

Birmingham Business

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December 2023

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recipes for success

PLUS

Spotlight on commercial
property and real estate

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25 years supporting the local economy

As ART Business Loans (ART) celebrates 25 years in business it is encouraging that through credit crunch, recession and pandemic, ART has remained true to its mission.

ART continues to provide access to appropriate finance supporting enterprise and targeting job creation and preservation in underserved areas and communities.

ART provides loans of between £10,000 and £150,000 across the Midlands, with a mixture of

private sector funds and public sector support where banks have been unable to fully meet the customer's needs

The customer base is very well spread across many sectors and ART remains committed to supporting viable businesses to give them the opportunity to grow or trade through challenging times.

To apply for a loan, see ART's website: www.artbusinessloans.co.uk



Access to the right finance is an issue for every micro and small businesses. For a while it seemed like peer to peer lenders and alternative funders might offer a solution to those refused by the banks: however most of these have raised the bar in the amounts they are prepared to lend, and escalated interest rates on smaller loans.

Some of the main reasons why emerging businesses are unable to obtain support are:

- They are at an early stage and have a limited trading record.
- The borrower has few assets to offer as security.
- Small loans are not profitable for major lenders.
- They are unable to meet lenders' initial requirements for financial information.

For businesses that used reserves to come through Covid and post economic downturn obtaining fresh funds is now far more complex, and slower: it's no longer as simple as putting in a self-certification

and seeing funds in the bank account in one day. Those that borrowed simply to survive lockdown today face a sterner challenge as lenders now demand forecasts rather than making decisions on past performance, future figures that businesses simply cannot produce.

So where does a small, ambitious business turn? One answer has to be Community Development Finance Institutions (CDFIs). They are prepared to lend where other lenders say 'no'. About 99% of businesses supported have been declined by another lender. They can say "yes!" because they take a person-centred approach when supporting businesses. Details of CDFIs across the country many operating in targeted geographic areas can be found at www.findingfinance.org.uk.

ART Business Loans (ART), a leading local CDFI, has supported a wide range of businesses over 26 years and now is able to lend throughout the West Midlands Region and adjoining counties. It is accredited to provide the BBB Recovery Loan Scheme.

Over the last 10 years ART has supported 632 businesses lending £25

million and helping those businesses to create or preserve over 4,300 jobs. In the current year ART has obtained additional funds to lend and seeks to support those SMEs with a viable proposition that are unable to find their full requirements from other sources.

Loans are from £10,000 to £15,0000 and can be used for most purposes. Benefits include:

- Can lend alone or part of a package with others.
- Ability through extensive network to refer businesses to other finance providers for additional funds or wider business support.
- Can repay loans early without penalty.
- Most loans are unsecured but if security available will lend at discounted rate.
- Relationship approach and all potential businesses that are supported will be visited on site.
- Will lend up to 5 years and are very likely to be lending at lower rate than alternative lender for similar deals.

For more details including case studies and hints and tips on raising finance visit the ART Business Loans website www.artbusinessloans.co.uk

Pictured back row, from left: Sudip Sangha, Finance and Operations Officer, Graham Donaldson, Loans Manager, Martin Edmonds, Loans Manager
Front row, from left: Dr Steve Walker, Chief Executive, Rozna Haque, Loans Manager and Yasar Irfat, Finance and Operations Manager





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By HENRY CARPENTER
Editor

It all feels a bit flat out there right now. By 'out there', I'm referring to the world of business as well as the general atmosphere on the streets – both of which are of course interconnected.

Sometimes it's worth looking at where we've come from to where we are now to recognise that things could be a hell of a lot worse. Thankfully a year is a long time in politics. It was only a year ago that the country was reeling from a clumsily delivered, uncoded mini-budget which ended up seeing off the last prime minister and her chancellor.

So back then, we would probably have taken 'a bit flat' a year down the line.

On a more macro scale, in terms of a city's timeline at least, the comparison between the Birmingham of, say, 50 years ago to what it is now is even more marked.

One of those who has been able to take an objective view on the winds of change, as a senior player in a city centre law firm and all-round standard bearer in the city's business community, is John James.

John's column in this edition combines nostalgia with pride, hope and, in some areas, concern in the city for which he has been such an enthusiastic cheerleader. It is a cracking potted history of Birmingham's fortunes since the early 1970s.

Back then it was a city in post-industrial decline but, thanks in part to various business and civic leaders who had a vision for a brighter future, it has pulled up its socks, and its fortunes have been reversed with various industrial sectors now thriving.

The spirit of entrepreneurialism is alive and well, certainly if the subjects of our cover story are anything to go by. Eugene Patterson and his father Ivor are bringing a new line of sugar-free fruit-flavoured drinks to market – and some of the big retail heavyweights are starting to sit up and take notice.

Jon Griffin enjoyed interviewing the enterprising couple, as he did Darryl Eales, the prominent businessman who is now chair of Solihull Moors FC, and Nasir Awan, the new president of GBCC.

There's much more in the form of news, interviews and commentary, as well as a bumper special report looking at the commercial property and real estate sector in the region.

As this is our final edition of 2023, it just remains for me to say a big thank you to everyone who has supported us once again this year – sponsors, advertisers, contributors and readers alike.

On behalf of everyone at Birmingham Business, I wish you a happy and healthy festive period.

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Birmingham-business

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A city in safe hands

For more than 50 years, John James has been one of Birmingham's most ardent cheerleaders. As he steps back from public life in the city, the former law firm partner, business galvaniser and networker supreme casts a wistful eye over the region's development during the last half century, and looks forward with optimism to its healthy future.

A couple of months ago, I was invited as a guest to the Greater Birmingham Chamber Young Professional of the Year Awards. It was a glittering evening which reflected brilliantly the many and varied talents of the young leaders of Birmingham and the West Midlands. I was generously hosted by Henrietta Brealey, the chamber's hugely talented chief executive.

I was lucky enough to be at this very special event because the chamber, through its Future Faces initiative, was reviving something I had been closely involved with over two decades ago. In 2001, as the chief executive of Birmingham Forward and its younger 'arm' Birmingham Future, I met with a number of business leaders who cared as passionately about our city as I did, to create an awards programme which would not only recognise existing young talent in the professional and financial services sector (the most dynamic and fastest growing business sector in Birmingham), but also provide an ongoing programme for growing and nurturing those talents. This would not only add value to the local economy, but also encourage skilled professionals to stay and build their careers here, and attract others in the UK to do the same.

So the Birmingham Young Professional of the Year awards were launched, and have since exceeded the wildest dreams of their creators. Many of the overall winners have gone on to great success, and perhaps even more importantly, many of those who have taken part but didn't win on the night, have nevertheless been empowered and emboldened by the experience, and become leaders in their chosen areas of expertise. They have also developed into committed and powerful advocates for Birmingham as a city in which to live, work, thrive and be happy.

So, some 22 years on from that

first BYPY event at the ICC, as I sat on Henrietta's table, and looked around the room, I felt an immense sense of pride. I watched the award winners receive their trophies and marvelled at their achievements at such a young age. I was also hugely envious of the rewards now bestowed on the overall winner: participation in the prestigious Aston University MBA course, and also the Common Purpose programme – so brilliantly developed by another talented leader, Louise Teboul. The original concept that winners should also become ambassadors for the city has happily been retained, but winning BYPY now means so much more, and that can only bode well for the future of an initiative which spotlights talents and skills which are as good, if not better than any in the UK.

But equal to my sense of pride was a feeling that the time had come to step aside from my (largely self-appointed!) role as a torch bearer for Birmingham, a role which I have happily embraced for over 50 years since I first started working in the city in 1970.

When I first started to 'bang the drum for Brum' I wasn't exactly a voice crying in the wilderness, but there weren't many like me out there. Birmingham was a city that had lost faith in itself in the aftermath of the heavy toll of the Second World War and was struggling to create a new identity. The fightback started in 1971 with an organisation I and sundry accountants, lawyers, property advisers and stockbrokers – Birmingham had its own stock exchange then – created called the Young Professionals. Remember, at that time there were no networking aids like mobile phones or emails, and many of us were actually barred from touting for business by our respective professional regulatory bodies. Even handing out

business cards was a disciplinary offence.

So we took over some rooms in the Birmingham Conservative Club in Ethel Street just off New Street, which included a bar and catering facilities, and we provided a place for young professionals in the city to meet and chat convivially over lunch and after work, and informally, but effectively, establish networks of contacts. Of course, we didn't call it networking then (I'm not sure we knew what the word meant), but we created, both for ourselves and our clients and business associates, an awareness of the burgeoning professional skills in Birmingham.

And when, a decade or so later, Roger Dickens of KPMG, and I, with the backing of Sir Albert Bore, were looking to form Birmingham City 2000 (later Birmingham Forward), there was a template we could build on. As a result, with the support and authority of the Greater Birmingham Chamber, combined with the success of Birmingham Future and the BYPY Awards, we have become the best networking city in the UK bar none, which is why so many young talents in Birmingham flourish here . . . and are here to stay.

One happy consequence of this success has been the emergence of new, impressive cheerleaders for Birmingham and the West Midlands, which is another reason why I can step aside from this role with confidence.

An obvious example is Andy Street, who in his role as Mayor of the West Midlands, is selling the region, and Birmingham as its capital, to great effect. That of course is his paid job, but there are many other people who, in an unpaid capacity, are equally convincing and passionate advocates for Birmingham.

People like Nicola Fleet-Milne, chair of the Colmore BID, Tim Andrews MBE of Hollywood Monster, Alex Bishop of

“These are exciting times for a city leading the way in life sciences, the new green industries, AI and digital technologies, and for the many new businesses developing in a fast-changing world.”

Shoosmiths, Liz Lewis-Jones of Liquid PR, Professor Paul Cadman of Steps to Work, and Anthony McCourt of Court Collaboration – which is helping shape the new face of Birmingham’s built environment. So I leave the city in good hands, aided and abetted by its many other vocal and articulate advocates too numerous to name here.

One of the advantages of slipping back into my cave (like Puff the Magic Dragon) is the opportunity to make a few final observations on where Birmingham stands today, and I have chosen to divide them into the good, the bad and the ugly characteristics of the city.

Let me start with the ugly. That has to be Birmingham City Council effectively going bust. It’s not a pretty sight and an image in national and international terms we could well do without. I hope the current government-led enquiry into the causes of this debacle is robust – and that those responsible are held fully and publicly accountable – because financial crises of this nature do not happen out of the blue, and certainly the legal claims against the council of allegedly up to one billion pounds have been on the radar for several years. However, it is important to remember that in purely practical commercial terms Birmingham remains a city in which business can be conducted just as before, and with all the skills and originality which for over three centuries it has been renowned. New York famously went bust a while ago, but when I last looked it was still the leading financial centre of the world.

The bad is more of a problem, and that is Birmingham Airport. In my view, airports are one of the key benchmarks of a business city in terms of stature and international credibility. We fail badly in this regard in terms of our airport’s ‘welcome’ on arrival, its drop-off options on departures, its clearance times through security, its baggage retrieval problems, and the inadequate refreshment and seating facilities for passengers. In recently published customer satisfaction league tables, Birmingham Airport ranks poorly – not the worst, but nowhere near the best, and that is simply not good enough for one of the top international trading cities of the world.

Another personal bugbear is the fact that in the 1990s Birmingham had no less than three daily scheduled direct flights to the United States – New York, Chicago and Newark. Now there are none. Even

allowing for the fact that business these days is often conducted through video links and other technology that doesn’t require face-to-face contact, that omission in my view also undermines our credibility as a world player in international trade.

But now we come to the good, of which there is so much. Let me return to Andy Street. It’s taken the region time to adapt to the concept of a mayor with executive powers – as opposed to lord mayors who have primarily only ceremonial roles. But Andy, now in his third term, has embraced the job with the boyish enthusiasm for which he is renowned, and made it a key part of the wellbeing of the West Midlands community. It is not an easy role, as his powers are limited, but he has used them to great effect and generated government funds for the region which would not have otherwise come to us. He has proved himself a champion of economic, social and community issues which have resonated beneficially right across the region. Although he stands for election on a Conservative ticket, he is a self-declared staunch (and highly effective) advocate for the West Midlands first, and a politician second. He and Andy Burnham, the Greater Manchester mayor, exemplify what a life-changing difference an elected mayor can make to a region.

And a greater good brings me back to where I started – the young leaders of our city. Henrietta Bearley, the youngest chief executive of the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, one of the most powerful voices for business in the country; Alice Kinder, at 31 the youngest president of the Birmingham Law Society (the second largest law society in the country) in its history; and so many managing partners or chief executives of our top legal and financial institutions still in their 30s or early 40s. The only public accolade I ever received was in 2004 when I won the BYPY Most Inspiring Leader award, but these amazing people inspire me now!

These are exciting times for a city leading the way in life sciences, the new green industries, AI and digital technologies, and for the many new businesses developing in a fast-changing world.

Birmingham is a uniquely diverse, innovative and creative city, equipped for the future with exceptional young leaders attuned and geared up for it.

To misquote the old Orange mobile phone slogan: the future’s bright, the future is Birmingham!



Nicola Fleet-Milne



Henrietta Brealey



Anthony McCourt



Alex Bishop

HS2: A levelling-down debacle

By DONALD HOUSTON
and REBECCA RILEY

A branding failure

HS2 has always suffered from a branding failure. HS2 sounds rather anodyne and the ‘2’ reminds those north of London that they were only playing catch-up on London’s existing HS1 to the south (the Channel Tunnel rail link). Given inevitable controversies around cost and damage to areas of landscape beauty, ‘Green Rail’ might have been a more visionary sell, demonstrating the longer-term environmental benefits (particularly aiding the transition to net zero).

Emphasising faster travel times into London was never going to resonate with travellers in cramped, delayed or cancelled low-speed trains in the north of England. Selling HS2 (or Green Rail) as part of a UK-wide strategic expansion and upgrade of the rail network to add essential capacity and take cars and lorries off roads would have gained more political traction and popularity – and made it less easy to axe halfway through construction.

For Birmingham, the link to Manchester probably had more positive transformational potential – echoing the view that better connections between northern cities are a greater priority than faster connections to London.

The Birmingham-London HS2 leg always risked attracting London commuters to Birmingham. For Birmingham, the link to Manchester probably had more positive transformational potential – echoing the view that better connections between northern cities are a greater priority than faster connections to London.

Blowing the whistle after the train has departed

Now that we’re only getting London-Birmingham, the main effect of HS2 will be to further expand and strengthen London’s labour market. There is a strong strategic case for axing London-Birmingham and keeping Birmingham-Manchester – but too late of course, since construction on the southern leg is already well underway.

Given that HS2 is already being built and other investments are planned around it, blowing the whistle after the



train has departed will do damage to investor confidence beyond the immediate scaling back – and blow a major hole in planned allied upgrades of existing lines in the Integrated Rail Plan for the North and Midlands. Important innovation, skills formation, and jobs in rail engineering of benefit beyond HS2 could be lost. A crucial question is what will replace HS2 to deliver quality and capacity on Britain’s rail network and how committed to levelling-up the UK Government really is.

By scrapping HS2 north of Birmingham, almost by accident, the UK’s wealthiest region (London) gets both of the UK’s high-speed rail lines – HS1 to the Channel Tunnel and HS2 to Birmingham. It would be hard to design a better levelling-down policy.

Additional network capacity and levelling up

An important strategic argument for building HS2 was to provide additional network capacity to move freight off the roads (existing routes don’t have sufficient bridges and other clearances to allow for larger loading gauges to enable a smooth transition between road and rail).

