

Somerset Voice

The Official
Magazine of
Somerset
Chamber of
Commerce

June / July 2022

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100% Electric



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Front page: Electric vans are helping to deliver Bristol Airport's aim to be a net zero airport by 2030. Photo: Bristol Airport.

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FIRST WORD

Welcome to the June/July edition of Somerset Chamber's magazine, Somerset Voice. We know businesses are facing unprecedented pressures from all sides at the moment and we hope you will find our updates from the wider Chamber network on pages 24-26 helpful.

There, you will find details of the urgent action and support the British Chambers of Commerce is lobbying Government for as UK businesses continue to face a perfect storm amid stalling consumer activity, weakening confidence, soaring inflation and rising cost pressures.

The deteriorating economic outlook and the financial squeeze on businesses from soaring energy bills and the national insurance rise risks weakening labour market conditions even further by dampening recruitment and limiting firms' ability to increase wages and invest in their staff.

All we hear from members currently is of the difficulties they are facing trying to recruit. Rest assured we are listening and the Chamber network is taking your concerns to the very highest levels of Government.

More must be done to help people access rapid retraining opportunities for in-demand jobs, including assisting older workers to turn to more sustainable jobs. Introducing a new skills tax credit to incentivise employers to invest in training for workers would help to revitalise employer-led training.

But it's not all doom and gloom in this edition! Many of our members have been doing amazing things to reduce their carbon footprint to help both their businesses and the environment. You can find out more about them on pages 8-14.

We also highlight the incredible achievements at Hinkley Point C which has now spent £4.1 billion with local and regional companies, given £13.3 million to local community projects and invested £24 million into education, skills and employment support. There is more from EDF's latest socio economic report on pages 28-30.

Plus we've got all the latest news from our Business Partners on pages 15-17 and members on pages 31-37!

Emma Rawlings

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q1 2022

Inflationary Pressures Reach Uncharted Territory. The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) for Q1 2022 – the UK's largest independent survey of business sentiment and a leading indicator of UK GDP growth – shows inflationary pressures on firms reaching levels never previously recorded in its 33-year history.

AT A GLANCE

Cash flow

Most firms report no improvement to cash flow, with slightly more reporting worsening compared to Q4 2021.

As measured as a percentage balance, the manufacturing sector stands at -5%, the lowest level since Q1 2021, while the services sector stands at +4%, the lowest since Q2 2021.



Inflation

Almost two-thirds of firms overall expect to raise prices, increasing beyond what was already at record highs.

As measured as a percentage balance, the manufacturing sector stands at +74%, the highest level on record, while the services sector stands at +54%, again the highest on record.



For the full BCC QES Q1 2022 results see our website

www.somerset-chamber.co.uk



SOMERSET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q1 2022

Somerset businesses, like others nationally, are feeling the effects of inflationary pressures with over 80% of local business reporting that it is a larger concern than three months ago. The effect of continued COVID restrictions and infections in Europe is creating issues within the supply and logistics chains, continuing to impact electronics and raw materials such as timber, exacerbated by the conflict in Ukraine.

With recruitment still being difficult for many businesses, the trend to increase investment in training continues. But with cashflow pressures and the prospect of a recession looming, we may see this number drop over the course of the year as businesses tighten spend in the face of ballooning energy costs and increases to interest rates.



FEATURE Going green

More and more businesses are realising they can save time and money, as well as the environment, by adopting new ways of working that cut down on waste and pollution while helping to safeguard the world around them. Here our members share their stories of their green initiatives and environmentally-friendly schemes.

Bristol Airport

Bristol Airport has invested in three additional electric Nissan e-NV200 vans to its landside and airside operations.

This brings the total number of electric vehicles on site to five. The additional Nissan e-NV200 vehicles combines storage space, manoeuvrability, safety and will use the electric charging points installed throughout the airport.

Bristol Airport is also expecting delivery of a fully electric e-COBUS 3000 which will have the capacity to carry up to 110 customers to and from the terminal building and aircraft. A previous diesel

COBUS will be re-manufactured and converted into a fully electric e-COBUS 3000 for the airport's airside operations.

Both the e-COBUS 3000 and the new Nissan e-NV200 Combi vans are another step forward in the Airport's aim to achieve net zero operations by 2030. Bristol Airport has already made three key commitments to be a net zero airfield, with net zero buildings and operate a net zero fleet of vehicles by 2030.

Martin Fisher, Motor Transport Manager at Bristol Airport, said: Sustainability is a key focus for us and we are always looking to explore different technology which can help us reduce our impact on



the local environment.

"Our sustainability achievements and ambitions, which has been recognised at a global level, has always been a driver of our development and is now very firmly integrated into our business. This project is only one of many in where we are working on to achieve being a net zero Airport operation by 2030."

Path Financial

Path Financial - the first and only national financial advisory firm in the UK set up specifically to tackle the climate crisis - has proved its ethical credentials even further after securing B Corporation (B Corp) Certified business status and the Good Egg mark from Good With Money.

B Corp is one of the highest certifications a business can receive for sustainability. The firm secured a hugely impressive 99.1 score, making it one of the most sustainable businesses in the UK.

The ethical finance firm has also received the Good Egg mark from consumer financial advice website Good With Money, awarded to companies that are making a positive impact for the environment and society.

Since its inception in 2019, Path Financial has established itself as the go-to advisor for thoughtful investors looking to put their money where their morals are. Every pound that Path Financials' clients invest is driving positive change towards a more sustainable world.

Somerset-based Luke Sword, Financial Planner at Path Financial, said: "This is part of an ongoing



commitment for us. Our next big goal is to become Net Zero by the end of 2022 - watch this space!"

If you want to align your money with your values, Path Financial would be delighted to hear from you. Arrange a chat with Luke - on the phone, online or in-person at Path Financial's Bath office - by contacting him at luke.sword@thepath.co.uk or 03330 503 300.

A C Mole

At A C Mole we have always been aware of our carbon footprint but as with many other businesses, the Coronavirus pandemic, the news headlines and various other factors such as the COP26 summit, hit home that we needed to do more to play our part as a local business



to mitigate and reduce our impact on the environment.

Our journey first began back in September 2015 when we had solar panels fitted to our office roof. To put the environmental benefits of these into perspective, as a result, at date of writing we have saved over 37,500kg of CO2 emissions and planted the equivalent of 1,720 trees. Well and truly a worthy investment.

Other changes we have implemented include transitioning from paper to electronic files, reducing printing and postage, increasing our awareness of unnecessary wastage on a variety of materials we use on a daily basis and really pushing to cut down on single use plastic.

We've supported initiatives such as the Somerset Wildlife Trust's dormouse scheme on the business park and are delighted to be part of the Blackbrook Green Forum, set up with other businesses with the aim of working together to create a business park that is not just place to work, but also supports the network of wildlife that we are so lucky to have within our community.

Weston College

Weston College has long been a champion of sustainability and social action, with all new campuses designed to BREEAM standard, and renewable technologies built into its teaching infrastructure as early as 2013 at its South West Skills Campus (Construction Centre of Excellence) for students to see sustainable construction in action – first hand.



Principal Dr Paul Phillips CBE said: "At Weston we are already upskilling our young people to meet The Department of Education's sustainability and climate change strategy, which sets out the Government's clear vision for green skills across England and highlights how education and colleges can lead the way.

"We are also helping businesses navigate towards net zero as the lead for the West of England Institute of Technology (WEIoT). One of the ways we are doing this, is through the WEIoT's new Advanced Engineering campus, built within GKN's new cutting edge Global Technology Centre."

Based within Bristol's aerospace heartland, it is a unique place to study as part of our higher technical skills engineering apprenticeships, where students can learn about the decarbonisation of flight and see the latest engineering technologies being used as they unfold for greener aviation.

The College's ethos, however, is that we also recognise that the talent needed to solve the global climate change crisis, will come from all backgrounds. More importantly, we also see that 'green jobs' are a great chance to level up and want to ensure that our green skills agenda is as inclusive as possible.

Cornish Mutual

Farmers across the region are striving to measure and improve their carbon footprints. To support their members with this, Cornish Mutual's Future Farming programme has explored ways farmers can reduce their environmental impact and adapt to upcoming changes.

Funding for environmental improvements is changing but there are new opportunities emerging, said Gary Rumbold (pictured), FWAG South West Chief Executive. In the future he believes farmers will benefit from both private and public sector funding but advises caution in the early days.

Mark Brooking, Sustainability

Director at dairy cooperative First Milk, believes regenerative agriculture should be part of all farms' plans. The regenerative farming principles focus on soil health, encouraging plant diversity and maintaining living root.

He said: "We're trying to make sure we treat the soil as the most important asset on the farm. If you have healthy soil, you'll end up with healthier and more productive plants."

Rising costs of fuel and fertiliser are adding extra pressure on farmers. One beef and sheep farm has reduced fertiliser use with Bokashi, a process which creates compost through fermentation of manure.

Meanwhile, there is ongoing work to develop farm machinery which



can run on alternative tractor fuels, for those looking to reduce their reliance on diesel.

To read Cornish Mutual's Future Farming environment articles in full, visit: <https://www.cornishmutual.co.uk/future-farming-programme/>

Somerset Film

In 2019, Somerset Film declared a climate emergency and have been committed to reducing their carbon footprint by 10% each year. They use their programme of digital media activities across Somerset to inform and facilitate action to mitigate the climate emergency, their core staff and freelancers are all trained by Albert (BAFTA) in sustainable production.

Alongside this, the café at their media centre, The Engine Room, features a wonderful vegan and vegetarian menu. They are powered by a green electricity supplier and have recently purchased a pedal generator which can charge mobile phones and power projections. They have supported the Bridgwater Active Travel Day and been involved with the Big Plastic Count to encourage change with the use of



plastic packaging.

