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May/June 2018

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INTRODUCING THE TEAM

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(front) Natasha Boaden, Chimene Felton, Jane Ward & Sarah Pryce*

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It's time to look

In today's fast-paced world, there's rarely a let-up in workplace pressure. If you're not careful, you can easily find yourself putting in hours of unpaid overtime, just to stay on top of the workload.

"Don't work harder, just work smarter," managers say. It sounds a perfectly sensible philosophy, but it's sometimes much more easily said than done.

In this issue, we take a look at the new trend of 'agile working' – the idea that we should be able to work where, when and how we choose, with maximum flexibility to boost both performance and productivity.

Is it time for your company to follow in the footsteps of big names like Unilever, Lloyds Banking Group, BT, ITV and John Lewis?

Flexibility, in fact, seems to be a theme which runs through many of our features this time round.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, for example, tells us why it is unveiling a new-look membership offer in response to the changing needs of the economy, and the highly publicised gender pay gap report is challenging firms to rethink their salary structures. We look at what some of the county's biggest firms revealed.

Elsewhere, with judging now under way for the 18th annual county business awards to be handed out on June 15, the reigning company of the year, Reconomy, explains why it's



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at how you work

on the verge of yet more prestigious recognition.

We also drop in on another growing business, in south east Shropshire, which is cashing in on a quest to protect the environment by using skilled local craftspeople to make a range of eco-coffins.

With UK unemployment at its lowest level for a generation, we report on a number of job-creating initiatives across the county, from pizza distributors in Telford to accountants in Ludlow.

And TV's 'Secret Millionaire' Mo Chaudry has done what he hinted when

he spoke to us exclusively in issue eight, by becoming majority shareholder in a leisure company which works across some 30 countries. He tells us what it's all going to mean.



This year has seen some big and high-profile casualties on the high street, including the likes of Toys R Us and Maplin. Shropshire Council, however, has given a bold vote of confidence to Shrewsbury by spending over £50 million on buying the town's

three main shopping centres.

Is retail on its knees right now? Experts give us both sides of the story in a special report.

And there's more . . . we've got picture specials from events in Oswestry, Ludlow and Telford, our usual dose of advice from TV's money saving expert Martin Lewis, and a round-up of the movers and shakers in our regular appointments section.

If your company is making news, or has something to say on a topical issue, please get in touch – we'd love to give you a headline, either in print, on our website, on indeed both.

Carl Jones,
Editor



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Please mind the pay gap

The gender wage gap has barely fallen over the last 15 years and greater understanding of its determinants are needed – Institute for Fiscal Studies

By Carl Jones

So now we know . . . or do we? What exactly have the UK's latest gender pay gap revelations told us that is either surprising, or particularly new?

Men earn more money than women at more than three quarters of companies, largely because men still hold more senior positions commanding the highest salaries.

The real question is whether this situation is changing – and that's something which the latest highly publicised pay revelations don't really address.

Under new legislation, all companies with 250 employees or more are now legally required to publish their gender pay gap. Failure to do so puts them at risk of legal action.

More than 10,000 large firms have provided details of their gender pay gap, with 78% paying men more than women. The average pay differential between men and women has emerged as around 9.7%.

In Shropshire, as in most parts of the UK, there are widely varying statistics from one industry to the next.

Shropshire Council has one of the larger gender pay gaps – men earning 26% more than women, compared with a gap of just 5.2% in favour of men at Telford & Wrekin Council.

The county's NHS trust pays men 12.5% more, on average, than women, while one of the county's biggest employers, IT company Capgemini, has a 17% differential in favour of male staff.

And there is a huge gender pay gap at Shrewsbury School, where the report shows women earn 57.8% less than their men.

Not all of Shropshire's biggest companies pay men more than women, though. Bridgnorth Aluminium's reports show that it pays men an average of 1.4% less than women, and at Morris Care Limited, the average man is paid 4.9% less than the average woman. Shrewsbury-based waste processing firm Veolia has no gender pay gap at all.

It's important to differentiate a gender pay gap with the issue of equal pay.



McDonald's is among those reporting no wage gap at all

The gender pay gap is calculated as the difference between the average salaries of men and women.

It is not the same as equal pay, where firms are required to pay people doing the same job the same salary, regardless of their gender.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the biggest gender pay gaps tend to be in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as construction, and financial services.

Unions which represent many of the reportedly under-paid staff don't emerge untarnished from this report either.

Unite, the UK's biggest trade union, has revealed a median gender pay gap of 29.6%. It means that when comparing hourly rates, for every £1 that a man earns on average, a woman is paid 70p.

And it's even higher at teachers' union NASUWT, where the figure is 42.7%.

Snapshot of Shropshire's prominent employers. . .

- **EPSON TELFORD LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 4.1% less than the average man
- **CAPGEMINI UK PLC:** The average woman is paid 17% less than the average man
- **SHROPSHIRE COUNCIL:** The average woman is paid 26% less than the average man
- **TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL:** The average woman is paid 5.2% less than the average man
- **DENSO MANUFACTURING UK LTD:** The average woman is paid 13.1% less than the average man
- **STADCO LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 2.2% less than the average man
- **MIDLAND NEWS ASSOCIATION LIMITED** – publisher of the Shropshire Star. The average woman is paid 3.1% less than the average man
- **GROCONTINENTAL LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 8.6% less than the average man
- **THE SHREWSBURY AND TELFORD HOSPITAL NHS TRUST:** The average woman is paid 12.5% less than the average man
- **MULLER UK & IRELAND GROUP LLP:** The average woman is paid 3% less than the average man
- **BRIDGNORTH ALUMINIUM LIMITED:** The average man is paid 1.4% less than the average woman
- **DONCASTERS LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 16.9% less than the average man
- **SHROPSHIRE & WREKIN FIRE AUTHORITY:** The average woman is paid 11% less than the average man
- **RICOH UK PRODUCTS LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 10.4% less than the average man
- **MCPHILLIPS (WELLINGTON) LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 11.3% less than the average man
- **VEOLIA ES SHROPSHIRE LIMITED:** This company reports no gender pay gap.
- **TM TELFORD DAIRY LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 8% less than the average man
- **BAE SYSTEMS PLC:** The average woman is paid 15.6% less than the average man
- **MAGNA SPECIALIST CONFECTIONERS LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 15% less than the average man
- **MORRIS CARE LIMITED:** The average man is paid 4.9% less than the average woman
- **THE WREKIN HOUSING TRUST LIMITED:** The average woman is paid 1.8% less than the average man

Figures based on the BBC's gender pay gap online calculator



Bridgnorth Aluminium pays men an average of 1.4% less than women

Another union with a high gender pay gap is shop workers union Usdaw, which pays women 33.5% less than men on average.

Among the big banks, Lloyds TSB has the largest median pay gap at 42.7%, followed by the Royal Bank of Scotland at 36.5%.

At the other end of the scale, BT has a 2.3% gap in favour of women, while Primark, McDonald's and Costa are among those reporting no wage gap at all.

Of the big West Midlands football clubs, West Bromwich Albion has the highest median gender gap of 34.3% in favour of men, compared with 11.5% at Wolves.

A spokesman for the Institute for Fiscal Studies said: "The gender wage gap has barely fallen over the last 15 years and greater understanding of its determinants are needed.

"The new data being provided by employers could help contribute to that. As ever, however, the statistics are limited and need to be interpreted with care."

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A Major guest for awards ceremony

A record-breaking Antarctic skier will be the guest speaker at this year's Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.

West Midlands-based army reservist Major Sandy Hennis, one of the six-woman Ice Maidens skiing team, will speak at the June 15 event which will celebrate the best of the county's commerce and industry.

The Ice Maidens made the headlines when they became the first all-female team in the world to ski unaided coast-to-coast across Antarctica.

Chamber chief executive Richard Sheehan said: "Speak to any of the previous winners and they will be in no doubt that winning an award can be extremely valuable.

"Not only can it raise your company profile, enhance your reputation, instil trust and attract new business, but ultimately it can help make your company more profitable.

"This year we have broadened the categories ensuring there is something for every business, no matter how big or small, a new start-up or trading for many years.

"We are very pleased with the quality of entries, and are always proud of the event itself and the positive impact it has on businesses."

Tickets are now on sale for the black-tie awards ceremony, at The International Centre in Telford, on June 15. To book a place, and choose your seats, see www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk



Antarctic skier Major Sandy Hennis – guest speaker at the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, 2018

It's GoGo go as pizza firm creates new jobs

How's this for a tasty slice of inward investment? Food and distribution business **Pizza GoGo Ltd** has created **25 new jobs** at its new specialist manufacturing and distribution centre in Telford.

The firm's arrival was made possible thanks to Enterprise Telford and has attracted almost £150,000 of funding from the Business Growth Programme, which supported the development of a state-of-the-art manufacturing and distribution hub.

A further £100,000 from the Marches LEP's Building Investment Grant enabled essential expansion work to be carried out immediately.

Founded in Essex over 30 years ago, Pizza GoGo now has more than 100 branches throughout the South East of England, and was seeking a suitable distribution base in the Midlands or North of England.

It chose a site on Stafford Park due to Telford's proximity to the UK's road network, and availability of suitable premises.

Michael Harte, the company's managing director for the Midlands, said: "Telford proved an ideal location for our expansion and the unit we chose with the support of Enterprise Telford ticked many boxes.

"However, we knew further expansion would be needed to realise our vision of not only having an office and distribution provision here, but also a dedicated



Jess Richards, Katherine Kynaston, Councillor John Minor, Caroline Cattle and Michael Harte

manufacturing facility. Realistically, without the funding, this additional development would have been put off for a couple of years and a temporary solution put in place in the South East."

Pizza GoGo, a manufacturer of cheese and dough which counts Domino's, Pizza Hut and Papa John's as its main competitors, had already said it would create 15 full-time jobs in Telford.

The further expansion means an additional 10 jobs have now also been confirmed.

Marches LEP director Gill Hamer said: "This investment is a fabulous example of a company seeking guidance, support and investment from a variety of partners across the region and the joined-up approach that has consequently been taken, will make a hugely significant impact on the local economy."

Full details on how to apply are available from Caroline Cattle and Alison Rogers on mbig@herefordshire.gov.uk or by calling the Marches Growth Hub team on 0345 6000 727.



FBC Manby Bowdler has retained its 'outstanding' 2-star rating in the Best Companies awards for a second year

A happy workforce

Law firm FBC Manby Bowdler has set its sights on achieving the top ranking for employee satisfaction after retaining its 'outstanding' two-star rating in the Best Companies awards for a second year.

Best Companies recognises the country's best companies to work for based on feedback received from employees.

The ranking system is modelled on the Michelin Guide star system used to recognise the best restaurants.

The system measures employees' levels of fulfilment, engagement and motivation and the two-star status was confirmed following a confidential employee survey that covered issues including leadership, personal growth, and wellbeing.

It is the fourth year running that FBC Manby Bowdler, which has offices in Telford, Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury, has featured in the list.

FBC Manby Bowdler managing partner Kim Carr said: "We are very pleased to have not only retained our 2-star status but to

have increased our engagement scores in relation to the leadership and my company categories.

"This signals that there is more comprehension and excitement among our team about our future growth strategy and that people are more engaged with the business, its aims and the strength of the senior management team to take it forward.

"We are determined to reach the three-star status of 'extraordinary' and look forward to working with our exceptional team to get there."

The firm employs more than 200 people and has an annual turnover in excess of £12 million.

Investment brings on board children's magazines

The Claverley Group, which owns the Shropshire Star and several of the county's weekly newspapers, has taken a majority shareholding in Kennedy Enterprises Ltd, publisher of children's magazines.

Kennedy publishes a portfolio of 25 different magazines, with annual copy sales close to four million.

The investment will see Kennedy Publishing, the company under which Kennedy Enterprise Ltd trades, continue to operate from its current base in Wick, near Bristol.

The agreement with Claverley has been made with a view to support the further growth of the business.

Dean Barber, circulation director of the

Claverley-owned Midland News Association, has been appointed managing director of Kennedy Publishing. Dean will work alongside the current shareholders of the business, Joanne and Paul Kennedy.

The Claverley Group comprises MNA, publisher of the Express & Star and Shropshire Star; the Guiton Group, which owns Jersey Evening Post and Guernsey Press; commercial print company Precision Colour Printing; and publishing software company Press Computer Systems.

Claverley Group CEO Phil Inman said:



"We are delighted to confirm our investment in a growing business and look forward to working with the current shareholders to support the development of the portfolio of titles over the coming years.

"The deal shows Claverley's commitment to print and will further grow our portfolio of businesses."

Paul Kennedy said:

"Claverley is well known to us through our longstanding relationship with Precision Colour Printing. We welcome the opportunity to draw upon its strengths while continuing to increase our range of quality magazines."

Better safe than sorry

Former trauma medic Steve Bray has designed his own special medical kitbag to respond to a terrorist attack or disaster when he visits a major city around the world on business.

The founder of Telford-based medical supplies company SP Services put together the pack 'just in case' he was ever near the scene of a bombing, shooting or terrorist incident – months before the latest terror attacks in Manchester and London.

The Parabag is full of life-saving equipment including trauma dressing, tourniquet, a dressing to stem heavy blood loss, and treatment for facial burns.

With security services still on high alert in the UK, Steve believes the public can save lives in the aftermath of an attack if they have the right equipment to hand and the knowledge of how to use it in an emergency.

"I know I'm more likely to come across a cardiac arrest than a terrorist attack, but following the terrible terrorist attacks in Paris, Brussels, Nice and Munich, I had become concerned that if I ever got caught up in one, I wouldn't have any kit with me to help the injured," said Steve.

"I also had a slightly selfish motive as I might also need some med kit to look after myself if I was one of the injured.

"I came up with this small med kit idea in 2015 which I wear on my belt while travelling around London, whether in my business suit or casual wear. It's an unassuming, easy to wear kit, that anyone can carry.

"There is no excuse not to be prepared, especially as lots of companies are now also providing short courses on how to deal with immediate life-threatening injuries," added Steve.

SP Services works with companies all over the world, and has its headquarters on the Hortonwood industrial estate.

Steve Bray has stepped down as managing director this year to be replaced by Simon Leggett, who has held senior management positions with companies such as OCS Group, The Consortium, Staples, and Office Depot.



Steve Bray now carries the Parabag when he visits a city on business

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* BNI members, on average, increase their business 20% the first year. See www.bni.co.uk for more details.



IS THE NEXT CHAPTER
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Welsh Bridge headquarters of Morris & Co in Shrewsbury, and below, Robin Morris (centre left) with the property management team – James West (left), Liz Lowe and Steve Flavell

As one of Shropshire's most prolific business dynasties approaches yet another milestone, **Chris Austin** catches up with the latest generation of the Morris family for an update on their current commercial interests

EMBRACING THE PAST & PRESENT



Five generations of the Morris family have built one of Shropshire's biggest and best-known business success stories.

And a real milestone is just around the corner. The Morris Company, which employs more than 700 people across

its property, care and site machinery divisions, is preparing for its 150th anniversary.

Not many private family-run businesses flourish into the fifth generation of ownership, so the milestone – in just a few months' time – will bring many reasons to celebrate.

Plans are already underway to ensure everyone who makes up

the business today can mark the achievements of the past and the present.

Whilst the business is deeply rooted in Shropshire, with the company headquarters in the Queen Anne building sitting at the head of the Welsh Bridge in Shrewsbury, Morris's has grown beyond the county boundaries through a blend of enterprise and investment. ▶

◀ Today, it has bases across the UK and a growing international business which is recognised by the Sunday Times as one of its 'Fast Track 200 companies' for its export sales of lighting towers.

Over the years the company has traded in all manner of industries and sectors – from candles and bakery, to drapery and lubricants and from food to property - watching as markets and opportunities opened up, investing and then divesting as those markets matured.

The company derives from the original philosophy of its founder James Kent Morris back in 1869 which stated: "To do the common thing well brings success."

It's a sentiment which has stood the test of time, still sitting in prime position etched in the wall in the reception area at the Welsh Bridge offices today.

Today, the Morris family remains actively involved at the helm of each of the company's trading operations.

"We realised several generations ago that one of the keys to success was bringing in seasoned industry-specific talent to work together with our family to create successful and pioneering trading operations," says Robin Morris, chairman of the group of businesses and director of Morris Property.

"We are carrying out the design and build project over two-phases"

With its portfolio of 225 properties, the property operation has more than 100 years of heritage of building, restoring and leasing property.

"We have just started work on a £700,000 scheme to extend and refurbish the changing and leisure facilities at Telford Snowboard and Ski Centre," explains Robin.

"The centre is undergoing renovations to both modernise the building and provide more space for the growing number of enthusiasts who come to ski and play sports on the adjacent new astro turf sports field.

"We are carrying out the design and build project over two-phases and will deliver 17 new showers, 13 new toilets and additional changing room space. The traditional brick building will be timber-clad with a retaining wall and landscaping to complete the works. The scheme is estimated to take five months to complete with handover scheduled at the end of July."

In March, Robin and head of estates Elizabeth Lowe attended MIPIM, the world's largest international real-estate exhibition.

In partnership with the Midlands UK team from Shropshire Council, Marches LEP and Historic England, Morris Property travelled to Cannes on the French Riviera to put the county on the international stage and encourage investment in Shropshire.

The company's construction arm, meanwhile, has masterminded all the building projects for the parent company over the years for both its commercial and residential ambitions.

Most recently it has been creating extensions to its range of care homes across the county for sister business Morris Care, with extension plans now complete at its Oldbury Grange nursing home in Bridgnorth and new plans approved for extensions at Isle Court and Radbrook nursing homes in Shrewsbury.

The man who started it all

James Kent Morris was born in 1847 and was the eldest of nine brothers and sisters born to Langley Morris and Elizabeth Kent.

He started as an apprentice at a grocer's shop in Mardol where he worked for a further 18 months following completion of his apprenticeship, before leasing a grocery shop and

candle factory in Frankwell in 1869.

It was here that the Morris story of entrepreneurship started, as he grew the business from a small grocer's shop to one of the most successful candle factories in the county, as well as branching out into the oil business by importing petroleum oil from America.



