

JEWELLERY QUARTER

SPECIAL EDITION

# Birmingham Business

FREE

January/February 2026



Looking  
up to the  
challenge

Panel of professionals  
on JQ's future

**PLUS:** WEALTH MANAGEMENT  
SPECIAL REPORT

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# Birmingham Business Best Places to Work AWARDS

2026



**The Great Hall, University of Birmingham**  
**Thursday June 11th, 2026**

Birmingham Business is hugely excited to be launching this new awards event to the business calendar to celebrate the region's great employers.

These are the business leaders who recognise the value of fostering an environment where a happy and loyal workforce thrives and maximises its potential.

Maybe it's through investment in their staff, or their attitudes regarding inclusivity, or possibly their focus on education or training . . . they deserve to be honoured so let's do just that.

## Categories



### BEST COMPANY OVERALL

Large 100+ employees	Medium 21-99 employees	Small 1-20 employees
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### MOST INSPIRING LEADER

Male Female

### BEST COMPANY FOR...

Diversity, equity and inclusion

Training and education

Apprenticeships

Investment in staff

Investment in environment

Health and wellbeing

## Who is behind it?

Birmingham Business is run by Henry Carpenter and Carl Jones. Henry is the editor of Birmingham Business magazine, while Carl is the editor of its sister publication, Shropshire Business. Carl is also a BBC radio presenter and enormously experienced and respected awards host – he has hosted the Shropshire Business Awards for every one of the last 25 years, and many events at the ICC in Birmingham.

## AllinAll Events

We are so pleased that AllinAll Events will be staging and managing the event. The firm has forged a formidable reputation in the West Midlands for staging some of the most high-profile events in the region, including Birmingham Tech Week, the Multicultural Inspire Awards and the Birmingham Law Society Awards.

Emma Jones and her team at AllinAll will ensure this is an event which will not only run like clockwork but stay long in the memory for all who attend.



### Henry Carpenter says:

*"The importance of inspirational employers and managers who truly understand the value of both workforce and workplace has never been greater.*

*"Through talking with employers, managers and employees in my role at Birmingham Business it is clear to me that there are any number of visionary and effective leaders in the West Midlands who get the best out of their staff through care, nurturing, investment and downright wisdom.*

*"These awards provide the perfect opportunity to pay tribute to them."*

## Who can enter?

This is for any and all West Midlands businesses based not just in Birmingham, but in all surrounding areas from Wolverhampton to Coventry, and Solihull to Sutton Coldfield – essentially, any business based within the West Midlands Combined Authority.

Businesses can be nominated by their staff, by their customers – or they can simply nominate themselves.

## How to enter

Visit [birminghambiz.co.uk](http://birminghambiz.co.uk) and the online form is on the home page. The form has been devised to be clear and straightforward.

## The timeline

**W/C January 26th:** Awards officially launched and nominations open

**March 31st:** Nominations close

**April 23rd:** Judges meet in person to create final shortlist

**April 24th:** Finalists contacted and given all information and next steps

**May 11th- 22nd:** Finalist interviews (online)

**June 11th:** Awards ceremony at Great Hall



21



26



32



40



62

# Birmingham Business

## Welcome

This issue is something of a first for Birmingham Business.

Never before have we themed an edition around a district, but there are few urban areas across the UK with such a unique sense of history, heritage and soul as Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter. It deserves a special focus.

Most people know JQ as one of the world's great centres of its eponymous industry with hundreds of businesses involved in jewellery and allied trades, from designers and craftspeople, to the retailers and manufacturers, all in this concentrated area lying next to the city centre.

However, there is a great deal more to the Jewellery Quarter than, well, jewellery. It is probably second to Digbeth as a creative hotspot in Birmingham, there is a flow of cracking real estate schemes in development, it boasts a great hospitality scene with a wealth of restaurants, cafes and pubs, and there are scores of professional services companies supporting these and numerous other industries.

We are lucky to have contributions from guest writers such as Professor Carl Chinn and chair of the Jewellery Quarter Development Trust who provide superb and comprehensive commentaries on the district's past and present.

But this most charismatic of areas is facing its challenges like any other. The cover story comprises an honest discussion involving some of the leaders from different elements of the jewellery trade who reveal their hopes and fears for the area.

This is a district of contrasts, and Jon Griffin's excellent interview with the current managing director of a venerable family-owned badge-making business is counter balanced by my chat with one of the country's leading exponents of 3D printing and scanning, servicing the film, TV and gaming industries amongst others.

We are also really excited to use this edition to launch our Birmingham Business Best Places to Work Awards 2026. These are taking place on June 11 at the University of Birmingham's Great Hall, and will be honouring the wonderful employers in the region across a wide range of categories.

All the details are on the following pages . . . get entering!

Elsewhere we are running our annual wealth management special report, and we meet two of the city's most prominent figures in the worlds of business and media, PJ Ellis and Andy Dawson, whose Wit+Grit podcast is going live at Millennium Point on January 30.

It only remains for me to wish all our readers and partners an extremely happy new year, and here's to a healthy and successful 2026.



By HENRY CARPENTER  
Editor

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Birmingham-business

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## Pathway Group founder honoured to receive MBE

A Birmingham entrepreneur said he was “incredibly proud and still slightly taken aback” after being awarded an MBE for services to diversity and inclusion in business in the King’s New Year Honours List.

Safaraz Ali is the founder and chief executive of Pathway Group – a skills, employability, and career development organisation dedicated to social mobility and measurable social impact.

He is also the founder of the Multicultural Apprenticeship Awards, the managing director of F5 Foster Care – which specialises in supported accommodation and open social care – and the founder and chief executive of business networking platform Pathway2Grow.

Mr Ali said: “Receiving an MBE is a genuine honour and a moment to reflect on the journey so far.

“It’s particularly meaningful because my parents are no longer here to see it, but I know they would have been immensely proud. I am looking forward to sharing the moment with my siblings, wider family, and the colleagues I’ve worked alongside over many years.

“I’ve never approached my work with recognition as the goal. My focus has always been on doing the right thing – building platforms that create opportunity, remove barriers, and deliver real outcomes.

“This recognition doesn’t change that, but it does reinforce the responsibility that comes with leadership, particularly in areas such as skills, social mobility and inclusive growth.”

Mr Ali also paid tribute to his colleagues at Pathway Group and the Multicultural



**Safaraz Ali**

Apprenticeship Awards, saying that the honour reflected “the collective effort of many people”.

Mr Ali was one of several people in the West Midlands honoured for the impact they have on the lives of others.

The Lord Lieutenant of the West Midlands Derrick Anderson CBE said: “Across the West Midlands, countless remarkable individuals work tirelessly to make our region a better, brighter and more compassionate place. Many are wellknown within their own communities, yet their contributions often go unrecognised more widely.

“This year’s recipients reflect an inspiring range of achievements and offer a glimpse into the character of our region and the people who make it exceptional. We are deeply grateful for all they do, day in and day out, and I am truly delighted to see so many receive the recognition they deserve in the New Year Honours.”

## Special donation

A Birmingham charity which supports older people, their families and carers, has received a special £25,000 end-of-year donation from Bevan Brittan, as part of its ongoing commitment to supporting local communities.

The law firm has made the donation to Age UK Birmingham in line with its ongoing pledge to support vital causes in the cities where it is based. It is the third year in a row that the business has shared £100,000 among its four office charities, with additional fundraising activities undertaken by colleagues throughout the year.

This latest donation will come as a welcome boost to Age UK Birmingham, which offers specialist, impartial advice about care, health and housing through a free advice service, its website and face-to-face appointments.

Julia Jones, partner and community engagement lead for Bevan Brittan in Birmingham, said: “We are delighted to once again be able to make these donations to Age UK Birmingham and our three other office charities.

“Colleagues in our Birmingham office care deeply about the local community and we’re incredibly proud of the relationship that we’ve built with Age UK Birmingham in recent years.

“We truly hope that this special end-of-year funding will make a real and tangible difference to the organisation in the months and years ahead.”

## Pertemps named as one of the UK’s best



**Steve West**

West Midlands recruitment firm Pertemps has been named one of the UK’s best companies to work for the 19th year running.

No other organisation has featured more frequently on the prestigious Best Companies list, which surveys employees on areas such as management and leadership, pay and remuneration, added benefits and working conditions, through an anonymous survey.

Formerly known as the Sunday Times Best Companies to Work For list, the West Midlands-based recruitment firm first appeared in 2006 and has been a consistent presence ever since.

Pertemps retained its position in the top 20 of the large company category and is the highest ranked recruitment business.

The company was also rewarded with an ‘Outstanding’ rating for customer service.

Steve West, CEO of Pertemps Network Group, said: “This is a phenomenal achievement for our business and is a testament to every one of our people.

“Being recognised as one of the best companies to work for in the country for 19 consecutive years speaks volumes for the way the company has continued to place our people at the centre of what we do.

“The individuals and teams across our business are what sets us apart from our competitors, and we will continue to invest in them, their skills, and their personal development.

“Our people are what makes us the company we are, and they remain an essential part of our future strategy.”



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# Portrait of a treasured district

Birmingham Business talks to some of the Jewellery Quarter's key players to get an idea of what makes the area so remarkable in this JQ special edition



# The jewel in Birmingham's crown



**Chamberlain Clock, Jewellery Quarter.**  
Picture: Anne-Marie Hayes



MATTHEW BOTT assesses the numerous reasons why the Jewellery Quarter deserves its reputation as a truly unique district with a remarkable heritage and a potentially golden future.

Cities across the world have an historic district in or close to their city centre. Seasoned travellers know that these often are the best places to stay, with a more neighbourhood vibe to the cafes, bars and restaurants when compared with their downtown counterparts. The Jewellery Quarter is one of those places.

This part of Hockley is Birmingham's original creative quarter, with goldsmithing traced back to Roger Pemberton in 1553. It came into being properly in the mid-1700s as the Colmore family moved out of their New Hall Manor and started to carve their estate up into the Georgian streets of housing we see today.

The Birmingham Assay Office was established in 1773, St Paul's Church was consecrated in 1779. Industrialisation followed soon after the opening of the canal in 1789 and the jewellery trade exploded in the mid-1800s. Look carefully at many of the buildings around today and you can trace this history back through post-war factories and a 'flatted factory', Victorian and Edwardian silver and pewter works, right back to houses with jewellery workshops built in their back yards.

The Jewellery Quarter today is rare in that it is one of the only surviving places in the UK with its foundational industry still in place, but the area is more than just history. It is an area bursting with newer firms in digital technology, food and drink, fashion, web- and graphic design, architecture, and much more. The spirit of entrepreneurialism and creativity, baked into the orange-red bricks and the blue paving of these streets continues to influence today's businesses.

Hand-in-glove with this is the Jewellery Quarter's reputation as an outstanding place to live and visit. Close to the city core with great transport links ticks some of the requirements for city-living, but the differentiators are why so many people choose to make the Jewellery Quarter their home. A wide range of food – from your local café to fine dining, two coffee roasteries, three breweries and plentiful bars and pubs, all with a strong independent streak – help define the Jewellery Quarter today.

As do the countless places to see and

do things. The Museum of the Jewellery Quarter, the Newman Brothers Museum at the Coffin Works, the Pen Museum and J W Evans all tell the history of the area, and people can get involved with a plethora of hands-on creativity from pottery to rug-making, and chocolate-making to art classes, music lessons, capoeira, and open mic nights. Film clubs, sports clubs and supper clubs really mean there is something for everyone.

## The trade that named the place

If you're a Brummie you kind of know the Jewellery Quarter is a special place, and if you're new to Birmingham there's a chance you've heard this. What few of us really appreciate is that it is a very special place. It's distinctive to Birmingham, and it's unique not just in the UK but globally.

This was recognised in May 2025 when Birmingham was awarded World Craft City status for Jewellery and Allied Trades by the World Crafts Council – a UNESCO-affiliated NGO which champions craft preservation, craft education, craft certification and creative economies worldwide. We were the 74th place globally to be awarded this status and the first designated for jewellery-making and allied trades such as silversmithing, goldsmithing, giftware, regalia and much more.

Following the application, led by the Jewellery Quarter Development Trust and Birmingham City University, and supported by Birmingham City Council and the Goldsmiths Company, the judging panel flew in from Mexico City, New Delhi and Melbourne. They spent three days exploring a trade that has been here for over 250 years. They looked at how it evolved with consumer tastes and how it uses the latest technology alongside traditional bench skills.

They were interested in the education pathways and infrastructure, and they learned about the future challenges and opportunities, particularly the need to bring in new talent. The judges also spent their time here enjoying the food and drink offering in the Jewellery Quarter – and

were grateful of the good weather so they could walk off the generous hospitality!

As you walk around the Jewellery Quarter, the retailers you see are just tip of the iceberg. Behind closed doors hi-tech sits next to jeweller's benches, and companies young and old supply royalty, celebrity and prestige marques the world over. In this industry alone, hundreds of businesses employing around 4,500 people generate approximately £750 million in revenue in our square mile of the city centre.

Birmingham Assay Office is the largest in the UK and the School of Jewellery is the largest in Europe, offering the widest range of courses in the world. The Crown Jewels were restored here before the Coronation.

The Wimbledon trophies and the Lonsdale Belt were made here. Civic regalia from across the UK comes from the Jewellery Quarter as do royal honours such as MBEs and OBEs. Silver candlesticks made on Albion Street sit in the Cabinet Room of 10 Downing Street.

King Charles III writes with a Jewellery Quarter pen, the Crown Prince of Jordan wore a Jewellery Quarter ceremonial sword at his wedding made and Beyonce sported a \$200,000 pair of diamond-encrusted stilettos made – you guessed it – here in the Jewellery Quarter.

What makes the Jewellery Quarter extra-special internationally is not just the goods it produces, but that it's an ecosystem that has all the constituent parts and infrastructure in-situ with many companies inter-reliant on each other. This is extremely rare.

However, there are challenges facing this ecosystem. Skills shortages and the average age of the workforce mean there is a danger of some of those skills being lost. Characterful architecture, walkable streets plus good food and drink attracts much-needed residential investment, but also drives up land and rental values, adding pressure to an already-tough business environment.

Bespoke, skilled and hand-crafted work offers more value in a world where AI and mass production dominate, and in times of upheaval, tradition provides stability. This is a huge opportunity for the digitally-

savvy next generation of craftspeople and entrepreneurs who can reach audiences across the world.

Three long term solutions have been identified with action already underway to help the trade thrive for the next 250 years:

- New talent and skills development.
- Special protection for jewellery and allied trades.
- Placemaking and profile-raising.

The ethos of collaboration is part of the response to these challenges.

**1.** A group of local organisations (Argent College, Quartermasters, Stryx Gallery, School of Jewellery and the JQDT) set up the 'JQ Common Room' consortium to bid for Cultural Action Area activities funding from Birmingham City Council and Enterprise Zones. This includes microgrants to deliver local social and economic improvements; 'JQ Lates' on the last Thursday of the month to encourage people to explore the area after work; and pilot a 'Creative Careers' fair targeting schools. These activities also spurred new connections and further collaboration is underway on a big push for awareness among young people to show there's a career for them, whether they want to go down an apprenticeship route, diplomas or degrees. There is also an appetite in the trade to bring those with few or no qualifications or from marginalised backgrounds into the trade; all that is required is good hand/eye co-ordination and a desire to work hard.

**2.** Local planning policy was taken into local hands with the adoption of the Jewellery Quarter Neighbourhood Plan following referendum of local businesses and residents in 2023. The Neighbourhood Plan adds extra protection for the jewellery trade and directs residential development away from the most sensitive areas. It also raises quality standards and harnesses the benefits of investment, for example, by supporting the provision of affordable



The jewellery trade has given this small district its own very distinct identity

workspace. Further work is underway, led by jewellers and supported by the local councillors, Jewellery Quarter Business Improvement District, National Association of Jewellers and the JQDT to identify additional protections for the jewellery trade to give businesses security of tenancy and protect the uses within buildings.

**3.** Individuals and businesses across the Jewellery Quarter proudly fly the flag and have enormous reach. Continued improvement of the visitor experience needs to take place with an ongoing programme of public realm, accessibility and building upgrades, but that alone won't cement the Jewellery Quarter in the regional, national and international psyche – we need to broadcast louder and further. World Craft City status has given us a boost (we estimate that 16 million people heard about the Jewellery Quarter on national news outlets). BCU and the World Crafts Council recently signed a memorandum of

understanding to explore the development of a World Crafts Academy, and the JQDT is leading on the creation of the Birmingham Jewellery Biennial – a jewellery festival for the UK held here every other year and starting in 2027. Showcasing the Jewellery Quarter with in turn showcase the city on that international stage.

### Epilogue

When they arrived, the World Craft City judges didn't know much about Birmingham and the West Midlands. However, when we talked to them about Boulton and Watt, Jaguar Land Rover, Cadbury's, GKN and Lucas Engineering, Triumph and BSA, they couldn't fathom why we weren't shouting it from the rooftops. In true Brummie style we brush over the specialness – the 'genius loci' – of places like the Jewellery Quarter, preferring instead to talk about the traffic or football or the bins. This very local trait was spotted by the judges and while they viewed it as endearing, they also felt it was their job to hold a mirror up and show us just how important our city is.

Let's heed their advice. Let's speak loudly and confidently about Birmingham and our neighbours. Let's celebrate the things that make the city unique, and let's invest time, effort and money in that uniqueness. When competing for national and international investment and tourism, 'interesting and specific' garners more attention than 'bland and generic'.

Our place in history is secure due to the Industrial Revolution, but our future is still up for grabs. We excel at engineering and finance. Our diversity means our creative, culinary and cultural offering can be second-to-none. Ditto film, TV and gaming.

Of course we will be talking about our reputation for jewellery and allied trades. Say it quietly but we might even be able to talk about football in the same context.



