the Dublin to Cork line – working overnight when passenger services aren't running.

They depend on power arms to handle the intense task, and were among the first customers in the world to buy the new PA8085T-VFR from McConnel.

Thomas said: "The beauty of this machine is that it is much more comfortable to operate when working for long periods, and because the visibility is better, it also improves precision and safety.

"The arm is always precisely where you need it, which makes it intuitive to control and increases the speed at which you can work. It's also very stable and well-balanced."

Thomas and Jim believe the Tele-VFR machine is one of the most important innovations ever launched by McConnel.



McConnel clearing the busy Dublin to Cork line in Ireland

## Top fund raisers



Tudor Griffiths with The Richard Bayliss Cup after TG Group raised £2,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support at the World Coracle Championships

Staff from a family-owned Shropshire firm have been named top fund raisers at the latest World Coracle Championships.

Two teams from Tudor Griffiths Group, in Ellesmere, raised just under £2,000 for Macmillan Cancer Support and received The Richard Bayliss Cup from organisers.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths, who led the two intrepid quartets, said: "It was a really fun day, and at the same time, it gave everyone the chance to raise plenty of money for such a deserving cause.

"To have received the trophy as the top fund raisers was a real honour for all of us here at Tudor Griffiths Group. We entered a team two years ago and the feedback was terrific, so the event is fast becoming a firm favourite with our staff – it's a good team bonding event and it's very competitive!

"We do our best and it's the taking part that counts, along with having lots of fun and hopefully not getting a soaking! Supporting Macmillan Cancer Support in Shropshire is a great cause."

The World Coracle Championships has been running for 10 years and takes place on the River Severn in the Shrewsbury. Teams have already started to sign up for the 2018 event – including Tudor Griffiths Group.

## Sweet success continues



Alessio Dyfnallt and Roman Aslamzade outside the Shoplatch store

Specialist dessert shops have become all the rage, with several new outlets springing up across Shropshire in the past 12 months.

The Little Dessert Shop is among them, moving into Shoplatch in Shrewsbury.

It is the company's third West Midlands base, following on from Telford and Stafford.

Regional store manager Roman Aslamzade said: "Shrewsbury has an authentic and medieval feel compared to our existing locations.

"We're happy how far we have come, and the opportunity to open more franchises

including Shrewsbury has been outstanding."

The deal was completed by expanding commercial property agency Cooper Green Pooks.

Spokesman Alessio Dyfnallt said: "We are confident that this new venture will add to the town's reputation for offering an eclectic mix of retailers and cafés, both in the Market Hall and Shrewsbury in general."

Cooper Green Pooks now has seven members in its commercial department, having welcomed new arrival Harry Belshaw, from Newport to the team. The company now employs 35 people.

# Entrepreneurs helped

**F**ive Shropshire companies have joined forces to launch a new mentoring and money scheme, supporting up-and-coming entrepreneurs.

Gemma Allies, who runs the Skin Sincere beauty brand, has been announced as the first beneficiary of the ASYSTORS project.

The founding supporters are Brewin Dolphin, Morris & Company, Marches Care, Dyke Yaxley and Wynn Developments.

They were inspired to come together in support of the Shropshire Youth Support Trust charity, who provide help for young people aged 18-30 to start a business.

Mike Paul, who chairs the Shropshire Youth Support Trust ASYSTORS panel, said: "These founding partners place real importance in social responsibility and undertake a range of activities within their own businesses where staff are involved in pro bono projects to benefit their local communities.

"So, the chance to come together, share skills and experience to support enterprising young people to get ahead, particularly those who may be disadvantaged, struck a chord immediately."

Gemma Allies originally launched her business in 2015 selling her range of sensitive skin cream products into beauty salons.

She had reached a point where she felt she and business partner Rosemary Nutting needed a strategic sounding board to guide their expansion plans and funding to take them to this next level.

Through mentorship and the financial award from the ASYSTORS, she is now planning a targeted PR promotional support campaign to propel her skin cream business into the retail market and increase her stake within the salon sector.

Robert Bland, chair of trustees of the Shropshire Youth Support Trust charity said: "Our rationale is all about maximising young people's business and personal potential with a view to leading to financial independence.

"The ASYSTORS prove that Shropshire is blessed with some



*From left standing Robert Bland, Joanna Morris, Mike Paul, Jenny Wynn and Brian Price with first awardees seated Gemma Allies (right) and Rosemary Nutting*

outstanding private organisations who have pledged their time and expertise to this new enterprise as well as some valuable resource which will provide that all important financial boost to many a business dream."

To find out more about the scheme, call Richard Nuttall on 01952 299214 or email [hello@systbusiness.co.uk](mailto:hello@systbusiness.co.uk)

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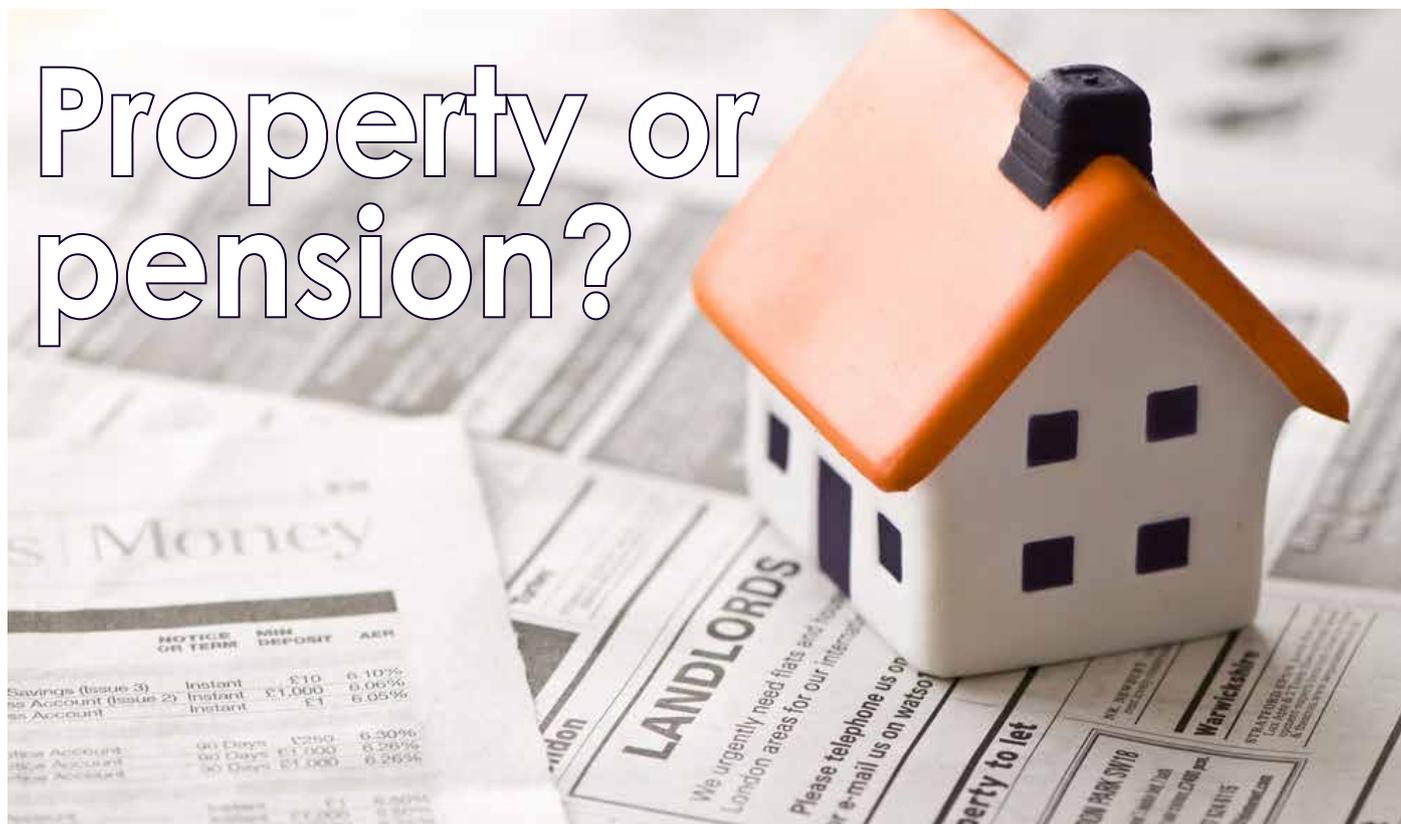


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# Property or pension?



Would you be as well to plough money into bricks and mortar rather than a pension scheme? Nick Jones shares his thoughts.

**The Budget included a giveaway for first-time buyers, but beneficiaries should beware cutting pension contributions in response.**

All told, the Autumn Budget was far from radical.

One of the few significant proposals was a decision to remove stamp duty for first-time buyers on properties worth up to £300,000. For first-timers buying properties valued at between £300,000 and £500,000, the first £300,000 will be exempt from stamp duty.

Housing has become one of the UK's most charged political issues in recent years, and the decline in home ownership has shown itself in a growing intergenerational disparity.<sup>1</sup>

For younger people keen to clamber onto the lower rungs of the housing ladder, the Budget therefore comes as a welcome fillip. Yet they still need to come up with the deposit, which could mean making far-reaching financial decisions.

At 2.2%, wage growth sits significantly below the rate of inflation, which is currently 3%.<sup>2</sup> That mismatch means that putting money aside for a deposit is becoming ever harder for those reliant on their salaries. Moreover, forthcoming increases in automatic enrolment contributions will cut take-home pay still further for those affected. The current contribution minimum for employees is just 1% of qualifying earnings, but in April that will rise to 3%, and to 5% in April 2019.<sup>3</sup>

Faced with pressures from both inflation and rising obligations, some first-time buyers may be tempted to opt out of automatic enrolment altogether. Increasing numbers of first-time buyers benefit from



family support, as money for a deposit is often taken from savings or freed up via equity release – one retirement provider reported that 2% of its customers were purchasing an equity release product to help a first-time buyer.<sup>4</sup> Yet for buyers who cannot access this kind of family support, it may not be possible to save for a deposit while also remaining in the automatic enrolment scheme.

