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May/June 2025  
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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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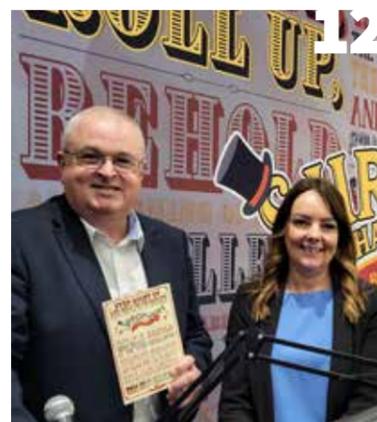
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**AND THE FINALISTS ARE:** It's the 25th anniversary of the Shropshire Business Awards this summer – we take a look at who's in the running for the big prizes, including a special 'Champion of Champions' trophy. P12-14

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By Carl Jones  
Shropshire Business Editor

# SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

## Welcome

**They say a week's a long time in politics. I think you could narrow that down to 24 hours when the likes of Donald Trump get involved.**

The International Monetary Fund has downgraded its economic forecasts for both the UK and the global economy in the light of recent events; it's doing well to keep up.

So much has happened since our last edition, with big economic headlines on both sides of the Atlantic which are going to impact the Shropshire business community.

Starting, of course, with tariffs. One man who knows a thing or two about international trade is Anton Gunter of Global Freight Services in Telford. He gives us his thoughts on what he calls TTT – the Terrible Trump Tariffs – in his column.

Closer to home, we've also had Rachel Reeves's spring budget statement which, in truth, had very little to say. That's probably just as well, since it coincided with the introduction of the hike in employers' National Insurance which is proving enough of a headache to many bosses. Some are warning it could lead to redundancies this summer.

Politicians certainly aren't the favourite people among Shropshire farmers right now. We've seen convoys of tractors processing through both Shrewsbury and Telford protesting against the Government's changes to inheritance tax rules.

We round up this, plus various other developments in the world of agriculture and rural affairs, in our cover story.

There's plenty to talk about in their world right now, and farmers, landowners, and agricultural businesses are being encouraged to attend a free agricultural seminar at The Down Inn near Bridgnorth on May 15 where professionals from Lanyon Bowdler, Nock Deighton and Stanton Ralph accountants will be providing expert advice.

It's an evening seminar, from 5.30pm to 7.30pm, focusing on key topics affecting the agricultural sector today, including planning legislation, divorce implications, and the

latest updates on the proposed inheritance tax changes.

Moving to fields of a different kind, it's been a season to forget on the pitch for Shrewsbury Town FC with relegation to the fourth tier for the first time in a decade, and owner Roland Wycherley still trying to find a buyer after a deal with an American businessman fell through.

But one of the club's players has seen his wife making headlines for happier reasons this year with the launch of a new business upcycling vintage football shirts into puffer vests and jackets. I went along to meet Julie Herman and Funso Ojo to find out about their venture, which is gaining new fans across the country and further afield.

There's not long now until the 25th anniversary of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards. I'm delighted and honoured to be involved in compereing this event once again this year.

As I write this, judges are preparing to start criss-crossing the county visiting all the finalists. And when you take a look at the list of businesses shortlisted this year, you'll realise what tough decisions they are going to have to make.

We've got lots of picture galleries in this issue, dropping in on a range of events including an International Women's Day event in Shifnal, and the Shropshire Business Festival at Telford's International Centre.

Check out the Shropshire Business Live TV Youtube channel, where you can watch some of the interviews we did.

Finally, don't forget about the 2025 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards. The closing date for entries this year is June 27, and there are seven categories for individual apprentices, and three for employers.

Last year's inaugural event was a huge success, and it looks set to be even bigger and better this year. A huge thanks to all the brilliant sponsors who are backing the competition this year.

It's a reminder of just how supportive the Shropshire business community really is. Long may that continue.



Rachel Reeves visited RBSL in Telford in the week of her budget speech



Managing director at McPhillips Paul Inions



James Worthington from MyWorkwear

# A testing time for all

From tariffs to taxes, and tensions in global markets, these are uncertain times for many Shropshire businesses – particularly those that export or import goods and products. ADAM PRINGLE gauges the mood

## So, Awful April is now behind us... but what's next. Miserable May? Jittery June?

No sooner had Chancellor Rachel Reeves delivered her spring budget statement, than Donald Trump dusted off his tariff chart and sent stock markets into a tailspin of confusion.

A snap poll by the British Chambers of Commerce's insights unit revealed the extent to which businesses expect to be hit by US tariffs.

It showed that 62% of those with trade exposure to the USA are taking a hit – 20% report a significant negative impact, 42% report some negative impact, 16% report no impact, 5% report some positive impact, and 2% significant positive impact.

However, the survey also showed that 40% of firms considered the 10% tariff given to the UK – far lower than many other economies including the European Union – to be better than they had been expecting.

Alongside increasing prices, 15% said they would now seek alternative suppliers, while 13% said they expected to absorb the costs. Around a third said they would take no action at this time.

Shortly before Trump's so-called 'liberation day', the UK's Chancellor had set out plans for our own domestic economy in her spring statement.

Among her headlines was a much-anticipated



Jennifer Hughes of Transicon

£2.2 billion rise in defence spending, paid for by cutting the overseas aid bill, and an extra £1 billion to help get more people back into work.

She also said inflation, which is now back below 3%, was forecast to fall to 2.1% next year.

The Chancellor said she was bringing forward £3.25 billion of investment to deliver reforms for public services in a new transformation fund, designed to bring down the costs of running the government.

She said she was 'not satisfied' by the Office for Budget Responsibility's announcement that it had revised down the UK's growth forecast this year from 2% to 1%.

In the week of her budget update, Rachel Reeves had been in Shropshire visiting Telford

defence firm Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land (RBSL).

The Hadley Castle company is set to benefit from a pledge by the UK Government to increase its defence budget in light of global challenges like the ongoing crisis in Ukraine and conflict in the Middle East.

The company said: "We were proud to give the Chancellor the opportunity to see RBSL's world-class people, skills and facilities that are delivering major programmes for the British Army."

"She met an alumni of our graduate programme, now playing a key role in the delivery of the Challenger 3 Main Battle Tank, and also saw Boxer production first hand, touring each stage of the line from weld, surface treatment through to integration and assembly.

"The highlight was an up-close look at a completed Boxer vehicle made in Telford."

RBSL isn't the only Telford-based company to welcome the defence spending announcement. Transicon, which provides automated control systems for critical infrastructure including power stations, has been actively developing projects with partners in the defence sector supply chain.

General manager Jennifer Hughes said: "The Chancellor's boost of £2.2 billion to defence spending is welcome news for companies like ours working in critical national infrastructure.



Helen Columb of Turas Accountants

"We've been supporting UK manufacturing and utilities for over 55 years, and this investment creates real opportunities for engineering firms throughout the supply chain.

"Our team is currently helping to upgrade essential infrastructure at power stations and developing exciting AGV projects with defence sector partners. This funding gives us confidence to continue innovating and investing in these areas.

"What particularly stands out is the recognition that strong supply chains are fundamental to national security. As a Telford-based business delivering bespoke engineering solutions nationwide, we're part of that vital network keeping the UK safe and operational.

"The focus on skills development is something we're especially passionate about. The engineering skills gap is a challenge we face daily and whilst we have continued to invest in training our own workforce, the Government have continually made it harder to do so.

"This latest round of investment is obviously welcomed but it needs to be in the right places to create more of the right opportunities for young people, and there needs to be a focus on encouraging more women who remain underrepresented in our sector.

"We're ready to play our part in strengthening the UK's defence capabilities and look forward to working alongside government

and industry partners to deliver the next generation of security solutions."

Elsewhere, there is widespread concern across Shropshire about the implication of the National Insurance rises which kicked into force in April, and the impact this will have on recruitment.

Helen Columb of Turas Accountants in Telford said: "It obviously makes it more expensive to employ people and has certainly had a chilling effect on growth and recruitment – the very things we need to be encouraging to help the economy move forward.

"The increase in NICs to 15% and the cutting of the threshold at which employers start paying them to £5,000 has cast a long shadow on financial planning for the year ahead, and there was little in the statement to change that.

"Having committed to not raising taxes further in the wake of her November budget, the Chancellor has left herself with little wriggle room, and I think her statement reflects that.

"Without economic growth to generate extra revenue for the Exchequer, it has no option but to cut spending on some public services in order to balance the books."

Construction company McPhillips welcomed a £600 million funding boost for the construction sector – but warned the spring statement showed the fragility of the overall economy.

Managing director Paul Inions felt it painted a gloomy picture of the state of the nation's finances, with spending cuts following the tax and borrowing rises announced in the October Budget.

"Having ruled out tax rises ahead of the statement, the Chancellor left herself with little option but to cut public spending if she wanted to stay within her own fiscal rules.

"There is only one way out of her current predicament and that is to do everything she can to help the private sector start to grow. Unfortunately, the rise in employer's National Insurance contributions and changes to employment laws do nothing to help.

"However, the extra £600 million of funding to train tens of thousands more skilled construction workers over the next four years is certainly welcomed. If it can deliver on the Chancellor's promise to train up to 60,000 engineers, bricklayers, electricians and carpenters by 2029, then it will be a big step forward."

Paul added: "We certainly need this sort of

national investment if we are to speed up work on the UK's infrastructure and build the 1.5 million homes the Government has promised in the next five years."

And Wayne Carter, managing director of Fabweld Steel Products, said the statement failed to address the reality facing businesses at the moment – rising costs for energy, wages and NICs, while asking the same companies to invest in innovation and growth.

The budget statement coincided with the results of a new study of business leaders from Telford-based MyWorkwear, which revealed the bleak outlook facing companies across the UK in the wake of Rachel Reeves' tax changes.

Nearly three quarters of businesses surveyed said they were actively concerned about the increase to employer's National Insurance contributions and increase in minimum wage, with 68% explaining that they expect to pass these increased cost rises on to their customers.

Nearly half of businesses (44%) answered 'yes' when asked whether they had concerns that their business would struggle to survive the next five years because of escalating costs.

Over 60% of respondents explained that they were investing in automation and technology instead of people. This was echoed by 57% saying they had shelved plans for recruitment and 28% having made plans for redundancies.

As a branded workwear provider who fosters relationships with businesses across multiple industries, Halesfield-based MyWorkwear said it was facing increased costs of around £100,000.

"We tend to be a pretty good barometer for economic sentiment and the findings of our report strongly echo the feedback we're hearing from customers in that businesses are struggling and concern is growing about the future of the UK economy," said co-managing director James Worthington.

"As well as increasing costs from employer National Insurance contributions and increased minimum wage, the report noted that inflation rates are playing a huge concern in business owners' worries as well as a lack of skilled labour.

"The inflation rates we are experiencing ourselves are causing us to look at new commercial activities and new pricing structures to try and find ways to absorb the price hikes that are in addition to our usual standard annual price increase."

Nearly three quarters of businesses surveyed said they were actively concerned about the increase to employer's National Insurance contributions...

# Partnership is a milestone

**Digital technology provider Shootill has acquired Essex-based IT support firm Dynacom as part of a plan to scale its integrated service offering across the UK.**

With over 20 years of experience, Dynacom supports businesses nationwide with IT support, cyber security and cloud solutions.

Shootill managing director Simon Jeavons first met Dynacom owner and managing director Simon Beckett in 2017 at a Microsoft Inspire conference in Washington DC and they remained in close contact ever since.

Over the years, they collaborated on joint projects, referred business to each other and developed a lasting professional respect – laying the groundwork for this move.

Simon Jeavons said: “We are on a mission to offer businesses a smarter, more joined-up way to manage their digital needs all in one place. Dynacom’s team shares our customer-first mindset and long-standing commitment to excellence.

“This partnership not only strengthens our Group, it also marks another key milestone in our national growth plans. We’re actively pursuing more opportunities like this in 2025 and beyond.”



*Pictured from left are Simon Beckett, Simon Jeavons and Rod Plummer*

Simon Beckett said: “This is a great move for our team and our customers. We’ve built Dynacom on long-term relationships and trusted service. Joining the Shootill Group gives us access to wider expertise and future-facing capabilities.

“It’s a big step forward, made easier by the strength of the partnership we’ve already built with Simon and the team.”

Rod Plummer, executive chairman of Shrewsbury-based Shootill, said: “This marks another proud moment in Shootill’s journey.

“The business has been built on steady progress and strong partnerships, and this move reflects our commitment in recent years to scale with purpose. Dynacom is a great fit for the Group, and we’re looking forward to what comes next.”

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**Shropshire Festivals has won the Tourism Event/ Festival of the Year prize at the 2025 West Midlands Tourism Awards for its flagship event – Shrewsbury Food Festival.**

It is the second year running that the Shropshire business, which is also behind events such as the county’s Oktoberfest and business festival, has scooped gold and pipped big city events to the post.

The awards night at Edgbaston stadium celebrated the best venues, experiences and events from across the West Midlands visitor economy. The ceremony was hosted by radio, TV and sports broadcaster Amber Sandhu.

Shropshire Festivals owner Beth Heath said: “We were completely shocked to hear our name announced – we didn’t expect to pick up the award two years running, especially being up against events in big cities! I’m so proud that a Shropshire family-run business has scooped gold, putting Shrewsbury firmly on the map as a great place to visit.

“Shrewsbury Food Festival has been growing in momentum since it was launched in 2013. We’re passionate about creating a day out for the whole family – whether you want to enjoy the bars, street food and live music, shop ‘til you drop, learn from top chefs, or soak up all the free activities and fun for kids. We’re dedicated to creating zero waste events, committed to championing local businesses and people.”

Shrewsbury Food Festival is an annual event in the town’s Quarry Park which champions local independent producers, chefs, performers, and businesses. It happens across two days – this year’s event is on June 28 and 29.

The event boasts around 200 food, drink, and homeware exhibitors, chef demonstrations, a chef school, a live music stage, a family entertainment stage, a field to fork area, VIP tent, corporate party tipis, and a whole area of free kids’ activities.

- Turn to page 30 for a picture special from one of Shropshire Festivals’ other big local events, the Shropshire Business Festival



*Sid and Beth Heath with Clare Wells from Shropshire Festivals collecting their gold award*



*Steve ‘the Hungry Guy’ rustling up a treat at last year’s event*



*The festival champions local independent producers and retailers*

# Council makes savings

**Shropshire Council expects to have made £47 million of savings in the financial year that has just ended.**

The council has published regular financial updates in recent months to provide transparency around its financial challenges.

The latest report says the council expects to have achieved 52% of the £90 million savings target it began the last financial year with, and has plans in place for the outstanding savings which require 'new or different ways of working' and time to implement.

The report stresses that the council's financial position remains extremely challenging with continuing pressures across many areas from rising demand and growing costs for services, particularly in social care, which accounts for around £4 in every £5 in the council's budget.

The figures show that, like many councils nationwide, Shropshire is also seeing continuing pressures in many areas of social care such as external residential placements, fostering, and growing numbers of children with special needs requiring home to school transport.

The council has approved a further £18 million programme of savings for 2025/26, with £7.7 million of these developed following public consultation.

Key areas include a review of waste services and improving park and ride services in Shrewsbury to increase income, while further savings will come from service reviews across the council.

James Walton, executive director for resources, said: "The report shows our position has improved slightly and the expected overspend by the year-end is reduced by almost £0.9 million and can be met from our General Fund Balance reserves, meaning we remain in budget.

