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SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER AWARDS
Best New Business (SBLTV)

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By Carl Jones
Shropshire Business Editor

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SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Welcome

Whisper it quietly, and certainly don’t rush off to count any chickens just yet, but there do appear to be tentative signs of economic improvement beginning to emerge across Shropshire.

Surveys and statistics suggest that recruitment troubles caused by a damagingly tight labour market are beginning to ease – albeit slowly – and although we have yet to see real evidence of falling inflation, there is a general acceptance that the peak has probably now passed.

Add to that the number of Shropshire businesses that are expanding, investing, diversifying, and winning accolades for their achievements, and it feels like there is a returning confidence which gives us more reasons to be cheerful than we’ve seen in some time.

One company which is boldly embarking on a journey of growth and discovery is Turtle Doves, the ethically-sourced fashion brand with its headquarters in Shrewsbury.

Our exclusive interview with managing director Graham Holbrook reveals the company’s exciting plans for international growth, examines what it’s like to go through a major business sale, and explains why the business remains committed to keeping its roots right here in Shropshire.

There’s been a sharp rise in the number of Shropshire workers who have chosen the self-employment route either during or since the pandemic, and it’s clearly made a big difference to their lifestyles. Find out what it’s done for their mental health in our special report.

It’s not good news for everyone, though. Shropshire’s heritage tourist attraction, The Severn Valley Railway, says it needs an urgent injection of funds to secure its

survival after a slower than anticipated recovery.

What else have we got in this packed issue? With the dust now settling on Jeremy Hunt’s Budget, we get verdicts from a range of local business leaders, including a look at whether the Government’s pension changes are enough to coax 50-plus retirees back into the workplace.

There’s plenty of commercial property news to report too. Three dentists’ practices are under new ownership, as is the Secret Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms.

There has been no shortage of business networking events taking place around the county since our last issue.

We’ve got a four-page picture special from the Shropshire Business Festival held at Wrekin College, lots of images from the Federation of Small Businesses’ regional awards event at RAF Cosford, and a round-up of the latest Shropshire Chamber expo, held at Shrewsbury Town FC.

And talking of the Chamber – the finalists have now been announced for their annual awards, which will be held at Telford International Centre on June 23.

The showpiece Company of the Year award will be a four-way battle between two previous champions, and two first-time finalists.

As usual, this Oscars-style event looks set to be the biggest business gathering of the Shropshire calendar this year, with finalists crowned in 12 different categories. Check out all the runners and riders on page 24.

We always like to think that our magazine is out of this world when it comes to Shropshire business news and views . . . and in this edition, there’s no disputing it.

Turn the pages to discover how complex metal components which are made in Telford are being used in space exploration and the next generation of aeroplanes.

It’s just one of the many high-flying businesses we are so lucky to have in our wonderful county.



The Budget briefing, held by WR Partners at the Albrighton Hall Hotel

Ignorance isn't bliss

Small businesses are the bedrock of the Shropshire economy – yet in many people's eyes, they're the sector most pointedly ignored in the Chancellor's spring Budget statement.

Now that the dust has settled on Jeremy Hunt's first statement, just what have some of the county's businesses made of what he had to say?

WR Partners held a Budget analysis session at the Albrighton Hall Hotel, near Shrewsbury, to run through some of the main points.

Paul Brown, tax partner and director at WR Partners, said: "The meaningful measures it contains to help small and medium-sized entities were very few and far between.

"Given that the Budget is the tax adviser's equivalent of Christmas, this year feels like someone has left a nicely-wrapped piece of coal under the proverbial tree."

Mr Hunt focused on four 'E's' . . . Enterprise, Employment, Education and Everywhere.

On Enterprise, Paul said: "The ability of companies to expense 100% of their capital expenditure on plant and machinery each year sounds great, except the range of assets it applies to is limited to those that currently attract the higher rate of writing down allowances, and the vast majority of businesses that presently get this relief through the annual investment allowance.

"For other plant and machinery, which currently attracts a lower rate of capital allowances, the deduction is limited to 50%. It still seems attractive, except that, again, the AIA gives them a 100% deduction for most businesses.

"The second measure was an 'increase' in the R&D credit for small and medium-sized companies whose expenditure on R&D is at least 40% of their total spending.

"These companies will get an enhanced deduction of 127% – a



Paul Brown, tax partner and director at WR Partners



Jenny Head, Tom Davies and Tim Taylor joined in with the analysis

decrease from the 130% currently available, although admittedly less of a decrease than for other SMEs. When there are already concerns about inflated claims, which is one of the reasons for the upcoming reduction in the credit, I'm not sure encouraging the unscrupulous to increase their claims to exceed the 40% mark is a smart move.

"At a more niche level, there are some welcome enhancements to the tax credit schemes for the creative industries, which are welcome."

On Employment, new measures to encourage people back to work were announced – particularly aimed at getting the over-50s back into the workforce.

Paul described this as 'a laudable aim' and added: "One such measure is the increase in the annual pension savings allowance from £40k to £60k, and removing the lifetime allowance cap for tax-free pension savings.

"However, the cynic in me thinks it seems a bit of a stretch to say that a measure aimed largely at highly-paid NHS consultants can really be described as encouraging participation of those over 50s in the workforce."

The speech's Education section focused largely around childcare system reforms, with additional funding to encourage new joiners to the industry and increases in funding to nurseries providing free childcare.

Paul said: "The landmark (and much-trailed) measure was the extension of the availability of free childcare to those working families with children between nine months and two years old. However, the rejoicing may need to be put on hold for some due to the phased introduction, which starts with 15 hours free for two-year-olds from April 2024, and the total 30 hours only being available to all by September 2025."

Extending the energy price guarantee for another three months was viewed as welcome news, as well as the alignment of the prices paid by those on pre-payment meters with those who pay by direct debit.

Paul concluded: "I did expect a steady as she goes Budget after the measures introduced in November. I did not expect the speech to be quite as uninspiring as it was. The emphasis was on prosperity with a purpose, but it isn't easy to find many measures that will go far to achieve that.

"I also still need help reconciling the drive for growth with a very large hike in corporation tax, which must have the effect of choking off investment, regardless of the damp squib of the new capital expenditure rules."



Katy Thomas-Davies, Sian Turner and Sophie Shorey at the event

Bite-sized Budget verdicts from the county's experts

"The Chancellor clearly felt the need to act to address the unfilled jobs blighting our economy, which was so badly needed. Help on childcare costs, and extra incentives designed to entice more over 50s back into the workplace are also to be welcomed. The jury is out, though, on whether enough has been done to ease the pressure which Shropshire businesses are facing with their energy bills."
RUTH ROSS, Shropshire Chamber chief executive

"Funded childcare will be a great help to working parents and may well free up more capacity in the labour market. Although I can see sense in being prudent, it is disappointing that the Chancellor didn't use the additional fiscal headroom he now has to reverse or reduce the corporation tax rise, which would have helped companies facing cashflow pressures."

BRIAN EVANS, Lanyon Bowdler solicitors

"Given the different rates historically claimable under the SME and RDEC schemes, it's a worry that smaller businesses may be at a disadvantage if the merged scheme favours larger businesses. SMEs in Shropshire – and in the wider UK – make an amazing contribution to innovation and development which shouldn't be overlooked or discouraged."

MARK EVANS, R&D Tax Claims

"The cost of early years childcare is often a barrier to women returning to the workplace, so this is a positive step for growth and will go some way to plugging the million-plus vacancy crisis. However, the childcare sector is struggling with staffing issues of its own, and whilst this has to be welcome news, it must be tempered with proper funding of the many small private nurseries that work hard to provide a safe and stimulating environment for our children in what is a heavily-regulated industry."

ALASDAIR HOBBS, Human Results, Telford

"Talks of a recession and a stuttering economy have definitely had an impact on construction output, but there remains some positives in the sector and reasons to be optimistic for the rest of 2023. I am pleased to see the Government is recognising the urgency of the UK's clean energy revolution. We have invested millions into the business to reduce our environmental impact and have a dedicated sustainable design team that is helping to prove that traditional construction can still be green."

ANDREW HUXLEY, Besblock, Telford

"We very much welcome plans by the Chancellor to encourage the long-term unemployed and early retired people to go back to the workplace, as well as greater financial support for parents of young children, but our worry is that these measures alone won't help the immediate staffing struggles which care homes are currently facing."

DEBBIE PRICE, chief executive of care provider Coverage Care Services

"The new full capital expense deduction is a welcome addition to soften the blow of losing the capital allowance super deduction that expires at the end of this month. Whilst not as generous as the existing scheme, this will allow UK manufacturing businesses to continue to invest in automating their processes and help with the push towards net zero."

PHIL ALSTON, commercial director of Telford-based engineering firm iconsys

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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



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Having a ball . . . Louise Welsby

A festival of fun

It was a business networking event with a difference. There was axe throwing, lorry driving, office chair racing . . . and a whole lot more interactive fun on offer at the first Shropshire Business Festival.

Organised by the team at Shropshire Festivals, the event at Wrekin College was declared a great success – with plans already under way to repeat it again next year.

More than 500 people attended the mix of workshops, seminars, exhibitions and networking opportunities that were woven around festival-style fun on the college's Wellington campus.

The event was supported by a band of sponsors including Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, Department of International Trade, Barclays, Chrisbeon, Throgmorton, WPG, Azets, Dulson Training, Volvo Shrewsbury – and Shropshire Business magazine.

Seminars were led by wealth manager Nick Jones on financial independence, PR expert Felicity Wingrove on compelling communications, and the Department of Business & Trade on exporting, amongst others.

Workshops also ran throughout the afternoon, including a session on sustainability



High Sheriff of Shropshire Mandy Thorn with Beth Heath

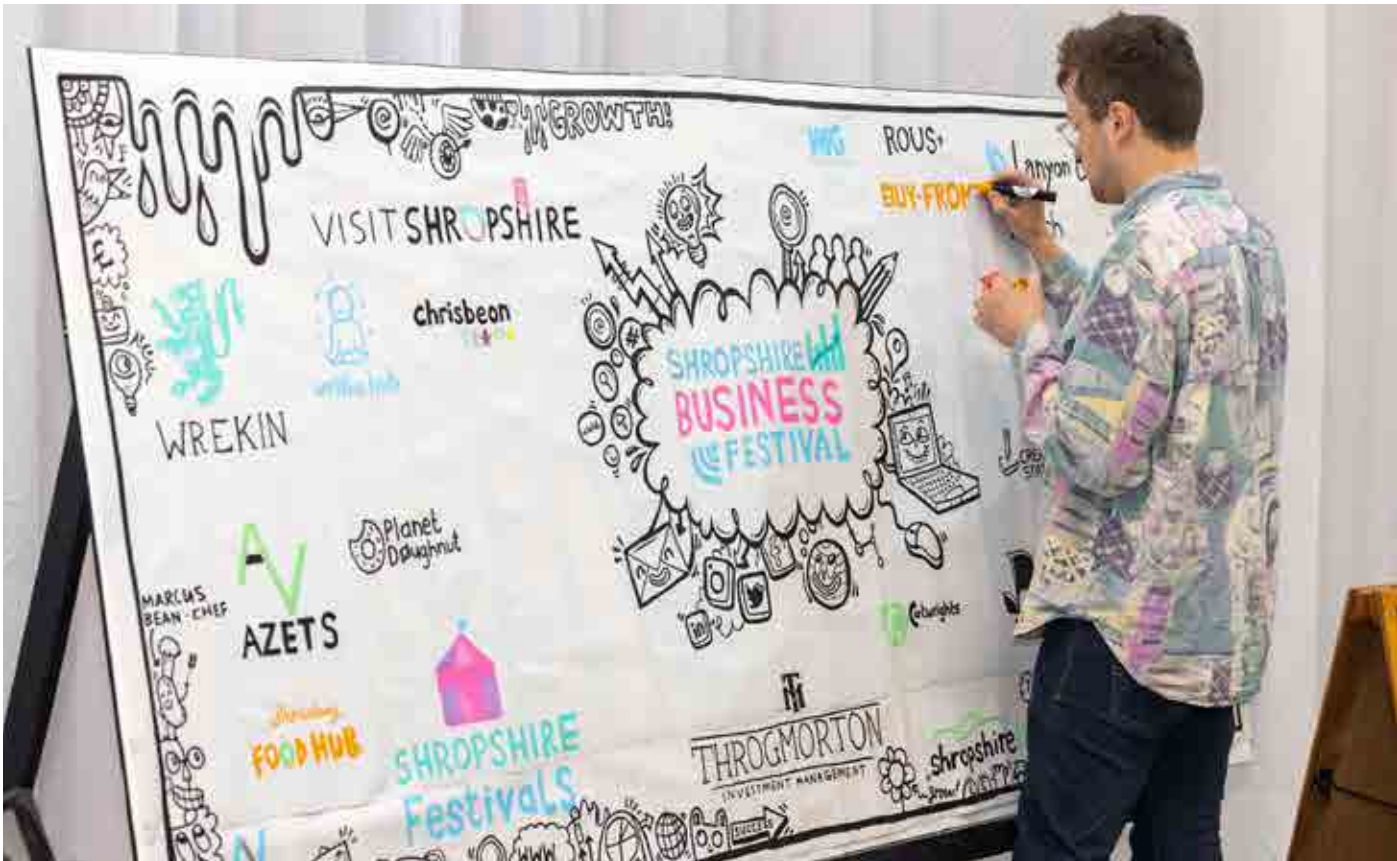
from Barclays and several involving the Azets team, including R&D tax credits, and a Q&A with Graham Holbrook of county fashion success story Turtle Doves.

Shropshire Festivals director Beth Heath said: “It was awesome to put some pizzazz into a business event – it was a far cry from the stale conferences we can be subjected to.

“We brought together the best business folk in the county in a festival setting with live

music, street food and tips – because let’s face it, there’s no better way to connect with people than when you’re having fun!

“The first Shropshire Business Festival was a great success – there was fantastic feedback on the one-to-one sessions in the Azets Accountants area and the Lanyon Bowdler lawyers lounge, plus the personality profiling with Human Everything proved to be a great ice breaker for the Shropshire Chamber networking tipi.



Capturing a visual representation of the day



Steve ‘The Hungry’ Guy

Thanks to everyone involved, my amazing team and volunteers, and all the exhibitors and generous sponsors. And thanks to the business community for coming along and enjoying it – we’ll definitely be back for another one in 2024.”

Shropshire Business Live TV brought its studio to the event, filming content for the monthly show – including giving nine festival visitors the chance to have a crack at being a guest newsreader. Check out the results on



Richard Scott-Worthington takes a break on the social lawn

the SBLTV YouTube channel. And Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones hosted ‘Shropshire’s Brainiest Business’ quiz at the end of the day, which was won by a team from Jackfield-based media company Rous+.

Kieran Jones, membership growth executive at Shropshire Chamber, won an office chair in the Chrisbeon racing competition.

The day kicked off with the first ever Visit Shropshire Tourism Expo, which welcomed

tourism and hospitality businesses from across the county for networking, seminars, workshops, and activities,

Next up, Shropshire Festivals will be hosting the Shrewsbury Food Festival on June 24 and 25, followed by Shropshire Petal Fields in August, Shropshire BizFest on September 14, and Shropshire Oktoberfest on October 6 and 7.

Visit www.shropshirefestivals.co.uk for more information. Further pictures on pages 12-13.



A flight simulator was one of the many interactive attractions



Wrekin College business school hosted workshops and seminars



Adam Copson and Chimene Felton from Throgmorton Associates



Visit Shropshire gave a tourism presentation before the business festival kicked off



The SBLTV team filming material for their show



The Shropshire Festivals 'team pink'



A caricaturist was capturing cartoon likenesses of guests



Amelia Redge of Reech



Mark Derham of Bridge Coffee



Greendawn was promoting electric vehicle technology



Kieran Jones from Shropshire Chamber with Richard Hughes of Chrisbeon



Planet Doughnut was giving away tasty samples



Anthony North of Cartwrights



The team from Lanyon Bowdler



Networking on the Shrewsbury Food Hub stand



Pippa Tait and Darren Neill of Sales Geek



Talking tourism in one of the festival breakout areas



Ben Minchell and Paul Nightingale of V&D Interiors



Rachel Owen and Kieran Jones



Axe throwing was one of the activities on offer



Chrisbeon held an office chair racing competition



ORJ was one of several local law firms exhibiting



Claire Moore of Peakes Travel Elite



Battered, bruised, and fighting for survival

Customer numbers at Severn Valley Railway have not returned to pre-Covid levels, and it is now seeking to raise a 'survival fund' of £1.5 million

Shropshire's famous Severn Valley Railway says it needs an 'urgent injection of funds' to ensure its survival.

The heritage line, based at Bridgnorth, has already laid off a number of staff over the coming months as it seeks to combat the after-effects of Covid which bosses say have left it 'battered and bruised'.

Customer numbers have not yet returned to pre-Covid levels, and the railway is now seeking to raise another £1.5 million for what it describes as a 'survival fund'.

In a statement, the team says: "In common with most heritage organisations, the SVR has been profoundly affected by changes in the financial climate caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, post-Brexit supply chain issues, and the cost-of-living crisis.

"We've seen rapid rises in the cost of utilities, fuel including coal and diesel, and supplies across the board. These have been compounded by staff shortages and a fall in visitor numbers. This has now placed the SVR at serious financial risk.

"We have been as agile as possible in reacting to this fast-changing environment, reviewing and re-planning all aspects of the business, and reducing costs.

"However, it is now crystal clear that the SVR needs an urgent injection of funds, combined with a different way of running the

business in order to survive the coming year and beyond.