On the last Saturday of every month, they host a Repair Café where anyone can bring along a broken household item to be fixed by volunteers. This scheme is helping to cut the use of raw materials, energy and CO2 emissions by reusing instead of manufacturing new products.

Last month, they also held a successful Seed and Plant Swap event, with another planned to take place for Seed the Day in September. Seed the Day is a local environmental community event which Somerset Film are heavily

involved with, this year they will also be screening an environmental film, Seed to Seed.

Find out more about Somerset Film at The Engine Room by visiting their website: www.somersetfilm.com



SDS

Over the last few months SDS has been working with our colleagues at SWMAS and we were delighted to achieve our future net zero benchmark.

We recognise the importance of making a full and lasting commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions from our activities, in support of the wider commitment of the world to limit global temperature increases and the impact on the planet.

Our industry is sometimes mistakenly thought to be not the kindest to the environment. However, while promoting the use of FSC paper guaranteeing that

it comes from responsible and sustainable sources and supplying PaperCut software which reduces unnecessary wasted prints and cuts down usage, we can really impact our client's printed output.

But it seems that paper is being made out to be a bad thing for businesses to use. I know we are obviously biased but it's worth considering the impact of the alternatives.

A single sheet of paper printed via a laser printer or photocopier equates to around 6g of CO2 whereas an email with an attachment during its life will equate to around 50 g CO2.

Elsewhere in our organisation we have invested in software to diagnose issues without the need to



travel to customers and more virtual meetings have all helped in our journey to net zero.

Please contact us if you wish to know more about our environmental policies please contact at info@sds ltd.uk.com or 01278 72378.

James Tobias

Sustainability is a huge focus for James Tobias and winning the Somerset Business Award's Environmental Achievement award in 2021 really helped position us well ahead of the curve.

The plan for this year and beyond is to utilise more diverse materials to complement our EcoWall product (which is already being used as a sustainable alternative in our StorageWall system and made entirely from recycled waste plastic).

Our RPC (Recycled Plastic Composite) product started our journey and we'll continue to incorporate sustainable materials in our product range. Generally people want to consciously do the

right thing and many companies are embracing new ideas, it just comes with a price tag. But, as demand increases, prices will fall and building requirements and legislation will help support this too.

Our goal for 2022 is to keep promoting our design, manufacture and install services. With a passion for bespoke products and new product development, our future ambition is being fuelled by live projects that are embracing sustainable materials within their products.

We aim to introduce bespoke alternatives to projects, such as recycled board and we can provide class A sound absorbing solutions working in conjunction with The Woolly Shepherd, whilst focusing on sustainability and end use.



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If you'd like to know more, contact us today on ryanw@james-tobias.com or 01278 437300. www.james-tobias.com

Lendology CIC

Local social enterprise and first carbon-neutral home loan provider, Lendology CIC, works with local councils to help homeowners across the South West to improve their homes as well as their home energy ratings.

Their commitment to the environment is not only demonstrated through the loans provided to tackle fuel poverty and reduce carbon emissions but also through green initiatives adopted by their Somerset based team including:

- Solar panels: Our landlord shares our green outlook and installed solar panels
- Electric car charging point: Two electric car charging points are

available, powered by solar

- Ground source heat pump: Heating in the office is powered by a ground source heat pump
- Allotment / Composting food waste: Food waste goes into our community compost, which is then used on the on-site allotments
- Terracycle: Recycling not collected by the council is sent to a local charity that also benefits from increased funding
- Soap/washing up liquid: Glass bottles are refilled at our local zero-waste shop in Wellington, The Blue Pantry
- Laptop Re-use: Old laptops are provided to Cosmic who re-configure and give to local school children who need equipment



Lendology recently gained its accreditation through Carbon Neutral Britain having reduced its emissions to under 10 tonnes and offset them through renewable projects around the world. They continue to decrease and conserve their emissions by focusing on encouraging more carsharing to reduce commuting emissions.

Quantock

At Quantock, we absolutely believe in the power of printed communications and marketing material, yet are also acutely aware of the need to reduce both our environmental impact and that of our clients.

Over the past decade, the range of options for sustainable printing have transformed dramatically. Using recycled paper no longer means inferior quality - through extensive research and testing, we've managed to collaborate with suppliers who offer best-in-class quality, ensuring that our clients' printed material remains of the highest standard.

We've found that collaboration has been a real asset on our sustainable journey. Over the past decade we've transitioned the majority of our printed material to be produced by a partner whose environmental credentials are



impeccable - running on solar power, using non-toxic vegetable based inks and recycling as much waste as possible.

We've also built strong relationships with material suppliers, who are able to give us the exact information we need, whether it's recommendations on the best carbon offsetting schemes or advice on which new products are on the horizon.

We're always open to collaboration, and love to share our expertise and experiences with other businesses. If you're looking for help or guidance in reducing the carbon footprint of your printed marketing material, get in touch - we'd love to hear from you!

Middleton Engineering

Middleton engineering has been in the (green) industry for 40 years. Primarily manufacturing recycling machinery. This includes baling press from 60T up to 120T, semi-automatic machines, channel balers and twin rams. Together with bottle perforators and bale wrappers and conveyor of all kinds. We also build horticultural machinery for processing compost.

We provide manufacturing recycling machinery for distribution depots, supermarkets, county councils and private companies across the country and have taken on many apprentices over the years and now have three in various departments.

We have our own machine shop producing our own cylinders from short up to 300 Id x 4 1/2M in length and our own design office and draw and manufacture all our own parts.

WPA

WPA treats others as we would expect to be treated and our environment is integral to our success - it's the right thing to do. More customers are also demanding it and new recruits take a serious look at WPA because of our environmental credentials.

Since 2006, we have been annually independently certified by British Standards Institute (BSI) to ISO 14001 in Environmental Management. A key criteria for success is continuous improvement, with digital operations and cloud computing helping make the 'paperless office' a reality.

Another of our strategic goals has been to make WPA a great place to work. During lockdown, we increased the number of car charging points, built bicycle shelters, changing rooms and showers as well as creating a wildflower meadow and walking track to promote exercise and make the most of natural daylight and fresh air - all good for our people, our business, our customers and the environment.

Over the coming year, we plan to replace our gas fired heating and air conditioning system with air-source, as



well as installing the latest LED lighting. Beyond that, we are discussing tree planting, a photovoltaic installation and creating a gym for our 300 staff.

Planning and measuring progress is key, particularly as reporting achievements to regulators, existing and prospective customers is likely to become the norm and may form up to 25% of the score when companies are deciding where to place their business. We are ahead of the pack but there is so much more to do.



We manufacture all our own items in house and keep a large store for everything we build and items readily available for service and repairs. Our Somerset Company delivers everything under one roof, thereby keeping travel miles to a minimum.

Middleton Engineering understand the demands and needs of the industry and is constantly looking at new ways of improving its waste baling solutions to help companies improve their environmental credentials. Utilising the skills of its highly experienced team, Middleton Engineering works in collaboration with its clients, ensuring that every project is completed to the highest standard and customer specification.

New Leaf Life Design

We have a green heart at the centre of our business created by establishing a caring collaborative 'green' ethos that drives all business decisions and contributes towards a positive environmental impact.

We have achieved this by building a green rural office, switching to sustainable banking and an ethical pension provider, switching to renewable green energy provider and building a wellbeing / wildlife site around the offices which include, moon gardens, newt ponds, bee and butterfly gardens.

We've adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals - these are a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all - and will report on our progress as part of our Conscious Social Responsibility and impact surveys each year.

This week we gave our first New



Leaf Award to a young beekeeper in Somerset. In collaboration with Somerset Beekeepers, we give 5% of all our training income towards new hives and equipment for a young beekeeper to start keeping bees. This commitment is part of our B Corporation status.

In June we will be helping to put on a climate summit conference in Taunton where we will be encouraging SMEs to stake five small steps towards helping their business become carbon neutral.

We are a very small company, but we want to show that it's possible to be the change you want to see. We may not be big enough for a glitzy award, but we are small enough to conserve resources and B Corp lead the way to a greener planet in business.

AV Path

South West newcomers AV Path haven't been idle in their first months of trading and their mission to improve peoples' work-life balances, as well as helping to reduce business travel, is coming along very well already.

AV Path's video conferencing solutions are being installed up and down the country, as well as in our local area.

So apart from bringing your remote workers, suppliers and customers into the office from anywhere in the world, how else does this technology benefit our environment?

The obvious answer is the large reduction in your organisation's carbon footprint; monitoring software and room usage statistics help you work out the number of people who didn't make a journey to that meeting, and subsequently their reduced emissions contribution, and your time saving too.

As soon as video conferencing becomes a working habit, the savings accrue accordingly, and our air gets a little bit cleaner!



But there are the non-tangible benefits too: less time spent in the car, train, or plane can only be good for all of us, and that means better quality home-time for everyone to de-stress at the end of the day (or indeed the middle of the day).

With the amazing mobile technology we carry with us everywhere, the work emphasis has permanently shifted to "it's what you do" and not "it's where you do it" any more.

Thinking about a change in the way you or your teams work? Call us for a chat any time.

NRL

NRL provides engineering recruitment and contracting services across the UK and globally and is turning to colleagues to help shape the next step in the NRL Group's carbon strategy.

The group, which has an ultrasonic qualification and testing facility in Portishead to support work on Hinkley Point C, achieved the Carbon Neutral International Standard across their operations in 2021 – and are now looking at how they can continue to drive environmental initiatives.

Keen to ensure that everyone had the opportunity to be involved with this activity, colleagues from across their recruitment, non-destructive testing and rail contracting branches

were invited to sign up to become carbon champions.

The team of champions, led by the group's Compliance Manager, Pat McCarthy, meet regularly to advance NRL's carbon strategy. Looking for both regional and company-wide opportunities to reduce carbon consumption.

Having spent recent years supporting engineering clients to advance their net-zero energy objectives including identifying transferrable skills to place workers onto new green energy projects, the NRL Group is now keen to ensure that they make similar advances within their own operations.

