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Issue 2

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Plus: Building Careers Vine of the times Never Truly Off Duty

Dipping toes in to uncharted waters

Congratulations. You did it. You survived everything that 2016 had to throw at you!

Politically, and economically, it has to go down as one of the most tumultuous years in living memory.

And if the truth be known, we're all still trying to digest the upheaval, on both sides of the Atlantic, which has implications for every economy in the developed world. So, how are you feeling about things?

Gauging the temperature of the Shropshire economy as we set off on the 2017 rollercoaster, it certainly seems to be a mixed picture.

For every owner or manager fretting about

impending threats, there's another licking their lips at the potential to exploit opportunities.

Here at Shropshire Business, we're taking a glass half-full approach.

Thank you to everyone who was kind enough to say such good things about our launch issue – we hope we can live up to your lofty expectations going forward.

If that first edition was something of a scene-setter, this one gets stuck into some of the key issues in vital areas of the Shropshire economy.

The construction sector, for example, clearly has some medium to long-term concerns, but right now our big building companies are working flat-out.

English wine is on a roll, too, and we meet a

businessman who is about to put Shrewsbury well and truly on the map with some mouthwatering vineyard plans.

But we're not raising a glass to everything right now.

One of the perils of the modern working world is the pressure to be on duty 24/7, courtesy of that omnipresent mobile phone and tablet.

Can you relate to this? If so, take a look at what one HR expert has to say about the perils of failing to maintain a sensible work-life balance.

We've also got a fascinating insight into the life of a Bank of England agent, courtesy of Glynn Jones, who was born and raised in Shropshire, and is well versed with the quirks of our business climate.

One of the things I love so much about Shropshire is its ability to surprise. Around the most unexpected of corners, you stumble across a gem of a business making waves on a global scale.

Kadai Firebowls, based near Church Stretton, is one such example, naming Game of Thrones and Tom Cruise's production crew among its A-list customer base.

But however successful you may be, there's always scope to learn. Our columnists offer advice on a vast array of topics, from hosted telephony and pay-per-click advertising to trade agreements, succession planning, and apprenticeships.

We've also got more news from the commercial property and farming sectors, picture

galleries from business social gatherings, and news of who's been on the move in our regular Appointments section.

Have you got something to say? We'd love to hear from you. Tell us what you are up to, and let's all share a happy, fascinating and prosperous 2017.



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Built on dreams

By Carl Jones

Happy new year . . . or is it? The answer to that question seems to depend greatly on which sector of the economy you find yourself working in – and whether your company is a net importer, or exporter.

Economists reckon the construction industry is usually one of the most reliable barometers to the health of a nation, but right now it's painting a pretty confusing picture.

More homes are being built in the county than we've seen for several years, there's evidence of infrastructure work appearing in all our towns, and most of Shropshire's big construction firms report being rushed off their feet.

Scaffolders and bricklayers are commanding wages of up to £24 an hour in some instances, due to what recruitment firm Manpower describes as a 'chronic' shortage of skilled workers.

And yet, the county's Constructing Excellence organisation claims Government plans aimed at limiting the number of foreign workers employed in the UK could place Shropshire's construction industry in jeopardy. It fears proposals by Home Secretary Amber Rudd

for companies to declare the number of foreign nationals they employ in a bid to reduce the number of migrant workers will have a major impact on the county's building sites.

Gareth Emberton, chairman of the network organisation for construction and supply chain businesses, says the Government must be realistic about the significant numbers of foreign workers required by construction employers in order to meet housing demand.



Gareth Emberton, chairman of the network organisation for construction and supply chain businesses

"The proposals announced by Amber Rudd at the Conservative conference are worrying to say the least. Her message was that British people should be filling those jobs," he adds.

"But there is already a huge skills gap which exists in the UK in the construction sector and we need to find practical ways of tackling that issue.

"To then potentially reduce the number of migrant workers in the sector by deterring businesses from employing them could have a serious knock on effect to our industry and impact on the rate of building and development in Shropshire."

The Government's initial consultation paper produced in a drive to reduce net migration and encourage businesses to hire British staff caused an outcry from business leaders.

It has now said data on foreign workers would be used to inform policy rather than to name and shame companies.

But Mr Emberton says with the impending exit from the European Union – whenever that may eventually be – there is still cause for concern in the industry.

"The Government has nailed its colours to the mast with its attitude towards migrant workers and, with the plan to leave in two years, the construction industry could have a massive shortfall in available labour," he continues.

"More needs to be done by those in power to address this as soon as possible or it will have a huge impact on future development and economic stability."

The Federation of Master Builders believes the Government needs to start by 'turbo charging' the SME house building sector in 2017.

The rise in house building completions is helping to tackle the housing crisis, but more work needs to be done if the Government is to hit its ambitious one million new homes target, the federation believes.

Chief executive Brian Berry says: "Figures showing that 189,000 additional homes were created in 2015/16 is positive progress towards solving the housing crisis.

"However, the total created still falls below the number needed each year to deliver the Government's stated aim of building one million new homes by 2020.

"The current figures also show a strong reliance on the conversion of existing buildings to residential use, which is a trend that can't be sustained indefinitely.

"Recent Government policies to boost house building are

helping, but there is still plenty of room for more radical solutions to meet the one million target.

"The Government needs to turbo-charge the SME house building sector. Smaller firms, once the main drivers of house building in this country, have become only marginal players in the market, which has hampered the capacity of the industry.

"The Government has already recognised the importance of revitalising SMEs through its attempts to improve the availability of finance for smaller firms, but much more can be done.

"Figures showing that 189,000 additional homes were created in 2015/16 is positive progress towards solving the housing crisis"

"In particular, we need to see a renewed focus on enabling planning permission for more small sites, which are the bread and butter of SME builders.

"We're hopeful that the Government will listen to the voice of SME builders in its forthcoming Housing White Paper and put measures to enable more small scale development at the heart of the country's house building strategy."

Picking up the skills and resources points, Jonathan Carr-West, chief executive of the Local Government Information Unit, says: "There is a large untapped potential in small sites, but resource and capacity pressures in planning departments make it difficult to unlock."

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Ludlow Touring Park manager Karen Price supervises the start of work on the new expansion

◀ "We need new approaches and new partnerships to build the homes we need. By working with a wider range of local builders, councils can stimulate local economic growth, while providing jobs and training for young people in the area."

Yet right across Shropshire, major construction projects are pressing ahead without any sign of Brexit-fuelled doubt, including speculative industrial units in both Telford and Shrewsbury.

Work has also begun, for example, on a new caravan holiday home park on the edge of Ludlow, with Morris Leisure investing £200,000 in developing the park for 36 caravan holiday home alongside its Ludlow Touring Park, which already has 135 pitches.

First phase work is expected to be completed over the next couple of months and will see 20 pitches created.

The touring park is estimated to generate around £2 million a year for the local economy. It is one of six parks in Shropshire and North Wales owned by Morris Leisure based in Shrewsbury.

"We are delighted to report that our bookings at Ludlow Touring Park are increasing every year, mostly through personal recommendations and repeat business," says Edward Goddard, Morris Leisure's managing director.

"It's great to be able to develop a caravan holiday home park alongside the touring park and we now feel the time is right to press ahead with the work to bring even more sustainable tourism to Ludlow, which is a very popular destination.

"We believe the new park is going to further enhance the local tourism offer and generate extra income for Ludlow and the surrounding area, which has got to be good news for the local economy."

Andy Gough is sales and marketing director at one of Shropshire's biggest and best known house-builders, Galliers.

He says: "Although generally there are some mixed predictions for the residential property market in 2017, due to continuing Brexit uncertainty, as far as Galliers is concerned we are expecting to enjoy one of our busiest and most exciting years.

"There is no doubt that competition is fierce in the sector and companies such as ours are having to offer customers exceptional service, which can mean assisting them with their move and making incentives available.

"And it goes without saying that our product has to be of exceptional quality in order to stand out from the crowd, and that new developments have to be sited in carefully-chosen locations.

"When you combine all these factors, you can succeed as a house builder in uncertain markets.



"We are pleased to say that we saw steady growth in 2016 – and this will carry on over the coming 12 months – with our developments in Belvidere, Church Aston and Hadnall continuing to thrive and new schemes opening up in Newport, Baschurch and other locations.

"This of course will mean new jobs being created within the company and for sub-contractors, translating as good news for Galliers and for the economy of Shropshire as a whole.

"Our investment in the county is important to us as a company and we are proud to be one of the region's longest-established building companies."

And no wonder developers are so keen to crack on with house building projects.

The latest Halifax house price index of the year shows that prices continued to climb, with an annual rate of increase of 6 per cent, and predicts further growth in 2017

Founder and chief executive of eMoov.co.uk, Russell Quirk, says: "There is yet more signs of life shooting from the frosty ground of the UK property market.

"Many in the industry have been quick to put the boot in over the last few months where the UK property market is concerned, hanging gloomy predictions on a dwindling level of demand in the market.

"It would seem this simply isn't the case. The driving factor behind inflating house prices is an imbalance between supply and demand and, with house prices spiking this late in 2016, it would seem there is certainly a sustained level of buyer demand present in the current market."

So, many reasons to be cheerful, then. Less pleasing, however, are the results from a new online tool created by the Government and the Office for National Statistics allowing people to find out the gender pay gap in their profession.

It shows that construction and building trades, along with financial managers and directors, have the highest gender pay differentials.

The online tool has been launched as a fore-runner to new rules which will force large employers to report their gender pay and bonus gaps from April.

The regulations, which will affect almost 8,000 employers with around 11 million employees, will shine a light on workplace practices that could be preventing women from reaching the top in their organisations.

Minister for Women and Equalities Justine Greening says:



One of Shropshire's best known housebuilders, Galliers (pictured above) is looking forward to a successful 2017

"Britain has the lowest gender pay gap on record, there are more women in work than ever before, more women-led businesses than ever before and there are now women on every board in the FTSE 100.

"But if we are to help women to reach their potential and eliminate the gender pay gap, we need to shine a light on our workplaces to see where there is more to do to.

"Employers must play their part in this too and take action to tackle the gender pay gap in their organisation."

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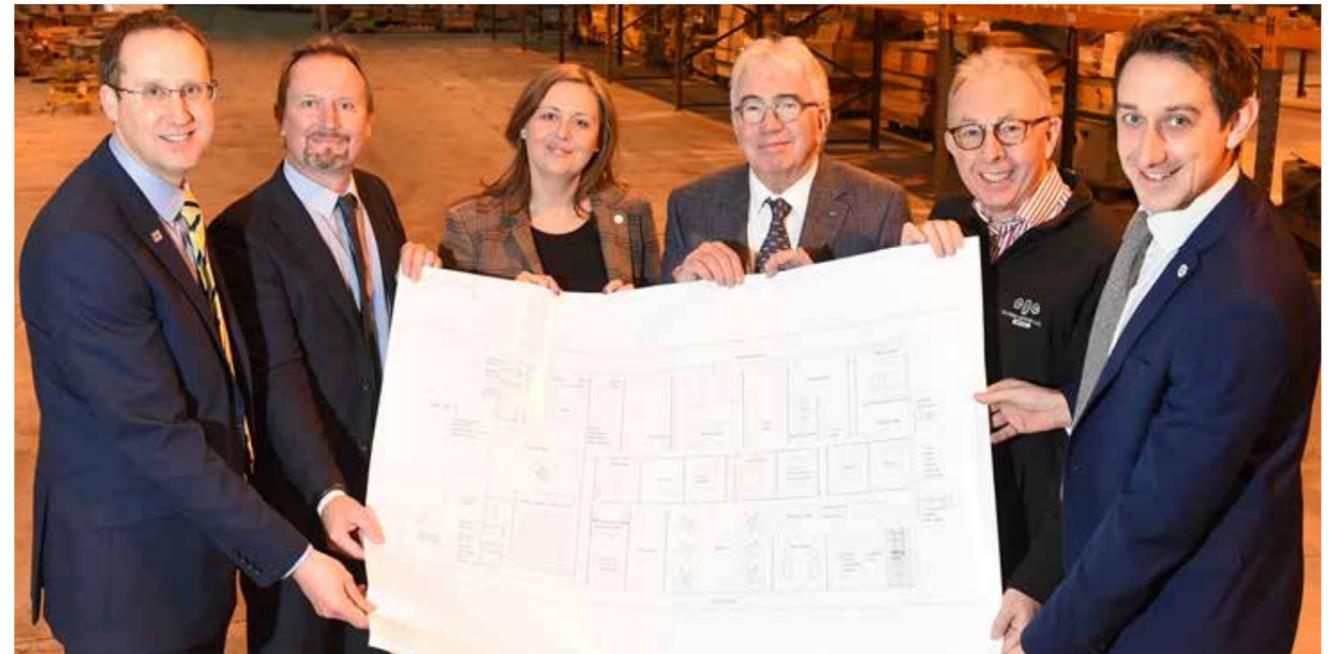


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NEW COLLEGE TELFORD

£3m vision to bridge the manufacturing skills gap



Launch time – Matthew Snelson (Grainger & Worrall), Christopher Greenough (Salop Design & Engineering), Bekki Phillips (In-Comm Training), Peter Neumark, Mike Roe (both Classic Motor Cars) and Gareth Jones (In-Comm Training)

Work is under way on the creation of a new state-of-the-art training hub in Shropshire, with the aim of supporting '2020 learners by 2020'.

More than 100 local businesses and stakeholders attended the £3 million Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology (MCMT) launch event in Bridgnorth to find out how they can play their role in helping it reverse the region's skills and competency gaps.

The MCMT, which is led by a consortium of Classic Motor Cars, Grainger & Worrall, Salop Design & Engineering and training provider In-Comm, will provide a high-tech environment for individuals to learn from engineering experts on the latest technology – all geared towards giving them opportunities to apply their new found skills on real life manufacturing situations.

Supported by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, work on fitting out the 36,000 sq ft building on the Stanmore Industrial Estate is now getting under way, with exciting plans in place to create dedicated fabrication, foundry, lathe, metrology, milling, robotics and vehicle trimming sections, as well as a specialist CNC Zone and spray booth/mixing capabilities.

There will also be an auditorium lecture theatre, bespoke learning environments, 5 vehicle ramps and a rolling road test facility.

"This is one of the most exciting

developments seen in manufacturing training provision in the area for many years and yesterday gave us the perfect opportunity to communicate our vision to employers, colleges, universities and future learners," explained Matthew Snelson, director of Grainger & Worrall and managing director of the centre.

"We believe the MCMT is critical to closing the skills gap for Shropshire businesses, but we are under no illusions that we will need the rest of local industry, education and training to play their part. This could be through informing how the provision develops, using the services and even offering time and expertise to help with delivering some of the learning.

"There are also plenty of opportunities for businesses to sponsor different learning zones or donate equipment and machinery our learners can train on."

The Marches Centre of Manufacturing & Technology has received £1.9 million of funding from the Marches LEP to bring the concept into reality, with £1.1 million of private funding already pledged by the consortium. Additional sponsorship and business engagement will look to bring the budget to over £4 million.

It will look to support 2020 learners between now and 2020 and this will largely involve developing apprentices in advanced manufacturing and engineering, giving employers a strong pool of skills to tap into as they continue to compete globally.

In addition to this, there will also be capacity to work with 400 companies on developing existing manufacturing

professionals up to Level 7 qualifications, covering business improvement techniques, team leadership, vehicle body repair and paint, vehicle body building, technical development, quality and continuous improvement.

Gareth Jones, managing director of In-Comm, added his support: "We will be looking to open our doors for office based courses from April 1st and full engineering courses from August 2017. There is a lot of work ahead to equip the centre and build a pipeline of learners who want to be part of something new and exciting.

"There is a lot of engagement planned with Shropshire schools and colleges to get young people thinking about engineering and manufacturing as a career and, it is important to stress, that the MCMT is open to all employers in the area.

"It is the clearest sign yet of the desire to reshape training provision so that local needs are met and there is no doubt we will become an important asset when looking to attract inward investment into the Marches."

Graham Wynn OBE, chairman of the Marches LEP, said: "Plugging the skills gaps that currently exist will mean that businesses here will be able to grow and thrive. That means more investment and more jobs, which can only have a positive impact on the economic prosperity of our county.

"The MCMT is one of three Advanced Manufacturing Hubs which are being funded by the Local Growth Fund via the Marches LEP and we're delighted to see this milestone reached yesterday."

Privacy invaded by 'snooper's charter'

A Telford technology company has issued a stark warning about the Government's new Investigatory Powers Act, claiming it has major implications for the privacy of every British citizen.

Entanet, the ISP and communications company based at Stafford Park, believes the legislation – described by opponents as a 'snooper's charter' – could lead to further sweeping powers being assumed by the state.

The company's product manager, Paul Heritage-Redpath, says the passing of the Bill into law, which got its royal assent in December, sets a dangerous precedent.

"Entanet campaigned hard against the IPB and its previous incarnations," he said.

"Given the volume of data breaches already this year, as a responsible ISP we consider the collection of every citizen's browsing history to be a profoundly bad idea; it is inevitable that, at best, there will be scope creep among government departments.

"At worst, your life will fall into the wrong hands. We will let former Prime Minister David Cameron have the last word: 'If we want to stop the state controlling us, we must confront this surveillance state'."

In a multiple-choice straw poll conducted on the Entanet website last year, 57 per cent of respondents said that if the IPB was passed, they would be 'off to live in the woods so that they wouldn't have a digital footprint to spy on'.

A further 24 per cent said they were mostly concerned about how their business will manage the cost of required data retention.

Fourteen per cent said they had no knowledge of the IPB, while only five per cent said they were not bothered as they have nothing to hide.

"The Investigatory Powers Act will impact your business and your personal life," Paul said.

The New Statesmen agreed with Entanet's stance on the bill, saying: "The powers contained in the IP Bill are more suited to a dictatorship than a democracy, giving the state sweeping powers to intrude into the private lives of ordinary citizens who are not under suspicion of any crime.

"What few people realise is that the Bill is not just a 'catching up' with powers that evolved in secret over the last decade. In fact, the government is using the bill to extend its powers, especially for ordinary police and law enforcement.

"Your Internet Service Provider will be forced to keep a record of the websites you visit and the apps you use, storing this information for a year – whether or not you are suspected of a crime. The powers in the Bill to gain access to Internet and phone records are not limited to the police but given in many cases to government departments, including the Department of Health, DWP and HMRC.

"The powers for security services go even further, in ways that lack balance and sufficient restraints."



Leighann Morgan (centre) with Emily Soden (left) and Lydia Darby

Lights...camera... action – it's time to plan a more **Opulent** lifestyle

A new luxury travel agency has launched in Shropshire, specialising in bespoke holidays, corporate business and VIP and concierge-style travel.

Opulent Travel Services, based in Shrewsbury, has been launched by Leighann Morgan who has a 20-year background in the travel industry.

She worked for big industry names such as Going Places, Thomson's and Baker Dolphin, as well as various independent travel agencies, before starting her own business.

"Five years ago I branched out on my own, firstly as a Travel Counsellor and then as an independent agent. Opulent Travel Services is an evolution into luxury travel," she said.

The company has been launched with the support of The Global Travel Group franchise which gives Opulent Travel access to a vast electronic database and full client protection under its ATOL licence.

Miss Morgan has taken on two extra staff to help run the agency which operates out of offices in Town Walls, Shrewsbury.

"As an independent travel agency we're not tied to in-house products. Recently we've been putting bespoke packages together for high end luxury cruises and a number of luxury group trips to the USA," she added.

Miss Morgan has won awards in the past, including Mumpreneur UK Best Saleswoman Award winner 2012. She came to the attention of prestigious clients after featuring in the national lifestyle magazine Fabulous four years ago and making an appearance on the BBC Big Breakfast sofa for International Women's Day.

The same year she was invited by prestigious clients to develop connections at the Cannes Film Festival.

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Roger Wolens from The Green Organisation with Mike Tuzzio – public sector divisional director (Lyreco) and Manel Roura – QSS manager (Lyreco)

Apple of a green organisation's eye

Workplace and office supplies specialist Lyreco has been crowned one of the greenest businesses of its kind.

The Telford-based firm has won a Green Apple Award from The Green Organisation, dedicated to recognising, rewarding and promoting environmental best practice around the world.

As a result, Lyreco has been invited to have its winning paper published in The Green Book, the leading international work of reference on environmental best practice.

Lyreco has a series of initiatives across its network of 27 Regional Distribution Centres and satellite centres in the UK and Ireland.

They have included installing a roof mounted solar photovoltaic system – the fourth largest in the UK – at its National Distribution Centre in Telford, achieving zero landfill at the National Distribution Centre and Head Office with a recycling rate of 97 per cent, and reducing its electricity consumption by 39 per cent in four years.

Peter Hradisky, Lyreco's managing director, said: "We continuously strive to be a more sustainable organisation by researching ways we can reduce our environmental impact.

"We look to increase our contribution to local community and society while engaging employees, suppliers and customers on the journey."

Consolidation – mini department store for Ludlow

Businessman Glyn Price is consolidating his three shops in Ludlow into one "mini department store" after securing the lease of a listed building in the town centre.

Mr Price, who already has Leaf, Walnut and Frank Lloyd, selling women's and men's wear in the town, has leased 27 The Bullring, which was previously occupied by cards and gifts business Emporos.

He said consolidating the three businesses into one larger shop in Ludlow would make it much easier for customers.

"We will still trade as Leaf, Walnut and Frank Lloyd but they will be in a mini department store," he adds.

"It's a nice project and a lovely shop but the refurbishment has been hard

work, as the last time it was refitted was 1952. We have tried to restore beams downstairs and to open up the shop to more light. The landlord has been fantastic."

