

Somerset Voice

The Official Magazine of
Somerset Chamber of Commerce

February / March
2024

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Front page: GTE Training Academy is a dedicated supplier of health and safety training programs tailored for the construction industry. Find out more in our health and safety sector focus.

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FIRST WORD

It is always good to start a new year with a positive outlook and it seems the economic tide may slowly be turning for the better as business confidence continues to improve as we move into 2024.

According to the latest data from the Chamber network's Quarterly Economic Survey, there was another small increase in business confidence in the final quarter of last year.

The percentage of firms expecting an increase in turnover over the next year (56%) rose to the highest level since Q1 2022 when COVID restrictions were lifted.

The data also revealed the disproportionate impacts of economic shocks on different types of businesses. Manufacturers, for example, were more likely to be exposed to the trade barriers established with Europe, while many firms in the retail and hospitality sector reported recessionary conditions.

However, while it is likely the UK will avoid a technical recession, the survey results provide more evidence of a very low growth climate as most SMEs continue to report no improvement to sales, cash flow, or investment.

Businesses have been desperate for a clear long-term plan for growth from Government that addresses infrastructure, access to skills and global trade.

Our data shows business confidence is growing, but real challenges remain in the coming year.

Investment continues to be the Achilles' heel for business. The Chancellor's decision in his Autumn Statement to make full expensing permanent was very welcome. 2024 needs to be the year when companies are given further assistance to invest.

In the noisy election year ahead, it is crucial politicians remain focused on growing the economy and helping businesses thrive.

The county's businesses need a clear, long-term strategy which delivers on infrastructure, trade, skills and green innovation to grow the economy.

Emma Rawlings

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

OUR BUSINESS PARTNERS

Contact us to find out what benefits Somerset Chamber Business Partners receive.

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DAVE CREW Head of Employer Partnerships, Weston College



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BRITISH CHAMBERS OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2023

Business confidence improves though most firms report no increase to investment. The BCC's Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) for Q4 2023 – the UK's largest independent survey of business sentiment, made up of 91% SMEs – shows an increase turnover growth expectations, although most firms continue to report no increase to sales, cash flow, or investment.

More than half (56%) now expect their turnover to grow over the next twelve months

Most firms report no increase to sales, cash flow, or investment

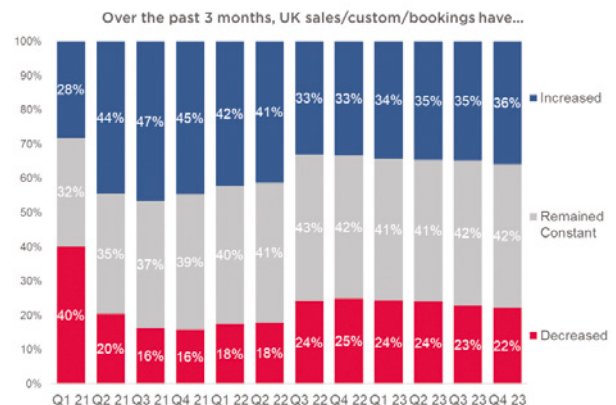
More firms now expect prices to rise, halting the downward trend in this indicator

AT A GLANCE

Domestic Sales

Overall, 36% of respondents reported an increase to domestic sales in the last three months, while 22% reported a decrease, largely unchanged since Q3 2022.

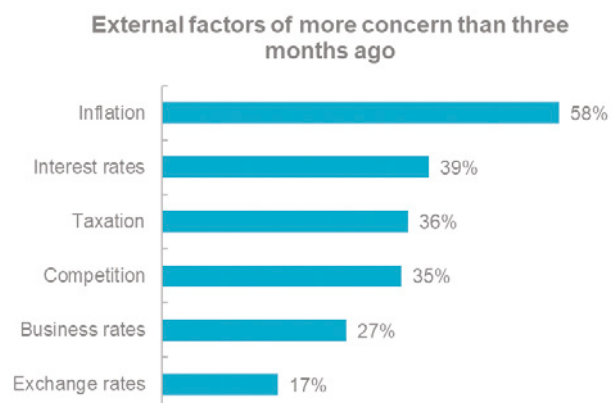
B2B service firms (e.g. finance, media, legal) were the most likely to report increased sales (38%), while the manufacturing sector was the least (32%).



External factors

Inflation remains the top external factor of concern for the majority of respondents 58%), though this has declined significantly from the peak of 84% in Q3 2022.

Interest rates are a concern for 39% of respondents, down from 45% last quarter. B2C service firms are the most likely to cite inflation (62%) as a concern.





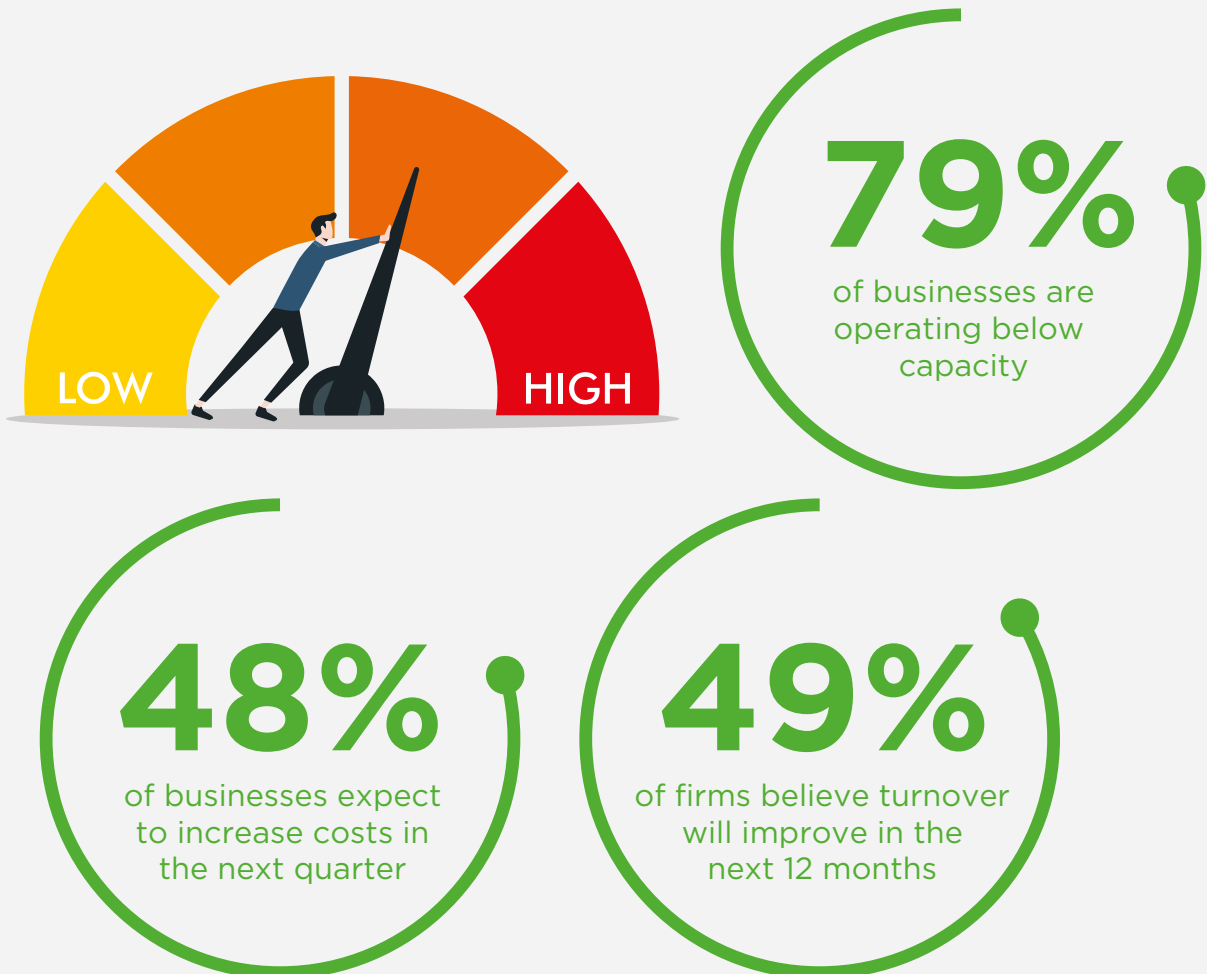
SOMERSET CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

QUARTERLY ECONOMIC SURVEY Q4 2023

Three-quarters of Somerset businesses expect their workforce to remain constant over the next three months, while just over half of companies which had tried to recruit new staff, some 56%, reported having difficulties filling vacancies. Worryingly, 79% of businesses said they were operating below capacity.

Some 37% of respondents said their cash flow had decreased in the previous three months which, in turn, had a knock-on affect on business confidence with a third of companies believing turnover would worsen in the next 12 months, up from 28% the previous quarter. On the flip side, almost half of companies said they believed turnover would increase, at 49%.

However, business said rising fuel bills and labour costs were piling pressure on the need to raise prices, with 49% now saying their expected to increase prices, compared to 42% in the previous quarter.



Could you be a Somerset Business Mentor?

What do Bill Gates, Richard Branson and Mark Zuckerberg all have in common? They, along with many of the world's most famous entrepreneurs, have all had a business mentor and acknowledge the importance that the mentor played in helping their business adapt and grow.

A mentor will hold their client accountable in a way that their team cannot. Because of their own experience and their objective perspective, a mentor can help businesses to see where they may be losing profits or help to spark new initiatives that can contribute to business growth and success.

Somerset Business Mentors is offering Somerset SME businesses which have been trading for over a year and have two or more employees an opportunity to work with a Somerset-based business mentor for six hours of free support over a six-month period. They can assist in areas such as growth strategy, finance, marketing, HR, e-commerce, bid writing, acquisition, exit strategy, and much more!

The mentoring programme is also seeking 10 additional voluntary business mentors. Existing mentors have been selected from executive and senior management level Somerset business leaders and successful entrepreneurs.

They include a former NASDAQ CEO, a soft drinks manufacturer who supplies major retailers in the UK and abroad, a multi-million pound NHS equipment supplier and a



Funded by UK Government

University of the West of England

Somerset Council

senior transformation executive who works with UK and US quoted businesses. All understand the challenges with running and growing a business and the value of an impartial sounding board.

To date, the scheme has trained 40 Somerset business mentors who have been matched with over 60 SMEs.

All mentors receive two days of free mentor training and a mentoring qualification. The next training days will be February 27 and March 12, at Hurds Hill House, Langport. Mentors must commit to mentoring a minimum of two mentees for six hours each, over a 12-month period.

More information about becoming a volunteer mentor is available at <https://www.somerset.gov.uk/business-economy-and-licences/somerset-business-mentoring>.

The Somerset Business Mentor programme is run by Somerset Council and funded by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

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Business partner spotlight on Albert Goodman

Looking back at 2023 and looking ahead to 2024

The achievement of B Corp status last summer has enabled us to get third party verification that we live by our purpose of “collaborate to achieve” and our wider values that enable us to be a force for good with our clients, our people and our communities.

What was pleasing about this, was that we were able to achieve the standard without having to materially change what we did as a business.

In 2024 we are looking to widen our impact by making the B Corp principles a conscious and purposeful part of what we do. We intend to do this by joining forces with other B Corps and increasing our client’s and people’s understanding of what it means to be a B Corp.



This will form part of the new year learning and development plan for our people in 2024 which is another of our key focus areas. We are already members of the 5% club and heavily invest in apprenticeships for our people, but we are also keen to ensure that those not on a trainee programme are also invested in and are developing along with our business.