No idea is off limits for consideration by the team of carbon champions, and the NRL's Group Executive board hopes that this collaborative



approach will help to generate fresh ideas and ambitious future plans.

To maintain the NRL Group's carbon neutral status, the organisation invests in carbon credits each year to offset any consumption that cannot be immediately mitigated, supporting projects which complement their own business activities – including advancing clean energy projects in developing countries.

Find out more about the NRL Group at www.nrlgroup.co.uk

BUSINESS PARTNER NEWS

Local businesses in Taunton launch the Blackbrook Green Forum

Albert Goodman and Clarke Willmott have launched an initiative known as the Blackbrook Green Forum with the aim of working together with other businesses on the Blackbrook Business Park in Taunton and its surrounds to improve and protect the local environment.

Launched at Albert Goodman's offices, the event was attended by most businesses on the park. It included an introduction to the forum and hopes of what it wants to achieve collectively



by bringing together more businesses that are equally as passionate about sharing ideas and taking proactive steps that will be good for local people, local businesses and the planet. Some initial steps discussed already include inter-company car sharing, more electric points provided and an increase in recycling.

The forum hopes to meet quarterly to encourage others to get involved and progress all things green.

Sophie Parkhouse, partner at Albert Goodman, said: "Blackbrook Business Park has a real collaborative feel about it and by joining forces with Clarke Willmott and other businesses right on our doorstep to make a positive impact feels like a step in the right direction.

"I lead all things net zero at Albert Goodman and plan how we are going

to transition to our goals by 2030. To take this one step further and invite the local business community to share in our vision feels really exciting. If everyone can make a small contribution today, it will have a big impact on our local environment long-term."

Dale Edwards, Strategy Consultant for Green Energy at Clarke Willmott, added, "Partnering with Albert Goodman on such a worthy cause is fantastic as we always enjoy working with the team. The launch went very well, and we had lots of conversations which gives us hope that we can preserve and enhance our surroundings with like-minded people who are all keen to take responsibility. I can't wait to encourage more businesses on Blackbrook Business Park to join our cause and be part of something that will create a positive legacy here in Taunton."

**TO THE POINT.
NO NONSENSE
APPROACH. ”**

We *could* use this advert to tell you how good we think we are.

We *could* tell you that we are friendly, fair and forward-thinking.
That we're transparent and trustworthy.

We *could...* But with client reviews like this on the shelf,
our accountancy expertise speaks for itself.

Sir Michael Barber announced as new Chair of Somerset County Cricket Club

Sir Michael Barber, who lives locally in North Devon and is a member of Somerset County Cricket Club, has been chosen to take over from the club's outgoing Chair, Gordon Baird.

Sir Michael has also worked on delivery and accomplishment with elite sports organisations including the Lawn Tennis Association and Team Sky. Since 2016 he has been a member of the FA's Technical Advisory Board, which has helped the England men's and women's teams prepare for major tournaments.

In April 2021 his latest book, *Accomplishment: How Ambitious and Challenging Things Get Done*, was published. It identifies the pattern of accomplishment across many fields including sport, business and science as well as government. It has been described by Matthew Syed as "an excellent analysis".

His previous book, *How to Run a Government so that Citizens Benefit and Taxpayers Don't go Crazy*, has been influential among politicians and officials worldwide.

After accepting the role, Sir Michael, who was once described by Time magazine as 'the single most influential educator on the face of the earth', said: "As an avid fan of county cricket over the years and a local person, living in North Devon, I am thrilled and honoured to take on this role.



"I have been impressed by the immense contribution Somerset makes both to cricket in England and Wales and to the South-West region, especially in recent years. The flow of Somerset cricketers into England teams – women as well as men – is impressive. Somerset's results over the last decade on the field are striking too.

"The Club is rightly famous for its impressive and highly committed Membership base and has been managed well through challenging times.

"These are all strong foundations for the next phase of the Club's history as we approach our 150th anniversary, in 2025. I hope my knowledge and experience of working with governments, education institutions and elite sports teams, will enable me to contribute, alongside others, to Somerset's success in the future."

Mr Baird said: "After what has been a difficult period for so many people, I am delighted to say that the club emerges from the pandemic in a

robust position both on and off the field. This is thanks to the hard work, dedication and passion of our ever loyal and supportive members, players, executive team, staff, legion of committee members and volunteers.

"It has been an honour to represent Somerset County Cricket Club throughout this challenging time and I wish Sir Michael every success in the role.

"He is an outstanding leader with a genuine passion for the game and with a clear understanding of the current cricket landscape, he shares a commitment to securing Somerset's position within the game as a successful members club both on and off the field. Most importantly he has the experience, skills and passion to support the executive team and cricket staff in achieving their goals."

Somerset CCC Chief Executive, Gordon Hollins, added: "I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gordon Baird for his unwavering commitment and support during what has been a turbulent time. His contribution to the club has played an important role in ensuring that we are in the strong position that we currently find ourselves in. I now look forward to working with Sir Michael and the new board, to deliver a strategy designed to ensure the club and cricket in the South West flourishes for years to come."

Clarke Willmott announces promotions for Taunton office

National law firm Clarke Willmott LLP has announced its 2022 promotions list which includes several Taunton-based lawyers.

Robert Mullan, a commercial and private client litigation lawyer, James Edmondson, a personal injury lawyer, and planning lawyer Laura Urch have been promoted to senior associate, while commercial property lawyer Jessamy Warren becomes an associate.

Across the firm's seven regional offices two lawyers were promoted to partner, eight to senior associate, and seven to associate.

Clarke Willmott CEO, Stephen Rosser, said: "Developing our people is



Pictured, left to right, Robert Mullan, Jessamy Warren and James Edmondson.

absolutely fundamental to us as a business. The great service that we can provide to our clients is only possible due to the great people we have within the firm, and this has become even more critical as we



Laura Urch.

Clarke Willmott is a national law firm with offices in Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, London, Manchester, Southampton and Taunton.

For more information visit www.clarkewillmott.com

embrace flexible ways of working.

"Whether our staff began their careers with us or joined at a more advanced level we are committed to training and developing our talent."



WPA staff begin 5,000 mile walk

WPA staff have set themselves a target to walk 5,000 miles, approximately 17 miles each, and WPA will make a donation to the British Heart Foundation for each mile walked.

The new track around WPA's wildflower meadow will be well used while walks to and from work and getting outside at the weekend are being encouraged.

To spur the team along, there were competitions between individuals and teams across the WPA. To encourage walking elsewhere, neighbouring businesses on the Blackbrook Business Park are aware and Greenbrook, the Blackbrook Businesses' environmental group organised a litter pick. Further afield, WPA will be encouraging customers and intermediaries to do some extra miles and promoting the initiative to the 200 schools that its Foundation has supported over the last three years.

WPA have chosen the British Heart Foundation because heart and circulatory disease is the leading cause of death in the world and physical cardiovascular fitness keeps bones and muscle healthy reducing the risk of developing a stroke or high blood pressure.

Nathan Irwin, WPA's Chief Executive, said: "With walking being so good for everyone's mental, social and physical health while making the most of natural daylight and fresh air, it is arguably one of the most socially accessible and inclusive forms of exercise available.

"We are consciously not asking for donations, we just want to help everyone be a bit healthier and have some fun doing it."

Victoria Carswell, fundraising manager at the British Heart Foundation said, "We are incredibly grateful to WPA for choosing to support our work with their epic challenge.

"For more than 60 years, the public's generosity has funded BHF research that has turned ideas that once seemed like 'science fiction' into treatments and cures that save lives every day. But millions of people are still waiting for the next breakthrough.

"It is only with donations from organisations like WPA that we can keep our research going and discover the treatments and cures of the future."



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New Members

Welcome to our newest members of the Somerset Chamber.

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Rosie Wicks, 07507 846922
rosie@blossomhr.co.uk
www.blossomhr.co.uk

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lorna.withington@conciergeuk.co.uk
www.conciergeuk.co.uk

Employment Support Service

Health and wellbeing

The Employment Support Service is a free service within Somerset NHS Foundation Trust. Skilled employment specialists work with talented people wanting to gain employment. We engage with local employers to help them develop a diverse workforce and meet recruitment needs.

Sue Newell
MHEmployment@SomersetFT.nhs.uk
<https://www.somersetft.nhs.uk/employment-support-service/>

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Alcohol manufacturer

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Mark One has been providing specialist IT services to local businesses for over 20 years, adapting quickly to the ever-changing business environment. We serve a wide range of clients across the UK, including SMEs, charitable organisations and multinational corporations.

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AA research reveals bright future ahead for EV fleets

Positivity towards electric vehicles (EVs) is at an all-time high among operational fleets, according to the latest Operational Fleet Insight Report from the AA and Rivus Fleet Solutions. The research, involving more than 500 fleet managers, found that 82% felt the quality of EVs on offer had improved since last year and 84% believed the range from manufacturers has improved.

The positivity around EVs also extended to the long-term cost benefits, with almost two thirds (65%) believing that EVs had better whole life costs than diesel or petrol. 66% of fleet managers recognised that EVs required less servicing and 59% identified that EVs held their resale value and had less downtime. Some 67% of fleet operators expect to be using EVs within the next five years, compared to over a quarter (26%) using currently.

Although fleet managers are starting to look more positively at the broader range of benefits, there are still barriers when it comes to the practical elements of EV adoption. A third (32%) had identified the lack of charging points across the country and the workplace as the top barriers.

Gavin Franks, director of business services at the AA, said: "It's positive to see that there is a much greater awareness among fleets about the benefits of EVs, despite the concern over lack of charging points across the country and at work being the main barriers to take-up. With charging infrastructure improving on an almost daily basis, as investment in charging points is paying off, we expect fleets will see a change quicker than they anticipate and the pace of adoption will pick up further."

