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Issue 4

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Plus: What do you earn? Brexit briefing Business 'Oscars' Export success

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It's countdown to

Well, here we go again. Another British summer, and yet another invitation to the ballot box.

They say uncertainty is the true enemy of business, and the snap general election called by Theresa May will do little to help calm choppy economic waters – at least in the short term.

But a common message coming through loud and clear from the pages of this issue is the fact that it remains very much 'business as usual' for the resilient Shropshire economy.

Having sat in on a Brexit debate, and a

round-table forum for the construction industry, it seems the referendum last summer has, so far, made little difference to the day-to-day business of most firms.

We're made of stern stuff; putting our noses to the grindstone, and just getting on with it.

Whether we will be quite as calm if June 8 ushers in a Government which wants to rip things up and start again, of course, remains to be seen...

Let's hope that the election campaign doesn't become too nasty, or take our eyes off the ball, when it comes to seeking the best EU deal for our businesses.

Talking of which . . . here's a starter for 10: What do Aston Martin, Kylie and Dannii



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Election Day – again



Minogue, and the Cannes Film Festival have in common?

Answer: They all have reason to be thankful to the invention and dynamism of Shropshire companies.

Our cover story charts the amazing rise of Shifnal businesswoman Deborah Mitchell, who was working out of a converted toilet block in the mid 1990s, but now commands a £33 million worldwide business with a who's who of celebrity clients.

Elsewhere, when the stars step out at the famous Cannes Film Festival this year, they will be walking on a piece of Telford engineering.

And James Bond's favourite car maker has confirmed Bridgnorth manufacturer Grainger &

Worrall as its preferred engine castings partner for the sleek new DB11. Exports are holding up well, too. We turn the spotlight on a Jackfield guitar-making firm selling to Japan and Canada, and an award-winning Ellesmere manufacturer which is breaking into North America.

And talking of awards . . . have you got your tickets yet for the hottest date on the Shropshire economic calendar?

The 17th annual Shropshire Business Awards will be held at a glittering ceremony on June 23, at Telford's International Centre, when multi-millionaire Poundland founder Steven Smith will give the keynote speech, and the 2017 Company of the Year will be crowned.

It's the biggest event on the county's

corporate calendar, with up to 700 people expected on the guest list.

No wonder that when it comes to quality, innovation, competitive pricing and top-rate customer service, customers all over the world are voting for Shropshire.

Carl Jones,
Editor



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The 'Brexit Begins' gathering at the Lighting Industry Association in Telford was attended by representatives from a variety of businesses

Here's to

By Carl Jones

For many Shropshire companies, the handling of Brexit will be the biggest strategic challenge they face in a generation. But can it also be a springboard for lucrative new trading opportunities?

That was the question posed at a 'Brexit Begins' presentation and seminar, held at the Lighting Industry Association's premises on Stafford Park, Telford.

On the panel were economist Professor Paul Forrest from the West Midlands Economic Forum, Martyn Mangan of Enterprise Telford, Marches LEP chairman Graham Wynn, Simon Balderson of food packaging firm Sirane Group, and the chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Richard Sheehan.

Among the audience were representatives of the manufacturing,

education, financial, service, hospitality, marketing and recruitment sectors, who raised a series of issues in a Question Time-style debate, chaired by Laura Parkinson of Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors.

But first, Paul Forrest delivered a state-of-the-region address, setting out where he saw Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin's position – its strengths and weaknesses – after the triggering of Article 50 by Prime Minister Theresa May.

"Outside of the M4 corridor, it's important to remember that Telford has the highest concentration of advanced manufacturing industries in the country. It's a really dynamic part of the country," he said.

"The worst thing for Shropshire, to be honest, is TV show Countryfile – because every time you see the programme you see this bucolic Victorian landscape, when in actual fact manufacturing as a proportion of the local economy is bigger than the Black Country. It's a hi-tech manufacturing centre."

He added: "It's important to remember that 40% of the imports that go into the single market are from countries like

America, China and Japan, that don't have free trade agreements. So it is possible to still export to the EU.

"And with the depreciation of sterling, we have got some benefits.

"But we do have to look at how they are going to negotiate.

"I'm really concerned that they will concentrate on the city of London which provides about 2% of gross value added to the whole economy, while the manufacturing sector provides about 11 or 12%. Then also there are the service sector industries that are related to manufacturing.

"In Telford and Shropshire, we reckon this so-called 'manu-services' sector is equivalent to around 6-7% of the total economy, so these are the people we need to make sure we are caring about when we go into the Brexit negotiations."

Paul said: "It's no good having a free trade agreement until you know what sort of trade you are doing.

"And before we have that trade operation, we need to have an internationally competitive infrastructure. We need to be talking about ultra-fast



The panel, from left, Professor Paul Forrest, Martyn Mangan, Simon Balderson, Laura Parkinson, Graham Wynn, and Richard Sheehan

the future

and super-fast broadband – which isn't! This regional economy is on the cusp of intelligent manufacturing, which demands the internet of things.

"What Brexit has done is bring into sharp focus the problems we have in the economy. If we stayed in the European Union, we would still have these problems. We need to have proper broadband, proper roads and rail.

"Everybody goes on about the skills gap, and how it is an acute problem, but it is not a problem of failure – it's a problem of success, caused because the economy has been growing so dramatically over the last four or five years."

Paul's view was: forget the rights and wrongs of the Brexit referendum campaign and debate, it's now time to move on, and make a success of the result.

The paradox in the West Midlands is that it is the most export-orientated region of Britain, but also the most Eurosceptic part of the nation.

Paul continued: "The main thing is, it's not going to be the end of the world. The West Midlands economy over the last 20



Professor Paul Forrest delivering his state-of-the-region update

years has survived really well without any major national Government intervention. We've really been ignored until very recently.

"The public sector is under huge pressure right now, so it's important for everyone in this room to articulate clearly exactly what it is you need to get things going. There's nobody else speaking for you

at the moment to consider what is going to impact on your industry – somebody has got to tell the Government what is going on."

The event was organised by Telford Business Solutions Centre, and backed by the University of Wolverhampton, Marches Growth Hub, Enterprise Telford, and Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors. ▶



Ray Hickenbottom of the FSB, in conversation with Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones



Lack of certainty is the biggest problem with Brexit, according to Martyn Mangan, pictured above

◀ Ray Hickenbottom of the Federation of Small Businesses kicked off the Q&A session: "Given that most grant funding at the moment is coming from Europe, do you anticipate that continuing, and should we be looking for a loosening of some of the terms and conditions when this is under our own control?"

In short, no. That was Martyn Mangan's view. "This particular Government has no penchant to grant fund anybody, and it is extremely difficult to talk to them about supporting industry.

"The biggest problem with Brexit at the moment is not the process, but the lack of certainty, which is letting most businesses think 'do I invest, or do I hold off until I really need to?'"

The panel agreed that terms and conditions of any grant funding needed to be loosened – but it was highlighted that in many of the current cases, it's often local regulations which add the most damaging restrictions, and not always the EU.

Simon Balderson of Sirane, whose company is a European market leader in packaging materials and exports worldwide from its Shropshire base, said: "We've grown the company and have never had a grant yet. We've been going for 15 years.

"The reason is that we have been put off by the process, the paperwork, and the speed at which these things are made available. There is no point having a grants system if there is no easy access to it."

Richard Sheehan agreed that the landscape was becoming increasingly confusing over who was delivering a particular grant, where the cash was coming from, and what sort of companies could qualify.

There was also a widespread concern that retail businesses were often excluded from accessing any funding streams.

Graham Wynn said: "For me, the sustainability of our market towns is one of the issues I keep coming back to.

"When I'm putting bids forward for funding, the treasury formula is around land value uplift, and that goes against us in a rural economy compared with converting a brownfield site into something that is going to create lots of employment opportunities.

"I've been banging on about this for some time, and I've got some positive strokes back from Government to say they are prepared to look at this.

"How we create sustainability in the future is a question I keep coming back to, and this means we need a particular focus on our market towns."

My question to the panel was this: Given the fact that there are still a mind-boggling list of rules, regulations and legislation to be untangled before Britain can extricate itself from the EU, are the majority of Shropshire companies still ploughing on regardless for the time being? And if so, might that policy come back to bite them?

Martyn Mangan said: "They are not ploughing on ignorant of Brexit, but they have businesses to run. At the moment, while the pound is down, you might as well sow the seeds while the sun is shining.

"But I still think they are scared about what is going to happen. They know who their customers are, where their markets are, and that there is flux in there. They are just hoping that somebody else is going to take care of the problem, while they run their business.

"You'll find with larger companies that instead of having a line in their strategy about how they can become globally mobile, they will now have written an entire chapter on it."

On the day after the Brexit vote in June last year, Simon Balderson said he and his

management team got together to talk it all through. "We decided immediately that we wouldn't plough on, but we would accelerate on.

"I think Brexit has given us as a country a certain confidence. Maybe that's a sort of Blitz spirit.

"Generally speaking, when other people are stopping or dithering, that is the time to move forward, because it's an opportunity.

"But we also did a risk assessment of the sort of things that are going to affect us, and number one by far was the fact that 70% of our workforce in the UK is Polish."

Richard Sheehan pointed to the chamber's quarterly economic survey, which gauges the mood of the local economy and shows trends.

He said: "Looking back at late 2008 and 2009 after the last recession, it showed companies dusting themselves off and rolling their sleeves up – doing what business does best. We are seeing very similar signs now. Yes, there are concerns around issues such as raw material costs and currency, but they are reporting that they are really busy. There are lots of positive stories, and the attitude is – this is what we have got, so we have got to get on with it."

The lack of 'suitable' British candidates for many job opportunities in Shropshire was raised – particularly in the manufacturing industry, where the panel recognised a vacuum between the perception of modern-day working conditions, and the reality. So, is that because we're not shouting about how vibrant and varied our engineering and manufacturing industry really is?

Richard Sheehan said: "We work with a number of schools in terms of careers events, and it is very, very difficult to get a school to allow us to take a business into their environment to engage with young people.



Graham Wynn, who had been with the Prime Minister several days earlier



Laura Parkinson of Lanyon Bowdler chaired the debate held at the Lighting Industry Association in Telford



Dale Kynaston, one of two delegates from Telford College of Arts and Technology



Paul Challinor of Telford & Wrekin Council photographed at the debate



Brian Evans of Lanyon Bowdler in conversation at the event

"That's because it is not in the curriculum and they are not focused on it. While it should be in their conscience for producing rounded individuals, it is a problem which will exist until something is built into the school curriculum to allow business engagement.

"The second thing to address is the parents. There is a generation of them who saw manufacturing as filthy dirty black and sooty holes, and nothing could be further from the truth now. And they still have an influence on the young people."

Gareth Hughes of recruitment agency Ethero gave his experience of the current situation. "From adverts that I might place on job boards in every location, of every 100 applicants a maximum of 10 will be English.

"That is the reality. And of the 10 that do apply, five as a maximum will be young people. The promotion and advertising of these jobs needs to find a better way of

getting across the enthusiasm of what these jobs can do for young people."

Graham Wynn added: "We have been talking about the skills gap for 20 years and still haven't addressed it.

"When you are looking at young people entering the world of work, it's the softer skills we are missing, because there is no attainment around things such as communication skills, and the ability to have a conversation face-to-face and look people in the eye.

"We need to be teaching young people a broader basic set of skills that employers need. I believe it is for employers to deliver the skills they need to do the job, in conjunction with a college or private sector provider."

Graham was among a group of business leaders sitting round the table with Prime Minister Theresa May when she visited the

region at the end of March, and he called for greater engagement from the Department of Education, with the Marches LEP.

"They are totally disengaged at the moment, and from chambers to LEPs, we have a big pool of business people who are prepared to give their time to talk to young people about manufacturing and the businesses in their area.

"But we are blocked by teachers who say it's not part of their curriculum and not what they are going to be measured against. We do want the opportunity to get into schools – not just to get in, but to be welcomed in, so that we can produce more rounded individuals.

"There are no such things as jobs for life any more; it's about making young people aware of the opportunities, and the sort of softer social skills required to meet the needs of employers."

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Poundland – one of the most recognisable UK retail successes



Orchard Valley Foods was named last year's Company of the Year

Pound for pound advice

The Shropshire-based entrepreneur whose Poundland retail empire made him a multi-millionaire will be sharing his top tips for success at this summer's county business 'Oscars'.

Steven Smith, who now lives in a £6 million mansion near Bridgnorth with its own pool, bar and helipad, will deliver the keynote address at the 17th annual Shropshire Business Awards.

Tickets are now on sale for the black-tie evening, at Telford's International Centre on June 23, when the Shropshire Company of the Year, plus a host of other winners, will be crowned.

Richard Sheehan, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce which organises the event, said: "Since its launch back in 2001, the Shropshire Business Awards has been famed as the largest celebration of our county's business success.

"A key part of the night is always the quality of high-profile guest speakers, and we are delighted to add Steven to that list in 2017. He is an outstanding speaker, and an outstanding businessman, with strong connections to our area."

More than eight out of 10 British shoppers have been into a Poundland store



Poundland millionaire Steven Smith



since Steven launched the company in 1990.

Steven's theory was that there are no such thing as bad products, only bad prices. He was proved right, when they took £13,000 on their first day and he sold his business for £50 million in 2002. The

industry is now worth a staggering £5 billion.

The idea of Poundland was born when Steven started work on his parents' Bilston market stall in the West Midlands at the age of 14.

He noticed that sometimes they made more money from items in the 10p to £1 box than from the takings of everything else on the stall. He left school at 16, and set up his first shop at 17.

He says he never forgets his roots, and is now keen to give something back to other businesspeople looking to expand and succeed. He was voted Britain's Best Boss a few years ago and is ambassador for the RBS/NatWest Entrepreneur Spark. He is also a Retail Ombudsman, where his job is to oversee the department in London responsible for dealing with complaints from consumers and retailers over the UK.

Want to hear what Steven Smith has to say? To book your seat for the Shropshire Business Awards 2017 – and check out the 2017 finalists, go to the website online at www.shropshirebusinessawards.co.uk

- The 2016 Shropshire Company of the Year, Burford-based Orchard Valley Foods, has been taken over by a Scandinavian business. NIC Enterprises Limited has acquired a majority ownership of the firm, but bosses say it is very much 'business as usual' for staff. NIC is part of Orkla Food Ingredients within the Orkla group, headquartered in Oslo, Norway.



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Richard Noble pictured with Telford College corporation chairman Paul Hinkins and the Bloodhound car



Bloodhound team members explain the theory behind the world record bid

A need for speed

Risk. We Brits don't really like it. But unless we're prepared to change that cautious approach, we're in danger of being left behind on the hi-tech world engineering stage.

That's the view of Richard Noble, a man who certainly knows a thing or two about risk. He broke the world land speed record in 1983 when his Thrust SSC car topped 633mph – a title he held for 14 years.

Now aged 71, he's a director of the Bloodhound project which is seeking to up the stakes even further by blasting a car over the 1,000mph mark in 2018.

Bloodhound's project team is touring the country on a crusade to inspire budding young engineers, and rolled into Shropshire to spend a week at Telford College of Arts and Technology.

Richard told a VIP gathering during his whistle-stop visit: "We are in a fascinating time in life, as the procedure to sign us out of the EU begins, and our country has to change, big time.

"We hardly manufacture in our country at all now. Our manufacturing is just about 8% of gross domestic product, whereas it should be 20 or 25.

"This represents a fantastic opportunity for the next generation, because Britain is going to be on its own, and we've got to show the world what we can really do."

And as well as writing its name into the record books, that's what Bloodhound is seeking to help achieve.

Back in 2013, the business secretary was Vince Cable – who happened to be Richard Noble's next door neighbour.

Richard recalled: "He revealed that the need was for 830,000 working engineers by the year 2020; in other words, that was about 100,000 a year. And we were only



Students race their own rocket-powered vehicles as part of a week-long activity programme



Engaging young people with STEM subjects, in a practical and enjoyable way

getting around 30,000. Why? Because we only got 32,000 physics A levels a year. The fundamental problem was with schools just not firing the kids up and getting them excited.

"In terms of gender balance, Britain was absolutely the worst in Europe. Among our professional engineers, only 10% were women.

"And in 50% of state co-educational schools, there was not a single girl with a physics A level. Suddenly you realised what has happened – we'd just gone backwards, and it was an absolute nightmare."

How do you reverse that? Not easily. As Richard said: "We're not specialists in education, we are land speed record chasers."

But thanks in some small part to Bloodhound, and its focus on making STEM (science, technology, engineering and maths) relevant and exciting with the help of ambassadors from top brands such as Rolls-Royce, headway is being made.

The TCAT team were certainly delighted with the success of the Bloodhound week, which involved around 400 students – both from the college itself, and feeder schools in the area.

The college's engineering and technology students got chance to work on the Bloodhound Model Rocket Car Challenge, where they built and raced rocket-powered cars.

At full speed, the supersonic Bloodhound car will cover a mile in 3.6 seconds - that's the equivalent of 4.5 football pitches laid end-to-end, every second.

The Bloodhound team is targeting October this year for its first series of engine tests, in Cornwall. It has earmarked a desert site in South Africa for the 1,000mph attempt, in around 18 months.

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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Courses reflect changing times

Five new courses are being launched by New College Telford to help meet the ever-changing demands of local employers. From September, the college will be running one-year level two BTEC Extended Certificates in Art and Design, Business, Media Digital Production, Science, and Sport.

Jean Wright, vice principal for curriculum at the college, said: "We pride ourselves on already offering the widest choice of courses across Telford & Wrekin, from A Level right up to degree level – but the needs of the local economy are changing all the time.

"Each of these new one-year courses builds in the skills development which is needed for students to progress onto higher level vocational studies – but they are also

a qualification in their own right. They give learners the option to progress onto a level three BTEC course, or choose to explore an apprenticeship instead if they wish."

The Art and Design course will look at communicating ideas through art, design and discussion, as well as following briefs and meeting customer needs.

On the Business course, students will look at enterprise in the business world, finance, and business online.

The Media Digital Production course focuses on communication techniques and the media sector, explaining how to pitch for a project, and create your own material.

Students choosing the new Science course will cover a wide range of topics,

including energy and our universe, biology and the environment, the living body, chemistry, and other specialist options.

And the new Sport course will turn the spotlight on training for personal fitness, organising and leading events, and knowledge of rules, regulations, skills and tactics.

Jean Wright added: "It's not just about sitting in a classroom. All students on these courses will also undertake a period of work experience during the year."

To apply for a place, or to find out more about any of the New College Telford courses, call 01952 641892, email admissions@nct.ac.uk, or see the website www.nct.ac.uk

Changing rooms via customised graphics

A creative Shropshire company is eyeing up further expansion after landing a customer service award, and catching the eye of former Dragons' Den entrepreneur Theo Paphitis.

Wall Chimp, based at Arscott near Shrewsbury, is a family business which is run by mother-of-two Rachael Davies.

It specialises in the design and manufacture of graphics which stick onto the walls of homes or businesses.

And although the company is still very much in its infancy, it is making steady progress . . . and picking up accolades and celebrity supporters along the way.

It won the Best of Houzz award earlier this year, in recognition of its customer service.

Houzz is an online platform for home renovation and design, bringing homeowners and home professionals together.

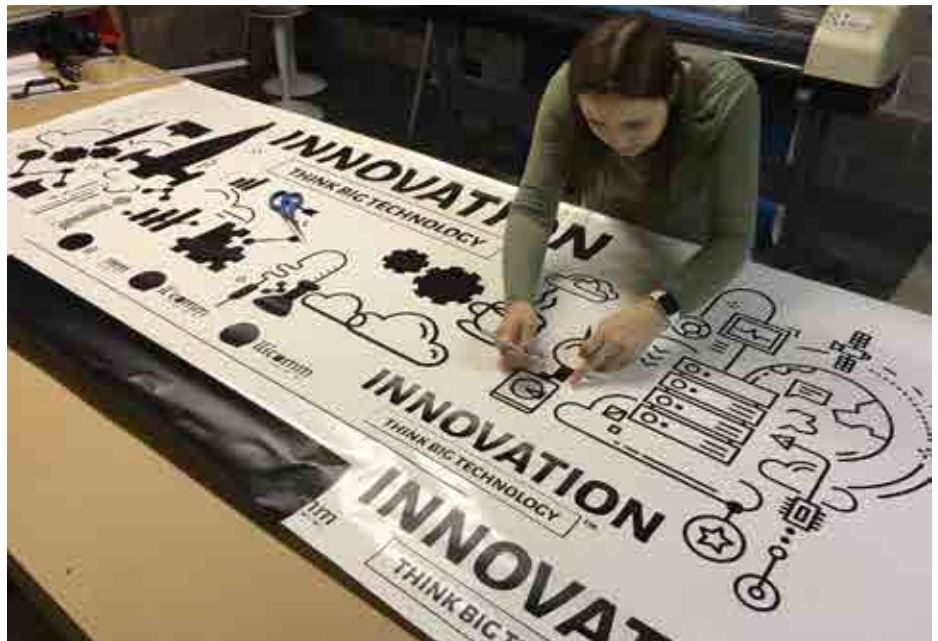
And Theo Paphitis also recognised the progression of the Wall Chimp brand by giving it a 'Theo Paphitis Small Business Sunday', award – part of a nationwide initiative supporting up-and-coming enterprises.