In order to deliver an excellent client experience, we need to ensure that our people have a future ready skill set and with the recruitment of a new learning and development resource from January, we are going to start to deliver on this.

Elsewhere, we opened our new Bristol office in the spring, and have since been recruiting brilliant people into the



team and getting to know the Bristol business scene. It has been exciting to see the great work that goes on in the city. We were delighted to see Bristol City Women - whom we sponsor - get promoted to the Women’s Super League.

Our recruitment strategy has been successful in a very difficult market. Our launch of our Bristol office secured eight new hires as well as a transfer of our existing people from our previous Westbury on Trym office.

We have brought in 61 new people across different departments in all of our locations. We continue to live by our ‘grow our own strategy’ and our total of 61 included 28 new trainees starting their career with us.

Looking ahead to 2024, we are planning to continue growing organically as part of our key strategic aim of being an independent firm with a strong regional identity. Another big trainee intake will mean we will continue to provide great career paths for people.

Iain McVicar, Managing Partner at Albert Goodman



Predictable working pattern request: a right for the future

New legislation recently received Royal Assent which permits workers who do not have clear and predictable working patterns to request this from their employers, writes Gina McCadden, a solicitor in the employment and HR team at Clarke Willmott.

The Workers (Predictable Terms and Conditions) Act 2023 introduces a new statutory right for workers to request a more predictable working pattern. The Act comes into force to



try to address the issue of 'one sided flexibility', especially for workers in the gig economy.

The legislation was first suggested as part of the Taylor Review in 2017. Workers who have uncertain working patterns regarding their hours and times of work, such as zero-hours workers, and those on a fixed-term contract of 12 months or less, will be able to request a change to their working pattern.

It is expected that to be able to make a request, workers will need at least 26 weeks service. This will be confirmed in secondary legislation and it is unlikely that service will need to be continuous to be eligible.

If requested, the worker will need to outline clearly that it is an application within the relevant legislation and specify the change that they wish to have made to their contract and the date on which it should take effect.

A worker will only be able to make a maximum of two requests in any 12-month period.

Employers are required to respond to requests reasonably and must notify the worker of their decision within one month. If a change is accepted, then the employer will need to provide new terms and conditions within two weeks. These terms cannot impose detrimental changes to other contractual terms at the same time as making the changes which have been approved as part of the process. Employers can refuse a request for certain permitted reasons.

The Government has announced that the measures in the Act and any secondary legislation will come into force one year after the date of Royal Assent. Employers will, therefore, need to ensure they have appropriate measures in place to deal with these requests by September 2024.



Health Insurance

The highest rated
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based here in Somerset

 Trustpilot



Rated 'Excellent' as at 11.01.24

Business partner spotlight on WPA

- the Somerset-based health insurer for companies and families

An unwavering commitment to customers

With an unwavering commitment to our customers, WPA were thrilled to be recognised as the first and only Which? Recommended Provider of medical insurance in the UK at the end of August.

This remarkable achievement adds to our excellent and consistently market leading independent Trustpilot score of 4.6 out of 5 and the series of awards recognising the focus of WPA and the amazing team at our Head Office in Taunton.

WPA treat our customers as we would want to be treated. We provide access to the sort of healthcare that we want for ourselves and our families and we've been helping our members as a not-for-profit organisation since 1901.

While some of the competition struggle to answer the phone with three-hour call waits in the news, WPA, on average, answer the phone within 130 seconds. Customers really are at the centre of all that we do.

Our DNA

Not-for-profit means that we're not hampered by the demands of shareholders motivated to make a profit. WPA have two overriding objectives:

- To help customers access the best healthcare - our insurance business today
- To promote good health, the work of the foundation

WPA offer groundbreaking versatile and valued personal and business health insurance policies that have truly revolutionised healthcare in the UK. While some health insurers might direct you to a restricted list of 'recognised' providers, WPA empowers customers with the freedom to choose where, when and who by they are treated.

The foundation invests in the communities in which we thrive.

There are projects in Taunton supporting the young, such as the Somerset Cricket Foundation and Channel Adventure. In the West Country, we are helping parents with travel and accommodation costs to accompany their children to hospital and nationally, we are supporting schools to purchase healthy physical activity equipment. Last year, we supported more than 30,000 children.

WPA are proud to be certified as a carbon zero company, through CO2 balance's Gold Standard and Verified Carbon Standard carbon offset projects and we continue to invest in minimising environmental footprint.

Why health insurance?

Health insurance is a safety net during times of illness. It extends the choices of recovering from illness allowing customers to access the best healthcare at a time of their choosing. For companies, it improves productivity and is proving an effective employee retention tool - both business imperatives for different reasons. For employees, with UK health challenges in the headlines daily, it is a growingly popular work benefit.

Why WPA?

WPA are your local health insurer. We are award winning and have an amazing team primed to take your call. We have products that can be tailored to your circumstances, needs and budgets. We are also the Which? Recommended Provider for medical insurance. As a result, in the last 12 months, we have grown the number of customers that we have by 17%. We have grown the number of staff and, on current trajectories, we need more great people.

To find out more or partner WPA in our work get in touch with George Dowse-Brennan

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Health Insurance



Local Somerset route to be altered as part of A303 upgrade

Users of the A303 in Somerset will start to use the new road layout this month as the A303 Sparkford to Ilchester dualling scheme continues to move forward later this month.

To allow for National Highways to carry out the next stage of essential work, changes in the layout of the road around the Yeovilton Junction and Steart Hill Junction are needed.

Specifically, the Government-owned company needs to move traffic onto the newly built eastbound carriageway to allow space to build the new westbound dual carriageway.

The changes will affect the road between the Podimore roundabout and the Steart Hill Junction.

The changes include:

- Eastbound traffic on the A303 will travel from Podimore roundabout and follow traffic management to take them on to the new eastbound carriageway of the A303
- Westbound traffic on the A303 will switch from the west bound carriageway at Steart Hill and will run temporarily on the new east bound carriageway of the A303
- Local traffic will have different entry and exit points to the A303. The newly built Steart Hill overbridge will be open, connecting the community of Downhead to villages to the south of the A303

Siân Hopkins, National Highways' Senior Project Manager for the A303 Sparkford scheme, said: "We appreciate the A303 is a well-used road, and we are keeping disruption to an absolute minimum.

"We understand roadworks and changes in road layout can be frustrating, but we've communicated the traffic switch well in advance to local communities.

"We're ensuring access is maintained for residents and business and we'll be keeping people fully informed as we continue to progress with the scheme.

"We thank people in advance for their co-operation and patience and in the meantime, we advise drivers to plan ahead and allow a little extra time for their journeys during this work."

The A303 Sparkford to Ilchester upgrade will provide a high-quality three-mile dual carriageway link on the A303 in Somerset, including new and replacement slip roads, junctions and road bridges to replace existing junctions and direct access roads.

The new dualled section will start east of Podimore Roundabout, follow the alignment of the existing A303 to Downhead, and then move north of the existing A303 single carriageway, allowing the existing road to be kept for use as a local road in this section.

The route will rise up West Camel Hill before crossing over the existing A303 at the junction with Steart Hill/Howell Hill and meet up with the existing road again between Vale Farm and the Ministry of Defence signal station at Eyewell/Traits Land.

The final section of the route bypasses the existing Hazlegrove Roundabout to the north through the Registered Park and Garden associated with Hazlegrove House, before tying into the existing A303 Sparkford Bypass.



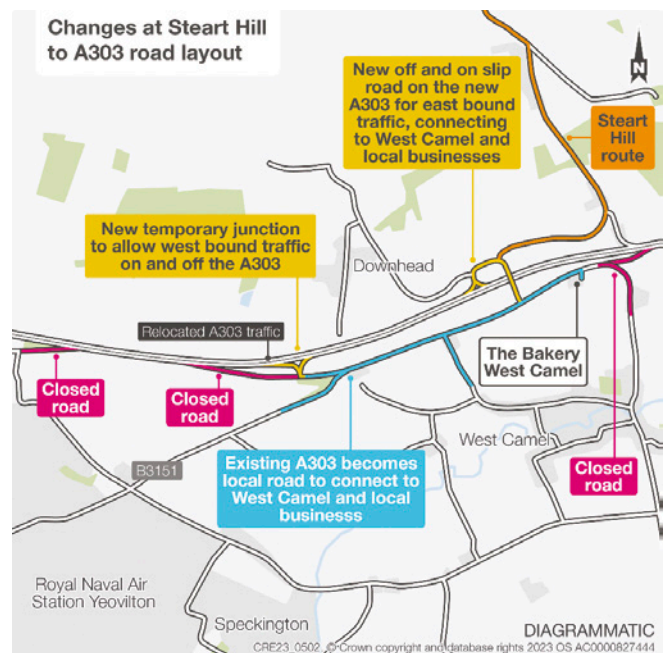
Once completed, the route will make this section of the A303 safer for all users, while protecting the environment by minimising the impact on the surrounding landscape.

National Highways said the £155m scheme between Sparkford and Ilchester would not only promote economic growth in this area of Somerset, but it would also tackle a long-standing bottleneck, reduce journey times to the South West and improve traffic flows in the area at peak times and during peak seasons.

On an average day, the A303 between Sparkford and Ilchester carries 23,500 vehicles but numbers increase significantly in the summer, particularly at weekends, making journeys unreliable and unpredictable.

National Highways is working with its delivery partner, Galliford Try, to construct the scheme.

With construction now into its third year, more details about the scheme and the construction process is available on National Highways' website at <https://nationalhighways.co.uk/our-roads/south-west/a303-sparkford-to-ilchester/>.





Health and wellbeing

Employers have a duty of care for all their employees but supporting employee health is much more than setting up safety nets or running reactive support programmes. To keep workforces in good shape, employers need to offer a wide range of services – from physical activities to promoting good health and offering dedicated training and support. Somerset Chamber's Members already know the benefits of a healthy and happy workforce and here they share some of their initiatives and ideas to boost productivity and retain staff.

ApolloIQ

ApolloIQ has witnessed first-hand the transformative power of Robotic Process Automation (RPA) in the healthcare sector. Based in the heart of Somerset, we are not just participating in the technological revolution; we are at its helm, reshaping the landscape of patient care and safety.

Our journey with RPA began with a simple vision: to streamline healthcare operations, allowing healthcare professionals to focus where they truly excel – patient care. RPA is more than just a tool, it is the cornerstone of our strategy to enhance healthcare efficiency while maintaining the highest standards of patient safety.

In our work, we have seen how RPA can transform healthcare facilities. By taking over routine administrative tasks, it allows medical staff to devote more time and attention to their patients. This shift is not just about

improving efficiency, it is about recentring healthcare around patient wellbeing and safety.

Our success stories, such as our collaboration with local groups such as Tone Vale Primary Care Network, are testament to the potential of RPA in revolutionising healthcare.

At ApolloIQ, we are driven by the belief that technology should complement human care, not replace it. As we continue to innovate, our goal remains steadfast: to harness RPA in creating a healthcare future where efficiency, compassion and safety are inextricably linked.

As we lead this charge into the future, we remain committed to our mission – a mission that began in Somerset but now extends far beyond, to reshape healthcare across the globe.



Teapot

Talent flourishes in a happy work place. At Teapot, we work hard at our team culture. Our internal goal is to have a happy team who excel in their work and are invested in the company and its clients.

This means our customers get to work with people who love what they do and who enjoy helping them achieve their ambitious goals.

In our 14 years of business, we've carefully cultivated an environment that ensures our people have freedom to be creative, try new things and be recognised for their contributions.