Somerset Chamber of Commerce is committed to providing members with a range of benefits that offer real value to their business.

As well as putting them in touch with fellow Chamber members who are specialists in their field, membership also offers access to a range of discounts and professional support.

This includes a 67% discount off your AA roadside breakdown cover.



Latest Member-to-Member Offers

As a member of Somerset Chamber why not take advantage of our great range of member-to-member offers?



If you have an offer you would like to add to our list, visit www.somersetchamber.co.uk/membership



#WELLCONNECTED

Meet the Neighbours - Dorset



▲ Sarah Young of Porter Dodson and James Tuckett of Mash Group.



▲ Sally Robertson of South West Schoolwear and Derek Smart of Amberley Management Selection.



▲ Stuart Harris of Oakmount Control Systems and Glenn Weeks of Nexus Open Systems.



▲ Andrea Steel of Church House Investments, Sarah Young of Porter Dodson, Emma Rawlings of Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Caron Khan of Dorset Chamber of Commerce.



▲ Jon Allen and Rachel Allen of Train4All with Emma Rawlings of Somerset Chamber of Commerce.



B2B dinner at Weston College



▲ Alistair Tudor of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, Mandy Bridge and Natasha Eatten of Nuffield Health and Dave Crew of Weston College.



▲ Lynsey McKinstry of Weston College, Joolz Lewis of Enlightened Business, Karen Morledge and Linda Meek of Morledge and Co and Sue Estcourt of Weston College.



▲ Neil Vinnicombe of Begbies Traynor, Jeff Tyndall and Josh Nicholson of Jatech Limited.



▲ Dr Catherine Lewis and Kate Tyndall of SOH Vanilla.



▲ Mandy Bridge of sponsor Nuffield Health addresses attendees.

Construction Connections at ibis Bridgwater



▲ Steve Woodward and Louise Green of Weston College with Emma Rawlings of Somerset Chamber of Commerce.

Sector Focus – finance



◀ Lexi Shore of A C Mole, Alistair Tudor of Somerset Chamber of Commerce and Amanda Gunter of A C Mole.



UPCOMING EVENTS

Ladies' afternoon tea and networking

Join us for some informal networking over tea and cake and the chance to hear from our guest speaker Kate Walker of Kate Walker Bridal. Kate will explain how she began her career, the impact COVID-19 had on the wedding sector and her plans and ambitions for the future.

Time: 2pm - 4pm
at Dillington House, Ilminster
Cost: £24.75 plus VAT

Wednesday
15
June

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SOLICITORS & ADVISORS

Training workshop - SEO, the stuff that makes a difference

This training workshop is aimed at businesses which are looking to gain a greater knowledge and understanding of search engine optimisation. SEO has gained a reputation of being an area where few dare to tread. In this workshop, Pam Knight, of White Knight Marketing, will help you focus on areas that will make a real impact on your website's visibility.

Time: 9.30am - 1.30pm
at Equity House, Taunton
Cost: £49.50 plus VAT

Thursday
30
June

Sponsored by
WHITE KNIGHT
MARKETING

Let's network over breakfast!

Our let's network events are a great way to get out and meet new people - while enjoying a delicious, cooked breakfast! A designated 'table head' will ask everyone to introduce themselves, giving guests the opportunity to hear from others, learn about their businesses, highlight their own companies and organisations and make meaningful connections.

Time: 8.15am - 10am at Taunton Rugby Football Club
Cost: £22.75 plus VAT

Tuesday
21
June

Making the most of membership - moneycorp with Patrick Postill, Regional Account Manager, Corporate Partnerships, moneycorp

One of the many benefits we offer Somerset Chamber members is professional advice on foreign exchange and international payments through British Chambers of Commerce partner moneycorp. Key benefits include bank-beating exchange rates, expert advice on the markets, safeguarded client funds and fast online transfers 24/7.

Time: 10am - 11am - online

moneycorp
exchange experts

Wednesday
20
July

Training workshop - trust, the new workplace currency

What makes people stay in or join your business and give of their best? One thing - trust in the management and leadership of the enterprise. Attendees will come away with research-based insight into the key factors that determine whether their people will trust them or not and the things they can do to build and cultivate trust.

Time: 9.30am - 1.30pm
at Equity House, Taunton
Cost: £49.50 plus VAT

Sponsored by



Thursday
23
June

Annual summer barbecue

Always one of the highlights of the Chamber events calendar - and one that sells out quickly - our hugely popular summer barbecue, offers an evening of relaxed networking with some delicious barbecue fare. This year it will be taking place in the new setting of the wildflower meadow at WPA.

Time: 5.30pm - 7pm at WPA's
wildflower meadow, Blackbrook
Business Park, Taunton
Cost: £10.75 plus VAT

Sponsored by



Wednesday
3
August

*Prices are plus VAT unless otherwise stated

Please note due to high demand, some of these events may be fully booked by the time of printing.

Please note that all non-members are entitled to attend a maximum of two Chamber events. Should you wish to attend further events, you will be required to become a Somerset Chamber member.

CHAMBER NEWS

Somerset Chamber bids farewell to Operations Manager Alistair



Somerset Chamber of Commerce bid a fond farewell to Operations Manager Alistair Tudor at the end of May. Alistair, who has worked for the Chamber since 2016, has joined Chamber member Stephens Scown Solicitors as their Senior Client Manager.

Alistair joined the Chamber as a Membership Sales Manager having spent his career working in a business-to-business sales roles, latterly with physical trading and

shipping businesses globally.

In 2017, he was promoted to the role of Operations Manager, managing the Chamber team, supporting the board and Chamber leadership and forging close links with both members and the Chamber's Business Partners.

Alistair said: "Working with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce has been an amazing experience and I've loved working with individuals and organisations to provide opportunities for them to develop both their organisation and their customer base.

"The sheer variety of wonderful companies across our region has meant that no two days have been the same and being in a position to support those businesses as part of the Chamber network has been an absolute privilege.

"I'm going to miss the team at the Chamber hugely. They are an enormously passionate and hard-working group and the effort that they all put into ensuring businesses in the region are connected, supported and given opportunities to grow is immense.

"Stephens Scown is already part of Somerset Chamber so I don't need to tell them about the benefits of joining! I'm looking forward to the new challenge with the Stephens Scown team and I hope to catch up with Chamber members as a guest rather than as a host at an event very soon."

Graeme Crosbie, Chair of the Chamber's Board of Trustees, thanked Alistair for his hard work over the last six years and said: "Alistair has made a huge contribution to the Chamber, including guiding the team through the challenges of the pandemic.

"He has been instrumental in forging new business partnerships with key local businesses and strengthened existing relationships with companies from all sectors and of all sizes.

"It has been a pleasure to work with him during my time as a trustee of Somerset Chamber and I hope we will see him on the other side of the fence as a guest at the Chamber's networking events in the future!"

The Chamber team wish him well in his new venture!

Are you reaching your future workforce?

Many of us will remember the family member or friend who helped us get our foot on the career ladder.

Perhaps they offered you a part-time job or connected you with someone they knew. It was then in your hands to make the most of that opportunity.

But all too often I also hear the phrase 'if only I'd known that job existed' . . .

At Somerset Education Business Partnership we want every young person to know about all the great

opportunities in Somerset. Ambitious? Yes. Achievable? With the support of parents, teachers and the business community - yes!

In addition to our monthly business and education newsletters we have now introduced a parent alert. This gets the latest Somerset careers opportunities and information to those who have the keenest interest in their young people and who are best placed to influence them.

So, to all those with children or younger family friends - make sure you keep up to date by subscribing www.somerset-ebp.co.uk/subscribe.htm

And if you are in business in Somerset and have opportunities to share - from



open days, to work experience, to vacancies - then tell us at support@somerset-ebp.co.uk.

We will get your message out to Somerset's parents and raise your profile with your future workforce.

Finally, if you need any support with your future talent planning, then let us know too. We'd be very happy to help.

For more information, please contact andrew.hanson@somerset-ebp.co.uk or Imelda.leetch@somerset-ebp.co.uk.



Kaiasm clinches hamper of luxury goodies in free prize draw



Steve Johnston, Founder and Director of Client Services at Kaiasm, has taken delivery of a luxury hamper of Somerset produce.

He was chosen at random from the local businesses which completed the British Chambers of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey (QES), which was run locally by Somerset Chamber of Commerce.

The hamper was created and delivered by fellow Chamber member The Hamper Guys and Steve was delighted to win!

"I never normally win anything - but hold on! Being a member of Somerset Chamber is a win for every local business member. Is that too cheesy?"

Given that there were three different cheddars in that hamper, yes, maybe!" Steve said.

Kaiasm, which is based in Whatley, near Frome, is a data technology company which helps clients – such as National Highways, the NHS, Screwfix and Wilko – to structure large, complex data sets so they can better serve their customers and other users.

The firm was founded by Steve and Liam McGee in 2011 and currently employs 30 people. They were recently awarded a Queen's Award for Enterprise in recognition of their pioneering approach to data technology.

British Chambers of Commerce calls for immediate emergency budget

The British Chambers of Commerce is calling for an immediate emergency budget to deal with the costs crises facing businesses and people throughout the country.

It has developed a three-point action plan that would allow firms to keep a lid on rising prices, boost productivity and ease cost pressures.

The proposals include:

- Ease upfront costs of doing business by reversing the recently introduced National Insurance increase until at least 2023/24.
- Help firms manage the impact of rising energy prices by cutting VAT on their energy bills from 20% to 5% for a minimum of one year.
- Address labour shortages by reinstating free Covid tests for companies to ease the strain on productivity caused by persistent high absences

Together the three steps would take the pressure off businesses that are battling to keep the economy afloat and offer a route to higher productivity and tax receipts in the future.

Shevaun Haviland, Director General of the BCC, said: "These are simple, straightforward measures that can be quickly reversed when the economy is in better shape.