"This will enable the organisation to implement longer-term plans, to enable the SVR to adapt to the new economic environment, and for these measures to have an impact."

The railway has already implemented what it describes as 'a raft of stringent cost-saving measures'. A round of compulsory redundancies, which came on top of previous recruitment freezes and not replacing staff who had left, has reduced the annual salary bill by £770,000.

"We are only making purchases that are absolutely essential. We are looking everywhere we can to save money," the team said.

"As well as passenger revenue, we are vigorously pursuing other income streams; for example, contract work from outside customers, which brings in much-needed additional cash.

"In other words, we are using every single tactic in the book to cut costs and increase revenue in 2023. These steps will all help, but our forecast shows that by themselves, they are not going to be enough to ensure the SVR survives through this next, very difficult year and into 2024."

Last year, the SVR's passenger numbers were almost a third lower than pre-pandemic levels, while running costs have spiralled. In the past year alone, the electricity bill has doubled and the company expects to pay £462,000 in 2023.

"All these things have been entirely outside our control, but what they mean is that the railway has been severely financially weakened.

"We cannot escape this brutal and unwelcome fact."

This is not the first time in recent years that the SVR has faced financial challenges.

It was awarded nearly £1 million through the Government's Culture Recovery Fund at the end of 2021, following reported losses of about £500,000 a month during lockdown.

Jonathan Dunster, the railway's interim managing director, said the SVR had traditionally relied on having a cash reserve to help it through the winter months when it was closed to the public.

But he said that fund had been eaten away significantly over the past few years. "We would not be making this appeal if it wasn't completely necessary for the survival of the railway," he said.

Opened in 1862 after a nine-year building project, the Severn Valley Railway was originally part of the much longer Shrewsbury to Hartlebury line.

All public passenger services stopped in 1963, but the Severn Valley Railway Society saved the line after negotiations with British Railways, who agreed to sell it for £25,000 in early 1966.

• Details about how to support the SVR's survival fund can be found online via the website at svr.co.uk

Mouthwatering lunch

Two inspirational global business professionals compared notes on climbing to the top of their industries at a Shropshire business lunch.

The Moreton Hall Business Lunch in Oswestry began with a presentation from the top team at Moreton Enterprises, the school's student-run business.

It was followed by a keynote address from Victoria Price, an EY tax partner, who is head of private tax for Europe, the Middle East, India, and Africa, and the UK and Ireland private tax leader.

She recalled her own inspiring journey as a teenage mum who studied for the final weeks of her A Levels with her baby asleep in the corner of the classroom.

Victoria abandoned her medical career plans and chose accountancy, qualifying at the top of her national cohort. Determined to succeed both professionally and as a parent, she persuaded her first boss to allow her to do a full week's work over four days, allowing her time with her baby.

Victoria then welcomed to the stage the leading Manchester businessman Tayyab Akhlaq, director of a number of businesses including 'Public Desire', one of the fastest growing online retail businesses in the UK.

As a global online footwear brand selling to fashion-conscious young women, Tayyab provided insights into the role of social media in growing his business.

Tayyab's followers and customers include A-list celebrities, although he admitted that when Kylie Jenner first got in touch he thought it was a spoof!

The Business Lunch concluded with a Q&A session.

Tania McGee, from solicitors Lanyon Bowdler, said: "Victoria and Tayyab were uplifting and inspirational with fantastic tips to take away."

Rob Hudson from Handelsbanken added: "Although Victoria and Tayyab were not household names that I had heard of before, their talks were some of the best I have heard and very inspirational. They both invited us to look at life differently and to look at it their way."



Guest speakers and students at Moreton Hall Business Lunch



Victoria Price and Tayyab Akhlaq in conversation

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Discover the new owners

Inside the Secret Hills Discovery Centre, with a replica skeleton of the fully-grown male Shropshire mammoth that was found less than 20 miles away, are: David Evans, Grant Wilson, David Mills, Tammy Shurmer and Richard Woolley

The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre in Craven Arms has new owners.

A deal has been struck to transfer the ownership of the site, just off the A49, and lease 12 hectares of surrounding meadow land to a local charity.

The centre has been owned by housing provider Connexus since 2014 and managed by local charity Grow Cook Learn. The new deal sees outright ownership transferred free of charge to the charity, and 12 hectares of local meadow gifted to Craven Arms Town Council, which will lease it to Grow Cook Learn.

It is hoped the move will allow the new owners to apply for additional funding to deliver a range of ambitious projects in and around the centre, which will benefit the community and local wildlife.

Grant Wilson, manager at the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre, said: "Acquiring the freehold and a long lease on the meadows is a really positive step for our charity."

"We have big plans for the future which we hope will help the centre to grow and attract more visitors. These include starting a regenerative horticulture project, creating a wetland area in part of our meadows, and refurbishing the shop and café areas."

"Our vision is for the centre to be something which the local community can take pride in, and which becomes a well-loved place to discover nature, relax with friends or learn about our food, history and the landscape."

The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre gives visitors chance to learn about the famous mammoths discovered nearby in the 1980s by exploring the Shropshire Hills Through Time exhibition

Richard Woolley, chief executive at Connexus, said: "The gifting of the meadows to Craven Arms Town Council will ensure that it is in public ownership again and we're delighted Grow Cook Learn have come to an agreement with the town council to manage the area. We wish the Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre the very best for the future."

Chair of Grow Cook Learn charity trustees, Charles Edwards, said the centre had been on an amazing journey since April 2014 and said he was proud of the staff, volunteers, charity members, centre users and others who had helped them along the way.

Chair of Craven Arms Town Council, David Mills, said: "The transfer of the meadow land from the council on a 99-year lease will benefit the local community and visitors to the area, and ensure the land remains as open countryside."

The Shropshire Hills Discovery Centre gives visitors chance to learn about the famous mammoths discovered nearby in the 1980s by exploring the Shropshire Hills Through Time exhibition or enjoy a variety of walks through the surrounding meadows.

Grow Cook Learn is a registered charity connecting people to the food and landscape of the Shropshire Hills, providing opportunities to local people and visitors to learn and discover.

Connexus is a community-focused rural housing group with over 10,500 homes across Shropshire and Herefordshire. Its focus is to provide good-quality affordable housing through the development of new affordable homes, maintenance and improvement of existing homes, and the development of associated services to enhance the lives of its customers and communities.





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WINNER

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SHOWCASE | CONFERENCE | AWARDS



Distillery welcomed to site

The team behind the award-winning Ludlow Gin have thrown open the doors of a brand-new Ludlow Distillery.

Visitors can see, taste, and experience the business behind the scenes, as well as creating their own unique gin in the Ludlow Gin School.

The distillery is next to Ludlow Farmshop, just off the A49.

Founder Shaun Ward said: "I've always loved creating things. At New Year 2017, I had a dream to create a range of beautiful, hand-crafted gins, traditionally-made in handmade copper stills.

"Within weeks we'd created the curiously smooth Ludlow Gin in our kitchen with a tiny still, and by September 2018, we'd officially launched Ludlow Gin at Ludlow Food Festival.

"September 2023 marks our fifth birthday – over the last five years our team has grown to include Ludlow Whisky, as well as Ludlow Fine Wines, formerly John Villar Wines.

"We're really excited to launch our new distillery at Ludlow Farmshop. We've finally realised our dream to bring something new and exciting to the famous food scene of Ludlow.

Jon Edwards, managing director of Ludlow Farmshop, said: "We are delighted to welcome Ludlow Distillery to our site.

"They are a business we have worked closely



The Ludlow Rose Gin was inspired by its involvement as a sponsor for the RHS Malvern Spring Show

with for many years, and we feel they are the perfect fit to our destination. We are passionate about keeping the fantastic Ludlow food and drinks reputation alive, and having Ludlow Distillery onboard really adds to this."

The distillery also created a special limited edition gin to mark the King's Coronation.

The Ludlow Rose Gin was inspired by its involvement as a sponsor for the RHS Malvern Spring Show, and a visit, a few years ago, to the gardens of Highgrove, the private home of King Charles.

Meanwhile, the Three Tuns brewery in

Bishop's Castle has won a bronze award in the Cask Session Dark Beer category at the SIBA National Beer Awards 2023 for its Stout.

Commercial director Joshua Ferris, said: "I'm thrilled that after an award-winning 2022, Stout has continued to gain recognition.

"Whilst Stout has been a firm favourite with customers for a number of years, it is nonetheless a privilege to receive acknowledgements such as these.

"It goes a long way in justifying the huge investments we have made to our processes, plant and machinery in recent years."

Tender provides the perfect start

Telford & Wrekin Council has launched a tender opportunity for the 'Start Up Telford' scheme – the first of a new business support programme being delivered by the council's inward investment office.

Funded through the council's £5.8 million UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the programmes are designed to help 600 businesses over the next two years.

The tender opportunity seeks a partner to deliver the 'Start Up Telford' programme from July 2023 to March 2025.

The scheme will provide fully-funded start-up support – benefiting 150 individuals across the borough and giving them the chance to grow their business from scratch.

The council says 'Start Up Telford'

will build on previous successful council business support schemes, which have provided individuals with a great business idea and the skills, confidence, knowledge and awareness to plan for and launch a business or social enterprise.

The successful partner will provide an end-to-end service, from dealing with enquiries and initial signposting, to providing a high-quality tailored package of support all the way through to aftercare for individuals who participate.

The deadline for the Start Up Telford tender is noon on Tuesday May 16.

Katherine Kynaston, Telford & Wrekin Council's director for housing, employment & infrastructure, said: "Invest Telford is our inward investment and business support service which aims to attract new businesses to the area and provide support to existing ones.

"We want to make it easier for businesses to access the information and additional help they need to invest and grow in our area."

Build a new relationship

CQS Solutions, based at Telford Innovation Campus, has linked up with a leading software company to embrace digital innovation which is revolutionising the construction industry.

Owner Tim Lloyd said the Construction Industry Training Board has been calling on the industry to focus on digital transformation to bring the latest technology to the sector.

"Companies of all shapes and sizes face escalating costs in raw materials coupled with shipping delays and staff shortages.

"We have teamed up with Masterbill Micro Systems to ensure that we are doing our very best to make sure we are at the forefront of our industry and CQS is fit for the future."

The integrated CAD and BIM measurement software can be used anywhere where there is an internet connection – at a client's office, on site or at home.

Tim said use of the software would put the company 'at the forefront of the digital revolution'.



Tim Lloyd of CQS Solutions

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33 THE BULLRING, LUDLOW, SHROPSHIRE SY8 1AA

TO LET - £33,500 PER ANNUM (EXCLUSIVE)

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- Total Net Sales Area on ground floor 1,293 ft sq (120.1 m sq)
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- Comprises lockup shop unit with glazed shop frontage
- Grade II Listed and benefits from servicing at rear

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Reech managing director, Rob Hughes, speaking at Visit Shropshire's Tourism Expo

Reech's top marketing tips

Rob Hughes, managing director of full-service marketing agency Reech, spoke at Visit Shropshire's Tourism Expo, discussing the top marketing foundations for businesses to get right in 2023.

For those who couldn't join the team on the day, here's a run-down of Reech's starter for ten for investing your marketing budget wisely (especially when the economy's tough).

1) Brand consistency wins

Consumers are 6 times more likely to purchase from a business with a purpose, so it's important that you define your business's mission, vision and values, no matter how big or small you are. Spend time figuring out your brand's personality, why a customer should come to you above everyone else and what you stand for. Then, you can take your superpower and make sure it comes across consistently across every touchpoint.

2) Reflect your customer experience on your website

The majority of people who visit your website won't buy anything. You need to treat your website the same as your shop window or reception, making it clear, easy to navigate and impactful. Create content to help people find you, make it memorable and allow visitors to get in touch with you easily.

3) Invest in quality media

Businesses shouldn't compromise when it comes to professional and considered photography, animation and video. Do your products and services justice with media that showcases your personality, your people and your culture. Stock won't cut it when it comes to standing out from the competition.

4) Powerful personalisation

Research shows that 80% of consumers are more likely to buy from a company that provides a tailored experience. By treating customers as individuals, targeting them with relevant marketing messages and using channels like email to provide bespoke recommendations, you can increase conversion and loyalty.

5) Remember review marketing

Who doesn't check the reviews before making a booking these days?

Keep your review profiles up to date, respond to reviews quickly and politely and request new reviews via channels like email marketing. You want to ensure your reviews reflect your customer experience.

6) Build influencer relationships

Customers are more likely to buy from brands they trust and, by identifying influencers in your market or local area, you can build credibility. Influencers could be press, business owners or celebrities – anyone who has a trusted voice in your field. By reaching out, starting a conversation and nurturing advocates of your business, you can see quality and sustainable growth.

7) Repurpose user generated content

Let your customers do the talking! User generated content is considered the most authentic form of marketing content so, to build trust in your brand, reshare the great photos and videos that your customers are creating about your business. Don't forget to tag your customers to increase your reach!

8) Trial paid advertising

Paid advertising generates 150% as many conversions from clicks in comparison to organic search results so why not trial advertising on channels like Google, Bing, Meta, LinkedIn and Pinterest. Reach your target audience, scale budgets up and down and see instant results. Plus, you can start small and grow what's working, giving you control and flexibility.

9) Don't forget shareable offline moments

Take your amazing offline experience online and create moments or spaces that your customers will want to share. Have an amazing installation in your store, hosting an event or having an exciting celebration in the office? Tell your unique brand story online.

10) Explore email automation

With email automation you can create a complete communication journey, personalising content, sending timely campaigns and reducing manual tasks. Both easy to manage and automate, build email flows to generate sales and share the right messages, at the right time.

● **Want to discuss your marketing for 2023? Get in touch with Reech's team of experts at reech.agency.**

Breath of fresh air for Brasserie

An empty building in the centre of Bridgnorth is being brought back to life as a co-working centre.

Business support specialist Good2Great is behind the plans for the former Brasserie restaurant in the High Street.

The premises is to be re-named The Printworks, as The Bridgnorth Printing Company traded there throughout the last century.

It will have 'hot desks' to rent by the day, meeting rooms and three sound-proofed 'zoom booths', as well as permanent office space for local businesses.

Rental will be available on a short or long term basis, by the hour, day or month.

"The Brasserie closed over three years ago and it has been empty since. We had the idea to convert it after seeing similar successful spaces in Oswestry and Shrewsbury," said Johnny Themans of Good2Great.

He applied for a grant from Shropshire Council and the project was awarded a grant through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, which is part

of the levelling up agenda for the UK. "Our work with small and medium-sized enterprises has shown that there is a real need from entrepreneurs for flexible office space, especially post-pandemic.

"There are also more new businesses than ever starting in the county, as well as people working from home with 'hybrid working', so we think this will fill a real gap."

Johnny added: "It will be perfect for people working from home, who want to find a flexible, professional workspace as an alternative to the dining room table.

"It will also attract local businesses looking to work alongside other companies in a professional and social environment, and firms looking for well-appointed and compact office accommodation that they can rent on a flexible basis."

Local tradespeople are being employed in the refurbishment, which should be completed by the end of May.

Graeme Manton, estate manager of Apley Estate, which owns the premises, said: "We are really excited to be able to support this project as it will bring life back into the building and support so many local businesses."



Johnny Themans of Good2Great with Tracy Woods from the economic growth team at Shropshire Council outside The Printworks

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Acquisition of modular specialist

Modular building market leader Portakabin has acquired Shropshire-based Darwin Group in a move which the new owners say will offer ‘significant benefits to healthcare providers across the UK’.

Darwin Group, which specialises in modular buildings for the healthcare sector, employs around 200 staff and had a turnover of around £80 million last year.

Portakabin says the deal means it will now be able to offer healthcare providers both temporary and permanent building solutions to cover all future clinical and non-clinical requirements.

“This union between two of the most respected offsite modular builders in their respective fields is an exciting development for both Portakabin and Darwin Group,” said Portakabin chief executive Dan Ibbetson.

“We are both passionate about providing the healthcare sector with the most comprehensive range of market-leading products and services, particularly given the considerable pressures on our healthcare professionals today.”

Richard Pierce, chief executive of Darwin



An example of one of Darwin Group’s projects

Group, added: “An incredibly strong culture runs through the DNA of both businesses, and our commitment to delivering quality healthcare facilities allowing clinicians to enhance patient care makes this a natural fit.

“We are truly excited to start working together to continue delivering outstanding buildings for our customers.”

Portakabin was advised by Stephens, Addleshaw Goddard and KPMG, and Darwin Group was advised by Deloitte, DLA Piper and PwC.

Darren Boocock, corporate finance partner at Deloitte, said: “We have worked closely with the Darwin team over the last two and a half years, helping them raise the funding to support their expansion ambitions

and assisting them as they built out the management team and explored strategic opportunities for the business.

“Portakabin is a natural home for the team; both businesses share the same cultural values and passion to provide exceptional solutions to the healthcare sector. We wish Richard, Jim and the rest of the management team all the best as they pursue the next stage of their exciting journey.”

Andy Moody, corporate finance director, added: “This deal is a real success story for the Midlands market. Darwin is an exceptional Midlands business with an unrivalled reputation in healthcare. The transaction with Portakabin will enable them to expand their solutions to the healthcare sector.”

Deal sealed with a smile

Three Shropshire dental practices are under new ownership after being bought by Todays Dental for an undisclosed sum.

The practices, which have a total of 13 surgeries offering dental and skin treatments, are The Dental Spa at Oxon and Winchester House in Coton Hill, and Pontesbury Dental Practice.

The businesses were owned and operated by Christopher Quarmby, Susanne Ellis and Roy Dixon.

