

SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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Loads of opportunity.
Why Swindon is still a magnet for logistics

Pages 12 & 13

CREATIVE SWINDON

Special report on the up-and-coming businesses that are creating a buzz

PAGES 8 & 9

Lucky to be alive.
Swindon lawyer cheats death on Mount Kilimanjaro

Back page



News Brief



August Green Special

Swindon Business News goes a shade of green next month with a special edition devoted to all things environmentally-sustainable, low-carbon and waste-reducing. Features will focus on Green IT and how firms can use it to drive down costs, low-carbon buildings, alternative energy, waste and resource management, environmentally-sensitive transport, and the easiest ways to 'green up' your business - saving money and the planet. To find out more contact the advertising team on 01793 615393.

Brunsdon Westinsure acquired by insurance giant Swinton

Swindon-based independent commercial insurance broker Brunsdon Westinsure has been acquired by insurance giant Swinton for an undisclosed sum.

Established in 1957, Brunsdon specialises in business and personal insurance and risk management.

Its commercial team will continue to operate from its office at Dammas House Old Town while the smaller personal lines team will move to Swinton's branch in Swindon.

Rod Alcorn of Brunsdon, said "We carefully considered a number of offers for our business and were impressed by the enthusiasm of the commercial team at Swinton."

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Apprentice star visits town and says 'You're hired'

Swindon-born Nick Hewer, Lord Sugar's right-hand man on *The Apprentice*, returned to his roots to help celebrate Plan 500's success.

The plain-speaking PR man-turned reluctant TV star, pictured right, gave his backing to the scheme, which is creating 500 work-related opportunities for the town's jobless youngsters, at an event at the STEAM museum.

Representatives from around 140 companies attended the high-profile breakfast event - and many are now considering signing up to take part in the scheme

Plan 500 has now surpassed the 400-opportunity mark and is on course to hit 500 soon, gaining recognition from the Government along the way as one of the best projects of its kind in the country.

Full story, p3



Demolish old industrial estates, council is told

Pressure is growing on Swindon Council to tear down some of the town's outdated industrial estates and redevelop the sites for housing while allowing other areas to be reclassified as employment land.

The trade off is being put forward by leading figures in the town's business community as a way of heading off a potential showdown between the council and business groups over its controversial Draft Core Strategy.

Swindon Business News revealed last month how the Draft Strategy, which will shape the town's development for the next 15 years, had provoked a harsh response from some members of the business community. They feared it would send out a signal that Swindon, which once prided itself on being Europe's fastest-growing town, was now closed to business.

A key part of the strategy is a reduction from 36,000 to 25,000 in the number of new homes planned for the town between now and 2026 - which critics say is not enough to attract new industry to the town or generate economic growth.

Criticism from the business community - including a hard-hitting joint report from Swindon Chamber of Commerce and GWE the Initiative in Swindon - coincided with the shock rejection by councillors of the 74.5-hectare mixed-use development near Coate Country Park. The decision went

against the advice of the council's planning officers who had said the scheme could meet part of Swindon's growing need for new employment land and new homes.

Talks have since taken place with council chiefs to urge a rewrite of the draft strategy to re-zone areas such as the Cheney Manor industrial estate for housing. Many of the former factories on the estate, which was built in the 1960s, stand empty with property agents in the town saying they are unlikely to be re-let.

"It would be better to knock the estate down and re-class it as housing land," said one. "At the moment the council insists it stays for employment land while saying the number of new homes in the town must be reduced to avoid encroaching on greenfield sites."

Chamber of Commerce president Gary Mealing said the council needed to revise the Draft Core Strategy as it "lacked ambition".

"It is based on one projection and there are no alternatives. Our concern is if you lack ambition in this document and in your vision, history tells us you lack in delivery. If you plan low you get low or lower."

Meanwhile Swindon's attempt to go it alone and set up its own Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) appears to have fallen foul of ministers, who said it was too small. The town is now likely to link up with Wiltshire to form a joint LEP.

AFL seals Nigeria cable deal

More than 3,000km of fibre optic cable has been supplied to Nigeria by Swindon firm AFL to form the backbone of the country's first open access communications network. AFL's pioneering SkyWrap cabling and installation equipment enabled operator Dancom Technologies to build the network at a rate of between five and nine km a day. For more go to www.swindon-business.net

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SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS

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People

• Malcolm Poynter is the new managing partner of Swindon law firm Charles Lucas & Marshall. He takes over from Peter Graham who is retiring on July 31 after 42 years with the firm, the last 12 spent as managing partner. Malcolm Poynter joined Charles Lucas & Marshall in 1986 and has been involved in various aspects of running the business, most recently as head of commercial property. He will be chiefly responsible for development of the firm's strategic objectives and will continue to provide legal advice to landowners and commercial clients.



Malcolm Poynter

• Simon Pook becomes sole head of Charles Lucas & Marshall's residential property team, following Peter Graham's retirement.

• Wootton Bassett Chamber of Commerce has welcomed Suzanne Gore as new president and Lis McDermott as vice president at the annual meeting at Cafe Italian in the town. Suzanne is a local independent mortgage advisor with 18 years' experience of working in the financial industry. Born in Wootton Bassett and having lived in the town for many years, Suzanne has extensive knowledge of the area and numerous local contacts within the business community. She currently runs her own mortgage advice business, Only Mortgages. Suzanne joined Wootton Bassett Chamber of Commerce committee 18 months ago, serving as vice president. She has taken over from previous resident Paul Dunn of video

production
company
BizView.tv,



Directors of Monahans Financial Services,
Steve Missen, Simon Ewings, Mervyn
Osman and Roger Perry.

who stood down from the post after serving for two years.

• Monahans Financial Services has built on its recent success by appointing Simon Ewings as a director. Simon joins from Francis Clark Financial Planning, having been a senior consultant with them since 2002. He has Chartered Status, the highest qualification for Independent Financial Advisers, and at the time he gained it, was one of the youngest people in the country to do so. Throughout his career Simon has advised individuals and corporate clients on a wide range of subjects including Pensions, Investments, Trusts, Taxation and Personal and Corporate Protection. He also has a strong background in building relationships with professional connections such as solicitors, property agents, accountants, stockbrokers, investment houses and employee benefit consultants."

Events

• Using Humour to Develop your Business!

When: **12 July, 7:30am-9:00am**

Where: Chiseldon House Hotel, New Road,
Chiseldon SN4 0NE

Contact: melaniednicholls@gmail.com

• Swindon Mindful Employer Network

When: **14 July from 2pm**

Where: Thrings, Penny Lane, Swindon

Contact: [david.latham@](mailto:david.latham@richmondfellowship.org.uk)

richmondfellowship.org.uk

• Royal International Air Tattoo

When: **15-17 July**

Where: RAF Fairford, Gloucestershire

Contact: 0800 107 1940

• Vox Academy - Making the Media Work for You and Social Media for Business seminars

When: **20 July, 9:30am-12:30pm and 2pm-5pm**

Where: 3 Little London Court, Swindon

Contact: 01793 511990

Email: enquiries@voxonline.co.uk

• Wessex Environment Business Network

When: **21 July, 11am-12:00pm**

Where: Village Green, Methuen Park,
Chippenham

Contact: 01225 355553

• Swindon Business Breakfast

When: **22 July, 7:30am-9:30am**

Where: Swindon Marriott Hotel

Contact: 01753 870500

• Swindon Business Lunch

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

Where: De Vere Hotel (Shaw Ridge)

Contact: 01753 870500

Contacts

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01793 429250

Bristol Airport
0871 334 4344

GWE Business West
08458 505066

Swindon Council
01793 445500

Business Link
0845 600 9966

Wiltshire Council
0300 456 0100

SSEP
01793 429259

Chamber of Commerce
01753 870500

Fast Forward
0808 178 3657

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0845 600 9006

First Great Western
08457 000 125

Visit Wiltshire
0845 602 7323

Vox Academy

Wednesday 20th July

At Vox, 3 Little London Court, Swindon.

Session 1: 9.30am - 12.30pm
Making the Media Work for You

Session 2: 2pm - 5pm
Social Media for Business

Price: £45 per session.

Book one or both sessions. Call or email for details:
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Trio of awards added to Vox's trophy cabinet

Public relations and marketing consultancy Vox is celebrating after crafting a succession of successful award entries for its clients.

The latest submission was for the national SCEPTRE awards – the retail industry's most prestigious awards. Vox wrote the submission which allowed The Brunel shopping centre's manager Tony Wilkes to scoop the title of Large Centre Manager of the Year.

In May Vox also put Tony forward for the Wiltshire Business Awards, where he walked away with the Business Person of the Year award. Vox also won the award of Best Newspaper in the West of England from the CIPR for inSwindon, where Tony is the chairman.



Sue Pycroft

Vox has an enviable success rate in getting clients shortlisted for awards – which currently stands at higher than 90 per cent. Successful clients have come from across a range of industries and sectors, including accountants, membership organisations, property management, not-for-profit, retail, recruitment and education and training.

Company director Sue Pycroft said: "Awards aren't a frivolous and attention-grabbing activity, but can really help boost the morale of your staff and their belief in the company. They are also a simple way of demonstrating your skills and expertise to customers, potential customers and competitors."

"Our skills in persuasive writing, plus the ability to research and root out the salient points that judges are looking for mean that we consistently hit the spot – and help to bring home awards."

To find out how Vox can help you motivate your staff and highlight your business through awards, call 01793 511990 or email: enquiries@voxonline.co.uk.