Alongside this sits our health and wellbeing initiative. Teapot put together a care and growth package for all

our employees. This includes working from home three days per week, 24/7 free mental health support, flexible working around families, a set of unique perks (from Tesco Vouchers for the tricky months, remedial massage, pension boost for the financially savvy or an extra day off for mental health, or simply to chill out).

We grow our staff's ability through training as a team and individually and help them achieve their own goals. It's our employees' that see us continue to deliver exceptional work, expand our knowledge and build on our reputation.

Without them we wouldn't be where we are today. Our motto is 'Create, Change, Grow' and this means internally for ourselves as well as for our clients' businesses.

Shreeve Care Services

Janet Shreeve set up her most recent care business, Shreeve Care Services, a little over a year ago to provide consultancy and support to companies looking to provide the best care, to families seeking the best support for a loved one.

Janet also helped establish care companies to improve



their offering. Before that, she worked in the care sector for more than 20 years, in particular working with the live-in care sector.

In January 2024, Jodie Fraser from Fraser Allen Estate Management began working with Shreeve Care Services. Having met Jodie when she was looking for support and advice with regards to care for her grandmother, we recognised the many health benefits of having the right accommodation.

Many people don't wish to go into a care home but if they can stay in their own home and look at options for care then they can make a decision that is truly personal for them and beneficial to their health.

Following a day in the summer finding out about starting a podcast, Janet launched 'You Care, I Care' which sees her talk with many different people from all aspects of care, health and wellbeing. Experts share their different experiences within the care industry, as well as looking at many different aspects of care.

To access 'You Care, I Care', visit the Shreeve Care Services website or find it on Spotify and other streaming services.

If you would like to get more information about Shreeve Care Services visit www.shreevecare.services.co.uk.

Numatic International

At Numatic International, the wellbeing of employees and their families is paramount. We have a variety of well-established health and wellbeing initiatives alongside a wellbeing culture that goes beyond that of simple compliance to help support the mental, physical and financial health of our workforce.

All employees and their family members have 24-hour access to our employee assistance programme (EAP) which provides immediate counselling and therapeutic support. Employees can also meet regularly in our designated wellbeing room, while we also have a team of 20 trained mental health first aiders across our site.

We regularly monitor our employees' health with free eye tests available and 'Know Your Numbers' events held across the year to help employees better understand their health, so they can take positive steps to improve it.

Staff are encouraged to get active via our walking routes and group or local gyms at a discounted rate. Employees can also sign-up to the cycle to work scheme. Free chiropractic support is also available.

On top of this, key dates, such as International Men's and World Menopause Day are celebrated with visits by keynote speakers and support from our occupational health provider.

Monthly 'Wellbeing Wednesday' sessions are held for staff to attend, so that they can meet in a relaxed environment, network with colleagues from other departments and most importantly enjoy a cake or two!

We even provide free fruit for our staff and continue to work with a range of organisations to continually improve our wellbeing offer and the lives of our staff.

Numatic

SASP (Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership)

The last few years have demonstrated just how much pressure and responsibility medical and NHS staff have been working with. All too often their own health and wellbeing has been compromised in their vocation to help others.

Bridgwater Bay Primary Care Network (PCN) know that well-trained, resilient, healthy and committed staff are their most valuable resource and, in a bid, to support staff health and wellbeing, enlisted the help of Somerset Activity and Sports Partnership (SASP) health and wellbeing coaching service on a specialist project.

SASP's health and wellbeing coaches work with residents in five PCN's across Somerset to support people with long-term conditions to access physical activity, to promote and protect their future health.

From the staff satisfaction survey at Bridgwater Bay PCN,

it concluded that employee's own mental and physical wellbeing could be improved and less than a third of staff met the recommended Chief Medical Officer's activity levels, with resistance exercises being of most concern.

SASP has delivered stretch and guided relaxation sessions in two GP surgeries and the feedback was a resounding success, with more being planned and opportunities being established with SASP's health and wellbeing coaches for individual one-to-one sessions with staff, daytime or evening, in person and on the telephone.

Information provided would create 'achievable' movement opportunities, clarify nutritional advice and strategies for improving mental wellbeing.

If you are looking to try something new in your working day, but struggling for ideas, why not try a 10-minute exercise video at lunch. More details at www.sasp.co.uk/exercise-videos



Key Person Insurance Hub – Tony Pizii

The world of group insurances is evolving, whether it be group private medical, life or income protection, if your employer has engaged any of these it's well worth checking your policy for added value benefits.

Most insurers now offer a range of benefits including stress helplines, libraries of mental health video modules and materials to help line managers spot the warning signs of poor mental health, also bite-sized videos, articles, and advice to help employees manage mental ill health, stress, and anxiety. In some cases, a dedicated team of mental health specialists are available to offer personalised care and provide the right support strategy and treatment for the member.

Virtual GP services whereby a member can book a confidential call 24/7 with a GP for advice. This could be a video call, or an unlimited amount of phone calls. The

GPs can prescribe medication for collection from the members local pharmacy. They can also offer an open referral to a specialist if needed. This service enables the member swift access to a healthcare pathway, without the wait to see, or talk with their own GP.

Medical second opinion services are available for those diagnosed with a critical condition.

Help to get active, with discounted gym memberships. Online and app-based exercise plans, some offer personalised four or eight-week plans including nutritional advice.

It's worth checking your policy as most of the benefits are free to access, if you're unable to find your membership details, we just need to know who you're insured by, and we are happy to guide you through your options.

tony@keypersoninsurancehub.co.uk



CHASE Consulting

CHASE Consulting's commitment to minimising workplace stress reflects our belief that our employees are our most valuable asset. We create an environment where stress is reduced, and wellbeing is prioritised. We treat our team as we would like to be treated ourselves and have a very clear family first perspective.

A key element of this commitment is acknowledging the impact of both work-related and personal stress on our team and providing support for any form of stress irrespective of the source.

We reinforce the importance of personal life and



minimising personal stress by having flexible working, this allows the team to start and finish when they like. They can complete the school run before work, have a dentist appointment during the day or make the most of a sunny afternoon and take an extended lunch break and go for a walk.

Trust, inclusion and open communication are central to our wellbeing strategy. By promoting an inclusive environment and encouraging honest dialogue, we ensure that each team member feels part of a supportive community. Our yearly review ends with the most important question: "Are you happy?".

Continual learning and feedback are also essential for our wellbeing strategy to work, as is the team feeling valued, appreciated and listened to. We review workloads each week to prevent excessive stress, and our policies are designed to foster a balanced and healthy work environment.

This integrated approach to health and wellbeing makes CHASE Consulting a supportive and nurturing environment for all.



4 SERVICES

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How To Access

For expert guidance on protecting your business, contact the advice line on **01455 852 037**

To access our document libraries, please visit your chamber website at **chambersomerset.questcover.com**

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Dome lift caps off progress at Hinkley Point C



The dome for Hinkley Point C's first reactor building has been successfully lifted into place. The major milestone closes the roof on the first reactor building, allowing the first nuclear reactor to be installed next year.

The power station's two nuclear reactors will provide reliable zero-carbon electricity for six million homes, boosting Britain's energy security for decades to come.

Engineering teams lifted the 245-tonne steel dome precisely into place on top of the reactor building. The achievement ends the year on a high as the 14-metre-tall dome sits on top of the 44-metre-high reactor building.

The dome is the top part of the reactor building's inner containment – a steel cylinder encased in concrete. Measuring 47m in diameter, it is wider than the dome of St Paul's Cathedral – and made up of 38 prefabricated panels which were shipped to Hinkley Point C and welded together in an onsite factory. Prefabrication and modular construction are key features of Hinkley Point C's construction.

Simon Parsons, Nuclear Island Area Director, said: "Building the first nuclear power station in a generation is a challenging job and the success of this complex operation is due to the determination and commitment of our fantastic teams.

"Lifting the dome allows us to get on with the fitting of equipment, pipes and cables, including the first reactor which is on site and ready to be installed next year."

Just days before dome lift, the giant polar crane was also lifted into the first reactor building. The crane will rotate 360° at the top of the building and will be used to install heavy equipment during construction, such as the reactor

and steam generators. It will also be used when the power station is operational for refuelling and maintenance.

The transfer compartment pool (pictured) has been lifted out of the East Pool Bunker and positioned safely inside the fuel building on the nuclear island.

The pool will be used for the safe handling and rotation of nuclear fuel assemblies as they move in and out of the reactor building.

Weighing in at around 1,200 tonnes of stainless steel, concrete and lifting tackle, the module is one of the heaviest objects to be lifted by Big Carl during the life of the project.



Somerset Chamber of Commerce remains a strong voice for local businesses

Somerset Chamber of Commerce continues to provide a strong link between local businesses and key policymakers, investors and economic leaders, both across the county and further afield.

Graeme Crosbie, the outgoing Chair of the Chamber's board of directors, said it was vital the Chamber acted as the voice of Somerset businesses and used its influence and reach to support its members in the ever-changing business environment.

Speaking at the Chamber's annual general meeting, Mr Crosbie said: "We maintain some fantastic relationships right across the Somerset business landscape and we are seen as that vital cog, the conduit between the policymakers and the investors in Somerset on one hand and the Somerset business community that we represent on the other.

"The important thing is being at the table and representing the voice of Somerset businesses to try and influence any decisions which are being made. And we are sat at the table. We have the voice and are representing your views that is the critically important part."

Somerset Chamber Chief Executive, Emma Rawlings, echoed his comments and said she was working both locally and nationally with key economic experts.

"I speak every week to the Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce and I feed back all the conversations you as members have



▲ Outgoing Somerset Chamber Chair Graeme Crosbie welcomes new Chair Emma Warren.



▲ Somerset Chamber of Commerce board members, from left, Vice-Chair Dave Crew, Lizzie Ginbey, Graeme Crosbie, Chair Emma Warren, new board members Joe Routledge and Karen Morledge, Jerome Timbrell, Mike Cahill, Somerset Chamber Chief Executive Emma Rawlings and Matt Ruddle.

with the team. I tell them what is happening on the ground in Somerset so they are able to go into Number 10 and tell them what policies are needed and what needs to be changed," Mrs Rawlings said.

She said the Chamber continued to work hard to represent the business community and to reach all corners of the county with business-specific events.

The organisation was also bringing together all the county's town chambers for regular meetings to ensure there was a true collective voice for local businesses.

"We have set up a programme of events with Somerset Council's economic team so we can hear about the issues in the local towns and the issues they are facing. It might be planning, it might be the High Street - we will bring the right people to the town chambers and ensure we have a collective voice to represent the county as a whole," she said.

In addition, the Chamber was continuing to work with EDF to lead the Hinkley Supply Chain for the Hinkley Point C project and had also

launched the Somerset Supply Chain to provide a similar service for the Glastonbury Town Deal.

The team was also working with the Department for Education to ensure school and college leavers had the skills needed by employers through a scheme known as the Local Skills Improvement Plan.

At the end of the meeting, Mr Crosbie officially handed over to new board of directors Chair Emma Warren, and welcomed two new member board directors, Karen Morledge and Joe Routledge. Dave Crew was appointed as the new Vice-Chair.



Chamber members enjoy exclusive tour of helicopter manufacturer



Somerset Chamber Chief Executive Emma Rawlings (left) and the Chamber's Project Manager - Hinkley Supply Chain Lead, Scott Jenkins (right), joined members for an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of leading Somerset aerospace business and Chamber Business Partner, Leonardo UK in Yeovil. They are pictured with Mike Roberts, of Leonardo UK.



Somerset Chamber welcomes return of long-standing Business Partner

Somerset Chamber is pleased to announce Bridgwater & Taunton College has renewed its existing partnership with the Chamber for another year.

The Chamber works closely with its business partners to support and promote them as part of their partnership and the college plays a key role in the local education sector.