Christopher Quarmby said: “It has been a pleasure over 10 years to work with fantastic and dedicated staff in delivering a fantastic level of dental care as we have grown our three practices.

“By putting our staff at the forefront of what we do and investing in their training and support, we have been able to produce a very resilient and motivated team that has served the community so well during the Covid pandemic.

“In looking for a buyer to take our three practices to the next level, we were delighted to find in Todays Dental a group that shared our ethos and passion to invest in our staff and further develop the services that we provide.”

The deal was handled by specialist business property adviser Christie & Co, which described Todays Dental as ‘a fast-growing, new entrant to corporate dentistry with a wealth of dental experience within their senior team’.

Steve Williams, acquisitions director at Todays Dental, added: “The Dental Spa, Pontesbury Dental, and Winchester House match us in their passion for caring about the people within their teams and the patients they see.

“It’s why we’re so excited to be collaborating with the entire team as we build on the fantastic practices they have created, expanding on what they can offer to their patient base.”



Steve Williams, acquisitions director at Todays Dental, said: “The Dental Spa, Pontesbury Dental, and Winchester House (pictured above) match us in their passion for caring about the people within their teams and the patients they see.”

Steve O’Connor at Christie & Co, who handled the sale, said: “It has been a real pleasure to act for Chris, Susanne, and Roy in the sale of their very impressive group.

“There was significant interest in the group from potential purchasers and fierce competition – typical for a group project of this size and quality. The vendors wanted to find a buyer who shared their values and ethos.

“Despite some economic headwinds, the practice sales market remains buoyant, with particularly strong interest from buyers for high-quality practices in urban areas.”



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Aico is bidding to make it a hat-trick of Company of the Year victories



Marketing specialist Reech makes two appearances on the shortlist

Spotlight to shine on county's finest

Oswestry home safety company Aico will be bidding to make it a hat-trick of Company of the Year triumphs in June after once again being shortlisted for the showpiece category of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.

The company, which has won the top prize at the last two events, is up against another former Company of the Year winner, Telford-based Dodd Group, plus two Shrewsbury-based businesses, Shropshire Homes and marketing firm Reech.

The top prize will go to an 'all-round star performer', judged on elements including financial track record, pursuit of excellence, creativity and innovation, leadership and customer service skills, commitment to the community and sustainability, and effective response to economic challenges.

Aico is shortlisted in a total of three categories this year, while there are also multiple nominations for Telford College, Telford-based internet service provider Exascale, another former Shropshire Company of the Year winner, PaveAways, and Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

This year's finalists come from all corners of the county, including Telford, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Bridgnorth, Whitchurch, Shifnal, Bishop's Castle, Ellesmere, Market Drayton, and Knockin.

The awards will be handed out at a glittering Oscars-style event in front of hundreds of guests at Telford's International Centre on Friday June 23.

It looks set to be one of the biggest events in the 23-year history of the awards. There are some tickets still remaining - see shropshirechamberbusinessawards.com for all the details.

Ruth Ross, chief executive of Shropshire Chamber, paid tribute to the 'extraordinary adaptability, innovation and success' of the 2023 finalists.

"Once again, we have been amazed and delighted by the volume and quality of entries, including very strong interest in our new categories. Shortlisting each of them down to a final four was a really tough task for our independent judging panel."

Teams of judges are visiting each of the finalists at their premises



The Shropshire Homes team



Annabel Hemingbrough is shortlisted for Young Business Person



Dodd Group's property care division has already won a big award this year

during May to make their final decision. The competition was open to all businesses with an operational base in the county of Shropshire or Telford & Wrekin - whether or not they are a Chamber member.

It includes the return of long-running categories including Company of the Year, Best New Business, and Best Small Business.

There are also new-look categories this year for Global Business recognising international trade, Commitment To People, and a return of the Business In The Community award.

"The Shropshire Chamber Business Awards are firmly established among the largest events of their kind in the country, with a history stretching back more than 20 years," said Ruth Ross.

Launched in 2001, the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards have attracted audiences of more than 900 people for the black-tie celebration

"We know that Shropshire businesses are going to be facing significant challenges over the coming year, so it's more important than ever to celebrate and recognise the success stories of our incredible collection of 2023 finalists."

The John Clayton Award, named after a previous Shropshire Chamber president, will also be presented on the night to someone who is judged by the Chamber board to have made an outstanding contribution to the local business community.

Launched in 2001, the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards have attracted audiences of more than 900 people for the black-tie celebration and become one of the largest and longest running business awards events in the UK.

Previous company of the year winners include Bridgnorth-based Grainger & Worrall and Whitchurch-based Grocontinental - which have both won the title twice - plus McConnell of Ludlow, Pave Aways of Knockin, Salop Leisure of Shrewsbury, CJ Wildbird Foods of Upton Magna, and Telford-based companies Reconomy, Lyreco, and Smartwater.



An artist's impression of the new dining hall extension at Burton Borough School in Newport being built by Pave Aways



Telford International Centre will host the awards night on June 23

THE 2023 FINALISTS

COMPANY OF THE YEAR:

- Aico, Oswestry
- Dodd Group, Telford
- Reech, Shrewsbury
- Shropshire Homes, Shrewsbury

BEST NEW BUSINESS:

- 8 Financial Planning, Telford
- Charlie The Vet, Shrewsbury
- Coton Meadows Pet & Equine Crematorium, Whitchurch
- Film Shropshire, Shrewsbury

BEST SMALL BUSINESS:

- Chrisbeon Office Supplies, Telford
- Exascale, Telford
- Mutneys Professional Pet Care, Market Drayton
- The Shropshire Distillery, Ellesmere

COMMITMENT TO PEOPLE:

- Assured Vehicle Rental, Telford
- Liquid Fleet, Telford
- Rotherwood Healthcare, Shrewsbury
- Shrewsbury Colleges Group

GLOBAL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR:

- Aviramp, Telford
- Jesmonite, Bishop's Castle
- Seymour Manufacturing International, Telford
- Telecom Infrastructure Partners, Shrewsbury

COMMUNITY CHAMPION - BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY:

- Aico, Oswestry
- Azets, Shrewsbury
- Bright Star Boxing, Shifnal
- Pave Aways, Knockin

EXCELLENCE IN MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING:

- CEL Group, Telford
- Fabdec, Ellesmere
- Northwood Hygiene Products, Telford
- SDE Technology, Shrewsbury

WELLBEING IN THE WORKPLACE:

- Dyke Yaxley, Shrewsbury and Telford
- Housing Plus Group, Shrewsbury
- Iconsys, Telford
- Pave Aways, Knockin

THE TRAILBLAZER - INNOVATION AWARD:

- Aico, Oswestry
- Exascale, Telford
- Start Tech, Shrewsbury
- Telford College

THE ECO AWARD:

- Shrewsbury Colleges Group
- Staysafe PPE, Bridgnorth
- The Little Green Pantry, Telford
- Tradology UK, Telford

YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON:

- Aleesha Skett - The HR Dept Shropshire
- Annabel Hemingbrough - Telford College/Purple Frog Systems
- Dylan Purewal - Berrys
- Faye Hudson - Reech



Force to be reckoned with

Manufacturing has begun on the British Army's Boxer mechanised infantry vehicles at Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land, in Telford.

The last time a platform started manufacture at the Hadley Castle Works site was in 1986 with the production of the Warrior fleet, which is still in service today.

Colin McClean, RBSL managing director, said: "RBSL is proud to be regenerating this armoured vehicle capability and contributing to the Land Industry Strategy, marking a new chapter in vehicle manufacture for the UK defence industry."

"Not only will the delivery of Boxer provide the British Army with a complete step-change in capability to meet their MIV requirement, it will also protect vital engineering and manufacturing skills as a sovereign capability to the UK, and we are incredibly proud to be a part of this milestone, alongside our partners in WFEL."

The Boxer programme will deliver more than 600 vehicles to the British Army. Production has been subcontracted equally between RBSL and Stockport-based WFEL. Both companies will undertake fabrication of the armoured vehicle structures, together with the assembly, integration and test of the complete vehicles at their respective facilities. Current orders are delivered on one shift, with additional capacity for further orders and export.

RBSL has invested £40 million in its 29-acre site, transforming it into a world-class manufacturing facility so that the business can deliver next generation military vehicles and essential in-service support.

This includes the installation of system integration labs which will support both Boxer and the British Army's Challenger 3 Main Battle Tanks through life with updates and upgrades; new cranes, welding equipment and surface treatment facilities; and new test facilities, including a 1.6km test track and a turret test rig – the largest in Europe.

Mr McClean added: "Over the last two-and-a-half years, our employees have been working



Managing director Colin McClean (right) with apprentice Billy Grew

hard to prepare us for 'M Day' – Manufacturing Day.

"We have developed new manufacturing capabilities, state-of-the-art facilities, tools, and IT infrastructure, and we have invested heavily in our people through recruitment, specialist training and development, ensuring we have the right, high-performing team to deliver our future."

"RBSL has a proud heritage of working with the British Army and remains the Design Authority for almost all the UK's in-service

armoured vehicle fleet. The Boxer MIV Programme builds on that relationship and marks a new chapter in vehicle manufacture for the UK defence industry. This is truly an exciting time to be part of RBSL.

"We are all looking forward to seeing Boxer vehicles running down the production lines and then around the test track, whilst we continue to work closely with our industry partners and customers to deliver this much-needed capability to British soldiers and their allies. Together we are one team, with one mission."

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A word to the wise...



Hollie Whittles

What's in a word? Now there's a question – especially when the word I have in mind is 'innovation'.

For many people, this term evokes images of boffins in lab coats doing things that most of us fear or fail to fathom.

However, in a business context, I believe that innovation has much more humble origins. It is simply about doing things differently in order to improve. This might be, for example, improving existing business processes to 'do more with less'; improving the work environment to attract the right people with the right skills; or developing new and improved products and services to win new customers and more orders.

The annoying thing is, many small businesses are missing out on the financial and expert support available for innovation, because they don't realise that a lot of what they are already doing – pretty much any beneficial changes to business practices, products and services – is within scope.

So how do we break through this innovation mindset?

Well, we could start at first principles by looking at the accepted definition of innovation. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, that would be 'the introduction of new things, ideas or ways of doing something'. Not a white coat in sight for me. Just the notion of doing something, almost anything, differently from the way it was done before.

However, to my mind innovation is not an end in itself. It has to deliver something worthwhile to a business, its customers, its workforce, a wider community or society as a whole.

I prefer therefore, to think less about 'innovation' and more about 'modernisation' and 'diversification'. After all, who in their right mind would not want to modernise, by taking advantage of the most up to date tools and techniques available to run their affairs? Who would want to pass up opportunities to diversify by developing profitable new products and services to grow their business?

It might be dismissed as semantics, but I believe that policy-makers need to articulate a more accessible definition of 'innovation'. There should be a much stronger focus on 'day to day' activities that are 'new to firm' – as well as those that are 'ground-breaking' initiatives that are 'new to market'.

Because then progress can be supported and made easier – whether through baby steps or paradigm shifts. Normally of course, it's somewhere in between these two extremes – because progress tends to be driven by day-to-day need and demand, rather than futuristic flights of sci-fi fantasy.

We should embrace progress – sensibly, not fear it. Even when, as is the case for things like artificial intelligence such as ChatGPT, there are doom-mongers putting up 'do not go

there' signs. On that point, does anyone else remember the concerns that computers and robotics would render us all unemployed and worthless by the new Millennium? That didn't turn out quite so bad after all, did it?

As far as I am concerned, the machines are nowhere near the point of taking over. Creative, intuitive thought is a human trait that can be supported by new technology, not replaced by it.

So, for innovation – or modernisation and diversification – to happen on any level, businesses need the right people with the right skills and aptitude to develop and deliver change.

That's why I believe that more should be made of 'T Levels', apprenticeships, and the innate skills and experience of our more senior workforce. In addition, the Local Skills Improvement Partnerships are coming to the end of their initial data gathering and viewpoint analysis.

Their recommendations to Government for local skills support will play a key role in unlocking the potential of our people, businesses, and places in the coming months and years.

Allegedly, the genius that was Einstein said that the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results. To improve, do better and move forward, businesses have to modernise and diversify. It's that simple!

To my mind innovation is not an end in itself. It has to deliver something worthwhile to a business, its customers, its workforce, a wider community or society as a whole

Hollie Whittles is a Telford-based businesswoman who is national policy champion for the Federation of Small Businesses

Keeping the economy healthy

An area of Shrewsbury town centre is bucking the national trend and celebrating being fully-let by a string of thriving independent businesses.

St Mary's Street and Dogpole links the Castle Quarter of the town to Wyle Cop, and the latest arrival means every unit on the street is now fully-occupied.

Seb Slater, executive director of Shrewsbury BID, said: "This is really positive news, despite the challenges of the present economic climate, and highlights the importance and popularity of independent businesses here in Shrewsbury."

"It's not just new businesses that should be celebrated, and it is worth highlighting that others have stood the test of time. Teestar, for example, at the bottom of Dogpole, has been there since 1976 and is one of Shrewsbury's longest-running businesses."

New arrivals Spires Goldsmiths and the Wellness Atelier have both opened this year, the former Darwin's Kitchen unit has been taken on by Shrewsbury Optometry, Cromwell's has been refurbished under a new owner, and Kashmir and Silk relocated to Dogpole from The Parade last year.

Meanwhile, Drapers Hall was recently profiled in The Guardian's top 10 of the best new hotels in Britain, which placed the hotel and restaurant as one of the picks of recent openings and revamps in the UK.

Melissa Jane, of the Wellness Atelier, said: "We are extremely excited to have made the move. It is a particularly vibrant part of the town and it's nice to think that we are in an area so popular with other independent businesses."

"Variety is important, and it is easy to understand why our street is also so popular with tourists and local shoppers – there are so many



James Austin and Melissa Jane are delighted to be part of a thriving independent trading community different types of businesses to explore, a real eclectic mix with something to suit everyone."

James Austin, of Number 8 in St Mary's Street, said: "Since opening in 2015, our business has gone from strength to strength. It is great to see St Mary's Street and Dogpole full of independent shops, restaurants and pubs."

"This part of Shrewsbury town centre is a true test of how the local community and tourists keep the town's economy healthy, even after pressing times over the last couple of years."

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."

Growing rapidly

Packaging specialist Sirane has been named as one of the fastest growing companies in the region.

The Telford-based firm is one of seven West Midlands firms to make it into the top 100 of the latest UK Growth Index. It features as number 87 in the list with a compound growth of 54%.

Sirane has three bases in Telford, and was founded 20 years ago with the aim of 'providing a new pace of innovation and level of service to the packaging industry'.

Now in its second year, the Growth Index is described as the definitive independent league table of the UK companies with the fastest growing sales.

It was created to celebrate the companies that have supercharged growth and the leaders that have inspired and driven it.

Companies are ranked by compound annual growth rate in sales over their last two financial accounting years.

Andy Higginson, advisory chair of the Growth Index, chair of JD Sports and former chair of Morrisons, said: "The inaugural Growth Index 2022 showcased 100 exceptional companies. The 2023 cohort is equally impressive with a small number returning to the list, with leisure and hospitality debuting, and retail thriving.

"Generation X companies are doing remarkable, innovative things and many of them are consciously becoming a force for good. I'm glad to be involved in this effort to celebrate and champion their much-needed contribution to our economy and society."

Earlier this year, Sirane became the first company in the UK – and one of only three worldwide – to take delivery of the newly-released HP Indigo 200k Digital Press.

The digital press – offering short-runs, unlimited unique designs, increased productivity and energy efficiency – is set to revolutionise the company's printing capabilities on both flexibles and board.



Kirty Parekh, the owner of Sires Master Goldsmiths, in his new premises

Jeweller joins creative hub

An independent jeweller has opened for business in the heart of Shrewsbury town centre. Sires Master Goldsmiths, owned by Kirty Parekh, has opened at 16 St Mary's Street.

He specialises in hand-engraved initial and family crest signet rings, exclusive diamond and gem jewellery, and designing and remodelling once-loved jewellery.

Having studied precious metals and gemstones at Birmingham's prestigious School of Jewellery, Mr Parekh said: "We are really enjoying Shrewsbury. We could have easily opened the business in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter, but Shrewsbury is a creative hub and I think people appreciate our art and craft."

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Home sweet home
for creative people

A Shropshire organisation which provides a unique wellbeing space for creative people has secured funding from a national housebuilder.

The ArtShack, based in Berwick Wharf, has received the donation from Persimmon Homes West Midlands.

Established in 2017, the organisation offers a space where participants can develop their artistic ability in a creative, non-judgmental and friendly atmosphere.

Founder Maggie Allmark said: "Funding like this helps us to stay open during these challenging times. The rising cost of electricity, logs for heating, plus materials and equipment means that we would struggle to continue to support our creative community. It helps us to continue to do what we do – to use creativity as a holistic therapy and social prescription, and for this we are very grateful."

David Greengrass, sales director at Persimmon Homes West Midlands said: "ArtShack provides an outlet for people to explore their creative side at the same time as providing a safe environment for people's mental wellbeing. I am delighted we have been able to support them to enable them to continue to offer this important service."

Award for Beth

Solicitor Beth Heath is officially the best in her field after winning a major national award.

Beth, of Lanyon Bowdler, was named Clinical Negligence Lawyer of the Year at the Personal Injury Awards, which recognise the excellence of law firms and individuals in the personal injury and medical negligence sectors all over the UK.

Judges said: "The winner of this award is a department head and rising talent in clinical negligence practice, achieving big things in a short space of time. They manage a large team across multiple offices that continues to rank highly."