Plan 500 - now it's just 100 to go

Swindon's innovative Plan 500, the public-private scheme, set up to create 500 work-related opportunities for local young people, has passed the 400 mark and is well on the way to reaching its target.

Eight months in to the year-long project, organisers celebrated with a special event at the STEAM Museum where guest of honour, The Apprentice's Nick Hewer, gave his backing.

Steve Blore, chair of Plan 500, was enthusiastic in his support for local businesses and revealed news of a new grants scheme that could help get even more companies on board and ensure success.

Launched last year to help give 16-24-year-olds a leg up on the job market, companies can help in a variety of ways – anything from pledging mentoring to work experience. In return, employers benefit by given training in how to mentor young people and, in some cases, qualify for grants for apprentices.

The project owes its success so far to the concerted efforts of the organisations behind it. These include the Department for Work and Pensions, Forward Swindon – the town's economic development company, Swindon Council, GWE Business West, Nationwide Building Society plus, of course, the 180 forward-thinking companies already on the register.

Around 140 delegates attended the breakfast event on June 29, half from people who have not yet signed up and could potentially benefit from a grant of up to £1,000 for each apprentice taken on.

Said Steve Blore: "We are now making our final push to reach our target and I cannot tell you how important it is that we get there."

"To help us on our way, Plan 500 and the National Apprenticeship Service are



Delivering Growth:
Director of economic
development at Forward
Swindon, Bill Cotton

committed to helping more local businesses benefit from apprenticeship training. We are able to offer a limited number of grants to any local small employer – with less than 249 staff – which offers an apprenticeship place.

"These grants are on a first come, first served basis and are aimed at companies who have not offered apprenticeship training before."

"They are available to companies which plan to recruit a new apprentice or who can offer apprenticeship training to an existing member of their company."

For more information, Contact Lisa Smart at Forward Swindon on 01793 612276 or register your interest at: www.forwardswindon.co.uk/Plan500

Strong growth fuels firm's entry into Top 100 table

Watson Petroleum, the Brinkworth-based fuel distributor, is featured for the first time in the latest Sunday Times/Deloitte Top Track 100, the ranking of Britain's 100 largest private companies by sales.

The family-owned business, which had a turnover of £585m in the year to April 2010, entered the table at number 100. Watson employs more than 600 people and runs a fleet of 280 distinctive red tankers delivering fuel to domestic, industrial and agricultural customers. It made pre-tax profits during the period of £10m on revenue growth of 17 per cent due to volume and price increases, as well as from acquisitions.

Watson joins Malmesbury-based household appliance maker Dyson in the table, which is now in its 10th year.

Dyson achieved pre-tax profits of £227m on sales of £770m in the year to December 2009.

Watson and Dyson are among 53 companies in the table, that are owned by families or entrepreneurs. The remainder are backed by private equity.



Field Sales Professional Wiltshire and surrounding counties

Hills Waste Solutions offer a range of specialist waste management and recycling services to both the public and private sector.

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The ideal candidate will be a professional self starter with enthusiasm to develop their own skills and contribute to a close knit team. Field sales experience within the service industry is essential. You should have excellent communication and relationship building skills with the ability to liaise and influence both internal and external customers. We are looking for candidates with a background that includes contract negotiation and who have the confidence to bring new ideas to the team.

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- Email an up to date CV; with a covering letter stating your reason for applying and detailing your suitability for this post; to join@hills-group.co.uk

The Hills Group is committed to monitoring and maintaining equal opportunities and welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

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CONTACT

BATH – 01225 447870
12 Mile's Buildings, George Street, Bath BA1 2QS
BRISTOL – 0117 920 9393
2 St Augustines Court, St Augustines Place, Bristol BS1 4XP

CHELtenham – 01242 210410
123 The Promenade, Cheltenham, Glos GL50 1NW
SWINDON – 01793 238323
26 Commercial Road, Swindon, Wiltshire SN1 5NS

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ARE YOU THINKING STRATEGICALLY?

As a busy business owner, it can be difficult to step back and think strategically about where you are going and how you are going to get there. Andrew Phillips, Manufacturing Specialist at the Manufacturing Advisory Service in the South West (MAS-SW), who works with Wiltshire businesses, explains how to implement strategy – and why it's vital for success.

Business owners often have to wear many hats: IT, HR, marketing and finance to name but a few. It is easy to get embroiled in the day-to-day operational issues and lose sight of the bigger picture.

Ultimately your role as a business owner or director is to guide and shape the business – to make it as profitable and sustainable as possible. To do this successfully, you need absolute clarity of purpose and a realistic plan.

We help manufacturers to think differently about the way they run their businesses, often by making small changes – whether in the boardroom, back office or on the shop floor. Always make time to:

Develop your strategy: MAS-SW helps senior management teams arrive at a practical growth strategy supported by a detailed and achievable action plan which we help you to implement.

Plan to Grow: If your company is in a period of growth or looking to expand, you need a plan. For example, you may want to explore the multi-billion pound opportunities associated with low carbon markets by working to obtain greener credentials or get your business ready to export.

Adopt lean thinking in the office and shop floor to improve productivity, cashflow and on time deliveries plus cut costs and reduce waste.

For further information on business strategy, please contact MAS-SW on 0845 608 3838 or email info@swmas.co.uk



Andrew Phillips, Manufacturing Specialist for Wiltshire, MAS-SW

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Bright future for Kembrey Wiring following take over

Swindon aerospace firm Kembrey Wiring Systems is to create jobs as part of an investment by new owners Arundel Aerospace & Defence Systems (AADS).

Kembrey, which employs around 180 at its Greenbridge factory, has played a major role in commercial and military aircraft engineering since 1954. Today it makes wiring harnesses and other specialist equipment for major aerospace companies such as Rolls Royce on its Trent 1000 engine, which will power Boeing's new 787 Dreamliner aircraft, and with AgustaWestland on the AW101 medium-lift military and civil helicopter.

Dick Martin of Kembrey,

said: "We welcome this new development. AADS brings with it a wealth of experience and expertise which will be invaluable to us, along with a great number of contacts within the industry which will help us to maintain and further develop our leading position within the market."

No details of the new jobs have been announced.

AADS, which has acquired Kembrey from Sussex-based wiring specialist group Time 24 for an undisclosed sum, was set up by two leading aerospace figures to build a portfolio of companies that provide mission-critical systems and sub-systems to the aerospace, defence and security markets.

Chairman Ian Stopps CBE is a former chief executive of Lockheed Martin UK, while chief executive John Gimson was previously managing director of Hampson Industries Special Products Division.

Mr Stopps said: "Kembrey Wiring is a perfect fit for AADS' strategic buy-and-build policy. Our vision for Kembrey is a simple one. We will use our expertise and experience to grow and develop the company into a sustainable business, starting by cementing its position with existing customers and key markets. Kembrey is already a market leader in its target sectors and so we have an excellent basis to build on."

Thamesdown upgrades its ticketing technology

Thamesdown Transport passengers are to benefit from some of the UK's most advanced bus ticketing technology when it introduces a new system in September.

The bus operator has signed a deal to use Parkeon's Wayfarer200 system which can handle concessionary passes and its own commercial smartcard scheme and also handle tickets bought on buses run by Stagecoach.

It replaces Thamesdown's existing Wayfarer system. The update has been brought forward to take advantage of cash incentives to increase public transport use by making bus travel more convenient.

Thamesdown is to receive a regional grant and money from the Bus Service Operator Grant Integrated Transport Smartcard Organisation (BSOG ITSO).

From September the operator's 90 vehicles will be fitted with the system, which will also link the new ticketing equipment with Thamesdown's real time information (RTI) system at bus stops.

Thamesdown managing director Paul Jenkins

said: "Investing in this technology at this time will not only bring significant advantages to our concessionary and commercial customers, it will also enable us as a company to benefit from the BSOG uplift and a regional funding opportunity."

"Critically, we need the technology to be able to dual-read our successful Wayfarer-mapped commercial smartcard schemes along with the ITSO-based English National Concessionary Travel Scheme smartcards."

"We also run a multi-operator network ticketing scheme locally with Stagecoach and so a key consideration was the need for both companies to migrate to ITSO to maintain inter-operability with smartcards."

Thamesdown chose French-owned Parkeon for the system after conducting a rigorous assessment of ITSO ticketing systems.

Parkeon head of UK sales Gavin Trimnell said: "Our relationship with Thamesdown goes back more than 20 years through three generations of ticketing equipment and so we are delighted to be continuing what has been a very positive business

Mindful Employer event packed with top speakers

A packed agenda and top speakers are in prospect at the July meeting of the Swindon Mindful Employer Network. Taking place at Thrings offices in Penny Lane on Thursday 14th at 2pm, representatives of local employers will benefit from free presentations and talks which help in building healthier businesses.

Jonathan Naess is returning to Swindon due to popular demand. Jonathan is director of Stand to Reason www.standtoreason.org.uk and a recognised specialist in workplace mental health issues. He is being joined by colleague Anna Kavanagh an employment law specialist and an experienced trainer and speaker on mental health at Stand to Reason – and both will present a module from their Fit for Business training programme for line managers, which has been successful in reducing psychological sickness absence by 50 per cent at a FTSE 100 company.

The second session of the meeting will focus on the potentially damaging impact of uncertainty in the workplace. Presented by Isla Baliszewska of Your Coaching.

Representatives of employers may contact: david.latham@richmondfellowship.org.uk

Bringing the world to your doorstep

RTS Communication's Swindon operations manager Mike O'Sullivan continues the firm's monthly series of articles looking at effective communication.

