

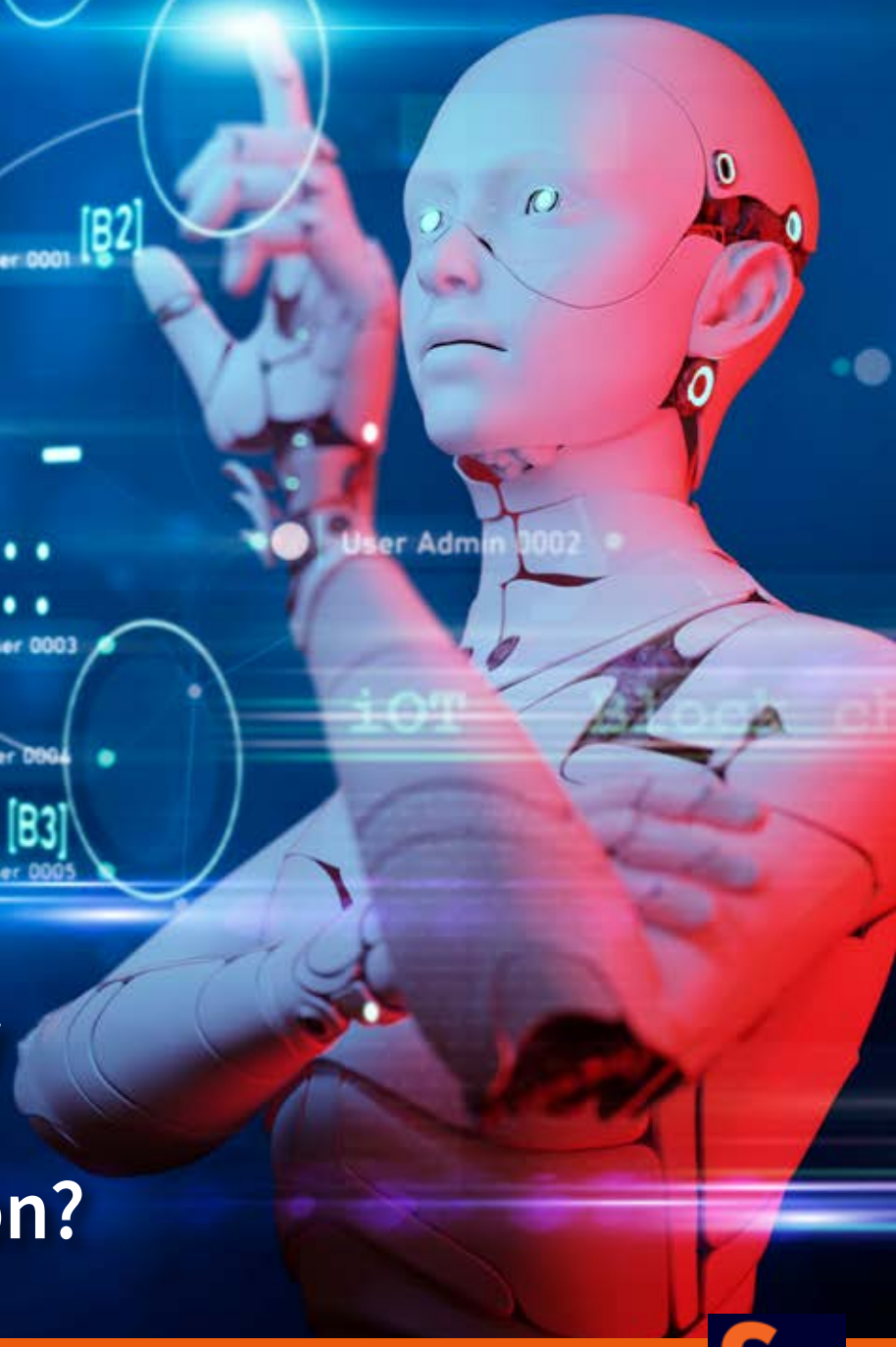
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ISSUE 41 :
SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023

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MIDLANDS MEDIA AWARDS
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SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER AWARDS
Best New Business (SBLTV)

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The views expressed by our columnists are not necessarily those held by the publisher, or editor.

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



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By Carl Jones
Shropshire Business Editor

SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

Welcome

In keeping with the tech-driven theme of this edition, I was toying with the idea of just getting Chat GPT to write a 400-word piece to place here.

But I'm hoping that it would have been incapable of capturing the multitude of emotive business issues swirling around in my head, built from three decades of interaction with the local business community.

Or would it . . . ? Never underestimate your competition, they say!

Artificial Intelligence is here to stay, whether we like the idea or not. We carried out a Shropshire Business survey a few weeks ago to gauge local opinion, and while three quarters of you said you were happily embracing AI, a significant number also expressed fears about what it could mean for their jobs.

In our special report, we take a look at some of the big talking points around AI, asking where it's going to lead us next (and how quickly), what it can already do for us now, and how we can potentially capitalise.

We also reveal what happens when we do ask an auto-bot to write a Shropshire business-themed article for us!

Shropshire attracted national headlines this summer when a survey revealed that some manufacturing and engineering businesses are shying away from employing people under the age of 21 because of concerns over their reliability and work-readiness. What do you think? Is this a fair comment, or just the voice of a vocal minority?

We explore the issue in more

detail, and report on a debate around recruitment and skills which was held in the final edition of the third series of Shropshire Business Live TV.

Incredibly, Shropshire Business magazine is seven years old this month – where has that time gone?

On behalf of our fantastic team, I want to thank everyone, from the bottom of our hearts, who has supported and encouraged us along the way. We are hugely grateful, and never take it for granted.

I know they say you should always look forward, but I couldn't resist a sneaky peek at what I was writing in this column seven years ago, to see how much has changed . . . or indeed stayed the same.

We were championing the fact that Shropshire is home to some of the UK's most dynamic, innovative, creative, and internationally-successful enterprises, driven by remarkable people. That's certainly not changed.

We were speculating about what the future held in the face of complex economic challenges. Back then it was all about Brexit – now you can substitute interest rates and inflation.

And we were celebrating the desire to keep the "Shropshire pound" in the county by supporting local suppliers whenever possible. Since Covid, I think this appetite has grown even stronger.

Just goes to show that the more things change, the more they stay the same.

So I'll sign off in much the same way as I did in that very first edition.

Let's all work together to remind ourselves what a great success story Shropshire truly is, and play our part in ensuring that it continues to thrive.

Is £87 million scheme on a road to nowhere?

With tens of millions of pounds needing to be shaved off the local authority spending bill to balance the books, people are asking whether Shrewsbury’s North West Relief Road should ever be built.

The £87 million project, which would complete a ‘ring road’ around the county town, has been years in the planning, but has reached something of an impasse this summer. It has now reached the point where the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership says it is considering withdrawing its funding for the Oxon Link Road stretch. A final decision will be made at its board meeting in November. The LEP has agreed to give Shropshire Council time to prepare a refreshed business plan for the scheme, which has received £4.2 million of LEP investment through the Local Growth Fund.

Board members agreed the business plan should include updated traffic modelling and up-to-date analysis showing that there is still a need for a road and that it offers value for money. This information would need to be produced by the end of October, by which time a planning decision would be expected to have been made.

LEP chair Sonia Roberts said the board wanted Shropshire Council to demonstrate that there was still a strong business case for the money to be invested in the scheme.

“The board will consider this new information and the outcome of the planning decision at its meeting in November and make a final decision about whether to continue to support the Oxon Link Road project,” she said.

“We feel we have been very patient with the council, having first awarded this funding eight and half years ago. The Marches LEP has a mandate from Government to ensure the best use of public money and is accountable for the appropriate management and oversight of all funding we allocate.

“The board has agreed that in this case the council must provide the evidence that this funding still represents an appropriate use of public money and must also make progress on planning.”

The LEP decision follows continued delays in delivery of the OLR. The funding was originally awarded as part of the first round of the Local Growth Fund specifically for the 1.14km of the Oxon Link Road, and not for the larger North West Relief Road.

LEP chief executive Rachel Laver said: “This is a significant amount of public money and it is the LEP’s duty to ensure it is used



The project, which would complete a ‘ring road’ around Shrewsbury, has been years in the planning



LEP chair Sonia Roberts

appropriately. We are aware that there are significant other issues which affect this project and this decision seeks to give the council time to address some of those concerns.

“Members will decide in November what is the most appropriate course of action once we have received the updated information we require from Shropshire Council. We continue to have an excellent working relationship with the council.”

The scheme had been due to go before planners for final approval earlier this summer, but a decision was delayed again after the Environment Agency raised concerns over the impact which it felt pile-driving work could potentially have on local drinking water supplies.

As a result, agency officials said they could not recommend the scheme is given planning permission “at this time”.

The North West Relief Road project has been met with vocal opposition, with more than 4,500 objections from the public – as well as from town councils in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Oswestry, and Bridgnorth.

Shropshire Council insists the route is vital to take traffic out of Shrewsbury’s town centre, and will provide economic benefits.

Shrewsbury Business Chamber has also previously given its backing to the project, saying: “We have campaigned for this road for many years as we believe its construction will bring considerable environmental, commercial, and transport benefits for the town and its hinterland.

“It will reduce vehicular traffic from the town centre and approach roads, as well as from the villages on the west side of Shrewsbury.”

And when Shropshire Chamber of Commerce carried out a survey of its members, 78% of them came out in favour of the scheme.

● *What do you think? Is there a sound business and environmental case for the North West Relief Road, and do you think it will ever be built? Email editor@shropshirebiz.com with your views*

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Is contract work on the cards for professionals?

Would you be prepared to cash in your full-time contract for the flexibility of contract work instead? According to new research, the answer from a growing number of Shropshire workers appears to be a resounding ‘yes’.

More than half the professionals polled in the survey say they would consider switching to a contract role for the right pay, citing a combination of the current economic climate, and a decline in company culture and workplace perks.

The findings are contained in the Contractor Recruitment Guide published by Walters People, which said the top five sectors for hiring contractors this year were IT and digital, healthcare and life sciences, engineering and construction, finance and

accounting, and creative industries. According to the survey, the ‘soft perks’ of the average permanent employee average out at £1,200 a year, while contractors stand to boost their earnings by more than 10 times that figure.

Janine Blacksley, director of Walters People, said: “With the rise of fully remote working and 4-day week trails, it is no surprise to hear that professionals are re-thinking how they carry out their day job – and contracting can be a viable option.

“Once upon a time, permanent jobs provided the best level of job security – but with the economy as turbulent as it is, professionals are becoming more comfortable with jobs not being ‘for life’ and that is where the gig economy comes in.

“There has been a misconception that contracting belongs only to highly-experienced workers or those with a specialist skillset – but the very nature of contracting is professionals who are able to come into a role quickly, hit

the ground running, and help to complete a project or fill a temporary hole within a business, and that can be any individual at any seniority level.

“We are all too aware of how much young professionals value attaining a work-life balance, as well as their habit of getting itchy feet and being quick to consider their next career step. Both of these aspects are foundational to contractor roles – as is the ability to earn more than their permanent counterparts.

“Added to that, young workers have been described as the most entrepreneurial – they place real value on being able to let their work do the talking rather than the hours served.

“Contract roles provide young professionals with the perfect springboard to be the best in their field. They are also great resume-builders and provide opportunity to build-up experience as well as hone a host of new skills.”

Fast forward to a property development

Telford’s former Maxell factory has been demolished to make way for nearly 300 new homes.

The Apley site was home to one of the first big Japanese brands to set up a base in the town, making video and audio cassettes, and batteries. But it had been empty since 2014.

Countryside Partnerships started work to demolish the 183,000 sq ft factory with the help of enabling and demolition experts McAuliffe Group.

Much of the waste generated from the demolition is being recycled, with around 95% of the former factory’s concrete floor slab being crushed to provide certified aggregate, helping to reduce lorry movements.

Phil McHugh, of Countryside Partnerships, said: “The demolition of the Maxell factory is a major milestone for Charlton Gardens, clearing the way for 285 new homes that will provide high-quality living environments for many families in the region, who will be able to enjoy an exceptional lifestyle and a green outlook.”



The former Maxell factory site is set to become a development of 285 new homes



Advanced Chemical Etching has enjoyed a £550,000 sales boost in the first six months of 2023



Martin Cox has worked in the etching sector for more than 15 years

Scratching the surface of business possibilities

Educating companies on the manufacturing benefits of etching is paying off for a Telford-based precision component specialist.

Advanced Chemical Etching has enjoyed a £550,000 sales boost in the first six months of 2023 after securing a string of new contracts with clients in the aerospace, automotive, electronics and, more recently, the space sector.

This marks a 13% increase on the same period last year and, to cope with the renewed demand from customers in the UK and overseas, a further 15 people have been recruited to work at its base in Hortonwood.

Executive director Chris Ball said: “A lot of the new work we have won has come from firms who are reshoring orders back to the UK, many of whom are looking for security of supply and quicker lead times.

“Etching is a very undervalued manufacturing discipline. It can be used to produce high tolerance parts in their thousands and, thanks to the processes we’ve developed, we can etch lightweight materials including aluminium and titanium.

“When we’ve been exhibiting this year, a significant number of delegates thought our parts had been produced using laser cutting or by stamping – two procedures that traditionally are more expensive than what we do.”

ACE, which specialises in the development of precision components to customers in more than 35 countries, has also strengthened its sales team with the appointment of industry expert Martin Cox.

The former toolmaking apprentice has been involved in the etching sector for more than 15 years and brings with him a wealth of technical and commercial experience spanning automotive, aerospace, electronics and medical.

Managing director Ian Whateley said: “2023 has been an extremely exciting year, with a 30% increase in the workforce, two strategic sales appointments and the installation of new etching machines to boost our capacity.

“The latter should be operational by December and will provide the platform required for us to hit £10 million sales by the middle of 2024.”



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Delighted to support fundraising campaign

The chairman of Shropshire Rural Support charity has thanked everybody who supported a fundraising drive to buy and install a life-saving community access defibrillator at Shrewsbury Auction Centre.

Andrew Bebb says it's "fantastic" that the mission to provide the defibrillator at the livestock market has been successful.

"The defibrillator has been a long time coming, for various reasons, but we got there in the end. It's wonderful news and I would like to thank everybody who contributed to the fundraising campaign."

Directors of Halls, the Shropshire business which runs Shrewsbury Auction Centre, paid half the cost of the defibrillator. Local farmer and businessman James Cartwright, who owns Cambers Country Stores, covered the rest after hearing an interview with Andrew on BBC Radio Shropshire.

James Evans, a director of Halls and an auctioneer at Shrewsbury and Bishop's Castle livestock markets, said: "We were delighted to support Andrew's fundraising campaign for the community access defibrillator because you never know when you are going to need it."



At the installation of the new defibrillator are (from left) Shropshire Rural Support chairman Andrew Bebb, Shrewsbury Auction Centre manager Jonny Dymond, Halls' director James Evans, Cambers Country Stores manager Graham Pocock, and Henry Angell-James Memorial Trust founder Sally Angell-James.

Awards leave staff 'over the mooooo-n'

A Shropshire cheese company has scooped six prizes at the event known as the Oscars of the dairy industry.

Telford-based Bridge Cheese supplies cheese and dairy products to the food manufacturing, wholesale and food service sectors.

It won three gold awards, two silvers and one bronze at the awards, which champion world class producers of cheese and dairy products. Every year, more than 5,000 entries are received by organisers.

Bridge Cheese took the top two awards in both the grated cheese (non-UK cheese) and processed cheese sticks/strings/ropes categories, as well as a gold award for its mild white cheddar, a silver for its garlic and chives ropes, and a bronze for its mature white cheddar.

This is the first time Bridge Cheese has entered the annual industry awards.

Commercial manager Monica

Chauhan said: "We are absolutely over the moon.

"We've attended the trade fair for a number of years, but this is the first time we've taken the plunge and entered the awards and we couldn't be happier.

"The quality and consistency of our product is something we are really proud of, so for a panel of judges to validate that is an amazing feeling.

"We are also really chuffed to have both the gold and silver awards for our cheese ropes, as these are bespoke products we've developed specifically for our pizza customers – both in the food manufacturing and food service sectors.

"We're especially pleased about the awards for products we source on behalf of our customers – we work hard to make sure they benefit through our supply chain and the flexibility it offers."

Bridge Cheese recently expanded its premises at Stafford Park with an extra line and additional warehouse space to accommodate its growing customer base.



Commercial manager Monica Chauhan from Telford-based Bridge Cheese

Return of BizFest

Shropshire BizFest is back – with a winner of the BBC's hit show The Apprentice as one of the headline speakers.

The event, organised by marketing agency Reech, is free to attend and will be held at the Dye House at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings on September 14.

Among the guest speakers is Mark Wright, the entrepreneur, digital marketing specialist and speaker who won The Apprentice in 2014 and he runs one of the UK's fastest growing digital marketing agencies.

He is chief executive of digital marketing agency Climb Online which he launched with Lord Alan Sugar's backing after winning the show. The company turned over £1.7 million in its first year of trading.

Mark has since gone on to invest in a number of other business opportunities.

Other speakers include Julie Bates, founder and co-director of Shropshire-based faux flower specialist Peony, which has gone from strength to strength since launching in 2005.