James Kent Morris



Beaufort Ridge detached houses, The Mount



Director of Morris & Company Bill Morris centre left with family board members Robin (left), Timothy (centre) and Chris Morris



Last year saw completion of its four and five-bedroom residential development for Morris & Co Homes on The Mount in Shrewsbury, Beaufort Ridge, as well as commencement of the final phase at its celebrated 20-acre Vanguard Trade Park at Battlefield which it started developing 11 years ago.

These distinctively designed trade counters have proven to be one of the most successful concepts for flexible retail, wholesale and storage units and the final phase will provide a further 21,500 sq ft.

Over the past few years, the company's construction arm has flourished, winning tenders and building for external clients with 2017 seeing a doubling in volume of work.

High-profile projects include the county's first 77,000 sq m superhub at Battlefield and Shrewsbury's new Tannery site for student accommodation in the west end of town.



Morris Site Machinery manufactures and distributes a range of site machinery and equipment

Perhaps less well known is the success of the company's site machinery business, headed by Chris Morris.

With its 60 employees, four service depots and manufacturing plants, it has established status as a leading player in its UK market and a burgeoning export business which grew last year by 102% and is on course for further growth in 2018.

Morris Site Machinery manufactures and distributes a range of site machinery and

Clockwise from top left – the team on site at Telford Ski Centre; Stretton Hall Nursing Home; Vanguard Trade Park at Battlefield; Chris Morris launching the Halo light complete with angel

equipment including SMC mobile lighting towers, ArcGen welders, Denyo generators, and Hilti power washers and pumps. These products are sold to the UK and overseas hire industry for use by a wide range of industries from construction and mining, to rail and the events sector.

As a direct descendant of James Kent Morris who established the Morris business back in 1869, Chris explains: "I feel proud to be involved with a light-giving business in 2018.

"All those years ago, my great, great grandfather produced candle light from

his store here in Frankwell from which the lubricants division was to grow, and here we are today trading in the latest solar, LED and diffused lighting sources currently available."

Morris & Company bought the ArcGen business back in 2009 and then built it through the acquisitions of site machinery brands SMC and Hilti to create the Morris Site Machinery brand and business.

Chris continues: "The firm thrives on the senior design team's industry knowledge and capability, and we have just launched a revolutionary new lamp for our celebrated TL90 lighting tower – the Halo." ►



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The company's lighting towers weathering -40 degree temperatures in Siberia



Timothy Morris with Cindy Cruzado, pictured at Isle Court Nursing Home



TL90 towers have illuminated the film sets of James Bond and the Olympic Stadium

◀ "Made from the material used in traffic cones, this virtually indestructible lamp provides a diffused but powerful light source ideal for rail and roadside with its anti-glare properties. This is a first within its market and is already causing a stir both in the UK and overseas."

The SMC lighting tower range, we discover, is renowned in the UK for providing a robust mobile lighting source and the TL90 towers have lit up everything from the film sets of recent James Bond films to the Olympic Stadium at night.

In recent years, with Brexit and a falling sterling, the company says it has been building its export markets, and today Australia is one of its largest trading territories where its machines prosper as they are able to withstand the extreme temperatures and terrains of the antipodean landscape.

Morris Site Machinery was Highly Commended at the latest Midlands Business Awards for its commitment to export and was a finalist in the Exporter of the Year category for its continued commitment to expansion of the business overseas; in 2017, it saw its export sales grow by 128%.

The company was delighted to be highly commended at the awards for its commitment to innovation and leading initiatives such as the Halo soft light, battery powered lighting and its TL90 Ultimate lighting tower which offers a near 300-hour run time from a single tank of fuel.

Phil Winnington, international business director, says: "To be highly commended in this category is an honour and we look forward to continuing to grow our international footprint over the coming year."

Closer to home, the collection of six nursing homes run by Morris & Company across Shropshire and into Cheshire continues to win accolades with its reputation for a high level of care offered for both the elderly frail and the growing numbers of those living with dementia.

The professional medical sector is increasingly working with Morris Care to meet the complex nursing needs for many in the community.

Timothy Morris heads the care division, and he points out that each of the homes is beautifully appointed with the comforts of a luxury hotel.

"Whilst each has its own distinct personality, they all share a reputation for the quality of their nursing care and compassionate approach," he says.

"The group has been caring for the elderly, those requiring respite, post-



Rowley's House was acquired by the Corporation of Shrewsbury through the generosity of Morris and Company in 1931

operative, disability and palliative care as well as dementia care for over 25 years.

"With demand continuing to rise, we are expanding several of the homes this year to be able to care for more residents.

"The company's philosophy is to offer a holistic, all-encompassing type of care unique to each resident, allowing them to retain their dignity later in life.

"This calibre of care is increasingly being recognised by the authorities, not simply through good CQC reports but also The Care Centre in Wellington joined other homes within the group by being acknowledged by the Gold Standard Framework for its services.

"We put training and mentorship high on our list of priorities and are extremely proud of the 540 nurses, carers and support staff who make up the wider care team today."

With so much invested in the region, Morris's has an active corporate social responsibility programme at play.

This ranges from its own Stepping Stone project providing support for people to get back into work, to charitable sponsorship, fundraising and donations; planet friendly recycling and energy programmes to the all-important recognition of its fantastic staff.

Last year, over 115 staff awards were presented and celebrated for outstanding service – the business is acutely aware of the value of its people and their contributions to its ongoing success.

With the 2019 milestone on the radar, the company is busy working up plans to celebrate its longevity – a chance to look back and remember what has gone before in order to make the business what it is today. And sometimes, looking back is as important and enjoyable as looking forward. **SB**

Bespoke items for an historic development



Joinery manager Steve Granda and joiner John Lewis look through the first batch of completed windows

Morris Joinery has been commissioned to manufacture and supply bespoke joinery for a development on the outskirts of Shrewsbury to convert an historic flour mill into a prestigious residential development.

Mytton Mill Developments Limited has called upon the company to design and manufacture over 100 windows and doors at its 12-home development.

It will include two riverside mews houses, four contemporary apartments and two penthouses within the main mill complex, and the conversion of and extension to ancillary buildings to form a two further dwellings and two new large detached properties.

Two members of the Morris Joinery team have been working on the windows for several weeks with the help of an apprentice and specialist paint sprayer. The four-month project is expected to be completed by the start of the summer.

Joinery manager Steve Granda said: "We were delighted to win the commission for the bespoke joinery on such a prestigious local project, especially given the amount of windows required for the first phase of the build."

William Onions, director at Mytton Mill Developments Limited said: "Nothing is too much trouble for the joinery team and they have given significant and valuable input and advice on style, materials and manufacturing methods from the outset."

The evolution of a membership model



Richard SHEEHAN

Over the past nine months, Shropshire Chamber has been researching how it provides support for the local business community into and beyond the 2020s.

Starting with feedback from our members and the wider Shropshire business community, we have looked at membership models across many sectors up and down the country to ensure what we provide is the very best it can be.

As a result, we are about to launch an exciting new membership model, driven by choice and value whilst providing an unrivalled solutions-based offer in support of Shropshire business.

Shropshire Chamber has been supporting businesses for over 50 years, having a positive impact on our economy and employment growth with this year alone having evidence-based support of over £27 million.

There is little doubt that in this day and age people value choice in all parts of their life with business being no different, so we are delighted to be leading the way with our innovative model which will closely be followed by cutting-edge digital opportunities.



Networking in action – members of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and the wider community have given the organisation feedback

Shropshire Chamber is a not-for-profit organisation, and it has been my privilege to be part of an incredibly committed team for over 10 years.

During this time, we have been living in a world of austerity and a business landscape that has been in constant flux; the short-term future promises to be equally challenging from the B-word to labour shortages and rising costs, and Shropshire Chamber is committed to help.

We look forward to speaking to you all as we learn the future needs for your business both now and in the future, and strive to ensure that membership levels are right for your company.

As part of the new programme roll-out, we will be issuing invitations to events and briefings, so please make sure you have

opted into our communications to share in this exciting future as part of the 'Ultimate Business Network'.

Finally, don't forget to book your tickets and join us at the county's premier business celebration on June 15, when Telford's International Centre once again hosts the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.

This is the 18th year of this black-tie event which showcases the cream of Shropshire business, and we will be crowning the 2018 company of the year, plus more than a dozen other category champions.

For further details, see the website www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk

• Richard Sheehan is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce

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Town welcomes new firm of accountants

A new accountancy firm has opened for business in Ludlow.

Thorne Widgery has moved into offices at Parkway, off Corve Street, to build on several strong links it already has with the town.

The practice has a number of clients in the area, and director Dan Crowther was born and bred in Ludlow.

He said: "Thorne Widgery has a history spanning 75 years in Hereford and Shropshire, and while we are certainly proud of our past we are a firm that is firmly fixed on our future."

"Our expansion to Ludlow is the next logical step for our practice, as we already have a number of fantastic local connections. I hope plenty of local business leaders will join us at our new office to learn more about what we have to offer."

One of the firm's current local clients, Corrabeth Bishop of Ludlow Stoves, said: "Thorne Widgery has handled everything. We just pick up the phone and it gets sorted."



Dan Crowther, director at Thorne Widgery in Ludlow

"With their help, we moved from using old-style accounting spreadsheets to Xero Cloud-based accounting. This has made a huge difference to the way we run the business."

"We have a brilliant working relationship with Dan. He has a great sense of humour and he is also very patient with us. He's also very supportive and, if we're having doubts, he gives us a pep talk and reminds us how far we have come as business owners in just a few short years, which really helps."

Community bank opens

Just Credit Union has opened a new community outreach branch in Brookside, Telford.

The not-for-profit community bank is working in partnership with Brookside Big Local, the lottery-funded, resident-led social regeneration programme.

The branch is at Brookside Community Centre every Tuesday between 1.30pm and 4.30pm to offer ethical loans and savings.

Just Credit Union's chief officer Karen Farrow said: "Being available and visible within the communities we serve is core to what we do. Our outreach officer will be available by appointment or subject to availability on a walk-in basis."

Just Credit Union was set up over 15 years ago specifically to improve the financial well-being of people living or working in Shropshire and Telford and Wrekin.



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The 2018 winners and commended businesses at the Businesses for Children Awards at the Park Inn, Telford

Awards to celebrate work with youngsters

Companies which provide support, education, services and products for children and young people were once again celebrated at Shropshire's fifth annual Businesses For Children Awards.

The not-for-profit event was backed by headline sponsor Henshalls and many other local businesses, and raised hundreds of pounds for charity.

Carl Jones, editor of Shropshire Business, compered the black tie ceremony, at Telford's Park Inn by Radisson hotel.

Baby Sensory Shropshire, run by Helen Jones won the Parent's Award following praise for the way her classes help new mums to make friends and share advice.

The New Business award went to Bright Star Boxing, which is in the process of moving to a new home in Shifnal. It earned particular praise for the work it does with children with behavioural issues and those with learning disabilities.

The Rock Project, which specialises in teaching children to play guitar, bass, drums and sing in small groups before coming together to play as a band and performing live concerts, was named Franchisee of the year.

Alison's Bee Class, which runs an educational programme to teach primary school children about bees and why they are so important, took the Educational Business prize.

And Telford Chin Woo won the Sports Business trophy – one of two successes for Lisa Smith who was also a joint winner of the Volunteer award, alongside Sally Johnson of the Harry Johnson Trust.



Alisha Patel-Smith, of sponsor PC Net Solutions, with their guests and finalists



Dave Williams, from headline sponsor Henshalls Insurance, takes to the stage

Love 2 Stay, the resort at Salop Leisure in Shrewsbury, was voted best business providing Activities For Young People, while Little Green House Childcare won the Nursery or Pre-school prize.

Other award winners included: Su's Childminding; Shrewsbury's Climbing The Walls centre; playgroup Ready Steady Let's Get Messy; author



Carl Jones, editor of Shropshire Business, was master of ceremonies

Lorna McCann; and Ben Anderson from 7 Academy of Performing Arts, who was recipient of the new Inspirational Leader of the Year award.

The audience was told how Ben had faced and overcome adversity, and founded an "amazing organisation which inspires real aspiration amongst children and young people within its community".



Craig Marston, of KE Design, presents the Sports Business award to Telford Chin Woo



Dani Wozencroft, representing Ed Bagnall Photography, presents the Activities for Young People award to Mark Bebb of Love2Stay



Cherry Adams, of sponsors CLCA, with Sally Johnson, one of the winners of the Volunteer of the Year Award



Sam Goddard, of the nominated charity Empathy for Special Children, was the speaker for the evening



Teresa Boughey, of Jungle HR, presents the Educational Business for Young People Award to Alison's Bee Class

And the winners were...

- **Shropshire Parent's Award:**
Baby Sensory Shropshire
- **New Business:**
Bright Star Boxing
- **Franchisee:**
The Rock Project
- **Educational Business:**
Alison's Bee Class
- **Sports Business:**
Telford Chin Woo
- **Activities for Young People:**
Love 2 Stay
- **Nursery/preschool:**
Little Green House Childcare
- **Childminder:**
Su's Childminding
- **Activities For Under Fives:**
Climbing The Walls
- **Businesses For Babes:**
Ready Steady Let's Get Messy
- **Children's Product:**
Lorna McCann
- **Volunteer:**
Lisa Smith & Sally Johnson
- **Inspirational Leader:**
Ben Anderson
- **Commendations:**
Sing and Sign,
On the Move Education,
Royal Touch Photography,
Homestart,
Simply Magical Photography,
Elizabeth Wilkinson

Data helps potato industry

A team of researchers from Harper Adams University are working on a project which could save millions of pounds for the UK potato industry.

Dr Matthew Back, Dr Ivan Grove and Bill Watts have teamed up with Leeds University and Barworth Agriculture in a bid to improve the accuracy of the 'AHDB Potatoes potato cyst nematode pallida calculator' which is currently used as a forecasting tool for UK potato growers.

Potato cyst nematodes are microscopic worm-like pests that lie dormant inside mature cysts and then migrate into potato roots, causing irreparable damage. Each mature cyst can hold up to 600 eggs.

And for potato growers, just five to 10 eggs per gram of soil can lead to economic loss - estimated to be £26 million annually to the UK potato industry.

Dr Back said: "Our Sustainable Agriculture Research and Innovation Club research represents a real opportunity to streamline management choices made by potato growers through better outputs from the PCN calculator.

"The calculator is a great educational tool for crop advisors and

growers, but unfortunately, there are deficiencies. One area for improvement relates to the decline of PCN population density over time.

"We would like to build in a range of data that includes a wider diversity of soil types and rotations."

Senior research assistant Bill Watts, has been employed as part of the 20 month project, which will provide the extra data needed for the calculator. He'll primarily be investigating the tolerance of different potato varieties to PCN over different soil types.

He said: "The varieties under investigation include Estima, Lady Rosetta, Marfona, Maris Piper, Markies, Melody, Nectar, Pentland Dell, Royal and Taurus. They represent the ten most widely grown varieties in the UK today."

The project is being run in conjunction with the Plant Nematology Laboratory at Leeds University.

Funding is being provided by SARIC, a research-industry club providing £10 million funding through a five-year partnership between Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council and a consortium of leading companies.

Senior research assistant Bill Watts



Protecting vehicles of rural community

Much Wenlock-based Bulldog Security Products says it has seen a spike in business after a spate of rural crime.

The firm is urging people with all terrain vehicles and quad bikes to get them tracked and secured to stay one step ahead of the thieves.

It comes after a warning from West Mercia Police about an increase across the county in thefts of these types of vehicles.

Bulldog managing director Ian Jordan said: "Quad bikes and all terrain vehicles are highly desirable targets for thieves and there is a thriving market out there for them. They can be stolen and passed on so quickly that it can be very difficult, if not impossible, to recover them.

"Vehicles are often stolen to order and the thief knows they have an outlet for them before they even carry out the theft. This is why prevention is so important and there are many ways of securing the vehicle.

"As an added insurance get your vehicle fitted with a tracker. They are simple to fit and an inexpensive system of keeping tabs on where your vehicle is, making it easier to recover.



Ian and Yvonne Jordan from Bulldog Security Products in Much Wenlock

"These vehicles are the most likely to be stolen in rural areas and we know police recovered two quad bikes recently because they had tracking devices fitted."

Mr Jordan said they had seen an increase in buying on-line in recent weeks

and also an influx of people booking in to have their tracker fitted at their site in Much Wenlock.

Police officers from Much Wenlock have also visited Bulldog to collect some security advice leaflets for victims.

Company displays its wares and creates jobs

Ellesmere-based construction and building materials company TG Group has created jobs with the launch of a new kitchen and bathroom showroom in Cheshire.

The new facility at TG Builders' Merchants in Northwich will employ three full-time staff, and include 12 full-sized kitchen and bathroom displays.

Showroom manager Ben Jones said: "This development follows hot on the heels of a brand-new kitchen and bathroom showroom at our Oswestry branch, and we've taken a similar approach to give customers the opportunity to see some of our products and accessories in a relaxed and realistic setting.

"Sometimes it's difficult to imagine what a range would look like in the home environment, so by creating 12 full-sized displays, it's much easier for customers to picture our styles in their own home.

"It's creating a real buzz with our customers. We've also introduced a new free service using the latest computer aided



In the new Northwich kitchens and bathrooms showroom are Ben Jones (left), customer Lucy Gittins, and Chris Prater, kitchen and bathroom adviser

design software to help customers design their dream kitchen, which helps them to explore the opportunities before deciding on a purchase."

TG Group employs more than 250 people working across Shropshire, Cheshire, Worcestershire, and mid and north Wales. It has eight builders' merchants, 12 ready-mixed concrete plants, two sand and gravel quarries, a sea-dredged sand operation, recycling services, and a skip hire division.

Vaccination rates rise at pharmacies

More people than ever have turned to a chain of Shropshire pharmacies to help them ward off the flu in the wake of the lingering winter season.

Bosses at Lunts, which has two branches in Shrewsbury and others in Pontesbury and Craven Arms, have reported a sharp rise in the number of vaccinations.

Double the number of jabs have been given at the Hereford Road branch in comparison with last winter, and a rise of 60 per cent was seen at Roushill.

Owner Martin Lunt said: "We hope to have taken some of the strain off local GPs by increasing the number of vaccinations we have administered this year and aim to reach even more at-risk residents in 2018/19."

