

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Pigs, pubs and supermarkets.
Organic farmer
Helen Browning
in profile

Page 4

The Green Issue

A special section dedicated to sustainable business - from recycling to renewable energy

Pages 7-12

Regeneration game:
Industrial building
to serve up modern
cuisine



Back page

News Brief

Agency wins £95,000 grant

Create Studios, Swindon Council's digital media centre, has been awarded £95,000 by the National Lottery Grants for the Arts.

The money will help secure its work with aspiring young media makers and communities across the town for three years and will culminate in a major regional project in celebration of its 30th anniversary.

Manager Shahina Johnson said: "It acknowledges at a national level the good work we're doing in Swindon and means we can deliver ground-breaking initiatives to benefit people across the town."

Former chief executive jailed

Dennis Grant, the former chief executive of Swindon Chamber of Commerce, has been jailed for four years and four months at Gloucester Crown Court after admitting a string of frauds totaling more than £660,000.

Grant, 63, of Banbury, Oxfordshire, committed the offences between 2006 and 2009 while working at the charitable Cotswold Water Park Society.

He used the cash to buy an Aston Martin car, a villa in Cyprus, holidays and a flat for his daughter.

The Swindon Chamber of Commerce went bust in 2006.

Coming up next month . . .

In our September edition Swindon Business News will continue its series of quarterly features on exporting, this time looking at the nuts and bolts of trading overseas. We will also be taking the pulse of the rural economy in North Wiltshire, gauging the strength of the corporate finance market and the appetite for dealmaking, and looking at business education provision in the Swindon area. This edition will also include our indispensable, six-monthly guide to the area's independent schools and colleges.

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At last - LEP gets go ahead

Swindon and Wiltshire's joint bid for a Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has been approved by the Government – ending a drawn-out saga that put them among the last areas of the country to set up one of the private sector-led bodies.

The green light, from business minister Mark Prisk and decentralisation minister Greg Clark, gives Swindon and Wiltshire a LEP covering an area with a population of around 650,000 and more than 26,000 businesses.

The LEP may now bid for permission to set up an enterprise zone – an area with less restrictive planning rules and other incentives aimed at helping small firms set up and grow and create jobs.

However, with restrictions on central Government funding there is no guarantee that any bid will be approved.

The LEP will also have to go to ministers for money for each project it wants to back – competing against LEPs across the country.

The LEP, which has the support of Swindon and Wiltshire Councils, plans to help create 10,000 jobs and safeguard a further 8,000 over the next four years. Its priorities include increasing the coverage of super-fast broadband, regenerating and improving connectivity between the main population areas, supporting the tourism industry and helping to realise

the potential of the growth sectors such as advanced manufacturing and engineering, information technology and logistics.

Swindon had originally expected to be part of a larger LEP with Gloucestershire and Wiltshire. But that idea fell apart when Gloucestershire decided to go in alone a year ago. Swindon then put in a bid to ministers for a solo LEP, only to be told the town was too small to support one of its own.

Despite initial misgivings on both sides, the councils and business organisations representing Swindon and Wiltshire agreed to work together on a new joint bid – which has now been approved.

Talks are taking place to draw up a shortlist of LEP board members, possibly with a number of sub-groups for different sectors. Whoever chairs the main board has to be drawn from the private sector.

Possible hurdles could be the widely differing economies of Swindon and Wiltshire and the need to pull together interest groups from the different parts of the area, including bridging the psychological barrier of Salisbury Plain.

Ian Larrard, director of GWE The Initiative in Swindon and Wiltshire, welcomed the LEP. He said: "This is great news for our region. Along with Forward Swindon and other business organisations, we have been

immersed in the process of bidding for the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP and we are delighted that it has been approved. It has been a real collaborative effort and while it is early days in the development of this new LEP, the message about it being there to promote economic development and remove the barriers to private sector jobs growth is exactly what GWE The Initiative is all about.

"What business will want to see now is action. We will continue to work hard to ensure that the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP makes it easier for businesses to grow and prosper. Building on the collaboration with other key business organisations that led to the successful bid, GWE's aim is to ensure that our LEP addresses the key issues important to business and that it has the power and resources needed to take action."

Honda's double boost as full production resumes

Honda confirmed that both its new Civic hatchback for Europe and the next generation CR-V 4X4 will be built in Swindon, safeguarding the 3,000 jobs at its South Marston plant

And in a further boost, weekly production at the plant will return to normal levels in early September after the interruption in parts supply caused by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami earlier this year.

The new Civic – designed exclusively for Europe – will be the 9th

generation of the popular hatchback. Honda's first-ever Civic went on sale in 1972.

Production of the small family car will start later in the year at the Swindon plant, ahead of a sales launch in early next year. Mark Trowbridge, director of quality and new model at Honda of the UK Manufacturing (HUM), which operates the Swindon plant, said: "Our Associates are all really excited to be producing the next generation of Civic here at Swindon."



Civic pride: Engineers with Honda's next Swindon-built model

Packaging firm unwraps move to larger base

Specialist packaging manufacturer GWP Group is relocating its GWP Conductive division from Wootton Bassett to a purpose-built 23,000 sq ft base on Cricklade's Chelworth Industrial Estate.

The division specialises in the design and manufacturing of packaging that allows electronic devices to be transported without risk of damage.

The business, acquired by GWP nine years ago, is the UK market leader in the conductive corrugated packaging market with a 73 per cent market share and also exports across Europe and to Australia and Israel. GWP chief executive David Pedley said: "The move will allow GWP Conductive to continue to innovate in design and manufacture to bring the next generation of packaging to market."

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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SWINDON **BUSINESS** NEWS

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People

• Steve Fraser, a partner at Monahans Chartered Accountants, has been appointed to the main committee that runs the Faculty of Information Technology of the Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW). The ICAEW is a professional membership organisation, supporting more than 130,000 members and the IT Faculty exists to represent chartered accountants' IT-related interests and expertise and to contribute to IT-related public affairs, as well as helping accountants, and anyone else in business, to keep up to date with IT issues.



Steve Fraser

• Swindon-based financial services partnership Openwork has appointed Mark Duckworth as managing director of distribution and marketing. Mark was previously commercial development director at the firm, which he joined in November 2010. Prior to this, Mark worked at retirement financial specialists Living Time, where he was distribution and partnerships director responsible for all sales distribution, strategy and key deals throughout the UK. He has also worked for Prudential, where he was distribution director



Mark Duckworth

responsible for distribution throughout Europe and the Middle East, and AXA, where he was national sales manager.

In his new role Mark assumes responsibility for all elements of Openwork's distribution, including adviser recruitment, marketing and the development of our overall proposition strategy.

He also has operational responsibility for developing its IFA network capability and has taken on a management role across key corporate accounts.

• Sharon Phillips is re-joining Averies, the Swindon-based waste management company, as transport manager due to its expanding lorry fleet and to meet a growing demand for long-term contracts. Sharon brings a wealth of knowledge to the role with many years' experience in the logistics industry. She will be responsible for overseeing and expanding operations to meet customer needs, analysing logistical problems and producing solutions as well as allocating and managing staff resources. Her appointment follows that of a new sales manager, Dan Sealey, who has been working in the waste industry for more than 15 years and brings with him area knowledge and invaluable expertise.

• Nick Armitage has been appointed to the post of restaurant manager and head of hospitality at Hartham Park, near Chippenham. Nick has 25 years' experience in the hospitality business and until recently ran a successful Michelin-rated restaurant in Suffolk and before that The American Bar at the Savoy in London. Nick has already

made some changes at Jacks with the introduction of a new breakfast menu from 8am, 6 days a week, a new bar food menu and an elevenses & afternoon tea menu served throughout the day.

• Synergy Health, the Swindon-based sterilisation services group, has appointed Liz Hewitt to the board as a non-executive director with effect from September 1. Liz is a chartered accountant and will become chairperson of the audit committee as well as being a member of both the remuneration and nomination committees. She previously held senior roles at Smith & Nephew and 3i Group and is also a trustee, council member and member of the audit committee of Cancer Research UK.

• Bowood Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort has appointed Matt Hunter as its new business development manager focusing on both leisure and corporate opportunities and markets. The move is a return to Bowood for 34 year-old Matt who spent a year's work placement there in 1999 as part of his four-year university degree. In the intervening years he has built up an impressive track-record in sales and marketing in the hospitality industry. Matt previously worked as sales manager at The Thistle Hotel in Cheltenham and was cluster sales manager for the South West while at Intercontinental Hotels Group with responsibility for the Holiday Inn hotels in Swindon, Bristol, Gloucester and Taunton.



Matt Hunter

Events

• Swindon Business Lunch

When: **19 August, 12:30pm-2:30pm**

Where: De Vere Hotel (Shaw Ridge)

Contact: 01753 870500

When: **13 September, 8am-9:30am**

Where: STEAM, Swindon

Contact:

catriona.bunting@rsmtenton.com

Where: UK College of Personal Development

Contact: 01793 433571

david.latham@richmondfellowship.org.uk

• Lifting the lid on finance for SME's: Business Planning Seminar

• Caring - for your business

When: **14 September, 1.45pm**

• Employment Law Question Time

When: **Thursday 13th October 6.00pm**

Where: Swindon Marriott

Contact: 01793 433571

• Business Village Networking Group

When: **18 August, 7:30am-9:30am**

Where: The Crown Inn, Stratton

Contact: Steve Dye, 01793 680866

• Send your events to Swindon Business News @ info@swindon-business.net

Click here.

SBN

Check out the latest updates
www.swindon-business.net

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Advice group plans to make up for missing Link

A new organisation that will offer advice to firms in Swindon is being launched to plug the gap left by the withdrawal of the Government's Business Link services.

The Business Foundation and Enterprise Scheme will go live in September – two months before the closure of Business Link – and is aimed at helping new and growing businesses or those needing expert advice.

It will be sponsored by Swindon-based Banks Chartered Accountants and run by former Business Link adviser Keith Farmer, who was with the Government-funded agency for 13 years following a 30-year career in banking.

Banks director Richard Mathews said: "There is a real need for business advice in Swindon to help the local economy."

"We're not doing this as a money-making exercise, and the nominal fee for the advice sessions will be just to cover our costs. Keith has all the expertise following his career in banking and Business Link and we wanted to offer that up to Swindon businesses and those just starting up."

The Business Foundation and Enterprise Scheme will offer two levels of advice: half-day training courses on business basics, including legal structures, marketing, finance, business planning and cashflow to be held on Tuesdays, and one-to-one sessions with



Richard Mathews

Keith, for bespoke business advice on Wednesdays. Businesses can opt for either or both sessions, which will be held at Banks' offices in Devizes Road, Old Town.

Keith added: "We're working closely with the JobCentre and the banks so people running or starting up businesses will find out about the new scheme."

"Since Business Link has virtually disappeared there's nothing in its place to help the local economy." For more information, or to book, contact Shelly Hacker at Banks Chartered Accountants on 01793 616284.

IT company receives financial support from national innovation agency

Emnico Technologies, the Swindon-based IT support and software services company, has been awarded a grant from the Technology Strategy Board (TSB) to develop an IT product that could help to improve the competitiveness of small and medium-sized companies across the UK.

The TSB – the UK's national innovation agency – is based in Swindon and works to accelerate economic growth across the UK by stimulating and supporting business-led innovation.

Emnico's development project focuses on efficient ways of identifying valuable data from IT infrastructures, and the processing of this data to extract commercial knowledge to improve the speed of IT fault diagnosis and recovery, provide tailored IT advice to clients and supply better information to application vendors about the causes of software bugs and IT failures. Emnico will work in partnership with Kasra Technologies, based in Cambridge.

The project outcomes will improve the competitiveness and growth of small and medium-sized companies (SMEs) through better use of IT for increased productivity, improved reporting, and a better quality of service to their end-users. SMEs will also benefit from reduced service downtimes and maintenance costs that will arise from the combination of highly-efficient IT support service and more proactive and tailored IT advice. The total cost of Emnico's development project is £540,000 with the TSB funding half.

