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July/August 2025  
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**COVER STORY**

**The Greatest Show:** More than 700 people were at Telford’s International Centre for the 25th anniversary of the county’s business awards. We’ve got the inside story on all the big winners, and a picture gallery from the Shropshire business community’s biggest night out, starting on P15

**EUROPEAN UNION ‘RESET’**

How does the new UK-EU deal – and the latest stream of economic data – trickle down to the day-to-day operations and balance sheets of Shropshire businesses? P6-7

**UNBLOCKING BUSINESS POTENTIAL**

Is the secret to your success staring you in the face? Paul McGillivray explores how businesses can overcome the operational constraints that limit their growth potential. P10-12

**RIGHT ON CUE**

Carl Jones meets the Shropshire-based professional snooker coach who is one of just seven people in the world recognised as ‘advanced’ level. P26-27

**WHO’S INCLUDED?**

Breaking down barriers faced by women, ethnic minorities and hard to engage groups considering careers in engineering and manufacturing. P46

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**By Carl Jones**  
Shropshire Business Editor

# SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

## Welcome

**In the fast-paced cut and thrust of business, it’s so easy to overlook the importance of pausing to recognise our achievements.**

Celebrating business success isn’t just about marking milestones – it’s about fostering motivation, strengthening company culture, and inspiring teams on to even bigger and better things.

And that’s why events like the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards are such an important part of the county’s economic calendar.

Maybe I’m a tad biased, having hosted the 25th anniversary celebration at Telford’s International Centre... but what a fantastic showcase of everything that’s magnificent about our business community

More than ever, we need an uplifting break from the incessantly downbeat news headlines in this most angry and volatile of worlds. And this event certainly delivered.

The brilliant businesses recognised at this year’s Shropshire awards – and showcased in our 12-page special report – may not directly receive any new contracts as a result of the exposure. But acknowledging their accomplishments will certainly have boosted staff morale, cultivated a greater sense of unity, and reminded staff that their contributions really do matter.

Celebrating success is even more than that, though. It also enhances your brand reputation, signalling credibility and excellence to your clients, stakeholders, and competitors, and making it easier to recruit the best quality staff. And you can’t put a value on that.

Shropshire businesses have a lot to wrestle with right now. Surveys suggest a widespread feeling of uncertainty over what the short and medium-term future holds.

Uncertainty doesn’t have to mean stagnation, however. The pages of this

edition are brimming with examples of companies that are viewing it as a chance to assess risks, pivot where necessary, and foster a mindset of agility.

Businesses that remain proactive, transparent, and customer-focused are always the ones that not only endure, but emerge stronger.

Perhaps you feel your growth potential is limited by operational constraints? Help is at hand from Paul McGillivray, the best-selling author and strategic transformation consultant who has spent two decades helping businesses to transform their operations.

He explains why the real barrier to growth in your business could be hidden in plain sight. Read his top tips on page 10.

One of the best aspects of reporting on the Shropshire business world is uncovering little-known gems.

Who knew, for example, that the county is home to one of just seven top-level professional snooker coaches in the world? I went along to meet Colin Matty at his base near Hadnall – and got a fascinating and frank verdict on my technique!

Photographers have been out and about around the county once again covering celebratory business events. We’ve got everything from the 25th birthday celebrations of a Cleobury Mortimer food laboratory, to a celebration of our latest King’s Award for Enterprise winners, and the ‘battle of the big accountants’ which was fought out on the football field.

What else? We reveal why one of the world’s biggest hotel brands is coming to the county, and why Gen X workers in Shropshire could be the first to feel they simply can’t retire.

As ever, if there’s a topic you think we should be covering, an issue that needs tackling, or success stories that deserve a wider platform, please don’t hesitate to get in touch.



# Biggest reboot for

**By Adam Pringle**

**There’s certainly been no shortage of ‘big’ economic news in recent weeks. We’ve had the Government’s eagerly-awaited spending review, a reset of our trading relationship with the European Union, and a real mixed bag of trade statistics.**

But when you feed it all into the economic supercomputer, how does it all trickle down to the day-to-day operations and balance sheets of Shropshire businesses?

Let’s take the new EU deal first. The UK has reached a new agreement with the European Union, setting out post-Brexit relations on areas including fishing rights, trade and defence.

Although some of the small print still has to be agreed and paperwork signed, it marks the biggest reboot since the UK officially left the EU five years ago.

Michael Harte, managing director of Bridge Cheese in Telford, gave his thoughts on the EU reset when he met with Telford MP Shaun Davies for what he described as an ‘open and honest’ debate.

He said: “As a small to medium-sized business in the food industry, we were absolutely delighted to hear the news around the reset agreement with the EU. We are now looking to the future with renewed confidence and optimism. Our aim from this will be to increase our turnover. From a standing start, we would hope that a good 10% of our volume will be supplying into the EU market in the next two to three years.”

He said this had the potential to create up to 12 more full-time jobs. “The EU will become an important part of our business here at Stafford Park.”

Shaun added: “Bridge Cheese is such a great example of a local business with a global footprint, and it’s so important that we give them the support they need to continue their growth and boost our local economy.”

Shropshire Business polled business owners on social media to collect other views on the EU reset – and it revealed a mixed picture.



*Bridgnorth Aluminium has welcomed the UK-US steel tariff agreement*



**Gerhard Trilling**

Jude Robinson, joint owner of GWR Fasteners in Oswestry who also now runs a farm shop, said: “Even if you only read posts from employers on LinkedIn, you will understand the struggle of hiked taxation

on businesses, the downturn of growth (investment in capital and people), and witness entrepreneurs escaping to foreign lands.

“What will deals with the EU matter if there’s no businesses to contract with?”

The Government’s financial squeeze on employers is certainly taking its toll on the Shropshire business community and creating an atmosphere of nervousness and uncertainty, according to the results of the latest Shropshire Chamber of Commerce’s latest quarterly economic survey.

It quizzed business owners on a wide range of topics including sales, recruitment, training, cashflow, and confidence levels, and found that the rise in employer National Insurance and the National Living Wage was pushing wages up, and provoking some bosses to reduce head counts.

It is also prompting companies to raise their prices to offset the costs, while the added costs are said to be putting the brakes on recruitment.

The survey was carried out over a three-week period in May, shortly after the increased employer National Insurance and National Minimum Wage rules had come into effect –

and when Donald Trump was unveiling his first wave of tariffs.

Rosie Beswick, Shropshire Chamber’s policy analyst, said: “When we asked employers to tell us their greatest ‘fear factors’, there was a general frustration that policy decisions outside their control were sapping confidence.

“Some sectors reported an increase in bad debts, and a growing battle to get bills paid on time – and the extra costs being shouldered by businesses appears to be reducing the prospect of making big-ticket investments.”

Only one in three of the Shropshire businesses that took part in the survey reported a rise in sales over the past quarter – with fewer than one in five seeing a rise in future orders.

The number of companies predicting job losses increased by 2% on the previous quarter, and firms also reported a significant gap in the salary and benefit expectations of prospective staff, against the packages they could afford to offer.

Just over 25% of employers are expecting a rise in turnover and profits over the coming months – broadly unchanged on the previous

quarter. The survey also showed that nearly 40% of Shropshire employers were seeing a rise in bad debts and a worsening of credit terms, and three quarters claim Rachel Reeves’ first Budget has had a negative effect on their businesses.

There were some indicators heading in the right direction, however. The number of Shropshire companies looking to invest in training rose by 7% on the previous quarter.

While the EU reset has met with a mixed response, the UK’s deal with Donald Trump to end potentially devastating tariffs on our steel exports has left manufacturers breathing a sigh of relief.

They include Gerhard Trilling, general manager of Bridgnorth Aluminium, the only aluminium rolling mill producing coils and sheets in the UK.

He said: “Bridgnorth Aluminium has been one of the loudest voices championing the need to secure a trade deal with the United States, so we naturally welcome news of a 0% tariff agreement on aluminium.

“This is a significant achievement for our Government, but more importantly for UK manufacturing and our ability to compete

globally. This will give us much-needed certainty and will allow us to accelerate our investment in new technology at our Bridgnorth facility, driving our desire to be a sustainable manufacturer and a key player in the circular economy.

“This agreement will unlock new market opportunities, attract increased investment, and accelerate innovation throughout the supply chain.

“It will also undoubtedly safeguard high value jobs and, crucially, will give us the platform to create new employment locally with a strong determination to grow the aluminium specialists of the future.”

Economic figures are painting a mixed picture right now. GDP data published in June showed the UK’s economy shrank by 0.3% in April, although overall it has grown 0.7% in the past three months.

It suggests that we are turning more squarely into some significant headwinds.

And analysts warn that this continued uncertainty will inevitably hamper firms’ investment decisions and long-term growth prospects – hitting investment, recruitment and prices.



*Shropshire Chamber's latest quarterly survey*



*Michael Harte of Bridge Cheese (right) with MP Shaun Davies*

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“It feels like we get a personalised service rather than a set plan off the shelf that would be generic or formulaic.”



# New rose for monarch earns its stripes

Shropshire's world-leading rose breeder David Austin Roses won a Gold Medal for its RHS Chelsea Flower Show stand showcasing 'The King's Rose' – its newly-unveiled rose created in collaboration with The King's Foundation. It is the first striped variety the Albrighton-based company has introduced in its 60-year history.

The secret garden-themed display, which is the largest the brand has ever created at the show with over 50 different varieties, was celebrated by RHS judges for its exquisite beauty and unmistakable craftsmanship.

Chairman David Austin said: "Winning our 29th gold medal at RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2025 is a true testament to the dedication and skill of our entire team."



David Austin introduces King Charles to the new rose

# Jobs at former GKN site to provide a massive boost

**More than 400 jobs are coming to Telford with the creation of a new defence manufacturing facility.**

The news has been described as a huge boost to the town's role as a major player in armed forces support, on the back of new contracts at RBSL.

Rheinmetall – a global leader in defence technology and manufacturing – is to establish a new UK facility in Telford, further cementing the town's status as a key hub for the UK's defence sector.

The new facility located at the former GKN site in Hadley will manufacture cutting-edge artillery gun barrels, marking the first time in over a decade that the UK will produce such equipment domestically.

The move aligns with the Trinity House Agreement between the UK and Germany, which strengthens European security and bolsters NATO capabilities.

In addition to generating over 400 highly-skilled local jobs, it is expected to deliver an estimated £400 million boost to the economy over the next decade.

Councillor Lee Carter, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council, said: "The Hadley Castle Works has provided for the nation's security for generations. Whether that be parts for Spitfires or D-Day landing craft to modern day Boxer armoured vehicles, Challenger tanks and now artillery barrels, the country's defence is often made in Telford.

"We're proud to play that role and will continue to do what we can, given our local skilled workforce and strategic location."

Telford MP Shaun Davies added: "It's a genuine win-win for our local economy and the nation's defence.

"Huge credit goes to the outstanding workforce here in Telford – their skill, dedication, and reputation for excellence continue to set the standard. I also want to acknowledge the company's leadership for their vision and determination in pushing this deal forward, and to thank our local council for their work alongside me and the Government to help bring this over the line."

Rheinmetall's decision complements its existing joint venture with Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land (RBSL) in Telford, which includes the manufacture of the Challenger 3 tank and the Boxer armoured vehicle.

It's a genuine win-win for our local economy and the nation's defence. Huge credit goes to the outstanding workforce here in Telford – their skill, dedication, and reputation for excellence continue to set the standard.

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# Unlocking business potential

PAUL MCGILLIVRAY, co-founder of strategic software development studio Remote, explores how businesses can overcome the operational constraints that limit their growth potential.

**When companies hit a growth ceiling, the real barrier is often hidden in plain sight. After over two decades helping businesses transform their operations, I've found one factor consistently emerges as the hidden obstacle to scaling: operational constraints.**

For Shropshire businesses looking to grow, these constraints can be more impactful than market conditions, competition, or even access to capital. They quietly limit your growth while consuming valuable resources and energy.

The indicators are clear: decision cycles lengthen, teams spend days firefighting rather than innovating, profit margins gradually compress, and leaders find themselves handling operational issues instead of focusing on strategy.

**Finding the bottleneck**

This pattern can be explained by the Theory of Constraints. Developed by business management expert Eliyahu Goldratt, the theory establishes that every organisation has at least one constraint limiting its performance, like the weakest link in a chain.

Take a practical example: imagine a manufacturing business where the production team can create 500 components a day, but the assembly department can only process 200. No matter how efficiently the production team works, the company's total output will remain capped at 200 units per day. In this case, the assembly department is the bottleneck, so all resources and energy should be allocated to that department, while any effort applied to improving the production team will be wasted.

This principle applies beyond manufacturing to every business function – from customer service and sales, to finance and operations.

While identifying these bottlenecks is crucial, I've found that we need to go deeper to understand how these constraints interact within the broader business ecosystem. This is where systems thinking becomes essential.

**Systems thinking**

Systems thinking provides another essential lens for understanding operational constraints. This approach views businesses as interconnected systems rather than isolated departments or functions.

When one part of the system changes, it inevitably affects other parts, often in unexpected ways. This explains why improving one department without considering its connections can create new problems somewhere else.

A distribution company that implements faster order processing might overwhelm their warehouse operations. A professional services firm that accelerates client acquisition might strain its delivery capacity. These ripple effects



At the Scope To Scale book launch

occur because businesses operate as integrated systems.

Systems thinking reveals why many improvement efforts deliver only temporary results. When you address symptoms, rather than underlying system structures, you end up doing what system thinkers call "shifting the burden," where short-term fixes actually weaken the system's long-term capabilities.

These insights reveal why addressing symptoms alone isn't enough. To create lasting change, we need to look at the deeper structures that generate these patterns in the first place.

**Structural transformation**

While most improvement approaches focus on symptoms, lasting transformation requires addressing the underlying structures that determine how businesses operate.

Here's where I've discovered a powerful insight – business constraints often mirror leadership constraints. The way founders and executives think, decide, and operate creates patterns that become embedded in business systems. I call this the "mirror effect."

A leader who struggles with delegation often creates centralised decision structures



Paul McGillivray has more than two decades of experience transforming business operations for mid-market organisations



Purpose-built software becomes transformational when designed to address structural constraints



Founders struggling with trust create business systems that require excessive oversight

that become operational bottlenecks. A founder uncomfortable with uncertainty might establish overly rigorous approval processes that slow down the entire organisation.

Recognising these deep patterns is essential for true transformation. Powerful operational improvement encompasses both systems technology and the evolution of mindsets that shaped them.

**Structural orientation**

This understanding brings a big shift in how we tackle business improvements. Most businesses follow a problem-solving approach:

they spot what's broken and fix it. This might help for a while, but I've learned it rarely creates lasting change.

I've found a better way forward – focus on creating what you want instead of fixing what you don't. Start with a clear picture of your ideal business and build systems that naturally deliver those results. Rather than asking "What's wrong and how do we fix it?" ask "What do we want to create, and what business structures will make that happen?"