"They are renowned for a thorough and organised approach, and for their caring and compassionate attitude."

Brian Evans, managing partner at Lanyon Bowdler, said Beth's award was richly deserved and a testament to the strength and commitment of the whole clinical negligence team.

He said: "Our congratulations go to Beth on a great win against some stiff competition, including the chief assessor of the Law Society's Clinical Negligence Panel, and the head of medical negligence from Slater & Gordon's London office. This is a brilliant achievement and is well deserved."

"I know Beth would say that she could not have won this award without the support of her

team, so without wishing to detract from Beth's stellar personal achievement, everyone in the team is a winner for the support they give which enables Beth and our other clinical negligence partners and senior lawyers to do what they do."

Beth has been a leading voice dealing with cases involving the maternity services scandal at Shrewsbury and Telford hospitals.

She said: "Being named as Clinical Negligence Lawyer of the Year is a major honour, which I hope will give our clients even more reassurance that Lanyon Bowdler can be trusted with such sensitive cases."

"Clinical negligence cases, particularly ones involving maternity services, are understandably distressing and we always take care to support our clients during the process."

"The motivation behind all cases is a desire to get answers to what went wrong and to help bring about improvements so the same mistakes are not made again. That will always remain our priority."



Beth Heath from Lanyon Bowdler

It's time to hang up
old telecoms tech

Joe Newton



As you may have heard, Openreach announced a nationwide switch-off of traditional telephone lines.

This upgrade involves the disconnection of both Analogue and ISDN lines, which will also affect various phone systems, broadband services, fax, point-of-sale terminals, and more. It's crucial to review your options and start putting plans in place ready for the switch-off. We are here to assist you with this upcoming network upgrade.

There are many benefits associated with upgrading to VoIP from ISDN so the sooner you transition over, the sooner you can start taking advantage of new features and technology. These benefits include:

- Cost savings: Using the internet to transmit calls, VoIP is typically less expensive than using traditional phone lines. VoIP also allows for free or low-cost long-distance and international calling.
- Scalability: It can easily grow with your business. You can add or remove lines as needed, making it easy to scale up or down depending on your business's needs.
- Advanced features: Access a range of advanced features that are not available with most telephone systems that use ISDN.

So which system is right for your business? As an independent provider we work with several well-known brands including 8x8, Wildix, Avaya and Gamma. We are experienced in designing, implementing and supporting each system and can work with you to identify the best fit.

We're not tied to any particular manufacturer or supplier. This means that we can provide you with impartial advice. We'll work with you to understand your business needs and provide you with a solution that delivers.

On-premise or cloud? Many providers will force you down their preferred route, but this isn't a one size fits all decision. For some customers, scalability and the ability to work



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

from any location means that cloud is the best option for them. For other customers such as hotels and schools with a large number of extensions relative to the amount of calls made, a CAPEX purchase is far more cost effective. We have equal expertise with both models, and prefer to be led by our customer's needs and preferences when advising which is more appropriate.

Changing systems can be a daunting task, but we are here to ensure a smooth transition.

We would like to invite you to learn more about our product portfolio and can provide you with a demo of these services, as well as answer any questions you may have. If you're not quite ready to upgrade, it's still worth putting plans in place so that you can understand the options available and schedule in time for installation

Contact Connexis today for a comprehensive telephony review – 01952 528000 or sales@connexis.co.uk



Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford

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High-flyers

Shropshire celebrated a hat-trick of successes at this year’s Federation of Small Businesses regional awards.

RAF Cosford aerospace museum hosted the West Midlands finals, where the locally-based winners spoke of being ‘stunned, speechless, honoured and delighted’ with their success on home soil.

Bridgnorth-based Good2Great won the Service Excellence award, Madeley’s First Aid Plus from Much Wenlock was crowned Start-Up Business of the Year, and Telford’s Bethany Tomlinson of Lyfbar was named Young Entrepreneur of the Year.

The local connections didn’t end there, however, with many other Shropshire companies shortlisted, and Global Freight Services of Telford being one of the competition’s sponsors once again this year.

The regional winners now go forward to represent the West Midlands at the national FSB finals in May.

The awards recognise the ambitions and achievements of sole traders, self-employed, micro and small businesses – whether or not they are FSB members.

Madeley’s delivers Ofqual-regulated physical first aid and mental health first aid courses to companies across a range of sectors, as well as working with adults with learning disabilities, schools, clubs and children with neurodiversity.

Louise Madeley, who had a 25-year career in acute nursing and gained a postgraduate degree in neuroscience in 2001, said she was ‘still stunned and delighted’ by the success.

“To come home with a winner’s trophy for the West Midlands takes a little getting used to.

“I left the NHS to start up on my own and do physical and mental health first-aid training. If there’s one thing that’s needed at the moment, it’s a lot more mental health first-aid training to start getting people to have conversations to help each other.”

Most recently, Louise has worked as manager of a medical centre, and teacher of sexual health, physical and mental health first aid at a Shropshire independent school, teaching first aid to secondary age school children.

Telford’s Bethany Tomlinson was unable to attend the ceremony due to work commitments, and her Young Entrepreneur of the Year award was collected on her behalf by FSB national policy champion Hollie Whittles.

Hollie, director of Telford-based digital companies FraggelWorks and Purple Frog Systems, said: “I love this award for the young entrepreneur because, as a business owner, that’s what I am looking for – young people with those creative skills. Young people are the future of our businesses and it’s good to create those pathways into business.”



RAF Cosford aerospace museum hosted the West Midlands finals of the FSB Small Business awards



Louise Madeley said she was ‘still stunned’ to have won the regional title



Delighted – the Lyfbar duo with their award

industry is challenging, and time is always a precious commodity. However, this award has given us the motivation to keep pushing forward and striving for excellence in everything we do.”

Bridgnorth business Good2Great, which won the Service Excellence Award, is this year marking a decade of supporting start-ups. Founders Johnny and Sally Themans have helped 1,000 new businesses.

Collecting the award, Sally said: “For me, the heart of a community is having good thriving businesses. We work in the community with lots of businesses and some of the start-ups we have helped are also here today, who we are immensely proud of.

“We’re so humbled to have won this – more so because there were so many wonderful folks



All of the West Midlands winners at RAF Cosford



Anton Gunter, right, of Global Freight Services with Intrernational Business regional winner Olpro



Event master of ceremonies Dave Sharpe



The event crew ensured things ran smoothly on the night

there who have been on our programmes and were quite rightly there also as shortlisted or winning entries – or playing an important role with the FSB in the region.”

A number of other Shropshire businesses were shortlisted for awards. MOO and BOOM of Whitchurch were up for Young Entrepreneur, and Lornashouse – also from Whitchurch – was a Family Business finalist.

The Little Green Pantry from Wellington was shortlisted for both Start-Up Business and Sustainability, while ChocTilly of Jackfield was up for Start-Up Business and Micro Business.

Connect Consultancy of Telford was a finalist in the Self-Employed and Freelancer category, ANTA Education of Telford was up for Diversity and Inclusion, and Mutneys Professional Pet



Hollie Whittles collected the award on Bethany Tomlinson’s behalf



Sally Themans of Good2Great collects the Service Excellence award



RAF Cosford Museum provided a dramatic backdrop for this year’s regional finals

Care of Market Drayton was shortlisted as one of the best Larger Small Businesses.

Anton Gunter, managing director of Global Freight Services, said: “It’s so inspiring to listen and meet businesses of the West Midlands who produce, service and keep the economy going with great distinction. Well done for another great show of support.”

FSB development manager for the region, Mike Goodall, added: “This year, despite the many challenges facing them, more small business owners than ever took the opportunity to showcase their successes.

“It was great to see such a strong showing from Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, who fought off fierce competition to get this far.”

The UK finals are being held at the National

Motorcycle Museum in Birmingham on May 18, when 11 category champions will be crowned, along with the overall FSB Small Business of the Year for 2023.

FSB West Midlands regional chair, Sue Tonks, said: “During these challenging times for small businesses, its more vital than ever to celebrate the work they do and the positive contributions they make to their communities.

“Every year we are both amazed and delighted to see the quality and quantity of West Midlands businesses who enter our awards.

“It is further proof – if any was needed – that this region is an exceptional one for innovative, creative and progressive small businesses.”

Will pensions changes entice return to work?

Lee Fellows



One of the stand-out announcements in the Chancellor's Spring Budget – and let's be honest, there were not that many – concerned pension allowances.

Mr Hunt, you may recall, made a number of changes which he said would help lure recently retired over-50s back into the workplace.

Key among these were:

- **Abolition of the lifetime allowance (LTA)**

The removal of the cap to lifetime pension savings after which extra tax was due was possibly the biggest surprise in the Budget – and designed to encourage pension savers not to retire early. The abolition comes into effect in April 2024, but by setting a zero rate for 2023, the Chancellor has effectively introduced it with immediate effect.

It is particularly targeted at senior doctors in the NHS, many of whom have complained that it

was costing them more money to work under the old system than they were earning.

- **Annual allowance changes**

The annual allowance remains – but has increased from £40,000 to £60,000, meaning people can make a much larger annual contribution to their pension funds without a tax penalty. And the amount that those who are already drawing a pension will be allowed to add to their pot without facing a tax charge has also increased from £4,000 a year to £10,000. The minimum tapered annual allowance also increased from £4,000 to £10,000 from April, and was accompanied by a rise in the adjusted income threshold to £260,000.

Now these are clearly important moves and offer a significant opportunity for some who are approaching pension age to put more aside for their retirement – and stay longer in work whilst they do so.

The measures are part of the Government's growth plans to get more people back to work, including early retirees such as those doctors who left for pensions tax reasons. The hope will be that it also incentivises others not to take early retirement in the first place.

But the latest figures suggest that the abolition of the LTA – expected to cost £2.75 billion over the next five years – will affect just one per cent of the population.

Recruitment agencies and HR departments

are unlikely to be overrun in the stampede as a result.

And this is a bit of a double-edged sword. There is some thought that giving a big savings boost to those who are already well off and thinking about retirement is more likely to give them the nudge they need to give up work, sooner rather than later.

Time will tell just how effective the move will be in that regard, but if nothing else the abolition of the LTA has helped simplify a hugely complex system, and should mean that long-term financial planning is a little more straightforward as a result.

Of course, there is also a massive caveat to all these changes.

The Government is just 18 months or so away from the need to call an election, and the Opposition has already said that it would reverse the policy if it wins the next general election. Shadow Chancellor Rachel Reeves says she would rather see a plan targeted specifically at doctors rather than a 'free-for-all for the wealthy few'.

With such uncertainty over the medium-term prospects for both the economy and financial legislation, we would urge everyone to get the best possible advice about how to handle their financial planning.

Nothing in life is ever certain and here at Q, we won't pretend otherwise. But we can offer you the peace of mind which comes from talking to experts before you take some of the most important decisions of your life.

Lee Fellows is a financial planning expert from Q Financial Services

Talk isn't cheap

By Christopher Tennant

ChatGPT is very much the technological talking point of the year so far, making headlines for its realistic, human-like conversational experience.

The prototype – developed by OpenAI, an artificial intelligence research laboratory co-founded by Elon Musk – has been linked with Microsoft in a multi-billion-dollar investment.

It has the power to transform our working lives, performing a range of tasks from writing resumes and suggesting recipes, to helping plan holidays and explaining complex topics.

But how will ChatGPT influence the customer service domain?

ChatGPT can demonstrably save you time, supplement your knowledge on a subject, and provide the heavy lifting for research tasks during customer service outsourcing.

Blair Strachan, from customer service outsourcing experts Kura, says: "We believe the advisor of the future is highly-skilled with the expertise to resolve any complex problems.

"People love the ability to get the information they need, when they need it, using automation. When things go wrong, that's why the highly-trained adviser will play its part, using empathy and knowledge to put the customer's mind at ease."

"Technology will play a crucial part to remove less complex tasks."

ChatGPT can also handle large volumes of repetitive customer service questions, which can enable human customer support to focus on more complex cases. AI tools can respond instantaneously, so users can avoid lengthy queues. Couple that too with ChatGPT's 24/7 availability, where responses can be sent even outside of business hours. Should a query fall outside of a human agent's sphere of knowledge, ChatGPT can provide a handy prompt.



ChatGPT is programmed to detect and analyse sentiment

Customer service teams can expend a lot of energy categorising incoming questions into relevant groups which ChatGPT can do automatically.

But what about that personal touch which is so important to Shropshire businesses?

Perhaps surprisingly, ChatGPT is programmed to detect and analyse sentiment, and can use customer-specific data about their past interactions to generate responses tailored to each individual customer.

That's not to say it is without risks. ChatGPT

is certainly a handy tool, but not without its limitations and shouldn't be considered a complete replacement for human customer service agents.

Arguably the biggest risk to an organisation using ChatGPT in customer services presently is that, as a chatbot, it can provide answers or information that is not actually 100% helpful . . . or even accurate.

And the last thing an organisation needs is to provide a negative, reputation-damaging experience.

It's been reported that ChatGPT could also pose a security risk. Two potential risks, as with any automated chat service, is that it could be manipulated by prospective scammers, and could also leave itself open to possible data breaches.

As the tool is designed to follow the user's commands, this could leave it vulnerable to security risks when used in a business setting. Scammers, for instance, may try and trick it into issuing refunds or providing credit. This could have negative financial implications for your business, or could undermine customer trust.

It is important to note, however, that in its current form, this is not a risk for a business to be particularly concerned about. ChatGPT at present, is just a chatbot, and potential data breaches are only likely to come to the surface should companies choose to implement it as part of their automated customer services – opening the door to the possibility of customers to be lured into a phishing scam where ChatGPT can convincingly impersonate the organisation.

So what do we conclude? While it is certainly in vogue, whether ChatGPT proves to be the grand disruptor of the decade remains to be seen.

Further down the line, if Shropshire organisations choose to use this as part of their automated customer services, there may be issues that arise regarding security and the potential for phishing.

But it would be foolish to ignore its potential benefits for the customer service arena – when used responsibly.



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Graham with the Turtle Doves team at Harlescott

Hand in glove with global market

CARL JONES chats to the boss of an ethical Shropshire fashion brand which is spreading its wings to the other side of the world

It's been a momentous few months for Graham Holbrook. The managing director of Shropshire-based Turtle Doves sees 2023 as the year when the business matures from adolescence to 'really growing up'.

Known for its fingerless gloves using only ethically-sourced materials, Turtle Doves has just been acquired by Refined Brands, a specialist in digitally native natural and sustainable British brands.

In the past few weeks, it has also gone international for the first time, selling into Australia and New Zealand. Over the next three years, the company is looking to double its current £5 million turnover and create many new jobs.

But let's start at the beginning. The origins of Turtle Doves can be traced back to December 2009 when Graham's ex-wife, Kate Holbrook, dreamt up a design for some unique wrist warmers which also doubled up as fingerless gloves.

Having made some for friends, she tested

them at a school fair, and when they started flying off the shelves, she quickly moved to copyright the designs.

Before she knew it, Kate had a growing band of regular customers, and two market stalls in Shrewsbury.

With turnover doubling year-on-year, it was 2011 when the founders realised this was no longer a cottage enterprise, and had the capacity to become much, much bigger. By 2013, it had launched the trading arm of the business, and the following year Turtle Doves moved out of the Holbrook household in Shrewsbury into a commercial unit down the road.

Not long after that, accountant Graham joined the business, on the back of three decades of experience as head of risk at various large companies in the UK, particularly in the retail sector.

Another big turning point came in 2015, when Turtle Doves won a gold medal in the Green Apple Awards, held at The Houses of Parliament. It's an award which had been won the previous year by Marks & Spencer, and brought a huge profile boost to the brand.

Turtle Doves employs an increasing number of ex-Laura Ashley seamstresses, whose jobs disappeared in the 1990s when production



Simone Goward

was moved to the Far East, and the company passionately believes in retaining British craftsmanship. "We will always design and make our products in Britain," it pledges.

It has a factory and headquarters at Lancaster Road, in Harlescott, where around 10% of production takes place, employing 40 staff – but uniquely, the majority of the production is done by people working from their own homes. . . a domestic cottage industry army which now peaks at a further 100 staff during the busiest times.

Turtle Doves products are already stocked in over 300 shops in the UK, and last year it sold over a quarter of a million of its fingerless gloves.

It has two shops in Wyle Cop, one selling Cashmere products and the other selling vintage clothing, which the company says has been a big success since it opened earlier this year.

It's not all been plain sailing, though. Graham Holbrook breaks the Turtle Doves story down into four sections: the beginning, the growth, the difference of opinion which led to a parting of the ways between him and Kate shortly before the pandemic, and the sale of the business – with all the expansion prospects it brings.

So when did the idea of selling the company first materialise? "We probably go back about four years, when I went to an Azets forum on exit and succession planning and ended up talking to a man called Mark Selby, head of their corporate finance unit," Graham says.

"He told me that if I could grow the business to have a £5 million turnover, I would probably start to get people knocking on the door. And that's exactly how it turned out.

"I'd invested a lot of the family money into the business and wanted to get some of it back. I'd also persuaded friends and family to part with some of their own savings to help us on the way, so was keen to make sure they were rewarded too. I also wanted to share the risk. We're a very seasonal and a unique business, and last year presented some cashflow issues when a Dutch bank, owned by Russian oligarchs, was sanctioned."

This also came on the back of a challenging couple of years during Covid, when lockdown prevented the team from getting into the Shrewsbury factory to pack up orders.

"I was keen to look for a financial umbrella so the risk is shared.