"The £47 million savings that Shropshire Council has achieved this year – equivalent to around 18% of our day-to-day budget – is one of the highest figures proportionately of any council in the country. This comes after achieving £51 million of savings in the previous year.

"We must be clear to the people of Shropshire – the outlook remains extremely challenging, particularly as demand for social care continues to rise. More difficult decisions lie ahead."



The team from The Hundred House at Norton with the award

## Best events team crowned

A Shropshire weddings venue events team has been crowned the best in the country after picking up a national award at a gala event in London.

The Hundred House at Norton, near Bridgnorth, lifted the Best Events Team accolade at The Wedding Industry Awards – adding to the regional title it won before Christmas.

Award winners were revealed at a special ceremony held at The Underglobe in London.

# Gain first aid skills

**Telford College has launched a series of new short courses designed to provide staff with vital first aid skills needed in the workplace.**

Three-day programmes covering first aid at work or paediatric first aid are now available, alongside intensive one-day options with a focus on emergency workplace or paediatric first aid training.

The courses are based in the clinical skills centre at the college's Wellington campus, but are also available as a 'blended learning' programme with two days on site, and one day of modules delivered online.

For groups of 12 candidates or more, the college's clinical educators can also deliver the course at a company's premises.

The first aid at work course covers topics such as the role of a registered first aider, CPR, use of a defibrillator, assessing and managing an incident, and dealing with specific cases such as heart attack, stroke, diabetes, burns, bleeding, head and spinal injuries, and more.

The paediatric first aid programme, which is being offered free to Telford College early years apprentices, explains critical

skills needed to manage emergencies involving children and infants.

"These new courses have all been created in response to requests from employers and are delivered by our clinical educators," said Sue Williams, business programme manager for early years and education at Telford College.

"Regulations are changing from September this year, meaning early years apprentices and students on long term placements are required to have paediatric first aid training to be counted in ratios at the level below their study programme.

"If all staff from an early years setting complete paediatric first aid training, it can apply for Millies Mark – an accreditation only awarded to settings with 100% of staff who are Psychological First Aid (PFA) trained."

The first emergency first aid at work course starts on May 8, with the emergency paediatric first aid at work courses kicking off on May 29.

Sue added: "Everyone who successfully completes these courses will be equipped with the necessary qualifications to manage first aid emergencies in the workplace."

All of the courses are regulated by Ofqual – the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation.

# Restoration of gardens



The Friends of Telford Town Park were joined by volunteers from local companies as they dismantled and moved the Japanese garden in the Chelsea Gardens, and tackled restoration work to encourage reptiles back into the park. It involved moving trees, gravel, large stones and a lantern – as well as cutting back trees and plants in the reptile area. Regular volunteers have been joined by teams from Lyreco (pictured) and Fujitsu.

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# 25 glorious years

**The finalists have been revealed for this year's Shropshire Chamber Business Awards. And the question is, will there be a new name to add to the prestigious 'Company of the Year' roll of honour?**

Six businesses are in the running for the showpiece award this year, including two former champions.

Aico of Oswestry, which won the top prize in 2020, 2022 and 2023, and McPhillips from Telford which lifted the title in 2010 will be competing alongside Dulson Training, Jesmonite, Shropshire Festivals and Severn Hospice.

A special 'Champion of Champions' award to mark the milestone will be decided between former company of the year winners Aico, McPhillips, Salop Leisure and Pave Aways.

A record number of entries were received for this year's event – the 25th anniversary of the competition, and more than 30 independent judges spent a day at the Chamber's Telford offices shortlisting the categories.

The winners of 14 awards will be crowned at a Greatest Showman-themed gala awards night, at Telford's International Centre on Friday June 20.

This year's finalists come from all corners of the county, including Telford, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Ludlow, Clun, Broseley, Shifnal, Ruyton-XI-Towns, Bishop's Castle, Rodington, Buildwas, Alveley, and more.

The event has become established as the largest on the county business calendar, and



**The independent judges who shortlisted finalists**

this year's event is on target to be a sell-out. For ticket availability and more details, see [www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/awards](http://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/awards)

Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber, said: "We have once again been amazed and delighted by the volume and quality of entries. It has been really refreshing to see so many first-time entrants and finalists this year.

"Shortlisting each category was a really

tough task for our independent panel – we had a record number of entries, and the standard was incredibly high."

She added: "It is always a highlight of the calendar when we recognise the amazing businesses we're so fortunate to have in our county – but it will be even more special this year as we celebrate the event's 25th anniversary.

"Our role at Shropshire Chamber of



**Ricoh UK Products is up for two awards**



**McPhillips has been creating 'The Reserve' at Chester zoo – a unique safari-style experience featuring 51 luxury lodges, restaurant, and lounge**



**Dulson Training has pivoted since the Coronavirus pandemic to help train more HGV and fork lift truck drivers**

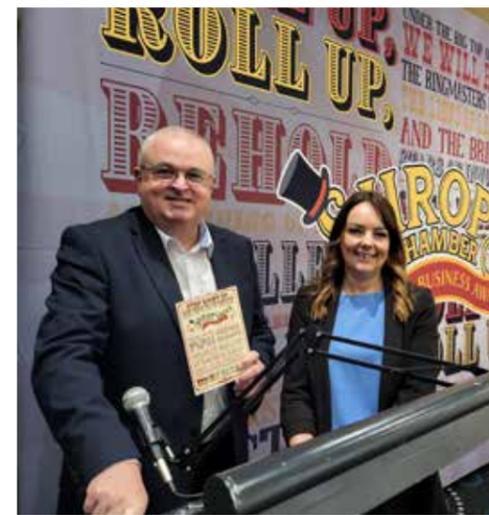
Commerce is to help businesses of all sizes to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and celebrate their success.

"The business awards is such an important part of this – championing the incredible businesses we have across all corners of our county. We are determined to lay on 'the greatest show' this year; an awards night that no-one will forget.

"Times are tough for many businesses



**Pave Aways, the 2019 company of the year, is shortlisted for Champion of Champions this time**



**MC Carl Jones and the Chamber's Kelly Riedel revealed the finalists at the Chamber's spring expo in Telford**

at the moment, and the awards are an opportunity to give them the recognition they so richly deserve."

Teams of judges have been visiting each of the finalists at their premises to make their final decision.

Another name will also be added to the roll of honour for the John Clayton Award this year. The award is given in honour of a former Shropshire Chamber president, to recognise



**Shropshire Festivals helped to create the 'Shrewsbury Moves' event which included a ferris wheel in The Square**

someone who has given an outstanding contribution to the local business community over a number of years.

Ruth said: "We take immense pride in showcasing businesses of all sizes on this year's shortlist.

"They shine as beacons of excellence in their respective fields and elevate the stature of Shropshire businesses on a regional, national and international stage." ▶

## Business Awards -

### COMPANY OF THE YEAR

- Aico, Oswestry
- Dulson Training, Rodington
- Jesmonite, Bishop's Castle
- McPhillips, Telford
- Severn Hospice
- Shropshire Festivals, Buildwas

### BEST NEW BUSINESS

- Frankly Farm Tours, Broseley
- Kindridge Bid Solutions, Telford
- LevelUp Escapes, Shrewsbury
- Southwater Veterinary Group, Telford

### BEST SMALL BUSINESS

- E4 Environment, Pentre
- Meg Hawkins Limited, Aston Botterell
- Preloved Tech, Telford
- Shropshire Festivals, Buildwas

### OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Aico, Oswestry
- Niche Patisserie, Oswestry
- Start-Tech, Shrewsbury
- Tanners Wines, Shrewsbury

### OUTSTANDING BUSINESS GROWTH

- Aviramp, Telford
- Komplex Community, Telford
- Shuker Building & Development, Bicton Heath
- Telecom Infrastructure Partners, Shrewsbury

### COMMUNITY CHAMPION - BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

- Aico, Oswestry
- Brightstar, Shifnal
- Cappgemini, Telford
- Good2Great, Bridgnorth

## The 2025 Finalists...

### EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING

- Aviramp, Telford
- Hospital Direct, Clun
- Independent Control Systems, Telford
- Ricoh UK Products, Telford

### RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY ACHIEVEMENT

- Riverside Cabins, Ruyton-XI-Towns
- Severn Hospice
- Shropshire Design, Shifnal
- The Hundred House, Norton

### THE TRAILBLAZER - INNOVATION AWARD

- Aviramp, Telford
- Seymour Manufacturing International, Telford
- Shropshire Festivals, Buildwas
- Telford College

### THE ECO AWARD

- Fabweld Steel Products, Telford
- Ricoh UK Products, Telford
- Shropshire Wildlife Trust, Shrewsbury
- Staysafe PPE, Alveley

### YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON

- Anthony Cannan – Buck & Bear Products, Ludlow
- Beth Griffiths – Monks, Shrewsbury
- Jordon Tipper – Start-Tech, Shrewsbury
- Kareem Zaman – Autocraft, Telford

### INSPIRATIONAL ADULT LEARNER

- Anna Redding
- Lama Khaled
- Keely-Hill Harding
- Kimberley Pearce

### CHAMPION OF CHAMPIONS

- Aico, Oswestry
- Salop Leisure, Shrewsbury
- McPhillips, Telford
- Pave Aways, Knockin





Aico hosting an Edmundson Electrical Ltd regional meeting in its Centre of Excellence



Start-Tech has been shortlisted in two categories



Members of the Jesmonite team at this year's World of Concrete show



Thumbs up for Aviramp, a three-time finalist this year



Salop Leisure is in the running for the Champion of Champions award



Severn Hospice's income generation team raised over £11 million in 2024-25 for patients and their families

## Take a walk down memory lane

To celebrate the 25th anniversary of the awards, Shropshire Business magazine has delved into the archives to create a souvenir 100-page magazine, packed with pictures across every single year of the competition. It also includes memories from some of the people who have played a pivotal role in the event over the years. The magazine is now circulating around the county - you can also download an e-copy from the Shropshire Business website.



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# One-stop shop seeking to create opportunities

**A new 'Skills for Growth Partnership' that is looking to transform skills provision for employers in Telford has been hailed a success after its official launch.**

More than 80 businesses and training providers attended the unveiling of a groundbreaking collaboration between Telford & Wrekin Council, Harper Adams University, Telford College, In-Comm Training & Business Services and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

The partnership has been established to provide a one-stop shop for employers seeking skills support and to create new opportunities for training and development for Telford & Wrekin employers.

Councillor Lee Carter, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council, who opened the event, said: "We're serious about providing the best opportunities for local people and making sure Telford and Wrekin remains the place in the Midlands to do business.

"This new Skills for Growth Partnership brings together our borough's leading skills providers under a single collaborative framework, making it much easier for employers to access the training and development they need.

"By working together, our partners are simplifying the skills landscape for businesses, which can often be complex and difficult to navigate. This joined-up approach will help employers find exactly the right support they need, regardless of who provides it."

The event at the flagship Quad development was hosted by Be Bold Media's Amy Bould, and featured two panel discussions including hearing from Caggemini, Lyreco, Wrekin Sheetmetal and McPhillips (Wellington) about the skills challenges they face.

Lawrence Wood, principal and chief executive of Telford College, was on the event panel with members of the partnership.

He said: "Telford College welcomes this opportunity to further develop our partnerships with education and training providers for the benefit of employers in Telford & Wrekin.



**Skills for Growth panel speakers: back row from left, Stuart Bishop (McPhillips Wellington), Ruth Ross (Shropshire Chamber of Commerce), Jo Long (Caggemini), Michael Milward (Lyreco), Dan Turner (Invest Telford), Lawrence Wood (Telford College). Front row from left, Alistair Dawes (Harper Adams University), Poppy Durnall (Wrekin Sheetmetal), Gareth Jones (In-Comm Training)**

By working together, our partners are simplifying the skills landscape for businesses, which can often be complex and difficult to navigate. This joined-up approach will help employers find exactly the right support they need...

"Only by working together can we make a real difference." Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, added: "This is such an exciting collaboration, with so much potential. It chimes perfectly with our mission here at the Chamber, where we strive to bring businesses together.

"We are always stronger when we are fighting on a united front in the best interests of our economy."

The event also featured an expo showcasing the range of skills initiatives and funding opportunities available to businesses across the borough.

● For more information about the Skills for Growth Partnership and how it can support your business, email [skillsforgrowth@telford.gov.uk](mailto:skillsforgrowth@telford.gov.uk)



Purple Frog recently ran a Dragons' Den challenge at Haberdashers' Adams School in Newport

## Unlocking potential: How work experience supercharges student skills



**Hollie Whittles**

**Work experience is a crucial component in the development of young professionals, and providing that employer engagement is something I am very passionate about. It provides students with the opportunity to apply their knowledge to the real world, gain practical work-ready skills, and understand the dynamics of the workplace.**

When Ofsted are going into schools, they are keen to understand progress with Gatsby Benchmark 4 which focuses on linking curriculum learning to careers. This benchmark emphasises the importance of making students aware of how their academic subjects relate to various career paths and employer encounters, so it is vital as businesses that we help to facilitate those encounters.

Employer support could be achieved in a variety of ways from popping in to give a talk, taking part in careers fairs or school activities that involve businesses, joining employer advisory boards, offering internships or work

### AI tools for students

- ChatGPT: helps generate ideas, answer questions, and provides explanations.
- Grammarly: grammar and spell-checker for grammar, punctuation, and style.
- Google Gemini: research tool for relevant information and conducting research.
- Microsoft Copilot Designer: art generation tool to create visual content for projects.
- Otter AI: transcription tool converting spoken words into text for lectures and meetings.

### The role of AI in enhancing work experience skills for students

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is revolutionising various aspects of our lives, including education and professional development – 48% of students, according to Turnitin, are already using AI-generated tools.

Businesses can use AI to create simulated work environments where students can practise and hone their skills. These simulations can mimic real world scenarios, providing students with a safe space to learn and make mistakes without real world consequences. This is particularly beneficial for students who may not have access to traditional internship opportunities due to geographical or financial constraints.

There are many AI-driven platforms that provide personalised learning experiences tailored to a student's needs and career goals. These platforms can recommend courses, projects, and resources that align with the student's interests and skill level.

AI can assess a student's skills and provide targeted recommendations for improvement. This can help students identify their strengths and weaknesses and focus on areas that need development. AI can also help students connect with professionals in their field and match them with suitable job opportunities.

Employer engagement isn't limited by the size of your business – there are many ways you can get involved. Connect with the Marches Careers Hub and find out where you can add your support: [www.marchescareershubs.co.uk](http://www.marchescareershubs.co.uk)

Providing work experience is invaluable for students as it equips them with essential skills, helps them explore career options, and builds their professional network.

AI can significantly enhance this experience by providing personalised learning, virtual internships, and continuous support, ensuring that students are well-prepared for the future workplace. If you want help with AI, talk to us!

**Hollie Whittles is a director of Purple Frog Systems in Telford**



# What on earth can farmers try next?

These are unsettling times for our farmers. Protests about the Government's new inheritance tax rules continue, and there are fears that Donald Trump's tariffs could seriously dent food sales. Some feel it is a case of diversify, or die. ADAM PRINGLE reports.

**Our farmers are not happy. The Government's plans to apply inheritance tax to agricultural assets worth over £1 million have provoked angry protests which have seen convoys of tractors take to the streets in both Telford and Shrewsbury.**

Farmers claim the policy will force many of them out of business, with future generations unable to afford to continue their family's legacies which in many cases have spanned multiple generations.

