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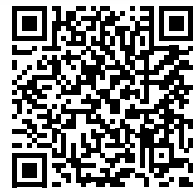
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Magazine editor:

Carl Jones
editor@shropshirebiz.com

Operations director:

Henry Carpenter
henry@shropshirebiz.com

News editor:

Rachel Jones

Editorial design and layout:

Paul Naylor

Advertising:

sales@shropshirebiz.com

General enquiries:

info@shropshirebiz.com



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ONLINE

Budget 2023: Previews, reaction, and analysis of the Chancellor's November 22 statement on www.shropshirebiz.com – where you can also download archive copies of previous magazine editions.



ON TV

Watch us: Catch up on series four of Shropshire Business Live TV – the latest show includes more from the Business Leaders' Breakfast and the latest Shropshire Chamber expo, plus news, views and expert analysis. Watch on [Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/shropshirebiz) or sbltv.co.uk



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SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Welcome

Why doesn't Britain make things any more? That powerful and provocative front page headline bemoaning a rapid decline of our once great manufacturing industry has always stuck in my memory.

It was about a decade ago, and the UK's manufacturing sector had shrunk by two-thirds in little over a quarter of a century – the greatest de-industrialisation of any major nation.

Globalisation and the lower cost of overseas labour had conspired to see significant chunks of our industry taken abroad, and the Brexit campaign was in its infancy.

But, to coin a famous phrase from the writer Mark Twain, reports of our manufacturing sector's imminent death were being greatly exaggerated.

For all the service sector expansion that Shropshire has seen since the turn of the century, and its tech-led diversification, our county is still proudly 'making things'. Great things too... and lots of them.

In fact, in Telford & Wrekin, the manufacturing sector's percentage contribution to local GDP is still approaching twice the national average.

In this edition, we celebrate our many magnificent manufacturers, including the 29-acre Hadley Works site in Telford which has seen a return to its heyday, working on two prestigious contracts for the British Army.

We also spotlight new inward investment which is adding fresh names to the county, alongside established firms that continue to win awards and accolades for their products and processes.

At the same time as manufacturers are making their mark, our High Streets are facing something of a crossroads. The days of building a retail offering around a big

anchor tenant are gone; so-called 'clone towns' hold little appeal for the modern-day shopper who needs little excuse to buy online.

We attended a fascinating conference in Shrewsbury which discussed some of the key issues, and explored ways in which landlords and tenants could work together for mutual benefit.

Talking of the future, another of our features spotlights the annual Shropshire Business Leaders' Breakfast, where delegates were presented with a vision of how our county could look in 2050. There was also a thought-provoking look at how AI is already playing a bigger part in many of our working lives than we possibly realise.

We've got one of our biggest ever collections of social scene picture galleries too this time, from Shropshire Bizfest at the Flaxmill to networking at Weston Park, a bootcamp at Wroxeter, community volunteers' celebrations at Cosford, and the Dyslexia Awards in Telford.

And the new director of business at Shropshire Chamber, Matt Lowe, takes on our 'Five Minutes With' questions, revealing how he's seeking to support businesses across Shropshire to be happier, healthier, wealthier, and wiser. That sounds like a pretty good set of objectives to me...

As this is our final edition of 2023, it just remains for me to say, on behalf of our fantastic Shropshire Business team, a big thank you to everyone who has supported us once again this year. More people are now reading the magazine than ever, which makes us very happy.

We wish you a happy and healthy festive period, and look forward to working with you, and sharing more of your success stories, in the New Year.

As the battle for control of 10 Downing Street ramps up to a fever pitch of rhetoric, rumour, mud-throwing and madness, 2024 is certainly not going to be short of economic headlines.



By Carl Jones
Shropshire Business Editor

Narrowing the gap

The gap between what employers have to offer – and what young professionals want – seems to be widening. So how can Shropshire companies solve this damaging stalemate? ADAM PRINGLE reports.

Skills . . . skills . . . skills . . . it's the word which seems to have been on everyone's lips this year.

Companies continue to struggle filling vacancies across multiple sectors of the Shropshire economy, for a number of reasons.

Sometimes it's simply a case of a shortage of appropriately trained staff on the doorstep to meet the requirements of a particular task. In those instances, it's fairly clear what business and education can do to solve that, working in collaboration.

But that's just one side of the coin, and the other is far more complex. Many of the problems are being caused by staff who either can't or don't want to fit into the working patterns being offered by local employers.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has just published the findings of its latest quarterly economic survey, looking at activity during the third quarter of this year.

One of the headlines is what it describes as a 'recruitment mismatch' across the county. While a growing number of job-seekers are looking for part-time or flexible work, the vast majority of vacancies being advertised are full-time positions, it says.

Square pegs, round holes . . . and no obvious quick fix?

"Changing times and changed attitudes are forcing employers to look at new ways to attract staff," says Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross.

"Skills shortages are still biting, although rising inflation has helped to alleviate some of the unfilled vacancies because the need for people to work, in whatever degree, has become more important."



Many young workers are uncomfortable in a team environment and half of GenZ professionals say they prefer to work alone

The survey found that more than 10% of Shropshire firms are looking to grow their teams further over the final three months of this year – if they can find the correctly skilled staff with the right work ethic.

Perhaps there is a clue to the root of the problem here. More than a third of Gen Z professionals openly admit that they don't enjoy working in a team setting, with half stating they 'work better alone'.

The findings from a poll by recruitment firm Robert Walters will doubtless be a blow to the Shropshire companies who are battling to bring multiple generations under one roof in a hybrid working world.

The survey found:

- 37% of young workers do not like working in a team environment
- Half of young workers claim that they 'work better alone'
- Two thirds of managers say collaborative working has declined since Gen Zs entered the workplace
- 41% of managers feel Gen Zs lack adequate communication skills

It sounds like something of a stalemate, which has been exacerbated by post-Covid

attitudes. So where do we go from here?

Chris Poole, managing director of Robert Walters, says: "Gen Zs have the potential to revolutionise our ways of working and business practices, but workplaces risk standing still or going backwards unless they understand how to bring the best out of this cohort.

"Every one of us has weaknesses in our professional skillset, and so it is unfair to focus on what 'isn't working' with younger workers – what about their strengths?

"Young workers possess a unique set of skills and characteristics shaped by their upbringing and experiences. Understanding these strengths – and adapting to this – can ultimately lead to a more productive and successful workforce."

Despite being hyper-proficient with technology, a third of managers state that they are unable to reap the benefits of their young workforce due to Gen Z's poor interpersonal skills.

When analysing further, results show that Gen Z are highly adept at communicating through digital channels. In fact, 40% of managers have stated how impressed they were at the ease with which junior workers are comfortable using various digital communication tools such as instant messaging, video

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Matt Lowe, director of business at Shropshire Chamber, at the skills support event in Telford

conferencing, and collaboration platforms.

Chris says: "Their ability to communicate effectively in virtual environments is valuable in today's increasingly remote and digital work settings – in particular with the emergence of AI and the potential this generation brings in teaching older workers the benefits of this."

"However it is apparent that in-person communication and team-working needs to be built upon if we are to get the very best out of a multi-generational workforce and help Gen Z professionals to fully thrive in the workplace."

Shropshire businesses are currently being urged to help shape the future of skills training across the region by taking part in the second stage of a major research project.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan is being led by Shropshire Chamber and is designed to gain a better understanding of skills and training requirements across the region.

Around 450 businesses contributed to the first stage of the project, and a report on the findings has just been published.

Organisers are now appealing for more employers to step forward for the next stage, to help ensure that their views are fully-represented.

The LSIP project is targeting specific sectors

such as engineering, manufacturing, food production, professional services, construction, environmental technologies, and health & social care.

The aim is to help post-16 education providers and other public sector bodies to ensure that the voice of employers is at the forefront when planning skills training.

Matt Lowe, director of business at Shropshire Chamber, updated businesses on the LSIP project's progress when he spoke at a Skills Support Showcase in Telford.

"The emphasis is to build an understanding of what we need from employers for the next 10 to 15 years, and for providers to be working in partnership to help achieve it," he said.

"From the first phase of the research, businesses have raised important issues around gaps in work-ready skills. They told us that soft skills, including basic professional use of email, Word and Excel, are below par – even with graduates."

"Dropout rates and no-shows among staff, particularly in semi or low-skilled roles, also remain high, suggesting there is an issue around people understanding the expectations of what 'being employed' involves."

"The second stage of the LSIP research

will be more of a deep dive into some of these important issues, and we want to engage with as many businesses as possible to add greater depth to our research."

Matt told delegates at the Skills Support Showcase, held at AFC Telford United's New Bucks Head stadium, that there was a clear need to 'help bridge the language and culture gap between private enterprise, and public bodies'.

He added: "Some of the key tasks of stage two are to help employers to help themselves through stronger interactions with training providers."

"We want to ensure those providers have staff with current knowledge who understand the various business ways of working, and who can work together to find innovative delivery solutions."

"We want to signpost and spread the word to ensure that all employers understand just what is available, accessible, and where to find it."

"But without the support of employers, large and small, we cannot make this happen. We need your stories, and your feedback."

"So, we ask employers to be willing to share their thoughts, confidentially, or to work directly with providers or other stakeholders to ensure we are all moving in the same direction."

The Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper has put employers firmly at the core of the skills agenda for post-16 education – a stance welcomed by the business world.

Marches LSIP project officer Rosie Beswick said: "This project will help to support those giving careers advice and help signpost employers to the vast array of local providers who can support their staff development."

"The end goal is to ensure that employers can find the skills they need, that training is understood and focused, and that the Marches businesses can prosper and grow for the benefit of all."

FIND OUT MORE, AND JOIN THE DEBATE...

- To view or download the latest quarterly economic survey from Shropshire Chamber, go to <https://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/policy-representation/economic-data/quarterly-economic-survey>
- For more details, or to contribute to the second stage of the LSIP research, email lsip@shropshire-chamber.co.uk or call the Shropshire Chamber team on 01952 208200.
- The full stage one LSIP report can be found at www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/policy-representation/local-skills-improvement-plan/marches-lsip-stage-1-report

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Games for everyone

A Telford-based company with an interest in inclusive gaming has launched a cash incentive to encourage more grassroots football teams to get involved in a free football-themed, casual skill game.

Paul Carpenter, founder of SG Organisations, came up with the concept of Goalscorer after realising many competitive video games were aimed at younger age groups, where dexterity and reaction times are important factors.

Developed with games industry experts, Goalscorer is inspired by classic strategy games such as chess.

Paul said: "The difference with Goalscorer is that it's much quicker to play than chess and you don't need the mental ability of a grandmaster to be the best.

"Goalscorer is all about supporting grassroots and youth development in football, so we are offering cash prizes for the top three players each month for their chosen football team or registered charity.

"By supporting teams from lower leagues and amateur football teams, we are giving them an added incentive to compete and have the same opportunity to be the best as Goalscorer players that support larger and wealthier teams."

AFC Telford United Women's team won the first £100 prize. Paul hopes the game will appeal to other football teams, both amateur and professional, as it can be customised in the colours of any football team and he is encouraging anyone to play.

SG Organisations says it intends to build on the development of Goalscorer with the continued support of games industry experts, sponsors and advertisers who believe that there is space in the market for an inclusive game.

Future developments include improved custom game and



Paul Carpenter (centre) with Hannah Clarke (far right, back row) celebrating the launch of the cash incentive for topping the Goalscorer league table

leaderboard functions, customised game counters, the development of custom premium versions of the game for sponsors and advertisers, social game and fantasy-themed options.

Paul said: "SG Organisation is also looking to work with a publisher or investor to turn our Training Edition into a version called Goalscorer Premier where all teams are Premier League.

"But first, we're looking for feedback on the updated Beta test version of Goalscorer Training Edition which is available in IOS and Android versions to download free on Google Play and in the App Store."



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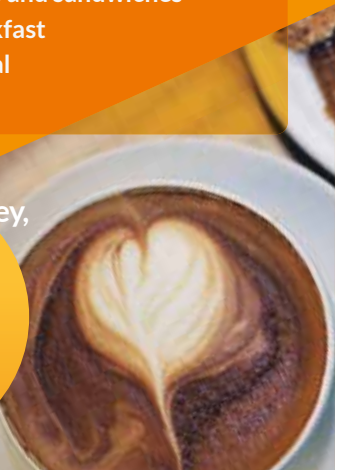
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Vinyl countdown for music lovers

A new vinyl record shop has opened in the heart of Wellington, aiming to hit all the right notes with indie music lovers.

Spinning Around Records in New Street is being run by Emma Perks, looking to capitalise on a resurgence in vinyl record sales.

She started the business with support from a start-up grant through Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our High Street programme.

Spinning Around Records sells a range of new releases as well as second-hand titles and add-ons and accessories such as vinyl sleeves and brushes.

Emma said: "I've identified a gap in the market for my shop as currently the majority of record shops in the borough specialise in rock.

"I'm hoping my 'indie' niche will make me stand out and attract a certain customer base that just isn't catered for at the moment.

"I know a lot of people who have disposable income and have built up a large collection of vinyl records, but they have to travel some distance to look for them and buy them."

Emma has a background in retail and store management and is experienced in merchandising stock, store health and safety, staff management, recruitment and driving sales to hit targets.



The official opening of Spinning Around Records in Wellington

Tech provider's head office

International call centre technology provider TCN has chosen Shropshire as the base for its first UK head office.

The new site, at Butcher Row in Shrewsbury, will serve its UK staff, and be a base for meetings with senior overseas officials. TCN also has operations in Bucharest, Romania and Utah in the USA.

Spencer Taylor, regional head of sales and operations for UK and Ireland, said: "TCN has had a data centre in London for many years, and with the addition of our Romanian head office offering UK clients extended hours of service, the support for the UK and EU has been significantly strengthened over the last 12 months.

"We are thrilled to have secured an office in such a historical building. Even though TCN is a modern company, founded in 1999, built in the Cloud with a presence in the UK for the past decade, it's only in the past 12 months that the UK team has grown significantly."

In the US, TCN has built a strong name and brand for itself as a top call centre technology provider, and the company says it aims to establish

this same brand awareness in the UK. As a start to achieving these goals, TCN has announced a new integrated partnership in the UK with DebtStream and Debtrak.

It has also become an official national Money Advice Liaison Group Ltd (MALG) member. MALG is a UK membership forum for 'working together to improve the lives of people in debt.'

It aims to promote better communication, best practice, understanding and professionalism among organisations operating on a national and regional level concerned with people in debt, debt advice, debt collection and all related matters within the UK.

"TCN will take advantage of our membership to help us stay compliant, learn more from members and what they need at forums, exhibit at events and more," added Spencer.