**BRIDGWATER
& TAUNTON
COLLEGE**



▲ Andy Berry, Bridgwater & Taunton College Principal

Bridgwater & Taunton College operates across main centres in Bridgwater, Taunton and Cannington and is the largest apprenticeship provider in Somerset with 3,000 apprentices. The college also works with 1,500 employers and has invested £50 million in facilities in the last three years alone.

It has one of the broadest curricula of any school or college in the United Kingdom and hosts the Southern Hub of the National College for Nuclear.

Finding your future workforce in 2024

During 2023 the Somerset Education Business Partnership carefully tracked the impact of its activities to ensure that it was helping businesses to reach the next generation of local talent. The team was delighted to have discovered that they were!

The partnership's largest event connected 3,000 students and 40 businesses and...

- 92% of businesses that attended shared opportunities with young people
- 90% of students attending became more aware of places to work in Somerset

Meanwhile, the partnership's bespoke conservation construction workshop...

- 87% of students learned about construction roles they were not previously aware of
- Half of the students would consider a career in conservation construction

Andrew Hanson, Partnership Manager, said: "These results reassure us that we can share Somerset's great career

opportunities effectively with our young people and support specific sectors facing recruitment challenges.



"We recognise that businesses of different sizes and sectors will need different solutions to reaching young people. So, we have developed a variety of approaches to meet different needs.

"If young people still do not know about your business and the great work you do, please get in touch.

We can help you to raise your profile and attract the future talent you need."

Andrew Hanson, Partnership Manager:
andrew.hanson@somerset-ebp.co.uk; 07912 264531

Imelda Leetch, Partnership Coordinator:
Imelda.leetch@somerset-ebp.co.uk; 07519 124546

Shortlist announced for Somerset Business Awards 2024

The shortlist has been announced for the Somerset Business Awards 2024, with companies, charities and individuals from across the county vying for the honours.



Judges faced a tough time whittling down the huge number of entries for the 2024 awards, which are run annually by Somerset Chamber of Commerce.

This year is the 19th anniversary of the awards, which are again supported by main sponsor Albert Goodman. The grand final will be hosted by Global broadcast journalist Cormac MacMahon at the Winter Gardens Pavilion, in Weston-super-Mare, on March 22, 2024. Tickets will be on sale soon.

The finalists were due to be announced as Somerset Voice went to print, following visits by the judges.

Somerset Chamber Chief Executive, Emma Rawlings, thanked everyone who had entered the awards and said the most hotly contested categories had included Service Excellence, Small Business of the Year and Employer of the Year.

She added: "It was great to see so many entries from both Chamber members and non-members from all corners of the county, representing a wide range of sectors and industries.

"In fact, there were so many high-quality entries this year, some of the categories have a record number of shortlisted entrants!

"I am really looking forward to the final as it always a great opportunity to celebrate the successes and achievements of Somerset's many incredible businesses and organisations."

The shortlisted companies, charities, individuals and organisations are:

Small Business of the Year (turnover up to £0.5 million) sponsored by Gather Technology Ltd

- Alpha Housing Services Limited, Taunton
- ARK at Egwood CIC, Merriott
- Fit Food Tasty, Bridgwater
- Little Kickers (North and Mid Somerset), Weston-super-Mare
- Sonder Digital, Taunton
- Talking Stick Digital, Bridgwater
- The Digital Cogs, Highbridge
- The Social Lemon, Weston-super-Mare

Medium Business of the Year (turnover up to £6 million) sponsored by Higos Insurance Services

- Clarkson and Woods Limited, Blackford
- Container Team Ltd, Weston-super-Mare
- Elliott Environmental Services Ltd, Yeovil
- Family Adventures Group, Bridgwater
- Filbert's Fine Foods Ltd, West Pennard
- Netitude Ltd, Frome

Large Business of the Year (turnover over £6 million) sponsored by Stephens Scown

- Bridgwater & Taunton College, Bridgwater
- Rotec Hydraulics Ltd, Taunton
- Somerset Passenger Solutions, Bridgwater
- Synertec, Wellington
- Turnbull Infrastructure and Utilities, Bridgwater

Albert Goodman Family Business of the Year Award

- Container Team Ltd, Weston-super-Mare
- Hippychick Ltd, Bridgwater
- Mark One Consultants, Yeovil
- Melhuish and Saunders, Glastonbury
- Summerfield Developments, Taunton
- The Ascot Group, Weston-super-Mare
- Walker and Ling, Weston-super-Mare

Best Use of Digital Technology Award sponsored by Teapot Creative

- Glastonbury Abbey, Glastonbury
- Mark One Consultants, Yeovil
- Presona UK Ltd, Bridgwater
- Somerset County Cricket Club, Taunton
- Somerset Passenger Solutions, Bridgwater

Charity of the Year Award sponsored by Clarke Willmott

- bibic, Langport
- It's in the Bag Cancer Support, North Somerset
- St Margaret's Hospice Care, Taunton
- SWALLOW Charity, Midsomer Norton
- The Henhayes Centre, Crewkerne
- The Royal Bath & West of England Society, Shepton Mallet

Employer of the Year sponsored by Blossom HR

- Lendology CIC, Taunton
- Netitude Ltd, Frome
- Poolbridge Accountancy Limited, Highbridge
- Singer Instruments, Roadwater
- Turnbull Infrastructure and Utilities, Bridgwater
- WPA, Taunton

Investing in Somerset Award sponsored by Hinkley Point C

- Battens Solicitors, Yeovil
- Bridgwater & Taunton College, Bridgwater
- Somerset Automotive, Watchet
- The Ascot Group, Weston-super-Mare
- Turnbull Infrastructure and Utilities Ltd, Bridgwater

Start-up of the Year Award sponsored by Westcotts

- Eating Disorder Recovery Ltd, Bridgwater
- Milton and Chambers, Wellington
- Our Precious Earth, Minehead
- Serenity Women's Clinic, Taunton
- The Cancer Screening Trust, Yeovil
- The Giftie Company Ltd, Norton Fitzwarren
- Wessex Pop-Up Coldrooms Ltd, Curry Rivel

Apprentice of the Year Award sponsored by Weston College

- Lendology CIC - Jack Parnell, Taunton
- Poolbridge Accountancy Limited - Chloe Smith, Highbridge
- Poolbridge Accountancy Limited - Lakiesha Baker, Highbridge
- SBA CIC - Natasha Margetts, Langport
- Somerset Automotive - Luke Cardwell, Watchet
- Turnbull Infrastructure and Utilities - Ryan Jones, Bridgwater

Environmental and Sustainability Award sponsored by Gravity

- Balanced Energy Ltd, Bridgwater
- Cookswood Development - Lomax Design and Build, Stoke St Michael
- Green Sense Events Ltd, Wells
- Lendology CIC, Taunton
- Riverside Holiday Village, Bleadon
- RocketGro Peat-Free Composts, Bridgwater
- Somerlap Forest Products Ltd, Mark
- West Country Drainage Services Ltd, Burrowbridge
- Zebra EM, Taunton

Service Excellence Award sponsored by Porter Dodson

- Alpha Housing Services Limited, Taunton
- Container Team Ltd, Weston-super-Mare
- Family Adventures Group, Bridgwater
- Jays Logistics (South West) Ltd, Highbridge
- Nest GI, Weston-super-Mare
- Rotec Hydraulics Ltd, Taunton
- Talking Stick Digital, Bridgwater
- The Royal Bath & West of England Society, Shepton Mallet
- West Country Drainage Services Ltd, Burrowbridge

Manufacturing and Engineering Award sponsored by Leonardo UK

- Electrified Automation, Bridgwater
- Presona UK Ltd, Bridgwater
- Rotec Hydraulics Ltd, Taunton
- Teklagraf Ltd, Weston-super-Mare

Business Resilience and Growth Award sponsored by Barclays UK

- ARK at Egwood CIC, Merriott
- Family Adventures Group, Bridgwater
- Purplex Marketing, Weston-super-Mare
- Somerset Passenger Solutions, Bridgwater
- The Middlewick, Glastonbury

The Somerset Business Awards 2024 media sponsors are Newsquest and the Somerset County Gazette Series and Global.



Health and safety

Approach Training for Safety

An employer is responsible for anyone who drives for/ or during their working day. AT4S delivers affordable and effective training with tailored, flexible programmes based on the 'National Standard for Driver and Rider Education' incorporating current HSE guidance.

Our qualified, experienced professionals offer inexpensive training which helps refresh road user skills, reminds drivers of their duty of care when on the road and can offer re-education, all helping promote better and safer road safety attitudes within business.

AT4S delivers both practical or classroom activity and advise businesses on the most suitable method based on the type, level and frequency of your particular staff's road usage and responsibilities.

These include:

- Onboarding services (induction-assessment- review)
- Refresher (e.g.: Confidence coaching/nervous drivers)

- Re-education (returning drivers/those who trained abroad)
- Reactive (post incident) assessment/coaching
- Road user risk assessments (specific and generic)
- On the road safeguarding (designed for those who transport customers eg carers)

Assessment notes are provided for each attendee, candidates receive a certificate of attendance, the training/HR department is provided with a schedule including suggested refresher dates and each candidate receives a mini certificate to keep in their vehicle to prove the training.

We are working hard to raise awareness of this important training and are offering special rates to Chamber members. Please contact james@teamapproach.co.uk and mention if you are a Chamber member or have been referred by one.



C2 Safety

It's estimated that the annual costs of workplace injury and new cases of work-related ill health in 2021/22 were £20.7 billion. That's a massive number, and it's clear not enough is being done to protect the health and safety of people at work.

If you don't have the time or perhaps don't know where to start or would just prefer to get support from the experts with all the health and safety requirements put on you as a business, we're here to help.

We'll give you peace of mind and reassurance that you are complying with all current and relevant health and safety legislation.

We know the regulations, we make them understandable and we'll help you implement them in your business.

Whether creating full health and safety policies, performing risk assessments and fire risk assessments, training your team, or performing safety audits, we provide practical and pragmatic advice specific to your business. All our proposals are checked in line with the risks presented and the costs incurred with implementing the corrective actions.

We're a team of NEBOSH qualified and dedicated local Safety Advisors with a vast knowledge and experience of many different industries and we won't tie you down with a long and onerous contract. We want you to work with us because you value the service we provide, not because you have to.

Get in touch with C2 Safety today on 01278 671995, or email us at info@c2safety.co.uk to see how we can help your business.



GTE Training Academy

GTE Training Academy is a dedicated supplier of health and safety training programs tailored for the construction industry, with expertise that lies in delivering certifications and qualifications that are widely recognised within the sector, accredited by the Construction Industry Training Board (CITB) under the Site Safety Plus Scheme.

Kevin Browning, managing director at GTE Training Academy in Portishead, near Bristol – which specialises in on-site health and safety for the construction industry – said: “Good management of on-site health and safety is crucial to the successful delivery of any project and site leaders have an important role to play in ensuring standards are fully understood and met.

“With a wide range of health and safety training courses now available through the classroom, remote-online sessions or training provided on site and at the premises of individual businesses, it’s never been easier for employers to up-skill their workforce.”

GTE Training Academy’s suite of Site Safety Plus (SSP) courses are designed to give everyone from operatives to a senior managers the skills they need to progress through the industry safely.

From health and safety awareness (HSA) to site supervision and site management safety training schemes, GTE Training Academy also offers first aid courses, providing a three-year qualification for all industries and specialist tunnelling and working in confined spaces health and safety courses.

GTE Training Academy can be found just a few minutes’ drive from junction 19 of the M5 and online at www.gteta.com.



