

Birmingham Business

FREE

June/July 2023

Calthorpe's next chapter

**The CEO helping
to shape future
of historic estate**

PLUS

Interview with Sir Albert Bore

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Birmingham Business

Welcome

For decades before laying my professional roots in Birmingham – and really not knowing the city or its politics at all – Albert Bore was an individual who seemed to appear frequently on the regional news (we lived elsewhere in the Midlands district).

Maybe it was the name which I found easy to remember. I was vaguely aware he was involved in local government, but if truth be known I didn't really pay too much attention to who he was or what he did.

I should have done. The publicity surrounding Mr Bore – now Sir Albert – related to the radical changes which he, and other visionaries, believed essential to the vital improvement of what was then a very tired, even depressed city centre.

What we see now in that area just to the west of the central business district – particularly in the form of Brindleyplace, the ICC and Paradise – might not even exist if it wasn't for Sir Albert, let alone the series of quarters he helped pioneer in pockets around the ring road.

It is now a city centre which can hold its own against any other in the country and it is right that Sir Albert is recognised as one of the architects of this welcome urban facelift.

I thoroughly recommend reading Jon Griffin's excellent interview with this sometimes controversial but nonetheless massively influential figure.

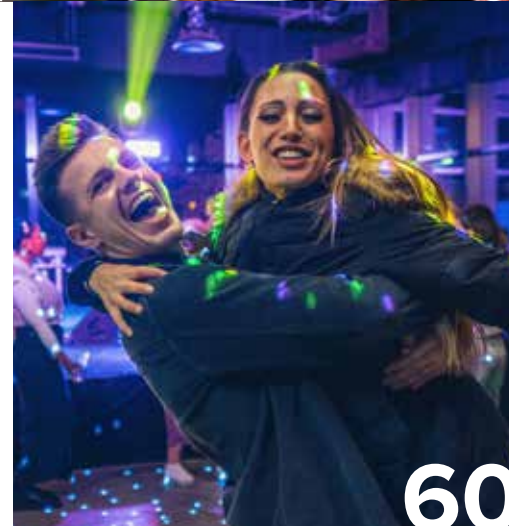
After the turmoil of those darkest days of the economy at the tail end of last year – perhaps most vividly characterised by the disastrous autumn mini-budget and the months of industrial action – there has been a comparative calm in economical spheres for some months now.

It seems almost flippant to say it, when inflation and cost of living means that our collective pockets are lighter, but some semblance of stability has undoubtedly returned . . . words offered tentatively, but nonetheless it is a necessary starting point to recovery.

With stability comes confidence, and that leads to the lifeblood of any swirling economical ecosystem – investment.

If there is one sector which is a visible manifestation of investment, it is property, and in this month's edition we shine a light on the commercial property scene in the West Midlands.

Thanks to some of the region's most authoritative voices, we understand why organisations view Birmingham as a good place to do business and what they take into account when basing themselves here. This is a city which now has pretty much everything to offer them.



By HENRY CARPENTER
Editor

OUTLOOK

- 06 Planning for a new Birmingham**
The framework is set out for a greener city

SPECIAL REPORT

- 22 Commercial property**
We hear from some of the sector's most experienced thought leaders and shine a light on some of the big moves, news and deals happening across the region

ON THE COVER

- 30 Interview with Hadyn Cooper**
The CEO overseeing the property empire of Calthorpe Estates

FEATURES

- 10 Showtime**
We meet the managing director of Solotech – a major player in the audiovisual industry
- 14 Sir Albert Bore**
The man behind Birmingham's transformation
- 40 Purpose driven**
An audience with the managing partner of a regional law firm which is celebrating its 50th anniversary
- 46 Birmingham's Mr Music**
We catch up with Jim Simpson – the brains behind the city's annual jazz and blues festival

SOCIALS

- 19 Networking**
Photos from a new event hosted by EFG Harris Allday
- 52 Boutique launch**
Influencers and media gather to celebrate the launch of TAG Heuer's new outlet
- 56 Bears Business Club**
Networking event with a focus on sustainability
- 60 The Bond is back**
The Fazeley Street venue in Digbeth was brought back to life with a party for 400 people

PLUS

Business news from across the region

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Planning for a new Birmingham

outlook



A masterplan to transform Birmingham into a greener city with the creation of thousands more jobs and homes was unveiled at the UK Real Estate Investment & Infrastructure Forum in May.

Our Future City: Central Birmingham Framework 2040 outlines the potential to create 74,000 new jobs – an 80% increase on the city centre’s current employment capacity – as well up to 35,000 new homes.

It has been developed with technical support given by Arcadis as lead consultants and Howells providing architectural support.

Speaking ahead of the launch, Councillor Ian Ward, leader of Birmingham City Council, said the framework would create a city that works for the people and

communities of Birmingham.

“Like all great cities, Birmingham forever reinvents itself and our transformation is never-ending,” he added.

“Even so, our emergence in recent years underlines why I’ve labelled this a golden decade of opportunity for the businesses, people, and communities of Birmingham.

“There’s a real buzz about Birmingham at the moment, a growing city of enormous potential and – as we showed to great effect last summer when hosting the Commonwealth Games – we’re ready to fulfil that potential.

“Now this framework, the most important strategy for Birmingham this century, is set to supercharge our quest to be a leading international city.”

Delivery of the framework’s vision

would double the city’s green spaces to a level comparable with Vienna and double Birmingham’s network of active travel routes to 200km – the same level of transport infrastructure as in Copenhagen, with the ultimate aim for the city to become a benchmark for meeting the challenges of the 21st century in its own right.

And, by creating vibrant new neighbourhoods, there would be a doubling in population density, bringing Birmingham into line with other major European cities, but not at the expense of green open space – with a pledge that the concrete bound mistakes of the past will not be repeated as part of the effort to tackle the climate emergency on the city’s route to net zero carbon emissions.

This plan also marks a major change

from previous approaches to the city centre, with a clear intention to spread the benefits of development and investment into inner city areas, supporting access to infrastructure, jobs and improved public spaces.

As such, the new framework goes beyond the Inner Ring Road, and is geographically grouped into five key zones:

■ City Heart: Bull Ring, Colmore Business District, Snowhill and Steelhouse, Southside, Town, Westside;

■ Central North: Eastside and Aston Triangle, Gun Quarter, Nechells, Newtown;

■ Central East: Bordesley, Digbeth, Small Heath;

■ Central South: Balsall Heath, Edgbaston, Highgate;

■ Central West: Hockley, Jewellery Quarter, Ladywood, Spring Hill.

In addition, the framework is seen as critical as meeting some of the city’s major challenges including unemployment which is double the national average, the ten-year gap in life expectancy between the poorest and most affluent areas in the city and the fact that over 40 per cent of Birmingham’s children grow up in relative poverty.

Simon Marks, Birmingham and Midlands city executive for Arcadis, said: “Arcadis is privileged to have been the lead consultant in developing this exciting framework for Birmingham. The vision is bold and rightly ambitious – so much has been achieved in recent years, and the Commonwealth Games proved we can deliver.

“The scale and nature of the proposed transformation has not been seen in over a century. Moreover, inclusive growth is at its heart where the communities and citizens of Birmingham will directly benefit from the transformation.

“As we move forwards into delivery, we will be reinstating the reputation of Birmingham as a leading international city of the future.”

Howells partner Glenn Howells said: “Our Future City: Central Birmingham Framework 2040, represents a once in a generation ambition for equitable growth for Birmingham.

“The city is setting ambitious targets to double its green space, double its active travel routes and half its pollution levels – for the benefit of all its current and future residents while delivering on homes and jobs in emerging sectors.

“As Howells, we are located and invested in the heart of this industrious city and have worked in partnership with the council and Arcadis team to develop an inclusive framework that we believe will establish a clear, city-scale ambition for the next 20 years of economic and social growth.

“Our goal is for Birmingham to set a benchmark for transformative change that builds on its strong history, demonstrating what the future can hold for any growing city striving to create a sustainable future for all.”



CGIs of planned development



outlook

International students boost economy

A new report has revealed the £42 billion impact of international students to the UK economy, with £3 billion generated in the West Midlands.

The joint report – released in partnership with Universities UK International, the Higher Education Policy Institute and Kaplan International with London Economics – is in its third iteration and was commissioned to explore the economic impact of international students on the UK economy.

University College Birmingham currently supports over 8,000 students from more than 90 countries, with 1,395 international students studying at the 2022 University of the Year.

Known globally as the youngest city in Europe, Birmingham plays host to over 8,000 first-year students, with 41% of graduates choosing to live and work within the city.

A case in point is Jasmin Anwar, who joined the university in 2022 to study for

her PGCE, having spent 14 years teaching students in her native India.

“I loved teaching in India, but I’ve always wanted to explore the world and face new challenges. When I first told my family I wanted to study in England they were worried I’d get homesick, but I’ve had so much support from everyone at the university.

“I’ve always loved the hustle and bustle of city life, it reminds me of being back home.”

Despite receiving a job offer to teach at a school in London, Jasmin is hoping to secure a position in the Midlands.

She added: “Birmingham has become my home. My husband and daughter joined me here last month. She’s really interested in mechanics and engineering, so she loves looking at all the construction work in the city. I can’t imagine a better place to live, work and study. I feel very blessed to have had this opportunity.”



Jasmin Anwar

Midlands has most potential for growth

The West Midlands is expected to see the second weakest economic growth across the UK in both 2023 and 2024, according to PwC’s Good Growth for Cities Index.

Birmingham is the lowest performing West Midlands city in this year’s analysis, ranking 47th out of 50 UK cities in the index, decreasing from its 2022 ranking of 46th. Areas for improvement include jobs, income and high streets.

However, West Midlands cities included in the index are out-performing or in line with the UK average on work-life balance, measured by an increase in the proportion of employed people working less than 45 hours a week, and income distribution, measured by the ratio of median to mean income, an indicator of wealth equity.

The index ranks 50 of the UK’s largest cities, based on the public’s assessment of 12 economic measures, including jobs, health, income, safety and skills, as well as work-life balance, housing, travel-to-work times, income equality, high street shops, environment and business startups.

Wolverhampton and Walsall ranked above the UK average for safety, while health and environment indicators were in line with the UK average across all the



Matthew Hammond

West Midlands cities included in the Index.

Matthew Hammond, PwC UK Midlands regional market leader and Birmingham senior partner, said: “The report highlights key areas in which the West Midlands performs below the UK average, including overall economic growth.

“The 2022 PwC economic outlook analysis showed that the region’s economic output remained around 3.3% smaller than pre-pandemic levels and identified the Midlands as one of the regions with most potential for growth.

“The post-pandemic opportunities which will drive inclusive growth across the region are centered on our growth stock sectors - advanced manufacturing, med tech and life sciences, digital and creative technologies, future mobility & low carbon technologies, supported by financial, business and professional services.

“Future growth sectors should be used as a roadmap of opportunity, with continued support from public and private businesses, our world class universities, local and central government.”

Survey shows recruitment is slow

Lingering economic uncertainty and cautious recruitment policies continued to dampen hiring activity in the Midlands, according to the latest KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs survey.

The report, which was compiled by S&P Global, found that recruiters registered quicker falls in both permanent placements and temp billings, while there was a fresh increase in the supply of permanent staff.

Growth of demand for permanent workers softened, hitting its lowest for over two years. This contrasted with a sharp and accelerated rise in temp vacancies. Pay pressures showed further signs of moderating, most notably for temp wages which increased at the softest rate for two years.

The KPMG and REC, UK Report on Jobs: Midlands was compiled from responses to questionnaires sent to around 100 recruitment and employment consultancies in the Midlands.

Recruitment consultancies based in the Midlands signalled a reduction in the number of people placed into permanent roles for the fifth successive month in April. The rate of contraction quickened notably on the month and was solid overall. That said, the drop was slightly softer than that seen across the UK as a whole.

Anecdotal evidence indicated that permanent staff appointments fell due to more cautious hiring policies at clients. There were also some reports that candidate shortages had impacted recruitment efforts.

Permanent staff appointments fell across all four monitored English regions,

with London seeing by far the sharpest reduction.

Kate Holt, people consulting partner for KPMG in the Midlands, said: “The data is evidence that many employers across the Midlands are in need of new talent, and there are also a number of people who want new roles with greater development opportunities and pay – highlighted by the rise in available permanent staff.

“However, placements are still falling which means there is a disconnect between what workers want and what employers are offering.

“In this age of ‘great resignation’ and

‘quiet quitting’ more and more people will be looking for job satisfaction on top of good benefits and hiring managers will have to go a step further to show that they can provide this to potential candidates.”

Neil Carberry, REC chief executive, said: “This data shows how uncertain many employers are feeling right now.

“Permanent placements have fallen but the drop was slightly softer than that seen across the UK as a whole. Businesses continue to turn to temps to help them through, with temp vacancies expanding in the Midlands at a sharp and accelerated pace that outstripped the UK-wide average.”



Businesses confident in ‘Brand Britain’

Mid-market businesses in the West Midlands are confident in the international appeal of British products and services, according to Grant Thornton’s latest Business Outlook Tracker survey.

Almost two thirds of the business leaders in the West Midlands said that ‘Brand Britain’ is helpful to UK firms when trading internationally.

While confidence in the nation’s overseas perception was lower in the region compared to the national

average of 66%, 64% of the region’s business leaders did believe the West Midlands has an effective and consistent strategy to attract global investments. The region has been named as one of the potential homes of the government’s new investment zones.

James Brown, managing partner in the East & Central region at Grant Thornton UK LLP, said: “The appeal of Brand Britain has always been strong and it’s great to see that West Midlands

business leaders recognise it as a strong card they can play to achieve international growth.

“Last year’s Commonwealth Games in Birmingham contributed at least £870 million to the UK economy and helped promote our region on the global stage, putting us in the shop window for further investment.

“Coventry’s year as City of Culture was also a triumph, drawing attention to the city’s cultural heritage and its status as a leader in automotives.”



It's showtime!

Some of the world's biggest musical acts and entertainment shows owe a debt of gratitude to Solotech, a major player in the audiovisual industry.

HENRY CARPENTER meets the firm's managing director at its new national headquarters in Solihull.

Did you hear about the Abba Voyage performances last year?

They were a series of concerts featuring virtual avatars of the Swedish supergroup as they were in 1977 and, thanks to access via the internet, it's easy enough to watch clips of the concerts in full swing. It's quite something – an immersive sonic and visual leaving the crowd in raptures.

What you might not know is that a fundamental role in the concerts was played by a UK business which now has its headquarters in Solihull, or more specifically in huge new premises incorporating both warehouse and offices at Blythe Valley Business Park.

Solotech is now one of the biggest players in the audiovisual industry, responsible for ensuring that top festivals and music acts look and sound their very best in front of audiences of tens of thousands.

It is now a global brand which started as a relatively small audiovisual company in Quebec in 1977. It was only about 10 years ago that it enjoyed a surge in growth when it was acquired by three Canadian shareholders who gave it the encouragement and capability to expand.

This is explained by managing director Bryce Jewell from a meeting room above Solotech's vast warehouse in Blythe Valley. The business appears to be sitting pretty both literally and figuratively – as industrial parks go, this is one of the most prestigious in the region, and the company itself is now seeing record turnover, year on year. No wonder he is so chipper.

"In my opinion we are now the best at

what we do," says Jewell, who has been involved in the tech sector – latterly at the very highest level – for over two decades. His CV includes heading Global Cloud Xchange, the world's largest privately owned subsea cable system.

"In 2018 Solotech bought SSE Audio, the UK's leading audio renting company. We are now very much focused on providing all the audio for live events, helping clients to put on the best live shows.

"With that acquisition, we are able to deliver what we call 360-degree live event

services – namely audio, lights and video.

"The visual aspect is so important – if you have 30,000 people in a crowd, you have to think about those at the back. We endeavour to create immersive content in conjunction with a fantastic audio experience."

Audiences at live performances given by the Arctic Monkeys, Coldplay, Sam Smith and Helene Fischer – not to mention festivals such as Reading, Leeds and Download – will this year be experiencing a little bit of what Solotech has to offer.



Solotech UK, under the leadership of Bryce Jewell, left, has enhanced the AV experiences at top live events across the country, including BST Hyde Park



Bryce Jewell at Solotech's warehouse in Blythe Valley

As tech evolves, so the business has had to invest, particularly on the visual side of the operation.

"There is a constant refreshment of new technology coming through which needs to be integrated on behalf of clients. It is an ongoing evolution.

"For us it is all about meeting clients' demands and delivering their vision in a temporary way. It requires a lot of precision planning and a great deal of hard graft.

"We are supporting 10 of the largest touring musical acts this year and many of the top shows. We are certainly one of the biggest players in the AV sector."

The UK arm of the business is rapidly going from strength to strength, but this is a company with a truly international reach, especially stateside where there are offices in Canada, Las Vegas and Nashville, as well as Hong Kong and Macau, to name just a few.

Jewell took over the reins of Solotech UK in December 2021 after Covid had impacted live production significantly.

You might think that successive lockdowns would have crippled the business but actually Jewell suggests it came out of the pandemic in a stronger and more robust position.