First launched in 2018, BizFest is a chance for Shropshire business owners to gather insights and information they can apply to their own business.

Whether they already have an established strategy for their growth and marketing, or they want to learn about new trends and approaches, BizFest aims to have something for all attendees to take away.

Reech managing director Rob Hughes said: "As a result of the pandemic, BizFest has unfortunately been absent from the Shropshire business events calendar, but we're proud to be bringing it back and focusing on business growth.

"We're excited to have Mark Wright join us as a headline speaker and



Amelia Redge and Michelle Jehu of Reech, at the Flaxmill

we have no doubt that all attendees will come away with new ideas for their businesses from all the speakers they hear from."

BizFest is free to attend, with a limited number of spaces available. You can register your interest to attend the event – which will also include live music, and food and drink from Shropshire-based suppliers – at www.shropshirebizfest.co.uk.

There are also opportunities for businesses to sponsor, or attend as an exhibitor. Email bizfest@reech.agency for more information.

In addition to hearing from keynote speakers, attendees can meet with prospective partners and suppliers, network with other like-minded individuals, and develop new and fruitful working relationships that support the future growth of their business.

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Opportunity brings power to the people

A share offer has been launched to fund the transfer of a solar farm near Whitchurch into community ownership.

The scheme, for Twemlows solar farm, has been launched by Shropshire and Telford Community Energy, a local community benefit society.

STCE says it will enable local people who care about climate change to put their money to work to tackle the issue directly, earn a fair return on their investment, and greatly increase the solar farm's economic contribution to the local area.

The north Shropshire site has been operating since 2016 and, with a capacity of 10MWp, it supplies enough electricity for the equivalent of 3,400 average homes, saving over 4,000 tonnes of carbon per year.

It has been built on agricultural land, where a local farmer grazes sheep between the panels.

Robert Saunders, who chairs STCE, said: "Our aim is to raise the capital needed to purchase this highly-efficient operating solar farm and deliver a substantial increase in community benefits for many years to come. "We have ambitions to develop other community energy projects, and are working on a heat and wind project in Bishop's Castle. "Twemlows is supporting a cleaner, greener, fairer future helping to accelerate the transition to net zero and we hope lots of local people will join us on the journey."

STCE has already distributed £22,500 from the Twemlows community fund this year, supporting projects such as household energy surveys and advice in south Shropshire, new lighting and rainwater harvesting for the Park Lane Centre in Telford, Whitchurch Blackberry Fair, and maintenance of wildlife areas at Queensway playing fields near Whitchurch.

Once it is community-owned, the Twemlows site is expected to generate a community benefit pot of £4.5 million over the next 18 years.

The share offer is being launched on positive investment platform Ethex with a target annual return of 6%. The minimum investment is £250 and the total fund raise target is £730,000.

The share offer will be open until October 27 – but may close earlier if fully-subscribed.

Shareholders will become a member of Shropshire and Telford Community Energy on a



Twemlows solar farm pictured from above



STCE team members at Twemlows

one vote per shareholder basis and have a say in how the site is run in future.

STCE is part of a partnership with four other like-minded community benefit societies in England and Wales called Community Energy Together (CET).

Robert Saunders added: "Community-owned energy gives individuals the vital opportunity to play a part in the clean energy transition beyond just being a consumer. "STCE is in great company with four like-

minded community benefit societies. While owning our individual solar farms, we are committed to working together and supporting each other so that we can benefit from each other's expertise, experience and share knowledge and lessons along the way."

Emma Bridge, chief executive of Community Energy England, said: "Local ownership of our green energy infrastructure is vital for engaging people with the changes we must make to get to net zero."

New home for group

Healthcare construction specialist Darwin Group has relocated to Telford after a period of rapid expansion that has seen it create 30 new jobs.

The off-site construction specialist, which employs around 200 specialist staff, has moved its office from Shawbury to Telford's Plaza One building after outgrowing its former home.

Telford is now home to 109 Darwin Group office-based staff, while its production facility which employs 72 people, will remain in Shawbury.

The firm, established in 2006, works in partnership with the NHS to create healthcare facilities built using innovative off-site construction methods at its own production facility.

Its founder and chief executive Richard Pierce said that recruitment would continue throughout the next 12-18 months and the Telford move would help to attract the best new talent as the firm continued to grow.

"We enjoyed our time in Shawbury, but we'd simply outgrown the space. The last 12 months have seen us go through a period of phenomenal growth, with 30 new roles created in the last seven months alone.

"We decided to relocate to Plaza One in Telford because it gives us the perfect space for our expanding team, and it increases our employment catchment area. It's also an easy location to reach thanks to its excellent road and rail links, which will help us attract the very best talent as we continue to grow."

The company celebrated the opening of the new Telford headquarters with a visit from Telford & Wrekin Council's mayor Councillor Arnold England, and cabinet member for Education, Employment and Visitor Economy Councillor Eileen Callear.



Darwin Group chief executive and founder Richard Pierce, Councillor Arnold England, Councillor Eileen Callear, and Darwin Group deputy chief executive Jim Pierce

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AI

The fourth industrial revolution is here, and it's being driven by Artificial Intelligence. But will AI improve your job, transform it – or maybe make it redundant?

Shropshire Business editor CARL JONES canvasses a wide range of opinions in this special report . . . and puts Chat GPT to the journalistic test.

Friend, or foe? That's the big question about the AI revolution. And here in Shropshire, there are wildly differing views.

If you ask Chat GPT to answer the question, you'll unsurprisingly receive a swift, slick and unequivocally positive response. But in truth, the answer is far from straightforward.

Even architects like Sam Altman, chairman and chief executive of OpenAI which developed ChatGPT, have gone on record to warn of an 'existential risk' it presents to humanity.

This could become even more serious, he believes, when AI morphs into what is referred to 'artificial general intelligence', where 'smarter than human' machines begin to perform more tasks without our input. It sounds like something out of a dystopian sci-fi movie.

And at time of writing, the Hollywood actors' and writers' strike, where the threat from AI is at the very heart, has passed the 100-day mark with no obvious sign of resolution.

Yet at the same time, AI is already proving to be incredibly useful in many critical areas of our lives such as medical technology, transportation, energy, space travel and business analytics – as well as being used by the police to help track drivers using their mobile phones at the wheel.

When Google's own chatbot, Bard, was asked to identify the 10 jobs most at risk of being replaced by artificial intelligence, data entry clerks came out top of the list, followed by customer service representatives, truck drivers, telemarketers, accountants, legal assistants, web developers, translators, graphic designers, and factory workers.

Should they be worried? The Spectator magazine sums it up like this: "AI may become the crack cocaine of the digital age, offering the highs of facility and speed to the masses without giving most of us anything good. Meanwhile, the dealers – the tech giants and autocratic regimes – will become ever more rich and powerful."

But is the county's business community feeling an addition yet to this newest technology-driven drug? Shropshire Business magazine ran a poll on LinkedIn to try to find out.

Highly unscientific, of course, but it revealed that 75% see AI as something which should be embraced, while 10% find it scary and are worried that jobs will be at risk. The remaining 15% reckon the jury's still out as they dip their toes in the water and continue to cautiously investigate.

One person who is in no doubt about the power or impact of AI is Rod Plummer, the boss of Shoothill in Shrewsbury, a firm of custom software engineers with a focus on business intelligence.

He says: "Put very simply, AI attempts to mimic how humans think and behave while machine learning – a subset of AI – uses algorithms, small processes, and machine code to automate repetitive tasks.

"We all use this technology already in ways we don't perhaps realise. Google analyses what you're searching for, and if you spell a word wrong, corrects it or suggests a different word based on other people's previous searches.

An artificial problem or real danger?



Rod Plummer of Shoothill in Shrewsbury

"This is machine learning. As for business, I would say within the next three to five years AI will apply to most businesses in some form. For example, I could see a law firm using an AI chatbot on its website to analyse a case, assess its legal ramifications based on thousands of previous court proceedings, and match you to a specialist lawyer before arranging a meeting for you.

"Estate agents could automatically value your house or your accountant prepare your tax affairs within seconds of a new budget announcement by the Chancellor. It's just a question of imagination."

Rod says AI is most definitely not out of the reach of Shropshire businesses.

"While costly to develop, AIs like Chat GPT offer an API, a middle-man for software, allowing two systems to interact. This means that for very little cost when partnered with an understanding of your business, you can benefit from this innovation.

"We have already carried out a number of projects using AI, both for our clients and ourselves. One of our customers, Supersocks, wanted to automatically remove backgrounds from images leaving just a person's face.

"We built an algorithm to facilitate this on

their website. Last month we implemented an AI chatbot system to assist a company's customer support; this saw a reduction in support emails of 38%. Another client took orders by email. Their staff spent hours manually creating purchase orders, so we used machine learning to speed this process up."

Shortly before lockdown, Shoothill also created its own image colourisation AI 'Photovamp', where people could upload a black and white photo and the system would turn it into colour, as well as identifying different objects within a picture.

"AI is also changing our work as a software company. While it's not writing our computer programs (yet), AI is starting to help us to check our code, and to test our software," Rod says.

But against all these endless opportunities and possibilities, should we be fearful that AI is going to take Shropshire people's jobs?

"Thirty years ago, some companies probably thought the internet wasn't going to be relevant to them," Rod says.

"People would have a secretary to type a letter, put it in an envelope and post it, but now we have email. We also had travel agents to book holidays, while people were going into the bank to pay in cheques or bookshops to buy books. Today, I book my holidays online, scan my cheques with an app and get my books on Amazon. And what business doesn't have a website?

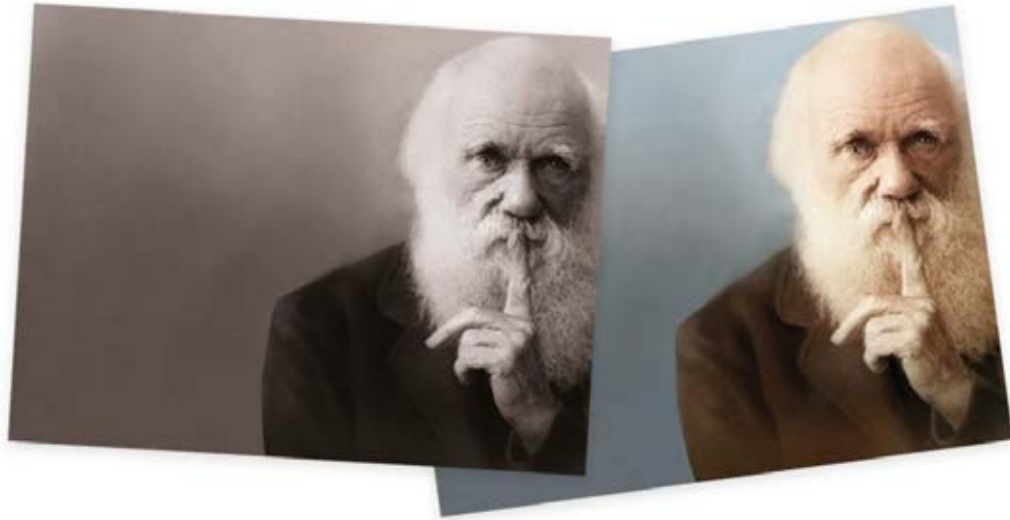
"All this meant some jobs disappeared – but how many new jobs and companies were created because of the web . . . Shoothill included?

"The same can be said for AI – it's here to stay. We are at the beginning of this journey and while some jobs will undoubtedly be affected, massive new opportunities and businesses that don't yet exist will emerge.

"It's our job to understand what this tech is capable of, and how we can apply it to a business's needs. We've done this for 17 years and AI is going to help us offer greater benefits to our customers."

Not everyone is feeling quite so well-equipped to operate in a digital world, though.

Google is launching a set of training courses to show UK workers how AI can be integrated into their jobs. It comes as the Digital



AI in action – Charles Darwin transformed into technicolour, thanks to Shoothill's AI 'Photovamp'

Exclusion report finds five million workers will be acutely under-skilled in basic digital skills by 2030.

Claire Trachet, tech industry expert and chief executive of business advisory firm Trachet, says there is a real need for a combined effort between tech giants and the Government to focus on upskilling its tech workforce.

"Whilst Google's approach in helping the UK workforce is a step in the right direction, more needs to be done to ensure the workforce can effectively use and manage AI.

"It would be great to see the Government partnering with tech firms in this area to provide better support for companies across the UK, helping them to unleash AI's potential in a positive and safe way. Without this action, as we know, AI can pose risks which could later become difficult to slow down or reverse.

"Due to the fast-growing nature of AI, the Government also need to propose clear regulation that will balance driving innovation across the economy and also safeguard the interests of consumers and businesses. While we have some form of risk management and different reports coming out now, none of them are true coordinated approaches. As the AI space is so fast-paced, establishing effective regulation can be difficult. One thing that can be done, is to put a clear responsibility onto the boards of these AI companies, so that they prioritise the safeguarding surrounding their products at all times."

According to a Forbes Advisor survey, 76% of UK consumers are concerned about the misinformation that comes with AI technology, suggesting a caution amongst consumers around how AI operates and its potential.

Claire adds: "In terms of the job market, AI remains very new in the grand scheme of things. I personally think that there needs to be a balance between AI and humans overseeing the decisions being made by the technology.

"Although AI can be utilised by businesses to improve efficiency amongst data-driven tasks, it can lack vital human skills that are necessary for the workplace, such as emotional intelligence, the ability to read a room and interacting with clients."

Greg Sheppard is managing director of



Greg Sheppard from Amery IT Support, Telford

Amery IT Support in Telford, and has worked in the industry for over 20 years with companies such as Epson and Xerox.

He believes AI – in its current form - is not going to take over the world or steal our jobs.

"There's no 'Judgment Day' scenario on the horizon. AI is an algorithm, nothing more and nothing less, and once you understand the algorithm you can start to exploit it to your advantage.

"One of the primary challenges in the AI landscape revolves around data quality. AI systems heavily rely on data to make informed decisions, and if the data is biased or flawed, it can lead to inaccurate results or reinforce existing biases.

"Concerns surrounding potential job displacement have been raised repeatedly. While AI can automate certain tasks, history has shown that technological advancements often lead to the creation of new job opportunities rather than eliminating jobs altogether.

"It is essential to focus on reskilling and upskilling your workforce to embrace the changes brought about by AI. In fact it is considered by many that within the next 10 years we are likely to see official AI query writers become commonplace in many sectors



Cat Brown of Pertemps

and education to be expanded to include courses on AI querying or complete AI courses all together."

Greg says another 'exciting' aspect of AI is its capacity to augment human capabilities.

"By leveraging AI as a tool, professionals in various fields can amplify their problem-solving abilities, make data-driven decisions, and handle vast amounts of information more effectively. This collaboration between humans and AI can lead to groundbreaking advancements that were previously unattainable."

"I am personally excited about medical advancements and diagnosis through AI. Rather than viewing AI as a potential threat, we should recognise it as a transformative tool that empowers us to achieve more. To fully harness its potential, individuals and organisations need to invest in upskilling efforts.

"The impact of AI in the workplace is going to be nothing short of revolutionary.

"In customer support, AI-driven chatbots are becoming commonplace and in some cases actually good.

"These virtual assistants efficiently handle customer inquiries, resolve common issues, and provide personalised assistance around the clock. This not only improves customer satisfaction but also frees up human agents to focus on more complex and value-added interactions.

"AI's prowess in data analysis is transforming how businesses interpret information.

"AI algorithms can identify patterns, predict trends, and uncover insights from large datasets, aiding in critical decision-making across various departments like marketing, finance, and operations."

Dr David George from Telford is an AI expert who has developed choiceMaster, an AI-based service which helps online shoppers make informed decisions by recommending the best option for them and providing a clear explanation. He has founded and co-founded successful software companies that specialise in applying AI solutions to knowledge-intensive business processes for large international organisations.



Dr David George says AI has the potential to improve road safety

◀ “Artificial Intelligence currently stands at the forefront of technological advancement, transforming businesses, contributing to economic growth and impacting the way we live,” he says.

“Yet, the question of whether AI is a friend or foe remains a complicated issue, as developments unfold a future of both promise and concerns.

“Progress in AI is rapidly establishing itself in our daily lives, causing transformative changes across various sectors. For example, in healthcare, AI algorithms meticulously analyse medical data, enabling the early detection of potential diseases.

“This advancement not only enhances diagnostic accuracy but also paves the way for achieving human-level performance in diverse domains, including computer vision, image processing, natural language understanding, and reasoning capabilities.

“In transportation, AI propels the advancement of self-driving cars, having the potential to significantly improve road safety and efficiency. Beyond this, AI is now pushing the boundaries of human-like creativity by applying generative algorithms capable of crafting art forms, music, and literature.

“In customer service, chatbots powered by AI now offer immediate assistance, enhancing user experiences, reducing response times and improving service levels.”

Ethical and economic concerns are at the heart of the issue, Dr George says.

“Amid the developments, the emergence of AI also raises responsibility and economic challenges. One central issue lies in job displacement, as increased automation threatens employment.

“The fear of AI rendering some human workers redundant requires careful consideration and proactive strategies to reskill the workforce for roles that harness the collaborative potential.

“Furthermore, AI’s decision-making capacity intensifies ethical quandaries.

