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APPRENTICESHIP AWARDS : We bring you all the winners, celebrations and reaction from a brilliant night at the 2025 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards, including a comprehensive photo gallery, in our six-page special. P16-21

SUSTAINING YOUR ADVANTAGE: Sustainability is becoming a business imperative – can artificial intelligence help drive your company's eco-friendly innovation and efficiency? We report on a Shropshire seminar which provided big food for thought. P6-7

COVER STORY: With a new headquarters and new team members, marketing agency Reech explains the importance of clarity, confidence and commercial focus for forward-looking businesses. P12-13

HYPE, OR HOPE?: Companies are making strategic decisions about embracing new technology without fully understanding the implications. Chris Meah explains how to benchmark the best tools, and pick a winning formula. P28-31

ON THE MOVE: Check out who's been promoted, and who's taken up positions with new Shropshire employers, in our four-page special. P54-57

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By Carl Jones
Shropshire Business Editor

SHROPSHIRE
BUSINESS

Welcome

As Chancellor Rachel Reeves prepares to deliver her second budget, the Shropshire business community finds itself in a climate of cautious anticipation.

With the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasting a fiscal shortfall of up to £50 billion, the Government is expected to balance growth ambitions with pragmatic tax reform on November 26.

Since Labour pledged not to raise income tax, VAT, or National Insurance, businesses are now bracing themselves for 'technical' tax adjustments instead – particularly around pensions, payroll systems, and capital allowances.

Everyone has a slightly different take, but some of the financial services experts I've been talking to in recent weeks expect scrutiny of corporate tax reliefs, R&D incentives, and potential reforms to business rates.

Professional services companies are laying on seminars over the coming weeks to dissect the small print – keep on turning for more details.

With infrastructure and sustainability highlighted among Westminster priorities, sectors reliant on Government contracts – such as construction, healthcare, and green energy – will undoubtedly be monitoring spending reviews closely.

Talking of sustainability, we paid a visit to the lecture theatre at Lilleshall National Sports Centre for a fascinating seminar, discussing the role that artificial intelligence can play in helping firms accelerate progress towards their targets.

It's become inevitable that AI now has a high profile in our pages, because it's now a talking point in virtually every boardroom.

But are you making strategic decisions about AI without a full understanding of what it actually is? Tech expert Chris Meah ponders this topic in one of our talking point features.

And here's another talking point for you: why is there currently so much chaos, confusion and frustration among employers around the Employment Rights Bill?

HR expert Ishbel Lapper tells us why, in its current form, she feels it's not helping businesses, not helping workers, and certainly not helping the country to move forward.

Meanwhile, we're still buzzing from the success of the 2025 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards. Around 200 people celebrated at the Mercure Telford Centre Hotel, where prizes were given out to winning apprentices, and employers too.

Our six-page special includes news of all the finalists, and a photo gallery which gives you a real flavour of the occasion. Check out Shropshire Business Live TV's YouTube channel too, where you'll find a highlights video from the event including lots of backstage interviews.

As this is our final edition of 2025, it just remains for me to say, on behalf of our fantastic Shropshire Business team, a big thank you to everyone who has supported us once again this year – our sponsors, advertisers, distributors, and everyone involved in delivering our content to you.

More people are now reading our magazine than ever. Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin is and will always remain our core readership, of course, but our reach now stretches as far as the USA, Australia, and many countries in Europe.

They say bad news travels fast… hopefully we are proving that Shropshire's business success stories can do exactly the same!

We wish you all a happy and healthy festive period, and look forward to working with you, and sharing more of your success stories, in the New Year.



Jenny Pearson welcomed guests



Howard Betts in conversation with Nigel Ryan and Karen Woodcock

When sustainability meets AI innovation

In today's climate-conscious economy, sustainability is no longer a corporate buzzword: it's becoming a business imperative.

For Shropshire companies still navigating post-pandemic recovery, alongside rising energy costs, and evolving regulatory landscapes, embedding environmental, social, and governance principles is not just about ethics; it's about long-term viability.

From large manufacturers to SMEs, businesses are under pressure to decarbonise supply chains, reduce emissions, and demonstrate transparent ESG reporting.

Consumers, too, are voting with their wallets – demanding greener products, ethical sourcing, and corporate accountability.

But sustainability isn't just about compliance or reputation. It's a driver of innovation and efficiency. There is a growing library of evidence which appears to show that employers who prioritise sustainability now outperform their peers in profitability and resilience.



Guest speakers at the Sustainability Partnership's second event: from left, Jordan Tassell, Denise Brinton, Lewis Prince, Vlad Cazan, and Andy Whyle

The challenge lies in turning good intentions into measurable impact… and that's where AI steps in.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's new Sustainability Partnership has been exploring how artificial intelligence can accelerate the business community's efforts to become more eco-friendly.

The lecture theatre at Lilleshall National Sports and Conferencing Centre hosted the second meeting of the group, which brought in expert speakers from as far afield as Romania.

Presentations and discussions highlighted AI's potential to transform sustainability from a compliance challenge into a competitive advantage – from energy-efficient logistics to intelligent waste reduction, recycling, and manufacturing.

Guest speakers included Lewis Prince of Purple Frog Systems, Vlad Cazan from KFactory, Jordan Tassell of iconsys, Denise Brinton from Staysafe PPE, and Howard Betts of Shropshire and Telford Community Energy.

Lewis – a senior AI engineer at Telford-based Purple Frog Systems – explained why the use of smaller AI models had the potential to lower a company's costs and environmental impact – highlighting Google's revelation that the powering of its AI functions is a main factor in its 27% rise in electricity use last year. That figure has probably risen even higher this year.

Vlad Cazan jetted in from Romania to deliver a presentation at the event. He outlined a case study showing how AI systems had immediately reduced emissions at one automotive company by 5%, and increased managers' time to focus on their core activities by 30%.

"It is dangerous to have a 100% reliance on things like ChatGPT because of the 'garbage in, garbage out' principle, but if you think artificial intelligence is the future you are falling behind – because it is already a big part of our lives," he said.

Jordan, head of marine and ports at Telford-based iconsys, explained how his company's 'smart power management system' was helping to optimise the use of energy both at sea and at ports, sparking debate about how similar principles could also be used in agriculture.

And Denise, managing director of Alveley-based Staysafe PPE, revealed how her business kept track of every single kilogramme of workwear and PPE equipment given to them for recycling or re-purposing.

She said she was 'amazed' that the family-run firm was still the only one of its kind in the area – since it recovered over 420 tonnes of waste last year, saving nearly 6,000 tonnes of emissions.



Guest speaker Lewis Prince from Purple Frog Systems

The session was chaired by Andy Whyle of Sustainability West Midlands who said: "We need to understand what the business pain is in relation to sustainability, because the more sustainable we all become, the better this place is for us to live, work and play.

"The success of this partnership is going to be based around joining up businesses with solution providers."

Jenny Pearson, head of commercial success at Shropshire Chamber, said: "Uniting Shropshire businesses in the common cause of creating not only a more sustainable future, but also a more sustainable present is invaluable."

The broad conclusion from the Lilleshall event was that artificial intelligence offers Shropshire businesses a toolkit for smarter, faster, and more sustainable decision-making. From predictive analytics to intelligent automation, it can help organisations reduce their environmental footprint while boosting productivity. For example:

- **Energy Optimisation:** AI-powered systems can monitor and adjust energy usage in real time, identifying inefficiencies and reducing consumption. For example, smart building technologies use machine learning to regulate heating, lighting, and ventilation based on occupancy patterns – cutting costs and emissions simultaneously.
- **Supply Chain Transparency:** AI can map complex supply chains, flagging environmental risks and identifying opportunities for greener sourcing. Natural language processing tools can scan supplier reports, news articles, and social media to detect ESG-related issues before they escalate.
- **Waste Reduction:** Retailers and manufacturers are using AI to forecast demand more accurately, reducing overproduction and minimising waste. In the food industry, AI algorithms help predict spoilage rates and optimise inventory, contributing to both environmental and financial sustainability.
- **Sustainable Innovation:** AI accelerates research and development in green technologies. From designing low-carbon materials to optimising renewable energy systems, machine learning models are helping engineers and scientists solve complex environmental challenges faster than ever before.

To truly harness AI for sustainability, businesses must fully integrate it into their environmental, social and governance strategies from the outset. What does this look like?

Embracing data-driven decision-making, for starters. ESG success depends on robust data. AI thrives on data, making it ideal for tracking emissions, monitoring compliance, and generating real-time sustainability insights.

Then there's ethical AI governance. Just as businesses are held accountable for their environmental impact, they must also ensure their AI systems are transparent, fair, and free from bias. Ethical AI frameworks should be part of any sustainability roadmap.

As AI reshapes job roles, it's also important for businesses to invest in training and reskilling their workforce. This not only supports a just transition but also ensures that staff can contribute meaningfully to sustainability goals.

Where you take things from here depends almost entirely on your answer to these two questions.

Do you treat sustainability as a cost to your business, or a catalyst?

And do you view AI as a threat, or a transformative tool for good?

- The next meeting of Shropshire Chamber's Sustainability Partnership is planned for March 5. To register interest, email enquiries@shropshire-chamber.co.uk or call the Chamber team on 01952 208200.

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New £1.9 million library under way for Telford College students

Telford College is transforming the Learning Resource Centre at its Wellington campus with the creation of a new £1.9 million library.



An artist's impression of the new library at Telford College's Wellington campus

Work is now under way on a two-storey refurbishment, which is due to welcome its first students in the spring of 2026.

The project is funded by the Government's Capital Transformation Fund and is being delivered by Johnson Design Partnership – a boutique architect practice based in Bridgnorth.

JDP has worked with Telford College to design the 700 square metre library, which will provide more than 150 seats, with two bookable study rooms, plus teaching space, workshop and collaborative study areas.

Students will have access to a wide range of e-books and online journals, and smart lockers will store dozens of laptops that will be available to loan.

"This project will create a vibrant, modern library designed to enhance student engagement, independent learning, digital fluency, and inclusivity," said Caroline Bastow, Telford College's vice principal for support and performance.

"The new library will serve as a hub of academic support, offering flexible study zones, group collaboration areas, social learning spaces, and integrated digital resources.

"It is part of a wider redevelopment plan for the Wellington campus to modernise learning environments, promote digital integration, and ensure equality of access for all learners."

Becky Johnson, architect at Johnson Design Partnership, said: "It's always fun to work with educational clients to transform existing buildings into exciting new spaces that inspire students.

"At the heart of our design is the introduction of lots of natural light to create a brighter learning environment, while a two-tier ceiling system will deliver the best possible acoustics."

Business festival confirmed for 2026

Shropshire Business Festival is returning to Telford's International Centre in 2026 following the success of its debut at the venue this year.

The organisers, Shropshire Festivals, have announced March 5 as the date for the free one-day networking event that brings together business leaders and emerging talent from across the county.

"We've thrown out the rulebook on traditional networking," said Beth Heath at Shropshire Festivals. "Too often, business events feel forced or unengaging.

"We're creating something completely different – an atmosphere where real conversations happen naturally around icebreaker fun and engaging activities, leading to meaningful business relationships that drive results for the year ahead.

"Last year we welcomed over 800 attendees, and we believe our 2026 event will be even more popular, with businesses wanting to drive sales, build leads and form new connections."

Around 60 businesses from across the West Midlands will exhibit at the Festival and there will be a hub to grow leads in a networking area. For exhibitors and sponsors, the Festival provides access to Shropshire's business decision-makers.

Stand applications are now open.

Visit www.shropshirebusinessfestival.co.uk for more details.



Shropshire Business Festival returns to the International Centre, Telford, on March 5, 2026

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It's been a year of real progress

Bridgnorth Aluminium has reported a strong recovery, with turnover rising to nearly £230 million and a marked improvement in performance across the business.



Bridgnorth Aluminium manufactures coils for lithographic printing plates, packaging, and battery foil stocks for electrification



Gerhard Trilling: "We've bounced back thanks to the hard work of our team"

The UK's only fully-integrated producer of flat rolled aluminium coils for customers around the world saw sales rise nine per cent last year despite challenging trading conditions.

General manager Gerhard Trilling said: "The last year has been a year of real progress for Bridgnorth Aluminium. After a tough 2023, we've bounced back thanks to the hard work of our team and some smart changes to how we operate.

"We've improved productivity, cut costs, and strengthened our relationships with customers and seen new projects delivered.

"Highlights have included a new major multi-year contract with an EU client, and the investment of nearly £2 million in new filtration technology at our Shropshire site. This upgrade will help us supply cleaner, higher quality aluminium for electric vehicles and packaging — two markets that are growing fast.

"I'd also like to thank our workforce here in Bridgnorth – the shop floor, engineering and maintenance teams all went the extra mile and stepped up to take up overtime opportunities and postpone holidays as demand for our products rose in the last year.

"We're also continuing to focus on sustainability, with new initiatives to reduce our energy use and carbon footprint."

The company, which employs 320 people, has launched a new recruitment drive and is looking to create up to ten new jobs in the coming months.

"Like many in the metals sector, we continue to navigate a challenging environment. Uncertainty over global trading conditions, the new US tariffs, the introduction of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and persistently high energy costs all present ongoing pressures.

"But despite these headwinds, Bridgnorth Aluminium remains focused on resilience, innovation and supporting our customers in the UK and internationally."

The annual accounts also reveal that Bridgnorth Aluminium has donated more than £50,000 to local charities in the past year.

The company manufactures aluminium coils for lithographic printing plates, packaging, and battery foil stocks for electrification.

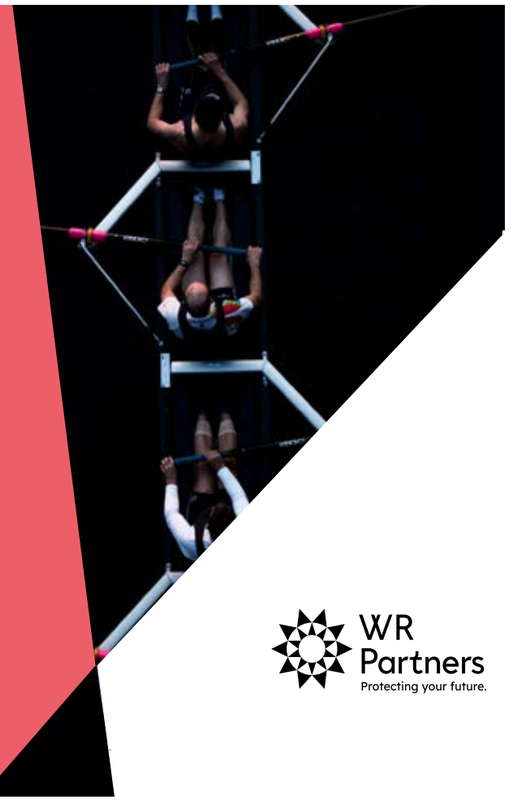
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The minister on a tour of the RBSL plant in Telford



Best of British – new Boxer and Challenger armoured vehicles are being produced in Telford

Military equipment impresses minister

The UK's newly-appointed minister for defence readiness and industry paid a visit to one of Telford's leading manufacturing companies to see some of the latest military equipment.

Luke Pollard visited Rheinmetall BAE Systems Land at Hadley Castle, where production is under way on new Boxer and Challenger 3 vehicles.

The minister toured production lines, met with apprentices and engineers, and received briefings on investments that are aimed at re-establishing the UK as a global leader in armoured vehicle manufacturing, weapons systems and advanced defence technologies.

They are also strengthening Telford's position as a key strategic business hub for the defence industry.

Rheinmetall UK has invested over £200 million in the UK, including £56 million at its Telford site. These upgrades have modernised infrastructure, expanded production capacity and established a pipeline of advanced skills.

Hundreds of apprentices, graduates and experienced engineers are already working on Boxer and Challenger 3 vehicles, supported by partnerships with UK SMEs, universities and training providers.

The Boxer Mechanised Infantry Vehicle (MIV) programme is now entering full rate production, with the first fully British-built Boxer delivered to the British Army's Armoured Trials Unit in Bovington earlier this year.

With around 75% of the platform sourced through a UK supply chain, Boxer is both strengthening Army capability and embedding UK industrial resilience.

Alongside Boxer, RBSL is leading the £800 million Challenger 3 programme, delivering 148 next-generation main battle tanks with upgraded firepower, protection and digital systems.

John Abunassar, chief executive of of Rheinmetall UK, said: "We were proud to welcome the minister and showcase the dedication of our workforce delivering critical capability for the British Army.

