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MIDLANDS MEDIA AWARDS Magazine of the Year – winner

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FIGHTING BACK AGAINST LATE PAYMENTS: The Government's Small Business Commissioner, Shropshire-born Emma Jones, has been telling us why tackling the late payments crisis facing small businesses is her number one priority. She says: "There's a real payments crisis facing small businesses across this country. Did you know that, on average, small business owners spend 86 hours every year chasing invoices which they haven't been paid for?" So, what is being done about it? Emma reveals details of a free, impartial service which has already recovered over £1.4 million of unpaid payments so far this financial year. Read the full story at www.shropshirebiz.com



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By Carl Jones Shropshire Business Editor

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS Welcome

So, as we race towards the second quarter of 2026 in what feels like the blink of an eye, let me ask you a question: "How are you feeling?"

Are you glass half full, glass half empty, or just punch-drunk from all the mixed messages we're trying to make sense of right now?

This sense of contradiction is becoming the defining theme of the year. The economy sometimes feels as though it's speaking in several voices at once. Headlines hint at resilience, yet boardrooms whisper caution. Inflation cools, then stubbornly reappears. Recruitment surges in one sector while investment stalls in another.

Against this backdrop, optimism and uncertainty sit side by side, leaving Shropshire businesses to navigate a picture that never quite comes into sharp focus.

That's why, in this issue, we dig deeper into what these mixed messages really mean for leaders, innovators, and the wider Shropshire business community... and how clarity can still be found even when the signals refuse to align.

Take Telford, for example. We've seen some worrying job-loss headlines since the turn of the year. Yet, in the very same breath, we discover the town has been highlighted as one of the UK's high growth hot spots.

Our cover story, featuring office supplies specialist Chrisbeon, captures this contrast perfectly, sharing how it is increasing its floor space in the town by 50%.

There's no shortage of Shropshire employers looking to recruit right now – if only they could find the kind of skills they need.

Walk into almost any boardroom, HR

workshop, or networking breakfast around the county and you'll hear the same refrain: "We can teach people the job. What we can't teach them is attitude."

This raises a crucial question: why is recruitment still proving to be such a minefield for so many Shropshire employers, even as the UK's unemployment rate rises to 5.2%, its highest level in nearly five years? Is it a matter of skills, mindset, risk – or a widening disconnect across generations?

Apprenticeships appear to be the answer for a growing number of local firms, yet even here the contradictions persist.

On one hand, employers speak glowingly about the ability to 'grow their own' and how apprenticeships are central to staff development. On the other, a report from a local training provider warns that more needs to be done to raise awareness of their benefits, especially amid a worrying decline in the number of young people considering vocational learning.

But let's not end on a glass half-empty note; that's not our style! For the past 10 years we have proudly championed everything that's great about the Shropshire business community.

Talking of which... don't forget that entries are now open for the county's annual business awards, soon to be followed by the return of the Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards, which launch at the Skills Show in Telford on March 19.

Shropshire is brimming with success stories, and these are the perfect platforms to showcase them. Why not throw your hat into the ring this year?

People remain the beating heart of our economy. Technology may change, but it's the human touch that really cements long-term business relationships. Long may that continue.

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Shropshire Business Magazine



National recognition for 'resilient' Telford economy

It's a tough climate for many businesses, but Telford & Wrekin has been highlighted as one of the UK's high growth hot-spots

There have been some headline-grabbing job loss announcements in Telford & Wrekin since the start of the year.

Ricoh UK Manufacturing – one of the trailblazing Japanese manufacturing firms which first set up a base in the town during a wave of Far East investment in the 1980s – is set to move a sizeable chunk of its production to a sister site in France.

And the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust, now under the ownership of the National Trust, is shedding just under 50 posts as part of a streamlining exercise as it is embedded into the organisation.

All is not well on the retail front either, with TGI Fridays shutting its outlet in the town centre, and family-run Yellow by Keep It Local – which stocks items from small businesses – also closing its doors, with its owners saying: "Footfall is there... but it doesn't translate to sales."

So it's fair to say the town has been in need of some good news. It comes in the shape of the new 2026 Growth Flag report, which places Telford & Wrekin third in a national league table for the proportion of businesses expecting to achieve high growth in the coming year.

The report highlights the UK's strongest business growth opportunities for 2026 and looks at how data can help bring that growth to life.

It also places the statistics in stark context, saying: "It is a challenging period for business growth in the UK. Overall, signs of business risk are increasing, start-up rates are declining, and future business growth potential is lower."

"This report uses Growth Flag's predictive data to spotlight the UK's top 10 areas with the strongest business growth potential for the coming year," says Richard Jefferey, co-founder of Growth Flag.

"These areas reflect both the breadth of opportunity across the nation as well as the diverse range of ambitious businesses within them."

Growth Flag pulls data from over 15 Government and premium commercial datasets to provide a comprehensive view of UK businesses. That includes all sectors, all geographies and all registered businesses, no matter their size.

Telford & Wrekin featured third in the league table, behind only Perth & Kinross in Scotland, and the Southwark borough of London.



Richard Jefferey of Growth Flag



Inside Ricoh's site at Priorslee

On Telford & Wrekin, the report says 14% of employers currently show 'high growth potential'.

It adds: "Telford and Wrekin is a high growth and resilient economy in the West Midlands, home to one of the highest shares of manufacturing jobs in the UK."

"The region is outperforming national trends with strong productivity growth and has major strengths in advanced engineering, automotive, agri-tech, and digital industries."

"Telford and Wrekin has attracted high levels of inward investment, with the area housing facilities for international businesses such as Magna Cosma, Müller, and Caggemini."

The Growth Flag places the Shropshire Council unitary area in the 'scaling growth' bracket, which is categorised as: "Areas that have high growth potential businesses widely present in the local business base, but these businesses are of lower value on average."

In the past year, the number of businesses identified with high growth potential across the UK has fallen by 16%, according to the report.

It says regional differences highlight a gap in business growth potential across the nation.

"In particular, the levels of high growth potential businesses vary significantly between the different boroughs in London, and within the West Midlands."

The data highlights that, on average, local areas with a diverse mix of urban and rural settings tend to demonstrate the strongest growth potential in their business base.

The report says: "Despite the regional and sectoral diversity of high growth businesses, the UK's business landscape is showing signs of strain."

"While ambitious firms continue to emerge across the country, the number of businesses projected to achieve 20% growth in the coming year has dropped sharply by 16%."

"This decline also coincides with a significant rise in business risk, with a 78% surge year-on-year of companies showing critical distress signals. All businesses, including those which are growing, face a complex web of economic pressures."

"Skills shortages remain one of the most persistent barriers to business growth in the UK. This challenge has been recognised across recent Government strategies, including the Modern Industrial Strategy. When businesses lack access to employees with the right skills, it directly undermines their ability to scale, compete and adapt."

"The rising cost of business is a significant impediment to growth. Increases in taxes, particularly National Insurance contributions, and the upcoming rise in the Minimum Wage have added financial pressure, slowing planned investment and squeezing margins."

"Other widespread issues include late payments, elevated energy costs, as well as higher rent, insurance and supplier expenses. Borrowing costs have also escalated due to persistently high interest rates."

"Digital adoption is increasingly defining business competitiveness. Businesses that embrace new technologies are better positioned to improve efficiency and increase productivity. However, adoption remains uneven, particularly among SMEs who face barriers such as cost and skills."

"As AI continues to rapidly evolve, the gap between digitally mature businesses and those lagging will likely widen, making targeted support and digital transformation investment more critical than ever."

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce chief executive Ruth Ross said Telford's top three ranking spoke volumes about the ambition, resilience, and ingenuity that define our business landscape.

14% HIGH GROWTH POTENTIAL **Telford and Wrekin**
7% (OF WHICH) SHOW RISK SIGNALS **WEST MIDLANDS**

KEY SECTORS: *Advanced Engineering, Agri-tech, Digital*

Telford and Wrekin is a high-growth and resilient economy in the West Midlands, home to one of the highest shares of manufacturing jobs in the UK. The region, which is outperforming national trends with strong productivity growth has major strengths in advanced engineering, automotive, agri-tech, and digital industries. Telford and Wrekin has attracted high levels of inward investment, with the area housing facilities for international businesses such as Magna Cosma, Müller, and Caggemini.

"This is more than a statistic. It is a powerful endorsement of the environment we have collectively built across Telford & Wrekin and the wider Shropshire region – an environment where enterprise is encouraged, innovation is nurtured, and businesses of all sizes feel confident to invest in their future."

"What stands out in this ranking is the recognition of our strong sector ecosystems. From advanced manufacturing and engineering to digital, professional services, and green technologies, we have cultivated clusters of expertise that allow businesses to collaborate, learn from one another, and accelerate their growth."

"This doesn't emerge by accident; it is the product of long-term commitment, strategic investment, and a shared belief in the potential of our local economy."

She said the support infrastructure that surrounds the Shropshire business community was equally important.

"Companies at every stage of their journey have access to guidance, funding pathways, skills support, and practical help to scale sustainably. This partnership approach is one of our region's greatest strengths."

"When public bodies, private enterprise, and the Chamber work in harmony, the results speak for themselves. Telford & Wrekin has become a place where businesses not only start but thrive, supported by local partners that understand the value of a vibrant private sector."

"And this really matters. Because when businesses grow, so do opportunities for local people. High-growth firms create skilled, well-paid jobs. They invest in training, innovation, and community partnerships. They help shape a prosperous future for the entire region."

Ricoh has yet to confirm how many staff at its Telford site are impacted by the decision to move toner output to a site in Normandy. It says the process is expected to take around 14 months, starting in May.

Councillor Shirley Reynolds, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for children & young people, learning, employment and skills, said: "We understand how incredibly difficult and unsettling this consultation period will be for Ricoh employees and their families."

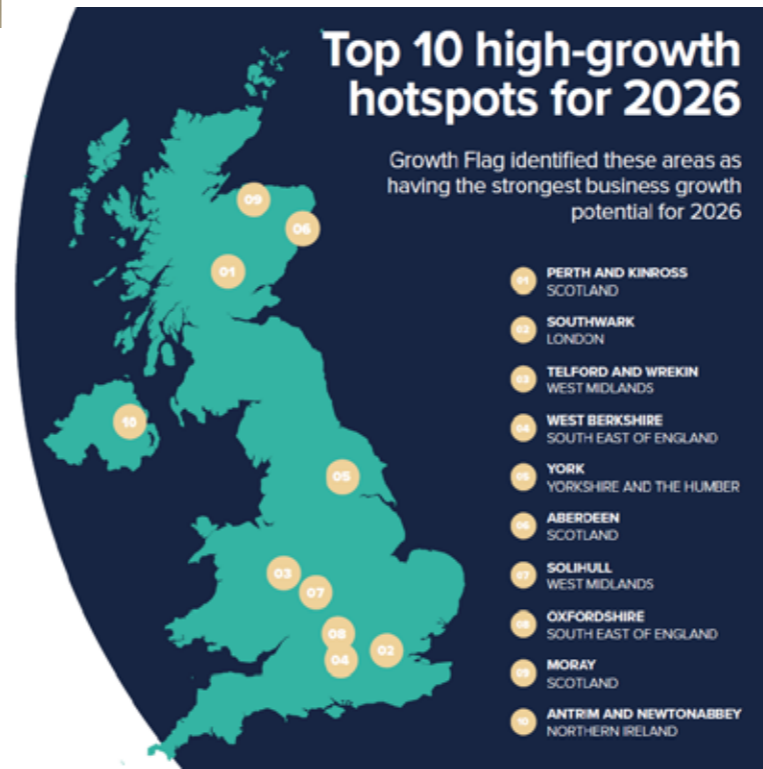
"If redundancies are confirmed, we want people to know that support will be available immediately."

"Whether it's exploring new training, updating a CV, or connecting with employers who are recruiting, our teams stand ready to provide one to one support to help residents plan their next steps with confidence."

At the Ironbridge Gorge Museums Trust, job roles most at risk are in areas such as IT, human resources and marketing.

National Trust regional director Paul Forecast said: "Financial challenges affecting the heritage sector led to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust approaching the National Trust to take on the care of the Ironbridge Gorge sites."

"We have looked at how the Ironbridge Gorge sites are currently run and how we can streamline processes, due to many management and support roles already existing within the National Trust."



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Could an outside objective view be of benefit to your business?

Ludlow-based John Knight is looking to offer his services as a business mentor to a select few local companies.

As managing director of Strategic Business Exits, he is looking to support other owners who are looking to plan for an exit or who are just ambitious, want to grow and think they could benefit from an outsider's objective input.

Over a 45-year career, John has been instrumental in establishing, building and selling six diverse businesses.

He grew his branded goods business – Brand Logistics & The Bentley Collection – from zero to £3 million turnover in three years and sold it the following year to a large competitor.

He also created and launched an intellectual property concept, Violent Veg, on a budget of £5,000, which attracted a £500,000 investment from a specialist venture capitalist and was sold four years later for a seven-figure sum.

"This is an interesting business case study," said John. "How to monetise a seemingly daft idea scribbled on a parking ticket!"

He's also been through four acquisitions including an MBO and, over the past 10 years, has put this experience to good use by helping business owners sell their businesses through his M&A advisory firm Strategic Business Exits.

John said: "Throughout my early business

career I was fortunate enough to have guidance from some very experienced business people who acted as mentors, or non-executive directors," he said.

"When running a business, time can become a black hole and, before you know it, you're no closer to your objectives than you were a year ago.

Over a 45-year career, John has been instrumental in establishing, building and selling six diverse businesses.

"Having a mentor on board questioning what we were doing each month, holding us to account and lending an outsider's objective viewpoint really helped keep us focused on what we were trying to achieve.

"I don't have an MBA – just grey hair and tons of business experience," he said. "And I'm not offering a dreaded formulaic algorithm-driven programme but informal, common sense advice and input tailored to each business."



John Knight of Strategic Business Exits

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Apprenticeship Awards

IT'S BACK . . .

Entries open for the 2026 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards on March 19th

We're looking for star apprentices, plus the best apprentice employers in the region.

NEW FOR THIS YEAR: Rising Star award, and Apprentice Mentor of the Year

Closing date for entries is June 26

FREE TO ENTER

Limited sponsorship opportunities still available.



Going back to where it all began

Piteau Associates, a specialist in geotechnical engineering, hydrogeology and water management consulting, has significantly expanded its presence in Shrewsbury. The company has tripled its floor space at Canon Court West on the Abbey Lawn business estate. The firm now employs 180 people across 11 office locations in seven countries, serving mainly the mining sector but also working on sectors ranging from environmental to municipal and industrial projects. Staff in Piteau Associates' Shrewsbury office provide mine water management support to projects worldwide. The move to the new suites at Abbey Lawn marks a resonant milestone for UK country manager Felip Ortuño. In a rare "full circle" moment, he has returned to the exact building where he first began his career upon arriving in the UK – describing it as "incredibly satisfying". The move to increase their footprint was facilitated by Morris Property and commercial agents TSR.



Felip Ortuño in his original office

North Wales move is an 'important acquisition'

Telford-based Northwood – a specialist in professional paper hygiene and wiping products – says it is gearing up for significant growth after acquiring a major new base in North Wales.

The Stafford Park company has taken over the Coleshill mill and converting facility from Kimberly-Clark, along with the Flint converting site previously operated by Kimberly-Clark Personal Care.

The acquisition includes a tissue mill capable of producing around 30,000 tonnes of tissue a year, a converting plant for rolled and folded tissue products, a national distribution centre, and a factory equipped with technology for manufacturing environmentally friendly wet wipes.

Although the value of the 98 acre purchase has not been disclosed, the deal means Northwood now employs 850 people across nine UK sites, including 250 at its Telford headquarters.

Paul Fecher, founder and chairman of Northwood, said: "This is another important acquisition and brings renewed opportunity for our businesses to expand in many traditional and new sectors. We look forward to populating the site and bringing it into full production under our UK management and ownership."

Operating as Northwood Tissue (Flint) Ltd, the site will be integrated into Northwood's Away From Home and consumer divisions. Thanks to its scale and strategic location, the company says the facility will complement its existing operations and support further expansion.

The tissue mill and wider site will strengthen Northwood's capabilities across both markets, enabling the business to broaden its product ranges and extend its value chain.