Each train would take 76 lorries off the roads, easing road congestion and moving freight onto greener more efficient trains. Now that the majority of HS2 is cancelled, how will this capacity be absorbed by an already overburdened road network?

The strategic argument for HS2 evolved with the policy focus shifting over time to help ‘Level Up’ the economically left

behind places in the north. So why didn’t construction start in Manchester (if not Glasgow) and head south? That way, at least the North would have got something when the money ran out. Many voters can’t see why so much taxpayers’ money is going towards getting to London quicker. Positioning this major transport investment as tackling road congestion, freeing up local rail lines by removing intercity trains and reducing the carbon footprint of freight would resonate much more with voters’ concerns.

By scrapping HS2 north of Birmingham, almost by accident, the UK’s wealthiest region (London) gets both of the UK’s high-speed rail lines – HS1 to the Channel Tunnel and HS2 to Birmingham. It would be hard to design a better Levelling Down policy. But favouring London isn’t really an accident – it’s the result of a ‘London first’ mentality that runs deep in Whitehall. Public spending per capita is substantially higher in London than any other English region, with transport forming an important part. Throw in a poorly articulated strategic case for HS2, poor planning leading to spiralling costs and the Sunak Government’s wavering commitment to Net Zero and Levelling Up – and we get a disastrous decision for the UK’s long-term future made by two men out-of-step with the majority bowing to short-term financial and political pressures.

HS2 was never the best levelling-up policy to start with – but the segments north of Birmingham were certainly better than nothing.

*Donald Houston is professor of regional economic development and Rebecca Riley is associate professor for enterprise, engagement and impact, City-REDI / WMREDI, University of Birmingham.

A different league

When Darryl Eales took on the chairmanship of Solihull Moors FC – in which he also has a stake – it was just the latest in a string of enterprising moves for someone who is as much a football fan as he is businessman. JON GRIFFIN meets him.

interview



Darryl Eales has a CV to die for. Former CEO of Lloyds Banking Group private equity arm LDC, chairman of Solihull Moors Football Club, part owner of world-famous etiquette guide Debrett's, investor in a string of other enterprises . . . and more.

But like so many lovers of the beautiful game who once dreamt of glory in their youth, the diehard Blues fan turned National League boardroom boss admits he would prefer to have soaked up the roar of the crowd as a player.

"I would have swapped a lot of my success for playing professional football," he reflects amongst the homely surroundings of the ARMCO Arena in the shadow of the giant Jaguar Land Rover plant in Solihull.

It's an interesting insight into the mentality of the lifelong football fan who grew up watching non-leaguers Moor Green with his father Barrie before graduating to his beloved Birmingham City. He eventually bought into Oxford United following a successful business career and now aims to take Solihull Moors into the promised land of the Football League.

"You do question yourself sometimes, particularly when you are sinking quite a lot of personal wealth into something," he says. "But this could be an absolutely amazing football club that goes back to traditional community grassroots football while also achieving success on the pitch – but it just needs that one season where we get promoted."

Back in the spring of 2022 Solihull Moors – which grew out of a merger between former non-league stalwarts Moor Green and Solihull Borough – came so close to that goal, agonisingly losing 2-1 to Grimsby Town in the National League play-off final in front of over 22,000 fans at the London Stadium.

It was so near and yet so far. But football is a cruel game which routinely leaves its millions of followers – as well as players – heartbroken. That, as Eales knows only too well, is very much a part of its global appeal.

"Solihull should have a football league club," says Eales. "It is one of the biggest metropolitan borough councils in the country without a league club, and it would really put Solihull on the map on its own rather than it being on the edge of Birmingham. It would also be massive for the West Midlands."

It's hard to disagree with that – football, the most popular sport in the world, can

raise the profile and boost the economy of an area like little else. And Eales would love to be the man who takes his beloved Moors into the hallowed territory of the elite 92 to stand proudly alongside West Midlands neighbours Villa, Blues, Albion, Wolves, Coventry and Walsall.

Football and other sports run deep through the Eales back story. "I went to school at King Edward's Camp Hill in the days of the 11-plus exam. I was always quite a diligent kid and quite competitive. I loved sport, it was more about playing team sports and being a jack of all trades. I played five or six sports at school – rugby, cricket, hockey, tennis, basketball and fives, and also football on Sundays."

The young Eales was also a keen student away from the sports fields. "My grandparents owned a second-hand furniture shop, my dad owned a shop and then became an independent financial adviser. The thing I learned very early on was the massive importance of work ethic – I got that from the whole family."

That work ethic has served Eales well in the course of a career in finance which saw him spend more than a decade at the helm of LDC, the private equity arm of Lloyds Bank.

"I was the first in our family to get to

O-Levels, A-Levels and go to university," he says. "My father reckoned he was about the only person in his class who didn't end up in prison."

"One of the formative arrangements with my father was when I got to the age of 15 he said he would no longer give me pocket money but would double everything I earned. I ended up with three jobs, delivering Spot the Ball leaflets, cleaning cars and working at Hall Green dog track."

"I don't think I had great academic expectations at school. When I got my A-Levels I got three As and a B and my father said 'Why did you get a B?' I knew he meant to say really well done but one of the things I learned from that is that if you are going to give people praise, don't give them back-handed praise because they are likely to misinterpret it or take it in the wrong way."

"When I was choosing my university courses I wanted to do history, but my father suggested I should go into something more business-orientated. So I went to Exeter to do accounting and economics from 1980 to 1983. I got the best first in my year despite the Brummie accent."

Eales took his first steps on the career ladder as a trainee chartered accountant



Darryl Eales at his new football home

interview

“I was gloriously naive. You think you know football but it is an absolutely bonkers industry. There is always an emotional level to it because you are judged every week by whether you win or lose.”

with the then Price Waterhouse in Birmingham before leaving in 1987 to join Lloyds Development Capital, an embryonic subsidiary of Lloyds Bank, in a move he calls “the biggest break of my career by a country mile”.

“What I had learned at Price Waterhouse was that I didn’t fit into a big corporate empire. In those days you had a partner who looked after you and mine was a guy called Neil Andrews, who became a close friend. He said ‘it is the wrong environment for you, you don’t fit into a concertinaed, structured environment’.”

Eales admits the move to LDC was the crucial catalyst for an entrepreneurial career which has taken his investment portfolio into a variety of realms – from football at Oxford and Solihull to Debrett’s, and from websites to an office workspace operation in San Francisco.

“Although LDC was part of a corporate I had a superb mentor in the guy who ran the Birmingham office called Michael Joseph. In 1992 he got promoted to be MD of the whole business and went to London, and I took over running the Birmingham office.

“I was in the right place at the right time. I think luck and opportunity play a huge role in getting on in life, but you have

got to be able to spot them. That was the luckiest moment, with the benefit of hindsight.”

Eales climbed the ladder at LDC just as the UK’s management buyout sector was cranking up into overdrive in the 90s.

“I really did love private equity and venture capital because you were helping people and businesses grow, and that whole management relationship was the foundation of what I believe differentiated LDC in the marketplace.

“You were meeting people who were trying to get things done, and you were constantly surrounded by positivity. I was really lucky, I observed so many capable people.”

Eales eventually took over LDC’s four offices in Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds and Nottingham, where he met his invaluable PA of nearly two decades and now also director at Solihull Moors, Cheryl Cooper. He was subsequently promoted to CEO of the whole LDC operation, moving away from his Brummie roots to London in 1998.

Eales recalls: “I did that for 11 years. It was intense, and I am told I was relentless working 80 to 100 hours a week.

“After the banking crisis in 2008 the world changed dramatically. Risk

management and compliance took over – the whole culture mentality became ‘I don’t trust you unless you can prove trust’.

“With 20-20 hindsight I think a decade of being CEO of a business – where it is full-on and relentless – is probably a good innings. I just left. It was like a bereavement but you don’t know it at the time. I left and decided to buy Oxford United.”

It was Eales’s first ownership foray into the ‘bonkers’ world of professional football although he had been part of a syndicate which had made enquiries into buying Birmingham City in 2012-13 during the tortured Chinese ownership of the St Andrew’s club.

“I think I had always wanted to own a football club. We paid £4 million for Oxford in 2014. I bought it with a guy called Mark Ashton, who was CEO, and the manager was Michael Appleton, a great manager.

“I was gloriously naive. You think you know football but it is an absolutely bonkers industry. There is always an emotional level to it because you are judged every week by whether you win or lose. You have got the fans who love to disagree with each other and social media has made pub conversations public which I think is very unhelpful. My advice on social media is don’t do it, just ignore it – particularly if you own a football club.”

By February 2018 Eales was moving on again after a Thai consortium approached him to buy Oxford and the entrepreneur decided to turn his attention closer to home with Solihull Moors.

“Moors had been promoted the season before from the National League North to the National League,” says Eales.

“If you get promoted it generally means it is going to cost you more money and the previous owner Mike Turl – who did a great job – decided that, a bit like me with Oxford, the financial burden was more than he wanted. So one of my best mates Mike Seabrook asked if I would get involved with Moors.

“The one thing I learned from Oxford was to try to get a group of people to invest, so we got about 20 local business people, including Cheryl, to become shareholders, with me and my family owning 35 to 40 per cent. There were so many positives around it once I had got my head around the fact I was back involved in football.”

But he quickly realised that the Moors required considerable investment if they were to challenge for a place in the

Football League. “The reality is that we had no infrastructure so over the last four of five years we have spent probably £4 million over and above the football side on the infrastructure, including the stadium and the training ground. We have now got facilities which compare to League One clubs.”

The chairman is justifiably proud – Grimsby Town notwithstanding – of how far the Moors have come in a relatively short space of time. “It’s a professional set-up. We have a first-team staff of about 10, a first-team squad of about 25, we have started an elite academy in the last two years so we have got about 60 youngsters who combine sport and education.

“We have got an amazing community foundation run by Becci Fox. We run about 65 youth and junior teams every weekend,

all playing in Solihull Moors colours. Our women’s first team is doing extremely well, and we are massively into disability sport.

“We currently get about £90,000 a year central funding from the FA. If you get promoted to League Two you get £1.5 million. Promotion would transform the economics of the club.”

With the highest-paid player on around £1,600 a week and crowds of 1,500 it’s clear that the Moors have some way to go to bridge the divide between non-league football and the Football League.

But the man who also part-owns Debrett’s, the ultimate guide to society etiquette first published in 1769, remains determined to create sporting history of his own in his native West Midlands, with ultimate promotion to the most famous sporting league in the world.



Solihull Moors – a team aiming for promotion



BEARS BUSINESS CLUB
WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB

ASSOCIATE YOUR BUSINESS WITH EDGBASTON STADIUM

- ✓ Network and meet local business contacts at our **Bears Club networking events**
- ✓ Raise **awareness of your brand** with advertising and affiliation opportunities
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Helping businesses through change

news

Law firm Trowers & Hamlin's Birmingham office has launched a new campaign to help firms in the region navigate significant changes taking place across the business landscape.

The six-month Growth Through Change campaign comprises a series of events and commentary that will highlight how business leaders can address key challenges. These include the current macro-economic environment as well as fast-moving technological change and the move towards net zero.

The recent Business Barometer survey, carried out for Lloyds Bank Commercial Banking, found that business confidence in the West Midlands fell six points during September 2023, to 36%.

Despite this drop in confidence, research has shown that the region is growing at a faster rate than Greater London and Manchester. Reference data from research house EvaluateLocate also demonstrates that Birmingham is resilient to economic shocks because it has an increasingly broad-based economy.

Yetunde Dania, head of Trowers' Birmingham office, said: "While the West Midlands business community is currently navigating significant change, we know

from history that businesses in the region are tenacious and resilient.

"The changes we are seeing across so many areas of the commercial landscape, not least of all in our gig-economy and digital sectors, offer real hope for the region and this is a real chance to grasp the potential that the new opportunities bring.

"Of course we are conscious that the city isn't without its challenges, including recent developments with Birmingham City Council, which makes the launch of our



Yetunde Dania

Growth Through Change campaign very timely.

"However, reassuringly, research has found that there was very little economic impact in other areas where councils had entered Section 114, such as Croydon and Northamptonshire."

Duncan Lamb of the UK economic vitality index, EvaluateLocate, said: "For the past 30 years, the West Midlands and Birmingham have benefitted from sustained development and regeneration initiatives which have made their economies more robust and better equipped to take advantage of opportunity.

"As the upward curve in Birmingham's economic vitality shows, it now stands on the threshold of a further period of growth. This will, in part, be driven by the kind of exciting regeneration projects that are moving forward in locations such as Digbeth that have massive potential to create diverse commercial, creative and residential environments.

"This potential is highlighted by the fact that the level of economic vitality across both the West Midlands and Birmingham is recovering faster than the All-UK median rating and is tracking back towards positive growth."

Fresh faces arrive at Aon



Professional services firm Aon is welcoming new talent to its office in Birmingham with the arrival of two apprentices, two placement-year students and nine recent graduates, who will start their careers with the company.

The firm's Early Careers programme is intended to provide meaningful work-experience opportunities and the chance to enhance professional skills.

The new recruits will work across a wide range of areas including investment, client management, wealth and actuarial consulting.

Chris Barley, head of office for commercial risk, said: "Providing a variety of pathways for young talent to gain experience and develop their skills is something we place significant importance on.

"It has been a pleasure to witness the enthusiasm that our recent graduates, placement students and apprentices have shown. They have wholeheartedly embraced the opportunities on offer to learn and develop new skills."



Alison Delaney

The next chapter for successful education programme

The book, Little Chick Has Lunch on The Moon, was created by Alison Delaney as part of her 'Little Chicks Life Lessons' education programme. It has landed in 89 Waitrose stores, including Solihull.

The book focuses on raising the confidence, dreams and aspirations of primary school children and equipping them with key life learnings. It aims to help them recognise their unique abilities and unlimited potential, no matter their background.

The retail launch follows the successful initiative with Little Chicks Life Lessons last year, which saw the John Lewis Partnership, as part of its commitment to driving change and unlocking the potential of children and young people in care, sponsor the delivery of the Little Chicks Life Lessons education programme across selected primary schools in the West Midlands.

Through this special partnership, the programme reached around 700 children aged 4 to 11, including those with backgrounds in care.

Mrs Delaney said: "Having been adopted at three months old and having in turn supported over 10,000 children and teachers both in the UK and Africa through my education programmes, I have seen first-hand the positive impact on young people when they are given the right support, tools and opportunities to thrive.

"The launch at Waitrose stores across the UK marks the next step for us, and we hope that the rollout will ensure the book is accessible to all and will provide even more children and young people with the opportunity to develop their aspirations and dreams as they go through life."

■ Birmingham-based Rem3dy Health has announced expansion into Europe following investment from pharmaceutical firm UPSA.

This expansion sees a new product range across 7,000 UPSA pharmacies throughout France and 5,000 in Italy over the coming year.

Rem3dy's founder & CEO, Melissa Snover, said: "As the sole female founder of a manufacturing scale-up, the opportunity to collaborate with Isabelle Van Rycke, CEO of UPSA, has held profound personal significance for me.

"Our continued collaborative effort will provide ground-breaking, preventative nutritional solutions that cater to the needs of our valued customers."



President and CEO of UPSA, Isabelle Van Rycke, and CEO of Rem3dy Health, Melissa Snover

news

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Fruit-filled *family focus*

It's one thing to spot an opportunity to sell a new range of healthy but refreshing canned fizzy drinks, but quite another to have the courage, drive and a little bit of luck to bring them to market. But that's what the father-and-son team behind Revibed appear to be in the process of doing, with some of the biggest retailers starting to take notice.