For example, a manufacturing company might keep adding more quality checks to catch defects, only to find new problems popping up elsewhere. With a creative approach, they would redesign their entire quality system – building in checks throughout the process, making responsibilities clear at every stage, and creating automatic feedback loops. This prevents quality issues rather than just catching them after they happen.

This approach breaks the frustrating cycle where you make improvements, things get better briefly, but then slide back to how they were before. If you've ever felt like you're playing a never-ending game of whack-a-mole with business problems, that's exactly what's happening – fix one issue and another immediately appears. To help businesses implement this approach consistently, I've developed a structured methodology that transforms this thinking into practical action.

**The SCOPE framework**

The SCOPE framework, detailed in my book Scope to Scale, provides a structured approach for implementing these principles. The framework – Strategise, Clarify, Optimise, Prototype, Execute – helps businesses identify their critical constraints and transform them into competitive advantages.

By systematically mapping business systems, identifying bottlenecks, and designing new structures that eliminate them, SCOPE creates sustainable improvement rather than temporary fixes.

**Eliminating constraints through technology**

Purpose-built software becomes transformational when designed to address these structural constraints. By creating systems that directly target bottlenecks, businesses can multiply their capacity without proportionally increasing resources.

Software eliminates constraints in three primary ways:

- First, through automation of manual processes. Every business has processes that consume time without adding value. Custom software can automate these tasks, freeing valuable human capacity.
- Second, through intelligent workflow design. Beyond simple automation, software can redesign how work flows through an organisation. By implementing decision rules and approval hierarchies, businesses can dramatically accelerate operations.
- Third, by creating a single source of truth. The most powerful way to remove constraints comes from connecting systems that previously operated separately. When information flows smoothly between different parts of your business from one central location, everyone works from the same data, dramatically increasing your operational capacity.

But technology alone isn't enough. For these systems to drive meaningful change, they must

be guided by a powerful force that maintains momentum through the transformation process.

**Structural tension as a driver of change**

A powerful principle I've applied in this process is structural tension; the creative force that emerges when we hold both our current reality and desired future clearly in mind.

By establishing clear visibility of both where the business is and where it needs to be, leaders create productive tension that naturally drives transformation. This tension seeks resolution not through problem-solving but through creative action that moves the organisation towards its vision.

**Expanding the possibilities with AI**

The emergence of AI capabilities is creating entirely new transformation opportunities. While traditional automation handles structured, rule-based processes, AI can tackle the semi-structured and judgement-based tasks that previously required human intervention.

AI can now review documents, extract information from unstructured sources, identify patterns in operational data, and make preliminary decisions based on established criteria. The growing use of AI agents in business workflows means that more and more operational data movement and decision-making can be supported or automated by AI.

Even with these powerful technologies at our disposal, I've discovered that often, the most fundamental barrier to transformation isn't in the systems themselves, but in the thinking patterns that created them.

**The mirror effect**

Perhaps the most profound insight from our work with hundreds of businesses is how leadership patterns shape business structures. The constraints that limit a business often directly mirror the thinking patterns of its leaders.

A founder who struggles with trust, creates business systems that require excessive oversight. A leadership team uncomfortable with transparency establishes information silos that become operational bottlenecks.

This mirror effect means that true business transformation often requires personal transformation. As leaders evolve their thinking patterns, their business structures naturally evolve in parallel.

I've found that the businesses that achieve the most dramatic transformations are those where leaders recognise these patterns, and actively work to redesign both their personal and business structures simultaneously.

**Putting it all together**

Our Strategic Systems Reset accelerator helps mid-market organisations apply these principles in practice. This two-day intensive experience systematically identifies operational constraints and designs new structures to eliminate them.

Unlike traditional workshops that provide theoretical knowledge, the Strategic Systems Reset delivers practical transformation. Participants leave with a clear understanding of their operational constraints and a structured roadmap for eliminating them.

The accelerator combines diagnostic tools, strategic frameworks, and practical implementation guidance to create immediate impact. It's designed to deliver immediate practical value, helping businesses quickly



Identify significant operational capacity improvements that can be implemented right away.

Identifying these opportunities is just the beginning. Next, it's essential to turn these insights into functioning systems that actually transform how your business operates.

**Bridging strategy and technology:  
The Implementation Challenge**

The ideas we've explored can transform your business operations, but putting them into practice isn't always straightforward. Many businesses struggle with the gap between knowing what needs to change and actually building the systems to make it happen.

This is exactly why we established Remote 25 years ago. We realised that truly transforming how a business operates requires both a clear understanding of where the bottlenecks are and the technical know-how to build software that eliminates them.

By combining these two elements, you end up with solutions that fundamentally improve how work moves through your organisation. Built from this principle, software transforms operational workflows rather than simply creating digital versions of existing processes.

We've applied this approach across industries from manufacturing and financial services to healthcare and professional services. In each case, we've helped businesses turn their operational constraints into opportunities for sustainable growth, by building purpose-built software that directly addresses their specific challenges.

**From constraint to competitive advantage**

Looking ahead in 2025, Shropshire businesses face real challenges: tight budgets, difficulty finding skilled staff, and fast-changing



**Paul says: focus on creating what you want instead of fixing what you don't**

technology. Having efficient operations matters more than ever.

The businesses that will succeed are those that view their operational bottlenecks as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles to overcome. When you improve both your business

systems and the thinking behind them, you can push past barriers that have been holding you back.

It all starts with one straightforward question: what's the single biggest constraint in your business that, if transformed, would make the greatest difference to your performance?

- Paul McGillivray has more than two decades of experience transforming business operations for mid-market organisations.

He is the author of the #1 bestseller "SCOPE to Scale" and creator of the Strategic Systems Reset accelerator for operational transformation. For more information about the upcoming Strategic Systems Reset in Shropshire, visit the website [www.remote.online/strategic-systems-reset](http://www.remote.online/strategic-systems-reset)



# Community and recognition are real game-changers



**Hollie Whittles**

**In today's fast-paced business world, it's easy to get caught up in the daily grind – chasing leads, managing teams, and keeping up with change. But for many businesses, the real magic happens when they look beyond their own walls and tap into something bigger: community.**

One shining example of this is the GTIA (Global Technology Industry Association) community. Joining the GTIA community has benefited our business in so many ways, and it is inspiring to be part of global network of ambitious, supportive, and forward-thinking business leaders. I'm proud to represent the UK & Ireland as vice-chair on GTIA's Executive Council. Being part of any community isn't just about networking; it is a mindset. Sharing knowledge, celebrating wins, and lifting each other up. And in a county like Shropshire, where collaboration often prevails over competition, that mindset is making a real difference.

**The power of belonging**

Being part of a business community offers more than just connections. It creates a sense of belonging. Members regularly share insights, challenges, and opportunities – whether it's through in-person events, online forums, or informal meet-ups.

That kind of support can be a lifeline, especially for small businesses or solo entrepreneurs who often feel isolated.

As MJ Shoer, GTIA's chief community officer, puts it: "We're building a community where people feel empowered to share, learn, and grow together. It's not just about business – it's about relationships, trust, and mutual success."

Community also opens doors. Members can find new clients, partners, or suppliers simply by showing up and being part of the conversation. And because the community is built on shared values, those relationships tend to last.

**Why awards matter**

Another powerful way to grow your business – and your confidence – is by entering business awards. Whether it is the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, the West Midlands Business Awards, or GTIA's own Spotlight Awards recognition initiatives, awards offer more than a trophy.

They are a chance to reflect on your journey, showcase your achievements, and tell your story. They boost credibility with customers, attract talent, and energise your team. Even being shortlisted can raise your profile and open new doors.

Nadeshda Ponce, a business strategist and social impact advocate, said: "When we

recognise and celebrate the achievements of others, we create a culture of encouragement that lifts the whole community."

**Giving back matters**

An example of how giving back can lead to recognition was being honoured with an invitation to the Royal Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in May, hosted by King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

The invite was in recognition of my contributions to national skills policy through my role with the Federation of Small Businesses and the Department for Education.

"This recognition is a testament to the collective efforts of everyone involved in advancing our National Skills policy.

"I am so grateful for the support and collaboration of my colleagues and partners in this journey."

This is a powerful reminder that when businesses invest in their communities – whether through policy work, mentoring, or education – they not only help others grow, but also it can lead to natural elevation (even though unexpected and humbling!).

**A call to action**

If you are a Shropshire business owner, now is the time to lean in. Join a community. Put yourself forward for awards. Share your story. Celebrate others. Because when we support each other, we all rise.

In a world that often feels disconnected, community and recognition aren't just nice-to-haves – they're essential tools for growth. And in Shropshire, we're lucky to have both in abundance.

**Hollie Whittles is a director of Purple Frog Systems in Telford**



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# A taste of what's on offer

**New bars, cafés and eateries are opening across Shropshire in a boost to the local hospitality sector.**

Shrewsbury-based entrepreneur Lee Ozturk has revealed he will be taking over two of the town's most iconic venues — The Peach Tree Restaurant and Havana Republic — this summer.

The Abbey Foregate venues have been closed since September 2024, but Lee – who also runs Lee's Peaberry Café – says his goal is to restore them to the reputation and energy they once enjoyed before the pandemic.

"These venues hold a special place in Shrewsbury's heart," he said. "I'm honoured to have the opportunity to bring them back, and I'm committed to creating something that feels both familiar and exciting — a return to form with a fresh twist."

Elsewhere in Shrewsbury, The Lantern's Protection has already opened in in a four-storey property in Mardol Head.

The Ward's Firm Limited – a north Shropshire-based company – has completed the letting of the property to launch its exciting new venture.

Director Callum McCarthy said: "We are eager to bring The Lantern's Protection to Shrewsbury, offering a new, vibrant space for the community."

A new bistro has also opened in the heart of Telford's Station Quarter. The Ironmasters Bistro is based at The Quad – the digital and enterprise hub which houses a mixture of education and business support organisations.



**Councillor Ollie Vickers with Tim Luft of European Innovation and Nigel Birch at the new Ironmasters Bistro in Telford's Station Quarter**

It is a collaboration with internationally-renowned brand Bodum, serving locally roasted artisan coffee, plus cakes and savoury treats sourced from local suppliers,

Nigel Birch, manager of Ironmasters Catering, said: "We're proud to open a space that not only serves excellent food and drink, but also supports local producers and offers a venue for people to connect, work and relax."

The Quad is a unique collaboration between the local authority, Harper Adams University, Telford College and other partners which aims to retain local talent, and be the catalyst for creating careers in applied sciences and the digital sector.



**Peach Tree and Havana Republic owner Martin Monahan (left) with Lee Ozturk**



**McPhillips becomes a two-time Shropshire Company of the Year**

# Businesses strike gold at silver anniversary awards

Organisers promised to lay on 'the greatest show' for the 25th anniversary of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards – and they certainly didn't disappoint.

**Roll up, roll up, for the Shropshire business community's greatest show. More than 700 people answered the rallying call, and they were rewarded with a spectacular evening of celebration and entertainment.**

The 25th anniversary of the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards was a beguiling mix of nostalgia, spectacle, and recognition of the local business community's brightest stars.

It was Telford-based building and civil engineering company McPhillips that took the night's biggest prize, lifting the Company of the Year title for a second time.

It was a good night all round for Telford-

based businesses, with aircraft access ramp maker Aviramp picking up two awards – for Innovation, and Outstanding Growth.

There were also victories for Iconsys, who won for Excellence in Manufacturing and Engineering, and Southwater Veterinary Group which was named Best New Business.

A special 'Champion of Champions' award to mark the competition's milestone – open to all previous company of the year winners – was won by Oswestry-based home life safety company Aico.

The John Clayton Award (given to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to the Shropshire business community over a number of years) went to Steven Owen, managing director of Knockin-based Pave Aways.

Two other individual awards were handed

out, with Anthony Cannan of Ludlow named Young Business Person of the Year, and Anna Redding from Derwen College taking the newly-introduced Inspirational Adult Learner prize.

Elsewhere, Shifnal-based boxing-themed education and training academy Brightstar won the Community Champion award, and Shropshire Wildlife Trust picked up the Eco award.

Meg Hawkins Limited – the homeware, giftware and greetings card company from Aston Botterell in south Shropshire – was named Best Small Business, and the Outstanding Customer Service prize went to Niche Patisserie of Oswestry.

Riverside Cabins, the boutique cabin pods tourism business near Shrewsbury, won the Retail Leisure and Hospitality trophy.

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Aviramp with its Trailblazer award for Innovation

And a special award was presented by the Chamber's past and current chief executives Richard Sheehan and Ruth Ross to the event's master of ceremonies Carl Jones, in recognition of his 25-year involvement in hosting the awards.

Shropshire Chamber president Piran Littleton, whose Bishop's Castle-based company Jesmonite made the trophies, said: "For a quarter of a century, these awards have stood as a beacon of excellence, recognising the resilience, innovation, and outstanding achievements of Shropshire's vibrant business community.

"Over the years, we've seen businesses grow, industries transform, and individuals rise to extraordinary heights – and we are incredibly proud to continue this tradition in 2025.

"This year's celebration comes against the backdrop of a rapidly evolving world. We are all navigating a time of continued change – technological disruption, global economic uncertainty, environmental pressures, and shifting societal expectations.

"Yet, despite these challenges, our local businesses have demonstrated remarkable agility, leadership, and community spirit."

The event, which featured a medley of Greatest Showman-themed musical entertainment, also raised thousands of pounds for the Midlands Air Ambulance through a charity fundraising game.

Guests heard a message from business secretary Jonathan Reynolds, who congratulated the Shropshire business community for putting on the event over the past 25 years.



Southwater Veterinary Group wins Best New Business



Iconsys wins for Excellence in Manufacturing and Engineering



Aico celebrates its Champion of Champions victory

"These awards recognise the brilliant businesses who help to put Shropshire on the map," he said.

"Thank you for your tenacity, and for your entrepreneurial spirit. Thank you for creating jobs, fostering talent, and strengthening Shropshire's high streets and communities. You are a credit in everything that you do."

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said: "It is always a highlight of the calendar when we recognise the amazing businesses we're so fortunate to have in our county – but it was even more special this time

as we celebrated the event's 25th anniversary.

"Our role at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is to help businesses of all sizes to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and celebrate their success.

"We want to be the driving force for a thriving economy, strong partnerships, and resilient growth in Shropshire, delivering a measurable impact for businesses and the community."

It's been a fantastic 2025 so far for McPhillips, which has completed a high profile project at Chester Zoo and, closer to



Steven Owen received The John Clayton Award



Roll up, roll up . . . a huge crowd attended the event



Anthony Cannan receives the Young Business Person award from Stuart Mackenzie of McPhillips

home, begun work on Telford College's new sixth form building and delivered a new £2.6 million chilled storage warehouse and office development for Dale Brothers.

Dale Brothers managing director Robin Dale said: "Choosing the right construction partner for our development was crucial. McPhillips proved to be the perfect choice, demonstrating exceptional expertise in delivering precisely what our operation needed."

Aico said it was honoured to receive the Champion of Champions award. The team



Telford College principal Lawrence Wood presents Anna Redding with the Inspirational Adult Learner award

say the recognition reflected the journey the business has taken since first being named Company of the Year in 2020, and its ongoing dedication to colleagues, customers, and the communities it serves.