"The UK Gun Hall, alongside our Boxer and Challenger 3 programmes, is proof of Rheinmetall's long-term commitment to Britain. Together with Government and industry, we are investing in sovereign capability, strengthening supply chains and preparing for the future of UK defence."

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The Barn at Hay Yard – Reech's new purpose-built creative hub



Rob Hughes, founder and managing director

Why brand & bravery will define the next chapter for Shropshire

The team at full-service marketing agency, Reech, are no strangers to the challenges that come with B2B and marketing high value products or services. Particularly in sectors where sales cycles are long, complex and often unpredictable. Founder and managing director ROB HUGHES, alongside agency director AMELIA REDGE, discuss how they help some of Shropshire's most ambitious businesses navigate the storm with clarity, confidence and commercial focus.

Time to Be Strategic

Rob says: "Nationwide, we have seen trends and threats throughout 2025, meaning businesses are having to navigate prolonged decision timelines, procurement freezes, shifting customer behaviours and fatigue from short-term, ROI-chasing marketing that's no longer effective.

"Home to some incredible manufacturing innovation, growing technology hubs and highly skilled professions, Shropshire's commercial landscape has always been exciting and competitive. But we're not immune to these challenges. There's a familiar pattern across the region with delayed decision-making and sales cycles stretching out longer than before.

"If the last quarter has taught us anything, it's that hope isn't a strategy. Simply hoping that the next few months will be better than the last isn't enough. It's time to be strategic, smart and courageous.

"And, recent research has revealed almost half of struggling businesses admitted they'd be willing to change their business strategy this year, highlighting that brands understand they need to be proactive and agile to succeed. But often, it's just knowing where to start."

Long Sales Cycles

"Most of the B2B and service-based businesses (B2B or B2C) we work with have long sales cycles," adds Amelia. "Whether that's securing six-figure contracts, working with multiple decision makers or forming professional partnerships that last years.

"Meaning your marketing must be long-term too.

"It requires consistency, creativity and, above all, confidence. Confidence to persevere when quick fixes seem tempting. Confidence to show up when competitors go silent. And confidence to defend your strategy to stakeholders.

"Because the moment your prospect is ready to buy (and that moment will come), you either exist in their mind or you don't. It really is that simple."



The Reech team in their new headquarters



Your marketing – like your business – needs to be based on a long-term strategy

The Power of Brand

Amelia continues: "B2B strategy and marketing high-value products is a long-term investment that deserves time and resource for it to work to its full potential.

"The best place to start? Brand.

"I'm constantly surprised by how many Shropshire businesses still treat brand as a nice-to-have or something they'll eventually get around to. Because in a long B2B sales cycle, brand is the heart of everything, it's your reputation, tones of voice and visual identity.

"And it's able to tailor how you behave in the world, attract clients and talent, align internal teams and tell your story.

"Even more than that, it's how you're remembered, talked about and trusted. And in businesses where deals don't happen overnight, trust is everything.

"In fact, 27% of B2B decision makers consider trust a valuable KPI. Additionally, 93% view trust as a sign of a stronger brand, 94% say it drives better customer loyalty, and 62% believe it supports premium pricing.

"So, if you're serious about future growth, investing in your brand is absolutely non-negotiable."

Practice What We Preach

On Reech's own approach to brand, Rob says: "We believe in the power of brand so much that we've just made our own strategic move as part of our wider objectives.

"Reech has officially opened the doors to its purpose-built creative hub at Shrewsbury Business Park: The Barn at The Hay Yard. We've created a space that invites innovation, encourages strategic thinking and reminds us daily of what happens when you invest in your vision.

"It's so much more than an office. It's another touchpoint and an extension of our brand. Plus, it embodies everything that we as an agency believe in: that experience matters and in the power of combining creativity with performance.

"Every last detail was considered and intentional, from the materials used and design layout to how we host clients and collaborate with our team.

"We're proud to lead by example. After all, we are a B2B and service-based business with a long sales cycle too. We get it!"

reech



Reech is a long-time supporter of Shrewsbury Town FC

So, What Now?

If you're a Shropshire business with a long sales cycle wondering how to move forward after a challenging quarter, here's Reech's advice:

1. Long-term strategy. Stop thinking about monthly performance reports and start thinking about where you want to be in 12, 24, 36 months.
2. Brand, brand, brand. Brand doesn't just mean a logo and a colour palette. It encapsulates everything that your business means, believes in, and stands for.
3. Be distinctive. In a crowded market, the safe option is often the invisible one. When you're positioning your business, how can you be distinctive and differentiate?
4. Align sales & marketing. Marketing should be a sales-enabler, not an afterthought. Everyone must be on board, aligned with the strategy and consistently delivering the same good service.
5. Be patient & presence. Don't disappear while your audience is in research mode. Keep showing up with value to enhance authority and credibility in your space.
6. Measure (the right things) Clicks and leads are great, but in long sales cycles also think about pipeline health, brand recall and touchpoint engagement.

Why Reech?

"At Reech we specialise in helping businesses with long, complex sales cycles to build brands that sell and strategies that scale," says Rob. "From brand and content to web and digital, we bring our full-service 360-method to every challenge.

"And we're proudly rooted here in Shropshire and believe in the businesses on our doorstep. We know this county has everything it needs to lead from the front and we're here to help you every step of the way."

Established in 2009 with a clear vision to help build successful brands, Reech has since evolved into one of the UK's most reputable full-service marketing agencies, renowned for delivering results-driven campaigns, with creativity at its core. Headquartered in Shrewsbury, but working with brands and businesses globally, Reech is a certified B Corporation, recognised WordPress, Mailchimp, Google, and META partner, and has officially been named as a top 20 branding agency outside of London by The Drum Recommends.

- For further information, visit the website **www.reech.agency**, or contact by email via **hello@reech.agency**

Putting the 'B' in Business



Amelia Redge and Rob Hughes commemorate the B Corporation certification

Reech has announced its certification as a B Corporation, joining a growing movement of companies that are reinventing business for the benefit of all people and our shared planet.

Verified by B Lab, the not-for-profit behind the B Corp movement, the achievement demonstrates that Reech meets high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability alongside a commitment to goals beyond shareholder value.

The milestone marks a two-year programme of improvements across every corner of the agency, from sustainable operations to employee benefits and governance.

Chris Turner, executive director of B Lab UK, says: "Welcoming Reech to the B Corp community is hugely exciting. Its commitment to doing business differently will be an inspiration to others and will help spread the notion that success in business is as much about people and planet as it is profit."

Rob Hughes, founder and managing director of Reech, added: "This is an amazing moment for us, along with our team, clients and partners.

"The B Corp certification process is extremely thorough and we have worked hard to roll out a robust change roadmap to achieve the standard. From our recent office move, to our policies and processes, everything has been considered as part of our journey to become a Certified B Corp."

"We have reviewed everything from benefits and policies, to sustainability initiatives and supply chain," said Amelia Redge, Agency Director at Reech. "We are really proud to join the limited number of B Corps across the county and are grateful to our team for all their efforts. It's certainly not a finish line! We will continue to create brilliant work for our clients while knowing that we are part of a positive movement, making a positive contribution."

From breaking news to breaking ground

Construction work is under way on the site of the former Shropshire Star newspaper headquarters in Telford.

It marks the beginning of Morris Property's latest regeneration project that will bring a new 46,000 sq ft logistics warehouse and an Aldi retail store to the Ketley site.

Designed by architects PHD and Stoas, the two units will be built by Morris Property's construction team, and will incorporate car parking, provision for electric vehicle charging and landscaping.

It will bring employment opportunities to the site which has been vacant since 2022.

Morris Property's chief operating officer James West said: "We are thrilled to be under way on the Ketley Point development. This marks the start of an ambitious project that will bring this much-loved site back to life.

"Its prime location, within a mile of Junction 6 of the M54 motorway, is reflective of Morris Property's focus on unlocking sites in central hubs to create sustainable, well-connected commercial space to serve local businesses."

Paul Johnson, Morris Property's contracts manager, said: "As someone who has grown up in this area, it's especially exciting to be involved in a project that will have such a positive impact. It's a great feeling to be breaking ground on something that will benefit both businesses and residents alike."



Pictured on site at Ketley Point to mark the start of development work are, from left, Paul Johnson, construction manager Steve Flavell, head of development Liz Lowe, James West and site manager Mike Williams

The Ketley Point development is expected to be completed in phases over the next 12 months. Once fully developed, Morris Property says it will feature 'cutting-edge amenities, green spaces, and modern infrastructure'.

The Shropshire Star's then owners, Midland News Association, sold the 5.2 acre Ketley site in 2022 when it outsourced its newspaper printing and downsized its operation.

It had been home to a purpose-built printing press facility for more than 50 years, producing not only the Shropshire Star but also a series of weekly newspaper titles.

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Nomination was a wonderful surprise

A husband-and-wife farming team from Ellesmere have been nominated for a national award.

Clare and Ian Mainwaring from the Oteley Estate have been named as Community Farming Heroes by members of the local community.

The Oteley Estate – which overlooks The Mere – is a 2,000-acre mixed livestock and arable enterprise with Beef Shorthorn and Highland cattle, sheep and pigs, and 900 acres of combinable crops.

It is run by Ian and Clare with the support of Ian's father, Robert Mainwaring. It has remained in the same family since the 1500s.

Clare said: "It was an unexpected and wonderful surprise to receive our nomination. We are very grateful to our local community for their support, to the NFU for providing a platform for farmers and growers to receive recognition, and to our dedicated team for the help they have given us growing the business.

"Like most farmers, we care passionately about our land and community, and see the importance in sharing the produce that comes from our local landscape with the people who live here."

Ahead of the 10th annual Back British Farming Day, the NFU asked supporters to nominate local farmers and growers who provide a special service to the local community, to thank them for the work they do that goes beyond day-to-day farming.

The NFU said: "We asked the public to nominate their local 'Community Farming Hero' – from producing food that their local community loves to buy, taking care of and encouraging nature on their farm, or spending time teaching local children and opening up their farm."



View across The Mere at Oteley



Clare and Ian Mainwaring at a private event

The Oteley Estate has an on-site farm shop and café, selling homegrown beef, lamb and pork, alongside pies and meals, fresh produce, and a range of local food, drinks, and gifts.

The estate has undergone several reincarnations, from being a lavish country house to a hospital camp in the war. One of the most notable ancestors was Sir Francis Kynaston, who was acquainted with kings James I and Charles I.





The 2025 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Award winners

It's a bright future for county's businesses

Star apprentices and employers have been celebrated at the 2025 Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards.

The event returned after a successful debut last year, crowning 10 category winners plus an overall apprentice of the year for both Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

Agata Serafin, from Elite Precast Concrete, was named Telford & Wrekin Apprentice of the Year, having also won the Manufacturing & Engineering title.

Around 200 guests at the Mercure Telford Centre Hotel heard how she had always wanted to work within engineering and design, with colleagues saying her 'enthusiasm to learn and progress' was witnessed every day.

Agata has recently been helping with the design and development of a new electric vehicle charging block. She said the awards also helped to raise the profile and champion the roles that women can play in engineering.

Honor Davies, from SJ Roberts Construction at Marton, lifted the Shropshire Apprentice of the Year award after earlier winning the Construction & Civil Engineering title.

After developing an interest in architecture, Honor chose an apprenticeship which has allowed her to combine architecture, an apprenticeship and a university education.

Managers describe her as an invaluable member of the design team, whose attention to detail is exemplary. They say: "She is so much more than an apprentice, she is undoubtedly a bone fide member of the team."

It was a good night all round for SJ Roberts, which was also named large Apprentice Employer of the Year. The company is currently ranked 13th in the UK Government's list of top 20 SME apprentice employers, and best in the Midlands.

The medium-sized Apprentice Employer of the Year award went – for a second successive year – to Pave Aways of Knockin. The former Shropshire Company of the Year has been nurturing apprentices for over 50 years and has supported more than 70 people into careers in construction.

The prize for small Employer of the Year went to Shrewsbury-based IT and cyber security specialists Start-Tech. Guests were told how two of the company's seven apprentices have progressed into leadership roles.

The competition was organised and delivered by the independent media team behind Shropshire Business Live TV, which filmed the event for broadcast over the coming days.

It has been created to celebrate the brightest apprentices in the area, as well as recognising employers for their support of apprenticeship programmes.

This year's event was backed by some of the county's biggest and best names, led by headline sponsor Telford College, and the Marches Careers Hub.

Category sponsors included Keele University, WR Partners, In-Comm Training, J&PR, ANTA Education, Shrewsbury College, McPhillips, SBC Training, Pave Aways, and Purple Frog Systems.

Carl Jones, editor of Shropshire Business magazine who hosted the awards, said: "The quality and volume of entries once again surpassed expectations, and our panel of independent judges wanted to let finalists know how difficult their decisions had been.

"It's been another incredibly successful event, and we're looking forward to making it a regular fixture on the Shropshire business calendar.



Agata Serafin and Honor Davies, the Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire Apprentices of the Year



An audience of around 200 people attended this year's awards night

"We're incredibly grateful to everyone who has supported us and made this fantastic event possible once again."

There were tears of joy and huge cheers around the room as this year's winners were revealed.

Josh Howse from the Learning Community Trust won the IT and Digital Industries award.

He joined the Trust's central IT services team as an apprentice after a career change from working in recruitment.

His colleagues said: "Josh's dedication and passion is second to none, going out of his way to support all, making time to ensure everyone gets the chance to have dedicated support – and willing to work over to ensure a task is completed if he knew it would impact on teaching the next day."

She agreed, and one colleague said: "Summer is a ray of sunshine and brightens up every room she enters – I don't know how we would cope without her now."

Charlie-Mae Grimston, from Purple Frog Systems in Telford, was named Creative and Media Apprentice of the Year.

Colleagues described her as an exceptional multi-media marketing apprentice who has demonstrated outstanding dedication, creativity and impact.

She has been instrumental in managing event swag budgets across six international events over the globe: "She consistently delivers high quality work while continuing to expand her skill set by attending training and webinars," her employer said.

It was a case of second time lucky for Early Years and Education winner Tom Miles, from Castle House School in Newport, after he was a finalist in 2024.

Tom began his career in a completely different field before realising his creative talents and those of a caring nature would be better placed supporting and helping others.

His flair and creativity ensured fantastic learning opportunities for children, his bosses said, and he received a distinction in his end point assessment.

Guests heard about the impressive apprenticeship credentials of all three employer champions.

Apprenticeships are embedded in the DNA of IT and cyber security business Start-Tech. With a 25-strong team, including T-Level students, it has supported seven apprentices, all of whom are still with them today.

Two have progressed into leadership roles, and the audience heard how one of them was being mentored to become the company's next managing director.

Construction company Pave Aways has been nurturing apprentices for over 50 years and supported more than 70 people into careers in construction.

In the last 15 years alone, it has been committed to taking on at least three apprentices every year, and this year has taken on five – expanding into a broader range of roles across the business.

SJ Roberts has supported nearly 200 young people starting their careers in construction. It is currently ranked 13th on the UK Government's 2025 list of the Top 50 SME Apprenticeship Employers – highest in the West Midlands.

Later this year, it will launch an in-house training hub to support staff CPD, especially for those mentoring apprentices.

Lawrence Wood, principal and chief executive of headline sponsor Telford College, said he had been incredibly impressed by the commitment among employers to supporting apprenticeships since taking up his role just over a year ago. "Long may it continue," he said.

"It's a real privilege to sponsor this event and be able to present trophies to the overall winners. Having people like Agata and Honor winning this year proves what it takes to be an outstanding apprentice.

"These are people who work hard, are incredibly dedicated, and give it their all."