JON GRIFFIN reports.

It's a fledgling father-and-son soft drinks enterprise which has already caught the attention of Sainsbury's, the Co-op, Lloyds Bank, wholesalers and now Virgin Atlantic.

The new Revibed superfood infusion drink is the intriguing homegrown brainchild of Brummies Ivor and Eugene Patterson. It is currently boasting an annual output of 30,000 cans of the sugar-free products – aimed at an increasingly health-conscious public.

Ivor and Eugene are now in a battle to gain a firm foothold in a crowded – but potentially highly lucrative – market sector.

The concept was born five years ago when, by sheer chance, Eugene came across an exotic drinks concoction in Thailand and Indonesia which closely resembled his father's own superfood creation – containing hibiscus, ginger and lime – which he had made for family and friends in his Birmingham kitchen.

As Eugene explains, with a clear nod to his father's inspiration: "I had a euphoric moment in 2018 when, while travelling in the Far East, I discovered a sorrel-type drink similar to my dad's, often consumed in acai smoothie bowls.

"I saw the plant out there and put two and two together. It looked the same but it didn't taste the same – my dad made the best one – so I said to my father that we should try to sell it to a mass market."

Ivor, whose childhood and upbringing spanned inner-city Birmingham and sun-kissed Jamaica before a career spent in banking and finance with the likes of Barclays, HSBC, Santander, Severn Trent Water and elsewhere, recalls his early efforts at creating a soft drink with a difference.

"I used to make sorrel and hibiscus drink, and the original name was Vibe. I had watched my mum make it while I was growing up. I loved the drink and made



it for family and friends, adding my own twist."

By 2018 the younger Patterson had graduated from Trent University in Nottingham with a first-class degree in business management and entrepreneurship – and was keen to channel his energies into a business venture as well as taking in the sights on an exotic trip around South East Asia.

"I went travelling for five months in 2018, visiting Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Bali, Fiji, Hong Kong and Australia. We were in a rice field in Indonesia where you see the locals farming. There was a tourist shop and they were serving the drink which resembled my dad's. They called it Roselle and the tour guide said it was a delicacy in Indonesia. That was when I thought we could be onto something.

"I came back from travelling in May 2018 and ended up working on the E.ON graduate scheme working in various departments including sales, marketing and team management operations. But lockdown happened in 2020, which was tough, and we transitioned from the office to home.

"At that time a lot of people immersed themselves in TV to keep themselves occupied. But I was driving myself crazy, going for runs, doing boxing sessions with my dad in the back garden. I wanted to immerse myself in something – and then the penny dropped."

Eugene realised that lockdown had given him a unique time and opportunity to consider how to take father Ivor's soft drink creation onto a different level altogether while fulfilling his own ambitions to prove himself in the business world.

"The world had stopped and I saw that I could actually immerse myself in this," says Eugene. "So in my spare time after work I was sketching ideas and working with my dad in the kitchen to try to formulate a recipe. We launched in December 2020 when we initially put it out to close friends and family."

Ivor recalls: "Initially we did two samples, one with sugar. The USP at the time was to say let's do something healthy. The other sample was without sugar, so we did research with about 150 people in a local gym."

At the launch stage Vibe – later to be renamed Revibed – was still very much a father-and-son kitchen table enterprise.

"We ordered bottles through wholesalers online," says Eugene. "In



terms of making the drink, we used local sources for sorrel leaves, going to the market and buying stuff like limes and ginger in bulk, and physically making it in the kitchen."

Patterson senior's lengthy career in the banking and finance sector – he is a fellow of the Chartered Institute of Credit Management and a fellow of the International Compliance Association for anti-money laundering – had taught him the importance of research for start-up ventures.

He says: "I made sure we did proper marketing research so we did a business plan, and tested the market before I said to Eugene that it was well worth going for it. The results in the gym in Erdington were great and I thought we were onto something."

But as lockdown took its toll on the nation – both physically and mentally – the Pattersons believed that their drinks concept could benefit from the nation's heightened preoccupation with personal wellbeing.

Eugene says: "I realised that to get into supermarkets, sugar, with the sugar tax levy and also for general health, wasn't the way to go. Either limit it or deviate

completely. My dad traditionally makes the drink with sugar but we decided to remove that – it was a conscious effort on our part."

In May 2021 they market-tested the drink at a vegan market in Leicester, selling out 60 bottles within an hour. But the road to success was far from smooth as Eugene took to his car in an effort to drum up business elsewhere.

"There were a lot of nos," he recalls. "Because of the climate it was literally just me driving around and my dad supporting. We were trying to get into independent stores which was very trying. On our first launch day we made £400 which is not a lot of money but at the time it gave me a bit of confidence that there was something in this."

Early attempts to carve their own niche in an extremely competitive marketplace were often frustrating as Eugene continued to drive around the UK in a bid to persuade independent stores to stock the product. There were mixed results.

"We were selling a case of 12 cans at a time driving around, haemorrhaging money, doing the vegan markets, making £200 here and there. I was still full-time at E.ON so I was doing it at weekends, it was

"On our first launch day we made £400 which is not a lot of money but at the time it gave me a bit of confidence that there was something in this."

exhausting and I wasn't seeing a return on the investment."

A critical turning point in the Revibed story arrived in the shape of supermarket giant Sainsbury's and its Thrive programme which provided support with mentoring and strategic guidance. The Pattersons beat around 1,000 applicants to a final nine after the Sainsbury's awarded £1 million for black-funded businesses.

"It sounded too good to be true," says Eugene. "I thought this is a lifeline, this is the opportunity I wanted. The general premise of it was to help businesses become retail ready. It was a 16-week intense programme and comprised workshops and masterclasses with an opportunity to be listed in Sainsbury's at the end."

Although Eugene's pitch for a permanent stock agreement with Sainsbury's ultimately proved unsuccessful, the Pattersons' drinks project gained vital ground with success and recognition at the Lloyds Bank Launchpad pitch competition for start-ups and a further crucial breakthrough when the Co-op agreed to stock the drink – by now renamed Revibed – in 100 stores nationwide.

The Pattersons are also currently in talks

with Virgin Atlantic to stock the drinks. A choice of three superfood combinations are now available – hibiscus and peach, passionfruit and ginger, and raspberry and acai.

Meanwhile, the Revibed project has gained further momentum with the drinks produced and canned by a third-party company in Saltash, Cornwall, moving the original concept further away from the family kitchen table and into a more professional realm.

Says Eugene: "We produce 30,000 units yearly, 10,000 for each flavour. We are now in 100 Co-op stores and more than 50 independent stores. The brand awareness is getting out there more and more, and we have over 10,000 followers across all social media."

Now father and son are pinning their hopes on attracting new investment to enable Revibed to further broaden its commercial horizons.

"It is getting there but we are at the stage now where we are seeking investment to scale up," says Ivor.

"We are at a crucial crossroads to raise the finance to get us to the next stage. This is a healthy concept – we are completely new to this, but anything is possible."



Celebrating forty years of working together

news

Two West Midlands manufacturers are celebrating 40 years of working together with a major export order secured at Blechexpo, the international trade fair for sheet metal working.

Birmingham metal stamper Brandauer has joined forces with Coventry's Auric Metal Finishers to design, develop and supply bespoke EloPin push fit-connectors for a tier 1 automotive supplier in India.

The £1.5 million order will see Brandauer produce up to 30 million parts annually and will help create new jobs in the region.

Rowan Crozier, CEO of Brandauer, said: "This contract involves a very complex component for use in motive control systems. The customer was struggling to source the technology in India, so they turned to the West Midlands for inspiration.

"We have significant experience in push-fit connectors and were able to



tweak our EloPin product to come up with a solution. Better still we can complete all the tooling at our new Precision Tooling Academy we run with In-Comm Training.

"The relationship with Auric Metal Finishers was also key to the deal. We understand the way each other works and Auric's ability to deliver reel-to-reel

precision plating ensured we could provide the finish that was crucial to the end application."

Pictured: Rowan Crozier, Brandauer, with David Harris of Auric Metal Finishers

Support package launched

More than 1,000 small to medium-sized businesses in the region are set to receive a major investment readiness boost with the launch of a new support package.

Oxford Innovation Advice has been contracted by Business Growth West Midlands to deliver an investment readiness programme across three of

the region's leading economic areas – Birmingham, the Black Country and Solihull.

Utilising over £1 million of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the initiative will help SMEs demystify the world of business finance, covering topics such as debt and asset finance, grant funding opportunities, equity and crowdfunding.

The support will be delivered through a combination of workshops, masterclasses and one-to-one mentoring by finance specialists, all of whom have experience in unlocking funding and helping firms grow.

There will also be access to bespoke online resources that will help bosses better understand key measures, financial forecasting, cashflow needs and creating pitch desks to entice potential investors.

"We know that one of the challenges for West Midlands businesses is securing the capital financing that enables them to grow and thrive," said Paul Edwards, head of economic development and delivery at the West Midlands Combined Authority.

"As part of the service, Oxford Innovation Advice will provide businesses, who want to grow and expand, with independent advice and expertise in how best to secure external finance – whether that is debt, equity or other sources.

"We are excited by the potential of this

programme to help companies in our region."

Two stages of support are available under the investment readiness programme.

The first will focus on engaging with businesses and providing information and advice on finance. This will be followed by one-to-one support to develop specific requirements such as developing investment pitches, financial forecasts and identifying different funding routes.

Aiming to support 400 small businesses in its first 12 months with a broad range of practical expertise and knowledge, it has ambitious plans to increase this number to 700 in the second year.

Jane Galsworthy, managing director of Oxford Innovation Advice, said: "Access to finance is all about supporting small to medium businesses to improve their financial skills and become investment ready. We are positive that this tailored approach will bring sustainable and positive results for SMEs and the economic growth of our region.

"There is so much potential here and sometimes all it takes is a little bit of specialist advice and guidance to help companies secure finance to implement their growth plans."



Fintech company named in top 20

A Birmingham-based fintech start-up has been named among BusinessCloud's Fintech50 for 2023.

GFA Exchange has been recognised within the online news platform's top 20 most innovative financial technology creators in the UK.

BusinessCloud developed a shortlist of 173 companies including well-known global organisations across digital banking, card payments and trading.

GFA Exchange's AI-powered, data-driven software assists finance providers in mitigating risk, reducing operational costs, and eliminating unconscious bias.

Founder and CEO of GFA Exchange, Joel Blake OBE, said: "We are thrilled to have been chosen for the Fintech50 for 2023. It reaffirms our commitment to reshaping finance through inclusivity and data-driven solutions.

"This acknowledgment is not just a testament to our hard work from our dedicated team, but also to the invaluable support we have received from our partners and advisors.

"It is an honour to represent inclusive innovation in this space and to help finance providers unlock new growth opportunities for underserved businesses."

As part of the celebration, Mr Blake said GFA Exchange is offering a free portfolio audit to 20 organisations eager to discover which of their business clients are best positioned for growth and why.



Joel Blake



Stephen Rome

Welcome economy boost

A sharp rise in the number of companies launched in the West Midlands is a welcome boost to the local economy, according to R3.

The Midlands branch of the UK's insolvency and restructuring trade body also hailed the possibility of an increase in employment rates and business growth in the pre-Christmas trading period.

According to R3's report, start-ups rose by 5.86% in the West Midlands from 5,998 in September to 6,351 in October. This was one of the highest numbers for start-up businesses in any UK region outside Greater London.

R3 Midlands' figures, which are based on an analysis of data from business intelligence provider Creditsafe, also showed a year-on-year rise of 10.63% in the West Midlands compared to October 2022, when start-ups numbered 5,741.

The R3 analysis also highlighted a fall in the number of West Midlands companies with late payments on their books, a trend which has continued over the last six months. Insolvency-related activity in the region, which includes liquidator and administrator appointments as well as

creditors' meetings, also decreased.

R3 Midlands chair Stephen Rome said: "It is encouraging to see positive statistics for our region, particularly as trading conditions are so challenging at present.

"With the upcoming Christmas period a crucial time for so many firms, the data indicates that there is still scope for growth in the Midlands. Advances in technology, interconnectedness and cheaper workspaces compared to London are helping to make it easier to start a new business here.

"The fall in companies with late payments is further good news for our region, however it should be noted that late payment figures remain relatively high and can pose a significant threat to a company's health if not dealt with promptly.

"Should significant cashflow difficulties arise, it is crucial for business owners to take professional advice as soon as possible. There is a significant amount which can be done to rescue and support local businesses, beyond traditional insolvency solutions, if help is taken early enough."

Agency strengthens board

Comms agency Liquid, which has offices in Birmingham and Brisbane, has strengthened its board with the appointment of Andy West as non-executive director.

In his new role he will provide Liquid with strategic guidance and support to help achieve its international growth ambitions.

His previous experience includes positions at a number of tech communications consultancies worldwide, where he worked with colleagues and clients in Europe, North America, the Middle East, Africa and Australia.

Mr West has worked alongside well-known names within technology including Zoom, McAfee and NetApp, and launched two of his own dot-com businesses.



Andy West

news

Warning on the use of AI

news

Businesses and HR professionals should be wary of unintentional discrimination as a result of using artificial intelligence in the recruitment process, an employment law expert has warned.

Katherine Cooke, senior associate in employment law at Midlands law firm Higgs LLP, said businesses would be liable for any discrimination that occurred as a result of using AI.

There have already been examples of businesses having problems when using AI to screen job applicants, including retail giant Amazon.

"There are going to be many ways that AI can be used to streamline processes and improve productivity," she said.

"One of the ways businesses are already using AI is in screening CVs for vacancies where there are many applications. The AI can scan the applications and rank them on pre-determined criteria, for example academic results or keywords used to describe skillsets.

"While this may seem an economic strategy to produce a manageable shortlist, I would urge caution. There are already examples where businesses have used AI in this way and unintentional gender and race discrimination has occurred, which is clearly unacceptable and illegal.

"It is unintentional and even if the discrimination has been committed by an AI algorithm, the business could still be held liable. AI software must be carefully monitored to identify possible discriminatory outcomes."

Amazon implemented an automated recruitment tool that unwittingly resulted in discriminatory bias against female applicants. Despite creating the algorithm on a neutral basis, the CV screening system self-modified itself to prefer male candidates due to the data collected from Amazon's employees in the preceding 10 years. This resulted in CVs including the word 'women's' being downgraded by the algorithm.



Katherine Cooke

Uber, meanwhile, introduced AI software to ensure that only its registered drivers were taking bookings using the app through facial recognition. The authentication software experienced issues in recognising dark-skinned faces, which resulted in those users being unable to access the app and find jobs. The disparity was more apparent for darker-skinned females, with a failure rate of 20.8% compared with a failure rate of 6% for males.

Recruitment company wins top award

Excellence in work around diversity and inclusion has landed a top award for a West Midlands-based recruitment firm.

Investors in People – the international organisation that supports businesses which invest in their employees – announced Pertemps Network Group as the winner of the category at its annual awards in London.

The business, which has its headquarters in Meriden, is already a gold-accredited IIP partner after being assessed earlier this year.

Pertemps CEO Steve West said: "This prestigious award places us as the number one business in the UK for our engagement, promotion and delivery of an outstanding DE&I strategy.

"IIP gold accreditation already recognises us for our commitment to our people and excellence in supporting skills and careers. It is fantastic to receive this additional recognition for the focus we have always put on ensuring equal opportunities for all and breaking down barriers to employment and career progression.