With the transaction now complete, systems are being aligned for a phased start up, and Northwood will begin a recruitment drive to create a significant number of local job opportunities.

Northwood operates across the hygiene sector in the UK and Europe and is the leading supplier of parent reels into the paper hygiene market. It has grown into one of the UK's foremost manufacturers in the sector, with a portfolio of well known brands including Rhino Kitchen Towel, Hush, Freedom, Raphael, North Shore and Whisper.

The company was founded by Mr Fecher in 1974, focusing on the supply of parent reels for the tissue sector. It acquired Kruger Tissue's UK operations in 2009, including a recycled tissue mill and converting plant.



Deal makers – from left, Marc Fecher, Paul Fecher, Adam Fecher and Paul King



The North Wales site at Flint

Productivity is on the up at aluminium specialist

Bridgnorth Aluminium has invested £600,000 in a new production line to help drive expansion into new markets.

The company says the refurbished Schmutz line will meet demand for new opportunities in underfloor heating and cooling applications for the automotive sector and data centres.

The investment gives the company an in-house capability for finishing thinner gauge materials.

Installed and upgraded by experienced engineers, the equipment will provide slitting and winding for thin gauge aluminium reels destined for customers in Wales, the EU and the US.

It comes just a few months after the business returned to 24/7 operations in key process areas, and builds on new molten metal filtration equipment that reduces impurities in the casting process.

Commercial director Adrian Musgrave said: "It has been a really positive start to 2026, with export orders up, new domestic clients secured, and some major advancements in capabilities well on the way to being completed."

"This is all being achieved against a backdrop of global uncertainty and is real testimony to the long-term strategy the management team has put in place, and the way our 330-strong workforce responded to a difficult time for our business in 2023."

"Every penny we spend futureproofs our factory in Shropshire and reinforces our commitment to remaining the UK's last remaining producer of flat rolled aluminium coils."

"The Schmutz line has also sparked a mini recruitment drive, with a 10% increase in our finishing team that work flexibility across several of our lines."

The company has also launched a focus group initiative designed to boost employee engagement and retention.

This has already proved crucial in BAL signing up to the Shropshire Investors in Community scheme run by Shropshire Community Foundation, which will give it access to charities and grassroots organisations across the county.

Adrian added: "We are immensely proud of our heritage, having been a part of the local landscape since the 1950s."

"Generations of local people have been part of our past story, and we want to explore ways where the next generation can write their own chapter in our success, ensuring the local economy benefits at the same time."

Bridgnorth Aluminium continues to lobby Government and key stakeholders on the importance of aluminium as one of the UK's critical minerals and an essential ingredient in the nationwide move to Net Zero.



Inside the Bridgnorth Aluminium manufacturing base



Bridgnorth Aluminium is one of Shropshire's biggest employers

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Could your business benefit from engaging an experienced mentor?

Over my 45-year business career I benefitted hugely from the objective and strategic advice I received from non-executives and business mentors, all of whom had **'been there and done it'**. They ensured we stayed on track through advising, probing, questioning and making us accountable at board meetings every month.

Over that time, I've built and sold six businesses, been through 4 acquisitions and, for the past 10 years, I've worked in M&A, advising entrepreneurs on the sale of their businesses.

My experience covers all aspects of establishing, managing, growing and selling small businesses, including:

- Strategic planning
- Intellectual Property
- Sales & marketing
- Contracts
- M&A, finance & funding
- Building management teams

I took my branded goods business from zero to £3m in 3 years

It's this experience I could bring to bear for business owners who are ambitious, looking to grow or perhaps planning an exit.

If you'd like to explore whether I might be able to add value to your business, please email me in confidence:

john@strategic-business-exits.com



John Knight,
Managing Director,
Strategic Business Exits Ltd



Car radio brainwave



Vicky Coates, Ben Coates and Maddi Bailey in the Garage Talk studio

A Shropshire creative agency has launched a new radio show targeted specifically at the automotive aftermarket.

Garage Talk Radio is the brainchild of Ben and Vicky Coates of Shropshire Creative, who said it was born from a desire to 'bring the automotive aftermarket into the digital age'.

After spotting what they felt was a clear gap in the industry's online presence, they set out to create a platform that would connect the sector through news, insight, and conversation, starting with the launch of the Garage Talk website and social media channels.

The two-hour show, which runs on Tuesdays and Thursdays, brings together industry news, insight, conversation and entertainment in one place, including guest interviews from across the industry and listener-led features.

Insurance for horses in sport

Whitchurch-based Stallion AI Services has formed a partnership with SEIB Insurance Brokers to provide tailored sport horse insurance solutions.

This collaboration will enable the former Shropshire Company of the Year's clients to access sport horse insurance with bespoke and discounted cover.

Tullis Matson from Stallion AI Services said: "We are excited to partner with SEIB Insurance Brokers. This collaboration allows us to offer our clients tailored sport horse insurance solutions that perfectly complement our advanced equine reproduction services.

"Together, we aim to provide breeders, owners, and sport horse professionals not only with cutting-edge reproductive technology but also with comprehensive financial protection and peace of mind.

This partnership reflects our shared commitment to supporting the long-term welfare and success of the equestrian community

"This partnership reflects our shared commitment to supporting the long-term welfare and success of the equestrian community."

Paul Glasper, commercial director from SEIB Insurance Brokers, said: "We are thrilled to partner with Stallion AI Services – an industry leader whose dedication to the future of equine reproduction aligns with our own commitment to providing unparalleled protection for sport horses.

"Together, we are setting the highest expectations for our horses' wellbeing and performance capability through equine science and financial peace of mind."

Alongside offering sport horse insurance, Stallion AI Services is also working alongside SEIB to offer specialist embryo and semen insurance.

Knock, knock... we're moving in next door

It's another big year of progress for office furniture and stationery company Chrisbeon, which is increasing its floor space by 50% in a major expansion

It's shaping up to be another landmark year for long established Shropshire office furniture and stationery supplier Chrisbeon, which has announced a major expansion of its operations.

The family-run company, based in Telford, has acquired the building directly next door to its existing showroom on the Stafford Park trading estate, allowing it to increase its overall footprint by 50%.

The move reflects both sustained growth and a strategic commitment to enhancing the customer experience at a time when businesses are rethinking their workspaces and seeking more flexible, sustainable solutions.

Partners Craig and Richard Hughes took possession of the new premises at the start of the year, and have created an internal connection between the two buildings which allows customers to move seamlessly through an expanded showroom offering a wider range of furniture, seating, storage and preloved items.

"This expansion allows us to enhance the showroom experience for our customers while also strengthening the operational side of the business," says Richard.

"By taking on the premises next door, we can build directly onto what we already have in Telford. It's a practical investment that supports both our team and our long term plans."

The additional space means Chrisbeon can showcase more products in situ, helping customers visualise how furniture will work in their own offices.

A mezzanine floor has been built at the rear of the new building, creating extra storage capacity and improving logistics efficiency – a key consideration for a business that prides itself on prompt delivery and responsive service.

The expansion follows the successful launch of Chrisbeon's online webstore, chrisbeonshop.co.uk, which has streamlined ordering for business customers across the UK.

Although the bulk of the company's work



Moving in next door... Chrisbeon directors Richard and Craig Hughes

is in the Shropshire, Mid Wales and West Midlands area, it delivers products nationwide – including a next-day courier service for stationery.

"Our aim has always been to offer a prompt service, and the webstore has allowed customers to easily browse, select, order, and relax while we handle the delivery," says Craig. "But many still want to see and try furniture in person.

"This new space gives them more choice and more room to explore – and it also allows us to showcase our hugely popular preloved used office furniture range."

A Half Century of Family Values

Chrisbeon proudly celebrated 50 years in business in 2024, and has continued to grow and thrive ever since.

The company began in 1974 when Craig and Richard's father, Brian, teamed up with his cousin Chris to sell used office furniture. Their mother, Jean, soon joined the venture, helping to embed the family ethos that still shapes the company today.

And the next generation is already coming through – Richard's son Tom Hughes has also been working in the business for the past seven years.

What started as a small operation quickly grew into a trusted supplier for businesses across Shropshire and beyond, which has been at its current base on Stafford Park since 1990.

"Our 50th anniversary was a big year for us," says Richard.

"A lot has changed since 1974, but our commitment to our clients remains the same. We've grown our client base, retained loyal customers, and continued to build momentum."

The crowning glory from that golden anniversary year was success at the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, where Chrisbeon was crowned Best Small Business on the local business community's biggest night of the year.

"We were all absolutely thrilled with the award," Richard says.

"The business awards are something of an institution here in the Shropshire business community and we are always happy to support the event, judging categories in the past and attending the event with our team to celebrate another successful year.

"It genuinely meant a lot to us to be recognised for our efforts, and to be presented with the award in our 50th year really did make it extra special."

Sustainability at the Heart of the Business

One of the strongest drivers of recent growth has been Chrisbeon's focus on sustainability.

The company's preloved furniture range – a nod to its origins – has become a major part of its offering, appealing to businesses looking to reduce waste and make environmentally responsible choices.



With decades of experience, a strong family ethos and a comprehensive product and service offering, Chrisbeon supports organisations nationwide

The company's range of preloved furniture is not included online, as it changes on a weekly basis. If customers are unable to visit the Telford showroom, they can call or email the Chrisbeon team to check what's in stock, and receive emailed photos and prices.

"There is nothing more sustainable than buying preloved rather than new furniture," Richard explains. "Our preloved range is as popular as ever, and remains a very big and successful part of our business."

The company is always looking at ways of reducing its carbon footprint. It has an electric vehicle charging point, and sends its waste cardboard, plastic and packaging pieces back to one of its manufacturers for reuse or recycling.

And it has cut back on printed catalogues in favour of online ordering. These changes reflect both customer expectations and the company's own environmental commitments.

In 2025, Chrisbeon sent more than 4,800kg of material for recycling, generating a total CO2 saving of over 4,200 kgCO2e.



Proud winners of the Best Small Business title at the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards in 2024

Supporting Businesses Through Change

Over the past year, Chrisbeon has seen increased demand for its CAD 3D office planning service, which helps businesses redesign their workspaces with precision and confidence.

The team has also supported more companies relocating or reconfiguring their offices — a trend driven by hybrid working and the need for adaptable environments as Shropshire businesses adjust in the wake of the Covid pandemic.

"Working with a business from start to finish is something we really enjoy," says Richard. "Helping them plan their new offices, providing the furniture, putting it in place — and then seeing it all come together for their teams — it's incredibly rewarding."

A Proud Part of the Shropshire Business Community

As long standing Patrons of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Craig and Richard remain active supporters of the local business community. They regularly attend networking events, collaborate with fellow businesses, and continue to support charities and good causes across the county.

"The face of the Shropshire business community has changed over the last half century," Richard reflects. "But Chrisbeon has grown and adapted during that time to remain an integral part of it."



A wide range of new and preloved furniture is on display



Chairs for all occasions, budgets - and colour preferences



Chrisbeon supplied the furniture for the refit of the Pave Aways reception area at Knockin



Personal, friendly service - the heart of values at Chrisbeon

Still family owned and run, Chrisbeon has built its reputation on reliability, personal service and long term relationships. That ethos remains central to the business today, underpinning everything from product sourcing to installation and aftercare.

The company's ISO9001 accreditation reflects this commitment, ensuring consistently high standards across both public sector and commercial projects.

Chrisbeon is also a proud supporter of the Shropshire Community Foundation, which champions 'local giving', building partnerships with like-minded individuals and organisations who also want their local communities to thrive.

It doesn't compete with local charities, but instead acts as a philanthropic hub to direct funds to them - providing an informed and professional channel for anyone looking to give within Shropshire.

National Buying Power, Local Expertise

As a member of a national buying group with a combined turnover exceeding £25 million, Chrisbeon benefits from significant purchasing power. This enables the company to offer a vast choice of office furniture, seating and stationery, with highly competitive pricing across its full product range

Customers gain the advantages of national scale procurement while still enjoying the personal service of a local, family run firm.

Chrisbeon's offering extends far beyond traditional office supplies. Services and product ranges include:

- Office Furniture: Extensive collections of desks, seating, storage and workplace accessories
- 3D Office Space Planning: A professional design service helping businesses create efficient, well planned office layouts
- Stationery & Business Supplies: Nationwide next day delivery on more than 29,000 products
- Large Telford Showroom: Featuring new and preloved furniture, seating, storage and stationery
- Pre-loved Office Furniture: Substantial stocks of quality used furniture, with a trade in service available
- Bespoke Furniture Solutions: Custom designed items for spaces where off the shelf options aren't suitable
- Free Chair Trials: Short term testing of office chairs to ensure comfort and suitability



Ready to dispatch deliveries of all sizes to the business community of Shropshire and beyond



Whatever you need for your office, Chrisbeon can help you make the most of your space

- Educational & Café Furniture: Classroom tables and chairs, breakout seating and café style furnishings
- Printed Business Gifts: Branded pens, keyrings, umbrellas, USB sticks, mugs and more

With decades of experience, a strong family ethos and a comprehensive product and service offering, Chrisbeon continues to support organisations nationwide with dependable, cost effective workplace solutions.

Whether supplying a single office chair or fitting out an entire building, the company remains committed to delivering quality, value and exceptional customer care. 📧



Inside the Stafford Park showroom

**Chrisbeon Office Supplies, Units B2 & B3, Stafford Park 4, Telford, Shropshire, TF3 3BA
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Website: www.chrisbeon.co.uk / www.chrisbeonshop.co.uk**

The Telford Skills Show is back for the tenth year this month. The free, annual event which started in 2016 gets bigger and bigger every year and is a huge showcase of employment, apprenticeship and training opportunities across the region.

Telford & Wrekin Council's Job Box team is co-ordinating the event at Telford International Centre on Thursday 19 March from noon to 6pm.

The council is sponsoring the event along with the Careers & Enterprise Company, Telford College and Harper Adams University.

Open to all ages, the event attracts a wide range of employers from across Telford, Shropshire and the West Midlands and those attending this year include Pave Aways, Housing Plus Group (Wrekin Housing) and public services including the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force.

At the event people can:

- Discover real job, apprenticeship and career opportunities
- Try hands on activities and explore different career paths
- Get personalised advice on CVs, applications and interview
- Meet employers and industry experts to learn what they're looking for

Telford & Wrekin Council will have a stand at the event to promote latest vacancies and apprenticeships with the local authority.

You can find out more about the Telford Skills Show and sign up for it by searching 'Telford Job Box Skills Show' or emailing jobbox@telford.gov.uk



The Skills Show returns to Telford International Centre on March 19

Telford Skills Show back for 10th year

Many employers will be actively recruiting at the event as well as offering hands-on activities for people to give them an interactive on-the-day experience.

For employers attending the Telford Skills Show there are lots of benefits. They can connect directly with future talent on the doorstep and help to inspire the next generation.

Councillor Shirley Reynolds, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for children, young people, education, employment & skills, said: "We are really excited to see the Telford Skills Show back once again at the Telford International Centre – an event which gets bigger and bigger each year and is now celebrating its 10th anniversary.

"People of all ages can check out the wide range of opportunities which are available

and there are many success stories of people who have attended previously and now find themselves in full time employment or an apprenticeship.

"In Telford and Wrekin, we know the difference that a good job can make to an individual's life."

Sam Hine, social value and inclusion manager at Housing Plus Group, said: "We're really looking forward to the Telford Skills Show this year and have been regular attenders over the years.

"We find it a really good opportunity to meet with local people who are looking for work or a career change or wondering what they might do post education. It's a really good opportunity for us as a big local employer. We employ a lot of people locally in all sorts of careers and jobs."



An artist's impression of the new £10 million school

£10 million school project

SJ Roberts Construction has been appointed to deliver a new £10 million school project in Mid Wales.

The company, based at Marton on the west Shropshire border, will build a new Special Educational Needs and Alternative Provision school in Kerry near Newtown.

Once complete, the new facility will replace the adjacent school building, which the local authority has declared as no longer fit for purpose.

Work is just getting under way, with an anticipated 18-month build schedule in readiness for a planned launch of the new school in autumn 2027.

SJ Roberts Construction will partner with its sister company Lowfield Timber Frames which

will be responsible for the design and erection of the timber frame structure around which the new 1,650 square metre school building will be constructed.

