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MIDLANDS MEDIA AWARDS Magazine of the Year – winner

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By Carl Jones Shropshire Business Editor

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Welcome

Shropshire is a county shaped by contrasts – rural yet ambitious, steeped in heritage yet restless for innovation, proudly independent yet deeply connected to global forces.

And never has this been more clearly illustrated than in the pages of our latest edition. Because while we may be more than 3,500 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, the economic tremors from the US-Iran conflict have landed squarely on our doorstep.

The impact has been swift and sobering. Heating oil prices in the county have more than doubled, gas bills have spiked by up to 60%, and supply chains that once felt dependable are now showing their fragility. Manufacturing, agriculture, tourism, logistics – no corner of our economy has been untouched.

And yet, as is so often the case in Shropshire, our business community talks not of despair, but of determination.

Employers are reassessing energy strategies, diversifying suppliers, exploring renewables, and building resilience into their operations. Community organisations are fighting to protect the people who need them most.

Farmers are adapting once again to rising input costs. Manufacturers are rethinking production schedules and investment plans. It's a reminder that global instability doesn't just shape markets – it shapes mindsets too.

But if the economic headwinds have been strong, the spirit of Shropshire's business community has been stronger.

Nowhere was that more evident than at the Shropshire Business Conversation – our 10th birthday celebration, which was an incredibly inspiring gathering. We brought together some of our most memorable cover stars from the past decade for Q&A sessions which were a masterclass in leadership, candour and connection.

From Will Stratton Morris's reflections on transforming global coffee brand Caffè Nero, to Music Magpie founder Walter Gleeson's mission to champion the next generation of tech entrepreneurs... from Merrythought boss Sarah Holmes's stewardship of a 95 year old teddy bear icon, to Charlie Blakemore's journey from Telford apprentice to West Midlands CEO of the Year.

The conversations were rich, honest and full of the kind of insight you only get when great leaders share a room and speak from the heart. A big thanks to our friends from Shropshire Festivals who helped to make it all possible (and for the surprise birthday cake too!)

It was a reminder of something else that's so important: Shropshire's business community is not just talented – it is generous. Generous with experience, generous with encouragement, and generous with its willingness to lift others up.

That same spirit runs through our cover story feature on Manuscript Pen Company of Highley, where the fifth generation of the founding family is writing a bold new chapter.

The story is a powerful example of how heritage and innovation can coexist – a company rooted in 19th century craftsmanship thriving in a 21st century marketplace by embracing ecommerce, personalisation, diversification and bold strategic thinking.

These are among the important topics tackled in this issue by our expert columnists, including – once again – the tricky topic of skills. How do employers find the staff with the attributes they require; ability, application, and attitude?

The collaborative response now under way, uniting councils, colleges, training providers, the Chamber, the voluntary sector and employers themselves, shows what can be achieved when we stop working in silos and start building a system that genuinely reflects the needs of our economy.

Last, but certainly not least, we reveal the finalists for the 2026 Shropshire Chamber Business Awards. It's been a record breaking year for entries, and a line up of finalists that showcases the very best of our county's innovation, resilience and ambition. From manufacturers and tech firms to hospitality stars, community champions and sustainability pioneers, the breadth of talent is extraordinary.

Taken together, these stories paint a clear picture. Yes, the challenges are real. But so is the momentum. So is the creativity. So is the resilience that has always defined Shropshire's business community.

If our decade of Shropshire Business magazines has taught us anything, it's that this county doesn't just weather storms... it finds ways to grow through them.



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.

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John Knight,
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Shockwaves from the war have spread far and wide

Operating in an uncertain time

By Adam Pringle

Shropshire may be over 3,500 miles from the Strait of Hormuz, but the economic shockwaves from the US-Iran conflict are now well and truly on our doorstep.

In a county where the economy is powered by small and medium sized enterprises that thrive on stability, predictability and tight operational margins, the sudden volatility in oil and energy markets has dented confidence and dominated daily decision making.

The most immediate pressure point has been energy. Oil and gas markets, already sensitive to geopolitical tension, reacted swiftly and sharply to the conflict, pushing UK wholesale gas prices higher... and dragging business costs up with them.

Shropshire has one of the highest proportions of consumers relying on heating oil, which is served by a totally unregulated market. Before Donald Trump's declaration of war on Iran, prices in the county were around 65p per litre. By mid-April they had more than doubled.

Some local firms also reported monthly gas bills rising by around 60% almost overnight; a stark reminder of how exposed our energy intensive industries are to global instability.

Shropshire's manufacturing base, which includes advanced engineering, metalworking, food processing and chemical related operations, is feeling the strain.

And when prices spike, margins shrink, investment decisions stall, and long planned upgrades or expansions are quietly shelved. Even businesses that are not heavy energy users are discovering that volatility has a way of creeping into every corner of the economy. Refrigeration, transport, warehousing, agricultural operations... each relies on stable fuel and energy costs to remain viable.

Supply chains, too, have become more fragile. With shipping routes disrupted and vessels rerouted away from the Strait of Hormuz, delivery times have lengthened and freight costs have already risen.

Manufacturers are wrestling with delays in receiving raw materials, particularly those linked to petrochemicals. For companies operating on just in time models, even a small hold-up can ripple through production schedules, affecting everything from staffing to customer delivery commitments.

Some businesses are now exploring reshoring options or diversifying their supplier base, not out of preference but necessity. Our automotive component makers, plastics manufacturers and advanced engineering firms – sectors that rely on precision, timing and global connectivity – are among those feeling the most pressure.

Then there's the impact on tourism. Shropshire's tourism sector hit a record £1 billion in economic impact last year. We attracted 10.66 million visitors for an industry which supports 9,454 jobs.

But when fuel and food prices rise, discretionary spending falls, and that shift is felt acutely by retailers, hospitality venues and tourism operators.



Tourism in our market towns depends on confidence, disposable income and a willingness to spend

Our visitor economy depends on confidence, disposable income and the willingness of families to spend on days out, meals and short breaks, and it becomes vulnerable when household budgets tighten.

Businesses that weathered the pandemic and the cost of living crisis with admirable resilience now find themselves facing yet another test of endurance.

As is so often the case in incidents such as these, it's the people who need support the most that often bear the brunt.

Phil Ryan, who runs the ring and ride service for the Mayfair Community Centre in Church Stretton, has spoken about the rising cost of refuelling his vehicles since the Iran war.

The scheme supports hundreds of people who would otherwise struggle to get around, and although the group says it is desperate not to raise prices or reduce services, it has admitted that the situation currently "doesn't look very promising".

Shropshire's manufacturing base, which includes advanced engineering, metalworking, food processing and chemical related operations, is feeling the strain.

Turning to agriculture, a cornerstone of Shropshire's identity and economy, our farmers are grappling with higher prices for the likes of red diesel, fertiliser, transport and refrigeration. These costs stack on top of one another, squeezing margins and forcing difficult decisions about planting, harvesting and investment.

NFU president Tom Bradshaw says: "We've already seen this situation play out with the Russian invasion of Ukraine which drove an ongoing cost of living crisis here... it is yet another sobering reminder of the need to build resilience in UK farming."

Anecdotal evidence suggests many Shropshire employers are now reassessing their energy strategies, exploring fixed rate contracts, renewable options and efficiency measures to reduce exposure to future shocks.

Others are diversifying supply chains, building financial buffers or collaborating more closely with local chambers, councils and sector groups to share intelligence and advocate for support.

Statistics released last month showed that manufacturing output nationally has slowed to a six month low, with firms citing the conflict as a key factor.

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Another 12 months on the roads

Shropshire Council has extended its highways contract with Kier for an additional year taking it to April 2027. Under the extended contract, more services will move back under the council's direct control, including greater use of local contractors and closer working with town and parish councils. The council says: "Kier will continue to deliver a wide range of highways work across Shropshire with particular emphasis on resurfacing

and surface dressing which is the best way to stop potholes appearing." Andy Wilde, Shropshire Council's service director for infrastructure, said: "This one-year extension gives us stability and continuity while we continue to develop our mixed economy approach. "It means the council has much greater control over day-to-day reactive services, while Kier focuses on the areas where it offers the best value and expertise."



Michael Harte of Bridge Cheese

The new road is due for completion by 2031

Connecting businesses

Shropshire's business community has hailed confirmation of the long awaited M54 to M6 link road as a landmark moment for the region's economy, connectivity and future growth

The Government has officially named the £200 million scheme as a flagship project within its £27 billion national road investment strategy – finally addressing a missing piece of motorway infrastructure that has constrained the area for decades.

The two mile stretch will connect the M54 at Junction 1 to the northbound M6 at Laney Green, removing an estimated 19,000 vehicles a day from local roads and easing pressure on key commuter routes.

Telford & Wrekin Council leader Lee Carter said the announcement should 'unlock access to jobs in one of the Midlands' fastest growing towns'. The project is due for completion by 2031.

Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, welcomed the news, saying good transport links were essential for the county's economy.

"Our central location is an incredibly powerful selling point when it comes to marketing the county for inward investment. This only works, however, if we have reliable and efficient transport links.

"This link road project will level the playing field for Shropshire, making it just as easy to access the northbound carriageway of the M6 as it has been for the southbound route for many years.

"If it reduces congestion on surrounding roads and cuts down travel times, it can only be good for business and for the appeal of Shropshire as a destination."

Local employers have also welcomed the certainty the project now brings, believing it will make deliveries more predictable, reduce congestion and strengthen supply chain reliability. Improved connectivity, they say, is likely to draw further investment into the area.

Michael Harte, managing director of Bridge Cheese in Telford, said: "The new M54 to M6 link road will improve transport routes by reducing congestion on local roads and cutting journey times, supporting the excellent service that will allow our business to continue growing."

Telford MP Shaun Davies said: "For years, residents and businesses have faced delays and congestion. Now we can look forward to a future with better connectivity, stronger growth, and improved daily life for thousands of people.

"I've heard directly from local businesses about the difference this link road will make from creating jobs, unlocking opportunities, and supporting growth."



Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce



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Stans at St Martins



Big crowds turned out to see Liz Dawn cut the ribbon in 1991

Fresh plans for Stans

Independent retailer Stans Superstore has been sold – ending a long and proud family connection to a business which dates back nearly 80 years.

The site at St Martins, near Oswestry, has been in the hands of the Faulks family since Stan founded the business as a fish and chip shop in 1947.

It was extended into a superstore in 1991, and has now been sold by the family for an undisclosed sum to an as yet unnamed buyer.

Current owners Peter and Robert Faulks confirmed that the store would continue to operate as normal during the handover period.

In a statement, the family said: “We have been thinking about an exit strategy for some time now and we feel that now is the right time.

“The new business owners are already in retail trade with petrol forecourts, retail outlets and hotels. We feel that this is the right company to secure the long-term sustainability of Stans and take it into the future.”

They added: “We have upgraded the store over recent years, including new checkouts and an extensive refrigeration upgrade.

“We are so proud of the name Stans, the history of Stans, and all that it means to the local community, as well as further afield as our reputation has grown over the years. We are also proud to be part of the Stans family and we’ve enjoyed growing up and working in the business from the ages of five and six, working after school and weekends.

“We grew up in a family business environment, with mum and dad, who started off as a fish and chip shop in 1947. The business grew over the years and after coming back from working with Tesco and Woolworths in 1974, dad, mum and ourselves enjoyed working together so much, and had several alterations to the shop over the next 14 years.”

Tragically Stan died of a massive heart attack in May 1988, but the family built on his legacy, trebling the size of the shop in 1991 where Coronation Street star Liz ‘Vera



The Faulks family has built and nurtured the business for nearly 80 years

Duckworth’ Dawn cut the ribbon in front of big crowds.

Stans Shop became Stans Superstore, with a petrol station added in 1994. By this time, Stans grandchildren, Andrew, Sarah, Lisa and Katie had all come into the business.

We feel that this is the right company to secure the long-term sustainability of Stans and take it into the future

The family added: “The business could not have grown and evolved without the tremendous support of our staff, many of whom have been with us for 20, 30, 40 years and more. We would like to say a huge thank

you to them all, and especially the current team of 123 members.

“We’d also like to thank our thousands of loyal customers who have supported Stans for many years and especially those who have followed their parents and grandparents shopping at Stans.

“Similarly, we wish to thank all our suppliers, especially those in the local vicinity for their wonderful support and ideas. We have enjoyed every minute of being ‘Stans’ and all that it entails, but we feel that now is the right time to finally put our feet up.”

Dave Morris, regional director at Christie & Co, who handled the sale, said: “Stans Superstore is a fantastic family-owned supermarket. It has been a pleasure helping the Faulks family sell this important community asset.”

The new buyers have pledged to ‘do the previous owners justice’ by remaining the focal point of the local community.

“From one family business to another, we believe we share the same values and ethos that has made Stans so respected and ever dependable,” they said.

Management buyout

Q Financial Services, which has offices in Telford and Shrewsbury, has been bought out by its management.

The buyout sees Ben Wootton, Jacques Moulson, David Wells and Josh Timbrell take the reins.

The new leadership team paid tribute to the previous directors – Stuart Mackintosh, Ryan Wheeler, Steven Parry and Mitchell Gough – for their role in building the business, and outlined their intention to build on those strong foundations.

Ben Wootton joined Q Financial Services in 2018 as a mortgage and protection adviser, while Jacques Moulson brought experience from NatWest, where he worked across retail and commercial banking, before joining the firm in 2022.

David Wells was one of the first to join the business after a career running golf venues, and Josh Timbrell specialises in commercial finance, residential mortgages and protection.

Outgoing director Mitchell Gough said: “It is with great pride that we are now handing over the Q Financial ownership baton to the most talented group of people I have had the pleasure of working alongside.

