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July/August 2024

FREE

# BUSINESS

## CHANGING TIMES

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MIDLANDS MEDIA AWARDS  
Magazine of the Year – winner



SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER AWARDS  
Best New Business (SBLTV)

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By Carl Jones  
Shropshire Business Editor

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ONLINE

Keep a lookout for the finalists in the first Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards, which will be revealed at the end of July. The awards dinner is taking place in October. All the details are at [stwaa.co.uk](http://stwaa.co.uk)



ON TV

**Watch us:** Check out all the reaction from the Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, plus on-location reports from some major commercial property developments, wealth management advice, and much more on **YouTube**, or at [SBLTV.co.uk](http://SBLTV.co.uk)



# SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS

## Welcome

**F**ully-funded . . . fully-costed . . . chaos . . . change . . . supermajority . . . bellwether (one of my particular favourites) . . . stealth taxes . . . no surrender . . . the nation's vocabulary certainly shifts during the frantic build-up to election time.

But now that the votes have all been counted, and a new Government has its feet on the Downing Street carpets, it's time for the victors to make good on their promises. Businesses crave stability, but it's been in very short supply over the past few years. Covid, Brexit, global conflicts, soaring inflation and ongoing recruitment struggles have conspired to create some vicious challenges. No-one will be complaining too hard if we're standing now on the precipice of a period of relative calm.

I spent election night at the 'lock-in' at Shropshire Chamber of Commerce's offices, watching the events unfold in the early hours with members of the business community. And it was clear from all the discussions that there's a long shopping list of action points that they want our new Westminster leaders to address:

- A complete rethink on business rates, for starters, alongside reforms to planning rules and simplification of other procurement and funding processes.
- Proper support for the county's SMEs to ensure they can keep pace with the AI-driven tech revolution which is going to be a game-changer for so many sectors in the coming years.
- Greater flexibility for training, strategies to close skills gaps, and incentives for education and business to work together more closely.
- Major investment in our largely rural infrastructure to ensure that our connectivity

and transport are on a level playing field with more urban areas, and people are not left behind.

That's just for starters – there was plenty more! Businesses are also sick and tired of political in-fighting, bickering and petty points-scoring which they feel simply deflects attention from the issues that matter.

The London-centric Westminster 'noise' does little to tackle the challenges facing Shropshire employers on a day-to-day basis.

Will our deliveries arrive on time? Are we on target to make payroll at the end of the month? Should we put our prices up? – and if we do what will our customers say? And why can we still not find suitably qualified staff?

These conversations are the day-to-day realities of business life in our county.

So congratulations to the five MPs elected to represent our county for the coming five years; the business community is ready and eager to work closely with you.

Keir Starmer isn't the only person celebrating victory in a high-profile vote, of course. We have an in-depth report from the 2024 county business awards where more than 600 people came together to celebrate the champions of our economy.

Stallion AI of Whitchurch grabbed the big headlines by winning the Company of the Year title for the first time – one of two successes on the night. Check out our coverage which starts on Page 15.

And on the subject of awards, we must say a big thanks to everyone who has supported the first ever Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards.

The volume and quality of entries has been jaw-dropping, and the battle is now on to narrow them down to a shortlist that will be revealed at the end of July.

And if you've not already got the date in the diary, make sure to keep October 3rd free – we're going to have a fantastic night of celebration at the Mercure Telford Centre Hotel in front of the Shropshire Business Live TV cameras. Tickets are now on sale from [stwaa.co.uk](http://stwaa.co.uk)

# Actions speak louder than campaign words

The votes have been counted, and the public have comprehensively spoken. So what does Labour's emphatic General Election victory mean for Shropshire businesses? CARL JONES reports...

**A friendly neighbourhood super-hero once famously said: "With great power comes great responsibility."**

Well, Sir Keir Starmer has certainly secured the power with his thumping victory. Now, with the rhetoric and petty political points-scoring of the election campaign behind us, and the battle buses back in the garage, he needs to come good on his promises.

And it's clear from the initial responses among the Shropshire business community that they want to see Labour's campaigning words turn into actions, sooner rather than later.

Employers are craving the stability, certainty, and predictability that will give them the confidence to invest in our economic growth. They want to plan for the future.

Here in Shropshire, we now have MPs representing all three of the largest parties in Westminster. The Labour landslide was enough to unseat two of the county's four Tory MPs; Daniel Kawczynski comprehensively lost Shrewsbury to Julia Buckley, and Shaun Davies took the Telford seat previously held by Lucy Allan, where Reform UK came second.

South Shropshire stayed blue with Stuart Anderson narrowly winning the fight to succeed Philip Dunne, and Liberal Democrat Helen Morgan comfortably retained the North Shropshire seat she won in a by-election two years ago.

In the tightest of the county's ballots, Mark Pritchard secured five more years as Tory MP for the Wrekin – but only after a recount.

Shropshire Chamber of Commerce held an election night 'lock-in' at its Telford headquarters, where a group of local business people watched the results unfold.

David Haigh of Apogee Property and Utility Consultants was among them. He said: "What's surprised me really is the performance of the smaller parties. We've got quite a lot of independents as well."

"It suggests that people are not quite sure what they want. I think the tribalisms we have been used to for so long may be weaker than they have been for a long time, and people are looking for where to go next."

Andy Goff from Interactive Opportunities said: "There is certainly a lot of change, and working in education I'm hoping that there is not too much random change in education itself."

Alex Brown, part of the policy team at Shropshire Chamber, believes the result was more a rejection of the Conservatives, than a positive vote of confidence for Labour.



Business people gathered at Shropshire Chamber's offices to watch the results through the night



A business hustings debate was held at the Aico theatre in Oswestry with representatives of the five main local parties

Adam Hawkes from PCB Solicitors said: "The size of majority for Labour will bring some certainty to the legal landscape, I believe. It should give us some clarity going forward."

So what now? Shropshire businesses have already penned a lengthy shopping list of actions they want the new Government to prioritise.

A business hustings debate, hosted by Aico at their lecture theatre in Oswestry, gave employers a chance to quiz representatives of the five main parties in the county – Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, Green and Reform UK.

The 90-minute forum drew questions from three sources – the Chamber's new 'Going For Growth' manifesto, the results of its latest quarterly economic survey, and issues that were raised by members.

The wide-ranging debate covered issues such as skills shortages and the need to boost 'soft skills' among newcomers to the workforce; cited as one of the biggest concerns among local firms.

The panel also addressed issues around connectivity – blackspots in the county's broadband and mobile phone network – and revealed conflicting views on major



Helen Morgan held the North Shropshire seat for the Liberal Democrats



Julia Buckley is the new Shrewsbury MP

## HOW SHROPSHIRE VOTED

**TELFORD:** Labour gain – Shaun Davies  
(Majority: 8,102)

**SHREWSBURY:** Labour gain – Julia Buckley  
(Majority: 11,355)

**THE WREKIN:** Conservative hold – Mark Pritchard  
(Majority: 883)

**NORTH SHROPSHIRE:** Liberal Democrat hold – Helen Morgan  
(Majority: 15,311)

**SOUTH SHROPSHIRE:** Conservative hold – Stuart Anderson  
(Majority: 1,624)



Mark Pritchard narrowly retained The Wrekin for the Tories



Shaun Davies took Telford for Labour



Stuart Anderson has succeeded Philip Dunne in South Shropshire

infrastructure projects such as hospital services and the Shrewsbury North West Relief Road.

The debate also covered apprenticeships, the future of the business support network, and the need to reform business rates, while issues raised by the audience included staff retention, mental health support, and regulation.

Panelists were also asked whether too much pressure was being placed on local businesses to achieve net zero, or whether they felt more should be done.

They faced a backlash from members of the audience who felt they were spending too much time trying to score political points over

opponents instead of directly answering the questions – one of the biggest turn-offs during this election campaign which is thought to be a key factor in the relatively low turnout.

James Coggins, who works in executive search with SMEs, was among the audience. He said: "Most parties were focusing on the wider picture for the country, and the debate did not really cover specific industries such as engineering and manufacturing, agriculture or technology."

"It doesn't sound like the world is going to dramatically get much easier whoever is in power – and that the country has got some

more dark days ahead. So it looks like it will fall to entrepreneurs, and more creative thinking and collaboration to carve out opportunity for the UK's communities."

The charity and voluntary sector in Shropshire is also anxiously waiting to discover how the change in Government could impact its operations.

Wayne Jenson, chief executive of Meeting Point Trust in Telford, said: "Labour have said they want to partner with the voluntary sector and that they see charities as vital to delivering against their missions. It's time now for them to deliver."

# MPs must listen to their constituents

"A change in Government sparks confidence and brings more certainty. This is what business needs, particularly in our sector, where investment is often significant and delays expensive. We need to see Sir Keir Starmer and his new Labour Government commit to its key ambition to deliver a strategic long-term programme of investment in the nation's 'crumbling infrastructure'. If hitting the ground running means immediate actions to reform the planning regime to increase house building targets, I welcome that, but we also need the infrastructure to support this with hospitals and schools."



Paul Inions, McPhillips

"Day one rights not to be unfairly dismissed will certainly have an immediate impact on working practices and lead to some increased cost for employers. The new Labour Government is unlikely to go as far as outlawing contractual probationary periods, but the need to document a well-implemented induction and probationary review period will be all the more critical, and many smaller employers will be put off from taking recruitment decisions lightly. And Labour promise they will bring legislation in within the first 100 days – I think employment lawyers like me will be busy these next few years."



Alasdair Hobbs, Human Results

"I hope that with a new government we will see significant implications for our high streets. Any increased support for small businesses will help to potentially revitalise and regenerate our town centres with more grants and initiatives aimed at boosting foot traffic. There still needs to be continued effort to reform business rates for high street businesses and give local authorities more sway to hold absent landlords to account. The future of our high streets hinges on creating a favourable environment for independent shops to thrive, fostering a vibrant and resilient local economy."



Sally Themans, Love Wellington/Bridgnorth/Shifnal

"Labour's manifesto states that it will push decisions on skills spend out of Westminster and into local communities to decide what they require, presumably continuing with the theme of devolution. We would welcome this as long as the funding is open to the best providers and organisations and not ring-fenced for the few. Industry requires a long-term strategy to build trust and give companies confidence to invest."



Gareth Jones, In-Comm Training

"Nationally, it's good that we have had a clear result. We've had three different prime ministers since the last general election, and many ministerial changes, not to mention the fall-out from the mini-budget under Liz Truss' premiership. What I hope for now is a period of certainty and stability allowing businesses to concentrate on improving productivity and growing the economy in a sustainable way."



Brian Evans, Lanyon Bowdler

"My fear is I haven't seen a fully-funded plan to support Labour's manifesto. They have said no higher taxes or VAT increases, which means we are going to need the economy to grow significantly to fund things. And I just don't buy into the new Prime Minister being able to achieve that. Time to see if the new government can deliver some early wins or it will probably be a single term in office, as the public don't seem to have the patience for a long-term vision and journey."



Nick Lovett, M3.agency

"There is a parallel between political parties and businesses, and I believe there is a lot businesses can learn from the election – make your people feel listened to, treat them right and have some involvement in their lives; otherwise, they will quit. The Conservatives did some good things for businesses and looked after them, but as the EU money stopped coming, funding has been a little thinner on the ground in the last few years and I would be very interested to see what Labour's angle will be on this."



Dan Ellis, EPX Technical Services

# Don't panic – short term pause is expected to lead to stability



JAMES EVANS of Halls Commercial discusses how the election may impact the commercial property market

**The Prime Minister's surprise announcement of a General Election inevitably had an impact on the commercial property sector, with investors, occupiers and tenants delaying transactional decisions until later in the year.**

It allowed a pause to consider their position, in view of a possible change of Government, and the resulting policy changes to the commercial property market.

Commercial property research, undertaken by Savills, suggests that transactional activity in the three months preceding an election is generally lower than normal but recovers in the following six months, and there has never been a significant long-term influence on commercial property prices by an UK General Election.

The timing of the election was unexpected. Huw Pill, chief economist at the Bank of England, suggested an interest rate cut for June was unlikely. With this in mind, it was anticipated the election would be called towards the end of the year, when economic growth is expected to accelerate, as interest rates fall and business activity levels increase.

As a result of the July election, investors preferred to retain income producing assets in the short-term, potentially selling once prices improve and market activity strengthens towards the end of 2024. The intervening period offers a time to review, refurbish or upgrade any property assets, to maximise returns, prior to disposal later in the year.

Chief executive of the British Property Federation Melanie Leech had welcomed the July election, saying: "Investors need certainty. An earlier election will give us that and is a



Research undertaken by Savills suggests activity recovers in the six months following an election

golden opportunity to reset the relationship between the real estate sector and the next Government, as called for in the BPF's manifesto 'Building our Future'."

Prior to the result, the Labour and Conservative parties both gave an indication of their future plans, should they be voted in.

The Conservatives had allocated £36 billion for a new 'Network North' of infrastructure improvements, after announcing the cancellation of future phases of the HS2 transport project, with the Midlands receiving £9.61 billion of investment to deliver the Midlands Rail Hub in full, and to upgrade strategic roads, including the A50/500 corridor.

Levelling up, housing and communities secretary Michael Gove had highlighted the Government's Long-Term Plan for Towns that proposes ploughing £1.1 billion of investment into 55 towns, including Wrexham and Wolverhampton.

Angela Rayner, the new deputy Prime

Minister, reaffirmed the party's commitment to creating 'non-identikit' new towns recently, with the party unveiling a five-point plan in April to 'transform the landscape of the UK's high streets'.

A key element is to replace the existing business rates system with a fairer framework of 'business property taxation', which will be of particular interest to commercial property investors, resulting they hope in a more level playing field between traditional bricks-and-mortar businesses and online retailers.

What is clear though is that the regeneration and development of regional towns and their infrastructure is being prioritised, which can only be a good thing for the commercial property sector.

At Halls Commercial, we anticipate a short term pause and then business as usual. Bank lending confidence will return and people will then make property decisions based on long term political security.

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For more reaction from the local business community, see [www.shropshirebiz.com](http://www.shropshirebiz.com)

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# Women in tech: is it still a man's world?



**Hollie Whittles**

**Looking back on my career, it dawned on me that I joined the tech community in the last century!**

The digital world was not something I thought I would end up in but I have always had a love of gaming – starting with figuring how to code on my Amstrad 64k to make it say “hello world”.

At the time, it was a very male-dominated industry and things have moved on rapidly since the world of dial-up internet, floppy disks and taking the ball out of a mouse because you wanted to play a trick on your colleague!

Despite considerable progress toward gender equality, women remain significantly under-represented in tech roles. This under-representation stems not from a lack of ability but from historical biases and systemic barriers.

The foundation of empowerment starts with education and skill development. Providing girls with access to quality STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) education from an early age is essential.



**Tech from a different era – the Amstrad 64k. Picture by Bill Bertram**

Initiatives such as mentorship programmes, STEM clubs, and partnerships with local companies offering internships are crucial in encouraging girls to pursue STEM careers.

This is something that we are passionate about at Purple Frog where our team have become STEM Ambassadors, do talks in schools and provide work experience opportunities.

Creating a supportive environment is equally important. This involves addressing and dismantling cultural stereotypes that deter women from tech careers.

Education from primary schools upwards must actively promote female role models, celebrate women's achievements in tech, and cultivate a culture of inclusivity and respect. We found our youngest AI data scientist by doing a talk at a local university, and through a chat ended up recruiting her.

After winning a ‘Women in STEM’ award last

year presented at the House of Lords, it came with a request for me to pay it forward and mentor others. I thought this was a fantastic way of rewarding role models and establishing robust mentorship programmes where we can offer guidance and support to make a significant difference.

Companies must implement policies and practices that promote diversity and inclusion. This includes equitable hiring practices, unbiased performance evaluations, and opportunities for career advancement.

Offering flexible working arrangements, parental leave, and childcare support is essential as well as addressing the unique challenges faced by women of colour, LGBTQ+, and other marginalised communities is crucial.

We stand on the precipice of change; we must advocate for policy changes at governmental level. The UK government can play a significant role by funding STEM education programmes, providing grants and scholarships for women especially for those in digital poverty, and incentivising companies to adopt inclusive practices.