Headline sponsor

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BOOK OF THE NIGHT sponsored by STARTTECH CERTIFIED IT & CYBER EXPERTS

EVENT MEDIA sponsored by SBLTV



Steve Morris of category sponsor Keele University presents the Health and Social Care award to Keeley Martin



Agata Serafin is crowned Telford & Wrekin Apprentice of the Year by Lawrence Wood of Telford College



All smiles for Tom Miles after collecting the Early Years and Education Award from Laura Jones, of category sponsor WR Partners



Josh Howse from the Learning Community Trust received the IT and Digital Industries award from Alex Whittles of category sponsor Purple Frog Systems



Summer Craven of Dodd Group receives the Business Legal and Finance trophy from Colin Thaw of category sponsor SBC Training



Start Tech of Shrewsbury with Stuart Bishop from category sponsor McPhillips



Honor Davies with the Construction and Civil Engineering title, presented by Victoria Lawson of category sponsor Pave Aways



Agata Serafin receives the Manufacturing and Engineering trophy from Paul Hodgetts of category sponsor In-Comm Training



Back-to-back victories for Pave Aways, pictured with Craig Howard of category sponsor ANTA Education



Charlie-Mae Grimston receives the Creative and Media award from Rhea Alton and Kirsty Smallman of J&PR



Honor Davies receives her Shropshire Apprentice of the Year trophy from Lawrence Wood



Jules Rhodes of category sponsor Shrewsbury College with the victorious SJ Roberts team

2025 Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards

The winners, their employers and training providers

APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR (SHROPSHIRE)
Honor Davies (SJ Roberts Construction / University of Wolverhampton)

APPRENTICE OF THE YEAR (TELFORD & WREKIN)
Agata Serafin (Elite Precast Concrete / Telford College)

IT & DIGITAL
Josh Howse (Learning Community Trust / Telford College)

HEALTH & SOCIAL CARE
Keeley Martin (Coverage Care / SBC Training)

CONSTRUCTION & CIVIL ENGINEERING
Honor Davies (SJ Roberts Construction / University of Wolverhampton)

BUSINESS, LEGAL & FINANCE
Summer Craven (Dodd Group / Telford College)

CREATIVE & MEDIA
Charlie-Mae Grimston (Purple Frog Systems / Telford College)

MANUFACTURING & ENGINEERING
Agata Serafin (Elite Precast Concrete / Telford College)

EARLY YEARS & EDUCATION
Tom Miles (Castle House, Newport / Telford College)

SMALL EMPLOYER
Start-Tech, Shrewsbury

MEDIUM EMPLOYER
Pave Aways, Knockin

LARGE EMPLOYER
SJ Roberts Construction, Marton

- *Watch the highlights from this year's awards on the latest Shropshire Business Live TV show – follow SBLTV on YouTube.*

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A popular win for Honor Davies among her colleagues from SJ Roberts Construction at Marton



Carl Jones in conversation with Andriane Usherwood-Brown from the Marches Careers Hub



Housing Plus Group, a finalist for large employer of the year



Simon Badley, Alison Ashley, Josh Howse, Paul Jones from the Learning Community Trust



Charlie-Mae Grimston chats to SBLTV after collecting her award



Chris Pritchard and Paul Shuttleworth



Creative and Media finalist Ellie Hendley with colleague Zoe Lawson



Staff from Telford College, the event's headline sponsor



Snapping a souvenir picture



Carl Jones with Lawrence Wood and Sarah Davies from headline sponsor Telford College



Celebrations on the SJ Roberts table during the awards presentation



Kirsty Smallman and Rhea Alton of J&PR, sponsor of the Creative and Media award



Paul 'Shuttsie' Shuttleworth brought the night to a musical conclusion



Master of ceremonies Carl Jones introduces proceedings



iconsys of Telford was shortlisted for two awards



Lawrence Wood, principal and chief executive of Telford College



The delegation from the Marches Careers Hub



Purple Frog Systems was up for two awards

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EVENT MEDIA sponsored by SBLTV

Real-world relevance

Telford College's adult courses open up a world of possibilities for reskilling, upskilling, and career development.

Tailored specifically to fit around the lifestyles of more mature learners, many offer flexible schedules to fit around work, family, or other commitments.

The current programme includes mandatory training such as first aid… and the college is always keen to talk with employers about creating bespoke training to meet their needs.

Beckie Bosworth, Telford College's director of apprenticeships and employer engagement, said: "Adult education courses are a really powerful route to personal growth, career advancement, and economic resilience.

"In today's fast-changing job market, upskilling and reskilling are no longer optional – they're essential. Whether you're adapting to new technologies, shifting industries, or reigniting a long-held passion, adult learning offers flexible, targeted pathways to success.

"Our adult courses are designed with real-world relevance, helping learners build practical skills in areas like digital literacy, project management, healthcare, trades, and much more.

"And if you are looking to take your career in a different direction, reskilling can open doors to entirely new sectors – often with higher pay and better job security."

Oral health improvement practitioner Charlotte McNaughton is all smiles after completing a level three BTEC in education and teaching which she described as a 'valuable investment' giving her more skills, structure and confidence.

"I regularly deliver training to care staff, early years practitioners, wider workforce and other organisations, and wanted to develop and strengthen my teaching skills," she said.

"Since completing the course, I have more confidence delivering training sessions and approach them with structure. It made me more aware of how to make learning accessible through visual aids, different languages, or adopting the training format."



Charlotte McNaughton with her certificate

Some of Telford College's adult courses are fully-funded – subject to eligibility. For more details, take a look at the course listings at www.telfordcollege.ac.uk or contact the student support team at info@telfordcollege.ac.uk

- If you would like to know more about developing your teaching and training skills, and to find out about the next intake dates at Telford College, please email clinicaladmin@telfordcollege.ac.uk



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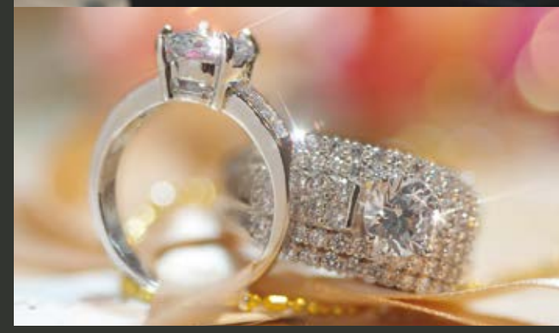
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Making tax digital: are you ready?



Helen Columb



Huge changes to self-assessment for sole traders and landlords are on the way. Helen Columb, owner of Turas Accountants, says now is the time to start getting ready for Making Tax Digital.

It's the most significant change to the Self-Assessment system in a generation and it's just a matter of months away.

And my bet is that you are woefully underprepared for it.

I'm talking about Making Tax Digital for Income Tax Self-Assessment (MTD for ITSA).

The new regime – which comes into effect in April 2026 for self-employed business people and landlords with a gross income of over £50,000 a year – requires them to keep digital records and submit quarterly updates to HMRC using compliant software.

That £50,000 figure is nothing to do with profits. It is about total turnover from self-employment or property before expenses. That means many who believe they are under the threshold may in fact be caught.

And the hope that the change may yet get delayed – as it has been in the past – is simply wishful thinking of the worst kind. It's coming, and it's coming soon.

Why the big change? Well, the taxman will tell you it's to modernise tax reporting, reduce errors and bring the system closer to real-time.

That's all well and good for them, but for you it means a fundamental shift in how you record, review and submit your financial information.

And I can tell you that waiting until 2026 to adapt is a recipe for stress, disruption and potentially costly mistakes.

So, here's some steps you should be taking right away:

1. Check your qualifying income

If the total exceeds £50,000 – whether through employment or as a landlord – you will be in scope from April 2026. If your income is between £30,000 and £50,000 you are getting 12 months' grace – but you will need to go digital by April 2027. If the figure is between £20,000 and £30,000 your time will come in April 2028.

2. Choose compliant software

Now is the perfect time to look at the different software available and choose the best one for your circumstances. We use Xero and find it does the job very well.

Things to think about include the way the software integrates with your bank, ease of use in the way it categorises transactions, and whether you'll be able to share access securely with your accountant.

3. Move to digital record-keeping early

If you currently use paper or spreadsheets, now's the time to start moving across to digital. Early adoption means you can get used to the new software, iron out any issues and get really comfortable with everything before the quarterly reporting clock starts ticking.

4. Understand quarterly reporting

You will need to submit income and expense summaries every three months, plus a final end-of-year declaration. There's no change to when your tax will be due, but there will be more regular reporting of your accounts. This will require a steady flow of accurate data, not a last-minute scramble.

5. Review your processes

Look at how you capture receipts, track mileage, record rental repairs or allocate costs between personal and business use. It's important to have accurate processes in place because small inefficiencies will be magnified under quarterly reporting.

6. Budget for compliance costs

Even with free software options for simpler cases, there may be costs for licences, training or additional bookkeeping support. Factor these into your financial planning now so that you are not caught out by any extra bills.

As part of all this, there's one person you really need to make your best friend for the next 18 months – and that's your accountant.

The shift to MTD is as much about process and judgement as it is about technology, and there are huge benefits to having a good, trusted accountant at your side throughout.

They will:

- Help you interpret the rules correctly, especially around what counts as qualifying income and allowable expenses
- Guide you in selecting and setting up software that fits your needs rather than forcing you into a one-size-fits-all solution
- Ensure your quarterly submissions are accurate, reducing the risk of penalties or HMRC queries
- Spot opportunities to improve cash flow, claim reliefs and plan for tax liabilities well ahead of deadlines
- Act as a sounding board when the rules or your circumstances change

The taxman is introducing MTD in phases to try to help sole traders make the change as smoothly as possible, but it's still going to be a steep learning curve for many.

That's where your accountant will truly earn their fee – so you want someone you can trust, who is professional and who knows what they are doing.

They will help bridge the gap between the legislation and the way you actually work, making sure that the legal requirements are translated into workable routines.

By acting now, you can spread the transition over the next 18 months, avoid the bottleneck of last-minute adoption and enter April 2026 with confidence.

MTD is not just a compliance exercise. It is an opportunity to bring greater clarity, discipline and foresight to your finances.

The sooner you start, the smoother the journey will be.

Helen Columb is director of Turas Accountants in Telford

Distressing time for businesses

County	2024Q2	2024Q3	2024Q4	2025Q1	2025Q2	2025Q3	YoY
Derbyshire	5,094	5,335	5,616	4,814	5,261	5,694	6.7%
Herefordshire	1,574	1,648	1,833	1,628	1,818	2,020	22.6%
Leicestershire	8,843	9,002	9,564	8,678	10,021	10,649	18.3%
Northamptonshire	5,719	5,964	6,345	5,475	6,374	6,776	13.6%
Nottinghamshire	8,404	8,476	9,261	8,094	8,981	9,670	14.1%
Shropshire	3,672	3,784	4,346	3,591	3,764	4,369	15.5%
Staffordshire	3,819	3,792	4,096	3,657	4,015	4,333	14.3%
West Midlands	35,302	36,313	37,862	32,426	37,898	39,669	9.2%
Worcestershire	2,717	2,588	2,941	2,422	2,715	2,895	11.9%
Telford and Wrekin	1,119	1,106	1,167	1,019	1,088	1,275	15.3%
Shrewsbury	432	463	572	492	521	594	28.3%
Oswestry	120	124	140	116	130	174	40.3%
Bridgnorth	220	237	272	206	234	108	-2.7%
Ludlow	118	111	133	96	104	227	-4.2%

The number of Shropshire businesses experiencing 'significant' distress has increased by more than 15% over the past year, according to the latest figures from Begbies Traynor's 'Red Flag Alert', which monitors the financial health of UK companies.

There are now a total of 4,369 businesses across the county experiencing difficulties, the survey reveals.

There were sharp annual rises in 'significant' distress in Shrewsbury (+28%), Oswestry (+40%) and Telford and Wrekin (+15%). However, year on year numbers fell in Bridgnorth (-4%). and Ludlow (-3%).

Hardest hit industries across Shropshire were property, construction and support services.

Nationally, the latest Red Flag Alert research for the third quarter of this year recorded 726,594 businesses in significant distress – a 14.8% increase on the same time last year.

Nick West, partner at Begbies Traynor, said: "Businesses are looking for certainty after a turbulent and unpredictable year. With financial distress rising across the county, this will especially be felt by firms in Shropshire.

"In times of uncertainty, it is vital for business leaders to take stock and review their past, present and future income streams. Shropshire businesses have demonstrated remarkable resilience in a challenging economic climate, but we may see more companies coming under strain and facing difficult decisions in the months ahead.

"However, periods of change can present opportunities. Strong, well-positioned businesses have the chance to strengthen or diversify by acquiring or rescuing struggling but viable firms, helping to preserve jobs, skills and ideas across the region. The coming month will be crucial."



Cold Chain Federation's annual 'Cold Chain Live' event

Insight and innovation

Senior figures from the cold chain industry gathered at Telford International Centre for the Cold Chain Federation's annual 'Cold Chain Live' event. Organisers described it as the best yet, serving up two days 'packed with insight, innovation, and collaboration'. They said it had once again highlighted the strength and ambition of the industry. Flying the flag for Shropshire was Telford-based Seymour Manufacturing International (SMI), which showcased its range of energy and money-saving thermal insulation products for the logistics, retail, pharmaceutical and agricultural sectors.

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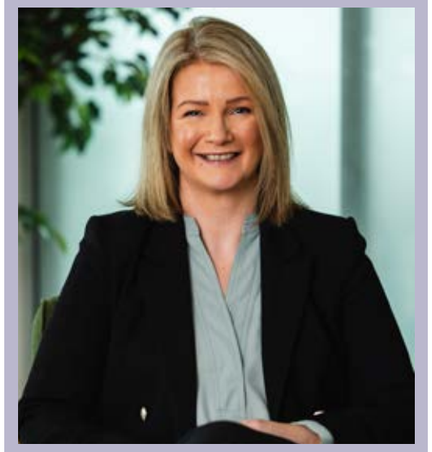
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Exceptional contribution



Sarah Davies of WR Partners

WR Partners – the accountancy and business advice firm with its headquarters in Shrewsbury – has appointed a new partner.

Sarah Davies, who specialises in inheritance tax, trusts and the dynamics of multi-generational clients, has been with the business since 1998, building a career dedicated to landed estates.

The company said the promotion was a recognition of her 'exceptional contribution' and 'outstanding leadership' skills.

She said: "I feel very proud to be stepping into the role of partner. I have been fortunate to spend my career working with inspiring clients and colleagues.

"I look forward to continuing to support our Estates clients in planning for the future, while also helping to develop the next generation of our team."

Helen Spencer, managing partner at WR Partners, said: "Sarah's promotion is a reflection of her respected career, her expertise and her commitment to clients.

"She has shown outstanding leadership within the Estates team, combining technical skill with genuine care for people. This is an important step not just for Sarah, but for the continued strength of our Estates and Rural Services."

Before returning to the Estates team, Sarah also spent time leading the training and development function at WR Partners.



Ruth Westwood with David Brown at Stadium Point

Welcome to Shropshire

Invest In Shropshire officials visited the soon-to-be new UK headquarters for global company Börger UK Limited on Stadium Point Business Park in Shrewsbury.

Client account manager Ruth Westwood met up with the company's managing director David Brown on the site, next to Shrewsbury Town FC's stadium.

The pump manufacturing company is moving to Shropshire from Staffordshire and David outlined his plans for the new 9,000 sq ft-plus building which will be the company's new home from 2026.

"Relocating from Staffordshire is a big step, but one that supports our ongoing growth," he said.

"The quality of the build, the location, and the long-term potential of the site made this an easy decision. We're proud to become part of the Shropshire business community."

Agents marketing the site say Stadium Point Business Park has attracted strong interest from a range of industrial and commercial occupiers.

Built across three zones, the site includes trade counters, offices, food retail and warehouse distribution spaces.

Commercial agents and the Shropshire business community gathered on site for the opening of the first four completed office buildings on zone one and to hear a talk by international Rugby Union referee Nigel Owens.

Morris Property's head of development Liz Lowe said: "As well as being a great networking opportunity, it allowed agents and the wider business community to see for themselves the kind of environment and sustainable units we are creating here.

> Agents marketing the site say Stadium Point Business Park has attracted strong interest from a range of industrial and commercial occupiers

"This was about showcasing the look and feel of the office buildings we intend to develop, with bright, spacious, high spec finishes and seeing this unit's prominent position at the entrance to the park – as well as enjoying the fascinating talk from Nigel."



New board members are sought by Shropshire Chamber of Commerce

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce is looking to broaden the professional expertise on its board of directors by appointing new members.

A number of current directors will be stepping down when their terms come to an end later this year – presenting a perfect opportunity to bring in new faces.

Chief executive Ruth Ross said: "With a strong senior leadership team now in place and operational management firmly embedded, we are redefining the role of the board to focus purely on strategic direction, oversight, and governance.

"We are now inviting applications from local business people who are keen to help shape the future of the Chamber, drawing on their professional experience, sector knowledge, and commitment to Shropshire's economic and business ecosystem."

The Chamber board, which meets quarterly, is responsible for providing strategic oversight and governance to the organisation, ensuring its financial sustainability and effectiveness.

Board members are not expected to get involved in the operational delivery of Chamber services. The overall annual time commitment for these voluntary posts is around five days a year.