TCN has two decades of experience building contact centre systems based in the Cloud with thousands of clients worldwide across most continents, handling billions of calls a day. It has global data centres and offices worldwide, including the USA, Canada, India, and Australia.



Spencer Taylor is pictured at the new UK TCN head office in Shrewsbury with account manager Emma Reynolds



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Launch of fresh opportunities

Telford College has opened a new cutting-edge Clinical Skills Centre at its Wellington campus to train students for a wide range of careers in health and social care.

The £430,000 facility was officially opened by Simon Whitehouse, chief executive of NHS Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, who described it as 'absolutely fantastic'.

The new centre has been created to give T-Level students experience of a realistic clinical environment and includes two 'skills rooms' – a four-bed hospital ward, and a two-bed maternity environment.

Sarah Davies, director of health and social care at the college, said: "We have a range of interactive mannikins covering all age ranges, as well as some fabulous cutting-edge virtual and augmented reality equipment.

"All of our health students will get chance to spend some time in the centre, helping to fully prepare them for their work placements and encouraging them to take their studies further.

"The equipment we have in this centre is state-of-the-art, and replicates exactly what our healthcare workers of the future will find in the clinical environment, meaning T-Level students will be fully prepared for the work placement element of their studies."

Telford College has exceeded its target for health and social care students this year, with numbers more than 60% up on this time last year.

Mr Whitehouse said: "The work that the college leadership team are doing here is absolutely fantastic when we think about how we develop a workforce which is going to be deliverers of care going forward in Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin.

"Colleagues who have worked with students from here on our wards would say straight away that it boosts confidence because of the experience they have already had with the simulation equipment, and working as part of a team.



Simon Whitehouse cuts the ribbon to open the new centre at Telford College, watched by Sarah Davies and college health students

"Looking at the simulation mannikins in here, and the anatomy equipment, it's just fantastic. I think back to my clinical training, and the time when I was a student, and wish I'd had access to something like this. It would have made a big difference."

He added: "This college is absolutely at the forefront in health and care, and we are delighted to partner with and work with them to look at how we can really think about the workforce, and continue looking after our students going forward.

"Part of coming to events like this is just to get people to open their eyes a bit, and really explore the sort of opportunities there are in the NHS. There are so many."

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Thousands of components are being created for the Challenger project



CARL JONES visits a Telford manufacturer that is working on two important projects for the British Army

A force for good

It's a hive of activity right now at RBSL's Hadley Castle Works, with two massive projects under way for the British Army.

The high-profile work marks a return to the glory days for the 29-acre plant, which has a proud track record over many decades for building headline-grabbing military equipment which has been used all over the world.

This time, after £40 million of investment in cutting edge manufacturing facilities, and a fast-growing workforce, the company is going full steam ahead on two major projects for the armed forces – building new Boxer mechanised infantry vehicles, and upgrading Challenger 2 Main Battle Tanks into Challenger 3s.

The last time a military vehicle started its manufacturing journey at the Telford site was

in 1986 with the production of the Warrior fleet, which dates back to the company's days as GKN Defence.

"When I first walked through the shop floor two-and-a-half years ago, there really wasn't much to see to be honest," says Steven Read, production manager on the Challenger project.

"The changes we've seen since then, to create the nice clean modern facility you see here today, have been phenomenal.

"No-one has built a main battle tank for the British Army in the UK in the last 25 years, so this is a big achievement. Everyone understands how important this project is, not just for RBSL, but also to the British Army, and the end users who will be operating these vehicles day in, day out.

"We are currently working on eight pre-series vehicles, the first of which will begin trials next year. We then have a bit of a gap while the

trials take place, before full production is due to start at the end of February or beginning of March in 2026."

Harry Love, one of the assistant project managers on Challenger, adds: "The preparatory work is significant. You have to design all the parts in conjunction with suppliers, but the exciting part is really starting now as we begin building stuff instead of just designing it."

And to put that preparatory work into some context, there are an estimated 22,000 different components which go into the manufacture of the Challenger project alone. It's a big jigsaw to put together.

"We have had to get people's mindsets re-aligned to actually building vehicles, rather than just supporting vehicles which are already out there. It's going to be a very busy time over the coming months," Harry adds. ▶

◀ “We are a part of history; at the forefront of something which is brand new. The best thing is the people though. This job can be stressful, so it’s important that everyone is supportive, and there’s a definite feeling that we’re all in it together.”

Iwona Kurpiewska is the company’s recruitment manager. She and her team have overseen the addition of more than 400 extra people to the business over the past four years, taking the total workforce to around 750 full-time staff.

“We have been recruiting for roles right across the business, from engineering to project management, procurement, assembly and integration technicians, business support, finance and HR.

“The recruitment process has gone very smoothly. Not only have we been able to attract very talented people, but they are all very passionate about what they do.

“I thought it may be a challenge to recruit the production workers we required in the current economic climate, particularly some of the niche roles we have here, but that has not proved to be the case.

“Competitive salaries we offer, plus hybrid work, flexible working hours – and a four-day week for operational staff – have made these jobs more attractive.”

She adds: “We have people here from very different backgrounds. Some were serving in the army and have gone through a transition process, but we also have people who worked for other businesses who have relocated.

“We’ve engaged with the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) and attend various careers events to help them find roles after army life.”

As part of this, RBSL is planning to launch two new programmes. The first is a civilian work attachment for people in the process of transitioning from the military, and the other is an ex-military programme, operating on a six-month placement basis.

Apprentices are at the very heart of the RBSL operation, and get chance to take on important roles with both the Boxer and Challenger projects. A total of 15 new apprentices have been taken on already this year.

Ellie-May Burkacki is in her final year as an engineering apprentice, and says: “You don’t always appreciate the things you get to see and work on, on a daily basis.

“Sometimes you might have to wait for a Challenger to move out of the way before you can walk down the shop floor – that’s not something that happens in every workplace, or that people see every day!

“We’re also now getting the chance of being mentors for some of the first-year apprentices, which is another great opportunity in itself – I enjoy helping people.”

Lily Blakemore, who is on a two-year year project management apprenticeship, says: “We’re not treated as apprentices, just as members of the team. I thought the apprenticeship would be just making the tea and coffee – but we get to work on things which are making a real difference.

“We get way more responsibility than I thought when I first signed up for this. The tasks we get to do are very important, and I’m really enjoying it.”



Ellie-May Burkacki with other RBSL apprentices



Cat Edwards loves the variety of her role



Jack Sears, second from left, and the Boxer team



The site has a proud military manufacturing heritage, going back generations

Rhys Taylor, a fourth year engineering apprentice who is looking forward to a permanent role on the Challenger electrical team, agrees.

“It’s pretty cool. We get to travel internationally as well. I’m working on the prototype Challenger vehicles at the moment; I never thought I’d get the opportunity to do that, as one of the youngest people in the team at the age of 22.”

Cat Edwards is an operations apprentice whose wide-ranging role can involve everything from track bashing and servicing to diagnosing faults, and even designing

brochures for the apprenticeship scheme or setting up exhibition stands.

“It’s great,” she says. “There’s also the networking side of it. We get to meet some important people – I met Ben Wallace when he was defence secretary, and have met top level majors as well. The job opens up so many opportunities for us.”

And the apprentices don’t have to look far for proof of how they can progress within the RBSL system. Jack Sears joined the company six years ago as an engineering apprentice, before switching to become a project management apprentice.



The 29-acre Hadley Castle Works site



400 extra staff work on the two big projects



Sparks are flying once again on the shop floor

He's now a fully-fledged project manager, helping oversee the £830 million Boxer programme, and is also being funded by the company to study for a degree. All at the age of just 24.

"I genuinely don't think you could do something like this anywhere else," he says. "It is amazing working here; there is a really close-knit family feel to the team, and a really upbeat and positive feeling around the business."

"When I joined, this place hadn't manufactured anything in about 20 years. The only work you could see was that of our In-Service Support Team who were, and still are,

vital to the business. Now you can literally see Boxers being built, Challengers driving round, and a pipeline of at least 10 years of work.

"I got to work on a number of vehicle types during my apprenticeship which are now out in Ukraine. It's really good to see things that I've worked on appearing in the news headlines, making a real difference to people's lives.

"I was also given the responsibility of taking £500,000 to transform a building here into a systems integration lab to support the Challenger programme, and was made project manager. If we didn't get it built within the timescale, we could have been missing out on a £12 million payment. That's a lot of responsibility!

"The business doesn't just give a task like that to a new apprentice though; they train you up thoroughly, so you don't feel like you are being thrown in at the deep end. When I first joined the business, I couldn't ever imagine I'd be studying for a degree."

The Challenger upgrade is part of an £800 million contract which will see work completed on 148 vehicles – adding a brand-new turret onto a modified hull.

RBSL says the aim is to produce 'network-enabled, digital main battle tanks with state-of-the-art lethality, upgraded survivability, plus world-class surveillance and target acquisition capabilities'.

The contract involves equipping them with the latest 120mm High Pressure L55A1 main gun, firing kinetic energy anti-tank rounds and programmable multipurpose ammunition.

The gun is also complete with increased first-hit capability and the latest fire support technology.

The new turret structure and improved survivability systems are being designed to give the highest standard of protection for the crew. The long-range commander and gunner primary sights are also being improved with automatic target detection and acquisition.

The Mechanised Infantry Vehicle programme will see the delivery of more than 600 Boxer vehicles to the British Army, with RBSL responsible for the manufacture of over 270 of them.

Boxer is an 8x8 armoured vehicle with a design for interchangeable mission



The Boxer programme – 600 new vehicles

configurations, and a maximum gross weight of 38.5 tonnes.

Welding has just been completed on the first mission module, which has moved into the paint booths for the next stage of the manufacturing process.

The next stage is to begin assembly of the vehicle. This includes a number of sub-assembly items which will be fabricated in Telford, such as the bulkhead, wheel hubs and driver's hatch, and the power pack.

When the drive module and mission module are fully-equipped, they will then be integrated together ready for commissioning and testing which is due to take place in 2024.


Production of Boxer has been contracted to Rheinmetall and KNDS, who have subcontracted the manufacture of the vehicles equally between their UK-based subsidiaries RBSL and Stockport-based WFEL, with both companies handling fabrication of the armoured vehicle structures together with assembly, integration and test of the complete vehicles at their respective facilities.

In addition to the system integration lab, the £40 million investment at the Hadley Castle Works has also included new cranes, welding equipment and surface treatment facilities and new test facilities, including a 1.6km test track and the largest turret test rig in Europe.

And it's not just good news for the RBSL team – there are spin-off benefits to the wider Shropshire business community.

The Challenger and Boxer projects have provided contracts for more than 50 West Midlands companies, including AV Birch in Bridgnorth, Pearce Environment of Shrewsbury, and Telford-based firms such as Fabdec and Wrekin Steel. RBSL also works with local apprenticeship training providers.

Colin McClean, RBSL managing director, says the company is incredibly proud to be writing 'a new chapter in vehicle manufacture for the UK defence industry'.

"Not only will the delivery of Boxer provide the British Army with a complete step-change in capability to meet their MIV requirement, it will also protect vital engineering and manufacturing skills as a sovereign capability to the UK and we are incredibly proud to be a part of this milestone." 

Firm makes the awards shortlist

Embroidered and printed clothing specialist MyWorkwear has been shortlisted as a finalist for the SME of the Year Award in the Midlands & East region at the MAKE UK Manufacturing Awards 2023.

The Halesfield-based company's award submission detailed its ambition of increasing turnover by 25% in the current financial year, as well as its investment in new machinery and equipment.

It also outlined the supplier's commitment to consistently upskilling staff members as well as its support for the local community and commitment to its chosen charity, Race Against Dementia.

Co-owner and co-managing director James Worthington, said: "We are proud members of the MAKE UK Association and are thrilled to be named as finalists against some fantastic competition. This nomination is a testament to the hard work of the MyWorkwear team."



The team from MyWorkwear

MyWorkwear produces embroidered and printed clothing for companies across the UK. The team makes thousands of garments per week using state of the art embroidery and heat transfer machines to add logos, names and designs onto uniforms, workwear, teamwear, promotional items and other garments, as well as supplying PPE and non-personalised clothing and accessories.

Digital update

A Bishop's Castle manufacturer with a global reach has updated its online presence with the help of a county digital specialist.

The new website has been built by Ascendancy for Bishop's Castle-based Jesmonite, bringing together two previous websites and creating an enhanced platform to display the company's products and increase future growth in traffic.

Jesmonite produces an eco-friendly resin used by customers through a growing network of international distributors on a huge range of items – from small craft projects to award-winning architecture.

Helen Culshaw, director of Newport-based Ascendancy, said: "The craft market really took off during the pandemic, leading to Jesmonite's website becoming dominated by a craft focus while the firm's architectural projects were displayed on a second site.

"Jesmonite wanted to bring the two websites back together to show the full range of what their product can do."

Katy Williams, of Jesmonite, said: "We are extremely happy with the website Ascendancy has built for us, and the feedback from our distributors and customers has been fantastic."

Entrepreneurial spirit



Paul, Adam and Marc Fecher from Northwood Hygiene Products



Absolute Collagen's Maxine and Darcy Laceby

Two Shropshire manufacturers have made it to the UK finals of the EY Entrepreneur of the Year Awards 2023.

Adam, Marc and Paul Fecher are from Northwood Hygiene Products, the toilet tissue manufacturer with a huge factory at Stafford Park, making around half a million toilet rolls a day.

The privately-owned company, which employs more than 200 staff in Telford, began its journey in 1976 when Paul Fecher established Northwood Paper Sales.

During this time, the focus was to target the supply of parent reels for the tissue sector. Over the next 30 years, the Fecher family grew the business to become the UK's largest independent paper agent and supplier of various paper grades to the UK paper converters.

In 2009 the opportunity to acquire Kruger Tissue's UK operations arose which included a recycled tissue mill and an AFH converting plant.

Over the course of the following years, more pieces of the Northwood manufacturing jigsaw came together.

Waste reclamation specialist Ashley Recycling was acquired in 2011 guaranteeing a supply of high-quality recycled waste paper for the mill facility.

In 2012, the mill and converting plant of Peter Grant Papers was also acquired by the group and a new logistics company formed as the final part of a fully-integrated supply chain solution for the away-from-home paper sector.

The offering from Northwood was further complemented with the joint venture acquisition of the former Georgia Pacific paper mill in Bridgend where consumer tissue products are manufactured in a fully-integrated tissue mill and converting plant.

In 2015 Disposables UK was also acquired, and in 2016 the acquisition of both Freedom Paper Products and Midland Paper Products followed.

The other Shropshire-connected finalists are mother and daughter team Maxine and

Darcy Laceby who co-founded and own the supplements brand Absolute Collagen, which has gone from strength to strength since its launch in 2017.