"I am incredibly proud of this award and would like to thank all of my colleagues involved with supporting our people-centric strategy."

Pictured: Pertemps director of HR Tracy Evans with the company's lifetime president, Tim Watts



■ A new managing director has been appointed at one of Birmingham's most iconic hotels.

Natalie Woon has now joined the Cube Hotel where she will take control of the day-to-day running of both the hotel and the Marco Pierre White Steakhouse Bar & Grill.

Networking event

social



Chris Piggott, Stephen Talboys and Beth Martgetson



Timothy Ison and Neil Thorogood



Stephen Talboys, Reiss Matthews and Richard Neea

Wealth management firm EFG Harris Allday held a professional networking event at the Colley Ison Gallery on Colmore Row. Approximately 30 professionals were welcomed to an evening of drinks and seasonal canapes. This was followed by an intimate presentation from Birmingham-based artist Annette Pugh discussing her latest collection, before Timothy Ison, director of Colley Ison, gave his views on art as a potential investment.



Hannah Holden in conversation



Timothy Ison, Hayley Spendlove and Annette Pugh



Caroline Sisson, David Hutt and Rupert Cecil



Commercial property & real estate

SPECIAL REPORT

The range and quality of Birmingham's commercial properties is something the city can be proud of.

The office buildings in the city centre – which are under a constant programme of modernisation to meet the requirements of new working trends and societal demands – are the equal of anywhere in the country. Hospitality venues, business parks and retail outlets are not far behind.

In this commercially backed special report, we hear from some of the sector's most experienced and authoritative thought leaders, and we also shine a light on some of the big moves, news and deals taking place across the region.

Q and A with Alex Tross

advertisement feature

Carter Jonas' new head of office agency in the Midlands gives his thoughts on joining the business, and what attracted him to his new role within the growing team.

When did you join Carter Jonas?

I joined in the summer, so I've had a few months to get to know the teams in Birmingham and across the country.

What attracted you to the business?

Firstly, its ambition. Carter Jonas launched in Birmingham in 2016 with a handful of people in a flexible workspace. This opening enabled the team to pursue additional national mandates and transform their approach to client contracts. Since then, the office has grown enormously to become one of the firm's most established and sustainable hubs offering a wide variety of services. We now have a permanent base in the city, at Two Snowhill, and more than 150 people in our Midlands business. Whilst we've increased in size, it's still an incredibly friendly and down-to-earth place to be. As well as the people, I put this down to its partnership structure. Having spoken with several industry contacts, I was

confident that it was the place for me. The business is giving me the freedom and flexibility to shape my role and pursue new opportunities for our team.

What does your job entail?

As head of office agency in the Midlands, I support landlords, occupiers, investors and developers with their office leasing and acquisition strategies. My involvement may include working with investors and architects at the initial stages of a design process as we respond to the evolving needs of occupiers, right through to marketing a scheme and finding the best business for a particular space.

When advising occupiers, we are acting as their outsourced property team. We take time to understand their commercial requirements, and to find a property that will support their business growth. We save our clients a significant amount of time, locating suitable properties, and negotiating the best lease terms, helping them navigate what can be complex waters to avoid costly mistakes.

You have a lot of industry experience, specifically working in the Birmingham market. How does this support your new role?

An agent's value is predicated on their

knowledge of the market. Having worked in Birmingham for almost 20 years, I know the stock inside out and have gained a deep understanding of the occupier mindset, and conversely, what makes a great development. I am also committed to the city as a centre of innovation and think that the property industry and wider business community should do all it can to

encourage and help create more places for people to live, work and prosper.

Carter Jonas is a multi-disciplinary property consultancy; do you work with other areas of the business?

Yes, we offer the best value to clients when working together to support them. We have a great platform with specialist teams working across infrastructure, compulsory purchase, valuation, investment, geospatial, energy, planning, development, commercial and professional services, land assembly, building consultancy and contract management to name but a few! I work closely with our capital markets professionals, identifying opportunities for existing or prospective landlord clients. I also do a lot of work with our Building Consultancy team to deliver strategies to fit market requirements, and to help occupiers avoid incurring unnecessary costs during their lease.

What recent developments in your business/industry are you most excited about?

The impact of the last three years has changed the way we see and relate to office space. Since the growth in hybrid working, there has been a real flight to quality by occupiers. Businesses realise the importance of the office but understand that it has to be more than just a 'desk farm'. Occupiers are demanding spaces that meet increasingly high sustainability criteria and provide a vibrant, attractive, and green working environments. These factors are



vital for the recruitment and retention of talent, encouraging working from the office, and promoting the well-being of employees. Advising in a market where people are the focus and not just bricks and mortar is incredibly rewarding. The quality of spaces has increased significantly. Being part of that evolution and seeing the positive impact that a work environment can have on people is really exciting.

What opportunities/challenges do you expect in the next six months?

To date, 2023 has been a challenging year; interest rate rises, and inflationary pressures have led to volatility and market speculation. Whilst we seem to be moving in a more positive direction, we continue to operate in a more cautious market. As we plan for the market to pick up, as it always does, and new opportunities, landlords are focusing on upgrading and creating quality, relevant spaces to attract occupiers. Many businesses are still looking for space and are prepared to pay a premium if it ticks all the right boxes.

What is the most exciting thing about doing your job in Birmingham?

Birmingham still has a huge amount of as-yet unrealised potential, unlike many other UK cities. We've had some setbacks with the impact of economic challenges, but it's been fantastic seeing how our city responded to events such as the Commonwealth Games and the momentum that was built. There is vast array of talent here and the region

provides an excellent standard of living with great connectivity. We just need to harness the positives and realise that we are greater than the sum of our parts.

What are you most proud of in your career?

I try to be bold in the advice I give, and challenge accepted norms, and I still get a buzz from working with someone to develop and realise a strategy. It takes a lot to create a thriving business community, but when investors, developers, landlords and occupiers work together, they can make something special that has a positive influence on the wider community.

What advice would you give someone starting a career in your line of work?

You only have to look at Carter Jonas to see that the property sector is incredibly varied with people working within numerous parts of the industry. I advise anyone considering it, to try different areas. Also, network as much as possible, you never know when a chance encounter could lead to a new instruction or opportunity. Thirdly, be well rounded. Property is much more than bricks and mortar. Your value as an agent is understanding all things that affect property, not just a building in isolation.

What couldn't you get through your working week without?

My Outlook calendar. Very few days are the same, and they are often busy, so I need structure and good organisation to make sure I don't miss or forget anything important. I'd be lost without it!

About Carter Jonas

Carter Jonas is a leading UK property consultancy working across commercial, residential, rural, planning, development, infrastructure and everything in between. Having significantly enhanced our presence in Birmingham, we are committed to supporting clients on the wealth of opportunities in Birmingham, the West Midlands and nationally.

From our established office at Two Snowhill, we provide a full-service consultancy across all property sectors. Alongside our national network of 1,000 experts, working out of 34 locations, we deliver national coverage with unrivalled local expertise.

Our dedicated teams deliver a variety of specialist services to a range of private and public sector organisations, with a breadth of experience that is among the most varied in the UK. Providing a tailored, dedicated service and simply better property advice enables us to forge lasting, effective and trusting partnerships with our clients. These long-standing relationships are our most important and closely protected asset. We never forget the importance of the people behind the brands, businesses, projects and goals; that's why some of the biggest property owners have been clients of Carter Jonas since our business started in 1855.

advertisement feature

The sustainability conundrum

Birmingham has ground to make up if its collective office space is to reach the correct standard of energy efficiency in the quest for net zero, explains **SHAUN WILKES** of property consultancy **Carter Jonas**.



Sustainable office buildings are crucial for achieving the UK's climate goals and promoting environmental sustainability.

Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards (MEES) are becoming an increasingly important tool in support of the UK Government's commitment to achieve net zero by 2050, through driving improvements in energy efficiency across the building stock, thereby helping to mitigate energy use, cost and associated carbon emissions.

April this year saw another stage in the tightening of MEES. Prior to 1 April 2023, MEES legislation prevented the granting of new leases on commercial buildings with an EPC rating lower than E. However, landlords of all F and G-rated buildings are now required to carry out works to improve their energy performance to an E or better. Failure to do so means the landlord will have to cease letting the property unless they are able to register a valid exemption.

A recent report from Carter Jonas' in-house research team focused in on the issue. The report *Offices: Past, Present, Future - The Sustainability of Office Stock*, analysed how sustainable and energy efficient the UK's office stock is, and to what extent it meets the requirements of the workforce today and in the future. Using 110,000 office records, our team analysed four key office quality metrics: EPC ratings, BREEAM assessment, office-grade classification, and age of office stock, looking at the picture nationally and in 12 major UK office markets.

Birmingham's average sustainability level for the office stock ranked 11th out of 12 key markets, due to the high proportion of poor EPC ratings and its ageing stock. The city has, in fact, one of the largest amount of office buildings over 30 years old across the country, with 15% falling under EPC bands G-F, and over two-thirds in bands G-D. This means that Birmingham will have 70% of its office buildings unlettable by 2027.

The results highlight the challenges facing many commercial property owners, particularly of older or low-quality space. However, tightening of MEES is not the only trend driving tenants to new, sustainable Grade A spaces. Occupiers are trading up into more environmentally friendly accommodation, which also promotes health and well-being, to demonstrate that they are observing their corporate environmental and social policies. Moreover, footloose occupiers are increasingly placing environmental considerations towards the top of their checklist of property selection criteria.

This trend away from low-quality properties with poor environmental credentials is being further reinforced by the need for employers to provide a vibrant, attractive, sustainable work environment to underpin a return to the office, as well as recruitment, retention, productivity and wellness strategies.

It is also important to consider that the focus has shifted from viewing the office as a physical location. This change has been accentuated by the pandemic and has

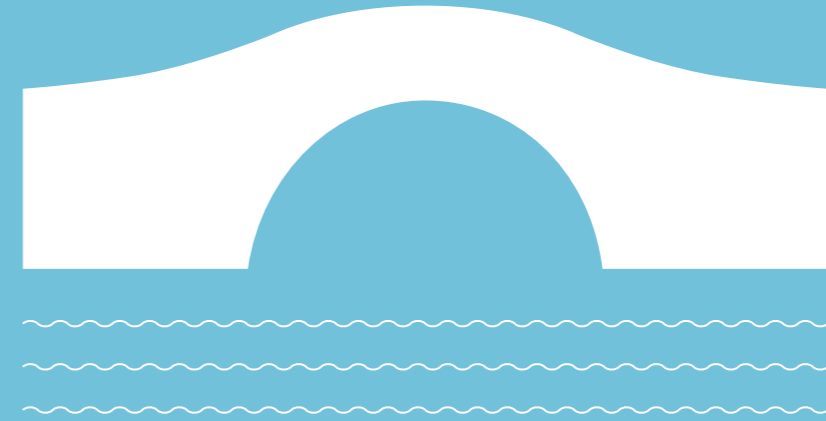
prompted organisations to rethink their approach to bricks-and-mortar spaces. Agile and collaboration-driven offices and the desire for cross-pollination between firms are trends that are likely to persist, reflecting a move away from traditional, rigid setups.

For landlords and developers with unlettable office stock, all is not lost: older buildings can still be of relevance, but their success will depend on the proactive approach to decide whether to invest in upgrading, or consider a change of use. Retrofitting with renewable technologies can enhance the performance and appeal of the properties, whilst, given the long-term reduction in office occupier demand, the repurposing of low-quality office space into more modern and versatile buildings that meet the needs of local communities can also help reduce the need for new construction, and promote sustainable urban development.

In summary, a combination of tightening MEES standards, occupier preferences and corporate social responsibility goals is driving the structural shift in demand towards new and refitted, people-centric, sustainable, energy-efficient buildings.

A thoughtful approach to office refurbishment and repurposing, coupled with careful consideration in meeting minimum energy standards, can contribute to the success of both modern and older office spaces in accommodating the evolving needs of potential occupiers.

*Shaun Wilkes is a partner in Carter Jonas' Building Consultancy team in Birmingham.



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A question of collaboration

Brindleyplace is a key part of the city's business and visitor ecosystem. Now under new ownership, it is up to asset manager Matt Long to ensure that it continues to evolve and stay the pre-eminent mixed-use estate in the city.

HENRY CARPENTER meets him.



As he conducts a brief tour around Brindleyplace, Matt Long is in his element.

His commentary on the various buildings and the public realm for which he is ultimately responsible is interrupted only by cheerful exchanges with a pair of office workers and a security guard, part of the 70 strong Praxis estate team.

Busy during both the day and evenings, the estate doesn't stop at the weekends either, Matt explains. "It's always busy," Matt says. "It's the city's pre-eminent business destination. But thousands come to Brindleyplace at the weekends too. Families visit Sea Life, the Ikon Gallery, Crescent Theatre and Legoland, and there are all the bars and restaurants which are so popular in the evenings. Crowds of people come to the ICC, Utilita Arena and the Symphony Hall as well, so we're a part of those destinations too.

"It is a true mixed-use estate, which successfully morphs with time of day and time of year – and there aren't many like it in Birmingham or indeed elsewhere in the country that do that so well."

He points out the buildings occupied by various big-name occupiers – Deutsche Bank, Avison Young, Deloitte, Page Group, Odgers Berndtson, Marsh McLennan, Reach plc, Unity Trust Bank – as well as a transport hub which is just a small contributor to the estate's green credentials (more of which later), and leisure and retail offering of varying types and sizes including independents.

The transport hub incorporates bike racks, Brompton and West Midlands cycle bikes for hire and e-scooters, all with covered areas and benches. As Matt walks through these thoroughfares, he is clearly proud of the estate and is energised by his role within it.

For the last two years, Long has overseen the placemaking and tenant engagement at Brindleyplace and has a firm hand on the tiller of the forward direction of the estate which was first developed by Argent in the early 1990s.

Long is almost rubbing his hands in anticipation of what lies ahead – quite possibly because of the commitment from the estate's new owners, real estate investors Praxis, to embark

“An important part of the ethos of Brindleyplace is that we are one team on one estate, and we all share in the desire to fulfil our offering of being the best business and visitor destination in the city, for all our stakeholders.”

on an investment programme to ensure Brindleyplace’s standing at the top of the panoply of commercial estates continues.

On August 31 of this year, the sale of the estate from HSBC Alternative Investments to Praxis, was completed. This was big news on the national property scene, not just Birmingham’s. At the time it was the largest regional office sale of the year.

We are now sitting in a meeting room in x+why, the flexible workspace in Foundry, at the heart of the estate, which in many ways epitomises society’s new way of working after the pandemic put paid too much of the traditional five-days-a-week working model.

It has been something of a whirlwind for Long, since he was brought in to the Brindleyplace team in October 2021, right at the end of the last Covid lockdown.

“I had previously worked on leasing, placemaking and customer engagement, which is all about building relationships and trusted partnerships, which was especially important during Covid. This was, of course, a difficult time for everyone. But I had also previously been an occupier and office agent on the estate as well, so I knew what it was about,” he says.

“I was brought in to undertake an engagement and placemaking role – in other words, to work with occupiers across the estate and find out what we as a landlord could do to make business life better.

“Businesses were feeling their way with the new hybrid ways of working and it was a period of uncertainty for us all. It was about working together to establish the best route forwards – and this applied to the smaller operators in the flexi spaces every bit as much as the big corporates.