Emnico managing director Heydar Faramarzi said: "Like many other businesses, Emnico Technologies has needed to continuously diversify in the current economic climate. This funding has enabled us to take a major leap from incremental advances to a

significant innovation with real economic and business value." The award follows the company's success in the "Harnessing Large and Diverse Sources of Data" funding competition, which resulted in the TSB agreeing to invest £5 million of government funding in 21 new research and development projects across the UK aimed at helping stimulate the development of innovative technologies and strategies to enable businesses to extract greater value from large and diverse data sources.

Emnico took part in the national competition following a meeting at the TSBs Swindon office, where Heydar Faramarzi met Zoe Webster, now head of technology at the TSB.

Ms Webster said: "Nearly two-thirds of commercial innovations originate in small companies and we need to encourage and nurture this vital source of wealth-generating new products and services. We are very pleased to support Emnico Technologies' project. While the company is on our doorstep here in Swindon, its work could benefit companies across the country."



Heydar Faramarzi

Businesses urged to get the best value out of social media

A recent study by serviced office provider Regus shows that businesses in the South West are ahead of the UK average in using social media, with 44 per cent using it to win new business and 48 per cent to engage with existing customers.

These figures represent the growing acknowledgement that social media has a place in a business environment. However, in the rush to join the 'new media revolution' it should not be seen as the only PR and marketing route to take, or a stand-alone channel, warns

Eleanor Collins of Vox. "There's no doubting that social media has become an invaluable business tool," said Eleanor. "For very minimal outlay, you can be reaching and engaging with your customers – new and old – on a level that was only possible face to face before. At Vox, we encourage businesses we work with to embrace social media. However, how they utilise it can vary enormously. Social media shouldn't be approached with a blanket, scatter-gun approach, but, like any other business investment,

thought through strategically and implemented in a targeted manner that's in line with your existing PR approach and messaging."

"Think about where the people you want to reach are. What's the point of spending hours setting up a Facebook page if the people you want to reach don't use Facebook, or don't use it with their business hats on?"

If you want to find out more about how social media can add to your company's PR and marketing, call Vox on 01793 511990.

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Gloss is put on firm's future

Swindon-based specialist paint supplier Holman is being promised a bright future after its acquisition by local businessman Paul Hague.

The 25-year-old business, based in Old Town, supplies specialist paints and coatings such as wood treatments, industrial and fire-resistant finishes and furniture lacquers, and is the exclusive distributor for several leading manufacturers.

Mr Hague, who runs Broadoak IM, has a track record of developing industrial businesses. The deal was brokered by KBS corporate, a Bolton-based firm which advises companies on selling or acquiring businesses. KBS Corporate deal executive Chris Hinchey said: "Holman's new owner plans to develop the existing brand further within the marketplace and identify new distribution channels which should provide it with a bright and sustainable future."

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Putting 'rocket fuel' into ambitious local firms



Ambitious local firms with strong potential for growth are invited to join a series of programmes being run by Business Link to further boost their performance.

Business Link spokesperson Michelle Yates explains: "Intelligent and well-structured, these workshops help businesses achieve a step change in their development. They provide the fuel that high growth businesses need to really take off."

The Strategic Leadership Programme is designed for senior executives of small and medium-sized businesses facing change, looking at new opportunities or wanting to review their leadership approach and discover the skills needed to improve their performance. There are three half-day modules covering leading change, leading as an individual and employee engagement.

This programme is being held at the Park House Conference Centre in Swindon on September 14, 21 and 28.

A second programme, called **Right People, Right Results**, will help business owners identify the right people to achieve their business objectives. Delivered over a day and a half, this programme covers two modules: Recruitment and Progression, which helps identify and develop the right people to enable the business to meet its objectives and grow, and Performance Management, which will help business owners establish best practice in appraising, reviewing and developing their people.

The Right People, Right Results Programme is being held at The Brook Madison Hotel, Swindon, on September 14 and 15.

Michelle Yates added: "Bringing together small groups of entrepreneurs, these courses are compelling to attend – and are also useful in building networks of like-minded local business leaders."

Contact Business Link on 0845 600 9966 for further information.



Back to the future for farming

For an active woman, being laid up with a bad back is not something that acclaimed organic farmer Helen Browning is enjoying.

Ironically, it was a bumpy trailer ride around Highgrove, that bastion of all things 'green', that proved the last straw for her back, which had been giving her twinges for some time. The resulting shifted disc has meant she's spent the past five weeks unable to sit or lie comfortably.

"But it's much better now" she says. "I'm looking forward to getting back to work."

Work, for Helen, is Eastbrook, her successful organic farm in Bishopstone, near Swindon, the village's Royal Oak pub (of which she is an Arkells tenant) and her position as director of the Soil Association. In fact, the latter is now a full-time post, so the farm and pub are largely run by her business and personal partner Tim Finney and her "brilliant management team".

The pub is a more recent passion of Helen's. Having taken on the tenancy about four years ago she has turned it back into a traditional pub, serving great food. But it is her commitment to organic farming and her work with the Soil Association which has won her acclaim; in 1996, aged just 34, she was awarded the OBE for services to organic farming.

Much came to Helen at a young age. When she was just 24, having completed her agricultural technology degree, she returned to the family farm in Bishopstone, keen to help out and put some new ideas into practice. She was surprised and delighted when her father asked her to take over.

"My father moved here in 1950, taking on the tenancy from the church, so I grew up here and I realised quite early on that I wanted to go into farming," she said.

Farming is embedded in Helen's family – her father had five maiden aunts near Malvern who were farmers and who had a big influence on Helen. "I was so impressed as a kid. They had such fun – a wonderful independent life, going to market, hunting, making cheese and wonderful yellow butter. I just loved it!"

When Helen took over Eastbrook Farm it was mixed – beef, dairy, arable, sheep. Her father had given her free-rein and so she decided to experiment with organic farming.

"There are a number of reasons behind my attraction to organic farming. I was interested in health, partly because I wasn't healthy as a child. And I had seen farming change so much – we lost loads of hedges to make way for the bigger machinery, started using more and more chemicals, wildlife started disappearing at a rate of knots. More pragmatically, I wanted the farm to stand on its own two feet, we couldn't rely on hand-outs forever.

"And there's the very important element of animal welfare. During my degree I saw how some animals were treated and was just horrified."

Helen's first step was to set up a 20-acre trial site within the farm. The results told her much of what she needed to know; for example, the milk yields were higher from cows fed on organically grown clover than on fertilised grass. Initially, one of the two dairy herds was converted to organic. Then over the course of about eight years the farm switched totally to organic production of milk, lamb, poultry and – the product Helen is best known for – pigs.

Helen started with two saddlebacks. "I was partly trying to prove a point because at university I'd come up with the idea of keeping a pig unit outside and I got nil point! But I was

Award-winning organic farmer Helen Browning talks to Jo Smyth about pigs, pubs and her rise to success



sure I could set up a system which was centred on the needs of the pig."

Helen initially sold her goods from the farm gate and for 12 years owned a butcher's in Shrivenham. The farm began making sausages and curing bacon, selling to restaurants and independent outlets.

All did not run smoothly. In around 1989 Safeway took an interest and wanted to stock organic pork; the farm was geared up to go when Safeway pulled the plug because the farm wasn't able to supply the whole volume needed for launch. The next plan, to scale up to supply a large number of independents, also had to be shelved because the business model was too expensive to maintain.

Helen's response was to change the model and increase sales to supermarkets such as Waitrose and Sainsbury's, all branded as Helen Browning's Organic.

The two main arms of the business are her two Ps – the pigs and the pub.

"We took the Royal Oak on because we really want to be a community business, and we wanted to do something here where we are customer-facing. I love it and it's going really well," said Helen.

Helen's enterprises as a whole employ around 25 full-time equivalent staff and the business turns over about £4.5 million.

It is the Soil Association which now takes up much of Helen's time. She began her association with it in the nineties as a trustee and now has the full-time role of director.

"One of our current focuses here is on everyone having a healthy diet – I know with my animals if I feed them well they are healthy and it's the same with people. We are working very closely with schools and teachers to

In profile: Helen Browning

Age: 49

Married/children: has been married, with one daughter.

Drives: Subaru 4x4

Hobbies: travel, anything sporty – watching and playing, eating out

Currently reading: Alastair Campbell's Diaries

Favourite film: The Thomas Crown Affair

Favourite restaurant: Royal Oak, Bishopstone – of course!

Role model: Great Aunt Molly, who farmed and made the yellow butter

Current project: rewriting the Soil Association strategy

Secret to success: be true to and follow your values

"I was convinced that the way forward was as a branded business. We had to have that link with the customer – I didn't want to become just a supermarket supplier, because that way lay servitude."

The 2001 and 2007 national Foot-and-Mouth outbreaks hit the pig business but, by focussing on the brand, they pulled through and their main outlets now are Sainsbury's and Tesco. Organic milk goes through OMSCo into Yeo Valley and other processors and grain goes to the likes of Doves Farm in Hungerford.

educate children," she said.

Plans in the pipeline include resurrecting a meat mail order business, starting an organic orchard and increasing the popularity of the Royal Oak.

"In a way my whole career has been about inquiring and finding the best way to do things, not necessarily being dogmatic about organic. Complexity is what life's about and I thrive on the diversity."

**In September:
Rural Economy in Focus**

New vehicles for Wincanton

Logistics group Wincanton has invested £4.2 million in 27 new vehicles for its dedicated construction fleet. The vehicles will be used to carry building materials from bricks to tiles and aggregates for the Chippenham-based group's building sector customers.

This investment follows the addition of 20 new curtain-sided teardrop trailers introduced earlier this year in partnership with Lafarge.

Wincanton operates the UK's largest shared-user construction materials fleet with around 200 vehicles. Driver comfort was a priority in buying the trucks and the cabs feature an internal height of 2.1m with a raised single bunk and fitted microwave and fridge.

Vectura signs US agreement

Vectura, the Chippenham-based specialist drugs firm, has signed a collaboration, development and licence agreement with a US division of an unnamed leading international pharmaceutical company for its VR315 combination therapy for asthma/chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. Under the agreement Vectura will provide support for the US development of the drug and will receive an initial payment of \$10 million and up to \$35 million when it reaches pre-determined development milestones.

Vectura will also receive a royalty from all US sales of VR315, which is delivered using Vectura's ground-breaking technology.

Healthy outlook for Synergy as it agrees new bank funding

Synergy Health, the Swindon-based international sterilisation services group, has secured a multi-million pound refinancing agreement to support its continued global expansion.

Synergy, which employs more than 4,000 people worldwide and specialises in the medical devices and healthcare sectors, has expanded rapidly in recent years through a string of acquisitions. Last month it bought a Malaysian medical device sterilisation firm, a move which

followed two major acquisitions in the US and Germany last year. Acquisitions have mainly been funded by operating cashflow and debt.

The group, whose sterilisation businesses include Swindon-based Isotron, has become the leading supplier of sterilisation services to UK hospitals – a market it claims to have created in 1996 – and following the recent acquisitions is now the second-largest global provider of sterilisation services to medical device manufacturers.

Business First named College of the Month

Business First at Swindon College has been named as the college of the month by the NCFE (a national qualifications organisation) for the delivery of a new NCFE award in equality and diversity which covers the recently updated Equality Act.

Business First, which works with hundreds of employers across the region, received the accolade for 'exemplary standards of delivery, assessment and verification, employer engagement and marketing'.

Alison Jamieson, quality assurance manager for Business First at Swindon College, said: "We have delivered short, vocationally-related courses to employers for many years and our provision has continued to grow in

terms of quality.

"In a very short timescale we have all worked extremely hard to meet the outcomes of delivering the new NCFE courses. The equality and diversity award is our first one to be externally verified and I am confident we will achieve the same standards right across our new provision.

"This title is another recognition of our consistently high standards and measurable impact on local employers. The NCFE has also taken examples of our work to use as a benchmark for other colleges."