Other key design details will include solar PV panels, air source heat pumps, and a mechanical ventilation heat recovery system. These features will ensure the new building achieves Net Zero Carbon once in operation.

SJ Roberts Construction managing director Mike Sambrook said: "This is an exciting project to be working on as we're passionate about delivering high quality, future-proofed learning environments.

"When it's a project based near to our own headquarters, it's extra special as it allows us to combine our local knowledge with our in-house specialist teams to ensure the highest

standards of quality and co-ordination. We are committed to utilising the local supply chain wherever possible but have also engaged with market leading consultants in architecture and sustainability to work alongside those experienced teams."

SJ Roberts Construction and Lowfield Timber Frames have delivered a range of previous education-related projects for clients including Telford & Wrekin Council, The 3-18 Education Trust, and PGL Travel.

James Gibson-Watt, cabinet member for Learning Powys, said: "This investment will ensure pupils have access to facilities that meet modern standards and support their learning and wellbeing. It also reflects our commitment to transforming education and building a stronger, fairer, greener future."



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A shift in investment:

Why commercial property is gaining momentum as the investment of choice



James Evans

Halls has completed the sale of the former bank in High Street, Church Stretton

Over my 35-year tenure as a registered commercial property valuer and agent, I have witnessed many shifts in investor sentiment and property investment in the property market.

Due to the prohibitive and worrying legislation changes for residential property, as the head of Commercial Property for Halls, I am seeing a notable pivot in investment strategy by investors: landlords are moving away from residential property portfolios and increasingly turning to commercial property for capital investment. As we move forward, this trend reflects both regulatory changes in the residential sector and the enduring advantages of a commercial property portfolio.

The Residential Conundrum

The Renters (Reform) Bill 2023–2024 is arguably the most significant catalyst for investment change. It promises greater tenant security but also introduces a series of challenges for residential landlords. Key changes include the abolition of Section 21 “no-fault” evictions, more structured and contestable rent increases, and

the insecurity of tenancy durations. Landlords will also face stricter obligations for repairs, safety compliance and potential penalties for non-compliance.

Additional reforms on the horizon, such as rent caps, tighter, minimum base EPC standards and adjustments to leasehold rights could further impact residential investment returns and the attractions of residential properties as an investment vehicle. With higher compliance costs, increased paperwork burdens, reduced rental rate and non-compliant eviction flexibility, residential property is becoming a much less predictable investment environment.

Commercial Property – what’s the appeal?

Offering an alternative view, commercial property investment offers strategic advantages. Longer leases bring income stability, while tenants typically handle property maintenance under Full Repairing and Insuring leases, reducing operational headaches. Commercial yields are generally higher than residential, with net returns often ranging from between 5% to 10%, depending on tenant covenant, location and property type.

Other benefits include lower tenant turnover and voids, more straightforward eviction processes, and, quite importantly, commercial property performance is closely linked to the strength of tenants’ businesses rather than the wider housing market – offering greater peace of mind for investors.

Pace in the commercial marketplace: 2 High Street, Church Stretton

According to our Agency Team insights, Shropshire’s commercial investment market is particularly active stepping into 2026 with use

and understanding supply. A recent example is the investment sale of 2 High Street, Church Stretton – a former banking hall with an existing tenancy to PCB Solicitors LLP. Listed as an investment opportunity which was offered for £250,000. The property went under offer within a day and is now under the ownership of a private property company. The current lease provides an annual rent of £19,700, giving a net initial yield of 7.7%.

This attractive building provides over 2,700 sq ft of office accommodation, including basement space, accessible facilities and the benefit of a secure, existing professional tenant. Its prime location in a sought-after town with excellent transport links, adjacent to the A49 and within easy reach of Shrewsbury and Ludlow, demonstrates the fast-moving demand for premium, well-positioned commercial investment assets from smaller property investors.

“This property illustrates the strength of commercial investment sales in Shropshire,” said James. “The property offered a strong tenant covenant alongside a good commercial location, attracting significant interest and achieving a rapid sale. Investors looking to sell or acquire commercial properties should contact us.”

Looking ahead

For investors navigating the evolving investment landscape, commercial property offers stability, yield and strategic flexibility. Halls Commercial is actively seeking investment properties to meet growing client demand; we have retained clients who can act fast. Whether considering an acquisition, sale or valuation, our team provides industry-backed advice and access to on and off-market opportunities to align opportunities with client needs.

James Evans is head of commercial property at Halls Commercial

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Paul Inions and Andrew Dunham of McPhillips with Nigel Ryan of EVC Solutions



Anna Williams and Steph Smith from Lingen Davies



Sarah Thompson, Andy Weston and Dan Turner at the launch event

Awards look to the future

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has unveiled plans for its 2026 Business Awards, promising a glittering event that will be ‘celebrating excellence and inspiring tomorrow’.

A capacity crowd of business people gathered at Hencote vineyard and restaurant in Shrewsbury for the official launch event, to hear about this year’s categories.

There are 14 awards on offer this year, including the showpiece Company of the Year title, and returning categories for new businesses, small businesses, outstanding customer service, and innovation.

Also returning this year are awards for community champion, outstanding business growth, excellence in manufacturing and engineering, retail leisure and hospitality achievement, and Young Business Person of the Year.

New for 2026 is a Best Place to Work award, while eco-friendly companies can apply for a new-look sustainability achievement prize.

The awards are free to enter, and companies do not have to be a Shropshire Chamber member to qualify. They simply need to have an operating base in either Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin.

Shropshire Live presenter Ryan Kennedy, who is hosting this year’s awards, spoke to Paul Inions of Company of the Year reigning champions McPhillips, Lawrence Wood from sponsor and past winner Telford College, and Anna Williams of Lingen Davies – which has been selected as the charity to benefit from fundraising at the awards this year.

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said: “This year marks the 26th anniversary of our awards. Over more than two decades, they’ve become a true highlight of the Shropshire business calendar, and I’m proud to say that 2026 will be no different.

“Our theme this year is ‘Celebrating Excellence and Inspiring Tomorrow’. It’s about shining a spotlight on the outstanding performers across all corners of our business community, while also recognising the rising stars who are shaping the county’s future.”



Awards host Ryan Kennedy with members of the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce team



Guests gather at Hencote vineyard and restaurant for the launch

This year’s winners will be crowned at Telford’s International Centre on Friday June 19.

At the launch event, the Chamber’s team outlined remaining sponsorship opportunities, with packages on offer for every budget. They also released a batch of discounted ‘early bird’ tickets for the awards night.

Kelly Riedel, the Chamber’s head of member success, said: “For sponsors and for finalists, the awards night provides an incredible chance



Shropshire Live presenter Ryan Kennedy will host this year's awards ceremony

to showcase their brands in front of up to 700 people.”

● Entries for the awards close on April 17. Shropshire Business editor and awards co-founder Carl Jones will be running a free awards writing workshop at Shropshire Chamber’s Telford offices on March 12. Places can be booked through the Shropshire Chamber website. For more information about the awards, visit www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/awards



Ryan Kennedy with Chris Pritchard and Shropshire Business magazine editor Carl Jones



Lawrence Wood of award sponsor Telford College



The 2026 awards are officially launched

THE 2026 AWARDS CATEGORIES AND CRITERIA

COMPANY OF THE YEAR: The showpiece award for an all-round star performer, flying the flag for Shropshire business excellence. Judged on a combination of:

- Evidence of financial success
- Creativity, innovation and ambition
- Leadership and customer service excellence
- Training, people development and marketing strategies
- Giving back – showing a commitment to Shropshire
- Effective response to economic challenges
- Awards, testimonials and accolades
- A commitment to diversity, wellbeing and sustainability

BEST NEW BUSINESS: For start-ups in any sector, formed since January 2023. Entries will be assessed on:

- Strength and originality of business vision
- Clear and dynamic business plan
- Financial objectives, and evidence of progress
- Creative and ambitious marketing and growth strategies
- Testimonials, case studies and accolades

BEST SMALL BUSINESS: For small or micro businesses in any sector, employing up to 10 full-time equivalent staff. Judged on:

- Innovation, and forward-thinking strategies for growth
- Gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage
- Commitment to staff development and wellbeing
- Clear and creative marketing and growth plans
- Accolades, testimonials, and evidence of financial success

OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE: For companies that go the extra mile in looking after the needs of their customers. Judged on:

- Ways of consistently exceeding customer expectations
- Measuring customer satisfaction, and acting on feedback
- Training and development in customer handling and service skills
- Awards, accolades and testimonials
- Evidence of going the extra mile to deliver five-star service

OUTSTANDING BUSINESS GROWTH: For companies who can demonstrate sustained success over the past three years. Judged on:

- Evidence of strategic and profitable expansion including accounts and payroll growth for 3 years, new products/services and expansion into new markets
- A dynamic and scalable business model
- Profitability, plus a growth in staff numbers and/or turnover
- Ability to break into new markets, at home or overseas
- A commitment to staff development and wellbeing

COMMUNITY CHAMPION – BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY: For businesses that believe in ‘putting something back’ into the Shropshire community. Judged on:

- Top-to-bottom ‘buy-in’ from staff at all levels, over and above statutory requirements
- Examples of projects which have made a real difference to local people’s lives
- Supporting Shropshire suppliers by ‘buying local’
- Fostering links with schools, colleges and community groups
- Case studies, endorsements and testimonials

EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING: Celebrating the contribution being made by companies of all sizes in the manufacturing and engineering sectors. Judged on:

- Innovation and customer satisfaction
- Quality control processes, and use of new technology
- Effective leadership and management
- Testimonials, and evidence of financial success
- Health, safety and wellbeing policies and processes

EXCELLENCE IN TOURISM: For organisations that deliver outstanding visitor experiences and showcase the very best of Shropshire’s tourism sector. Judged on:

- Creating memorable, high quality experiences for visitors
- Innovative approaches to enhancing the visitor journey
- Investment in staff training, service standards and tourism specific skills
- Evidence of strong visitor feedback, reviews and repeat custom
- Contribution to promoting the local area, culture or destination

RETAIL, LEISURE & HOSPITALITY ACHIEVEMENT: For companies making a positive contribution to some of Shropshire’s most important sectors. Judged on:

- Established market position and strong financial performance
- Overcoming challenges to gain a competitive advantage
- Commitment to staff development and wellbeing
- Clear and creative marketing and growth plans
- Awards, accolades and testimonials

BEST PLACE TO WORK: For organisations of any size or sector that demonstrate outstanding commitment to creating a positive, supportive, and rewarding workplace culture. Judged on:

- Employee engagement, satisfaction, and retention initiatives
- Commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities
- Investment in staff development, training, and career progression
- Wellbeing programmes and support for work-life balance
- Recognition, testimonials, and evidence of workplace excellence

THE TRAILBLAZER – INNOVATION AWARD: For companies who have spotted a gap in the market, and thought outside the box to fill it. Judged on:

- Your USP: What makes you stand out from the competition?
- Innovation in products, services or processes
- Evidence of profitability and effective leadership
- Testimonials, awards, and potential for future growth
- A commitment to staff development and wellbeing

SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENT: For companies leading the way in environmental responsibility and sustainable business practices. Judged on:

- Proven commitment to reducing environmental footprint and promoting resource efficiency
- Innovative approaches to sustainable products, services, or operations
- Integration of sustainability into long-term business strategy and culture
- Positive impact on staff, customers, and the wider community through sustainable initiatives
- Recognition, certifications, or endorsements highlighting environmental leadership

YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON: Open to anyone aged 30 or below in January 2026 who demonstrates flair, commitment and an entrepreneurial spirit. Judged on:

- Evidence of a significant influence on the business
- A commitment to training and personal development
- Entrepreneurial attitude, reliability and work ethic
- Strong people skills and maturity beyond their years
- Testimonials from managers, colleagues, and/or customers

THE JOHN CLAYTON AWARD: For an individual who has given an outstanding contribution to the Shropshire business community. They need to have:

- Championed the Shropshire business community over a significant number of years
- Made a significant positive impact on the lives of others
- Given back to the county through either mentorship, volunteering or charitable actions
- Been an inspirational role model who has inspired their colleagues or peers



Breakfast with bites of information

Wrekin College is looking to build on the success of its 'Business Breakfast' series and online business directory this year to strengthen links with the local economy.

They cite the initiatives as key platforms for collaboration and knowledge-sharing, and part of the school's wider commitment to supporting enterprise, entrepreneurship and real-world learning.

The first Business Breakfast of the year looked at 'Protecting Your Business with Intellectual Property' – an issue of growing importance as businesses look to safeguard their brands and support their long-term growth.

Guest speaker Chris Hawkes, director at leading IP law firm Stobbs, shared practical, commercially focused guidance on trademarks, copyright, designs and IP strategy.

Ben Smith, joint acting headmaster at Wrekin College, said the school was keen to grow the initiative further this year.

"We've seen a really positive response to our business networking programme, and in 2026 we want to build on that energy. We aim to create a sustainable, supportive network where parents, alumni and local businesses can share expertise, form partnerships and learn from one another.

"Starting the year with a session on intellectual property reflects the kind of practical, relevant topics we want to explore. These events are about offering real value to businesses, while also giving our pupils insight into the professional world they will one day enter."

The Wrekin Business Directory, which already includes more than 50 businesses, has been created as a networking and visibility tool for businesses connected to Wrekin College, connecting local companies from a wide range of sectors.

Copies of the directory will be available to download via the school website and shared across the parent body, the school, and the Old Wrekinians Association.



Wrekin College is looking to build on its 'Business Breakfast' programme

New site in county town

Supply2Trade has chosen Shrewsbury as the site for its sixth UK branch.

The company has opened on Vanguard Way at Battlefield Enterprise Park, where it has a window centre, trade counter and showroom.

The Stoke-based business is a partner for trade professionals across the UK, delivering UPVC and aluminium products.

Founded in 2019, it now has more than 5,000 trade customers and has grown from a single warehouse to a UK network of six branches.

The deal for the 3,783 square feet unit in Shrewsbury – which has an additional 1,247 sq ft mezzanine and forecourt car parking – was completed through Halls commercial.

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Recruitment innovation sees reinvestment in local enterprise

An innovative new recruitment service is reshaping how employers across Telford and the wider Shropshire county access skilled staff, while ensuring that all profits generated are reinvested to fuel innovation and enterprise.

Unitemps Harper Adams was only formally launched back in September but is already rapidly emerging as one of the county's most forward thinking recruitment services. Positioned with a clear social purpose, it connects talent with meaningful opportunity, all while powering the next generation of local enterprise.

"At the heart of our approach is a commitment to understanding the needs of local businesses," said Jenice Forde, branch manager at Unitemps.

"Employers benefit from a responsive, streamlined hiring process, a strong pipeline of motivated candidates, and a service that feels more like a long-term partner than a traditional agency. And the team's mission is rooted in purpose as much as performance."

"Every placement we make contributes directly to the university's ability to invest in enterprise, research and innovation, and that benefits the whole of Shropshire."

Recognised as 'Shropshire's University', Unitemps strengthens Harper Adams' role as a catalyst for innovation, and creates a continuous cycle for talent, enterprise and opportunity.

This reinvestment model sets the service apart. Profits from recruitment are reinvested into initiatives that help students, graduates, and local industries bring new ideas to life. Funds support business incubation, research, industry collaboration and skills development programmes that have a tangible impact on the region's economic resilience.



Jenice Forde, centre, believes in helping to meet the needs of business

For employers, the benefits are two-fold – access to high quality recruitment support, and the knowledge that their partnership is helping to drive regional growth.

"We're here to support businesses with the talent they need today, but also to strengthen the region for tomorrow," Jenice said.

Any businesses looking to learn more about the Unitemps service are invited to connect with Jenice, or her colleagues Helen Walker or Amelia Fleet, on 01952 815207 or email unitemps@harper-adams.ac.uk

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New partnerships are a beautiful idea



Deborah Mitchell, Jodie Allen, Ella Cox, Pippa Eley and Holly Wilkinson at the launch event

Telford College has relaunched its hair and beauty training salons with two exciting new partnerships.

It has teamed up with locally-based cosmetics company Heaven to supply skincare products, and with leading global brand L'Oréal for its professional haircare range.

The Retreat is the college's on-site hair and beauty salon, which not only serves as a specialist training facility, but also opens to the public. Level three students conduct treatments under the watchful eye of tutors.