Absolute Collagen's story began after Maxine decided to pursue her dream of going to university to study Fine Art at the age of 50 once her daughters had flown the nest.

From here, she re-discovered herself, feeling she had been hiding behind being who she thought everyone else needed her to be.

Her perspective changed about her own potential through the discovery of collagen, enabling her to feel strong in her skin. From there, Absolute Collagen was born.

The company now has all-time sales over £100 million, and employs 50 people with a fulfilment base in Telford.

For 37 years, the EY Entrepreneur of the Year competition has scouted leading individuals and companies that demonstrate the qualities of a great entrepreneur – vision, leadership and success – while working to improve the quality of life in their communities.

A national celebration

Businesses across Telford and Wrekin have showcased their manufacturing prowess by supporting a national celebration of manufacturing.

National Manufacturing Day (NMD), organised by the Manufacturers' Organisation Make UK, was an opportunity for manufacturers to highlight the range of highly-skilled and well-paid jobs they offer.

Telford businesses opening their doors to showcase their manufacturing skills and innovation included The Severn Partnership Ltd and i2r Packaging Solutions Ltd.

Severn Partnership, a market leader in mobile mapping and geometric surveying which uses the latest digital technology, staged a special event on the day at Lamda House, Hadley Park, called 'Towards Digital Twins and Factory 4.0'.

The event showcased how firms can create a digital twin of their production facilities to revolutionise the effectiveness of their production planning.

Meanwhile i2r staged a recruitment event at



Shropshire businesses have shown support for National Manufacturing Day

its Hortonwood base as it continues to invest in skills and digital infrastructure and strives to add more talented people to its team.

The business was founded in 2007 with the ambition of providing fresh and innovative packaging solutions and the business has grown considerably.

The i2r team now consists of nearly 200 staff, has a growing international footprint, with customers all around the world and has ambitious growth plans.

Manufacturing in Telford and Wrekin is

buoyant, with the borough making a 17% GDP contribution compared with the 10% contribution nationally.

The industry makes up a significant part of Telford and Wrekin's business base, creating hundreds of sustainable jobs and well-defined career progression routes.

Telford & Wrekin Council is a member of Make UK – an organisation that champions engineering and manufacturing across the country.

Chris Corkan, Make UK interim regional director Midlands and East, said: "I applaud businesses in Telford throwing open their doors for National Manufacturing Day.

"It's an important showcase of what we do, make and the careers on offer in modern high tech environments. Our sector provides fulfilling and exciting careers that pay wages 9% higher than the overall economy.

"The UK is the eighth largest manufacturing nation in the world.

"This event is all about shouting about that success and sharing with the local community how industry remains on the forefront of delivering net zero and entering into the fourth industrial revolution."

R&D centre sets up in the county

Indian agricultural company Tractors and Farm Equipment Limited (TAFE) has chosen Shropshire as the home for its new research and development centre.

TAFE Advanced AG Solutions is expanding into the Ni.PARK development in Newport, having previously had a base at the Agri-EPI centre at Harper Adams University.

Ranked as the third-largest tractor manufacturer globally and the second largest in India by volumes, TAFE is committed to towards sustainable farming practices.

Chairman and managing director Mallika Srinivasan said: "We established the Research and Development Centre in Telford with exceptional support from Invest Telford, Harper Adams University, and the Agri-EPI Centre.

"Our collaboration with Harper Adams University has been key to driving sustainable farming practices, and we look forward to continue working closely with them."

TAFE's collaboration with Harper Adams University and the Agri-EPI Centre has yielded what the company describes as 'remarkable success' in developing advanced technological, agronomic, and educational solutions for sustainable food production.

Invest Telford, in close co-operation with the Department of Business & Trade, Harper Adams University, and the Agri-EPI Centre, played a pivotal role in ensuring a seamless transition



TAFE has moved in to the Ni.PARK, Newport

for TAFE through multiple channels of support and fostering connections within the vibrant Ni.PARK community.

Jane Lycett, international business development manager of the Agri-Epi Centre said: "In 2018, TAFE became our first tenants at the Agri-EPI Centre Midlands Agri-tech Innovation Hub located on the Harper Adams University campus and we have been happy to collaborate with them ever since.

"Following the initial phase of R&D, the team returned to India. Then in 2021/22 – at the point of deciding to create a permanent UK R&D facility – they based their team at the Midlands Hub until they grew to a scale which made a move to Ni.PARK the next logical step which is great to see."

Department for International Trade, Minister for Investment Lord Johnson said: "Telford is fast becoming a global leader in the new agricultural revolution, reinforcing the UK's position as a hub for international investment across a range of sectors. I welcome TAFE to the UK as the latest in a long line of the best and brightest innovators creating cutting-edge agri-food solutions."

Bright sparks recognised

Telford-based electrical manufacturer Hager UK has won the Residential Product of the Year prize at this year's Electrical Times Awards, having also been shortlisted for Commercial Product of the Year, and Marketing Initiative of the Year.

The annual Electrical Times Awards celebrate the best that the industry has to offer, recognising and rewarding proactive approaches to individual achievement, technical innovation, and supply chain collaboration.

"Receiving this industry acknowledgement is thanks to a whole team effort. From the team members who regularly connect with our community of electricians to gather valuable feedback and insight, through to those on the shop floor bringing these items to life, and our sales and marketing teams who are showcasing their exclusive benefits and features," the company said. "We're incredibly proud of the collective ambition across the business that's ensured these products and initiatives have been positively received by our customers (and their end-users) – and now recognised by the industry, too."

The company makes standard and specialist products for its community of over 20,000 electrical professionals across the UK.

Hager UK said: "We're passionate about manufacturing robust and long-lasting products that are not only practical, compliant and safe, but sleek, innovative, and sustainable – making them the perfect partner for professionals within the sector. Entered in the domestic category was our arc fault detection device with ProTools. Following amendment two of the 18th Edition Wiring Regulations, this was manufactured to ensure installers had not only a compatible component but also an innovative solution that provides advanced fault-finding capabilities. Our next-generation power and lighting board has been shortlisted for the commercial title, having been designed to offer great configuration flexibility and increased energy data. Hager Ready app has been nominated as Marketing Initiative of the Year. The app is a portal of resources, information, advice and support for contractors. As an industry first, our marketing team adopted a new and exciting strategy to showcase this to electricians throughout the sector – including comic strip-style cartoon designs shared on social media."



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Bruderer is a world leader in high precision punching technology and stamping machinery

Pressing ahead with new premises

The world's leading manufacturer of high-speed presses is to open a 48,000 sq ft new factory and showroom in Telford next year.

Swiss-based Bruderer is relocating to Shropshire from Luton, and has begun construction work on a new site at Hortonwood.

It will house a dedicated competence centre capable of servicing new and pre-owned machines, restoration of legacy presses and, for the first time, a showroom to give a first-hand insight into new models, ancillary equipment and turnkey solutions.

The firm will relocate over the course of the next nine months, with four new jobs and an apprenticeship programme set to be created to cope with an increase in demand for its technology.

"We have been planning this investment for a number of years and I'm delighted that our parent company have recognised the potential in the UK and agreed to build our new factory and showroom," explained Adrian Haller, managing director of Bruderer UK.

"The UK was the first subsidiary outside of our Switzerland home some 55 years ago and we still remain a strong base for Bruderer presses, with seven domestic companies investing in new machines in the last nine months alone.

"We had outgrown our Luton facility and many of our staff, and indeed customers, are based in the Midlands. It was a natural decision to find a home in that region and Hortonwood gave us not only the perfect location, but also the space to build our new factory from the ground up.

"This means we can house all our spares, a cleaning and paint shop, machining area, quality checking station and exhibition space to promote all our solutions under one roof.

"Staff will also be looked after, with outside areas set in landscaped gardens, air-conditioning throughout, showers, changing rooms and EV charging."

Bruderer UK is a market leader in high precision punching technology and turnkey solutions.

Its high-speed presses are synonymous with maximum performance



An artist's impression of the new Bruderer factory

at highest precision with unsurpassed reliability in the metal stamping and forming industry.

The company range is focused on the BSTA series with a nominal force of 20 to 250 tonnes and a stroke rate range of between 1 to 2500 strokes per minute.

Thanks to several strategic partnerships with ancillary equipment providers, it also offers full turnkey solutions that include tooling, servo feeders, decoilers, multi-way rewinders, vision systems and press and tool monitoring systems.

Adrian, who started at Bruderer UK in 1998 and has headed up the UK operation since 2007, said: "Customers will benefit significantly from this investment. For the first time, they will have a state-of-the-art demonstration centre to explore our latest high speed presses and even set-up tooling projects to prove-out the effectiveness of the machine.

"We also have lots of training space, so can have staff from our clients on site to show them exactly how to get the most out of their Bruderer high-speed stamping machines."

Andreas Fischer, chairman of Bruderer, added: "Shropshire is seen across the world as the birthplace of the industrial revolution and, today in 2023, still offers proximity to a lot of existing and new customers.

"I believe this move gives us the foundations to grow and plan for the next 55 years in the UK."

Spring into Christmas

Wenlock Spring has joined forces with West Mercia Police to launch a new campaign this Christmas aimed at tackling drink-driving.

Called 'The Only One for the Road', the campaign is encouraging drivers not to risk even one alcoholic drink if they are driving.

With freshly-liveried delivery vans making the point clear, Wenlock Spring has also printed more than 100,000 beer mats, posters and glasses with the sobering message for drivers to steer clear of alcohol.

Wenlock Spring is providing materials free of charge to any business that wishes to use them including posters and beer mats which carry the campaign message.

Matthew Orme, director at Wenlock Spring, said: "Working in partnership with West Mercia Police, we hope to change people's attitudes and remind them to think twice before picking up an alcoholic drink if they're in charge of the keys."

"While in many ways drink-driving campaigns are nothing new, we believe encouraging people to go alcohol-free should be easier than ever as the choice of alcohol alternatives has never been better."

Wenlock Spring is a second generation family business based at Wolverton, near Church Stretton, and its water is sourced from a protected historic spring dating back to 1086 near the famous Wenlock Edge.



Water – The Only One for the Road

Garlic confit with a kick

A Shropshire food company has secured £7,500 in funding to kick-start the business.

Bella's Garlic is being supported by First Enterprise – Enterprise Loans under the British Business Bank's Start Up Loans programme.

The Dawley-based company claims to be the first to produce garlic confit in England – hand-crafted confectioned garlic offered as a practical substitute for fresh garlic in meat, pasta or salad dishes.

Founder Mary Ann Republica has a decade of experience in the food and hospitality industry, and after escaping domestic violence with her daughter, says she is motivated to use her skills and business degree to establish her own start up, with an aim to become financially independent.

"The approved loan provides my business with the necessary resources to kick off and enhance its online presence," she said. "I expect to see wider distribution of my product across stores in the UK. I am grateful for the invaluable guidance and transparent support provided by my business adviser from First Enterprise – Enterprise Loans throughout the application process."

The funding is being used to buy essential equipment such as cookers and



Bella's Garlic founder Mary Ann Republica

sterilisers, acquiring ingredients to produce garlic confit, and investing in marketing collaterals such as labels, banners and stands.

First Enterprise – Enterprise Loans provides Government-backed business loans ranging from £500 to £250,000 for start-ups and SMEs that are unable to borrow from traditional High Street lenders.

The not-for-profit organisation reinvests any surplus into loan funds to further support economic growth and job creation in the local communities.

Richard Bearman, managing director of Small Business Lending, British Business Bank, said: "Mary Ann is an inspiring business owner given her situation of escaping domestic violence and now having the confidence to start and hopefully scale her business."



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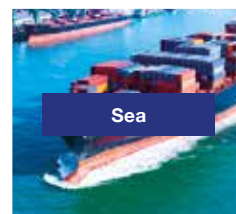
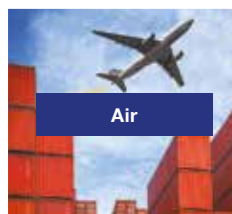
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County link for cold chain industry award winners

Two Shropshire companies have been honoured at the UK's cold chain industry awards.

Culina Group of Market Drayton, and Seymour Manufacturing International from Telford, were among the winners in the 2023 competition.

The Temperature Controlled Storage and Distribution Awards brings together companies from cold chain logistics across the UK 'celebrating the sector and its innovators'.

Organisers said: "The event is all about recognising the companies and individuals who are innovating, pushing the boundaries, and making a real difference in the temperature controlled storage and distribution industry."

Culina Group was named temperature controlled storage operator of the year at this year's awards night, held at the Midland Hotel in Manchester.

Judges said: "As always customer care, quality control and product care were the top focus in this sector – and the winners provided them with plenty of evidence that supported this standout choice."

Paul Willocks of Culina said: "This award is not only a recognition of past accomplishments but also a challenge for Culina Group to maintain exceptional standards, and to continue pushing the boundaries of what is possible in the refrigerated transport sector."

"Winning the refrigerated transport operator of the year award for the third year in a row is a testament to the hard work and dedication of every member of the Culina Group team."

"The business is honoured to once again receive this recognition from peers in the industry."

SMI, based at Stafford Park, picked up the materials handling equipment provider of the year trophy. The category was open to any manufacturer supplying the temperature-controlled storage and distribution industry.

Judges said they were looking for a range of products, or single product which 'demonstrates customers' needs and enhances the work environment of a site'.

And SMI's Temprow pallet covers, which are used by Co-op to protect bananas in transit between distribution centres and retailers, wowed the panel.

Ross Clarke, who collected the award on SMI's behalf with colleague Dave Arthur, said: "Thanks to everyone at TCS&D for this award, and for such a fantastic night of celebration with hundreds of peers and colleagues from the sector."

SMI is the inventor of Temprow, which has been cited as the most thermally-efficient material of its kind.

The UK-manufactured liners reduce wastage of bananas by preventing them from ripening too quickly during Co-op deliveries.



Dave Arthur and Ross Clarke of SMI with their award



The TCS&D Awards winners at the Midland Hotel in Manchester

SMI managing director Jill Seymour said: "Our Temprow thermal roll cage covers and liners offer enormous savings and benefits when transporting frozen, chilled or ambient products."

"Products such as the Co-op liners are tailor-made to specific customer requirements, and we have been working hard on refining our designs and trial tests for this project over many months."

"We are delighted to be working with the Co-op organisation on this exciting project, which we are sure will make life considerably easier for their delivery teams and provide outstanding thermal protection."

The SMI liners have been supplied to Co-op depots in Andover, Avonmouth, Birtley, Cardinal, Carrickfergus in Northern Ireland, Castlewood, Dalcross, Lea Green, Newhouse, Plymouth, Thurrock, and Wellingborough.

Hamper champ

The Shropshire Hamper Company has been taken over by another county business, The Host's Pantry.