Business First has Ofsted Grade 1 Outstanding status and also holds the Matrix Standard and Training Quality Standard (TQS) kitemark.



From left: Paul Archer of Lemon&Co, Kerrie Hunt of Thrings, and Malcolm Gregory of Withy King

Employment law experts to appear at unique event

Three of Swindon's leading experts on employment law are to share a platform at a free, one-off event offering businesses of all sizes and sectors a unique opportunity to get an update on vital employment-related issues.

The event takes place at the Swindon Marriott Hotel on October 13 and is staged by the Swindon Mindful Employer Network, which supports businesses on mental health and well-being issues, in association with the Swindon Chamber of Commerce and Swindon Business News.

On the panel will be Paul Archer of Lemon&Co, Malcolm Gregory of Withy King and Kerrie Hunt of Thrings. Those attending will get the chance to put questions to the lawyers.

The meeting will be chaired by Melanie Richens, a trained solicitor. She said: "Many employers are bewildered by the complexities of employment law – which, of course, is subject to constant changes by Parliament and the EU.

"I strongly urge managers, professionals and business people to attend this free question time and bring themselves up to date with the latest developments."

Richmond Fellowship Wiltshire's David Latham, who manages the Swindon Mindful Employer Network, added: "This is a unique opportunity for the local business community to attend an event which provides top-class advice to Swindon companies and employers from all sectors. We are grateful to Kerrie, Malcolm and Paul for

their commitment and giving up their very valuable time."

Swindon Marriott is hosting the event as part of its ongoing support to the network. General manager Adam Flint said: "This will be a terrific networking event with the added incentive of learning something extremely useful for your business."

To book email David Latham at mindful@richmondfellowship.org.uk

The event starts with networking at 6pm and will finish at 7.30pm.

Meanwhile the Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership (SSEP) is the latest organisation to back the Swindon Mindful Employer Network.

The SSEP is responsible for developing and promoting the economic well-being of Swindon and is actively working with many of the town's employers and business organisations.

David Latham, of the network, said: "It is not everyday that the SSEP gives its support to local organisations but we are thrilled that, from now on, our publicity material will include a logo from the SSEP – a very high-profile body which is positively influencing the lives of local people."

SSEP chair Rikki Hunt said: "The Swindon Mindful Employer Network has an important role to play in supporting businesses and their staff in the borough. I believe the town benefits from this initiative by promoting Swindon as a great place to live and work."

Strong demand for phones helps Intel post record revenue

Chipmaker Intel has posted record quarterly revenues and higher profits for the fifth consecutive quarter.

Revenue for the second quarter was \$13bn (£8bn), up more than 20 per cent on a year earlier, while profits rose slightly to \$3 billion.

The US firm, which has its European sales and marketing base in Swindon, said it expected sales in the second half of the year to rise at a similar rate due in part to continuing strong demand for mobile phones and tablets. It said demand in emerging markets was helping to drive overall sales.

Smiths News promises to deliver further growth

Smiths News the Swindon-based newspaper, magazine and book distributor, has said it remained on track to deliver annual pre-tax profit growth in line with market forecasts.

Group revenues in the 19 weeks to July 9 declined by 2.8 per cent on a like-for-like basis, it said in an interim management statement to shareholders, although sales of newspapers and magazines were given a boost by the Royal Wedding. Revenues at Bertrams, its book wholesale business, fell by 7.5 per cent on a like-for-like basis sales for the most recent six-week period in line with last year.

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Focus on childcare



Dodford Farm Daycare opened in 2003 and is located in the beautiful countryside on a working farm so the children have a good understanding of animals and first hand by experience visiting the animals and hatching chicks and feeding the lambs in the Spring time. The staff here are caring and well experienced as noted in the Ofsted report.

"Young children learn how to share through staff members' sensitive management of the situation. Staff are kind, patient, and energetic which gives the children a secure feeling about themselves. Through positive attitude by the staff, all children learn a mixture of life skills."

Everyday is a fun day at Dodford as we learn through play and stimulating activities indoor and outdoors set out for the children and we also have a superb soft play barn as well as two outdoor play areas that ensure the children have plenty of fresh air.

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Directors' Briefing

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WIK WITHY KING

The legal landscape is constantly changing, making it difficult for directors to keep up with a seemingly endless stream of new rules and regulations. Here, solicitors from Withy King's commercial teams in Swindon, highlight a few of the most recent developments and signal changes to be aware of over the next few months.

Promotional expenses

Some forms of corporate hospitality, entertaining, gifts and other promotional expenses may now be illegal after the Bribery Act 2010 came into force last month (1 July). The Act has already raised significant concerns, particularly for organisations which rely on corporate hospitality for their business development. The offences described in the Act are very widely drafted and it would seem that providing and accepting many types of promotional expense are now prohibited.

Website cookies

The way in which your business uses cookies and similar technologies for storing information on computers and other electronic devices changed on 26 May. A cookie is a small file of letters and numbers which is downloaded when the user accesses certain websites and allows a website to recognise which user is accessing its site. The new rules state that cookies can only be placed on a user's device if they consent - although there are certain exceptions, for example if cookies are considered 'strictly necessary'.

Contractors versus employees

It is often unclear whether an individual is a self-employed contractor or an employee in the eyes of the law. The Supreme Court has recently confirmed that when determining employment status, employment tribunals and courts need to assess the reality of the relationship between the parties. They can disregard contractual terms which suggest self-employment if they do not reflect what happens in practice i.e. if your contractor walks and talks like an employee, he/she most probably is an employee regardless of what the contract may say.

Drainage

Look out for the new drainage regulations. From 1 October, what you thought was a private sewer might turn into a public one. Good news for reduction in maintenance costs but bad news for new drainage connections. You can appeal when the local Water Authority comes knocking but you've only got two months to do so.

For further information on these or any other business issues, please visit www.withyking.co.uk or contact Alex Pyatt, head of the commercial team at Withy King solicitors in Swindon on 01793 536 526 or email alex.pyatt@withyking.co.uk



Alex Pyatt

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High-energy team provides funds for low-energy start-up

When Allan Slater came to the end of his contract with a well-known Services provider in the water industry, he decided to branch out on his own and develop a range of specialised fluid treatment systems that shared a common power source: "microwaves". One of the products he wanted to develop used a beam of microwaves in the Radio Frequency (RF) to power a lamp that would revolutionise the treatment of opaque liquids.

After refining his ideas, he joined up with another experienced executive from the food industry, Peter Moore, and they decided to develop and commercialise their RF powered pulsed white light equipment, designed to sterilise opaque liquids, such as milk, fruit juice and beer.

Traditional UV light treatments had stopped at water purification, because the technology was not able to affect opaque fluids. In addition, preliminary analysis has shown that traditional flash pasteurisation of beer by heating, for example, uses almost 50 times more energy than the equipment now being developed by the team.

Allan and Peter turned to corporate finance specialist Watersheds, based in Northampton, to help their company, Microtek Processes, to raise £500,000 to fund the start-up of the new business and provide funds for patent applications and equipment for validation trials.

Watersheds invited experienced finance director, Darren Henry, who was looking to buy a business, to join the Microtek team. Darren was impressed by the prospects for Microtek and after technical due diligence, agreed to fund the first investment round in the company.



The lamp connects to the mains and just five would light the pitch at Wembley Stadium

From left: Stephen Smart from Watersheds and Darren Henry, Peter Moore and Allan Slater from MicroTek Processes Ltd.

Photo: Professional Images

This subsequently led to a small number of additional private investors buying shares and discussions with potential VC partners.

Watersheds' Partner, Stephen Smart, is delighted to have been able to help Allan and Peter to finance the start up, at the same time as gaining something of an education in the application of micro-wave powered light generation.

Allan Slater said: "Watersheds really stuck at their task and showed great determination in the pursuit of

the objective: to help Peter and me to fund our fundamental belief in our products and take them from the drawing board to market."

Peter Moore, who combined his Business Development role with presentations to potential funders organised by Watersheds, said: "Stephen and his colleagues were there whenever we needed them and showed drive and ingenuity to bring the funding round to a close. It is now up to us to make this the business it deserves to be."



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SMEs urged to avoid holiday hell

Now that the holiday season is here, small and medium-sized businesses are being urged to seek advice on coping while staff are away.

Sarah Matthews-DeMers, president of the West of England Society of Chartered Accountants (WESCA), said this summer was likely to prove even harder for many businesses due to the economic downturn.

"At this time of year, when employees will be taking their holidays, it is essential that firms plan ahead to ensure business is not disrupted," she said.

"With economic prospects still difficult, firms need to avoid disruption. They must ensure that cash keeps flowing by examining their debt collection and bill paying procedures as well as making sure proper safeguards are in place."

Ten tips to manage while staff are on holiday:

- Try to anticipate employee holidays. Can you still operate if certain staff are away at the same time?
- Getting cash into your business is critical. At holiday times you will have staff away – but so have your customers. Plan ahead to avoid payment delays
- Make sure any urgent invoices are paid on time otherwise you could damage your credit rating, limiting access to supplies on credit
- If the person authorising payment is away make sure that someone else can authorise it in their absence. The same applies with cheque signatories
- Make sure staff complete a proper handover and that the handover is given enough time before people go away. Ensure staff enact their 'out of office' email and that an alternative contact is given



- See if staff are happy for others to have access to their emails. This may help avoid any nasty surprises when they return. Also make suppliers or customers aware of alternatives to their regular contacts
- Look after remaining staff and make sure they understand why they are expected to take on extra work – staff on holiday will be expected to cover for them when they are away on leave
- Debrief people when they get back – this will enable them to get back 'up to speed' quickly.
- Once people have returned from holiday, give them time to adjust. However, try to make sure they regain their productivity quite quickly
- Suggest that staff book their next holiday soon after they get back – this will give them something to look forward to and will also help you plan ahead

Lawyers help seal entrepreneur's paint job

Swindon-based law firm Withy King's corporate team has helped a City investment banker-turned-West Country angel investor back an innovative paint company.

Gavin Eddy, who has built up a portfolio of businesses, has expanded it further by investing in Cornish firm Naturepaint, which manufactures

environmentally-friendly paints for interior walls, ceilings and woodwork.

Withy King helped to facilitate the buy-out of the firm's existing investor, private equity fund Finance Cornwall, before developing a new shareholders' agreement and reorganising its constitution to reflect the deal between Gavin and the company.

CONTENTS

Information Technology - P8
Transport - P9

Waste & Recycling - P10
Green Business - P11

Energy - P12
Green Property - P13

Welcoming the winds of change

Green business is big business. From waste recycling to renewable energy and from green IT to sustainable transport, every sector is having to adapt to a new ways of working.

The pace of change can sometimes be seen as a threat. The EEF, the manufacturers' association, recently said British industry had reached a 'tipping point' where the burden of climate change related policies could jeopardise jobs and investment.

But with such a challenge comes opportunities. And green jobs – whether in developing new low-carbon technologies or in offering consultancy services to help cut carbon emissions – are expected to be created in their thousands over the next few years.

Swindon, with its strategic location and advanced manufacturing base, could play a lead role in emerging green sectors. The town's rail and motor heritage could come to the fore. Rail travel will become more efficient and sustainable – opening up opportunities for companies allied to the industry, many of them already in Swindon.

Motor transport has to clean up its act and Honda is among the leaders in 'green' motoring. Swindon is also home to pioneering fuel cell development at Johnson Matthey while logistic companies such as Howard Tenens are accelerating their own investment in alternative fuels.

The Government's research councils and Technology Strategy Board – based at North Star – are investing public funds into new technologies to keep the UK at the leading edge of the renewables sector.

RWE Npower Renewables, also based in the town, is a lead private-sector lead player in the sector, although it recently pulled out of the world's largest wave energy project on the Scottish island of Lewis on concerns over the viability of the technology.

Weighing up the balance of greener energy production against a public yet to be completely convinced of its need – or where its production sites should be located – will be a key factor over the next few years, as Honda in Swindon has already discovered.

