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July/August 2023
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ISSUE 40 :
JULY/AUGUST 2023

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MIDLANDS MEDIA AWARDS
Magazine of the Year – winner



SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER AWARDS
Best New Business (SBLTV)

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Printed in the UK by The Magazine Printing Company:
www.magprint.co.uk



By Carl Jones
Shropshire Business Editor

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SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Welcome

This time last year, the hospitality industry was still well and truly in the doldrums after feeling the full force of the Covid pandemic.

We may have been technically out of lockdown by then, but battered and bruised public confidence remained brittle – and inflation was beginning to pile pressure on overheads too.

Fast forward 12 months, and where are we now? Inflation remains stubbornly high, and with interest rates expected to keep rising for some time to try to bring it under control, these remain uncertain times.

Some hospitality businesses have fallen by the wayside. Cafés and restaurants have either shut down or reduced their opening hours, and we've lost several more of our local pubs.

But . . . and it's a big but . . . there are still reasons for optimism.

In our spotlight on the hospitality and leisure industry, a special report comes from Iscoyd Park near Whitchurch, which explains why the dark days of Covid could have proved something of a silver lining.

There's also good news on the sporting front with a big tennis deal set to bring significant visitor spend into the county, and we report on the opening of what must surely go down as one of the most unique eating experiences for many a mile, in Shrewsbury.

Yes, times remain incredibly challenging with many unanswered questions. Just how confident are our small businesses? How stressed are staff? These are just some of the big talking points we explore this time.

We also bring you a comprehensive round-up of the runners, riders and big

winners at the county's business "Oscars" – were you among the near 600-strong audience at Telford's International Centre for the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards?

Congratulations to Aico of Oswestry for their history-making third Company of the Year title. Find out who the other winners were, and check out our picture gallery, starting on page 11.

One of the prizes handed out at the ceremony was for "Business in the Community", and in spite of these testing times, it's heart-warming to see so many businesses supporting clubs, organisations and causes in their local areas. We round up just a small fraction of them inside.

What else? Well, we've got news of acquisitions, rebrands, start-ups, new networking initiatives, top tips on how to avoid falling foul of identity fraud, and a reflection on the growing focus which seems to be falling on issues around sustainability – plus, of course, all the usual round-ups including four pages of new appointments.

And so, as we head into the summer holiday period, is the Shropshire economy now in a sunny disposition?

Recruitment problems are still causing headaches, to the extent that some manufacturers are going so far as to suggest they no longer want to seek to recruit under 21s because they will either not bother turning up for an interview, or throw in the towel after a week of graft.

Salary demands are also still putting pressure on profit margins, and clients are tending to leave things far more last-minute before committing to orders. So I'd say probably not yet.

But after what we've all been through over the past two or three years, things could be a lot worse, right...?

Clocking on for work

How confident are small businesses? How stressed are staff? And is time-tracking software the answer to keeping tabs on Shropshire’s army of home workers? CHRIS AUSTIN reports

Confidence levels among small business owners in our region is at its highest level for a year – and ahead of the UK average.

The Federation of Small Businesses’ West Midlands Small Business Index quarterly report summarises the recent performance, current circumstances, and future aspirations of owners.

It shows that there has been a sharp increase in confidence among the region’s small business owners compared to previous reporting periods.

In fact, confidence levels have entered positive territory for the first time since the beginning of 2022 and the West Midlands is the most optimistic of all UK regions.

On revenue generation, the position has moved from negative to neutral, with 34% of firms now reporting an increase, the same number as reporting a decrease. Meanwhile the outlook for future profits is really positive, with almost twice the number of respondents expecting an increase (41%) than expect a decline (22%).

Other highlights include:

- Half of SMEs expect to grow in the next 12 months, compared to just 5% who expect to downsize, sell or close their business
- Marginally more expect to increase capital investment in their business (21%) than expect to decrease it during the coming quarter
- The overwhelming majority reported that staff levels had remained unchanged, although 12% had reduced employee numbers

Unsurprisingly, the greatest perceived barriers to growth over the next year remain the general economic conditions in the UK, followed by rising utility costs and increasing labour costs.

Rob Harrison, the FSB’s West Midlands policy representative, said: “The findings are testament to the tremendous resilience and determination of our regional small businesses.

“They have overcome the disruption caused by events such as the UK’s exit from the EU, national political upheaval and global events such as the pandemic, and major disruptive conflicts, to start 2023 in a much more confident manner.

“This is a welcome step forward and the Federation of Small Businesses remains committed to working with local stakeholders and national Government to build on this positive momentum, and to create the best possible conditions for small business creation and growth”.

But while small business owners may be feeling in a more confident place, the same can’t be said for a significant number of staff.

Another piece of research suggests that nearly two thirds of Shropshire professionals are suffering from some form of workplace-related stress, with over 40% pointing to concerns over job security as the biggest trigger.

Despite employers spending millions on wellness initiatives every



Stress levels appear to be rising for many staff

year – increasing their spend by 20% since the pandemic – 55% of professionals still think their employer is not doing enough to combat stress in the workplace, the poll by recruitment firm Robert Walters found.

Asked how often they felt stressed at work, a third stated “very often” with a further 27% stating “somewhat often”. Fewer than one in ten staff said they were not feeling any form of “reoccurring stress” at work this year.

So what are the causes, and whose responsibility is it to do something about it?

When asked about what causes workplace stress, concerns over job stability were the most common trigger, followed by more pressure from management, lack of a pay rise, and taking on a heavier workload.

Nearly half the professionals who responded to the survey said it was down to HR and senior leaders to tackle the situation, followed by line managers.

Chris Poole, managing director of Robert Walters, said: “UK employers spend an estimated £100-200 per employee on wellness initiatives and benefits every year – but our survey indicates they may only be applying a sticking plaster.

“Employers must strike the balance between not breaking the banks or piling pressure onto managers to solve workplace stress, but still being proactive and listening to the needs of their employees.

“Simple interventions – such as making sure workloads are manageable, setting realistic deadlines and making sure employees have access to support, safe spaces and relevant resources – can all help to alleviate pressure in the workplace as well as professionals’ day-to-day work life.”

Long work hours, heavy workloads, tight deadlines, unclear job

expectations, job insecurity, and conflicts with colleagues or supervisors are all factors which contribute towards workplace stress, the survey says.

If not addressed, workplace stress can snowball into higher turnover rates, levels of employee burnout, absenteeism and lower levels of productivity, it warns.

With a significant increase in the number of Shropshire people now working from home since the pandemic, there is also a growing concern among managers that it is making them less productive.

Some bosses are investing in time-tracking software to keep closer tracks on their workers.

But does the evidence back this up? It depends who you ask, of course, but there is a significant body of evidence to suggest that working from home can make staff more productive, happier in their job, and less likely to suffer burnout.

Employee engagement experts at Weekly10 have pinpointed five ways they believe Shropshire employers can motivate remote workers . . . and why commonly-used time-tracking software isn’t the answer.

1. Thinking ahead with realistic goals

Employee engagement can be encouraged by setting professional goals. By thinking ahead and setting clear guidelines that coincide with personal development plans, managers and team leaders can help workers achieve their goals. That being said, these goals should always be realistic. If workers do not have enough resources to meet their targets, this can have the opposite effect and discourage hard work. They may also feel the need to work overtime, which can quickly lead to employee burn out.

2. Creating incentive programmes

Once employers have established realistic goals, they can create incentive programmes. It can be stressful to meet deadlines and targets, but financial and social rewards are sure to motivate remote employees. These incentive programmes can offer anything that aligns the company and its values, such as commission, wage increases, profit sharing, bonus payments and more.

3. Remember to recognise and celebrate success

From passing probation to reaching monthly targets, there’s lots of things to highlight in the workplace. Employers can praise employees on video calls, in monthly catch-ups, or during team meetings. And, whether they use Slack or Microsoft Teams, it’s also a good idea to create an achievements channel for this very purpose.

4. Practising and encouraging transparent feedback

No matter the nature of the job, employees should understand the successes and potential pitfalls of their performance, thereby promoting constant growth for remote workers. However, communication is a two-way street. Employees should feel comfortable voicing any praise or concerns of their own. By conducting frequent 1-2-1 meetings, team members are more likely to feel comfortable sharing their feelings, and understand the option is there for them to do so. With this clear line of communication, employers are better able to spot issues, find solutions and help the team develop.

5. Prioritising health and wellbeing

The health and wellbeing of employees is paramount. If they are suffering from a physical or mental ailment, for example, it will inevitably affect their performance at work. That is why they should feel comfortable confiding in managers and taking sickness leave. To promote health and wellbeing in the workplace, employers can organise online mental health catch-ups, virtual guided meditation classes and more. Then, in turn, remote workers are more likely to engage with the business.



The first quarter results for 2023 carried out by the FSB

Time-tracking software is a commonly used tool. It allows managers to oversee the daily activities of remote workers, including the level of work being completed at home.

But the Weekly10 team say time-tracking software definitely isn’t the answer to improve productivity or loyalty.

“Despite the visibility it gives employers, time-tracking software is actually harmful to the productivity of remote workers. Not only can it put unnecessary pressure on workers to complete tasks, but it can also foster a mistrusting environment that demotivates workers.

“Employee engagement is the driving force of success. There are multiple ways to encourage this, such as harnessing positive attitudes and encouraging personal development.

“However, time-tracking software is not the answer to improve business operations. While it tracks multiple factors – including the amount of time between actions – it is harmful to workplace productivity.

“It’s also unrealistic to expect employees to stay at their desks all day. Employees cannot work at full speed all day, every day, without experiencing burn out. Plus, regular computer breaks can prevent eyestrain, musculoskeletal disorders, and circulation problems.

“Alternatively, employees can measure outputs and inputs with regular meetings, use goal setting to establish clear expectations, and build a culture based on trust, rather than using time-tracking software.”

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SDE Technology is one of the largest manufacturers of pressings and assemblies in the UK



Richard Homden, managing director

Pressing ahead with £2 million investment

Pressings and assemblies specialist SDE Technology has invested more than £2 million in acquiring its largest ever progression press.

The Shrewsbury-based company has installed the 1000-tonne Chin Fong press and coil handling line at its Brixton Way factory, an installation that will allow larger die usage and help create larger products for use in the automotive sector.

The press, which has a bed size of 4.5metres x 1.8metres, has capacity for over £2 million of new revenue, with the management team already in discussions with larger OEMs and tier 1s looking for security of supply and opportunities to de-risk the supply chain.

Eight new jobs have been created and many more safeguarded because of the investment, the company says.

"This is our largest ever progression press and one of the largest in the UK automotive supply chain," said managing director Richard Homden.

"It is a fantastic time to invest in this new capability. Yes, there are current headwinds, but for the bold there are also opportunities, with lots of reshoring, electrification and carbon reduction projects currently being discussed.

"The £2 million investment will be a game-changer for our business and the West Midlands as a whole."

SDE Technology is one of the largest manufacturers of pressings and assemblies in the UK, employing more than 130 people across its core production business and at Salop Haulage Ltd.

The company has overcome tough trading conditions, the pandemic, chip shortages and energy costs, to secure several new



Eight new jobs have been created and many more safeguarded because of the investment

opportunities in the automotive sector and is now planning on maximising its latest Hot Form Quench process.

This is a revolutionary hot forming process for use in the automotive, aerospace, and renewable sectors, and gives designers the freedom to create parts that offer significant weight savings, yet still deliver higher structural strength.

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cannot be formed cold. In some instances, it can also reduce the part counts from multiple components to just one.

Chris Greenough, commercial director at SDE Technology, said: "The Chin Fong investment comes off the back of two earlier press installations, offering 100 and 200-tonne capabilities.

"These have been put in initially to deliver pressings for the white goods industry, but they could also be used to support other tooling projects going forward."

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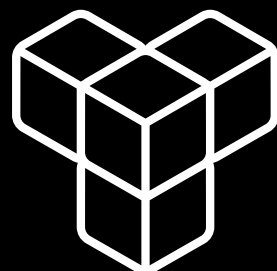
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Three cheers for county's winners

They call it the 'Oscars' of the local economy, and this year's Shropshire Chamber Business Awards was certainly a dazzling occasion to behold

History was made at Shropshire's business "Oscars" this year as home life safety company Aico became the first three-time Company of the Year.

Nearly 600 people were at Telford's International Centre for what has become firmly-established as the largest event on the Shropshire business calendar.

The Shropshire Chamber Business Awards are now in their 23rd year, and saw a record-breaking number of entries in many of its categories this time.

Aico picked up two awards on the night – landing the Trailblazer award for innovation alongside the showpiece Shropshire Company of the Year title.

But on a night of huge celebration which reminded us all of the quality, diversity and all-round excellence of the Shropshire business community, winners came from all corners of the county.

Best Small Business went to The Shropshire



Kelda Wood, winner of the John Clayton award

Distillery of Ellesmere, the Global Trade category was won by Jesmonite of Bishop's Castle, and Alveley-based Staysafe PPE won the Eco Award.

Pave Aways from Knockin – a former Shropshire Company of the Year – added to its proud history in the competition by this time winning the Business In The Community title. It

was a particularly good night for Shrewsbury-based businesses, with SDE Technology collecting the Manufacturing and Engineering prize, accountancy firm Dyke Yaxley taking the Wellbeing In The Workplace title, and Charlie The Vet winning Best Small Business.

Shrewsbury Colleges Group also won the Commitment To People prize, and Faye Hudson, from town marketing agency Reech, was crowned Young Business Person of the Year. The John Clayton Award, which goes each year to a person who has made an outstanding contribution to the county, was presented this year to the inspirational Kelda Wood.

She wrote her name into the record books as the first para-athlete to single-handedly row across the Atlantic, and runs a Shropshire charity called Climbing Out, using outdoor activities to help rebuild people's confidence and self-esteem.

Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones, who was once again master of ceremonies, told the audience: "This year's winner certainly knows a thing or two about overcoming adversity – and always does it with a smile."

All pictures in this feature courtesy of Yarrington



Kelda Wood and Ruth Ross share a joke on stage

◀ “Her motto is not to say ‘I can’t’ but to turn that around and say instead ‘How can I?’ She’s an inspiration, and a role model in the art of positivity, determination and resilience.”

Guests were entertained by celebrity singer and impressionist Debra Stephenson, who has worked on Spitting Image, and prime-time TV shows with the likes of Rory Bremner and John Culshaw.

Reflecting on the evening, Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce’s chief executive, said: “Once again, we were amazed and delighted by the volume and quality of entries, including very strong interest in our new categories.

“We had a record number of companies apply for the awards this year, with a healthy mix of both members and non-members. So everyone recognised should hold their heads up high, and be proud.

“We don’t do this to make a profit. We do it to showcase Shropshire businesses and remind those outside the county that we are here – and that we have some truly great businesses in our county.”

The competition was open as usual to all businesses with an operational base in the county of Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin.

Although it is organised by the Chamber, the shortlisting and judging is carried out by teams of independent business people, and category sponsors, without any Chamber staff involvement.

Ruth added: “We know that Shropshire businesses are facing significant challenges over the coming year, so it was more important than ever to celebrate and recognise the success stories of the incredible businesses we have in our county.”

Launched in 2001, the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards are established as one of the largest and longest running business awards events in the UK.

This year’s event included a game of ‘heads and tails’ to raise cash for one of the charities the Chamber has chosen to support this year – Little Stars, which helps parents in need of essential baby items.

The charity’s founder Leanne Simcoe joined Carl Jones on stage to help run the game, which raised nearly £2,500 for the charity.

Shropshire Chamber president Piran Littleton described this year’s awards as “an extraordinary celebration of business success, where we acknowledge and honour outstanding Shropshire-based businesses and the remarkable individuals within them”.



Nearly 600 people attended the event at Telford’s International Centre



Raising cash for charity – Leanne Simcoe of Little Stars with Carl Jones



Enjoying a game of heads and tails

“It owes its existence to the unwavering commitment and meticulous organisation of our dedicated Chamber team, the relentless efforts of the production team, and, undoubtedly, the invaluable support of our sponsors,” he added.

“We wholeheartedly express our gratitude to each and every one of you for contributing to the resounding success of this event.”

So who won what, and why? Let’s find out a bit more about the winning companies:



Comedy impressions from Debra Stephenson

AICO, OSWESTRY: Company of the Year & The Trailblazer Award for Innovation

After its multiple successes at the Shropshire Chamber Awards in 2020 and 2022, Aico became the first company in the event’s history to win the Company of the Year award three times.

It’s been another big year of growth and innovation for the Oswestry-based business, best known for its smoke alarms and associated home life safety products.

Managing director Neal Hooper said he was proud and honoured that the team had taken the top prize again this year – although it was by no means Aico’s first awards success of 2023.

Earlier in June, the company also picked up a Customer Service Excellence prize at the ASCP Safety and Compliance Awards, and collected the Fire Safety Manufacturer of the Year award at the Fire and Security Matters Awards.

Andrew Sturgess, national specification manager for Aico, said: “These awards are a recognition of our commitment to excellence and passion for innovation. We are always looking for ways to improve our products and services, and we are constantly striving to be the best that we can be.”

One of Aico’s most recent high-profile partnerships is with English Heritage, which cares for over 400 historic buildings, monuments and sites – from world-famous prehistoric sites to medieval castles.

It is trialling Aico’s HomeLINK Connected Home Solution at Pickering Castle in Yorkshire.

Dan Little, national sales manager at Aico, says: “It has been great working with English Heritage; their portfolio of properties is undoubtedly different to those we typically work with.

“That being said, they still face the same asset management challenges around maintenance and compliance. Seeing the Aico technology in these environments shows its versatility and ability to help solve unique problems.”

In addition to fire detection, English Heritage is exploring the use of the company’s Ei1025 Environmental Sensors which monitor temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels.

English Heritage regional estates manager Ashley Hardy says: “The technological advancements in Aico’s Gateway enable us to monitor vast and disperse sites in real time.

“The technology provides us with the confidence and assurance that our sites are adequately protected. Should anything happen, the Gateway responds immediately and notifies us of potentially hazardous scenarios such as if the detector has been removed or loss of power.”

THE SHROPSHIRE DISTILLERY, ELLESMERE: Best Small Business

Since building its “Gin Shed” in 2018, the company has grown into an award-winning distillery and gin school, making small batch quality spirits.