World Craft City judges being shown around the district by Matthew Bott  
Picture: Anne-Marie Hayes

\*Matthew Bott is the current chair of the Jeweller Quarter Development Trust. Established in 2011, the JQDT is a volunteer-led, not-for-profit Community Interest Company set up to deliver improvements to the Jewellery Quarter. For more information see [www.jqdt.org](http://www.jqdt.org)



# Trade concerns

Despite its proud heritage and reputation as one of the great hubs for its eponymous trade, the Jewellery Quarter is in a period of change with its main industry under enormous pressure from a wide variety of angles. Birmingham Business editor HENRY CARPENTER met with a handful of business leaders at the School of Jewellery to discuss the state of the health of the trade and the district as a whole.

## The panel

**Norma Banton**, founder of both the Silverfish Jewellery Company, founded in 2002, and Masterpiece Academy, established in 2021 to help break down barriers for young people from marginalised local areas wanting to enter the jewellery trade.

**Giles Knox**, managing director of Firmin and Sons, manufacturers of metalware, primarily for the military or police. Established in 1655 – and now part of the Kashket group – it is the oldest privately-owned manufacturer in the UK.

**Rachel Morrish**, of RE Morrish, a second-generation manufacturing jeweller on Vyse Street, manufacturing silver and gold jewellery, making over 7,000 different products.

**James Newman**, of James Newman Jewellery. A former student of the School of Jewellery, he set up his own jewellery design and manufacturing business 30 years ago.

**Rebecca Skeels**, course director at Birmingham City University's School of Jewellery which was set up in the 1980s and is the largest specialist school in the world for jewellery.

**Alex Wardle**, of A Wardle & Co, manufacturers established in 1952 making a wide range of items from brass and bronze parts, badges and button fronts all the way through to fine jewellery.



Alex Wardle

**Henry Carpenter:** Alex, is the Jewellery Quarter in good health?

**Alex Wardle:** I think it's pretty much fifty-fifty at the minute. It has changed a lot since I was a kid and I've been around the Jewellery Quarter since I was born.

There are very specific problems now in terms of the trade itself, problems that haven't really been addressed since the 80s and the 90s which is when the local communities surrounding the region were marginalised. These local areas used to provide a lot of the workforce, and these were skilled people.

So I think that the 80s and the 90s were a problem area and it all dragged forward really.

There are also a lot of housing issues in terms of potentially pushing out the trade itself – the council didn't protect the buildings or the trade when it had the opportunity many years ago.

**Rachel Morrish:** I've been working quite closely with the council over their issues of selling properties since about June of last year.

We've just recently had a big meeting with the council where we're now looking at getting building protection in place so that the buildings that are currently workshops and for the jewellery trade are hopefully going to get protected, like Hatton Garden and Savile Row in London have where they're like cluster businesses.

We don't know whether the council will carry on selling properties but the protections should be in place which

means that if somebody buys a trade-related building, they can't just turn it into apartments. They will have to keep it as the uses are, and that would hopefully give us protection that we haven't had before.

We've also set up an organisation called The Jewellers of the Jewellery Quarter with the NAJ [National Association of Jewellers]. This is about people starting to come together, talking about problems and actually being more proactive rather than everybody burying their heads in the sand and not communicating.

We can be quite insular and I think moving forward we've got to work together, and in my dealings with the council all of sudden they've gone oh, we can't just do what we want.

And so I think moving forward, we will come together and start to do better things in the Jewellery Quarter. The World Craft City status, for example, is exactly what's needed but we must start telling the world about it – we need as a collective to come together and say this is unique, not just to the UK but to the world, and we've got so many skills, so much to show everybody and also to pass on to future generations. What we have is actually really important and very special and very unique.

**HC:** Is there a sense of pride that you're conducting your business in a truly unique and remarkable district, not only in Birmingham, but in the UK?

**RM:** Yes I think so, but I think we need to get better at collaborating and stop feeling that we're in competition with each other

because we're not. As a collective, we can do more and bring more business to us all, but we just need to become better at working together and telling the world what we are. The Jewellery Quarter brings more money into the city's economy than the airport, for instance, and that's quite a big achievement.

**Rebecca Skeels:** Also people don't ask for help, often because they are all busy. I think when you start asking for

help, and when people get together and discuss, then they can support and help each other more. There is a lot of goodwill out there with people very willing to help.

**Giles Knox:** I've always said that for us the competition isn't the people down the street or the other company in the Jewellery Quarter. It's someone who's going to take an order and send it all to be manufactured in China or India or Macedonia.

I think there is some protection for precious metal work, with concerns about insurance and shipping meaning it's less likely to be made overseas.

And if the customers are only judging on the price and aren't educated in what they're getting for their money, they'll send the whole order over to someone who die-casts in China.

**RM:** I think the end consumer does need to be made aware of British manufacturing and support British work. I sell that to my customers but I'm not always sure they sell it to theirs. If a diamond ring is made in Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter they ought to be told about it.

**Norma Banton:** I think there's more that the council could do with promoting individual businesses. When I first opened my shop in 2004, there was an information centre on that corner and that was great because people would come down to my shop all the time.

It's just a small thing to have an information centre but it meant a lot because the people who worked there knew all the businesses and they knew where to send people, especially for retail shops.

**RS:** What's so good about the Jewellery Quarter is that every bit of the industry is here. It has got the retail, the training, the support for the training, the manufacturing, the insurance companies, it's got the biggest companies and the smallest companies, all in a very small amount of space. The hard thing is getting the awareness out there.

**GK:** There really needs to be a critical mass of companies with specialist capabilities.

Also if there's only one person who has a specialist skill and they don't want to train anyone, you're going to have a problem. We need those skills to be transferred.

**HC:** Let's talk about the next generation. Are you seeing an appetite to get involved with the trade increasing or waning?

**RS:** I've been in the university for six years and the courses have got bigger. However, craft courses in universities aren't supported in the same way across the country as they were probably 10 years ago.

We're lucky in this university because we've got multiple courses. Also, because we're in the Quarter we do have amazing support from the industry. The students get experience which is great because a three-year degree isn't quite enough on its own to get the amazing skills they need in one area. They have to have experiences in the industry in the JQ to give them the confidence to work in it.

They certainly have a passion for the



Rebecca Skeels



Rachel Morrish

**“I was hooked by the creative aspect of it. I like the graphic aspects of design. I like the fact that there was a workshop with big hammers and fire and I could play around, and it quickly became apparent to me that I could consider making something that had some kind of tangible worth.”**

sort of industry that they want to go in to, but it doesn't have to just be the making – some are into designing, some of them in retail, some of them in curating, we've had students go and work in the theatre and making bicycles with some of the jewellery skills. KTPs [knowledge transfer partnerships] are also very useful.

**GK:** We had an KTP with BCU which looked at our product range to try to modernise our manufacturing methods, which was very successful.

The issue we've had is that young people want to be creative and do things with their hands, but what we want is to make a thousand helmet plates and the thousandth to look like the first. That's not the sort of thing that people go to university to study and it's been very hard to get manufacturing apprentices.

**RM:** I think the NAJ are also looking at apprenticeships and getting back to how it probably was 20, 30 years ago. You could get an apprenticeship whereby you attend college two days a week, and are in a job for the other three. As a manufacturing company, we've looked into it and it's very difficult at the moment. So I think we need to really try to get that back to how it was.

**NB:** Masterpiece Academy is only small with just six benches, so we can only have six students at a time, but that does mean that we can give them that personal attention.

So, when we started Masterpiece



James Newman

Academy, I really wanted it to be culturally relevant by helping those in marginalised communities. We started planning in 2020 in the aftermath of the George Floyd moment and the Black Lives Matters movement, and I think that caused a lot of organisations to look within themselves and ask what the systemic barriers are that prevent people from local, marginalised areas from coming into the trade.

So we set up Masterpiece Academy to

address those issues. Most of our young people who want jobs have got jobs. These are young people who wouldn't have considered the trade had they not stumbled on Masterpiece Academy. It's been a huge privilege so I hope we continue to get funding so we can carry on opening doors for more young people who want to come into the trade.

**James Newman:** It's about opportunity. From my own experience, I was a kid from a working-class background in South Yorkshire but instead of mining or heavy industry, I was creative and went to art college. I was introduced to jewellery and just found it amazing.

I was hooked by the creative aspect of it. I like the graphic aspects of design. I like the fact that there was a workshop with big hammers and fire and I could play around, and it quickly became apparent to me that I could consider making something that had some kind of tangible worth.

When I graduated in the 1990s there was that kind of next step, there was an incubation space. There would be a group of us with some benches and someone on a Friday morning would come in and say right, how are you going to make what you do a business. That in its absolute bare essence, was what got me into business.

I had a workshop for 12 months which was funded. I had someone I could speak to. I applied for some funding from The Prince's Youth Business Trust, we did trade fairs and we would meet customers. That is how I got started.

But at that point, there were opportunities for graduates to leave this school and rent a workshop from the council for a negligible rent. Three

of us got together, rented a workshop, and within 18 months of me starting out I employed someone for the first time. A couple of years later I got to a point where I could employ two people and ended up in a shop.

**RM:** This is something that I've started to talk to the NAJ about that. We need a space where people go when they finish their training and talk to them about how actually do you do your accounts? How to go to a trade show and just help people to find the next step.

It isn't there at the moment, and it's something that we definitely need to work on.

**JN:** It's got to be made much easier for people to rent. If graduates can get a workshop or space for a very reasonable rent to get them started, perhaps rising incrementally, and if they are given opportunities like this, then this area could and should rise again.

**HC:** Thank you all very much.



Giles Knox



Norma Banton



# Birmingham Jewellery Biennial

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# A hive of activity: Birmingham's Jewellery Quarter

By PROFESSOR CARL CHINN



It was a momentous occasion in June 2025 when the World Crafts Council, a UNESCO-affiliated organisation, named Birmingham as a World Craft City for jewellery and allied trades.

One of only eight places in Europe with such a vital designation, this was also a recognition of the Jewellery Quarter as the centre of Birmingham's creative industry. That highlighting of this unique manufacturing hub was opportune as its survival is threatened by rising rents propelled by the widespread conversion of buildings into apartments and offices. If the quarter's blend of traditional crafts and modern concepts were to be lost, not only would 200 years of history be swept away but also Birmingham itself would lose part of its very soul.

Although the origins of the modern Jewellery Quarter lie in the 18th century, the working of precious metal in Birmingham can be traced to the later Middle Ages. In a tantalising reference from 1308, an inventory of the possessions of the Master of the Knights Templar noted 'Birmingham pieces'. Of high value, seemingly they were precious ornaments of some kind. Later that century, when a surname often indicated the person's trade, a John Goldsmith was noted. He followed an elite trade requiring a significant amount of capital and highly specialised tools and though other goldsmiths succeeded him, the town never boasted more than one in a generation.

From the mid-17th century, however, there is a gap in information on the working of precious metal in Birmingham, but there can be little doubt that the making of jewellery appeared from the town's trade in toys (small metal goods), buttons and buckles. Requiring similar skills and tools, these trades encouraged adaptability as emphasised by Sketchley and Adams's *Tradesman's True Guide and Universal Directory of Birmingham* in 1770. Under the heading of Toy Makers, it pronounced that:

*An infinite Variety of Articles that come under this Denomination are made here, and it would be endless to attempt to give an Account of the Whole, but for the Information of Strangers, we shall here*

**Pictured left: Looking along Warstone Lane to its meeting with Vyse Street at the Chamberlain Clock, erected in 1903. The building on the right is the old Rose Villa Tavern, replaced by the present structure in 1919. (Birmingham Lives)**



**The Chamberlain Clock, Warstone Lane, 1954**

*Observe, that these Artists are divided into several Branches, as the Gold and Silver TOY MAKERS, who make Trinkets, Seals, Tweezers, Tooth-pick Cases, Smelling Bottles, Snuff Boxes and Philligree Work, such as Toilets, Tea Chests, Inkstands, &c. &c. The Tortoise TOY MAKER, makes a beautiful Variety of the above and other Articles; as does also the Steel, who make Cork Screws, Buckles, Draw and other Boxes, Snuffers, Watch Chains, Stay Hooks, Sugar Nippers &c. and almost all these are likewise made in various Metals, and for Cheapness, Beauty and Elegance, no place in the World can vie with them.*

As for Birmingham's jewellers "these Artists held the First Rank among the Mechanics, for the Elegance of their Work: they are the Makers of Necklaces, Ear-Rings, Rings, Buckles, Sleeve-Buttons and Studs, Seals, &c". There were 23 jewellers, one of whom was a woman – Elizabeth Merry.

Significantly, eight of them had an additional trade such as filigree worker, toy maker, button maker, metal roller and watch chain maker. Two of the jewellers were also lapidaries. Along with eight more in that trade, they cut and polished large stones for snuff boxes, knife handles, cabinets, seals, rings, buttons, and other items.

Despite the interchange between the trades, the jewellers were becoming a distinct group, although they were spread across Birmingham and not gathered in one locality.

Their emergence is substantiated in Pearson and Rollason's *Directory of 1777*. Along with 35 jewellers it named four ring makers, and sixteen watch chain makers – later a branch of the jewellery trade. There was also an entry for a company making tools for jewellers, four silversmiths and two silver rollers, whilst it is likely that some buckle, button, toy and candlestick makers worked in silver.

Still, the largest producer of silver goods was Matthew Boulton, first at his works at Snow Hill and then at his Soho Manufactory in Handsworth. A man of many parts, he employed artists and commissioned designers to fashion expensive silver ware that appealed to the wealthy. Concerned that his silver products had to be assayed at Chester and that silversmiths there might steal his designs, Boulton led a campaign for Birmingham to have its own office for assaying silver.

An astute publicist, he realised that if the worth of Birmingham's precious goods were assured through rigorous testing and hallmarking then their appeal would

be enhanced. Boulton was successful and in 1773 the Hallmarking Act founded the Birmingham Assay Office, for which the anchor was chosen as the hallmark.

Although recognised as a Birmingham trade by the end of the 18th century, jewellery making was not yet one of the town's main industries and there were probably just 400 artisans employed in ten or 12 manufactories. Those working in gold made principally seals, keys, and watch chains, whilst the silver workers produced shoe, knee, and other buckles, as well as considerable quantities of comb ornaments set with conspicuous paste or imitation stones.

The most prominent of the jewellers was Joseph Taylor, who boasted a showroom in London and who placed an eye-catching copper-plate advertisement in *Bissett's Magnificent Directory* of Birmingham in 1808. Describing himself as a gold and silversmith, jeweller, and gilt and general toy manufacturer, he emphasised the strong connections between these trades. In the background of the engraving is a ship, signifying Taylor's trading links; whilst to the left is an elephant and in the foreground is a tortoise, animals which provided ivory and shells for his boxes. Laid out on the ground in the front are jewellery boxes, articles of precious metal and a sheet of paper upon which is written the words diamonds and pearls.

Despite the harsh economic conditions of the 1820s, the jewellery trade continued to grow and by the end of the decade, 150 manufacturing jewellers and 40 goldsmiths and working jewellers were listed locally. In addition, there were five gold beaters, two jewellery stampers, 23 lapidaries and 37 silversmiths. Yet these craftsmen faced a problem: their work was seen as old fashioned by the wealthy. In response, a group of workers resolved to present to Queen Victoria outstanding articles, strenuously urging that she would be graciously pleased to patronise them.

The leading firms were supportive and the specimens for the royal couple were made. Finally on Thursday 28 May 1845, the deputation of jewellers waited upon Prince Albert to present to him and Queen Victoria what the *Illustrated London News* pronounced were beautiful specimens of Birmingham jewellery. The Prince expressed his admiration of the ingenuity, taste, and skill exhibited in the designing and manufacture of each separate article; and inquired how it was that fashion could, as he put it, perversely persist in going abroad for articles of bijouterie when it could command so admirable and exquisite a manufacture of them at home. He concluded by assuring the Birmingham men that he knew the Queen would fully share his own admiration of the costly presents with which the loyal and ingenious artisans of Birmingham had favoured them.

The success of the royal presentation owed much to a realisation of the importance of design. In 1849, *Allen's*



*Pictorial Guide to Birmingham* stressed that: *the precious metals are here wrought into a vast variety of elegant forms – seals, pencil cases, brooches, chains, and every article comprehended by the term Jewellery are manufactured in a style that, for solidity and elegance of design, cannot be excelled. The quantity of silver used in the manufacture of pencil cases, thimbles, chains, &c, may be estimated at about 3,000 ounces weekly or 160,000 ounces per annum.*

In the succeeding decade, new firms sprang up, more capital was invested, more highly skilled labour was drawn in and new branches of the trade were begun. The significance of design and the application of art methods in this development was emphasised by a knowledgeable commentator in the *Daily News* in his appraisal of the Birmingham jewellery trade in September 1865. In no other place was there a wider employment for students of design.

That was made clear at the large manufacturing jewellers' establishment of T. and J. Bragg in Vittoria Street where there were usually between 30 and 40 apprentices. Each had to show some amount of skill in drawing and each was bound through their indentures to attend the Birmingham School of Art and Government School of Design.

From about 500 workers in the 1830s, by 1865 there were 7,000 employed by between 500 and 600 gaffers. Their trade was divided into five sections. Those in jewellery proper made gold and silver lockets, links, rings, bracelets, pins, and necklaces. The other groups were gold and silver chain manufacturers; silversmiths; gilt toy makers; and box makers, die sinkers and workers in other subsidiaries.