The markets that we all now work in are, or have the potential to be, global. As the world seems to get smaller and boundaries are no longer a barrier to trade; businesses value the Yen as much as the Pound.

Swindon is surging forward in establishing new and developing existing international trade links. China has been identified as a key area for us and with the help of the newly-launched Swindon-based UK-China Business Consortium we hope to see more local businesses working internationally. (See back page)

However, with global trade comes the issue of communication. Aside from the obvious cultural differences in ways of working, how do you actually get face to face with your new contacts without regularly spending long hours travelling – with all of the associated costs and environmental impact?

Video conferencing provides businesses with a quick and easy solution.

For more information on RTS Communications visit: www.rtscommunications.com or call 01793 694470.

Name change for health and safety division at PFA Consulting

Swindon-based multi-disciplinary civil engineering consultancy PFA Consulting has changed the name of its health and safety division to PFA Safety.

PFA Consulting's managing director, Peter Finlayson, said: "The new name is a logical step for us, and reflects the fact that over the past four years we have grown a successful health and safety business which, while complementary to our core consulting engineering disciplines, tends to operate in a different market."

"Clients won't see any changes to the delivery of training and other health and safety services provided by PFA Safety."

"Training will still be delivered at Stratton Park House by the same tutors, and organised by the same administrative staff."

CDM Co-ordinator services and other safety consultancy will also continue to operate from Stratton Park House."

PFA Consulting formed in 1985 and offers a wide range of services to an expanding client base.

For further information contact: www.pfapl.com

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Swindon College North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1DY

Businesses gather at event to discuss Swindon's future

Swindon stands at pivotal point in terms of its economic development, with tough decisions needed to ensure the town continues to thrive.

But how that growth is managed in an era of localism will be key to fulfilling the town's potential as a vibrant and dynamic business location.

This message came across loud and clear at Barclays Bank's A Future for Swindon event, which gathered together more than 70 business figures representing all key segments of the town's economy.

Chris Elias, Barclays Corporate director in the town, opened the event, supported by Swindon Business News, at the STEAM railway museum by disputing the fact that Swindon is an average town - even though market research companies, politicians and the media often portray it as typical of the rest of the country.

"It's an above average town with a lot going for it," he said. "A stone's throw from here we have the National Trust, English Heritage and the UK Space Agency.

Futurist and broadcaster James Bellini, who chaired the event, looked at the challenges facing Swindon "from 35,000 ft", setting them in context of a global population boom, spiraling use of the internet and mobile technology particularly in developing nations and the rise of new economic superpowers such as China, Russia, India and Brazil.

This was a challenge to Swindon as many businesses could now be based anywhere in the world - the so-called "anywhere economy".

Another challenge will be to set the town apart from others in the UK. Its target sectors for growth such as advanced engineering, financial and business services and ICT were the same as most other UK places, he said.

The event's centrepiece was a panel discussion with Professor Martin Boddy, assistant vice chancellor Urban and Regional Studies at the University of the West of England, John Davies, a partner at law firm Thrings, which has its largest office in the town, and Richard Deacon, managing director of Old Town-based family-

owned jewellers Deacon & Son.

Prof Boddy, who has studied the growth of Swindon over several decades, said the town would not suffer greatly from the Government's public sector cuts because, unlike places in the North and Wales, it was not over-reliant on public sector jobs.

However, the town will continue to be the location of choice for many firms in the business services and possibly manufacturing, he said.

Addressing the "anywhere economy" theory, he added: "Everybody has got to be somewhere and Swindon's advantages, which have made it a good place for inward investment in the past such as its location and skilled workforce, will still be relevant in the future."

Mr Davies said a more holistic approach needed to be taken to the growth of the town to ensure that the right number and type of houses were built to attract people to the town while also ensuring new skilled jobs were being created.

He also said the town needed to send out the right message that it was open for business and wanted to attract more companies while also tackling its image problem.

The private sector now had the lead role in this. "We should be putting up signs at the motorway junctions. We should be marketing the brand," he said. "People say we should be a gateway, such as the Gateway to the West, but we should be a hub, a place where things happen, not a place you drive through to get somewhere else."

Richard Deacon, the sixth generation of his family to run his business, which was founded in 1848, said transport and connectivity were problems which were creating different centres around the town rather than bringing people together in its traditional heart of the town centre and Old Town.

"It's actually very hard to move around the town," he said. "So people spend their lives in their own communities. To stop that we should look at other ways of moving people around - for instance, Swindon would be a great place to have a light railway."

He also said a lack of civic pride was holding back the town as shown by the length of time it took to get the new central library.

Summing up Chris Elias said he felt the event had proved there is a real passion among the business community to make Swindon a success.

"We just need to pull all the strings together," he said.



Chris Elias



Pertemps secures a new two-year deal

Swindon Borough Council has renewed its contract with Pertemps Recruitment Partnership with two-year Master Vendor deal for the placement of temporary staff.

Pertemps was firstly awarded Master Vendor status in 2006 when Swindon Borough Council sought to appoint an employment agency who could provide a single point of contact and resource for a high volume, diverse flexible labour requirement.

Both organisations have worked tirelessly over the last five years to deliver a recruitment solution that could satisfy the key objectives for Swindon Borough Council. Pertemps working in partnership with SBC have delivered significant financial savings and continues to drive cost reduction as a key objective during public sector spending cuts.

The local community recognises Pertemps as the employment agency of choice when seeking employment at Swindon Borough Council.

In fact over 80 per cent of Pertemps flexible labour is fulfilled from within the local Swindon community which ensures that local employment for local people provides regular and ongoing employment.

Head of corporate procurement, Lawrence Bunn, said: "Following a

rigorous tender exercise Pertemps was awarded the contract in 2006 due to their proven ability to deliver a one stop shop approach to all of our temporary staff requirements. We are delighted to continue our contract arrangement with Pertemps for a further two years due to their willingness to accept both operational and financial constraints within the Public Sector, whilst continuing to offer quality recruitment services combined with real added value."

Director of Pertemps Swindon, Anne Wilkes, said: "My team and I at Pertemps Swindon are delighted to be re-awarded Master Vendor Status with Swindon Borough Council one of the towns most prestigious contracts. Our joint relationship has gone from strength to strength and we look forward to delivering continued high levels of service, combining a cost effective total recruitment solution to Swindon Borough Council."

Pertemps celebrates its 50th Anniversary this year and combined with both local and national celebrations the award of Master Vendor Status with Swindon Borough Council provides great news for Pertemps Swindon, our flexible workforce and the local community.

Valuable advice given at region's largest export event

More than 300 business people from across the South West heard valuable first-hand advice on trading overseas from a group of experienced exporters at ExploreExport, the region's largest annual international trade event.

Organised by South West arm of UK Trade & Investment - the Government's export help body - it was designed to guide companies through a period of rapid world economic change as well as provide businesses with an opportunity to meet and network with a broad selection of companies and organisations that can help develop overseas ambitions.

Discussions on the day were led by trade and investment minister Lord Green alongside Nick Hewer, business mentor on the BBC's The Apprentice and Lara Morgan, entrepreneur and founder of CompanyShortcuts.com.

They were joined on stage by a number of local businesses who shared the secrets of their export success.

• More than £2,000 was raised for local charities at the second annual Swindon Ladies' Luncheon.

Mayor of Swindon councillor Ray Ballman was among more than 100 women who attended the event at Bushwackers in Fleet Street, which heard natural medicine expert Philip Weeks speak about the ancient Chinese art of face reading.

Former Swindon Advertiser editor Dave King talked about autism and the introduction earlier this year of an autism alert card in conjunction with Wiltshire Police.

Among charities benefiting were Christ Church in Old Town, the Willows Counseling Service and the Swindon branch of the National Autistic Society. A donation was also made to the Mayor's Charity Appeal.

The facebook effect: How to manage social media in the workplace

With Facebook now having more than 640 million customers worldwide and Twitter growing a staggering 1,382 per cent over the past year, it is likely that the majority of employees in the workplace now conduct a large part of their private communications online. While there are many benefits to small businesses using social media to raise their profile with potential customers, the impact of social networking sites in the workplace throws up some interesting issues for employers.

Those with concerns over social networking within company time could, rather than completely discourage it, create an IT strategy that stipulates what kind of social networking is allowed within working hours. This will ensure that employees know what is expected of them and enable employers to take advantage of the benefits that social media presents to small businesses.

Business First at Swindon College is now able to offer a range of specialist hands-on courses for employers who wish to explore the world of social media, why and how it should be used and how to get the maximum benefit from it.

For more information on the full range of courses and how they could benefit your organisation, call the Business First Team on (01793) 498404 or Businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk



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CARTER JONAS

The Property People

Lemon&Co gains quality standard for conveyancing

Swindon-based Lemon&Co Solicitors is one of the first law firms in Wiltshire to be awarded the Law Society's new quality mark for conveyancing practices.

The firm, which has one of the region's most respected property teams, obtained the Conveyancing Quality Scheme (CQS) status following a rigorous Law Society assessment.

Membership of the CQS opened in January and the scheme aims to reinforce consistency of standards throughout the conveyancing process, reduce the risk of fraud and give consumers peace of mind when it comes to home buying.

Lemon&Co's head of residential conveyancing David Halfhead said: "We are very pleased to have achieved the award as the audit included a full review of both the department and the processes we have in place.