Ruth said: "We are seeking applicants who can bring a diverse range of skills, experiences and backgrounds across all sectors and sizes of businesses in Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.



The Shropshire Chamber of Commerce leadership team, from left, Sue Nichols, Nicola Clinton, Ruth Ross, Jenny Pearson, and Kelly Riedel

"We are particularly keen to hear from people with specialist skills in area such as financial management and commercial strategy, entrepreneurship and business growth, international trade, sustainability, digital transformation and AI.

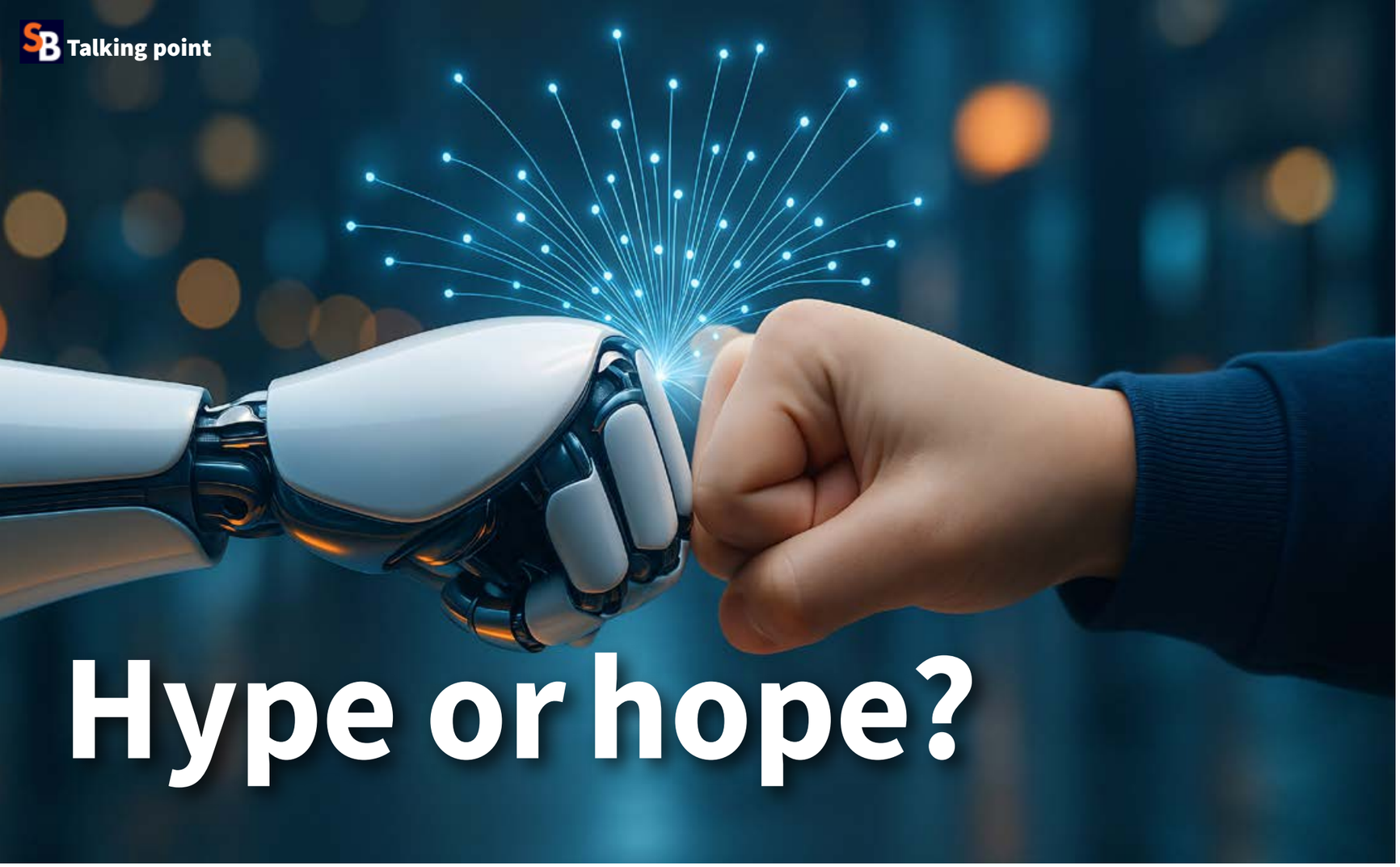
"Board members need to be able to motivate and influence the Chamber's senior leadership team, and have strong strategic thinking and decision-making capabilities.

"Becoming a Shropshire Chamber board member provides a platform to influence local business policy and support economic growth, and is a chance to give back to the business community.

"Working together, the board and the Chamber team can shape a stronger, more inclusive, and better-connected Shropshire business community – for the benefit of everyone."

Applicants need to be connected with a business which has been a member of Shropshire Chamber for at least two years. For an informal conversation about the role, contact Liz Keirle in the Chamber's executive office: l.keirle@shropshire-chamber.co.uk





Hype or hope?



Dr CHRIS MEAH assesses attitudes to artificial intelligence and ponders the strategic decisions it is persuading businesses to make

There's this thing called AI – maybe you've heard of it?

Since late 2022, with the launch of ChatGPT, the growth in interest has become AI mania. "Artificial" and "intelligence" are the new Posh and Becks, it seems – I'll let you choose which is which.

There's just one slight problem: companies are making strategic decisions about AI when most people still don't know what it actually is. It's like you're at a party, talking to someone for a while, and you realise you don't know their name. It's too late to ask.

You then find out that no one knows their name. Everyone is just nodding along, calling them "mate", with no clue what their name actually is.

That's current AI in a nutshell. It's fine for parties, but not business strategies. Boards are demanding an AI plan. Customers expected "AI powered" features yesterday. Your team swings between "Have you ChatGPT'd it?" and AI fuelled nightmares.

Committing to an AI strategy without understanding it is like marrying the party guest whose name you never asked – and AI providers don't have a pre-nup in their Terms and Conditions.

The advice I give to leaders and organisations is to get literate in what AI is, ask what it can do for you, and think where it might be going.

For practical purposes, treat the current state of AI as: software that predicts and generates language (and other patterns) from examples. That turns out to be incredibly powerful!

Predicting the next word in a sentence unlocks lots of useful opportunities.

But, there's no Wizard of Oz behind the curtain; that is all that's happening.

We could dive deeper into understanding, but let's examine what it enables us to do.

What you can do now (that actually helps)

Today, most online meetings have an AI assistant that can automatically record, transcribe, summarise, and even extract and assign actions from the conversation. Magical!

You can also use those same tools offline. In face-to-face meetings, you can open your Zoom, Notion, or most other meeting apps on your phone and record the meeting in the same way. You can meet in person, but have all the automated diligence of your online workflow.

But we can make AI an active participant. You have a board meeting. You decide on an exciting new direction. Everyone is ecstatic. They're high-fiving. Could AI be the "sceptical 10th person"? If "9 out of 10 people agree", what would the 10th person say? AI could digest the conversation, extract information from across your company, and give three reasons why the direction might fail. That raises decision quality, robustness and speed now – no need to wait for AI improvements or sci-fi futures.

What you can't do now (without a lot of pain)

There's much talk about the end of software development and AI agents writing all the code. "Vibe coding" is trending. But like the Pokémon cards, pogs, and pet rocks that came before, the craze has narrow and limited uses.

If you want some intuition for the current limitations, consider this: the technology we use for producing words (in things like ChatGPT) can also be used to predict the weather.

If you want to predict today's weather, it's likely to be highly accurate! Tomorrow's too. What about the weather next month? Next year? Thirty years from now?

You intuitively know that the further out you have to predict the weather, the less likely you are to get an accurate forecast. We can forecast later today, and then use that to forecast tomorrow, but as you chain these predictions together, you will drift further from reality. In 30 years, there are so many factors that you will be assuming incorrectly that the prediction will be gibberish – a shot in the dark.

That's what happens with AI coding (and most complex AI tasks) right now. For a simple task, it is excellent! You can knock up a complete and rapid prototype easily – that has incredible value if harnessed properly. However, solving a complex problem with a maintainable system requires a coherent thought process – something that our current AI doesn't have. Instead, for now, AI in these complex scenarios can augment human capacity, but cannot replace it entirely.



McDonalds can provide you with 80 per cent of a good meal. Michelin star restaurants closer to 100 per cent. Are you an 80 per cent person when it comes to output, or will only 100 per cent satisfy?

How to evaluate (the messy 80%)

My rule of thumb: AI gets you 80% there – but the path to 100% finished product isn't a straight line. You'll revisit messy ground because AI will have done things in a way you cannot always understand.

It's like if you were aiming for a 100-floor skyscraper, AI would build to floor 80 but use jelly instead of cement.

Where is 80% good enough?

So, is it game over for AI at this point? No. It's incredible. In generative AI and large language models, we've created a way to communicate fluently with computers in plain language. That is amazing, and makes this AI revolution the most accessible in history. If you can use language, you can interact with these systems.

But you need to know how and where to use it. Ask yourself, "Where is 80% good enough?" There's definitely a place, whether you'd like to admit it or not.

Take food. Michelin star restaurants are the pinnacle – 100% food. Then there's McDonald's. It feeds many more people, with 1,270 locations in the UK versus 188 Michelin-starred venues, usually with queues around the corner of any drive-through. I'd call it 80% food.

Is there some 'McDonaldsification' you can bring to areas of your business, so that you can free your team up to work on what needs to be Michelin Star quality? Look for places where your people don't enjoy things, where you need to achieve at a large scale, or where you don't currently add value but could with the help of AI.

AI moves at a rapid pace. Do you have to keep up with every development? It's impossible – the pace of change is too high to keep track of all the thousands of shiny new AI-empowered apps that come out each week. The solution is to ask: do you have to be the hare, or can you be the tortoise?

Where you can, pick one general tool and use it. These include offerings from OpenAI with ChatGPT, Anthropic with Claude, Google with Gemini, and X with Grok. These models will do most jobs well enough, and you won't need to keep switching. If you can afford to wait around six months, these general models will likely absorb today's specific tools' niche features. If you can, be a tortoise.

If you can't wait — because the capability is core to your competitive advantage — be a hare. Try the specialist tools, benchmark them all, pick a winner, and stay updated so you can keep at the fast-moving frontier. But you can only sprint in two or three directions before you spin yourself silly, so limit it to what drives your specific advantage.

The key is whether you're the tortoise or the hare, you're still in the race. You want to build a culture of using and experimenting with AI now, and move forward. As the tools improve, you'll be running and ready to adopt, rather than standing on the starting blocks.

AI can feel scary to many people. Let's be clear – without team buy-in, any AI attempts are destined to fail! There is no other way to make this work long-term. Many companies have been short-sighted in laying off staff they don't think they will need, and they may well pay the financial and reputational price in the future.

How do you get team buy-in? Show them the value: both theirs and AIs.

You have to get past identifying with job roles – if people do that, then any automation of that role is a threat. Instead, you value people because they know the culture, they have the relationships, and they have your trust. ▶

If they can automate some of their tasks, then great! You can support them in doing more for the company in other ways. They have to understand the good on the other side. Show you value them, have clear communication, and reward the right behaviours.

Then, have people see the benefits of AI. Remember Marie Kondo? Lay out all your tasks, see what sparks joy or value, and keep it. Automate the rest with AI, or delete the non-valuable tasks. AI will help your people focus and be more effective in what they enjoy and add the most value to.

AI can help you in many ways, but focus on two: what can AI help you do quicker, easier, or cheaper?

What can AI help you do that you could never do before, or do in a new way?

Where might it go? (and where faith kicks in)

Will AI handle complex, multi-step work end-to-end? Possibly.

The intoxicating promise is that with more data and computer power, we get more intelligence. But, at the moment, there are three dots on a whiteboard, and we're leaping to "everyone can see that dog I've drawn, right?"

The bridge from today's systems to general intelligence includes a leap of faith.

Near term progress is more likely to be very practical: tools that call tools (APIs or MCPs), richer memory with your internal data, and multiple specialised 'agents' collaborating under human supervision.

That's plenty to transform operations without waiting for the marketing hype and AGI promises to become reality.

What might change (and what it rewards)

- Revenue per employee becomes the quality metric

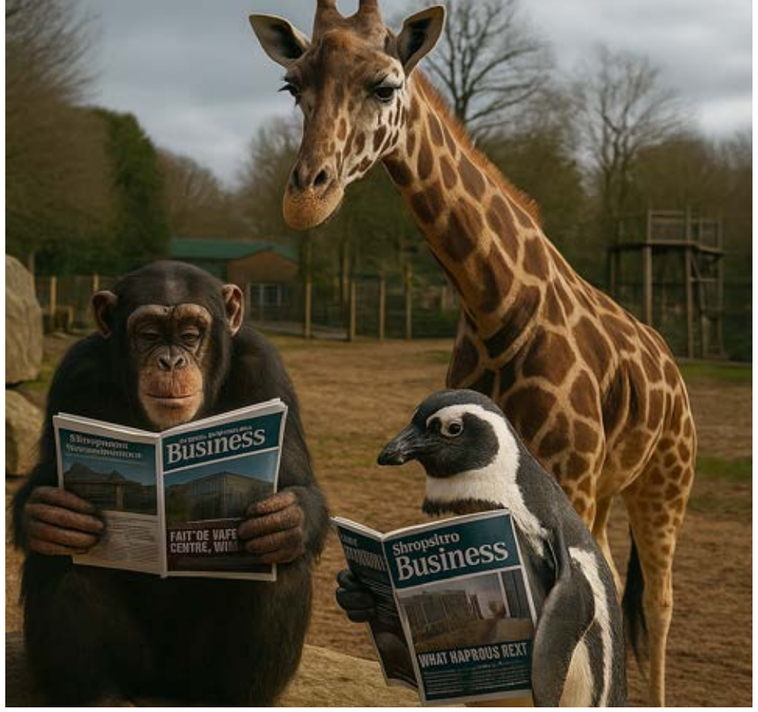
  Revenue alone won't be the focus. Consider which business you would prefer to own or invest in: £100 million revenue with 10,000 employees is £10,000 per employee. £25 million with 100 employees is £250,000 per employee – 25 times the leverage. AI pushes firms to ask: how much value can each person create with the right tools, data, and environment? Revenue per employee will be the standard metric.

- Culture shifts from activity to outcomes

  To embrace the opportunity, you need a strong culture to be an asset in your business. Let's describe an asset as something that, if you went travelling the world for six months, would still be there delivering value when you return. If your culture relies on you, it's not an asset. It depends on your continued presence, time and effort. You need to build a sustainable culture which prioritises learning, focuses on experimentation, and measures progress in outcomes.

- What stays the same (the non negotiables)

  What stays the same? I run AI Retreats for CEOs and leaders. We explore AI from top to bottom: what it is, what it means, where it's going. All of that is important, but we always tie everything back to the company's vision. If you had a magic wand and anything was possible, what would your company do? How would it solve problems for customers? What would the team and operations look like? Where would people spend their time? Having a clear and compelling vision makes AI decisions easy – does it help us towards the vision? Yes? Experiment away. No? It's a distraction.



AI can create you an image of zoo animals reading copies of Shropshire Business magazine in a matter of seconds. Well, of a fashion, but what is its real potential?



Dr Chris Meah believes AI will get better, but it is important to keep an open mind

Audience and distribution

In a world where anyone can make anything, the key is distribution. An audience that trusts you is the advantage. 'Influencers' and content creators get this (and it's often all they need).

AI will increasingly squash the distance between idea and execution, and if creation is easy then the audience is king! You cater to them, and they reward you with trust. A group of people who trust you will choose to buy from you. Creation is being commoditised; trust and access are power.

Final word

AI is powerful. It will get better.

However, there is a lot of hype to dodge, and a lot of uncertainty lies ahead.

Keep an open mind, get value from the tools we have now, and build a culture that can thrive in uncertainty.



Dr Julia Buckley with Shrewsbury College staff and students on the Supported Internship programme

Futures through supported internships

Shrewsbury College had the pleasure of welcoming local MP Dr Julia Buckley to the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital, where the college's DFN Project SEARCH Supported Internship programme is proudly delivered.

The visit focused on the continued development of the Supported Internship course and explored the real challenges faced by young people with additional learning needs as they transition into employment.

Discussions also highlighted the transformative impact that Supported Internships can have — opening doors to independence, confidence, and sustainable careers.

During her visit, Dr Buckley spent time engaging with several of our Interns, showing genuine warmth, kindness, and interest in their personal journeys.