The Government, however, views its new 20% tax band as 'a fair and balanced approach, which fixes the public services we all rely on'. So they certainly agree to differ on that one.

Then there's Donald Trump. Outside the EU, America is the largest market for British agricultural products, making any trade barriers a major concern for food producers.

Americans have been buying more and more UK-made meats and cheeses in recent years, but the new tariffs – if they remain in place – could make them far less financially appealing.

And if the UK goes down the route of trying to resurrect a trade deal with the Americans, the US president says we need to start importing its chlorinated chicken.

"The UK maintains non-science-based



**Co-founder of Soil Nurture Luke Boxall**

standards that severely restrict US exports of safe, high quality beef and poultry products," the White House says.

On the flipside, a new survey suggests that UK consumers are now far more likely than ever to support a 'Buy British' campaign and more strongly support domestic food producers.

Either way, farmers are a resilient and adaptable bunch, and here in Shropshire there are plenty of examples of agricultural businesses which are already diversifying and exploring new income streams.

They include Luke Boxall, co-founder of Soil Nurture in Neenton, near Bridgnorth, who produces natural fertiliser known as vermicast.

The company, which Luke founded with a group of fellow worm farmers, sees worms break down organic material to create a sustainable alternative to chemical fertilisers.

"I have received so much support from Shropshire Growth Hub, everything from initial advice and guidance to set up the business, attendance at networking events, webinars and various workshops, as well as one-to-one business support, financial support and even vocal coaching," says Luke.

The business received financial support through Shropshire Council's ARG Economic Recovery Fund for composting equipment and benefited from a free business start-up course with Bridgnorth-based Good2Great.

Luke also accessed specialist support through UKSPF Sustaining Shropshire and UKSPF Business Boost 360 funding, which included voice training and podcast opportunities.

Emma Chapman, growth hub manager, helped introduce Luke to specialist organisations including Harper Adams University's Agri-EPI Centre and CREST (Centre for Research into Environmental Sciences and Technology).

The support has helped Soil Nurture develop a range of organic products, including bio-composts, bio worm tea, bio carbon soil, and bio worm extract.

The company has recently partnered with Mycolife to offer soil microbial analysis and launched an e-commerce platform.



**Luke Boxall of Soil Nurture meets with Emma Chapman from the Shropshire Growth Hub**

The company has recently partnered with Mycolife to offer soil microbial analysis and launched an e-commerce platform.

Emma says: "We are delighted to have been a part of Luke's journey over recent years and see the way his company has grown. We look forward to working with him again in the future and helping in his search for a strategic partner to develop the business still further."

Meanwhile, the four farmer founders of The Green Farm Collective – including one from Shropshire – have teamed up with Eurostar Commodities to develop a line of flours produced using regenerative farming practices.

The Green Farm Collective is a group of farmers who met via a competition called 'Soil Farmer of the Year'.

The group, including Michael Kavanagh who manages a farm at Boningale near Albrighton on the east Shropshire border, believes in regenerative agriculture and the benefits of reduced pesticides, increased carbon capture and improved biodiversity, water, air and soil.

Alongside co-founders Jake Freestone, Angus Gowthorpe and Tim Parton, he has launched RISE RE:GEN Flour which is designed to encourage the food industry to value sustainable farming both financially and

ethically. The quartet formed the regenerative farming community four years ago to support other growers in their regenerative practices, promising to create new and lucrative end markets for TGFC members.

"The Eurostar team has embraced the importance of the farming approach that our members practice centred around soil health, reduced environmental impact and improving farmland biodiversity," says Jake Freestone.

"They also recognise that the way we farm should be rewarded and we couldn't have asked for more. They have developed an exclusive partnership and a bespoke brand of TGFC flours which they sell to their influential customers for pizza, bread and other wheat-based foods, and also pay us a fair and reflective price for our crops. It really is a true and respectful partnership and one that demonstrates Eurostar's progressive leadership in the food supply chain."

Eurostar Commodities is a family-run importer and supplier of ingredients to manufacturers, wholesalers, foodservice, retailers, and consumers across the UK, Ireland, northern Europe, the Middle East, and Iceland. The launch of the RISE range fits a growing interest from their customers for environmentally conscious ingredients, it says.



**RISE RE:GEN Flour**



**The four founders of The Green Farm Collective: Michael Kavanagh, Tim Parton, Angus Gowthorpe and Jake Freestone**

## Legal issues were focus of seminar



**Pictured from left are Sophie Dwerryhouse of The CLA, Dan Matthews from Ceres Rural, and Alexandra Phillips of mfg**

Legal issues affecting Shropshire's farmers and landowners were covered at an agricultural seminar in Ludlow.

Rural specialists from law firm mfg Solicitors, and colleagues from the Country Land & Business Association (CLA) and Ceres Rural, hosted the free seminar which saw over 70 people attend at The Salwey Arms.

It included presentations on key issues affecting farmers and landowners, with a focus on strategies for succession planning and the legal implications of protecting rural businesses against a backdrop of extensive change in the sector.

Alexandra Phillips, partner and head of the agricultural and rural affairs division at mfg Solicitors, said: "Our farming seminar is always a hugely popular event in the local farming and rural business calendar here in Shropshire.

"This year gave farmers and landowners a chance to hear first-hand from experts about the big changes happening across the rural sector, how to deal with them, and how to stay one step ahead. It was a brilliant event."

“The market for regeneratively farmed flours is growing because consumer demand is growing, so it is a proud moment for our business to partner on such an important range,” said sales manager Diane Crabtree.

As yet, a standard for Regenerative Farming hasn't yet been created, however, TGFC has recognised the importance of ensuring verification of both the farmer and their practices.

Jake adds: “We have teamed up with Food Integrity Assurance, an audit body, to establish our own set of standards, including carbon and environmental baselining, diversity in crop rotations, farmland biodiversity policies, a nutrient management plan and minimal soil disturbance practices. We also have a partnership with Trinity Agtech's Sandy software to record and report on members' farming interventions to give full transparency to our farming methods.”

Beyond the standards and the new flour range, the founders say TGFC is having an important impact. Collectively, they say they are creating a credible, traceable and fully audited set of practices which gives confidence to partners like Eurostar as well as its all-important customer base.

## Showing support for county show



**Beckie Lenton and Nikki Edwards at The Rural Charity shop in Whitchurch Road**

Businesses in Shrewsbury have been invited to decorate their shop windows in celebration of the Shropshire County Show.

This year marks 150 years of the Shropshire and West Midlands Agricultural Society – the organisers of Shropshire County Show.

Show chairman Phil Thorneycroft said: “It's a milestone year for the society and we thought it would be fitting to host a Shropshire County Show Shop Window Competition, inviting the vibrant shops and businesses of Shrewsbury to participate to showcase their creativity and celebrate the legacy of farming and agriculture in Shropshire.”

Michael Kavanagh says his emphasis is building plant health and minimising synthetic inputs. He grows milling wheat, malting barley and quinoa, and has 500 ewes. The lambs are fed on a grass-based diet and are sold through a local farm shop. The farm sequesters a lot of carbon and his aim is to build as much soil life and organic matter as he can.

Meanwhile, historic woodlands around the east Shropshire border are set to be opened up to the public for the first time in hundreds of years this autumn as part of a major investment by Bradford Estates.

It is creating a woodland walk called ‘The Bradford Walk’, combining 10 miles of newly-created permissive paths with existing paths, enhancing connectivity and creating England's longest new permissive public path under the England Woodland Creation Offer scheme.

It is part of Bradford Estates' 100-Year Plan, championed by custodians Alexander and Eliza Newport, and integrates historic woodland with newly-planted areas. More than 195,000 UK-grown trees are being planted, enhancing wildlife habitats, connecting communities with nature, and significantly increasing woodland cover over the next decade.

Alexander Newport, managing director of Bradford Estates, said: “We want to open up our beautiful estates in a sensitive way and create connectivity for both native wildlife and the local community, as well as visitors to the area. In these times, when people are calling for more green space, access to nature has never been more important.

“As an organisation, we are also acutely aware of the climate emergency and believe this scheme will contribute towards the nation's Net Zero targets.”

The estates are home to historic woodlands that cover almost 10% of its 12,000 acres, and the new routes will create a new network that links pleasure grounds, carriageways, and local heritage assets such as Weston Park, Boscobel House and Tong village.

The planting will be entirely plastic-free. To achieve this, Bradford Estates is investing nearly double the usual costs to use eco-friendly tree guards made from cotton and pine resin.

The Tree Hugger Guard is designed to reduce the CO2 generated through manufacturing and transportation.

Eliza Newport, of Bradford Estates and



**Alexander Newport of Bradford Estates joins the woodland planting watched by son Archie**

trustee of The Tree Council, says: “During Covid, we walked the forests and lakes on the estates and were inspired to find a way to open up these beautiful natural spaces for the community to enjoy.

“We wanted to reverse the trend of declining tree planting, maintain the lush forests and restore woodland habitats for today and for future generations to enjoy. It has taken almost five years, but we are proud to see this vision come to life.”

Keith Jones, area director at the Forestry Commission, adds: “This project is an example of how landowners can play a key role in helping to achieve the national target for woodland cover in England, and the goal of reaching the Net Zero target.

“The expansion of timber-producing woodlands, alongside improvements in water quality, nature recovery, and river ecosystems, is incredibly positive. The addition of a footpath is also a real benefit to the local community, offering them easier access to the woodlands and surrounding countryside.”



**Giving back – the Bradford Estates woodland is a timber-producing environment and open for walks**

# An exciting new chapter beckons

**One of south Shropshire's best-known hotels is under new ownership, with the promise of an 'exciting new chapter' for the business.**

The Cliffe at Dinham, a three-star AA Silver Star hotel in Ludlow, has been acquired by The Nawab Hotels Ltd for an undisclosed sum.

The UK-registered company is owned by Your Travel Ltd, an Asian hospitality group. It is owned by Faiyaz Nawab, who has a notable presence in the fields of hospitality, sports, and entertainment

The hotel has been run for the past 15 years by Paul and Barbara Brooks as a family-run business, during which time it has undergone significant investment and enhancement.

A particular highlight of the establishment is its four AA Rosette-awarded restaurant.

In a statement, The Nawab Hotels Ltd expressed its commitment to preserving the hotel's legacy while implementing strategic enhancements to further elevate the guest experience.

Faiyaz A. Nawab, founder and director of The Nawab Hotels Ltd, said: “We are delighted to make our international hotel investment in the United Kingdom with The Cliffe at Dinham.



**The Cliffe at Dinham is a highly-regarded three-star AA Silver Star hotel in Ludlow**

“The hotel has garnered an exceptional reputation for its outstanding hospitality and award-winning restaurant. We look forward to continuing to build on this success.”

Peter Brunt, from Colliers' hotels team, who handled the transaction, said: “The Cliffe at Dinham attracted strong interest due to its unique character, solid trading history, and potential for growth.

“With the new owner's experience in travel and hospitality, the property is well-positioned for continued success. We are proud to have facilitated the sale.”



**The Cliffe hotel is under new ownership**



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# Trump's sunbed just got more expensive...

Anton Gunter



**Howzit. It's been a busy first quarter for international trade and the new US president (well, same old Trump) is still trying to bully his way around the world.**

His latest gift – trade tariffs for the world – is supposed to start making the US great again.

So how will these tariffs affect not only businesses in the US, but also the UK? And how will they impact normal people day-to-day who may be buying or selling items online?

“What are tariffs?” I hear you ask. Well, anything that is imported or exported will have a commodity code, set by the World Customs Organisation (WCO).

These do vary slightly from country to country and show importers and exporters how much duty they will need to pay, and if there are any preferential or trade deals in place.

Take a motor car, for example. There will be a commodity code for the car itself, but then you can break the vehicle down into all its parts and find commodity codes for every part of the vehicle – from tyres to seats, the engine to the lights. Each will have its own code, as will every item you may have on your desk in front of you.

A lot of noise was made during the Brexit referendum regarding trade deals, and the UK Government works hard to put trade deals in place where certain items have a percentage duty tariff which is reciprocated between the two agreeing countries.

Then we revert to Uncle Donald, a very rich man with a very bad tan, for an update on how his current bullying tactic is set to work. We all watched his theatrical display when announcing the new list of trade tariffs, and on the surface, it appears that his motive is absolutely correct as the US is in a trade deficit with a lot of countries.

But this isn't a move from the foreign governments; a lot of US trade is done because of cheap labour in places like Vietnam and China.



**One of the major concerns when looking at the effects of the TTT (Terrible Trump Tariffs) is the impact on not only the US stock exchange, but also ultimately the dollar**

This is why US companies like Nike and Apple make products in the far east.

So it will always look like there is a trade deficit. But on closer inspection this is self-created. We only have to look at places like Detroit to see the demise of car manufacturing in the US, and at the buying patterns of the US consumers to see that a lean towards foreign car imports is having an effect on US manufacturing.

But what do tariffs mean for the everyday person? Well suddenly courier companies like DHL have suspended services for delivery to private individuals with consignments over \$800. According to reports, days on from the implementation of the newly-adopted tariffs, private individuals were not accepting new duty rates and were declining consignments. Then manufacturers like Apple saw the prices of their products to the US market go up considerably.

In a strange way, Trump is trying to force manufacturing back to the US, but for me, this ship has sailed as it will take time to build factories and train workers. And it will definitely not be at the same overheads as before, meaning products will be more expensive for the general US population.

Likewise, we have seen retaliatory rates being imposed specifically by China – America's largest trading partner, but also the base of manufacturing for a number of US companies.

Trump is no stranger to using tariffs to get his own foot-stamping way. He levied tariffs on

Mexico and later Canada, to start getting them to take immigration more seriously. And where did that get him? He has subsequently put the higher tariffs on hold for a more basic 10% rate of duty to give countries time to negotiate trade deals. The USA only has a trade deal with 20 countries as it pushes its own agenda on those that agree.

One of the major concerns when looking at the effects of the TTT (Terrible Trump Tariffs) is the impact on not only the US stock exchange, but also ultimately the dollar. Sterling has continued to strengthen against the dollar, but we have all watched our pensions decrease in value as a lot of investments are in US company stocks which seem to be slumping.

Ultimately, here in the UK we should see US products becoming cheaper. Our Government continues to seek a trade deal with the US, but I am not sure chlorinated chicken is for me on the BBQ.

There is no doubt Trump is using tariffs to bully countries into doing more trade and buying more US-manufactured products, but at what cost? This will ultimately determine his presidency being a success or failure as he has promised to bring manufacturing back to the US and only time will tell if this actually happens.

But let's put this into an example Trump will understand – his sunbed is manufactured in the EU, and this means it's now become 25% more expensive. Will he use a US-manufactured one? Only time will tell.

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



*“Our commitment is to stay independently-owned: a community-based broker, where you deal with people you form a relationship with” – Nigel West*

## Personal touch is our policy

It's a growing family business where the customer experience is paramount. PAUL NAYLOR sat down with the managing director of a long-established Shropshire and Staffordshire-based insurance broker

**Fiveways Insurance Group has added hundreds of new clients to its database with its takeover of a local competitor.**

“We have recently purchased Ashley Insurance Services (AIS), based in Eccleshall,” said Nigel West, managing director at Fiveways.

“The company started out in Stafford alongside us – just around the corner. We've kind of grown up together – they've been in business 30 years or so, and we've always been aware of each other.”

In fact Fiveways – based in Newport and Stafford – isn't far off celebrating its 60th anniversary, having provided professional insurance advice since 1967.