The Heaven team – including founder

and former Telford College student Deborah Mitchell – attended the launch event to support students and see their products being used in the salons. Deborah also spent time speaking one to one with learners, offering industry insights and product knowledge.

She said: "We are extremely proud to announce our partnership with Telford College. As part of this exciting collaboration, students will be fully-equipped with Heaven Skincare products, giving them the tools to learn and excel in their craft. We can't wait to see the amazing talent that emerges from this programme."

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Delivering adult skills training across the region

Telford College is strengthening its position as one of the West Midlands' most active skills providers, delivering large scale adult training programmes well beyond its Shropshire base to help employers tackle ongoing labour shortages.

The college's HGV training provision, which is funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority and delivered in partnership with PR Training, GTG Training and A1 Training, has become one of the largest programmes of its kind in the region.

Designed to address the national shortfall of qualified HGV drivers, it is now supporting unemployed and low income adults across multiple West Midlands communities, including high need areas across Birmingham and the Black Country.

Hundreds of adults have completed the college's 'Into Employment' pathway, with qualification and job outcome rates reported to be above regional averages.

The programme combines classroom learning, practical driver training and employability workshops, with digital access supported through the provision of laptops.

"It's a model which is deliberately built around inclusion," says Beckie Bosworth, the college's director of partnerships and employer engagement.

"A significant proportion of participants come from diverse cultural backgrounds, women are entering logistics roles in increasing numbers, and wrap around support – including financial literacy sessions, hardship funds, mental health guidance and career coaching – is helping to remove barriers that typically prevent adults from re entering training."

Telford College was named Engaging Adults in Learning winner at the West Midlands Combined Authority adult learning awards last summer.

Beckie says: "More than 400 learners have completed logistics programmes in Birmingham, Coventry, Dudley, and Wolverhampton over the past year – areas with some of the highest unemployment rates in the region."

"Of these learners, nearly half come from diverse cultural backgrounds, and many are women, challenging stereotypes and promoting inclusivity in traditionally male-dominated sectors such as HGV and logistics."

"We collaborate with key partners such as the Department for Work and Pensions, Shaw Trust, National Careers Service, and Ingeus, to offer vital wrap-around support, including financial literacy workshops, hardship funds, and career guidance."

"This holistic, inclusive approach empowers people to overcome barriers, helps employers fill critical vacancies, and strengthens the local economy."



Telford College's HGV training provision is funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority and delivered in partnership with PR Training

One of the college's most successful adult training programmes in the West Midlands is its HGV provision, which aims to give unemployed and low income adults the qualifications, skills, and confidence needed to secure jobs in the logistics sector.

It is helping to address the national shortage of 200,000 HGV drivers expected in the next five years.

Alongside logistics, the team continues to deliver a broad portfolio of adult training across the region

Employer engagement is central to Telford College's work across the region.

For example, the college launched a new bus driver training programme, piloted in Wolverhampton, to help fill dozens of vacancies. This was delivered in partnership with National Express West Midlands, West Midlands Combined Authority, and the Department for Work and Pensions.

Alongside logistics, the team continues to deliver a broad portfolio of adult training across the region. This includes employer focused health related qualifications such as first aid, paediatric first aid, fire marshal training and wider mandatory compliance courses.



Let's Make Britain Great Again

Anton Gunter



Howzit. These are exciting times, and as we all sit down and watch the football World Cup and support our various countries (yes, the mighty Bafana Bafana has made the cut!), some of us will watch with particular interest and pride in a job well done.

I can already hear you ask: "But how does a freight forwarder sit down and smile even as his team is beaten?"

Well, if it wasn't for an agent in Mexico, a consignee in Mexico City, a consignor in Doncaster – and yes, your favourite freight forwarder based in Telford – we might not even be watching football. And here's why.

The world is a very busy place, never more so than when companies and countries are preparing to host the world's largest televised sporting event. Millions of viewers are depending on the services of a freight forwarding company in Telford – and this is where we should all be proud.

UK made cabling, so crucial to the broadcast industry, is wanted across the world, and that's a proud moment for Britain in its attempt to become great again. But how do we help, and how do we ensure it is received on time and within budget?

"Hard work," you'll hear me shout. "Very hard work." It starts with relationship building in – of all places – a beer spa in Prague and a conversation between UK based agent Global

Freight Services and a Mexican based agent, Berpar International.

Yes, sometimes business is done in strange places; the seeds of this job were firmly sown while sitting in wooden tubs of beer, and whilst this was just the starting block, it was the important friendship building which underpins all of our agency work.

Upon return from Prague, a lengthy conversation took place with various airlines to ascertain service levels, space availability and, importantly, pricing. This part of the process is ongoing, because despite the fact that service levels are agreed and pricing is fixed, it's the space allocations which require the hardest work.

Continual conversations are needed when bookings are made to make sure 20 or 30 pallets depart on time to meet tight deadlines. Christmas, New Year and any day in between is still used to make sure the pallets actually leave on flights as assigned.

Did you know that when you go on holiday, below you can be anything from cables to foodstuffs, pets and animals to bicycles, laptops to cans of beer? The cargo hold is a hive of activity and on certain routes and flights, you may even see a Lamborghini being loaded on.

But back to the pallets that have now departed on their 10 hour flight to Mexico City. Our job is to make sure the agent knows they are on their way, and we continually update on the progress of the plane once we know the cargo has departed.

Because whilst our process is coming to an end once the plane arrives, in Mexico the job is only just starting. They will need to start the process of customs clearance and, once the cabling arrives, they must arrange delivery as quickly as possible to ensure deadlines are met and the customer is happy enough to book the next 20 pallets for shipment.

So when you are watching the World Cup this summer, no matter where you are in the world, think about Global Freight Services and how we help agents and clients to not only take their products locally, but also globally.

Think, too, about how we as a nation can



Cheers... networking in a giant tub of beer

stop with the negativity and hatred, and can all make a difference in life to ensure this little island, with so many good attributes, once again becomes great.

Because without the guy who makes the cable, the guy who makes the plastic around the cable won't be needed. Without the guy who makes the plastic reels on which the cables are reeled, the cable will knot and be damaged.

Then we have the delivery driver – without whom the product would still be at the manufacturer, which would mean the guys loading the plane also have less to do.

Then we have Global Freight Services, and together with the whole supply chain we work to make sure Britain and her great products get to their destinations and ensure that the world sees these great products.

Do you need your products seen on the world stage? Do you already export? Does the world know who your company is? If 'no' is the answer to any of the questions asked, give us a call.

And remember, South Africa has just as much chance of winning the World Cup as England...

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

Rural businesses nominated for awards

Shropshire has received a string of nominations in the regional finals of the Countryside Alliance Awards... affectionately known as the 'rural Oscars'.

The Awards recognise the vital role that independent businesses play in supporting the rural economy and fostering community spirit across the British countryside.

Three local favourites are vying for the Midlands title in the best pub category: The Castle Inn at Bletchley, The Tally Ho at Bouldon, and The White Horse in Clun.

In the village shop and post office category, Jackie's Prees Stores and Vine & Co in Church Stretton have both been shortlisted. And the rural enterprise category sees

Iscoyd Park, near Whitchurch, in the running for its innovative contribution to the local landscape.

Voting is now open and closes on Easter Monday.

Regional winners will travel to the Palace of Westminster in July, where the national champions will be crowned.

Growing confidently in partnership

News and entertainment platform Shropshire Live has appointed tech firm Shoothill to manage the maintenance and development of its website as it prepares for a significant expansion.

The Shrewsbury firm's role is to ensure the online platform – which already reaches over 100,000 readers a month – is robust, scalable, and fully optimised.

The partnership comes as Shropshire Live gears up for an ambitious expansion. This includes enhancing its online offering, adding video and podcasts and making a strategic leap into digital radio (DAB), further cementing its position as a multi-platform media provider for the county.

Martin Childs, business partner at Shropshire Live, said: "Partnering with a local and highly experienced team like Shoothill provides us with the expertise and technological backing we need to grow confidently. This is a crucial step in preparing our entire digital ecosystem for the demands of new digital platforms."

Simon Jeavons, group managing director at Shoothill, said: "Shropshire Live is an integral part of the county's digital landscape. We are delighted to be working closely with them to ensure their website not only runs perfectly today but is also strategically positioned to handle the increased traffic and new features that their expansion into digital radio and enhanced online content, including video, will bring."



Patrick Howe and David Bissell of Shoothill, Chris Pritchard and Martin Childs from Shropshire Live, and Claire Critchell of Shoothill

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More than 80 employers filled two halls at Shrewsbury College

Connecting employers with talent of the future

Shrewsbury College hosted the inaugural Routes2Careers event at its London Road Campus, welcoming over 1,000 young people to a large-scale careers fair designed to connect future talent with leading regional employers.

The campus was transformed into a professional exhibition space, with more than 80 organisations participating across two dedicated halls.

Students aged 14 and above from five schools attended daytime sessions, followed by an evening open session for parents, carers, and members of the wider community. The event also included a dedicated SEN-friendly session to ensure equitable and accessible engagement for all attendees.

The careers fair brought together a broad range of industries, including media, engineering, food production, public services, health, construction, digital, and professional services.

Employers such as the BBC, Babcock, McPhillips, Müller – and Shropshire Business magazine – provided insights into sector-specific opportunities, emerging skills needs, and potential employment pathways.

Throughout the event, exhibitors were invited to share the key advice they would offer to their 16-year-old selves.

Delegates engaged with a variety of interactive demonstrations, including VR-based skills simulations, industry-specific equipment displays, and practical challenges. Alongside the exhibition, a programme of Spotlight Talks enabled students to hear first-hand



Lewis Hardie and Rachel Owen of Start Tech



Students had the opportunity to try out a driving simulator

from industry professionals about their career journeys and the realities of working within their fields.

College principal James Staniforth said: "It was fantastic to see so many engaged students finding out about different routes into early-career opportunities across a range of industry sectors in our region. I'd like to offer my thanks



IHP was promoting construction opportunities in the healthcare sector

to all the organisations that supported this event."

Andrew Lee, director of employer engagement for the college, said: "We developed this event to help organisations meet their future skills needs and provide career inspiration for the young people across Shropshire and Mid Wales.



BBC Shropshire on hand to give talks and careers advice



Helen Walker and Jenice Forde of Harper Adams University



Shingler Construction promoting their apprenticeships



SJ Roberts said the event gave the team direct access to 'the workforce of tomorrow'

"We hope that Routes2Careers 2026 delivered a strong foundation for future annual events. Shrewsbury College remains committed to supporting every young person to identify their strengths, explore meaningful pathways, and progress toward fulfilling futures."

George Heeks, engineering apprenticeship co-ordinator for Muller, said: "The



The event welcomed more than 1,000 young people



Puregym offering have-a-go activities to visitors



Employers gave talks about routes into their industries



Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones gave a talk on careers in the media



Muller said it was a great opportunity to meet potential future engineers

Routes2Careers event was a great opportunity to meet lots of potential future engineers and to talk about their aspirations for the future."

And his view was backed up by Evie Bennett, marketing executive for SJ Roberts, who said: "Bringing students and employers together is hugely beneficial. Students gain first-hand insight into the range of career



The Shropshire Wildlife Trust stand



Muller said it was a great opportunity to meet potential future engineers

pathways available, while employers like us gain direct access to the workforce of tomorrow.

"Shrewsbury College's Routes2Careers event was an excellent example of this in action. Students were highly-engaged, the range of employers was impressive, and the event was extremely well organised."

Second term on council for tech firm

Ian Groves, managing director of Shrewsbury-based technology firm Start Tech, has been elected to the Global Technology Industry Association executive council for the UK and Ireland for a second term.

Ian will collaborate with other leaders in the UK, Ireland and across the globe to strengthen GTIA and advance the people and businesses of the global IT channel. Executive council members are elected by members and serve three-year terms.

He said: "I'm incredibly proud that I've been elected for another three-year term. GTIA exists to

help people and businesses in the IT channel grow through trusted insight, collaboration, and community leadership.

"Continuing this work means representing the priorities of the UK & Ireland IT community, building on the momentum we've created, and helping advance the conversations and initiatives that matter most locally and across the broader channel.

"If you're looking for ways to accelerate your business and your career and you aren't yet involved, I'd be happy to discuss it further."



Ian Groves from Start Tech

Programme provides help for county's creative folk

Creative businesses across Shropshire are encouraged to apply for the Artisan Showcase 2026 - a fully-funded programme designed to help designer makers and producers take their next step into physical retail while building skills, confidence and long-term resilience.

Delivered by the Shropshire Growth Hub in partnership with the Darwin Shopping Centre and Buy-From Creative Agency, it supports eight selected businesses through a structured programme of retail preparation, expert guidance and real-world trading experience.

The initiative culminates in a week-long pop-up showcase in The Darwin Centre, Shrewsbury for April 20-25, and is possible due to core funding from the Marches Growth Hub, provided by the Department for Business and Trade.

Anna Sadler of the Shropshire Growth Hub said: "This is the third time we have run this very successful fully-funded programme and the showcase has proved to be a real highlight for all previous participants."

Previous participants say the programme offers more than just shop space. Rita Bains, founder of The Perfume Laboratory in Bridgnorth, described the experience as transformational.

"It was an opportunity to work alongside like-minded people in a supportive and inspiring environment. It wasn't just about selling products, but about being part of a community where we could learn from one another, share experiences, and grow together."

For Rita, the structured support was as valuable as the showcase itself. Through workshops, mentoring and peer learning, she gained practical insight into retail presentation, marketing and customer engagement.

The Artisan Showcase 2026 is aimed at creative businesses that are ready to explore physical retail but want guidance and support to do so sustainably.

Participants benefit from a four-month programme focused on retail readiness, marketing and sales, alongside the opportunity to trade in a prominent retail setting.

Applications are now open to Shropshire-based businesses working in design, making and production. Businesses interested in applying should email growthhub@shropshire.gov.uk



Kim Gilmour receiving the High Sheriff's award with Jane Trowbridge (High Sheriff of Shropshire), and Anna Turner (Lord-Lieutenant of Shropshire)

Recognition for Kim

Telford business woman Kim Gilmour has been recognised for her fundraising efforts and her 'great and valuable service to the Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin community'.

Kim, who runs Connect Marketing, said she was 'truly honoured' to be recognised for her annual Posh Frocks Charity Dinner, which has now raised over £42,000 for a variety of charities over the last 25-plus years.

She said: "What started as an annual dinner for the Shropshire

Business Women's Society in the 1990s has continued as a 'Fun, Food and Fundraising Dinner', attracting women of all ages and backgrounds, including many from my own business network.

"Each year we choose a different charity and raise funds from our grand hamper raffle, along with match funding from banks or other organisations. Our fundraising is only made possible by all the amazing donations for the raffle and everyone who supports the event on the night."

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Great start to 60th anniversary



It's been a good start to 2026 for the Salop Leisure sales team

Salop Leisure has reported a strong and confident start to 2026 after attending two major trade events in the caravan and holiday park sector.

Head of marketing Ed Glover attended the Caravan, Motorhome and Holiday Show in Manchester where he spoke directly with prospective buyers and reported a 12% increase in lead generation.

Ticket sales for the event were 15% up on last year, with 9% more people through the door who were interested in making a purchase.

Salop Leisure was also present at the HARPA (Holiday and Residential Parks Association) 2026 conference.

Ed said the mood across both events was positive, pointing towards a year of growth for the caravan and motorhome sector.

"Attending these two events has been a great start to 2026, with plenty to feel positive about. It was valuable to speak with customers face to face, catch up with industry colleagues and hear from some excellent speakers. There is a real sense of confidence across the sector.

"Here at Salop Leisure, sales levels across touring caravans, motorhomes and holiday homes are up 11% on January last year, indicating a positive year ahead for the business.

"This year also marks Salop Leisure's 60th anniversary, which is a real testament to the trust we have built with customers, suppliers and park owners over the past six decades. We look forward to revealing more about our 60th year in due course."

Webinars to deliver a learning platform

Telford-based engineering firm Transicon is launching a new 'Industry Masterclass' series to help manufacturers address some of the sector's most urgent challenges.

The firm, which specialises in automated control systems, has teamed up with the Manufacturing Revenue Growth Summit and trade exhibition specialists Lincoln West to deliver the programme of industry webinars.