Anyone facing such a decision should think carefully before opting out of auto-enrolment altogether. After all, property ownership comes with its own risks and obligations. Perhaps more importantly, auto-enrolment comes with its own benefits in the form of employer contributions. The downside of foregoing pension saving is that an employee will also lose the cumulative effect of his or her employer's contribution, which will be at least 3% by April 2019.

Likewise, the old rule applies that making pension contributions when you are younger is far more remunerative than when you are nearing retirement. Figures produced by Legal & General (based on Financial Conduct Authority assumptions) show that saving £269 a month in your 20s is the equivalent to saving £947 a month from the age of 55 – in terms of the income it ends up generating for you in retirement.<sup>5</sup> Discerning how best to allocate surplus income between a property deposit and a company pension scheme can be difficult. First-time buyers should beware

assuming that the Budget giveaway will automatically make it worth buying as soon as possible. In fact, the Office for Budget Responsibility warned that the reform will probably push up house prices at the lower end of the market, thereby potentially negating the savings being offered.<sup>6</sup> Seeking advice and weighing your options carefully is a more prudent approach than simply assuming there's nothing as safe as houses.

The value of a pension will be directly linked to the performance of the funds you select, and the value can therefore go down as well as up.

● *Nick Jones is the Principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury, a Senior Partner Practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management. The Senior Partner Practice represents only St. James's Place Wealth Management plc (which is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority) for the purpose of advising solely on the Group's wealth management products and services, more details of which are set out on the Group's website [www.sjp.co.uk/products](http://www.sjp.co.uk/products). The 'St. James's Place Partnership' and the titles 'Partner' and 'Partner Practice' are marketing terms used to describe St. James's Place representatives.*

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/data/housing/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://tradingeconomics.com/united-kingdom/wage-growth>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.thepensionsregulator.gov.uk/minimum-contribution-increases-planned-by-law-phasing.aspx>

<sup>4</sup> <https://tracewiseuk.co.uk/first-time-buyers-equity-release/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.legalandgeneral.com/pensions-retirement/pensions-explained/cost-of-delay/>

<sup>6</sup> <http://budgetresponsibility.org.uk/box/the-economic-effects-of-policy-measures-14/>

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\* BNI members, on average, increase their business 20% the first year. See [www.bni.co.uk](http://www.bni.co.uk) for more details.



IS THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR YOUR BUSINESS



Rachel Clements, Julia Burton, Rachel Owen and Lindsey Sherratt Barbara Rainford, Jon Hepburn, Roy Broad, Dennis Silverlock and Carl Jones

# Breaking barriers

**P**rofessionals across the county have a new networking support group following the merger of Telford and Shropshire's business partnerships.

The Professionals Partnership will hold four meetings a year, alternating between Telford and Shrewsbury. It is an independent networking organisation, administered by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

The first meeting will be on February 9 at the Park Inn, Telford, but The Shrewsbury Club hosted a pre-Christmas social event for just under 100 interested businesspeople, to officially unveil the group's plans.

It will be chaired by Paul Bennett, of Aaron & Partners, who said he was keen to break down the 'historical A5-M54 barrier' which has previously existed between Telford and Shrewsbury.

"As business people we don't recognise that barrier," he said. "Our professional services community is 7.9% of Shropshire's GDP. We already know one another and work together fairly regularly, and we need to shout and scream about what we can do collectively."

"By having events in both Telford and Shrewsbury, we hope to break down the historical barrier. It's simply about getting the best advice for you and your business and contacts."



Richard Sheehan, Jon Gidney, Teresa Rowe, Nick Jones and Paul Bennett

"It's about the relationship. As a professional community we need to know one another a bit better, spend some time together, and forge relationships – this is a joined-up way of doing this countywide."

Mr Bennett, who previously chaired Shropshire Business Partnership, said: "The people who ran Telford Business Partnership agreed to a merger so we could

set something up which is countywide, and that was pretty brave of them – I take my hat off to them. We have to sing with one voice."

Richard Sheehan, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber, added: "We recognise how important professional services are to the economic growth and prosperity of Shropshire as a county."



Phil Robinson, Diarmuid Flood, Brian Benson, Lewis Benson and Stephanie Henson



David Coull, Dena Norman, Derek Bennion and Paul Brennan at The Shrewsbury Club



Vernon Hogg, Peter Riches and Matt Sandford



Graham Mills, Trevor Hirst, Mark Freeman and Chris Lloyd

“It makes an awful lot of sense to bring these two groups together. We see collectively how much impact and wealth professional services have on the ground here in Shropshire, and the supply chain that feeds off that sometimes as well.

“We also understand that many people feel it is still necessary to go to Birmingham, Manchester or other large places to get specialist professional services – nothing could be further from the truth.

“I hope that creating connectivity will help everyone to see what a powerful group of individuals and skilled people we have here, so that we can keep the pound here in Shropshire.”

**“As a professional community we need to know one another a bit better, spend some time together, and forge relationships – this is a joined-up way of doing this countywide”**

Nick Jones, principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury, will be sponsoring the group. He said: “Why am I doing this? Because it is a great opportunity to make sure the collaboration between Shrewsbury, Telford, and the whole of Shropshire is as good as it can be.

“We need to get behind this as an idea share best practice, and find out who has the right skills for our clients.

“We are going to aim to line up great guest speakers to make the meetings worthwhile coming to, so you make great connections with great local people to trust with your business.”

● Pictures: Tony Adams PR



Jayne Smallman pictured with Rob Davies, Julia Hughes, Andrew Oranjuk, Rachel Clements and Zoe Ashbridge at The Shrewsbury Club



Aimee Hutchinson, Sian King and Adrian Twiss



John Walsh, Bryn Monk and Chris Bentley



Dave Williams, Sean Gorman and Colin Thaw



Siobhan Martin, Jennifer Hicks-Jones, Chris Piggott, Paul Naylor and Sarah Offland



*Feroz Khan and Dan Barton of Bluestonex with Rebecca Welch of Halls Commercial which let the building*

## In brief . . .

- A decade after work first began, commercial property developer Henry Davidson Developments has disposed of the final plot at Lawley Village. LNT Care Homes has purchased the 1.2 acre plot and its 66-bed facility will open in the autumn. HDD began the £30 million development in 2007, including a Morrisons supermarket, day nursery, pub and retail units including Subway, Greggs and Barnardo's - plus 23 apartments and 16 town houses, and an extra care facility for Sanctuary.

- Landowners directly affected by the proposed 132kv overhead electricity line from Oswestry to Wem are being urged to seek professional advice before making final comments. Shaun Jones, of Halls in Shrewsbury, says Scottish Power Energy Networks is inviting comments on its plans, available online, by February 2. "I encourage any landowner who will be directly affected by the proposed routes to make final comments at this stage because SPEN will shortly be seeking Government approval."

- Broseley-based estate agency Harwood is paving the way for growth with a refurbishment which means the rental department is now fully housed in one large office. "This will enable landlords and tenants to fulfil all their requirements in one hit," said managing director Patrick Smitheman. "The rental department now comprises of half a dozen staff and with the rental market growing rapidly, the alterations we are making to the ground floor office layout will assist enormously."

# IT firm has made church its home

**A former church building in Oswestry has become the headquarters of a thriving IT software and consulting company which has an eye on expansion.**

The building in Market Gate has been previously run as a gym, and is now being refurbished as the headquarters of Bluestonex.

The company, which helps to create software for large firms, has already moved into its new premises from its previous base at Park Hall.

Dan Barton from Bluestonex said: "We are in now, phase one of the operation has been completed and we are moving on to phase two. The ground floor offices are leased as opposed to hot desks but the meeting rooms are available to hire on an hourly basis.

"We still have three offices to lease out, these are made up of one five-person office, a two to three-person office and a one to two

person office. They are available for viewing on the ground floor.

"The phase two First Floor will be open for hot desks and meeting rooms by summer and we plan to start renovation in March. This could be delayed, however, if we decide to put roof windows in as this would need to go through planning. We are a design and innovation company and this is a great old building with plenty of open space. It is the perfect cultural site for what we do - space, light and a mixture of old and new aesthetics.

"It is a great location too, Oswestry is a good place and we want to bring people into the town and employ local people here. We hope it will be a busy, thriving building with lots going on."

The firm, which creates and designs interfaces for SAP enterprise software for companies such as Arla foods and Princes foods, is five years old and has around 25 employees both in Shropshire and at an office in India.

"We are trying to break new boundaries in the software industry," Dan added.

"The objective was to have a large design office, for us and for our customers to visit - and that is just what we have."



Dawn  
Humphries

## A patient's journey

**S**hropshire will host a major conference investigating the challenges facing those who survive a spinal injury - bringing experts together to advise people on what support is available.

The event, called 'Surviving Spinal Injury - The Journey', is being organised by Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors, and will be held at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital in Oswestry on March 15.

Speakers include Professor El-Masri, one of the pioneers behind the development of the Midland Centre for Spinal Injuries at Oswestry which has become one of the leading centres in the UK.

The day will follow a patient's journey from diagnosis through to rehabilitation and the ongoing support needed to lead fulfilling lives following treatment.

A percentage of proceeds from ticket sales will be donated to the Horatio's Garden project, which will be creating a specially-designed garden for patients at the Midland Centre for Spinal Injuries at the hospital.

Dawn Humphries and Emma Broomfield, of Lanyon Bowdler's personal injury and clinical negligence teams, will be chairing the event.

They said: "We held a similar conference in 2016 looking at brain injuries, which attracted more than 200 people from across the country, so we are expecting significant interest.

"The level of expertise of our speakers is incredible and people will be able to hear about the very latest innovations in treatment and rehabilitation techniques.

"It will be a valuable event for people recovering from spinal injuries and their families, as well as professionals who want to expand their knowledge base."