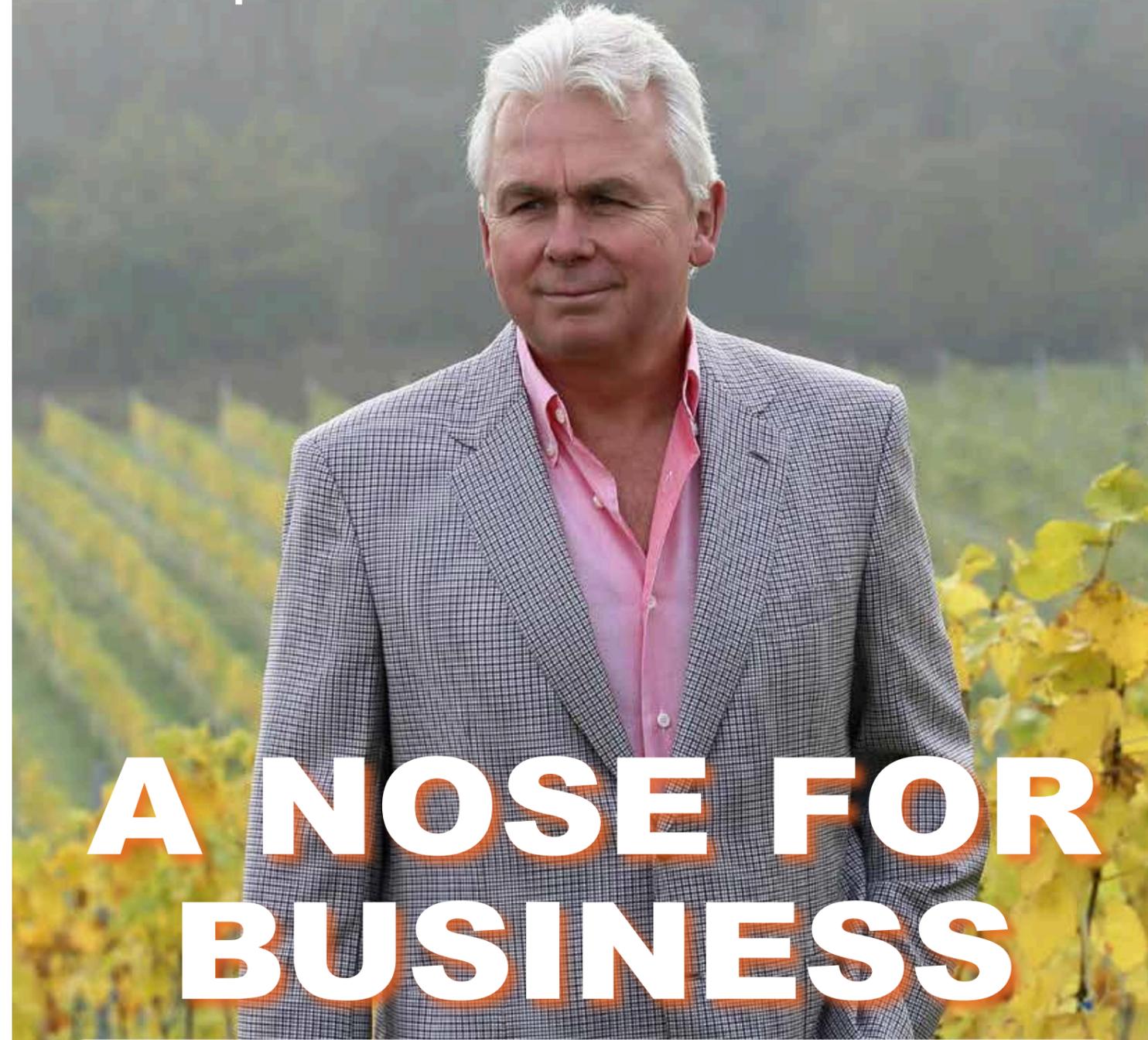
Mr Price also owns two shops in Barmouth and one each in Welshpool, Pwllheli and Aberystwyth.

His new Ludlow shop is situated in the town centre close to the junction of The Bullring with Tower Street. It comprises a basement area, ground floor shop and two sections of first floor accommodation.

The lease of the shop was negotiated on behalf of the owner by commercial agents Halls of Shrewsbury.

James Evans, from Halls Commercial, says demand for shops in Ludlow town centre remains strong.

In this issue's big interview we meet **ANDY STEVENS**. The former banking chief is in the process of transforming his Shropshire estate into an oasis of wine and wellness.



A NOSE FOR BUSINESS

By Henry Carpenter

Hencote has to be seen to be believed. It is not just the fact that it is a glorious Georgian manor on the edge of Shrewsbury, standing in beautiful open countryside with the best panoramic view of the county town you could imagine.

It's the very fact that it's there. Thousands of motorists pass this

65-acre estate, which lies just off the Ellesmere Road only a mile or two north of Shrewsbury town centre, each day with surely only a tiny percentage knowing what lies over the crest of the hill up Hencote Lane.

And why would they? It is only recently that it has started receiving guests after being meticulously restored to provide a luxury wellbeing retreat for visitors. There are seven suites and bedrooms at Hencote, as well as therapies, treatments and

top-level cooking tailored to guests' requirements.

To enjoy the views of the county town, the viewer first has to look over vines . . . lots of vines. There are 22,000 of them in total, carefully planted over curving acreage in perfect symmetry, not a single one out of place.

All this is explained by the owner Andy Stevens, the man whose vision, drive and investment is responsible for the remarkable transformation of the estate.



Part of the spectacular Georgian manor house at Hencote, home to Andy Stevens and wife Dora

◀ You can almost feel the pride Andy has in Hencote as he describes in detail the terrain, the grape varieties and the plans he has to bring the very best English sparkling wine to the market.

He has put his heart and soul into his beloved estate, as well as a financial investment which to describe as significant is euphemistic in the extreme.

The business acumen, and deep pockets, which Andy acquired, came as a result of an unconventional and cosmopolitan professional path which led him to many far flung regions and culminated with him becoming the boss of one of the Middle East's largest banks.

Despite not having done a day's work in his life in the UK – at least until 2014 – Andy Stevens is surely towards the top of the premier league of Shropshire financial heavyweights.

Andy's story started in 1959 when he was born in Hong Kong to parents who worked for its government, and the family continued to live there for the next 25 years.

"I was brought up as a typical colonial child," recalls Andy.

"My early prep schooling was in Hong Kong up to the age of seven and then I was sent to boarding school in my father's home town of Loughborough, where I spent the next 10 years.

"By the age of 12 I had set my sights on entering the world of finance. I was one of the first kids to do an O level in Economics, and I completed a degree in banking and finance at Birmingham University.



Businessman Andy Stevens made his name in The Gulf

"My ambition at that time was to join HSBC. However, I ended up joining Standard Chartered which at that time was a bigger bank than HSBC, believe it or not. When I left university in 1980 Standard Chartered sent me to Dublin for six months of training and then on to Hong Kong.

"I spent two years in Hong Kong and during long leave was told I was being sent

to the Falklands subject to a major review by the Thatcher government conducted by Lord Barber.

"To cut a long story short, I never made it to the Falklands but, in 1983, was sent instead to Bahrain which at the time was the major financial centre of the Middle East."

This was Andy's first foray into life in the Middle East, and he spent five very happy years there with Standard Chartered. The bank then decided to send him to Africa which is when the relationship started to sour.

He describes his role as "a generalist", relied upon to go in and manage the bank's operations.

"In Uganda I was director of administration, which meant I did everything other than the lending," he says.

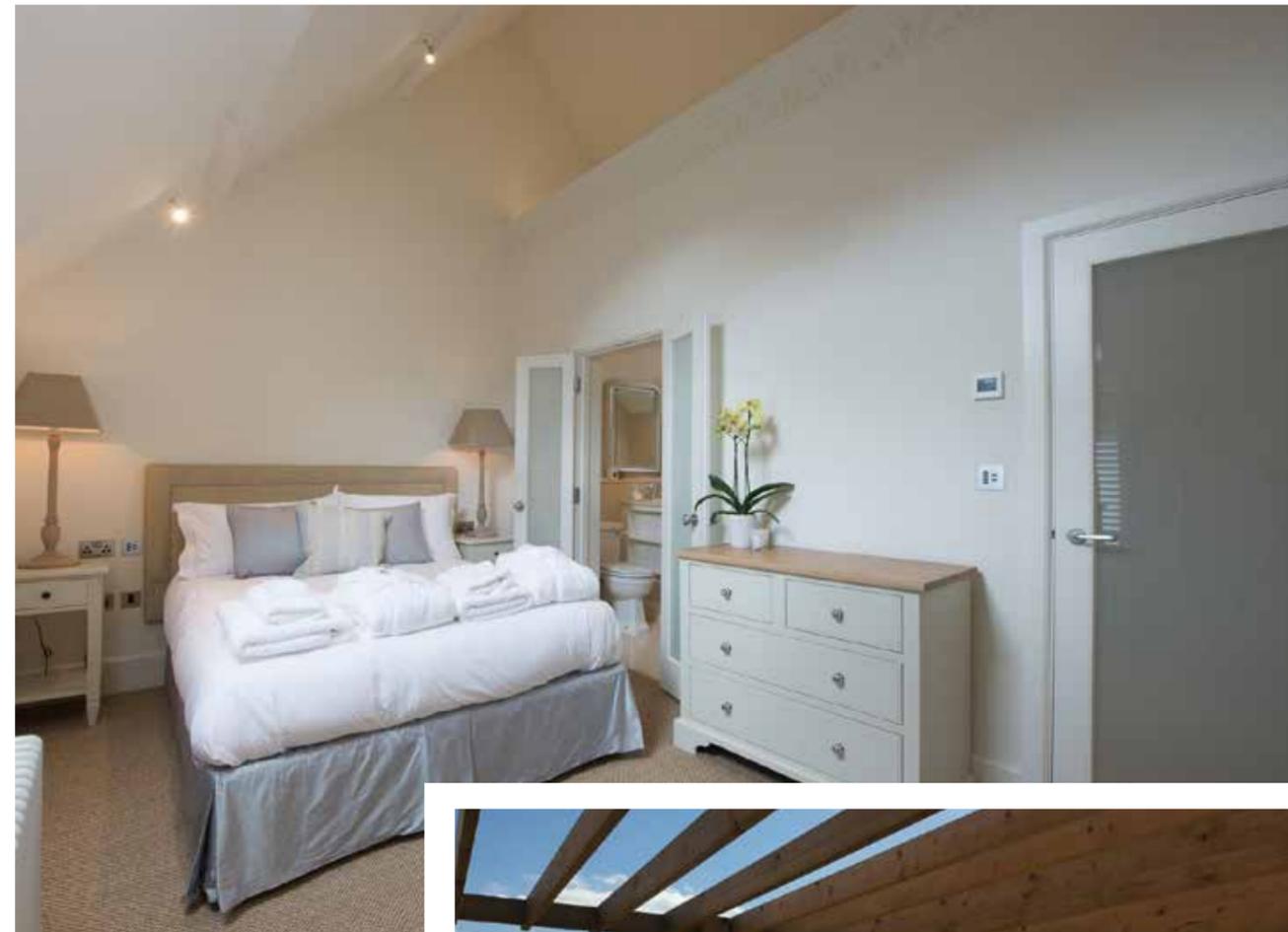
"This was a typical colonial pattern deployed by the bank whereby the likes of myself were expected to hold the fort; this was clearly a fast-dying model."

Andy became so disillusioned with life with Standard Chartered that in 1990 he left the bank entirely, and joined a relatively small bank on Qatar, the Commercial Bank.

He continues: "Qatar at that time hadn't discovered its wealth, and was a very inward looking, conservative nation.

"The Commercial Bank was the sixth largest local bank and it didn't take long to come to the realisation that I might have taken quite a risk!

"But I resolved to make something out of my decision, and a couple of geopolitical events came to my assistance.



Wellness treatments take place indoors...

"Soon after I joined the bank, the first Gulf War in 1990/91 resulted in every economy in the region trying to stimulate change. Then, in 1995, there was a bloodless coup in Qatar. As is often the way in that part of the world the heir apparent overthrew his father and he proceeded to usher in massive, unprecedented change.

"Qatar had been sitting on known gas reserves for 40 years, and the new emir brought about monetising those underground assets.

"He instigated the massive industrialisation in Qatar which became the second largest exporting gas producing nation in the world.

"What had been a very small economy worth about 6 billion dollars became, within the space of about 15 years, one of the most modern, dynamic economies in the world. The value of the economy escalated to 200 billion dollars.

"And in this extraordinary period of change I was lucky enough to be there and the bank rode that wave."

Andy's role with the bank evolved as time went on. In the early years he was assistant general manager looking after the retail bank but in 1998 he took the bank overseas into Egypt where it bought the franchise for Diner's Club.

That gave the bank a glimpse of the future and what could be achieved – and it also illustrated Andy's capabilities.

He was promoted to general manager in 2001 with the clear brief to "wake the bank up".



...and outside too. Hencote is gaining a fantastic reputation as a five-star wellness retreat

It is probably easiest to look at statistics when judging Andy's time as general manager and then group CEO. When he took it on, the bank was the sixth largest in Qatar with a balance of about 1 billion dollars on a capital base of 600 million dollars – "we were very small and insignificant," says Andy.

By the time he stepped down at the end of 2013 the balance was up to 35 billion dollars. Commercial Bank sat second behind the Qatari National Bank, was highly rated by all the credit ratings agencies, and had taken majority stakes in banks in Oman, UAE and Turkey.

"We achieved stellar results," says Andy. "We delivered a return on equity of 25 per cent which were unheard of, and dividend yields which were unsurpassed in the market."

In 2013, largely as a result of a change in power in Qatar and being asked to take on an advisory role which he felt unsuited to, Andy stepped down and thoughts turned back to the UK and, specifically, Shropshire.

Andy recounts his story in his Hencote office, as immaculate and ordered as the vineyard outside.

He looks content, as well he might. Married for 27 years to Dora and with four children who are now living independently, family life is good.

It also transpires that not only was he very, very successful, but Andy also learnt the importance of health and wellbeing through the stresses and strains of his career. This is why Hencote is fast becoming a destination as a five star wellness retreat – its owner understands the value of health. ▶

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BIG INTERVIEW

◀ But conversation again returns to the vineyard and its evolution.

"I have my sister to thank for my getting to know Shropshire, as back in the 1970s she had worked at Hawkstone Park. I subsequently bought a property in Weston-under-Redcastle but on one occasion, when I was over from the Middle East, I realised I had inadvertently let it out to the RAF and had nowhere to stay.

"My wife and I stayed in a nearby country cottage, and then one day I followed my instinct up Hencote Lane and found my way to the farm buildings here which were derelict. I managed to persuade the vendors to sell the buildings, along with three acres, to me. Restoring the buildings has been a massive labour of love and over the years I have brought more than 60 further acres.

"When I returned from Qatar I loved the freedom of walking around the open spaces here. There were 164 vines here at the time and I watched the vineyard develop; that year we got a phenomenal crop of grapes which made 250 bottles of wine, over a bottle a vine which is enormously productive.

"I thought, is there something here? I asked a leading viticulturist to inspect the soil and the estate's potential and the feedback was that there was no reason to suggest this couldn't be a successful site for a vineyard.

"I was and am quite determined to compete with the very best, and this meant the production of sparkling wine. I made my decision early in 2014 and by the end of that year we had prepared the land."

Andy and his team have planted 22,000 vines over seven hectares on the most fertile eight-hectare plot on the estate – south facing on a nice gradient on glacial till overlaying Kinnerton Sandstone Formation. They planted grape varieties - 12,000 pinot noir, 2,000 Pinot meunier, 2,000 chardonnay, 3,500 seyval blanc, 2,000 solaris, 1,000 pinot noir precoce to be exact – with, according to Andy, "the express intent of making the best possible English sparkling wines".

He makes particular mention of the unstinting support he has received from wife Dora. Not only has she moved around the world with him since they first met 33 years ago, but she has also had in invaluable input into the development of Hencote.

"Dora has been a role model in terms of creating the agricultural footprint on the domestic property," according to Andy.

In a good year, he estimates the vineyard has the capacity to make up to 70,000 bottles. However, he aims to nudge that figure up to 100,000 by augmenting what is grown at Hencote by buying in fruit from other grape growers.

Hencote, as he admits, is a work in progress. The wellbeing retreat is now set up and has started receiving visitors. Its reputation as a luxurious centre of excellence for cleansing mind and body is growing.

The vineyard still has a way to go – but it's a case of so far, so good.

"I am a very aspirational person and quite defiant," admits Andy. "However, I brought in very qualified people to ensure my gut instincts were valid.

"If we have an average growing year I would expect to be harvesting grapes in the autumn of 2017. We should bottle some of that wine by the late spring of 2018, but due to the slow fermentation process for sparkling wine it won't be on the shelves until 2020 at the earliest, though there will be a small amount of still wine which will be out before then."

It is some project. As he says: "I have put in my own equity into all this but the results will hopefully more than exceed the outlay."

If the vineyard even remotely follows the trajectory of Andy's commercial career, that won't be a concern; wine lovers and Shropshire in general will be toasting the success of a remarkable enterprise.



The spectacular view of Shrewsbury from Hencote



"I asked a leading viticulturist to inspect the soil and the estate's potential and the feedback was that there was no reason to suggest this couldn't be a successful site for a vineyard," says Andy Stevens.

At a glance...

At work

Current position: Chairman of Hencote and advisor to Investcorp Bank

Most career defining decision: Resigning from Standard Chartered Bank in 1989 to join Commercial Bank of Qatar – Goliath to David!

Advice to aspiring business people: Belief and instinct are powerful enablers

Three heroes with whom to share a boardroom table (alive or dead):

1. Margaret Thatcher
2. Alan Sugar
3. Richard Beaton (ideal if you could have your best friend around the table – it also helps that he has a great track record in business!)

At home

Family: Wife Dora and children Charles, Mark, Vivienne and Suzanne

Desert island disc: Hotel California – The Eagles

Desert island book: How England made the English by Harry Mount

Desert island film: Phantom of the Opera

Favourite holiday destination: Europe

Three heroes with whom to share a dinner table (alive or dead):

1. Sir Clive Woodward, the visionary World Cup winning England rugby coach
2. Sir Richard Burton (the great Victorian explorer, not actor)
3. Charles Leonard Stevens, my father

Among first of Transit specialists

Shropshire motor dealer Furrows has become one of the first in the UK to be chosen as a specialist Ford Transit centre – and the only one in the county.

The new purpose-built centre was opened at Furrows of Shrewsbury, in Harlescott Lane, by chairman and managing director of Ford of Britain, Andy Barratt.

He joined Furrows chairman Nic Coward and Jane Coward – the wife of the previous chairman – to cut the ribbon at a special ceremony to mark the unveiling of the new facility, watched by guests including long-standing customers and dealership staff.

Furrows joint managing director Russ Smith said: "To become a specialist dealer we have invested in new showroom and servicing facilities, extra staff and new operational procedures – it's so much more than just a sign above the door."

Fellow joint managing director Dave Farthing said the group's previous Transit Sales area had been at their Telford dealership.

"To become an accredited Ford Transit Centre meeting the very latest criteria, we needed more space and to reach a wider geographical area more easily," he said.

"So we have invested in creating the brand new Shrewsbury facility."

The Ford Transit Centre at Furrows of Shrewsbury stands alongside the dealership's existing showroom which stocks Ford, Mazda and Kia ranges, as well as its used car and van centre, service department, and multi-accredited accident repair centre.



At the official opening are, from left, Furrows chairman Nic Coward, chairman and managing director of Ford of Britain Andy Barratt, and Furrows joint managing director Dave Farthing



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New service

Shropshire's largest taxi firm is investing **£50,000** into the launch of a new executive service for business clients.

Bosses at Go Carz have unveiled a fleet of high-end vehicles as part of the new arm of the business, called Go Exec, and employed a new member of staff to manage the service.

Will Usherwood, the new business development manager at Go Carz, said: "We have more than 15 drivers specifically trained and selected for the executive service. Everyone is really excited and enthusiastic."

He said one of the features of the executive branch was the "premium service" which included free in-car wifi, newspapers and refreshments.

"It's an ideal arrangement for businesses who are entertaining clients who need to be collected from an airport or train station.

"We are already seeing a big increase in demand for the executive service, and we are sure its popularity will grow as more people become aware of it."

Cindy Wilday, area director of Go Carz, said the launch of Go Exec was an important development for the business.

"We have always provided some form of executive travel but by making this investment we are really committing to an absolutely first-class service for businesses," she said.

"The initial investment at this stage to launch Go Exec is in the region of £50,000, and we are always happy to make the necessary investments to grow the business.

"The private hire industry is a tough marketplace, but we feel we have the cutting-edge infrastructure and committed workforce to continue our growth."

Go Carz is the largest private hire firm in the West Midlands, taking some 100,000 phone calls and carrying out about 75,000 journeys a week across Shropshire and the West Midlands.

A stitch in time...

An Oswestry clothing manufacturer has sewn up a deal to help it expand and become more eco-friendly – all without dropping a stitch!

Sewprint Limited has invested over £40,000 in a top-of-the-range 6-head Tajima embroidery machine to boost capacity.

The firm, launched in 2011, moved into its new manufacturing base on the Maes-Y-Clawdd Enterprise Park in Maesbury Road in July, as it needed bigger premises for its expanding business - supplying and producing embroidered workwear, sportswear and schoolwear.

Customers have included a charity backed by Prince Harry, and professional snooker stars such as former world champion Shaun Murphy, and Ricky Walden.

The embroidery machine, which has been affectionately named 'Winni-Thread', can embroider six garments at a time, giving the company extra capacity, meaning orders can be produced quicker thereby reducing costs and lead times for customers.

