

Birmingham Business

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May/June 2024

A CLASS ACT

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Rachel Bleakley | Wealth Planner
T: 07876 137939
E: rbleakley@successionwealth.co.uk
www.successionwealth.co.uk

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Financial planning for business owners and executives

The value of a financial review

As a business professional your financial planning needs can be complex. However, a heavy workload means that your time is finite, and your personal finances can often get pushed down the agenda or forgotten altogether.

Nevertheless, it is vital that you take responsibility for your financial future to ensure that you don't make decisions, either intentionally or by omission, that you later regret, or miss opportunities which could impact on your future financial security.

New pension saving opportunities

Changes to the Lifetime Allowance (LTA) which were announced in the 2023 Spring Budget, mean that you can now contribute as much as you like to your pension schemes without fear of being penalised for exceeding the LTA. This is particularly good news for those who had amassed pensions of significant value and may open up new savings opportunities.

Any retirement planning also needs to look at your wider circumstances, including other investments, and both the funding and tax implications of these. It may be possible to reduce some elements of your tax liability with the careful use of pensions.

Understanding your retirement options is crucial if you want to realise the retirement that you have always hoped for, and timely advice is imperative to ensure that you optimise your contributions and ultimately maximise your pension benefits.

This is a complex area of financial planning and requires specialist advice. An experienced Wealth Planner will work with you to gain a detailed understanding of your particular situation and your goals before providing comprehensive, independent advice on the options and opportunities that are available to you.

Tax planning and tax efficiency

Reviewing your situation to identify any tax planning opportunities is key to ensuring that you are not missing out on opportunities that could reduce your tax burden. Improving your personal tax efficiency means more money in your pocket to put towards achieving your goals, both now and in the future, allowing you to keep more of your money to enjoy, invest, save, or pass on.

A financial review will help you to:

- Identify and implement ways that you may be able to reduce your taxable income while saving for retirement.
- Identify whether Inheritance Tax (IHT) will be liable on your estate and implement arrangements to minimise the tax due.
- Take care of your estate planning and explain your options for transferring your wealth in a tax-efficient way.
- Stay up to date on changes in tax legislation which you could benefit from.

Protection

Financial security also encompasses protection against unforeseen circumstances. Robust insurance coverage can safeguard against potential disruptions to income due to health issues. Adequate life insurance coverage will protect loved ones in case of unexpected events. Business and key person protection is also vital for business continuation. A well-rounded protection plan will provide you with peace of mind, allowing you to focus on your business.

Investments

Investing wealth is more than money. Managed the right way, it should be a tool that brings you closer to your goals, helping you to build and manage an

investment portfolio that is aligned to your beliefs, whilst also helping you to achieve your ambitions for your life and your business.

Generational planning

Generational planning can help to facilitate a smooth transfer of your wealth and business to your loved ones, in line with your financial plan. It will look at how to structure your assets in a tax-efficient way and consider the most appropriate time for any transfer of wealth to take place.

A trusted adviser with you for the journey

With limited time, you need to be confident that your financial planning is tailored to your specific circumstances and unique priorities, protecting your wealth, maximising your assets, realising financial opportunities, and managing risk.

A Succession Wealth Planner is more than a professional service provider; many of our clients tell us that they view their Planner as a trusted adviser and guide. We are here for the whole journey, throughout your working life and beyond, helping you identify and reach the goals in life that matter to you.

Working together we can achieve a clear view of your current situation and where you are heading, and then implement a strategy to help you achieve your financial goals, whilst also being flexible enough to keep pace with any changes you might face.

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The value of your investment(s) and the income derived from it, can go down as well as up and you may not get back the full amount you invested.

A pension is a long-term investment. The value can go down as well as up which could impact the level of pension benefits available.



Birmingham Business Welcome

So, the West Midlands has a new mayor.

It is a huge role, and we wish Richard Parker well. A strong, socially conscious mayor who is willing to fight his region's corner in Westminster is of crucial importance to the fortunes of the West Midlands.

What is also vital is that he engages with, and supports, the business community, and does what he can to bring investment into the region. There is no reason to believe that he will be any less effective than his predecessor, who worked tirelessly and passionately for the West Midlands, and Mr Parker would have been well aware of the brimming inbox which needs tackling without delay.

The business world will certainly be hoping he will step up and embrace the many and varied challenges which will come his way. We have invited leaders from several sectors, both public and private, to present the mayor with a wish list of what they would like him to prioritise during his tenure.

Elsewhere, the subject of this issue's cover story is looking like it might grow into the sort of remarkable success which gives an entire region a shot in the arm.

It is a profile of a private company called Accelerating Clinical Trials, which is already piquing the interest of the global pharmaceutical industry for its ability to expedite trials of new drugs and treatments for blood cancers swiftly and safely, thereby improving, prolonging, and ultimately saving lives.

If the concept sounds promising, the identity of those behind it should give even greater cause for optimism that this might develop into something very special.

Furthermore, it is based on the Quaker model whereby the profits are reinvented straight back into the ecosystem – in this instance for the network of research nurses.

On the subject of prominent business figures lending their weight to causes for which they receive no financial return, Jon Griffin chats to Paul Cadman – entrepreneur, serial NED and networker supreme who is a proud and relentless supporter of a varied string of charities.

We shine a light on the real estate sector in a special report, and also meet Alex Nicholson-Evans who in the newly formed role of city curator, is behind the 100 Days of Creativity project.

It is an issue packed with interesting interviews, news and insight, and I hope you enjoy it.



By HENRY CARPENTER
Editor

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Editor
HENRY CARPENTER
henry@birminghambiz.co.uk

Editorial director
CARL JONES
editor@birminghambiz.co.uk

Design and layout
MICHELLE DALTON

Business development manager/head of advertising
MIKE MOLONEY
sales@birminghambiz.co.uk

General enquiries
henry@birminghambiz.co.uk

ONLINE
birminghambiz.co.uk

@brumbiz

facebook.com/brumbiz

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Dear Mayor ...



Several weeks before the mayoral contest concluded, we asked leaders from the worlds of business, academia and culture to provide their thoughts on what they would like the newly elected mayor – regardless of personality or politics – to put at the top of his to-do list.

Over to you Richard Parker ...

Professor Aleks Subic Vice-chancellor and chief executive, Aston University

The newly elected mayor will lead a region facing many challenges, but with many assets too.

Inclusive economic growth is essential for the region's success over the next mayoral term. To help achieve this, the mayor will no doubt want to embrace one of the region's biggest success stories – our universities – which contribute £8.1 billion to the UK economy, support over 62,000 jobs and drive growth through place-based innovation.

Innovation requires a favourable ecosystem, with academia, business, and government at all levels, pulling in the same direction. This powerful partnership approach is known as the 'triple helix' model of innovation and the mayor must play a central enabling role within it. This will be key to driving investment and creating high-value jobs at scale and pace. It's a model my institution, Aston University,

is delivering with partners by establishing the Birmingham Innovation Quarter, a critical node within the new UK Investment Zone for the West Midlands.

If the region is to become a powerhouse of innovation, then we need to ensure all our citizens benefit from the high value jobs this will bring. Creating a more advanced skills ecosystem in the region, with digital inclusion at its heart, is crucial. I would like to see universities brought more deeply into the region's skills agenda to ensure the region has the right skills pipeline for the future world of work.

"I would like to see universities brought more deeply into the region's skills agenda to ensure the region has the right skills pipeline for the future world of work."

Advocating for our second city will also be essential; as the Resolution Foundation has argued, closing the productivity gap (and investment gap) between Birmingham and London is key to driving growth and equality across the West Midlands and the UK as a whole.

From delivering a coordinated approach to attracting FDI, to supporting a more strategic approach to planning, there is much that should be on the mayor's to-do list to shift the dial for Birmingham.

I look forward to working with the mayor to realise these strategic objectives.

Carmen Watson Chair of Pertemps Network Group

The region needs a skilled and sustainable workforce to ensure we stay at the top of our game.

The West Midlands rightfully has a reputation as a heart of business excellence but we must evolve to ensure this continues and makes best use of the resources and talent we have.

A key challenge is removing barriers

to employment. In our latest report on levelling-up, we examine how resilience, flexibility, investment and long-terms capital support will help ensure our organisations have the right people for the right roles in years to come.

We are seeking response from government on Apprenticeship Levy reform, which would allow it to be used

much more flexibly to help people into work in the way that best suits them, and support businesses to ensure they have the talent pipeline they need for the skills of the future. This must involve even closer collaboration between local government, central government, schools, colleges, universities and businesses.

New leadership challenges are emerging as a result of the changing dynamics of the workforce. How we attract the best talent and retain these people in the face of new opportunities, evolving roles and competitive packages including features such as flexible working and additional welfare support, will shape how we all work in the coming years.

"We are seeking response from government on Apprenticeship Levy reform, which would allow it to be used much more flexibly to help people into work in the way that best suits them."



Anita Bhalla OBE
Chair B: Music, and chair BCU

The best way for a new mayor to win hearts and minds? Just get creative.

Why? Because the public love the arts. The economy needs the arts.

And the region craves leadership that truly values the arts. This has to be a focus if Birmingham and the region's towns and cities are to prosper.

The arts bring places to life. Imagine Birmingham without its sprawling festivals, which bring colour and unpredictability to its world-class venues, and to its outdoor spaces. Consider the region without the CBSO, the Rep or Birmingham Royal Ballet at its heart . . . what a soulless region we would be with diminished appeal to creative young people.

Recent funding cuts to a host of arts organisations and venues means the idea of losing our artistic gems isn't just a passing threat. Therefore, our creative sector has to be protected and championed. It's in need of a true advocate.

It needs someone who appreciates the value of a region that nurtures creativity. We know, for example, that when choosing to study at BCU's Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, a number of our overseas students saw the West Midlands as a hotbed of artistic excellence, and as a potential location in



“The region craves leadership that truly values the arts. This has to be a focus if Birmingham and the region’s towns and cities are to prosper.”

which to further their careers. We need our mayor to consider this international perception, and appreciate how our arts offer genuinely puts the West Midlands on the global map.

The mayor must also recognise that students closer to home appreciate the opportunity to study courses in arts, design and media – and that the region has a multitude of employers in desperate need of young talent who can fill the all-

too-evident skills gap. We think we're painting a pretty clear picture here – by embracing the links between education, creativity and employability, the incoming mayor will be sure to draw a crowd of admirers.

Arts and culture are not just the icing on our economic cake but a big slice of that cake – just look at the GVA and tourism the sector brings to the region if you require evidence.

Nicola Fleet-Milne
Founder of FleetMilne estate and lettings agency, and chair of Colmore BID

As chair of Colmore Business District, I am keen to see the mayor support our growing professional and financial services industries in the city.

We need our mayor to really bang the drum for Birmingham's business sector on the national and international stage to drive investment and interest into the city.

Transport infrastructure continues to be key. We need a city that is well connected, with a range of transport options that are safe, sustainable and that are available for longer into the night.

For our city's hospitality sector, we need a real boost in Birmingham's standing as a tourist destination. Major events are fantastic for the city, but we already have a great offering here already – we need to showcase and celebrate that as well.

Most importantly over the coming years, we need a mayor who can convene.

Our public-sector institutions need to be working closely together to create an operating context that promotes growth and success, and our mayor also needs to champion the city and the region at a national level too.



“Most importantly over the coming years, we need a mayor who can convene.”



“The mayor needs to seize the moment to be one step ahead of the game and invest business-support funding into a new generation of programmes.”

Naeem Arif
Director, United Carpets, and president of the Royal Sutton Coldfield Chamber of Commerce

I would like the office of the mayor to consider the long-term benefits of the region.

For me this revolves around three issues.

The first is access to a highly skilled economy. I would like to see investment in tech, retail and hospitality, and manufacturing.

The next is a focus on transport/ connectivity across the region, to allow for

improved travel opportunities across the region and for us to be connected to the rest of the country.

Finally, I would like the profile of the region raised nationally and internationally, thereby encouraging people to want to do trade with us, to visit us and to recognise us a top-performing region.

There are the areas that I want to see delivered as part of the next mayoral term.



“I would like to see investment in tech, retail and hospitality, and manufacturing.”

Daniel Evans
Chief executive, BEC (Birmingham Enterprise Community)

It is no secret that we have a stack of nascent potential waiting to be unlocked throughout the West Midlands economy.

As well as many pressures such as rising costs and our struggle with 'scaling' companies, we are caught up in the UK's chronic productivity problem which needs to be a priority for the mayor and I believe there is a golden opportunity coming down the line with the change in government funding to the West Midlands coming through the single settlement agreement.

This is likely to be the source of business support funding post UKSPF – which could give us some certainty whilst the rest of the UK is scratches its head in regard to what comes next.

The mayor needs to seize the moment to be one step ahead of the game and invest business-support funding into a new generation of programmes with a

hard push on boosting productivity whilst exploring new models of funding support leveraging both public and private funds.

Get this right and there is potential for the West Midlands to recapture its former glory as the true powerhouse of productivity and innovation in the UK economy.

The mayor must also continue the push for a global West Midlands, drawing from the legacy of the Commonwealth Games and overseas visits to Canada and India as examples.

Through our work we are also seeing less obviously, high-potential markets like the Dominican Republic, Chile, Brazil and others take notice of what we have to offer as a region so again, the mayor needs to be prepared to embrace this interest with open arms and form new alliances before other regions come in to take this interest for their own businesses.



“We need someone who will fight for the region.”

Andy Dawson
Director and co-founder, Curium Solutions

The mayor has been a pivotal figure in the business scene across the Midlands over the last few years, filling the void left by a government that has become increasingly disconnected from the business community.

Whoever the successful candidate it, they need to prioritise building a sense of calm, irrespective of their political affiliations. The country is increasingly divided, becoming more focussed on regional and local interests, having become removed from Westminster in recent years. This mayor needs to emphatically put place before politics. We need someone who will fight for the region.

They will have debated policies about housing, transport, and other hotly contested topics. These promises are not to be forgotten. They must lay out their plans for delivering their promises to time, cost and quality. They need to be transparent and must accept accountability for the promises made. Talk is cheap, delivery is everything and this will build confidence across the business community and potential investors.

Having watched Andy Street and Andy Burnham defy political divide to unit behind and champion common causes in the past, there is a great lesson here. This mayor needs to build relationships with other mayors across the country to keep the government honest and making levelling up a continuous focal point. Strength in numbers will be important here.

Finally, they need to lead their teams effectively and efficiently. They alone can not deliver what is needed during their term in office, their teams will do that for them. They need to sensitively make any changes that they feel are needed to their teams, and then focus everybody on delivering the plan.



Teaming up to advise businesses

news

Two prominent West Midlands business leaders have joined forces to create a new advisory firm.

Paul Faulkner and Mark Taylor are bringing together more than 30 years' experience in high-profile roles to launch Element45.

The business offers services designed to develop leadership capability, tackle strategic challenges and raise organisational performance.

Mr Faulkner is the former chief executive of both Aston Villa Football Club and Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, while Mark spent 17 years as a partner at global accountancy and business advisory firm RSM, eight of those as regional managing partner in the Midlands.

The duo are teaming up to deliver a suite of services including bespoke advisory projects, support for boards and individual board members, learning and development activities and one-to-one mentoring and coaching.

The name Element45 is inspired by the chemical element rhodium, the precious metal known for its catalytic qualities, aligning with the firm's mission to be a



Paul Faulkner, left, and Mark Taylor

"high impact catalyst for positive change and performance improvement".

Mr Faulkner has recently been working with several West Midlands-based clients including the Richardson international investment business, furniture repair specialists Emmiera Group and the Kids' Village charity as Interim CEO, and will continue these client relationships with Element45.

He has led teams and organisations in a variety of sectors including professional

sport, banking, recruitment, charity and family offices.

He said: "I am excited to launch Element45 with Mark. Our values and approach to business very much align, and with Element45 we will be focused on using the experience we have gained in a variety of roles to help our clients overcome strategic challenges and grow their own businesses.

"We look forward to speaking with business leaders who would like to have a conversation and explore ideas."

Mr Taylor has 23 years' experience in professional services. RSM's Central region, which he oversaw for eight years, comprised seven offices and more than 1,000 staff when he departed in March.

Whilst overseeing the Central region more than double in size, he was instrumental in the transformation of its Birmingham office.

Amongst his other roles, Mark is also currently chair of Business Commission West Midlands, the group representing private-sector firms which was convened last year by the region's three Chambers of Commerce to establish a roadmap for business growth.

Entec Si celebrates NHS agreement

Birmingham-based change management consultancy Enter Si has been selected as a supplier on an NHS services framework after completing a successful tender process.

The two-year agreement with the NHS Shared Business Services Consultancy and Advisory Services for Health framework is accessible to more than 2,000 approved

organisations. It provides the NHS and public-sector bodies with a compliant route to market for the provision of consultancy and advisory services.

It can be accessed by local authorities/LEAs, further and higher education bodies, museums and housing associations, as well as NHS organisations.

Entec Si has been approved as a

supplier in three lots: business, leadership, management, governance, structure and strategy; integrated care, healthcare and community care; and IT business consultancy.

Eman Al-Hillawi, CEO of Entec Si, said, "We are delighted to have been selected by NHS SBS to be an approved supplier for consultancy and advisory services for health.

"Having delivered services for NHS Trusts previously, we understand the complexities and importance of successfully delivering change in the health sector and for the patients it serves. We pride ourselves on making the lives of our clients' communities better so what finer way to be able to do this than through this framework agreement."

NHS Shared Business Services was set up in 2004 by the Department of Health and Social Care to be the national provider of corporate services to the NHS.

It aims to make life easier for NHS employees, patients and suppliers, and to deliver value for money to the taxpayer.



The team at Entec Si



Melissa Snover receives the King's Award from West Midlands' lord lieutenant

King's Award winners

Birmingham health tech firm Rem3dy Health welcomed the West Midlands' lord lieutenant to present the King's Award for Enterprise in the Innovation category.

Following the announcement last year that Rem3dy Health should receive a King's Award, after His Majesty the King approved the prime minister's recommendation, the 3D printing innovators were finally presented with the trophy at their facility in Smethwick.

Rem3dy Health and the Nourished brand were chosen as one of 10 West Midlands winners across all categories and the only winner in Birmingham in the Innovation category.

The presentation followed a record 12-months for the business, which saw the Nourished brand expand across Europe and Asia as well as an improved presence on UK shelves with landmark supermarket deals alongside a variety of product and flavour launches.

Founder and CEO Melissa Snover, who launched Nourished in 2019, said: "The King's Award ceremony truly feels

like a culmination of the fantastic work of every single member of staff across all areas of the Rem3dy Health team.

"We pride ourselves on utilising our patented technology to pioneer personalised solutions across preventative and curative health. To be royally recognised for our contributions to innovation is something myself and the team are incredibly proud of.

"To win such an iconic award and be amongst a group of inspiring businesses from across the country is a huge honour, but our work doesn't stop here.

"We are committed to continuing to use Rem3dy Health tech to disrupt the nutrition industry and improve the health of our valued customers. This award has also reiterated the fact that Birmingham – and the West Midlands as a whole – is a global business hub.

"The winners are a testament to the region's trailblazing entrepreneurs and business leaders, the impactful work they do, and the ecosystem that allows them to thrive."

IT company acquires new division

Bosses at Birmingham IT firm Intercity are celebrating after the acquisition of Microsoft service partner Centrality.

David Keeling, the CEO of Bedfordshire-based Centrality, will join Intercity's board as managing director of a new division focused on leveraging his team's expertise in Microsoft's suite of products and solutions.

Centrality's 100-strong team will continue to work from the Bedfordshire office as part of a smooth transition plan into the Intercity Group. This will now take the combined workforce to over 325.

Intercity owner and group CEO Andrew Jackson said: "We are thrilled to welcome Centrality to the Intercity Group.

"Centrality have grown significantly over the last five years and become well known for their innovative and forward-thinking solutions by taking a Microsoft and cloud-first approach.

"Our commitment to be the best tech partner to work for and with will only be strengthened with this news. We look forward to welcoming all Centrality colleagues and their complementary expertise as they join the group."

Intercity CEO Charlie Blakemore added: "Centrality brings a fantastic and complimentary Microsoft capability to the Intercity Group and is a key part of our long-term strategic business growth plan.

"Most importantly, our values are totally aligned in providing a first-class service to our customers and looking after our colleagues and the communities we work in."



Pictured from left are Christina Pendleton, chief people officer at Intercity, Centrality CEO David Keeling, Intercity CEO Charlie Blakemore, Andrew Jackson, group CEO of Centrality, and Bianca Parker-Beckett, chief people officer at Centrality

news

Pictured from left are Charles de Rohan, Charlie Craddock and Graham Silk in front of the Centre for Clinical Haematology in Birmingham

Points of a virtuous circle

The name of the company is Accelerating Clinical Trials Limited, a title which precisely reflects its purpose. So far, so good. But when we hear that three of the biggest and most respected names in the life sciences sector are behind this indisputable force for good, we should investigate further – particularly as it's based here in Birmingham. HENRY CARPENTER does just that.

Professor Charlie Craddock cuts a relaxed figure as he leads the way from the reception of the Centre for Clinical Haematology to his office, pausing to assess with a colleague Aston Villa's chances against Chelsea later in the day.

