

# Birmingham Business

FREE • November/December 2021

## TIPPING POINT

Industry's role in a net zero world



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# A new refreshing 'can do' approach to SME funding in the Midlands

**STEPH BROWN**, business development director at Reward Finance Group, is delighted with the response she has received in the region

It is only a few months ago since I was tasked with helping to launch alternative finance provider, Reward Finance Group, in the Midlands, and I have been absolutely amazed by the response I have received.

It shouldn't have come as a major surprise because, having personally operated in the finance sector for more than 30 years, Reward has brought a refreshing approach to business finance.

Instead of making companies 'jump through hoops', like some other lenders, Reward makes the process simple, and works closely with SMEs to quickly find a solution to their finance needs.

We do that by being pragmatic and flexible. What's more, we are not faceless wonders making decisions based on a spread sheet. Instead, we meet the people running the company, get to know how the business operates, look at their track record, listen to their plans, and discuss why they need the money.

It could be for a variety of reasons such as developing products, introducing new services, taking advantage of an opportunity, or just to get over a cash flow issue.

We keep the funding options simple too. Based on 10 years of successfully helping SMEs, Reward has honed its products down to just two – Business Finance and Asset Based Solutions.

Business Finance is designed to give businesses an injection of capital from just a couple of months to three years, and for any amount from £50,000 and £5 million.

The loan is secured against business or personal assets, such



**Steph Brown**, business development director, Reward Finance Group

as property, machinery, or on occasion, stock. It can then be used like a traditional overdraft with interest paid monthly, on the amount borrowed, with no capital repayment. At the end of the term the loan can be paid off or renewed under a new agreement.

Asset Based Solutions enables companies to borrow against multiple assets, both on and off the balance sheet, including debtors.

Again, we have kept it simple by having just one legal agreement covering all the assets and just charging one daily interest payment against what is borrowed.

With a minimum of 12 months, SMEs can borrow between £100,000 to £5 million.

When working with Reward it's like dealing with a traditional bank but without the red tape, delays in

decision making and underwriting restrictions. But more than that, you can also talk to a human being as each account is allocated its own portfolio manager who will work with you every step of the way.

This no-nonsense approach has brought enormous success to Reward. In the last 12 months we have supported more than 300 SMEs, resulting in us breaking through the £100m loan book milestone for the first time and keeping us on track to record our eleventh year of continuous growth.

And we are not restricted to specific sectors either, each is considered on its merits. We have therefore been delighted to provide funding to property developers & investors, manufacturers, hospitality & leisure, and those in the care sector.

Whether you have been frustrated with your attempts to access finance or need the money quickly and your current lender demands you to fill out mounds of paperwork before taking weeks to make a decision, give me a call on **07748 313 237** or email me at **steph.brown@rewardcf.com**. I can assure you that my friendly and approachable team and I will work closely with you to do all we can to find a solution to your funding needs.



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## Birmingham Business

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By **HENRY CARPENTER**  
Editor

All the talk over the last few months has quite rightly been about COP26, so much so that the autumn budget has barely had a look-in as a media and conversational focus.

As we know, the summit in Glasgow has been cited as a potential game changer in the climate change agenda; time will tell how successful it has been and how serious the collective desire is for us all to make sacrifices for the long-term good of humanity.

It could not be a more appropriate time then for us to run a bumper special report focusing on the contribution the region's business community can make towards a net-zero society.

There are some seriously heavyweight figures and organisations in the region pioneering new ways in which we can cut back on carbon emissions. Dr Michaela Kendall, for instance, has spent the best part of three decades flying the flag for a hydrogen economy – and partly through her company Adelan, her voice is being heard louder and clearer as each year passes.

Then there's Aurigo which is leading the way in the use of driverless cars, with a prototype recently launched in Solihull. We conduct in-depth interviews with both.

And there is expertise aplenty,

evidenced by the insights of columnists and our commercial partners in the special report. Admittedly we have barely scratched the surface of such a vast subject, which is why we'll be running a follow-up report early in 2022.

One of Birmingham's most colourful characters is Tim Andrews, the philanthropic boss of sign-printing business Hollywood Monster. Whilst it has enjoyed a meteoric rise to success since it was originally launched in the family loft, the journey has not been without its wobbles as Jon Griffin discovers when visiting the firm's headquarters in Tyseley.

Meanwhile Kavita Parmar has, with the help of her husband, created a translation and interpreting business which has a truly global reach, and keep an eye out for Oyin Adebayo, the CEO and founder of Niyo Enterprises, whose tech start-up is having an increasingly significant social and economic impact in the region.

The en-masse return to work at the end of the summer coincided with a flurry of awards and social events across the business spectrum. With them came a buzz which had been absent for too long, and this has been captured across several picture spreads throughout the magazine.

We hope there's much for you to enjoy.

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# A step forward

**No urban spaces have been altered so radically over the last two years as central business districts. In character and function they might never be the same as before the pandemic struck. But does that mean they don't have a meaningful future as places where people can work and enjoy life? Not according to the Future Business District, a research-driven report commissioned by Colmore BID.** HENRY CARPENTER reports.

The business district was facing an existential crisis.

These words were written by Mike Best, a board member of Colmore BID, and harked back to the mid-pandemic days of lockdown in the summer of 2020.

They also explain why a just-published report – the Future Business District – was conducted in the first place. It was to ask fundamental questions as to how to ensure the long-term prosperity of the city centre district which had for centuries been a business, professional and financial services powerhouse but, thanks to Covid, was now a comparative ghost town with acres of empty office space and devastated retail and hospitality sectors.

So the words of Mr Best – chair of the report's steering committee – were far from hyperbolic. They represented a genuine concern for the future of the district and were the reason why Colmore BID commissioned a team from City-REDI (University of Birmingham) and the West Midlands Combined Authority to deliver the research programme.

The project leader was Kevin Johnson of Urban Communications who explained that the project was not an alarmist response in the March and April of the first lockdown; it was towards the end of the summer of 2020 as people were beginning to trickle back to work that it started as an embryo of an idea.

"It wasn't until the start of this year that the report began in earnest –

we were conscious of avoiding a knee-jerk reaction and wanted to see how things played out," said Mr Johnson.

"While productivity was going up because of people working effectively from home, we could see that the change in behaviours were impacting on the BPFs services, hospitality, retail and other sectors that traditionally contributed to vibrant central business districts.

"We discovered we were in the middle of a crisis."

The purpose of the report was "to inform long-term recovery from the Covid-19 pandemic and offer policy directions on best practice for central business districts across the UK".

An initial research phase involved an in-depth data review, workshops

on 'megatrends' and a call for evidence. This was followed by interviews, meetings and discussions with businesses, stakeholders and the broader community.

Two key questions were addressed. The first was, what is the likely long-term impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on city centre business districts? And then, how can we ensure they remain successful as places to attract businesses and people and contribute to vibrant city centres?

The full report, published in October along with a summary, is easy to access on the internet – Colmore BID's website is as good a destination as any.

It appears to be an exhaustive study but, as Mr Johnson pointed out, although it was as thorough an exercise as it could have been in the circumstances, it was impossible to "reach all corners of the district" and the feeling is that it would have been

more complete with further feedback from younger people.

"This is why we need the engagement of those we couldn't reach," he said.

So, what's the next step? "Well, it has to land with the audience. The reaction has been very positive so far. We have had all this time to think about it but you can't expect everyone to come on board with it immediately.

"We know that not all the proposals will fly but have a tentative action plan and potential investment . . . it's about turning it into something real.

"But do people understand what we are trying to put forward? Do the pillars highlighted by the report need better definition?

"We need to hear back from the audience, especially from those groups who haven't been as involved as we would have liked."

To heavily paraphrase the study (it is 80-odd pages long in its entirety), trends identified as shaping the future business districts include: the impact of digital transformation, the adoption of hybrid working and increased emphasis on access to skills.

It points out that future business districts will need to be even more focused around connections and culture – a place to connect, interact and collaborate and to enjoy urban experiences. Safety – on transport, in public spaces and at offices – was high on the agenda, and the demand for recognising social value, climate change and inclusivity among consumers and employees will continue to rise.

According to the report: "This

**A vivid contrast: ghostly images of the central business district taken days after the first lockdown was announced, set against fun-filled images of thriving streets taken before the pandemic.**



Kevin Johnson





Public realms should be used and enjoyed, the report says

requires a diverse offer to meet the needs of office workers operating on a hybrid working model, alongside the needs of consumers of cultural, retail, entertainment and leisure activities. It also requires action to positively address inequalities and lack of inclusion, and mitigate against spatial and economic overheating."

The preferred vision is one which sees increasing employment in the city centre and increasing culture, hospitality and retail footfall. It would avoid the business district becoming a ghost town or being solely focused on work – workers would also return

to the city centre for the wider benefits of city life.

Which leads us to the concept of 'the space between' – the hidden, unrecognised space utilised on an ongoing basis which provides opportunities for workers, residents and visitors to relax, connect and recharge.

This theme highlights how a high-quality public realm – plus hospitality and retail venues, together with green and open spaces – make the city centre attractive to businesses and individuals, and support wellbeing.

The district will be based on six pillars: connections and culture; agility and flexibility, and the creation of a flexible workspace for an agile workforce; greater collaboration between the various stakeholders in the district; a more integrated and demand-responsive transport network; safety; and opening up the district to all.

The report also sets out a series of recommendations – highlighting the action points for both businesses and public-sector organisations – to meet these six pillars put forward by the BID as pivotal to the district's future.

It is clear that the publication of the report is just the start of a process – it is not a final plan of action. The onus is now on the businesses and stakeholders to digest the report and engage with the BIDs to ensure that all voices have had their say.

The chair of the advisory panel

has been Alex Bishop, of law firm Shoosmiths.

"It really was a pleasure to chair the panel," she said. "It was such a collaborative process and so refreshing to engage with such a diverse range of disciplines.

"Not that I needed proof of the benefits of diversity, but the discussions were so rich and insightful.

"We have to change behaviours. For instance, to get to a car-free Colmore BID we need to make the alternatives as easy as possible, so integrated transport and flexible carnet-style ticketing are needed quickly."

She pointed out that the hybrid way of working – which many organisations have grasped wholeheartedly – might be seen as an allure to the district.

"We can promote this collectively to attract and retain the best talent," she explained.

"This is more than working from home, it is banishing the cult of presenteeism.

"People come in for a purpose. Flexibility around arrival and leaving times gives them more freedom with their lives and reduces the load on public transport at peak times.

"The key now is to act. Not everything will work out. Some things will fail but let's fail fast and move on to the next idea.

"It is Birmingham's time and the response to the report demonstrates we are all collectively ready to seize that moment."



# Indian connections

A new strategy aimed at strengthening links between the West Midlands and India has been unveiled by the West Midlands India Partnership.

Developed in collaboration by the West Midlands Growth Company, PwC and the UK India Business Council, the Stronger Together strategy identifies a five-year programme of activity to unlock mutually beneficial and sustainable economic opportunities between the region and India, as both territories look to rebuild from the impact of Covid-19.

An official event held at PwC's Midlands office at One Chamberlain Square, launched the strategy to market, hosted by WMIP chair and local businessman, Dr Jason Wouhra. More than 70 delegates attended in person as well as hundreds across the globe who tuned in online.

The strategy outlines five key priorities for establishing closer links with India. These include: promoting the West Midlands' pivotal role at the heart of the UK's close association with India; accelerating R&D innovation through enhanced science and education collaboration; increasing two-way trade and investment within the existing West Midlands-India corridor; further investing in WMIP to boost engagement between the region and India; and maximising the economic potential of the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games.

Andy Street, mayor of the West Midlands, said: "As we recover from the pandemic and look to make the most of our trading links outside the EU, there is a real opportunity for the West Midlands to become the

beating heart of the UK's relationship with India.

"Our region is already home to an established base of Indian companies and, despite the pandemic, remains the leading destination for foreign investment outside London. It is absolutely critical we build on this, which is why the new strategy launched by the West Midlands India Partnership is so important."

Steve Page, Midlands international

markets leader, PwC, and executive board member of WMIP, added: "We are proud to have helped develop the strategy for the partnership.

"It will support the region's long-term economic growth plans by developing stronger links and opportunities for collaboration with the Indian market, particularly as we prepare for the shared opportunities the Business and Tourism Programme and Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games will bring."

**Standing from left: Ghanshyam Nabar, West Midlands India Partnership director, Professor Robin Mason, pro vice-chancellor (International), University of Birmingham, Stephen Page, Midlands international markets leader, PwC UK, mayor of the West Midlands Andy Street, Dan Storer, chief investment officer of the West Midlands Growth Company, Ninder Johal, founder, Nachural, and Sanjay Pandey, executive director & COO, State Bank of India.**

**Seated from left: Trevor Ivory, partner, DLA Piper, Professor Julian Beer, deputy vice-chancellor, Birmingham City University, Lakshmi Kaul, director UK, Confederation of Indian Industry, Dr Jason Wouhra, chair of the West Midlands India Partnership, Dr Shashank Vikram, Consulate of India Birmingham, and Anil Puri, chairman, Purico Group Ltd.**



## RECOGNISED FOR OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

Manufacturing Technology Centre chief executive Dr Clive Hickman has received one of the Royal Academy of Engineering's most prestigious awards.

He was presented with the Sir Frank Whittle Medal at the academy's AGM in London in recognition of his outstanding and sustained achievement in engineering.

The academy said that Dr Hickman was awarded the Sir Frank Whittle Medal – named after the inventor of the jet engine – in recognition of his outstanding career in the automobile industry and for leading the set-up and growth of two engineering research centres, the Manufacturing Technology Centre and the Tata Motors European Technical Centre.

He has been chief executive of the Manufacturing Technology Centre for more than 11 years. Previously he had more than 35 years' experience in the automotive industry culminating in the position of head of engineering for Tata Motors in India,



and led the creation of the world's cheapest mass-produced car, the Tata Nano, which set a new standard for low-cost personal transport

Dr Hickman said: "I could not have achieved anything in my career without the help and support of the great teams that I have been privileged to work with and so I would like to thank all of my colleagues, friends and family for their continued support."

The MTC was founded by the University of Birmingham, Loughborough University, the University of Nottingham and TWI Ltd.

**Left: Dr Clive Hickman is presented with his award at the Royal Academy of Engineering AGM by Sir Jim MacDonald**



Alex Bishop



# Law firm to offer funding facility

Legal and professional services group Gateley has signed an agreement to enter into a litigation funding facility to help finance long-term disputes.

It provides funding for an initial sum of £20 million with room for a further £30 million, valuing the total facility up to £50 million.

The portfolio has been arranged with Bench Walk Advisors LLC, a litigation fund based in Delaware.

The agreement will see Gateley become one of only two listed law firms with access to a funding facility. It will create a single finance line between Gateley and Bench Walk, with funding made available at no risk to clients.

It offers a lifeline to those claimants who would otherwise have been unable or unwilling to bring cases forward. Gateley and Bench Walk will only receive a share of the payout if a case is successful in effecting a recovery.

Richard Healey (pictured), partner and head of Gateley's dispute resolution group, said: "Our

approach to funding through this facility will result in a single no win, no fee agreement between us and the client.

"We see numerous examples these days of clients being reluctant to commence litigation for fear of throwing good money after bad and potentially being liable for opponents' costs if the litigation is not successful.

"By offering this facility we are in a position to provide a solution to such concerns. We have for some considerable time been keen, where the circumstances are right, to move away from the traditional hourly rate model and to align a successful outcome for our clients, shareholders and our own business."



## NETWORK TO OFFER FREE ADVICE AND SUPPORT

Bosses from across the Black Country have the chance to boost their businesses as part of a regional network offering free expert support and advice.

The Peer Network Programme is a government-funded initiative managed by the IBD business advice group on behalf of the Black Country Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hub.

It gives small to medium-sized companies the chance to develop and improve their businesses through one-to-one sessions with industry experts as well as tapping into the experience of their peers.

Maddison Smith, programme manager at the BCLEP Growth Hub, said it was a unique opportunity for business owners to benefit their individual businesses as well as support economic growth for the whole of the Black Country.

"The Peer Network Programme allows like-minded business owners to pool their expertise for the benefit of their own companies. But that collaboration also builds



strength into the Black Country economy as a whole. We want to bring businesses together to not just survive, but thrive," she said.

Chris Gough (pictured) from the IBD Group said that the peer networks helped business leaders build lasting relationships and

create new opportunities within their companies as well as finding solutions to common problems.

"As we move forward post-pandemic there's never been a more important time to invest in the future by working with people who know business best – other business leaders," he said.

The Peer Network Programme has already helped members gather extra insight and expertise on marketing, personnel issues, financial planning, increasing distribution and manufacturing as well as pandemic recovery strategies.

Networking takes place virtually once a fortnight over nine months in structured, small-group sessions. Each member of the network also gets separate one-to-one mentoring sessions.

To be eligible to join, businesses must have been trading for over one year, have had at least five employees before the pandemic and have a turnover of at least £100,000 in one of the last three years.

# Driving ambition

**Oyinkansola Adebayo is a health and beauty entrepreneur with a clear mission – to economically empower black women in this region and beyond. HENRY CARPENTER meets her.**





Some people make a name for themselves as successful entrepreneurs, improving the livelihoods of those who work for them, as well as their own.

Others make a positive impact on a wider social level, perhaps to the benefit of a group in society which does not enjoy the fortunes of others.

And every once in a while you come across someone who has succeeded at both. Oyinkansola Adebayo – known universally as Oyin – is one such person.

Oyin is the founder of the Niyo brand, first starting it as a hair and beauty business before adding the network group.

The latter was set up specifically to empower black women, and its influence is extending far beyond the West Midlands; at the latest count there are some 3,000 women worldwide who are currently part of Niyo Network. Oyin is a prominent figure in the region's business scene, not least because she is frequently up for awards – the latest being Women in Tech – and has become synonymous with empowering black women to become successful business owners.

And she's still only 25.

Oyin's professional journey started

when she was in her teens. Not long after moving to Birmingham from Nigeria when she was 13, Oyin took umbrage at the amount of money her mother was spending on the care of her daughters' hair.

"That's how we all kicked off," Oyin remembers. "I started doing my sister's hair, and my mum referred me to lots of her friends. I had some business cards printed and put myself on the Gumtree advertising site.