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Respected businessman takes on chairman role

Shropshire-raised entrepreneur Mo Chaudry has invested in leisure solutions supplier The Pulse Group, and taken over as its chairman.

The former TV 'secret millionaire', who was schooled and raised in Telford, has become a majority shareholder in the business.

Founded by Chris and Dave Johnson in 1980, The Pulse Group has provided business support to more than 75,000 leisure facilities in 30 countries across six continents over the last 38 years.

It currently provides business support solutions to over 100 UK clubs and operates 15 fitness, leisure and soccer centres. The Pulse Group will soon operate a further four soccer facilities in partnership with Liverpool City Council and the FA.

Mr Chaudry brings with him a wealth of experience and business acumen, as chairman for M Club Spa & Fitness chain, owner of the UK's most successful waterpark, Water World Leisure Group, in Stoke-on-Trent and owner of Adventure Mini



Mo Chaudry with Chris and Dave Johnson

Golf. The former Telford College student spent most of his early years living and studying in the town – and told how he felt Shropshire had set him on the path to success.

The Pulse Group team has created

a five-year growth plan to propel the business forward, setting them up for continued success in 2018. Together, the two organisations employ over 500 staff and have a combined turnover of £40 million.

"As a hugely respected and successful businessman and long-standing customer and supporter of The Pulse Group, Mo shares our view and philosophy for the business," said Pulse Group managing director Chris Johnson.

"With Mo's experience and expertise and his committed investment to the Pulse family we look forward with excitement to the next stage of growth for the company in 2018 and beyond."

Mr Chaudry said: "Having worked closely with the team over the years throughout the set up of M Club Spa & Fitness brand, I have always been thoroughly impressed by Pulse's offering - their knowledge and expertise was invaluable to my business.

"I firmly believe in The Pulse Group and the integrity and principles they show, which is why I am looking forward to working with the team to take the business to the next level."

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Top dogs working when and where they desire



Ask most people about 'agility' and they will probably mention dog training. However, if you mention 'agile' to someone in IT they will think you are talking about an approach to software project development that emphasises incremental delivery, team collaboration, continual planning and learning.

Just to confuse matters, there's now a new term on the block: 'agile working'. It is connected with flexible working, but it is not the same thing. Flexible working is a well-known general term to describe working at times and places away from traditional full time 9-to-5 office-based employment.

Agile working goes one step further, empowering individuals to work where, when and how they choose, with maximum flexibility to optimise their performance and productivity. Agile working is sometimes referred to as 'smart' working or activity-based working, because its focus is on innovative and creative ways of working to get results.

A recent McKinsey study for the Agile Future Forum (a consortium of 22 leading UK companies) found that if the UK just halved its current productivity gap, it would add an extra £400 billion per year to the economy by 2025. Therefore, not surprisingly, there's been growing interest in how agile working can make a difference, with early proponents including Unilever, Lloyds Banking Group, BT, ITV and John Lewis.

Unilever offers every employee choice and freedom around where, when and how they work, as long as their job can be done. To achieve this, they have had to remove old 'input' measures of success, such as time and attendance, and focus on 'outputs' such as results and performance. Unilever describes their agile working as "an approach to getting work done with maximum flexibility and minimum constraints".

The stumbling blocks that trip up most organisations are not around implementing



Agile working is connected with flexible working, but empowers individuals to work where, when and how they choose, with maximum flexibility to optimise performance and productivity

new technologies or investing in new workspaces, but resistance to changing the familiar and traditional cultures and mindsets that are still firmly rooted in Victorian command and control principles.

So how do you overcome these traditional obstacles and implement successful agile working? Here are 4 essential components to ensure the right infrastructure is in place:

CHAMPIONS

Gaining the support of senior managers is absolutely key. The only way this can happen is if senior managers are genuinely excited and enthusiastic about changing the way they work and are then willing to lead by example.

COLLABORATION

Employees and workers need to be brought on board at an early stage. Agile working has to be considered in line with the meeting of business objectives, but it also has to take account of different job roles and people's differing needs and constraints.

TRUST

Agile working only works when there is strong mutual trust. Behaving in a professional manner and being trusted not to take advantage of newly given autonomy

and freedom requires mutual respect and honest, clear communication throughout the organisation.

SOCIAL GLUE

Agile working has to incorporate social interactions. Humans are social beings so organisations need to factor in effective social meetings and encounters, particularly when any type of virtual or remote working is being utilised like using WhatsApp groups or LinkedIn Elevate to stay connected with peer groups.

According to the Agile Future Forum, agile working is not just the latest work 'fad', but a serious concept that will enable businesses to stay competitive in an increasingly volatile, unpredictable, ambiguous and complex world.

Agile working will not be suitable for all businesses, but for those operating in knowledge and technology-based sectors, the potential rewards for companies and their workers will be significant.

● *Kay Heald has more than 20 years human resource and management development experience gained as both an internal and external HR consultant in London, Nottingham and Shropshire. See www.kayhealdhr.co.uk*

Shopping maul

By Chris Austin

Internet shopping, the weak pound, low or non-existent pay rises, a tightening of household budgets, car parking charges . . . there are umpteen reasons why the high street is currently struggling.

But whatever the reason, one thing's not in doubt – people are choosing to spend far less time in their favourite high street shops right now, and it's putting huge strain on traditional retailers in Shropshire's market towns.

Statistics tell a chilling story. Last year 5,855 UK high street stores closed, with fashion and footwear outlets being the hardest hit, according to statistics compiled by The Local Data Company.

The problem has continued to deepen this year following the collapse of both Toys R Us and Maplin, which has resulted in the loss of over 5,000 jobs.

And many other retailers, including Carpetright which is closing nearly 100 stores including its base in Telford, are pulling in their horns at a rapid rate of knots.

“The emergence of e-commerce is resulting in a shift to online shopping, with customers favouring the convenience and speed of browsing. . .

Kennedy Zvenyika, managing director of GIC Capital says: “While the consumerist element of our society shows no sign of slowing down, what is changing is the way that people are choosing to buy their goods.

“In particular, the emergence of e-commerce is resulting in a shift to online shopping, with customers favouring the convenience and speed of browsing for clothes on websites as opposed to visiting busy shops.

“You only need to look at recent statistics from leading online retailer ASOS, which show that their profits are up 10% to £29.9m, to see that these sorts of businesses are leading the way for the retail industry.

“In order to remain competitive, brands will need to consider utilising websites to sell their goods and will also need to take steps to ensure that their online presence is pertinent with their target market.”

For businesses, of course, e-commerce gives them the ability to overcome geographical locations and take advantage of global markets while also gaining new custom thanks to the potential of search engine visibility – which comes in a lot



Above and below – back in 2012, this was the vision for the redevelopment of the Riverside shopping centre in Shrewsbury



Toys R Us is among the latest big names to be struck from UK retail parks and high streets

cheaper than a prime shop front. But not everyone is writing off the high street just yet – which will doubtless come as music to the ears of Shropshire Council, which has only just completed the purchase of Shrewsbury's Darwin, Pride Hill and Riverside shopping centres from UK Commercial Property Trust at a cost of around £51 million.

BBC business correspondent Emma Simpson, for example, says: “You might be thinking that retail's on its knees given the

grim headlines these last few months. The high street isn't dead, but it is changing.

“Once again, beauty salons, nail bars and coffee shops are filling the gaps. Ice cream parlours are also flavour of the month, for now at least. But the number of clothing stores continues to shrink.

“The big fashion chains don't need as many stores as they once did as shoppers buy more online. Retailers are facing an array of challenges including rising costs and consumers with less money to spend.

“What disposable income they do have, less of it is going into retail. And businesses are having to adapt. 2018 is shaping up to be just as tough, judging by the first quarter of this year.”

The West Midlands suffered a net loss of 144 retail outlets during 2017 as business confidence over 338 new store openings was tempered by 482 closures.

Digital offerings are increasingly becoming make or break in areas like fashion but also for banks, travel agents and estate agents – all of which have been shutting down a significant number of high street stores in the past year.



A handful of those exhibiting at the Shropshire New Homes Exhibition



Shropshire Home Expo 2018 opens at Shrewsbury Town FC

Special event raises the roof for county's property professionals

The county's leading house builders, professionals, developers, partners, advisors and suppliers came together for a successful two-day Shropshire New Homes Exhibition.

The event, in its second year, was held to give people quick and simple access to many different aspects of the home buying journey, and was declared a big success.

Show organiser Judy Bourne, director

at Monks Estate and Lettings and Estate Agency, said: "It was very clear to everyone involved in the show that new homes and information on plans for the county's future housing developments is something that is of exceptional interest at the moment.

"Inundated with enquiries, the exhibition has initiated a lot of business for the exhibitors and started many people off on their journey to a new home within Shropshire."

Developers shared information on homes planned for the county over the coming months, and allowed visitors to view development layouts and view homes as

yet unbuilt. It was held at Shrewsbury Town football club.

Judy added: "Following on from the success, we are now focused on the launch of an accessible and interactive resource within Shrewsbury town centre.

"The 'Shropshire New Homes Hub is a new and dynamic approach to connecting with the home-buying and selling market.

"Allowing the public constant access to the latest information, news and advice via a combination of interactive technologies and face-to-face consultation, we are looking forward to announcing more information in due course."



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Bring along a banner event attracts 100-plus business folk

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce staged a 'Bring a Banner' evening business expo at the Climbing the Walls activity centre at Battlefield in Shrewsbury, which attracted over 100 people.

The networking event was open to members and non-members who were invited to simply bring along their company pop-up banners and chat to like-minded people.

Event organiser Teresa Rowe said: "This is the first time we have visited Climbing the Walls and it proved to be a great success."

"This has been a completely new style of event and of course, at such an unusual venue, with the feedback from those attending being very positive indeed."

One company attending for the first time were new chamber member Promotional Handling Ltd, which provide sales promotions, logistics, warehouse and storage in Welshpool.

Spokesman David Clark said: "This has given us the opportunity to meet lots of business people and to discuss potential future mutual growth, so was a very successful evening for all."



Pictured at Climbing the Walls, Battlefield, are David Clark and Leah Whitley from the activity centre, Andy Hodnett of Yarrington, Joanna Jago of Global Freight and Kathryn Holloway of Promofix Ltd

Angel investors prefer aiming for local area

Investors and 'business angels' are eager to invest millions more pounds into counties such as Shropshire – but feel they lack the sort of infrastructure and information needed to make it happen.

This is one of the key findings in a new report from the UK Business Angels Association looking at regional funding disparities.

The UKBAA is a not-for-profit organisation representing the views and interests of the national angel investment community.

With the vast majority of equity investment concentrated towards London and the South East, it points to an acute dearth of funding posing a significant threat to the progression of start-ups and scale-ups in Shropshire and elsewhere across the West Midlands.

The report reveals an overwhelming desire among investors to invest into local entrepreneurs, but a frustration that the available infrastructure consistently channels the funding to London instead.

Headline findings include:

- Nearly one in five local investors are looking to invest in their area, but find their advisors instead prioritising London-based SMEs
- There is a clear need to boost the availability of advice and investment infrastructure across the West Midlands.
- More than two thirds of angel investors invest inside their home region, but only 8% of ALL UK angel investment goes to the West Midlands region
- One in 10 Midlands-based investors would like to invest in regional but are unable to due to lack of accessibility and available options
- A fifth of 20% of Birmingham-based investors say that they receive London focused advice, prioritising SMEs in the capital over entrepreneurs in their own backyard

Jenny Tooth, chief executive of the UKBAA, said: "There is a lack of infrastructure which means that neither angels nor entrepreneurs are visible to each other."

"The presence of funds is not enough as you have to create an environment where entrepreneurs are investment-ready."

The UKBAA is opening a new West Midlands Angel Hub, in Birmingham, to provide a focal point for angel investors of all levels to connect with each other.

"It will also provide an opportunity to see some of the innovative and creative local businesses, who will have an opportunity to pitch to the angels."

Business angels in the UK collectively invest an estimated £1.5 billion per annum and are the UK's largest source of investment for startups and early-stage businesses seeking to grow.

The UKBAA's members include angel networks, syndicates, individual investors, early-stage VCs, equity crowdfunding platforms, accelerators, professional advisers and intermediaries.

Something old, something new

A growing e-commerce agency has its eyes on expansion after moving into an iconic building in Shrewsbury town centre.

Fisheye, an award winning Magento development agency, has relocated from St John's Hill to Irelands Mansion on High Street.

Managing director Dave Mistry Pain said: "We are now in the perfect building for us. Shrewsbury town centre is bustling and it is a great place to work, the new building is in keeping with our modern business style but steeped in great tradition too.

"It is larger than our previous premises so it means we can expand the company and bring in new staff as and when we need to."

The first floor office suite forms part of a Historic Grade II listed three storey



Fisheye has relocated from St John's Hill to Irelands Mansion on Shrewsbury High Street

building including timber framework with infill panels.

James Evans, of Halls Commercial who secured the deal for Fisheye, said: "This office space has been refurbished to the highest quality and when Fisheye went to look around I knew it would be a great space for them.

"It is an exciting time for them, and this area of Shrewsbury has seen a lot of commercial activity in recent months; it really is a thriving place."



Students Daniel Hopkins, Stephanie Matthews and Tommy O'Callaghan in front of the Spoon Gorilla statue at the British Ironworks Centre

Invaluable experience

The British Ironworks Centre near Oswestry has been offering work experience to independent living and foundation studies students from North Shropshire College.

They had chance to develop customer service skills in the café, and help showroom staff with stock handling and setting out of merchandise during the two-week placement.

Sarah McManus, from the centre, said: "We feel this is an important time to support young people in experiencing the world of work, and we hope they have learnt a lot of new and important workplace skills."

Daniel Hopkins, one of the students, said: "I have really enjoyed my time. I especially liked working in the stockroom and packaging orders for customers."

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Reconomy's Stafford Park offices. The business has been shortlisted for further awards this summer.



Reconomy supports clients across the housebuilding, construction, infrastructure and commercial sectors

There's never a moment to waste

By Carl Jones

Shropshire's reigning company of the year is in line to receive yet more glittering accolades over the coming months.

Reconomy, based at Stafford Park in Telford, has been shortlisted for both the Construction News and the National Recycling Awards this summer.

It marks another highlight for the waste management and recycling company, which expanded once again at the start of the year by taking over waste management broker Waste Check Ltd, based in Bromsgrove.

This was added to previously acquired businesses including Cory Environmental's waste brokering division, and Countrywide Waste Management Limited and Network Waste.

Reconomy has also picked up some truly blue-chip corporate clients in the past few months through a partnership with facilities management company CBRE, including Goldman Sachs, Deutsche Bank, and Agilent Technologies.

It also provides outsourced waste management services to many of the UK's leading construction and infrastructure developers, including Balfour Beatty, Skanska, Kier and Morgan Sindall. It's big business, working with big names.

Reconomy has seen its Kier account alone grow from around £1 million in 2015 to a projected £3.5 million this year, and has not long re-signed a three-year preferred supplier agreement with the group.

With Balfour Beatty, meanwhile, Reconomy has launched an innovative partnership called the Derby Streetlighting Project, which sees women in custody at Foston Hall Prison carrying out paid work



Reconomy chief executive Paul Cox

and receiving training by deconstructing some 13,000 streetlamps – allowing them to be fully recycled instead of dumped into landfill.

No wonder the company is currently on the lookout for more staff . . . it has just finished recruiting 10 young people to gain precious transferable skills by joining the team on summer internships, running from June to August.

Each intern can choose to work exclusively in Reconomy's customer services, operations or finance teams, or move across these business areas to gain a more rounded knowledge of the company's working practices. When the scheme ran last year, two interns went on to be offered long-term jobs.

Training and staff development played a key role in helping Reconomy win the Company of the Year accolade at the 2017 Shropshire Business Awards.

It provided more than 2,000 hours of training in 2017, and also became the first UK company to trial a newly developed employee engagement smartphone app, aiming to root out the causes of negative emotions and increase positivity.

Some of the company's other numbers are staggering. Last year it managed the outsourced disposal of approximately three million tonnes of waste; a figure which is still growing.

And by seeking out every opportunity for reuse and recycling, Reconomy successfully diverted 93% of this waste away from landfill.

As for awards recognition, Reconomy has started 2018 as it ended 2017. Last year it was shortlisted for 10 accolades, and it has two more glittering dates coming up in London very soon.

It is a finalist at the 2018 Construction News Awards, in the specialist contractor category, and will be judged by many of the construction industry's most influential and experienced individuals. Winners will be announced on July 12 at the Grosvenor House Hotel.

Chief executive of Reconomy, Paul Cox, says: "The CN Awards attract the construction industry's biggest and brightest names, so being shortlisted is a wonderful achievement."

The other pending London date is a couple of weeks earlier, on June 28, when the London Hilton hosts the National Recycling Awards, which brings together hundreds of waste management professionals to recognise and celebrate best practice and innovation.

Having been named Resource Management Business of the Year at the 2016 event, this year Reconomy has been shortlisted in the Independent Operator of the Year category.

Since 2012 Reconomy has recorded unprecedented levels of expansion, boasting a five-year compound annual growth rate of 21% based on revenue, and an impressive 33% based on earnings before taxes, depreciation and expenses.



Reconomy managed the disposal of 3m tonnes of waste in 2017



Reconomy – waste management support to thousands of UK businesses

Despite tough economic times, the company is continuing to set itself aggressive sales targets. Last year it recorded revenue of £123 million, and its next milestone is to reach £200 million turnover by 2020.

Paul Cox, who was named Transformational Business Leader for the Midlands in the Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year Awards, says: "Our goal is to be a pioneer of the waste industry and bring about changes that will benefit the entire sector."

"Being shortlisted for these awards is a wonderful acknowledgement of this as well as our many other recent achievements."

As you can imagine, keeping on top of all the documentation is a major task for the Reconomy team. In 2017 it was responsible for processing more than 986,000 documents, including over 550,000 waste transfer tickets. That all adds up to a 31% increase in volume since the start of 2016.

It's just under a year now since Reconomy was acquired by private equity firm EMK Capital in a move which all parties described at the time as the next stage in its 'transformational growth story'.