Craddock has an easy, self-assured demeanour and he is clearly a popular and highly respected figure at the CCH, which sits in the sprawling Queen Elizabeth Hospital complex in Edgbaston – but none of this is too surprising given he is the centre's academic director, an acknowledged global authority in blood cancer and stem cell transplantation, and has a list of roles and accolades far too long to go into.

We are joined by two scarcely less eminent figures in the Birmingham life science's panoply – Charles de Rohan, the former chief executive of the Binding Site, the Edgbaston-based medical diagnostics firm (which has since been sold to a healthcare giant for £2.25 billion), and Graham Silk, the co-founder (with Craddock and one other) of the blood cancer charity Cure Leukaemia and a respected West Midlands investor and businessman in his own right.

Silk, many will remember, wrote the Life Sciences Economic Sector Report at the behest of then-mayor Andy Street, although most refer to this comprehensive, in-depth document as the Silk Report.

It's a bit of a squish in Craddock's small, book-lined office but no one cares. We are here to talk about Accelerating Clinical Trials, the company limited by guarantee which Craddock set up with former patient Silk before persuading de Rohan to join as the company's chair.

It is barely two years old but ACT is “starting to see real traction,” according to de Rohan.

Yes, you couldn't pick more effective leaders, combining the academic gravitas and global contact list of Craddock, the strategic guidance of Silk and corporate know-how of de Rohan. However, they are all quick to point to what Silk describes as “a superb team of execs” as key to ACT's success.

However, it is the possibilities of what ACT might achieve which is the real point – and that is, ultimately, to save lives by literally accelerating clinical trials. At the moment this is concentrated on blood cancers, but it is the potential of expanding it out to other diseases that leads to the possibility of it becoming a billion-pound business – a rare unicorn for the region. But more of this later.

If there is a driving force behind ACT, it is in the form of Craddock, who has only a short time to lead the discussion before departing next door to hold a clinic.

“With many cancers, the therapeutic landscape was bleak until about 10 years ago, and 20 per cent of the patients in my clinic today,” he says pointing in the direction of the main waiting room, “would

simply not have been alive a decade ago.”

Thankfully, however, there have been remarkable advances in transplant and cell therapies, and new drugs, thanks to the “trillions of pounds, dollars and euros which have been invested into basic biomedical science,” largely courtesy of some of the world's academic institutions.

All of which would be wonderful news were it not for the fact that the adoption of these ground-breaking therapies into routine clinical practice is often painfully slow – a cause of intense frustration for both patient groups and the biotechnology companies who have developed them.

“The responsibility we have as a society is to connect patients as quickly as possible with these transformative new drugs which can mean the difference between life and death,” continues Craddock.

“The biopharmaceutical sector is now generating a tsunami of amazing clinical assets that have taken billions of pounds to develop, but before they can be adopted as a new standard of care, which allows companies to recoup the money they have invested, it is essential that data concerning the efficacy, and critically, safety is provided to regulatory bodies such as the FDA and EMA. Safety is so important – we just can't have another

Thalidomide situation.

“At present the default position for pharmaceutical companies with promising new drugs is to contract the delivery of these pivotal trials from global contract research organisations – CROs – which are huge and remote behemoths.

“By common consent this is a pretty sub-standard model – it is too slow, too expensive, and critically CROs just don't engage with or invest in the clinical community looking after these complex patients. They are also clunky and sometimes companies have to employ three CROs to obtain all the data they need for drug approval.

“In the UK and across Europe, clinical co-operative groups caring for patients are suddenly saying if we just had the ability to deliver the pharmacovigilance and safety data like a CRO then our other advantages of scale, rapid access to genomic data and expert clinical insight would make us the ideal vehicle for clinical trial delivery.

“ACT is exactly that model. We have aggregated extremely skilled clinicians working in big metropolitan centres across the country creating a catchment region of 25 million. Working together through funded national research nurse networks – the Trials Acceleration Programme (TAP) and IMPACT (a bone marrow

transplant trial network) we have already demonstrated the UK's ability to accelerate recruitment to pivotal blood cancer trials.

“But what we really needed was a trial delivery vehicle that is commercially competitive with the CRO sector that can quickly give pharmaceutical companies the quality of data around efficacy and safety. And that's exactly what ACT has done.”

It's worth noting at this point that ACT is set up differently from many in the life and health sciences sectors. Yes, it's a commercially nimble company limited by guarantee – nothing unusual about that – but it follows the Quaker model whereby all profits are reinvested, in ACT's case into a charitable foundation, DIDACT Foundation. This charity is overseen by leading UK haematologists to fund training and further trials that might not be of interest to pharma companies but will help patients.

Its governance model is also distinct from universities, those seats of academia where so much of the research in this area traditionally takes place; reading between the lines, the decision-making process is much quicker this way.

Currently, ACT has obtained £5 million from three charities, Cure Leukaemia, NHSBT and Anthony Nolan. This may not be a huge figure, but we should bear in mind that it is only just emerging from its infancy. And more to the point trials are opening and beginning to bring in money which in turn means it is able to compete with the CRO sector.

“We went to the American Society of Haematology's annual meeting in December last year,” says Craddock. “Ordinarily it's very difficult to get a global pharma company to put a new drug into the UK – but now they are biting our hands off to understand how they can place trials of their new drugs through ACT.

“We met with 30 companies in a three-day period, and they are saying that the UK – providing it has this ability to deliver the trials of the quality needed to get the drug licensed, and with its clinicians, its world-class science, and its clinical and regulatory advice – creates a highly effective one-stop shop that they can't get from CROs.

“This will allow ACT to move to being a financially sustainable proposition probably in about 18 months as we generate a surplus that gets reinvested back into more nurses for the patients, in stark contrast to the global CRO sector where the shareholders on Wall Street take the profit rather than it finding its way back to improve patient outcomes.”

I wonder whether the ACT model is pioneering. Yes it is, according to de Rohan, because of the virtuous circle it has created: all the profits that are generated from the commercial trials go back into a charity which then funds investigator-initiated trials.

The funds are then channelled through

“The clinicians understand that the speed in getting the trials done means that the money will flow through faster for more research.”



Charles de Rohan

the same network of research nurses through the two groups, the TAP and IMPACT nurses.

“The clinicians understand that the speed in getting the trials done means that the money will flow through faster for more research,” says de Rohan. “That is why it is a pioneering virtuous circle – the money stays within the ecosystem rather than flowing out into the pockets of shareholders.

“It's in their interest to recruit patients quickly and to get the trials done quickly.”

If ACT is to become the success which many in the health sector believe is possible, this will surely be partly due to the fact that it was set up for the right reasons by people acting for the general good rather than to boost the mood of their bank manager. De Rohan admits that he joined the industry 30 years ago for altruistic reasons (“to do something for the good of society”), and Craddock seems totally uninterested in lining his wallet.

The same goes for Silk, though of the trio he is the one perhaps most personally aware of the importance of speed; a patient himself with leukaemia 20 years ago, he had been given three years to live,

but thanks to the swift access to a clinical trial his life was saved and he has gone on to make a full recovery.

This, incidentally, was when he met Craddock and the duo went on to create Cure Leukaemia with another patient.

“When we created Cure Leukaemia, the whole purpose was to take luck out of the whole process and create an infrastructure which would allow the acceleration of drugs through to patients – and that really is what ACT is now,” says Silk.

“The ultimate is to start spinning out into other disease disciplines as and when we're ready. We're not there at the moment but we can't be far away and if there are other Charlie Craddocks around in lung or breast or brain or whatever the other areas might be, then this could be done quickly.

“The likes of Sir John Bell, the government's life sciences advisor, and Kate Bingham [who chaired the government's vaccine taskforce during Covid] are saying this is absolutely scalable as a model.

“That is why ACT could end up a unicorn in the fulness of time.”

The heads on the experienced



Professor Charlie Craddock

shoulders of Craddock, Silk and de Rohan are wise enough to accept there is a long way to go before ACT can be considered an out-and-out success.

That said, the prevailing mood in Craddock's office is one of optimism over what the future holds. There are several reasons for this.

De Rohan mentions the personnel involved, including "the chairs of each of the charities that fund ACT, a few very seasoned trialists, a very talented group of execs – real experts who have come out of the traditional CRO space.

"Proof that we are doing the right thing lies in all those who want to join us," he says. "I find that really gratifying."

Silk echoes Craddock's observations on the vastly increased speed of drugs and therapies.

"The world is creating more and more treatments," he says. "The whole genomic explosion is going to come through in so many areas. There's a tidal wave of new treatments emerging, hence the need to create this network and infrastructure to enable them to get that access to patients.

"The whole evolution of the genomic process is driven by the pharma sector, which is fully front-on commercial. We decided we had to be overtly commercial as well, perhaps becoming a bit of a disruptor in the NHS.

"What separates what we do with our commercial success is that we distribute the profits through the DIDACT Foundation and that then goes out to the environment of the network to enable more trials to be run. So we actually become self-sustainable."

There is a sense that Silk is quietly satisfied that the team has been able to prove to the naysayers that speeding up the clinical trials process is most certainly possible.

"It's interesting," he says, "because when we started Cure Leukaemia a lot of people said, oh this won't work, the Trials Acceleration Programme hasn't got a chance, reasoning that it had never been done before.

"There's a phrase – success has many fathers, failure is an orphan – which basically means that many people will seek credit for success, but few will accept responsibility for failure. We dared to try."

From what we hear, the greater the success of ACT, the greater hope would be for swift, effective clinical trialing and ultimately more lives will be saved.

So why is the government not investing? "I think it merits investment, certainly," says de Rohan. "But it needs to retain its independence as a company, and it should be allowed to work commercially."

Silk agrees. "Yes, I would love to see government money coming in, though they often want to see proof of something before they invest.

"The interesting thing is, if they ended up giving us, say, £50 million pounds, we would give them the value back in drugs

multiple times over.

"We've spoken to politicians on both sides of the political divide and I think once the election gets out of the way and we can start moving forward with whoever the next regime is going to be we might find we've got more traction with them."

There is one final piece in the jigsaw which give Craddock, de Rohan and Silk the belief that ACT is on firm footing, and that is Birmingham itself.

Indeed, Silk doesn't rule out the possibility of the city becoming Britain's life sciences answer to Silicon Valley.

Craddock draws a parallel with history.

"The Industrial Revolution was probably one of the most important events in human history. Why did it happen in areas such as Dudley, Cradley Heath and the Black Country?" he asks.

"It was because of a confluence of the critical raw materials – coal, water and clay.

"If you think about Birmingham's potential as a global life sciences centre, it is uniquely attractive because it has one of the largest populations in Europe, critically it is ethnically diverse, stable, and it is right at the heart of Britain.

"Now that we have built these national networks which accelerate trial recruitment so effectively, all we needed was the catalyst of a clinical trial delivery vehicle that can deliver for global pharma what they need.

"I sit on advisory boards with global pharma every month, and if you can't

deliver the quality of data at speed, they are simply not interested in partnering with you. However, now that the ACT infrastructure and its linked trials networks can accelerate delivery of registration standard trial data it's a very different conversation indeed, and the UK is seen as a highly attractive partner.

"Why is it that the CRO sector has flourished historically? It's because it provided the quality of trials data companies needed.

"But what we're showing with ACT is that when clinicians groups work together with inspired financiers and charities, the unique assets of the NHS can be fused into a trial delivery vehicle which is commercially nimble resulting in a win-win for patients and the pharmaceutical sector. That's what we've done and this game-changing proposition is now attracting the interest of global pharma.

"If we get this right and the ACT model flourishes, and you then scale this into other diseases as Graham says, you rapidly increase patient access to novel therapies whilst at the same time growing a private-sector cluster with the potential to create tens of thousands of jobs around Birmingham.

"This is the growth opportunity for life sciences in the UK and it plays to our core strategic assets just as the great figures of the Industrial Revolution, Brindley, Watt and Wedgwood, would have wanted us to do."



"The whole genomic explosion is going to come through in so many areas. There's a tidal wave of new treatments emerging, hence the need to create this network and infrastructure to enable them to get that access to patients."



Graham Silk

Law firm continues Bears' sponsorship



Callum Haynes, sales director at Talbots Law, second right, pictured with Birmingham Bears players, from left, Jake Lintott, Craig Miles and Ed Barnard

Midlands-based Talbots Law has cemented its commercial partnership at Edgbaston after signing a new deal to continue as Bears' front-of-shirt sponsor.

Talbots – which has 11 offices across the region – has been the official legal partner at Edgbaston and the lead partner of the Bears for the last two years and the latest contract will see them back the Bears for the 2024 and 2025 Vitality Blast campaign.

The company's name will feature prominently on a new-look Bears T20 shirt which is set to go on sale at the end of the month.

Talbots Law CEO Dave Hodgetts said: "The decision to continue our partnership with Edgbaston and the Birmingham Bears is an exciting one.

"As exclusive legal partner to the stadium, we have been able to work closely with key stakeholders both internally at the club and from across the wider local business community, and we are delighted to continue building on those relationships."

Improving the landscape

A special interest group has been created as part of TechWM's goal to establish the region as an internationally recognised tech hub.

Women in Tech has been devised with the aim of improving the landscape for women in tech by amplifying their voices and contributions to the sector, and promoting better gender equality across leadership and investment.

Chairing the group is Tara Attfield Tomes, founder of East Village PR agency.

She said: "The stats are horrifying. Women make up only 24% of the tech industry, with less than 3% from black and ethnic minority groups. A massive 77% of leadership roles in tech are filled by men, and we've all heard

the statistics around only 2% of VC funding going to female founders.

"As a group, we want to tackle these stats head on and shine a light on the organisations, initiatives, and individuals working hard to create change.

"Our focus is on getting more women into tech and advocating for changes that enhance retention, ensuring that organisations support more women into leadership roles through robust sponsorship and mentorship. This is in addition to helping more female founders securing funding, of course.

"Collectively, our goal is to make the West Midlands the best region for women to succeed in tech."



■ Birmingham City University's STEAMhouse facility has joined forces with engineering consultancy Arup to create a new digital innovation hub.

The hub, which aims to help accelerate the growth of digitally focused businesses, three distinct support areas: a growth lab, in which digital start-ups and scale-ups can collaborate, a create lab to help increase accessibility to the latest technologies, and an experiential sound lab.

BCU vice-chancellor Professor David Mba and Arup director and Birmingham office leader, James Watts, officially launched the labs at a ribbon-cutting event at STEAMhouse.

Joanna Birch, director of innovation, enterprise and employability at BCU, said: "Since opening in 2018 our mission is to make innovation happen – supporting all businesses in finding ways to develop new ideas, products, services and business models to meet customer and citizen needs.

"Co-creating and inspiring businesses is at the heart of what we do and the digital labs are a continuation of that mission.

"Each lab within the hub has been specifically designed to address the digital needs of those using it, but to also foster learning and development across industry."



By CHRIS MEAH
Founder and CEO of School of Code

Exponential deception

It is tremendously difficult for us humans to understand exponential progress. We're just not built for it. A combination of cognitive, psychological, and environmental factors means we struggle to appreciate what 'exponential' really means. We think linearly.

For example, here are two options. You can have £100 now, or 1p but I'd double it every day for a month. Instinctively, you'd grab the £100 – some people would say you'd be right to, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush and all that.

However, let's think of this mathematically. On day 2, your penny would be 2p. Day 3: 4p. Day 4: 8p. Day 5: 16p. After a week, you'd have 64p . . . that £100 still looks pretty good.

Day 10: £5.12. On Day 15, we'd exceed the £100 offer with £163.84. Nice! So we've proven it's worth choosing the penny doubling in just 15 days. Halfway through the journey, we've got enough to rent a blade of grass in London.

Day 20: £5,242.88. Day 25: £167,772.16. Day 28: £1,342,177.28. Day 29: £2,684,354.56. Day 30: £5,368,709.12.

Be honest with yourself – it seemed impossible that 1p could turn into over £5,000,000. There might be a few reasons for that.

We were comparing to £100, we anchored to that value. It's hard to see from £100 to £5 mil. We are used to linear patterns. If we walk at a steady pace, we know we will cover equal distances over equal intervals of time. The rate of change doesn't increase dramatically – it can't, our two legs can only move so fast. Even if we run twice as fast as we can walk, we can't easily run twice as fast again, and again.

There is also very little progress at the start of an exponential journey. Those penny-doubling calculations don't get us excited for at least two weeks; a misleading lack of early progress means we get complacent and lack urgency.

Maybe you knew automatically you'd be quids in, and your brain works differently. Congratulations – you are going to understand progress in technology, and in particular progress in artificial intelligence, better than the rest of us. The race to market often obscures the rapid

advancements in AI. The rush to be first leads to overhyped and underwhelming initial products, which can anchor our expectations and blind us to the underlying exponential progress.

Take image generation. In 2014 the first images of AI-generated faces were pixelated, grainy, greyscale images that wouldn't be mistaken for images of real people. By 2019, we had faces generated that would make you double-take as to whether they were real or not. In 2024, AI-generated faces are more convincing to humans than real faces.

In just a decade, we've leapt from blurry and unrealistic to virtually indistinguishable from reality. In 10 years, we've gone from rubbish to more human than human. The same is true of the progress in voice generation, code generation, music generation, and many more. A few years ago, machines creating things of the quality and scale of what we see today would have been unthinkable by most people in the tech field, never mind the average person with very little exposure to this world.

This has real-world consequences. AI films have gone from joke to gimmick to becoming hard to ignore. Search for examples of OpenAI's Sora model to find out how far we've come already. Film studios are now pondering whether it's worth investing in spaces and people, or embracing AI into their production model.

With just three seconds of audio and a single headshot image, you can create a deepfake of you that could fool your nearest and dearest. What does that mean for scams? What does that mean for verification for things like banking? How do you know you're talking to the person you think you are? What should we do about that?

"Well, it's ok but there's no way it can fool me." You're probably right – it's often glitchy, with weird artefacts, and we can probably still distinguish AI from reality with enough effort.

But remember our exponential progress story. That's how AI has and will develop. What you see now is the worst this technology will be.



Leading the cultural charge

Former entrepreneur and heritage marketer **Alex Nicholson-Evans** has taken on the post as **Birmingham's first city curator**. The evidence of her work starts now, with the **100 Days of Creativity project** – another first for the city – which runs over the summer. **JON GRIFFIN** catches up with her.



Alex Nicholson-Evans may be Birmingham's first city curator helping to champion the wealth of creative skills across the city, but her business acumen dates back to her teenage years arranging school discos and selling university t-shirts.

Nicholson-Evans, the newly appointed strategic brains behind Birmingham's inaugural 100 Days of Creativity – a marketing campaign aiming to shine a light on a summer feast of arts and culture – has come a very long way since her days as a budding teenage entrepreneur.

Smiling at the memories of those exploits in her home town in Buckinghamshire, she recalls: "By the age of 13 I had already started running my own company – I noticed there was a gap in the market for discos. I went to a girls' school and there was a boys' school down the road and never the two shall meet.

"There was a bit of a gap for the two schools to socialise and have fun so I started booking DJs and village halls. The company was called The Local. I made pocket money out of that and it gave me a taste of business. I had always been really interested in filling gaps in the market.

"I remember volunteering at the local Oxfam shop when I was even younger. They had loads of designer clothes coming in. They were just being laid out with all the other clothes and I thought how silly, there is an opportunity here to bring in a different demographic to Oxfam. So I created a brand for designer clothes within this little Oxfam shop on Amersham High Street."

The former teenage disco and clothing guru is now looking forward to helping sell a summer of culture in Birmingham to the wider world, and believes she inherited those entrepreneurial genes from her parents.

"I grew up with a family running businesses. My dad was into food importing and export. A little bit of flair for business definitely came from seeing my mum and dad in action," she says.

Her natural aptitude for business and voluntary work grew during her student days at the University of Bath where she was involved in social enterprise activities, including helping women in Bolivia.

"I worked on an amazing project out in Bolivia, empowering women to create alpaca wool products. We supported



Alex Nicholson-Evans, far right, presenting at the 2024 West Midlands Tourism Awards



At the Malfy Gin Terrace launch at The Grand Hotel, with Lynsey Rutter of Midlands Art Centre

them exporting into the UK and selling them to the UK market. Those sorts of experiences were more transformative for me than just doing the studying."

Graduating with a 2:1 degree in social sciences in 2008, she honed her entrepreneurial skills still further by launching a clothing company called Fresh Apparel in tandem with a business partner.

"The business was in essence a t-shirt distribution company – we would take the orders, take the risks and then ship them out to universities. It wasn't going to be a winning enterprise but it was all experience. It was the first time I had been involved in straight sales and cold calling."

She combined running Fresh Apparel with voluntary work at nearby Stoke Mandeville Hospital. This eventually led to a two-year spell within the NHS where she rose to the role of trauma and orthopaedics co-ordinator at the world-famous complex.

"It was a real eye-opener for me," she says. "It was a challenging time for the NHS – there were always more people needing appointments than there were slots or surgeries available. I started to understand and learn different skills managing relationships.

"How could I get consultants to add slots where there weren't any? How could I manage the experience of a patient calling up who wanted surgery and was told they couldn't have it for six months?"