Additionally, there were about 1,000 electro platers who made ornaments and table ware. This remarkable rise in the jewellery and allied trades benefitted from: the discovery of gold in Australia and California; the vastly increased wealth of England and her colonies, particularly

**Left, top: The cyclist is travelling from Legge Lane and approaching Frederick Street. The car coming towards him is coming to the same junction but from Graham Street. In the background is St Paul's Church. This photo looks like it was taken in the 1950s. (Birmingham Lives)**

**Jewellers at work in the Jewellery Quarter in the 1950s. Unlike in the pen, button, pin and other industries, few women were employed in the jewellery trade so this is an unusual photo featuring them. (Birmingham Lives)**

**The Grade II listed Jewellers Arms on the corner of Spencer Street and Hockley Street in the 1960s. (Birmingham Lives)**



**F H Weight, an electro plate and jewellery manufacturer in Branston Street.**

regarding the rapidly expanding middle class; and a growing desire for personal adornment. These factors were boosted from 1854 by the legalisation of lower standards for gold alloys which magnified the market for less costly jewellery.

Gaffers and skilled workers enjoyed high incomes and wages, whilst the trade was distinguished by several other factors. The first was the considerable number of small but independent manufacturers with between five and 50 workers. This phenomenon lent itself to social mobility, with nearly all master jewellers having started out as workmen.

Their progression was facilitated by the second factor, the relatively small sum needed to start up as a master. All that was needed was a peculiarly shaped bench, leather apron, a few tools, a gas jet in a small workshop in the top room of a former house and some funding to buy precious and base metals.

A third distinguishing feature was the sub-division of labour, for example, splitting the making of an earring into various processes so that many more could be made than by one man. A die was cut or engraved and the gold rolled at the steam mill to the requisite gauge. Then blanks or discs were cut out by a screw-press, stamped and cut to the exact shape desired (also by the press).

Along with these specialist skills were engraving, case making, jewel mounting, jewel setting, and polishing – often carried out by the many independent outworkers or craftsmen in small workshops.

This subdivision also encouraged the jewellers to gather close to each other so that their articles were passed from one hand to another more easily, quickly and cost effectively.

Such a concentration was also beneficial to the factors who bought most of the products. Originally spread across Birmingham, by the 1850s the jewellers were overwhelmingly gathered in a

distinct part of Hockley to the northwest of Birmingham town centre. As an identifiable neighbourhood, Birmingham's jewellers' quarter was first mentioned in 1860 by the author Walter White. In *All Around the Wrekin* he stated that for the most part Birmingham was a town of workshops, through which a person might walk from street to street noting the change of aspect with the change of trade. Thus, amongst the pearl button makers there was a suspicion of makeshift, but by contrast the jewellers' quarter looked clean and respectable.

A pleasant location around and above St Paul's Square, this neighbourhood became the home of the employers as well as their workplace. Prosperous masters bought big houses with workshops or small factories in their sizeable gardens, like that advertised in December 1865 in the *Birmingham Daily Post*. A capital front dwelling house at 53 Vyse Street, it came with a "spacious and well-lighted three-story manufactory (to accommodate about eighty pairs hands) with enclosed yard and appurtenances; the whole forming a most compact and desirable jeweller's premises".

By 1881, the jewellery trade was one of Birmingham's most important industries with 600 masters employing 8,000 people. Six years later, the Jewellers' and Silversmiths' Association was formed to watch for legislation affecting the trade, assist in developing exports and seek the removal of restrictions. It also sought to promote art and technical education amongst workers and from 1888 arranged for classes at the Municipal School of Art in Margaret Street. Two years later, the Vittoria Street School for Jewellers and Silversmiths was started in a former factory. It could take up to 460 students and held courses for boys from the age of twelve and a half years, adult craftsmen and women. Today it is the internationally renowned School of Jewellery of Birmingham City University and it's fitting that the ceremony awarding Craft City status was held there.

The jewellery trade carried on expanding until the First World War, after which the number of workers dropped – and by then, the employers had moved to live in newer homes in emerging suburbs. It continued to face difficulties throughout the inter-war and post-war decades, but resilient and creative as it is, the jewellery trade remains significant in the 21st century, even more so as it enhances Birmingham's name nationally and internationally. Despite the challenges, the Jewellers' Quarter is still an industrial hive, a vast producing centre, of which Vyse Street and Warstone Lane are the two great arteries.

Proud of their traditions, adaptability, inventiveness and ingenuity, its community of craft workers hold in their hands the future of a great industry.

It's an industry that our city should not only honour but also support actively.



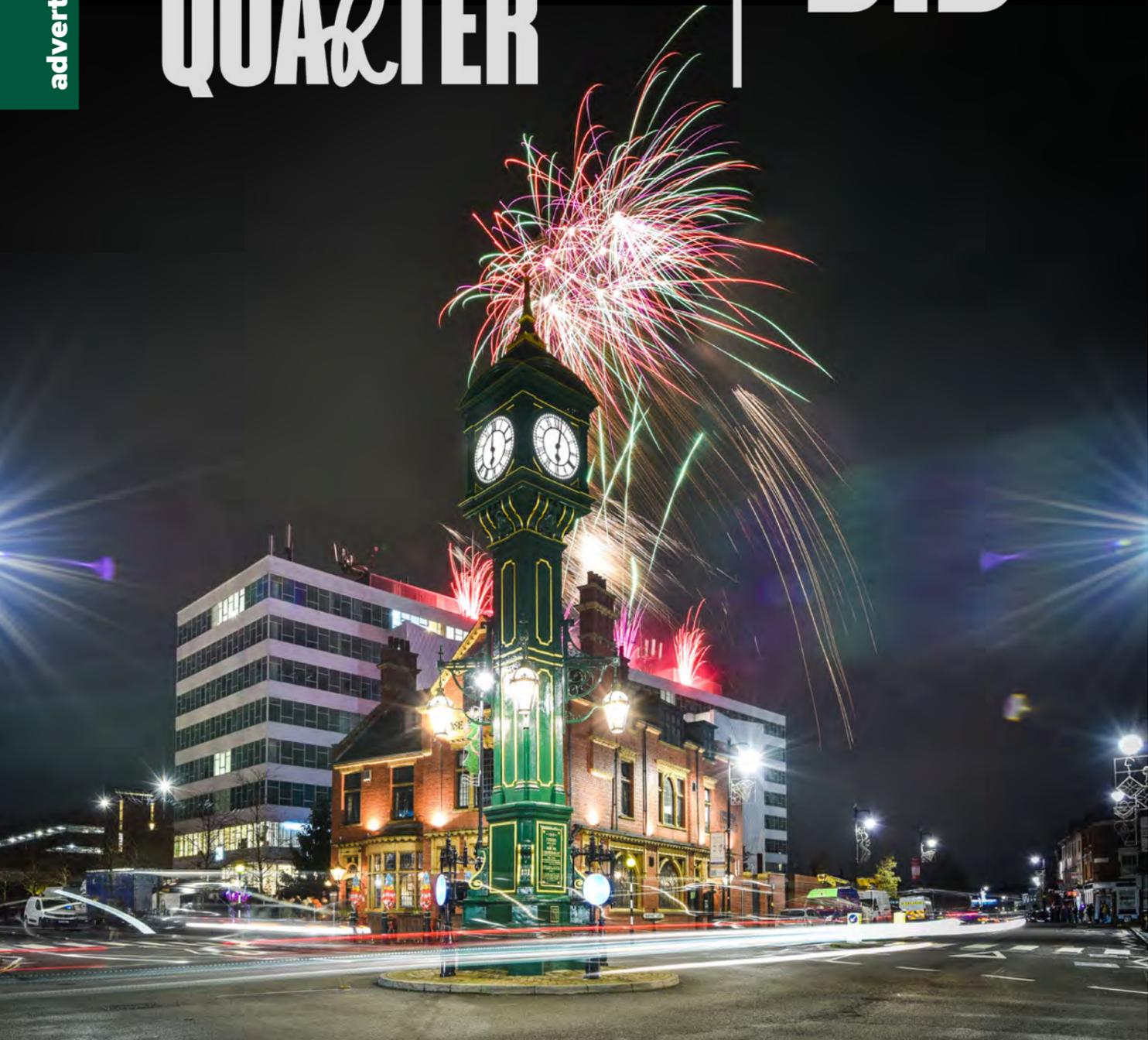
\*Professor Carl Chinn MBE is a social historian, writer, teacher and public speaker. He is the author of 36 books and in 2001 was awarded the MBE for his services to local history and charity. Early in 2026, he will be hosting his own podcast, Our Lives, Our Stories.



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# THE JEWELLER & QUARTER

# BID



## The Jewellery Quarter Business Improvement District

The Jewellery Quarter Business Improvement District (JQBID) is a partnership of over 700 local businesses working together to enhance one of Birmingham's most distinctive and historic neighbourhoods.

Funded by a levy paid by businesses within the BID area, the JQBID reinvests this money directly back into the Jewellery Quarter to support economic growth, improve the local environment and promote the area as a great place to work, visit and do business.

Now in its third five-year term of operation, the JQBID continues to play a vital role in championing the interests of local businesses. The current BID term is delivering on a business plan endorsed by more than 87% of levy-paying businesses in the 2022 ballot, demonstrating strong confidence in the BID's vision and track record. Acting as the collective voice of the Jewellery Quarter, the JQBID consistently works to enhance the trading environment, strengthen business connectivity and secure investment that benefits the whole area.

### Events that bring the quarter to life

One of the most visible ways the JQBID supports the area is through annual events that attract thousands of visitors and create a lively environment across the Quarter.

JQ Beer Weekend, held each spring, celebrates the Jewellery Quarter's vibrant pub and bar scene. Over a single weekend, more than 25,000 drinks have been purchased in local venues as part of the event, giving a direct boost to hospitality businesses. Special offers, live music and unique experiences encourage visitors to explore the area.

In the summer, the Jewellery Quarter Festival transforms the streets for a free, family-friendly celebration of the area's creativity, heritage and community spirit. Featuring live music, artisan markets, workshops, heritage tours and activities for all ages, the festival has attracted over 80,000 visitors during the past decade alone. It plays a crucial role in raising the profile of the Jewellery Quarter and reinforcing its reputation as one of Birmingham's most distinctive destinations.

The BID delivers festive cheer through

the Christmas Light Switch-On with this year marking the 10th year. More than 100 bespoke lights now illuminate the area, helping to create a welcoming and vibrant atmosphere for businesses, residents and visitors. The BID has secured £20,000 in grant funding to support this lighting scheme, ensuring the Quarter shines bright during the important winter trading period.

### Investment, partnerships and visible change

Alongside events, the JQBID secure external funding and working in partnership to deliver long term improvements. Working with Townscape Heritage and supported by National Lottery funding, the BID played a key role in the restoration of the historic Chamberlain Clock, which was repaired and returned to working order for the first time in over 30 years.

The BID has also secured £70,000 of funding to support improvements at Jewellery Quarter Station, enhancing the experience for the thousands of people who travel into the area every week. More recently, we have been awarded £34,500 of grant funding to deliver improved wayfinding across the Quarter in partnership with the JQ Neighbourhood Forum, helping visitors navigate the area more easily and encouraging greater footfall across all streets and businesses.

Supporting the area's thriving creative and retail sectors, the JQBID has hosted a Jewellery Quarter Wedding Fair every

other year, which we received £30,000 of grant funding for, helping to promote local jewellers, venues and suppliers.

The BID has also worked closely with businesses to introduce alfresco dining and outdoor seating, creating more vibrant streets and supporting hospitality operators to make the most of public space.

### A cleaner, safer and better-connected quarter

For more than 10 years, the JQBID funded Clean Team has provided enhanced cleansing and rapid graffiti removal, helping to maintain a high-quality environment that businesses and visitors can be proud of.

Another major partnership with Colmore BID, the JQBID has supported major public realm projects such as improvements to the Livery Street subway, strengthening links between the Jewellery Quarter and the city centre and improving safety and accessibility for pedestrians.

The Jewellery Quarter BID continues to deliver real, measurable benefits. By championing the area, securing funding and bringing people into the Quarter year-round, the JQBID is helping ensure this historic neighbourhood continues to thrive as a vibrant culture where everyone can be anyone.

Welcome to where individuality shines.



advertisement feature

# A three-dimensional success story

Through a combination of startling technology, creative flair and trusted collaborations, Jewellery Quarter company Backface has been setting the world of 3D printing alight. HENRY CARPENTER meets the owner of this pioneering business.

We're assessing the capabilities of 3D printing company Backface and the conversation turns, bizarrely, to a chat about Les Battersby – the combative, Status Quo-loving character from Coronation Street.

It prompts Tim Milward, Backface's affable co-owner, to start talking about his photogrammetry camera rig and it quickly becomes obvious that we're dealing with something a little out of the ordinary here.

"Bruce Jones, who plays Les Battersby, was starring in a range of horror films with some small production company and in one particular film he was decapitated," explains Milward.

"The effects team came here with Bruce, he got 3D-scanned in the camera rig and then we produced a half-size version of his head. The prosthetics make-up guy could use it to take a cast and turn it into like a little puppet from which they could pour blood out on demand."

Sure enough, the mask of the rather sinister but strangely familiar face – certainly to Corrie devotees anyway – peers out from a display shelf where it sits alongside all manner of different fabrications made from the Backface studio in George Street.

It tells a tale not only of what's possible by way of facial recognition – and we'll come to the intricacies of the rig later – but also of the breadth of what this pioneering firm is capable. The client list also tells a story. When the likes of Google, the BBC, the NHS, Paramount, Marvel and PlayStation have come calling, Milward must know that he's doing at least something right.

Much of Backface's work is subject to NDAs, so he is unable to give too much away, but if another seal of approval is needed which he absolutely can talk about, it comes from that ultimate testimony provider, the Guinness Book of Records.

"Yes, in 2016 we achieved the Guinness World Record for the world's tallest 3D-printed sculpture of a human," smiles Milward.

"The print was achieved using a full colour 3D printer and stands 2.05 metres tall from head to toe. The

**Tim Milward with the 3D printed head of actor Bruce Jones**

record attempt was already a challenge but attempting to print something this size on a full colour 3D printer made the achievement even more exciting!

“Channel 5’s Gadget Show presenter Jon Bentley was 3D-scanned using our 96 DSLR camera rig and the resulting scan was used for the print.”

There is little that Backface can’t make when it comes to 3D printing. Much of the work comes from marketing agencies keen to tap into Backface’s design and printing capabilities to create figures, props, trophies, and other replica fabrications.

The commissions are often to be used as promotional material and supplied in goodie bags, maybe for a big film coming out or the launch of a new video game.

The firm is also, aptly given its location, involved with the jewellery trade, bringing designs to life and working in partnership with manufacturers, casters and so forth.

And as with film and video character replicas, jewellery items are often requested ahead of a large event such as London Fashion Week.

I ask if he could give an example of a project of which he’s particularly proud. . . and after consideration he points to the replica of the Empire Windrush which Backface was commissioned to put together.



3D printed desk tidies for Hat Films

“We’ve been lucky to be involved in some amazing projects and this is right up there with the best,” he says. “Birmingham City Council approached us to see if we could help them out with their Chelsea Flower Show Garden which they’d been working on with former Play School presenter Baroness Floella Benjamin.

“This was in 2018 which marked the 70th anniversary of the Windrush arriving in the UK, and so Floella wanted to celebrate the fantastic work the Windrush Generation had done for the UK.

“So she teamed up with our local council to put her Chelsea Flower Show vision together. The garden was to feature a replica of the Empire Windrush, the first ship to bring immigrants over from the Caribbean to help the UK rebuild after the second world war. To make it about the people, Floella and BCC wanted to make sure they were represented in the garden – and turned to us to see if we could help.

“Of course, scanning people in 3D is what our rig was built for, so one hot Saturday morning our studio was filled with people ready to be scanned. Floella and BCC brought along some inspirational people with a connection to the Windrush – some descendants from the original passengers, others part of the Windrush Generation themselves. Everyone had interesting stories to tell.

“The figures took a few weeks to process, to complete the artwork and 3D print before they winged their way to Chelsea. What put the icing on the cake was that the Windrush Garden went on to win a gold medal!”

By way of another example of their capabilities, Backface are experienced hands now at replicating trophies. The Ryder Cup, for instance – the bi-annual golf tournament between the US and Europe – is a gold trophy which Milward and his team replicated so the original didn’t have to be hauled around in the run-up to the competition.

Despite Milward often being the sole bod in the office, Backface isn’t exactly a one-man band. When times are busy, he has a team of freelancers he can call on.

And nor is it a one-location enterprise; there is a further studio near Coventry which is where his co-founder and owner of the business, Michael Nichols, tends to be based.

They go back a long way, Milward and Nichols. They worked together at a garden centre business back in the early noughties for which they created a website and sold plants online back in the very early days of ecommerce.

When the business wound down because HS2 was going to steamroller through it, they put their heads together and came up with the idea of 3D printing – which was really in its infancy – as their next commercial concern.

“We ended up just buying that big colour printer in there,” says Milward, jerking his thumb towards a side room.

“We bought that in 2015. It was very expensive!”

Go on, how expensive?

“Not as much as a house but more than a car,” he laughs. “We also bought a hand scanner which is very good and you can scan a person accurately but it does take 15 minutes to scan somebody head to toe.

“In our earlier days our customers were mainly individuals, wanting little models of themselves for trinkets, or perhaps for the tops of wedding cakes.

“We very quickly realised that if we were going to do these little figures of people, most people want their child capturing and a child isn’t going to stand still for 10 minutes while you walk around them with a hand scanner.

“So that’s when we started to build the photogrammetry rig. It took several months of YouTubeing to figure out how to make it work because you can’t just go and buy one, you have to design your own and make it.



Milward is particularly proud of the Windrush anniversary project he was involved in with Baroness Floella Benjamin



A render of a 3D scan

“The cameras need to go off instantaneously and then all the data goes back to a central point to process. We then discovered that most computers can’t process that much data in less than a day, so we started building a mega computer

that would process it all.”

The business had started off in Fazeley Studios in Digbeth but during the Covid pandemic they took the decision to move to the Jewellery Quarter.

This coincided with a change of focus for

Backface; the traditional customer base of consumers shifted to a more B2B market during the pandemic. Uncomfortable though it might make Milward feel, Backface had a good Covid.