Among the speakers will be former patients of the hospital, including Martyn Ashton, who will speak about his way back from a life-changing injury suffered during a bike trials demo at the British Moto GP.

Martyn, a former mountain bike trials world champion, is paralysed from the waist down following the accident in 2013 but has not let it stop him from riding, using a specially adapted bike to enable him to continue to do what he loves.

He said: "I am looking forward to speaking at the conference because I am passionate about encouraging people affected by a spinal injury to live as full a life as possible.

"The treatment and support I received from the team at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital was fantastic, so I am very happy to come back to be involved with this conference."

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# Eye on the economy

**P**aul Hinkins chairs Telford Business Board, with 38 members spanning a range of sectors. It meets every couple of months to gauge the views of the local economy. He explains their hopes for 2018.

## Q. Which organisations does TBB work with?

A. We're proud to have a diverse range of members on the board, ranging in size and scale, and covering a cross-section of industries from manufacturing and engineering, to design, environmental technologies and tourism. We also work with many partner organisations to help drive positive change, including the Marches Growth Hub, the Marches LEP, the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills, and MSPN, a dedicated skills provider.

## Q. How does the board deliver change?

A. We have a wide network and through our partnership with these organisations, as well as our board members, we ensure that the region's business voices are heard and understood. Their needs are fed into the local Marches LEP and into central government, which can subsequently bring benefits to SMEs to help them grow and thrive in Telford. We can signpost their needs to the most relevant organisations, and provide them with the voice so that they can access vital support including loans, training and grants.



*Paul Hinkins is looking forward to a prosperous 2018*

## Q. What are TBB Sector Champions?

A. We have 18 sector champions covering manufacturing, environmental, security, tourism and leisure, ICT, as well as food and drink, agriculture, skills and training, and care – and much more.

## Q. Hopes and plans for 2018?

A. Land investment continues to be an ever-important topic and we see this continuing well into 2018 and beyond. We're eager to continue encouraging inward investment, and helping not only to ensure businesses have the right facilities and opportunities to stay here, but others have what they want and need to attract them to the region.

## Q. How does this investment make a difference?

A. We understand that for many, it's not just a case of finding a job in Telford – it's about the wider benefits of moving to Telford, whether it's education and higher education for children at local schools, Telford College and the University of Wolverhampton's Telford campus, through to travel and transport facilities available, leisure and entertainment, and housing.



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Subject to job creation, grants of up to 45% of eligible project costs and a maximum of £100k may be available to renovate, extend or reconfigure premises in the Marches area (Herefordshire, Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin).

The grant is unable to fund core farming operations, residential development, purchase of buildings and businesses involved in the retail sale of goods and services to the general public.

To find out if your company is eligible to apply, and to discuss your proposal further, please contact the programme team on **01432 260662** or email **mbig@herefordshire.gov.uk**



# Support vehicle is donated

Shropshire motor dealers Furrows have handed over the keys to a new support vehicle to the Hospital at Home team from Telford's Princess Royal Hospital.

It's the 16th year that the dealership on Haybridge Road has backed the project which helps children who need ongoing medical treatment after being discharged from hospital.

The support from the children's ward staff means the young patients can receive check-ups and minor treatment at home rather than going back into hospital.

Carol Drake from the Princess Royal Hospital's Hospital at Home team visited the Telford dealership to collect the new Kia Picanto that Furrows have provided.

"We are so grateful to Furrows for the generosity they have shown over the years, and thanks to their help, we've been able to support so many children and their families right across Telford.

"It's always a pleasure to see local businesses giving something back to their community."



*Carol Drake from the Hospital at Home scheme with the Kia Picanto at Furrows of Telford*

# Investment of £120k for a care company

**A** Shrewsbury care company is diversifying into the call centre industry after a £120,000 investment supported by Barclays.

CLCA Company Limited was established in 2012 providing care in Shropshire, Powys and the West Midlands, employing 200 staff and with turnover of £2.4 million.

The £120,000 investment has created an overseas call centre operation based in the Philippines to provide 24-hour telephone support to a range of home care professionals operating across the UK.

Cherry Adams, managing director of the Battlefield-based business, said: "We offer a personalised service supporting adults and children with the same respect you would want for yourself or a member of your family.

"The new investment will allow us to expand our operation into providing 24-hour support to not only our own staff operating across the region but also to our competitors and similar operators across the entire UK, delivering vital back up services and peace of mind, simply a phone call away.

"Running a business is tough with no respite and being tied to the business 24 hours a day, but the rewards far outweigh the downsides even after working long hours. The joy of seeing our efforts appreciated or simply a big smile from one of our clients makes it all worthwhile."

Ruth Maddox, Barclays business manager, added: "Barclays research identifies the significant role entrepreneurs play in the local economy and is committed to supporting such propositions. CLCA Company Ltd has grown rapidly over the last five years and continues to invest to identify new revenue streams."



*Cherry Adams is managing director of CLCA*



*Shaping Shropshire's county town's future - an artist's impression of Station View, Shrewsbury*

# Collaboration, consultation plus a splash of inspiration

**A** public and private sector partnership staged an interactive concept to motivate the townspeople and businesses of Shrewsbury to play an integral part in helping create the visionary plan shaping the future of the town.

Shrewsbury BID, Shropshire Council and Shrewsbury Town Council came together in a partnership to jointly lead the exciting and ambitious programme which is now on course to deliver The Big Town Plan for Shrewsbury.

The idea was to provide a 'pop up' space where the public would have a physical place to go and share their ideas and comments on the outline Plan developed for consultation.

This plan had been drafted following a series of workshops held last summer with over fifty local people and organisations participating. The ideas and conversations flowing from these sessions formed the basis of the outline Town Plan.

It set out a vision and priorities and ambitions for the town to guide development and ensure it continues to evolve as a great place to live, work, visit and invest.

In tandem, a dedicated website at [shrewsburybigtownplan.org](http://shrewsburybigtownplan.org) was launched featuring all the information and the opportunity to get involved.



*Nic Laurens, Helen Ball, Seb Slater and Gemma Davies, head of economic growth at Shropshire Council*

The informal consultation HQ was based within a vacant shop unit at 80 Wyle Cop where over 5,000 people visited over the three-week period to have their say and speak directly to members of the Big Town Plan team.

The pop up allowed people to explore the plan in an accessible and visible way with the four key themes of the plan laid out together with visual concepts to

stimulate response and feedback. During the consultation period The Big Town Plan Team were on hand to explain and answer questions and encourage everyone to leave their thoughts and suggestions on post it notes across the display boards.

Organisers said this proved incredibly popular as a method of gathering opinion and ideas. More than 2,000 post it notes were placed and have been recorded to



*How Victoria Quay could be transformed by the planned changes outlined by Shrewsbury BID*

feed into the next stage of the preparation of the plan.

Seb Slater, executive director at Shrewsbury BID was part of the team masterminding the project and said: "The artist impressions displayed in the pop up generated some really passionate debate and we received so many positive, interesting and often inspirational comments.

"It also gave people the chance to air their opinions on things they did not want to see in the town."

Nic Laurens, portfolio holder for economic growth at Shropshire Council added: "Shropshire Council is proud to have been involved in allowing the residents and businesses of Shrewsbury to have their say on the future of Shrewsbury.

"The insight and feedback so readily given has not only been useful for the Big Town Plan, it will also support the Shropshire Economic Growth Strategy.

"The level of interest has been remarkable, and ensuring we incorporate the feedback and investigate the many projects suggested is a key part of this next phase which we are now working on."

Helen Ball, town clerk at Shrewsbury Town Council said: "We are delighted by the interest shown from people locally about the Big Town Plan.

"It has been a consultation process which has engaged all, from those who like to access information online to those who like to call in for a chat."

The partnership is now appointing Masterplanners to take the Big Town Plan to the next phase, using information gathered during the consultation to shape the vision.

They will develop an illustrative masterplan and urban design strategy which will identify and define key character areas and transformative projects within the town.

● *For more information, and to keep updated on the scheme, see [shrewsburybigtownplan.org](http://shrewsburybigtownplan.org) and follow on twitter @bigtownplan*



*Local professional, Kelly Jones, having her say*



*A busy and interactive experience at 80 Wyle Cop*

# Reflecting on life in business

A working mum from Shrewsbury has launched a new luxury nail and brow boutique in the town.

Charlotte Tennant, 35, has opened Mirror Mirror on Castle Street, where clients have the option to enjoy an alcoholic drink whilst being pampered.

She said: "I have run my own businesses for the last eight years, but with two young daughters now at school, balancing work and personal commitments is increasingly tricky and there's very little spare time – especially during the hours of nine to five."

It's a new departure for Charlotte, a law graduate who went on to specialise in human resources, and has combined running her own HR consultancy with management responsibilities for a food production business which has been in her family for over 60 years.

She has appointed Abbie Treherne as boutique manager at Mirror Mirror, and an additional seven full and part-time roles have already been filled.

A further four roles are anticipated to be created in the coming months.



Abbie Treherne with Charlotte Tennant at Mirror Mirror

# Girls get on their bikes to pursue career goals



Former Shrewsbury High School student Emilie Weaving won this year's GDST Emerging Talent Award

**Shrewsbury High School has been shortlisted for an award at this year's TES Independent School Awards, where the winners will be announced in February.**

The school has been recognised in the Strategic Education Initiative category for encouraging girls to pursue careers and degrees in areas of science, technology, mathematics, engineering and related STEM disciplines when nationally the trends are so poor.

There has been a rapid increase in the number of girls pursuing courses in these STEM disciplines at the school, from 21% in 2013 to 54% in 2016.

Headmaster Michael Getty says: "Major influences have been the huge uptake of open access STEM clubs in school and the award-winning bio-medical programme for would-be doctors, dentists, vets, nurses, physiotherapists, and bio-medical engineers that is now a large annual event and programme in school and across the county."

"Similarly, the operation of engineering programmes, which require students, for example, to build and engineer full size electric cars in school and then to race

them, are seen as forward looking and inspiring.