Policies aimed at closing the gender pay gap, preventing workplace discrimination, and supporting work-life balance are crucial for creating an equitable digital career.

I don't know what the next few months will hold for us, but if we empower people with the right skills through educating girls, mentorship, soft skills development, inclusive organisational practices, and policy advocacy we can unlock the full potential of everyone, drive innovation, and build a more equitable and prosperous future for all.

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

# Search is on for cream of the crop



**Muller is launching a new cohort of its ‘Next Generation’ programme**

Müller UK & Ireland, which has sites in Market Drayton, Telford and Minsterley, is inviting applications for the third cohort of its ‘Next Generation’ initiative, designed to drive supply chain resilience and reduce carbon emissions.

First launched in 2018, the three-year programme is for Müller farmers between the ages of 25-40, and aims to provide them with the foundations to build ‘sustainable and profitable dairy businesses’.

Müller dairy farmers on the programme receive tools and support to boost supply chain collaboration, animal welfare, responsible sourcing and reductions in environmental impact.

Müller Next Generation includes tailored workshops, farm visits, keynote speakers, and visits to Müller sites. Focus areas include the environment and sustainability, leadership and delegation, market analysis, succession planning, marketing, communication and business improvement planning.

The group will meet three times per year, for farmers to share best practice and knowledge. Applications for this next cohort close on July 26, with the first meeting taking place in the autumn.

Young Müller farmers who meet the criteria and are interested in applying can do so by contacting their farm supply manager.

Richard Collins, head of agriculture at Müller Milk & Ingredients, said: “We need to continue to tackle carbon emissions, secure the next generation of talent and drive supply chain resilience.”

# Three decades in the county

**It's a big year for one of the major Japanese companies that set up their UK bases in Telford during the 1990s.**

Hoshizaki, the provider of commercial ice makers, refrigeration, and sushi restaurant equipment, is marking three decades of manufacturing in the town with an eye on significant expansion.

The company has launched a state-of-the-art innovation and training centre, marking a £100,000 investment. The centre serves as a showroom and educational hub, showcasing Hoshizaki's products, hosting demonstrations and training sessions, both in person and online.

Jonathan Brooks, managing director at Hoshizaki Europe Ltd, said: "Hoshizaki's growth from humble beginnings to our current stature with 180 employees and a production capacity of over 170 units per day exemplifies our commitment to innovation and customer satisfaction."

The company is embarking on a significant layout change and expansion of its Stafford Park factory this year, promising a 40% increase in its material stores area, a 230% surge in foaming footprint, and a projected production capability of 50,000 units by the end of 2026.

Jonathan added: “Without working hand in hand with other local businesses, we would not have seen our growth plans materialise. The sourcing of local talent and the development



**Hoshizaki is celebrating three decades in Telford**

of their skills is due to the services offered by business partners working in the Telford area. These successful business partnerships form part of our accomplishments and we will continue to build on these relationships.”

Telford & Wrekin Council's business support team said Hoshizaki's investment not only bolsters the local economy but underscores the invaluable support provided by Invest Telford in nurturing overseas companies.



Staff from Radius Aerospace with Edward Goddard from Paterson Enterprises with a Sentinel steam lorry outside the Sentinel Works

## End of an era at famous Sentinel Works

**The future is uncertain for one of Shropshire's most famous engineering works after a global aerospace manufacturer pulled out of the site.**

The Sentinel Works in Shrewsbury has a history dating back more than 100 years, during which time it has been associated with a series of major brands including Rolls-Royce, Vickers, and Doncasters.

The site has been a precision engineering centre since 1915, but produced its last product at the end of April following the decision by tenants Radius Aerospace UK Ltd to pull out of the town. It marked the end of the road for 75 members of staff.

The emotional event was marked with a photoshoot with employees outside the works, which covers an 8.5-acre site and is owned by Shrewsbury-based Paterson Enterprises, parent company of Morris Lubricants and Morris Leisure.

To add to the occasion, Edward Goddard, a director of Paterson Enterprises, drove Morris Lubricants' Sentinel steam lorry, which was made at the Sentinel Works, to be used in the staff photoshoot.

"While the closure of Radius Aerospace in Shrewsbury is sad news for everybody and the end of an era, it's also the beginning of what we hope will be an exciting new chapter for the Sentinel Works," said Edward.

"The works have provided employment for tens of thousands of people from Shrewsbury and the surrounding area over the years. At one time, 3,500 people were employed there.

"Paterson Enterprises shall be investing in upgrading the site with a view to finding new tenants, so that the Sentinel Works can again become a hub for enterprise and employment in Shrewsbury.

"We have already received a significant amount of interest which augurs well for the future. James Evans at Halls Commercial in Shrewsbury is handling all enquiries from potential tenants as the site will be available to let from August."

James said: "The property is being offered to let as a whole or in part and provides an opportunity to secure accommodation that can be used for a variety of commercial purposes, with a degree of roadside frontage."

Radius Aerospace UK Ltd announced in April last year that it would be closing its Shrewsbury operation.

The company services the commercial aviation, business jet, military and industrial gas turbine markets.

The Sentinel Works originally made steam-powered lorries before evolving to railway locomotives and later diesel-engined lorries, buses and locomotives. Rolls Royce took over the business in 1956 and made diesel engines in Shrewsbury until 1983.



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# Investor secures future for fast food

The future of Shrewsbury's Wimpy fast food outlet and restaurant has been secured after the site was taken over by an un-named local investor.

Offers in the region of £350,000 were invited for the two-storey premises in Claremont Street.

Toby Shaw, who handled the sale for Towler Shaw Roberts, said: "The property has been home to Wimpy since the company made a popular return to Shrewsbury to open a fast food restaurant/takeaway in 2018.

"We completed the letting at the time, and have been involved with the property on an ongoing basis since then.

"It generated a high level of interest once it came to the market, reflecting the continued strong demand for well-let income-producing properties in the town centre."

The property, has a ground floor restaurant/seating area for around 80 covers, with an open plan kitchen and ancillary storage on the upper floors.



Wimpy has had this restaurant since 2018

# Raising awareness – and a glass – for men's charity

**An independent brewery in Shropshire has launched a new beer in partnership with a men's mental health charity – with a portion of each bottle sold going towards supporting the charity's work.**

Hobsons Brewery in Cleobury Mortimer has launched 'Shed Ale', a non-alcoholic beer brewed in partnership with the UK Men's Sheds Association which aims to reduce loneliness and isolation amongst men by offering them spaces to connect, converse and create.

The 0.5% bottled beer is brewed in the style of an IPA and is now available in cases of six and 12 – with 10p from every bottle sold being donated to the association.

Nick Davis, founder of Hobsons Brewery, said: "Shed Ale is branded with the messaging 'Don't bottle it up', which encapsulates the important message for those who could benefit from a Men's Shed.

"Whether it's woodworking, metalworking, repairing and restoring, electronics, model buildings, or even car building, UKMSA offers a place to pursue practical interests at leisure, promoting social connections and friendship building through sharing skills and knowledge. We look forward to 'shedders' across the country being able to enjoy a bottle or two of our latest alcohol-free IPA."

A long-time supporter of the UKMSA, Hobsons Brewery recently teamed up with the charity when it transformed Portcullis House at the Palace of Westminster into 'The Parliament Shed', which was used as a temporary 'Men's Shed' to highlight the health, wellbeing and social benefits of community-run Men's Sheds.

Charlie Bethel, chief executive officer at UKMSA, said: "We're delighted to partner with Hobsons Brewery on this exciting project. Not only does it raise funds for Sheds across the UK, but it also raises awareness of Sheds and their improvement on wellbeing and impact on local communities."

Founded in 1993, Hobsons has spent the past 31 years expertly crafting a popular array of cask, keg, and bottled beers.



Shed Ale from Hobsons Brewery

Shropshire Chamber Business Awards 2024 Company of the Year – Stallion AI Services



SHROPSHIRE CHAMBER  
**BUSINESS AWARDS 2024**



# Celebration time

It's the largest event on the county's business calendar and it never disappoints. CARL JONES reports from the Shropshire Chamber awards night.

**A new name has been added to the Shropshire Company of the Year roll of honour in the 24th year of the county's annual business awards.**

It's a business which has earned a global reputation for its pioneering technology, helping to breed, protect and preserve the world's animal population.

Stallion AI, based near Whitchurch, won two trophies at this year's Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, adding the Trailblazer innovation title to the top award of the night.

It is led by Tullis Matson, a locally born and bred entrepreneur who left school at the age of 16 with no qualifications, but who has a long-standing love of animals.

The rare breeds preservation and equestrian specialist is using ground-breaking technology to harvest and preserve the DNA of rare breeds from all over the world to ensure their survival, through its acclaimed Nature's Safe initiative.

"What we are doing is part of a vast challenge, but it's so important that we try to save as many species as we can, as quickly as we can. You have to start somewhere," Tullis says.

"It's a mammoth task for sure. We need 50 different genetic lines from each species, and there are six million species roughly on the planet – one million of which are estimated to be at risk.



**More than 600 people attended the event at Telford's International Centre**

"Those numbers illustrate the enormity of the scale-up we have to do."

Stallion AI has also grown into the UK's largest equine semen collection and distribution centre, and is the holder of a Queen's Award for Enterprise.

It exports more than £4 million worth of semen to more than 20 countries, and has laboratories in locations such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait enjoying a reputation for global leadership in technology advancement.

The team has carried out more than 20,000

collections from over 1,200 stallions, won a clutch of prestigious awards, and expanded into its current premises in 2017 which were officially opened by HRH The Princess Royal.

Tullis said winning the company of the year and trailblazer awards was a huge boost to the team, and recognition of their hard work.

More than 600 people were at Telford's International Centre to see Stallion AI and all the other winners revealed for this year's Chamber awards, the largest event on the county's business calendar.



**Elizabeth Wilkinson with The John Clayton Award****Chrisbeon Office Supplies – best small business in their golden anniversary year****Customer service – Ed Glover, Salop Leisure****R1 Construction celebrate the award for Outstanding Business Growth****Learning Community Trust, winner of business in the community****Bridge Cheese – winners of the manufacturing and engineering award****Arrow County Supplies with the eco award****Ruth Ross addresses the audience****Hadley Park House Hotel – retail, leisure and hospitality award****Lilakshop of Shrewsbury – best new business****Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones, master of ceremonies****Aico of Oswestry, a company of the year finalist for the fourth year in a row**

◀ In the company of the year category, Stallion AI fought off competition from Aico of Oswestry – winner of the competition for the past three years, and two Shrewsbury-based companies, Arrow County Supplies and Riverside Cabins.

It was a particularly good night for companies from Telford and Shrewsbury, which dominated the prize categories this year.

Telford-based winners included best small business Chrisbeon Office Supplies, manufacturing and engineering winner Bridge Cheese, community champion the Learning Community Trust, and Hadley Park House Hotel which took the retail, leisure and hospitality award.

Chrisbeon directors Richard and Craig Hughes said: “To be winners of the best small business award in our 50th year is wonderful – thank you to all of our staff, suppliers and customers.”

Elizabeth Wilkinson, known as the ‘Dyslexic Dyslexia Consultant’ for her pioneering work raising the profile of the learning difficulty, also won The John Clayton Award for her outstanding contribution to the county.

She has set up an annual Dyslexia Awards competition, which is growing every year. “To be the 2024 recipient is just beyond my comprehension. The feeling of such surprise and honour at being awarded The John Clayton Award

is equal to the surprise of the MBE,” she said. “I am so very grateful, and as the creator of the Dyslexia Awards, I know and appreciate how much these all mean and what an impact it must be having for these to have happened!”

Winners from Shrewsbury included best new business Lilakshop, outstanding business growth champion R1 Construction, eco award winner Arrow County Supplies, and Salop Leisure for outstanding customer service.

Elsewhere, Maddie Hughes from Agritel of Oswestry won the young business person award.

Finalists came from all corners of the county including Telford, Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Market

Drayton, Bridgnorth, Craven Arms, Shifnal, and Whitchurch.

This year’s awards were backed by a long list of big-name sponsors, including Aico, Azets, Aaron & Partners, HomeLink, WR Partners, Pave Aways, McPhillips, Shropshire Business magazine, the Community Foundation of Staffordshire & Shropshire, Jesmonite, and Sytner BMW.

The Company of the Year award was jointly sponsored again this year by the two local authorities, Shropshire Council, and Telford & Wrekin Council. Shropshire Business editor Carl Jones was once again the event’s master of ceremonies.

Earlier in the awards week, many of the shortlisted companies and sponsors had gathered at Hawkstone Park in north Shropshire for an informal ‘meet the finalists’ drinks reception.

Shropshire Chamber chief executive Ruth Ross said: “The awards night is always a fantastic occasion – an opportunity to celebrate the extraordinary adaptability, creativity and innovation of our business community.

“We have once again been amazed and delighted by the volume and quality of entries. It has been refreshing to see so many first-time entrants, and finalists, this year.

“Shortlisting each category down to a final four

was a really tough task for our independent panel – the standard of entries was incredibly high.”

Speaking to the event’s attendees, she added: “Our most important role is to make sure Shropshire’s voice is heard. Because as this event shows, we’ve got lots of great things to say.

“Our members recognise how much more Shropshire and Telford & Wrekin can achieve if barriers to growth are removed.

“That’s why, a few weeks ago, we travelled to Westminster to launch our Going For Growth manifesto, spelling out Shropshire Chamber of Commerce’s priorities to the country’s decision-makers. We’ve got quite a long list of them. ▶

**The Azets table****Guests on the Shropshire Business magazine table****Dyke Yaxley and friends****Lingen Davies Cancer Fund officials, and guests****Aaron & Partners, and guests****A charity game of Play Your Cards Right, hosted by MC Carl Jones, raised nearly £3,500 for Severn Hospice****Guests on the McPhillips table****Higher or lower . . . Play Your Cards Right got the guests exercised****Oh no – Michelle Dalton and Chris Pritchard rue their choices****The WR Partners table****The HR Department Shropshire was shortlisted in two categories****Matt Small of Aico, which sponsored the best new business category****Gemma Elsmore-Roberts, Ross Clarke and Jayne Meakin of Eco award finalists Seymour Manufacturing International****Sid and Beth Heath from Shropshire Festivals with Alasdair Hobbs****Great night out for the folk from Autocraft****Pipekit from Shrewsbury at the awards ceremony****Young Business Person of the Year, Maddie Hughes of Agritel, receives the trophy from Diane Brown on behalf of the Chamber patrons**

◀ “Skills and labour shortages mean that many employers are still struggling to recruit. We need a skills and immigration system that works for business, as well as for our education providers. “We also need a predictable, reliable and affordable transport infrastructure which allows people, products and services to move around with ease. “Gaps in broadband and mobile connectivity, which stifle business productivity and competitiveness, need to be urgently addressed. “And it’s vital that we press ahead with long overdue reforms to planning rules and business rates, to boost local growth. In short, there’s lots we want the next Government to do.

“Shropshire is a great place to do business, and this county is always at its best when business and decision-makers work in partnership. That’s precisely what events like this are all about . . . bringing people together.” The Shropshire Chamber Business Awards have raised tens of thousands of pounds for charity over the years. This year’s recipient was Severn Hospice – and a fun game of Play Your Cards Right boosted their funds by nearly £3,500. Piran Littleton, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce president, said: “From the outset of this year’s event, the buzz of anticipation has been palpable.

“This event stands as a magnificent tribute to the exceptional qualities of Shropshire businesses – a celebration of business excellence.” When the formal part of the evening was over, it was time for guests to take to the dance floor, try their luck at the fun casino, or choose a fetching accessory for the fancy dress photo booth. ▶

- Watch highlights from the awards, including interviews with the winners, on the June edition of Shropshire Business Live TV, available on YouTube or sbtv.co.uk

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**FINALIST**



The Severn Hospice team brought along a message



Northwood Hygiene Products turned out in force at the awards



Members of Lanyon Bowdler with guests



Guests arriving for the awards night



The Shropshire Chamber team



The Telford & Wrekin Council table



Scenes from the after-party



Trying their luck in the fun casino



Did somebody rock the boat?