Machine learning algorithms can inherit biases present in the training data, inadvertently perpetuating societal prejudices. The potential for AI to make critical decisions, such as those in criminal justice or financial loan approvals for example, raises transparency and fairness concerns that demand effective and timely controls.”



AI is already helping drive innovations in healthcare



Dr David George from Telford

So it’s a case of working out how to balance progress and responsibility then?

Dr George says the ongoing evolution of AI hinges on achieving a balance between technological advancement and societal well-being. As AI matures, he believes that ensuring that it contributes positively to society requires proactive measures such as:

- **Transparency and Accountability:** AI technology and system developers must prioritise transparency in AI systems, disclosing the training data sources and algorithmic mechanisms underpinning their decisions. This fosters accountability and allows users to build trust in an AI’s content output.

- **Ethical Frameworks:** Establishing internationally accepted ethical guidelines for AI development will help steer its progression towards beneficial outcomes. Ethical considerations should be intrinsic to the AI design, development and model training processes, which must contain unbreakable guardrails.

- **Regulation and Governance:** Government and international agencies must collaborate to create a comprehensive regulatory framework for AI. This should address data privacy and security, algorithmic accountability, potential biases, malicious use and disinformation.

- **Education and Adaptation:** The impending job landscape demands additional

educational initiatives that equip individuals with the skills necessary to effectively collaborate with AI systems and benefit from augmentation. This is the responsibility of business organisations, trade-union movements, and of course, private individuals. The chair of the UK Government’s Foundation Model Taskforce said it was “inevitable” that more jobs would become increasingly automated. As an individual, you may not be replaced by an AI, but specific job tasks might be replaced by someone who knows how to use AI effectively.

Dr George concludes: “AI presents both opportunity and challenge. The positive contributions to industries including healthcare, customer service, transportation, and creative expression are now proven and undeniable.

“Yet, ethical concerns and potential job displacement underscore the necessity for a cautious and responsible approach to AI system deployment. Even as AI and increased automation bring benefits to business and society at large, we will need to prepare for major disruptions in our working environments.

“The convergence of AI with other advanced technologies such as quantum computers and biological neuroscience adds complexity and influences advances in the development of a future AI ‘superintelligence’.

“As AI’s capabilities improve and become more prevalent, our collective responsibility deepens. We are at a pivotal moment in time where society must harness AI’s strengths while mitigating its drawbacks.

“By fostering open dialogue, international collaboration, and ethical awareness, we can navigate the complicated landscape of AI and ensure that it remains a reliable and friendly helper as we move into a progressive AI-augmented future.”

With technology moving at such a pace, it’s predicted that two thirds of current school children are expected to work in jobs that don’t even exist yet. One of the top listed ‘future careers’ is said to be an AI Ethicist, which commands a current average salary £70,000.

Artificial intelligence will be great for the economy long-term, but the interim could bring growing pains for certain segments of the workforce, according to David Steinberg, co-founder and chief executive of Zeta Global.



Man v machine - we have been pitting our wits against AI for years

“Jobs will change,” he said. “While the blue collar workforce felt the biggest impact in the past, it will be white collar employees who will need to retool and shift skillsets to be successful in the golden age of AI.”

He predicts that over the next decade, the true value of AI will be realised through the enterprise, particularly in areas like business intelligence, marketing and supply chain.

AI will be able to do the same thing for businesses as pricey management consultant firms for a vastly reduced cost, he explains, plus AI will accommodate the massive inequity looming on the horizon when it comes to job openings and talent available due to a significant percentage of the population aging out of employment.

“The roles that will grow in value include those in creative areas and those who bring in business and close business deals,” Steinberg said.

“Those currently in school or in the workforce will need to identify opportunities to learn and grow for tomorrow’s roles.”

While most of the chatter surrounding AI centres on the technology itself, David says everyday consumers need to be made aware that what they could be seeing or hearing may not in fact be real.

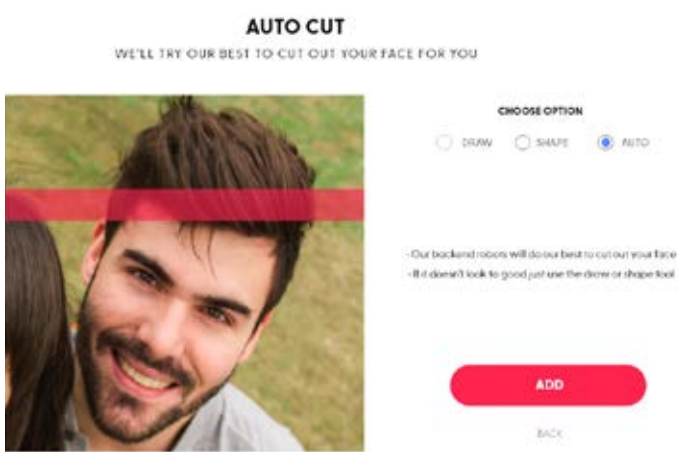
They need to understand the potential repercussions to the job market and shifts in other aspects of daily life, he believes.

“This degree of understanding is critical to creating an empowered population that can welcome the new technology, instead of being scared of it.”

In his upcoming book, Our Least Important Asset, author Peter Cappelli says Artificial Intelligence promises to take control a step further, not just moving decisions away from employees but away from their supervisors as well.

And he warns: “As with other AI interventions, when we take away decisions from employees and they are not accountable for them, their interest in contributing extra effort falls.

“With AI-based algorithms making decisions, it isn’t even clear how employees could help if they were inclined. Suppose an employee truck driver learns from someone in a rest stop that they are shutting down a road on the route mapped out for him by the company’s AI system. ▶



An AI algorithm is used to remove the background from a picture

So just how good is this Chat GPT service? We asked it to write us a 500-word article about AI for Shropshire businesses – and this is what it produced, accompanied by a suggested headline...

Unlocking Growth and Efficiency

In today’s rapidly evolving digital landscape, businesses are increasingly turning to Artificial Intelligence to gain a competitive edge and drive growth.

Shropshire, known for its thriving business community, is no exception. With the advent of AI technologies, Shropshire businesses have an unparalleled opportunity to revolutionize their operations, enhance decision-making, and improve customer experiences.

This article explores the transformative power of AI and how Shropshire businesses can leverage it to unlock new possibilities.

Enhancing Operational Efficiency:

One of the primary advantages of AI is its ability to automate and streamline repetitive and time-consuming tasks. Shropshire businesses can leverage AI-powered tools to optimize inventory management, supply chain logistics, and even customer service operations. By automating these processes, businesses can save valuable time and resources, allowing employees to focus on more strategic tasks that require human creativity and critical thinking.

Improved Decision-Making:

AI is capable of analysing vast amounts of data and extracting actionable insights. Shropshire businesses can harness this power to make data-driven decisions that can significantly impact their success. AI algorithms can identify patterns, detect anomalies, and predict future trends, enabling businesses to adapt their strategies proactively. Whether it’s optimising marketing campaigns, forecasting demand, or mitigating risks, AI empowers businesses to make informed decisions that maximize profitability and minimize uncertainties.

Personalised Customer Experiences:

In an era where customer expectations are at an all-time high, providing personalized experiences is paramount for business success. AI technologies, such as machine learning and natural language processing, can enable Shropshire businesses to deliver tailored experiences to their customers. By analysing customer data, AI can understand preferences, anticipate needs, and offer personalized

recommendations. Chatbots powered by AI can also provide instant support and assistance, enhancing customer satisfaction and building brand loyalty.

Cybersecurity and Fraud Prevention:

As businesses become increasingly reliant on digital platforms, the risk of cyber threats and fraud escalates. AI plays a vital role in combating these risks by identifying patterns and anomalies that human operators might miss. Shropshire businesses can employ AI-powered security systems to detect potential breaches, monitor network activities, and proactively respond to threats. By leveraging AI’s ability to learn from vast datasets, businesses can fortify their digital defences and protect sensitive information, ensuring trust among customers and partners.

Upskilling the Workforce:

Contrary to popular belief, AI is not a threat to jobs but a catalyst for innovation and upskilling the workforce. Shropshire businesses can seize the opportunity to reskill employees and equip them with AI-related skills. Training programs and partnerships with AI solution providers can help businesses bridge the skills gap and ensure a smooth transition to an AI-driven environment. This not only enhances productivity but also empowers employees to take on higher-value roles that require creativity, problem-solving, and strategic thinking.

Conclusion:

Artificial Intelligence is reshaping the business landscape worldwide, and Shropshire businesses must embrace this transformative technology to stay ahead in a competitive market. By leveraging AI to enhance operational efficiency, improve decision-making, provide personalized customer experiences, enhance cybersecurity, and upskill their workforce, businesses in Shropshire can unlock a world of new possibilities. Embracing AI is no longer a luxury but a necessity for businesses seeking sustainable growth and success in the digital age. Shropshire’s vibrant business community can undoubtedly harness the power of AI to propel their organizations towards a prosperous and innovative future.

◀ “A delay won’t be their fault, and drivers are paid largely by the hour. Will they try to do something to avoid it? If so, how do they go around the mapping algorithm without getting in trouble, or just sit out the delay and get paid for it?”

The latest Totaljobs Hiring Trends Index, which surveyed more than 1,000 HR decision makers in the UK, shows a notable shift towards the integration of AI in recruitment processes, with two in five already using it to streamline and speed up operations.

One fifth of businesses plan to educate and train staff on AI usage to improve productivity, and a similar number aim to increase their use of AI within day-to-day work before the end of this year.

Julius Probst, European labour market Economist at Totaljobs, says: “Businesses are recognising the value of leveraging AI technology to streamline their hiring procedures and improve efficiency.

“As the job market evolves, it is imperative for businesses to embrace innovative solutions like AI to stay ahead, streamline processes, and secure the talent they need. By combining strategic talent management approaches with the integration of AI, organisations will be better placed to achieve their recruitment objectives in the current climate.”

Those who are worried about this march of technology making their jobs redundant may not like to hear this, but AI bots are already getting greater engagement on social media



Results of the Shropshire Business online poll

posts than those created by humans, according to one survey.

West Midlands recruitment specialist Pertemps set up a programme over 10 weeks with a series of polls on social media, asking questions about AI – with half of the questions generated by ChatGPT.

And guess what . . . there were more engagements with AI questions than those written by humans.

Pertemps director Cat Brown says: “There is an awful lot of chatter about AI and how it can be integrated to make industry work smarter, but with that come concerns about replacing people and taking jobs. However, we need people to put the technology to best use.

“It is about augmentation, not replacement. It does not necessarily mean fewer jobs, just different ones. AI will automate some tasks but in many roles that can be seen as a positive. With new technologies come new possibilities and opportunities for people to

learn new skills, adapt and find fulfilment in their work. Our research shows that, already, the technology is effective and can be used to support colleagues in some of their daily tasks.


“It is essential to remember that technological advancements have always created new jobs. Evolving is in our DNA. We have done it many times before and we need to remember how to adapt and create a world where humans benefit from AI to help them work smarter.

“Think of what we already use in our daily lives, things like smart speakers. They help us free-up time.

“In the recruitment world, it can help our delivery teams work to a level of scalability that wasn’t possible before. For instance, when launching a campaign, consultants can access wider talent pools quicker than ever before.

“However, AI can’t and shouldn’t replace people. You can support a recruitment process by automating regular engagement, but the old adage of ‘people buy from people’ is still very much true today. The bond between a candidate and their recruiter is valuable and studies show better engagement leads to greater commitment.

“By embracing AI, we can create a more efficient and productive workplace, and free up time in our lives to dedicate to the tasks that only humans can do.”

● So what do you think? We’d love to hear your views on the AI revolution. Email editor@shropshirebiz.com and tell us your experiences, positive or otherwise. 



Netflix suggests films for you to watch based on your history

Application of intelligence



Hollie Whittles

ChatGPT, AI and machine learning are hot topics at the moment – but how can you use them in your business?

Everyone assumes that AI is the Hollywood version with robot overlords taking over the world. In reality, AI is already here and we are using it in society.

Phone apps such as Uber using an AI to figure out the closest car to your destination; Netflix suggesting films for you to watch based on your history; Amazon prompting ‘customers also bought’ options on checkout; digital assistants like Alexa and Siri – all of which are helping to make our lives better.

As with all things, there are always pros and cons and there is a lot of concern about the future of AI. Film director James Cameron told

CTV News: “I think the weaponisation of AI is the biggest danger.”

The Pros

- Enhanced decision making: In our business, we develop machine learning solutions to predict patterns in data, for example, use of historical data to create future predictive modelling, improving forecasting, determining customer behaviour, customer demographics, customer value (RFM) and predicting customer churn to enhance decision making.
- Improved customer experience: We are automating social media posts and using AI algorithms to improve customer experience.
- Mitigation of human error: We are automating processes to make things quicker and more efficiently and mitigate human error – all of which can save costs and provide huge returns on investment.
- Use of ChatGPT to search the internet and create content.
- There are many uses for ChatGPT ranging from searching the internet for a book you can’t remember the name of, to creating content which you can then adapt for social media and marketing.

The Cons

- Loss of jobs: With automation, people are concerned about their jobs becoming obsolete therefore AI integration must be

carefully planned to minimise displacement and allow for staff to upskill into new roles. I champion apprenticeships for the Federation of Small Businesses and this is a great route to consider when upskilling existing staff.


- Ethics and morality: There are concerns around privacy, bias and transparency – remember the Cambridge Analytica scandal for Facebook (Meta)? Businesses need to address these concerns and establish guidelines to minimise misuse.
- Accuracy: Where humans are involved in a process, there’s always a possibility for errors such as data entry typos so automation can help improve but AI can lack creativity and accuracy too. People are using ChatGPT but it doesn’t always give the right answer, so humans are still needed to fact check and research any information given.
- Cost: For a business to embrace emerging technologies it can be quite worrying, costly and time-consuming. Businesses are ruling out AI due to a lack of knowledge to implement it, so the UK Government needs to support businesses and provide further training and incentives so that business can scale up.

To sum up, AI will be transformative to our society and we need to tread carefully, but I still believe there are many positives that will allow business to adapt, evolve and transform.

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



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Networking event is part of an ACE week

The Shrewsbury Club is hosting a ‘Game Changers’ networking lunch in October to shine a light on women who continue to make waves in their respective fields.

ITF Women’s World Tennis Tour Shrewsbury is hosting the event, sponsored by Aaron & Partners and WR Partners, on October 19 from noon until 3pm.

It is part of a week-long tennis spectacular at the club, which is hosting the Budgen W100 – the biggest women’s tennis event to be staged in the UK – from October 15-22.

Headline speakers at the lunch event include:

- **Stacey Copeland**, who etched her name in history as the first British woman to secure the Commonwealth boxing title as well as representing her country on the football field too.
- **Maggie Murphy**, the pioneering CEO of Lewes FC, which became the world’s first community-owned football club to distribute revenue evenly between male and female teams.
- **Felicity Wingrove**, who has first-hand experience of the challenges faced by women climbing the business ladder, and has become an expert in psycholinguistics and communications.



Dave Courteen, owner of The Shrewsbury Club and event organiser, said: “We’re incredibly excited and privileged to once again be hosting the biggest indoor women’s tennis event in the UK.

“This prestigious event is certainly inspiring – with last year’s winner Marketa Vondrousova going on to become the 2023 Wimbledon champion.

“To further shine a light on brilliant women, we wanted to create a suite of events to promote and encourage this important message, and showcase the value of equal opportunities in both business and sport.

“The Game Changers Networking Lunch is an opportunity for three fantastic individuals

to share their personal stories on their journey to success, and the obstacles they had to overcome.

“Hosted by Radio 5 Live tennis reporter Abigail Johnson, we hope the event will encourage others to be brave, bold, and break barriers, whether that be in business or sport.

“And, thank you to our sponsors, Aaron & Partners Solicitors and WR Partners, who’ve supported us greatly in bringing this event together, and without whom it wouldn’t have been possible.”

- To find out more, visit the website at www.worldtennistourshrewsbury.com/tickets-and-events/networking-lunch.

WIN! Ticket Giveaway WIN!

Thanks to Aaron & Partners and WR Partners, Shropshire Business has some fantastic FREE TICKETS to give away for the tennis event at The Shrewsbury Club.

We have THREE PAIRS OF DAY TICKETS for the tennis, plus FOUR ‘ACCESS ALL AREAS’ PASSES which allow you to have lunch in the players’ area. The tickets are valid for any day of the competition apart from the final Sunday.

To be in with a chance of claiming tickets, simply send an email with your name, company name and contact details to editor@shropshirebiz.com

Emails must be clearly labelled ‘Tennis Tickets’ in the message header. Winners will be chosen at random, and contacted by the sponsors with details for ticket collection.

Closing date for entries is September 30.



Civic Park has been a huge success



Plot 13 is part of the former Stadco site

Park development deemed a success

Only one of an eight-unit scheme remains to let at a speculative commercial development at Battlefield Enterprise Park in Shrewsbury.

Halls Commercial said the Civic Park development had been an outstanding success.

The new-build commercial development sits on what was Plot 13 at the former Stadco site, undertaken by a local property investor/developer.

The former Stadco site was sold as a whole by Halls Commercial on behalf of Magna around two years ago, and now forms part of the Nine Bridges Business Park – a phased break-up of the site, again undertaken by Halls

Commercial on behalf of the purchasers. Civic Park is in the highly sought-after commercial district of Shrewsbury and the site was a piece of virgin grassland used as expansion land for the former Stadco site.