What triggered this latest purchase?  
“The owner, Graham Ashley, retired from April 1 and we have now incorporated Ashley Insurance Services into Fiveways.

“When Graham was first looking to sell the business, he looked at various options, deciding to approach us. He wanted it to go to a local broker that he could trust who would retain the same level of cover and customer service they are familiar with.

“All the clients and data files have been transferred and all previous clients of AIS have received a letter from both businesses to inform them of the change and we then contact regarding renewals.”

So, what has the feedback been from these clients who previously used the services of AIS?

“Feedback to us and Graham has been excellent. Jo has joined us from AIS, providing continuity, and for us it has meant a significant increase in the number of clients to handle.



**Nigel West, managing director of Fiveways Insurance Group, at the Newport office**

“We have had a good response to the renewals we sent out prior to the switch on April 1, with every client renewing.”

What is the demographic for the business?  
“Probably 50 per cent of the clients are from Shropshire or Staffordshire, with the remainder dotted around the country. Graham did historically deal with classic vehicle insurance and cover for high end vehicles, which has insurers dealing with us nationwide.

“The benefit to the client is we have a wider reach than they would previously have experienced.”

It's been a busy time for Nigel and his team. In addition to the purchase of AIS, it isn't that long ago since Fiveways launched its scheme for woodland owners and their liability.

“Woodways launched in July 2024. It's a scheme that means all policies renew on the same day, with a mass renewal each July. If someone joins the scheme halfway through a year they pay proportionately, renewing on July 1 each year.”

Emma Whittall is heading up Woodways and that team has expanded with the addition of modern apprentice Raven O'Neill.

The business has grown significantly over the last three years, in which time Fiveways became a patron of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

“We've been members of the Chamber for a long time, but felt we hadn't made the most of our membership until around two years ago, when we became more involved in networking.

“Through this, we saw an opportunity to raise our profile in the business community, in line with the growth of Fiveways itself.

“Yet regardless of growth, our commitment is to stay independently-owned: a community-based broker, where you deal with people you form a relationship with, rather than a faceless call centre.”

● Fiveways Insurance Group has offices in Newport and Stafford. Contact 01952 812 380 for Newport and 01785 251 790 for Stafford. Visit [www.fivewaysinsurance.co.uk/](http://www.fivewaysinsurance.co.uk/) for more details.

# Fashionably kitted out



CARL JONES meets a Shrewsbury Town footballer's wife who has launched a new business upcycling shirts into puffer vests and jackets

**When Taylor Swift began turning up to her boyfriend's American football matches in made-to-measure NFL-themed garments, it was the talk of the fashion world.**

Recycling, upcycling and reimagining sporting garments celebrating your favourite team colours quickly grew into a game-day revolution. At the heart of it was the fashion designer wife of San Francisco 49ers full-back Travis Kelce, Kristin Juszczyk, who was the brains behind the creations.

But she's not the only one. The wife of Shrewsbury Town midfielder Funso Ojo is now making similar waves on this side of the Atlantic by giving the colours of the country's top football clubs a new eco-friendly lease of life.

What started as a hobby – adapting a club shirt into a puffer vest as a way of keeping warm while watching her husband play – has grown into a business which is now scoring customers all over the UK and further afield.

Belgian-born Julie Herman has a background in fashion design, having graduated from the British Academy of Fashion Design with a postgraduate degree last year.

"Last season I saw the wife of that NFL player wearing various different garments made from his shirts, and I thought to myself – why not try it with some football shirts over here?"

"With my degree in fashion I knew very well how to sew and how to make a pattern, so I tried to make one, and it came out amazingly.

"I love sewing, and love football too – going to support my husband at his games. This was a nice way to support him that little bit more.

"I was going to save that first one to wear at the final game of last season, but I was so proud of it that I wore it in March, and lots of people commented on how nice they thought it looked. They wanted to know where I got it.

"When I told them that I'd made it myself, I was asked if I could make a few for other players' wives, and in the summer, we decided to start it up as a business to make stuff for friends, family – and fans too."

Rose Ojo is an eco-conscious fashion brand which upcycles shirts into puffer vests for £180, or turns them into bomber jackets for £280. Each jacket takes Julie around two days to create.

Initially she practised by using old shirts from her husband's career which were lying around the house. He has played for a range of clubs during a 17-year career, including PSV Eindhoven, Antwerp, Aberdeen and Wigan, as well as representing Belgium at a variety of age levels.

Funso has been on loan at Shrewsbury Town FC this season from his parent club, Port Vale, and is totally supportive of his wife's venture.

Belgian-born Julie Herman has a background in fashion design



Julie at work on a Chelsea puffer vest



A very personal puffer jacket

He's even had a crack at making a jacket himself – although he admits that his version took him 'a little bit over two weeks'. He says: "I wanted to have a go at making one, so I could appreciate the time, effort and incredible skill that goes into it.

"Now that we've been in the news more often, and been pushing the brand on social media, my team-mates are starting to see what it is all about, and are back and forth with plenty of great banter about it. All good."

Julie doesn't source the shirts, but instead relies on customers to send them to her. "It could be a new one from a club shop, or an old one. I've had shirts from the 1980s and 1990s, and I love that – I'm very passionate about the environment so I'd always prefer to use a vintage shirt that someone has already bought.

"If it's a new shirt, I always ask to have one a few sizes bigger, but if it's a vintage shirt I can add my own fabric to make side panels."

As a footballer's wife, moving around comes with the territory, so a home-based business which Julie can pack up and take with her provides the flexibility she requires.

She has just invested in a new industrial-standard sewing machine which she hopes will speed up the process.

"We're a good team, and it's nice to be able to connect over football with this business.

"These shirts have a lot of sentimental value to many customers, so there's lots of pressure and responsibility. They have to be perfect. There can't be any mistakes.

"I want it to be something that the customers can wear for years. That is really important to me."

She also envisages Rose Ojo having a life well beyond her husband's footballing career, with plans to move back to their native Belgium, as well as widening the range of items they produce.

She added: "I am looking to expand into more items, not only puffer vests but also accessories or bags.

"We're getting orders from all around England now. I've made puffer vests for more than 20 different football clubs, which is fantastic – and we've also had orders from Scotland too, and a couple from America.

"Shipping is a bit harder when it comes to sending them overseas to America or Europe, so most of the potential business is going to be in the UK.

"My ambition is to make a garment for every single professional football club in England. That would be great. It's so nice to see fans at the games wearing the puffer vests."

For the future, Julie wants to keep growing – but in a controlled way. She's not looking to employ an army of machinists any time soon, but is open to partnering up with maybe another like-minded designer to help boost production.

"I want this to always remain a hand-made business, so I don't want to turn this into a factory. Customers are sending something to us which is very special to them, and I want to make sure they are looked after, and not rush the orders.

"Our core item is the puffer vest, and we've also done puffer jackets, but I want to expand to other products so we can have a wide range to choose from.

"There are a few companies in the UK making things like bucket hats and bags which are very nice, but I've not seen anyone here doing exactly what we are doing. I could be wrong.

"There is a lot of potential, I believe, but I don't want to rush things. I want to take my time and gradually build up brand awareness."

Funso adds: "Our short-term goal now is to get as many fans around the grounds wearing memorable shirts which have been turned into a puffer.

"And next year we've got the World Cup in the States. It would be so cool to see some families and kids in a stadium wearing them.

"It would be nice to think that, in two or three years' time, we have possibly become well enough known where we can get a partnership deal with the English Football League, or the FA, to get more closely involved with the clubs.

"I still feel like I have many more years in me as a footballer, but at the same time I want to be ready for what comes next, and am enjoying helping Julie behind the scenes."

But above all, whatever the future holds, the duo are in no doubt about the most important ambition of all for the business... to continue having fun.



Julie with her husband Funso Ojo



Julie has adapted shirts from some of her husband's former clubs



Rose Ojo has been featured in Four Four Two magazine

# Perfect collaboration with Chinese

**A conveyor specialist which is relocating its production base to Shropshire later this year has become the sole UK and Ireland agent for an innovative Chinese manufacturer of steel belts and machinery.**

Continuous Process Solutions has signed a deal with Shanghai Mingke Process Systems Ltd to supply their steel belts and machinery for the food, chemical, wood-based panel, rubber, film casting, conveyor belts, ceramics, papermaking and automotive testing industries.

The company is currently based in Dudley, but is set to move to new premises in Jackfield in the next few months.

Managing director Jarrod Hunt said: "We were already well-known in the continuous process industry for our decades of expertise, supplying our own tailored products and services, including tracking and cleaning systems, ancillary products and technical services."

"However, this collaboration with Mingke now allows us to offer their top quality steel belts and machinery, enabling us to offer a full bespoke end-to-end service - from design



Managing director of Continuous Process Solutions Jarrod Hunt (right) with sales and service specialist James Robinson

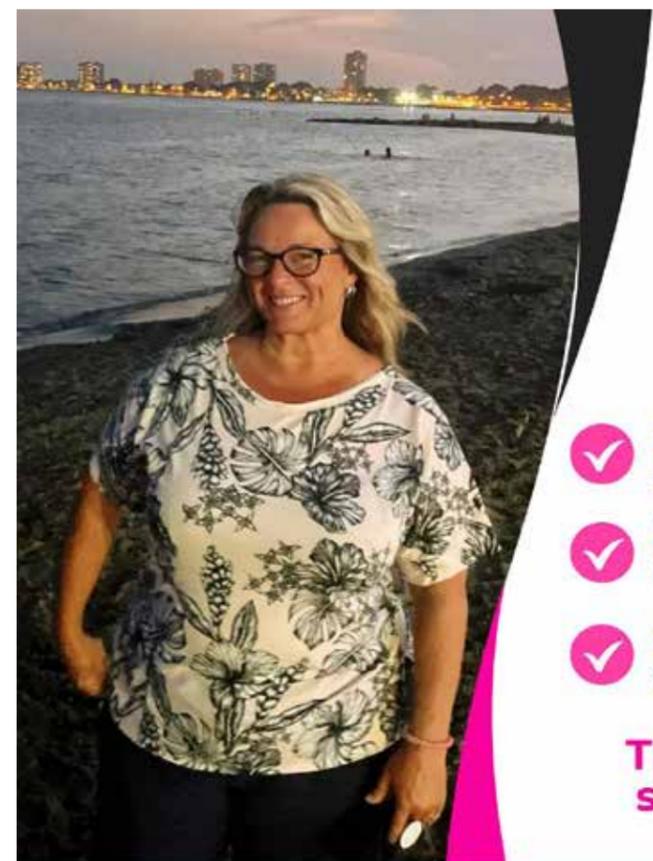
and consultation, to installation and project management, to maintenance and servicing.

"Higher import costs due to Brexit, as well as Mingke's economies of scale and more advanced processing knowhow, means that while their products already rival those of the European manufacturers for quality, they can offer significant savings for our customers."

Florence Gu, foreign trade specialist at Mingke, said: "We are very proud to have Continuous Process Solutions on board as our first-ever UK and Ireland agents. We approached them due to their breadth of

expertise with the continuous process industry, as well as their in-depth knowledge of FMCG and other manufacturing markets in the UK and Ireland.

"They were the perfect choice to work with as we look to expand our global reach; our sales and service centres are already located in more than 10 countries and regions around the world, including Australia, China, Poland, Turkey, Russia and Brazil and now, working in collaboration with Continuous Process Solutions, we can bring our innovative products to the UK and Ireland."



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# An outstanding Ofsted grade for Shrewsbury Colleges Group



The Welsh Bridge campus



The English Bridge campus

**Shrewsbury Colleges Group has been awarded an outstanding grade by inspectorate Ofsted.**

Principal and chief executive James Staniforth said: "We are absolutely delighted by this result, which is testament to the quality, dedication and experience of our staff, the hard work and positive attitude of our students and the support of our many partners."

The Ofsted report is published following an inspection that took place between March 4 and 7, 2025.

As well as receiving an outstanding grade overall, the college was judged to be outstanding in all but one of the areas inspected. The college also was rated as making a 'strong' contribution to local, regional and national skills, the highest grade for this judgement.

The report praises the college for its 'calm, purposeful and positive learning environment' where 'teachers and staff drive and inspire students to achieve the highest possible grades'.



James Staniforth



Shrewsbury Colleges Group's London Road campus

contribution to local, regional and national skills needs as this is testimony to the excellence of our work with our valued partners, including our work with partner schools, employers, Shropshire Council and the Marches LSIP."

Chair of governors Joycelin Hoyland said: "This outstanding grade and glowing report are evidence of the strength of leadership at Shrewsbury Colleges Group, and to the expertise and commitment of our academic, vocational and professional services staff.

"Our ambition is now to ensure that we can grow at sufficient pace so that all students who want to study with us are able to do so."

Shrewsbury Colleges Group was formed following the merger of Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Shrewsbury College in August 2016.

The college is the largest sixth form college in the country. It provides post-16 education to approximately 4,200 16 to 18-year-old students, as well as offering adult education, higher education, community learning, and training for apprentices. In total, the college works with around 9,000 students each year.

The college was graded as 'Outstanding' for Overall Effectiveness, with 'Outstanding' grades for Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, Leadership and Management, Education Programmes for Young People, Adult Learning Programmes, and Provision for Learners with High Needs, and rated Good for Apprenticeships.

The college was previously inspected in November 2021 when Ofsted awarded the college a 'Good' rating with an 'Outstanding' rating for Behaviour and Attitudes.

Other comments from the inspection report include:

- "A culture of high standards in teaching and high aspirations for student outcomes."
- "Students are taught by highly skilled industry experts and experienced qualified academic staff."
- "Students behave impeccably well and are enthusiastic about their learning."
- "Highly effective, individualised support for students with high needs."
- "Students develop into responsible and active citizens because of the wide and rich experience provided alongside their studies."
- "Excellent relationships with a wide range of employers."
- "Students benefit from a comprehensive tutorial programme that readies them for adult life and for moving on to higher studies and employment."
- "Staff are empowered and encouraged by supportive managers to improve their work continually through rigorous collaborative quality processes."

"We are particularly pleased that the report recognises the quality of education at the college - including our A-level, vocational, and high needs provision," said James Staniforth.

"I am also delighted with the judgement that we make a 'strong'



The Clickingmad team get stuck into their first project at Crowmill Craft Centre in Alveley



Shaun Carvill shows Stuart Anderson around the Clickingmad offices where he met Daniel Sweeney

# 25 'acts of kindness' for silver anniversary

**A Shropshire digital agency is celebrating its silver anniversary by pledging to deliver 25 'acts of kindness' in the community.**

Clickingmad, based in Bridgnorth, specialises in website design, development and digital marketing.

To mark its 25th anniversary, the company has launched its '25 in 25 Acts of Kindness' campaign which will see it donate £75,000 worth of digital services and other support for charitable and community-focused projects across the region.

Managing director Shaun Carvill said: "Reaching 25 years in business is a major milestone for Clickingmad, and we wanted to mark the occasion by contributing in a meaningful way.

"Many charities and community interest organisations struggle with outdated digital platforms, so we are offering £75,000 of our services to help them modernise their online presence."

The campaign began with the team planting trees at Crowmill Craft Centre in Alveley, a working craft and care farm supporting people with learning difficulties and additional needs.

Among the other local causes already selected for support are Little Stars in Oswestry which supports vulnerable families and children and Headway in Shrewsbury which provides help for people with brain injuries.

South Shropshire MP Stuart Anderson visited the Clickingmad headquarters in Bridgnorth to officially launch the campaign in his constituency, and learn more about their plans. He said: "It was fantastic to see a local business celebrating its success by giving back.