Rachael has lived all her life in Shropshire, apart from her Business Studies and Marketing degree course at Bangor.

She says: "A wall sticker is a new modern way to transform the walls of your home, without the mess and stress of painting and offers a much different approach to design instead of the conventional canvas or picture frame.

"Total customisation means you can add quotes, silhouettes and much more in just a few simple steps.

"We can also create something totally



Wall Chimp design and manufacture graphics to stick on to walls of homes or businesses

custom to you, either a family motto or a quote you like by your most influential celebrity – the possibilities are endless."

Rachael previously worked at global insulation manufacturer Kingspan for over a decade, ending her time as the company's UK marketing manager.

"I enjoyed it immensely, but gave up my career to be able to start our family.

"Harley came into our lives in May 2015 and more recently Ollie joined us in December 2016 – the little 'Chimps' as we call them!

"The Wall Chimp business has enabled me to continue with my passion of brand marketing and product placement, although in a completely new market sector which I find extremely exciting."



Wall Chimp is run by Rachael Davies

A REAL HIVE OF ACTIVITY

In this issue's big interview we meet self-made multi-millionaire **DEBORAH MITCHELL** the former Miss Shropshire who created a beauty empire.

By Carl Jones

The first time I met Deborah Mitchell, she was selling beauty treatments from a converted downstairs toilet at the Holiday Inn, in Telford.

Today, she is the globe-trotting boss

of a £33 million turnover luxury beauty treatment and skincare company, best known for her trailblazing Bee Venom range.

Her client list is a who's who of celebrity names, and she looks set to make it big in the United States this year after signing a deal to supply top hotels, salons and airport stores.

No wonder she's had to turn down an approach from the producers of BBC show *Dragons' Den*!

"I would have loved to do it, but I'm just too busy," she says. "For me, it's not just about giving money – I would want people to benefit from my time and attention as well, and at the moment, I'm just too busy to give it to them." ▶



Stylish – Heaven’s salon in Market Place, Shifnal, is a far cry from its origins in a converted hotel toilet

◀ And yet, despite conquering the globe, winning multiple awards and having a brand and client list that’s the envy of her competitors, the 52-year old former Miss Shropshire winner admits she still has many insecurities.

“I love what I do, but sometimes I will wake up one morning, look at my diary, and think – can I really do this? At heart, I’m a very shy person, and I am constantly doubting myself.”

But let’s not get ahead of ourselves. Back to that converted toilet in Telford.

“It’s funny, because in 1994 I hadn’t really got any business structure behind me. I just liked doing treatments, and it seems to just be fortuitous that everything I thought was a good idea turned out to be right.

“At the Holiday Inn, I was using treatments I had made up and developed, and at one stage I was turning over £12,000 a month and had four girls working from 8am to 10pm.

“People kept coming in and asking me to open in their hotel because they hadn’t seen a beauty place like it. I didn’t have enough products, so I started to make my own.”

Eventually, she says she was effectively “thrown out” of the Telford hotel after about six years, because while they wanted a slice of the pie, Deborah was determined to retain full control.

It’s a battle which has recurred on several occasions along her business journey since.

She says: “The first thoughts I ever had about going into business were on my beauty course. I wasn’t interested in what the teacher was talking about, so I looked



Deborah treating a client

out the window and daydreamed about what the future was going to be. I planned my future.

“I wanted to go mobile first of all, then go into hotel leisure club facilities, and then from there I wanted to make products, supply them to all my leisure club contacts, and eventually supply others all over the world.

“I sit here and look at my products now, look at the business I’m doing all over the

world, and think – yes, I’ve actually gone and done it!

“My business has grown organically. This might not sound particularly businessy, but I’ve tended to wait for some sort of sign that makes me go off in a direction. It’s an instinct really – every time I’ve tried researching and chasing or trying to force anything, it seems to fail.”

When Deborah left the Holiday Inn, she was pregnant with her son Chris.

“That was a tough time. We found this salon in Shifnal, and I got all my savings together. I had to find £30,000 to spend on just the floor of the shop, and the money ran out when I got to the first floor staircase.

“But I did really well. A lot of customers followed me, and we gained many new ones. I remember it being really hard, though – having to bring up two young children, while running a business, and trying to sell my products.”

By now, a new millennium was just around the corner. And Deborah had her first taste of international negotiation.

“I had a deal on offer from Hong Kong, and flew over when my son was born. But I was too frightened to take people up on it.

“My bottles were hand made, and as I flew over, the pressure of the cabin made a tiny hole in the side of them. Stupidly enough, I thought I must be the only person having problems like this, so I turned down all overseas offers and said no, I’m not selling them. And carried on in the UK.”

But even selling products to domestic department stores was sometimes tough. Deborah remembers one occasion when a buyer tore into her packaging and pricing structure – only to then offer to help rescue her business by buying in.



Deborah says: "At heart, I'm a very shy person, and I am constantly doubting myself"



Not just a girl thing – there's a men's range

"At the time, I was ready to cry. I hadn't realised that he was trashing me in such a negative way just to make me think I needed his help.

"Luckily for me, putting me down and trying to get control of half my business hadn't worked. I walked away."

When Beatties opened its new department store in Telford, Deborah took the plunge, and took her products into there.

Almost immediately, she was turning over £19,000 a week from that single store, and says she felt the 'big boys' looking on with worried expressions.

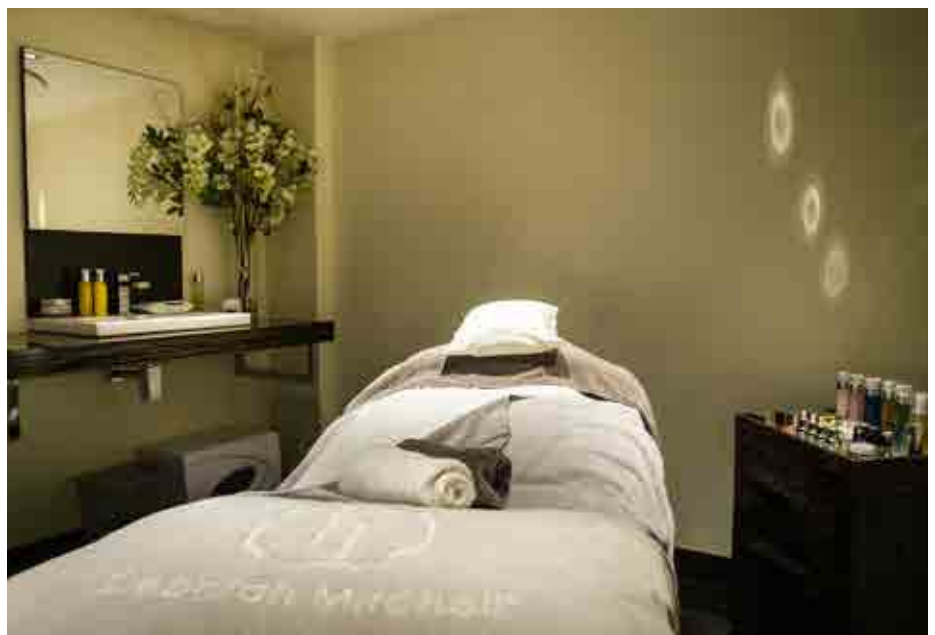
When Beatties was taken over by House of Fraser, Deborah was in 16 stores. But although sales were booming, her overdraft was growing, because the money she was forking out for products was taking, in her view, far too long to come back to her from the retailer.

"I remember talking to my mum and saying I've got to leave. The very next day, that's what I did. And I'd suddenly got much more time to concentrate on all the sales. People who heard I had left Beatties started to contact me on the website I'd set up.

"We were able to get into airports, and other retailers – although the business sort of went back a few steps, it was earning more money.

"The overdraft was starting to come down, and this was the time when I felt the business was finally starting to take off."

Among the people who had been in contact with Deborah by this time was a certain Victoria Beckham. "We'd had a phone conversation when I was at Beatties when she wanted some of my Age Defiance Cream," she recalled.



Shropshire is where the heart is – inside the Heaven salon in Shifnal

She had also been contacted by retail tycoon Theo Paphitis, in his pre-Dragons' Den days, to talk about some form of partnership. Deborah wanted to change her packaging, and knew this could be a way to raise the finance.

But again, she just had the nagging feeling that something wasn't quite right.

"Everyone was congratulating me about the fact that Theo wanted to buy part of the company and to help me, but the day after we talked, I didn't feel right about it."

So she turned it down . . . how was

she going to raise the cash for her new packaging now?

She recalls a phone call she made to husband Chris, while he was driving: "I said, 'I've got something to tell you. I've bought something.' He thought I was going to tell him about a new pair of shoes or expensive dress, but no – I'd bought a house with a bit of a deposit I managed to get together, then remortgaged it to raise the money for the new packaging."

He just about managed to keep the car on the road! ▶



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The Bee Calm range. No bees are harmed in the making of these products!



Deborah with US TV guru Forbes Riley

◀ Changing the packaging gave Deborah the confidence she needed in her products, and released her nagging fears that she still wasn't good enough. Again, it was an instinctive move which reaped rich rewards.

"After leaving Beatties and getting my debts down, I put my head down and worked hard, selling products to salons. Gradually more and more money was coming in.

"I was more business savvy by now, and realised that time really is money.

"To anyone new to business, I'd urge them to take that message. Don't waste other people's time if you are starting off, because they won't be impressed if you work with them or need to ask their help later on."

Deborah remembers getting a phone call from Dubai from a would-be distributor on the back of growing word-of-mouth about the Heaven range.

"I flew over with a £5,000 order, but wasn't keen to be pushed around. I told them they would have to buy some products before I flew out, and give me a business class flight, so I knew they were serious. Time, as I say, is money.

"If any distributor wants any free samples, they are not going to be a distributor of mine. If they are prepared to buy something, then that's a different matter.

"I'd achieved quite a lot in England by that time, but during the week I was in Dubai, I was all over the area, seeing the media."

Celebrities were starting to talk about Deborah's products. There was Tracey Taylor, wife of Duran Duran guitarist Andy, plus Kylie and Dannii Minogue. Endorsements were coming from the world of film, TV and politics, through clients and fans as diverse as Simon Cowell, Kate Hudson, Tess Daly, Jack Nicholson, and Michelle Obama.

"These celebrities were speaking about using my products, and it was a fabulous way of raising the company's profile, and gaining publicity."

And then, there was the royal family. The Duchess of Cornwall is known to be a long-time fan of Heaven, and it's said that she introduced the range to Kate Middleton on the eve of her wedding. Deborah, of course, is the soul of discretion.

"One of the royal family members bought one of my moisturisers, and they researched me and the bee sting facial.

"One thing led to another and I went to the palace, hoping I would get invited back.

"Years later, I'm delighted to say that I still go." ▶



Latest Heaven promotional campaign – getting the brand and packaging right has been key



ABOVE – Dannii Minogue has been a long-time advocate of Heaven products

RIGHT – Deborah says: "My staff get excited sending out products to Strictly judges. I love the fact that Tess Daly must have told them how good my bee venom mask is"



◀ Deborah is probably best known for her Bee Venom range, which has been hailed as a natural alternative to Botox. It uses the clear, odourless liquid released from a honeybee when it stings, and contains more than 20 known compounds including powerful anti-bacterial, anti-inflammatory and anti-viral properties.

The patented ingredient, called Abeetoxin, is collected without harming the bee population.

“Historically, venom collection was lethal to bees, but the modern method has their wellbeing in mind. Beekeepers start with fabric-covered plates that have conductor wires stretched flat across them.

“When a bee lands on the plate, the wires deliver a mild electric current that agitates the bee just enough to make it sting, causing the venom to drop onto the plate. Since the fabric on the plate is very thin, it doesn’t trap the stinger the way plastic or rubber used to do, leaving the bee free to fly away unharmed.

She adds: “The unusually high levels of hive loss reported by beekeepers over the past decade has been caused by a cocktail of diseases, parasites, poor nutrition, and environmental stressors like pesticides and limited water access.

“Bees that are stimulated for venom have been noted to yield more honey than their non-stimulated counterparts. So it’s a win-win.”

With high-profile clients, and a loyal following in the UK and Dubai, Deborah thought the next logical step would be to break America. But it was the east, not the west, which came calling next.

“I hadn’t seriously considered China, because I thought it would be a difficult market, but I was contacted by a young girl from Taiwan who wanted to buy some products.

“How sweet, I thought; someone from China wants to help their skin. Then we had an order from this girl for £38,000! She wanted to be a distributor for Taiwan, so I gave that to her.

“Shortly after, I was talking with a company that wanted distribution rights in Taiwan and China, with a £1.5 million order on the table. I told them they could only have China, because this little girl had already got Taiwan. The deal fell through because they wanted both – but I had given that girl my word. I didn’t mind turning down £1.5 million for a promise!”

Again, it was an instinctive decision that paid off. Deborah flew out to Taiwan to meet the ‘little girl’, and when she stepped off the plane, she was greeted by crowds of people with their faces painted with Heaven products, plus flowers, and film crews.

“I’d expected to have to go and find a taxi – I was mortified; I hadn’t even re-applied my own make-up,” Deborah recalled.

It turned out that this young girl’s father was the man who founded, and then sold, skincare group Shiseido, and had decided that Heaven was the next big thing.

“We forged a deal for £100 million over the next 10 years, and we’re about five years into that now. Growth is going steadily, and every order they place is pretty much doubling up.”

Deborah also now holds a licence for her products in China, where typical orders are in the £500,000 bracket.



The Silver Bee Venom Mask. One of the many products from Heaven by Deborah Mitchell



Deborah pictured with Katie Price

Heaven is now truly a global success story. In addition to China, Taiwan and Dubai, it’s sold at spas and hotels in the Philippines, Japan, Australia, Slovenia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Holland, Belgium, Mexico, Saudi Arabia . . . to name just a few.

But what about the USA? Well, Deborah believes this year is going to be the make-or-break time.

“I decided last year that 2017 was the year I wanted to do America very big, and after meeting groups connected with some of the biggest names, we have now signed a deal. They distribute my products in America, including airport duty-free stores, but it remains my company. We work alongside each other.

“At the moment, I do around £1 million worth of business with America. This deal is going to be an enormous jump, as the plan is to supply all these big stores at once.

“For me, I’m standing at ground zero. This deal is going to be the make-or-break of the company.

“I’ll need a bigger factory, and have to up-scale everything to meet the supplies. And if it doesn’t come off, I could be left with a massive over-capacity.

“That’s why, in many ways, I still feel like I have achieved nothing. I feel like I’m still at first base. I’m a perfectionist with my business and can look at everything and

think everyone has better packaging, and does this and that better than me. I’m never satisfied.

“In the past, I’m well aware that fear has stopped me expanding. Fear has been my enemy to the business.

“But I’m not looking ahead to what I might achieve in five years now. I’m concerned about what I can achieve tomorrow, or the next day.

“I have a goal, and I’m not prepared to wait for it. What I want is for Heaven to be known as much as Estee Lauder, but still be a niche market brand.”

The personal touch has always been important to Deborah. She remembers one difficult time, some years ago, when she was persuaded to upgrade her company’s telephone system.

“We installed one of these switchboards which asks you to press one for this and press two for that, and almost overnight the orders started to drop off.

“Our business had become really successful because it was personal, and this phone system didn’t match my business culture. We quickly got rid of it – it was another important lesson learned.”

Deborah admits she’s not good at delegating; despite having well over 27,000 Twitter followers, and a huge rush of messages when she makes one of her regular TV appearances, she handles it all herself. And she’s got the online side of the business tied up tightly, so that no-one else is allowed to create a website for Heaven products, other than her.

“I will admit that I need to be in control. But I do allow my staff the chance to grow in the business.

“I think I’m an amazing boss because I give everybody challenges to do so they can all improve. I’m very good at spoiling people, too. Sometimes, staff leave because they think life could be better, and then they want to come back.”

So what’s a typical week in the life of Deborah Mitchell?

She says: “Well, I’ll probably fly off abroad somewhere, handle some through-the-night calls, keep an eye on the salon, check on stock, and do some work from home.

“I’ll be in bed answering emails and dealing with social media, I will have to create presentations on products to be sent out to stockists, and there will probably be some media work to do too. It’s a full-on lifestyle – not much work-life balance.”

That downstairs loo in Telford must feel like a whole lifetime away now.

Delivering objectives

Growing the economy is one of the key strategies in Shropshire Council's Corporate Plan, and Gemma Davies has stepped into the spotlight by taking on the key role of head of economic growth, tasked with delivering the plan's economic objectives.

Gemma brings a wealth of experience with her, mainly gained from her time at Cheshire West and Chester Council.

During that time, she led development programmes, a business growth service, and skills and employment team, as well as overseeing structural changes, and developing cultural change to business engagement across a number of services in the council.

She also led the One City Plan for Chester and the development of a new Commercial Business District working with the private sector. So it is no surprise that Gemma has hit the ground running since her appointment.

She said: "Even though the county is widely recognised as a fantastic place in which to live, work and do business, a step change is needed in its economic productivity. It has significant potential to do more and do it better.

"This is what I wanted the strategy to address. We must be ambitious, focused and committed if we are to achieve maximum economic productivity from the assets and opportunities we have here in Shropshire."

Gemma has been busy working on the Economic Growth Strategy for Shropshire for 2017 to 2021, which aims to drive forward Shropshire's economic agenda and ambitions.

Written alongside partners, it shows that the council is serious about economic growth, recognises current businesses and the importance of retaining them, as well as attracting new investment into the county.



Gemma Davies brings a wealth of experience to her new role

Under Gemma's leadership in previous roles, achievements included drawing in £230 million of private sector investment, over 300 businesses supported to start up, 2,500 new jobs created and a reduction in long-term unemployment by 32%.

Last year she was also leading on the development of a sub-regional devolution programme on behalf of the three unitary councils in Cheshire and Warrington.

She says she hopes for similar success in Shropshire: "I am lucky, I have a great team to work with. We need to refocus our efforts and put in place the right resources to grow the county's economy, whilst making sure that whatever we do is right for Shropshire."



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In the wake of Brexit, Polytec Car Styling is among the local businesses to announce new jobs in the region



Director general Dr Adam Marshall



New jobs at Magna Cosma Castings are evidence that manufacturing locally is on the rise

Moving on with optimism



We've been hearing for months that Brexit means Brexit, but for the Shropshire business community, Brexit also means opportunity.

Economic surveys carried out by Shropshire Chamber reveal a great deal of optimism amongst members – along with the inevitable caution which comes with an unknown future.

We have all the ingredients within our county to carry on with business as normal, and this seems to be the message and feedback we are receiving, loud and clear.

I attended the recent British Chambers of Commerce annual conference in Westminster, and the message was similar from chambers the length and breadth of the country.

I was also at a recent meeting of the Midlands chambers, where it was good to be able to talk as a collective group,

sharing thoughts and expressing individual viewpoints to both the BCC president, and director general Dr Adam Marshall.

At the same time, we received feedback about the policy work and lobbying the BCC team are doing on a daily and weekly basis on the Westminster corridors of power.

I can assure all Shropshire businesses that their voice is being heard, and that the regional variances are noted.

Concerns we have in Shropshire will often be different from, say, our business friends in the north east or the south west, and this is noted by the BCC policy team and used to support on-the-ground information and feedback to ministers and the Brexit team.

As I write, I'm preparing for a meeting in London, when presidents from the 52 UK Chambers will hear from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the department for exiting the European Union.

This will give us an insight into the UK's approach to the negotiations with the EU, and how companies should respond – once again, it is an opportunity to raise the voice of Shropshire businesses.

Britain's economy should weather the Brexit process, largely because Europe is booming, according to influential forecasters from the EY Item Club.

It says exporters have been able to enjoy the benefits of a weaker pound thanks to resurgence from across the channel, and with unfettered access to the single market (for now!) and a weaker pound, exporters are enjoying the best of both worlds.

The world economy is firing on all cylinders at the moment, and the remarkably strong eurozone is a big part of that; conditions are nothing like the last time we had a big devaluation in 2008.

Most economists expect growth to slow this year alongside consumer spending. The forecast is for GDP to rise by 1.8% this year, 1.2% next year, and 1.5% in 2019. And as growth slows, the Bank of England is likely to hold interest rates at the current record low of 0.25% for some considerable time to come.

Recent announcements of new jobs into the region from Magna Cosma Castings and Polytec Car Styling are evidence that manufacturing locally is on the rise.

This kind of investment will have a positive effect on the Shropshire economy in the months and years to come.

So, as we continue to plough through the unknown world of Brexit, I can assure you that myself, chief executive Richard Sheehan and all the Shropshire Chamber board and team are doing everything we can to connect local businesses, lobbying and making policy our focal point.

By making our members' voices heard loud and clear, we are making a real difference in this fantastic county of Shropshire.