Training for Safety

According to the Health and Safety Executive, in 2019/20 693,000 workers had a non-fatal injury at work. 20% of all workforce injuries were due to manual handling issues and 13,000 workplace fires lead to 746 injuries.

First aid at work training can help reduce the severity of workplace injuries and manual handling and fire safety training can help to prevent the injuries and fires from occurring.

Training for Safety offers a wide range of first aid courses including HSE approved first aid at work, OFSTED approved paediatric first aid and National Governing Body approved outdoor first aid. Additionally to first aid, we deliver approved courses in manual handling, fire safety and fire marshal/warden.

All training courses can be tailored to suit businesses’ individual requirements and can be delivered on your

premises, which can help reduce costs and minimise the disruptive process that health and safety training can have on any business.

Training can also be flexible around working hours and shifts patterns, and courses can be combined, which can further help reduce costs and disruption. We can also work with businesses to develop a training schedule to meet the needs of the company along with health and safety requirements.

Additionally, courses are regularly offered at local venues, to allow access for those who wish for a more traditional training approach.

The courses are not only for businesses we also deliver specific courses aimed at schools and colleges, clubs and other organisations, as well as professional drivers.

For more information, please contact Andy@trainingforsafety.co.uk.



Seetec Pluss

Seetec Pluss is an employee-owned company that supports people who face a range of barriers to move into and progress in work. Here are our top tips on how to make employee wellbeing a priority for your company.

Taking care of your team isn't just the right thing to do; it's smart for business too.

Firstly, it builds a healthier and more inclusive workplace. Happy and healthy employees are more productive, collaborative, and innovative.

Secondly, it improves work-life balance. Flexible schedules and a supportive environment let people excel in their professional and personal lives.

Here are Seetec Pluss' seven top tips for embedding wellbeing into your company quickly and easily:

1. Encourage physical and mental health through fitness initiatives such as walking, yoga or meditation over lunch
2. Encourage your colleagues time to attend regular

health check-ups and consider benefits like wellness packages

3. Allow flexible working hours or remote working to help employees balance work and personal commitments
4. Foster a culture that values personal time, reducing stress and burnout
5. Acknowledge and celebrate achievements to boost morale
6. Plan regular events or outings to strengthen team bonds and create a positive work atmosphere.
7. Ensure that top management actively supports and promotes wellbeing initiatives.

Remember, wellbeing isn't a one-size-fits-all approach. Ask your team what they want and adjust your initiatives accordingly. By implementing these practical tips, you're investing in a workplace where everyone can thrive.

Find out how Seetec Pluss can help by contacting geraldine.scott-smith@seetec.co.uk.

Seetec
PLUSS

CHASE Consulting

CHASE Consulting Ltd prides itself in offering bespoke services, aligned with the unique needs of each business. Our qualified consultants bring a wealth of knowledge and a personalised approach to each client, ensuring maximum engagement and promoting safer practices.

Understanding that a one-size-fits-all strategy is ineffective in health and safety, we focus on custom solutions that provide real value for money. Our experience has shown that evaluating situations and simplifying them maximises client buy-in and promotes a deeper understanding of safety protocols.

Our range of services predominantly focuses on construction safety and CDM Compliances but also caters

to diverse needs within health and safety, including:

- Client CDM adviser services and principal designer services,

ensuring compliance and safety in design and construction phases

- Regular health and safety site inspections to identify and mitigate potential hazards
- Design development reviews aligned with RIBA project stages
- Development of CDM documentation providing robust support throughout the project lifecycle
- Developing and implementing tailored health and safety management systems
- Assistance with ISO Certification and pre-assessment checks
- Crafting bespoke policies and procedures, aligned with the specific requirements and risks of your business

At CHASE Consulting Ltd, we are committed to providing tailored, effective, and comprehensive health and safety solutions, ensuring your business is not only compliant but also a safer, more efficient place to work.

Contact us now at info@chaseconsultingltd.co.uk or 01823 475375 for a free initial consultation.

CHASE Consulting
Your Safety. Our Purpose.





Safety in Design

At Safety in Design we help construction teams understand the CDM2015 regulations and how to harness them for more successful project delivery, by any measure.

We've trained thousands of people in organisations around the world - from contractors to designers; government departments to local councils; national energy providers to airports.

Our Founder, Liz Bennett, has worked passionately to change the mindsets and behaviours of construction teams for over 20 years to work better together, for better outcomes, and for all involved.

We want to help you succeed, driven by happy and healthy teams, proud of a job well done.

"Safety in Design has helped Heathrow find answers to health and safety conundrums in a way that helps us understand how, as a large organisation, we can manage

risk affectively," Head of Health, Safety and Wellbeing Solutions: Infrastructure, Heathrow

"It was good to have a trainer that had quality construction experience and wasn't a career trainer and understood the impacts and challenges that can arise from projects," Project Engineer, Scottish & Southern Electricity Networks

"Top marks — an engaging and informative course," Technical Assurance Manager, HS2

"The course was very good, it exceeded my expectations," Senior Design Manager, Balfour Beatty

"Liz was very professional and knowledgeable applying real life experience to enhance the training. I would thoroughly recommend this training," Associate Director, CBRE

Find out about our courses and member discounts by getting in touch at info@safetyindesign.org.uk.

Napier Occupational Health

The mission of Napier Occupational Health Ltd is to work with Somerset organisations to create and maintain healthy, productive work cultures. Napier OH is led by Dr Jenny Napier, a consultant in occupational medicine, and accredited specialist on the GMC register.

Napier OH partners with you to map the needs of your organisation and to develop a bespoke occupational health and wellbeing service that adds value for you and your staff, focusing on both protecting health and restoring function.

Services include:

- Management referrals and case management - we offer advice about workability and your legal obligations, suggest adjustments, and make recommendations that best protect and promote healthy working lives
- Pre-placement medicals and fitness for work medicals - Napier OH can advise on fitness for work, including where there are regulatory or safety critical requirements

- Health surveillance - Napier OH can guide you through establishing a surveillance programme, as well as deliver lead, asbestos or ionising radiations surveillance as an HSE appointed doctor
- Eligibility for ill-health retirement assessments
- Executive medicals to assess and improve health and wellbeing
- Strategic consulting - Napier OH can serve as your company chief medical officer (CMO) taking a strategic view, helping you navigate towards compliance with the requirements of health and safety law, as well as further creating a healthy, flourishing work culture



Up next in the April/May edition of Somerset Voice:

Sector focus: recruitment

Feature: audio visual and digital

Deadline: March 13

Christmas drinks and nibbles at BLOCK Taunton



▲ Carol Pilgrim of MyPA and Kate Tyndall of Aardvark Occupational Health.



▲ Dan Cross and Andrew Bush of event sponsor Go2 Couriers.

Construction Connections at Train4All, Somerton



▲ Attendees were given a behind-the-scenes guided tour of Train4All's premises.



▲ Train4All directors Jon and Rache Allen with Scott Jenkins, Somerset Chamber's Project Manager - Hinkley Supply Chain Lead.



We would like to apologise for printing the incorrect name in the last edition of Somerset Voice - our let's network over breakfast photo at Hornsbury Mill sponsored by AmicusLaw should have read Stephen Forsey not Simon Forsey, of AmicusLaw.

Annual breakfast update with Somerset Council



▲ Karen Morledge (left) of Morledge & Co and Kelly Criddle of ESS Education and Support Services.



▲ From left, Will Grant and Ben Trickey of Summerfield Developments with Nigel Hatfield of Hatfield White.



▲ From left, James Wade of Accounts Projects, Paul Hake of Albert Goodman and Rob Cadwallader of Milsted Langdon.

▼ Robert Hill, Sam Harkness, Sarah Manley, Jo Bartlett and Caroline Mortimer of event sponsor Clarke Willmott.



Construction Connections

Thursday
22 FEB

Join us for construction-specific networking with professionals from across the construction and planning industries. It is the ideal opportunity to make new contacts – plus there is the bonus of a buffet lunch, too!

Time: 12 noon – 2pm at ibis Bridgwater, Bristol Road
Cost: £19.99 plus VAT for members;
£24.99 plus VAT for non-members

Afternoon tea and networking

Thursday
7 MAR

Due to demand, our ever-popular afternoon tea is now open to everyone, so come and join us to make new contacts and to strengthen existing business connections. The afternoon will offer plenty of opportunities to raise the profile of your business in a friendly and professional environment.

Time: 2pm – 4pm at Old Oak Farm, Back Lane, Curry Rivel
Cost: £28.75 plus VAT members;
£33.75 plus VAT non-members

Sponsored by:



Workshop: SEO with Teapot Creative

Tuesday
12 MAR

Whether you are looking to create an online presence for your existing business or want to start a new e-commerce venture, this workshop will arm you with actionable tips and strategies to launch and grow your digital marketing and SEO efforts. Join us for a practical, hands-on introduction to the ever-evolving world of internet marketing.

Time: 10am – 12 noon at Somerset Chamber, Equity House, Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton
Cost: £49.50 plus VAT for members;
£54.50 plus VAT for non-members

Hosted by:

Teapot.

Workshop: building and growing a better business

Thursday
16 APR

This workshop is aimed at small to medium business owners, who will learn the key to improving business performance, maximising efficiency and increasing profit. Attendees will understand that they need to take a strategic view of the business in order to realise its full potential and that working on the business instead of in the business is paramount. Laura Day of Laurel Finance will help you get more from your business, whether that is more time, more money or more mind freedom.

Time: 9.30am – 1.30pm at Somerset Chamber, Equity House, Blackbrook Business Park, Taunton
Cost: £59.50 plus VAT members;
£64.50 plus VAT non-members

Hosted by:



Exclusive tour of Numatic International

Tuesday
23 APR

Numatic International welcomes you to the home of Henry where you will receive a presentation from the Head of Operations and see the working factory in full swing! Come along to see for yourself how Henry and the rest of the family are made. Light refreshments will also be on offer. The tour and presentation will take two hours with additional time for refreshments and networking.

Time: 10.30am – 1pm at Numatic International, Millfield Road, Chard
Cost: No charge – but spaces are limited!

Hosted by:

Numatic

Meet the neighbours - Dorset

Thursday
25 APR

Somerset Chamber of Commerce in association with Dorset Chamber invite you to our first meet the neighbours event this year! The lunch will offer great networking opportunities as we welcome businesses from both sides of the border and early booking is advisable.

Time: 12.30pm – 2.30pm at The George Albert Hotel, Wardon Hill, Evershot, near Dorchester
Cost: £39.50 plus VAT for members;
£44.50 plus VAT for non-members

Jointly sponsored by:



*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, prospective members are permitted to have two tickets to our events before being asked to become a Chamber member.



Welcome to our newest members of Somerset Chamber.

Able Alex Ltd

Landscaping

Able Alex Ltd created in 2019. We are a family-run business and pride ourselves in our work, designs and outcomes we can achieve. This has given us the opportunity to expand and find our footing within the local community.

Alex or Jess 01460 242609

office@ablealexltd.co.uk

ablealex.uk

BidVantage

Business consultancy

BidVantage is a premier bid consultancy, offering comprehensive services from writing to management and training, aimed at securing new contracts for businesses. We also provide expert guidance on social value commitments and crafting compelling bid responses.

Robert Ward 07725 942973

rob@bidvantage.co.uk

www.bidvantage.co.uk

ESU Medical Solutions Limited

Healthcare (medical and veterinary)

ESU Medical, helmed by Periwinkle Kaur, revolutionises the healthcare sector. A standalone providing vessel sealing connectors, endoscopy, and laparoscopy equipment, surgical supplies, and maintenance. Empowering human hospitals and the overlooked veterinary sector, ESU envisions an innovative future for UK healthcare.