“Suddenly all the marketing budgets that all the big clients got shifted from in-person events to things that they could post and give away,” he explained.

“The bulk orders started to come in and our client profile has remained pretty similar since.”

The Jewellery Quarter is working well for Milward and Backspace. He often name-checks businesses who he collaborates with in the most glowing of terms. Jewellers A. Wardle & Co and Fluid Design are two cases in point.

He is reluctant to spill the beans in terms of turnover figures, but the sense is that business is brisk, and the client list is there to prove that this very individual company continues to make a serious mark in the world of 3D printing.

So, what next for Backface?

“Who knows?” says Milward. “We’ll just keep on evolving.”

With the photogrammetry rig no doubt at the centre of it all.



# STEP INSIDE THE

# JEWELLERY QUARTER

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# Breathing new life into the Jewellery Quarter

As placemaking gathers pace across Birmingham, over the last five years Cordia UK has been playing a prominent role in shaping its future with a wave of sustainable, design-led regeneration schemes across the city's iconic Jewellery Quarter, transforming derelict heritage buildings and brownfield sites into vibrant homes, workplaces and community hubs – and reshaping the area for a modern, diverse population.

Cordia UK is the UK arm of residential powerhouse Cordia International and a member of Futureal Group, one of the largest property developers and investors in Central Europe. With over 20 years of experience and more than 12,000 homes sold, Cordia moved decisively into the West Midlands to capitalise on Birmingham's resurgence.

Their ambition: to deliver high-quality, sustainable residential and commercial spaces that respect the city's heritage while catering to contemporary needs.

## Heritage meets modern living

One of Cordia UK's first projects is The Gothic – a stunning redevelopment of a cluster of Grade-II listed structures on Great Hampton Street, including a former public house, townhouses, and a gold-chain manufactory dating back to the 1800s.

The project has skilfully restored original architectural details while converting the site into a bespoke collection of one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments and duplexes.

But for Cordia UK, heritage is not a constraint – it's an opportunity. The firm's approach blends old and new: breathing life into beloved buildings while introducing contemporary design, energy-efficient living, and mixed-use functionality.

## Transforming the JQ for a new generation

Beyond The Gothic, Cordia UK is rolling out a pipeline of ambitious projects aimed at redefining the Jewellery Quarter as a modern, mixed-use neighbourhood. Among these:

The Lampworks – Cordia UK's flagship residential development in Birmingham – is a 148-unit build-to-rent scheme comprising one-, two- and three-bedroom apartments, set within a sensitively restored historic industrial setting.

Designed for the modern Birmingham resident, the development is fitted with the latest technologies and high-quality finishes, alongside a range of shared

amenities including a co-working space, shared lounge and communal kitchen and dining areas.

As a cornerstone project for Cordia UK in the city, The Lampworks exemplifies the company's design-led, sustainability-focused approach, combining contemporary living with the character of the Jewellery Quarter. The scheme will also introduce three commercial units along Great Hampton Street, supporting new businesses and contributing to the area's thriving mixed-use ecosystem.

Bradford Works – set to become Birmingham's first purpose-built shared living development, with 54 en-suite studio units and communal amenities tailored for young professionals, creatives and students. The scheme offers 100% A-rated energy-efficient, affordable living, addressing a demographic that has historically lacked access to accommodation of this kind.

Mott Street & Nightingale – recently granted planning permission, this landmark regeneration project will deliver 179 stylish build-to-rent apartments, combining restored historic warehouse structures with contemporary new-build blocks.

In addition to housing, Cordia UK is delivering a wider placemaking vision in the area, which includes The Bank – a heritage refurbishment of a former Lloyd's Bank's building on Great Hampton Street. The project has enhanced the building's energy performance from EPC D to B and features additional top-tier retail units and offices, among which is also the company's UK headquarters.

## Sustainability, community and long-term vision

Cordia UK's philosophy centres on sustainable development and long-term value creation. All projects aim to deliver high-quality living with energy efficiency at the core – from modern insulation and heat-pump based heating systems to thoughtfully planned communal amenities and green surroundings.

The firm's impact goes beyond architecture: Cordia UK seeks to turn underutilised urban spaces into thriving neighbourhoods that attract new residents, local businesses and creative industries. With residential, retail, co-working and leisure spaces side-by-side, the JQ is increasingly becoming a vibrant, 24/7 district and a 15-minute city – combining Birmingham's industrial past with its dynamic future.

## Contributing to the next chapter

Cordia UK's commitment to the city is both deep and long-term. The company is actively delivering a substantial pipeline of projects, reflecting not a site-by-site approach but a broader ambition to help shape the city's future.

Urban regeneration and placemaking are not new concepts, as they are embedded in the company's DNA, underpinned by more than two decades of experience delivering complex, city-shaping developments across Europe. As part of the wider Cordia International and the Futureal Group, the business has already demonstrated its expertise in transforming historic urban districts in cities such as Budapest and Warsaw – bringing together the revitalisation of historic urban fabric, contemporary living and sustainable design at scale.

That same knowledge and proven approach are now being applied in Birmingham. By restoring heritage, injecting new housing supply, delivering sustainable design and creating mixed-use communities, Cordia UK is making a long-term bet on Birmingham's growth trajectory.

As demand continues to rise and investors seek stable, well-designed assets, Cordia UK represents a beacon of responsible, future-focused urban development. For Birmingham – and especially for the Jewellery Quarter – it is a story of renewal, reinvention and reinvigoration.



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# Badge of approval

**WO Lewis is a Jewellery Quarter stalwart, having made badges and other items for high-profile customers for the best part of two centuries. JON GRIFFIN meets the current boss of this hugely respected family-owned business.**

Philip Lewis is looking back with considerable pride at nearly 200 years of Brummie craftsmanship delivered by five generations of family blood, sweat and tears – and one extraordinary statistic stands out amid many.

His last complaint was 16 years ago. The complainant in question, recalls Lewis, was the Oxfordshire Women's Institute following excessive removal of enamel from a shipment of badges.

"We redid the whole lot for them," he recalls. "My ethos is that the customer has got to be satisfied.

"It is all about delivery on time and quality. We try to do a good job – that's the most important thing."

Customer satisfaction – underpinned by a remarkable attention to detail which sees him inspect every handmade product painstakingly manufactured in a factory dating back to the Victorian era – is at the heart of the WO Lewis story.

The redoubtable Brummie badge maker – one of the Jewellery Quarter's most enduring companies – has survived two world wars, the great crash and banking bailout of 2008, Covid and so much more across nearly two centuries of traditional craft skills, from expert enamelling to state-of-the-art printing, gold and silversmithing.

Since its foundation in 1832 WO Lewis has produced hundreds of thousands of intricately manufactured items, ranging from lapel badges, commemorative medals and enamelled jewellery, to key fobs, plaques and shields.

The company supplies badges to racecourses throughout the UK, boasts a vast array of other clients from the Pony Club to the Probus Club and can count the royals, the St Moritz Tobogganing Club, Pink Floyd and Roger Daltrey among its customer base over the years.

While many contemporaries in the Jewellery Quarter have fallen victim to the effects of globalisation and cheap imports, WO Lewis remains a beacon of Brummie excellence and handmade expertise – and still today in the hands of the same family ownership.

And while its name and reputation may not have generated quite the same volume of headlines as Longbridge or LDV, Lucas or IMI and many other Midlands manufacturing giants of the past, the badge maker – founded five years before Queen Victoria took to the throne – remains a proud standard bearer for the 'Made in Birmingham' hallmark which grew out of the workshop of the world.

The urban sprawl which gave birth to the City of a Thousand Trades might have boasted better-known names across the centuries – but few have survived as long as a family-owned factory.

Or as the fifth-generation Lewis managing director puts it: "It's tough. There were a lot of badge makers (in the Jewellery Quarter), probably around 20. I shouldn't think there are more than three or four now. If they say they do it, I think you will find that they are buying it in because they haven't got a factory."

Whilst stepping into the firm's Howard Street headquarters just a few hundred yards away from Birmingham city centre feels a little like venturing into a Dickensian time warp for the uninitiated, there's nothing remotely obsolete about the modern techniques, ethos and expertise which continue to drive this £1 million turnover concern.

"By and large we have relied on reputation and word of mouth, providing a good service, delivering on time and creating quality products," says Lewis. "There is still an awful lot to be said for Made in Birmingham and Made in England – but I don't think the consumer really has any idea these days."

The Made in Birmingham motif has been part of Philip Lewis's working life for more than 45 years, ever since he took over as the fifth-generation custodian of a family enterprise which dates back to his great, great, great grandfather, William Oliver, who founded the company in 1832.

"I haven't got all the details. Our records go back to the early 1900s, 1890. William Oliver Lewis was from Birmingham – we have all come from Birmingham. I think early on it was mostly needles and buttons, which a lot of the companies were doing in those days.

"It was based here in the Jewellery Quarter. In fact we have only moved 100 yards. We were compulsorily purchased by the council in 1969, so we bought this land and built the factory to continue running the business."

Philip Lewis took over as the latter-day

**“We do the debenture badges for Wimbledon, Lord’s, we have done Twickenham and the Six Nations. There have been football clubs – we used to make for some of the Premier League clubs such as Aston Villa, Newcastle United and Birmingham City.”**

generational figure in charge of the family silver after his father Michael – who had been held captive in Burma for several years during the Second World War – moved to Canada at the age of 70.

“I moved in when I was 20. I was travelling the world at that stage and had come back home to find something to do. I made the decision to come back and work with my cousin Andrew, and we carried on from there.”

He recalls with relish the family atmosphere in the Jewellery Quarter of his father’s era, when deals were often struck over leisurely, convivial lunches.

“In the old days you used to go out and do a deal over lunch. Not a lot was done in the afternoon – they used to come in and have a sleep, then sign the letters and make their way home.

“There was more of a family atmosphere within the Jewellery Quarter then. JR Gaunt, Fattorini, Toye, Kenning and Spencer – they all used to go out for lunch. There was a real community spirit in those days, but we don’t have that so much now.”

In his 45-year plus tenure, Lewis has overseen the firm’s capture of a significant slice of the UK’s racecourse market, a happy coincidence given his passion for the sport of kings.

“We found a niche in horse racing, which we are most probably renowned for, making the badges for membership on a yearly basis. They are enamel badges with a cord which gives the customer entry into certain bars and members-only areas. We probably make 70 to 75 per cent of the badges for racecourses.

“We do places like Cheltenham, Aintree, Stratford, Warwick and Leicester. Many racecourses have closed – Gatwick, Birmingham, Hurst Park and we have done those in the past. We also do the Pony Club, the British Horse Society, polo clubs.

“Somewhere between 40 and 50 per cent of our turnover is supplying racecourses – that is our biggest single sector. Goodwood has expanded into motor racing and that would be another big market.”

The company’s involvement with the horse racing fraternity has reaped some prestigious rewards, including supplying the Royal Family.

“I did things for the Queen through the British Horse Society and the Pony Club. I have done work for Buckingham Palace. There’s a letter over there saying thank you for making items for the doll’s house which is on display in Windsor Castle.

“I did a lot of stuff for Royal Windsor Horse Show. I once stood on Prince Philip’s foot which I apologised for and then we went and had a cup of tea. I have been introduced to the Queen and I know Zara Phillips through horse racing.”

At the other end of the celebrity spectrum, the Birmingham firm has worked with rock star royalty. “We worked with Pink Floyd and Roger Daltrey. They wanted some little pins for one of their tours.”

The list of blue-chip clients for this tiny, charmingly understated Birmingham stalwart – its workforce is just seven-strong – is seemingly endless, although Philip Lewis gives the impression he is hardly the sort to name drop, preferring to let the firm’s quality speak for itself with its impressive roll-call of VIP clientele.

“We do the debenture badges for Wimbledon, Lord’s, we have done Twickenham and the Six Nations. There have been football clubs – we used to make for some of the Premier League clubs such as Aston Villa, Newcastle United and Birmingham City.”

But VIP endorsements notwithstanding, 64-year-old Lewis admits the firm faces a challenging future with skills shortages, overseas competition and the lack of a family successor all clouding the horizon.

“There is, of course, China where a lot of enamel work is done. It is very good quality stuff – there is no doubt about that – but they also do cheaper versions, and some racecourses wish to save themselves £2 or £3 per badge on their order. If they have 2,000 to 3,000 members that comes to quite a lot of money.

“The point is they are not always the same as they are told – we have had people go abroad and have had problems. Then they come back to us and say it didn’t work.”

The threat from China aside, Lewis views skills shortages as a further obstacle to the future of this venerable Birmingham institution.

“The workforce is the biggest problem. There are seven of us, it is a very small operation. It used to be up to 25 but it is a dying trade because everything is done by hand. You stamp the badge on a machine but you have to cut out the excess metal with a hand press and then you have to solder by hand and fire the enamel off.

**A worker at the stamping press**



down to me. I view it and send it back upstairs to be titivated if it has got a scratch on it or has a bit of enamel missing. I will check everything before it goes to the platers where it has its gold, chrome or silver finish. I view every single item.”

Against that backdrop of a lifetime in the trade Lewis’s goal is to take the family firm to its double century.

“I am an only child, there are nieces and nephews but they never wanted to get involved,” he says.

“I would like to do another six years which will take us up to 200 years old and that would be quite something – and in the same family as well.”

It would indeed be some achievement. But whatever the future ultimately brings for WO Lewis, its place in the highly distinguished annals of Brummie manufacturing is surely safe for posterity.



**Left: Enamelling a set of Masonic badges  
Below: Philip Lewis has 45 years of experience in the badge-making industry**



“The majority of it is done by hand but there are not enough enamellers. I have been looking for enamellers for 30 years and nobody wants to do it. We are losing many people because trainees have not been brought through.

“Today’s generation don’t want to sit on a factory bench all day working machinery. The old school used to be the mother and father working here, then the son or daughter would come along.”

Nevertheless, if Lewis finds himself short-staffed at any juncture, he can always fall back on his own expertise after more than 45 years at the Jewellery Quarter grindstone.

“It is very, very skilled work. I can do everything – there is no point asking somebody to do something if you can’t do it yourself. If we are busy I will go and sit upstairs with the girls doing the enamelling.”

It’s that desire for perfection that still drives this latter-day guardian of industrial values which go back decades – or even centuries – and has kept WO Lewis a fixture of the Jewellery Quarter for nearly 200 years.

“If we make something here it comes



# Firm celebrates a climb up up industry rankings

A Midlands accountancy firm is celebrating after climbing a prestigious set of industry rankings.

HB&O, which expanded its footprint earlier this year by opening an office in Birmingham, has climbed six places in the Accountancy Age Top 50+50 rankings for 2025.

The expansion into Birmingham, launch of new service lines and a growing virtual finance office team has helped HB&O to move up to 93rd in the rankings, the firm said.

It's the second time HB&O has featured in the Top 50+50 rankings, marking continued growth for the independent firm, which also has offices in Coventry and Leamington.

The company, which employs more than 100 people across its three offices, offers a wide range of services to businesses and individuals, including audit, tax, transaction tax services, payroll, business advisory services and VFO.

Mark Ashfield, managing director at HB&O, said: "Climbing the Accountancy Age Top 50+50 rankings is a fantastic achievement for the business and testament to the exceptional work our staff deliver for clients every single day.

"This result really is the icing on the cake in what has been a landmark year for HB&O. Our expansion into Birmingham represented a major investment milestone that has enabled us to grow our presence across the West Midlands."



Pictured back from left are HB&O director Stuart Grosvenor and managing director Mark Ashfield, and front from left, tax director Neil Allcroft and head of tax Helen Coombes

## Fast-track service has big uptake

A desire for leaner inventories and quicker stock replenishment has led to a major uptake in a Black Country company's emergency manufacturing service, the firm has said.

The Brierley Hill-based wire rope specialist Alloy Wire International has reported £250,000 of sales to companies involved in aerospace, energy and oil and gas over the last six months.

The EMS fast-tracks a request in five days – from receiving the order it goes through to its technical team, allocation of raw material and into production.

Sales executive Paul Chatterley said: "I believe the surge in enquiries for the emergency manufacturing service reflects the volatility in the marketplace, with customers wanting things quicker and others worried about supply chain disruption.

"Another big driver is also involvement in an increasing number of prototype products and trial quantities, especially in short batches."

## Shortlist announced

Judges hailed a "high calibre and diverse range of entries" as the shortlist was revealed for the 2026 Royal Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield & Tamworth and Cannock Chase Chamber of Commerce Awards.

More than 40 businesses and individuals have been shortlisted across eight categories for the awards, which take place at Statfold Country Park near Tamworth on February 12.

As well as crowning the eight category winners, one business will also be named overall STLC Business of the Year.

The presidents of the three Chambers will also hand out President's Awards.

David Woakes, pictured, head of commercial development at Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce, chaired the judging panel.

He said: "The judges were very impressed by the high calibre and diverse range of entries for these awards. It is testament to the scope and quality of businesses across Sutton Coldfield, Lichfield, Tamworth and Cannock Chase. We wish all finalists the very best of luck."

# Expert help for public speaking

A legendary figure from the world of sports broadcasting is offering to help Birmingham bosses to improve their public speaking skills.

Gary Newbon, who was awarded an MBE in 2019 for services to media, sport and charity, has been a broadcaster for over 50 years and has interviewed some of the biggest names in sport, including Sir Alex Ferguson, Chris Eubank and the late Brian Clough.

Mr Newbon, who lives in Solihull, has trained top executives in media and public speaking skills elsewhere in the UK, but is now making himself available to Birmingham managers and decision makers.

He said: "It's a fact that the vast majority of executives get extremely nervous when they address large crowds.

"Because of my experience in the media, I am able to give them the confidence to cope with large crowds and media questioning.

"I can teach people how to prepare themselves and have the right disciplines to hold a whole room with confidence."

Mr Newbon began his journalism career in his home city of Cambridge before joining Hayter's Sports Agency in 1967. He was also a sports columnist for the Sunday Mirror, and his television presenting career began in 1968.