● *Peter Guy is president of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, and will be speaking at the Shropshire Business Awards, at The International Centre, Telford, on June 23*



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S O L I C I T O R S



Dilwyn Jones and John Shaddock pictured at the photography exhibition



David Hurn, Magnum photographer, chats with those in attendance



Evolution Explored – one of the many thought-provoking photographs on show



Byron Grainger-Jones, Emma Molyneux and Corinne Brown at the event



Charles Howell, Kate Gittins and Andrew Prow were impressed by the images



George Candler and Seb Slater enjoyed Evolution Explored

The Darwin Project, Shrewsbury

Thought-provoking and emotional images on the theme of evolution made a big impact when a ground-breaking photography exhibition was staged in Shrewsbury.

'Evolution Explored, A Magnum Photos Exhibition' displayed the work of international photographers from the renowned Magnum Photos Agency.

The exhibition ran until April 23 at The Square and St Mary's Church.

The exhibition was a collaboration between Shrewsbury BID, The Hive and GRAIN Photography Hub and is supported by Arts Council England and partners.



Evolution Explored ran until April 23 at The Square and St Mary's Church



Judith Howland and Tessa Kirk at the photography exhibition



Lyn Surgeon, Martin Wood, Charlotte Brock and Phillip Williams-Rowe, with Sue Wood (front).



Images on display from Magnum Photos Agency generated interest



Robin Morris, Helen Rowlinson, Ioan Jones and Peter Bettis at the exhibition launch



Jacqueline Champion with the Duke of York as he officially opens the Champion & Reeves premises



The Duke of York meets members of the team



Best of British – Champion & Reeves is now exporting products from its popular range to Japan

Champion & Reeves celebrate



The nougat production line in operation



The premises, at the Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury

It's been quite a few months for the award-winning team at fast-growing Shropshire confectionery firm **Champion & Reeves.**

The company's premises at The Food Enterprise Centre in Shrewsbury has been officially opened by the Duke of York, and its products are spreading far and wide, including a first international order to Japan.

Prince Andrew revealed that he was not the first member of the royal family to sample the Champion & Reeves range: "Your product was on the piano at Sandringham at Christmas," he revealed.

He told the civic leaders and VIP guests: "Someone wants to go along and tell other counties what you are doing here. Congratulations to everybody and I wish you all continued success."

"It was a very memorable day for all staff," said director Jacqueline Champion.

"There was much excitement around preparing for the Duke of York's visit, and he was absolutely charming and engaged with staff and guests alike.

"Everyone commented on the interest that he took, illustrated by the time he took and the depth of questions that he asked. There were smiles all round and much laughter throughout the visit, with many happy memories made."

The company, which was a winner at the Shropshire Business Awards last year, has also been recognised this year at the Shropshire Star Excellence In Business Awards.

It is exhibiting at ITV's This Morning Live show, at the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham this month.

Champion & Reeves makes premium confectionery including nougat and traditional butterscotch, which is 100% natural, with no artificial additives or flavourings, gluten free and palm oil free.

The product range is sold throughout the UK royal houses, including Buckingham Palace.



Hand-made products from the Champion & Reeves range



The Duke of York shares a laugh with the Champion & Reeves team



Prince Andrew is welcomed to the Shropshire factory, where local MP Daniel Kawczynski was among the guests



The production process at Champion & Reeves is explained to the royal visitor



Opportunity and threat



More individuals are considering the option to transfer away from defined benefit pensions, but is there a right or a wrong answer?

Defined benefit (DB), or 'final salary' schemes, promise participants a guaranteed income in retirement, based on a formula linked to earnings and length of service. If you are fortunate enough to have one, then your employer is responsible for funding the scheme and for ensuring there's enough money to pay your pension income at the time you retire.

DB schemes are some of the most prized and generous occupational pension schemes around; yet there is evidence that some DB scheme members are walking away from their gold-plated benefits and towards defined contribution (DC) schemes instead.

These offer no income promises, and

BMW workers have been striking over the planned closure of their 'final salary' pension scheme

require participants to manage a variety of risks.

Why is this happening? The answer could lie in the 'cash equivalent transfer value' – a cash sum offered by some DB scheme trustees in return for members giving up some or all of their pension rights.

The relatively high transfer values being offered at the moment are part of an effort by some schemes to offload their members and reduce their overall liabilities – as low interest rates and gilt yields combine to make DB schemes more expensive to operate.

As a result of these developments, some individuals are considering the option of transferring their benefits and putting the money into a DC pension – so should they stay or should they go?

As usual, the correct decision for an individual depends upon a wide number of

factors personal to them. How reliant are they on the income the existing scheme guarantees?

Do they have a range of other assets that will form part of their overall financial picture when they reach retirement? How is their health? Do they desire greater flexibility regarding the amount, timing or pattern of the actual income?

So to summarise, this is both an opportunity and a threat. To make the most suitable decision people really should seek qualified, professional advice. The pitfalls are huge and if the wrong choice is made it usually cannot be undone. It is, however, unlikely to be in your best interest to do this.

● *Nick Jones is the principal of Nick Jones Wealth Planning in Shrewsbury. He is also chairman of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce Patron Members.*

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Grainger & Worrall has worked closely with Aston Martin's engineering design team to enable the evolution of the DB11 power plant

County link to an iconic sports car

Aston Martin has confirmed Shropshire manufacturer Grainger & Worrall as its preferred engine castings partner for the new DB11.

At the heart of this iconic sports car is the new 5.2 litre twin turbocharged V12, providing the cleanest, most fuel efficient, powerful and fastest accelerating model in Aston Martin's history.

Using skills and technology pioneered by the Bridgnorth-based manufacturer in its work with F1 teams and other high performance marques, Grainger & Worrall (GW) has worked closely with Aston Martin's engineering design team to enable the evolution of a lighter, more powerful power plant.

The engine blocks and heads are produced in a dedicated production environment at GW's UK facility. Exploiting the potential of GW's precision sand casting process all castings are manufactured from a high grade, high integrity and recyclable aluminium alloy.

Edward Grainger, managing director of prototypes, said: "GW's precision sand casting process, developed specifically for the engine's manufacture, delivers accurate, high integrity parts with increased design freedom.

"Utilising the latest real time X-ray and CT scanning capabilities in parallel ensures exacting and reliable quality in the development process."

Assembled at Aston Martin's engine plant in Cologne, Germany, the new twin turbo, 48 valve, V12 unit is able to meet



Edward Grainger, right, says the company is delighted to be associated with a success story like Aston Martin. Grainger & Worrall now employs more than 550 people in the UK.

stringent emission and fuel consumption requirements, whilst producing increased performance.

As part of the extensive engine development process, the Shropshire firm has created intricate sand cores and structures using the latest 3D sand printing technology.

This supported the complex CAD outputs of the design team, which was responsible for the production and validation of the development parts prior to production.

In addition to the ongoing supply of engine castings, GW provides rigorous in-process inspection together with unique part identity, ensuring full product traceability.

Edward Grainger continued: "Aston Martin is a great British success story across the globe and acts as a superb ambassador for UK engineering. We are delighted to be a part of this very special and desirable sports car, which has been described as the 'true 21st century Aston Martin'."

Grainger & Worrall now employs more than 550 people in the UK, with an annual turnover in excess of £50 million, and supplies high precision castings to F1 motorsport and prestige marques.

The family-owned business – a former Shropshire Company of the Year – invests significantly in research and development, and exports more than 55% of its products.

County firm's a cut above

By Henry Carpenter

It is the time of year, you could say, that the sound of Oakley's fills the air.

Stop and pause in a village on a weekend afternoon, and you will almost certainly hear the sound of a mower or two in action. There's a decent chance that it will be a ride-on model, and if so it will have been supplied by this familiar Shropshire company.

If you're a golfer and you notice the fairways are looking healthy and manicured after the winter months, consider that these might have been cut courtesy of an Oakley's machine. Even the golf buggies lined up at the clubhouse could well have passed through its order book.

Because this is what the team at Oakley's do: they provide garden machinery for individuals and professional groundcare machines to caravan parks, golf courses and local councils.

Oakley's is based halfway along that mile-long straight stretch of the A458 between Cound and Cressage and it is here that the showrooms and after-sales facilities that support Shropshire and the West Midlands are located.

The company is owned by the Bland family and Robert Bland, the current chairman, joined the family firm in 1972, before taking over the managing director's role from his father, Jack, when he was 26. Ray George, the current managing director, took on the MD post from Robert 10 years ago, while the parts department is now run by Paul Tipton.

However, it all started, Robert explains, in 1921 when George Oakley opened a farm machinery business in Shrewsbury.

"My father bought the business off George in 1945," continues Robert. "The firm operated from a site in St Michael's Street but over the years we also had depots in Shifnal and Welshpool.

"We built our reputation selling all manner of agricultural machinery, from Ford tractors to New Holland combine harvesters, but the company also operated frozen food shops, petrol stations, car hire and sold white goods and irrigation equipment. I suppose our real heyday was in the 1980s. We had a 50 per cent market share in Shropshire for new tractors, selling more than 300 new tractors every year, and employing more than 200 people across our various sites and activities.

"In 1969, we had also started to distribute fuel oil and, by 1991, we had built a state of the art distribution depot in Telford; this is still very much running successfully but managed independently of Oakley's the groundcare business."



Paul Rawlings, Paul Tipton and Ray George at the business on the A458



Jack Davies and John Stansfield demonstrate the golf buggies available from Oakley's



From the archives – 26 machines destined for Oakley's in 1946



Paul Rawlings and Robert Bland in discussion at Oakley's

The 1990s saw turbulent times for the farming industry, and circumstances prompted the Oakley's management team to give up the farm machinery arm of the business in Shrewsbury and move the business to Cound, or more specifically into what had been the grain-drying shed, to concentrate on horticultural machinery. The land at St Michael's Street, meanwhile, was sold for housing.

The year of the move was 2000, since when the business has followed a new course, catching the attention of new markets.

"Lawn mowers and garden machinery for the home owner as well as groundcare equipment for the professional user are what we now concentrate on", says Ray George.

"A growing part of our business is the hiring of specialist machines for cutting and maintaining grass finishes for both short term and longer term hire to all customer types.

"We have developed excellent relationships with several local authorities and now supply councils in Birmingham, the Potteries, Cheshire as well as Shropshire.

"We also spend a lot of time supporting local schools and sports clubs with their complex machinery needs. But garden machinery is what we are best known for

among Shropshire people, I would imagine.

"It is amazing how technology has advanced since I've been in the business, and keeping abreast of it and even ahead of the curve has been hugely important for us as a business.

"Users can do so much more now with less work.

"I would also say that an important element to our success is the relationship we have with various key franchises – we enjoy a close association with excellent brands such as Hayter, Toro, Kubota, Stihl, Trimax, Scag, Club Car, Stiga and Mountfield.

"They are all tried, tested and trusted, and our customers identify with them in a really positive way as well."

A tour around the site reveals there's a lot more to the Oakley's set up than retail. Various mechanics and fitters – all factory trained – service machines large and small in the workshop and this, under the direction of the recently appointed new service manager Paul Rawlings, Ray suggests, is one area where the team from Oakley's believe they stand apart from competitors. The Parts Department is run by Paul Tipton

There are 24 workers at the Cound premises, most of whom are involved in the after-sales ensuring that machinery is kept

in the best of health. As Ray explains: "One of our catchphrases is 'try before you buy or hire'.

"While we use our experience and expertise to tailor machinery to clients' needs, no equipment is completely indestructible and we pride ourselves on our ability to provide an after-service second to none."

Sitting adjacent to the workshop and offices, is a neat line of golf buggies – a relatively new arm of the Oakley's operation.

"We have a fleet of around 150 buggies which we hire out to courses across Shropshire and the wider region," says Ray.

"In the last 12 months we have also diversified into selling refuse sweepers - it really is a constantly evolving business, as it has to be."

Trade is brisk, it appears. According to Robert, Oakley's turns over some £3.5 million per annum, a figure rising by the year.

"Business is steady but as with any sector there are always going to be challenges – it is up to us to meet them and that will no doubt mean we will continue to diversify."

With that, it was back to work at what has without doubt become a Shropshire institution.



Robert Bland, the current chairman, joined the family firm in 1972



Paul Jones carries out maintenance work at the Shropshire firm



So far, so good?



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?

There is no doubt that we are currently going through a period of unprecedented change and uncertainty. Not least because the decision to leave the EU was, arguably, the most significant development of recent years.

I am struck by the number of events that have been hosted by various organisations, to try and understand the implications of this decision. Truth be told, I don't think anyone is entirely sure!

You will no doubt have noticed that there is a lot of debate and noise - but not



Traders in Ludlow fear current business rates revamp could force some retailers to close

a great deal of clarity or purpose – about where we are heading and what the longer-term implications are. According to much of the popular press, little has changed and indeed, the country is doing just fine. So should we take solace in these gung-ho statements or should we exercise caution?

Personally, I remain cautiously optimistic, but am still wary of those who proclaim 'business as usual'. Because various surveys of business opinion – including FSB's own, quarterly Small Business Index, show that while business sentiment remains remarkably robust with anticipation of growth, investment and increased employment, perhaps buoyed by higher levels of international trade and employment off the back of a lower Sterling exchange rate, there is concern about the ever-increasing costs of running a business in the UK.

From the National Minimum and Living

wages, to the cost of fuel and energy and the broken system of business rates – which penalises businesses that need physical space irrespective of their ability to pay – pressures are definitely mounting and action needs to be taken.

I would like therefore, like to hold this Government to account. A Government that has proclaimed that it wants an economy that works for all.

No-one in their right mind would argue with that. So these fine words need to be matched with bold and focused actions, to ensure that endeavour, risk and perseverance do actually reap rewards.

So let's support our politicians and policy makers who put their head above the parapet to champion an entrepreneurial environment, celebrate business success and campaign for systems that support all those seeking to establish and grow successful businesses.

There are many challenges ahead. The opportunities are also there too – if we have the right support and mind-set in place to take them up. I want to encourage a positive and progressive outlook and will work with all those who share my views. I believe that we should all take the view that the future is there for the taking. So let's stop navel gazing, get on with it and make the best of where we're at. The alternative is not worth thinking about!

● *Ray Hickinbottom is chairman of the FSB in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire*

It's the ticket for minister

Business minister Jesse Norman visited Shropshire to see some of the latest 'big ticket' projects which are set to create thousands of homes and jobs.

With more than £104 million of Growth Deal funding from the Government being invested in the region, the Minister came to see progress on sites in Shrewsbury and Telford and meet employers taking the lead on workforce development.

Mr Norman, who is the Government's Growth Champion for the Marches LEP region, toured the Flaxmill in Shrewsbury before heading to the Marches Centre for Technology and Engineering's satellite site at Salop Design & Engineering.

He met the employer-led consortium awarded a £1.9 million contract from the Marches LEP to develop the new advanced manufacturing training centre and also spoke with apprentices.

Chairman of the Marches LEP Graham Wynn said: "Jesse Norman has been incredibly supportive of our bids for Government funding to support our ambitions for growth. From an initial £83 million for infrastructure and broadband projects, we recently successfully negotiated a further £21.9 million for skills and business boosting schemes. And this



From left, apprentice Alex Malam, Business Minister Jesse Norman, Richard Homden and Chris Greenough of Salop Design & Engineering, LEP chair Graham Wynn, Bekki Phillips, of InComm Training and Matt Snelson, managing director of MCMT

was a fantastic opportunity to showcase our track record in delivering these big ticket projects with our partners, Shropshire Council and Telford & Wrekin Council."

Mr Norman said: "I congratulate the Marches LEP on its strong performance over the past year in promoting economic growth across the region.

"Effective LEPs like this one are an important part of the Government's plans to support the creation of skilled jobs and help every area to reach its full potential."

The minister also met with the Shropshire Business Board at University Centre Shrewsbury before heading to

Telford College of Arts and Technology for a discussion with Telford Business Board.

Graham Wynn added: "The Telford Land Deal, which secured an additional £44.5 million investment in this region, formed part of our first Growth Deal.

"Our partners, Telford & Wrekin Council, were able to show the Minister the immediate benefits of this on site at the new Hortonwood West development."

Mr Norman also visited businesses at the Marches Growth Hub in Telford and toured the new Auto Sports engineering department at the University of Wolverhampton's Priorislee campus.

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In brief

- Telford & Wrekin Council is set to offer enhanced discretionary development services to support growth, improve determination times and generate additional income. The changes will also adapt the planning service area to respond effectively to Government proposals to introduce private sector competition into the processing of planning applications. This will mean that alongside enhanced pre-application advice and support to applicants inside the borough, the proposal will enable the council to provide planning and development services outside of Telford and Wrekin.

- Sentinel Care Services, based in Telford, has been rated as good by the Care Quality Commission, which is the independent regulator of health and social care in England. The report praised the company's management organisation and said people received care from safe and well-trained staff. Inspectors said: "People were supported by staff who were caring and treated people with kindness and respect. People and their relatives told us staff developed positive relationships with them. People and their relatives felt the service was well managed and the quality of the care was good."

Cover star

A Telford manufacturer has played a starring role in an important engineering project at one of the world's most famous film festivals.

Fabweld Steel Products has designed and manufactured replacement access covers located at the entrance to the Palais des Festivals et des Congrès Cannes in France.

Its FAB PAVE access covers, which are infilled with relevant material to blend in with the surrounding surface, have been installed in Cannes' Festival Square, which is always bustling with film stars, celebrities and paparazzi during the annual event.

Fabweld was commissioned by civil engineers ETS Brosio to produce the replacement access covers for its client, the Cannes Waste Water Syndicate.

The covers allow contractors to service heavy-duty valve systems that protect the area against flooding when there is heavy rain.

The brief had to meet specific design needs including working within the existing framework and allow for one-man operation as the covers are lifted daily to allow the services underneath to be emptied.

The firm also supplied further access covers for a similar project in nearby Ecole Bocca Park and has secured an additional contract to design and manufacture five similar covers for other areas of the city.

Fabweld managing director Richard



Festival Square at the entrance to the Cannes Film Festival with FAB PAVE access covers

Hilton said: "The Cannes Film Festival is one of the biggest cultural events in the world and, outside of that, the Palais is the second busiest business tourism destination in France so it was imperative that we created an attractive and workable solution that met the customer's brief.

"The cover was fabricated from mild steel and hot dip galvanised to protect it from corrosion. It was supplied with structural support steelwork to ensure it can accept heavy vehicular traffic and the design ensured that, when the covers are hinged back, the support steelwork can be removed to give clear access for any maintenance with machinery."

Cannes is not the first high profile location to feature FAB PAVE access covers. They have also been used in the redesign of the ancient Elefetheria Square in Nicosia, Cyprus, and Terminal 2A – known as the Queen's Terminal – at Heathrow airport.



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Sarah Lewis and Esther Wright have launched Fizz Festivals Ltd

Joint venture puts the fizz in festivals

Two Shropshire businesswomen have teamed up to launch an events business that will bring classical music events and live music festivals to the region.

Esther Wright, of ElevenTen Event Management & Consultancy, and Sarah Lewis, of Lily's Secret Vintage Tearoom, A Very Vintage Events and Polka Dot Catering, have joined forces to launch Fizz Festivals Ltd, a Newport-based events business with a strong family focus.

Esther Wright has 15 years' experience running large-scale events for charities, local authorities and music festival organisers, including hospitality events at the annual Aldeburgh Festival, and a five-date Buskaid concert tour, including a performance at the prestigious Queen Elizabeth Hall in London.

Closer to home, Esther's company, ElevenTen Event Management & Consultancy, has organised major outdoor events in Shropshire and across the UK.

Fizz Festival co-director Sarah Lewis is also no stranger to events organising and catering on a large scale. As the owner of Polka Dot Catering, A Very Vintage Events and Lily's Secret Vintage Tearooms near Gnosall, she is the organiser of the pop up vintage fair at RAF Cosford Air Show and has several corporate catering contracts.

Both women grew up locally, with Esther attending the Grove School in Market Drayton and Sarah living in Norbury, attending Burton Borough School in Newport.

Esther Wright said: "Sarah and I are both extremely passionate about creating fabulous events that appeal to all generations. We create magical musical events which bring together the best of local food and drink producers.

"We provide a platform for local musicians to perform alongside well-known names from the music industry, all in stunning locations."

Sarah Lewis added: "We are busy planning a classical musical event, Proms and Prosecco in The Park, which will take place in Newport this September."

Good news for retailers

It's a volatile time for retailers – but latest retail sales figures show signs of optimism.

John Pitchford, head of corporate banking for Barclays in Shropshire said: "Solid growth, supported by continuing increases in online purchases indicate that parts of the industry are finding ways to encourage shoppers to keep spending.

"Inflation remains front of mind for all of us in retail, and there's no doubt that rising fuel prices are having an impact on the amount of disposable income people have available for other purchases, making this result all the more impressive.