It was launched by the owners of Shropshire Festivals, Beth and Sid Heath, in September 2020 to diversify during the pandemic, buying from local food and drink companies that were unable to exhibit at festivals due to Covid restrictions.

The business has now been taken on by Jessica Beardmore and Scott Woodland from The Host's Pantry which offers a stress-free solution to hosting at home by sourcing produce and ingredients, delivered to the door.



Beth Heath is pictured with Jessica Beardmore of The Host's Pantry

"The Hamper Company has grown into a fantastic corporate gifting solution," said Beth. "The success of the business means it's ready to be taken to the next level, and The Host's Pantry is the perfect fit to continue that growth."

The Host's Pantry exhibited at the Shrewsbury Food Festival this year, and Jessica said: "After meeting Beth at the food festival, we began discussing the takeover of the hamper business, which fits really well with the services we already offer.

"Both businesses work with trusted local suppliers, bringing a selection of quality products together into a premium, hassle-free package. We're excited to develop what the Shropshire Hamper Company offers and continue to champion the best food and drink products made in the Shropshire area."

A return on investment is the focus

A technology business which specialises in working with Amazon sellers has opened a new base in Shrewsbury as it expands and diversifies its client base.

Ecommerce Intelligence says it helps clients develop robust, specific sales models with a focus on return on investment.

The firm, which also has a base in the USA, generates millions in client sales every month.

Bosses said the new base at New Zealand House, in Abbey Foregate, had larger office space to accommodate the company's growing team of professionals, enabling them to work more effectively while fostering a culture of creativity and teamwork.

"We are excited about this pivotal moment in our company's journey. The move to our new office represents not just physical growth, but also a reflection of the progress we have made as a business," said managing director Chris Turton.

"Securing a deal with Morris Property has been a smooth process, and we are looking forward to the future."

Neil Anderson, head of estates at Morris Property, said: "We were delighted to offer Chris the opportunity to expand his progressive business at New Zealand House. We hope that the team settle in well and enjoy their new space."



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Long term industrial strategy is key to driving economic growth



Ruth Ross

Shropshire manufacturers have faced many challenges over the past few years – from Covid 19 lockdowns and continued supply chain disruptions to the present high inflationary environment.

Throughout this, one thing has remained constant: the requirement for economic stability as a necessity for growth. Businesses across the county have been longing for a period of calm and stability for many years, and in today's turbulent market it is the only ingredient needed to boost confidence, and hence investment.

Delivering value for taxpayers has long been a benchmark for success for the UK's manufacturing sector with every £1 million contributed by the sector to UK GDP generating a further £1.5 million of benefit across the wider economy. (Source: The True Impact of UK Manufacturing - MTA, 2018)

As a sector it is capable of game-changing innovation, as evidenced through the Covid 19 pandemic with efforts to ensure the NHS was supplied with life-saving ventilators and other much-needed medical equipment.

Manufacturers are leading the way in adapting processes and reaching the net zero target as part of the drive for investment in the green economy. With global links and unrivalled export capabilities, and an employment footprint spanning the length of the country alongside its cutting-edge innovation, the UK manufacturing sector is ready to lead the way in the race for growth.

The West Midlands is the UK's sixth largest region in terms of gross value add (GVA), and the third largest manufacturing region. The region accounts for 7.2% of the UK's total output, with the manufacturing industry contributing to one per cent of the UK's total output. The West Midlands generates 14.4% of its regional output from manufacturing, well above the UK average of 9.8%.

Shropshire has a strong manufacturing sector with some of the UK's leading

manufacturers and engineering companies basing themselves here, spanning automotive, aerospace, petrochemical, agri-tech, food, and metals. The Shropshire manufacturing sector alone added £710 million to the local economy, equivalent to more than a tenth of the county's total economic value.

Yet despite these strengths, there remains growth potential waiting to be unlocked. The UK is the only leading nation in the world without a comprehensive, long-term industrial plan. Manufacturers need an industry-led vision showcasing the role that the sector can play in growing the UK economy. Creating the headroom for growth through a pro-business tax and regulatory environment will reduce unnecessary business failures.

There are big bets for growth where the right support framework from Government can help unlock business investment from the manufacturing sector. The Government can take advantage of these markets by addressing the current headwinds manufacturers face, targeting interventions, and revisiting the tax landscape; restoring economic stability and working with businesses and organisations like the Chamber to ensure that support and funding helps to unlock industry capability and innovation; and shifting firms from survival to growth mindsets and signalling to the rest of the world that it is open for business.

Ruth Ross is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, which has bases in Telford and Shrewsbury



BizFest 2023, held at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings



Regional manager at Sky, Chris Morris

It's festival time for business community

A former winner of hit BBC show *The Apprentice* topped the bill at the third Shropshire BizFest.

Mark Wright, who won the show in 2014 and set up a digital marketing business in partnership with Lord Alan Sugar, was the keynote speaker for the event at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings.

His company turned over £1.7 million in its first year of trading and was sold last year for a reported fee of more than £10 million – giving Mark the chance to invest in a number of other business opportunities.

Speaking to Shropshire Business Live TV at the event, he said: "I've always been a visionary and have always thought big. The last 10 years has been amazing – *The Apprentice* quite literally put steroids into my business journey, which has been amazing.

"If I can encourage any business owner out there, it's to dream big, to write your goals down, and to surround yourself with other great business people. That's why people are at BizFest."

Other speakers included Julie Bates, founder and co-director of Shropshire-based faux flower specialist Peony, which has gone from strength to strength since launching in 2005.

Gareth Prosser, director of the academy at Everton FC, also gave a presentation, along with Chris Morris, a regional manager with broadcast giant Sky.



*Mark Wright, winner of the BBC's *The Apprentice* show, gave the keynote presentation*



The event was held in the old dye house at the Flaxmill Maltings



Laura Scotland filming a '90 Seconds With' interview



Julie Bates of Peony, left, talked about her faux flower business



Networking outside the main hall



Mark Wright talks to the SBLTV team



Gareth Prosser, director of Everton FC's academy



Rob Hughes, centre, with members of the Reech team

The speaker line-up also featured Hannah MacKechnie (founder of Radfield Care), Joe Lockley of boxing academy Brightstar, Helen Knight of Lingen Davies, and Rob Hughes (managing director of Shrewsbury media agency Reech which organised the event).

First launched in 2018, BizFest gives Shropshire business owners a chance to gather insights and information they can apply to their own business.

In addition to hearing from keynote speakers, attendees can meet with prospective partners and suppliers, network with other like-minded individuals, and develop new and fruitful working relationships that support the future growth of their business.

Rob Hughes thanked everyone who attended and made it 'such a fantastic day'.

He said: "The buzz in the Flaxmill was amazing and whether you came along as a guest,

showcased your business or provided your services, we are really grateful.

"When it came to our speaker lineup, there were so many valuable insights shared and we are confident that everyone left with learnings to take back to their teams and to help grow their business.

"A special shout out to Mark Wright for bringing his marketing knowledge and infectious energy to Shropshire – what an inspirational talk."

reech

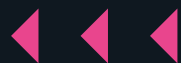
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Hannah MacKechnie, founder of Radfield Care



Rob Hughes, managing director of Reech



Helen Knight of Lingen Davies in conversation



Chris Carr of Volvo Shrewsbury talking to SBLTV



Joe Lockley of Brightstar



Rachel Owen and Kelly Riedel of Shropshire Chamber talking to Chris Pritchard on SBLTV

- **Shropshire Business Live TV filmed a number of interviews at Shropshire Bizfest to feature in the first episode of its fourth series. Watch the show now at sbltv.co.uk, or on the SBLTV Youtube channel.**

How to improve your customer experience with Connexis Studio



Joe Newton

This month we are launching a new product, Connexis Studio, which will give all of our customers a professional music on hold solution to improve their Customer Experience .

A 2020 study concluded that callers to SMEs spend 20% of call time on hold, meaning you've got time to engage callers in your products and services, and make their experience of getting an answer to their question as easy as possible. But how can you use your phone system as a tool to improve Customer Experience?

Connexis Studio's professional prompt recordings create truly useful IVR menus that help callers quickly reach the right person to resolve their query. What's more, informative and sincerely empathetic in-queue messages help direct callers to other communication channels that may be better suited to their reason for calling, which helps to reduce caller frustration, and take the pressure off when you're receiving more calls than normal.

Prompts can also be used to keep callers informed of known disruptions to service. Here's an example:

Your local travel agent has 10 employees. Several flights have been cancelled to destinations in Spain and Greece and they are therefore receiving an influx of calls. This is creating a long wait time for people who are calling for more info on their cancelled flights, callers wanting to make new reservations, or check on bookings that are unrelated to the cancelled flights.

Connexis Studio enables you to quickly and easily write and activate a high quality AI voiced message that lets the affected customers know you are aware of the flight cancellations and that they will be contacted by a member of your team shortly. These callers can then end their calls, satisfied that their enquiry is in hand, instead of growing more frustrated as wait times grow. Plus, queue length is drastically reduced for all other callers.

Once a caller is waiting in queue, they are a captive audience for promotions and



Connexis Studio's professional prompt recordings create truly useful IVR menus that help callers quickly reach the right person to resolve their query



Once a caller is waiting in a queue, they are a captive audience

marketing messages. Playing marketing messages to waiting callers keeps them updated with all your promotions and helps them engage with the products and services your offer. Harnessing this opportunity to engage and delight customers has led some businesses to increase sales, with 93% of customers saying they would be likely to make an additional purchase with companies who offer excellent experiences.¹

It's estimated that consistent brand presentation increases revenue by an average of 23%,² and Connexis Studio makes it easy to extend your brand across your phone system using bespoke recordings. What's more - our bank of 300+ professional voice artists make it easy to sound local, wherever you operate,

with one small monthly cost included in your telephone bill.

There is a package to suit every business, from the free Starter option, the low-cost Standard option, and higher value options that give you all of the flexibility that you could need.

If you are an existing Connexis customer then you should have received a welcome email, inviting you to activate your free Starter package - if not then please get in touch. For new customers we will offer what we believe to be the most suitable package for your needs as part of the proposal. If you are not a Connexis customer, but you are interested in the Connexis Studio solution then please do get in touch.

Speak to us today about how Connexis Studio can help improve your Customer Experience. Email sales@connexis.co.uk, or call 01952 528000

Sources: 1 Source: Help Scout's 2022 article - '111 Customer Service Statistics and Facts You Shouldn't Ignore' <https://www.helpscout.com/75-customer-service-facts-quotes-statistics/>

2 Source: Oberlo - '10 Branding Statistics You Need to Know' <https://www.oberlo.co.uk/blog/branding-statistics>

connexis

Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford

Networking ... it's a jungle out there



Kelly Riedel, the Chamber's events and training manager, plus 'friend'

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's latest expo – including a safari-themed speed networking session – has been declared a huge success.

The 'Connectin Business' event, held at Shrewsbury Town FC's Croud Meadow stadium, was one of the busiest yet, with sold-out display stands including several first-time exhibitors.

The day included a speed networking event with a difference, bringing fun and colour to proceedings with a special 'safari' theme.

Kelly Riedel, the Chamber's events and training manager, said: "It was a really busy and successful event. We've had some fantastic feedback, particularly for injecting some fun into the speed networking session.

"One delegate wrote to us to say: 'the feeling around the room was wonderful. Everyone was open to conversation and exploring new opportunities'. That's great to hear, as it is exactly the atmosphere we were trying to create.

"We are always looking for interesting and different ways to connect with our members and with non-members, keeping our networking events fun, productive and fresh.

"Our calendar of business meetings, workshops and networking dates is packed with diary dates that could lead to that next business opportunity that you're looking for."



Brothers Richard and Craig Hughes, Chrisbeon



Members of Shropshire Chamber and attendees had a great time at the event

Awards are for UK-wide electrical apprentices

Shropshire's three-time company of the year, Oswestry-based Aico, has launched an Apprentice of the Year Award to honour bright lights in the electrical industry.

The company says providing future installers with industry knowledge and expertise is vital to creating safer communities, and the new award is designed 'to applaud the remarkable accomplishments' made by future professionals across the industry.

It is open to any electrical apprentice currently enrolled on an apprenticeship scheme, anywhere in the UK. A representative like a college or company may also assist the apprentice with the application.

The company says: "This is a fantastic opportunity for apprentices, employers, and colleges to showcase our current talent in the industry."

Aico's national sales manager Tony Boyle added: "Our Apprentice of the Year award aims to recognise outstanding apprentices who not only have excellent technical skills, but are role models for others in our industry.

"The electrical professionals of tomorrow



The awards are open to any electrical apprentice currently enrolled on a scheme in the UK

are so important to our industry, and we aim to highlight and celebrate their success."

Application forms can be found at aico.co.uk/news-and-events/apprentice-of-the-year-2024, and can be submitted to marketing@aico.co.uk. The closing date for applications is January 1.

Twelve nominees will be chosen to attend the JTL Training Centre Day in Birmingham to

take part in a final assessment, and the top six will receive an exclusive invitation to the Aico in The Community Awards, set to take place on April 18.

The winner will be announced at the Community Awards and will also receive a top-of-the-range multi-function tester to add to their toolkit, worth up to £1,200.

Council's winning ways



Pictured at the awards ceremony at the Hilton Birmingham Metropole are, from left, Martin Weaver, Rachel Cole, Abbie Chandler, Christopher Davison, Tim Baldwin, Oliver Rothwell, and Summer Nunn-Hammond

Shropshire Council has been crowned National Council or Local Authority of the Year 2023 at the National Energy Efficiency Awards.

The council beat 16 other local authorities for their efforts in tackling fuel poverty and reducing carbon emissions.

Shropshire Council and installation partner BidConnector were shortlisted for several national awards for the work they do to help make vital home improvements, helping to keep homes warm, lower carbon emissions, and help residents save on energy costs.

The Council and BidConnector also took silver in the National Insulation and Fabric Project of the Year category, recognising the efforts of all those involved in delivering a successful energy saving project, where new insulation, draft exclusion or energy efficient building materials or systems have been installed as an energy efficiency measure.

Hospitality roles filled

A new recruitment agency has launched in Shropshire specialising in serving the hospitality sector.

Top Table Personnel offers recruitment in all areas of the sector, including kitchen and bar staff, chefs, and hotel management.

The brand is part of the DMOS People recruitment group based in Shrewsbury.

The business is headed up by Edward Danks and Patrick O'Grady, who have over 30 years of experience in the hospitality sector.

The pair met working in a Shrewsbury pub before moving into recruitment.

Edward said: "We're here to help the hospitality sector to

thrive, following a problematic period with Brexit, the pandemic, and now a cost-of-living crisis.

"We want hospitality businesses to be able to offer a great service, not a rushed, understaffed one.