The company has documented its journey over the past 12 months in a new publication called "A-Z of Reconomy". In it, the company talks of the challenging

economic environment, and uncertainty around the terms under which the UK will be exiting the European Union.

"Reconomy's core proposition remains appealing to businesses of all sizes looking to reduce their waste costs, either through greater efficiency or waste reduction," it says.

It is currently working on a £3.5 million deal with homebuilder Bovis Homes, with an ongoing commitment to drive down waste volumes and disposal costs.

The A-Z reveals: "Since first working with Bovis Homes, Reconomy has been responsible for reducing overall waste costs by 31%."

Companies need to take a responsible approach to their waste management

Retirement homebuilder McCarthy & Stone, which is currently looking to build new complexes in Shropshire, signed up for a waste management trial with Reconomy, which will lead to a £2 million contract.

And of course, there are increasingly powerful legislative reasons why companies need to take a responsible approach to their waste management.

Paul Cox explains: "Waste management in the construction industry, which creates a third of all waste generated in the UK, is heavily regulated."

"This regulatory complexity is compounded by uncertainty, following the UK's Brexit vote, and this makes compliance increasingly difficult."

"Many businesses are unaware of their compliance risks. Up to 56% of UK businesses are not fully compliant with their legal responsibilities under waste management legislation."

"Yet ignorance is no defence and fines can now seriously impact finances - as much as £3 million, in fact."

"It is now critical that your business recognises its obligations under waste management legislation."

He continues: "Understanding waste management legislation and how it applies to your construction practices is essential to the success of your business."

"Not only will it help you avoid damaging compliance failures and fines, it will help you navigate the changing regulatory environment as Britain withdraws from the EU."

"Demonstrating competency around waste management legislation makes it easier to win new business and boost your bottom line."



Based at Stafford Park in Telford, Reconomy employs over 300 members of staff

Six-figure investment

The founder and former chief financial officer of Telford technology firm Rockford IT have made a six-figure investment in a county marketing and digital agency.

Tom Sykes and Grant Thomas aim to help boost turnover at Shrewsbury-based Reech four-fold by 2022.

Tom, who sold Rockford in a landmark £3.9 million deal to SysGroup at the end of last year, has taken a 30% stake in Reech, founded and run by managing director Rob Hughes.

In a series of other changes, Dena Evans has become a creative director and shareholder, and James Brinkler has upped his stake in the business.

Rob, 34, started the business along with his wife, Joanna Hughes, in their box bedroom in 2009 after being made redundant.

It has grown to 11 staff, based at Shrewsbury Business Park, with clients including Wolverhampton Wanderers, Aico, The Shingler Group, Technology Supplies, SJ Roberts Homes, and the ARH Group.

"It was incredibly flattering when Tom approached me with this offer," Rob explained.

"The business has grown impressively



The Reech team, at Shrewsbury Business Park

from humble beginnings but this investment will accelerate our expansion plans significantly.

"We worked with Rockford IT for a number of years while Tom was chief executive and we're delighted he's had the faith to put his own money into Reech."

Reech now plans to double its office capacity and expand its digital marketing operations, specifically mobile apps and bespoke software. Six new staff are to be appointed this year.

"What's particularly exciting about this

project is that we have grown a business before and learned a huge amount during that process," said Tom, who has become executive chairman.

"Our aim is for Reech to be turning over in excess of £2.5 million by 2022 and proving itself on a bigger stage."

The deal was truly a Shropshire affair, thanks to the fact that Reech instructed Shrewsbury solicitors, Lanyon Bowdler, to work on its behalf, while Tom and Grant instructed fellow Shrewsbury firm, Aaron & Partners.

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Apprentices with a hunger to succeed

Market Drayton food producer Palethorpes has been spelling out why it is such a big believer in taking on apprentices.

The company, part of the Addo Food Group, makes chilled savoury rolls, savoury hot pies, pasties and slices at its north Shropshire base – and has been committed to employing apprentices for many years.

Among the latest batch are Ben Littley and Abigail Taylor, who have been working at the Maer Lane site for the past six months, while studying through Telford College.

Ben, 22, is in the engineering department, while 25-year-old Abigail is working towards her AAT in accounting level three qualification.

Ben, from Bicton near Shrewsbury, initially studied automotive engineering before joining Palethorpes, and is now training to be a maintenance engineer.

He is on a performing engineering operations level three course at college, which includes a diploma in electronic and electrical engineering.

Abigail, from Wellington, says she hopes her advanced apprenticeship in accounting will provide her with an ideal springboard to further development within her chosen



Luke Williams and work assessor Mike Blasé

profession. There are also two second year Telford College apprentices at Palethorpes – Luke Williams and Daniel Stones.

Palethorpes training manager Andrew Holland said: "The beauty of taking on an apprentice is that it gives us the chance to 'grow our own' well-rounded members of staff, who get to know the origins of the business and are brought up to know our ethos and values.

"With a company of our size, there are many different career paths which they can follow at the end of their studies. And the salaries which they can go on to earn are very good indeed. People think because we are a food producer that it is just packing products into boxes, but there is a lot more to life at Palethorpes than that.



Ben Littley in the engineering department

"As a market leader in the chilled savoury pastry sector, we utilise advanced automation and robotics in our production facilities, this requires industry leading innovation from our employees who have the skills, attitudes and behaviours to meet the challenges of working in a fast paced ever changing working environment.

"Our apprentice engineers, for example, get chance to work on general maintenance, in our grain silos, and with some of the robotic packing technology."

The company says it will be looking to recruit more apprentice engineers later this year, as well as upskilling its existing workforce in a variety of apprenticeships at different levels, continuing its partnership with Telford College.



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Poolscape Ltd designed the chemical-free swimming pool at the heart of the resort

There are 124 touring caravan pitches at Love2Stay

It's a site to behold

A luxury £6.5 million caravanning and glamping resort in Shropshire has added another award to its list of accolades.

Readers of Practical Caravan and Practical Motorhome magazines have voted the Love2Stay facility at Shrewsbury the UK's best site for families.

It follows the BIOTOP Frogking 2017

award for natural swimming pools, and recognition at the Shropshire Businesses for Children Awards (See page 20).

Lizzie Pope, Practical Caravan's digital editor, said: "Set in 22 acres, its website claims that it 'really has it all' and, having stayed there ourselves we can't disagree."

In voting for their Top 100 Sites Guide 2018, readers left several comments about the Emstrey site.

One said: "Being relatively new to touring caravans, we were slightly cautious that it wouldn't be as good as it said on the tin.

"We needn't have worried. Facilities are amazing, and especially great for children."

Love2Stay has been developed by Salop Leisure, with 124 touring caravan pitches and a village of 11 luxury glamping lodges with panoramic views across to Wales and the Shropshire Hills.

Centrepiece of the resort's 'back to nature' ethos is a natural, chemical-free swimming pool designed and built by Hereford-based Poolscape Ltd in collaboration with multiple RHS Gold Medal winning landscape designer Owen Morgan from MOSAIC.



The CIPD, the professional body for HR and People Development, is working with its members and the local business community to provide topical events, presentations and networking opportunities to raise professional standards in people and organisational development across Shropshire.

Upcoming events include:

21st June 2018

An Evening with Motivational Speaker – Paul McGee, international bestselling author of S.U.M.O (Shut Up, Move On) – The Straight-Talking Guide to Succeeding in Life

10th October 2018

Shropshire CIPD Wellbeing Event and Exhibition with Dr Sheena Johnson, Occupational Psychologist and Senior Lecturer at Alliance Manchester Business School and co-author of Wellbeing: Productivity & Happiness at Work

For more details, costs and booking information please go to:

www.cipd.co.uk/learn/branches/shropshire and click on Local Branch Events

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Lifting the lid on an alternative send-off

James Meynell's eco-coffins business has placed the entrepreneur at the heart of the green revolution. Henry Carpenter reports.



“When someone asks me about my line of work and I give my answer, it is either a complete conversation stopper or the start of a long discussion!”

So says James Meynell, the south Shropshire entrepreneur who, recognising society's shift in attitudes towards the environment, seized the opportunity to apply our increasingly green agenda for that fateful time which reaches us all, our final send-off.

James, you see, is the founder of FTP Eco-Coffins which has grown into one of the largest distributors of environmentally friendly coffins and caskets in the UK.

“We are now shifting approximately 1,500 each year,” says James from his office in the tiny village of Boraston, near Tenbury Wells, overlooking a sweeping stretch of the Teme Valley – a fittingly tranquil and restful location for his trade.

“So I suppose we have come a long way since we launched the coffins business back in 2006. We sold fewer than 200 in our first year of trading but, from a business sense we were able to take advantage the explosion in green sensibilities which really took off towards the end of the noughties.

“We don't sell to individual members of the public – or at least it is very rare – but through a network of funeral directors all over the UK and I am glad to say that we have developed a very steady and solid client base. We also have a distributor in Ireland.”

A coffin, he explains, is deemed environmentally friendly according to what it is made of. Willow, seagrass, bamboo, water hyacinth and even cardboard are some of the materials used for such caskets.

“The materials are infinitely more sustainable than usual woods because they replenish much more quickly, especially the likes of bamboo which grow at an amazing speed,” enthuses James.

“Furthermore, they are much more biodegradable than the traditional veneered coffins. And unlike the veneered coffins they do not release harmful emissions into the atmosphere when cremated.”

By and large the raw materials for these eco-coffins are grown in far-off lands with the seagrass, for example, coming from Vietnam where it has been carefully harvested to ensure maximum regeneration and a continuous supply. ►

Shropshire entrepreneur James Meynell, the founder of FTP Eco-Coffins



Sam Curtis ensures that an oval-shaped oak coffin is ready for delivery

◀ The bamboo and water hyacinth coffins are from China – where they are crafted in a small, family-run workshop based in the province of Guangxi – while the willow models are annually harvested and crafted in Poland.

One of the newest products available through FTP – which stands for Fine Timber Products – Eco-Coffins stable is a unique oval-shaped solid oak variety, which is made near Leominster.

“These are constructed from FSC-certified materials, using reconstituted wood and formaldehyde-free adhesive,” explains James.

“But perhaps the most eco-friendly of all the materials we use is water hyacinth; their harvest actually aids the environment as water hyacinth is a weed that needs to be controlled.”

All of these may look less sturdy than the chunky coffins with the brass handles that we are more used to but they are deceptively sturdy. Willow coffins, for instance, can carry weights of up to 350lbs. They are also suitable for cremation and are appropriately lined with cotton biodegradable liners.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, high-profile characters have departed this world in an FTP coffin, none more prominent than the Shropshire acting great Pete Postlethwaite. Others include leading Buddhist, Reverend Gyosei Handa, through Milton Keynes undertakers The Funeral Company, and Reverend Lord Beaumont of Whitley, the Green Party’s first representative in the House of Lords.

James’s professional path has taken several twists and turns to get to where it has now. The son of a Black Country industrialist and former High Sheriff of Shropshire, Hugh Meynell, the family business had been the manufacture of shower valves in Wolverhampton.

After Meynell Valves was sold in the



FTP provides eco-friendly caskets of all shapes and sizes, some even for pets



A popular addition to the FTP line is the coffin cart, used to transport caskets at burials

late 1980s, James was involved in founding another manufacturing company in Telford which was eventually sold as well. He then launched Fine Timber Products in 2001 as a predominantly oak flooring company. The eco-coffins division was added in 2006 after a chance telephone call with a Polish importer who explained to James his connections to willow coffins.

He has kept the operation as streamline

as possible, with only himself and a handful of colleagues comprising the business.

“I would like to think that we are gaining a reputation among funeral directors across the UK for our reliability – as you can imagine, dependability is key where funerals are involved,” he says.

“If an order comes in, and assuming we have the stock which is extremely likely, we can 99 per cent guarantee next-day delivery.



"I would like to think that we are gaining a reputation among funeral directors across the UK for our reliability," says James

"We also try to ensure that we always have a wide range of sizes available, from child and infant sizes to coffins which are up to 6ft 10in long and up to 26in wide.

James also recognises the importance of continuing to introduce new products to the FTP stable.

One such item is a coffin cart, used to transport caskets to their final resting place at either green or traditional burials, while there is a market for eco-friendly pet caskets as well.

James explains: "I introduced the cart to our product list because there is often quite a distance for coffins to travel at funerals, especially on natural burial sites.

"This can lead to a long and uncomfortable walk for the pall bearers whose shoulders might also suffer the effects of the coffins rubbing against them.

"The carts are light, easy to manoeuvre and surprisingly robust. This is important because they will need to stand up well to the terrain of natural burial sites which is often quite uneven.

"I have spoken to several funeral directors and owners of green burial sites. Indeed, a fair number of natural burial ground managers have purchased them.

"But really it's amazing how broad the range of eco-friendly coffins and associated items can become.

"Coffins themselves are often coloured now – we can supply almost any colour of willow coffin, and really quite intricate designs such as Union Jacks or rural scenes can be applied to cardboard caskets – our next big project."

Anxious not to stand still and looking further into the future, James advises us to keep an eye out for a natural burial ground on the Shropshire Staffordshire border, of which he will be a co-owner.

To paraphrase an advertising catch line from a few years ago, the future looks bright – and green – for James and his coffins. **B**



Seagrass adult coffin



White oval coffin



Willow traditional coffin



James with some of the FTP Eco-Coffins range



Water hyacinth coffin



The team at MKM Telford celebrate the official opening of the new Ketley branch

Seizing the opportunity



Sarah Windrum has a new role

The Federation of Small Businesses has a new regional policy representative for the West Midlands.

Sarah Windrum, who runs her own technology business and is a board member of the West Midlands Combined Authority, is urging companies to 'seize the opportunity' to make a difference.

As the formal link connecting FSB's national policy to the area's small businesses, she is pledging to help ensure that local challenges and opportunities they face are addressed in FSB policies and campaigns at the national and regional levels.

She said: "I will draw on my business experience, local knowledge and network of contacts to provide the evidence, ideas and drive necessary to influence decisions and to deliver beneficial change for small businesses in the West Midlands and elsewhere.

"In business and in life, I believe in capturing attention and harnessing imagination. I also believe that everyone has the power to make a positive difference. So we should all seize the opportunity."

First branch in the county

MKM Building Supplies has created 18 jobs with the opening of its first branch in Shropshire.

The branch, at Ketley Business Park in Telford, offers building, timber, plumbing and heating supplies for both the general public and trades, plus kitchen and bathroom showrooms.

The Hull-based company operates branches throughout England and Scotland, and already has more than 50 branches. The Telford site is being headed up by a duo of directors, Paul Tarr and Mark Evans, who bring over 50 years of experience in the builders' merchants sector to the table.

Paul Tarr, said: "We've handpicked a fantastic, skilled team of local people - everyone's raring to show the trades and public what MKM is all about."



Branch directors at MKM Telford, Mark Evans and Paul Tarr

Health and safety matters matter

It's time for employers to start taking the health and safety of their staff more seriously.

That's the message from Charles Gunter, part of the in-house health and safety team at Henshalls Insurance Brokers in Newport and Shrewsbury. His comments follow a high profile court case involving contractors on a construction site.

"A worker on the site was trying to attract the attention of a vehicle driver on a neighbouring worksite when he was struck and run over by a tipper truck. The contractor he was working for was fined £500,000 and ordered to pay £30,000 costs, along with a victim surcharge of £120.

"The fines handed out by the court show

just how seriously employers must take the responsibilities they have for staff safety."

Mr Gunter said the HSE investigation had shown that walkways connecting adjacent worksites were not protected enough, and the traffic management plan was not up to date.

"Employers have a duty of care to their staff, and it's important that everyone feels safe and secure in their individual working environment."

Henshalls runs a health and safety service to help businesses stay up-to-date with ever-changing legislation, as commercial insurance policies demand businesses comply with the latest rules.

Pure dedication leads to further accolades

Pure Telecom is celebrating a hat-trick of successes after winning two top industry accolades for the third time.

The company, based on Shrewsbury Business Park, received the 2018 awards from its operational partner O2, and has been recognised in categories which examine customer service and digital excellence.

The national titles are part of O2's approach to rewarding a partner's levels of digital knowledge and expertise and customer service, instead of ranking businesses by their scale and size alone.

Matt Sandford, managing director of Pure Telecom, said: "The O2 digital excellence category looks at our digital knowledge, capability and performance and covers O2's partnership with Microsoft and other technology providers.

"We live in a digital age and to be presented with this award again proves that we are embracing the ever-changing demands of the sector.



The Pure Telecom team celebrate their success

"The customer service title, which we have won for the fourth time, proves our ability to provide world-class customer support.

"A lot of hard work and dedication goes into achieving this and the title gives us a

competitive edge. I am very proud of the team."

As part of its prize, the company receives new excellence award branding and further marketing and digital consultancy to help develop its business.

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S O L I C I T O R S



Lynda Richard and Hugh Strickland



Chris Cheeney, Andrew Marshall and Sally Marshall

School of thought

Hundreds of well-known faces from the region's commercial community gathered at Moreton Hall for the school's annual business lunch.

The former chief executive of the London Stock Exchange, Xavier Rolet, was the latest high-profile guest speaker at the event at the event, near Oswestry, which has become a much-anticipated fixture for many in Shropshire and surrounding counties.

Mr Rolet – who in 2017 was named by Harvard Business Magazine as one of the top 100 CEOs in the world – gave an in-depth address on various aspects of the current economic climate in which he emphasised the importance of enterprise and innovation.

He took to the stage after members from Moreton Enterprises, the commercial venture run by the Year 12 girls, gave their annual business presentation.

The lunch was sponsored by Investec Wealth and Investment Ltd, the international specialist banking and asset management group.

Katy Tanner, one of the event's organisers, said: "Xavier's speech was a clear and insightful overview of capitalism, renewed nationalism, fragmentation and protectionism, and the rise of China."

"He addressed with ease the thorny



Former chief executive of the London Stock Exchange, Xavier Rolet, was the guest speaker

issue of increasing competition for Western economies and how there needs to be a greater focus on supporting entrepreneurs and encouraging innovation.

"If his speech wasn't enough, Xavier then gave a small focused seminar on Careers in the City to a very appreciative audience of Moreton economic and finance students and external students from local schools, talking about how new ideas are needed to respond to growing challenges."