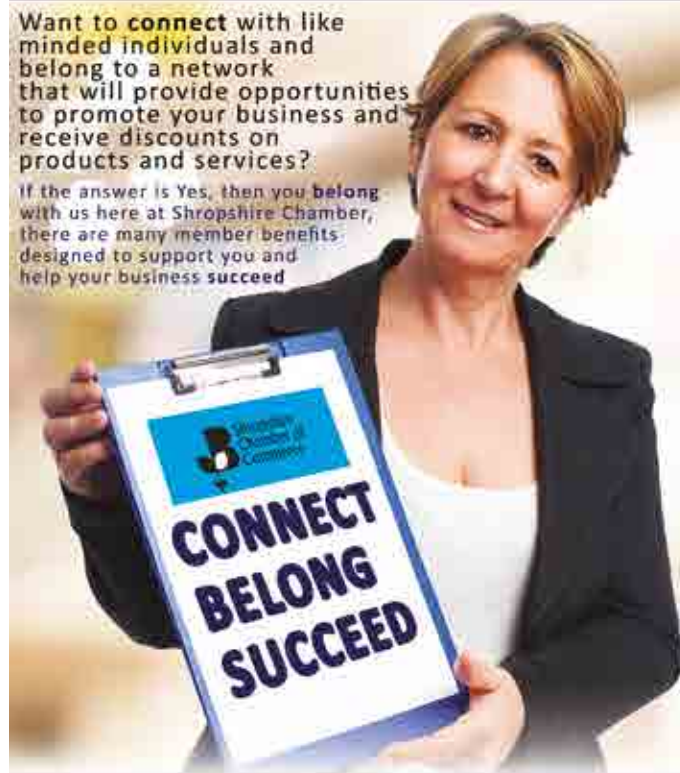
"Looking forward, I think we can expect some volatility in the overall numbers as retailers tackle various challenges over the coming months, but these figures show it is still possible to achieve sales growth in the current trading environment."

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In brief

- The Marches Growth Hub is launching a new programme called 'Building Business Confidence Across the Marches', designed to give businesses the tools they need to flourish and grow. The scheme is open to eligible small-to-medium sized businesses in a variety of sectors, as well as aspiring entrepreneurs and individuals. It is being delivered by Bridgnorth-based business specialists, Good2Great. Director Jonny Themans said: "The project is all about helping people understand how to develop their commercial potential, grow sales and develop the profitability of their business." For more information, visit the site www.start2great.co.uk

- The Shrewsbury Club at Sundorne in the county town has become a Patron member of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce. Manager Alvin Ward said: "We share a real passion for helping to develop business links throughout the county, quality of service and improving health in general. Our joint mission is something that can be expanded through our wide range of facilities and which our dedicated professional staff can support."

- Twice as many people are reaping the benefits of the Superfast Telford roll-out of fibre broadband compared with six months ago, Telford & Wrekin Council and BT have revealed. The percentage of households and businesses choosing an upgrade has jumped from 10 to more than 20 per cent since September – and is continuing to grow rapidly. More than 3,000 premises across the borough are now able to access superfast fibre broadband as a result of the Superfast Telford programme. Areas to benefit most recently include parts of Lightmoor, Ironbridge, Tibberton, Stirchley, Aqueduct and Lawley.

Career in carpentry beckons

Morris Joinery, has offered work experience to five prospective bench joiners who will have the opportunity to gain a full-time traineeship or apprenticeship in September.

The Shropshire company's team attended Careers Week at Shrewsbury College to meet joinery and carpentry students – and it ignited the idea to invite interested students to spend time with Morris Joinery and put their skills into practice whilst learning more about their trade in a working environment.

Each of the selected students will spend four days in the joinery workshop at Bicton Business Park, Shrewsbury, to observe experienced bench joiners and carry out tasks to assess their hand-skills and attention to detail.

After six weeks, three students will be shortlisted to go back for another week's work experience, and following this Morris Joinery will recruit the most successful students as apprentices.

The aim for Morris Joinery is to provide an insight into a realistic working environment helping students upskill and build their CVs whilst giving the successful apprentices an opportunity to continue learning whilst working and earning.

Steve Granda, Morris Joinery manager, said:



Steve Granda pictured with student Josh Davies

"With the skills shortage in the industry, we felt it was important to inspire the next generation and look for students who we can nurture and develop into highly skilled craftsmen.

"These students showed determination and a desire to learn when we first met them and so it was only natural that we offered them an opportunity to show their practical skills with a view to recruiting the most successful."

Fantastic four promoted

Four graduates have been promoted to trainee solicitors at Shropshire law firm Terry Jones Solicitors.

Emma Humphreys, Zoe Smith, Lily Timmins and Emma Whitehouse have begun their 'period of recognised training', the final stage on the path to qualifying as a solicitor.

Terry Jones Solicitors has four offices in Shropshire – Telford, Shrewsbury, Bridgnorth and Newport.

Emma Whitehouse and Lily Timmins are with the residential conveyancing teams in the Telford and Bridgnorth offices respectively, whilst Emma Humphreys helps the wills and probate department at Shrewsbury.

Zoe Smith, who is also based at the Shrewsbury office, works alongside managing director Terry Jones in commercial property and agricultural law.

Terry Jones said: "Over the last 12 months, these young ladies have demonstrated their commitment to the firm, and as just reward we were delighted to offer them a training contract.

"This will allow them to put into practice all the knowledge and skills they have learnt thus far. It is gratifying to watch them progress with their hard work paying off as they commence the next step of the career."

Lily Timmins said: "The growth within the conveyancing department has been significant



Lily Timmins, Emma Humphreys, Zoe Smith and Emma Whitehouse

since I joined the firm in 2015, and I thoroughly enjoy working in such a fast paced and exciting environment. To now be awarded a training contract is an amazing opportunity."

Zoe Smith added: "I am very excited about the opportunities that have arisen and I very much look forward to working alongside Terry Jones and progressing within the commercial property and agricultural department, as it is an area of law I am very passionate about".

Having spent her first few months at the Telford office, Emma Humphreys relocated to Shrewsbury to join the wills and probate team. She said: "I am delighted to have been offered a training contract and I am looking forward to completing my period of recognised training with the firm."

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Tara Beasley, Hannah Jones, Selina Schoelles and Florence Wade-Smith



Samantha Harris and Simon Harris



Jackie Gurden, Katy Tanner, Richard Gurden and Anne Griffith



Ana Berry, Emily Kiel, Ruth Jefferis, Melody Yang and Verity Snow

William Hague at Moreton Hall

One of the most prominent and respected politicians in a generation addressed a packed audience at Moreton Hall school for its annual business lunch.

More than 600 people, including many from Shropshire's business community and pupils from Moreton Hall, listened as Rt Hon Lord Hague of Richmond gave his views on 'The Post-Brexit World'.

Lord Hague's speech followed a presentation given by members of Moreton Enterprises, the business venture run by Year 12 girls.

In the presentation the girls outlined how the real-life business methods are seeing the group achieve a turnover of up to £50,000 each year.



Lord Hague pictured at Moreton Hall's annual business lunch



David Young, John Simpson, Simon Long and Dominic Gascoigne



Jeannie France-Hayhurst, Vivien Sutcliffe and Fiona Walters



Moreton Hall welcomed Lord Hague



Beccy Theodore-Jones, Jeni Pearce, Andrew Shakeshaft and Sandra Ryan



Rose Bubb, Gaye Moore, Sara Smith and Josie Davies photographed at the well-attended event



Lily Mainwaring, Cicely Peers, Hannah Jones, Lord Hague, Tara Beasley, Martha Stewart and Verity Snow



Matthew Nunns and Rebecca Bowyer



Christopher and Sarah Waters with Henry Carpenter



Sarah Hartshorn, Mark Savill and Bethan Davies



Lady Hague at the Moreton Hall event



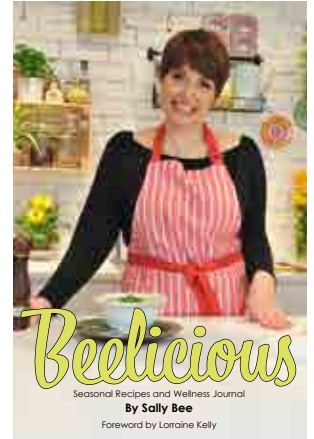
Christine Kendall and Mike Kendall pictured with Zoe Detheridge



Media & You poster design for Jason Donovan's UK tour



Paul Naylor, from Newport-based Media & You, with just a small selection of the projects he is currently working on



Sally Bee is a regular on Lorraine Kelly's show

Paul has stars in his eyes

What have TV cook Sally Bee, War of the Worlds supremo Jeff Wayne and singer/actor Jason Donovan all got in common? Well, for one Shropshire businessman, they have each contributed to an action-packed first few months since he formed his design and marketing agency.

Paul Naylor, a former journalist for Shropshire Newspapers and Express & Star, developed many skills in his time with the Midland News Association.

But, earlier this year the time was right for him to spread his wings and launch his new venture – Media & You.

Based in Newport, Paul has many years experience in journalism, having written television, travel and food reviews – and if you ever need anyone to help you with a Star Wars article, he is the man.

"It has been an incredible start for Media & You," says Paul, who has a website at www.mediaandyou.co.uk

"I feel blessed to have such a great network of friends and former colleagues who have collaborated with me on a number of exciting and varied projects."

Varied indeed. In addition to pulling together the recently launched Shropshire Business magazine, Paul has just sent to print a 256-page book containing recipes and a lifestyle journal for TV chef Sally Bee on behalf of local business A Way With Media.

Sally is a regular on Lorraine Kelly's morning show and familiar to many.

This is Paul's second book. His first was released late last year on behalf of Michelin Star chef Stephane Borie, based at Checkers restaurant in Montgomery.

"Anyone who knows me, knows how much I like food. Working on Sally's and Stephane's books certainly made me hungry." But there's more to the business than that.

Paul was commissioned to design the poster artwork for Jason Donovan's forthcoming tour.

"It was certainly a memorable day when I was asked to provide artwork for such a well known star."

And the celebrity connections don't end there.

Next year sees the 40th anniversary of Jeff Wayne's musical version of War of the Worlds.

The album sold millions of copies around the globe and in the UK has amassed sales in excess of 2,500,000. Famed for its narration by the late Richard Burton, the album artwork is instantly recognisable.

Media & You will be helping to pull together a book to mark the significant anniversary.

"With my love of sci-fi, this contract is a dream come true," adds Paul.

He certainly likes his sci-fi. In particular Star Wars. George Lucas's sci-fi epic celebrates its 40th anniversary this year and Paul has just returned from a trip to Orlando where likeminded fans gathered at Star Wars Celebration.

Off the back of that trip, Paul hopes to release a book based on Celebration Orlando and archived material from Star Wars fan website www.jedinews.co.uk for which he is a contributor.

Among Media & You's latest clients is Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP. Paul will be promoting the company in print, online and via social media.

He is also working with a media partner on behalf of Seymour International of Shifnal on a range of product materials.

Prior to leaving the Midland News Association, Paul was the designer and editor of Business Matters for Shropshire Chamber of Commerce having already been involved for many years with Prosper magazine for the Black Country Chamber of Commerce.

During his time with the Midland News Association, he also designed Made in the Midlands magazine.

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Seal of approval

A Shropshire private training provider has been given a resounding seal of approval by Ofsted following its latest inspection.

In-Comm Training, which operates academies in Shrewsbury and Aldridge, has been rated 'outstanding' across all areas of the business, becoming the only organisation in the county to achieve this level.

The Grade One verdict recognises that apprentices achieve 'outstanding' qualifications that help prepare them for promotion and their future career, that learners achieve high levels of Maths, English and IT and most budding engineers secure high grades in their technical training.

"To secure 'outstanding' rating from Ofsted is a fantastic achievement for everyone connected with the business," explained Gareth Jones, joint managing director at In-Comm Training.

"Over the last three years, we have worked tirelessly to raise the profile of vocational learning, in order to meet the acknowledged skills gap and have put in place a number of ambitious plans to make sure we are seen as an 'outstanding provider'.

"This includes employing the best staff and investing more than £1m in the latest workshop equipment, including new CNC capabilities, millers, lathes, welding bays, a fluid power section and CAD suite. Ofsted's 'outstanding' rating reinforces that what we are doing is working."

Inspectors cited that employers play a significant role in planning and delivering high-quality apprenticeship programmes and that leaders and managers are highly responsive in meeting the skills needs of the region.

Bekki Phillips, joint managing director, continued: "We spent a lot of time working with firms in our area and they all told us that they would invest more in training if it gave them future employees ready for work."



In-Comm Training has been rated 'outstanding' by Ofsted

Named best in county

A street food café and artisan coffee shop in Shrewsbury Market Hall has been named the best venue of its kind in Shropshire.

The Bird's Nest Café was voted by members of the public as the winner of the Best Independent Coffee Shop/Café in the regional 2017 What's On Awards.

"This award means so much to us and it's a great testimony to all the hard work and dedication poured into the business by our fantastic team of staff," said owner Chloe Tench.

The Bird's Nest was founded in

2011 by friends Aaron Brown and Victor Deng, from Birmingham, who had run a café together in the French Alps.

Aaron took over the running of the Bird's Nest on his own a couple of years later and expanded the business, and Chloe took over the running of the café last year.

Market Hall facilities manager Kate Gittins said: "The Bird's Nest has been an enormous asset to the Market Hall and it has done a great deal to raise the profile of the market over the years. It has been a joy to watch the rise of their success."



The Bird's Nest team celebrating their award, Elliot Jones, Chloe Tench, Georgie Trifunovic and Aaron Brown

TG Builders Merchants



Bridgnorth, Ellesmere, Northwich, Nantwich, Oswestry, Tattenhall, Welshpool, Wolverley

TG Concrete



Aberystwyth, Bala, Bangor, Ellesmere, Newtown, Oswestry, Porthmadog, Prees, Pwllheli, Tattenhall, Welshpool, Wrexham

TG Skip Hire



All Skip sizes: Mini Skips to 40 yd Maxi roll-on roll-off Skips

TG Electrical



Domestic, Commercial & Solar PV Contractors

TG Enviro



Waste Management & Renewable Energy

Applying for funds

Shropshire farmers and land managers can now apply for funding under Countryside Stewardship, a county surveyor has advised.

Countryside Stewardship is a targeted scheme which funds projects that restore habitats, improve water quality and woodland, reduce flood risk, protect landscapes and provide food and shelter for pollinators, birds and other wildlife, explained Vicky Price of rural surveyors Berrys.

"Natural England has improved the application process this year to make it easier to apply, including simplifying evidence requirements for claims and applications wherever possible and offering additional support and advice," she said.

"The funding will be offered to those who propose to make the best environmental improvements within their local area.

"The Mid Tier of Countryside Stewardship offers five-year agreements for environmental improvements in the wider countryside, such as reducing diffuse water pollution or improving the environment for birds, pollinators and farm wildlife.

"Higher Tier specifically focuses on environmentally important sites, including commons and woodlands, where the more complex management requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission, including tailoring of options."



Mid Tier application packs must be requested by July 31, with applications to then be submitted by September 30, 2017

Those thinking of applying for the Higher Tier will need to have submitted an initial application by May 5, 2017. Higher Tier application packs must have been requested by April 13, allowing Natural England to send out the maps and evidence requirements in time for farmers and land managers to develop their application.

Mid Tier application packs must be requested by 31 July with applications to be submitted by September 30, 2017.

Natural England will contact everyone who has a Higher Level Stewardship or Entry Level Stewardship agreement expiring this year to let them know which scheme they will be most suited to.

Tenancy update from rural surveyor

James Neame FAAV, is a rural surveyor for Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP, based in Tasley, Bridgnorth. He specialises in Landlord and Tenant matters, compensation claims and compulsory purchase.

Here, James provides his latest tenancy update.

Rent Review? Plan ahead!

With pressure on farm incomes over recent years, rent reviews of both Agricultural Holdings Act 1986 and Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 (FBTs) have been few and far between. We saw rent review notices being served and later withdrawn by landlords and the agricultural industry fell upon harder times. This extended the rent review periods beyond the common three year cycle. This longer period of a static rent is then something to be cautious of when a rent review does occur. Some Agricultural Holdings Act tenants were even successful in having a rent reduction.

With a minimum of 12 months' notice required to instigate a rent review, Landlords may well be thinking about serving a notice between now and the 29th September allowing the rent to be reviewed from September 2018. With the uncertainty of commodity prices, and the continuing unknown that Brexit is bringing, it would be a guessing exercise to predict what rental values will be in 18 months' time. However, it is best to plan ahead and consider the impact that a change in rent would have on your farming business. If it was to rise, could you sustain the additional outgoing? With rents not having been reviewed for a number of years, it is likely that there will be some increases for Farm Business Tenancy rents. Our advice is to not presume that rents will remain static and to ensure that you have a plan in place if rents do rise.

A new way to work out your rent

The Agricultural Tenancies Act 1995 allows for freedom of contract between the landlord and tenant. This means that the normal rent review procedure of following market rents need not apply. A more creative rent formula could be implemented that could suit both parties reflecting the statutory rent formula that was in place in the 1986 Act. This could be on a commodity price basis so that the rent payable was linked to the price of cereals, for example. If you are entering into a new tenancy agreement, it may be worth negotiating the terms on which the rent will be reviewed.



James Neame FAAV, rural surveyor for Nock Deighton Agricultural LLP

New FBT? How about a Brexit clause?

If you are currently in negotiations about a new Farm Business Tenancy, or likely to be entering into a new agreement, it may be worth discussing the inclusion of a "Brexit clause".

This is a clause in the agreement that can result in a change to either rights or obligations of the parties dependent upon an event or action caused by Brexit. The clause would detail a potential Brexit related event and the changes to the contractual obligations or rights as a consequence.

This can provide protection against a potentially adverse impact of Brexit. With this comes the challenge of being able to predetermine the potential consequences of Brexit and at this stage, it may be too early to say. However, as Brexit negotiations progress, it may be worth bearing in mind.

Global interest for auction

High demand for quality, well maintained tractors, machinery and implements resulted in a north Shropshire farm dispersal auction attracting a worldwide internet audience.

Buyers from as far away as New Zealand, Eastern Europe, Ireland and across the UK all bought lots at the successful auction held by auctioneers Halls at Coton Farm, Ruyton-X1-Towns, Nesscliffe, near Shrewsbury.

The auction followed a change in farming policy by Mr Neville Jones, whose family has farmed in Ruyton-X1-Towns since 1954.

A range of tractors, vehicles, trailers, harvesting and cultivation equipment, most of which had been purchased from new and had been regularly serviced and maintained, went under the hammer.

Top prices were £38,500 for a 2013 New

Holland T6 175, which sold to an Irish buyer, £35,500 for a 2001 Claas Medion 320 combine harvester, which sold to a Yorkshire buyer, £28,500 for a Manitou MLT 627 loadall, £27,000 for a McCormick XTX 145 Xtraspeed tractor, £20,000 for a New Holland TS 115 tractor, which sold to Yorkshire and £14,000 for a 2005 12 tonne grain dryer, which sold to North Yorkshire.

Nick Hyne from Halls, said the auction attracted great online interest via i-bidder, with two lots selling to New Zealand and others going to Poland, other Eastern European countries and Ireland.

"This auction demonstrated the strength of the current market for used farm machinery of all types," he added. "We are delighted with the international interest and the excellent prices achieved for Mr Jones."



The 2013 New Holland T6 175



2001 Claas Medion 320 Combine

'Green accolade' for a farmer's work

A Shropshire farmer has been awarded a 'green accolade' for his environmental work, which includes exporting enough energy to power his neighbouring 500-home village.

Neil Furniss of ME Furniss & Sons, of Edgmond, near Newport, received the endorsement after an independent assessment of the farm.

Environmental measurement company Credibly Green completed the study at the 410-hectare site which is given over to arable farming and pig breeding.

"We have issued the farm with a 'green stamp' meaning that it has been audited for the environmental impact of its waste management operations and energy use," said Paul Frith, director of Bridgnorth-based Credibly Green. "The business is taking substantial strides towards reducing its carbon footprint by exporting substantial amounts of electricity to the National Grid from its renewable energy projects – this accolade is a way of showing the community, suppliers, contractors and staff that it is committed to the environment."

Using industry standard data, and a bespoke carbon toolkit, Credibly Green examined the carbon emissions equivalent of the farm in terms of electricity, water, fuel, waste and recycling activity between January 2016 and January 2017.

Data showed it was exporting enough renewable energy to the grid to power 600 homes, after supplying its own domestic and agricultural buildings and facilities.

The farm consumed 746,757kWh of electricity – much of which was low or zero



Cath Edwards of Credibly Green with Neil Furniss of M E Furniss & Sons of Edgmond

carbon renewable energy – exporting a total of 2,869,141kWh to the National Grid via their solar photovoltaic panels and anaerobic digestion plant.

Fertiliser application was the largest contributor to annual emissions, followed by fuel consumption.

Neil Furniss explained that he used digestate from the AD plant to replace other fertiliser, reducing environmental impact.

"We are delighted with the results of the report, which show a total net saving of 605 tonnes of carbon, and we will continue our good work now that we have official accreditation of our environmental efforts. It is amazing to think that we generate enough

electricity to power our local village!"

Paul Frith added: "With recent intensification of farming practices across the UK, environmental awareness is key to promoting responsible and sustainable land management.

"ME Furniss & Sons identified that there were ways to offset the carbon impact of their fertiliser application and fuel consumption by generating electricity from renewable energy sources.

"They are continuing to take steps to measure and understand the key impacts of their own operations and will be advocates of change within nearby farming communities."

Charlotte scores the highest in UK

Chartered surveyor Charlotte Rogerson is being put forward for a special award after gaining the highest mark across the UK in her professional examinations.