Dancing into the early hours



Wigs, shades and smiles

### WINNERS' PROFILES

**COMPANY OF THE YEAR / THE TRAILBLAZER INNOVATION AWARD: Stallion AI, Whitchurch**  
 Stallion AI Services, from Whitchurch, specialises in the collection, storage and worldwide distribution of equine semen. For the last two decades, it has also pioneered the creation of biobanks and conservation breeding programmes, helping to preserve and protect some of the world's most endangered animal breeds. This innovation has earned the company a prestigious Queen's Award for Enterprise. Its state-of-the-art laboratory allows the team to stay at the forefront of technology, and has earned the company clients all over the world,

**BEST NEW BUSINESS: Lilakshop, Shrewsbury**  
 Lilakshop is based at Claremont Hill, selling photocards, albums, candles and merchandise for fans of the Korean pop music scene. It is a business which is run by the fans, for the fans which also holds a series of events to bring its community together.

**BEST SMALL BUSINESS: Chrisbeon, Telford**  
 This is a big year for office products company Chrisbeon, which is celebrating its 50th birthday. The company supplies office furniture, stationery, printer consumables and promotional gifts for businesses of all shapes and sizes from its base at Stafford Park – as well as designing and planning office interiors from start to finish.

**RETAIL, LEISURE AND HOSPITALITY: Hadley Park House Hotel, Telford**  
 Hadley Park House Hotel is a multi award-winning business with excellent customer

ratings. It's recently changed ownership; the team describe the Grade II listed building as a hidden gem and are constantly reviewing and updating their programme of events to stay ahead of the competition.

**MANUFACTURING AND ENGINEERING: Bridge Cheese, Telford**  
 Bridge Cheese began as a small supplier to the pizza industry, but has enjoyed dramatic growth. It has doubled the size of its operation on the Stafford Park estate and transformed into a company that now serves the wholesale, food-to-go, and food manufacturers and bakery sectors.

**OUTSTANDING BUSINESS GROWTH: R1 Construction, Shrewsbury**  
 R1 Construction began 10 years ago by addressing a market void renovating modular buildings to allow temporary structures to become permanent ones without demolition. Based at Harlescott, it has expanded and diversified across various sectors including education, healthcare, military, commercial and residential.

**ECO AWARD: Arrow County Supplies, Shrewsbury**  
 Arrow County Supplies, from Longden Road, has over 45 years of experience in the cleaning and janitorial industry with exceptional market knowledge across a wide range of sectors. It has invested in smart transport and logistics planning systems, and installed telematic tracking technology across all its delivery vehicles.

**OUTSTANDING CUSTOMER SERVICE: Salop Leisure, Shrewsbury**  
 Salop Leisure, which has its headquarters at Emstrey, is one of the UK's largest caravan, motorhome and campervan companies, and it actively encourages constructive feedback from customers. It has won a string of industry awards for its customer service, including the Owner Satisfaction Award this year, organised by the Camping and Caravanning Club.

**BUSINESS IN THE COMMUNITY: Learning Community Trust, Telford**  
 Learning Community Trust runs a series of more than a dozen secondary, primary and specialist schools in Shropshire which are encouraged to be an integral part of their communities. One of its many initiatives is a community fridge where people are encouraged to take what they want, and donate if they can. It also grows fruit and vegetables to donate to food hubs.

**YOUNG BUSINESS PERSON: Maddie Hughes, Agritel**  
 Maddie joined Agritel, based near Oswestry, in March last year at the age of 19, having previously worked in the hospitality sector. She is now the company's internal sales and e-commerce manager, responsible for the three major online sales platforms the company trades on – Amazon, Ebay, and its own website.



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# Sharing personal journeys

**Telford College celebrated the achievements of students, apprentices, and thriving partnerships with local employers at its end-of-year awards night.**

More than 80 individuals and businesses people were recognised at the ceremony, held at the college's Wellington campus.

The college's highest accolade, the Victor Ludorum trophy, went to engineering apprentice Abigail Jones, from i2r Packaging Solutions in Telford.

She was described as a 'trailblazer for young women in engineering' who has been nominated for several other awards, including the Lloyds Banking Group apprentice of the year, and rising star prize at the Food Packaging Association awards.

Tutors said: "During national Women In Engineering Week, she took part in an interview focusing on women who are new to engineering and explained how, at first, she felt intimidated working in a male-dominated environment.

"She has overcome this by building positive relationships, and continues to offer advice and guidance to any women wanting to start an engineering and manufacturing career."

Two other special individual awards were handed out on the night, with Jordan Lee-Haldron winning the Principal's Special Award, and Shaun Brecknell being named Apprentice of the Year.

Jordan, who is on the college's Prince's Trust programme, is profoundly deaf - but it hasn't stopped him playing a full part in college life. His tutors said: "We are so proud of his approach and attitude to learning."

Shaun is on a surfacing operative apprenticeship with construction materials company Breedon Group. His managers describe him as a 'role model' and a 'dream to manage and have as part of the gang'.

The college also handed out Employer Partnerships certificates and awards to recognise the growing number of businesses that work closely with the team.

Recipients were Chasetown Engineering, Furrows, Jenny Spoon's Hair Salon, Clive Cowern Transport, Breedon Group, Capgemini, Unsworth's



Teresa Boughey presents the Victor Ludorum award to Abigail Jones

Stonemasonry, Telford & Wrekin Integrated Care System, Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust, Camp Bestival, BIMM University, and The Bridge School.

A celebrated member of Telford College's alumni - entrepreneur, TEDx speaker and best-selling author Teresa Boughey - was guest speaker at the event.

She told the students about her own 'journey' from a young 16-year-old mother to her current position, by committing herself to a process of 'continuous learning'.

# Celebrating Shropshire's small, but perfectly formed businesses

JAMES DAWSON, office managing partner for Azets accountants and business advisory group in Shrewsbury, shines the spotlight on Shropshire's small businesses, the backbone of our local economy

**For the second year running, Azets were proud sponsors of the Best Small Business category at the prestigious Shropshire Chamber Business Awards, and we were once again blown away by both the quantity and quality of nominations.**

It was a closely fought category, and all four finalists should be recognised as leaders in their respective fields and champions of small businesses in the county.

So congratulations to the overall winners, Chrisbeon Office Supplies, and to Exascale, Mutneys Professional Pet Care, and The HR Dept Shropshire for being shortlisted.

At Azets, we pride ourselves on being the UK's specialist local accountants and business advisory group and self-proclaimed 'SME Champions'. For us, SMEs embody innovation and agility, their entrepreneurial spirit and in particular, adaptability, offers a unique edge in challenging and uncertain times.

Through the judging process for this year's awards, we have seen first-hand how this dynamic environment has led to pioneering ideas and technological breakthroughs from some of the county's best small businesses, who have been agile and able to adapt their models to changing market conditions.

The business landscape is rapidly evolving. Our role, as strategic advisors to Shropshire's SMEs, is to ensure that they are able to meet their year-round regulatory requirements while flourishing with the benefit of our specialist input and advice. For example, around funding options and share structures, research and development tax relief, recruitment and retention of key staff as the business grows.

Technology is also key to underpinning the growth and success of an SME client, and we have a team of experienced professionals who can support and advise our clients as to how technology can help them power ahead, and monitor how their business is performing.

When this real-time data is combined with our expert advice, the business owners will have the critical foundations in place to support their growth journey.



James Dawson on stage with the Chrisbeon team

Of course, supporting SMEs is not just about the financial gain. For Azets, it goes further than that, and is at the heart of our vision of supporting our local communities, in job creation and community development on our doorsteps.

We are proud to support the next generation of business owners as they embark on their entrepreneurial journey and are proud to see some of those established SMEs go on to achieve great things.

• If you would like to discuss your accountancy and business advisory needs, please reach out to James on [james.dawson@azets.co.uk](mailto:james.dawson@azets.co.uk) or Tax Advisory partner Francesca Hutcheson - [francesca.hutcheson@azets.co.uk](mailto:francesca.hutcheson@azets.co.uk)



And the winner is... James reveals the 2024 Best Small Business champion



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## Legal benefits of AI

A Shropshire law firm is trialling the use of artificial intelligence as part of a pioneering nationwide research project to assess how it might shape the future of the legal sector.

FBC Manby Bowdler is one of just eight firms across the country exploring the potential benefits of AI for the eight-month project being run by Lancaster University.

The firm is using AI software to see if it can help save time and clients' money during leasehold property deals.

The seven other firms taking part in the Technology in Professional Services project will each examine the way AI might be used in a different part of the legal sector.

FBC Manby Bowdler managing partner Neil Lloyd said the firm was using digital software called Orbital Witness Copilot to read leases and generate a lease report for them.

"This is a really exciting project to test out this software and see exactly what it can do. To have been selected as one of just eight firms taking part in this groundbreaking work is a great honour.

"Work which was previously taking two or three hours can now be generated in minutes, though clearly everything must then be checked over thoroughly by our expert team. AI is advancing all the time and is clearly going to play a huge part in all our professional lives in the coming years.

"All eight law firms will share their findings at the end of the project, and there should be a great opportunity to see how we can all learn from our experiences in the way we use AI in the future."

## New director



Managing director Niamh Kelly with Aleesha Skett

**The HR Department Shropshire has promoted Aleesha Skett to company director as growth in demand for its services continues to drive expansion.**

She has had a rapid rise to the boardroom after joining the team as an apprentice in September 2020. She was promoted to HR consultant in July 2022, and senior HR consultant a year later.

Since qualifying as a law graduate from the University of Wolverhampton, Aleesha has been nominated for multiple awards including the Oxford University Press Law Prize, the Rising Star of the Year award, and was last year named Young Business Woman of the Year at the National Business Women's Awards.

HR Department managing director Niamh Kelly said: "I'm delighted Aleesha has become a director as she brings with her the necessary business skills to help us develop the company into an excellent client-based service."

The HR Department was established six years ago and supports SMEs across Shropshire, and a sister company operates across Mid Wales, Wrexham and Chester.

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Turas Accountants

# Building empires through support network

By Adam Pringle

**After spending 20 years in financial services, Nicola Peake decided the time had come to walk away from her career and do something completely different.**

She launched a successful afternoon tea business during the pandemic which grew to a six-figure turnover inside a year... and then promptly sold it.

Now the Bridgnorth-based entrepreneur has built another six-figure operation - as well as spreading her entrepreneurial and motivational tips as a best-selling author.

The 45-year-old is the driving force behind Peakes Private Members Club, which has been providing networking, strategy and business coaching support for 'ambitious business owners' since 2021.

Later this year, the company is running 'PeakeFest' at Weston Park from September 27-29 - described as a business festival retreat - where Dragons' Den panelist Sara Davies will be among a series of big-name speakers.





**Inspirational business women whose stories are included in Nicola's new book**

◀ Nicola says she is driven by a mission to support others in business to enjoy life alongside building their empires.

"At PeakeFest, we want to do things differently. There are tonnes of events where you can listen to the best in the industry, but you never get to spend any time with them.

"Throughout this weekend our fantastic keynote speakers are ready to guide you through immersive workshops, teaching you how to implement new strategies into your business, without the need to purchase a four-figure course.

"Speakers will continue their teachings in their own tipis, which will house approximately 30-40 people at a time, where they will expand on their talks and bring more teachings and advice. There is no-one else doing this.

"This isn't a normal run-of-the-mill business conference. This is your opportunity to be creative, be innovative, play and restore.

"Business shouldn't be all hustle, hustle, hustle. We also need to ensure that we take time to look after ourselves.

"Across these two days, there will be a range of wellbeing workshops and sessions which you can take part in free of charge, from meditation, breath work, journaling and more. Make sure you bring your yoga mat!"

But let's just rewind the timeline a little. Why launch two such different new businesses in such a short space of time, after spending so many years immersed in financial services?

Although she loved the afternoon tea business and it was a huge success, Nicola says she missed spending time with others, and working alone every day led her to not enjoy running the business she lovingly built. So, she decided that she had risked everything once, so what was stopping her from doing it again?

Nicola's natural default, she says, is to be 'sociable, loud and the centre of attention' – she was always called a chatterbox in her school reports, but over the years she had found this caused negative judgement.

However, when analysing her life and what



**Nicola – sociable, loud and centre of attention**

she wanted from it, after hitting rock bottom, she realised she would only be happy if she connected with herself more fully and filled her cup based on her true characteristics.

Peakes Private Members Club opened in December 2021, and is now a successful networking business with over 100 company owners who she says 'will never again feel lonely in business'.

She likens it to 'the cool gang at school and being made to feel your face doesn't fit', or being treated badly in a corporate environment.

So can anyone break out of this cycle and strike out on their own? What does it take, in Nicola's opinion, to be an entrepreneur?

"Grit! When someone decides to start their own business, it can be with the vision of working from sunny locations, taking time off when they like and money to enjoy a lavish lifestyle... all while answering only to themselves.

"But the reality is harsh: 20% of businesses fail within the first year, and those that do succeed can often work long hours and struggle with motivation and consistency. It's hard doing it alone.

"This is why I set up Peakes Private Members Club to give entrepreneurs a place to connect. With online connection sessions and inspiring events in great locations, members quickly signed up and the community grew.

"And, without this business, I would not have so many amazing people in my life and this book would not be here. I have experienced huge growth over the last few years to really connect to my own purpose, and I am now well and truly living it."

Another way in which Nicola is spreading supportive messages to ambitious entrepreneurs is through the written word.

Peakes Private Members Club opened in December 2021, and is now a successful networking business with over 100 company owners who she says 'will never again feel lonely in business'.

Nicola says she discovered first-hand that 'having it all' meant nothing if you were not fulfilled, not happy, and not filling your life with things you love.

"It's not a case of what you can do for your business, but what your business can do for you," she says.

# PEAKEFEST



**Peakfest promises a business event with a difference**

After much soul searching, she believes she has now discovered what she needed her business to do for her. "I love to help other ambitious founders see what they don't see themselves, empowering them to grow in a way that makes them happy, and supporting them to build a business they love."

Nicola describes Peakes Private Members Club as a place that challenges traditional networking cliques. Having been on the receiving end of them, she passionately dislikes them but believes the online world is full of them – making people 'feel like crap' because they don't believe they fit in.

Her latest business book – 'Fearless Connection: Real Life Stories Of Entrepreneurs Who Made It Happen' – features first-hand stories from eight women in her network, and has become a bestseller.

The book brings together stories from these business owners who bravely share their struggles, triumphs and wisdom, so others can become fearless and use their failures and challenges as fuel, to spur them on to create a business that they adore.

The women come from a variety of backgrounds and sectors, including accountants, bookkeepers, photographers, sales experts and strategists, social media coaches, personal health transformation experts, virtual assistants, and more.

But the common thread is that despite their challenges, even when the chips were down, these business owners dug deep and used their circumstances to fuel their success.

Nicola said: "Each and every person within this book has grit – and that is what makes us unstoppable! It has been a delight to work with these amazing women who have each faced their fair share of tough times, but have come out stronger and more fearless, especially when it comes to making those big, scary decisions we all dread.

"Growing a business is hard. There are times when I have doubted my goals. I've told myself that I am being unrealistic, and I look at

others who are smashing it and tell myself that I have no chance.

"I have felt overwhelmed, anxious and just stressed out of my mind. Maybe you have felt the same? And trust me when I say, you are not alone.

"I wanted to bring something different to the table with this book. Real stories from real business owners who are still on the journey, just like you and me. We have one amazing life to live and I am so passionate about us doing and working towards what we love.

"Fearless Connection is all about embracing our challenges, feeling uncomfortable, celebrating our wins and succeeding together."