Derwen College expressed its delight at Anna Redding's victory as Inspirational Adult Learner. "We are beyond proud of everything Anna has achieved," they said. "She's embraced every opportunity at Derwen College, developing the skills to work, volunteer, perform, and live independently, always with passion and determination."

# THE 2025 WINNERS

**Company of the Year:**  
McPhillips, Telford

**Champion of Champions:**  
Aico, Oswestry

**Best New Business:**  
Southwater Veterinary Group, Telford

**Best Small Business:**  
Meg Hawkins Ltd, Aston Botterell

**Innovation – The Trailblazer Award:**  
Aviramp, Telford

**Manufacturing & Engineering:**  
Iconsys, Telford

**Community Champion:**  
Brightstar, Shifnal

**Eco Award:**  
Shropshire Wildlife Trust

**Customer Service:**  
Niche Patisserie, Oswestry

**Outstanding Business Growth:**  
Aviramp, Telford

**Retail, Leisure & Hospitality:**  
Riverside Cabins, Shrewsbury

**Young Business Person:**  
Anthony Cannan, Ludlow

**Inspirational Adult Learner:**  
Anna Redding, Derwen College

**The John Clayton Award:**  
Steven Owen, Pave Aways

**Special Award:**  
Carl Jones, recognising 25 years of hosting the Awards



Brightstar is crowned Community Champion



Shropshire Wildlife Trust wins the Eco award





*Riverside Cabins celebrates its victory*

“Anna truly lights up every stage she steps onto, and now she’s shining even brighter as a role model for others to follow.”

A shocked and stunned Steven Owen, managing director of Knockin-based Pave Aways, collected the night’s first accolade, receiving The John Clayton Award for an outstanding contribution to the local business community.

He was described as ‘a hugely respected business person who has not only proved their skill in the boardroom – but has built a reputation for constantly giving back to the community’.

The third individual award went to Anthony Cannan of Ludlow who, at the age of just 22, already owns and runs two businesses in his home town of Ludlow – the Buck & Bear barber shop, and a Thai restaurant called Jup-Jup.

Best New Business winner Southwater Veterinary Group was described as a company



*Niche Patisserie wins for Outstanding Customer Service*



**Best Small Business – Meg Hawkins Limited**

with one clear vision: to provide ‘exceptional veterinary care in a high tech independent practice with traditional values’.

Iconsys said it was ‘absolutely thrilled’ to win the Excellence in Manufacturing and Engineering award.

“It’s a proud moment that reflects the exceptional work we do across engineering design, system integration and smart

manufacturing, driven by our mission to deliver world class automation and digitalisation solutions for UK industry.”

The audience heard how Shifnal-based Brightstar – winner of the Business in the Community award – was originally created to help six people who were facing significant barriers within their lives, and now helps 600 young people every week.



*Carl Jones receives a special award from past and present chamber chief executives Richard Sheehan and Ruth Ross*



*A proud night for trophy makers and Company of the Year finalists, Jesmonite*



*Smile for the camera*

Telford-based Aviramp was the night’s only double winner, picking up the Outstanding Business Growth and the ‘trailblazer’ Innovation title.

The company, which makes access ramps for aircraft, has enjoyed its most profitable year. It has doubled its headcount in three years and seen a 30% increase in sales.

Shropshire Wildlife Trust’s victory in

the Eco award category was attributed to its ‘vision of a thriving natural world, where wildlife and natural habitats play a valued role in addressing the climate and ecological emergencies, and people are inspired and empowered to take action’.

Victory in the Best Small Business category was particularly poignant for giftware entrepreneur Meg Hawkins of Aston Botterell –

the watercolour artist whose products are now sold all over the world.

The Jesmonite-made trophy had a special significance since the company was founded by her partner Ade’s father, chemist Peter Hawkins, in 1978.

Niche Patisserie of Oswestry said it was ‘absolutely thrilled’ with recognition for Outstanding Customer Service in its fifth anniversary year. The family-run bakery, shop and café sells handcrafted, artisan produce and says service is paramount to its success... along with some very tasty treats.

Having been a finalist in last year’s Company of the Year category, Riverside Cabins of Shrewsbury tasted victory this time for Retail, Leisure and Hospitality achievement. Since 2020, it has grown a loyal following with luxury cabins, hot tubs, yoga retreats, and outdoor adventures in the heart of Shropshire.

● See more pictures on pages 20-23.

Advertisement Feature

# Success story ramps up

**It has been a whirlwind few weeks for global aviation specialist Aviramp.**

The Telford-based company – the world leader in the manufacture of step-free ramps for getting on and off aircraft – has just scooped two Shropshire business awards and been named in both the Sunday Times and The Manufacturer top 100s.

All this just days after one of its ramps was used by US veterans returning to northern France for commemorations to mark the 81st anniversary of D-Day – and chief executive Graham Corfield was asked to speak at the arrival ceremony.

Graham, who started the Stafford Park business 15 years ago and now sees his ramps in use in 750 airports around the world, said he was thrilled by the success.

“We enjoyed a record-breaking year in 2024, are on target to do even better this year and are looking to expand within Telford as we head into a new phase of the company’s growth,” he said.

“So, to win both the Outstanding Business Growth and Trailblazer Innovation awards at the Shropshire Chamber awards night was something really special because we are very proud of our Telford roots.

“The remainder of this year will see new product launches, visits to key trade shows and



*The award-winning Aviramp team say they are incredibly proud of their Telford roots*

the ongoing consolidation of our position as the global leader in what we do.

“We are looking for a new base for our headquarters in Telford and also examining the possibility of establishing an assembly plant in the United States in the near future.

“Demand has been driven by our unique solar-powered range of ramps, which can run all day on a single charge in even the most challenging climates.

“At a time when too many people are talking the UK down, it’s great to be proving people wrong by leading the world in what we do.”

The company’s boarding ramps and bridges are used when an aircraft is parked on a remote stand and offer a safe, dignified alternative to stairs and separate ambulifts for wheelchair users and those passengers with reduced mobility.

For more information visit [aviramp.com](http://aviramp.com)



Advertisement Feature

# A byword for excellence

**Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Since 1964, McPhillips has been a byword for excellence and expertise in civil engineering and construction. To win Company of the Year in 2025 not only recognises how we are still delivering that excellence but also our support for our local supply chain, our local community and our 240-strong team.**

Since our 2010 win, McPhillips has undergone remarkable transformation. A management buyout in 2017 preserved the founding principles of this family business, while enabling fresh strategic vision under managing director Paul Inions and his leadership team.

The numbers tell a compelling story of growth: from a £26 million order book in 2010 to £72 million in 2025, with 140 projects valued at £300 million delivered in the past five years alone.

Our directly employed workforce has expanded to 240 people, with an exceptional retention rate rare in our industry.

McPhillips has successfully diversified beyond its civil engineering roots, developing



*McPhillips has diversified beyond its civil engineering roots*

partnerships with major clients including Shropshire Council, Telford & Wrekin Council, BAE Systems and Birmingham City Council. Our 16-year relationship with Dogs Trust and eight-year partnership with Chester Zoo – where we are completing a £36 million development programme - exemplifies our 91% customer satisfaction score.

Finally, this award was also a chance for us

to highlight the newly established McPhillips Community Fund – the very first of its kind among Shropshire businesses which demonstrates our continued commitment to give back to the county we’ve helped build for over six decades.







Business in the Community finalists, Good2Great



Nick Jones with Pete Slms



Carl Jones with a flourish of musical theatre



Guests on the Aaron & Partners table



Peter Guy and Richard Sheehan



A great evening for those at the Coforge table



Circus entertainment greeted guests



Entertainment on the night



The BeBold Media team



All smiles from the Seymour Manufacturing International team



Shropshire Festivals was shortlisted for three awards



The Telford College table



The scene is set for the 'greatest show'

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Guests were treated to a spectacular medley of Greatest Showman songs



Keith Winter and Mark Bebb



Staff and guests from Shropshire Design



The team from Tanners Wines



A disco rounded off the night's entertainment



Hugh Strickland of Aaron & Partners presents Aviramp with the Outstanding Business Growth award



Guests on the Shropshire Council table



The Harper Adams University delegation



The Shropshire Chamber of Commerce team



Taking aim at the coconut shy



Talbots Law was well-represented at the event



Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross



Colourful celebrations at the after-show party



Liz Lowe and Claire Brown from Morris and Company



The team from Start Tech at the drinks reception



The Shropshire Business table

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# 100th deal through investment fund



**Rafael Joseph from Mercia, Paul Conner and Gary Price from Crown Plus Limited, and Beth Bannister from the British Business Bank**

The British Business Bank's Midlands Engine Investment Fund II has marked its 100th deal, having driven over £37 million of investment into new and growing businesses across the region since its launch last year.

The landmark deal was a £3.9 million equity investment in specialist highways drainage contractor Crown Plus, based in Telford.

It provides a complete highways drainage service – from detailed defect surveys to remediation and renewal – and has an exclusive contract to carry out surveys and testing across the Midlands and South West on behalf of National Highways, using the latest CCTV and surveying equipment.

The company has almost tripled its turnover in the past three years and says the funding will enable it to invest in new equipment and take on bigger projects. Crown Plus currently employs over 50 staff and expects to double that by 2030.

Paul Conner, director and co-founder at Crown Plus, said: "We have now reached a pivotal point where we need to invest in new equipment to exploit the opportunities ahead.

"This funding will enable us to implement our five-year vision for expansion. We look forward to working with Mercia Ventures and the British Business Bank as we embark on this new chapter of growth and development."

# Administrators called in

**More than 140 jobs have been lost at a Telford construction company which has gone into administration.**

Elements Europe is a £40 million-plus turnover business with a base at Hadley Castle since 2005, and it was taken over by South Korean construction specialist GS Engineering & Construction six years ago.

It specialises in designing and manufacturing room modules and bathroom pods for residential developments, student accommodation, and hotels across the UK – mainly acting as a subcontractor.

But in 2021 the company tried to move into the main contracting sector and took on high profile projects in the London borough of Hackney, and in Birmingham.

The move caused significant cashflow problems, and directors had been seeking to either sell or refinance the firm. Accounts for the year 2023 show a pre-tax loss of more than £29 million.

Now the business has called in the administrators – Interpath Advisory – who have axed 141 of the company's 217 staff, with the remainder retained to support the administrators with the next stage.

Joint administrator Sam Birchall said: "Sadly Elements Europe has not been immune to the headwinds facing the construction sector. Our intention

is to pause work on the ongoing contracts at East Road and Camp Hill while we explore options to rescue all or parts of the Elements business."

As a priority, Interpath said it would be providing support to those employees who have been impacted by redundancy. It is also seeking buyers for the company's assets.

At least 16 significant UK construction companies have already fallen into administration this year, following 2024 which saw high-profile names such as ISG – the UK's 6th biggest construction firm at the time – folding with the loss of thousands of jobs.

Sadly Elements Europe has not been immune to the headwinds facing the construction sector. Our intention is to pause work on the ongoing contracts at East Road and Camp Hill while we explore options...

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SB

Feature

# On cue for those with 147 dreams

CARL JONES meets a Shropshire-based professional snooker coach who is at the very top of his game.

**It's not what you'd call your typical home office. A 27ft long garden room near Hadnall with a pristine full-sized snooker table, adorned with fascinating memorabilia.**

But this is Colin Matty's workplace. He's one of just seven coaches in the world to have achieved 'advanced' status, accredited by the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association.

And that means he is in demand from players of all ages and abilities, looking for those marginal gains to take their games to the next level.

Colin has been lead coach at many of the major snooker and pool tournaments, including the iconic World Snooker Championships in Sheffield, plus the World Cup of Pool in Leicester.

He has also been working for the past eight years with World Disability Billiards and Snooker, offering coaching during open days at their events around the country.

First things first, though. How on earth did he become a snooker coach in the first place?

For Colin, it all stemmed from a love of playing the game, which he first discovered at a young age when he spent time at his grandparents' farm at Pitchford, near Shrewsbury, which had a full-size table.

Thinking he had some serious potential, his family reached out to one of the best coaches in the business – the 1979 world champion Terry Griffiths – who agreed to take him on. The rest, as they say, is history.

"I had ambitions of making it as a professional player back then, and Terry was brilliant with me; so patient, and with a great sense of humour," Colin recalls.

"We'd have a laugh, but he also had a brilliant way of explaining things. He'd follow me round the table with a video camera, and show me my cue action from every perspective so I could visualise what he was telling me.

"I also had a bit of help from Willie Thorne back in the day as well, but although I did make improvements and was a good player, it became apparent that I was never going to be making it to the very top to play on the telly.

"But I really wanted to stay in the game and make a living from it, and it was Terry who said to me: 'Why don't you become a coach?'



Colin with the late great Terry Griffiths



The office – Colin's training room near Hadnall

That conversation changed my life – it's no exaggeration to say that I have a career now in the snooker world purely because of him. I owe him such a lot, and miss him."

Colin's job takes him to some of the most iconic locations on the snooker calendar, including the World Championships at Sheffield where he has coached in the 'cue zone'.

He was also on duty in Telford when professional snooker came back to Shropshire for the first time in many years with the Players

Championships at Telford International Centre.

"I've been involved in these events ever since I first qualified as a coach. It's a good incentive, because people come along to these events who have maybe never even seen a professional snooker table before, let alone have the opportunity to play.

"It's a privilege to be involved in these events, and I'm very proud to be one of only seven people in the world to have been accredited as level three advanced coaches."



Colin receives his level three coaching certificate from World Snooker boss Jason Ferguson



Playing a few frames with his good pal Joe Johnson – the 1986 world champion



Colin says he was a good player, but not good enough to make it onto the telly

Colin has worked his way up through the coaching ranks over the past 10 years, starting at level one for what he describes as 'community coaching' to level two which is more in-depth for players of an intermediate level.

"You can coach anyone to play snooker. There's not actually an obstacle or a hurdle that can't be overcome... the more you get into it, the more you find there's always a solution to the problem.



Delivering a snooker masterclass in Sheffield



Colin's coaching table at his home near Hadnall



Colin has coached a few celebrities including former England footballer Peter Crouch

"Level three advanced is much more in-depth, taking not only snooker technique to a higher level, but also everything else that goes into the game – from sleep patterns and diet, biomechanics, and the mental side of the game.

"At the highest level it's a very mental game. Physically, the top 128 players in the world have all got it, but it's that extra ability to keep your concentration, stay in the moment, and not over-think things that you need to get

right to the very top.

"I think snooker is the hardest game in the world, and the best players are the ones who make it look so easy.

"As a lifelong fan, it was always a dream for me to have my own snooker table, but I never thought it would be a reality," he says.

So does a top coach have to be a top player too?

"Good question. It does help, because what you are doing is helping people to develop a snooker brain. Someone who is a really good player will already have those shots, so it's a huge advantage if you can understand this.

"I was a good player, and still would be if I could be bothered to practise enough, but I now get satisfaction from helping other people to improve.