She joined the group in a seed-planting activity, representing how, with the right nurturing and support, young people can grow and flourish both personally and professionally.

Supported internships are structured work-based learning programmes designed for young people aged 16 to 24 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), particularly those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

The internships aim to help participants gain the skills, experience, and confidence needed to move into paid employment.

Unlike traditional internships, supported internships are tailored to individual needs. A key feature is the presence of a job coach, who provides on-site support to help the intern learn tasks, adapt to the work environment, and gradually become more independent.



Dr Buckley spent time engaging with several of the college's interns

Shrewsbury College's Supported Internship programme is more than just a course with work experience — it represents a deep commitment to inclusion, empowerment, and building brighter futures for young people with additional needs.

The college says: "A heartfelt thank you goes to Dr Buckley for her time, encouragement, and dedication to making a difference within the Shrewsbury community."

- If you know someone with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) who may benefit from this life-changing opportunity, please contact Shrewsbury College's admissions team or email lauraj@shrewsbury.ac.uk for more information.

About the college . . .

Shrewsbury College was formed following the merger of Shrewsbury Sixth Form College and Shrewsbury College in August 2016 – it was renamed in September 2025 from Shrewsbury Colleges Group.

The college is the largest sixth form college in the country. It provides post-16 education to approximately 4,200 16- to 18-year-old students and offers adult education, higher education, community learning, and apprenticeship training. In total, the college works with around 9,000 students each year.

Ofsted inspected the college between 4 and 7 March 2025 with a team of 13 inspectors. The college was graded as 'Outstanding' for Overall Effectiveness, with 'Outstanding' grades for Quality of Education, Behaviour and Attitudes, Personal Development, Leadership and Management, Education Programmes for Young People, Adult Learning Programmes, and Provision for Learners with High Needs, and rated Good for Apprenticeships.

The college was previously inspected in November 2021 when Ofsted awarded the college a 'Good' rating with an 'Outstanding' rating for Behaviour and Attitudes.



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£99,600 grant for a Hive of activity

The Hive – a Shrewsbury-based charity dedicated to using creativity to support young people – has secured a £99,600 grant over two years from The National Lottery Community Fund, Reaching Communities grant.

The cash is described as a 'turning point' for the organisation, and will provide a vital investment to not only help safeguard essential services for young people in the county, but also strengthen the foundations for long-term, systemic change.

"This funding means so much more than keeping our doors open," said Katie Jennings, The Hive chief executive.

"It's about laying the groundwork for a future where young people's voices lead, where creativity connects us, and where no-one is left behind.

"We are proud of what we've achieved so far, but the need for The Hive's services is growing – and now, with the help of this Reaching Communities funding, we can meet it head-on."

Expansion sees 14 promotions



Hugh Strickland, who heads up the Shrewsbury office, and Nick Clarke with newly-promoted Jennifer Gibson, Natalie Antenbring and Zoe Lloyd

Law firm Aaron & Partners has strengthened its senior team with 14 solicitor promotions as its expansion continues.

Among those promoted are five lawyers from its Shrewsbury office, including two elevated to partner level: Jennifer Gibson from the employment team and Zoe Lloyd from corporate and commercial.

Jennifer joined as an associate in 2022, and has developed a strong reputation for advising both employers and employees on complex legal matters in the Shropshire area.

Zoe trained with Aaron & Partners, qualifying as a solicitor in 2017. Promoted to senior associate in 2023, she prides herself on providing advice on complex commercial issues, often involving an international element.

Additionally, dispute resolution solicitor Natalie Antenbring and family solicitor Katie Hughes-Beddows have been promoted to senior associate, while wills, trusts and tax solicitor Rebecca Estry has been promoted to associate.

Nick Clarke, senior partner at Aaron & Partners, said: "These promotions are a reflection not just of individual achievement, but also of the commitment our people show to clients every day.

"We're continuing to invest in building a strong, diverse team across all of our offices, and I know these newly-promoted colleagues will play a key role in helping clients achieve the best possible outcomes.

"As we grow, we're committed to recognising and nurturing talent from within – these promotions are just one step in an exciting journey ahead for both our people and our clients."

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Referee kicks off first viewing of contemporary new offices at Stadium Point, Shrewsbury

Commercial agents and the business community gathered at Morris Property's Stadium Point Business Park for the opening of its first completed office building last month and to hear an inspirational talk by international Rugby Union Referee Nigel Owens.

Guests arrived to enjoy a gastro breakfast courtesy of Wild Street Kitchen before watching Nigel Owens cut the ribbon on the 4,960 ft² office and subsequently entertain them with a fascinating insight into his life as a world class rugby referee.

With its sleek contemporary design, plenty of natural light and a flexible floorplate, the offices are the first of four buildings to be constructed at Stadium Point. Unit 11 is designed with sustainability in mind: from floor to ceiling glazing, sensor-controlled LED lighting, PV Solar panels and EV charging with its own a self-contained car park. Sole agent for the site, Toby Shaw from TSR, reported feedback from Stadium Point's new occupiers reinforces that the flexibility of the high-quality units and its great location are proving a winning combination for connectivity in and around Shrewsbury.



Nigel Owens (left) with Chris Morris, Liz Lowe and Toby Shaw







A cautionary tale in the making. . .



Ishbel Lapper

I can't think of anything in recent times that's caused quite so much chaos, confusion and genuine frustration among employers as the Government's Employment Rights Bill.

Let's be honest – it's a muddle.

In its current form, it's not helping businesses, it's not helping workers and it's certainly not helping the country move forward.

Before I get into why, let's rewind a bit.

The Bill was very much the passion project of Angela Rayner, the former Deputy Prime Minister. She pitched it as a landmark reform to modernise workplace protections across the UK – and on paper, it's sweeping.

We're talking day-one rights for unfair dismissal, paternity, parental, SSP and bereavement leave, a ban on zero-hours contracts, tighter rules on fire-and-rehire, stronger union protections, and new safeguards around flexible working, whistleblowing and fair pay agreements.

Now, I'm all for protecting people at work – that's the heart of what I do. But the way this Bill has been handled? It's left employers in a fog of uncertainty, and that's not good for anyone.

The removal of the two-year qualifying period for unfair dismissal means that from day one, every new hire carries legal risk.

Businesses used to have time to assess cultural fit, performance, and potential. Now, they're staring down the barrel of tribunal claims before someone's even settled in. Add in the restrictions on fire-and-rehire and zero-hours contracts, and you've got a cocktail of obligations that many employers feel will choke flexibility, especially in sectors that rely on seasonal or project-based staff.

And here's the kicker: if businesses hesitate to recruit because they're worried about being locked into costly disputes, it's the workers who lose out. Rights on paper are one thing, but if there are fewer jobs going, those rights don't mean much.

To make matters worse, the implementation has been staggered and unclear. Some parts of the Bill won't come into force until 2026 or 2027, and key details – such as how probation periods will work – are still under consultation. That stop-start approach makes it impossible for employers to plan with confidence and leaves workers unsure of when their new rights will actually apply.

Then there's the political backdrop. Angela Rayner was the driving force behind this Bill and her departure has sparked rumours that it'll be watered down or reshaped entirely.

And just when we thought we'd seen it all, the Government threw in the curveball of identity cards being linked to employment rights – a move that's raised eyebrows across the board. For employers, it's another layer of admin and compliance. For workers, it feels intrusive and undermines the very empowerment the Bill was meant to deliver.

So yes, it's little wonder the Bill has become a lightning rod for criticism. What started as a bold attempt to reshape the world of work now risks becoming a cautionary tale – not just about legislation, but about how we communicate, consult and collaborate when it comes to people's livelihoods.

As someone who works closely with both employers and employees, I can tell you: clarity, fairness, and trust are everything.

And right now, this Bill is falling short on all three.

Ishbel Lapper run HR Solutions Shropshire, based in Telford

End of part one for cinema renovations

The second phase of a renovation project at a Shropshire community cinema has reached the halfway point, with significant progress made to redevelop the historic building.

The upper floors of the Wellington Orbit are being brought back into active use to create adaptable, inclusive spaces for the community.

The works mark a significant step forward in realising a long-term vision to enhance facilities and deliver greater value to the local community in a project which is set to be completed in 2026.

Local contractor Pave Aways is delivering the project, and Telford & Wrekin Council's Building Innovation Telford is managing the delivery.

This project builds on a decade-long journey for Wellington Orbit that began in 2012, culminating in the opening of phase one of the project – a 63-seat ground floor cinema and cafe in 2019.

In 2023, Telford & Wrekin Council successfully secured £9.8 million of Government funding – some of which was from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund – to invest in key assets that are essential to Wellington's cultural, retail and leisure economy, and one of these is Wellington Orbit.

The additional Government funding enabled the purchase of the former bank and is funding the restoration of the remainder of the building.

Some of the most significant progress over the past couple of months includes roof repairs and new windows. The building required significant roof refurbishment to replace decayed timber and now has a stabilised and reinforced roof structure.

Inside, structural changes continue to develop including first-floor partitions, ceilings, electrical/mechanical installations, and toilet blocks, stairways and the boardroom are all starting to take shape.

Goaaaalll! for Shoothill



Mike Davis of Shoothill with the Foundation team

Shrewsbury Town Foundation has announced Shoothill as its official IT partner.

It builds on Shoothill's existing collaboration with Shrewsbury Town Football Club, and aims to help the Foundation to deliver impactful programmes in education, employability, health, inclusion, and sport.

Shoothill will provide IT services including connectivity, cyber security and managed IT, ensuring the Foundation has the tools it needs to deliver with confidence.

Simon Jeavons, group managing director at Shoothill, said: "The work they do in the community is so important, and we're proud to play a role in helping them achieve their goals."

Shin Aujla, Foundation director, said: "It's so great to have a local partner on hand to help us with whatever we need."

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* Placements must start by March 2026.



The first Bathing in Business session at Frankly Farm Tours



Fran Ash, John and Natalie Franklin-Hackett and Jeffrey the Llama

Networking with a difference

A new networking group offering 'something a little different' has been launched by a well-known face on the Shropshire business scene.

Bathing in Business aims to offer a more relaxed approach to networking for smaller businesses or those who may be overwhelmed by a larger crowd.

The initiative is the brainchild of Fran Ash who is the business development manager at Ash Plumbing & Bathrooms in Telford. Fran has been a regular attendee at various networking groups across the region.

More than 30 people attended the first Bathing in Business session at Frankly Farm Tours, in collaboration with owners John and Natalie Franklin-Hackett.

Fran said she had been thinking about creating something different for many years and she is delighted that her vision is now a reality.

"Bathing in Business is a more relaxed, inclusive event bringing together small business owners from all walks of life. It's about celebrating community, connection, and creating a safe space where small businesses can be themselves with no pressure to hard sell or pitch.

"The group consisting of a diverse mix of small businesses from across Shropshire took part in open conversations over coffee and cake. We swapped stories, shared advice, and built connections in a relaxed, informal setting.

"Hearing business owners chat so openly about the highs, the lows, and everything in between reminded me exactly why I wanted to create this space. It wasn't about corporate networking or the hard sell, it was about real people, real conversations, and building each other up.

"I also knew I wanted the venue to be a break from the norm – somewhere that reflected the relaxed and refreshing feel of the event.

"That's why I approached Frankly Farm, set in the heart of the Shropshire countryside, as it offered the perfect backdrop for something a little different.

"I'm so proud of how our first Bathing in Business event turned out. It started as just an idea I had a year ago, and to see it come to life as a sell-out event was incredible.

"The positive feedback has been overwhelming and has shown me just how needed this kind of group is in Shropshire."

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WREKIN SENIOR 11-16
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Saturday 24th January 2026
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LOVE THE JOURNEY



Event speaker announced

The founder of a Shropshire company specialising in providing expert support for adults and children with serious injuries will be one of the guest speakers at a major event taking place in the county in March.

A variety of speakers are being lined up by organisers Lanyon Bowdler for the Innovation After Injury conference at Theatre Severn in Shrewsbury on March 4, and tickets can be booked for the event now.

The conference promises to be an inspirational day for anyone affected by serious injury, particularly spinal or brain injuries, and those working in the professional field.

One of the speakers will be Jenny Whittall who founded Telford-based Jennifer M Whittall Ltd in 2009 – a company dedicated to supporting people recovering from spinal cord injury, traumatic brain injury, medical negligence, orthopaedics, amputation, and multiple disabilities.

Dawn Humphries, head of the personal injury team at Lanyon Bowdler, said: "Plans for our big event in March are now well advanced and we are delighted with the extensive list of speakers who have agreed to be with us on the day.

"Jenny Whittall is a qualified physiotherapist with a professional career spanning over four decades and since



Jenny Whittall will be among the speakers at the event in March

qualifying in 1982, she has built a wealth of experience across both the NHS and private sectors, gaining extensive expertise in clinical practice and healthcare management.

"She is also a highly-respected expert witness, having prepared more than 500 reports for both claimant and defendant solicitors, including joint instructions, covering areas such as physiotherapy, care needs, immediate needs assessments, and equipment recommendations."

Dr David Lee, a chartered psychologist and chartered scientist will be another speaker on the day. David is the full-time clinical director at Sleep Unlimited – a company specialising in the delivery of training of psychobehavioural treatment strategies for insomnia.

In addition, Francesca Bingley – a rehabilitation coach – will be outlining the work she is involved in as a member of the team at Breathe and Recover which is an organisation dedicated to bridging the gap between body, mind, and spirit through the transformative power of breathwork, yoga, meditation, and mind-body integration.

Dawn said: "Speakers at the conference will cover a variety of subjects and turn the spotlight on a range of incredible people who have battled back from serious injuries, along with professionals working in catastrophic injury rehabilitation."

Tickets for the Innovation After Injury conference are available by visiting the Lanyon Bowdler website at www.lblaw.co.uk/about-us/events or by emailing marketing@lblaw.co.uk

- Lanyon Bowdler has retained its top tier ranking in two categories in the latest edition of the "industry bible", Legal 500. The firm has been recommended in 13 practice areas of the guide with tier-one recognition once again awarded in the legal fields of clinical negligence and agriculture and estates. It has 17 recommended lawyers in the guide, eight leading partners, five next generation partners and three leading associates.







Don't miss the call this festive season:

Add a sprinkling of joy to your holiday message

Amanda Stevens





Planning on being away from the office this Christmas? Why not leave a festive message for callers?

Businesses everywhere are gearing up for one of the busiest times of the year. Parties are being planned, the decorations are being dug out, and calendars are being filled with all the jobs that need doing before the festive break.

During this hectic period things can easily get overlooked. So, while everyone is struggling to find their secret Santa gifts and arguing about who is working when during the last couple of weeks in December, don't forget one of the most important jobs of all – planning the Christmas message.

Why a Christmas Message?

It is an excellent way to communicate important changes in opening hours, service requests and emergency out of hours details. A joyful festive greeting shows customers, and potential customers that your business embraces the festive season while still delivering an excellent customer experience. A seasonal greeting thanking customers for their loyalty, makes customers feel appreciated and adds a personal touch of warmth to a company brand.

Creating the Perfect Christmas Message

Keep it simple. A clear short Christmas message will be listened to and remembered. It should be no more than 30 seconds long with a voice and message that matches your Company brand. You could even incorporate some festive music too. Make sure the information contained within your message is accurate and ensure it is removed straight after the holiday period.

Planning your Christmas telephone message goes beyond spreading good will and season's greetings—it's a communication opportunity.

Done correctly it can improve customer service, streamline operations, open doors for seasonal sales, and reinforce your brand's commitment to clear, effective communication. With a thoughtful approach, every call becomes a moment of connection, ensuring your customers feel valued throughout the festive season.

Why Choose Connexis?

Whether you are planning to close completely for the festive period, or operating on a reduced number of staff, we can assist you with creating the perfect Christmas message, helping you and your team to enjoy a stress-free holiday season.

Create professional and memorable caller experiences with Connexis Studio. Professional welcome greetings, auto-attendants, IVR, and custom call menu recordings infused with license-free music for queuing and holding callers.

The innovative Connexis Studio platform can generate bespoke recordings from simply entering your website. It's all editable and you can choose tailored AI voices and music recommendations.

AI has come on a long way. Hear the voices and see the scripting for yourself to understand how Connexis Studio can help you set up professional recordings quickly and easily.

- Contact Connexis for expert guidance, hands-on implementation, and tailored solutions. Call 01952 528000 or contact by email sales@connexis.co.uk

connexis

Amanda Stevens is Office Manager at Connexis, based in Telford

The Force is with logistics firm

A family-run Telford firm has achieved record sales just two years after a management buyout.