Periwinkle Kaur 07421 111288

sales@esumedical.co.uk

www.esumedical.co.uk

Fifields Construction

Public and private (commercial, industrial, educational, healthcare)

Fifields Construction is a regional construction company delivering new build, refurbishment and fit-out solutions to the public and private sectors across the South West. Our work ranges from new build projects, refurbishments, fit-outs and the refurbishment of Grade II listed buildings.

Jack Wayland 01392 438517

jack.wayland@fifieldsconstruction.com

www.fifieldsconstruction.com

Johnson Elevantja Limited

Engineering: industrial braking systems

Design and manufacture of electrical, electro-hydraulic, hydraulic and pneumatic industrial drum and disc brakes and braking systems, rail clamps and storm brakes for cranes, hoists and conveyors in steelworks, power stations, ports, nuclear industry and mining.

Neil Skeemer - General Manager 01278 456411

neil.skeemer@elevantja.co.uk

www.elevantja.com

Nest GI

Property insurance

Hello, we're Nest GI! We provide transparent and fee-free insurance advice across a panel of 40+ insurers. Specialising in property insurance, we consistently deliver value for money. Contact us for all of your home, buy-to-let, or commercial property insurance needs.

Ed Jackson 03330 110555

support@nestgi.co.uk

www.nestgi.co.uk

R&D Machinery Ltd

Material handling, construction, agriculture and access

We are the main dealer for the entire Manitou, Comblift and Aisle master product range. We have a solution for your business applications.

Jason Fullard 01803 863400

sales@rdmachinery.co.uk

www.rdmachinery.co.uk

Security 2000 Ltd

Property services

Security 2000 Ltd is a local security supplier with national reach, providing mobile security patrols, key holding and alarm response, timed building open and closes, vacant property inspections and services, vehicle escorting services and static security guarding.

Richard Gabriel 07494 976045

Richard.gabriel@security2000ltd.co.uk

www.security2000ltd.co.uk

Wessex Refrigeration Hire

Refrigeration

We supply high-quality refrigerated trailers and coldrooms for rent, catering to clients on both short and long-term agreements. Our premium chillers offer chilled or frozen options. Our service includes a comprehensive maintenance plan to ensure optimal performance.

Ed Rosa 0345 3130122

ed@refrigerationhire.co.uk

www.refrigerationhire.co.uk

Latest member-to-member offers

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

Optimise Workplace Wellbeing

Free wellbeing health check

FREE
HEALTH
CHECK

50%
DISCOUNT

Cricket St Thomas Golf Club

50% off venue hire for conference and business bookings

BidVantage

£50 off online bid writing training sessions

£50
OFF

10%
DISCOUNT

George Albert Hotel

10% off delegate rates for members

Wessex Refrigeration Hire

One free month of walk-in coldroom rental

FREE
MONTH

50%
DISCOUNT

DH One

50% off DH One 100.5 FM radio advertising

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

Are employers obligated to offer financial support?

Employers have a duty of care to protect employee health, safety, and welfare as far as reasonably practicable. However, they are not under any legal obligation to assist employees in their financial difficulties.

Despite this, it may be in an employer's commercial interest to try to help employees suffering from financial problems as this could affect their performance at work, resulting in a drop in productivity.

Employee mistakes could cost the business money, they may suffer from more mental health issues, and their attendance could suffer from increased sickness absence. Employees may also show a lack of confidence, low self-esteem, mood swings, or suffer from lack of sleep over any financial worries.

There are many ways employers can help support employees who are facing financial difficulties:

- Counselling services
- Employee loans - care must be taken to ensure such a loan does not fall foul of consumer credit laws. Employers must take advice from commercial lawyers who will draft the loan agreement. There could also be tax implications
- Pay advance - employers must establish a policy highlighting arrangements for the salary percentage advance

- Discounted services - employers may have customers, or partnership relationships with other businesses, where they can try to negotiate and secure discounted services
- Hybrid working to reduce travel costs
- Open door approach - employers should try to ensure that they can facilitate a workplace culture where employees can speak freely and in confidence to their manager about personal matters that could be affecting how they carry out their job
- Increase salaries or give one-off bonuses

There are just some of the options an employer could consider if deemed practicable. Additional guidance or assistance is available via the Quest Advice Line on 01455 852 028.

As a member of Somerset Chamber, businesses automatically receive membership of Quest, a national British Chambers of Commerce scheme which offers Chamber members access to advice on HR, legal, health and safety, tax and VAT at no additional cost to their annual membership fee.



SBA CIC recognised with prestigious Innovation in Enterprise Award



SBA CIC, a leader in business support, training, people skills and innovation is proud to announce that it has been



awarded the Innovation in Enterprise Award in recognition of its outstanding contributions to innovation, project delivery and programme design.

The award was presented by Fraser Doherty MBE, Scottish Entrepreneur founder of SuperJam, Envelope Coffee and Beer 52 at the National Enterprise Network Awards in London.

SBA was selected for its groundbreaking programmes and support initiatives, including the successful launch of new projects such as The Training Hub, CHOMP and Advance! The schemes are aimed at those who are looking to improve their own skills to enable business

and personal growth.

Patricia Marks, CEO, said: "We are thrilled and honoured to receive the Innovation in Enterprise Award. This recognition is a demonstration of the hard work, creativity, and dedication of our entire team. Innovation is at the core of everything we do, and this award validates our commitment to growth and progress in our field."

The accolade comes at a time when the SBA is poised for continued development, with plans that already include business support and training on a global scale, with new partners now in Singapore and Malaysia.

Taunton School named as one of UK's best schools for cricket by world's leading cricketing magazine

Taunton Senior School features in the top 10 and Taunton Prep in the top 50 of The Cricketer's Schools Guide 2024. Taunton is one of only a handful of schools to have both senior and prep schools mentioned.

This year's roll call of schools - which features both state and private schools - follows a lengthy selection process by the magazine.

All entries are judged against a wide range of criteria including evidence of a compelling commitment to cricket in the curriculum, facilities, fixture programmes and coaching.

"This is a wonderful achievement," said Pete Sanderson, Director of Cricket at Taunton School and former Somerset County Cricket coach.

"It is a reflection of the commitment to the sport by Taunton School - and the boys and girls who train so hard throughout the year. We are absolutely delighted that their hard work, along with that of our coaches and sports department staff, has earned Taunton School, yet again, a top place in this highly-respected guide."



The news comes as four students have been selected to join the elite pathway training schemes. Three players have joined the Somerset Academy - Ben Church, Oscar Coleman and Kian Roberts - run by Somerset County Cricket Club. Alice Robbins has also been selected for the Western Storm Academy.

Last year Taunton School's Under 15 boys' team made it to the final of the Somerset County Cup. The Under 15 girls reached the final of the Lady Taverners indoor regional competition,

while the Under 19 boys' team came second in the Regional T20 group. In addition to these the Under 13, Under 12 and Under 11 boys teams all reached county finals, with the latter moving onto regional finals whilst the Under 13 girls teams won the county cup.

Matt Cook, Taunton School Deputy Head, said: "This is testament to the depth and quality of the programme available for boys and girls throughout our Prep and Senior schools.

"We congratulate all our students who continue to commit above and beyond to the sport, ensuring we remain a centre of excellence for cricket."

Taunton School has a long cricketing tradition with strong ties with Somerset County Cricket Club. All pupils at the prep and senior schools are introduced to the game when they join the school and have many opportunities to progress in the sport, working with the school's coaching team which includes former England player Marcus Trescothick.



TAUNTON
SCHOOL



Bristol Airport wins international sustainability award

Bristol Airport has won the Sustainable Airport award at this year's Airport Honour Awards, run by International Airport Review.

The airport beat off competition from airports in three continents to take the award for its sustainability strategy, culture and ethos.

The awards ceremony was part of the International Airport Summit held in London, which brought together over 200 airports from over 80 countries. It brought together industry leaders and innovators to discuss how to solve the biggest challenges facing the airport sector.

The Sustainable Airport Award recognises Bristol Airport's efforts to achieve net zero operations by 2030. The multi-million-pound investment required to make that target a reality continues, with a new 1.6 MW solar array constructed on our airfield, gas being steadily removed and replaced with heating provided by air source

heat pumps, and lighting being upgraded to low-energy LEDs.

The award also recognised the replacement of diesel vehicles with electric and efforts to increase the numbers of passengers and staff using public transport. The airport has made staff travel free on the A1 and A3 Flyer bus services and seen sharp increases in the number of people using the services.

On winning the Sustainable Airport award, Hannah Pollard, Head of Sustainability at Bristol Airport, said: "We're proud to be recognised by the International Airport review and to win this award. It supports our long-term sustainability plans and our aim to take a lead in this area.

"There's a huge amount still to do, not only as part of our plan to achieve net zero operations by 2030, but to address emissions from road transport accessing the Airport and from flights. Our region is pioneering



zero emissions hydrogen-powered flight and we're in unique partnerships working to make that a reality."

Pictured, from left, are: James Cox, Hannah Pollard and Whitney Love, from Bristol Airport collecting the award.

Registration open for air ambulance cycle challenge

Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance has announced that online registration is now open for next year's Coast to Coast Cycle Challenge, which takes place on Saturday, May 18, 2024.

The ever-popular event is not designed as a race and involves cycling through some of Dorset and Somerset's most beautiful countryside.

There are two routes available to choose from – a 55-mile route which starts at Watchet Harbour in Somerset at 10.30am and finishes in the Dorset seaside resort of West Bay and a shorter 11 miles route, which starts at the Royal Oak public house in Drimpton at 2pm, which also finishes in West Bay.

With a mixture of quiet back roads, interspersed with some very demanding climbs and equally hairy descents, the event has something to offer everyone! There are several

pit-stops along the route, which provide a well-earned rest and refreshments for those who want it.

As ever, there will only be 600 places available. Participants can enter as an individual or as a team and the charity is asking anyone who is fortunate enough to gain a place, to raise a minimum of £50 in sponsorship.

Emma Jones, Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance Fundraising Manager said: "Next year's Coast to Coast Cycle Challenge has moved back to its usual calendar spot in May and we really can't wait to see everyone on the day!

"This will be our 13th year running this popular cycling event which brings people from across our two beautiful counties together, including patients who have experienced the work of our service first-hand, those who are cycling in memory of loved ones, or those who simply want to challenge themselves and support the charity in return.

"Last year, our crew were tasked to 2,424 incidents; as an air ambulance service, we're the busiest we've ever been! With the number of missions increasing each year and our operational costs rising, we really hope that those who are fortunate enough to gain a place will use this as an opportunity to raise as much as possible for our life-saving service."

For more information and to sign up today, visit: www.dsairambulance.org.uk/c2c.



AB Heritage approved as Historic Environment Service Provider

The Institute for Historic Building Conservation (IHBC) has accepted AB Heritage into its Historic Environment Service provider scheme (HESPR).

The HESPR scheme provides an invaluable resource for clients looking to connect with experts across a number of heritage disciplines by providing a directory of companies who are recognised as working to the high standards expected by the IHBC, through their Designated Service Adviser (DSA).

Under the HESPR scheme, AB Heritage has been recognised as being expert providers of archaeology, historic research, historic area assessments and conservation planning.

The HESPR approval sits alongside AB Heritage's accreditation as a registered organisation for the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists, the professional organisation that sets and monitors quality standards for commercial archaeology in the UK.

Andy Buckley, MD, said: "We are delighted to have been approved for inclusion in this important resource for the industry. AB Heritage has over 13 years' experience of helping clients across the UK to balance the needs of heritage legislation with delivering their successful development goals.