"The spectrum is very broad. I do a lot of work with pool players as well as snooker players – some of which have had good wins on the ultimate pool tour. There's some big money on the eight-ball pool circuit these days which is rising really quickly, and young people are playing for up to £20,000.

"Pool is a mental game with the exact same pressures – but snooker is number one. If you want to improve your cueing across any cue sport, you can't get away with anything on a snooker table. This shines a 20,000 watt light on any inconsistencies or bad habits you might have."

It was crunch time. The moment for this 50-something magazine editor who used to be half decent at the game decades ago (before needing varifocals!) to pick up a snooker cue for the first time in about two decades, and put his technique to the test in front of the main man.

Suffice to say I didn't exactly pot balls off the lampshades, but Colin did at least use the P-word... 'potential', praising my stance and the relative straightness of my cueing.

"There's definitely something to work with there," he said. I'll take that – all I need now is a pair of those giant Dennis Taylor-style specs so I can see the other side of the table!

So what does the future hold for Colin?

Does he have a bucket list of ambitions to achieve in the sport over the coming years?

"To be honest, I'm loving things right now. I'm doing a full-time job working in the sport that I love, with people coming to my house to play snooker. My carbon footprint driving to work is non-existent.

"I also get to mix with current and past professional snooker players too – my practice partner is David Taylor, the former world number seven who was known back in the day as the 'silver fox'.

"Joe Johnson, the 1986 world champion, is another – I'm lucky enough to spend a lot of time with him as well. He's another great guy.

"So where do I want to be in two, three, five years' time? Doing more of this! I think snooker's on the up, and having a Chinese world champion will certainly take things up a notch – they're treated like rock stars.

"But don't forget the Brits; we have quite a few good players coming through too."

● You can find out more about Colin's business at [www.colinmattysnookercoaching.com](http://www.colinmattysnookercoaching.com)



## County IT experts recognised at international awards

A Telford-based IT provider has been recognised for excellence at an industry-leading awards ceremony in Finland.

Midland Computers was named Best UK Performance 2024 at WithSecure's Star Awards, acknowledging its commitment to delivering security that connects cyber defence with

measurable business objectives. The company was also shortlisted in the Global Competence Leaders category.

Amy Davies, managing director at Midland Computers, said: "Being applauded on an international stage is a true testament to the dedication of our team, who work tirelessly to

stay ahead of evolving regulations, industry trends, and emerging threats, ensuring our customers remain compliant, secure, and efficient."

WithSecure's Star Awards was held during Sphere 2025, the company's annual co-security event in Helsinki.

# Inaugural careers festival brings businesses together

**Wrekin College has celebrated the success of its first ever Careers Festival – bringing together more than 20 businesses and organisations for panel discussions, workshops, industry talks, awards and networking.**

The event is part of a wider initiative by the school to better prepare young people for the world of work by bridging the gap between education and industry.

It has also launched the Wrekin Business Directory – a free platform to connect parents, alumni and local businesses, fostering collaboration, mentorship and community growth.

"The festival was a real milestone in what we're trying to achieve at Wrekin," said Louise Christie, director of external relations at Wrekin Old Hall Trust.

"We want to create a dynamic bridge between the classroom and the boardroom – helping our students develop confidence, curiosity and professional connections that will serve them for life.

"At the festival, students heard from an impressive panel of entrepreneurs, business leaders and creatives, all operating within the region. It was a fantastic opportunity for young people to explore pathways and for local employers to engage with the next generation of talent.

"A particular highlight was the involvement of several Old Wrekinians who returned to share their experiences and guidance."



**More than 20 businesses took part in the first Careers Festival at Wrekin College**

Businesses taking part included ROUS+, Coforge, Azets, Lanyon Bowdler, Telford College, Telford & Wrekin Council, Telford Tigers and Shropshire Festivals.

Beth Heath, of Shropshire Festivals, said: "It

was fantastic to work with Wrekin on delivering such a vibrant and interactive event. Giving students the chance to meaningfully engage with businesses – and vice versa – is what real careers education should look like."

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# AI in the workplace: from theory to Business Transformation



**Joe Newton**

**Artificial Intelligence (AI) may seem like a recent breakthrough, but its roots stretch back decades.**

The field was formally established in 1956 as an academic discipline, though British mathematician Alan Turing had already laid its conceptual foundations years earlier. In 1950, Turing introduced the "Imitation Game", what we now call the Turing Test, as a means of determining whether a machine could exhibit intelligence indistinguishable from that of a human.

In 2014, a chatbot named Eugene Goostman sparked debate when it reportedly "passed" the Turing Test, convincing 33% of human judges that it was real. However, the results were controversial, Goostman's fictional persona as a 13-year-old Ukrainian boy with imperfect English raised questions about whether the feat demonstrated true intelligence or simply a clever illusion.

Fast forward to 2018, and AI's trajectory shifted dramatically with OpenAI's release of GPT-1 (Generative Pretrained Transformer). This model laid the foundation for one of the most transformative technologies of the decade. In 2019, Microsoft made a landmark \$1 billion investment in OpenAI, becoming its exclusive cloud provider and helping to power increasingly sophisticated models.

OpenAI's watershed moment came in late 2022 with ChatGPT, a chatbot that captivated the public imagination. With the ability to generate text, answer questions, and even draft code through a conversational interface, ChatGPT ignited discussions in professional and educational circles about ethics, originality, and AI's role in daily work.

Microsoft moved quickly, embedding the technology into its ecosystem. Bing Chat, powered by OpenAI's models, debuted in February 2023 and evolved into Microsoft Copilot by November 2023, integrating AI into Windows 11, Office, Edge, and Microsoft 365 applications.

Not to be outdone, Google launched Bard in March 2023, later rebranding it as Gemini in February 2024. Now, both tech giants are



**Wildix's AI in x-bees**

racing to shape the future of productivity through generative AI.

In just a few years, AI has transitioned from theoretical exploration to real-world business transformation. Today, generative AI tools are redefining how professionals work, streamlining communication, surfacing insights, and automating routine tasks.

Connexis, a Telford-based communications, cyber-security and connectivity provider, is helping businesses harness AI with practical tools, including:

### Microsoft 365 Copilot

This AI is more advanced than the free version available in Windows and Edge. It integrates seamlessly into Outlook, Word, Excel, and Teams, enabling features like summarising long email threads, drafting context-aware responses, generating documents from SharePoint or OneDrive files, and providing insights from past conversations. In Teams, it can transcribe meetings, highlight key points, and even translate dialogue in real time.

### Leexi

A cross-platform meeting assistant that transcribes, translates, and summarises discussions across multiple video conferencing platforms, not just Microsoft Teams.

### Wildix Collaboration 7

Offers advanced telephony features, including AI-powered transcription, sentiment analysis, and multilingual chat assistance.

### x-bees by Wildix

A powerful sales intelligence tool that summarises staff calls, enables keyword-based search, and delivers actionable insights into customer interactions.

### AI Chatbots and Voicebots

Wildix also provides AI-powered bots to handle basic customer queries and seamlessly route complex requests to human agents, improving both efficiency and user experience.

Artificial Intelligence isn't just the future; it's already shaping the way businesses operate today. Companies looking to stay competitive must embrace AI tools that enhance productivity, reduce operational friction, and unlock deeper insights.

As Microsoft 365 and Wildix continue embedding AI into their ecosystems, organisations of all sizes can leverage this once-futuristic technology to transform the way they work.

AI even helped me write this article!

• Ready to integrate AI into your business? Contact Connexis for expert guidance, hands-on implementation, and tailored solutions. Call 01952 528000 or email [sales@connexis.co.uk](mailto:sales@connexis.co.uk)

**connexis**

**Joe Newton is Technical Director at Connexis, based in Telford**



# Formula for VR learning

**An online training provider for the automotive industry is gearing up to roll out virtual reality learning experiences thanks to a £97,000 investment.**

Our Virtual Academy, based at Church Stretton, has received funding from the Community Investment Enterprise Fund through BCRS Business Loans.

The company was established in 2016 by former Formula 1 mechanic Ben Stockton and specialises in the production and delivery of online face-to-face training and bespoke training videos to assist automotive technicians to repair vehicles.

It is using the funds to create and deliver electric vehicle VR experiences to teach theory and practical skills remotely.

Ben said: “We know from speaking to our customers that there is significant interest in VR training, especially for electric vehicles. The investment will enable us to continue to stay at the forefront of training technology associated with the motor industry.

“A lot of training is solely focussed on passing tests to achieve a certificate – our approach is to ensure technicians are provided with meaningful work experiences and an understanding of how to be productive and competent at their job.”

BCRS Business Loans senior business development manager Louise Armstrong said: “Our Virtual Academy is leading the way in the



Shrewsbury Town FC's Croud Meadow hosted the competitive clash

automotive training industry, and I'm pleased that BCRS Business Loans could provide the funding the business needs to innovate and grow.”

The Community Investment Enterprise Fund aims to invest in 800 small businesses nationally and support 10,500 jobs.

The capital is available to SMEs who are unable to access the finance they need from traditional sources.





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Presenting the proceeds to Severn Hospice

# Accountants battle it out on the pitch

**Two of Shropshire's accountancy giants battled for bragging rights on the football field when they clashed at Shrewsbury Town FC's Croud Meadow.**

The match between WR Partners and Dyke Yaxley ended 1-1 after 90 minutes – and went to a penalty shootout.

It was WR Partners who emerged victorious to lift the 'Accountancy Cup'... but the real winners on the day were Severn Hospice, as the event raised around £1,500.

The charity challenge drew a large and enthusiastic crowd, and was fiercely contested.

Organisers praised the sportsmanship on display and thanked everyone who attended for their generosity.

They said: “It was an unforgettable evening, all in support of a truly vital cause. We had so many people come down and show support and both teams played with full pride and passion for their firms.”

A rematch is already planned for next year, on a date to be announced.



Shrewsbury Town FC's Croud Meadow hosted the competitive clash



The Dyke Yaxley team



Cup final goalmouth action



The WR Partners team



# Hotel ready in two years

A new Hilton hotel is to open in Telford town centre. The Hampton by Hilton Telford will be based at the heart of the town's Station Quarter development.

Construction of the 142-bed hotel is already under way, and it is set to open early in 2027. The project is expected to create nearly 40 new full-time jobs.

The six-storey hotel is a key development within the Station Quarter masterplan, and will be located at the corner of Ironmaster's Way and Lawn Central.

The hotel will be operated by Legacy Hotels & Resorts Ltd, which operates a portfolio of branded and independent hotels across the UK.

Partners describe the news as a 'landmark signing' for Telford Town Centre which will bring significant economic benefits.

Nick Smart, vice president of development for UK & Ireland and the Nordics at Hilton, said: "We are thrilled to bring Hampton by Hilton to Telford, helping to shape the town's future as Telford's Station Quarter goes through an exciting regeneration."

"Telford is a bustling destination for business and leisure travellers, and we look forward to extending Hampton's signature hospitality to the local area."

The hotel is being constructed by Bowmer + Kirkland, who are currently on site building 84 apartments for the council's wholly-owned company, Nuplace Ltd.

Stuart Fanshaw, Bowmer + Kirkland regional



An artist's impression of the new six-storey Hampton by Hilton Telford

construction director, said: "As we maintain an ongoing presence in the region, we'll continue our investment in skills leaving a positive, lasting legacy through our social value initiatives, building on the apprenticeships, T-Level placements and local employment achieved to date."

Councillor Lee Carter, Telford & Wrekin Council leader, said: "This is another exciting chapter in the Station Quarter project which continues to move at pace."

"Station Quarter is a key part of our wider Investing in Telford and Wrekin programme, creating educational facilities and vibrant residential and social spaces in Telford Town Centre which make it a very attractive place to live and work."

"The Hampton by Hilton development will be an excellent addition to this area of Telford Town Centre – attracting visitors and increasing footfall, and we can't wait to see the development start to take shape."

# Conference welcomes inspirational speakers



Andrew Jenkins was a finalist in the 2024 series of BBC TV show The Traitors

**Inspirational speakers including a decorated war hero and a TV star who battled back after a life-altering car accident will be coming to Shrewsbury for a special event next year.**

The Innovation After Injury conference is being hosted by Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors at Theatre Severn, featuring talks about how new technology can help recovery, along with stories from people who have overcome major challenges.

Former Royal Marines Commando Mark Ormrod MBE is one of the headline speakers – he became the UK's first triple amputee from the Afghanistan conflict after being injured in 2007.

He has since become an author, motivational speaker and Britain's most successful-ever Invictus Games athlete, along with winning BBC South West's Sports Personality of the Year, with Prince Harry describing him as "Britain's answer to Superman".

Also at the conference on March 4 will be Andrew Jenkins, who became a familiar face to millions after making the final of the BBC TV show The Traitors in 2024.

Many years before that, Andrew was involved in a car accident that left him in a coma for four weeks, with doctors fearing he would never walk or talk again. But he is now on a mission to use his story as a beacon of hope for others.

Dawn Humphries, head of the personal injury team at Lanyon Bowdler, said the Innovation After Injury conference would be an inspiring event for people who had survived major injuries, as well as professionals working in rehabilitation or support services.

"This is the third event of its type we have held at Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury, following the Thriving After Brain Injury conference in March 2024, and Surviving Brain Injury – the Journey in 2016.

"We will have specialists sharing their knowledge about a range of subjects, such as how nutrition and sleeping well can aid recovery, and discussions about new technology in rehabilitation and innovations in medication."

The Innovation After Injury conference is supported by headline sponsors MedBrief, which supplies digital case management facilities for law firms, and legal expenses insurance provider ARAG, along with further sponsors No5 Barristers' Chambers, Paladin Experts and France + Associates.