"We were delighted with how the event ran – and after the 10th lunch, it is a firm

staple in the calendar for business people both locally, regionally and nationally. With attendance building year on year and with each guest speaker providing invaluable insight into a variety of topics from the business world, it is becoming an unmissable event.

"Of course, none of it would be possible without the generous sponsorship from Investec Wealth and Investment who have supported the event for five years running now."

● More pictures from the event on 44-45



Sue Hildick and Jane Heath



Alan Willis, Becky Theodore-Jones and Steve Hall



Xavier Rolet, Jeannie France-Hayhurst and James Tanner



Ellie Mason, Buffy Boroughs and Eliza Kiel



Sophie Meynell, Martha Stewart, Adrian Quin, John Simpson, Xavier Rolet, Jonathan Forster, Lara Tapp and Lily Mainwaring



Rob Hudson and Nigel Woodward



Louise Hudson, Carrie Morris and Tim Morris



Norman Pursglove and James France-Hayhurst



Richard Jones and Chris Barnes



Vicky Varley, Adrian Twiss, Russell Marshall, Nigel Woodward and Rob Hudson



Jonathan Forster (principal, Moreton Hall), guest speaker Xavier Rolet, John Simpson (Investec), Adrian Quin (Investec)



Carolyn Tilley pictured here with Katy Tanner, Stewart Roberts, Clare Jukes and Paula Forster

Clubbing together to play

Three Shropshire golf clubs have joined forces to announce a deal which is believed to be the first of its kind in the UK.

Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Lilleshall Hall golf clubs have announced a three-for-one deal, in a move applauded by England Golf, the sport's governing body.

While clubs across the county have long had reciprocal arrangements offering reduced rate golf, this is the first to give full members of all three clubs free golf at each other's courses.

Shrewsbury GC captain Les Lewis said the partnership arrangement had already seen good uptake.

"Lilleshall and Bridgnorth are both within 30 minutes' drive and just 25 miles away from Condover," he said.

"They are well run, well presented courses, which, like ours, provide a good golfing challenge and I know that our members have enjoyed the reciprocal arrangement as have members of the other clubs who have visited Shrewsbury.

"All three clubs are members' clubs, offering a similar package to a roughly similar membership profile, so they are a good fit and from early

discussions it was clear we have likeminded views."

Mr Lewis said that members should see this as an extra add-on benefit, coming at no extra cost to their existing package.

"There will of course be occasions when our course is closed and vice-versa and we hope that this relationship will allow members to play golf elsewhere when such a situation arises.

"In addition, our casual golfers should also be able to play golf at Lilleshall or Bridgnorth when competitions at our own club prevent them from getting on their own course.

"At a time when golf is under pressure and numbers of members are falling nationwide, it is important to try to add value to an annual membership and this arrangement does just that at no extra cost."

England Golf has applauded the three clubs' move, stating that collaboration and partnership is taking golf in the right direction.

"We'll be looking for even closer co-operation going forward and by working together we hope to offer a more interesting package for our members," said Mr Lewis.



Shrewsbury Golf Club chairman, Iain Gilmour, Will Schofield, Lilleshall Hall Golf Club chairman, and John Sollars, chairman of Bridgnorth Golf Club

Energy of the room

More than 70 representatives from businesses and other organisations across the region attended a Business Energy Efficiency Programme (BEEP) conference at the Park House Hotel in Shifnal.

Delegates included both existing and prospective BEEP clients. The programme helps small and medium-sized businesses to lower running costs by reducing energy consumption and help the environment by cutting carbon emissions.

BEEP programme manager Christopher Atkinson said: "The delegates enjoyed listening to expert speakers from BMW talking about electric vehicle technology, while Digiland, a local business, shared their own experiences of introducing new energy efficient technologies at their workplace and how BEEP helped their business to identify, fund and deliver the energy efficiency improvements.

"They also enjoyed hearing from BECCI (Built Environment Climate Change Innovations) another EU-funded programme run by the University of Wolverhampton who talked about the adoption of low carbon projects."

BECCI also hosted an environmental technologies and innovation marketplace."

Experiences were shared during the round table discussions on topics including energy storage, understanding LED lighting, solar power and renewable storage.

Businesses on the Business Energy Efficiency programme receive a free energy efficiency assessment review which will help businesses understand their energy usage and provide advice and recommendations on how to make improvements.

Grants from £2,000 to £20,000 (covering a maximum 40% of project costs) are also available to help businesses undertake energy efficiency improvements such as lighting, heating, variable speed drives and compressors and more.



Pictured from left, Glenn Barrowman from University of Wolverhampton, Hannah Bishop of BMW, David Baxter from Digiland Ltd, master of ceremonies Carl Jones, Shropshire Chamber chief executive Richard Sheehan, and BEEP programme manager Christopher Atkinson

The Business Energy Efficiency Programme is part-financed by the England European Regional Development Fund Programme as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme.

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

● For further information visit www.business-central.co.uk/beep or telephone 01905 677888.

Let's talk business

By Carl Jones

You know your stuff - and you know that you know your stuff. But standing up in front of a packed room of people to prove it can often be a different matter entirely.

Public speaking is like Marmite. For some, it comes very easily and is the most natural thing in the world, yet for others, the thought of having to deliver a presentation – however brief – can induce endless nights of stress of worry.

And these days, in a world of vlogging, podcasting, promotional company videos or speed networking events, the ability to stand up and deliver a confident, engaging and informative message either in front of an audience, or TV camera, has never been more important.

That's where Toastmasters comes in. It has two branches in the county, one in Telford and a second in Ludlow, and meets every couple of weeks to offer a safe, controlled environment in which people of all levels and backgrounds can hone their skills.

“If you forget to mention a key point, or get the order of a presentation back-to-front, the important thing to remember here is that no-one knows, other than you”

Words like ‘criticism’ and ‘nerves’ are banned – here, you'll only get gently suggestive tips from your peers about how you might be able to improve on things next time round, and as I discovered when I dropped into one of their gatherings at the Ramada hotel in Telford, there's no shortage of applause and good humour.

There is no such thing as a right or wrong way to deliver a presentation; I've learned that over many years of taking to the stage myself, and listening to a wide array of others. Correctly gauging your audience, and connecting with them, is the only real thing that matters.

And it's vital to remember that, as a general starting point, your audience will be willing you to be good. They're on your side. They don't want to sit through a car crash of a presentation any more than you want to be the one delivering it.

If you forget to mention a key point, or get the order of a presentation back-to-front, the important thing to remember here is that no-one knows, other than you. Folk will usually be none the wiser . . . as long as you manage to style it out with a confident demeanour!

The two Toastmasters groups in Shropshire are affiliated to the international



Sam Warner, fourth from left, with other members



Shropshire Speakers session at the Ramada hotel in Telford

not-for-profit educational organisation that teaches public speaking and leadership skills through a worldwide network of meeting locations.

Headquartered in Denver, Colorado, it now has more than 352,000 members across some 16,400 clubs in 141 countries.

Since 1924, Toastmasters International has helped people of all backgrounds become more confident in front of an audience.

The evenings follow a standard format in which the evening is divided into two halves. The first half will usually be three short prepared speeches given by club members, which will then be evaluated by other members.

The second half is the 'Table Topics' challenge in which members (and guests if they feel up to it) are invited to speak for up to two minutes on a topic about which they will have no prior knowledge.

On my visit to the Telford group, people had to pull an item out of a lucky dip sack, and topics included ceramic tiles, door knobs and packs of playing cards!

"Toastmasters provides a supportive and positive environment where members have the opportunity to develop their communication and leadership skills," says Telford businesswoman Sam Warner.

She runs a business called Get Your Message Across, and is the current president of Ludlow Speakers, which meets at the Blue Boar pub in the town centre.

"I joined because I was really waffley, over-dramatic and my presentations were far too long; now I have structure, I get to the point and leave my audience with a call to action.

"I am asked to speak at all sorts of events on many different subjects, and my training makes it a delight rather than a chore. It's opened up so many more opportunities for me and my business.

"I started going to Toastmasters in 2010 and haven't looked back."

Want to know more? Check out either www.toastmasters.org or www.shropshirespeakers.org.uk. Visitors are welcome to just turn up at a session – with no pressure to speak unless they wish.



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Charles Starmer-Smith, The Daily Telegraph

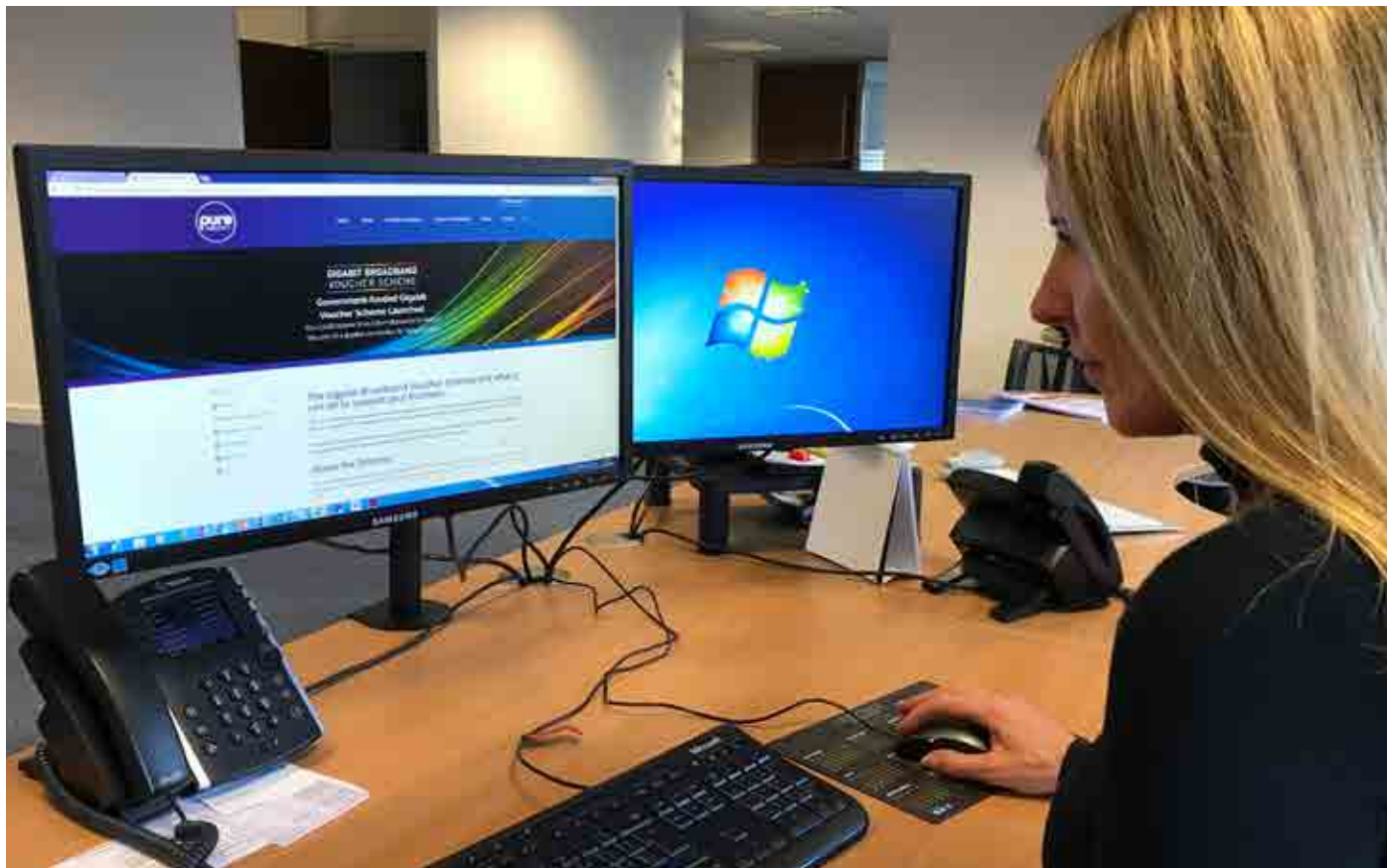
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For the fastest and most reliable broadband, capable of delivering gigabit speeds, a full fibre connection is required

Feed your tech the full fibre diet



A scheme meaning that businesses can get up to £3,000 to improve their broadband speed has been rolled out to Shropshire.

The Government has just launched its 'Gigabit Broadband Voucher Scheme' in the county, which aims to provide vouchers worth up to £3,000 for small and medium sized businesses to help with the costs of connecting to full fibre broadband.

Pure Telecom, based on Shrewsbury Business Park, has been chosen as a partner to run the initiative . . . and is now

encouraging people to get in touch. Sales director David Hayward explained that a further £67 million had been made available to extend the project throughout the UK, after a pilot project in four regions.

"We are delighted to be supporting this and want to ensure that Shropshire secures its fair share of this funding," he said.

"The scheme aims to accelerate the roll-out of gigabit-capable connections to business customers with up to 249 employees and a balance sheet of up to 43 million euros by making the switch to full-fibre broadband more affordable."

He said that to be eligible, the new connection must have a minimum speed of 100mbps and represent at least a doubling of speed compared to the existing service.

Vouchers are available now and will end once the government has issued the full fund to businesses or by March 2019, whichever comes first.

If the price of providing a connection is more than £3,000 then businesses can 'top up' the cost themselves and no VAT or monthly charges are payable.

Businesses can pool their vouchers to improve local infrastructure in areas where high-speed connections were previously

unaffordable or unavailable, providing long-term service improvements and cost reductions.

David added: "Optical fibre-based networks are faster, more reliable, easier to upgrade and set the gold standard for connectivity."

"Demand for greater and greater digital connectivity in terms of speed and reliability is set to grow exponentially in future years."

"The UK now has 95% coverage for superfast broadband with speeds of 24 megabits per second or higher."

"However, most superfast connections still depend on copper telephone wires, which are limited in the speeds they can support. For the fastest and most reliable broadband, capable of delivering gigabit speeds, a full fibre connection is required."

"One gigabit is the same as 1,000 megabits – so it's a big leap forward in connection speeds that could benefit you and your business into the future."

"Full fibre also supports symmetrical connections – meaning your upload and download speeds can be the same."

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

Business consultancy launches



Vernon Hogg from Oswestry who has launched Hadleigh Management

A Shropshire man with 25 years of experience at senior management level has launched a new business consultancy.

Vernon Hogg, from Oswestry, has started Hadleigh Management, from offices in Vanguard Way at Battlefield Enterprise Park, in Shrewsbury.

"It's lonely at the top sometimes trying to juggle everything and it's great to gain another perspective on things from someone who has been there," said Vernon.

The new venture is a tailor-made business practice delivering the renowned 'Quantum Leap' program, a three-month development initiative focusing on specific improvements in any given sector to increase revenue, beat procrastination and reduce time stress in both management and staff.

Vernon continued: "Recent research has shown that a good work-life balance is far more important to most people than money or material rewards, but for this to be successful a combined vision and collaboration between the workforce and ownership needs to be achieved.

"Strangely, research also shows that the 'golden age' for motivation is 51 years old, as people in that stage of their life are enthusiastic and flexible, combined with a demand for challenges and a desire to learn and develop."

In brief . . .

- Steel manufacturer Fabweld, based in Telford, has recorded its own place in history after designing access covers for a high profile project at a London museum. The FAB PAVE access covers have been used at London's Natural History Museum, which is currently undergoing a major upgrade of its entrance areas. They are designed to allow access to vital services below ground while blending the floor's paving with the overall surface.

- Ocean Telecom of Oswestry has announced a partnership with The Movement Centre, a charity that helps children who have a disability that affects their movement control. The telecoms provider will be organising a number of fundraising initiatives to raise money for the charity, which is based on the grounds of the orthopaedic hospital at Gobowen.

- A new start-up camper van conversion business has let a unit at Telford's Tweedale Industrial Estate. Wozavan Camper Conversions has taken Unit 6B, which extends to 1,100 sq ft. Paul Williams, who completed the letting for Towler Shaw Roberts, said: "It's a new business which specialises in full or part camper van conversions and the unit they have taken is in a prominent position."

Google grants face withdrawal

Charities that receive up to £7,450 worth of free advertising on Google every month could see their grants withdrawn under a new policy, a Shropshire internet marketing company has warned.

Google has changed its policy for charities using the free service – meaning if they do not meet a number of stringent requirements, their grant funding could be stopped.

The Google Ad Grants scheme is used by more than 35,000 charities globally, each allocated over £7,000 of free advertising every month.

But since the start of this year, all Ad Grants AdWords accounts must meet a number of key requirements, including achieving a five per cent click through rate each month.

Helen Culshaw, of Ascendancy Internet Marketing in Shifnal, said: "Charity accounts operate in a similar way to business accounts.

"A text ad is created to direct users to a website, and these ads appear on Google

when particular phrases have been searched for."

Google have said they recognise there are reasons why CTR may fluctuate, so charities will be alerted through "in-product notifications" if their account is at risk of falling below five per cent CTR, with educational resources offered to help them improve.

However if the CTR requirement is not met for two consecutive months the guidance says the grant will be cancelled.

"Charities can request that their account be reinstated after it has been adjusted to bring it into compliance," added Helen. "So there are things that can be done if a charity finds themselves with a cancelled account.

"There are keywords that cannot be used in charity accounts – those that Google believe are overly generic such as free video, today's news, job alert and the names and places of historical events or people.

"Meeting Google's new requirements for charities on an ongoing basis is challenging, and requires constant attention to the account and a strong knowledge of best practices.

"Our expectation is that many charities will find the new rules too difficult to meet, and will lose their free advertising grants as a result."

Highest grade for H₂O

Wenlock Spring is celebrating another accolade after picking up a British Retail Consortium double AA accreditation.

The bottled water company secured the highest grade possible for announced audits in the recognised food safety and quality awards.

The BRC's Global Standard for Food Safety is developed by food industry experts and provides a framework for the management of food product safety, integrity, legality and quality. Businesses are assessed through rigorous audit across seven areas.

The company's quality manager, Anna Lenartowska, set herself the target of achieving the teamwork AA standard when she joined the company last year.

Matthew Orme, director of Wenlock Spring, said: "I am very proud of Anna and team for showcasing our best practices and ensuring that our customers have the highest possible confidence in our brand."