"Girls now pursuing these careers in such volume is important as it challenges the stereotype that only boys and men gravitate towards these kinds of professions."

One example is Emilie Weaving, a higher apprentice at JCB Power Systems who studying for her mechanical engineering degree at Sheffield Hallam University.

Her real passion lies with motorcycles, and in her spare time she has been a race technician with the British Superstock Championships.

# Manufacturing partners

**Shropshire Manufacturing Partnership rounded off its 2017 programme with a visit to automotive component maker Stadco's Telford plant, at Hortonwood.**

The partnership was formed in 2016 as a dedicated networking and collaboration group for the county's manufacturing industry, offering members the chance to see behind the scenes at some of the county's biggest operators.

Stadco was the latest big-name company to host the group, following Salop Design and Engineering, Ricoh, Filtermist, Caterpillar, and GKN Wheels and Structures.

Barclays supported this event, which it described as an opportunity to network with like-minded business people, share key issues and successes, and see the Stadco set-up.

Sarah Offland, relationship director for corporate banking, said: "It followed the publication of a report by Barclays which examines UK manufacturing's attitudes to the 4th Industrial Revolution and the benefits that early adopters of 4IR technology have experienced.

"This ranged from tackling productivity challenges to reducing costs and up skilling



Shropshire Manufacturing Partnership members at Stadco in Telford. Picture: Tony Adams PR

the workforce. Increased investment is also predicted to have a significant impact on the UK economy with additional value creation and new jobs."

According to the report, there is huge potential in 2018 for Shropshire

manufacturers to increase efficiency and effectiveness by investing in an increasingly wide variety of areas such as 3D printing, automation and robotics, machine learning, advanced analytics, and sensors on production lines.

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# Logistics hubs for UK airport could be sited in Telford

Two Telford sites have been selected by Heathrow Airport as potential logistics hubs, ensuring businesses across the UK can form part of the airport's supply chain for expansion.

Land at Hortonwood and Telford's Rail Freight Terminal are among five West Midlands sites in the longlist of Logistics Hubs.

A total of 65 sites are being considered by Heathrow following a commitment made by the airport to shake-up the UK construction industry by using expansion to revolutionise the way Britain builds major infrastructure.

Heathrow chairman Lord Deighton said: "As the UK leaves the EU, Heathrow is an essential infrastructure project that will ensure Britain remains an open trading nation.

"As part of that, Heathrow's third runway will rely on talent from all over Britain helping to create a national asset for generations to come. This means new procurement opportunities for businesses in every region, helping drive growth and investment into local communities in all corners of this country.

"The third runway is not a London centric project – it is one we are opening up to the whole of the UK, asking for its skills and expertise to help build an asset this country so desperately needs to safeguard its future prosperity."

Four locations will be selected from the long-list once finalised and will pre-assemble components of the expanded airport before transporting them in consolidated loads to Heathrow, playing a key role in supporting the expansion's efficient delivery.

Heathrow's expansion is the first major infrastructure project in the UK to pioneer the large-scale use of logistics hubs.



Robin Melley (left) and Gary Matthews (right) receive their award from guest presenter, ITV's Emma Jesson.

# Honoured to reclaim top award

A firm of chartered financial planners, based near Bridgnorth, have reclaimed a regional award.

Matrix Capital was named Financial Planning Company of the Year at the annual West Midlands Insurance Institutes competition – the second time they've lifted the title in the last three years.

Robin Melley, for the firm, said: "To have taken the award twice is a wonderful boost for our team."

Organisers said the awards, at the ICC in Birmingham, were designed to 'emphasise professionalism, reputation and ethical practice'.

Mr Melley said: "This past year has been an extremely successful for Matrix Capital, and this latest award follows hot on the heels of the extension of our exclusive contract to advise the NS&I Premium Bond £1 million jackpot winners each month."



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A christening at the popular hotel was based on Alice in Wonderland

Something different – themed events prove popular at the Wroxeter

# Decade of change at a regarded hotel

**T**he husband and wife team who took over the Wroxeter Hotel in 2007 have been reflecting on a decade of change in the industry, and what the future holds for their business.

Ed and Hannah Hall said they had seen big changes in both the weddings and corporate sides of their business.

Hannah says: “Our corporate work has built over the last 10 years because of the change in companies and staff relations. The majority of companies now will have an away day for their staff as part of keeping up morale and encouraging better working relations.”

Ed adds: “We also have a lot of family events - special birthdays, baby showers, anniversaries. And it is not just the weddings that have some great theme and decor - we had a full Alice in Wonderland christening, complete with the Mad Hatter!”

The weddings side of the business has also grown significantly on Ed and Hannah’s watch, and Hannah’s highlight has been the first woodland wedding.

“It actually brought me to tears. We had worked so hard to create a woodland wedding site in the grounds, bought tipis, planted a wildflower garden - to see the video of the first wedding made me realise that all of our hard work had been completely worth it.

“The wedding industry is constantly evolving, themes come and go and brides and grooms have their own ideas of exactly what they want.

“Ten years ago there was a basic structure behind the themes - more often



Ed and Hannah Hall at the Wroxeter Hotel, near Shrewsbury

than not the groom and ushers were in a smart suit with a waistcoat or top and tails. The bridesmaids all matched and the ceremony was followed by a sit down meal and a dance.

“Now that has all changed - we have had brides in wellies, grooms in flat caps and braces, bridesmaids in all different colours and all different styles and a ceremony in a barn followed by a barbecue and marshmallows toasted over the fire.”

So how else is the Wroxeter Hotel different now, 10 years on. Ed says: “It has changed in so many ways, not only in looks

as we updated the decor and refurbished all of the rooms, but in the way it works.”

Ed and Hannah teamed up with the Harper family at Morrells Wood Farm in 2016 to launch Shropshire Farm Weddings, which has been hugely successful, winning awards.

And they say they are continuing to enjoy challenging themselves – with exciting (but so far top secret) new plans in the pipeline.

● Read more of Ed and Hannah’s views on the hotel industry on our website, [www.shropshirebiz.com](http://www.shropshirebiz.com)

# Awarded best employer

**A** law firm with three offices in Shropshire has been named best employer in a national awards competition.

FBC Manby Bowdler, with bases in Telford, Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Wolverhampton, scooped the title at the British Excellence in Sales Management Awards in London.

The competition is run by the Institute of Sales Management, and recognises the cream of sales professionals across the country.

It is the latest in a string of awards picked up by the firm for its commitment to its employees.

FBC Manby Bowdler's Neil Lloyd, who was one of the finalists for the sales director of the year award, said: "We are over the moon to have won the national title amid tough competition.

"Our people are our biggest asset and we can only deliver the service and sales that we do by nurturing, supporting and developing them. It's great to get the external validation of awards like this that we are getting it right."

Meanwhile, the company's specialist leisure and hospitality team has supplied legal support to Pretty Box Pink, a Shrewsbury-based gift shop, which has relocated from Wyle Cop to St Mary's Street in the town centre.

Owner Karon Raines said: "The support provided by Charlotte Nutting and her team at FBC Manby Bowdler was a phenomenal help. She provided a straightforward approach to the task in hand and there was no time wasting."

Charlotte added: "Commercial property activity across the leisure and hospitality sectors in the town has been particularly buoyant in the last couple of years and the town's unique mix of fine dining, specialist retailers and larger businesses has resulted in a really interesting portfolio of clients for me and the team to work on."



*Karon Raines with Charlotte Nutting of FBC Manby Bowdler*



*Comedian Jimmy Carr presents the British Excellence in Sales Management Award to the FBC Manby Bowdler team in London*

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Tamsin Foster of Energize, with Professor John Buckley of University Centre Shrewsbury



Chris Child, chief executive of Energize, pictured at the lectern



Lee Hassan of Teme Leisure presents the Aspiring Talent prize to footballer Sadie Craig

# Community 'Oscars' – Energize Awards

**M**any big-name Shropshire companies supported the 11th annual Energize Awards, which have become known as the 'Oscars' of community sport and physical activity in the county.

The ceremony was held at the Telford Hotel and Golf Resort, with two-time Paralympic medallist Mel Clarke as guest of honour, and Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones as master of ceremonies.

Among the companies which sponsored the event were Pleydell Smithyman, Teme Leisure, Global Freight, Furrows, Start Technology, Nick Jones Wealth Planning, GS & PA Reeves Limited, Yarrington, and the Wenlock Olympian Society. NHS Telford & Wrekin won the Active Workplace award. Pictures courtesy of Yarrington ([www.yarrington.co.uk](http://www.yarrington.co.uk)).



The Energize 2017 award winners with guest of honour, paralympian Mel Clarke



Graham Mills of Nick Jones Wealth Planning



Dave Farthing of Furrows, with Anton and Nicole Gunter



The team from Pleydell Smithyman, Ironbridge



Master of ceremonies Carl Jones interviews Mel Clarke



NHS Telford & Wrekin CCG won the Active Workplaces award

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# Supermarkets are now turning to the dark side

By Molly Johnson-Jones

**In ten years' time, the vast majority of online delivered groceries which come into Shropshire homes will have been delivered from 'dark stores'.**

At the moment, only Ocado and Amazon have solely dark store fulfilment, and as a result they have a wider range, lower overheads, fewer substitutions, greater opportunity to develop technology, and the ability to generate decent margins from online.

While investment required is heavy compared to the pay-as-you-go store pick model, dark stores are a way of addressing the profitability problem that has weighed on online grocery since its inception.

Without making this commitment, Ocado and Amazon's market-leading capabilities will allow them to steal market share as more consumer spend shifts online, so the supermarkets must act to future-proof themselves.

There is no doubt that online penetration in the UK will grow from here – we estimate that by 2022 online will represent 9.8% of the UK food & grocery market, up from 7.8% in 2017 – as millennials, who have been the greatest adopters of online food and grocery, start to have families and reduce reliance on top-up grocery shopping.

Additionally, online provides the chance for retailers to grow market share in a channel currently unpenetrated by the discounters (their model would mean that online would be loss making) although they face competition from Amazon.