“It has been a wonderful journey and one I will cherish for the rest of my days. While I will remain in an advisory capacity, the reins have been passed to a highly capable team who will take Q Financial to the next level.”

Q Financial has offices at Haygate Road in Wellington, and St Austin’s Friars in Shrewsbury.

Last year the business acquired Kingsland Financial – a financial services firm with over 25 years of experience in mortgages, investments, and pensions.



New owners of the business Jacques Moulson, Josh Timbrell, Ben Wootton and David Wells



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Some of the area's biggest names are involved in the manufacturing hub



Delegates at the first meeting of the logistics hub

Bridging the gap

Telford College's employer hubs are proving to be effective bridges between education and industry... reshaping how local businesses access talent, training, and innovation.

They are increasingly evolving into collaborative spaces where employers and educators can work together to co design solutions to real workforce challenges. But their impact goes far beyond consultation.

The hubs are re engineering the relationship between the college and the business community, ensuring that skills development is not just responsive to industry needs, but aligned with long term economic growth.

Each hub is built around a key sector of the regional economy, from engineering and advanced manufacturing to health and social care, digital, construction, and business services.

There are also hubs for logistics, sports, creative industries, public uniformed services, hair and beauty, and a new hub in the development stage for catering.

Employers are invited to get involved not as occasional advisers, but as strategic partners. They can help shape Telford College's curriculum content, identify the emerging skills that will define the next decade of local employment – and even influence investment in facilities.

"It gives businesses a direct voice in the talent pipeline, while giving students access to the most current industry expectations," says Beckie Bosworth, the college's director of partnerships and employer engagement.

"For employers, our hubs offer a single point of access to apprenticeships, upskilling programmes, bespoke training, and recruitment support. Instead of navigating a complex landscape of courses and contacts, businesses can work with a dedicated team that understands their sector, their challenges, and their ambitions.

"This streamlined approach has already helped companies across Telford and Shropshire to address skills shortages, modernise their workforce, and adopt new technologies with confidence."

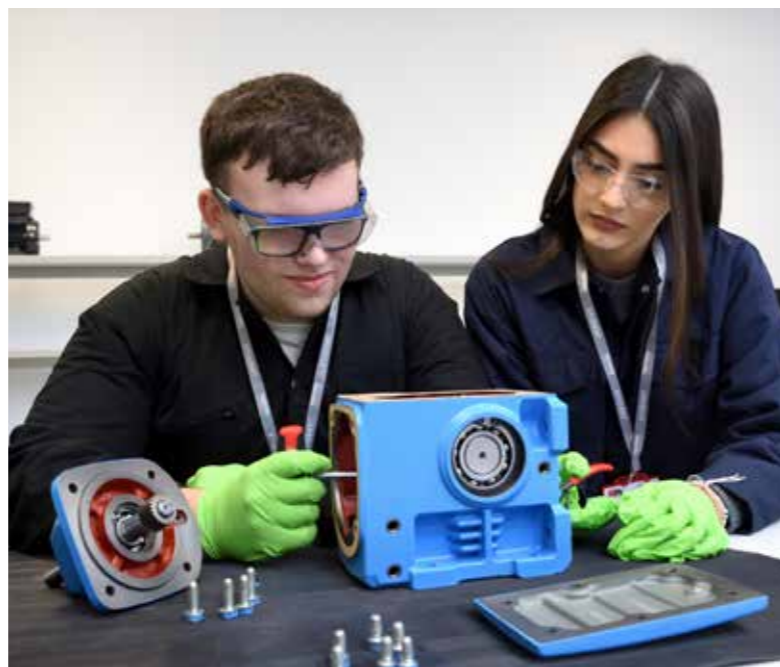
Among the major local businesses involved in the engineering hub are RBSL Kraft Heinz, Aga Rangemaster, Hoshizaki Europe, Pickstock, i2r Packaging, Keysight Technologies, plus the NHS and Jobcentre Plus.

The logistics hub, meanwhile, includes names such as Kinaxia, Kuehne + Nagel, and Little Pot Transport, while other employers engaging with the hubs include Supreme Home Care, Telford International Centre, Telford and Wrekin Council, Avara, Babcock International, Shropshire Cricket, Wolves Foundation, and ABC Nurseries.

Building closer working relationships between the college and leading local employers also opens the door for students to take part in employer led projects, live briefs, workplace visits, and guest sessions that bring theory to life.

Many hubs also facilitate mentoring, internships, and direct progression into apprenticeships or employment, and feature presentations from guest speakers and industry experts.

"The result is a learning environment that feels plugged into the real world, where young people can see a clear line between their studies and their future careers," Beckie says.



Hubs give employers a chance to shape the college curriculum

"Rather than waiting for employers to raise concerns about skills gaps, the hubs give us an opportunity to proactively gather intelligence, track sector trends, and anticipate future needs.

"This forward looking approach ensures that training programmes evolve at the same pace as industry – a crucial advantage in fast moving fields such as digital technologies, engineering automation, and health innovation."

Beckie adds: "These hubs are also strengthening the Shropshire economic ecosystem.

"By bringing together businesses of all sizes – from global manufacturers to local SMEs – they create a platform for shared learning and collaboration. Companies that might never have crossed paths are now exchanging ideas, identifying common challenges, and exploring joint opportunities for growth.

"This collective energy feeds back into the college, enriching its curriculum and expanding opportunities for students."

In a time when employers are demanding job ready talent and education providers are under pressure to demonstrate real world impact, Telford College says its employer hubs offer a model that works.

They are practical, collaborative, and deeply rooted in the needs of the local economy. More importantly, they are helping to shape a workforce that is skilled, adaptable, and ready for the future – strengthening the links between education and business in a way that benefits the entire region.

United in business

A Shropshire business man is bringing football banter into the boardroom by creating a networking group with a sporting twist.

Simon Jones, from Buildwas, has launched a members-only business networking group exclusively for Manchester United fans.

He's following this up over the coming weeks with a similar group for Liverpool supporters, and hopes to have around a dozen groups up and running for fans of other clubs over the next couple of years.

"We're providing members with an instant connection, as they all have a shared passion," said Simon, who originally fell in love with Manchester United during his schooldays in the 1980s.

"This isn't just networking – it's building relationships with fellow fans in business. The immediate bond builds a deeper connection that will turn into trust and camaraderie, leading to more authentic and enduring partnerships."

The Manchester United group has now been up and running for several months and has a core of around 100 members who get access to online networking sessions, get-togethers and social events.

Some of the events have included appearances from Manchester United legends like Brian McClair.

Simon, who has a background in technology-related sales and marketing, says



Players Live founder Simon Jones with United legend Brian McClair



Members on a 'walk and talk' get-together at Wizard's Edge



Meeting a United legend at the Drum and Monkey pub in Alderley Edge

that when people share a team, they also share a shorthand – a sense of identity and camaraderie that breaks the ice faster than any corporate introduction ever could.

By tapping into that energy, he says the network is already sparking fresh collaborations, referrals, new ideas and

partnerships, and is excited about how the business could grow.

"Football gives our members an instant connection, which is something they don't get in other networking groups."

You can find out more about the group at players-live.com

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The event gets under way at Telford International Centre

Cover stars assemble

Celebrating a decade of Shropshire Business magazine

Shropshire Business magazine kicked off its 10th birthday celebrations by bringing together some of its highest profile cover stars for a glitzy networking dinner.

The former chief executive of coffee chain Caffè Nero and co-founder of tech reselling service Music Magpie were among the power-packed line-up at the Shropshire Business Conversation.

The event, held at Telford International Centre, was jointly organised by Shropshire Festivals and Shropshire Business magazine at the culmination of this year's Shropshire Business Festival.

The line-up included Shrewsbury-based Will Stratton-Morris, who joined Caffè Nero in 2017 as the first externally appointed CEO for its UK coffee house business, responsible for around 650 stores.

He was joined by Walter Gleeson, co-founder of retail 're-commerce' giant Music Magpie, who in more recent years has been on a mission to help a new generation of entrepreneurs and invested in AFC Telford United.

The line-up also included Sarah Holmes, the fourth generation of her family to run iconic Ironbridge teddy bear maker Merrythought, and Charlie Blakemore of Intercity Technology, who has just been voted the West Midlands' CEO of the year.

Completing the panel were Steven Owen, managing director of former Shropshire company of the year Pave Aways, and Ella Cox, director of Telford-based Heaven Skincare, which has a Royal Warrant and a legion of celebrity customers.

The guests shared insights into some of the challenges and pressures involved in running high-profile and fast-growing businesses, and some of the risks and instinctive decisions they have taken in the quest for success.

"We have featured some truly inspirational Shropshire business people on the front cover of our magazine over the past decade, and it was a real treat to be able to bring so many of



Will Stratton-Morris, Walter Gleeson, Carl Jones, Sarah Holmes, Steven Owen and Charlie Blakemore



Ella Cox of Heaven Skincare

them together for the first time," said Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones.

"The event truly lived up to its title, because there were some brilliant conversations and connections made."

Albrighton-based Charlie Blakemore said: "It was a real pleasure to meet so many brilliant Shropshire business leaders and share experiences.

"I spent much of my early career in Telford, serving my apprenticeship there and it was genuinely special to return and to share some of my experiences and lessons that I have picked up along the way.

"I was fortunate to learn so much from the people I worked alongside and it reminded me just how influential those early years were.

"I feel a great sense of pride and gratitude for the region and the county that helped set me up for such a rewarding and enjoyable career. It was truly great to be back."

Shropshire Festivals director Beth Heath described the evening as 'epic' and said: "Thanks to the great speakers for being so inspirational." ▶



Will Stratton-Morris of Caffè Nero



Beth Heath, Tracey Rous, Sally Themans and Claire Moore



Ella Cox of Heaven Skincare during the Q&A



Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones hosted the event



Beckie Bosworth and Sarah Davies



The event gave guests chance to become Shropshire Business cover stars



Jane Rasquinha in conversation



Helen Spencer, Paul Littler and Brian Evans



Networking at the pre-dinner drinks reception



Rosalind Godfrey



Felicity Wingrove and Alan Adams



Dave Courteen and Linda Grocott



Joanna Morris from Shropshire Community Foundation



The Shropshire Business Conversation event at Telford International Centre



Guy Haydon of Aerovolt makes a point



Steven Owen and Sarah Holmes



James Worthington chats with Charlie Blakemore



Jon Duigenan and Andy Begley

THE SPEAKERS

WILL STRATTON-MORRIS

Will is an experienced senior executive at blue chip customer facing brands, with expertise in transformational change, digitisation and franchising in multi-site businesses. He joined Caffè Nero in 2017 as the first externally appointed CEO for its UK coffee house business, responsible for around 650 stores, employed 6,000 people and served 120 million customers annually. He is now the company's group chief business development officer. He was the cover story on issue 16 of our magazine, in May 2019.

ELLA COX

Ella Cox is a director of Telford-based Heaven, a multi-million pound global beauty brand which was built by her mother Deborah Mitchell from her kitchen table. The company has a string of celebrities, including members of the royal family, among its customer base. Deborah now takes huge delight in being able to give something back, helping young people and entrepreneurs to chase their goals... whatever challenges they may face. She was the cover story on Issue 4 of the magazine, in 2017.

STEVEN OWEN

Steven is managing director of Pave Aways, based at Knockin near Oswestry. He won the John Clayton Award in 2025 recognising his contribution to the Shropshire business community, and his business is a former Shropshire Company of the Year. Steven - a huge advocate of apprenticeships - led a management buyout of Pave Aways in 2011, which helped to drive the company's turnover over £22 million. He was the cover story on issue 17 of our magazine, in July 2019.

SARAH HOLMES

Sarah has been managing director of the iconic Ironbridge-based teddy bear maker Merrythought since 2017. The family-run company is the UK's oldest remaining teddy bear manufacturer, having celebrated its 95th anniversary last year. Sarah is the fourth generation of the family to run the business. Sarah was the cover story on issue 6 of our magazine, in September 2017.

CHARLIE BLAKEMORE

Charlie has run some of the country's biggest businesses, performed giant-killing heroics in the FA Cup, and been awarded for his commitment to the region's business community. From his first job as an apprentice at GKN Defence in Telford, he progressed swiftly through the ranks to lead the £1.2 billion turnover global land business at BAE Systems. He is now CEO of Intercity Technology. Charlie was cover story on issue 47 of our magazine, in September 2024.

WALTER GLEESON

Walter is the co-founder of retail 're-commerce' giant Music Magpie, who in more recent years has been on a mission to help a new generation of entrepreneurs. He set up a company with his wife Alexa, bringing together some of his most experienced, trusted, and expert contacts to inspire, innovate, motivate and discover new and emerging tech-stars, and has also invested in AFC Telford United. Walter was cover story on issue 32 of our magazine, in May 2022.





Walter Gleeson, Music Magpie co-founder



Steven Owen, managing director of Pave Aways



Kirsty Smallman, Pippa Tait and Sarah Holmes



Sarah Holmes, managing director of Merrythought



It was certainly an enjoyable event



Shropshire Festivals presented Carl Jones with a cake to mark the magazine's 10th birthday



Niamh Kelly chatting with Steven Owen



There were plenty of networking opportunities



Jamie Ricketts and Paul Naylor



Charlie Blakemore and Walter Gleeson in conversation with Carl Jones



The team from marketing agency Clear

Mere welcomes new venture by brothers

One of Shropshire's most visited tourism spots has received a fresh boost with the launch of a new watersports hub.

The Paddle Bros, run by brothers Chris and Tim Harris, has opened a new base on the shore of the mere at Ellesmere.