"That's exactly how it has turned out. We are already seeing the benefits from the exchange



In the production area with Marie Masefield

of ideas that come from like-minded businesses working together."

In addition to the pandemic, there was another major change to the business in 2020, as co-founder Kate Holbrook walked away.

Graham says: "Kate came up with the idea of the gloves, which are stunning, and my role when I first joined was to try to make sure that the idea met its potential.

"From the very earliest days, I felt it was vital to grow Turtle Doves fast, so that we could achieve scale before someone else came in and copied what we were doing.

"But a difference of opinion began to emerge about how we should approach the future of the business, and things came to a head.

"My view, which only escalated during the pandemic, was that we needed to capitalise on online sales. Why would you not look to grow massively – particularly using Facebook – while people were stuck at home, spending even more time than usual online?

"There is no doubting the fact that Covid speeded up the growth of the online side of the business, which is our main source of revenue. In fact, 98% of our business is now online."



Ginette Jones in the steaming area



The Turtle Doves brand is heading Down Under



Around 40 staff are based at the Harlescott site



Caroline Bennett colour-matching products

◀ Soon, a lot more Turtle Doves business will be coming from overseas too. Expansion into Australia and New Zealand this month is just the start of an export strategy that will see campaigns rolled out in northern Europe, America, and Canada later this year.

Graham explains: “We’ve started with the southern hemisphere because it’s currently their winter – and the Australians love British products. “I always wanted to take the business international, because it’s so unique.”

It’s also one of the factors which made Turtle Doves an appealing acquisition opportunity for Refined Brands.

Chairman Ben Barnett says: “The creation of Refined Brands was motivated by a desire to build a differentiated family of sustainable fashion brands, alongside founders and teams that shared our passion and vision. Turtle Doves are pioneers in fully-recycled garments and accessories, and I am delighted to welcome Graham Holbrook and his team to the group.”

Group managing director James Williams adds: “Combined, our brands create the leading portfolio of digitally native, British ethical fashion brands, with a razor-sharp focus on natural and sustainable fabrics. We see significant opportunity to bring our pioneering brands to an ever-growing audience of ethically conscious consumers.”

And Francesca Hutcheson, tax partner



Emma Harrison

at Azets Shrewsbury, says: “Turtle Doves is a fantastic Shropshire business success story and testament to Graham and Kate’s vision, innovation, and hard work.

“As a long-standing customer, this is a product I truly believe in and it’s great to see the brand go from strength to strength, with the backing of its new owners.”

It’s been pretty much business as usual for Graham at Turtle Doves since the deal went through earlier this year.

“The only change for me is that I now have two meetings a week with the group to talk through performance. That really does focus the mind to make sure sales, production and costs are all on track.

“I’ve been in business 40 years, and ten years with Turtle Doves, and I’m still learning an awful lot about how to run this as efficiently as possible. A lot of that comes from the group, because they’ve been operating online businesses much longer than me.

“You have got to look after your stakeholders – customers, employees, suppliers, and shareholders – giving each of them equal weighting.

“Teams with resilience, the ability to never give up, and to find a solution to a problem, are the ones that tend to be successful. That’s what I believe we have got.

“We have plans to double in size within the

next three years, but will always want to stay a Shropshire-based business. I love this county and it’s been very good to us since Kate and I moved up here 24 years ago.

“The link to Laura Ashley just over the border is important too. We’ve employed lots of their former machinists, and customer services staff too. And that’s been great for me. I left Norfolk to move to Mid Wales to work for Laura Ashley for four years in the 1980s, and it changed my life forever. They are easily the most inspirational company I ever worked for. I learned a lot and have still got many lifelong friends from my time there.”

Looking ahead, Graham concludes: “Most of our growth is going to come from internationalisation, and also working with big retailers around the world.

“We have some new systems coming online that are best in class, enabling us to deal with any type of customer, whether it’s an individual, or a big global retailer. That’s a big sea change for Turtle Doves, when the business goes from basically being a teenager, to really growing up.

“There have been plenty of stresses and pressures along the way over the past few months, but I can’t wait to see what the future holds.

“I’m experienced enough to know you can’t push these things too quickly, but I can see the incredible potential.”



Cutting strips of cashmere



Paula Coleshill packing boxes

Support for expansion

Internet solutions provider Exascale, which has its headquarters in Telford, has secured a Business Growth Programme grant to support its ongoing expansion.

Telford & Wrekin Council’s Invest Telford business support team worked closely with Exascale – guiding the firm through the grant application process and ensuring it received the £30,000 cash boost.

The grant has enabled the business to buy new equipment, expand its product range and invest in new machinery to speed up business growth.

Exascale provides ethernet leased lines and broadband nationally alongside its own gigabit full-fibre network in both Telford and West Bromwich, connecting homes and businesses.

The company has most recently connected the village of Horton to its rapidly growing network in Telford.

Established in 2009, Exascale provides services for a wide range of sectors including hospitality, aerospace, education, software and IT, as well as consultancy sectors.

Exascale has points of presence in London, Wolverhampton and Manchester, and its headquarters are based in Trench Lock.

The Invest Telford business support team offers businesses fast, responsive and bespoke solutions to help organisations achieve their business goals – supporting with new developments, start-ups, relocations and growth plans.

The team can help businesses to navigate challenges, remain resilient, and invest in their business.

Thomas Bibb, Exascale managing director, said: “As our business continues to grow and respond to the demand for a local, dependable, and high-quality gigabit full-fibre alternative internet service provider in Telford and Wrekin, we look towards finding efficiencies to improve our productivity, and fuel growth.

“The BGP2 grant has enabled Exascale to fast-track the purchase of plant and machinery, increasing our speed to market and creating several new full-time jobs in Telford.”

One of those new jobs has been filled by Ellis Nicholas, a field engineer and one of Exascale’s latest recruits.

Ellis said: “I’ve never been in this line of work before, but Thomas has



Claire Critchell (Telford & Wrekin Council’s investment and business support team leader), Katherine Kynaston, Thomas Bibb, and Exascale field engineers Max Perry and Ellis Nicholas

taken me on and taught me everything over the last month. It’s genuinely one of the best jobs I’ve ever had, with one of the best bosses, because he really looks after his staff and cares for them.

“I really hope that the job lasts for a lifetime, and I can’t see myself working anywhere else. Don’t get me wrong, it’s a hard job but we help each other, and I want to come into work and do a good job.”

Thomas added: “A huge part of our business success is reliant on having the right skilled people in the team, and so it’s vital we invest in the right people and find the right training, to ensure that we’re at the top of our game when it comes to civil works and telecommunications.

“That isn’t always easy but I’m proud of the team we have – from individuals like Max who have been with us from the beginning, to Ellis, our newest recruit.”

The BGP is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and supports small to medium enterprises in the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership, designed to strengthen supply chains, stimulate innovation and help businesses grow.

Katherine Kynaston, Telford & Wrekin Council’s director for housing, employment & infrastructure, said: “We’re proud that Exascale continues to grow in the borough and that our businesses and residents benefit from access to good quality internet connections as a result.”

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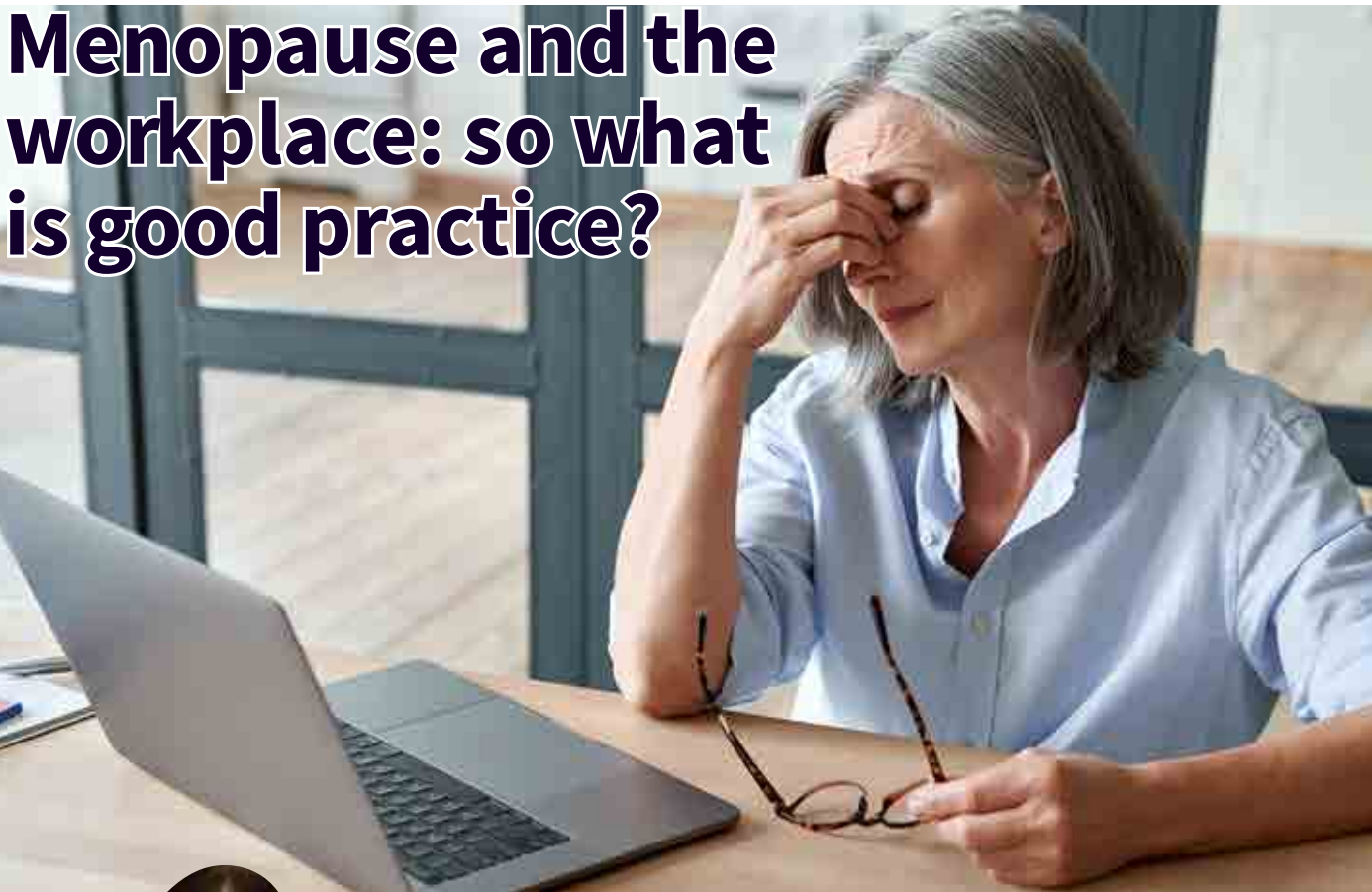
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Earlier this year, the Government provided its official response to the Women and Equalities Committee’s ‘menopause and the workplace’ report – and it makes for an interesting read.

The report contained a number of recommendations and, although the Government accepted some of the recommendations, it also pushed back on a number of them, giving various reasons for doing so.

Recommendations which it accepted included:

- The Government should lead the way in providing good quality and accurate information about the menopause to the general public.
- The cost of Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) prescriptions should be reduced.
- A ‘menopause ambassador’ should be appointed to work with businesses, unions and

Jennifer Gibson is an associate solicitor specialising in employment law, at Aaron and Partners, in Shrewsbury

advisory groups to encourage awareness, good practice and guidance to employers.

Those recommendations that were not accepted included piloting a ‘menopause leave’ scheme, creating a new protected characteristic of menopause in the Equality Act, and creating model menopause policies for businesses and companies to use when addressing these issues internally.

With this last recommendation, the Government stated in its response that it did not believe a model menopause policy was necessary at this moment, but it agreed that there is much that employers can and should do to help their employees experiencing the menopause.

So what should Shropshire employers do? Acas says employers that create and support an open environment around the menopause can help affected staff to continue to do their job confidently and effectively.

We advise that the first step for employers to consider is implementing a menopause policy.

Having a policy in place will raise awareness of menopause and its impact in the workplace, encourage open conversations between line managers and staff, and direct staff to relevant advice and assistance.

Secondly, employers should consider training within the workplace to help them educate and inform workplace colleagues about the potential symptoms of the menopause, and how they can support women at work.

Should employers require assistance with either of these steps, our specialist employment team will be happy to assist.

Menopause passport

A pilot ‘menopause passport’ scheme run by a Midlands hospital has increased confidence and boosted emotional wellbeing, according to those who took part.

The personalised passport allows women to indicate when they are in need of more support at work – such as taking more breaks, working different shifts, or sitting closer to the toilets and air conditioning.

It was the brainchild of nurse Wendy Madden from University Hospitals in Birmingham, whose menopause symptoms led to her taking 11 weeks off work.

She told the BBC: “What we’re doing is individualising that person’s individual menopause journey and what support they need at different stages of their journey.”

It is estimated that as many as three million women are having to cope with serious menopause symptoms while at work.

Debs Wallbank, from Much Wenlock, became a menopause coach after experiencing six years of undiagnosed symptoms, including anxiety, leading her to leave several jobs.

“It’s not about labelling women,” she said. “It’s about raising the awareness, so that people are more compassionate and can make small adjustments that don’t have to even cost any money.”

Alongside the passport, a group of menopause champions have been appointed, acting as points of contact for people who want to better understand the condition.

Joining forces

Roger Parry & Partners, the property company with bases in Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Welshpool, has expanded its planning and architectural services team by amalgamating with Les Stephan Planning Ltd.

Bosses say the Les Stephan Planning team will become ‘an integral part of the on-going service’ provided by the business throughout the Midlands and Wales.

Les Stephan Planning’s senior planning consultants are members of the Royal Town Planning Institute and include three former local authority planning officers with knowledge and expertise in a variety of planning aspects.

Roger Parry, partner at Roger Parry & Partners, said: “The company shares our values and our long-standing commitment to excellent and successful planning advice in the region.”

He said the amalgamation would allow the planning department to take on ‘more substantial projects’.

Les Stephan said: “I am looking forward to remaining with the new amalgamated business in a consultancy capacity, with the support of Rob Mills, Stuart Taylor and Daniella Owen, who will remain in position to ensure continuity to all clients’ current and future projects.”

Richard Corbett, partner at Roger Parry & Partners, added, “Expanding the company is very exciting for us with offices in Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Welshpool.

“This amalgamation will enhance our planning and architectural services business for the benefit of all our current and new clients.



The amalgamated teams from Roger Parry & Partners and Les Stephan Planning

“Going forward we are now able to expand more into sectors involving Land Promotion and Option Agreements, and have the resources to take on larger scale projects and a wider spectrum of work.”

Roger Parry & Partners, which has its headquarters on the Oxon business park in Shrewsbury, has been in business for over 40 years, and has a strong presence in the residential, agricultural, and commercial sectors.

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Grant funding means new HQ

A Shropshire youth charity is getting a new headquarters after securing grant funding worth £1.5 million.

SYA – All About Youth runs youth clubs, groups and projects for young people and supports voluntary groups across the county.

The charity has received the grant from the Youth Investment Fund for a new building which will replace the charity's current headquarters at its site at The New Lodge, Upton Lane, Shrewsbury.

PSG – a subsidiary of Shropshire Council – have been commissioned as independent construction consultants to manage the project, and Shropshire Council agreed a 99-year lease.

Richard Parkes, SYA chief executive, said: "These are exciting times for the charity and this is the best news we could have received.

"We are committed to extending our range of services over the coming year, making the support we provide accessible to even more young people across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin, and our new HQ will make that even easier.

"There is no doubt young people across Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and beyond have had a difficult time during the pandemic, and have missed out on so many opportunities.

"It has been an essential part of our quest to provide a more suitable and permanent home for us to carry out the work we do. A new base has been a top priority on our to-do list for a while and we are now in a position to proceed.

"It will be built on our present site in Upton Lane and replace the demountable building we've been working from."

Coronation commemorated

Park View Business Centre near Whitchurch is planting a series of oak trees to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles III.

Maintenance manager David Hotchkiss has nurtured and now planted the first of these saplings at the centre, on the Nantwich road. It follows the Queen's Green Canopy tree planting initiative for the Platinum Jubilee last year.

Dave said: "This has been a great thing to do. It will give me years of pleasure seeing the tree expanding into its new space. I'll now have something to prompt me to remember this special year every time I notice it growing on."

Park View Business Centre says it takes its green credentials seriously. The planting programme will continue in the autumn and echo the renewable energy activities already working on the site. Ultimately, 100 new trees will be planted around the centre.



David Hotchkiss says the planting scheme will give 'years of pleasure'

Advertisement Feature

Putting customer satisfaction first

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

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What is your company's ethos and philosophy?

Our cultural handbook is clear 'our advice must always be what is best for the customer, not what is most profitable for the bank'. We back that up by being free of sales targets and short-term bonuses, so customers know we work in their interests.

What can customers expect from Handelsbanken?

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Tell us a bit about the Shrewsbury branch

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experience. We serve the areas of Telford and Shrewsbury, offering personal and corporate banking along with a wealth management service. With a focus on customer service rather than expensive marketing campaigns, our customers come to us through word of mouth and recommendation.

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Being part of the community is a key part of what Handelsbanken is about. It not only benefits our customers, but also means we can really make a difference in the area. Our local knowledge can help customers when they want to buy or sell property or businesses who can benefit from the networks we're part of. With a focus on building a more sustainable future, we're keen to give something back to our community.

What achievements are you most proud of?