Its plans to build three wind turbines at its South Marston car plant were put back for a second time recently when more than 300 opponents turned up at a council meeting due to decide whether to give them the green light.



The car giant, which has teamed up with wind energy pioneers Ecotricity on the project, claims the 120m turbines are essential to keep its Swindon car and engine manufacturing site as one of the world's most efficient while also meeting tough internal targets to reduce its carbon footprint.

The Japanese firm said the plant is aiming to slash its carbon emissions by 24 per cent within nine years. Honda is determined to lower its £8.5m annual energy bill and sees using alternative energy supplies as key to this. It says it has already reduced the amount of energy needed to produce a car by 37 per cent since 2000 by designing-in energy-efficient processes at its plant – but further savings will be harder to achieve.

Making workplaces greener is another key to achieving lower carbon emissions. The Royal Mail's Dorcan centre, the country's third largest, is looking at every aspect of its operation to make it more sustainable through reusing, recycling or reducing its energy costs.

That's no mean feat when the building has a floorspace of

14,282.4 sq m, employs more than 1,000 people, operates 24 hours, handles five million letters a day and costs about £38 million a year to run.

Environment pillar lead William Hume has looked at all aspects of the business – from reusing rubber bands – it put nearly 82,000 back into circulation in one month instead of sending them to landfill – to installing energy-efficient Dyson Airblade hand dryers in the toilets, replacing paper towels which could not be recycled and often blocked drains.

"It's a bit like doing a Rubik's Cube," he said. "You think you've done it, but when you look at it from a different angle it isn't finished."

Even the way businesses train their staff or hold conferences and meetings are being made greener.

The fact that these can also mean lower bills at a time of spiralling fuel and utility bills only helps.

RTS Communications, the video conferencing specialists in Swindon, is reporting increasing take up as firms cut back on travel.

Mike O'Sullivan, operations manager, said: "Of course, occasionally you need a face-to-face meeting, but generally video conferencing is now a better option and keeps people focused on the business at hand."

Training can also be made greener, according to the Chippenham-based learning and development company, coincidentally also called RTS but not connected.

"On its own eLearning isn't enough, but as part of a blended solution, which includes traditional face-to-face training, it's extremely effective" said Martin Baines, business development manager.

"We can also save organisations time and money as well as help their green credentials by using our webinar technology to deliver corporate communications or brief teams on new products"

So successful has the eLearning revolution been that it has set up a separate company, RTS eSolutions, specifically to develop and deliver eLearning. The firm has its own recording and editing studios at its Chippenham HQ, which are used to produce webcasts, webinars and podcasts. Webinars made for car firm Mazda earlier this year had more than 200 participants from all over the UK.

Swindon leading the way for green growth

Swindon Borough Council has recently approved a strategy to ensure the town is well placed to reap the benefits of 'green' growth and the 'low carbon' economy. The strategy, known as the Swindon Sustainable Energy Framework, aims to position Swindon as a key low carbon location for business by creating an environment for both existing and new businesses to work collaboratively on key issues of energy cost, energy security and CO2 reduction.

Council leader Roderick Bluh explains why the framework is so important. "All businesses face the same energy challenges – rising and unpredictable costs, security of supply and the need to reduce CO2 emissions – but these issues are also opportunities.

"Working in a leaner, more joined up way to develop local, affordable and sustainable energy supplies will not only help address key energy issues in our area, but can also provide the backdrop for economic growth."

What are the priorities?

The new framework aims to facilitate energy projects which can offer one or all of the following benefits:

- reinforce local business
- attract new businesses to Swindon
- develop skills and expertise locally

There are two strands of activity: firstly, the development of a renewable energy infrastructure to form a new district energy network designed to serve Swindon, driven by a business focussed energy partnership – already involving companies such as BMW Group and Honda.

Secondly, to facilitate the growth of a low-carbon economy within Swindon through focussed business support, marketing and inward investment, and the development of appropriate skills and research. Economic development and regeneration company, Forward Swindon will take a lead here. The newly-established Swindon and Wiltshire Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) may have a role in driving this activity too.

Solar Panels:

Swindon Borough Council is taking the step of installing photovoltaic (solar) panels on all suitable council-owned buildings.



One of the new SCS schemes at Cheney Manor, Swindon

This will not only highlight the ease with which major organisations can adopt renewable technologies, but also enables the Council to benefit from cost savings by taking advantage of the financial incentives still on offer from the Government's Feed-in Tariff scheme. Swindon Commercial Services (SCS) is leading the implementation of the photovoltaic programme for the council. SCS has already installed 220 kW of renewable generating capacity in time to qualify for the higher level of Government-backed Feed-in Tariff.

For more information about the Swindon Sustainable Energy Framework contact Steve Cains, at SCains@swindon.gov.uk

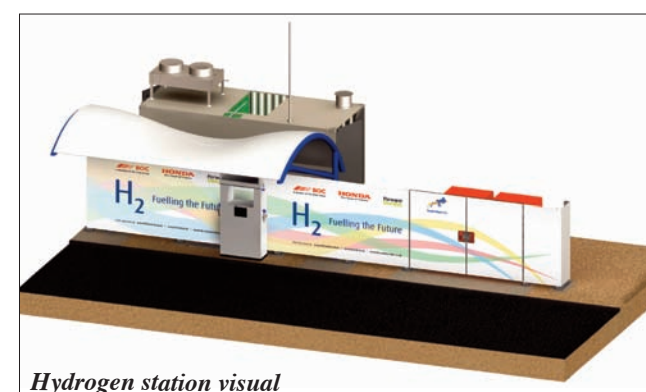
Hydrogen Highway:

Another exciting development is Swindon's involvement in delivering a low-carbon solution to the future transport needs of the UK's population. The UK's first open access commercial hydrogen filling station will open in September 2011 at the Honda plant in Swindon as a result of a partnership between vehicle manufacturer Honda, industrial gases business BOC and Forward Swindon. The station will be operated by BOC and will look very much like a conventional filling station. It will be open to all users of hydrogen-fuelled vehicles following training and registration. Forward Swindon have been instrumental in pulling together the project team and arranging funding as part of its role to encourage inward investment to the area and raise the

profile of Swindon in the low-carbon economy.

The Government is encouraging the faster adoption of hydrogen and fuel cell technologies, bringing them into everyday use. However, the lack of infrastructure has meant that development and testing has been limited in the UK to date. The Swindon station offers a solution, and represents the midpoint in a new Hydrogen Highway stretching from Swansea, along the M4 corridor via Swindon to London.

Ian Piper, CEO of Forward Swindon, said: "This project is a great example of private/public partnership and Forward Swindon is delighted that the town will be at the forefront of sustainable transport technologies."



Hydrogen station visual

For more information about the Hydrogen Highway project contact Lawrence Murphy at:

lawrencemurphy@forwardswindon.co.uk. General inquiries for Forward Swindon should be addressed to juliafalcon@forwardswindon.co.uk

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The amount you can save on ink if you use this font (Century Gothic)

IT can lead the green revolution

The IT industry has a key role to play in reducing the UK's carbon emissions and helping businesses and public sector organisations become more sustainable.

That is the view from BCS, the Swindon-based Chartered Institute for IT and it is one that is finding favour among Government policymakers and the 'green' movement.

For decades the fast-paced growth of the computer industry and the wider IT sector were not linked to the climb in carbon emissions or the drive for more sustainable business practices. The two did not seem to go together.

Most 'green' legislation was geared towards old, smokestack industries and known polluters such as the automotive industry and the aviation sector.

But more recently, as sales of personal electronic devices have

spiralled, questions have been asked about how these are produced, the energy they use and, particularly, how they are disposed of.

Chris Wallace, product manager, professional development services, at BCS, believes the issue of green IT is moving rapidly up the business and political agendas.

"It's about rising awareness, creating partnerships and countering some of the conflicting messages that are coming out," he said.

"People didn't necessarily see IT as a 'green' issue. At BCS we are at the forefront of this."

IT professionals are waking up to the fact that they have a role to play, he said.

For instance, in procurement the mantra has always been bigger and better – regardless of whether they extra capacity was actually needed.

"Businesses, like individuals, tend to buy the highest specification

equipment they can get for the money. But they probably don't need that amount of power."

The growth of data centres, with their thirst for water for cooling and ever-growing need for power, has also had an impact on the carbon footprint on the IT sector.

Running alongside that is the constant need for more powerful batteries to drive energy-hungry portable devices.

"As IT professionals we need to think about this," said Mr Wallace.

"We need a change of mindset – burning carbon like there's no tomorrow doesn't have to be the norm."

In fact, making the UK IT sector the more sustainable in the world could bring it tremendous opportunities as other countries will need to play catch up as they, too, are forced to reduce their carbon footprints.

Businesses can take some simple steps to reduce their carbon footprint through better use of IT, Catherine Bozec, Fast Forward business development manager told the Lean Green Business Forum.

- Laptops use 50 per cent less power than desktop computers and it takes 50 per cent less material to manufacture them.
- Removing screensavers reduces energy bill.
- Don't leave PCs on standby. Switch them off.
- Consider cloud computing.
- Don't use ink-jet printers.
- Change your font – using Century Gothic can save up to 31 per cent on ink use.



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Sustainable printing really doesn't have to cost the earth

Printing in an environmentally-friendly way doesn't have to cost more, despite what most businesses think.

While a lot of recycled papers are more expensive than normal papers, FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)-certified papers and boards – which are produced from pulp grown in well managed forests – generally don't cost any more.

Buying it is usually as easy as requesting it when ordering print – the only restriction is that the printer has to be FSC-accredited.

Forests support up to 1.6 billion of the poorest people in the world while 60 million indigenous people and countless species of plants and animals are wholly dependent on forests for their lives.

Demand for forest products, such as timber and paper, continues to grow, putting increasing pressure on the world's forests. Wood is a renewable resource: when forests are well managed, with consideration for the environment, the wildlife and the people living and working in them, harvesting timber can actually be an effective way of safeguarding the forests for future generations.

Choosing products sourced from these well-managed forests and from recycled post-consumer waste allows businesses and consumers to support the world's forests.

The FSC enables firms to buy forest products of all kinds with confidence that they are not contributing to global forest destruction. FSC-certified forests must be managed to the highest environmental, social and economic standards. Trees that are harvested are replanted or allowed to regenerate naturally. But it does not stop there. The forests must also be managed with due respect for the environment,

the wildlife and the people who live and work in them. This is what makes the FSC system unique and ensures that a forest is well-managed, from the protection of indigenous people's rights to the methods of felling trees.

The FSC is an international, non-governmental organisation dedicated to promoting responsible management of the world's forests. The FSC system includes a certified chain of custody that tracks the timber through every stage in the supply chain, from the forest to the final user. This is monitored through the invoicing process and the final label on the product has a code that confirms that the item is genuinely FSC. Codes can be verified by contacting FSC UK.

Swindon printing firm MPD is FSC-accredited as well as having PEFC (Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification) and ISO 14001-2008 (environmental) accreditation.

The business is very environmentally conscious and is always happy to discuss ways of helping customers become more environmentally friendly when ordering print.

MPD also has the quality accreditation ISO 9001-2004 and produces work to the colour management accreditation ISO 12647. Specialising in litho, digital (HP Indigo) and Hi-Volume copying, it is also able to produce full-colour personalised print to help businesses target more-specific customers. Everything is produced to the highest standards with quick turnarounds – and it won't cost the earth.

For more information on FSC, PEFC or ways to become more environmentally friendly, call MPD on 01793 495522 or visit: www.mpd-offset.co.uk



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The number of cars one double-decker bus can replace on the road

75

Go Green this Summer with Stagecoach West

Cars produce nearly 60 per cent of all UK domestic transport greenhouse gas emissions. One double-decker bus can replace 75 cars on the road and travelling 100 miles by bus results in 15.6kg fewer carbon emissions than travelling by car.