Chris and Tim Harris are based at Mere Cottage, which is already a prime location for water sports including guided paddles, lessons and equipment hire for stand-up paddle boarders, canoeists and kayakers.

They said: "Our aim is to help boost the local economy by providing new water-based experiences and encouraging people to explore the town and its surroundings."

"We are also committed to protecting the Mere's ecology and ensuring that our operation supports and safeguards local wildlife."

The investment underscores the continued importance of tourism to Shropshire's economy.

Each year, more than 10 million people visit the county, with tourism contributing roughly £910 million annually.

The sector creates jobs for over 9,000 people both directly and indirectly, making it one of the area's largest employers.

Councillor Liz Woodbridge, mayor of Ellesmere, welcomed the move. "While the Mere is a major draw, our ambition is for people to stay longer and explore everything Ellesmere has to offer. We have around 100 retail



The Paddle Bros Chris and Tim Harris

businesses in our historic high street and market hall, and The Ellesmere Yard canal basin is seeing transformative developments."

Project manager at Visit Shropshire Mark Hooper said: "New ventures like The Paddle Bros add real value to the visitor experience, helping us showcase Shropshire's landscapes, waterways and market towns while encouraging people to discover more and stay longer."

Refurbishment means suspension of boat trips

Volunteers who operate the George Watson Buck narrowboat on the west Shropshire border say they have taken the 'difficult decision' to suspend weekend boat trips on the Montgomery Canal at Llanymynech this year.

Graham Deakin, who chairs Llanymynech Canal Wharf, said it was 'due to factors outside their control' but confirmed that the Visitor Centre would still be open at weekends.

"This decision hasn't been taken lightly, but we didn't want to promise trips that we might not be able to deliver for our visitors."

"The situation does though give us an opportunity to refurbish our boat during the summer months when it is hopefully drier, warmer and with longer days. We have long planned to make 2026 a year to raise funds to refurbish our historic and unique boat – the only narrowboat built by JCB – so we are now launching a campaign to ask 2,026 people to give a fiver to help us complete a major overhaul of the boat this summer."

"We recently received a

generous donation for £500 towards refurbishment from The Cabin in Llandrinio, so we are looking to use that to help us improve the boat for future generations of visitors."

"We have long planned to make 2026 a year to raise funds..."

"Our popular Visitor Centre and exhibition will remain open to welcome visitors who want light refreshments and to find out more about the Montgomery Canal."

Based at the Llanymynech Canal Wharf in the Heritage Area in Llanymynech, the Visitor Centre is in a historic stable block and is an ideal spot for locals and visitors to the area to find out more about the heritage and wildlife of the Montgomery Canal. The wharf is run by volunteers from the Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust charity.

Property specialists join forces

Two of Shropshire's independent estate agency businesses have announced a strategic merger.

Mannleys and Samuel Wood have joined forces to create Mannleys Group, with bosses outlining plans for growth and further acquisitions.

Directors describe the move as a 'long-term investment in the regional property market, designed to enhance service rather than consolidate operations'.

The combined executive leadership team includes co-directors of Samuel Wood, Russell Griffin and Andrew Cadwallader, and co-directors of Mannleys Aaron Manley and Chris Mann.

Samuel Wood has built a strong presence across Shrewsbury, Ludlow and south Shropshire, while Mannleys has established itself in Telford and the surrounding markets.

The group says: "The combination of wider geographic coverage, experienced teams and increased investment capacity will enable the group to deliver a broader reach while maintaining the independence and service levels both brands are known for."

Chris Mann said: "This is an exciting opportunity for Mannleys to join forces with Samuel Wood. Both independent and respected businesses share similar values and a strong commitment to service, and by working together we can create a more proactive and ambitious company for sellers, landlords and tenants across Shropshire and the wider region."

"By combining our teams and experience,



Co-directors of Samuel Wood Andrew Cadwallader and Russell Griffin (far right) are pictured with co-directors of Mannleys, Chris Mann and Aaron Manley

we are building a business with genuine momentum and clear ambitions for further growth."

Andrew Cadwallader said: "This merger will create a progressive, forward-thinking property business built for the future."

"By combining our strengths, we are creating a more dynamic and capable company, with improved coverage and greater resources to support our clients."

"We are particularly excited about the

opportunities this creates for growth across the region and the ability to continue building a modern, forward-thinking agency that remains firmly focused on service and results."

"We also see this as a platform for future acquisitions and continued growth across Shropshire and neighbouring areas. The Group will be better positioned to showcase Shropshire homes to a broader audience and support sellers and landlords with an enhanced service."

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Building a skills system that works for Shropshire

Matt Potts



Ask any employer in Shropshire what is holding back their ability to grow, and the answer is remarkably consistent: skills.

Whatever their sector, businesses are struggling to recruit people with the technical capabilities, basic employability skills and workplace behaviours needed to keep pace with demand. Many employers tell us the same story – they have the orders, they have the ambition, but not always the workforce required to deliver it.

Over the past 18 months, we have taken a long, honest look at these issues. Rising economic inactivity, long term health conditions, demographic change and geographic barriers all shape the labour market in Shropshire.

These pressures are real and cannot be solved in isolation. That is why partners across the county have come together with a shared determination to reset how we approach skills, employment and workforce development. Our aim is simple: to build a more coherent, responsive and proactive system that works for people, for employers and for the long term growth of our economy.

Listening to employers has been essential. Through surveys, consultation and direct conversations, businesses have been clear about where the gaps are. They need engineering and manufacturing expertise, construction and green skills capability, stronger digital foundations and better employability and communication skills.

They also need practical barriers removed – transport challenges in rural areas, rising costs, limited access to training and a shortage of job ready candidates. Taken together, this feedback has helped us build a clearer picture of what Shropshire needs from its workforce of today and tomorrow.

To respond effectively, we've adopted an integrated approach. Recognising that no single organisation can solve this alone, we've co-ordinated efforts through the Get Marches Working Plan, LSIP, Connect to Work, and local employment strategies. Local authorities, the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, colleges, training providers, Jobcentre Plus, Public Health, Integrated Care Boards, and the voluntary and community sector are all working together and this collaboration is one of our greatest strengths.

We have also mapped employer feedback against wider labour market data to understand where the system is working well, where gaps remain and where we need to change direction. It has given us the opportunity to take stock, realign our priorities and develop a strategy that responds to the challenges we face now, while making sure we are ready for the workforce we will need in the future.

Shropshire already has significant strengths. We have modern, employer designed training programmes, specialist SEND provision, employment hubs for young people and adults, and community based



Bespoke ADHD awareness training aimed at employers. Picture courtesy of Enable.

employability support. Providers care deeply about helping people progress and have shown real willingness to collaborate, share insight and adapt provision so it better reflects employer demand. This commitment across the system gives us a strong base to build on.

Our focus now is on being proactive. We want to strengthen the pipeline of talent needed for business growth, support the transition to a greener economy and ensure residents of all ages have opportunities to develop new skills, retrain or re-enter work. A better, more co-ordinated skills system is central to achieving this. It also reinforces our wider ambitions to boost productivity, attract investment and build a resilient, forward-looking Shropshire.

Local authorities, the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, colleges, training providers, Jobcentre Plus, Public Health, Integrated Care Boards, and the voluntary and community sector are all working together

We have seen from UKSPF-funded programmes just how much can be achieved when we work in this way. The impact was felt across communities and businesses, with hundreds of residents gaining skills, progressing into work or improving their confidence. The same principle applies here: the value of this work lies in what it means for people on the ground. It matters to employers who need skilled staff to meet demand. It matters to individuals who want the chance to progress. And it matters to our local economy as we look to the future.

Our message to Shropshire businesses is straightforward: together with our partners, we know what needs to be done and are dedicated to building a skills system that works. The framework is already in place, our collaboration is solid, and we are committed to working alongside employers to develop a workforce that supports growth.

Matt Potts is service manager for economic growth at Invest in Shropshire



Charlie has been with the business for the past 16 years



The product showroom at the Highley site

Mightier than the sword

CARL JONES visits one of Shropshire's oldest family businesses to discover how its current generation is writing a bold new chapter

In a world where family businesses often struggle to survive beyond the first or second generation, Manuscript Pen Company stands as a remarkable exception.

Now in its fifth generation of family ownership, the Highley-based business has not only survived but thrived through economic upheaval, pandemic disruption, and the seismic shifts of modern lifestyles and commerce.

At the helm today is Charlie Stockbridge who, when asked if there was always an inevitability to him joining the family business, says: "No, absolutely not. It was really the result of a sliding doors moment."

After leaving Shrewsbury School and graduating from the University of Edinburgh, his career path took him from sports media to London's finance sector.

It wasn't until the 2008 financial crisis forced a reckoning with his life choices that Manuscript entered the picture at all.

"I decided I wanted more control over my destiny," he explains.

What started as a tentative three-year trial with the family business in 2010 has become a 16-year commitment. And he admits he is absolutely loving the challenge – and responsibility – of carrying the company into the next generation.

Manuscript's roots in the pen trade date back to 1856. The family business was originally founded in Birmingham as T.Hessin & Co in 1870, later merging with the renowned D. Leonardt & Co in 1949 – whose heritage dates back to 1856 – and has since grown and evolved into a global leader in the world of fine writing and creative tools.

Today it crafts and distributes its own



The family business was originally founded in Birmingham as T.Hessin & Co in 1870

acclaimed range of calligraphy products worldwide, and also serves as the exclusive UK distributor for some of the most prestigious names in the luxury pen, gift, and stationery industry.

The company has produced billions of writing instruments for the global market, and its products have been used by the kings and queens of Europe. It is proud to be still manufacturing pen parts here in the UK.

Currently, the Highley site stocks more than 20,000 different component parts, and employs 36 staff. One of the most recent investments has been a £20,000-plus laser engraving machine which can personalise a range of pens for businesses or individuals.

Charlie says it will allow the company to scale up personalisation of products, opening doors across business gifts, retail, and direct-to-consumer channels.

Meanwhile, the embrace of e-commerce represents another significant pivot from the traditional distribution model that once dominated.

The past few years at Manuscript can be summed up as mixture of growth, setback, and reinvention – but without ever losing sight of the proud heritage which the company actively honours and recognises.

"We've gone through waves of growth really," Charlie says. The period from 2010 to 2017 saw exceptional expansion, particularly driven by major retail partnerships, and a rapid rise in the popularity of calligraphy.

"Then we went through some setbacks as a lot of businesses do, and the pandemic forced us to furlough staff and reconsider everything. We had to remodel ourselves.

"I love solving problems. And I love to look at what's next and what's new and what we can do to innovate. Having a really good strong team around me working with me, helping to manage the day-to-day while I look ahead to the future – that's essential."

Shortly before the pandemic, Charlie had made a bold strategic move: acquiring a distribution business called Lime Internet Limited.

As a trustee of the London Stationery Show, he had been discussing diversification strategies with a friend in the industry. "This friend said in a fairly throwaway fashion 'why don't you buy me out?' I laughed at the time and got on the train back home – but then I thought 'hang on, he's got a point. Why don't we buy them?' So we did!"

The acquisition proved transformative, but wasn't without its challenges. "It gave us a whole new understanding – although distributing other people's products was a very different scenario."



The T. Hessin factory in Birmingham

"We had a sharp learning curve involving different costing models, different markets, and different ways of branding and marketing."

Today, Manuscript distributes products from top brands such as Sheaffer, Cross, Visconti, Monteverde USA, Diplomat, and more. It also handles a range of LEGO products including pens and collectible Star Wars keyrings.

The Shropshire site is essentially three businesses in one... the heritage Manuscript calligraphy brand, the distribution operation, and a newly-launched Tom Hessin brand which is gaining a growing following.

Tom Hessin? That's a nod to the company's 19th century roots.

In 1870, Andrew Charles, a young man from Northern Ireland, arrived in Birmingham with ambition in his heart and craftsmanship in his hands. He founded T. Hessin & Co, named in honour of his grandmother's maiden name, and quickly built a reputation for producing some of the finest steel pen nibs in the city.

At a time when Birmingham was the global capital of pen making, the Charles family stood at the forefront of the trade – and Charlie says he is so proud to have been able to honour his ancestors with this new venture.

"My great-grandfather named the company after his son, Thomas Hessin Charles," Charlie explains. "Over 150 years later and five generations on, our family remains in the pen trade – the only one from those pioneering days to still do so."

"Tom Hessin carries that legacy forward: quality product, inspired by heritage and designed for the present day."

"I started planning this around 2018. I wanted to do a luxury stationery range. We felt that focusing on the name Tom Hessin would be a powerful marketing tool and link perfectly with our story."

Locally, Manuscript is known by many as



Latest orders in the packing area



A rich history is on view

simply 'the pen factory'. Charlie smiles: "Yes, that's so true. But when people come to visit, they are surprised what goes on here. They never picture that we're a 30,000 square foot operation with state-of-the-art warehousing systems."



Distributors, they are... Star Wars LEGO keyrings include Yoda

"They think of us being in one small room." Schools, supermarket chains, department stores, independent retailers, and online platforms are all among Manuscript's core customers.

"We're selling to a wide breadth of people



The new Tom Hessin range



This catalogue dates back to 1896



Manuscript is proud to fly the 'Made in the UK' flag



"We can still say 'Made in the UK' which we're very proud of," says Charlie Stockbridge

spending anywhere from £10 on a Lego keyring to £10,000 on a high-class fountain pen."

For all its operational success, Manuscript exists within a challenging macro-economic environment. The past few years have tested even the most resilient of businesses. When

asked about global economic pressures, Charlie acknowledges: "Unfortunately, we are exposed to those things. We haven't exactly been supported as small business owners and operators in the last few years. It's tough. We've gone from one crisis to another, and it can be

really difficult to maintain positivity when you get the wind taken out of your sails."