Her time at Stoke Mandeville came to an end when she landed a job with American-owned Globus Medical which would in due course lead to her move to the Midlands – and to the city which would become her adopted beloved home.

"They flew me out to Philadelphia to do my training – it all felt like a world removed from my broom cupboard turned into an office in the NHS."

Promoted to regional account manager, she moved to Birmingham in 2013 – and soon fell in love with the Midlands capital, despite any initial preconceptions.

"When I moved to Birmingham I had a perception of the city driven by London national media that was completely inaccurate. It wasn't until I started working for Birmingham Museums Trust and I got to know the people and the city that I started to fall in love with the place. I love the city so deeply that it baffles me when

"When I moved to Birmingham I had a perception of the city driven by London national media that was completely inaccurate. It wasn't until I started working for Birmingham Museums Trust and I got to know the people and the city that I started to fall in love with the place."

anyone has anything negative to say about it."

In her new role as city curator – which she combines with running her own Living For The Weekend events and hospitality company where she has organised the likes of Birmingham Cocktail Weekend and Birmingham Restaurant Festival – Nicholson-Evans is determined to fight the oft-quoted Londoncentric image of a post-industrial city currently plagued by the financial problems at Birmingham City Council.

"The West Midlands Growth Company would say that the perceptions of the city are around 10 years behind where the city actually is. It is why I think the role of city curator and the work many other people are doing is so important. If we do not mobilise as a city, the only stories covered and the only news that will be talked about on X/Twitter is the council's financial collapse.

"Birmingham is still resilient, it is still creative, it is still extraordinary in the face

of all of that. Whenever possible I want to create opportunities for people to see it for what it really is, which is an absolute gem in the UK's crown, an extraordinary place for people to work and live.

"It is so important that people hear that narrative, the positive stories, the excitement and innovation that is coming out of the city and not just the headlines around Section 114."

For now, Nicholson-Evans is concentrating on an entirely different narrative to the council's troubles – helping showcase a summer of creative delights.

"My contract is with Colmore BID but it is very much a city centre role, looking at how the BIDs could work more closely together. I feel that this role is really needed and it can make a genuine difference.

"It allows me to make an impact and bring people together in a different way. Actually, it's a bit of a dream role for me because it combines my love of the city,



With Rebecca Phillips, of OPUS, at Light is Coming, Snow Hill Square. Picture Verity Milligan

my near decade of experience in a major cultural organisation in the city and my decade of producing festivals for Living For The Weekend.”

Turning her attention to the city's forthcoming 100 Days of Creativity – which is funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, a central pillar of the levelling-up agenda – Nicholson-Evans forecasts that this will be a unique celebration running from mid-May through to the end of August.

She reckons the new marketing campaign will provide an unprecedented platform for the city's wide variety of cultural and arts activities, over 100 days from May 19 to August 26, starting with the Flatpack Film Festival and ending with Birmingham Weekender.

She explains the rationale behind the initiative, which is backed by a range of strategic partners including Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, the West Midlands Growth Company, Culture Central, the five city centre BIDs and Birmingham City Council.

“I came into this city curator role, looked ahead into the next year and thought OK, what is happening in the city? Where are we?”

“We had the Commonwealth Games followed by the Birmingham Festival, but because of the council's financial position what is the plan for Birmingham to say we are still here? We are still a destination for tourists, we are still a place where you want to live and work. There has been nothing.

“That was fundamentally where the idea began – it was all about bringing together partners to shout about the city. I realised there were an incredible number of creative events happening, the Ikon Gallery was turning 60, the B Side Festival was celebrating 40 years of hip hop, there's 40 years of Birmingham Jazz Festival and so on. When you pull it all together as a full programme, that is exciting.

“You can bring things together alongside jewellery workshops from a local jeweller, alongside a drink and draw at a local pub, alongside theatre at the Hippodrome, alongside dance. In essence this is a marketing campaign which we are branding as a celebration of creativity.”

Nicholson-Evans is urging large and small organisations – from volunteer-led societies to not-for-profit organisations or local creative businesses – to join the



At Hospitality's Women of the Year 2024, Claridges ArtSpace

100-day party and back the initiative by submitting their own planned activities.

“I really feel the 100 Days concept has legacy. I would love to see what 100 Days of Sport would look like, what 100 Days of Food would look like . . . there are so many options.”

And she suggests the digital reach of the campaign could ultimately echo beyond this year's initial 100 Days.

“It is better for the entire city if I can drive more traffic to that site, more subscriptions to that e-newsletter, more followers to those social platforms because then actually the legacy of 100 Days is all of that growth, not just the immediate impact this summer.”

She says the campaign will help to improve the public image of Birmingham for many. “I do not think that people

necessarily always think of Birmingham as a creative city. I also don't think that that is front of centre, and it should be.

“This campaign will shine a light not just on major cultural organisations that make national news like the Hippodrome, but it will also highlight all the smaller makers and independents that are part of a much bigger ecosystem which makes the city thrive.

“There often isn't a light on all of those things together. We are looking forward to a really creative summer in Birmingham.”

Clearly, the former teenager who once cut her business teeth running teenage discos and selling t-shirts to impoverished students is relishing her new role as Birmingham's first city curator – and showing the world what the city really has to offer.



Nominations are open for this year's Innovation Awards

Nominations are open for the 2024 Innovation Awards which highlight ground-breaking advancements in the region and the people behind them.

The awards, which are organised by the Technology Supply Chain, have been created to celebrate innovation in its many forms – including the contributions of individuals – across sectors ranging from manufacturing and engineering, to sustainability and tech.

Nominations are open until June 30, providing an opportunity to shine a spotlight on innovators across a wide range of disciplines.

A judging panel featuring figures from organisations such as Make UK, TechWM, EY, the IoD and others will evaluate the finalists, culminating in a black-tie ceremony on November 8th at the Eastside Rooms in Birmingham.

Dr Richard Fallon, co-founder of the Innovation Awards, said: “I am delighted to witness the continued growth and impact



Dr Richard Fallon

of this event in showcasing the ingenuity and dedication of innovators worldwide.

“Each year, we are inspired by the inventive advancements across various

industries, and it is a privilege to honour those driving positive change.”

Birmingham Business magazine is pleased to announce its partnership with the Innovation Awards 2024.

Editor Henry Carpenter said being invited to partner with an event that celebrates cutting-edge innovation across various industries was a “no brainer”.

He added: “The magazine champions business across the West Midlands, and as such we are honoured to be part of an initiative that recognises and rewards the trailblazers shaping the future with their innovative products and services.

“As a partner, we are proud to join forces with other sponsors, including Ryan, Bibby Financial Services, Oxbridge, Tantamount, University College Birmingham, Birmingham City University, and WMG, in supporting this celebration of innovation.”

■ **To nominate or discover more about the Innovation Awards, visit <https://innovation-awards.co.uk/>**

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Real estate

SPECIAL REPORT

Holistic approach to regeneration needed

By CHRIS MORRIS
Real estate partner at Shoosmiths



Birmingham has undergone a transformation in recent years, evolving into a vibrant and dynamic city – powering the growth of the wider West Midlands along with it.

This renaissance has been driven, in part, by a booming residential market and surge in development. These projects have reshaped the city's skyline, while laying the foundation for the next chapter of its progression, based on large-scale regeneration and placemaking.

This is no less evident than the arrival of Berkeley Group's St Joseph in 2018, which was one of many catalysts for Birmingham's recent development landscape, with the firm transforming the city's Gun Quarter and Eastside.

Then there's the Octagon, which has erupted out of the ground at pace and will be the city's tallest building at 155m, featuring a mix of uses, including build to rent.

Moda Living, HBD and Vita Group are also bringing ambitious residential-led schemes forward across the city. This reinforces the strength of Birmingham's living sector, which continues to set new records for the amount of residential development in the pipeline.

The city's resurgence has not been without its challenges though.

Adversity

2023 was a difficult year for the real estate industry, in the West Midlands and nationally. Persistent inflation and elevated interest rates caused a tightening of the borrowing market – putting pressure on investors, developers, and project viability.

Birmingham has faced additional setbacks, with the City Council battling its own challenges.

The cancellation of the northern leg of HS2 was a blow to the region's transport connectivity, though efforts to revive the line have been proposed by Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham and West Midlands Mayor Andy Street. All eyes will no doubt be on the outcome of the May metro-mayoral elections and how this could impact plans.

Despite the economic and political

headwinds, development activity in the West Midlands has remained resilient. One supporting factor behind this is an increased focus and renewed shift towards partnership working, which Shoosmiths has encountered while advising clients.

While some consolidation is to be expected during difficult operating periods, the partnerships model has the potential to unlock new developments and long-term growth, with developers partnering more and more with local authorities, pension funds and international capital to achieve this.

For example, a joint venture between Aviva Capital Partners and Moda Living is supporting the regeneration of a four-acre site in Digbeth. The plans include 1,000 build to rent apartments, alongside green spaces, roof terraces and public realm.

These partnerships will play a key role in Birmingham, accelerating housing delivery and enabling the development and redevelopment needed to elevate the city to a new level.

New chapter

Having proven itself on the global stage as a residential development and investment hotspot, the next phase of Birmingham's growth journey must be centred on a holistic approach to regeneration that prioritises well-planned mixed-use schemes that complement the surrounding area.

We've witnessed the success of these types of projects at Paradise, for example. The completed first phase of the office and leisure development has attracted global businesses such as PwC, as well as a range of restaurants and bars.

Other stages of the project, including One Centenary Way, are having a similar impact. Arup is relocating 1,000 staff to the building and is to be joined by Goldman Sachs and JLL.

Paradise's phase two plans for new public realm and a hotel help to demonstrate the power of adopting a holistic approach to regeneration – incorporating residential, commercial and recreational space, while creating vital new jobs, homes and economic growth.

Similar projects are also being progressed across the wider West Midlands region.

Shoosmiths recently acted on the acquisition of Gracechurch shopping centre in Sutton Coldfield. The firm advised SAV Group and BPG on the purchase of the 1m sq ft retail centre and while plans are still being formalised, with the West Midlands Combined Authority also providing its backing, SAV Group and BPG have an ambitious vision for the site spanning new homes, as well as leisure, retail, commercial and other uses.

Returning to the city centre, there is an opportunity to learn from these regeneration projects ahead of progressing key developments such as Smithfield and Curzon Street. It is important that development is considered carefully to not only drive and stimulate economic growth, but also address the shortage of housing, particularly affordable.

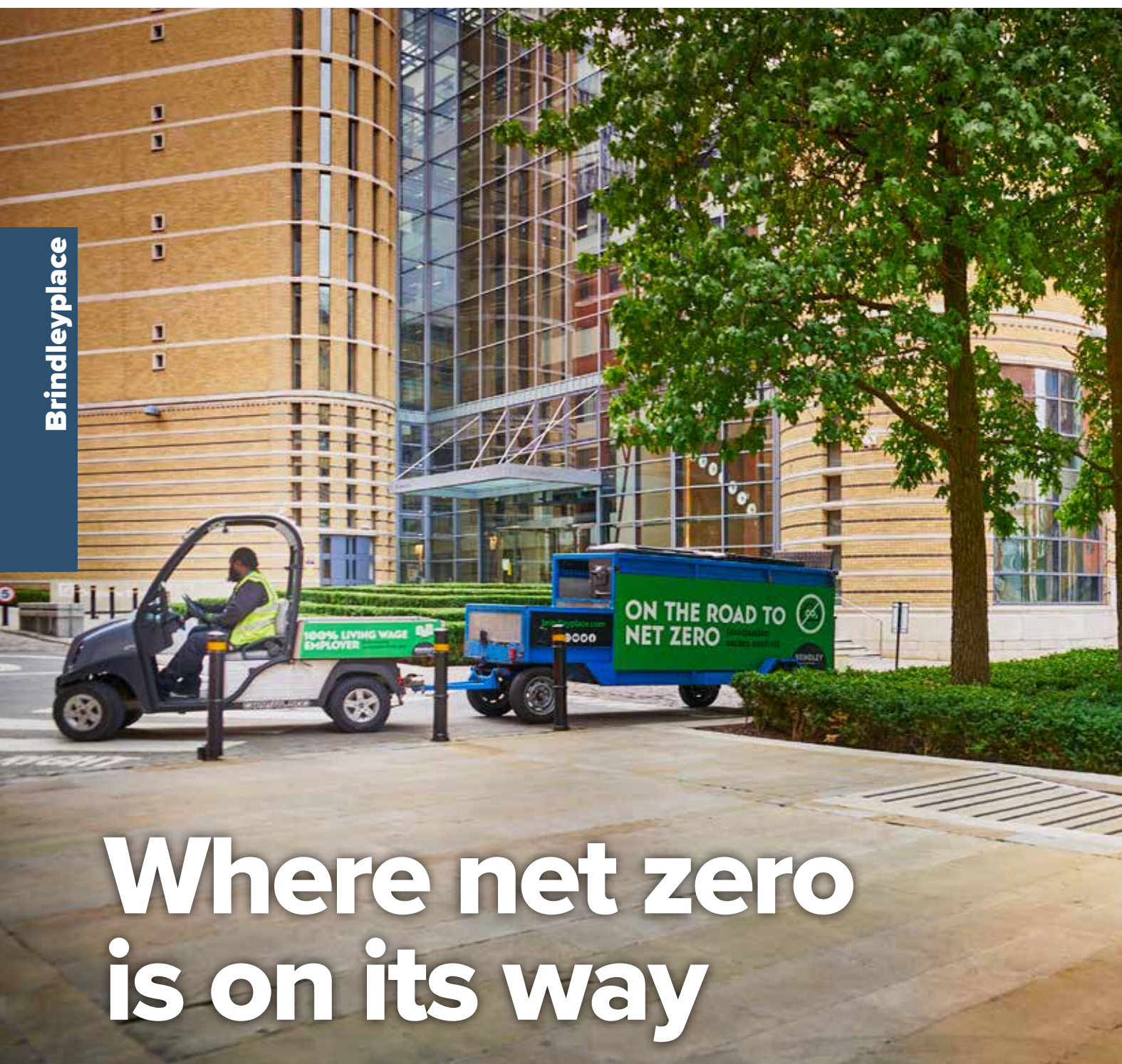
Prosperous future

There are other reasons to be positive about the future of the city.

Investment in transport infrastructure, coupled with the Council's plans to redefine and extend the city-centre, could create new opportunities for development and growth. The ongoing Metro extension, forthcoming Midlands Rail Hub and HS2 line will also enhance connectivity in Birmingham.

The impact of this can already be seen in Digbeth, where we've had the announcement of Digbeth Loc Studios, set to be created by Peaky Blinders writer Stephen Knight, and the regeneration of the historic Typhoo Tea factory that is pre-let to the BBC.

The latest plans from Birmingham City Football Club to create a new stadium does not only come as welcome news to Blues fans, but also symbolises the forward progress the city is making. The proposals for a multi-billion-pound 'Sports Quarter' is further evidence of the holistic regeneration and placemaking that will shape Birmingham for years to come.



Where net zero is on its way

Brindleyplace has been putting the environment and sustainability front and centre of the estate for years, but recently this push towards a net-zero future has become turbocharged. HENRY CARPENTER has been asking questions of some of the estate's key figures to find out more.

MATT LONG

Senior asset manager, Praxis

Q: What does Praxis want to achieve with the Brindleyplace estate?

A: Praxis is one of the UK's leading real estate investment managers, and a recognised leader in sustainable development and asset management.

Praxis bought Brindleyplace in August 2023, and is passionate about improving its environment further through active investment to reduce the estate's carbon footprint and working with its partners, including the local community, Westside BID and other local statutory, voluntary and charity organisations, to find new ways of promoting a shared, sustainable future.

The original developer, Argent, which built the estate in the 1990s, had a vision of setting, place, sustainability and commerciality that was ahead of its time, and which has laid a sound commercial foundation on which to build on.

By furthering ESG at the core of decision-making and regeneration, the experienced team at Brindleyplace will continue to evolve the work on the estate as it matures as a commercial and leisure destination not just for those who work in and visit it, but for everyone in Birmingham.

Decarbonising the estate's existing buildings, reducing energy consumption and improving amenity across the estate, while putting the environment of both people and place first, are the first priorities for Praxis. How it benchmarks this investment will allow it to measure the difference it is making to ensure the estate is reimagined effectively both for today and tomorrow.

Renewing and enhancing the public realm so it continues to work for all, while reviewing the estate's social value impact, will also be paramount.

Together, these are the three main pillars of the work now being undertaken and which builds upon the strengths of the current estate's long-term advantages of location and quality, and its outlook for the future.

Q: What has been the impact of Brindleyplace on Birmingham?

A: Brindleyplace transformed Birmingham's commercial office and leisure offer when it first opened. Then, the city lacked modern, open plan, Grade A office space, which Brindleyplace began to deliver and attracted major employers like Deloitte, NatWest, Lloyds Bank, Deutsche Bank and Avison Young, amongst others.

The estate has always prided itself on delivering a safe and secure, well-managed environment around the clock, and this will always be central to how it operates for occupiers and visitors.

It has always provided a truly mixed-use destination for Birmingham and brings visitors – as well as workers – out of the



city core and widens both perspectives and horizons. The estate also set out to furnish the city with further major tourist attractions, and again Brindleyplace provided, along with 30 new cafes, restaurants and bars, new leisure space that appealed to a wide range of tastes and budgets, all set in a carefully designed, low carbon trio of public squares between the city's canal network, the ICC and NIA, and one of its major commercial routes.

Creating jobs, skills and opportunities for local people and communities, especially in and around the centre of the city, remains a key outcome of the investment being made in the estate.

As well as widening the size of the city centre itself and aiding its commercial offer, Brindleyplace also helped place the city's waterfront at the heart of future development opportunities, a role it continues to play today with further new residential developments in the local area, as well as tram connections and a revitalised Broad Street.

Q: How will Brindleyplace deliver on its goals?

A: Through sheer hard work by the teams behind Praxis and Brindleyplace, the estate will increase its ability to affect real change by: building upon its green credentials to de-carbonise its buildings while refurbishing and repurposing both real estate and the public realm, attracting new jobs to the city by offering occupiers the connectivity, amenities and security they're looking for, and deliver a world-class, waterside visitor destination that supports local communities and positively contributes to the local economy and reputation of the city.

Investment will always be made where the estate can make a difference to people's lives, through jobs, skills, opportunities and amenities. The renewed focus on decarbonisation and net zero, for example, builds upon existing work.

Inclusivity and partnership are at the heart of everything the estate does, and the accessible, open and welcoming

nature of Brindleyplace will only increase as it builds upon its successes. At the same time, everyone who works at the estate is proud that it has always been an example of global best practice in the successfully delivery of mixed use development, comparable to other projects around the UK and Europe.

Moving forward, realising the full potential of the estate will entail the re-using, re-imagining and repositioning of its offer, enhancing the ESG credentials of every building, creating opportunities to de-carbonise wherever possible, and focusing on a shared net-zero future.

Q: How will the estate align with its occupiers' aims?

A: The estate has always been focused on its occupiers' expectations and ensuring those expectations are met, while also leaning towards the corporate priorities of its partners.

The provision of solar PV as part of our buildings, for example, the long-term use of electric vehicles, and smart waste management, have all already contributed to a culture and an ethos built around sustainability that allows for the next steps along the pathway to net-zero to be realised.

Whether that is around active travel, wellness and wellbeing, or being safe and secure around the clock, these are all key priorities that chime with the businesses at home on the estate.

Priorities to improve and re-imagine what's already in place will mean upgrading, activating and evolving the public realm, as well as the commercial buildings. Every single asset across the estate will go through a rigorous exercise to ensure its sustainability credentials match the ESG expectations of everyone who uses it.

Occupiers will be involved in setting aims and goals to ensure they correlate, and this agenda will focus on the key areas of: health and wellbeing, energy, transport, water, resources, resilience, land use and ecology, pollution and estate management.

***This is a commercially backed article**

ELINOR HUGGETT

Sustainability lead, real estate, Deloitte

Q: What are the current marketplace drivers for greener, more sustainable and more productive workspace?

A: The marketplace is seeing an unprecedented push and pull towards more sustainable workspaces. Firstly, talent, particularly in younger generations, is demanding genuine commitment to sustainability from prospective employers: in our recent Gen Z and Millennial Workplace Survey, Deloitte found 50% of Gen Zs and 46% of Millennials are already pushing their employers to drive change on environmental issues.

Further, many of this generation have, or are considering, changing their career path due to climate concerns: 42% and 39% respectively. This makes it abundantly clear to organisations that action is imperative.

Added to that, a rapid increase in legislation in many regions, coupled with a continued spotlight on corporate sustainability reporting, is driving a flight to sustainability across all aspects of organisational operations.

In Europe alone, we have seen the alphabet soup of EPBD, CSRD, and CSDDD, among others adopted: most relevant of these in terms of workplace is the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (EPBD), which will drive significant improvements in building stock this side of 2030.



Globally, we have seen the Buildings Breakthrough arising from COP28, which highlights the vital role buildings play in climate action, and led to the Declaration de Chaillot, where over 70 countries came together to commit to accelerate action on sustainable buildings.

Q: What further features to your Birmingham workplace would improve your colleagues and visitors' experiences of your space?