"The Treasury and HMRC have proven their ability during the pandemic to

implement similar changes quickly and efficiently. Making these changes would have an immediate benefit for both businesses and the public.

"The costs crises facing firms and people in the street are two sides of the same coin. If we can ease the pressure on businesses then they can keep a lid on the price rises being driven by surging energy bills, staff shortages and higher taxes.

"Firms will then have the breathing space they need to raise productivity and strengthen the economy. But a change of course is needed now, if the Government does not act immediately then rising costs will put our economic recovery in a stranglehold that will have repercussions for years to come.

"The Government has a variety of financial levers it can pull, and this is the time to use them. Acting today will then give businesses a chance to create the future profits needed to fill tax coffers."

The measures in more detail:

Postponing the rise in National Insurance Contributions would not only ease the immediate pressure on companies' balance sheets but it would also put money back into the pockets of people – boosting consumer confidence. When supply chain disruption has unwound and global factors influencing inflation have receded the economy will then be in a much stronger position to bear the increase.



Cutting VAT on business energy bills to 5%, for all businesses, would provide another quick release valve on soaring costs for firms. For example: a small business which has an energy bill of £10,000 and currently pays the standard 20% rate would pay £2,000 VAT. Our proposal would see that cut to £500. This measure could be adjusted over time to take account of those sectors most in need.

Many businesses in the UK are still seeing above average absence rates as Covid continues to impact the workforce. Around two thirds of more than 1,100 firms surveyed in April by the BCC reported staff absences due to Covid symptoms or self-isolation. Bringing back free testing would allow firms to limit the disease's spread among employees. With wider structural staff shortages continuing to limit productivity this would be a key measure to keep the economic recovery on track. New sub-variants of Omicron are reportedly leading to rising infection rates in the US and South Africa.

Firms facing 'hiring crunch' as vacancies hit record high

Businesses are facing a perilous 'hiring crunch' as there are now more job vacancies than unemployed people in the UK for the first time since records began.

According to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the unemployment rate fell to 3.7% between January and March, its lowest for almost 50 years, as job openings rose to a new high of 1.3 million.

However, wages, excluding bonuses, failed to keep pace with rising prices, a problem expected to intensify because of growing food and fuel costs.

The data showed that there was a rise in the number of people moving from economic inactivity - classed as those aged 16-64 who haven't been working or seeking a job - into employment.

At the same time, people moving from job-to-job also reached a record high "driven by resignations rather than dismissals", said the ONS.

Suren Thiru, BCC Head of Economics, said: "Although payroll employment continues to rise and the unemployment rate is falling, the headline figures more reflect several distorting factors, including rising economic inactivity, rather than the

reality on the ground.

"Record jobs vacancies highlight the perilous hiring crunch facing businesses. With rising economic inactivity confirming that the UK workforce is shrinking, labour shortages are likely to persistently drag on UK growth by stifling firms' ability to operate at full capacity.

"Although total earnings growth rose sharply, the robust headline figure more reflects strong bonus payments rather than a meaningful improvement in underlying wage growth. Despite recruitment difficulties, the damage to firm's finances from soaring inflation and rising national insurance will limit the extent to which wages can continue rising.

"While demand for workers is currently strong, the squeeze on firms' finances from soaring energy bills, surging inflation, and the increase in national insurance is likely to weaken recruitment intentions and weaken wage growth in the near term.

"An emergency budget is urgently needed to give firms the breathing space to recruit and retain staff, including reversing the recently introduced National Insurance increase until at least the next financial year."

Somerset County Cricket Club renews business partnership



Somerset Chamber is pleased to announce Somerset County Cricket Club has renewed its business partnership with the Chamber for another year.

Based at the Cooper Associates County Ground, in Taunton, the club continues to go from strength-to-strength and offers local businesses a wide variety of hospitality and sponsorship opportunities. A number of Chamber members already work closely with the club as key sponsors on and off the pitch.

Emma Rawlings, Somerset Chamber Executive Director, said she was looking forward to further building on the existing relationship with the club and added: "It's great to be able to work with the cricket club and means we will be able to support both the club and our members in Somerset."

Somerset Chamber helps to secure more than £2 million in business funding

Somerset Chamber is proud to have helped the county's businesses secure more than £2 million in Government funding to support young people into work and help firms find new talent.



The Chamber acted as an official gateway for the Government's Kickstart Scheme, securing placements for 324 young people, with 130 businesses taking part through the Chamber.

Kickstart is now closed to new applicants, but since it started in September 2020 it has helped companies cover the cost of employing a 16 to 24-year-old for six months, for 25 hours a week, with no cost to the business. The Government paid 100% of the National Minimum Wage for those 25 hours, plus National Insurance contributions.

Employers also received a £1,500 set-up grant for the placement to cover the cost of training, equipment or even

travel. Many young people taken on as Kickstarters found themselves offered permanent roles once the Government-funded element had finished.

Emma Rawlings, Executive Director of Somerset Chamber, said: "The figures are absolutely phenomenal and I'm proud the Chamber has played such a significant part in the success of this scheme in the South West. All credit to the Chamber's Jenn Chidley-Sanders who spearheaded our involvement in the scheme."

Jenn, the Chamber's Member Engagement and Policy Manager, said: "When we heard about the Kickstart scheme, it seemed the perfect opportunity for businesses to support young people.

"It has not been without its challenges, but, overall, it has been an exceptional scheme to be involved in. We have been able to help 130 businesses and given 324 young starters the opportunity to find work and learn new skills, which has been absolutely wonderful to see."



HINKLEY UPDATE

Hinkley Supply Chain's Loretta wins Women in Nuclear global award

Hinkley Supply Chain engagement officer Loretta Browne has won a prestigious international award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the nuclear sector.

Loretta was named as the Women in Nuclear (WiN) Global Honorary award-winner for her commitment to the nuclear industry through her voluntary work with WiN.

Loretta, who lives in Axbridge, with her partner Chris and young son Aidan, is a founding member of WiN in the UK and has volunteered with the organisation for more than eight years, currently as its director of fundraising and partnerships.

The award citation states: "Loretta has been a committed member of WiN Global for over eight years and has made significant contributions to the

organisation's mission and vision. We celebrate her dedication and drive."

WiN has representatives in 145 countries worldwide, with the UK branch formed in 2014 to encourage more women into the industry and to improve the representation of women in leadership.

Loretta said: "I am absolutely delighted to be given this recognition by WiN Global for my efforts in supporting WiN.

"Working with the WiN UK team to help drive change in the nuclear industry is fun and rewarding and I would urge everyone to get involved in WiN however they can to make this a more inclusive and diverse industry."

Loretta's role with the Hinkley Supply Chain is to engage with existing

Hinkley Point C contractors to support their procurement activities and to promote regional suppliers. She is also a business development consultant and a chartered engineer and has worked in the nuclear and defence industries for 20 years.

Emma Rawlings, Executive Director of Somerset Chamber of Commerce, which runs the Hinkley Supply Chain, congratulated Loretta on her win and said it was much deserved: "We are all thrilled for Loretta as she is absolutely committed to working in the nuclear sector and supporting women of all ages and from all backgrounds.

"It's so important the nuclear industry isn't seen as a male-dominated environment as there are so many opportunities for women right here on our doorstep at Hinkley Point C."



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BRIDGWATER
& TAUNTON
COLLEGE

New training centres ready for next phase of construction at Hinkley Point C

The Energy Minister, Greg Hands has opened one of three new training centres to support the Hinkley Point C project. Together with existing facilities and investment into education and skills, the centres will be ready to help local people join the additional 4,000 workers needed for the next phase of the power station's construction.

The Minister unveiled the new Welding Centre of Excellence at Bridgwater and Taunton College's campus in Bridgwater this morning. The project has invested £8 million into the three new training centres, in partnership with the college. The Welding Centre will train and qualify 500 welders a year, helping local people into work and meeting skills shortages in the South West and across Britain.

It comes as Hinkley Point C publishes its 2022 Socio-Economic Impact Report, which shows that:

- The opportunities provided by Hinkley Point C are playing an important role in improving social mobility in the South West - making a difference to people who need support
- The district of Sedgemoor is seeing the largest growth in household income of any area in Devon and Somerset - above the regional average and above cities like Exeter and Plymouth
- The project has trained 922 apprentices and is on track to hit its target of hiring 1,000 apprentices during construction later this year
- £4.1 billion has been spent directly with companies in the South West, so far
- 1,400 companies in the South West are now involved in building Hinkley Point C, with 14,000 jobs across the region expected to be supported throughout the project



The welding facility is the latest Centre of Excellence to be opened in support of the Hinkley Point C project, which has now invested a total of £24 million into education, skills, and employment support.

It joins the Electrical Centre of Excellence in Bridgwater and the Construction Skills and Innovation Centre, in Cannington. A Mechanical Centre of Excellence will open in Cannington this summer, to train students in pipefitting, steel erection and plating. Together they will support the next phase of the project, as electrical systems and major components begin to be installed.

The centres will provide new routes to people who are looking to start a career in construction, regardless of their background or skill set. New training courses have been launched, including the government's Bootcamp scheme, T-level work experience placements and supported traineeships.

Hinkley Point C's Managing Director, Stuart Crooks said: "The energy crisis has shown the need for Hinkley Point C's reliable, low-carbon electricity is more urgent than ever. This report shows the project is also delivering big social and economic benefits in the communities that host us and beyond. It's good news to see that productivity and prosperity is rising locally and we've worked hard to ensure that people in the region can benefit from the many job opportunities on offer in the next phase of construction."

Andy Berry, Principle and Chief Executive of Bridgwater & Taunton College, said: "The partnership between Bridgwater & Taunton College and Hinkley Point C continues to open up new training and employment opportunities for everyone - no matter their age, background or previous skill set. The new training centres of excellence are not only making a difference to local career prospects today but will ensure Somerset has the skills needed for the next generation of net-zero projects."