"The main benefit is to our clients is they can be even more assured that the work they come to us for is handled at the right level of seniority and not treated as part of a conveyor belt.

"The focus has to be on what the home buyer needs as every person and sale/purchase is different and I think the CQS mark really demonstrates what we try to deliver as a team – and as a firm – on a day-to-day basis." Law Society President Linda Lee said quality mark was introduced to help recognise high standards in the home buying process. "Buying a home is one of the largest purchases anyone will make in their lifetime, so it is essential that it is done to the highest standard by a solicitor," she said.

Lawyer on track to become a 2012 Olympic judge

Swindon lawyer, Paul Trincas is aiming to swap the courtroom for the athletics track at the 2012 Olympics – as he sets his sights on becoming an official.

Paul, a partner and head of corporate services at Charles Lucas & Marshall, has applied to become part of the Olympic 'Athletics Team' – and has been short-listed for interview.

If successful, he will be part of an army of an estimated 70,000 people who will be needed for key support roles during the duration of the Games.

"The Olympics in London is a one-off special event that is unlikely to arise again during my lifetime. I felt I would be kicking myself if I didn't take the opportunity and apply," he said.

"It is not a paid role but I love athletics and to be part of such a great occasion in the main Olympic Stadium is an

experience and an opportunity I don't want to miss out on."

Paul, who is a qualified UK Athletics Official and who has taken written and practical exams as well as on-going assessments to achieve his qualified status, has been an active member of Newbury Athletics Club for the past ten years.

A schoolboy record holder in sprint hurdles, he now coaches youngsters interested in his favourite athletics event.

If selected, Paul will have to undertake a variety of training and briefing courses in the run up to London 2012 and will need to be available for all 11 days of track and field events.

As well as being a qualified UK Athletics time-keeper, he has listed 'anti-doping' regulation as an area of interest in his application.



Paul Trincas

Firms are warned over new Bribery Act

New legislation makes it illegal to offer or receive bribes and to fail to prevent bribery. Individuals convicted under the Act can be jailed for up to 10 years and face unlimited fines.

Firms are being warned they could risk unlimited fines or even jail if they don't take action over the new Bribery Act, which came into force this month.

The Act makes it illegal to offer or receive bribes and to fail to prevent bribery. Individuals convicted under the Act can be jailed for up to 10 years and face unlimited fines.

The government claims it will underpin the UK's position as a global leader in the fight against business corruption. But business organisations have expressed fears that firms could fall foul of the legislation if corporate hospitality offered to clients and potential

clients is deemed to be a bribe.

Debbie Taylor, director of Target HR Consultancy, said the Act puts the responsibility onto directors to make sure bribery is not taking place in their company.

"Laws against bribery have been in force since the 1800s, but it is now a corporate offence, making company directors more responsible for the actions of their staff", she said.

"Ignorance is no defence. A company can be found guilty of passing or receiving a bribe even if the directors were not directly involved or had no prior knowledge that the act was taking place."

Debbie warns that the penalties for corporate bribery can be severe, so it is important for directors to take action.

"If found guilty, penalties start with an unlimited fine and companies can also be barred from bidding for public contracts and disqualified from other supplier lists," she said. "On top of this, company directors can be individually prosecuted and jailed for up to ten years."

"With this in mind, businesses would be well advised to familiarise themselves with the new regulations and ensure they are compliant. This should involve a thorough risk assessment to establish appropriate anti-bribery policies, as well as ongoing implementation, training and monitoring."

While business groups are understandably worried about the new Act, a business has a defence if it has adequate procedures in place to prevent bribery.

"Common sense rules what is a bribe and what isn't," she said. "As long as companies have the right safeguards and procedures in place and seek the advice of trained HR professionals, they should be fully compliant with the new Act, as well as reducing the potential for bribery within their organisation significantly."

Employers are unaware of their legal responsibilities, according to Acas report

One in four employers risks unwittingly breaking the law, warns employment relations expert Acas.

The breaches are revealed by a study of companies and organisations using a new service to help them spot and resolve problems at work.

The research by Acas shows that 28 per cent of the users of its online tool discovered they were not complying with the law.

But 55 per cent of those surveyed said they had since revised at least one policy or procedure as a result of using the Acas Model Workplace tool, while 54 per cent had introduced, or planned to introduce, new policies or procedures.

Acas South West director James Cross said: "The Model Workplace costs nothing to use but as our research shows it can save employers time, money and stress further down

the line. It makes more sense to check your employment practices for free rather than fix them after an expensive mistake that could end up before an Employment Tribunal."

Figures from the Acas helpline show that the top three topics employers and employees in the South West are seeking advice about are:

- **Discipline, Dismissal and Grievance:** 31 per cent
- **Redundancies, Lay Offs and Business Transfers:** 22 per cent
- **Contracts:** 19 per cent

The Acas Model Workplace helps employers assess how well they are managing their staff. It offers practical guidance on maintaining good employment relations and directs employers to other useful Acas resources to help them prevent problems.

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Growth Fund opens South West office to close equity gap

The £2.5bn Business Growth Fund, which will invest in small and medium-sized firms, has opened its South West office with former 3i regional director Paul Oldham at the helm.

The Fund, financed by the UK's clearing banks, will inject between £2m and £10m for minority stakes in companies based in the South West and South Wales turning over between £10m and £100m from its regional office in Bristol.

Businesses of this size have long complained that they are overlooked by private equity, venture capital

and other equity-based lenders who prefer larger, more lucrative investments.

As a result of this equity gap, innovative businesses are often held back.

Mr Oldham, who has also previously worked for Grant Thornton and LDC in Bristol, will have overall responsibility for developing relationships with businesses in the region and for successfully executing fund investments.

He will also sit on the board of some of the fund's investee companies and is a member of the BGF's national investment committee.

He said: "We are aiming to bring something new to the market and to broaden the financial options available to businesses. We will offer growth finance to business owners who want access to capital but do not want to sell; we will take minority stakes; and we are not under pressure to exit within a certain time frame."

During his career, which included 13 years at 3i, Mr Oldham has overseen more than 40 equity investments in small and medium sized businesses.

The Bristol office is the fourth opened by the Fund since its launch in May.

Alarm bells ringing on time-to-pay liabilities

HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) established its Business Payment Support Service towards the start of the recession to enable businesses to defer tax liabilities during difficult trading conditions. Until recently, obtaining HMRC's agreement on time-to-pay had been relatively straight-forward.

"Rather worryingly," says Martin Gurney of HW Chartered Accountants. "There is an increasing incidence of refusal of time-to-pay applications. Perhaps of even more concern is that fact that, in the accountancy press in June 2011, HMRC is reported as stating that their national policy is to refuse time-to-pay where it is aware that a company has recently paid dividends as part of its remuneration packages. HMRC's view appears to be that paying dividends instead of settling tax liabilities is iniquitous. As a tax adviser, readers will appreciate that I do not believe that such an argument has any merit."

So where does this leave companies who pay dividends? - is it now impossible to pay dividends during periods of difficult trading conditions and still obtain a time-to-pay agreement with HMRC?

"My view is that the drawing of a commercial, tax efficient package must not be allowed to impact on HMRC's perception of the company, and that we therefore must continue to challenge HMRC on this whenever it occurs. In fact their apparent stance

that the drawing of dividends may be prejudicial is flawed to a large extent."

"If, as with many owner managed companies, a company pays low salaries and high dividends then the company pays less PAYE/NIC but at the expense of higher corporation liabilities. If a company reverses this strategy in favour of salaries, the company pays more PAYE/NIC but then has lower corporation liabilities. Possibly HMRC's stance is based on a perceived risk that tax due on dividend income may become uncollectable from the individual at a later point. However, whatever their reasoning, it has to be wrong that legitimate tax planning is penalised in this way."

And finally... some helpful tips in resolving time-to-pay agreements:

- It is best to approach HMRC in advance of the tax due date
- Be realistic about what the business can afford to pay - it is harder to renegotiate time-to-pay if you breach a previous agreement
- If you are struggling to maintain any arrangement, keep in regular contact with HMRC
- Do not take 'no' for an answer. It is clearly not in the public interest for HMRC to drive companies into insolvency

Martin Gurney is the tax partner at HW Chartered Accountants in Swindon. If you would like to discuss this or any other matter with Martin, please call him on 01793 533838.

New tax rules threaten employers who file late tax payments

Employers could face steep fines if they file late tax payments for staff under new HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) rules.

The penalty regime imposed by HMRC, which started on April 6, applies to the late payment of PAYE/NIC on employees' wages.

Richard Mathews, director at Swindon-based Banks Chartered Accountants, said: "The penalties are based on the number of defaults and/or late payments which take place in relation to the tax year and increase in magnitude with the number of defaults that occur."

"They are now only just being raised by HMRC for the 2010/11 tax year as they now have details of when all the monthly payments were paid to determine the rate of penalty charged."

The scale of penalties is: one default in the year, no penalty; two, three or four defaults in the year, one

Companies are being urged to make sure their PAYE/NIC bill is paid on time

per cent of the total of the defaults, including the first; five, six or seven defaults in the year, two per cent of the total of the defaults; eight, nine or ten defaults in the year, three per cent of the total of the defaults; finally, if there are 11 or more defaults in the year the penalty is four per cent of the total of the defaults.

Richard added: "As can be seen from the scale, the penalty can be a fairly substantial amount if the monthly PAYE/NIC payments were also of a fairly sizeable amount. Furthermore, should the amounts remain outstanding for more than six months after the penalty date a further penalty equivalent to five per cent of the unpaid amount is charged with a

further five per cent charge being raised 12 months after the penalty date."