"It was a mobile service – my mum would drop me off wherever I needed to go. I never told anyone my age – I was only 15! – but by the age of 18 I had grown my clientele to about 100 women."

A spell at university in Nottingham followed where she completed a course in economics. There was a reason for this change of tack. Oyin's intention had been to return to Nigeria where she was aiming to become president – seriously – and she saw an understanding of economics as key to that ambition.

"I look back on my ambition to run for president of Nigeria and I find it hilarious today. But I just had a penchant to bring change into the world. I saw many inequalities and I wanted to do something to change that.

"After I had posted one of my hair shots on social media, a friend who was really passionate about female entrepreneurs, pushed me to do an article on her blog."

Oyin's hair clientele numbers grew again and while she was working she would spend many hours in conversation. Much of the subject matter would revolve around empowerment and she twigged that the women she was chatting to wanted to succeed beyond beauty . . . they wanted to be game changers in their fields.

This led her to set up an event called Beyond Hair – all about helping black women to do something with their ideas.

"The whole point was that we are beyond our hair," she says.

"At the first one we had about 80 women turn up and that was really fantastic. Then people asked us to put on another the following year – 150 came to that – and at the third event, at Millennium Point, 350 came.

"At that event we ran a workshop with about 40 women, many of whom wanted to continue what we were talking about.

"I realised that a lot of the woman that we had supported in the network community – which at the time was

about a thousand women globally – were in jobs that were going to be automated. I wanted to do something about it.

"I decided to put together a coding bootcamp, and that's how we're here today with Niyo Network. The hair and beauty element remains the same – we still service clients across the Midlands."

The pandemic inevitably – given the visiting model of the Niyo stylists – resulted in a slump for the hair and beauty side of the business but Oyin saw it as an opportunity to empower her stylists, a team which had grown to about 10.

"We are working on some sort of bootcamp for stylists, providing them with products and services that would enable them to be the best they can be.

"In the future, I want to build a house of brands that puts upskilling black women at the centre of that ecosystem."

Sadly, Oyin still sees inequality in the business world, though she admits there have been changes for the better post George Floyd.

"There is a lot of work still to be done and it needs to start with education. People don't have an understanding of the disparities that actually exist.

"There is a book I strongly recommend called Demanding More by Sheree Atcheson. She is the former diversity and inclusion director of Monzo, and I actually had the privilege to interview her. She really speaks a lot about the biases that we have."

Throughout our conversation, Oyin often references bootcamps. It turns out Niyo Network operates several. There's a black women's bootcamp for software engineers. There's also a black disruptor bootcamp, and one focusing on virtual reality.

"We also have one for data analysts and project managers," she says. "This is all about getting as many black women into data analytics roles as possible.

"Let's look at AI. I don't know what stats to believe but according to the British Computer Society, less than 1% of the IT industry is made up of black women – and that is a problem.

"What matters is that lack of representation still exists. And if we are going to build technology that's going to really impact people across the globe, we have to make sure that it includes this space.

"Many of the companies that we would talk to are not just tapping into UK markets, but also African markets. So why not make sure that your workforce is inclusive?"

We return to hair and beauty, which Oyin admits is "a whole different ball game".

She describes Niyo's original model as "a sort of Uber for hair and beauty". It didn't work particularly



**"In the future, I want to build a house of brands that puts upskilling black women at the centre of that ecosystem."**



Oyin has been a regular presence at award ceremonies across the region



Oyin started styling hair when she was a teenager



successfully at first – and she says the reason for this was the level of quality on offer and the lack of accreditation. Many afro hair stylists were unable to get this.

“We’re here to actually bridge that gap – to be able to say, look, we want to give accreditation and demonstrate that quality can be guaranteed. The industry can be a lot more formalised.”

I had been warned that Oyin was highly modest and would be unwilling to sing her own praises, but she is clearly held in the deepest respect for what she has achieved already which goes far beyond improving the bottom line.

The exciting bit though, is what lies ahead. Thankfully she doesn’t hold back in describing her ambitions.

“I want Niyo Hair and Beauty to have its own tech solution that basically simplifies the booking process and embraces black women getting their hair done by qualified and accredited stylists.

“I want Niyo Network to be the space for black female disruptors to come to globally to learn how to upskill and find opportunities, whether that’s becoming entrepreneurs or gaining employment in high-impact spaces.

“I want us to increase to a network of tens of thousands of women globally, in all manner of skills. We’re trying to build systems in place where



Oyin's Beyond Hair summit grew year on year

it's not necessarily reliant on me, it's reliant on our systems.

“I am looking to upskill women in different areas because upscaling is not just in tech. We are very obsessed with digital upskilling, which is great, and it is important. But there are various other areas in which people can be upskilled.”

Oyin admits she would like to partner organisations who want to increase inclusion in their workplace, as well as support the next generation of black females in tech. Likewise with Niyo Hair and Beauty, she is looking to work with organisations in the beauty space who want to support the next generation of black females in beauty and hair.

But her final ambition, for now anyway, is to instigate collaboration which goes far beyond these shores.

“I am looking to expand what we’re doing, not just across the Midlands or even this country,” she says.

“I am going to Nigeria to see how we can facilitate true intercontinental collaboration.

“I want to see how we can foster Birmingham as a global region – and I am on that mission to see how we can do that by connecting the city to Nigeria.”



# Birmingham is bouncing back

Birmingham is “on the precipice of exciting opportunities for economic growth” despite the impacts of Covid-19 and Brexit, according to a major economic report.

The Birmingham Economic Review, published by Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce and the University of Birmingham’s City-REDI, revealed signs for recovery across the region even though challenges such as talent shortages and inequality remain.

While the pandemic led to significant falls in output, productivity and employment, the report says Birmingham continues to be a draw for high-profile business moves and expansions.

Furthermore, the economy is bouncing back quicker than expected, with Greater Birmingham businesses reporting increased domestic and international demand.

More than half (52%) of Greater Birmingham firms surveyed during Q3 reported an increase in UK sales and just 13% recorded a fall in domestic activity.

Fifty per cent reported an increase in advanced UK orders and 35 per cent experienced an increase in international sales.

As the UK strives to hit net zero targets, the Birmingham Economic Review also highlights significant opportunity for firms in Greater Birmingham to be involved in the low-carbon supply chain through



Simon Collinson

low and zero-carbon activities taking place across the wider region.

Key opportunities include the shift towards electric vehicles, the decarbonisation of domestic heating and the region’s growing clean energy sector.

Henrietta Brealey, chief executive of the GBCC, said: “The data contained in this year’s Birmingham Economic Review – the fifth annual review of its kind – is perhaps the most important to date.

“Following the once-in-a-lifetime social and economic shock precipitated by coronavirus and subsequent restrictive measures, we are beginning to see positive signs of recovery at both local and national levels.

“While the impacts of Covid-19

and Brexit remain in play, the city stands on the precipice of exciting opportunities for economic growth.

“At the time of writing, it is now less than a year to go before the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games, and the city has a unique opportunity to leverage the array of benefits that the once-in-a-generation investment in HS2 and associated local developments will bring.”

Professor Simon Collinson, deputy pro vice-chancellor for regional engagement and director of WM REDI and City-REDI, University of Birmingham, said: “The pandemic has hit the UK economy harder than most other OECD countries and the West Midlands harder than most other UK regions.

“This economic shock, coupled with Brexit, led to significant falls in output, productivity and employment as well as new levels of inequality.

“Uncertainty remains, but the signs are remarkably promising. The range of indicators we track, presented in this report, show growth and optimism as part of a tentative bounce back.

“As we look ahead to regain our growth momentum, we need to retain and attract the best talent and investment.

“But this new growth pathway will also need to be more sustainable and more inclusive than our trajectory in the pre-pandemic era.”

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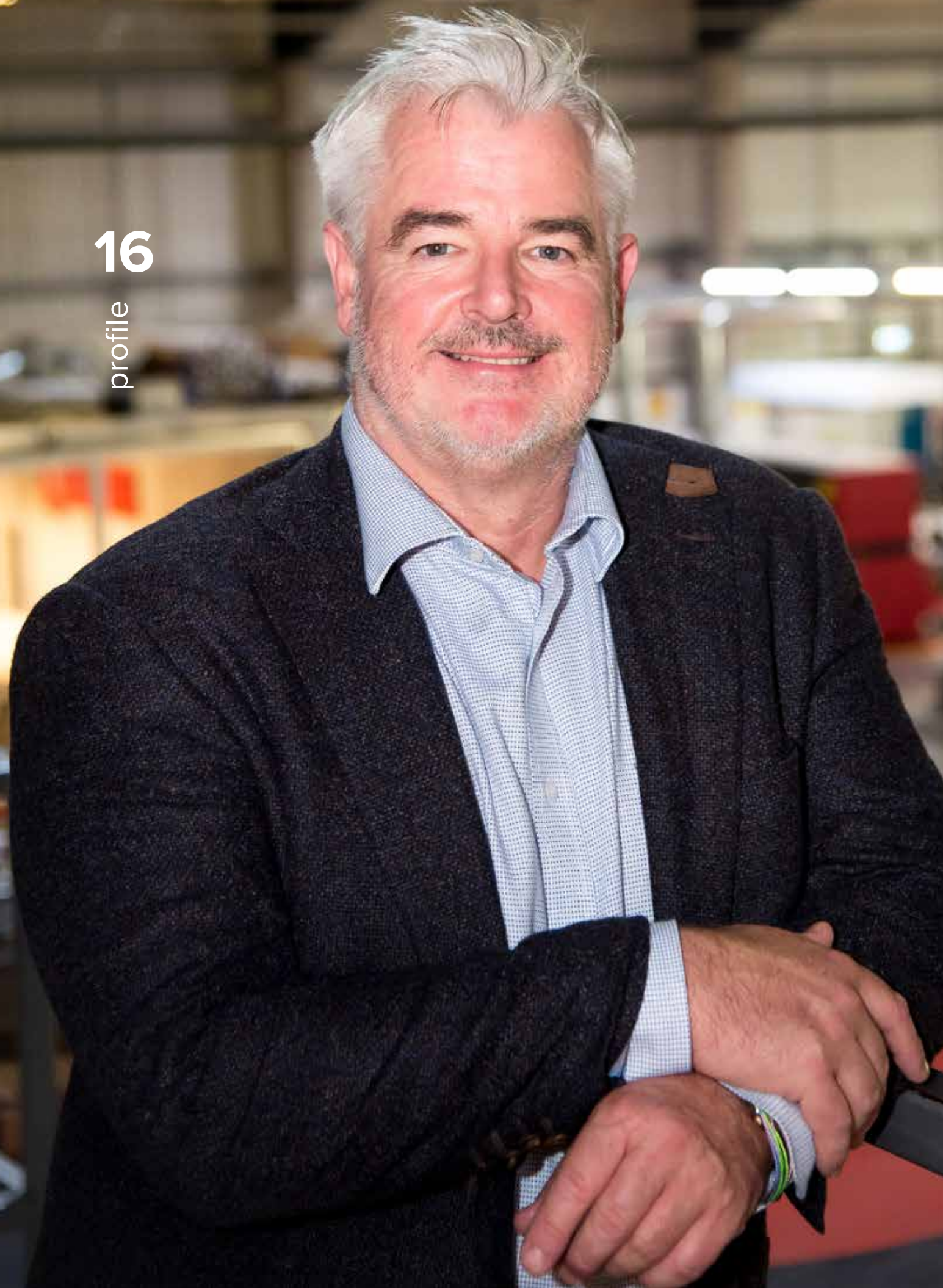
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Henrietta Brealey





# Signs of the times

**The diversity, size and quality of the images printed by Hollywood Monster have earned the Tyseley-based firm its status as a national market leader in its field. JON GRIFFIN meets its charismatic chairman, Tim Andrews, whose influence reaches far beyond the region's business community and has led to him being awarded an MBE.**

Tim Andrews is recalling with feeling the day he thought a lifetime of relentless hard work was about to be brought crashing to the ground.

"It was absolutely horrible. We were like rabbits in the headlights. I stood up in front of everybody at work and they were all scared shitless. They had mortgages to pay and for the first time in my career, I had no answers. If you have got no clients overnight, there is nothing you can do."

The genial chairman of Hollywood Monster thought he had seen it all, from fondly remembered early days running his signs company with his father John from the loft, to making his first sales call to his beloved Blues; from steering the company through the financial crash of 2008 to establishing a UK market leader with clients ranging from top European football stadiums to the London Olympics.

But nobody could have foreseen Covid-19 – or its devastating impact on so much of corporate Britain. As Andrews recalls, 19 months on from the desperate scenario of March 2020: "We had to close the business because we had all our work taken off us.

"It was all events led and we had no work. We had become the largest graphics supplier to the events industry. We sent all the guys home. Our hands were tied, there was nothing we could do.

"A week or so afterwards, Rishi Sunak announced the furlough scheme. I cried in front of the TV that night. I realised it was going to save the business. Furlough saved our business without a shadow of a doubt but there was still a shortage over the salaries.

"We had a survival plan. We had to look at the big earners in the business and let them go. We decided to make 19 people redundant. It was very difficult but we now have a much flatter structure. It is less people, more efficiency. One of the things we learnt from the pandemic was not to build a business with too many layers.

"We lost £1.4 million over the pandemic which was knocked off our balance sheet. Just before the pandemic we had grown to a £10 million turnover. We are down to 40 people now and our turnover is about £7 million. By the end of November we will be breaking even

for the year to date. We have cut our costs and come back a different business."

The coronavirus crisis had proved yet another milestone in the 30-year transformation of Hollywood Monster – from a start-up signs company run by a father and son team from a 'broken-down builders' yard' – to a national graphics business with an international reputation. At the heart of it all across three decades stands Tim Andrews MBE, entrepreneur, charity fundraiser extraordinaire, diehard Birmingham City fan and much more besides.

Covid might have dealt an undeniable blow to Hollywood Monster, but it had hardly been the first hurdle to overcome for Andrews and his entrepreneurial vision. The original incarnation of the firm, which would eventually become his pride and joy, had been born out of a family crisis when father John was made redundant.

"It was a bit of a shock. He had worked at the company, Ashford Construction, for 17 years. They closed the business down and decided to focus on development. When he was made redundant he





still had a mortgage, he still had two kids living at home. He finished there as plant manager."

Tim – who had been cutting his teeth as an apprentice at aerospace firm Hymatic Engineering in Redditch – saw his father's redundancy as the chance to fulfil a lifelong dream of running his own business.

"When I was a kid at school, I always wanted to have my own business. My father's employer Martin Ashford was the guy who motivated and encouraged me. He was an inspirational figure, he taught me a lot. I could see the respect he got from his employees – everyone held him in high esteem – and he taught me how to treat staff.

"My dad was different. He came from a farming family and was old fashioned. In many ways he taught me how not to be with people . . . he could be a cantankerous old bugger. I am not slagging him off but he was a real slave driver, a hard taskmaster. But he taught me that you had to work hard for your money, that nothing comes to you easily. It was a really powerful lesson and a great ethic to have.

"He could be a bit of a bully but he always meant well. He thought that unless you are sweating at the end of the day you have not done a day's work."

That no-nonsense work ethic was to stand Andrews in good stead for many years to come, and ultimately would lay the foundations for the nationally renowned business that is Hollywood Monster today. But it all began in very different circumstances from the 30,000 sq ft headquarters that is home to the Tyseley-based market leader 30 years later.

"Part of my dad's redundancy package was a company lorry. He started working with me doing signage. There were two roles. I was on the admin side, liaising with accountants, the taxman and banks. My dad was the doer, he did the hard graft. I was starting work at 7am and getting home at 10 or 11 at night. It was like that for many years. I was

doing two jobs for the price of one.

"The company was called Hollywood Signs and we ran it from loft space in the family home. When it was just me and my dad, it was brilliant. It was colourful – there were typical father-and-son disagreements.

"He was working from a workshop in Wythall. We had a lorry, we had clients, we had a factory but we had no business plan."

Andrews Junior had been a Birmingham City fan from childhood. "I used to go under the turnstiles. One of my mate's dads was a copper so we would get in free in the days of Archie Gemmill, Trevor Francis and Bob Latchford," he says.

His beloved Blues provided the budding signs entrepreneur with his first sales break, albeit in unorthodox style.

"The very first sales phone call was to Birmingham City. I rang Bill Coldwell who was the commercial manager and was also caretaker manager at the time. I wanted to have signs around the pitch so I went to see him and he said 'I have not got any money, I can pay you with a season ticket'. We got corporate season tickets in the Wiseman Suite in 1991-92.

"We went on to sponsor them rather than being paid for doing the signage – we had the four corners around the ground."

Hollywood Signs was up and running.

"The business was doing very well. Our first year's turnover was £75,000, the early years were quite profitable and our overheads were negligible. My company car was a van, it was all about starting at the bottom.

"It snowballed. Hollywood Signs was a memorable name and there was a demand for what we supplied. In those days, we used to hand paint the signs, there were no computers. I remember the Glow-worm Boilers sign used to take me three days . . . I was very slow.

"In 1995 we moved to a 3,000 sq ft unit in Acocks Green. We wanted



it to be attractive to clients after we had been in a broken-down builders' yard. It went from zero overheads to £12,000 a year rent, and then you have got your electricity, heating, rates, fuel to get there."

Slowly but surely, Hollywood Signs' profile in the West Midlands was growing in tandem with the parallel emergence of Birmingham as a modern forward-thinking conurbation rather than a gloomy home for metal bashers and other 'dirty' blue-collar industry.

"We were focusing on large developers and expanding on the back of Birmingham's expansion with developments in places like Broad Street and Brindleyplace. We were in the right place at the right time. In 2000 we built our own factory in Greet, a 7,000 sq ft, modern purpose-built site. Turnover had grown to over £1 million, we were doing work for the likes of Birmingham City Council, Brindleyplace, Carillion, Blues. We had 15 people when we moved in there."

As the new Millennium dawned and much of the outside world evolved from its traditional analogue base to embrace a digital future, Andrews remortgaged his house to raise funds for founding a new firm operating out of rented accommodation in Halesowen, Monster Digital.

"Hollywood Signs was purely the property market and football, Monster Digital was exhibitions and trade work. There was a market in billboards, big, large, wide-format printing banners called building wraps. We grew Monster Digital's turnover to £3.5 million and Hollywood Signs' turnover was also £3.5 million."