Improving Social Mobility

Sedgemoor and West Somerset (now part of Somerset West and Taunton Council) are the two districts that host Hinkley Point C. They include the market town of Bridgwater and seaside towns like Minehead and Watchet, which are geographically isolated and challenged by seasonal work. In 2016, West Somerset was ranked at the very bottom of the UK's social mobility index, whilst Sedgemoor contains areas which are among the most deprived 10% in the country.

The opportunities provided by Hinkley Point C are playing an important role in overcoming these challenges - making a difference to the lives of people who need support most. After almost six years of construction, Hinkley Point C is helping local people to retrain, up-skill and access valuable careers without moving away.

Bridgwater, the closest major town to the construction site and a focus of investment by Hinkley Point C, is outperforming the major regional cities in terms of its productivity.**

Sedgemoor is seeing the largest growth in household income of any area within Devon and Somerset - above the regional average and above larger cities, such as Exeter and Plymouth.**

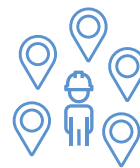
Somerset is also exceeding the national average growth rate in productivity and has seen the South West's biggest decline in NEETS - those not in education, employment or training.**

By working with the local authorities and strategic partners, we are developing sustainable and skilled jobs, improving productivity and economic growth.



£500,000

investment into the setup and delivery of local employment hubs and an Education Business Partnership



350

businesses from Sedgemoor and West Somerset are within the supply chain

The Hinkley Jobs Service has supported almost

1,500

local people into work



£24 Million

investment into local education and skills facilities



£500 Million

projected spend in Sedgemoor and West Somerset*



which includes

£8 Million

to develop new Centres of Excellence in Bridgwater and Cannington

* Now Somerset West and Taunton Council

** Office for National statistics data summarised within Heart of the South West LEP economic dashboard - <https://heartofswlep.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Economy-dashboard-0422.pdf>



Education initiatives

The Hinkley Point C Inspire education programme and Young HPC network have **supported thousands of students across Somerset schools**.

We are a **member of the West Somerset Opportunity area**, which specifically tackles the challenges of social mobility.

We **invested £400,000** into a new Education Business Partnership, which is successfully linking local businesses with young people within the region.



Employment Opportunities

The Hinkley Point C Jobs Service **has supported 1,500 local people into work**. The employment hubs, made possible by Hinkley Point C, are **supporting hundreds more**. Located in relatively isolated towns such as Minehead, Stogursey and Williton, employment hubs have already supported **over 500 people** with job applications, CV writing guidance and careers advice.



Boosting Skills

We have trained **922 apprentices**, **invested over £24 million** into education and skills – and together with the Construction Skills and Innovation Centre and National College for Nuclear, **over 5,000 people** are expected to be trained and certified in the years ahead.



Access Assistance

Access is vital to opening up **opportunity** and **improving social mobility**. Recognising the challenge, Hinkley Point C stepped in when local bus services were cut and now provides a **free bus service** linking the rural areas of West Somerset with Bridgwater.

Regional Impact - South West



1,417 companies

building Hinkley Point C



14,400 jobs

expected to be supported through construction



£5 Billion
projected economic value to the region



Bridgwater-based Berry and Escott are a specialist engineering and steel fabrication firm. Employing 45 people only a few miles from Hinkley Point C, the company has recently invested in new technology and expanded its steel fabrication and production facilities.

MEMBER NEWS

Teapot Creative - taking the digital lead in Somerset

Teapot Creative Ltd in Hambridge, Somerset, has taken over directorship of the CIC Digital Somerset (formerly known as Digital Taunton). Teapot is an agency which uses design and digital creativity to create change for businesses and is, therefore, perfectly skilled for taking over this digital lead for Somerset.

Digital Somerset ran regular events in Taunton which were based around everything digital. It was the brainchild of Shane Griffiths and Jeremy Hyams and was hugely successful. Sadly, due to COVID, it had to be put on hold but it's now making a welcome return.

Through a mixture of events, driven by a network of passionate, like-minded people, the goal of Digital Somerset is to connect and upskill professionals around the county.

Teapot Director Lizzie Ginbey said: "We see this as a great opportunity to strengthen what Teapot already does



Fellow Director Barry Tottle said: "Providing a platform for like-minded people to come together and develop new skills is crucial for growth in the industry and to attract a future talent pool, and we look forward to making all sorts of new connections during this business endeavour."

Digital Somerset co-founder, Jeremy Hyams, said: "We thoroughly enjoyed creating Digital Somerset and the amazing events we were able to run, connecting like minded digital experts from across the South West."

Fellow co-founder Shane Griffiths added: "The time has come for initiatives such as this to come to the forefront again and we can think of no better people than the fantastic team at Teapot to take up the charge. We



look forward to seeing this next stage in the Digital Somerset journey evolve, we know it will be in safe hands."

Digital Somerset was made up of individuals and businesses who were passionate about ensuring Somerset becomes a hub for digital innovation and collaboration. Teapot's aim is to continue this dream and create a digital culture which celebrates and encourages innovation and change and will put Somerset on the map for the digital industry.

Ben Lee promoted to partner at PKF Francis Clark

Taunton-based Ben Lee has become a partner in PKF Francis Clark's latest round of promotions.

As well as leading its business services team in Taunton and Bristol, Ben is the accountancy firm's head of blockchain and cryptocurrency, having established himself as a nationally renowned expert in this rapidly-evolving area.



He said: "I joined PKF Francis Clark in 2018 after moving to the South West from London, and I'm really glad to have joined a progressive, forward-looking firm that complements my modern take on how the profession can operate.

"They have supported me in pursuing my passion for crypto, and I'm very proud to lead an offering for clients involved in the digital asset space alongside my role as a client engagement partner. I'm truly grateful for the many colleagues who make the firm a pleasure to be a part of."

Meanwhile, Ryan Prynne, a family business specialist based in Torquay, also becomes a partner, with legal sector specialist Nick Barnes and corporate services specialist and tax adviser Rob Deare promoted to directors.

Ryan said: "I'm thrilled to have been appointed a partner in PKF Francis Clark. I joined the firm in August 2012 and knew almost instantly that this

was the place I wanted to develop my career. PKF Francis Clark recognises the importance of its people and I've seen first-hand how they invest in the long-term development of their staff."

New directors Nick and Rob have been with PKF Francis Clark since 2003 and 2013 respectively, based at the firm's offices in Truro and Exeter.

Managing partner Andrew Richards said: "Alongside recruiting experienced professionals as we continue to grow our teams, developing our next generation of leaders within PKF Francis Clark is crucial to our success and the quality of service we deliver to our clients, so I'm hugely encouraged by the calibre of people we have progressing through the ranks.

"Congratulations to Ben, Ryan, Rob and Nick on their thoroughly deserved promotions. They have all worked very hard to get to this point and I look forward to seeing them flourish as they take this next step in their careers."

C&D South West invests in the future with new warehouse

Driven by their commitment to invest in the future of not only the organisation but the local area too, Chard-based transport and logistics company, C&D South West, is purchasing an additional warehousing site in Martock, Somerset.

The new site boasts a 26,728 sq. ft expansion of warehousing, yard and office space, as well as a healthy amount of future job opportunities for the local community.

With many customers based in the South West, transporting their goods across the UK and Europe, C&D wanted to invest in the future and to further grow its business.

Lorna Hammond, C&D's Managing Director, said: "It's a great pleasure to announce the addition of our new yard at Martock. With this new facility, C&D has made its next big step into investing in the future. This will allow us to further expand our service offering to customers with additional storage and warehousing capacity,



alongside an expansion of yard space to grow our vehicle fleet for future work.

"We're both excited and honoured to reach this achievement and hope that this new business venture will open new doors for not only us as a business, but for the people of Martock and the wider Somerset community too."

Founded in 1987, C&D has been providing quality distribution to clients for almost 35 years. The company offers a guaranteed 24-hour delivery service to every UK postcode every day, with 96% of their business being palletised distribution for customers based within a 40-mile radius of their HQ.

Martock is already a hub of service, manufacturing and distribution businesses and the new site will expand C&D's existing service offering and bring a plethora of new and exciting opportunities for growth, both within the business and the surrounding area. C&D is hoping to create new jobs through the expansion of its fleet and service offering, which, in turn will enable them to better serve both current and new customers.

Lorna is the third-generation leader of C&D and has followed in her father's and late grandfather's footsteps, providing quality transport and logistics services locally, nationwide and internationally.

Tracy digs in for the Queen's Green Canopy Project



Tracy Neal, Joint Head of Agriculture & Rural Property, at Battens Solicitors has been busy planting 60 new trees and a mix of 120 hedging plants as part of the Queen's Green Canopy Project on her land in North Dorset.

The Queen's Green Canopy (QGC) is a unique tree planting initiative created to mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee in 2022 which invites people from across the United Kingdom to "Plant a Tree for the Jubilee". www.queensgreencanopy.org

"Having been bought up on a farm in New Zealand rural matters, and in particular the environment, has always been important to me. As a custodian of the land, I want to ensure that I do all I can to help preserve the flora and fauna. These trees will be mapped and I hope that planting them will leave a legacy for many generations to come".

Battens' Agriculture and Rural Property team has seen an increase of new and existing clients buying land to plant trees to offset carbon and move towards net zero. Purchase of land with established woodland is also on the rise. For more information, please contact Tracy Neal on 01935 846076 tracy.neal@battens.co.uk

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Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital recognised for high patient safety standards

Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital is celebrating after being named as a National Joint Registry (NJR) Quality Data Provider after successfully completing a national programme of local data audits.

The NJR monitors the performance of hip, knee, ankle, elbow and shoulder joint replacement operations to improve clinical outcomes primarily for the benefit of patients, but also to support orthopaedic clinicians and industry manufacturers.