Yet here too, diversification proves its worth. "The fact that we've diversified so much, brought in the right skill sets, and now have more opportunities to sell online helps alleviate these pressures to some degree. But I'd be lying if I said it didn't cause concern."

Perhaps the most striking aspect of Manuscript's evolution is how it has maintained connection to its past while building toward the future. The company archives contain memorabilia dating back to the 1800s, including brochures and designs from 1896. Rather than relegating these to a museum, Charlie has made them central to the company's identity strategy.

"Twenty years ago, I wasn't interested in this stuff at all," he admits. "But now I look at it and I couldn't be more interested. Reading my grandfather's book, looking at the brochure from 1896, I feel so fortunate that we've got that in our archives. We can use that as a team to tell that story and be unique in the industry."

This approach – leveraging 130 years of history as a competitive advantage rather than a constraint – perhaps points to the reason why Manuscript has succeeded where many family businesses falter. The fifth generation hasn't simply inherited a business; he's reimagining it.

I want to be able to be an optimistic MD that can reinvest in the staff and in the company

Charlie says: "We are literally the only company in the UK that's got five consecutive generations in this market with my great-grandfather and my grandfather who I remember well, and my parents."

"We can still say 'Made in the UK' which we're very proud of. We're also very proud of our Shropshire roots. The change in the last couple of years has probably been the quickest of anything that we've done during my 16 years with the business."

"We've implemented a new management software system which has been brilliant from a warehousing and e-commerce perspective."

"The biggest challenge is how we maximise growth where we've clearly got potential. How do we make sure that we are looking at the now, but as a team, also collectively looking at what our obstacles may be to achieving that growth?"

"In five years' time, I'd like to have taken all the strengths that we've acquired in the last 18 months and optimised them. The model that we've now put together is one that I want to keep... evolution rather than revolution."

"I want to be solid, strong. I want to be able to be an optimistic MD that can reinvest in the staff and in the company. I love our products, and I love to be able to be ambitious with launching new ideas."

"This industry is really quite dependent on newness. You have to have a new product, and it has to be exciting all the time."

"You've got to play to both sides... the newness, but also the fact that you've been around since the 1800s."

Staff... The final frontier

Anton Gunter



Howzit. This month is an ode to good staff... you know, those heroes who do all the hard work so that bosses can take the credit?

We are currently in the middle of end of year reporting season, and let's be honest, while the saying 'Turnover for vanity, profit for sanity' is often used, I think the same can be said of staff.

Being the MD of Global Freight Services is only possible for me because we have great staff who quietly go about their business ensuring the day-to-day operations run smoothly, leaving little old me to go about boasting about just how good our business really is.

Since 2019 and the vote to leave the EU, Global Freight Services has been at the forefront of ensuring that companies are ready for the changes. Talking to customers, ensuring that we know the processes, and ultimately making sure work continues and logistics and companies are serviced to high standards.

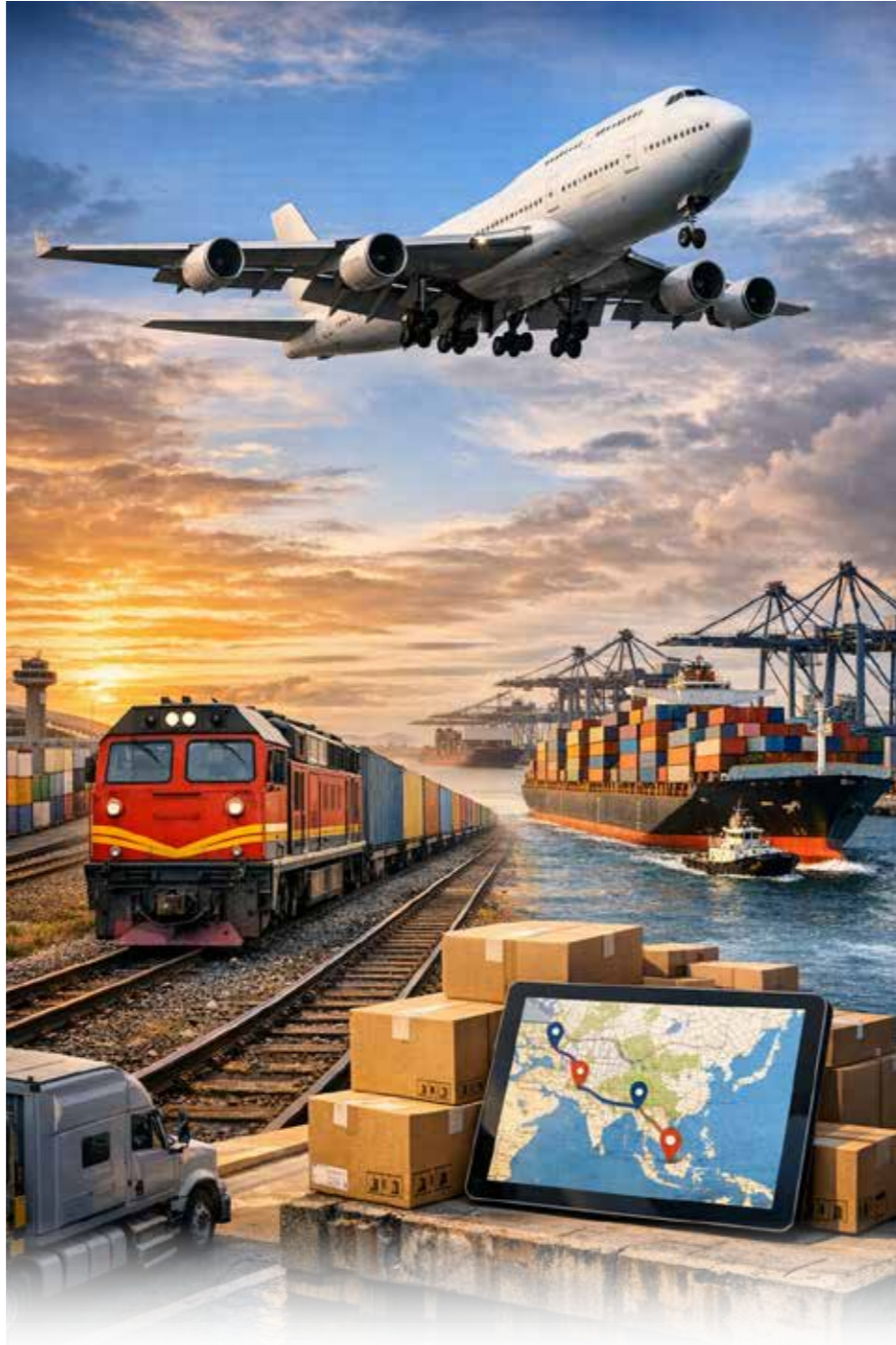
Then in 2020, we had the pandemic. No-one knew how to deal with this crisis, and yet slowly but surely as we followed protocols, the staff set out and started working.

Some worked from home, and others worked tirelessly while social distancing. Goods flowed in and out of the warehouse, shipping didn't stop, and neither did airfreight. Requests for quotes flowed in at a ridiculous rate as potential customers looked to ship large proportions of safety equipment.

With the help of staff, Global Freight ensured as a company we could continue working no matter what – and the best thing about it all was, while large companies made it near impossible to actually talk to human beings, staff at Global Freight were on a phone to chat through issues.

Then, when all appeared to be calming down, Russia invaded Ukraine and the war in Israel kicked off. Within minutes of both, the logistics world was thrown into chaos – and within minutes, we were ensuring issues were solved and goods were moving seamlessly. This doesn't happen by chance; it happens because staff work hard to ensure things happen.

Good companies are not there by chance; in fact they are not even there because of the bosses. Good companies all have one thing in common, and that's the fact that you will always find good staff working hard, working



quietly, and at times working under immense pressure, to firstly ensure customers are kept happy, and ultimately make sure that bosses are happy too.

So let me ask you something – when did you last say thank you for the smallest thing? When did you last think to yourself, 'how did that happen?'

At times, as bosses we forget to say thank you and well done to those who deserve it. Sometimes the pressure of facts and figures gets in the way of the good that all staff do. We always think the staff could do better, and at times they probably could, but when the chips are down, and Donald decides to invade

another country, or oil hits an all time high, it's the staff who have to give the bad news to customers. It's the staff who have to tell them that a consignment has been delayed, and it's the bosses who – nine times out of ten – get the accolades and the plaudits.

Quite simply, Global Freight Services could not exist without the great staff we have. They would be horrified if photos or indeed names were used, yet on a daily basis, they are the ones on the front line making sure logistics, transportation and the movement of goods happens. This in turn allows the company to thrive and grow, and for this I will always be grateful.

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



Jockeys taking part in the Ludlow race day



Barney Branston

Ludlow charity race day

More than £74,000 was raised at the annual Charity Race Day on a sunny spring afternoon at Ludlow Racecourse.

Educating Kids Outdoors was this year's designated charity, and the 330 guests contributed to the fundraising effort through donations, sponsorship and the promise auction.

With a central base at Weston Park, EKO was set up by Natasha Branston in 2019 to encourage children to benefit from being outside to play and learn and not be glued to tech.

Mrs Branston said: "We had not dared to hope for the amount that we raised and I cannot thank everyone involved enough – my team at EKO, volunteers that support the charity, our race day committee, trustees, all of the donors to the auction, sponsors, the guests and of course the Ludlow Racecourse team.

"It was such a fantastic fundraising opportunity. Now we can turn many talked about ideas into reality, for children across Shropshire and surrounding areas."



More than 300 people attended the Ludlow event



Former High Sheriff of Shropshire Selina Graham



Trustees and founder (from left), Richard Jackson, Natasha Branston, Clare Downes, Amy Holcroft and Adrian Marsh



James Tanner



The EKO team



Natasha Branston



The shortlisting panel at Shropshire Chamber's offices



Ruth Ross, Ella Preece, Kelly Riedel and Grace Bywater

Companies in the running for our county's 'business oscars'

The finalists have been revealed for the 2026 Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, with seven companies battling for the showpiece Company of the Year title.

A record number of entries were received for this year's competition, which will see 14 awards presented at Telford's International Centre on June 19.

Battling for the Company of the Year award this year are former champion Pave Aways from Knockin, alongside Telford-based duo Aviramp and Kraft Heinz, Riverside Cabins of Shrewsbury, Fowler & Gilbert from Market Drayton, Bridgnorth Aluminium, and Shropshire Festivals.

Exotic Zoo of Telford is up for three awards, while Jesmonite of Bishop's Castle, The Hundred House at Norton, R1 Construction from Shrewsbury, Lingen Davies Cancer Support, Pave Aways, Shropshire Festivals, Aviramp, and CEL of Telford have each been shortlisted in two categories.

This year's finalists come from all corners of the county, including Telford, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Bridgnorth, Market Drayton, Bishop's Castle, Shawbury, Newport, Buildwas, Broseley, Rodington, Cosford, and more.

Teams of independent judges will now be touring the county over the coming weeks to meet all of the finalists, before choosing their winners. The Chamber plays no part in the shortlisting or judging.

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

"They represent the very best of the Shropshire business community - organisations that are innovating, investing in their people and driving growth across."

"Being shortlisted is a significant achievement in itself, and it reflects the hard work, resilience and ambition that underpin our local economy."



2019 champion Pave Aways is up for Company of the Year again



Bruce Orme, from category sponsor Wenlock Water, with Carl Jones



Businesses gather at the Mercure Telford Centre Hotel to hear the finalists revealed

She added: "This competition matters because it shines a light on businesses across all corners of Shropshire who are pushing standards higher, year after year. The judging process is rigorous, and the calibre of entries continues to rise."

"That tells us something important: our county is home to exceptional talent, and businesses here are not just keeping pace but leading the way."

"As a Chamber, we see first hand how these awards inspire confidence, collaboration and

pride. They celebrate success, but they also encourage businesses of all sizes to raise their aspirations."

"Shortlisting each category was a really tough task for our panel - we're so grateful to all of our independent judges from the local business community for giving up their time to help."

"This year's finalists set a powerful example of what can be achieved, and we are delighted to recognise their contribution to the prosperity of our county."