Andrews had clearly come a very long way from his days painting signs in a grimy workshop alongside his 'hard taskmaster' dad John – but the financial crash of 2008-09 was to prove another significant obstacle.

"Hollywood Signs was hit because it was very much property led. One by one, Hollywood Signs' staff were

diverted to Monster Digital. Then we took the decision to close the two sites down and take on a new one. We married the two businesses together to become Hollywood Monster in 2009.

"We retained all the clients – it reduced overheads, time lags, inefficiencies, the horrendous amount of time sitting in traffic. It was a great move for us because the financial crash saved the business – we sold the factory in Greet."

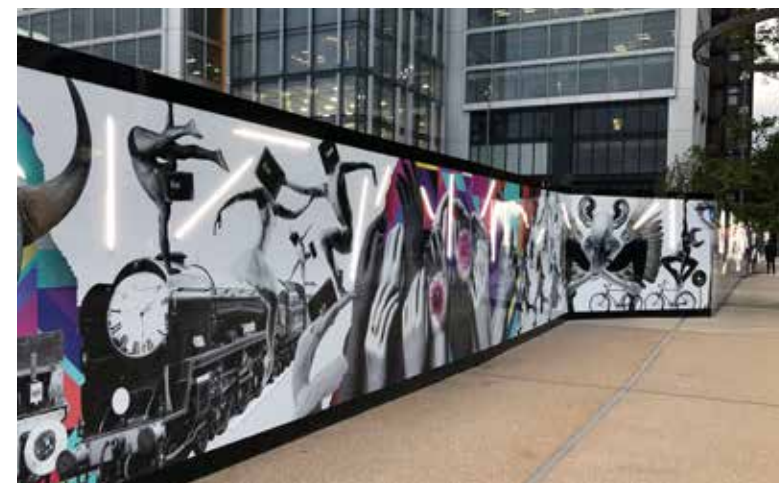
Hollywood Monster was effectively consigning the financial crash to history with a series of blue-chip contracts – including the 2012 London Olympics. "It was a big break, we did over £1 million of branding and we still do a lot of work in the Olympic Village.

"A lot of our work can be seen at places like European sports grounds, clubs in the Champions League, top European clubs, Villa Park, St Andrew's – we have been selected to be a supplier to the Commonwealth Games.

"We are involved with McDonald's, we do signage direct to leading supermarket chains, we do work for cinemas, we do shopping centre displays at the likes of Westfield Shopping Centre. We supply the NEC Group, Excel in London – we are pretty much the market leader. We have invested more than £4 million in machinery in recent years and have the widest print machine in the UK."

Alongside that outlay in state-of-the-art technology, Hollywood Monster is also investing in the future of the planet by adopting a new environmentally friendly initiative. "We have spent time testing

**Amongst other projects, Hollywood Monster has been involved in producing signage for McDonald's, Westfield Shopping Centre and Birmingham City FC, as well as the property and construction market and the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham**







materials from China and Germany that do not have PVC in them.

"There are landfill sites across the world that are full of PVC. Everybody is looking at how they can be more protective of the environment or the planet.

"We are going to be the first print company in the UK to ban PVC. This is a brave step, much braver than McDonald's banning plastic straws. We have replaced it with non-PVC products like polyester, which are naturally easy to recycle and are sustainable.

"There are a lot of people taking Hollywood Monster really seriously as a result. When you start making statements like that in this industry, people have to take notice. We have come out of the pandemic in a better place than when we went into it."

As a new, greener Hollywood Monster emerges post-Covid, Andrews has his own personal blue riband date with royalty to look

forward to after being awarded an MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for services to charity and the community.

"I thought at first it was a wind-up. I got an email and I emailed my two sons to check it out – then it hit me that it was for real. I am really proud, I cried when I was told and when I read it in front of my girlfriend.

"I always dreamt of this. I wanted to get an MBE for my dad and say 'are you going to say well done now, dad'? When I take my mum to meet the Queen, I will be very proud."

Andrews' reputation for fundraising has been a large part of his public profile in the West Midlands for many years, and his LoveBrum charity initiative has helped highlight the often unsung work of around 200 different volunteer-led organisations.

"People in Manchester, Leeds and Liverpool beat their chests and are very gregarious about their cities and

very proud. We are very unassuming. I believe that Birmingham needs a bit of momentum and movement.

"Volunteer-led community organisations make this city a better place and through LoveBrum we give them a platform and a voice. The aim has been to bring civic pride back to the city. It is a movement for a better Brum."

With his chairmanship of Hollywood Monster and Birmingham-based Lightbox Digital, as well as a non-executive role at Novus Project Management and his tireless charity work, 52-year-old Andrews has a full and varied diary – "I am glued to my phone" – but he still has ambitions for his beloved Birmingham City following a previous spell as CEO of Birmingham City Ladies.

"Whilst the football industry is massive, it is nowhere near as professional as it could be. I am a Blues fan through and through and I would love to see the day when we have a consortium of local businesspeople coming together to buy the club. I would love to be CEO of Blues and then maybe chairman afterwards."

After more than three decades at the coalface of Birmingham industry, Andrews recently swapped city life for the countryside and moved to a four-acre farm in Gaydon, where he enjoys the rural life with partner Samantha, some sheep, chickens and a dog.

You rather suspect that father John – the tough taskmaster who taught his son the value of hard work – would finally approve of how life has turned out for the diehard Blues fan who turned a tiny two-man sign-painting business into a multi-million-pound turnover enterprise.



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Ian Dutton

Guest speaker Dinesh Dhamija

Organiser Ninder Johal and  
daughter Simren

Martin Chandler, Elizabeth Halpin and Safaraz Ali

# Summer Business Ball

Hundreds of guests from the region's business world gathered at Wolverhampton Racecourse for the Nachural Summer Business Ball and Awards, with several categories of awards recognised organisations and individuals across the commercial spectrum. The guest speaker was the founder of Ebookers, Dinesh Dhamija, and around £7,000 was raised on the evening for the chosen charity, Acorns Children's Hospice.

# Smart doorbells 'RING'ING IN PRIVACY ACTIONS



In a recent county court case, it was found that a smart doorbell that records video and audio is in breach of data protection laws in England and Wales. The Ring doorbell and security camera system, produced by Amazon, stored audio and video footage of a neighbouring property. Whilst the video footage feels like more of an invasion of privacy, the court were more concerned with the collection of audio, finding that the

audio could be collecting personal information about neighbours without them knowing about it.

In 2018, the GDPR and resulting UK legislation, the Data Protection Act 2018 (the DPA), came into force and along with it a raft of new measures that organisations responsible for looking after people's data were required to comply with. Over the past two years we have seen an increasing number of claims being made alleging that an individual's data protection rights, and therefore their right to privacy, has been breached. It is no surprise technology such as CCTV, which is becoming more accessible, results in breaches of data protection by unsuspecting individuals.

Unfortunately, it appears that a lot of data breach claims, masquerading as breach of privacy claims, are the new 'ambulance chaser' claims. Whilst these claims are often of low value, they can still be quite a nuisance to your organisation.

## Basis for a claim

**Most claims start by alleging that the data controller has breached the GDPR or the DPA by:**

- Sharing personal data without consent
- Retaining or sharing personal

data without having a legal exemption to do so

■ Failing to comply with a request to delete data.

Some claimants also argue that the organisations actions are negligent, in breach of a person's Article 8 rights to a private and family life, have misused private information and are in breach of confidence.

## What to do if you receive a data breach claim

In our experience, many claims are relatively low, and most are trying their luck. Admitting to facts can give the claimant the validation they need to pursue their claim and seek to increase the level of damages they are seeking. We therefore strongly recommend that no admissions as to the facts are made if you seek to negotiate directly with claimants.

In some circumstances, the claims can be defended by a comprehensive Letter of Response which helps to diminish a claim, or even scares the claimant away. We suggest you refer a letter to your Data Protection Officer and/or seek legal advice before responding to the facts of the claim to avoid inadvertent admissions and rising damages.



# The quest for net zero

**SPECIAL REPORT**

The fight to tackle climate change by striving for a net zero society is right at the top of the business agenda, whether you're a strategy-setting boss or a jobseeker increasingly mindful over the green credentials of a prospective employer.

In this commercially backed special report, we ask some of the most knowledgeable and authoritative voices in the region to shine a light on ways in which businesses can contribute to this campaign which will shape the very future of humanity.





By **WILL HARGREAVES**  
Environmental policy advisor at  
Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce

# 26 Creating a lasting legacy

sustainability

## It is up to businesses to grasp all the opportunities to come their way to contribute to the net zero agenda.

COP26 has increased the focus on environmental issues, in particular climate change.

But also, since the UK Government's legislated 2050 net zero target in 2019, we've seen nations, multinationals and businesses across the world set their own net zero targets. Only a few years ago, businesses were setting percentage carbon reductions targets. Today, net zero is becoming the new norm.

Younger generations increasingly demand climate action, and as they progress into the economically active population, pressure on companies to take action will continue to increase.

Climate change increases the likelihood of extreme weather phenomenon, such as storms and heatwaves, which can damage and disrupt supply chains, assets, infrastructure, agriculture, and economies. We've seen unprecedented changes in the climate and can expect these to intensify without remedial action.

Additional environmental issues put at risk the functioning of modern economies and society. These include resource and water scarcity, biodiversity loss and pollution from production processes, products and waste. All of which can be exacerbated by climate change.

With more stringent environmental policy, continued investment in the net zero transition, and increased public and private focus on climate change, businesses can be certain of the increased development of the low-carbon economy and business. We've seen the Government announce that businesses bidding for large contracts (greater than £5 million) must detail credible net zero plans, including scope 3 emissions (all indirect value chain emissions that are not in scope 2). This means that those bidding for these contracts will have raised expectations for their suppliers to comply with their

net zero targets. The requirement to measure businesses carbon emissions is filtering through the supply chain.

The net zero transition can provide increased economic growth and new business opportunities. Government and private investment in low-carbon innovation, technology and practices, for transitioning to net zero by 2050, could improve GDP by 2-3% between 2020 and 2050, supporting around 300,000 additional jobs.

## Net zero opportunities for the region

The West Midlands Combined Authority has targeted net zero by 2041 and released a five-year decarbonisation plan (the first of four).

The West Midlands has nationally recognised sectoral strengths in transport, electric vehicles, waste recovery and recycling. Utilising these, and the region's research and innovation capability can help increase investment and develop low-carbon R&D, innovation and manufacturing, so supporting export growth.

How the region meets the demand for skills in the low-carbon sector is important. 92,000 regional jobs are expected to be created by 2041 because of the transition. The demand for skills is expected to grow in professional and financial services, manufacturing, low-carbon heating technologies, energy efficiency products, green stimulus and solar panel installation sectors. Businesses must start to consider how skills demand will be influenced by the low-carbon journeys of their sector.

The development of a Gigafactory in Coventry can help strengthen the ambition of the West Midlands to be at the forefront of the green industrial revolution and support the expansion of batteries for electric vehicles. This will build on the UK Battery Industrial Centre in Coventry

and support increased low-carbon manufacturing, innovation and local supply chains. Currently, the low-carbon manufacturing and goods sector is the fastest growing sector in the West Midlands region.

## Business response to the net zero agenda

The British Chambers of Commerce surveying demonstrates many businesses in the West Midlands are planning to or have taken action on low-carbon measures. These include installing LED lights, reducing plastic and paper use, recycling and reducing car journeys (remote working policies, car sharing etc.). The main drivers for change (starting with the highest) include environmental concerns (75%), cost savings (54%), differentiation (29%), and increased customer demand (28%).

A separate study by the British Chambers of Commerce of over 1000 UK businesses found only one in seven (13%) businesses have targets to reduce their carbon emissions, and many businesses find high cost, lack of resources and lack of time barriers to decarbonising. The main barriers for businesses surveyed were high upfront adaptation costs (34%) and lack of finance (30%). In the next six months, businesses would like to see greater access to grants (28%), tax allowances (14%) and lower adaptation costs (14%) as the top three steps to support their decarbonisation. Although, only one in ten (11%) businesses are measuring their carbon footprint and the smaller the business, the less likely they are to measure it.

From the conversations the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has had with its members, we are seeing businesses respond to the net zero agenda by:

■ Reducing direct and indirect emissions across operations through adopting and/or switching to low

or zero carbon alternatives, such as making buildings and processes more energy efficient, switching to an electric fleet, and green energy procurement.

■ Developing and implementing technological innovation and business models. This includes transforming supply chains, business practices and moving towards more sustainable business models, such as the circular economy.

■ Individually and collectively leveraging purchasing power to increase demand for products and processes that contribute to net zero.

■ Influencing low-carbon choices amongst stakeholders, including employees. Sharing information on low-carbon alternatives and support empowers and encourages low-carbon choices.

■ Leading and developing business and sector best practice through ambitious targets and delivery.

■ Engaging in the net zero conversation and sharing experience to inform and influence policy.

I have provided two case study examples on businesses benefitting from the net zero agenda:

Advanced Engineering is a manufacturer in Birmingham. It switched to LED lights, installed Power Correction Factor equipment and used Elcomponent data logger to achieve savings of £15,000 per year and 60 tonnes of CO2. This process was supported by the Low Carbon SME programme which advises and supports energy efficiency for SMEs.

Enzen is a global knowledge large enterprise specialising in the energy and water sectors, that has achieved contributed to significant carbon reductions. Since 2006, Enzen has estimated its UK activity has delivered US\$1.67 billion in efficiencies through fuel, electricity, manpower and other cost savings, plus mitigated 58.56 million tonnes of CO2 emissions by decarbonising electricity grids, reducing fossil fuel usage and lowering travel demand.

## How the Government can incentivise

Once the quick wins and low-cost measures have been implemented, higher investment in low-carbon measures and technology will be needed to fully decarbonise business. Policy frameworks and mechanisms must incentivise favourable economics for accelerating the adoption of low-carbon technologies and measures. In consultation with our members,

the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce has identified key steps for Government support and policy to ensure a successful net zero transition for businesses.

1. Increase financial support for businesses (particularly SMEs) through the increased value of grants, favourable finance and financial relief, to stimulate accelerated business decarbonisation and low-carbon technology uptake.

2. Increase the provision and investment into supply side low-carbon infrastructure and encourage a modal shift in city transport.

3. Increase devolution powers to invest in regional low-carbon technology.

4. Provide clear and long-term policy certainty and planning to stimulate private investment.

5. Invest in skills, training and careers for the regional and national net zero transition.

You can find more detail on the above on the Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce website.

## What businesses need to do

Despite the issues businesses are experiencing at the moment, and the limited time, resources and cash available, making a start on decarbonising can be done. Every business can start considering how climate change and the net zero transition will impact their strategy and operations. Taking early preventative and/or mitigative action will minimise future costs and disruption.

### Developing a net zero strategy should include:

■ Allocate responsibility and accountability for executing your low-carbon strategy.

■ Assess environmental impact within a defined scope and boundary. For a full assessment consider your direct (i.e. owned and controlled sources) and indirect emissions (i.e. purchased energy for electricity, heat or cooling, business travel, supply chain).

■ Assess how the external environment and stakeholders may influence the need to take action. Identify areas most at risk to climate related and socio-economic changes.

■ Understand how to engage and manage relevant stakeholders, low-carbon markets, risks, legal and compliance obligations and seek regional and national support (such as R&D tax credits, Low Carbon SME and ATETA programmes) and adopt low-carbon technologies.

■ Integrate key components of environmental performance into business functions through environmental KPIs. Ensure business decisions account for environmental performance. Review activity to ensure consistency with the organisational vision and goals. Seek to mitigate the risk of climate, policy and socio-economic changes.

■ Maintain open dialogue with your stakeholders, including customers. Seek to influence more environmentally sustainable decisions and business.

■ Share successes and learnings with stakeholders. This includes policy consultations, customers, suppliers etc.

If it's not already, the active management of sustainability should be an imperative alongside other key business functions.

There is a wealth of opportunities available to business engaging in the green agenda and taking action will future proof the business and create a positive business legacy.

27 sustainability





# Taking a lead on sustainability

## What is GBSLEP?

The mission of the Greater Birmingham & Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership is to drive the inclusive economic growth of the region, creating jobs and increasing the quality of life for all our residents.

GBSLEP has a unique triple helix structure of bringing together partners from our local authorities, businesses and academic organisations to make locally informed decisions in a joined-up way. By doing this the organisation can implement innovative measures to reduce carbon emissions across the region it serves, whilst encouraging local businesses to adopt low carbon technology.

## How does GBSLEP directly support businesses?

GBSLEP Growth Hub is the business facing delivery arm of the organisation, made up of accredited and specialist business advisers. The GBSLEP Growth Hub is fully funded, so there is no cost to businesses who receive our help.

When you contact the Growth Hub for support, you'll be put in touch with the most relevant advisers for your company's particular challenges and aspirations, and they will work with you on bespoke solutions to help you grow – and to do so sustainably.

"I'm really pleased! I was introduced to [a Growth Hub sector specialist] not even three weeks ago and a lot has happened already, and there is more in the pipeline... thank you guys for everything!" – Shaun Sookoo, director of Winny's Kitchen



Shaun Sookoo



Tyseley Energy Park

## The Growth Hub's low-carbon and sustainability work with businesses

Will Broad is GBSLEP Growth Hub's lead low-carbon sector specialist. Will comes from a background of advising SMEs with their growth and business development, and brings expertise from the low carbon sector to help businesses transition to a low carbon economy.

The Growth Hub leverages its position in the local ecosystem to keep businesses aware of the opportunities for support, funding and technical expertise. We often act as a 'connector' between businesses looking to launch a new product, market or service with organisations or agencies whose collaboration would assist or improve the success of new product and business launches.

The Growth Hub works closely with both emerging and established Low Carbon Goods and Services companies in the West Midlands region. We help by identifying sources of grant funding, scale up support, recruitment and retention guidance, signposting to relevant technical programmes for further support, and connecting businesses with local sustainability networks.

Financial support and guidance is delivered to all low carbon businesses that the Growth Hub works with. There is a recognition that the investment environment is challenging for low carbon and sustainability-centric businesses,

making our Access to Finance support particularly valuable for emerging businesses that are wishing to go through their first raise.