In addition to the BRC AA accreditation, the Shropshire company also picked up two medals from the British Bottling Institute for both their still and sparkling products.

Wenlock Spring water is sourced from a protected historic spring, dating back to 1086, near the famous Wenlock Edge. The water filters naturally through the rock strata – giving its unique blend of minerals, including calcium and selenium.

The company has been bottling water in Shropshire for more than 28 years.



Double AA accreditation from the BRC for the bottled water company based in Shropshire

Shortlisted for national recognition

Telford technology company Entanet has been named as a finalist in four categories at this year's CRN Sales & Marketing Awards.

The voice and data communications provider has been shortlisted in the Best Company to Work For, Best Marketing Campaign, Best Partner Website, and Technical Innovation categories. Winners will be announced at a reception in London in July.

Entanet's sales director Stephen Barclay said: "It's fantastic to be highlighted as a great company to work for because we believe our people are at the heart of our success."

"We also take great pride in our efforts to lead the way with innovative products and services for our partners."

"This has been further reinforced this year by our exciting partnership with CityFibre, so to be shortlisted in these prestigious awards is real testament to the hard work and dedication of all our teams."



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Efficiency savings follow move

A catering company has announced efficiency savings and increased productivity one year after re-locating to new premises in Telford.

Hammonds Catering moved to a new site at Bridges Business Park in Horsehay, smaller and more compact than its previous base at Halesfield.

Proprietor John Hammond said: "We have been able to design and build the facilities to perfectly suit our needs, which in turn has led to a far smoother operation and significant gains in productivity.

"Although we have streamlined our operation we have retained the capability to expand our role with our bigger clients and will be involved with several major companies and organisational projects later this year, including the official opening of a major new factory on the T54 site at Nedge Hill in Telford."

The company has also added new vehicles to its fleet.



John Hammond with part of the Hammonds Catering fleet

Public speakers are voices of the future

The latest annual competition aimed at teaching Shropshire pupils the art of public speaking and debating has been declared a huge success.

The Debate-Ed scheme was launched by Lanyon Bowdler solicitor Holly Edwards three years ago, and during that time more than 500 pupils across Shropshire have been involved in debating workshops, with 168 pupils taking part this year.

The latest competition was held at Shrewsbury College and was open to students from Years 7-9. A total of 168 took part, including nearly 50 from Concord College, Meole Brace School, Prestfelde School and Priory School.

Lanyon Bowdler was the key sponsor, along with support from the Midcounties Co-Operative and Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

Teams from Meole Brace School, Priory School and Concord College made it into the final, with Barney Cansdale and Sophiya Martynyuk of Concord College ultimately winning.

Guest judges were from the likes of Lanyon Bowdler, Shropshire Disability Network, Headway Shropshire, My Shrewsbury Magazine, Brands 4 Learning, BBC Radio Shropshire and Revive Aromatherapy.

Lanyon Bowdler was the key sponsor, along with support from the Midcounties Co-



Barney Cansdale and Sophiya Martynyuk of Concord College, with Kay Kelly (left) and Holly Edwards (right) of Lanyon Bowdler

Operative and Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

One of the judges, Vicki Archer of BBC Radio Shropshire, said: "If that's the future we can all relax. They were smart, articulate, engaging and most importantly they listened; not only to each other to

forward the debate, but to feedback and improved throughout the day."

Kay Kelly, a partner at Lanyon Bowdler, added: "It was quite humbling and inspiring for those of us acting as judges and providing feedback."

Art at the heart of construction

A construction company has enlisted the help of a renowned county artist to promote its latest development project.

TC Homes, based in Shrewsbury is working with social housing company Severnside Housing on Alexandra Road in Wellington.

With construction now well under way, imagery depicting a row of houses has been displayed at the site by artist Linda Edwards.

TC Homes is veering away from the normal on-site signage and says it will be working with a different Shropshire artist for each new project.

Director Victoria Charnley said: "To start off, we chose Linda Edwards of Sunny Side Art from Shrewsbury. Her work, which depicts different Shropshire vistas and well-known historical places and streets, is closely associated with the county and is instantly recognisable.

"We thought it would be nice to replicate a street scene for this development and as soon as we thought that, we thought of Linda."

The Alexandra Road development



Sarah Friday, project manager for Metrics Consultants, director of TC Homes Tim Charnley, artist Linda Edwards, John Alvey, town councillor for Haygate Ward Wellington, and Sepp Sargeant, head of development for Housing Plus Group, with the new fencing at the Alexandra Road, TC Homes Development

comprises of 12 terraced houses, six one bedrooomed apartment and six two bedrooomed apartments.

TC Homes won the Severnside Housing contract worth over £1 million, and the completion date is expected to be in April 2019.

TC Homes is working alongside local subcontractors and the project will create around 30 jobs, including Paul Bennett who has been newly appointed as site manager for the development. Alexandra Road is one of five major development projects the company is working on in 2018.

Transformation of our canal network

The trustees behind a scheme to breathe new life into historic canal buildings have promised to press ahead with the long-term transformation, despite missing out on lottery funding.

The Shrewsbury & Newport Canals Trust says it will continue with plans to turn Wappenshall Wharf into a visitor and heritage centre by exploring other funding and ways of carrying out the work.

The trust had a second application for £1.88 million turned down by the Heritage Lottery Fund in March. Wappenshall Wharf was built between 1835 and 1838 as a loading point for goods to be transported by canal and it acted as a 'halfway house' for narrowboats traveling between Norbury Junction and Shrewsbury. After the Shrewsbury and Newport canals officially closed, a coal merchant used the buildings until 1967; then a truck repair firm until 2009.

Telford & Wrekin Council then led an initiative to buy the site and lease it to the SNCT. Some preparatory work has already taken place on a small warehouse that will become a café - and developing that facility will be the first target.

SNCT Chairman Bernie Jones said: "This is an historically important site that deserves to be restored to its former glory and preserved for generations to come.

"The trustees have unanimously agreed to explore using our existing funds, possible pledges and other potential sources of funding, to go ahead with a planned sequential restoration of the site."

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End of the line for annual tax return?



**Andrew
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The way individuals and businesses interact with HMRC is changing, with much greater use being made of digital technology and existing data, and a requirement for businesses to file quarterly information digitally.

Making Tax Digital (MTD) is a key part of the Government's plans to make it easier for individuals and businesses to get their tax right and keep on top of their affairs . . . meaning the end of the annual tax return for millions.

Already, we have seen the introduction of changes for both business and personal tax. Here's a quick summary:

Making Tax Digital for Business (MTDfB)

The Government had originally instructed that businesses were to keep digital records and update HMRC quarterly for income tax from 2018. However, the MTDfB initiative has undergone considerable revision over the summer of 2017, resulting in alterations to the timetable originally proposed. The new proposal has particular consequences for VAT registered businesses who are required to be compliant from April 2019.

Personal Tax

Every individual now has access to their own 'Personal Tax Account' and these are being regularly expanded and improved.

Personal Tax accounts are designed for taxpayers to interact securely with HMRC, update details, and check tax affairs in real time. All taxpayers can now create and access their own Digital Tax Account and we recommend that you create one. We have developed an information sheet which sets out the steps you need to take to open your own account, which can be found on our website.

Watch out for changes to your PAYE Tax Code!

Banks and building societies are now



VAT-registered businesses will feel the initial impact of Making Tax Digital next April



Making better use of existing data, HMRC can find information required elsewhere in some cases

required to report information to HMRC earlier and more frequently than currently. This information will then feed into the Personal Tax Accounts and will be used by HMRC to estimate tax liabilities in the form of 'Dynamic Coding'. Dynamic coding aims to reflect changes in the work and income through real-time changes in tax codes, so the right amount of tax is collected up front.

You may not need to submit a Self-Assessment Tax Return

Making more use of existing data, HMRC can now find the information they need for some taxpayers elsewhere, removing the need for some individuals to complete a Self-Assessment Tax Return. This new system is called Simple Assessment. These changes took effect from September 2017, with HMRC writing to customers with a tax calculation in the

form of a P800 or a Simple Assessment letter (PA302).

First to be affected are the new state pensioners with income greater than the personal tax allowance (£11,500) in 2017/18; and employees or pensioners with PAYE tax codes who have underpaid tax and who cannot have that tax collected through their tax code because it is too high to code out.

The PA302 is a binding assessment: HMRC can enforce it. It is therefore essential that it is checked carefully.

If correct, taxpayers can pay their bill online or by cheque by the deadline in the letter. If incorrect, there is a 60-day window to contact HMRC. This can be done online via a Personal Tax Account.

● *Andrew Richardson is based at the Shrewsbury office of accountancy firm Whittingham Riddell*



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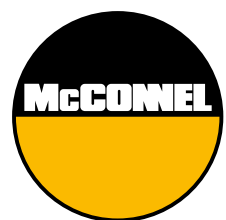
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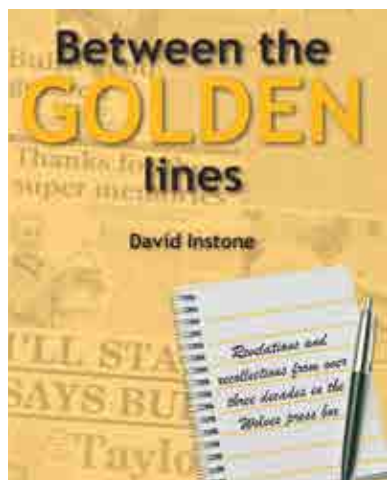


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Writer David Instone and cover designer Paul Naylor are both based in the market town of Newport

Memoirs from football writer document 30 golden years

Shropshire has always been closely associated with Wolverhampton Wanderers football club – Billy Wright, Johnny Hancocks, Graham Turner, David Edwards and a strong supporter base have seen to that.

Now the links between club and county have been cemented further in a new book from a Newport-based author who reported on the club for the Express & Star newspaper between 1986 and 2002.

David Instone's 'Between the Golden Lines' book is a 256-page hard-back detailing his career in a role envied by many.

"A friend in Shrewsbury suggested ages ago I should commit my memories to print – and I eventually agreed and spent three years working on what the cover refers to as recollections and revelations from my 30-plus years in Wolves' press box.

"With a few funny tales and a sprinkling of my mistakes, I tell dozens of stories behind the stories and explain the unique relationship between a club and local reporter."

The 'Made in Shropshire' angle is underlined by the fact the designer of the book's cover, Paul Naylor of Media & You, and its producers, Thomas Publications, are also based in Newport.

David has written several other publications, including biographies of Sir Jack Hayward and Steve Bull and a 'Wolverhampton Wanderers Greats' publication. He also runs the website www.wolvesheroes.com with John Richards, the club's former record goalscorer and managing director.

Flood risk is the focus of event

Natural ways to manage the challenge of flooding in Shropshire will be discussed at a free event run by CREST@UCS - the Centre for Research into Environmental Science and Technology at University Centre Shrewsbury.

The workshop on Tuesday May 15, from 9.30am to 2pm, will explore the benefits offered by natural methods of flood management, such as soil infiltration and wetland creation.

It will feature talks from Dr Anne Wheeler, Chair of the Severn and Wye Regional Flood and Coastal Committee; Mike Morris, Deputy Director of the Severn Rivers Trust; Dr Phil Marren, CREST@UCS Researcher; Dr Nicola Hall from Reaseheath College; Guy Pluckwell from the Environment Agency and Peter Lambert, from Shropshire Wildlife Trust.

Jon Britten, CREST@UCS project

manager, said: "River flooding is one of the big challenges facing Shropshire, costing the county millions of pounds every year.

"Leading experts will talk about how to 'slow the flow' and the benefits of natural flood management for both rural businesses in Shropshire and the more urban area of Telford."

To book a free place go to: <https://natural-flood-management.eventbrite.co.uk>. Alternatively email crest@ucshrewsbury.ac.uk or call 01743 297561.

The £1.97 million centre has been created at the university, in partnership with University Centre Reaseheath.

This was after UCS was awarded a European Regional Development Fund grant of almost £1.2 million, via the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, with the University of Chester contributing around another £800,000.



Green-Door is a more lightweight and user-friendly replacement for the heavy sliding 'night door'

Warm welcome for cold solution

A Telford company's new innovation which could spell the end of the unwieldy 'night door' for food retailers has been warmly welcomed by top supermarkets.

The Green-Door, available for both freezers and chillers, is the latest innovation from the thermal insulation specialists at Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI).

Green-Door is a more lightweight and user-friendly replacement for the heavy sliding 'night door', using SMI's acclaimed Temprow, the world's thinnest and most thermally-efficient material of its kind.

Andrew Watson, store manager at ASDA Glasshoughton, Castleford, said: "The Green-Door has brought lots of benefits since installing it in place of the old night door.

"It is much lighter to use – reducing the risk of injury – much easier to clean, and saves us energy and money too. I would

have no hesitation in recommending it, particularly in an area where there is a great deal of footfall."

SMI chairman Brian Seymour explained: "Cheap flip-flap doors have been used in chillers for several years, despite having relatively short lifespans, high maintenance costs and breakage.

"We researched the real needs of the food industry and targeted economic performance, being user friendly, and longevity. The aim was to create a quality door that would require little maintenance, was easy to use and saved significant amounts of energy, and carbon."

Dave Perry, SMI's divisional sales manager, added: "Put simply, our Green-Door is a 'fit and forget' item which allows easy access for staff, a constant closed-door solution, and is virtually maintenance-free."

SMI is based on the Stafford Park industrial estate and works with a host of blue-chip brands both in the UK and abroad, including retailers such as Waitrose, Morrisons, ASDA, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, The Co-op, and Lidl.

Impressive chart position

Telford-based Network Telecom has been named at number 35 in the latest Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100 table.

The league table ranks Britain's 100 private companies with the fastest-growing profits over three years and comes after the telecoms and IT company increased its profits by over 90% in 2017.

Network Telecom is one of 12 companies headquartered in the West Midlands to have made the league table.

The 12 companies have made a strong contribution to the local economy. Together they employ 2,100 staff and have achieved combined profits of £76m.

They are part of the 'Midlands Engine', overtaking London for the first time on Profit Track 100 with a record 19 companies in total, up from 11 last year.

"We are over the moon to have placed so highly in the 19th annual Sunday Times BDO Profit Track 100," said Paul Maxfield,



Celebrating hard work – Paul Maxfield of Telford-based Network Telecom

managing director and founder of the Hadley Park-based business.

"After a record year of growth, we're excited to have been recognised nationally and to celebrate the hard work that all of our teams have put in. This year we'll be working on continuous improvement with both our staff and our customers."

Richard Rose, partner and head of the Midlands at BDO, the title sponsor of the league table, added: "These high-growth, high-energy and highly entrepreneurial companies will be the difference between success and failure in our post-Brexit economic future."

"These businesses are playing their part by recording strong levels of revenue and profit growth and by creating jobs. We'd like to see the Government do more to help them by focusing on skills, infrastructure investment and tax simplification."

The full league table can be found at www.fasttrack.co.uk.

This announcement follows the news that Network Telecom has been shortlisted for Reseller Sales Team of the Year for firms with £7.5m-plus turnover at the Comms Dealer Sales and Marketing Awards and for Insider's Made in The Midlands Awards in the Manufacturing Innovation category.

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Coaching is for more than sports players



**Clare
DOWNES**

We all naturally expect the top performers in sport to have a coach, but we all need support to perform at our best.

There are times when we would benefit from someone to help us when we 'hit a wall' and cannot see how we can improve, pick us back up after illness, redundancy, a career break, not achieving the promotion that we aimed for – or simply to remain energised and focused after a bad day!

Coaching in business is not always clearly understood and can be thought of as a luxury reserved for those at the top. Everyone in a business will need someone to enable them at some point. Increasingly as businesses focus on the well-being of their teams, coaching is finding a place to provide both career and emotional support; home and work are often difficult to separate.

Shropshire is a county with many family businesses, where board room table and kitchen table are often the same. This brings with it heightened emotional challenges in the workplace at times.

Family businesses can be the very best and very worst and which of these is achieved is usually down to clarity of communication. Openness removes assumptions. Coaching has a place in helping to draw out this dialogue, to bring about meaningful conversation in a safe place and with no judgements being made.

Coaching also comes into play with growing businesses; merger, acquisition and rapid growth. Owners may not have experienced how to manage more people in new roles – and the requirement to let them do their jobs without constant interference. The structure of a business in growth is not a 'one fits all' template.

Again, coaching conversations, underpinned with structural strategic planning, can ensure the right business shape takes form.

Business owners may find it difficult to admit that they simply do not have the answers; they have not been here before and are learning too. The real strength in business is to know when to ask for help and from whom.



Coaching in business can be thought of as a luxury reserved for those at the top

You will not always make the right choices, but by being receptive to an outside opinion, you always learn something. Business owners are happy to ask for legal advice, financial advice; areas where they feel that they need a professional in the specific field.

Why do they not then ask for advice when it comes to supporting their own development and that of their team? If these relationships are strong, the business is fit for purpose and resilient, able to cope with good and bad.

With a coach, thoughts can be articulated and ideas tested, without the risk of feeling exposed. It helps with then going back into the business and delivering with confidence.

It is vital that a coach does not become a prop. Coaches do not have to have experience of your specific business sector. They are not there to mentor in how to do your job. They are there to enable you, not do it for you.

When considering a coach for you or

your team, think first about how comfortable you feel with the person and the perspective and value that they can add to help you reaching personal and professional potential. We all want to be the best that we can be; this does not stop when we leave the school gates.

Training courses can add skills – but coaching goes beyond this, to make you think more deeply about you as a person and the relationships within your team – at work and home.

We spend a lot of time at work, and workplace well-being is a current headline debate.

This is for everyone – whatever your role, everyone plays a part.

A greater understanding of yourself and your capabilities within the context of the team that you work within can only result in achieving increased potential, individually and collectively.

● Clare Downes is the founder of 'the circle'. Visit www.circlecommunication.co.uk

Seminar focuses on farming

More than 70 farmers, landowners, land professionals and rural business owners attended an annual spring farming seminar at the Ludlow Kitchen, hosted by law firm mfg Solicitors and the Country Land & Business Association.

Presentation topics included employment law, issues surrounding GDPR, partnership agreements and land titles.