In Emma Glynn, it has one of the very few female distillers in the UK, and this year the business has launched its first vodka, Spring Vodka – taking its name from the local Wenlock Spring water it is blended with.

Emma says: “We’ve created a clean, crisp vodka that I’m really proud of.

“We’re passionate about developing new recipes to keep evolving our offering – I love exploring new botanical combinations. We’ve also just released a Grapefruit & Hop Gin in time for summer cocktails.

“As gin lovers, we had tasted many over the years, but found we



were disappointed by some that turned out not to be created as they claimed and were lacking any real personal touch or love.

“As creative personalities we began discussing the possibility of producing classic, honest spirits on our terms, filled with our ideas and inspirations.

“When we first moved from Lancashire to Shropshire, we were both commuting 120 miles each day for work. I worked in education and Gareth was a chemical engineer. After a little while, I was able to move work closer to home, while Gareth continued to commute. Behind the scenes it was all systems go for building the Gin Shed.”

CHARLIE THE VET, SHREWSBURY: Best New Business

The business is run by Charlie Astle, a practising small animal vet with over a decade of experience.

During the Covid pandemic, when in-person consultations became largely impossible, she spotted an opportunity – to become known as the “at home pet care expert”.

“Most of my veterinary consultations were done via phone or video instead of face-to-face,” she said. “I quickly realised that most of my clients lacked the basic items needed to treat their pet at home.

“I started looking into what first aid kits existed for pets and found most were not fit for purpose, with many containing products that were even dangerous for pets. None contained instructions on how to use the contents safely.”

The first product was a pet first aid kit that comes with a great set of resources showing how to treat minor injuries at home, and what to do in emergency situations prior to arriving at the vets, and the company quickly secured a contract with the Central Co-Op Group.

“Our broader focus is pet wellness, welfare and education,” she said.



SHREWSBURY COLLEGES GROUP: Commitment To People

The group is home to more than 9,000 students a year, across three campuses.

It says: “We are committed to creating a positive learning and working environment that is free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation, and place equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of everything we do.

“All college policies and procedures go through the Equality Impact Assessment procedure.”

It is one of the many businesses to sign up to Shropshire Chamber’s Mental Health Charter, produced with Merulae Ltd, which provides a framework for providing a workplace that is supportive of the mental health and wellbeing of its workforce.

By signing the charter, the group recognised its responsibility to ensure it can provide access to mental health support, provide awareness and training, and put in place systems to continue to support people in the workplace.

This is in addition to the college achieving the Employer Pledge, a public declaration committed to ending mental health stigma and discrimination, and introducing Mental Health Champions within the college.





SDE TECHNOLOGY, SHREWSBURY: Excellence in Manufacturing and Engineering

Based at Harlescott, SDE Technology has over 50 years of engineering experience.

Formerly known as Salop Design & Engineering, it is one of the largest manufacturers of pressings and assemblies in the UK, offering many aspects of presswork, including hydraulic deep draw presswork.

The company has three divisions:

- SDE Lightweight Engineering is dedicated to the design, development and manufacture of lightweighting solutions for automotive, aerospace and other industrial and consumer sectors, from concept through to production.

- SDE Powder Coating & Surface Technologies provides a range of surface finishing technologies for different types of metals.

- And SDE Logistics, including Salop Haulage, has grown out of the other two divisions as the vehicle for delivering finished products to customers.

Earlier this year it invested more than £2 million in acquiring its largest ever progression press – a 1000-tonne Chin Fong press and coil handling line which opens up more opportunities in the automotive sector.

Eight jobs have been created and many more safeguarded following the investment, which the company believes has the capacity to generate more than £2 million in new revenue.

Managing director Richard Homden said: “This is our largest ever progression press and one of the largest in the UK automotive supply chain.”

JESMONITE, BISHOP’S CASTLE: Global Business

Jesmonite is sold across the world and used by millions of people to make products from jewellery to tables and building facades.

The story began in 1984 when the original compound was invented – an acrylic-modified gypsum composite. It was conceived as a safe alternative to fibreglass and lightweight alternative to cast concrete, and remains extremely popular to this day.



At the end of last year, it won a Queen’s Award for Enterprise, in the international trade category; one of the highest accolades a UK business can receive.

Jesmonite is a two-part system product that when mixed together can be used to create laminated structures or cast pieces.

Their products are used around the world and can be seen in the King Saud Mosque in Riyadh, at Westfield Whitford City in Australia, in art installations such as Fons Americanus, which was exhibited at the Tate Modern in 2019, and on cruise ships such as Saga’s Spirit of Discovery.

The company has built a network of 75 international distributors,

which is growing all the time. Over the last year it has welcomed new distributors from Belgium, France, Palestine, Thailand, Ukraine, Malta, Vietnam, Switzerland, Malaysia, Brazil, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Ghana and Nigeria – having already opened the first Jesmonite store in the world, in Spain.

STAYSAFE PPE, ALVELEY: The Eco Award

This is a business which collects industrial PPE, sanitises, inspects, and returns it for re-use, saving businesses up to 70% on replacement costs, and boosting their eco-friendly and sustainability credentials.

It operates a “nil to landfill” policy, and its process utilises JLA’s ground-breaking Otex disinfection system. When separated from oxygen by an ozone generator, it’s a free radical gas and agitates in the wash.



The gas bubbles attach themselves to the cell walls of viruses, bacteria and pathogens, killing them instantly. The agitation also opens fibres up, so dirt and grease come away more easily.

The company has been working with HS2 contractors to clean and recycle headwear, safety gloves and hi-vis clothing.

DYKE YAXLEY, SHREWSBURY AND TELFORD: Wellbeing in the Workplace

The company has a culture built around five steps recommended for a positive attitude and healthy lifestyle – be active, take notice, learn, give, and connect.

Mental health plays a major role in the induction process, and the company’s newsletter, Wellbeing at DY, is published quarterly.

The company says: “Looking after your employees’ wellbeing and welfare is vitally important and is becoming even more so with the current challenges we are all facing.

“Creating a culture for your business which demonstrates such an environment certainly assists with the retention of your team.”

With a commitment to employees’ physical health, wellbeing and understanding of the current financial climate, Dyke Yaxley covered the entry fees for staff who took part in this year’s Shrewsbury 10k, in conjunction with a wellbeing package offered by Ultimate Fitness Events.

Team DY was joined by Sam Lakin and Caitlin Burke from Kingsland Wealth Management, who are both regular participants in the DY Run Club every Wednesday night.

Dyke Yaxley and Kingsland Wealth colleagues also take part in an annual Steps Challenge alongside teams from Henshalls and FlexIT, which raises vital charity cash.

This year, 32 Dyke Yaxley staff signed up in teams of four, with the aim of completing the most steps in a month-long campaign, and they achieved an incredible overall step count of 11,236,754.



FAYE HUDSON OF REECH, SHREWSBURY: Young Business Person

Faye joined Reech in December 2020 as client marketing manager, and was then promoted to head of client marketing in April last year.

Faye is responsible for planning, delivering, and evaluating successful campaigns for clients across design, development and social.

She has previous experience working in fast-moving consumer goods marketing and media sales in Europe, and has brought her in-house experience to the Shropshire agency to support and build on client marketing strategies.

The Reech team describe her as someone with strong people skills, and maturity beyond her years.

Faye is described as “an Excel whiz for marketing planning and reporting” and using project management tool TeamGantt to keep on top of tasks.

Outside of work, Faye is a sewing enthusiast and is busy building a wardrobe of self-made clothes. She also loves music and enjoys playing the guitar and piano.



PAVE AWAYS, KNOCKIN: Business In The Community

The company admitted it was already on cloud nine after two wins at this year’s Constructing Excellence Wales awards.

It won Building Project of the Year for Hafan Yr Afon, as well as a Value Award for Welsphool Church in Wales Primary School with Architype Architects.

But recognition for the work it does in its local community, here in Shropshire, is described as particularly special.

Pave Aways is currently looking for charities and groups in Wellington that need a helping hand to come forward as part of its pledge to build a better future in the communities it works in.

The company is carrying out refurbishments to facilities at Lakewood Court in Severn Drive for Telford & Wrekin Council, and pledged to carry out minor building repairs, decorating or plastering free of charge

to a community facility or club in Wellington, or sponsor a local sports team with new kit.

Commercial director Victoria Lawson said: “We are committed to supporting the communities where we live and work, and would like to pay something back to organisations in Wellington that deserve our help.

“It might be a community hall that needs a lick of paint, a building that provides facilities for local people that is in need of our professional skills, or a sports team that needs a new kit.

“We know building maintenance and upkeep can be costly and time consuming to carry out, but we’re here to help and happy to be able to support an organisation that plays an important role in the community.”



THE 2023 WINNERS

Company of the Year

Winner – Aico, Oswestry

Finalists – Dodd Group, Reech, Shropshire Homes

Best Small Business

Winner – The Shropshire Distillery, Ellesmere

Finalists – Chrisbeon Office Supplies, Exascale, Mutneys Professional Pet Care

Best New Business

Winner – Charlie The Vet, Shrewsbury

Finalists – 8 Financial Planning, Coton Meadows Pet & Equine Crematorium, Film Shropshire

Commitment to People

Winner – Shrewsbury Colleges Group

Finalists – Assured Vehicle Rental, Liquid Fleet, Rotherwood Healthcare

Manufacturing and Engineering

Winner – SDE Technology, Shrewsbury

Finalists – CEL Group, Fabdec, Northwood Hygiene Products

The Trailblazer: Innovation Award

Winner – Aico, Oswestry

Finalists – Exascale, Start Tech, Telford College

Global Business of the Year

Winner – Jesmonite Limited, Bishop’s Castle

Finalists – Aviramp, Seymour Manufacturing International, Telecom Infrastructure Partners

The Eco Award

Winner – Staysafe PPE Limited, Alveley

Finalists – Shrewsbury Colleges Group, The Little Green Pantry, Tradology UK

Wellbeing in the Workplace

Winner – Dyke Yaxley Limited, Shrewsbury

Finalists – Housing Plus Group, Iconsys, Pave Aways

Young Business Person

Winner – Faye Hudson of Reech, Shrewsbury

Finalists – Aleesha Skett (The HR Dept), Annabel Hemingbrough (Purple Frog and Telford College), Dylan Purewal (Berrys)

Business in the Community

Winner – Pave Aways Limited, Knockin

Finalists – Aico, Azets, Bright Star Boxing

The John Clayton Award

Winner – Kelda Wood

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Ruth Ross with Craig and Richard Hughes



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Dale Williams from Assured Vehicle Rental



The Reech table at the awards on June 23.



The Shropshire Business table



Dani Wozencroft and Simon Alton



Fun at the casino tables



The Telford College team

Awards night pictures courtesy of Yarrington

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New networking group for rising stars

A new networking event bringing together professionals in the first five years of their careers from across the region has landed in Shropshire.

Shropshire Rising Professionals has been launched by Shrewsbury legal firm Aaron & Partners, with an inaugural event taking place at the Riverbank Bar & Grill on Victoria Quay.

The event offers the chance for up-and-coming professionals from sectors including law, accountancy, HR and property development to make valuable connections in a relaxed setting.

Attendees at the first session included professionals from businesses such as Azets, Base Architects, and Brewin Dolphin.

Natalie Antenbring, a dispute resolution solicitor at Aaron & Partners, said: "The past few years have raised various challenges for people, but it's so important to have a good network of trusted people you can call upon.

"Here in Shropshire, there's a fantastic array of talented rising professionals. This event was all about bringing them together to share ideas, network and build relationships outside of work.



The first Shropshire Rising Professionals event was held in Shrewsbury

"We've received some superb feedback from our first event. Attendees described it as being fun, relaxed and productive with a great venue, and that's exactly what we were hoping to achieve.

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

● If you would like to be involved in future events or for further information, send email via rsvp@aarondandpartners.com

Market-leader adds another 'great fit'

Telford waste management group Reconomy has been on the acquisition trail again.

Cooper Parry Corporate Finance advised the shareholders of UK Waste Solutions on their sale to the former Shropshire Company of the Year.

Headquartered in Newark, Nottinghamshire, UK Waste Solutions Limited is a firm of sustainability consultants and managers which specialises in supporting clients across the hospitality, distribution, transport, facilities management, manufacturing and construction sectors.

Through its flagship Novati brand, it works with many well-known and highly-respected brands, including Marston's, Prezzo, Roadchef, Network Rail, CBRE and Birmingham Airport. The business has enjoyed significant growth in recent years and now has 3,500 customers.

The acquisition includes all four of UK Waste Solutions Limited's primary brands – Novati, AMA, Click Waste UK and Evolution – and its 160 employees.

It further strengthens Reconomy's market-leading position in the commercial waste sector as the biggest technology-enabled, outsourced resource management solution in the UK.

UK Waste Solutions Limited's offering across a broad range of sectors and industries is

highly complementary to Reconomy's existing business, deepening its capabilities and footprint within this vertical to better service new and existing clients.

The transaction follows the acquisition of Denmark-based green-tech business Combineering in February this year.

Reconomy Group recorded revenues of over £1 billion in the last financial year across its 30 offices worldwide, and is one of the UK's largest and fastest-growing businesses operating in the circular economy, waste management and sustainability sectors.

Guy Wakeley, chief executive of Reconomy Group, said: "We are delighted to welcome the UK Waste Solutions Limited team to Reconomy Group.

"It is a great fit with our business due to our shared commitment to developing closed loop solutions that will accelerate the shift towards a more circular economy.

"The transaction is consistent with our ambitious plans to grow both organically and through further acquisitions in the UK and around the world."

Michael Benton, managing director of the recycle division at Reconomy Group, added: "UK Waste Solutions Limited has a track record of delivering an excellent outsourced service and will be a valuable addition to the Recycle

Division at Reconomy Group. Its customer-led approach aligns perfectly with our values and deepens our capabilities. It increases our joint offering in the commercial, industrial and construction industry to deliver economic and environmental benefits for businesses, providing an unrivalled, added-value outsourced alternative."

Max Kanda, managing director at UK Waste Solutions Limited, said: "Reconomy Group's commitment to innovation in the circular economy and well-established footprint across the UK market will strengthen our combined growth, as we will be able to offer a wider range of services to our joint customer base.

"We are excited to become part of one of the UK's largest and fastest growing companies at a critical period for meeting the challenges of resource scarcity through technology and data-led closed loop solutions, as the adoption of the circular economy becomes increasingly central to how we do business globally."

Tom Summers, associate partner of Cooper Parry, said: "UK Waste Solutions is a fantastic local business.

"The focus on sustainability solutions it shares with Reconomy makes for an exciting partnership and a combined outsourced business service offering that will support the UK's transition to a circular economy."

Great turnout at first meeting

Telford & Wrekin Council teamed up with Denso Manufacturing UK and partners for the first Telford Sustainability & Energy Cluster meeting.

This new forum aims to bring businesses and partners together to help shape the future of sustainable and clean growth within the borough of Telford and Wrekin.

Business-led, it is a sub-group of the already established Telford and Wrekin Borough Climate Change Partnership which was formed in June 2020 to help drive the borough's journey towards carbon neutrality.

The partnership comprises members drawn from the local business community, educational establishments, community groups, town and parish councils and other public sector organisations.

It brings together key stakeholders to showcase and highlight best practices, identify areas of focus, and collaborate on projects to address sustainability issues.

The aim is to provide a platform to support and address the challenges businesses face including achieving energy security and reducing costs.

More than 20 businesses attended the



More than 20 businesses attended the first meeting at Denso

inaugural meeting at Denso's Hortonwood site.

Chris Lindsay, Denso sustainability and energy manager, said: "We have been committed to sustainability since the company began in 1949, so it's at the heart of our core values, protecting lives, preserving the planet and preparing a bright future for generations to come.

"TSEC is an opportunity for us to connect to other businesses and for us to work together on common issues and solutions that will not only help us grow and thrive, but will benefit Telford and the wider community."

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin

Council cabinet member for place, said: "This first forum meeting was an important opportunity to hear directly from the business community about the issues they face but also to share best practice and insights from experts so we can work together."

The creation of TSEC was recommended in a recent report by Sustainability West Midlands, commissioned by the Improvement and Development Agency and Telford & Wrekin Council.

The report highlighted the need for organisations to work closely together to achieve clean growth.



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Upskilling workforce

Telford College is launching new degree-level courses in September to help to upskill the local workforce.

They include a level five HND business programme, and a level five HND in healthcare professions' support, and are part of the college's ongoing campaign to work closely with the local business community to fill skills and recruitment gaps.

The level five business HND is a full-time, two-year course aimed at those who are looking to develop their knowledge of business beyond level three qualifications, or are perhaps seeking to expand their skillset to help gain promotion.

Working with experienced Telford College tutors, you'll gain a higher understanding of specialist areas of business such as marketing, human resource management and finance.

The HND healthcare professions' support is designed to address a growing demand for high-quality, professional and technically skilled staff within the healthcare sector. This qualification

has been designed for those working as or seeking to become trainee assistant practitioners and, ultimately, assistant practitioners in healthcare.

The college works closely with the NHS, which is reporting an increasing demand for high-quality, professional and technically-skilled staff, and this course provides learners with the critical skills and practical competencies they will need.

Teresa Hughes, director of business, digital and professional at Telford College, said: "Employers are looking for staff with a real knowledge of working in industry, so whether you're already in employment or about to leave full-time education, this course will help you advance your career."

"The learning process need not stop there. Completing this course opens up a wide range of further options. For example, you can progress to further studies at university, link up with professional bodies in your sector, or commit to continuing professional development."

Abigail Allen, programme manager for higher education and access at Telford College, added: "Care, compassion and commitment are the core values needed to learn all the practical skills required for a range of careers from care assistants to health visitors, midwives, nurses, therapists, or nutritionists."

"Our new level five HND qualification for healthcare professions' support is being launched to meet a real need in the healthcare sector. This is a full-time, one-year top-up for students who already hold the level four HNC Healthcare Professions' Support.

"It will prepare you for a variety of roles within the health and social care sector by covering the knowledge, skills and behaviours within relevant occupational standards including integrated health and social care, healthcare management, public health and health promotion, and healthcare and nursing assistant practice.

"The course can lead onto so many exciting clinical-based roles, like operating department practitioners, pre-registered nurses, jobs in therapeutic radiography, in-patient assessment, occupational therapy, mental health support . . . and much more."