## What's the low-carbon strategy for Greater Birmingham?

The GBSLEP acknowledges the scale of change required to transition our region smoothly towards Net Zero. Our Strategic Economic Plan 2016-2030 allocates provisions to enable businesses to flourish and grow into world-leaders in the transition.

To underline our commitment to enabling Clean Growth in 2021, we appointed Cllr Ian Courts as our Net Zero Champion on our Board. Under his leadership, a comprehensive programme of low carbon initiatives is being rolled out.

Along with other partners in the region, we have also signed up to 'Race to Zero', which is a global campaign to rally leadership and support from businesses, cities, regions, investors for a healthy, resilient, zero carbon recovery that prevents future threats, creates decent jobs, and unlocks inclusive, sustainable growth.

## Who are we working with to achieve clean growth for Greater Birmingham?

GBSLEP has already demonstrated how working with partners in the private, public and academic sectors is crucial to strengthening

low carbon enterprise in the region. Targeted investments such as the Birmingham Energy Innovation Centre at Tyseley Energy Park are already making a difference and supporting our route to a low carbon economy locally.

Tyseley Energy Park has become a nexus of low carbon innovation within the wider region. Here we have invested in a new access road to the previously landlocked site, as well as £7 million into the Birmingham Energy Innovation Centre (BEIC), while a further £892,000 has been allocated to the Energy Transition Centre.

## What have we already delivered for businesses?

"The support from the GBSLEP has made a meaningful contribution to our product testing and development. It's great to see them supporting innovation and businesses in the region." Will Flint, CEO of Energym

### Low Carbon and Circular Economy

**Grant fund:** This initiative was launched by GBSLEP to award businesses up to £30k to support circular economy or decarbonization feasibility work. One of the fund's recipients, IPV Flexgen, used the grant to work with partners to explore the feasibility of a system using solar panels and hydrogen fuel cells to fuel the needs of a vertical farming facility. In another project, the Confederation of British Metalforming, Kelvin Thermotech and the University of Birmingham partnered to explore how composite Phase Change Material could be used to improve the energy efficiency of energy-intensive industrial users in the region.

**Growing Place Capital Fund:** In September 2021, we launched our Growing Place Capital Fund programme around the themes of clean growth and young people. It invited proposals from organizations that needed up to £500k to drive clean growth in the region, with a particular focus on proposals that generated opportunities for young people.

**Zellar Pilot:** 100 businesses in the region have been awarded a year's free access to Zellar – a new online platform for businesses to manage their sustainability journey.

Businesses are urged to make contact with the GBSLEP Growth Hub to make sure they don't miss out on our next round of low carbon funding and other opportunities: [www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk)

## What's next for Greater Birmingham businesses?

In November 2021, we will launch our Clean Growth Programme. The programme will help businesses of all sizes and sectors with planning, funding and delivering practical steps to reduce their energy use and carbon footprint. In addition, the programme will support businesses with innovations that help them galvanise the increasing commercial opportunities in the clean growth

and low carbon market.

Contact us via the Growth Hub to make sure you're the first to hear when this programme opens.

## How to access tailored advice and support on business growth and de-carbonisation

If you'd like to explore ways to reduce your company's carbon footprint, and stay up to date with grants and other funding opportunities, please contact us today. Our specialist advisers will offer you tailored support to overcome your company's unique challenges, and achieve your growth aspirations sustainably.



Low Carbon Circular Economy Fund launch event

[www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk](http://www.gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk), 0800 032 3488, [info@gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk](mailto:info@gbslepgrowthhub.co.uk)





# Decarbonising our public transport

The first of a fleet of 20 hydrogen buses, which National Express West Midlands will operate in Birmingham by the end of the year, was part of a roadshow which arrived the city in October.

The double-decker hydrogen bus tour of the UK stopped off at National Express West Midlands to see the strides being made to decarbonise public transport in Birmingham.

Made by Wrightbus, the buses have been purchased as part of the council's Clean Air Hydrogen Bus Pilot, which aims to kick-start the hydrogen market as a viable zero-emission fuel and are hailed as another solution to tackling Birmingham's poor air quality.

The UK Hydrogen Roadshow – a partnership between bus manufacturer Wrightbus, hydrogen distribution firm Ryze Hydrogen, and hydrogen production company INEOS through its INOVYN subsidiary – travelled from London to Glasgow ahead of COP26.

This highlighted the potential that low-carbon hydrogen fuel has to play in various industries.

Birmingham City Council's cabinet member for transport and environment, Councillor Waseem Zaffar, said: "I am delighted that we will be introducing hydrogen buses to

Birmingham later this year. "This will improve the health of residents and supports the worldwide movement towards cleaner air and net-zero emissions."



## Midlands is a top area for green investment

Both Birmingham and Coventry feature on a list of top UK locations for cleantech Foreign Direct Investment in 2020, according to new analysis by EY.

Research published ahead of the Government's Global Investment Summit found that the UK was Europe's second most popular

location for FDI-backed clean technology projects in 2020.

Topping the table for UK cities was London, Europe's single biggest city for cleantech project numbers in 2020. Birmingham and Coventry attracted two projects apiece, along with Grimsby and Scarborough. Only Aberdeen (four) was home to more projects.

Cleantech projects were deemed to be those which included investment in energy transition, biodiversity, sustainability and the pursuit of net-zero targets.

Simon O'Neill, office managing partner at EY in the Midlands, said: "Clean technology and sustainability are important economic drivers in the Midlands and it's welcome news that both Birmingham and Coventry have attracted cleantech investment projects.

"Earlier this year, the Midlands Engine set out its Ten Point Plan for Green Growth, with a unified voice to accelerate the Midlands' pathway to net zero. The region's businesses

have a significant part to play by driving investment and strategy, and supporting job creation in this area.

"The UK is in an encouraging place on green investment, with cleantech project numbers keeping pace with the UK's overall FDI performance.

"It also performs better on cleantech than perceptions might imply – our regular UK Attractiveness Survey has shown that while investor support for UK cleantech has grown significantly in recent years, Europe is still more likely to be perceived as a leader in this area.

"With scope to improve investor perceptions, the UK has a solid foundation from which to accelerate its cleantech performance.

"UK cleantech acceleration is vital. This is a priority area for investors and the UK might struggle to meet its climate commitments without co-ordinated cleantech investment. Crucially, our research also suggests cleantech investment can also help level up the economy."



Simon O'Neill

# Adjusting to a low-carbon economy



**Net zero can drive much more than just the green agenda for organisations, it can be a catalyst to purpose-driven, sustainable growth. However, long-term change is not simple as JANE WHITLOCK, practice senior partner for Deloitte in the Midlands, explains**

The pressure on businesses to develop a meaningful response to the climate crisis is increasing, but change is not simple and there are a multitude of considerations businesses need to think about when embarking on the path to net zero.

Climate change is not a choice and corporates play a big role in decarbonising the economy. Our biggest priority as a business, and as a region, is to create solutions that facilitate that transition to a low carbon economy, whilst adapting to more challenging operating conditions.

Deloitte is supporting the flagship climate project as part of COP26 'The Futures We Want', which has been commissioned by UK government and BEIS to visualise what a feasible, desirable, and resilient net zero future looks like.

This has led to key conversations with our clients around new products and services, and we are working with Midlands-based businesses to understand the opportunities that a net zero economy will bring and how we can expediate that through technology and the ecosystem already in place.

Companies that get ahead of this challenge are likely to build a competitive advantage and the next decade will be testing for some, but it will present big opportunities in the way we provide business solutions and also how business manages the expectations of the government, clients, colleagues and investors.

### Taking the pathway to net zero

Net zero is unsurprisingly a concern which dominates every CEO's agenda. From public to private, small to medium size businesses, we are seeing the majority start to model the impacts and plot their net zero path.

However, there are many

businesses that are behind the curve and are just starting to think about what that pathway may look like. There are a host of fundamentals that will be beneficial to think about when decarbonising a business:

**1.** Understand your carbon footprint and net zero costs: the first step is to focus on reducing emissions and understand where your hotspots are in your value chain. This includes understanding your supply chain emissions and products as these are critical parts of the business ecosystem.

**2.** Define your vision and purpose: the power of purpose should not be undervalued. It unites employees, clients, customers and investors to build a stronger business with shared values. By making a clear commitment to cutting your company's emissions, you are committing to the future, sending a clear signal about what you want to achieve and by when.

**3.** Share your strategy: the vision and purpose are vital, but share it with the world to engage your stakeholders and keep you accountable.

**4.** Quick wins: you're in this for the long-term and some goals will take years to achieve. To balance this,

make easy changes quickly. Take advantage of any cost savings related to lower emission systems, fleet or facilities.

**5.** Build partnerships to build change: individual corporate action is great, but real change requires systemic rethinking. Working with partners and suppliers to evaluate the whole supply chain is an essential step in driving collective change with quicker results.

Adjusting to a low-carbon economy is not simple as it requires changing business models and behaviours. Change takes time, but the cost of doing nothing vastly outweighs the investment required to decarbonise the economy.

Action needs to be taken by every business and the Midlands is already leading the way from hosting the first net zero Commonwealth Games in 2022 to its achievements in clean transport with the All-Electric Bus City in Coventry and UK Battery Industrialisation Centre.

A collective focus on net zero in the region will not only increase collaboration and sharing of technologies, but can accelerate the future growth of the local economy.







## The case for hydrogen

When it comes to fuel cell technology, Dr Michaela Kendall is right at the top of the tree and has been for many years. The boss of Birmingham-based Adelan is also an integral part of a cohort from the West Midlands representing both the industry and the region at COP26. HENRY CARPENTER catches up with her before she heads to Glasgow.



Dr Michaela Kendall is in a chipper mood.

Despite the perilous state of the planet, this naturally upbeat character is expecting to return from COP26 with the world taking one step closer to a hydrogen economy.

“People want a better environment and they want to do good,” she says. “The green economy has emerged from that feeling – politically, socially and environmentally things are aligning really nicely, and that’s brilliant news for everyone.

“We just have to get on with it now.”

Kendall has been banging the hydrogen drum for more than 30 years – longer than pretty much anyone else in the country – and is a nationally respected figure in the development of fuel cell technology.

We meet at Aston University, where Kendall has been a visiting professor for many years, specifically at the Energy and Bioproducts Research Institute. The team at EBRI know her well, and she is clearly a popular figure there.

As well as being an academic who has devoted the best part of her life to developing new technologies, her day job is as CEO of Adelan Ltd, the solid oxide fuel cell development company she set up with her father in the mid 1990s.

Fuel cells, to the scientific laymen among us, allow electricity to be produced through an electrochemical reaction. They vary in size according to their intended use but they can fit in a car, for example, as a nondescript-looking box easily small enough to be fitted discretely.

When asked about how they contribute to the net zero cause, Kendall is patience itself.

“Because a fuel cell is an electrochemical device, it strips the electrons from the molecules so the fuel isn’t burned,” she explains.

“The fuel molecules remain, but there isn’t the pollution caused by the high temperatures of combustion.

“Because very pure fuels are used in the cells, there aren’t as many impurities such as sulphur, and because these fuels are being used very efficiently, hydrocarbons are not being released into the atmosphere.

“And there’s even less carbon



Dr Kendall in a lab at Aston University



In collaboration with Toyota, Adelan offers fuel cell vehicles to lease

associated with hydrogen if renewable energy is used to produce it – what is known as green hydrogen.

“Fuel cells allow the targeting of carbon reduction from, say, diesel. You can start to reduce the carbon emissions – and that is a stepping stone to a hydrogen economy.

“We have to take various steps, the first being to use today’s fuels smarter. That’s what the fuel cell does and that’s why it’s such a crucial device.”

Fuel cells are also very cheap, she says, and can be used across all sorts of industries.

Construction, for example, is one industry which she mentions time and again as one which is looking to adopt fuel cells with increasing regularity. By doing so, construction sites can reduce the use of diesel engines and start to introduce other technologies such as batteries, solar, and fuel cells.

All of these are good technologies as far as they go. Batteries

though are for storing energy, not generating it. A generator might come in the form of a solar panel which is excellent – but only for five months of the year in the UK.

“The intermittency of renewables is a problem. They’re brilliant technologies but they just need an additional intermediary – and that is hydrogen.

“This should be stored and injected into the grid; use it for transport and eliminate those carbon emissions.

“A whole integrated energy system approach needs to take place, but it needs to be regulated so it is done in a sensible and organised way.”

Providing an overview of the benefits of hydrogen is one thing, but the commercialisation of these technologies is something which needs to be encouraged, according to Kendall – and is the reason why Adelan was set up in 1996.

As she admits, the idea behind Adelan was, and still is, to develop technology to make commercial products.

Back then, the target market was domestic homes, specifically for boiler replacements. This proved tricky in what was a highly competitive market – and with the benefit of hindsight, Kendall admits it wouldn’t be her first choice.

“We started looking at smaller products. We’re not a huge company like Rolls-Royce so what that made us do was innovate again and produce the first portable solid oxide fuel cells.

“We focused on smaller systems but using common fuels like LPG, natural gas or biofuels – which is our favourite, by the way, because you can reduce the carbon even further. There’s an advantage to using hydrocarbons because of the energy density of the fuel.

“Intellectual property and patents, which underscore a certain technology, are also a key part of what we do. There was a fuel cell bubble at the time, particularly in the US, that targeted the commercialisation of those patents.”

Like almost all businesses, Adelan has been adversely affected by Covid which led to a shrinking of the company. But, like others, this

**“The intermittency of renewables is a problem. They’re brilliant technologies but they just need an additional intermediary – and that is hydrogen.”**

focused the minds of Kendall and her team to strive for efficiency.

The goal has remained the same – to commercialise the technology – and much of the last few years has been spent working on commercial relationships and delivering the products to market.

Once such relationship is with Toyota.

“We lease their vehicles,” says Kendall. “People can have a short-term lease to see if a hydrogen vehicle works for them. We want to give people a taste of it – if they don’t like it, we can maybe find them a different vehicle. That builds up demand for hydrogen.

“We also provided the first fuel cells in the construction phase of the HS2 programme as we see it as important to decarbonise that project.

“One of our products is a small generator supported by a fuel cell which is a back-up or top-up solution to commercial sites – often construction – but equally effective for the likes of festivals, street markets and other leisure-related

sites where small generators can produce clean and efficient energy.

“Our clients want to see diesel being replaced. Not only are they trying to decarbonise but they also don’t like the fact that it’s a pollutant which comes with a nuisance factor and the noise and smell associated with it.

“We have also launched a toolbox. This is effectively a way of engaging with businesses which feel they want to move towards fuel cells but don’t know where to start; we can introduce them to the technology, understand their business and then offer a fuel cell or hydrogen solution.

“While it’s not necessarily our number-one way of doing business it shows where the fuel cells can go.”

Michaela Kendall has been devoting her work to the hydrogen cause for more than three decades now, and freely admits that if she knew it was going to take this long for the fuel cell movement to get real traction, she wouldn’t have bothered.

In many ways, her future was shaped by her upbringing. She spent

## SOME FACTS

■ **Hydrogen is the most abundant element on earth. It is locked up in water, hydrocarbons and other organic matter. Hydrogen can be produced from diverse resources including fossil fuels, biomass, and water electrolysis with wind, solar or grid electricity.**

■ **In 2020, roughly 87 million tonnes of hydrogen was produced worldwide for various uses.**

■ **Fuel cells generate electricity through an electrochemical reaction and can use different fuels. As long as there is a constant source of fuel and oxygen, fuel cells will continue to generate power.**

■ **Fuel cell systems vary greatly in size and power, from combustion engine replacements for electric vehicles to large-scale, multi-megawatt installations providing electricity directly to the utility grid.**

■ **Fuel cell electric cars can have a driving range of more than 300 miles on one tank of hydrogen fuel. They can refuel in just a few minutes and the fuelling experience is almost identical to a petrol station. At the moment there are very few refuelling stations in the UK.**



## “We need to line up the technology with the investment to scale up that technology – and then we need to line up the end users to deploy it.”

part of her early years growing up in the industrial town of Runcorn in Cheshire where almost everyone worked at ICI, including her father Kevin.

Kendall remembers the growing awareness back in the mid-1980s that human activity was causing environmental damage, and in a town like Runcorn the disruption of the environment was very visible.

The topic of environmental damage was not an easy conversation to have in the neighbourhood because so many people relied on the industry for their jobs.

It should be mentioned that her father Kevin – an R&D academic at ICI back then – has played a crucial role in the trajectory of his daughter’s career path, and all these years later is a key part of the Adelan team as its chief technology officer.

“I was interested in environmental science from a young age and studied the subject at O level,” says Kendall. “For me it was about a scientific rather than political discipline.

“I went to Middlesex University to read environmental science and technology. I’d already learned about air and water pollution, and had looked at technologies like solar and wind power. They weren’t popular or deployed, and that struck me as odd.

“My dad was a physicist working for a chemical company and he started to get interested in fuel cells, which were less well known. He was also interested in the protection of the environment.

“When I was doing my final-year dissertation in 1992, I asked if he could make me a solid oxide fuel cell.”

That fuel cell – which was created in a pioneering tubular form – was to act as the embryo from which Adelan would grow.

Long story short, a US firm heard of the work her father was doing on tube fuel cells while at Keele University, and offered funding to support further technology programmes.

Adelan’s first office was opened on the University of Birmingham

Research Park, following the investment – at £1.5 million, no small amount – and thus the first independent fuel cell company in the UK was up and running.

Kendall explains all this in the apt setting of a laboratory at Aston University, but time is short. There’s work to do – a lot of it – with an extraordinary month ahead which includes chairing the upcoming Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Network Conference at the

NEC – “where people will be able to see the products and understand their tangible benefits”.

But first, COP26. She is attending an investment and technology event hosted by Bosch.

“Technology developers, integrators and investors will

be gathering to explore what’s possible,” she says.

“We have kept a continuous development process going at Adelan and this is a great opportunity to show them where these products could go to.

“Another event is the hydrogen summit which will see the bringing together of many global forces – they will gather with a common good to build a hydrogen economy.”

Not once during our chat does Kendall’s upbeat demeanour flag when talking about the prospects for hydrogen.

“We need to line up the technology with the investment to scale up that technology – and then we need to line up the end users to deploy it. Several things need to happen, but they will happen.”

There are other benefits to the fuel cell technology, too, which go far beyond our shores.