“An important part of the ethos of Brindleyplace is that we are one team on one estate, and we all share in the desire to fulfil our offering of being the best business and visitor destination in the city, for all our stakeholders. Our in-house estate management team helps make this a reality, and we pride ourselves on running a quality service to everyone who interacts with the estate.

“This is an important point for our new owners; that we are a hands-on estate team that can control and maximise the benefits of our public realm and look after its cleanliness, security, and maintenance.

“This is one of the USPs of

Brindleyplace. It is a very tightly managed and well-run estate. Security and the wider team are all superb – it has always been this way and will continue to be so.

“That is a major draw for a commercial organisation. Safety and security for people and the workplace is paramount. Once you walk out of your building in Brindleyplace, you are still part of a community, and that matters. Our staff are obviously committed, with several members of the team being here for over 20 years – even back to when the estate first opened.”

This brings us back to the estate’s history and the fact that reinvestment, as opposed to reinvention, in some areas is welcome.

The foundations have always been great, Long says, pointing out that this was an estate built to last with some great design work and imaginative public realm and making the most of the local setting. But even the very best buildings inevitably age. Praxis has committed to updating and decarbonising not only these buildings, but also the public realm. And that’s exciting, says Long.

“We have three outstanding squares and excellent public realm – nowhere else in Birmingham can really rival that, and the sense of community which has always been here because of it,” he says.

“Businesses love it, not least because it’s all here for their staff. When you step out of the office, you’re in your own piece of the city centre, with leisure facilities, shops, the canals, options for exercising and enjoying nature, and transport links all right here.”

Working with the business occupiers to understand what needs changing for them to adapt to altered working patterns and hybrid working practices is clearly not to be underestimated and is an important part of the business plan moving forward.

He continues: “Pretty much everything which is in the business plan is underpinned by what we can do to improve the buildings and the whole estate – particularly from an ESG perspective. It applies to both the buildings and the public realm.

“We’ve got beehives, bug hotels and a wide range of recycling initiatives to keep our carbon footprint low and promote nature, but we’re now looking at how we can invest in the buildings and the public realm further to take it all to the next level.

“ESG is fundamental not just to us as a business, but it is part of what



Placemaking is a key component of Brindleyplace’s make-up



Bee hives, one of the many green initiatives on the estate

Brindleyplace is and always has been. Our customers and occupiers have their own ESG criteria which we want to dovetail into as well and I want us to be working together on this.”

Long reels off various other key points on the business plan – and they all amount to the same mission: to keep evolving the estate and adapting it to the requirements of customers. Clear and consistent communication is key, along with using the estate occupier app, social channels, and screens to push out the same positive messages and build the sense of community.

The good news for occupiers is that Matt and the wider team started working on the improvements the day the business plan was drawn up. A tight timescale has been imposed and they are sticking to it.

It’s not just the individual components of the estate which make it so attractive to

businesses – the improved accessibility through the development of Paradise and Arena Central as well as the expanding West Midlands Metro has meant more and more people can reach the estate easily. For example, from the dedicated Brindleyplace tram stop it’s now just 4 minutes to New Street station and Grand Central.

“We work with various public sector bodies to ensure we’re leading the way with green transport initiatives. It’s going to be key for us as a major city centre location,” says Long.

Testament to this is the Green/Approved Modeshift STARS Travel Plan accreditation, which is the first in a five-step scheme which recognises an organisation’s ongoing commitment to providing sustainable travel for employees and visitors.

“Not only is it nice to be recognised officially rather than anecdotally, but it

does also provide a framework and give us points to work on where areas might need attention,” he admits.

“I do strongly feel – and there is evidence to support this – that with rising building costs, and the subsequent higher rents, repurposing wonderful buildings in an ESG-friendly way is absolutely the way forward.”

Another point of difference with Brindleyplace is in its placemaking – which can loosely be defined as the creation of quality spaces in which people want to live, work and play.

“We curate a process throughout the year where we’re working with partners – the Ladywood Project, Westside BID and the Canals & Rivers Trust, are three such examples – alongside our own on-site charities like the Ikon and Crescent.

“We host regular food and craft markets, film festivals and a wide range of seasonal events and all sorts of other occupier and public events. There is really very little you can’t find on this estate. My job is to strike the balance between a serious business community on one hand, and a family-friendly visitor attraction on the other.

“All of this contributes to the wellness piece, which I see as a key element at Brindleyplace. We have on-site gym with swimming pool, fitness trails and running clubs, a wellness consultant who offers advice and free-of-charge yoga sessions to occupiers, seated massage sessions, and an inward-facing app for our occupiers to be able to communicate and share initiatives.

“Instead of second-guessing the occupiers as to what placemaking they want to see, we ask them directly. It’s a partnership, and always has been.”

Occupier relationships are hardly new to Long – he has been in the industry for 25 years and what he sees as a fundamental concept – a healthy landlord-customer collaboration – hasn’t changed.

“The biggest thing for me has been observing how the place and the immediate environment matters just as much as the buildings themselves, and I truly believe that Brindleyplace has a very strong offer in that respect.”

There’s one feature of the estate that Long hasn’t mentioned, but it is one which won’t be lost on visitors or occupiers – and that is the atmosphere.

People smile at Brindleyplace. They seem content. And that must count for a lot.



Tenants appreciate the estate’s focus on wellness

Make the Switch to maximise property potential

advertisement feature



John Angus

There has been a significant shift in private tenant expectations in recent years. Economic uncertainty, a greater focus on sustainability and a transition to online platforms has increased the demand for flexible, convenient and high-quality accommodation at a competitive price.

John Angus, MD of Birmingham-based asset management company, Switch Hospitality Ltd, explores how service expertise from the hospitality industry can be used to diversify across sectors, in turn maximising opportunities and increasing returns for landlords, investors and property developers.

In the evolving landscape of hospitality, we must constantly keep abreast of the latest developments in the sector to ensure we're meeting, and exceeding, customer expectations.

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Our burgeoning client portfolio includes the landmark hotel Park Regis Birmingham and a brand-new development in Snowhill, Aparthotel Birmingham. By taking learnings and best practice from both the hotel and aparthotel markets, we can complement and enhance the customer offer and experience within each.

And it's from our broad experience in hospitality that we recognise how wider sectors can also benefit from the 'Switch standard' of service.

Despite the seeming disparities between the hotel and serviced apartment sectors, we know that both share common ground when it comes to three key areas: customer service, innovation and

sustainability. By adapting our knowledge and expertise from all areas of hospitality, we can translate this to adapt to new and emerging market trends, such as the rise of BTR assets.

There is an exciting opportunity to tap into the corporate short-stay market, which is currently spending almost double the price of a monthly rental for hotel bookings with significantly less flexibility.

In Birmingham alone, upwards of 450,000 hotel rooms are used by corporate guests each year, with an estimated £8m spend. Meanwhile, 60% of corporate companies, given the choice, would prefer a serviced apartment with hotel-level services.

Through our portfolio, we work with conference and business guests on a daily basis, and believe that, when we have the ultimate management responsibility on behalf of owners and developers, Switch can deliver an average of 15% additional occupancy to BTR, PRS and co-living assets.

Our existing corporate booking systems to fill vacant units with short-stay guests, in turn widening the tenant demographic, and creating a credible void management solution that increases profit potential and allows a flexible and agile approach through a diverse service offering.

As both business and leisure travellers increasingly seek accommodation that goes beyond the hospitality norm, there's a huge opportunity to provide comfort, convenience and a personal touch across every project - regardless of the property type.

At Switch, we offer a unique proposition and can leverage our hospitality expertise across a range of sectors to provide clients with innovative solutions to their business challenges. And as every Switch employee is trained in-house at the award-winning Park Regis Birmingham, clients know that they can always expect the gold standard of service from our dedicated team.

To achieve success in any sector, a sharp focus on exceptional guest experience, customer loyalty and client retention remains key - and at Switch, we're committed to unlocking every opportunity we can.



Park Regis Birmingham

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Scan to visit Aparthotel Birmingham

Be apart of Birmingham

advertisement feature

With a host of major names in the tech, finance and creative sectors now calling Birmingham their home, it's clear to see that city business is booming. And if you want to work at the heart of the action and experience the comfort of apartment living with the luxury of hotel services, it's time to be apart of something amazing.

Opening in December 2023, Aparthotel Birmingham is an exciting new addition to the Switch Hospitality Management portfolio, which is set to redefine the traditional corporate stay.

Following an extensive redevelopment, the former Royal Angus Hotel has been transformed into a luxury serviced aparthotel, with 161 self-contained apartments in the heart of the city available for long and short stay.

Set across nine floors and ranging in size from 22m² to 56m², are a choice of 10 accommodation types - from a Classic Studio to a Grand Two Bedroom Apartment and a selection with pet-friendly

terrace gardens - each with superfast Wi-Fi and modern designs to suit every need.

With the freedom to book as long or short a stay as needed, you can benefit from the familiar comforts of home, while enjoying the exceptional service, premium amenities and flexibility of a hotel - leaving you to focus on the (business) task at hand.

All rooms have dedicated spaces for sleeping, relaxing, working and dining, including a fully-equipped kitchen with fridge-freezer, washer-dryer and combi-microwave oven as standard.

Early morning meeting? Our rooms are equipped with black-out curtains, luxurious linens and super-soft pillows, so you can wake up refreshed and ready to go. And with an on-site NISA Local store and a 24-hour concierge service, we've thought of every detail to ensure a stress-free stay.

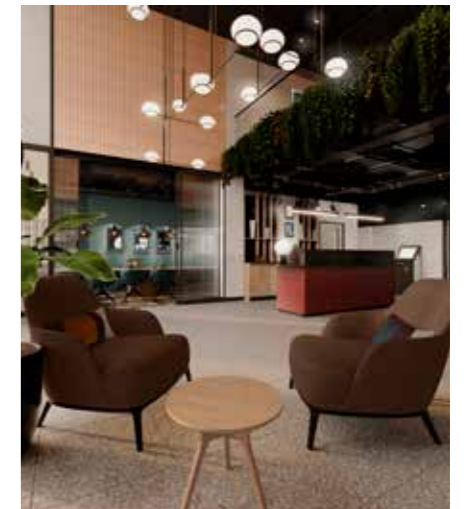
What's more, 'The Hub' on the ground floor features a 12-seat boardroom alongside modern co-working spaces, providing the perfect space to power

through emails and connect with clients, with free superfast Wi-Fi and private meeting facilities to hand.

Benefitting from a prime city-centre location, Aparthotel Birmingham is minutes from St Chad's tram stop and Birmingham Snow Hill station, with direct access to Stratford-Upon-Avon, Worcester and London Marylebone via the Chiltern Line. The site is easily accessible from the A38 and has a dedicated link bridge to the car park with 24/7 security.

With the convenience of home, the practicality of an office and the indulgence of a hotel, Aparthotel Birmingham ticks every box. And with the 'Switch standard' level of service guaranteed for every guest, a stay with us is the easiest business decision you'll make.

For more information visit aparthotelbirmingham.co.uk or to make an enquiry contact enquiries@aparthotelbirmingham.co.uk



If you're interested in hearing why you should make the Switch to an enhanced asset management solution, contact John Angus john.angus@swhm.co.uk or visit www.swhm.co.uk



Corkfield officially open to residents

A build-to-rent development standing next to Edgbaston Stadium has now opened its doors to residents.

Corkfield, which features 375 apartments, is owned and developed by PATRIZIA, which was also behind The Forum in Southside.

The scheme will be operated by Native Residential, which was selected after a competitive tender process.

Phase one of the development, which comprises 164 apartments, has now been released to the market. In addition to fully fitted and furnished new homes, Corkfield boasts more than 30,000 sq ft of shared and social space.

Olivia Seaton, asset manager at PATRIZIA said: "Edgbaston is Birmingham's most sought-after address, combining easy access to the city centre with a leafy setting.

"Take-up of the apartments has been brisk. More than 800 people are expected to live here and we look forward to building a vibrant new community here."

Rajiv Mehta of Native Residential said: "We are delighted to be appointed by PATRIZIA on this

landmark asset in Birmingham.

"We have now successfully recruited a stellar senior onsite team and we are greatly looking forward to welcoming the first residents to the scheme."

Corkfield was designed by CallisonRTKL – now known as Arcadis – while the amenity space and apartments were interior designed and furnished by Cast Living.



Pictured from left are Dan Williams, head of development at PATRIZIA UK & Ireland; Craig Flindall, chief operating officer, Warwickshire County Cricket Club; Richard Scutt, director of real estate development, PATRIZIA



One Centenary Way launches at Paradise

Several members of Birmingham's business community gathered at Paradise in the city centre for the official launch of One Centenary Way.

Designed by Birmingham-based Howells, with engineering input from Arup, One Centenary Way is a 68-metre tall, 13-storey, 280,000 sq ft commercial building with bar and restaurant uses on the ground floor.

The steel exoskeleton of the building enables it to straddle the A38 Queensway tunnel, with the road running directly beneath the site remaining open throughout the construction period.

Completed earlier this year by contractor Sir Robert McAlpine, the building book-ends Paradise and overlooks Centenary Square and Broad Street.

The basement features Birmingham's first dedicated cycle hub with space for up to 400 bikes, showers, storage and maintenance facilities, all of which will be available to the public as well as Paradise occupiers from next year.

Environmental consultancy Arup will soon begin the relocation of its 1,000-strong Midlands team to the building and will be joined early next year by global banking group Goldman Sachs and real estate advisers JLL.

Further floors of the building are currently under offer, leaving one-and-a-half floors available.

The development boasts strong green credentials with a pure electric heating and hot water supply system and SMART access to services, information and facilities.

Rob Groves, regional development director at MEPC, the development and asset management arm of Federated Hermes, said: "The official launch of One Centenary Way is a huge milestone for Paradise and the city. It is another successful element of the Paradise estate, and a crucial building for Birmingham in terms of attracting new and existing office occupiers looking to expand or find a new home where they can grow sustainably.

"It has enabled organisations like Arup and Goldman Sachs to move thousands of jobs to the city centre, contributing to a thriving regional economy and a growing profile for the city's real estate market."

Chris Taylor, CEO of real estate and head of private markets, Federated Hermes, said: "One Centenary Way is evidence of our long-term thinking and commitment to a net zero future at Paradise. One of the largest commercial buildings in Birmingham, it is an exemplary design, a triumph of engineering



Dan Storer, West Midlands Growth Company, Chris Taylor of Federated Homes, and MEPC's Rob Groves

proress and a new landmark for the people of the city."

The Paradise redevelopment is being brought forward through Paradise Circus Limited Partnership in a joint venture with Birmingham City Council.

The private sector funding is being managed by the international business of Federated Hermes, which has partnered with Canada Pension Plan Investment Board on the first phase of the development and for One Centenary Way.

New addition to Star City

Adventure golf brand Jungle Rumble is among the newest additions at the Star City entertainment complex.

Jungle Rumble, which offers food and a bar alongside adventure golf, has taken 13,407 sq ft of space on a 15-year lease.

Childrens indoor soft play operator Monster Mayhem has also recently extended its lease on the 8,947 sq ft unit it already occupies for an additional 10 years.

In addition, Zauq Buffet, the Southern Asian buffet restaurant, has renewed its lease with a new 15-year term on 5,460 sq ft.

The leases have been signed by Quadrant, the UK real estate asset management and development company which is Star City's asset manager.

Since advising on its purchase in late 2016 on behalf of funds managed by a US-based global alternative asset manager, Quadrant has radically overhauled the Star City scheme with a re-branding and repurposing of key areas.