Plot 13, along Vanguard Way, was bought by a property developer/speculator who obtained planning consent to build eight units on the site and proceeded to purchase them.

The un-named purchaser has since built eight commercial and trade counter units, which Halls said had been quickly snapped up, with just one remaining.

Halls Commercial have been involved in the whole development of this site – from the property disposals relating to the land, the planning and conception relating to its development as eight units, to finding tenants for the buildings.

The development includes tenant occupiers like Decostitch, Brightstar Boxing, Clima-Temp and Kaizen Recycling.

James Evans, head of Halls Commercial, said: “It is wonderful to have been involved in this project from start to finish. We have, as a practice, provided professional advice throughout.

“I remember horses eating grass on this land and now there is an outstanding-looking, new-build trade counter/commercial development on the site.

“It is fantastic for Shrewsbury and shows the demand for high quality commercial units in the town.

“As a practice we have offered a comprehensive development and asset management/investment service to our clients.”

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End of the road for businesses

Three years short of its centenary, well-known Shropshire coach company Elcock Reisen has gone out of business.

Announcing the news on its social media channels, the company said: "It comes with great sorrow that Elcock Reisen has gone into administration – therefore all future bookings, holidays and day trips will no longer be able to go ahead."

"Thank you to everybody for your loyalty and valued custom over the many years we have been in business; best wishes to the future."

More than 30 staff have been impacted by the closure, which bosses blamed on a proposed takeover falling through, and rising prices and wages.

Last year the company invested heavily in a fleet of new wheelchair-accessible Mercedes-Benz coaches.

The company was well-known for running holidays, day trips, corporate and private hire as well as school and college transport.

The Elcock Reisen news was one of a series of gloomy reports impacting Shropshire workers – and providing a reminder that the economic downturn is far from over.

The owners of the Globe Bingo club in Donnington, Telford, have also called in the administrators, seeking to sell all eight of their sites as going concerns.



One of Elcock Reisen's new coaches it bought last year

The company said it had been impacted by the Covid pandemic, saying customer numbers had failed to reach pre-pandemic levels.

Administrator Tim Bateson said: "Majestic is one of the UK's most recognisable independent bingo operators, but in recent years has seen trading adversely affected by the impact of lockdowns during the pandemic, as well as the cost-of-living crisis. We will continue to trade the business in the immediate term while we seek a buyer for the business, and would encourage any interested parties to make contact with us as soon as possible."

Telford-based ALW Group (UK) Limited, which makes electronic components at its base in Tweedale, has also appointed administrators.

And the collapse of retail chain Wilko looks set to spell the end of five Shropshire stores – Telford, Wellington, Shrewsbury, Oswestry and Market Drayton.

Chief executive Mark Jackson said the firm had a 'significant level of interest' in a potential buyout, but had been left with no choice but to take the tough decision after being unable to close any deal.

Netherlands order for body dryers

An innovative business near Shrewsbury is celebrating its largest ever export order after sealing a contract with a major supplier to the Dutch care sector.

Ford-based iDry, which was founded by Gary Seale in 2021, is shipping 75 of its wall-mounted, full body air dryers to Lavicta in a bid to improve care for elderly residents and to free up time for staff who no longer have to perform the drying task.

It comes at an ideal time for the business, which is expected to ramp up production to 220 units per month, as demand also increases from clients in domestic care and for hotels and luxury properties.

The company is now looking to attract additional investment to maximise this opportunity, as well as bringing its Model 2 to market – a model that will be controlled remotely by an app and features 14 different heating and drying functions.

"A switch has definitely been flicked overseas and the care sector really get us and what we are trying to do with our technology," said Gary.

"In the last three months, we have secured our biggest export order that is heading to Holland, as well as kick-starting new pilot schemes or shipping units to clients in Scandinavia and the No White Flags charity in the US.

"We've been talking about the cost savings and the environmental impact of iDry for some time, and we can now quantify this thanks to lots of customer feedback and our own performance surveys.

"By putting in 20 of our body dryers, a client is saving more than 117 care hours every week – vital hours that can be spent delivering what elderly patients or residents really require.

"It has also been proven that to launder one towel costs 28p, whereas a five-minute session with our body dryer is less than 2p. A major financial, and importantly, environmental saving."

First developed by Michael Godwin in 1991, iDry uses air outlets positioned at different heights along the dryer leg to push warm air out to the user.



The export of 75 units to the Netherlands is iDry's largest to date

The current production and assembly process is truly a West Midlands affair, with Birford Cable & Harness, Heelman, Tooling 2000 and PJS Mouldings providing electrical, precision parts and plastic mouldings.

Gary added: "The Europeans and even the US get what we're trying to do, and we'd love to start having the same impact in our home markets, starting with care specialists on our doorstep in Shropshire for example.

"Talks have taken place, but they seem more reticent to press the button on new technology than their international counterparts.

"2023 is going to be a milestone year for the business and we are now actively seeking external investment to help us scale up production, introduce our Model 2, and maximise a strong pipeline of opportunities."

iDry made its first appearance on DIY SOS recently when Nick Knowles and his team used its technology to help futureproof the home of a family who had two children with progressive disabilities.

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Strengthen your organisation's safety through identity security




Joe Newton

In today's digital landscape, the integrity of your organisation's data and systems is paramount. A single compromised user credential has the potential to cripple an entire organisation, making identity security the first line of defence against cyberattacks. Safeguarding your digital assets from unauthorised access has never been more critical, and that's where AuthPoint Total Identity Security from WatchGuard comes into play.


With the increasing sophistication of cyber threats, traditional security measures are often inadequate. Protecting your organisation's sensitive information requires a multi-layered approach, and it all starts with ensuring that only authorised users can access your systems and applications.

At Connexis we have been a WatchGuard partner for four years, using AuthPoint to provide Multi-Factor Authentication to our customers, and to secure our in-house systems. Multi-Factor Authentication is a form of system access control that requires two or more methods, or factors, to prove you are who you claim to be. The most common factor is "something you know", which usually takes the form of a password, but could also be a PIN code or a security question. MFA requires at least one other authentication factor, usually either "something you have" such as an app on your smart phone, or "something you are" which refers to some sort of biometric such as facial recognition or a fingerprint scan.

AuthPoint Total Identity Security takes this a step further by helping to secure the weakest of the three main identity factors, your password. It is a comprehensive solution designed to address the challenge of securing identities across your organisation. This all-in-one bundle combines three essential components:




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Keep Identity Real

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AuthPoint Keeps Your Identity Real



- ✓ Web Single Sign-On
- ✓ Fatigue-Resistant MFA
- ✓ Password Management
- ✓ Credentials Monitoring

Unlock Identity Security

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By adopting AuthPoint Total Identity Security, you're not only fortifying your organisation against cyber threats but also bolstering your overall security position

- Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA): The original element of the AuthPoint solution is a powerful multi-factor authentication solution that not only enhances security but also offers the convenience of single sign-on (SSO). With strong time-based tokens sent to a mobile app, additional factors, and mobile phone DNA confirmation, AuthPoint MFA ensures that only legitimate users gain access.
- Dark Web Credential Monitoring: Stay ahead of potential breaches by being notified when compromised credentials associated with monitored domains appear on the dark web. Prompt notifications are sent to administrators and users, allowing them to take immediate action and change their passwords, minimising potential risks.
- Corporate Password Manager: Elevate your password management game with the Corporate Password Manager. This feature enhances password quality, reduces the need for frequent resets, and mitigates risks associated with shared or stolen passwords.

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By adopting AuthPoint Total Identity Security, you're not only fortifying your organisation against cyber threats but also bolstering your overall security position. This comprehensive bundle ensures that every aspect of identity security is covered, from user authentication to password management and dark web monitoring.

At Connexis we are WatchGuard Gold Partners, meaning we're fully trained and experienced in deploying and supporting WatchGuard solutions for businesses like yours. Get in touch today to discuss your security requirements by calling 01952 528000, or emailing sales@connexis.co.uk



Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford

Cheers for botanicals

Weston Park has teamed up with a Shropshire distiller to launch its own brand of gin.

The stately home on the county's eastern border has collaborated with Wrekin Spirit to create the hand-crafted London dry gin, which uses botanicals picked from its own gardens.

Weston Park Gin was the inspiration of head butler Barry Fairhurst, working with the estate's gardens and kitchen teams.

It is flavoured with fresh botanicals handpicked from the estate including rhubarb, nettle root, basil and lemon thyme, giving it a fresh and natural character, which captures the spirit of Weston.

Different botanicals will be used throughout the year to produce a range of seasonal gins.

Martin Page, general manager of food and beverage at Weston Park, said: "This has been a very exciting project and the whole team from the chefs to the gardeners have enjoyed pulling together – and testing – a wide range of botanicals for each seasonal gin."

Martin said Wrekin Spirit's general

manager Sam Moseley had played a vital role in bringing the gin to fruition.

"Sam's experience and expertise has crafted a gin that we are all very proud of and hope our customers enjoy."

Weston Park's Butler's Blend is being served in the Granary Restaurant and will be followed by a winter spice version in the autumn months.

Wrekin Spirit was founded in 2018 on the family farm in Kynnersley, near Telford, by Isabel Moseley and her son Sam. Each batch is hand-crafted and distilled in copper stills.

Sam has been a regular trader at Weston's food and craft events and has been working with the team in the Granary Restaurant to create a gin that draws on the inspiration from the kitchen gardens.

"We are delighted to have been able to use ingredients from Weston's own gardens and estate to create a gin which really reflects the character of the stately home," said Sam.

"This is a refreshing, natural and elegant gin which I am sure will be a hit with all who try it. It has been a really enjoyable project to work on."



Weston Park Butler's Blend Gin



Martin Page and Sam Moseley celebrate the new blend



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Spirit of good will

Hobsons Brewery in Cleobury Mortimer has launched a new beer in collaboration with Shrewsbury Town Football Club – where 5p from every pint sold is set to be donated to the club's charitable foundation.

Spirit of '79' nods to the club's most successful year in its history – in which Graham Turner played an instrumental role as manager in leading The Shrews to the Second Division for the first time.

The beer is being sold in cask and bottle throughout The Croud Meadow, as well as in pubs within a five-mile radius of the ground, and will support the Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation in creating opportunities for people to lead healthy and active lifestyles.

Nick Davis, founder of Hobsons Brewery, said: "When the opportunity came along to support Shrewsbury Town FC and their amazing foundation, we instantly knew we wanted to be involved. Supporting the community and giving back is so important for Hobsons and to be able to do that through selling an exciting new beer is even better."

"The 1979 season is such a huge part of our



At the launch are, from left, Alex Burrows, Charlie Farman, Gavin Chance, Graham Turner and Milly Wheeler



Three Tuns Brewery stout

local history. We simply couldn't look past the name 'Spirit of '79' and we hope the team this year are able to emulate that success and go on to have a great season."

Meanwhile, another Shropshire brewery is celebrating after being recognised at the Great Taste Awards.

The Three Tuns at Bishop's Castle received a three-star award for its stout, which was

described by judges as 'both ethereal and rich'

Joshua Ferris, from the brewery, said: "We are so proud to be adding the prestigious black and gold Great Taste 3-star badge of honour to our Stout."

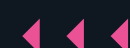
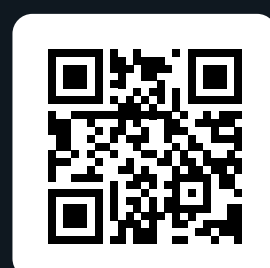
"Great Taste is the most recognised accolade for taste and quality in the food and drink industry, so it's a huge moment for us and the whole team is thrilled with the result."



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Credit where it's due

A new Telford-based business has launched to help recover cash from outstanding sales invoices.

The founders of Granville Credit Control Services say they are seeking to fill a 'gaping hole in day-to-day business life'. Kim Kelly, a director of the company which is based at Park Lane Centre, said: "In my work as a bookkeeper, I could see that so many businesses were struggling because of late payment of sales invoices they'd issued."

"By not being paid on time, the owners of businesses are having to find other means to pay their way and it just doesn't sit comfortably with me."

Fellow director Shai Patel, who comes from a business planning background, said: "It was clear to me that many of the businesses I helped to apply for grants and loans were unable to give a clear picture of their financial position due to monies owed from others."

Late payment can be a major headache – particularly for small businesses which dominate the Shropshire economy. And latest statistics make for grim reading:

- A third of payments to small businesses are late
- The average value of each payment is more than £6,000
- 20% of small businesses have run into cashflow problems due to late payments
- If small businesses were paid on time, it could boost the UK economy by an estimated £2.5 billion a year

Kim and Shai first met through a business networking group, BNI Thomas Telford, more than five years ago. They are joined in the new venture by fellow BNI member Paul Naylor, whose background in design and marketing adds another dimension.

"I see this as a really wonderful opportunity to help businesses



Meet the team from Granville Credit Control Services: Kim Kelly, Shai Patel, Ruth Goss, Ami Patel, Sherry Barnard and Paul Naylor throughout Shropshire and further afield in obtaining what is rightfully theirs," said Paul.

Ami Patel and Sherry Barnard are also directors, and the team is supported by operations manager Ruth Goss.

"We are not debt recovery in the traditional sense," said Shai. "For us, credit control is as much about prevention as it is cure. We can put processes in place to help avoid future issues, but if you do have outstanding sales invoices, we can begin the process to recover monies over an agreed time scale and fee."

Fit for work?

Recruitment woes for businesses



BY CARL JONES

Shropshire hit the national headlines this summer when an economic survey revealed some manufacturing companies are refusing to hire young people amid concerns over their reliability.

Some businesses claimed to be having so much trouble with interview 'no-shows', or young staff failing to complete their first week in a job, that they are adopting policies of no longer seeking to recruit anyone under the age of 21.

The comments came from a quarterly economic survey carried out by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, covering the period between April and June this year – and it provoked a UK-wide debate.

Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber's chief executive, said: "It was clear from the results of this latest survey that getting the right staff is still proving difficult."

"Qualifications not meeting employer expectations, and recruitment shortages, are causing major issues for businesses across all sectors, and salary demands remain high, which is putting pressure on profitability."



Ruth Ross, chief executive for Shropshire Chamber of Commerce

"Interview no-shows, or younger recruits not even completing their first week, is hampering the manufacturing industries, with some employers revealing to us that they are no longer recruiting anyone under 21 years of age."

"Machine operators, fabrication welders, project managers, warehouse staff, trades and engineers are high on the list of needs from across the sectors again this quarter. The

construction sector is still in need of all trades."

The survey also showed that software developers were in particularly high demand across Shropshire, with employers reporting that the skillset and experience of applicants was not matching expectations.

The recruitment debate was the centrepiece of a panel discussion on the final edition of the third Shropshire Business Live TV series, held at Aico in Oswestry.

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The recruitment panel debate featured on Shropshire Business Live TV

On the panel were Aico director Matt Small, project director of the Local Skills Improvement Plan Richard Sheehan, and Debbie Kirkpatrick from Telford defence equipment manufacturer RBSL.

The general consensus was that employers shying away from employing under 21s were the exception, rather than the norm.

But Richard Sheehan said: “It came as a shock in one way that businesses would actually come out and say this, but in another way it didn’t because we had known for some time that there were some anxieties around young people and their work ethic – what they will and won’t do.

“It’s quite disappointing to see it highlighted, but in another way I think it’s also quite important that it is, because it means we can try to do something about it. That takes us right back to school time, careers advice, mentoring – there are a whole raft of things that can help to better prepare young people for the workplace.

“We cannot lose sight of the fact that there are some fantastic young people out there in the workplace around Shropshire, and at a time when we are struggling to fill vacancies around the county – as indeed companies are nationally – the last thing we need is a group of individuals being effectively discriminated against for specific reasons that can be fixed.”

Matt Small said: “At Aico, we’ve been hiring apprentices since the 1990s, but in a more structured way since about 2018. Since that time, between 10 and 15% of the entire Aico workforce is made up of existing or previous apprentices.

“I was quite shocked by the comments in that study – I’m not sure if it was taken out of context or was a massive generalisation, but employing young people has been a really



Some manufacturing firms are shying away from employing young workers

successful means of filling skills gaps in our organisation.

“It’s about steering young people when they come to work for you. If people are left to their own devices and are not managed or mentored, then maybe situations can arise – but those are not situations that we have encountered.”

He admitted there was a real mixture in levels of work-readiness among young people who were applying for jobs at Aico.

“There are clearly some schools and colleges that are preparing candidates for their interview better than others. It is improving, more work needs to be done, and we are heavily invested in mock interviews and employment-readiness workshops.”

Debbie Kirkpatrick said: “We are also very lucky that we have a high volume of recruitment interest for our business, and I

think that’s got a lot to do with the outreach we do in the local area.

“We work with local schools, we have them into our sites, and we offer work experience as well – getting them really geared up into our industry.

“We also do mock interviews as well.

“Speaking as a parent of a 16-year-old daughter who is looking at apprenticeship options at the moment, I think it’s quite normal and natural among young people in general these days that they don’t really know what they want to do.

“At RBSL we are very good at encouraging them to try different things, putting them on six-month rotations. We recruit for certain areas of the business including engineering, manufacturing, business admin and project management.