A: We are always looking for the best

ways to align our occupied spaces with our corporate sustainability goals, which include commitments around our Scope 1 and 2 carbon emissions.

With that in mind, buildings which are fossil fuel free, or indeed have decarbonisation plans in place for onsite fossil fuel systems, are very attractive to us.

Similarly, sites with existing energy efficiency measures, or plans for energy efficiency interventions or upgrades, help us with these targets.

When it comes to electricity, our commitment to 100% renewable electricity by 2030 means existing renewable tariffs, or better still, onsite generation, is great!

In terms of workplace experience, we're keen to ensure our people, clients and visitors have an easy and pleasant journey through the site. This means reception areas, both communal and Deloitte specific, are important to us: they give the first impression of a site, and have a huge impact on navigability.

We're also on the lookout for sites with increased amenities for us and other tenants – things like coffee shops, gyms or other wellbeing spaces, and external spaces really add to the employee and visitor enjoyment.

We find that our people respond really well to choice in terms of locations for informal meetings, and spaces that support our hybrid working model.

JOSHUA MEEK

Head of impact & sustainability, Unity Trust Bank

Q: What makes commercial space stand out from a sustainability point of view?

A: It's important to think about three dimensions of sustainability in a commercial space that an organisation like Unity Trust Bank (Unity) considers.

Firstly, consider the environmental management practices and credentials of the materials, management and energy supply of the space, with the context of the UK's responsibility to achieve net zero emissions by 2050 within a 1.5 degrees centigrade temperature pathway.

Of the 20% to 25% of UK emissions attributed to real estate, it is estimated that 30% of these emissions are from non-domestic buildings and yet up to 600,000 commercial units are in energy inefficient pre-1920s buildings.

Therefore, commercial real estate managers need to find bespoke solutions for their units to decarbonise and consider the impacts on nature and wider ecosystems. Therefore, 'greening' an office is not just good from a cost saving perspective, it's providing wider social good and resilience.

Secondly, it's about the ESG (environmental, social and governance) practices of the commercial space owners. While Unity is committed to supporting organisations to deliver positive outcomes, we expect commercial real estate managers to equally treat their



staff, communities and stakeholders with fair, equitable and responsible practices.

This can focus on reducing waste, taking appropriate environmental impact assessments and reducing environmental footprint. In social it is about being a great and inclusive employer and supporting inclusive development for key stakeholders, while governance refers to the equitable, fair and transparent management of these practices from the board room across the whole organisation.

Finally, consider who is in the building, who you do business with and how you treat tenants. Alongside the responsibility for commercial real estate owners to safeguard the UK and communities from bad actors in money laundering, fraud, criminal activities etc, we should also consider what communities need in their neighbourhoods.

For some, this list may include absolute exclusions of who they would share commercial space with, but for others it would be about ensuring all tenants are acting responsibly and in the interest of their communities.

Q: How has the investment in your office enefitted the wider business?

A: Unity recognises the proactive approach 4 Brindleyplace has taken to deliver a greener and lower carbon office space. The very building we are based in is already a highly sustainable space, but, like us, it is on a journey towards a net zero future where the very fabric around us will become more and more sustainable.

The wider Unity business benefits significantly from investments made in the energy efficiency and green credentials of Brindleyplace. We are proud to host our customers, colleagues and stakeholders

from across the UK in our offices to drive our mission of contributing to a better society.

Q: What else do your colleagues get out of their Brindleyplace location?

A: In three words: connection, local and wellbeing. The programme provided for occupiers and their people are well used by Unity's staff.

Lunchtime yoga sessions, for example, directly support wellbeing from a physical and mental perspective while also providing opportunities to connect with others. Our own people want to be able to access more than just great transport links and create business partnerships, and Brindleyplace delivers lots of added value as well.





By ALEX TROSS

Carter Jonas partner and head of office agency in the Midlands

insight

The new requirements of the office environment

Since the easing of the lockdowns in 2021, the Birmingham office market has seen a rapid evolution in response to a changing work landscape and the impact on the demand for office space.

For context, we measure market performance by 'take-up' – in other words the number of square feet let in any given year. As you would expect, that number was very low during the pandemic when demand for office space plummeted.

From just over 780,000 sq ft in 2019, take-up fell to 521,000 in 2020 (a drop of a third!). It's important to note however that of that 521,000 sq ft, almost 55% was due to the one letting to BT at 3 Snowhill. That letting was the biggest single letting Birmingham has ever seen, so anomalous to say the least. Adjust for that deal and the drop was more like 70%.

That being said, the recovery started quickly and as a market, we bounced back in 2022 with a figure of 693,000 sq ft which was respectable given the impact of Covid. We then saw a small increase again in 2023 to 703,000 sq ft.

That improvement in performance was due in large part to the fact the people realised that the office is more than just being at a desk. It is an opportunity to commune with our fellow humans.

We enjoyed the additional flexibility offered by hybrid working but despite wanting a greater degree of flexibility, we understand the benefits of getting together with our friends and colleagues. Ideation, collaboration, business development, training and fostering culture as examples, are all irrefutably easier in real life as opposed to on Zoom or Teams, and it is

that realisation that has encouraged many people back to the office.

The return isn't complete and landlords, in the face of reduced demand, are doing their best to entice people back to their offices. They can no longer rely on just providing a basic white box, with grey carpet and expect high levels of demand to deliver occupiers.

In response to scarcity of demand and more demanding occupiers, most new buildings will have at least one roof terrace and gyms and cycling/shower facilities are now relatively commonplace, not to mention business lounges and on-site coffee shops. Landlords are much more mindful now of the need to provide spaces that offer a lifestyle through on-site amenity as opposed to just a place to sit at a desk for 8 hours.

So, landlords have responded to the occupier flight to quality but looking forward, more has to be done to ensure that people continue to return to the office, and we see a return to the pre Covid levels of footfall and resultant vibrancy and dynamism the city enjoyed.

The challenge is that landlords can't do it alone, offices are part of a city centre ecosystem that needs to work as a whole to make it an attractive place to return to.

In October 2021, Colmore Business Improvement District commissioned the Future Business District study, in partnership with BCC, WMCA and with research done by the University of Birmingham.

A number of city centre business were polled, and the questions were a) what is the impact of the pandemic on the city

core? and b) how do we collectively ensure the city centre thrives post covid?

They key themes from the responses were as follows: hybrid working is here to stay; connections and culture are key; and employees want more social value.

The overarching theme of the responses related to the ecosystem referenced above. The future of offices is inextricably linked to the other elements of city centre life and all stakeholders have an opportunity and obligation to make the business district a success.

The office is the main reason people come into the city centre but when they come, there has to be more than just a desk waiting for them. They need to have a bustling and varied leisure, retail and cultural offer and they need to support those venues and the services they provide.

Landlords, businesses and their employees also need to look up and out and not just think about their one building or one office. There should be some collective focus on lobbying agencies that impact the public realm to improve the space between buildings.

Ultimately, every challenge also offers an opportunity and I have seen firsthand how the pandemic has resulted in a dramatic improvement in the quality of office space available.

We continue to see the impact with Q1 delivering a take-up figure of 203,000 sq ft.

It's a great start to the year but if we are to see offices continue to evolve and take-up get back to where it was, we need to pay as much attention to their setting as their individual qualities.



Calthorpe

Answering the city's call

The Calthorpe Estate is almost the perfect case study of the changing nature of a privately-owned urban estate.
HENRY CARPENTER reports.



Loudon's Yard garden view

If an illustration is needed of the Calthorpe Estate's appetite to meet the needs of today's society, it exists not more than 50 yards away from its headquarters.

Just the other side of Hagley Road from the estate's HQ, a high-rise (for this area), mixed-use scheme called New Garden Square is steadily taking shape. The first residential stage, called Loudon's Yard, is nearing completion, and this epitomises the high-end, build-to-rent model which is so popular across many metropolitan areas of the UK.

New Garden Square is an ambition for a 1,600-2,000 residential apartment development as part of an 11-acre masterplan, which comes in at 37 storeys at its highest.

It also embodies a modern way of living which reflects a lifestyle choice. In many ways, the build-to-rent – or BTR, as it's universally known – concept is

not dissimilar to that of a glorified hotel, with amenities such as top-level IT, gymnasiums, concierge and gardens all on site.

Over the last decade, not only has the prominence of BTR schemes come increasingly to the fore, but working trends have also changed. And certainly in the case of Calthorpe, many of its larger commercial office tenants have moved to the city centre.

The result? The opportunity for schemes such as New Garden Square . . . and with close scrutiny the potential of converting other hitherto commercial-orientated buildings and sites into residential developments.

It's worth bearing in mind that in responding to the fast-evolving needs of the 21st-century city dweller, this 300-year-old estate – which, to give you an idea of timescale, pre-dates Birmingham

Council by 100 years – is in effect wrestling with centuries of tradition. The Calthorpe houses in leafy Edgbaston are characterised by their handsome Victorian architecture, and so proposals like New Garden Square represent a sea change in the estate's way of thinking.

The estate's latest vision for New Garden Square is a joint venture scheme with Moda Living. The route to get to this stage has however been long and circuitous, over 10 years, with different developers and funders becoming involved with the project, only for them to withdraw for varying reasons.

The essence of rethinking this prominent site at the heart of the estate was accelerated by the success and growth of the city centre's new cosmopolitan commercial workplaces; new city centre districts such as Paradise Circus, Snow Hill and Arena Central which

“The great thing is we know we can deliver – we can turn a vision into reality in a way which others can't.”

offer large, flexible, environmentally efficient central workplaces.

The land of New Garden Square, once home to classic Edgbaston mansions from the mid-1800s, was transposed by the estate through the 1960s to the 1980s into the modern office blocks of demand of that time. However, a change in today's requirements have led to their obsolescence.

The return to residential of centuries past has an air therefore of 'nostalgic déjà vu', but at its heart this is regeneration, which remains the essence of Calthorpe Estates' DNA.

Everyone at Calthorpe is happy to partner with Moda Living, a hugely respected national developer, owner and operator of high-quality modern neighbourhoods (as Moda describe their schemes), with a string of high-profile developments in Birmingham to its name, either completed or in the pipeline.

This is all explained by Ralph Minott, the historic estate's master planning and development director who joined the team 16 years ago, and who has navigated the estate's vision for New Garden Square since 2013.

As he says, Moda Living don't just develop and sell, they own and operate, “and so the similarities of the two organisations' mantras truly align”.

If you were a prospective resident of Loudon's Yard, what would you be getting for what might be felt a premium offer?

“You would be getting a one, two or three-bed apartment, but one that stands out in that everything is included,” explains Minott. “The communication, such as your internet package, is paid for.



Left: Ralph Minott

Below: The New Garden Square scheme represents a sea change from the traditional architecture of residential property on the Calthorpe Estate

for the estate here, and an important environmental credential we are proud of for the project,” he says.

Furthermore, Minott's hope is that within a few years Hagley Road will be less appealing for motorists, and a beacon of public transport travel, with the aim for SPRINT Rapid Bus addition, ultimately the extension of the Metro, and with these, a reduction of car lanes, offering safe cycle and pedestrian ways alongside.

This realisation will promote the living development opportunities along Hagley Road, and would be the consequence of intensive collaboration between the city council, Transport for the West Midlands and the estate.

Working with public bodies such as these is an important part of Minott's role and the Calthorpe Estate long-term strategy. As he says: “It is important we understand the city's needs and vision for growth.”

Housing growth and the long-term demand for new homes are the overriding issue for the city. Calthorpe Estates' land cover, ownership, and control across the 1,600 acres of Edgbaston offers an assurance of prospects and possibilities for future homes long into the future, such as New Garden Square, quite unlike anywhere else in the region, explains Minott.

“The great thing is we know we can deliver – and that we can turn a vision into reality in a way which others can't,” says Minott. “That's what the estate has been about for the last 200 years really.”

It's worth noting Calthorpe's rich and varied history. After what was then some 2,000 acres of land was bought by a



London businessman called Sir Richard Gough in 1717, it remained in agricultural use for the first 100 years. However, by the early 1800s it became apparent that it was perfectly placed for residential development and it's fair to say that the 19th century – and the first half of the 20th – represented its heyday as one of the great residential estates in any major city.

It wasn't until the 1950s that it took a more commercial turn when the architect John Madin submitted a masterplan proposal for the whole estate, with intensive commercialisation around Fiveways, which was accepted by the city planners.

That marked the start of the commercial district on the fringes of the estate closest to the city centre. The easternmost stretch of Hagley Road was to change in purpose and character for the next few decades, attracting blue-chip names such as Sun Alliance, HSBC, the AA, Prudential and government ministries into prominent office blocks.

This coincided with a statutory ruling which would force the estate to look at its residential portfolio in a different light. The introduction of a parliamentary act in 1967 – the Leasehold Reform Act – gave owners of houses with long leases the right to purchase the freehold from the estate.

Ever since, thousands of houses have gained the legal right to buy their freehold, although in parallel under the act the estate, as with many others across the country, secured a landowner's management scheme. From this Calthorpe oversees and manages the enduring maintenance, quality and character of the estate.

Calthorpe was forced to look for other

opportunities – and the focus moved to the commercial property portfolio. Many of the buildings on the estate used for office, retail, medical and hospitality were historically residential properties repurposed for commercial use.

Now though, the pendulum has swung back in favour of residential – both answering the call of the city and reflecting the commercial tenancy levels which started to dwindle at the start of the 21st century.

The likes of Zurich and HSBC have since moved to the city centre, and using these vacated buildings as case studies, the former is being marketed for redevelopment into a residential apartment block while the HSBC site has planning consent for student accommodation and a hotel.

There are parameters which the estate won't go beyond though: yes, the estate needs to reflect the societal requirements of the 21st century and beyond, but only whilst retaining the character and heritage of this extraordinary mixed-use estate.

And Minott admits that there was a reluctance in his first decade working at Calthorpe Estate to talk about residential on sites which had become commercial in the post John Madin masterplan era, due to the Land Reform enfranchisement implications. Now the estate is happy to consider residential development opportunities through a thorough process.

When asked how the guidelines are created, he points to the leadership of the estate's chief executive, Haydn Cooper, who since joining in 2020, highlighted the big appetite in the major cities for this new wave of residential. While he suggested this was something Calthorpe

could embrace, it was also important to acknowledge that some areas would be more relaxed than others when assessing residential schemes.

So he put forward a zonal system for the land use in varying parts of the estate, which would initiate consideration of residential opportunities.

Minott explains: "Zone 1 north would principally be the heart of the estate and never at risk of enfranchisement. This is the land moving from Fiveways, past the estate office to the Vicarage/Monument junction, a key transport node in the city highways strategy, and then south down and including the Botanical Gardens, an imperious asset to the estate and the city.

"Zone 1 south encompasses another area of special use significance covering the land of the Priory tennis club and hospital, Pebble Mill, Tally Ho and their environs, classified in the city's Future City Vision (OFC) as the River Rea growth corridor. Again, there would never be any risk to the ultimate title in these locations.

"Zone 2 is more scattered, largely extending out from Zone 1. New Garden Square sits within it, but also includes sites which have suffered decades of dereliction by leaseholders such as Five Ways Tower. These would still largely remain a leaseholder approach, but allowing a greater percentage – 75 per cent – of residential to be considered, with the chief executive's ultimate approval.

"Everywhere where residential is already long established is typically Zone 3.

"For me, creating this measured focus on opportunities for a change in land use was exceptional. This offers the city a more open view of how the estate is able to respond to the growth ambitions of the region long term.

"When you bear in mind that not only did Calthorpe create some three million square feet of offices on the estate since the 1950s, but the landlords who had long leases on those plots were typically blue-chip funds, and so a decision to repurpose land and leases of such value was and is truly visionary."

What then of the future?

In the short to medium term, there are several buildings in Zone 2 which are destined for redevelopment, though not solely for residential. Some are for professionals, some for students. Many have the medical profession in mind, an important and distinct offer on the estate – remembering the proximity of the Queen Elizabeth Hospital on land given by Calthorpe – while others might be earmarked for hospitality, and Edgbaston Village and properties around Greenfield Crescent bear testament to this.

In decades and centuries to come, the land's uses might well have altered again and again to meet the needs of this most prized part of Birmingham, but always keeping pace with modern living.

This is what Calthorpe does – and this is what it has to do.



Navigating the UK's housing crisis

By JOANNA LEE-MILLS
Shakespeare Martineau



As the UK prepares for a highly anticipated general election, the country's ongoing housing crisis has emerged as a central issue for voters and political parties alike. Promises of sweeping housing policy reforms have been a mainstay of campaign promises, with each party vying to present the most comprehensive solutions to address the nation's affordable housing shortage.

Against this backdrop, the struggle for accessible and sustainable homes in Birmingham, the UK's second-largest city, has taken on even greater urgency. The city faces a shortfall of over 30,000 affordable homes as of April 2024, a figure that has steadily risen over the past decade, driven by a combination of factors, including skyrocketing property prices, a lack of new housing development, and the lingering effects of the pandemic on the construction industry.

The average house price in Birmingham now stands at £275,000, up from £220,000 just five years ago. This represents a staggering 25% increase, far outpacing the 17% rise observed across the West Midlands region as a whole. Rental costs have also surged, with the average monthly rent for a two-bedroom property in the city reaching £950, an increase of nearly 20% since 2019.

These soaring costs have put home ownership out of reach for many Birmingham residents, particularly those on lower and middle incomes. The city's median annual household income is £32,500, meaning that the average house price is now over eight times the typical family's earnings. This has led to a significant increase in the demand for affordable and social housing options.

Unfortunately, the supply has not kept pace with this growing need. Birmingham City Council's housing development programme has faced numerous challenges, including funding shortfalls, planning delays, and the effects of the pandemic on housing delivery. In the 2023-2024 financial year, the council completed just 850 new affordable homes, falling well short of its annual target of 1,500.

*Deputy head for the Birmingham office of national law firm Shakespeare Martineau, Joanna Lee-Mills also heads up the social housing development team. Her expertise encompasses advising on social housing development transactions, from site assemblies to larger scale phased sales and purchases.

Housing associations, which play a crucial role in providing social housing, have also struggled to keep up with demand. According to the National Housing Federation, the Birmingham region's housing associations collectively completed just 1,200 new affordable homes in 2023, a 15% decrease from the previous year.

Alongside the need for more family-sized affordable homes, the city must also consider the unique requirements of its ageing population. Birmingham's over-65 population is projected to grow by 20% over the next decade, underscoring the importance of incorporating suitable retirement living options into the overall affordable housing strategy.

To address these challenges, Birmingham City Council, housing developers, and housing associations must work together to unlock new solutions. One key priority is to explore a wider range of tenure options, including shared ownership, community land trusts, and cooperative housing models. These alternative approaches can help bridge the gap between traditional social housing and full home ownership, providing more pathways to affordable, secure living.

Critically, increasing funding for new affordable housing schemes must also be a top priority. Birmingham City Council has called for greater investment from the national government, as well as more flexible funding mechanisms that can better adapt to local market conditions. Housing associations, too, will require additional resources and support to scale up their development efforts. For the ageing population, we have a need to focus on accessible, energy-efficient homes, as well as integrated care and support services to enable older adults to live independently for longer.

There is call for a more creative approach. Imposing specific targets, such as the completion of 2,000 new affordable homes annually by 2026, supported by the establishment of, say, a £100 million Birmingham Affordable Homes Fund would present as first steps to overcome some

of the current hurdles. Innovative financing solutions, such as municipal bonds and land value capture mechanisms, could also help unlock the necessary resources.

Additionally, streamlining planning and approval processes, while incentivising private developers to enable affordable units to become more viable in their projects, could accelerate the delivery of new homes. Upskilling and supporting the local construction workforce would also be crucial to ensuring that the supply of affordable housing can keep pace with demand.

Finally, a renewed focus on sustainable, energy-efficient housing will be essential. The UK's commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 means that new affordable homes must be designed and built to the highest environmental standards, helping to reduce residents' energy costs and the city's overall carbon footprint.

This could include incorporating renewable energy sources, water conservation features, and passive design elements to create homes that are not only affordable, but also environmentally responsible. Ensuring equitable access to these sustainable homes, particularly for underserved communities, would be a critical component of this effort.

As the UK prepares to usher in a new government, the housing crisis in Birmingham and across the country will undoubtedly be a key priority for voters and policymakers alike. The decisions made by the incoming administration will have far-reaching implications for the future of affordable housing in the city and beyond.

Birmingham City Council, housing developers, and associations must work in tandem to implement a comprehensive strategy that addresses the multifaceted challenges facing the city.

By embracing innovative solutions, securing adequate funding, and prioritising both affordability and sustainability, they can strive to ensure that everyone in Birmingham has access to a safe, secure, and environmentally conscious place to call home.



A CGI image of the next New Garden Square phase in for planning, Block D



University acquires space at Baskerville House

One of Birmingham's landmark buildings is set to form part of a university campus.

University College Birmingham will be acquiring 45,000 square feet of space at the Grade II listed Baskerville House in Centenary Square.

It plans to locate its student support and student employability services in the building. These include a library and quiet learning spaces, and several professional services functions.

As part of the investment, the university will also establish a meetings and events space to support local businesses, employers and industry partners in the heart of the city.