The company is run by Ian and Angie Roome, and Ian said: "It is a really exciting time for us. Having looked at several



Ian and Angie Roome with a new machine

other brands, the machine was supplied and installed by AJS Embroidery, who are the UK distributors for Japanese company, Tajima, one of the oldest and most respected manufacturers of industrial embroidery machines in the world.

"It can cope with all sorts of products – even baseball caps – in a fraction of the time it takes other machines, which means we can remain cost-effective, whilst producing high quality embroidered garments."

The combination of the new machine and the move to the new premises means the company has invested over £70,000 in the business in recent months, with further expansion planned.

The company also plan to take on additional staff, and their first apprentice in



Professional snooker player Shaun Murphy

2017, with the help of Telford College of Arts and Technology.

Angie added: "We really have seen a big expansion in a short space of time, and we have ambitious plans to take the business to another level.

"Our aim is to continue to provide top quality customised workwear and staff uniforms, at a cost-effective price, while providing outstanding customer service".

The link with Prince Harry came through charity Armed Forces Para-Snowsport Team which works to provide opportunities for wounded and injured soldiers.

Sewprint, produced merchandise for the charity and provided on-line support through a website 'shop'. Prince Harry visited the charity in April and was presented with an AFPST polo shirt produced by the company.



Author Steve Plant and John Russell of Three Tuns Brewery

It's three cheers for this book of greats

The UK's oldest brewery is helping a lifelong football supporter achieve his goal of raising £20,000 for Birmingham's Children Hospital.

Three Tuns Brewery, in Bishop's Castle, has thrown its support behind Steve Plant's new 'They Wore The Shirt Book', which chronicles the proud history of Wolverhampton Wanderers football club through its collection of 'Gold and Black' strips.

Bosses at the company marked the launch of the 256-page publication by brewing a specially crafted Indian Pale Ale.

John Russell, managing director of Three Tuns Brewery and himself an ardent Wolves fan, said: "Football and ale often go hand-in-hand and many a match has been dissected over a good pint between friends and family. When Steve came to me with his idea for a limited edition beer I jumped at the chance.

"They Wore The Shirt is a really special publication and the amount of time and effort gone into producing it is phenomenal, especially for someone who is running his own business. As soon as I saw the draft of the book – featuring my own favourite shirts – I was sold and started brewing an IPA that would hit the spot."



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Making a difference



Richard SHEEHAN

With the festive season behind us, we once again turn our attention to Brexit – in whatever form it eventually takes.

Our survey work is telling us that Shropshire businesses have very clear ideas about what the Government needs to deliver in 2017.

The demonstration of strong leadership and a clear strategy in negotiations is vital if we are to avoid a crisis in business confidence, and the economic impact that inevitably follows.

The impact of a weak currency will continue to put pressure on businesses that import goods and raw materials, with the knock-on effect being felt within consumer markets as costs and prices continue to rise.

As Shropshire's only accredited Chamber of Commerce, we are totally committed to representing our business community through our connectivity across the UK.

We recognise the significant part it must play in keeping our business community fully up to date, whilst ensuring we are well placed to influence Government policy and

strategy through extensive lobbying within corridors of power in Westminster.

Our accrediting body the British Chambers of Commerce is engaging with ministers and Government departments, ensuring we get the latest information back here on the ground, but equally important is that the voice of Shropshire Business is heard and listened to.

Based on the current priorities fed into us by our members, we have identified clear areas of concern that need urgent attention.

Trade Agreements – International Trade plays a significant part in the Shropshire economy, with goods and services already being sent around the globe. We are committed to ensuring that competitive trade agreements are put in place, quickly, efficiently and in full consultation with business. This is not a job for civil servants alone.

Regulation – The unravelling of EU regulation will be a challenge that will tax the best minds. Government must provide clear leadership and precise communication to ensure business clearly understands what the future looks like to allow strategic planning and compliance.

Labour Market – Many Shropshire businesses benefit from the skills delivered by a migrant workforce. Uncertainty around what the future looks like, reduces our ability to attract the best talent and threatens retention of existing skills – we want early and clear direction.

Our latest workforce survey revealed 41% of businesses employing EU staff say they have expressed uncertainty over their future residency status. 5% of businesses have seen EU employees resign following the referendum, and 10% have EU employees who have stated their intention to leave the UK.

As we continue to look for growth and the skills needed to make it happen, this is an unhealthy position.

EU funding – Businesses have been familiar with EU funding projects in support of growth. It is no accident that following our network lobbying, the Chancellor, Philip Hammond announced a Treasury guarantee for the projects agreed this autumn. This really does demonstrate outstanding policy work by the Chamber network.

Shropshire Chamber will continue to consult with the business community on issues as they occur, and promise to provide the very latest information and direction as we journey into the future together. Our website-based Brexit Information Service will be available to businesses across Shropshire, full of the latest developments and the things you need to know.

2017 is going to be a bit of a rollercoaster ride with challenge and opportunity around every corner. Now more than ever our business community needs to be connected, working together for the growth of our economy, making sure that Shropshire looks after Shropshire, and taking advantage of opportunities within domestic and overseas markets.

With over 150 business-enhancing events, a comprehensive suite of both classroom and online training supporting skills development, and an extensive cost saving benefits offer and powerful connected lobbying and policy work on behalf of members, we are making a real difference in our magnificent county.

Now is the time to be part of this expanding community and to get connected.

● *Richard Sheehan is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. Visit www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk*



The European Union Chamber – the unravelling of EU regulation will be a challenge that will tax the best minds



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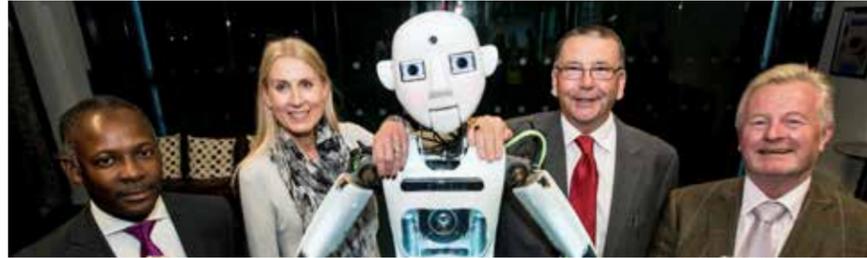
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News in brief...

- Shrewsbury business, property and planning firm Berrys has been rated the number one county-based planning consultancy in Shropshire for the second year running. This has been confirmed by the annual Planning Consultancy Survey which ranks Berrys in the top 50 of planning firms, based on number of consultants and volume of planning work.
- Matt Hignett, an independent financial adviser with Beaumont Financial Planners in Oswestry, has been recognised as one of 35 'Rising Stars' under the age of 35 by CityWire's New Model Adviser website.
- A Bridgnorth care home has achieved a nationally recognised gold award. Morris Care's Oldbury Grange passed the Gold Standards Framework Care Homes Accreditation Quality Hallmark after a rigorous independent review. It is one of only a select few in Shropshire to hold the coveted hallmark.
- Elcock Reisen, the Ironbridge-based coach company, has bought a specially commissioned VDL Futura model as part of its anniversary celebrations. The company has begun its 90th year of trading.
- Shropshire businesses are leaving themselves vulnerable to the fallout of cyber attacks by failing to have a disaster recovery plan in place. Less than a quarter of all SMEs have plans in place, according to IT infrastructure expert Chris Pallett, of Bespoke Computing in Telford.



The launch of the Careers & Enterprise Company's 'Enterprise Adviser Network'

Future workforce

More than 40 business leaders celebrated the launch of an initiative in Telford which will see schools and employers join forces to help develop the workforce of the future.

Representatives from companies across the borough and the wider Marches area attended the launch of the Careers & Enterprise Company's 'Enterprise Adviser Network'. The initiative is aimed at building stronger guidance-based relationships between businesses, schools and colleges so young people are equipped with the knowledge to develop their workplace skills. Held at Enginuity in Coalbrookdale, the event focused on the important role that businesses have in ensuring young people have access to the right careers advice at the right time, and the impact that access

to business leaders with Enterprise Adviser roles can have on young people. Dr Floyd Millen, head of operation delivery at the Careers & Enterprise Company, said: "As someone who grew up a few miles away and now lives in the south east, I'm pleased that the Marches LEP and Telford & Wrekin Council have demonstrated their commitment to bringing businesses and schools together in a way that will provide young people with transformative, life changing experiences." Paul Hinkins, deputy chair of the Marches LEP who was also at the launch, spoke of a skills void and an ageing workforce. "Here in the Marches, there are too many people in the 16-54 age bracket that leave to pursue careers elsewhere," he said. "We need to prevent that from continuing by encouraging young people to realise their potential with businesses already based here and those which will invest in the region in the coming years."



Someone has sent something through to your mobile device. A text? An email? A voicemail? Can you afford not to check?

Feeling too guilty to be off duty?

By Carl Jones
It's just gone 9pm. The soaps have finished, the washing up's done, the dog has been walked, and you've put the bins out.

And then, just as you're about to settle into your favourite armchair with a cup of cocoa or glass of something stronger, you hear that sharp, shrill sound which has become the modern-day scourge of relaxation. "Bing". Someone has sent something through to your mobile device. A text? An email? A voicemail? Who knows . . . but can you afford not to check? Usually, your curiosity will get the better of you, and before you know it, you're immersed back into the world of work, mopping up a non-urgent email which could easily have waited until the morning. But that's not always the point, is it? It's the fear of not being seen to be on duty, on the ball, and available for your employer at the drop of the hat. And according to a growing number of commentators, it is creating a corporate burn-out epidemic, as we lose sight of the importance of a sensible work-life balance.



Kay Heald gives her views

Can you relate to any of this? It's that toxic mixture of guilt, curiosity, and determination to stay ahead of the game, and look like you're totally committed to doing the best job you can. Kay Heald, who runs a successful HR consultancy based near Telford, and is also joint leader of Network with Style, a

Shropshire-based women's networking group, commissioned her daughter to make a short video raising awareness of the phenomenon called 'device addiction'. She wanted to find an interesting way of highlighting some of the problems created by the long working hour cultures that she says a growing number of her clients seem to be struggling against. "I didn't want to 'tell off' my clients or write them nagging emails, but find a way of engaging with them, so that I could talk more openly about how they could help themselves and their staff to find more productive and healthy ways of working with technology." Kay, who describes herself as a 'slightly-reluctant-technology-follower', says a long hours work culture is now well established in many small businesses "The way we communicate and 'stay connected' has been blurring the lines between work and play. "Unfortunately, a long hours work culture and 'anytime' working can be exacerbated by the wider societal problem of FOMO (fear of missing out) and FOBO (fear of being off-line). "Social, peer and personal pressures can make 'switching off' from work and devices even harder.

'Happiness is not the absence of problems but the ability to deal with them'

Anonymous



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◀ “Although employers can’t dictate an individual’s use of their own devices outside work, they can help empower them to take responsibility for their own actions whilst working.”

She adds: “When used well, information and communication technology aids flexible working and can contribute to a healthier work-life balance.

“However, research is now showing that technology is making many people actually work longer hours. This has been described as a contributor to the ‘dark side’ of flexible working.”

The latest Chartered Management Institute survey of UK managers found 77 per cent working at least an additional hour each day.

Up to 10 per cent of managers admitted to putting in more than three extra hours a day and 61 per cent of those interviewed blamed their increases on technology.

The CMI study also reported a link between managers working longer hours and them suffering from increased headaches, irritability, insomnia and early symptoms of mental health problems.

There is also an unwritten expectation that staff will be prepared to return calls and texts from their employers during scheduled holidays – because they are afraid of what bosses might think of them if they don’t.

The average employee sends or receives more than 130 emails every day, and that figure is only forecast to rise.

Kay says: “People’s access to too much information, or cognitive overload, is also widely known to impair the ability to think clearly, learn new things and make decisions.



Technology can contribute to a healthier work-life balance according to Kay Heald

“Britain is known for its long hours work culture, but our productivity levels remain well below that of other G7 countries – nearly 20 per cent lower, according to the Office of National Statistics.

“If a long hours work culture is not good

for the health and wellbeing of workers and it’s not contributing to increased productivity levels of businesses, owner managers need to take action now to break bad habits and introduce smarter and more effective ways of working.”

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Large firm experience - small firm prices - first meeting free



Maura Thomas says one absent-minded glance at your inbox can quickly turn a relaxing evening into a few more hours of work or worry

Kay, who has more than 20 years of experience in human resources and management development, says it’s vital that Shropshire companies set clear boundaries and codes of conduct regarding communication, for the sake of both parties.

“Make guidelines explicit and clearly define acceptable and unacceptable in-work and out-of-work communication – such as reasonable time periods for responding to emails,” she says.

“Ensure managers, staff, workers and sub-contractors are made aware of company rules and how they can make complaints if rules are broken.

“And lead by example – make sure that senior managers abide by the rules both for themselves and those they manage.”

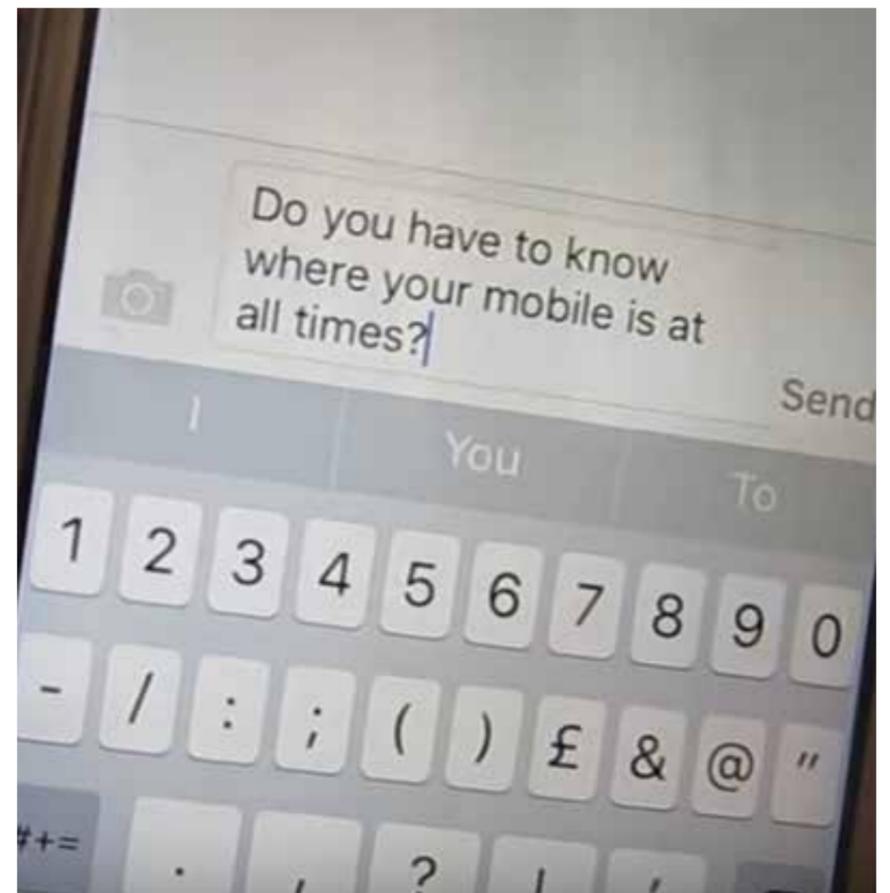
Maura Thomas, an award-winning productivity speaker, and author, doesn’t mince her words. She says one absent-minded glance at your inbox can quickly turn a relaxing evening into a few more hours of work or worry.

“I’ve seen over the past decade how after-hours emails speed up corporate cultures,” she said. “That, in turn, chips away at creativity, innovation, and true productivity.”

Still need more convincing? The National Sleep Foundation says: “Reading a work email at 9:30 pm can keep you up with stress.

“The blue light from the screen mimics daylight and stimulates you; and you can wake up feeling tired, anxious, and depressed.”

And researchers from the acclaimed Harvard Business School say the light exposure from smartphones, specifically blue light, prevents sleep because it suppresses the sleep-inducing chemical, melatonin. So that late-night inbox cleanout may feel like a head-start for the following morning, but all the evidence points to the fact that it causing more harm than good.



Kay Heald says Shropshire companies need to set clear boundaries and codes of conduct

Next time you feel pressure to send or read a few more emails before crawling into bed, or while you’re out with family and friends, stand firm and hold off.

You may find it incredibly liberating if you can avoid such temptation.

● What do you think? Can you relate to these issues? Send an email (during working hours!) to editor@shropshirebiz.com. To watch the video made by Kay Heald’s daughter, see Kay’s channel on Youtube

UK holiday market to benefit from Brexit

The devaluation of the pound against other currencies is persuading many people to plan their holidays in Britain this year, as jetting off to the sun is set to become much more expensive.

That's the conclusion of award-winning caravan, motorhome and campervan dealership Salop Leisure after speaking to customers at the West Midlands Caravan and Motorhome Show in Shrewsbury, which unveiled the 2017 models from leading manufacturers.

The show, held at Salop Leisure's Emstrey headquarters, attracted more than 20,000 visitors – seven per cent up on last year's event - over nine days and produced record breaking sales.

"The main topic of conversation was Brexit and the devaluation of the pound, which is going to make overseas holidays a lot more expensive," said Salop Leisure's chairman Tony Bywater. "It seems that a lot more British people will be staycationing this year, which is great

news for us and the British tourism industry. We were delighted with touring and static caravan, motorhome and campervan sales at the show and it was particularly pleasing to see a large number of first time buyers, who ranged from young families to retired couples."

The Brexit theme continued when Salop Leisure's sales team attended the Motorhome and Caravan Show at the NEC, Birmingham. One of the top salesmen at the show was George Harris, a touring sales executive at Salop Leisure, who secured record sales

Mr Bywater said: "I have been involved in the caravan industry for 50 years and I'm more optimistic than ever about business prospects for 2017.

"I think it's going to be a fantastic year for the industry and our company, especially with the opening of our new touring park alongside our headquarters."



Tony Bywater of Salop Leisure

Interns join the Energize team



June Walden, who chairs the ISGA, with Helen Culshaw of Ascendancy

Rio inspires a website

The success of the Team GB gymnasts in Rio has created a new generation of youngsters wanting to emulate Olympic medallists.

And the Independent Schools Gymnastics Association has been working with Shifnal-based Ascendancy Internet Marketing to design a new website to handle large amounts of data on a national level.

The new website aims to provide British youngsters with the information and advice to help them on their way to providing Team GB with further successful gymnasts in the future.

Ascendancy director Helen Culshaw said: "We were delighted to work with the ISGA in designing their new website and making it easier for users to access information and advice. We have helped make that path as smooth as possible."

The new website is used by a wide variety of people from teachers, competition judges and coaches as well as parents and pupils wanting to know when and where competitions are. It also allows people to download photos and full sets of results.



Zara Morris and Bryony Lainton – new interns at Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin

Shropshire's county sports partnership – Energize Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin – has welcomed two new university interns to its team.

Zara Morris and Bryony Lainton are both working one day a week at the Energize headquarters, based at the University Centre Shrewsbury building.

Zara, 20, is a second year Sport Management BSc student at University Centre Shrewsbury, who is working on various community-based sports and

coaching activities including the Women Make Coaching initiative.

Bryony, 23, who lives near Wem, is in her second year of a Business Studies BA (Hons) course.

Helen White, business development officer at Energize, said: "Zara and Bryony have quickly embedded into the team, and are providing extra support in some of our key areas. They are helping to organise coaching workshops, dealing with customer enquiries, booking venues, and helping with marketing."

Energize helped the county's schools, community groups and voluntary sports clubs to access more than half a million pounds of funding to put on new or improved activities during 2016.

Small businesses meet challenges of National Living Wage

New research from the Federation of Small Businesses has found that small firms are meeting the challenge posed by the new National Living Wage (NLW) – absorbing the costs by taking lower profits.

Following the introduction of the new wage in April, small businesses have demonstrated their resilience in meeting this challenge, the FSB says.

But it says some businesses have struggled to do so.

The FSB's quarterly business survey found that 47 per cent of small businesses now cite wages as the main contributor to the rising cost of doing business.

The federation is now calling for the

Low Pay Commission to be given flexibility on how to meet the Government's NLW target of 60 per cent median earnings by 2020.

The FSB wants this target to be adjusted if it becomes clear the economy cannot bear the rapid pace of NLW increases. The NLW is currently projected to rise by £1.85 per hour over the next four years, reaching £9.05 by 2020.

FSB research found that the majority of small business were already paying all their staff above the new NLW of £7.20 an hour.

However, despite this, about a third of businesses (32 per cent) said the new wage has led to some increase in their

wage costs and further one in five (19 per cent) said labour costs went up significantly as a result of the new wage.

Of the businesses that report increasing labour costs from the NLW, the majority of them (59 per cent) absorbed the increased cost through reduced profitability.

However, the FSB says some firms have had to take other action in order to stay afloat, such as increasing their prices (35 per cent), reducing staff hours (24 per cent), cutting investment (23 per cent), and recruiting fewer workers (16 per cent).

Some businesses also sought to meet the increased cost through improved efficiency (13 per cent).

County cranes for car plant

Shropshire-made cranes are being supplied to one of Britain's big car manufacturing plants.

A 35-tonne capacity overhead crane has been installed at BMW's Swindon MINI Plant by UK lifting equipment manufacturers Pelloby Limited.

The electric travelling crane system, which features a double girder design and wire rope hoist unit, was commissioned as part of a project to replace an older crane in the site's press shop.

The finished crane, supplied by the Telford-based company, offers a 9.8m height of lift and spans 21.7m between two pre-existing gantry supports. Walkways were incorporated into the design on the external side of each of the crane's beams to provide access for maintenance and inspections.