"Our mission is to find the right people for every business to help improve staff retention."

Demand for UK hospitality workers has risen by 46% compared to pre-pandemic levels according to ONS data, something which Patrick wants to help tackle.

"We want to partner with hospitality businesses across the UK, and especially here in Shropshire," he said.

"We are already working alongside Mosaic Club (The Shrewsbury Club), Brunning and Price (The Mytton and Mermaid and The Armoury), Mercure, The Terrace, and Prestige Cleaning."

A fresh new sound for Shropshire

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Encouraging signs for county events venue

Telford International Centre has revealed a sharp increase in the number of corporate bookings received since April.

Compared with the same period last year, the order book has grown by 21%. The centre is attributing this growth to the increased importance corporate clients place on in-person events to achieve business objectives, and the venue's commitment to creating an immersive experience for visitors.

Businesses need to make sure they are selling on Amazon as consumers make a return to online shopping, a Shropshire-based industry expert says. Chris Turton, founder of Shrewsbury-based specialist Amazon agency Ecommerce Intelligence, says: "Online shopping went through the roof at the height of the pandemic, because everyone was stuck at home, but then Amazon vendor came under pressure as inflation skyrocketed. What we are seeing now is shoppers returning."

- ATW Couriers Ltd has become the first tenant to move into Orchard Business Park at Hortonwood in Telford.

The growing business, which delivers packages and products for local and national companies across the UK, was founded by owner Adam Welborn in 2019, but had outgrown its previous premises at Halesfield.

- A 'Game Changers' networking lunch, sponsored by Aaron & Partners and WR Partners and held at The Shrewsbury Club, shone a light on women making waves in their respective fields. The debates were built around 'shattering barriers and championing equal opportunities in business and sports'.

Speakers included former Commonwealth boxing champion Stacey Copeland, chief executive of Lewes FC Maggie Murphy, and communications expert Felicity Wingrove.



Networking lunch

- Media group National World has bought the Midland News Association, publishers of the Shropshire Star and various weekly titles in the county, in a deal worth a reported £11 million.

It ends the founding Graham family's connection with the business, which had dated back to the 19th century.

Claverley director Tom Graham said: "Selling our flagship regional news assets was an extremely difficult decision for the shareholders."

- The Learning Community Trust, which runs more than a dozen school sites across Shropshire including Hadley Learning Community, Ercall Wood and Charlton secondaries, is looking for business people to join its boards of governors and trustees, to widen the breadth of experience among its team.

The roles are voluntary, but some expenses can be claimed. For more details, email steph.morley@lct.education

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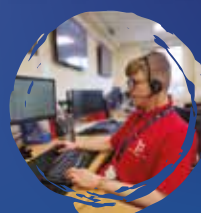
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The county's population is predicted to rise by more than 61,000



Tracy Darke offered a glimpse of Shropshire in 2050

Future-proofing the county



Calvin Lord-Latham and Paul Gretton

Business leaders from across the county converged on The Shrewsbury Club to reflect on some of the challenges, opportunities and trends that will be facing businesses over the coming years.

The county's annual Business Leaders' Breakfast offered a glimpse of what Shropshire could look like in 2050, how the quickly developing world of AI is going to shape our future, and delivered updates on how the Government's levelling up funding is being spent across the county.

Andy Begley, Shropshire Council's chief executive, opened the event by committing to taking the 'Shhhh out of Shropshire' and embracing partnerships across the private and public sector.

He explained that the council is very much open for business and alive to the opportunities around major infrastructure projects, particularly in relation to transport and the built environment.

Other talks during the event included a panel discussion where Calvin Lord-Latham from Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation spoke about the inspirational Shropshire Sports Collective, a joint project between the Foundation, Energize STW, Shropshire Cricket Board, Embrace Education Trust and Bright Star Boxing Academy.

Guests also heard from Tracy Woods about the role of the Shropshire Economic Board, Paul Gretton on some of the manufacturing and prototyping support available through Aston University, and Jane Trethewey of Shropshire Council on a new civic crowdfunding initiative called Spacehive.

Tracy Darke, Shropshire Council's assistant director for economy and place, delivered a 'Shropshire 2050' presentation which spotlighted opportunities and trends from various viewpoints, including housing, the environment and transport.

She also looked at some of the predicted population and labour force trends, and the impact it could have on the county's infrastructure.

Tracy's presentation revealed that Shropshire's population would be shrinking significantly were it not for migration – but the county's population is predicted to rise by more than 61,000 by 2050.



Carl Jones gets proceedings under way

The county will need to continue increasing its housing supply to meet this need, she said, with almost 40,000 extra households expected to be created.

And that means an extra 40,000-plus tonnes of household waste, and an increased demand on water supplies equivalent to 152 Olympic-sized swimming pools.

Tracy's presentation also revealed the number of cars on Shropshire's roads is set to rise from 210,800 to 270,700 by 2050, with drivers covering an extra 384 million miles a year.

"More than 11,000 electric vehicle charging points are going to be required to meet demand," she said.

The morning's final keynote speech came from Paul McGillivray, co-founder and technical director of Remote, who explored the growth of Artificial Intelligence in our business lives.

Dave Courteen from The Shrewsbury Club also spoke to delegates,



Dave Courteen of The Shrewsbury Club welcomed guests



The closing address from Lezley Picton



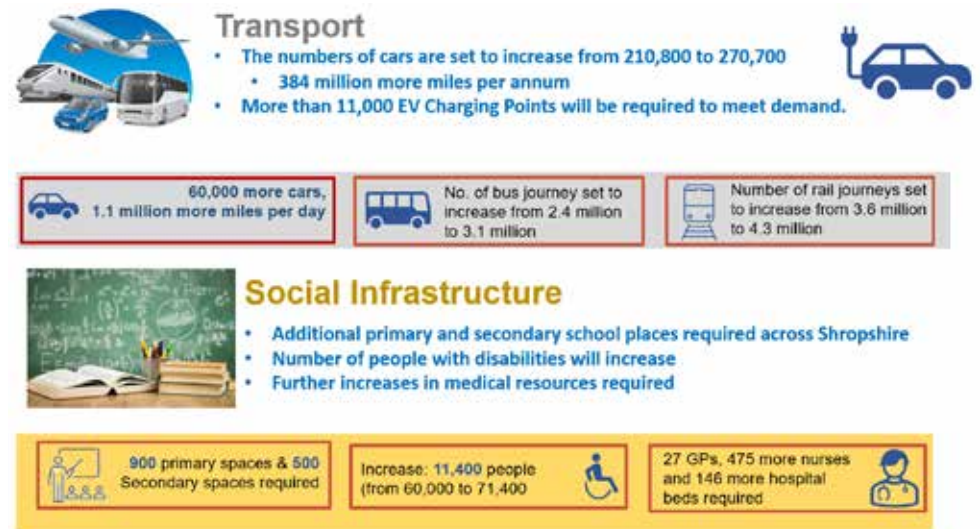
The event ended with a Q&A session involving all the speakers



Tracy Woods spoke of the economic board



Glimpsing an AI future – Paul McGillivray



Bus journeys are set to rise from 2.4 million to 3.1 million in the years to come

welcoming them to the venue and revealing the huge boost to the tourism sector that the return of the prestigious W100 women's tennis competition had brought to the county.

Lezley Picton, leader of Shropshire Council, closed the event by saying the council would build on its relationship with the Government and decision-makers to drive action that will bring in funding for the county.

Mark Jones, Shropshire Council's cabinet member for growth and regeneration, said: "It was a great opportunity to meet some of Shropshire's best business people and hear more about what the future may hold for our brilliant county.

"It's really important to bring together people across all different sectors, to look at how we can learn and support one another in ever-changing and challenging times. Thanks to the Invest in Shropshire team for putting on a fantastic event."



Jane Trethewey explained the new Spacehive initiative

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Creating a brighter future:

Why businesses should engage with schools to promote skills and careers



Hollie Whittles

In today's fast-paced online world, the unity between education and the world of work has never been more critical. Businesses have a unique opportunity to shape the future workforce and, in doing so, create a brighter future for themselves.

By actively engaging with schools, colleges and universities they can explain employer needs and work-ready skills, ensuring that the next generation is well-prepared for the challenges that lie ahead.

A good reason why businesses should partner with schools to foster skill development and career awareness is the ever-changing job landscape.

The fourth industrial revolution has ushered in an era of technological disruption, automation, and innovation. For students to thrive, they need to acquire a blend of technical skills, soft skills, and the ability to adapt.

Business owners often state that they are struggling to employ students who are work-ready but are not stepping up themselves to make a difference. Businesses can play a crucial role in informing schools about the changing needs of the job market, bringing the curriculum to life while equipping students with the right skill set.

Engaging with schools also provides businesses with an opportunity to cultivate a pipeline of potential talent.

By establishing these partnerships, they can identify and nurture young, motivated individuals, which ultimately reduces future recruitment challenges locally. It also allows businesses to influence the development of curriculum that aligns with specific industry needs, leading to a more seamless transition from education to the world of work.

In this way, they not only secure their future but also contribute to the economic development of their communities. We have an ageing population in the county of Shropshire so we need to foster a culture of students studying and living in the area.

On the other side of the equation, students gain amazing insights into the professional world through these employer interactions. The various career possibilities and skills required to excel



Schools and businesses must collaborate to identify and nurture young, motivated individuals

in different fields can be a powerful motivator to guide students to make informed decisions about their academic and career paths.

Likewise, work experience, placements and company visits provide a real-world context to their studies, making learning more engaging and relevant. It can also raise the aspirations of students who may not have the same support as others and potentially provide opportunities to expand their available options.

Young graduates can often face the frustration of being unable to secure jobs because they lack experience, while they cannot gain experience without jobs. Businesses can help this through work experience and apprenticeships, providing students with the chance to apply their knowledge and gain practical experience.

For anyone wanting to get involved there are plenty of resources available through the Skills For Life campaign. These interactions give businesses an opportunity to shape future talent, ensuring they meet their specific requirements and fit seamlessly into their organisational culture.

Engaging with education is not only a strategic decision but should be part of corporate social responsibility. It is a way for businesses to give back to the communities they operate in, strengthening the bond between

the industry and society. It's an investment in future generations, and by promoting skills and careers, businesses can contribute to reducing unemployment, fostering economic growth, and narrowing socio-economic disparities.

Businesses have a vital role to play in shaping the educational and career trajectories of our young talent. By engaging with schools, they can shape curriculum, provide essential practical experience, and create a more seamless transition from education to employment.

The future of our workforce and our economy depends on it, and the time to act is now.

Quick wins:

- Offer work experience
- Create teacher encounters
- Deliver talks in schools
- Sponsor events and pupils
- Become an Enterprise Adviser
- Join employer advisory groups
- Become a school governor
- Create virtual resources
- Join trailblazer groups & route panels
- Become a STEM Ambassador
- Engage with the Marches Careers Hub

Hollie Whittles is a Shropshire small business owner and FSB National Skills Champion

Is your brand invisible?

On average, organisations and brands change their corporate image every 7-10 years to make sure they are still seen and heard by their ever evolving markets and customers.

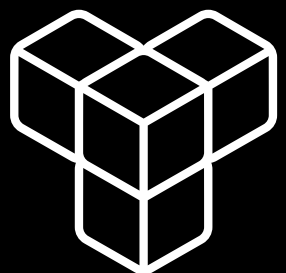
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In the market for change

Do Shropshire's market towns have to dramatically 'repurpose' themselves to survive in these changing times?

That was the question posed at a thought-provoking seminar at Shrewsbury Museum, which looked at ways of re-using empty spaces in town centres.

Keynote speaker was Ojay McDonald, who heads up the Association of Town and City Management.

He told how the days of a town building its retail offering around one key 'anchor' national tenant were gone, and explained why landlords and retailers now needed to be increasingly flexible and innovative with the way they used prime retail space.

He told the audience including council development officers, landlords, agents, developers, business and tourism leaders and regeneration specialists, that thriving towns could not afford to be 'clone towns', and needed to build a unique identity.

The event was organised by Sally Themans, who promotes the High Street through her work at Good2Great, and Seb Slater of Shrewsbury Business Improvement District.

"It was an inspiring morning for anyone interested in the health of our town centres," said Sally, who also fronts the Love Wellington, Love Bridgnorth, and the newly-launched Love Shifnal bands.

"Whilst parties are working away to promote High Streets in many innovative ways, with notable success in many towns, one obstacle remains a challenge – empty, unloved premises.

"They are a continual blight, a deterrent for further investment and a blot on the landscape so it was fascinating to hear Ojay's insights into this issue."

He told the seminar that whilst retailers faced many challenges, including internet shopping, absentee landlords, staffing and energy prices, there were ways forward which promised a brighter future.

"We have to be flexible and dynamic in the way we work, with the ability to respond to quickly changing demands. Shorter leases and smaller unit design will help.

"Town centres will also have a role to play in integrating health and social care provisions but the key to all this will be partnership – working with like-minded people who care about their High Streets and can work together on creative solutions.

"By joining forces with a range of partners who are passionate about their communities, our town centres can be re-purposed as thriving places," he said.

The seminar highlighted three successful town centre regeneration examples – The Printworks in Bridgnorth, The Orbit community cinema in Wellington, and the St Mary's shopping arcade in Whitchurch.

There was also a panel discussion with Ojay McDonald, Seb Slater, Tracey Darke



Andy Smith of The Orbit in Wellington, Seb Slater of Shrewsbury BID, Kate Gittins of Shrewsbury Market Hall, Sally Themans of Good2Great, and Ojay McDonald from the Association of Town and City Management



Adele Nightingale speaking in the panel debate

(assistant director of place and economy at Shropshire Council) and Adele Nightingale of Oswestry BID.

The debate came as a four-week public consultation got under way on the Smithfield Riverside regeneration project in Shrewsbury town centre.

The project will transform the area between the River Severn, The Darwin centre, Roushill and Raven Meadows.

Earlier this year Shropshire Council secured almost £19 million of levelling up cash from the Government to further support the regeneration of Shrewsbury town centre – kickstarting design work on the Smithfield Riverside masterplan.

This first public consultation focuses on the west and north west of The Darwin centre, and will see the demolition of the Riverside shopping centre and former Riverside medical practice to create space for modern offices and homes, as well as restaurants and a cinema. Plans also include a new public park adjacent to Roushill.

The first phase of public consultation runs until November 15, with local businesses and communities invited to view and comment on the plans at <http://smithfieldriverside.com>

The details will also be available at libraries in Bayston Hill, Bridgnorth, Church Stretton, Gobowen, Library at The Lantern in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Market Drayton, Much Wenlock, Oswestry, Pontesbury, Shrewsbury and Wem.