Exotic Zoo in Telford is up for three awards



Thomas Bibb and Mitchell Callaghan of Excascale, shortlisted for outstanding business growth



The team from Lingen Davies, which is up for two awards

THE 2026 FINALISTS

COMPANY OF THE YEAR

- Aviramp, Telford
- Bridgnorth Aluminium
- Fowler & Gilbert, Market Drayton
- Kraft Heinz, Telford
- Pave Aways, Knockin
- Riverside Cabins, Shrewsbury
- Shropshire Festivals, Buildwas

BEST NEW BUSINESS

- Handleys Stitch Interiors, Broseley
- Kindridge Bid Solutions, Telford
- The Salwey Lodge, Ludlow
- Titan Platforms, Telford

BEST SMALL BUSINESS

- Elevated Support, Ludlow
- European Innovation, Telford
- GWR Fasteners, Oswestry
- Shropshire Festivals, Buildwas

OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE

- Cardington Rural Escapes
- Dulson Training Limited, Rodington
- Elite Hampers, Telford
- Shropshire Floats, Myddle

OUTSTANDING BUSINESS GROWTH

- Affco Flow Control, Telford
- CEL, Telford
- Excascale Limited, Telford
- Shuker Building & Development, Shrewsbury



COMMUNITY CHAMPION - BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY

- Exotic Zoo, Telford
- In-Comm Training, Telford
- McPhillips, Telford
- R1 Construction, Shrewsbury

EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING

- Aviramp, Telford
- CEL, Telford
- Iconsys, Telford
- Kraft Heinz, Telford

RETAIL, LEISURE & HOSPITALITY ACHIEVEMENT

- Exotic Zoo, Telford
- Hadley Park House Hotel, Telford
- Salop Leisure, Shrewsbury
- The Hundred House, Norton

BEST PLACE TO WORK

- Jesmonite, Bishop's Castle
- Lingen Davies Cancer Support, Shrewsbury
- Midlands Air Ambulance, Cosford
- Pave Aways, Knockin

THE TRAILBLAZER - INNOVATION AWARD

- Jesmonite, Bishop's Castle
- Pegs, Shrewsbury
- Planet Doughnut, Shrewsbury
- UserBoost, Oswestry

SUSTAINABILITY ACHIEVEMENT

- Lohas Fertiliser, Shawbury
- Preloved Tech, Newport
- Scrubmission Ltd, Telford
- Wild Shropshire, Whitchurch

YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON

- Cian Iddison - Dyke Yaxley, Shrewsbury
- Emilie Kerr - Lingen Davies, Shrewsbury
- Jack Ryan - Sygneus Ltd, Shrewsbury
- Dan Sherratt - R1 Construction, Shrewsbury

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Further investment in solar energy

Apley Farm Shop has doubled its solar energy generation, upgraded to energy efficient refrigeration and switched its maintenance fleet from diesel to electric as part of a major push to strengthen its environmental commitments.

The Shropshire estate – between Telford and Bridgnorth – has long championed green innovation across its businesses, which include a play barn, butchery, café and the nearby Stockton House wedding venue.

Existing measures already include EV charging points and a wood chip heating system.

Estate director Graeme Manton said: “Our further investment to double the solar field has made a major difference to our power usage and costs. During the summer months, the panels will account for up to 100% of our power requirements.”

A grant from the West Midlands Growth Hub has enabled the installation of new,



Graeme Manton, Daniel Morton, Jordan Stephens, Bert Edwards and Linda Harris

energy efficient refrigeration units, while the expanded 40kWp solar system – designed and delivered by Alt Group within six weeks – will generate around 38,700kWh annually and save an estimated 12 tonnes of CO₂ each year.

The estate continues to enhance its ecological standards, from planting 7,000 new trees to managing 5,000 acres under high level stewardship and sustainable farming initiatives.

Win win win situation



Beth and Sid Heath with the award



This year's Shrewsbury Food Festival is on June 27 and 28

Shropshire Festivals is celebrating a remarkable hat-trick after winning Tourism Event/Festival of the Year at the 2026 West Midlands Tourism Awards for its flagship Shrewsbury Food Festival. It marks the third consecutive year the company has taken home the top prize.

Held over two days each June, Shrewsbury Food Festival has become one of the region's standout summer showcases, championing independent producers, chefs, performers, and local businesses.

The event brings together around 200 exhibitors alongside chef demonstrations, a kids' cookery school, live music, family entertainment, a field to fork zone, VIP experiences, corporate hospitality, and a huge programme of free children's activities.

The awards, delivered by VisitEngland and supported by the West Midlands Tourism and Hospitality Advisory Board and the West Midlands Growth Company, shine a spotlight on the region's most impactful visitor experiences.

Beth and Sid Heath collected the award at The Belfry Hotel & Spa, and Beth said the recognition honours “the time, effort, planning, money, and fair amount of blood, sweat and tears” invested over 13 years.

She praised the “brilliant team” and the many partners, volunteers, and ambassadors who help bring the festival to life.

Shropshire Festivals has also joined more than 80 major UK attractions in calling for clearer Met Office weather reporting, arguing that a single rain symbol can significantly affect visitor numbers.

There was also recognition at the event for other Shropshire tourism businesses, including Riverside Cabins and the RAF Museum at Cosford.

Industry is ready to start building

A leading figure in the region's construction industry has called for more action to get the country building.

Tim Lloyd, owner of quantity surveyors CQS Solutions which has a base in Telford, says there needs to be a constructive rethink of how the UK supports construction activity.

His call comes after a new poll of more than 400 construction professionals by the Building Cost Information Service shows that most expect only a slight increase in output in 2026, with a third expecting no change.

“We have the talent, the experience and the appetite to build. What we need now is a clearer pipeline, faster decision-making and a stronger focus on making projects viable in the current climate

“The industry isn't standing still by choice – it's waiting for the right conditions to move at pace. With the right support, we can shift from cautious optimism to meaningful progress.

“Rising costs and labour shortages are not new, but they do require smarter planning and more collaborative procurement. Clients, contractors and consultants all have a role to play in ensuring projects remain deliverable without compromising quality.”

Tim said action now needed to be taken to remove some of the barriers which had seen too many schemes stalled for too long, including speeding up the planning process still further.

“To build momentum, we need to accelerate approvals, reduce the financial uncertainty that developers currently face because of the delay between buying a site and actually being able to get working on it, and give the supply chain confidence to invest.

“The industry is ready to deliver, but we need clarity, consistency and a shared commitment to unlocking viable projects. If we get that right, 2026 can be a year of genuine progress rather than marginal gains.”



Linda Grocott and Daniel McGowan (left) pictured with Lyneal Trust trustees and volunteers

Foundation donates funds for defibrillator

The Grocott Family Foundation, based at Prees, has donated £2,000 to The Lyneal Trust to fund the installation of a defibrillator at the charity's headquarters near Ellesmere.

The Trust provides accessible canal boat and canal side cottage holidays, as well as canal day trips, for families and groups with special needs or vulnerabilities.

Linda Grocott, from the Foundation, said: “The work that The Lyneal Trust carries out is exceptional, providing much-needed respite for people with vulnerabilities and also their carers.

“What's also remarkable is the dedication and support provided by the 60 volunteers who make everything happen. The team delivers so much joy to visitors.”



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What's in store for those requiring more space?

A new 100-room self storage centre has opened on Whitchurch Business Park.

4M Self Storage hosted an open day for local people and businesses to view the rooms, which range from 10 sq ft up to 140 sq ft.

Owner David Grocott declared the facility officially open by cutting a ribbon at the entrance to the new building.

Following the success of its first self storage facility based at Prees Green, launched in 2021, 4M took the decision to expand into Whitchurch. The new site, constructed on two levels, uses technology to provide instant booking, smart access and high-level security via a specially-developed app.

A number of units have already been contracted by both individuals and local businesses.

Mark Jones, 4M's business manager, said: "Last year, UK self storage annual revenues surpassed £1 billion which marked a significant milestone for the sector. This is reflected in the demand for units at our site in Prees Green which is consistently at full occupancy."

The company already has plans to add further units to the Whitchurch site later this year.



David Grocott officially opens 4M's new self storage facility in Whitchurch

Theatre Quarter is transforming town



An artist's impression of how this area of Oakengates town centre will look

The transformation of shop units on Limes Walk in Oakengates is now complete as work continues at pace to regenerate the town centre.

The external shop canopy on Limes Walk has been removed, opening up the area and allowing more light to reach the shop frontages and temporary public realm works as part of the wider theatre project.

Properties have been demolished to make way for the large public realm area which will include a new pedestrianised zone, square, and public spaces which adjoin Limes Walk and Market Street.

The square and community spaces, which are being created as part of the Theatre Quarter project, support the wider Telford Theatre plans and are located directly outside the theatre.

The Theatre Quarter works will open up the rest of Oakengates town, linking this area with Market Street where many other businesses and services are based, as well as becoming a focal point for live events and an enhanced market.

Completion of the first phases of the Theatre Quarter project have seen businesses move into transformed retail units which improve the overall appearance of the town centre, with further new businesses set to move in, while apartments above the retail units are now fully-let.

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Joe will be competing against the best from over 80 countries



Years in the making – Joe's journey to this moment has been a long one

Joe's heading to 'Skills Olympics'

An exceptional apprentice from Shrewsbury College has been selected to represent the UK at WorldSkills Shanghai 2026, known as the 'Skills Olympics', where the world's most talented apprentices and young professionals compete head-to-head in a high-stakes battle of skill, precision and innovation.

Joe Shinger, who is training in construction at Shrewsbury College while working for the Shingler Group, one of the region's most highly regarded construction companies, will represent Team UK in the bricklaying competition as part of WorldSkills Shanghai 2026 this September.

Selected, mentored and trained by WorldSkills UK, Team UK brings together a group of competitors at the very top of their fields. These individuals are among the most highly skilled young professionals anywhere in the world.

Competing against the best from over 80 countries, Team UK will showcase world-class expertise across a diverse range of disciplines. As well as bricklaying, these include renewable energy, 3D game design, car painting, health and social care, and chemical laboratory technician. Each competition is a high-performance test of precision and endurance.

WorldSkills is globally recognised as the ultimate benchmark of skills excellence, where nations compete to demonstrate their ability to power future industries and economic growth.

This year's event in Shanghai is expected to attract more than 250,000 visitors, as well as government leaders, global employers and education experts.

Joe's journey to this moment has been years in the making. He has progressed through rigorous WorldSkills UK regional and national competitions, followed by intensive specialist training in the UK and internationally.

In the final months before Shanghai, Joe will undergo further high-performance preparation to ensure he is ready to compete at the highest possible level.

Pearson, the lifelong learning company, is the official partner of Team UK at WorldSkills Shanghai 2026.

Stuart Raine, curriculum director for construction and the built environment at Shrewsbury College, said: 'We're delighted that Joe has been selected. He has worked extremely hard. He has enjoyed the challenge of getting



Joe Shinger is training in construction at Shrewsbury College while working for the Shingler Group



An exceptional apprentice – Joe Shinger

this far and is keen to continue his success to date in Shanghai.

"We're also honoured to be hosting the Team UK brickwork team at the college with their pre-final training camp ahead of the competition at the end of April."

James Staniforth, principal of Shrewsbury College, added: "Joe is the perfect ambassador for the UK, showcasing the skills we produce, and we will wish him well in the final. He is a fantastic inspiration for our other students and apprentices."

Ben Blackledge, chief executive of WorldSkills UK, said: "Congratulations to Joe

on being selected for Team UK, it is a huge achievement and a proud moment for Joe, the Shingler Group and Shrewsbury College.

"At a time when employers are sceptical about employing young people, Team UK show just how important it is to have young professionals in the workforce. These young technicians have an incredibly valuable mix of world-class technical skills, impressive employability skills, and a mindset for success.

"If we are serious about tackling the NEET challenge, we need to get more young people ready for work, and skills competitions are a proven way to improve engagement in training and work readiness."

Freya Thomas Monk, managing director of Pearson Qualifications, said: "Every member of Team UK has earned their place through exceptional dedication and commitment to their chosen fields, representing the very best of our nation's talent.

"WorldSkills Shanghai is an opportunity to celebrate their vocational and technical expertise, and the skill, determination, and ambition it takes to set new benchmarks for excellence on the global stage. Pearson is proud to support Team UK as they take on this extraordinary challenge and inspire future generations to aim high and believe in their potential."

WorldSkills Shanghai 2026 takes place from 22-27 September and will feature around 1,500 young people from over 80 countries.

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Customers welcomed to a theatre of baking

A new artisan bakery has opened in the former NatWest bank building in Bridgnorth – one of two good news retail stories for the town centre.

Well-known Shropshire bakery, Catherine's, has created what it describes as a 'theatre of baking' in the long vacant premises.

Customers are invited to watch the entire production process, from the kneading of dough to the pulling of fresh loaves from the oven, directly from the shop floor.

Founded in 1994, Catherine's currently produces bread, cakes, sandwiches and savoury items for shops in Newport, Bridgnorth, Shifnal, Wellington Indoor Market and also has a small wholesale provision to independent local businesses.

High Street champion Sally Themans – a driving force behind Love Bridgnorth – said: "This novel approach plays perfectly into the idea of the High Street as a place of experience. Kudos to the owners and bakers who have pushed this exciting project through – the fit-out is amazing and the community response has been incredible."

Catherine's is not the only good news story on the Bridgnorth High Street – Hope House Children's Hospices has also announced plans to open a new and bigger shop in the town centre.

The charity, which provides vital care and support for local children with life-threatening conditions, has 14 shops which together raise nearly £1 million each year towards the £10 million running costs.

The new Bridgnorth store will open later this year in the premises on High Street which was formerly occupied by Bodycare. Work will begin shortly to give the store a makeover.

Head of retail Lindy Welch-Smart said the new location was twice the size of the charity's existing shop, and would be generating plenty more volunteering opportunities.

"We already have incredible support in Bridgnorth from people who bring us donations of stock and who shop with us. This exciting new store will give us much more space to display our pre-loved fashion and homeware.

"People are changing the way they are shopping and, consequently, we have had some of our best trading weeks on record.

"We are really proud to be investing in Bridgnorth and in our retail operation at this time and are confident that this will help us to raise even more money to fund our vital services for local children and their families."



The Hope House team outside their new store on the High Street



Fiona and John Powers of Catherine's Bakery



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Tax changes add financial pressure

Businesses will face higher operating costs as a result of tax changes that came into force at the start of the new financial year – that's the message from a Shropshire accountancy firm.

The new rules affect everything from dividend taxation to digital reporting requirements and inheritance tax planning.

Helen Columb, owner of Telford-based Turas, says the scale of the changes means many business owners could face unexpected financial pressure if they do not plan ahead.

"Some of the changes may seem technical, but together they will increase costs for thousands of small and medium-sized businesses across Shropshire. I'd urge all business owners to start examining what the impact on them will be now rather than when the bill arrives."