Online food & grocery is a particularly difficult channel to succeed in. Goods are low-value and frequently purchased, all of which are characteristics that lend themselves perfectly to the more convenient model of online.

However, with food and grocery items yielding little profit, it also means that the more expensive fulfilment model of online, particularly instore pick which the majority of grocers operate, brings down retailer margins even further.

Frequency of purchase is growing, with ATV falling, and therefore the return from online is declining. Ocado's Q3 results showed that online basket sizes continue to fall, this quarter saw -1.2% on top of -3.4% for Q3 2016.

This trend is consistent across the sector as multi-buys decrease, the use of delivery passes increases, and more mobile grocery ordering causes reductions in basket size while simultaneously increasing frequency of purchase. Though this is a metric which bricks and mortar food and grocery retailers seek to increase, for online food & grocery retailers it is problematic.



Ocado, pictured, and Amazon have solely dark store fulfilment



Inside an Amazon warehouse

The larger the online basket, the greater the incremental profit, as every online order has to be picked and delivered at an additional cost to usual instore shopping. Therefore operating margins are smaller, and we estimate that online baskets need to be above £60 to break even.

However, by committing investment to dark stores, even though painful in the short term, volumes can grow and the overheads of online would be reduced through scale, potentially reducing the breakeven threshold.

There are limitations to investment in dark store capability though; the big four retailers are all currently managing ambitious cost-saving programmes and seemingly incompatible margin targets at a time of the highest CPI and PPI that we have seen in over a decade.

Simultaneously, the grocers are expanding their online offerings in a

constant battle to provide the best services. All offer delivery saver schemes, Sainsbury's and Tesco provide same day delivery (both have some dark store capability now but it does not cover the majority of online fulfilment), and all are developing apps in a bid to win market share of the highest growth area of food retail. The investment into this is costly, and return on capital is currently low.

Moreover, if the grocers choose to stop limiting the availability of online with more time slots, greater same-day geographical coverage, and better product availability, then online will grow faster than its current rate. This will bring margins down across the business as online contributes a greater proportion of sales.

Current strategic thinking is short-term and does not fundamentally change the method of fulfilment. If anything, the novel ideas such as two hour delivery are a way to keep up with Amazon and gain cheap advertising.

The retailers need to stop trying to keep up with Amazon's capabilities, and start defining the future of online food & grocery themselves. The channel will grow to take 9.5% of the food retail market by 2022, and if fulfilment improves this could be even higher.

Do the grocers want to give that share away to the pureplays who are better placed to deal with the challenges of basket size and fulfilment issues? We don't think so, and it can be mitigated by reinvesting cost savings into dark stores, not just choosing to sit on cash to return to investors.

• Molly Johnson-Jones is a senior food and grocery analyst at GlobalData.



The finalists for 2018 have been revealed



A glittering awards ceremony will take place at the Park Inn Hotel, Telford, on March 10

# It's anything but child's play

**A**n awards ceremony celebrating businesses in Shropshire which cater for children and young people has revealed its 2018 finalists.

The Businesses for Children Awards, now in their fifth year, shine a light on the hard work to support children and young people.

There are 12 categories, including new business, educational business for five to 18 year-olds, activities for under fives, franchisee and a volunteer award.

The winners will be revealed at a glittering awards ceremony at the Park Inn Hotel, Telford, on March 10.

Henshalls Insurance Brokers is the headline sponsor for the second year in a row, and marketing director Dave Williams said: "The judges must have had a very difficult time deciding the finalists. I know there was some tough competition.

"We are delighted to be sponsoring the awards again and can't wait to celebrate with all the finalists and the winners on the night."

Trish Parsons, co-ordinator of the 2018 event, said more than 100 nominations were received.

"Our judges all said they found it very hard to compile their list of finalists. I know they are going to have a really tough job choosing the winners.

"We are really looking forward to this year's ceremony.

"It is always such an inspiring event, and we know our winners really value their awards.

"The achievement stays with them for years to come.

"It is a huge confidence booster for those doing fantastic work in the county for our young people."

See [www.bcawards.co.uk](http://www.bcawards.co.uk) to book tickets.

## The 2018 finalists:

**The BCA Volunteer of the Year 2018 - sponsored by MGP Accountants**

Lisa from Telford Chin Woo  
Dawn Colyer  
Janet of Bubbles  
Elizabeth Wilkinson  
Sally Johnson

**BCA Business for Babes 2018 - sponsored by JS Business Admin**

Swim with Style  
Homestart Shropshire  
Baby Sensory Shropshire  
Ready Steady Let's Get Messy  
Clatterbugs

**BCA Sports Business for Children and/or Young People 2018 - sponsored by Ke-design**

Telford Chin Woo  
Wrekin Riders BMX Race Club  
Swim with Style  
Bright Star Boxing Academy  
The Little Sports Club

**BCA Educational Business for Young People category 2018 - sponsored by Jungle HR Ltd**

Alison's Bee Class  
Bright Owls  
The Rock Project  
Exotic Zoo

**BCA Shropshire Franchisee 2018 - sponsored by Vehicle Glass Conversions in association with National Windscreens - Telford, Oswestry & Wolverhampton**

Baby Sensory Shropshire  
The Rock Project-Shrewsbury  
Sing and Sign  
Musical Steps

**BCA New Business for Children and Young People 2018 - sponsored by J&PR Ltd**

The Little Sports Club  
Head First Education  
Love2Stay  
Ready Steady let's Get Messy  
Bright Star Boxing

**BCA Shropshire Parent's Award 2018 - sponsored by SJF Design, Print & Promotional**

Love2Stay  
Baby Sensory Shropshire  
Little Daisies Childminding  
Royal Touch Photography  
Severn Gymnastics & Trampoline Club

**BCA Business providing Activities for Young People 2018 - sponsored by Ed Bagnall Photography**

Fusion Theatre  
Climbing the Walls  
Love 2 Stay  
7 Academy of Performing Arts  
The Rock Project

**BCA Shropshire Childminder 2018 - sponsored by Yarrington Ltd**

Kelly's Childminding  
Su's Childminding  
Little Daisies Childminding

**BCA Shropshire Nursery/Pre-School 2018 - sponsored by Park Inn by Radisson Telford**

Little Green House Childcare  
Smiley Faces  
Farm Friends  
Oddsocks Day Nursery  
Honeybuns

**BCA Business providing Activities for the Under Fives category 2018 - sponsored by Allun Williams**

Climbing the Walls  
Paint and Create  
National Windscreens Balance Bike Track  
Mini Professors  
Ready Steady Let's Get Messy

**BCA Children's Product 2018 - sponsored by Bellini's Box**

Lorna McCann (author)  
Bear and Squidge  
Crafty Mrs B  
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The heads and tails charity game was a fun experience that was embraced by the nominees at the awards ceremony



Charlie Cartwright with sponsor James Tomlinson of J&PR



Laura Kavanagh-Jones receives her award from Elizabeth Wilkinson

# Dyslexia Awards, Ingenuity

**T**he second annual Dyslexia Awards were held at Ingenuity, in the Ironbridge Gorge.

Compered by BBC Shropshire presenter Paul Shuttleworth, there were more than 120 people in attendance, and 15 awards up for grabs.

Organiser Elizabeth Wilkinson said: "The room was alive with the buzz of positivity and wonder. Finalists and guests of all ages were amazed and inspired by the number of amazingly talented finalists and winners in the room."

The event, backed by a host of local sponsors, also raised £650 for the Georgia Williams Appeal through a raffle, and 'heads and tails' game.



The 2017 winners with their awards at the ceremony held in Ironbridge Gorge at Ingenuity



Lynnette Williams from The Georgia Williams Trust



Wayne Chisnall - Winner of the 2017 Dyslexia Awards Amazing Art Award



Denise McGowan pictured with sponsor Claire McKeown



Nicola Rust with sponsor Rachael Tyrell



Samantha Scott and sponsor Leighann Morgan



Sam Titley - with sponsor Deborah Hughes-Beddows



Michael Davey and Jo Fieldhouse (YMCA Wellington) with sponsor Kay Heald



Rebecca Oxtoby - with sponsor Joanna Jago

# And the winners were:

**SHINING STAR JUNIOR AWARD** sponsored by Saint-Gobain PAM UK: Sam Williams

**SHINING STAR TEENAGE AWARD** sponsored by Global Freight Services Ltd: Rebecca Oxtoby

**SHINING STAR APPRENTICE AWARD** sponsored by Darwin Wealth Management: Sam Titley of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

**SHINING STAR ADULT AWARD** sponsored by True Potential Hypnotherapy: Holly-Elizabeth Smith

**LEARNING SUPPORT AWARD** sponsored by In The Loop: Sam Warner

**HEAD TEACHER AWARD** sponsored by Opulent Travel Services: Samantha Scott, of Market Drayton Infant and Nursery School

**SENCO AWARD** sponsored by Scanning Pens Ltd: Lesley Tranter of Shrewsbury Colleges Group

**EDUCATOR AWARD** sponsored by Get Your Message Across: Lesley Urquhart of Shrewsbury Colleges Group

**SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYER AWARD (LESS THAN 50 EMPLOYEES)** sponsored by Kay Heald HR: YMCA Wellington

**SUPPORTIVE EMPLOYER AWARD (50+ EMPLOYEES)** sponsored by Kay Heald HR: Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

**DYSLEXIA INFORMATION DAY AWARD** sponsored by Special-T Assessments: won by Multiplicaion Rules! represented by nine-year-old Joel Tomlinson of Shrewsbury

**AMAZING ART AWARD** sponsored by Fusing Ideas Glass: Wayne Chisnall

**INNOVATION AWARD** sponsored by Federation of Small Businesses – Shropshire: In The Shed Design Studio and Stationary Boutique

**ENTREPRENEUR AWARD** sponsored by J&PR Ltd: Charlie Cartwright

**OUTSTANDING PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARD** sponsored by True Potential Hypnotherapy: Denise McGowan

**CERTIFICATE OF SPECIAL RECOGNITION** for services and dedication to ensuring dyslexic employees in her charge got the appropriate support and services: Laura Kavanagh-Jones of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

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Conducting surveys during a student placement from Liverpool John Moores. Student Leah Patterson is pictured left. Picture: Stuart Edmunds

# Working together for student placements



**Since 2015, the corporate engagement team at Shropshire Wildlife Trust has been working with Liverpool John Moores and Manchester Metropolitan universities to facilitate student placement opportunities with the trust's corporate partners.**

Working mainly with the ecology, environmental science and geography departments, these take the form of both full-year sandwich placements (between the second and third years of the degree) and shorter summer placements; usually for around six weeks.