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A future in green jobs



More than a third of Brits agreed that they would be more loyal to their workplace if they provided them with more detailed information on how to be greener at work and at home, the research claims

Shropshire's recruitment rollercoaster shows no signs of slowing down, with companies across a multitude of sectors still struggling to fill vacancies.

And judging by two new pieces of research, it's going to take more than an inflation-busting salary to persuade young people to fill out application forms – or indeed to retain them as part of your team.

Younger workers are 'climate quitting' for more environmentally-friendly jobs faster than ever before, a KPMG survey of 6,000 UK workers shows.

And in another piece of research by Save Money Cut Carbon, it's reported that as many as one in five younger workers will either turn down jobs, or hand in their notice, if a company's environmental, social and governance values don't align with theirs.

It's not just the youngest of workers either. More than a third of Brits agreed that they would be more loyal to their workplace if they provided them more detailed information on how to be greener at work and at home, the research claims.

And over half feel their employer provides them with 'zero information' on how to be more sustainable at work and at home.

For employees to be fully-engaged, it's imperative that they feel their voices are being heard, their values are being taken into consideration, and their work is making a positive difference, the research says.

Mark Sait, chief executive of Save Money Cut Carbon, says: "Our next generation of workers is set to propel the evolution of ESG strategies much further.

"We see experienced managers and senior leaders across environmental, energy, water, and carbon reduction, leaving perceived secure large corporate jobs and consultancies.

"One recent joiner said I don't want to work for a 'why' business that just talks about it, I want to work for a 'how' business that delivers it, I want to look back on my career and say I did my bit.

"For those just entering the workplace, the same is happening with candidates looking for internships, for their first jobs or making a mid-life career change, who are actively looking for businesses like us."

No doubt fuelled by evidence such as this, Shropshire businesses are pushing sustainability to the top of their agenda.

Many attended a Business Energy Breakfast at Shrewsbury Town FC, organised by Shropshire Council.

The agenda included case studies from Oswestry-based Aico, and from the Big Solar Co-op, who are working with local businesses to install roof-mounted solar panels together.

There were two panel debates, showcasing companies who have maximised their energy savings by implementing best practices and explaining how auditing can lead to energy and carbon savings.

Ryan Evans, operations and sustainability lead from Aico, talked delegates through the company's sustainability journey and target of becoming carbon neutral by 2030 – and 'being transparent' with customers, staff and stakeholders.

Among the audience at the event was Mark Thompson, chief executive of fast-growing Telford battery specialist AceOn.

The company has just opened a new office at Solihull to focus on its growing residential,

commercial, and industrial energy storage business.

The move will create four new jobs and is the first part of an expansion strategy which Mark says could see the company setting up a new warehouse and manufacturing facility in the West Midlands Combined Authority area later in the year, while maintaining its headquarters in Telford.

Meanwhile, The Marches Growth Hub Shropshire says 19 Shropshire businesses are now officially certified as Carbon Literate following a training event held at the end of last year.

The companies have since been assessed and certified.

The programme was led by Business Net Zero's sustainability consultants and trainers Sue Burnell and Kevin Oubridge, in collaboration with the Marches Growth Hub Shropshire and CREST, and was aimed at businesses who want to make a difference and start their sustainability journey.

Sue and Kevin delivered a one-day workshop and two online sessions.

Maggie Fennel, a green infrastructure specialist who attended the course, said: "The carbon literacy workshop was an overview of carbon and general sustainability issues, presenting clear evidence and guidance on how to decide on most effective action points for individuals and businesses.

"Best takeaway for me was seeing the variety of different organisations participating at all levels, and the great engagement exercises and communication tips."

Corinne Brown, from Shrewsbury Colleges Group, added: "A huge shout out to the Business Net Zero – we are over the moon to have now received our certificates."



Availability of skilled staff remains an issue for a third of firms

Positivity is growing

Business confidence in the West Midlands has returned to positive territory for the first time in nearly a year, but remains weak amid a backdrop of economic uncertainty, a survey has found.

ICAEW's Business Confidence Monitor for the West Midlands put confidence for the first quarter of this year at 1.2 on the index, significantly above last quarter's reading, but below the UK score of 2.5.

Despite the recovery, confidence remains fragile as companies in the region continue to be concerned about high inflation and rising interest rates.

Company sentiment was buoyed by a healthy growth in domestic sales, while projections for the year ahead are expected to surpass the national average.

Exports grew at a less favourable rate, but businesses anticipate a stronger rise over the next 12 months, possibly reflecting the depreciation of sterling against the euro, a small pick-up in European markets and the reopening of the Chinese economy, the report found.

Justin Kyriakou, ICAEW Midlands regional director, said: "While it's encouraging that labour market challenges and cost pressures appear to be easing, there's still plenty to be cautious about as companies become increasingly concerned over high inflation and rising interest rates.

"To capitalise on the jump in confidence, the Government must fix the fundamental problems facing the UK economy with a plan to deliver long-term economic growth by injecting resilience and stability into the UK."

Growing optimism among businesses was undermined by the range of challenges they faced, including customer demand, which affected 40% of the companies surveyed and was the most prominent issue for businesses in the region.

Meanwhile, labour market challenges eased, despite the availability of non-management skills and staff turnover being cited as a growing problem by approximately a third of firms.

Salary growth stabilised in the region, though at 3.9% remains distinctly higher than the historical average. Despite hitting record highs over the course of last year, cost pressures in the West Midlands appear to be easing, the report found.

In brief...

Bridgnorth-based Severn Gorge Park Homes Ltd has acquired the 150 pitch holiday park Rhea Hall Caravan Park at Highley, near Bridgnorth, for an undisclosed sum. Thursfield directors Tony Gibb and Tim Edwards provided commercial property and corporate legal advice to Paul and Adam Jones, directors of Severn Gorge Park Homes Ltd. The latest transaction now gives directors Paul and Adam Jones 15 sites in total, with further acquisitions planned.

Shropshire's not-for-profit care home provider has formally committed to a county-wide campaign to highlight the needs of older LGBTQ+ people. Coverage Care Services now has dedicated champions in each of its 12 care homes. Work is under way to support LGBTQ History Week and Pride Week activities, and each home is developing its own mini-projects.

SWS Broadband has fast-tracked two Shropshire villages to receive its ultra-fast, full fibre broadband services. Due for completion in late summer, the roll out by the Shrewsbury-based company will take place in Minsterley and Pontesbury. Chris New, CEO of SWS Broadband, said: "We will be providing the opportunity for some 2000 customers across these two villages."

Arts Alive, which brings theatre and cinema to rural communities across Shropshire, has been awarded £180,000 from the BFI National Lottery Audience Projects Fund. It plans to appoint two new part-time roles (Audience Outreach and Digital Marketing) to engage new audiences in specific areas through 'new and innovative marketing approaches.'

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Making fresh connections at expo



Shrewsbury Town Football Club's Montgomery Waters Meadow was the venue for Shropshire Chamber's spring 'ConnectIn Business' expo.

Events manager Kelly Riedel said: "We had an incredible day and we know that's all down to our exhibitors and visitors."

"Seeing so many Shropshire businesses together and networking in one room is one of our favourite things about holding an expo."

"Connections and building relationships are crucial to the success of any business."

An evening business expo will be held on July 6, at Telford College, and the next ConnectIn Business expo at Shrewsbury Town FC is due to be held on October 11.



Plans to be a leader for enterprise

University Centre Shrewsbury has signed up to become a patron member of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, as part of a campaign to expand its links with the local business community.

The centre, which is part of the University of Chester, has joined a select group of businesses which support the Chamber through its pro-active and dynamic patronage scheme.

Kirstie Simpson, deputy dean and associate professor of the University of Chester Business School, said: "We want to be a patron of Shropshire Chamber as the opportunity relates directly to our aspiration of being the most connected business school in the UK."

"We would also like to ensure that all our students can benefit from the insight of local business people, and that local businesses can benefit from engaging with our students. We hope that a mutually beneficial relationship will flourish over the coming months."

She added: "We are keen to work with enterprising individuals and businesses in Shropshire, creating connections and new opportunities with them and our students."

"We believe that the key strength of the patronage programme is the ability of the Chamber to bring different businesses and stakeholders together, to add value to our local economy."

"Our vision is to be the UK's enterprising business school; positively transforming our communities through education, research and knowledge exchange."

University Centre Shrewsbury hosted the



University Centre Shrewsbury wants to build closer links with local businesses

relaunch of Shropshire Chamber's 18-35 group in February. The group is designed to provide a networking and socialising platform for like-minded young business people.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's patron programme gives businesses the opportunity to raise awareness of their organisations, and express their commitment to the success of the local business community.

Rachel Owen, Shropshire Chamber's director of member engagement, said: "Being a patron is a mark of excellence and integrity, and demonstrates a firm commitment to the Chamber, and the success of Shropshire's economy as a whole."

"Patrons understand and engage with one another and aim to identify opportunities, and trade with and obtain introductions for each other wherever possible."

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

"Through their attendance as patrons at appropriate events, networking forums and business expos, they demonstrate their belief in the programme and through on-going membership they commit to maintaining the highest standards."

"We're delighted to welcome University Centre Shrewsbury to the programme and would like to thank them for their ongoing support for the Chamber and for the wider Shropshire business community."

More information about Shropshire Chamber's patron programme can be found on the Chamber's website.

Unwavering dedication from new CEO

New Shropshire Chamber of Commerce chief executive Ruth Ross

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's new chief executive has pledged her unwavering dedication to supporting economic and employment opportunities across the county.

Ruth Ross officially took over the top position at the start of April following the retirement of Richard Sheehan, who has been with the organisation for nearly 16 years.

She paid tribute to her predecessor's 'dedication and tireless work on behalf of the Shropshire business community'.

And she said: "I am excited and proud to have been given the opportunity to lead this fantastic team, and fully recognise the importance of the Chamber's place within the business community."

"The foundations of the organisation are solid and its commitment to supporting economic and employment opportunities remains unwavering."

"This is a challenging climate for our business community, but it is at times of economic struggle that the support and backing of a member organisation like Shropshire Chamber really comes into its own."

Ruth, who joined the Chamber in 2015, was appointed deputy chief executive last year, having previously fulfilled a variety of roles including membership recruitment, skills and compliance, and director of business.

She added: "Working with the Chamber team, members, and stakeholders over the last 18 months, as we redesign the services we deliver in response to the changing needs of business, has been enlightening."

"We have an ambitious strategy in place to double the size of the Chamber's membership base, which will provide new and dynamic business networking contacts, and give us a

This is a challenging climate for our business community, but it is at times of economic struggle that the support and backing of a member organisation like Shropshire Chamber really comes into its own

much more powerful lobbying voice in the corridors of power.

"And with the fantastic team we have here at the Chamber, I am confident it's something we can deliver."

Ruth said: "Whilst we all recognise the future comes with challenges, I firmly believe in one thing: working together makes us stronger, and as 'team Shropshire' we can achieve great things."

"Collectively we can fight the county's corner and lobby our decision-makers – and we will continue to listen to our members and partners to shape our services in a way which best meets their needs."

Piran Littleton, Shropshire Chamber's president, said: "Ruth has been taking increasing day-to-day operational responsibility for Chamber activities over recent months, and has flourished in the role."

"Her appointment as chief executive will deliver important continuity, and ensure that it is very much business-as-usual for our members, patrons and partners."

Mr Sheehan will retain his links with the Chamber for the coming months in his role as project director for a Local Skills Improvement Plan for the Marches area.

The plan, funded by the Department for Education and being led by Shropshire Chamber,

aims to put the voice of employers at the heart of the learning and skills system to build stronger partnerships with further education providers.

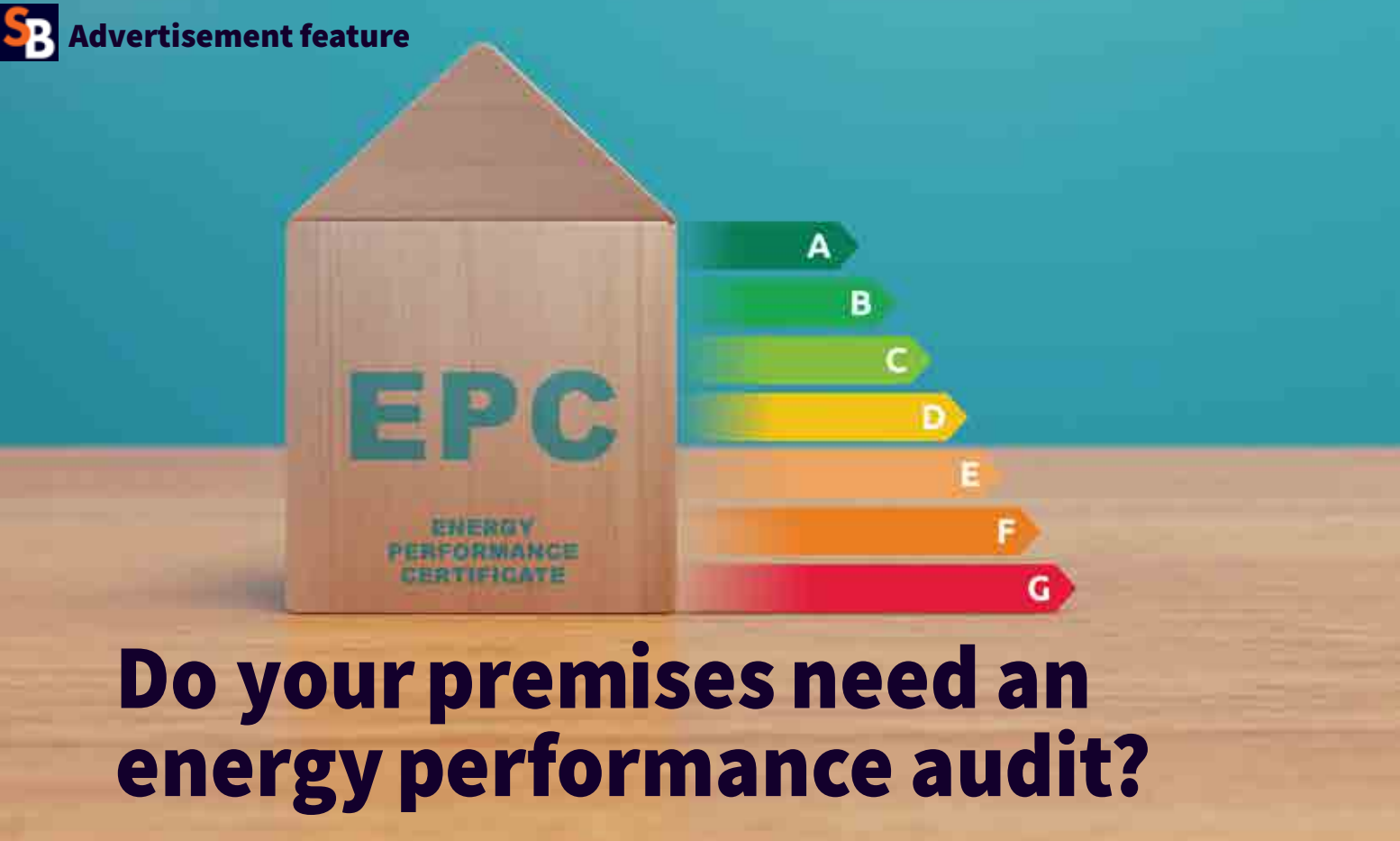
Ahead of his departure from the chief executive's role, Mr Sheehan said: "I consider myself incredibly fortunate to have worked with a truly wonderful group of people who have supported me over the past 15 and a half years, and look back with pride that I have been privileged to serve the business community."

"There have been relentless challenges throughout the years, from the credit crunch and recessions to Brexit, the pandemic, and the cost of living and energy crisis. But through it all, the Chamber has always been there supporting members when they need us most."

"Never has the sense of community and connectivity been more important than it is today. The business community in this county is resilient, determined, and innovative, and never fails to surprise and delight."

"It has been an honour to have worked with so many of you. I am truly grateful for your wisdom and friendship."

"I know that the Chamber will be in good hands as Ruth steps into the chief executive's position. Like me, she fully recognises the importance of the role which a thriving Chamber can play in our business community."



Do your premises need an energy performance audit?



James Pulford

Energy efficiency is more important than ever in the world today. As well as showing your commitment to sustainability by helping to reduce your carbon footprint, it also leads to substantial savings for your business.

Government legislation requires companies to meet certain standards, including obtaining an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC). If you own or manage a commercial property, you must obtain an EPC certificate and ensure that it is available to any prospective tenant or purchaser. A higher energy efficiency rating can make your property more attractive to potential tenants or buyers, who may be looking to reduce their energy bills and environmental impact. To obtain an EPC certificate for a commercial

property, you will need to hire an accredited energy assessor. Our colleagues at IDEA Ingham Energy (IDEA Ltd), Seb and Nigel Ingham, are experienced energy consultants, who conduct comprehensive EPC audits. Here, they discuss what a non-domestic EPC is, how it can help you achieve energy efficiency, and break down some of the jargon.

What Is a Non-Domestic EPC?

A Non-Domestic Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) displays the energy performance of a commercial building on an A to G scale (A indicating net zero and G being the worst performing). The rating is based on the estimated carbon emissions of the building. You need it to build, sell or let a non-domestic property.

What Is MEES?

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) require landlords in the private rented sector to have an EPC with an E rating or better before they can issue a new lease for a property. Since April 2018, the regulations became a legal requirement upon the granting of a new lease as well as lease renewals.

New MEES Legislation

The regulations now apply to all privately rented property, including where a lease is already in place and a property is occupied. All rented properties, regardless of lease, will require an EPC with a minimum E rating.