To find out more about these new courses, and the rest of the Telford College higher education curriculum, see www.telfordcollege.ac.uk/join-us/our-courses/higher-education/



Abigail Allen, programme manager for higher education and access at Telford College



Pave Aways director Charlie Davies, Jamie Evans, Victoria Lawson and Steven Owen with one of the new electric vans

Electric vehicles leading to a road of sustainability

Building contractor Pave Aways has completed another stage on its journey for greater sustainability with the addition of new electric vehicles to its fleet.

The Knockin-based business has introduced two Maxus electric vans and an electric Tesla as a pool car to support its drive for changes in its day-to-day operations so it can build a better future for the environment. The vans will be used by Pave Aways' on-site teams, with the pool car available for its head office-based staff.

Sustainability is one of Pave Aways' five key values and the introduction of the electric vehicles is just one way the company is working to reduce its carbon footprint.

Managing director Steven Owen said: "We already encourage vehicle sharing and ask staff to avoid unnecessary journeys, but the nature of our work means we have to be on the road."

"We chose these vehicles as they have an excellent range which will allow staff to travel around our sites on a full charge. We'll be testing the benefits of these new vehicles and, as the technology and infrastructure of the charging network improves, we aim to bring even more electric cars and vans to our fleet as vehicles need replacing."

Pave Aways celebrates its 50th year in business this October, and it has already developed a growing specialism in net carbon construction for the public and private sector including building to Passivhaus standards.

Meanwhile, electric vehicle users in Telford and Wrekin can also look forward to easier access to charging points, after the local authority won £683,370 from the Office for Low Emission Vehicles to install 70 charging points in 21 public car parks across the borough.

The fund, administered by the Department for Transport, looks to provide greater access to charging points for residents who cannot charge at home.

The council originally planned to apply for funding to install 44 charging points across 10 car parks, but then took a more ambitious approach.

It means the council can install 70 new charging points across 21 car parks in Wellington, Dawley, Oakengates, Hadley, Ironbridge, and Newport. Each charging point will feature two sockets, so a total of 140 cars would be able to be charged at the same time, and local tradespeople are being employed in the refurbishment.

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Taking the right steps

A new manufacturing facility has been created in Telford for staircase specialist Stairplan.

Morris Property has formally handed over the base at Hortonwood 1 to the company, which makes bespoke timber staircases using the latest software and technology. The company commissioned the build to aid company growth with 1,658 sq m of additional warehouse space. The facility is on a plot to the rear of their existing unit, which is one of the most advanced staircase production facilities in Europe.

Morris Property was awarded the £1 million contract to build the steel framed unit and has fully fitted it out to include office space, storage, and 30 additional car parking spaces and two disabled spaces added to the existing car parking area.

Steve Flavell, construction manager at Morris Property, said: "This build is a great addition to Stairplan's well-established business location, giving them the foundation for future business growth. We wish them the best of luck."

Graham Thomas, managing director at Stairplan, added: "Reputation is everything and with their proven track record, we knew Morris Property would deliver."

"This recent expansion is a significant investment for us and our objectives have certainly been achieved with minimum disruption. It's been great to deal with another family-owned business with shared values."



Stairplan directors Lee Thomas and Graham Thomas, Morris Property's contracts manager Mark Bennett, and site manager Graham Smith

● **Morris Property outlined some of its other current projects on one of the latest editions of Shropshire Business Live TV. Watch the show on sbltv.co.uk, or check out the show's Youtube channel**



Videographer is highly praised

A Shropshire-based videographer has been recognised by a local charity that supports young people with their business ventures.

Amy Hill is the founder of Koru Films, a video production service predominantly aimed at creating video content for the third sector, including not-for-profits, charities and social enterprises, filming from the heart, to help organisations tell their stories.

And now she has received funding and a Certificate of Recognition presented by Katie Morris from Morris & Company – one of the Asystors for Shropshire Youth Support Trust.

The Asystors are a group of Shropshire businesses committed to helping young people to kick start their business dreams with guidance and funding.



Amy Hill receives the certificate of recognition from Katie Morris

Amy originally approached Shropshire Youth Support Trust (SYST) for help and guidance before starting a full-time video production role. A few years later, she returned to her assigned mentor Vince Craig, director at Meadowbrae Technical Services, and started working towards her pitch for funding for her own video business.

For the pitch, she worked with Vince to develop a test shoot, hiring equipment to demonstrate the difference between her videography boundaries and future ambitions. The panel were impressed by her expansive planning and visuals, and were delighted to offer her funding to expand her range of equipment that could elevate her work.

Amy has since worked with a range of clients including Breathworks and Cuan Wildlife Rescue, and has just secured two new video projects for charities based in Birmingham and London. She has continued to work with Vince, who supports her in personal development and business acumen, and regularly gives back to the SYST, including filming their introduction videos on the website.

● **Five Minutes with Katie Morris – see page 66**

New home for care provider

Brockton Care Ltd has opened new offices in Newport after receiving a business start-up grant through Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our High Street programme.

The business, previously based in Ercall Heath, has moved into a spacious empty unit on Newport High Street.

Up to 90 staff across the group have moved into the new offices, and the relocation has also paved the way for a further ten to 15 new jobs.

Brockton Care Ltd has been established for over 13 years, and provides a care at home service and training for disabled people across Staffordshire and Telford and Wrekin.

It provides care for the elderly, dementia, and Alzheimer's patients, those with learning difficulties, patients discharged from hospitals, as well as palliative care, respite care, and end of life care at home.



Brockton Care business owner Tracy Willetts-Perrins (right) with her daughter, Brodie Willetts-Perrins

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An aerial view of how the site will look

Telford's huge new Station Quarter development project has passed a significant planning hurdle.

Enabling works for the development, on brownfield land between the town centre and the railway station, have been going on for several months.

Construction for the first phase can now officially begin after the scheme was officially granted planning consent by Telford & Wrekin Council.

The aim of the Station Quarter project is to create what the council describes as “a vibrant and sustainable urban space that will enhance connectivity”.

It will include housing and commercial opportunities, a state-of-the-art digital skills and enterprise hub involving Telford College, and new public spaces for residents and visitors.

These new computer-generated images, including an aerial perspective, give an idea of how the finished project will look.

Councillor Shaun Davis, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council, said: “This further planning approval for Station Quarter marks an exciting chapter in Telford's growth.

“This project represents our commitment to creating sustainable, modern, and accessible spaces that meet the needs of our residents. We are dedicated to building a prosperous future for Telford, and Station Quarter is a significant step forward in achieving that vision.”

The council says it hopes the Station Quarter will be “a catalyst for positive change in Telford”, attracting new businesses, and reaffirming Telford as a vibrant place to live, work, study and visit.

Phase one of the Station Quarter project will include the development of the digital skills and enterprise hub, a hotel, plus 189 townhouses and apartments.

It will also include new and improved public

Arriving at the next Station...



A much-needed new hotel is part of the first phase

spaces, providing a gateway to Telford by linking the central railway station to Telford Shopping Centre.

The Council says: “The digital skills and enterprise hub will provide education and business start-up spaces to enhance digital skills, cater to local employer needs, and empower residents of all ages.

“The addition of a new, high-quality hotel will bolster Telford's reputation as a premier shopping, leisure, and conference destination in the region.

“Additionally, the low-carbon apartments and town houses – being delivered by the Council's wholly-owned housing company,



Telford College will be involved in the digital skills and enterprise hub

Nuplace, and housing association partner Legal & General Affordable Homes – will be available on a private rent, affordable rent, and shared ownership basis, and will kick start the creation of sustainable, high-quality urban living in central Telford.”

Construction work for phase one is set to begin this summer, with work scheduled for completion by 2025.

The project is being partly-funded with £200 million pound investment of match-funding from the private sector, as well as £22.3 million from the central Government's Towns Fund.

More information about the project is available at www.stationquartertelford.co.uk

On track to explore

Visit Shropshire and Transport for Wales have signed a new partnership to highlight and promote the ease of exploring the county by train.

Collaboration will include a series of campaigns including website, in-station and social media, to showcase the routes and experiences available across the county.

The rail network criss-crosses large swathes of Shropshire, linking many towns and villages including Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Whitchurch, Wellington and Gobowen. Services also call at Church Stretton where the new “Round the Mynd” shuttle bus loop stops close by.

Victoria Leyshon, partnership marketing manager at Transport for Wales, said: “We're thrilled to be partnering with Visit Shropshire to raise awareness of the West Midlands area, and of course, promote sustainable travel.

“We're looking forward to working together on some new initiatives to encourage more people to jump aboard and explore the delights of Shropshire by train.”

Mark Hooper, project lead at Visit Shropshire, said: “Many of our towns aren't designed to accommodate lots of cars, which is why travelling and exploring by train makes so much sense.



Victoria Leyshon and Mark Hooper

“And with sustainability key to our future plans, it's great to work with a partner whose services can connect with other car-free experiences we offer, such as walking trails, cycle routes, and our new shuttle bus loop to key beauty spots, pubs and cafés.”

In brief...

A newly-launched law firm has moved into Shrewsbury Business Park. Maple House is the new home of Ashton & Co Legal Services Limited – a practice established by local solicitor Richard Ashton. The firm has completed the letting of a first floor office suite. The letting was handled by Towler Shaw Roberts.

Business Watch Guarding of Telford is offering a free audit to local companies to ensure their security is effective. General manager Mark Garner said: “Even with provisions in place, weak points or vulnerabilities can often be identified which may be unknown to those without industry knowledge, expertise, and experience.” Details are available on 0844 332 8900, or email security@business-watch.co.uk

New Bucks Head Stadium, the home of AFC Telford United, has received a National Policing Award for Safety. The stadium achieved this accolade after successfully taking part in the Licensing Security and Vulnerability Initiative – a police-led initiative to improve the safety and security of its premises for the benefit of staff, customers, and local communities.



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Building bridges – superbly



The latest creation by Shrewsbury-based bridge-making specialists Beaver Bridges, being escorted through Dublin for safe passage to the ferry port. It was on its way to the UK to be painted, before heading to its final destination in Leeds as part of a design-and-build project for the Clarion Housing Group

Beverage company celebrates growers

Molson Coors Beverage Company celebrated the 15-year anniversary of its Growers Group by awarding its 2023 Grower of the Year Award to third generation Shropshire farmer Phil Preece.

Molson Coors and the Growers Group farmers share advice, data, and insight to help growers take steps to improve the sustainability of their farming practices, while guaranteeing a regular supply of top-quality malting barley.

The Grower of the Year award recognises Phil for excelling at consistently producing high-quality British malting barley, for his

proactive engagement as a member of the Molson Coors Growers Group, and for adopting more sustainable farming practices.

He is trying to increase biodiversity on the farm using cover crops, hedgerows, and field margining to provide spaces for local wildlife to thrive while improving soil health, alongside seeking to enhance water pollution preventions by integrating biofilters, settlement ponds and precision watering techniques.

Phil and his family operate a 280-hectare all-arable farming business in Bridgnorth, which during 2022 produced over 406 tonnes of malting barley exclusively for Molson Coors' brewing operations – adding to the 47,000 tonnes supplied annually by members of the

Growers Group. Phil said: "Winning this award is a special achievement.

"The valued relationship we've built with Molson Coors and the tools, information, and support we've received through the Growers Group and our Frontier Agronomist David Allison, has been essential in helping us deal with the recent economic challenges faced by our industry."

Kristy Smith, category lead for brewing materials at Molson Coors Beverage Company, said: "Phil has been a consistent and valued grower of great quality malting barley since the very beginning of the group.

"He not only delivers good quality barley year on year, but he is an active and valued member of the group."

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SHREWSBURY COLLEGES GROUP

Simplification of funding for county's businesses

A new support package has been created to streamline funding support for Shropshire businesses.

One of the aims of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) – set up to succeed and improve upon previous EU funding – is to simplify the funding process for businesses looking to access funds.

Shropshire Council has partnered with Birmingham City Council and others to launch the West Midlands small-to-medium sized enterprise grants programme.

Existing small-to-medium sized businesses based in the Shropshire Council area can apply for grants from £5,000 to £100,000. Businesses must employ fewer than 250 people, and have been trading for at least six months or more.

The majority of applications are expected to be for an average grant of between £10,000 and £20,000.

A larger grant will only be awarded in exceptional circumstances.

This is to make sure that as many businesses as possible can benefit from the limited budget available.

Awards will be considered for the following types of projects:

- Expanding and growing existing businesses
- Inward investment
- Developing new market opportunities
- Innovation, including new product development
- Capital investment
- An increase in the productive capacity of new and existing premises through new property builds, refurbishment and extensions

Applicants must demonstrate their projects will create new jobs.

Grant awards will also be limited to a maximum of 50% of the total project costs, with

businesses expected to "match-fund" whatever grant amount they receive.

All business sectors are eligible, but there are some types of businesses and organisations that will not be able to apply.

All potential applicants are urged to refer to the eligibility criteria to make sure they qualify before submitting an application.

A new funding round opened at the start of July. More details are available from wmgp@birmingham.gov.uk.

Dean Carroll, Shropshire Council's cabinet member for growth, regeneration and housing, said: "Shropshire businesses have benefitted greatly from previous funding schemes like this.

"To date, the county has seen nearly £4 million of investment and almost 200 jobs created, with numerous other jobs safeguarded.

"This new fund is great news for Shropshire businesses, and it's great to be working with other authorities across the region to support businesses all across the West Midlands."

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‘Sunshine suggestions’ to help the hospitality and leisure sector



Hollie Whittles

At long last, summer seems to have arrived! Better late than never, as they say.

With the sun shining, Shropshire’s unparalleled heritage, natural and recreational attractions have even greater potential to draw visitors and their spending power to the county. What’s more, with favourable exchange rates at the moment, UK destinations are much more affordable and attractive to international visitors. Meanwhile, many budget-conscious Brits will be looking to make their money go further with local staycations.

These are all opportunities that need to be seized. Plus recent data from the Federation of Small Businesses shows that they come at a time when confidence amongst local small businesses has increased significantly.

That said, while confidence overall is now significantly greater than at the end of 2022, it is still only just into positive territory, and the lowest levels of confidence are rooted in the hospitality, leisure and retail sectors.

So, some cause for optimism, some for concern. That’s why the Federation of Small Businesses is urging the Government and other policymakers to consider as a priority, ways to alleviate the burden on our tourism industry.

To inform their thinking, we have even created a list of “Sunshine Suggestions” that would help to improve the prospects of tourism firms this summer. That list includes:

- Transport needs to run smoothly – with better planning and co-ordination of road and rail works, the Government’s “Pothole Fund” fairly allocated, and disputes amongst service providers resolved
- Parking must be accessible on High Streets and there should be more park and ride facilities for tourist hotspots
- VAT thresholds should be increased from £85,000 to £100,000. This could spark growth in the hospitality industry, as currently many tourism firms halt trading near the end of the tax year to avoid hitting the current limit and incurring additional costs
- Small Business Rates Relief thresholds should be increased to £25,000 to remove 200,000 small firms out of the rates system
- Energy costs should be addressed by adopting FSB’s proposal to allow small firms who negotiated their contract at the height of the energy crisis last year to be able to “blend and extend” their contracts to take advantage of lower, wholesale prices
- Local Visitor Economy Partnerships should ensure that their campaigns and support schemes are fully reflective of small business interests

Small firms – particularly those in the hospitality and leisure sector – have already endured the profound impact of the pandemic and overcome numerous obstacles. Now they have to navigate high inflation and the “cost of doing business crisis”.

They also face the on-going challenge of finding people with the right skills, aptitude and desire to work in hospitality and leisure-based industries. Recruiting staff is tough for many small businesses right now. I know this, from running two small businesses myself, even though both are in industries where you would expect candidates to be queuing at the door for the opportunities on offer. For small businesses operating in hospitality and leisure, which is sometimes perceived to be high in stress and low in pay, it’s even tougher.

We desperately need the right people with the right skills to help all businesses in all sectors to move forward. That’s why I took up the invitation to be FSB’s National Skills Champion.

In this role, I am seeing some great work by training providers in the public, private and educational sectors to develop new approaches to workforce training and development. However, I am also seeing some issues around strategic direction-setting – for example through the emerging Local Skills Improvement Plans, running to a different timeline than operational support and funding programmes – such as the Shared Prosperity Fund.

I remain optimistic for the prospects of Shropshire’s small businesses.

Let’s do all we can to ensure they shine this summertime.

Hollie Whittles is a Shropshire small business owner and FSB National Skills Champion

Breaking the mould

Oswestry-based home safety company Aico welcomed the Housing Ombudsman Service to an online event focusing on damp and mould in the housing sector and best practices to keep residents safe.

A report called “A Spotlight on Damp and Mould: It’s not lifestyle” places the responsibility for resolving poor quality housing in the hands of social landlords.

It provided 26 recommendations for landlords to assess their approach to resolving cases of damp and mould.

This year the Housing Ombudsman published a follow-up report to provide insight into landlords’ responses, including a number of actions that landlords have taken as a result.

And it was this document which was the centrepiece of an engaging Q&A panel debate in front of more than 500 attendees.

HomeLINK’s sustainability and ethics Lead, Sam Collier, opened the event by giving an overview and timeline of the increased efforts to prevent damp and mould cases by the sector – and highlighted the work yet to be done.

He said: “Aico decided to host the Housing Ombudsman Service on this webinar as we believe we all have a part to play in tackling damp and mould in the sector.

“We know our customers are facing a huge uphill task to improve the condition of their housing stock, and this event provided some excellent insight into what steps they can take to make progress in this area.

“It’s great to see the HOS providing recommendations around innovative tools such as sensors, dashboards and resident apps to enhance the data landlords have about the condition of their properties, so they can make better informed decisions, and improve the health of their homes and the wellbeing of their residents.”



Diane Hughes and Nina Wadia with the massage chair

Soapstar shopper at show

Former Eastenders and Strictly Come Dancing star Nina Wadia tested out a Shropshire furniture company’s latest massage chair when she visited their stand at the Ideal Home Show.

Furniture For Life, from Oswestry, has a range of massage chairs designed with fitness recovery, stress relief and relaxation in mind, including the Positive Posture Brio Sport chair which Nina tried out.

Diane Hughes, managing director of the company, said: “We were delighted to meet Nina. She really enjoyed her massage chair experience and it was great to talk to her about the relaxation and therapeutic benefits.