They operate either as work experience over a number of areas, or can cover a

more discrete project within the placement provider's business.

This initiative came about through the Government-run Meres & Mosses Nature Improvement Area project, which operated in north Shropshire and south Cheshire between 2012 and 2015.

These two universities played a major part in delivering research work within the project area.

They have subsequently helped to continue the delivery of the Meres & Mosses Forum; an annual two-day wetland conference for academics and practitioners alike.

The next forum takes place on March 5 and 6 at Ironbridge Gorge Museum - delegate tickets are available by searching for Meres And Mosses Forum on [www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk)

Student placements provided to date have been varied and have included roles such as carbon footprint analyst, assistant ecologist, planning and development surveyor, and GIS assistant.

The great thing about this project is that we are able to discuss with our existing and new corporate partners where their resource gaps are and can then advertise these to students interested in developing their skills, knowledge and employability before they graduate.

We have found that these are often roles that are not viable to employ

permanently but need a short-term input which these placements can provide. The team at Shropshire Wildlife Trust work with their corporate partners to develop the placement descriptions and collate applicants prior to interview to make the first step of providing these opportunities easier.

Metropolitan University's placement co-ordinator Dr Scott Pedley says: "Employability is one of the key issues in higher education at the moment. Students are no longer just looking for the qualification but are much more keyed in to what their experience at university can offer them.

"This partnership arrangement with Shropshire Wildlife Trust is allowing our students to access a much wider range of workplace experience that will prove invaluable beyond their current studies."

Shropshire Wildlife Trust is now looking for more placement opportunities to present to the students at their partner universities.

If you feel that your business could benefit from taking part in this scheme or would like an informal chat to discuss it further, please email academic co-ordinator Jenna Shaw at [jennas@shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:jennas@shropshirewildlifetrust.org.uk) or call on 01743 284280.

- Tom Hayek is the corporate and business development manager at Shropshire Wildlife Trust



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# Communication up in the clouds



Companies are discovering new, streamlined methods of communication, whilst reducing a number of risks and costs, through the cloud



**T**here's a good reason why cloud communications is trending among businesses.

By discarding office-based phone systems, companies are discovering new, streamlined methods of communication, whilst reducing a number of risks and costs.

Hosted telephony is a telephone system that resides in the cloud rather than in your office, so it eliminates many of the practical and technical problems that plague more traditional on-site systems.

This is the reason why hosted call centre services have been steadily growing by around 11% each year – twice as fast as traditional call centres.

The reality is that the scale and modular approach of hosted telephony provides companies with many opportunities to increase productivity with cost efficiency, avoid the unavailability that enrages customers and focus on growing their businesses by using telephony.

Here are some of Pure Telecom's top

tips for moving to the cloud to help save you money:

#### END COSTLY SUPPORT

Maintenance and support costs can quickly outstrip your initial capital outlay for an on-premise private branch exchange. And as your equipment ages, prices only soar higher. Walk away from on-premise hardware sooner not later.

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When communication infrastructure is down because of updates, repairs, or natural disasters, your bottom line suffers. With a cloud approach, vital communications capabilities work independently from local power, network, or systems availability. This means even if a fire, flood, or storm makes your office inaccessible, you can still work from any Internet connection or mobile device.

#### SCALE TO MEET DEMAND

Buying hardware is a guessing game. If you size your exchange for current needs, you can quickly outstrip capacity. But if you select systems too large, you can waste hard-earned capital. With cloud communication services, you pay for precisely what you need, when you need it. You have the flexibility to accommodate fluctuating demand as your business develops.

#### ELIMINATE BUYER'S REMORSE

Capital purchases represent a significant financial commitment. But even

with careful research, things don't always go to plan. If your new exchange fails to deliver promised productivity benefits, your investment is sunk. With cloud communications, service-level agreements guarantee you get the performance you expect. If you are disappointed for any reason, you can simply change the features you use or move to a new provider.

#### CLOUD COMMUNICATIONS STOP TECHNOLOGY HEADACHES

It can be hard to make certain you're making the right technology move at the right time. With cloud communications, your service provider, not you, assumes that risk. They are responsible for acquisitions, upgrades, and capabilities that keep pace with the market.

#### COST-EFFECTIVELY ADD NEW FEATURES

Adding a new customer contact centre or deploying new communication productivity features are two major ways to boost your business. But new features such as these may require a costly infrastructure upgrade. Cloud communications lets you easily add new features for some, or all, of your team for a set monthly fee. Let costly infrastructure investments be a thing of the past.

● *Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom in Shrewsbury.*

# 50 new jobs created

**P**roto Labs, which specialises in technology-driven manufacturing services, is creating 50 new jobs at its factory in Telford.

The company, which already employs 360 people in the UK, is looking for workers with manufacturing, office and engineering experience to work with advanced, evolving technologies at its Halesfield plant; notably CNC machining and injection moulding.

General manager Lee Ball said: "A business like ours, which stems from innovative foundations, needs quality teams to continually evolve.

"Engineers and designers, and those equipped with STEM qualifications are essential for what we do.

"Our specific requirements are none standard for the manufacturing sector, we offer challenging roles support computerised systems and processes. Investing in and developing skilled employees is vital to us; particularly as we need specialist expertise



*Proto Labs is looking for workers with manufacturing, office and engineering experience*

to operate our machinery and fulfil our manufacturing processes."

In-house training and skills development is offered, including the industry acclaimed

Injection Moulding Technician Level 3 programme, a 12-month course which includes a nationally recognised Certificate in Polymer Processing on completion.

## Company sold in £3.9m deal



*Representatives of all parties celebrate the deal*

Rockford IT, the award-winning Telford technology business, has been sold to SysGroup in a deal worth £3.9 million.

The new owners are among the UK's fastest growing managed IT and cloud hosting providers – this was their sixth company acquisition in the space of three years.

Chief executive of Rockford IT, Tom Sykes, said: "This is an exciting opportunity for Rockford to become part of a team that is providing first class IT managed services, particularly in cloud hosting and the security sector.

"With a shared vision and support from SysGroup, the Rockford team will be committed to growing with the company and working with some of the world's biggest organisations."

Chief executive of SysGroup, Chris Evans, added: "Rockford further solidifies our presence in existing markets and also expands the group into new sectors such as hotels and leisure. We look forward to leveraging our newly combined and deeper skills to further our organic growth."

Two Shropshire companies – law firm Aaron & Partners and accountants Dyke Yaxley – played key roles in helping to complete the deal. Established in 2001, Rockford provides managed hosting services, a 24/7 IT service desk, IT security, connectivity services and disaster recovery solutions to around 200 UK customers including SMEs, councils, education organisations, professional services, and blue chip customers.



*The branding for the two companies has been refreshed*

## A fresh look for two sister companies

Web and IT company Information Solutions, and its sister company The Web Orchard, have moved into larger Shrewsbury premises, taken on extra staff, and unveiled a new brand identity.

Director Peter White said: "Over the past year our businesses have gone from strength to strength, and with future development planned it's been great to move into the larger offices.

"Refreshing the branding better reflects the two companies as we progress into this phase of the company.

"We're happy that we've been able to remain in The Pump House in Shrewsbury, as it's a great low energy and environmentally friendly building, and allows us to have a great central hub for working with the whole of Shropshire and the West Midlands."

The company runs the Love Shrewsbury website and the Community Hub web services for local parish councils.

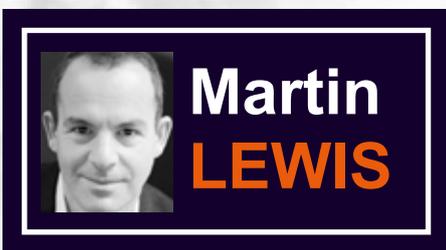
The rebrand was carried out by Carl Jones Design, and it is not the first time the two companies have worked together, having collaborated on projects such as the new Housing Plus Group, Blue Square Building, and Battlefield 1403 websites.



To qualify for an SMI discount, the applicant must be certified as having a severe mental impairment and eligible for a specific benefit

# Useful information on council tax discounts

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



**S**ome of the most vulnerable people in Shropshire are missing out on a council tax discount worth hundreds or even thousands of pounds – as little is known about it, and some misinformation is being given out. It's time to change that.

If you have, or know someone living with dementia, Alzheimer's, Multiple Sclerosis, Parkinson's or other similar conditions – it's important you take five minutes now to read about the Severely Mentally Impaired council tax discount.

**This discount typically saves people £400 a year**

Like students, those who qualify for the SMI discount are disregarded for council tax purpose. That means those living alone don't pay any council tax at all, while those living with another – often their carer – qualify for a 25% reduction. This is worth an average of £400 a year.

In some cases, it's also possible to get the discount backdated. Though it's up to individual councils whether they allow this – so it's a postcode lottery.

Bob's email shows the impact. "Saw you on This Morning talking about this. In short wife two strokes since 2009, we applied to

council and got both reduction in council tax and over £2,000 refund. Yippy. Thank you. I know of others in same boat so I am helping them."

Personally, due to the range of misinformation that's given out on this (as I'll run through below), I think the rules need changing so that all councils backdate it.

## Who's eligible?

For someone to qualify for a SMI council tax discount, both of the following must apply:

**1)** They must be medically certified as having a severe mental impairment. This is not specific to any particular medical condition – it is officially defined as someone who has "a severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning (however caused) which appears to be permanent."