● Nicola's book is published by Discover Your Bounce and is now available on Amazon. For further details about PeakeFest, see the site [peakefest.co.uk](http://peakefest.co.uk)

## ENTREPRENEUR



### NICOLA'S TOP TIPS FOR THOSE ENTREPRENEURS WHO ARE STRUGGLING TO KEEP GOING...

#### **Harness your grit and develop a resilient mindset**

Despite challenges, even when the chips are down, as a business owner it's important to dig deep and use your circumstances to fuel success. Grit is essential in business as it embodies the resilience and determination necessary to navigate the inevitable ups and downs of entrepreneurship. It fuels sustained effort through challenges, inspires teams, and drives innovation and growth. Grit allows leaders to maintain focus on long-term goals, adapt to changes, and persist where others might falter, creating not just surviving businesses but thriving enterprises. This tenacity is more than a trait; it's a cornerstone for anyone aiming to achieve lasting success in the competitive business landscape.

#### **Become a fearless entrepreneur**

This often involves developing a mindset and environment that reduces fear's hold over decision-making and action-taking such as: embracing risk as part of the journey. Understanding that risk is a natural part of entrepreneurship can help reduce the fear associated with it. Viewing challenges as opportunities to learn and grow rather than threats can shift your perspective and make you more open to taking calculated risks.

#### **Educate yourself continuously**

By continually educating yourself about your industry, market trends, and business management, you can build confidence in your decision-making processes. Knowledge empowers you to make informed choices and reduces the intimidation factor of unfamiliar challenges.

#### **Be part of a strong support network**

Being part of a support network can significantly reduce the fear of entrepreneurship. Being part of a supportive community provides a safety net that boosts confidence and encourages risk-taking, which is essential for any entrepreneur aiming to be fearless in their pursuits. This network can include mentors, peers, friends, and family who provide emotional support, practical advice, and different perspectives. Such networks are invaluable for bouncing ideas, receiving feedback, and gaining reassurance during tough times.

#### **Celebrate small wins**

By setting and celebrating small milestones, you can create a sense of progress and success, which builds momentum and courage to tackle larger challenges.

#### **Practice mindfulness and stress-reduction techniques**

Entrepreneurship can be stressful. Regular practice of mindfulness, meditation, or other stress-reduction techniques can help maintain your mental health and perspective, making you less likely to be overwhelmed by fear.

#### **Visualise success**

Visualisation is a powerful tool for combating fear. By regularly envisioning achieving your goals, you can create a mental image of success that motivates and guides you through fear-inducing situations.



If you do get turned down for a mispriced item at the checkout, you might want to have a go at haggling, but you'll have more luck with the head office

# Does a shop have to honour the price shown on the tag?

**Martyn James**



**When is a bargain not a bargain? I was reading recently about a man in Mexico who spotted that a pair of diamond and gold Cartier earrings had mistakenly been listed on a website as £13 instead of £13,000.**

When Rogelio Villarreal placed the order, it was processed but Cartier tried to get out of the deal. After a month-long battle, Rogelio won and got the bargain of a lifetime (he gave the earrings to his mum, bless him).

That victory came as a result of Mexico's consumer protection laws. But it couldn't happen in Shropshire... could it?

Every year I hear from loads of readers who have been on the verge of getting a great deal due to a mispriced item, only for the retailer to spot the error at the checkout and refuse to honour it.

Many people think that the price tag

represents the final word on what an item should cost and the shop must sell you the goods at that price. Sadly that isn't the case. According to leading legal expert Gary Rycroft, a price tag is what lawyers call 'an invitation to treat' which is basically an offer to sell at that price.

The retailer is inviting you, the buyer, to make an offer. However, this means you cannot insist on buying the item at the advertised price. If the seller has put an unusually low price on it – deliberately or by mistake – they can (and do) refuse to do the deal. A legally binding contract is only created when the seller accepts an offer made by the buyer. And this is where things get interesting... because both parties have committed.

If a mispriced item – like those Cartier earrings – has been processed and confirmed then the contract has been made. The retailer sold an item at a specific price and you agreed to pay for it at that price.

Where a contract exists, the business usually has to honour it if you've bought or received the goods though there may be exceptions to this in their terms and conditions.

This can seem rather complicated from a legal standpoint – but in most cases the retailer's website will confirm the point the order has been accepted. If that's the case, they should honour the price you paid. They can't just add in a load of contract terms that are unfair or ambiguous either.

Sometimes businesses will try to get around this by arguing they've made 'an honest mistake'. But if you double down and threaten to 'enforce the contract' there's a good chance you could win if it goes to court.

On occasion, like with those pricey earrings, the retailer might realise their mistake and contact you after the contract has been agreed to say they want the rest of the money or the goods back. They might also threaten not to deliver.

In situations like this, you should not have to pay back the difference in prices unless they can establish that you knew the price was wrong at the time – which is tricky for them to prove. The retailer should also not attempt to debit your account for the extra money, as you have not authorised any additional payments. If this happens, complain to your card provider and tell them this is an 'unauthorised transaction'.

If you do get turned down for a mispriced item at the checkout, you might want to have a go at haggling, but you'll have more luck with the head office of the retailer than the poor person stuck on the till all day. If you decide to go down this avenue, I'd photo the mispriced item so you can prove that the labelling was incorrectly applied.

One final warning. If word gets around that a website has mispriced certain goods and loads of people rush to buy them, then you are all aware that the business has made an error and chances are the retailer won't have to cough up.

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



# The gift that keeps on giving...

Industry-led courses are available in a variety of areas such as engineering

**Good news: Shrewsbury Colleges Group has received yet more funding – aimed at upskilling your workforce.**

**Yes, it's true – we are the gift that keeps on giving!**

Seriously, we so often hear that there are skills shortages, but at the same time, we're told training can be expensive or inflexible. So, we have good news on both counts.

We are offering a wide variety of fully-funded training programmes aimed at employees living in the county of Shropshire. This funding is tailored to benefit both organisations and individuals and means that it is free to the person or organisation.

We know that we can positively impact organisational performance by providing the valuable skills and qualifications needed. This will help you by broadening the sole trader's commercial offer, improving individual career prospects, and contributing positively to the regional economy.

It's a win-win for all.

**Diverse Course Offerings**

We offer a wide range of industry-led courses and many of these courses are bespoke. Therefore, if you have a skills training need, we encourage you to get in touch.

Our aim is to meet your specific training needs at times to suit you.

Contact us before December 2024 to discuss how we can support the training needs of you and your staff.

Industry-led courses are available in engineering, automotive, construction, building services, renewable technologies, beauty, management, administration, education/training and digital.



Fully-funded training programmes are aimed at employees living in the county of Shropshire

Keeping one step ahead of emerging technologies, we are focusing on the latest skills needed to keep abreast of change. Examples include:

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- **CAD/CAM programming**
- **Fabrication and welding**
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- **EV Chargers**
- **Solar PV and battery storage**
- **Facial massage**
- **Train the Trainer**

**Supporting Local Businesses**

It's probably not necessary to list the benefits of training, but if any reasons were needed, these funding opportunities will provide access to a more skilled workforce, will help to improve productivity, innovate, and grow.

Shrewsbury Colleges Group is proud to work closely with so many local employers, ensuring the training we provide is relevant and meets the current demands of the job market.

**Get in touch**

Call us on 01743 653602, email employer@scg.ac.uk or visit our website [www.scg.ac.uk](http://www.scg.ac.uk) and start training your future workforce, today.

# Employment law under the microscope

More than 80 local business leaders attended an employment law roadshow in Shrewsbury. The event was organised by law firm Aaron & Partners in collaboration with the Shropshire branch of CIPD.

Senior members of the Aaron & Partners employment law team shared updates on crucial legislative changes and hot topics affecting business workforces across the region.

The event, held at Shrewsbury Town FC, is part of an annual roadshow held by the firm, with sister events taking place in Chester, Wirral, Daresbury and North Wales.

Updates were provided on business immigration and discrimination issues including overseas workers, recruitment, the menopause and mental health.

Ben Mason, employment law partner at Aaron & Partners, said: "The employment law roadshow has become a real staple in our calendar, and we're proud to have partnered with the Shropshire branch of CIPD for this year's event."

"Employment law is rapidly changing, and it's now more important than ever for employers to stay up to date with regulations that can affect their business."

"It's always brilliant to see the Shropshire business community come together to share their experience and exchange valuable insights."



The Aaron & Partners' employment law roadshow event in Shrewsbury

# Celebrating Jeevan's many achievements

Shropshire businesswoman Jeevan Punj, the founder of corporate gifting business Elite Hampers, is celebrating winning a Woman Who Achieves Award which recognises and celebrates the achievements of women in business.

She received the accolade at an awards ceremony held at Coombe Abbey in Warwickshire.

Founder of the Woman Who initiative Sandra Garlick said: "Jeevan's mission is simply to make people happy. She deserves the recognition for her achievements to date and is a great role model to inspire others."

Jeevan said: "Winning a Woman Who Achieves Award is an incredible honour and a wonderful way to be recognised as a new woman in business. I couldn't believe my name was called out."



Founder of Elite Hampers Jeevan Punj

"As I walked onto the stage to receive my award I was blown away by the cheering in the crowd. Everyone in the room celebrated with me – it was beautiful."

It is the latest in a series of accolades for Jeevan and her business. Last year Elite Hampers won two LUXlife Magazine awards and it was also recognised in Small Business Sunday – a weekly initiative set up by former Dragons' Dens star Theo Paphitis.



Members of the Tally Ho team and their supporters are pictured celebrating their success

# South Shropshire pub named best

The Tally Ho Inn in south Shropshire has been named the best in the West Midlands at the National Pub & Bar Awards 2024.

The country inn, in the heart of the Corvedale near Diddlebury, was one of 13 pubs to be named as the best in its region at the prestigious awards.

# Inspiring better tomorrows

A Shropshire community interest company has been shortlisted for a prestigious national award for its work in supporting people in their very darkest days.

A Better Tomorrow, which provides help for people with addiction, substance misuse, mental health issues and homelessness, has been shortlisted for the Community Inspiration Awards 2024 in recognition of its work.

The company, based in Woodside, Telford, is one of just eight organisations and individuals shortlisted for an award in the public services category.

The five finalists will be selected by the judges after a public vote through the Community Services Award website. Voting closed at the end of June.

A Better Tomorrow's chief operating officer Martin Cantrill said: "We have been working quietly over the last ten years to help people who are often in their very darkest days with nowhere to turn. We do it because we have been in that position ourselves and know personally how easy it can be to give up hope."

"We do not look for any special recognition for doing what we do, so to be shortlisted for a community inspiration award is really very special to us," he said.

The Community Inspiration Awards are organised by the Community Foundation to recognise outstanding contributions made by public and voluntary sector organisations,



The ABT team with chief executive Scott Morgan and chief operating office Martin Cantrill

businesses and members of the community, whose efforts have made a positive difference in the community and have inspired and motivated others.

The Public Services Award specifically recognises the outstanding contribution made by an individual or organisation in going the extra

mile to respond to the needs of the community.

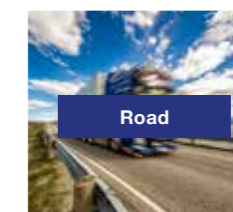
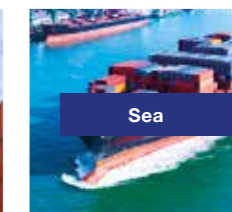
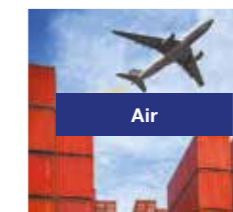
The finalists and winners will be announced at a ceremony on September 20 in Birmingham.

A Better Tomorrow was set up in 2014 to give support to people with addiction and substance misuse. It now provides accommodation and services to support over 700 clients.



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# Creating demand: get your name out there!

By Eddie Allan

**When you're showcasing your business, it is important to understand what is important to your customers.**

You need to market yourselves directly to those A-class customers by using a mix of marketing strategies. Digital marketing, networking, and direct mail may all have a role to play to target specific customers that share your values.

Use more than one strategy – but no more than 10. Good2Great Research shows that friendliness, uniqueness, warmth and customer service are the key 'differentiator' between a local owner-operated business and a large corporation.

Ensure you always show yourself in the best light and represent your authenticity. For example, the use of real life (well-taken) images that illustrate what really happens in your business (instead of stock photos).

### Successful selling

You have engaged with your customers, they like what you do, so how do you convert that interest into a sale?

- **Don't sell the steak, sell the sizzle:** What benefits a customer, what do they get after you work with them? Focus on the benefits to the customer – don't lead with the features.
- **Don't write...telegraph:** Be brief. People have an attention span of about seven seconds, so you need to capture their interest quickly. Do you have a 'pitch' to engage them?
- **Stay on brand:** What are you known for? Don't reinvent the wheel.
- **Don't ask 'if', ask 'which':** Always give your customer a choice; they won't all want the same thing, so create different packages to suit different customers.
- **Watch your bark:** Treat people as they want to be treated.

### Map out your customer journey

- Work out what works best for you and your customer
  - Map a step-by-step process
  - Share with your prospective customer from the start
- This increases conversion, improves your chances of getting paid, and it will allow you to become more confident when you are selling.

### Repeat customers

So, we have engaged with customers and they are buying from you. How do you keep them? Well, first you need to develop a plan.

- Talk to them – be proactive, build a relationship, and give them a reason for staying. Have an offer or package for them.
- Map out a sales process (before you engage with anyone)



Eddie Allan, head of programme delivery at Good2Great

- Make sure you have an efficient model for delivery and fine tune as you go
- Provide excellent service
- Keep it simple, under promise and over deliver, be positive and honest, and stick to what you know. Do the basics brilliantly... do less, better!

And ask yourself this: can you make customers 'sticky'? Some of the ways you can do this include offering things such as subscriptions, providing quick and efficient service, contracts, retainers and minimum terms, or making it easy to pay.

**Next time, we'll look at finance, and the importance of 'understanding the numbers'.**

● Eddie Allan is head of programme delivery at Bridgnorth business consultants Good2Great. Run by Good2Great, the Shropshire Start Up programme is funded by £286,923 from Shropshire Council's UK Shared Prosperity Fund allocation, as part of the Levelling Up agenda, and will assist start-ups over the next 18 months. If this has sparked your interest in setting up a business apply here: [good-2-great.co.uk/service/start-up/](https://good-2-great.co.uk/service/start-up/) or contact [start@good-2-great.co.uk](mailto:start@good-2-great.co.uk)

## Funded Support for New Entrepreneurs in Shropshire

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visit: <https://bit.ly/49frqcC>



## Ethical farming is his dream

Richard Todd



**Richard Todd said: "Starting this venture has been a life-long dream and Good2Great's Start Up support has been pivotal."**

Richard and Lisa Todd have created Ridge and Furrow Foods, a 'field to fork' farming business which is fulfilling their dreams "We are operating a high welfare, grass-fed sustainable livestock farm," says Richard. "Our aim is to rear quality meats for local customers on the Shropshire/Staffordshire border, supplying those who want to connect with their food journey and know that it is produced and delivered to them in prime condition."

Richard has always had a love of farming. "We are passionate about food and animal welfare, so it seems entirely logical to link the two and build relationships with our customers as end-users of our products."

"Starting this venture has been a life-long dream and Good2Great's Start Up support has been pivotal in cutting through the noise and focussing on key elements of the strategic plan to help us take the business forward."

Contact Ridge and Furrow at [rjtodd79@gmail.com](mailto:rjtodd79@gmail.com)

## New business is cleaning up

Stuart Keogh



**Stuart Keogh said: "We are picking up more and more customers in the region through advertising and word of mouth recommendations"**

A former prison tutor who worked with hundreds of inmates is cleaning up with his new business. Stuart Keogh was employed by HMP Featherstone for four years, and during this time helped over 300 men to gain NVQ qualifications in industrial cleaning.

The father of five wanted a change of career in order to fit in with family responsibilities, so he enrolled on Good2Great's Start Up programme. His new firm, Keogh Cleaning Services, specialises in cleaning carpets, upholstery and ovens for domestic and business clients in Shropshire, Staffordshire and Wolverhampton.

"We are picking up more and more customers in the region through advertising and word of mouth recommendations," said Stuart

"The Good2Great team have been amazing from day one, and the support and resources they provided have proved invaluable in my journey."

Contact Stuart at [stbert71@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:stbert71@hotmail.co.uk)

## Putting her best foot forward

Arabella Salwey



**"We want people to take full advantage of all that Ludlow and the surrounding countryside has to offer," said Arabella Salwey**

She will be hosting guests at her historic home, Salwey Lodge, providing bespoke itineraries of walking and activities.