“We’ve had circumstances before where



Nathan Wilcox, production manager Chis James and team leader Kacper Zasacki at Fabweld

apprentices have come in thinking they want to be a project manager, but when they have looked at other things, they feel their interests may be in different areas.”

What about flexible working, home working, or hybrid working opportunities? Have they become an essential ingredient in engaging a young person in a job?

To a degree, the panel thought – Debbie said she felt flexibility certainly helped to make roles more attractive since the Covid lockdown.

But they felt arguably more important in a largely rural county like Shropshire was the ability to fit working hours around the availability of public transport services, with many young people either not owning or having access to a car.

One Telford manufacturing business is taking an innovative approach to current recruitment challenges by introducing a new shift aimed at attracting part-time workers.

It’s the first time in two decades that Fabweld Steel Products, which makes access covers for the water, energy and security sectors, has restructured its shift system.

The company is hoping to increase its headcount with part-time staff working a 6pm-10pm shift for the first time in a move which it hopes will be attractive to those looking for flexibility or second jobs.

There are currently more than 74,000 unfilled factory jobs across the UK, according to manufacturing organisation Make UK.

There are also more people looking for second jobs, with recent research from BBC Worklife revealing 47 per cent of people have little to no savings left at the end of each month, with a further 15% saying that paying routine bills was a struggle.

FSP managing director Wayne Carter

said the rising cost of living meant increasing numbers of people were looking to supplement their income with second jobs and it was hoped the new shift patterns would help attract people looking for flexibility too.

He said: “We are in a cost of living crisis and many people are struggling to make ends meet.

“This shift would suit someone who is already in work who needs a bit more money coming in, or those who can’t work during the day because of other commitments but have a few hours to spare in the evenings.

“This isn’t just a problem for FSP, as manufacturing businesses across the country are struggling to fill vacancies.

“Our own approach to recruitment, skills and training means that we are often one of the first to fill vacancies but people are now also looking for flexibility, which means a new evening shift may suit some workers better.

“It is the role of good employers to innovate and develop ways of working which increases productivity and efficiency, but still offer great working patterns and conditions for employees – that’s always what we aim to achieve at FSP.”

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is currently in the process of producing a new recruitment ‘tool-kit’ to help employers re-engage with people who have stepped away from the workplace.

It comes as companies across the county continue to report problems finding people with appropriate skills to fill job vacancies.

Ruth Ross said: “When we speak to local businesses about their most pressing concerns at the moment, two words get repeatedly mentioned – skills, and recruitment.

“We have been aware for many months now that some companies are being held back

from taking advantage of growth opportunities by an inability to find the right staff.

“We are currently carrying out important pieces of work designed to tackle the issue from two perspectives – rapidly upskilling the existing workforce, and encouraging experienced people back into employment.”

Ruth said: “We need to address the fact that – particularly since Covid – there is a latent pool of talent in Shropshire which, for whatever reason, has turned its back on the workplace.

“They may have stepped away completely from a skilled profession, or decided to find other ways of earning a living which allows them to change their work-life balance.

“We know through our recent research that a significant proportion of these are in a position, and are indeed eager, to return to the workplace. The question is, how do we help them to do it?”

She added: “Educating employers about how to engage and interact with these people is key.

“They are looking for a greater degree of flexibility, a different kind of working relationship, and a recognition that some of them – while extremely talented – lack the confidence and belief that their skills are still right for today’s working world.

“Our new guide for employers, available very soon, will offer a tool-kit to help companies re-engage with these people.

“We’re not just talking here about those in a more senior age bracket; it applies equally to parents who are seeking a return to work after starting a family.

“With childcare and nursery places at a premium, and certainly not cheap, businesses might need to consider offering more flexible part-time roles.”

It comes as the British Chambers of Commerce’s latest Quarterly Recruitment Outlook reveals there is still no easing in the record high difficulties in finding staff across the whole of the UK.

The second quarter results for 2023 showed that the percentage of firms facing recruitment difficulties was down just three percentage points from the historical high of 82% at the end of last year.

While recruitment difficulties are being experienced across the economy, the construction and engineering, and hospitality sectors were the most likely to report problems, the survey found.

Jane Gratton, head of people policy at the BCC, said: “The tight labour market continues to ramp up wage costs, fuelling inflation, and creating huge difficulties for businesses.

“Firms are being squeezed on all sides. There are more employment opportunities than ever before, but we also have low unemployment, and over a million jobs are currently left unfilled.

“Firms cannot fulfil order books and are turning down new work. They are caught in a vicious circle where the lack of people holds back growth and reduces opportunities for investment, including in training – part of the long-term solution.”

Why investing in university level courses makes complete business sense

As another year of exam results are released it's always a time that lends itself to a nostalgic trip down memory lane. Whether that's the opportunities you turned down, the results you didn't quite achieve or the ones you didn't ever in a million years expect, or just to see how far you have come.

Shrewsbury College's post-16 education and choices will all have a whole host of memories and stories, that form part of our journey, with trillions of "sliding doors" moments along the way.

So, as you are sharing your stories with colleagues, and hearing their own experiences, now would be an ideal time to review how your business could further benefit from University Level courses starting this autumn.

Following another successful Graduation Ceremony this July, it's fresh in our minds the positive impact that achieving a University Level course can have on an individual and the pride their friends, families, and employers share in celebrating our students many achievements.

As we embark on the 2023/24 academic year, how many of you will be sponsoring your employees to that next level? And what are the benefits to business from this investment?

Employers repeatedly tell us they want their workforce to be more productive and require less management. We also hear how difficult it is to recruit and retain skilled staff, that the workforce is ageing, and the talent pipeline isn't coming through.

One crucial factor in retaining employees and getting the best out of them is to invest in their education.

It's commonly understood in business that what sets you apart from your competitors is your staff – so investing in them and their education to a higher level, will not only address skills gaps within your team, but could also accelerate your business growth to the



We did it – employees and the workplace benefit massively if an employer invests in education



Michelle Dawes, Director for Higher Education

next level. What better way to demonstrate your commitment to your team, retain vital skills, and set out your stall to become an even more attractive proposition for your future employees.

Michelle Dawes, Director for Higher Education at SCG, said: "Sponsoring an employee comes at a cost, but the return on your investment more than pays for itself with skills, confidence, and fresh insight coming back into your business that can be measured, tracked, and evaluated.

"Student feedback in the recent National Students Survey (NSS) reported 97% saying their course helps develop the knowledge and skills they will need for the future. As an employer, you benefit from that development and investment."

"Ignoring staff development will most certainly come at a direct cost through a continuous cycle of replacing staff who feel undervalued."

At Shrewsbury Colleges Group we have a whole host of opportunities, ranging from Access to University courses through to full degree level qualifications in a range of subjects, such as Construction, Engineering, Health & Social Care, Education, to name but a few.

To find out more come and join us at one of our upcoming events, bring your staff, talk to our delivery teams – and find out how to get the very best from your most precious asset – your staff.

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Like it or not, artificial intelligence is here to stay.

Business leaders now face a choice to either embrace AI or to ignore it. Those who aren't prepared to get on board and embrace AI in some capacity and form are going to get left behind. And that's not a prediction . . . I guarantee it.

AI is changing the way we live our lives; it is everywhere in our existence.

Today, AI is being used to personalise recommendations for videos and media content, classify and categorise images to improve search engine performance, and create new content through auto generative image creation and copy.

It is also enabling revolutions in driverless vehicles, detecting diseases, preserving wildlife and agriculture, and assisting HR departments in recruitment.

In January this year, ChatGPT was estimated to have reached 100 million monthly active users and its website generates over a billion visits per month.

Beyond its record-breaking status as the fastest-growing consumer application in history, OpenAI's ChatGPT has transformed the AI landscape.

AI has created a new wave of opportunity for those who are willing to invest the time and resources into understanding how it can be used to their advantage.

Those entrepreneurs willing to embrace AI are starting to realise that if they can create ways to leverage AI's power, they could potentially open a whole new world of possibilities in their respective fields.

There's no doubt about it: When it comes to the workplace, AI is here to stay.

But ever-increasing adoption of the technology isn't necessarily a done deal. That's because many people still have a range of concerns about it.

The fear of human thought and input becoming obsolete is very real for many but ultimately misguided, as AI is still a long way from replacing the creative, intuitive thought processes of humans.

What AI can do, though, is automate repetitive tasks and free us up to focus on more meaningful work that requires our unique human insights and expertise.

To extract maximum business value from this technology, organisations must

understand what's stopping people from fully embracing AI, and then devise smart strategies for overcoming those barriers.

If you're feeling daunted by the thought of taking on AI, as many are, then don't worry. Don't panic.

Take some time to learn as much as possible about AI and the opportunities it could present to your business, as well as getting an awareness of the constraints and limitations you'll have to face.

It really is an exciting time to be in business if you're prepared to look at these advancements with curiosity and optimism.

AI is undoubtedly going to change the world of work and industry, but with the right knowledge and preparation, businesses can adapt to these changes and take full advantage of all that AI has to offer.

It's safe to say that AI is here to stay – and while its power could potentially be seen as a blessing by some and by others a curse, the truth is that those who are willing to invest in understanding it, and how to leverage it, could very well be the ones who reap its greatest rewards.

Choose to ignore it at your peril and be prepared to be left behind.

The Chamber stands ready to support any business looking to understand more about AI through our events, training and seminar programme.

Visit www.shropshirechamber.co.uk to find out more.

Did you know we offer an amazing range of university-level courses right on your doorstep?

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Events

University Level Courses Advice Evening Higher Education Centre, London Road Campus | 26 September 2023 5.00pm - 7.00pm

University Level Courses Open Morning Higher Education Centre, London Road Campus | 21 October 2023 10.00am - 1.00pm

www.scg.ac.uk/events

Ruth Ross is chief executive of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, which has bases in Telford and Shrewsbury

Management buyout

Bridgnorth manufacturing firm Grainger & Worrall – one of the county’s largest businesses and a two-time Shropshire company of the year – has begun a new era after completing a management buyout.

The Stanmore-based business, which employs over 700 people, makes precision components for some of the world’s top motoring brands, including Formula One vehicles, and says it is now in a ‘much stronger position’.

The new board said the buyout triggered a ‘resetting of the organisation’s culture and move towards a more diversified product base of combustion engine parts, electric vehicle related products and very large castings for a range of sectors’.

In its latest results to the end of October last year, the group’s companies reported a combined turnover of £77.6 million after removing inter-company trading.

It reported a loss of £5.3 million, although this did include significant costs relating to the business’s restructuring.



Bright future – the senior team at Grainger and Worrall

In early April, despite a challenging climate, a pay award of £1.2 million was made to the workforce – the largest pay increase ever awarded by the business.

Iain Johnson, group chief financial officer, said: “A very intensive turnaround was put into effect during late 2022 which led to the management buyout by the Evolution Castings Group team in June 2023. The very positive changes in the business are now being felt in our performance and most importantly by the team, suppliers and customers.”

Chairman Andrew Burn said: “The extent of the group’s losses in the reported period were expected and have been planned for.

What is important for everyone to remember is that these are the results for the period when the business was experiencing significant difficulties. I am pleased to say that as a result of the turnaround and the management buyout the business is in a much stronger position now. We now have a team of over 770 people, and we have been consistently making profits each month since April 2023. We have turned the corner and we are seeing the impact of this on our stakeholders.”

He added: “Our suppliers are also hopefully feeling the differences with increased demand and our turnover growth, and I am delighted to say that a couple of weeks ago we were able to bring all of our suppliers back into terms, and credit rating agencies have become increasingly supportive.”

“Customer demand has been growing thanks to the amazing knowledge and expertise of our team, with enquiries that we are dealing with being valued at over £100 million as we become market-focussed and emphasise the group’s unique selling points.

“Today, thanks to incredible efforts of our stakeholders and the whole team, the business is now a very different place. We still have much more to do but we are well on the way with our journey.”

Global platform for researcher

Shropshire researcher Conor Heath has presented his findings on marketing in the gambling industry on an international stage.

The 31-year-old, from Shrewsbury, worked as a research assistant alongside his lecturer Dr Jamie Torrance, during his time studying for his BSc Applied Psychology at University Centre Shrewsbury.

His research findings led him to give a presentation at one of the world’s most prestigious gambling conferences, Current Advances in Gambling Research Conference 2023.

Conor said: “The research I conducted with Dr Torrance involved a frequency analysis of gambling, cryptocurrency and financial trading marketing in Premier League football.

“The findings indicated that marketing for these products is very prevalent. The English Premier League has recently announced a ban on gambling shirt-front sponsorship. However, our study demonstrated that the most popular location of gambling marketing is pitch-side hoardings. Therefore, we argue that the Premier League ban will be largely ineffective.

“I presented these findings at the CAGR conference which was very daunting as an undergraduate. However, my presentation was well-received and it actually led to an article about our research in The Guardian newspaper.”



Researcher Conor Heath

Conor balanced his work as a research assistant alongside his studies, citing good time management as the key to his success.

He added: “I managed my time effectively through weekly meetings with Dr Torrance where targets were set. We had quite an intensive project on our hands that required a lot of time-

consuming data collection and having clear weekly goals to work towards really helped to break the project down into digestible chunks.

“Being efficient and timely was of great importance as the research related to current gambling policy, which is forever changing.”

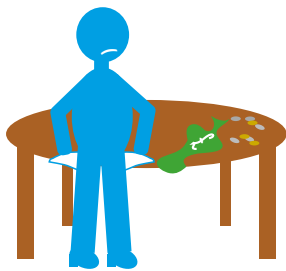
Conor decided to study Applied Psychology at the Shrewsbury university site as the course content matched his interests – cognitive neuroscience, videogames and health promotion – and he explored these topics in his dissertation. He received an exceptional overall grade of 79% in his programme – the highest ever awarded at UCS in Applied Psychology.

He is considering a career in the video game industry or a master’s degree in the future, and said: “UCS has allowed me to achieve these accomplishments due to the interesting and useful program, helpful lecturers, and beneficial opportunities provided to students.”

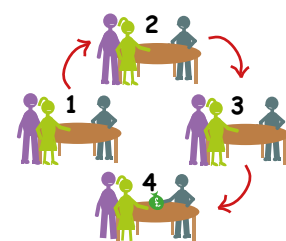
Dr Torrance said: “Conor’s recent achievements are fantastic and are indicative of his hard work and determination. Working with him on this impactful project has been a real pleasure.

“We make every effort in encouraging students to develop their skills and produce great research. Conor is a shining example of our commitment to working alongside students as partners and I’ve no doubt he will continue in his achievements moving forward.”

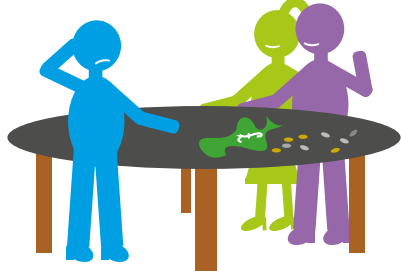
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A local butcher's product is fresher and looks better, yet it is more expensive

Local is Lekker . . . but at what price?



“Local is Lekker” is a popular saying and theme in South Africa – Lekker being the Afrikaans word for nice, very nice, or better.

In the UK we do not see value in using local companies, or indeed local products, half as much as the rest of the world. Various countries place high duties and tariffs on products imported from other parts of the world in order to protect their own industries.

This is clearly visible if you look at the very insular French wine industry. Yes, they do make wine, but my allegiances clearly lie with the Western Cape region which has a gorgeous array of various wines; red, white, sparkling or still. But I digress – and this almost proves my point.

Very often local is more expensive than the overseas competition; this being the case with

lamb for example. New Zealand lamb is cheaper than Welsh lamb, even though the latter is a mere few miles from Shropshire. How can this be when you consider the distance the “frozen fresh” lamb must travel in order to get onto our plates? A local butcher's product is always fresher and always looks better than the supermarkets, yet it is more expensive.

When it comes to services, I know we as a local freight forwarding business are head and shoulders above a lot of the larger companies, yet a lot of companies prefer to use their services because they are cheaper.

The words “we have had a quote and they are cheaper” rings around our offices. Yet these same companies bemoan the services of said cheaper quotes.

You see, when you use a local company like Global Freight Services, you buy experience. You buy customer care and best of all, you buy the relationship between you and a single individual who is in control of your account from start to finish.

We use several courier companies in our daily work with clients. We know which companies provide the best service, when things go wrong. Yes, that's right, we don't always buy on price – because it's when something goes wrong that the cheap price operators disappear.

We all know that feeling; we think we have secured a great deal and a little down the road we fully understand why it was so cheap.

Yet even though we vow we will never buy cheap again, we do and when it all goes wrong, again, we fall into a vicious circle of repeating our initial mistake of buying cheap – instead of basing our decision on service. Local is Lekker also features heavily when building relationships.

It is the fact that you are quite literally just down the road when things get difficult or someone needs help understanding, or something as simple as making sure paperwork is correct.

It's this part of Local is Lekker which invariably goes wrong when new people come into the business and no longer see the value in local. Relationships built over a few years are broken down for the sake of cheaper shipping prices.

But luckily there are a lot of companies and customers out there that do see the value in local. For them it's not an open cheque book, but more about the service levels that they know they will get from a Shropshire-based company.