“We had a great show this year, with lots of interest and buoyant sales, despite fears about the economy.”

Furniture for Life is looking to expand its range into the sports rehabilitation industry by introducing specifically designed sports massage chairs into sports teams, clubs, gyms, and spas.



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All parts are developed and manufactured at its main site in Telford and at a sister business in Kingswinford



ACE specialises in the development of precision components to customers in more than 35 countries

International and domestic growth

Complex metal components which are made in Telford are being used in space exploration and the next generation of airplanes and cars, thanks to the technical expertise of a fast-growing local manufacturer.

Advanced Chemical Etching has seen sales grow by 15% in the last year, with export orders increasing after the firm boosted capacity with the installation of two 'Chemcut' etching machines at its Hortonwood 23 facility.

With a strong order pipeline and new opportunities in hydrogen fuel cell markets accelerating, the company has just agreed a deal on two further machines that will help it offer increased capacity and reduced lead times on parts.

They should be installed and operational by the end of the year, and will provide the platform required for ACE to secure £10 million of sales by the middle of 2024.

Chris Ball, executive director at Advanced Chemical Etching, said: "Whilst we've seen a strong surge in domestic contracts, the faster growth has come from the work we do overseas where we are competing against a host of international rivals.

"Export now accounts for over 35% of our annual turnover and we're seeing really strong demand from Austria, Germany, Switzerland and our traditionally strong markets of Belgium and Luxembourg.

"Our ability to etch precision components quickly and in a range of materials is a big selling point, as is the way we control all the forming processes in-house too.

"This makes us extremely competitive against the rest of the world and proves UK manufacturing can do battle on the global stage."

ACE specialises in the development of precision components to customers in more than 35 countries, spanning aerospace, space, general engineering, automotive, electronics, medical, telecoms, and renewables.



Ian Whateley and Chris Ball of Advanced Chemical Etching

The scope of its activities is far and wide and can include anything from safety critical components for aircraft and F1 cars, to meshes and electronic connectors, battery interconnectors, fuel cell bi-polar plates, cooling plates and heat exchangers.

All parts are developed and manufactured at its main site in Telford and at a sister business in Kingswinford.

Ian Whateley, managing director at Advanced Chemical Etching, said: "Investment in the latest technology is key to our business, but it must be made in line with investment in our greatest asset...our people.

"Over the last year, we have increased our total workforce by another 15% to 75 people, and have made two key appointments to strengthen our sales team.

"Matt Chiswell and Chris Flynn have really hit the ground running, generating and converting new opportunities in export markets and in the South East. We now have the depth of talent and the industry-leading equipment we need to hit the £10m turnover mark ahead of schedule."



Kirsty Slow and Ruth Tuffnell at the 20th anniversary event



Celebrating - David Vick, Paul Lennon and Aaron Nawaz



Anthony Walton, Pippa Tait and Chris Pallett

20th anniversary for Bespoke team



Eli Wilkinson



Craig Foster pictured with James Youngman



Happy birthday to us - celebrations for the Bespoke Computing team

Telford-based IT company Bespoke Computing threw a party for staff, customers, friends and suppliers, at its Stafford Park premises to celebrate the company's 20th anniversary.

It was formed by managing director Chris Pallett in 2003 when, faced with relocation or redundancy, he took the plunge to set up a new business of his own.

It provides IT services and tailor-made telephone and communications services to companies of all sizes in Telford, Shropshire, the West Midlands and across the UK.



Richard Letby in conversation



Mark French at the anniversary party



Craig Walton and Debbie Borley



Emma Insley, Sonia Sunner, Kirsty Walker and Laura Butler

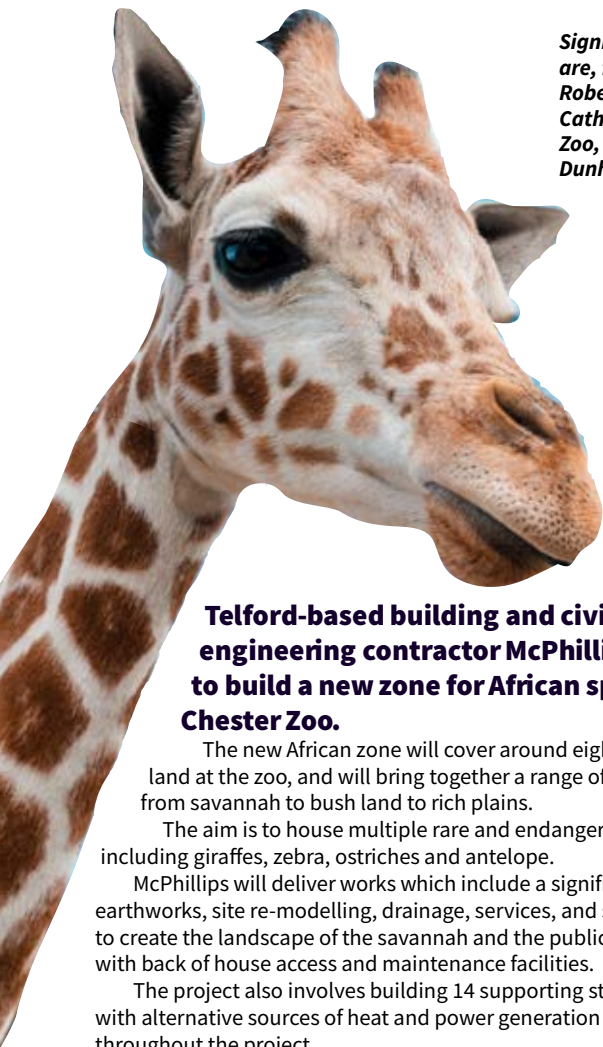


Brian and James Benson with Telford College principal Graham Guest



Tracey Westbury pictured with Katy Maddock

New zone for zoo



Signing the contract are, from left, Ian Roberts of McPhillips, Cathy Lunn of Chester Zoo, and Andrew Dunham of McPhillips

The zone will house endangered species like giraffe

Telford-based building and civil engineering contractor McPhillips is helping to build a new zone for African species at Chester Zoo.

The new African zone will cover around eight acres of existing land at the zoo, and will bring together a range of different habitats from savannah to bush land to rich plains.

The aim is to house multiple rare and endangered species including giraffes, zebra, ostriches and antelope.

McPhillips will deliver works which include a significant element of earthworks, site re-modelling, drainage, services, and site infrastructure to create the landscape of the savannah and the public realm, together with back of house access and maintenance facilities.

The project also involves building 14 supporting structures, with alternative sources of heat and power generation a key factor throughout the project.

McPhillips contracts director Andrew Dunham said: "We're really excited by this fantastic project and are looking forward to working with Chester Zoo.

"We previously worked together to deliver a multi-species conservation breeding area and have forged a very collaborate relationship with the team at Chester.



"Over the past two years, we have worked in a consultancy capacity on their new African habitats. Our team has provided value engineering solutions to meet the strict criteria that such a project demands.

"Our level of involvement is testament to our credentials in the animal welfare sector, and we're confident our reputation will be further strengthened by the successful delivery of the project."

During the next decade, Chester Zoo will continue to develop, aligning its wildlife habitats to the conservation work that its teams undertake both in the zoo, and across the world in support of its mission to prevent extinction.

Kevin Jackson, project lead at Chester Zoo, said: "Our new African zone will put a spotlight on a whole host of highly-threatened species from the African continent.

"This important new addition to our zoo will ensure we can continue to attract visitors for years and years to come, which is key to funding our vital species-saving work long into the future.

"At a time when a million species are faced with extinction and global biodiversity under huge threat, these projects will give a major boost to our charity and the conservation work we carry out, here in Chester and right across the world."

Join the audience for series finale

Shropshire Business Live TV will be broadcasting the final episode of its third series in front of a studio audience on July 27 – why not come along and join in the fun?

The show will be streamed live from the theatre at Aico in Oswestry at 12.30pm, and will include panel debates, special studio guests, and a chance for lots of audience participation.

Want to claim some free tickets for what promises to be a networking event with a difference? Email info@sbltv.co.uk, or contact us through our website, sbltv.co.uk.

SBLTV was launched in the spring of 2021 to help give companies a platform to keep in touch during the Covid pandemic, but has gone from strength to strength since. It is a partnership between Shropshire Business

magazine, Shropshire Live, and the events and production team at Yarrington in Shrewsbury – which has created a TV studio at its Frankwell headquarters.

Last month's show featured exclusive footage from behind the scenes at the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, as well as a range of studio guests including Nick Jones of Throgmorton Associates, Elite Hampers owner Jeevan Punj from the Federation of Small Businesses, Paul Littler of WR Partners, and Mark Barrow from Shropshire Council.

You can check it out – along with content from other shows in the series – on the SBLTV Youtube channel.

Search for @shropshirebusinessliveTV



Paul Littler of WR Partners with Carl Jones at the SBLTV studio

Accountants celebrate first decade

A Shropshire accountancy company is celebrating its 10th birthday with an anniversary package of events and charity fundraising.

Turas Accountants, based in Hall Court in Telford, started trading in 2013 as Columb & Gosling Accountants, changing its name three years ago under the leadership of owner Helen Columb.

It now works with clients across the country covering VAT, company accounts, bookkeeping and payroll. It specialises in e-commerce, helping clients who have online businesses using marketplaces such as Amazon, eBay and Etsy.

The celebrations kicked off in June with an anniversary party for clients and supporters. Later in the year Turas will be organising a sponsored walk to raise awareness and funds for the national charity Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide.

Helen Columb said: "We no longer just provide accountancy for our clients. We are regularly involved in putting together bespoke packages of support and advice to help them grow and develop their businesses in a tough environment with increasingly complex accountancy needs.

"Our tenth anniversary seemed an ideal opportunity to celebrate how our business and our team have developed over the years. We also wanted



The Turas team, from left: Jamie Thatcher, Joyce Renhard, Vicki Evans, Zoe Case, Kelly Hughes, Will Morgans-Sharples, Andrea Logan-Weston, Helen Columb

to help a charity that is very close to our hearts as a company. And, of course, we want to thank our clients for their support over the years."

We need to build skills

The West Midlands has been identified as one of the key UK regions for tackling a shortage of trade and construction skills.

"Alarming" statistics from the UK Trade Skills Index report show just 2,120 construction and trade apprentices started placements in the region last year – around 8% of the total in England.

That's the second lowest of all the English regions, despite it accounting for over £9 billion of business.

The UK Trade Skills Index 2023 was commissioned by tradesperson directory Checkatrade.com and undertaken by independent macro-economic research firm Capital Economics.

The report also depicts the "perfect storm" facing the UK construction and repairs industry, with a huge skills gap and trade sector vacancies at record highs.

It added that the skills gap is being exacerbated by an ageing workforce, an exodus of EU workers post-Brexit, and the cost-of-living crisis.

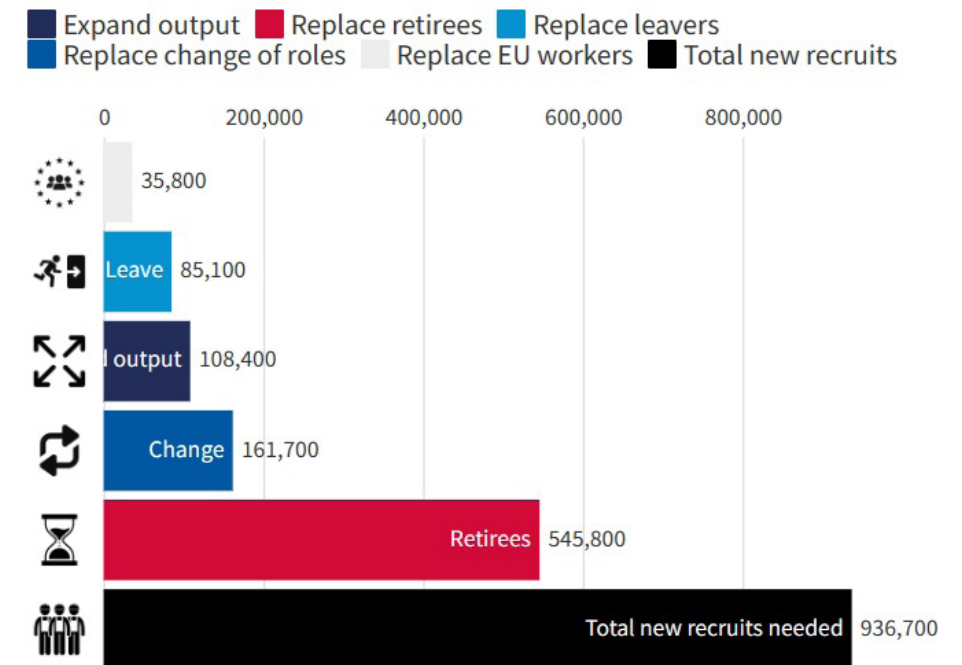
It found that the UK needs almost a million new recruits in trades and construction over the next decade just to keep pace with demand.

The report's findings have been described by entrepreneur and investor Richard Harpin, chairman of Checkatrade.com in 2017, as both "urgent and alarming".

They are spearheading a series of new projects aiming to tackle the challenge, focused on school leavers and young people aged under 25.

Richard said: "The figures revealed in our UK Trade Skills Index 2023 report should come as a wake-up call to everyone involved in the trade and construction industry, but also they should be seen as a genuine opportunity for the West Midlands, which is a hotbed for trade talent.

Estimated need for new recruits in the UK by 2032



"Although we expect the economy to continue to be squeezed in 2023, the construction sector is finding itself in an increasingly alarming situation caused by Brexit, an ageing workforce and the cost-of-living crisis. Combined, this is creating a perfect storm in the industry, and causing a widening skills gap, which we must address.

"Let us be in no doubt, the sector faces urgent and concerning challenges now and over the next decade. It's incumbent on both businesses and Government to come together and act before it's too late."

It is the third year in a row the annual UK Trade Skills Index has been published. It said that of the 937,000 tradespeople reported to be needed to meet demand within the next decade, nearly a quarter of a million – 244,000 – must be qualified apprentices in order to plug a growing skills gap.

The report also laid bare concerning statistics regarding output and employment in construction. It suggested the skills gap could lead to a further blow to the Government, which is expected to miss its housebuilding target of 300,000 new homes each year.



Jack signing copies of his debut book

Jack Fallows



Jack Fallows takes to the mic to welcome guests to his book launch in Shrewsbury



Assembly of a guide to finance

As a financial adviser, I've seen first-hand the anxiety and confusion that people have when it comes to their finances.

However, I've also observed the incredible sense of relief and freedom that comes when people understand their finances and have a plan for their future.

That's why I decided to write my book, "Money: The Assembly Guide", which shows how to structure money in a way that is strong enough to weather everything life will throw at it.

The idea came about after witnessing numerous people make mistakes with their finances that had a negative impact on their lifestyle and relationships. Just imagine working an extra ten years beyond your desired retirement age because you had to spend your savings to take time off work due to ill health. Envisage the stress that would be felt by you and your family if you lost your money investing. In these circumstances, money becomes an inhibitor, not an enabler, of freedom.

Other than the basics, we're not taught about money at school or in the workplace. We're expected to learn as we go. However, of all the things you would feel comfortable muddling through by trial and error, is your hard-earned money one of them?

I've deliberately avoided jargon and technical terms that can be confusing, intimidating, and unnecessary. Instead, I wrote the book in a conversational style to cover all the important elements of personal

finance – insurance, saving, investing, retirement and inheritance planning – without it being overwhelming.

Have you ever felt that "tidy house, tidy mind" feeling when you have finally mustered the motivation to complete the household tasks "adulting" requires of you? Afterwards, you can relax and enjoy life in a way that feels even sweeter. You can concentrate on doing things that genuinely make you happy, without worrying, right?

The book shows people how to create a plan for their finances and the positive impacts this can have on a multitude of areas in their life, such as their mental health and physical wellbeing.

It is intended for business owners, people who want to retire before their state pension age, and anyone who wants a plan for their finances so they can go about their lives confident that their money is in good shape.

My book launch event was held at the Riverbank Bar & Kitchen in Shrewsbury, and brought together over 70 local people.

It was amazing to see so many people who work and run businesses in different industries, all from different walks of life, acknowledge the power of structuring their finances in a safe and sustainable way.

I'm so grateful for the support I've received. I'm proud of the book and what it represents. I believe the minimum that anyone deserves is to feel confident about their finances, and I hope that my book can be the first step for many people in achieving that.

Here's to helping people achieve that "tidy house, tidy mind" feeling about their finances!

Jack Fallows runs Herald Wealth Management, based in Shrewsbury. His book is available from Amazon or Waterstones

Reech and Reward to support Brightstar



Joe Lockley of Brightstar with the Reech team

Full-service marketing agency Reech has named Brightstar as the successful recipient of its Reech and Reward funding for 2023, offering access to £10,000 of marketing services to support the organisation with its growth plans and marketing strategy.

Since its foundations in 2016, Brightstar has grown from a sporting training club to an organisation that supports over 600 people across its different programmes, offering mentoring to young people, supporting those suffering with mental health issues and helping the unemployed.

With a mantra of 'Believe, Belong, Become',

Brightstar has ambitious plans to grow across the West Midlands over the next two years. Through Reech and Reward, Reech will support the Brightstar team with its branding and marketing strategy, aiding with the creation of materials and offering expertise during this period of expansion.

After receiving a wealth of high calibre applications, Reech announced Brightstar as its chosen organisation for 2023. Following an impressive presentation, it was clear that Brightstar's objectives aligned closely with the agency's values and that Reech could add real value to Brightstar over the next 12 months.

Joe Lockley, director and founder of Brightstar, said: "We were really excited to hear that we had been chosen for Reech and Reward this year.

"We want to change the perception of

Brightstar as a Boxing Club and continue to empower people to make positive choices in their lives. From the conversations and sessions we've already had with the team at Reech, I'm confident that we can enhance our marketing and continue to grow our impact on both a local and national scale."

Amelia Redge, head of growth and marketing at Reech, added: "Everyone at Reech is looking forward to becoming a real extension of the Brightstar team this year and helping to increase awareness of the great work they do.

"When we started Reech and Reward, we wanted to support organisations where we could make a tangible difference, put our expertise to good use and have fun along the way. Brightstar ticks all of those boxes and we can't wait to get started."