For more information about the event and to book early bird tickets now, contact the team on 01743 280280 or email marketing@lblaw.co.uk

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# Fractal and fractional content: The new wave in marketing



**Ruth Martin**

**Every profession or industry has its own jargon – a kind of shorthand for something that is accepted as common knowledge. But every now and then a new set of phrases crop up which need a bit of explaining even for the experienced practitioner.**

Those of you involved in marketing may have heard the phrases fractal and fractional content flying around and assumed it was all some kind of mysterious mathematical magic. In fact, the principles are derived from mathematical and philosophical ideas and they are reshaping the ways businesses and brands think about reach, resonance, and repurposing. Fractal content takes its inspiration from fractals in mathematics, which are infinitely complex patterns that replicate at different scales. In the marketing world, the term refers

to the practice of creating content that mirrors a consistent brand message across various platforms and formats while adapting to the scale and needs of each channel. For example, a long-form blog post on a company website can be atomised into smaller, digestible pieces – such as tweets, Instagram captions, or LinkedIn posts – that retain the essence of the original content. Each piece stands alone yet contributes to the overall marketing story. It is both versatile and efficient allowing marketers to extract multiple assets from a single core idea and so ensuring the brand voice remains unified while reaching a range of different audiences. Fractional content is about delivering hyper-focused, bite-sized messages tailored to specific audience needs. In a world of dwindling attention spans, fractional content capitalises on the idea that less is sometimes more. These are the snackable videos, quick infographics, and single-sentence insights designed to capture attention in a fraction of the time it takes to consume traditional content. Fractional content must be immediate and relatable – for example an amusing 15-second TikTok video that captures a brand value or a single eye-catching statistic posted on LinkedIn. The goal is to make an immediate impact while encouraging the audience to explore deeper layers of the brand. Although they are used in different ways, fractal and fractional content are complementary. Fractal content ensures that a brand’s core message is scalable and consistent, while fractional content focuses on delivering bursts of engagement tailored

to micro-moments. Together, they create a dynamic interplay of depth and brevity that caters to modern consumer behaviour. The increasing reliance on fractal and fractional content stems from the evolving digital environment. In today’s saturated digital landscape, platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube Shorts reward brevity and creativity, pushing marketing teams to deliver more value in less time. Meanwhile, consumers demand personalisation and relevance. The key to success lies in understanding that content is no longer a one-size-fits-all endeavour. The future belongs to those who can fragment ideas without losing their essence and scale messages without diluting their impact. As businesses continue to navigate the complexities of consumer engagement, fractal and fractional content will likely grow in importance. They represent a rethinking of what effective storytelling looks like in the digital age and are set to become the building blocks of a modern marketing evolution. But beware of putting all the emphasis on the digital landscape. It’s just as important to put these strategies in the context of an overall marketing strategy. Don’t under-estimate the importance of the traditional strands of marketing which still have a role to play. A holistic marketing strategy will combine the adaptability and immediacy of the digital toolbox with the broad exposure and consistency of traditional methods to meet audiences where they are – whether they’re scrolling through a feed or diving deep into a specialist magazine.

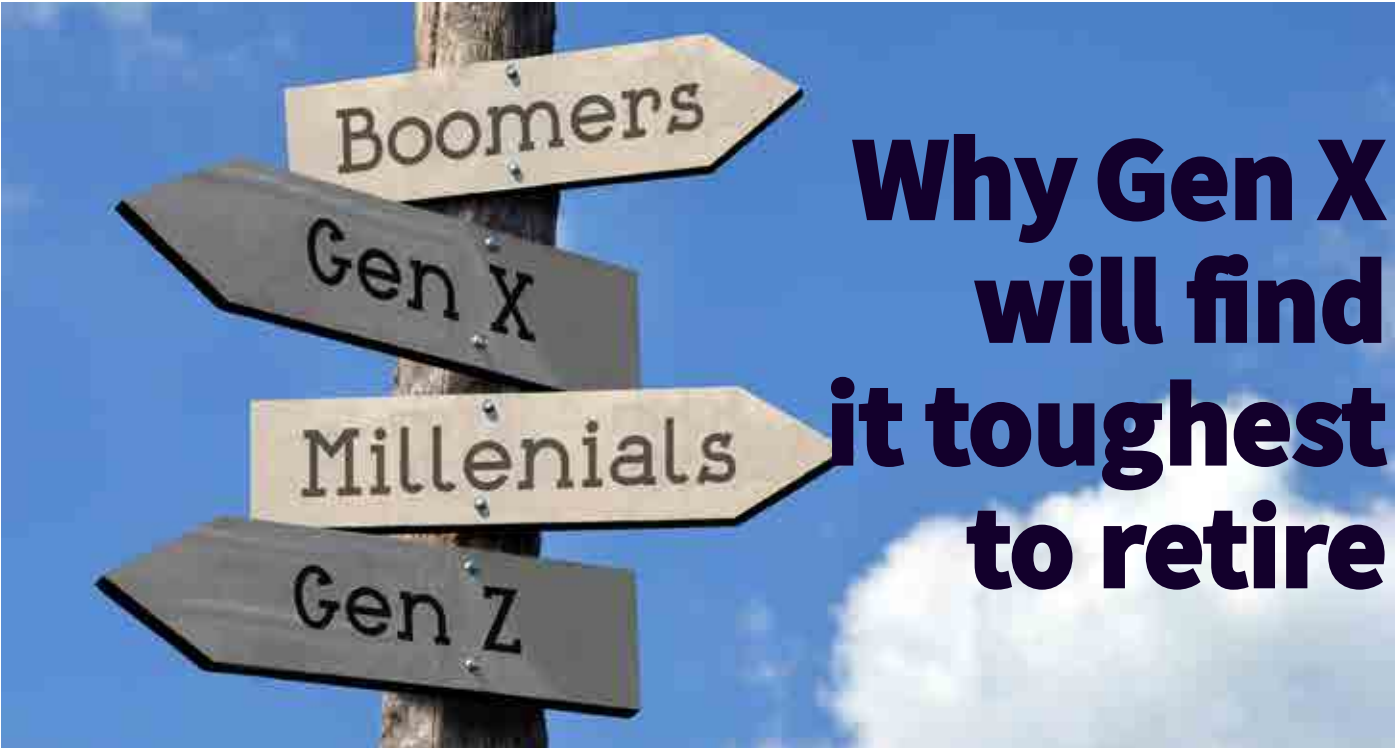
**Ruth Martin is a Shropshire-based strategic marketing specialist. She is a member of the Chartered Institute of Marketing and works with a diverse range of clients across the county and beyond.**

# Bringing real world expertise to TV storylines

A Shropshire social enterprise has been working with the makers of Channel 4’s flagship show Hollyoaks on a domestic abuse storyline. Lived experience organisation PEGS (Parental Education Growth Support) offers help to parents being abused by their children, be it verbal, physical, emotional, financial, or other. And one of the current Hollyoaks storylines centres on the changing dynamic of father and son Ste Hay (Kieron Richardson) and Lucas Hay (Oscar Curtis). Michelle John, founding director of Shrewsbury-based PEGS, said: “We’re proud to support Hollyoaks in bringing awareness to Child to Parent Abuse, taking a vital step towards this important issue being more widely recognised and spoken about. “CPA is often hidden or misunderstood, and it’s vital that we start more conversations about what families are really experiencing behind closed doors. “Being such a popular programme, we know that the Hollyoaks storyline will help parents who are experiencing abusive behaviours to feel more confident in asking for support from those around them.”



*Shropshire-based PEGS has been working with Hollyoaks on its domestic abuse storyline*



# Why Gen X will find it toughest to retire

*Pension outcomes across the generations are likely to differ*

**By Adam Pringle**  
**Many Shropshire workers are facing the prospect of remaining in their jobs well beyond their expected retirement age – particularly those who form part of Generation X.**

Pension policy changes, the rising cost of living, and financial illiteracy have conspired to make securing a stable future increasingly difficult. And people born between 1965 and 1980 are being hit the hardest, experts say. Research from Annuity Ready reveals that while 40% overall feel they are on track for a comfortable retirement, Gen X lags behind at just 28%. In contrast, Gen Z, Millennials, and even Baby Boomers report feeling more financially secure. It found:

- Generation X is the least financially prepared for retirement, with only 28% on track compared to 50% of Gen Z and 47% of Millennials.
- 65% of Gen X lost access to final salary pensions, leaving many without the financial security previous generations enjoyed.
- 82% did not receive any education about pensions during their school years, highlighting critical gaps in financial knowledge.
- Nearly 6 in 10 say retirement planning feels like navigating a complex minefield, with 31% unaware of annuities despite 80% wanting a guaranteed income for life.

In 1995, half the UK workforce had access

to a final salary pension. Today that number has collapsed to just 12%. While nearly half of Gen X had access to these schemes early in their careers, 65% say they are no longer available to them. This shift has left thousands of Shropshire workers in this bracket relying on personal savings and defined contribution pensions, which often provide far less financial security. Auto-enrolment, introduced in 2012, arrived too late for many in this generation. One in three say it has made no meaningful impact on their savings, and they now face the challenge of trying to catch up with limited time. And the result? Retirement anxiety is growing, with 17% of Gen X believing they will never be able to retire, and two thirds fearing the cost of living will prevent them from retiring comfortably. Could we be seeing the first generation that may have to work until they drop?



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# Technology is underground hit



Each SewerBall is around the size of a tennis ball



SewerBall has been successfully trialled in Shropshire

## Engineers at Severn Trent have begun rolling out innovative new technology to help detect potential problems in its network of sewer pipes, after a successful trial across parts of Shropshire.

SewerBalls are floating spheres packed with sensors and placed in pipes to monitor changes to things like temperature or the pH balance of the waste water.

The French-made devices – which are about the size of a tennis ball – can track issues up to three times more quickly than traditional methods, Severn Trent says.

Darius Bristow, innovation project manager

at Severn Trent, said: “SewerBall means that we can access more of our network far more easily than with a standard CCTV kit. Being untethered and able to move with the flow lets us get a really good look inside the pipes and we can complete an inspection quickly.

“We’ve been trialling the SewerBalls and they’ve worked fantastically, helping us to pinpoint potential issues. It can sometimes be difficult to find the exact location of a problem, so knowing exactly where we need to go and what the issue is will mean we can potentially dig down and make a repair much more quickly.

“This kind of technology can be a huge help in more rural areas, where things like infiltration can be more difficult to detect.”

In a trial which took place over two weeks at sites in Shropshire and Staffordshire, the team was able to survey 14km of sewage pipes, with 80% of the potential issues identified confirmed as requiring attention.

Darius said: “Infiltration can be a problem as it means more water is in the network than should be there, taking up capacity at pumping stations and treatment works, and some businesses dispose of commercial waste directly into the sewer rather than paying to have it taken away.

“Both of these are significant issues that are absorbing capacity from our sewer network, and being able to eliminate them will help to reduce sewer flooding or the need to use storm overflows.”

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# Bridging the international gap

Bridge-making specialist Beaver Bridges has launched a new international division to expand its global footprint.

The Shrewsbury-based company says it hopes the move will allow it to export its expertise in steel bridging solutions to markets around the world.

Beaver Bridges International builds on a foundation of strategic partnerships with TFe Connection Group supported by GRP Steel-Indonesia, and LMH Engineering/Jamestown Manufacturing-Ireland.

These alliances are further strengthened by the support of Mitsui & Co – one of Japan’s leading Trade Finance companies, giving customers flexible financial options to support their projects.

Richard Hinckley has been appointed global business development director for Beaver Bridges International.

The company says: “With his extensive experience and strategic vision, he will lead the division’s ambitious growth and strengthen Beaver Bridges International’s presence on the world stage.”



Richard Hinckley of Beaver Bridges

# Climate change experiment that's right on your doorstep

**Engineering specialist Transicon has played a vital role in future-proofing one of the world’s largest climate change experiments.**

The Telford company partnered with Birmingham Institute of Forest Research to develop a new control system for managing the Free-Air-Carbon Dioxide Enrichment experiment.

Led by the University of Birmingham and based in a mature oak woodland near Gnosall on the east Shropshire border, the experiment is designed to investigate the impact of elevated CO2 levels on forest ecosystems.

It is one of only three such research facilities to exist worldwide and is supporting researchers globally to understand how forests respond to environmental change.

Jennifer Hughes, general manager for Transicon, said the project demonstrated the versatility of its automation and control engineering expertise beyond its traditional manufacturing applications.

She said: “It’s been absolutely fascinating to be involved in such an exciting and globally significant project.

“We’ve developed control systems for all sorts of uses across the manufacturing sector, but developing a system for use in environmental research and so closely linked to sustainability is a real first for us.

“I’m extremely proud of the team – they have done an amazing job. Our new control system will ensure this important experiment



On site at the experiment facility near Gnosall

is future-proofed for many years to come, supporting researchers worldwide.”

Dr Kris Hart at the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research said: “The Transicon team has transformed our research capabilities with their innovative approach to modernising our control systems.

“Their expertise has enabled us to significantly enhance the precision and reliability of our carbon dioxide delivery system,

which is absolutely vital for the integrity of our long-term climate change research.

“Working with a company that understood both the technical requirements and the scientific importance of our work has been invaluable.”

Transicon, which was set up in 1967, is based at Queensway Business Park, Telford. It works with major manufacturers and producers including Muller Dairy, BMW and Tata Steel.





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Ports like Bremerhaven are grappling with escalating backlogs

# It’s time to hug a freight forwarder

**Anton Gunter**



**Howzit – the UK has been under the blanket of a heat wave: yes that’s right. For a few weeks we will be moaning about sunny weather and then move back to moaning about the rain**

Talking of moaning, it’s time to address the elephant in the room – or should I say, the cause of heat under one’s collar.

This month we are looking at the logistics world in terms of importing and exporting and what’s currently hot and what’s not. And believe me, it’s time to give your freight forwarder a huge hug, because we are all trying to do our best for our customers.

The starting point as always is looking at world events. And as such, we still have Russia trying to invade Ukraine. We then have Israel being angry with everyone which in turn is enraging the Houthis, who are continuing to attack commercial shipping trying to enter the Red Sea via the Gulf of Aiden. This does all mean that we are still headed around the Cape of Good Hope.

Then Mr Trump continues to launch his idea of “Making America Great Again” by throwing trade tariffs around the world as if he was spreading sweets. The continual

implementation, non-implementation, and then implementation again causes uncertainty, not only for the country involved, but the wider world. Every threat that is made and then rescinded or delayed means economies are being affected.

With Trump trying to force China into a headlock, and the worldwide economy really having to work hard, we are seeing falling volumes of freight from China. This means fluctuations within the freight industry. Monthly rates are being adjusted nearly on a weekly basis.

At the beginning of the month, shipping lines are being optimistic and quoting higher rates, but as the month unfolds, we get reductions in rates, which means bookings are stalling until the rate appears right. The problem with this is that we then see space issues – which funnily enough does two things. It makes the booking process an auction with prices going up and those willing to pay the higher rates getting the space, while those trying to use the lower rates are bumped to the next vessel. Unless of course they pay the shipping line’s ransom.

Then we are seeing congestion at European ports. Port congestion across key Northern European hubs is intensifying, with Bremerhaven particularly affected by labour shortages during the recent holiday period. Compounding the situation, low water levels on the Rhine are limiting barge capacity, particularly out of Antwerp and Rotterdam, further straining inland logistics. Major gateways including Antwerp, London Gateway, Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Bremerhaven are now grappling with escalating backlogs, as container ships face mounting delays. This means that vessels planned to arrive at ports are being delayed, slowing down and generally trying to be as efficient as possible.

All of the above is impacting worldwide

logistics. Previously unheard of road transport from China to the UK is still in operation as companies are trying to get their products to the UK quicker. The further introduction of rail freight is a sign that companies are trying to beat the lengthy times it is taking to get freight from China to the UK – and likewise, they are more than ever looking for that very fine balance between cost and servicing in terms of timings.

So, here’s the thing... at any one time, freight forwarders are monitoring vessels, containers, shipments, and port arrival notices.

That person who you know is in the freight industry has apps on their phone which normal people find boring. Marine traffic, plane finder, port arrival declaration, every courier company, every shipping company, track and trace containers, and various others.

That person also accesses those apps when they wake up in the middle of the night to make sure they know where the freight is. Then there are the bespoke forwarding packages which track vessels and containers.

So you would think that we have total control of vessels and know exactly what is happening... WRONG.