So it's not a question of someone having dementia or Parkinson's

● Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of Money Saving Expert. To join the 12 million people who get his Martin's Money Tips weekly email, go to [www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip)



## It's a competitive overdraft market

If you bank with Lloyds, Halifax or Bank of Scotland - you're one of over 20 million people across the UK who had their overdraft charges changed at the back end of last year, and for some it can mean paying hundreds of pounds more a year. Yet at the same time the overdraft market's never been more competitive with three banks offering 0% overdrafts.

When the changes to the Lloyds Banking group's charges reached people's statements, my mailbag started filling up, with many shocked at the cost, like Danny who tweeted me: "@MartinSLewis new overdraft fees £3.18 per DAY I'm £2,500 overdrawn! Way beyond simple change in terms... HELP!"

This has been a root and branch (sorry) reform of charges. Before some of its brands charged a flat daily fee, others a monthly charge and daily interest. Now it's 1p per day for each £7 you're overdrawn, which works out to around £1 a day per £700 of overdraft (so around £30 a month if you're that far in continually). It's also got rid of charges for busting your overdraft limit.

While there are more winners than losers, the winners' gains are smaller than the losses for those who lose out.

**Losers:** Those with overdrafts in the thousands, or those constantly overdrawn in the high hundreds. For example, if you were constantly £2,500 overdrawn you'd be charged £110 compared to £40 - £60 before.

**Winners:** Those with smaller overdrafts or who previously bust their limit will pay less. Someone £100 overdrawn for a week now pays £1, compared with £6 - £7 before.

### The top 0% overdrafts

If you're paying too much for your overdraft. Ditch and switch. When you apply to a new bank you will be credit scored - it's often not too harsh - but you can be rejected or given a low overdraft limit. For full options see my guide to cutting overdraft costs at [www.mse.me/cutoverdrafts](http://www.mse.me/cutoverdrafts), in short here's three top deals.

- Switchers to [www.firstdirect.com](http://www.firstdirect.com) get a free £100 and may qualify for an ongoing fixed £250 0% overdraft (15.9% EAR above that). So if you're less than £350 overdrawn, switch and after the free cash you'll only owe £250 at no cost.

- [www.hsbc.com](http://www.hsbc.com) Advance gives switchers a free £150 (and another £50 if there after a year) and a six-month 0% overdraft (only do it if you can clear in that time), which it says is typically £1,000.

- [www.nationwide.co.uk](http://www.nationwide.co.uk) FlexDirect gives switchers a 0% overdraft for a year (50p/day after), anecdotally limits here can be pretty high too, as [mattboliver](https://twitter.com/mattboliver) tweeted me: "@martinslewis Matched my old one - £1,200. Implied I could have asked for more, but the point was I wanted to pay off."

It's also possible to use special money transfer credit cards to shift larger overdrafts to credit cards at 0%, this can be a very powerful way to cut your overdraft cost. For full info on that see [www.moneysavingexpert.com/moneytransfers](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com/moneytransfers).

*In many cases the individual is incapable of claiming SMI for themselves, therefore a carer can*

automatically qualifying. Some will, some won't. It's up to a GP to decide and they will have to sign the form (which they should not charge you to do).

2) They must be eligible for one of a range of benefits. These include; incapacity benefit, disability living allowance, personal independence payments, severe disablement allowance, income support, constant attendance allowance, disability working allowance, some forms of universal credit and others.

Just to be clear, some councils wrongly tell people they need to be receiving these benefits.

That's not correct - the law simply says you need to be eligible for them - this may well act as a prompt to claim them too.

### Tool up before you apply to the council, misinformation is rife

It is quite likely the person who has the SMI will not be able to claim themselves, in which case their carer can do it for them. You'll need to fill out a claim form from your council to register for the discount. Find contact details at [www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction](http://www.gov.uk/apply-council-tax-reduction).

I've been campaigning to raise awareness on this since 2016. There have been successes such as Paul: "Thanks - with your guide, just helped my parents claim back £2,400 council tax as dad has Parkinson's."

Yet many people have struggled to claim, like Philip: "My wife started receiving

benefits for Parkinson's in 2001. My council originally told me that we didn't qualify as we had savings.

However, it eventually admitted it had given us wrong information and we were given a 25% discount."

This mixed feedback prompted the team at my site [www.moneysavingexpert.com](http://www.moneysavingexpert.com) to launch an investigation, consisting of Freedom of Information requests to all councils in England, Scotland and Wales, and a mystery shopper exercise of 100 councils.

The FOI results from 265 councils showed a staggering difference in those claiming the discount.

Uptake in Renfrewshire is 77 times higher than just 40 miles away in East Ayrshire - which is unlikely to be accounted for by differences in the population make up alone.

In the mystery shopping exercise nearly 70% of councils gave out some form of misinformation; from not knowing the eligibility criteria, down to five call handlers being unaware of the existence of the SMI discount at all.

So if you are calling up to arrange it, make sure you understand it yourself. If they give you the wrong information be polite but firm.

More help and guidance if you're struggling with this at charities including [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk), [www.dementiauk.org](http://www.dementiauk.org) [www.carersuk.org](http://www.carersuk.org) or [www.alzheimers.org.uk](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk)

Do let me know via @MartinSLewis on Twitter how you do on this.



Switching saves money



Sarah Reece



Nick Williams

## Two partners join firm

Property, business and planning firm Berrys has appointed two new partners at its Shrewsbury office: chartered surveyor Sarah Reece and chartered town planner Nick Williams.

Sarah becomes the first woman to be appointed a partner at Berrys. Having joined the Shrewsbury office in 2003 after graduating from Seale Hayne with a first-class

honours degree in rural estate management, she has played a vital role in developing agency and professional services at the office and was appointed associate partner in 2009.

Married with two young children, Sarah is a member of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, a registered valuer and a fellow of the Central Association of Agricultural Valuers.

## A dream apprenticeship

Young Wellington woman Tayler Jarvis has landed a dream apprenticeship with technology giant Capgemini after thriving in the learning environment at Telford College.

The 20-year-old completed her GCSEs at Ercall Wood School before taking Business, Economics and Maths A levels at the college's King Street campus.

She has now been taken on by Capgemini, a consulting, technology services and digital transformation company, as a degree apprentice – meaning the company sponsors her entire studies, she has no student debt, and has a guaranteed job from day one.

Tayler is combining her full-time work as an applications consultant with a Leadership and Business Management degree at Aston University,



Tayler Jarvis

which she studies in evenings and weekends through online lectures.



New appointment for Matthew Tyrrell at Morris Joinery

## Matthew has a new challenge

Morris Joinery has appointed Matthew Tyrrell as its new assistant joinery manager to support growth at its Bicton workshop.

He is responsible for the day-to-day running of the workshop alongside the Joinery manager, providing quotations and managing the team's three apprentices

Matt, 34, has worked in joinery since leaving school where he completed an apprenticeship in bench joinery and carpentry at Worcester College of Technology. He started his career as a bench joiner at Wyre Forest Woodcraft, then owning his own business in Worcestershire for ten years.

"I felt like I needed a new challenge," he said. "I believe you never stop learning and this role is already teaching me more every day which is something I am keen to instil in our apprentices who are just starting out."

## An honorary degree for Lord Lieutenant



Honoured and delighted – Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, Sir Algernon Heber-Percy

**Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire, Sir Algernon Heber-Percy, has received an honorary Doctor of Letters degree from the University of Chester, in recognition of his outstanding contribution to the role he has held since 1996.**

During his army career, he held the positions of Lieutenant Grenadier Guards from 1962-1966, Hon Col 5 Bn Shropshire and Herefordshire Light Infantry 1998-1999 and Hon Col West Midlands Regiment 1999-2005.

Since leaving the Army, his career has primarily been taken up by farming estate activities at his home in North Shropshire and the administration of Hodnet Hall Gardens. He said: "I feel most honoured and delighted. The ceremony gave me a brief opportunity to say thank you to the University of Chester for its enthusiasm and commitment to its youthful new centre in Shrewsbury.

"The opportunity the university has given us is deeply appreciated."

## A Pure marketing role



*Sharon Hutchinson has joined Pure Telecom*

Expanding telecoms company Pure Telecom, which has its head office on Shrewsbury Business Park, has appointed a new marketing manager.

Sharon Hutchinson has been recruited to the newly-created role from Halls Auctioneers of Shrewsbury where she oversaw all marketing activity, including print, digital and social media, for the past decade.

Previously Sharon was marketing manager at the Enta Group of Telford, an IT distributor and telecoms company working with a wide range of manufacturers such as Microsoft, BT, Fujitsu and D-Link.

Speaking of her new role, she said: "I look forward to working with a great team to grow their presence both locally and regionally over the coming months and years."



*Luke Jones, centre manager of Flexspace Shrewsbury, with receptionist Alice Clarke*

## Office provider is part of a busy SME community

Putting the interests of local SMEs first is the top priority according to Luke Jones, who has been appointed manager of the Flexspace centre in Shrewsbury.

The serviced office provider lets and manages office space and light industrial units at the Battlefield Enterprise Park. He said: "There's a really strong small business community here in Shropshire and Shrewsbury in particular. In 2015 the council released statistics suggesting over 98 per cent of businesses in Shropshire employ less than 50 people – that's a really busy SME community. It's clear there's a real appetite for enterprise locally."

Luke, from Shrewsbury, previously worked at Hawkstone Park Hotel for over 10 years.

## Extensive experience

Telford law firm Martin-Kaye has welcomed a new solicitor with over 14 years' experience who specialises in commercial litigation.

Sara Brumwell is the latest new face to join the team at Euston Way, and she has extensive experience in handling probate disputes, property and consumer claims, and professional negligence cases against solicitors, surveyors and other professionals.

She has previously worked in a High Street practice in Staffordshire and said: "I am a strong believer in the benefits of Alternative Dispute Resolution, even in the most difficult cases, and my preferred approach is to try to achieve a settlement with court action as a last resort."