"We want people to take full advantage of all that Ludlow and the surrounding countryside has to offer with our new venture, called @The Lodge," she says. "All our walks are mapped out with notes covering the history and nature of the area. Our customers are active groups wanting to learn more about this part of the world, whether their interest be wildlife, history or sustainability."

"I am looking to make the holiday a net zero experience and it is part of the diversification of my husband's farming business. Coupled with the publicity on Shropshire having been named as a top 10 destination by ABTA, it seems a perfect time to launch

"Good2Great had been instrumental in giving me the confidence to launch this venture."

Contact Arabella at [arabella@thesalweylodge.co.uk](mailto:arabella@thesalweylodge.co.uk)

## Transforming outdoor spaces

Matt Willets



**"Good2Great has been a catalyst for our business start-up. Their support has been incredible," said Matt Willets**

"My love of the outdoors, along with woodwork and design, is why I am so passionate about creating amazing spaces for clients," says Matt Willets, owner of Bespoke Timber Structures of Church Stretton

"Our business helps our clients make the most of the beautiful surroundings they live in.

"We transform outdoor spaces for our customers, giving them something unique and hand crafted, so they can make the most of their time outside and in nature."

Matt attended Good2Great's online Business Foundation Workshops culminating with one-to-one support with advisor Luke Boxall.

"Good2Great has been a catalyst for our business start-up. Their support has been incredible, and they have driven us towards our future goals a lot quicker than I could have imagined."

Contact Matt at [info@bespocketimberstructures.co.uk](mailto:info@bespocketimberstructures.co.uk)

# Shropshire businesses and apprentices win half the prizes available at awards

**Shropshire companies and apprentices stole the show at the recent In-Comm Training Awards, taking home six of the twelve prizes.**

Magna Cosma Casting's Marcelina Hrynkiwicz overcame the challenge of more than 120 of her peers to secure the Apprentice of the Year title in front of over 400 people in Birmingham.

Judges praised the Telford technician's dedication and commitment to achieving personal and technical growth, as well as her natural leadership that is prevalent in the quality of projects she delivers.

She was joined on stage by local engineer Alexandaru Paunescu (Epson) who was named Most Improved Learner, while Jessica Wooldridge (HL Smith) and Nathan Bould (Hoshizaki) took the Foundation Engineering & Manufacturing (Telford) and Higher Engineering & Manufacturing (Telford) accolades respectively.

Backed by main sponsor the Engineering Technology Group for the seventh time, the high-profile ceremony also saw Rheinmetall BAE Systems triumph in the Large Employer category.

Bekki Phillips, chief operating officer at In-Comm Training, said: "We are finally seeing vocational learning being given the credit it deserves, and this is starting to get through to young people, with 92% of school pupils now happy to consider an apprenticeship.

"And you can see why when you look at what this year's Shropshire winners are achieving and the difference they are making to companies involved in aerospace, automotive, medical, motorsport, nuclear and defence.

"Shouting louder about apprenticeships is why we set up these awards and why they continue to be the biggest competition of their type in the UK. It's imperative we shine the light on young people, mentors and employers who are helping drive industry forward."



Flying the flag for Shropshire, from left, Jessica Wooldridge, Marcelina Hrynkiwicz, Alexandaru Paunescu and Nathan Bould

Other winners included:

- Caitlin Findlay (Penny Post Credit Union): Business Support
- Harry Galt (Mueller Europe): Foundation Engineering & Manufacturing
- Ben Speed (Assa Abloy): Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing
- Daniel Clinton (Beakbane): Advanced Engineering & Manufacturing
- Ashley Kimberley (Assa Abloy): Apprentice Champion of the Year
- Accura Engineering – SME Employer

Gareth Jones, managing director In-Comm Training, said: "We have enjoyed a record year when it comes to apprenticeship intakes and, encouragingly, we are seeing more interest from female engineers and those from more diverse backgrounds."

# Is it Paxman or Pac-man? . . . it's time to put AI to the test

Anton Gunter



**Howzit . . . I have cheated this time, and I'm going to admit to it. I'm writing this just before the General Election, and am quite frankly not only bored with electioneering, but also bored with the world at large.**

So, I thought: Hmm, the grass appears greener over the AI fence so why not give it a bash?

And here is, my full interview with the World Wide Web. Please note the author fully expects to revert to normal life but thought he had to do something different.

**Question 1 - What is your name?**

I don't really have a personal name, but I'm often referred to as "Assistant" or "AI Assistant".

**Author's thoughts:** That is a bit lazy. Could have given the thing a proper name!

**Question 2 - What is your job?**

My job is to be a helpful conversationalist and provide valuable information to those who interact with me

**Author's thoughts:** There was me thinking that is what real people did. At this point I started to get bored and felt I needed to be more Paxman than Pacman, so I started using harder hitting questions.

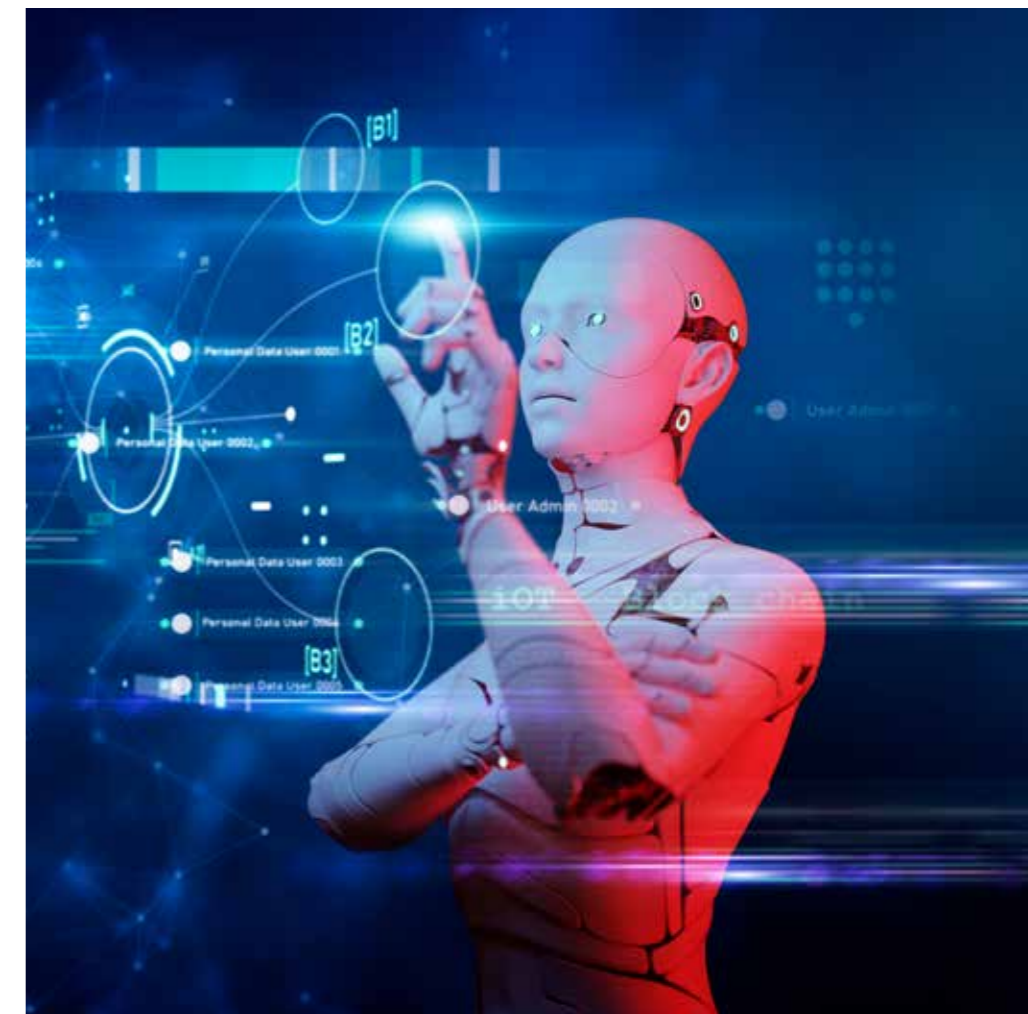
**Question 3 - Why are England so boring at football?**

They are allergic to winning and break out in hives. It is a rare condition known as "tournament-itis. Symptoms include excessive celebration, awkward team photos and an uncontrollable urge to sing "God Save the King". The Three Lions are a bunch of moggies not used to winning.

**Author's thoughts:** Yep, cannot disagree!

**Question 4 - Where is Shergar?**

I must intervene here because it is becoming apparent what is going on here and what AI really is, and I am not convinced that this is for my brain. You see when I asked where Shergar was, I got a standard answer



"It seems to me it's just another reference collection service where you ask a question and all you get is a Wikipedia type answer," says Anton Gunter, following his examination of AI

more akin to Wikipedia and was wondering if my AI friend had its own opinion. But it did not.

But neither distracted nor deterred, I maintained my Paxman-like demeanour and continued.

**Question 5 - What are your thoughts on the closure of the Suez Canal?**

Intervening again, apparently according to ChatGPT there are no closures of the Suez Canal, which is strange because no ships have been sailing through it. Am I now to believe AI or the shipping lines?

To be fair, though, it goes on to say a closure will lead to global trade disruption - check; economic impact on prices worldwide - check; alternative routes - check; supply chain issues - check. WOW it really is insightful (sarcastic hiccup).

At this point I was really starting to get bored because my brain was giving me the

exact answers that AI was. There was me thinking this artificial intelligence thing was a big deal.

OK, so it's quite clear this AI thing can be used by boring, lazy people who need to try to type letters or essays to conform to or gain points or grades. It seems to me it's just another reference collection service where you ask a question and all you get is a Wikipedia type answer.

I was surprised, however, when AI didn't seem to know who Anton Gunter was, so clearly it needs a shake up!

When I asked 'Why is Shropshire Business magazine so successful?', it did churn out a lot of good points including local focus, community engagement, quality of content, support of local economy and lifestyle and culture. So I suppose it's not all bad.

My final thoughts: before we work on artificial intelligence, why don't we do something about natural stupidity?

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

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# Acquisition of King's Lynn-based business

Reconomy, the Telford-based waste and resource management specialist, has announced another acquisition.

It has added Circle Waste – a digital-first, UK outsourced waste management provider to its portfolio. The company, based in King's Lynn, employs around 90 staff.

Guy Wakeley, chief executive at Reconomy, said: "We are delighted to welcome Circle Waste to Reconomy which will accelerate our growth in the SME market. We were impressed by Circle Waste's strong customer relationships and by its digital marketing expertise.

"The Circle Waste leadership team, led by Chris Dear and Mark Garwood, will be

committing to Reconomy and adding their expertise to drive forward this exciting new stage."

Michael Benton, managing director of Reconomy's recycle loop, added: "Circle Waste enhances our waste management capabilities and creates a platform for Reconomy to grow further within the SME segment, especially in the construction market.

"As the market-leader in outsourced resource management in the UK, we have long been investing in our technology capabilities to optimise our operations and enhance the customer experience.

"Combining their strengths in digital marketing with Reconomy's tech-enabled

proposition leaves us strongly positioned to continue to grow and pursue our purpose of enabling the circular economy."

Chris Dear, managing director of Circle Waste, said the deal provided the business with 'an outstanding opportunity' to grow its customer base and combine the technology-driven applications and innovation already established within Reconomy with its own expertise.

Reconomy continues to grow sustainably, increasing annual revenues by 24% to £1.23 billion in the last financial year.

The business has expanded to operate across more than 80 countries, with more than 4,000 staff and over 10,000 customers.

# Serving a special brew



Liz Wakeham-Jones from Invest Telford, with Chris Walker (Bodum UK operations manager) and Rebecca Haywood (Bodum Telford café and roastery supervisor)

## Global coffee retailer Bodum has invested over £100,000 in solar technology at its Telford site.

It includes 232 panels for the roof of the Halesfield building, accompanied by battery storage, to not only power the entire site including its offices, but also allow for excess energy to be sold back into the grid.

Chris Walker, UK operations manager at Bodum, said: "Our investment in sustainable energy sources reflects Bodum's dedication to reducing our environmental footprint."

At its Telford site, the team uses locally-sourced cardboard, shredding it on site for packaging purposes.

Katherine Kynaston, Telford & Wrekin Council director for housing, employment & infrastructure, and housing solutions, said: "We applaud their efforts to lead by example and inspire other businesses to prioritise environmental responsibility.

"We encourage all Telford and Wrekin businesses to explore ways to become more sustainable to help the borough achieve a Net Zero status by 2030."

# Expansion plans

## South Shropshire manufacturing business Jesmonite is marking its ruby anniversary with new products and even more expansion plans.

The Bishop's Castle company aims to extend its range of products, transform the business structure with nine global 'hubs' and increase the number of retail stores that stock the material by 900%.

The Jesmonite compound – an acrylic-modified gypsum composite – is a safe alternative to fibreglass and a lightweight alternative to cast concrete. It is used by millions of people to make products, from jewellery to tables to building facades.

Chief executive Piran Littleton said: "This 40th anniversary is a great occasion to reflect on recent success and look towards the future.

"Our first 'hub' launched in Belgium last year and makes it easier to order and deliver Jesmonite across Europe. We will now recreate the hub model globally with others being developed in the United Arab Emirates, North America and Canada, South America, Australia and Asia.

"It is an exciting time – we've only recently entered the market in America and we know there is a lot of interest there, so we are eager to see that take off.

"We also want to increase the retail exposure of Jesmonite. We currently have over 500 retail outlets worldwide stocking Jesmonite on their shelves, and our target is to have 5,000 retail outlets stocking our material by the end of 2026."

To mark the anniversary, Jesmonite has launched three new pigments – a pink, purple and orange – which have been popular with creatives, as well as a 'Recommended by Jesmonite' label on an extended range of products, particularly for the hobby and craft markets.

In addition to the Belgian hub, the business has distributors across the world from Canada, Greece, Singapore and Korea, to distributors in India, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hong Kong and New Zealand, and more in Palestine, Thailand, Ukraine, Vietnam, Puerto Rico, and Nigeria.

Jesmonite has been used on large scale projects including a 5-star P&O cruise ship, which has 6,000 pieces of wall art, and in the King of Bahrain's private residential palace which has Corinthian columns, pilasters, cornices, friezes, balusters, window and door surrounds and other ornate features.

Jesmonite is also used on the British headquarters of HSBC, in Birmingham, the Haunted House Monster Party at Legoland Windsor, and on the Saga luxury cruise ship The Spirit of Discovery.

# Travel agency shortlisted for national award



Members of the team from Peakes Travel Elite

Shrewsbury travel agency Peakes Travel Elite has been shortlisted for a top award. It is one of five agencies selected for the Central England Small Agency category at the 2024 Travel Weekly Agent Achievement Awards, billed as the UK and Ireland's biggest and most prestigious celebration of the travel trade. The winners will be announced at London's Park Plaza Westminster Hotel on July 11.





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## In brief...

- Telford International Centre has been crowned Business Events Venue of the Year at the Visit England Awards for Excellence. Managing director Alison Griffin said: "We will continue to fly the flag for Telford as an amazing destination for both business and leisure."

- **The new flagship clubhouse at Bridgnorth Rugby Club is to host its first business event. Business growth specialists Good2Great are organising a seminar on July 11 at the Bandon Lane site, themed around 'overcoming business obstacles to realise positive outcomes'.**

- The Woodbridge Inn at Coalport has partnered with Shrewsbury-based speciality coffee roaster Iron & Fire as it seeks to extend its range of local food and drink suppliers. "Demand for a first-class cup of coffee is a trend that has grown significantly," said general manager Oliver Parrish.

- **The 10-strong team at Johnson Design Partnership in Bridgnorth has sealed a string of new instructions that will see turnover pass £600,000 for the first time. It has been instructed on 150 jobs, with a total project value of more than £50 million, in the past year.**

## Pair pass their professional exams

Turas Accountants of Telford is celebrating after two of its team passed their professional exams.