Lot of love for award-winner

Telford-based mobile and IT recycling and recommerce company Preloved Tech has won The Startup Award at this year's eBay for Business Awards.

The Trench Lock company was quoted as a shining example of a business forced to pivot during the pandemic that hasn't looked back since.

Tens of thousands of mobile devices and IT equipment are being collected, refurbished, and remarketed back into the second use market each year.

Judges said: "We can't state enough just how tight the competition was this year – and it's been truly heartening to hear so many stories of success and overcoming adversity from incredible businesses that trade on eBay."

Managing director Matt Giles said: "We work tirelessly every day to help businesses, schools and individual consumers to securely and easily recycle their personal or business devices,

diverting them away from landfill and helping to reduce electronic waste.

"Over the years we have given recycling rebates in excess of £500,000 back to the schools, charities and businesses we support, and partner with many organisations to provide an ethical recycling service to their customers.

"As a relatively new business, only in our fourth year, to be recognised by an organisation the size of eBay as a pioneer in our industry is truly amazing and testament to the hard work our team puts in every day."

He added: "eBay provides us with the perfect platform to sell our refurbished and used tech, all of which have gone through our recycling process where they have been fully tested, data wiped to GDPR compliance, refurbished and cleaned ready for their new owner."

The business was formed in 2019, and won a Best Digital Business award last year, as well as narrowly missing out on the Mobile Industry Awards this year in the best recycling practice category which went to Music Magpie.

Members of institute



Signing on the dotted line are David Williams from Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College, and Janet Stephens from Telford College, with Dudley College principal Neil Thomas

Two Shropshire colleges have joined the Black Country and Marches Institute of Technology. Telford College, and Herefordshire Ludlow and North Shropshire College say it will see much needed higher-level skills in engineering delivered in the area. Led by Dudley College of Technology, the institute aims to meet the skills demands of industry by providing technical training from level four up to degree-level programmes with university and further education partners.

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- Further outbuilding providing Total Gross Internal Floor Area of approximately 1,830 ft sq (170 m sq)
- Significant residential development potential (subject to statutory consents) and suitable for variety of commercial uses

SIMILAR PROPERTIES REQUIRED



OFFERS INVITED

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- Allocated commercial land currently subject to planning application awaiting determination to provide a Net Site Area of approximately 5.4 acres (2.185 hectares)
- Prominently located fronting onto Battlefield Road in sought-after commercial quarter of Shrewsbury
- Suitable for a variety of commercial uses (subject to any statutory consents)

SIMILAR PROPERTIES REQUIRED



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Wroxeter Hotel hosted the FSB bootcamp



Community matters – Sally Themans



Breakfast at the start of the day

Business bootcamp

The Federation of Small Businesses held a ‘bootcamp’ at Wroxeter Hotel with a day of guest speakers, networking opportunities and exhibitors.

Backed by the Department for Business & Trade, it included a presentation from TEDx and mental health speaker Andrew Pain on ways to deal with ‘imposter syndrome’, and a talk from Peter ‘The Speaker’ Hill, who won investment from Deborah Meaden on the TV show *Dragons’ Den*.

Other speakers included Sally Themans of Good2Great on how to make your business relevant to the local community, and Jamie Pratt from Stockton Business Consulting on ways in which a university can support business growth.

The speaker line-up was completed by Peter Roper of The Family Business Practice on the importance of reputation, and Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones also held an on-stage interview with Jeevan Punj, director of Elite Hampers in Telford and the FSB’s area lead for the county.

There was also a speed networking session with Amanda Bourne of Find a Biz.

Hollie Whittles, the FSB’s national skills champion, hosted the event and said: “This event was all about bringing businesses together – getting everyone learning, but also networking at the same time.

“Speakers gave up their time to share some of the top tips around ideas they could have done with when they were setting up their own businesses – and explaining that it’s OK to fail, and you don’t have to be everywhere all at once.”



Speakers and presenters at the FSB bootcamp event



Andrew Pain spoke about ‘imposter syndrome’



Networking and contact-building at the FSB event



Peter Roper’s brand reputation message



Host Hollie Whittles with Carl Jones



Dragons’ Den investment winner Peter Hill

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QiRefurbs and Contracts Limited was initially a home-based business



High-profile clients include Holland and Barrett and Bupa Dental Care



The company carries out corporate interior refurbishments

Growth leads to new premises

A Telford refurbishment company is on the move after continued nationwide success saw it outgrow its former home.

Qi Refurbs and Contracts Limited was initially formed as a home-based business before moving to the Business Development Centre on Stafford Park.

And now, after increasing its workload and taking on more staff, the team is set to relocate to brand new premises on Hortonwood.

Founders Calvin Boden and Jason Palmer began the interior refurbishment company with just a few hundred pounds in 2019 – and their latest end of year figures show they turned over £1.9 million in the last 12 months.

Qi Refurbs and Contracts carries out corporate interior refurbishments including: decorating, joinery, electrical, plumbing, flooring, fire risk works assessments, fire doors, fire compartmentation, air conditioning and suspended ceilings.

They also specialise in installing dental equipment offering an entire wrap-around package where they can completely strip out and refit an entire dental surgery or dental practice.

Their most high-profile clients include Holland and Barrett (the UK's leading health and wellbeing store) and Bupa Dental Care. They are also working with Mac Construction Consultants, Colosseum Dental and Vein Centres across the UK.



The team at QiRC Limited

Calvin said: "We are extremely busy and have contracts all over the UK, with projects in Dublin, St Helier, Scotland, Wales and across England too."

"The move to new premises is an exciting step for our entire team, and we're looking forward to starting afresh in a brand-new space."

QiRC began with just two members of staff, but they now employ eight full-time and two part-time staff.

"We really have outgrown the space we were in and our office move has also created another role for a project co-ordinator, with plans for even more expansion and growth," said Calvin.

"We employ local businesses as sub-contractors wherever possible – in particular, Premier Security and Electrical Services, based

on Halesfield. They employ four people and we are responsible for contracting a large part of their workload."

"And we also employ three or four sub-contracted joiners on a regular basis and two sub-contracted teams for decorating."

"QiRC is a real family business too with six of our family members employed, and we're all very excited about what the future holds for everyone involved."

Calvin and Jason have over 30 years' experience in the industry, and their building and maintenance contract business has a large geographical network of highly-skilled commercial and domestic trades people that allows them to provide the best value services available.



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In the saddle for savings



Albie Cadwallader-Williams, Hattie Cadwallader-Owen, Kevin Williams, Bobby Cadwallader-Williams, and Everlyn Cadwallader-Owen with bikes from Discounted Bikes Shropshire

Shrewsbury entrepreneur Kevin Williams has launched a new online bike shop, Discounted Bikes Shropshire, offering cut-price children's bikes in the run-up to Christmas. He says he wants the business to help parents as the cost of living crisis continues to hit festive budgets. "We have lots of bikes available for up to half price. The bikes are brand new but sourced from a bike firm in Derbyshire that is no longer trading, so when our stock is gone, that's it," he said. Kevin is offering free delivery for customers within 15 miles of Shrewsbury, and has already sold over 120 bikes. Details can be found at www.discountedbikesshropshire.co.uk

Major deals for commercial firm

Halls Commercial has been acting in two significant transactions which are bringing the former cattle market site in Oswestry back to life.

The deals have involved bringing two major operators to the site, with the negotiation of a sale of a long leasehold interest to fast food chain McDonald's and the letting of a purpose-built drive thru unit to Costa Coffee.

Halls Commercial, acting on behalf of Morrisons PLC, has led the negotiations, acting alongside joint agents Knight Frank.

The Smithfield Park site on Shrewsbury Road provides a total seven-acre development site adjacent to the Morrisons food store, and this forms phase one of the development.

The site has been marketed as

being available for a variety of uses including retail, gym, trade counter, commercial, and car showroom ventures.

The two new drive-thru locations form the first part of the development.

James Evans, head of Halls Commercial, said: "We are delighted, as a practice, to have provided agency support relating to the first phase of this development and we are thrilled to announce the two successful transactions to McDonald's and Costa Coffee."

"They represent great news for the town of Oswestry and we look forward to bringing further good news to the town with our continued development of the former cattle market site and phase two of the development."

Morrisons completed its 47,000 sq ft store with a modern petrol filling station, opening their doors to the public in October 2019.

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How international events impact on world of logistics

Anton Gunter



As we witnessed the terrible acts of terrorism in Israel, I was acutely aware that events in the world will influence our lives . . . no matter where we are. And this is particularly true with logistics.

During the Second World War, Germany made a point of attacking supply lines to and from Britain with the thought of starving its citizens. Torpedoing supply ships was meant to dent the war effort in Britain. There were food shortages and shortages of vital supplies.

Likewise, directly after 9/11, flights were stopped and airspaces closed. This led to freight being stuck at various airports around the world creating a backlog and in some cases a shortage of essential supplies.

More recently, we experienced the Covid pandemic and whilst lockdown provided most people with a chance to stay at home and protect themselves, the logistics industry continued to keep the supply chain moving as best as it could. During this time ports across the world closed, opened and closed again at various times – and almost certainly never at the same time.

When the initial pandemic struck, China closed factories and industry in China ground to a halt. This meant ships and other transport from China was not available. This was then further compounded by shipping lines removing vessels of rotation and thus creating a perfect storm for shipping rates to go through the roof and nearly touch the moon.

Then, when the Chinese ports opened again and the world was flooded by containers from China, we found the rest of the world's ports either closed or on staffing levels which were not able to cope with the influx of containers. Containers were backing up at various ports with the poor customers now not only paying high shipping rates and high delivery costs, but also port charges and port storage charges too.

On top of this, we then had the strange phenomenon that the containers were now not in the right areas – and we experienced a shortage of containers not only in China, but all around the world.



The current situation in Israel is having an effect on logistics in the region with shipping lines and airlines stopping all services to Ashdod and Ben Gurion Airport



When Covid abated, we then had Brexit to contend with, and again processes were challenged and changed, as were ways of operating. Supply chains were being stretched and we even saw various supermarkets bemoaning Brexit for the lack of produce and the lack of clarity and uncertainty.

If Brexit wasn't enough, the logistics world and indeed the whole world were shocked to see events unfold in Ukraine. And whilst some of us may have been sat thinking, oh well it's Ukraine and it's miles away, we were

suddenly thrust into confusion over gas and oil prices, proving how reliant we are on the now sanctioned Russian fossil fuel.

This means that transport costs go up. It also means that for some customers, the Russian market – which for some was a major market – is closed and there is no way of re-opening it. It also meant that road freight prices to Eastern Europe increased and, in some instances, routings were no longer available.

Then in the final instance, when Brexit or the Ukrainian conflict couldn't quite stop logistics, we had the Evergreen getting stuck in the Suez Canal. This meant that even if you didn't have freight onboard, your freight could not actually get to the UK. Long delays and uncertainty was again the perfect storm to create another increase in prices. In the logistics industry, it became clear that the Suez Canal is even more important than first anticipated.

The current situation in Israel is having an effect on logistics in the region with shipping lines and airlines stopping all services to Ashdod and Ben Gurion Airport – and if this spills out further, the vital link to Europe, The Suez Canal, could once again affect logistical chains no matter where you are.

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Anton Gunter is managing director of Global Freight Services, the international freight forwarder with its headquarters in Telford



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Guests gather for the event at RAF Museum Cosford



More than 250 people attended the event at RAF Cosford

Volunteers celebrated

More than 250 people gathered for a special afternoon tea to celebrate the work done by Shropshire's army of community volunteers.

The event, at RAF Museum Cosford, was hosted by Mandy Thorn MBE, High Sheriff of Shropshire. From street pastors working throughout the night to ensure the safety of revellers to guide dog trainers and a life-saving leisure centre team, the event heard about the strength, commitment and resilience of the people of Shropshire.

Guests were entertained by musicians from Jackfield 10-Piece Brass Band and Morris dancing group, Shrewsbury Morris.



High Sheriff Mandy Thorn with Anna Turner (Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire) and deputy lieutenants



Diane Douglas, Zara Bavcevic and Heather Lloyd



Guests enjoyed dancing provided by Shrewsbury Morris



Rob Hatts, Christine Holmes, Kathy Hatts and David Holmes from Shrewsbury Drapers



Community Resource volunteer Karen Pardoe, with the charity's Sue Chalk, Bev Baxter and trustees Hugh Strickland, Mark Thorn and Amy Bould



Reverend Richard Hayes and Joleen Hayes at the event



Claire Brentnall pictured with Margaret Buckingham, Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner and Steph Eddies-Davies



Zeze Sohawon, left, with Tamara Thomas, right, of charity Emotional Dysregulation in Autism with Mandy Thorn



Sophie Taylor and **Julia Morgan** both from the League of Friends at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital with Victoria Charnley (centre) PA to the High Sheriff



High Sheriff Mandy Thorn pictured at the event



Wellington Leisure Centre life-savers **Susie Nicholls**, **Faith Cooper**, **Nakita Kang**, **Alex Holloway**, **High Sheriff Mandy Thorn** and **Ruth Giblin**



Robin Glover, **Mayor Arnold England** and **Ruth Giblin**



Unsung heroes from around the county were invited to the event



Xue Han, **Grace Tong** (Chinese Arts and Culture Centre) and **Gareth Williams** from Weston Park



Sallie-Anne O'Byrne, **Mark Cuthbert-Brown** and **Bethan Davies**



Val Kirton, **Jenny Wynn**, **Mark Thorn** and **High Sheriff Mandy Thorn**



Steph Eddies-Davies, **Charlotte Arnold**, **Saira Varghese** and **Heather Tudor**

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Social scene



Guests at the CEOs and Leaders Lunch

Leaders do lunch in style

Weston Park hosted a CEOs and Leaders Lunch, which included an afternoon of networking and a chance to tour the historic property.

The event was organised by B4 Shropshire. Area director Victoria Charnley said: "The Orangery in the main house was the perfect venue for this intimate, informal lunch. Wonderful food, great discussions and an opportunity to learn more about Weston Park from chief executive Colin Sweeney."



James Tanner of Tanners Wines



Johnny Themans of Good2Great



Chris Pallett of Bespoke Computing



Colin Sweeney from Weston Park



Richard and Tina Rosser



Felicity Wingrove shares a joke



Alison Griffin from The International Centre, Telford



Dena Evans, creative director at Reech



The event was held in the Weston Park Orangery

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JON GRIFFIN meets a broadcast legend who played a key role in bringing top-level ice hockey to Telford

The iceman cometh

Gary Newbon is in reflective mood as he looks back on a lifetime of TV fame and a galaxy of world-famous interviewees.

"I just want it to last a bit longer," he admits. "My big weakness is that I probably don't know how to enjoy my age because all I want to do is work. I love it, it's the reason to get up in the morning."