The final Local is Lekker ingredient is making sure that if you receive a service on time, you also pay on time. Yes, that is right, it is a mutually beneficial relationship that is not just one way.

In fact, this is probably the most important part to any local company. You get what you want, so why should the provider not get what they want?

Go on, hug a local company, and give them some love.

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



Realisation of a vision

A new eye hospital has opened in Telford, providing cataract surgery and YAG laser capsulotomy to NHS patients.

SpaMedica has opened a base at Titan House on Euston Park, helping to cut waiting times for those requiring treatment to improve their vision. The new hospital says it will offer appointments to patients in just two to four weeks, compared to a national target of 18 weeks.

Telford is the 49th SpaMedica site in the UK. Manager Debbie Allmark said: "We know the enormous difference these procedures can make, restoring patients' independence and helping them get back to the hobbies, activities and lives they love."

"We're delighted to be working in partnership with the NHS to reduce local waiting lists and ensure patients who need cataract surgery or YAG laser capsulotomy can easily access high-quality treatment, within a much shorter than average timeframe."

NHS patients who have been diagnosed with cataracts or posterior capsule opacification can ask for a referral to SpaMedica Telford through their local optician or GP.



SpaMedica has opened a base at Titan House, Telford

Aiding acquisition on behalf of media group

Claverley Group Limited, the media company which owns the Shropshire Star and several of the county's weekly newspapers, has announced another acquisition.

The company has bought Lyonsdown Limited, a privately-owned specialist digital media production company, for an undisclosed sum.

It is the latest in a series of deals made by the group since 2018, following the acquisitions of B2B publisher HPCI Media, children's magazine publisher Kennedy Publishing, and creative design and print management business Cubiquity.

The Midlands corporate finance team of BDO advised Claverley on the latest acquisition and provided tax advice on the transaction.

Alper Dervish, who led the BDO team, said: "Claverley is a long-standing client, with a strong foundation in traditional media within the Midlands."

"In more recent years, the group has successfully diversified into digital media and content production, and this latest acquisition demonstrates that drive and ambition."

"Once again, we've been able to support Claverley in executing its corporate development agenda through the early identification of a complementary business for the group. Through our continued network of advisors and intermediaries, and eyes on the market, we were able to highlight Lyonsdown as a potential good fit."

The London-based company provides high level media – both content for republication and video services – for a prestigious client base, including Amazon and Bloomberg, among others.

It was formed in 2006 and provides video content, articles and platforms, lead generation services and hosting digital events, gaining national recognition within a competitive marketplace.

Phil Inman, chief executive of Claverley Group, said: "The business has grown rapidly over recent years and we look forward to working with the current team to support further growth and development."

"The acquisition of Lyonsdown Limited, trading across several different media titles, provides a further expansion of our specialist content and media brands and will continue to support our wider diversification within our overall group."



Alper Dervish, from the Midlands corporate finance team of BDO led the team that advised the Claverley Group

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Card stations inspire the next generation

A new career support initiative has been launched in Shropshire to inspire pupils to consider careers across the spectrum whilst being supported by county employers.

Career Cards has been launched by Andy Goff, who has decades of worldwide experience in teaching, technology in education, and media training in schools. Andy, based in Shrewsbury, has already won the support of many leading businesses across the county who have signed up as sponsors.

The Career Cards' stations have 12 individual cards which each feature an industry, role, photo and background of the person, with a scannable QR code to take the pupil to a video on the Career Cards' website, recorded by that person, to find out more.

A range of videos are available to watch, informing more about what that person does, what they like about their job, and the different pathways to it, including university, apprenticeships and other avenues.



Andy Goff says he has been overwhelmed by the support from Shropshire businesses

Andy, who is already working with a number of schools, said: "The Career Cards project is all about connecting businesses with the exceptional young talent we are fortunate enough to have here in Shropshire.

"We have phenomenal businesses in the county that are not exempt from the national recruitment crisis.

"Skills and recruitment is a massive nationwide problem across many industries, so together we aim to discover and engage the future talent out there, and ensure they know

the vast opportunity presented by Shropshire employers. We want to keep the talent here in Shropshire and we will only achieve that by ensuring students understand those opportunities right here on their doorstep in the very early stages of their future career planning.

"I have been overwhelmed by the support of Shropshire businesses so far and it has been wonderful to see the students' reactions – picking up Career Cards and taking them home to discuss with their parents.

"We so often hear of young people leaving education still totally clueless of what they want to do – that isn't their fault – they just haven't been exposed to the opportunity early enough.

"Careers Cards is a nationwide project which was born here in Shropshire – every card station will be individual to the particular region it is placed in. The project will expand month on month and I am so excited to see the network of businesses already throwing their support behind the project."

Career Cards' stations have already been sponsored by Furrows, Start Tech, and J&PR, which is also the media partner for the project.

Thanks for a decade of service

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has said a big thank-you to its long-serving company secretary who has stepped down from the role after nearly a decade of service.

Ann Fisher, from Hatchers in Shrewsbury, specialises in corporate and commercial law, and took up the Chamber position in December 2013.

Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber's chief executive, said: "We are hugely grateful for everything Ann has done for the Chamber over the past 10 years – and to Hatchers for allowing her the time to work with us.

"She has been invaluable in covering our Companies House duties, and in carrying out other crucial duties on our behalf such as reviewing our articles of association and code of conduct."

Ruth visited Ann at the Hatchers offices in Shrewsbury to present her with a departing gift on behalf of the Chamber team. Going forward, her duties will be

covered in-house by the Chamber team, as part of an internal restructure.

Ann studied law at Staffordshire University and the College of Law in Chester, and has specialised in corporate and commercial law since qualifying as a solicitor in 2000.

She has a particular interest in advising owner-managed businesses on matters including business sales and acquisitions, start-ups, shareholder agreements, articles of association, share options, joint ventures, intellectual property, agency and distribution, manufacturing and supply agreements, e-commerce, website terms and conditions, and general commercial contracts.

Ann acts for a wide range of not-for-profit organisations, including charities, schools and societies, advising on constitution, company secretarial and commercial contracts.



Ruth Ross presents Ann Fisher with a parting gift on behalf of the Chamber team

Trading careers does the job

When Richard Vickers left school at 16 his career path seemed clear – joining his father in the family joinery business.

But 15 years and a university degree later, he is celebrating his decision to change course and re-train as a quantity surveyor. He has just been promoted to associate director with Telford-based CQS Solutions.

Richard, of St George's, started his working life as an apprentice joiner with his father Andy Vickers.

But after a degree in Commercial Management and Quantity Surveying, he spent the final two years combining studies with working as a trainee surveyor with CQS Solutions.

Nine years on, he has been promoted to associate director by company owner Tim Lloyd.

"I think having spent time 'on the tools' in the building industry has given me a massive advantage. Having the knowledge of how things work on a building site helps the planning and preparation," he said.

Richard is not the only one of the CQS Solutions team to have come to the company from a trade background and to have been promoted. Ben Allen, who originally trained in groundwork and drainage, has been made senior quantity surveyor after six years with the company.

Emma's Caribbean dream comes true



Sherlina Samuels, Cllr Lee Carter, business owner Emma Williams, and Chloe Samuels at the official Park Street Kitchen opening

A Caribbean street food business has started an exciting new chapter after moving into a permanent high street unit in Wellington.

Park Street Kitchen has made a name for itself in Wellington Indoor Market Food Court and has now opened at Market Street

The business has been supported with a start-up grant through Telford & Wrekin Council's Pride in Our High Street programme which has helped owner Emma Williams take this next step.

It is the only modern Caribbean food outlet in Shropshire and has built up a strong customer base in the market, bringing a good selection of 'free from foods' and vegan dishes to a takeaway business in Wellington.

It specialises in traditional Jamaican food dishes, stemming from Emma's family heritage – healthy eat-in and takeaway meals using a variety of fresh quality ingredients, and also provides a pre-order, collection and delivery service.

This move will enable Emma to grow the business – making the most of a much larger unit space and flexible trading hours.

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Tackling skills shortage



Stage 1 Report of the skills improvement plan

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has published the findings from the first phase of its Local Skills Improvement Plan project – designed to gain a better understanding of the area’s skills and training requirements.

The stage one report outlines a series of ‘quick wins’ which could be achieved over the coming months to boost upskilling and knowledge sharing, and paints a comprehensive picture of current training provision across the area. Hundreds of local businesses contributed to the first stage of the research, which has now been officially signed off by Secretary of State for Education, Gillian Keegan.

The Marches LSIP project is being led locally by Shropshire Chamber, and is targeting specific sectors including engineering, manufacturing, professional services, construction, environmental technologies, and health & social care. The aim is to help post-16 education providers and other public sector bodies across the Marches – Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin and Herefordshire – to ensure that the voice of employers is at the forefront when planning skills training.

Richard Sheehan, LSIP project director, said: “The Government’s Skills for Jobs White Paper has put employers firmly at the core of the skills agenda for post-16 education – a stance welcomed by the business world.

“With productivity sluggish and the economy still damaged by Covid and other world events, it now requires an even greater push to ensure that skills needs are met.

“The Marches LSIP project is giving us that extra strength; enabling us to unpack ambition and opportunity, for current employees, prospective employees, and employers whose



Richard Sheehan, LSIP project director

businesses provide wealth, employment, and opportunity to the Marches.”

Reflecting on the first stage of the report, Mr Sheehan added: “We have a wide range of provision within the Marches already striving to ensure they meet skills shortages. With the strong stakeholder collaborative culture already embedded it allows us to willingly agree to work even more closely, openly, honestly, and productively to embrace the opportunities the LSIP project offers.

“Change takes time, but even in stage one we clearly saw the appetite from businesses to get involved, to give their honest opinions, and to willingly work with the LSIP stakeholders to ensure that everyone is focused on the same goal.

“Many business/provider relationships already exist and work well; LSIP gives us the opportunity to increase those relationships, broaden the voice greatly, and strengthen current relationships.

“Barriers that hinder unnecessarily can easily be removed through a collective willingness. Our one objective is to ensure that The Marches, grows, prospers, innovates; to achieve that we will ensure, collectively, that we continue to harness the power of the employer’s voice.”

Among the ‘quick wins’ the report suggests is the effective use of Local Skills Improvement Fund cash – not restricted to a single project, but spread across a variety of projects involving a collective of training providers.

“Other funding streams or employers self-funding would help support fast and vital upskilling, whilst not requiring current staff to be away from the businesses for long periods,” the report says.

More than 450 businesses across the Marches gave their time, insights, and views to the researchers to ensure that the employer’s voice was heard. To read the full stage one report, visit <https://www.shropshire-chamber.co.uk/policy-representation/local-skills-improvement-plan>

In brief...

- Dairy giant Müller has switched all its coloured milk bottle caps to clear, reducing dependency on virgin plastic by more than 1,500 tonnes each year.

Following a trial in early 2022, the dairy company – one of Shropshire’s biggest employers with a base in Market Drayton – began converting coloured caps in winter last year across its dairies in Britain.

Rob Hutchison, chief executive of the division, said: “We are proud to have led this industry change and will continue to look for more sustainable packaging solutions, ensuring we play our part in delivering a better future for British dairy.”

- Shrewsbury-based speciality coffee roaster Iron & Fire has again been awarded star status for four of its coffee blends in the Great Taste Awards.

All products submitted for judging are blind tasted by a panel of experts.

This year, stars were awarded to four of the company’s distinct coffee blends, Morning Glory, Decaf Blend, Severn Blend and Brazilian Samba.

- Farm machinery to the value of nearly £5.6 million has been sold by auctioneers Halls in the first seven months of an exceptionally busy year.

Farm dispersal sales have been held across an area spanning from the West Midlands to Mid and North Wales, while collective farm machinery auctions are held in Shrewsbury and Kidderminster throughout the year.

Halls has a network of offices across Shropshire, Powys and Worcestershire.

- The Rotary Club of Wellington has launched a new membership initiative in a bid to attract more individual members and those from the business community.

The club introduced Corporate Membership in 2020 for businesses, schools, charities and organisations, and has now launched an ‘Associate’ scheme.

The Associate scheme is a ‘try before you buy’ where interested parties can attend as many times as they want in six months and enjoy the networking, the social events, the activities and the lunchtime meetings.

Media partner for annual festival



Shropshire Live presenter Ryan Kennedy with Julia Roberts

Digital news and entertainment channel Shropshire Live has been announced as a media partner for this year’s seventh annual Ginger & Spice Festival in Market Drayton.

Shropshire Live will be supporting the communications before and during the annual festival, from September 28 to October 1, with a series of interviews on their new mid-morning radio show with Ryan Kennedy.

The interviews will showcase the local artisan traders, businesses, sponsors and artists lined up to attend this year’s award-winning festival.

Festival director Julia Roberts said: “Shropshire Live launched their brand-new mid-morning show with Ryan Kennedy in March this year from Market Drayton, so it is the perfect collaboration for us to promote both our organisations and the town throughout Shropshire.”

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

Digital-focused provision

Harper Adams University has joined Telford College as education partners for the digital skills and enterprise hub being created at the new Station Quarter development in central Telford.

The hub aims to provide a digital-focused provision, leveraging the expertise of local institutions to deliver cutting-edge educational opportunities to students and businesses.

Graham Wynn, chair of the Telford Town Board, said: “We are delighted to have Harper Adams as our strategic, higher education partner locating in the new teaching and learning centre, as part of the Station quarter development.

“There are significant synergies in Harper Adams degree level programmes that are a perfect fit for our business community who will benefit from the opportunity of a wide range of degree level courses in business, engineering, and digital skills.

“Station Quarter is a significant development in ensuring Telford’s continued success and future prosperity.”

Professor Ken Sloan, vice chancellor of Harper Adams University, said: “This partnership presents an exciting opportunity to leverage our expertise in digital innovation to benefit students, businesses and the wider community.

“Together, we can create a dynamic learning environment that nurtures talent, fosters collaboration and contributes to the growth of digital skills in Telford.”

The digital skills and enterprise hub aims to become a regional focal point for digital and business learning. It will also foster innovation and entrepreneurship, reinforcing Telford’s position as a hub for digital skills and technological advancements.

Graham Guest, principal and chief executive of Telford College, said: “We are proud partners in the Station Quarter development which will play a pivotal role in shaping the future workforce and driving economic success in the region.

“For us, this is all about building close partnerships with business. We see it as a unique and ambitious alliance between industry and education which will raise everyone’s aspirations.”

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Phase two of scheme has been completed

Morris Property has completed the second phase of Telford and Wrekin Council's innovative 25-acre agricultural technology park, Ni.PARK, in Newport.

Phase two of the multi-million-pound scheme includes three energy efficient units each covering 10,000 sq ft in landscaped grounds.

The scheme has a focus on sustainability, incorporating electric vehicle charging points, solar panels on the roofs, sustainable drainage systems and ecological enhancements to reduce environmental impact.

Phase two was built over 36 weeks and sits next to the initial 24 starter units, which were completed in 2021.

Steve Flavell, construction manager at Morris Property, said: "We are delighted to reach completion of this innovative project. Businesses are already thriving in the starter units and we wish the new tenants the best of luck in their new homes."

The latest units are being delivered using the council's Growth Fund.



At the handover are Telford and Wrekin Council's senior surveyor Catherine Hawsworth, Councillor Nathan England, Morris Property site manager Dave Fletcher, and Morris Property construction manager Steve Flavell

Face-to-face mortgage advice at pop-up days

A Shropshire mortgage adviser is launching a series of pop-up advice surgeries across the county as people continue to struggle with industry changes and mortgage rates.

Nathan Blissett, founder and principal mortgage adviser at Dwello Mortgages in Telford, said people were struggling to understand the daily changes in the industry and many were panicking and often making regretful choices.

He hopes that by bringing the personal, face-to-face, free advice surgeries to towns and villages across the county, people will be able to learn exactly what is right for them and find out about the options available.

The Dwello Mortgages team hopes to work with estate agents across the county and other venues to host their pop-up mortgage surgeries.

Nathan said: "These surgeries could be held in a cafe, a town hall, a sports club or stadium, at a staff meeting or event, at a business premises such as an estate agents or a library, or be held for a specific group of people."

"The majority of people in such places will either have a mortgage already and may not know what product is right for them at this current time; or they will be considering buying their first home in the future; or they may be thinking about upsizing or have a Buy To Let property or portfolio."

"Each individual scenario brings its own set of questions, worries and anxieties, and we want to help people understand what the market looks like for them, what options they have and why – understanding the why is so important for all involved."

He said he had been receiving an increasing number of enquiries from clients who had seen their perfect property but didn't think it was the right time to buy – or from landlords who thought they needed to sell their Buy To Let portfolio which would have a significant impact on people who need to rent.

Any business or group organiser which would like to book a pop-up surgery at their venue should email Nathan@dwellomortgages.com or call 0333 533 0051.



Nathan Blissett, founder of Dwello Mortgages, Telford

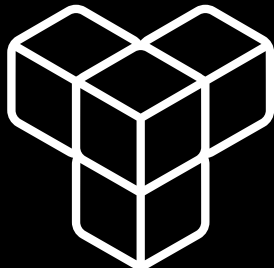
Is your brand invisible?

On average, organisations and brands change their corporate image every 7-10 years to make sure they are still seen and heard by their ever evolving markets and customers.