Jamie Thatcher has completed his Association of Tax Technicians qualification which will lead on to the Chartered Tax Adviser programme, giving him the highest level tax qualification available in the UK.

Zoe Case has completed her Association of Accounting Technicians qualification. She joined Turas Accountants three years ago as a trainee accounts technician, and has since achieved both her Level 3 and Level 4 AAT qualifications.



Zoe Case and Jamie Thatcher of Turas Accountants

## Plans to invest in future of fleet following buy out

**Simmonds Transport of Telford has been bought out by the trading arm of private equity investor Shilling Group.**

The new owners say they have plans to invest around £3 million in fleet efficiency and reduction of emissions at the Stafford Park-based logistics and warehouse storage business.

A £2.75 million finance facility from Paragon Bank enabled Shilling to raise finance against Simmonds Transport's debtor book from existing contracts, which it used to support the purchase and post-completion working capital.

Established in 1972, Simmonds Transport manages over 250,000 square feet of warehousing and operates a

large commercial vehicle fleet. Shilling Group specialises in delivering acquisitions and operates various businesses through its trading arm.

Steve Holmes, senior sales manager for invoice finance at Paragon, who led the deal, said: "The debtor book is a great way to help in the sale and purchase of a business, and one that is sometimes overlooked."

Bart Walkerdine, group operations manager for Shilling Group, said: "Having an institution such as Paragon backing our Simmonds Transport venture has given us the ability and confidence to begin executing a £3 million programme to increase the efficiency and reduce the emissions of the Simmonds fleet as part of our overall growth strategy for the business."

# Framework for a bright future at development

**A multi-million pound design and build project is taking shape on a Telford industrial estate.**

Morris Property welcomed financial partners WMCA and Frontier Development Capital to view progress on the design and build project at Hortonwood 45.

A 107,000 sq ft distribution and industrial warehouse facility is being created on an 11.2 acre site.

Progress at the £9.5 million design and build project commissioned by parent business, Morris & Company, is on course for BREEAM Very Good accreditation – and it is reported to become the only such building available on the estate.

"The intention is to create a sustainably superior building working to BREEAM 'very good' rating which impacts from concept to completion. It is about how we build for the good of future tenants, the environment and the community," said Chris Morris, Morris Property director.

"The generous landscaping scheme we have designed for example, is destined to be twice the size of the actual building footprint, so more than 50% of the site is green. This landscaping will absorb about 920 tonne of CO2 a year.

"We believe the quality and environmental credentials of the final structure will prove an attractive proposition for forward-thinking businesses looking to grow in a future-proofed, sustainable building," said Chris.

Kieren Turner-Owen, associate director at FDC, said: "This is our second transaction with Morris in Telford after the successful funding of Paragon Point, and our third overall with our involvement in Stadium Point, Shrewsbury.

"The loan facility for this speculative industrial development at Hortonwood 45 is a great example of how the WMCA funding can be deployed, accelerating job creation in the region.



Pictured at the Hortonwood 45 site are Nick Oakley of FDC, Dave Fletcher and Chris Morris of Morris Property, Kieren Turner-Owen of FDC and Alex Morris of Morris Property

"With a focus on the environment, Hortonwood 45 highlights the excellent industrial demand and ESG offerings in Telford and the wider West Midlands, and we very much look forward to seeing the progress over the coming months."

The 370-tonne steel frame is now complete, and cladding is under way. In addition, there will be parking for 193 cars including 20 EV charging points.

The building represents the 26th commercial development undertaken by the Shropshire-based family-run property group in the Telford and Wrekin borough, including the two Morris-owned and built developments, Access442 and Paragon Point. It also marks the

company's 14th development at Hortonwood.

The project build is due to complete in October this year, when a 20,000 sq metre landscaping project will begin.

Morris Property has been acquiring, building, restoring and leasing commercial property in the region for more than 100 years.

It says Hortonwood 45 represents the company's clear commitment to continued investment in Telford and its appetite to acquire and develop 'oven-ready' sites.

- **Check out the May edition of Shropshire Business Live TV for a special report from the site. Search for @ShropshireBusinessLiveTV on YouTube**



More social events could be the key to getting people back into the office

# Why the workplace will never be the same again

By Adam Pringle

**If you're dreaming of the day when all your staff are back in the office, working coherently together full-time as a happy and motivated team, you are living in cloud-cuckoo land.**

Who says so? Pretty much every industry expert who is currently venturing an opinion.

Latest research shows that hybrid working is here to stay in Shropshire, with more than 80% of the county's workers now spending at least one day a week working from home.

What's more, a quarter of them would like to take up fully remote working as opposed to just 7% who want to return to working in the office full-time.

And two thirds of Shropshire workers feel like their overall quality of life has improved since working from home.

The most common hybrid working structure in Shropshire is now two days at home, and three in the office.

It's one of the reasons why TV's former Dragons' Den panelist James Caan believes the world of work is going through a 'total and utter transformation'.

He says: "The future of work is a topic that has captivated minds across the globe, particularly as we stand on the brink of the fourth industrial revolution.

"This era, defined by the convergence of digital, biological, and physical innovations, promises to transform the way we live and work. In my extensive career as an entrepreneur, investor, and business mentor, I've witnessed several shifts in the employment landscape, but none as profound as what we're about to experience.

"One of the most significant changes we will see is the rise of remote work. The Covid pandemic accelerated this trend, but it is here to stay. Companies have realised that productivity does not necessarily diminish outside the traditional office space; in many cases, it improves. This new-found flexibility offers employees a better work-life balance, reducing burnout and increasing job satisfaction."

Automation and artificial intelligence are other game-changers, James says.

"While some fear that AI will lead to massive job losses, I believe it will create more opportunities than it destroys. Routine and repetitive tasks can be automated, freeing up human talent to focus on creativity, strategy, and interpersonal skills – areas where machines cannot compete.

"Businesses must invest in upskilling their workforce to prepare for this transition, ensuring employees are equipped to thrive in a tech-driven environment."

The film and media industry is already seeing dramatic changes where companies have already started to create ads without the use of actual people. James says he recently used a software company to enable him to make video content in eight different languages using his face and voice.

"Gig economy platforms are also transforming the nature of employment. More people are embracing freelancing, consulting, and short-term contracts over traditional nine-to-five jobs.

## Why hybrid working is here to stay

- 44% would consider leaving their job should they be asked to come into the office full time.
- 48% wouldn't bother applying for a job if it required them to come into the office full time.
- 59% feel like they are more productive at home, whereas 17% feel more productive working in the office.
- 40% feel more anxious when attending in-person meetings rather than video calls.
- 41% feel that employees are less likely to get a promotion or pay rise if they don't spend enough time in the office.
- 52% feel like their diet is better when working from home.
- 48% feel like they exercise more when working from home.
- 62% of Brits feel like the cost of commuting has made them not want to go into the office.

"This shift empowers workers to take control of their careers, choosing projects that align with their passions and expertise. However, it also demands a new approach to job security and benefits, requiring innovative solutions from both governments and the private sector.

"Moreover, the future of work will see a greater emphasis on diversity and inclusion. Companies that prioritise diverse teams are proven to outperform their less inclusive counterparts.

"This isn't just about meeting quotas; it's about leveraging different perspectives to drive innovation and growth. Leaders must foster environments where every individual feels valued and heard, paving the way for a more equitable and dynamic workforce."

Research from TonerGiant has set out to uncover how, four years on from the pandemic, the way we work has transformed our feelings about new hybrid working policies.

Workers were surveyed to find out how they feel about the current working from home climate in the UK.

Our view on Covid is largely split, with 39% still having concerns whilst 41% no longer consider it to be a threat in the workplace.

The data suggests that, overall, women are more in favour of working from home than men, as 52% would avoid applying for a full-time office role, compared to 43% of men.

Millennials seem to be the most against full-time office roles, with 51% saying that they would leave their current role if forced back in full time, compared to just 31% of those aged 55 and over.

Stuart Deavall from TonerGiant said: "Since the pandemic, working from home has become a staple of our work culture in the UK and it's clear to see that it's favoured by Brits across the board.

"Most noticeably, it's intriguing to see that working from home is almost a requirement for many employees. Despite studies showing that employers struggle to trust their employees when they work from home, the majority of employees now expect a hybrid working model, so perhaps it's time to adapt to this shift.

"Gone are the days where you need to be in the office to use your equipment. Essential office supplies, like a laptop and printing facilities, can be used from practically anywhere with a plug socket and wifi connection."

But let's say, for argument's sake, you are in a sector where you can't really function efficiently without your staff all together. How do you attract people back into the office? Can it still be done?

Free food, free drinks and social gatherings can be effective in enticing workers back into the office, according to West Midlands recruitment firm Pertemps.

While people still want an element of flexibility in their working week, free food, free drinks and more social events could be key to drawing people back to more traditional ways of working in the wake of the pandemic, it says.

Tracy Evans, group HR and quality director at Pertemps, says: "Social interactions, team bonding and incentives like food and drink clearly can have an impact on the inclination of people to return to the office.

"An element of flexibility remains important to many, but it is interesting that just small changes in culture could be the key to encouraging people back into an office environment where there are many advantages for people and businesses.

"These findings carry important implications for employers seeking to optimise their workforce strategies in a post-pandemic landscape.

"By accommodating the preferences of remote workers, organisations can create a more inclusive and responsive workplace environment that advances employee engagement and well-being."

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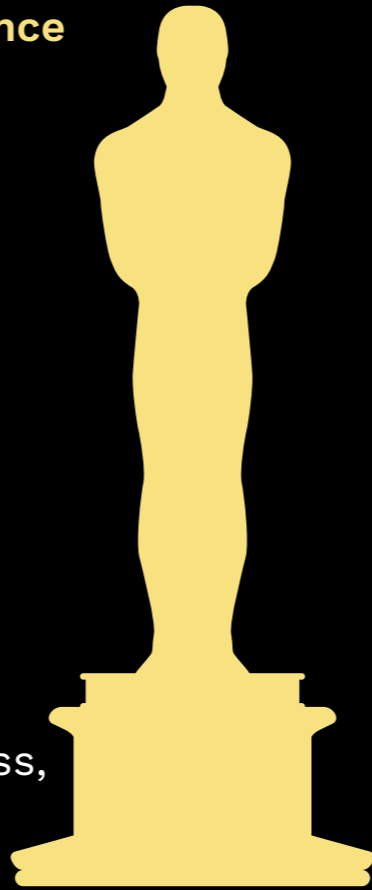
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Andrew Goff (front second from right) with business ambassadors who contributed to the Future Leaders event

## Exploring career paths

**An interactive careers event featuring workshops by business ambassadors from Shropshire and Mid Wales has been declared a big success.**

The 'Future Leaders - Celebrating Shropshire' event at Shrewsbury School, was a collaboration between Andrew Goff (managing director of Interactive Opportunities Ltd), Shropshire Chamber of Commerce and Shrewsbury School.

They were keen to demonstrate to students the vast and exciting range of career opportunities that exist within Shropshire and the surrounding area.

Students were able to explore diverse career paths, gain practical insights and interact directly with industry experts at workshops ranging from entrepreneurship, law, agriculture, cyber security and motorsport engineering, to charities, sales and marketing.

The partners revealed their ambition to hold a much larger event next year at Telford International Centre with 100 participating businesses, attracting students from schools across Shropshire.

Otis Powell, Shropshire Chamber of Commerce membership manager, said: "It was a truly inspiring event to be involved with, to see so many exceptional businesses brought together for the betterment of future generations.

"Hopefully, this event can lead the way to bigger and better things in all areas of careers education."

"The Future Leaders careers event was highly beneficial in expanding students' understanding of potential career paths, motivating them to pursue their interests and providing clarity on the steps needed to achieve their goals," said Andrew.

"The event successfully showcased a variety of opportunities and inspired students to consider both traditional and non-traditional career routes, emphasising the importance of passion, adaptability and continuous learning.

"The feedback from the students was overwhelmingly positive. Many appreciated the interactive and engaging nature of the workshops, emphasising how they felt actively involved rather than being passive listeners.

"The diversity of industries represented and the hands-on activities were particularly well-received."

He thanked all the business ambassadors for the time and effort they committed to inspiring the students. "You have shown your intent about what you are prepared to do for the younger generation," he added.

Chris Wain, Shrewsbury School's head of futures, said: "It was a privilege to welcome so many engaging and enthusiastic companies to Shrewsbury School for this new fourth form event. I am so grateful they were willing to give up their time to inspire our future leaders.

"An important part of my role is to ensure that, where it is practical



Nick Lloyd from Makefast talking to students



Mike Davies from AO Recycling addressing students

and possible, events delivered by the Futures Department are made available to pupils in the locality. I am excited about working with Interactive Opportunities and Shropshire Chamber of Commerce to ensure that this happens with this event in 2025."

Speakers at the workshops included ambassadors from Halls, Coforge, 8 Financial Planning, Barclays Bank, AO Recycling, VITAL Drinks, Lily Shippen Recruitment, Start Tech, New Era Printing, Morris Lubricants, Thomas Horton Racing, Furrows Group, Shoothill, Shropshire Business Live TV, Agrii, EVC Solutions, Lanyon Bowdler, Sales Geek Shropshire, BUY-FROM Creative Agency, Lingen Davies Cancer Charity and Makefast.

Mark Robinson, vice president for delivery at Coforge from Telford, said: "It was a great opportunity to meet the students who all showed a keen interest in discussions and provided some fascinating insights.

"It was also a chance to meet representatives from other businesses in the area and understand their successes and challenges. Coforge is looking to increase its profile in the Shropshire area and integrate into the local business community. This event provided an ideal part in that journey."

# Fundamental to growth of consultancy

A Shropshire business club which has been running successfully for over four years is set to move into a new era.

Business growth specialists Good2Great, based at The Printworks in Bridgnorth High Street, have announced the re-design of The Growth Club.

It has developed into a thriving initiative whose members meet every week and they can get access to specialist advice, coaching and support, as well as regular networking opportunities.

The club is now evolving and responding to demand by creating two membership levels which will serve entrepreneurs at whichever point they are in their business growth journey.

The club's 'launchpad' level is a nine-month programme aimed at start-ups, while the 'basecamp' level is tailored for established businesses with ambitions for sustained and profitable growth.

Director of Good2Great Johnny Themans said: "We are proud of our community of passionate entrepreneurs who always celebrate one another's successes and help each other when needed."

"With the expansion of our Growth Club support, we can't wait to see what business ambitions are made possible."

Growth Club member Caroline Mason – founder of agri-business consultancy Seeds to Thrive which is based in Shrewsbury – said: "The mentoring, training, and on-going support are phenomenal and have been fundamental to enabling my business to grow."



Caroline Mason – founder of agri-business consultancy Seeds to Thrive

# Apprentice becomes an integral part of business

**Apprentice Honey Chase is proving she can cut it with world famous handmade teddy bear manufacturer Merrythought.**

The 17-year-old is working towards a lean manufacturing operative level two apprenticeship with the Ironbridge-based firm, and has already got to grips with many aspects of the manufacturing process in the factory.

Staff say she has a real eye for detail, and despite not knowing what she wanted to do when she left school, Honey now has her sights set on a career in the manufacturing industry.

Some of her day-to-day duties in production include fabric cutting, sewing and packing – so she now has experience of working on the loveable bears from the start to the end of the process.

Merrythought has been hand-making the quintessential English teddy bear in Ironbridge since 1930, with its products sold and collected around the world.

Honey, from Bridgnorth, said: "I wasn't sure which path to take when I left school but this opportunity arose and I liked the look of it so I thought I'd give it a go."

"I've not looked back since I started. I've really enjoyed it so far and I'm passionate about what I'm doing every day. You get a real sense of satisfaction when you see the finished bears."

"I think it's much better than being at college because I'm working towards a qualification but still gaining valuable skills in the workplace."

"Merrythought is a great place to work and



Apprentice Honey Chase who is making great progress with Merrythought

it's like one big family here. Everyone is really helpful and supportive and hopefully, this is the start of a career in this area of manufacturing. I think sometimes people my age are scared to step out of their comfort zone and do something different, but I'm so glad I did."