Charlotte, a rural chartered surveyor at Berrys in Shrewsbury, secured the highest mark across all three parts of her Central Association of Agricultural Valuers examinations.

She will now be offered free attendance at the conference day of the national CAAV annual meeting and conference being held at

Bristol in June and her name will be submitted to the Royal Agricultural Society of England for the Talbot Ponsonby prize for agricultural valuation.

"I am absolutely delighted and proud to achieve this accolade," said Charlotte. "It makes the hard work and revision before the exams all the more worthwhile."

Charlotte, a graduate of Harper Adams University near Newport, joined Berrys in 2014 as a qualified RICS surveyor after working as a rural surveyor in the north of England.



Chartered surveyor Charlotte Rogerson

Putting Robocut through its paces

An all-terrain remote control slope mower produced by an award-winning Ludlow company has been put through its paces in challenging terrain at one of the north of England's most stunning beauty spots.

Robocut, from McConnel, was armed with a fixed-tooth forestry flailhead, one of 22 different working attachments available, giving it versatility and turning it into a true multi-purpose work platform.

Capable of working on slopes up to 55 degrees, Robocut enables safe, fast working in hazardous, hard-to-reach and restricted access sites.

It has proven itself in a wide variety of hostile terrains from mountains in Scandinavia to jungles in Papua New Guinea and can be found working in more than 20 countries around the world.

Meanwhile, McConnel's new Italian distributor Agrimec di Crosetto Elio e c. snc has successfully showcased the latest Power Arm technology at one of Italy's most influential trade shows – attracting interest from hundreds of farmers and contractors and opening up a new market for the Shropshire firm

Appointed as McConnel's Power Arm distributor in the country, Crosetto put the spotlight on the PA6565T at the National Fair of Agricultural Mechanisation at Savigliano, and were impressed with the buzz the machine generated.

Crosetto's export manager Fabio Alessio said: "The quality of the PA6565T grabbed a lot of attention.

"We have already been asked to quote for orders by potential customers.

"It was certainly a very promising show debut."

Based in the Piedmont city of Marene, Crosetto manufactures trailers, dumpers, manure and slurry spreaders and operates as a major dealer for some of Italy's top agricultural brands.

McConnel export manager Edward Hall said: "We are delighted to team up with Crosetto and be able to work together with the company to create new opportunities in a successful agricultural market."



Robocut is put through its paces



McConnel makes waves at a top Italian show



Iain Morrison and John Amos



Richard Connolly and Simon Brown

Experts at seminar

More than 70 people attended an annual farming seminar in Ludlow, one of the most popular fixtures in the town's rural business calendar.

Held at Ludlow Kitchen, the event was hosted by Midland law firm mfg Solicitors and the Country Land & Business Association, with a variety of presentations covering topics including succession, taxation, rights of way and the possible impact of Brexit on current decision making.

The seminar was chaired by Iain Morrison, partner and head of the firm's agricultural and rural affairs division. He said: "Our Ludlow farming seminar is always well attended and attracts farmers, landowners and land professionals from across Shropshire, Wales and the West Midlands.

"It was their opportunity to hear first-hand from experts about key challenges in the rural sector and how to overcome them."

Guests were treated to a drinks reception and buffet which included local produce.



Mark Riches, Alexandra Phillips and Dawn Utting

Official launch for offices

The NFU Mutual Welshpool team has moved into new, larger office space in the heart of the town.

After six years at its former office in Puzzle Square, the opportunity arose for the business to expand and take up the larger space on the main route way through the town – where the old Spar used to be located. Senior agent at NFU Mutual Welshpool, Stephen Kenyon, said: "We had

outgrown our existing premises so were looking for a larger office space.

"The project has been in planning for almost 2 years and now I'm thrilled to announce the doors are officially open for business."

Planned Office Interiors were tasked with the 12 week project to renovate the existing 290sqm ground floor space at 20 Church Street, to create a large, modern

and airy office space which now includes a conference room, four private offices and a large kitchen area with storage space.

Stephen Kenyon added: "We will be able to host more events, seminars and workshops for our policyholders and NFU members."

An official open event is being planned to launch the new premises for NFU Mutual Welshpool, on July 20.

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Big question – how much do you earn?

By Chris Austin

It's the question that dare not speak its name. "How much are you on?"

Money is the great office taboo. It's the conversation that we never, ever have, no matter how well we get along with other colleagues.

Such questions as: "What does he/she earn?" Or: "Did they get a raise during the annual salary review?" habitually go unasked. They are considered crass and impolite, impolitic and intrusive.

Margaret Murray, a company director with a regional public relations firm, says: "People just don't like talking about money.

"They feel uncomfortable and compromised. Most people believe what's in a pay packet is strictly between them and the cashiers."

And yet such secrecy leads to all manner of misconceptions. The absence of clarity leads to supposition and, as most people know, presumption is the root of all ignorance.

So we imagine journalists are really well paid, when, in fact, their earnings are considerably less than the annual national salary.

We suppose plumbers are coining it in by charging excessive call-out charges, high hourly rates and inflated charges for working anti-social hours. And yet, like journalists, plumbers earn far lower wages than most imagine.

At the other end of the scale, we inaccurately assume head teachers earn comfortable salaries and train drivers are modestly remunerated. Both, in fact, are far better paid than we might imagine.

New research reveals people think solicitors earn 20% more than their actual salary, that we think teachers earn 7% more than they actually do, and that the only professions that we accurately guess are those of nurses, administrators and chief executives.

Such statistics are all the more remarkable when research shows that 68% of workers in Shropshire say an increased salary is the most important factor for changing careers.

Tom Price, the owner of a plastering and building company in Telford, says the figures are no surprise. "People imagine those in certain trades are coining it in. The reality is frequently very different. They're simply trying to earn a decent wage."

According to a new poll of more than 2,000 by Oxford Open Learning, our perceptions are frequently wildly inaccurate.

Of the fifteen professions surveyed, ten of their annual salaries were over-estimated.

Dr Nick Smith, courses director and founder of Oxford Open Learning Trust, said: "A previous study we carried out



People dramatically underestimate how much train drivers earn, according to research

Profession	Actual Salary	Perceived Salary	% Salary overestimated/underestimated
Journalist	£23,500	£30,000	27.66%
Plumber	£24,746	£30,000	21.23%
Solicitor	£50,000	£60,000	20.00%
Hairdresser	£15,473	£18,000	16.33%
Retail Assistant	£13,122	£15,000	14.31%
Florist	£15,926	£18,000	13.02%
Teacher	£27,813	£30,000	7.86%
Chief Executive	£94,884	£100,000	5.39%
Administration	£17,351	£18,000	3.74%
NHS Nurse	£24,936	£25,000	0.26%
NHS GP	£69,514	£65,000	-6.49%
MP	£74,962	£70,000	-6.62%
HR Manager	£38,127	£35,000	-8.20%
Train driver (not including London underground)	£47,000	£32,000	-31.91%
Headmaster of secondary state school	£76,192	£50,000	-34.38%

found that money is the biggest motivator behind changing careers, followed by better working hours and personal interest.

"However, the results of this survey show Brits are overestimating the salaries earned by many professions.

"Among British workers, over half said that salary was an important factor when they chose their current job role. When it

came to choosing a new career or job role, this figure increased to 68% - suggesting that monetary incentives are key for choosing a new career.

"Changing careers seems to pay off; over a third of workers polled that had moved to a new job role said they had an increase in salary after the first year of their new career."



Joint celebration – the 2017 BCA winners and highly-commended businesses pictured together

Children’s businesses celebrated in county

The fourth annual Shropshire Businesses For Children Awards were held at the Park Inn hotel in Telford.

Shropshire’s top children’s businesses were recognised in 13 categories for the support, education and services and products they provide for children and young people.

Winners included Su Wigley Childminding, Baby Bird Café, Baby Sensory Shropshire, Simply Magical Photography, Jungleland, MD Warriors, Headstart, Kieran Edwards of Wrekin Riders, Shropshire Kids Festival, ABC Day Nursery, Baby Ballet, and Diddy Rugby. There were also commended certificates for four businesses – Chatty World, Fidget Pie for Kidstrapp, Shropshire Event Nannies, and Excitim.

Guests raised more than £680 on the night, which went to the winning charity, Home-Start Telford & Wrekin, and a former winner of the BBC’s Young Apprentice, Ashleigh Porter-Exley, was guest speaker.

Entries are already open for the 2018 competition – see www.bcawards.co.uk for details



Rhian Hickley, Headstart, with Elizabeth Wilkinson, Dyslexic Dyslexia Consultant



Kieran Edwards, of Wrekin Riders, with Christine Oliver, of MGP Accountants



Louise Howard from Lanyon Bowdler pictured here with Craig Howard



The team from Wroxeter Hotel which sponsored the tables



Leila Campbell, of Baby Ballet with John Smallman of Vehicle Glass Conversions



Master of ceremonies Carl Jones, editor of Shropshire Business



Ashleigh Exley-Porter, Kingswood Learning Leisure, with MD Warriors team



Penny Hustwick, of ABC Day Nursery, and Stuart Fleming, of The Park Inn by Radisson



Su Wigley, of Su Wigley Childminding, and Shirley Davies of Yarrington



A selection of the finalists pictured with Scott Bird, of Wolverhampton Grand



Andrea McDonald of University Centre Shrewsbury presents an award to the team from Shropshire Kids Festival



Tony and Carol Sharp of Simply Magical Photography with Phil Gadsby of Memo Office



Speech – BBC Young Apprentice winner Ashleigh Porter-Exley



Dave Williams from headline sponsors, Henshalls

Tannery sending products overseas

A Shropshire tannery that manufactures leather gardening products is aiming for new markets after winning new clients at a global trade show.

Bridgnorth-based Bradley's Tannery, founded by Bradley Burn in 1984, has seen exports grow from just five per cent 20 years ago to 85 per cent today.

Bradley credits the recent upsurge in exports to the expert advice and support he received from Department for International Trade West Midlands advisors with helping him to expand his global reach.

Working with the Shropshire DIT team, he secured funding to attend the Ambiente Show in Frankfurt, the world's biggest consumer goods show, in February 2017. Having already signed up at least a dozen new customers as a result of attending the show, he is now following up leads from retailers in new markets overseas.

Bradley's Tannery curries leather to turn into a wide range of goods, such as bags, gloves and hats. Its gardening collection of



Exports of Bradley's products are 85 per cent gloves, secateurs pouches, arm protectors, aprons and tool carriers, is widely sold around the world, with Far East markets including Japan and Taiwan. Germany and Austria account for about 60 per cent of its European sales.

The company, which counts British royal houses, Selfridges and Liberty among its customers, prides itself on using only leather from the UK for its goods and employs six people at its Stanley Lane workshop, who handmake all the products.

Bradley said: "There's no doubt that without DIT's help, we wouldn't be in the markets we are in today. We've been able to attend shows in USA, Canada and Japan, thanks to its financial help.

"As a very small, niche manufacturer, these are huge outlays but you have to be there, so having access to expert help and funding is vital if we are to compete with larger companies. Going to the Ambiente show not only gave us many new leads to pursue, we also signed up new customers, which is great."

Richard Smith, head of the DIT international trade team in Shropshire, who has advised Bradley's Tannery for a number of years, said: "It's great news that Bradley has secured new customers and has other leads to pursue after the trade show in Germany. His is a very small Shropshire company that makes high quality goods for a number of niche markets, so the fact that it is stocked in retail stores around the world is something to be proud of."

Stand-by for music

A craftsman who makes handmade and bespoke oak guitar stands and racks is hitting the right notes in a global market after launching into overseas trade with the support of a Shropshire shipping specialist.

Andy Bennett, who runs StandMade from a family workshop at Maws Craft Centre near Ironbridge, has secured orders from as far afield as Japan and Canada since teaming up with exporter Global Freight.

He is now aiming to double turnover with a key focus on international customers.

The keen guitarist launched StandMade just four years ago after ditching a career in live music event management.

He spotted a gap in the market for guitar and case stands and racks that he manufactures using traditional carpentry methods. They can also be personalised and tailored to a musician's individual needs.

Andy already counts Manic Street Preachers lead singer and guitarist James Dean Bradfield, Squeeze frontman Chris Difford and folk legend Martin Carthy among his satisfied customers.

Being able to trade successfully overseas had been a crucial step in growing his business, he said.

"When I had my first overseas enquiry, I genuinely didn't have a clue how to go about exporting my products. I probably would have done research on the internet and ended up costing myself far more time and money," he explained.

"The stands and racks are pieces of furniture and can be sent to customers fully assembled so I needed a freight company that understood the service I was aiming to provide to my customers as I have worked hard to build up a reputation for quality from order to delivery.

"Global Freight has made exporting so simple for me and been the key that has allowed me to open the business up to overseas customers. There is a huge appetite internationally for British craftsman made products and Global Freight is helping me to tap into that market, which is increasingly important as we face leaving the European Union."

Nicole Gunter, managing director of Halesfield-based Global Freight, said StandMade was typical of the small businesses it aimed to help get a first step on the export ladder. "Exporting for small companies is not about multi-million pound deals – it can be just one order that opens doors to overseas trade, like it did



Andy Bennett of Stand Made with Anton and Nicole Gunter of Global Freight

for Andy. International trade is a massive opportunity for smaller businesses but many people are too frightened to take the first step.

"Our role is to advise and guide as well as deal with the smooth transport of goods and the vast majority of goods we moved last year across the globe was for smaller manufacturers.

"The strong Euro makes UK products an attractive buy and businesses, even small ones, should be making it a top priority in the post Brexit world we face."



Chris Powell, managing director of Fabdec

Explore the globe with a specialist

Shropshire manufacturer Fabdec is breaking into new export markets as it builds on an already strong track record for international trade.

The Ellesmere-based company, which produces stainless steel heating and cooling systems, is already a recipient of the Queen's Award for Export.

Fabdec continues to seek new markets for its products. After having strong connections to Germany, Russia and Japan the company has succeeded in a leap over the Atlantic and started exporting to North America. Plans for other markets are on the way.

The company has developed a range of tanks that extend to 32,000 litres but are compact enough to fit into a dry container. This cuts transport costs and secures a safe delivery to remote places.

Managing director Chris Powell said: "The dairy sector has improved globally and the rise in milk prices means that farmers are beginning to invest in better cooling systems and technologies.

"As farm sizes are growing worldwide the need for big farm tanks is growing. The technology of producing such tanks is not so common worldwide.

"The UK is our main market but we have customers across Europe and are always looking at new export opportunities. The tanks we are manufacturing for North America could be a great stepping stone into the market there and we are excited about the potential.

"We have also had significant orders coming in from Eastern Europe, markets which had previously dipped, which is a real sign of improved confidence in the dairy industry world-wide."

Following major investment in machinery and engineering last year – and with a highly skilled workforce – Fabdec is currently exploring opportunities to expand its steel fabrication work into sectors such as pharmaceuticals, chemicals and soft drinks.

Chris added: "We have a huge production site, years of expertise and know-how, and the manufacturing capability to work on cylinders and tanks of any size and for any industry.

"It takes years of experience and real engineering talent to adapt to bespoke manufacturing, but we have the expertise and flexibility to turn around projects quickly and to budget."

Beyond the Eurozone

The majority of small to medium-sized firms are planning to enter new markets in the next two years and of these, more are planning to look beyond the Eurozone for new trade than within it.

That's the result of a study by Albion Ventures, one of the largest independent venture capital investors in the UK.

In Shropshire and the rest of the West Midlands, it says 53% of SMEs are likely to enter new markets in the next two years.

Despite being the UK's largest overseas trading partner, more than one in five SMEs are planning to do more trade with countries outside the EU over the next two years compared to 16% who are targeting the single market.

The report shows that appetite among SMEs to target new overseas markets since the Brexit vote has grown from 34% in 2015 to 37%, significantly more than those who are focused on expanding domestically. A further 13% of small businesses plan to grow through launching new products and improving their online services.

In sector terms, more than three-quarters of transportation firms are planning to enter new markets, the highest of any sector. Manufacturing businesses (75%) and the tech sector (72%) were second and third respectively.

Patrick Reeve, managing partner at Albion Ventures, said: "The good news is that most SMEs plan to grow by tapping into new markets. Given the uncertainty of our long-term trading relationship with the single market, policymakers will be pleased that small businesses are increasingly looking beyond the Eurozone for new overseas growth opportunities.

"For businesses that get it right, conquering new markets can have a transformational impact."

Pro-business Brexit



Christopher Greenough of Salop Design & Engineering

Shropshire businesses are calling on the Government to deliver a 'pro-business Brexit' now that Theresa May has finally triggered Article 50, beginning the UK's official exit from the European Union.

Christopher Greenough, commercial director at Salop Design & Engineering in Shrewsbury and also president of the Made In The Midlands organisation, said: "I am confident that we will end up with a brighter, better United Kingdom.

"There are opportunities to look to the future and look to trade with partners outside the EU region.

"There are many countries that look to the UK and our product as world class, and the made in Britain brand is something that we can build upon.

"There are uncertain times ahead, but as a manufacturer in Shropshire, I will continue to be optimistic and look to support this country.

"We need to unite behind the Prime Minister, and make sure the rest of the world knows that Britain is open for business.

"Let's look to our strengths, which is a strong manufacturing base, and with further investment in the steel industry, the supply chain and skills provision, we can continue to push the UK economy to bigger and better things."

Middle ground

Everyone has their own feelings about how they want to fund retirement. Some business owners contribute to pensions, and others look to use their business to fund their later years. But there is also the middle ground.

"Over the years, I've met many business owners who have considered holding commercial property within a self-invested personal pension," says Mark Evans, of Beaumont Financial in Oswestry.

"A SIPP can be used to hold commercial property that is used within the business. The rents paid reduce the taxable income of the business and all rent is received tax free into the pension. Rent payments don't count towards the pension annual allowance so other contributions can continue within the normal bounds, too."

There's no capital gains if the property is sold and it is also removed from the estate for inheritance tax purposes. Mark says it can be a mutually beneficial arrangement for you and your business. "Of course, there can be drawbacks. Rent must be paid at the market value; there are no discounts and the SIPP provider can pursue payment even if it is your business.

"The property cannot be used as collateral for any loans to the business and if borrowing is used to fund the purchase, it is likely to be expensive and interest won't be relievable for tax purposes. There's likely to be other expenses in the running of the property, too.

"Holding commercial property in a SIPP won't be suitable for everyone. It can be a mutually beneficial arrangement but there are drawbacks and it carries its own set of risks. If you think it could benefit you, it's worth taking independent financial advice to find out more."

Confusion online

Ocom's new proposals to provide fixed levels of compensation to broadband users for outages and delays have been described as a recipe for confusion by a Shropshire technology firm.

Entanet, in Telford, believes the system could potentially cause channel players serious problems.

Head of service Neil Watson says that for the many companies that sit between Openreach and BT at one end of the supply chain, and the consumer at the other, the plans could have some serious implications.

While the company has its own independent network and provides broadband on a wholesale basis, Entanet ultimately falls into this category too. Like every supplier in the UK using the BT backbone, we rely on Openreach to fix any faults on the BT network, and conduct any installs," he says. "When something breaks on the BT network, or an Openreach engineer doesn't turn up – why should reseller A (the 'retail provider') bear the brunt of the compensation claim?"

He also notes that funding compensation payments for a major outage – which might affect scores or even hundreds of customers – could cause serious cashflow issues for smaller third-party providers.

And he points out that these companies have no control over when problems are finally fixed and therefore what compensation will need to be paid out. "Yes, they should be able to claim it back up the channel, but how long will that take?" Mr Watson asks.



Neil Watson

He is also concerned about the further potential for contention and complexity when it is not clear where the blame for an outage lies.

"It's far from uncommon to have issues where Openreach have difficulty finding the root cause of the issue and where it lies or won't admit that the

issue is on their network."

While agreeing with the principle of compensating customers for significant outages and other issues, he feels it is also important for customers to understand that from time to time, there may be faults and issues with services – and calls for greater focus to be put on guarantees and service levels agreements.

The current proposals will now enter a period of industry consultation until June 5, and are due to be implemented 12 months later.



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Round-table

By Carl Jones

When it comes to the Shropshire construction sector, size most certainly matters.

For a county with so many relatively small pockets of land which are ripe for development, big isn't always better where housing is concerned.

But it's becoming more and more difficult to make the numbers add up for the kind of developers which are looking to take a slice of the market by mopping up these sites.

More than a dozen top developers, and property-connected company bosses, came together at the Growth Hub in Telford to discuss this, and many other pressing issues in the construction sector.

The Telford & Wrekin Property Round Table revealed an industry which has many more positives than negatives right now, and is yet to feel any significant impact from Brexit.

Martin Parrish, boss of The Planning Group Limited in Shrewsbury, said: "There was a concern about what might happen when the referendum was first announced. But it has not really changed anything other than a little stutter at the time."

But finding the right sort of skilled workers remains a big issue, along with trying to work out how to make a decent margin from the smaller house-building projects.



Martin Parrish, boss of The Planning Group Limited in Shrewsbury, with Carl Huntley

James Dunn, head of estates at Telford & Wrekin Council, said: "We are seeing decent levels of enquiries from big house builders, and the larger plots are selling.