G Force Express Ltd has added dual-branded trailers to its fleet

G Force Express has boosted turnover to almost £7 million – a major increase from the £100,000 it recorded in its first year of trading.

The logistics specialist, which provides pallet and parcel deliveries, warehousing and international distribution, was bought out by managing director Sam Ravenscroft and director Richard Marshall in 2023.

The duo have set their sights on further growth following diversification of their services and investments in their fleet.

The company was initially set up by Sam and three family members in 1993 to provide parcel courier services, and has grown its team from a handful of staff to 42.

It has also increased its fleet from three vehicles to 39 as its portfolio of services and customer base has grown.

Sam and Richard credit their shareholder membership of national pallet network Pallet-Track, which they joined in 2008, with helping the business to grow and develop.

On its first night, G Force Express Ltd handled 15 pallets on behalf of the network and now handles an average of 300 pallets per night. The firm has added six new G Force Express and Pallet-Track dual-branded trailers to its fleet.

Sam said: "We are still very much a family-run business and we're immensely proud of that fact; it reflects in our staff and our customer retention, as we maintain our family feel of personalised customer service and being honest in what we do.

"Those core values are very important to me and are what our success and reputation are built on."

Richard said: "In terms of the future, we're very committed to growth and we're open to new opportunities.

"We're currently looking for new land to increase our space, as we will soon outgrow our current site which we purchased in 1999 and built our premises on.

"To accommodate our forecasted growth, we ideally need four acres and a 400,000 sq ft warehouse to support the next phase of G Force Express."



Technology, humanity and the future we build together



Hollie Whittles

I recently attended the GTIA (Global Technology Industry Association) ChannelCon EMEA event at London Heathrow which brought many businesses together from across the technology channel.

As vice chair of the UK & Ireland Executive Council for GTIA, I had the privilege of attending the closing keynote by Sir Bob Geldof, and I can honestly say it was one of the most challenging and thought-provoking presentations.

Sir Bob opened with a confession: though he described himself as 'completely useless with technology', what captivated him was the possibility of what technology could enable.

He spoke of his early venture, DeckChair.com, as a simple idea sparked by the frustration of overpriced plane tickets and a desire to 'look at prices simultaneously and ask for a list from the cheapest to the most expensive'.

From there, he traced a fascinating journey: growing up in 1950s Ireland, hearing rock 'n' roll for the first time on a transistor radio, through to the technology-driven mass broadcast of Live Aid in 1985 and the web-enabled activism of Live 8 two decades later.

Perhaps the most resonant line for me was: "Some of it wondrous, some of it dubious and all of it scary, thrilling and wonder-inducing." In a room full of IT professionals it forced a pause: Why are we doing what we are doing, and what is the broader impact of our work?

Themes that stayed with me

1. Technology as an amplifier of humanity

Sir Bob reminded us that Live Aid was made possible by 'newer, faster technologies of guitars and keyboards, recording techniques, mass television and new cameras … satellites … where the world saw and heard itself not as nations, but as neighbours'. That reminds us: we are not just selling services and solutions, we are enabling connection, communication, transformation. Our work can amplify the positive.

2. The darker side of tech and social media

He did not shy away from the uncomfortable truths. He spoke of social media as 'a transgressive medium that isolates rather than socialises … an echo chamber of one's own tastes and prejudices… you get stuck'. For us in IT, that means being mindful not just of functionality and margins, but of ethics, exposure, the unintended consequences of what we enable.



Hollie Whittles with Sir Bob Geldof



Live Aid 1985

3. The question of intent and value

He asked: "Everyone in this room is involved at the forefront making money from it, predicting it, selling it… but who considers its value and worth to society? Who thinks about whether what they are doing is good or bad?" That resonated deeply. As I returned to my responsibilities for the UK & Ireland region, I found myself reflecting: "Are we really asking that question enough in our community?"

What this means for us

We have an opportunity and a responsibility to shape how digital businesses operate in this "scary, thrilling and wonder-inducing" era:

- Elevate the conversation: Let's bring discussions beyond just tech specs and revenue to encompass purpose, ethics, broader societal impact.
- Champion responsible innovation: As partners and providers, we can insist on design and deployment that account for bias, inclusion, unintended harm.
- Further awareness and training: Educate our community on tech's dual nature, its power for good, and its potential for shadow.
- Embed measurement of "value": Include metrics around social impact, customer wellbeing, community effect not just uptime or license renewals.

What I'm taking home

Leaving the event, I carried with me three key take-aways:

1. Always ask why. Why is the technology doing this? Who benefits?
2. Remember the human side. Technology is never neutral, it shapes behaviour, relationships, and society.
3. Leadership does not stop at innovation, it includes stewardship.

I'm excited for what the rest of 2025 holds and how we can steer towards a future where technology doesn't just deliver business outcomes, but also delivers humanity.

Hollie Whittles is a director of Purple Frog Systems in Telford



Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones chaired a panel debate and Q&A session



The presentation from Mark Bramall of Dyke Yaxley

Maximising returns

Halls Commercial explored the future of commercial property real estate when it hosted an exclusive event for industry leaders and investors.

The event, held at the Halls Holdings head offices at Battlefield, was delivered in partnership with Barclays Private Banking, Dyke Yaxley, CoStar and Shropshire Business magazine.

Commercial property investors, professional partners and development companies came together for an information-packed evening including presentations, analysis and a question-and-answer panel debate.

It focused on maximising returns from commercial property, specifically growth, tax efficiencies and funding advice.

The evening's agenda took a deep dive into the ever-evolving commercial real estate market and provided a must-attend event for delegates looking to stay ahead in this investment-led sector.

From discussions on capital funding for commercial property investment to insights on portfolio investment strategies and macro market trends, the event offered attendees a comprehensive look at where the commercial property market is heading, delivered directly by experts from across the field.

It spotlighted a range of critical topics aimed at helping property owners, investors and professionals optimise their investments and drive growth.

Speeches were delivered by Barclays chief market strategist Julien Lafargue, Mark Bramall and Sarah Crane from Dyke Yaxley Chartered Accountants, Giles Tebbitts from CoStar, and James Evans, head of Halls Commercial.



The panelists and presenters, from left, Mark Bramall, Giles Tebbitts, Julien Lafargue, James Evans, and Sarah Crane

Opening the evening, Mr Lafargue covered 'Economic Challenges and Opportunities' outlining a realistic view of the global and UK economic outlook.

His role, which he has held since 2021, involves shaping the bank's investment outlook and providing strategic guidance to clients across global markets.

He outlined the UK's stagflationary pressures and fiscal challenges, with limited policy flexibility, but highlighted the fact that – in spite of these challenges – economic growth had shown some resilience.

The Barclays presentation highlighted several opportunities, including the potential for lower interest rates, improved productivity, and the importance of clear communication around debt sustainability.

On the global stage, delegates were told that growth remains steady but modest, with major risks stemming from tariff disputes and potential AI-related market bubbles.

Mark Bramall and Sarah Crane of Dyke Yaxley then turned attention to tax essentials for property owners and buyers.

The session provided an in-depth overview of the key tax and structural issues involved in owning property in the UK. It explored the main ownership options – individual, corporate, partnership, trust and pension structures – highlighting how each impacts exposure to taxes such as Stamp Duty Land Tax (SDLT), Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED), VAT, Capital Gains Tax (CGT), and Inheritance Tax (IHT).

The duo explained how rental income, financing, and property sales are taxed differently for individuals and companies, and emphasised the importance of planning around reliefs, allowances and extraction of profits.



Halls commercial director Jon Murgatroyd welcomes guests



Guests were treated to canapes and drinks



Halls Holdings headquarters in Shrewsbury hosted the event



Julien Lafargue, chief market strategist from Barclays

The presentation also touched on upcoming Making Tax Digital (MTD) requirements for individuals and stressed the need to align property ownership strategies with both short and long-term objectives.

Next up was a presentation from Giles Tebbitts, director of market analytics at commercial real estate information and analytics provider CoStar Group UK, who led a key topic for the evening – data driven trends and insights across UK commercial property.

The session offered a view of market analytics driven by data held on 680,000 commercial buildings across the UK, diving into the UK office market nationwide and regionally in the West Midlands.

The session further delved into another key commercial segment, industrial and logistics, with insights suggesting momentum is building and that third party logistics providers and supermarkets are driving demand. He said data shows industrial rent growth has fallen back in line with inflation.

The evening concluded with a presentation from James Evans, head of commercial property at Halls, who spoke on the importance of staying adaptable in the market, alongside the capital gain opportunities and rental returns on matching the right investment with the right client.

He highlighted his points with a detailed review of activity at Ludlow Business Park, from acquisition to property management, walking guests through the multi-million acquisition in March 2024 on behalf of an investor client looking to diversify their portfolio.

He explained how the investment was streamlined by experts at Halls Commercial through proactive lease renewals, re-letting of vacant units, and standardisation of lease terms.

The presentation highlighted the benefit of a hands-on management approach – focusing on tenant mix, sustainability initiatives (such as EV charging and solar energy), and long-term value growth.

James said: "The commercial property sector is at a pivotal moment, where innovation, sustainability and adaptability are key drivers of success. It's crucial for industry leaders to engage in these discussions and form strategic partnerships like the ones we've seen today."

The panel debate



Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones chaired a lively panel debate and audience discussion all around the commercial property industry.

Key questions covered topics that investors and property professionals are grappling with right now, from risk management and tax considerations to data-driven investment decisions and sustainability.

With a variety of key questions from across the audience and deep-dive responses by the expert panel, Halls said the discussion reinforced that the commercial property market was evolving rapidly, with technology, sustainability considerations and smart financial strategies playing ever more significant roles.

The conclusion was that investors who can adapt to these changes, armed with the right tools and insights, will be well-positioned for long-term success. Key questions tackled by the panel included:

GROWTH IN THE COMING 12–24 MONTHS

One of the most pressing questions for investors is: How do you identify avenues and attitudes for investment in commercial property over the next year or two?

Julien Lafargue said it weas clear that the market remained active and funding strategies are evolving, with increasing opportunities for banking providers.

"There are lots of deals to be had, and people's attitude to risk remains uncertain. There is a desire to wait to invest until key dates such as the November 26 Budget announcements," he said.

"However, there are a lot of opportunities for cash buyers and deals now – depending on investors' attitudes to risk.

"Opportunities for cash buyers are plenty right now," he added, noting that those with liquidity are in an advantageous position.

His emphasis was on value-add projects, those where investors can enhance the asset's value through strategic development or improvements. He also noted a rising loan-to-cost ratio for new construction projects, which may indicate growing optimism despite the broader market uncertainty.

TAX CONSIDERATIONS: PERSONAL VS. COMPANY INVESTMENTS

Mark Bramall from Dyke Yaxley was asked: "For those investing personally versus via a company structure, what are the key tax considerations that could affect long-term returns?"

He explained that investors choosing to invest through a company structure had more flexibility, particularly in leveraging debt to boost returns. "You can make debt go further and see long-term gains through more strategic investments, we see less single buy-to-let and more portfolio long term investments.

"We are walking clients through various advisory routes, helping them protect their family investment strategies," he added, underscoring the importance of long-term planning in uncertain times.

THE ROLE OF DATA: IS IT THE KEY TO SMARTER DECISIONS?

One of the most interesting aspects of the panel discussion was the emphasis on data in today's commercial property market. CoStar, with its team of 50 researchers, provides access to crucial property market data, including lease and sales comparables.

Giles Tebbitts said the emphasis was on comparable information, which allows property professionals to turn raw data into actionable insights. "It's all about building an analytical chart and then dissecting the information to make informed decisions," he said.

The tech-driven approach to property data, he said, was becoming increasingly central to investment decisions.

James Evans added his perspective as a seasoned commercial property surveyor, saying: "Data has its place, but so does gut reaction. As a valuer, I'm constantly tracking trends and interacting with the market. My role is to be ahead of the curve and advise on what I believe is happening, even before the data fully catches up."

The consensus was that although data is critical for making better investment decisions, it must be combined with human intuition and expert market experience.

For those who have the expertise and tools to analyse it, the panel said this data-driven approach was becoming a key differentiator in a competitive market.



Colleen Mullarkey

How to thrive during the darker months

According to research, fatigue-related productivity costs employers an estimated £1,248 per employee a year.

Winter can make this problem worse. Shorter days, colder weather, reduced sunlight can all lead to lower energy levels, decreased motivation, and even Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD).

For employers, the 'winter slump' is also a bottom-line concern. Supporting employees through the winter months can boost morale, reduce absenteeism, enhance productivity and protect your bottom-line.

Winter can be mentally tough. Reduced daylight can disrupt circadian rhythms. This can affect melatonin (the sleep inducer) and serotonin (the natural mood booster) and can contribute to fatigue and low mood.

Colder weather can discourage outdoor activity, reducing opportunities for exercise and social interaction. Holiday stress and financial pressures can cause, or add to, emotional strain.

Seasonal changes can significantly impact mood, sleep and stress levels. Building and maintaining a consistent routine can help.

How Businesses Can Support Their Employees

Forward-thinking organisations understand that mental health is as important as physical health.

- Encourage Breaks and Movement – Simple initiatives like 'walking meetings' or encouraging short breaks outdoors can help employees stay active, combat lethargy and are a natural mood enhancer.

- Foster a culture of open communication and a psychologically safe work environment – Create a safe environment where employees can voice concerns about any challenges. Proactively check in with employees to address any potential issues early. Signpost employees to your workplace mental health and wellbeing resources.

- Foster a Culture of Connection – Organise team activities, virtual coffee breaks for remote workers, or mini-wellness challenges to maintain social interaction and morale during the darker months.

- Flexible working – Are there additional options you could introduce to support employees being able to get outside more during daylight hours?



Meeting on the move could be a real mood enhancer

And then there is 'Seasonal Stress'. The end-of-year and holiday obligations can lead to burnout. You should allow employees to opt out of any workplace Christmas activities without judgement.

Not all employees wish to socialise with their work colleagues. For some, the anxiety ahead of the Christmas party may lead them to drinking a lot before arriving to 'help' ease the nerves!

Not all employees want an alcoholic drink, so ensure that a safe environment is created where an employee can ask for a non-alcoholic drink without fear of peer pressure or ridicule.

And if your workplace is doing a 'Secret Santa' set a budget, or allow employees to opt out without judgement.

How Your Employees Can Help Themselves

Organisational support is crucial but your employees can also take steps themselves.

- Seek Natural Light – Spend time outdoors during daylight hours, even if it's just a short walk at lunchtime. Exposure to natural light helps regulate mood and sleep patterns.

- Stay Active and Connected – Exercise is a proven mood booster as it can increase your serotonin levels, endorphins and other neurotransmitters which are beneficial to optimal health. Social interaction is vital for mental health. Make time for friends, family, or colleagues, even if it's through virtual meet-ups.

- Maintain a Balanced Diet – Comfort foods and the influx of sugary festive treats are tempting in winter. Productivity can dip, mental health can suffer and stress levels can rise. Balancing your meals and snacks can help with mental health, mood and energy levels. Eating the mince pie or the chocolate with a handful of nuts or seeds (health, allergy and medication permitting) can help ease stress, reduce energy slumps and fluctuations in mood. Try to drink alcohol alongside a meal to limit the impact on blood glucose levels.

- Prioritise Sleep – Shorter days can disrupt sleep cycles. Aim for a consistent bedtime routine to ensure restorative rest. Avoid caffeinated drinks five hours before bedtime and avoid electrical devices for one hour before bedtime.

Encouraging abdominal breathing can help with focus, productivity and relaxation.

It brings fresh oxygen into the body and supports your nervous system, helping you 'switch off', from fight and flight mode (sympathetic) to rest and digest mode (parasympathetic).

Try doing three abdominal breaths whenever a new demand lands, such as an email, a text, another invite, or a family issue.

As the Harvard Business Review states: "Resilience is about how you re-charge, not about how you endure."

Colleen Mullarkey is director of Shropshire-based Nourish Holistic Wellbeing

Welcome to the board



Libby Crossland

A Telford business woman has co-founded a new company to help senior executives take the next step towards 'board readiness'.

Libby Crossland has joined forces with Sussex-based Suzie Thompson to launch The Leadership Visibility Company.

"We exist to make credible leaders visible in the places that count," said Libby. "When people can see what you stand for and what you deliver, everything becomes easier. You can deliver a message with clarity to prospective clients, new hires and potential partners."