The registry collects high quality orthopaedic data in order to provide evidence to support patient safety, standards in quality of care, and overall cost-effectiveness in joint replacement surgery. The 'NJR Quality Data Provider' certificate scheme was introduced to offer hospitals a blueprint for reaching high quality standards relating to patient safety and to reward those who have met registry targets.



To achieve the award, hospitals are required to meet a series of six ambitious targets during the audit period 2020/21. One of the targets which hospitals are required to complete is compliance with the NJR's mandatory national audit aimed at assessing data completeness and quality within the registry.

The NJR Data Quality Audit investigates the accurate number of joint replacement procedures submitted to the registry compared to the number carried out and recorded in the local hospital Patient Administration System. The audit ensures that the NJR is collecting and reporting upon the most complete, accurate data possible across all hospitals performing joint replacement operations, including Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital.

NJR targets also include having a high level of patients consenting for their details to be included in the registry and for hospitals to demonstrate timely responses to any alerts issued by the NJR in relation to potential patient safety concerns.

Mark Enticknap, Hospital Director at Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital, said: "Improving patient safety is of the upmost importance and something all staff take very seriously. We fully support the National Joint Registry's work in facilitating improvement in clinical outcomes and governance for the benefit of joint replacement patients and we're delighted to be awarded as an 'NJR Quality Data Provider'."

Trio of new appointments at the top for leading property developer

Somerset-based property business, Summerfield, has announced a new leadership team to continue enhancing the business going forward and welcomed the appointment of a new Non-Executive Director.

After 30 years of working for Summerfield, James Holyday has been appointed as the new Managing Director for Summerfield Developments (SW) Ltd, overseeing the commercial division which has a steady stream of new and ongoing commercial development projects and an established property investment side of the business.

Ed Khodabandehloo has welcomed his new role as Managing Director for Summerfield Homes (SD3 Ltd), overseeing the company's house building division that has developed almost 2,000 residential properties and has a longstanding reputation for building quality new homes across the South West.



Mark Blackwell has decided to pass his Managing Director duties to his two trusted colleagues and will continue working on a part time basis across all the group companies in his new role of Financial and Strategic Director.

The Summerfield Developments (SW) Ltd Board has also recently been strengthened with the appointment of Karen Chapman who is a Partner

of Druces LLP in London. Karen has undertaken the role of Non-Executive Director for Summerfield.

Karen has been with Druces LLP for almost 30 years and said she took great pleasure having the opportunity to contribute to the strategic direction of Summerfield's future in the South West.

James Holyday said: "I'm delighted with the recent appointments and very much look forward to continuing to deliver optimal workspaces, and building on the excellent reputation the company already has across the South West."

Ed Khodabandehloo added: "I am immensely proud to take on the role as Managing Director of such an established regional housebuilding business. We have a strong collection of sites coming through across the South West and a very competent team in place that I look forward to continuing to work with."

Paul joins S Roberts Group as Waste Manager

Paul Rann from Clevedon has joined family-run waste management company S Roberts Group, in Bridgwater, as its new Waste Manager.

In his new position, Paul will be partly responsible for maximising recycling opportunities and monitoring and maintaining plant equipment.

He said: "I am delighted to have joined the team at S Roberts Group and although I have only been here a short time so far, it is very clear that everyone is committed to doing the best job possible, everyone is pragmatic and the team are great problem solvers. Customer service is truly at the heart of the business and I see that in action every day.

"Within operations, the variety of challenges faced on a daily basis means no day is ever dull. There's a

great satisfaction that comes with overcoming challenges, finding solutions and being part of a highly engaged team."

As part of his position, Paul also controls and monitors operational waste receipt and dispatch consignments, ensuring accurate records and documentation are provided and available for inspection.

He ensures waste recycling plant and transfer stations operate in full compliance with applicable environmental and health and safety legislation, and new technologies and best practice, wherever possible. This helps minimise the company's environmental impact and aids its forward movement within the waste hierarchy.

As well as this, he manages



management of personnel, and manages the operation in line with budgetary requirements.

Paul is also the company's Technically Competent Manager and liaises with regulatory bodies as required and ensures client contractual requirements are complied with.

Taunton School named as finalist in international awards

Taunton School has been announced as a finalist in the 2022 StudyTravel Secondary School Awards.



The school, which welcomes students from over 40 different countries and is celebrating its 175th anniversary this year, has been voted as one of the best in Europe by the international organisations that it works with.

The ST Secondary School Awards 2022 cover 13 categories, including regional awards for secondary schools in Europe, North America and Australia and New Zealand. They are specialist, peer-voted awards recognising excellence amongst schools, agents, service providers and associations working in the high school sector.

Principal of Taunton School International, Adrian Hallworth, said, "It is a real honour to have been named as a school that provides an excellent educational experience for its students and educational partners and agents. We are truly delighted to have been named among so many fantastic schools across the world."

Taunton School has recently announced plans to invest £20 million in a world-class campus development project which includes a new international school built on the main campus by September 2026.

The development will also include a new state-of-the-art sixth-form centre and library for students and enhanced sports facilities. These plans follow the completion of a new dining hall in 2020, officially opened by HRH Princess Anne a year ago.

Porter Dodson recognised as an Investor in People for third time

Porter Dodson has achieved 'We invest in people' gold accreditation from Investors in People. This is the third consecutive time that the firm has achieved gold accreditation, with the firm placed in the top 17% of accredited organisations that achieve gold.

Investors in People is the UK's leading accreditation for business improvement through people management. They provide a wealth of resources for businesses, with their mission being to make work better by providing accreditation, advice and support on how to improve your business.

Managing Partner, Kate James (pictured), said: "We are very proud to have achieved gold accreditation for the third time. We understand that the success of our firm begins and ends with our people. I would like to thank everyone at Porter Dodson for their dedication, community spirit and hard work, which enables us to give our clients the very highest quality service and advice."

Porter Dodson is a Top 200 UK law firm with seven offices across Dorset and Somerset. For more information, visit <https://www.porterdodson.co.uk>



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The HR Detective Debbie Morris solves case of Concilium HR re-brand

Until now, people have known Concilium HR and its founder Debbie Morris, for its people-focused 'say it how it is' general HR support. A strong brand with fantastic clients since 2014. But as with all good relationships, there were signs of a seven-year itch, so Debbie felt the time was right to reignite the HR passion.

After a global pandemic and more furlough queries than you can shake a stick at, coupled with the joys of home-schooling and overcoming a personal health challenge, Debbie is changing direction. She's becoming The HR Detective, specialising in conducting workplace investigations.

Using her naturally inquisitive mind, The HR Detective will deliver on issues many people love to hate – employee investigations and complex case work. Focused on asking challenging questions and getting to the heart of the issue, Debbie's super-sleuthing approach will provide well-investigated, impartial reports. This will enable employers to make informed decisions and have confidence that they have acted fairly.

Employee issues are painful. They create stress, anxiety, lost productivity and reduced income and that's just the impact on the business. Debbie recognises her interest in facts, details and transparent communication positions her perfectly for conducting investigations. From complex grievances and allegations to dysfunctional teams. And what's more, she loves doing it.

Using HR skills developed across a career of more than 20 years, there isn't much that surprises her. So you can outsource those tricky employment issues and know you'll get an experienced pair of hands leading an objective investigation.

Her honest approach means she'll tell you how it is, so some recommendations may take you out of your comfort zone. But she'll get to the root cause and help you proactively mitigate risks for your business, while treating your employees with dignity and respect.

Employee investigations don't come up every day, but when they do you need independent, experienced support. As Concilium HR re-launches as The HR Detective, seek Debbie out, and understand how her new services will benefit your business. That way, when an issue arises, you know you've already got the person to call.

Detective hotline: 07885 370054. www.concilium-hr.co.uk



Call for Wells businesses to work together

Wells Chamber of Commerce and Tourism comprises of a friendly and energetic group of businesspeople passionate about promoting the beautiful city of Wells, working together on common issues and to raise the profile of the Wells business community.

Now is a very important time for businesses that have been affected by COVID and lockdowns. In the coming months, Wells Chamber will be concentrating on recruiting new businesses with a focus on networking.

The Chamber believes in bringing like-minded people together to talk in an endeavour to find new ways to do business in these changing times.



The next meeting will be on Monday, July 4, at 6pm in Wells Town Hall.

Scan the QR code for more information or contact Sean Sloan on 01749 681395 or log-on to www.wellschamberofcommerce.co.uk





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Swann returns to The Castle at Taunton as executive chef

Andrew Swann has been appointed as executive chef at The Castle at Taunton in Somerset - returning to where he first started his career more than 20 years ago.

As part of his role, Swann will be responsible for the food and beverage offer across the award-winning hotel, including its 70-cover Brazz restaurant, as well as its 44 rooms and suites.

He initially joined the business in 2000 as a 17-year-old commis chef and has since worked in some of the UK's top hotels and restaurants, including Michelin-starred Zafferano and L'Escargot, as well as Soho House Group, Rök Smokehouse and The Savoy. Most recently, Swann was head

chef at Luciano's by Luciano Pierre White, in Dorchester.

Swann grew up in Somerset having moved to the area at the age of 15. A classically trained chef, his cooking style focusses on using seasonal produce that is sourced locally.

Owned by three generations of the Chapman family for 72 years, The Castle at Taunton has long been known for its food pedigree and Swann follows in the footsteps of many well-known chefs who have worked in its kitchens. These include Chris Oakes (who won the hotel its first Michelin Star in 1984), Gary Rhodes, Phil Vickery, Richard Guest and Liam Finnegan.

The move also comes following a recent £150,000 kitchen refurbishment, enabling the restaurant to offer a wider, more sustainable, and energy efficient offer for guests.

Swann said: "It feels so great to be back home. I fell in love with cooking when I first started my career here, and to be able to come back so many years later to continue that journey is really special for me.

"Given the hotel's history, I know I have some big shoes to fill but that's what gets me up in the mornings.