"But in the time since the last recession, there aren't that many small or medium sized builders who will build 15 or 20 plots. These companies were decimated in the last recession and have struggled with financing – they're just not there."

So, a massive gap in the market then? James Wood, the co-founder of Shrewsbury developers Saxonby, said: "There are quite a few issues at play.

"Access to finance is one of the big ones – I have got a 10-unit scheme on the way at the moment which has probably got a total cost of about £2 million. The most that any high street bank would lend me on that was 40% of the cost. ▶



Note of caution from David Brammer of Lanyon Bowdler



Praveen Chaudhari and James Wood at the round table meeting

◀ “You look at that and say, if I have got to fund £1.3 or £1.4 million, am I going to do that. It’s a hell of a lot of risk for a relatively small profit margin. How many businesses have got that sort of money to through into those sorts of schemes?”

“The general problem is that making the numbers work on 15 or 20 units, compared with the 50-plus units being built by the plcs, is really difficult.

“We still have the infrastructure and fixed costs whether we want to build two or 20. You haven’t got the economies of scale, so the odds are all against it.

“There is a breaking point too where landowners just don’t sell land. We’ve seen no real impact of Brexit other than a rise in build costs, from materials. We have had close to double digit rises on nearly everything. And all of this makes smaller schemes less viable all the time.

“Are developers going to go into something for a 10% profit, when they are having to sign their house off as a risk against the development? Probably not. No-one can make this work at the moment.”

And so, the panel felt that if you really want to stimulate the market for smaller sites involving more local property companies, the Government has to reinvent the way the system currently works.

In terms of the number of new homes which need to be built in the county, James Dunn pointed out that there is a big difference between east and west.

“In terms of supply, Telford is obviously very different to Shropshire. The projected need is only 8,000 or 9,000 houses, and we have got consents for over 17,000 already.

“In contrast to that, there is no way that Shropshire has got the supply it needs in a month of Sundays.”

So what about the Brexit factor . . . on lack of it?

Praveen Chaudhari, of law firm Lanyon Bowdler which sponsored the event, said: “People stood still at the last recession and the market went very quiet to start. There was a concern that people would slow down and put things on hold again, but this has not really happened.”

His Lanyon Bowdler colleague David Brammer, though, sounded a slight note of caution.

“There is probably more nervousness in the London property market.

“What we will see is a response from some of the very big investors like financial services who have already fought shy of going to London.

“Inevitably there is going to be a spin-off from that at some stage that might ripple out from London.”

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More than a dozen top developers, and property-connected company bosses, came together at the Growth Hub in Telford

Paul Inions, managing director of McPhillips which is involved in some of the biggest road projects in Shropshire right now, said his company had seen no impact whatsoever from Brexit so far.

His diverse client list including housebuilders, local authorities and private clients were continuing to issue tenders as frequently as at any point over the past three years.

James Dunn concurred: "We haven't seen any impact of Brexit at all. Two things are happening – one is that we are seeing larger investors come in on the back of the Jaguar Land Rover effect in the West Midlands.

"It is not so much the fact that we have the engine plant down the road, but we have companies like Magna and Polytec coming in to serve the Solihull factory.

"Jaguar Land Rover's policy is that they very much want their supply chain to be within an hour's journey of their factories, so that is turning out to be a real positive.

"At the same time we have also seen local businesses growing. We are building two units at Hortonwood west for existing businesses – one that's growing within Telford, and one that's moving from Broseley.

So far, so good then.

But then Gareth Emberton, managing director of Crown Group Holdings and chairman of Shropshire Constructing Excellence, said: "We need to beware of hand grenades."

What sort, exactly?

He added: "We have doubled in size in the past 12 months and about 60% of our work in the south at the moment, around the Northampton, Oxford, and Reading area.

"But I was over in Ireland to set up a company not long ago and there is an interesting feeling.

"There is a steady stream of London-centric businesses going over to Ireland, such as financial services and lawyers. It's like a conveyor belt

"I think generally things are good, but I feel we have to be careful, and mitigate against a risk, because no-one really knows what is going to happen."

The discussion turned to skills, a perennial problem for the construction sector, particularly since the last recession which saw a dramatic fall-off in the number of newcomers being trained with work-ready qualification.

Carl Huntley, of Base Architects, revealed how his company had been looking for a handful of staff after a restructure which saw a closure of its office in Bristol.



Gareth Emberton, managing director of Crown Group Holdings, pictured at the event



James Dunn, head of estates at Telford & Wrekin Council, makes a point



Liz Wakeham Jones pictured with Laura Parkinson



Carl Jones, editor of Shropshire Business, in conversation

◀ “For us to find members of staff to replace them here took us nearly seven months. Around 200-300 CVs dropped through the door, but none of them had the skills sets we were after.”

The panel agreed that there was still a challenge getting people to come to the region – as well as addressing the number of skilled people living in Shropshire, who were choosing to commute out of the county for their work.

The panel quoted examples of Shropshire developments where more than 90% of buyers were over the age of 50, and felt much more needed to be done to aid first-time buyers.

Laura Parkinson said: “From the point of view of attracting talent to the area, making it work for those younger people is important, to give us a much better chance.”

James Wood suggested that the time had come to completely ‘reinvent’ the rules of tenure.

“When it comes to these shared ownership properties to help people onto the housing ladder, some local authorities only let you staircase up to 85 or 90% ownership.

“That’s kind of bonkers, because for these people the end game is to own their own home. We’ve really got to do something about this.”

Traditionally, Shropshire businesses look to the east when it comes to potential competition, or collaboration.

But is it time that they turned their attention over the border to keep an eye on developments in Wales?

The panel certainly thought so, with significant work being done to improve

**THE
ROUND-TABLE
LINE-UP**

- Chris Goulson, Telford & Wrekin Council
- James Dunn, Telford & Wrekin Council
- Martin Parrish, The Planning Group Limited, Shrewsbury
- Carl Huntley, Base Architects, Shrewsbury and Chester
- Gareth Emberton, Crown Group Holdings, and Shropshire Constructing Excellence
- Praveen Chaudhari, Lanyon Bowdler
- David Brammer, Lanyon Bowdler
- Laura Parkinson, Lanyon Bowdler
- Paul Inions, McPhillips (Wellington) Ltd
- James Wood, Saxonby
- Rob Orchard, Cyril Orchard Group
- Steve Owen, Paveaways
- Liz Wakeham-Jones, Telford Growth Hub
- Carl Jones, Shropshire Business

the transport infrastructure through the Welshpool and Newtown areas, opening up the west Wales coast.

Steve Owen of Paveaways said: “There is no doubt they are spending quite a lot of money out in Mid Wales at the moment, regenerating a lot of the area around Welshpool. But you have to prove that your supply chain is made up of something like 65% within 25 miles of the site. That can be hard to prove in parts of Wales, but given

another couple of years, activity is really going to kick off.

“Once they sort the roads and bypasses out, it’s going to be quicker for Shrewsbury people to get to the heart of Mid Wales than it is to get to Birmingham.

“The volume of congestion from Shrewsbury to Telford is becoming phenomenal, and it’s a lot cheaper in Wales – there are a lot of advantages of looking that way.”

Was there anything else constraining construction companies in the area right now? Commercial rents in the Telford area were still not at a sufficiently high level to make many design and build projects stack up at the moment.

James Dunn said: “People who want to build factories for their own use are still happening, and Telford & Wrekin Council building for themselves as an investment still works to get a good return. But for the developer out there, it is still definitely a challenge.”

Terms and conditions relating to development sites were not helping matters, it was claimed – with delays at the former sugar beet factory in Allscott, and old Dairy Crest factory at Crudgington cited as examples.

A problem with the more traditional forms of funding also emerged during the discussion, with claims that trying to get support from high street banks remains tough.

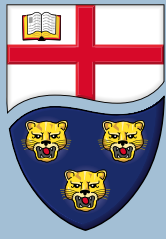
Many construction firms were now turning to peer-to-peer lending as an alternative, with lenders being prepared to pre-fund developers to prevent their projects from stalling.



Representatives found the round table to be a networking opportunity



Positivity – the round table left many feeling more optimistic



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Fine line of employment rights needs addressing

Are your contractors self-employed for tax purposes and personally registered for VAT? Then your company may be walking a very fine line when it comes to employment rights.

Gemma Workman, from Martin-Kaye Solicitors in Telford, said the Court of Appeal had ruled that a plumber who was considered to be self-employed was actually employed by the business that hired him.

"The plumber carried out work solely for the one company and signed an agreement that his work would be governed by terms and conditions set out in their staff manual.

"This included rules on working hours, uniform and appearance, restricted his ability to work for himself or other companies, insisted he should use a company van, and said that he could only swap jobs with other members of their staff. But after several years working under this arrangement, the plumber had a heart attack and the company ended their association with him.

"He took them to a tribunal, but because of his tax status and the fact he had submitted invoices for his work, the company said he was not entitled to make a claim. But as part of his case, the plumber



Gemma Workman

had made claims for unpaid holiday pay and unlawful deductions from his wages, for which he didn't need to show he was an employee, he just needed to be a 'worker' for the company.

"The court agreed he was a worker because under the terms of the agreement, he was forbidden to send anyone in his place to do the work required as the company insisted he should carry out the work in person. And despite the company taking the case right to the Court of Appeal, they upheld the tribunal's decision that the plumber was a worker regardless of his self-employed tax status.

"The message to employers is very clear – if you place any restrictions on who else a self-employed contractor can work for while they are working for you, you will almost certainly be storing up trouble. You must also allow them to send someone else to work in their place if they are unable to fulfil their work obligations for you.

"If you're not flexible in your approach and you do impose restrictions, they will be your worker no matter how they are registered for tax purposes, and they will be entitled to a whole raft of worker's rights."

In brief

- Harper Adams has become the first university ever to scoop the Whatuni University of the Year honour two years in a row. As well as taking home the title of University of the Year, the campus, based near Newport, also came top in three other award categories: Job Prospects, Course and Lecturers and Student Support. Dr David Llewellyn, Vice-Chancellor said: "This is a tremendous vote of confidence from our students and we greatly appreciate their support. It just goes to show that smaller universities have a big role to play in providing an environment where students can really get the most out of their time in higher education."

- Town officials have welcomed the campaign by trustees of a north Shropshire nursing home to help ease the current NHS bed-blocking crisis in the county. Ellesmere Community Nursing Home, in Trimpey Street, Ellesmere, is the town's former cottage hospital which is now run by a community trust. Trustees have called on the Clinical Commissioning Group to establish a partnership agreement that could ease Shropshire's bed-blocking pressures. And now the mayor of Ellesmere, Councillor Ian Ward, has backed the Trust's appeal, saying it's a common-sense solution that could make all the difference.

- Fix Auto Oswestry (Pant Motor Bodies) of Llanymynech has beaten bodyshops in major cities and towns to win a Vauxhall Approved Bodyshop of the Year award. Fix Auto and their sponsors Arthurs Vauxhall of Oswestry and Newtown were presented with one of only four regional awards, with Fix Auto qualifying for the national final. Paul Northcote, Bodyshop Sales Development Manager for Vauxhall Motors, said: "This is an amazing achievement. To pull off a regional coup of this kind is absolutely tremendous."

- Tickets are now on sale for a glittering ball in Shropshire which will raise money for a charity which changes young people's lives. The Climbing Out Charity Ball and Awards will take place at Shrewsbury Town FC on June 24. All proceeds will go to the Climbing Out charity, which organises outward bound programmes for young people dealing with life-changing illness or injuries. A series of awards will be presented to youngsters who have inspired others with their achievements. There will also be a three-course meal and dancing to a live band. Tickets cost £35 and are available by emailing keldawood@climbingout.org.uk or www.climbingout.org.uk

£412,000 tax claim

An expanding bottling company on the west Shropshire border has reclaimed more than £400,000 following successful research and development tax claims.

Radnor Hills Mineral Water Company received a total of £412,000 thanks to specialist help from R&D Tax Claims Limited, with R&D tax refunds spanning a four-year period.

Based at Knighton, Radnor Hills began as a small company packing cuplets for airlines, but today has grown into a company bottling a diverse range of mineral water, flavoured spring water, sparkling premium pressés, fruit juices and school compliant drinks.

Last year they produced 230 million bottles – this year capacity has increased to produce 400 million.

Radnor Hills managing director William Watkins said that despite initial scepticism that they had an R&D claim, the process had been straightforward and rewarding.

"Soft drinks is a technical business with some very complicated processes, and the key to this claim was identifying an applicable R&D scheme within our business – establishing what was and was not eligible.

"The team at R&D Tax Claims understood exactly what was needed, and had an immediate grasp of what we did, steering us in the right direction towards a successful claim."

Mark Evans, managing director of R&D Tax Claims, said: "Claiming back R&D tax from HMRC is a government backed initiative that was introduced to actively encourage SMEs to claim back money – money that can be reinvested to support and grow those businesses."

The R&D claims submitted on behalf of Radnor Hills were technical ongoing projects that included the development of a hot filling process for fragile juices, a specialised cooling and re-cycling system,



Radnor Hills managing director William Watkins with Mark Evans, managing director of R&D Tax Claims Limited



A selection of Radnor Hills' soft drinks

clean in place system development and integration software development.

Mark said: "Radnor Hills has to use innovative solutions to grow the business and develop new products and processes in a market dominated by some very large corporations with significant resources.

"A lot of time is spent by the Radnor management team delivering new ideas and concepts that improve both productivity and quality."

William added: "The whole process has certainly been worth it.

"We knew we had a legitimate claim, but Mark and his experienced team ensured that no unnecessary time was wasted. They came out to us, listened, understood and identified our eligibility criteria. They walked us through it.

"We pay a lot of tax and this is a legitimate tax break. We have been able to reinvest the £412,000 back into the business.

"There must be so many businesses across the UK that are just not taking advantage of R&D claims."

Selected to be an IT supplier

A Telford IT company has been selected as a supplier to one of the country's largest educational purchasing groups.

Leegomery Computers, based at the Telford Innovation Campus, has won a place within the Crescent Purchasing Consortium.

The firm already counts many Shropshire schools as its clients, such as Charlton and New College in Telford, and Adderley Primary School near Market Drayton, together with several local authorities.



Account manager Ann Rochelle at Leegomery Computers

Now, as a result of joining the consortium, it says it is set to considerably expand its customer base.

"Being chosen by CPC is a major step forward for us and will allow us to tender for work in further education institutions,

academies, schools and free schools across the country," said sales director Harvey Shergill of Leegomery Computers.

"We had to fulfill a range of stringent requirements in order to be selected."

Steve Roberts, IT coordinator of New College Telford, said: "Leegomery Computers has delivered the equipment in a very quick time and at highly competitive prices, thereby assisting our students with their studies."

Linda Haycocks, of Moreton Say Primary School, added her testimonial saying: "We received a first class service with prompt delivery of the items we ordered and can fully recommend Leegomery Computers."

Fore! – golf role for Shropshire businessman

A Shropshire businessman has become the first independent chair of England Golf – the country's governing body for amateur golf.

Nic Coward is chairman of the Furrows Group which owns Ford, Kia, Mazda and Skoda dealerships in Telford, Shrewsbury and Oswestry.

His family have deep roots in Shropshire, including strong links with Shrewsbury Golf Club, where Nic learned the game, and Nic became chairman of the family-owned Furrows Group following the death of his father, John, in April 2015.

Now, as well as his role with Furrows, Nic will be at the helm of one of the country's

largest sports governing bodies looking after more than 1,900 golf clubs, and 675,000 men, women, boy and girl club members.

Nic said: "Golf in England has a huge amount to be proud of, from Olympic gold to the huge impact in communities across the country. There is great work going on at every level of the game. What is really exciting is the opportunity to do even more, to get more people playing, more often."

Alongside his role as Chairman of the Furrows Group, Nic is a non-executive director of Oritain, a New Zealand-based company leading the way in proving the origin of food, and he advises major sports



Nic Coward

and entertainment businesses in the UK and around the world.

In a 20-year career at the top levels of British sport, Nic was the General Secretary of the Premier League, the Chief

Executive of the British Horseracing Authority, and for a time was joint Chief Executive and a Board Director of the Football Association, as well as a Director of Wembley Stadium.

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

Anonymous



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Time to make a BID



Since 2007, Business Improvement Districts (or BIDs) have been established across the UK to upgrade, enhance, and at times transform the environment in which locally-based businesses trade.

Currently, there are 251 active BIDs nationally, providing additional services and benefits that encourage positive local economic growth. Key aims being to bring more quality jobs to the BID area and to promote a sustainable infrastructure as the foundation for future prosperity.

That said, BIDs are challenging and hard work - and moving the project to ballot stage is the initial task.

This is being taken forward by members of the Oswestry BID working group; all are volunteers from the local business community, owners and managers from businesses large and small, who are offering their time and skills freely.

They want to give Oswestry businesses an opportunity to vote on a locally focused and exciting business plan - a plan that will give them the chance to identify projects they would like to see introduced and have a say in how BID funds are invested to best effect.

To make this happen, the BID working



The possibility for an Oswestry BID is here, and businesses have the opportunity to grasp it group are spending the coming months listening intently, holding a series of surveys, workshops and drop-ins, to hear what Oswestry businesses want and need in order to prosper. Every Oswestry business has a vital part to play, and is encouraged to take up this opportunity and get involved.

Once business views have been brought together into a vision and strategy to take Oswestry forwards, all businesses to be levied within the designated BID area will be asked to vote on whether they support it.

Should they decide, by a majority, that they would like Oswestry to have an active BID for the next five years, then the current BID working group will have completed its task and a new management team will be formed.

This process will see an Oswestry BID board put in place made up of cross-section of businesses and organisations across the BID area. The board will then in turn appoint a project manager and support staff to implement the projects identified in the plan.

At a recent launch of the Oswestry BID, the working group were very pleased

with the level of attendance with over 50 businesses from the town centre and industrial estates coming along to find out more. It also marked an important milestone for the BID, having secured financial support from Oswestry Town Council and Shropshire County Council.

The positive energy level shown by Oswestry businesses has given us a sound springboard for regular events and activities through the summer to get as much input from locally-based businesses as we can.

The possibility for an Oswestry BID is here, and we now have the opportunity to grasp it.

If we do, then it will give those businesses not only a strong voice in the direction of the local economy, but the means to get things done. This will be for the benefit to all who live and work in Oswestry both now and in the future.

If you would like more information about Oswestry BID, email feedback@oswestry4bid.co.uk or visit the website at www.oswestry4bid.co.uk

● *Ian Follington is acting chair of the Oswestry BID working group.*

Baffled at decision by regulation authority

The decision by the Solicitors Regulation Authority to close its meetings to public and press scrutiny has baffled and concerned a Shropshire regulatory law expert.

The SRA is facing a 'crucial credibility test' as it is required by the Legal Services Act 2007 to be 'transparent' and 'accountable' in each of its regulatory activities, and also to apply good regulatory practice, said Paul Bennett, a professional practices partner in the Shrewsbury office of Aaron & Partners.

He said the SRA's current executive team had done 'a huge amount of good work' to support innovation in the profession, and engage openly.

He also praised the individuals and operational teams he dealt with on a day-to-day basis at the SRA.

"They are highly professional, are keen to do the right thing and, crucially, on sensitive issues to my clients, to be seen to do the right thing," he said

Mr Bennett, former chairman of the Law

Society's small firms division, continued: "On this basis, the new lack of transparency from the board is a concern.

"Good regulation carries the confidence of the profession, and the public, and why the SRA thinks its work is more sensitive than say the General Medical Council or Health & Care Professions Council is unclear and difficult to justify in my opinion.

"In my view, not being fully transparent with the press, the profession and consumers is potentially unlawful and the SRA risk someone challenging the board's decision before the courts to ensure the SRA is open and transparent in its actions."

Neil Rose, editor of Legal Futures, says: "At a time when the SRA is demanding ever more transparency from those it regulates, the irony is obvious.

"As is the need for a body that constantly reminds everyone that it is a public interest regulator not to close its doors to public gaze."



Paul Bennett

More than words

Shropshire's economy is trailing behind many parts of the UK when it comes to taking advantage of Google AdWords, it has been claimed.

What are AdWords? They're the adverts you see at the top and bottom of a Google search page.

And according to new research by Google partner, Shifnal-based Ascendancy Internet Marketing, over half of Shropshire businesses have never tried marketing their website with them.

Founder Helen Culshaw says: "The service works by displaying information about a business when an internet user searches on Google for something relevant to that company's services.

"Over a million companies worldwide already use AdWords, with some larger companies even having people in-house to manage it. But these managers don't generally have the kind of in-depth expertise that you would get from a specialist agency.

"Our research was based on Google data relating to 126 of Shropshire's largest businesses. Of the 126 businesses, only 14 had an active AdWords account, while 46 had a lapsed account and 66 never had an account at all."

Helen adds: "We believe the number of



Helen Culshaw, picture here with Lisa Veale and Rowena Grundy of CJ Wildbirds, taking advantage of Google Ad Words

companies using AdWords in Shropshire is extremely low, compared to numbers in other counties across the UK.

"AdWords is vitally important for large and small businesses alike and we at Ascendancy are able to offer our wealth of experience in a way that can benefit each one individually."