Robin Huntbach pictured with Peter Stephens and Gary Shorthouse



mfg's Chris Piggott addressing guests on GDPR concerns and actions



Jim Franklin pictured with Richard Franklin



Simon Biggs, Sophie Derryhouse and Aaron Powis at the presentation



Mike Adams, Celia Adams and Tom Bell at the Ludlow Kitchen

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According to the barometer, only 32% of companies are prepared to let apprentices stay off-site for 18 months to complete their courses

Taking the temperature of appetite for training

The introduction of the new Apprenticeship Levy is splitting opinion among bosses in the manufacturing sector.

The In-Comm Training Barometer, which is designed to take the temperature of UK industry's appetite for training, revealed that just 55% of manufacturers believe it is working.

Just over a fifth said they had taken on apprentices as a result of the Levy – a small number, but still an increase in the face of an annual decline in the number of Apprenticeship starts over the last 12 months.

These results were presented to Anne Milton, minister for skills and apprenticeships, during a special delegation to Westminster involving 50 employers and apprentices.

In-Comm operates training academies in Bridgnorth and Shrewsbury under the Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology banner.

"There has been a lot of debate around the success or failure of the Apprenticeship Levy and these results show the jury is still very much out," explained Gareth Jones, managing director of In-Comm Training.

"Companies are tapping into it and we have seen a number of them use it to increase or start using apprentices, which, compared to the national reduction in starts, has to be a good thing.

"Encouragingly, 89% also said they



The In-Comm Training Barometer

would employ apprentices in the near future.

"It's clear from the anecdotal information we received through the report that a lot of managing directors and training managers believe there needs to be better communication, more transparency and an ability to use the levy to boost other forms of training too.

"A good number even indicated they wouldn't mind going back to the old days of the Engineering Industry Training Board, where every firm paid a Levy, but could

spend the money on all forms of training, not just apprenticeships."

The In-Comm Training Barometer asked manufacturers about the new Trailblazer Standards, with two thirds saying they didn't understand them and 87% of those respondents citing 'content' as the main stumbling block.

When it comes to appetite for different types of Apprenticeships, only 32% of companies are prepared to let their apprentices stay off-site for 18 months to complete their full-time Apprenticeships.

"It is vital that a tri-party collaboration happens here and everyone plays their part...industry to allow individuals the time to learn, providers to deliver industry-led content at high levels with no short cuts and Government with funded initiatives to help industry upskill and become more productive," added Gareth.

"Results from the Barometer also showed that companies, especially SMEs, aren't preparing their workforce for the next industrial revolution, with just 45% of respondents saying they are futureproofing their skills for Industry 4.0.

"If we are ever going to solve the productivity gap we need Government to help engage these companies, make sure there is support out there to understand the opportunity and then ensure they are not left behind in the global race to become quicker, smarter and more efficient."

The Training Barometer was completed by small, medium and large manufacturers, supplying 12 different engineering sectors.

Slide over TV - the time for drones has arrived

Shrewsbury-based production company Helter Skelter Studios is helping estate agents to take their offerings to new heights.

The company, which has its roots in TV and photography, has started to develop drone and virtual reality services for use by property agents and agricultural merchants.

McCartney's in Ludlow has commissioned the Mount Street company to survey a farm near Knighton, and a virtual tour facility has been developed using 132 images to create a 360-degree panorama across 22 acres.

Law firm is acquired

Long-established Shropshire law firm, Terry Jones Solicitors, has been acquired by Metamorph Law Limited.

Founder and managing director Terry Jones has been a well-known practitioner in the county for more than 40 years.

Having been a partner in a local firm, he started his own business in 2000 in Shrewsbury and subsequently expanded into Telford, Newport and Bridgnorth.

This acquisition strengthens Metamorph Law's existing Shrewsbury offering, which currently trades under the Linder Myers brand, by bringing additional expertise in commercial and agricultural matters, a matrimonial, family and childcare team, a crime practice and further residential conveyancing and trust and estates resources.

Terry Jones has joined the local Metamorph Law management team, working closely with Metamorph Law's local leader and national head of trusts and estates, Richard Ashton, to integrate the two businesses.

Metamorph Law's group managing director Alan Webb said: "The acquisition of Terry Jones Solicitors adds further depth and quality to our operations and brings some of the leading legal teams in the area into our business.

"There is a great fit with our existing offering in Shropshire.

"It adds a fantastic and respected local brand to our stable and fits perfectly with our strategy to grow as a single business with multiple brands."

Terry Jones said: "Having known some of the Metamorph Law senior management team for many years, I feel that the ethos and direction of Metamorph Law coincides with my own vision and objectives for the future.

"I am confident that joining Metamorph Law is the best way forward to ensure long term benefits for the clients, staff, and the brand that I have built up over many years."

Richard Ashton added: "I have known and respected Terry for many years and am delighted now to have the opportunity to work alongside him to integrate and continue to develop and grow our business."



Terry Jones

• Oliver Nicholas, from the criminal team at Terry Jones Solicitors, has been giving his top tips to local companies on how to avoid a potentially costly health and safety problem. Read his article in our 'features and analysis' section at www.shropshirebiz.co.uk

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Testing the MOT testers



Curriculum leader Andrew Lee, with motor vehicle assessor Steve Lloyd, plus Ryan Davies and Phil Davies from Furrows, pictured at Furrows Service Centre in Battlefield

More than 150 people have passed one of the new MOT courses being run by Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

The three courses on offer at the London Road campus - MOT Testers Class 4 and 7, MOT Centre Managers and Annual Updates - started just over a year ago.

They have proved so popular with the industry that extra courses have had to be laid on and additional specialist staff trained to deliver them.

Curriculum leader Andrew Lee said: "We have been blown away by the success of these courses. We were expecting this number over several years, not just the first 12 months, it's been a phenomenal take up."

"We've seen people travelling from as far Stoke, Worcester, Hereford, Wrexham, the West Midlands and Mid Wales."

"The success of the courses has also increased our apprenticeships in the area by 300% because of the good relationships we have been forging with a number of garages."

The 150th student to pass the MOT testing course was Ryan Davies, a mechanic with the Furrows Group, which is celebrating its 100th birthday this year.

Ryan, 23, from Minsterley, said: "I can't continue to do my job without passing important updates like this."

Phil Davies, service manager at Furrows, said: "We have put 23 of our mechanics through either the MOT Testers or Annual Update courses this year. It's a very well-run course."



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Ross D'Aniello, head of the agency's country homes department, has joined the board as sales and marketing director

Management changes

One of Shropshire's longest-established estate agents, Nock Deighton, has announced some key changes to the top tier of its management structure.

Director and shareholder Michael Nettleton has been appointed vice chairman and Ross D'Aniello, head of the agency's country homes department, has joined the board as sales and marketing director.

Managing director Graham Taylor said: "We are bucking the trend and experiencing an exciting level of growth."

"We have recently opened our new Kidderminster office and this will coincide with a number of new ventures, projects and relationships across Shropshire and Worcestershire."

Ross joined Nock Deighton two years ago after spending time with several big local property firms. Prior to this he worked with major blue chip firms in London and the south east.

An additional facility



Polytec's Adrian Williams and Pave Aways managing director Steven Owen outside the newly completed Polytec building in Telford

A Shropshire building contractor has handed over a new flagship building to an automotive parts supplier after the successful completion of a multi-million pound contract.

The 38-week build by Pave Aways for the Polytec Group included the construction of a paint plant and assembly halls with a combined floor area of 7,800 sq m and 640 sq m of office space spread over two levels at Telford54.

The £8.45 million build contract also included extensive external work on the 28,000 sq m greenfield site. Pave Aways constructed 4,000 sq m of car parking and internal concrete roads, with detailed drainage and other services and an attenuation system to store and release surface water.

Pave Aways also oversaw the fit out of the paint plant that was delivered by Sturm-Gruppe.

The new development is an additional facility for Polytec, which produces bumpers and accessories for car manufacturers including Jaguar Land Rover. The firm needed the extra manufacturing space to increase output after winning a number of new contracts.

Pave Aways managing director Steven Owen said: "This has been a substantial build that we are delighted to have completed and handed over to our client.

"Our team faced some challenging weather conditions over the winter with heavy snow stopping external work completely for a period but our experience in manufacturing projects like these allowed us to mitigate the impact on the overall programme.

"Polytec will be a valuable addition to the Telford and Shropshire business community and we look forward to seeing the plant in operation in due course."

The completion of the Polytec development is the latest in a series of contracts in the manufacturing sector for Pave Aways.

Recent builds including a 370 sq m extension for Zip-Clip in at its UK headquarters at Offa's Dyke Business Park in Welshpool completed in 12 weeks, and a new 5,500 sq m factory for Invertek Drives, also in Welshpool.

Pave Aways has with more than 40 years of experience providing construction excellence in Shropshire and Mid and North Wales.

With more than 100 employees and a turnover of in excess of £25 million, it works on a wide variety of developments from residential schemes to multi-million pound new build and refurbishment projects across a wide range of sectors.



An aerial view of the new Polytec site in Telford that has just been handed over by Pave Aways

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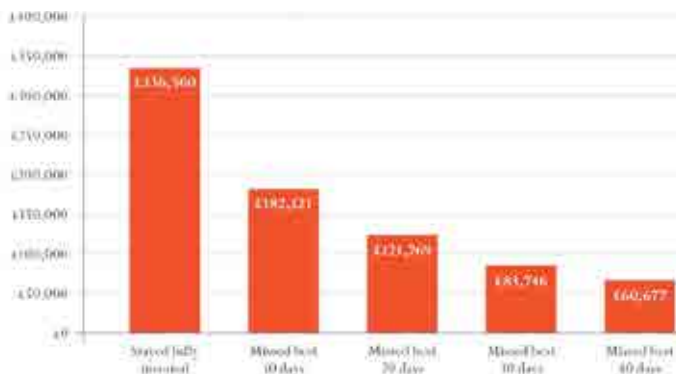
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The legendary investor Warren Buffett said: "The stock market is designed to transfer money from the active to the patient."

Don't miss the best days



The recent spike in volatility has highlighted once again that attempting to time the market is difficult – and can be costly.

A month or two on from February's correction, the bull run for equity markets has entered its 10th year. But it would be wrong for investors to assume that the recent return of volatility was a mere blip.

The S&P 500 fell by more than 10% over the course of nine trading days. That was the fastest drop into correction territory for the US market since World War Two.

Yet within a week, more than half of that fall had been reversed. It meant that the worst week for markets since 2016 was immediately followed by the best week since 2015.¹

“The sharpest falls and the biggest gains tend to be concentrated into short periods of time.”

Investors who took flight as markets wobbled would have made a costly mistake.

The reality is that market volatility is the norm. From 1980 to 2015, every year but one (1995) saw the S&P 500 index fall at least 5%.² Yet the latest bout of volatility came after two years without a dip of that magnitude, which is what took many investors by surprise. Indeed, last year was the quietest for US stocks since 1964.³

Yet there are plenty of reasons to expect more volatility in the months to come, as markets grapple with a changing economic and political picture. What's vital is that investors do not allow short-term



When it comes to investing, doing nothing is often best

factors to distract them from their longer-term objectives. As recent events illustrated, the sharpest falls and the biggest gains tend to be concentrated into short periods of time. If you react to markets falling by selling out, then you are likely to miss the recovery.

The chart above shows how damaging missing a small number of the best days would have been if you'd invested £100,000 in the UK stock market over the last 20 years. For example, missing just ten of the best days over the whole period would have reduced returns by over 45%.

Cumulative returns on a £100,000 investment over 20 years (FTSE All Share index)

It's only natural to be concerned about short-term fluctuations in stock markets. Crucial to long-term investment success though is the ability to accept and ignore volatility, rather than to try to anticipate it. The only certainty is that it is impossible to be sure how and when markets will move. Time in, not timing, is the key to investing.

The legendary investor Warren Buffett said: "The stock market is designed to transfer money from the active to the patient."

When it comes to investing, doing nothing is often best.

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● 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

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³ www.marketwatch.com, January 2018

Audio visual innovator

What does the HS2 head office in Birmingham have in common with the Menai Science Park in north Wales, banana cultivations, and holographic images of shipping freighters?

Answer – they've all been brought to life by a small Shropshire company which specialises in audio and visual technology.

Phoenix AV Solutions, run by director Dennis Silverlock, is based at Weston-under-Redcastle, near Wem.

"Our experiences with a wide range of innovative projects for blue chip corporate clients has seen a few win national awards and push boundaries," he said.

"We are proud of being a small company, and see it as one of our strengths. Unfortunately, there is a great deal of mistaken belief that 'bigger is better'."

Size certainly hasn't stopped the company from winning contracts with big-name clients.

At the Menai Science Park, part of the



Dennis Silverlock



The reception area at Menai Science Park in north Wales

University of Bangor on its new Anglesey site, Phoenix AV was contracted to provide equipment, installation and commissioning for various meeting rooms and public areas. The first phase was a £51,000-plus deal.

And at the Birmingham CEK HS2 office in Cornwall Street, seven meeting rooms had to be equipped with up to date AV systems including meeting room management, reception booking-in, digital signage and video conferencing. That job

was worth over £43,000. The Shropshire company has previously worked on the Pratt Group's new Halo Project in London, providing a 3D holograph of the project being started later this year – as well as working with Jaguar Land Rover, and using its technology to show the life cycle of banana cultivations.

Mr Silverlock said: "This helps to show Shropshire micro companies can be involved at national levels."



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For those with more than one car at the household, it is worth doing your homework to see which policy saves you the most money

Pluses and minuses of multi-car policies

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



**Martin
LEWIS**

If you've got two or more cars in your household, you may be able to save thousands of pounds using a multi-car policy . . . then again doing that may leave you paying thousands over the odds. Frustrating isn't it. There's no law as to when it's cheaper, but I have come up with a rule of thumb that can help.

Multi-car insurance really is marmite. In a Facebook poll of 2,100 people I did recently, 40% with more than one car said multi-car won for them, 60% said separate policies did. And the differences can be startling.

On the 'love it' side is boredwithbeingignored who wrote on my web forum: "Over three cars (including our 18-year-old son's), we saved £4,600 as our MultiCar policy reduced it to a much more manageable £2,600."

On the 'hate it' side Suzanne emailed: "Husband had three cars on multi-car, followed your guide and bought three separate policies, saving £1,400."

GET THE OPPOSITE QUOTES TO WHAT YOU'VE ALREADY GOT FIRST

This is the simple rule of thumb. If you're at renewal and are in a household with more than one car, and you've got a multi-car policy, then start by looking for the cheapest separate policies for each car. If you've got separate policies, then start by checking multi-car insurance.

Now this might not be as catchy a rule to remember as 'don't eat yellow snow' – but there is some logic behind it. This is because what tends to happen is multi-car newbies get hot offers to suck them in, then that advantage usually erodes at renewal.

THE TOP MULTI-CAR DEALS

Frustratingly, you can't use comparison sites to do multi-car searches (some look like they do, but they just forward you to one insurer rather than doing a comparison). So instead, you have to do this manually as trial and error. Try as many of these as you can stomach...

● Multi-car policies

Here all cars are on one policy. The big name in multi-car is www.admiral.com which would always be my start point, yet it's not alone both www.aviva.co.uk and www.lv.com are players in this area as well.

● Multi-car discounts

Here you get a discount on the cost to insure each 'additional' vehicle. There's www.morethan.com (15%), www.axa.co.uk (10%), www.esure.com (10%),

- 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



Cashback sites - and even the art of haggling - can substantially reduce the cost of insurance



Admiral multi-car insurance is one example www.privilege.com (% varies) and www.sheilaswheels.com (10%).

There are also a range of firms that in one way or another potentially offer those with multiple cars discounts. Yet here the cars aren't all in one policy. They are separate policies where you get a discount.

Therefore, the easy way to do this is to use a comparison site for each car and just keep a note of these firms' prices for each vehicle.

Plus as the discount is off each additional policy, insure the car with the cheapest premium first because you'll usually get the discount on the next 'additional' (and subsequent) cars – and if they're most expensive you save more. This can be especially useful for example if one car is for a young driver, and far more expensive than others.

With multi-policy discounts, the discount is for getting an additional policy – for example it could be a car policy and a home policy, but two cars also counts. For this, try www.directline.com (which isn't on comparison sites) and www.churchill.com – the discount varies.

THE CHEAPEST STANDALONE POLICIES

There's a whole art to getting cheap car insurance for individual cars including; haggling, cashback sites, how to home into the perfect policy requirements and more. You can read my full guide to it at www.moneysavingexpert.com/carinsurance or for under 25s at www.moneysavingexpert.com/youngdrivers.

Yet in brief, for each car, just use a comparison site for each vehicle. Yet as they don't search identical insurers, and can have different prices for the same firm, it's best to do a few checks for a wider spread. The current order to try (do as many as possible) is www.confused.com, www.moneysupermarket.com, www.gocompare.com and www.comparethemarket.com.

DO I HAVE TO BE AT RENEWAL TO DO THIS?

If you've different cars in the home they may be up for renewal at separate times – which may make you think you can't switch to a multi-car policy. Well don't worry. The first thing to do is get a quote and see if it's likely to be saving you substantial cash.

If you find it's likely to be much cheaper, then provided you haven't claimed (or reported an incident in that insurance year) on the policy that's not at renewal since its last renewal, then for £50-ish admin fee you can normally cancel your policy, and get the rest of the year refunded (you won't earn that year's no-claims bonus) and switch to the deal.

Reclaim overpaid loans for students

This is a clarion call to everyone who's been to university in the last 20 years or so. Hundreds of thousands have overpaid student loans, and with one quick phone call could be entitled to money back.

I first dipped my toe in this subject last November, suggesting people try it to see if it happened. Ever since I've been swamped with success stories of people getting their cash back. There are three main ways you may be owed money – if you've questions the full details are in my www.mse.me/studentloanoverpayments guide, but in brief...

1. YOU MAY HAVE STARTED REPAYING YOUR STUDENT LOAN TOO EARLY

You're only eligible to start repaying your student loan in the April after graduation, which for most is around nine months after leaving. For those who didn't finish university, it's the April following leaving – even then you only repay if you earn over a set threshold.