Each masterclass will focus on a particular pain point affecting UK manufacturers, including rising operational costs, skills shortages, ageing machinery, and the increasing need for automation and digitalisation.

Six global OEMs have signed up to take part in the series of webinars – Stäubli, Nidec, Bosch Rexroth, Danfoss, Siemens and ABB.

Each webinar will explore a single challenge in depth, with experts from the guest manufacturer and Transicon sharing practical solutions and real-world case studies which demonstrate how manufacturers have overcome similar issues.

Transicon's head of business development for the north Laura Hayton said:

"Manufacturers are facing rising costs, energy pressures, increasing automation complexity and growing cyber security risks to name but a few of the challenges facing the sector.

"Our aim is to build a genuinely valuable learning platform where manufacturers can access clear, practical insight and solutions.

"The masterclass series brings together the real-world integration expertise of Transicon with the specialist knowledge of our global technology partners to create a space where manufacturers can gain the confidence to make informed decisions.

"We aim to help manufacturers bridge the gap between the potential of the technology which is now shaping our working lives and the on-the-ground results they are experiencing."

The series opens with global industrial and mechatronic solution provider Stäubli joining Transicon on March 17 to look at the problem of rising operational costs, labour shortages and the use of automation and Automated Guided Vehicles for efficiency.

A second seminar with Japanese manufacturer Nidec in June will look at solving unclear digital strategy and the issue of investment paralysis, and further sessions with Bosch and Siemens will examine skills shortages and cyber security respectively.



Laura Hayton of Transicon

A decade of development

Telford Land Deal has generated more than £60 million in land sales and supported nearly 2,500 jobs, a new report reveals.

Established in 2015, the partnership between the local authority and Homes England has enabled the reinvestment of land receipts back into Telford.

A new report looking at its impact over the past decade shows it has generated £60.3 million in gross land sales and supported the creation of 2,493 jobs, many in the engineering, manufacturing and emerging growth sectors.

It has enabled the development of 1,583 new homes across the borough, including hundreds of affordable and specialist homes and more than 209,000 square metres of employment floor space has been delivered, helping both local firms and major national and international investors to expand and succeed in Telford.

The Partnership's innovative approach including upfront site preparation, attracting inward investment, securing planning consents and resolving development constraints has unlocked brownfield and underused land across the borough.

Sites at Hortonwood, T54, Ni.PARK in Newport, Halesfield and across north and east Telford have benefited from this work, bringing forward modern industrial units, high tech premises, and thriving business clusters.

There have also been a number of social and community benefits. The expansion of Park Wrekin Gymnastics Club made possible through redevelopment of the former Charlton School site is cited as a clear example, with membership growing from 250 to 1,200 since relocation and supporting gymnasts performing at international levels.

Councillor Richard Overton, deputy leader of Telford & Wrekin Council and chair of the Telford Land Deal board, said: "The Telford Land Deal has been truly transformative for our borough.

"Over ten years it has brought forward new homes, supported skilled jobs, accelerated investment and strengthened our communities.



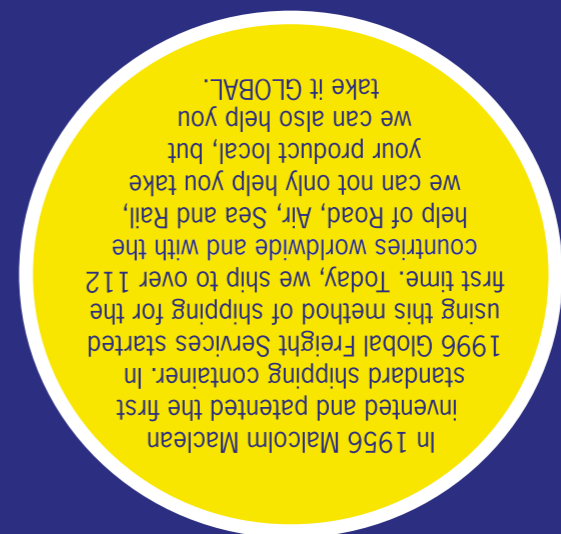
The T54 site has expanded significantly since this picture in 2017



The vision for Ni.Park in Newport which has become a reality

"It has proved what can be achieved when we take a bold and innovative approach to regenerating public land and reinvesting directly into Telford. We are immensely proud of the results and look forward to continuing this success as the Telford Land Deal enters its final phase."

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Ruth Martin



The 8th P of Marketing: Why partnerships power business growth

When we talk about the traditional marketing mix, most of us are familiar with the classic 4Ps: product, price, place and promotion, and then there's people, process and physical evidence. But there's an eighth P that deserves just as much attention: Partnerships.

Partnerships sit firmly at the heart of sustainable business growth. These can include relationships with clients, referral networks, suppliers, local businesses or the wider community.

The strength of those connections often determines not only how well your business performs, but how resilient it becomes when conditions shift. Successful businesses rarely grow in isolation; they grow through collaboration. People buy from people, after all.

Relationships first, marketing second

Marketing is sometimes reduced to campaigns, adverts or social media posts, but fundamentally it's about trust. Partnerships can build that trust faster and more authentically than many traditional channels.

Referrals are a perfect example. When someone recommends your business, they effectively lend you their credibility, and that endorsement often carries more weight than paid promotion because it's rooted in an existing relationship.

Partnerships go beyond referrals, though. They can include joint initiatives, collaborative events, shared content, supplier relationships or simply supportive connections between local businesses. These relationships open

doors, extend reach and help businesses embed themselves within their communities.

Networking is where the magic happens

A common misconception is that networking only happens at formal business events or breakfast meetings. While those certainly have value, partnerships can develop in many environments; exhibitions, conferences, training sessions, charity initiatives, community gatherings and industry forums, to name a few.

The key is approaching these spaces with curiosity rather than a hard sales agenda. People remember meaningful conversations, not rehearsed pitches. Focus on learning about others - their challenges, goals and expertise - and relationships will develop more naturally.

Confidence and impostor syndrome

That nagging feeling you don't quite belong? That's likely impostor syndrome, and it's more common than most people admit. Research suggests that around 70% of adults experience it at some point.

There are ways to tackle it. If you want to do more networking, presenting or hosting events, consider confidence-building courses, business coaching or mentorship.

Confidence doesn't always come naturally, but with the right tools and mindset, it can become part of your professional armoury. And remember, most people in the room have felt the same at some stage.

Partnerships strengthen the local economy

Community involvement has become an increasingly important element of marketing. It's no longer viewed simply as goodwill; it's effective, relationship-driven marketing.

Collaboration with regional businesses keeps knowledge, resources and economic benefit within the area, helping create stronger local business ecosystems.

Organisations that actively engage with their communities through collaborations, sponsorships or shared initiatives often build deeper loyalty and longer-term relationships.

Getting strategic

While many partnerships start organically, a more intentional approach can maximise their impact. Identify complementary businesses, look for shared audiences or aligned values and maintain consistent communication.

The global partnership between Nike and Apple revolutionised fitness tracking by combining sports expertise with technology. Local businesses may not operate at that scale, but the principle is the same: collaboration can create added value that neither partner could achieve alone.

Not every collaboration leads directly to sales, but many deliver visibility, credibility and future opportunities. Often, the real value emerges over time.

Nurturing and growing your partnerships

Wherever a partnership begins, it needs ongoing attention. Follow up after conversations, connect on social media, share others' successes and offer support. Small actions build strong networks.

Ultimately, the eighth P reminds us that marketing is deeply human. Behind every transaction is a relationship, behind every brand a reputation, and behind every successful business a network of people who trust and support it.

Partnerships are a long-term investment. Whether attending an exhibition, collaborating with another business or simply connecting over coffee, those interactions aren't separate from your marketing strategy; they are your marketing strategy. Invest in them consistently and they often become the thread connecting every other part of your marketing mix.

Property market stability is on the cards this year

Shropshire's housing market has entered 2026 with a sense of stability and renewed confidence, reflecting the latest findings from the national Rightmove House Price Index.

Across Britain, the average asking price of newly-listed homes now stands at £368,019, broadly unchanged both month-on-month and year-on-year.

The steady start to 2026 follows the strongest early-year uplift since 2020, suggesting that buyers and sellers are returning to the market with greater certainty after the economic questions that shaped late 2025.

For Shropshire, average sold prices are currently around £295,000, which agents say positions it comfortably below national values while maintaining consistent buyer demand – a combination that continues to attract movers seeking both affordability and quality of life.

For buyers and sellers who delayed decisions during uncertainty, this Spring offers a genuine opportunity

Russell Griffin, director of Samuel Wood, said that rather than dramatic price swings, the evidence points toward a measured, functional Spring market built on confidence and sensible expectations.

"The opening months of 2026 are encouraging. Shropshire continues to represent excellent value compared with national pricing, and we are seeing steady enquiries across first-time, family and rural homes alike.

"For buyers and sellers who delayed decisions during uncertainty, this Spring offers a genuine opportunity – provided pricing is realistic and advice is grounded in true local knowledge," he said.

Several national trends are directly benefiting Shropshire according to the agents, including mortgage rates being lower than a year ago, a greater choice of homes for sale, resilient first-time buyer activity, and realistic pricing.



Executive chairman Andrew Goddard, director Edward Goddard, Owen Lloyd, Marcus Forrester, Clayton Matcham and Hannah Stocking from Morris Lubricants, with Teri Harding and Ryan Ferris of the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity

£20,000 raised for charity

Employees at Morris Lubricants in Shrewsbury have skydived, climbed mountains, run an ultra-marathon, played sports matches and baked cakes to raise £20,000 for the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity over the last two years.

Chairman Andrew Goddard described it as a 'fantastic achievement', saying: "The courage and generosity of our employees never ceases to amaze me.

"We selected the Midlands Air Ambulance Charity as our chosen charity because they do such fantastic work and have the potential to be called upon by anyone at our business, and our employees and customers, too."

Morris Lubricants has been based in Shrewsbury since 1869 and manufactures oils, greases and lubricants, which are exported to more than 100 countries around the globe and the company serves all parts of the UK.



11-16



16-18

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Ruth Martin is co-founder and director of Martin & Jones Marketing

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Bradford Estates property director Chris Hodson with PYROmaster Studios managing director Phil McIver

It's innovation, growth... and a pint after work

• A theatre and events production company is set to grow after moving onto a business estate on the east Shropshire border. PYROmaster Studios, established in 2016 by Phil McIver, has relocated to a 2,000sq ft commercial unit on Lizard Lane Business Village in Tong. The business specialises in sound, lighting, staging, and set design and construction for the theatre and events industry, supplying production equipment for venues across the country.

• Network Rail has announced plans to improve accessibility at Wellington Railway Station. The proposals include the installation of two passenger lifts and associated works to provide step-free access between platforms and Wellington Bus Station. The application has been submitted as part of Network Rail's national 'Access for All' programme.

• A husband-and-wife team have been highlighted for their 'world class' customer service - winning a coveted award ahead of thousands of businesses based on independent reviews. Lease Loop, run by James and Danni Godfrey in Telford, has been given the Feefo Exceptional Service Award. Only 32 businesses from more than 6,500 brands who are part of the Feefo review platform have achieved the award this year.

• Magna Housing is one of the first organisations to achieve Aico's Housing Professional Quality Standard. Oswestry-based Aico, the European market leader in home life safety, has introduced the standard to recognise partnering organisations which demonstrate superior competency, best practice, and an ongoing commitment to professional development.



Above: James and Danni Godfrey of Lease Loop

Below: Stephanie Lloyd-Foxe of Magna Housing Group and Steve Bulley, relationship manager at Aico



• BCRS Business Loans is inviting businesses to attend a free networking event as 'Pint After Work' returns to Shrewsbury. Attendees are invited for a free drink at the White Horse pub in Wenlock Road on Thursday March 12 from 4.30pm to 6.30pm. Hosted by BCRS Business Loans to support the business community, the Pint After Work event offers professionals an opportunity to network and strengthen professional relationships while enjoying a complimentary drink.

• A new Capital Punishment Exhibit has opened at Shrewsbury Prison, offering a rare and reflective look at one of the most challenging chapters in Britain's justice system. Free to enter, it includes rare artefacts never previously displayed to the public: including the life mask and bronze cast hands of Albert Pierrepoint, Britain's most prolific executioner, plus original documents and official correspondence.



The new exhibit at Shrewsbury Prison

• Hobsons Brewery in Cleobury Mortimer hosted a special brew day to create its first ever beer brewed in celebration of International Women's Day. Women from across the brewery, alongside members of the wider community, took over the brewhouse for the day to brew Six Sirens, a limited edition cask beer designed under the guidance of renowned brewer Nadia Spencer.



The Six Sirens beer at Hobsons Brewery

• Mail Solutions, the Telford-based printing company, was invited by local MP Shaun Davies to take part in an export round table in Westminster chaired by trade minister Sir Chris Bryant. Head of international sales Tony Forbes said: "It was insightful to hear the experiences of other companies and gain a deeper understanding of how the UK government, through the Department for Business & Trade, is supporting and promoting UK exports."



Mail Solutions taking part in the round table debate



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Meeting an urgent need



Our factories are where the magic is at, says Gareth Jones

National Apprenticeship Week was an opportunity to turn the spotlight on the many Shropshire companies embracing the 'earning and learning' principle to grow their own workforce.

But it also saw the publication of a new report which claims more needs to be done to raise awareness of the benefits of apprenticeships, against a backdrop of a worrying drop in the number of young people thinking about vocational learning.

The In-Comm Training Annual Barometer, which surveyed 16 to 21-year-olds, saw a 9% drop in the number considering an apprenticeship, with more than half of those questioned saying they had no idea of the schemes available in their area.

The results are being used by In-Comm, which has a training centre in Telford, as a rallying call to get schools, colleges, employers, training providers, local authorities and government to do more to educate teachers, parents and learners on the opportunities of becoming an apprentice.

"You could say four fifths considering an apprenticeship is healthy, I get that. However, we've been feeling a drop in enthusiasm on the ground for a while now and this report underlines the upturn in learners choosing vocational learning isn't growing at the pace we want," explained Gareth Jones, managing director of In-Comm Training.

"This isn't the message we wanted to be pushing during National Apprenticeship Week, but all of the organisations involved in the skills ecosystem need to heed this warning and start working even closer together to change perceptions and deliver better career advice."

He added: "Poor career advice that sees learners start the wrong full-time course can later block funding and access to



CES apprentice electrician Oli Walden with James Stanley-Hartley

apprenticeships when they want to reassess their options. This is a major concern."

"Our factories are where the magic is at. Industry has an ethical and moral role to play in ensuring the sustainability of advanced engineering and manufacturing in Britain, whilst also delivering social impact by providing exceptional career opportunities."

More encouragingly, the Barometer also found that 43% of learners felt the government's budget changes have made them feel more positively about going down the vocational route.

Specialist electrical contractor CES is calling on the government to modernise apprenticeship training and develop a new green skills route.

Joe Collison, managing director of the Shrewsbury-based firm, used National Apprenticeship Week as the perfect opportunity to highlight the UK's urgent need for specialist training in the green energy sector.

According to a recent UCAS review,

demand for green skills in the energy sector is rising rapidly, with almost half of organisations surveyed highlighting a shortage of suitably trained staff as a concern.

The company, which has taken on electrical apprentice Oliver Walden, argues that a dedicated renewable or "green" apprenticeship, would deliver the specialist skills the sector urgently needs - and support the UK's net zero ambitions.

Joe Collison said: "We are passionate about developing the next generation of talent for the renewables sector. While our apprentice Oli learns valuable skills with us, with a focus on decarbonisation alongside learning the fundamentals of being an electrician, it is clear that current apprenticeships do not go far enough to prepare people for the 'green' technologies that are rapidly transforming the sector.

"We urge the government and training providers to consider dedicated green apprenticeships, so young people can train specifically in areas like solar and energy



Apprentices are at every level at iconsys in Telford

storage, not just traditional electrical skills. This would help plug the significant skills gap we face and support our decarbonisation goals nationally and here in the Midlands."

Shropshire's reigning company of the year, McPhillips, is bringing a new generation of skills staff into the construction and civil engineering industry.

The company employs over 280 people delivering civil engineering and building projects throughout the Midlands, north west England and Wales, and has its headquarters at Hortonwood.