"The 25 in 25 Acts of Kindness initiative is a brilliant example of corporate social responsibility in action, and the £75,000 worth of digital services being made available will make a tangible difference to organisations in South Shropshire."

Shaun said: "We are grateful to Stuart for joining us to launch this initiative and for helping raise awareness of how businesses can positively impact their communities."

The 25 in 25 Acts of Kindness initiative includes 25 separate charitable actions throughout the year, ranging from website design and development support, to fundraising efforts and volunteering projects.

Shaun said: "We are keen to hear from charities and community groups in South Shropshire who feel they could benefit from professional digital services and from the support of our experienced team."

● To find out more or apply for support as part of the initiative email [shaun@clickingmad.com](mailto:shaun@clickingmad.com)



And we're off... Stuart Anderson (left) with Clickingmad managing director Shaun Carvill and members of the team in Bridgnorth



Action! Wild Edric media from Ludlow gave guests the chance to be TV stars for the day



Dr Pretty Basra delivering one of the seminars



Clare Wells takes her dinosaur for a walk



Ian Groves of Start-Tech which sponsored the seminar stage

# Festival brings county businesses together

## The biggest yet, and the best yet... that was the verdict on this year's Shropshire Business Festival.

After two years at Wrekin College, the event was moved to Telford International Centre for the first time.

More than 800 people attended the event, organised by 'team pink' from Shropshire Festivals – who say they are already looking forward to doing it all again next year.

Exhibitors pulled out all the stops to lay on a host of interactive activities including giant snakes and ladders, remote control driving challenge, hoopla, welly wanging, and much more.

The Start Tech seminar stage included presentations from Tracy Sherratt of the British Business Bank, Dr Pretty Basra of the Women Money Business podcast, James Gough and Dougie Nicoll from Clear, Alan Adams of Horizon Consultants, Liza Freudmann and Johnny Themans on social value and sustainability, and Start Tech boss Ian Groves, who spoke about cyber security.

Shrewsbury-based digital agency Clear also ran its own series of workshops, on topics such as digital marketing and Shopify POS for pop-up shops and events.

The day was rounded off with a VIP Pudding Club for a mouthwatering final networking opportunity.

"The whole ethos of Shropshire Business Festival was about creating fun moments to make networking effortless," the organisers said.

"This is business networking with a difference – the chance to throw inflatable axes, take part in Brightstar's rowing competition, drive remote-controlled cars with Chrisbeon, stroke an alpaca, drive a lorry, and play games for a chance to win tickets."



Guests gather to watch the Good2Great start-up awards



Luke Crump created a visual interpretation of the festival



Alan Adams



Kim Gilmour chats to Caroline Hamps



HR experts Alasdair Hobbs and Ishbel Lapper



Dudley Building Society promotes its Bridgnorth branch



Team pink – the Shropshire Festivals staff who organised and ran the event



The Chrisbeon team - Owen, Tom and Craig



Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones introduced the speakers



Guests in the seminar area



Liza Freudmann takes to the stage



The team from Nuffield Health



Mark Harris and Mandy Thorn share a laugh



Helen Cumb from Turas invited visitors to guess the number of sweets in the jar



This light game was a test of reflexes



Sherridan Grady from Clear



Joe Lockley and Tarrah Lewis of Shifnal-based Brightstar



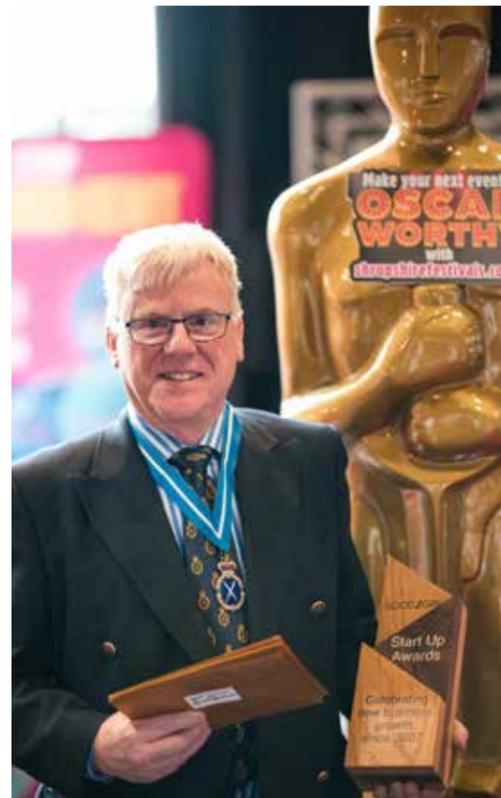
Ray Hickinbottom from the Federation of Small Businesses



Kerry Bainbridge from Shropshire Chamber of Commerce



Kaye Heseltine takes a bath



High Sheriff Brian Welti



Daniel West from Fiveways in Newport



Holleigh McClay from the marketing team at Lanyon Bowdler



The team from short let specialists Pass The Keys

● Shropshire's visitors will have even more inspiration for exploring the county in 2025, as the latest edition of the Welcome to Shropshire Packs is officially launched. Now in its fourth year, the initiative continues to grow, with this year boasting the highest number of participating businesses to date. A total of 20,000 packs are being produced for distribution across the county.

● **Entrepreneur Rob Oliver has launched Countrywide Shropshire, creating jobs for six local staff in the Shropshire area. He brings over 30 years of hands-on experience in agriculture, transport, and grounds care. From managing a 300-acre farm to operating a fleet of biosolid delivery lorries, his career has been rooted in land and logistics. For the past seven years, Rob has specialised in grounds maintenance, including national infrastructure contracts, before deciding to build something of his own.**

● A Telford-based author has released his latest children's book, continuing a collaboration with a county-born publisher. Sam Spiralli the Seriously Nutty Squirrel is the ninth children's book released by Roy Bradshaw from Madeley. With teaching experience in the secondary and primary sector and a former engineering career, Roy decided it was time to write an amusing story to complement the action-based and problem solving adventures throughout his other eight books. Roy has published his last six books with the help of Paul Naylor from Media & You.



The new 'Welcome to Shropshire' packs



Roy Bradshaw with his latest book

● **Two local charities will benefit from a quiz night hosted by a Shropshire law firm in Shrewsbury on May 22. The latest in a long series of charity quizzes organised by Lanyon Bowdler will take place at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery. It costs £10 per person to enter and the evening will include live music, a raffle and a bar. Money raised will aid the charities We Are Farming Minds and Belmont Hall in Wellington. Amanda Jones of Lanyon Bowdler said: "We love hosting our quizzes – they are always popular and provide the opportunity to raise some money for good causes." For information and to book, email vicki.thomas@lblaw.co.uk**

● Shropshire entrepreneur Matthew James has created a new premium tea company. House of Kolze, based in Shrewsbury, has launched with a limited first edition English Breakfast Ceylon Tea, as well as a promise to change how we think about our daily brew. The launch product has been sourced exclusively from the prestigious Dimbula growing region of Sri Lanka, which is renowned for the quality of its tea. "Tea has a somewhat outdated image and reputation," said Matthew. "Over the past 20 years coffee has become an artisan product and craft drink served in cool coffee shops, while tea has largely remained a poor relation. We're bringing this beloved beverage firmly into the 21st century, with a promise of a craft tea that sits alongside people's lifestyles."

● **Telford label printing specialist Labfax has taken its operations to the next level with the installation of a state-of-the-art machine that will allow it to print full colour labels digitally for the first time. It represents a massive investment for the Hortonwood business. The Konica Minolta AccurioLabel 230 Digital Label Press machine costs £180,000.**

● Telford & Wrekin Council has launched a new wave of grants to support High Street businesses through its Pride in Our High Street programme, which is offering businesses a series of separate grants with a total funding value of £1.2 million. They include start-up grants of up to £10,000 to help businesses set up on the High Street in empty retail units, and start-up trial grants of up to £2,500 to help businesses test the waters on the High Street first, often as pop-up shops or a market stall.



Matthew James of House of Kolze



Small Talk Nurseries in Dawley is one of the businesses already supported by the Pride in Our High Street programme

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# ‘Meeting of Minds’ to discuss town centres

## It is not all ‘doom and gloom’ on the High Street, a Shropshire event has heard.

The seminar, hosted by Bridgnorth-based consultancy Good2Great which specialises in helping businesses to grow and High Streets to thrive, discussed how empty buildings in town centres can be revitalised.

The High Street ‘Meeting of Minds’ event attracted an audience from across the Midlands to the Festival Centre in Market Drayton.

Sally Themans of Good2Great told delegates that action was being taken to bring more life to town centres.

“It is not all doom and gloom – there are positive signs emerging, with new initiatives underway,” she said.

One of the key speakers was Vicki Bidwell, the government’s lead on one of the new High Street Policies, who shared an update on new measures to tackle long-term vacant properties, including the introduction of High Street Rental Auctions and a proposed Community Right to Buy scheme.

She explained that the auction initiative would allow local councils to put commercial properties in designated areas up for rent if they had



Pictured from left at the seminar, Vicki Bidwell, Ian Nicholson, Charlotte Hollins and Sally Themans

been empty for 12 months.

“Landlords who are doing nothing to find a tenant will find this is not an option any more – this scheme is a deterrent and will hopefully spur landlords into action,” she explained.

Fellow speaker was Iain Nicholson, founder of the Vacant Shops Academy, who stressed that collaboration was the way forward.

He said: “The formation of ‘place partnerships’ is vital. These bring together landlords, businesses, councils, cultural organisations and many other bodies and we would urge all towns who want to see a more positive future to create one.”

Charlotte Hollins, community business leader at Fordhall Organic Farm - England’s

first community-owned farm – also spoke to the seminar about how assets could be saved by the power of people coming together to take action on these disused buildings.

The seminar was the latest in a series of events to be hosted by Sally Themans, an experienced ‘High Street champion’ who has worked with towns and individual retailers across the Midlands, advising on uniting communities, businesses and authorities to drive change and create healthy local economies.

# Expansion plans for long-established dairy

Dairy giant Müller has given a huge vote of confidence to Shropshire by announcing plans for a big expansion of its site in Market Drayton.

Shropshire Council has granted planning permission to the company for an investment which is expected to create new jobs.

Matt Potts, Shropshire Council’s service manager for economy, funding and skills, said: “This considerable investment is a tremendous show of confidence in what Shropshire has to offer major companies.”

Müller has been a part of Shropshire for over 30 years, with sites at Market Drayton, Minsterley, and Telford.

Stuart Ellison, head of engineering operations, said: “We are dedicated to supporting the local Shropshire community. We are excited about this site development and look forward to sharing more details in due course.”



The Müller site in Market Drayton is scheduled to be expanded considerably

# Anti-money laundering

## A crucial safeguard for the commercial property industry

James Evans, head of commercial property at Halls Commercial, and the company’s commercial property negotiator Kylie Jones explore the growing importance of Anti-Money Laundering legislation, its impact on commercial property professionals, and how businesses can stay compliant.

### The commercial property market is key to economic growth and business operations across the UK, but it also attracts criminals seeking to launder illicit funds, making Anti-Money Laundering (AML) measures essential to maintain transaction integrity.

As the industry evolves, complying with AML regulations is not only a legal requirement but a safeguard against financial crime. Today we step through AML’s importance in commercial property, with guidance on how businesses can protect themselves and their clients.

#### So, what exactly is AML?

AML refers to a set of laws, regulations, and procedures aimed at preventing criminals from disguising illegally-obtained funds as legitimate income. In the UK, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) and HMRC oversee stringent regulations that businesses must adhere to in order to detect and prevent money laundering. These measures are particularly crucial in the property sector, where high value transactions are commonplace, making it an attractive target for those seeking to launder money.

While estate agency businesses don’t directly handle the funds involved in property transactions, they are integral to the process. Estate agents act as intermediaries between buyers and sellers, and they come into contact with both parties early in the process. This positions agents to identify suspicious activity before transactions proceed further, helping to ensure that illicit funds do not enter the market.

#### Key AML requirements for estate agencies

Estate agents must comply with several minimum requirements. These include:

- Customer due diligence (CDD): Estate agencies must conduct due diligence on all clients and relevant parties before entering a business relationship. This ensures they understand the identity of everyone involved and can assess the risks associated with the transaction.
- Verifying beneficial ownership: Agencies must verify the identity of beneficial owners – those who ultimately own or control the property



Anti-money laundering (AML) refers to a set of laws, regulations, and procedures aimed at preventing criminals from disguising illegally-obtained funds as legitimate income

being transacted. This includes understanding the ownership and control structure, especially in cases involving trusts, companies or other legal entities.

- Identifying anyone who cannot produce standard documents: It is essential to have procedures in place for anyone who may be unable to provide the usual documents, such as those unable to manage their own affairs due to mental incapacity.
- Enhanced due diligence for higher risk cases: When dealing with high risk clients, including Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs), agencies must apply enhanced due diligence. This involves additional scrutiny and obtaining more detailed information about the source of wealth and funds.
- Ongoing monitoring: Once a business relationship is established, agencies must continuously monitor their clients for any changes in circumstances that could affect their risk level.
- Reporting suspicious activity: If an agency is unable to complete proper due diligence or detects suspicious behaviour, it must report this to the authorities.

- Record-keeping: Proper documentation and records of due diligence must be maintained and updated as required.

#### Consequences of non-compliance

Failure to comply with Anti-Money Laundering (AML) regulations can lead to severe penalties, including substantial fines and reputational harm.

For example, in October 2022, HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) fined 68 estate agents a total of £519,645 for not adhering to AML requirements. And between April and September 2023, HMRC fined 254 estate agency businesses over £1.6 million for failing to register or re-register for AML supervision, with fines ranging from £1,500 to over £50,000.

These incidents underscore the risks associated with non-compliance and highlight the need to adhere to stringent AML standards in all transactions

#### Protecting your transactions

At Halls Commercial, we understand the importance of maintaining a secure and compliant environment for every commercial property transaction. We ensure that all transactions meet the necessary legal requirements, and we take the necessary steps to identify and mitigate potential risks.

Halls Commercial Property is based in Battlefield, Shrewsbury

# Latest work takes hub into another orbit

The next stage of works to transform Wellington Orbit into a thriving cinema, arts and community hub is getting under way.

The rest of the building at 1 Station Road will be converted into multi-functional spaces, offering a range of flexible, hireable areas including a purpose-built studio space for dance and drama groups, meeting rooms, and more café space.

Shropshire-based contractor Pave Aways Ltd will deliver the project and Telford & Wrekin Council's Building Innovation Telford team will project manage the delivery.

This project builds on a decade-long journey for Wellington Orbit that began in 2012, culminating in the opening of phase one of the project – a 63-seat ground floor cinema and cafe in 2019.

Since then, Wellington Orbit has grown steadily, driven by the dedication of over 1,000 members, numerous grantors, partners, and the invaluable support of staff and volunteers.



Wellington Orbit volunteers Danny Collier and Beth Lewis, Councillor Angela McClements, chairman of Wellington Orbit John McGregor, and Pave Aways director Steven Owen, on the upper floor which is set to be transformed

# Flower show cancelled due to financial losses

**Shropshire Horticultural Society has cancelled this year's Shrewsbury Flower Show, saying the event's financial losses were 'no longer sustainable'.**

The news will come as a blow to tourism and hospitality businesses in the area which receive significant spin-off benefits from the famous show's weekend.

The Society said: "We have struggled to put on a show that was financially viable for several years. Over the past few years strenuous efforts have been made to reduce costs and boost attendance.