Employers using electronic payments must ensure their cleared payment is with HMRC no later than the 22nd of the month following the end of the month or quarter to which it relates. If paying by post, a cheque must arrive with HMRC no later than the 19th of the month following the end of the month or quarter to which it relates.

Richard added: "While an appeal can be made against these penalties, HMRC are adopting a tough stance and it is advisable to ensure future PAYE/NIC payments are with HMRC on time."

Pension deficits to stifle growth for many South West firms, says research

Growth could be stifled and investment opportunities jeopardised because of the size of pension deficits in some South West firms, according to new research

The 100 companies in the region with the largest pension schemes have a combined pension deficit estimated at more than £2 billion. A deficient is the gap between the cost of providing the pensions promised to employees and what they hold in assets.

The figure was calculated using publicly-available information obtained from Companies House by BBS Consultants & Actuaries who have been tracking the region's

company pension deficits over the past year. Among the businesses at the top of the 100 list are Swindon-based Nationwide Building Society, with a £495 million deficit, Chippenham-based logistics group Wincanton (£174m) and finance group Zurich Employment Services (£119.9m).

BBS estimates that at the end of 2010 the total pension deficit for the top 100 companies in the region stood at £2.35 billion. Three months later, at the end of March this year, that figure is estimated to have moved down 18 per cent to £1.92 billion, then by the end of June the figure shifted back up to £2.58 billion.



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HOW SWINDON CAN BE A NEW HUB FOR THE CREATIVE INDUSTRIES

On the top floor of the Wyvern Theatre, in a section of the building away from the auditorium that most people never see, a group of small businesses are helping to turn Swindon into a creative hub.

The town may not yet be a by-word for creativity in loftier circles - but these individuals, along with a collection of other small design agencies, marketers, film-makers, animators and app developers are shaping an emerging part of Swindon's industrial make-up.

And they are keen to get the town's blue-chip companies to wake up to the creative talent on their doorstep.

"Why do our top companies go to London for creative work when they have everything here - and probably at a much lower cost?" asks Sara Tye, founder and managing director of Redhead PR.

Sara formed her agency eight years ago when she returned to Swindon, her home town. Her career before reads like a training manual for thoughtful and creative public relations - a far cry from the image of PR as a little more than 'spin' and cocktail parties.

She worked in stakeholder relations at Thames Water, headed communications for Yellow Pages, implemented BT's environmental policy and managed PR for The Body Shop - a job that took her around the world with founder and ethical business pioneer, the late Dame Anita Roddick.

With that kind of experience she knows a thing or two about creativity - and she believes Swindon's bedrock of innovative designers, film-makers and the like along, with its wider arts community, make the town something special. She just wishes it would shout about it more.

The clear message from the businesses based around the Create Studios at the Wyvern is that Forward Swindon (the town's economic regeneration organisation)

needs to promote Swindon as a creative hub alongside the more traditional industries of financial services, electronics and engineering.

The studios themselves are an award-winning digital media organisation in what is becoming known as Swindon's cultural quarter - more of which later.

The studios' three strands are mobile media, including outreach projects that engage young people and communities; create inclusive, which includes projects that draw together individuals and communities in danger of social exclusion; and create professional, which includes commissions for third-sector partners needing digital, promotional or training resources.

Every year the studios work with 7,000 people, making 80 media productions seen by 120,000 people and working with 30 partner organisations and 20 digital artists. Funding comes mainly from Swindon Borough Council and the Arts Council.

Social inclusion is a common theme among Swindon's creatives. Film-maker Gurchetan Singh has worked closely with the Create Studios since returning to his home town from university 10 years ago. His first 30-minute documentary, on Swindon's Sikh community, was distributed internationally as an educational video.

Since then he has made documentaries on subjects ranging from heroin abuse and autism, working with those who have first-hand experience of these, and his work has been screened by ITV and Channel 4. He has received funding from Film4 and three years ago won the First Light Best Documentary award for his film The Child and Me.

While his usually commissions come from London or further afield, Gurchetan remains loyal to Swindon - researching and editing his work in his small studio at the

Growing a business with smart web marketing

High-performing companies use smart web marketing to grow their business despite a difficult economic climate

Nearly every business has a website but, in reality, few deliver strong business performance. High-performing companies have moved beyond the 'we need to be on the web' stage to implement a range of smart web marketing strategies.

Since 1995, web marketing firm Brand New Way has been involved in developing and testing brand new ways of using

digital marketing. 16 years ago, the options were limited but now, there are so many choices, few companies have big enough budgets or expertise to do everything. Success depends on choosing the best web marketing strategies for your business and implementing them effectively.

A major survey by online experts Econsultancy recently asked 885 senior marketers 'How do you rate the following channels in terms of return on investment?'

Search engine optimisation and email marketing ranked

the highest with 73 per cent and 72 per cent of respondents respectively rating them excellent or good. Pay per click was third with 56 per cent and social media was fourth with 43 per cent. The remaining channels (mobile marketing, affiliate marketing, offline direct marketing and online display advertising) scored between 34 per cent and 24 per cent.

It's time to make sure that Wiltshire's businesses don't miss on making the most of the web, one of the few sectors growing in the current economic climate.

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THE FANTASTIC FIVE

From experience with high performing companies (big and small), across all sectors, there are five key methods that consistently deliver powerful web marketing results:

- 1 A 'pretty brochure site' that simply tells people what you do or sell is no longer enough. Design and build a website that effectively converts visitors to leads or customers. Set objectives and measure performance.
- 2 Use Google pay per click advertising to reach prospects who are searching for your product or service today. It can deliver great results even with modest budgets.
- 3 Email marketing can be used in many strategies and is good at increasing customer lifetime value. Newsletters can help you stay in touch, keep customers engaged and get them coming back for more.
- 4 Search engine optimisation is crucial to get a good search ranking given Google is often the first place (B2B & B2C) buyers search when looking to buy a product or service
- 5 Analyse your website performance. Web analytics will help you to identify what's working and what isn't and can also provide great insight.

Which of the Fantastic Five you focus on will depend on a number of issues such as your business objectives, product or service, target customers, brand message and, of course, budget. It's always better to start with one or two methods and do them well than try to do five or more badly.

CREATIVE SWINDON



Talent show: The Wyvern Theatre is also home to some of Swindon's most creative companies

Wyvern and mostly filming in and around the town.

In the same way Mark Pepperall, founder and artistic director of Hot Pepper Design sees Swindon as the ideal place to run his business, which he launched 15 years ago.

Mark, who is also one of the UK's leading dance photographers, working with the renown East London Dance Company - he also designed their website - and Swindon Dance, carries out design work for businesses worldwide. His latest is with Australian skin care and natural health firms. Mark's packaging designs can be found in Harrods among others and his ads on the pages of glossy magazines.

"You probably couldn't get further away from Swindon than Australia," jokes Mark. "But the time difference works. I work on the designs, email them to the client in Australia who looks at them overnight and emails back with any changes for me to work on when I get in the next morning."

Mark's design, photography and branding work has been used by a range of businesses from urban wear to electric guitars.

In the same way, Mark Miles of Rendermedia has carved out a niche producing cutting-edge CGI and animation for blue chip brands in Swindon and beyond.

Mark formed his agency eight years having working in TV and educational software. Today his CGI fly-thrus and

animations are used by clients as diverse as food group Nestle, pharmaceutical giant Bristol-Myers Squibb, the National Trust, Castrol and Forward Swindon. "All produced from a little room in Swindon," says Mark.

"There's a great atmosphere here in these studios," he adds. "We share work as much as possible - there's no need to go to Bristol or London when all the expertise you need is right here in Swindon."

Sara agrees. "There's a real buzz around Swindon at the moment," she says. "It's time we started telling the world what we've got here."

The creative hub theme runs parallel to the plans for a cultural quarter led by Artsite, which is based in the old post office in Theatre Square, now called the Post Modern Gallery and a stone's throw from the Wyvern.

It aims to take over the empty Oxfam bookshop and Merlin Gallery across the square, which have been made available by landlords Swindon Council.

The two will become studios and workshops, staging exhibitions and acting as a meeting place for the town's creatives.

Sally Taylor, of Artsite, said: "This is a fantastic opportunity to build on the huge success we've already had and will give us the space to provide more affordable studios to Swindon's artists."