Jaydee O'Neill, 17, started a level two construction operating apprenticeship with McPhillips, training at Telford College's Wellington campus, in September.

He says: "As an apprentice, you get so much more practical experience than you would if you did a full-time construction course at college, because you're out on site with a gang for a lot of the time.

"You're also getting paid to learn which is great; I'm able to buy new clothes and pay for my driving lessons. For anyone interested in a career in construction, I'd definitely recommend an apprenticeship."

Ollie Fudge, 18, from Shifnal, is a second-year apprentice on the same course, and completed the classroom part of his training in December.



Ollie Fudge, from Shifnal, working for McPhillips

"That involved handing in my portfolio and doing my End Point Assessment, a practical where I put into practice everything I'd learned like block paving, slabbing, edgings, drainage and concrete.

"I enjoyed the college side of things though. It was a great stepping stone between school and work: you're with 20 lads all doing the same course, and we all got on.

"But as an apprentice, you're also learning when you're out on site while earning money at the same time which you wouldn't if you were at college full time. I'd recommend it as a way into construction, definitely."

Stuart Bishop, the safety, health, environment and quality manager at McPhillips, says: "We have a good, ongoing collaboration with Telford College.

"The construction centre, built by McPhillips, strengthens the partnership with its location and facilities highly valued, easing logistical co-ordination for apprentices.

"It also means we're able to provide direct feedback to college staff, so that our



The In-Comm Barometer has revealed some thought-provoking findings

back. Helping the next generation to come through is a very special and satisfying thing.

"I feel that apprenticeships have started to really kick in again and grow over the past few years, but the ethos is generally the same - get young people with the right talent and motivation embedded in a business as quickly as possible, to learn on the job."

He added: "Hopefully the fact that we have people like myself who have come through the same apprenticeship route is an illustration of what is possible, and give them something positive to aim for.

"We'd like to see more diversity, though. For example, it would be nice to see more girls coming into engineering apprenticeships to give us a better balance. We're doing a lot of work with local schools to raise awareness and interest."

Rheon Paul and Ben Morris-Jones are among the latest intake of electrical engineering apprentices at iconsys, spending four days each week with the company and a day at Telford College. Both are hoping to eventually move onto degree-level apprenticeships.

Rheon, 21, a graduate of Holy Trinity Academy in Priorslee, has been studying with Telford College for five years, including vocational engineering and aviation courses.

"I wanted to get more hands-on experience and felt an apprenticeship would be the best way to go. I've been here for over a year now, and they do like to give you experience across all parts of the company, to develop a real understanding of what's going on. I'm enjoying it.

"I love learning, and I love getting up in the morning and not knowing what I'm going to be doing from one day to the next. Every day here is different, which is great."

Former Ercall Wood Academy student Ben, who is just over three years into the same apprenticeship, added: "Like Rheon I've appreciated the rotations around the business. I've done a couple of months with the hardware design team which I've really enjoyed.

"It gives me an idea where I might see my career progress in the future. I knew I wanted to be working in industry, getting my hands dirty - that's why I took the apprenticeship route. I'm glad I did.

"You gain confidence in yourself, you learn teamwork skills, and I'm so happy about it. You're always learning something new."



UKSPF enabled Shropshire Council and Visit Shropshire to develop a new brand and photography library



Hands Together Ludlow was supported by UKSPF



Jenna of Jenna Blair Yoga accessed support from the Shropshire Growth Hub's Business Boost 360

Powering Shropshire forward: Why we mustn't lose momentum



Back in 2022, we secured vital funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund enabling us to address some of the county's most pressing challenges.

Now that the funding has ended, we've been able to reflect on its legacy and measure the difference it has made to our communities, businesses and local environment.

An initial review covering 2022-25 has shown that UKSPF has had a transformative effect. Projects not only met their goals but, in many cases, surpassed them, supporting more individuals than expected, reaching more businesses, and generating a surge in community-led activity across the county.

A total of 71 projects sought to address the challenges that businesses and individuals faced in the county – including rural isolation, skills shortages, ageing infrastructure, and dispersed communities – through programmes that provided targeted, place based provision.

The UK Shared Prosperity Fund has given Shropshire a real shot in the arm. More than 1,400 businesses – from bright new start ups to long established rural microenterprises – have tapped into support.

Local businesses have taken full advantage of grants, innovation vouchers, expert advice, and mentoring opportunities. The impact is clear: 204 new jobs have been created, 90 start-ups have been launched, and numerous companies are now better prepared for growth.

Our Shropshire Growth Hub ran its highly successful Business Boost programme helping nearly 265 businesses, with most of that being support on a 1-2-1 basis.

And we strengthened delivery partnerships, including collaborations with Harper Adams University, Aston University, and higher education colleges.

The push towards greener practices has been just as impressive, with carbon cutting improvements made by local companies estimated to have saved more than 6,600 tonnes of CO₂. Not bad for a county that prides itself on its landscape and environment.

In addition to a programme that helped develop our 'In Shropshire' branding with partners like Visit Shropshire to promote the county far and wide, communities right across Shropshire have felt the benefits too.

Many town centres, villages and neighbourhoods have benefited



Several historic buildings have been restored such as Ellesmere Yard, the Cambrian Station Building in Oswestry (pictured), and St Johns Church, Doddington

from 28 projects restoring heritage assets, enhancing green spaces, supporting cultural events, and boosting volunteering capacity.

More than 700 community events took place with UKSPF support – from arts festivals to farmers' markets. And with over 950,000 square metres of green and blue space improved or created (that's roughly 130 football pitches), the county now has even more beautiful places for residents and visitors to enjoy.

But perhaps the most inspiring change has been felt by local people themselves. Projects delivered under the 'People & Skills' priority has been genuinely life changing for many, especially those who've found it hardest to access training or employment.

Young adults, older residents in isolated areas, people facing financial or digital barriers – all have been able to take meaningful steps forward. The Shropshire Skills Hub, for instance, sailed past its initial target by helping 411 residents gain vocational qualifications in its first phase alone.

Others have returned to learning through projects focused on numeracy, basic skills and digital capability. Dozens of participants are now in work, progressing in their careers, or simply feeling more confident about what they can achieve next.

One learner summed it up perfectly when they described the programme as 'one of the most beneficial things I have done', crediting it with helping them rebuild confidence and secure a new job.

In my view it's these individual stories that truly create a lasting legacy and offer a genuine sense of fulfilment and pride for everyone involved in securing funding and carrying out the projects.

While UKSPF has driven remarkable progress, Shropshire's funding future is uncertain amid growing indications that future Government investment programmes are prioritising combined authority areas.

But we're lobbying hard for continued support, determined to maintain the momentum and preserve the long-term benefits these projects have delivered, ensuring that their positive impact endures for years to come.

Matt Potts is service manager at Shropshire Council, leading on business growth, external funding, skills development, and overseeing Invest in Shropshire

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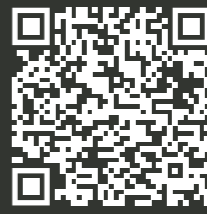


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Growth via investment in people



Nick Clarke of Aaron and Partners

Shropshire law firm Aaron & Partners has surpassed 200 employees for the first time, marking a major milestone in its growth journey.

It follows the firm bolstering several practice areas, including an expanding restructuring and insolvency team, a series of new hires for its compliance and real estate teams, and the appointment of Robert Richards as dispute resolution partner, where he brings over 15-years' experience advising clients on commercial and property disputes.

Aaron & Partners said reaching 200 people marked a significant moment in its evolution, reflecting its sustained investment in talent, expertise and client service across key practice areas.

Senior partner Nick Clarke said: "Reaching 200 people is a proud moment for the firm, but more importantly it reflects the kind of business we have been building in the right way."

"Our growth has always been driven by investing in good people, creating a supportive culture and expanding our expertise in a way that genuinely benefits our clients."

"As demand for our services continues to grow across both our commercial and private legal offerings, we remain focused on quality and delivering positive outcomes for our clients. We're pleased to mark this key milestone – but we have lots of other exciting growth plans in the pipeline that will ensure we continue on this positive trajectory."

Making Tax Digital is wake-up call for many

The introduction of new tax reporting regulations will put bookkeeping under more pressure than ever before, according to a Shropshire accountancy firm.

Helen Columb, of Telford-based Turas, said poor record keeping would be exposed by the switch to digital records when the Making Tax Digital regime starts in April.

MTD represents one of the biggest changes to the UK tax system in a generation, requiring the self-employed and landlords to keep digital records and submit quarterly updates to HMRC using approved software.

Helen said many business owners still underestimate how dramatically quarterly digital reporting will change HMRC's visibility of their finances and that poor or inconsistent bookkeeping will become far harder to hide.

"The new system will give HMRC near real-time insight into income patterns, making sloppy record-keeping a serious risk. MTD isn't just a new way of filing tax returns, it's a new level of scrutiny."

"Quarterly reporting means HMRC will see your numbers far more frequently and any inconsistencies, gaps or unusual patterns will stand out immediately. Businesses that have been 'making do' with messy books will find that much harder under MTD."

Under the new rules, anyone with qualifying income over £50,000 will be required to join MTD for Income Tax from this April, with thresholds dropping to £30,000 in 2027 and £20,000 in 2028.

Helen said the biggest risk would be complacency. "If your bookkeeping isn't up to

scratch, now is the time to fix it. Burying your head in the sand and hoping you can do it all later is a recipe for trouble."

Turas Accountants is advising businesses to move to MTD-compatible software as early as possible, and keep digital records consistently throughout the year, avoid relying on estimates or retrospective data entry, and seek support now if their bookkeeping is behind or disorganised. Helen said: "Good bookkeeping has always mattered, but under MTD it becomes essential."

Turas Accountants is advising businesses to move to MTD-compatible software as early as possible, and keep digital records consistently throughout the year

The businesses that prepare early will have a smooth transition. Those that don't could face penalties, stress and unwelcome attention from HMRC."

Turas, which is based in Hall Court in Telford Town Centre, started trading in 2013 as Columb & Gosling Accountants. It changed its name to Turas Accountants six years ago.



Helen Columb of Turas Accountants

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Finding the right people is such difficult work

Why is recruitment proving to be such a minefield for so many Shropshire employers? Is it a question of skills, mindset, risk – or a lack of connection across generations? ADAM PRINGLE investigates

Walk into almost any boardroom, HR workshop or networking breakfast around Shropshire and you'll hear the same refrain: "We can teach people the job. What we can't teach them is attitude."

Across a wide range of sectors, from manufacturing and logistics to hospitality, professional services and technology, employers are grappling with a recruitment paradox.

On paper, the labour market looks relatively active. Applications come in. CVs arrive. Interviews are booked. Yet too often, the candidates who turn up – if they turn up at all – lack the fundamental behaviours that make workplaces function: things like communication, reliability, teamwork, timekeeping, initiative, and the ability to adapt.

These aren't niche competencies. They're the bedrock of employability. And their perceived decline is becoming one of the most pressing business challenges of the decade.

Employers have always valued soft skills, but the urgency around them has intensified.

It's an issue that was tackled at a meeting of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce patrons when they met with the Harper Adams and

Unitemps team at The Quad in Telford earlier this year.

Bosses say the issue isn't a lack of technical ability – it's a lack of readiness for the realities of work. Concerns range from poor communication and weak timekeeping to low resilience, limited initiative, difficulty working with others and a growing sense of transactional engagement rather than long term commitment.

These issues aren't confined to young people entering the workforce. Employers report similar challenges across age groups, though the causes differ. For some, it's a lack of experience. For others, it's burnout, disengagement, or a shift in expectations about what work should feel like.

But the result is the same: businesses are spending more time and money managing behaviours that previous generations of managers took for granted.

The reasons behind this attitude gap are complex, and they're not simply about "work ethic". Several long term social and economic trends have converged to reshape how people communicate, learn, and perceive the workplace.

One major factor is the digital communication divide. Many employers say candidates struggle with in person communication because so much of modern

interaction happens through screens.

Messaging apps reward brevity, not nuance. Social media encourages broadcasting, not listening. Algorithms curate comfort zones, not challenge. The result is that some employees find it harder to read a room, resolve conflict, or ask for help – all of which are deemed to be essential workplace behaviours by employers who, typically, are from an older generation.

The Pandemic also left a deep imprint. Covid disrupted education, early careers, and social development. Young people missed out on part time jobs, work experience, and the informal learning that happens through observation.

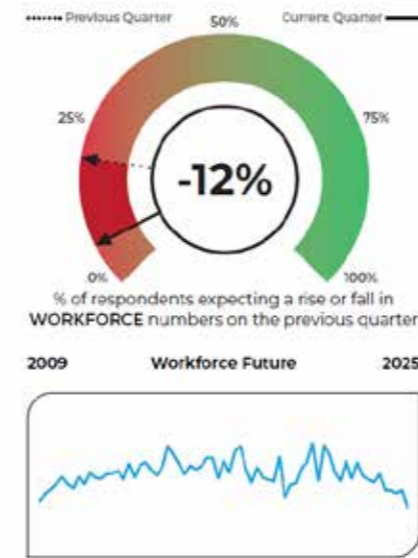
Meanwhile, older workers reassessed their priorities, leading to a rise in career changes, early retirement, and a shift in attitudes toward work life balance. Some employers feel this has led to a decline in commitment – from interview no shows to early resignations – but it also reflects a deeper truth: people are more selective about workplace culture, wellbeing, and flexibility.

Colleges and schools across Shropshire are working hard to prepare students and form closer partnerships with employers, but businesses often say the system doesn't fully reflect the realities of modern work.

Soft skills are taught, but not always



Many candidates struggle with in-person communication because so much of modern interaction happens through screens



Workforce Future:

"I am laying off 2 staff, it is not viable to have non skilled staff on £27K a year. I have also had to give the other members of staff huge pay rises to keep them."
Retail / Wholesale Sector

"Our plans to increase workforce by 25-33% placed on hold due to the need to ring-fence resources as a contingency against economic stagnation and taxation concerns."
Professional Services Sector

"We might have been looking to take on another person this year, but the Government imposed too many extra costs on business."
Marketing & Media Sector

The latest workforce report from the Shropshire Chamber survey

embedded. Work experience is inconsistent. Careers advice varies widely. At the same time, generational shifts in values are reshaping expectations. Younger workers often prioritise purpose, autonomy, and wellbeing. Older workers may prioritise stability. Neither is wrong – but the mismatch can create friction.

Speaking at the launch of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards at Hencote in Shrewsbury, Telford College principal and chief executive Lawrence Wood said: "I've created a new department that just focuses on engaging with employers."

"A college doesn't function on its own, in isolation. We are not a qualification factory – we're about supporting people of all ages to gain the skills they need, so they can be fantastic employees in the workplace."

All that being said, employers need to accept that the labour market has changed. The behaviours businesses want cannot simply be assumed any more; they must be cultivated. Employers who succeed in attracting and retaining people with the right mindset are those who invest early, communicate clearly, and build cultures that reinforce the behaviours they expect.

One of the most effective strategies is to rethink recruitment itself. Instead of relying heavily on CVs and formal interviews, many organisations are shifting towards behaviour

based assessments, practical tasks, and values led conversations.

These can often reveal far more about a candidate's attitude than a list of qualifications. Some employers are also widening their talent pipelines by working more closely with schools, colleges, and training providers.

When businesses engage early – offering workplace visits, mentoring, mock interviews, and real world projects – young people gain a clearer understanding of expectations, and employers gain a clearer view of emerging talent.

Clarity is another crucial factor. Many employers assume that behaviours like punctuality, communication and teamwork are obvious. But for someone new to the workplace, or returning after a long break, these expectations may not be as intuitive as managers think. Businesses that articulate their standards explicitly – not just in handbooks, but in everyday practice – see better results. This includes setting clear boundaries, giving consistent feedback, and modelling the behaviours they want to see.

Training also plays a vital role. While some employers argue that soft skills should already be in place, the reality is that workplaces are now part of the learning eco-system. Companies that invest in communication workshops, resilience training, conflict

resolution, and personal development often find that employees respond positively. These programmes don't just improve behaviour; they build confidence and loyalty.

Culture, too, is a powerful influence.