“About one billion people are not connected to power in the world – and many, many people only have intermittent power. There can be smaller investments in smaller energy generators to enable their progression as well.

“Distributive power has a lot of advantages. There aren’t the same financial barriers to deploy it.

“You can have gradual investment in distributed energy systems and build up the capacity required.”

Final question – how close does she think are we to a hydrogen economy?

“All this has taken a lot longer than it should have done,” she says.

“I drive a hydrogen car and so do others. We’re just not at mass adoption stage quite yet. A lot of it is related to investment, regulation and technology hurdles – and these moving cogs have to align, which is not easy.

“But I can see the supply chains forming and the commercial relationships developing. It’s going to happen – I remember seeing it with solar and wind in the ’80s, and as we all now know, these technologies work.”

With that, our time is up, but there could be no more devoted a professional to fly the flag for hydrogen, or the region, at COP26 than Michaela Kendall.



It has been billed as humanity’s last chance to save the planet. Even if you’re wary of hyperbole, it’s hard to deny that COP26 marks an important moment in efforts to tackle the climate crisis.

This adds to a rising sense of doom. Nearly 60% of young people are “very” or “extremely” worried about climate change, according to research from The University of Bath. But climate anxiety is not limited to the young. People across the generations want to see an urgent response from world leaders.

The scale of the problem can bring on a sense of helplessness. How can my individual actions make a difference? Does it really matter if I eat less meat or fly less?

But of course, in a climate emergency, every action counts: every molecule of carbon that stays in the ground helps our future.

Like it or not, in our capitalist economic system money makes the world go round. What you do with your money does matter. And switching to sustainable pensions, investments and savings could be 23 times more impactful than lifestyle changes, the Make My Money Matter campaign estimates.

When it comes to investing, shareholders have the power to effect significant change.

The shake-up of ExxonMobil’s board this summer is a good example. Shareholder resolutions tabled by activist investors proposed

Many areas of the UK will be impacted by climate change. Indeed, Birmingham City Centre is now warmer than the surrounding countryside, which has led to the local council launching the city’s “route to zero” (R20).

Many businesses and governments – at the UK and local level – are already making changes and net zero commitments. The Midlands, for example, has an important role to play, with the Government’s Green Industrial Revolution paper identifying the region as key for electric car production to reduce carbon emissions.

As we speak to more wealth management clients here in the Midlands, as well as further afield, we regularly hear that they want their savings and investments to be allocated towards sustainable causes. We, like many of our clients, are concerned about the world our children will inherit. Investors UK-wide – including our clients in the Midlands – have an important role to play in the fight against climate change. We are helping them to help make a difference through actively managed, considered investment portfolios.

**Dave Price, portfolio director and head of the Birmingham office, Cazenove Capital**

# Tackling a world on fire

## How can investors move from climate anxiety to climate action?



four new board members. The oil giant lost three seats. This is because asset managers like Schroders supported the proposals and voted for change.

Climate action by investors can drive both financial returns and help to protect the planet. Avoiding carbon-intensive industries also reduces risk.

In the near term, COP26 developments could have direct implications for investors.

Carbon taxes put a price on carbon and emitters are charged based on what they release. This is necessary, and would be positive in the fight against climate change.

Of course, shares in companies that are the largest emitters, or those that are the most exposed to carbon in their operations, are likely to fare the worst if action on carbon pricing is taken.

When Schroders launched its Carbon Value at Risk tool it showed 20% of profits generated by global companies were at risk if carbon prices should rise to US\$100/tonne, the level required to meet the 2015 Paris Agreement.

Climate conscious investors have already prepared for this – we know that all profits are not equal and that environmental impacts, like carbon emissions, are likely to be a drag on profits in the future.

While investors can improve returns by avoiding risk, there are of course enormous potential gains to be made through investments harnessing new cleaner technologies. Innovation provides real hope in the fight against climate change.

So COP26 gives us an opportunity, a moment in time on which I hope we will look back and say that co-ordinated action was taken.

\*This article first appeared in The i Paper on October 29, 2021



By **KATE ROGERS**  
Head of sustainability at Cazenove Capital







# Funding for growth

Aceleron – the Birmingham-based company which specialises in sustainable battery technology – has raised a further £2.5 million as it continues to expand its global sales.

The latest funding has come from existing investors BGF, the MEIF Proof of Concept & Early Stage Fund, which is managed by Mercia and part of the Midlands Engine Investment Fund, and Mercia's EIS funds. It brings the total raised by the company so far to £5.4 million.

The funding is intended to help the firm build relationships with automotive manufacturers and other major corporates while continuing to enhance its products.

Aceleron has developed a lithium battery technology which enables easy repair and reuse over time, thus reducing cost and waste. The design allows the individual cells to be removed and replaced, rather than having to dispose of the entire battery.

Founded in 2016 by Amrit Chandan and Carlton Cummins, the company now offers products for both domestic and commercial applications and sells in Europe, North and South America, Africa and India.

Most recently it provided batteries to the NHS test and trace campaign while the founders were selected as

#OneStepGreener climate leaders ahead of COP26.

CEO Amrit Chandan said: "I am pleased to have secured further support for our mission of making batteries maintainable to help preserve and nurture our scarce resources."

"The world is waking up to the importance of this mission, with an increased awareness that we are borrowing the resources of our children and thus have a duty of care."

**Pictured from left, Sandy Reid, Carlton Cummins, Amrit Chandan and Grant Peggie**

## CONSULTANCY LAUNCHES ESG DIVISION

Birmingham communications consultancy Liquid has launched a specialist environmental social and governance division.

The Liquid ESG team said it has aligned its integrated communications expertise with experience in advising on and communicating the ESG agenda.

CEO Elisabeth Lewis-Jones said: "Never before has social and environmental sustainability and responsibility been higher on the agenda."

"Purpose-driven businesses are waking up to the importance of responsible investing and

governance for building resilience and leadership within their industries.

"ESG is acting as a catalyst for positive change and is being recognised far beyond those companies legally required to report on their ESG results."

The news came after Liquid was named Best Agency Outside of London at the PRWeek Awards 2021.

The ceremony at the JW Marriott Grosvenor House saw Liquid recognised for its commercial achievements, creative successes and innovative response to the pandemic.



Elisabeth Lewis-Jones



# Serving the common good

**Unity Trust Bank's record as an ethical bank is standing the test of time**

By chief operating officer, MARK CLAYTON

Sustainability and corporate responsibility are 'must haves' for any business and are at the heart of everything we do at Unity Trust Bank.

Established in 1984 to serve the common good, our values have never been more important than they are today.

We believe ethical banking has a pivotal role to play in making the world a better place and are committed to delivering social impact, not simply maximising profits.

We only lend to like-minded organisations that want to positively contribute to the social, economic, and environmental needs of local communities. Recent research carried out by Elavon Merchant Services, our global payments partner, revealed that more and more people are making better informed choices about how they spend their money.

Of 1,100 adults surveyed, 90% said they want to purchase from businesses that are responsible and sustainable and plan to increase buying from brands with ethical credentials.

Supporting local businesses and having a fair supply chain were the main drivers for 90% of respondents,

and 89% cited the environmental sustainability of a company as a significant motivator.

Additional research conducted with UK SMEs revealed that 82% believe ethical and green credentials will become even more important to customers in future.

At Unity, we align our lending and carbon footprint to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – a global framework to help achieve a more sustainable future. Every lending proposal we receive is aligned to one or more of the SDGs so businesses must be able to demonstrate the positive impact they are making in local communities.

During the pandemic we increased support for frontline organisations such as care homes, pharmacies, early years nurseries and charities as well as Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs) and Resident Social Landlords (RSLs). Between July 2020 and 2021, we provided financial support worth more than £185m.

It has never been Unity's policy to lend to organisations that have a detrimental impact on the environment, and we will continue to support those that deliver positive climate outcomes.

Banks have a regulatory obligation to assess the possible impact of climate change on customer loans, for example weather events such as heatwaves, floods and wildfires, plus changes to business models as we move towards a low-carbon economy. We look at the probability of these events occurring in the future and the cost associated to our customers so that we can have more informed conversations.

There are also things Unity chooses to do beyond our regulatory requirements.

While our customer lending is underpinned by the value of the societal benefits it delivers, a sizeable chunk of our balance sheet comprises treasury investment. Unity is now using this to invest in both green and social bonds that are aligned to our values, adding to the impact of our overall lending.

Unity's clear set of values and beliefs are firmly embedded in our culture too, from choosing our suppliers and ensuring their ethical credentials are aligned to ours, to living by our brand values.

We were the first bank to be Living Wage accredited and pay the real Living Wage, the first to achieve the Fair Tax Mark and the first Carbon Literate Bank.

As part of our commitment to help build a sustainable society, employees receive carbon literacy training so they can learn about how their actions affect the planet and use this knowledge to make more informed choices.

This training and our ongoing conversations create a better understanding about how we can reduce our carbon footprint as individuals and as a business.

Unity is also a Women in Finance Charter signatory, a member of the Banking Standards Board and holds the Investors in People Gold standard.

■ See our latest Impact Report at [www.unity.co.uk/impact-report/](http://www.unity.co.uk/impact-report/)



**Bangla Housing Association was able to increase its support for the Bangladeshi community in London thanks to Unity Trust Bank funding**



Call **0345 140 1000** or visit [unity.co.uk](http://unity.co.uk) to find out how we can help your business. Follow us on LinkedIn, Twitter, Facebook and Instagram



# Electric hub opened

Birmingham's first ESB Energy multi-charging hub for electric vehicle users has been officially opened at a flagship site in Navigation Street.

The hub includes four rapid (50kW) multi-connector chargers and two fast chargers (22kW), allowing eight EVs to charge at once.

Last year, Birmingham City Council announced it had secured funding through the Office of Zero Emission Vehicles to roll out 100% renewable energy electric vehicle charge points across the city.

Navigation Street is the first of 394 fast and rapid charge points being rolled out across the city over the next two years by EV infrastructure provider and specialists ESB Energy.

The council's Route to Zero Action Plan, published last year, identified electric vehicle charging as a key priority, with an aim to have more than 9,000 charge points in Birmingham by 2030.

Speaking at the launch of the new hub, Councillor Waseem Zaffar, said: "Delivering a best-in-class electric vehicle charging infrastructure network is a key priority in our Route to Zero Action Plan.

"It's a major step in improving air quality in the city and will be key to the electrification of our taxi fleet.

"I'm delighted to have reached this important milestone and look forward to seeing more charge points being installed across Birmingham over the coming months."



Business development manager of ESB Energy, Brian Carroll, left, and Councillor Waseem Zaffar

## TREES PLANTED IN HONOUR OF NEW EMPLOYEES

A forest of 1,000 trees is being planted to celebrate new staff joining a business outsourcing provider.

Sigma Connected has bought the young trees with the dual aim of helping to cut carbon emissions and to celebrate new colleagues completing their probationary periods at the firm.

The Birmingham company, which offers 'white label' customer contact centre services across the energy, water, retail and financial services, has signed a partnership with international environmental charity Treedom for The Sigma Forest, with thousands more trees to be planted in the coming years.

As part of the initiative, Sigma Connected staff receive a photo of the moment the tree, which could be a fruit tree or another species, is planted in either Tanzania, Ecuador or Madagascar. They then receive regular updates about the tree and

the farmer caring for it.

Jo Regan-Iles, group people officer at Sigma Connected, said: "We are committed to reducing our carbon footprint, which means more than just taking real measures to cut the amount of CO2 we produce. Forests play a vital part in the ecosystem by not only absorbing carbon but increasing habitats for local wildlife.

"By gifting a tree to each of our colleagues we are not only recognising their achievements and growth with the firm, but also demonstrating our commitment to them and the planet. We are delighted to be involved in the Treedom initiative and look forward to partnering with them for many years."

Founded in 2010, Treedom allows people to adopt or dedicate a tree, improving the environment and helping to provide social benefits to farmers and their workers.

Climate change is one of the most pressing and urgent challenges for humanity today.

Landscape professionals can lead the way with a holistic and integrated approach and bridge the gap between the built and natural environment.

Sustainable actions, commitments and integrated approaches including implementation of green infrastructure, based on the foundation of the natural environment can help in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from all sectors of our economy, including the built environment.

Landscape professionals are uniquely placed to bridge the gap between the built and natural environment, taking a holistic approach to planning and design of development, while delivering on climate resilient landscapes.

They can provide an integrated view on green infrastructure, permeating through every stage of planning and design process, implementing sustainable measures such as: infrastructure designs for natural flood management, energy and carbon efficient strategies, embedding nature-based solutions and enhancing resilience.

Through good design practice, which at any scale aims to strike a balance between the different elements of functionality, durability, understanding of local natural and cultural elements and visual appeal. This holistic approach is a cost-effective way of providing sustainable solutions, such as visual impact and management of climate risks.

By applying a holistic approach to project planning, design and management, landscape professionals can make key contributions to reducing construction costs, making more efficient use of land and using sustainable materials in construction practices, thereby ensuring high standards of delivery against climate and economic objectives.

## Global climate commitments

COP26 in Glasgow is a defining moment as it will determine the scale of commitment and transformative action that will be required to limit global warming in the next decade. As COP26 host, the UK has an additional responsibility to

# The built environment

demonstrate globally, what further climate action can be taken to reduce emissions.

## Path to a low-carbon future

To limit global warming to 1.5°C, transformative change is required within the energy, land, urban and infrastructure (including transport and buildings), and industrial systems. Following the publication of the Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C and the UK Government's commitments to net zero emission targets, the Landscape Institute has further strengthened its commitment to deliver transformative climate and nature-based solutions within the landscape sector.

The LI's 2020 Greener Recovery report addresses questions how the landscape sector can deliver a sustainable recovery from the pandemic. An unintended, yet welcome outcome of the pandemic lockdowns was an improvement in local and global environmental conditions. The reduction in social, economic and industrial activity led to improved air quality in urban spaces, cleaner rivers, reduced noise pollution and improved conditions for local wildlife.

The UK Government can maintain these significant gains by: taking a natural capital approach to new infrastructure and housing

investment; investing in maintenance and renewal of existing places; setting fairer standards for green space; investing in natural solutions to climate change; and investing in green skills, digital and data.

The LI's 2021 Landscape for 2030 report further demonstrates how landscape professionals can respond to the climate crises. The report showcases examples of best practice, where landscape professionals provide an integrated, holistic approach to climate action, incorporating both mitigation and adaptation measures.

Some examples of how landscape professionals can play a central role in providing integrated mitigation and adaption solutions on range of different scales are:

- Reducing embodied carbon of outdoor spaces.
- Implementing energy saving measures such as: living roofs and tree planting, reducing food miles by integrating and maximising local food production in the landscape
- Enabling non-vehicular transport by designing for low-carbon travel routes
- Using sustainable urban drainage systems to adapt to increasing flooding and coastal erosion
- Increasing urban heat resilience by installing urban green infrastructure to improve thermal performance of buildings and reduce the urban heat island effect



Jane Findlay is a landscape architect, president of the Landscape Institute and the founding director of Fira. She is a masterplanner and designer with over 36 years' experience of designing and delivering large and complex projects, and is particularly experienced in the design of the healing landscape for healthcare.

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sustainability



Jo Regan-Iles



# A glimpse of the future

The concept of driverless vehicles has been with us for a while, but a West Midlands firm has broken new ground by selling a passenger shuttle to a local authority. JON GRIFFIN hops aboard for an action ride.

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"It's like a giant road sweeper," says the security guard as £250,000 worth of cutting-edge technology heads towards the entrance of the National Exhibition Centre.

It could be a scene from a James Bond movie, a Gerry Anderson space-age puppet series or a Star Trek episode – but this is real life, not fiction.

The quarter-of-a-million-pound 'road sweeper' heading towards me is nothing less than a likely template for the future of travel in the 21st century, another nod in the seemingly irreversible direction of greener, more environmentally friendly modes of transport.

An intriguing comparison perhaps, but there's rather more ingenuity to the Auto-Shuttle – a potentially landmark development in the illustrious annals of West Midlands manufacturing – than can be found within the framework of a standard council road sweeper.

The Auto-Shuttle, in fact, marks something of an industry first – the first autonomous vehicle of its kind to be sold commercially by manufacturers Aurigo. It marks a significant investment by Solihull Council in a greener, more environmentally friendly future for our towns and cities, where climate change is never very far from an increasingly vociferous public debate.

It's also an investment in the technology of tomorrow – a milestone in the development of driverless vehicles which could transform how the world moves from A to B more efficiently and with significantly less carbon footprint.

And the shuttle, it should be noted, is also a product of a region which has long been a byword for world-leading innovative manufacturing in transport, the region which gave birth to the likes of Herbert Austin's Austin Seven or Alec Issigonis's Mini.

Nobody is drawing any heady comparisons yet with such legendary icons of West Midlands industry but shuttle manufacturers, Coventry-based Aurigo, believe the vehicle genuinely has the potential to revolutionise transportation around towns, cities and rural areas, both in the UK and overseas.

As I take my seat in this ultra-



modern piece of hi-tech machinery, it occurs to me that it's my first journey on a public highway in a driverless vehicle, albeit one with two safety operatives sitting in the front seats to ensure nothing untoward occurs.

It's a little like a theme park or fairground ride without the candy floss stalls and the queues of excited youngsters. After all, this is a seven-minute, one-mile-plus circular tour of the NEC highways – chosen for a month-long trial of the Auto-Shuttle following Solihull Council's £250,000 investment – rather than a turn on the rides at Drayton Manor Park or Alton Towers.

There's a pleasant autumnal view of the NEC lake to enjoy as the electric shuttle snakes its way past Resorts World, the car parks and the various hotels dotted around the complex. Seven minutes later, the shuttle drops our small party of volunteer travellers off at the NEC entrance, safe and sound. We are back, for now, in the world of human-operated vehicles.

Aurigo, a division of the Richmond Design and Marketing Group designing, developing and building cutting-edge vehicles at its engineering centre, supplied the £250,000 electric shuttle as

part of the passenger trials recently undertaken at the NEC. It's a first for Aurigo – and a first for the NEC.

The RDM Group was originally established in Coventry in 1993 by former Rover Cars executive David Keene, who had spotted a gap in the market for electrical-based solutions after meeting a wide variety of SME suppliers developing new state-of-the-art technology. Aurigo was later established as a division of RDM to explore and develop autonomous technology innovations, including the Auto-Shuttle.