"Being a member of this scheme will help us reach and serve more clients. As an HESPR company AB Heritage now offers 15 minutes of free expert advice and guidance, and we would be delighted to hear from clients."

AB Heritage was incorporated in Taunton in 2010 and now supports clients' heritage planning across the UK. Heritage Consultants deliver a full range of heritage reports required for planning and the design and management of programmes of archaeology from regional offices in London, Leeds, Newcastle and Exeter. In the South West, the senior heritage consultant and main contact is Paul Cooke.

More information about AB Heritage is available online at www.abheritage.co.uk.



Blueloop Limited signs Armed Forces Covenant

Blueloop Limited proudly announces its commitment to honouring and supporting the armed forces community by signing the Armed Forces Covenant. The covenant, a symbolic gesture of solidarity and support, reflects Blueloop Limited's dedication to upholding the welfare and fair treatment of service personnel and their families.

Blueloop



Having signed the covenant, Blueloop Limited pledges to actively consider the unique circumstances of armed forces personnel in its policies and practices. This commitment extends across various facets, including employment, education, healthcare, and societal integration, ensuring that veterans and their families receive equitable opportunities and support.

"We are honoured to sign the Armed Forces Covenant, demonstrating our unwavering support for those who have selflessly served our country," said Jon Gerdes, Managing Director, "At Blueloop Limited, we recognise the invaluable skills and sacrifices of military personnel and are committed to creating an inclusive and supportive environment for them within our organisation."

Blueloop Limited's signing of the covenant signifies our dedication to action, fostering a culture of appreciation and inclusion for armed forces personnel. By embracing the covenant's principles, Blueloop Limited joins a nationwide effort to ensure that veterans and their families receive the respect and support they rightfully deserve.

Rebrand to Rae & Co reflects company's growth

Somerset Design Studio has rebranded to become Rae & Co Creative in a move Creative Director Kirsten Rae said reflected the company's "journey of growth and collaboration over the past five years".

She said the move was not just a change in name but a shift in mindset, which encompassed a small team of talented and like-minded creatives.

"Our core mission at Rae & Co Creative is to craft strong and meaningful brands and creative solutions for businesses, helping them to take their brand to new heights. At the heart of

RAE & CO
CREATIVE

our approach is our commitment to creative excellence," Kirsten said.

Rae & Co Creative offers a range of services, including brand strategy, graphic design, photography, content creation and creative training.

More information is available online at www.raeand.co or by emailing info@raeand.co.



Distinctive Communications expands into Exeter

A specialist communications consultancy for place-makers, purposeful businesses and public bodies has expanded its presence in the South West with a key appointment in Exeter.

Working across the West of England and Somerset, Distinctive Communications has appointed Devon-based Arianne Smart as Account Manager to lead on public relations and communications support to clients in the Greater Exeter area.

It comes as the consultancy progresses through its second successful year of operation and as it takes on several new clients and projects across the South West.

Arianne brings wide-ranging experience of devising and executing PR and communications activity for clients including property companies, developers and landed estates. She has worked in PR agencies for almost a decade, is an Accredited Practitioner from industry body the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and holds a degree in public relations.

"It is a really exciting time to be joining the team," Arianne said. "Distinctive

has really made its mark in the South West, supporting clients in property and place-making and achieving some stand-out results.

"I am looking forward to supporting the talented team on delivering communications work for the existing client base, as well as leading on new projects and looking to increase our presence in and around Exeter."

Chartered PR Practitioner Ben Lowndes founded the firm in June 2022, after growing Social's South West agency from its inception in 2017 to one of the region's best known specialist consultancies in 2022.

Ben said: "I am proud of everything we've achieved since launching



Distinctive in 2022 and expanding our footprint in the South West is an exciting new opportunity for us.

"Arianne's appointment is a key part of this and I am sure that her experience will further build on our offering to deliver impactful PR and communications work."

Arianne joins Content Writer Jasmine Gordon, an experienced communications and marketing professional who worked on communications campaigns in the publishing and charity sectors before joining Distinctive in 2022.

The team is supported by Graphic Designer Stacey Broadbear, who provides concept-driven graphic design services and has supported Distinctive with design projects including promoting Bath's cultural offering and supporting an impactful research report.

To find out more, visit www.distinctivecomms.co.uk.

New senior appointment at Summerfield Homes

South West housebuilder, Summerfield Homes, has continued to grow its team with the appointment of a new Divisional Director to head up strategic land and planning.

Neal Jillings joins the housebuilder as Divisional Director for Strategic Land and Planning in his new role based at the firm's Taunton office bringing with him over two decades of experience within residential development across the region.



Neal is a chartered member of the Royal Town Planning Institute and brings with him a wealth of specialist knowledge and experience. This includes working for a local planning authority, the Planning Inspectorate, Savills and, more recently, running his own practice where he has recently been working with the team at Summerfield Homes in a consultancy capacity.

In his new role, Neal will be responsible for identifying and progressing future opportunities for housing schemes in the South West in line with Summerfield Homes' growth plans. Neal will also be working on progressing the planning strategy for some of the company's existing strategic land assets from Plymouth to North Somerset.

Ed Khodabandehloo, Managing Director at Summerfield Homes, said:



"I am pleased to continue our growth plans with the appointment of a highly qualified and well-respected professional in Neal.

"We have some exciting strategic land holdings across Devon and Somerset and with Neal on board we can really focus on bringing these to fruition as well as adding to the company's already expanding land portfolio."

Neal Jillings said: "I have enjoyed working with Summerfield Homes as one of my key clients and taking up Ed's offer is a fantastic opportunity for me. I have worked in planning and development throughout the South West for almost 30 years.

"I hope to bring some of that experience to bear in helping Summerfield Homes maintain its position as a respected and successful regional housebuilder."



Alpha Housing Services scales up success!

Alpha Housing Services, a prominent family-run property management company, has been awarded Scale Up Property Management Company of the Year in the UK News in the Block Awards 2023.

This is Alpha's fourth award in just two years, showcasing its significant portfolio expansion and service excellence. This year's celebrations have been particularly meaningful, with the close-knit team having much to celebrate scaling-up client numbers, customer service, team size and even MD Piers Wrangham's new addition at home – a new baby girl called Kitty!

Starting from managing just a handful of properties in the 1980s, Alpha has grown to manage over 2,600 units today.

Piers said the growth was not just in numbers but also in the

quality of service and client satisfaction, as evidenced by the various awards received over the last few years and the remarkable achievement of never losing a client.

These achievements, coupled with the company's commitment to staff development and high standards for clients, significantly contributed to Alpha being chosen as the winner of the Scale Up Property Management Company of the Year award, reflecting its outstanding performance and continuous advancement in the property management sector.

Piers said the success of its scale-up could be primarily attributed to his dedicated team: "The remarkable growth we've experienced is a direct result of the team's unwavering commitment and exceptional talent. Their dedication is the cornerstone of our success in scaling up."

The Alpha team has expanded and developed over the years in line with the addition of new sites to manage. From humble beginnings running from a spare room with no support staff, the company has an ever-growing team of property, maintenance and finance specialists.

The company places a strong emphasis on continuous training and acquiring professional accreditations, believing that the personal growth of each team member directly contributes to the quality of service.

While the company has already started its digital transformation journey, adding a new, easy-access client portal and 24-hour service, Alpha Housing is looking forward to a future of continued success and growth, both for the business and its employees.



Hippychick bucks the trend with year-on-year sales growth

Hippychick Ltd, a Bridgwater-based business that distributes and sells baby and toddler gear and luxury gifts, has had one of its best years of trading in the last decade – welcome news for a business that will be celebrating 25 years in business in 2024.

Julia Minchin, Hippychick's founder and Managing Director said: "Having several routes to market helps. Hippychick is a business-to-business operation as well as a direct-to-consumer retailer. This year, both sides of the operation have performed outstandingly.

"The website along with Amazon are our biggest consumer facing retail platforms and last year, growth exceeded targets, increasing by a massive 36% (2021-2022 versus 2022-2023).

"But our trade arm, which sells our products into key accounts, is tracking even higher sales growth this financial year, currently at 43%.



"A business like ours is only really as good as the products in the portfolio. We operate in a sector that deals exclusively with babies and toddlers. We've always remained wedded to our brand values since our inception, never straying from our mission to offer only the best quality baby and toddler products, as this is one area where parents, particularly first-timers, will almost certainly never compromise.

"Consumer belt tightening is of course impacting our business as it is across the whole of the retail sector. But our



strategy is to create genuine value for the consumer, reducing our margins to keep prices competitive but selling higher volume.

"We are also really getting into the swing of warehouse sales, a new retailing concept we launched last year. These events are mutually beneficial, providing Hippychick with a platform to sell end of lines and seconds, direct from our warehouse at up to 80% off list price and, at the same time, delivering extraordinary value to our local customers.

"They also provide us with the opportunity to help raise money for our charity of the year, the Somerset based Brainwave."

Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital awarded gold for commitment to patient safety

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 procedures to improve clinical outcomes for the benefit of patients, but also to support and give performance feedback to 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 value 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.

In order to achieve the award, hospitals are required to meet a series of six ambitious targets during the audit period 2022/23. 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 compares

the number of joint replacement procedures submitted to the registry 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 so that they can be more easily contacted in future should the need arise.

Heidi Finney, Director of Clinical Services 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 for the benefit of joint replacement patients and we're delighted to be awarded as an 'NJR Quality Data Provider'."

National Joint Registry Medical Director, Mr Tim Wilton, said: "Congratulations to colleagues at Nuffield Health Taunton Hospital. The Quality Data Provider Award demonstrates the high standards being met towards ensuring compliance with the NJR and is often



a reflection of strong departmental efforts to achieve such status.

As well as being a fundamental driver to inform improved quality of care for patients, registry data provides an important source of evidence for regulators, such as the Care Quality Commission, to inform their judgements about the quality of health services."

Full details about the NJR's Quality Data Provider certificate scheme can be found online at: www.njrcentre.org.uk.



Hollam Solicitors raises money for charity through Will Aid

Hollam Solicitors are celebrating their hugely successful support of the Will Aid campaign, which is an annual campaign run by nine leading charities. Solicitors volunteer their time to provide a free professionally written Will and clients make a donation to the charities.

They have, so far, raised over £8,000, more than any other law firm in the South West. Deborah Schmieder, the firm's Principal, said: "We have been happy to give our will writing services free of charge throughout November to support charities and are so proud of our clients who have made the donations."

Hollam Solicitors boasts a range of legal services. Specialising in family law, divorce, probate, and lasting powers of attorney, the firm has become a one-stop destination for those seeking expert guidance.

In August, the firm opened an office in Williton. This move has allowed them to cater the nearby towns of Watchet,

Minehead, and the Exmoor area. The expansion aligns with their mission to make legal services more accessible to the community they serve.

Hollam Solicitors was founded by Deborah in 2021 following the sudden loss of her husband. Having worked as a solicitor for over 15 years, Deborah was forced to reconsider her career. She decided to start her own legal firm and the business has gone from strength to strength.

Deborah added: "In a profession often perceived as cold and detached, I am determined to ensure that anyone who comes to Hollam Solicitors for advice will receive an empathetic and supportive service."



PKF Francis Clark is officially a Great Place to Work – again!

PKF Francis Clark is celebrating being certified as a Great Place to Work for a second year running.

The accolade is a direct result of feedback from colleagues in an independent survey by Great Place to Work, the global authority on workplace culture. It found that overall 87% of employees say PKF Francis Clark is a great place to work, compared to 54% at a typical UK company.