Suzie said: "Many senior leaders and founders tell us they are confident running the business but not being visible as themselves. Positive visibility builds the trust that wins work and lifts engagement."

Libby has previously built and scaled executive branding teams, served as head of marketing for a £45 million recruitment group and held senior roles in global learning and development scale-up operations.

Tenterhooks time

How will the November Budget impact you and your business? A series of events are planned in the county over the coming weeks to help provide the answers.

WR Partners is holding its Budget update session at Shrewsbury Town Football Club on December 1, from 8.30am to 11am.

Tax partners from the Shrewsbury-based firm will deliver a breakdown of the Chancellor's plans and explain exactly what the announcements will mean for the future.

With the Office for Budget Responsibility forecasting a fiscal shortfall of up to £50 billion, the stakes are high and the room to manoeuvre is tight.

Insiders suggest Rachel Reeves may target tax reform to plug the gap. Inheritance tax, capital gains, and stamp duty are all under review, with whispers of long-speculated council tax rebanding and cuts to cash ISA allowances also gaining traction.

Despite previous pledges to avoid further tax hikes, the Chancellor recently acknowledged that "the world has changed" – hinting at a shift in strategy.

Award for strong leadership skills



Walter Sulaman-Evans with his certificate

Shropshire teenager Walter Sulaman-Evans has been awarded a British Citizen Youth Award Medal, which was presented at the Palace of Westminster. It recognises young people across the UK who make a meaningful difference in their communities through leadership, initiative and service.

He joined the newly-launched International Aid for the Protection & Welfare of Animals' (IAPWA) Youth Ambassador Programme earlier this year, and within weeks exceeded all fundraising, outreach, and public engagement targets. He became IAPWA's first Official Youth Ambassador and the only participant to qualify in the 2025 programme.



Pledge of support from marketeer

Martin & Jones Marketing has pledged its support for the Shropshire Army Cadet Force Trust.

The Oswestry-based company has signed up to sponsor the army cadet force in recognition of the work it does helping young people develop confidence, leadership and practical skills.

The Shropshire Army Cadet Force Trust helps young people aged 12–18 develop confidence, leadership, and practical skills through adventure, discipline and teamwork.

It raises funds to support cadet activities, equipment, and experiences not covered by the Ministry of Defence. Its mission is to ensure that no young person is denied the full cadet experience due to financial reasons.

Colonel Marius Coulon, secretary to the Shropshire Army Cadet Force Trust board of trustees and Honorary Colonel of Shropshire ACF, presented Ruth Martin with a certificate marking the sponsorship.

"We are very grateful to those companies in Shropshire such as Martin & Jones Marketing who so kindly support the County Army Cadet Force Trust.

"The donations they make to be a patron or friend allow the trust to support the county cadets with their unfunded events such as the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme, Adventurous Training and also to support those cadets from less fortunate backgrounds."



Colonel Marius Coulon presents Ruth Martin with the Martin & Jones Marketing sponsorship certificate for the Shropshire Army Cadet Force Trust

Cultivating fresh ideas

Shropshire Organic Gardeners visited Lohas Fertiliser near Oswestry to see how the organic fertiliser is produced.

More than 20 keen organic gardeners visited the West Farm site where they toured the production site and learned about the process from founders Carlos Kao and Lian Lin.

Lohas Fertiliser has been pioneering carbon-negative organic fertilisers, where the NutriCycle X range represents their latest development, combining Lohas' enzyme-based fermentation technology with rigorous composting and quality assurance to produce a fertiliser that supports soil health while reducing harmful emissions.



SOG visited Lohas Fertiliser

The group members saw first-hand the stages of transformation from organic waste to final product, and heard from Lohas' technical team about process, safety, pathogen control and environmental impact.

Carlos Kao said: "It's one thing to explain the science behind NutriCycle X, but another to walk people through the facility and see their response. Their questions around soil health, emissions and compost quality were insightful and encouraging."

Lian Lin said: "We are very proud of what we've built here. It meant a lot to show our product and facility to people so knowledgeable about organic growing."

Rachel Strivens, chair of Shropshire Organic Gardeners, said: "We need to make best use of technology to deal with waste and this is looking to be an excellent way of dealing with a particularly difficult waste stream and turning it into a very usable product within the farming system. The number of questions members had was encouraging."



Enhanced by AI – the Ascendancy team from Newport

AI drives smarter results

A digital marketing agency is reshaping its operations with AI, and harnessing the tech to deliver smarter results for its fast-growing client base.

Newport-based Ascendancy is actively embracing a culture of AI use for all team members, focusing on areas such as content creation, ideation, and data insights.

Mary Harris, of Ascendancy, said: "We are focused on a shift from tactical skills to more strategic, creative and analytical capabilities, concentrating on the human expertise needed to guide and interpret AI, rather than performing the manual tasks it automates.

"The main change to work patterns is shifting from tactical execution to strategic direction. In the past, a significant amount of time was spent on granular, time-consuming tasks, such as manual keyword research, audience segmentation, A/B testing ad variations, and manually adjusting bids.

"Now, with AI having the ability to automate these repetitive tasks, our work patterns have evolved. We spend less time on manual implementation and more time on higher level strategic functions."





A union of thoughts and togetherness

Anton Gunter



Howzit... and welcome to the end of 'Meetings Month'!

I have been busy attending various meetings in cities such as Prague and Budapest at the same time as the EU – or more importantly the Schengen states – have brought in new immigration controls which everyone seems hell bent on blaming on Brexit, when it has nothing to do with the UK leaving the European Union.

But enough on this; I am more interested in creating world peace and a lasting legacy for generations to come.

You see, at the meetings I have attended, I was surrounded by men and women from different cultures, religions and most importantly countries. There were over 200 varying opinions cultivated by what and how a country is perceived.

Meetings last between 15 and 20 minutes, and during this time you have to both listen and tell your story to build a lasting relationship. Yes that's right: I have to listen – and for those how know me, they'll realise that's not always easy.

We had delegates from Iran, Israel, Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Australia, plus the usual European contingency from members of the EU. We had African delegates from Kenya and South Africa, and we even had guys and gals from the USA too.

Why does this matter? Because over three or four days, there was no talk of war or divide. There was no talk of genocide or murder or land grab. In fact, there was a union of thoughts and a togetherness against the duties being imposed by one Donald Trump.

Chinese agents talking and looking for work-arounds with US agents to ensure the important Christmas trade is able to be loaded and sent from China. There were meetings between the UK and members of the European Union bringing a better understanding of what Brexit continues to deliver, and how we work together to ensure consignments to and from the UK and the EU continue to move.

Once the official meetings are concluded, the magic of network meetings really happens. That's when a 40ft container discussion is over a beer, and the complexities of customs clearances in various countries is done while having dinner.

Adults meeting adults and talking in adult ways. It's a funny thing to see people talking about topics that would normally not be mentioned. Cultural conversations that normally somehow get missed mean that I now understand how the Jewish faith differs and is the same as the Muslim faith. How the Chinese have limitations in the communications we take for granted. Having dinner with various cultures and religions opens your eyes to see what else is out there.

This is where the light bulb moment happens. If people can spend time together to discuss shipping business and logistics in a peaceful manner, how can we have a world that is such a mess? How do we get to a space where major shipping routes are changed because of conflict and war.

In both Budapest and Prague, we sat down with common thoughts of how we overcome the pressures on logistics brought on by world powers trying to push their agendas over others… while the world still needs shipping and airfreighting.



Building lasting relationships with business people from around the world

My final thoughts from this time travelling is that the world needs more freight forwarders.

Actually, I wonder if politicians could take the pressure of working in the logistics field where you cannot hide behind spin or a common party policy. International logistics has the ability to reward – but also has the ability to show the world how co-operation between nations can lead to a peaceful outcome for all and allow us all to live with each other.

Isn't that what's meant to happen?

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



Blists Hill Victorian Town was the location for an edition of Shropshire Business Live TV

New custodians for museums

The National Trust is to take over the running of Shropshire's internationally renowned Ironbridge Gorge Museums in a multi-million pound deal.

The Government has announced a £9 million investment which it says will help to secure the future of the jewel in the county's tourism offer, which marks 40 years as a World Heritage Site next year.

The National Trust will become the new custodians of the museums in early 2026, including Blists Hill Victorian Town, Enginuity, Coalbrookdale Museum of Iron, the Old Furnace, the Darby houses, the Museum of the Gorge, the Ironbridge Tollhouse, the Tar Tunnel, Coalport China Museum, Jackfield Tile Museum and Broseley Pipeworks.

The announcement – described by Telford MP Shaun Davies as a 'game changer' – was made during a visit to the area by culture secretary Lisa Nandy.

She said it was a 'bold commitment to our industrial heritage and a clear sign of the Government's belief in Telford's national importance – and the importance of the World Heritage site in The Gorge'.

Paul Forecast, regional director of the National Trust, said: "The Ironbridge Gorge is among the United Kingdom's most significant heritage sites, a place which marks a turning point in our shared history.

"The National Trust is dedicated to preserving such unique places on behalf of the nation, and the Ironbridge Gorge couldn't be more at home in our care.

"We'd like to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust who have looked after these special sites and collections since 1967, caring for them and sharing their story with visitors from around the globe.

"With the support of Arts Council England, Historic England, and National Lottery Heritage Fund we're delighted to have secured a sustainable long-term future for the Ironbridge Gorge."

Mark Pemberton, chairman of the board of trustees at Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, said the grant from the Government recognised the significance of the museum.

"Ironbridge was important as the birthplace of industry and now as a major tourist destination it plays a part in the success of the local economy."

Telford MP Shaun Davies said: "The Ironbridge Gorge Museums are more than just buildings – they represent a living history of working-class Britain, they are a window into Shropshire's past, the story before Telford and the birthplace of the Industrial Revolution.

"This £9 million Government investment and the new partnership with the National Trust is a game-changer – securing the future of these museums for generations to come."



Culture secretary Lisa Nandy in the Ironbridge Gorge with Telford MP Shaun Davies



Blists Hill Victorian Town is one of several sites involved in the deal

Councillor Lee Carter, leader of Telford & Wrekin Council, said: "The National Trust's national profile will elevate Ironbridge's museums to new heights, attracting wider audiences and strengthening our position on the global stage."

The collection of Ironbridge Gorge Museums is a major contributor to the local economy. Together, they attract hundreds of thousands of visitors each year, contributing over £17.6 million directly to the local economy and supporting jobs, education, and community engagement.



The Field Studies Council has launched new corporate partnerships to deliver genuine environmental and social impact



Contractors involved in the regeneration of the old YMCA building in Wellington

Partnerships and investments

More than 50 employers across the West Midlands have been named and shamed by the Government for failing to pay the minimum wage. Enforcement action has been taken to get workers repaid by their employers, and fines have been handed out. Among Shropshire companies named in the list were Hazle Farm Child Care in Shrewsbury, The Coaching Inn Group of Oswestry, and the Floral Company UK Limited of Shifnal.

The Field Studies Council – a Shropshire-based leading environmental education charity – is looking to build a greener future with support from construction companies and the supply chain. It is offering construction companies the opportunity to transform their environmental commitments into measurable action through partnerships that deliver tangible biodiversity outcomes with the creation of new corporate partnership packages.

Businesses need to get used to being good employers now – regardless of when sweeping employment law changes come into effect. That's the advice from Shropshire-based HR expert Alasdair Hobbs who has seen a big increase in clients looking to implement new policies ahead of the Employment Rights Bill becoming law. One of the highest-profile changes in the Bill – removing the requirement for staff to have been employed for two years before being able to claim unfair dismissal – is expected to be introduced in 2027.

Halls Commercial have been appointed joint letting agents for a new premier roadside development on the edge of Shrewsbury, where work is already under way. Hazledine Park is owned by Shropshire Council and is being developed by Cordwell Leisure Developments, who are experts in high quality, roadside developments. The site is at the junction of Hazledine Way and Oteley Road, adjoining Bannatyne Health Club and Meole Brace Golf Club.

The upper floors of the historic former YMCA building in Wellington have been handed over to Telford & Wrekin Council following a major refurbishment programme. The building, which once hosted a World Championship snooker match, has been fully restored to create nine upper floor apartments and maisonettes. Contractor Pave Aways has led on the project at Walker Street to breathe new life into the historic building.

The Cavalier Centre in Much Wenlock celebrated the completion of its new Andrews Bowen arena surface by welcoming over 140 guests to experience the transformation first-hand. The evening featured a dressage demonstration by Team GB rider Izzy Lickley. The investment provides a world class facility suitable for a wide range of equestrian disciplines including riding, carriage driving, vaulting, and jumping.

The British Ironwork Centre near Oswestry has won a 'Travellers Choice' award from Tripadvisor, meaning it is among the top 10% of things to do worldwide. The awards recognise attractions that consistently receive outstanding ratings and demonstrate an exceptional commitment to hospitality excellence.



The event at The Cavalier Centre





Networking at the Stockton House event



Speaker Amelia Redge



Apley Estate's Linda Harris



Shropshire Chamber's Network of Women event

Network of women

Stockton House – the conference and events venue between Telford and Bridgnorth – hosted Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's latest Network of Women event.

Amelia Redge from Shrewsbury-based Reech was guest speaker at the meeting, reflecting on her route to the top, from high pressure roles in London and Birmingham to joining Reech initially as head of growth and marketing, then at director-level in just 12 months.

Kelly Riedel, the Chamber's head of member success, said the Network of Women was all about creating a relaxed group where women could connect and forge mutually beneficial relationships with like-minded individuals from across the region.

"Our meetings buzz with energy, offering the perfect chance to meet new people, gain fresh insights and the opportunity for our delegates to elevate their businesses."

The Chamber's next Network of Women event is being held on November 18 at the Hundred House Hotel in Norton, from 11am until 2pm.

Meg Hawkins, whose south Shropshire business was victorious at this year's Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, will be the headline speaker.



Meg Hawkins will be guest speaker at the November meeting



Creating spaces clients dream of

Nikki Jeffery from The Staging Experts has a gift – an eye for what makes a room come to life. This gives her a secret weapon to help clients sell houses via **home staging** – quickly and at the best price. It helps prospective buyers to imagine themselves living there – rather than seeing how you live.

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Brewing a range of skills for future construction industry workforce

Shropshire company of the year McPhillips has created a new drive-thru Costa Coffee on the outskirts of Ludlow – as it continues to offer career opportunities to the next generation of construction workers.

The £1.2 million project took six months to complete and features parking for 30 cars, including four EV charging points.

Built alongside a Sainsbury's supermarket at Rocks Green – also delivered by McPhillips four years ago – the land was originally earmarked for a petrol filling station. But planning permission was granted last year for a coffee shop.

The 1,800sqft development included the installation of an attenuation tank underneath the car park to manage rainwater, and acoustic fencing to minimise noise impact on nearby residents.

Andrew Dunham, director at McPhillips, said: "We began work in February 2025 and completed just six months later, and the project showcases how meticulous timeline planning enabled us to overcome challenging space constraints on such a small site – parking, deliveries, our compound, all exacerbated by having to displace half of the site for the installation of an attenuation tank."

Telford-based McPhillips continues to invest in a home-grown workforce by signing up three young people from the town to its award-winning apprenticeship programme.

Josh Freestone-Gittins (17), Jaydee O'Neill (16), and Alfie Flack (17), have all begun their NVQ Level 2 Construction Operatives apprenticeships – a two-year programme that allows them to earn while they learn.

McPhillips apprentices gain industry-recognised qualifications alongside valuable hands-on experience under the guidance of experienced mentors.

Managing director Paul Inions said: "Investing in young people and growing our own workforce is key to how we future-proof the business. Our projects may stretch far and wide, but we're proud of our Shropshire roots and it's a pleasure to take on three local youngsters. I wish them every success in their construction careers."

Stuart Bishop, SHEQ manager at McPhillips, who oversees the company's apprenticeship programme, said: "Our apprenticeship programme has a strong track record of developing skilled construction professionals, as demonstrated by our recent success in the CECA West Midlands Awards when Kai Ginifer was named Most Promising Apprentice 2025.

"We'll be watching Josh, Jaydee and Alfie closely to see who our next award winner will be!"

Around 30% of McPhillips' current 240-strong workforce has graduated through its in-house apprenticeship programme. The scheme, delivered in partnership with Telford College, provides comprehensive training across various aspects of construction, including health and safety, plant operation, road construction, and specialist skills such as block paving and pipe laying.

Successful apprentices receive industry-recognised qualifications including CSCS and CPCS cards, an NVQ Level 2, and some plant operating certificates, positioning them for long-term careers in the construction sector.