Now 78, this is a man who has covered seven football world cups, three Olympic Games and sparred verbally with the likes of Pele, Muhammed Ali, Sir Alex Ferguson, and Brian Clough in a star-studded TV career.

He was controller of sport for Central Television for 23 years, a former deputy head of ITV Sport and one of the region's best known media figures. In 2018 he was awarded an MBE for services to sport, the media and charity.

Gary was also instrumental in bringing ice hockey to Telford in 1985. He was part of the consortium which founded Telford Tigers, alongside TV's former Golden Shot warm-up man Dave Ismay as chairman, and Canadian defenceman Chuck Taylor as player-coach.

He has a rich fund of anecdotes from countless broadcasting assignments across the globe – from falling out with Sir Alex Ferguson after daring to ask if the abrasive Scot was in line for the sack, to being told by Brian Clough that millions of Midland TV viewers would be happy that he had lost his voice.

In a notoriously fickle industry where careers can now be cut short at the stroke of an ill-considered tweet or a careless Facebook post, Newbon has ploughed his own extraordinary furrow over the decades across a media sporting landscape transformed beyond recognition since he made his own debut in September 1964 – having attended the same school as another TV sports broadcast icon, John Motson.



"When John died a guy who was our prefect at the end of the dinner table wrote to the school and said he had to split Motty and I up because all we did was talk football every meal!"

Gary's grandfather took him to see Leicester when he was six and he has been following them ever since. The manager was Norman Bullock and he says he can still remember some of his early heroes like Arthur Rowley, who

would go on to write his name into the history books at Shrewsbury Town.

He was keen to continue a promising rugby career on leaving school but his father sat him down at the age of 19 and advised him to pick a career that would keep him going for the rest of his life.

"So I decided to become a journalist. I thought that if I can't play sport, I want to report on it."



Picture strip (L-R): Interviewing boxing legend Muhammad Ali; One of Gary's early TV appearances; Gary pictured with the Queen Mother when he made a film about her love of horses; Gary Newbon helped to found Telford Tigers ice hockey club in the 1980s; Now listen here young man . . . with the genius Brian Clough; Gary became good pals with Sir Alex Ferguson



He cut his teeth at a news agency in Cambridge before moving on to Fleet Street with Hayter's Sports Agency. "It was the finishing school for many top journalists and broadcasters. Then two things happened which were extraordinary. You need a bit of luck in life.

"I stood in for my great friend Chris Lander and went to Wales to cover a rugby match. I was in the bar with Cliff Morgan and Vivian Jenkins, two former Welsh players. Morgan was with the

BBC and Jenkins was the number one rugby writer for the Sunday Times.

"We all slowly got drunk in the bar and they kept poking me saying I had to get into television. I was enthralled with these guys. When I got the job in TV I rang them up to thank them but they hadn't got a clue what I was talking about – they couldn't remember a word of it!"

Gary quickly found his feet in regional TV and by 1970 he was chosen by ITV to jet out to Mexico to cover the classic World Cup of Pele, Jairzinho, Bobby Moore, and Gerd Muller. He went on to eventually cover seven World Cups – following a chance meeting at a London TV cocktail party with former England and Wolves captain Billy Wright, then head of sport and outside broadcasts at Birmingham-based ATV.

"They were looking for a new sports presenter. I was offered the job and did Star Soccer – hundreds and hundreds of shows – sometimes on two or three times a day. I also covered sports including speedway and greyhound racing."

Gary's long broadcasting career in the Midlands began on December 2, 1971, during an era when regional sports coverage was at its height, as millions of fans tuned in each week for their local football fix – from ATV's Star Soccer to London's The Big Match, from Granada to Anglia, Tyne Tees to Yorkshire.

"When ATV became Central I was made head of sport in Birmingham and when Billy Wright retired I became controller of sport for the whole company. I expanded the sport with a guy called Trevor East. It was all going swimmingly until Carlton and Granada merged.

"My 30-person department went down to three. I was 59, so I went to see Vic Wakeling, managing director of Sky Sports."

By this time in 2004, Gary had long been a national broadcasting figure familiar to millions of armchair sports fans. His switch to Sky Sports brought further TV fame, presenting Sporting Heroes, Time of Our Lives, live boxing and darts.

He cites Sir Alex Ferguson, the late Brian Clough, Chris Eubank and his now deceased fellow TV pundit Jimmy Greaves as the four individuals who most helped propel his profile as a broadcaster; a quartet who also became friends.

"I developed a trust with Alex. The first time we fell out he told me I was crap and wouldn't talk to me. Shortly after, I was doing a fight night and saw him in a hotel and joined him for

breakfast. I said 'look, can I start again?' and from then on he went the other way and would give me a briefing on the team and all sorts of things. He would do half time interviews for me which he had never done. He was the best manager in my lifetime."

But even the most successful UK manager of all time couldn't match Brian Clough for charisma, according to Gary. "He was hilarious. He once said 'Rome wasn't built in a day, but I wasn't on that particular job'."

"He gave me a hard time sometimes. I turned up one day and had lost my voice. He said 'there will be two and a half million people in the Midlands absolutely thrilled with that news' and then wandered off. He came back with a doctor later on in fairness. He was a genius."

Today Gary can look back on an extraordinary career mixing with world celebrities and coaxing revelations out of an entire Who's Who of sporting immortals. So has he ever been awestruck?

"I have only been in awe of two people – the Queen and Luciano Pavarotti, who I had dinner with one night unexpectedly."

He met the late monarch when she was invited to a showing of his Royal Champion film he made, highlighting the Queen Mother's passion for national hunt racing.

"When I got home I told my wife Katie that I'd had two-and-a-half minutes with the Queen on my own. When she asked me what we spoke about I realised I couldn't remember.

"Being awarded the MBE was my proudest moment," he adds. "It was a late recognition for what I have achieved for sport, media and charity."

Notwithstanding his chat with Her Majesty, he has a treasure trove of sporting memories to look back on over more than 52 years as a broadcaster and journalist as he nears his ninth decade, with many of the highlights featuring in his newly published autobiography 'Newbon, Bloody Hell'.

The years roll by, but Gary Newbon is still turning his hand to media work, with his forthcoming autobiography, newspaper columns, consultancy work for an international law firm, after-dinner speaking and other engagements.

"I have reinvented myself," he says. "There are always new things around the corner. I have had a fantastic life . . . how many people would have given their right arms to do what I've done?"

Prize is a thing of beauty



Laura Davies with her award

Telford beautician Laura Davies has been crowned Midlands Beauty Therapist of the Year.

The former Telford College student runs Enlightenment on the Stafford Park business estate, and took the prize at the regional finals of the English Beauty Industry Awards, held in Birmingham.

She started work at a salon at Rowton Castle near Shrewsbury, before taking on the Enlightenment business in 2015.

In the Midlands final, Laura beat off competition from rival salons in Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Walsall, Nottingham, Coventry, Kidderminster and Stourport.

She said: "I cannot quite believe I've won this award. I'm so lucky to have support from all my amazing clients who voted for me, and made it happen."

The award was based on a combination of customer reviews, plus before and after pictures of treatments which I had to provide."

Credit control is easy as 1.23



Shai Patel, Kim Kelly and Paul Naylor at the new GCCS offices in Telford

Newly-formed Granville Credit Control Services (GCCS) has moved into St James House on Hollinswood Road in Telford.

Three of the company directors – Kim Kelly, Shai Patel and Paul Naylor – are based at the first floor of the serviced offices – office 1.23.

"We were impressed with the décor and the flexibility, with its 24 hour a day, 7 days a week accessibility," said sales director Kim, who previously

worked at the site for Capgemini around 15 years ago.

The team said the site was perfect for the credit control business to meet with prospective clients in and around Shropshire.

"It offers an opportunity for future expansion and networking with other businesses," said business development director Shai.

Paul Naylor, marketing director, added: "It's an aspirational setting that matches perfectly with the GCCS aspiration of helping businesses throughout the UK to get to grips with their credit control requirements."

Advertisement Feature

Earnings figures show modest rise

Our UK Chief Economist James Sproule says earnings data suggests that interest rates have now peaked

Annualised average (nominal) earnings (with bonus) were up 8.1% (consensus 8.3%), excluding bonus earnings were up 7.8% (consensus 7.8%).

These numbers were down from their peak in July when average (nominal) earnings with bonus hit an annual growth rate of 8.5%.

The slight easing of growth against expected numbers will be welcomed by inflation hawks, this is the first time that month-on-month numbers have fallen since February, and will be further evidence to markets that we are at the peak of the interest rate cycle.

The broader key here is nominal, and with inflation falling steadily it is necessary to focus on real earnings as well.

Total real earnings are up 1.3%, and while this has been a concern of the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee, we see a modest rise in real earnings after a prolonged (since November 2021) period of real earnings falls as being what should be expected.

Inflation which contains a volatile energy component was always going to fall away faster than stickier earnings and this earnings growth is one of the key components of avoiding a recession in the coming months and achieving a soft economic landing.

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Unlocking the benefits of cultural diversity

Marina Ibrahim



In today's interconnected world, understanding and embracing cultural diversity is not just an ethical imperative; it's also a business necessity.

This holds true even for small businesses, self-employed individuals, and entrepreneurs operating in areas like Shropshire. Here's why:

The Business Case for Diversity

Cultural diversity enriches our perspectives, enhances creativity, and fuels innovation. According to multiple studies, diverse teams outperform their homogeneous counterparts in problem-solving and decision-making.

For small businesses that often operate on slim margins and face stiff competition, leveraging the advantages of a culturally diverse

team can be a game-changer. By incorporating varied viewpoints and experiences, businesses in Shropshire can create more robust strategies and offer products or services that resonate with a broader audience.

Low Investment, High Returns

One common misconception is that fostering diversity and inclusion demands significant resources. In reality, simple and cost-effective measures can go a long way.

Open dialogues, inclusive hiring practices, and awareness programmes are some of the low-cost strategies that can be implemented. For self-employed individuals, cultural competency can broaden clientele and enhance customer satisfaction.

Entrepreneurs can build a strong foundation for their start-ups by prioritising diversity from the outset.

Diverse Teams Drive Innovation

In an age where businesses have to pivot quickly to adapt to market demands, innovation is key. Diverse teams, by their very nature, bring in a variety of problem-solving approaches.

For Shropshire's small businesses that aim to grow or even disrupt their sectors, this diverse perspective offers an invaluable resource for fresh ideas and solutions.

Navigating the Global Marketplace

Shropshire may be a local market, but the Internet has removed geographical trading and recruitment barriers, offering even the smallest businesses a global reach.

Cultural diversity within the team can provide unique insights into international markets, aiding in effective localisation strategies and even offering a competitive edge.

Your Takeaways

Embracing cultural diversity is not just a feel-good move; it's a sound business strategy that offers quantifiable benefits.

Given the growing multicultural fabric of the UK, including Shropshire, ignoring this dimension could mean missed opportunities.

Businesses can start small — perhaps by diversifying their suppliers, creating a more inclusive marketing strategy, or educating staff by offering workshops on unconscious biases and cultural agility.

The potential returns — increased creativity, enhanced problem-solving, broader market appeal, and improved financial performance — make a compelling case for why small businesses, self-employed individuals, and entrepreneurs in Shropshire should not only acknowledge but actively embrace the manifold benefits of cultural diversity and inclusion.

● Marina Ibrahim is an award-winning coaching and training consultant from Globility Coaching in Ludlow



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Triumph over adversity

A dyslexic Shropshire woman who goes 'above and beyond' to help other learners was among the inspirational people celebrated at the 2023 Dyslexia Awards.

Victoria Thornton, from Shrewsbury Colleges Group, who also won the award in 2019, took the learning support award at the presentation ceremony in Telford.

The Dyslexia Awards are the brainchild of Telford-based dyslexia consultant Elizabeth Wilkinson MBE.

Judges said they had read many wonderful supportive comments from both students and academic staff that emphasised Victoria's commitment to supporting students to achieve their goals.

"She clearly champions her own dyslexia, which puts her students at ease and gives them confidence to do the same. She is obviously very supportive and non-judgmental, which opens the doors to successful learning and helps unlock potential.

"Victoria consistently goes above and beyond to provide the support needed, making a visible difference to the lives of the students she supports. Without her help and support, many students may not have completed their courses."

Victoria said: "It's important to me because I'm dyslexic and I know the difference that greater support and understanding can make to individuals. It's an honour to be recognised by my colleagues and students for this award."

The 2023 Dyslexia Awards and celebration evening was held at the Mercure Telford Central Hotel to showcase the achievements and talents of dyslexics nationwide.

The annual event is the brainchild of Elizabeth, who is dyslexic herself, and who has worked in the field of dyslexia in Telford for 24 years.

She said: "The Dyslexia Awards were created in Shropshire, so it is great to see such a supportive and inspirational winner from our home county.

"It was another amazing night, and everybody had a great time. I am so proud of all our finalists. Every year I am blown away by them, but this year I was so very humbled to see how proud people were to be nominated. I love that people are being proud and are using this as a platform to highlight dyslexic talents and to make a positive difference."

The event, hosted by BBC presenter Paul Shuttleworth, also raised hundreds of pounds for local charity West Mercia Search and Rescue.

It was supported by a string of organisations including Telford-based Global Freight Services, MedatativeState.Com, Exclusive Solutions Ltd, the Federation of Small Businesses, CRG Business Solutions, Darwin Wealth Management Ltd, Vaikai Web Design, and In The Loop, from Shrewsbury.



Founder Eli Wilkinson at the lectern



The event was held at the Mercure Telford Centre hotel



Darwin Wealth Management sponsored the young entrepreneur award



Jacqueline Stockwell receives the entrepreneur award from Jeevan Punj on behalf of the FSB



Victoria Thornton receives her award from sponsor Sally Joyner from In The Loop



The 2023 Dyslexia Awards winners celebrate together



Anton Gunter of Global Freight Services presents the community rising star award to Neave Chatting-Tonks



Eurydice Caldwell receives the Founder's Award from Eli Wilkinson – her second award of the night



MC Paul Shuttleworth (right) presents the proceeds of the night's fundraising to West Mercia Search and Rescue



High Sheriff of Shropshire Mandy Thorn addresses guests



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Three senior positions filled following internal promotions

Embroidered and printed clothing firm MyWorkwear has welcomed three senior hires to its team following record-breaking sales.

After a successful first half of the year, the Telford-based workwear provider saw its highest sales month to date in July thanks to new partnerships with businesses across the country.

The team welcomed Julie Sale as business development manager, Becky Homersley as marketing manager, and Tara Payne-McLoughlin as account manager to further continue its growth.

Julie joined the team with over 20 years



Julie Sale, Tara Payne-McLoughlin and Becky Homersley at MyWorkwear headquarters

of sales experience in the entertainment and learning and development industries.