*Sara Brumwell has joined Martin-Kaye*

## Developing the next generation



*New Fabdec apprentices Sophie Jones and Daniel Fullerton*

**E**llesmere-based manufacturer Fabdec has kickstarted a new apprenticeship programme with four young people joining the business.

The company, which manufactures heating and cooling products, is looking to support a new generation of engineers and commercial leaders, working with local colleges and training providers.

The four apprentices are welding duo Tom Rowlands, 19, and Sophie Tyrer 19, Daniel Fullerton, 21, in engineering, and commercial apprentice Sophie Jones, 23. All four live within eight miles of Fabdec's headquarters, which is home to all of the business's manufacturing, engineering, commercial and R&D divisions.

Each apprentice will spend four days a week within the business learning their trade, and a day at college for classroom-based learning. At the end of their apprenticeships they will achieve NVQ Level 3. Chris Powell, Fabdec managing director, said: "This is an exciting period of growth at Fabdec and we have recognised that to ensure our long-term future, we need to continue developing our younger members of staff."

The business is also celebrating an increase in demand for exports, with orders being placed in the US, Japan and across Europe.

# Conveyancing lawyers



From left, Sarah Seabridge, Rachel Jones, Tracy Barnett

Terry Jones Solicitors, with offices in Shrewsbury, Telford, Newport and Bridgnorth, has appointed three new conveyancing lawyers to join the team in Telford.

Conveyancing executive Rachel Jones has over 20 years of experience in residential conveyancing, and a sound understanding of the new build industry and its complexities.

Tracy Barnett who is an associate member of CILEx, joined the firm as a conveyancing executive in October and complements the property team. Tracy has legal experience across a wide range of disciplines for over 20 years.

Solicitor Sarah Seabridge completed her LLB (Hons) degree at the University of Wolverhampton and went on to complete her Legal Practice Course at The College of Law in Birmingham, qualifying in August 2016.



Grant Dodsworth, assistant sales manager at Arthurs of Oswestry

## Look who's back

**N**o fewer than five times over a 14 year period, Grant Dodsworth has left Vauxhall dealer Arthurs of Oswestry and a previous sister operation in Shrewsbury.

Now he is back at the Lower Brook Street dealership as assistant sales manager.

"Once again for me, it is great to be back," said Grant, 43, who each time he has left the dealership has moved on to develop and improve his experience in the motor trade. He has returned following two years as head of concierge Mercedes Benz Cheshire Oaks where he says he gained 'valuable knowledge and experience'.

And one of the other reasons for his return to Arthurs of Oswestry is the fact that his daughter Emily, who is nearly three, is in nursery in the town centre.

# Driving forward change through national committee

Thomas Shacklady – a student at Derwen College, in Gobowen, near Oswestry – has been voted on to the National Union of Students FE Committee. Thomas, who has Down's Syndrome and learning difficulties, stood against students from mainstream colleges to gain his place on the committee.

Thomas will be a strong voice on the committee representing



Jason Tanulak of Saxonby Group, based in Shrewsbury

## Busy time for care group

Shrewsbury based Saxonby Group has launched a new haulage and muck-away operation. Headed up by Jason Tanulak who with nearly ten years as an experienced driver and operator, it will offer haulage and muck-away services to the construction sector, from large civil engineering and utilities companies to SMEs, as well as removal and disposal of stone, spoil and top soil to domestic and residential customers.

"This was previously a contracted, bought-in function we used to service the early stages of our housing developments, but with growth in the company, it made sense to establish our own cost-effective haulage company aimed not only at other businesses but also to a potentially wider customer base," said James Wood, group managing director.

## Adding to the team



Mike McGrath and Jayne Meakin at SMI's Telford headquarters

Thermal insulation specialist Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI) is gearing up for an exciting 2018 by welcoming another two new members to the team.

Jayne Meakin, who lives near Bridgnorth, has taken on the role of accounts administrator at the company's headquarters in Telford, handling book-keeping, accounting, and payroll duties. And Mike McGrath, whose globe-trotting career has seen him work on both sides of the world, is the new divisional sales manager for the south of England.

SMI founder and managing director Brian Seymour said: "It has been an exciting few months for us, with lucrative new sales leads and record-breaking sales of our Cold-Stop insulated curtains across the UK.

"We are excited about what our new-look team will be able to achieve in 2018."

learners with special educational needs and disabilities. Sarah Laszlo, learner voice programme co-ordinator at Derwen College said: "Thomas will now continue the work that former Derwen student Robin Ferguson has been doing with NUS for the last two years to drive forward change within the movement for students with learning difficulties and disabilities."

## Chief executive role

The Hive in Shrewsbury has appointed a new chief executive. Katie Jennings formerly worked for the Hive as programmes and projects manager for 12 years and previously for other arts organisations in Shrewsbury and Bristol.

In her 12 years at the Hive, Katie has helped the organisation secure over £2.5 million in grant funding from diverse funding streams and has been involved with seeking support from other organisations, including The White Stuff Foundation and Youth Music, to help continue to fund the projects the Hive works on across Shropshire and the West Midlands with people living in challenging circumstances.

Peter Pack, for the board of trustees, said: "We are thrilled to have Katie leading the Hive at this exciting time for the organisation – her experience and passion for the role will really enable us to extend the range of our activities and the quality of our work."

## Management position



Aimee Davies of Halls

Estate agent Halls has expanded the property lettings department at its Ellesmere office due to increasing demand.

Aimee Davies, 24, from Gobowen, moves across from residential sales negotiator to become lettings portfolio manager, working alongside lettings department manager Gemma Smart.

A business management graduate of Glyndwr University, Wrexham, Aimee has worked for Halls for two years. She is working towards a Level 4 Diploma in Residential Sales and Property Management and Association of Residential Letting Agents examinations.

The company has increased its managed property letting portfolio by 15 per cent in the past year.

## An asset to the firm

Charis Denham, a graduate of Harper Adams University, has returned to Roger Parry & Partners, working as a chartered surveyor in the firm's Minsterley office. She previously worked for the firm for 12 years. It means the company now has eight qualified chartered surveyors.

Roger Parry said: "Charis is a huge asset to our team as she is able to advise clients in all property



Charis Denham of Roger Parry & Partners

valuation, planning and development matters and also has working knowledge of the basic payment scheme, countryside stewardship, commercial and residential agency, compensation, landlord and tenant matters."

## Strengthening links



Vice chairman of the Motorsport Industry Association, James Grainger

**J**ames Grainger, a director of Bridgnorth-based manufacturing company Grainger & Worrall, has landed a key role in the British motorsport industry.

He has been appointed vice chairman of the Motorsport Industry Association. It further strengthens the Shropshire company's links with the sector – it already supplies precision-machined parts for top car brands, including Formula One teams. He said: "This is both an exciting and important time for the global motorsport industry, with new technologies constantly supporting the development of more efficient and lighter vehicles. As vice chairman of the MIA, I can help Grainger & Worrall work more closely with the sector and ensure that our members continue to have an active voice in key industry developments."

## Directors join the board



New Galliers directors Darren Abley, Steve Cassie and Emma Macdonald

Shropshire house builder Galliers Homes has strengthened its board with three promotions. Emma Macdonald steps up to the position of design and planning director at the firm, which has its head office on Shrewsbury Business Park, and is expanding its operations throughout the county.

With over 25 years' residential property experience, she has spent the last three with the firm and its sister company Cameron Homes. Darren Abley has been in the construction industry for 30 years, working for a range of national names where he progressed to the position of construction manager.

He moved to Galliers a year ago and was recently promoted to the role of production director. Steve Cassie is the third new board member, stepping up after 15 months with the firm.

A former commercial manager and quantity surveyor with several other companies in the Midlands construction sector, he now becomes technical director at Galliers.



Connexis, in Pearson Road, Telford, can provide communications needs for businesses of all sizes *William Rowland is managing director of Connexis*

# Technology helps you reach larger audience

**T**he modern traveller demands much more than coffee, tea and biscuits in their hotel room, with one technological advancement having become perhaps top of the list.

Wifi is no longer simply considered desirable by many using the services of a hotel - it is essential. Whether the visitor is on business or hoping to engage with friends and family via social media, connectivity for smartphones, tablets and computers is key to a happy stay.

"We have many clients in the hospitality sector, with several here in Shropshire," says William Rowland, managing director of Connexis.

Connexis has long standing relationships with local hospitality businesses including The Shrewsbury Club Fitness & Spa and The Prince Rupert Hotel in Shrewsbury.

Further afield The Malvern Hotel & Spa in Malvern, Holmer Park Health Club & Spa in Hereford The Trefeddian Hotel in Aberdovey, The Dower House Hotel & Spa in Knaresborough and Hazelwood Castle in Tadcaster, Yorkshire.

Connexis, based in Pearson Road, Telford, is well equipped to provide all communications needs for businesses of all sizes.

The company can now offer an enhancement to its existing public access wifi solutions with the introduction of subscription service So Wifi.

So Wifi is an effective solution for small business, hospitality, retail and enterprises that seek to improve turnover, without investing in expensive or complicated marketing.

By installing a So Wifi hotspot in your business, you can extract information from



*So Wifi is an effective solution for small business, hospitality, retail and enterprises that seek to improve turnover, without investing in expensive or complicated marketing*

visitors and customers so that you can increase profitability, and make decisions that can help to advance your business through to the next level.

Businesses simply install a So Wifi hotspot in their location, and start giving fast and easy guest-wifi for customers.

Every time a guest logs onto the wifi with their own social media or e-mail account, the individual business can gather their contact information and other valuable analytics.

In exchange for enjoying your free guest-wifi, they automatically 'Like' your Facebook

page, and thereby boost your online reputation.

Even more importantly, you now also have the ability to contact them at any time after.

You can contact your list in many different ways; including e-mail, personalised or automated messages and social media.

To discover more about So Wifi and the other services carried out at Connexis, get in touch today.

● *William Rowland is managing director of communications specialist Connexis, based in Telford. A new website is in development and this will launch soon.*

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