Carrying up to eight passengers, the shuttle uses a suite of sensors

to understand its surroundings, enabling it to move around safely and negotiate other live traffic with little or no operator input. As far as I could tell, there was little input from the two 'operatives' on our seven-minute tour of the NEC.

The test trials at the NEC, backed by funds from the Greater Birmingham and Solihull Local Enterprise Partnership, have seen the Auto-Shuttle operate autonomously along a mile-long pre-mapped section of Pendigo Way between Hall 5 and Resorts World, giving up to 1,000 travelling 'guinea pigs' a glimpse into the transport

**Aurigo is a division of the RDM Group which was founded by David Keane**

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of the future in a technology-driven world.

Once complete, experts believe the Auto-Shuttle could be used to support other ‘first and last mile’ journeys – short, repetitive distances – in and around Solihull, and could possibly be used at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham next year.

Aurigo operations manager Ricky Raines – who is taking part in the NEC trials as one of the two safety officials manning the vehicle – says: “All our vehicles are fully electric. We are not trying to reinvent the wheel, we are trying to get autonomous technology developed further.

“We have to come up with a clever way to build these vehicles without expensive tooling. We have built three Auto-Shuttles so far and we are planning to make more. The other two are back at Aurigo undergoing testing.

“This is a world first for us. It is the first commercially owned Auto-Shuttle, the first one that has been sold [to Solihull Council]. We are going to be supporting them in the first trials, and then possibly looking at handing it over to them to see if they can operate it themselves.

“We have got the expertise, we have got the systems in place so it might be easier to leave it to us. Autonomous vehicles are going to be the future – they can be used in more controlled environments such as business parks and airports.”

Raines says the shuttle could play a major role in tackling parking problems in towns and cities by using park and ride facilities on the edge of conurbations and utilising the Aurigo vehicle for transport into centres.

“It will free up real estate and make parking easier. It’s also a very nice green story. We are speaking to a lot of councils and government agencies who are looking at the bigger picture and the future of transport. Implementing autonomous vehicles should ultimately provide a safer method of transport because there is less room for human error.”

He says the Aurigo electric



The Aurigo Auto-Patrol can be used at a diverse range of events



For left, Councillor Ken Hawkins, Solihull Council, Gary Masters, NEC Campus general manager, Chris Lane of TfWM and GBSLEP board member Ewa Truchanowicz

vehicles would appeal to a future world with an increasingly green agenda. “That is where the biggest interest is. There are green targets to be hit and autonomous vehicles can be a big part of that.

“We have not put a timescale on this but I would say it is likely that autonomous vehicles will be introduced over the next decade on a slow speed, fixed path. You have to build up a load of trust with the public.

“With every project we undertake we are further along with the technology. We are doing it in a real-world environment, which brings it forward in leaps and bounds.”

Judging from the initial reaction to the NEC trials, there already seems to be an encouraging level of trust in the Aurigo transport revolution.

Councillor Ken Hawkins, of the Environment and Infrastructure Portfolio at Solihull Council, says: “Connected Autonomous Vehicle technology has the potential to revolutionise the way we get around our towns, cities and rural areas as well as transport goods. The trial is all about looking at how we can practically and safely start to incorporate autonomous vehicles into our future transport infrastructure.

“Alongside the obvious environmental benefits, this is an excellent example of how smart technology could be used to cut congestion and improve public transport.”

Meanwhile, West Midlands mayor Andy Street points out: “The region is at the cutting edge of the development of Connected Autonomous Vehicles technology and this real-world trial offers an excellent opportunity to understand the role autonomous vehicles can play in our transport system.

“This technology has the potential to change the way we travel and will no doubt become a key part of our future transport system. On top of that, this emerging high-value sector in research and manufacturing is already playing an increasingly important role in the green industrial revolution happening right here in the West Midlands.”

Paul Thandi, CEO of the NEC Group, says: “We are proud to launch this innovative project in partnership with Solihull Council. It is by pioneering technology projects like CAV that we can continue to invest in the sustainability of the live events industry and the wellbeing of future generations.”

Back at the sharp end of the

**“This technology has the potential to change the way we travel and will no doubt become a key part of our future transport system.”**

NEC trials, Ricky Raines says confidence in the Auto-Shuttle and other autonomous vehicles is likely to grow as the public becomes more familiar with the concept of driverless vehicles.

“The trials enable people to get used to seeing the vehicles, how they operate, what they look like, giving them information about what to expect in the future. There is always the odd one or two that are against it, but the slow introduction of them will build people’s confidence.”

Aurigo currently boasts four separate autonomous products at its engineering centre in Coventry, including the Auto-Shuttle, the four-seater Auto-Pod, the Auto-Dolly luggage and cargo vehicle aimed at airports and the newest Auto-Patrol vehicle, which comes with an attached drone and could be used to provide security at sports events and festivals.

Meanwhile, the manufacturer has raised its burgeoning national profile further by showing off its hi-tech wares at October’s Global Investment Summit in London, one of a ‘green dozen’ innovative firms selected for their sustainability credentials.

Hosted by Boris Johnson and supported by members of the Royal Family, the summit has pledged to demonstrate Britain’s commitment to a green future in the UK and abroad ahead of the global COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow.

Minister for Investment Gerry Grimstone paid tribute to the West Midlands pioneers. “Aurigo and the other businesses show why the UK is a global hub for green technology – from major advances in tidal turbines and fusion energy to electric vehicle development and zero-emission aircraft. These industries of the future will not only help ensure a cleaner, greener planet but also create high-value jobs across the UK.”

Aurigo’s presence at the London summit came just weeks after it announced its best month of autonomous sales, with £500,000



Aurigo operations manager Ricky Raines

of new deals in place with local authorities, universities and other commercial partners.

And as the green agenda becomes an unstoppable feature of the daily national conversation, this small West Midlands company, which currently employs 70 people, appears to be increasingly well placed to take advantage through its range of innovative electric products.

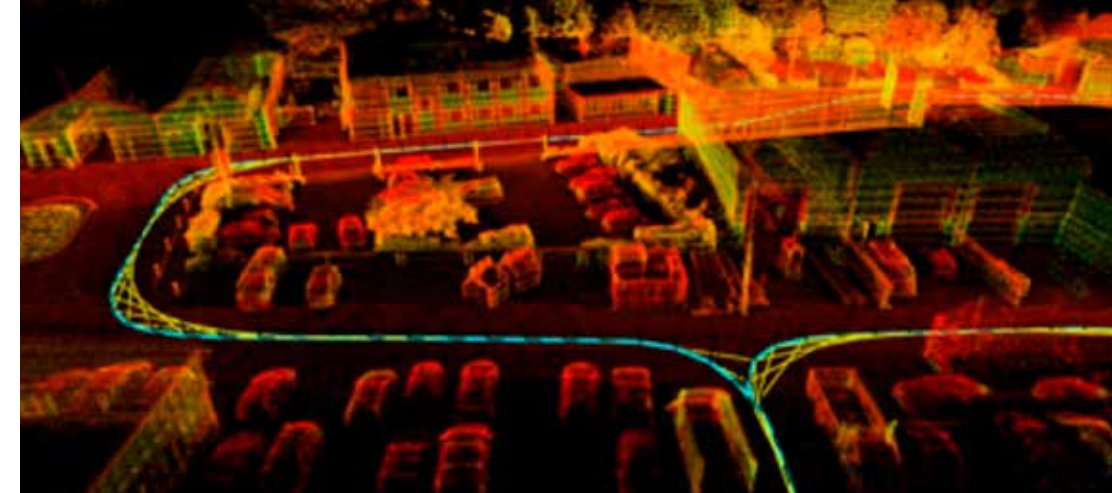
“You have got big organisations trying to break into the autonomous

vehicle sector but we are definitely a world leader,” says Raines. “Aurigo has approached this at a slow speed – we are not just looking at producing autonomous vehicles, it’s also about implementing them in real world environments.

“We have already had lots of enquiries – we hope that our vehicles will eventually be used all over the world. The costs will come down when they are being used on a larger scale. This is a very exciting time for us.”



Precise engineering at RDM, Aurigo’s parent company



The firm is a leader in autonomous control systems





# Supporting you and your business

As a business owner, you will have many commitments to meet and goals to strive for. On a daily basis, you may be considering the growth potential and valuation of your business, ensuring the welfare of your staff, and managing customer and supplier relationships.

But that's not all. On top of your business responsibilities, you will also need to keep on top of your own personal finances and, most importantly, understand how one can impact the other.

We offer a friendly, local service, backed by the strength and security of FTSE 100 company, St. James's Place Wealth Management. Crucially, we understand that business and personal financial management need to be considered hand-in-hand; our experience and support can help you successfully secure and enhance both.

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# Social and governance investing

## BEYOND THE 'E' IN ESG

With the Glasgow climate-change conference nearly upon us, much of the talk is of investing to limit global warming.

But with all this emphasis on the environment, businesses must not lose focus on social and governance factors – the S and G in ESG investing. As part of our commitment to responsible investment, St. James's Place aims to ensure they don't.

Governance refers to the way companies are led – for example, how their boards and shareholder groups are made up and remunerated, and how they make decisions.

Social factors look at how companies manage their relationships with workforces, supply chains and communities. These factors are crucial because good practice in S and G can help increase profits and financial sustainability, while bad practice can be disastrous for corporate reputations and share prices.

Well-run companies perform better financially, so fund managers have paid close attention to governance since long before ESG became popular.

### How social and governance factors link to business performance

Many studies have shown that social performance contributes to financial performance and therefore share prices.

For example, analysis by S&P Global Ratings found accounting for social concerns when investing can protect portfolios, especially as part of a comprehensive ESG investing strategy.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile, numerous studies have shown that diversity in boards – an essential aspect of good governance – is positive for long-term performance as it encourages innovation, avoids group think and



JON LEE,  
director at  
Throgmorton  
Associates

improves decision making. For example, a 2020 McKinsey report found companies with higher levels of ethnic diversity were 36% more profitable than their peers.<sup>2</sup>

### How to invest in social and governance factors

St. James's Place invests in social and governance factors via numerous processes and initiatives, from signing modern-slavery and human-rights conventions to making sure supply chains have increased traceability and integrating consideration of communities into our investment decision processes.

St. James's Place also prefers to actively engage with companies with poorer ESG practices rather than screen them out of our portfolios.

### What else is St. James's Place doing?

St. James's Place has committed publicly to leading on positive ESG

impacts. For example, we have joined Climate Action 100+, which engages with 167 top companies to move them towards net zero, and signed the UN PRI, which promotes sustainable investment practices.

But social and governance factors are equally important to us. In the social field, St. James's Place continues to work with sustainable suppliers; build our diverse, inclusive workforce; and create a culture of learning and development.

We also have strong governance practices throughout our business, reflected in our membership of FTSE4Good Index, Business in the Community – the Prince's Responsible Business Network, the Good Business Charter and the UN Global Compact Network UK.

Our world is changing faster than anyone predicted. We believe responsible investing has a huge role to play in shaping a better world and building a sustainable future.

The value of an investment with St. James's Place will be directly linked to the performance of the funds you select and the value can therefore go down as well as up. You may get back less than you invested.

Sources: <sup>1</sup> What is the 'S' in ESG?, S&P Global, August 2021. <sup>2</sup> Diversity wins: how inclusion matters, McKinsey & Company, May 2020



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## A decade in business

The Birmingham office of international law firm Trowers & Hamlins is celebrating its 10th anniversary.

Since opening the Birmingham office in July 2011, Trowers & Hamlins has advised on some of the most prominent projects in the region, including 5G technology and HS2.

Head of the Birmingham office, Yetunde Dania (pictured in red dress), said: "It has been wonderful to see how much the Birmingham office has

grown and developed over the last 10 years.

"When we first moved to Colmore Row, we did so with the intention of establishing ourselves not only in the legal sector but also in the community itself.

"I take great pride in saying that ethos is still at the core of what we do as we continue to establish ourselves further across many different platforms."

### MIDLANDS HOTEL WINS BEST IN UK

Park Regis Birmingham has scooped the award for Best UK Hotel at the M&IT Awards 2021.

The awards ceremony, which was held at Evolution London in October, is regarded as one of the most prestigious events of the year for the hotel industry.

Organised by Meeting & Incentive Travel magazine, the awards ceremony brings together all sectors of the industry to reward excellence

in service. They are completely independent and voted for by customers.

Park Regis Birmingham – run by Switch Hospitality Management Group – opened its doors in 2016.

Managing director John Angus said: "This is a fantastic achievement for the hotel. To win Best UK Hotel is true recognition for our amazing team. I would like to thank them and of course our fantastic clients."



Park Regis regional sales manager Jessica Brabant and John Angus, managing director of Switch Hospitality Management Group

■ The overseeing of a rapid expansion of an electronics manufacturer in Walsall has led to Tony Hague being named as one of the LDC Top 50 Most Ambitious Business Leaders for 2021.

The CEO of PP Control & Automation, Mr Hague impressed judges with the way he has taken the business from £3 million in 2001 to a projected £30 million revenue this coming year, supporting more than 20 of the world's largest machine builders.

Investment in people and processes has been at the heart of Mr Hague's approach and helped beat off the challenge of over 600 nominees.

The programme, supported by The Times, celebrates inspiring leaders behind the country's most successful and fast-growing medium-sized firms.

"This is a tremendous honour – made possible thanks to everyone who works at PP Control & Automation," said Mr Hague.

"The last 20 months have been some of the most challenging I've ever known in business and all 230 staff have gone above and beyond to make sure we have continued to supply our customers."

The featured LDC Top 50 come from all corners of the country and operate across many sectors. Collectively, they employ more than 9,500 people and contribute more than £1.2 billion to the UK economy.



## Awards evening

Dragon's Den investor Piers Linney was the headline speaker at a black-tie dinner and awards evening which marked the end of Birmingham Tech Week in October.

Hundreds of tech leaders gathered at the ICC to celebrate the achievements of the region's leading technology investors and most exciting start-ups, such as Nourished – the Birmingham-based 3D edible vitamin brand founded by Melissa Snover – which won the tech scale-up award.

This year's Birmingham Tech Week brought together 1,500 attendees for face-to-face events and more than 1,000 for online sessions, to explore the region's future significance as the country's fastest-growing digital hub.

Chair Kim Leary said: "The tech sector in our region is booming, with a huge number of successful start-up and scaling businesses, and a growing ecosystem. Everyone has been working hard to shine a spotlight on the West Midlands so there's a real sense of celebration and collaboration across the city."



Melissa Snover



Pam Sheemar and Henrietta Brealey



Phil Oldershaw and Kim Leary



Anita Chumber and Ed James



Piers Linney and Ninder Johal



# Welcome investment

A £400 million allocation for a new Midlands Engine Investment Fund has been welcomed by the British Business Bank.

An additional £50 million has been allocated to the current MEIF programme to take it to £300 million, ensuring continuity of funding whilst the next generation of MEIF becomes operational and funds are made open to investment.

The current MEIF fund has invested £142 million in Midlands SMEs since launch in 2017. Its investments have helped leverage a further £150 million of additional private-sector funds into these businesses and is forecast to create more than 3,800 jobs.

Catherine Lewis La Torre, CEO of British Business Bank, said: "The Chancellor's announcement is a clear and welcome show of support for the Midlands' most ambitious and innovative businesses and the success of the MEIF to date. Since launching in 2017, the MEIF has helped more than 460 businesses invest, innovate, grow and create jobs.

"There is a strong sense of momentum and ambition in the Midlands right now. The region's



Sir John Peace

businesses are looking to come back stronger and push forward with growth plans. These funds will continue to support innovation, expansion and the creation of high value jobs."

Sir John Peace, chairman of Midlands Engine, said: "SMEs are the backbone of our dynamic Midlands economy - and for too long there have been barriers around access to appropriate finance for growth for ambitious firms.

"We are a region of entrepreneurs and truly ambitious businesses that can, and do, compete on the global stage as well as deliver high quality jobs and the products and services



Catherine Lewis La Torre

our nation needs.

"As we look to build an ever-stronger UK economy and act powerfully in global markets, access to financial support for development and innovation, and for expansion, including reaching new markets, is critical.

"Midlands firms stand ready to accelerate our economic growth, given the tools they need - and in fact, they are already delivering tangible impact and driving recovery.

"Finance for growth is simply essential which is why I am pleased to see government backing our business community with the confirmation of this investment."

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# State of the region's start-up ecosystem

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column

The West Midlands start-up ecosystem, with Birmingham at its core, is riding a wave of enthusiasm due to the Commonwealth Games, the 5G testbed, HS2, an abundance of talent and a host of other factors.

However, in my capacity as an entrepreneur and business trainer, I consistently come across founders who do not share the enthusiasm for the region that many of us have, due in part to issues around funding and market reach.

While it is important to continue to accentuate the region's profile to enhance its growth, it is even more important that all stakeholders pay close attention to the metrics that underscore the true state of the ecosystem.

One such metric can be found in the recently released Global Start-up Ecosystem Report 2021. Published by the Global Entrepreneurship Network, GSER contains a ranking of the Top 40 start-up ecosystems in the world, as well as the Top 100 emerging start-up communities globally.

Birmingham took its place in the Top 100 emerging start-up list, moving up three places from its 2020 ranking to 45th. All cities in the emerging ecosystems list were evaluated on four core metrics: performance of start-ups, the funding available to them, their market reach, and the talent available to them. For each metric, a rating of one to 10 was awarded. Across all metrics, Birmingham scored five for performance, six for funding, one for market reach, and nine for talent.

Personally, I find the ratings consistent with my experience within the ecosystem. Scoring nine out of 10 on 'talent' is not surprising considering the impressive enterprise support and talent development work being done by all the universities in the region, as well as enterprise support organisations such as Supertech Cluster, Birmingham Enterprise Community, Bruntwood, GBSLEP and BSEEN.

Considering the fact that the 'performance' metric is measured using valuations, exits and growth rate, a score of five out of 10 for Birmingham is justified and is an indicator of challenges within the other two metrics, 'funding' and 'market reach'.

Although there is an increasing amount of capital flows to the region, the funds are largely inaccessible for most of the start-ups, many of which are considered too early for the sort of funding available.