Shipping lines change berthing slots. Shipping lines instruct vessels to bypass ports. Shipping lines control vessel arrivals. Then you add in ports. Congested ports in the UK force shipping lines to look at vessel efficiency, and that leads to vessels passing the intended port of arrival to come back later or indeed, have the container removed. This all means that arrival times change.

So next time an arrival time changes, ask the following question: “Why has the arrival time changed?” And if your freight provider doesn’t know, call me at Global Freight Services Ltd. I may not be able to control arriving vessels, but I can let you know why it has changed.

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



# Workshop to identify staff

An expert workshop to help employers identify and support staff with issues around addiction has been hailed a great success.

Community company A Better Tomorrow and Telford-based Triangle HR teamed up to stage the workshop – Breaking Barriers, Tackling Workplace Addiction – at Weston Park.

It was designed to give employers and managers the knowledge, skills and confidence to recognise, address and support addiction in the workplace.

A Better Tomorrow works to help those in recovery from drug and alcohol addiction, those with poor mental health and women fleeing domestic abuse.

Nikki Hall, managing director of Triangle HR, said: "This is such an important issue in all modern workplaces but one which often does not get the attention it needs.

"We looked at some real-life case studies so that everyone could really understand the different ways in which addiction might manifest itself in the workplace, looked at best practice in dealing with it legally and ethically, and how businesses can benefit in the long term from building a supportive culture."

# Now with added sauce

**Kraft Heinz – home to household brands like Heinz, HP, and Lea & Perrins – has become a patron of Shropshire Chamber of Commerce.**

The company, which employs 220 people at Hortonwood in Telford, says it is looking for opportunities to increase collaboration with the local community and take advantage of the Chamber's training and networking opportunities.

Site manager Anton Hickey said: "Our Kraft Heinz Telford facility is a key strategic plant for the business, and an area of growth as we increase investment in our people, new equipment, and our digital infrastructure.

"As a large employer in the area, we are keen to contribute, collaborate, and create meaningful connections that benefit both Kraft Heinz and the Shropshire community.

"Learning and development is a key priority for our site, so we are particularly excited to be working more closely with training partners in the local area."

The site produces around 1.5 billion food sachets each year. Half of this is made up of Heinz's iconic tomato ketchup, with the remainder a mixture of other sauces such as mayonnaise, barbecue, mustard, tartare sauce, and HP sauce.

More than five million kilogrammes of tomatoes are shipped into the Telford site every year, where around £15 million has been invested over the past four years.

Anton said: "We've called Telford home for more than 30 years, and we want more people



Learning and development partner Dan Gibbons, Anton Hickey, Ruth Ross, and HR manager Katie Holt at the Kraft Heinz site in Telford

to know we are here. We are looking forward to accessing the Chamber's training programme to help upskill our workforce, and discovering how we can work with other companies in the Chamber network."

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said: "We are thrilled to welcome Kraft Heinz to the patronage programme, which is designed to enhance long-term relationships, driving both profitability and community connection – making them a strategic asset in today's competitive marketplace."

# Raising a glass to IT support for brewery

**IT support company Information Solutions has won a new contract with Joule's Brewery.**

The Shrewsbury-based company has been appointed digital support provider for the expanding brewery, which is adding several locations in Birmingham to its portfolio, as well as The Stag in Market Drayton.

Callum Jinks, the brewery's finance manager, said: "As we continue to grow, having a reliable and responsive IT partner is essential.

"Information Solutions' local knowledge, technical expertise, and strong service reputation made them a natural choice to support our expanding operations and evolving digital needs."

The Shropshire firm will be supporting Joule's Brewery across its existing and expanding portfolio of locations, providing infrastructure and IT support.

"We are thrilled to welcome Joule's Brewery to



Paul Biddulph of Information Solutions with Georgia Charlton-Briggs and Callum Jinks from Joule's Brewery

the Information Solutions family," said director Peter White.

"Joule's Brewery is a fantastic local business with a rich heritage and exciting growth plans. We are looking forward to providing them with the reliable and secure IT support they need to continue their success."

# New plant on its way

Work is under way to prepare a site on Ludlow's Coder Road business park for the construction of a new biochar plant.

The environmentally sustainable plant received planning consent in March and will help Shropshire Council to achieve its climate change targets, as well as producing a small amount of renewable energy and biochar that can be sold for many uses in agriculture, construction and industry.

The first on-site activity will be the decommissioning and removal of redundant material and equipment from the former biodigester use of the site. Specialist professional contractors will carefully undertake this phase. Inevitably there is potential for this short phase of work to cause some disruption through vehicle movements, noise and potentially dust and odour.

Work to install the new plant will take place over summer and autumn 2025, with the aim to have the plant operational early in 2026. BioDynamic Carbon Ltd – a joint venture company with Shropshire Council – will operate the plant which is expected to produce around 1,000 tonnes of biochar a year.



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# Bridging the gap: protecting landlords, supporting tenants



James Pulford

**In today's commercial property landscape, asset performance is more about proactive management than just initial acquisition.**

A well-managed commercial property doesn't just safeguard a landlord's investment in the first instance; it fosters strong tenant relationships for the long-term value for landlords and tenants alike.

So, how does commercial property management help bridge the gap between landlords and tenants?

At the centre of operations, property management is not simply about collecting rent – it's about creating an environment where professional standards, legal compliance and foresight ensure the asset works for all parties.

With the UK property management services industry projected to reach £33.0 billion in 2025, and commercial property values forecast to grow by over 19% by 2034, effective property management is no longer optional – it's essential (Statista, 2025; Alan Boswell Group, 2025).

With the long-term growth trajectory, at Halls Commercial we view property management strategically, not just a support function.

We manage this balance between landlords and tenants with several key focuses:

- Proactive property management ensures that both landlords and tenants understand and meet their lease obligations. This includes scheduling maintenance, overseeing statutory compliance, and providing consistent communication. This hands-on approach creates a stable base that encourages long-term occupancy.
- Commercial leases, especially Full Repairing and Insuring (FRI) agreements, often place substantial repair and maintenance responsibilities on the tenant. Misunderstandings about these obligations can lead to disputes or unexpected costs. Clarity is key to protect landlords and support tenants here, so our crucial role is communication and understanding of complexities and to ensure that both parties understand their rights and responsibilities from day one.



*A valuable aspect of professional property management is forward planning*



**Lease renewals, rent reviews and break clauses are predictable events that can be managed for the best financial outcome for landlords, and minimal disruption for tenants**

- The benefits of proactive management are clear. Properties that are well-maintained are more attractive to tenants, leading to higher renewal rates and lower vacancy.
- To mitigate risk, we recommend Schedules of Condition as a baseline record of a property's state at lease commencement. This protects tenants from being liable for pre-existing defects and gives landlords a clear benchmark for assessing deterioration. Used effectively, it helps prevent costly dilapidation disputes and ensures fair outcomes at lease end, in the best interests of both parties.
- Ensuring lease events are prepared for in advance is key. Missed notice periods or delayed negotiations can result in costly voids or missed opportunities to increase rent.
- If a tenant does choose to exit, we act fast, and this is where cross-departmental collaboration is important. Our agency team works closely with the property management department to prepare and remarket space immediately minimising downtime, matching tenants and landlords.

Really the secret is preparation. A valuable aspect of professional property management is forward planning. Lease renewals, rent reviews and break clauses are predictable events that can be managed for the best financial outcome for landlords, and minimal disruption for tenants.

- By handling lease renewals, rent reviews and break clauses we help landlords optimise income and retain tenants. With commercial property values expected to rise by 19.15% from £94 to £112 per sq ft by 2034, rent reviews

and renewals must be aligned with current and forecasted market conditions (Alan Boswell Group, 2025). This approach directly supports increased rental income and capital value for landlords.

The key? Forward-thinking management that bridges the gap between both landlords and tenants.

Appendix:  
Statista (2025): Revenue of the Property Management Services Industry in the UK from 2013 to 2025. [www.statista.com/statistics/uk-property-management-industry-revenue/](https://www.statista.com/statistics/uk-property-management-industry-revenue/)  
Alan Boswell Group (2025): Commercial Property Price Forecast: UK Market Outlook to 2034. [www.alanboswell.com/market-reports/commercial-property-price-forecast](https://www.alanboswell.com/market-reports/commercial-property-price-forecast)

**James Pulford is head of commercial property management at Halls Commercial**

## Anniversaries, awards, and action against crime



*Matthew, Lori, Bruce and Juliet Orme of Wenlock Spring at the London awards*

- **Wenlock Spring has won Best Sustainable Product in this year's Vendies Awards. The accolade recognises the company's commitment to environmental stewardship, responsible sourcing, and innovation in sustainable packaging, including fully-recyclable PET bottles and aluminium cans which it provides for the sector.**
- The cost of rural crime in Shropshire fell by more than 59% last year to £1.439 million, according to figures from NFU Mutual. Officials said it highlighted the positive effects of co-ordinated action against organised and serious crime in the countryside. Quad bikes and all-terrain vehicles remained top targets for thieves, the research revealed.



*The New Era team mark a quarter of a century*

- **New Era Printing – the digital print specialists is Shrewsbury – is marking its 25th anniversary with an online refresh and new website. Director Chris Henderson said: “We’re incredibly proud to have reached 25 years in business. So much has changed in print since we started – from turnaround times and technology to how customers place their orders.”**
- Shropshire Independent Cinema is launching a groundbreaking cultural initiative to support the farming community, as part of The Rural Remix weekend of rural-themed films from July 11-13. Farmers and farm workers can “buy 1 ticket, bring a farmer's friend for free” at Wem Cinema, Ludlow Assembly Rooms, and The Old Market Hall in Shrewsbury.

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Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner and the team from Grainger & Worrall

Mandy Thorn MBE welcomed guests

# It's a royal occasion

**Businesses across Shropshire are being encouraged to put themselves forward for the prestigious 2026 King's Awards for Enterprise.**

Teams from this year's local winners – Fabweld Steel Products of Telford, and Grainger & Worrall from Bridgnorth – were guests of honour at the special event held at Stockton House, hosted by Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner and Lord Hamilton of Dalzell.

The gathering brought together previous winners, business leaders and representatives from local authorities to inspire more Shropshire companies to enter what is widely regarded as the UK's most prestigious business accolade.

Mandy Thorn MBE welcomed guests and highlighted the transformative impact the awards can have on businesses of all sizes.

She said: "We have extraordinary businesses throughout Shropshire demonstrating innovation, export excellence and sustainable practices every day. We want to see more Shropshire winners!"

Guest speaker Tullis Matson, whose company Stallion AI previously won a Queen's Award for Innovation, and Will Oakley of last year's winner Willogame, told attendees that winning the award had directly benefitted their businesses, through new contracts as well as a raised profile.

- The Shropshire Lieutenancy can help make the process accessible to first-time applicants and also offers feedback on applications. For more information see [www.gov.uk/kings-awards-for-enterprise](http://www.gov.uk/kings-awards-for-enterprise)



Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner with the Fabweld team



Tullis Matson DL (Stallion AI)



Lord Lieutenant of Shropshire Anna Turner, Jonathan Craven (Howmet Fastening Systems) and Mandy Thorn



Will Oakley of Willogame

# Trusted partner to supermarket giant

**One of Shropshire's largest food companies is celebrating a milestone partnership with supermarket chain Aldi.**

Compleat Food Group – owner of Palethorpes in Market Drayton – is marking 25 years of a successful working relationship with the discount chain.

From its north Shropshire site, Compleat Food Group has supplied Britain's fourth largest supermarket with a range of savoury pastry products since 2000, producing up to two million pies each year for its UK stores.

This year, the company has introduced new flavours to Aldi's shelves including Wagyu and caramelised onion, and Wagyu and wild garlic.

Compleat Food takes inspiration from traditional pub classics and supplies Aldi's specially selected steak pie and specially selected chicken, smoked bacon and leek pie, available in family and individual servings.

The long-term partnership has helped to drive significant growth over the years, with the company now employing around 600 people at its Palethorpes bakery.

Mark Howgego, chief product officer at Compleat Food Group, said: "We are so proud of our partnership with Aldi, and it has been a pleasure to supply its customers with our pies for more than 25 years now.

"We pride ourselves on developing new, innovative products that customers love, and we have lots of exciting plans ahead."

Julie Ashfield, chief commercial officer at Aldi UK, said: "Compleat Food Group has become a trusted partner for Aldi, and it has been brilliant to watch the business go from strength to strength.

"We are excited to continue to work together and have no doubt the new pies will go down a treat with our customers."



Compleat Food Group – owner of Palethorpes in Market Drayton – is marking 25 years of a successful working relationship with discount chain Aldi

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Staff and learners have joined forces to film the #imincluded video

# Apprenticeships and upskilling opportunities are for everyone

**A high profile campaign celebrating inclusivity and diversity in industry has been launched by a Telford-based specialist training provider.**

‘I’m In-Comm, I’m Included’ is the message being championed by apprentices, learners and staff at In-Comm Training as they look to break down some of the barriers faced by women, ethnic minorities and hard to engage groups considering an apprenticeship and career in engineering and manufacturing.

The powerful message is featured in a new 90-second video that uses the personal narrative of more than 15 people from the company’s two technical academies – one at Nedge Hill in Telford, and the other at Aldridge in the West Midlands.

It will be the focal point of a campaign calling on individuals, ambassadors and companies to get involved, act on their own inclusivity campaigns and reach out to engage with their communities to tell their story, amplified via the #imincluded hashtag across all social media channels.

“There have been major strides made, but this is just the start...we want to accelerate the good work and help industry bridge the major skills gap we face by being even more inclusive,” said Bekki Phillips, executive director at In-Comm Training.

“A lot of firms talk about it, that is true. However, the message needs to be louder, and we felt that we wanted to seize the moment and launch a campaign that everyone associated with industry can get involved in.

“We spoke with learners, employers, apprentices and our Skills Steering Group and the unanimous decision was made to launch ‘I’m In-Comm, I’m Included’.”

In-Comm Training has spent the last eight years raising the profile of apprenticeships and upskilling opportunities across hard-to-reach groups and areas across the West Midlands, and nearly 17% of its apprentices are now female and a similar number coming from a Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic background – both above the national averages.



Nteokan Egopija is aiming for an engineering design job

Bekki said: “Progress has been made, but these figures are still nowhere near high enough. Industry is for everyone, regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, religion and beliefs and we are working hard to prove that.”

Nteokan Egopija is one of the faces that appear in the campaign video having started her Level 3 Machining Technician Apprenticeship at a leading aerospace company in September 2023.

“It has been one of the best decisions I’ve made, and I’ve really enjoyed learning the technical elements and then immediately applying them to real-life engineering scenarios – all while earning a wage too.

“From the minute I stepped into In-Comm Training’s Technical Academy in Telford I felt welcome. If you throw yourself into the course you’ll get so much respect, help, advice and friendship – I’d recommend it to other girls who are practical and good problem solvers.”

# Transformational leadership programme reopens its doors

**Following the success of its first cohort, a pioneering leadership development programme is reopening its doors this September.**

The Entrepreneurial Leadership Programme – delivered by award-winning Shropshire-based consultancy Good2Great – is a five-month initiative created to help business leaders step back from day-to-day pressures and develop the skills, mindset, and clarity needed to lead their teams and businesses more effectively.