For more information about Reech and Reward and to keep up to date with the progress of the project, visit [reech.agency](https://www.reech.agency)



Graham Guest opens the event



Katherine Kynaston, Janet Stephens, Dr Ben Silverstone

Sparkling relationships

A major conference for regional business leaders on electrification and sustainability has been hailed as a "tremendous success", and the start of a new era of collaboration.

Held at Telford College, it marked the official launch of a new Telford Electrification Network Group (TenG) – designed to build on some of the debates kick-started at the conference.

The event was run in association with WMG at the University of Warwick, Telford Business Board and Telford & Wrekin Council, and included presentations from high-profile guest speakers, plus interactive displays, and a question-and-answer panel.

Speakers included WMG trio Professor Robin Clark, Professor David Greenwood and Dr Benjamin Silverstone.

They also took part in a Q&A panel with Telford & Wrekin Council chief executive David Sidaway, Marches Local Enterprise Partnership chief executive Rachel Laver, and Telford Business Board's sustainability specialist Andy Whyte.

There was also a video message from West Midlands mayor, Andy Street, praising the initiative and the collaboration.

Dr Silverstone said the event was an "excellent opportunity for business in and around Telford to see what opportunities there are to support their future aspirations".

Delegates, who included owners and chief executives from some of the region's leading businesses, were invited to register their interest for the new TenG group.

Janet Stephens, Telford College's deputy chief executive, said: "The group has been created to keep businesses connected and networked around upskilling the workforce for the electric revolution, and will be run jointly by the college and WMG.

"Benefits of getting involved include the chance to upskill members of your workforce around the opportunities which electrification can bring.

"There will also be opportunities to help design the college curriculum to ensure it meets



Andy Whyte, Eleen Callear, Professor David Greenwood, Professor Robin Clark, Dr Ben Silverstone, and Graham Guest



A robotic dog was one of the star attractions

the skills development needs of employers, and invitations to more networking events, sharing best practice with like-minded local businesses.

"Being part of TenG will also give you chance to add your voice to lobbying activities with local, regional and national stakeholders.

"There is a real momentum towards reducing the UK's reliance on traditional fossil fuels. How do we prepare for the electric revolution? How do we meet the skills challenges this will bring? And what else must we do to reach our net zero



The panel debate and Q&A generated lots of questions

targets? These are just some of the questions which members of the TenG group will be considering."

The event generated positive feedback from delegates, including Mark Thompson, managing director of Telford-based renewable energy and battery specialists AceOn, who described it as a "tremendous success".

"It is wonderful to see the work going on to form new partnerships and collaborations across the region, and the role Telford College is playing in this regard," he said.

"Having input from the likes of West Midlands mayor Andy Street is good for the college, good for Telford and good for the region. There was a real buzz about the event and an energy among all involved to build on its success."

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Photo by @littlepapershopdesigns

Loyal, cheerful and professional – the events team



Photo by @littlepapershopdesigns

Opera has become a popular addition to the programme of events at Iscoyd



Photo by @littlepapershopdesigns

Head gardener Archie tending to the gardens on the estate



Photo by @leahweddings

The venue has had more than 100 wedding bookings in the last year



Photo by @littlepapershopdesigns

The Godsals family – Phil runs the family-owned weddings and events venue with his wife, Susie



Some of the valued team members at Iscoyd

Teamwork makes the dream work at Iscoyd

HENRY CARPENTER visits a family-owned events venue to discover why the dark clouds of Covid brought something of a silver lining

If you're after a mood-lifting escape away from the grim headlines and general challenges of life, you could do worse than spend an hour or two at Iscoyd Park.

This weddings and events venue near Whitchurch really is an oasis of genuine warmth and cheer – that much is clear from taking a stroll around the estate.

You can feel it in the kitchens, where you'll be given a smile and a firm handshake from executive head chef Jason Hodnett. It's there in the grounds, where the gardeners – under the watchful eye of long-standing team head Archie – tend to the glorious lawns, beds and borders. The estate office, where the events management and administration teams run, is a hive of cheery hellos, and the housekeepers smile and wave while setting up the dining areas and preparing for the next guests' visits.

And you most certainly feel it in conversation with Phil Godsals, who runs the family-owned weddings and events venue with his wife, Susie.

Yes, it's a particularly beautiful summer's day when we meet, and yes, the gardens are probably looking at their most spectacular. This has been a record year as well in terms of bookings, with well over 100 weddings as well as the various side events, such as supper clubs, opera evenings and Sunday lunches.

But more than anything this is the Iscoyd way. The warmth here is authentic and uncontrived, with a philosophy and

an atmosphere which has built up and strengthened in the 15-odd years since the Godsals hosted their first wedding.

"Our central ethos here is that this is first and foremost a much-loved country home that holds weddings, rather than a straightforward wedding venue," explains Phil.

"And it's very much about forging and maintaining strong relationships with all those who come here, whether it is couples getting married or guests at our events.

"Weddings have always been and will, in all likelihood, continue to be our core business, but we have also created a programme of supper clubs, Sunday lunches, afternoon teas, private parties, and dinner, bed and breakfast opportunities.

"All of these create a club atmosphere. These other events help us to keep in touch with couples who have got married here.

"The relationship between our team and married couples starts in the planning stage before the wedding, during the wedding itself, and then in the years and decades beyond when they might return for christenings, anniversaries or other special events.

"It really is like an unofficial club with relationships that last many years and we have so many supporters who are sharing our journey with us.

"It is all part of the family house feel where everything is friendly and personal."

One of the areas in which Phil and Susie say they are enormously lucky is in the standard of their team.

"It's a really close team who reflect and understand the ethos here," says Phil.



Photo by @littlepapershopdesigns

Head chef Jason Hodnett gathers some herbs, with one of his colleagues from the kitchen

A relatively recent and very welcome recruit has been head chef Jason Hodnett, formerly of The Raven in Much Wenlock and Peckforton Castle in Cheshire.

"Jason has been absolutely brilliant and we are very lucky to have him," says Phil.

"Our food offering is really ambitious and with Jason at the helm we have been able to expand it with real confidence.

"At Iscoyd we are always evolving and coming up with new ideas to make it as nice and attractive as it could possibly be. For that to happen, the food has to be at the highest level. The food here should be absolutely amazing, not functional.

"Not only is he a top-quality chef, but he has great people skills and is a pleasure to work with.

"We are also enormously lucky to have such a superb and dedicated events team. It hasn't been easy at times, but they have been nothing but extraordinarily loyal, cheerful and professional."

Phil and Susie are heading an organisation which, like so many hundreds of others across the country, had to face the uncertainty and practical implications of Covid – the hospitality and tourism industries were hit as hard as any in terms of lost revenue and uncertainty for the future.

The lockdown period and accompanying measures is not somewhere the Godsals would like to return, but Phil concedes that, in hindsight, the dark cloud of Covid came with a silver lining.

Iscoyd emerged from the pandemic in better shape than it was in previously as the Godsals were afforded the time to concentrate on projects they otherwise wouldn't have time to address.

And if anything, the relationship between Iscoyd and the couples who were due to get married in that period only strengthened.

"The couples were incredible, really supportive," says Phil. "They knew the position we were in but it must have been really difficult for them as well.

"However, I know that those who deferred their bookings until restrictions were lifted were able to enjoy an improved version of the place.

"We definitely came out of the pandemic with a stronger, more desirable venue. And the grit, determination and loyalty shown by the team here has been extraordinary – I could not be more proud of them."

◀ Among the improvements made over recent years, Phil points to the Bridal Cottage, a black-and-white property on the edge of the estate as a key change.

“It allows bridal parties to have a get-together the day before the wedding and not have to worry about any time or travelling issues. It really is beautiful.

“We have also created an outdoor ceremony space underneath the old pigeon house and planted a beautiful white garden around that.”

Continuing our stroll further away from the house, slightly hidden away by the lake and a wildflower enclosure, sits a showman’s wagon with all the modern comforts which might be expected in the house itself. The Godsals could not be accused of a lack of ingenuity, vision or courage to invest in a constant improvement programme.

Phil and Susie are clear in their objectives. “We have to keep pushing. I always like the idea that couples will be getting a lot more than anticipated when they make their booking,” says Phil.

High in the list of the Godsals’ priorities is the environment, and their enthusiasm to add to the drive for a sustainable, net-zero future is perhaps best reflected in their next major project in the pipeline.

Literally a stone’s throw from the kitchen sits a walled garden which, at present, sits largely neglected.

The wall itself is in good condition, but Phil and Susie are keen to re-purpose it not only as a beautiful space in its own right, but also as a fertile area for vegetables and fruit for the kitchens, and flowers which can be used for the house and weddings, rather than importing them.

A personal confession: having known Phil and Susie since their earliest days at Iscoyd, and witnessing how the couple have transformed Iscoyd so lovingly and intelligently, and grown their team of staff to the levels they are at now – from a small handful to numerous chefs, managers and support staff – has been inspiring.

It is also important to recognise that this has all been achieved while carrying the weight of responsibility of being the latest custodians of a home which has been in the Godsal family for several generations.

When Phil and Susie, along with young children Poppy and Hector (who have since been joined by Cecily), upped sticks from London to take on Iscoyd, it was clear that they had a monumental challenge on their hands, albeit with the invaluable support and encouragement of Phil’s father Philip, a respected land agent who had been living there previously.

“A massive decision had to be made about what to do with the property to make it work as a family home which would pay for itself as a self-sufficient enterprise,” says Phil, formerly a successful, London-based dealer in contemporary art.

“We realised that to make it viable we had to go the whole hog. First of all, this meant updating the fabric of the house to modern standards so it could continue as a property fit to live in for the foreseeable future.

“We engaged with some nationally-acclaimed designers and it is fair to say that



Photo by @jamesfearphotography

A wedding venue for all seasons



Photo by @leahweddings

Design touches are evident in every room

without their input, the property would not be looking anywhere near as impressive as it is now.”

The results are there for all to see. Conservation architect Clare Craven, based at Denbigh, drew up the plans and the help of top interior designer Susie Hoodless was enlisted to help give rooms the look they were after: contemporary and sophisticated but very much in keeping with Iscoyd’s historical past.

Similar attention to detail has been given to the gardens, and Phil suggests that much of the credit for the layout and what they have matured into should go to nationally-acclaimed designer Xa Tollemache who, he says, “has been an enormous help to us from the beginning”.



Photo courtesy of BBC

One Show presenter Alex Jones at Iscoyd

Iscoyd started winning national accolades, including the best wedding venue and best accommodation categories at the Hudson’s Heritage Awards, and it caught the eye of television producers.

It had an episode devoted to it in the Hidden Houses series presented by flamboyant designer Laurence Llewelyn-Bowen, and much more recently it has been used as the location for Reunion Hotel, hosted by Alex Jones.

Whether they be awards judges or television producers – not to mention the hundreds of wedding couples and events guests who have visited Iscoyd over the years – all are surely agreed on one thing: this is a gem of a place with its own unique personality. 📷

Time for fresh ownership

A renowned and successful destination restaurant at the heart of Wellington is up for sale as a going concern.

Karen Lee, the owner of The Walnut in Market Square, wants to spend more time with her family and said: “Whilst it’s a very emotional decision, the time is right for someone new to take it on”.

She hopes it will give the new owners the opportunity to shine with their own unique offering while keeping the current base of loyal and regular customers without any need for a closure period.

The Walnut first opened on Tan Bank in 2019, before moving to the centre of Wellington two years ago. The restaurant serves breakfast, lunch, and dinner, cocktails, and a popular bottomless brunch. It’s currently open every day except Wednesdays and Sundays, leaving scope for growth. The first floor has a light and airy room overlooking the town square, which has hosted a number of private functions such as wedding receptions, baby showers, and local business meetings.

Karen is an avid supporter of Wellington and said it was an exciting time to run a business in the town, especially as Telford & Wrekin Council announced an added investment of nearly £10 million into Wellington earlier this year.

“I opened The Walnut to bring top quality food and customer service to the heart of Wellington, and to give people a reason to come into the town. Since I moved



Karen Lee, centre, outside The Walnut

the business into Market Square, other businesses have followed and grasped the opportunity which is right here in Wellington, due in part to the exceptional support from Telford and Wrekin Council. Anyone who knows me will know I love the restaurant and everything it offers. We have supported people through the pandemic, bereavement, illness,

and loneliness. Many of our regulars have an emotional attachment to The Walnut and the team, and I have always made it a priority that everyone is welcomed accordingly,” Karen said. “I would like to pay tribute to my team – they are exceptional people who make The Walnut what it is and I am super proud of them all. They work so hard and most have started without any experience of a working environment, and they will all go on to great things in their chosen profession.”

Local councillor and passionate supporter, Cllr Anthony Lowe said: “The Walnut earned its place as the town’s foremost fine dining destination, and has become known for its innovative collaborations with guest chefs, local producers, kitchen takeovers, tasting evenings, and even fashions shows.

“The Walnut has been at the centre of the foodie movement which has seen Wellington build a reputation as the destination for every imaginable cuisine, with the opening of the market’s food quarter and many new eateries in the town. It has been the place we have chosen for all our special occasions, and we very much look forward to seeing how the restaurant evolves, as well as what Karen will bring to the town in the future.”



The Gaskell Arms Hotel & Restaurant, Much Wenlock

Hotel for sale

The Gaskell Arms Hotel & Restaurant in Much Wenlock is on the market due to the retirement plans of its current owners.

The former 17th century coaching inn has been in the Sheldon family for 45 years, and has hosted many notable figures over the years, including Mick Jagger and Dr William Penny-Brookes, one of the pioneers of the modern day Olympic Games.

Sam Roberts of Christie & Co, which is marketing the site, said: “Over the past 45 years, the current owners have created a versatile business with multiple income streams.”



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World class tennis returns to county

The Shrewsbury Club will again host a prestigious ITF World Tennis Tour event in October as world class tennis makes a welcome return to Shropshire – providing a boost to the hospitality sector.

The Budgen Motors W100 tournament will be the biggest event in women’s tennis, outside of the grass court season, to be held in the UK this year.

Set to feature leading British and international players, the tournament is to take place at the Sundorne Road venue’s indoor courts between October 15-22, with tickets now on sale.

Its return follows the huge success of last year’s \$100,000 event – the highest-profile tournament played at The Shrewsbury Club – which was well-supported by local tennis fans.

A strong line-up of international stars headed to Shropshire, including Karolina Muchova – a French Open finalist this year, who lost in the second round in Shrewsbury – while the event also featured Katie Boulter and Jodie Burrage, who contested the Nottingham final last month.

Dave Courteen, The Shrewsbury Club’s managing director, said: “We are really proud to be hosting such a prestigious event which provides Shropshire tennis fans with the opportunity to watch world class tennis close to home.

“It would not be possible to stage events like this without the fantastic support of local businesses, so we thank them for their wonderful backing.”

Tickets can be purchased via the tournament website at <https://worldtennistourshrewsbury.com/tickets-and-events/>



The tournament was a big success in Shrewsbury last year



Michael Halford and Ben Anderson, owners of the Shire Collection, outside The Peach Tree in Shrewsbury.

It’s all Greek to owners

The old Severn Social site in Frankwell has been given a new lease of life as an immersive Greek-themed restaurant inspired by the movie Mamma Mia.

It has been taken over by The Shire Collection, which also saved The Peach Tree Restaurant in Abbey Foregate from closure in December.

The company also runs other Shropshire venues including The Buttercross in Market Drayton, Havana Republic in Abbey Foregate, and The Boujee Lounge in Castle Foregate in Shrewsbury.

The restaurant offers a dining experience inspired by the flavours and ingredients of Greek cuisine, curated by executive chef Chris Burt.

Michael Halford, director of The Shire Collection, said: “Our recent success in saving The Peach Tree Restaurant has given us the confidence to expand and offer our guests an even more unique and unforgettable experience.”

Give Teams a voice

Joe Newton



Does your business use Teams? If you have Microsoft 365 then you probably do. Teams currently has 6.75 million users in the UK alone, and 300 million users globally, so there is a good chance that you are one of them.

If you are a Teams user, then you may have thought about using Teams as your telephone system.

But is that the right solution for you? Or are you better off sticking with a standalone telephony platform? Whatever you decide to do, Connexis can help you get there.

First of all, if you want to use Teams for Telephony, you will need either the “Teams Phone Standard licence”, or an “E5” licence, per user.

As a Microsoft Partner, Connexis can provide this for you to enable voice within your Teams application.

The second thing that you need is a connection to the public telephone network to be able to make calls through Teams.

Here you have several options, depending on what works best for your organisation.

1. Microsoft Calling Plan

If you really want to, you can buy a Microsoft Calling Plan directly from Microsoft. This is the least flexible and least value for money option and so is not what we would recommend.

2. Operator Connect

This is the new and improved version of Direct Routing, which we have been offering to our customers for some time via our partnership with Gamma.

This is a similar solution to Calling Plans, however it is cheaper; you get more inclusive minutes, and there are additional business continuity and fraud management features that are not offered with Calling Plans.

3. Teams Integration with 8x8, Wildix or Gamma Horizon

This is the premium option to give you the best of both worlds.

A cloud telephony platform is built primarily for voice, whereas Teams Phone



Changing systems can be a daunting task, but Connexis is here to ensure a smooth transition

System is just an additional feature on what is designed to be a collaboration and meetings platform. It’s no surprise that 8x8, Wildix and Horizon offer a far superior level of service.

8x8 offers 99.999% reliability (known as “Five 9s”), which equates to an average of less than 6 minutes downtime per year; Teams on the other hand is only 99.9% reliable, which sounds good, but equates to an average of 8 hours and 45 minutes of downtime per year.

Wildix runs on Amazon Web Services (AWS), the largest cloud service provider in the world, and also the most reliable; since Wildix came to the UK in 2017 there has only been 1 outage.

Both 8x8 and Gamma Horizon have Contact Centre capability, allowing your business to make use of web chat, email,

SMS and social media channels through one system. Wildix isn’t a full contact centre, but with their Kite feature you can make use of web chat functionality directly into your telephony platform, and SMS integration, without the extra expense of a contact centre.

You could of course use these systems and Teams independently of each other, however if you spend a lot of time in Teams it does make sense to be able to make a call using the Teams interface.

The Teams integrations offered by all three platforms enable you to do this while still using a superior back-end telephony platform.