Becky heads up the marketing team with over a decade of experience in marketing and

PR across the telecoms and IT industries. And Tara joins the team after 20 years in the beauty industry in a range of roles from account management to sales.

Co-managing director of MyWorkwear James Worthington said: "Their wealth of experience and enthusiasm will take our sales and marketing efforts to new heights enabling us to help even more businesses with their workwear needs."

The new appointments follow two internal promotions as Gayle Parker embarks on a new senior leadership team role as commercial director and Lauren Chandler takes on the role of sales office manager.

Graduate surveyors

Halls, the independent firm of estate agents, chartered surveyors, auctioneers and valuers, has strengthened two of its divisions by recruiting new graduate surveyors.

Kate Oakes and Ellie Studley have joined the growing rural professional and commercial teams respectively at the headquarters in Shrewsbury, having recently graduated.

Jon Quinn, Halls' managing director,

said: "It's imperative that Halls continues to recruit the most talented young people, so that we have the perfect blend of experience and youth to drive the company forwards to take advantage of new business opportunities."

Kate won two awards as she graduated with first class honours in Rural Enterprise and Land Management from Harper Adams University. Her parents run a 25-acre smallholding.

Ellie, a real estate graduate from Liverpool John Moores University, is also a keen horse rider like Kate, owning three horses and having previous experience as a British eventer.



Halls' new graduate surveyors Kate Oakes and Ellie Studley



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Leanne Jones, Emily Moulard, Kelly Reynolds, Afsarah Haque-Hassan, Calum Eagles, Brian Evans, Mia Williams, Sophie Speirs, Claudia Booth, Jemma Parockki, and Sarah Gallagher

Next generation of lawyers

Lanyon Bowdler has taken on two new trainee solicitors as part of its long-term commitment to train the next generation of lawyers.

The news follows the qualification of three former trainees at the law firm, two of whom will be continuing their professional careers with the company, while eight other trainees currently working at Lanyon Bowdler are changing seats – moving to different departments to broaden their experience.

Callum Eagles and Mia Williams are the two new arrivals. Managing partner Brian Evans said: “Callum actually started with us as a secretary in

November 2020 after completing a law degree at the University of Birmingham. He has been working in our commercial and agricultural property department and will do his first seat there.

“Mia did a law degree at Liverpool University and her LPC at the University of Law. As a first language Welsh speaker, Mia was keen to return to North Wales to qualify as a solicitor and we are pleased to welcome her to her first seat in the private client department at our Conwy office.

“We would also like to offer our congratulations to two of our former trainees – Eleanor Howells and Miriam Homer, who have just qualified as solicitors.

“Eleanor will be working as an assistant

solicitor in the dispute resolution team, and will be a fantastic addition to help with the department’s growing workload, while Miriam will be joining the personal injury team.

“We also have a number of trainees who have now completed their first seat with us and have moved on to other departments.”

Emily Moulard has moved to personal injury in Shrewsbury; Afsarah Haque-Hassan to clinical negligence in Shrewsbury; Jemma Parockki will work in the corporate department; Leanne Jones is moving to residential property in Oswestry; Claudia Booth moves to family in Hereford; Sophie Speirs to family in Telford; Kelly Reynolds to private client in Shrewsbury; and Sarah Gallagher will be in dispute resolution in Telford.

Keeping it in the family

Tudor Griffiths Group has embarked on a new chapter with the addition of the sixth generation to the team.

The family-owned company which has its head office in Ellesmere, employs over 300 people, trading out of 30 different locations.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths’ sons Harry and Oliver have now become the sixth generation of the family to join the firm.

Tudor said: “It’s wonderful to see the legacy of our company strengthened by Harry and Oliver joining the family company.

“Welcoming them into the business marks an important milestone. Their fresh

ideas will be essential as we stride forward, and their involvement ensures a seamless transition from one generation to the next.”

The group’s story began in 1874, when William Griffiths – at the age of 25 – turned his vision into a reality by establishing himself as a builder in Kinnerley, near Oswestry.

Today, the Tudor Griffiths Group, which is still under family ownership and management after almost 150 years, continues to thrive.

The Group is made up of several divisions, including eight builders’ merchants in Ellesmere, Oswestry, Northwich, Nantwich, Tattenhall, Welshpool, Wolverley, and Bridgnorth.



Harry and Oliver Griffiths, the sixth generation of the Griffiths family to join the Tudor Griffiths Group

Dream role for Elizabeth

Taking part in excavations at Shrewsbury Castle has enabled a heritage enthusiast to achieve her dream career.

Elizabeth Painter, 29, from Shrewsbury, had always hoped to work in the museums and heritage sector and found studying for a BA (Hons) in History followed by a Master's in Museum Practice was the perfect springboard to realise her goals.

She is now employed as the heritage and tours manager of Shrewsbury Prison and Museum.

The opportunity to take part in three archaeological excavation projects at Shrewsbury Castle gave Elizabeth the chance to learn new skills, including 'taking over' the University's Instagram page to share updates of the work she and her fellow students were taking part in.



Elizabeth Painter

She said: "I took part in all three seasons of archaeological excavations at Shrewsbury Castle and took over the University of Chester's Instagram page for a day, creating content for a feed post along with multiple stories and reels to run throughout the day.

"I loved taking part in these digs as there is nothing quite like being in a hole in the ground uncovering information that has been lost for centuries."

With a dissertation focusing on the negative impact the Covid pandemic had on how young people engaged with heritage, Elizabeth was able to put her research to good use.

Welcome to the team

Forge Property Consultants, the firm of chartered surveyors and valuers, has welcomed a new team member on a placement year.

Charlotte Robinson is studying real estate at Harper Adams University, and will be supporting the company directors in their work across commercial, residential and agricultural property matters from their Shropshire and Staffordshire bases.



Charlotte Robinson

Patron of community foundation

Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner has become a patron of the Shropshire Community Foundation, set up almost a year ago to channel funds from individuals, businesses and authorities to tackle community problems within the areas of highest need.

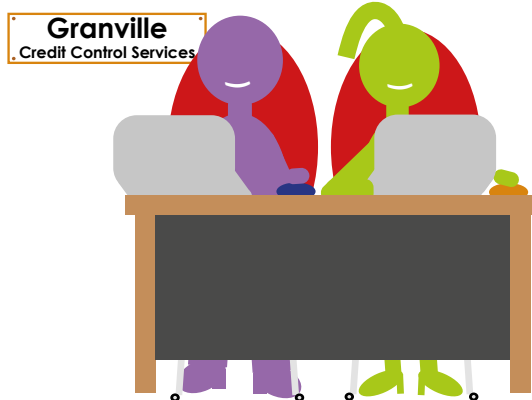
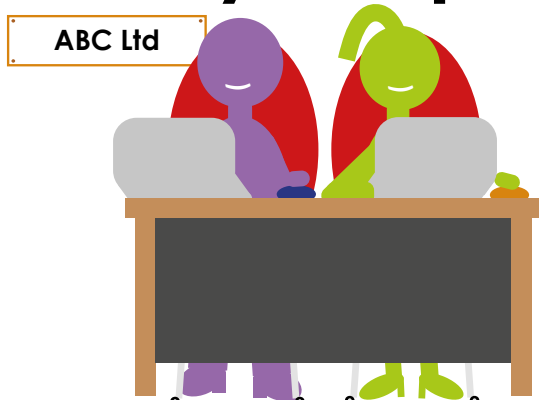
She said: "My role is all about celebrating the very best Shropshire has to offer, as well as recognising how we can collectively support communities and the people within them. I'm honoured to be asked to become a patron of the Shropshire Community Foundation, and I'll be taking every opportunity to connect them with organisations and individuals across the county who are seeking to make a real difference."



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Doctor joins the board of local enterprise partnership



Dr Simone Clarke

Pro-vice chancellor for Education and Students at Harper Adams University, Dr Simone Clarke, has joined the board of the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

She takes on the board's higher education champion role, as well as working with the other board members on the LEP's strategic and policy matters.

LEP chair Sonia Roberts said: "She brings a huge amount of high-level experience and expertise gained across the higher education sector and I know she will be a tremendous asset to the team."

"Our universities and colleges have a major role to play in the growth and development of the business sector in the Marches region, and it is vital that we work together for a common purpose."

"I know Simone will be key to making sure everyone achieves success."

Dr Clarke joined Harper Adams in 2020 and has spent more than 25 years in higher education management. She achieved a first-class honours degree in history at Aberystwyth University before completing her PhD at the same university.

She said: "I am delighted to join the LEP at such a critical moment for the organisation which is offering strategic leadership and funding for our region to enrich and develop its economic and social life."

Dr Clarke's management experience includes governance, research management, strategic and academic planning. She also has grassroots business experience as she previously ran her own hospitality business.

An extended family

Two new faces have joined the ranks at law firm FBC Manby Bowdler.

Lily Swindley and Stewart Harris have both joined the Shrewsbury office, with Lily becoming an apprentice paralegal in the family team, and Stewart joining the agricultural and rural services team as a trainee solicitor.

Neil Lloyd, managing director of FBC Manby Bowdler, said: "They are

now part of a big extended family of legal professionals and support staff who work together to offer some of the very best legal services in the county and beyond."

Trainee solicitors are graduates who have earned a two-year training contract, while apprenticeships are aimed at school leavers and take longer to complete. Both routes into the legal profession lead to the same qualifications and the ability to practise as a solicitor.



Lily Swindley and Stewart Harris have both joined FBC Manby Bowdler's Shrewsbury office, pictured with FBC Manby Bowdler partner Tom Devey (centre)

Bold move from BBC

Strategic communications company Be Bold Media has strengthened its team with a new recruit from the BBC.

Radio producer Liz Kennedy has joined the Newport-based consultancy after a 21-year career with the broadcaster to work across its portfolio of accounts.

Be Bold managing director Amy Bould said: "Liz is a fantastic radio journalist, a wonderful people-person, and a fabulous addition to our team of journalists and media professionals."

"With her radio and production skills, Liz perfectly complements our existing team and will strengthen still further our proven ability to tell our clients' stories in the most creative ways possible."

Liz said: "I jumped at the chance to join Be Bold because of the way they work. I've worked with them during my time on the radio and always been impressed at the way in which they create content which really works for both their clients and audiences."



Liz Kennedy

Directorship for Laura

Laura Manley has been made a director of family business A R Manley and Son Ltd.

The specialist joinery manufacturer has been in business since 1945, and she is the fourth generation to join the board.

Laura is business manager and director of operations at the company, based at Rodington.

She is pictured with father-in-law Fred Manley, his father Alec Manley, and a portrait of the founder Alec Manley senior.



Laura Manley is business manager and director of operations

Background in account management

Chloe Hayward, from Telford, is the new client experience manager at WR Partners.

She has an extensive background in account management across diverse sectors, and her new role involves scrutinising every aspect of client interaction with the firm – as well as reviewing all processes and client touchpoints across departments,

identifying areas for enhancement to deliver what the company says will be 'a more effortless and satisfying experience'.

"Chloe will also establish a robust system for measuring feedback every quarter and deliver personalised email client surveys," the WR Partners team say.



Chloe Hayward from WR Partners

Five minutes with...

MATTHEW LOWE is the new director of business at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. He joined in July after two and a half years as regional director with the CBI, having previously held lobbying roles at chambers of commerce in both the Black Country and Staffordshire

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

Guiding the business operations and corporate services for the Chamber including finance, legal, HR, compliance, premises, public affairs and our international trade activity.

HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY UNCERTAINTIES IN THE ECONOMY?

Economic uncertainties impact every business differently; some see it as a time to invest, for some it's a time to batten down the hatches. For the Chamber, and in my role, it's about how we operate as a stable and quality-run business, enabling us to support the Shropshire business community to navigate whatever headwinds they face.

HAS THE FALLOUT FROM THE PANDEMIC CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES?

There's never been a more important time to access local business support provided by the Chamber. The pandemic showed us that business is often at the front line when it comes to providing services, creating wealth and keeping people employed. Post pandemic we're looking ahead to what businesses need to get their heads around such as the future of work, AI and skills.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – AN OPPORTUNITY, THREAT, OR BIT OF BOTH?

For me AI is here to stay and there's no point trying to avoid it. It's an opportunity to do things differently and more efficiently – providing that businesses are aware of its impact and how best to capitalise on it.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

Sketching, painting (albeit I'm not very good at it) and popping into Shrewsbury with my partner and the dog for brunch.

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?

It's green all year round. Having worked in the deepest darkest depths of Stoke-on-Trent and the Black Country, the rolling verdant hills of Shropshire are beautiful.

TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY WOULDN'T KNOW.

I own a corgi – and being 6ft 5ins myself we look mismatched.



Matthew Lowe is director of business at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Driven, detailed and reliable. Corporate services isn't exciting, but it's necessary.

YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?

- Being recognised for my policy work in transport through a Fellowship with the British Chambers of Commerce
- Achieving my post graduate qualification in public affairs following a career as a secondary school teacher – it's never too late to teach an old dog new tricks.
- My first commercial sale – it was only worth £4,000 but it was great to get that over the line.
- Leading my previous organisation's LGBT+ Allies staff network and marching in the 2022 London Pride parade.

PET HATES?

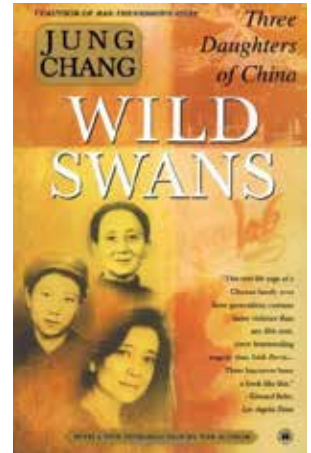
Queueing... I hate waiting.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF SOME WISE ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

I would tell my younger self to not limit your options. Be open to trying new things and different careers, and learn from every position you have.

ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE ALBUM TO TAKE TO A DESERT ISLAND.

Book: Wild Swans by Jung Chang. Film: Kill Bill. Song: Transparent Soul by Willow.



Wild Swans is Matthew's desert island book choice



Kill Bill would top Matthew's movie list

FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

Mary Beard, Mary Anning (Paleontologist), Betty Boothroyd, Nigella Lawson and Hilary Clinton.

WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?

Crab cakes, grilled halloumi with spiced couscous, followed by affogato.

AND FINALLY... WHAT DO YOU THINK THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HAS IN STORE FOR YOU, AND YOUR BUSINESS?

It's really an exciting time at the Chamber. We've embarked on a period of change to drive us for the next 50 years. We are just caretakers of the business and everything we do is to support businesses across Shropshire to be happier, healthier, wealthier, and wiser.

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