Rooting for Swindon: Sara Tye of Redhead PR says the town should shout about its creativity

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CASE STUDY



Two years on and still smiling

Positive verdict for Jurys Inn

Two years on from opening, Jurys Inn in Swindon is going from strength to strength. Under the guidance of general manager Alexandra Brunner, the 229-bedroom hotel remains the largest and the newest in town and is proud to be very much part of the Swindon community both in the corporate and the leisure markets. Located right in the heart of the town with its own car park, Jurys Inn is less than 10 minutes walk from the railway station and under five minutes from the Wyvern Theatre, making it a great location for pre-theatre drinks and great value overnight stays. All rooms have air conditioning and double beds - some with king-sized beds - along with high-speed internet access, tea/coffee making facilities, hairdryer, flat screen

Freeview televisions, spacious and well-lit working area and room service. The hotel also has 12 fully DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) compliant rooms with interconnecting rooms should a carer need to stay as well. But Jurys is not just a hotel. To cater for Swindon's busy conference industry it boasts a dedicated meeting floor with a staffed lobby. Its seven modern rooms, each has natural daylight and air conditioning, have capacities ranging from two to 40 delegates. The hotel offers very competitive day delegate and room hire rates. Jurys realises that meetings should not be just about business or training in its rooms - however pleasant they are. The hotel has an extensive lounge area with wi-fi which, along with its Il Barista Coffee Bar, also has a take-out service. Both the bar and lounge make great locations for conference break-out sessions, informal and ad-hoc meetings or just for relaxing after a day's business. The hotel even has its own mini-library along with a stylish bar with plasma TVs so conference or meeting delegates do not miss out on big sporting events. Jurys Inn's terrace is an ideal location to catch some sun between conference sessions or meetings. The hotel's contemporary restaurant offers food for all tastes with an a la carte menu and a chef's selection with three courses for £18. The bar offers food from its own comfort menu or from the main a la carte menu. For delegates arriving late food can be ordered in the restaurant until 10.30pm and from the bar until 11pm. Room service is available for those who need to carry on working. Jurys Inn's reputation as a great venue for business was enhanced earlier this month when Business Networking International (BNI) launched its latest chapter at the hotel with 50 guests attending. Jurys will remain the venue for BNI and the hotel's sales manager Peter Rudge will be an active member of this referral group. The hotel is also supporting the Party in the Park at RAF Brize Norton on August 20. Jurys Swindon is offering a package of two nights' accommodation with breakfast, transport to and from Swindon and an entry ticket for £99 per person (under fives are free). The hotel will also donate £5 from each booking to Help for Heroes.



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Conference market

The conference market is undergoing major change. Gone are the days when businesses were happy to book delegates in for residential conferences and willingly pay for extras such as overhead projectors, wi-fi and even coffee and biscuits. Today the emphasis is on value for money with a big swing to day and half-day conferences - and venues that try to load extras onto corporate clients' bills find they will not get a repeat booking. The conference market in Swindon, with its raft of large international firms and its location on the M4, is probably as competitive as any in the country. In such a challenging environment, venues in and around the town are having to raise their game, refurbish existing facilities, invest in new technology, enhance their websites and upgrade their inquiry and booking procedures - all while remaining competitive on price and flexible in the use of their accommodation. Nicolas Perilli, general manager at Swindon's Campanile Hotel on the Delta Business Park, has witnessed the changes in the market over the past couple of



Nicolas Perilli

The Goddard Arms

Situated in the heart of the old town, The Goddard Arms was fully refurbished to a very high standard in Autumn 2009, opening just before Christmas. With a massive history in Swindon, The Barracuda Group have managed to retain much character of the old whilst incorporating contemporary bedrooms and dining. The 'Court Room' caters for business meetings and smaller groups, with conference facilities and catering as needed. The 'Vault' is truly the surprise in the old town, a private hire bar deep in the basement of The Goddard Arms. Catering for smaller parties of up to 40, when the disco lights come on and the music pumps out it really is a unique space, well worth that enquiry!

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competition hits new peak

years - but sees signs that better times are on the way.

"There are not so many 24-hour delegates these days, but there are more short conferences," he said. "We tripled our revenues for day conferences in June on the same month last year. This is partly due to better brand awareness and better referencing for us on Google, but also reflects the market."

"Last year we did a special offer of buy two conferences, get one free. This year we haven't needed to do that."

"Swindon is a very, very competitive market, particularly in the three-star market."

Mr Perelli says clients are leaving it later to book. "Sixty per cent of our bookings come within 10 days of the event. We have to be extremely quick to respond and make sure we offer the right rates," he said.

The 120-bedroom hotel, 80 double, 40 single, has three meeting rooms which can accommodate between 15 and 40 delegates individually or can be made into one large room.

Needless to say wi-fi, coffee and biscuits and use of a video projector are all free.

"People expect a lot more for free these days," said Mr Perelli. "One big advantage we have is free car parking. Our location close to the M4 is also a big plus for us."

Elsewhere around the town,



Lydiard Conference Centre in Lydiard Park is one of five venues operated by the Chartridge Conference Company, and has 13 meeting rooms suitable for corporate gatherings and business meetings. All lecture rooms and syndicate rooms are clustered together, and have a full range of specialist equipment including free wi-fi.

The centre, which has 37 bedrooms, also boasts a fitness room

and an indoor swimming pool.

Alexandra House at Wroughton, part of Principal Hayley Hotels and Conference Venues 24-strong chain, has 16 spacious air-conditioned meeting and function rooms in a modern purpose-built venue.

Next to junction 16 of the M4, the Swindon Hilton Hotel has 17 meeting rooms which can accommodate from two to 400 people.

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Companies looking for a venue for a small business meeting or hold a conference for up to 60 delegates, or a team building day, Bibury Court could be just the ticket.

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For more information please contact sarah@biburycourt.com or call 01285 741 171.

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Quality childcare on offer at Busy Bees

Busy Bees Day Nursery in Portsmouth is designed to meet the needs of children aged three months to five years. Busy Bees is open 7.30am - 6pm, Monday to Friday.

The nursery has fantastic facilities, including; secure access systems throughout, large outdoor play areas designed for each age group and large fully equipped Base Rooms designed specifically for babies, toddlers and pre-schoolers.

Busy Bees was recently inspected by Ofsted and received a GOOD outcome as well as 1 area of 'Outstanding' relating to partnership with parents. The also provides free nappies and wipes, and offer

government funded only sessions, as well as emergency childcare places.

The nursery provides fresh home cooked meals in fully equipped kitchens, with delicious snacks for all ages available throughout the day. The nurseries are also able to cater for any dietary requirements your child may have.

Busy Bees is committed to ensuring every child's needs are met by making their interests, safety and happiness central to everything we do.

Book and start your nursery place before the end of April and receive 25 per cent off one months fees. Call Helen on 023 9238 3030 for more details and to book a visit.

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dodfordfarmdaycare@tiscali.co.uk

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Reduce your carbon footprint with Green IT

Green IT can have a significant impact on an reducing an organisation's carbon footprint as well as saving money, a business forum at New College Swindon heard.

The event, hosted by Fast Forward, the College's professional training division, attracted businesses from across Swindon.

Author and Green IT advocate Mark O'Neill spoke about the first formally-accredited training course for Green IT - the Foundation Certificate in Green IT - which he is responsible for creating with Swindon-based British Computer Society (BCS).

He also gave practical, everyday tips on how businesses and individuals can reduce their electricity consumption as well as advice on larger Green IT solutions. He also pointed out the fact that many disused computers from British firms end up in developing nations where they are dismantled by child labour working in appalling and hazardous conditions.

New College is also paving the way in 'being green' and working in partnership with a consortium of colleges, including Exeter College and Weymouth College, on a new Lean Green IT Machine initiative, supported by LSIS (The Learning and Skills

Improvement Service)

This new initiative aims to help Further Education colleges share their knowledge 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.

The event, which also looked at how to grow your own talent with an apprentice, was the second in a series of Fast Forward forums.

New College apprentice Daniel Knapp from Aligra Personnel was on hand to provide delegates with a first-hand account of life as an apprentice, and the benefits of the scheme to both the employer and the employee.

New College principal Graham Taylor said: "We are delighted with the success of the Lean Green Business Forum. We hope all the delegates came away with practical advice and inspiration on how they can continue to improve their businesses with Green IT and apprentice initiatives."

See August's SBN for more about Green IT

CASE STUDY



Distribution firm looks to expand locally and internationally

Groundwell Logistics Ltd (GLL) may be an unfamiliar name alongside Swindon's distribution businesses but the firm has a pedigree that goes back four decades.

The privately-owned firm has its roots in BCA - formerly Book Club Associates - which pioneered mail order book retailing in the UK.

Once owned by Swindon-based WH Smith, German entertainment giant Bertelsmann and German investment group Aurelius, BCA is now part of retail home entertainment group The Webb Group. Along the way BCA moved its logistics into the arm's-length business, Groundwell Logistics, led by experienced industry figure Tony Day - although its prime customer remained BCA.

Following a recent change in ownership, Tony has been able to buy GLL's trading name, packing facilities and website and is now able to offer a fulfilment service based on 23,000 sq ft of modern warehouse space in BCA's former building on Swindon's Groundwell Industrial Estate.

"There is a lot of potential here, a lot of capacity for expansion," said Tony, as he walks the corridors of the extensive facility where hundreds of workers once picked and packed millions of books to be despatched to BCA customers. Tony is keen to get GLL known to e-commerce businesses which need a reliable, cost-effective fulfilment operation.

"Most businesses never start up with a view to becoming warehousing and distribution experts. As their business grows, the demands of providing consistently high-quality order fulfilment can be overwhelming. Outsourcing this work to a third party can be a daunting prospect and clients need to feel confident that they can entrust their reputation to a reliable partner. This is where we

come in."

From a standing start GLL has already picked up some notable clients from the UK and the US and processes a wide range of products, in addition to attracting business from its traditional book distribution market sector.

"It may sound like a cliché but we really are big enough to cope and small enough to care. Our historical connections have allowed us to maintain significant discounts with national couriers and packaging suppliers and we're pleased to be able to pass these on to our customers."

GLL, which has retained its ISO14001 accreditation, can offer same-day shipping and promises all charges are up front with no set-up fees, additional hidden costs or minimum commitment.

"Above all, we recognise the importance of providing a consistently reliable service," said Tony.



GLL offers a full range of fulfilment services at its Groundwell site

Pulling power of town's logistics industry set to continue into future

Swindon has long been a honeypot for the logistics industry. The area's location on the M4 has made it one of the country's hot spots for distribution and warehousing - and with 31m people within three hours' drive time of the town that is likely to continue. B&Q's 74,000 sq m (796,649 sq ft) warehouse at South Marston, completed recently, is just the latest addition.