He has covered seven World Cup football finals, three Olympic Games, European Champions Football and many world boxing championships around the world. He has also presented hundreds of television programmes.

"I have been an interviewer for much of



Gary Newbon

my life and so I understand about nerves from both sides," he said.

"I remember when I started. There was no autocue and not much help around, so I had to learn how to cope with my own nerves but I also learned to understand that many footballers and other sportsmen and women have also been nervous.

"So these are skills I've honed over a long period of time and I am here to bring them to Birmingham's business community.

"I did it recently with the CEO of an energy company in the south of the country. In one day, I turned him round from being nervous in front of large crowds and the media to being able to cope with ease."

Mr Newbon added that he would come to clients' offices or a venue of their choosing, and can work with up to three people in the day.

## Neocare owner sets out five year plan

The owner of a medical products business which is set to celebrate its 20th anniversary has unveiled plans to scale the firm across the UK and Europe.

Neocare was established in 2006 and manufactures stainless steel products for medical facilities across the UK, with a particular focus on sterile services and endoscopy.

New owner Rakesh Javer has set out a five-year plan to grow into new markets such as pharma and veterinary, both in the UK and overseas.

Neocare supplies products to all types of decontamination, hospital, food, laboratory, medical manufacturing and pharmaceutical facilities from its manufacturing base in South Wales.

Mr Javer, who is based in Solihull, has worked in the medical capital sales environment since 2006 and said purchasing a business in the space was a logical next step.

He said: "The equipment we manufacture is an important part of the treatment jigsaw in medical settings – if it's not in the right place at the right time in the right position, it can cause problems."

Solihull-based Prime Accountants Group and director Jamie Skelding advised Mr Javer on several aspects of the purchase.

## Celebrating 45 years service with company

West Bromwich steel fabricator Steelway Brickhouse has been celebrating a valued staff member's milestone of 45 years of service.

Lee Oakley joined Steelway in 1980, and has since become an integral part of the business, contributing his expertise and commitment through many changes and developments in the company.

Mr Oakley started in production control when he joined the firm, but he moved into sales and is now office sales manager.

"Looking back, it's hard to believe it's been 45 years," said Mr Oakley. "I've seen the company evolve in so many ways, but the sense of family and commitment here has always stayed the same.

"It's been a privilege to work alongside such talented people and to contribute to Steelway Brickhouse's success over the years."

Alan Curtis, managing director at Steelway, said: "We have had the privilege of celebrating something truly special – 45 years of service from one of our longest-standing and most respected colleagues.

"When Lee joined in 1980, the world looked very different, but through every change, new technology, new systems and new challenges, his commitment and professionalism have never wavered.

"His knowledge of our industry is second to none, and his insight and dedication have helped shape Steelway into the business it is today."



# Funding fuels export growth for robotics firm

A Birmingham specialist in factory automation and robotics solutions has been able to capitalise on overseas opportunities after receiving funding from a business finance provider.

Mechatronic Production Systems, which is based at Kings Norton Business Centre, has secured export deals in the face of upheaval in the UK economy after receiving £200,000 in UKSE funding.

Mechatronic supplies factory production and robotic process automation to automotive, industrial, medical device and aerospace companies.

Despite many customers in their domestic markets pausing long-term investment due to international tariffs, Mechatronic has employed new staff and is targeting growth, all through focusing on overseas opportunities.

The company approached social impact funder UKSE, which works with companies across the West Midlands, in 2024 for backing.

Managing director Tony Parker-Watkins said the business needed to adjust the delivery of its plans in the face of national and global economic challenges.

Mr Parker-Watkins said: "There is no doubt a lot of manufacturers have put the

brakes on spending on capital investment, which impacts us, as they absorbed the costs of increased National Insurance payments and other changes such as the export tariffs but things picked up for us from the spring onwards.

"We reapplied our focus outside of the UK and have picked up significant projects for customers in the EU and Asia. We are committed to serving customers in the UK but we have been able to make the most of these opportunities further afield.

"We have recruited two new people and the business is on target and structured to achieve growth. Our focus is now on building our overseas new business pipeline as there is plenty to fight for.

"The funding from UKSE has enabled us to capitalise on these opportunities. We are looking to recruit, subject to the work in the pipeline being secured."

UKSE Midlands area manager Steve Grice said: "We are pleased to have seen Mechatronic make strides forward despite the challenging economic environment.

"Even though the going has not been favourable, Tony and his team are taking a global view to unlock new opportunities which benefit not just their business but the wider West Midlands economy."



**Kath Lang, operations director at PLT Training**

■ A specialist health and safety training provider has invested £1.25 million into a new 'centre of excellence' in Oldbury.

PLT Training has expanded and purchased a facility in Pearsall Drive, creating a dedicated training space to support more than 10,000 learners every year.

The firm currently works with more than 1,500 companies nationwide every year, ranging from SMEs and sub-contractors to major employers like Assa Abloy, Arvato SCM, AO Recycling, Williams F1 and Red Bull Racing.

Operations director Kath Lang said: "We had grown rapidly over the last five years and felt the time was right to look for a larger training space that allowed us to do more delivery at our own facility.

"The space in Oldbury came up and we jumped at the opportunity. It was a pretty blank canvas which gave us the chance to shape the training zones exactly how our instructors wanted them.

"We've taken on an extra couple of people as part of the move and plan for more to join the team of 17 instructors in the coming months."

# Birmingham – the beating heart of a new economic era

JAYNE HUSSEY, a partner and head of law firm Mills & Reeve's Birmingham office, assesses what devolved powers mean for the region

One month into 2026 and the mood music in Birmingham and the West Midlands is refreshingly positive.

Yes, we have our challenges like everyone else, but there are many reasons to believe that 2026 is going to be a good year for the city and the region.

We seem to have started where we left off at the end of 2025 when experts described Birmingham as being poised to become "the beating heart of a new economic era" – a statement that's hardly surprising given the West Midlands is the only UK region to have clusters in all eight of the sectors identified as having the highest growth potential over the next decade, according to the government's 10-year Industrial Strategy.

The ambitious remark is also thanks to high levels of foreign direct investment and excellence in emerging industries such as AI. It's little wonder that the West Midlands Combined Authority has embedded AI and innovation into its Growth Plan, declaring in its AI Missions document that it wants to make the region "the UK's AI testbed for public services and business innovation".

There is similar positivity in the recently published Birmingham Economic Review, produced by the University of Birmingham's City-Region Economic Development Institute and the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce. While it was tempered with caution, thanks to ongoing economic pressures, skills shortages and access to capital, it also highlighted the long-term competitiveness of the region and why the West Midlands remains "a leading destination for foreign direct investment outside of London".

On the back of the report's launch – an event I attended back in December – Raj Kandola, acting deputy CEO at GBCC, said the data in the review told a story of resilience, while pointing to collaboration as a key factor in future success.

He said: "Businesses must embrace innovation and digital transformation, while policymakers focus on creating the conditions for investment and skills development."

Those 'conditions' will be critical if we're to meet our long-term ambitions. While we have all the right ingredients as a region, we

must have government support to realise those goals and, with it, the autonomy to be masters of our own destiny.

## Putting your money where your mouth is

The chancellor's Autumn Budget gave us a real glimpse into what 'place-based' decision-making will look like in the West Midlands and the kind of devolved powers on offer.

As a region, we will benefit from a series of major devolved funding packages aimed at accelerating housing delivery, boosting local growth, and backing the region's expanding creative economy.

For the first time, our Mayoral Strategic Authority – amongst others – will receive a slice of £1.3 billion from the new National Housing Delivery Fund, designed to unlock strategic residential sites and speed up regeneration. What's more, the West Midlands and six other city regions will receive a share of at least £13 billion in devolved 'integrated settlements'. The funding will give mayor Richard Parker greater control over a single, flexible pot for growth, skills, public services and infrastructure, aligned directly with the region's economic strategy.

Additionally, the West Midlands has been named as a recipient of the newly-launched Regional Project Accelerator, together with the region receiving £25 million from the newly confirmed Creative Places Growth Fund. When you add several other additional funding streams, including the Mayoral Revolving Growth Fund and the Local Government Fund, the future landscape starts to become clearer.

We asked for devolved powers and we got them – in part. While place-based decision-making enables us to direct investment into areas of need, while being more targeted in our efforts, with a reduced risk of things being lost in translation in Whitehall, are there any downsides to devolution?

## A cautionary tale

There's no doubt that, regardless of what devolved powers we are given as a region,

Whitehall will continue to have the final say. The latest budget has served West Midlands well, but where could potential conflicts lie?

Overall, different rules and policies across England have the potential to create a patchwork of policies, with the risk of funding disparities, as well as uneven skills and productivity. If certain regions are better equipped to manage greater power, others may falter and be left behind. This leads to the question as to whether we have the capacity and skills in local government to manage an increase in devolved funding, as well as the necessary insight and data to direct it purposefully.

Devolution can also intensify 'regionalism'. As a region, we've always had a strong identity – and one that we're very proud of – but with more money in our back pocket, so to speak, could that trip us up in future.

Power is a complex force and one that needs to be managed carefully. The good news is we have been given the opportunity; we are a region in which the government trusts; and, whatever pitfalls stand in our way, we must embrace the chance to influence how the West Midlands looks over the course of the next few years.

## Redefining the future

There's no doubt that the Midlands is a place where highly motivated and ambitious business and political leaders draw on our strong heritage each and every day to help redefine our future.

Leaders in the region have a commitment to push boundaries, particularly in areas such as tech, AI and life sciences, while at the same time combining it with the pride we have in heritage industries like manufacturing, real estate and construction, as well as the highly skilled talent pool, which is supported by a cohort of world-leading universities.

We have made our ambitions clear; we have been given a new set of tools from central government to work with; now we must wrap our arms around the opportunity, be mindful in our approach, but set about delivering on these ambitions. Something the Midlands is brilliant at.

# Manufacturer crowned at industry awards



**Jane Somerville and Chris Corkan**

A Bilston-based manufacturer of roll-tooling equipment was crowned Business Growth & Strategy winner for the Midlands and East region at the Make UK Manufacturing Awards 2025.

The award recognised the company's expansion into export markets and strategic vision since the business was acquired by Jane Somerville and Nicola Owen in 2020.

The regional win now puts Bowers & Jones in the running for the national title, which was set to be announced at an awards ceremony in January.

The award celebrates manufacturers who have demonstrated exceptional growth, clear strategic direction and successful navigation of business challenges. Since 2020, Bowers & Jones has more than doubled its turnover, expanded its workforce, and grown its international customer base to more than

300 clients worldwide, with 80 per cent of sales now coming from export markets.

Managing director Jane Somerville said: "We are delighted to receive this recognition from Make UK. This award reflects the hard work and commitment of our entire team, who have been instrumental in our growth journey.

"Winning at regional level and progressing to the national finals is a proud moment for us as a Black Country manufacturer. It demonstrates that with the right strategy, team, and dedication, businesses can thrive even in challenging times."

The win marks the third business award for Bowers & Jones this year, following wins at the Express & Star Business Awards where they were named Small Business of the Year, and Insider Media's Made in the Midlands Awards, where they secured the Export Business of the Year title.



# Peas in a pod

**While Andy Dawson and PJ Ellis are well known in the region for their many and varied professional positions, they are also pals and family men who enjoy bouncing ideas off each other. It was after one of their many chats that they decided to launch their Wit+Grit podcast which has since seen a variety of guests feature on the weekly show. HENRY CARPENTER catches up with this most dynamic of duos ahead of their first live performance.**

Pinning down PJ Ellis and Andy Dawson in the run-up to Christmas isn't easy.

Not only are they two of Birmingham's most visible figures, certainly in business and media circles with numerous roles between them to fulfil, but it is also a notoriously tricky time of year.

Nevertheless, here we are on an online call a week before Christmas to discuss the pair's Wit+Grit podcast, and more topically the live event they are staging at Millennium Point on January 30. Actually, the energy and humour pinballs between them virtually every bit as effectively as if this were an in-person get-together.

For those who don't know them, Ellis is a key member of the BBC WM radio team, but has worn several other hats with distinction since he came into our living rooms as part of the Big Brother household in one of the reality TV show's earliest and most memorable series.

Lawyer, entrepreneur, digital marketer, social media wizard, awards host, charity ambassador and family man are just some of the strings to his bow. Those who follow him will know that he wears his (sizeable) heart on his sleeve, broken when he lost his beloved mother in 2024 – which he refers to frequently as an event which has since shaped much of the way he thinks.

The similarly cerebral Dawson is the founder of Curium Solutions, in essence a business consultancy firm with a people-first focus (get him on the subject of leadership and it's likely to be an enthusiastic conversation). He has also

been sworn in as the latest president of Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce. "I'm amazed he still talks to us," jokes Ellis.

They also share many characteristics. For starters, they are 'people people'. They enjoy the company of others, are thoughtful, sensitive, empathetic, good listeners and opinionated without being judgemental . . . in short, they embody many of the qualities which make for a good podcast. And another common factor, crucially as it turns out, is that they are parents to kids who are either in or

entering their teens.

They had known, liked and respected each other for a good ten years before a matey chat last summer turned into something rather more consequential.

It was over a coffee in Sutton Park – which is local to them both – and a discussion over the concerns they held for their children in today's fast-evolving world that saw the conception of the podcast.

"I've always wanted to do something with Andy," says Ellis. "We've always got on very well and we also have a





connection in that we have shared anxieties about our children, and what the future holds for them.

“Our children are on similar journeys – all superb kids, very reflective of society.

“But as parents, we’re wondering why kids that are brilliant at home struggle outside, perhaps lacking in resilience and self confidence.

“How are they going to live and exist and survive in a world of work? To use a legal analogy, a digitally brilliant, AI-fluent paralegal joining a law firm and has to work with the old-school lawyer who’s on the golf course looking people in the eye and doing deals over the table.

“It’s just polar opposites. So we were thinking about how we could look at that and ask other people what they thought about it.

“I started procrastinating over what might this look like? What do we say? How do we articulate this? Andy just said, let’s just go for it, let’s start a podcast. Within a few days we had a brand sorted.”

The next stage was to establish the format. Wit+Grit – so named for obvious reasons – is run weekly, usually with a guest, although some weeks it’s just Dawson and Ellis having a natter.

At the time of writing, they have banked 20 editions, with a broad spectrum of guests, predominantly but certainly not exclusively from the business world.

These have included former Aston Villa and chamber boss Paul Faulkner, Gymshark’s Ad Davies, the WMCA’s mayor Richard Parker, McDonalds franchisee Doug Wright, a handful of young solicitors,

a hostage negotiator trainer, a charity boss . . . it’s a wide and intriguing mix.

“While PJ and I are unified in the concept of helping to prepare our kids for the next stages of their lives, it is important to get interesting people on and have good conversations that are a bit different and resonate,” says Dawson.

“For instance, we’ve just recorded a siblings episode, which is with a chap called Will Crawford from a music mindfulness company called Quietnote and his sister who wants to be a professional poker player out in Vegas.

“We’ve had a couple of recently qualified solicitors on, we’ve had two female entrepreneurs starting out on a digital journey and so we’re just trying to have slightly different conversations and formats and see if we enjoy it.

“We have a theme in each episode, but the conversation goes anywhere and everywhere in a nice way with some common threads through it. But if my friends’ kids listen and pick up some really simple messages that are relatable to them, then that’s what we’re trying to achieve.”

I ask whether any episodes in particular have stuck in the memory, not only as fun and interesting but also providing meaningful pearls of wisdom and takeaways helpful for the younger

generation. The answer is several.

Dawson points to Ad Davis from Gymshark who talked about development and leadership, and how the two are entwined with the great leaders excelling at creating opportunities for others.

And they both thought the episode with Met counter-terrorism hostage negotiator trainer Katey Martin was a standout.

“She was really helpful because a quick takeaway was how I articulate with my kids in intense moments,” says Ellis. “She pointed out that with kidnapers and hostage takers, never to start a dialogue with the words ‘I think’ because it really isn’t about you. And that got me thinking about how I sometimes talk to my kids.”

Then there was Iain McCallister, the founder of security service MAN Commercial.

“He’s been very, very successful,” continues Ellis. “One phrase he used was ‘dig one hole and dig it deep’, and I thought, hang on a second, that applies to me because I’ve been juggling so many plates over the last 30 years that my wife has been urging me to pick my battles more and slow everything down.”

Abbie Vlahakis, the Millennium Point CEO, is another who provided helpful insight, according to Ellis. “We were talking about the concern of kids being lethargic but she pointed out that this

has been an issue since the times of the Roman Empire, when the philosopher and statesman Seneca had said that he was fearful for the lethargy of the next generation going into battle, that they weren’t battle worthy.

“So this has been going on forever, and her overarching belief was to trust these kids and to give them the opportunities. And I thought, you know what she’s bang on.”

The very first guest was Tracy Westall who last summer was awarded an OBE for services to the digital sector and diversity. In the podcast, she was talking about an Amnesty International report about misogyny in the workplace which was backed up by data.

“As a dad of a daughter I’m instantly all over this,” says Ellis. “So there have been loads of takeaways and I have to admit that I’m quite proud that we’re having these conversations.”

Wit+Grit Live is looming on the horizon but I wonder what lies beyond. Most podcasts have fizzled out by this point in time, so what are the ambitions of the two mates? After all, with the guest-gathering and editing of each episode, delivering a polished podcast takes no small amount of time and energy.

By the sound of it, they are going to double down on their efforts and commercialise it to the extent that it becomes a much more significant part of their professional lives.

They believe they have got the formula very much on the right track, and they also have tremendous belief in each other.