The university has grown significantly over the last three years, through curriculum development and diversification, and a key priority in its plans for growth has been enhancing the student experience with facilities that can better prepare learners for their future careers, while ensuring employers benefit from graduates who can transition from training to the workplace with ease.

Vice chancellor and principal professor Michael Harkin said: "The university has a proud history of investing in the city centre

to provide first class buildings and facilities for students, with close to £200 million spent in the last 10 years.

"Working with our partners, we are committed to providing excellent opportunities for students and for stakeholders in the region, and our most recent investments and newly announced plans for further expansion reinforce this commitment.

"Most recently, in December 2023, we completed a £23 million redevelopment of the former James Cond printworks, to create the Centre for Sustainable Construction and have enrolled over 400 construction students to establish what is already our biggest Further Education Department. Our brand new £6 million sixth form centre development in our Camden House building is now complete, and we look forward to welcoming our first cohort of sixth formers in September 2024.

"Despite the freeze on undergraduate tuition fees for over six years and huge economic pressures, we have achieved our development aspirations in a cost effective and secure manner, without the need for external financial investment."

New lead at Avison Young

Commercial real estate firm Avison Young has announced the appointment of David Martin (pictured) as interim regional managing director for Birmingham – taking over from Carl Potter who has led the Birmingham office since 2018.

Prior to taking up his new role, Mr Martin spent 18 years as a principal in Avison Young's building and project consultancy division, leading a multi-disciplinary team of building surveyors, quantity surveyors, project managers and services consultants, and working across a range of projects for both public and private sector clients.

His extensive career – which also includes 12 years as a partner with King Sturge – has seen him advising high-profile clients on major acquisitions, ensuring that assets meet commercial needs, and delivering schemes providing considerable value to clients, occupiers, and communities.

"Having worked at Avison Young for many years, I'm delighted to be stepping up to lead the Birmingham office," said Mr Martin.

"At a national level, we're going through a period of growth, and this is mirrored regionally.

"The diversified economy of the West Midlands provides us with fertile ground to build from to supercharge the growth of the region – and I'm looking forward to working with the team to enhance collaboration and maximise the work and impact of our people to achieve that goal."



Demand for high-end workspace continues

A two-tier market is emerging in Birmingham's flexible office sector, according to new research from CBRE.

The property consultancy's latest Flex Market Update shows a gulf in occupier levels between higher priced, best-in-class space in the city – which is 85% to 100% full – compared to 'no frills' operations with fewer amenities, where voids are between 35% and 55%.

The gap is also reflected in rents, with entry level costs now at £100 per sq ft compared to top rates of £155 per sq ft.

According to Dan White, CBRE head of flex Midlands & South, demand remains highest at the quality end of the market.

He said: "High-end workspace with hotel-like amenities and excellent customer service from in-house teams are key requirements as businesses look to their space to drive employee engagement.

"Current asks include larger break-out spaces, areas dedicated to different types of work – from informal meeting and drop-in spaces to conferencing facilities, club/bar space, and gyms. Good coffee is now a given."

While enquiries at the close of 2023 remained buoyant, 22,000 sq ft of flex space was transacted by CBRE's Midlands and South flex team in the first six weeks of 2024 alone.



David White

Retention rates are also increasing. Sixty per cent of occupiers placed in flex space by CBRE in 2022 re-signed for 2023. Average initial terms and transaction sizes in Birmingham are similarly rising, now at 15 months and 2,500 sq ft respectively. Average occupancy across the city is now 85%.

As a result, interest from operators looking for space in the city remains keen, said Mr White.

Whilst operators initially played it safe,

opting for city centre offerings, success beyond the central business district is now proven. At Brindleyplace, Spacemade's 10X is now fully occupied, while x+why scored the largest flex letting outside London at Foundry, in Q3 2023.

Mr White said: "Whilst flex occupiers may be prepared to look in a more diverse range of locations, they are sticking to their guns when it comes to quality. Operators who can deliver this can be confident of selling desks."

Cash boost for children's hospital

A children's hospital in Birmingham has received a cash boost of over £12,300 over the course of six years of fundraising, thanks to charity events held by the team at Persimmon Homes Central.

Birmingham Children's Hospital is a leading specialist paediatric centre, caring for sick children and young people up to the age of 16.

Members of the Birmingham-based team have taken part in a number of events in the past six years, including dress-down Fridays and the sponsorship of the wards at the hospital during Christmas time.

Neil Williams, managing director at Persimmon Homes Central, said: "At Persimmon, we encourage our team to raise funds for causes close to their hearts and it's great to know that our fundraising efforts throughout the past six years have been able to raise a significant amount for such a worthy regional cause."



Council reappoints Bonde Wolfe

Bond Wolfe has been reappointed by Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to sell the council's redundant and surplus property assets after a public tender process.

The West Bromwich-based property auctioneer was first appointed by Sandwell in May 2021, but the team driving the auction business has worked with the council for over 19 years.

Gurpreet Bassi, chief executive of Bond Wolfe, said: "Our team has been responsible for submitting and winning every contract to act for them over this time.

"We will be selling their surplus property assets – anything from vacant residential properties and old office blocks, to schools and development sites with or without planning permission."

Bond Wolfe will also be instructed to sell properties via Sandwell's empty homes scheme, if properties have been sitting empty for a prolonged period.

The company recently successfully retained the contract for Birmingham City Council following a public tender.

Mr Bassi added: "We continue to work closely in partnership with our colleagues at Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council to assist in identifying assets with value that can best be realised via the auctions process, producing a result, one way or another, on the day.



Gurpreet Bassi

"This provides transparency and is another step in helping the city to develop under-used assets into council tax revenue producing properties via the private sector, at no further cost to the taxpayer."

He said that Bond Wolfe's historical connections to Sandwell were also a factor in their success.

"We are proud of our Black Country roots and what we bring to the community," said Mr Bassi.

"Our staff are ingrained in and passionate about the region, and gain a sense of achievement seeing the opportunities that the properties we sell bring to the area and in helping to shape the future landscape."

Celebrating a record year

Property consultancy Vail Williams, which has an office in Birmingham, has reported its best-ever financial year, with revenues of £18.3 million for 2022-23.

This represented a 5% increase over the previous financial year, and included the highest grossing single quarter since 1988 when the firm was founded.

Managing partner Matthew Samuel-Camps said: "What is absolutely clear is that once again we have had our best-ever year as we continued to increase our fee income and outperform previous years.

"We have seen an excellent collegiate performance. We increased our team numbers, productivity improved, we did a lot more multi-disciplinary work and we continued to serve high-quality clients across a range of sectors. We continued to advance our expertise, our client base and the type of work undertaken.

"The agency team continued its strong

performance from the previous year, our planners made significant inroads and grew our offering, while the building consultancy and restructured property asset management teams pushed ahead on all fronts."



Matthew Samuel-Camps

■ Touchwood Solihull has announced it is expanding its retail offering with the opening of fashion, jewellery, and homeware store, Oliver Bonas.

This will be the brand's fourth store in the West Midlands, and its first location in Solihull. Oliver Bonas is an independent British lifestyle brand that sells a range of fashion, homeware and accessories, including jewellery, bags, shoes and more.

Tony Elvin, general manager of Touchwood, said: "We are so pleased to welcome Oliver Bonas to Touchwood, as we continue to evolve and expand our retail and leisure offering.

"This new store opening emphasises our commitment to offering a diverse mix of shops and restaurants at Touchwood, and we look forward to welcoming guests to Oliver Bonas soon."

Launch celebration



More than 40 guests including many prominent business and community figures were invited to Simpson's Restaurant for an exclusive event held by Moda Living to celebrate the launch of their latest development, Loudon's Yard. Guests indulged in a three-course tasting menu whilst enjoying talks from the Moda team and Paul Collins from Smoke & Ash.



Lucy Kemp

Hannah Smith, Skye Round, Tom White, Sophie Clews, Maise Violet Rees, Emily Carey, Richard O'Gorman and Ian Russell

Right: Galina Thomas, Gareth Thomas, Jonathan Cox and Sammy Bromwich



Below: Maise Violet Rees, Emily Carey, Richard O'Gorman and Ian Russell



Jessica Lazzari and Nadine Hannelore

Joining forces with tile manufacturer



The UK's longest-operating manufacturer, supplier and importer of ceramic tiles has joined forces with Aston University in a management knowledge transfer partnership.

Shropshire-based Craven Dunnill, which has been in business for over 150 years, has a large and complex supply chain, both of finished tiles and of the raw materials for manufacturing.

Craven Dunnill wants to fully streamline and digitise its processes and practices, including ordering, purchasing, stock and warehouse management, as well as delivery planning and sales tracking. It would also see the company's different business divisions integrated.

A KTP is a three-way collaboration between a business, an academic partner and a highly qualified researcher, known as a KTP associate. An mKTP focuses specifically on increasing effectiveness and improving results through better management practices.

The company is working with Aston University's Professor Ben Clegg and Dr Gajanan Panchal from Aston Business School.

Professor Clegg, a professor of

operations management, has pioneered a successful methodology called 'process oriented holonic modelling', a way of engaging employees in organisational change using systems modelling and storyboarding, that will be used to help Craven Dunnill's employees to guide and implement new processes.

Dr Panchal specialises in logistics and supply chain management, including warehouse management and optimisation. He uses a variety of approaches to comprehend and analyse problems with warehousing operations.

Completing the team in the KTP associate position is Dr Olanrewaju Sanda, who, working closely with management and the Aston University team, will digitalise operational systems.

Simon Howells, CEO of Craven Dunnill, said: "Although the mKTP is for two years, we don't see it as a finite project. It will improve our pace of change and our developmental dynamism.

"Our supply chains and processes are complex, and we know getting the best advice and expertise is going to be really crucial for the long-term growth of the company."

Business leader takes on role of pro-chancellor

Business leader Dr Matthew Crummack has been appointed by Aston University as its new pro-chancellor and chair of the University Council.

The pro-chancellor plays a major role in the oversight of the university governance and the management of the University Council and its committees.

Dr Crummack is the chief executive officer of Domestic & General Group. Previously his career has involved senior leadership roles in global companies such as GoCompare, lastminute.com, Expedia, Nestlé and Procter & Gamble.

He has been a member of the University Council since 2021 and is an alumnus and visiting professor in the College of Business and Social Sciences at Aston University. He graduated from Aston University with a BSc in international business and modern languages in 1993 and in 2016 was made an honorary doctor of science by the university.

Dr Crummack will replace Dame Yve Buckland, who has held office since 2017.

Vice-chancellor and chief executive, Professor Aleks Subic, said: "Matthew has been an outstanding supporter of the university for many years, and I am looking forward to working with him and drawing on his considerable business expertise as



we continue to implement our new Aston 2030 Strategy.

"I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge Dame Yve's leadership of the University Council over the last seven years.

"She has been a passionate supporter of the university, bringing her considerable experience of governance and leadership to the work of the board and its committees.

"Her selfless commitment to the role and wise counsel have been invaluable and I am grateful for her support in the development of the 2030 Strategy."

■ A spin-out company from Aston University's pharmaceuticals research group has been shortlisted for a life sciences industry award.

The Medilink Midlands Awards aim to showcase the very best collaborations between industry, academia and the NHS across the Midlands.

The company, MESOX, founded by Dr Ali Al-Khattawi, a lecturer in pharmaceuticals at Aston Pharmacy School, is competing in the start-up category for newly established companies that show a promising future.

With expertise in particle engineering for drug delivery and pharmaceutical spray drying, MESOX uses IP-protected carriers to improve the bioavailability and efficacy of pharmaceuticals, partnering with pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies to bring challenging therapeutics to market.

Dr Ali Al-Khattawi said: "We are excited to be nominated as a finalist for this award, which is a testament to the innovative research at Aston University that has led to MESOX and a great way to recognise the efforts of our team.

"MESOX is expediting the development of life-saving therapeutics through cutting-edge carrier technologies. Our vision is to be a leading research-based pharmaceutical company in the Midlands one day and we hope this opportunity brings us a step closer to this goal."

Why I launched the Black Talent Awards

It's time to change the negative narratives around black underachievement with awards that celebrate relatable role models, says DENISE MYERS

Whenever I am asked why I established a careers award that specifically celebrates black talent, I am always transported to my early adolescence when the inspiration for my career in recruitment started. But this is no fairy tale.

Like many people from marginalised backgrounds who have gone on to forge lives very different from the one from which they came, I channelled negative experiences into positive energy that fuelled my path towards a destiny few thought I could achieve.

Like any typical teenager, I fancied myself as a singer and dancer. But I also wanted to be a social worker. I loved the idea of helping people turn their lives around. But my class tutor said I had to lower my sights and strive for something more 'achievable' – like a job at the local factory.

The tutor's feedback didn't dampen my dreams but it did make me more determined to prove him wrong. From that point onwards I vowed that I would never allow anyone to define who I was or what I was capable of.

Undoubtedly, unconscious biases around the abilities and aptitudes of children of particular colour and class, like myself, play out in schools all the time, with some teachers inadvertently putting a glass ceiling on young aspirations, perhaps to save them from future disappointment. Of course, mine is just a personal anecdote but you don't have to search very far to find data that corroborates the experience. Black children in developed countries like the UK are widely expected to fail. And because no one believes in them they, in turn, don't believe in themselves.

I have since considered all the other countless students, past and present, who did not or will not pursue a particular career

path because they were discouraged or told they didn't have the ability by teachers, peers or other significant figures. I have spent all of my professional life rallying against such barriers set by those who inadvertently believe that I should 'know my place'.

There have been many instances in my life where this has been a message relayed to me, either covertly or overtly. Today, I run two successful recruitment businesses and a community group that helps young black people manage their job search, engendering them with a confident and resilient mindset that empowers them to plan and pursue ambitious careers in what is often an intimidating and hostile process.

Addressing employment inequities doesn't stop at helping young disadvantaged prospects from entering professions. The whole ecosystem needs addressing. Employers need support to become more inclusive organisations by having access to a diverse talent pool. They must

also have measures in place to ensure talent from marginalised backgrounds can progress successfully in careers within their business. Becoming a genuinely fair employer means constantly reappraising diversity, equity and inclusion efforts; staying honest and curious about what is and isn't working, and leaning into, often, difficult debate. Real change comes from uncomfortable places.

Whilst I help corporates navigate this journey, my biggest challenge is in addressing the negative mindset that often prevents young black people from believing in themselves and going for jobs that they are more than capable of doing.

The problem is that there is a huge relatable role model deficit. The typical



entrepreneurs or role models that are heralded do not look, sound like or come from the same worlds as the people I represent. Very often, such role models are white, mainly male and privately educated. Of course, success came to them because they held something exceptional – a talent or an innovative idea. But they also had favourable circumstances that enabled them to flourish and, most importantly, harness a can-do mindset.

I felt that the homogenous narratives of success needed diversification. Young black talent need to see role models that are relatable; who are succeeding on terms they can identify with.

I launched The Black Talent Awards in 2022, with the valuable backing of Merlin Entertainments, Serco, Haleon and EDF Renewables UK to do precisely that. Last year's winners included a headteacher who transformed a failing London state school in a deprived area into an Ofsted 'Outstanding'.

Just as Black History Month provides an important opportunity to foster appreciation and understanding of black heritage and culture in our society, awards that celebrate black talent acknowledge the achievements of remarkable individuals who have succeeded in a world where the playing field still remains stubbornly sloped against them.

We are too used to consuming a diet of negative narratives around black underachievement. It's time to celebrate the feats of those who have triumphed over adversity to demonstrate what is possible.

*Denise Myers is CEO of recruitment firm Evenfields and founder of the Black Talent Awards.



Anniversary celebration

social



Juree and Torquil Chidwick



Andrew Fox, Louise Brown, Suzanne Virdee and Andy Brown



Laura Forde, Ellie Beattie, Taylor Duffy and Debbie Murray



Emma Howden, Charlotte Harriman and Karl Harriman

Left: Juree Chidwick, Kavita Parmar, Anita Champaneri and Jas Rohel



Local personalities and members of the media were among the guests who gathered at Sabai Sabai in Solihull to celebrate the Thai restaurant's first year in business.

Owners Torquil and Juree Chidwick treated guests to cocktails and canapes, as well as Thai green curry and coconut pandan cake desserts.

A raffle on the night raised £400 for charity Kids' Village – the UK's first respite holiday village for children with critical illness.

Above: Anouk Horrevorts and Tom Cullinan

A MAN OF MANY PARTS

profile

In the second instalment in our series looking at prominent business figures who give considerable support to some of the region's remarkable charities, JON GRIFFIN meets the inimitable Paul Cadman – entrepreneur, collaborator, serial NED and Brummie to his core.

Paul Cadman – a former Brummie of the Year and a figure once described as the “best connected man in Birmingham” – is in typically bullish mood in a bar in St Paul’s Square as he reflects on his life to date.

“I earn well, people seem to want to pay me a decent amount of money. But that is not my measure of success, and it never has been.

“I have never been financially motivated. I don’t want to make money, I want to make a difference. Do I want to sit and think I have just put a deal over the line for £10,000 or £50,000, or do I think I have just changed somebody’s life?

“What is the reward for me? It is changing somebody’s life. What is your measure of success in life? Is it a big house, a big car and loads of money in the bank? That is not mine.”

Cadman may point with pride to his LinkedIn biography listing a clutch of awards and executive roles in business and the charity sector over several decades – but you suspect, at heart, he’s a dyed-in-the-wool Brummie whose down-to-earth demeanour belies a razor-sharp business brain.

That streetwise acumen and steely determination to succeed in life was originally forged on the uncompromising back streets of inner-city Birmingham back in the sixties, growing up with his sister Deborah – who recently stood



Cadman in the fire service

down as chief executive of Birmingham City Council – and two brothers in Bordesley Green.

“It was a back-to-back house, we didn’t have a garden, we would be playing around in a nearby scrapyard and wandering off dusk till dawn without a care in the world,” he remembers.

“We used to walk across the railway line to get into the Blues. We were like the Railway Children creeping through the fence into the ground.”

Cadman, whose illustrious CV now boasts a professor’s mantle to add lustre to his various business boardroom successes, admits he was “awful academically” at school.

“Now I am a doctorate and professor with two universities, so you could say I have turned it around quite well. But at school I used to get caned every day – I couldn’t read or write and I really struggled.

“The teachers used to give me a hard time because I was quite rebellious, quite a difficult kid. I remember being expelled from school for almost the final time, my dad being brought out of work and dragging me up the road into a boxing gym.”

Sport would prove a saviour for the junior Cadman – who learnt to box and later played rugby to a high standard – and put him on a more positive trajectory in life. But by now he was adapting to life with dyslexia – by turning the condition to his own advantage.

“I remember words,” he explains. “I have got an exceptionally good memory. That thinking ahead mindset is why I have done so well in business. My dyslexia is the biggest gift I have ever had in my life – it has made me the person I am.”

The adolescent Cadman found a new purpose in the boxing ring and in martial arts, while at the same time cutting his teenage working teeth helping out at Birmingham Meat and Fish Market.



With mayor Andy Street and street artist Gent, in front of the artwork for Art4Charity

“I was working 12-hour days at 12 or 13 years of age. You get to meet people, you understand how Birmingham works, how commerce works. That was where I got my education, working there, getting to know the underbelly of the city.”

Undeterred by his lack of academic success, Cadman trained at the Birmingham College of Food, qualifying as a chef and landing a job at the city’s plush Swallow Hotel in Edgbaston.

After 12 months at the Swallow he switched roles again, finding a long-running career niche with the fire service, where he clocked up 20 years.

“I worked at various different places – Erdington, Ward End . . . I loved it but I got to the point in 2005, am I going to do this for another 10 years or am I going to do something else?

“I was in the fire service for 20 years but I was always doing different things with different businesses. I got offered a job to go and work for the Bibby Line Group, a billion-pound global organisation. I went in there as a middle-management head of legal and ended up on the main board looking after their mergers and acquisitions. I spent £300-odd million on different companies and eventually came out of that.”

Ever on the lookout for new business opportunities, Cadman was approached by Black Country car design firm Futura, where he was hired to write a new corporate strategy which boosted

“Nobody actually knows what I do for a living because I do that many different things, but what everybody does know is that I am charity or third-sector minded and want to make a difference – everybody does understand that.”



Cadman received the Brummie of the Year award in 2021

turnover from £16 million to £40 million over five years.

“We put them on the map . . . it was after that that I was thinking I don’t want to work for anybody else,” he says.

That decision to veer away from executive employment into a life combining part-time boardroom roles with high-level charitable appointments would further raise the Cadman profile in the West Midlands and beyond – and enhance his reputation in the region’s charity sector. In due course, his charity work would grow to encompass 50 per cent of his packed business schedule.

“Nobody actually knows what I do for a living because I do that many different things, but what everybody does know is that I am charity or third-sector minded and want to make a difference – everybody does understand that.”

And Cadman is at his most animated when he reels off the string of charities across the West Midlands who have engaged his services – and the invaluable work undertaken by his



Paul Cadman with Jean Templeton, CEO of St Basils on the left, and Abigail Vlahakis, CEO of Millennium Point, for a charity sleepout

colleagues in the sector.

"I am chief executive of Steps to Work, a £22 million charity which puts around a thousand people a year into work. It's been going for 25 years – the team there have got a tough gig.