People are more likely to demonstrate positive attitudes when they feel valued, supported, and connected to a shared purpose. A workplace that celebrates effort, encourages initiative, and recognises progress creates an environment where good behaviours thrive. Conversely, a culture of inconsistency, poor communication, or unclear expectations can undermine even the most motivated employees.

Flexibility is another area where employers must adapt. While businesses need reliability and commitment, employees increasingly expect a degree of autonomy over how they work. Striking the right balance is essential. Companies that offer flexible arrangements – without compromising operational needs – often find that employees repay that trust with stronger engagement and better attitudes.

The most recent quarterly economic survey carried out by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce revealed a snapshot of recruitment frustrations for many employers.

One professional services company said: "Because of the costs in the UK and the difficulty for micro businesses to employ in order to generate the necessary revenue to continue to provide employment, an overseas experienced virtual assistant was deemed our most secure option."

"Our preference is to provide local opportunity, but the economic scenario does not enable us to do so. We are finding it harder and harder to employ staff who are hungry, humble and smart."

Another firm in the marketing sector added: "We might have been looking to take on another person this year, but the Government has imposed too many extra costs on business."

And in the construction sector, this was the view of one Shropshire employer: "We have an ageing workforce, remote and rural manufacturing sites, and we have very little young blood coming in – or even on the horizon."

The consensus is that employers must recognise that recruitment is no longer a one way process. Candidates are assessing businesses just as much as businesses are assessing them.

Organisations that present themselves as supportive, forward thinking and people centred are more likely to attract individuals with the right mindset. This means showcasing culture, offering development opportunities, and demonstrating a genuine commitment to wellbeing and progression.

The challenge of recruiting people with the right attitude is real, and it's not going away. But it's not insurmountable.

By rethinking recruitment, strengthening partnerships with education, investing in soft skills, and building cultures that nurture positive behaviours, employers can create workforces that are not only capable, but committed, adaptable, and ready for the future.

And the consensus among employers we've spoken to across Shropshire is this: Attitude isn't a bonus – it's the foundation on which everything else has to be built.

Coffee business is a family affair



Sue Oliver (centre) celebrates 20 years of managing Love Coffee with daughter Clare Clark and granddaughter Bella Clark

The manager of Love Coffee in Shrewsbury is celebrating 20 years working with Salop Leisure. Sue Oliver has been at Love Coffee since the business moved from its Meole Brace site to Emstrey in 2006. It's been a family affair for Sue ever since, with daughter Clare Clark working with her for the last 18 years, and granddaughter Bella Clark joining the business four years ago.

Love Coffee is a very important part of Salop Leisure, and is instrumental in bringing in new customers

Sue said: "I've grown with the business over the last 20 years and feel very proud of how much it has progressed in that time. "Salop Leisure is a big company, but it doesn't feel like working for a big corporate company. It's got that family feel, where we support one another and work hard to deliver outstanding customer service." Mike Harris, joint managing director at Salop Leisure, said: "We are all very proud of the hard work Sue has put in to building Love Coffee into the successful business it is today. Love Coffee is a very important part of Salop Leisure, and is instrumental in bringing in new customers."

Sweet deal proves a 'Truly' fabulous move

Truly (UK) Ltd, the Ludlow business specialising in sprinkles, cake decorations and baking packaging, has acquired the Sugar and Crumbs brand.

The Shropshire firm sells into the home baking, ice cream, bakery and general business-to-business sectors, providing products in quantities from retail pots to 25kg manufacturing bags.

It stocks the biggest selection of sprinkles and inclusions in the country, as well as exporting to 28 countries worldwide, from its 10,000 sq ft. base in south Shropshire.

Sugar and Crumbs will be moving their stock and operations in Stockport to be part of Truly (UK) Ltd's group of brands over the next few months.

The acquisition means Truly (UK) Ltd now encompasses Twist ingredients for wholesale customers, the Scrumptious retail range, a trademarked brand of mixed sprinkle blends called Sprinkletti, and Sugar and Crumbs' flavoured icing sugars, flavour shots and 'Whipping It Up' mixes.

The business was launched by sisters Louise Gough and Niki Thompson in 2010, sparked by their frustration at the limited choice and quantities of sprinkles on offer. Today they stock over 1,500 varieties of sprinkles and inclusions,



Louise Gough and Niki Thompson from Truly (UK) Ltd

plus toppers, lustres, cupcake cases, muffin tins and packaging.

Louise said: "This is a really exciting moment for the business. Truly started out around the same time as Sugar and Crumbs, and for the last 15 years we've attended retail shows side by side, and we've championed one another throughout.

"Sugar and Crumbs is a brand we have a lot of respect for, especially for the online community they've built, and we are thrilled to be able to sustain its future by bringing it into the Truly family.

"Our aim has always been to make the widest selection of quality baking products

available to the largest audience, and this acquisition strengthens that.

"Over the coming year, we will be working hard behind the scenes to bring both brands together into one seamless shopping experience. Until this work is complete, both websites will continue to operate. For the time being, you can still order from either website and we will combine your orders when instructed.

"We are very excited for this new addition and believe this will make stocking up easier than ever for your bakery, shop or kitchen counter - more brands to choose from for more baking magic."

From Downing Street to Shropshire:

Why AI skills must be at the heart of business growth



Hollie Whittles

I recently had the honour of spending an evening at Number 10 Downing Street for a reception on the future of AI innovation in the UK. Hearing directly from the Prime Minister about the UK's ambition to become a world leader in artificial intelligence was both inspiring and reassuring.

One year on from the AI Opportunities Action Plan, published in January 2025, the message from Government is clear: AI is central to the UK's economic future. The Plan made 50 recommendations focused on building the infrastructure, public service capability and innovation ecosystem needed for Britain to lead in this space.

But what stood out most to me was this: small businesses must be at the heart of that journey.

AI must be built with small businesses in mind, not done to them

Too often, technological change can feel as though it is imposed on smaller organisations. New systems, new terminology, new compliance considerations all landing on already stretched teams.

AI innovation must not be something done to small businesses; it must be something built with them.

Free AI training: a real opportunity for Shropshire businesses

Encouragingly, the Government has recognised the scale of the challenge and the opportunity. Through the AI Skills Boost programme, developed in partnership with industry, millions of UK workers are being offered access to free AI training.

The ambition is significant: to upskill millions of workers by 2030 and embed



Hollie on the steps of Number 10

foundational AI knowledge across the workforce.

For business owners and employees in Shropshire, this presents a tangible opportunity.

These courses are:

- Free to access for UK adults
- Delivered online, allowing flexible, self-paced learning
- Designed for all levels from complete beginners to those wanting to deepen their understanding
- Structured so that some courses offer a recognised AI foundations badge that can be added to CVs and LinkedIn profiles
- Many of the introductory modules can be completed in under an hour

The focus is practical, helping people understand what AI is, how it works in everyday tools, and how it can be used responsibly and effectively in business settings. For many SMEs, this could be the first step in demystifying AI.

What this means for Shropshire

Shropshire has a proud history of innovation. From the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution to a thriving modern SME community, we have always adapted to economic change.

AI represents another turning point. For local businesses, the potential applications are wide-ranging:

- Automating repetitive administrative tasks
- Enhancing marketing and customer engagement
- Using data more effectively to inform strategic decisions
- Improving forecasting and operational efficiency
- Supporting innovation in product and service development

However, none of this happens without people who understand the tools.

At Purple Frog Data Analytics, we see daily how powerful AI can be when implemented responsibly and strategically. With our own AI MVP Lewis Prince leading innovation in this space, we are proud to be contributing to the conversation and to practical delivery at both local and national levels.

But AI leadership is not reserved for tech companies. Manufacturers, retailers, professional services firms, construction businesses all stand to benefit. The key is starting with skills.

Skills as a growth strategy

Too often, training is viewed as a cost. In reality, it is one of the most powerful growth strategies available to small businesses.

An AI-literate workforce is:

- More productive
- More innovative
- More adaptable to change
- Better equipped to identify opportunities and manage risks

For business owners concerned about margins and competitiveness, improving digital and AI capability is not optional, it is strategic.

A call to action

My evening at Downing Street was a memorable reminder that small businesses are firmly on the national agenda when it comes to AI policy. But policy alone will not deliver progress.

The question is whether we choose to equip ourselves and our teams to lead in that future.

Now is the time for local businesses to act and to explore the courses, start the conversations internally, and view AI skills not as a technical add-on, but as a core component of sustainable growth.

If the UK is to become a world leader in AI, it will not be driven solely by large technology firms or Government departments. It will be driven by thousands of ambitious, skilled, forward-thinking small businesses including those right here in Shropshire.

And that is a future worth building.

Hollie Whittles is a director of Purple Frog Systems in Telford



Dr Haider Al-Khateeb from the Cyber Security Innovation Centre at Aston University



Dan Vaughan of Capgemini

AI and cyber security are in the spotlight

Telford College kicked off a new series of employer networking events with a seminar exploring artificial intelligence and cyber security.

The free event, which attracted businesses from across the region, featured presentations from expert speakers and gave delegates the chance to join a guided tour of the Wellington campus.

Sarah Davies, Telford College's executive director for partnerships and employer engagement, told delegates: "We really value your feedback, and are keen to hold events such as this more regularly, looking at a wide variety of themes."

"We want to make sure employers have a strong and consistent voice in our decision making. If you know what your end goal is, but are unsure what's required to get there, that's where we can step in and help."

Dan Vaughan, business change consultant at Capgemini, urged employers not to 'outsource their thinking' as they strive to adopt fast-developing artificial intelligence platforms.

He said companies often overestimated the short term impact of new technology in the workplace, but underestimated the scale of change it will bring in the long term.

"There is a lot of excitement and hype around AI, but also an underlying sense of fear and ambiguity," he said. "The question isn't whether we are using AI now - it's how well we are using it, and how well we will use it in the future."

Dr Haider Al Khateeb, deputy director of the Cyber Security Innovation Centre at Aston University in Birmingham, outlined some key issues surrounding the adoption of artificial intelligence, emphasising the importance of collaboration.

He spoke about the dilemmas facing many employers - particularly the need for 'balancing privacy with opportunities to solve problems'.

"AI can support the way we do things, but



Dr Haider Al Khateeb, Beckie Bosworth, Craig Edwards, Sarah Davies, Lawrence Wood and Dan Vaughan



The employer networking event at Telford College's Wellington campus

it also introduces an element of risk to our businesses," he said. "The way we address this is attracting a lot of attention at the moment. Yes, there is risk, but there are also high rewards."

Detective sergeant Craig Edwards, from the Regional Cyber Crime Unit, also gave an insight into the work being done by police to inform and protect businesses from increasingly sophisticated cyber criminal networks.

Telford College principal and chief executive Lawrence Wood earlier outlined the

college's newly updated strategic plan, with a focus on driving economic growth through innovative and impactful partnerships.

"I don't believe colleges are just qualification factories," he said. "Employers are looking for people with other skills too; communication, teamwork, the ability to think on their feet and take initiative."

"We also want to ensure all our staff have up to date skills and knowledge, and understand what the modern workplace is like."

Sustainability at the core of company



Nicola Atkins and Matt Giles of Preloved Tech

Newport-based Preloved Tech Ltd has been listed in the Green Growth 100 - an initiative launched by Small Business Britain in partnership with BT to spotlight small businesses successfully using sustainability as a core driver of growth.

All the companies in the list are embedding sustainable practices into their operations - from cutting waste and energy use to rethinking supply chains, attracting new customers, and strengthening long-term resilience.

Founded in 2019, Preloved Tech Ltd has been led by Matt Giles and Nicola Atkins who have placed sustainability at the core of the business.

Through secure and sustainable technology recycling solutions, ensuring technology hardware is diverted away from landfill and given a second lease of life, the business has shown how responsible practices can deliver both environmental impact and commercial success.

Matt said: "This recognition is a real milestone for Preloved Tech. Being included in the Green Growth 100 validates our belief that sustainable technology and commercial growth can - and must - go hand in hand. We're proud to be proving that circular tech can scale while delivering genuine environmental impact."

A razor-sharp partnership

A precision relationship between two manufacturers that has spanned more than 60 years is celebrating a new milestone.

Brandauer, a metal stamping and tooling specialist, has worked with Bruderer UK to specify and install a new press and associated ancillary equipment, capable of producing millions of precision razor frames every week.

The £700,000 machine line delivers 51 tonnes of power at up to 1050 strokes per minute, and a precision mechanical feed can cater for high tensile stainless steel that is just 0.15mm thick.

Bruderer UK opened its new competence centre at Hortonwood in Telford just over a year ago, and it is playing a key role in how the relationship develops.

"Our relationship with Bruderer goes way beyond that of a machine supplier; in essence the press specialist has become a critical partner in our pursuit of new automated process development and ultra precision parts," said Brandauer chief executive Rowan Crozier.

"The latest BSTA510-150B2 press is the perfect example of how the relationship works. We won and set-up a new line to supply lead frames for subscription razor assemblies and, due to increasing volumes, recognised the need for additional capacity that could take us to the next level."

"We sat down with Bruderer UK's expert sales team, who are all former toolmakers, and came up with an option that gave us the power, the control, the speed and the accuracy our clients were craving."

"A relationship of more than six decades proves the importance of collaboration and the longevity of its precision high-speed presses that are among the best in the world."

Adrian Haller, managing director of Bruderer UK, said: "The latest project means we have now placed 38 different machines into Brandauer's Birmingham factory since the early 1960s."

"We know each other inside out and this means we can work quickly to test-run tooling projects, seamlessly picking up highly confidential contracts where precision is paramount."

"Through tooling concepts, press optimisation, protection systems and ancillary equipment, we are able to jointly deliver world class automation solutions that go far beyond a simple machine sale."

"The razor contract was secured against international competition and proves that UK manufacturing can be very cost competitive."



Rowan Crozier of Brandauer with Adrian Haller from Bruderer UK





Andy Hooper, Rachael Hooper, Graham Mason and Katie Brett



Danielle Lloyd, Max Ball, Helen Ball and Clare Turner



Lyndsey O'Loughlin, Paige Eades, Jon Crowe, Claire Brown and Rob Davies



James Broxton, Ross Wigley and Aaron Childs

Out of heritage comes innovation...

Shrewsbury MP Julia Buckley performed the official opening of a new co-working and innovation hub, based in the Morris Building at Welsh Bridge.

Co-Founded is designed to support the area's growing community of entrepreneurs, freelancers, and remote workers, offering a flexible and modern alternative to traditional office leasing.

Jon Ditchburn, one of the joint founders, said: "Our heartfelt thanks go to the Morris family and their team – their trust and faith in our vision have been vital in bringing this project to life. The history of this building adds a unique and inspiring dimension to our community."

"We're not just providing desks; we're creating a place where the next generation of Shrewsbury businesses can build their own legacies."

Julia Buckley said: "By investing in the historic Morris Building and transforming it into a modern, high quality workspace, the founders are creating exactly the kind of environment that freelancers, remote workers and growing businesses need to succeed."



Shrewsbury MP Julia Buckley cuts the ribbon with founders Jon Ditchburn, Jon Crowe and Chris Ford



Liz Lowe and Trish Randles



Helen Ball and Emma Molyneux



Jenny Pearson and Caitlin Verrilli



Julia Buckley, Jon Crowe and Katie Morris



Sian van Beek and Mark Richardson



Ryan Egan with Jessica Dornan



The Co-Founded team: front, from left, Sophie Mullard, Katie Faulkner, Jon Ditchburn, Jo Martin, Caitlin Verrilli. Back, from left, Jon Crowe, Chris Ford



Caitlin Verrilli, Sam Skelton and Angela Pin



Katie Faulkner, Tremayne Ashton, Neil Anderson and Sarah Evans



Tom Waters, James Credeford and Neil Rowley

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Product recalls: knowing your rights



Martyn James



Once you've established if the item you purchased is part of a recall, check out the guidance on the recall notice about what happens next. These appear on the recall notice, Trading Standards and regulator website... and loads of other places

Have you purchased an item that's been involved in a product recall? Don't panic! But do be cautious.

Nestlé recently recalled some batches of baby formula, reportedly because they may contain toxins. In addition, vehicles, white goods and thousands of other products are recalled each year because they may pose a risk to the public.

So how do product recalls work and what can you do if you've bought something that's not safe? I spotted my good friend and top legal expert Gary Rycroft talking about this very subject on BBC Morning Live recently, so I've corralled him in to writing a joint guide for you on that very subject!