“Many business owners are juggling competing priorities and leading without support, often feeling burnt out,” said Johnny Themans, managing director of Good2Great.

“This programme creates space to think strategically, connect with others, and lead with renewed vision and confidence.”

Ruth Martin, co-founder of Martin & Jones Marketing in Oswestry, said: “I’ve learnt so many things already that I’ve been able to implement into my business. It’s made me look at my staff and bring new people into my team.”

Now open for cohort two, the programme runs from September 2025 and includes in-person sessions, peer learning, and expert coaching. This is designed to help participants

understand their leadership style, challenge their thinking, and unlock their potential in a supportive environment.

As part of its commitment to supporting the wider business and community landscape, the Entrepreneurial Leadership Programme is offering two fully-funded places for leaders of not-for-profit organisations in Shropshire.

These complimentary spaces are designed to ensure that charities and social enterprises can access the same high quality leadership development.

Mark Hooper, project lead at Visit Shropshire, who took part in the first cohort, shared the impact the programme had.

He said: “I think it really makes you evaluate yourself and think about the future – as opposed to just being constantly reactive, we’re now much more proactive.”

“We’re delighted to be reopening applications for a second cohort,” said Johnny. “Having already seen the difference this programme can make, we can’t wait to welcome the next group of leaders.”

- Organisations interested in applying for a place are encouraged to get in touch early as spaces are limited. To enquire, visit: <https://go.good-2-great.co.uk/entrepreneurial-leaders-enquire>



Johnny Themans, managing director of Good2Great

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Shaun Davies MP launching Clickingmad 25 in 25 at Severn Hospice in Telford

# Acts of kindness take place

**Bridgnorth-based digital agency Clickingmad is stepping up its '25 in 25' acts of kindness campaign which marks the company's silver anniversary.**

Two more Shropshire MPs – Shaun Davies of Telford and Helen Morgan from North Shropshire – have helped to kick off activities in their constituencies.

Clickingmad is turning 25 this year, and to celebrate, the team is committing to 25 good deeds for charities and community groups during 2025. That includes donating £75,000 of digital support, plus a range of volunteering and fundraising activities.

The Telford and Wrekin campaign launch was held at Severn Hospice in Apley, one of the region's most important care providers.

During the visit, Shaun Davies met the Clickingmad team and spoke with staff at Severn Hospice about the challenges local charities face, and how businesses can step up to help.

Shaun Davies said: "It's great to see Clickingmad doing something so positive to mark 25 years. Many charities struggle with digital support, and this campaign offers real help at a time when it is badly needed. I'm proud to support this launch in Telford."

In North Shropshire, the launch took place at the Little Stars charity in Oswestry, where members of the team rolled up their sleeves to help at its sorting bays – organising donations and preparing children's clothing for



Shaun Carvill of Clickingmad and Leanne Simcoe of the Little Stars charity

local families in need. Helen said: "It is always good to see local businesses giving something meaningful back. Little Stars is a wonderful charity doing incredible work for lots of families in need, and I'm sure the support from Clickingmad will make a real difference. I'm proud to see such campaigns taking place here in North Shropshire."

Shaun Carvill, managing director of Clickingmad, said: "We wanted to celebrate our anniversary by making a real difference. 25 in 25 is all about giving back. Whether it's building a better website or just giving up our time, we want to help where we can and put our skills to good use."

The year-long initiative includes donating £75,000 worth of digital services to UK charities and non-profits across Shropshire, and Telford & Wrekin; delivering 25 individual acts of kindness throughout the year; offering strategic digital advice and support to help organisations grow online; and volunteering time with local community projects and care homes.

- If you know a charity or organisation that could benefit, get in touch with the team at Clickingmad. Send your email to [25in25@clickingmad.com](mailto:25in25@clickingmad.com)



Helen Morgan MP with the Clickingmad and Little Stars teams



Shaun Carvill (right) talking to Telford MP Shaun Davies

# An insight to rehabilitation

**An event bringing people together to discover more about the Oswestry Veterans Orthopaedic Centre has been declared a great success with plans already in place for a return visit.**

The networking morning at the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital was arranged by Lanyon Bowdler Solicitors, in collaboration with the RJAH charity, and gave people a valuable insight into the cutting-edge rehabilitation provided at the hospital.

Debbie Humphries, of Lanyon Bowdler's personal injury team, said: "It was a real privilege to meet consultant spinal surgeon Mr Birender Balain, and consultant anaesthetist Dr Sophie Shapter, who spoke to us about their pioneering work."

"We then had a tour of the hospital's groundbreaking new simulation labs which are used to prepare military personnel for the challenge of dealing with injuries in battle situations."

"Everyone found both the talks and the simulation labs fascinating, and we would like to say a huge thank you to Mr Balain and Dr Shapter for sharing their insights with us, as well as the RJAH charity for their support in making the event happen."

"The feedback from those attending was extremely positive, with people enjoying the relaxed atmosphere and greatly appreciating the chance to experience the simulation lab."

"We are now planning another event at the hospital later in the year, and will share more information once the details are confirmed."

Another successful event held by Lanyon Bowdler was the firm's Brain Injury Networking Forum which made its Birmingham debut at No5 Barristers' Chambers.

Ben Wain, of Strolll, which has developed a revolutionary method of therapy using augmented reality glasses, and Henry Pitchers KC, head of personal injury at No5 Barristers' Chambers, gave talks to an audience of professionals working in the field of brain injury.



The event at Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital



The brain injury network forum in Birmingham

## Council of the year



Telford & Wrekin Council celebrates at the event in London

Telford & Wrekin Council has been crowned 'Council of the Year' at the Local Government Chronicle Awards.

The event celebrates the best of the best across UK councils, with Telford & Wrekin Council not only scooping the top award but also being shortlisted in the best environmental services and best public partnership categories too.

Chief executive David Sidaway said: "I'm enormously proud of this achievement as it confirms what we hoped – that we're on the right track, providing Telford and Wrekin residents, businesses and partners with the best service in the country from their local authority."

Telford & Wrekin Council has achieved back-to-back 'outstanding' ratings from Ofsted for its children's services, as well as a 'good' outcome from the Care Quality Commission, and being branded 'exceptional' by the Local Government Association for adult services.

Ongoing investment plans, including the Station Quarter development, were also recognised in the award.

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## Shropshire CEOs sleep out to raise thousands for homeless charities

Leaders of some of Shropshire's biggest companies have taken part in a 'CEO Sleepout' spending the night under the stars in aid of local charities.

Dozens of business leaders, C-suite execs and directors – including Helen Johnson of legal firm Aaron & Partners – joined the event at The Croud Meadow, home of Shrewsbury Town Football Club.

The event has raised over £22,000 in total for The Shrewsbury Ark, Shrewsbury Food Hub, and the Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation.

Helen said: "We're not only raising funds, we're also deepening our understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness – and recognising the responsibility we have, as business leaders, to drive meaningful change."

The Shrewsbury Ark provides support to people experiencing homelessness, while Shrewsbury Food Hub works to reduce food waste and distributes surplus food to charities across the town. Shrewsbury Town FC Foundation is the football club's official charity, and focusses on education, inclusion, employability and wellbeing programmes.



Participants included Helen Johnson of Aaron & Partners



Business leaders at the CEO Sleepout at The Croud Meadow

## Safety upgrades will bring peace of mind for residents

**Raven Housing Trust is partnering with Aico – the European market leader in home life safety – to upgrade fire protection systems in 432 dwellings across its sheltered and temporary accommodation.**

This major investment underscores Raven Housing Trust's commitment to the safety and wellbeing of its residents.

The three-year programme will see electrical contractor AJS Ltd install Aico's fire and carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in 432 individual temporary dwellings. Separately, Raven Housing Trust's Direct Labour Organisation will be undertaking upgrades to sheltered accommodation sites and general needs properties. The sheltered accommodation upgrade will also integrate the existing Warden Call systems, providing enhanced safety and rapid response capabilities.

Aico's relationship manager for the South East, Paul Barrett, will work closely with Christian Hirschfield from Raven Housing Trust, alongside other teams involved in this project.

"We have chosen Aico as our manufacturer for this project due to their reputation for high quality products and innovative technology," said Christian. "Aico's commitment to safety and reliability makes them an ideal partner for our homes, ensuring that we provide the best possible protection for our residents."

Paul will further support the team by delivering Aico's award-winning Expert Installer training course. This CPD-accredited course will equip the Trust with the essential knowledge and skills needed to correctly and efficiently

site and install Aico's safety systems. The team will then extend their knowledge by completing Aico's Domestic Fire and CO Alarm Systems City & Guilds-assured training held at their headquarters in Oswestry.

Paul said: "Christian and his team are taking the lead in installing Aico products to comply with BS 5839-6 using our Grade D1 Ei3000 Series alarms and LD1 specification. It has been a pleasure getting to know Raven Housing Trust over the years, and I am sure our trusted partnership will continue long into the future."

Christian and his team are taking the lead in installing Aico products to comply with BS 5839-6 using our Grade D1 Ei3000 Series alarms and LD1 specification. It has been a pleasure getting to know Raven Housing Trust over the years, and I am sure our trusted partnership will continue...





# Kudos indeed for 25 years

**Kudos Blends held a black-tie celebration to mark its 25th anniversary. The Cleobury Mortimer company is established as a pioneer in baking science and advanced leavening systems, having been founded in 1999 by entrepreneur Dinnie Jordan.**

The celebration at Brockencote Hall welcomed shareholders, customers, global distributors, suppliers, and team members for an evening of fine dining and entertainment.

Guests were invited on exclusive tours of the Kudos Blends site to explore the company's recent developments, including the upgraded milling facilities, a brand new test bakery and upgraded laboratory.

Dinnie Jordan said: "When I started Kudos Blends, I just wanted to understand the chemistry behind baking powders in relation to baking to help bakeries overcome their technical challenges. I never dreamt we would become a global leader in the field."



Dinnie Jordan with husband Ian Thompson



The Kudos Blends 25th anniversary branding



Dinnie Jordan with shareholders Steve Stilliard and Graeme Kelly



Guests were invited to enjoy a casino table at the anniversary event



Matt Ayres, Anthoy Eyles, Dinnie Jordan with Melissa Patasnik and Rob Berube



# Credit . . . where it's due

**Martyn James**



**Your credit file is your passport to loans, credit, mortgages and much more. Yet judging by my postbag, there's a lot of confusion over what lies within your credit reference report, how credit scoring works and why you might get turned down if you want to borrow money.**

Well fear not! Here's my guide to credit scores, files and your rights.

Credit score versus credit reference file

Think of your credit score as a number that helps lenders understand how much money they can lend to you. The higher the score, the safer a prospect you are. Credit scores go up and down over time, depending on your finances, but even in the worst scenarios you can always turn them around.

Credit reference agencies set your credit

score and there are three of them in the UK: Experian, Equifax and TransUnion. You can request your statutory credit report for free (avoid unnecessary subscription services). If there is anything on there that is incorrect or unfair, you can appeal.

Your credit reference file is a report that covers all the data that credit reference agencies hold on you. This includes information on loans, credit cards and other financial commitments you have – along with outstanding debts too. The file also records the number of applications for credit you make over a rolling 12-month period. If you apply for credit too many times, it can affect your credit score.

What about my personal information?

Your credit file will contain personal information too, so it's vital that this is all up to date. It's essential to be on the Electoral Roll. This tells businesses that you are who you say you are and you are living at the address listed on the credit file. If you're not on the Electoral Register it's really easy to sort out. Just follow the guide on the Gov.uk website: <https://www.gov.uk/electoral-register>

Make sure your personal details are all correct as these may be cross-referenced from time to time. So check that your birthdate and the time you have been resident at your last few addresses are accurate too.

Inevitably, your credit file will also include serious matters that are on the public record. This means bankruptcies, debt management plans and other court judgements.

How do I see what's on my credit file?

By law, you are entitled to your statutory

credit score for free. But this isn't always so easy to find on the credit reference agency websites. Avoid signing up for the monthly subscriptions – your statutory report comes at no charge for the digital version.

A subscription gets you a more detailed credit report. You should be able to cancel this at any time, but check that you have done so as loads of readers tell me they forgot and ended up paying fees for months or years.

When you receive your free or subscription credit report, it's not always so straightforward to read or understand. I'd start by checking if your personal details are all correct. Then look at the section showing your existing or settled loans, credit and other borrowing. These should show if you have 'defaulted' or missed any payments.

If you spot any errors, you can appeal these through the lender. You can also mark any disputes over errors on the credit file itself through the credit reference agency. If a debt has nothing to do with you, the credit reference agency can put a 'notice of disassociation' on the file, which separates you from the debt while things are sorted out.

I've been turned down for credit even though I have a good credit score – why?

When you apply to borrow money, a financial institution will check your credit file (with your permission). But they will often also conduct their own assessment of your credit worthiness, to see if you meet their criteria.

They don't have to tell you how this works. But if you ask, they must tell you if you failed their credit score, the credit reference agency score or both.

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





*Pupils welcome the new head of football Scott Ruscoe*

## Back of the net for pupils

Oswestry School has appointed Scott Ruscoe as its new head of football. He is a former professional footballer with an impressive playing career across clubs including Aston Villa, Stoke City, Port Vale, Chester City and Newtown FC. After hanging up his boots, Scott transitioned seamlessly into coaching, and is currently shaping the future of football as an academy coach at Wrexham FC. He said: “I am eager to embrace the challenge of leading the programme and fostering a culture of teamwork and excellence. “This opportunity excites me not only because of my passion for the sport, but also for the chance to develop my leadership and coaching skills in a dynamic, supportive environment.”

## Playing on a global stage



*Serchem board of directors Simon Lloydbottom, Alison Arnold, Ed Grainger, Oliver Wadlow and Richard Hale*

A Shropshire-based global leader in the manufacture of hygiene and decontamination products has made a top-level appointment aimed at maximising its international expansion potential. Serchem, based at Hortonwood in Telford, has named Ed Grainger as its new international sales director in a move aimed at further developing relationships and opportunities across the world with a particular focus on Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The company has established itself as a global leader in the development and manufacturing of premium hygiene and decontamination products. Its innovative solutions are trusted by both the National Health Service and private healthcare providers in the UK and it has a growing reputation worldwide. The family business has built up more than 40 years of experience and manufactures over 750 different products at its plant in Shropshire. Alison Arnold, Serchem commercial director, said: “It is a tremendous coup for us and one that will help drive Serchem forward into a new era of development. “We have reached the point where we now need to take the next steps in increasing our international appeal, and Ed is just the person to spearhead the challenge. “We are committed to growing our international focus and investing to capitalise on a wealth of global product supply opportunities, and the decision to appoint Ed came on the back of recent strong sales and increased potential outside the UK.” Ed said: “The team and products at Serchem are world class. I’m thrilled to be joining the team and look forward to helping achieve the global aspirations for the business. I can’t wait to get cracking.”