"We had a guy we have been working with who hadn't left his house for years. His wife died, he was on his own, he had some form of breakdown. We took him to his gate, we took him shopping, and now he has a job and is working.

"We have put over 25,000 people into jobs and that has changed generations. Generations of lives have improved because of the stuff we do.

"I have been around Acorns children's charity for about 20 years, and I am vice-president. I am a board member of St Basils, a 50-year-old charity for the homeless. When I was in the market you would see homeless people so I was pretty attuned to what was going on.

"We help thousands of kids. I am hugely passionate about that, but with the cuts from the council we are possibly going to lose £1.5 million. We are going to get that sorted. If we do not give them the money there are going to be maybe 1,000 kids that do not go through our dedicated care and guidance – and they are going to go to bad."

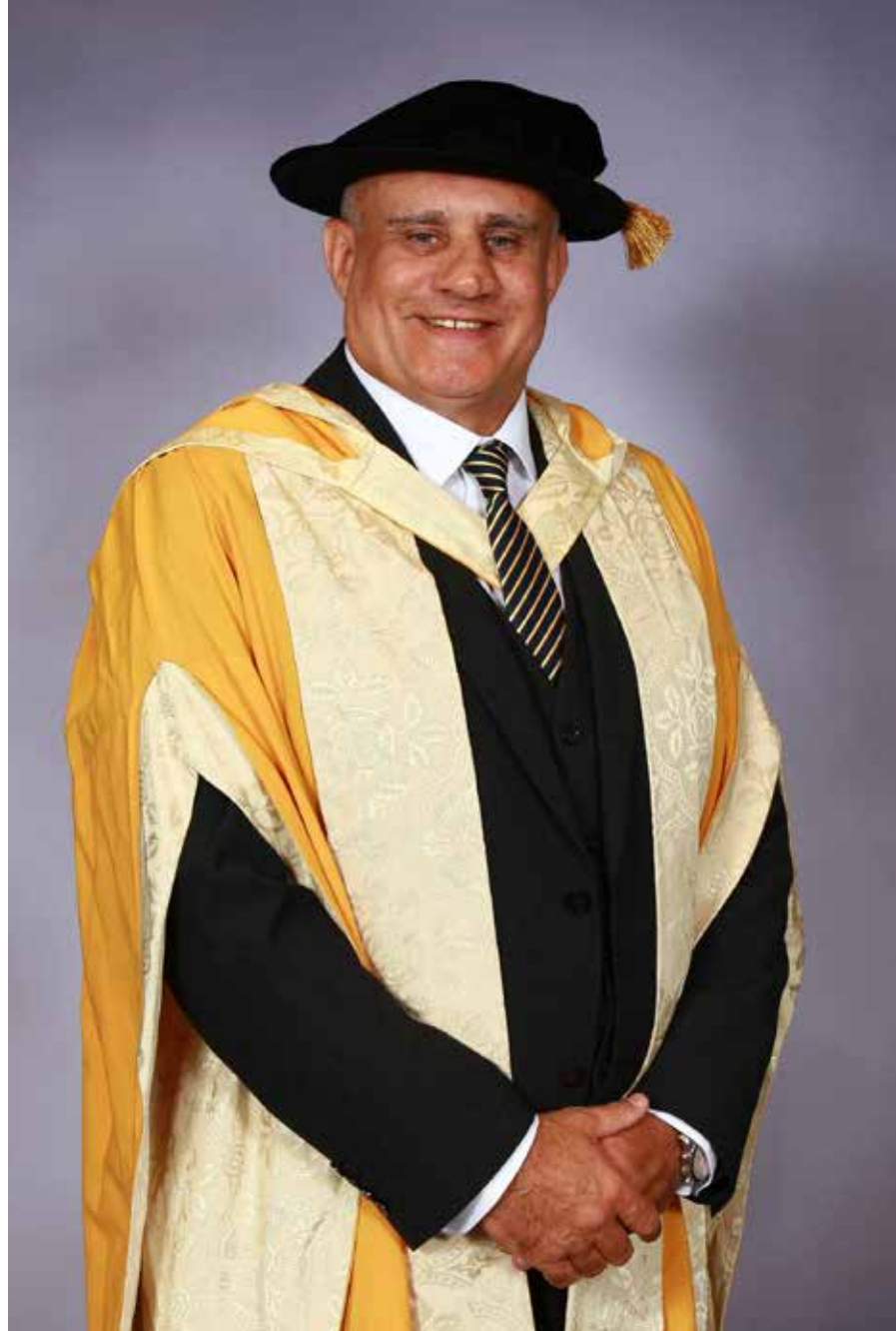
Cadman is also fiercely proud of his work chairing the Birmingham Youth Sports Academy, which delivers sports sessions for thousands of the city's inner-city youngsters from areas such as Bordesley Green, Alum Rock, Small Heath and elsewhere.

"They started off in parks with cones, now we have got thousands of kids playing grass-roots football, kids who don't get a meal, don't get anything. They all turn up looking for a game – we give them kits and food.

"BYSA is 20 years old. Our first kids are now doctors or lawyers, or flying planes or accountants, originally from places like Small Heath or Nechells with few opportunities or aspirations. We are giving them opportunities and aspirations.

"If you look at BYSA everybody is given kit, everybody dresses the same. There is no hierarchy. When you have got thousands of kids wearing brand new sports kits and they all look the same, nobody is different and everybody comes together. That is great and very pleasing."

Around half a century or so after being written off by teachers as a no-hoper, the



Cadman receiving his honorary doctorate at Birmingham City University

latter-day Cadman is as passionate about his home city as he is about his various charity commitments.

"I am proud to be a Brummie, I am proud of the city, I am proud of the people. The people's mindset here is that they will naturally give back. I am not convinced that that happens as much in London, Liverpool or Newcastle as it does in Birmingham."

Cadman is also proud of his seven-days-a-week work ethic, insisting that it's an essential element of his character inherited from his parents, who both held down several jobs to help feed a family of four youngsters.

"I need a 100mph lifestyle. I always get people asking how can you focus on so many things? How can you be productive? But I can work 100 hours a week or something ridiculous like that and just deliver stuff.

"If I watch two hours of TV a week that is all I watch. I don't go to the cinema, I don't read books. I listen to podcasts

when I am working.

"I work every day, and I am at an event every night – or two or three events every night."

For now, Cadman – whose latest business move is a new role with his beloved Blues helping the club's official charity, the Birmingham City FC Foundation – has no plans to slow down or reduce his overflowing diary of engagements.

"At some point I will buy a house in Barmouth overlooking the sea and just chill. But I have got no interest in slowing down. I still get one opportunity after another.

"When you win Brummie of the Year your profile goes up, people want to work and interact with you, and the more you can guide their goodwill to give back to the third sector, the better.

"To be able to intervene in people's lives and make a difference . . . I am never going to stop, am I? That is what gets me out of bed in the morning."



Why the Midlands region needed an economic forum

By NINDER JOHAL

With mayoral elections in both the East and West Midlands and a backdrop of a general election, 2024 will be a significant year for the Midlands region.

The region has always been seen as significant by government, when under the leadership of Sajid Javid the term The Midlands Engine was born.

The home of William Shakespeare, Rebecca Adlington, Wedgewood, Cadburys chocolate, the world heritage site Ironbridge, and the world-famous Black Country Museum, the region is the largest economic unit outside London.

Accounting for 22% of the UK's exports, with 75.4% of the region having access to gigabit broadband, with a growing med tech and life sciences sector underpinned by brilliant world class universities, the region has much to shout about.

But with a productivity gap of £86.3 billion, and 22.4% of the population inactive there are numerous challenges on the horizon.

Whilst there are great opportunities to address these opportunities and challenges there was not in my mind a forum to discuss these issues that involved a PAN region agenda.

Having organised awards nights in both the East and West Midlands over a number of years (the Signature Awards in Birmingham and the Nachural Entrepreneurship Awards in Leicester), it was blatantly obvious to me that whilst there were excellent gatherings in the east and west there was not one where both regions came to together to discuss the issues of the day around innovation, investment, levelling up, international trade and infrastructure.

The idea was born to hold an annual summit to see how we could as a region capitalise on the opportunities available and discuss how we could tackle the threats and weaknesses of the region both current and future.

The first question was, could we get together as a region and put our parochial views aside to tackle the issues together?

An attendance of over 500 people



confirmed that we could and with an 50/50 split between East and West Midlands attendees the event was a phenomenal success.

The Midlands Engine organisation set up in 2017 had shown that it was possible to act and partner across the region successfully whilst encouraging partnership and collaboration. They therefore were the obvious organisation to ask if they would like to be involved in this new summit.

The idea for the inaugural summit became reality last year when the first Midlands Economic Summit was staged in June at the Vox Conferencing Centre. With over 500 people in attendance, and a number of keynote speakers including Pat McFadden MP, Saqib Bhatti MP, Saul Resnick (CEO of DHL), Mike Owens (Schumacher Packaging), Jackie Wilde (Smartparc), Jessica Bowles (Bruntwood), Carmen Watson (Pertemps), Robert Franks (WM5G) and Paul Faulkner – the line up discussed all things innovation, investment, levelling up and sustainability.

The Midlands Economic Summit for 2024 will look to see where the globe economy is heading and the need to innovate in order to compete with increasing international competition. As a region we also need to look to encourage investment domestically and from foreign jurisdictions,

The excitement around AI and technology will be another theme that we will be looking to explore and with our partners WM5G, we will be looking at what

this means for business and the Midlands economy.

As we anticipate the announcement of the UK election, we will look issues around balancing the UK economy through the levelling up pledge for the current government. We will be hearing from the levelling up minister and for the first time we will be also hearing from the metro mayors of the East Midlands for the first time, and the West Midlands Metro mayor, on their views on devolution and what the future looks like for combined authorities.

With over 500 attending last year and with more expected this year, there is an obvious need to find a way for the region to navigate through what has been a very difficult 36 months and with global conflict an ever-increasing threat, the region needs to find a way to work together to capitalise on all the brilliant assets that it has. How can we increase the size of the economy, reduce inequalities, improve infrastructure (both digital and physical), and encourage investment?

We have much to boast about. We have an economy that is worth £252.6 billion (the size of Denmark), 20 world-class universities, 21 high-tech science parks and brilliant entrepreneurs creating world class businesses.

That alone is a good reason to attend the second Midlands Economic Summit where we can celebrate and network with great and good from the Midlands and beyond.

SPOTLIGHT ON



Family and owner managed businesses

In association with
MILLS & REEVE

Birmingham law firm on the move

The Birmingham office of a national law firm is continuing its growth trajectory by moving into new premises this summer.

Mills & Reeve is due to move into two floors in One Centenary Way – part of the Paradise development – in mid-June, having been based in Colmore Row for the last 18 years.

Jayne Hussey, the Birmingham head of office, said the move not only heralded an exciting new era for Mills & Reeve in the region, but also reflected the firm's focus on ESG.

"We are all very excited about the move," she said. "It represents a significant investment and a huge vote of confidence in Birmingham and the West Midlands region."

"The location of our new offices in One Centenary Way were chosen with care. Our decision to move there reflects our commitment to minimising our impact on the environment and recognising our responsibility for guardianship of the environment."

"It has been designed to be a modern, sustainable office for a purpose-led future."

Mills & Reeve has seen exponential growth since the Birmingham office started 25 years ago with five members of staff.

The workforce now stands at 330, a number Mrs Hussey expects to increase to more than 400 after an impending recruitment drive. Mills & Reeve also has ambitions to become one of the top four Birmingham law firms over the next few years.

One of the firm's key missions has been 'powering business' – supporting businesses of varying sizes across a wide variety of sectors.

"We are able to offer a full service covering all legal disciplines," she said.

"We have employment specialists, disputes specialists, supply chain contracting specialists, we have banking specialists for funding, corporate specialist for mergers and acquisitions, property specialists and so on – it's a one-stop shop."

"The lawyers here have expertise in individual industry sectors, particularly aligned to the growth areas in the West Midlands economy, such as tech, life and

health sciences, advanced manufacturing and education."

In terms of size, the majority of the firm's business clients have a turnover in excess of £10 million and go up in size to multi-national corporations which are listed on the FTSE 100.

In addition, Mills & Reeve has a long-standing tradition of acting for family and owner-managed businesses, said Mrs Hussey.

The firm's lawyers not only look after the business side of these organisations, but personal wealth specialists are also key to ensuring family members maximise opportunities available to them.

As well as powering businesses and building their future through focusing on ESG commitments, another key focus for the team is connecting communities.

This is based on the concept of business being a force for good; every

partner at Mills & Reeve makes a monthly contribution to the firm's charitable trust.

Mrs Hussey said: "Something we are extremely proud of is our engagement with secondary schools over topics such as employability and skills development."

"For instance, we do a lot of work with the George Dixon Academy in Smethwick, providing opportunities to pupils there which they might not otherwise have had access to."

"Our people have always been engaged in aiding the local region's causes, getting involved with volunteering and spreading awareness. As we grow, we hope to continue to contribute to this wonderful city for many years to come."

"I'm greatly proud of what we're able to achieve as an office for the community and am honoured to be the one at the head steering the firm in a new era in the city of Birmingham."



Paradise Birmingham commercial director Ross Fittall and Jayne Hussey

Wealth protection for business owners

FOMBS

Businesses and personal wealth are structured for all sorts of reasons – tax efficiency, succession, inheritance planning and of course relationship breakdown/divorce.

Finances in divorce are decided by statute (section 25 Matrimonial Causes Act 1973) and by the application of that statute to specific cases. The “section 25 factors” that a court should consider include length of marriage, ages, financial resources, earning capacity, housing needs, standard of living and contributions.

In 2000, the case of White ushered in a new dawn of equality in recognition of equal contributions to a marriage. Previously, a court would typically limit the claims of the “home maker” to what they needed to meet their reasonable requirements, while leaving the vast majority of assets (such as valuable businesses) with the “breadwinner”.

Society changes, and so too does the law. Sharing assets built up during the marriage equally now tends to be the starting point; and can be the end point, provided that the needs of both parties and any minor children are met. If needs are not met then there can be a departure from equality of marital assets and/or an invasion of the “non marital” assets to meet need.

But what happens when there has been a business built up on one side of the family over generations? Or where the



By KATHERINE KENNEDY
Partner, family law, Mills & Reeve

hard graft was undertaken by one party prior to the marriage?

Businesses may appear to be worth little in their infancy. However, a great product, an established management team and a good network can be valuable assets in themselves. A business owner may feel aggrieved to share any value they had generated before a relationship began.

The family court has wide ranging powers. Judges have complete discretion to reallocate assets, shares and interests in private companies. Business premises, directors' loan accounts, cash and income streams can all be “invaded” to achieve a “fair” outcome in matrimonial proceedings.

Business owners may consider the valuable wealth protection tools listed below:

Company structure and documentation

- Pre-emption rights/first refusal can increase the chances that spouses aren't given a shareholding. Company documentation can communicate to a judge that a transfer of shares in a divorce will not be accepted by fellow shareholders and will likely be unworkable.
- Consideration should be given to how shareholdings can be valued and approached. This may also support post-separation negotiations.
- Ensure that spouses or family members cannot create stalemate and block company progress pre- or post-settlement.
- Anti-competition provisions in shareholders agreements and employment contracts can prevent family members setting up on their own.

- Consider who should be an employee and/or shareholder and why - particularly family members. Aside from potentially tax efficient extraction of profits to family, do they need to be involved?
- Shares in a business can be held within a trust structure as a helpful layer of wealth protection.

Nuptial agreements

Nuptial agreements can be entered into before (Pre-Nup) or after (Post-Nup) marriage. Terms can include:

- Ringfencing the business from sharing
- Attributing value to one party's contribution to the business.
- Allowing income generated from business assets to be ringfenced; or ringfencing assets acquired from income.
- Stipulations around sharing a business built up during the marriage, excluding any pre-marriage or post-separation accrued value.
- Indemnities to ensure non-business owners are not affected by business dealings - eg. personal guarantees or tax liabilities.
- Having a business policy requiring all existing and incoming shareholders to have a pre-nup. This can protect the company and can make the conversation about entering into a pre-nup easier to address.

If the worst happens....

Think carefully about your approach when trying to resolve financial matters following a separation.

There are many options available and court should be considered a last resort. Fire tends to feed fire in our experience. Litigation may be appropriate for your circumstances, and an experienced family lawyer will be able to guide you on the range of possible outcomes. However, it can also generate unpredictable cost; both emotionally and financially. A negotiated outcome allows certainty and you can structure an outcome a court may not impose.

Negotiations can be facilitated by lawyers or within a mediation forum or by using a collaborative law approach.

With the correct approach it's possible to safeguard the business and reach a negotiated deal in a reasonable timeframe. The focus should be allowing the entrepreneur/owner to concentrate their energies on building a thriving business.



By HAYLEY SIMONDS
Principal associate, corporate finance and company law specialist, Mills & Reeve

Successful business owners tend to have a natural appetite for taking risk, and while they'll be alive to commercial risks that impact their business, they often don't give much thought to the risk of falling out with their fellow business owners or family.

Often, it's only when these business owners experience such situations, or see someone else they know face them, that they appreciate the real value in planning for the “what ifs” that can have a material impact on their business.

So how can you protect a business?

Legal documents won't prevent a fall out, but they can reduce its impact on the business in two important ways:

1. Discussing what would happen “if” can help to identify potential issues before they escalate into a problem
 2. If a problem does arise, the method of solving the problem is already set out
- It's much easier to agree the solution before the problem arises.

The potential ‘what ifs’

Typical issues that can arise include:

- A falling out between shareholders or board members.
- A shareholder who wants to exit, such that the business might need to find cash to fund the exit.
- Divorce of a shareholder which, at the very least, can be a big distraction for the business but can also require financial settlements or share transfers to be made.
- Disagreements on the direction of the business.
- Disagreements over the distribution policy.

Protecting your business from ‘what ifs’

- Arguments over succession of ownership or board appointments.
- Involvement of family members – do family members have a right to employment or shares in the business?

Solutions will vary on the circumstances, but the impact of these issues can be addressed through a combination of a family charter, shareholders' agreement and bespoke articles of association. These documents are not always all needed, but each can have a role to play.

A family charter is a document that sets out the relationship a family has within its business and sometimes more widely with their family wealth. It's a private document and is often not legally binding, as it covers principals rather than legal obligations. Shareholders and wider family members may be parties to a family charter and it will cover topics including:

- The family's long-term ambitions for the business
- The family's engagement with the business
- How a family will interact with the business
- Share ownership

A family charter can be useful for large family-owned businesses or businesses where a family has a material stake. It provides clarity for all the family on what's expected of them and what they can expect from this key family asset. Managing expectations can help to avoid disputes.

A shareholders' agreement is a legally binding agreement between shareholders that sets out how shareholders will interact with each other and with the company. They tend to be private documents and focus on matters that benefit from a formal agreement including:

- How shareholders exercise their voting rights – the agreement could specify that an action can only be taken if all shareholders agree, or if the board of directors authorise it.
- Board decisions requiring shareholders' approval (commonly referred to as “reserved matters”).
- A distribution policy establishing the financial principals on when profits are retained and reinvested and when they will be distributed to shareholders.
- The mechanism for dealing with disputes.

A company's articles of association is the internal rule book for the company. It sets out the relationship between a company, its board of directors and its members. It's a public document, as a copy of the current version must always be filed at Companies House and can be downloaded by anyone. The articles will reflect company law, but they're also capable of being quite bespoke.

The articles will include rules around:

- Board appointments, dismissals and decision making
- Share rights
- Share ownership

Conclusion:

Planning for potential disputes can often be overlooked until a problem arises. It's a bit like paying for insurance: you only really value it when you need it. As lawyers, we see many situations when having these documents would have saved time, costs and, most importantly, unnecessary pressure on a business and its owners.

Hayley Simonds
07584 454743
hayley.simonds@mills-reeve.com



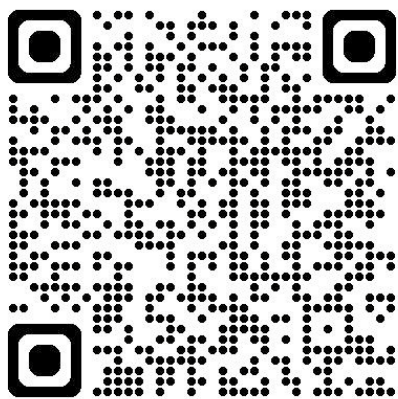
Katherine Kennedy 03443 276250
katherine.kennedy@mills-reeve.com

Helping owner managed and family businesses to fly

As an owner manager, you're pulled in every direction. One moment you're thinking about how to continue growing your business, the next you could be looking at NED appointments, company values or employee retention. And that's not even to mention the personal pulls of family, relationships and personal finances. It's a juggling act.

We get it. We provide professional and personal legal support for owner managed businesses that keep you on the path to achieving your goals.

Get in touch:



Will structuring for business owners

Many business owners know that their business assets may benefit from relief from inheritance tax, but they fall into the trap of thinking that makes their affairs "simple" and don't take specialist advice on Will structuring and inheritance tax planning. Taking the right advice can help save significant amounts in tax.