It joins major bases for retailers such as Iceland, WH Smith and Scotts of Stowe and distribution centres for firms such as truck maker MAN, vehicle dealer Rygor while warehouses such as those run by TDG and SDC have sprung up around the town to feed components into Honda's car and engine plants and BMW's Mini panel factory.

But changes in the industry are bringing new challenges. The growth of national super-warehouses has allowed towns in the Midlands to rival Swindon, while increases in fuel and other costs - the average truck journey now costs 60p a mile - and environmental pressures are also having an impact.

B&Q's warehouse will be operated by DHL and employ around 600 people by the time opens at Easter next year. The

During the past five years, foreign ownership of firms making up the top 50 logistics companies has increased to 52 per cent

warehouse, which distribute directly to the DIY group's outlets across the South of England, has delivered a timely boost to the town after a spate of closures, including the nearby Morrisons South Marston distribution centre, also run by DHL. The supermarket chain is centralising its South West distribution into a new 800,000 sq ft warehouse next to the M5 at Bridgwater, Somerset.

Despite this, property agents believe Swindon remains in a prime position to attract logistics firms. "We're still in the top 25 per cent of towns," said Paul Whitmarsh, partner at Swindon-based agents Whitmarsh Lockhart. "But we are running short of modern stock and some of the older warehouses are not good enough to attract occupiers."

The firm has just let the last major empty warehouse at South Marston and Mr Whitmarsh believes the more specialised nature of the modern logistics industry means future developments were likely to be purpose-built.

Demolition of the former Woolworth's distribution depot at Dorcan, which closed along with the high street chain in 2008, proves this point.

Other major warehouses are being re-used by new players in the market (see GLL case study, left).

Environmental pressures are also reshaping the industry

while increased use of technology is allowing forward-thinking logistics companies such as SW Group to give themselves a competitive advantage (see case study, right).

The Howard Tenens Group, a long-established logistics operator in Swindon, is positioning itself as a lead player in environmentally distribution and warehousing. It set up Tenens Environmental in 2008 to look at alternative fuels and other ways of becoming reducing its carbon footprint.

Since then its 200-strong fleet has been converted to dual fuel (natural gas and diesel) with the ambition ultimately to run all its trucks on biomethane. The group, which employs 500 people across 13 UK depots is also taking its environmental commitment to its three million sq ft of warehousing.

It has fitted energy efficient lighting which alone is reducing its utility bills by seven per cent - and utility bills accounting 30 per cent of a warehouse's running costs that amounts to a big saving.

As pressure grows to reduce vehicle movements and make the logistics industry greener, attention is turning to moving bulky goods by rail.

Rail produces 70 per cent less carbon dioxide emissions than the equivalent road journey, according to the Freight on Rail, a pressure group which brings together rail freight operators, transport trade unions and the Campaign for Better Transport.

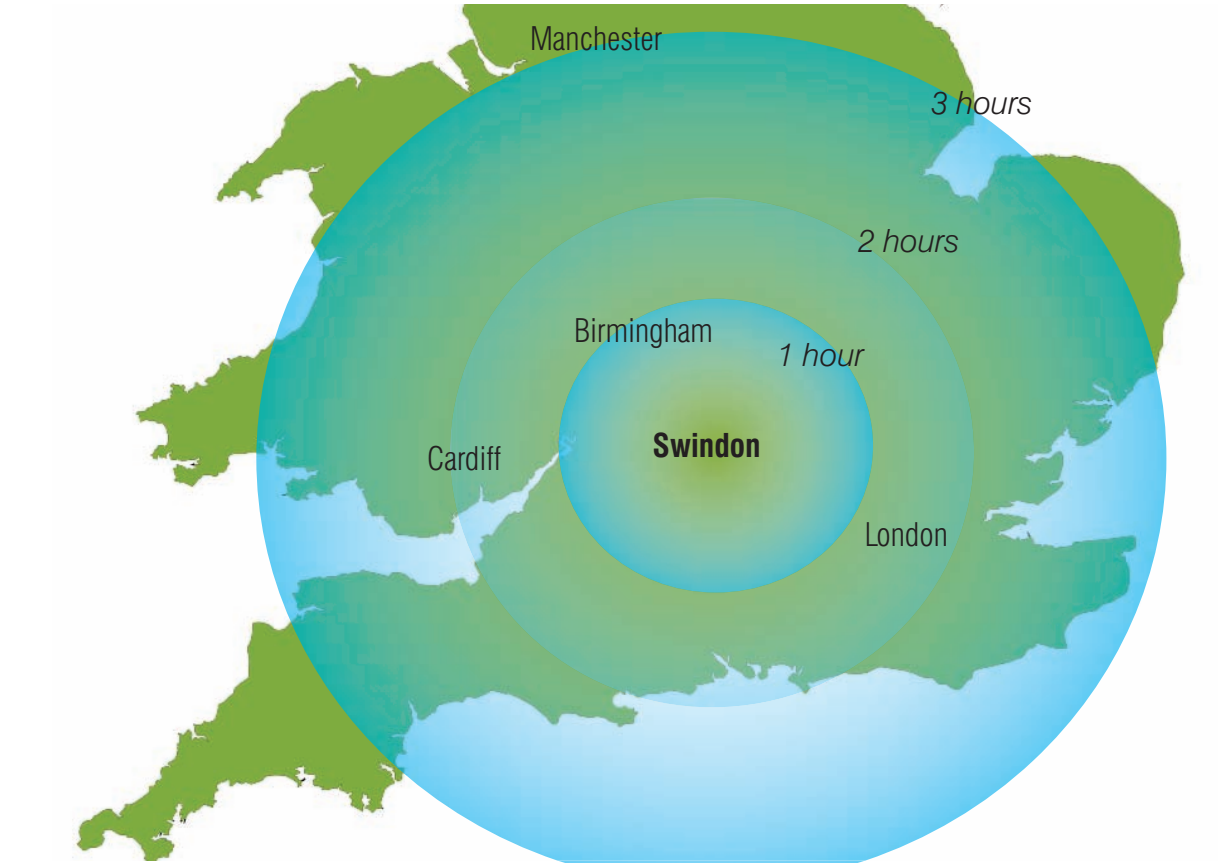
In the past 10 years rail freight has grown by 60 per cent and it now has 11.5 per cent of the UK surface freight market against eight per cent in 1994. Swindon, with its location on the main London-Bristol railway can play a key role in this trend.

Keypoint Swindon, Legal & General's seven-acre site between Honda's South Marston factory site and the main London-Bristol railway line, calls itself a 'flexible, bi-modal hub'.

So far it has attracted the Bodleian Library from Oxford, which will store four million books, as well as TDG and SDC, which both feed parts into Honda.

TDG's 175,000 sq ft building employs more than 100 drivers and 70 dedicated warehouse staff, operating 24 hours a day, five days a week, and is ultimately responsible for the time-critical delivery of around 20 per cent of a car. Some 200 deliveries are made directly into the Honda plant daily, providing parts in a strictly pre-defined sequence to meet the car firm's just-in-time requirements of the lines.

Ownership changes are also reshaping the industry. New research from Barclays Corporate and accountants Grant Thornton shows more than half of the UK's largest logistics companies are now foreign-owned, with more likely to fall into overseas hands over the next few years.



HGV TRAVEL TIMES

London in 2 hours
Bristol in 1.5 hours
Cardiff in 2 hours

Birmingham in 2 hours
Manchester in 3.5 hours
Newcastle in 5 hours

HGV Isochrone Statsitics	2 hours	3 hours	4.5 hours
Total population seviceable	12.9m	30.9m	49.0m

Source: Gazeley

Technology is driving us forward

National logistics group harnesses the power of GPS tracking systems etc to deliver cost-effective transport and warehousing to its customers

SW Group Logistics is one of the UK's leading privately-owned logistics operators - leaving many of its competitors trailing behind by bringing leading-edge technology to everything it does.

By using technology - whether in-cab GPS systems, hand-held devices that record delivery times or CCTV in its depots - SW Group can offer its customers a more efficient, cost-effective service.

The firm has its head office within its Swindon depot with additional depots in Cricklade, Telford, Edinburth (in partnership with MSL) and has just opened a substantial depot in Leeds, which will enhance its operation in the North.

The company was established in the 1950s. The current chairman and chief executive Ken Knox has overseen its transformation from a small transportation business to a national logistics operator offering a comprehensive range of supply chain services to blue-chip clients. These include Schneider, Panasonic, Legrand, Becton Dickinson, Viesmann and Dragonfly Tea. It is also on Honda's preferred supplier list, operating a dedicated pick-and-pack parts area for a number of the car giant's key suppliers, including Yazaki.

Another specialist area is the ability to handle oversized pallets which are used in the electronics and computer industries, alongside standard gauge

pallets. It offers a service to companies in this sector which also delivers more efficient ways of working, with pallets being handled four times against 10 or 12 traditionally, which means less likelihood of damage to expensive hardware.

This is achieved by utilising its own national network and not putting freight into a national pallet network as used by competitors. This reduces handling damage and enables immediate response to customer queries through its traffic controllers and drivers.

While growth over the years has lifted the business into the top two per cent of UK logistics companies, it is still owned by the Knox family with Ken's son Richard now leading the company as managing director.