Changes to the EPC Calculation Metrics

The EPC rating is based on the carbon emissions of a property. Over the last 10 years, the grid's electricity supply has been significantly decarbonised as more electricity is generated from renewables. As a result, the Government updated the metrics by which the EPC rating is calculated to account for the reduction of

carbon emissions associated with grid-supplied electricity. The new carbon factors were implemented in England last year and were implemented in Wales in March 2023.

Any property where the primary fuel is grid-supplied electricity will see improvements in the EPC rating. Conversely, oil and gas now score slightly worse as the Government aims to move away from fossil fuels.

Halls Commercial manages a wide variety of commercial properties of varying ages and types, which have a broad range of EPC results. The department has worked with landlords and tenants to bring their portfolio up to and above current standards over the past 18 months to ensure that all properties and clients are EPC compliant.

EPCs consider factors such as heating and cooling systems, lighting and ventilation, and also recommend improvements to increase energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions. We have helped businesses improve their EPC rating both locally and nationally. A recent local example was an industrial unit in Shrewsbury where the PPM replacement of an older roof to a modern one was a major reason in the EPC rating moving from E to a very respectable C.

We also assisted a retail shop unit in Much Wenlock, where the tenant's shop-fit included the installation of LED lighting throughout, which brought the EPC from G to D. The improvement in EPC ratings has saved both businesses significant costs.

We can guide you through the EPC process, identify opportunities for improvement and implement energy-efficient measures to enhance your business.

James Pulford is head of commercial property management at Halls Commercial

Room for more rooms

Budget hotel chain Travelodge has resubmitted plans for a new 83-room site in Shrewsbury.

This hotel, proposed on part of the current car park in the corner of Barker Street and Claremont Street, would be the group's third hotel in the area, in addition to sites at Battlefield and Bayston Hill.

Tony O'Brien, UK development director, said: "Shrewsbury is a growing town, with very limited, good quality, affordable hotel accommodation in the town centre, so there is a strong need for a new Travelodge to help fulfil growing demand from visiting business and leisure travellers.

"Travelodge and Morris Property have worked collaboratively and closely with the local planning authority and taken account of all of the feedback that we received about the proposed development of this site for a new Travelodge hotel, to produce what we think is a fantastic design proposal.

"Travelodge will be making a long-term commitment to Shrewsbury town centre, and the new hotel will result in thousands of new overnight visitors each year, who will spend hundreds of thousands of pounds in the local shops, restaurants, bars and attractions, providing a long-term, multi-million pound boost to the local economy."



An artist's impression of the new Shrewsbury Travelodge site

Elizabeth Lowe, head of developments at Morris Property, said: "Following the withdrawal of the previous planning application for a new Travelodge fronting Barker Street in Shrewsbury, we have been working closely with both the planning and conservation officers at Shropshire Council. This has seen us address concerns raised about the initial application, with particular attention paid to comments received from both the Town Council and Civic Society.

"The new application has been designed to complement the ambitions of the Big Town plan in not only providing a use deemed suitable for

this location, which will greatly assist the tourist economy of the town, but also to help create public realm space around Rowley's House and Mansion. This will hopefully assist the council in identifying a potential occupier to look closely at the functionality of the building in light of a hotel next door.

"There will be some parking retained to the rear of the scheme, and the intention is to look at EV charging for some of these spaces. If the infrastructure is available, this will be a welcome progression for the town, as currently there is a complete absence of EV charging available."

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A helping hand for town

A Bridgnorth web design company has come to the rescue after life-saving equipment was stolen from a park in its home town.

Staff at Clickingmad were distressed to hear that a vital defibrillator had been snatched from outside Bridgnorth Rowing Club.

The equipment had previously been funded by the rowing club, but was also available for public use in the adjoining Severn Park.

Clickingmad stepped in to replace the defibrillator and its cabinet to help save lives. Managing director Shaun Carvill said the theft came shortly after the whole team had completed a day-long first aid course.

“We had learnt about the use of defibrillators and how their availability regularly saves lives in real emergencies.

“We couldn’t understand why anyone would have stolen the equipment, particularly as it is in such a well-used park with rugby pitches and a children’s play area nearby as well as the rowing club. We immediately wanted to do something to help.”



Martin Evans of Bridgnorth Rowing Club receives the new defibrillator from Ivet Rekemova, Seamus Howard and Alex Guest of Clickingmad Ltd

Strategic thinking from partnership

The Shropshire Economic Partnership laid out a three-stage strategy for business prosperity at what was its inaugural board meeting.

The board, formerly known as Shropshire Business Board, discussed its role and influence across the county, and how it can support local business, strategic locations and employment and skills in Shropshire.

It is comprised of representatives from the public, private, education and voluntary sectors, and was set up to convey a single business voice for Shropshire, champion growth and sustainability for the business community, and put Shropshire firmly on the map as a county to invest, grow, and do great business within.

The economic growth strategy focuses on a three-stage process:

- An immediate restart following the heights of the pandemic

- Short-term revitalisation for the county
- A long-term growth strategy which can contribute to creating a healthy economy for Shropshire.

The board says it will take an active role in concentrating on the most important local issues affecting businesses, and will oversee preparation to create an action plan, review existing projects and funding opportunities, and review its own performance against a stringent monitoring process which looks at indicators such as productivity, wages, investment, homes, and jobs in Shropshire.

Lezley Picton, leader of Shropshire Council, and chair of the Partnership, said: “The board is made up of experts from virtually every corner of Shropshire in terms of sector, industry, and even geography, so we’re really hoping the partnership will be a space where opportunities are unlocked, and businesses feel empowered to grow to their fullest potential.”

Jeannie McGillivray, former Shropshire Business Board Co-Chair, CEO of Shrewsbury-

based software development company Remote, and deputy chair of the new group, added: “The inaugural meeting of the SEP marked a pivotal moment from which the incredible background work required to create this opportunity for Shropshire will take flight in 2023.

“The board brought together the best thinking from cross-sector experts across the county to champion growth and sustainability for the business community.

“With a clear focus on long-term economic growth, this partnership will be fundamental in creating a healthy economy for Shropshire as we navigate the current turbulent economic conditions and beyond.

“The board will concentrate on important issues local businesses face, and work towards creating an action plan that makes a real difference to businesses in Shropshire.

“I’m excited to see the partnership unlock opportunities and empower businesses to grow to their fullest potential.”



At the former New College Telford site are Haydn Griffiths and Mandie Mulloy of YMCA Wellington, with Chris Timmins (centre) from Jessup Partnerships

Changes are on the way

A nursing and residential care home on the outskirts of Newport is on the market for £1.95 million.

Christie & Co has been instructed to sell The Rylands on Forton Road, which is registered to care for up to 44 residents.

The three-storey 19th century building is currently operated with a management company in place and the owners in the background.

The business has been owned by Lynn and Mark Cowling since 2005, and was brought to market to allow the pair to retire.

They said: “During our period of ownership, we have extended the home and modernised many of the facilities. We have enjoyed our time running the home and are selling now to retire.”

Paul Reilly, director of healthcare at Christie & Co who is handling the sale, said: “The home has been well-established for many years and enjoys good occupancy levels.

“We believe a hands-on owner-operator would increase profitability by reducing some of the management and staffing costs.”

Meanwhile, another historic Shropshire property is poised to get a new lease of life.

Jessup Partnerships is to remodel the former New College Telford site to provide 28 new homes for YMCA Wellington.

The development will comprise 24 one-bedroom studio apartments and four wheelchair accessible homes, with resident facilities such as laundry, electric vehicle charging points, and car parking being added around the building.

The King Street building became surplus to requirements following the merger of New College Telford, and Telford College of Arts and Technology.

Jessup Partnerships says it has worked closely with Heritage England to ensure the grade two listed building maintains its character and conforms to the listed building guidelines.

Mandie Mulloy, chief executive of YMCA Wellington, said: “After four years of planning due to unforeseen circumstances, this new development of 28 apartments will give the next chapter for our young people in Telford for many more years to come.

“I feel excited to know that we will be moving young people back into this beautiful building.”



The Rylands, in Forton Road, Newport, built in the 1800s



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Exporting and manufacturing must work hand-in-hand . . . and stop blaming Brexit for everything



In recent months it's been reported that, due to Brexit, UK exports have dropped. The doom-mongers amongst us blame our departure from the EU for this . . . and a lot more.

This is further compounded by comparisons with other G7 countries (Germany, France, Italy, Japan, Canada, USA), many of which export commodities like oil and gas, precious metals, luxury goods and motor vehicles. Goods manufactured or extracted from the earth.

Over the past 20 years, compared to other G7 countries, the UK has always been near the bottom of the list. So, it's no major surprise that a recent comparison of exports put the UK – guess where – near the bottom again.

Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine, products that normally came from Russia, which are now sanctioned, are being sourced from countries like Canada. These include oil, gas, and wheat. Also, it needs to be remembered that since various UK Governments have instituted policies regarding new oil and gas exploration, along with excessive oil industry taxation (and green activists preventing established wells from

The UK can be great again, despite Brexit and all the negative thoughts which surround it. But it genuinely needs companies, including manufacturers, to step forward and export their products. The quality of the product has long been sought after, as has the Made in Britain stamp.

operating), UK exports in the oil and gas field have dropped. This means that the UK is now reliant on cars, aircraft parts and electronics to boost its export numbers.

But what is not reported is the following: UK exports are made of 50% product and 50% services. This makes the UK the second largest exporter of services of the G7 nations. Countries like Canada, Germany, Italy and Japan export over 80% of products, with France and the US exporting 70% product. It is then little wonder that the UK looks bad when we look at 51% of products exported. But no one cares . . . because it's all-Brexit's fault.

OK, so now that we understand the numbers, what does it mean for the UK? The bottom line is our manufacturing was strong, but over successive Governments it has clearly dropped.

In order to make exporting strong again, we need to make manufacturing attractive for the next generation. We need to stop making having a degree the most attractive proposition, and look at manufacturing apprenticeships, where we teach young

people from the start how to make things. We need to get UK manufacturing to start marketing itself as innovative and leading-edge, with manufacturers leading the way in making sure they are equipped for the modern world with modern technologies.

We need the Government to make investment in UK manufacturing, and bring companies into the modern world.

The UK can be great again, despite Brexit and all the negative thoughts which surround it. But it genuinely needs companies, including manufacturers, to step forward and export their products. The quality of the product has long been sought after, as has the Made in Britain stamp.

It is no coincidence that we export as much services as we do product, because our people are knowledgeable.

What we don't seem to be good at is promoting ourselves and promoting our products. We also seem to find the same old excuses as to why we can't export, rather than finding the positives as to why we should – and can – export.

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

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Shocks aplenty for the self-employed

Record numbers of Shropshire workers have turned to freelancing or self-employment since the start of the pandemic – and the majority say it has had a significant impact on their mental health.

New data published by Leapers, a project supporting the mental health of freelancers and the self-employed, shows that 85% of those who moved into self-employment during 2022 saw a positive effect on their mental health.

“There are definitely lots of benefits working for yourself, perhaps not having to deal with office politics, not having to commute into an office, being able to turn down work which doesn’t motivate you – but it’s pretty clear there are mental health benefits too,” says Matthew Knight, chief freelance officer and founder of Leapers.

When more and more employers are struggling to retain talent, self-employment seems like an attractive way of working for many – 54% of those who moved into freelancing last year said they did it because they wanted ‘more control’ over the work they do.

But Matthew says there are some challenges for the newly self-employed to consider too.

“Lots of our members come to self-employment and experience a bit of a shock when they suddenly realise they don’t have someone to chat to at work any more, or aren’t sure who they can ask questions of, or where they can get support from.

“In fact, 63% of the self-employed say they don’t feel they have adequate support for their mental health at work, and this is something which the Leapers project is aiming to tackle, by encouraging those who hire freelancers to signpost to support resources from organisations like Leapers, as well taking steps to ensure the freelancers are paid on time, communicated to with respect, and offered feedback and community.

“Working for yourself doesn’t mean working by yourself – and we want to make sure that everyone who is self-employed knows there are supportive communities and resources for those who are starting their own business. It’s so important to know where you can find support during that first year”.

The research, published this week on the Leapers website (www.leapers.co/research) also shows a significant gap in Government support for the self-employed. Only 11% feel supported, and 72% say they are concerned by the constant changes in Government leadership and policy on topics like IR35.

The most common stressor for the self-employed in 2022 was the increased cost of living and concerns around inflation – as self-employed people have no guaranteed income.

Among the Shropshire workers who have set up their own businesses this year is Kay Price of Bicton Heath, who has launched a new counselling and psychotherapy service.

She worked with Bridgnorth-based business consultants Good2Great to create KLP Counselling, undertaking an eight-week start-up course to help with areas such as marketing, accounts and working sensibly and safely.

Kay is based in two locations: The Natural Health Centre in Shrewsbury and the Mayfair Community Centre in Church Stretton, where she offers a counselling service to people suffering from anxiety and depression.

“My focus is on mental health – let’s talk about things – don’t suffer in silence.

“I have worked in the past with people suffering poor mental health due to bullying, domestic abuse or low self-esteem, which left them feeling helpless, hopeless and with a very low mood.



Kay Price of Bicton Heath, who has launched a new counselling and psychotherapy service

“I believe counselling can help us all become the person we are meant to be.”

Figures from the UK Labour Force survey suggest that the solo-self-employed now contribute £303 billion to the UK economy.

Matthew says: “78% of our group say that self-employment is a sustainable way of working, and 74% are optimistic about 2023 being a better year for them professionally.

“If you’ve got a good support network and you’re proactively considering your own mental health at work, self-employment is a highly rewarding way of working.”

When more and more employers are struggling to retain talent, self-employment seems like an attractive way of working for many

Building new careers

Alterations have been completed to create additional teaching space at Telford College Construction Centre, for the delivery of a new suite of renewable technology courses.

The project included internal and external work and was carried out by SWG Construction, based in Shrewsbury, which delivers development schemes across Shropshire, the West Midlands and Mid Wales.

The work has expanded and enhanced the on-campus construction training facility, helping the college to keep pace with growing demands as a state-of-the-art centre of learning excellence.

It is supported by the Strategic Development Fund, which enables education centres to reshape teaching and training provision and update facilities, and includes a practical workshop and two new classrooms at Telford College’s Wellington campus.

Shaun Humphries, construction director at SWG, said: “This project needed to be carried out while students and staff were attending the college, so it was important to work closely with the team there in order to get the work done as safely and unobtrusively as possible.

“We carried out the project at the college’s



The extra teaching space created in the construction centre at Telford College

Construction Centre, completing alterations to the existing training facility to provide much-needed additional teaching space.

“Our team used all their experience of working in a live environment to plan and co-ordinate the work to ensure minimal disruption was caused to the day-to-day activities at the college.

“Work inside the building centred on fitting new fire-rated partitions and doors, adapting mechanical and electrical services, and putting in new floor and wall finishes on a newly-constructed mezzanine floor.

“External works included the creation of a new concrete apron to the outside of the

building, and putting in a new fire escape and access ramp.”

David Candlin, Telford College’s director of estates, said: “We’ve been very impressed with the way SWG approached the project.

“Health and safety and control of sub-contractors in shared areas has been managed really effectively, and the overall finish of the facility is of a high standard, with the additional facilities provided exceeding our initial expectations.

“The project provides a dedicated space for renewable technology courses, and to create and provide awareness raising courses for our own students.”



Manager Tim Robinson (right) celebrates Love Plants’ 10th birthday with his team: John Burroughes, Julie Bull, Chris Gater and Li Zakovics

Decade since planting roots

Love Plants, at Salop Leisure’s Emstrey headquarters in Shrewsbury, is marking its 10th anniversary by holding a series of workshops.

The centre was opened by award-winning gardener and landscape designer Chris Beardshaw in April 2013.

The birthday celebrations began when plant adviser Gill Jones and Tom Pountney, head groundsman at Love2Stay resort, led the first of three workshops at Love Plants. Tips were given about what vegetables to grow in allotments and seasonal gardening tasks.

Spring planting and hanging baskets was the theme of the second workshop led by Tom. The final workshop, on May 20, will see him focus on bulbs, containers, pots, and hanging baskets for summer colour.

“It has been a successful ten years for Love Plants, and we hope to continue to grow the business by sharing the expertise of our team who have vast experience of plants and different types of gardens,” said manager Tim Robinson.





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Showing a real lack of energy

High Street in Shrewsbury has emerged as one of the hardest streets to heat in England and Wales.

Based on analysis of energy performance certificates by comparison service Uswitch.com, the street has an average energy efficiency of just six – compared to a nationwide average of 67.

It makes the street the third worst in the country for energy efficiency.

The report says the reason for the low rating is the number of top-floor flats with single-glazed windows, no insulation, and no low-energy lighting.

It says High Street has the potential to improve its energy-efficiency rating by more than 500%.

Natalie Mathie, energy expert at Uswitch.com, said: “It’s shocking to realise just how much energy is leaking out through uninsulated walls and roofs.

“Take a moment to look up your home’s EPC certificate online and see where your property could be improved – the reports are incredibly detailed and will give you estimated costs for all the energy-saving measures.”



Ben Anderson with students at the new Madeley site

A Shropshire-based performing arts academy has moved into a new home as part of a £100,000 investment.

7 Academy of Performing Arts has relocated to a brand new, purpose-built studio in Madeley, on the site of the former library.

Since launching in August 2016 at Sutton Hill, 7 Academy’s mission has been to inspire and celebrate individuality with their extensive range of classes in dance, musical theatre, and dance ability.

The team says the new studio allows an

expansion to its existing programmes to include a new discipline, acro cirque, which combines acrobatics and circus skills.