This was largely down to a diversification towards building up what the firm calls its system integration services, a catch-all description which basically means the installation of top-end visual and sound production. Think massive plasma screens, huge speakers, digital imagery, advertising boards and other electronic media.

In this area, Solotech's clients come from a wide array of sectors including education, churches, transport, bus stations, airports, corporate AV, visitor attractions . . . the list goes on.

By way of a high-profile example of a successful SIS collaboration, Jewell offers Outernet on Tottenham Court Road in London.

"It is a multi-functional space with floor-to-ceiling LED walls delivering immersive audio solutions," he says. "It was actually quite tricky – the architects came up with

the space and it was up to us to deliver immersive audio. There wasn't a lot of acreage to make that solution work.

"We have also been heavily involved at Ascot Racecourse, and places like York Minster where we have had to be sensitive and sympathetic to the materials.

"Closer to home, Birmingham Symphony Hall and Aston Villa FC are two other venues where our integrated systems are on show.

"We went from a heavily weighted live production business but diversified more



Solotech provides AV solutions in all sorts of settings, from corporate spaces and airports to churches and sports arenas, including Aston Villa FC (right)



Solotech supported the hugely successful Abba Voyage concerts

into systems integration. It was certainly a challenging time but we came out of Covid stronger than before.

"We're much more robust. There aren't many who focus on both live production and systems integration as we do, but it means that we can leverage both sides of the business. It not only gives us the clout with suppliers but also a greater ability to deliver what our clients need.

"We also have two studios in Hollywood where we can offer extended reality experiences, as well as both a streaming

business and an e-gaming business. It gives us real robustness."

Jewell is full of praise for Solotech's owners and "the direction they want to take the company", and this is matched by his admiration for the staff.

"When I joined in December 2021 I was struck by how passionate the staff are in delivering a relatively unique and sometimes very taxing service . . . but the show must always go on," he says.

There are currently 230 members of staff in the UK – though Jewell expects

that number to grow by 20% this year – although the firm also works with a pool of 800 freelancers across the UK and Europe.

On the subject of which, Jewell brings up the issue of recruitment. "We are always looking for high-calibre staff to join us," he says – especially at this time of year with a packed summer schedule. An apprenticeship scheme is being formulated and the firm is liaising closely with schools.

And other plans for the future?

"We've grown the visual side of the business significantly and our plan is to grow our capabilities into Europe," says Jewell.

"It's the same on the systems integration side which had been audio-only until recently. This year we are installing a lot of lighting and video into theatre and attraction spaces."

And he believes the new Blythe Valley HQ gives the firm a sound footing to realise its ambitions.

"I'm really happy with what we've landed on here. We are surrounded by some really well-known brands. It gives us access to a new talent pool and fantastic transport links. It also ticks a lot of the green credentials, and is a much more modern and safe working environment for our staff."

The mood at HQ is upbeat, no doubt, but there is no room for complacency, and that comes from the top.

"In this business you're only as good as your last gig," says Jewell. "We have to deliver an amazing experience each and every time."





The father of modern Birmingham

Few civic leaders in the modern era have had as influential an effect on the transformation of a city as Albert Bore has on Birmingham. This now-knighted local government titan did as much as anyone to pull what was a faded urban sprawl up by its bootstraps into the vibrant, confident epicentre of commerce, culture and colour that we now know.

JON GRIFFIN reports.

It is well over four decades ago but Sir Albert Bore's memories of late 1970s and early 80s Birmingham vividly bring back to life a compelling narrative of urban neglect and decay.

"There was nothing. The city centre was hopeless, most of the outskirts were lacking any vibrancy whatsoever and Birmingham was an awful place. If you had a government minister up here you hoped it was windy and raining because that would show Birmingham up in its worst light.

"It was awful in terms of job opportunities, it was not doing well on the skills front, it was not going anywhere.

"In those days, where would you put people up? The Plough and Harrow Hotel on Hagley Road was the only one. Where would you take people for a meal?"

A knight and 'father of the house' at Europe's biggest local authority, this academic from Ayrshire has been a permanent fixture in the city council chamber since 1980 and has left an indelible stamp on his adopted home city in nearly 45 years of unwavering dedication to the Birmingham cause.

The rise of the former Aston University nuclear physics lecturer to an influential internationally renowned politician with both feet in the corridors of power in Europe is inextricably linked with the transformation of Birmingham from a post-war industrial city reliant on obsolete metal-bashing industries into a modern urban centre with a progressive outlook and an enviable range of modern business and leisure facilities.

The story of Sir Albert Bore's political career

"The problem with the NEC was that people came up from London and went back down to London the same day. There was no need for hotels, restaurants and footfall in the city centre. The decision to put the ICC where it is now came from that understanding."

— and the many battles he took up and fought on behalf of the city he had first encountered as an academic all those years ago — reflects the recent history of Birmingham itself and its latter-day incarnation from a 1970s ugly duckling best known for the Birmingham pub bombings, British Leyland and the Crossroads Motel into today's cosmopolitan conurbation which last year hosted the Commonwealth Games last year to great acclaim.

Bore has been a constant political presence throughout the gloom of the 70s and 80s — when Birmingham lost 200,000 jobs and the city's jobless rate was 50% in its most deprived areas — through the years of urban metamorphosis which brought the ICC, the NIA, Brindleyplace, Michelin-starred restaurants and so much more.

The sprightly septuagenarian is in fine form as we meet in the elegant surroundings of the Exchange building opposite Centenary Square, an appropriate setting of a former municipal bank transformed into a new multi-purpose community centre, yet another impressive part of the city centre jigsaw which Bore and like-minded visionaries have patiently

helped assemble.

Still very much a presence on Birmingham City Council after an astonishing 43 years of unbroken service to the municipal Labour cause, his career — twice leader of the authority — transcends the story of Birmingham over the last four decades.

"I go back to where I was in 1984 when I unexpectedly took over the chairmanship of the Economic Development Committee," he says. "I can still remember the facts that we used to put out there . . . more jobs lost over a 10-year period in the late 70s and early 80s than the whole of Scotland and Wales put together, about 200,000.

"Unemployment in some parts of the city was over 50%, average unemployment was about 25%. This was a city which had lost its way and there was no-one out there coming in to rescue it.

"In those few short years in the early and mid-80s there was a spark lit within the city council. The city somehow had to be moved on and decisions were made."

But by this time, a new Thatcherite world had emerged which was casting large parts of loss-making heavy manufacturing to the winds and would culminate in the defeat of Arthur Scargill and the NUM in the pivotal miners' strike of 1984-85. Whilst Bore was the polar opposite of Mrs T in political terms, he instinctively understood that Birmingham could no longer be propped up by the metal bashers of yesteryear.

"You had to move it from the old metal manufacturing industries into new technology activity. You had to build upon what was the emerging success of the NEC. We needed to build on that success and that was why the decision was taken to bring the ICC in. You could do something with a convention centre which would build on the success of the exhibition centre.

"The problem with the NEC was that people came up from London and went back down to London the same day. There was no need for hotels, restaurants and footfall in the city centre. The decision to put the ICC where it is now came from that understanding."

The transformative project which would become the ICC — Birmingham's 'game-changer' in today's parlance — had its roots under the previous Tory leadership of Neville Bosworth, and was fostered further by his Labour successor Dick Knowles with input from, amongst others, the new



At the opening of a women's enterprise hub



For decades, Albert Bore has been an active advocate for progress in the region

man at the helm of the council's Economic Development Committee, Albert Bore.

"We didn't get government money for the NEC, and we didn't get government money for the ICC. We had to get European money and that was why we went to the European Commission. We were putting the economic argument that Birmingham had gone through the recession, it had lost all these industries, it was trying to move into 'sunrise' industries rather than 'sunset' industries, it was trying to move into new technology."

As Birmingham's manufacturing sector inevitably declined — in common with the shrinkage of coal, steel, the shipyards and other heavy industry nationwide — the urban sprawl once known as the City of a Thousand Trades was attracting a new professional services sector with legal and accountancy firms at the forefront of a white-collar revolution. And the lawyers

and accountants wanted conference space — and hotels — to impress their clients.

"We felt that an ICC in the city centre could be a catalyst for that changing business environment in Birmingham. I went with Dick Knowles to see (government minister) Nicholas Ridley to get an Urban Development Grant to get the Hyatt built.

"We asked for around 60 to 70 million — quite a big figure. Ridley said no way, you go to the Hyatt and tell them they have got to get the price down. After Hyatt International came back to us they lowered the price quite considerably so we could go for a lower grant. We went back to Ridley and you could have knocked us over with a feather in some respects — he agreed it.

"We got a good deal out of it and there was also the agility, drive and enthusiasm that went into projects like the ICC."

But not everybody shared this vision for a convention centre with luxury hotels and the like.

"I remember spending one evening when we had a special meeting to consider whether or not we went ahead with the ICC. I spent a lot of time that evening arm-twisting. We narrowly won the vote.

"Many council colleagues were opposed to it. They felt that they should not be putting money into white elephants and didn't buy the argument that a vibrant regeneration of the city and the development of new industry was the way forward. They felt we needed to put money into education."

But Dick Knowles, Albert Bore and the other visionaries, who had realised that Birmingham had to be dragged kicking and screaming into a new future based on professional services and new technology rather than widgets and lathes, won the day. The seeds were sown for the rebirth of a jaded conurbation into a modern European city with the opening of the ICC in 1991.

But, as Bore recalls, that was just the beginning.

"We had used our compulsory purchase powers to buy up a lot of land — more than was needed for the ICC and the NIA. So we sold off what we didn't need, the land either side of the canal, and that is now Brindleyplace.

"By that time we had a masterplan for the Brindleyplace area and were able to say to (developers) Argent 'we have got the money in our back pocket, what we want you to do is deliver on every aspect of that masterplan'. Brindleyplace was going to add to jobs in the city centre, namely the professional services sector, and that is what has happened."

Bore is keen to stress that the vision for a reborn Birmingham which would ultimately give birth to the ICC and Symphony Hall (where CBSO director Simon Rattle proved the driving force with his desire to leave the Town Hall), the NIA, Brindleyplace, the Hyatt and all the rest was not simply a Labour Party project — or just a blueprint for the redevelopment of the city centre.

"Back in 1988 we held a symposium called the Highbury Conference. The city centre at the time was a terrible place and if we could do something to transform it we would perhaps create an environment and a vision which would encourage others to invest. The Highbury Conference brought in a number of delegates from Birmingham, the region, nationally and some internationally.

"A lot of business people were there. We took them around the city, gave them dinner and effectively locked everybody away for a day and a half at Highbury. As we were ending Sunday lunch, we had drafted a symposium outcome.

"The symposium reached a conclusion



Meeting prime minister David Cameron with a cohort of political leaders and representatives of the business community from Birmingham

that what Birmingham should do is enlarge the city centre by breaking out through the inner ring road, develop a set of quarters that made up the enlarged city centre."

The city's burgeoning business community fell in behind the new urban vision with growing enthusiasm.

"It encouraged others to invest," says Bore. "Roger Dickens (former KPMG heavyweight and leading city businessman) set up lobby group Birmingham Forward in response to the Highbury Symposium and that is a good example of how the business community responded to what they saw as an exciting vision for Birmingham.

"The likes of Roger Dickens were so important because we put a partnership together with the Birmingham business community and Birmingham Forward that could drive certain agendas, and then to add in the blueprint that was Highbury completed the picture.

"There was an economic and cultural strategy here and it wasn't just about putting jobs and vibrancy into the city centre, it was about using the city centre as a springboard to other areas of the city."

Thirty-five years on from the Highbury discussions, Bore cites the regeneration of Castle Vale, the Attwood Green housing project at the old Lee Bank area and the rebirth of the Longbridge area following the closure of MG Rover in 2005 as prime examples of projects which owed their origins to an economic strategy first formulated in 1984, later enshrined in the Highbury Conference conclusions and turbo-charged by developments such as the ICC and Symphony Hall, the NIA, Brindleyplace and the rest.

The domino effect of the Bosworth, Knowles, Bore and co masterplan, the Highbury Conference, and the billions of pounds of investment in Birmingham since many of the city's traditional industries finally saw the sun go down on them are still being felt today.

"Look at what is happening in Southside. That was mentioned in the Highbury Symposium document as one of the districts that we thought might be a cultural quarter because the Hippodrome was there. That has now become the vibrant Gay Quarter. The amount of residential development there is amazing, and now we have also got Smithfield coming along."

Bore is also proud of Birmingham's renaissance as a cultural centre with the likes of the Symphony Hall, the Birmingham Royal Ballet and other latter-day artistic developments all adding to the gradual transformation of a blue-collar industrial heartland into a city of genuine style and substance.

"Simon Rattle was pushing and pushing on the cultural side for years. He wanted to get out of the Town Hall, he wanted a Symphony Hall. We were lucky again because we got one of the most brilliant acoustic architects in the world. People come up from London because the CBSO now has international standing as one of the best acoustic halls in the world.

"Bryan Bird (former deputy leader of the city council) went to London and negotiated with the Covent Garden Ballet. We moved it out of London and retitled it. This was a period where there were lots of ideas, many people contributing, it wasn't just the city council driving it, there were other drivers around, but they

were all acting as one to create a new Birmingham."

The Scottish nuclear physicist turned local government fixer may, quite rightly, always be associated with the creation of the new Birmingham of today, but he's not resting on any laurels as he continues his marathon stint on the city council after standing down as leader in the autumn of 2015. There is still fire in the Bore belly.

"Birmingham needs a proper transport infrastructure. We are the biggest city in Europe without an underground, we have got a pathetic attempt at a tram system. If you put in transport infrastructure you are able to get people from residential area A to workplace area B."

Bore believes that the city can learn from the likes of Manchester and other European centres such as Munich to improve its transport links.

"Manchester and Greater Manchester have stolen a march on us. Birmingham lost its way a bit and allowed Manchester almost to take on the mantle of the second city, even though Manchester is quite small in comparison. Look at the tram network in the Greater Manchester area – look at what they have got compared to us."

Bore remains frustrated that a long-term deal signed off by David Cameron's government – which used an initiative based on projected business rates to help fund a £3 billion regeneration by taking the tram system all the way out to Birmingham Airport – was subsequently scrapped.

"That was signed off by George Osborne but Cameron lost out and the Treasury withdrew from the deal," he says.

Transport issues notwithstanding, Bore remains justifiably proud of his adopted city today.

"I am very proud that the Birmingham I now live in is unrecognisable compared to the Birmingham I came to live in."

And he is still playing a key role in the city's civic affairs, helping organise a Homes for Ukraine programme, dealing with issues in his Ladywood ward and bringing all his experience to bear across the city council's various corridors of power as chair of the Co-ordinating Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

"I have made mistakes. I have got under people's skin, but I am proud of what I have done," he says.

Does he miss leadership? "It is different for me now. I was directly engaged and I was responsible for driving things forward. The engagement with issues for me is much more remote than it used to be."

But while Sir Albert Bore may no longer be leader of Birmingham City Council he only has to walk a few hundred yards out of the Council House in Victoria Square to view the ICC, the NIA, Brindleyplace, the Hyatt, and all the rest of modern Birmingham, and perhaps reflect on how his vision – and that of a few others – helped transform an entire urban landscape.



New event



Jack Peglar, James Isaacs and Elisabeth Lewis-Jones



James Martin, Laura Banks and Eamonn Daly



Richard Killingbeck and Sophie Fenn



Stephen Talboys and Anna Brittan



Mark Embley, Ian Eaton and Nick Hall



Henry Carpenter

Wealth management firm EFG Harris Allday held its inaugural professional network event at its Birmingham head office in the city's former stock exchange. Colleagues, friends and associates from the Colmore area were given drinks and canapes, and there were addresses from EFGHA managing director Richard Killingbeck and Birmingham Business editor Henry Carpenter, who spoke about Birmingham Business TV.



Caroline Sisson and Neil Thorogood



Symphony Hall and the ICC were key parts of Birmingham's renaissance

Why the Neighbourhood Plan matters to the Jewellery Quarter

It supports and protects the jewellery and creative industries

It focuses on the conservation of existing industrial and built heritage and protecting against harmful development.

It enhances the Jewellery Quarter environment

It encourages innovative and exceptional buildings of the highest quality whilst ensuring that they are sensitive to their surroundings.

It upholds the Jewellery Quarter as a creative, mixed-use quarter

It is important to retain existing, and encourage new, spaces available for creative purposes.



It enables movement around the Jewellery Quarter

It will increase ease of connectivity which will drive greater footfall to enable growth of businesses.

Historic opportunity for Jewellery Quarter

Residents and business owners are urged to vote in the JQ's Neighbourhood Plan referendum in July.

There is a simple message from Nicola Fleet-Milne and Matthew Bott: make sure you vote on July 13 – and vote 'yes'!

The message is directed at rate-paying business owners and residents registered to vote in the Jewellery Quarter at a potentially pivotal moment in its timeline – it is their chance to have a say in the district's future at the JQ Neighbourhood Plan's crucial vote.