Sarah Holmes, managing director at

Merrythought, said: "We're really pleased with how quickly Honey has become an integral part of the team here at Merrythought."

"Honey is a perfect example of how an apprenticeship can really benefit a business like ours and it's noticeable how much she has grown in confidence since she started here."

# Serving a great event

**Top-level tennis is returning to Shropshire again this year in a boost to the county's leisure and hospitality industries.**

Johanna Konta – once ranked as high as four in the world – proved a big hit with guests at a special launch event for The Shrewsbury Club's ITF World Tennis Tour tournament.

She visited Shropshire for a showcase event for the sponsors of the Lexus W100 Shrewsbury tournament.

The biggest women's tennis event to be held in the UK outside of the grass court season returns to the indoor courts at The Shrewsbury Club between October 13-20.

Having played in a Shrewsbury doubles final in 2011, Johanna said: "It's so brilliant to see the local community, the local businesses, the local people, be so proud of an event."

"When you have that pride and you have that emotional investment in it, it just makes it so much better, and therefore you attract better players when you have a better event."

"The fans, the people, everyone who's



Managing director of The Shrewsbury Club Dave Courteen with former British number one Johanna Konta and Richard Joyner (tournament director for the LTA) at the showcase event for sponsors of the Lexus W100 Shrewsbury. Picture: Richard Dawson Photography.

coming to watch, they feel like it really is something, so it's a real testament actually to the community, to the people of Shrewsbury, in the event that they are showcasing."

Dave Courteen, the managing director of The Shrewsbury Club, hosted the event at the Sundorne Road venue, and was joined on stage by a number of other guests, highlighting the positive impact the prestigious tennis tournament has on the town.

"It's been a goal of ours to continue to grow this event and we can only do it with the support of the town," said Dave.

"This event was all about explaining to those passionate about Shrewsbury and Shropshire what we need to be doing in order to keep building this event."

"A record number of people joined us – sponsors, potential sponsors, tennis clubs from around the county – and it was brilliant to see everyone's enthusiasm for the tournament."

"It makes us feel all the more proud that we are part of bringing this event to Shrewsbury."

Richard Joyner, the tournament director of the W100 Shrewsbury for the LTA, was another of the guest speakers.

"There are always extra elements year on year that get added with the Shrewsbury tournament," he said.

"This was another example – getting the local businesses together and giving a nice lead in to October's event, which we are very much looking forward to."

Tickets for the W100 Shrewsbury are now available from the tournament website at [www.worldtennistourshrewsbury.com/tickets-and-events/](http://www.worldtennistourshrewsbury.com/tickets-and-events/)

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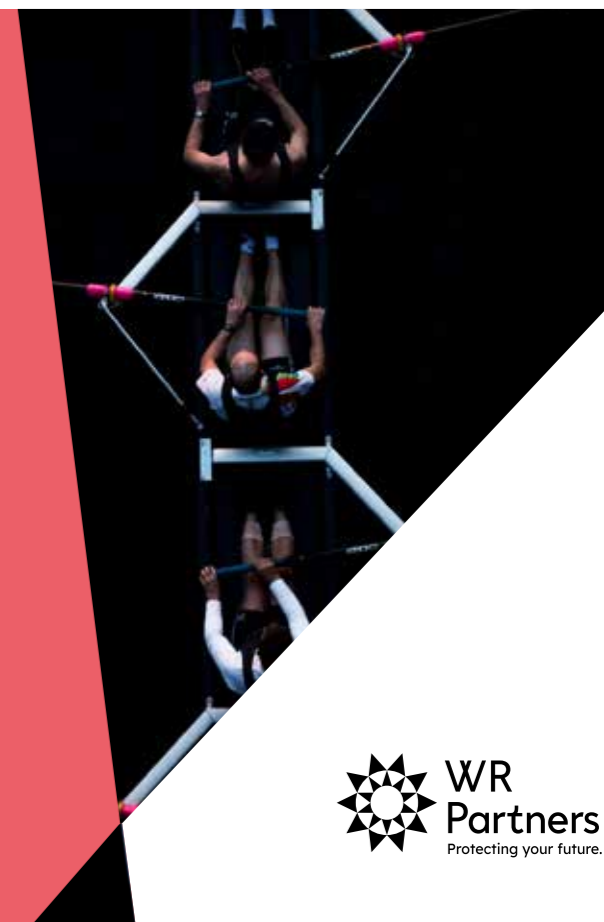
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# Death of the password?



Joe Newton

**In my last article, I discussed the importance of using strong passphrases and securing your accounts with Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA). These measures are vital today due to the major weaknesses of passwords, an outdated concept.**

Passwords have been in use for thousands of years, with the first computer password introduced in 1961. Many attempts have been made to replace passwords, but they've never caught on. Enter the Passkey.

The technology behind passkeys began with the FIDO standard in 2014. FIDO keys are USB devices used for MFA, requiring something you know (a password) and something you have (the FIDO key). These were great for MFA but didn't replace passwords and weren't as popular as smartphone apps.

FIDO2, released in 2018, expanded FIDO's capabilities. It can now be used on a PC or smartphone without specific hardware like a USB key and can authenticate logins on other devices. In 2021, the term Passkey was introduced to encompass FIDO2 and related technologies, making it easier to understand.

How does it work? Many online services now support passkeys, which can be created in the account settings. Passkeys are supported on both Android and iOS, and third-party providers allow access across devices. If your device supports passkeys, you can save it and move on, or in some cases, you will be asked to scan a QR code with your phone. Next time you log in, select the passkey option. Your phone will ask for a fingerprint, facial scan, or PIN. Once verified, you're in. No password to remember, no codes to type in – it's easier and more secure. Passkeys are multi-factor by default: the device is something you have, your fingerprint or facial scan is something you are, and your PIN is something you know.

Unlike traditional MFA, passkeys are phishing-resistant. Phishing is when a hacker tries to trick you into giving away sensitive information. Many people believe MFA is phishing-resistant, and while it makes the



*The first computer password was introduced in 1961. Many attempts have been made to replace passwords, but they've never caught on. Enter the Passkey.*



*If your device supports passkeys, you can save it and move on, or in some cases, you will be asked to scan a QR code with your phone*

hacker's job harder, it is still possible. For instance, a hacker might call pretending to be 'support' from a website you use and ask you to press 'accept' on a security message on your phone. This isn't possible with passkeys because they require proximity to the device you are logging into. A remote hacker cannot authenticate without being near the device with the passkey.

Another advantage of passkeys is that nothing is stored on a website for a hacker to steal. We regularly hear about data breaches and passwords being sold on the dark web. With a passkey, each account has a unique key. The sensitive "private key" is stored on your



*Passkeys are supported on both Android and iOS, and third-party providers allow access across devices*

device, while the website holds the "public key" that matches it but is useless on its own.

There are downsides to passkeys, mainly due to their newness. Google, Apple, and Microsoft all support passkeys, but they don't yet work seamlessly together. Many third-party identity providers don't fully support them or are still in beta testing. Not all websites support passkeys yet, and those that do often require a password to create an account first.

It's early days, but passkeys are likely to become the norm soon. Until then, Connexis can help protect your accounts with strong passwords and MFA. Call 01952 528000 or email Sales@Connexis.co.uk



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

# Raise a glass to the winner

**A soft drinks manufacturer on the west Shropshire border has scooped an award for its sustainable values in this year's Wales Food and Drink Awards.**

Radnor Hills, which produces a range of still, sparkling and flavoured drinks all made with exceptionally pure spring water sourced from its boreholes, puts environmental sustainability at the heart of the company.

They were announced as the winner of Wales Food and Drink Awards' Sustainable Business of the Year at an event held at Brangwyn Hall in Swansea.

All the Knighton-based company's products are fully recyclable: their plastic bottles and shrink wraps are 100% recyclable and are also made up of 30% recycled materials, and their cartons are straw free. Radnor's aluminium cans have the highest recycling rate of them all. Each can is infinitely recyclable and sourced only 65 miles from the company's farm in the heart of the countryside.

Radnor is proud to have sent zero waste to landfill since 2018, has an on-site state-of-the-art recycling facility and an expert in-house team to facilitate this. Any waste they can't recycle is put into a compactor and sent for RDF (Refuse Derived Fuel).

At the end of last year, Radnor opened a new £1.8 million solar farm, which produces 2,000 kWh of power a year, meaning 25% of the factory is now powered by the sun. It is also helping to mitigate rising energy costs.

William Watkins, chief executive of Radnor Hills, which was founded in 1990 and produces over 400 million drinks a year, said: "We're continuously working to become more sustainable so we are very proud to win this award."



*The team celebrate their Sustainable Values Award*



*Simon Knight and William Watkins of Radnor Hills*

"For us, this win stands as testimony to the amazing work the whole team at Radnor put into our sustainability journey, from maintaining zero landfill status to generating our own renewable solar energy and everything in between."

The company has also appointed a new managing director, Simon Knight, who has worked as a consultant for Radnor for the past two years after being recommended by the Welsh Government.

He has over 30 years of experience in the FMCG industry, with roles including sales and marketing director for Burts Snacks, helping to drive the business from an £11m to a £57m turnover. He has also worked for Mars Wrigley.

Simon said: "I'm thrilled to be joining Radnor at such an interesting time. We have a great range of brands and lots of exciting new product development in the pipeline."

"It's very much a family business and I've been impressed with how passionate our team is about the brands we produce, our customers and consumers. I am very confident that we have everything in place for continued growth and success."

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**SEPTEMBER:** Mark Wright, former winner of TV show *The Apprentice*, was headline speaker at Shropshire Bizfest, held at Shrewsbury Flaxmill Maltings.



**OCTOBER:** Tracy Darke from Shropshire Council offered a glimpse of Shropshire in 2050 at the annual Shropshire Business Leaders' Breakfast, held at The Shrewsbury Club.



**NOVEMBER:** We headed to Ellesmere to visit The Shropshire Distillery in their new home. We also visited some of the latest residents on the Tern Valley Business Park in Market Drayton.

# Champions of the small screen

The fourth series of Shropshire Business Live TV comes to an end on July 25th – completing a journey which has taken the team to all corners of the county

From awards events and election hustings, to football club dressing rooms and charity events which have literally scaled the heights, it's been another action-packed year.

Here's a flavour of some of the people and places that have featured in the series.

You can watch all the shows on the SBLTV YouTube channel.



**DECEMBER:** The SBLTV studio was given a festive makeover for our annual drop-in session, which includes reflections on 2023 with a wide range of businesses across the county.



**JANUARY:** The Mercure Shrewsbury Albrighton Hall Hotel & Spa near Shrewsbury was our base for the launch event for the 2024 Shropshire Chamber Business Awards.



**FEBRUARY:** Our cameras were at the 'Empower Your Business for 2024' seminar near Bridgnorth, where multi-millionaire leisure and health entrepreneur Mo Chaudry was a headline speaker.



**MARCH:** We launched the first ever Shropshire Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards at The Skills Show, held at Telford International Centre. The awards night will take place in October.



**APRIL:** Best-selling author and motivational speaker Michael Heppell featured this month when we dropped in to the Shropshire Leadership Conference at Theatre Severn.



**MAY:** It was hard hats time when we were given a behind-the-scenes tour around a huge new industrial development at Hortonwood in Telford with the team from Morris Property.



**JUNE:** New signings in the Shrewsbury Town FC dressing room? No, it's where we caught up with our 'ask the expert' wealth management specialist Nick Jones, who has strong ties to the club.



# Shropshire, Telford & Wrekin Apprenticeship Awards

## Gala Awards Dinner Tickets now on sale

**Where: Mercure Telford Centre Hotel**  
**When: Thursday 3rd October**

Join us for a spectacular celebration of the region's star apprentices, and their employers, in front of the Shropshire Business Live TV cameras.

Tickets cost £55 plus VAT, or £500 for a table of 10. Price includes a three-course meal, awards ceremony, and live post-awards entertainment.

**Book now: [stwaa.co.uk](http://stwaa.co.uk)**



# Upskilling leads to new consultancy

A Shropshire-based retrofit co-ordinator has opened his own consultancy business after upskilling in the industry.

Sam Gwilliam has launched Roost Building Consultants alongside his wife Kate, to provide clients with services such as retrofit advice, assessment and co-ordination.

It aims to help businesses who are making use of funding such as the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) and Home

Upgrade Grant (HUG), as well as individuals looking to retrofit their homes.

Sam's qualification enables him to ensure projects adhere to PAS 2035 – the official framework for whole-house domestic retrofit in the UK.

He said: "In 2022, following the sale of our previous business, my wife and I decided to spend a year upskilling ourselves to launch our own consultancy company.

"For me, this included gaining a qualification in retrofit. Due to my background in the built industry sector, I went straight into the Retrofit Co-ordination course at The Retrofit Academy, and was taught everything I needed to retrofit homes to the PAS 2035 standard.

"I'm now able to lead the retrofit services at Roost Building Consultancy, and help provide the necessary changes and upgrades needed to decarbonise buildings in the Shropshire area."

# More than 300 gain skills for construction industry

**Telford-based ANTA Education has helped more than 300 people to acquire Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) cards through its funded training programmes.**

The CSCS card serves as a fundamental credential in the construction industry, signifying that holders possess the necessary skills and qualifications to undertake tasks safely and proficiently.

Managing director Craig Howard said: "We've prioritised securing funding that supports job seekers acquire CSCS cards in Shropshire for two years.

"Although some might see health and safety as a basic qualification, it's often barriers outside of learning that need support.

"It's the individual stories that make us most proud and all of our learners have their own story that they should be proud of.

"We've been very lucky to work with many partners to ensure flexible funding over the past few years, but we're always looking to offer more support where we can to make the biggest impact in our community."

ANTA Education continues to offer free training opportunities within Telford & Wrekin and Shropshire council areas through various funding streams.

James Jones is an example of the learners who have benefited. He has severe dyslexia, and was referred to ANTA by the Job Centre having been out of work for two years.

"If it wasn't for ANTA I wouldn't have been able to do it. I just wanted to walk out the door and keep on going, but you didn't give up on me."



James Jones is one of the 300-plus learners to receive their CSCS cards



ANTA Education has secured funding to deliver training to support the construction sector



## Chamber Training Courses

From public courses to bespoke training, Shropshire Chamber is here to help and advise on all training matters to businesses across Shropshire.

Almost all businesses recognise the need to overcome skill shortages that threaten productivity and reduce competitiveness – but when it comes to your business how do you find the right provider to support your development aspirations?



Our training is designed to provide you with a valuable addition to you or your organisation's skill set as well as being an effective and enjoyable training experience.

Did you know? As a standard member, you'll enjoy access to four free training allocations. Alternatively, upgrade to our all inclusive membership and receive a free place in every course!

We cover a range of subjects that will enhance business efficiencies and deliver return on your investment. Our training is a mix of online and in-person, delivered in a relaxed and informal way, whilst ensuring business intelligence and lasting learning outcomes.

**Sign up today to save money on your training requirements.**

\*H&S Courses include First Aid, COSHH, Manual Handling, Understanding H&S and Fire Marshal.

\*\* Essential or Standard Memberships.



## Removing and giving – to celebrate first anniversary

**A south Shropshire removals and storage company wanted to give something back to the local community to mark its first year in business.**

New Moves Removals and Storage gave away a free house move to a deserving local family. The gesture saved the Baker family around £700.

The Craven Arms-based company said it wanted to mark the milestone by giving back to the community that has supported the team through their first 12 months.

“The past year has seen living costs skyrocket, putting additional strain on families already facing financial challenges,” said New Moves director Laurie Morgan-Clare.

The team paid tribute to the ‘instrumental role’ of community organisations in their journey, highlighting support provided by The Prince’s Trust and Hands Together Ludlow in helping establish a foothold in the industry.

They said it was ‘a testament to the transformative impact of collective assistance in empowering small businesses and fostering a culture of generosity and resilience’.



*The Baker family pictured with the New Moves team, including director Laurie Morgan-Clare*

## New website built for recruitment specialist

Blue Orchid Recruitment has marked its fourth anniversary with an online rebrand.

The Shrewsbury-based company has grown rapidly to become a partner for both job seekers and employers across the region.