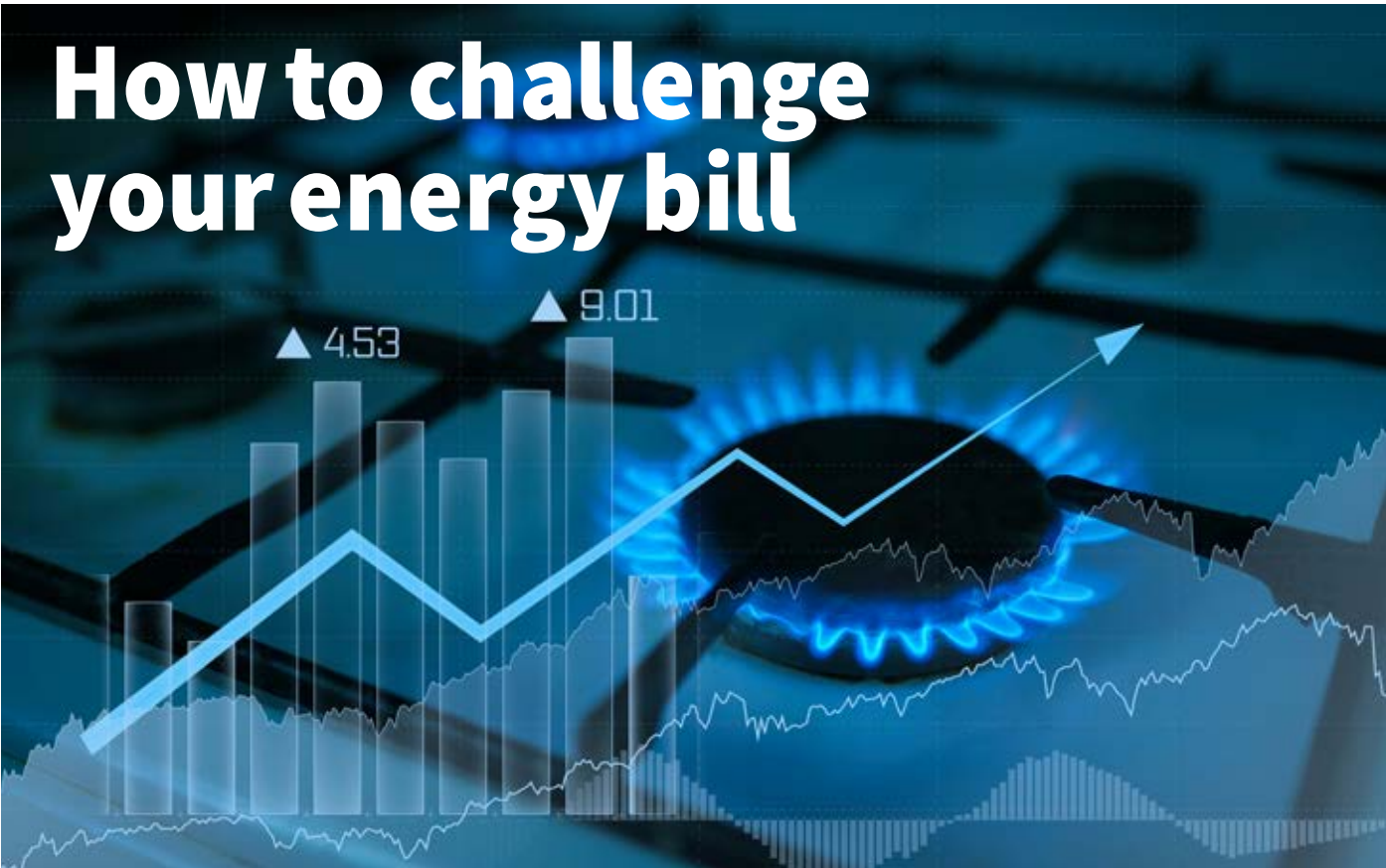
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In the last few weeks, the news has been filled with some absolutely horrifying stories about ludicrous energy bills that clearly can't possibly be true.

What's particularly frustrating is the abject failure of some energy firms to acknowledge that these bills are wrong. Often a basic check to see if a meter is "working" is enough for some legitimate complaints to be dismissed.

However, you should always fight back. I've been working on a few shocking cases for the next two seasons of Rip Off Britain. But until then, check out my guide on what to do if your bill doesn't seem right.

How to turn detective if your bill seems wrong

Many of the people I speak to who are worried about energy prices feel bamboozled by their bills. This is because energy billing is complicated and can be affected by lots of

random elements. But don't worry, here's what you can do.

Start with the meter readings. If you have an ancient meter (like me) then it's really easy to read the dials wrong. So photograph your gas and energy meter dials and send those to the firm. Most energy businesses can check pictures for you to see if they match up with the right reading.

We still have a bit of a "service hangover" from the pandemic. So your energy supplier may well have been working off estimates for a long time. If that's the case, then you may be able to appeal the bill even if the meter turns out to be working properly. Dig out the bills and check when the meter was last read by the firm. There'll be a code on your bill that explains whether the readings are estimated, officially read or sent by smart meter.

If you or your energy provider suspect the meter might be faulty, they may ask you to provide daily meter readings for seven days to see if there's an obvious problem. If the readings make no sense, it's for the energy firm to come up with answers and solutions. This should involve sending out engineers to assess the meter's performance or even a forensic analysis of your bills.

Don't forget, if all else fails, you can make a formal complaint to the business and go to the Energy Ombudsman if they don't sort things out.

Breaking the rules by back billing

Regulator Ofgem has a number of rules that businesses are supposed to follow – but don't assume they are behaving properly. One

of the things that businesses aren't allowed to do (but still do) is "back billing".

If an energy firm sends you a new bill that covers a period that is older than the last year, they should not be charging you for it (as long as you haven't deliberately dodged meter readings). They are only allowed to charge you for the most recent 12 months.

This is for new bills though. If you have an outstanding debt that you were correctly billed for at the time, the business can pursue it for up to six years. However, if you think you've not been treated fairly then you should make a formal complaint.

Nonsensical charges

I've seen some horror stories lately, including an older lady living alone, who was charged £12,000 for one year of energy use and a couple who moved in to a new home and were hit with a bill for £6,000 for six weeks of energy use.

These bills are clearly errors. It's not your job to work out why – it's the responsibility of the business. Tell them to suspend all debt recovery while the matter is fully investigated and keep pushing back. They are supposed to be the experts – and can write off debts if they want to.

The Energy Ombudsman

Don't forget that the Energy Ombudsman is a free alternative to the courts that you can go to if the business does not resolve your complaint. <https://www.ombudsman-services.org/sectors/energy>

Martyn James is a leading consumer rights campaigner, TV and radio broadcaster and journalist. <https://martynjamesexpert.co.uk/>



Hugh Strickland with the High Sheriff of Shropshire, Mandy Thorn



More than 100 guests attended the celebratory reception at Hencote

Decade celebrated with guests

Law firm Aaron & Partners celebrated a decade of success for its Shropshire office by holding a reception at Hencote in Shrewsbury.

More than 100 guests, including Aaron's staff and business partners, attended the event.

Over the past ten years, the team has grown its office in Shrewsbury to a current

headcount of almost 40 members including solicitors ranking in the Legal 500 directory.

Hugh Strickland, who took over as head of the Shropshire office last year, said: "Since our foundation here in 2013, we've made a real name for ourselves in Shrewsbury and across the wider West Midlands region.

"It's been a fantastic journey defined by the brilliant efforts of our team, and we look forward to continuing this success in the future.

"We'd like to thank everyone who came

along and celebrated this milestone with us. It was a superb evening."

Guests were treated to a tasting of special locally-sourced wines, followed by a special performance from Trystan Llŷr Griffiths and Menna Rhys Griffiths of the Welsh National Opera.

Nick Clarke, senior partner and head of dispute resolution, said: "We have achieved amazing growth in our Shrewsbury office – from £250,000 in our first year, to just under £4 million in our most recent year."



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Growth event in Ironbridge Gorge

Critical Steps To Sustainable Growth is the title of a free business planning event taking place in the Ironbridge Gorge in September.

Organised by Bridgnorth-based Good2Great, it is being held at the Engine House in Coalbrookdale, next to the Ennui centre, on September 21.

Johnny Themans of Good2Great said: "As things remain so politically and economically volatile and the other pressures we're facing on a day-to-day basis continue to mount, I can guarantee only one thing: change followed by more change."

"These changes present us with challenges AND opportunities. For your business to adapt and take advantage, it's vital that it's in optimum shape with a clear plan for your future direction."

"To survive and thrive in the next two years you need a laser focus on effectiveness, efficiency and performance."

He said the event, running from



Johnny Themans of Good2Great

9.15am until noon, was designed to help companies prepare an action plan to survive and thrive, and so protect themselves 'from the coming storm'.

The agenda includes a five-step plan to build sustainable growth, plus sessions on how to drive efficiency against a backdrop of rising prices, political uncertainty, technological advances and labour shortages; how to be a high performing team with great leadership that delivers your company's ambitions and beats the competition; and tactical tools to help you succeed.

Bookings close at 5pm on September 18 and can be made through www.addevent.com



Luxury retreat – Bryn Tanat Hall

Workforce set to double at hall

A luxury retreat on the west Shropshire border has launched a new ownership development of holiday lodges set within 15 acres of parkland.

The lodges are at Bryn Tanat Hall, a family-run, five star self-catering destination at Llansantffraid. Five lodges, priced from £250,000, are included in the first phase, with another four to follow.

The new development builds upon Bryn Tanat Hall's existing lodge offering, and will see the current workforce of 11 expected to nearly double over the next three years.

Susan Martin, of Bryn Tanat Hall, said: "Our vision as custodians of the Bryn Tanat Hall Estate is to ensure that the idyllic and arresting physical landscape, diverse wildlife habitats and ecosystem are protected."

"To support this, we have planted thousands of trees, specimen now semi mature, woodland and hedging, and created a wildlife pond with a second planned on the Lower Parkland Luxury Lodge park."

Award beckons

Renewable energy and battery specialist AceOn has been shortlisted for a top prize in one of the country's most prestigious awards schemes.

The Telford-based company is a finalist for the exporter of the year title at the Lloyds Bank British Business Excellence Awards.

It will compete against 10 other firms from across the country for the title – sponsored by the Department for Business and Trade – with the winners being announced at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London's Park Lane in November.

AceOn managing director Mark

Thompson said: "The past 12 months have really seen our export performance take off. This nomination is further confirmation that we have established ourselves firmly as one of the UK's battery specialists."

"We are exporting products and working on projects with companies and organisations across several continents. We have secured some big orders and seen a seven-figure increase in the value of our exports business."

"A key ingredient in our success is that we have established strong partnerships with market-leading suppliers of batteries and components such as BMZ. This means that, for our export and domestic markets, the batteries we distribute and the battery packs we manufacture here in the UK offer value-for-money and good quality for our customers."

"And we were delighted to be selected as a Regional Export Champion to share our experiences with other Midlands' businesses and help the region power up its international trade."



AceOn's pioneering solar storage battery, the SolarSDS, is being marketed in Nigeria

End of an era as demolition is go

Plans for the partial demolition of Riverside shopping centre in Shrewsbury town centre have been approved.

The proposals will see the partial demolition of units 2 and units 44-48 in the Riverside, along with the former police station and the pedestrian walkway canopy.

The work, which will be undertaken later this year, will enable essential ground investigation works – helping to inform and shape the design of Shropshire Council's Smithfield Riverside regeneration masterplan.

Smithfield Riverside aims to regenerate the area between the Darwin Centre, Roushill and the River Severn in Shrewsbury town centre.

The project will aim to reconnect this underused area of Shrewsbury to the rest of the town centre and create a modern mixed-use destination, with a major emphasis placed on celebrating its unique riverside location.

Earlier this year, Shropshire Council, supported by the Shrewsbury Big Town Plan Partnership, secured almost £19 million of Levelling Up funding from Government to further support the regeneration of Shrewsbury town centre.

Councillor Mark Jones, cabinet member for Economic Growth and Regeneration at Shropshire Council, said: "We anticipate work starting later this year and will continue to liaise very closely with the Riverside centre's existing tenants and other key stakeholders within the community to ensure the programme can move forward at pace, while also causing minimal disturbance to the wider town centre."

Advertisement Feature

Mortgage market more resilient than expected

Our UK economist Daniel Mahoney says interest rate expectations should moderate housing market correction.

June's mortgage approvals exceed expectations

Net mortgage approvals, a key future indicator for the housing market, saw an increase from 51,100 in May to 54,700 in June. This was considerably better than expected, exceeding market expectations by 5,700, and suggests that the housing market is proving to be slightly more resilient than previously anticipated. Despite the better-than-expected reading, mortgage approvals remain below the average during the late 2010s. The effective interest rate paid on newly-drawn mortgages continues to increase, rising by a further 7 basis points to 4.63% in June, and the rate on the outstanding stock of mortgages increased by 10 basis points and now sits at 2.92%.

Falling interest rate expectations should moderate housing market correction

So far, UK house prices have seen a peak-to-trough fall in nominal

terms of around 4%, according to the Nationwide Price Index. Relatively robust mortgage approval readings for June could indicate that any further correction in the housing market will be relatively modest in nominal terms, although price corrections in real terms space will of course continue to be significant. June's CPI reading, which unexpectedly came in under expectations, has helped bring interest rate expectations down, which could help to further moderate the correction to UK house prices.

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Students are selected based on performance and ability for assessment



The British School of Watchmaking, based on the outskirts of Manchester

Future-proofing of the watchmaking industry



JON WESTON is managing director of Rudell the Jewellers, a Houlden group member with retail stores in both Wolverhampton and Birmingham. He is a trustee and founder of the British School of Watchmaking – and says we must act now to protect and invest in the fine art of watchmaking.

How did you become involved with the BSOW?

I became involved in 2006 when the school became operational, and I used to go along to the annual supporters' meetings to represent Houlden. Around eight years ago, I was contacted by the then MD, Mark Hearn from Patek Philippe.

He asked if I wanted to get involved as a director as he knew I shared his real passion for the preservation of the fine art of watchmaking. This was evident because of my involvement creating the after sales procedures for watches and jewellery with Rudells.

I accepted, and the following year was asked to be MD. In a normal month I usually dedicate two to three days to the school and feel my skillset as MD of Rudells has transferred well to the role of MD for BSOW. Running a charity, which the BSOW now is, has many similarities to running my business.

Tell us a little about some of the key projects you have been involved with in recent years?

One of the key things I have implemented was changing the criteria for assessment days to a higher standard. Why? The thinking behind this was to ultimately produce a higher standard of watchmaker at the end. If you do not set the bar high, you do not give the lecturers the right ingredients to work with.

On our assessment days, the top eight potential students are selected for both our 1800 hour and 3000 hour courses solely based on their performance and ability. Also, we registered as a charity in 2019 (which took a year) and this came with advantages including



BSOW has produced 118 skilled watchmakers since the first graduations in 2008

savings with business rates and that any supporters' financial donation can be claimed back as an allowable deduction against corporation tax each year.

Following this, we relocated to a purpose-built premises in the Stockport area, which allowed us to double in size.

We did some groundwork with education body Watchmakers of Switzerland Training and Educational Programme who are the gold standard of watchmaking training, on the plans for the two-floor building. We teach WOSTEP's courses and syllabuses and wanted the end result to be a first-class facility for the watchmakers of tomorrow. I think we definitely achieved this!

Why did you get involved with the school?

The main reason was for the preservation of the fine art of watchmaking at the highest

level. If you are looking for a watchmaker now because there is such a shortage, sadly often your only option could be to poach someone from another business which does not solve the overall problem.

If you do this, you are driving the costs of employing watchmakers higher and higher which is not good for overheads and eats into profits.

The best thing to do is to grow your own – produce your own watchmakers by putting them through our school.

To put things into perspective, around a decade ago WOSTEP conducted a survey and concluded that there was a shortage of around 60,000 watchmakers in the world.

We have produced 118 watchmakers since our first students graduated in 2008 and realise that this is just a small drop in the ocean, but it is a positive start.



Unique – the British School of Watchmaking is the only UK-based school to teach the 12-month industry recognised 1800 Course



James Robinson, general manager at BSOW



Lecturer Tom Keegan joined the school in 2008



Students enjoy state-of-the-art facilities

What is the most challenging part of your role with the BSOW?

Probably getting the support for the school as we are a non-profit organisation and receive no Government funding. Also trying to communicate within our industry the importance and relevance of the future of watchmaking and the BSOW and its evolution, because if we do not act now, the effect will be colossal on both retail and manufacturing. If the retail network and brands do not support the school, basically the school will struggle to exist.

It should be in retailers' interests as their reputation and the brands they deal with could all be at risk if we do not protect the future of the watchmaking industry.

Over half of the currently employed watchmakers are over 50 years of age. We need to attract new students now; it takes about five



The school is proud of its student development

years before watchmakers are proficient across most brands. Each movement has its own signature parts, and every brand has different calibres.

The principles are the same, but the functions can vary so that is why it takes so long before a watchmaker can do anything you throw at them. Even then, specialist study of calibres is constantly needed.

Of all the mechanical watches sold in the last five years, the UK has one of the biggest markets across the globe. Who is going to service them in the next 10 to 15 years? There is no point producing a top-notch product if there is no after sales support in place.