# New head at a historic school



*Craig Williams will become headteacher in January*

**A Shropshire school which is about to celebrate its 180th anniversary has announced its new headteacher as it looks forward to the next exciting chapter in its history.**

The Old Hall School, which becomes Wrekin Prep this September, will welcome Craig Williams to the role in January. Current headteacher Mrs Anna Karacan will leave at the end of this academic year. Craig has been head of the highly successful Abingdon Prep School in Oxfordshire for the past eight years, having taught in a number of the country’s top schools during his career. After attending Bradfield College as a pupil, he went on to gain his degree in Geography from Oxford University, and has since taught at prep schools in Sussex, Somerset, Berkshire, and Oxfordshire. Emma Crawford, chair of governors at the Wrekin Old Hall Trust, said: “Old Hall has continually evolved throughout its 180-year history but has always delivered the very best education for its pupils and will continue to do so as Wrekin Prep. “Both the number and quality of candidates reaffirmed that our school is well-regarded across the country. Craig impressed us all with his warmth and his child-centred and hands-on approach to education. He very much shares the values of our family school.” Craig said: “I am delighted to be joining the Wrekin Prep community as it looks forward to this exciting new chapter which will see efforts continue to build stronger links with Wrekin College. “The people and pupils I met as part of the interview process could not have been more welcoming, and I look forward to more opportunities to visit the school community at other events so I can meet even more Wrekin Prep families ahead of my official start in January.”



*Sylvie Cowell and Helen Spickernell have joined Good2Great in Bridgnorth*

# New faces at consultancy

**Two key appointments have been announced at award-winning business consultancy Good2Great.** Joining the team at the Bridgnorth-based firm, which specialises in helping businesses grow and revitalising High Streets, are Sylvie Cowell and Helen Spickernell. Sylvie joins as business operations manager, bringing with her a strong background in strategy, business development and leading cross-functional teams. With extensive experience driving growth and operational excellence, Sylvie will oversee marketing, business development, customer service, office and event coordination and contract compliance. Her role focuses on streamlining operations, enhancing productivity, and supporting scalable, sustainable growth. Helen is the newly-appointed head of relationships and business development, and she grew up on a Shropshire farm where community values and hard work shaped her. After building a career in sales, account management and running her own business (following time spent living in Luxembourg), she has returned to her roots to help drive local economic prosperity. “The appointments of Sylvie and Helen mark an exciting chapter in Good2Great’s expansion strategy,” said director Johnny Themans. “Sylvie’s addition to our newly-established leadership team represents a major step in building a more structured, future-ready organisation, while Helen’s expertise will help deepen our engagement and widen our reach.”

## Sales management role

Shrewsbury Town Football Club has appointed Steve Maden as commercial sales manager. Steve, who originally joined the club on a part time basis in 2021, will lead on delivering the club’s commercial strategy, with a focus on revenue generation, sponsor engagement, and partnership development. His role includes managing all sponsorship and advertising opportunities, as well as overseeing Sovereign Club membership. He has previously worked for Sytner BMW and served as a commercial volunteer at his beloved Madeley Cricket Club since 2014. Steve said: “This is a job I have always wanted – I’m incredibly proud to be working for Shrewsbury Town. “Football offers a unique and powerful platform for businesses. We have some outstanding commercial opportunities that can really help companies raise their profile, not just locally in Shrewsbury and Shropshire, but right across the UK.”



*Steve Maden*

# Senior leadership team will drive organisation



*Ruth Ross (centre) with (from left) Sue Nichols, Nicola Clinton, Jenny Pearson and Kelly Riedel*

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce has unveiled a new-look senior leadership team to drive the organisation forward and step up its support for members. It includes new roles for several familiar faces and a key external appointment, to cement the Chamber’s reputation as a champion of Shropshire’s business community. Jenny Pearson has joined as head of commercial success, where her role includes taking a lead on marketing activities. Born and bred in Shropshire, she worked as a buyer at famous London department store Harrods for nine years before living and working in Italy for 16 years. Since returning to the UK, she spent five years as head of sales at Kadai in south Shropshire. Kelly Riedel, who joined the Chamber four and a half years ago having spent more than two decades working in the hotel and hospitality industry, has been appointed head of member success. For the past few years she has taken the lead on organising the Chamber’s business awards. “It’s the variety of work that I love the most,” she says. “I love getting out and about, speaking to members and learning about their fascinating businesses.” Nicola Clinton, who has taken a senior role in the finance team, has been with the Chamber for over five years after previous experience in the hospitality industry. “I was initially managing our training services, which gave me great insight into how we support our members, before moving into the finance department to broaden my understanding of the organisation. I’m now excited to take on this new senior role.” Sue Nichols has been with the Chamber since July 2023, having previously run her own accountancy practice and held senior finance roles in the construction, renewable energy and manufacturing sectors. She said her objective as the Chamber’s finance manager over the next few years before her retirement was to help Nicola grow into the senior finance role. Ruth Ross, Shropshire Chamber chief executive, said: “I’m delighted with this new-look senior leadership team, which has a fantastic blend of skill, experience, ideas and enthusiasm. “They all share the same vision – to establish Shropshire Chamber of Commerce as an essential, influential leader with a reputation for making outstanding contributions to our business community.”



# Associate non-executive directors are appointed

Two new associate non-executive directors have been appointed to the Board of The Shrewsbury and Telford Hospital NHS Trust (SaTH). Professor Heidi Fuller, head of School for Allied Health Professions and Pharmacy at Keele University, and Jon Sargeant, former chief financial officer at Doncaster and Bassetlaw Teaching Hospitals Trust, have joined SaTH. Trust chair-in-common Andrew Morgan said: "I am delighted to welcome Heidi and Jon to the Trust. They both bring a wealth of knowledge and experience aligned to our biggest priorities. Their passion for education, research and transformation will help us on our improvement journey to improve quality and deliver value for the communities we serve."

# New role for Amelia

A Shropshire marketing agency has restructured and expanded its leadership team on the back of 24% year-on-year growth. Following the appointment of Michael Bush as non-executive director last summer, Shrewsbury-based Reech has welcomed Amelia Redge to the Board. "Since joining Reech in 2022, I've loved being part of a team that drives continuous and sustainable growth," she said. "Joining the Board is a hugely proud moment for me. I'm excited to bring my B2B marketing experience to the helm of the business to continue building something really special."



Amelia Redge

# Higher rights in courtroom



**Euros Jones and Emma Simoes**  
**Two law firm partners have been awarded Higher Rights of Audience, entitling them to present cases in the higher courts.**  
Emma Simoes and Euros Jones are both partners of GHP Legal, which has a base in Oswestry. Emma said: "Appearing in Crown Court trials used to be something reserved for barristers who would be briefed by solicitors before presenting a case to the court. This was clearly less than ideal in respect of providing continuity for the client." Euros added: "It means that I can personally argue my client's case in court, present evidence, cross-examine witnesses and deliver closing arguments, and all without the need to instruct a barrister. Continuity and familiarity are everything in a criminal case."



Ben Handley, Jane Parry and Rachel Owen have joined Start Tech

# Three fresh faces at firm

**Shrewsbury-based technology company Start Tech has welcomed three new members of staff.**  
Jane Parry joins with over 30 years' experience in the IT industry as the new service desk manager. Rachel Owen, former director of membership at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce, is the new account manager, and Ben Handley has been recruited as a service desk technician. Managing director Ian Groves said: "Start Tech is going through a period of growth, and leading the way with a new generation of managed IT services, helping businesses to optimise their infrastructure with the latest tech developments. This includes creating robust strategies for AI implementation and strengthening their cyber security." "The recent high profile cyber security breaches have shown the importance of partnering with an IT business that can help you protect against attacks, keeping your reputation and customer trust intact. "As the business develops, our team grows, so we are thrilled to welcome three talented and impressive new team members. With Jane, Rachel, and Ben on board, we'll be able to provide an even better premium service."



Nick Taylor with Shoothill group managing director Simon Jeavons

# Nick is managing director

Housebuilder Pro – the specialist software provider for the UK housebuilding sector – has announced the appointment of Nick Taylor as managing director. Backed by Shropshire-based Shoothill, Housebuilder Pro is focused on delivering smart, practical tools that help housebuilders manage their operations more effectively. Nick's promotion follows five years with the company, during which time he has played a central role in the growth and evolution of the platform. After joining the Board at the end of 2024, Nick now takes full responsibility for the strategic direction of the business. Simon Jeavons, group managing director of Shoothill, said: "Nick has been instrumental in shaping Housebuilder Pro into what it is today – a system trusted by many regional and national housebuilders. His drive, vision and understanding of the industry makes him the right person to lead the business into its next phase." Nick said: "I'm proud of what we've achieved so far and excited about what's next. I've been lucky to work with an outstanding team including forward-thinking developers who've helped shape the system."

# A fresh new sound for Shropshire

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56

57



# Five minutes with . . .

LOUISE CHRISTIE is director of external relations at Wrekin Old Hall Trust – a role she took on at the start of the year

## WHAT DOES YOUR JOB INVOLVE?

My job is a senior leadership role providing strategic oversight and operational leadership across communications, development, enterprise, marketing, and admissions, supporting the headmaster to deliver the Trust's strategic goals while line managing key teams and driving income-generating initiatives.

## HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ECONOMY?

My work is directly shaped by economic fluctuations, which influence parental confidence, fee sensitivity, and the competitiveness of pupil recruitment — requiring agile marketing, strategic admissions planning, and sustained relationship-building to safeguard income and long-term growth.

## WHAT'S YOUR VIEW ON THE CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT FOR YOUR JOB?

The change in government and the continued threat of increased taxation on independent education have added significant uncertainty to the sector, intensifying fee sensitivity among parents and placing greater pressure on my role to protect pupil numbers through strategic communications, targeted admissions, and long-term stakeholder engagement.

## HOW DO YOU VIEW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – AND HOW MIGHT YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS USE IT?

AI has the power to transform education and we are working hard to understand how to harness this power for the Trust currently, while also protecting the integrity of what we teach and deliver as well.

## HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?

Supportive, strategic, empathetic, and visionary.

## YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?

Communication.

## BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?

The scale of the remit and the limit of resource means that I have to be really creative in how we deliver the very best outcomes for all.

## YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?

Since starting in January, my proudest achievement has been building a cohesive, forward-looking strategy that unites marketing, admissions, development, and enterprise — strengthening Wrekin's visibility, deepening community engagement, and laying the groundwork for long-term growth across the Trust.

## PET HATES?

Ignorance and negativity!

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

Clarity is kindness, and it is OK to say no.

## HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?

I love walking and go out every morning at 5am with my dog Ted. I also love spending time with friends and getting to the seaside whenever possible.



Jacinda Ardern – former New Zealand prime minister



Brooklyn Nine-Nine is a favourite TV show



Early bird Louise takes a 5am walk every day with her dog Ted



AI has the power to transform education, Louise says

## FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?

The people, the landscape, and the business community.

## SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?

LinkedIn and Instagram.

## FAVOURITE MOVIE AND/OR TV SHOW?

Brooklyn Nine-Nine, and Schitt's Creek.

## EARLY BIRD, OR NIGHT OWL?

Early Bird.

## DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?

David Bowie, Billy Connolly, Tina Fey, Jacinda Ardern, Bob Mortimer, Jameela Jamil, my daughter Georgia, and my mum.

# Our People, Your Team.

## Here to help you.

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

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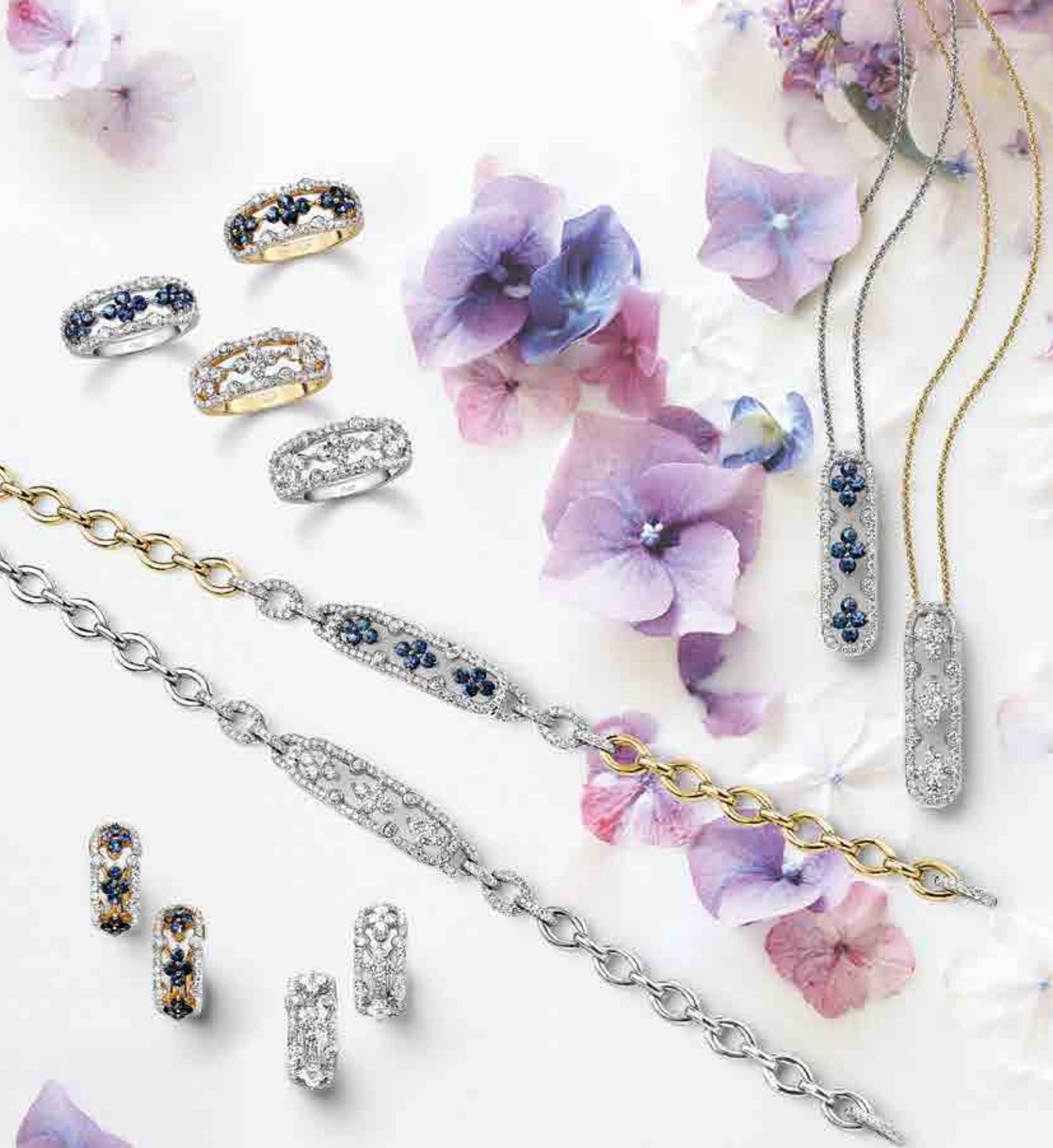
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