Call Connexis today to discuss your Teams telephony journey on 01952 528000, or email support@connexis.co.uk



Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford

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It's a small world



Tiny Town directors Emily and Leighton Brown at their new premises

Emily and Leighton Brown have big ambitions for their new "Tiny Town" which has been created in the centre of Newport.

The indoor child-sized town and cafe has opened its doors in The Old Ballroom after receiving a business start-up grant through Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our High Street programme.

The couple have created a variety of role play locations for children to explore – encouraging independent play and allowing children to learn, develop their communication skills, and have fun at the same time.

Tiny Town is a safe and secure environment which features small, accessible buildings including a hospital, bakery, construction site, police station, hairdresser, supermarket, vet and much more.

Each little building gives children the chance to step into a new role, focus on using a higher level of language, and develop their social skills.

There is also a cafe and baby area at the Stafford Street venue, which is aimed at babies and pre-walkers up to the age of seven or eight.

Emily said: "We want to make Tiny Town a part of the Newport community and give children a learning experience to develop their language and social skills, as well as bring more footfall to the streets of Newport."

"A soft play area is a place where children play independently and focus on physical development, but this role play centre will give children an opportunity to learn alongside their parent or carer."

"Due to the lockdowns we have seen over the past few years, the number of five and six year olds who need speech and language support at school has risen by 10%."

"Pretend play is critical for developing oral language, and researchers have discovered that children who engaged in pretend play often used higher forms of language than they would use in normal situations."

"Hopefully this new facility we are offering will make a positive difference to the way youngsters communicate. We're very grateful for the business start-up grant we've received to help make this happen."

The centre is opening for three sessions a day, seven days a week and can cater for up to 20 children.

Pride in Our High Street business start-up grants provide funding to help businesses open in empty retail units on the high streets in Dawley, Madeley, Ironbridge, Oakengates, Wellington, and Newport.



Children love dressing up and developing their communication skills



Tiny Town is situated at The Old Ballroom in Newport

The grant is used to support business set-up costs such as building refurbishment, fixtures and fittings, utility connection costs, and marketing and branding.

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin Council's cabinet member for place, said: "There are a range of indoor children's entertainment venues in Telford and Wrekin, but this indoor child-friendly town is unique and we're sure that Tiny Town will be well-received by the local and wider community."

"Tiny Town opening means The Old Ballroom is now occupied after standing empty for two years – so this is all part of our commitment to bring empty units back into use and make our High Streets vibrant and attractive places to visit."

Programme of activities

The Marches Local Enterprise Partnership has unveiled a programme of activities which it says will help drive forward the region's economy and build a sustainable future.

They include a comprehensive land use study to identify how much of the Marches is farmed, how much is woodland, and how much is unmanaged privately-owned land. The study will identify opportunities for carbon offsetting and potential for the region to be a major exporter of sustainable energy.

A Marches-wide Local Area Energy Plan is also planned to build on work developing a flexible, reliable and secure energy generation and supply system which underpins the move to a net zero economy.

The first funding will be offered through the Marches Energy Grant scheme, which includes free advice, energy assessments, and grants for energy efficiency and renewable energy measures to SMEs from all sectors in Herefordshire, Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin. The scheme offers grants of up to £20,000 and builds on the success of previous programmes such as the Marches Renewable Energy Fund and



The Marches LEP hosted a visit by transport officials to the region earlier this month

the Business Energy Efficiency Project (BEEP) grant scheme.

Marches LEP chief executive Rachel Laver said: "This is just a snapshot of the LEP and Growth Hub in action, working to create a region which is a great place to live, environmentally sustainable, and has a thriving business base."

"We have recently hosted officials from the Government, strategic transport agency Midlands Connect, and our three local authorities to highlight the need for investment across our transport infrastructure, and to ensure we don't lose out to urban areas."

"We have appointed leading consultancy

Aecom to help develop a prioritised list of strategic transport projects and create the evidence base to drive our case.

"And the Marches Careers Hub continues its work to transform careers education across the region by linking education with business, and helping secondary schools and colleges achieve world class careers guidance."

"The LEP has a clear agenda to work with our partners in the three local authorities, with our education and skills providers, and with the business community to help the region meet its ambition to become a high-skilled, high value economy which is a great place to live and work."



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Survey focuses on tourism in county

A wide-ranging study which will help to develop Shropshire's tourism economy has been launched.

Around 3,000 businesses, ranging from campsites to luxury hotels, are being contacted by Visit Shropshire, the county's tourism association.

Mark Hooper, who heads up Visit Shropshire, said: "The report will allow us to track and monitor the number and types of visitors attracted to the county, along with associated spend and consumer behaviours.

"The reports are recommended by national bodies such as VisitBritain or VisitEngland, and Destination Management Partnerships, who have benefitted from this intelligence to leverage additional funding for the sector.

"This is Shropshire's first economic impact study and will give us vital information, enabling us to make more informed decisions for the management, development and marketing of our visitor economy."

"The method we are using is capable of delivering robust outputs at a variety of geographical levels. It has been adopted for use throughout the UK and overseas by tourist boards, local authorities, regional development agencies, national park authorities, and many other public and private sector organisations."

Visit Shropshire is working with Global Tourism Solutions on the report, which is being funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. It will cover 2022 and results will be available in the autumn. Findings will be available to anyone to use and will form the basis of future decisions and strategies.

All who participate in the study will be protected by a non-disclosure agreement, which guarantees all commercially-sensitive data remains completely confidential.

● Visit Shropshire will be holding a virtual Q&A with Global Tourism Solutions to allow businesses to find out more and ask questions. The meeting will be held virtually at 10am, on July 4. Email mark@visitshropshire.co.uk to sign up.

Sophie makes the management list



Sophie with other members of the 35 Under 35 list

Founder of communications agency SA Communications, Sophie Attwood, has been listed in the Management Today 35 Under 35 List.

This year's list features a mix of women in senior leadership positions across all areas of business, from investing and climate technology, to wellness and beauty and healthcare advertising.

Sophie specialises in the beauty, wellness and health sectors and founded SA Communications, which is based in Whitchurch, in 2017. She has also secured a publishing deal and her new book, Beautiful PR, launches in November.

Bowled over at generous sponsorship

Shropshire County Cricket League has won support from a company which has been a household name in Market Drayton for more than 60 years.

Meadons Insurance Brokers, on Cheshire Street, has thrown its weight behind a major cricket competition designed to bring Shropshire communities together and encourage fresh talent to the sport.

The Meadons Premier 100, and the Meadons Challenge 100, culminate in the Premier finals at Wellington Cricket Club on July 9, and the Challenge finals at Shelton on July 23.

Meadons manager Lesley

Prior said: "We're delighted to be sponsors for this wonderful celebration showcasing all that is great and good about sport.

"Shropshire is blessed with many talented cricket players and clubs which invest in young sides. These 100 competitions bring many players, families and friends together and create a real buzz among local people, cricket fans or not."

Meadons, which provides all types of commercial and private insurance and is part of The County Group, also specialises in cricket insurance and provides cover for more than 500 clubs countrywide.



Going into bat: Meadons manager Lesley Prior with SCCL treasurer Mike Hall (left) and chair Gordon Smith

New address is winning formula

Manufacturing sub-contractor CEL Group says it is rapidly reaping the rewards of moving to its new purpose-built base.

The business, which celebrates its 20th anniversary this year, has been fully operational at the Hortonwood West business park in Telford since September.

The plot was developed through the Telford Land Deal programme, a partnership between Telford & Wrekin Council, Homes England, and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership.

Via the Marches Building Investment Building Grant Scheme, CEL Group received over £63,000 of funding to make the final alterations to the building.

Since making the move from its previous Telford unit in Halesfield, CEL Group has virtually doubled its floor space to 40,000 sq ft.

It means the sub-contract manufacturing business is now expanding its services, passing on the benefit of additional capacity to UK customers and offering additional engineering

service support, UK assembly, and stock management and storage space for products manufactured at its facilities and partners in China.

The move to Hortonwood West is also enabling CEL Group to accelerate its expansion of flexible supply chain services.

These are already helping many leading Original Equipment Manufacturers compete more successfully in the UK market, as well as overseas.

CEL Group offers low-cost quality manufacturing and full logistics management to many different industry sectors, with over 60% of its products supporting the healthcare sector, including the NHS.

Products range from components to complex fabrications, and from assemblies to full box builds.

Simon Cartwright, CEL Group managing director, said: "Moving to the new site has made a huge difference, bringing several of our operations under one roof.

"Here, we can improve our services and grow faster which makes it easier for our

customers – UK manufacturers – to compete more effectively and grow too. We're already expanding our UK assembly offer, as well as other initiatives.

"The Telford Land Deal has been instrumental in redeveloping these sites, making it possible for businesses like ours to move into smart purpose-built units and expand our operations and services."

CEL Group, which also has office space at its new premises, employs 16 staff, with the company's first ever apprentice now leading an assembly line.

The firm is also looking to take on further apprentices, both on the shop floor and potentially supporting CEL Group's sales and marketing function.

Julie Tickell-Cartwright, CEL Group marketing director, said: "We have always been proud to be based in Telford, but this new location has taken us to the next level."

To date, the Telford Land Deal programme has attracted around £325 million of inward and foreign investment, creating in the region of 2,000 jobs and nearly 1,300 new homes.

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Anton Gunter



Howzit . . . yes, that's a strange greeting to be opening with, but all will be revealed.

For a few issues now, I have been banging on about exporting and the benefits. My view on exporting – or indeed international trade – has not changed; it is an untapped revenue stream which many companies are still not looking at, and for unknown reasons almost refuse to look at.

We are part of two worldwide networks of independent freight forwarders, which gives us the ability to work in some 170 countries. It allows us to make sure we have contact points for both imports and exports to and from various countries.

In the morning I can speak to someone in China and Australia, in the early afternoon Dubai, South Africa and Europe, and by late afternoon, we are in contact with the USA, Canada and the rest of central and South America. It gives our customers confidence that we can make sure freight is collected or delivered on time. But the funny thing that is lost on several people is that no matter where the import or export is from, the agent speaks great English. That means that you, as a supplier or customer do not need to speak Mandarin, Turkish, French, or indeed Spanish, because all our agents speak English.

"Xin Chao" from Danang: I recently visited the Vietnamese riviera city for a network agency conference. There were some 150 agents representing around 100 countries. Over the five days, one-to-one meetings were held to discuss existing and new partnerships to the benefit of our customers. In each one of the meetings I held, (and yes, subsequent conversations over some beers!), the language spoken was English. Sometimes it amazed me that my international friends would apologise for their English and it left me thinking: "Wow, you apologise for the fact your English is not great, and it's making me apologise for not being able to speak your language."

English is the international language for worldwide trade



Rini Verhoef (the Netherlands), Owen Chen (China) Polly Zhang (China) and Anton Gunter (UK) awaiting their turn on a Vietnamese coracle

Believe me, I try to learn some phrases from each agent. Recently, our agent in Vietnam arranged a meeting for one of our customers here in the UK to visit three suppliers in Vietnam. Our agent went that extra mile and accompanied the customer to interpret. The visitor was also instructed on local customs, dress codes, professional etiquette and even on local restaurants good for informal continuation of meetings.

The bottom line is this: Brits are so reluctant to speak a foreign language, unless of course we are on holiday when "una cerveza grande, por favor" slides off the tongue!

But you don't need to speak a foreign language. What you do need to be is interested in the country you are looking to trade in. Ask questions about their culture, visit places, learn some phrases – a simple hello in a foreign

language always makes people smile, especially if you have it nearly correct. The look on the Vietnamese people's faces when the words "xin chao" came out of my mouth was priceless.

Being South African means I speak Dutch and Flemish, which gives me a unique bond with my agents from those countries, and means I can openly chat business in a language they are comfortable with.

So go on. Make the call to that supplier in a foreign country, answer the email from a potential sales lead – because I promise, once you start your international journey, it will take you on some interesting routes.

It will not always be smooth sailing, but we have international logistics high on our priority of things to take care of. And remember, just because you can't speak Mandarin doesn't mean they can't speak English...

Vineyard uncorks debut wines

Rowton Vineyard has launched its first two wines – Solaris 2022 and Still Pink 2022 – and they're already off to an award-winning start.

The vineyard, west of Shrewsbury, is nurtured by twin sisters Zoë and Melissa Evans, and the two new wines have received a Bronze award in the IEWA awards – an independent, consumer-focused wine competition.

Solaris 2022 is crafted from Solaris grapes, a variety known for its ability to thrive in cooler climates, and this white wine boasts a symphony of fruit-forward flavours.

Still Pink 2022 is made from Pinot Noir Précoce grapes, and it has a pale blush hue, offering a medley of ripe strawberries, succulent watermelon, and zesty citrus flavours.

Zoë and Melissa have embraced environmentally friendly practices at the vineyard too – from sustainable farming methods, to using recyclable packaging materials, and the sisters are committed to preserving the beauty of Shropshire for generations to come.



First wines to be launched from Rowton Vineyard



Zoe and Melissa Evans pictured at Rowton Vineyard

£30,000 improvements grant

Bridgnorth has received funding to commission a business needs survey to see how the town could be helped during challenging economic times, potentially becoming the county's third Business Improvement District.

The town has received the £30,000 grant from the Government's Levelling Up programme to be used for research and consultation.

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) are private sector schemes which work on behalf of the business community. There are currently BIDs in Shrewsbury and Oswestry.

They prioritise investment in their local environment in order to improve trading performance and marketing of the town.

Meetings have already been held with businesses and retailers, with both Bridgnorth Town Council and Bridgnorth Chamber of Commerce to discuss options.

Town mayor Councillor Karen Sawbridge said: "The money that has been secured for this purpose will be used to appoint a specialist who will consult with all businesses about the plan.

"We want to hear what businesses and traders think about the future of the whole town – the High Street, Low Town and the industrial estates."

Jason McComb, who runs several local enterprises including Riddleys on Bridge Street, said: "A BID would offer a co-ordinated approach to promotions and would help with the current retail climate by encouraging visitors."

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

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Complying with international standards

Shropshire web designer Clickingmad has secured updated approval under the international standard for information security.

The Bridgnorth-based company has been re-certified by an independent accreditation body to the ISO 27001 standard for its information security management system. It means the company and the work that it does for clients across the Midlands comply with international standards for confidentiality, integrity and the availability of data.

Clickingmad managing director Shaun Carvill said the company had held

ISO 27001 certification since 2020.

“The re-certification process is rigorous and complex but it means that we are absolutely confident we are complying with the best practice in our information security for our own company and for our clients.

“Accreditation can play a critical role in protecting our clients’ cyber security by demonstrating our commitment to information security, providing a framework for information security management, enhancing client confidence, improving risk management, and providing a basis for compliance with data protection regulations.”



Darren Price and Alex Guest of Clickingmad

Trikes for Ukraine

Kind-hearted benefactor David Pryce has been given a £500 boost by Morris Lubricants for his eighth mercy mission to help vulnerable young and elderly people in Ukraine.

David, 59, from Wellington, has launched his Trikes for Ukraine II campaign and has already collected 35 trikes for disabled children and young adults in Ukrainian orphanages.

He has also collected 400 blankets for vulnerable people living in a hospice and residential homes for the elderly, and 70 soft beds for dogs.

David has used his own van on his seven previous mercy missions when he delivered medical and pet aid, but this time he needs a much larger vehicle.

Oil and lubricants manufacturer Morris Lubricants has donated £500 to his latest mission and David is hoping that either a generous rental business or a haulier will come forward with a lorry he can drive.

What makes the mercy missions even more remarkable is that David lives with cerebral palsy. He runs his own transport consultancy business, Transportwise, and has funded most of his previous trips to Ukraine himself.

As a child, David found great independence and freedom from riding a bike, so he launched a campaign and bought 21 trikes which were delivered to three Ukrainian orphanages earlier in the year.

“I have bought 35 second hand tricycles, many of which are



David Pryce and Morris Lubricants' executive chairman Andrew Goddard

specifically adapted to support riders with posture and positioning needs. I have too many for my van, so I am trying to locate a suitable lorry that I can use to transport them to the Polish border. I would love to hear from anybody who can help.”



A significant part of the site was damaged by a huge fire two years ago



The site is home to the former Wem Brewery



James Chambers focused on redevelopment and modernisation after years of neglect

Refurbished Wem offices available

Newly-refurbished offices at Wem Business Park are now available to rent.

James Chambers, director of Superfast Properties, bought the site a year ago and has focused on the redevelopment and modernisation of the site after years of neglect. A significant part of the site was also damaged by a huge fire in October 2021.

“Regenerating a business park, especially one with such historical significance as the former brewery, is a daunting endeavour,” he said.

“The design concept aim of the rebuild scheme was to create a commercially viable, high-quality business park which would bring significant economic benefit and employment opportunities to the town of Wem.”

The works to date include the re-cladding of buildings, new roofs and guttering, refurbishment of the office block, new roller shutters and pedestrian doors.

After the planning application was granted, arranged through Paul Watson, senior planner at Halls, and designed by Dave Houghton, senior architectural technician at Halls, the rebuild of the fire-damaged site started at the end of February this year.

The build is to provide four light industrial units, for storage or distribution-related use, of up to 2,000 sq ft made from a steel portal framework with a brick-built interior with welfare and office facilities.

Each unit has energy-efficient LED lighting, electric heating and roller shutters, all powered by solar panels is also installed.

The refurbishment and regeneration of the site allows the introduction of renewable energy sources with the solar fuelled electricity providing an EV charging site, the owners say.

Head of Halls Commercial, James Evans, said: “Superfast Properties have invested a great deal into Wem Business Park to provide a modern and attractive environment for a range of businesses.

“The development of this site is great news for Wem and the surrounding area.

“It is essential that we continue to offer high quality spaces where our businesses can grow. This maintains Shropshire’s contribution to the national economy, the vitality of our towns and cities, and provides local employment opportunities for residents.”



Halls Commercial helped with the planning



New units at Wem Business Park are now available to let

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Waterway restoration

TV canal stars Timothy West and Prunella Scales are supporting a new £250,000 appeal to restore a waterway along the Shropshire-Wales border.

Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust chose the opening of the canal's recently restored section, to Crickheath, near Oswestry, to launch the new Restore the Montgomery Canal! Appeal.

West and Scales said: "Volunteers working on the very special Montgomery Canal have successfully restored the canal to Crickheath, on time and on budget.