Over the past four years Stagecoach West has invested around £12.5 million in new buses. This is set to increase at the end of this year when it launches a new fleet of luxury Stagecoach Gold buses on its Swindon-to-Oxford route. The company is also undergoing its own carbon reduction programme and backing a national campaign called

Greener Journeys which aims to take a billion car journeys off UK roads over the next three years.

Recognising that young people are potentially the passengers of the future, Stagecoach West is keen to encourage them to use the bus, especially those who are about to decide whether to buy a car or continue to travel by public transport. As a result, the company is running a ticket promotion over the summer holidays entitling the under 25s to unlimited travel on its entire network for just £10 (normally £19).

To find out more visit www.stagecoach.com/west and www.greenerjourneys.com

Private hire taxi firm ditches the radio and moves with the times

Private hire taxis are not usually associated with 'green' motoring but Cross Street Radio Cars in Swindon is embracing the need to reduce its CO2 usage.

The firm, based on Cheney Manor Industrial Estate, works off a PDA (personal digital assistant) system instead of radios so its products are recyclable as all drivers have in their cars is a mobile phone, holder and 12v charger.

This is in contrast to the radios, wires and aerials traditional fitted to taxis. Additionally, the number of miles travelled and the amount in grams of CO2 used is given on each invoice the firm sends out to its customers so they can see how each trip is impacting on their corporate carbon footprint.

For example, an invoice for journeys totaling 552 miles travelled would show 142,123 grams of CO2 used.

"We are well aware of green issues and will continue to work for a better future," said Marion Spencer of Cross Street Radio Cars.



Leave the car at home, save carbon and catch the bus

Research shows that if just one car journey in every 25 was switched to a bus journey, there would be a billion fewer car journeys on our roads and we would save two million tonnes of CO2 within three years.

For anyone looking to make their business greener, these figures – taken from the Greener Journeys campaign (www.greenerjourneys.com) – cannot be ignored, according to Paul Jenkins, managing director of Thamesdown Transport.

"Going by bus is an effective way of travelling for business, especially for making journeys in and around Swindon – and you'll find that Thamesdown often has a bus service going your way," said Paul.

"However, to make a real impact, businesses need to look at how their employees travel inside and outside of work."

Thamesdown has an Annual Employer TravelPass scheme under

which employees can save up to £140 a year by signing up to an annual pass, the cost of which is deducted monthly from their wages.

"Companies of all sizes can help their employees go green and make a difference by joining it," added Paul.

Thamesdown itself is committed to providing the greenest travel possible and regularly invests in its fleet and premises to help minimise its carbon emissions.

Last year it acquired eight new Versa buses that are lighter and more fuel efficient. Although powered by diesel, they conform to tough new European standards which limit emissions of nitrogen oxides from commercial vehicles.

Mr Jenkins added: "Bus engines are not rated for CO2 output in the way that cars are, but carbon emissions from a bus are linked to its fuel consumption. These Versas do more miles to the gallon than our previous

'heavyweight' buses so making them 'greener'.

"We also train our drivers in 'safe and fuel efficient driving' techniques."

The new buses are also designed with a high proportion of components capable of being reclaimed at the end of their life. Their integrated construction saves weight and is based around a steel frame for strength.

Thamesdown has looked at its environmental impact in other ways, recently installing solar panels on its Barnfield depot roof that will reduce total annual electricity consumption and thereby cut CO2 emissions by an estimated 42 tonnes per year.

The depot itself is a modern, energy-efficient building with sensors that turn off lights when not required as well as a rainwater harvesting system.

For more information on Thamesdown's Employer TravelPass scheme, call Thamesdown on 01793 428428.

Stagecoach WEST

You don't have to be a superhero to save the planet

Stagecoach are committed to doing all we can to minimise our impact on the environment.

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- Using alternative, renewable fuels
- Saving energy at offices and depots
- Conserving and recycling water
- Reducing and recycling waste
- Providing affordable bus travel
- Providing training in more efficient driving techniques

Greener Smarter Travel
www.stagecoachbus.com/west

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Tenens installs more natural gas refuelling stations

Howard Tenens, the logistics group with its principal base in Swindon, has installed natural gas refuelling stations at three of its depots.

The stations, at Andover, Boston and London (Aveley), provide the infrastructure which underpins the group's low carbon transport strategy and supports the roll out of dual fuel (diesel and gas) vehicles across its HGV fleet.

Two of the stations are grid connected which complements the group's objective of having a virtual supply of gas and eventually biomethane as a road transport fuel.

Howard Tenens is providing access to the stations by arrangement so that other firms can enter the market without incurring the high cost of supporting a refuelling infrastructure. Catherine Crouch, group environment director, said: "The logistics sector has an important role to play if the UK is to meet its European carbon reduction targets. Howard Tenens takes its environmental and corporate social responsibility seriously and we are committed reducing emissions."

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The percentage of rubbish in our dustbins that could be recycled

Future bright for recycling firm following Spanish acquisition

Malmesbury-based recycling specialist Futur has been acquired by Spanish group SAICA for an undisclosed sum.

Futur was founded in 1994 by sales director Tim Bostwick and managing director Simon Dymoke with the aim of bringing a European model of waste management through partnership to the UK.

It has since grown a wide customer base by focusing on large-scale waste producers particularly in the distribution, retail and food manufacturing sectors. The firm said it will

remain at its Malmesbury base with SAICA retaining and extending the existing management team to head up its UK operations in paper recovery and integrated waste management.

The deal is the latest by SAICA, a €2.2bn turnover, family-owned paper company, in the UK. The group's strategy is to have a major presence in the paper industry with strong integration between paper manufacturing, corrugated packaging and recovery.

The Futur acquisition is its first investment

in the recovery sector. Mr Dymoke said: "At Futur we are very proud of the reputation we have built within the UK recycling industry as evidenced by our loyal blue-chip client base. Our year-on-year growth has been based on continual development of our service offering and being part of SAICA's exciting plans for the UK presents exciting opportunities both for Futur and our customers."

Mr Bostwick added: "This is the perfect long-term home for Futur. There is a good fit with SAICA, both culturally and strategically

and the team is looking forward to explaining the benefits to our customers both new and existing."

In 2008 SAICA acquired SCA's 18 corrugated packaging facilities in the UK and Ireland and earlier in 2010 construction began on a £290m paper mill in Manchester which is due to start production in March 2012.

SAICA, founded more than 70 years ago, is now market leader in Spain and operates in six European countries.
www.futur-recycle.co.uk/

£50 billion of clutter in UK Homes

We're a nation of hoarders, according to new research from insurance company LV=. UK homeowners have enough clutter to fill 11 Wembley Stadiums. Clothes, books and sports equipment top the list of possessions, with 10 per cent of households estimating they have more than £1,000 worth of stuff they no longer use.

But there's no need to feel guilty about what's lurking in your loft because you can help others by donating your unwanted items to the Swindon Samaritans charity shop at 5 Curtis Street, near the tented market.

The money raised from selling donated clothes and other items goes directly towards running the unique Samaritan confidential listening service which operates from the same building.

It's easy to make donations. The shop is on a main road so it's convenient to just drive up, drop off and drive away. The shop always need ladies' and men's clothes, shoes, bags, etc, and all good quality bric-a-brac.

"It's also the ideal place to look for a bargain too," said Swindon branch director Paul Bentley. "Our customers tell us that we're the cheapest charity shop in town."

Samaritans Donation Collection Service. If you can't come to us, we'll come to you and collect your donations if you live within a 30 mile radius of the shop. To arrange a collection call us on: 01793 526430.

Swindon & District Samaritans is a registered charity 252847
www.samaritans.org/swindon

Wiltshire's innovative £20 million treatment plant under construction

Hills Waste Solutions is building Wiltshire's first state-of-the-art waste treatment plant on Northacre Trading Estate in Westbury.

The two-year project, costing £20 million, is a significant investment by Hills and will help underpin its expansion into new markets. It is also a key element in Wiltshire Council's strategy to reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill.

Managing waste more sustainably is one of the great challenges of our time.

The issues for major producers of waste can be complex, with the result that the process can be both costly and time consuming. It is against this backdrop that Hills Waste Solutions offers a range of specialist waste management services over a wide area of western and southern England.

The drive to reduce, re-use, recycle and recover has particular relevance for businesses and Hills' mission is to help customers in both the private and public sectors achieve their waste management targets. Hills specialises in waste collection, recycling and the recovery of energy from waste. Where these desirables are not possible, Hills has highly



Computer generated image of the Northacre resource recovery centre

professional and closely regulated services to deal with such waste.

"Our field based team of waste solution consultants have been specially trained to identify solutions to specific customer requirements," says Alex Marland, divisional director. "It usually means piecing together a complex jigsaw in which every part is integral. The relationship we have with our customers is fundamental to this."

He goes on to say that Hills' greatest strength lies in its capacity to bring together technology, logistics and personnel into a failsafe working arrangement that recycles and recovers as much waste as possible. "We have a track record for producing positive results. Our customers remain with us because they like our people, the way we do business and the positive impact we have on their supply chain."

Waste not, want not

With the introduction of new recycling services this year, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust is working with Wiltshire Council to encourage residents to recycle more.

With more waste going to landfill it is time to find another way of disposing of it at the point where it is generated. It is estimated that one third of waste going to landfill sites is kitchen and garden waste, which over time releases methane, adding to the amount of gasses that contribute to global warming and climate change. Also, if everyone in the UK stopped throwing food waste away it would cut climate-changing emissions by the equivalent of taking one in every five cars off the road.

A waste minimisation officer at Wiltshire Wildlife Trust, said: "Composting uncooked vegetables and fruit with garden waste can create very good quality compost for your garden, saving a lot of money every year on commercially bought compost. Over the years this can be a substantial saving. Cooked kitchen waste can easily be disposed of in widely available food waste digesters."

To find out more about composting and sustainable living, visit:
www.wiltshirewildlife.org/green_living

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The amount of plastic, in thousands of tonnes, used each year in the UK

275

Pioneering companies are joining forces to increase recycling rates and savings



Managing waste in the workplace can be a complex issue but Swindon firms Averies Recycling (Swindon) and specialist joinery business Edmont are working together to show how it can be done effectively and efficiently.

As a licensed waste carrier and operator, Averies has to keep up to date with the latest regulations, which means it can ensure each customer has the best option for their individual needs.

The firm, whose dedicated waste transfer station near Swindon town centre processes more than 40,000 tonnes of waste each year, offers a comprehensive waste management service and has an expanding customer base, including councils, schools, offices, factories and national building companies.

Edmont, which specialises in joinery, building, restoration, retail and interior fit-out work and whose high-profile clients include Nationwide Building Society, disposes of more than 40 tonnes of waste a month.

Recycling and waste management have been a priority at Edmont since the 1990s and have improved recently in response to rising industry standards such as ISO14001, and an on-going commitment to a cleaner future.

The firm took one of Averies' free waste reviews to learn the most economical, sustainable and environmentally friendly way to dispose of its waste. As a result its waste disposal is now more efficient, which means fewer skip exchanges and increased recycling rates, not only reducing carbon emissions but saving money too.

For every skip collected by Averies, more than 90 per cent is recycled. All waste is sorted at one of the firm's licensed recycling centres and all recyclable waste - including wood, plastic, metal, cardboard, etc - is segregated, leaving only a small amount to go into landfill. Unlike other waste management companies, Averies does not own landfill sites so it is genuinely in its best interest to recycle as much as possible.

The company says that through continued investment and innovation it expects to be able to offer 100 per cent recycling within the next two years.

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First car club opens at The Triangle

A multi-stakeholder sustainable travel co-operative, is to launch the first car club in Swindon. The Goco car club has been developed in partnership with Hab Oakus, developer of The Triangle, a sustainable 42-home development, one-mile north of Swindon rail station on Northern Road.

The car club, operating initially with two cars, is available to residents moving in to the The Triangle development from July 2011, as well as all other Swindon residents. It will offer local residents and businesses the opportunity of booking a car for an hour or more to provide a sustainable travel option.