For Shrewsbury-based company CJ Wildlife, using Google Adwords has become a crucial tool to help reach new customers and market products to a wider audience.

Ascendancy created a bespoke training programme for CJ Wildlife's marketing team.

The company's marketing supervisor Lisa Veale says: "We have seen huge benefits from Google AdWords.

"Our team was using it before we went to Ascendancy but we needed their expertise to help us understand the full potential and the latest features it had to offer.

"After the course, we saw a sharp increase in traffic from Adwords and have sustained an overall increase in performance from the campaigns whilst seeing an ongoing improvement in our return on investment, which is great for our business needs."

Fact File

- AdWords was launched in 2000, with customers originally paying a set fee per month rather than on a pay-per-click basis.
- AdWords has become Google's main source of revenue. Its total revenue in 2015 was £51.38 billion, with £4.92 billion from the UK.
- The number of people who click on the advert in first place position when searching on a mobile device is reportedly 27.7 per cent.
- Around 70 per cent of customers searching on their mobiles call straight from Google search rather than clicking through to the company's website.

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UCS student Lauren tries the Invictus Trainer



You can hook up your Android or Apple device and make the most of fitness apps

Fitness training for all

Shropshire entrepreneurs Scott Smith and Paul Cooksey have developed a piece of fitness equipment with a difference – and it's one that's in demand all over the world.

Wheelchair users Scott and Paul are both long-time fitness enthusiasts. After sustaining a spinal cord injury during a car crash, Paul found he was putting on more and more weight, and he couldn't work out a way to shift those extra pounds – so he took matters into his own hands and built a training device he could use with his wheelchair.

Paul recalls: "I'd gone from 12 to 18 stone, and cutting calories didn't seem to make any difference. Then I met Scott playing wheelchair tennis in Shrewsbury and he was interested in seeing the trainer I'd created – at that stage, it was made of wood and rollers from a factory conveyor belt!"

Recently, the pair have become involved with University Centre Shrewsbury through applied exercise science Professor John Buckley, using the state-of-the-art equipment in the university's Active Living Lab to test their Invictus Active Trainer to measure the impact of weights upon energy burned.

Professor Buckley, along with undergraduate and postgraduate students, had the opportunity to try the unit as it was tested, and the students continue to study the unit as part of their dissertation.

For Scott, the idea of a trainer that would help wheelchair users keep fit was hugely exciting. He says: "I'm from a marketing background, and I could see immediately that there'd be a market for the trainer. I'd been using my skills promoting other products, and I was really keen to use those skills to make the trainer available to more people."



The Invictus Trainer means wheelchair users can train in sports clubs and gyms

Unlike its early prototype, today's Invictus Active Trainer is made from lightweight aluminium, which means a sole user can easily carry it and set it up, and rollers used in trainers in professional cycling.

The trainer is used for rehabilitation in hospitals such as the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Orthopaedic Hospital in Oswestry, as well as for leisure purposes in health clubs. Extras include a heart rate monitor, a stand for an Android or Apple device, and a speed and distance sensor.

Scott adds, "We're currently working on testing the trainer for race chairs; people are asking us more and more often about the possibility of using it in conjunction with wheelchair racing, as the training equipment used at present is pretty bulky and not easily transportable."

Meanwhile, Professor Buckley has been involved with the World Health Organisation as part of an International Expert Panel setting out plans for global policies on rehabilitation.

He has published a chapter on cardiac rehabilitation in a new International Olympic Committee Manual of Sports Cardiology. His 2015 international report in the British Journal of Sports Medicine on reducing sitting time in office workers continues to be cited in the media and this April he appeared on the BBC 1 TV programme Health – Truth or Scare.

In relation to the Invictus Trainer for people who are wheelchair bound, Professor Buckley says: "Scott and Paul are an excellent example of fact that we all benefit from making lifestyle changes that promote our health.

"They took the initiative and devised their own fitness machine, but we can all make minor alterations to our working pattern to keep ourselves healthy – being on our feet more often, using our muscles more for transport, even if it's not very far, taking the stairs instead of the lift or escalator, and always parking a little further so we do some more walking... it all makes a difference."

Tomorrow's world is taking shape



Matt
SANDFORD

Every year, technology makes it slightly easier for Shropshire businesses to communicate both within themselves and with their customers. Let's look at some of the trends, and what might be coming up soon.

More remote working

For many people, the mobile revolution has already occurred and technology is evolving to reflect the fact that most of us who work can do some of that work on the go. Remote working has risen by a fifth in the last decade with over 1.5m people in the UK regularly working from home or on the move.

That trend is spearheaded by technology, as broadband connectivity, email, messaging apps, conference calling and video conferencing make it easier to do everything you would normally do in the office, remotely. This will only increase this year.

Surge in social selling

The trend of using social media and networks to communicate directly with customers is growing. Part of a general move away from more intrusive forms of advertising, it's potentially a smarter way to network and can deliver some serious results.

Research by Feedback Systems in 2016 claimed 61% of companies that use social selling saw a positive increase in revenue. Most of the activity was centred on LinkedIn and Twitter though Adidas famously launched a social campaign on WhatsApp, aimed at creating communities of like-minded people in a 'dark social experiment'. That's 'dark' as in 'difficult to measure' but using the app as a platform to build interest ahead of other messaging.

Shorter, less sophisticated videos

Around half of YouTube traffic now comes via mobile and that's only likely to rise. Further research shows that a



Oculus Rift could lead to virtual reality becoming much more commonplace

one-minute video is 50% more likely to be watched than a two-minute video. Combine this with the fact that more people are making and posting their own videos, and shoppers are increasingly relying on them to choose what they buy. Popularity has been driven by amateur (and not so amateur) vloggers but we can expect to see this less sophisticated style to be increasingly adopted by brands.

Growth of the cloud

Research carried out last year showed that 93% of businesses are using some form of cloud solution, and this is continuing to grow. Cloud use can range from bespoke services created specifically for larger companies, to smaller businesses that use online storage and collaboration services like Box or Office 365.

More mobile payments

It is predicted that the global market for online payments will reach \$780bn in 2017 (up from \$450bn in 2015) and over \$1tn by 2019. Samsung Pay was expected to arrive in 2016 but the rumours are strong that it will make an appearance in the next quarter of 2017. It's expected to incorporate both Near Field Communication and traditional magnetic stripe payments so that it should work with virtually any credit card reader. Mobile-only banking services such as Mondo and mobile payment systems like Android Pay are also growing in popularity, moving us just a little closer to a cashless society.

A little more Virtual Reality

Virtual Reality and augmented reality continue to be developed, with new possibilities trickling through this year. From the obvious gaming possibilities creating new options for tech companies, to Facebook's much-touted acquisition of Oculus Rift which could lead to virtual reality becoming much more commonplace. Marketers are increasingly using virtual reality to help their brands stand out, from Coca Cola to McDonalds, Top Shop to Volvo. And even smaller startup companies like Mercaux are looking into the technology – they're considering adapting their online retail technology that compares various garments to include virtual reality content.

And looking further ahead, Emteq is working on FaceTeq, a facial sensing platform that can track emotional interaction, and could lead to the next big leap in virtual reality.

Automatic ordering on the increase

Amazon has seen success with its Dash buttons which allow shoppers to order replacements of everything from toilet roll to coffee at the push of a button. Carling produced a similar button for its beer. As these and other devices grow in popularity more household goods may be ordered automatically and brands will need to work hard to be included as shoppers leave brand choice to the delivery mechanism.

● *Matt Sandford is managing director of Pure Telecom in Shrewsbury*

Borough's economy benefits from MoD site

A new Defence Fulfilment Centre at Donnington – said to be worth around £60 million a year to the local economy – is officially open for business.

Two years after it was confirmed that the centre would be built in Telford, it was opened by the Minister for Defence Procurement, Harriett Baldwin MP.

Donnington beat off competition from Bicester to be named as the home of the Defence Fulfilment Centre, providing a consolidated, national centre for MoD logistics, commodities and services with state of the art infrastructure.

Bringing the DFC to Telford will secure many local jobs, and is said by the local authority to be worth around £60 million a year to the borough's economy.

Councillor Shaun Davies, Telford & Wrekin Council's leader, said: "We always said that safeguarding the existing jobs at MoD Donnington was the key priority and today we delivered that.

"The investment and confidence in Telford has secured and created more jobs, as well as helping to grow the local economy.

"We certainly didn't begin the process as favourites for this but we worked hard and convinced the MoD that Telford is the best place for the Defence Fulfilment Centre."



Donnington beat off competition from Bicester to be named as the home of the Defence Fulfilment Centre, providing a consolidated, national centre for MoD logistics, commodities and services with state of the art infrastructure

Luxury travel arrives in town

Shrewsbury Mayor Councillor Ioan Jones cut the ribbon to officially open the first high street shop of a new luxury independent travel agency in the town.

Opulent Travel Services, which only launched last Autumn, has relocated from offices in Swan Hill to a shop unit in Longden Coleham.

Councillor Jones said he was delighted to support new business, entrepreneurship and job creation.

Opulent Travel, which specialises in bespoke holidays, corporate business and VIP and concierge-style travel, has been launched by Leighann Morgan following a 20-year career in the travel industry.

She has worked with big industry names such as Going Places, Thomson's and Baker Dolphin, as well as various independent travel agencies, before branching out on her own six years ago, firstly as a Travel Counsellor and then as an independent agent.

She set up Opulent Travel Services as an evolution into the luxury travel market and the business has so far created one additional full-time job and one part-time post.

"We're so excited to have opened our very first shop in Shrewsbury. This is a goal that we've been working towards over the past few months. A visible high street presence will help us to grow the business and create further jobs in the future," she said.

Miss Morgan is a school business advisor for Young Enterprise, working with pupils at Shrewsbury High School. She is also working with Shrewsbury College to provide work experience places for students.

In 2012 she was named Mumpreneur UK Best Saleswoman of the year. She came to the attention of prestigious VIP clients in



Shrewsbury Mayor Councillor Ioan Jones, pictured with Leighann Morgan, cuts the ribbon at Opulent Travel Services

London after featuring in a national lifestyle magazine nearly five years ago and making an appearance on the BBC Big Breakfast sofa for International Women's Day.



Investment in the Newport Enterprise employment site – opposite the turning to the Aldi supermarket near the A518 and A41 junction – will provide space for a range of new firms including start-ups, smaller businesses and larger occupiers

Close to 1,000 jobs in sight for market town

A £9 million business park investment in Newport that could create 950 new jobs, is set to go ahead after securing Government funding through the Midlands Engine and Telford & Wrekin Council.

The £9.3 million funding for the Newport Enterprise Package will play a very major role in the borough's economic development and rapid growth, promoting Newport for inward investment and supporting the Enterprise Telford drive for growth and prosperity.

It is described as more great news for the borough's economy, which is already attracting a range of major new employers, and will create hundreds of new jobs in this part of the borough.

This investment in the Newport Enterprise employment site – opposite the turning to the Aldi supermarket near the A518 and A41 junction – will provide space for a range of new firms including start-ups, smaller businesses and larger occupiers and could create up to 950 new full time jobs.

While the Midlands Engine funding will provide £6.3 million, an additional £3 million will come from the Telford Land Deal between Telford & Wrekin Council and Homes & Communities Agency, further Council funding and developer contributions.

"The site will provide a strong offer to high tech companies, creating high value



Dr David Llewellyn, vice chancellor of Harper Adams University

employment linking with Telford's strong advanced manufacturing sector, being in close proximity to the world renowned Harper Adams University and its leading Agri Tech Centre of Excellence."

Councillor Shaun Davies said: "This is more great news for the borough and the region and will create a crucial employment site in the Newport area which will give a real boost to business and employment in the town and for the agri-tech sector the site will serve.

"This is another significant investment

by the Council into Newport. Last year we took on the Audley Avenue Enterprise Park ensuring it remains for business use, keeping hundreds of jobs in Newport.

"We now want to begin work on this new site in 2018/19 and bring employment land forward as quickly as possible.

"It's another major economic boost for the borough, another signal how it is on the up and recognition by the Midlands Engine of the key role we have to play in driving growth."

This investment, supported by the LEP's latest Growth Deal with Government, follows other major projects in Telford and Wrekin including the opening of the new MoD Logistics Hub at Donnington this spring, and growth at areas such as the T54 site which has attracted the new multi-million pound Magna and Polytec investments that will create 400 new jobs in their first phase. The Magna site is now under construction.

Dr David Llewellyn, vice chancellor of Harper Adams University, added: "By working with the Local Authority and the Marches LEP, with the welcome support of Newport Town Council, we are delighted that the Growth Deal funding announcement will make it possible to embark on the next phase of our plans to create an agri-tech innovation park at the edge of Newport.

"The aim of this joint initiative is to put Telford & Wrekin's economy at the heart of a new industry sector. Not only will this development bring the potential for new jobs and economic growth, but it will also support research and innovation for the agri-food industry, a theme that will feature strongly in the UK's food and farming strategy."

Coffee specialist in new location

Tilley Green Coffee Company has moved to new headquarters at Whitchurch Business Park to service its expanding nationwide customer base.

The company was set up in 2013 to supply coffee machines and coffee products predominately to restaurants, bars, hotels, cafes, garden centres and leisure outlets.

Previously based in Higher Heath, the company has moved into new office accommodation with an adjoining warehouse for increased storage space, enhanced stock control and to streamline distribution.

The new headquarters also offers customers a dedicated training centre for both product and barista training.

"Because of our increasing order book, we simply ran out of space," explains Tilley Green sales manager Adrian Dratwinski.

"Our new facility not only allows us to service our existing customers more efficiently, but also provides capacity for future growth. We believe our new premises will be a launchpad for future success.

The move is good news for local jobs too. The company has added two additional full-time members of staff to its team. Joining the business are office administrator Ruth Jones of Whitchurch, and operations co-ordinator Shaun Bond from Prees.



The team from Tilley Green at the new headquarters



Kevin Bailey in the new Battlefield Carpets showroom in Shrewsbury

Family-run business is now open

A new family-run, independent carpet centre has opened in Shrewsbury.

Battlefield Carpets, at The Market Place, off Battlefield Road, near Tesco, has opened its doors after a two-month refurbishment overseen by new manager Kevin Bailey, from Shrewsbury.

Mr Bailey, who has 35 years of retail experience, has created two retail jobs with the store opening. He said: "We offer a full range of carpets and flooring from major suppliers from the UK and beyond."

All buildings must meet a standard

Landlords and asset managers with commercial and residential properties are being reminded of additional responsibilities over the energy-efficiency of the buildings.

Shrewsbury-based property consultancy Berrys says buildings not meeting the minimum energy performance standard will not be allowed to be let from 2018 until they have been upgraded.

The Energy Efficiency (Private Rented Property) (England and Wales) Regulations 2015 make it unlawful for properties with F or G Energy Performance Certificates to be let without cost-effective energy efficiency improvements or fulfilling an exemption criterion, such as being Listed.

From April 2018, all rented property which is to be let must have an EPC rating of at least "E". This also applies to all renewal tenancies to the same tenant for the same property on or after April next year.

And Berrys says non-domestic properties have until April 2023, including existing tenancies, to ensure they meet the minimum E rating.

"Although there is one year to go before the 'E' Rating obligation comes into force for new tenancies, we are advising our property owning clients to take steps to upgrade their properties now as potential tenants are tending to avoid lower energy grade properties," said Graham Bowcock, partner at Berrys.

"Banks too are conscious of the regulations; mortgage valuers are obliged to report on the property's EPC band and the implications if the banding is F or G.

"Arguably tenants may be less interested in properties with low EPC bands due to increased heating and running costs. This may make certain properties less attractive for future sale or letting, irrespective of the legal requirement."

Property owners selling or renting residential or commercial properties failing to meet the legislation could end up with a property on their hands or face being fined up to £150,000.

Final units at park go to investor



The units on Vanguard Park, near Shrewsbury

Vanguard Park, on the northern fringes of Shrewsbury, has sold its final three units at Plot 19 to a local investor.

Towler Shaw Roberts, on behalf of site owners Morris Property, managed the sale of units H, J and K to an unnamed buyer.

The business park is already home to businesses such as Motorworld to Travis Perkins and Mercedes Benz.

Toby Shaw, a partner of TSR, said: "These are modern trade counter and commercial units, set in a prime location with a combined size of over 8,500 sq ft. The investor purchased them speculatively, as there will be a high level

of demand for units of this size in this location."

Liz Lowe, Head of Estates at Morris Properties, said: "We are pleased to have attracted more business investors into the town and we are seeing more and more demand for parks like ours as more investors look to build their portfolios. Vanguard Park benefits from a central location and good transport links with a modern and contemporary design."

Vanguard Park is two and a half miles north of Shrewsbury town centre and home to 35 national, regional and local trade counter occupiers.

Services in Ludlow will create around 20 jobs

The developer of a new petrol station and convenience store in Ludlow, which has the potential to create around 20 jobs, has agreed to lease the property to Applegreen.

Work on the development, on the site of the former Burway Abattoir site in Bromfield Road, at the northern entrance to Ludlow, is scheduled to begin in June. The developer, Mead House Pension Fund, hopes to complete the work in October.

Applegreen, who have one the UK's fastest expanding networks of petrol stations and convenience stores, will take on the lease. The company's nearest petrol station and store to Ludlow is at Church Stretton.

"We are delighted to announce that Applegreen has signed a lease for the new petrol station and the 3,000 square foot convenience store," said a spokesman for Mead House.

"It has taken a long time to get to this point, but we are now making real progress, which is great news for Ludlow in terms of investment and jobs.

"We expect the build to take around 16 weeks, which means the petrol station and store should be open in October."



An artist's impression of the proposed petrol station and convenience store

From Shrewsbury to Telford

Truck and van firm Indelease has moved into new headquarters in Telford.

The company, which provides acquisition services for commercial vehicles, has more than doubled in size in just two years.

It has moved from Shrewsbury, to a new base at Central Park in Telford which is three times the size of its former home.

Director Oliver Smith says: "We've grown tremendously over the last two years – both in terms of the volume of business written and in physical size.

"Demand for our services has never been stronger. Now we want to build on that momentum and the new headquarters will give us the perfect platform from which to do that."



Indelease has relocated to new headquarters



Julie Sheehan, Richard Sheehan (chief executive), pictured with Teresa Rowe and Steve Maden



Catherine Gough, Nigel Gough and Keith Winter pictured with Andy Young and Jackie Young



Katy Jones, Paul Coulthard-Jones, Sandy Edwards and Jonny Edwards



Nick West, Linda Davies and Nick Davies

Chamber celebrates in Whitchurch

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce hosted a celebration evening for its patrons.

The event took place at the Macdonald Hill Valley Hotel, Whitchurch.



Margaret Ratcliffe and Colin Ames toast the successful Chamber of Commerce event



Robert Williams, Attia Williams, Anton Gunter and Nicole Gunter



Emma Jones and Nick Jones pictured with Jane Ward, Graham Mills, Leigh Mills, Steve Oliver and Jane Smallman



Ceirios Guy, Peter Guy (president), Anna Brennand and Paul Gossage at the Whitchurch evening



Alison Suckley, Brett Hughes, Lisa McLoughlin, Ed Preece and Sue Evans pictured at the Macdonald Hill Valley Hotel



Staff of Network Telecom, Telford, were at the event



Katherine Lear, Natasha Boaden and Sarah Pruce



Helen Wright, pictured here with Alice Davies, Nathan Williams, Jess McGowan and Barbara Webb



Melanie French and Tony French, pictured with Joanne McKay, Gavin McKay, Richard Hughes and Gina Hughes



Grainne Walters and Anthony Walters pictured with Craig Hughes and Claire Hughes



Rhiannon Williams, pictured with Alan Adams, Felicity Wingrove, Tom Lloyd and Jennie Windle

Are you being ripped off by your energy supplier?

TV's money-saving expert **Martin Lewis** writes for Shropshire Business



If you're one of the 60% of people on a standard energy price tariff, including the big six energy firms, you're being RIPPED OFF.

And that rip off is getting bigger. After huge price hike announcements, many are burning £350 a year. Yet it takes just five minutes . . . you can stop it.

And right now is the moment, because with all the big suppliers having announced their price intentions, there's a level playing field for comparison.

Take a look at this table. The prices I've put in are dual fuel deals for someone with typical use - paying by monthly direct debit and using paperless bills. Compare that to the cheapest one year fix, where the rate is guaranteed for a year (not the price you pay, that depends on how much you use). Of course if your bill is higher or lower, so is your saving:

PROVIDER'S STANDARD TARIFF	AVG PRICE CHANGE	PRICE AFTER THE CHANGE	OVERPAYMENT COMPARED TO CHEAPEST
CHEAPEST 1 YEAR FIX	-	£834	-
Npower	UP 10.2% on 16 March	£1,187/yr	£353/yr
Scottish Power	UP 9.1% on 31 March	£1,167/yr	£333/yr
E.on	UP 9.3% on 26 April	£1,144/yr	£310/yr
SSE*	UP 5.7% on 28 April	£1,129/yr	£295/yr
EDF	UP 1.2% on 1 March	£1,082/yr	£248/yr
British Gas	Frozen until August	£1,044/yr	£210/yr

*including Scot Hydro, Southern Elec, Swalec & Atlantic

Switching really isn't that big a deal. It's the same gas, same electricity, same safety, all that changes is customer service and billing. And don't worry, no engineers come to visit, it's done without that, and you won't be cut off mid-switch - you are guaranteed continuous supply.