Nicola and Matthew are two of the driving forces behind the formulation of the Plan which has an overarching vision: that the district is a successful community of businesses and residents, with jewellery, designing and making at its heart.

While their businesses might be based elsewhere in the city, they have both lived in the Jewellery Quarter for the best part of 20 years, and their passion for the area is obvious.

For them the Neighbourhood Plan is all about ensuring a successful future for the Jewellery Quarter, whilst very much respecting its rich history. It is essential, they say, that a proactive and positive stance is taken for the Plan.

Here are some of the key messages which the Neighbourhood Plan is aiming to achieve:

Jewellery

- The protection of heritage is about looking after the industry that gave the Jewellery Quarter its name, as well as nice buildings in the area
- New development within the Creative District should maintain the net commercial space
- This development should provide suitable and affordable space for jewellery and other creative businesses



- Existing jewellery and creative businesses should be retained - either in the development or helped to relocate to other premises in the JQ
- Street improvements and new routes to bring more people in from town, drive up footfall and improve trade

Residential

- The Plan supports providing a range of housing sizes, types and tenures, and affordability
- It tackles nuisance by requiring new apartments to mitigate any potential causes, and any new uses appearing next to homes to do the same
- By having active uses, key routes through the JQ will be busy with people and feel safe
- The Plan supports higher quality design, public art and increased biodiversity

Heritage

- The Plan will tackle dereliction and vacancy by supporting getting buildings back into use

- It complements the Conservation Area rules by acting as a buffer zone around it, and protects heritage assets that are outside it

Everyone

- The Plan requires better quality design for all new development, and the use of appropriate and quality materials
- It will generate steady supply of commercial space
- There will be more public spaces, art and nature for workers and residents to enjoy
- New development will be less generic and more in keeping with its JQ surroundings

HOW TO VOTE

- Businesses need to register to vote by 28 June – the Council are writing to all businesses to invite them to do so
- Residents will need to be on the Electoral Roll, and will be sent voting information



Polling stations will be announced nearer the date, likely to be the usual spots for elections. All voters MUST bring their Voter ID. Passport, Driver's Licence, and other such photographic ID is accepted. Visit <https://bit.ly/JQvoterID> to see the full list

This QR code will direct you to Birmingham City Council's webpage all about the Plan and the Referendum process.





Commercial property

SPECIAL REPORT

The region's commercial property and real estate market is a hive of post-Covid activity with investors and business on the lookout for growth opportunities and space in which to base themselves.

From city centre offices for the professional services sector or the creative industries hubs of Digbeth and the Jewellery Quarter, to the labyrinth of warehouse space and business parks across the region, Birmingham has it all.

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



By ALEX TROSS



54 Hagley Road



Henrietta Brealey

Office relocation

Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has announced plans to relocate to new premises at 54 Hagley Road in Edgbaston by the end of the year.

Following a diligent process and close engagement with its employees, board and committee members, the GBCC has agreed to lease office space at 54 Hagley Road - a stone's throw from Chamber of Commerce House which has been home to the region's largest and longest-running business membership organisation since 1960.

The GBCC will continue to operate from Chamber of Commerce House in Harborne Road until completion and a relocation date have been finalised.

Henrietta Brealey, chief executive of the GBCC, said: "I'm delighted to announce that 54 Hagley Road has been chosen as our new premises.

"Over recent months, we have worked closely with partners and key stakeholders

to identify premises which will help fulfil our ongoing mission to connect, support and grow local businesses. I'd like to thank my colleagues, our board, presidents and committee members for their vital input during this exciting process.

"We have exchanged contracts on the new premises and will be formerly completing the move to our new building by the end of the year. Watch this space, we look forward to sharing further information over the coming months as details are finalised.

"Until then, I'd like to remind our customers and those firms that use our on premises services on a regular basis that Chamber House remains our main location.

"The move is part of our ambitious three-year business plan and strategy.

"It is a privilege to lead this organisation, which celebrates its 210th anniversary this year, as we continually evolve and grow our

work with and on behalf of the city-region's business community."

Established in 1813, the GBCC moved to Chamber of Commerce House in 1960 from the New Street headquarters it had occupied since 1916.

The offices were formally opened by the then paymaster general Lord Hills and a new reception area was opened by Prime Minister John Major in 1996.

The GBCC has nearly 2,500 members, ranging from start-ups to multinational corporations.

It supports businesses in building their profile and networks, finding opportunities and learning from best practice locally, and trading internationally.

It acts as the voice of local businesses, working in partnership with stakeholders across the region to make Greater Birmingham the best possible place to work and do business.

The evolution of the city's office market

The dominant trend in the office market is currently the occupier's flight to quality.

Pre Covid, pretty much everyone with an 'office job', worked in that office every day. Landlords could therefore rely on the fact that there would be a relatively consistent demand for their product, and many didn't need to work that hard to secure an occupier.

They could deliver the standard box with grey carpet and white walls and the market, faced with very little choice, didn't demand much more than that.

Things began to change with the rise in popularity of the serviced off market. Those providers disrupted the status quo with a compelling mix of flexible leases, furniture and broadband packages and in some cases, exotica like free prosecco and on-site dog yoga.

The flexibility and ease were attractive, and that attractiveness was further enhanced by a layer of 'cool' that was afforded by a focus on design and an appealing aesthetic. No white walls or grey carpet in sight!

What was interesting was that all those service and amenity garnishes were only available at a premium but clearly a premium that occupiers seemed more than happy to pay.

Traditional landlords were faced with a choice: evolve or see their market share decimated.

We started to see elements that were typically the preserve of the serviced sector, creep into the traditional landlord space. Much more amenity, more communal spaces, basement gyms and roof terraces etc.

This 'hotelification' of the office began before Covid, but the lockdowns and resulting societal shift towards hybrid working have accelerated the adoption of the concept.

The lockdowns were a forced experiment on a grand scale and the results were largely that people found they could improve their work/life balance without their employers' bottom line being too negatively impacted.

Traditional landlords now had a second nemesis to contend with. Not only was there the threat from the upstart serviced office providers, but they now also had to

contend with the home office as well.

Hybrid working is here to stay.

Employees want it and employers in the war for talent have to offer it to secure the very best candidates who are aware of their leverage in a talent scarce market.

However, many employers see the downside of hybrid working. Culture can be diluted, trainees miss out on valuable time with senior colleagues, management is more difficult etc. Therefore, many employers want their staff back in the office but are understandably hesitant to mandate it for fear of limiting their ability to recruit.

What they can do however, is create or choose an office environment which is appealing enough that employees will happily endure the commute to enjoy what lies at the end of it.

Occupiers need and want more. Offices need to be less 'desk farm' and more community hub and that's where the landlord comes in. A single office suite can only offer so much and elements that drive occupier choice are now much more to do with the office's context than just the office itself.

That wider context is the whole building which is the responsibility of the landlord.

Occupiers have been shown what is possible in terms of office design and amenity levels by the serviced office providers and they like what they see very much. They also want some of those

home comforts to form part of the office experience.

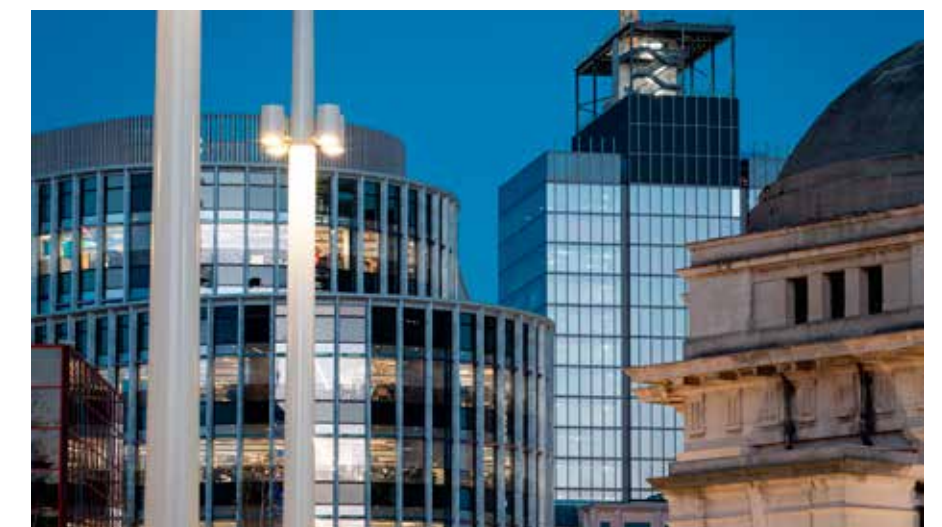
In a market that has yet to reach pre covid demand levels and is also more crowded in terms of the competitive landscape, landlords have been forced to raise their game in response to what is a more demanding, sophisticated occupier.

What we see now is that the best performing buildings are those that understand the prevailing occupier mindset and have delivered a product that meets occupier requirements in a post-covid world.

Not only do the requirements extend to the amenity and design credentials of a building but now landlords also have to deliver against wellbeing and ESG (environmental, social and governance) criteria.

All of these things have a cost and require a landlord to commit limited capital to deliver. However, we saw above that the market isn't particularly price sensitive and prime rents have actually increased since the end of the lockdowns, despite the drop in demand.

Many sectors remain challenging but what we know is that when it comes to offices, occupiers are prepared to pay for quality and if landlords want to compete effectively for what can at times be scarce demand, they need to give occupiers what they want.



Work commences on Hazelmere House

Construction of a West Midlands town's first new mixed retail and office development in close to 25 years is under way.

Hazelmere House in Sutton Coldfield will consist of up to 3,500 sq ft of open plan office space with the adjoining refurbished former cottage providing retail space of 700 sq ft.

Commercial property consultancy

Burley Browne has been appointed by a private investor/developer to market the development which is expected to reach practical completion and be ready for occupation in October.

David Hemming, joint managing director of Burley Browne said: "Sutton Coldfield has unfortunately fallen behind in bringing new retail and office developments to the market.

"Hopefully this will be the first of many new schemes that will not only allow current businesses to grow and expand and stay, but encourage new businesses to choose invest and move to the town.

"The cottage, which has been vacant for many years, will have new life breathed into it, and will provide a truly unique home for the eventual business that secures it."



York House on the market

A prominent office building in Birmingham city centre is on the market for £3,950,000

York House is located on the corner of Newhall Street and Great Charles Queensway and is being sold as a commercial investment with the potential for residential conversion, subject to planning permission. The sale is being handled by commercial property agents Bond Wolfe.

The freehold, 22,175 sq ft, five-storey building is currently part let, producing

£187,552.50 per annum, with an estimated rental value of £308,550 per annum.

James Mattin, managing director agency of Bond Wolfe, said: "York House is one of the most recognisable buildings in the inner-city core, sitting at the heart of the business quarter."

"Its close proximity to both New Street and Snow Hill railway stations enhances its attraction for office workers, and it would also make an ideal residential conversion, subject to planning permission."

Paradise: latest phase

Construction work on the latest commercial building at Paradise Birmingham has begun.

Activity to prepare the site at Three Chamberlain Square has been taking place throughout 2023 and construction work will now be visible upon the site next to the Town Hall and fronting Paradise Street.

Scheduled to open in 2025, Three Chamberlain Square was awarded planning permission by Birmingham City Council in June 2022, and forms an integral part of the overall Paradise masterplan.

It is expected to ensure a continued

supply of Grade A office space for the city with developers focusing on low-energy, low-carbon design as part of the drive to net zero for the Paradise portfolio.

It will add another new commercial building to the estate while the immediate public realm will help create new connections between Chamberlain Square and Paradise Street.

This includes a new access route for the Town Hall tram stop, aiding both city centre connectivity and improving accessibility to public transport for the millions of pedestrians who access the Paradise estate each year.

The 189,000 sq ft space is being built by

construction and engineering contractor Sir Robert McAlpine.

The company, which has already completed work on One Centenary Way at Paradise, will continue its relationship with Paradise as it works on this second key phase of the £1.2 billion Paradise development.

Ross Fittall, of Paradise development and asset manager MEPC, said: "This announcement of moving ahead swiftly with Three Chamberlain Square underlines our ongoing commitment to the city and to bringing forward new buildings at Paradise that are at the cutting edge of building technology and sustainability, as well as being of real architectural merit."

"Sir Robert McAlpine has already proven itself to us over the past three years as it worked on the successful completion of One Centenary Way. Its civil engineering skills are essential to a project like Paradise where we are always working within a highly constrained site with complex topography, groundworks, infrastructure and pedestrian flows to deal with."

As well as Three Chamberlain Square, a new 17 storey hotel on the corner of Paradise Street, was approved in 2022, along with three new public spaces – Ratcliff Square, Western Terrace and Ratcliff Passage.

Together, this work on Three Chamberlain Square, the new hotel and new public realm, will complete the work associated with Phase Two of the development.

Work is also currently well underway on Octagon, the 49-storey apartment tower at the northern apex of the Paradise site.



Pictured from left are Ross Fittall of MEPC, Chris Hucknall of SRM, Alex Housden of MEPC and Stuart Bale of SRM

Don't let your property drive your business...

Ensure your business drives your property



The journey towards commercial lease expiry has always required occupiers to think long and hard about what the future holds for their business in property terms, but the pandemic has amplified this.

Whereas before, it would be relatively straightforward to think about future office needs ahead of lease expiry, now businesses need to go much farther in their thinking, as they assess what the post-pandemic workplace needs to look like.

The expiry of your commercial lease represents an invaluable opportunity to establish this, and really evaluate your property (and workforce) requirements.

Ideally, you should start thinking about what this looks like 24 months ahead of your lease expiring. But where do you start?

First, you need determine what you want to achieve and what brand image you want to portray. If you are committing to a 5 to 10-year lease, it is likely this will go beyond your business plan cycle, so it is important to get this stage right.

This will confirm whether or not your current premises fits your needs, and if it doesn't what should happen – from liaising with your landlord around potential refurbishment options, to exploring new locations and buildings.

Key considerations as part of this discovery phase might include:

1. Business and brand values

Your property acts as an extension of your brand, so it is important for it to reflect your brand values. Think about how you want to convey these externally through your commercial premises and how you want to differentiate yourself from your competitors.

2. What you want your premises to do for your business

Think about how you work and how you want your premises to work for your business. Have you embraced hybrid and smart working practices? Do you need Zoom rooms or video conferencing space? What about space to socialise, collaborate and innovate?

3. Staff demographics

Think about who you are trying to attract and bring into the office. Is your workforce

quite young and vibrant? If so, this will impact the type of office environment you want to create. You may find that a more experienced workforce wants to work more flexibly, so you might need less space than before, but with a good standard of amenity and quality.

4. Where you need to be

This might change depending on the type of environment that you want create, or the rental values / budget you have in mind. If your workforce is based elsewhere, you might want to consider a different location, moving out of a London HQ, for example, in favour of regional satellite offices.

5. What your expectations are around green credentials

Businesses are, rightly, increasing their expectations of landlords around the green credentials of the buildings they occupy.

So, think about what this looks like for your business in terms of your property's

carbon emissions and green credentials such as BREEAM and EPC Ratings, LED lighting, solar PV and more.

Once you know the answers to these questions, it becomes easier to establish what is best for your business.

At Vail Williams, we specialise in supporting businesses with their future workplace strategies to ensure that it is their business driving their property needs, and not the other way round.

From initial evaluation to the sourcing and securing of new premises, and lease negotiations to project management of your building's fitout, our chartered surveyors can help.

For help with a forthcoming lease event, get in touch.

Vail Williams is a national property consultancy with 11 offices across the UK, including Birmingham, which specialises in commercial and residential property services for occupiers, landlords, investors, developers and lenders.

Find out more

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By INDI SIDHU



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What risks does climate change pose to the real estate sector?

The consequences of a changing climate – as well as regulatory and technological changes necessary to decarbonise – pose very real and material risks to the real estate sector.

Some of these risks such as can be classed as a physical risk whereas business-related risks are classed as transition risk.

Climate-change related physical risks will vary depending on where a building is located, its local environment and the nature of construction. Changing weather patterns and more frequent catastrophic events – such as intense storms, hurricanes, wildfires, flooding or drought – mean higher costs, whether that means maintenance, repair or replacement of damaged assets or adaptations like strengthening buildings or increasing heating or cooling capacity. In the UK, the most material localised climate risk is flood risk.

A transition risk is business-related risk that follows societal and economic shifts toward a low-carbon future and responsible economy. These risks relate to policy, liability and technology. For example, governments are tightening energy performance (with EPCs) and emissions standards and climate risk disclosures are now mandatory in the UK and the EU. This necessitates adoption of the new and evolving technologies, potentially at higher costs, which may impact profitability if not planned for.

Further risks also include market risk,

reputation risk and financial risk. Tenant business disruption may also mean they can't pay rent, and insurance may cost more, or become impossible to get. Then there are tenant counterparty risks to rents and capital values, for example, where a tenant's business will have to adapt to survive in a net zero world, or where a tenant's business is deemed unethical or suffers reputational change.

Equally, ethically 'unacceptable' landlords as well as unsustainable properties may also be rejected by tenants: and a poor reputation makes raising investment capital and debt more difficult.