What makes the BSOW different from other schools?

The major difference between the BSOW and others in the UK is that we are the only

facility to teach the CFC qualifications – the programme which the Swiss watchhouses teach at the highest level.

We're also the only school in the UK and the first in Europe, to teach the industry recognised 1800 Course, service watchmaker. Following completion of this 12-month course, a graduate can provide routine service of standard type products – both mechanical and electronic.

The 3000 Course, taught over two years, is more in-depth with micro-mechanics, where you make more components and it is centred upon preparing students for employment as watch repairers and prepares them, for example, to make parts for a watch which are no longer in production.

Our new state-of-the-art facility gives us more space to grow and evolve and is obviously hitting the right chord with our students as this year, a student scored the highest mark ever for the 1800 course – 96.04% and similarly we had a highest ever score achieved with the 3000 course – 93.92%. Incredible results!

We are now lucky enough to have three classrooms. So, we have options for running another 1800 course, short courses, or a brand accreditation course.

We have also just ordered £200k of equipment for our newly created polishing facility.

Any last words?

We must invest in the future watchmaking workforce of tomorrow.

I encourage those who are able, to get involved any help is hugely appreciated, whether that be buying instruments and equipment or making a financial donation.

The BSOW have a very professional, world-class setup, at the absolute top of its game.

Being a watchmaker should be considered an attractive career path for males and females so please share details of the BSOW with your retail network to raise awareness so we can tackle the shortage challenge together.

People will always need watchmakers; it is perhaps a little isolating at times but offers a nice living.

Everyone in the industry will need the school, or at least the graduates which our programmes produce, at some point in the future.

• Want to learn more? Visit the BSOW website britishschoolofwatchmaking.co.uk



New – Gemma Workman



Claims help – Amy Bills



Specialist – Alicia Johns



Assistance – Angharad Hird



Wills advice – Mai Lewis

Law firm is growing

Law firm Lanyon Bowdler has had a busy summer with a raft of new appointments and promotions.

Employment lawyer Gemma Workman, who has worked in the south east of England and in Shropshire for the past six years, has joined the Shrewsbury office.

She advises both employers and employees on all aspects of employment law, including issues relating to settlement agreements, contracts of employment, disciplinary and grievance procedures, redundancies and employment tribunal proceedings.

Two new lawyers have also joined the firm's specialist team set up to manage legal claims relating to failures in maternity care at Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust.

Clinical negligence specialists Amy Bills and Alicia Johns will work on the SaTH maternity unit team to deal with a growing number of claims.

Lanyon Bowdler is currently dealing with more than 150 active cases against SaTH – with seven of the cases relating to incidents taking place since the initial findings of the Ockenden report were published in 2020.

At the Oswestry office, two new solicitors have joined the private client team.

Mai Lewis and Angharad Hird will help clients with the preparation of wills, give advice on inheritance tax, prepare and register Lasting Powers of Attorney, and assist with estate planning and administration.

Also in Oswestry, former trainee Rachel Tomley has now qualified as a solicitor and joined the family law department.

She has experienced a wide range of legal cases and issues during her training contract with Lanyon Bowdler including time with the court of protection, clinical negligence, family and personal injury departments.

Another new face is Preet Poonia who has been appointed as Lanyon Bowdler's debt recovery manager, working with clients to help them reclaim their unpaid debt.

She has previously worked as a litigation legal assistant at a national law firm in Birmingham and has wide-ranging expertise in civil litigation, mainly covering debt and asset recovery.

And finally, six lawyers have been promoted to the position of associate – the first time so many promotions have been made at once.

Four of the six – Ruth Edwards, Katie Baker, Emma Deering and Jennifer Edwards – work out of Lanyon Bowdler's Conwy office in North Wales, while Emma Jones is based in Telford and Stephanie Barton



Rachel Tomley has qualified as a solicitor



Debt recovery manager Preet Poonia



Developing their roles – Ruth Edwards, Katie Baker, Emma Deering, Jennifer Edwards, Emma Jones and Stephanie Barton



works at the firm's office in Ludlow. Managing partner Brian Evans said: "One of the things I enjoy is seeing people develop in their roles, and progress within the firm.

"We are committed to supporting career development and strongly believe that this level of continuity can only benefit the firm and our clients."

Horticultural specialist Ross

Ross Underwood has been appointed head gardener at award winning Goldstone Hall Country House Hotel, near Market Drayton.

Ross, who previously worked as head gardener at nearby Hodnet Hall Gardens, has a long career and experience in horticulture including working for David Austin Roses and Bridgemere Garden World, and is also trustee at Dorothy Clive Garden.

He is responsible for the management and continued development of the five-acre award-winning garden including a one-acre productive kitchen garden, with a team of three, under the stewardship of hotel owner John Cushing.

John said: "Ross's experience and depth of knowledge will enable us to build upon and further develop the garden's potential for an exciting future."



Ross Underwood – head gardener

Commercial banking director | New CEO at Paycare

NatWest has appointed Mark Caulkin as the new director of commercial banking for Staffordshire and Shropshire.

With over 37 years of experience at NatWest Group, Mark will be responsible for overseeing relationships with commercial customers across the two counties to ensure they have the financial and business support they need to thrive and achieve their full potential.

Mark's role also includes overseeing the delivery of new opportunities and growing the NatWest brand with the professional network across the locations his team serves.

Mark has held various positions at the bank throughout his career, most recently holding the position of corporate banking

relationship director in the West Midlands. He has also managed SME clients in North Staffordshire and Shropshire, and has spent time as a business development director.

"Staffordshire and Shropshire are both home to so many inspirational businesses across a multitude of sectors, from manufacturing to agriculture, technology and telecommunications, so it's an honour to be in a position where I can support them to grow and thrive, creating success stories the whole region can be proud of."



Mark Caulkin

A new leader has taken the helm at health and wellbeing provider Paycare.

Anthony Burns has been part of the not-for-profit organisation for a decade, most recently as commercial director, and takes over from retiring chief executive Kevin Rogers.

He says he is keen to balance the organisation's prestigious 149-year history as a health cash plan provider and supporter of affordable healthcare for all, with the continual innovation needed to meet the wellbeing needs of businesses and individuals.

"I see myself as being more of a custodian than a CEO. The world has changed dramatically, and Paycare has not been immune from the challenges of recent years, but the current climate means health cash plans are the most relevant they have ever been – both for individuals and employers in Shropshire and across the rest of the UK."



Anthony Burns

A fresh new sound for Shropshire

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Strategic growth plans

Renewable energy and battery specialist AceOn has strengthened its team with a key appointment to help drive its strategic growth plans. Jean Maclachlan has joined the company – which has bases in Telford and Solihull – as senior project management consultant.



AceOn's Richard Partington with Jean Maclachlan and Alex Thompson

Jean, who has a wealth of knowledge and experience in the industry, moves to AceOn from US-headquartered Fortune 500 company, Cummins Inc, which leads the diesel engine and alternative energy industry.

AceOn managing director Mark Thompson said: "With her experience and knowledge of the market, Jean is ideally placed to help drive our continued growth in the sector."

In the last few years Jean has worked primarily in new energy production and distribution. Her educational background stems from one of the top ten engineering universities in the US, Virginia Tech, with a speciality in Industrial Engineering.

She said: "I am absolutely delighted to be joining AceOn to help the company with its continued growth. I am a big admirer of the work that it does and its proud track record in innovation and delivering low carbon, sustainable energy solutions."

Liam is an asset to the team

Morris Property has welcomed another bench joiner to its workshop at Bicton Business Park, Shrewsbury. Liam Jones has become the latest apprentice to join the expanding joinery team. His career began as a painter and decorator, but he worked as a kitchen fitter before finding his passion for joinery as he watched bespoke, made-to-measure kitchens being crafted in the workshop. Morris Property construction manager Steve Flavell said: "Liam is a real asset to the

Liam Jones



team assisting them with their busy workload and helping on site fitting bespoke windows and doors for clients. "There's a real skills gap in the construction sector so it's vital we support and inspire young people to choose a career within the sector and open opportunities for the future. Liam takes our number of current apprentice bench joiners to three."

Supplier has innovative client

Telford & Wrekin Council's Invest Telford business support team has appointed Halesfield-based European Innovation Limited as its supplier for the new Business Start-up Service

The service aims to support 150 individuals between now and February 2025 with developing a new business idea, and follows the launch of Thrive Telford which provides a full package of business support services and new grant programmes. The service is fully-funded, features a mix of 1-2-1 business mentoring sessions and a host of dedicated business workshops – ideal for anyone interested in setting up their own business. Tim Luft, managing director of European Innovation Ltd, said: "The Business Start-up Service in Telford will help anyone 16 and above who has thought about starting up their own business. Up to 12 hours of mentoring and dedicated business workshops will take clients through the key stages of researching, setting up



Telford & Wrekin councillor Lee Carter, European Innovation directors Tim Luft and Nigel Birch, and Telford & Wrekin Council's Investment and Business Support team leader Claire Critchell at the Maxi House Innovation Studio in Halesfield

and launching a new business. We will be able to bring in business angel investors who are ready to invest with our overall aim being to ensure Telford becomes the best place in the UK to set up a new business, furnishing hands on support to help individuals scale their business quickly and efficiently."

To apply for the Business Start-up service, or for further details, visit www.startuptelford.co.uk

Overseas success story

Three prestigious international schools in France, Switzerland and Singapore have hired Telford company Spaceoasis to create and install the interiors for their new school buildings.

The Hortonwood furniture company's continued overseas success has enabled it to take on new staff, including Will McGarry who has joined as technical designer.

Will's job is to help the design team prepare highly detailed and precise manufacturing drawings so the production team, also located in Hortonwood, can make the furniture.

One of his latest projects involved working on refining and detailing the design of Lego and robotics tables for a school in Switzerland, with three different heights for three different age

ranges of children.

"It's really interesting work because every project is different. It gives me the opportunity to be creative," said Will, who is also delighted he can bring his rescue dog, Pip, into the office with him.

Spaceoasis has delivered projects for Eton College, Dulwich College, Queen Anne's School, Wimbledon High School, Clongowes Wood College in Ireland, Apex 2100 in France and the exclusive Aiglon College in Switzerland.

This summer it has been installing furniture in schools in Rheintal, Switzerland and Singapore along with several projects in the UK.



Will McGarry and Pip

1st Choice for MD role

Shrewsbury-based 1st Choice Insurance has a new managing director.

Callum Watkins first joined the business in May 2018 in the marketing team, becoming commercial director in 2021.

He now leads the business with his senior management team and its founder, Jason Martin, who said: "After a decade of being in business, 1st Choice Insurance is thriving with nearly 50 members of staff."

"When I look at what the next 10 years hold, I feel confident and ready to pass the day-to-day running of the business to a capable pair of hands. I wish Callum well on his new position."



Callum Watkins

In the driving seat for advancement

Driver training specialist Dulsan Training, which has bases in Shrewsbury, Telford and Ludlow, has upskilled five members of staff as part of a company restructure.

Two members of the team – Dave Cross and Martin Hartley – are now fully-qualified NRI and DVSA Driver CPC training instructors. A third Driver CPC instructor to have qualified is Nigel Gaskin.

Mark Williams, who was taken on as an experienced LGV driver and became a Shrewsbury team leader almost two years ago, is now compliance and training manager.

And Dave Rowland has been promoted into a health and safety compliance role, having recently added a Minibus and Driver Awareness Schemes training qualification to his repertoire.



Dulsan Training has bases in Shrewsbury, Telford and Ludlow



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Five minutes with...

Jeevan Punj is director at Telford-based Elite Hampers, and regional lead for the Federation of Small Businesses in Shropshire, Herefordshire and Worcestershire

WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

Creating professional food and drink hampers to help add value to business relationships by showing appreciation through gifting.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT JOB?

Two years, although I have been enjoying gifting since childhood.

HOW ARE YOU IMPACTED BY THE RECENT UNCERTAINTIES IN THE ECONOMY?

In such a turbulent economy, it's important to be able to adapt and create new opportunities. In a short two-year period, we have adapted to significant price increases in raw materials and delivery charges. We have looked into more sustainable products and ways of delivering.

HAS THE FALLOUT FROM THE PANDEMIC CREATED ANY NEW OPPORTUNITIES?

Yes... This is how this business came about in the first place. Prior to the pandemic, I was a qualified optometrist and had been testing eyes in Shropshire for around 15 years. The pandemic resulted in temporary optician closures during which time I explored my creative side, and it encouraged me to create a business from the ground up. If it hadn't been for the pandemic, maybe Elite Hampers would have remained just an idea!

ARE YOU STILL MEETING ON ZOOM/TEAMS ETC, OR BACK TO FACE-TO-FACE NETWORKING?

Both online and face-to-face networking, although I prefer the latter.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

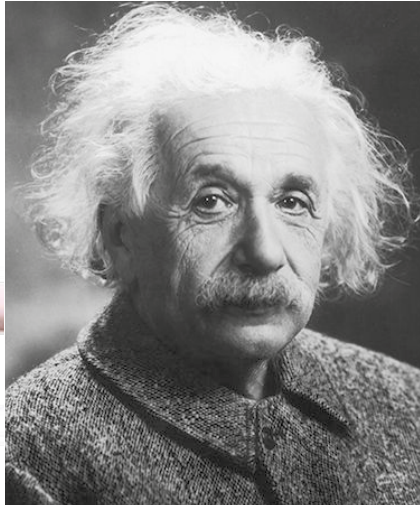
Supportive, creative, empathetic and honest.

HIGHLIGHTS OR MILESTONES OF YOUR CAREER SO FAR?

Being given the role of Regional FSB lead; I'll be a guest speaker at the FSB Bootcamp in Shropshire this October. We have become official gift suppliers for the national Dyslexia Awards, attended numerous expos, accumulated 5-star Google reviews and recently been on Shropshire Business Live TV. Lux Life Magazine have confirmed we are winners of their "Perfect Gift Awards 2023" and that we have been awarded "Best Online Food and Drink Hamper Business 2023". I am also nominated for the Women Who Solopreneur Awards and we have recently been recognised in 'Small Business Sunday' by Theo Paphitis.



Jeevan Punj – showing appreciation via gifting



Albert Einstein would be a dream dinner guest

ANY PARTICULARLY FUNNY STORIES DURING YOUR CAREER?

I was talking to a businesswoman about Elite Hampers, how I personalise corporate hampers and why I enjoy it. I then mentioned my background as an optometrist. Her immediate reaction was: "I thought I knew you from somewhere!" I had tested her eyes! I've confused a few other local people since!

PET HATES?

Working in clutter

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

Comparison is the thief of joy, so always be yourself. Don't waste time imagining the future or suffering the past, live now. Read "If" by Rudyard Kipling.

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

Go on long walks, meditate, and have "coffee dates" with my five-year-old son. I really enjoy making hampers and sometimes I go to "relax" in my workshop!

WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE IS SPECIAL ABOUT THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS COMMUNITY?

It's inclusive, supportive, and genuine. I've met some amazing people who have used my services, referred my services, and invited me to numerous networking opportunities.

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

I can speak basic A-level French and enjoy learning new words on my Duolingo app.



The Lion King would be Jeevan's desert island CD

YOU CAN TAKE ONE BOOK, ONE FILM AND ONE CD ONTO A DESERT ISLAND – WHAT WOULD THEY BE?

Book: Inner Engineering by Sadhguru
Film: The Lion King
CD: The Golden Collection Duets of Lata Mangeshkar and Mohammed Rafi

FIVE DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

Sadhguru, Celine Dion, Walt Disney, Mahatma Gandhi, and Albert Einstein.

WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?

Tofu vegetable curry made with coconut milk served with fried rice. Dessert would be warm chocolate brownie and custard (yum!).

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

We have seen growth in our second year of trading, and we hope to expand our premises to accommodate increased demand. We will continue to create professional gifts for employees and clients and are already working with our suppliers to add a new range for 2024.

Our People, Your Team.

Here to help you.

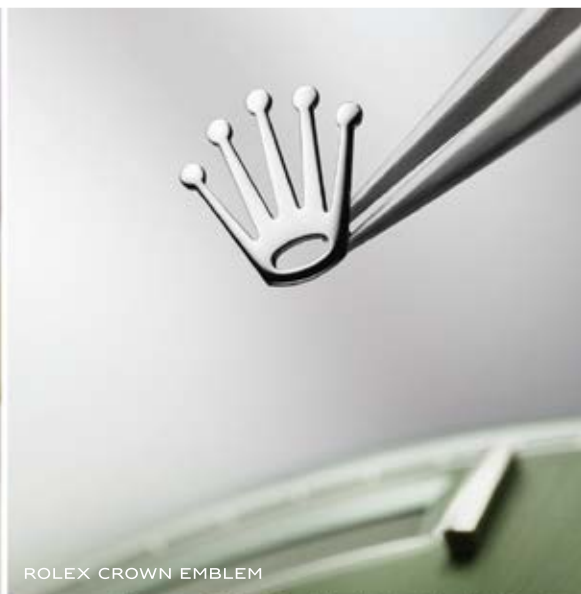
We can hold meetings via telephone and video and, of course, we are also able to offer meetings in person. Please contact us and a member of our team will be happy to help.

Find Us:

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