One of the most immediate cost increases will fall on business owners who take part of their income as dividends.

From April 6, the ordinary dividend

tax rate has risen from 8.75% to 10.75%, and the upper rate from 33.75% to 35.75%.

"For many directors, dividends are a core part of their remuneration," Helen added. "These higher rates will directly reduce take-home pay or increase company costs."

Businesses and farms also face major changes to inheritance tax. Both Agricultural and Business Relief have now been capped at £2.5 million per person, with any value above that receiving only 50% relief.

"Family-run firms could be hit particularly hard. Owners need to revisit succession plans urgently and should be discussing with their advisers the most efficient way to handle the change."

Meanwhile, the government's Making Tax Digital for Income Tax programme has begun its phased rollout.

Most sole traders and landlords earning over £50,000 will now be required to keep digital records and submit quarterly updates to HMRC using commercial software.

"This isn't just an administrative change," Helen said. "It's a new ongoing cost for software, training and compliance."



Ian Groves at IT Nation Connect Europe

At the foothills of AI

The managing director of Shrewsbury-based Start Tech, Ian Groves, spoke at the IT Nation Connect Europe conference in London.

The three-day event attracted tech professionals from around the world for knowledge sharing and networking, creating opportunities to enhance businesses within the industry. Ian was invited to discuss AI for managed service providers.

"There is a lot of hype around AI – everyone thinks they should be doing it, and no one wants to be left behind," he said.

"All this hype creates the impression that everyone else is already using it, even though we're all still learning."

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Office space: who is driving the demand?

Simon Cullup-Smith



After a decade working in the property industry across Shropshire and the wider West Midlands, I have seen the office sub-market shift in several different ways, both predictably and somewhat not.

However, despite the external issues around hybrid working and the supposed decline of the office, the reality on the ground here in Shropshire tells a different story.

Demand for office space across Shropshire remains not only resilient, but quietly consistent. It may not always make headlines in the same way as city-centre markets, but that's where potentially the hidden opportunity lies.

What's particularly interesting is who is driving that demand. We're not seeing just a focus on large corporates with major expansion plans. Instead, activity is coming from professional services firms, healthcare providers and a growing base of SMEs. These are businesses with generally strong local ties, companies that value accessibility and reasonable occupancy costs just as much as they do square footage. In many ways, it creates a more sustainable office market.

Shropshire is championed for its relative affordability in the office market. Office rents here remain competitive generally compared with larger regional centres, which is attracting a broad mix of occupiers. For many, it's a strategic decision: why pay a premium for a postcode when you can secure high quality space, often with parking and strong transport links, at a more sensible cost?

Investor appetite outpacing supply

We're also seeing this dynamic play out on the investment side. There is an appetite from investors for commercial and sub-market office assets in the county, particularly those that are well-located and income-producing. In fact, one



Telford's Station Quarter is proving particularly attractive

of the defining features of the current market is the imbalance between supply and demand. There isn't enough quality stock available to satisfy investor interest, and we are finding as a practice there is a demand for commercial investment, enticing investors away from the residential investment market due to changes in legislation.

We have had several instances already this year where properties have gone under offer shortly after coming to market. A recent office sale at Knights Court, Dunbar House, Shrewsbury underscores ongoing demand for well-located, out-of-town space for investors and owner occupiers alike. The detached two-storey building offering 5,000 sq ft, will provide its new owners with additional office space to grow their flourishing business and has been sold to an owner occupier. Our team is always needing more commercial listings for investors and owner occupiers.

Location on point

Another key trend is the importance of business parks and strategic employment locations. For example, Shrewsbury's Oxon Business Park or Telford's Station Quarter are proving particularly attractive, offering modern accommodation that aligns with how businesses operate today.

These environments provide the infrastructure, connectivity and professional setting that occupiers are looking for, without the congestion or occupier costs of larger business areas.

Also, we shouldn't overlook the appeal of town centre offices. Character buildings, often with period features, continue to attract occupiers who want something different, particularly client-facing businesses.

The diversity of stock across Shropshire is one of the area's strengths for investors, occupiers and tenants.

Here's a snapshot of current office availability across Shropshire:

- Hermes House, Oxon Business Park, Suites E and F (4,475 sq ft) offer contemporary, fully air-conditioned accommodation with dedicated parking, available at £42,000 per annum
- Unit 4, New Windsor House, provides a smaller, open-plan option (648 sq ft), suited to occupiers seeking a ready-to-use space at £15,500 per annum
- In the town centre, Irelands Mansions, 29 High Street, offers a characterful office space, delivering a well-located 1,625 sq ft for £20,300 per annum
- In Telford, the fourth floor at The Quad, in the Station Quarter, brings 7,575 sq ft of turnkey office space to the market, with modern specifications and parking, quoting £113,600 per annum

Looking ahead, I believe the outlook for the office market in Shropshire is quietly positive.

The fundamentals are strong: a diverse occupier base, competitive rental and sale pricing coupled with increasing investor demand from the departure of residential investors from this marketplace and seeking other investment opportunities.

The office sub-market is steady and sees dependable performance that is arguably more attractive long term.

Simon Cullup-Smith is a commercial property agent at Halls Commercial

Logistics giant is new patron

One of the world's leading logistics companies has become a patron of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

Kuehne + Nagel operates across nearly 100 countries with a network of around 1,300 sites – including a major base in Telford.

It delivers supply chain solutions spanning sea, air, road and contract logistics, supported by advanced digital technologies and deep sector expertise.

Brian Franklin, director of operations at the company's base at MOD Donnington, said: "Having engaged several times over the last few months with the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce team and having the opportunity to meet some of its members, it has been easy to see the outstanding things being achieved within the region, and the amazing success stories of the work undertaken to drive growth and support local businesses at all levels.

"As a large local employer, being a patron member of the Chamber enables us to play a more vital role in strengthening the local business community and enhances our engagement within it.

"It assists us in fostering greater collaboration and increases our ability to deliver social value and sustainable growth across the county. It is a privilege to be a member of an organisation that aligns so closely with our values and contributes so much to Shropshire's success."

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's patron programme is designed to give businesses the opportunity to raise awareness of their organisations and express their commitment to



Shropshire Chamber's head of commercial success Jenny Pearson (third from left) with Kuehne + Nagel directors John Kerr, Elizabeth Armstrong, and Brian Franklin

the success of the local business community.

Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber chief executive, said: "The objective is to generate ideas, enthusiasm and dynamic business opportunities and to feed this back through Shropshire Chamber and onwards to the county's businesses as a whole.

"We are absolutely thrilled to welcome Kuehne + Nagel to the patronage programme, which is designed enhance long-term relationships, driving both profitability and community connection – making them a strategic asset in today's competitive marketplace."

Big boost for a catering family

Jenny's Catering, a family-run catering business based in Shrewsbury, has secured a £20,000 loan from BCRS Business Loans to support growth and invest in new equipment.

Established in 1989 by Jenny Swain and now run alongside her son Chris, the business provides catering for weddings, birthday parties, corporate events and community functions.

The loan from BCRS Business Loans will be used to invest in new equipment, including cutlery and crockery, to ensure the business is fully-prepared for the summer season ahead. The funding will also support the company's plans to expand into new markets by increasing its supply of quiches, pastries and sandwiches to local retailers.

Operating from its headquarters and coffee shop on Vanguard Way in Battlefield, Jenny's Catering employs 12 staff and works with

clients including local authorities, hospitals, event organisers and corporate clients.

We are proud to be a family business that has been part of this community for over 35 years...

Chris Swain said: "This loan means we can invest in the equipment we need to serve our customers well and make the most of the opportunities ahead. We have grown year on year, and this funding helps us continue on that path.

"We are proud to be a family business that has been part of this community for over 35 years, and we look forward to building on that further."



The Instaloft team is eyeing up significant expansion this year

Job creations fuel national growth of Telford-based firm

Loft boarding specialist Instaloft is on track to grow by 20% this year as part of an ambitious job-creating growth strategy.

Originally established in 2014, the Telford-based firm has grown into the UK's number one loft boarding brand, with over 150 staff, eight depots and thousands of customers.

Focused on expanding its reach on a national scale, the company says it is now on track to increase its revenue to £24.3 million by the close of 2026, while creating new jobs for fitters across all its depots.

Managing director Ben Crouch said: "2026 is set to be an exciting year for Instaloft. We're seeing a clear shift in homeowner behaviour, with more people investing in improving their existing space rather than relocating, which is driving demand for increased storage space."

Advertisement Feature

A fond farewell and an exciting new chapter begins at Hatchers



Jacinta Walmsley who is retiring after 35 years at Hatchers



Hatchers directors

After an incredible 35 years at Hatchers, we bid a heartfelt thank you and farewell to Jacinta Walmsley, legal director of our residential property team and LLP member.

Jacinta has been central to the team's growth and success, playing a key role in shaping its development over the years.

She has guided colleagues and clients alike through both opportunities and challenges, and her leadership, dedication, and expertise have left a lasting mark not only on the residential property team, but across the firm as a whole.

Her contribution extends far beyond her immediate role. Jacinta served for many years as personnel partner and, more recently, as a valued member of the management board, helping to influence the firm's direction and continued success.

Her commitment to people and to the business has been unwavering throughout her career. She has made

a meaningful difference to so many colleagues over the years.

As we mark Jacinta's retirement, we also look ahead to an exciting new chapter.

We are pleased to introduce our next generation of directors, who will build on the strong foundations established over many years through the likes of Jacinta and other directors who have shaped the firm and its values.

The firm's current legal directors are Andrew Holland, Patrick Gittins, Helen Cowley, Emma Jones, Jennifer Woods, Sarah Cox, Georgia Davies, Sarah Jane Smith and Joanne Roberts.

This transition represents both a celebration and an exciting step into the future. While Jacinta will be greatly missed, her legacy endures in the strength of the team she has helped build and the culture she has shaped.

We thank Jacinta for her outstanding contribution to Hatchers and wish her every happiness in her retirement.

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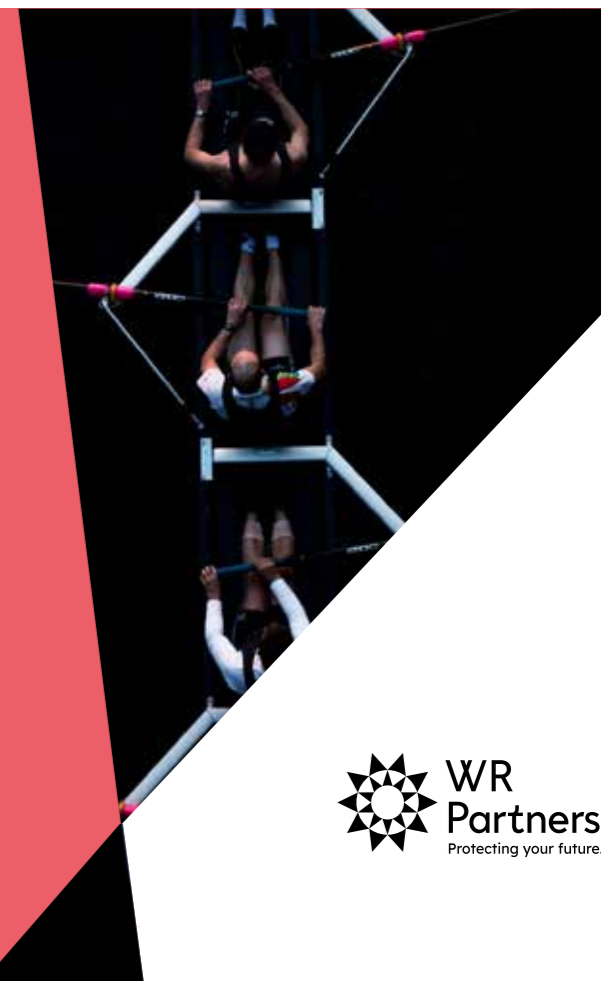
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Andrew Jenkins from TV's The Traitors



Jenny Pendlebury of JMW Ltd Case Managers



Dr David Lee discussed innovative methods for the assessment of sleep



Dr Duncan Harriss presenting in the main auditorium

Show of inspiration and determination

The power of resilience and determination was showcased at a conference which brought more than 200 people to Shrewsbury from across the country.

Speakers, including a former Royal Marine who lost both legs and an arm in an horrific battlefield explosion, gave a series of inspirational talks at the Innovation After Injury event at Theatre Severn.

The event was organised by Shropshire law firm Lanyon Bowdler, and spotlighted the latest developments in rehabilitation and treatment for people living with serious injuries, such as brain and spinal cord injury.

Opening the conference was Mark Ormrod MBE, who explained his journey as the UK's first triple amputee from the Afghanistan conflict, to the most decorated Team GB medal winner at the Invictus Games.

Other speakers included Andrew Jenkins, who appeared on hit TV show The Traitors, and shared his personal experiences of being a brain injury survivor following a catastrophic car crash.

Dawn Humphries, head of the personal injury team at Lanyon Bowdler, said the conference was an inspiring event.

"This is the third event of its type we have held at Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury, following the hugely successful Thriving After Brain Injury conference in March 2024, and Surviving Brain Injury – the Journey in 2016," she said.

"We were delighted to welcome a fantastic range of speakers who shared fascinating and inspiring stories about battling back from life-changing injuries.

"We also had specialists sharing their knowledge on subjects such as how nutrition and sleeping well can aid recovery, along with discussions about new technology in rehabilitation, and innovations in medication."