These risks are often interconnected and are a key concern for investors and lenders as tackling them may be difficult or costly.

As the low-carbon transition accelerates, there is also a growing risk of stranded assets and write-downs from properties that fail to meet market expectations and regulatory requirements. In its simplest form, a stranded asset can be a building, a piece of land, or a piece of related infrastructure that once had value but no longer does due to climate related transition and physical risks as well as external societal factors.

Something that distinguishes stranded assets from other forms of obsolescence is the immediate nature of the write down in value because of changes in regulations

related to energy performance, climate change and decarbonisation.

The concept of stranding is one used extensively in the Carbon Risk Real Estate Monitor risk assessment tool which estimates the stranding date and outlines a indicative decarbonisation pathway to lengthen the standing date.

The changes in regulation, reporting requirements and potential value downside have increased the focus on climate related and social risks to real estate. However, the sector still faces major issues in managing these risks, even once they are identified due to the lack at asset specific data.

To overcome this, asset owners and managers will need to improve data collection and use this information to form a strategic response.

Valuers will also have to be more aware when carrying out inspections. In terms of the information to be collected this can start with an individual tenant's power and water consumption through to carbon audits. Ultimately this will be the responsibility of the owner or asset manager. Valuers will also need to be more proactive in noting ESG risk factors when carrying out inspections.

Whilst environmental check lists already exist, these may need to become more comprehensive and importantly pick up on the 'S' and the 'G' – social and governance.

Aparthotel coming to Snowhill

A new hotel is set to launch in Snowhill this autumn.

The new Aparthotel Birmingham – a redevelopment of the Royal Angus Hotel – was acquired by SevenCapital in August 2020, and will be managed by Switch Hospitality.

The hotel will offer guests the choice of 161 studios, one and two bedroom apartments and suites across nine floors.

Aparthotel Birmingham is intended to provide corporate and leisure guests with the comforts of home, whilst offering the service, premium amenities, flexibility and indulgence of a hotel.

The accommodation includes rooms with private terraces to interconnecting suites that can host up to six people. Guests have been promised "best-in-class amenities and the latest technology,

including keyless entry, online self-check in and an in-room Alexa, in addition to on-site parking and pet-friendly rooms".

John Angus, managing director at Switch Hospitality, said: "From the pre-planning stages of Royal Angus' redevelopment, we were able to offer consultation that should both maximise the asset value for SevenCapital, whilst responding to the burgeoning demand for high-quality accommodation in the city centre.

"Having successfully managed Park Regis, which recently received the title of Best UK Hotel for the second year, we pride ourselves on providing best-in-class service that prioritises the needs of both leisure and corporate clients.

"Whether guests choose to stay at Aparthotel Birmingham for a weekend or a month, we are committed to providing all

the comforts of a home away from home."

Damien Siviter, group managing director at SevenCapital, said: "Aparthotel Birmingham will prove a fantastic asset to the hospitality provision in the city centre, with very few of this kind currently in operation in its locality.

"We are pleased to have Switch Hospitality Management on board to manage its operations, having established a successful working partnership with them through our Park Regis Hotel and St Martin's Place residential developments. We look forward to the anticipated opening later this year."

Aparthotel Birmingham is the latest addition to Switch's portfolio, which includes Park Regis Birmingham, St Martin's Place, Lyndon House, Holiday Inn Express Birmingham South and Nite Nite Hotel.

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Man *on* a mission

Overseeing the property empire of one of urban Britain's most historic estates is no easy task at the best of times, let alone when there is a pandemic, soaring inflation and a cost-of-living crisis to contend with. But when the trustees of Calthorpe Estates took on Haydn Cooper as its CEO, they selected a man with vision, passion and pedigree.

HENRY CARPENTER meets him.

It is a brisk walk of five minutes or so from the Calthorpe Estates offices in Edgbaston to the High Field pub.

The route Haydn Cooper chooses is along the Hagley Road, before turning off down Edgbaston Village Walk, over the road to Greenfield Crescent, before cutting through to Highfield Road which is where we settle for our interview.

Along the way, the estate's spritely 42-year-old CEO points out various landmarks and developments. There's the major construction work on the other side of Hagley Road – a joint venture between the estate and developers Moda Living which will see the creation of up to 1,500 apartments, as well as various other amenities for occupiers and visitors.

Pretty much opposite, is the metro station – a game changer, according to Cooper, which means that Edgbaston is just minutes to the city centre. He for one has stopped driving into the centre as a result of this much-heralded new link.

Then there's Greenfield Crescent, which has undergone a multi-million-pound refurbishment to bring the public realm – the street itself – up to the highest standard. Cooper points out Chapter, the restaurant on the crescent which was launched at the end of 2021. This is just

another element in the panoply of thriving hospitality venues on the estate, he explains, which also includes the Physician, the Michelin-starred Simpsons, new pizzeria Smoke + Ash and the High Field.

He also mentions the monthly artisan market held on the street. "It has been a remarkable success bringing in a huge number of people," he says mid-stride. "One Saturday in May 3,800 came over the course of the day to look around the 70-odd stalls. It is good for the area and the occupiers."

Within that five minutes' stroll – make it 10 with the stops and observations – a snapshot is given of the core commercial centre of Birmingham's most historic and extensive privately owned estate.

Cooper has been in office for almost three years and with that comes the responsibility of overseeing the current chapter in this historic estate's timeline.

The estate itself is run as a trust for the Calthorpe family, the region's wealthiest landowner with a further estate in Scotland – more of which a little later. The operational side of running the estate is left to Cooper; the Calthorpe family and trustees offer encouragement and support, but not interference, for which he is clearly grateful.

“Yes, there is a lot of heritage but the estate is extremely forward looking,” he says. “We are here to make progress and we are aligned very closely with the city council and its masterplanners to achieve this.

“Edgbaston is a growth area which people want to visit. It is also a fantastic lifestyle location which is now connected far more effectively with the city centre.

“There is a great deal of business space which is serviced by a wonderful heritage and will be welcoming a new influx of residents. There are 12 schools – primary and secondary, state and private – and almost endless places to get medical attention.”

You half expect him to add ‘what’s not to love?’ but he doesn’t need to – his affection for the area is obvious.

Nonetheless, it was the trickiest of baptisms for Cooper when he took the top job at Calthorpe Estates.

He had been sounded out by head hunters in early 2020 to take on the CEO role – a proposition the 39 year old found too appealing to ignore.

However, it is not as though he was lacking in suitable experience, despite his young age for such a position. Having studied land management at Reading University, he worked for the Grosvenor Estate in London “which set the scene for my career – I have worked for private family estates ever since”.

After handling their Mayfair estate, he went on to work for the Cadogan Estate, also in London, and then for the six months before the Covid pandemic arrived, the duchies of Lancaster and Cornwall.

It was an altogether different environment when he was awarded the job at Calthorpe. We were in the depths of the first major lockdown, there were to be no team meetings or hand-shaking introductions on his first day at work – he was essentially plunged in the deep end, charged with overseeing an estate with

hundreds of deeply concerned commercial tenants.

He smiles about it now in the belief that the Covid hangover had finally been shaken off but it was, in his own words, “a very challenging period”.

“What wasn’t challenging was the acceptance that we had to support our occupiers with rent deferrals and so forth.

“The difficult part was managing the cashflow. While the revenue from rent had reduced, we still had to honour loans, staff overheads, property repairs and other expenditure. It was a tough time requiring careful cost control.

“However, we are certainly stronger now than we were pre pandemic. When I arrived in the middle of Covid I was always going to implement change – I subscribe to the Duke of Westminster’s belief that leaders are agents of change.

“I was able to make changes wherever

I felt necessary. Covid made us re-assess and accelerate business change under new leadership.

“The biggest change was a new focus on the customer, and that was achieved by bringing the majority of property management in-house. This side of the operation had been contracted out through agents, but now we were in a position to deal with customers directly.

“This has meant that our connection to the rent payers is greatly enhanced, and we are now able to be far more nimble and collaborative in reaching solutions.”

Another change to the estate is in its personnel. The team is now 20 strong – the headcount has increased to accommodate this new focus on customer management.

Cooper name-checks property director Richard Suart and asset manager Tom Foley as recent key appointments, while

Ralph Minott – a comparative old hand with 15 years’ experience – is the director of development.

“The development and masterplanning area is the other side of the business,” says Cooper. “It is about the long-term planning of the estate, and implementing projects and refurbishments.

“Recent examples are the pre-let of a development to Asda Express at Pebble Mill which will be on-site in the summer, and several refurbishments on Greenfield Crescent, the latest of which is Chapter restaurant.

“It has become clear to me that the development of a huge number of new offices is not consistent with the strengths of Edgbaston, and the focus must now move more to residential – hence our collaboration with Moda Living. The city wants to see residential growth.

“There are certain buildings which are being looked at for change of use or demolition. The Five Ways Tower, for instance, is getting closer to redevelopment.”

The estate is in the throes of a considered programme of redevelopment with the long term very much borne in mind – that much is obvious – but Cooper and his team aren’t the first custodians to adopt a forward-thinking approach.

Like all successful estates, it has had to evolve and adapt to needs and societal changes since its very beginnings. Charting the Calthorpe history to where we are now is fascinating, not only because it provides an interesting timeline in its own right, but it also provides context to change – and those developments which Cooper and his team are overseeing are arguably far less radical than those in decades and centuries past.

The story started in 1717 when a London merchant called Sir Richard Gough bought the 2,000 acres of land a few miles to the west of the city. For the first 100 years it was a rural estate, used purely for agricultural purposes, but by the early 1800s it became apparent that it was perfectly placed for residential development.

“The industrial pollutants and the smog from the city centre factories and foundries blew to the east, and so the middle classes and more affluent were keen to live in the west,” explains Cooper.

“Roads were put through fields and developers were given 99-year leases to build their own plots, and over the years master planners would come and fill in the gaps.

“If we fast forward to the 1950s the estate was far more developed, but took a more commercial turn when the architect John Madin put in a masterplan proposal at Fiveways, which was accepted. That marked the start of the commercial district on the eastern fringes of the estate closest to the city centre.”

The estate had thus far been on



Pictured above is The High Field, and right, Simpsons and The Physician



Pictured from left are Richard Suart, Ralph Minott, Adele Pogmore, David Woolridge and Haydn Cooper



The artisan market on Greenfield Crescent

a curve of continual expansion and development since its inception, but that changed in 1967 with the introduction of a parliamentary act – the Leasehold Reform Act – which allowed owners of houses with long leases to compulsorily purchase the freehold from the estate. Ever since, thousands of houses have had a legal right to buy their leases, although any external changes to properties need to be agreed with the estate to ensure the character of the surrounding area is maintained.

Anyway, the upshot of this is that the estate has shrunk geographically. It has also been forced to look for other opportunities – and the focus since has been on building the commercial property portfolio.

In time regional headquarters for blue-chip names such as Zurich Insurance and

HSBC found a home on the estate, though they have since moved to the city centre.

“Things never stay the same, and we expect that,” says Cooper. “It leads to new opportunities, and in the case of Zurich we expect that to be redeveloped into a residential apartment block, while the HSBC site has planning consent for student accommodation and a hotel.”

The list of commercial tenants now cover a wide range of industries, but there is a strong medical theme which runs through the estate, with private heavyweights such as diagnostics firm, the Binding Site, and IP firm Barker Brettell, rubbing shoulders with several hospitals and any number of medical and dental practices. If Birmingham was to have a formal Medical Quarter, it would sit squarely on the Calthorpe Estate.

Its proximity to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital is key – and while the QE doesn’t sit on Calthorpe land, it is built on land gifted to it by the estate. Two other institutions synonymous with the city – Edgbaston cricket ground and the University of Birmingham – are also based on land given to them by the estate. It hasn’t exactly been shy of major acts of philanthropy over the years.

There’s another hub within this ecosystem which is worth mentioning – Pebble Mill, the site on the southern margins of the estate which is still probably best known as the former BBC recording studios. However, it is now occupied by a variety of private medical and dental hospitals, and a care home.

“Most development has been done by incoming occupiers, but we manage and maintain the spaces between the buildings,” says Cooper. “We are really proud of it – it has a great sense of place, and is now a more mature location rather than a development site.”

I wonder if the estate is permanently on the lookout for acquiring new land and property.

“I would say we are more opportunistic than acquisitive,” answers Cooper. “We are more interested in the regeneration of what we already have.

“Our stated aim is ‘to create exceptional places’, and that comes under four headings – community, connected, sustainable and excellence.”

We have discussed three of these pillars, but not the sustainability agenda.

“The journey for all businesses is to carbon net zero, and we are committed to get there by 2050,” he says.

“It isn’t easy for us as we have a lot of old buildings and it is a case of progressively improving them to get to that point.

“However, we are able to utilise Calthorpe’s Scottish estate near Inverness where one million trees are being planted in order to capture carbon. It doesn’t replace the need to reduce carbon emissions in Birmingham, but it shows our determination to help redress the balance.”

Cooper has had to deal with tremendous challenges at Calthorpe, particularly at the beginning of his tenure, but as we near the end of our chat I get the sense that a millstone has been lifted from his shoulders and he is looking ahead with real optimism.

He agrees, pointing out that the direction the city is taking as whole excites him.

“It is one of the reasons why I took the job here – I believe Birmingham’s time is now, and I fully agree with those who say that this is the city’s golden decade. It is now incumbent on businesses to work together to make it happen.”

And as for the estate itself?
“I see the opportunity for change everywhere . . . and it’s very exciting.”



Calthorpe Estate is home to several healthcare and life sciences organisations including Pebble Mill, top, and Binding Site

Act now to reduce your business rates liability



As of 1 April 2023, all businesses now have a new rateable value (RV) following the publication of the Rating List as part of Revaluation 2023.

This will affect what businesses occupying commercial premises have to pay in business rates over the next three years.

On average, RVs across England and Wales have increased by some 7.1% on the last rating period.

This means that most, but not all, businesses across the Midlands will be paying more business rates than they did before. Indeed, for some sectors such as industrial, this will be significantly more.

The RV for industrial and logistics occupiers in England and Wales has gone up by 27.1% on average, meanwhile for

office occupiers this is 10.2% and retail is down -10%.

In the Midlands, this translates into an average increase in RV of 25% for industrial occupiers, which, whilst widely predicted based on market evidence at the valuation date, will still come as a shock to occupiers in the context of the wider economic climate.

Office premises have undergone a surprise increase in RV, rising by 10.4%. This was not expected, given the fact that the valuation date was mid-pandemic when COVID restrictions and remote working were impacting the office market.

On a more positive note, retailers benefitted the most by a fall in RV of 11.25%, which was expected, given the effect of the pandemic on the UK high street.

Check, Challenge and Appeal

Your business rates for the next rating period (2023-2026) are calculated by multiplying your premises’ new RV by a formula called the ‘Multiplier’.

However, many rating assessments by the Valuation Office Agency (VOA) can be incorrect, which means you could be paying more business rates than you should be.

This can be down to a variety of reasons, including incorrect or inaccurate valuations of your business premises.

Now that the new Rating List is live, it is time to make sure that you don’t pay more than you should in business rates, over the next three years, and we can help.

Our business rates experts based across the UK, can work with you to review and ‘challenge’ your new Rateable Value with the VOA.

If we believe that there are inaccuracies in your RV, you could be entitled to potentially significant savings on your business rates liability over the next rating period.

As part of our support, we will also

Average % change in rateable value (RV) across the UK

Region	Average across all sectors	Industry	Office	Retail
England	7.3	27.8	10.3	-10
North East	2.2	19.1	8.6	-13.9
North West	7.4	23.2	17.2	-9.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	4.7	19.4	7.9	-14.6
East Midlands	8.6	23.2	5.5	-10.6
West Midlands	9	26.7	15.3	-11.9
East	14.4	35.1	26.3	-10.2
London	3.3	33.1	6.1	-8.9
South East	10.9	33.5	20	-10.1
South West	9.5	27	14	-4.7
Wales	1.3	12.1	5.7	-10.1

explore the full range of business rates reliefs that are available to you, from small business rate relief and transitional relief to empty rates relief and more.

We can also explore any historical savings that can be recovered and will work

with the VOA on your behalf to regularise your position.

To find out more about how we could help reduce your business rates, get in touch to request a no obligation call back from our team.



Find out more

Adam Barnfield, Head of Business Rates

Vail Williams LLP

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Mixed-use development given the green light

A £360 million mixed-use development – which is expected to lead to hundreds of jobs – has been given the green light by planners.

Birmingham-based developer Woodbourne Group is leading on the Curzon Wharf project where proposals include new residential buildings, shops and offices, as well as research and development and life sciences facilities. The firm is hoping it will be a net-zero carbon scheme.

Located next to Aston University and Birmingham City University, it will occupy a one million sq ft site which is currently home to industrial units built in the 1960s.

The scheme will include a residential build-to-rent apartment block. Standing at 53 storeys high, making it Birmingham's tallest building. The purpose-built student accommodation will be 41 storeys and another residential unit will comprise 14 floors.