**“I want to create a much bigger monster with the podcast, and I want the monster to jump over the fence and rip us apart because I’m ready for it.”**

“PJ lights up any room he walks into – although I’m sure he won’t like me saying that!” says Dawson. “The great thing is, there’s complete faith and trust between the two of us. If one of us says they will do something, the other has total confidence that it will be done. I’ve learned that we’re a good combination. I always had the suspicion that would be the case but it’s just nice to see it playing out.”

He insists that the live event will not be a one-off but hopefully the first of many. Not only will these strengthen the Wit+Grit brand and increase awareness of the podcast, but they will also provide a revenue stream.

The main income though when it comes to “professionalising the pod”, as Dawson describes it, will come from the online advertising and sponsorship opportunities which streaming platforms like YouTube provide.

The viewing figures of the podcasts are on the increase, helped in no small part by their following on LinkedIn, but it does of course help that Ellis has a flair for digital marketing – and the analytics on YouTube are also grounds for optimism.

But really, as with the subjects of the podcasts themselves, the commercial methods are far from set in stone. They will try whatever’s out there with the view that all opportunities are worth testing.

“I’ve definitely got to that point in my life where I want to do things with purpose, particularly after my mum died and seeing the world with a new perspective,” says Ellis.

“I would love this to eventually be my

main job. I’m coming into that sort of part of my life where I don’t want to have as big a portfolio career as I do at the moment. And I also want to help [wife] Kelly grow her business.

“I want to create a much bigger monster with the podcast, and I want the monster to jump over the fence and rip us apart because I’m ready for it.

“That excites me because Andy’s a successful guy. Yes he’s my mate, and while we both have the energy, we’ve got different skills. One that he has, and it’s something I’m not brilliant at, is growing and exiting a business.

“Those are two very brilliant key skills that I want to be around and I’m excited about that.”

For now though, it’s eyes on Millennium Point on January 30. Ticket holders can expect a full day of guest interviewees – some who have been on the podcast, some not – clips from past episodes and plenty of reflection between our protagonists.

This is likely to comprise much of the ‘grit’, while some good food, entertainment, yoga in the seats and maybe some mindfulness provides more of the ‘wit’ element.

This bright and engaging duo are up for this – and for what lies beyond.

As Ellis says with typical gusto, “bring it on!”.

**■ To buy tickets for Wit+Grit Live on January 30 visit: [witandgrit.co.uk/buy-tickets](http://witandgrit.co.uk/buy-tickets)**



# Forvis Mazars backs GBCC while growing Birmingham footprint

Global professional services network Forvis Mazars has become a patron of Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce.

The decision to join the GBCC's top tier comes as Forvis Mazars prepares to relocate to Three Chamberlain Square in Birmingham city centre.

Currently operating from Two Chamberlain Square, the firm is expanding its presence by relocating its 340 staff into premium office space on the second floor of Three Chamberlain Square.

Birmingham managing partner Stephen Lewis said: "The Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce plays a vital role

in strengthening the region's business ecosystem, advocating for growth and supporting organisations of all sizes.

"At Forvis Mazars, we are committed to helping businesses thrive locally, nationally, and internationally.

"Becoming a GBCC patron allows us to deepen our engagement with the chamber's work, collaborate with other leading organisations, and contribute to shaping a more resilient and forward-looking business community.

"We look forward to working closely with the GBCC team to champion innovation, sustainability, and inclusive growth across Greater Birmingham."



Raj Kandola and Stephen Lewis

## Small Heath pharmacy sold

A pharmacy in the Small Heath area of Birmingham has been sold for an undisclosed sum.

Saydon Pharmacy has been owned by Great Wood Pharmacy for over five years but was brought to market to enable them to re-focus on larger volume pharmacies. It has been purchased by first-time buyer, Sardar Shabir of Spring Hill Pharma.

Commercial property specialists Christie & Co advised on the sale.

Carl Steer, a director at Christie & Co,

said: "It is always great to see a first-time buyer secure their first pharmacy.

"After some false starts for my clients with prior sales, it was nice to see a committed, organised buyer bring the sale to completion in good time."

His colleague Raj Patel added: "It was a pleasure to provide funding for Sardar, to help him enter into pharmacy ownership. He is an experienced individual, and I look forward to working on other projects to fund soon."

## Unity Trust Bank verified for impact

Birmingham's Unity Trust Bank has become one of a small number of banks around the globe to be independently assessed as meeting the 'operating principles for impact management' standard.

The 'principles' are globally recognised guidelines for investors to ensure that their money is being used for good and reported in the correct way.

Unity's impact management system was reviewed and verified by The Good Economy, the independent impact advisory and assurance firm. The verification confirms that the bank's processes are robust, credible, and aligned with best practice in impact management.

Joshua Meek, chief impact officer at Unity Trust Bank, said: "This is another first for Unity.

"Our mission is to be the UK's leading social impact bank and this verification of our alignment to the 'principles' represents a significant achievement."

## Funding target exceeded

A West Midlands-based pallet network has exceeded its target to fund a life-saving critical care car.

Pallet-Track, which is based in Wolverhampton, hosted multiple fundraising events to help smash its £75,000 target in aid of the Midlands Air Ambulance charity, raising a total of £88,959 over the last three years.

Its donations have been used to fund a critical care car, which has supported the charity's recently announced night time operations and ensured 24-hour emergency cover for those in need.

The firm has now pledged to continue its partnership with the charity by raising an additional £75,000 to fund the critical care car for another three years – taking its total fundraising to over £150,000 by the end of 2028.

# Wealth management

## SPECIAL REPORT



# Tech, AI and the rising demand for financial advice in the West Midlands

overview

It is easy to buy into the doom-laden narrative that technology – from artificial intelligence to social media – is pushing society towards some form of breakdown.

Yet, for personal finance, the opposite is more likely to be true. In a region like the West Midlands, where financial and related professional services employ over 170,000 people and generate many billions in economic value, technology is increasing, not reducing, the need for high-quality advice and financial education.

In fact, educational charity and professional body the Chartered Institute for Securities & Investment (CISI) notes that demand for trusted, well-qualified advisers continues to grow as people confront more complex financial choices.

Used well, digital tools put an extraordinary range of information at people's fingertips, allowing advisers to serve more clients more efficiently. They can improve access to guidance and streamline how advice is delivered, but they also make the landscape more complex and raise the stakes for getting decisions right. That combination is particularly visible in Birmingham, which is now recognised as one of the UK's leading financial and fintech hubs outside London.

## The growing need for advice

The need for financial advice and education has rarely been greater. Economic and political conditions are shifting quickly, with frequent changes to tax and pension rules making it harder for individuals to understand how to build and pass on wealth efficiently.

The November 2025 Budget reinforces the ever-changing landscape of public policy impacting all of our lives, leaving many people with more questions and concerns about how to financially plan for the future.

At the same time, the much-discussed 'great wealth transfer' is gathering pace as more baby boomers reach later life. Those who inherit significant assets often need help structuring, investing and protecting that wealth.

Those who do not inherit face a different challenge: building financial security from scratch in an environment of higher living costs and less generous long-term guarantees than previous generations enjoyed.



By **KATRANIA LOWERS**,  
Chartered FCSI,  
Colmore Partners



Historically, many people accumulated wealth almost by default through defined benefit pensions and the steady rise in UK property values.

Today's workers tend to move jobs more frequently, resulting in multiple small pension pots that are harder to manage.

Getting onto the housing ladder is more difficult, and the costs associated with raising children have risen sharply.

For younger professionals and entrepreneurs in and around Birmingham, that means being more proactive about financial planning rather than relying on automatic, employer-driven outcomes.

## The Midlands context: a growing finance and fintech hub

These pressures are playing out against a backdrop of rapid change in the Midlands economy. Birmingham and the wider West Midlands now host one of the largest concentrations of financial and related professional services jobs outside London, with tens of thousands of people employed in banking, insurance, asset management, accountancy, law and advisory roles.

The city has also become one of the

UK's most prominent fintech centres, attracting both homegrown startups and major national and international players. Organisations such as Supatech (part of the wider SuperTech West Midlands cluster) are helping to knit together this community by supporting technology-led innovation across business, professional and financial services. Large institutions, including global investment banks and household name retail banks, have relocated significant operations to Birmingham.

Alongside them, a vibrant ecosystem of smaller financial planning, wealth management and technology businesses has emerged.

Infrastructure investment, including improvements to regional transport, is reinforcing Birmingham's position as a connected business hub. For individuals and business owners, that translates into more opportunity but also more complex financial decisions – from managing equity stakes and bonus schemes to planning for business exits, retirement and intergenerational transfers.

This environment amplifies the demand for accessible, trusted financial advice.

## The advice gap, social media and AI

Despite heightened need, many people still perceive formal financial advice as expensive or only relevant once they have accumulated substantial wealth. That perception contributes to an advice gap, particularly for younger professionals and the owners of small and medium-sized firms who are plentiful across the Midlands.

In that gap, social media and unregulated digital content have rushed to fill the space. There is no shortage of online material promising quick paths to wealth or offering strong opinions on complex investments.

Some of this content is useful and well researched; much of it is not. Distinguishing between regulated expertise and unverified commentary has become a core challenge for anyone trying to look after their money.

AI tools compound this dynamic. On one hand, they can analyse data, generate scenarios and summarise information with impressive speed. On the other, they can give an illusion of certainty without understanding a person's full context, values or long term goals. Even for digitally native generations, major decisions –

buying a home, selling a business, retiring or passing on wealth – usually end with a desire to talk these issues through with another human being.

## Where technology really helps advisers

Rather than replacing advisers, technology is changing how advice is delivered and who can access it. Automation and AI are increasingly used to handle the time-consuming, highly regulated parts of the process – from gathering information and preparing reports to recording meeting notes and ensuring follow-up tasks are completed.

For firms in Birmingham and the wider region, this means more capacity to focus on the parts of the job clients value most: clear explanations, personalised recommendations and honest conversations about trade offs. Greater efficiency also creates the potential to serve more people, including those with smaller portfolios or at earlier life stages, without compromising quality.

For those not yet ready to engage an adviser, higher-quality digital content, interactive tools and educational resources can provide a useful first step. Over time, platforms that offer trusted financial information – content that is easy to consume, transparent about its sources and overseen by qualified professionals – are likely to grow in importance. In a market as active as Birmingham's, combining local insight with national expertise can be especially powerful.

Colmore Partners, for example, along with many other, forward-thinking financial planning firms, is embracing all of these developments to allow it to help more clients than ever.

## What financial planning really is

Much of the confusion around financial planning and wealth management stems from the belief that it is mainly about selling products. This is not the principal purpose of advice. Good financial planning is about helping someone understand their situation, articulate their goals and make

decisions that are both affordable and sustainable. Financial planning is a process, not dependent on your personal wealth and may not lead to the recommendation of any financial product.

The CISI's annual Financial Planning Week will run 26 January 2026, to encourage people throughout the UK to take advantage of free financial planning sessions, to spread awareness and understanding of the benefits of financial planning and encourage people to take control of their finances. Consumers looking to book a free session with a participating firm can go to CISI's Wayfinder website [financialplanning.cisi.org](https://www.financialplanning.cisi.org).

Showing a client that they can safely spend more and enjoy life now or gently challenging them if their current choices risk undermining their future self, are key elements of good financial planning. It often involves working through emotional relationships with money – shaped by family upbringing, peer influence and past experiences – as much as it does analysing numbers on a page.

Investing for the long term requires discipline and patience, especially when markets are volatile.

A key part of the planner's role is to help clients look beyond short-term noise and stay aligned with long-term ambitions. In that sense, financial planning can offer financial education that many people never received in school or university. For a region with a strong entrepreneurial streak and a growing population of first-time investors, that education is particularly valuable.

## Consolidation, succession and client relationships

The rising demand for advice has coincided with significant consolidation across the financial services sector, including in the Midlands. Large investment managers have merged, and many smaller financial planning firms have been acquired by bigger groups, often backed by external capital.

In investment management, scale can bring advantages in terms of cost, regulatory resilience and access to tools and research.

If lower fees mean clients keep more of

their returns, that is clearly positive. In the financial planning profession, consolidation is often driven by succession: owners seeking a way to retire while ensuring that clients continue to receive ongoing service and that staff have stable career paths.

The consolidation in the financial planning profession is less about a need for scale and more about selling up being the most attractive option to the owners of these businesses. Selling to a larger organisation is one option but not the only option – employee-owned structures, management buyouts are additional solutions but do require forward thinking from the firm to ensure they have the correct team and management in place to ensure this provides a successful outcome for all parties (including the clients).

Whether consolidation benefits clients depends on how it is handled. If it preserves long-term relationships, supports planners with robust systems and maintains a strong service culture, it can be a force for good.

If it dilutes personal contact or increases staff turnover, clients may feel they have lost the trusted individual who understood their story. Many people who seek a new adviser do so after a longstanding relationship has broken down, often because their previous planner retired or moved on.

Unlike retail banking, where local branches have been steadily disappearing, advice firms that prioritise continuity can offer something technology alone cannot replicate: the sense that someone knows them, their family and their goals. In a city such as Birmingham, where community ties and business networks are tight knit, that continuity is a significant differentiator.

## Humans first, technology alongside

For all the advances in AI, it is hard to imagine most people asking a machine, in isolation, "Am I doing the right thing?" when the decision involves their life savings, their children's future or the sale of a business they have built over decades. Technology can provide models, scenarios and insights, but the final decision often hinges on values, emotions and personal context.

The most powerful model for the next decade, in Birmingham and beyond, is likely to be a hybrid one. Technology will enhance the advice process, making it more efficient, more accessible and better documented. Social and digital channels will extend the reach of quality financial education when implemented in the right way. Meanwhile, the core of effective financial planning will remain what it has always been: a trusted human relationship that helps people make clearer, more confident decisions about their money.

As long as financial decisions remain profoundly personal, the combination of human judgement backed by rigorous professional standards – including those set by institutes like the CISI – will continue to underpin public trust in advice.

overview



# Rothschild & Co boosts Birmingham presence with key appointment

WM news

Rothschild & Co's UK Wealth Management business has appointed an industry heavyweight to lead its Birmingham-based Midlands team.

Ben Gulliford joins Rothschild & Co from Barclays Wealth, where he held senior roles working with ultra-high-net-worth individuals, entrepreneurs, and family offices, having joined as a private banker in 2006.

Rothschild & Co's UK Regional Wealth Management presence was initially founded a decade ago in Manchester by Peter Hindle and now totals more than 20 people.

Mr Hindle, head of client teams at Rothschild & Co's UK Wealth Management business, said: "We are delighted to welcome Ben to our team. With over two decades' experience in wealth management, his understanding of the financial needs of entrepreneurs and family business owners, combined with our respective networks, make him the ideal person to lead the next chapter in our growth story in the Midlands."

"We continue to invest in our business and recruit highly skilled and connected individuals to deliver exceptional service to clients across the UK."

In addition to the wider professional



**Ben Gulliford**

community, Rothschild & Co Wealth Management works closely with its global advisory business, established in Birmingham for more than 20 years. As global advisory colleagues guide business owners and shareholders through the successful sale of their companies, the wealth management team advises clients on how best to protect and grow

the proceeds for their families' security, through long-term investment and wealth planning strategies.

Rothschild & Co has invested significantly in its UK Wealth Management business which has resulted in AUM doubling in the last six years, with UK offices now in Birmingham, Leeds, London, Manchester, and Guernsey.

# Verso expands Midlands advisory network with Everlong acquisition



**Simon Redgrove**

A Midlands financial planning firm which has an office in Birmingham has been acquired by wealth management consolidator Verso Group.

Everlong, which was established in 2003, provides wealth management and financial advisory services to businesses and individuals throughout the Midlands.

The firm has a team of 12, including six chartered financial planners, advising on more than £350 million of client assets.

Everlong's addition expands Verso's adviser network and strengthens its presence across the region. Managing director Paul Hamilton and his team will join Verso and work alongside the executive team, while chair Richard Garside and director Jakki Grogan will leave the business.

Simon Redgrove, managing director of Verso's advisory business, said: "I am pleased to welcome Paul and the Everlong team to Verso."

"Our businesses are closely aligned in how we work and the values we hold,

which makes this a strong fit. Being recognised recently as the UK's top financial advice firm by FT Adviser hasn't changed our focus.

"We're still working to be the first choice for clients seeking advice and for high quality advisory firms looking for a long-term partner. Our model is built around clients, with a clear investment approach and centralised administrative and regulatory support, so our advisers can focus on what they do best."

Paul Hamilton, managing director of Everlong, said: "Joining Verso represents an exciting new chapter for our clients and team. With our shared commitment to excellence, it was an easy decision to make."

"Our clients will have access to a wider range of investment solutions, and our colleagues will have opportunities for professional development and advancement across the group. It's win-win all around so we look forward to contributing to Verso's growth across our region."



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# FINANCIAL PLANNING

## Why offering support for employees is a strategic must-have for 2026 and beyond

insight

insight

The future of wealth management is being reshaped by digital-first strategies, automation and AI-powered decision making, alongside the evolving expectations of your people.

However, behind the headlines, the real engine of optimised and sustainable financial outcomes is financial planning, the disciplined process of aligning life goals, financial resources and informed decisions over time.

Birmingham's business community is navigating a commercial landscape that is complex yet opportunity rich. However, for employees, rising living costs, volatile investment markets and shifting legislation are reshaping the way they plan for their financial futures. For employers and their people, these pressures can translate into real-world challenges, such as retirement anxiety, the lack of access to advice and economic uncertainty. Furthermore, new rules around inheritance tax and pensions (as well as ISA changes) continue to add layers of complexity.

Against this backdrop, many employers across Birmingham and the West Midlands are building in financial wellbeing initiatives to support their employees - not only to help their employees achieve better outcomes for them and their loved ones, but to strengthen business resilience, help to maintain productivity and protect the future of the business.