The crane in place at Swindon

In addition to designing, manufacturing and delivering the 35 tonne crane, Pelloby also project managed the removal of the existing crane and installation of the new system.

Operator training was provided for the BMW staff and to further guarantee the utmost in workplace safety, an ongoing maintenance contract was put in place which will see the Pelloby team inspect the crane on a regular basis.

BMW has also placed an order with Pelloby for two more 35 tonne cranes to replace other cranes in the press shop which are due to be installed towards the end of this year.

Pelloby's managing director Glen Hickman said: "It is a pleasure to be able to supply cranes for various production processes taking place at this plant."

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Steps to take when planning to trade on the international stage



Nicole GUNTER

Exporting to new markets is something which many companies are now keen to explore, especially with the uncertainty over what our international trading relationships will look like in a post-Brexit era.

What do they need to consider? Proper planning and research can make the difference between success and failure for businesses considering importing and exporting either for the first time or to new markets.

Launching an overseas trade programme can be a daunting prospect – and if it goes wrong, it can also be extremely expensive.

From not researching the potential overseas market properly to failing to have sufficient insurances in place, businesses can easily find that the value of any potential hike in sales has been wiped out simply because the paper work wasn't correct or shipments were held up at customs.

There are important steps to take when planning to trade internationally for the first time, here's a few which shouldn't be missed out.

Do your research – The internet can provide a wealth of how-to information for first-time importers and exporters, but it's also important to research your market and where there is a need for your product or service.

Get advice – It is always worth seeking an expert view on the logistics of moving goods overseas. We're often surprised at how many companies are paying too much for their shipping simply because they've made assumptions on the size, weight and packaging of a consignment. And it's worth speaking to other exporters, to find out what works for them.

Define your market – Find out how your product and service might need to be adapted for export and what regulations must be complied with. This will be a moving landscape in coming years following Brexit. Think about opportunities

in fast growth markets: it is predicted that emerging markets will be importing more than they are exporting by 2026.

Consider the risks – Risks are higher in foreign markets than at home. Monitor your progress against your plan and re-assess the risks at regular intervals. That includes mitigating your supply chain risk by forging close relationships with your suppliers and buyers.

Keep an eye on costs – Businesses thinking about international trade for the first time or targeting a new overseas market should make sure they have the right resources and commitment to put towards it. A good understanding of how fluctuations in exchange rate will affect profitability and pricing is vital.

Check the legalities – Understand the rules of engagement, particularly issues such as duties and paperwork. Finding out at the outset what is required might save a few headaches later.

Look to the long-term – While every profitable sale is welcome, it is always worth looking at long term market potential, to assess whether initial investment might bear fruit later.

Look beyond your borders and consider the opportunities in rapidly growing markets.

● *Nicole Gunter is managing director of Telford company Global Freight.*

£35,000 investment adds Ireland to distribution company's contracts

Ningbo Palletised Distribution, which has a contract to deliver hazardous materials in the SY and TF postcode areas, has launched a new venture in Ireland.

The company has invested £35,000 in creating Ireland Express, in response to an increase in exports to Ireland since Brexit.

Ningbo's managing director Chris Stockton said: "Businesses in Shropshire seeking to ship products across the Irish Sea have to use a multitude of partners.

"This often comes with numerous bits of paperwork and documents, increasing time spent.

"By launching a dedicated nightly service to Ireland using our existing structure and adding to our fleet, we are able to save companies time and money, as well as offering a stronger option."

He added: "Ireland is the UK's fifth biggest trade partner, and the Irish economy continues to grow and improve at a fantastic pace. We've noticed an increase in goods being exported to Ireland and Northern Ireland and predict this rise to carry on."



Ningbo's managing director Chris Stockton with an Ireland Express branded wagon

Become part of a searchable directory of UK exporters

Shropshire businesses wanting to break into overseas markets, and take advantage of the global appetite for UK goods and services, are being urged to visit the new online trade hub, GREAT.gov.uk.

It is a single digital destination for trade and investment, bringing together and connecting UK businesses, international

buyers and international investors. Whether businesses are new, occasional or frequent exporters, they will be able to take advantage of the new suite of tools and exclusive deals on fees or commissions with some of world's leading online marketplaces. By registering with the find a buyer service, businesses will become

part of a brand new searchable directory of UK exporters which government will use to match their products and services with worldwide demand.

A new tool on GREAT.gov.uk will help businesses access the best e-commerce opportunities via preferential deals with the world's largest online marketplaces.

Focused on driving an overseas market

Anorth Shropshire company is planning a major expansion of its overseas sales, thanks to the support it has received from the Department for International Trade.

Haydox @ The Wood Yard, which manufactures and distributes access equipment for the offshore oil and gas sector, became part of The Wood Yard, in Whitchurch, Shropshire, in the summer of 2015.

It only began to export in earnest earlier in 2016 but after achieving 75% of sales to six countries in just over 12 months, it is putting in place an ambitious overseas growth programme for 2017.

Christine Hamilton, interim regional director for DIT West Midlands, praised the company for focusing on driving its overseas trade.

She said: "It has tapped into an in-demand sector and is providing vital access equipment to a range of offshore companies and I'm delighted that the work The Wood Yard is doing with our Shropshire team is yielding positive results.

"Its success demonstrates the value of working with our ITAs. With our support and guidance, companies can access whole new markets, which help them to strengthen their business, lead to expansion and the creation of jobs in the local economy."

Haydox @ The Wood Yard, which supplies timber pole ladders and aluminium stagings for the oil and gas sector, has been working with an International Trade Adviser at DIT in Shropshire since the summer of 2015.

Andrew Haydock, managing director of the Wood Yard has participated in a number of DIT export programmes, including strategic export workshops, and has been supported by digital trade advisers on web and social media platforms, improving search engine optimisation and designing a website for international markets.

He has also received advice from Coventry University-based IntaTrade, on matters such as routes to market, intellectual property and copyright and branding in overseas markets.



Andrew Haydock, managing director of the Wood Yard, has participated in a number of DIT export programmes, including strategic export workshops

He said the support he has received over the past few months has enabled him to become more focused on putting together a detailed strategic export plan. It will also mean he will be able to reduce his reliance on outsourcing manufacturing and bring more work in-house.

Haydox @ The Wood Yard already exports to United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Thailand, Malaysia, South Africa and Singapore.

Increasing demand for its products means it now has its sights firmly on new

markets in the Arab Gulf, South East Asia and the Far East.

Mr Haydock said: "The support we've had from the DIT really has helped us to push us further in our ambitions.

"While we knew what we wanted to do, getting the support and mentoring from our ITA has enabled us to look at how we can explore new opportunities.

"We're very excited about our plans for 2017 and we'll continue to work with our international trade adviser as we grow our markets."

Next generation of engineers in training



Graham WYNN

I started my engineering apprenticeship at college in Bridgnorth. After more decades than I'd care to remember, I was back there in December to help launch a £2.9 million centre which aims to train the next generation of engineers.

There was a period of at least 20 years when the vocational training route had somewhat fallen out of favour. Its legacy was a workforce not equipped for the right job, and jobs which employers couldn't fill with the people who had the necessary skills and qualifications. But the tide is turning. The realisation has dawned that apprenticeships and training 'on the job' is absolutely vital if we are to not only support our businesses to grow, but tackle the current skills crisis head on.

The Government has announced it wants to support employers to achieve a target of three million apprenticeships by 2020. And the Marches LEP has responded to this call by securing £3 million of funding to develop a project to create three Advanced Manufacturing Hubs in the region, which will create 2,700



Training 'on the job' is vital, but had fallen out of favour for a long time

apprenticeships. In November 2015, the Marches LEP awarded three contracts which will see hubs set up in Bridgnorth, Shrewsbury and Hereford. These training centres will create nearly 2,700 apprenticeships and deliver more than 1,960 additional qualifications over the next five years.

Importantly, the contracts were awarded to consortiums including employers and training providers. They will work together, in partnership, to create fantastic careers and develop our future workforce.

I recognise that I come back to this word – partnership – quite a lot in letters and emails I write, and speeches I make. The private sector contribution not only to these skills projects but also to the LEP itself cannot be under-estimated.

The majority of our Marches LEP Board members are from the private sector. They direct LEP work, they work with our local authority partners to monitor the spending

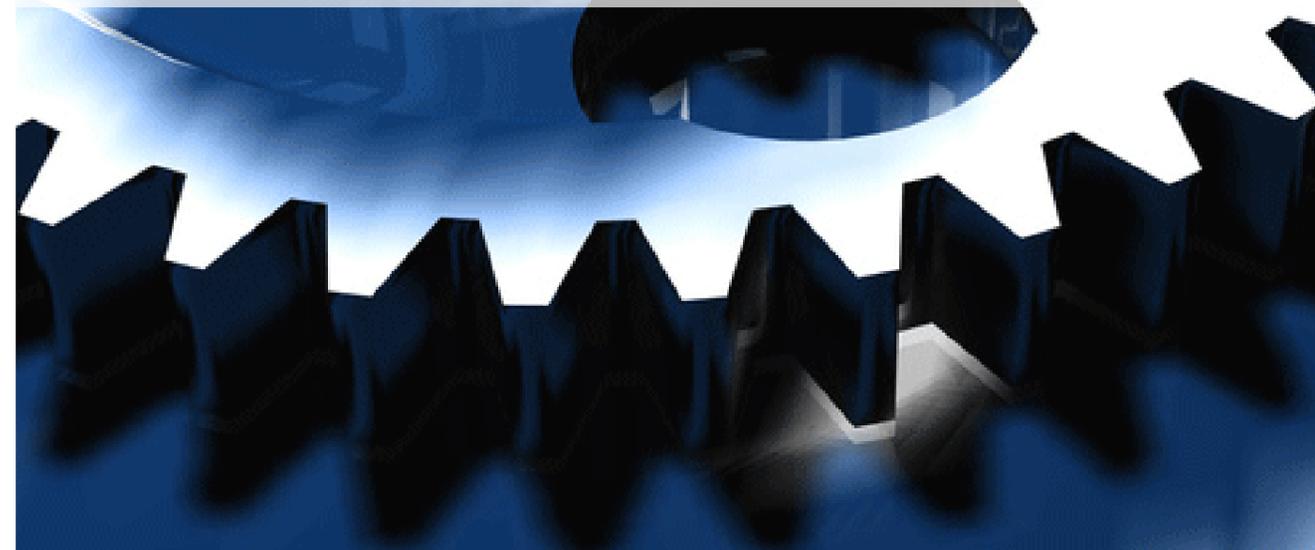
of public money, they ensure the LEP delivers what the business community needs and that it achieves value for money in everything it does.

Our LEP Board Members lobby the Government on issues which are critical to the growth of our economy and they direct skills, transport and business support committees – working for the benefit of businesses based here and the people who live and work here.

They do this for no fee, no salary, no bonus and no expenses. They give of their considerable time and expertise freely.

So as we head into what may again be another challenging year for our region and our businesses, I'd like to place on record my thanks to each and every one of them.

● *Graham Wynn is chairman of the Marches LEP, and founder of award-winning Telford company TTC, which is now one of the UK's largest national driver retraining companies.*



Keeping the cogs of industry turning – Advanced Manufacturing Hubs in Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Hereford will train thousands of people

Pitfalls of losing business partner

Would you want a board meeting with your deceased business partner's spouse?

Over the years I have had many meetings with company directors and business owners who may indeed have had to deal with their business partner's spouse or partner.

You may wonder how this would come to pass.

Well, basically if your fellow shareholder (for simplicity I will refer to limited companies, but partnerships are equally affected) dies and leaves his shares to his spouse or partner, then you have a new business partner.

So, at a time when your business has lost a valuable asset on the death of a director, you have inherited a shareholder who, at worst, may want a say in the direction of your business and at best be entitled to a dividend.



Mark EVANS

So what can you do to prevent this? Firstly you need to ensure that in the worst event the surviving shareholders have sufficient funds to purchase the shares of the deceased.

Secondly you need to ensure that if the surviving directors wish to purchase the shares or the surviving spouse or partner wishes to sell them, either party can force the transaction.

Thirdly there needs to be a simple mechanism to achieve this at a time of great stress to both your business and the people involved.

Another issue that businesses rarely consider is what would happen if an important member of your team such as the Production Director was off sick for a long period, or, worse still, died.

For many businesses the cost would be significant and like many other risks the answer is to insure against it.

The company can insure a key individual to provide funds in the event of that key person dying etc. and so provide cash at a difficult time.

One final point regarding life cover for company directors is that your life cover can be paid for by your company. It is deductible for corporation tax and is not a P11D (benefit in kind) to you. This is called 'relevant life cover' and is written for the benefit of your family – making it a highly tax efficient way to protect your business.

● *Mark Evans is an independent financial adviser, and chartered financial planner, from Beaumont Financial, based in Oswestry*

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More rights

The landmark legal ruling which granted Uber taxi drivers the same rights as employed workers could have a knock-on effect for thousands of other people, according to Shropshire legal experts.

The London Central Employment Tribunal has found that a group of Uber drivers are not self-employed people, but workers who are entitled to receive the National Minimum Wage and holiday pay. Uber is an app which connects registered drivers with passengers directly, instead of through a centralised booking service or by just hailing a car in the street.

Ryan Bickham of PCB Solicitors says: "In a world where temporary positions or short-term engagements are becoming more prevalent, one of the key questions is exactly where and when do the lines become blurred and such workers become 'employees'?"

"On the back of the Uber case, couriers working for takeaway delivery firm Deliveroo, which currently classes its drivers as self-employed 'independent contractors', have already taken legal steps to gain unionisation and workers' rights such as paid leave."

Prior to the hearing, the Government appointed Matthew Taylor to examine the 'gig economy' to address concerns about the lack of workers' rights for individuals in non-standard work arrangements, such as maternity leave, holiday and sick pay, and pensions protections.

Ryan says: "The Uber case has already seen a shakeup across the employment industry, particularly those offering self-employed jobs as part of a wider organisational structure."

"There are several different definitions in UK law on workers and employees. An employee, for example, has full protection including unfair dismissal and redundancy, and a worker has some protection, including holiday pay, a maximum of 48 hours work a week, rest breaks and an entitlement to receive minimum wage, whilst a 'gig' economy worker, might be opted out of all of those."

Pop-up practice



Johnson Design Partnership team members preparing for their Ludlow show, from left Matt Spinks, director and senior architect, Kim Chesters, practice manager, and Michael Daw, architectural assistant

A Shropshire architectural firm hosted a 'pop-up practice' on the outskirts of Ludlow. Johnson Design Partnership staged the two-day exhibition at the Clive Hotel in Bromfield when a range of architectural models, visuals, drawings and videos were on show.

Founder Vic Johnson said: "Our aim was to meet

prospective clients face to face, build up relationships with people and connect with businesses, offering consultation on general design matters or specific projects.

"Ludlow is an amazing place to live and work and we are keen to raise our profile here."

Pension plot?

There are early signs that some pension savers risk exhausting their funds in retirement.

The Association of British Insurers has published statistics for the first full year since the Freedom and Choice pension reforms were introduced, covering the period from April 2015 to April 2016.

While the figures show that the majority of savers are taking a sensible approach, there are signs that a minority may be withdrawing too much from their pension fund.

Moreover, that minority is doing so at rates that would see their money run out in a decade or less, if they are reliant on it as their main source of income.

During the last quarter, 4% of pots had 10% or more withdrawn, with many other savers taking their whole fund in one go. However, the data is unable to reveal whether these savers may have multiple pots or other sources of regular income.

The most recent quarter also shows a slight drop in the sales of guaranteed income (annuity) products, with £950 million invested, compared to £1.1 billion in the previous quarter.

Sales of flexible income (drawdown) products have

remained consistent, with £1.48 billion invested, compared to £1.49 billion the previous quarter.

The ABI said that the fall in annuity sales in the last quarter probably reflected ongoing pressure on annuity rates. Those rates have since been pushed down further by the Bank of England's August decision to cut interest rates to a new all-time low, and to introduce further quantitative easing measures.

Retirees opting for drawdown pensions should seek professional help to calculate how much money they can withdraw each year without running out.

While selecting a balanced and well-diversified investment portfolio is critical, knowing how much money to take from a drawdown policy is arguably of greater importance.

• Nick Jones is the principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury, a partner practice of St. James's Place Wealth Management



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Banking on valuable feedback from Shropshire companies



The Bank of England's iconic headquarters in London, heads up regional branches forming a UK network

When the Bank of England's monetary policy committee sits down each month to set the base rate of interest, it carefully considers feedback received from its network of agents across the UK.

These agents tour the country seeking the opinions of all sections of the local business community, and are regular visitors to Shropshire.

And our county's connection doesn't end there, because Glynn Jones, the Bank's deputy agent for the West Midlands and Oxfordshire, was born in Telford and spent many years being raised in Shrewsbury.

The Bank has 12 agencies which form a national network across the UK, and Glynn works from offices in Birmingham city centre. So, what exactly is their agenda?

Glynn explains: "Our primary role is to assess both economic and financial conditions based on the views of businesses in the region as an input to the policy making process, both for monetary and financial stability. The agencies therefore form a vital link between business and the Bank."

"The Bank's regional branches were first established in 1826 as a response to the financial crisis of 1825-26, involving the



Glynn Jones, the Bank's deputy agent for the West Midlands and Oxfordshire, was born in Telford and spent many years being brought up in Shrewsbury

failure of many provincial banks. The main reason for establishing the branch banks was to enable the Bank to take further control of paper note circulation, in order to prevent another crisis.

"The Bank's Court of Directors decided that branch business should be conducted by 'persons of commercial knowledge with local experience'."

While the network of branches grew and changed during the 19th century, their basic

responsibility was still to provide a banking and banknote distribution service, and branches continued to issue notes into the early 20th century.

From 1930 on, however, the branches gained a new function – a requirement to send confidential reports on business conditions to Threadneedle Street, the Bank's iconic London headquarters.

This intelligence gathering role was further enhanced by the establishment of the Bank's Monetary Policy Committee in May 1997.

Glynn says: "The network now had a key role to play in enabling the Bank to collect 'proper regional and sectoral information for the purpose of monetary policy formation.'"

"Since then, the agents' role has continued to evolve and grow to include intelligence pertinent to the Bank's financial stability functions, an aspect of work which has been given added impetus by the recent creation of the Financial Policy Committee and Prudential Regulation Authority.

"With around 9,000 contacts a year across a range of sectors, the Agents have access to a deep pool of business intelligence.

"In Shropshire, I visit a very diverse range of businesses, from local farmers to major manufacturers, tourism operators to car dealerships, logistics and not forgetting my favourite – the food and drinks sector.

"We also hold two panel meetings in Shrewsbury and Telford, drawing together a range of local employers."



Glynn Jones explains that agents help to communicate policy to a broad audience and to promote a widespread understanding and trust of the monetary and financial stability policy framework

This intelligence is not just analysed and communicated internally, but is also viewable externally, via the Agents' Summary of Business Conditions, which is published on the Bank's website at the same time as the minutes of the MPC's monthly meeting.

The summary includes the agents' 'scores' together with findings from special surveys commissioned by the MPC and based on interviews with contacts to investigate a particular issue of topical interest in more depth.

Glynn continues: "The agents are also widely known through their representational role, notably our presentations of the Inflation and the Financial Stability Reports.

"In Shropshire, this involves regular presentations to the business community, including the Business Board, events at Telford College of Arts and Technology, and the Telford Business Partnership.

"This engagement is not confined to businesses but also includes the wider community, the third and education sectors. Through this role, the agents help to communicate policy to a broad audience and to promote a widespread understanding and trust of the monetary and financial stability policy framework."

As part of this engagement, Glynn says the agencies also host regional visits by policymakers and facilitate meetings between them and firms around the country.

"Through these meetings - and events - such as the recent Future Forum held in the Midlands in October - policymakers are able to engage directly with the public and the business community.

"And they are able to hear, first-hand accounts, about the issues facing both



Glynn Jones pictured with Brian Seadon at Telford Business Partnership

and gain insights into the workings of the economy, including underlying dynamics of change – not just what is happening here and now."

One of the more enjoyable aspects of the job, according to Glynn, is interaction with schools, and the business people of tomorrow.

"The agencies have been instrumental in the Bank's schools' challenge - Target 2.0 - which has been attracting entries from over 250 schools from all over the UK for

nearly two decades, with agents acting as judges in regional heats and finals.

"All in all it makes for a busy, challenging but thoroughly rewarding job – I can honestly say no two days are the same.

"And while the agencies have a long pedigree, they continue to perform a vital role for the Bank which recent events – not least the heightened uncertainty following the EU referendum vote to the more wide ranging responsibilities given to the Bank by Parliament - only serve to reinforce."

Return to the dam, 50 years on



Work takes place in the shadow of the dam



Work commenced in the mid-1960s



The Clywedog Dam as it looks today

A Shropshire sand and gravel company is supporting a programme of work on one of the biggest dams ever to be built in Britain – more than 50 years after they first won a contract for the project.

Tudor Griffiths Group, from Ellesmere, first signed a deal to supply sand and gravel for the building of the Clywedog Dam in 1964.

And now the family-owned company

has been called upon as part of a scheme to install a new hydro-electric system in the lower basin of the dam.

Managing director Tudor Griffiths said: "It's such a great feeling to be working on the dam so many years after my grandfather first won the initial contract."

The Clywedog Dam was built to eliminate flooding in the upper Severn valley, creating a domestic water supply for a large area of Wales and England, and also generating electricity.

The site is three miles from Llanidloes and 60 miles from the Tudor Griffiths head office and quarry in Ellesmere.