The development will also include nearly

130,000 sq ft of office, R&D and life science space, over 3,000 sq ft of retail units, more than 15,000 sq ft of leisure space, 76,424 sq ft of new and improved public realm and 490 metres of walking and cycling routes.

Tani Dulay, chief executive of Woodbourne Group, said: "We have worked hard to reach this point and it is incredibly satisfying to stand on the brink of delivering such a development.

"We need to help power the economic recovery by facilitating investment, creating jobs and acting as a catalyst to further success."

Neil Rami, chief executive of West Midlands Growth Company, said that Curzon Wharf had the potential to boost growth and innovation in the West Midlands, not only creating jobs in its own right, but helping to drive regional investment as a flagship development.

"This is a very visible beacon of the region's commitment to creating world-class, sustainable infrastructure," he said.

Agency integration increases portfolio

Birmingham-based estate management firm MetroPM has integrated the block management portfolio of Nick Plotnek Associates into its business.

The transfer, which became effective in April, sees a further 40 estates come under MetroPM's management.

Managing director Matthew Arnold said: "Nick Plotnek Associates specialise in lease extensions, purchase of freehold and acquisitions, along with block and estate management.

"Having managed several of the estates for some 30 years, they have taken the decision to focus on lease extensions and freehold purchase, transferring the block management portfolio to us with whom they have worked closely for over 15 years."

Nick Plotnek said: "It was very important to us that the portfolio transferred to an agent who is regulated by RICS.

"As apartment and estate living becomes more popular and buildings more complex, it is vitally important for residential managers to specialise in this field of expertise, enabling them to deliver consistent and high levels of service to customers."



Matthew Arnold

Growth at Star City



Real estate firm Quadrant has received planning permission for a new 100,000 sq ft logistics unit at Star City.

A planning committee voted unanimously in favour of the scheme at its leisure-led mixed-use complex.

The newly granted planning consent allows for part of the 23-acre site fronting the M6 motorway and some of Star City's existing leisure space to be replaced with a new industrial shed. Permission by delegated powers has also already recently been granted for a new ft drive-thru restaurant in the car park.

John Maddison, partner at Quadrant, said: "Securing planning for this significant new industrial development at Star City will bring much-needed new employment space to the market in central Birmingham, contributing to the area's continued and phenomenal growth.

"Star City is among Birmingham's most attractive leisure-led mixed-use destinations, and despite having to navigate Covid, the asset management initiatives we have deployed in recent years will ensure it remains a leading destination now and long into the future, benefiting both Birmingham's economy and the local community."

Engineering firm unveils Colmore office

Multi-national engineering consultancy Royal HaskoningDHV has unveiled its new office at Cornerblock in the Colmore Business District.

The office space will have desks for around 100 employees, and the company's hybrid work policies give the team scope to further expand.

The office move brings together Royal HaskoningDHV's Birmingham-based team with colleagues from two acquired companies – digital specialists Twinn and sustainable transport planners ITP.

Director Jonathan Bull said: "We have had teams based in Birmingham for over 10 years, so we are already familiar with the energy and buzz around the city.

"This move consolidates our position in the city and brings colleagues together in this incredible space. Sharing knowledge and resources will help us continue to deliver ground-breaking projects, both in the city and around the world."



BBC move to Digbeth

Birmingham City Council planners have given the go-ahead for the BBC's new home at the former Typhoo Tea factory in Digbeth.

The Tea Factory will house several BBC editorial teams including The Archers, BBC Asian Network, BBC Newsbeat, BBC Radio WM and Midlands Today.

The building is on target to achieve a BREEAM rating of outstanding and an energy performance certificate of A.

Stuart Thomas, BBC head of Midlands said: "Having a new home for the BBC in Birmingham is all part of our commitment to do more in the Midlands."

"Breathing life into this wonderful factory will help turbo charge the whole of Digbeth as the city's creative heart."

Birmingham City Council leader Councillor Ian Ward said: "The new BBC HQ represents a huge vote of confidence in Birmingham and our creative sector, so I am delighted the project has now been granted planning permission."

"Our vision for Digbeth is to build on established creative businesses, attracting and encouraging new ones. The BBC move added to the coming of HS2, the Midland Metro extension and the MasterChef move will help us attract further investment."



Developer Stoford, which submitted the application on behalf of the corporation, said receiving planning approval for the new 84,001 sq ft custom-built centre was an exciting next step in its plans.

Director Gerard Ludlow said the Bordesley Street scheme represents the first phase of a wider masterplan for the surrounding area.

He added: "We have been working

closely with the BBC to ensure we not only keep the historic legacy of the almost 100-year-old factory but also deliver a pioneering scheme using low carbon principles. We are looking forward to breathing new life into it."

Over the next decade, Stoford plans to deliver up to 800,000 sq ft of residential, office and hospitality accommodation around the new BBC building.

Agreement of long lease

Qahe Ltd has taken 45,000 sq ft of office space at Louisa Ryland House on Newhall Street in Birmingham's city centre.

The higher education provider has agreed a 15-year lease on five floors of the Grade II listed building. The rent is undisclosed.

CBRE, the real estate firm, along with joint agents JLL, advised the landlord Euro Property Investments Ltd on the letting. Daniel Watney LLP advised Qahe.

Theo Holmes, senior director and head of office agency at CBRE in Birmingham, said: "This letting means the building has an anchor tenant in place."

"For Qahe, key factors in its decision to relocate to Louisa Ryland House included the ability to occupy at high density and having its own entrance to the building."



Landmark Birmingham development sold

A landmark Birmingham mixed use office and retail development has sold for £825,000.

Swali Investments & Holdings has purchased Rocky Lane House, a 6,332 sq ft office building which fronts Aston Cross Business Village.

The Birmingham-based property investment company intends to occupy the offices for its own use.

David Swali, CEO at at Icare24 Group, said: "We are excited to announce the acquisition of Rocky Lane House as the new headquarters for the Icare24 Group."

"With its spacious and light-filled areas, Rocky Lane House offers an ideal office

base for our team."

"We eagerly anticipate completing the design and development process by Estilo and moving into our new office this summer. This milestone signifies our commitment to growth and providing a dynamic work environment that fosters innovation and collaboration within the Icare24 Group."

Rocky Lane House is a freehold two-storey property in Aston Cross Business Village in the Waterlinks area of Birmingham. It has recently refurbished office space of 3,186 sq ft with the ground floor comprising three retail units, all of which are let and self-contained.

Ed Siddall-Jones, managing director

of commercial property firm Siddall Jones which handled the sale, said: "There was keen interest in Rocky Lane House, demonstrating the continuing keen appetite for quality investment opportunities in Birmingham."

"The office element has recently undergone a comprehensive refurbishment and boasts an impressive ground floor reception area with two meeting rooms off, and kitchen, shower and toilet facilities also on this level."

"The first-floor space comprises an open plan suite with toilets and fitted kitchen, and the development comes with extensive car parking."

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Purpose driven

Anthony Collins is one of the region's more unusual law firms. HENRY CARPENTER visits its Edmund Street offices for an audience with managing partner Peter Hubbard to understand both its points of difference from other legal practices, and also why it is in such a good state of health as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.



It is all very different now.

These days, if you want to meet the boss of Anthony Collins, you are first greeted by a besuited receptionist, before taking a choice of lifts. These take you through several storeys of smart offices in Edmund Street, each floor visible from its glass-sided walls as you pass by.

When the firm was launched 50 years ago this August, the eponymous founder could be found in one of the four upstairs rooms in Cherry Street – but it had to be in the morning as that was the only time there was a receptionist.

Anthony Collins isn't the first law firm to mushroom in size from humble beginnings, but few can have done so quite as dramatically. There are now 330 people on the firm's books – the majority based in the Birmingham HQ, the rest located in the North West. Last year's accounts reveal an annual turnover of £26 million – a 12% hike on the previous year's figures.

It is fair to say it is one of the more financially robust law practices in the region.

However, this isn't what sets the firm apart from almost all others in the UK. Of course, the bottom line needs to be recognised to pay its staff, but the unique stance of AC is that it is committed to a triple bottom line of people and the environment, as well as profit.

All of this is explained by managing partner, Peter Hubbard, in a meeting room on the firm's eighth floor.

There is a common purpose at AC, he says, and it is this: to improve lives, communities and society.

"That is our inclusive vision," says Hubbard, "and that is what attracts high-calibre people to come and work here."

"They want to help us grow our vision of wanting to serve people and improve society."

If this sounds naïve, it really isn't – the social-purpose focus underpins a commercially successful model that has been there from day one. As Hubbard says, enabling people to work for a purpose gives AC depth in specialisms that other law firms perhaps just don't have.

He explains: "The heart of our

work is helping individuals and then advising anchor institutions such as local authorities, charities, housing associations, schools, social care providers and social businesses to help them deliver their work.

"AC has been a purpose-led organisation long before it became trendy to be claiming a social purpose."

If you want an example of AC making a visible, tangible difference to society in Birmingham, you need look no further than Acocks Green and Perry Common.

The firm delivered the regeneration of both estates in the early 1990s by advising Birmingham City Council to set up Stockfield and Witton Lodge community associations.

"They are both still local, independent community associations which are running well and still looking pristine," says Hubbard. "One of the original directors, Linda Hines, was awarded an MBE for services to the community, and that is what it is all about."

He also tells us about other projects further afield which have had a profound

impact on communities and individuals. The firm advised on implementing the Housing First project in Manchester, for example, which successfully takes homeless people off the streets.

The recent Cumbria and Somerset local authority reorganisations enlisted the help of AC to help them better serve their residents. The firm enabled the first UK surgeon to return to work after being partially paralysed in an accident, and it also advised on Newcastle-upon-Tyne's public buildings decarbonisation project.

A truly nationwide client base then, and the launch of other offices outside of Birmingham – which came to pass in 2019 with the first new office hub being in Manchester – was only a matter of time.

"We wanted to reflect our national client base, not to get more clients," says Hubbard, carefully.

"Our presence in the North West enables more people across the country to work with us. It opens up a new talent pool of people who want to work for a purpose-led law firm but can't move to work in Birmingham."

"We tend to attract two types of people. There are those starting out on their careers who want to make a difference through the work they do. Then there are those who have experienced working elsewhere and are determined to find a place where work can be more fulfilling."

Five decades down the line and it is worth going back to AC's inception, and Anthony Collins himself, to understand his vision and where the firm's values were originally moulded.

Mr Collins – happily still going strong at the age of 81 – set up the law firm to reflect his personal faith and to serve others. This has grown into a much wider and inclusive endeavour now, attracting people from across the country to work at a law firm committed to improving the lives of others as well as improving the

physical, economic and social fabric of society.

By the time he retired in 2003, Mr Collins had become one of the best-known figures in the region's legal world and had served as president of Birmingham Law Society. Moreover, the service-first ethos was firmly instilled at the firm he founded, and according to Hubbard attracted "a huge number of people who were looking to have a positive impact on the West Midlands and further afield through their work".



The Anthony Collins team moving from Temple Row into St Philip's Gate

"The firm has become successively clearer about what its purpose is and we have continued to refine what we do," he says.

"We advise many anchor organisations who are themselves supporting individuals.

"We are pre-eminent nationally in our particular fields – the third sector, local authorities, social enterprises, health and social care organisations and we have one of the biggest private client teams in the West Midlands.

"The firm is now accredited as a B Corp organisation, so independently audited as a better business, delivering the triple bottom line of profit, people and the environment."

We have touched on profit – and people in the community and wider society. But more introspectively, AC also places great store on its own people.

Inclusivity is high on the agenda, with women constituting 43% of its partners – delivering on its Women in Law pledges – while 56% of job offers in 2022 were to minority applicants as part of its Fair Race Commitment.

"We look after our staff, and deliver for them on issues such as profit share, invisible disabilities, career planning, support groups and paid volunteering days," says Hubbard. "This goes for everyone – not just the lawyers. This is very much a team game."

Given the singular, purpose-driven ethos of AC, I wonder what sort of professionals it attracts when, let's face it, making as much money as possible is the motivation of many.

"People tend to self-select whether they come here," says Hubbard. "We tend to attract two types of people. There are those starting out on their careers who



The firm's founder, Anthony Collins

want to make a difference through the work they do. Then there are those who have experienced working elsewhere and are determined to find a place where work can be more fulfilling.

"We attract huge numbers of really commercially astute people – professionals who want to be respected as individuals rather than simply tools for making money."

So there will be celebrations at the AC offices in this special milestone year, and you can tell that Hubbard – who joined the firm in 1994 as a trainee and became senior partner in 2014 – is enormously proud of what it has achieved.

There are, however, plenty of to-dos on the hit list.

"We want to be a key adviser, informing national social policy," he says for starters.

"We want to be indispensable to clients who are delivering publicly funded services across the UK.

"We want to be a magnet for employing people who are committed to improving society through their work.

"We want 20% of our partners to come from ethnic minorities. And we want to be carbon neutral by 2030, as part of our B Corp commitment."

The purpose-led practices of this most principled of law firms continue to evolve and respond to the needs of society – and they will no doubt continue to do for the next 50 years.



King's Award 2024

Applications for the 2024 King's Award for Enterprise have opened – with September 12 the closing date for submissions.

The award is given annually for outstanding achievement by UK businesses in innovation, international trade, sustainable development and promoting opportunity through social mobility.

Three Birmingham companies have received the 2023 award and were congratulated by the Lord-Lieutenant of the West Midlands, Sir John Crabtree OBE, who described their achievements as "remarkable and a testimony to the West Midlands' inherent entrepreneurial culture".

Manufacturers and suppliers of high-quality ceremonial to the armed forces

communities, Ammo & Company, received the award for international trade.

Founded in 1850, the company – which is based in Gravelly – manufactures and supplies equipment used in many ceremonial occasions, including the Coronation of the King, Trooping the Colour, Ceremony of the Keys at the Tower of London, Firing of the Royal Salute. The company exports to more than 20 Commonwealth countries.

Meanwhile Rem3dy Health, which trades as Nourished and has premises in Digbeth and West Bromwich, has developed the world's first personalised nutrient gummy, manufactured on demand with patented 3D printing technology.

The revolutionary method combines seven different active ingredients into one daily personalised stack, using 3D printing technology and a patented vegan encapsulation formula. The firm won the award for innovation. And Erdington-based

Shelforce – which provides employment and opportunity for some of Birmingham's most vulnerable people – won the award for promoting opportunity.

Shelforce was established in 1839 as a workplace for visually impaired people as part of the Royal School for the Blind.

From originally manufacturing items such as brushes, baskets and mats, it has totally re-invented itself to become a window and door manufacturer while staying true to its origins in employing and training those with disabilities.

Sir John added: "Each of the recipients of the King's Award for Enterprise has an extraordinary story to tell and their achievements are remarkable and a testimony to the West Midlands' inherent entrepreneurial culture.

"The recipients include those that are long-established who have diversified and transformed themselves to meet changing markets and those who have developed innovative techniques to meet the needs of business and consumers. On behalf of the West Midlands, I congratulate them all."



Ammo MD Tommy Dalman welcomes Anne, the Princess Royal on a recent visit to Birmingham



Melissa Snover, founder and CEO of Nourished

■ For further information and details on how to apply for the 2024 King's Award for Enterprise, visit www.gov.uk/kings-awards-for-enterprise

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Fleet deal creates hundreds of jobs

More than 100 new jobs are set to be created in Birmingham after fleet management giant Holman won the contract for BT Group's 37,000 commercial vehicles.

Described by Holman as "one of the biggest fleet management deals in history", the contract includes all of BT's light commercials, large commercials and specialist vehicles, HGVs, plant and ancillary equipment.

The initial seven-year contract covers service, maintenance and repair, portfolio management, glass replacement, and pool vehicle/rental management. To support the contract Holman is expanding operations into Birmingham with a new facility and new roles ranging from leadership through to trainee.

Nick Caller, Holman UK managing director, said: "We are delighted to have been selected by BT to win what is arguably the largest fleet management contract awarded in the UK.

"Our solutions will ensure we maximise BT Group's investment in its commercial fleet."

Cyril Pourat, BT Group chief procurement officer, said: "To ensure we can maintain our fleet of 37,000 vehicles in the UK, allowing our engineers to build and maintain our next generation fibre and mobile networks, we have chosen a fleet partner who can provide an efficient service to our engineers.

"We regularly review our contracts with suppliers, and we have made an agreement with Holman to transfer the maintenance of our commercial fleet to them later this year."



Recruitment hub launches

A new recruitment hub has been launched to help match people in the Solihull area with jobs that best suit their skills.

Local recruitment specialist Pertemps Network Group has teamed up with Solihull Moors Football Club to offer the community new services from its ground on Damson Parkway.

Tim Hibbert, regional manager for Pertemps Birmingham, said: "The new office offers support to jobseekers looking for temporary or permanent work in the local industrial and commercial markets.

"With four experienced recruitment professionals at the helm, it is an extension to the existing flagship Birmingham branch."

Print firm's acquisition prevents job losses

Birmingham-based printing and signage firm Hollywood Monster has acquired Sygnet Group.

The acquisition will mean the entire Sygnet Group workforce will retain their employment, saving 25 jobs in total.