● **Hear more from Andrew Jenkins on the Shropshire Business Podcast. Follow the link from www.shropshirebiz.com**



Mark Ormrod MBE in conversation with event host Carl Jones



The event brought delegates together from all over the UK



Jeff Goodright of Cyber Spider



Lt Col Carl Meyer from the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital



Networking on the concourse at Theatre Severn



Francesca Bingley delivered a 'Breathe and Recover' session



Anna Redding from Derwen College provided musical entertainment



Jakko Brouwers explored the use of AI in neurological conditions



Sheri Taylor, a specialist in nutrition rehab

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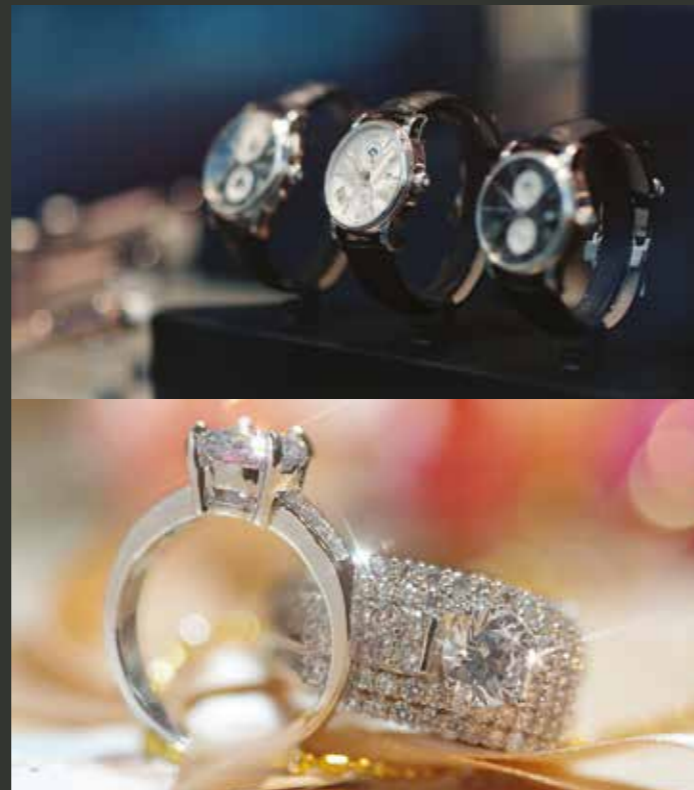
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Hollie Whittles



One question is becoming impossible to avoid: are you using AI yet? If not, your competitors soon will be.

Claude, developed by Anthropic, is an AI assistant – think of it as an eager assistant who can draft, analyse, summarise, and problem-solve across almost any business function, without needing a lunch break or a pension.

Claude is one of many such AI Large Language Models (LLM) that can do this, including Microsoft's Copilot and OpenAI's ChatGPT, but Claude is considered one of the best.

"The question is no longer whether AI will change your industry. It already is. The question is whether you'll be driving that change or scrambling to catch up."

That was among the key themes at this year's Microsoft MVP Summit, where Purple Frog Data's CEO Alex Whittles and AI consultant Lewis Prince were among a select group of MVP's (Microsoft Most Valuable Professionals) gathered to discuss the road ahead.

The message from Microsoft's leadership was unambiguous: AI adoption and digital transformation are not optional extras. They are the competitive baseline.

It's no longer 'should we adopt AI?' – it's 'how fast can we scale it, and how do we build the skills to do it properly?'

For Shropshire businesses, that message translates directly to opportunity but only if you act. The most tangible way to start is not by overhauling your entire operation overnight, but by identifying the repetitive, time-consuming tasks that drain your team's energy and asking: could AI handle this and reduce bottlenecks?

The answer, in most cases, is yes. Tools like Claude can be trained with custom skills and context specific to your business to provide 'Agentic' functionality. At Purple Frog, for example, when a customer support ticket is received, our Agentic AI Claude 'bot' performs an automatic assessment of the ticket, identifies any previously related tickets, researches, and suggests actions to our support team. This greatly speeds up our responses and increases accuracy. The human expertise still shapes the output; AI simply removes the grind of getting there.

This is the practical reality of AI adoption

Meet Claude!

Why businesses that ignore AI will be overtaken by those that don't



Lewis Prince and Alex Whittles at Microsoft HQ in Redmond, USA

that often gets lost in the hype: it's not about replacing your team. It's about freeing them to do the work that actually requires human judgement, creativity, and relationships.

A marketing manager who spends three hours a week writing content can spend those hours building campaigns. A business development director who drafts proposals from scratch can redirect that time toward the conversations that win clients.

Embrace it or get left behind. It really is that simple and that urgent.

The businesses that will struggle are not those who lack the technology. They are those who lack the will to change.

Resistance, whether from leadership reluctance or team inertia, is the real barrier. And that resistance has a cost, measured in the productivity gains your competitors are already pocketing.

The starting point is simpler than most people expect. A conversation. An audit of where your team's time actually goes. A clear-eyed look at which tasks are ripe for automation, and which genuinely need a human touch. From there, the path forward becomes visible.

Purple Frog Data are helping clients with Claude integrations, Power BI dashboards through to full Microsoft Fabric implementations. If you start building your AI capabilities now, you will be the ones with the skills, data, and competitive edge when that acceleration arrives.

So, meet Claude. Meet the future of how your business could operate.

Hollie Whittles is a director of Purple Frog Systems in Telford

Consider this great recognition

Morris Property has achieved an impressive 45 out of 45 in the Considerate Constructor Scheme for its bungalow development in Donnington, being delivered on behalf of Housing Plus Group.

The project, which is due for completion this summer, involves replacing homes originally built during the rapid expansion of Telford New Town in the 1960s.

The previous bungalows have now been fully demolished, clearing the way for a future focused housing scheme, ensuring safe, comfortable and sustainable living for future residents.

The development has been carefully planned to blend sensitively with the surrounding neighbourhood. The final scheme will include private parking, attractive landscaping, and a newly formed entrance off the main road – improving access and enhancing the overall look and feel of the site.

Paul Johnson, contracts manager at Morris Property, said: "Achieving 'Excellent' status under the Considerate Constructor Scheme is a fantastic recognition of our team's commitment to delivering this project to the highest standards for the Donnington community."



Full marks for Morris Property's team in Donnington

Katie Schulz, project manager at Housing Plus Group, said: "This development is a great example of how we're creating places people are proud to call home. These new bungalows have been designed with real care, from accessibility and comfort to long term energy efficiency, so they can truly meet the needs of local residents for years to come."

Quality development attracts investment

Morris Property has completed the sale of Units 3 & 4 at Stadium Point Business Park in Shrewsbury, marking a strong first quarter for the Shropshire-based developer.

The commercial units, totalling 7,964 sq ft, have been purchased as an investment acquisition.

The deal was handled by selling agents Towler Shaw Roberts, with Toby Shaw securing an occupier for the space while the sale progressed, ensuring the units were purchased by a local investor with a tenant already in place.

Situated just off the A5 bypass on the south side of Shrewsbury, Stadium Point continues to attract interest from investors and occupiers thanks to its strategic location, energy-efficient build quality and accessible site layout. Units 3 and 4 offer dedicated parking, a separate service yard, and strong branding and signage opportunities.

Liz Lowe, head of development at Morris Property, said: "We're very pleased to start the year with another successful sale secured at Stadium Point. Investors and occupiers are being drawn to the quality of the development and the ease of working with our team and TSR. The sale reflects continued investor



Toby Shaw and Liz Lowe at Stadium Point

appetite for this thriving commercial location."

Toby Shaw, commercial agent at Towler Shaw Roberts, added: "This was an excellent opportunity for a local investor to secure a high-quality, energy-efficient unit in a strategic location."

"Stadium Point continues to perform exceptionally well in the local commercial

market, and we were pleased to identify and secure an occupier during the transaction to support their investment."

Stadium Point Business Park is Morris Property's largest commercial development to date, providing high-quality units across the prime 28-acre site on the south side of Shrewsbury.

Networking journey comes full circle

Paul Naylor



I'd studied business to a reasonably high level, but networking had never come up as an important ingredient for success. It's something that many dismiss.

Business networking is essentially the strategic practice of establishing and nurturing professional relationships for mutual benefit. It is a high impact, low-cost marketing tool used to generate leads, share knowledge and secure referrals. I have found it to be a real plus.

I launched my business, Media & You, in February 2017 off the back of a quarter of a century in the newspaper business.

In my time with the Midland News Association, I experienced an almost unique career. I started in the advertising department of the Shropshire Star in an administration role, before being 'headhunted' into a production department position at sister newspaper the Express & Star, in Wolverhampton.

I spent a large chunk of time as planning manager for that paper, helping to balance the editorial to advertising ratios. It was an interesting and fulfilling role, but I had always yearned to be a journalist. It was an ambition I finally achieved in my mid-30s.

When I left the organisation in 2017 as group supplements editor for Shropshire Star and Express & Star, the biggest shock to my system was the sense of isolation.

I'd been used to working in a bustling environment, surrounded by people sharing ideas and that's what I missed more than anything else.

When you've worked with so many people it can be a lonely experience launching your own business, so I was intrigued when a good friend saw a post on Twitter inviting people to a networking group.

I went along to the Thomas Telford Business Networking International (BNI) meeting, not really knowing what to expect.

That first meeting was an eye-opener.



A training session on behalf of BNI Thomas Telford



Paul Naylor, current president of BNI Thomas Telford Nigel West, and Madhu Veerappan at The Valley Hotel, Ironbridge

Around 20 businesses giving a brief insight to what they do, a 10-minute feature presentation from one member and a breakdown of business transactions and interactions over the previous seven days.

It felt like being in a boardroom meeting, with heads of department sharing updates. I was impressed straight away.

Over the years I have been a member of several groups, starting at Thomas Telford, joining Achievers in Wolverhampton at the end

of Covid, before transferring to BNI Britannia in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Britannia is a great group with around 30 quality members. I enjoyed my time there, but the timing of those meetings just wasn't working for me. Some like the early start, others find it difficult – but that is the beauty of BNI. There is a group for all circumstances – time of day, in-person groups, online groups. Whatever you are comfortable with you can find.

It felt like being in a boardroom meeting, with heads of department sharing updates. I was impressed straight away.

So, following a break of six months, I accepted an invitation along to Thomas Telford, my old stomping ground.

Thomas Telford fits my wants and needs. The meetings are at a time that suits me, plus it places me back in Shropshire where to this day much of my business is still based.

I owe BNI a great deal. Without it I would never have met so many of my clients. Benefits of membership are countless, but without doubt it has been pivotal in the success of my business.

Paul Naylor is the owner of design and marketing agency MEDIA & YOU



Mark Harris, managing director of The Business Company

Comedy from TV star Ignacio Lopez

Aico director Matt Small in conversation



Host Carl Jones in conversation with guest of honour Kevin Sinfield



Guests enter the hall at the ICC

Night of inspiration and innovation

An audience of 450 people gathered at the International Convention Centre in Birmingham for the third Aico Community Awards.

The event, organised by the Oswestry-based home life safety business, was an evening of celebration and recognition within the social housing industry and local community.

It showcased inspirational colleagues, projects and innovations from the housing sector – and raised thousands of pounds for Motor Neurone Disease charities.

The 14 award winners came from all over the country and included a ‘People’s Choice’ champion voted for by the audience on the night.

Guest of honour was rugby and fundraising legend Kevin Sinfield, who took part in a Q&A on stage with compere Carl Jones.

Kevin spoke about his plans to bring the MND community together with his latest challenge when he plans to run seven ultra marathons in seven days in memory of his friend Rob Burrow, who famously wore the number seven shirt when they were rugby league team-mates.

He received a standing ovation from the audience in recognition of his efforts, which have already raised around £15 million for the charities, and said he was touched by the generosity of the donations which would make a ‘massive difference’.

Aico managing director Neal Hooper said: “We are passionate about supporting both the sector and our communities, and recognising inspirational people, organisations and initiatives is a powerful way to champion excellence, share knowledge and foster collaboration in creating safer homes.

“It is essential that CSR continues to be championed, encouraging greater involvement from individuals and organisations in supporting their local communities and building a more resilient future.”

The audience heard how Aico staff had given a combined 3,000 volunteer hours to the local community last year, and were on target to do exactly the same in 2026.



The 2026 Aico Community Awards at the ICC



Aico managing director Neal Hooper



Isabelle Parasram of Social Value UK



Matt Home (of Willowdene Rehabilitation) presents the collaborative partnership award to Equans



Evelyn Cleaton from the Aico events team



Lee Duffy of Aico presents the trophy to apprentice of the year winner Emily-Jane Simmons



Soho Collective Band entertained the guests



Alexa Scrivener presents the inspirational colleague of the year award to Steve Messenger of Booker and Best



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Martin & Jones Marketing making friends



Ruth Ross and Matt Potts



Helen Spencer of WR Partners



Beth Heath of Shropshire Festivals



Craig Hughes chats to the team from Paycare

It's the business

Hundreds of people walked through the doors of Telford International Centre to do business a bit differently at the 2026 Shropshire Business Festival.

Organised by Shropshire Festivals, the annual event featured seminars, workshops, speed networking sessions, and colourfully interactive exhibition stands.

The aim was to break down barriers and spark authentic conversations that lead to lasting business relationships.

It was a chance for exhibitors to get their products directly into the hands of Shropshire's decision-makers, have meaningful face-to-face conversations in a relaxed environment, and discover why informal networking yields serious results.

Organisers promised to 'turn business upside down and add some fun'... and the view of visitors was that they succeeded by laying on the best festival yet.



Yes, that really is a human fruit machine...