"Regrettably, the loss incurred by the Society in staging the 2024 show was significantly greater than we had anticipated – by way of example, we spent over £150,000 on security and barriers.

"Recent changes to National Insurance and the minimum wage, combined with the cost of living crisis, mean that further extensive losses would be incurred should we proceed with the 2025 show. Such losses are simply no longer sustainable.

"We have therefore decided to take time to consider how best to take the Society forward to enable it to carry on providing benefits to as wide a spread of people as possible.

"This necessarily involves looking very carefully at the long-term viability of the Shrewsbury Flower Show. The Society is, sadly, far from alone facing these challenges. All options will be considered over the coming months and we anticipate making a further announcement later in the year."

The Society's statement added: "As the Society still has substantial resources it will continue to fulfil its role as a charity funding horticultural and local causes.

"In the past, the Society has made many



Shrewsbury Flower Show has been a mainstay on the horticultural calendar for decades

donations to the town including donating the Castle and Porthill Bridge to the town and, more recently, making a significant contribution towards the refurbishment of The Quarry.

"The Society is currently lead sponsor of the Young Horticulturist of the Year competition staged by the Chartered Institute of Horticulture and also sponsors a student through the Royal Horticultural Society. This is in addition to supporting various local causes."

Beth Heath of Shropshire Festivals, which runs several other high profile events in the county including the upcoming Shrewsbury Food Festival in the Quarry, said she was 'totally gutted' to hear the news.

"Events have become harder to make sustainable post Covid. An increase in regulations, changes in law, the cost-of-living crisis and recent rises in employment costs means that several events are just not viable anymore.

"The Shrewsbury Flower Show has been iconic for decades and to see it go will have a huge knock-on effect for tourism, hotels, eateries and the region as a whole. Use this as a reminder to please buy tickets or support your local events and festivals.

"They make memories for thousands of people and without support, they simply won't be here in the future."

# State-of-the-art future for site

**Bruderer – the world's leading manufacturer of precision high-speed presses – has reinforced its commitment to the future of domestic manufacturing by investing heavily in a state-of-the-art site in Telford.**

The company has moved its entire operation from its base in Luton to the 10,000 square metre facility on Hortonwood.

For the first time in its 57-year history, the firm will have a purpose-built location to give customers a first-hand insight into its latest technology, ancillary equipment (including servo feeders and decoilers) and multi-progression press tool-proving systems.

The move has also seen Bruderer UK increase its direct workforce to 14 as it looks to drive innovation in the production of pressed parts and components for the critical automotive, aerospace, construction, electronics, EV, food, medical and renewables sectors.

Managing director Adrian Haller said: "This isn't just an investment in our business, it's an investment in UK manufacturing. We want to show companies that we are here for the long haul, and we are serious about supporting our wide array of UK clients for another five decades.

"Being able to build a factory from scratch is a fantastic opportunity. We've brought together the best engineering minds and the latest technology to create what we believe is a true centre of excellence for presses and associated products.

"A massive 25 tonne crane dominates the workshop area and allows us to easily move around the presses we are refurbishing, while the showroom has been designed to showcase up to two turnkey lines, including servo feeders and decoilers. We can even prove out tools on the machines to show customers exactly what we can do."



Bruderer, based at Hortonwood, will incorporate the Luton division

He used completion of his new factory to call on the Government to reverse recent tax changes and deliver a fully-funded industrial strategy to support SMEs and make the UK more competitive on the global stage.

"We've placed our faith in UK manufacturing – now it's time for the Government to do the same. We need Starmer and Reeves to reboot the economy and introduce policies that actively foster growth and support companies like ours to thrive."

Bruderer UK turned to local construction specialists McPhillips, Cyril Orchard Group and Design & Planning Associates to build its new factory.

It features the latest thermal management technology, air source heat pumps, and roof-mounted photovoltaic panels, all working together to maximise energy efficiency and reduce reliance on conventional power sources.

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Find your future



Beth Heath presents Mel Fullerton with the best creative new business award



Mandy Thorn and Johnny Themans with start-up champion Keli King and finalists



The winners each received a stylish award

# Inaugural start-up awards

**Bridgnorth-based business growth specialists Good2Great have crowned the winners of their first ever start-up awards.**

Judges were looking for exceptional service delivery, customer satisfaction, and unique solutions that met clients' needs effectively. Keli King of Wellington, who runs The Little Green Pantry, was named start-up champion. She founded an eco-friendly store that has diverted over 95,000 pieces of plastic from landfills.

Her business supports the community with sustainable options, recycling services, and collaborations with local schools and businesses.

Judges said: "Keli's commitment to sustainability and community, even during financial challenges, has established her as a trusted, impactful presence."

Keli said: "My team and I have worked hard to grow the business and we're so grateful for the amazing support we've received from the community along the way. We're excited to see what 2025 has in store for us!"

The winner of the best service-based new business was Jim Prescott of Allsports Coaches Coaching Academy CIC, which trains military veterans and young people for sports coaching careers, contributing to social inclusion.

Mel Fullerton of Silverlicious Artisan Jewellers won the best creative new business award. Judges were looking for innovation, originality, and artistic quality in products or services that enhance the creative industry. Mel produces handcrafted jewellery inspired by folklore and nature.

The product-based business award went to Kate Coady from Heartwood of Bridgnorth, who creates sustainable, handcrafted wooden products, and the social or environmental impact prize was given to Frankly Farm Tours which provides accessible farm experiences for diverse groups.

The awards were handed out during a ceremony held at the Shropshire Business Festival at Telford's International Centre.



Kate Coady and category finalists with Johnny Themans and Craig Hughes of Chrisbeon



Awards were handed out as part of the Shropshire Business Festival



Johnny Themans of Good2Great and Ian Groves from Start Tech with service-based business winner Jim Prescott and finalists



The Eden Project and its famous domes

# County link to horticultural paradise

**One of the UK's best known visitor attractions has appointed a Shropshire-born 'showman' as its director of horticulture.**

The Eden Project in Cornwall celebrates its 25th birthday next year, and Peter Jones will lead on the strategic vision for ensuring its plant collections are the star of the show.

He will be in charge of a 50-strong team, after 19 years at the Royal Horticultural Society.

This team manages and tends the plant collections in the world famous Rainforest and Mediterranean Biomes, as well as more than eight hectares of outdoor gardens, a 72-hectare outer estate and Growing Point, the Eden Project's new plant nursery which is heated by deep geothermal energy.

Peter will also direct the horticulture for new Eden Projects being planned for Morecambe in Lancashire and Dundee in Scotland.

Peter said: "As someone who is passionate about plants and the role they play in enriching all our lives, I feel a real affinity with the work the Eden Project is doing to connect people with nature, a mission that has never been more important."

"I leave the Royal Horticultural Society after 19 wonderful years and I am immensely proud of the work I've helped deliver with the incredible team at RHS Garden Wisley. I started at Wisley as a diploma student, going on to work in - and then manage - the Bicentennial Glasshouse, before taking up my most recent role as garden manager for Hardy Ornamental."

"The RHS has nurtured me and helped me grow, and for this I shall be eternally grateful."



Director of horticulture Peter Jones



Peter's job will be to make the plant collections the star of the 25th anniversary show

Andy Jasper, chief executive of the Eden Project, said: "Peter is a horticultural showman and will bring excitement and wonder to our plant collections as we approach the end of our first quarter century. His arrival at the Eden Project heralds a new era for our gardens and is proof that there has never been a better time to work in horticulture."

Tim Upson, RHS director of gardens and horticulture, said: "This is a remarkable achievement for Peter and reflects his exceptional leadership, horticultural expertise, and the significant impact he has made. We couldn't be prouder of him as he embarks on this exciting chapter."

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# Securing payments taken over the phone

Joe Newton



For many businesses, taking card payments over the phone is an essential part of operations. It's convenient, fast, and enables seamless transactions. However, as financial fraud continues to rise, regulators have tightened security requirements, making compliance more complex for companies of all sizes.

While some businesses view new regulations as an unnecessary burden, the scale of financial fraud tells a different story. Globally, card fraud exceeded £10 billion annually, with UK businesses facing an average of 633 attempted network breaches per day in 2024. Large corporations, including BA, FIFA, Facebook, and Uber, have experienced high-profile breaches. Equifax, one of the most notorious cases, was fined £500,000, but the true cost of the breach soared to £3.5 billion in damages.

Smaller businesses, unfortunately, are even more vulnerable. 61% of breach victims are small to medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), a number rising each year as cybercriminals increasingly target less secure networks. Worse still, 60% of small businesses do not survive beyond six months after a cyberattack. The financial burden can be crushing, for example, a restaurant suffered a card payment breach, incurring £21,000 in audit expenses and an additional £66,000 in fines from credit card companies.

Companies handling card payments must adhere to four major compliance requirements in the UK:

- Payment Card Industry Data Security Standard (PCI DSS 4.0) – Enforced from March 31st, 2025, requiring stricter security measures.
- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) & Data Protection Act – Holds business owners personally liable for data breaches.



- Cyber Insurance Policies – Many insurers now demand PCI DSS compliance as a condition for coverage.
- Acquiring Bank Contracts – Businesses must comply with PCI DSS under their merchant agreements.

Despite these clear legal obligations, many companies remain unaware of the risks or operate under common misconceptions, such as:

1. "We don't record calls, so we're compliant." Not true – avoiding call recordings addresses only two out of 350 security requirements.
2. "We only take a few payments." Even a single transaction requires compliance.
3. "We manually enter card details into a secure terminal." While the terminal may be PCI compliant, your business may not be, leaving sensitive customer data exposed.

Businesses across various industries have fallen victim to breaches, including travel agencies, dental practices, and leisure venues, collectively incurring £105,000 in penalties and remediation costs.

As security standards evolve, businesses must implement smarter solutions to reduce their risk. Descoping – removing internal systems, staff, and IT infrastructure from PCI DSS scope – is increasingly seen as the most viable strategy for SMEs.

With PCI DSS 4.0 now in force, organisations must act to safeguard their financial and reputational stability. Understanding and implementing the right security measures today can mean the difference between survival and devastation tomorrow.

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Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford



The Docks at Selattyn

## 17th century pub is full of character

A historic pub on the north west Shropshire border which is said to be of 'national historic interest' is on the market.

The Docks at Selattyn – previously known as the Cross Keys – is up for sale through Christie & Co for £525,000.

It has been owned by Shaun Coady and Becky Ford since 2019, during which time it has grown in popularity and reputation, both for its food offering and as an old-fashioned drinking spot.

They said: "We have decided it is time to hang up our beer serving aprons to see some more of the world, and hand the baton over to someone who will love this pub as much as we have."

"Owning this pub, that we already knew and loved, has been a privilege, but it is time to move on, no matter how successful we have been."

The property dates back to the 17th century and has been a public house since around 1840. It still features a historic bar, which has been recognised by the Campaign For Real Ale as 'of special national historic interest'.

## Applications invited for £10,000 'reward'

Shrewsbury-based marketing agency Reech has launched its annual 'Reech & Reward' initiative, offering local charities and non-profit businesses the chance to secure £10,000 worth of free marketing support and services.

Agency director Amelia Redge said: "Having access to our entire team – from web developers and digital specialists to growth strategists and creative professionals – allows organisations to benefit from a tailored 360-approach to meet desired marketing needs and overcome any current challenges."

Shropshire-based charities, good causes, and not-for-profit organisations have until May 16 to submit their applications to [www.reech.agency/reech-and-reward-2025](http://www.reech.agency/reech-and-reward-2025)

"Reech & Reward is a highlight of our year, connecting us with amazing local initiatives and showcasing their invaluable work," Amelia said.

"Each entry is carefully reviewed with input from our team to identify those that align with our values. We shortlist two or three, inviting them to pitch their ideas and challenges at our Reech headquarters, before one charity is selected for a 12-month partnership."

Previous winners of the Reech & Reward campaign include Shrewsbury Food Hub, Brightstar, and Dog A.I.D.

Annual accounts | Self-assessments  
Ecommerce | Accounts management  
Cryptocurrency | Credit control  
VAT returns | Payroll | Bookkeeping



Turas Accountants



Paul Littler of the business leaders group



Members of the business leaders group during one of their meetings at the WR Partners offices

# Exploring business strategies

**A business leaders group which meets quarterly in Shropshire to exchange ideas and valuable insights is looking to expand following its huge success over the past 18 months.**

The group was founded in 2023 by WR Partners, which runs four sessions a year in both Shrewsbury and Cheshire.

Now, following what the company describes as its 'incredible' success, it is looking to expand the sessions to meet demand.

The group explores a range of strategies and tactics designed to provide a roadmap for success, guided by managing partner of WR Partners Helen Spencer, and the firm's director of business development and marketing Paul Littler.

Helen says: "Events run heavily on guest participation meaning there is always the opportunity to engage in in-depth analysis of a product or service to ensure they are market safe and ready

to face the next quarter with all the right tools.

"The sessions are specifically crafted to encompass a dynamic blend of opportunities for attendees, including collaborating with peers to allow like-minded business leaders to collaborate and exchange valuable insights on the daily hurdles and challenges they face.

"The sessions provide a platform for senior business leaders to discuss topics and exercises aimed at improving business performance."

Business people involved in the current Shropshire group say they leave each session with new ideas for reviewing and assessing business operations, and top tips for making positive change.

They are described as 'a fabulous mixture of straight-talking strategy and challenging debate'

If you are interested in joining the next business leaders group, taking place in June, or want to find out more details about plans to expand the sessions, contact the WR Partners team at hello@wrpartners.co.uk or 08000 664 664.



Managing partner Helen Spencer



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# Energy efficiencies and waste reduction

Shropshire businesses could save thousands of pounds a year in repair costs by proactively looking after their offices rather than burying their head in the sand over maintenance.

Mike Penn, director of Optima Facilities Management, said huge savings were possible through energy efficiencies and waste reduction.

"Prevention is always better than cure," said Mike, who has more than a decade of experience in the building trade.

"Clearly firms are looking to make cost savings in the current climate, but they shouldn't neglect their surroundings. Keeping on top of repairs and maintenance may seem like simple advice but it's the key to avoiding bigger bills down the line."

Optima FM manages all aspects of building and infrastructure to ensure efficient, safe and effective operation.

"While the business is relatively new, we've got years of experience in the industry - taking the hassle out of facilities management to allow you to focus on growing and running your business," Mike explained.

He said sustainable initiatives were extremely popular with firms looking to back up Net Zero commitments made by local councils.

"We are committed to reducing environmental impact through sustainable facilities management," said Mike. "Our eco-friendly solutions can help your business save energy, reduce waste and lower costs, all while looking after our planet."



Mike Penn of Optima Facilities Management

# Take a different route for greater flexibility

**More than one in three professionals in Shropshire say they would consider taking a contract role over a permanent one to gain more flexibility in their lives.**

New findings from talent solutions provider Robert Walters suggest we may see a spike in permanent staff switching to contract roles across the county.

"We're noticing a shifting of values amongst professionals," said chief executive Chris Eldridge.

"Work-life balance and flexibility are increasingly prioritised, causing professionals to scope out opportunities in line with these values. It's principally this trend that's encouraging professionals to take on a contract or temporary role over a permanent one."

Almost a quarter of Shropshire professionals say tighter company budgets have led to more pressure being placed on their workload and output by company leaders.

Chris added: "Although contracting is typically viewed as a riskier option because of the absence of job security, recent high profile

layoffs and unsatisfactory bonus seasons have prompted professionals to reconsider this.