Hollywood Monster is already the largest wide-format printing and signage contractor in Birmingham.

The combined business now has 65 employees and a turnover of £12 million, with the capability to print over 15,000 sq m of signage per day.

The Midlands-based company supplies to some of the world's most high-profile brands and events, as well as exhibitions at London Excel and Birmingham's NEC.

The new addition to Hollywood Monster will continue to trade from its site in Leicester as Sygnet Fabrications.

Tim Andrews, chairman of Hollywood Monster, said: "This is an exciting time of growth for Hollywood Monster, and we're delighted that Sygnet, who has contributed so positively to the print and signage industry over the last 45 years, can continue to deliver cutting-edge projects

as Sygnet Fabrications.

"We are especially pleased that the acquisition will lead to the retention of 25 members of staff, who have tremendous knowledge of the industry and have shown unwavering loyalty throughout their time at the company."



Tim Andrews

Green revolution exports to Qatar

A business based in the heart of the Black Country is now officially exporting part of the region's 'green revolution' to the Middle East.

Lets Sanify, based in Tipton, has sent its first consignment of eco-friendly disinfectants and cleaning products to Qatar, where they will be sold into the Lulu group of supermarkets which has more than 200 outlets across the region.

The product – which is proven to kill 99.9% of bacteria and viruses – is made entirely from natural products, salt and highly filtered water, and contains no alcohol or chemicals.

Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street, visited the factory to see off the first batch to Qatar.

Business founder Mahmudur Jaigirdar said: "We have something that can be a game changer in fighting bugs, whilst at the same time having no environmental downsides.

"The order from Qatar is the first time the disinfectants and cleaners have been exported, so it's a big step for the business."

Customers in the UK include the NHS, a contractor for Transport for London, hotels, schools and event organisers.



Mahmudur Jaigirdar with Andy Street



New employees at JP Alternative will help young people build self-esteem

More support for youngsters

Midlands training organisation Performance Through People has helped education specialist JP Alternative Education to recruit six staff who will be providing support for young people.

JP Alternative Education uses outdoor activities such as horse-riding, water sports and mountain biking to engage, nurture and raise the self-esteem of youngsters.

Paul Smith, business development manager at PTP, said: "We worked with six

candidates who were looking for a career change.

"Based on the employer's requirements, our programme included safeguarding, mental health and behaviours training, along with work experience at JP Alternative Education.

"After attending a guaranteed interview following the programme, all six candidates were offered employment and started work in April."

■ A Birmingham insolvency lawyer has taken over as chair of the Midlands branch of insolvency and restructuring trade body R3.

Stephen Rome, a director and practice leader at law firm Thursfields, will serve a two-year term at the regional helm.

He will be heading up campaigns to support local businesses and individuals in financial distress.

Mr Rome has been based in the Midlands for over 15 years and has a broad range of legal experience advising on commercial litigation and contentious insolvency – covering sectors such as energy, real estate, automotive and financial services.

He said: "We are facing one of the toughest periods in living memory for many Midlands businesses, with huge post-pandemic challenges and economic turbulence impacting heavily on cashflow.

"As a leading professional body, we are strongly committed to supporting our members as well as campaigning for businesses and individuals in crisis, their creditors and other stakeholders to maximise outcomes for all concerned."

During a 10-day period in July, scores of bars, pubs and public areas across the city will be full of the sound of live music. The Birmingham Jazz & Blues Festival, now in its 39th year, has brought millions of pounds to the region's economy, not to mention given enormous pleasure to music lovers across the generations. The festival is down to the vision and drive of one man – Jim Simpson – still as passionate as ever at the age of 85.

JON GRIFFIN meets...

Birmingham's *Mr Music*

He's the brains behind an annual jazz and blues festival which has pumped millions of pounds into the West Midlands economy over nearly 40 years.

He is also the man who launched Black Sabbath, who photographed the likes of Mick Jagger, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, and re-mortgaged his house to try to keep Ronnie Scott's afloat in Broad Street.

This is Jim Simpson – friend of the stars, record producer, irrepressible lover of jazz and blues, who for artistic reasons once turned down the Birdie Song, that slice of 1981 kitsch nonsense which became a money-spinning chart hit. He is as integral a part of Birmingham's cultural fabric as any figure of the last six decades.

Without Simpson, there would have been no Birmingham Jazz & Blues Festival – now in its 39th year – an annual summer music extravaganza which has become the longest-running event of its kind in England and Wales.

There would also have been no Black Sabbath, the Birmingham band fronted by Ozzy Osbourne, which started off in the former Crown pub opposite the city's crown court, and became one of the world's most successful heavy metal bands.

Without Simpson, countless blues bands would never have been able to get their feet on the musical ladder, thanks to the Henry's Blueshouse evenings he continues to help run at the Velvet Rooms in Broad Street – a lasting Brummie legacy to the raw, primal musical format which originated in the deep south of America and would inspire the likes of Little Richard, Jerry Lee Lewis, Chuck Berry and later the Rolling Stones.

And without him, there would have been no Big Bear Records, the UK's longest-running independent record label he continues to manage to this day from offices in Broad Street, an enduring testament to his love of jazz, blues and rock which first inspired the launch of the business back in 1968.

Simpson was born in London to a schoolteacher mother and jazz-loving father who served in the Royal Tank Regiment in the Western Desert during the Second World War. The family were evacuated, eventually ending up in Bromsgrove. A lover of jazz and the blues from an early age, he formed a jazz club at school. Called up for RAF duty, he found himself posted to Gibraltar during the Suez crisis and indulged his love of jazz by having his own music show on Radio Gibraltar, which also broadcast to Spain.

Returning to England in 1961 he landed his first 'proper job', as he puts it, as a beach photographer in the less exotic climes of Skegness before being appointed photographer at Birmingham's college of technology, which later

“Within a few weeks a band called Earth approached us and asked if I could get them a gig. I gave them an opening gig and they opened for Ten Years After. They were good so I repeat booked them. After a while they asked if I would manage them. Their name was changed to Black Sabbath.”

became part of Aston University. He was subsequently offered work as a freelance photographer with music weekly Melody Maker and found himself rubbing shoulders with – and photographing – the likes of the Rolling Stones, Chuck Berry, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard. Gradually, music would become both his passion and his vocation.

Jim Simpson is now 85 years old. But you suspect that his love of the music that ultimately changed the world back in the 50s and 60s – turning grey post-war monochrome into glorious technicolour courtesy of a few pioneering artists – keeps him young. It also keeps him flying the flag for the local rocking talent of Brum and elsewhere in the West Midlands.

As we meet in the offices of Big Bear Records at the bottom end of Broad Street, Simpson is already relishing the thought of this summer's festival, a cultural feast which in pre-Covid times made more than £5 million in one year alone for the city's economy, pulling in tens of thousands of visitors from across the UK and overseas.

“We launched in 1985, this is our 39th year, we are the longest-lasting jazz

festival in England and Wales,” he says. “Last year we approached pre-Covid levels, we had 194 performances in 10 days, 188 of those were free admission at a total of 91 venues. We had 79,000 people through. We go out to ordinary folk, we do not play just to seriously committed music fans.

“We go to parks, bars, restaurants, museums, art galleries, shopping centres and shops. There is live music on the Metro between Birmingham and Wolverhampton and we put music on steam trains to Stratford. We have free ukelele classes, mostly for kids. We teach them in one and a quarter hours to play one song and sing one song, which they don't do terribly well, but it doesn't matter.”

But whilst nearly four decades of largely free musical entertainment has generated millions of pounds for the region, there is also a constant battle to keep the show on the road.

“We generated £5.3 million in one year, but our core funding (from Birmingham City Council, Sandwell Council, Westside Bid and the Musicians Union) is £31,900 this year. Put that against wages, forget rent, and it ends up being a real co-operation.

All the venues put something in.

“From late November onwards, the jazz festival takes over. It's very labour-intensive, it means working 60 to 70 hours every week to keep the thing going. I have not had a holiday for something like 10 years. I hate the paperwork and the business side of it but I love putting shows together. I don't want to retire. I don't know what I would do. I just feel compelled to spread the word.”

In an era of budgetary cuts and increasing pressures on local authority finances, Simpson and the festival board – which includes the likes of well-known Birmingham business names such as ex MP John Hemming, former BT PR executive Derek Inman and national broadcaster Gary Newbon – realise that a new approach to keeping the festival's wheels turning may be needed in highly volatile economic times.

“We are finding other ways of making money. This year we are approaching businesses to become friends of the festival. We ask for £1,000 from 20 of them. They get accorded all sorts of privileges, not financial ones but they get their logo everywhere. We print 40,000 festival programmes.

“Our festival hotel is Hampton by Hilton. If you check in there during the festival you get a discount. You have got an average of 20 shows a day, free, many of them are on Broad Street. It's like going to New Orleans.”

But whilst the Jazz & Blues Festival and its extraordinary longevity over nearly four decades is undoubtedly one of the proudest artistic and cultural achievements for this most genial of entrepreneurs, it's not the only string to Simpson's multi-faceted musical bow.



American Blues Legends '79 in Chicago, taking a break from recording at Chess Recording Studios – from left are Billy The Kid Emerson, Jimmy Fastfingers Dawkins, Jim Simpson, Lester Mad Dog Davenport, Little Smokey Smothers, Eddie C. Campbell, Good Rockin' Charles and Chico Chism

He will always be remembered as the man who propelled Black Sabbath to worldwide fame. But the Brummie band were not Simpson's only musical proteges and enthusiasms.

“I opened this blues club called Henry's Blueshouse at the Crown in the city centre. We had Ten Years After, Status Quo, Barclay James Harvest, Chicken Shack, Arthur Crudup (the man who wrote Elvis Presley's first hit, That's All Right Mama). We had Arthur in an upstairs room in Birmingham.

“Within a few weeks a band called Earth approached us and asked if I could get them a gig. I gave them an opening gig and they opened for Ten Years After. They were good so I repeat booked them. After a while they asked if I would manage them. Their name was changed to Black Sabbath.

“Without me, there wouldn't have been a Black Sabbath – it was a real backbreaker of a job to get them a record deal. I got them gigs. We did TV in France and Germany before we got the record deal, I got 14 straight rejections. I knew the band were hot, people liked them, audiences came out for them.

“But London in those days was like a fortress, the music business even more so. Unless it was fashionable and in, they wouldn't show any interest. It's not that different now.”

Eventually, Simpson used his contacts in the music industry – he had already won major record deals for previous bands Locomotive, Tea and Symphony and Bakerloo – and was able to persuade a music publisher to put the money up to help fund Black Sabbath's first album, cut in just one day. The band, which helped invent heavy metal, were on their way to global stardom, principally due to the

initial efforts of Simpson.

The Black Sabbath story and many more tales of Brummie music legends through the decades are told in Simpson's highly readable memoir Don't Worry 'bout The Bear.

In the foreword, another Brummie legend, comedian Jasper Carrott, writes: “Jim Simpson is not a name that is too familiar outside Birmingham, but his influence is quite remarkable. Jim has been around the music scene in Birmingham for over 60 years. He has carved himself a place in the hearts and minds of the citizens of the city who know him as the indefatigable dynamo who is responsible for the history of many of its renowned musical legends, places of entertainment and of course, the world-famous Birmingham Jazz Festival.”

Jasper is surely spot on. Jim Simpson's influence on the music business in Birmingham across six decades cannot be questioned, as many performers and jazz and blues lovers would surely agree. This is after all, the jazz fan who tried to save Ronnie Scott's in Broad Street out of his own pocket more than 20 years ago by re-mortgaging his house. “It went down owing me nearly £50,000. It was so sad.”

Ronnie Scott's may have gone, but the music will always live on for Simpson, the man who turned his passion into a career – and is still rocking at the age of 85.

Or as he puts it: “There is nothing wrong with music, it keeps inspiring me. There is something primal about the rhythms of jazz and blues which appeal to the human spirit.” Quite.

■ **The Birmingham Jazz & Blues Festival is taking place July 14-23. Visit birminghamjazzfestival.com for more information.**



Jim Simpson with Muddy Waters and, right, Cousin Joe



Using business as a force for good

CLIVE READ, head of Birmingham at law firm Shakespeare Martineau – part of legal and professional services group Ampa, which recently became a certified B Corporation – discusses the movement and the importance of using business as a force for good.



CLIVE READ

It is difficult to overstate the importance of purpose in business. Profit may enable a business, but purpose is what drives it.

Historically, a business' purpose has been to maximise shareholder value. However, the world is changing and more corporate governances are highlighting the importance of non-shareholding stakeholders, such as their people, local communities and the environment.

B Corporations are a product of this shift in values – redefining what it means to be successful in business and using their company as a force for good.

Organisations with certified B Corporation status are legally required to consider the impact of business decisions on their people, customers, suppliers, communities and the environment – ultimately ensuring a balance between purpose and profit.

Since its launch in 2007, more than 6,400 companies working in 161 industries across the globe have achieved the certification and as more leaders recognise that businesses need to play their role in driving societal and environmental change, the number of companies actively seeking B Corporation status is growing.

This rise is reflective of a sea change in society, and a focus on climate change and social good, with consumers demanding purpose-led businesses and employees wanting to work for companies with clear values.

We feel strongly about changing business

for good by unlocking potential and, in January this year, we gained our B Corporation certification, which is a huge achievement for us and demonstrates our commitment to using business as a force for good for our people, planet, communities and clients.

Why become a B Corporation?

B Corporation is a high standard to achieve and a reflection on businesses truly balancing purpose and profit.

With recognition growing rapidly, more companies are looking to either become one or work with one, while conscious consumers are keen to support them. Furthermore it builds trust. Certification signals a commitment to transparency through publicly publishing results. It shows clients and customers that the highest verified standards of social and environmental performance, public transparency and legal accountability have been met.

The younger workforce is increasingly demanding that business should improve society and B Corporation status is a shorthand indicator of intent. With the war on talent raging on, the accreditation will set businesses apart when it comes to attracting applicants who want more meaning in their careers. This will, in turn, help businesses to build a strong culture,

improve employee engagement and retain top talent.

Part of the B Corporation certification process is identifying and shedding light on hidden areas that are in need of improvement when compared to peers. Benchmarking performance in this way can help to accelerate change.

The conventional wisdom when it comes to business is that there is a choice to be made between making money and doing 'good'. This is, however, a false dichotomy. It is a misconception to say B Corporations have to stop being as profitable. Not only is it the right thing to do, but it forms part of a sustainable hardcore business strategy.

Our clients, people, stakeholders and communities are all asking questions surrounding social and environmental performance, transparency and accountability. B Corporation is a good way of making sure you are living up to society's increasing standards, while also ensuring your business understands the impact its decisions and behaviours have on the planet, your people and the communities within which you work.

Becoming a B Corporation

To become a certified B Corporation, businesses must prove their sustainability credentials and demonstrate responsible

attitudes to employees, suppliers, local communities, the environment, and governance.

The benchmarks to achieving accreditation are incredibly high and the auditing process is rigorous, with non-profit B-Lab independently scoring companies across governance, workers, community, environment and customers to determine the business' social and environmental performance.

It is quite a daunting application process – businesses are required to score at least 80 out of 200 in an online, comprehensive questionnaire that explores every aspect of the organisation. Supporting documentation must also be submitted and companies also attend an interview with a local B-Lab to discuss and present evidence to reflect their business impact assessment results.

There are lots of certifications out there, but B Corporation is in a completely different league. In our experience, becoming a B Corporation isn't about simply getting the accreditation – it is about testing yourself, holding yourself to account, and living and breathing being a true responsible business.

It is an intensive process and

businesses that aren't serious about becoming a B Corporation would find it a huge administrative burden.

We have found efficiencies by building B Corporation into the core of our business, and embedding B Corporation values within our commercial growth strategy and ensuring they are fully supported from the top-down.

For example, we have changed the way our reporting and data is recorded so it is aligned with the accreditation process. That way, when the time comes to recertify, it is in an easily accessible and retrievable format.

B Corporation has also been built into our decision-making process and we now consider what positive impact each choice will have on our environment, people and communities, alongside the financials.

It is easy to bring those tests in – if you take a merger, for example, you could argue that bringing a regional brand into our group supports the local community, having a larger house of brands saves on our carbon footprint because we can invest in more technology, and gives our people access to wider career development opportunities.

Looking ahead

The current number of B Corporation-certified businesses has no doubt grown drastically from the original 82 that were first designated in 2007. However, it is fair to say that despite its importance, the profile of the initiative isn't as high as it should be outside of those in the know. Take the Fairtrade logo as an example – most people would see this in their local supermarket and know growers are getting paid decently for their labours. But would the same knowledge apply when it comes to evidence of B Corporation registration?

Hence the dedication of March as B Corp month, which showcases that B Corporation is a fantastic way to get behind the global movement that aims to create an inclusive, equitable, and regenerative economy and society.

For us as a business, we also take great pride in using our experience of the process to help our clients achieve their sustainability goals and support them in securing their accreditation. The pandemic has taught us the excuses of our previous paradigms are no longer valid. We must each create ripples to join into a wave of much-needed change – highlighting that good business can be both purposeful and profitable.