### Why financial planning matters now

Automatic enrolment and the continued shift to defined contribution (DC) pensions mean far more people now need support to make effective financial decisions,



By MARTIN PARISH,  
head of retirement at NFP

aligned with structured planning to turn their financial aspirations into reality. With legislative changes looming large – for example, pensions are due to be included within inheritance-taxable estates from April 2027, and allowances for cash ISAs are reducing - the need has heightened for improved support to help people manage the increased responsibility that now rests with them to optimise their financial outcome.

### Economic pressures can compound the challenge

Interest rates are predicted to reduce, geopolitical events continue to inject volatility into global investment markets, and longevity risk (especially the prospect of later-life care costs) has become a practical concern for many households. These factors can make long-term planning more complex, yet more essential.

Meanwhile, the government and legislators acknowledge the existence of the pension advice gap in the UK. Nearly 70% of people accessing their pension do so without professional guidance, increasing the risk of sub-optimal or costly decisions at precisely the moment when poor decisions can have the largest financial impact.

### Risk is not confined to individuals

Having a quality workplace pension scheme that a) can offer great support to employees and b) complies with UK automatic enrolment legislation is a critical element to providing a solid foundation for employee financial wellbeing. Not only that, but the Pensions Regulator issued almost £100,000 in fines for pension governance failures in the last six months of 2024 alone, highlighting why governance cannot be treated as a “fit and forget” exercise.

### This isn't just a personal finance issue; it supports business resilience

Poor financial wellbeing and retirement uncertainty can inhibit the attraction, retention and progression of top talent. Heightened financial anxiety can be evident throughout people's careers, but especially so on the approach to retirement. Therefore, supporting good financial outcomes for your people isn't just a great way to demonstrate your organisational culture; helping reduce financial uncertainty among your people can support effective succession planning and be an essential cog in your strategy for long-term business resilience.

### The commercial value of effective financial planning support

Employers are ideally placed to help their people make good financial decisions. Workplace financial education can increase understanding, confidence and action, and it can also help maximise the value your people derive from your workplace pension plan. This can translate to tangible business benefits, such as:

#### 1. Attracting and keeping great people

Great financial support can help you stand out in Birmingham's competitive jobs market and foster long-term commitment from your best people.

#### 2. Reduce productivity losses

Absenteeism and presenteeism together cost UK businesses over £100 billion a year. Financial-related stress can add to this burden; by equipping people to understand their financial position and future with confidence, employers can help reduce anxiety and improve focus at work.

#### 3. Control employee benefit costs

When people are forced to delay retirement due to lack of confidence or savings, it can lift the average age of your workforce. This can lead to increases in health benefits claims and premium costs, which is why supporting timely retirement is a practical way to mitigate rising benefit costs.

A good benefits governance framework is often the key to evidencing the commercial value of financial planning support over the long-term. Through regular reviews, data-led decision making and clear oversight, employers can spot trends and take action to reverse negative patterns among their people and strengthen positive ones. This is where AI can help triage the data, but governance sets the human-led standard for what “good” looks like.

Effective engagement is the other half of the equation. Automatic enrolment has created welcome participation, but it has also bred a level of complacency among those automatically enrolled into a pension plan. That is why communications should be targeted, practical and timed to moments when small changes (such as incremental contribution increases) are most likely to stick. AI-assisted nudges can deliver this personalisation at scale, while your managers and advisers can provide the human empathy that maintains trust.

The right technology will augment human advice, not replace it. AI can make it easier to provide personalised education, send timely reminders and create helpful models for people to visualise their financial future. However, it is important to have safeguards in place. Clear language, transparency about assumptions and easy access to qualified advice ensure that technology helps employees rather than confuses them. This is where good governance combines with innovation to make sure AI is used responsibly to help achieve better outcomes.

### Your practical blueprint for turning strategy into action

Based on the discussed challenges and trends, here is a four-part blueprint that aligns the above into one coherent plan:

#### 1. Evaluate the support you're currently offering

Review what you already provide in terms of financial support. Do you offer financial guidance, education sessions, or access to advice? Identify gaps and whether employees are asking for support you don't currently provide but could look to implement.

Employee surveys and feedback are great ways to check if your financial planning approach meets their needs.

#### 2. Review your benefits

Assess if your benefits package is fit for purpose. Are you offering benefits your people value, or spending money on ones that aren't being utilised? Flexible benefits, salary sacrifice options, and planning tools can also add real value.

Don't forget, salary sacrifice can still help reduce employer National Insurance

costs while allowing employees to access benefits more tax-efficiently. Align your offering with what matters most in Birmingham's competitive jobs market.

#### 3. Develop an engagement plan

Use people and benefit provider data to deliver messages which resonate with each demographic within your workforce. Think about the communication methods, timing, and messages that will help you deliver the best outcomes.

Data-driven nudges that are set to trigger on important milestones (for example, birthdays, contribution changes, opt-outs) can be a useful way to increase relevance and encourage employee engagement with their finances.

#### 4. Review activity

Check how well your benefits and financial wellbeing strategy is working. Are employees engaging with the financial benefits you offer? Are contributions improving or are people transferring in on pensions?

Link this to governance - regular reviews and oversight can help ensure compliance and showcase value. Tracking engagement isn't just about numbers; it's about informed decisions which build confidence and resilience.

### Conclusion: from uncertainty to confidence

For NFP, financial planning underpins an employer's benefits proposition, enabling employees to get on the first rung of developing a robust and sustainable financial plan which can be developed over their career. At the same time, it can help enhance their financial wellbeing and confidence to be a long-term, effective employee.

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# Concessions on IHT reforms

WM news

The Government has announced that the new allowance for 100% agricultural property relief and business property relief for inheritance tax will be increased from £1 million to £2.5 million.

From April 6 this year, 100% APR and BPR will be subject to an allowance that refreshes every seven years for individuals and ten years for trusts.

Where the combined value of qualifying business and agricultural assets exceeds the allowance, the excess amount will attract APR/BPR at the rate of 50%.

The original policy intention was for the allowance to be set at £1 million, but in December the Government announced the increase in allowance.

The Government's IHT reforms, which were first announced at the Autumn Budget 2024, have been subject to criticism.

Increasing the allowance to £2.5 million means that couples will be able to benefit from APR and BPR of up to £5 million on top of other allowances, including the nil rate band. It is stated that this will also be

the case for "people who are widowed and have lost spouses or civil partners before the policy was introduced".

This mirrors the existing provisions that allow the unused nil rate band and residence nil rate band to pass to the surviving spouse or civil partner.

The Government says the increase in the allowance will "significantly reduce the number of farms and business owners facing higher inheritance tax bills under the reforms, ensuring that only the largest estates are affected".

## DJH's wealth management move with Perspective joint venture

A West Midlands financial services group has gained new wealth management capabilities after signing a joint venture.

Black Country's DJH, which has offices in Halesowen and Walsall, has partnered with Perspective Financial Group to create DJH Perspective Wealth Management.

The move will give the firm's clients access to 200 wealth advisers in retirement planning, pensions and protection planning – all working alongside its existing team of inheritance tax, trusts, wills and probate specialists.

There will also be access to specialists advising in tax efficiency and business exit planning.

"This is a very exciting joint venture for us and creates a full solution offer for both our existing and new clients," said Scott Heath, CEO of DJH.

"Perspective Financial Group shares similar values of trust and service, and is completely independent so not linked to any specific products or packages.

"It's a 50-50 deal with both sides 100 per cent committed to making the business an overwhelming success and a key vehicle to both businesses scaling at the pace we want to."

The joint venture gives DJH the opportunity to gain immediate national infrastructure through Perspective Financial Group's 60-plus offices across the country, as well as taking its brand into wealth management for the first time.

It has also been structured to deliver



Ian Wilkinson of Perspective Financial Group, left, and Scott Heath of DJH

a scalable solution that ties in with the group's acquisition strategy, which it hopes will help it break into the top 20 accountancy firms in the UK.

Ian Wilkinson, CEO of Perspective Financial Group, said: "This is a very exciting deal for our business, and we are delighted to be joining forces with DJH.

"DJH has a fantastic network of clients, who could all benefit from the wealth management services we provide. Together and by offering a single solution, we firmly believe we'll add real value.

"Both businesses have ambitious growth plans, and this joint venture will support us in achieving our goals."

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# The future of wealth management

By KIERAN DUFFY, client director, Heligan Wealth Management

For much of the past two decades, commentary on the 'future of wealth management' has been dominated by technology.

Robo-advice, big data, artificial intelligence and machine learning have all been heralded as forces that would fundamentally reshape how capital is invested and advice delivered. In practice, technology has indeed transformed the mechanics of the industry: portfolio construction is more efficient, reporting more transparent, advice delivery more streamlined, and access to global markets more democratised than ever before.

Yet for high-net-worth individuals and entrepreneurial families, this framing is incomplete. The true future of wealth management is not defined by algorithms or platforms alone. It is defined by how effectively advisers integrate investment expertise with tax, legal structuring, corporate finance and family governance – and how well they build relationships that endure across decades, liquidity events and generations.

## From product distribution to trusted adviser

Traditional wealth management evolved around products: funds, portfolios and discretionary mandates. Success was often measured by short-term investment performance or the scale of assets gathered. That model is now under increasing strain.

Minimum wealth thresholds at many advisory firms are rising year on year, driven by regulatory cost, margin pressure

and the economics of scale. At the same time, clients' financial lives are becoming more complex. Entrepreneurs rarely hold their wealth neatly within an investment portfolio. Instead, it is spread across trading businesses, property, pensions, private investments, trusts and family structures, often across multiple jurisdictions.

In this environment, the role of the adviser must evolve. The future belongs to firms that act as long-term trusted advisers rather than product distributors – professionals who understand the client's entire balance sheet, not just the investable portion, and who are prepared to advise through periods of illiquidity, transition and uncertainty.

## Planning first, returns second

One of the most important shifts underway in wealth management is a reordering of priorities. For high-net-worth families, correct structuring is increasingly more important than incremental investment outperformance.

Recent UK policy changes have underlined this reality. Reforms to Business Relief and Agricultural Property Relief from April 2026, the inclusion of unused pension funds within estates for inheritance tax purposes from April 2027, and continued fiscal drag through frozen income tax thresholds have materially altered the planning landscape for entrepreneurs and senior professionals. These are not marginal technical tweaks; they fundamentally change how wealth is preserved and transferred.

Against this backdrop, focusing solely on portfolio returns without first addressing ownership structures, tax exposure, liquidity planning and succession is misplaced. A well-constructed investment strategy cannot compensate for poor structuring at the family or estate level. The future of wealth management therefore starts with architecture: understanding how assets are held, how risks interrelate, and how decisions taken today will shape outcomes over the next twenty or thirty years.

## The entrepreneur's journey: before, during and after exit

For entrepreneurs, wealth management cannot be divorced from corporate finance. The most significant financial event in many founders' lives is not an investment decision, but a liquidity event: a sale to trade, private equity investment, management buyout or generational transition.

Advisers who engage only after an exit has completed are often arriving too late. Value is frequently created or destroyed years earlier through decisions around share classes, incentive structures, debt, shareholder agreements and pre-sale tax planning. Access to experienced corporate finance professionals – and the ability to integrate their advice into personal planning – is therefore becoming a defining feature of best-in-class wealth management.

Post-exit, the challenge shifts again. Entrepreneurs must transition from

concentrated business risk to diversified family wealth, often while navigating identity change, new time horizons and intergenerational considerations. This period demands not only investment expertise but also behavioural insight, cash-flow modelling and thoughtful governance on how wealth will be used, preserved and ultimately passed on.

## Multi-family office thinking

These dynamics are driving a broader convergence between traditional wealth management and the multi-family office model. Historically, family offices were the preserve of ultra-wealthy dynasties, offering consolidated reporting, governance frameworks, bill pay and family education alongside investment oversight.

Today, entrepreneurial families with £10m to £50m of wealth increasingly require elements of this approach, even if they do not need – or want – the cost and complexity of a fully staffed single-family office. The future lies in a more modular, planning-led multi-family office model: open-architecture investment management, integrated with tax, legal and corporate finance expertise, delivered through long-term relationships rather than transactional engagements.

Crucially, this model recognises that investment management is not a standalone service. It sits within a broader framework that includes succession planning, philanthropy, education of the next generation and clear family governance.

In practice, many of the most effective advisory relationships already operate this way – even if they are not formally described as family offices. The difference is increasingly one of intent and structure: whether advice is coordinated deliberately across disciplines or assembled reactively over time.

## Relationships in a globalised world

Another defining feature of the future landscape is mobility. High-net-worth UK citizens are increasingly exploring options in jurisdictions such as Dubai, Jersey, Portugal and Italy, whether for lifestyle, tax or succession reasons.

For many large institutions, this creates friction. Clients are often forced to change advisers as they relocate, triggering a merry-go-round of relationships and a loss of continuity at precisely the moment when advice matters most. In contrast, entrepreneurial families tend to value the adviser relationship itself, not just the brand on the letterhead.

The future of wealth management therefore favours firms that can support clients across borders while maintaining a consistent advisory relationship – co-ordinating local expertise where required, but preserving strategic oversight and trust built over time.

This continuity is particularly valued by business owners whose commercial roots remain firmly in regions such as the Midlands, even as their lives and assets become increasingly international.

## Technology as an enabler, not the answer

None of this diminishes the importance of technology. Sophisticated reporting, data aggregation and portfolio analytics are now table stakes. Technology enables better decision-making, clearer communication and greater transparency – all essential for multi-generational relationships.

However, technology is not a substitute for judgment. Algorithms can optimise portfolios, but they cannot navigate family dynamics, resolve conflicting objectives between generations, or guide an entrepreneur through the emotional and strategic complexity of exiting a business. The firms that succeed will be those that combine institutional-grade technology with human insight and accountability.

## What discerning clients should look for

As the sector evolves, high-net-worth individuals should be increasingly selective about who they work with. The key questions are no longer simply about performance or fees, but about capability and philosophy:

- Does the adviser lead with planning and structuring, or with products?
- Can they integrate tax, legal and corporate finance advice into a coherent long-term strategy?

- Do they operate an open-architecture approach to investment management, selecting best-in-class partners rather than manufacturing everything in-house?
- Are they equipped to advise through exits, intergenerational transitions and cross-border moves?
- Do they invest in relationships with the next generation, not just the current wealth holder?

The answers to these questions increasingly separate commoditised wealth management from genuinely strategic advice.

## A multi-generational mandate

Perhaps the most profound shift shaping the future of wealth management is the great intergenerational wealth transfer now underway. Over the coming decades, trillions of pounds will pass from one generation to the next in the UK alone. This will test not just wealth management and tax planning, but family cohesion, governance and preparedness.

Advisers must therefore expand their remit. Educating the next generation, facilitating conversations about values and purpose, and helping families establish clear decision-making frameworks are no longer optional extras. They are central to preserving wealth and legacy over time.

## Looking ahead

The future of wealth management will not be won by those who shout loudest about technology or short-term investment performance. It will be shaped by firms that take a long-term, integrated view of clients' lives – that understand wealth as something to be structured, governed and stewarded, not merely invested.

For entrepreneurial families in particular, this means working with advisers who can stand alongside them before, during and long after major liquidity events; who can coordinate across disciplines; and who are committed to relationships that endure across generations and geographies.

That is the direction in which the industry is moving. And for those prepared to embrace this evolution, it represents not a threat, but an opportunity to redefine what excellence in wealth management truly means.

# Awards spectacular

celebration



Host Phil Upton

Pictures of celebrations from some of the winners and entertainers on the night



Richard Fallon addresses the audience



The starting gun has been fired for the 2026 Innovation Awards!

The awards will be officially launched at Hotel du Vin in Birmingham's city centre from 5.30pm on February 2.

But first the organisers of this popular fixture in the business calendar, the One Thousand Trades Group, are happy to reflect on last year's awards which were held in November at the Eastside Rooms.

"The Innovation Awards 2025 was another high energy celebration of the amazing innovation that is taking place in the West Midlands and across the UK," said Dr Richard Fallon, of the One Thousand Trades Group.

"The judges were highly impressed by the quality of the finalists and their work. We would like to congratulate all our winners and those highly commended – you and your innovative work are making a difference across the UK."

He said the group is delighted to announce the launch of the Innovation Awards 2026 - now in their sixth year – bringing together past winners, current trailblazers and future innovators.

The Innovation Awards recognise, celebrate and reward the companies, individuals and organisations dedicated to innovation across various sectors including manufacturing, sustainability, technology, healthcare, engineering and life sciences. They are open to innovative individuals, businesses and organisations across the UK, including universities, councils and catapults.

The launch event is designed to connect and inspire business professionals, entrepreneurs and organisations who are driving progress across manufacturing, engineering, sustainability, tech, health tech and other sectors, with the nomination window opening that evening.



celebration

## The complete list of winners from 2025:

- Manufacturing Innovator of the Year**  
S Jones Containers
- Engineering Innovator of the Year**  
Always Engineering
- Sustainability Innovator of the Year**  
Recyclus Group
- Construction Innovator of the Year**  
Composite Braiding
- Defence Innovator of the Year**  
The Structural Battery Company
- Technology Innovator**  
Joint winners FlashAcademy and Local Land Charges Programme
- Life Sciences Innovator of the Year**  
EarSwitch
- Creative Industries Innovator**  
Second Home Studios
- Education Innovator of the Year**  
Virtual Decisions
- New Innovation of the Year**  
DriRun
- Female Innovator of the Year**  
Professor Alex Richter
- Male innovator of the Year**  
Jeremy Dale
- Young Innovator of the Year**  
Leonard Nicusan
- Manufacturing Innovation Champion**  
The MTC
- Technology Innovation Champion**  
Bronze Labs
- Growth Innovation Champion**  
Gateley Global
- Innovation Thought Leader – Organisation**  
Centre for Digital Innovation
- Innovation Thought Leader – Individual**  
Johnathan Dudley
- Lifetime Achievement Award**  
Professor Gino Martini



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property

## Construction underway

Developer Chancerygate has started work on the construction of a new 270,000 sq ft Grade A urban logistics development on the former GKN Driveline factory site in Erdington.