"Generous supporters' donations have funded the reconstruction of Schoolhouse Bridge, the last highway blockage in Shropshire. With just two miles derelict in England, can you now help the volunteers to reopen more of the canal towards the Welsh border?"

Michael Limbrey, Montgomery Waterway Restoration Trust chairman, said: "For the first time for more than 80 years there were boats at Crickheath Basin, some of them even from the working days of canals. It was a day to celebrate the support of the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Canal & River Trust, and particularly the effort

of volunteer work parties over many years.

"The volunteers have now already started work on the next section. There is no lottery support for this, so we are asking anyone who can to help reopen more of this special canal by supporting our latest Restore the Montgomery Canal! appeal. The appeal got under way on the day of the Crickheath opening with a generous donation from a supporter of £1,000, which was increased by 25% through Gift Aid."

The opening ceremony marked the completion of restoration to Crickheath, near Oswestry, adding a further 1.5 miles to the national canal network.

Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, volunteers of the Shropshire Union Canal Society (SUCS) cleared, shaped and lined a length of canal that had been dry and derelict for many years, and contractors for the Canal & River Trust constructed a new basin where boats can turn.

The opening coincided with news of further funding for the Montgomery Canal. A grant of £7,531 has been awarded from National Grid's Community Matters Fund for towpath improvements which will benefit people who use the canal towpath south of Oswestry.



Offers above £3.95 million are invited for Breton Park, Muxton

Park life for £3.95 million plus

A park homes development on the northern fringe of Telford has been put up for sale, at a price of more than £3.95 million.

Breton Park, at Muxton, has 92 park home pitches, 89 of which are occupied privately-owned homes, with planning consent granted for an additional 19 pitches.

There are three vacant park homes, two of which are included in the sale, which is being jointly handled by Watling Real Estate and Avison Young. A detached cottage, a pair of semi-detached single storey bungalows and four garages, all of which are rented, are also included in the sale. Total annual income from pitch fees and rent is currently £184,146 a year.

Toby O'Sullivan, director at Watling Real Estate, said: "This is an excellent opportunity to acquire an established park home estate, within a desirable location, offering an attractive income profile and significant asset management potential.

"Breton Park includes a field adjacent to the main site, extending to approximately 1.7 acres, with planning consent for an additional 19 new pitches. Further asset management opportunities exist across the main site, in respect of the vacant units and annual pitch fee uplifts, to significantly increase the income generated from the park in the future."

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So, how can you keep hold of your identity?



There are few things worse than finding out a complete stranger has stolen your identity and left you potentially facing huge bills and a bureaucratic nightmare.

Every week I'm contacted by readers who tell me that they've been the victims of identity theft. So I've teamed up with my fellow TV expert and technology expert, David McClelland, to help you understand and avoid identity theft scams.

What is identity theft and how does it occur?

Identity theft occurs when fraudsters manage to get enough information about you to impersonate you. This might be applying for a credit card in your name or hijacking your bank account.

As David tells me: "The most frightening thing for many identity theft victims is that by the time they find out their identity has been stolen or cloned it may feel like it's too late to do very much about it." But don't worry – often there is a solution if you act when you

discover the fraud. Frustratingly, data breaches are one of the most common ways ID theft occurs. It's pretty astounding, but almost every week businesses are hacked or have such lax security that they allow our private information to get pinched. It's really hard to know which business leaked your info, but free websites like "Have I been pwned?" can help you check things like your email or phone.

Of course, sometimes we overshare our data on things like social media too (lock your profile and remove things like birthdays). It's estimated that two-thirds of all personal information comes from business leaks or social media.

Phishing – where scammers try to get us to click on links or trick us out of our passwords or bank details – is another major resource for fraudsters. However, there are public records too.

What to do if your identity has been stolen

First things first, it's easy to feel overwhelmed when your identity gets pinched. But businesses and official organisations are familiar with many patterns of fraud, so you might not have to fight as hard as you think when seeking help.

Start off by writing down if the fraudsters have gained access to three key forms of data: contact information (phone numbers, your address, email); financial information (bank or credit card details, online payment systems); and passwords, PIN codes and ID requirement information (like your first school or mother's maiden name).

Next up, have a think about what the scammer is doing with that information. For example, are they trying to get in to your bank

or financial websites? Are they using retail apps to go on a shopping spree? Or hijacking your email or social media/communications sites to 'phish' your friends? Or applying for new financial services like credit cards or phone contracts?

David has a great checklist to follow that tells you exactly what to do next:

Firstly, tell your bank, card provider and other financial services about the problem. Go through your accounts, and identify anything you have not authorised. They will explain the process and how they will prevent further fraudulent transactions.

Change your passwords and enable "two-factor authentication" for any of the main online accounts you've identified that might have been compromised (email, banking, payment services, social media). You might want to use one of the online password manager services if you are worried about remembering this information. It's much easier to use one of these than you think!

Tell your friends, family and colleagues so they know your account may have been compromised, and tell them to ignore any questionable requests for help, money or links that might get sent.

Notify Action Fraud and the police. Yes, they are overworked but if we don't do this, the scale of fraud goes unreported.

It also "proves" to the businesses that you are not faking it and genuinely have been defrauded.

Contact credit reference agencies. There's only three – Experian, Equifax, and Transunion – so it's dead easy to do this.

You do not have to pay – reporting fraud is free. They can "disassociate" you and your address from any fraudulent activity.

Martyn James is a leading consumer rights campaigner, TV and radio broadcaster, and journalist

A sporting chance

Shropshire businesses are continuing to pledge their support for top-level sport in the county.

Morris Property has been revealed as the new front-of-shirt sponsors for Shrewsbury Town FC's home shirt next season.

Chris Morris, director of Morris Property, said: "This is the beginning of an exciting partnership between our two organisations. We share a passion for Shrewsbury with our Shropshire heritage and strong sense of family values.

"We have been rooted here investing in the county town for almost 155 years now and our latest 28-acre commercial development site, Stadium Point, sits adjacent to the ground on Oteley Road, so supporting our new neighbours seems the perfect move."

Chris added: "There is a legend in our family history that my grandfather, Cliff Morris, was proud to have played for the Town many years ago and we even have a photograph of him in the kit at the ground to prove the claim.

"He played for the amateurs but was called upon to replace Finney in a 2nd division Alliance League game, and from newspaper coverage of the match, he scored the third and eighth goals, helping the Town win 11:1! He would have been proud to know that the family business was partnering with the club."

Meanwhile, Salop Leisure has signed a two-year deal to sponsor Shrewsbury and District Evening Cricket League's 20/20 competition which is celebrating its 45th birthday this summer.

The league, which runs from the end of April to the beginning of August, attracts teams within roughly a 30-mile radius of Shrewsbury and has been running since 1978.

Salop Leisure also sponsors Shrewsbury Town Football Club, Shrewsbury Senior Citizens Bowling League, and Salop Leisure Premier Football League. It also has advertising boards at cricket grounds across Shropshire.

Mike Harris, Salop Leisure's joint managing director, said: "This exciting and explosive form of cricket has really taken off in recent years and attracted a new audience to the sport. We hope it will encourage more players and spectators to get involved with local teams."

Elsewhere, Newport Rugby Club has been boosted by a £5,000 seasonal donation from housebuilder Bloor Homes, which is currently building on the southern edge of the town.

The money will go towards improving facilities at the club for players and visitors, and buying much-needed equipment. This season, the stadium will be called "Stade Bloor".

The partnership is ideal for both Newport Rugby Club and Bloor Homes as the housebuilder has a new development called Hutchison Gate currently being built to the south of Newport.

Paul Degg, regional managing director for Bloor Midlands, said: "Newport Rugby Club was an obvious choice for us to give money to – it's run by passionate volunteers and we very much wanted to help the teams in their upcoming season, to enhance the facilities wherever we can."

Youngsters at a junior football team in Telford are also celebrating after securing a new sponsor for next season.

The Lawley Lightmoor FC Galaxy Under 12s team has won the backing of PR and content creation agency J&PR Ltd, based in Wellington.

The boys, who are from various schools all over the borough, will play Under 13s next year which involves a bigger pitch and an 11-a-side game.



Salop Leisure sponsors Shrewsbury and District Evening Cricket League's 20/20 competition



Paul Degg, from Bloor Homes, with members of Newport Rugby Club



Morris Property's director Chris Morris, with Roland Wycherley MBE, STFC chairman

Lights... camera... action...

Derwen College near Oswestry has won a national award for an innovative partnership forged with a local film company.

The Natspec award for Innovative Partnership Working was for the partnership with Rocking Horse Media, which is using areas of the college as the location for their pilot television comedy/drama with an inclusive theme.

The partnership also provides meaningful work experience and industry information to students and supported interns, promoting inclusivity in the workplace and on screen and stage.

Director Gareth Thomas said: "Being autistic myself, Rocking Horse Media has always championed itself on being a neurodiverse supporting organisation, working with people from all kinds of diverse backgrounds.

"Getting to produce our care home drama series TV project – which champions the SEND community – right here at a renowned specialist college, with students with SEND involved on our set, both on and off camera, was the perfect marriage between both organisations."



Rocking Horse Media, works with Derwen College students

Convention is first of its kind

Telford International Centre is set to host the UK's first Specialist Defence and Security Convention.

The event, on November 1 and 2, is the next stage in the evolution of the Three Counties Defence and Security Expo, which is changing name and location to reflect the growing national and international reach of the event. Last year's event proved to be the most successful yet, with over 130 exhibitors and 20 industry-leading speakers from organisations such as Strategic Command and US Development Command.

As footfall at the 2022 event entered the thousands and its attendees proved to be increasingly national and international, organisers said they needed to grow to a larger venue.

Visitors will receive special access to Government decision makers, with the UK Ministry of Defence and an increasing number of teams from US Department of Defense continuing their support.

New for this year, US Development Command will be holding dedicated "Pitch and Present" sessions for selected organisations, with pre-event applications invited from exhibitors. Visitors can also meet industry experts

and enjoy early sight of the latest technological innovations, focused on specialist defence and security requirements.

Richard Morgan, president of SDSC-UK, said: "SDSC-UK is the UK's first national specialist defence and security event for innovation and technology.

"Our continued aim is to provide the industry with unrivalled access to key stakeholders, and valuable insights on specialist defence and security requirements and commercial opportunities.

"For the past five years we have proudly provided a forum for members of the defence and security community to come together and share knowledge that is so vital to the defence of this country. We couldn't be more pleased to extend the reach of this forum."

General Jim Roddis, commander of Strategic Command, said: "This event demonstrates the power of the human dynamic and getting like-minded individuals together to work through common problems. It's also a good opportunity to meet with industry partners and see some of the amazing and novel technological solutions that people are now offering to support UK national security and defence."

Shining a colourful light on town

Heritage students at University Centre Shrewsbury are to design a stained-glass window stand-in for St Mary's Church in the town.

As part of the project, they conducted a research day with the Churches Conservation Trust which focused on the history of the church's unique collection of medieval stained-glass windows.

The research day will be followed by a community project to interpret the windows and evaluation work taking place on site this summer.

St Mary's Church was affected by heritage crime during lockdown when two panels of historic stained-glass were damaged.

The restoration of these panels is part of a project to support and engage the public to understand the conservation of the glass called "The Past, Present and Future of St Mary's Stained Glass", carried out by the Churches Conservation Trust, which has secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund

The MSc Museums and Heritage Practice students, who study with the University of Chester at UCS, will engage with the wider community and create stained-glass designs that will be displayed in the church while the conservation work is started.

They will also contribute to the evaluation

of heritage interpretation at the site.

Dr Morn Capper, the Heritage lecturer at the University of Chester leading the project, said: "St Mary's holds a remarkable collection of medieval stained-glass, both of local designs and some that has travelled from far off European churches and cathedrals in Germany and the Netherlands.

"Too many historic churches are affected by heritage crime. When windows at St Mary's were smashed, I knew we had to support the efforts to conserve them for the future. Students contributing to this research will enhance their heritage skills, but they will also learn from heritage professionals and see the important work that the Churches Conservation Trust and their volunteers do daily."

Mark Sproat, interim head of region (North) for CCT, said: "St Mary's Church has many impressive architectural and archaeological features. We hope the students enjoy learning about the church and its collections, and we are looking forward to using their research to better inform our understanding of the building."

Professor Paul Johnson, head of University Centre Shrewsbury, said: "New designs inspired by the stained-glass windows have been created by the students and members of the community, and they will be on show at St Mary's Stained-Glass Festival in August."



Councillor Peter Scott cuts the ribbon to mark the opening of Dogby & Friends with business owner Lyne Looker-Revell

Posh pooches rejoice

A new pet boutique has opened in Newport. Dogby & Friends has a permanent base in the town thanks to a business start-up grant through Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our High Street programme.

Owner Lyne Looker-Revell has been keen to set up her own full-time business for some time after seeing a surge in demand for her products, and she has seized the opportunity to open the shop in a prime location on St Mary's Street.

Previously, she trialled her goods by selling them through gift and craft stalls locally.

She said: "We're excited to open in a great location in Newport and are very grateful for the start-up grant funding which has enabled us to do this."

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Advertisement Feature

Property sector holds up in turbulent times

Handelsbanken is a relationship-led bank rooted in the local community, offering personal and corporate banking with a truly bespoke service.

At a time of significant macroeconomic and geopolitical uncertainty, the UK property market has continued to attract professional investors and experienced landlords.

According to our research, most professional property investors indicate they are likely to increase their allocation to the sector as we look ahead.

Despite fears over the underlying strength of the UK property sector, it has held up relatively well in the face of material headwinds – including high inflation, steep interest rate rises, an ongoing conflict in Ukraine, political unrest, and a stressed UK economy.

While risks and challenges remain, recent industry data underscore this relative robustness: UK house prices rose between March and April 2023, for example, ending seven consecutive months of declines.

The latest report from local relationship bank Handelsbanken shines a light on sentiment from a highly influential and significant market segment: professional property investors who, based on our respondents, manage an average portfolio of 29 properties with a market value of £14m.

Key insights include:

- 59% of landlords are looking to increase the size of their portfolio
- Of these, over half plan to diversify into new sectors
- 92% expect to see valuations rebound
- London and South East cited as most attractive regions
- The most attractive sectors over the next 12 months are commercial offices (43%) and residential flats (41%)

To delve into the property insights within this concise 11 page report and find out more about our unique relationship banking approach, visit our website www.handelsbanken.co.uk/en/about-us/news-insights-and-media/insights/property-insights

- Handelsbanken, Shrewsbury branch: Michael Place, Anchorage Avenue, Shrewsbury Business Park, SY2 6FG. 01743 263780.

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Service industries have role to play

A Shropshire sustainability expert has stressed the need for service industries to do their bit when it comes to carbon reduction.

Sue Burnell, who runs Shrewsbury-based Business Net Zero, said it wasn't just big energy-hungry manufacturers who could cut down the amount of damaging carbon emissions and waste they produce.

"While it's always easy to see where manufacturers, retailers, and the hospitality industry can cut down on their energy use and waste, it's not always easy to see where desk-based service businesses can change," she said.

"But there is a lot that can be done by everyone. Do you need to drive to an office every day or can you work from home? Is it essential to fly to that meeting, or can it be done online? Does your coffee machine use wasteful pods and disposable cups, or would a filter machine and washable mugs work just as well?

"From the quality of insulation and type of lighting in your office, to how much paper and ink you use, there are numerous areas where positive change can be made. Even using an office dishwasher at the end of each day, instead of everyone washing cups and plates separately, can save litres of hot water."

Business Net Zero has been helping numerous organisations across the county identify where their biggest carbon outputs are, and how they can develop their own strategy for reducing them.

One of them is Telford-based quantity surveying company CQS Solutions – five members of the team took part in carbon literacy training with Sue, and as a result the company has already made some big changes.

Principal surveyor Tim Lloyd said: "Every company understands that they have got a responsibility now to be future-looking and forward-looking, and it's really important for the culture of the business to be ahead of the game and innovative in that area so we can offer clients a really unique service."



Sue Burnell (left) and Kevin Oubridge (right) from Business Net Zero with Tim Lloyd (middle) from CQS Solutions

"It's having the whole team aware of the impact of their actions, in daily life, in the work that they're doing, and just being more conscious of the impact of all these actions, like printing things off, going to site or even boiling the kettle – all these little things."

Tim said the company plan centred on travel, especially commuting and travelling to site. Some company cars have been swapped for electric and the firm has implemented a two day a week working from home policy for those employees who want it.

"We have spoken to the landlord of our serviced offices too about where the energy supply comes from, what they do with the waste, what sort of heating controls they have, basically to put some pressure on them to make some promises as well. If that comes off, there is a whole campus where we are that would be affected. That's the idea really – to effect some change which is bigger than just us."

A fresh new sound for Shropshire

shropshirelive on air

online

smart speaker

mobile app



More than 50 people took part in the charity event



The winning team – Tony Elson, Kevin Vaughan, Iain Williamson, Mark Slattery from Kev Vaughan's Carpentry and Tiling

Charity golf day

More than 50 people got together in the Shropshire sunshine for a charity golf day in memory of a young boy who tragically died aged just eight years old.

Telford-based Komplex Care, from Central Park, hosted the event at Bridgnorth Golf Club to raise money for Cure INAD UK, and organisers said it was a successful day. The charity is supported by the parents of Matthew Chapman, who was diagnosed with Infantile Neuroaxonal Dystrophy in October 2018, just before his fifth birthday, and died in February last year. Nurses from Komplex Care supported Matthew and his family in the final months of his life, and managing director of Komplex Group, Arron Zaib, said the company was keen to honour his memory.



Matthew's parents giving a speech



Ian Allsop of A&F Electrical Ltd, with Ray Pickford, Gary Kerrigan and Thomas Hyland of Marsh Commercial



Jamie Brock, Craig Pritchard, James Henson and Marcus Rayer



Komplex Care managing director Arron Zaib, with Katy Zaib and Lisa Thornton

Ashley Slade, Paul Howard, Owen Owen, Rob Baker – 'The Hosshay Jockeys'



The event gets under way at Bridgnorth Golf Club

Trainees at county law firm

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler has welcomed a new intake of trainees as it continues its commitment to helping aspiring lawyers take the first step in their professional career.

The company runs an award-winning training programme, which has seen dozens of trainees and apprentices qualifying as solicitors in recent years.