Business relief

Business relief is an extremely valuable relief from inheritance tax and it's critical to understand which assets qualify. After a person dies, inheritance tax is charged at 40% on the value of assets exceeding the available nil rate band of the deceased, unless an asset qualifies for Relief.

Business relief can apply to interests in a trading business (100% relief) and assets owned personally but used in a business (50% relief), provided they've been held for more than two years. The relief is available provided that the business isn't "wholly or mainly" an investment business i.e. it's mainly a trading business. Viewed in the round, the trading side of the business must outweigh the investment side. A careful eye must be kept on assets held by the business, which aren't actually used in the business, as these could result in relief being denied on the value of these 'excepted' assets. Examples include properties used by the owner and their family, or cash holdings that are not required for the operation of the business.

While it can be tempting for couples to rely on spouse exemption and simply leave everything, including their qualifying business assets, to the survivor on the first death, this strategy wastes a tremendous tax planning opportunity. This potential for double tax relief is explained below.

Two-fund will trusts – a case study

John is married to Jenny and has two children – a son from a previous marriage and a daughter with Jenny.

John owns shares in a trading business which he runs with Jenny and his son. The shares are worth £4 million, and an analysis confirms that they will benefit from business relief in full. John also has a portfolio of investments worth £4 million and owns the family home worth £2 million.

John is keen to maximise the benefits of the inheritance tax relief but also ensure Jenny is provided for after his death. Ultimately, he would like his two children to benefit equally.



By JOHN GRUNDY
Partner, personal tax and
estate planning specialist,
Mills & Reeve

We advise John to put in place a 'two-fund will trust' in order to achieve these aims. His will would pass his assets that qualify for business relief into a fund of the trust on fully discretionary terms, for the benefit of Jenny and his children. His executors can claim business relief on the shares.

John's remaining assets would pass into a fund in which Jenny had a life interest, so that spouse exemption could be claimed. Jenny would be entitled to the income arising from the assets in the life interest fund and have the right to remain living in their home. Jenny would also be a beneficiary of the discretionary fund of the shares.

A key part of this planning is that the relievable and non-relievable assets are held within two funds of the same trust. This enables, if appropriate to do so, the trustees to exchange assets of equivalent value between the funds, without triggering a capital gains tax or stamp duty liability. If these assets were 'exchanged', the shares would subsequently be held on life interest trusts, and the investments would be held on discretionary trusts.

Assuming Jenny survives for two years, the shares will qualify for relief a second time. The shares can either be held in the fund until her death and business relief claimed at that time, or she can choose to make a gift of the shares. Regardless of whether the shares are gifted or retained, a £1.6 million saving in inheritance tax is achieved compared to Jenny's fund holding non relievable investments.

There would be no charge on Jenny's death on the investments, as these will be subject to the trust relevant property charging regime – a maximum 0.6% tax levy for every year the investments remain in trust. The funds could be applied for the benefit of the children at an appropriate future time, in accordance with John's wishes.

The structure set out above is just one example, and there are a number of options available.

Flexibility tends to be key, to ensure the trustees can take appropriate action in the best interests of the family at the time. Appointing the right trustees is crucial.

If you would like to know more, do get in contact.

John Grundy 07435 754309
john.grundy@mills-reeve.com



Specialist training centre awarded grant

A training centre specialising in delivering training and qualifications for the leather goods industry has been awarded a £8,500 grant to encourage enterprise and deliver skills for employment.

The Leather Skills Centre has been awarded a £8,500 funding boost from Walsall Business Support to purchase an SAS Fortuna AN 400 leather splitter, a specialist piece of equipment which will be used as part of the training centre's training and enterprise offer.

The Leather Skills Centre, which is located on Bridge Street, Walsall delivers workshops and a range of accredited qualifications designed for beginners to advanced practitioners, teaching the skills required across the UK's saddlery and leather goods manufacturing sectors.

The purchase of the leather splitter will benefit learners using the centre to develop their making skills and will also be available for local businesses to use the machinery at a small cost.

Leather Skills Centre founder Patrick Burns said: "The funding from Walsall Business Support has allowed us to purchase a specialist piece of equipment which will not only benefit our learners but



Patrick Burns, left, with Rob Colbourne OBE

businesses in the region too.

"Our aim is to give back to the community and provide a resource to those looking to build their skills in the leather industry.

"Our centre is a hub of knowledge and expertise, and we want people to come and learn, share their experiences and

get advice from our talented in-house training team. Not every business has the machinery we have, and we want to make it accessible to all.

"In July, we will open our doors to learners from Australia, America and Europe as they embark on a 10-day side saddle course with us. We are excited to be sharing our expertise and knowledge with those looking to enhance their leather working skills.

"Longer term we are keen to invite senior members of the community who have previously worked in the leather trade to the centre. We hope to be able to reminisce and reignite memories of their time spent in the leather industry."

Walsall Business Support board member Rob Colbourne OBE said: "We are delighted to be able to support the Walsall Leather Skills Centre with the funding they need to purchase the specialist leather splitting machine.

"Walsall is famous for its rich heritage in the leather industry so it's great to be able to support the centre to continue to offer people specialist training to develop the next generation of saddle makers and leather goods experts in Walsall."

Doors open to UK's first African trade cash and carry

A husband-and-wife firm specialising in authentic African-Caribbean food products held a grand opening for their venture, Pride of Africa Trade Cash and Carry.

Founded by Olusegun Akande and his wife, Oyetola, this will be the first one-stop

African trade cash and carry in the UK, that is exclusively black owned.

The team were joined by broadcasters Marverine Cole from GMB and Nikki Tapper from BBC WM to cut the red ribbon in front of specially invited guests.

Mr Akande said: "We are thrilled that

our family and friends could join us for the celebration of this milestone - a result of our dedication to bridging the gap and ensuring that our African and Caribbean communities are seen and fully catered to.

"We've gone the extra mile to make this a reality, creating over 70 jobs and counting in the process, and we hope that the community will continue support us."

Located in New John Street West, the new 25,000 square foot warehouse aims to be a hub for African and Caribbean cuisine enthusiasts, offering a wide selection of specialty items, spices, seasoning, sauces, grains, beverages, fish, meat, poultry, palm oil, cooking oil and snacks, sourced directly from Africa.

Andy Street, mayor for the West Midlands, said: "It's great to see how a combination of entrepreneurial spirit and passion for the community has resulted in this unique local business becoming a commercial reality.

"This venture has created 70 jobs both full and part time and is a valuable asset to the economic growth of our multicultural city."

Pictured from left are Marverine Cole, Olusegun and Oyetola Akande, and Nikki Tapper



Gigafactory's Midlands home unveiled



The home of the prospective West Midlands Gigafactory has been launched.

Greenpower Park – the UK Centre of Electrification and Clean Energy – is set to boast the gigafactory as its anchor tenant, and is expected to boost Britain's plans to be at the epicentre of the green industrial revolution, setting the stage for significant investment in green electrified technology and skilled job creation.

The joint venture project has been designed to foster world-leading collaborations between industry, major academic institutions and stakeholders to drive the UK's ambitions in leading the transition to a cleaner, more sustainable energy future.

The Greenpower Park campus on the edge of Coventry is the only site in the UK with approved plans for a large-scale battery production facility with capacity for up to 60 GWh, enough to power 600,000

electric vehicles and benefiting significant incentives associated with investment zone status.

"In a decisive stride towards fortifying Britain's position as a global leader in electrification innovation, the unveiling of Greenpower Park with the West Midlands Gigafactory marks a transformative moment for the nation's net zero landscape" said Councillor Jim O'Boyle, cabinet member for jobs, regeneration and climate change at Coventry City Council.

"This ambitious initiative is not merely about setting the groundwork for the next generation of electric technologies and sustainable manufacturing practices. It is a clarion call to the world that the UK is open for business, ready to lead the charge in the green industrial revolution.

"With its strategic location, unprecedented financial support, academic partnerships, a ready-made

skilled workforce, and oven-ready plans to build Britain's biggest gigafactory, Greenpower Park is poised to become the cornerstone of the UK's electrified future, driving forward our commitment to innovation, sustainability, and economic growth."

The campus is intended to support the development of new businesses and manufacturing facilities with a package of incentives, combining investment zone status, approved planning permission and an unprecedented regional incentives package to kick start development.

With a strategic focus on electrification technology development and manufacturing, the centre aims to attract an unprecedented inward investment of £2.5 billion – creating 6,000 highly skilled jobs and placing the UK at the forefront of critical clean energy technologies.

Located at the heart of the UK's

manufacturing powerbase, and with official approval already secured for the gigafactory is thought to be ideally placed at Greenpower Park as a strategic centre for vital electrification and clean energy technologies.

Capitalising on a future workforce of over 210,000 local students enrolled in relevant degrees and vocational courses to meet the electrification sector's needs, the project's backers believe that the campus's launch will prove a pivotal moment in the UK's transition to an electrified economy, as well as a significant leap forward in battery technology development and sustainable manufacturing practices.

The unveiling of Greenpower Park comes after the gigafactory project has reportedly advanced discussions with a Chinese manufacturer of electric vehicle (EV) batteries to secure an investment of £1 billion to build the new gigafactory.

The Chinese firm is contemplating an initial investment of £1.2bn into the project, according to the reports.

EVE Energy, a Chinese company with a workforce of approximately 28,000 worldwide, was said to be in discussions to support the creation of a gigafactory spanning 5.7 million square feet, slated to form a main part of the proposed UK Centre for Electrification.

Reports suggested that the Chinese firm is contemplating an initial investment of £1.2 billion into the project.

The gigafactory, being developed in collaboration with local councils and Coventry Airport, is poised to generate up to 6,000 employment opportunities.

Future phases are anticipated to expand the Coventry facility, potentially surpassing the size of Nissan's £1 billion EV factory in Sunderland, featuring a 9 gigawatt-hour (GWh) battery production gigafactory – the first of its kind in the UK.

The West Midlands Gigafactory project announced last year that it was engaged in advanced discussions with leading Asian battery manufacturers regarding potential investments at its Coventry site.

A spokesperson for the project said: "Based in Coventry, West Midlands Gigafactory is the only available site in the UK that sits within an investment zone and has planning permission for a large-scale battery manufacturing facility.

"We are in discussions with a number of global battery manufacturers, but these remain confidential."

The key beneficiaries of the facility will likely include Jaguar Land Rover (JLR), Aston Martin Lagonda, BMW, and LEVC, the UK's sole electric taxi manufacturer.

The Coventry gigafactory plan is anticipated to attract private funding of up to £2 billion. However, potential investments are expected to hinge on substantial UK subsidies amounting to hundreds of millions of pounds.

Research found that if the UK is to meet its target of ending new petrol and

diesel vehicle sales by 2035, the national Gigafactory stock will need to grow to as much as 50 million square feet of factories and warehouses.

James Frith, head of European operations at Volta Energy Technologies, said: "It is reassuring to see more investment in the UK's battery supply chain, this will help Britain to maintain a viable automotive industry in the future and build on the needed battery technologies.

"However, it is notable that it is once again an overseas company, adding to investments by India's Tata group who own Agratas and China's Envision group who own AESC.

"The Government must now support the growing UK battery startup ecosystem, to make sure that while foreign companies are building capacity, it is UK technology that is used in the batteries these facilities will produce."

The West Midlands Gigafactory has recruited industry-leading figures in its drive for success, including a former director of Lotus.

Battery industry technology expert Richard Moore has been enlisted to lead its strategy and global contact with leading cell manufacturers.

Mr Moore is a veteran automotive battery expert with more than 20 years of experience in the industry. He was

previously a board member and executive engineering director of Lotus, where he led the engineering of all sports cars, including the Evija electric hypercar.

Previous high-profile industry roles include chief engineer at Jaguar Land Rover where he led the electrification engineering for propulsion systems across all Jaguar and Land Rover product programmes, including the Jaguar I-PACE, the company's first all-electric vehicle.

On his appointment Mr Moore said: "This is a significantly important project for the region, the British automotive and domestic energy industries and the UK as we transition to an electrified economy.

"I hope to be able to use my full experience to bring the project to fruition, with strategic advice and assistance in the ongoing discussions with the global battery industry."

"With demand for battery manufacturing increasing, gigafactories such as the one planned here in the West Midlands will be vital in delivering industrial and economic growth and ensuring that the UK remains globally competitive.

"In the UK, for the automotive industry alone, the demand for EV manufacturing capacity is expected to reach 200GWh by 2040.

"Now we need to make sure that the UK has the right conditions to attract battery manufacturers to invest here."



Richard Moore

Charging up?

Making batteries in the region is key to auto industry renewal

By PROFESSOR DAVID BAILEY



News of a possible battery gigafactory at Greenpower Park in the West Midlands has boosted hopes for the auto industry in the region and the UK more generally.

The hope is that a new battery plant, possibly through a £1 billion-plus investment by the Chinese battery giant EVE Energy, could help accelerate the transformation of the region's auto cluster towards Battery Electric Vehicles (BEVs) and sustainable transport more broadly.

The speculation comes after recent run of good news for UK auto: Nissan will assemble three new BEVs at its Sunderland plant, with a need for more British-made batteries from its partner Envision. And JLR owner Tata is to invest in a battery gigafactory in Somerset, securing assembly of JLR's new BEVs in the UK.

Jaguar will re-emerge as a fully electric luxury producer from next year (I can't wait to see the designs) while Land Rover is bringing a range of BEVs and plug-in hybrids to market between now and 2030.

The future really is electric despite the constant negative headlines in the petrol-sniffing right-wing media.

Despite recent good news, the UK more broadly has been lagging behind on building up a battery supply chain. Some 35 battery giga-factories are planned or built across the EU with just three currently planned in the UK.

That won't be enough to anchor mass BEV production in the UK long term. More battery-making capacity – like at Greenpower Park – will be needed to support BEV production in the UK by the likes of Stellantis, MINI, Toyota (if it decides to produce BEVs in the UK – it has yet to decide) and a raft of high-value niche players in the luxury and sports

car markets. Otherwise, shipping heavy batteries to the UK from the EU will put UK auto at a major competitive disadvantage.

Look at the projections. The Tata gigafactory could eventually produce 40 gigawatt hours (GWh) of batteries a year, while the Envision gigafactories servicing Nissan could reach 20GWh a year by 2030 and maybe 35GWh longer term. Put that in context: UK auto will need something like 100GWh of battery supplies a year by 2030 and some 200GWh by 2040 if it has recovered enough to make something like 1.8 million cars a year.

So recent investments have been hugely welcome in getting the UK off the starting line in the big battery race. But the UK is a long way behind the EU, let alone the US and China. The latter decided to go electric at the turn of the century and has scaled up and reduced costs so much so that it has something like a 30% cost advantage in making BEVs over UK and European auto makers. That's why we need Chinese investment in battery making in the UK.

On the positive side, the government finally has a much-needed battery strategy to try to attract significant investment. It's a good start but much more is needed if a mass electric car industry in the UK is to flourish.

That's where the West Midlands comes in. Pulling in battery production to the region has been a key goal of Coventry City Council, the West Midlands Growth Company and the owners of Greenpower Park. The site is unique in the UK in offering a big site with ready-to-go planning permission within an investment zone.

The regional economic benefits could be huge. A local gigafactory could create

thousands of jobs ranging from assembly through to research and development. The region has a rich manufacturing and engineering skills base which could be leveraged for this opportunity as long as workers are retrained and for the new jobs and skills needed in a BEV supply chain.

A regional battery gigafactory could – with the right support – boost the development of a battery local supply chain 'ecosystem', potentially bringing in suppliers of raw materials and components, and stimulating innovation and cooperation across the supply chain, universities and players like the Battery Industrialisation Centre.

This could in turn position the region as a major 'innovation hub'. The region already does much cutting-edge research on battery technologies in our universities, research centres and the 'phoenix industry' of highly innovative supply chain firms that grew out of the ashes of the mass auto industry. The goal is to push this further to get battery costs down and range up, and in so doing position the region as a leader in clean transport.

That in turn could offer locally supplied, high-quality batteries for UK auto makers, helping them to get costs down and in so doing anchoring BEV production in the UK.

In summary, this is something we need in the region if we want to retain an auto industry that makes BEVs and BEV components.

A battery gigafactory at Green Power Park could strengthen the West Midlands auto industry, create high quality jobs, boost innovation, and help the transformation of the UK's auto industry.

Building battery plants is nothing less than mission critical for UK auto.

*Professor David Bailey works at the Birmingham Business School and is a senior fellow at the UK in a Changing Europe programme.



ReLiB and revolutionising battery recycling processes

On the face of it, the explosion in the use of electric vehicles, and the transition to green energy solutions, has nothing but positive consequences for the environment. But what about recycling the lithium-ion batteries which are used to power EVs? In partnership with other world-leading universities, a team from University of Birmingham is well on the way to solving this conundrum.

The challenge

The switch from combustion engines to electric cars is continuing at an astonishing pace.

Five years ago, less than a million fully electric vehicles were built per annum; today that number is more like 14 million. And in 50 years' time there will be millions and millions of battery electric vehicles on the world's roads as the global car fleet of 1.7bn transitions from fossil fuels cars to electric vehicles.

However, current EV lithium-ion battery technologies are dependent on critical minerals such as nickel, manganese cobalt and lithium that are found in raw form within the earth that require mining, processing and refining using significant resources such as water. Furthermore, typical car batteries can weigh anything up to 800 kgs so they are very material hungry; simply demanding more and more critical minerals to be dug out of the ground is not a sustainable solution.

Recycling electric vehicle batteries is a solution, however, that could support the world's demands for critical minerals. But not all recycling methods are the same. Some methods burn off critical materials such as graphite, while other methods use very strong acids to pull out valuable metals whilst un-doing all the engineering that went into creating these materials in the first place.

Moreover, current recycling processes typically involve large amounts of manual intervention, to dismantle and separate components before processing.

With the projected numbers of EVs and therefore end-of-life (EoL) batteries that are anticipated, this will be an inefficient, unscalable and costly way of doing things.

What is needed is a revolution in recycling processes rather than a scaling up of current practices in both the processing of EoL batteries, and recovery and extraction methods.

For EV battery recycling to succeed globally and help deliver supply chain certainty, government regulation and stimulus will be needed, especially in next five to 10 years as the low current volume of EoL vehicles for recycling threatens to hamper the development of efficient, large-scale, high-throughput recycling processes.

What is ReLiB?

ReLiB is a £18 million research project funded by the Faraday Institution and led by University of Birmingham that is applying both technological solutions and thought leadership to the challenges of re-using and comprehensively recycling lithium-ion batteries of different chemistry systems.

The overarching aim of the project is to establish a technology pipeline and provide a clear roadmap for the efficient end-of-life management of EV lithium-ion batteries in the UK, encompassing both current and future battery chemistries.

The end result will be to recover,



The ReLiB team

reuse and recycle the maximum amount of materials from end-of-life batteries to facilitate the future efficient and sustainable EV battery recycling industry within the UK.

Our goal is to provide a UK EV battery recycling industry with a pipeline of scalable technologies that are responsive to regulatory drivers, new battery designs and chemistries, and the opportunities afforded by Industry 4.0.

ReLiB has begun conversations with leading players in the sector around near future collaboration, building a unique understanding of the future technology which can make the biggest impact for the industry.

The ambition is to improve the global-wide recycling chain by understanding the conditions required to ensure the sustainable management of lithium-ion batteries when they reach the end of their useful life in electric vehicles.

This will enhance the overall efficiency of the supply chain and ensure that the world has the facilities required for safe, economic and environmentally sound management of the materials contained in lithium-ion batteries.

Since many of the components in batteries are made from valuable elements with special properties, which should not be disposed of as waste, it seems imperative to explore how these could be recovered from end-of-life batteries to develop a system for re-circulating this material for new battery production.

This would reduce the demand for imported primary materials and would also enhance the security of supply and material efficiency.

The ReLiB project vision

The vision of ReLiB is to provide a global EV battery recycling industry with a pipeline of scalable technologies that are responsive to regulatory drivers, new battery designs and chemistries, and the opportunities afforded by Industry 4.0

OUR 5 YEAR VIEW

In five year's we aim to see the following technologies developed and scaled:

1. cathode leaching work to industrial level
2. upcycled electrode materials used in new cells
3. binder recovery (where there is an economic or regulatory rationale to do so)
4. biorecovery of materials e.g. metals from plastic EV battery waste, from secondary waste solutions 'zero waste' concept (where there is an economic or regulatory rationale to do so)
5. smart disassembly, separation and regeneration technologies e.g. direct recycling to protect the material crystal structure and embedded value of electrode material for reuse
6. digital diagnostic tools that can interface seamlessly with battery data passports to assess the state of health of batteries and inform recycling routes
7. identification of new research topics that fit with changing battery design & chemistry systems and regulatory drivers.

Paul Anderson, the ReLiB project principal investigator, said: "The time is right to grapple with the growing piles of batteries which will come out of the boom in zero emission electric vehicles.

"Acknowledging the challenge ahead, ReLiB is ready to work with a range of industrial partners on a collaboration basis to resolve such an immense challenge facing the transition to green energy."

The University of Birmingham's academic collaborators are the University of Edinburgh, Newcastle University, University of Leicester, University of Oxford, Imperial College London & University College London.