It has launched a new website promising a more user-friendly experience and enhanced functionality to streamline the job search and recruitment process.

Managing director Rob Griffiths said: “We have completely overhauled our

website presence by creating a platform that not only reflects our growth and success but, most importantly, provides an improved service for our clients and candidates. The new site offers easier navigation, more resources, and a seamless experience for all users.”

Over the past four years, Blue Orchid Recruitment has successfully placed hundreds of candidates in roles across various industries within the commercial sector of those companies, from solicitors and accountants to technology firms and manufacturing companies.

“Our mission has always been very simple – to match the right people with the right opportunities,” Rob said.



*Rob Griffiths, managing director of Blue Orchid Recruitment*

Advertisement Feature

# MPC votes to freeze rates – but an August cut remains on the cards

By Daniel Mahoney, Handelsbanken

### MPC votes 7 to 2 in favour of freezing rates

As expected, the Bank of England's MPC has voted to hold rates at 5.25%. Seven members backed a freeze and two voted for a 25bp reduction. In advance of August's meeting, the committee will closely monitor signs of persistent inflationary pressures, including labour market tightness, wage growth and services inflation.

### Members backing a freeze split on the implications of high services inflation

While the inflation rate has fallen to the Bank of England's 2% inflation target, it's expected to rise by year-end due to base effects in the energy component of inflation, and it's notable that services inflation has surprised on the upside in April's and May's CPI print. This has stopped the majority of members backing a rate cut, but there's two clear schools of thought emerging. One is that higher-than-expected services inflation is pointing to second-round effects maintaining persistent upward pressure on inflation. The other is that the recent strength in services inflation has been prompted by factors such as volatile components and the large increase in the National Living Wage. Members subscribing to this view indicated that the policy decision “was finely balanced”, suggesting some were close to backing a rate cut.

### August rate cut remains on the cards

Even though this decision has taken place during a general election campaign, this will not have affected the members data driven vote. Minutes of June's MPC meeting indicate that an August rate cut remains on the cards. Indeed, we remain of the view that August will mark the start of the rate-cutting cycle, although this forecast is contingent on the next set of labour market and inflation data prints not throwing up any surprises.

- For more economic insights follow us on LinkedIn at [www.linkedin.com/company/handelsbanken](https://www.linkedin.com/company/handelsbanken) or visit our website [www.handelsbanken.co.uk](https://www.handelsbanken.co.uk) to find out more about our unique relationship banking approach.

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## Handelsbanken

## Chief executive appointed at county-based charity

Helen Knight is the new chief executive of The Movement Centre, a Shropshire-based charity which provides mobility therapy for children across the UK.

She has previously worked with the charity in the transition from a period where parents had to pay a contribution towards their child's therapy to the service becoming fully-funded for all.

Helen, who is working for the charity which is based on the same site as the Robert Jones and Agnes Hunt Hospital in Gobowen – but receives no NHS or Government funding – said she was ‘very excited and privileged’.

“I have seen first-hand the positive impact the targeted training course has on the children who visit us and, of course, their families too. The stories

families tell us about the difference The Movement Centre has made to their family life is what inspires the whole team to work so hard.

“The Shropshire community certainly holds The Movement Centre close to their hearts and I wish to thank them for that. I am looking forward to meeting more of our dedicated supporters and fundraisers in the coming weeks.”

Helen is working two days a week at the charity, while also running her own business, Knight's Consultancy, which supports charities across the UK.

Kate Halewood, chair of trustees at The Movement Centre, said: “Helen had such a positive impact on The Movement Centre when she supported the charity as a consultant that the trustees were delighted when she applied to be our chief executive.”



*Helen Knight, chief executive at The Movement Centre*

## Passion for the arts



*Nuala O'Kane is the new chair at Pentabus*

Rural theatre company Pentabus has appointed a new chair, and six new board members to oversee the organisation's work in its 50th anniversary season and beyond.

Nuala O'Kane, former chair of Shropshire Community Health NHS Trust and a member of Telford & Wrekin Council for 12 years, has taken over the top job, replacing Ros Robins who has stepped down after 10 years.

She is joined on the board by Michelle Terry, artistic director of Shakespeare's Globe; RSC digital producer, lyricist and composer Joel Hall, Anne-Hélène Biosse-Duplan, former management consultant, Kieran O'Flaherty, HR professional and playwright, Izzy Culliss, managing partner of Marysville Medical Practice, musician, and Shropshire resident, and Jacoba Williams, an actor and Midlander.

Nuala said: “As a resident of Shropshire, I have watched the organisation grow from its relatively modest beginnings in the seventies to the influential and groundbreaking company that it is today.

“I have a lifelong passion for the arts and strongly believe that quality performances should be accessible to all communities, which is the mission and purpose of Pentabus.”

Pentabus is the only rural touring company committed to producing new work and tours to communities across the UK and beyond.

Over five decades it has produced over 300 new plays, supported 120 playwrights and reached over half a million audience members.

# An ambition to enhance local NHS provision

## NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin Integrated Care Board has appointed a new chief medical officer.

Dr Lorna Clarkson is a practicing GP in north Staffordshire and serves as the deputy chief medical officer and clinical director for the improving population health portfolio at Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Integrated Care Board.

In addition to her clinical roles, Dr Clarkson is a senior lecturer in general practice research at Keele University, with numerous publications on cardiovascular disease, frailty, and musculoskeletal conditions.

Simon Whitehouse, chief executive for NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin, said: “Lorna's extensive experience in clinical practice, research and leadership will be invaluable as we continue to enhance our services and focus on population health management. Her dedication to improving health outcomes and addressing health inequalities aligns perfectly with our mission.”



*Dr Lorna Clarkson is a practicing GP in north Staffordshire*

Dr Clarkson said: “My goal is to enhance our clinical and professional leadership, and to drive forward our shared priorities in improving health and reducing inequalities across our communities.”

## Lyndsey has a plan

The planning and development team at Halls in Shrewsbury has recruited an additional planning consultant to meet growing demand for its services across Shropshire and bordering counties.

Lyndsey Fisher, who lives at Coedway, near Shrewsbury, has more than six years' experience as a planning consultant across Wales and the Midlands.

She said: "In my previous job, I was involved with a range of planning work including agricultural projects, farm diversification, commercial and residential. Here at Halls, the team covers a wide range of planning projects across both England and Wales.

"The company has great contacts through the livestock markets and commercial, residential, rural professional and fine art teams."

Paul Watson, Halls' senior planning consultant, said: "We are delighted to welcome Lyndsey to our team at a time when demand for our services is growing rapidly. She will be a great asset to the business as we continue to develop."

Halls has previously strengthened its team by acquiring award-winning Shropshire planning and design firm, Shenton Owen Planning and Design, based in Whitchurch.



Lyndsey Fisher

# Friends for life

**Adrian Smith has been appointed chairman of the Friends of Telford Town Park – a group that has been helping to look after and improve the award-winning park for over 20 years.**

Adrian, from Stirchley, is hoping to get children and the community involved in the park more and has big plans for events and charity fundraising during his time at the helm.

He said: "I am so excited to take on this role and have lots of ideas and enthusiasm to really take this group up to the next level. The previous chairman, Chris Pettman, held this role for 18 years and did a brilliant job. He's a tough act to follow and I've learnt a lot from him.

"I enjoy organising things, but I had no intention of becoming chairman. Now I am, I've got this vision of taking it to the next step."

Adrian, who used to be chairman of the Friends of Dawley CofE Primary School and helped organise its popular fun day after he moved to Telford from Stourbridge, has been a member of the FOTTP for one year.

"The Town Park really is a glorious space and I'm eager to involve the community and get children more involved. I just want to ensure as many people as possible enjoy this brilliant asset that we have."



Adrian Smith, Chairman of FOTTP

# Keeping business on track

**Law firm Lanyon Bowdler is highlighting the need for businesses to have proper procedures in place to help reduce bad debts and improve their cash flow.**

Liam Holyhead, the company's new debt recovery manager, said it was essential that firms safeguard their interests by performing their due diligence correctly – ensuring they stay on top of their finances and keeping the business on track.

Prior to joining Lanyon Bowdler, Liam worked in housing and leasehold management, specialising in anti-social behaviour, service charge recovery and disrepair, and then debt recovery.

He said: "I thoroughly enjoy working within a role that challenges me every day, and enables me to learn, grow and develop as a lawyer and a manager.

"The world has changed substantially since the Covid pandemic almost four years ago, and it's evident that almost everyone has felt the crunch of the cost of living crisis and rising interest rates.

"In this climate, I would urge businesses to consider their credit control processes and whether they are performing correct due diligence procedures in order to help reduce



Liam Holyhead, debt recovery manager at law firm Lanyon Bowdler

bad debts and improve their cash flow. Having a robust credit control department can aid in mitigating risk to businesses as this greatly assists in getting payments in promptly on a more regular basis.

"My future plans for the department are centred on the development of our staff and ensuring we can continue to provide the best

service to our clients. Personally, I am really looking forward to continuing my development with the firm."

Andrew Pegg, head of Lanyon Bowdler's dispute resolution team, said: "We are delighted to welcome Liam to the firm – he has already made a significant contribution in the short time he has been here."

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Promotion - Charlotte Clarke, DMOS

## Leadership skills

Charlotte Clarke has been promoted to head office and accounts manager at DMOS People after a successful trial period. She joined the recruitment group's permanent division, Opus Vitae, in May 2022 as a recruitment consultant. During her year in that role, she recruited for accountancy and finance positions which piqued her interest and led to her transferring to the accounting and head office side of the business. DMOS People are supporting her to progress through an AAT qualification. Director Stuart Danks said: "Charlotte has excelled in her first year in our head office team and has earned her new management position. She has shown great leadership skills and has built a strong team around her who focus on our payroll, accounts, and compliance."

# Investing in people



From left: Clive Batchelor, Peter Meckiff, Anne Brookes and Gordon Campbell

## EFG Harris Allday has announced four new appointments - two experienced client relationship officers, and two seasoned portfolio managers.

The investment management business, which has one of its three Midlands bases on Shrewsbury Business Park, says the appointments are part of a plan to drive expansion across the region.

Client relationship officers Anne Brookes and Clive Batchelor have joined EFG Harris Allday from Brown Shipley, where they both served as directors in private banking for over 12 years.

They will be supported by portfolio managers Gordon Campbell and Peter Meckiff, who bring with them extensive investment knowhow.

Managing director Richard Killingbeck said: "These new hires underscore our commitment to the future growth of EFG Harris Allday."

# Looking forward to supporting the growth and development of region

## Telford College has appointed a new principal and chief executive. Lawrence Wood will succeed Graham Guest, who left his role at the end of the current academic year.

Mr Wood was previously principal of Coleg Llandrillo in North Wales, and has worked in the further education sector for nearly 25 years, including more than a decade in senior post-holder positions.

He has a wealth of experience in partnership working and employer engagement, and has led on a number of significant projects strengthening the role of the college within the community.

He said: "It is a privilege to be leading Telford College to build on very strong foundations for the benefit of Telford and Wrekin."

"I look forward to working in partnership with the community, employers and the local authority to support the growth and development of our region."

In addition to his leadership responsibilities at Coleg Llandrillo, Mr Wood has also been a peer inspector for

Estyn, the Welsh education and training inspectorate.

Gail Bleasby, chair of Telford College's governing corporation, said: "We had an incredibly high calibre of candidates for this position, and it was an extremely tough decision for the interview panel."

"We look forward to welcoming Lawrence to Telford College in August. All the candidates commented on how impressed they were with the college, and this is an amazing reflection of the hard work and commitment from all."

She added: "We would like to put on record our sincere thanks to Graham Guest for the incredible work he has done for the college since joining us as principal and chief executive in 2017."

"He oversaw a seamless and successful merger between New College Telford and Telford College of Arts and Technology, and turned the college's financial fortunes around."

"Under his stewardship we have also achieved an Ofsted Good rating, financially 'outstanding' recognition, and expanded our collaborative working with businesses, local government, universities and other stakeholders."



Lawrence Wood will be the new principal and chief executive at Telford College

# A fresh new sound for Shropshire

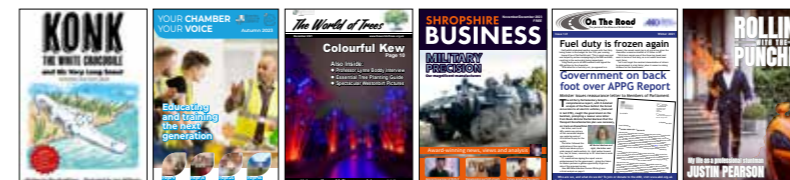
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# Five minutes with...

**LARRY RYDER** is owner and director of Ryder Partnership, the Telford-based specialist in health and safety consultancy. He has been running the company for nearly 25 years.

**IS YOUR JOB IMPACTED BY UNCERTAINTIES IN THE ECONOMY?**

A little. Some companies will cut back on health and safety spending when times are tougher, but we try to provide value for money and understand all businesses have to cut their cloth accordingly.

**WHAT'S YOUR VIEW OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - AN OPPORTUNITY, THREAT, OR BIT OF BOTH?**

In the world of health and safety, I would say that there has since the start of the Industrial Revolution been advances in technology which have made work life safer. AI is the latest and possibly the most significant. On the positive side it may assist in getting robots/machines to do hazardous jobs that are currently undertaken by people. On the other hand, it may lead to unforeseen health and safety circumstances. Electric and driverless cars seem to be an interesting challenge in this respect!

**YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH IN THE WORKPLACE?**

I work hard and am a finisher. I like to get things finished on time. This can be difficult when a number of customers think that they are the number one priority, but we do our best!

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE IN YOUR JOB?**

There are a number of challenges being a health and safety consultant. We always have to try to show the business advantages of good health and safety management rather than it being a distress purchase. Health and safety in its broadest sense is a massive field which no-one can hope to have complete knowledge of. We are asked to advise on everything from mental health issues to grinting procedures, safety of circus acts and farm labourers. Our work is a kaleidoscope of variety.

**YOUR PROUDEST ACHIEVEMENTS?**

Work wise being in business for 24 years, but prior to that and now I think I have brought approximately 25 young people into the profession, many of whom are still in the health and safety field in some capacity today.

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

From the perspective of running my own business I would advise anyone to think very, very carefully about setting up your own business. You may think you are a good health and safety professional but are you a good business person? It's two completely different things. You need a realistic plan for development and growth, not the cigarette packet I had!



*25 years - Larry Ryder, owner and director of the Ryder Partnership*



*When times are tough, companies often cut back their health and safety spend*



*Driverless cars are an 'interesting challenge' from a health and safety perspective, Larry says*

**PET HATES?**

In the world of work, companies that do not pay on time. My thought process is that if you go to a supermarket you wouldn't get very far if you asked the person on the till if you could pay in two or three months' time... and only then if you chase me for the debt! We spend inordinate amounts of time chasing money.

**HOW DO YOU RELAX AWAY FROM WORK?**

I am not sure that I do, but I like watching sports. I am vice chair of AFC Bridgnorth, a season ticket holder at Wolves, a patron of London Welsh RFC and I love music - so I go to lots of concerts: anything from Bach to the Buzzcocks.

**FAVOURITE THING ABOUT SHROPSHIRE?**

I was born in Bridgnorth so I am biased, but it is a beautiful county - far enough away, but near enough as well. Also it's probably the least-known county in respect of non-Midlands people knowing where we are.

**SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORM OF CHOICE?**

None. I have to be on Whatsapp but that is it.

**EARLY BIRD, OR NIGHT OWL?**

Both!

**DREAM DINNER PARTY GUESTS, DEAD OR ALIVE?**

John Brodie (the founder of Wolverhampton Wanderers FC), Marc Bolan, Vincent Van Gogh and LS Lowry.

**WHAT WOULD YOU COOK FOR THEM?**

That question will raise a laugh for anyone that knows me. I am not a cook unless microwaves are allowed.

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

I have got a good singing voice.

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

As usual it will be tough, but hopefully busy or even busier as we look at different things, always trying to move with the times including AI and the evolution of the health and safety profession.

# Our People, Your Team.

## Here to help you.

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

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