Managing partner Brian Evans said the latest additions had settled into their training contracts very well – having already worked in different roles for the firm.

“We have recently welcomed Kelly Reynolds, Sophie Speirs and Jemma Parocki to our training programme, joining Claudia Booth, who started her training contract in January.

“All four of them are already familiar with the firm, having worked in various administrative roles, before being accepted as trainees this year.

“It’s always great to see the ambition and drive of our trainees to succeed, and we hope all four will go on to enjoy long careers in the legal profession.”

Kelly joined in 2021 as a paralegal, assisting solicitors at court hearings and client meetings, before beginning her training contract.

She said: “I aspire to qualify as a solicitor and be recognised for my expertise in my chosen field. I would hope I can progress within my role to an associate and then potentially a partner one day, but that is a long way off yet!”

Sophie Speirs worked as a litigation assistant before joining Lanyon Bowdler and said the training contract had been a great experience so far. She added: “I have also enjoyed going back to my roots at the



Kelly Reynolds, Sophie Speirs and Jemma Parocki

University of Wolverhampton’s careers events, representing the firm to the current students and advising them on their career paths.”

Jemma Parocki has been with the firm since 2020, following experience in the teaching profession and a stint studying law in Australia as part of her university course.

She said: “Lanyon Bowdler is highly-regarded as a great training firm and I am delighted to have started as a trainee. My ambition post-qualification is to remain at the firm and become a partner within five years.”



Paul Hague and Steve Spooner have joined Tilley Green Coffee

Senior engineers join the team

Tilley Green Coffee, based in Prees, has welcomed two senior engineers.

Engineering manager Steve Spooner and service engineer Paul Hague will support the company’s expanding nationwide customer base, and focus on coffee machine servicing, testing, and maintenance, as well as training customers on how to operate machinery efficiently.

Steve, who lives in Stoke, has worked in service engineering for over 15 years and

entered the coffee industry five years ago.

Paul, from Shrewsbury, worked as an electrical contract manager for most of his career, and has embraced the new challenge of applying his electrical experience in the coffee industry.

Tilley Green Coffee was launched in 2013 and supplies coffee products and coffee machines predominantly to bars, hotels, cafes, restaurants, garden centres and leisure outlets.

Paulette has a new role



Paulette Morgan at the residential home in Newport

Paulette Morgan is the new manager at The Cottage Christian Nursing and Residential Home in Newport.

She has stepped up to the new role following the retirement of long-standing manager Julie Stevenson.

Paulette joined the home, run by not-for-profit care provider Coverage Care Services, in February 2022 as the deputy manager, following a long career in nursing.

She said: “My background is in nursing but moving into the care sector was certainly a good decision. I love being able to provide continued care to residents, build relationships with them and provide support on an ongoing basis.”

Paulette manages a team of 65 carers, nurses and domiciliary staff, and together they care for 40 residents at the home on Granville Road.

Last year Coverage Care Services secured the long-term future of the home after completing the purchase of the site. It had previously operated as a tenant of the home.

Chief executive Debbie Price said: “Paulette brings a wealth of professional experience to the role, and we have no doubt that she will continue to build on the fantastic care that The Cottage Christian provides to residents in the local community.”



Melinda Rice of mfg Solicitors

Senior associate Melinda

Law firm mfg Solicitors has promoted Melinda Rice to a senior associate in a move which sees her relocate to the Telford office.

She is part of the firm’s private client department, and an experienced wills, assets and estate planning expert.

Andrew Davies, partner and

managing director of mfg Solicitors, said: “Melinda has played a key role in the continued expansion of our private client department.

“Her promotion is well-deserved and she carries an exceptional reputation with our clients for providing clear and concise advice.”

Something good is brewing, thanks to Tino’s introduction



Tino Draghi is an experienced brewer

An award-winning independent brewery in Shropshire has welcomed a new head brewer to its ranks who brings a breadth of industry experience.

Hobsons Brewery, in Cleobury Mortimer, has appointed Tino Draghi, originally from Argentina, who has more than 10 years of experience in the industry having worked for notable brands such as BrewDog and Twickenham Ales.

In his new role, Tino will oversee production, including recipe development, brewing, and quality control.

Tino’s first recipe at Hobsons was a special beer to mark the Coronation of King Charles III.

Tino said: “Where I grew up in Argentina, we were surrounded by farmland, so being here already feels like home. One of the things that first drew me to Hobsons was its stance on sustainability.

“Brewing in the most carbon-conscious way possible has always been a top priority for me, so finding a brand that aligns so closely with your own values makes this new adventure that much more exciting.”



Nick Brandum is the community engagement marketing officer at Telford College

Delivering information, advice and guidance

Telford College has appointed a new community engagement marketing officer to raise the profile of its growing range of higher education and adult courses.

Nick Brandum, who lives in Shrewsbury, is no stranger to working in the world of education – or marketing.

He graduated from Bournemouth University with a degree in advertising and marketing, and then spent three years as sales and marketing manager for the University’s student union.

During this time, he organised one of the country’s largest freshers’ fairs and led on promotion for The Old Fire Station; a famous south coast music venue that helped break the careers of artists like Example and Ed Sheeran.

The newly-created role at Telford College is aimed at expanding its community outreach programme, and raising the profile of the college’s higher education and adult learning curriculum.

It involves working with staff, students, schools, parents, employers and other college partners, to deliver unbiased information, advice and guidance through pop-up shops, community events, workshops, jobs fairs and other recruitment events.

Nick, who has also previously worked for a creative agency in Birmingham dealing with global entertainment brands like PlayStation, Warner Bros and Netflix, said: “I’m super happy to be back in an education setting.

“I love putting my experience to use in a place made to help people.

“Having made Shropshire my new home, it’s a privilege to work for the largest further education college in the region.”

Non-executive advisor

An experienced automotive specialist has joined a Shrewsbury-based manufacturer to guide the next stage of its expansion that will include the creation of 20 new jobs.

SDE Technology, which provides pressings and assemblies for several car makers and tier 1s, has appointed Robert Joyce as its first ever non-exec advisor.

The supply chain expert has held senior roles at Rover, BMW and Jaguar Land Rover, and is expected to bring his impressive decision-making skills, contact book and sector knowledge to the fast-growing business.

He is known for quickly getting to grips with issues and the headwinds of change making him an ideal leader to help SDE make the most of multi-million pound opportunities arising from electrification, light-weighting and new model launches.

“This is a fantastic move for us and gives us access to one of the best experts in the automotive sector,” explained Richard Homden, managing director of SDE Technology.

“Robert will help us achieve the ambitious

growth targets we have set and will accelerate our investment plans.

“It is great to see both the vision he has for us, but also his enthusiasm for business and the way he perceives problems as merely tasks that must be overcome, and ones that can indeed aid us to our end goal.

“We are looking forward to exciting times ahead and that includes a recruitment push for twenty new roles between now and 2026.”

SDE Technology is one of the largest manufacturers of pressings and assemblies in the UK, employing more than 100 people at its factory on Brixton Way.

The company has overcome tough trading conditions, the pandemic, chip shortages and energy costs to secure several new opportunities in the automotive sector and is now planning on maximising its latest Hot Form Quench (HFQ®) process.



Robert Joyce

This is a revolutionary hot forming process for producing high strength aluminium parts for use in the automotive, aerospace and renewable sectors, and gives designers the freedom to create parts that offer significant weight savings, yet still deliver higher structural strength.

It also delivers improved formability in six and seven thousand series alloys that cannot be formed cold. In some instances, it can also reduce the part counts from multiple components to just one.

Because HFQ lends itself to higher strength aluminium, it is ideally suited for the vehicle safety cell in the automotive sector and has also been used to develop a prototype aircraft armrest. Richard said: “HFQ® was developed by Impression Technologies (ITL), who industrialised research by Birmingham University and Imperial College London. This is a great example of British research being utilised by British manufacturing.

“You simply cannot form this high-strength aluminium in any other way, unless you use a Super Plastic Forming process. Even then, SPF makes one part every 15 to 20 minutes, where the cycle time for our technology is one part every 15 to 20 seconds. That is a design and manufacturing dream.”

Directors named

A construction group which recently celebrated 20 years in business has welcomed two new directors to its company board.

SWG Group works on construction projects across Shropshire and Mid Wales, and is now expanding into the West Midlands as its client base continues to grow.

Bosses have now announced Sophie Shorey as SWG’s new finance director, and Josh Coleman as commercial director. Both bring extensive experience to the team – Sophie has worked in accounting for over 10 years, and Josh qualified as a quantity surveyor in 2013.

Jacqui Gough, SWG director, said: “We are delighted that Josh and Sophie have accepted positions on the board of directors. They have both made significant contributions to the company thus far and are real assets to the team.

“Moving forward, they will have crucial roles in helping SWG achieve its strategic goals as it continues to expand and develop its services and grow geographically throughout the area.”

Sophie joined SWG in 2020 as financial



Josh Coleman and Sophie Shorey

controller, and is credited with a major overhaul of the finance department over the past three years. She holds a CIMA Diploma in Management Accounting and is in the process of becoming a chartered global management accountant.

She said: “I am proud to be in a position where I can make a difference, and collaborate with a strong team of individuals throughout the group. We work together to achieve SWG’s strategic objectives, and I look forward to seeing them come to fruition in the upcoming years.”

Josh joined SWG as managing surveyor in 2021, after leading the commercial team at the long-established Arthur M Griffiths construction company based in Wolverhampton. He swiftly advanced to commercial manager in 2022, before becoming commercial director in 2023.

New team members

Marketing, web development and graphic design agency Hunter Bevan has added Russell Goodday and Alfie Lloyd to the team. Russell is an experienced digital artist, web, and app developer. Starting his career in 3D animation and illustration, he followed his interest in coding, becoming proficient in full-stack development. He will be responsible for developing and implementing custom web solutions, creating responsive, mobile-friendly websites and web applications.

Alfie, a digital marketing specialist, will be responsible for developing and executing digital

marketing strategies. He brings a wealth of experience in social media marketing and event management, with his role also encompassing traditional marketing techniques and client liaison.

Neil Bevan, director of Hunter Bevan based on Oswestry’s Artillery Business Park, said: “As our company continues to grow, it’s important that we have the right talent in place to meet the needs of our clients.”



Russell Goodday and Alfie Lloyd



Christina Polychronakis, Jaspreet Kler, Suzanne Tucker, managing director Neil Lloyd, Elizabeth Harris-Clark, Alison Price, Laurie Carruthers

Big promotions

Six legal experts at one of Shropshire’s leading law firms are celebrating big promotions.

Four new partners and two new associates have been created at FBC Manby Bowdler.

Suzanne Tucker, Alison Price, Christina Polychronakis and Elizabeth

Harris-Clark have all been made partners, while Laurie Carruthers and Jaspreet Kler are now associates.

Suzanne, Elizabeth and Laurie are based in the firm’s Shrewsbury office, while Christina, Alison and Jaspreet are based in Wolverhampton.

Looking forward to new challenge

Operations director Mike Harris has been promoted to joint managing director of Salop Leisure with responsibility for the day-to-day operations of the multi-faceted business.

He is working closely with the other directors Mark Bebb, Dylan Roberts and chairman Tony Bywater.

Mike’s career with the company began in 2001, as manager of Gwernydd Hall Holiday Home Park at New Mills, near Newtown. He progressed to become business manager three years later at Salop Leisure’s headquarters in Shrewsbury before becoming operations director in 2007.

“I am looking forward to the new challenge,” said Mike, who lives in Crew Green, near Shrewsbury. “As a business, we constantly strive to deliver first class customer service, which is why we are always proud to get previous customers recommending us to their friends and family.

“We were delighted to win another national award that relies on votes from those customers earlier this year. Our aim is to maintain and, wherever possible, improve the high level of customer service that we provide.



Mike Harris of Salop Leisure

“Despite a challenging economic climate, I believe the staycation boom, which began during the Covid-19 pandemic, will continue.

“Many people are still looking to invest in touring caravans, motorhomes and caravan holiday homes which will allow them and their families to escape for a holiday or short break any time they wish.”

He says 2023 will be a year of consolidation and organic growth within the business, which has more than 200 employees.

“The company is run like a family business and we are lucky to have loyal and talented employees who tend to stay with us for many years because it’s a great place to work,” he added.

Rhiannon rises to managing director

Rhiannon Williams is the new managing director of Telford-based PR company Zen Communications.

She steps up from her previous head of agency role after founder Felicity Wingrove stepped back into a part-time senior advisory role. She said: “Stepping back from the day-to-day running of Zen would be tough if I was handing the mantle over to anyone else, but with Rhi I know we’re all in the safest of hands.” With over 20 years’ experience across the sector, including a senior role with a national agency, Rhiannon has spent the last 13 years at Zen.

She said: “It’s an agency I genuinely love, and one where I’m proud to have helped grow an incredible team, and attract an inspiring cohort of clients. The work we do makes a difference, and I feel inspired each and every day. Being a part of the agency’s next steps is hugely exciting.”



Rhiannon Williams and Felicity Wingrove

Five minutes with...

KATIE MORRIS is head of group marketing at Morris & Company, which has its headquarters in Shrewsbury. This is her 21st year with the business.

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

Guiding the strategy and marketing plans for our group of property-related businesses which range from development and construction, portfolio management to holiday rentals.

HOW HAS YOUR COMPANY, AND/OR YOUR OWN ROLE, BEEN IMPACTED BY THE RECENT UNCERTAINTIES IN THE ECONOMY?

The company is over 150 years old so it has weathered a fair few economic crises! In marketing terms, we had just enjoyed an amazing 2019 marking the company's 150th anniversary, publishing books and films, staging exhibitions and special events – followed by the dramatic impact of the pandemic which hit us all in 2020. This was particularly poignant for our care division at the time, where daily and sometimes hourly, communications were pivotal. So, in both periods the company needed agile and effective marketing. I have a brilliant team working with me so we could rise to both challenges. With today's cost of living crisis, our holiday rentals business has been presented with some challenges which needed strong tactical marketing – thankfully the booking pipeline has since improved.

HAS THE FALLOUT FROM THE PANDEMIC CREATED ANY NEW OPPORTUNITIES?

Yes, property was affected in many ways with supply, material prices and manpower under pressure. However, the construction sector was encouraged to keep building during the pandemic so, as a company, we didn't stop! This sat well with our clients for ongoing work as well as subsequent projects which we have been awarded since.

ARE YOU STILL MEETING ON ZOOM/TEAMS ETC, OR BACK TO FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING?

The majority of our work is now face to face although we still hop on Teams to keep projects moving and to timescales. We enjoy networking and meeting people at events – it's always more memorable than staring at someone over a screen.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Fair, supportive, exacting and full of energy. Hopefully a bit inspiring...

HIGHLIGHTS OR MILESTONES OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

- Getting my first central London job in PR working with legendary PR man Patrick Benson, now sadly passed
- Joining global agency Ogilvy and winning the Nasdaq Stock Exchange account – me and stats?
- Meeting the McCartney family when working for Linda's vegetarian brand – what lovely and kind people
- Moving to Shrewsbury and working for a company who believed in marketing where I could make a difference



Katie Morris of Morris & Company

- Winning the Wines of South Africa PR account, having presented to 60 people in South Africa House in Trafalgar Square
- Finding out broadcaster Fiona Bruce was great fun (and a teeny bit irreverent) when opening our Birmingham agency offices
- Writing and publishing the Morris 150th coffee table book
- Being surprised by the Board on my 20th work anniversary with a certificate of proof – and a lovely gift

ANY PARTICULARLY FUNNY STORIES DURING YOUR CAREER?

The horror of a large potato rolling out of my briefcase onto the centre of the large Board table at my first big client meeting when I was a young starter in my career (it was for supper that night at my boyfriend's!).
Being auctioned by Brian Clough at a Butlins convention of under 18 school boys when working for Gillette. Nowadays it just wouldn't happen.

PET HATES?

Anyone bringing a bad mood to work with them.

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

Don't sweat the small stuff and choose your battles.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

Cooking, running, art classes, pottering around the garden watching my husband Chris do all the hard work, seeing friends and my Wednesday



Nigella's chocolate tart



Desert island film choice – Jean de Florette

G&T date nights with my wonderful 90-year-old father.

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

It's vibrant, connected and supportive.

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

I can type with my eyes closed (for a bit) at 90 words a minute.

YOU CAN TAKE ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE CD ONTO A DESERT ISLAND – WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Book: To the Lighthouse by Virginia Woolf
Film: Jean de Florette
Song: Moments by Alexis Ffrench

FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

Barack Obama, Reese Witherspoon, Richard E Grant, Jane Austen and the wonderful Joanna Lumley.

WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?

Goat's cheese soufflé, pan fried seabass, and Nigella's chocolate tart (it's Nutella!)

AND FINALLY... WHAT DO YOU THINK THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HAS IN STORE?

We have just kicked off our new financial year marketing plans with loads of great initiatives to get our teeth into. We've launched a video with Shrewsbury Town FC announcing our sponsorship which was great fun to film. No two days are the same here... long may that continue.

Our People, Your Team.

Here to help you.

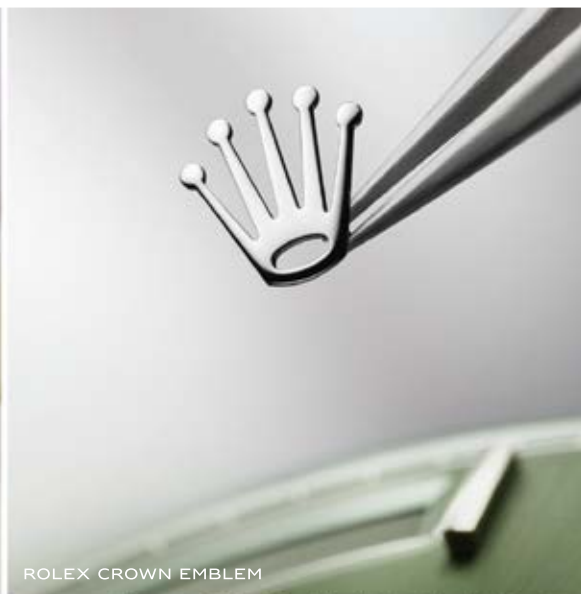
We can hold meetings via telephone and video and, of course, we are also able to offer meetings in person. Please contact us and a member of our team will be happy to help.

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