Ampa is a group of legal and professional services companies with a shared purpose – to unlock potential. Current brands within the group include full-service law firms for life and businesses Shakespeare Martineau and Mayo Wynne Baxter, consumer champion law firm Lime Solicitors, planning consultancy Marrons Planning, uninsured loss recovery experts Corclaim, cyber security consultancy CSS Assure, and strategic advisory consultancy Coadax.

Boutique launch

Influencers and members of the media were among those who celebrated the launch of TAG Heuer's first standalone boutique in the Bullring centre. Designed by TAG Heuer's in-house team in Switzerland, this is the first location to feature its design concept which includes a seating area with books and memorabilia paying homage to the brand's 160-year heritage. Among the brand's iconic ranges was the Carrera which celebrates its 60th anniversary this year.



Ifraz Ahmed and Kenneth Grey

Top right: Influencers Sam Bromwich, Shantania Beckford and Nabiiabee with a TAG Heuer employee, third from left

Sam Oliver, Olly Attfield-Tomes, Jason Hadden and Navneet Mangat



Barry Tomes, Norma Lewis and Brad Henshaw



Navneet Mangat, Terry Eleftheriou and Rai Singh



By SAMANTHA FAULKNER

The value of values

“Values are like fingerprints. Nobody’s are the same, but you leave ’em all over everything you do.”

Elvis Presley

We use our values consciously and unconsciously on a daily basis.

The author, monk and YouTube superstar Jay Shetty describes our values as an ethical GPS that we use to navigate ourselves to the people, habits and actions that serve us best. Whether we know it or not, our values play a massive part in every decision we make.

Values develop in any group that is together for long enough. And just as in our personal lives, our professional values affect the decisions we make at work. An organisation's values have the power to drive performance and influence behavioural norms within the company.

So as business owners, managers and leaders, we have a choice. We can consciously understand and nurture the organisation's values or let them develop ungoverned. Most business leaders choose the former, using a standard list of words like honesty, integrity, and freedom. A value proposition, behaviours surrounding it, and a purpose or mission statement are circulated throughout the business and published on the website for PR and advertising. And there you have it. The company's values are done. Tick!

I have been running values sessions with SMEs for a couple of years now. And a question I get asked time and time again is, “How can we install our organisation's values into the workforce?”

I have visited companies that display their core values on posters on their walls, in their loos and even on their coffee cups. However, they still have problems getting the workforce even to remember them, let alone demonstrate them. Granted, you might get one or two team members to recite a generic list verbatim. But on average, the team's actions are incongruent with the displayed values. When employees' behaviours do not align with the values derived, you will see conflicts and problems with unity, performance and team motivation.

Your customers expect your behaviours to correspond with the values you demonstrate through your PR website and advertising. When your workforce's behaviour doesn't match, customers start

to perceive you as disingenuous. So why is this such a common problem? Why is it so difficult to get the team's behaviour to match the organisational values?

We hold values in all facets of our lives. We have personal values, health values, family values, romantic relationship values, friendship values, professional values and many more. All of these values guide our behaviour, determining what we spend our time and energy on and what we move towards and away from.

Considering the impact values have on our lives, why do we rarely consciously think about them?

When did you, as leaders, last ask yourself important questions like what is the most important thing about my career right now, what values currently shape me, and are these things aligned with who I want to be?

Have you ever reflected on the values of your business partners, colleagues or management team? Have you ever asked them what they value? No? I'm not surprised. We don't do it – the mere idea of SMEs considering their values seems

abstract, idealistic and a little indulgent.

For your organisational values to be meaningful and have an impact, they must match the professional values of you and your senior team, not a generic list of single concept words we feel we should work by.

The values of our work colleagues heavily influence us. We spend so much time at work that it's no wonder we become like work colleagues.

The vital piece to this puzzle is that we do what we see far more than what we are told. Therefore the posters and coffee cups won't work. But what will work is knowing you and your leadership team demonstrate the behaviour that you value.

You can only be sure to do this by eliciting you and your senior management team's professional values. Once you know your own values, it's incredible how quickly you pick up on the values of others.

So when I get asked, “How can we install our company's values into the team?” I reply, let's start by understanding your own.



Edgbaston Stadium reinforces commitment to delivering sustainable events

How Edgbaston Stadium is working towards becoming leaders and pioneers for sustainability in the events industry.

With the latest innovations, systems and practices, the iconic Midlands venue is now stretching its own ambitious targets and working with event organisers to deliver amazing events in a green way.



Achieving Net Zero by 2030

The long-term goal of the team at Edgbaston is to become a fully net-zero venue by 2030. Working to create a positive and lasting impact in the lives of their staff, customers, communities, and environment, they believe they have the opportunity to take on climate action and create social value through the business, projects, culture and strategic partnerships.

Following an in-depth analysis of all corporate processes, travel, biodiversity and a range of other factors, Edgbaston has established their key focuses to be carbon footprinting, waste management, energy, and wellbeing.

Since 2019, the team at the home of cricket in the Midlands has driven many of their ambitious projects forward and

are already seeing the results. During this period, they have seen a 33% reduction in waste, due to changes in food and drink packaging, saving over 500,000 plastic alternatives. The venue now operates a strict zero waste to landfill policy, instead opting to sell all non-recyclable waste to make Refuse Derived Fuel. Additionally, support from partnerships with Drax Group and Amber Energy, enables the stadium to be powered by 100% renewable energy and save an average of 21,384kWh per year thanks to a phased LED installation.

Through a pledge of constant monitoring and reporting, Edgbaston Stadium will continue to move forward and strive for their Net Zero target and a sustainable future.

"We have the opportunity to have a significant impact on our local environment. We welcome thousands of visitors each year and if we can make positive changes it is going to have a real effect. We are acutely aware of the work and planning involved to reach our 2030 carbon-neutral goal and are determined to make real progress. As a prominent business in Birmingham, we should be setting the bar on sustainability and collaborating closely with our partners and suppliers to continue operating an ever-growing number of projects and systems to support our ambition."

Lydia Carrington, Sustainability Manager



"At Edgbaston, sustainability is not just a tick box exercise but a genuine passion for teams across the business. It is great to see so many of our team members engaging with our sustainability drive and helping to constantly improve our practices with innovative ideas. We are lucky enough to host many top-class events at Edgbaston and our

commitment to support our clients remains at the forefront. My team and I are devoted to ensuring we support event organisers to deliver events that consider sustainability at every stage of the process without compromising on the experience created."

Angela Sanders, Head of Conference and Events Sales

Creating a green event without compromise

The priorities of event organisers in recent years have changed. Increasingly, constructing events that not only provide a great experience for guests and delegates but also operate with mindfulness and consideration for environmental impact is top of the list.

From menus to stationery and waste management to energy usage, Edgbaston has implemented sustainable systems and can support event organisers in making their event as environmentally friendly as possible.

The efforts being made are noticeable throughout with reusable water bottles, waste segregation bins, recycled stationery and hydration stations a key part of any event space at Edgbaston Stadium. Alongside a comprehensive set of menus, all designed with sustainability in mind, the basis of a green event is clear to see without any compromise on service standards.

With extensive knowledge, the team at Edgbaston can provide valuable support to their clients, helping direct delegates to the greenest transport methods and can even assist with calculating the carbon footprint of each event for offsetting purposes.

Sustainable events don't have to be complicated. Now Edgbaston Stadium has put systems, training and investment in place, creating a greener event has never been simpler. With constant development and learning, Edgbaston Stadium is becoming the go to venue for sustainable meetings, conference and events in the region, whilst maintaining their reputation for creating unforgettable experiences.



What's on the menu?

Catering is at the heart of any event. With global food systems currently accounting for 30% of total global greenhouse emissions, the event and hospitality industry have a key part to play in developing a recipe for change.

At Edgbaston, they are proud to prepare over 95% of their food on-site and are proud of their home in the heart of the Midlands, sourcing over 80% of seasonal fruit and vegetables from local, like-minded suppliers.

One of the biggest initiatives to be launched in recent times is the introduction of an Edgbaston Garden located at the venue, growing a range of produce that help shape the dishes on the menu.

The introduction of Klimato carbon

food labelling has also revolutionised their menus, putting the information and choice into the hands of event organisers. Through valuable data, organisers can make fully informed decisions knowing the CO2 impact of each dish.

Challenged to develop menus with health, wellbeing and sustainability at the forefront, Edgbaston has created menus that help drive sensible fueling, adopt a plant-forward approach and ensure a lasting impact on the way catering is considered. With a commitment to reduce the amount of red meat used by 50%, provide at least 30% plant-forward dishes across all events and use no ingredients that require airfreight, the recipe for change is well underway.

For a sustainable future...

To find out more about sustainable events at Edgbaston Stadium, contact the Events Team on **0121 369 1994** or email **events@edgbaston.com**





BEARS BUSINESS CLUB Sustainable season launch event



Jack Scerri (Nant Ltd), Adam Stevens (Village Health & Wellness Club), Callum Ward (Village Health & Wellness Club) and David Parkes (Nant Ltd)



Warwickshire County Cricket Club welcomed over 70 local professionals and business leaders as it hosted the curtain-raising Bears Business Club networking event of 2023.

Hosted in the Warwickshire Suite at Edgbaston Stadium, members of the Bears Club came together in March for a season launch event focusing on sustainability in business, including a panel discussion from industry experts.

Following a period of networking on arrival and a premium three-course lunch, CDR originator at Drax Group, Fe Bush, started proceedings by discussing the importance of utilising bioenergy, carbon capture and carbon dioxide removals in protecting the environment.

Further discussions continued with commercial partnerships manager at Net Zero Now, Emily Tradd, addressing the reduction of commercial produces greenhouse gas emissions, before our Lydia Carrington, sustainability manager at Edgbaston Stadium, closed proceedings with details of the ambitious sustainability objectives in place at the venue for 2023.

Ben Seifas, head of sales & partnerships at Warwickshire County Cricket Club, said: "It's great to welcome back our Bears Club members to launch our 2023 season and introduce a series of new companies that have come on board over the past couple of months."

"Our aim for this year is to continue expanding the Bears Business Club and delivering engaging events for our members. Our sustainable launch was a great platform to kick off the season and we look forward to growing even more in 2023."



Emily Tradd (Net Zero Now), Fe Bush (Drax Group) and Lydia Carrington (Edgbaston Stadium)

Left top: Luke Landers (Naked Wines) and Darren Lake (Pure Cloud Solutions)

Left: Jack Scerri (Nant Ltd), Ali Mahmood (In Touch With) and David Parkes (Nant Ltd)



**BEARS
BUSINESS
CLUB**

WARWICKSHIRE COUNTY CRICKET CLUB



BUSINESS NETWORKING CLUB IN BIRMINGHAM

- ✓ Network and meet local business contacts at our **Bears Club networking events**
- ✓ Raise **awareness of your brand** with advertising and affiliation opportunities
- ✓ Benefit from networking and **hosting opportunities**
- ✓ Access **world class cricket** with Memberships and Season Passes at Edgbaston Stadium
- ✓ Get **exclusive discounts** on matchday hospitality, conferencing and events

For more information, email
georgeshakespeare@edgbaston.com
or call 0121 369 1994



Plastic packaging tax, one year on



By JAYNE HARROLD

column

Plastic packaging tax is a new tax on plastic packaging that was introduced on 1 April 2022. It applies at a rate of £210.82 per tonne on all plastic packaging with less than 30% recycled content that is either manufactured in, or imported into the UK.

It was introduced by the Government to incentivise the increased use of recycled plastic and reduce the amount of plastic being used in packaging.

Who is affected?

The main businesses affected by the tax are UK plastic packaging manufacturers, importers of empty plastic packaging into the UK, and importers of packaged goods. It's this last group that dramatically increases the number of businesses affected. When the tax was first launched HMRC expected 20,000 business to register for the tax. One year on the latest information is that just over 3,500 business have registered, substantially lower than expected.

We can expect HMRC to increase their efforts to get businesses to register and comply with the tax. Importers of packaged goods are most likely to be affected if they are in a sector that uses high amounts of plastic, including:

- Retail;
- Food and drink;
- Pharmaceuticals;
- Medical products;
- Fast moving consumer goods;
- Clothing;
- Electronics; and
- Chemicals.

What is required?

Any business which manufactures or imports more than 10 tonnes a year of plastic packaging needs to register with HMRC within 30 days of the end of the month where they breached the 10 tonne threshold.

Once registered, the business needs to complete a quarterly return to HMRC providing details of the plastic packaging which was:

- Manufactured in the UK
- Imported into the UK
- Exported from the UK, or is intended to be exported in the next 12 months
- Subject to the exemption for licensed human medicines
- Contained at least 30% recycled plastic
- Subject to a credit because it was made earlier and exported this period, or because someone else converted it

The returns are based on calendar quarters and need to be filed by the last working day of the month following the end of the period. Payment of any tax due needs to be made at the same time.

A very common misconception for many businesses is that they don't need to register if their packaging meets the 30% recycled content threshold. This is not true. All packaging, apart from transport packaging on imported packaged goods, counts towards the 10 tonne threshold and registration is required even if there is no tax liability.

The exemption for transport packaging on imported packaged goods is fairly limited in scope. It is the outer material

used to group multiple units together to protect them and facilitate handling. HMRC gives examples such as shrink wrap, straps, pallets, and reusable transport boxes.

Empty transport packaging does not fall within the exemption. If a registered business imports rolls of shrink wrap, or empty reusable boxes for example, then these count towards the 10 tonne threshold and they need to be included in the plastic packaging tax return.

Record keeping, data and evidence requirements

Record keeping, data and evidence to support the information reported in the plastic packaging tax return is by far the biggest challenge faced by businesses that need to register and comply with the tax. This is particularly true for importers of packaged goods because they do not control the data and they can have large product ranges.

Businesses need to hold detailed information at individual packaging component level for:

- Weight
- Composition
- Recycled content
- Exports
- Exemptions applied
- Packaging set aside for non-packaging use
- Amounts deferred due to intention to export in the next 12 months

The level and granularity of the data and evidence needed has never been required of businesses before and can be a significant challenge. For an individual item being imported there will be multiple packaging components involved, each of which has to be assessed.

HMRC also has very specific requirements for the nature and form of evidence required and the way it is collected. This means that you need to do much more than get a piece of paper from an overseas supplier.

Administration burden

When the tax was introduced, HMRC estimated that administration costs to business across the entire base of 20,000 taxpayers would be £400,000 per year, equating to £20 per business to cover the annual cost of completing, filing and paying tax returns, collecting all necessary data and evidence, keeping



the records and amending returns.

For manufacturers of plastic packaging much of the information is within their control and easier to deal with, but still a poses a significant administrative burden, certainly many orders of magnitude greater than the estimated £20 per year.

For importers of packaged goods the position is much more complicated because the information is not within their control. They have many different products that they import with changing product portfolios, and they have to obtain data from overseas suppliers and verify that data for accuracy. Administration costs are frequently substantially greater than the actual tax liability for many importers of packaged goods.

Commercial considerations

Having to pay plastic packaging tax adds to the cost of registered businesses. Given the current challenging market pressures there is little room left to squeeze margins and absorb the cost. HMRC are also keen that businesses should be clear about plastic packaging tax incurred to encourage transparency and behaviour change within the supply chain.

Businesses that are registered for

plastic packaging tax are allowed under the plastic packaging tax legislation to adjust the pricing of their contracts to charge the plastic packaging tax paid to customers. This is done by an increase to price, which can be shown separately on an invoice or included in the net price. Any price increases are also subject to VAT.

Initially it was proposed that businesses would have to issue special tax invoices showing the plastic packaging tax amounts. HMRC has recently announced that it will not be enforcing the requirement, which is a relief to many affected businesses.

Given that the legislation only allows the taxpayer to adjust the pricing of their contracts, those with long supply chains who have experienced an increased cost of supply to them as a result of plastic packaging tax will need to consider whether the contracts with their customers allow them to adjust their price to pass on the increased cost.

Liability for unpaid tax in the supply chain

Even businesses which source all of their supplies in the UK need to consider plastic packaging tax. There are joint and several liability and secondary liability provisions

within the law which can make anyone involved in the supply chain of the goods liable for any plastic packaging tax that wasn't paid by someone else. The only defence is to have robust supply chain due diligence in place to ensure that plastic packaging tax is being dealt with appropriately by suppliers.

HMRC approach and penalties

HMRC held a number of webcasts to brief businesses before the tax was introduced. During the first year there has been a soft landing period in terms of penalties. HMRC's desire has been to educate and inform affected businesses and they have not been imposing penalties for errors where a business is trying its best to comply. They still want to collect any unpaid tax, and penalties for deliberate errors is a different matter.

Moving forward there is likely to be increased pressure from HMRC as they expect businesses to be improving their processes and controls to comply with the tax.

Plastic packaging tax is subject to a tax-gear penalty regime for errors:

- Up to 30% of underpaid tax where a business failed to take reasonable care
- Up to 70% of underpaid tax where a business acted deliberately
- Up to 100% of underpaid tax where a business acted deliberately and concealed the error

Penalties can be mitigated based on a businesses behaviour in telling HMRC about the error.