"I'm especially excited to be able to work with an incredible core team here and to have access to some of the country's greatest produce. Where we are, we are spoilt by the produce coming in every season, and I can't wait to get reacquainted with the local farmers and producers."



Top 50 accolade for Nexus Open Systems Ltd

IT specialist, Nexus Open Systems Ltd, is proud to have been named as one of the top 50 managed service providers (MSPs) by Cloudtango.



Every year, Cloudtango honours the most successful MSPs across the UK serving small and medium-sized organisations, in what has become an industry reference due to its independent, unbiased approach, as well as in-depth analysis.

Stuart Wilson, Managing Director at Nexus, said: "By being selected, Nexus Open Systems Ltd demonstrated a track record of successfully delivering innovative IT solutions while exceeding customer expectations. Core to the Nexus managed service offering is our flexible approach and expert team.

"We will always have a constant handle on what's going on across all our clients' infrastructure and will promise faster problem resolution, greater expertise, proactive monitoring and regular maintenance. All of this frees up our clients to focus on running their business more effectively and I'm very proud that this has been recognised by Cloudtango."



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M-CNC Precision Engineering to host second Festival of British Engineering and Manufacturing



M-CNC Precision Engineering, in conjunction with local Somerset schools, colleges, businesses and enterprises plans to showcase the very best of British engineering and manufacturing in the hope of inspiring the next generation of engineers.

The Festival of British Engineering and Manufacturing (FOBEM) is an invitation-only, two day event on July 6-7, which will be held at the company's advanced manufacturing facility in Bridgwater. It will feature like-minded businesses and representatives from the UK engineering and manufacturing sectors, all hoping to inspire a new generation of precision engineers.

Students and teachers from local Somerset-based schools and colleges will have the opportunity to visit the M-CNC manufacturing facility and



observe the latest industry cutting-edge technologies in action and have the opportunity to engage with a wide variety of industry professionals, businesses and enterprises.

Participating businesses and the entrepreneurs behind them, will be encouraged to engage and take questions from students and visitors, giving them first-hand insights and practical advice about our world-leading industry.

The Festival Of British Engineering and Manufacturing has an ambitious goal: to reveal the innovation and creativity within the industry and signpost the multiple career paths that are literally "engineering new horizons".

M-CNC Business Development Manager, Leigh Howarth, said: "My career in engineering started when a teacher took the time to fire my imagination! They saw the potential in me that others didn't and opened my eyes to a world of creativity and innovation. That's the aim of this event. To inspire a new breed of engineer who will continue to pioneer and champion the UK's undisputed heritage of manufacturing excellence."

For more details of the event please email leigh@m-cnc.co.uk or call 07712 522902.

Somerset firm Old Mill expands corporate finance team



Pictured, from left, Tom Downes, Mark Neath, Scott Hill and Kathryn Mansell.

Somerset firm Old Mill has expanded its dedicated corporate finance team to further enhance its already comprehensive offering and support the firm's overall growth plans.

In November 2021, Old Mill announced plans to grow by 15% pa for the next five years and double staff numbers by 2026. With a team of just two - Partner Mark Neath and Adviser Kathryn Mansell - and a growing demand from business owners for their collaborative style of help and advice, particularly around succession plans, the corporate finance team was one of the obvious areas for growth.

The team welcomed Scott Hill at the end of last year to focus on helping owner managed businesses who are looking to make an exit and in January, Tom Downes came on board to lead the financial modelling and valuations offering.

This additional experience and resource has allowed the corporate finance team to expand its services, strengthen its expertise and offer more transactional support, as well as work on bigger and multiple deals. Most notably the team recently helped Gollidge Electronics secure a sale to Techpoint. It was also integral in Atlas Packaging - a Devon-based firm that Old Mill has worked with since 2010 - being acquired by Smurfit Kappa UK Limited's (SKUK).

Boost for charity and less waste to landfill thanks to Amarin Rubber & Plastics

For a number of years Amarin Rubber & Plastics has tried to find a way to decrease its landfill waste. A lot of the materials used in the company's manufacturing processes are not widely recycled and so the company were forced to think outside the box.

Enter local charity organisation Community Scrapstore. The charity provides materials and resources for all sorts of projects, from den-building to making fancy dress costumes. It mainly works with low-income families and children's groups.

Amarin, which is based in Weston-super-Mare, makes a wide range of materials available to the scrapstore throughout the year and the charity has been extremely grateful for the donations.

Sales Manager, Alex Howells, said: "We are always looking for ways to reduce our waste and being able to do so and help an amazing local charity is a great win-win situation."

Amarin is a market leader in the manufacture and supply of a comprehensive range of quality rubber and plastic products, offering unparalleled technical expertise and service to industry.



BUSINESS NEWS

Bank of England

By Malindi Myers, Bank of England Agent for the South West



@BoESouthWest



BANK OF ENGLAND

Agency contacts in most sectors reported that demand was strong in the first quarter of the year – before the invasion of Ukraine – and that impacts from the COVID-19 Omicron variant had subsided. However, rising materials and labour costs and supply shortages continued to hold back growth in output.

Contacts said that the escalation of the Russia-Ukraine conflict had lowered their growth expectations, as it was putting further upward pressure on input costs, was expected to exacerbate shortages of some tradable goods, and weigh on sentiment.

Contacts said that they had already begun to see further increases in the price of energy and of some inputs as a result of the conflict. And shortages of certain goods, such as semiconductors, were expected to become more prolonged, due to the importance of Ukraine as a producer of the raw materials required to make them.

Contacts in retail and consumer services said that consumer spending continued to grow at a robust pace. But there were concerns about the outlook for demand over the coming months, as rising energy and goods prices were expected to weigh on households' disposable income.

Companies expected their demand for labour to stabilise, but recruitment difficulties remained intense and the labour market was expected to remain tight throughout 2022. Pay settlements picked up sharply due to recruitment difficulties, higher inflation and the impact from the upcoming rise in the National Living Wage.

In response to increased cost pressures, many contacts said they expected to raise prices to rebuild or protect margins, which on average remain below normal. But the extent to which these cost pressures will become embedded in wages and prices is unclear.

Consumer spending picked up in early 2022, having weakened in December due to Omicron. However, contacts expected demand for goods to ease in the coming months as higher energy and goods prices weighed further on already squeezed household incomes, or if consumers switched to more social forms of consumption.



Contacts in professional and financial services reported buoyant demand, supported by corporate transactions. Demand for corporate restructuring work also increased, though insolvencies remained low. Contacts offering advisory services relating to environmental sustainability and property also reported increased activity.

Recruitment consultants reported very strong levels of activity, reflecting the tight labour market.

Demand for IT services continued to be strong, with growth held back by lack of staff. Logistics companies said growth was constrained by vehicle shortages, though the shortage of drivers was abating.

Exports of services continued to grow at a moderate pace, supported by the easing of some international travel restrictions. However, revenues from international tourism remained well below pre-pandemic levels.

Shortages of goods and labour continued to hold back output growth. Contacts were concerned that the war in Ukraine could lead to shortages of some tradable goods.

Manufacturing output grew at a modest pace in the past three months compared with a year ago, with growth constrained by shortages of goods and labour, in particular among manufacturers of automotive and electronic goods. However, most contacts reported strong order books, in particular those in the food and beverage, pharmaceutical, and chemicals sectors. And demand was gradually recovering in the oil and gas and aerospace sectors.

UK goods exports increased slightly over the first three months compared with a year ago, reflecting stronger demand from non-EU countries. For most contacts, exports to the EU had returned to 2019 levels, though the increased complexity and cost of exporting goods to the EU had led some smaller firms to reduce or stop selling to the region.

Investment intentions remained strong, though current investment spending was held back by rising costs and ongoing shortages of goods and labour.

Because of the tight labour market, companies have increasingly sought to invest in automation to raise output, rather than expanding headcount. Companies also reported investing in technology, logistics, online sales platforms and in measures to achieve net-zero emissions. Investment among consumer services firms was improving from a low base.

However, contacts also said that their ability to implement investment plans was being constrained by high materials and goods costs and supply issues.



Only half of smaller businesses are profitable

Only half of SMEs are profitable and four in ten would describe themselves as 'just about breaking even'. This is according to the 'SME Confidence Tracker' published by Bibby Financial Services, which also revealed that one in ten (equivalent to more than 500,000 businesses) are operating at a loss.

Read more about the tracker at:

<https://www.bibbyfinancialservices.com/about-us/news-and-insights/news/2022/profitability-on-a-knife-edge>

EU exporters benefit while UK firms struggle

Brexit is having a negative impact on small and medium-sized businesses in the UK, with many seeing their core European markets vanish overnight. Around 6.5% of British businesses closed between 2020 and 2021, only the second decline in 20 years. While the pandemic did have an impact, many smaller businesses blame increased bureaucracy and the cost of trading with the EU for the fall. However, EU exporters have benefited from the UK's lack of import controls.

Read more about the impact at:

<https://theloadstar.com/eu-exporters-benefit-from-border-largesse-as-uk-smes-struggle/>

'Economic shock' predicted for South West rural economy

Research by the University of Gloucestershire has predicted that £883 million will be lost from the rural economy across the south west of England by 2027. The region's rural economy is dependent on small, family-run farms, which will be hit hard by the transition away from Common Agricultural Policy support. The research indicates that up to £440 million less will be spent on materials and services, which will have a significant effect on jobs and businesses.

Read more about the research at:

<https://www.glos.ac.uk/content/university-report-predicts-economic-shock-for-south-west-rural-economy/>

Over half borrow to pay for insurance

More than half (59%) of small and medium-sized enterprises are borrowing an average of £1,105 to pay for their insurance policies. Vehicle insurance, property insurance and public and product liability insurance were the policies most likely to be paid for using a credit card.

Read more about the borrowing at:

<https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/uk/news/sme/over-half-of-smes-borrow-to-pay-for-insurance-405352.aspx>

Source: BAD News (Business Advisers News)



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