While more work needs to be done in relation to early-stage funding, the area where the region requires the most improvement is 'market reach'. Not only was Birmingham scored one out of 10 on this metric, it was a fall from scoring of two in 2020. In practical terms, a large number of start-ups in the region struggle to gain a strong market foothold for their products and services.

This inevitably leads to an inability to efficiently grow revenue, a situation which initiates a negative domino effect on profitability, valuation, fundraising and, ultimately, the region's economy.

Based on the foregoing, it is imperative that all stakeholders consolidate on the impressive work done thus far, while also making tweaks in areas that directly affect funding for idea or early-stage entrepreneurs, as well as access to market for all entrepreneurs within the region.

Idea-stage entrepreneurs are too early to access the angel, PE, VC and public growth funds available.

On the other hand, the sporadic £500-ish grants are too small and inconsistent to accelerate businesses from idea stage to a working MVP. As such, I recommend that relevant stakeholders facilitate the provision of £5,000 to £20,000 funds to early-stage businesses in the region, administer the funds through existing enterprise support organisations, and make training and milestone reporting a condition for funds disbursement.

To grow market reach for businesses, all stakeholders must prioritise the establishment of strong links to bigger local and international markets. Such partnerships serve as a catalyst for exponential growth for our businesses and our ecosystem as a whole.

My vision is to see the regional start-up community grow rapidly over the next 10 years to the point where we are at least ranked in the Top 10 of the GSER's Emerging Ecosystems list; I call it my "102030 vision" for Birmingham - Top 10, by 2030.

Our ecosystem is in its early growth phase and has a lot to be proud of. Yet, all stakeholders must continue to pay attention to the metrics that matter, and take the actions required to ensure that our region becomes one of the most attractive places to do business in the world.



Davies Okeowo is a business trainer and the CEO of PitchHub.co.uk which designs pitch decks for entrepreneurs



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# THE POWER OF WORD

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interview

**JON GRIFFIN  
meets the  
co-founder of  
an Edgbaston-  
based business  
whose translation  
and interpreting  
services are  
sought by clients  
all over the world**

In a quiet residential street in leafy Edgbaston, the very epitome of a Middle England suburban office location, a small Birmingham company is helping connect the world – with the aid of more than 350 languages.

The firm could be helping a Romanian patient receive the hospital treatment he urgently requires, oil the wheels of a multi-million-pound football takeover or smooth the passage for new lives in the Western World for frightened Afghan refugees.

It's all in a day's work for the 30-strong team – with the crucial backing of thousands of freelance linguists – who make up Word360, the largest supplier in the Midlands of professional translation and interpreting services.

The statistics on the Word360



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interview

website provide an insight into the scale and nature of one of Birmingham's more intriguing SMEs, with a near 30-year history of delivering language services, three million hours of interpreting under their belts, 27,000 happy clients and service users and a remarkable 14 million words translated to date.

Impressive though the figures undoubtedly sound, the bald statistics behind all those words over nearly three decades tell only part of the story. This is a Birmingham company with a genuine global network which can transform a hospital patient's life or a complex legal deal, to cite just two examples, at the click of a button.

Statistics aside, the rise and rise of Word360 – particularly in the last

five years – owe so much to the vision and drive of Kavita Parmar and her husband Tiku Chauhan, who have transformed a small operation into the biggest firm of its kind in the region, with current turnover approaching £10 million, and ambitions to eventually double that.

But it all began nearly 30 years ago in much humbler circumstances in Handsworth, when Tiku Chauhan's uncle RK Chauhan founded Express Interpreting, the forerunner to the Midlands market leader now proudly operating under the Word360 banner.

As Express Interpreting established itself over the years as a highly professional operator with a strong relationship with the NHS in Birmingham, the career of the

woman who would in due course go on to propel the company to greater heights was taking shape.

Co-owner and chief commercial officer Parmar recalls: "I had worked in the health sector as an optician for 11 years. I originally wanted to be an architect but when I realised it would take seven years to qualify, I thought I would go for a vocation which would give me better prospects.

"I was a locum working all over the country for the likes of Dollond and Aitchison, Specsavers, Optical Express – I specialised in domiciliary care, going out to patients in their own homes and into hospitals."

The entrepreneurial skills which she would later use to such beneficial effect in the eventual takeover and transformation of

**“We give local jobs to local people. If we work with the Dudley Group of Hospitals, for example, we want to recruit people who live in Dudley. If they are face-to-face interpreters, they are locally sourced.”**

Express Interpreting into Word360 became apparent when she set up a side business providing clothes for the elderly and disabled.

"Adaptawear started as a hobby and became a viable business. It was for the elderly, people with limited dexterity and mobility, who may not have had the capability to dress themselves. I wanted to create clothes that promoted independence whilst looking dignified."

Adaptawear proved so successful that the company was eventually bought out by a Scottish firm. "I had started a family and the offer was too good to be true – the business was taking up a lot of time and energy that I could no longer afford and I sold it in 2009. I went back to optometry because it fitted around having a family."

Just four years later both Parmar and her husband, a financial executive at car retailer Pendragon, were seeking fresh challenges – and saw potential in the world of interpreting and translation.

"I felt that I needed to push my skills and my husband also wanted a new challenge. The timing was right for both of us – it was a very certain step for me, I knew I wanted to do more in my career, I wanted to push my boundaries. He was looking to get out and do something on his own as well.

"We did our due diligence, the business had really good foundations, it had four staff, a turnover of half a million pounds with a strong network of reliable professional linguists. I had the entrepreneurial skills and Tiku came from a management background and had the management skills . . . we made a very good team.

"We bought the business in 2013 and I gave up optometry. We did a complete analysis of how we could create rapid growth, how we could develop and add value to the business." The key proved to be technology.

"For interpreters there was nothing there. It was a very manual business, everything was very paper based. We recognised that we had to innovate."

That innovation proved to be an automated platform using outsourced software which enabled

the booking of interpreters online for Word360 customers.

"That transformed the business – it meant that we could scale at pace. It was less about sectors and more about solving problems. Overnight we could offer 350 languages at the touch of a button. It was a game changer and pivoted the business.

"We have grown to become the largest supplier of interpreting and translation services in the Midlands. In Birmingham alone, we delivered 157 languages last year. The most in demand are Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic, reflecting the local demographic."

More exotic languages also form part of the Word360 repertoire, including Igbo (Eritrea, Nigeria and Somalia), Soninke (Mali and Senegal) and Twi (Ghana).

"We have a global freelance network of linguists that we can call upon. We work with jobcentres, community and religious groups. We have training courses which enable people to turn their languages into careers and become professional interpreters. It is about identifying people who want to learn and turn their language into a profession.

"We give local jobs to local people. If we work with the Dudley Group of Hospitals, for example, we want to recruit people who live in Dudley. If they are face-to-face interpreters, they are locally sourced."

Whilst the public sector still provides Word360's bread and butter, the Edgbaston firm has broadened its horizons to provide services for clients as varied as the BBC, DPD, the National Lottery, Ofcom, Highways England – and even the West Midlands footballing aristocracy.

"We can do everything from translations for packaging materials for B&M Stores, or creating a multi-lingual website for DPD."

More recently, the firm's skills and expertise have been in demand to help build new lives in the UK for Afghan refugees.

"We are getting a lot of refugees from Afghanistan in Birmingham, Somerset and elsewhere, and this is about helping them integrate and forge new lives. The Afghan crisis has brought interpreters to the public forefront, and enabled people to

understand the difference between interpreters and translators.

"Businesses often thought that using translators was outside their reach but we are finding that more and more businesses are coming to us. People are globalising a lot more since Brexit – companies used to recruit German, French or Mandarin students but this works out a lot more cost-effective."

She reveals that Word360 has undergone another 'step change' over the course of the coronavirus crisis. "We invested in technology and were able to offer remote interpreting services through telephone and video.

"We want our technology to be available to all businesses. We have pivoted this business to grow and deliver larger volumes. The ambition is to globalise the business. We have a good footprint in the US and UK, in the cosmetics industry, health care and social care. We want to grow this company over the next five years to a turnover of £20 million."

But it's not all about statistics and balance sheet growth at Word360, as Parmar is keen to stress.

"It is less about the numbers and more about achievement.

"We treat our business as an extended family – that family has grown to 30 staff who all believe in the strategies that we are trying to achieve and in the values by which we run the business. Being reliable and trustworthy are the values that our business has been built upon – we make sure that our team understand that vision and values are very important."

The emphasis on teamwork at Word360 seems to be paying off. The firm recently added to a clutch of industry accolades by winning two categories at the NHS Excellence in Supply Awards for Patient Experience and the Small Business Award.

But Parmar also sees the wider picture. "I think that success is relative. We get job satisfaction from the people we help along the way. It is about helping people and making that difference to a person or a life.

"This is an exciting time for the potential of the business. We have a very positive outlook here."

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interview





# Teeing off for charity

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social



Firms from across the West Midlands entered teams into a competition at Blackwell Golf Club in aid of the Bodie Hodges charity.

Sixty-four golfers teed off for the Corporate Pairs Challenge, sponsored by accountancy and recruitment firm Sheridan Maine and organised by 4th Revolution Marketing.

Funds raised went to Bodie Hodges, which helps families spend time together after the loss of a child.

**Left: Richard Horton, Neil Currie, Darren Gwynne and Keith Ross**



**Lloyd Moore, Mark Simpson, Thomas Shiels and Mark Barber**



**Matt Kind, Jonathan Roden, Richard Healy and Martin Cummings**



**Gary Lynch, Andy Mullen, Trevor Perry and Joe Ryan**



**Jamie Rodden, Chris Ball, Simon Adams and Josh Meekin**



**Joe Byrne, Shaun O'Leary, Pete Sanford and Ian Stringer**

## SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR DELOITTE

Financial services firm Deloitte saw its Midlands operation deliver double-digit growth across all its service lines over the last 12 months.

The practice said it has maintained its focus on recruiting and retaining talent to enable it to provide specialist, multi-disciplinary teams across multiple sectors, increasing headcount to more than 1,000 people across West and East Midlands.

Jane Whitlock, practice senior partner for the Midlands, said: "I truly believe attracting, retaining and investing in talent is the foundation of building trusted, long-term client relationships. This is imperative as we continue to navigate and adapt to a changing economy."

"Throughout the past 12 months we have witnessed growth across all our services lines, which is testament to our ability to change at pace alongside our clients and embrace new ways of working to minimise disruption."

"I am also extremely proud of how our people have supported each other as well as our clients during such a challenging time – and the outstanding commitments shown to our society partners and local communities."

"With the Commonwealth Games coming to our region next year, we have an opportunity to showcase the Midlands and show the rest of the world that it is a great place to live and work."

■ Birmingham risk management consultancy Equib is celebrating after winning contracts for two international transport infrastructure projects – the Auckland Link Alliance and Toronto-based Metrolinx.

Equib specialises in providing risk advisory and management services to heavy civil construction and infrastructure projects and programmes.

Bob Hide, managing director at Equib, said: "In our role as hands-on consultants, we are helping to raise risk understanding on some of the most ambitious mega projects ever undertaken in the UK and overseas."

"It's a real privilege to support the delivery of the Auckland Link Alliance through the multi-disciplinary review initiative, working alongside VINCI and Downer."

## RECOGNITION OF ACHIEVEMENT

The managing director of a Midlands accountancy firm who has been instrumental in raising thousands of pounds for charity has been presented with the British Empire Medal.

Kevin Johns, from Prime Accountants Group, was awarded the title for services to Solihull in the 2020 New Year's Honours list.

He was presented with the honour by the West Midlands lord-lieutenant, John Crabtree, at the

University of Birmingham.

Mr Johns has played a key role in a number of organisations in Solihull over the last 20 years. He has led Prime's fundraising efforts which have seen the business raise tens of thousands of pounds for charities such as Solihull Life Opportunities and Birmingham Children's Hospital.

"It was a wonderful and very humbling experience to receive the medal at the event in Birmingham," said Mr Johns.



**Kevin Johns receives his BEM from the West Midlands lord-lieutenant John Crabtree**

## NEW LEADER OF THE CIRCUIT

Michelle Heeley QC from No5 Barristers is the new leader of the Midlands circuit – the youngest person to be appointed the role.

Promoting social mobility and inspiring women to succeed at the Bar are just two of the goals she has set.

The former head of education and training at the circuit will replace fellow No5 Barristers' Chambers member Michael Duck QC, following his four-year term.



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# Flexible workspace

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property

Flexible workspace provider x+why will be opening at Brindleyplace after agreeing a joint venture to operate 40,000 sq ft of space at the estate.

Landlord Hines has partnered with the firm to operate the first, second and third floors at 6 Brindleyplace, which provide a fully serviced and managed environment.

x+why, which provides sustainable space for its occupiers, currently operates four locations in London. Its new Brindleyplace base represents one of its first moves outside the capital.

As part of the agreement, Hines and x+why will invest jointly in the new facility, which will provide space for hot desking and private offices of various sizes which can accommodate a range of businesses.

Rupert Dean, CEO of x+why, said: "When looking for options outside London to expand our business, it was important we chose locations which gave us the best opportunity to meet our targets and provide spaces which go far beyond only providing space in which to work.

"We know the office is not just about a place to be from nine to five, but a place to build culture, learning, mentorship, collaboration and fun. This building is a really exciting opportunity for us and one we cannot wait to bring to life."



## NEW ARRIVAL AT FAZELEY HOUSE

Alarm system specialist Verisure is launching a West Midlands branch after taking 2,300 sq ft of office space at Fazeley House in Aston.

Landlords Key Land Capital said the move will create new jobs and is expected to bring investment to the region.

Kevin Sharkey, managing director of Birmingham-based Key Land Capital, said: "Fazeley House has proved to be extremely popular with companies looking for high quality accommodation in a convenient location.

"Verisure identified the major business benefits associated with office space located just outside the city centre and we wish them success at their new branch."

Agent Ed Siddall-Jones was instructed by Key Land Capital to market vacant space at the refurbished property and negotiated the five-year lease with Verisure.

## HISTORIC SITE TO BE REDEVELOPED

One of Birmingham's most historic gun-making industrial sites is set to get a new lease of life after a multi-million-pound deal.

Birmingham developer Elevate Property Group has purchased the 0.79-acre 51-61 Price Street for an undisclosed sum – with the intention of redeveloping it into 84 apartments.

The property had been on the market for £2.5 million, and the sale was brokered by commercial property agents Siddall Jones.

Elevate Property Group has applied for planning permission for a scheme designed by Birmingham's K4 Architects Ltd which will provide a range of one, two and three-bed luxury apartments, including the restoration of Gunsmith House.

Ed Siddall-Jones, managing director of Siddall Jones, said: "The site includes the locally listed Gunsmith House which will be sympathetically restored by Elevate as a major part of the project.

"As the name Gunsmith House implies, Price Street was at the heart of Birmingham's gun-making industry which can trace its history back to the 17th century."

The site was granted outline planning permission for conversion and building work in May 2020. Elevate is hopeful of starting work on the project before the end of this year with completion projected for the end of 2022.

Harris Lamb acted for vendor Laycock Investments.

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property



## ARDEN UNIVERSITY SIGNS LEASE ON LOCK 14

Lock 14, Aegon Asset Management's newly refurbished office scheme, has been let.

Arden University has taken the entire 19,738 sq ft at the development on Summer Row in Birmingham.

The higher education establishment has agreed a 10-year term,

supplementing its existing premises at Centre City in Hill Street.

Aegon Asset Management has invested £1.8 million in a comprehensive refurbishment of the three buildings, which included significant structural alterations and a change of use – the buildings formerly

housed bars Mechu and Apres. The new Grade A space includes flexible meeting rooms, breakout spaces, kitchen, cycle storage, shower and changing facilities, plus a central courtyard and two roof terraces.

CBRE and Knight Frank advised Aegon on the deal.

## PROPERTY COMPANY INVESTS IN LANDMARK

Ashtrom Properties UK has purchased landmark office building Colmore Gate for £39.5 million.

Colmore Gate comprises 171,834 sq ft of office and retail space across 18 storeys and has 86 basement car parking spaces. It is currently let to five tenants, including the Crown Prosecution Service, AON and Tesco.

Knight Frank acted on behalf of Ashtrom Properties, while JLL advised Aviva Investors.

Guy Lewinsohn, CEO of Ashtrom Properties UK, said: "The acquisition of Colmore Gate is in line with our current strategy of investing in UK regional cities.

"We are excited to transform this landmark into a unique and exciting office building with strong ESG credentials and unrivalled amenity."

Joshua Morris, partner in the Capital Markets team at Knight Frank, said: "We are thrilled to have advised Ashtrom Properties on its purchase of Colmore Gate.

"The impressive landmark building represents a rare opportunity to deliver a significant repositioned office scheme into a supply-starved marketplace."





## INDUSTRIAL ESTATE SOLD

Hawne Trading Estate, a major Halesowen industrial estate, has been sold in a multi-million-pound deal.

The commercial property team at Thursfields Solicitors has advised on the sale which went to an undisclosed buyer.

Nick Jethwa, associate partner at agents G Herbert Banks Commercial, who advised the sellers, said: "Hawne Trading Estate has been managed by G Herbert Banks on behalf of a Worcestershire family who decided to sell in the early part of 2021.

"It was a significant opportunity in the West Midlands industrial market, which has been experiencing high



**Nick Jethwa of G Herbert Banks Commercial, centre, with Tony Gibb and Emma Hughes, both of Thursfields**

levels of investor demand.

"The site extends to approximately 7.5 acres, with buildings having a floor area of around 100,000 sq

ft. It offers asset management and development potential, with under-utilised buildings and areas of open land."

## A MOVE BACK TO THE BLACK COUNTRY FOR SECURITY FIRM



Security specialist GMS Group has returned to its roots by moving its HQ to the Black Country.

The firm has relocated to refurbished offices on a 60-acre site at Warrens Hall Riding School in Oldbury as it embarks on the next phase of its growth plans.

As well as redeveloping existing buildings to be the home for GMS headquarters staff, parent company the Male Family Group has upgraded the riding school facilities with a view to opening the doors for local good causes.

Previously based in Bromsgrove, GMS Group is home to a family of security specialist companies employing more than 500 staff nationwide. Customers include Jaguar Land Rover, Aston Martin, CEMEX UK, Kerry Foods, Neovia,

AF Blakemore & Son, Triumph Motorcycles, Vaux, Lineage, Avison Young and Grant Thornton.