The processes

Analysis of current LiB recycling processes shows that current methods result in the loss of many materials.

Most recycling capacity still involves high temperature 'pyrometallurgy' where combustion carbon from the anode, polymers and aluminium from the LiBs provides energy to liquefy and separate some metal components. In the process, carbon and polymer components are converted into CO₂ and as much as half the material mass is not recovered including lithium.

This ends up in a slag phase, from which it is difficult to recover anything usefully or economically, and metals need significant processing and refining before they can be used again.

Alternative processes based on solution chemistry or 'hydrometallurgy' are being developed in many places.

Typically these use a giant industrial shredder to chop the batteries into tiny pieces containing a mixture of all the materials in the battery. After physical separation of metal and plastic pieces, the remaining mixture (known as 'black mass') must be broken down into its constituent elements.

The active materials are dissolved in acid (leaching) before being precipitated out of solution as metal salts. This process also has parallels with extraction processes employed for metal and mineral extraction and refining in the mining industry, where the aim is to recover base precursors for



Professor Paul Anderson, principal investigator ReLiB

battery manufacture.

An effective recycling process for an EV battery pack can be broken down into four key stages. After removal of the pack from the vehicle, the first of these is gateway testing and disassembly to cell level.

The second involves opening the cells and separating the key components of anode, cathode, separator, current collectors, electrolyte and housing. Step three involves the processing of recovered active materials into a form ready for remanufacture. The final and fourth step in the process is remanufacturing into new cells of the latest generation chemistry ready to be assembled back into pack and modules for EV use.

The use of a combination of AI-controlled and teleoperated robotic automation is imperative in enabling cost-effective and safe, high-throughput disassembly. ReLiB is applying the key themes of Industry 4.0 (to the de-manufacture of EV battery packs to extract individual LiB cells from the pack housing (steel), wiring loom (copper) and control electronics (battery management system).

Active visual imaging and sensing enable a digital twin, an exact computational model of the pack, to be constructed real time, not only giving an inventory of components and materials, with an estimated value, but a pathway for disassembly.

The extraction of valuable materials from the cells is of utmost importance, as we seek to shift away from the energy intensive processes of refining back to base ores or metals to processes that retain as much of the atomically engineered structures within the active material is as possible to minimise the cost and energy requirement of remanufacture.

ReLiB researchers at the universities of Leicester and Birmingham have developed a method to separate the metal current collector (copper or aluminium) from the active material (coated onto the current collector).

This method uses powerful ultrasound to delaminate the active layer off the current collector in seconds, leaving behind bare metal and active anode or cathode material. This process enables separate

active materials streams to be recovered quickly with a minimum of contamination.

The active material of the cathode, currently often based on a mixed metal oxide containing nickel, cobalt, manganese or sometimes aluminium, has a significant amount of energy and cost invested in forming its layered oxide crystal structure, and therefore a lot of value can be retained if it is preserved during the recycling process.

This is additionally important for other widely used cathode active materials such as lithium iron phosphate (LFP), whose constituent elements at present remain relatively cheap.

Applying science

The ReLiB team at the University of Birmingham is developing selective leaching techniques and regeneration methods that not only retain the valuable crystal structure, but seek to repair any damage or lost chemical inventory in what is known as 'short loop' or 'direct' recycling methods.

These do not take the material back to traditional manufacturing precursors but recover the manufactured crystal structure and/or mixed metal solutions in a form that can be directly remanufactured into new cells with a minimum of further treatment.

One major advantage of this approach is that the leaching process and regeneration treatments being developed can be combined with reengineering the chemical composition into the latest generation to 'upcycle' the material from previous generation EoL batteries to the latest generation high performance chemistries for added value.

It also has the capability of dealing with mixed material streams, such as might be obtained from blended oxide cathodes used by some manufacturers, or even waste streams of unconfirmed provenance.

Currently recycling methods commonly focus on the recovery of metals, such as cobalt and nickel, using methods such as pyrometallurgy or hydrometallurgical leaching. Many of these processes result in the loss of valuable and critical materials such as lithium.

Commonly, hydrometallurgical processes use strong acids which leach



the desired metals from Li-ion battery cathode materials into solution. This process focuses on producing metals salts which can be used in the synthesis of new cathode materials. At Birmingham we are using milder hydrometallurgical processes, where organic acids are used to allow phase selective leaching. Phase selective leaching is where a desired phase is leached from mixed or blended materials.

This process avoids all metals being leached into solution, allowing for simpler regeneration of cathode materials. A patent has been published on this phase selective leaching and regeneration processes.

Our process has been shown to successfully separate Mn-rich phases from Ni-rich phases in cathode materials from both quality control rejected and end of life electric vehicle batteries (for example, generation 1 Nissan Leaf cells).

By avoiding leaching all phases into solution, we are able to achieve a shorter loop recycling process. Importantly for this work we have shown selective leaching for not only Gen 1 Nissan leaf materials, but the patented processes show selectivity over a range of compositions. As a result, the process is adaptable for different chemistries which allows us to recycle not only current generation materials, but also next generation materials.

These recycling methods developed on

the ReLiB project have been demonstrated to be able to not only regenerate cathode materials, but also upcycle to next generation materials. The methods provide a solution to recycling not only quality control rejected materials, but also end of life materials.

As a result, it will allow us to avoid these materials to go to landfill while also providing a potential source of valuable critical materials for new Li-ion batteries. While these processes are only one part of the ReLiB project, they highlight the importance of recycling research in the drive for net zero.

Footnote

Recycling EV LiBs in the UK is a double-edged issue: the economic and strategic importance of retaining and reusing critical raw materials to support a burgeoning UK electric vehicle industry has recently been well documented; but to exploit this opportunity the UK must meet the waste management challenge posed by greater numbers of EVs on the road and materials recycling rates that are likely to remain well short of 90% for the foreseeable future.

In this regard it is worth making the point that the waste management issues surrounding the domestic EV fleet, will be with us even if the UK should fail to manufacture a single battery.



 **THE FARADAY INSTITUTE** **ReLiB**
REUSE & RECYCLING OF LITHIUM ION BATTERIES



UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

For more information, please contact:
Paul Cornick, ReLiB Project Lead
School of Chemistry
University of Birmingham
Edgbaston
B15 2TT

07752 092295
p.a.cornick@bham

GBCC announces new head of policy



Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has announced the appointment of a new head of policy.

Emily Stubbs has been promoted to the role, having been part of the chamber's policy team since 2017.

In her new position, Emily will have full responsibility for development of the organisation's policy, campaigns and research activity.

The University of Birmingham law graduate joined the GBCC in 2017 as policy and patron advisor, and earned a promotion to policy and projects manager four years later.

In her most recent role as senior policy and projects manager, Emily managed the delivery of research and engagement projects with specific focus areas including

education, employment and skills, and business productivity.

She has also spearheaded the annual Growth Through People campaign, as well as delivery of the Birmingham Economic Review in partnership with the University of Birmingham's City-Region Economic and Development Institute.

Raj Kandola, director of external affairs at the GBCC, said: "Since joining the chamber in 2017, Emily has played a crucial role in shaping our policy output, with a particular focus on growing the reach and profile of the Birmingham Economic Review and Growth Through People campaign over the years.

"I'm delighted that she will be stepping up to lead the team that is responsible for our policy, campaigns and research activity."

Alwayse Engineering appoints new managing director

Claire Umney has been appointed as the new managing director for Alwayse Engineering, the Birmingham manufacturer of ball transfer units.

Based in Aston, Alwayse's products have been used throughout industry to facilitate the precise movement of loads of up to 10 tonnes across a range of applications and industries. It currently exports to 60 countries.

Claire brings with her a wealth of experience after holding leadership positions throughout the warehousing and logistics industry, most recently as managing director of Breathe Technologies, following 13 years at AEB International.

Her appointment follows the acquisition of

Alwayse by Lifco AB in March 2023.

Claire said: "As industry battles with the aftermath of a generational energy crisis, coupled with an urgent need to drive productivity while increasing employee wellbeing and loyalty, low-cost high-impact solutions can play a vital role in unlocking efficiency.

"Ball transfer units provide a fast, easy-to-install offline solution to a variety of manual handling challenges without increasing power demands for end users.

"I am excited about the challenges that lie ahead – both building on the success of the last 85 years, and in working alongside the talented team here at Aston to write the next chapter in the Alwayse Engineering story."



New managing partner elected at Barker Brettell

Barker Brettell, the Birmingham-headquartered intellectual property (IP) specialist, has announced that Yvonne Johnson has been elected as the firm's new managing partner.

Yvonne joined Barker Brettell in 2001 while training to become a UK and European patent attorney and qualified in 2004. She quickly displayed considerable talent in oppositions and appeals, and her career rapidly progressed as her reputation grew. A partner since 2008 and member of the firm's partnership board since 2015, in 2019 Yvonne took the lead when the firm set up an office in Stockholm and has been instrumental in the success of Barker Brettell Sweden AB.

Yvonne succeeds Andy Tranter who became managing partner in 2018, and Yvonne and Andy will collaborate closely over the coming months to ensure a smooth succession.

"Thank you to Andy who has been influential in steering the firm over the past six years, particularly during the pandemic, and many congratulations to Yvonne," said

John Lawrence, senior partner at Barker Brettell.

"Yvonne has all the qualities to be an excellent leader and has a strong track record of success. The energy, determination and adaptability Yvonne brings to the role will drive forward the firm's strategy, performance and culture. With Yvonne as managing partner, I'm

excited about the next chapter for Barker Brettell and I know Yvonne shares my enthusiasm for providing excellent client care and keeping this as a key focus of all we do."

Pictured: Yvonne Johnson with John Lawrence



Charity recruits award-winning board member

Birmingham-based charity Sport 4 Life UK has recruited an award-winning business figure to its board of trustees.

Julie Bailey brings more than 20 years' experience in finance to the charity which provides sport-themed personal development programmes to young people across the West Midlands

She is the founder of accounting firm Cygnus Consultancy and also co-founded Turnkey Venture Partners, whose mission is to help start-ups become market leaders.

In 2023, Julie exited the health supplement e-commerce venture she co-founded to focus on growing Pie Financial, which specialises in e-commerce accounting. She won the Business Woman of the Year award at the Birmingham Signature Awards in 2022, and was shortlisted for the CFO of the Year at the Women in Finance UK Awards in 2023.

Julie said: "Embracing the role of trustee at Sport 4 Life UK is a profound choice rooted in my desire to contribute to an organisation dedicated to fostering positive change for young people.

"The ethos of Sport 4 Life UK resonates profoundly with my personal values. It addresses a void I keenly felt during my own upbringing in an economically deprived environment, where access to opportunities was regrettably lacking."

Joining the team at Evelyn Partners

Wealth management and professional services group Evelyn Partners has announced the appointment of Rick Shaw as a partner in the employer solutions team in its Birmingham office.

Rick joins from Vialto Partners where he led and established the Birmingham team

as it transitioned out of PwC following the transaction in April 2022.

He specialises in global mobility tax and consulting services to companies and their cross-border employees, particularly for senior individuals moving into or out of the UK.

He has also provided wider support on immigration, corporate mobility planning and policy creation, and has extensive experience ensuring tax compliance for inbound and outbound employees across a number of jurisdictions beyond the UK, including US expatriate tax.

Prior to Vialto Partners, Rick spent 11 years at PwC and eight years at Deloitte which included periods abroad in the US and Australia.

Stephen Drew, professional services regional managing partner at Evelyn Partners in Birmingham, said: "Rick's extensive experience in the global mobility tax and consulting services space will be invaluable as we continue to expand the services we offer across the Midlands."



Law firm welcomes new partner

Andrew McManus has joined law firm Knights as a partner in Birmingham.

Andrew brings more than a decade of experience as a disputes lawyer for private clients in civil litigation, contentious trusts and probate disputes.

He works with clients on a wide range of private wealth disputes, specialising in challenging wills, claims under the Inheritance Act 1975, breaches of trust, land disputes and contested applications before the Court of Protection.

He is the 11th new partner at Knights so far this year and joins the firm's Birmingham team based at Two Chamberlain Square.

Jessica Neyt, client services director at Knights, said: "Andrew is a great addition, bringing a strong reputation and a huge amount of talent, energy and enthusiasm to our team.

"We are set for further growth in Birmingham and across the Midlands this year, and he will help us to deliver on our plans."



Andrew McManus and Jessica Neyt

Promotion at professional services firm

Professional services firm Aon has announced that Birmingham-based Debbie Peters has been promoted to chief commercial officer for its UK commercial risk business. She will report to UK CEO Jane Kielty.

Having joined Aon over 15 years ago, Debbie most recently held the position of regional managing director with responsibility for both the northern and central areas of the business.

In her new post she will be central to several initiatives planned in 2024, including the development of new tools and propositions.

Jane Kielty said: "Throughout her career

with Aon, Debbie has demonstrated her commitment both to the clients she serves, as well as to the teams around her.

"Her passion for supporting others within the business and driving forward social mobility is infectious, and I don't doubt she will be hugely successful in this new role."

Debbie said: "It is a privilege to take on this new role at a time of such significant growth for Aon's commercial risk business.

"In 2024 we have already secured several strategically important new clients, and I am looking forward to working with the team to further strengthen our proposition as we help our clients navigate new forms of volatility."



PR agency bolsters senior team

Birmingham-based PR and marketing consultancy Rewired has bolstered its senior management team with the appointment of Ely Price as client services director.

With more than 15 years of communications experience across both consumer and business-to-business sectors, Ely previously worked for Rewired until 2022. She rejoins the agency from an in-house role at automotive business LEVC.

As client services director at Rewired,

she will lead on service delivery and support the company's growth strategy.

Commercial director Harj Millington said: "Having expanded our B2B portfolio and won some exciting new national client briefs, we are hugely excited to welcome Ely back.

"Our strong team and collaborative culture is very important to us, so it's wonderful that Ely, who is highly regarded by both our team and our clients, rejoins us at a time when we are driving forward our ambitious growth plans."

Tech expert takes up senior position

A Birmingham-based IT firm has announced the appointment of a new managing director.

Sandy Robinson has taken on the role at Electronic Business Systems in Erdington three years after she, along with long-standing colleagues Richard Bates, Simon Pritchard and Dan Price, took over the company in a management buyout.

Since then, EBS has seen year-on-year turnover growth, with recruitment being a key focus. Fifteen new members of staff have joined since the MBO and a further eight new roles are being created this year.

As managing director, Sandy will be taking a broader overview of the business and focussing on day-to-day operations, while the firm's other three directors will continue to lead their respective departments.

With a background in software support and training, Sandy initially joined EBS in 2011 as a support consultant. Since taking over EBS with her colleagues, she has also aimed to encourage more women into senior tech roles and believes the West Midlands offers growing opportunities for female entrepreneurs and tech workers.



Strengthening leadership team at Azets

Azets has strengthened its regional senior leadership team with the appointment of Gurj Sandhu as regional managing partner based at the Birmingham office.

The appointment comes at a pivotal time of growth for Azets, as the business looks to double total revenue to become a £1 billion firm by 2027.

Gurj said: "I have worked with the Birmingham business community for a number of years and understand the challenges the local marketplace faces.

"Our foundation of strong partners has been crucial in our growth and we have big ambitions to triple revenue in this office over the next five years. As such,

we will continue to grow our fantastic team of partners to meet the needs of our expanding business.

"We will also look to bolster our core teams, which includes accounting, audit, tax and business advisory services."

With over 15 years of experience, Gurj is also the national head of capital allowances, a specialist area of tax that focuses on maximising tax relief for capital-related property projects.

He advises across a broad range of clients and sectors – including property investors and developers, leisure and hospitality, manufacturing, and private healthcare businesses.



Specialist law firm appoints new head of funding

Specialist law firm Anthony Collins has appointed a new head of funding in the form of returning partner Jon Coane.

Jon brings with him over 25 years of experience as a social impact finance lawyer with an extensive background across a wide range of services in funding and finance.

He will be working closely with clients across sectors including affordable housing, local government, and health and social care.

Peter Hubbard, managing partner at AC, said: "It is great to welcome Jon back, especially as our new head of funding.

"His experience will benefit both the team and our clients, offering advice and executing funding options that will bring positive impacts for their social businesses.

"Jon's appointment, and in particular his expertise in affordable housing, comes at a time of growth within our housing sector and as a wave of increased regulatory demand and financial pressures mount for our housing association clients."



Flagship hotel gains new manager

Switch Hospitality Management has announced the appointment of Kirstie Orton as manager of its flagship hotel Park Regis Birmingham.

Bringing more than 14 years' hospitality experience to the role, Kirstie previously held positions at leading hotel brands in the UK – including five years as executive housekeeper at Marriott International in Birmingham.

She joined Park Regis Birmingham as head housekeeper in 2020, and most recently worked as group operations manager at Switch Hospitality Management, overseeing all operations

across numerous sites in the portfolio. The primary project has been the lead-up to the opening of the new aparthotel Birmingham Snowhill.

John Angus, managing director of Switch Hospitality, said: "Kirstie has been a real asset to the business since she joined Park Regis in 2020, sharing our commitment to the 'Switch standard' of five-star service.

"We are delighted that following her hard work and dedication over the past four years, Kirstie is stepping into the position of hotel manager, bringing a wealth of knowledge and expertise to the role."

Five minutes with...

Karl George

Partner and head of governance
at professional services firm RSM



In one sentence, what does your role involve?

I am part of the consultancy team at RSM. I joined to help develop a new Environmental, Social and Governance team where we provide professional advice and support, and my specialist area is corporate governance.

How long have you been in your current job?

I have been here two years now.

Give a brief summary of your professional career to date.

I started my accountancy practice some 30 years ago, sold it and then started a governance consultancy. My first couple of years were in employment at an engineering company as a financial accountant and then I started my own business at the age of 23. I recently sold that business and am a partner at the global professional services firm RSM.

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

Yes. Qualifying as an accountant has been a crucial part of my career journey in order to provide the services to my clients through a registered professional practice. My governance accreditation – I'm a fellow of the Chartered Governance Institute – adds to my reputation and so does my honorary doctorate and visiting professorship.

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

Not all meetings can be online, but the vast majority of the meetings that I do are, and it has transformed the way I work. Not having to travel the breadth of the country for an hour-long presentation or short workshop has worked well. Also, bringing people together from various locations at the same time has a lot of benefits.

How do you get the best out of your staff?

Being clear about their objectives, checking in regularly and keeping them informed, keeping the work interesting and varied and helping them to work to their strengths. I believe it is important to practise what you preach – your staff learn more by what you do than what you say.

How have your working patterns changed since the pandemic?

Unfortunately the number of meetings in a day has increased considerably and too much of them are back to back. This is something that I am working on.

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

I receive about 30 to 50 emails a day. Some can be deleted straight away without much thought, but others may take careful consideration and response. I reckon each day I am spending about an hour tidying up, responding to, looking for and filing emails.

How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?

They would say that I say 'no problem' a lot because I am always willing to help and/or support when needed.

Highlights of your career so far?

There are several awards like the Police Community Award for a peace march I organised, as well as Business Midlander of the Year, Young Professional of the Year, and receiving an MBE.

Developing and writing the governance methodology and it being endorsed by Sir Adrian Cadbury was another highlight, and so have writing books, governance codes

and the RACE Equality Code.

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

I had been travelling abroad and got back to an assignment whilst jet lagged. I was observing a board meeting as part of the work that I do and nodded off for a moment and I think I was snoring also.

Pet hates?

Disrespecting time. Not doing what you say you will do.

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

I would have got my financial disciplines in order earlier – saving and investing, rather than spending.

How do you relax away from work?

At the moment I am thoroughly enjoying walking, which sounds weird for me to say as someone who has done martial arts, boxing and other combat type sports. I love live music and nice restaurants.

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

It is connected, diverse and innovative. There is a strong sense of community and collaboration with sector groups that are supportive.

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

I am an ordained minister in the church.

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

Book – I want to say the Bible but that would be cheating. Let's go business related, and perhaps something like Why Should White Guys Have All The Fun by Reginald Lewis.

Film – The Godfather. I can't say which.

CD . . . sorry there would be just too many to choose from but it would have to be a gospel medley/playlist.

Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?

Marcus Garvey, Richard Branson, Muhammed Ali, Queen of Sheba and Oprah Winfrey.

What would you choose to eat for your last supper?

If it's my last supper I would have to get several dishes in. So, I would like: a pre-starter of ackee and saltfish and fried dumplings; a starter that included black cod or Chilean sea bass; a main course that comprised curry chicken and rice and peas; and a dessert of ice cream, custard and a specially made carrot cake.



Increased funding available to SMEs

ART Business Loans (ART), a leading local CDFI, based in Birmingham, 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.

ART has obtained additional funds to lend through a pioneering impact investment from

Global technology company Block inc. and ethical lender Unity Trust Bank and seeks to support those SMEs with a viable proposition that are unable to find their full requirements from other sources.

Loans are from £10000 to £150000 and can be used for most purposes.

To apply for a loan, or make an enquiry see www.artbusinessloans.co.uk





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97 Darlington Street, Wolverhampton WV1 4HB. Tel: (01902) 423308 / 427199

89 High Street, Harborne, Birmingham B17 9NR. Tel: (0121) 427 1904

www.rudells.com