"Some individuals might opt for contract positions as a temporary fix or a way to enter a specific company, while others may view it as a more long-term career path.

"Professionals who take on contract roles quickly grow skills and experience which can align them to better levels of flexibility or pay in subsequent positions - having in-demand skills and varied experience is a crucial bargaining tool when negotiating more from future employers."

With job losses emerging across many sectors, pressure mounts on UK employers to pivot their hiring strategies to continue fulfilling business critical roles.

Indeed, a quarter of workers polled now think

that the gig economy could enhance workforce flexibility this year - with a further fifth thinking it could also increase market competition.

Nearly half of employers said they would hire contractors this year to assist with specific projects. Meanwhile 20% say they'd consider temporary hires due to permanent headcount freezes, and a further 22% would do so to plug skills gaps.

Chris added: "For employers, the short-term nature of contract roles allows for greater agility and quicker response times to market changes and business needs. Simultaneously, it means they can hire the necessary skillsets to finish projects without adding to their permanent headcount at a time when many are still considering cutbacks."

Some individuals might opt for contract positions as a temporary fix or a way to enter a specific company, while others may view it as a more long-term career path

# Investing further in resort



An aerial view of the Love2Stay touring and glamping resort

## Demand for short breaks in the UK has prompted the owners to invest a further £750,000 on new accommodation at a Shropshire touring and glamping resort.

Salop Leisure is investing in five new holiday lodges on its glamping village at the Love2Stay resort at Emstrey, Shrewsbury.

“We are finding that people in the 25 to 35 age group are increasing the number of short breaks they take to five a year,” said Salop Leisure’s joint managing director Mark Bebb. “It’s all about convenience, flexibility and luxury.”

“We are now attracting not just people who live across the UK, but also visitors from around the world, particularly Holland. They are attracted by the outdoor facilities, including our natural cold water bio swimming pool and hot springs.

“We encourage young families to spend quality time together away from technology. They appreciate the benefits of spending time together rather than being in separate rooms at home.

“Countless reports have been written about the health benefits of getting children off technology and into the fresh air. We are happy to help families do exactly that, surrounded by luxury accommodation and facilities.

“We are also finding that families enjoy multi-generational holidays with us, with grandparents staying in their motorhome or caravan on our touring park, while their children and grandchildren stay in a lodge.”

The brainchild of Mr Bebb, Love2Stay now has five luxury lodges, as well as the original 11 safari lodges and 11 woodland lodges. The resort is celebrating its eighth birthday this year.

## Go, go, go for partnership

Shropshire law firm Aaron & Partners has announced a new partnership with an outdoor sports company to sponsor nine running events this year.

Adrenaline Sporting Events organises races across North Wales and Shropshire. As part of the deal, Aaron & Partners will have designated branding at the start and end of the races – as well as on participants’ race numbers.

“For us, it’s fantastic to be able to partner with community-based organisations such as Adrenaline, to help get people moving,” said Helen Johnson, head of marketing and business development.

“There are so many benefits to exercise, both physically and mentally, and we’ve got lots of keen runners in the firm, who I know are really looking forward to taking part.”

The first – The Brynkinalt Running Festival near Oswestry – saw members of the Aaron & Partners team lacing up their trainers to get involved.

Alan Lewis, the founder of Adrenaline Sporting Events, said: “Without partners supporting our events, I’ll be honest, they probably wouldn’t happen. The events cost



Brynkinalt Running Festival near Oswestry

a lot of money to organise, so the support from our partners allows our events to thrive and flourish.”

The deal comes as Aaron & Partners continues its expansion by welcoming a new arrival at its Shrewsbury-based wills, trusts and tax team.

Jake Moses has previously worked with a top 50 law firm in Birmingham and a top 100 law firm in Cardiff.

His past work includes advising on estate planning for landowners with large-scale development opportunities, handling succession planning for farming families, and acting for executors of high value estates with international assets.



Helen Columb of Turas

## Accounting changes for the self-employed

### The countdown has started to major changes to the way income and expenses are reported – and businesses need to be prepared.

That’s the warning from Telford-based Turas Accountants which says businesses should start getting ready now for the new Making Tax Digital (MTD) rules which come into force in one year’s time.

Owner Helen Columb said all self-employed people and landlords with a turnover of more than £50,000 would be required to join the Making Tax Digital for Income Tax Self-Assessment scheme from next April.

It would then be extended to include those with a turnover of between £30,000 and £50,000 from April 2027 and those between £20,000 and £30,000 in April 2028.

Under the programme, income and expenses details must be submitted quarterly to the taxman using digital software, although there will be no change to when tax is collected.

“These are significant changes on the horizon for thousands of self-employed people and landlords, and it is important that they start preparing for them now rather than leave it to the last minute,” she said.

Helen said there were a number of things people could do now including:

- Setting up your own Government gateway, even if you have an accountant. HMRC sends emails out regularly with information, and having access to your portal means you can keep on top of any updates and see where you are with your tax and National Insurance.
- Separate your finances: Have a separate bank account for business transactions, even if this is a separate personal bank account. There are lots of banks that offer free or reduced fees for sole traders. The software that you will use will be able to connect to your bank.
- Landlords should also have a separate bank account for these transactions.
- Look at adopting software NOW. Don’t wait until your staging date. Give yourself time to understand the systems and how they work, without the time pressures of deadlines from HMRC hanging over your head. You will probably save far more time in the long run as you can raise invoices directly in the software rather than on paper or via Word documents.
- Look at instructing an accountant now, rather than later on when the staging date is looming, if you want help with the administration. Accountants will be in high demand and they may have waiting lists that will just add to your stress levels.

Helen added: “To add to the changes, from April 2026 MTD users will need to submit their Self-Assessment return through the same software they use for their MTD returns, and you will no longer be able to submit through the HMRC portal once you have been enrolled under MTD for ITSA.

“There are a number of software options available – our choice is Xero – and it is well worth getting started now so that you can see how they work and get used to handling them.”

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Cecilia Wong (Lanyon Bowdler), Rebecca Estry (Aaron & Partners), Ellie Jenkins (Wace Morgan), Abi Croft (Lanyon Bowdler), Rebecca Carter (Aaron & Partners), Rachel Raybould-Deer (MFG Solicitors)



The 'Sip and Paint' session took place at Henry Tudor House

# Connecting professionals at the start of their careers

**Two of Shropshire's leading professional services firms have collaborated once again to mark the second anniversary of Shropshire Rising Professionals.**

The networking group has been created by Aaron & Partners and Azets to support the county's early-career professionals with opportunities to connect, collaborate, and grow.

Launched in 2023, SRP was born from a recognition that young professionals often lack spaces to build their network in a low-pressure, supportive environment.

Since then, the group has grown steadily, drawing support from prominent regional businesses including Savills, RBC Brewin Dolphin, and Crown Wealth Management, who have all sponsored events.

The bi-monthly events, held in the Shrewsbury area, are designed to offer something different to more traditional networking formats. Free from the pressure of elevator pitches or formal introductions, the sessions instead focus on fostering genuine connections between attendees who are within the first five years of their careers.

"The beauty of SRP is that it breaks down barriers," said Natalie Antenbring, a dispute resolution solicitor at Aaron & Partners and one of the group's early supporters.

"There's no expectation to 'sell' yourself, it's all about meeting like-minded people and developing relationships that can evolve naturally over time."



Plenty to rabbit about . . . back row from left, Rebecca Estry (Aaron & Partners), Rebecca Carter (Aaron & Partners), Ellie Jenkins (Wace Morgan Solicitors), Abi Croft (Lanyon Bowdler), Rachel Raybould-Deer (MFG Solicitors), Natalie Antenbring (Aaron & Partners), Emma Clare Jones (Balfours), Clarissa Haynes (Balfours), Emily Turnbull (Aaron & Partners), Kate Boffey-Rawlings (RBC Brewin Dolphin). Front row from left, Cecilia Wong (Lanyon Bowdler), Carrie Wright (Azets), Abigail Murray (Aaron & Partners), Jessica Benton (Wace Morgan Solicitors), Amanda Pullen (RBC Brewin Dolphin), Amelia Fearn (Wace Morgan Solicitors), Naomi Turton (Wace Morgan Solicitors)

The typical SRP gathering centres around informal drinks and conversation, with sponsors providing the first round for attendees. But the group has also hosted a range of themed events that go beyond the usual after-work drinks format.

Highlights have included the first birthday celebration at Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, where guests enjoyed private access to exhibitions, and seasonal Halloween and

Christmas events that have become firm favourites on the SRP calendar.

To celebrate the group's second birthday, Aaron & Partners and Azets hosted a creative 'Sip and Paint' evening at Henry Tudor House, led by Adele from Waterside Art Painting Events.

Guests were guided step-by-step through creating their own painted masterpieces, all while enjoying glasses of prosecco and a relaxed playlist.



Jemima Boroughs (Shropshire Trading Ltd), Bryony Davenport (Handelsbanken), Jade Roberts (Wace Morgan Solicitors)



Natalie Antenbring (Aaron and Partners), Abigail Murray (Aaron and Partners), Carrie Wright (Azets)



Esme Johnson (Western Pension Solutions), Douglas Hamilton (Shoothill), Josh Welch (Shoothill)



Alex Simpson and Jake Moses (Aaron and Partners)



Carrie Wright and Amélie Jones (Azets)



Amanda Pullen (RBC Brewin Dolphin)



Max Beardmore and Billy Shaw (both RBC Brewin Dolphin)



Rising Professionals get creative to mark the group's second birthday



Jemma Groves (Lanyon Bowdler), Esme Johnson (Western Pension Solutions), Amélie Jones (Azets), Douglas Hamilton (Shoothill), Alex Simpson (Aaron & Partners), Maz Beardmore (RBC Brewin Dolphin), Jake Moses (Aaron & Partners)



Amanda Pullen (RBC Brewin Dolphin), Emma Clare Jones (Balfours), Billy Shaw (RBC Brewin Dolphin), Alex Simpson (Aaron & Partners), Maz Beardmore (RBC Brewin Dolphin), Jake Moses (Aaron & Partners)



Jade Roberts (Wace Morgan Solicitors), Jemima Boroughs (Shropshire Trading Ltd), Bryony Davenport (Handelsbanken), Clarissa Haynes (Balfours)

since our first event, with attendees describing it as fun, relaxed and productive with a great venue, and that's exactly what we were hoping to achieve.

"Some brilliant connections have been made, with attendees meeting other like-minded professionals they may never have otherwise come across."

Azets and Aaron & Partners say they recognise the value of investing in young

professionals – not just as employees, but as part of the wider Shropshire business community.

"SRP is an initiative that reflects the collaborative, inclusive culture we want to see across all industries in the region," Natalie added.

● For more information about Rising Professionals, email:

Natalie.Antenbring@aaronandpartners.com, Abigail.Murray@aaronandpartners.com, or Carrie.Wright@azets.co.uk

# On track for new station?

## Could Shrewsbury be set to get a second mainline railway station?

A new station on the outskirts of the town – to reduce congestion in the town centre – is part of the discussions in the Shrewsbury Movement Strategy's 10-year vision.

'Shrewsbury Moves' was published in January last year by the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership, made up of Shropshire Council, Shrewsbury Town Council, and Shrewsbury Business Improvement District, looking to improve how people move around the town, including the role that rail could play.

Included in its aims is the creation of a new Parkway station to alleviate pressure on Shrewsbury station and the town's highway network. Shrewsbury station would also be improved as a key gateway to the town.

Together with a new rail operator, Wrexham, Shropshire and Midlands Railway and its partner, rail development and delivery specialist SLC, Shropshire Council is now investigating the feasibility and private-financing options for a new Parkway station meeting the Shrewsbury Moves vision.

Dave Parry, chair of the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership, said: "This is great news and an important first step forward for a Parkway station that would provide a further boost for Shrewsbury and its transport infrastructure and attract the investment needed to help make our town an even better place for people to come to, whether to visit, live or work."

Ian Walters, managing director of SLC and director of WSMR, said: "We



An artist's impression of the Shrewsbury Parkway station

are pleased to be working with Shropshire Council to look into more detail at the case for a Parkway station close to Shrewsbury to serve Shropshire and the borders.

"Aligning these exciting proposals with WSMR's plans to operate passenger rail services shows how an Open Access rail company can attract much-needed private sector investment in railway infrastructure that will reduce road congestion in town and city centres, create jobs and support housing growth in the UK."

WSMR is currently awaiting regulatory approval for its plans to introduce new direct train connectivity between Wrexham, Gobowen, Shrewsbury, Telford, Walsall and London Euston, which it hopes to launch before the end of this year.



# Actionable strategies

## The president of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce shared his company's international trade experiences at a high-profile panel debate in London.

Piran Littleton, managing director of Bishop's Castle manufacturing firm Jesmonite, took to the stage for the British Chambers of Commerce's 'Driving International Trade' conference.

The event, which included an address from foreign secretary David Lammy who pledged a closer working relationship with UK business, brought together representatives from more than 30 chambers of commerce across the UK and overseas.

Mr Littleton, who has worked closely with his team to increase exports and achieve significant milestones including the Queen's Award for International Trade and Global Britain Business of the Year, was part of a panel exploring how exporters can navigate the local business environment in their strategic target markets.

He was joined by Jason Morris, vice president of the British Chambers of Business in South Africa; Katy Holmes, chief executive of the British Chamber of Commerce in Dubai; and David Weatherhead, regional trade director at Lloyds.

Jesmonite produces a world-leading compound material – an acrylic-modified gypsum composite – used by millions of people including artists to make products from homewares to jewellery, to large construction projects including landmark buildings and developments.

The Shropshire company has business and distribution hubs in Europe and America, and has set out to develop relationships with chamber of commerce organisations around the world.



Shropshire Chamber president Piran Littleton on the panel at the Driving International Trade conference in London

Mr Littleton spoke about strategic decisions and practical challenges involved in entering new markets, outlining his company's approach to strategic decision-making, and practical lessons other manufacturers could learn from the experience.

He said: "The aim of the discussion was to provide business leaders with actionable strategies and practical tools to successfully navigate local business environments in strategic international markets."

"Every market is unique, presenting distinct opportunities and challenges, and expanding into new regions requires in-depth knowledge of local business environments, regulatory frameworks, and effective financial and legal strategies."

The message from the panel was that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to international expansion, which requires a tailored approach.

Mr Littleton said: "At Jesmonite, we are really keen to ensure we work closely with trading partners so that we can adjust branding to suit the country."

"This means protecting intellectual property and trademarks and choosing your partners wisely – ideally working with those that match your company's own ethos and aspirations."

In her keynote address, BCC director general Shavaun Haviland said UK businesses were calling out for a pragmatic, growth-driven package of improvements to the UK/EU trading relationship.

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The International Women's Day event at The Park House Hotel in Shifnal



Gwynneth Slavin and Fran Ash

# International Women's Day event draws crowd

More than 100 people attended a Shropshire Chamber of Commerce half-day International Women's Day session at the Park House Hotel in Shifnal, featuring a top-level panel of speakers who shared stories from their careers, and tackled a broad range of topical issues.

Stacey Morrey of Triangle HR discussed her military journey and experiences on gender equality/issues, and voice and communication coach Emma Alston talked about overcoming anxieties and insecurities to communicate with confidence.

Two senior leaders from Shropshire Fire & Rescue Service – deputy chief fire officer Sam Burton and assistant chief fire officer Karen Gowreesunker – shared their career experiences.