"When the dam was built, it really was an incredible feat of engineering, and to ensure we could supply sufficient amounts of sand

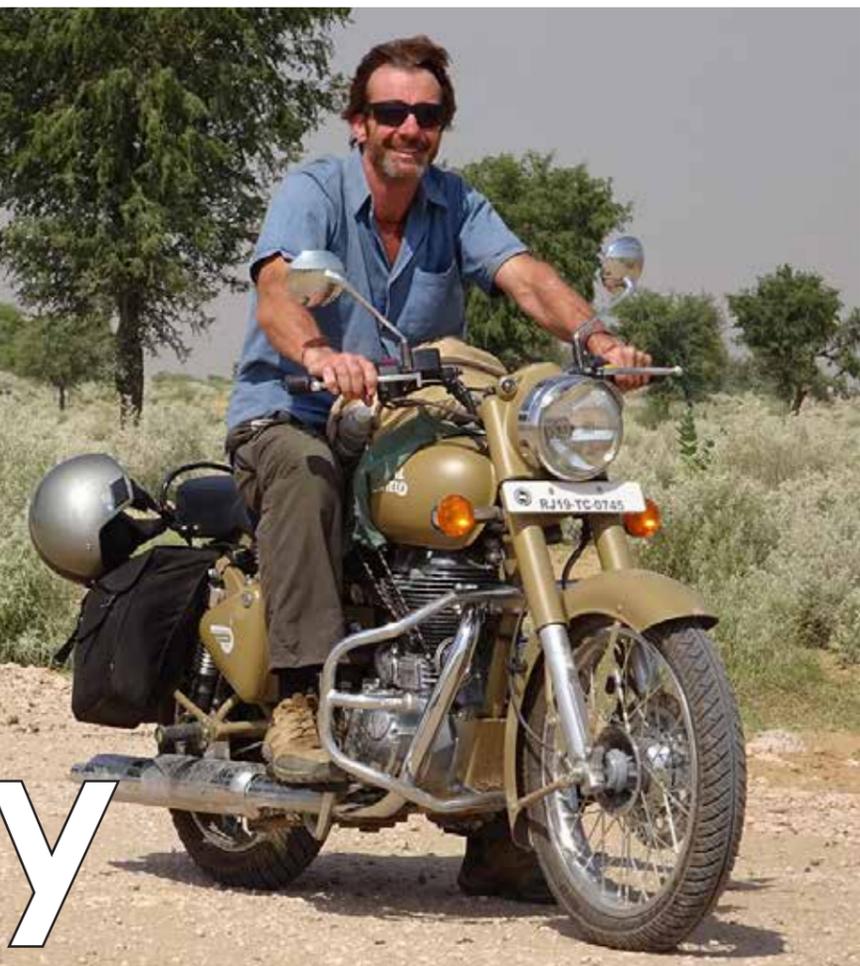
and gravel, my Grandfather hired every available tipper within a 30-mile radius of Ellesmere," said Tudor.

"Concreting of the main dam started early in 1965 and continued until October 1967, and during that time approximately 252,000 cubic yards of concrete were placed, so it really was a massive project."

Once the dam was complete, the area was landscaped to make it look like a natural lake and the water stocked with 17,000 trout. The Clywedog Sailing Club was also formed.

The current project on the dam involves the installation of a new 100 kilowatt hydro-electric system on the weir wall at the lower basin of the dam, and Tudor Griffiths is working alongside the appointed contractors, Bentleys.

Fire in his belly



Taste for adventure – Christo McKinnon-Wood pictured on his travels in India

By Chris Austin

It started out as a road trip. Christo McKinnon-Wood took a beat-up old Enfield bike over to India so that he could do what the young and adventurous do: go travelling.

The founder of Kadai Firebowls quickly fell in love. The culture, people and treasures of that remarkable country dazzled his senses.

An antiques dealer by trade, Christo wondered whether he might ship a few pieces of furniture back to the UK. He'd started out on London's King's Road and was sure there'd be a ready market for such Indian treasures.

Christo was so enamoured with India that he began to visit regularly and by 1995 he was regularly selling items at a small antiques market in Shropshire, at Church Stretton; a town in which he'd made a home.

Josephine Beasley, Kadai's marketing manager, takes up the story: "Christo made some really important connections in Indian and nurtured some great relationships."

It was during one of Christo's many trips to Rajasthan, in Northern India, that he had the idea for Kadai Firebowls.

It was the mid-1990s and Christo had been spending time with friends.



Barbecue time – firebowls come in a variety of shapes and sizes

They were on a rooftop garden and as the sun began to set the temperature fell. Josephine says: "They had a big Kadai bowl, the sort that are used to cook for large numbers of people at festivals, parties and weddings."

"It was just lying around but the people there decided to use it get warm. So they started chopping up old pieces of furniture so that they could light a fire."

The evening continued into the early hours and when Christo awoke the next

day he saw a bright future. Kadai Firebowls were born.

"He formed this idea of using those old Indian cooking bowls. They were almost obsolete and Christo decided to recondition them to create a new product."

Gradually, Christo's business evolved and by 2002 he was selling a range of sandstone that had been hand carved by highly skilled craftsmen in Rajasthan.

They used classic English designs from the 18th century, creating inspiring works that were quickly bought by the company's customers. His business, which is based at Home Farm, Leebotwood, started to take off. Over time, he developed a retail outlet, just off the A49, while using a large warehouse to store new treasures from his regular visits to India.

His company's ethos was about embracing the outdoors, just as his friends did in India. Christo found architectural treasures that people could use in their own gardens. Quality was king.

Josephine adds: "We work with a lot of family workshops out there and all the designs are unique to us. Christo comes up with new ideas here in Shropshire then goes over to India five times a year to help the workmen create the new products. The products are then shipped to us in large containers. We get several each month."

Creating desirable products, of course, was only one part of Christo's business. He also had to find ways of introducing new customers to his architectural antiques as he developed a UK market.

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Christo sold sandstone items, hand carved by Rajasthan craftsmen

Christo decided to recondition firebowls to create a new product

◀ That work was successful, though it took many years of hard graft. Today Kadai Firebowls has a wide range of customers, from those who will spend £20,000 a time on extravagant, showpiece items to young couples who have bought new homes and want something unique for their garden. Exhibiting at shows has helped to drive sales and Kadai have been award winners at Chelsea Flower Show since 2004. Their products have also featured in an enormous

amount of television programmes, movies and online channels. Their products were first used in Pirates of the Caribbean in 2006 and since then they have been used in numerous films and TV shows, including Robin Hood (2009), Game of Thrones (2010), ITV – Love your Garden (2011), Your Highness (2011), The Bastard Executioner (2016), Beowulf (2016), Winter Watch & Spring Watch (2015 & 2016), DIY SOS: The Big Build – Shropshire (2016), Autumn Watch (2016)

and The Mummy, a Tom Cruise movie due for release later this year. Josephine adds: “We have people who come down from a lot of the film studios. They come up from London and rifle through our warehouse and basically choose things that they might like. “They take a lot of the furniture to use as props in a lot of movies. The items are antique, Indian and unique-looking. “There’s a permanent Kadai bowl on Spring, Autumn and Winter Watch too.



Crowds, wellington boots and squelchy mud. Ah yes, it's festival time. What better than drying out by a giant Kadai firebowl



Kadai Firebowls are frequently used in TV shows, like ITV's Beowulf



The Kadai Firebowl fits perfectly in to the Beowulf background

“They all sit around it and you see it quite often on the programme.” Such exposure brings the company great PR. There’s a flurry of social media engagement following the screening of TV shows or films with people asking one another whether they saw a particular item on the big screen. And while that doesn’t necessarily correlate to instant sales, it enhances the brand and opens new doors. Garden shows, like Chelsea, are more effective as sales channels. “We did about 13 shows in 2016 and there will be more in 2017. We also have our own little retail outlet on the A49. And we have 200 stockists around the country and in Europe. “We are looking to push out to America and Australia. We also do a lot of business online.

“We have people who come down from a lot of the film studios. They come up from London and rifle through our warehouse and basically choose things that they might like. They take a lot of the furniture to use as props in a lot of movies.”

“The shows are driving considerable growth. Up until last year, it was a slow organic growth but now it’s started to explode a little. We launched a new website in 2016, which helped phenomenally. “And we’ve been able to see the link between new business and our appearance at shows. When we attend an event, people see the product, pick up a leaflet and tend to buy soon after. A lot of orders come in post-shows.” The company has 25 staff and a bright prospect. And Christo gets to carry on doing what he’s always loved most – travel, create new products and sell. He’s at the Shropshire company’s base practically every day. His main focus remains product development – he loves to invent new products then take those ideas back out to India.



Keeping warm on the set of BBC's Autumn Watch – the hosts huddle around a firebowl



Kadai firebowls range from a £20,000 centrepiece to something more suited to the garden



Brian Seymour with the SMI Back Stop product

Things heat up for SMI

Thermal insulation specialist Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI) has expanded into larger premises as it prepares to launch new products and clinch fresh export deals.

The award-winning company has relocated from Sutton Maddock to the former Sensotherm unit on the Stafford Park industrial estate in Telford. The move has already created two new jobs – with the hope of more to follow.

Founder and managing director, Brian Seymour, said: "These sophisticated, and much larger premises are key to the exciting plans we have at SMI for more product launches, and continued expansion."

"We are currently in talks to set up new trading links with Saudi Arabia and Russia over the next few months, as our business goes from strength-to-strength."

"Our new home is custom-built to a very high standard with much better staff facilities, and also gives us scope for further expansion, with extra building land."

SMI is the company behind Temprowall, the lightweight thermal insulation material which has been scientifically proven to cut energy loss by 25 per cent in chillers, and 33 per cent in freezers.

It is a world leader in thermal insulation for the protection of food, chemicals, agricultural and home delivery products, serving a diverse range of sectors from supermarkets and pharmaceuticals to blood banks, and the Ministry of Defence.

SMI's customer base is a who's who of top names, including Waitrose, Morrisons, Asda, Greggs, the Co-op, Tesco, Sainsbury's, Marks & Spencer, and Lidl.

One of SMI's most recent innovations is Back-Stop, a family of insulated flexible barriers designed to reduce energy loss from the back of a chilled or frozen vehicle.

Mr Seymour said: "We are all excited about what the next chapter holds for SMI. Brexit creates wonderful opportunities for British businesses to sell their products all over the world. And we intend to increase the proportion of our products which we assemble right here in the UK. It's a win-win situation for everyone."

Town welcomes Japanese eatery



Mike Matthews, Charlotte Nutting and Toby Shaw prepare for the Japanese restaurant

A restaurant unit in the heart of Shrewsbury, owned by the same team as the historic Prince Rupert Hotel, is due to open as a specialist Japanese eatery following several years during which it has stood empty.

Formerly the "La Trattoria" Italian restaurant on Fish Street, the unit has been owned by Mike Matthews, owner of the nearby Prince Rupert Hotel, for over 20 years. It has, however, stood empty since 2012 and with the economic downturn, Mike felt it unwise to launch another restaurant until the market had picked up and stabilised. He explains:

"When the unit was run as La Trattoria, we had a larger than life character at the helm and this helped enormously in maintaining the success of the business. Simply, without him the options for a successful business when the market was experiencing a downturn were less favourable."

"Shrewsbury has, however, enjoyed considerable growth in its night-time and hospitality economy in recent years and when we decided to once again let the Fish Street site, we secured a new tenant very quickly."

Legal advice on the lease was provided by Charlotte Nutting of FBC Manby Bowdler's commercial property team, and the marketing of the site was managed by Toby Shaw of Taylor Shaw Roberts who secured a 15-year lease with a tenant who

already runs a Japanese restaurant in London and 12 across Japan.

The unit is now undergoing a thorough re-fit which will see it dramatically transformed before its relaunch.

Shrewsbury-based FBC Manby Bowdler solicitor, Charlotte Nutting said: "In recent years, Shrewsbury has grown in to a first-class destination offering restaurants and bars that easily rival the very best UK cities. It is, therefore, hugely gratifying to have worked with Mike and Toby to agree the details of the new lease on this prime location unit."

"The new lease holders were especially keen to make their first UK investment outside of London in Shrewsbury given the unique character of the town and made clear that they wanted to make a long-term commitment to the area."

Whilst it's unusual for independent restaurant operators to express a lasting interest in a new location, the lease negotiations were all straightforward and as Mike adds, he had every confidence in the FBC Manby Bowdler team.

"I've known Charlotte and her team for many years and always turn to them for my property needs – both business-related and personal, says Mike."

"They provide sensible, honest advice and are very responsive to my needs. Indeed, I am now looking at engaging them on some HR and personnel needs that I have through my business at the Prince Rupert. Quite simply, this demonstrates my confidence in them handling my legal needs other than just those relating to property."

Once the new restaurant is launched, it is anticipated that it will create at least 10 full and part-time jobs.



Paul Hinkins, with Gerry Jewson, at the Halesfield site

Jobs joy thanks to rejuvenation work

A project to transform a dilapidated four-hectare site in Telford into a state of the art industrial facility could provide up to 240 jobs, starting with those in construction – thanks to £720,000 of financing from the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

In the first deal of its kind in the region, the LEP's pioneering Marches Investment Fund has provided the loan to Mold-based developer, Dicentra, so that the former Brintons carpet factory on Halesfield, can be brought back into productive economic use.

Paul Hinkins, deputy chair of the Marches LEP and Chair of the Telford Business Board, said the loan was the first to be made to the private sector from the fund, which has more than £4 million available to support projects.

He said: "We are tremendously excited to see this project come to fruition. We

are delighted that through our Marches Investment Fund, we have been able to support Dicentra in making this transformation happen.

"The LEP is focused on how it can support the private sector to build businesses and create jobs and the Marches Investment Fund is a very real way of doing this. We know that support of this kind where finance can facilitate stalled projects to move forward, is exactly what businesses keen to grow are looking for in the current economic climate."

"In addition to bringing commercial schemes to fruition, the fund can also be used by housebuilders looking to complete schemes and, through loan assistance, by projects needing to complete their final stage feasibility studies."

The challenge was to transform over two acres of steeply sloping ground into one of Telford's largest and most modern yards.

Thousands of tonnes of soil have been removed so that up to 6,000 sq m of disused industrial floor space could be commercially developed and as Dicentra director Gerry Jewson explains, the £720,000 loan, and the competitive interest rates, made a huge difference to the project.

"The loan funding that we received

meant that this project was able to move forward when it did.

"Whilst we had secured interest from a tenant, without a tenancy agreement signed we were prevented from considering more traditional funding options – the Marches Investment Fund provided a solution to this."

With a significant amount of levelling off work completed, including a significant cut and fill exercise, a yard in which deliveries can now be done in a safe and efficient manner has been achieved.

Mr Jewson added: "The application process was straight forward and the support received from the Marches LEP team throughout the whole process has been invaluable."

"The competitive loan rate was not only attractive from a commercial perspective, but it's also been reassuring to know that the interest charges will go to further benefit the local community."

Interest payments from the scheme go back into the loan funding pot, which is also further boosted by a share of receipts from sales of development land in Telford – an agreement negotiated as part of the Marches LEP's Growth Deal with Government in 2014.

National retailer finds Church Stretton home

Up to 10 new jobs will be created in Church Stretton when a national retailer moves into the town.

The former Scrappies recycling store in Lutwyche Court, Lutwyche Road, has been let to The Original Factory Shop, which has 220 stores around the country.

The 6,085 sq ft building, has been let on behalf of Church Stretton Consolidated Charities by Halls.

Mark Dodington, acquisitions manager for The Original Factory Shop, said the company would be making a significant investment to refurbish the building before opening in either February or March.

"We will be employing in the region of six to 10 people," he added.

"Church Stretton has everything that we want, which is a good mix of independent shops and a good, solid food store.

"We are a multi merchandise retailer which offers very good value to customers and we would like to find a lot more sites like Church Stretton but that's quite a challenge. Expansion is a priority for the company and we will consider any good opportunity to open new stores in small market towns in the next financial year."

The Original Factory Shop's nearest store to Church Stretton is in Leominster.



The former Scrappies recycling store in Church Stretton will be The Original Factory Shop

Paul Stephens, chairman of Church Stretton Consolidated Charities, is delighted that James Evans from Halls Commercial, who lives in the town, has managed to attract a national retailer.

"We are very pleased that a national company is taking the building in one lease and this will help us to reinvest in the community over many years," he said. "This was a good deal for everyone and every part worked together.

"Scrappies has moved to smaller

premises in the town which has given them an opportunity to readjust and the charity is now in a good position and James has found us a national retailer to move in.

Hopefully, The Original Factory Shop will attract more visitors to Church Stretton."

Mr Evans said the letting of the building was "great news" for Church Stretton and was one of a series of deals that Halls Commercial was hoping to complete during what promised to be a record December for the Shrewsbury-based company.

Church is set to get a different use

New life is set to be breathed into a Grade Two listed former Shrewsbury church which is up for sale for £300,000.

Commercial agents Halls say The Congregational Church, Coton Hill, is suitable for a variety of alternative uses, subject to planning consent. Existing planning consent allows retail use.

The deconsecrated church extends to 5,953 square feet – 3,724 sq ft on the ground floor and 2,228 sq ft on the first floor – and comes with eight car parking spaces.

Built in 1909, the brick church served one of the suburbs of Shrewsbury and incorporates significant stone detailing with an Italianate style clock tower.

Meanwhile, in another Halls deal, a three-in-one business between Shrewsbury and Welshpool comprising a village convenience store, off license and Post Office has come onto the market for £50,000.

The store has a sales area of 562 sq ft with a rear stores and welfare facilities. The property is fitted out as a post office and convenience stores and is served by a large car park.

Current owner Harry Blugher says he's looking for a buyer who will continue



Halls say The Congregational Church, Coton Hill, is suitable for a variety of alternative uses

to grow the business at Halfway House Stores, Halfway House, which has been open six days a week from 7.30am to 7pm.

Mr Blugher, who will continue his ownership of the adjoining Tony's Diner, is selling Halfway House Stores to investigate another business opportunity.

He said extending the front of the store, doubling the stock and the customer

friendly opening hours had contributed to the growth of the business.

"The extension has enabled us to keep more stock in the shop and it now looks more like a convenience store that customers take seriously," he added.

"I want a buyer who is going to take the shop forward and who pays the rent on time."

Story time just got interesting

A new children's book shop, with a café and basement events rooms for storytelling and parties, has opened in Shrewsbury town centre.

Button and Bear, in Thornes Hall, Castle Street, is a family enterprise run by Louise and Jon Chadwick and their four daughters, Emma, Becky, Lucy and Ellie. They also employ four part-time staff.

The shop has a small activities area for parents and children who want a break from shopping, while downstairs there is a woodland themed room for storytimes, rhymes and special events.

Button and Bear leased the shop, which has a sales area of 895 sq ft and a lower basement area of 698 sq ft, through commercial agents Halls' Shrewsbury office. The shop was marketed with a rent of £18,000 a year.

Louise, a former director of programmes for the Book



The woodland themed room in the basement of Button and Bear

Trust for nine years, gave up the London-based post two years ago to study for a degree in occupational psychology at the University of Wolverhampton.

"It's a complete change of pace to my previous work with the Book Trust, but I love it," said Louise.

"The challenge of something new is great and our shop is in a great location with a lot of footfall.

"The growth area in books is the children's market with a focus on picture books and highly illustrated books.

"Despite the rise in e-book, parents are still keen to buy physical books for their children to read.

● In another deal marketed by Halls, a personal fitness business based in Halesfield, Telford, has celebrated its first birthday by opening its second studio in Shrewsbury as part of a five-year drive to expand into 150 locations nationwide.

HITZone owners Stuart Cain and Jodi Ambrose are working closely with licensee Christine Heath to establish the new studio at Sweetlake Business Park, in Longdon Road.

Christine has let the 1,614 square foot, end of terrace, single storey unit.

It has designated car parking spaces, and Christine says she is hoping to initially build membership to 50.

Telecoms company relocates

A telecoms firm is targeting a record year of growth after relocating to new offices in the heart of Oswestry's business district.

Ocean Telecom has moved to a 1,700 sq ft office on Mile Oak Industrial Estate as part of an expansion drive that is targeting more than £1.8 million in contracts by the end of 2017.

The company, a provider of business mobile, landline, broadband and hosting, has a 12-strong team of sales, technical and administration staff at its new premises.

Ocean Telecom has enjoyed huge growth since it was founded in 1997 and now looks after big-name north Shropshire clients including Pentons Haulage, Fullwood, The Orthopaedic Hospital, The Fort and Hawk Group.

Jeremy Rose, managing director of Ocean Telecom, said: "This is a great move for our business and gives us the independence and space to grow."



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Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital and Culture More households and businesses will be able to benefit in the months to come

Acting Superfast to connect a county

Access to broadband frequently features as one of the most important issues for Shropshire businesses – particularly those who are based in the most rural or remote corners of the county.

The Superfast Telford broadband partnership has celebrated the achievement of two important milestones.

More than 2,000 homes and businesses across the borough are now able to access faster fibre broadband as a result of the partnership, which connected the first premises in Dawley just over 12 months ago.

Other areas of the borough to benefit so far include Lawley and Oakengates.

In addition, households and businesses in Ironbridge, Lightmoor, Rodington and Waters Upton have been able to access fibre broadband for the first time as a result of the Superfast Telford roll-out.

Local residents Emma and Edward Thomas were among the first to opt for an upgrade when fibre broadband went 'live' in Waters Upton.

Emma, a senior executive in an international financial services firm, said: "We wanted high-speed broadband in order for us both to be online at the same time, and because we often need to connect a number of different devices to the internet. It has made a huge difference to us since we upgraded in May.

"Having access to this kind of technology means we can live in the countryside but be as connected as if we were in the city.



The Superfast Telford broadband partnership is celebrating milestones

"I think it is very important that people like us can work from home and not have to travel miles to work every day or even have to move back to the city to do our jobs.