Hab Oakus is a partnership between Kevin McCloud's company Hab and housing group, GreenSquare. Goco Car will also involve partner organisations including Commonwheels to provide online bookings and offer the benefit of its nationwide network of car clubs. Swindon Borough Council, SEAT and Arval are also supporting the development of the car club.

"We're very pleased to be working with Goco on this vital community-based initiative," said Kevin McCloud from Hab Oakus. "Car clubs are a fantastic means of allowing people to save money and fuel whilst enjoying the benefits of car ownership."

Robin Pointon from Goco said: "There are now approaching 150,000 members of car clubs across the UK. They offer you the convenience of the car without the burden of owning one. You pay for a car when you need it, not when you don't plus help to reduce carbon emissions through reduced car ownership and use of vehicles with lower CO2 levels.

"Using The Triangle development as the catalyst, with the support of local partners and residents, we will be developing the car club across Swindon," continued Robin Pointon.

For more information on the car club or to sign up to the Commonwheels network, go to www.goco.coop/car and follow the links. For those who wish to receive regular updates on Swindon or provide support, please email gococarswindon@goco.coop

Video conferencing: the eco-friendly way to meet

In 2008 The Scotsman newspaper ran an article predicting the future for corporate meetings under the headline "Video killed the passenger numbers".

The story noted that the number of business travellers in and out of Scotland's three main airports had plummeted, thanks to the advent of video conferencing.

Mike O'Sullivan, operations manager with RTS Communications in Swindon, says now that the town has a video conferencing suite hire facility and mobile video conferencing at Basepoint, businesses are moving towards virtual meetings instead of spending hours on motorways or at airports.

"We've certainly noticed that the combination of environmental concerns and need to cut costs makes video conferencing very attractive to businesses," says Mike.

"Video conferencing is used extensively by courts and official inquiries, but increasingly businesses have realised it's a valuable resource that they should be using."

There is no need for companies to invest in expensive conferencing equipment.

"RTS has access to a worldwide network of video conferencing suites, so we can easily arrange suitable



locations for you and the people you need to meet with," says Mike. "Within seconds you can connect and share content, such as spreadsheets or presentations, as if you're in the same room."

Mike believes eventually it will be seen as socially inconsiderate - as well as financially reckless - to transport business people unnecessarily.

"Of course, occasionally you need a face-to-face meeting, but generally video conferencing is now a better option and keeps people focused on the business at hand," he says.

"It's greener, whether people are interviewing an overseas job candidate, or touching base with colleagues elsewhere, and we're proud to help make it happen."

Video conferencing factfile

It's hard to argue against the case for video conferencing, says Mike.

For example, a 400 mile-drive - say a round-trip from Swindon to Leeds in an economy-sized car - produces about 0.1 tonnes of CO2, the carbon emission equivalent of:

- leaving a hairdryer or a kettle on for a month
- leaving a TV on standby for 35 years
- leaving all the lights on at home for three months

At the current HMRC rate of 45p a mile it costs £180 to reimburse the car owner - on top of the unproductive time spent at the wheel. If the manager is on a salary of £30,000 that's more than £90 wasted just driving. Which makes video conferencing, from £85 per hour, a very sensible option.

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The year Swiss scientist, Horace de Saussure invented the world's first solar energy collector, or 'hot box'

Eco-partnership is a sunny money spinner



Panel beater:
Thamesdown Transport's
Barnfield depot

A landmark Swindon environmental partnership project is producing additional revenue for one partner, reducing another's costs and positioned a third as a leader in the field of photovoltaics.

Bus company Thamesdown Transport is reducing both its carbon footprint and its fuel bill with solar panels on the roof of its depot at Barnfield.

Swindon Council, which provided the photovoltaic equipment, is selling the excess electricity produced back to the national grid - receiving the export tariff or 3.1p per kilowatt hour (kWh).

And Swindon Commercial Services (SCS), the diversified building services firm owned by the council and which has considerable expertise and experience in photovoltaics, is using the project to add to its growing reputation.

The starting point for the project, at 1,800 sq m believed to be the largest of its kind in the South West, came when Swindon councillor Peter Greenhalgh championed the concept of using large buildings in the town to harness solar power.

The potential win-win situation became clear to all parties.

SCS head of renewable energy Neil Saunders, said: "We were involved from the outset. We sought the site, handled the financial modelling, initiated the design and modelling, supplied and fitted the panels, registered it with Ofgem and the electricity company and put onsite remote monitoring in place.

"Since it has been completed we've had visits from potential customers outside Swindon wanting to

understand how they can roll out a similar project where they are. It really has put Swindon and SCS on the map in terms of major photovoltaic projects."

Thamesdown Transport managing director Paul Jenkins is very satisfied with the outcome.

"This partnership approach has been very successful," he said. "The project was planned very closely with our engineering team, with particular emphasis on project management and safe working practices, and it all went very smoothly indeed - there was excellent attention to detail and there was just a very brief electricity shutdown of just one hour while it was all connected up.

"I'm very pleased we can make full use of our infrastructure - we already harvest rainwater from the roof and now we're using solar energy to reduce our carbon footprint further, as well as reducing our energy bill. It's a win-win situation for all the project partners."

The project uses 432 panels made by Japanese electronics giant Sharp which are mounted on fixed rails on the depot's roof made by German group SEN.

No planning permission was needed as solar has permitted development already granted for commercial buildings, subject to a number of factors.

Next in line for photovoltaics in Swindon is Catherine Wayte school while planning permission is being sought to put panels on the roof of the Civic Offices in Euclid Street.

Specs and savings:

System peak output:	99 kWp (kilowatt peak)
Annual output:	82,526 kWp
Annual feed-in tariff:	£27,151.19
Annual own-use saving:	£5,776.90
Annual export to the grid:	£767.50
Total saving:	£33,695.59
Payback:	8 years
Return on investment (ROI):	14

Triodos renewable energy fund powers up to invest in further growth

Triodos Renewables - already the most widely-owned renewable energy company in the UK - is raising a further £15m to invest in more green energy projects.

The money will be raised through a placing of up to 8,333,400 shares at £1.80 per ordinary share, with a minimum investment of £540. The offer is open to the Bristol-based company's existing 4,000 shareholders as well as to new investors and the shares will be tradable on the Matched Bargain Market managed by Brewin Dolphin.

Triodos Renewables - which is managed by Triodos Bank - was set up 15 years ago to attract investors who want their money "to make a practical difference in the fight against climate change and who recognise the long-term business potential of renewable energy". Projects financed so far include the Haverigg II Wind Farm in Cumbria, a re-powering wind

Shares go on offer to raise £15m for the company's sustainable projects

farm project at Caton Moor in Lancashire, a single wind turbine in the Orkney Islands, and the Beochlich Hydro Electric project in Argyll in Scotland.

Over the past three years Triodos Renewables has increased its power generation capacity by 57% and now owns and operates seven sites around the UK with a combined capacity of 36.8 MW, enough power for 24,500 homes.

The company has now targeted 100 MW of operating renewable energy capacity by 2015 and says it has access to an immediate pipeline of 19.1 MW of onshore wind power capacity with 2.4 MW in procurement or under construction and a further 16.7 MW of capacity under

exclusivity and ready to build. The first project to come on line will be a 1.5 MW wind farm in Dunfermline, Scotland, which is expected to begin producing clean, renewable power at an industrial site before the end of 2011.

Managing director James Vaccaro said: "The funds raised will be put to work very quickly building new projects and we are therefore targeting 9% to 10% annualised rate of return on investment to our shareholders over the long term. Our share offer allows investors mindful of the convergence of climate change, energy security issues and the need to transition to a safe and sustainable energy future, a chance to make a real difference and expect a good return."

Fast-growing Ovo Energy named as National Business Awards finalist

Independent energy company Ovo Energy has been named as a finalist in the prestigious National Business Awards - joining household names like Debenhams, JD Wetherspoon and BSkyB to compete for the accolade.

Being selected as a finalist for the Huawei Customer Focus Award comes hot on the heels of Ovo being rated top energy provider in a Which? customer survey, and winning the UK Customer Experience Award 2011 for utility companies.

The Cirencester-based company was set up in 2009 and is already making waves in the energy sector, offering a

simpler, fairer model of energy provision that returns power to the customer.

Founder and managing director of Ovo Energy, Stephen Fitzpatrick, said: "Ovo Energy was created by customers for customers, so we're really pleased to be recognised by the National Business Awards as a company with the consumer at the heart of our business. The energy industry is known for poor customer service and low consumer confidence, but we're totally committed to leading the way for change by putting our customers first and providing cheaper, greener, simpler energy."

BPV joins forces with Italian manufacturer

BPV Solar, the Swindon-based solar panel installation company, has teamed up with Italian manufacturer Energy Resources to offer businesses and home owners a new approach to PV.

BPV founder Russell Barnfield believes the jointly-branded package is breaking new ground and has some considerable benefits over rivals as the PV installation market becomes ever more competitive.

"Our approach is not only cost effective but will be designed, installed and monitored to the highest standards with the assurance of knowing that the end user will have the experience of a large Italian organisation," he said.

BPV/Energy Resources systems are fully insured for 25 years against loss of yield due to mechanical or product failure while also offering service and monitoring over the same period.

Energy Resources' technology means systems installed on Swindon roofs can be remotely monitored by the firm back at its headquarters in Ancona, Italy, and any faults diagnosed and immediately rectified by BPV.

Mr Barnfield was impressed when he visited the Energy Resources factory and saw its technology. Through the joint approach, BPV is offering two types of PV panel - crystalline and thin film.

"The latter is more suited to large commercial ventures as it gives a more efficient yield over an annual cycle, rather than crystalline which is geared more to the summer months," said Mr Barnfield.

Thin film panels use a cadmium paste to absorb and convert sunlight rather than the traditional silicon crystals.

"With the various technologies of Energy Resources, we can offer 'green' solutions to generate requirements, reduce carbon footprints and reduced payback periods due to the Government-driven Feed-In Tariffs," said Mr Barnfield.

Energy Resources has installed 80MW of photovoltaic energy and 20 MW of geothermal energy to date. The business is now looking to bring its expertise to the UK in this partnering venture.

"Its commitment is to integrate different sources of energy to create a zero carbon-emission building," said Mr Barnfield. "Its team of 140 people and a strength in engineering and research and development makes it different from its competitors.

"Basically - All the end user has to worry about is if the sun is shining or that it is not too cloudy!"

www.bpv-solar.co.uk
www.energyresources.it.

The government's target for reducing CO₂ emissions by 2050
(compared to 1990 levels)

80%

New College helps businesses cut carbon with new initiative

New College Swindon is working in partnership with a consortium of colleges, including Exeter College and Weymouth College, on a new 'Lean Green IT Machine' initiative, supported by the Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS).

This new initiative aims to help Further Education colleges share their knowledge and expertise in Green IT with the local business community. Not only will this result in money saved on IT and related energy costs at a time when businesses are under pressure to cut back, but it will ensure that the impact of IT on the environment is minimised.

A website (www.leangreenitmachine.co.uk) has been launched to support this initiative and to prove that New College is practicing what it preaches, a series of energy reducing successes have been announced.

So far energy savings of around 23 per cent have been reached at the college. Following an energy survey carried

out by the Carbon Trust, and a Learning and Skills council grant to improve the energy output of the college, two key initiatives have been put in place.

The college air conditioning was replaced with a Samsung DVM VRF system which uses heat gain in the IT server room to warm cooler areas – saving on electricity costs.

New College also implemented a voltage reduction scheme and installed VoltageMaster technology which reduced the voltage onsite from 243V to 220V.

These projects combined have reduced electricity and gas consumption by 16 per cent year on year, despite a particularly cold winter.

For further technical information on the success of these projects, please contact New College.