John Maddison, partner at Quadrant, said: The long leases being signed with innovative leisure brands at Star City are testament to its reputation as one of the leading entertainment destinations in the Midlands.

Key contract win for consultancy

Burley Browne is celebrating winning one of its largest instructions after being appointed by the National Farmers

Union to manage its entire property portfolio across the UK.

The Sutton Coldfield-based consultancy will be the NFU's property advisers, providing services including property management, lease advisory and agency for all its commercial properties and land in locations such as Exeter, Carmarthen, Dorchester and York.

David Hemming, joint managing director of Burley Browne, said: "This is a substantial success for the entire team and it reflects the hard work and growth within the business we have enjoyed over the last three years, particularly with the expansion of the management department.

"The NFU undertook a tender process early this summer to appoint a firm of surveyors to provide advice and real estate services for their UK property portfolio. We have been successful and are now

undertaking the handover process ready to commence in December. We can't wait to get started."

The NFU represents more than 46,000 farming and growing businesses. Its purpose is to champion British agriculture and horticulture, to campaign for a stable and sustainable future for British farmers and to secure the best possible deal for its members.

It owns a range of properties which are maintained by an in-house team, but it was seeking a firm of surveyors to formulate a property strategy, and to provide advice and real estate services for the organisation.

Burley Browne will work with the NFU to create a property strategy, provide advice on physical improvement and capital investment, and manage its property portfolio.



Pictured from left are David Hemming, Katie Mills and James Merrick of Burley Browne

Successful run of sales

A former BHS store in Walsall has been sold off market to an undisclosed private investor for £750,000.

The 35,380 sq ft building at 71-75 Park Street, Walsall, is currently let to Retail Multiples (Walsall) Ltd until 2029. The sale was handled by property auctioneers and commercial agents Bond Wolfe.

James Mattin, managing director at Bond Wolfe, said: "We are delighted to have continued our successful run of investment sales in Walsall town centre.

"This sale reaffirms the confidence there, and we look forward to announcing further pipeline sales."

Ryan Lynch of commercial property agents Siddall Jones represented the buyer, with law firm Clark Brookes Turner Cary in West Bromwich acting for the seller, while solicitors Kapasi & Co acted for the buyer.

Bond Wolfe also managed the sale of 18 Alcester Road South in Kings Heath for £290,000 to an undisclosed private investor.

The 1,503 sq ft, two-storey property is let to Everyday Loans Ltd until November 2027 with a rent of £22,500 per annum.

Mr Mattin said: "This is an area with a strong level of passing trade and high



footfall as it sits on one of the main thoroughfares into the city centre. Empty units are invariably filled quite quickly, so investors have the confidence that their property will always be let.

"Buyers see it as an affordable investment providing a solid and safe return on their capital."

West Bromwich law firm Clark Brookes Turner Cary acted for the seller and Wildings of Birmingham advised the seller.

Rebrand is a tribute to office's former use

A prominent city centre office building has been rebranded in tribute to its former use as a factory for billiards tables.

Landlord Grosvenor is relaunching 134 Edmund Street as the Billiards Building following an extensive refurbishment.

Once complete, it will offer a new reception and business lounge, gym and communal roof terrace.

With the building half let, 34,000 sq ft of

space will be available from Q1 2024 with Cat A and fitted floorplates ranging from 4,000 to 8,400 sq ft.

As part of the retrofit, it will now be electric powered, following the replacement of the building's gas-powered system.

Fergus Evans, office portfolio director at Grosvenor, said: "The relaunch of 134 Edmund Street as the Billiards Building

shows how existing buildings can be refurbished to create Grade A office space.

"Our retrofit has significantly reduced its annual carbon footprint and avoided the huge carbon impact of replacing it with a new building. It now offers best-in-class facilities in a prime location at the heart of Birmingham's CBD."

CBRE and JLL have been instructed as joint agents to market the office space.



Pharma company's plans for a new HQ

Sterling Pharmaceuticals is set to build a striking new 40,000 sq ft headquarters – designed by Birmingham architects Gancy Nicholls – at St Modwen's Longbridge Business Park.

The pharma company specialises in the development and large-batch production of non-sterile oral liquids as well as solid dosage forms such as capsules and tablets.

Sterling appointed Kenny Allan at KWB and David MacMullen of MacMullen



Associates, to find a suitable parcel of land after outgrowing its existing R&D and manufacturing sites in Moseley. MacMullen Associates is also advising on the building's design, planning and construction.

Kenny Allan, head of Industrial at KWB, said: "Following an extensive search for freehold land in the south west of Birmingham, I'm delighted we have found

this site at Longbridge Business Park. The park is fast becoming a hub for leading science, technology, medicine, precision engineering and R&D sectors, and offers staff excellent facilities and transport links."

Dr Qamar Nawaz, chief executive officer at Sterling Pharmaceuticals, said the new space would enable the firm to take on a number of new staff, bringing its workforce to around 150.

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By DANIELLE MCGRELLIS, Arup digital services lead

insight

What awaits cities like Birmingham in our digital future?

Digital is fast becoming an intrinsic aspect of everyday life in the developed world. The rapid advancement in data, artificial intelligence, and internet connectivity drives investment, business, community, and culture within cities as much as any physical infrastructure.

For cities like Birmingham, with our aspirations of being a global city, our success hinges on the ability to be forward thinking in how we perceive our city as a digital place as much as remaining a very real place where people live, work and visit. When integrated, these dual identities of digital and physical space present a city like Birmingham with a wealth of opportunities for growth and investment.

So, what could our digital future be in a city like Birmingham?

As highlighted at this year's Birmingham Tech Week, the city, once the beating heart of the Industrial Revolution, is now on the cusp of a digital revolution – including the commercial opportunities that flow on from a shift change in our patterns of living, working, and communicating.

Building on the strong existing heritage of innovation across the region and a growing SciTech cluster that reflects our growing expertise in MedTech, FinTech as well as utilising digital and technology to redefine established industries like

engineering and manufacturing, the city is ready go further.

Organisations like Arup are taking a lead in this process and helping to design better city-wide outcomes by improving collaboration for the benefit of everyone. Access to transport networks, digital infrastructure, healthcare, and the world of work are all changing, and people need help to fully understand these implications.

Making data-rich information more accessible on a city-wide basis brings an insight and understanding not previously possible. This transforms our approach to addressing some of the city's biggest challenges to better community and individual needs and accelerate a clear pathway for actions from both the public and private sectors. Healthcare, social and care services for example, are among the industries most likely to benefit while others will need to focus on transport or sharing knowledge and ideas.

A diverse application of digital and tech can help to effectively shape cities and populations, drawing on services already offered, tools and frameworks already in place, and identifying the digital gaps and using that information to drive ever greater innovation. This will shape – and fuel – all cities for the rest of this century and beyond. The integration of services with individual needs will become the keystone on which so much else is driven.

Human interaction is still available as well, but for the digital citizen, they can

report and progress their interactions with City Hall or the local police station just as easily as they access their bank or do their grocery shopping.

Today's digital citizens will undoubtedly reap the benefits of further changes, but we want to ensure these changes and improvements help everyone, and not just those already digitally plugged in. Access must be equitable and meaningful to ensure everyone feels included.

All of us can benefit from a more connected, information-rich way of living and working – and of making decisions about how we interact with the city as a real or digitally-experienced entity. And all cities will need to become more strategic if they are to deliver ever-more complex integrated services in the ways that citizens want.

Our city populations will become increasingly ultra-connected, and this will enable all of us to leverage the advantages of the digital future and help shape it to the needs of each citizen.

These change can be daunting, difficult and challenging all at once. For some people in Birmingham, as in every city across the world, it will be hard to keep up and understand the implications of these changes. It is important to recognise this and ensure that our people, organisations and cities support our citizens through this ever-changing journey to ensure they remain inclusive for all people and all communities.

Danielle McGrellis has more than 19 years' experience across digital, technology and engineering. As a leader within Arup's digital services business, Danielle spearheads the growth of Arup's digital services within the Midlands region and works across multiple sectors and industries.

Aston University opens new HQ

Aston University celebrated the official opening of its new Birmingham city centre headquarters and the launch of its 2030 strategy at a reception at John Cadbury House.

The event, hosted by the university's vice-chancellor and chief executive Professor Aleks Subic, brought together more than 70 business leaders and other senior figures from across the city and region including guest speaker Andy Street, mayor of the West Midlands.

The acquisition of the new HQ building at 190 Corporation Street – named after the founder of the Cadbury business – is a key part of Aston University's 2030 strategy, focused on creating an urban university that is integrated within the city centre and which drives city regeneration.

It houses the university's business and community engagement and alumni relations and development teams, along with a hub for business engagement, enterprise creation and innovation capacity-building. It also co-locates all the university's corporate services in one building, as well as hosting the chancellery and executive office.

The building was refurbished with financial support from the West Midlands Combined Authority which contributed £9.5 million to support the renovation of the historic building.

The Victorian structure now offers more than 46,000 square feet of office, retail and social space and is operationally net zero carbon, powered by 100% green



Mayor Andy Street, Aston University pro-chancellor Dame Yve Buckland, and vice-chancellor and chief executive Aleks Subic cutting the ribbon at the university's new city centre headquarters

electricity, with LED lighting, VRF air conditioning, electric car charging stations and cycle storage spaces.

Guests at the reception had the opportunity to hear about the university's vision and ambitions for the years ahead, including plans to establish a world-class innovation district – the new Birmingham Innovation Quarter (B-IQ) – in partnership with Birmingham City Council and Bruntwood SciTech, to evolve as an innovation ecosystem focused on science, technology and enterprise.

They were also able to network with key stakeholders of the University and enjoyed tours of the Business Hub, Enterprise Hub, Alumni Club and Chancellery.

Mr Street said: "I will continue to work closely with Aston University in the months and years ahead - including with regards to its 2030 Strategy with its emphasis on a dynamic and inclusive approach to education, science and enterprise. John Cadbury House is a testament to the positive role Aston University has played in enriching our city and region.

Professor Subic said: "For over a century, Aston University's enduring purpose has been to make the world a better place through education, research, and innovation, by enabling our students to succeed in work and life, and by supporting the communities we serve to thrive economically, socially, and culturally.

"Our 2030 strategy defines Aston University as an inclusive, entrepreneurial and transformational university, building on our proud past as UK's first college of technology, that is taking its rightful place in this Fourth Industrial Revolution.

"Our bold presence in the heart of the city's business district helps to realise this strategy and enable Aston University to become a thriving urban university, integrated seamlessly in the city centre, a key driver of city regeneration and a trusted partner for alumni, businesses, and the community."



launch



Prof Monder Ram, Alex Toft, Rt Hon Liam Byrne MP and Stephen Goldstein CBE DL



Keith Gabriel and Steve Walker
Michele Wilby and Philip Singleton



Sir Dominic Cadbury, Sir John Sutherland,
Professor Aleks Subic and Benedict Cadbury



Elaine Hewer, Sir Dominic Cadbury
and Clare Noakes

Below: Prof Monder Ram
and Keith Stokes-Smith



Rob Valentine and Richard Billingham



Sir Dominic Cadbury
and Benedict Cadbury



Amardeep Gill, Atul Rana
and Prof Zoe J Radnor



Matthew Revell, Jo Williams, David Sallah and Richard Kirby



Elise White and Elaine Hewer



Above left: Gemma Dilkes,
Dame Yve Buckland and Mark Smith

Above: Mark Smith, Gemma Dilkes,
Andy Street, Dame Yve Buckland and
Marco Forgione

Left: Louise Teboul, Amardeep Gill
and Michele Wilby



Carolyn Chapman-Lees, Indi Deol and
Paula Whithouse



Sangeeta Khorana, Marco Forgione
and Nancy Buckley
Right: Christina Bone, Dawn Hands
and Christiane Dickens



Investment growth

Birmingham and the West Midlands is proving a magnet for record levels of foreign investment and visitor numbers – despite rising inflation and increased labour costs.

That is according to the annual Birmingham Economic Review which paints an upbeat picture of a city viewed by the outside world as a “great place to invest”.

The report said 65% of businesses across Greater Birmingham expect an increase in turnover over the next few months.

But the review – produced by the City-Region Economic and Development Institute at the University of Birmingham and the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce – also warned that recovery post-pandemic has been slower in the West Midlands than in other UK regions.

The region’s slow fightback from the UK’s worst medical emergency for 100 years has been offset by a rebound from the city’s business, professional and financial services sector, which has “adapted well,” only shrinking by 1.1% between 2019 and 2021.

The report reveals that the West Midlands attracted the largest share of foreign direct investment outside London, with 181 FDI projects in 2022-23, an increase of 171% on the previous 12 months. Overseas investors created a total of 8,252 jobs, a 48% increase compared to



Henrietta Brealey

2021-22, with the Commonwealth Games playing “a key role” in the upsurge.

Meanwhile 2022 – the year of the Games – saw 141.2 million visitors flock to the West Midlands, a 38% increase since 2021 and a 5% rise compared to 2019. Spending by visitors rose to £14.1 billion, a 39% increase since 2021 and a 7% compared to 2019.

By contrast, skill attainment remains below average with 10.9% of economically active people aged 16 and over in Greater Birmingham having no qualifications. Birmingham is ranked as the seventh most deprived local authority in England, a rating unchanged since 2015.

Henrietta Brealey, chief executive

of Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, said: “Our report shows Birmingham and the West Midlands attracting record levels of foreign direct investment and visitor numbers, with a transformed city centre and extensive regeneration underway.

“Businesses remain optimistic. A deeper devolution deal for the West Midlands Combined Authority has provided more regional leadership and control in key areas, enabling interventions tailored to the needs of the region.

“This is all against a backdrop of significant economic uncertainty as rising inflation, interest rates, labour costs and more squeeze businesses. Despite all this, the fundamentals that make Birmingham a great place to invest and do business remain compelling.”

Rebecca Riley, associate professor, City-REDI at the University of Birmingham, said: “The UK economy continues to experience a series of economic shocks. This year the Ukraine situation has continued sending shocks through supply chains, adding to the worsening cost of living crisis, and ongoing uncertainties around interest rates, debt and the strength of our currency.

“The West Midlands region has been hit harder than most by the effects of these shocks due to the sectoral mix and exposure to the cost impacts and the underlying health of the population.”



Kevin Johns

Well-known figure celebrates 30-year milestone

A pillar of the Solihull business community who was honoured by the late Queen for his services to the town is celebrating 30 years working at one of its largest accountancy firms.

Kevin Johns joined Prime Accountants Group as a senior manager in October 1993 and after becoming a partner two years later, climbed the ladder to become managing director in 2015.

He was awarded a British Empire Medal in the New Year’s Honours list in 2019 for services to Solihull, in recognition of his business and charity work in the town.

As well as holding the positions of Solihull BID chairman and president of the Solihull Chamber of Commerce, Mr Johns has spearheaded Prime’s fundraising efforts, which have seen the business raise tens of thousands of pounds for charities such as Solihull Life Opportunities and Birmingham Children’s Hospital.

“There was never a 30-year goal, but there was a goal to enjoy what I do with people I enjoy working with – clients as well as colleagues,” he said.

“I’m a big believer that if you work hard and you’re committed to what you do, then results will follow. It’s the old sporting cliché – the harder you practice, the luckier you get.”

Bright future for hair care company

Award-winning afro hair care company Nylah’s Naturals is looking to a brighter future after securing £530,000 through a seed round investment.