"These days we do everything online, especially since having our baby in July. Being able to do things like internet banking and shopping makes things a million times easier, especially in the run-up to Christmas.

"We also use iplayer a lot for downloading and catching up with TV. But the new service is also fast enough to stream live content as it happens rather than having to download overnight."

Lead partners on the Superfast Telford project are Telford & Wrekin Council and BT.

Matt Hancock, Minister of State for Digital and Culture, said: "Fast, reliable broadband is no longer a luxury but a necessity.

"Superfast speeds will bring significant benefits to people in Telford and Wrekin

– helping them to do business, access public services and connect with family and friends in a simpler and quicker way.

"It's great to hear more than 2,000 homes and businesses are now able to connect and I hope many more will follow."

Councillor Angela McClements, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for Customer and Neighbourhood Services, said: "As the roll-out continues even more households and businesses will be able to benefit in the coming weeks and months thanks to the terrific work of the project team.

"It's important to remind people that upgrades do not happen automatically. Once an area has gone 'live', households and businesses who want to take advantage of the many benefits, like the Thomas family, need to opt for an upgrade through their chosen fibre broadband provider."

Ian Binks, BT's regional manager for the West Midlands, said: "Faster fibre broadband is changing the way people communicate, learn and do business.

"Whether you're updating a website, researching the internet for homework or using it for catch-up TV – everything is easier, better and faster if you use fibre broadband, especially at this busy time of the year."

By the end of 2017, around 9,300 households and businesses will have access to fibre broadband, with 8,800 of them able to get 'superfast' download speeds of 24 megabits per second (Mbps) and above.

All the latest information on the programme can be found on the partnership's website by visiting www.superfast-telford.co.uk

The site includes a map searchable by postcode where people can sign up to receive updates.

Keep an eye on the Horizon



The big advantage of the hosted system Horizon is that there is no hardware on site, except for handsets, and it has an easy to configure web-based portal so is ideal for multi-site businesses and home workers alike



Hosted phone systems were one of the big technology success stories of 2016 and I predict their popularity continuing to boom during the coming year.

Our company recently reported a huge surge in sales of hosted 'VoIP phones', which carry calls over the Internet, and these are now the fastest growing systems in the UK.

There has been exceptional expansion in this sector in the last 12 months, and as we have now developed into a specialist in this area we are finding that hosted phone

services now form a very substantial part of our business.

The big advantage of our hosted system, Horizon, is that there is no hardware on site except for handsets and it has an easy to configure web-based portal so is ideal for multi-site businesses and home workers, giving firms of all sizes the features and benefits of big expensive corporate systems within a user-friendly online portal.

It means you can take your number wherever you go!

The entire system is then centralised in the cloud, meaning it can be accessed from anywhere with an internet connection in the event of a disaster and there are no on-going maintenance costs.

We cover site survey, installation and all UK landline and mobile calls, as well as features such as call recording and auto attendant, in a simple monthly licence fee.

Plans can be created for different circumstances, such as bank holidays or unexpected office closures, and calls can be diverted or twinned with employee smartphones to be answered away from their desks.

A hosted phone system is particularly

good for companies with home-based or 'on the road' employees as it means that calls to their direct dial or office extension numbers can be seamlessly diverted to their mobiles, making contact easier and quicker for customers and ensuring that the employees feel an integral part of the company team.

The system is also ideal expanding and developing to suit a company's changing needs.

Local companies who have recently had Pure's Horizon system installed included Pipekit, Beaumont Lawrence, Miller Evans and Nick Jones Wealth Planning, which is based on Shrewsbury Business Park and has business and private clients across the country.

Principal Nick Jones said: "My initial reservations regarding the quality of calls on a VoIP system have proven unfounded.

"Now we have a much more professional system, allowing many more calls in and out simultaneously leading to a great experience for our clients and much more productive time for the team making and receiving calls."

● Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom in Shrewsbury



Communicating business in an ever-changing world

Deal with people and organisations that speak to you plainly. If they try to blind you with their technical prowess from the outset how are you going to handle them when there are tricky issues in the relationship?

The pace of change in communications is staggering. In a handful of years the ways businesses talk to their customers, and to each other, have altered beyond all recognition compared to decades of what came before – and the revolution rolls on relentlessly.

The rest of what it takes to run a business hasn't necessarily changed so much. There's still always the morass of red tape to wade through, never-ending HR matters to deal with, record keeping (including constantly changing requirements) and, oh yes, still your actual product or service to be delivered.

That being the case, expecting hard-working business owners and senior managers to keep up with the latest evolution in social media or digital marketing is a big ask.

This, in turn, makes it hard to evaluate the people you will need to bring in to deliver those essential elements of modern marketing, whether in-house or on an agency basis.

There's an interface of communications



techniques with cutting-edge technology that makes it possible for people with only a bit of knowledge (and jargon) to run rings around you.

I know that's slightly cynical, but recent experience has highlighted to myself and my colleagues that it's exactly what is happening on a daily basis to many businesses and organisations we come into contact with.

It's really easy to get lost in a blizzard of sales pitches and conflicting advice when you start to look around for providers, but there is a route through that should see you into clear air, where you can discern the wheat from the chaff.

It comes back to basic business principles and good practice:

- Deal with people and organisations that speak to you plainly. If they try to blind you with their technical prowess from the outset how are you going to handle

them when there are tricky issues in the relationship?

- Ask for references. If they can deliver on their promise, someone they already work for won't be shy in letting you know that.

- Use their tools on them. If someone claims to be an expert in search engine optimisation, see if they've got their own website good search engine exposure... If it's pay-per-click advertising, are they achieving good positioning for themselves or other clients? And look them up on social media * How are they engaging? What's their tone of voice? Do they feel like a good advocate for your business?

- Check any claimed credentials. It's not essential to use suppliers who sign-up to industry schemes, but if they claim to be, for instance, a Google Partner, check them out in the Google Partners directory. There are many who claim to be who are not.

It might feel like a wild frontier sometimes, but the communications revolution is actually as much subject to the rules of good business practice as any other.

Approach it like that and you can avoid beating yourself up that you're not down with the geeks!

- *Mark Waugh is managing director of Be Bold Media Ltd, based in Newport, and a former daily newspaper online editor*



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It all adds up to an interesting year ahead



Last year ACCA conducted research looking at the future of the profession and the shifting business demands that would shape the role of accounting

Accountancy professionals have spelled out a three-pronged plan which they believe will help their sector to succeed in 2017.

John Williams, head of the Association of Certified Chartered Accountants, says a focus on skills reflects the increasingly vital role professional accountants play in the wider UK economy.

He says: "The unpredictability of political events in 2016, and how they can have dramatic impacts on the future of trade and regulations, has really focused attention across business on the need for forward-looking strategic finance professionals at the very heart of firms."

"This year also comes with fresh uncertainties, whilst the promised start of Brexit negotiations in the spring means that the UK government will be relying on the insights and expert guidance of accountants on a scale rarely seen before."

The ACCA is urging policy-makers, business leaders and professional accountants alike to place these three issues right at the top of their priority list.

Securing the skills pipeline

Accountancy professionals will form the bedrock of reliable financial advice as the government triggers Article 50 and enters in to negotiations in 2017, the ACCA says. As students are counted within migration targets and the certainty of freedom of movement remains in doubt, universities' enrolments from EU students could take a hit. Prevention rather than cure will be key in ensuring businesses aren't hit by a dearth of skilled workers further down the line. The

priority for the coming year must be opening up pathways into professional careers, such as accountancy, for the next generation. Apprenticeships will play a key role here.

John Williams says: "The success of apprenticeship will depend very much on both demand and supply. Demand needs to be generated at all levels if apprenticeships are to succeed in opening up new and high quality career pathways. However, there is some way to go on this. Recent market research conducted by YouGov on behalf of ACCA found that one in three students between the age of 16 and 18 had not received careers advice on apprenticeships at all."

"Offering more apprenticeships and improving the visibility of alternative routes in to professional careers for those who are unsure about graduate routes, will lay the foundations for a diverse, highly-skilled talent pool when we need it most."

Promoting transferable skills on offer within apprenticeship routes

Many Shropshire businesses are preparing for the incoming Apprenticeship Levy which will see many businesses contribute to and draw down upon funding to open up more apprenticeship places for school leavers.

However, recent ACCA research found that half of all respondents felt an apprenticeship would limit their career path flexibility further down the line.

John Williams says: "Although apprenticeships offer direct routes into specific sectors the schemes are engineered to offer a range of transferable skills. In many cases these routes instil leadership and project management capabilities, financial management skills and improved communication abilities."

"It is vital that opening up apprenticeship placements is not seen simply as a way to offset levy payments but as a practical way to arm students with the transferable skills required to succeed and add value to businesses across the board."

Build on skills to address rapidly changing business needs

As well as preparing for the workforce of the future, ACCA's wish-list highlights the need for the continued professional development of accountancy professionals as they offer a steady hand as firms deal with a shifting business landscape.

Last year ACCA conducted research looking at the future of the profession and the shifting business demands that would shape the role of accounting professionals.

The report found that shifting business expectations alongside globalisation and digital connectivity agendas would require accountants to 'step out of the back room' and develop the creative, emotional and digital skills to have a hand in shaping business strategy, particularly as companies prepare for instability during Britain's exit from the EU.

John Williams says: "Accountancy professionals must gear up for years of uncertainty and build upon existing competencies to offer trusted, technically advanced advice as businesses prepare to navigate changing trade relationships, new regulatory environments and put together reliable financial forecasts."

"With big changes comes opportunity. Professional accountants have a critical role to play in ensuring businesses are able to navigate the uncertainty ahead and seize the opportunities that will arise along the way."

Peter's honorary membership

Shropshire businessman Peter Starbuck has become just the third person in history to be awarded honorary membership of the Drucker Society Europe.

The society studies and celebrates the works of Austrian-born management consultant, educator, and author Peter Drucker, often described as 'the father of modern management'.

His writings contributed to the philosophical and practical foundations of the modern business corporation.

Professor Starbuck, from Oswestry, has written extensively on Drucker in his own right as well as making contributions to other leading management books, and his thesis on Drucker is the only one lodged with the British Library.

The Drucker Society Europe meets every year in his home city of Vienna, and Professor Starbuck, who was chairman and managing director of construction company WSJ Group from 1966 to 1987, has attended all eight gatherings.

He said: "I first became aware of the work of Peter Drucker in the mid-1970s, when I read Drucker's Management: Tasks, Responsibilities and Practices. I related practically to his ideas and was an immediate convert."

"Hailed by BusinessWeek as the man



Award - Professor Peter Starbuck

who invented management, Drucker has directly influenced a huge number of leaders from a wide range of organisations.

"Studying and applying Drucker's ideas can help organisations to succeed, and in particular avoid the mistakes of the past - whether they are private, public or charitable."

"Each year the Forums gain in content and reputation. The number of world-recognised contributors increases, resulting in increased attendances of delegates from

around the world. This year they numbered 540, the maximum that the venue could accommodate.

"Why so many want to attend is not only to talk to world-class specialists, but to take away their messages to reflect upon."

Messages brought back by Professor Starbuck from the latest Vienna trip included:

- Marketers must continually check with their customers if they are receiving the products and services they want, which may not be what the supplier is providing. This relates to Drucker's purpose of an organisation, to 'create a customer'.

- The greatest challenge for a small to medium sized business is succession; children of the founder don't often have the same burning desire to succeed as their parents.

- Computer science has changed the way we work and think, as it has developed from the expensive exclusive mainframe of the mid-1940s to today's smartphone, which give access to all corners of the world where electricity can be generated. What should not be forgotten however, is that the modern day mainframe has also undergone continual development and is still central for major systems.

Professor Starbuck said: "The theme of the Forum was The Entrepreneurial Society and how it affects all our lives and organisation."

"We were told to treat change as a natural process, which was termed 'activism', rather than defend the present."

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First for store is set to be an annual event

The first Charity Christmas Market to be held at a county furniture store was hailed as a success – and will become an annual event.

The two-day event hosted solely for charitable organisations was held at Alan Ward in Shrewsbury.

A total of 20 charities set up their stands

and sold their Christmas gifts and cards or offered an activity for the children during the event, whilst performers entertained shoppers.

Store manager Andrea Cutler said: "The atmosphere at our first Charity Christmas Market was excellent – the children who gave up their time to sing or perform

throughout the weekend were exceptional.

"The charities all seemed to enjoy the event and we hope it helped boost their funds this year.

"We hope this is the start of a programme of events to be held in the space and we will be welcoming the charities back to give us their feedback."

Help given to our rural communities



The Rural Charity is a new arm of the Shropshire and West Midlands Agricultural Society

There's a new name on Shropshire's high streets after a county-based charity opened its first ever set of shops.

The Rural Charity is a new arm of the Shropshire and West Midlands Agricultural Society, and has opened furniture and household shops in Shrewsbury, Wem and Oswestry.

The shops were formerly operated by Relate and closed when the Shropshire branch of the charity ran into difficulty in October.

But they are now open again under the new banner of The Rural Charity, selling second-hand furniture and other items, with all profits going to help farming and the rural community of Shropshire.

Society director, Ian Bebbington, said: "We have had a fantastic start.

"The shops were already well-established and we have kept the majority of staff and volunteers to help with the continuity.

"The society has never done anything like this before so it has been a steep learning curve for us, but it's going really well so far.

"The aim of the shops is to provide extra income so we can do more work to support the rural community in Shropshire – which is exactly what the society was established to do in 1875.

"We want to be able to make donations to people who need retraining or financial support, as well as being able to help the society's supported schemes such as the Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution and the National Young Farmer's organisation."



Cindy Wilday from Go Carz is pleased to assist Telford Juniors Disabled Academy

Assistance for minibus

A Shropshire taxi firm has stepped in to support a junior disabled football academy – meaning the group can now take to the road in a new minibus.

Telford Juniors Disabled Academy set about fundraising for the new vehicle after targeting the need of a minibus to get them to away games and tournaments.

The group was set up about four years ago and claims to be the biggest of its kind in operation. But large transport costs needed every time they needed to travel, it

was decided that it was necessary to have their own vehicle.

Shropshire's largest private hire firm, Go Carz, was contacted by the club and agreed to help sponsor the project with a donation of £250.

Cindy Wilday, the firm's area director, said: "Telford Juniors Disabled Academy do an amazing job. They have grown over the last four years and are no longer restricted to helping disabled people, they have now extended that to include people from under-privileged backgrounds.

"They have been raising funds to buy a minibus and then they needed to insure and tax it, so it was quite a fundraising exercise for them."

Donating to worthy causes

Generous staff at a Shropshire insurance brokers gave an early Christmas present to a whole host of charities thanks to their fund-raising efforts.

The team from Henshalls in Newport and Shrewsbury have raised £1,000 in the last 12 months from a wide range of activities. And now, they have shared their charity totals between several local and national causes.

Elsa Mackay, who co-ordinates the company's fund raising initiatives, said: "The charities were chosen as many of us have been supported by the organisations themselves, or we're connected to them in some way, or they are causes that we all just feel very strongly about.

"It's great to have been able to split the amount we've raised and donate equally to each of our chosen recipients."

Each month Henshalls staff donate money from their salary through their staff tote scheme, and those payments have gone to: Midlands Air Ambulance, Cuan Wildlife Centre, Diabetes UK, and JDRF charity.

"We've also raised additional cash by organising events including dress down days and cake sales, and those donations have gone to: The Harry Johnson Trust, Newport Food Bank, Hilbrae Rescue Kennels, Severn Hospice, Rotary Club of Newport to help Newport First Responders, Guide Dogs for the Blind, and the Hillside Animal Sanctuary.

"And it's not just the money we've raised – we've also donated unwanted blankets, quilts and towels to Hilbrae Rescue Kennels to support the dogs while they wait to be rehomed," said Elsa.



Nina Evans and Elsa Mackay from Henshalls pictured with some of the charity donations

Carol service raises £500 for local hospice



The congregation at the FBC Manby Bowdler carol service held at Shrewsbury School's chapel

A carol service organised by a Shropshire law firm raised £500 for Severn Hospice.

Around 150 clients, representatives from local businesses and other organisations joined staff from FBC Manby Bowdler at its annual service in Shrewsbury School's chapel.

FBC Manby Bowdler organises the event every year to mark the start of the festive season and support a local charity.

The firm's staff choir played a starring role, leading the singing during the service. The 20-strong choir is made up of partners, solicitors, paralegals and administrative and support staff and meets regularly.

Senior partner Niall Blackie said: "We were delighted to have so many clients, staff

and their families joining us for this festive occasion.

"The carol service is one of the highlights in the FBC Manby Bowdler calendar and marks the end of a very successful year for the firm.

"We would like to thank everyone for their support of Severn Hospice, which does such great work supporting young people with life limiting illnesses and their families."



Many analysts feel the election of Trump ought to – in theory – be in Britain’s favour in terms of striking a trade deal with America

A special relationship?

Businesses just don’t know what to make of Donald Trump right now. One minute he’s a staunch supporter of Brexit, the next he’s standing by silently while his right-hand trade chief urges other countries to take advantage of the EU exit by moving out.

In the two months between confounding his critics and being sworn in as the 45th president of the United States, Donald Trump has tweeted, preached and procrastinated his way to unsettling almost everyone.

So what exactly does his victory mean for Shropshire companies in 2017, and beyond?

Many analysts feel the election of Trump ought to – in theory – be in Britain’s favour in terms of striking a trade deal with America in a post-Brexit world.

But that would be on the presumption that his policies will be consistent, not contradictory . . . and who feels they can guarantee that right now?

Trump was a big supporter of Brexit, and unlike Barack Obama, he insisted Britain would not be “at the back of the queue” for a trade deal.

But relations with Downing Street are hardly cordial. Before leaving No 10, David Cameron described Trump as “divisive, stupid and wrong” – and don’t forget, the heated Parliamentary debate over whether to ban him from visiting the UK.

Some economists warn his threats of tariffs could hurt American industries that depend on international supply chains,



Rob Whittall runs the US office of Dyke Yaxley. He believes Trump will take a far more moderate approach and will be supported by a strong team

and trigger a harmful trade war which could shrink globalisation and cut business opportunities for partners such as UK.

Outside the EU, the US is the UK’s biggest export market, with a fifth of UK goods and services sent to the world’s biggest economy, equivalent to 6% of the UK’s GDP.

The majority of Shropshire business comments on Trump’s victory have been expressing either astonishment, exasperation, and disappointment.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce chief executive Richard Sheehan described the result as ‘interesting’ but suggested it may actually lead to better trading relationships between UK and US companies. He is certainly not expecting the door to be suddenly slammed shut on transatlantic trade.

Salop Design and Engineering Director,

Christopher Greenough says: “He would not have been my vote, but neither was Brexit. I’m sure that he will have a lot of policy writers behind him.

“I think he will be looking for our special relationship to continue and, now we are not in Europe, that actually puts us in a better place. I think regardless of who was elected, the UK would have been at the front of the queue on any trade deals.”

The last word goes to Shropshire accountant Rob Whittall, who has a unique perspective. He runs the US office of accountancy firm Dyke Yaxley, based at Cleveland in the crucial ‘swing state’ of Ohio.

“I believe he will take a far more moderate approach as he indicated with his acceptance speech, and he’ll have a strong team behind him.

“I’m not concerned about Mr Trump as President because having someone in that position who has come from the world of business and not from a political background potentially could be great news for business.

“He understands what businesses need to run successfully and his policies could make real sense for business people.

“Running the country like a business rather than taking a political approach could be very good news indeed.”

Rob, whose work involves tax planning for UK and US businesses and high net-worth individuals, continues: “Far from being the catastrophe that many people seem to believe it is, Donald Trump’s election could be an opportunity for businesses in America and in the UK, and I’m looking forward to finding out more about his plans for the future.”

● *What do you think? Email editor@shropshirebiz.com with your views*

What direction for commerce?



Ashley Shackleton, head of public affairs for the British Chambers of Commerce

By Carl Jones

This could be a year of great opportunity for Shropshire businesses – but it’s also going to be a time of great uncertainty, with more questions than answers over the shape of post-Brexit Britain.

That’s the view of Ashley Shackleton, head of public affairs for the British Chambers of Commerce, who spelled out some of the big challenges facing the economy to a packed breakfast briefing in Shrewsbury.

Ashley heads up the political arm of the BCC, lobbying and commenting on behalf of more than 70,000 affiliated businesses.

His visit to the expo event at Shrewsbury Town Football Club, one of the big networking shows organised by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, was just one step on a big fact-finding roadshow.

“When I speak to people in Whitehall,

they ask me ‘What’s the view of business?’ and I’m always clear in saying that business doesn’t just have one view.

“That certainly wasn’t the case before the EU referendum, and it isn’t the case since. The size of a business and its geography play a part, but so too does their exposure to international markets.

“The last poll we did before the referendum showed 54% of our businesses said they would vote to remain, and 37% said they would vote to leave – certainly not overwhelming, but the majority for remain.

“And surveys since the referendum show that, like the rest of the population, people seem to have kept to the same views. It hasn’t really changed enormously.”

Ashley sees this as a ‘critical moment’, not just for the United Kingdom as a whole, but also for the long and proud history of the accredited chambers movement.

“I take my role very seriously in terms of engaging with Government, making them hear, and be very clear, about the issues we think are important, going into the next few years of transition.”

Prime Minister Theresa May’s signature phrase has become ‘Brexit means Brexit’.

Yet as the months have passed, there’s a feeling that it seems to mean less and less.

Ashley believes it has essentially bought her time to quickly assemble a new team in Government to begin the dauntingly complex task of putting the meat onto the bones of a Brexit strategy which they never expected to be having to write.

With Brexiteers in key roles, such as foreign secretary Boris Johnson, he says it has given her some ‘cover’ for whatever she eventually negotiates, knowing that in all probability she won’t be able to give the Leave campaigners every single item on their shopping list.