How to find your cheapest deal.

Your exact winner depends on your location and how much you use. That's why by far the easiest thing to do is use a comparison site - where you just put in your details and it finds you your cheapest deal.

It takes just five minutes with my www.cheapenergyclub.com, which I've designed to try to make it easy, and it automatically lets you see all tariffs across the market, and then monitors afterwards in case a cheap deal launches. Plus, as comparison sites get paid around £60 (dual fuel) if you switch through them, Cheap Energy Club gives you £30 cashback.

Alternatively use any www.ofgem.gov.uk approved comparison site. However, do beware some will ask you something like: "Do you only want to see tariffs we can switch you to today?" This is a proxy for: "Only see tariffs that pay us". So always select to see the whole of the market.

And if you've not switched because you find comparing too confusing. My most important message is that the sin of NOT COMPARING is worse than the sin of getting a comparison wrong. You may end up on

your third or fourth cheapest instead of your first, and with wrong predicted savings - yet you'd still be on a cheaper deal.

Now let me answer a few common switching questions:

Q. Can I switch if I'm on a prepayment (key or card) meter?

Yes. Just do a comparison, though the savings tend not to be as large. Far bigger savings are possible by switching to a standard meter, as there's more competition. If you're with a big six firm you won't be charged for switching meter, though will usually have to pass its credit check. Full help in www.mse.me/prepaidenergy.

Q. I'm electricity only, what should I do?

You can do an electricity only comparison exactly the same way as dual fuel, and the savings can still be substantial. If you're on an Economy 7 or 10 tariff, comparing is trickier though.

Q. I switched to a cheap fix, then I put my price up - have I been conned?

If you switch to a tariff with a guaranteed cheaper rate, you will save on the energy used. Yet if the firm estimated you'd use less energy than you are, the initial direct debit can rise. This feels like a price hike, but in the end as it's a cheaper rate while frustrating, you're still better off. Yet do get on the phone and ask it to justify any direct debit rise. If it can't you've a right to have it at a fair level.



- Martin Lewis is the Founder and Chair of Money Saving Expert. To join the 12 million people who get his Martin's Money Tips weekly email, go to www.moneysavingexpert.com/latesttip



Price increases are a familiar news item. It's worth checking to see if you are on the most appropriate tariff for your usage.

Q. I switched, but my bills haven't dropped by the predicted saving – what can I do?

When you do a comparison the 'saving' is compared to what you would've paid if you did nothing. Yet prices are rising, so if your bill was £1,000 last year, it would be £1,100-ish this year, therefore a £200 saving only cuts what you actually pay by £100.

Q. Is direct debit really cheaper?

Yes. Suppliers charge around 6% less if you pay specifically by monthly direct debit, so if you can, opt for that, but always give regular meter readings to get accurate bills.

Q. I rent, can I switch?

Landlords can't stop you changing supplier (unless your rent includes the energy bill). If they unfairly band it in your contract send them this factsheet www.mse.me/energyguide#rentingfactsheet.

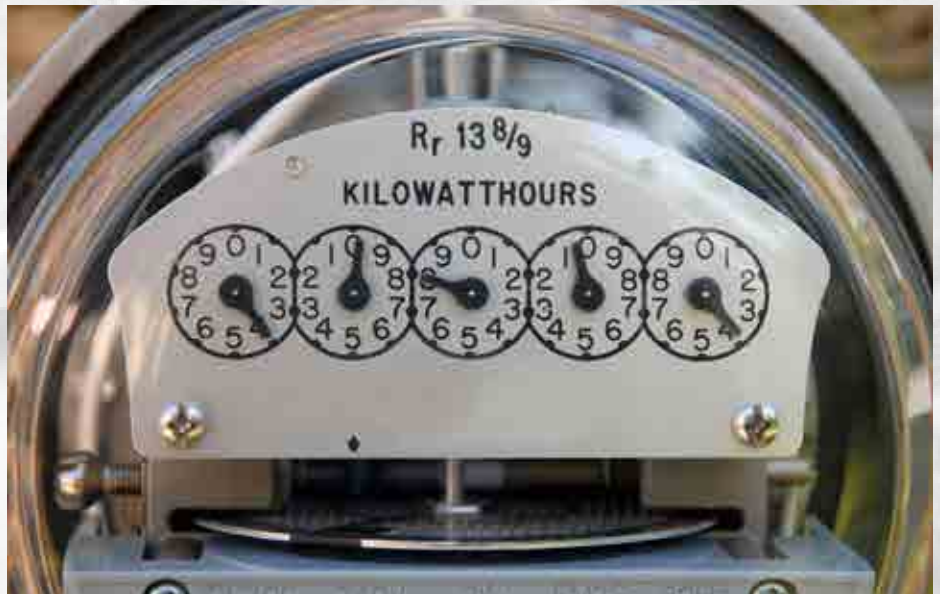
However, you do need a landlord's permission to change the physical meter, eg switching from a prepayment to a normal meter.

Q. I'm moving home, is there any point switching?

Yes, but grab a 'portable' deal. That's one that can move with you when you move. You'll find whether it's portable listed by most comparison sites.

Q. I've just moved home, and have no bills, what do I do?

Most comparison sites will ask you a few questions and estimate your usage.



Gas or electricity, or both – switching to a new provider can reduce bills significantly

Q. The comparison shows my cheapest is a small provider I've not heard of. Should I worry?

There's a lot of small, new challenger energy firms. Big picture is, don't worry. Even in the unlikely event that one went bust, the regulator Ofgem guarantees you won't be cut off, your custom will be moved elsewhere – though you may lose any super

cheap deal (but would be free to switch elsewhere).

The bigger issue is some of these small firms pump out very cheap deals to build market share, and then can't cope with the demand, hitting their customer service. So look at the feedback ratings on comparison sites, and if it's not good, scroll to the next cheapest.

Senior developer joins local agency

Shropshire-based marketing agency Reech has appointed David Barkley as a senior developer.

He brings a specialist set of skills which complement the existing digital team at the agency.

David has worked alongside Reech on many projects since December 2015, as a freelance consultant.

Due to increased demand for bespoke and complex software packages from their client base, Reech said it was a natural progression for David to become a full time member of the team.



David previously worked alongside Reech on many projects as a freelance. He has now joined the agency.

Team player



Nicola Corfield of Towler Shaw Roberts

Managerial role is next challenge

Commercial property firm Towler Shaw Roberts has appointed Nicola Corfield as property manager, based in the firm's Shrewsbury office. Nicola said: "I have worked in the property sector since leaving school and was previously a residential property manager for a property firm based in Shrewsbury looking after a multitude of sites across the country. This is a new challenge for me and it's one which brings the experience that I already have in property management through to a different sector." Nicola, who lives in Telford, attended Wrekin College and Leicester's De Montfort University, where she studied architecture. She is currently completing a masters degree in building surveying.



Lizzie Hughes, vice president of the Shropshire Law Society, has been recruited to the family team at Wace Morgan Solicitors Shrewsbury head office and Newtown office

A solicitor who is also an equestrian expert is riding high after joining Shropshire's legal firm Wace Morgan Solicitors.

Lizzie Hughes, vice president of the Shropshire Law Society, has been recruited to the family team at the firm's Shrewsbury head office and Newtown office.

"I have specialised in family law, specifically cases involving children, including intervention by social services,

adoption and custody disputes," said Lizzie, of Tettenhall. "I appear regularly on the West Midlands, Shropshire and Mid Wales court circuit before all levels of judges from magistrates to circuit judges."

After completing her law conversion and legal practice course at The College of Law in Birmingham she was employed at a specialist family firm in Telford, becoming a director in 2015.

Lizzie represented England in dressage last year and has now qualified for the British Dressage Winter National Championships in Gloucestershire in April.



Rob Tolley welcomes Will and Carol as his first franchisees

Telecoms company launches franchise

Shrewsbury-based telecoms company Fluid Network Solutions, which provides nationwide services, has franchised – with the first new business opening in Wessex. The company was set up by Rob Tolley in 2003 and has grown steadily year on year.

Now Mr Tolley has welcomed franchisees Will Job and Carol Watkinson to use the strength of the brand and extensive established business relationships to launch their own business. He said: “When I launched Fluid 13 years ago I intended to have a small business but it has grown far beyond all expectations.

“This comes as a result of the huge changes in the industry which have seen telecommunications and broadband become essential items for all businesses across all industries.

“Very rapidly the mobile phone and the internet have completely changed the way we communicate, the way we do business and even the way we plan and live our lives. There is now a need for regional directors to manage new clients - and run their own businesses with a complete back-up support system. We are extremely pleased to welcome Will and Carol on board as our first franchise team.”

Solicitors are filling key roles with firm

Solicitors at award-winning Shropshire law firm FBC Manby Bowdler have taken up a number of key roles in the fields of serious injury and clinical negligence.

Lucy Macklin Smith, a senior clinical negligence lawyer at the firm, has been appointed as the West Midlands co-ordinator of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers.

In her role for the not-for-profit organisation, which champions the right to justice for victims of personal injury, she is responsible for organising the region’s regular meetings that update members on the latest developments in the sector.

Meanwhile, partners Tim Gray and Susan Todhunter have been reaccredited to the APIL panel of approved lawyers. And the firm has also strengthened its serious injury and clinical negligence team with the appointment of Adam Wilson as associate.

Adam has more than 25 years of experience in high value and complex catastrophic injury claims arising from employers’ liability, occupiers’ liability and road traffic accidents.

The 32-strong team last year secured in excess of £10 million for clients in personal injury cases.



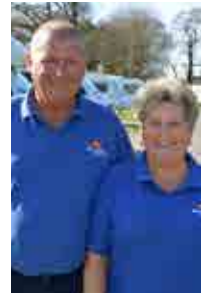
Lucy Macklin Smith, a senior clinical negligence lawyer at FBC Manby Bowdler, has been appointed as the West Midlands co-ordinator of the Association of Personal Injury Lawyers



Nick and Sandra

Management team named

A Shropshire touring caravan park has appointed a new management team for the new season. Gary and Tania Smith have been promoted to managers of Stanmore Hall Touring Park at Bridgnorth and new assistant managers are Nick and Sandra Bellinger.



Gary and Tania

The Smiths have worked for park owner, Morris Leisure, for five years, having previously served at Oxon Hall Touring and Holiday Home Park, Shrewsbury, Riverside Touring and Holiday Home Park, Betws-y-Coed and Ludlow Touring Park. They previously stayed at Stanmore Hall Touring Park as customers for 10 years when their friends, Mark and Tracy Kilmartin, were managers. Before opting for a change of lifestyle by becoming caravan park managers, Tania worked as a chef for 32 years and Gary worked as a landscape gardener for 27 years for Birmingham Council.

The Bellingers have moved to Bridgnorth from Swindon where Sandra worked for Tesco for 25 years and Boots the Chemist for 10 years.

Nick has spent most of his working life in the motor industry, rising to become body shop manager at Blade Motor Company.

Retiring from a role

Peter Willcock will retire from his dual role at Halls Holdings Limited in Shrewsbury from September 30, but will continue to work for the company as a consultant.

Mr Willcock, who lives in Bishop's Castle, has worked for the company, which has a network of nine offices across Shropshire, Worcestershire and Mid Wales, for 38 years.

He has led the company as chairman and managing director for 26 years. His successor as managing director will be David Giles while the new chairman will be Allen Gittins.

Both appointments begin on October 1. Mr Willcock said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed being chairman and managing director of Halls but it's time for a change and I have always believed in a retirement



Peter Willcock

policy. I genuinely believe that businesses need reinvigorating from time to time and younger people should be given an opportunity to acquire shares."

Championing further studies

The Marches LEP has announced that Ian Peake, the principal and chief executive of Herefordshire & Ludlow College, has joined its bus in-essed board and will focus specifically on championing Further Education throughout the region.

Following a career which saw him hold senior roles in the private sector and the NHS, Ian entered Further Education in 1996 when he joined the former Herefordshire College of Technology.

He assumed the leadership role at Herefordshire & Ludlow College in 2004 and has since overseen the college's significant expansion through



Ian Peake

mergers with Holme Lacy Campus, Ludlow College and County Training.

It has also been under his leadership that substantial capital investments have been made with the launch of a new £32m campus in Hereford, and a University Centre in partnership with the University of Worcestershire.

He said: "I am committed to the importance of strengthening the links between training, education and business and my new role on the board of the Marches LEP will enable me to contribute meaningfully to this across the region, whilst also getting further involved in wider economic development initiatives."

Accountancy firm practice manager



Adele Robinshaw worked in the banking sector for 34 years

Accountancy firm Dyke Yaxley has a new practice manager who brings a wealth of experience after working in the banking sector for over 30 years.

Adele Robinshaw is now working alongside the company's operations director, Marie Bramwell.

She previously worked in the banking sector for 34 years, beginning her career at NatWest in Shrewsbury, as well as working in several other banking roles across the West Midlands and dealing with national projects.

Dyke Yaxley operations director Marie Bramwell said: "We're delighted to welcome Adele to our team, and her knowledge and experience will be an invaluable addition to the company."



Laurence Lucas joins Lanyon Bowdler as a partner

Commercial property team has new partner

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler is expanding its commercial property team with the appointment of a new partner.

Laurence Lucas has joined following a period of strong growth for the commercial property department over the last two years. Demand for the team's services has steadily increased, despite the uncertainty surrounding the EU referendum. Head

of the commercial property team at Lanyon Bowdler, Praveen Chaudhari, said: "The commercial property market in Shropshire and Herefordshire has been very busy and we have seen a good number of transactions being completed. The quality of work being undertaken by the team has enabled us to attract the strong lateral hire of Laurence, who joins us from Willans."

BNI's leadership team



Secretary treasurer Richard Scott-Worthington, president Roger Ashford and vice president James Godfrey take up their new roles

The Thomas Telford Chapter of Business Network International (BNI) has a new leadership team. Roger Ashford, of Ashford Plumbing, has taken up the position of president, with support from Lease Loop's James Godfrey in the vice president role and Richard Scott-Worthington of True Potential as secretary treasurer.

Business Network International (BNI) is the world's leading referral organisation with more than 211,000 members and 7,800 groups – or chapters as they are known – worldwide.

The business referrals from members in 2016 alone generated more than £9 billion in revenue for member businesses.

In Shropshire, two chapters are well-established with likeminded business folk meeting in Shrewsbury and Telford.

The Thomas Telford Chapter meets each Thursday morning from 6.45am at The Ramada Hotel on the fringes of Telford Town Centre.

The Shrewsbury Chapter meets each Friday at 6.45am at Albrighton Hall Hotel, Shrewsbury.

It's an early start, designed not to get in the way of your day-to-day business, with a finishing time of around 8.30am.

Investing in future at Crown Group



Managing director Gareth Emberton with apprentices Dom Colbron and Richard Moss

Construction and landscaping specialist Crown Group has announced plans to increase its investment in apprenticeships as part of its strategic expansion of the business.

The Shropshire based company says the investment will see it add up to a dozen apprentices to its workforce over the next three years in its long-term blueprint for future proofing the organisation. Crown

Group is experiencing significant growth in its facilities management and environmental management divisions as well as its core business of delivering integrated design, building and maintenance services for construction and landscaping projects.

It counts construction leaders such as Bowmer & Kirkland and Galliford Try and local authorities among its regular clients. It is currently working on a high profile landscaping project at the Warner Bros 150-acre Hertfordshire studios as part of its multi-million pound expansion.

The firm has doubled in size in the last year and now employs more than 60 people across the country.



Mollie'Ann Grant of DM Recruitment

Apprentice found from within firm

It was a bit of a busman's holiday for Shropshire firm DM Recruitment when it decided to take on the firm's first apprentice.

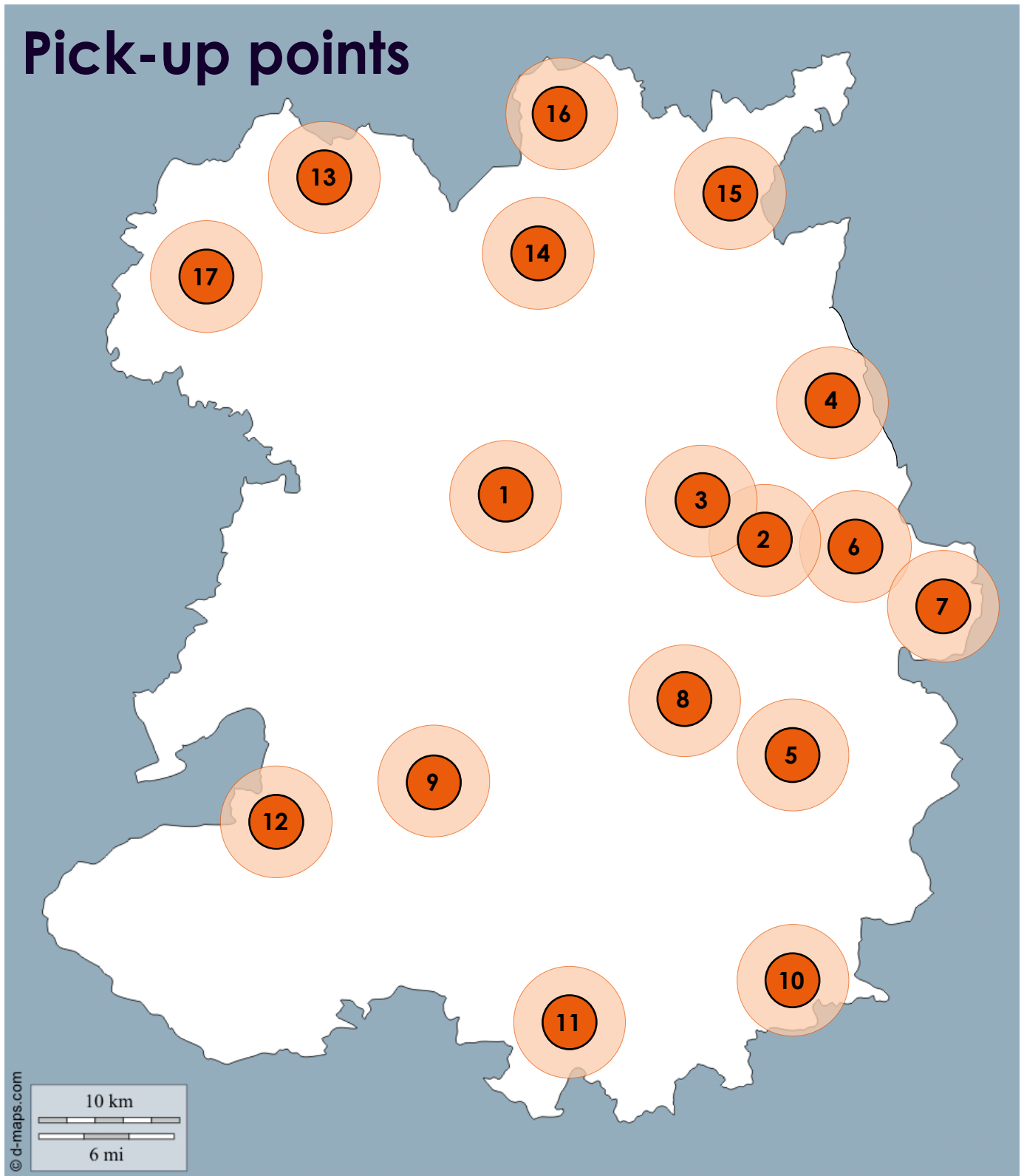
After an exhaustive interview process, they decided Mollie'Ann Grant was the ideal candidate to join the Shrewsbury-based firm as an apprentice branch administrator.

The 20-year-old, from Bishop's Castle, found herself plunged straight into the cut and thrust of the business. She said: "I'm really enjoying it.

"I'm making calls every day, seeing if people are available for work, chasing up references and sorting out wages. It is a great way of learning, so much more so than if I was sitting in a classroom. I was applying for business administration roles, but none of them were available as apprenticeships.

"Then I saw this job with DM Recruitment where I could learn on the job and realised it was what I had really wanted to do."

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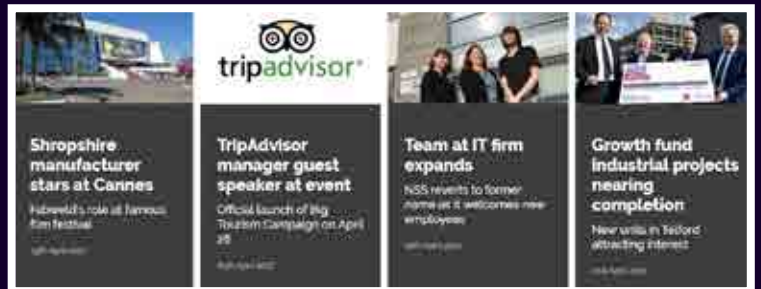
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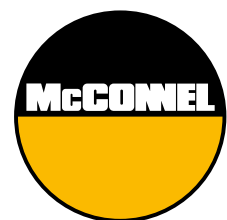
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