Yet a freedom of information request we did, shows in the last three years alone, over 100,000

university leavers repaid before the first April, which they shouldn't have done. And it's likely there are 100,000s more going all the way back to 1998. The reason this happens is if you are an employee you repay your student loan automatically through the payroll. So if your employer has the wrong info about your uni leaving date (which can be their fault or yours), or simply ignore it, then you may've started repaying too soon.

2. YOU COULD'VE OVERPAID IN A PARTICULAR YEAR

You only have to pay back your student loan if you earn over the earnings threshold in a tax year. Yet most payrolls work on a monthly basis. So the £21,000 threshold is seen as £1,750 a month. If you earned over that in a month, such as for a bonus, you could've had the money taken off you. Or if you stopped work half way through the year, money could've been taken off you, even though in total you earned under £21,000 in the year.

3. YOU COULD STILL BE PAYING EVEN THOUGH YOU'VE ALREADY PAID OFF YOUR LOAN

A huge 86,000 overpaid this way in 2015/16 alone. This happens because the Student Loans Company only gets told by HMRC how much you've paid once a year (though it does retrospectively calculate the interest as if you'd paid each month).

As a result, people who've finished paying off their loans can still have money deducted up to a year later – this is due to change from 2019. It will write and tell you if this has happened, but that takes time, if you think you're impacted call it and speak to it.

In the meantime to avoid this happening, a new rule means in the last 23 months you can switch to repaying the loan by direct debit instead of through your employer – which should help. So how do you get money back if you think you're due?

In a perfect world you'd check your payslips, then call up the Student Loan Company with your national insurance number, payroll number and PAYE reference.

Yet the world isn't always perfect, so do that if you can, it helps the Student Loans Company, but if you don't have these things just call it on 0300 100 0611 and it will do its best to help.



You may be owed money



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Amy Jones, office manager for Just Credit Union, Shropshire

A manager evolves

Amy Jones, who joined Just Credit Union as a 16-year-old business apprentice in August 2004, has been appointed office manager for Shropshire.

With fewer than 1,000 members when she joined, she has seen over 6,000 members join and its staff grow from three to more than 10 today.

She said: "One of the main reasons for loving my job is to watch the credit union ethos evolve and see the changes that come from this."

"Being part of the credit union movement has helped me to learn to save, be money practical and understand the difference between a want and a need."

Planes to caravans

A young woman who spent just over a year flying around the globe from Dubai with Emirates Airline's cabin crew has landed a new job in Shropshire.

Jenny Keir, 23, has been offered a full-time job as a sales executive at Shrewsbury-based caravan dealership Salop Leisure, after initially helping out during the Christmas period.

"I think caravans are brilliant and I missed the British countryside when I was working for Emirates," said Jenny, whose stepfather Steve Pugh also works for Salop Leisure.



Sale role for Jenny Keir at Salop Leisure

New role for Ben



Ben Lee at Arthurs of Oswestry

New sales consultant Ben Lee has joined the sales team at Oswestry Vauxhall dealer Arthurs.

The 35-year-old has been in the motor industry since he was 16. For the last four years he has been a dealership business manager in the Midlands.

But he and his partner Tracy made the decision to start a new life together in the countryside.

Warm welcome



Mark Dunford, Amy Dunphy and Nick Jones at St. James's Place Wealth Management

Nick Jones Wealth Planning has welcomed Mark Dunford and his PA, Amy Dunphy, to the expanding practice on the Shrewsbury Business Park.

Mark was an independent financial adviser for around a decade before joining St. James's Place Wealth Management in 1999, and have built up a significant Senior Partner Practice over the last 19 years.

Working together a number of times on client matters during the last ten years ensured that Mark and Nick fully understand how each other works.

Nick Jones said: "Mark's individual and personal handling of his clients' financial affairs is key to his approach and much of his business comes through recommendation from long standing, current clients."

Digital offer expands



Jan Minihane, centre, with J&PR directors Kirsty Smallman and Rhea Alton

A Shropshire PR agency has welcomed a new digital account manager to the team as it celebrates its sixth anniversary and a record breaking year.

Jan Minihane has joined the team at J&PR Ltd in Wellington to enhance the digital offering.

Jan, founder of The Net Advantage and the UK Paleo Awards, is managing the retained digital clients for the company and joining Kirsty to co-host PR and social media training days and one-to-one mentoring sessions.



James Smith is a part 2 architectural assistant at Base



Abigail Owen has joined the growing team at Base too

Fresh faces at Base

Base Architecture & Design, which has offices in Shrewsbury and Chester, has welcomed two new faces.

Jack Harris and James Smith have taken up roles as part 2 architectural assistants, while existing team member Adam Turnell has also qualified as an architect.

Base is currently working on more than 200 projects with a contract value in excess of £20 million from Grand Design new builds, renovations, extensions, and urban and commercial developments.

It works predominantly in the Midlands, Shropshire, Cheshire and north Wales.

Building team relations

Shropshire house builder Galliers Homes has appointed a new head of sales.

Maxine Conway, who has over 25 years' experience in the industry, joins the team at Shrewsbury-based Galliers in the new position of sales and marketing director.

"I have been employed by several of the large PLC companies, progressing from an on-site sales advisor to the position of director over the years," said Maxine, who has also spent some time working as a sales trainer focussed on selling skills, IT systems and customer service.

"I enjoy building team relationships that are open and honest and like to give others the opportunity to develop their skills in a supportive environment."



Maxine Conway of Galliers Homes

Care provider adds to its management team



A family affair at Furrows – from left, Molly, Sophie, Jess, Emily and Charlotte Banks

You can Bank on the staff of siblings at this car dealership

A Shropshire motor dealer is keeping it in the family after employing the fifth sister from the same family.

Furrows Group now has a full set of Banks siblings after Sophie joined her sisters at the Telford dealership in the sales administration department.

As well as Sophie, the dealer employs Charlotte, Emily, Jess, and Molly. Charlotte was the first sister to join the team, and now has a full-time position in the marketing team at the company's Shrewsbury dealership.

Emily works in the accident repair centre as a full-time co-ordinator.

Jess also began as a part-time receptionist, and now works full-time in sales admin.

Molly is working towards her Association of Accounting Technicians qualification, followed by her Chartered Institute of Management Accountants qualification.



New managers Michelle Oseland, Kelly Lowry, Carolyn Fisher and Debbie Ellis with chief executive David Coull (centre).

Independent care home provider, Coverage Care, has made a series of new appointments to its management team.

The company, which provides residential and nursing care for mainly older people in 14 homes across the county, said the five new home managers would underpin the not-for-profit company's long-term strategy for a successful and sustainable future.

Wendy Lellek replaces the recently retired Elizabeth Jones at Greenfields in Whitchurch, while Liam Palmer has been made manager at Innage Grange, Bridgnorth.

Debbie Ellis has taken the helm at Barclay Gardens in Telford with Carolyn Fisher and Michelle Humphries taking over at Montgomery House and Coton Hill House in Shrewsbury respectively.

New arm to business

Pure Telecom is introducing a new arm to its business by moving into the cloud, data security and co-location hosting sectors.

"This is an important step forward for Pure Telecom," said Ben Thurston, who has wide experience in the industry and has been recruited from London to lead the development.



Ben Thurston of Pure Telecom

"The extended range of products will result in us becoming a 'one stop shop' for their IT and telecoms needs.

"We are aware that there is a lot of innovation and choice in the new sectors and still some confusion as to which products work best together. We can guide people through the process."

Ben has previously worked for companies such as Global Crossing, Exponential-e and Level 3 (CenturyLink) and comes with vast experience selling hosted telephony, cloud, data centre storage and security products to many businesses ranging from SMEs to large government departments.

Accounts semi senior

Emma Lovett has joined Dyke Yaxley Chartered Accountants, in Old Potts Way, Shrewsbury, as an accounts semi senior.

The former Telford College student is preparing accounts, drafting tax calculations, assisting with audits, training junior staff, and helping staff to resolve system queries.

She also prepares VAT returns, works with clients on a daily basis, and is planning, supervising and assisting on the accounts of limited companies.

Emma is the latest new face to join Dyke Yaxley as the company continues to expand its workforce to meet an increasing demand for its services.



Emma Lovett

Presidential role

Lizzie Hughes, of Wace Morgan Solicitors, is the new president of the Shropshire Law Society, which represents the interests of all solicitors in the Shropshire region.

"I am very pleased to be stepping up to the position," said Lizzie, who specialises in family law.

"We have a number of events planned throughout the year which we hope will be enjoyable and beneficial for our members, including training sessions covering public and private family law."

Lizzie appears regularly on the West Midlands, Shropshire and mid Wales court circuit before all levels of judges from magistrates to circuit judges.

Away from work, the expert equestrian has represented England in dressage.



Lizzie Hughes of Wace Morgan

Tom works his way through the ranks

Legal assistant Tom Wickstead has taken on a new role at Martin-Kaye in Telford after impressing the management team with his hard work and dedication.

Tom initially had a work experience placement at the firm, in Euston Way, while still at school.

Then, after leaving Bangor University with his law degree, he spent seven years working for the National Health Service, before returning to Martin-Kaye as a legal assistant in the domestic conveyancing team.

Now, he will be assisting one of the firm's Partners, Andrew Oranjuik, and his colleague Sara Brumwell with civil litigation, professional negligence and commercial litigation cases.



Tom Wickstead has a new role at Martin-Kaye in Telford

Tom will also be involved in debt recovery operations. Mr Oranjuik said: "We have been extremely impressed with Tom's commitment and his attitude."

Strengthening team



Kelly Stant joined Lanyon Bowdler in 2015

Lanyon Bowdler has announced a newly-qualified solicitor to strengthen its clinical negligence team.

Kelly Stant joined the law firm in September 2015 and became a trainee solicitor 12 months later. She qualified in March, to take up her new position as a solicitor within the firm.

Colin Spanner, training partner, said: "Kelly has impressed us during her time with the firm and we are delighted to welcome her on board as a fully qualified solicitor. She will be working in our clinical negligence team, an area of law that is increasingly in demand."

Kelly was born and raised in the Oswestry area before moving to Cardiff where she graduated from Cardiff University with a law degree in 2015.

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Blog



Is your cash in the right place?

Martin Lewis offers tips to ensure your money is earning its maximum



Motor insurance affected by career choice

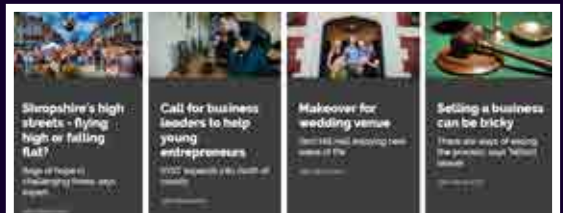
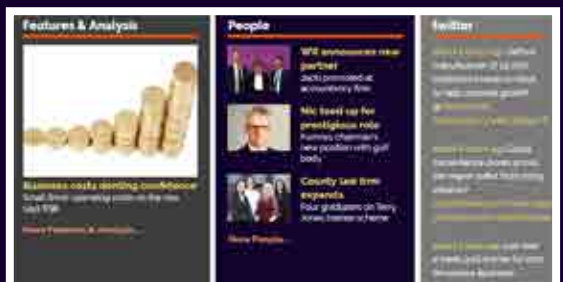
Accountants pay least in premiums, according to

survey



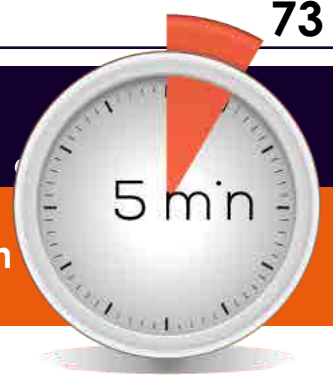
Why equality matters

HR professional Ishbel Lapper offers advice to employers



Five minutes with . . .

PAUL BENNETT is chairman of Shropshire's newly formed Professionals Partnership, and a partner at Shrewsbury law firm Aaron & Partners



IN A NUTSHELL, WHAT DOES YOUR COMPANY DO?

We deal with the complex and vital legal issues that arise regarding owning, running and selling businesses. Our core market is owner managed business. My specialist area is advising other law firms nationally on their internal challenges.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT JOB?

I joined Aaron & Partners LLP in May 2013.

EXPLAIN A TYPICAL WEEK IN YOUR WORKING LIFE:

If only there was a typical week! Last week: As a workplace mediator I resolved a directors' dispute with a colleague, I made written submissions to an accountancy regulator for an accountant accused of inadvertently breaking their rules, I completed a 5 month-long case of a City Executive leaving an Investment Bank in London following discrimination by the CEO and COO, I drafted employment contracts for a local farming business and partnership agreement for an events company. And every day I worked on an appeal case in the High Court for a solicitor we won a case for recently.

WHAT IS THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE FACING YOUR INDUSTRY RIGHT NOW?

The rise of unqualified advisers. In employment law, for example, many companies do not understand the threat of unqualified advice from HR consultants. HR has its place which is helping to get the most out of employees, performance-wise, but legal advice is a distinct skill and often we clear up the mess left by others.

AND WHAT ARE THE BIG OPPORTUNITIES?

Technology is evolving and will in the next 5-15 years revolutionise legal services. This means that the opportunity to become focused on wider business advisory services exists.

HOW DO YOU GET THE BEST OUT OF YOUR STAFF?

Ensure they are better than you at some aspect (so you let them get on with it) and work out what motivates them. For some, it is praise, for others recognition and for some a real challenge.

WHAT WAS YOUR LAST MEETING ABOUT, HOW LONG DID IT LAST, AND WAS IT PRODUCTIVE?

A new professional client with a dispute, it lasted around 30 minutes and was productive as we have a way of tackling the dispute.

HOW MANY EMAILS DO YOU GET IN A DAY, AND HOW MUCH TIME DO YOU HAVE TO READ THEM?

Anywhere from 120-150. I spent about two to three hours per day dealing with emails from clients, other advisers and courts.

DO YOU ANSWER WORK CALLS OR EMAILS AT HOME? WHAT'S THE RIGHT WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

I try not to. I generally turn my phone off at 6pm on a Friday night and turn it back on on Sunday evening in case I need to be aware of a priority for Monday morning. I'm never in contact during any holidays – I'm a great believer in the digital detox in the evening and at weekends, helping improve service to clients when at work.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Straight talking.

BREXIT – WHAT'S YOUR VIEW OF WHAT IT'S ALL GOING TO MEAN?

The economy is what it is. Businesses will adapt. Political clarity would be very good and ease the burden on businesses.



Paul Bennett is chairman of Shropshire's newly formed Professionals Partnership, and a partner at Shrewsbury law firm Aaron & Partners

HIGHLIGHT OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

10 years ago I acted in the Court of Appeal as the junior advocate to a QC on a media channel reporting restrictions case involving Special Forces soldiers. It's the sort of case that happens once in 25 years . . . and we won.

PET HATES?

Petty people. What does being petty ever achieve?

IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF SOME WISE ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

Relax and enjoy the ride.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

Walking locally with my wife and daughters and watching Shrewsbury Town FC. Listening to music, going to concerts and cycling last year... I rode from Liverpool to Hull, this year I'm cycling from London to Paris.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

It's a community. In any major city, this gets lost but locally we are so lucky that we can create and maintain a community approach.

TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY WOULDN'T KNOW:

I'm obsessed with music, I used to DJ and that came from a love of music.

YOU CAN TAKE ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE CD ONTO A DESERT ISLAND – WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Birdsong by Sebastian Faulks, The Shawshank Redemption and Oasis Definitely Maybe.

YOUR FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

My friends! The fun you have with close friends can not be bettered.

WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?

Beef bourguignon and dauphinoise potatoes

Pros and cons of cloud computing

By now everyone has heard of cloud computing. We use it in everyday life from the mobile apps we consume to watching Netflix, iPlayer and Amazon. Some of us, of a certain age, would say it's just like old-style mainframe computing, but let's not get ahead of ourselves.

So, what exactly is cloud computing?

Cloud computing is defined by NIST (National Institute of Science & Technology) like this:

The Essential Characteristics

- On-demand self-service – You don't need to speak to anyone
- Broad network access – It's connected to the internet
- Resource pooling – Everything is in a centralised place
- Rapid elasticity – It can expand and contract automatically
- Measured service – you only pay for what you use

What we should remember here is that cloud computing isn't a technology as such, it is just a different way to consume technology. A bit like how we get Electricity, we only pay for what we use, and we pay what the utility has measured that we have consumed.

Cloud computing also removes the Capex requirements of IT, you don't have to buy servers or software, you just pay for what you use.

So why is Cloud such a good fit for SME businesses?

What cloud means is that you get Enterprise levels of service and availability for an SME price.

Cloud computing comes with a financially backed SLA's, normally with an availability of 99.95%, this equates to under 5 hours downtime a year! That is something that a single server sitting on-premise cannot guarantee.

Cloud computing has seen a slow take up within the SME marketplace especially in the UK, this has been put down to various reasons, Lack of Network access, slow broadband speeds, Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt. However, now as the network operators have started to invest and bring better network access at a more economical rate, cloud computing is a real alternative to on-premise.

As always, look for a reputable, trusted supplier. Whilst Cloud can dramatically reduce your costs, if the systems are set up either incorrectly or more importantly not in the most proficient manner, this can produce bill shock.



Mysterious storage – these days, it is likely that much of your online content is stored 'in the cloud'



William Rowland, front centre, is managing director of communications specialist Connexis

Another benefit of utilising Cloud is it is accessible from anywhere if you have an internet connection. This really suits businesses with a mobile workforce or wish to migrate to a remote worker model.

Business Continuity is another area that Cloud addresses. If anything should happen to your premises, you can continue to access your data immediately, keeping the business going whilst you relocate or invoke your BCP plans.

So, if your current on-premise solution is coming to end of life, your looking to expand your business or you have a new application that you want to deploy. Think of utilising

cloud computing. Why? Just like an iceberg, there are a lot of hidden costs in running your IT on-premise, Electricity, real estate, staff, maintenance, etc. With cloud, those costs are taken in to account with the bonus of much higher accessibility and availability.

Whilst Cloud isn't the panacea for all your IT issue, and may not suit everyone, it is certainly not a bad place to start your next round of IT thinking.

● *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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