The next big milestone in the process is the triggering of Article 50 beginning our two-year Brexit process, and the publication of the Great Repeal Bill in parliament.

Ashley says: “One of the things we have been calling for is regulatory certainty.

“What do we do about a lot of the EU regulations if we leave the EU, for example?”

“This Great Repeal Bill will be converting a lot of these regulations into UK law, and from that point the Government can see whether any of them should be amended or scrapped.”



Ashley Shackleton recently attended a business expo held by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. Pictured at the event are Richard Sheehan, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Nick Jones, Corinne Brown, Paul Cook and Rebecca White

◀ "It is clear that there will be no off-the-shelf solution. The UK is looking for a bespoke relationship with the European Union."

So will it be the so-called 'soft Brexit' along similar lines to the arrangement with Norway – much like being a full EU member without being part of the decision making process, including free movement and membership of the single market and trade deals?

Will it be a nudge further down the line like Turkey, which has a customs union, and is unable to do its own unilateral trade deals?

Might we go for a simple free trade agreement along the Swiss model, which wouldn't include membership of the single market?

Or is it going to be the all-out 'hard Brexit', which means operating under World Trade Organisation rules.

Ashley says: "This hard Brexit is I think what all sides want to avoid, with potentially 10% tariffs on things like cars, and no single market access to services."

"But it would mean that we would have the ability as the UK to do free trade deals with other countries."

"It is important to say that if we stay in the European Economic Area, and in the customs union, we will not be able to do unilateral trade deals with third countries like the United States."

"There is a lot of talk about this, but actually we don't have the clarity enough to know whether the UK will have the ability to do those trade deals."

Since the referendum back in June, the BCC has been carrying out extensive research of its members, while getting to know new parliamentary teams, and taking part in round-table meetings with senior Government figures, including Chancellor Phillip Hammond.



Sue Steadman of RBS, Leah Whitley, Teresa Rowe, Angela Lewis of KRL and Justine Vaughan of Triangle HR at a Shropshire Chamber of Commerce event, attended by Ashley Shackleton

Areas of most concern among businesses, Ashley reports, include the impact on EU funding and regulations, and the future immigration status of EU nationals living and working in the UK.

"This is where we are focusing our policy attention. We have actually been very vocal about the status of EU nationals who are living and working here at the moment."

"Forget from a human level in terms of giving these people certainty who may have been living here for a number of years in good faith - we are actually telling the Government that this is bad for business."

"In all the survey work we have done over many years, skills is always one of the top issues, and they rely a lot on labour from EU nationals. The uncertainty at the

moment is not good for business. More needs to be done to bolster confidence and incentivise investment.

"Businesses very much look at the immediate future, and see the instability of the exchange rate as of critical concern. Depending on what business you are, a weaker pound could be good or bad, but we want a stable currency, not one that fluctuates."

Ashley says it's also crucial over the coming months that the Government is clear on exactly what businesses want – and need - from a post-Brexit Britain.

"The Government needs to learn about how they engage with business, to make sure they know exactly, in a quite detailed way, what we want as a country."



Ashley Shackleton is always vocal about the benefits the UK has trading on a global stage

"That means going systematically through sectors, and size of business, and quite a lot of engagement with ourselves, and other business bodies, to ensure that they know our views."

As the fifth largest economy in the world, and a global leader in areas such as finance, pharmaceuticals and aerospace, the UK picture is 'quite complex', he acknowledges.

It's vital, Ashley adds, to ensure that financial companies still feel able to be based in the UK – particularly bearing in mind that many Swiss banks currently have operations in London, merely to gain access to EU passporting rights.

And so, to the deal itself. Even when it's on the table, Ashley warns that it will be far from plain sailing to get the package ratified – as the Canadian trade deal with the EU has shown.

Many years in the making, it had to go through every single parliament of every single EU nation – and in some cases, their regional decision-making bodies too. Remember Wallonia . . . no-one outside Belgium had heard of the place until it tried to block the Canadian deal!

"You can see the problems that might arise from this. That unfortunately is a bit of a warning that any deal made between the EU and the UK may be extremely tricky."

"The practical side of supporting businesses – getting them exporting, is extremely important at this time. We actually need to put a lot more emphasis on that, even beyond our negotiations with the EU about what we are going to get, which is a few years down the line."

"There really is potential here for businesses to look to international markets to grow"

Ashley says he is seeing examples of companies now looking at export opportunities in South East Asia – something they hadn't been doing before the referendum result.

"Whitehall needs to change how it approaches things. We have a Department for International Trade which has been set up with the sole goal of going out there

and getting free trade agreements. This new department is going to have to work across Whitehall to get all the views, as well as with stakeholders, to make sure they negotiate on our behalf."

"The Government needs to always keep in mind what our economy needs. Is it just high skills, professors and scientists, or actually do we need low skills as well?"

The BCC has downgraded its growth forecast for the UK in 2017 to one per cent, rising to 1.8% in 2018. But Ashley acknowledges that the true picture of the economy's strength will only start to emerge once Theresa May triggers Article 50, and the exit door swings ajar.

He ends, though, on a positive note. "We are going through a period of great uncertainty, and through partnership with Government and chambers of commerce, there really is potential here for businesses to look to international markets to grow."

"We can all be very static through this uncertain period, but when we look back even at the last slowdown in 2007 and 2008 we hear great stories about businesses who were creative in that period, and saw opportunities where others didn't."

New grants up to £200,000 on offer from growth hub

The Marches Growth Hub is your single point of access to information on the vast range of support available to businesses in the region.

Whether you're interested in grant funding of up to £200,000, want to know what business networks are in your area or need help to start exporting, the business-friendly site, www.marchesgrowthhub.co.uk or helpline on 0345 6000 727 should be your first port of call.

Thousands of businesses have already taken advantage of the help on offer via the virtual hub, which offers up to date information on a range of issues from high

speed broadband and accessing finance to launching international trade programmes or finding commercial premises.

There's also information on the region's business networks, case studies from Marches' businesses which have taken advantage of some of the schemes and products on offer and a packed calendar of events aimed at supporting business growth.

The virtual hub's Support Finder tool is a great way to find specific business support products and services which apply to your business – wherever in the Marches you're based, and whatever sector you operate in. It's all about finding the relevant support for YOUR business.

As well as the virtual hub, hub sites operate in Shrewsbury and Telford, offering

a range of services, from face-to-face meetings with business advisors, hot desking facilities and meeting rooms for hire.

Marches Growth Hub Shropshire is co-located with Shropshire Chamber of Commerce at the Food Enterprise Centre at Battlefield Enterprise Park.

And Marches Growth Hub Telford & Wrekin is based at the University of Wolverhampton's Innovation Campus in Priorslee.

So whether you're thinking about starting-up, or if you're already running a business, no matter how small or large, or whatever size or sector you operate in, the Marches Growth Hub, developed by The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, is Your Gateway to Business Support.



Overseeing Wynnstay operations – chief executive Ken Greetham, whose leadership has coincided with sustained growth and stability

A century on and business is growing

It began 100 years ago as a farmers' co-operative. And in 1918, Wynnstay appointed its first general manager, the venerable Mr Joseph Henry Dowle.

A century on, the company has grown beyond all recognition. With head offices at Llansantffraid, on the west Shropshire border, Wynnstay presently employs more than 1,000 people.

It's listed on AIM, the London Stock Exchange's international market for growing companies, and its most recent accounts feature group revenues of £377million with a pre-tax profit of more than £9 million.

The man who oversees operations is chief executive Ken Greetham, a softly-spoken but redoubtably authoritative agricultural expert whose leadership has coincided with sustained growth and stability.

Wynnstay has developed during the past 15 years by making a series of shrewd acquisitions and expanding throughout most of the Midlands, all of Wales and into the North West, Yorkshire and the South West.

Wynnstay's centenary will be marked next year, and Mr Greetham is rightly proud that the company has grown from humble

By Chris Austin

origins to become a considerable force in the British agricultural sector.

"It is a milestone and we'll find a way to celebrate it," he says.

Yet the company's core business, supplying agricultural products and services in the rural economy, has changed little. It remains true to its founding fathers and also embodies some of the ethical principles laid down a hundred years ago.

It sees itself as part of the rural economy and invests heavily in developing strong business relationships with farmers. Wynnstay supports agriculturalists who face tough times brought about by global fluctuations because it knows that they will ride out the storm.

"The company was originally a farmers' co-operative and we are proud to have built the business around the farming community. Despite the fact that we are a plc and are on AIM, we have kept our focus on an agricultural level," he adds.

Wynnstay is a developed business with a broad base encompassing arable, ruminant and retail. Invariably, one of those sectors will outperform others as markets shift and there are fluctuations.

"The last couple of years have been particularly difficult for our farming

customers. But we have a broad base and we avoid being distracted by short term changes.

"The retail side has grown but we retain our agricultural focus. The retail sector, of course, provides a link back to the farming base."

Mr Greetham believes that farmers will recover from the challenges and setbacks that have been a part of their daily routine in recent times.

"We can see that the current issues in the agricultural climate are temporary. Recently, we've seen a little reprieve and the weakening of the pound has given a little lift. The long term macroeconomics are good for agriculture," he continues.

"The UK isn't as self-sufficient as it could be and strategically, therefore, agriculture is in a good place."

Self-sufficiency is an important issue. While the UK will never return to a high percentage – the fact that we drink so much tea and coffee, for instance, precludes that – there is alarm that we rely on other nations so much for our food and drink.

"I would say that as far as the Government is concerned, that is something that there should be a focus on. If we happen to have a poor harvest as a net importer, food inflation can take off very quickly. ▶



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◀ "Any island needs to make sure it has reasonable food resources for its growing population."

The impact of Brexit will have an effect on local farms, though the Government's failure to articulate a clear vision is cause for concern.

Farmers cannot adapt to the changes that will come because they do not know whether there will be tariffs for imports and exports.

"The EU remains a very important market to the UK. That doesn't mean we can't export further afield. But we will need tariff trade support or a good strong marketing campaign. At the moment, we don't know which way the Government will go."

Analysis of the international market helps to reveal new opportunities. The fact that we import 235,000 tonnes of poultry meat, for instance, means there are routes to market for those able to invest.

"It would be incredibly helpful to see the Government's direction of travel. But I think that on balance, we will see the industry becoming more market-led."

That shouldn't mean, however, that the market assumes complete control. Here in Shropshire, farmers are custodians of the countryside. Were it not for them, fields, hedges and watercourses might not be maintained. The pristine, undulating Shropshire landscape would soon deteriorate were it not for the invaluable

work of farmers, many of whom receive no reward for their efforts.

Mr Greatham believes the Government must give support to those who work in farming's less favourable areas.

"That support is needed to keep rural communities strong. Farmers are natural custodians of the countryside and the support mechanisms need to identify those areas. Milk and grain could be grown without a lot of support, but other areas need it."

A business as large as Wynnstay is exposed to numerous risk factors. Yet it has absolutely no control over one of the most significant of all; the good old British weather.

Milder autumns, hotter summers, wetter springs and shorter winters can have a profound effect on Wynnstay's grain and feed business. It can also be disquieting for farmers, who might lose a significant portion of their harvest. Mr Greatham is admiring of farmers who show considerable stoicism in the face of climatic change.

"I don't think we are yet seeing a climate change effect in our local farms but the weather is always an issue," he says. "We might have a March when some Shropshire farmers are a foot deep in snow or it might be sunny with spring lambs in the field."

"The variability of the weather is always a concern, although it's not as profound as in places like Russia, where a cold

snap can destroy everything. Our focus is on making sure we can supply farmers irrespective of the weather and our wide network of Country Stores helps us to provide that service."

The company is constantly investing. It recently spent £600,000 on a new bagging plant for bagged feed, which will be distributed through its network of stores.

Mr Greatham recognises the importance of efficiencies and of providing customers with high level expertise. "We have a network of people who can talk about specific farming issues and advise customers. We've also been very good at retaining staff. Every year we have the presentation of 25-year awards and there is a growing number of recipients. Our team is resilient and we now employ more than 1,000."

The company has a management structure in place with clear lines of communication.

A strong HR department also addresses any staff concerns. Mr Greatham maintains contact with those at the coal face.

"I'll actually be ringing all of our 52 Country Store managers today and I go to see them all once or twice a year. The people are the most important part of our business and I enjoy meeting them. I have to understand the nitty gritty. It's surprising what you pick up in general conversation. It is always helpful."



A bag of feed comes off the production line



The Wynnstay farm shop in Oswestry

The business keeps a firm grip of its balance sheet, not being distracted by short term fluctuations in market prices. The volatility of the agricultural sectors means prices can increase or decrease rapidly.

"We trade 1.5 million tonnes of raw materials and if they go up by, say, £50 a tonne, that's a massive inflation for us. So we have to monitor cash flow throughout the group to make sure we are in a position to withstand that."

"But I always say to people that we should not be judged by our revenues, which could change by 10-20%. We should be judged on our profits."

The group has a strong board with expertise in farming, business, banking and finance and business, through Jim McCarthy, formerly of Poundland. "They safeguard the interests of the shareholders, almost as much as the company itself."

With so many plates to keep spinning, Mr Greatham has little downtime. How does he relax? "I don't," and he laughs, just a little.

"Well, I don't switch off very much. We live on the Shropshire and Cheshire border. My family have grown and live away now so it's just myself, my wife and the dog."

"My weekends are in the home. I'm not a golfer or shooter but I am very involved in village activities. I'm a great advocate for strong rural communities."

Just like the business that he runs...



Wynnstay's impressive production facilities



Crop walking at an arable event



The Wynnstay brand is a familiar sight on Shropshire roads



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Apply for grant aid

Shropshire farmers are being encouraged to apply for grant aid, if they have any major development projects planned for 2017.

The rural professional team at Halls is encouraging farmers to consider applying for a grant from the Southern Shropshire LEADER programme.

The call comes after the company helped Shropshire contractor Andrew Phillips to diversify his thriving farming operation by buying a mobile wood chipping machine, a project part financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development.

Andrew and his wife run a 150-acre arable farm at Orchard Barn, Stapleton, near Shrewsbury as well as operating a successful agricultural contracting business. They spotted a gap in the market as many farmers now require wood chips for either livestock bedding or renewable energy.

Farm owners are currently buying in wood chips or sending timber for processing at great cost. Contract mobile wood chipping, which is a natural extension to services already provided by the business AJ and SE Phillips, helps farmers to control costs and contributes to woodland management across the county by enabling landowners to utilise home-grown timber in a sustainable way.

Andrew sought help from the rural professional team at Halls to complete his application for the LEADER grant, which is managed by Shropshire Council for the Rural Development Programme for England.

Both Louise Preece and Stuart Richards, based at Halls' headquarters in Shrewsbury, contributed to the process and said they were delighted to help secure the funding needed to buy the wood chipping machine.

"LEADER funding is made available to successful applicants who have a project that creates jobs, helps a local business grow and benefits the wider rural economy," explained Stuart.



Seen with the mobile wood chipping machine are Andrew Phillips (left) and Peter Banford of Shropshire Council, who manages the Southern Shropshire LEADER programme

"With another round of funding due to become available early in 2017, it's a good time for farmers, who have a business project in mind, to consider making a grant application."

Andrew has been involved in agriculture since the 1980s and has seen his contracting enterprise grow since 2007 to become the mainstay of his business.

The Southern Shropshire LEADER programme's next funding round opens closes on Monday, February 8, with future funding rounds open later in the year.

To date, the Southern Shropshire LEADER Local Action Group has approved

10 projects with a total grant allocation to date of £305,250.

Eligible projects receive between £2,500 and £40,000 and 70 per cent of them must directly support the rural economy, through creating and supporting micro and small rural businesses.

The remaining 30 per cent of projects must demonstrate that they are contributing to improving the rural economy.

• For more information about the LEADER application process, contact Stuart Richards at Halls on 01743 450700 or Peter Banford at Shropshire Council on 01743 254796.

Union asks for careful use of drones

The NFU is urging Shropshire farmers to voice their views after the government announced a consultation on the safe use of drones in the UK.

The team has welcomed the move and called for more protection for landowners affected by antisocial drone use.

Proposed measures being consulted on include mandatory registration of new drones over 250g, a theory test for users, increased penalties for misuse of the technology and potential new criminal offences to deter and address misbehaviour.

NFU vice president Guy Smith said:

"There are exciting developments in the pipeline for on-farm drone use, such as crop applications, which could keep British farming at the cutting edge and internationally competitive.

"However, we are also very aware of instances of irresponsible use of drones by members of the public and have already seen the first instances of sheep worrying by drones.

"We are calling for government to address this and are hopeful that any new legislation will introduce measures to

protect farmers and landowners from this behaviour.

"In any instance, we would stress to drone owners the importance of not flying near livestock, who react in very unpredictable ways.

"There is risk of causing distress to the animals, sometimes fatal, and it can lead to trampling.

"These actions impact greatly on farm businesses.

"We therefore urge that care is taken when flying in areas of farmland in particular."



Clwyd Evans, Mark Bramall and Sarah Hartshorn



Margaret Rowe and Christian Channer at the event



Derek Bennion and Chris Pallett at the Greenhous Meadow



Paul Bennett and Wesley Lovett at the breakfast meeting

Shropshire Business Partnership

Shropshire Business Partnership hosted a well-attended meeting at the Greenhous Meadow in Shrewsbury, where delegates enjoyed convivial chat and a full English breakfast.

They then listened with interest while Team Principal with the University of Wolverhampton's Formula 3 race team, Dave Tucker, explained the role of motor racing at the university and also how the students are benefiting from the £12 million investment in its engineering facilities.

Gill Hamer, director at Marches LEP, followed on by reflecting on the enormous investment in jobs and homes which the LEP has been overseeing over the last few years, and also its plans and challenges for developing future projects.



Jonathan Edwards, Dr Nicola Randall, Dan Mason and Jeremy Lloyd



Shropshire Business director Henry Carpenter with Amy Bould and Roy Broad



Teresa Boughey and Sarah Hartshorn



Helen Stones, left, seeks a second opinion



Winners – John and Joy Hindmarch, plus Debbie and Henry Carpenter with their trophy

Telford Business Partnership Quiz Night



And if you didn't know the answers, at least it was a great night out

Shropshire Business director Henry Carpenter led his team to victory in the annual 'Telford's Brainiest Business' quiz, held this year at the Buckatree Hall Hotel.

The event, which featured 15 teams, was organised by Telford Business Partnership to raise funds for this year's chosen charity, HomeStart Telford and Wrekin.

TBP board member Robin Melley said the event was a huge success, raising important funds for the chosen charity, with Barclays agreeing to match fund the proceeds, taking the total raised to over £1,200.



'I know it, I know I do....' Jan Minihane wracks her brain at the successful event



Old and Newey, featuring Andrew Mason



Thinking time for Shropshire Chamber



Julia Allinson, Teresa Rowe and Steve Maden



One of two teams from law firm Martin-Kaye



The Anglo-Welsh Marauders, featuring Tony Jemmett (right)



Marcus Trescothick and Laurie Riley at the charity event



Mark Bramall, Bob and Ellie Johnson



Keith Winter pictured with Mandy and Mark Thorn



Tony Elliott, Stacey Lea and Mark Griffiths

Dyke Yaxley Charity Dinner

Two well-known faces from the world of UK cricket were special guests at a charity dinner organised by a Shropshire accountancy firm.

Dyke Yaxley hosted the event at The Lord Hill Hotel, in Shrewsbury, where the guests of honour were former England Ashes winner Marcus Trescothick and the TV pundit they call 'The Analyst', Simon Hughes.

Thanks to the generosity of more than 80 guests at the dinner, the event raised £1,290 for Dyke Yaxley's two chosen charities – Severn Hospice and the Lingen Davies Cancer Fund.



Catherine Gough, Sue Fitzmaurice, Terry Jones and Rachel Wood



Margaret Radcliffe and Colin Ames



Cricketer Marcus Trescothick pictured at The Lord Hill Hotel, Shrewsbury



Michael Hannah, winner of the Shining Star apprentice award, with Ian Jones from sponsors Saint Gobain PAM UK



Outstanding Personal Achievement winner Samantha Harris from The Ideas Cupboard of Oswestry, with Claire McKeown of True Potential Hypnotherapy

Dyslexia Awards Event

A single mum from Shropshire who has spent 16 years championing the dyslexics of the county finally realised a dream by staging her first ever Dyslexia Awards.

Elizabeth Wilkinson moved to Shropshire when she was just four with her RAF serving parents when they retired from the forces and set up their own industrial commercial photography business in Telford.

In 2007, Eli's business, 'The Dyslexic Dyslexia Consultant' came into being after years of searching for much needed information, advice and guidance about dyslexia.

The 2016 Dyslexia Awards were held at Enginuity, part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums.



The 2016 Dyslexia Awards sponsors, at Enginuity, part of the Ironbridge Gorge Museums



The opening address for the 2016 Dyslexia Awards from Telford & Wrekin's mayor, Rae Evans



Innovation award winner Lindy Smith, of Lindy's Cakes, with the vice chair of the Federation of Small Businesses in Shropshire, Rachael Tyrell



Anton Gunter of Global Freight with the winner of the Shining Star secondary school prize, Mai Jones of Concord College



Best supportive employer winner Philip Minton, of K2 The Salon, pictured with award sponsor Philor Kay Heald

Parents topping-up the inadequate student loan

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



There's a hidden crisis hitting student finance. Not the oft quoted "£50,000 debt" – in practical terms that's mostly irrelevant, as it's repaid after university and only if you earn enough.

Instead, as many students have discovered after their first term, the real issue is the loan isn't big enough – specifically the maintenance loan for living costs.