Exotic Zoo brought some special friends



Shropshire Chamber held three speed networking sessions



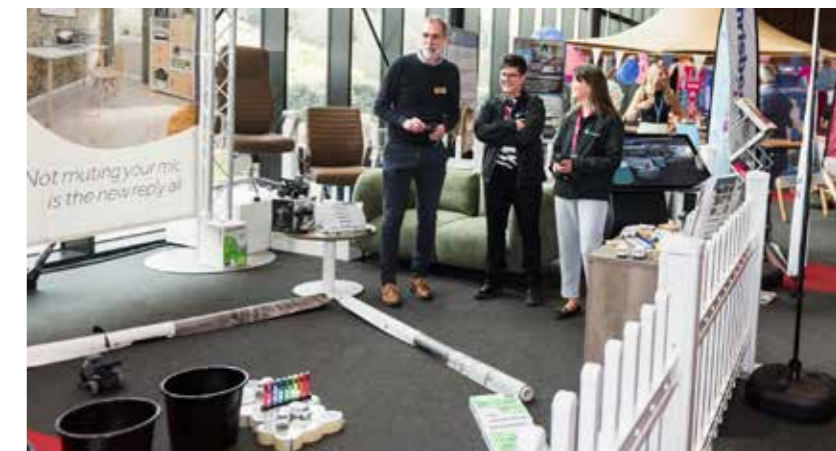
Shrewsbury College was promoting apprenticeships and T Levels



Shelly Barratt of Coya Marketing



Kelly Wilson and Helen Columb of Turas Accountants



Chrisbeon's remote control cars were a big attraction



Helen Walker of Harper Adams University



Jo Tracey on the WR Partners stand



Sarah Capewell of Telford College



From left, Megan Price, Adam Davies, Olivia Jones, Tom Devey and Chloe Turner

Key promotions at law firm

Shropshire law firm FBC Manby Bowdler has strengthened its team with a series of key promotions.

The firm, which has offices in Shrewsbury, Telford, Bridgnorth and Church Stretton, says the move comes amid a period of sustained growth.

The latest promotions see a trio of solicitors based at the firm's Shrewsbury offices – Adam Davies, Olivia Jones and Megan Price – all become partners.

Commercial property specialist Adam has spent a decade with the firm and is an expert in all aspects of the sector, including sales, purchase and leases of commercial premises.

Olivia, who works in the property

litigation team, advises clients on a wide range of matters including disputes over ownership of property, trusts of land, right of way disputes, breaches of covenants, claims for adverse possession and possession proceedings.

Megan works in the agricultural and rural services team where she specialises in land and rural property law.

In Telford, Kate Rowley is also promoted to partner, while her family law team colleague Chloe Turner is promoted to an associate.

FBC Manby Bowdler has also become a founding member of the Adeptio law Group.



Martina Morris

A privilege to join NHS group

Martina Morris has been revealed as new group chief nursing officer for the NHS Group that manages community and acute hospital services in Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin.

She is currently chief nursing officer and deputy group chief nursing officer at The Dudley Group NHS Foundation Trust and Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust, and will take up her new role in June.

Her responsibilities will include Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust and The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

Martina has nearly 30 years of nursing and leadership experience, including in critical care. She said: "I feel privileged to be joining the group and to be part of the exciting transformation taking place locally."

"My family regularly use local services, and I have seen first hand how hard working, caring and compassionate colleagues are, despite the significant pressures the NHS faces."

"Ensuring staff are supported, empowered and equipped to be the best version of themselves to deliver the best care for our patients and the communities we serve is very important to me."

Interiors company finds its new home



Brown + Ginger founder Josephine Marsh (centre) with Sarah Evans and Neil Anderson of Morris Property

An online interiors company has signed a six year lease on a commercial unit at Centurion Park on Kendal Road in Shrewsbury.

Brown + Ginger is an independent interiors company known for its distinctive furniture, lighting, mirrors and home accessories.

Founded in 2017 by Josephine Marsh, the company has relocated from a smaller unit on the outskirts of Shrewsbury, giving it increased warehouse and distribution capacity.

Josephine said: "Relocating to Centurion

Park is an exciting move for us. The additional space means we can operate more efficiently, expand our product offering, and continue delivering the high level service our customers expect. We've been busy settling in and are looking forward to everything this accessible new base will bring."

Morris Property's head of estates Neil Anderson said: "It's fantastic to see another dynamic company choose the commercial park as their new home. Centurion Park has earned a strong reputation as a supportive, well connected business environment, and we look forward to building a long term relationship with Josephine as the business continues to grow."

G'day to principal market consultant



Derrick Ogden has joined Telford-based Aviramp

Aircraft boarding ramp manufacturer Aviramp has strengthened its presence in the Asia-Pacific region with a key appointment.

Derrick Ogden has joined the Telford-based company as principal consultant for the Australian market.

He has spent more than four decades working in Australian aviation, leading on safety, compliance and operations at some of the country's largest carriers, including Qantas and Jetstar.

He has worked closely with Aviramp since the commissioning of the first Continental ramp in Melbourne and was also involved with major rollouts at Gold Coast and Hobart airports.

Derrick said the move to Aviramp felt like a natural next step after concluding a 22-year career with Qantas Group.

"I've worked with Aviramp for many years and have seen first hand how their equipment improves safety, accessibility and efficiency on the apron. I have a strong passion for the aviation industry and the opportunity to work with Graham and the team just made sense."

Derrick will work closely with airports, airlines and ground handlers to support the adoption of Aviramp's boarding ramps – equipment designed to improve safety, reduce manual handling risks and deliver a dignified, step-free boarding experience for all passengers.

Tourism chair

Telford and Shropshire Local Visitor Economy Partnership has appointed Mandy Thorn MBE as chair of the Telford and Shropshire Tourism Board.

The board sits at the heart of the VisitEngland-accredited Telford and Shropshire LVEP, a collaboration between Telford & Wrekin Council, Shropshire Council, Visit Telford and Visit Shropshire.

The partnership brings together public and private sector leaders behind a shared vision to grow the visitor economy, attract investment, and build long-term resilience across the destination.

Mandy said: "It is an honour to be appointed chair at such an important and energising moment for Telford and Shropshire. The strength of partnership behind this board represents a major opportunity for the visitor economy across the whole destination."

"There is enormous potential here. By bringing together strong leadership, sector insight and shared purpose, we can accelerate growth, strengthen our visitor offer and ensure tourism delivers lasting economic and community benefit. I'm excited to work with partners across the county to turn that ambition into action."



Mandy Thorn MBE



Mike Williams

Promoted to new role

Wealth manager RBC Brewin Dolphin has promoted Mike Williams to head of its Shrewsbury office following David Hall's decision to step down 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 Williams will lead a team of 18, which includes client-focused wealth managers.

Robin Mellows, regional centre head at RBC Brewin Dolphin, said: "With Mike Williams' 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."

Angela is on the team



Angela Jones (right) with Telford branch manager Matt Gilbert and office manager Charli Wisdom

Estate agent Halls has recruited senior sales negotiator Angela Jones to join the team at its Telford branch.

It comes at a time when the company is experiencing high demand for residential properties, especially starter homes priced under £250,000, semi-detached, three-bedroomed houses and detached, four-bedroomed homes.

Angela, who lives in Newport, is celebrating 20 years in estate agency, having most recently worked as senior sales negotiator for James Du Pavey in Eccleshall.

She joins branch manager Matt Gilbert and office manager Charli Wisdom at the office which covers a wide area including Telford and Wrekin and Bridgnorth.

Head of operations

A director with extensive experience in managing in-hand and contract farming has been appointed to lead the farm operations on the Bradford Estates.

Duncan Fleming has joined the landed estates business on the Shropshire-Staffordshire border as farm director to manage Bradford Farming – its in-hand farming business which focuses on arable crops alongside land licensed out to a portfolio of fresh produce, root vegetable and horticultural growers. He joins the business having previously been managing director at Westrope Farming, in Woodbridge, Suffolk.

Duncan said: "I look forward to bringing my experience of working with large person teams and complex agreements with multiple stakeholders to bear.

"It will be a very varied role with around 5,000 acres being used for the in-hand farming business, providing cereal crops, environmental stewardship, sheep grazing and licences to a growing number of vegetable, salad and plant growers."

Among the businesses operating on the farm is renowned rose breeder David Austin Roses, winner of 29 gold medals at the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show, which licenses irrigated land to grow award-winning flowers and leases agricultural buildings for its operations



Estates director Steve Farrow welcomes farm director Duncan Fleming to Bradford Estates

Firm reaches another milestone



Luke Rodgers with the Berrys team

Berrys has appointed Luke Rodgers as a transport planner in its growing engineering team.

He brings previous experience in transport and highways planning consultancy having worked for practices in Oxfordshire.

Luke will work closely with Callum Bebb, the senior engineer who leads the company's highways service offer.

Richard Harman, partner and head of engineering, said: "Luke joining us represents another milestone in the development of the wider established Berrys engineering team."

New look leadership team

Aaron & Partners has announced a series of senior appointments as part of a restructure of its leadership team.

The Shrewsbury-based law firm has introduced a new executive structure designed to support further growth across both its commercial and private client services.

Current senior partner Nick Clarke will take on the role of chief executive officer and retain ultimate responsibility for the Legal 500-listed firm's long-term strategic direction, working closely with key partners and departmental leads.

Helen Watson, currently the firm's head of employment, has been appointed senior partner and will continue to lead the firm's employment and immigration team across the firm's four offices.

She said: "I'm delighted to have the support and backing of my partners as we look to take our firm to the next level.

"I was the firm's first female equity partner in 2007 and so it's an exciting opportunity to be the first female senior partner at a time of real growth potential. My focus will primarily be on strategic opportunity, international relations, and internal and external collaboration while also supporting Nick in his new role as CEO and the firm's leadership team."

Helen is a chartered director and holds noteworthy board roles of vice chair of the International Advisory Group (IAG) – a successful business network developing collaborations and business for law firms across the globe.

Two further leadership roles have also been created to provide greater focus on growth across the firm's service areas.



The new-look leadership team – Helen Watson, Clive Pointon, Emma McGlinchey and Nick Clarke

Emma McGlinchey has been appointed head of business services and will be responsible for driving growth across the firm's commercial teams. She will also continue in her role as head of real estate.

Clive Pointon has been appointed head of private client services, with responsibility for the firm's wills, trusts & tax and family teams.

Under the new structure, Clive will step down as head of wills, trusts & tax, with partner James Wallace succeeding him.

Nick Clarke said: "This new structure reflects the scale we've reached as a firm and gives us a solid foundation to build on for the next phase of our growth."

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Five minutes with . . .

FRAN ASH is the founder of Fran Ash Mentoring, business development manager at Ash Plumbing & Bathrooms, and the driving force behind networking group Bathing In Business

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT JOB?

Our bathroom business has been running for over 15 years, and I joined it full-time in 2023 as business development manager. I officially launched Fran Ash Mentoring at the start of 2026 as I wanted to share my experience in business with others.

HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ECONOMY?

When the economy feels uncertain, business owners tend to feel the pressure first. My role often becomes helping people stay calm, focus on what really matters and keep moving forward, while also reminding them, they're not facing it alone.

WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON HYBRID AND FLEXIBLE WORKING?

I think flexibility is here to stay. Every business is different, so it's about finding what works best for your team rather than forcing everyone into the same mould.

WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE ON YOUR BUSINESS?

AI can be a useful tool for things like admin or content support, but I'm a firm believer that people still buy from people. Technology can support a business, but it can't replace genuine relationships.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Kind, approachable and someone who genuinely wants to see other people succeed. I also like to bring a bit of humour into things – if people feel relaxed and comfortable, the conversations tend to be much more real.

YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?

A genuine desire to support people and help them move forward. Whether that's through mentoring, encouragement or simply listening, I care deeply about making sure people don't feel like they're navigating business on their own.

BIGGEST CURRENT CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?

Balancing growth with sustainability. There are lots of exciting opportunities on the horizon at the moment, but it's important to build things properly and not rush ahead too quickly or spin too many plates and end up overwhelmed.

YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?

Launching Bathing in Business and watching it grow into a supportive community has been incredibly special. Networking genuinely changed my own journey in business, which is why creating a space where others can experience that same support means so much to me. Having the courage to turn my mentoring into a business was a huge personal achievement for me, as was becoming a networking ambassador for the Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.

PET HATES?

Clutter. I like things organised and in their place.

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

Everything is going to be OK, even when it really doesn't feel like it at the time. Trust your instincts and remember that the difficult chapters often end up shaping the path you're meant to be on.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

Long walks with our dog Megan, time in the garden and anything that gets me outside away from a screen.

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?

The beauty of the county and the sense of community. There are so many hidden gems to explore, and the business community here genuinely feels like a business family.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?

LinkedIn is definitely my go-to.

FAVOURITE MOVIE AND/OR TV SHOW?

I'm a sucker for a good historical drama or a rom-com... although EastEnders is a guilty pleasure of mine.



EastEnders is a guilty pleasure



Fran Ash



Fran enjoys long walks and time in the garden



Fran at one of her networking group venues - Frankly Farm Tours



Bathing in Business - the group has been steadily growing

EARLY BIRD, OR NIGHT OWL?

100% early bird – sometimes a little too early!

DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

Sir David Attenborough because I'm a huge animal lover, Freddie Mercury so I could ask him what it felt like walking out on stage at Live Aid in 1985, and someone like Stephen Fry or Queen Elizabeth II – anyone with incredible stories and historical insight.

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

I'm a big rock music fan. People don't always expect it, but Guns N' Roses, Metallica and Black Sabbath are regulars on my playlist.

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

Professionally, more growth, more collaboration and there are some really exciting projects in the pipeline with fellow Shropshire business owners. Personally, hopefully finding the right balance so I can enjoy the journey along the way.

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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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