Colleagues were also asked to name anything unique or unusual that makes PKF Francis Clark a great place to work. Anonymous comments included:

“The fact that despite having 900 employees over nine offices they still make it feel like being part of a big family, and they nurture the sense of belonging. You’re not a number here, you are respected and appreciated for the role that you play.”

“They recently placed me on a leadership programme which I think clearly demonstrates a commitment to those like myself who are perhaps in the latter years of their working career. It is refreshing and the programme has helped me develop my team further.”

“Constant thought about who you are as a person, ensuring your work/life balance is manageable and improvements to the office to enable a

strong social aspect at work.”

The in-depth Great Place to Work survey found PKF Francis Clark scored above the benchmark for the UK’s Best Large Workplaces in 26 out of 29 focus areas. The firm’s strongest areas include:

- Camaraderie – colleagues’ sense of enjoyment in the workplace, including freedom to express themselves, the sense of hospitality in the office environment and the feeling of being part of a community
- Support – the provision of training opportunities, resources and equipment, as well as appreciation of professional accomplishments
- Intimacy – people’s enjoyment of their colleagues, their sense that they can be themselves, and can count on and support each other

Amy Taylor, chief people officer at PKF Francis Clark, said: “It’s fantastic that our colleagues have once again rated us as a Great Place to Work, with improved scores across the board since the first time we took part in this survey a year ago.

“The UK’s Best Large Workplaces are an elite group, so to outperform this benchmark in almost all areas is hugely encouraging. The areas where we saw



the biggest improvement reflect some key initiatives, including one-to-one conversations with all colleagues as part of our annual pay review process, investment in enhancing our office environments and our new leadership programmes.

“These have been driven by our ongoing colleague listening programme, so it’s great to see they’re having a positive impact.”

The certification means PKF Francis Clark is in the running to be recognised at the UK’s Best Workplaces Awards 2024, which will be held in London in March.

Organisations which put the employee experience at the heart of their business gain their employees’ trust and, in turn, are truly able to build a great workplace culture that delivers outstanding business results.”

More information can be found at careers.pkf-francisclark.co.uk.

Porter Dodson promote Jenny Shepherd to Partner

Porter Dodson Solicitors, a top 200 UK law firm, proudly announces the appointment of Jenny Shepherd as a Partner in the Wellington office.

Since joining the firm in 2017, Jenny has demonstrated exceptional ability in the realms of specialist residential conveyancing. Her profound local knowledge coupled with her expertise has played a pivotal role in amplifying the team’s growth and elevating the firm’s profile throughout the South West region.

Jenny specialises in residential conveyancing boasting extensive experience in all aspects of transactions involving buying, selling, letting, and mortgaging residential land and buildings.

Beyond her exceptional professional capabilities, Jenny is an encouraging leader, providing a supportive environment for her team to flourish.



PORTER DODSON

The firm eagerly anticipates the continued positive impact she will bring to the Wellington office and the wider organisation.

Porter Dodson has built a trusted reputation for delivering personal and corporate legal services to clients across Somerset, Dorset, Devon, and the broader South West region.

For further insights into Jenny’s expertise and to find out more about Porter Dodson visit www.porterdodson.co.uk.



Jays trials electric lorry as it looks to a greener future

Transport and logistics business, Jays, has been trialling an electric lorry with a view to reducing emissions from their current fleet of vans and trucks.

The company provides collections and deliveries from Portbury, Wellington, Minehead and everywhere in between and has been trialling a 18T E-TECH D vehicle in partnership with Renault Trucks UK.

Commercial Sales Manager, Ben Walker, said: "There are many ways to look at the vehicle in regards to the pros and cons. From a business point of view, both cost and practicality play a big part in the decision to run a vehicle of this nature.

"The initial outlay for this vehicle is huge - almost four times the price of a current diesel counterpart and then you have the issue of where to charge it, if required away from base - the cost of that and then there is the operational battery range."

Jays will be looking at comparisons to their existing fleet of diesel vehicles



to assess how viable the model would be if they decided to integrate electric vehicles into the business.

Ben added: "The vehicle performed very well locally due to the regenerative braking - adding charge back into the battery, thus increasing the range.

"The main benefit to the local and wider communities is the reduced tailpipe emissions however the source of the electricity must be also considered. Secondly the noise pollution for a vehicle of this size is reduced dramatically, so for urban and local areas this is a plus point."

The Highbridge-based firm had the

vehicle on trial for two weeks, covering local collections and deliveries within Burnham, Highbridge and Weston.

Jays and sister company R T Keedwell has already trialled HVO fuel and a fuel additive technology in the last few years in an attempt to find both cost and environmental benefits for themselves, their clients and the wider environment and community.



Milsted Langdon earns the prestigious ESG Mark for its commitment to a sustainable future

Milsted Langdon, one of the South West's leading independent accountancy, tax and business advisory firms, has recently received the prestigious ESG Mark accreditation.

This distinguished accolade recognises the firm's deep-seated commitment to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards.

The award stands as a testament to the firm's dedication to fostering a positive impact on the environment, its clients, employees, and local communities.

Milsted Langdon had always held these things as part of its core values having previously adopted renewable energy generation and electric car charging at its office in Taunton and being a long-term supporter of local and national charities.

In accordance with its desire to have staff at all levels involved in moving the firm forward, a project team, with representatives from across the firm, was formed to engage in the process of reviewing the firm's current position



and recommending improvements, as well as engaging with ESG Mark in relation to the accreditation.

Simon Rowe, Partner and Chairman at Milsted Langdon, said: "We are honoured to receive the ESG Mark, an accolade that resonates with our core values and aspirations for a more sustainable and equitable future.

"The project team have done an amazing job both in helping us to attain this status but more importantly

in highlighting areas where we can continue to improve.

Obtaining the ESG Mark is not the end of the journey, but just a bright point along the way. The important thing now is to continue to improve and strive to do better.

"For us, it's not just about doing business; it's about doing business right. We are dedicated to elevating the communities we serve, championing diversity, and ensuring that our impact on the planet is a positive one. Importantly this is not just a goal for me as Chairman or the partners, but all of us that make up Milsted Langdon."

On top of its own ESG goals, Milsted Langdon offers valuable advice for its clients on related matters such as the benefits of 'green' taxation and ESG investments.

For more information about Milsted Langdon's services, please visit: www.milsted-langdon.co.uk



Bank of England summary – monetary policy as engineering rather than science

By Sarah Breden, Deputy Governor of the Bank of England and member of the Monetary Policy Committee



@BoESouthWest



BANK OF ENGLAND

Economic activity has been practically flat since the end of 2022. That is, of course, stronger than the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) and other forecasters expected this time last year, in part because of the adjustment to energy supply headwinds and the steep fall in energy prices since then.

But in historical terms it is very weak. GDP has grown by about 0.5% over the past year, which compares to average annual growth of 1.5% since the global financial crisis – itself a period of low growth by historical standards.

The labour market is loosening but it remains tight. The survey-based employment indicators point to a tentative slowdown in hiring. The level of vacancies has fallen from a peak of 1.3 million in the middle of last year to just under a million in the latest data. But that is still more than 100,000 above its pre-COVID level, which itself was elevated by historical standards.

And, importantly, while wage growth has finally begun to fall it is still greater than 7% on most measures which, given the current weakness in productivity growth in the UK, is several percentage points higher than a level that, if sustained, would be consistent with the inflation target.

Inflation has been falling over the past year but it remains far too high. It peaked at 11.1% in October 2022 and was 4.6% in the October data. A naïve calculation would imply that we have done more than two thirds of the work to get inflation back to target.

But much of the fall in inflation so far owes to base effects: the mechanical counterpart of the unprecedented increase in the level of energy prices that came to an end just over a year ago, with a much smaller contribution so far from the significant monetary policy tightening.

The UK economy has been hit by a series of unprecedented shocks - the UK's departure from the European Union, a pandemic, supply chain frictions, Russia's invasion of Ukraine. All have contributed to volatility in economic activity and inflation. We are in a state of the world where monetary policymaking is best considered as engineering rather than science.

The shocks and data surprises are too large for us to have any hope of understanding the detail of what is happening

in a complex system and fine-tuning economic outcomes through our models. Instead – like engineers – we should pay attention to real world outcomes and adjust accordingly.

That means we have to remain open-minded to make sure that we continually learn how the economy is responding to these shocks. We have had to remain humble about how well economic models perform when movements in important variables are 'out of sample' – in other words historically unprecedented.

We have had to place more emphasis than usual on what we know has happened, or is happening, in the economy and acknowledge that future projections are more uncertain than usual.

The economy is moving in the right direction to return inflation to the 2% target, but our job is not done. The question I am focused on is whether there is evidence of more persistent inflationary pressures which means we may need to tighten further.

Regardless, monetary policy still needs to be restrictive for an extended period of time to keep pushing down on inflation and to return it sustainably to target.

Given the uncertainty, I will continue to use a range of evidence – incorporating soft data, such as surveys, as well as real world conversations with businesses and others – to inform my view of where the economy is heading.



Action plan for Freeports

The Government has announced an action plan with over 50 measures to further accelerate the growth of port towns and cities. The measures include funding for Freeports and Investment Zones via the Investment Opportunities Fund and extending the window to claim special tax reliefs in English Freeport sites from five to ten years.

Read more about the measures at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/roadmap-published-to-accelerate-growth-in-port-towns-and-cities>

Upgrade to UK farming schemes

The Government has announced that from summer 2024 farmers will benefit from an upgrade to all of the UK's farming schemes. The upgrade includes funding uplifts, streamlined application processes, enhanced environmental incentives and support for the rollout of new technology.

Read more about the upgrade at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/biggest-upgrade-to-uk-farming-schemes-introduced-by-the-government-since-leaving-the-eu>

Increase in number of self-employed aged over 50

According to IPSE (the Association of Independent Professionals and the Self-Employed), in 2023 there were 1.1 million self-employed business owners aged 50 and over, an increase of 89,000 since 2020. This is despite the total self-employed population falling by 154,000 over the same period.

Read more about the figures at:

<https://www.ipse.co.uk/ipse-news/news-listing/more-than-one-million-over-50s-work-for-themselves.html>

Impact of Brexit and pandemic increased insolvencies

A total of 30,199 UK businesses became insolvent in 2023, which is 52% higher than in 2021. The increase has been attributed to the delayed impact of Brexit and the pandemic. According to Creditsafe, construction, wholesale and retail, and accommodation and food services were the sectors which accounted for the most insolvencies.

Read more about the increase at:

<https://www.creditsafe.com/gb/en/blog/reports/insolvencies.html>

Challenges facing employers in 2024

According to analysis of ONS figures by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, the biggest challenge faced by employers in 2024 is that the UK has too many vacant jobs and not enough people to fill them. The UK's ageing population and government plans to lower immigration will also have a negative impact on employers.

Read more about the analysis at:

<https://www.peninsulagrouplimited.com/resource-hub/labour-market-has-too-many-jobs-and-not-enough-people/>

Guidance on 2024 holiday pay changes

The Government has published guidance covering holiday pay changes which will be introduced throughout 2024. The changes include a new accrual method for irregular hours workers and part-year workers and the amount of leave workers can carry over into the following year.

The guidance is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/simplifying-holiday-entitlement-and-holiday-pay-calculations/holiday-pay-and-entitlement-reforms-from-1-january-2024>

Exporters face increasing challenges

A survey by the British Chambers of Commerce has revealed that 60% of firms trading with the EU believe it is now more difficult to do so than it was a year ago. Read more about the survey at:

<https://www.britishchambers.org.uk/news/2023/12/brexit-at-three-fresh-trade-challenges-growing/>

Source: BAD News (Business Advisers News)



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