Late payments

Penalties for late payments of plastic packaging tax were changed in Budget 2023. Plastic packaging tax is due to be paid on the last working day of the month following the end of the return period. If the tax is paid late a penalty of 5% of the outstanding amount will be charged.

A further 5% penalty is charged when the outstanding payment is 5 months late, and then another 5% penalty is charged when the payment is 11 months late.

From HMRC's tax receipts statistics, £206m has been collected to the end of February 2023 for the first 3 quarters, with £30m of that paid late. If the 5% penalties had been in place HMRC would have collected at least £1.5m in late payment penalties.

column





The Bond is back



The Bond in Digbeth was launched as a new creative content hub with a party attended by over 400 people. Landlord Oval Real Estate has partnered with industry body Create Central and GBSLEP to bring the Fazeley Street venue back to life. The £18 million facility is intended to become a focal point for the best creative talent in the West Midlands.

Top: Andy Street, Ed Shedd, Anita Bhalla, Neil Duncanson and James Craig

Left: Nassy Konan, Chris Torbett and Will Higgins

Below, from left: Felicity Beal and Reesha Ranat; Dan Lee and Harriet Giles; Richard O'Gorman and Ian Russell



Clockwise from top left: Carl McCaffery, Zoe Barry and Beth Kelly

Harry Nijjar, Poonam Gill and Sunny Gill

Elliott McAusland and Ning-Ning Li

James Tarpey, Andrew Waldron and Pam Cheema



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Driving a digital transformation

Aston University has begun a management Knowledge Transfer Partnership with nationwide accountants and business advisors Beever and Struthers to help drive the firm's digital transformation.

A management Knowledge Transfer Partnership is built around identifying strategic management-based initiatives to increase business effectiveness and improve practices.

As part of the mKTP, the team will conduct a comprehensive evaluation of Beever and Struthers' existing data systems. Following the assessment, specific methodologies will be proposed to ensure alignment between the mKTP and the firm's ongoing data systems.

The 30-month programme will aim to develop, embed and exploit smart data driven technologies within the audit function, enabling the business to increase the quality, productivity and capacity to deliver additional insight and value to clients.



Dr George Salijeni, a lecturer in accounting at Aston Business School and an expert in data analytics tools, said the mKTP offers an opportunity to share and utilise knowledge and technical exposure.

This expertise has been gained by academics at Aston University and Alliance Manchester Business School "through undertaking multi-disciplinary research and engagements with practitioners and audit

regulators on data driven technologies which include artificial intelligence".

He added: "Potentially, this project generates insights, workflows which could impact and transform the way audits are performed by leveraging data driven analytics tools and models."

Michael Tourville, partner at Beever and Struthers, said: "Given that the business has been around for up to 125 years it is quite traditional in its approach, but we are now keen to embrace the opportunities that a truly digital transformation could offer.

"Although we are a firm with a long history, we are also an entrepreneurial business and are keen to grasp opportunities when we see them.

"This mKTP is all about giving our clients more insight and helping us navigate data far better too. The main improvements for us will come from increased efficiency and insight, but we will also be able to further improve the quality of the service we offer."

University to offer smart engineering degree

Aston University is to open up the world of smart manufacturing to the engineers of tomorrow by offering a masters degree on the subject.

The degree is based on the research expertise in the University's College of Engineering and Physical Sciences, and the field is estimated to expand by more than 12% between 2020-2025 due to the 'fourth industrial revolution' and government involvement.

Industrial automation in manufacturing is on the increase as are software systems that reduce time and cost to the market.

The masters course will teach a wide range of hands-on skills in smart manufacturing to create innovative solutions for complex manufacturing problems through developing state-of-the-art technologies.

Programme director Dr Muftooh Siddiqi said: "This is a course for those who want to be at the forefront of technological growth.

"Smart manufacturing is of tremendous significance in the field of manufacturing and is a way to the future.

"This programme will embed the



Dr Muftooh Siddiqi

technological revolution deep within the mindset of engineers and teach the skills to design and develop new technologies that embrace the challenges of future manufacturing."

Shortlisted

Aston Business School has been shortlisted as a finalist in three categories at the Small Business Charter Excellence Awards.

The awards recognise and celebrate exceptional achievements by SBC accredited business schools that demonstrate a commitment to supporting and championing small businesses.

Aston Business School has been shortlisted in the categories of Outstanding Support for small Business, Outstanding Stakeholder Engagement and Outstanding Support for Student Enterprise and Entrepreneurship.

The winners will be announced at the Small Business Charter Summer Reception on June 22 at the House of Lords.

Professor Zoe Radnor, pro-vice-chancellor and executive dean of the College of Business and Social Sciences at Aston University, said: "We are delighted to have been shortlisted as finalists in three categories of the Small Business Charter Excellence Awards."



Emlyn Hudson, left, and Michael Smyth

New partner joins Gateley Legal

Gateley Legal has expanded its construction team with the appointment of Michael Smyth as a partner at its Birmingham office.

He joins from Stafford-based ORJ Law where he was a partner for 15 years, and has worked extensively in both contentious and non-contentious construction matters, having previously acted for developers and employers, as well as both contractors and subcontractors.

In his new role he will help widen the skill set of the team in Birmingham, while also working closely with Gateley Legal's property and banking departments.

Emlyn Hudson, partner and head of construction, said: "Despite what is happening in the wider economic environment our construction team is extremely busy, especially with dispute-related matters."

Leadership change at PR agency

Matt Walker has taken on the role of managing director at Reeves Media, a decade after joining the PR agency as an account executive.

He takes over from founder Clive Reeves who moves across into a CEO role.

Matt has spent five years since leaving the agency working in senior communications roles in the built environment, most recently heading up internal and external communications for national property and construction consultancy Ridge and Partners LLP.

Prior to that, he led external communications for Midlands-based property developer St. Modwen, working across its logistics, regeneration and residential portfolio.



Clive Reeves, left with Matt Walker

Clive Reeves said: "This is succession planning with home-grown talent, and I am pleased that Matt recognises the potential our business has and the opportunities there are for the future.

"We are in a good position to change leadership with great clients and a good culture.

"I will continue to work with the clients I already handle as well as strategic consulting with new ones."

Law firm hires housing specialist

Law firm Devonshires has hired housing litigation specialist Baljit Basra who joins the firm as a partner in its Birmingham office.

Baljit was previously at Anthony Collins Solicitors and has more than 20 years' experience training registered providers, court advocacy, disrepair, statutory nuisance, possession and advising on policy and procedures.

She will be part of the Birmingham

Bolstering growth plans

Marketing agency Team ITG has appointed Natalie Somerville as global managing partner to help grow the business overseas.

Natalie previously held senior marketing and consulting positions with brands such as Tesco, Camelot, B&Q, Sainsbury's and Asda, where she led on campaign strategies and forming partnerships.

The news follows the appointment of William Eccleshare to the board alongside a dedicated M&A drive in the US market to support key brands including Haleon, Johnson & Johnson, McDonalds, Puma, Claire's and L'Oréal.

CEO of Inspired Thinking Group, Simon Ward, said: "This appointment bolsters our growth efforts as we continue to target new markets, partners and acquisitions across the globe.

"We already have a well-established global customer base and look forward to Natalie playing a key role in expanding the reach of our technology and services over the coming years."

Team ITG forms the creative consultancy engine of Inspired Thinking Group, founded in 2009 by Simon Ward. The company is backed by mid-market investment firm Bridgepoint and has offices across Europe, New York and Chicago.





Conference Aston gains general manager

Events venue Conference Aston has taken on Kirpal Mehta as general manager.

Having started his career in 2002, Kirpal has worked for major brands and organisations throughout the Midlands including Wolverhampton Wanderers FC, Twycross Zoo and Tamworth Snowdome.

Bringing his two decades of experience to the role, he will oversee catering and housekeeping services at the venue.

Samantha Brown, head of sales, said: "Kirpal is a real asset to the team and we are pleased to welcome him to Conference Aston at an exciting time, having just had a strong year boosted by our work with the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games."

Five senior promotions announced

Birmingham law firm Sydney Mitchell has announced five senior promotions.

Andre Minnaar has been made partner while Mike Sutton, Lorna Payne, Ian Sheppard and Marta Konieczna have all been promoted to senior associates.

Andre joined the firm in 2019 and specialises in resolving complicated UK immigration, asylum and nationality problems. He is an experienced tribunal advocate, having successfully represented hundreds of appellants during his long career.

Mike has been working in the firm's personal injury division, dealing with claims

for clients in obtaining compensation for both personal injury and clinical negligence.

Lorna joined in 2020 and has helped private clients for over 15 years on wills, trusts and probate, while Ian has more than 15 years' litigation experience, most recently working on high value, diverse claims.

Marta specialises in freehold and leasehold conveyancing, dealing with new build purchases, re-mortgages, transfers of equity, shared ownership, lease extensions, unregistered property sale and purchase.



From left, Ian Sheppard, Lorna Payne, Andre Minnaar, Marta Konieczna and Mike Sutton

Trio strengthens Midlands BDO team

Accountancy and business advisory firm BDO has strengthened its Midlands team with a trio of appointments across key areas of the business.

Martin Hodgkins and Adam Gaunt join the digital and risk advisory service department as managers, with particular focus on the growing area of supply chain and logistics. They will work alongside Fraser Paget, who was appointed as department head in July 2022.

Adam, who recently relocated from the UAE, joins from MMI, part of the Emirates Group, where he spent eight years managing supply chains responsible for import-export logistics.

Martin brings 20 years' experience within supply chain, procurement and

logistics business functions. He also has extensive project management experience within retail and manufacturing supply chains. He joins from Molson Coors Beverage Company.

Martin and Adam are joined by Paul Hope, who has been appointed as a director in the forensic and valuations services team.

Paul specialises in insurance matters, disputes and deals, with a focus on increasing, protecting and recovering value for clients, as well as developing and advising them on the strategies needed to achieve this.

Adam Gaunt, Paul Hope and Martin Hodgkins



D'Antoni McNeil, Laura Cooksey and John Howis

Agency welcomes three marketeers

Sutton Coldfield-based marketing agency Edge Creative has welcomed three experienced marketeers to the firm.

Account manager Laura Cooksey, SEO specialist D'Antoni McNeil, and senior graphic designer John Howis have joined the team of marketing specialists.

Creative director and founder Louise Panayides said: "All three bring essential skills to our marketing table. Not only are they experts in their field, but they also bring fresh ideas and bolster the team with enthusiasm, knowledge and experience."

Team expands at construction firm

Construction firm Wavensmere Homes has made a trio of appointments to expand its Birmingham-based team.

Fionn Dolan joins as marketing manager, Edward Bate has been recruited as a technical manager, and Rebecca Perrens takes on the newly created role of assistant sales manager.

Edward is a civil engineer who joins Wavensmere Homes with 10 years' industry experience having worked at Miller Homes where he managed large residential projects.

Fionn worked at Dapa Atelier and Interiors where she also held the position

of marketing manager. Prior to that she was a content executive for Armac Martin.

Rebecca joins from McCarthy Stone where she was based for six years in sales and customer support roles, having previously worked as a sales adviser for Persimmon Homes.

James Dickens, managing director of Wavensmere Homes, said: "We will be announcing new site acquisitions over the course of this year, so the timing is right to invest in the expansion of the team. These three new positions will strengthen the technical, sales and marketing departments."



Edward Bate, Rebecca Perrens and Fionn Dolan

Commercial director joins Spitfire Homes

Midlands property developer Spitfire Homes has announced the arrival of new commercial director Martin Brazier.

Bringing more than 15 years of commercial experience, Martin's former role at Taylor Wimpey saw him play a key part in the roll-out of COINS, a software platform helping streamline project delivery and operations.

He will be responsible for the further growth and performance of the commercial team, and will work with both contractors and suppliers.

Following a new strategy and product range, Spitfire has launched a collection of sites across the Midlands in areas including Birmingham Worcestershire and Warwickshire.

Managing director Ben Leather said: "We continue to explore further land opportunities across the Midlands region.

"I have no doubt that Martin will play a significant role in supporting Spitfire Homes to fulfil our ambition of delivering further growth throughout 2023 and beyond."

Five minutes with...



Alistair MJ Lyttle

Headmaster, West House School



In one sentence, what does your company do?

We are an independent school and nursery.
How long have you been in your current job?

I was appointed to the staff in 1996 before taking over the headship in 2004. I am only the fifth head in 130 years.

Give us a brief summary of your professional career to date.

I qualified in 1994 and taught history and classics at Devenport High School for Boys in Plymouth for two years before moving back to Birmingham and taking up the position at West House. Initially, I taught just about everything but increasingly specialised in English and preparing pupils for the Eleven Plus exam. In 2002, I was appointed as deputy head before taking up my current position.

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

Eventually! I started out on a degree in accountancy at the University of Birmingham but quickly realised that it wasn't for me. I then changed to a degree in ancient history and archaeology, which I had studied at A Level, and developed a passion for studying the ancient world and the development of language. I was volunteering at West House and running the youth cricket at Harborne Cricket Club while undertaking my course and realised that my future lay in education. A PGCE followed at Birmingham which I completed in 1994.

Has the fallout from the pandemic created any opportunities?

Absolutely. The West House team were unbelievable in how they responded to the challenges presented by the prospect of remote learning. While the response to these challenges was immediate, over a period of time we re-evaluated what we taught, why we taught it and how we taught it. Many aspects of that response to the circumstances of the time have remained in place, such as the use of technology, how pupils submit work and how we carry out our planning and preparation. Perhaps more importantly, the aftermath has resulted in a far greater focus on pupil wellbeing and the appointment of a deputy head (pastoral) and the creation of the West House Wellbeing HUB.

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

They can to some degree. It's about striking a balance and being flexible enough to provide parents, fellow professionals and outside agencies with options. While

online meetings are, undoubtedly, more convenient, they somehow feel less 'human'. We work in an environment that is built around fostering positive relationships and a true sense of trust. These can only be built when you meet people, look them in the eye and sit down to talk and listen.

How do you get the best out of your staff?

Trust them to do the job, allow them to make mistakes and to learn from them without fear of reprisal. There is a place for formal appraisal, but the informal, light touch interactions are just as important. I also hope that the team appreciates the fact that I will thank them as often as I can and be the first to apologise when I get something wrong.

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

I will get anything up to a hundred emails a day and my first job is to delete those which are not relevant. This will generally leave something in the region of five to ten that require my attention. I will acknowledge receipt within 24 hours and generally respond within two days. However, I do always have to catch up over the weekend.

How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?

Dedicated, loyal to the cause, approachable and not taking myself too seriously.

Highlights of your career so far?

Being appointed head in 2004. I am an old boy of the school and, from the moment I walked into West House in 1980, I loved the place. That passion remains after all of these years.

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

There is a fantastic piece of footage on YouTube of me taking a significant tumble in the snow and ice during the second lockdown. One of my colleagues commented that I had 'proper stacked it' and the footage is set to Elvis Costello's 'I can't Stand up for Falling Down'. Well worth a watch.

Pet hates?

People who take themselves too seriously and lack a sense of perspective.

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

Focus on maintaining a healthy work/life balance. I lost my wife to cancer when she was 46 and, while I have no regrets, I do sometimes wonder whether I became too consumed in my work at times during the course of our marriage. We never know what lies around the corner and I do advise colleagues that family must come first.

How do you relax away from work?

I've always loved cricket and still play for Harborne (albeit at a fairly lowly level) and Warwickshire Over 50s. I also have a passion for horse racing and watching live music; China Crisis, Midge Ure, The Human League, Then Jerico and The Blow Monkeys still touring after all these years!

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

Certainly, when it comes to the sector within which I work, the number of high-quality establishments on offer only serves to drive standards upwards. I genuinely believe that this is a hugely exciting time for Birmingham and there is a real drive to attract investment and innovation into our city.

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

I am terrified of flying.

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

The Hound of the Baskervilles – Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, Dead Poet's Society and Diamond Dogs – David Bowie

Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?

David Bowie, Robin Williams, David Gower, Leslie Phillips and Sir AP McCoy

What would you choose to eat for your last supper?

Moules mariniere, lobster, cheese and biscuits.

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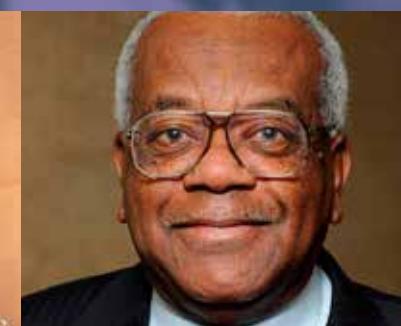


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It's not the wheels and cogs. It's not the steel we shape nor the gold we forge. It's not the sum of every single part that we design, craft, polish and assemble with countless skills and constant care. It's the time it takes. The numerous days and months that are

necessary until we can print this single word on each individual dial leaving our workshops: "*Superlative.*" It's the mark of our autonomy, responsibility and integrity. This is all we make, but we make it all. So that, in time, you can make it your own.

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