To find out how New College and the Lean Green IT Machine can help your business, phone 01793 732892. www.leangreenitmachine.co.uk

Making the nation's offices sustainable

The UK's 1.8 million non-domestic buildings consume 300TWh (terra watts hours) of energy a year and are responsible for 108 million tonnes CO₂, around 18 per cent of UK's total, according to the Carbon Trust.

So it is little wonder that huge efforts are being made to make the nation's stock of offices, factories, warehouses and shops more sustainable.

New building techniques mean workplaces now under construction can be at the leading edge of environmental sustainability and by reducing, re-using or recycling materials can effectively be carbon neutral.

But these so-called 'deep green' improvements which also encompass waste, water and transport are not always possible to retro-fit to existing buildings.

However, to meet the Government's target of 80 per cent reduction on 1990 carbon emission levels by 2050, improvements will need to be made to existing buildings, especially as more than half the buildings that will be in use in 2050 are already constructed.

Also occupiers are increasingly using their buildings' 'green' credentials as a marketing and staff recruitment tool – and according to Low Carbon Workplace, a unique partnership between the Carbon Trust, developer Stanhope and Swindon-based fund manager Threadneedle.

The partnership aims to significantly increase the availability

of high- specification, low-carbon commercial property in the UK and offers occupiers free, ongoing support in managing their carbon emissions.

"Tenants are sending clear messages that they prefer 'green' to 'grey' office space – and the Government is being equally clear in its legislative response. While demand is scarce, there is an opportunity for the early-adopter occupiers to demonstrate that sustainability is at the heart of their organisation – and steal a march on their competitors," says the partnership in its latest report.

Low Carbon Workplace checklist:

- Passive measures can optimise low carbon performance - e.g. using orientation, thermal mass and different window sizes to balance solar gain with daylighting.
- Improvements in glass technology can be harnessed to improve the building's performance while new glazing systems can significantly reduce infiltration of cold air.
- Even in well run air conditioned buildings, lighting can account for as much as 18 per cent of CO₂ emissions. New high-frequency lighting coupled with a lighting control system can transform the workplace while delivering significant carbon savings.
- Comprehensive metering and monitoring of energy can identify where and when carbon is being consumed, identify waste and provide a platform that encourages responsible occupant behaviour.

Green awareness strong within Vector's roots

Contract and permanent IT recruitment experts Vector Resourcing has a strong commitment to the environment and is determined to play its part through its 'green' strategy.

The business's two offices - in Malmesbury and Hartfield, East Sussex - are in keeping with local architecture and utilise the original structures which date back centuries.

The Hartfield office is in a designated Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and sits just outside a conservation area. Vector Resourcing has carefully revived a dilapidated agricultural building into a beautiful

barn conversion. The Malmesbury office is also a barn conversion situated in the historic Charlton Park Estate. Open plan offices in both also reduce the amount of energy required, minimising the firm's carbon footprint.

In 2009 it introduced Vector Live, a revolutionary bespoke system designed to deliver a comprehensive online service to clients and contractors including electronic timesheets, contracts and billing.

This reduces the need to print documents in a bid to save paper and has been praised for its ease of use and timesaving credentials.

As part of its ongoing strategy to streamline processes and become even more environmentally friendly, a bespoke intranet called Vector Life will be launched this year, allowing all internal forms and resources to be housed within one platform.

Director Donna Medway said: "We believe that all of our initiatives make good commercial sense as well as being environmentally sound and improving our operational efficiency. It is of vital importance for modern businesses to incorporate a 'green' strategy which underpins all workings so as to remain sustainable."



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Swindon's 'greenest' office?

The owners of Station Square, the former Network Rail office in the town centre, are nailing their colours to the mast and marketing it as Swindon town centre's 'greenest' office building.

Network Rail moved out of the 1980s-built, 51,000 sq ft building in 2009. Since then owners Amalgamated Berkshire have invested in it to set a benchmark for sustainability in Swindon's office sector.

The building has a BREEAM rating of 'very good'. BREEAM ratings gauge the sustainability of non-domestic buildings and according to Jeremy Sutton of Station Square agents Keningtons is probably the best that can be achieved with a refurbishment.

Significant investment has been put into its heating, air conditioning and lighting which means it has 62 per cent lower energy running costs than a typical office building constructed before 2002.

All lighting works on daylight and motion sensors while the state-of-the-art VRV air conditioning has heat recovery and is also zonal – which means small areas can be heated or cooled.

Replacing the original heating system with modern, smaller plant has also freed up space in the building's basement which is now being marketed as suitable for a gym and fitness studio or for data storage.

Letting agents merge

Two of Swindon's independent letting agents have joined to forces.

Swindon Home Finders and Richard James have merged, creating a team of 10 specialists in lettings, negotiations and administrators with more than 40 years combined experience in the industry.

Three local offices are linked by state of the art lettings software ensuring all available properties are promoted at each location.

"The market share makes us the agent of choice for anyone looking to rent or let a property in and around the Swindon area," said Sue Gidney, who founded Swindon Home Finders 15 years ago.

It was recently voted best letting agency in the South by satisfied customers in the prestigious ESTA Awards.

As well as a portfolio of around 500 properties Home Finders At Richard James has a specialist maintenance department and are members of ARLA (Association of Residential Letting Agents), NAEA (National Association of Estate Agents), OEA (Ombudsman for Estate Agents) and TDS (The Dispute Service).

Richard James said: "Letting is a growing industry and property is still a good long term investment."

"I'm delighted to be combining our expertise with Sue's and we are in a strong position to offer the best possible service to landlords and tenants."

Home Finders At Richard James can be contacted on 01793 431725 and 01793 520721.

Shop to raise funds for hospice

A charity shop aiming to raise vital funds to support a children's hospice has opened in New Town, Swindon and is trading well.

Acting on behalf of the John Cheatle Group, Alder King Property Consultants sublet 45 Regent Street to Helen and Douglas House. The lease on the 1,066 sq ft shop runs until May 2018. It is now trading with a ground floor sales area and a basement bookshop.

Helen and Douglas House cares for children and young adults with life shortening conditions and offers support to their families. The charity runs two hospice houses in Oxford that offer specialist symptom and pain management, medically-supported short breaks and end-of-life care, as well as counselling and practical support for guests and their family.

David Cryer, head of retail at Helen and Douglas House said: "It costs £4.5 million every year to run Helen and Douglas House, the vast majority of which comes from voluntary sources. This shop will play a vital role in helping us to meet our fundraising targets and to ensure that we can continue to help guests and their families in the local community."

Empty rates policy is hitting recovery, warns industrial property expert

The Government's policy of removing empty rates relief on industrial buildings is preventing small and medium-sized companies from contributing to the region's economic recovery, warns industrial property expert Russell Crofts.

Vacant industrial properties with a rateable value of less than £18,000 a year had previously been exempt from business rates. But in April the Government cut the threshold to just £2,600 a year – saving £400m annually in tax relief.

Mr Crofts, industrial partner at the Bristol office of property agents Knight Frank's Bristol office, said: "The economic recovery of the West Country is particularly dependent on the growth of small and medium-sized companies. But this move is a retrograde step that is damaging their ability to trade."

"Developers will not speculatively develop industrial units and warehouses with the potential burden of empty rates payments hanging over them. New stock will therefore only come from pre-lets, and no-one pre-lets units below 10,000 sq ft. So the region's smaller businesses will have no new buildings to occupy as they expand."

Mr Crofts wants the Government to think again. "It's a barrier to growth," he said. Referring to the recent announcement of the region's first Enterprise Zone in Bristol, he added: "Those inside the zone get a host of benefits while those outside are hit harder than they need to be. That can't be the intention, surely?"



Survey shows Swindon is still 'open for business'

Progress was made in Swindon's commercial property market during the second quarter of this year with a number of completions, openings and acquisitions, according to Andrew Kilpatrick of agents Kilpatrick & Co.

Andrew, a contributor to the RICS Market Survey, said: "While conditions across all three main sectors of Swindon's commercial market remain challenging, Q2 has seen progress, with B&Q's 796,000 sq ft distribution warehouse completed ahead of schedule, Bhs moving into its new 45,000 sq ft department store in The Parade and a drive thru Costa Coffee opening by Junction 16."

"Nearby, a 7.8-acre site, formerly occupied by Motorola, has been acquired by the Dick Lovett Group. All of these show Swindon is still very much open for business."

Andrew's comments came as the latest RICS Commercial Market Survey for Q2 2011 reported modest increases in commercial property occupier demand, but also a modest increase in the supply of commercial property available on the market.

No predictions of rental increases were noted, instead rents were

expected to soften further.

Outside London, the supply of vacant properties was increasing, particularly in retail, and incentive packages offered by landlords to secure a tenant were continuing to edge up, albeit at the lowest rate since Q3, 2007.

In the investment property sector, the RICS Survey reported demand continuing to edge up gradually.



Office suites at Paxton House Old Town brought to market

Alder King has been appointed to let suites in Paxton House in Swindon. Paxton House was extensively refurbished in 2005 when a reconfigured reception area and additional car parking was created. The result is that one of Old Town's best known office properties was brought up to modern standards and granted a new lease of life.

Self contained office suites on the ground and second floors are becoming available later in the year and can be leased on flexible terms to suit occupiers. There are four suites available on the second floor from 1,119 sq ft and these can be taken individually or by combination up to the whole floor which is just under 5,000 sq ft.

There are also two suites on the ground floor which can be combined so 1,453 to 3,251 sq ft can also be leased. Excellent allocated car parking is available and the building is adjacent to a pay and display car park.

Brothers' repair shop moves to Calne Business Centre

Nicholls Repair Shop, a new company set up by brothers Steve and Colin Nicholls, has moved into Unit 18, Calne Business Centre.

The brothers have installed new spray equipment and have already secured a contract from a local racing team to spray their cars.

Keningtons let the 2,437 sq ft unit on behalf of private landlord clients.

Steve Nicholls said: "We are very please to have been awarded a number of contracts which have helped in the set-up of our business. We are also pleased to have secured these new premises and had very straightforward dealings with the landlord and Keningtons."

Keningtons partner Jeremy Sutton added: "It's always good to see new companies setting up in business and we wish Steve and Colin all the best with this venture. We also have the adjoining unit under offer so its not all doom and gloom in the Calne market."

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Mark Wightman with the Mini Cooper he bought for £700 when he started work in Old Town in 1970

Mark Wightman, of Carter Jonas's Swindon office, has been a well-known and respected figure in the town's property market for more than 40 years. Here he looks at some of the changes in Old Town over that time.

I've been working in Swindon since January 1970 when I started at Farrant & Wightman in Newport Street. Although always based in Old Town, I am now in the fifth building and on the third name of firm - although all of them have emerged out of each other!

A Mr Ferris had started what became Farrant & Wightman in the late 1800s, later selling it to Augustus Hart who, in the 1930s, sold it to John Farrant. My father joined the partnership in 1944, and by the mid-1980s the firm had grown to more than 40 people with two offices in Swindon and one in Wootton Bassett.

At that time firms like ours were being acquired by banks and building societies. But wishing to retain our independence we merged with what eventually became known as Dreweatt Neate and so by 1987 we were part of a business with well over 200 staff and about 20 offices.

Then in 2009 Dreweatt Neate merged with Carter Jonas, a well known name with 35 offices nationally.

Back in 1970 my first office in Newport Street was brought about following a fire which had spread from the next door neighbours, GJ Handy & Co ironmongers (formerly Mr Jefferies) who also sold gas by the container. Apparently Newport Street was definitely a no-go zone with small airborne gas bottles reaching the other side of the street and damaging Skurra's car showrooms (now the Co-op supermarket).

In the 1970s there were four garages with showrooms in Old Town: Skurra's (Vauxhall), Crowdys (BMC, British Leyland) and in Devizes Road on the corner of Bradford Lane, and almost opposite, Quantocks (Standard-Triumph) which subsequently became Barclays Bank and now DPDS planning consultants. Swindon Motor Co (Wankel/NSU, Singer) had a frontage to Wood Street with a return frontage to Albert Street (now Willoby's Furniture Co, previously Pine and Cane) and workshops to the rear on the site now occupied by the Little London Court office development and where Carter Jonas has its Swindon office. WG Green (Humber-Hillman) in Marlborough Road is now the site of The Weavers.