The move to Oldbury from Bromsgrove symbolises a 'return home' for CEO Neil Male, who was raised in Dudley.

Mr Male said: "Everyone at GMS is motivated to make a positive difference to the region so our new Oldbury HQ will not be used just for business. With a strong interest in equestrian sports and the benefits horse riding can bring to many communities, we plan to work with local charities to open the doors for them to make use of our new home in their work.

"We are proud to hail from the Black Country and will continue to fly the flag for the region in our work for leading clients across the UK."

■ CBRE has appointed Will Ventham as head of its Birmingham office.

He joined the property consultancy in 2001, progressing to his most recent role as head of the Midlands office agency team.

He has advised on some of the region's highest-profile office developments, including Paradise, Arena, Brindleyplace, 55 Colmore Row and Blythe Valley Park. He will continue to advise key clients in addition to steering the Birmingham office, which employs more than 100 at its Temple Row HQ.

Mr Ventham takes over from Martin Guest, who has been head of office since 2005. Mr Guest will now focus on his role as regional managing director of CBRE's Midlands and South business, which includes the Birmingham, Bristol and Southampton offices.

He said: "I have worked alongside Will for 20 years and have been privileged to watch his progression through the business. He is a highly respected and knowledgeable adviser and a popular member of the CBRE family."



**Will Ventham, left, and Martin Guest**



**Khaleda and James Meredith**



**Sacha Dymova, Galina Thomas and Gareth Thomas**

# Launch of Lulu Wild

Guests including Instagram influencers and members of the press corps were treated to cocktails and a menu of modern Chinese food to mark the launch of Lulu Wild in Brindleyplace.

The Chinese restaurant and cocktail bar is run by the same team behind Aluna and Siamais in the Mailbox.

Marketing manager Naomi Aly said: "We are really proud of our new brand and hope everyone can see how we have upped the ante in terms of sass and sophistication."



**Anita Champaneri, Harish Nathwani and Alexandra Ionsecu**



**Eve Thomas and Louise Thomas**



**Liliana and Evie Farnell**



**James March, Fionnula Burke and Andrew Riley**



**Neha D'Souza and Lexi Florescu**



**Kelly Johnson, Amy Langston and Millie Frizzell**





## Chief technology officer appointed

**Pensions and investment advisory firm Isio has appointed its first permanent chief technology officer.**

Matt Glover, who will be based in the Birmingham office, is an experienced IT and change leader with 20 years of financial services experience. He joins Isio from Unity Trust Bank, having previously worked at Al Rayan Bank and NatWest.

Matt will lead Isio's technology and development teams and be responsible for its IT strategy and change portfolio.

Chief executive officer Andrew

Coles said: "Matt brings a wealth of experience and is perfectly placed to drive forward our digital innovation and development in the market."

"Our national network now spans eight regional offices and Matt will lead our internal team to ensure our strategy and infrastructure can support our rapidly growing business."

"Since becoming Isio last year we've achieved a great deal in a short space of time, and we thank interim CTO Jeremy Warren who planned and executed the IT strategy for launch."

## Portfolio manager welcomed

**Private equity firm Palatine has appointed Georgina Wendon-Smith as a portfolio manager.**

She is well known to the Palatine team having supported them on

several investments as an adviser.

Georgina joins from Beechbrook Capital, a specialist fund manager, where she was an associate director in the Birmingham office. With more than 10 years' experience in financial advisory, she has previously worked for Duff & Phelps and Grant Thornton.

Based in Birmingham, she will support the investment team with the current portfolio and new deals, predominantly across the Midlands and the south.

Richard Thomas, head of Midlands at Palatine, said: "We are delighted to welcome Georgina to the team. She is an excellent hire with a great skill set."

"We have had a very active 2021 so far with the exits from TTC and Wren Sterling, and a number of portfolio companies completing bolt-on acquisitions, so it's a great time to be strengthening our team ahead of a busy final quarter."



## New partner and head of department

**Law firm Ladders has appointed Damian Kelly as partner and head of its employment law service.**

A specialist in all aspects of employment law for more than 25 years, Damian joins Ladders from Black Country firm Higgs & Sons where he has been a partner since 2010.

Previously, he practiced at Eversheds in Birmingham, where he qualified and was then appointed partner in 2004.

Damian advises employers on a wide range of employment issues including contracts of employment, directors' service contracts, HR policies and procedures, disciplinary issues, redundancies and reorganisations, senior executive terminations, settlement agreements and tribunal claims. He also advises on managing relationships with trade unions, works councils and European works councils.

He regularly acts as a tribunal advocate and provides a range of employment law and HR training programmes for managers and HR professionals.

## Partner at Birmingham solicitors takes on judicial role

**Helen Tucker has been appointed a deputy district judge for the Midlands circuit.**

Helen, who is a partner at Anthony Collins Solicitors, will start sitting part time in county courts in the circuit from early 2022.

DDJs deal with a wide spectrum of civil cases, including housing, personal injury, claims for money, divorce and domestic violence matters.

She will remain an active partner in ACS's housing management team, co-leading the social purpose law firm's housing litigation service supporting housing associations and local authorities in the delivery of their housing management operations.

The appointment is for five years and can be automatically extended by the Lord Chancellor for further successive terms of five years – subject to the office holder's agreement and the retirement age of 70.

Peter Hubbard, senior partner at

Anthony Collins Solicitors, said: "On behalf of everyone at ACS, we would like to congratulate Helen on her appointment as a deputy district judge."

"We are proud to support our

staff and partners who pursue part-time judicial roles, and recognise the importance of doing so to support the administration of justice by our court service and judiciary."



## Expansion of property team at Midlands legal firm

**Midlands legal firm mfg Solicitors has expanded its commercial property team with the appointment of a new partner.**

Experienced lawyer Beth Margetson has joined mfg and will be based at the firm's Birmingham office in St Paul's Square.

Beth brings with her many years of expertise in all aspects of commercial property, including advice for landowners and developers on

the sale and purchase of land and buildings for development for various uses ranging from mixed use, industrial, energy, medical and education.

She will also support clients at mfg's other offices across Worcestershire and Shropshire.

Clare Regan, partner and divisional head of commercial property, said: "Beth is a superb addition to our team and the wider firm."

"Her experience is extremely impressive and her reputation has travelled far. She is already making an impact during this busy time as businesses start to get back to a sense of normality after a tough 18 months."

With 20 years' experience in the legal industry, Beth was highlighted as a Next Generation Lawyer and 'rising star' by the Legal 500 in 2018 and 2019.



From left, Clare Regan, Beth Margetson, Rhianon Clark and Ben Rothery





## Finance expert joins Cooper Parry Wealth

**Cooper Parry Wealth has appointed Sarah Lord as its first chief growth officer.**

Sarah is president of the Personal Finance Society and has been a board member for more than five years. She was a partner at Mazars LLP and more recently the chief client officer at Succession Wealth.

“My focus will be on developing and shaping our growth, expanding client solutions and driving wider reach with increased brand awareness,” she said.

Sarah’s expertise has been recognised with a number of national awards and nominations including being named in the Top 100 Most Influential – International Adviser 2018 and 2019, and shortlisted Personality of the Year – Professional Adviser Awards 2021.



## Graduate lands full-time position

**Principle Estate Management has rewarded a graduate with a full-time position after she excelled while working with them on a temporary contract.**

Esme Williams impressed the management at Principle with her analytical skills and was kept on to help in a number of areas, which has now resulted in her new full-time position as a business integration assistant.

She graduated with a first-class masters degree with honours in chemistry from the University of Birmingham.

Director Joe Jobson said: “Esme only joined us on a temporary basis, but has quickly become a great asset.

“Chemistry students learn fantastic analytical skills, which are very transferable to handling the company’s core block management business as well as the residential rented and commercial portfolios.

“Her science degree studies were very intense, so she emerged with a good work ethic and superb organisational skills, enabling her to quickly assess how long a task is likely to take and to constantly reprioritise.”



Mary Morgan and Dave Hodgetts

## Law firm names new CEO

**Midlands law firm Talbots has named Dave Hodgetts as its new chief executive officer.**

The experienced commercial director and qualified accountant joins after a 25-year career with Taylor Wimpey and E.ON.

One of his first tasks will be to put in place a five-year growth plan, the opening of new offices and the potential for future acquisitions.

“This is a very exciting time to be joining Talbots, a law firm that dates back more than 200 years and one that boasts an excellent reputation,” said Dave.

“We have emerged from the pandemic in a very strong position, with growth across all of our core areas of law, including residential property, trusts and estates, dispute resolution, commercial, family and criminal defence.”

Talbots Law has recruited an additional 50 staff over the last 12 months, with another 30 positions to fill between now and the end of the year.

His predecessor as CEO, Mary Morgan, said: “It’s fantastic that we have attracted Dave to the Talbots family, and he has come along at the right time in our development.”



## Head chef gets back to his roots

**Michelin-starred Birmingham restaurant Adam’s has announced the appointment of a new head chef.**

James Goodyear is classically trained and joins following a period working as head chef at Hide in London’s Piccadilly Circus.

The Coventry-born chef said: “The young team of chefs are great, very hungry and enthusiastic. I look forward to teaching them new techniques and working with them to continually improve their already exceptional skills.

“My culinary style is built around modern, European fine dining, so Adam’s is a great fit for me. Personally, this role is the perfect

opportunity to get back to my roots in the Midlands and take on an exciting challenge.”

Husband-and-wife team Adam and Natasha Stokes opened Adam’s in 2013 and it has since earned a Michelin Star, three AA Rosettes and most recently the number four rating in the Tripadvisor Travellers’ Choice Awards of best fine dining restaurants in the UK.

Adam said: “It’s the role of a head chef not just to cook, but to innovate, inspire and teach. James will be a great addition to our talented team and we are all looking forward to working with him.”



From left, Matt Long and Gary Hawkswood, both of Brindleyplace, and Jonathan Aspinall of Avison Young

## Property adviser taken on as a brand ambassador

**Birmingham property adviser Matt Long has been appointed as a brand ambassador for Brindleyplace in a newly created role for the estate.**

As head of tenant engagement and placemaking, Matt – who has more than 20 years’ experience in the local commercial property marketplace – will be an advocate

for those who work and visit Brindleyplace.

He joins Brindleyplace from Calthorpe Estates where he headed up customer and community relationships. He has also worked at Colliers International where, as a director, he was involved in the office agency activity in Birmingham, working as part of the

## Senior adviser strengthens team at PwC

**PwC has further enhanced its business restructuring services with the appointment of Rob Asplin as a senior adviser.**

Rob brings two decades of experience in the restructuring and private equity sectors, specialising in protecting and creating value in turnaround situations. Previously he has been a partner in a special situations fund, a portfolio chief restructuring officer, a non-executive director and has held senior roles in corporate finance and banking.

His appointment at PwC will centre on supporting UK businesses of all sizes to maximise value through the critical post-Covid recovery period. Rob will be particularly focused on working with private equity-backed businesses and PE owners in designing and delivering value recovery plans.

Rob Moran, partner and mid-market leader for BRS based in the Midlands, said: “It’s great to bring someone of Rob’s calibre and private equity expertise into our BRS practice as we continue to invest in our team.

“He brings a wealth of experience as an investor.”





# 5minutes with...

**Diane Benussi**

Founder of Benussi & Co, divorce solicitors

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downtime

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

Easing distressed clients into a positive frame of mind, so that we can get the best divorce for them, their children and their soon-to-be ex partner.

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

I set up Benussi & Co Limited in 1993 as a single subject business specialising in high net worth divorce, both nationally and internationally. In 2016, my daughter re-qualified as a solicitor (previously a VAT specialist in accountancy) and joined me in the firm. Since then I have stepped back from management of the business into the role of seeing new clients and reviewing each case in the firm every month. This makes my role very positive, seeing the clients and keeping in touch with their cases so that I can re-engage as necessary.

**How did your company respond to the coronavirus crisis?**

With agility! We are problem solvers.

**Has the fallout from the pandemic presented any opportunities as well as challenges?**

I, personally, saw Covid and its problems as a great opportunity to live in Norfolk, where I have had a house for 20 years. I improved the broadband and operated, seamlessly, from there. It was an amazing experience watching the natural world for a year. I was surrounded by deer, hares, badgers, seals and

millions of birds, and had time to 'stand and stare'.

**How do you get the best out of your staff?**

Employ special people, train them constantly, and nurture with loads of cake, Rudy's pizza and Asha's curry!

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

Very few. I delete in seconds, or action there and then.

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

Briefly – I hope!

**Highlights of your career so far?**

We have a vow of silence about our clients, except for those who publicly own up to being 'ours'. I never imagined any of the highs, lows, stress, vigour, entertainment and hilarity; and the unnamed characters that have been our clients have been awesome. I have travelled to amazing places: crossing on a ferry with waves breaking over the whole boat on a Scottish Loch in the middle of winter gales; going to a freezing Welsh Castle, again in the middle of winter; and flying to destinations I wouldn't have gone to otherwise. It has been a JOURNEY!

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

I was enthusing, enviously, over a client's upcoming trip to Iceland. She explained, as gently as she could, that it was a frozen food supermarket

she was going to shop in . . .

**Pet hates?**

Lack of candour.

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

"Try not to care so much".

**How do you relax away from work?**

Walking for miles with Cassie, my Spanish water dog, preferably with her charging through the waves on Holkham beach.

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

It is unique. It embraces everyone in a different way. New arrivals can't believe everyone is so generous, helpful and supportive for all their needs in the Birmingham business community.

I chaired the much-loved (now defunct) Birmingham Forward for two years and the face-to-face networking it organised was world class.

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

My first job was with International Computers Limited (ICL). I learnt to programme (Fortran) then designed operating systems in South Africa.

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

The book: Either a bird book for the area in which I am marooned, or Great Lives: A Century of 'Times' Obituaries. Every obituary starts a thought process.

The film: Truly, Madly, Deeply with Alan Rickman and Juliet Stevenson. I cry every time I see it.

The CD: Willie Nelson – any CD with Always on my Mind (so much better than Elvis's version).

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

Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, a magnificent woman who was judged very harshly in her later life.

Nelson Mandela for his dignity and statesmanship when his enemies finally turned him out of the jail they had incarcerated him in.

Sigmund Freud, so that he can see what he started and how it has progressed.

Rosa Parkes for being a simple woman who changed the world.

Seamus Heaney for his twinkling eyes and great brain.

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

Risotto, using Simon Hopkinson's foolproof recipe.



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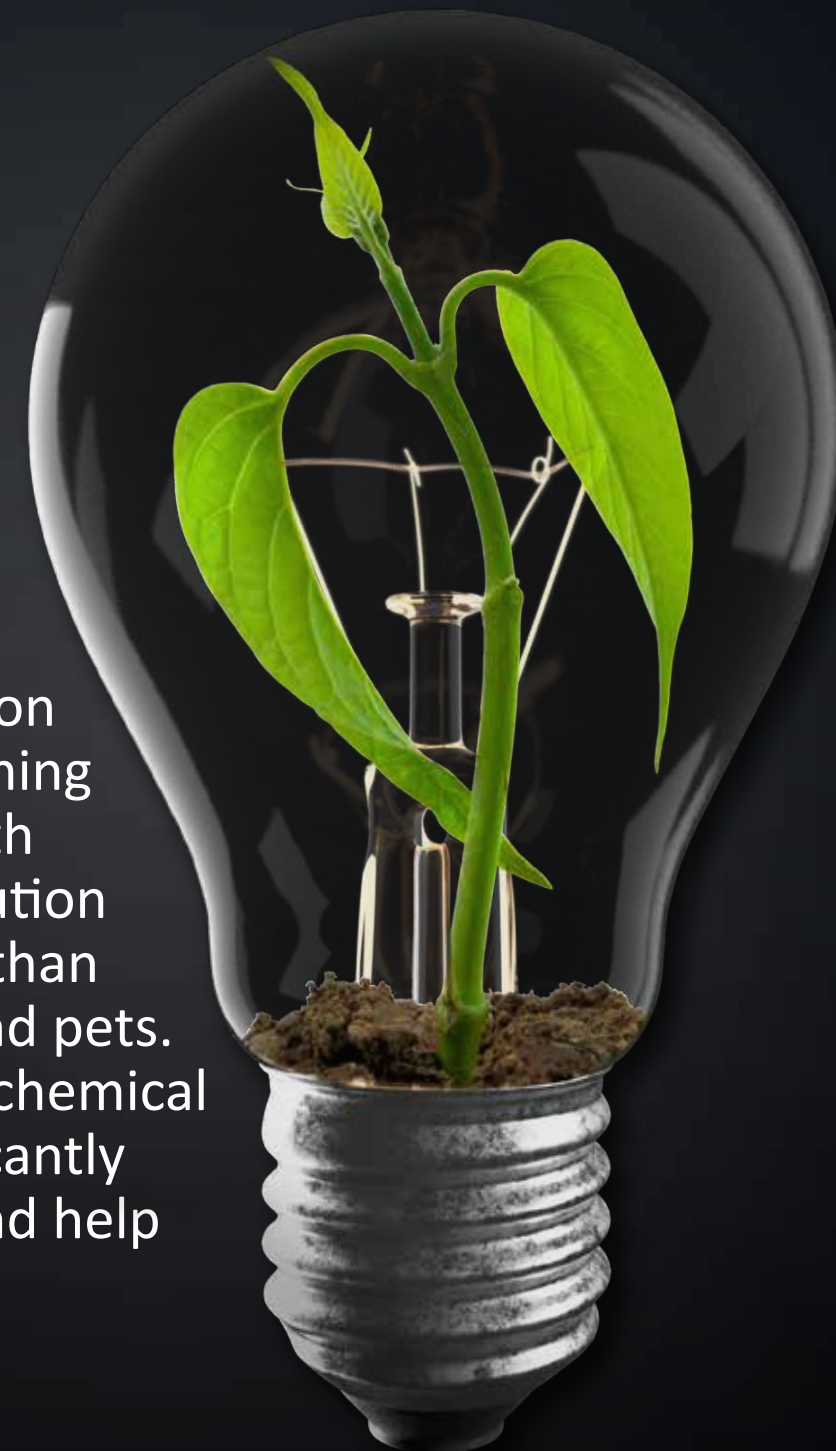


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