One reason for this is that the amount given is means-tested dependent on parental income, and that means-testing has increased, but none of this is communicated to parents. So let me take you through it.

I should note I'm focusing on English loans for English students. In the rest of the UK, the funding is more generous.

How much are parents expected to give their children to go to uni?

Tuition fees are paid for students by



A student loan is more often than not topped up by parents to assist during university years

the Students Loan Company, and students are also eligible for a maintenance loan, both are repaid only after university, if the graduate earns enough.

Yet for almost every 18 to 25 year old, even though they are old enough to vote, get married, join the army and more, the amount of maintenance loan given depends on their parent's household 'residual' income.

This is their total income before tax but after pension contributions, and it's reduced by just over £1,000 if they already have a child at university (though most parents shell out far more).

The loan starts reducing at family income above just £25,000 and by £60,000 it's roughly halved. And it's implicit that the expectation's parents will make up the difference – known as the 'parental contribution'. Yet I think it should be made explicit.

Parents aren't told they need to contribute

Many parents and students I come across complain the loan isn't big enough, but when I tell them the Government factors in a set parental contribution, they're shocked. It's quite bizarre the government keeps this fact under the radar. So I've written an open letter to the Universities Minister Jo Johnson asking for the student loan entitlement letter to lay it out plainly, something like...

"Students – your loan for living is £4,000 a year, this is less than the full loan and we expect your parents to make up at least the £4,200 difference."

Transparency would help stop family friction, allow people to plan for the cost, and let

students budget effectively. However, my suspicion is governments have never told people before, as they know parents will angrily reply "I can't afford that".

For now, to work it out yourself, take the loan you get and subtract it from the maximum amount available.

For students starting this year, living away from home (not London) the maximum loan is £8,200.

I've done a full ready reckoner to help you work this out at www.mse.me/parentcontributions

The parental contribution has increased by 27%

In 2015 only 35% of the loan was means-tested, this past year it was over 50% – a huge rise.

If you combine this with slightly increased loans, many parents will be asked to pay £100s more than they would in a similar situation last year, with the increase as much as 27%.

Even adding the parental contribution on top it may not be enough

Even the full loan amount won't do much more than just pay the rent for many students, especially in expensive areas.

Of course, unlike when I went to university, when working at the same time was somewhat frowned upon, these days it's accepted – and indeed often encouraged by employers.

So if work is available, most students should grab it.

It's worth noting too, there's little students can do if their parents won't give the money. They can try to be declared 'financially independent', but for that you usually need to be over 25, or married or can prove independence for three tax years.

● Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of Money Saving Expert. To join the 10 million people who get his Martin's Money Tips weekly email, go to www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip



Think of a student loan as an additional tax

How do you repay the loans?

The loans for tuition and maintenance are rolled into one by the Student Loan Company. Then...

a) You repay from the April after leaving uni, via the payroll, just like income tax – but only if you earn £21,000 or more.

b) Repayments are set at 9% of everything above £21,000, regardless of how much you borrowed; so the more you earn, the more you repay each month.

c) The loan's wiped after 30 years – whether you've paid a penny or not. And most people will repay for this whole time, in fact my calculations show only those on a starting salary of roughly £35,000 plus and above inflation pay rises after are likely to repay their full loan and interest.

d) Interest is set at up to inflation plus 3% depending on what you earn. Though you only actually repay this if you earn enough afterwards to clear what you borrowed in full.

In fact, a far better way to get the feel for the cost of the loan is to think of it like an additional tax that stops if you repay it or for most people after 30 years. So earn over £21,000 and whereas most basic rate taxpayers pay 20%, recent graduates effectively pay 29%. For earnings over the higher rate tax band of £43,000 most people pay 40%, graduates 49%. It's one reason I campaign to have it renamed a 'graduate contribution' as other countries call our system. Calling it a loan is dangerous – it means our young people are educated into a 'debt' and then end up getting other types of much worse borrowing too.

For full info on how the student finance system works, including the fact the government has sadly changed terms for many students even after they started, see my full 20 student loan mythbusters guide at www.mse.me/StudentLoans.

Beware savings sentiment

Are you a sinner? Financially that is. There are a host of everyday money misdemeanours that millions of people do, costing them thousands, without being aware of it. These aren't horrors like grabbing a payday loan, but the result of simple misunderstandings, bad habits or inaction.

So having recently toured around the UK doing roadshows for my ITV show, I've collated five of the most common.

Saving while you've expensive debts

Savings rates are depressingly low – the top easy-access rate is 1%. Credit card and other interest rates are depressingly high. So £1,000 credit card debt at 18% costs it costs you £180 a year, the same amount saved in top paying savings account at 1% interest only earns you £10. If you had both, pay the debt off with your savings and you'd be £170 a year better off.

Many of you will be thinking, "but I want to keep my savings, what if the boiler packs up or the roof falls in?" However, that's a sentimental strategy, not a logical one. Let's carry on the £1,000 debt and £1,000 savings scenario to show you why.

● If you don't pay the debt off with the savings and an emergency happens that cost you £1,000 to fix, you'd use all your savings and still have £1,000 of credit card debt.

● If you do pay off the debt with the savings, and a £1,000 emergency happens, you'd need to pay for it on your credit card, meaning you still have no savings and £1,000 of credit card debt.

The end result of them both is the same, yet by paying off the debt with the savings, you save in the meantime.

The only exception is if the debt is at 0%. Then the financially savvy and disciplined can do what's called stoozing, where you deliberately build up 0% debt only to save it and earn interest. Though with current saving rates so low, it's not as easy as it used to be. Full help on that at www.mse.me/stoozing

Not at least asking your energy firm are you on its cheapest deal

Most people in the UK are on their energy firm's standard tariff, which typically means they're overpaying by £300 a year. I've talked about switching until I'm blue in the face, and, of course, the best plan is take five minutes to do a full market comparison via my www.CheapEnergyClub.com or any www.Ofgem.gov.uk approved comparison site.

Yet for some that doesn't hit home. So let me be plain. Even if you won't do that, just pick up the phone and ask your current provider "Am I on your cheapest tariff?" and, if not, switch to that as there's no change but the price!

For example, as I write (it can change daily), on EDF's standard tariff someone with typical usage pays £1,070/year. It also has a 12 month fix at £880/year – £190/year less.

British Gas's standard tariff with typical use is £1,044/year, but it also runs Sainsbury Energy (ie, it's the same company but a different name), and its cheapest fix is £804/year – saving £240/year.

This 'don't ask don't get' saving works at all the big firms, so if you won't do a comparison, at least do this.

Only making the minimum repayments on credit cards

Credit card minimum payments are based mostly on a percentage of the balance, which only just covers the interest. So you hardly clear any off.

A 30-year-old with £3,000 debt on a credit card at 17.9% interest, who made only typical minimum repayments, would take 27 years to clear it. By then, they'd be 57 and have paid a total cost £4,000 in interest (see my minimum repayment calc at www.mse.me/minrepay to work out how long it'll take you).

Now you may be thinking 'easy to say, but I can't afford more than the minimum.' Well, I have a solution.

On £3,000 debt, the current minimum is around £70 a month. If instead of opting to pay the minimum, fix your repayment at £70. The debt will clear in five years at a total cost of £1,500 in interest, saving £2,400.

Though if you've debt on more than one credit card, focus all spare cash on repaying the most expensive, making only the minimums on the others. That way you get rid of the most expensive debts first.

Don't cover your home's value on buildings insurance

Your house price is the wrong figure, you only need to insure the usually much lower rebuild cost – literally how much it would cost to rebuild your home should it get knocked down. This is often far less than the market value.

There's information and a calculator on this at <http://abi.bcis.co.uk>.

Saving or borrowing to pay your children's tuition fees

I'm often freaked out by parents telling me they're saved up so their child won't have to pay tuition fees at uni. Worse, some even extend their mortgage. My problem isn't just that actually it's students', not parents' responsibility to repay this...

All new English full-time students can get a tuition fee loan and a living loan to help pay for uni costs. You're eligible to start repaying in the April after leaving, but only if you earn over £21,000, and you repay 9% above that. Repayments stop after 30 years. In many ways, it acts far more like a tax than a loan, and how many would save "in case my child earns enough to be a higher rate taxpayer"?

An extreme example provides clarity. Imagine your child goes to uni and becomes a brilliant poet, who never earns above the £21,000 threshold. They would never repay a penny. So if you paid the fees for them, you'd throw £27,000 away.

Most of course will earn over the threshold. However only high earners will earn enough to repay in real terms what they borrowed within the 30 years. If not, again it means pay their tuition fees and you're paying more than they'd need to repay. For most parents if you want to help them, a better thing to prioritise is building up a mortgage deposit. For far more on this see my [mse.me/dontpayupfront](http://www.mse.me/dontpayupfront) guide.

Apprentice Olivia welcomed to team

A new apprentice is taking her first steps on the career ladder thanks to a Shropshire insurance broker.

Olivia Morton has joined the team at Henshalls Insurance Brokers in her home town of Newport as her first job.

Director Mark Freeman said: "We're delighted to welcome Olivia to the Henshalls team, particularly as she's a local girl and we pride ourselves on giving local people the opportunity to develop their careers."

"We'll be helping Olivia to learn more about the industry and to work towards a Level Three qualification in Insurance with the Chartered Insurance Institute.

"This will give her credits towards a professional qualification, and with our support, her aim is to eventually reach advanced diploma level."

Mark said 16-year-old Olivia's appointment came after a countywide search for new talent which generated a huge response.



Olivia Morton with manager Elsa Mackay at Henshalls Insurance Brokers, Newport

Tourism chief



Alex Webb of Toni & Guy, Shrewsbury

Alex's skills show he's a cut above

Alex Webb has been promoted to head up the Shrewsbury branch of Toni & Guy, part of the global hairdressing group.

The 23-year-old attended Llanfair Caereinion High School, and started his career as a trainee at Toni & Guy in Hereford.

He moved to the Shropshire branch three years ago, has completed several Toni & Guy training courses and now heads up the Shrewsbury business, which employs 20 people.

"I have always wanted to go into management and have just undertaken a Toni & Guy business qualification which has given me training in starting up and running a company," he said. "They are a fantastic team in Shrewsbury."



Beth Heath with Shrewsbury Tourism Association board members (back from left) Mark Bebb, Edward Goddard, Michael Connor, Dilwyn Jones and Nick Bevan

Beth Heath has taken up a new part-time post as Shrewsbury's town tourism officer, working with Shrewsbury Tourism Association.

Beth, 38, who lives in Ironbridge, ran Ludlow Food Festival for 12 years and now organises Shrewsbury Food Festival, Shrewsbury Winter Festival and Shropshire Kids Festival in the town. "I have been organising festivals for what seems like ever and have built up lots of contacts in

Shrewsbury, so it makes sense that I should be working with all the businesses in the town," she said. "I have lots of ideas of how to put Shrewsbury on the map and to shout about how fantastic the town is. Our aim is to increase footfall, increase the length of the tourist season and encourage people from other Shropshire towns to travel to Shrewsbury because they don't tend to travel that much. STA chairman Michael Connor said: "A principal part of Beth's activities will be to attract more visitors to Shrewsbury, to consider the level of service given to visitors and to generate real benefits to businesses within the town."

Law firm adds to its numbers



Melissa Dyke has joined FBC Manby Bowdler

A Shrewsbury law firm has strengthened its residential property team with a key appointment.

Melissa Dyke has joined FBC Manby Bowdler as a licenced conveyancer based at its office at Shrewsbury Business Park.

Melissa, who qualified in 2008, specialises in residential conveyancing and works with individuals, buy-to-let investors, local estate agents and helps developers to facilitate plot sales.

She said: "Shrewsbury's property

market is buoyant with all types of property across the price spectrum remaining in demand.

"The town was recently voted one of the top 10 happiest places to live in the country and this always help to shine a light on the area as a place to move to, providing a boost to the property scene.

"There is also a vast number of new homes being built in the town and this will help support the property market as we continue into 2017."

Golfer exchanges his clubs for club

Professional golfer Jon Gidney is ready to tee off in his new role as marketing manager at a Shropshire health and fitness club.

Jon, who represented England at amateur level before turning pro, has joined the staff at The Shrewsbury Club, which is also the venue for international tennis tournaments.

Jon is a director of Elton Gidney, a Shropshire sports branding and management company, while he also works closely with businesses as a sales, marketing and sponsorship consultant.

Jon, 29, said: "I'm looking forward, in particular, to exploring new marketing initiatives with my colleagues to enhance the club."

Alvin Ward, the general manager of The Shrewsbury Club, said: "We are delighted that Jon has joined our team.

"We already have strong ties with local businesses, schools and charities which Jon will be able to complement by promoting the club throughout the community.

"He is well known in the area and very familiar with all we have to offer, so he is a perfect fit for the role."



Jon Gidney, right, with Alvin Ward, the general manager of The Shrewsbury Club



Solicitor Lucy Kealy

Lucy is back home with a familiar role

Solicitor Lucy Kealy has 'returned home' and resumed her career with a county law firm to help boost its private client team.

She is back with Lanyon Bowdler after a five-year absence and brings her specialist knowledge in wills, powers of attorney and estate administration/probate back to the company's Shrewsbury office.

Managing partner Brian Evans said: "She left us in 2011 to have her family and then she spent a time working for another local firm of solicitors and a national probate company."

Lucy is an Associate Member of Solicitors for the Elderly and acts as secretary for the Shropshire Solicitors for the Elderly Regional Group.

Joining an elite band

A Shropshire chartered surveyor has a new qualification under her belt and become one of an elite band of property professionals to hold dual chartered surveyor and town planner credentials.

Mandy Seedhouse, planning and environmental consultant at Berrys, has gained full membership of the Royal Town Planning Institute after completing a long and complicated application which included case studies and assessments.

"Mandy is now in a very elite band – this is a great achievement of which we are very proud," said Matthew Anwyl, managing partner of Berrys. "It is a reward for all her hard work and gives her a fantastically rounded view on the property world we live in."



Mandy Seedhouse

Mandy joined as a graduate surveyor at the Shrewsbury office of Berrys 16 years ago after completing a degree in Rural Enterprise and Land Management at Harper Adams University.

Commercial team boosted

Hannah Fynn is the latest addition to the commercial property department at the Oswestry office of GHP Legal. She joined the firm as a paralegal in the summer of 2014, but went on to complete an LLB honours in Law and Legal Practice Course, finally qualifying as a solicitor in November.

Nathan Wright, GHP Legal partner and head of training, said: "Hannah has impressed us during her final two years of legal training. Alongside the usual wide ground base undertaken by all our trainees we have also been happy to involve her in more complex work. This has included assisting in multi-million pound transactions and specialist lease work. Now she is a fully qualified solicitor and is equipped to handle her own casebook with confidence."



Hannah Fynn of GHP Legal



James Staniforth joins Shrewsbury Colleges Group

Head of college group is named

Shrewsbury Colleges Group has appointed James Staniforth to the role of Principal and Chief Executive. The newly formed group, comprising of Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Shrewsbury College, is Shropshire's largest combined A Level and vocational education provider since the July merger. Taking over from

the Interim Principal and CEO Lyn Surgeon after Easter 2017, James will join the Colleges Group from Strode College near Glastonbury, where he is currently the principal. He brings substantial experience of the education sector including senior roles within Sixth Form and Further Education colleges.

New faces at 'eco hub'



Dr Julieanna Powell-Turner, Leanne Trow, and Cath Edwards

Three new members of staff, including a director who is one of the leading international academics in the field of sustainability, have been taken on at an expanding 'eco hub' in Shropshire.

Dr Julieanna Powell-Turner, Leanne Trow, and Cath Edwards, have joined sister companies Credibly Green and Frith Resource Management, based at the hub in Bridgnorth's High Street.

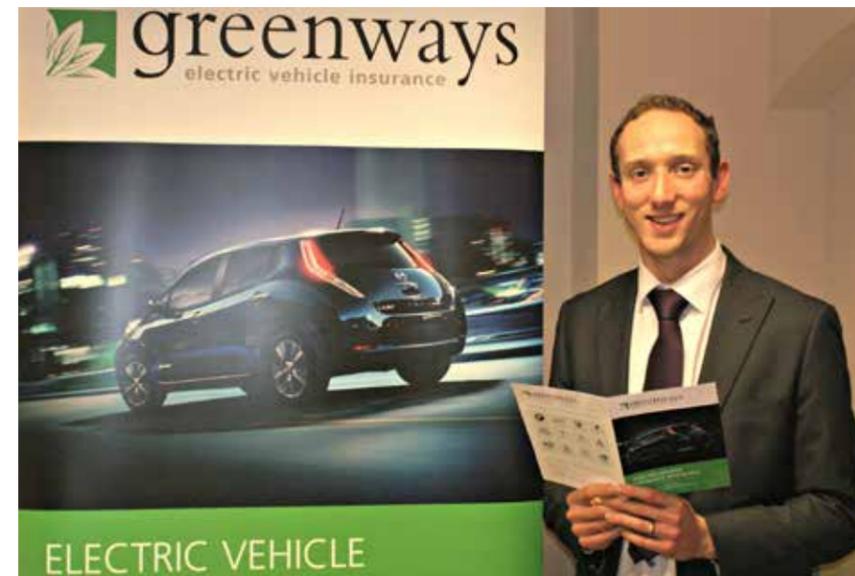
Credibly Green provides environmental performance reports to customers throughout the UK and Frith Resource Management is a waste management consultancy working with clients ranging from international governments to local authorities.

Paul Frith, who founded both firms, said: "They bring a wealth of valuable experience from the environmental sector and will enable us to provide our specialist services to a wider range of clients in the Midlands, across the UK and worldwide."

Dr Julieanna Powell-Turner, who has been appointed sustainability director, is a top academic and researcher with over 16 years' UK and overseas experience.

She has worked at Cranfield University for 10 years as head of environmental science, senior lecturer and course director.

Daniel takes on a management role



Daniel West has taken up a new role in family business Fiveways Insurance

A Newport-based company that has branched out to specialise in electric vehicle insurance is keeping business in the family with its new business development manager.

Daniel West, the son of Nigel and Lisa West, owners of Fiveways Insurance Consultants Ltd in Newport, had been planning on a career in airline management

after working with British Airways, but has returned to Shropshire from London to take up the new role with Greenways.

Nigel West said: "I'm absolutely delighted that Daniel has decided to come and join the family business."

"When he found out that we were launching Greenways he approached me to see if there would be any opportunities for him to help develop that."

"I was a bit surprised at first but I could tell he was serious."

"He is very business minded and has an extremely professional attitude so I know he will do well developing the business."



Sammy Davies of Bespoke Computing

IT firm has a fresh recruit

Former New College Telford student Sammy Davies is the latest new recruit at fast-growing Telford IT firm Bespoke Computing.

The 18-year-old is a new apprentice business administrator, boosting the back office team at the Stafford Park company to four.

The firm supplies IT hardware and software as well as IT support, cloud and internet services and telephone systems to businesses across a range of sectors.

Sammy, who lives in Albrighton and also studied at Idsall School, said: "I am learning new skills all the time and very much enjoying being part of the 'engine room' that supports the whole organisation."

An impressive appointment



Arthurs of Oswestry has made William Edwards its sales manager

William Edwards has become the youngest sales manager in the Vauxhall UK network after being promoted by Arthurs of Oswestry.

The 22-year-old, who has been a sales executive with the firm for two years, said he was 'proud' to be offered the position of sales manager at such a young age and looking forward to the challenge.

Arthurs Group Operations Manager, David Goldthorpe, said: "William is very highly thought of by the senior management and his colleagues within the group and although he may be lacking in some experience we are sure this will be more than made up for through bags of enthusiasm and desire to do a good job."

Fighting financial crime

Is your organisation an unwitting participant in financial crime?

Organised crime costs the UK at least £24bn a year, according to the Home Office. Tackling financial crime and ‘trade-based money laundering’ (TBML) – an all-encompassing term for the wide range of schemes used by criminals to disguise the origins of money and integrate it into the formal economy – is a major concern for governments globally.

Because of the magnitude of the problem, your organisation must be vigilant and report any suspicious activity, to avoid risking reputational damage and potentially facing criminal proceedings.

What’s being done about it?

The UK Prime Minister recently hosted an anti-corruption summit, gathering world governments, law enforcement agencies and businesses where they announced a global plan to recover assets lost to financial crime. Although the first of its kind, the summit will reconvene each year to continue the global fight against corruption.

As well as this, a number of organisations have been set up in partnership with banks including Barclays to combat money laundering and tackle the use of the financial system for terrorist financing and other crimes. These include the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and Joint Money Laundering Intelligence Taskforce (JMLIT).

The JMLIT has found that global corporations exporting dual-use goods – those that can be used for both civil and military purposes such as pharmaceuticals, electronics, and raw materials – are particularly vulnerable to trade-based money laundering.

If you are a tech business and you receive an order for 300 laptops from a contact in the Turkey-Syria border area, you would be right to raise your eyebrows – and indeed it is your responsibility under EU law.

But financial crime is often harder to spot than that – especially as no single activity on its own is a clear indication of illegal activity.

Put on your investigator’s hat



To make sure your organisation doesn’t inadvertently get caught up in this type of activity, it’s vital to carry out regular reviews of who you’re doing business with.

Try putting on your ‘financial crime investigator’s hat’ for just five minutes every day. Have a look at recent business transactions and find out where they are coming from. In a normal trade transaction there’s a clear connection between the payment and the buyer, so consider whether there is anything strange about the relationship. Although it’s worth remembering that for genuine tax efficiency some businesses will use different parts of their business to buy goods, and may structure supply through subsidiaries, sometimes it pays to be suspicious.

What to do if you’re concerned

Take a look at the National Crime Agency resources website – www.nationalcrimeagency.gov.uk or visit www.barclayscorporate.com for additional hints and tips.



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