Apart from garages with showrooms, there was several others with workshops only, including Hazells (which subsequently became Caltune and is now where Cricklade Court offices are) and Spearings off Bradford Lane, which is now houses.

There were also at least five gents' outfitters and tailors; Pakemans, Treasures, LG Stone, Dentrys and Henry Best. Of these, Treasures survived until a few years ago and Pakemans now has a shop in Cirencester.

The cattle market still operated every Monday under the banner of Amalgamated Livestock Auctioneers, a joint venture of Farrant & Wightman with Fielder Jones & Taylor. To the rear was the Old Town railway station, already closed by then, but a site ripe for redevelopment. The cattle market is now known as Dewell Mews and the former railway station site imaginatively named Signal Way and a light industrial warehouse development.

The early 70s was an exciting time for Old Town with the development of Burmah House, the iconic building that set new standards for Swindon as a headquarters office location for a major company. Although now accessed off Pipers Way, that road was not built through to the bottom of Croft Road until about 15 years later. Intel, followed by the Marriott Hotel and later still, the Nationwide headquarters made the construction of Pipers Way necessary.

Being alert to the growing importance of Swindon as a headquarters, office, industrial and distribution base, McLean Homes (Southern), a Swindon-based company that eventually

became what is now Taylor Wimpey, obtained planning permission to develop The Gates - Leverton, Chedworth, Carlton, Vanbrugh and Brettingham - in phases during the 1970s. Although close to Coate Water Country Park, I do not recall the development causing as much controversy as the recent proposals to the east of the park, but maybe this was because the Broome Manor Golf Course, built then and still owned by the council, surrounds these developments and buffers them.

Back in the core of Old Town, in the area bounded by High Street, Wood Street, Devizes Road and Newport Street, an American, George Elbogen Jnr, had ideas of developing a showpiece retail centre with pedestrian links to the adjoining streets. A multiplicity of landownerships finally dented his enthusiasm and the Cowley Group eventually developed mainly flats and apartments with a number of shops in what is now known as Godwin Court.

By this time the Swindon Co-operative store had been established for about 10 years. The access to its car park is off Newport Street, via Hoopers Place, which links with Phillips Lane and which served WJ White furniture makers in an ancient building that was formerly a brewery located directly behind The Bell in the High Street.

WJ White relocated to Signal Way and after quite rapid expansion moved again to Rivermead, West Swindon. Their premises in Signal Way were let for a while to WH Smith. However, the White's business contracted and they returned to Signal Way a few years later. The former brewery is now a nightclub with a Subway sandwich bar occupying part.

Courage also had a brewery in Old Town although by the 1970s it was mainly a delivery depot fronting onto the High Street. This is now Barclays Bank on the ground floor with offices above.

Old Town became a popular location for offices for professions such as solicitors, accountants and surveyors. Accountants Monahans and Morris Owen had already, by then, been long established in Old Town. Our locally-based accountants can be proud that they successfully combated an invasion from the large, multi-national practices, who for various reasons, did not stay for that long.

Probably originally because of the connection with agriculture through the cattle market, banks have always been a feature of Old Town. Barclays was formerly in a prominent building on the corner of Wood Street and Cricklade Street opposite the Goddard Arms. Lloyds Bank, formerly known as the County Bank, remains one of the most prestigious buildings in Swindon. The Midland Bank, now HSBC, was formerly in Wood Street - its colonnade façade has been retained and an office building developed to the rear of it. While other banks have relocated within Old Town, NatWest moved out altogether and its prestigious building in Wood Street is now, of course, The Old Bank bar.

There has been a trend over the past five to 10 years for commercial buildings, some of which were originally residences, to be converted into flats and apartments. This trend is likely to continue, particularly with the upper floors of some of the older buildings. Many of the buildings are of considerable character and this is a good way of providing a viable economic future for them. As with many other towns, there has been considerable growth in food and drink establishments in Old Town in spite of planning policies resisting this.

Over a period of 40-plus years there has been a considerable amount of change in the Old Town area. But this is just the tip of the iceberg for Swindon as a whole in that same period even if not over the past few years!

In Gear

Honda tops reliability survey



2011 Honda Civic

Honda has been rated the UK's most reliable manufacturer in the latest What Car? and Warranty Direct reliability study for an unprecedented sixth year in a row. The 2011 survey result reinforces Honda's reputation for building rock-solid, dependable cars you can trust.

Honda beat rivals to the top of the What Car? league table thanks to an impressively-low 9 per cent failure rate in the first 12 months. Honda dominated the top of the SUV table with the HR-V and CR-V at number one and two. Jazz and Accord both come fifth in their respective classes while Civic came third in the small hatchback category.

"The success of Honda in this years' reliability study is very impressive, especially as this is Honda's sixth overall win as the UK's most reliable car maker. Reliability is key for car buyers. The car makers at the bottom of the study have a lot of work to do to catch up with Honda," commented What Car? editor in chief, Chas Hallett.

Honda UK's managing director, Dave Hodgetts, commented: "We strive to make every second of Honda ownership an enjoyable experience, and that means looking after our drivers throughout their use of our cars. This all starts with building reliable and high quality cars that are affordable to run and maintain, but continues with service at our dealers that exceeds expectation."

Mini publishes results of UK's most in-depth electric vehicle trial



Full results of BMW Group's government-supported research into the day-to-day running of electric cars has been revealed.

Understanding how electric cars are driven in the real world has taken an important step forward with the release of data from the MINI E field trial in the UK. With 62 members of the public and 76 pool users running the battery-powered hatchbacks over two six-month periods, the Government-supported trial is the most in-depth of its kind in the UK to publish its findings.

An enormous amount of data was collected electronically by data-loggers in the car and the home charging points, and also from extensive driver research carried out by Oxford Brookes University. The early findings have already informed the development of the 2011 BMW ActiveE car, a four-seat car

based on the BMW 1 Series Coupe, but the biggest beneficiary will be the BMW i3, the first purpose-built EV from the BMW Group, set for launch in 2013. This information has also helped to inform UK policy-making decisions and other EV market stakeholders.

The UK trial discovered that everyday use of the electric MINIs didn't radically differ from the typical driving patterns of a control group of drivers of conventionally powered cars in the same segment. In fact, the daily journey distance of 29.7 miles was slightly more than the 26.5 miles recorded by the control cars, a mix of MINI Coopers and BMW 116i models. Interestingly, the UK average daily distance driven for private cars overall is less than 25 miles. With information gathered by on-board data-loggers, the average single trip distance was recorded as 9.5 miles compared to the UK average of seven miles.

For the full report visit Swindon Business News' online motoring section at www.swindon-business.net

New training centre at RAF Lyneham will fuel housing demand

The government's decision to develop a military technical training centre on the RAF Lyneham base is expected to fuel demand for a large number of new homes in the area.

Although the decision to retain the Lyneham site in a long term military use is widely supported, property specialist Louise Seaman of Colliers, said: "A review will be needed of the area's future housing requirements as new military and civilian personnel will want to live locally.

"Wiltshire Council has just gone out for its Core Strategy consultation which sets out the housing distribution across the county. This consultation document makes the assumption Lyneham is expected to close in 2012, however in light of this week's decision we would expect them to review its strategy given the potential spin off effects.

"With 1,500 new military jobs and other civilian posts created due the sheer scale of this investment, the council will need to identify significant land opportunities to meet the additional demand for housing, which could inevitably involve greenfield sites being developed. Towns closest to the former base will clearly be affected by the resultant development pressures."

The announcement made in Parliament indicated that 1,500 new military jobs will commence at Lyneham from 2013, however, other civilian jobs will be also created boosting the local economy of towns such as Wootton Bassett and Chippenham.

"The anticipated closure of the Lyneham RAF airbase would have meant a loss of £95 million a year to the local economy, so the new military training centre is a welcome boost and means the end the worry of a very uncertain future," Ms Seaman said.

Kids' holiday firm takeover gives it a new parent

PGL, the adventure holiday firm with a major centre at Liddington near Swindon, is under new ownership following the takeover of parent group Holidaybreak.

Indian travel operator Cox & Kings, which has been pursuing Holidaybreak for some time, had its £312m accepted this month. The price represents a 35.5 per cent premium to Holidaybreak's share price last Friday and a 54 per cent premium to its average share price for the past three months.

As well as PGL, Holidaybreak also runs the Eurocamp and Keycamp specialist holiday brands.

PGL was formed in 1957 to provide adventure holidays for children – its first one involved canoeing on the River Wye near its Hereford base. It has since expanded into residential school trips and family breaks.

Plastics company stretches to double its size

Stephens Plastics, the Corsham-based manufacturer of pond, lake and tank liners, flat roofing systems and specialist bags, has effectively doubled in size following the acquisition of Andrew Mitchell and Co.

The Wigan-based firm is the UK's leading producer of industrial textiles with a product range that includes specialist packaging for the automotive industry and side curtains for lorries. It has even made tents for the Sultan of Oman.

Stephens Plastics' owners Andy and Lorraine Marshall, who took over the 55-year-business in a management buy out (MBO) in 2002, are excited by the potential of the Andrew Mitchell acquisition. "The two production capabilities complement each other really well and this joining of forces will considerably strengthen both businesses," said Andy.

Iconic historic building set to become contemporary culinary destination

One of Swindon's iconic railway buildings has been given a new lease of life as a premier bar, restaurant and brewery.

The Weighbridge Brewhouse opens this week in the 19th century weigh house on Penzance Drive, Churchward – the result of a £2 million project by Anthony and Allyson Windle, who have run the award-winning Three Crowns at Brinkworth for the past 24 years. Around 20 full time and 30 part-time jobs are being created.

The couple have transformed the building, which became Archers Brewery in 1995 but has been empty since that business went into administration two years ago.

Modern furniture, a long, polished stainless steel bar and a glass piano will give the bar and two restaurants a contemporary feel even though the building has been preserved and in parts returned to its original look.

"We wanted to create something new for Swindon," said Anthony. "The Three Crowns is a traditional village pub and it's taken us more than 20 years to build it up. This will have the same high quality food but in a contemporary setting within an historic building.

"At one time it seemed this building was going to be demolished so I'm glad we could give it a new lease of life."

Many of the original features of



Sign of the times: Former railway building to serve as upmarket restaurant

the building, which was not listed but registered as 'of special interest' by Swindon Council, have been retained including a spiral staircase. A new glass atrium has been created to let in natural light, underfloor heating has been installed and replacement windows fitted.

Anthony, a qualified chef, has designed the kitchen. The menu will feature contemporary English and French dishes and there will be an emphasis on quality wine with more than 100 different varieties on offer from £15 a bottle.

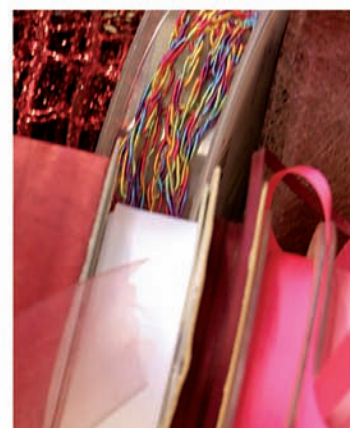
The couple have also installed a small brewery and appointed Mark Wallington, former owner of Archers, as head brewer. It will produce three standard beers and three seasonal

ales.

Anthony will be targeting local companies with an express business lunch guaranteed in under an hour while the smaller first floor restaurant will be marketed as a location for business meetings – with a brewery tour as an added extra.

The refurbishment and fit out work has mainly been carried out by local businesses – from the brewery, which was designed and installed by Elite Steel Fabrications to the roadside railings by Swindon Steel Supplies. The main contractors were J Saunders with C J Electricals fitting the complicated electrical system.

Opening on the evening of 12th of August. Bookings can be made by calling 07925979300.



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