Jennifer Hughes of Transicon Limited – a company dedicated to creating advanced control and automation systems – told how she had recently been contacted by a young woman seeking guidance on starting a career in engineering.



Sam Burton, Kelly Riedel, Ruth Ross and Karen Gowreesunker



Rachel Kili and Kerry Bainbridge



Kelly Riedel and Rachel Owen



Karen Gowreesunker of Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service



Guests at the Chamber's International Women's Day event



## Automatic compensation: Why businesses have to pay you when they get it wrong

Martyn James



**We often associate compensation with having to battle with businesses after they make mistakes or treat us badly. But did you know that many of the businesses that bill you monthly are supposed to pay you compensation when things go wrong?**

I say 'supposed to pay' because some are, ahem, a bit lax about coughing up. Others come up with a wide range of creative reasons for not paying out in full or in part.

But if you know just a little bit about the rules covering when you are supposed to be compensated, you can give businesses a nudge – and let them know you are aware of what you are entitled to. Here's my guide.

### Water compensation

You are entitled to compensation automatically if your water supply is interrupted, though this depends on which part of the UK you live in.

In England and Wales, the Guaranteed Standards Scheme (GSS) states that water

companies must make sure that water pressure is consistent, appointments to fix issues are kept, and interruptions are dealt with asap.

You can check out a table covering all the payments that you're entitled to on Ofwat's website.

### Energy compensation

While compensation for billing errors should be automatic, sadly, we are a long way off that for now. However, there are two types of compensation that might apply due to problems with your energy supplier.

Firstly, if you have a problem with your meter, a range of compensation payments are available, depending on how long you wait for a repair, missed appointments, and even the failure to make payments. Type 'Ofgem, compensation for energy supply issues' into a search engine to get the full list.

In addition, if you are thinking about switching energy suppliers and problems occur, you could also benefit financially. Compensation is available for delays completing the switch to a new provider, errors, not transferring credit balances, and not issuing a final bill on time. Pop 'energy switching compensation' in to the internet to find out more.

### Energy power cuts

We've had our fair share of power cuts in Shropshire so far this year as a series of named storms left their mark.

Not many people know this, but you can also seek compensation from an energy network if there's a power cut.

Energy networks are the organisations that provide the underlying infrastructure that supplies energy via your supplier to your home.

You can track down the right company

by searching online for 'who's my network operator' which takes you to the Energy Networks Association (ENA) that has a postcode search option.

You'll need to put your claim in within three months of the incident, or within a month if the power cut was planned but you weren't given notice. Compensation depends on what caused the outage – from storms to technical problems.

### Broadband and landline compensation

There's also a compensation scheme for problems with your broadband or landline services. While this isn't a definitive law or regulation, all the main telecommunications firms are signed up.

Automatic compensation should be paid out if repairs to your service are delayed, appointments are missed, and if there are delays setting up your new service.

Compensation for ongoing issues is by the day – something that suppliers sometimes try to get around by marking complaints as 'resolved' when they aren't. So make sure you look up the rules online if you think you've been short-changed.

You can find out all about the different types of compensation for broadband and landline problems by typing 'Ofcom, automatic compensation' in to a search engine.

### What if I don't get paid?

Just because rules about compensation are in place in all these sectors, doesn't mean businesses always follow them. So make a formal complaint to the business if you don't get paid.

If that doesn't work, there is also a free ombudsman or dispute resolution service for water, energy and telecommunications services. If in doubt, check 'em out!

**Martyn James is a leading consumer rights campaigner, TV and radio broadcaster and journalist. <https://martynjamesexpert.co.uk/news/>**



Matthew Bowering with Hannah Johnson and David Ramsbottom

## Solicitors join firm

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler has strengthened its commercial property team with the addition of two new solicitors.

David Ramsbottom and Hannah Johnson have both joined the firm's Shrewsbury office and are already assisting clients with a variety of agricultural and commercial property matters.

David specialises in the sale and purchase of agricultural land and commercial premises, agricultural tenancies, commercial leases and secured lending.

Hannah is experienced in a range of legal services, including commercial property leases, property refinance, and the acquisition or sale of land for development.

Matthew Bowering, partner in the commercial and agricultural property team, said: "We are delighted that David and Hannah have joined the team here in Shrewsbury, and I know their expertise will be of great benefit to our clients."

## Engaging with communities

A Shropshire education trust has appointed a new chair of trustees with over 30 years of teaching experience.

Kevin Barton says he is looking forward to engaging with local communities to help build on the work which is already being delivered by the Learning Community Trust.



Kevin Barton, the new chair of trustees at the Learning Community Trust

The multi-academy trust spans education for children and young people from the age of two years old through to 16 years old, and up to 25 years old in its specialist settings.

It runs more than a dozen school sites in Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire, including primary, secondary and specialist education centres.

Kevin said: "My initial priority has been to fully understand the whole organisation and the way it operates, and I have visited many of our schools to learn more from the headteachers and the staff."

"My next priority is to get out into some of the local communities and gauge how we can work closely with them to ensure the Trust reflects their thoughts and hopes for the future."

He began his career in education as a PE teacher and initially came to Telford as a deputy headteacher in the year 2000, spending the last 10 years of his teaching career in the county.

He has also worked with a wide variety of organisations including Nike, HS2, The British Council, and sport and education charities.

# In pursuit of a global ambition



Graeme Bell is the new global business development manager at Filtermist Limited

## A Telford manufacturer that helps companies create cleaner and safer working environments is embarking on a major international expansion drive.

Filtermist Limited, which employs over 150 people, has appointed Graeme Bell as its new global business development manager.

The filtration expert will be responsible for driving new opportunities in the APAC region – particularly in India and China.

His role will involve increasing sales of the firm's latest oil mist collectors and ancillary equipment in the countries it already serves in this area, developing new products specifically for these markets, and recruiting new distributors to the Filtermist network.

Graeme has already spent time visiting customers in China, Korea

and India, before being part of the Filtermist delegation that exhibited at the IMTEX exhibition – organised by the Indian Machine Tool Manufacturers' Association in Bangalore.

"There is massive untapped potential in the APAC region, and this is something I have been brought in to explore," explained Graeme, who has more than 30 years' experience working in mist extraction and air pollution control.

"The market is going to expand dramatically over the next five years. We're seeing a lot of opportunities in automotive, aerospace and electronics – India, in particular, is becoming a really important manufacturing hub for the Asia Pacific region."

"Demand for our products and solutions is growing rapidly in this region, and we need additional resources on the ground to help educate and showcase some of our latest oil mist filtration technologies to new clients."

# Inducted into industry's hall of fame

Financial strategist and entrepreneur Karl Hartey has been officially inducted into the Financial Hall of Fame, recognising his exceptional contributions, leadership, and dedication to the financial and wealth management industries.

It honours individuals who have

significantly shaped the future of finance, insurance, and wealth management, setting a benchmark for excellence in ethical financial practices, education, and industry innovation. His induction was formally celebrated at an event in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Karl, the founder and director of Hartey Wealth Management which has a base in Oswestry, described it as 'a great honour'.

"This recognition is not just a personal achievement but a testament to the dedication of my team and the trust our clients have placed in us."

# Chamber's networking trio

## Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has appointed a new team to run its thriving network clubs in Telford, Shrewsbury and Oswestry.

The trio – Gwynneth Slavin, Kerry Bainbridge and Andrenna Milligan-Spurway – are already familiar faces to the business community as members of the Chamber's membership support team.

Gwynneth is taking the lead for the Telford club, which meets at Hadley Park House Hotel.

Kerry will be the first point of contact for both the Shrewsbury club which meets at Origins restaurant, and the Oswestry club, which is based at the town's cricket club.

And Andrenna will be co-ordinating the combined network club events, when members of all three groups come together.

"Networking allows people to grow their career prospects, but as business owners building relationships may give your business the chance to break into new markets," said Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross.

"Last year we welcomed more than 1,600 attendees at our breakfast clubs – that's an increase of more than 20% on the previous 12 months, and shows how much they are valued."



Shropshire Chamber's network club trio: from left, Kerry Bainbridge, Gwynneth Slavin, and Andrenna Milligan-Spurway

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# Amy's rising to fresh challenge



**Managing director Amy Davies at Midland Computers**

Midland Computers has appointed Amy Davies as managing director, after almost 19 years of service. This comes as part of a management restructure at the Telford firm.

Amy said: "I joined the team back in September 2006, beginning my journey as an accounts administrator.

"Over the years, I've had the opportunity to gain a holistic understanding of the business, as well as participate in various training initiatives and complete my AAT Level 4, which has supported my progression - firstly to office manager, and then later to finance director in February 2023.

"It's an absolute pleasure to be at the helm of Midland Computers: a business that I've watched significantly grow over the years, and one that I genuinely care about. I'm thoroughly excited to see what the future holds for the company and the team."

# Georgina takes marketing role



**Georgina Davies-Hunter at Salop Leisure**

Motorhome and leisure company Salop Leisure has welcomed a new member to its marketing team.

Georgina Davies-Hunter joins the marketing team as a marketing assistant after enjoying spells working at Salop Leisure's Love2Stay touring and glamping resort and the Love Plants garden centre over the past three years.

Before joining Salop Leisure, Georgina became the first UK female football spotter, providing intelligence about football hooligans while working as a special constable for four years in her home town of Wrexham.

She attended every Wrexham Football Club home and away game for two-and-a-half years. She served as a special constable while completing a degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice.



**Morris & Company's Paige Eades with Zech Newton**

# From trainee to employee

Morris & Company has welcomed Zech Newton, a business T-Level student from Shrewsbury Colleges Group to its marketing team.

Paige Eades, group marketing executive, said: "We're delighted to have Zech join our team. He's enthusiastic and has shown a real aptitude for marketing. The T-Level placement is a fantastic way for us to support young people in our community and give them valuable work experience."

Zech joined the company as a trainee marketing administrator and is working one day a week alongside his studies.

# Three new workers



**Paul Grainger, Karen Pountney and Merrikki Glendenning**

# New Chapters Fostercare, based in Upton Magna, has taken on three new employees as part of its ongoing growth.

Karen Pountney has joined as acting registered manager, Merrikki Glendenning as foster family co-ordinator, and Paul Grainger as the agency's supervising social worker.

childcare, has worked for 15 years in nurseries and as a teaching assistant in schools, with particular emphasis on special educational needs children.

Paul's 37 years' experience at Telford & Wrekin Council included a period working in children's homes, running the leaving care team, then supporting adults and children with disabilities in the community, and finally moving over to foster care work in 2012.

Craig Walton, director at NCF, said: "These three new team members bring a combined wealth of experience and expertise bar none to our agency, enabling us to provide the support and services our foster parents require, and in turn help the ever-growing number of traumatised young people to live in safe family environments."

Karen holds an NVQ level 4 in management, a DipSW in social work and BTEC national diplomas in social care and education. In her 28 years' experience, she has managed a local authority fostering team of 200 carers and 15 staff, a residential care home, as well as working in community care and nursing.

Merrikki, who holds a degree in



**Pippa Tait**



**Claire Moore**



**Nikki Pickering**



**Beth Heath**

# Businesswomen join forces on committee

**Six local businesswomen have joined the executive committee of Shrewsbury Business Chamber, bringing a wealth of experience across various industries. The newly-appointed executive members are:**

- **Pippa Tait:** Pippa has owned and run Sales Geek Shropshire since 2022, where her mission is to elevate the sales performance of local businesses. Prior to this role, she spent 20 years in the MedTech industry.
  - **Claire Moore:** Claire Moore is the owner of award-winning independent travel agency Peakes Travel Elite. It has over 30 years' experience in arranging holidays to all corners of the world.
  - **Nikki Pickering:** Nikki, from Berlad Graham Solicitors, was born in Shrewsbury and has lived there all her life. She qualified as a chartered legal executive in 2003 and has spent her career specialising in family law both in Shrewsbury and the surrounding areas.
  - **Beth Heath:** Beth is the creative director of Shropshire Festivals and the marketing agency Shropshire ThinkTank. She is also a director of Visit Shropshire, championing the region's tourism sector. Beth has been running businesses in the West Midlands for over 30 years.
  - **Louise Christie:** Louise is a dynamic strategic marketer and communications expert with over 25 years of experience in the field spanning marketing strategy, brand storytelling, and public relations, with a particular focus on the retail sector.
  - **Suzanne Heavens:** Suzanne is the owner of Heavenly Brides of Shrewsbury - a well-established bridal boutique in the centre of the town. She opened the business in 2012 after a successful career in administration management.
- Shrewsbury Business Chamber chairman Kevin Lockwood said: "Their combined expertise in sales, law, marketing, events, and retail will be invaluable in supporting local businesses and driving economic growth."



**Louise Christie**



**Suzanne Heavens**



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# Five minutes with . . .

GARETH THOMAS has been a familiar face on the Shropshire business scene for many years. For the past year he has been a director at marketing and events agency Adfield Group in Beckbury.

**HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ECONOMY?**

I think all SMEs are impacted by fluctuations, some positive, some negative. Marketing can be the first cost line that gets pulled because people still don't understand it, so we must ensure we add value at every touch point.

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT FOR YOUR JOB?**

It's a difficult and thankless task to balance the books of any business without causing distress, let alone a country. However, I think the new government have gone for the easy option and not appreciated what is needed to stimulate the economy.

**HOW DO YOU VIEW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – AND HOW MIGHT YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS USE IT?**

I think if it's used for the right reasons, it could make business far more efficient and help overcome the diminishing productivity we are seeing as a country. We use it and will continue to use it for research and idea development.

**HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?**

Very grumpy in the morning! But hopefully fair, consistent, calm under pressure and inspirational when required.

**YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?**

In stressful times I like to remain calm. I don't waste energy on things I can't control and would like to think that I don't overreact to a problem. Don't get too high on the highs or low on the lows.

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?**

Attracting the younger generation and retaining them.

**YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?**

My children (although not children anymore). Without being corny, they are simply the best people I know, and it is a privilege to be involved in helping them achieve everything they have and everything they will do.

**PET HATES?**

Arrogance and rudeness – there is no need for it. Sincere apologies if I have ever come across rude or arrogant, it is definitely not my intention.

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

Enjoy it more. When you are as competitive and relentless as I have been described, you tend to not enjoy the wins as much because you are looking for the next one.



*Gareth believes we must embrace the AI generation*



*Bingeable – Gareth is a big fan of Succession*



*Gareth Thomas*

**HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?**

Football, walking the dogs, listening to podcasts, and eating!

**FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?**

The countryside, the vastness and diversity of it, and it's only an hour away from most places.

**SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?**

LinkedIn

**FAVOURITE MOVIE AND/OR TV SHOW?**

Warrior as a film, Succession as a TV show.

**EARLY BIRD, OR NIGHT OWL?**

Early bird – not to make a statement, but to get to the gym.

**DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?**

Muhammad Ali, Paul Gascoigne, Steven Bartlett, Professor Damian Hughes, Jo Malone, and Mel Robbins.

**WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?**

Beef Wellington, Dauphinoise potatoes.

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

Appearances are deceptive... I am not as grumpy as I look!

**AND FINALLY . . . WHAT DO YOU THINK THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HAS IN STORE FOR YOU, PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY?**

I think it is going to be interesting, the world is changing rapidly economically, politically and technically. We must navigate the headwinds created for us and embrace the new tech such as AI. Professionally, we are looking at opportunities in new niches where competition is less and looking to build on our expertise in exhibitions, conferences and events. From a personal point of view, I am keen to learn as much as possible about this new industry, be successful... and get fit!

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