McPhillips, (which celebrates more than 60 years in business and was crowned company of the year at the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards this summer), has delivered more than 140 projects as principal contractor with a value of £300 million in the last five years.



Trainee quantity surveyor George Hampson (left) welcomes new apprentices Alfie Flack, Jaydee O'Neill and Josh Freestone-Gittins to the McPhillips business



The new Costa Coffee outlet created by McPhillips on the outskirts of Ludlow



Carl Jones hosted the event and led the fundraising auction



Freya Morris and Steph Smith

Guests enjoy charity ball

More than 150 guests converged on Shrewsbury Town FC's Croud Meadow for the Pave Aways Charity Ball in support of the Lingen Davies Cancer Fund.

The evening, which raised thousands of pounds for the charity, was hosted by Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones.

Guests enjoyed dinner, entertainment, and the chance to take part in both a 50/50 raffle and live auction. The auction prizes drew plenty of competitive bidding and proved to be a highlight of the night.

Pave Aways site manager Andy Pagett shared his personal cancer journey with the audience, including the care and support he has received from Lingen Davies – a reminder of the real impact the charity has on people's lives.

Steven Owen, managing director of Pave Aways, said: "It was a fantastic evening with plenty of energy in the room, bringing together our supply chain partners and some of the most recognised names in the Shropshire business community.

"The mix of familiar faces and new connections created a real buzz throughout the night, and most importantly, we raised a great amount for Lingen Davies that will go towards supporting the vital work they do."



More than 150 people attended the evening



Guests were entertained by a pre-dinner magician



Pave Aways site manager Andy Pagett with his family



Shrewsbury-based Something For The Weekend provided live music



Smile for the camera



Staff and guests from McPhillips



Stephen Owen with his family



Throwing some shapes on the dance floor



The fancy dress photo booth proved popular

Perfect time for takeover



Martin Edwards

A thriving Shropshire architectural practice has new owners – and ambitious plans for the future.

Bleazard and Galletta says it now wants to expand its commercial and industrial portfolio as it targets new growth.

New owners Martin Edwards and Neil Homer have taken over the running of the firm, which was established in 1993 and with which they have both enjoyed considerable success.

It was formerly based in Wem but is now located at the more modern and spacious E-Innovation Centre in Telford.

Martin said the move into owning the business was a natural evolution for both the pair and the business.

"I have been with the firm all my working life – more than 25 years – while Neil enjoyed 11 years here from 2004 to 2015.

"We are longstanding friends and colleagues having met in the late 1990s at Shrewsbury College of Art & Technology whilst studying diplomas in construction. When the firm's founding partners reached retirement age, it was the perfect time for us to take over."

Martin said the firm wanted to build on its excellent reputation for residential, heritage and public sector work, but also develop its offer in the commercial and industrial sectors where it has enjoyed considerable success.



Neil Homer

Investing in training the next generation

Lanyon Bowdler has welcomed its latest intake of trainees and solicitor apprentices as it continues to invest in training the lawyers of the future.

The law firm, which has offices across Shropshire, has a long history of giving lawyers the opportunity to develop their careers, and is highlighting the success of its new trainee solicitors and solicitor apprentices.

New trainees include Jessica Gough, of Shifnal, who has joined the firm following the completion of her law with criminology degree at Cardiff University, and Amy Scourfield, of Hereford, who recently graduated in law at the University of Liverpool.

Also joining the firm are Nicole Smith, Ewan Higgins, Georgia Bennett and Cameron Petch, who have moved from existing roles within Lanyon Bowdler to take up trainee solicitor and apprentice placements.

Managing partner Brian Evans said: "We take great pride in providing a solid foundation for lawyers to grow as people and professionals, enabling them to enjoy a long and successful career in law.



From left – Ewan Higgins, Nicole Smith, Brian Evans (managing partner), Jessica Gough, Amy Scourfield, Cameron Petch and Georgia Bennett

"I have been very fortunate to see dozens of trainees qualify as solicitors, some of whom have gone on to become partners in the firm, and I am pleased to wish our six new trainees and apprentices all the very best on their training journeys.

"Each of them will develop their legal knowledge as they experience different areas of law across Lanyon Bowdler's wide range of departments.

"We have a strong ethos of providing a welcoming and nurturing environment where trainees can thrive, and I look forward to following the progress of our latest candidates with great interest."

Trainee solicitor Nicole Smith has started the first seat of her training contract with the firm's clinical negligence team, Georgia Bennett is spending her first seat with the family team, while Jessica Gough is with the private client department and Amy Scourfield joins the family team in Hereford.

Cameron Petch is currently with the personal injury team and Ewan Higgins is with the Court of Protection team.

Running in the family

A manufacturer of hygiene and decontamination products has appointed a third generation family member following the successful completion of a graduate development programme.

Bosses at Serchem in Telford have promoted Dominic Arnold to sales executive, where he will spearhead market development across Scotland.

It follows Dominic's successful completion of the company's 18-month post-graduate programme – and comes as the Hortonwood business also announces the acquisition of healthcare testing firm Serve Medical for an undisclosed sum.

Dominic, 24, will assume responsibility for developing Serchem's customer portfolio throughout Scotland, focusing on sterile services and endoscopy departments.

"This is an exciting period of growth," said Dominic. "We are introducing innovative products to market, expanding our international presence, and strengthening our team with exceptional talent."

Dominic's career progression represents a significant milestone for the Arnold family, whose commitment to Serchem spans three generations.

Company founder Clive Arnold established the business in 1981, with his son Paul Arnold serving as sales director until his passing in 2017. The company continues under the leadership of director Alison Arnold.

"Following in my father's footsteps is both a privilege and a responsibility," said Dominic. "His reputation for excellence and relationship building established the foundation for our company culture."



Dominic Arnold with his mum – Serchem's commercial director Alison Arnold

Steve leads on development

Living Space Housing has promoted Steve Woodbine to site manager, reflecting his 'outstanding contribution and continued professional development'.

Steve joined Living Space in July 2020 as an assistant site manager and has since supported the delivery of several key developments.

In his new capacity, he will lead the company's newly-approved £10 million residential development in Shrewsbury, off Cedars Drive. The scheme will deliver 38 high quality affordable and social homes, helping to address the national shortage of housing.

Developed in partnership with Housing Plus Group, the scheme will provide a diverse tenure mix of shared ownership, affordable rent and social rent.

Managing director Paul Breen said: "Steve's promotion is thoroughly well-deserved. He has demonstrated exceptional professionalism and commitment throughout his time at Living Space, and his contribution to our award-winning projects has been invaluable.

"We are confident he will continue to excel in leading the delivery of our Shrewsbury development, which will make a meaningful impact on the local community."



Steve Woodbine and Paul Breen

Steve said: "Over the past few years, I've had the privilege of working on a number of fantastic projects and alongside a talented team. I am excited to lead the delivery of the Shrewsbury development."



Bright Chitanda, learner manager

The future is Bright for curriculum

Telford College has appointed a new learner manager to oversee its digital curriculum.

Bright Chitanda brings significant experience in digital transformation, having previously worked on modernising training within the NHS.

"I'm a huge fan of the technological advances in delivering education – I want to get the very best out of latest innovations from multimedia to virtual reality and artificial intelligence systems," he said.

"I'm also very data-driven and I like to understand what the local skills market is telling us and make sure our offer reflects that, so students have the best possible career prospects.

"I'm looking to bring data analytics into the curriculum as we explore how to address skills gaps in the region and ensure our courses reflect employer needs. If learners can develop these skills, it will place them in a strong position for employability.

"Looking further ahead, I see real growth opportunities in cyber security, cloud computing, AI, data analytics, and digital marketing – areas that are vital for the future workforce."

Wealth of leadership experience

A Shropshire finance expert is bringing a fresh perspective to the UK Material Handling Association after becoming just the second female to be appointed to its board.

Rebecca Smith, managing director of Oswestry-based Midac UK Ltd, brings with her a wealth of leadership experience and a unique perspective shaped by her background in finance.

Rebecca has carved out a career as a highly respected accounting and senior management leader, with an impressive reputation both regionally and industry-wide.

She currently heads Midac UK Ltd, which specialises in battery solutions for the materials handling market, which is where her dealings with the UKMHA began. Her earlier career included a senior role with electrical speed drive manufacturer Nidec Industrial Automation, providing her with a unique mix of technical understanding and financial acumen.

She said: "As managing director of a company serving the materials handling sector, I discovered just how vital UKMHA's role was – not only in representing the industry's interests, but also in providing practical support on compliance and navigating ever-changing legislation.

"The compliance landscape can be daunting. Without the UKMHA's guidance, we could easily have encountered difficulties ourselves."

Rebecca quickly immersed herself in the organisation, attending events and learning from industry experts. Her commitment and active involvement caught the attention of UKMHA's chief executive Rob Fisher, who invited her to join the board.

Rob said: "Rebecca's appointment represents an exciting new chapter for the UKMHA. She brings a sharp financial mind, a strong track record of business leadership, and a willingness to challenge us to think differently. Her skillset will help us continue to evolve and better serve our members."

Rebecca said: "Sound financial management is a pillar of any successful organisation, providing the stability to support staff members and invest in future growth. I hope my perspective will help the Association grow with confidence."

Women in leadership is a cause close to Rebecca's heart, and she hopes her appointment will inspire others to step forward. As a parent to two young children, she is managing the demands of running a multi-million-pound business with the every day chaos of family life.

"One minute I'm making a decision worth millions, the next I'm at a roller disco with my kids – and the variety of life is something that sustains me."



Rebecca Smith has been appointed to the board of the UKMHA



President of agricultural show

An engineering graduate from Harper Adams University with a keen interest in agricultural education has been named the 2026 president of the Newport Show.

George Painter grew up with his sister Lisa on a farm near Newport, where his parents' enterprises included pigs, beef, sheep and arable crops.

He went to primary school in Tibberton, then secondary school in Market Drayton before a bachelor's degree in engineering at Harper Adams.

He went on to work at JCB where he has developed the welded structures of its construction equipment and agricultural product range, including telescopic handlers, wheeled loaders and the hi-tech Fastrac tractors.

George said: "I joined Newport & District Agricultural Society in 2007. In that time, I've worked to develop and grow the Society's education hub. The driving force behind that has been my strong belief in the educational aspect of giving children the opportunity to care for and experience young animals up close.

"After nearly two decades of being part of such a great and hard working team, it is a real privilege to now be asked to be the president for the 2026 show – I'm really looking forward to it."



George Painter graduated from Harper Adams University

New CEO at the helm

The new chief executive of a Telford-based education trust says he is 'immensely proud' to have taken on the role.

Paul Roberts has been with the Learning Community Trust since the day it was founded, and has held a series of roles including principal of Hadley Learning Community, and the Trust's executive principal, and deputy chief executive.

Before joining the Trust, Paul began his education career in Wednesbury, moving on to Abraham Darby in Madeley, and later in Sandwell where he led a number of sixth form centres across the West Midlands.

"Before the Trust started in 2017, I had a traditional headteacher's role, managing day-to-day operations at HLC where I began working 17 years ago," he said.

"But in the years since, my role has become much wider, not only focusing on education but now looking at systems and processes across a number of different schools, building relationships, and leading the operational side of the education business.

"The CEO role is so exciting as no two days are ever the same. It's a real mixture of supporting fantastic headteachers at our primary, secondary and specialist schools, and navigating through the business side of running a large Trust."

And the best thing about the job, in Paul's opinion? "The potential to be able to make a real difference. I have a vision of how we want things to be – a five-year plan to build what I believe is going to be an even more magical place for staff and students."



New CEO of the Telford-based Learning Community Trust Paul Roberts

The Learning Community Trust runs more than a dozen school sites across Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin.

Paul said: "We are a Trust very much focused on our communities. Having been in education for a long time I know that if you have a strong community, you have a strong school – and vice-versa.

"I was there on the first day when we decided to create this Trust, so to go from that first day in the office to now holding this position is something which makes me immensely proud.

"Alongside delivering outstanding exam results and creating amazing opportunities for our young people, I'm passionate about building strong community foundations around each of our schools – foundations we can grow year after year to support our families and the wider local area."



I'm a creative person and growing the business with new ideas and unique angles is what I'm best at – Scott Adams

Five minutes with . . .

SCOTT ADAMS is director of Exotic Zoo Wildlife Park, the zoo and natural history museum in the heart of Telford Town Park. He started the zoo nearly 15 years ago

HOW IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY FLUCTUATIONS IN THE ECONOMY?
It seems like the economy is less fluctuating and just on an endless decline. For a zoo, that is bad news! Less disposable income means fewer visitors. Zoos also rely heavily on heating and lighting, and we all know what is happening to energy prices. Having some of the most expensive energy in the world does not help! This means investment in growth is put on hold, as well as recruitment. For me, this is really hard because growth and moving forward are what drives me.

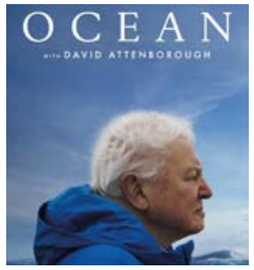
HOW DO YOU VIEW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE – AND HOW MIGHT YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS USE IT?
The core of our business is animal care and in-person customer service, which aren't suited to AI. But as an SME, I can see it revolutionising our marketing and paperwork, and improving some of our processes without breaking the bank.

HOW DO YOU HOPE YOUR COLLEAGUES WOULD DESCRIBE YOU?
Flexible enough to let them grow their job role to satisfy them. Relaxed enough to make work feel like an enjoyable part of their life. But in reality… probably the man who has too many wacky ideas that no-one really understands until it's finished!

YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?
I'm a creative person and growing the business with new ideas and unique angles is what I'm best at. I can see inside the customer's head and create something exciting and engaging for them. As the business has grown, it has given me the opportunity to employ a great team who are better than me at the areas I don't thrive in.

YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?
We won the Telford 50 Award! That was amazing. But I would say our connection to Telford, the local community and council which has seen us grow from humble beginnings to being asked to build the new zoo in Telford Town Park, to be part of Telford's beating heart and have lifelong security. It is the biggest achievement I could have ever dreamed of.

PET HATES?
None, I love all my pets!



David Attenborough would be the number one dinner party guest



Jurassic Park – the original – would be Scott's first choice for movie night

BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?
Money! It does not matter who is in power; small businesses seem to be taking the brunt of the punishment. When we first started, we paid our bills and staff and had money left to invest and grow the business. Now with every single bill rising out of control, watching the bank account and stressing about money has become the new norm. The obvious answer is to hike our prices, but that's not who we are. Being a luxury – a day out – at what point do people stop coming because they need to put food on the table or heat their houses? It's a big worry, and so hard to juggle.

IF YOU COULD GO BACK AND GIVE YOUR YOUNGER SELF SOME WISE ADVICE, WHAT WOULD IT BE?
You always tell people you don't have dreams, you just have ideas to turn into realities… you're right. So keep going. Hard work does pay off. Oh, and start paying into a pension sooner!

HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?
Art is a big part of my downtime and helps me relax. Entomology is also of interest, and dinosaurs…get me in a museum!

FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?
I've travelled a lot and worked around the country with the zoo… I can confirm, Shropshire is amazing! Green and clean, inclusive and caring. Never far from fields or forest. I was born in Shropshire and have lived here my whole life; I never once thought about running my business anywhere else.

SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?
Facebook. We have over 30,000 followers and get great engagement. It's really helped us connect with people over the years. Instagram is also becoming very active for us.

FAVOURITE MOVIE AND/OR TV SHOW?
Jurassic Park and Dexter.

EARLY BIRD, OR NIGHT OWL?
I'm very good at leaving things to the last minute and then working around the clock, so night owl can very much be my thing.

DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?
If you can't guess already, David Attenborough is number one! I've always wanted a beer with Barack Obama. And with music being a big part of my past, a whole host of rock royalty turning the dinner party into more of a party!

TELL US SOMETHING ABOUT YOU THAT MOST PEOPLE PROBABLY WOULDN'T KNOW.
In another life, I made a living out of being on a big stage with a microphone in my hand.

AND FINALLY . . . WHAT DO YOU THINK THE NEXT 12 MONTHS HAS IN STORE FOR YOU, PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY?
Exotic Zoo is heading to be the first 'zoo and natural history museum' combined in the UK, maybe the world. We are about to have our first full time palaeontologist and start working on UK museum status. It's been the dream since the start and it's all about to happen and I'm super excited!

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