What happens when a product is recalled?

If a brand announces a product recall, it's often only specific batches that are affected. The recall notice will provide the specific identification codes or product number, or even timeframes when the goods might have been on sale.

Once you've established if the item you purchased is part of a recall, check out the guidance on the recall notice about what happens next. These appear on the recall notice, Trading Standards and regulator website... and loads of other places. For items like groceries the advice is usually to return the goods to where you

purchased them for a refund. Specific schemes are put in place for larger items, for practical reasons. The manufacturer usually announces a process to repair or replace these items. This can sometimes take quite a bit of time, depending on how many people are affected.

What about dangerous products?

Some recalls relate to faults that pose a very real risk to the purchaser. We've seen washing machines that could burst into flames, cars that have faulty braking systems, and food and drink that contains glass fragments.

Electrical items with serious faults must not be turned on, plugged in, or used under any circumstances. However, you could find yourself stuck with a faulty dishwasher that you can't use for months or even years.

If you made the purchase within the first six months, your shopping rights come in to play. That means you could demand a refund if the repair or replacement isn't carried out urgently. If lots of people are affected though, this may prove challenging.

But what if you've consumed a potentially dangerous food or drink item that's been recalled? Contact your doctor or a walk-in/call-in health service as soon as possible if you are worried. Keep copies of doctor's notes and referrals in case you decide to pursue a complaint for compensation too.

Can I claim compensation?

Yes... but don't get too excited. While a refund for a product you must hand back is automatic, compensation for a product recall is not an automatic legal right and arises only if the situation is serious and there is genuine harm or financial cost to you.

If you're returning a contaminated food item for example, you might get a small shopping voucher as a goodwill gesture if you complain to reflect the inconvenience, but these are usually for (very) small amounts.

However, you can only seek compensation if you have been harmed or suffered financial loss arising from the product being recalled. Again, this must represent realistic costs.

So if your car is recalled but you need to drive for work, it's reasonable to ask the manufacturer if they can provide a courtesy car until your vehicle can be repaired or replaced.

This is unlikely to be offered to everyone – or indeed anyone unprompted.

Expect to be asked to prove how essential the vehicle is too.

Of course, you may not be looking for financial compensation.

For example, if you are looking to have a faulty washing machine repaired and you've got a few quotes from local tradespeople, ask the firm if they will pay the cost if their recall is likely to take a long time.

Martyn James is a leading consumer rights campaigner, TV and radio broadcaster and journalist. <https://martynjamesexpert.co.uk/articles/>. You can read Gary's top tips on food product recalls on the Morning Live website

Fresh life breathed into town's market



Some of the traders who have moved into their new market units

Traders have moved into new stalls at Wellington Market, marking the next major milestone of a big regeneration programme.

Nine traders have all been accommodated in new purpose-built units during the first phase of a year-long Telford & Wrekin Council project designed to safeguard the historic market's future for the next 50 years.

TF1 Entertainment, JSM Worktops, Drack's Den, iRepair, Off the Wall, Graham's Hoovers, Bath & Bed, Lucy's Shoes and Alexander Pets have moved from different parts of the market as part of the revamp.

Meanwhile, Aladdin's Cave – which sells household and gardening goods – is moving from the old side of its existing unit in the market to a

new part of the unit while the old part is restored.

Shropshire-based contractor Pave Aways Ltd is delivering the works, and a small number of traders were temporarily relocated within the market before moving into their new permanent homes.

Businesses remain open as usual throughout the works and new signage has been installed to show where traders are now located.

Telford & Wrekin Council is supporting market traders during the work by offering them subsidised rents. It has also supported Workman & Watchwear with a move from the market into a new permanent location on the High Street in Wellington.



Mike Williams of RBC Brewin Dolphin

Mike is now head of office

Wealth manager RBC Brewin Dolphin has promoted Mike Williams to head of its Shrewsbury office following David Hall's decision to step down as head of office after 15 years to focus on his wealth manager role.

Mike joined RBC Brewin Dolphin as a director in 2019, and has 29 years of industry experience having previously held roles at Barclays, HSBC and Evelyn Partners, formerly known as Tilney.

RBC Brewin Dolphin's Shrewsbury office has had a presence in the region for 16 years, helping people to effectively plan and manage their finances. Mike will lead a team of 18, which includes client-focused wealth managers.

Robin Mellows, regional centre head at RBC Brewin Dolphin, said: "With Mike's strong leadership and wealth management experience, we look forward to the continued growth of our Shrewsbury office as we endeavour to help more people across the region with targeted wealth planning solutions."

Changes take place at children's charity



Sarah Bew with Claire Keers and new physio Lara Whitton

Staff and trustees at a Shropshire children's charity which provides specialist services to youngsters with mobility issues have said farewell to their physio after 16 years and welcomed a new face to the team.

Sarah Bew spent her entire career working at Oswestry-based The Movement Centre and said it had been a real privilege to have played a part in helping the many children and their families who have benefited from Targeted Training courses.

She said: "I have mixed emotions at

leaving but have decided that now is the time to make a big change in my life. My mum, dad and sister live up in Scotland at the foothills of The Cairngorms, and I will be moving up there to be closer to them."

Staff at the centre – on the site of the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital but an independent charity and not NHS funded – have now welcomed new physio Lara Whitton to the team.

Lara said: "I'm really excited to see what I can bring to the team. I love working with children, and having already seen some of the incredible work the organisation does, it truly feels like an honour to be part of a service that makes such a meaningful difference to so many children and their families each year."

Emergency service education for MP

Telford MP Shaun Davies has been selected to join a cross-party parliamentary scheme designed to give MPs first-hand experience of the work carried out by the emergency services and the challenges they face on the front line.

It follows his graduation from the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme last year.

He said: "Our emergency services do an extraordinary job, often in incredibly challenging circumstances. This scheme is a valuable opportunity to see their work up close, listen to their experiences, and better

understand the pressures they face.

"What I learn will help inform my work in Parliament and my campaigning on behalf of our local emergency services here in Telford."

In addition to visiting emergency services in Shropshire, Shaun has so far visited the London Fire Brigade and the Mountain Rescue Team in the Scottish Highlands observing operations and speaking directly with emergency service personnel, gaining insight into issues such as funding, staffing, training, wellbeing, and the increasing demands placed on services.



Shaun Davies meeting with the Shropshire Fire and Rescue Service

New roles for key members of team



Chief financial officer Jayne Meakin

Thermal insulation specialist Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI) has announced new job roles for two key members of staff in recognition of their service.

The Telford-based company, known for its award-winning Tempro thermal insulation material, has promoted Kirsty Murrell to chief operating officer, while Jayne Meakin is now chief financial officer.

It has been another busy year for the Stafford Park-based

business, which has seen the launch of a new manufacturing division, and the continuation of a thriving partnership with key retailers including Co-op.

SMI has also launched new products including AdBlue thermal covers for the agricultural market, and a portable Safe Four-Step Trolley – targeted specifically at retail and warehousing staff.

SMI managing director Jill Seymour said: "We are delighted to be able to reward Kirsty and Jayne for their loyalty and commitment to the business. Their new roles reflect the increasing responsibilities they have been taking on over the past few months."



Kirsty Murrell, chief operating officer

Associate director for comms agency



Be Bold managing director Amy Bould, left, and associate director Sarai Gill

Strategic communications agency Be Bold – which celebrates its 15th anniversary this year – has appointed a new associate director.

Sarai Gill brings 15 years of experience in digital projects and strategy to the 10-strong team, based near Newport.

She said: "The opportunity to work with a PR agency that truly understands digital is exciting. Be Bold has built something rare – a business grounded in traditional PR excellence but with skill sets which make a real difference to business outcomes."

Managing director Amy Bould

said: "PR and storytelling now play an even more crucial role in how brands achieve visibility online thanks to the rise in AI search.

"The increased use of Chat GPT and AI Mode on Google means many companies who relied on a Google ranking to be seen are seeing visitors to their websites plummet and with that, sales and growth. But PR expertise can help reverse this.

"Clients increasingly want us to lead on all aspects of their marketing and digital strategy and Sarai's appointment is part of that commitment."

Inspired by ambulance charity

Midlands Air Ambulance Charity has welcomed Vic Younis as its newest business ambassador, strengthening the charity's connection with the business community.

He is head of dispute resolution and corporate services at Wall James Chappell, specialising in representing SMEs nationally across a wide range of legal business matters.

The charity's Business Ambassador Programme brings together influential leaders from across

the region's business community, harnessing their passion and expertise to drive meaningful impact for the charity and amplify awareness of its lifesaving work.

Vic said: "Having seen the lifesaving impact their clinical teams have, I am eager to use my platform to support their mission. This charity is the backbone of emergency pre-hospital care in our region, and their dedication to saving lives is truly inspiring."

To find out more about becoming a business ambassador with Midlands Air Ambulance Charity, visit www.midlandsairambulance.com/business-ambassadors



Business ambassador Vic Younis

Respected associate joins firm

A lawyer recognised as an 'associate to watch' in a prestigious national legal guide has joined Lanyon Bowdler's expanding family team.

Helen Davies qualified as a solicitor more than 15 years ago and has worked for several firms across the north west of the country.

Helen, who is based at Lanyon Bowdler's Oswestry office, was recognised as an associate to watch in the 2025 and 2026 editions of Chambers UK.

She said: "My particular focus is on the financial aspects of relationship breakdowns, whether involving married

or unmarried couples, which often involve complex property, business interests, and inherited assets. I also advise on nuptial and cohabitation agreements, as well as complex Children Act matters. I frequently collaborate with other professionals such as accountants, financial advisers, coaches, and therapists as needed to ensure clients receive a co-ordinated and holistic approach to their family circumstances."

Sue Hodgson, head of Lanyon Bowdler's family law team, said demand was continuing to grow for the firm's advice regarding family issues such as divorce and cases involving children.

Executive director bids a fond farewell

Shropshire Council's executive director and chief financial officer James Walton has left the authority after 26 years.

He became executive director in 2021 but had been in the role of chief financial officer since 2013.

James also undertook the role of Section 151 officer/treasurer for the Shropshire County Pension Fund, West Mercia Energy, Shropshire & Wrekin Fire Authority and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

James said: "After 26 years, this has been a difficult point to arrive at. I want to thank those who have supported me throughout my time here. I leave with deep gratitude for colleagues and genuine pride in what we have achieved together."

An excellent environment for architectural practice



Toby Shaw of Towler Shaw Roberts, Robert Green, and Morris Property duo Sarah Evans and Neil Anderson at the Abbey Lawn site

Shrewsbury-based architectural practice Arrol Green Design Studio Ltd have moved into new premises in the town.

The company, formerly known as Arrol Architects, has taken an 850 sq ft office suite at Cannon Court West, on the Abbey Lawn complex.

The company specialises in conservation consultancy, alongside the sensitive adaptive re-use of historical buildings for both residential and commercial clients.

It says the move to Abbey Lawn marks an important new

chapter for the practice, providing a high quality base to support its continued growth.

Robert Green, for the company, said: "This new office provides an excellent environment for our team and a strong base from which we can continue to deliver our specialist conservation and design services across the region."

Abbey Lawn is owned, developed, and managed by Morris Property, and the letting was secured in conjunction with local property agents Towler Shaw Roberts (TSR).

Technology should 'benefit our customers'

Steve Baldrey has joined rural housing association Connexus as director of IT, data and PMO – taking on responsibility for the IT and digital strategy at the Craven Arms-based organisation which manages 10,000 homes.

With extensive experience in senior IT leadership, Steve's previous role was as director of IT at housing group Orbit, where he spent five years overseeing major digital initiatives. Before that he spent two decades driving business and IT transformation in the automotive industry.

He said: "My priority is to ensure that technology directly benefits our customers, making our services more accessible, responsive, and tailored to their needs."

"Ensuring our IT systems are robust, innovative and above all, customer-focused, is essential. I'm eager to collaborate with teams across Connexus to deliver technology that makes a real difference in people's lives."

Connexus people director Matt Pitt said: "His wealth of experience in technology leadership adds real value and comes at a crucial time as we look to further improve our digital offer to colleagues and customers."



Steve Baldrey has joined Connexus as director of IT



Helen Davies

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STUART WOODINGS is the entrepreneur behind Shropshire Business Suite in Shrewsbury town centre, County Goldsmiths, Shropshire Holdings, and multiple property and training ventures

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

I'm never entirely comfortable being called an 'entrepreneur', but I'm not sure what else fits. My work is a genuine portfolio – one minute I'm talking to suppliers, the next I can be buying and selling jewellery, or out on site. And of course, there are always plenty of meetings.

HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ECONOMY?

Massively. The key is how you adapt and pivot. Right now, gold and silver prices are at an all time high, which is fantastic for our jewellery business. We're fortunate to have a healthy mix of companies across different sectors.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON HYBRID AND FLEXIBLE WORKING?

We wouldn't have opened Shropshire Business Suite if we didn't believe businesses wanted more flexibility. Many companies gave up large offices after the pandemic, but they still need professional space for meetings – that's where we come in.

WHAT IMPACT IS ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE HAVING ON YOUR BUSINESS?

I watched Terminator 2 years ago, and part of me still thinks Skynet will take over one day! But until then, AI is the best thing to happen to this generation. It's the new gold rush. We use it a lot; it's growing incredibly fast, and if you're not engaging with it now, you'll be left behind.

HOW DO YOU HOPE COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Decent, fair and honest. In business, that's everything.

YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?

Negotiation skills. And the ability to pivot and respond to whatever comes my way.

BIGGEST CURRENT CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?

People. With several businesses on the go, it's vital to be able to understand and connect with very different types of individuals.

TELL US SOMETHING MOST PEOPLE WOULDN'T KNOW.

Many years ago, I struggled with drug addiction. At my lowest point I weighed just over nine stone, and it nearly cost me my life.

YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?

Turning my life around. I've been to the bottom and experienced real poverty, but I like to think my positive mindset helps me handle things that others might find overwhelming.

PET HATES?

Dishonesty. A handshake on a business deal means everything to me. Too many people agree to something and then pull out. People can be very ugly when it comes to money. If you're fair, upfront and honest, you can build happy and long lasting relationships.

ADVICE TO YOUR YOUNGER SELF?

I'm not one for looking back – I've enjoyed the journey. But I'd probably say "try harder" in those early years. And buy bitcoin when it was a penny!

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

I'm not great at switching off, but I love a late night movie, spending time with family... and occasionally the peace and solitude of metal detecting.

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?

What's not to love? We're only about an hour from everywhere – Birmingham, Cheshire, Manchester, Liverpool – yet it feels like we're an island, surrounded by a moat. It's beautiful, comfortable, and full of great people.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?

I don't spend huge amounts of time on social media personally, but for the businesses it's Facebook, Instagram, and increasingly LinkedIn.



Thomas Parker, described as the 'Edison of Europe'



Classic movie – The Shawshank Redemption



Stuart Woodings



Stuart is convinced a Skynet-style AI will take over one day



County Goldsmiths in Shrewsbury

FAVOURITE MOVIE OR TV SHOW?

I'm a huge movie fan, but if I had to pick only one, it'd be The Shawshank Redemption.

EARLY BIRD OR NIGHT OWL?

Definitely a night owl – though that doesn't stop me starting work early. I'm not someone who clocks off after eight hours, because I love what I do.

DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS?

Wow, that's tough. I'd like to sit down with Elon Musk and discover how his mind is wired up. The same would go for Albert Einstein. But I found out not all that long ago that I'm the great, great, great grandson of famous Ironbridge inventor Thomas Parker, whose inventions in the late 19th century paved the way for electric street lighting, electrically-powered trams and trains, and electric cars. I'd really love to meet him.

AND FINALLY...WHAT DO THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HOLD FOR YOU?

I'm incredibly excited about where we are right now. We're launching a new property training academy called Legacy, aimed at people who want to get into property development but don't know how. We're building a hub offering training, finance, architectural services – a complete one stop shop, all run from Shropshire Business Suite. Helping people escape the rat race and enjoy life is a privilege, and hugely rewarding.

Our People, Your Team.

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We can hold meetings via telephone and video and, of course, we are also able to offer meetings in person. Please contact us and a member of our team will be happy to help.

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