Birmingham-based Nylah’s Naturals was set up in 2013 by Kameese Davis who wanted to create healthy and effective care for her daughter’s textured hair using non-toxic, naturally occurring ingredients.

The firm’s initial strategic focus is providing hair restorative solutions for black women with Afro hair, with a long-term vision to expand its global market presence to serve every demographic.

The company said it has a long-term product road map to continue addressing hair loss and hair care for the underserved black community. Pivotal elements of this plan include a direct-to-consumer subscription proposition in the UK and international expansion.

This round of investment – led by venture capital organisation Midven – will enable a number of key hires. The first of these is Bob Holt OBE, former CEO of global cosmetics brand, Revolution Beauty PLC, who will be joining as executive chairman, while dermatologist

and specialist in hair loss disorders, Dr Sharon Wong, has been appointed as clinical adviser.

Kameese Davis, CEO of Nylah’s Naturals, said: “In a landscape where less than 1% of VC money in the UK is allocated to all-female teams and only 0.02% reaches black women entrepreneurs, this investment takes on an even greater significance.

“With this support, Nylah’s is poised to redefine the hair care offering for black women, and make a meaningful impact, not only for ourselves but for aspiring entrepreneurs who look up to us as well. The future holds incredible promise, and we’re eager to begin this journey.”

In the run-up to securing this seed round investment, Midven has provided strategic guidance to Nylah’s Naturals and has committed to continue to support its growth. The current round remains open until April 2024, with hopes to raise an additional £500,000.

The investment will come from both the Midlands Engine Investment Fund through its West Midlands Equity Fund and the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund, in addition to a syndicate of angel investors.

Care provider’s boost to grassroots sport



Pictured from left are Elliot Horton, Les Trumpeter, Craig Williams and Nick Horton

West Bromwich care provider Select Lifestyles has supported the local community by giving £8,900 to grassroots sports teams in 2023.

Through the sponsorships, the firm supports five football clubs and one rugby club, across children’s and adult’s teams. The clubs include Paget Rangers Football Club, Merry Go Round Albion, Broadway FC, Tipton Town FC, Brownhills Community Colts and Aston Old Edwardians.

Nick Horton, managing director at Select Lifestyles, said: “Sport isn’t just about the competition on the pitch – it means so much more to those who play and coach. “It has the power to unite communities and provide vital physical and mental health support, and it means a lot to us that we can play a part in this.”

Craig Williams, 1st XV manager at Aston Old Edwardians, said: “Funds from the sponsorship this year have allowed us to buy two sets of match wear, one Veo Sports Camera and one season’s subscription to editing rights.”



Pictured from left are Huw Sparkes, junior investment manager at Midven, West Midlands mayor Andy Street, Kameese Davis, CEO of Nylah’s Naturals, and Midven director Rupert Lyle

Man of *values*

The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has a new president in the form of Nasir Awan, who was starting his two-year tenure at the chamber's AGM in November. As JON GRIFFIN reports, there is a fascinating story behind the life and career of this self-made wholesale magnate.

When Nasir Awan landed at Heathrow Airport in the summer of 1967 with his mother and younger brother, he would 'meet' his father for the first time – an eight-year-old stranger in a foreign land.

Nasir was a toddler with no memories of Bashir Awan, who had fought in the Second World War with the RAF on the Burma Front, when he left Pakistan six years earlier in search of a better standard of life for his family thousands of miles away in the alien surroundings of post-war Birmingham.

Today Nasir is among the West Midlands' most successful business figures. He is at the helm of one of the largest UK wholesale cash and carry businesses, and only the third Asian to take on the cherished mantle of president of Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, his tenure starting at its AGM in November.

But the driving force behind Awan Marketing PLC – which operates from a 45,000 sq ft distribution centre in Hockley with over 40,000 lines, a customer base of over 14,000 throughout the UK and a supply base in China – still clearly recalls that emotional day at Heathrow more than 56 years ago.

"When my father left I was only three years old. We were four brothers, two sisters and a mother left behind while my father came to the UK to make a better life for himself. The first time I remember seeing him was when I was eight years old. I only knew him from pictures.

"We were the last ones to join the family. The air fare was really expensive and he couldn't afford to bring the whole family over in one go. It was very emotional seeing him for the first time at the airport.

"My younger brother was six. I remember my father picking him up and carrying him, and my mother walking with him. I was running behind, keeping pace with him at the airport. I was eight."

That emotional airport reunion with his father after years of absence would prove to be Nasir's introduction to mid-60s



Nasir Awan on a Pakistan flood relief trip with Islamic Relief

“One of the things that I can probably add to the role is that a lot of previous presidents have been professionals, such as solicitors and accountants rather than from a trading company which is an actual business.”

Britain, a far cry from his birthplace in the exotic surroundings of Peshawar in the north west frontier near the Khyber Pass.

It also proved to be the critical turning point in the life of a man who would go on to achieve success and public recognition in his adopted home of inner-city Birmingham, culminating in an MBE for services to business and international trade in 2016.

“It was life in the inner cities. Because of my father, bless him, we used to have a lot of friends, English, West Indian, Asians, Sikhs. I have nice memories of playing in the street with all sorts of different races – you didn’t feel any different. There were no play stations or computer games, everybody would be out playing in the street.”

Bashir, who worked in factory jobs before setting up as a shopkeeper in Small Heath, instilled in his children the work ethic which would eventually take Awan to the prominent roles he holds in today’s much-changed Birmingham business world. “My father used to set us homework, he would come back from work and test us,” he recalls.

His father’s determined example and Awan’s own multi-racial upbringing on

the streets of Aston provided him with the vital foundations for a business career which began in his mid to late teens helping his father run the small family shop in Small Heath selling radios, cassettes and other electronic goods.

Life behind the shop counter provided the humble origins of a rich and varied business life which has brought Awan an MBE, prosperity and public renown in the West Midlands and further afield. But it wasn’t always a smooth ride for the teenage shop assistant.

“I was doing my O-Levels and my father suffered a heart attack,” he says. “He asked me to leave education and run the shop for him. I was about 15 or 16 at the time. It didn’t really make a lot of profit, we were very vulnerable to burglaries which happened quite often. I remember sitting there once all day and sold one pack of batteries for 28p.”

It is a very long way – both in decades and profile – from running a shop in Small Heath to masterminding today’s Awan Marketing PLC, a cash and carry powerhouse with trading tentacles worldwide. But Awan’s entrepreneurial flair and nose for business was soon in evidence as he branched out from

shopkeeping to selling watches.

“I used to buy watches off one of the importers who offered me a job as a commission agent which meant that I had to go out, find my own customers, take orders, deliver the goods and I would take commission.

“I set up a company called Awan Marketing Group. It sounded like a very big company. I had a very nice range of watches which were samples from somebody else. I would go in as if I was a big distributor and take orders. I would buy watches off him and would invoice him and deliver them. I had done that for about a year on the road – Birmingham, Leicester, London, Manchester, all over.”

In due course Awan teamed up with one of his brothers for the first trading incarnation of the business which would grow into today’s Awan Marketing.

“We opened our first cash and carry in Great Hampton Street in 1981. In 1987 we set it up as a limited company, before then it was just a partnership.

“We were really successful because at that time most of the wholesale cash and carries were selling unbranded products. Because of my experience from retail I started distributing for the likes of Phillips and Kenwood, and other big companies. Later on, when VHS was very big, we were one of the largest distributors of videotapes and audiotapes.”

By 2001 the brothers, who had also branched out into the investment property world, bought land for a purpose-built new base on the fringes of the Jewellery Quarter which would eventually become today’s Awan Marketing headquarters.

“In 2005, I parted company with my late brother,” says Awan. “He then took all the investment properties that we had and from then we had a tough few years because we had lost all the assets from the business because of the demerger.”

But the good times would eventually return for Awan Marketing as his two sons Adam and Salman gradually took over running up to 90% of the business while its founder continued to oversee the operation but had more time to devote to his considerable charitable and voluntary work.

“We have five people working out in China – the majority of our supplies are from there and we also import from Turkey, India, Pakistan, Korea, Brazil and Europe. We have expanded our customer base and our range of products. We are

distributing up and down the country, as well as exporting,” he says.

Awan’s success and contribution to society has seen him bring his talents and expertise to a string of charitable and voluntary organisations, embracing varied roles with the Inspire Education Academy at Yew Tree School, Aston, the Birmingham Ethnic Education Services, Sutton Coldfield Muslim Association, the National Asian Business Association and others.

More recently he travelled on three occasions to Pakistan and Turkey in his role as chair of Islamic Relief Pakistan to see at first hand the devastating impact of flooding and earthquake. Reduced to tears by the plight of people in his homeland, he recalls: “I would phone my wife and she’d say ‘how was your day’ and I would burst into tears. It was very emotionally draining.

“I saw two or three families sharing a tent with little access to clean drinking water. I saw children aged six with no shoes, very little clothing on their backs living in very unhygienic conditions. I have grandchildren of that age and I could see my own grandchildren in their faces. It really upset me.”

Back in his adopted home of Birmingham, Awan, who was made deputy lieutenant of the West Midlands in 2017, is now looking forward with considerable pride and anticipation to a two-year stint as the next president of the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce – following in the footsteps of self-made business owner Deb Leary.

“One of the things that I can probably add to the role is that a lot of previous presidents have been professionals, such as solicitors and accountants rather than from a trading company which is an actual business. All the previous presidents have done fantastic jobs but they were often employed by big companies so they were pretty secure.

“For somebody who is running their own business there is always that uncertainty and lots of things to keep an eye on – expenses, employees, taxes, buildings, insurance and so on. This is what many businesses face and I think I could probably relate more to them than somebody in a professional field.

“The president’s role is an honour and a privilege, and I hope to carry on the good work of the previous presidents. The shoes will be different (from Deb),



Top team at GBCC: Chair Greg Lowson, chief executive Henrietta Brealey, former president Deb Leary, and Nasir Awan



With CEO Henrietta Brealey

the dress code will be different, Deb has done extremely well. She has really got to know the city and the business community.”

Just the third Asian in the Birmingham Chambers’ 210 years of history to take on the presidency, Nasir Awan has come a

mighty long way since he first set foot on British soil as an eight-year-old in 1967.

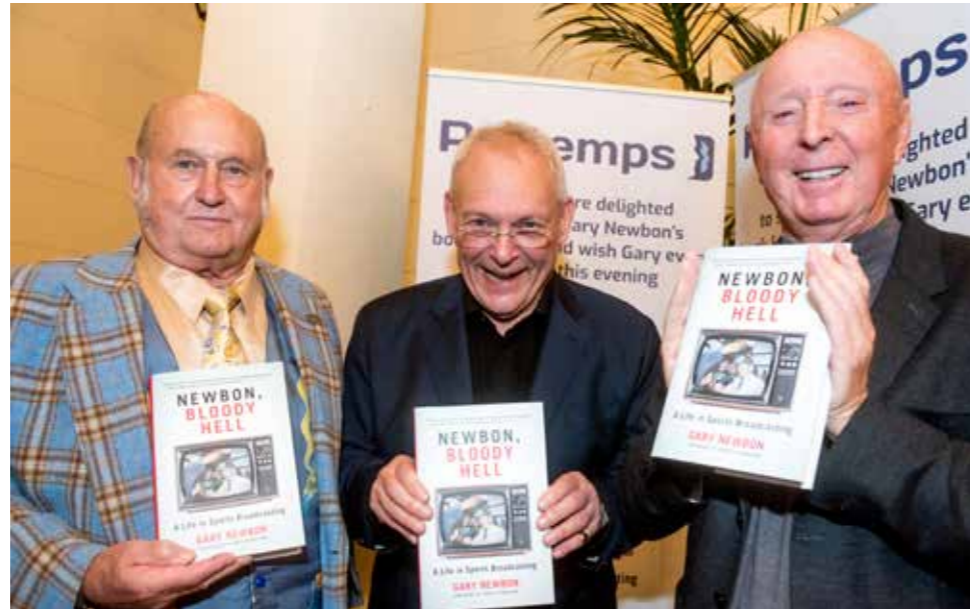
You sense that his late father Bashir – the man who forged his son’s destiny by starting a new life for his family in post-war Birmingham – would be very proud indeed.



Awan is the chair of Islamic Relief Pakistan



Henry Carpenter and Katie Newbon



Tim Watts, Gary Newbon and Jasper Carrott



Neil Walker and Percy Price



Brian Tustain, Bob Warman MBE and John James



Jasper Carrott

Gary Newbon's book launch

The atrium in Birmingham's Hotel du Vin was the laughter-filled venue for the launch of sports broadcaster Gary Newbon's autobiography *Newbon, Bloody Hell*. Guests from the worlds of business, sport and entertainment enjoyed drinks, canapes and speeches by comedian Jasper Carrott and Mr Newbon himself, who thanked Tim Watts of sponsors, Pertemps.

Right: Pamela Roberts and Brendan Batson OBE



David Lyons, Daniel Lyons, Bradley Rice and John Lyons



Neil Walker and Percy Price



Liz Urquhart, Llewela Bailey, Michelle Lord, Helen Featherstone and Emma Simpson



Jasper Carrott, Sarah Yang and Jim Simpson



Taushinfur Rahman, James Stephens, Leigh Stephens and Dr Moula Miah



Tom Ross, Ron Atkinson, Jasper Carrott and Anthony Coombs



Steve Featherstone and Tim Watts

Airline increases flights from Birmingham

Low-cost carrier Pegasus Airlines will start flying three times a week between Birmingham Airport (BHX) and Istanbul's Sabiha Gökçen International Airport (SAW).

Pegasus will offer the flights on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays from December 21. The airline serves more than 130 destinations in 49 countries across Asia, Africa and Europe from its SAW hub.

Nick Barton, CEO of BHX, said: "We are very pleased to welcome Pegasus Airlines into the BHX fold. It is a very impressive low-cost carrier whose commitment to sustainable long-term growth is matched by our own."

"I have no doubt these new services to SAW will be very popular, and Pegasus offers a strong onwards network covering Asia, Europe and Africa."



HSBC holds banking event

HSBC held a Banking Futures event for year 10 pupils at its Birmingham headquarters as part of a programme aimed at helping individuals and businesses to make the most of their money.

The school groups learnt more about career paths into banking and digital industries, giving them the chance to develop their financial capability.

They also attended seminars on how to avoid fraud, scams, how to shop wisely, and asked questions to the HSBC UK leadership team.

Ian Stuart, CEO of HSBC UK, said: "It's great we had nine schools joining the programme this year. Our young people drive the future, and we believe that every young person should have the chance to learn and fulfil their true potential."

"Our programme aims to help young

people build their money skills and shape their career goals, as well as give an insight into working at a bank, and in other careers such as in publishing and digital industries.

"Thanks to colleagues from Deloitte, Excel sports, and #MerkyBooks, who helped bring possible future careers to life."

Councillor Karen McCarthy, cabinet member for children, young people and families at Birmingham City Council, said: "I was so impressed by what I saw at the workshop."

"I observed a Q&A session with the HSBC UK leadership team and the panel mentioned so many topics that I felt were relevant to young people."

"I spoke to some young people afterwards, they sounded really inspired, which is great."



Regional leader appointed

PwC partner David Morris has been appointed as regional leader for the Midlands region, overseeing the Birmingham, East Midlands and Milton Keynes practices.

Mr Morris succeeds Matthew Hammond, who is taking on new roles after a decade as a regional leader.

Mr Hammond initially led PwC's West region for two years and has spent the last eight years leading PwC across the Midlands, whilst also being senior partner for the firm's Birmingham office.