Founder and director Ben Anderson said: “Our mission is to unlock the potential within our local community and give our members the confidence to pursue their dreams, whatever they may be.

“We are thrilled to be part of the regeneration of the old Madeley Library site, and to contribute to the local business economy. Our new studio will not only provide a first-class training ground, but will also become a vibrant local community hub where people can connect, learn, and grow together.”

A fresh new sound for Shropshire

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Sophie Dale-Black, Andrew Hustwit, Mark Wilcockson and Tracy Sherratt



Tracy Sherratt from the British Business Bank at the event



Calum Nisbet, Ian Priest and Jonathan Dudley

Accessing vital funding

Experts in business finance joined forces at a special event to help firms access vital funding to help them grow.

The British Business Bank and the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership hosted the free event at RAF Cosford.

Those attending were able to find out about sources of finance available through the LEP and its business support arm the Marches Growth Hub, as well as funding from the Midlands Engine Investment Fund.



Paul Kalinauckas and Dave Hamlet



Jo Grivell pictured with Mark Schneider and Ruth Westwood



Karen Morgen, Lucie Makono, Rachel Adams



Marches LEP access to finance champion Paul Kalinauckas speaks at the event



Andrew Hustwit, Paul Kalinauckas, Rachel Laver, Tracy Sherratt, Huw Sparkes and Ryan Cartwright at RAF Cosford for the event



Mike Lowe, Steve Anderson and Chris Harrison

From church
to retail and
now FA base



The property in Shifnal

A converted former Methodist chapel in Shifnal is to become the new administrative centre for Shropshire Football Association.

The county's governing body for football has bought the High Street building, which has previously been used as a self-contained retail showroom. There is also a three-bedroom house.

Dave Simpson, chairman of the Shropshire Football Association, said: "We have two teams: a football development team which works out in the community, and the administration team, which is going to be based in Shifnal, so this will be our new administration centre."

"We will let out the three-bedroom house, so that will provide income for the Shropshire FA."

The deal was completed by Towler Shaw Roberts, which has once again been voted the most active commercial property agent in Shropshire.

It was named in the annual EG Radius On-Demand Rankings as the most active agent in the county, leading the way for deals completed in the county during 2022.



Chris Mann and Aaron Manley outside the building owned by the firm in Market Street, Wellington

Home sweet home for an estate agent

Mannleys estate agency has completed on the purchase of a Wellington town centre building as part of its 2023 expansion plans – which will see a mortgage company joining them on the site.

The business, which was formed in 2012 by director Aaron Manley, had been renting a building in Market Street.

Now, with co-director Chris Mann on board since 2016 and a team of eight permanent staff, the directors seized the chance to buy the premises when it became available.

Aaron Manley said: "We are very central here and well-known in the community. It made total sense to invest permanently in this building."

"We are also welcoming in Hilltop Mortgage Solutions to the building so we can direct clients to them for financial and mortgage assistance all under one roof."

Chris Mann added: "We love Wellington and people are always popping in for advice, so to be able to put down permanent roots here feels great."

"It's been a fantastic start to the year. We have won the Gold award for Telford for our letting services in The British Property Awards."

In the last 12 months the lettings team has grown by 50%, and the company is on target to achieve a 25% increase in the number of its managed lettings this year.



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Bringing broadband to rural communities

SWS Broadband, which specialises in providing high-speed full-fibre broadband services to rural communities, has taken on 16 members of staff and moved to a new office location in Shrewsbury.

The new staff will work across all areas of the business, from experienced telecoms industry professionals to people with a desire to learn something new. A chef with a keen interest in IT and a military dog handler are just two examples of the team who will be trained by SWS in their new careers.

The changes follow a £75 million investment in the company last autumn and are the beginning of a planned period of sustained activity, according to SWS sales director, Rachel Corner.

“While we are eager to advance new projects, adopting a measured approach to delivering our strategic goals is key to sustained business growth.

“In addition, we don’t want to lose sight of SWS’s emphasis on a happy, dedicated workforce and the provision of excellent customer service. Apart from one person, the new members of staff have all been recruited from within Shropshire, some of whom have made a complete career change. We will support them with tailored on-the-job training.”



Rachel Corner – front, second from left – welcomes the recruits at SWS Broadband’s new office on Shrewsbury Business Park



Dave Jones pictured with Q directors Ryan Wheeler, Lee Fellows, Stuart Mackintosh, Mitchell Gough, Steven Parry

Former Wolves boss in partnership with county’s finance specialists

Q Financial Services has announced a partnership with former Wolverhampton Wanderers FC manager Dave Jones.

The team says the expertise and knowledge of the man who led the club into the Premier League for the first time will be a valuable asset to the Shropshire-based business as it seeks to build its presence in the Black Country.

“We’re extremely excited to welcome Dave to the team, and his expertise and knowledge will be a great asset as we look

to expand into the Wolverhampton area,” said Q Financial Services director Stuart Mackintosh.

“To achieve this, there is no better appointment than Dave given his local presence.”

Dave said: “I’m very excited to be offered the opportunity to be joining the team at Q Financial Services.

“They’re a forward-thinking, passionate and experienced group of financial advisors.”

From support worker to care home manager



Charlie Bradley at Coverage Care Services’ Lightmoor View home in Telford

Charlie Bradley is the new manager at Coverage Care Services’ Lightmoor View home in Telford, after starting her career as a support worker at the company’s Innage Grange site in Bridgnorth 19 years ago.

Charlie, who lives in Bridgnorth, said: “I started as a support worker then developed into care, and then to assistant manager there. I transferred here six years ago as a support to the manager and the clinical lead. I worked my way up to a deputy manager, and now I’ve taken on the manager’s post.”

Lightmoor View is a specialist home which caters for older people with dementia. It has 75 beds in six self-contained units.

Ryan’s got a new home to broadcast from



Ryan Kennedy

Well-known local broadcaster Ryan Kennedy has joined the on-air team at Shropshire Live to present a new weekday mid-morning show.

It’s also a radio first for the county as the show is being broadcast from Market Drayton.

Ryan presented his last show on BBC Radio Shropshire after 12 years at the station in March. He previously worked at Beacon Radio.

Ryan said: “I’m passionate about radio and I’m passionate about Shropshire,

so it’s great to have somewhere new to share my enthusiasm.”

Chris Pritchard, editor and breakfast presenter at Shropshire Live, said: “The show being broadcast from Market Drayton is important for us, as we want to get into the heart of our local communities at a time when other local media are withdrawing.”

Shropshire Live on air launched in October 2022, as an addition to the news and entertainment website which was established in 2009.

Looking to expand membership with its growth strategy



Mike Barton and Kieran Jones

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has appointed two new membership growth executives who say they are looking forward to building new and strong links with local businesses.

Mike Barton and Kieran Jones are both well-known in the county through their previous roles.

Mike, who lives in Pontesbury, is a keen tennis player who runs his own coaching business called High Five Tennis, and he has also worked as a commercial finance broker for Q Commercial Finance.

Kieran, from Minsterley, is a former retained firefighter – a task he carried out alongside his long-standing job at the Three Tuns Brewery in Bishop’s Castle, where he worked his way up from delivery driver to operations director.

Mike said: “I learnt a huge amount during my time at Q and worked with some amazing businesses to reach their goals.

“My job at the Chamber is a very rewarding one. I get to go out and meet businesses, learn about what they do, listen to the problems and challenges they are facing, and try to find a solution.

“We want to see businesses collaborating and supporting one another for the betterment of the whole business community.”

Kieran added: “It is great to learn about businesses from all sectors and of all sizes to see how we can support them on their business journey, to grow their business to its full potential.

“At my previous job, I decided to sign the company up with the Chamber as I was keen to see how this could support the business to grow.

“When an opportunity arose to work with the Chamber, I felt excited at the thought of being able to support other businesses to develop, grow and be supported in such a fantastic way.”



Kirsty Murrell has been appointed operations manager at SMI’s Telford head office

Adding to a loyal and hard working team

Thermal insulation specialist Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI) has announced a series of new appointments on the back of a record-breaking start to the year.

The Telford-based company, known for its award-winning Temprow thermal material, recorded its best combined January and February sales, with orders for thermal curtains, covers, liners and bespoke products from across the UK and overseas.

To build on the success, SMI has restructured its senior team as it prepares to launch a series of new products during 2023.

Kirsty Murrell is now operations manager and health & safety officer; Ross Clarke has been appointed business development manager; and Chris Davies is now sales manager – with particular responsibility for leading on SMI business in Ireland.

Gemma Elsmore-Roberts’ accounts role has been expanded to include quality

officer (due to the immense amount of work involved with ISO compliance), and Matt Weaver has been recognised as warehouse engineer.

SMI managing director Jill Seymour said: “This is going to be an important year for the company as we expand our range with innovative new products. My husband Brian, our chairman and founder, is constantly working on many R&D projects, and is hopeful some will be launched before the end of the year.

“We have an incredibly loyal and hard-working team here who create the family atmosphere which we are proud to have always retained. I’m incredibly grateful to all of them for their support.”

She added: “The success that has been achieved in the past two years has enabled us to modernise and adapt our manufacturing facilities.

“We hope to be launching a new product for the agricultural sector which we believe has huge potential and cost savings, and are currently trialling a new Temprow thermal cover for supermarket freezers, which has so far been very well received.”



Chloe Williams

Newly-qualified Chloe

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler has strengthened its commercial and agricultural property team in Telford with the appointment of a new solicitor.

Chloe Williams is a newly-qualified solicitor having already built up a great deal of experience within her specialist field.

Praveen Chaudhari, head of Lanyon Bowdler's commercial and agricultural team, said: "We are delighted to welcome Chloe to the firm – she has already made an impressive impact in her new role."

"We are living through a challenging economic climate, but while there are some worries within the commercial and agricultural sector, we are still seeing strong demand for commercial property within the Telford area, and are encouraged to see calls for our services remaining extremely high."

Chloe began her law career as a secretary in the commercial and residential property team at another local law firm in 2017.

Team is a special brew

Shrewsbury-based speciality coffee roaster Iron & Fire has made three senior appointments to support continued growth across both its trade and direct to consumer customer bases.

Since the pandemic, its direct-to-consumer business has more than tripled. It now has its sights on further growth in the coming year of 300% across its trade business, making a stronger team necessary.

Mark Shore has joined as finance manager with a remit to drive greater efficiencies in the team's accounting management systems, especially as business driven via e-commerce continues to grow.

Mark Brookes joins to head up business development, with a view to expanding Iron & Fire's footprint amongst larger hospitality venues and national brands.

And Sophie Cowdell is assistant



Mark Brookes, Sophie Cowdell, and Mark Shore with Joanna De Rycke

roastery manager. She has a proven passion for coffee having worked in the industry for almost ten years and her efficiency, friendly manner, and focus on customer services, all make her a great fit for the team.

Director Joanna De Rycke said: "It's imperative that we build our team with like-minded individuals, so whether that's prior experience in the speciality coffee sector, a sound grasp of working in a growing business, or just a passion for a great roast, we're always on the lookout for genuine talent to join us."



Martyn Gough welcomes Teresa Maden to Rybrook BMW Shrewsbury

Teresa's new role

A well-known and familiar face to the Shropshire business community has recently been appointed local business development manager at Rybrook BMW Shrewsbury.

Teresa Maden brings a wealth of expertise, professionalism and a 'people first' attitude to her new role. She said: "I am looking forward to reigniting existing relationships and cementing new ones."

"I am truly grateful to both Aidan Coley, head of business, and Martyn Gough, new car sales manager, for investing and believing in me. I am confident I can succeed and make a real difference to the business and its customers for many years to come."

Martyn Gough said: "I have known Teresa for many years through her role at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, so I am naturally delighted she has decided to join us. I know Teresa's strengths and she can only add to the success of the business moving forward, she will certainly bring significant value to the team."

There in three clicks

Three new team members have joined Bridgnorth-based web design specialist Clickingmad to help handle its growing business. Seamus Howard (24), Alex Guest (23), and Daniel Sweeney (23), have been recruited as junior web developers.

Clickingmad managing director Shaun Carvill said the company's business had grown significantly over the past two years.

"We were looking for new developers to join us, but we particularly wanted to recruit young people at the start of their digital careers. It gives them a chance to develop their skills and brings a new perspective to the company," he said.



Clickingmad's new junior web developers join the team

The three have been recruited to roles which include building, updating and maintaining websites, helping and supporting clients with updating their websites, and improving search engine optimisation.

Seamus, from Halesowen, has been programming in one form or another since he was a child. He started creating websites and basic games from the age of 12, and moved into web development from the age of 17.

Alex, from Bridgnorth, studied computer science at Staffordshire University after developing a passion for web development at an early age. He worked on freelance projects for businesses and individuals while at university.

Daniel moved to Bridgnorth from the Isle of Wight to take up his new post with Clickingmad, after completing a computer science degree at Aberystwyth University. He said that his experience in his new role had been excellent.

Shaun added: "It's quite inspiring to see the enthusiasm and commitment that the three of them have. They have all settled in really well, and we are looking forward to working with them into the future."



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Five minutes with...

MARK ALLSOP is managing director of Yarrington Limited, a creative company based in Shrewsbury which works across live events, digital projects, graphic design, video and live streaming. It has just celebrated its 25th anniversary.

HOW HAVE YOU BEEN IMPACTED BY UNCERTAINTIES IN THE ECONOMY?

We genuinely haven't felt any impact. Our clients are drawn from a wide variety of sectors and when budgets reduce for some, there will always be others who require our services. We're in a stronger trading position now than we were pre-pandemic.

HAS THE FALLOUT FROM THE PANDEMIC CREATED NEW OPPORTUNITIES?

Absolutely. The creation of live streaming studios and SBLTV has opened up new revenue streams and introduced us to new clients which continues to grow the company. We're an agile company that will swiftly adopt new technologies to offer services to clients, and this is a great example of our ability to react positively in a time of deep uncertainty. Remote working has also allowed greater flexibility for staff and improved work/life balances.

ARE YOU STILL MEETING ON ZOOM/ TEAMS ETC, OR BACK TO FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING?

We do them all! It comes down to client preference and we still undertake many meetings virtually. As for events, we're keen on hybrid formats that allow people to join virtually if they are unable to attend. There's obviously a cost saving to virtual and hybrid events, but we've worked hard to offer a better experience for those who can't attend in person.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Supportive, encouraging, knowledgeable... although sometimes challenging.

HIGHLIGHTS OR MILESTONES OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

There have been a few. I was lucky enough to be in Fleet Street during the eighties and nineties, working with some of the biggest brands in the world which was exciting and fun in equal measure. The success of Yarrington - from working as a sole trader in a back bedroom to where we are now - has to be the greatest achievement. The multiple and high-profile national awards we've won for our work were all stand out moments. We've also worked with many hugely talented colleagues and amazing clients in some fabulous locations along the way. I'm proud of the recent SBLTV and BBTV projects for many reasons, and the work we have undertaken that has made a difference to people's lives. A couple of stand outs would be flying into Monte Carlo by helicopter prior to a major conference, interviewing Piers Morgan on his TV set in New York... and preventing Lesley from stepping on a rattlesnake when we were working at an event in Arizona!



Mark Allsop, managing director



Monte Carlo - helicopter arrival was a highlight



Mark will be heading off to Greenland on a fishing expedition later this year

PET HATES?

Incompetence, rudeness, a lack enthusiasm, and people who lie. I don't tend to suffer fools gladly.

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

I have few regrets and I'd do it all again without hesitation, but I'd probably say: "Don't worry. Trust yourself. Everything will be just fine."

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

I'm an avid salmon fisherman and have travelled extensively in Scotland, Norway, Iceland, Wales, and Ireland in their pursuit. This year I'll be heading to the wilds of Greenland to fish for their cousins, Arctic Char. Hailing from the fair city of Wolverhampton, I have a lifelong affiliation to the Wolves and all the pain that brings. I'm a long-time season ticket holder and whilst I still enjoy attending games, I would never consider it relaxing!

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

It's a relatively small community compared to the larger conurbations and as a result, it all seems friendlier with good communication, and businesses are genuinely supportive of each other.

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

I used to dig graves for a living.

YOU CAN TAKE ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE CD ONTO A DESERT ISLAND - WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

I read quite a range of genres but rarely revisit titles so would struggle to name a favourite book. My all-time favourite film is the 1983 Bill Forsyth masterpiece, Local Hero. If there could only be one album it would have to be Astral Weeks by Van Morrison, a recording like no other.

FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

The late great contrarian Christopher Hitchens would definitely be on the guest list, as would Mikael Frödin and Feargal Sharkey, to discuss salmon angling and the abysmal state of our rivers. I'd also want to have my sons Douglas and Lewis there as their company is always enjoyable.

WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?

Probably something Italian as it's my favourite cuisine. However, with that guest list I think that the drinks would be far more important than the food.

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

Hopefully more of the same. I'm not out of ideas yet!

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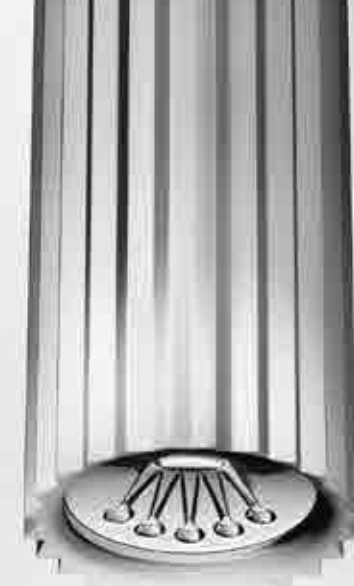
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