The Torque development will comprise 22 leasehold units ranging from 4,500 sq ft to 66,000 sq ft. Practical completion of the scheme is scheduled for the fourth quarter of 2026.

Neighbouring occupiers include Jaguar Land Rover, Volvo and Selco Builders Warehouse, as well as further retail and industrial parks.

All units at Torque will be fitted with

electric vehicle charging points and have solar panels on the roof. They are being constructed from high-performance building materials to reduce CO2 emissions and occupier operation costs – the scheme is targeting EPC A+ and a BREEAM Excellent rating as a minimum.

In September the site was forward sold by Chancerygate and investor Bridges Fund Management to commercial property investor and operator Indurent.

Chancerygate's development director Rob Watts, who is based at the company's Birmingham office, said: "Works are

well under way at Torque. We and our contractors A&H Construction remain on schedule to deliver Grade A urban logistics accommodation for Erdington and the wider region."

Indurent asset manager Jack Dutton added: "Torque represents exactly the type of high-quality, sustainable development we want to bring into our portfolio.

"We are proud to partner with Chancerygate on this project and look forward to welcoming a diverse range of occupiers when the development completes this year."



## Co-op launches micro stores

Birmingham-based property consultancy Johnson Fellows has advised Co-op Group as it launches its new 'on-the-go' micro stores, a first for the national grocer.

The initial stores, located in Solihull, Altrincham and Aylesbury, mark the start of a rollout of the retail format which is designed to cater to the grab-and-go market – serving breakfast, lunch and dinner.

The concept is around a quarter of the size of the Co-op Group's standard convenience stores, with new operating hours and a dedicated product range.

Johnson Fellows has advised on site selection and strategy in high foot traffic locations across the country.

Chris Gaskell (pictured), partner and head of agency at Johnson Fellows, said: "Our work with Co-op Group highlights how retailers are innovating their offer, adapting to the changing market and consumer habits.

"Our team worked closely with them to identify high footfall locations with maximum visibility, ensuring each site supports the new micro-store model and the grocer's wider growth strategy."

## Site plans approved

Plans have been approved for regenerating a former ironworks in Digbeth to deliver a £100 million mixed-use scheme.

Phoenix Yard – which is being developed by Hartwell and expected to deliver 200 construction jobs – is a 2.8-acre brownfield site and part of a wider regeneration and infrastructure investment in Digbeth.

This will include transport connectivity with the new Metro Eastside expansion and HS2, and the continued growth of creative, digital and cultural industries such as the BBC's new multi-million-pound headquarters at Typhoo Wharf and the £1.9 billion masterplan for Smithfield Market.

The plans by architects Allford Hall Monaghan Morris include 188,031 sq ft



of new creative, media and educational space, commercial floorspace and a roof terrace with views over the city, 240 new residential units, retail spaces, public realm and landscaping.

Joanne Churchill, group property manager for Hartwell, said: "It is welcome news that Birmingham City Council supports our Phoenix Yard vision and investment plans to create a landmark, mixed-use neighbourhood at the gateway to Digbeth."

"Phoenix Yard has been designed to complement the area's character while enhancing its next chapter as a thriving creative quarter."

Paul Monaghan, from Allford Hall Monaghan Morris, added: "Our work has been to ensure that we respect the site and area's industrial heritage while delivering distinctive architecture, energy-efficient buildings and public spaces fit for an exciting future for Digbeth as a creative quarter."

# Paradise to be new base for national law firm

National law firm TLT is moving its Birmingham base to One Centenary Way at Paradise – after opening in the city in 2023.

The 50-strong team will be relocating from its current base at Two Chamberlain Square to 13,820 sq ft on the sixth floor of

One Centenary Way.

The announcement comes on the back of TLT's recent record annual revenue increase to £187 million across its seven UK locations.

Mark Elder, TLT partner and head of location in Birmingham, said: "This move is

the natural next step in our journey to meet increasing demand and deliver on our strategic ambitions.

"We remain committed to Birmingham and to our responsibilities towards our people, place and planet, and constantly look to lower our carbon footprint with the aim of achieving net zero offices powered with 100% renewable electricity.

"By moving to One Centenary Way, we are not just reducing our own carbon footprint in line with our net zero goal, but also that of staff and clients, as well as creating an innovative office space.

"We are joining one of the greenest commercial buildings in this thriving city, where innovative design complements an unbeatable location with great amenities and transport links."

One Centenary Way is part of the £1.2 billion Paradise estate which is being developed by MEPC, the specialist development arm of Federated Hermes.

Tenants include environment consultancy Arup, global finance group Goldman Sachs, real estate company JLL and wealth management firm Quilter Cheviot.

Ross Fittall, commercial development director at MEPC, said: "TLT is another hugely welcome addition to One Centenary Way which is already positioned as one of the foremost professional services buildings in the city."



## Two new tenants at Holbrook

An industrial estate in Coventry has welcomed two new tenants in the form of Rubber4Roofs and Iveco Group.

The lets at Indurent Park Holbrook have been handled by Birmingham commercial property agents KWB.

The deal with Rubber4Roofs will see the EPDM roofing specialists take 24,650 sq ft at the site, relocating from nearby SwallowGate Business Park.

Iveco Group has agreed a deal for a 22,276 sq ft industrial unit as part of its current expansion plans. It will be used for research and development by Potenza Technology, part of the Iveco Group that focuses on low and zero emission technology in commercial vehicles.

Jack Dutton, asset manager at Indurent, said: "We are proud to see sustainability playing a central role in recent lettings."

"Our investment in high-quality upgrades ensures the remaining available units offer the same modern environment that today's occupiers expect, and we're seeing strong interest from businesses seeking future-ready space in a prime Coventry location."

The estate is already home to Clifton Tiles and Bathrooms, Wurth, CareCo, Freshest Greengrocers and TrophyMe.

Kenny Allan, director at KWB, said: "Coventry is a thriving business destination and this latest flurry of lettings at Indurent Park Holbrook demonstrates the strong demand for high quality industrial space in the area."

"Environmental credentials remain a key factor amongst occupiers looking for new space. The deals with Iveco Group and Rubber4Roofs mark a significant milestone, with 50% of the units now let."



## Creative hub coming to Port Loop regeneration

The Port Loop regeneration scheme near Edgbaston Reservoir is set to welcome a new creative hub after developers confirmed the sale of part of the historic Tubeworks building.

The stable block area of the building has been acquired by Hood Futures Studio, an organisation led by local artist Amahra Spence, whose Yard Art House has been part of the neighbourhood since 2020.

Port Loop's joint venture partners Urban Splash and Places for People said this new project will see part of the Tubeworks site, including the stable block and courtyard, transformed into a hub for creativity, hospitality and community life.

Following the submission of a

planning application this year, phased redevelopment is expected to run from 2027 to 2030.

Plans include the re-imagining of a hotel, equipped with artist studios, residency spaces, a performance theatre and a range of spaces to bring artists, city visitors and the local community together.

Adam Willetts, Port Loop project director, said: "This is fantastic news for Port Loop and the wider community."

"Amahra and Yard have been an important part of the Port Loop story, and we're excited to see Hood Futures Studio breathe new life into this important part of Tubeworks, creating opportunities for artists and residents."





Liberty Poole and Ellie Armstrong



April Alforque



Laura McEwan and Jonathan Bryce



Charlene Oakes, Peter Connolly, Phil Oldershaw, Siobhan Chiswick and Lalitaa Suglani



Aidan Hammond, Alison Hammond, Liberty Poole and Martin Williams



Deborah Stubbington and Richard O'Gorman



Dawn Buchanan



Clare Hobley, Paula Hanley-Smith, Fiona Toolan, Rhiannon White and Rebecca McCann

# Restaurant re-brand



Aman and Harpinder Gill



Lalitaa Suglani, Kiran Suvarna and Siobhan Chiswell



Siobhan and Richard Chiswell



Ceren Albayrak and Abi Hanson

Brummie TV personality Alison Hammond and influencer Liberty Poole were among the guests at a party at the top of 103 Colmore Row to celebrate restaurant Orelle's re-brand to 24 Stories. The restaurant joins the Stories Collection alongside venues in Manchester and London as part of The Evolv Collection. Guests were treated to cocktails, canapes and spectacular night-time views over Birmingham.

## Expansion of division at Heligan Group

Investment bank Heligan Group has announced the appointment of Adam Irwin as managing partner of its expanding Strategic Insights division.

Adam brings more than a decade of experience in risk intelligence, strategic analysis, corporate investigations and digital intelligence to the Birmingham-based firm. He has advised law firms, multinational corporations and ultra-high-net-worth clients on complex matters across multiple jurisdictions.

In his new role he will be responsible for developing Heligan's intelligence-led advisory and investigations capability. This includes proprietary strategic briefings,

threat and market scenario models, and intelligence-driven research to inform Heligan's deal and advisory teams.

He will also be involved in collaborating with senior government, defence and industry networks, and developing thought leadership and public commentary on the trends shaping the security, defence and risk sectors.

Prior to joining Heligan Group, he served as managing director of Nodum Global,



where he led global risk intelligence, investigations and client service operations.

Tim Grasby, CEO of Heligan Group, said: "Adam's appointment represents an important milestone in our continued growth as an intelligence-led advisory and investigations practice."

"His experience and perspective will further strengthen our ability to anticipate, interpret and act on complex challenges on behalf of our clients and investors."

## Familiar face returns to property agency MK2

Caroline Saxon has rejoined Birmingham commercial property agency MK2's lease consultancy team as an associate director.

Having originally worked for the firm between 2019 and 2021, she returns following stints at JLL and Network Rail.

Apprentice surveyor Lily Willis, now in her third year at MK2, has also moved across from the property management team to lease consultancy. The new arrivals have doubled the size of the team, which is now four strong.

Paul Rixon, director and head of lease consultancy at MK2, said: "Inflationary pressures on both landlords and occupiers means we are seeing an uptick in our rent review workload. It's great to welcome Caroline and Lily on board."

**MK2's lease consultancy team. Pictured from left are Paul Rixon, Lily Willis, Caroline Saxon and Oliver Bates**



## Two new partners join national law firm's Birmingham team



**Andrew Cox**

National firm Exello Law has grown its Birmingham team with the recruitment of new partners David Cooper and Andrew Cox.

Formerly founding partners of business consultancy Cox Cooper, their arrival bolsters Exello's growing presence in the Midlands market.

Andrew, an experienced corporate and employment specialist, has acted for a range of SMEs and senior individuals, primarily in the Midlands, from company formation to eventual sale. David has extensive experience

in commercial dispute resolution, employment disputes and non-contentious employment law, with a particular interest in settlement agreements.

Joanne Losty, COO of Exello Law, said: "David and Andrew's experience in employment, company and commercial law complements and reinforces our fast-expanding team in the Midlands."

"Exello's appeal to entrepreneurial lawyers – whether that's senior partners at some of the UK's leading firms or founders of their own practices – has fuelled faster than expected growth."

## Business development director appointed at Bishop Fleming



**Matt Tyler, left, and Mark Taylor**

Accountancy firm Bishop Fleming has appointed Matt Tyler as business development director to support the firm's growth strategy in the West Midlands.

Matt has a general practice background and brings business development experience within mid-tier accountancy firms, having built and led several successful commercial departments. His appointment marks the fourth senior hire in the Birmingham office in just five months.

Originally from South Staffordshire, he has an understanding of the local manufacturing, wholesale, technology

and professional services landscape to help the firm expand its presence in the region.

Mark Taylor, Birmingham office lead, said: "Matt's appointment is a game changer for our Birmingham office and the wider West Midlands strategy."

"His ability to combine commercial insight with a deep understanding of the local market will accelerate our plans to become a go-to firm for ambitious businesses in the region."

"This is not just about growth, it's also about creating meaningful partnerships that help clients thrive in a competitive landscape."

## Business development specialist joins Ladders

Law firm Ladders has appointed experienced business development specialist Kathryn Small as director of client experience.

With over 25 years' experience in professional services marketing and business development, Kathryn joins the firm from corporate finance firm Clearwater. Prior to this, she was head of marketing and business development at Barker Brettell and has also previously held senior roles at Gowling WLG, Irwin Mitchell and Eversheds Sutherland.

At Ladders, Kathryn will be focused on business development across the firm's full breadth of services as well as leading the marketing team.

She said: "My role will be to show clients 'the Ladders way' of doing things and going beyond the transaction to understand how clients feel following every



**Paul Mourton and Kathryn Small**

interaction they have with us.

"The firm has strong growth plans and a clear strategy for the next three years, and is committed to maintaining its investment in central services which are arguably the engine room of any law firm."

Managing partner Paul Mourton said:

"Kathryn's in-depth business development experience across multiple professional services firms makes her a valuable addition to our central services team."

"Her strategic approach and lead generation expertise will be key to our ambitious growth and development plans."

## S&W appoints partner in audit team



Professional services group S&W has appointed Andrew Dymond as partner in its audit team in Birmingham.

Andrew has over two decades of experience advising businesses across the Midlands. He joins S&W from PwC, where he led the central non-financial reporting team, helping companies navigate evolving ESG reporting requirements, as well as meeting growing demands for audited grant claims and compliance with cost and data-sharing contracts.

He has a proven track record advising mid-market and large businesses across multiple sectors, including manufacturing, service-based businesses and private equity-backed companies, alongside significant experience with listed entities and inbound work.

His expertise spans statutory audit, risk management and business assurance, helping clients navigate complex regulatory environments while improving efficiencies and driving sustainable growth.

# Five minutes with...



## Charlotte Stanyer

Programme and project management consultant for business change consultancy Entec Si.



### What's your view of artificial intelligence – an opportunity, threat, or bit of both?

Definitely a bit of both, but more so an opportunity if used thoughtfully. AI has huge potential to free people up to focus on more meaningful work and reduce inefficiencies. At the same time, it needs to be implemented responsibly, with transparency and a clear understanding of its limitations. I see it as a powerful tool rather than a replacement for human judgement and creativity.

### Social media platform of choice, and why?

LinkedIn. I like supporting my peers and colleagues and using it to connect with others (which is important in corporate!). I find inspiration seeing other people doing interesting work.

### How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?

I'd hope they'd say I'm organised, approachable and dependable! I also suspect they'd have something to say about my ever-enthusiastic nagging to get people involved in networking, mentoring and other things outside of 'the day job'.

### Highlights of your career so far?

A real standout was working internationally on a filming project in the US – it had been a childhood dream to work internationally! Winning the Greater Birmingham Young Professional of the Year award for digital, technology and innovation in 2024 was also incredibly meaningful. I felt so supported and seen. It felt like recognition not just of delivery but also of values and a nod to the positive impact of networking.

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

Walking to the office building through central Birmingham, and just as I arrive at the entrance, construction workers outside tell me that my (knee-length) dress is hiked up underneath my backpack! Luckily, I had thick, fur-lined thermal tights on, so what looked like skin actually wasn't. Still embarrassing.

### Pet hates?

Loud chewing. I try to be tolerant, but it's incredibly distracting and oddly unsettling.

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

Stop worrying about how things look from the outside. Be curious, say yes more often, and trust that confidence comes from doing, not waiting until you feel 'ready'. Most people are far too busy thinking about themselves to be judging you.

### How do you relax away from work?

I love being outdoors. Travelling in the van, paddleboarding with my step-kids, or soaking in the ambience of a forest. I'm also very content with a book, a cup of tea and my cats nearby, or listening to audiobooks and podcasts while walking my French bulldog, Honey. Balance matters to me, and switching off properly helps me show up better at work.

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

I have a strong connection to my Singaporean heritage through my nan. Her stories, food and traditions shaped my love of culture, design and philosophy, and I've even reflected that influence in my home workspace.

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

Assuming I have a set amount of time on the island before returning home . . .

Book: Dragonfly in Amber, so I can continue on the Outlander series which might take forever. Film: School of Rock (fave!). Album: Can I take my Coastal Cowgirl playlist?

### Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?

Jack Black because he's a global treasure, Louis Theroux for curiosity, Chappell Roan for sass, Stevie Nicks for atmosphere, and Adam Sandler to keep everyone laughing.

### What would you choose to eat for your last supper?

My nan's home cooking: stir-fried rice, Singapore chicken curry and her special greens. Comfort, memories and love on a plate. And a Thai chilli margarita for good measure.

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# Pertemps Network



### In one sentence, what does your role involve?

Bringing clarity, structure and momentum to complex programmes, helping people work together to turn ideas into meaningful, well-delivered outcomes with solutions that last.

### How long have you been in your current job?

I've been with Entec Si for six years.

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

I began with a degree in psychology because of my interest in how individuals and groups operate, particularly under pressure or change. After my degree,

I worked in the energy sector as an operational excellence coach, supporting teams to improve processes using lean and agile approaches. Over time, I became increasingly drawn to work that sat me at the intersection of strategy and delivery. At Entec Si, I've had the opportunity to work across public sector, private and not-for-profit organisations, supporting complex digital and transformation programmes. I also mentor others within my sector and outside of it.

I love the variety and pace of our work and seeing ideas through from concept to completion, but people are the golden thread through it all for me.

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

Yes, but perhaps not in the most obvious way. Studying psychology didn't teach me project management frameworks, but it gave me a deep appreciation for human behaviour, motivation and communication. Those foundations have been invaluable when managing stakeholders and facilitating collaboration to lead change.

My professional qualifications came later and added structure and discipline, but the academic grounding helped me understand the 'why' behind how people work, resist change or thrive within it.

### How is your job impacted by uncertainties in the economy?

Economic uncertainty tends to sharpen focus. Clients are understandably more cautious, more value driven and more outcome focused which actually reinforces the importance of strong programme management. My role becomes about prioritisation and ensuring every decision has purpose. It's really key to be adaptable as plans evolve and changes require calm and pragmatic responses, rather than rigidly sticking to assumptions that no longer hold.



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