During that time, PwC's Midlands practice has almost doubled in size, with investment in over 1,000 new roles and 44 new partners over the last eight years.

Mr Morris said: "It is a privilege to take on the role as Midlands leader. Having been born and raised in the Midlands, with a career journey that has taken me around the globe, it's a full-circle moment to be stepping into this role to help shape the future of the Midlands firm."

"The region has so much to offer, from being quite literally a place of 1,000 trades to the incredible talent and quality educational institutions we have on our doorstep. Having joined the firm in 2004 as a senior associate, I've seen first hand the career journey that PwC can offer and it's a priority of mine to champion, nurture and develop the next generation."

Agency merger

Two Birmingham marketing agencies have merged resulting in the creation of a new organisation called Lunar.

The merger of HDY and Orb – which has been backed by Elonex – means that Lunar is one of the UK's largest independent, full-service agencies.

HDY launched over five years ago and its portfolio of clients has included Sodexo, Severn Trent and Birmingham Airport. Its founder, Ed James, will now serve as founding partner at Lunar.

Branding agency, Orb, has been in business for more than two decades during which time it has built up a global portfolio of clients in the healthcare, F&B and real estate sectors including Health Trust Europe, BrewDog, GS Yuasa and Pension Insurance Corporation.

In the newly formed agency, Orb's founder Rob Bloxham will be a founding partner at Lunar, while Orb partner and ex-M&C Saatchi planner Jacqueline Tarry will become the firm's strategy director and have partner status.



Pictured from left are Nick Smith, Jacqueline Tarry, Ed James and Rob Bloxham

A-Team Academy comes top of the class

Educational testing service A-Team Academy was named top of the class at the Asian Business Chamber of Commerce awards.

The Yardley-based specialists scooped the overall Business of the Year award after winning the Outstanding Small Business of the Year category sponsored by Lioncroft Wholesale.

Meanwhile, the President's Award was presented to TV and radio presenter

Noreen Khan, host for 12 years of the BBC Asian Network and star of TV and radio shows including Countdown, Sport Relief, Celebrity Mastermind and Fighting Talk.

The headline sponsors this year were Aston University, Doug Wright trading as McDonalds and Lioncroft Wholesale.

A-Team Academy emerged overall winners after embarking on a £40,000 investment programme with the launch of another learning centre in Handsworth.

The judging panel, chaired by Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce director of external affairs Raj Kandola said: "What truly sets A-Team Academy apart is their inclusivity. Embracing students ranging from 10 to 70 years old to sit exams with them exemplifies the belief that education transcends age, creed or colour. "This unwavering dedication to inclusivity and equal educational access is the foundational reason behind establishing the A-Team Academy."

The academy established collaborations with the Access to Music college in the Jewellery Quarter while engaging in partnerships with local community institutions, including the Nishkam Centre, Oakland Young People's Centre and Lozells Central Mosque.

The increased engagement in the wake of the opening of the new state of the art learning centre prompted rises in enrolment from the Sikh, Afro-Caribbean, Romanian and Somali communities.

ABCC president Omar Rashid told guests at the awards: "In this room I know there are some amazing business owners and entrepreneurs."

"We should never shy away or fail to highlight the immense value and potential that Asian businesses bring to the table. We need to champion that our cultural and business diversity can be a strength, not a limitation."



ABCC Business of the Year 2023 A-Team Academy with ABCC president Omar Rashid and hosts Sunny and Shay Grewal

Vagabond hosts 'explore and self-pour'

social



Colmore Row wine bar Vagabond welcomed more than 200 guests for an 'explore and self-pour' evening. The venue saw guests indulge in a wide selection of wines and small plates, while the DJ played funk and soul favourites throughout the evening.



Seth and Stathis Black

Left: Nana Koranteng, Bennell Brew-Koufie, Grace Garrattley and Andrew Garrattley



Catherine Gwynne, Victoria Bennett, Jas Sharp and Layla Eagles



James Bovill and Kevin Meddings



Chris Sharratt and Lauren Eyles

Law firm welcomes new partner

Law firm Anthony Collins has announced the appointment of new partner Laura Jordan to strengthen its specialist health and social care department.

Laura joins from Voyage Care where she was legal director, company secretary and data protection officer. She also helped establish the in-house legal team during her eight-year tenure. Prior to that, she spent seven years as a corporate finance and private equity lawyer at Pinsent Masons, working with some of the UK's top providers in the sector.

Laura said: "I chose Anthony Collins because of its service-first ethos and commitment to improving lives, communities and society through its work. I am looking forward to using my experience to help clients achieve their goals."

Senior partner Matthew Wort said: "Laura is a fantastic addition to our health and social care sector team and I am confident that she will bring great insight to our clients."

"We seek out individuals who share our commitment to working towards creating a positive impact in society and help improve lives with the work we do."



appointments

Three members join team at chamber

The Black Country Chamber of Commerce has welcomed three new business relationship managers to its membership.

Account management and recruitment specialist Gemma Shakespeare is a former senior in-house recruiter at Wolverhampton Council and linguistics graduate from the University of Wolverhampton.

She is joined by Richard Hobbs, a former account manager with Made in the Midlands and business development coordinator at Wolverhampton College.

Richard is the producer of award-winning podcast Wolves Fancast and is a STEM ambassador.

Steve Salt has joined the chamber after

spending time as a Covid administrator and induction manager working at the Perry Barr Residential Scheme project in Birmingham.

Sales and marketing director Sian Roberts said: "Our new relationship managers bring a wealth of experience gained through many years working across several business sectors, including membership organisations."

"They are looking forward to assisting our members in maximising the benefits of chamber membership."

Pictured: Gemma Shakespeare, Steve Salt and Richard Hobbs

Key appointment bolsters senior team at finance firm

A Birmingham corporate finance firm has added deal maker Jonathan Wright to its team.

Jonathan joins Evolve Corporate Finance as a partner following nine years as a corporate finance advisor at Springboard. Prior to this, he held a role in industry and qualified as an accountant with BDO.

He brings many years' experience advising business owners, corporates and institutions on a range of transactions – including acquisitions, disposals and raising finance across multiple industry sectors.

His arrival also follows a period of expansion for the firm with Peter Talbot

joining as partner in the summer to lead the firm's debt advisory service offering.

Justin Sparks, partner and founder of Evolve Corporate Finance, said: "We are delighted to welcome Jonathan to our growing team."

"He is a great fit for Evolve as he has an excellent reputation and track record in delivering exceptional outcomes for clients."

"This is a key appointment for our business and bolsters our senior team. Despite the challenging market conditions, we have a strong pipeline of opportunities and Jonathan's skills, capability, and experience will help us to continue to capitalise on this."



Jonathan Wright, left, and Justin Sparks

Agent moves to Sporting Group

West Bromwich-based Sporting Group International is continuing its expansion with the recruitment of experienced player and coach development specialist Dave Lawrence to lead its new talent management division in football.

A FIFA-licensed agent who holds a UEFA A coaching licence, Dave boasts more than 20 years' experience in player and coach development.

Most recently he was director of football for West Bromwich Albion FC Women, where he managed all senior



and junior staff. Prior to that he delivered major community programmes as a senior member of staff within the West Bromwich Albion Foundation.

"Dave has played an important role in the development of multiple men's and women's professional footballers from his time with West Bromwich Albion," said Sporting Group International chief executive Adrian Wright.

"In a short time, he oversaw the transition of its women's team from a community set-up into a professional operation. He is also acutely aware of the

support that young footballers and their families need in stepping up from the academy into the professional game.

"Given the success of our talent management operation in India, we believe he will be a fantastic asset for Sporting Group International in supporting young footballers on their journey in the game."

Sporting Group International Sports Management aims to provide a tailored management service – both on and off the field – for players from the men's and women's game.



Expansion of team at accountancy firm

Midlands accountancy firm Prime Accountants Group has appointed Emma Clewes as its new head of tax advisory.

Emma, who has nearly 20 years' experience in the industry representing big four and top 20 firms, joined the business at the start of September and will be responsible for integrating tax matters into the company's service offerings.

Joining the management team at Prime, which has offices in Birmingham, Solihull and Coventry, Emma said: "It's the opportunity to be a big part of the business, to help it grow and to expand the team, which really appealed to me.

"Part of that work is to look at what is

already here, work with the other directors to look at our strategy and work with clients to offer a wholesome approach where businesses don't just see tax as an afterthought. It becomes part of the whole package we offer as business advisers."

Kevin Johns, managing director of Prime Accountants Group, said: "Emma brings nearly two decades of experience from across the whole spectrum of accountancy and we are delighted to have her on board.

"We believe our main strengths as a business will help Emma play to her strengths and be a valuable part of our team."

Planning lawyer joins Knights

The Birmingham office of law firm Knights has welcomed planning lawyer Stuart Tym as planning partner.

Stuart brings many years of planning experience with expertise in development work for both housing and commercial clients as well as working regularly on planning breaches and enforcement instructions.

He has worked for housebuilders and developers across the UK and has strong relationships with planning authorities and investment funds.

Stuart, who joins as the business prepares for further growth across the Midlands and the rest of the country, said: "I look forward to growing Knights' development practice across the region."

Jess Neyt, the firm's client services director in Birmingham, said: "We have set out plans for growth and Stuart is the latest new face helping us to deliver on that ambition. We are not slowing down and we want even more talent to join our team."



Two appointments strengthen team at Unity Trust Bank

Unity Trust Bank has announced two key appointments over the autumn.

Nina Chaidemenaki is the ethical bank's new customer insights and partnership manager, while Reon Odendaal has taken on the new role of deposits relationship manager for the Midlands.

Skilled in working across a variety of market sectors including healthcare, insurance and finance, Nina joins Unity from Critical Future, a strategy and technology company. She is also the co-founder of not-for-profit organisation Women4Cyber Greek Chapter, which focuses on empowering women to enter the business sector by strengthening their skills and knowledge as well as providing networking opportunities.

In her new role, she will be responsible for identifying customer needs and creating strategic partnerships to address new and emerging business demand, with the aim of improving the overall banking experience.

Louise Pursglove, head of brand and proposition at Unity Trust Bank, said:

"With Nina's valuable experience in market research and analytics, she will help to provide vital insights to help us better understand and serve our customers."

In his new role, Reon – who has more than eight years' corporate banking experience – will work with customers to better understand their individual needs and support them with liquidity and investment requirements.

A key focus will be talking to customers about their plans and strategies, and raising awareness about the range of products and services to help them manage their savings and investments.

Andrew Bird, relationship director (Midlands) at Unity Trust Bank, said: "Reon's banking knowledge, experience and personal approach will be a real asset to the bank.

"This new investment in the deposit side of our portfolio will enable us to further improve our customer experience and ensure organisations are making the most of their capital."



Nina Chaidemenaki



Reon Odendaal

Software company hires specialist

Solihull software company Kallik has appointed Avinash Voodi to its team.

With over 15 years' experience in marketing and sales, Avinash will play a pivotal role in the firm's expansion into the food and beverage markets.

He is a 'software as a service' marketing enthusiast, with expertise in global packaging technology.

He has crafted packaging artwork solutions for organisations in the food and beverage, pharmaceutical, consumer packaged goods and retail sectors.

In his new role as vice president of commercial growth within the food and beverage market, he will spearhead Kallik's new logo growth in the industry. He will work alongside the sales and marketing teams to focus on messaging and lead generation.

Kallik CEO Gurdip Singh said: "I am thrilled to have someone with Avinash's experience and talent join the team here.

"The food and beverage industry is a key growth target for the company as we scale out the market coverage for our product and services in this industry."

Five minutes with...



Daniel Evans

Chief executive, Birmingham Enterprise Community (BEC)



In one sentence, what does your role involve?

It is my job to steer the ship and keep us on course – essentially engaging with stakeholders and managing our strategy.

How long have you been in your current job?

Since we started BEC, coming up to five years.

Please give a brief summary of your professional career to date.

I started off working in the family business but knew I wanted to set up on my own at some point, so went to university to do business and learn more. At university I saw gaps for people like me wanting to start a business but needed to build a network and understanding of what to do, so started BEC to help fill this gap. I never thought it would be a business in itself but jumped straight into it full time after graduating as we'd established a clear need for the support we were delivering. In the last five years we have built up BEC to where it is now, working with businesses from 20 different countries and have been hands-on in helping people both start and scale their businesses. I have also had the opportunity to add other business interests to my portfolio and hold several board roles for organisations such as the National Enterprise Network and International Trade Council.

Did further/higher education set you up well for your particular vocation?

Yes. I did a BA (Hons) in Business Management at Birmingham Newman University, followed by an MSc in Entrepreneurship at Aston University. I use various things I learnt at both institutions on a regular basis in my role and made full use of every contact I could get whilst there to give me a strong professional network.

Can online meetings successfully take the place of face-to-face contact?

Not a chance! They may be good for quick catch-ups and convenience but I think if you want to build strong relationships you still need to get face-to-face with the person.

How do you get the best out of your staff?

I try to lead by example and wholeheartedly back the saying 'don't ask someone to do something you wouldn't do yourself'. I learnt early on from a previous boss that you should be

just as comfortable with a bin bag in your hand cleaning up after an event as you are giving the keynote speech. Doing this means you can earn the respect of your team and get the best out of them.

Have your working patterns changed since the pandemic?

Not particularly. I enjoy being in the office so I am usually in five days a week as I was pre-pandemic.

How many emails do you tend to get in a day, and how much time do you have to read them?

Usually 100 or more plus messages via LinkedIn and WhatsApp. I am absolutely horrendous at managing my inbox with it currently sitting at around 620 unopened messages. I'm a 'little and often' type of guy and will prioritise those that need an urgent response. We can't do it all!

How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?

I would hope they'd say hard working, passionate and committed. However, they are probably more likely to swap the last one for the word stubborn.

Highlights of your career so far?

There are a few, but the two big stand-out moments so far was the BEC launch event back in 2019 which was us opening our doors for the first time. The second, and more recent, was my first business acquisition which I was able to do alongside three of my cousins in April

this year when we bought a seaside retail business in Pembrokeshire, South Wales. To take over a 45-year-old business with a reputation it had was an honour and an exciting milestone in my career as I look to widen my professional portfolio.

Any particular faux pas or embarrassing moments in your career you would prefer to forget?

There is a particular karaoke video from a networking social that I will comment no further on. Actually, there is also a video of me playing bongos with a busker on Broad Street from a separate networking event that I will also not comment on... seems to be a bit of a habit.

Pet hates?

When people don't pull their weight. I've seen it a few times where people are involved in a business or organisation and expect others to do all the work.

If you could go back and give your younger self some wise advice, what would it be?

Concentrate on what you can control and don't worry about anything else.

How do you relax away from work?

Watching Chelsea play football or Wales play rugby. Although neither one has been particularly relaxing over the last two years.

What do you believe is special about the Birmingham business community?

It is one of the friendliest in the world. We get visitors from different countries who always comment about how welcome they are made to feel.

Tell us something about you that most people probably wouldn't know.

I am a huge musical theatre fan. I mean huge. Whilst working I usually have a cast recording from a show playing and I probably average attending about two shows a month. I am obsessed.

You can take one book, one film and one CD onto a desert island – what would they be?

Easy! Book: Rules for a Knight by Ethan Hawke. Film: That's My Boy. CD: Stadium Arcadium by Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?

My grandad and nan, great gran, great auntie and uncle, all of whom are no longer with us. I was too young when they all passed and there would be so much I'd love to speak to them about.

What would you choose to eat for your last supper?

Pizza!

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