The family ethos continues in the business and provides it with financial stability, but it is its commitment to using technology to drive efficiencies and improve its service levels that sets it apart from its rivals.

Rob Gibson, the operations manager who is supporting efficiency improvements, said: "The key thing is we have full traceability of goods from beginning to end."

"Drivers are equipped with hand-held PDA devices which register the time of delivery and GPS systems and mobile phones in their cabs to update the company and customer on delivery status

"We know where our customers'



Pulling its weight: One of SW Group Logistics fleet of modern vehicles

goods are all times. Not many logistics firms have our level of integrated technology. We can say a truck is half an hour away, can talk to the driver and give the customers real-time information. We have information on the delivery and receipt of goods. We also have CCTV in all depots so can make constant checks on vehicle movements and stock.

"All this means we can offer great customer service, which is and always

has been the bedrock of the company's success."

SW Group's fleet of 40-plus trucks is maintained at its own workshop in Swindon while it also has a team of mobile mechanics to keep them on the road.

The company is also conscious of its environmental obligations. All its diesel-engined trucks run on AdBlue additive to reduce CO2 emissions. The use of technology when planning

delivery routes has also resulted in a reduction in journey times and fuel consumption to ensure a competitive environmentally-conscious approach to service is maintained.

Within the group, staff training plays a key role in its success. Some 90 per cent of all staff training occurs inhouse by accredited trainers who are actively involved in enhancing the skills of both drivers (CPC) and warehouse operatives.

Supply chain

SW Group Logistics has developed a range of services that extend beyond straightforward haulage and storage and add real value in the supply chain. These include adding value to product as it passes through the distribution channel; preparing product in readiness for the assembly line; quality assurance activities and product rework. SW is ISO 9002 accredited and so all activities have procedures and processes in place to ensure consistency of results and reliability and foster greater efficiency.

Product services:

- JIT automotive logistics
- Pre-assembly line production
- Product configuration and reconfiguration
- Product repairs
- Quality control
- Diagnosis and testing

Packaging services:

- Packaging postponement
- Contract packing
- Co-packing kitting and assembly
- Retail-ready point of sale display
- Labelling
- Bagging

Returns management:

- Faulty goods
- Damaged stock
- Parts service

Warehousing

The firm has more than 150,000 sq ft of modern, secure, food-grade warehousing at its disposal and can offer dedicated, shared-user and bonded warehousing of all product types, from raw materials to finished goods, palletised or non-palletised. It offers a comprehensive range of warehousing services, fully supported by the Freightdesk warehouse management system. In addition to traditional warehousing services, SW Group Logistics has developed a range of added-value services to provide customers with a total logistics package a one-stop shop whereby all aspects of the supply chain can be handled efficiently, effectively and speedily.

Warehouse services include:

- Dedicated, shared-user
- Inventory management supported by Trademan Warehouse Management System
- Order handling/processing/pick/packing
- Dispatch
- Secure premises, supported by manned security and CCTV
- Invoicing
- E-fulfilment
- Returns management
- Customs and Excise bonding
- Cross-docking
- Pallet/barcode scanning
- Decanting
- Pick/pack operations

Transportation

Fast, reliable, efficient transportation is clearly key in reducing supply chain costs and lead-times between manufacture and consumption. SW Group Logistics has a range of transport and distribution services which respond to local and national needs in this respect. It employs Trademans technology to optimise routing and scheduling; Tracker monitors consignments and maximizes driver/vehicle efficiency. SW Group Logistics is able to utilise its own fleet of state-of-the-art vehicles but also has a watertight contract with a leading leasing company which allows it to flex its vehicle needs to meet those of its customers.

Transport and distribution services:

- Local and national distribution
- Dedicated carriage
- Groupage services
- Network consolidation
- Palletised and non-palletised loads
- Containerised transportation
- Time defined deliveries (including next day)
- Fleet maintenance
- Oversized freight
- Full routing and scheduling via tmWare
- Web-based procurement and consignment tracking
- Intranet Ordering System
- Vehicle satellite tracking (Tracker)
- POD visibility via internet
- 24/7 transport and warehouse operation
- Members of the UKWA and RHA
- BS EN ISO 9002 accredited



For more information contact
SW Group Logistics Ltd
01793 523750
www.swgrouplogistics.co.uk

Deals Digest



Market House, Old Town

- The investment interest in Market House, Old Town, has been sold to a local investor for more than £550,000. Commercial agents Loveday and Loveday secured the sale of the property, which has around 16,000 sq ft of retail and office accommodation. Bradley Forbes of Loveday and Loveday said: "We are delighted that we have been able to secure the sale of this investment on behalf of our clients, especially in the current climate. This purchase offers the new owner an opportunity to increase the value of the property by actively managing the asset as the market continues to improve, albeit tentatively. I am sure this will prove to have been a worthwhile acquisition."
- On behalf of Tesco, Loveday and Loveday has let the ground floor 2,500 sq ft shop and premises at 43 High Street, Wootton Bassett, to M & P Cards, an expanding greetings card retailer. Joint letting agents were Johnson Fellows of Birmingham. This shop has been vacant for some time and it is therefore pleasing to bring about re-occupation in the present economic climate to an expanding retailer.
- 23/24 The Parade, Marlborough has been sold by Keningtons LLP on behalf of private clients off a guide price of £485,000. The property is a three storey Grade II listed building that has been thoroughly refurbished allowing the historic features to be enhanced, and benefits from six car parking spaces. The investment produces a annual rental income of £32,000. Murray Walker of Keningtons LLP said: "Marlborough continues to be a sought after location for occupiers and investors with superior values being achieved, particularly for character Listed Buildings with good car parking."

Children's play area operator moves into Spectrum building

Part of Swindon's iconic Spectrum building has been bought by Kidz About, the children's play area operator.

The firm, formed in Swindon in 2005 and previously based at Blagrove, is to transform the 20,000 sq ft former car showroom at the front of the building into a play area, with slides, a football pitch and other play equipment.

The space was used by original occupier Renault to showcase its latest models - including suspending them from the showroom's high ceiling.

Spectrum, designed by Sir Norman Foster, is viewed by academics and style experts as a classic example of 1980s industrial architecture.

Kidz About will share the building with car seat manufacturer TS Tech, which occupies the large warehouse behind the former showroom.



FACTFILE

- | | |
|--|--|
| Built: 1983 | Architecture in Europa (1986) |
| Architect: Sir Norman Foster | Description: "A technical milestone in 20th century architecture" Chris Abel, |
| Client: Renault | Architecture in Detail |
| Listing: Grade II | Technical feature: Warehouse space is supported by 360 tension bars. |
| Length: 288m | Trivia: Used as a location in the 1985 Bond film A View to a Kill as baddie Max Zorin's hideout |
| Height: 96m | |
| Awards: Financial Times Architecture Award (1984), Structural Steel Award (1984), Civic Trust Award (1984), Constructa Prize for Industrial | |

Property consultants donate time to charity

To mark 100 years in business, Alder King Property Consultants has given staff time off to support their chosen charity.

As part of this commitment, the firm's Swindon office spent a morning at Prospect Hospice in Wroughton. The team painted existing sheds and fences, dismantled pallets for recycling into planters and assisted with fence building.

Alison Williams, senior surveyor at Alder King said: "It was a great experience for us as a team to volunteer

at Prospect Hospice and help with the maintenance of the garden. The hospice provides vital care to patients and support to their families in Swindon, Fairford and Lechlade and is very important to our local community."

Prospect Hospice provides dedicated end of life care to patients at the hospice in Wroughton, in the Great Western Hospital, and in people's own homes. Last year the hospice helped more than 1,600 people living with cancer and other serious conditions at a cost of £5 million. To support the hospice, call 01793 813355.

Long-term security offered at Park House

Advertorial: In these difficult economic times, companies have enough worries without the disruption of having to relocate their office space at short notice.

Through its prestigious Park House office complex, GWE can offer the long-term security these businesses need.

Park House, a Grade II-listed building, combines period character with the latest technology, flexibility and first-class service. Its convenient location in central Swindon, coupled with GWE's long history of supplying office space to new and established businesses, makes Park House an ideal choice for companies.

Period properties with character and charm are hard to find in Swindon so Park House is ideal for companies looking to enhance their professional image with a prestigious office location.

Park House's experienced and professional staff are known for their welcoming and helpful manner

through their telephone answering and reception service.

Licences are available on a monthly basis and provide exceptional value for short or long-term requirements. Companies have the option to upgrade or downsize at no extra cost.

GWE has a wealth of experience in the creation and management of high-quality business centres across Southern England. A portfolio of properties from fully-serviced premises to workshop units appropriate for light industrial use are available. Premises include

Faringdon Business Centre and the Great Western One workshop units in Swindon.

Ian Larrard, director of the Initiative in Swindon and Wiltshire, GWE, said: "For more than 20 years we have been supporting businesses through the high and low points of the economy. Helping businesses in the current economic climate is crucial and by offering affordable, flexible accommodation, with no tie-ins or hidden costs, we are responding to our customer needs and providing an excellent, innovative service for all tenants."

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- Self-contained site
- Fitted 5 tonne overhead crane

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The Parade leads the way for town centre retail regeneration

Fashion retailer USC is the latest high street name to take space in Swindon's redeveloped Parade Shopping Centre.

USC is taking a combined total of 6,226 sq ft over two floors on a 10-year lease for its first store in the town. Developers Ignis and Shearer Property Group (SPG) have created 80,000 sq ft of new prime retail space in The Parade since redevelopment of the street's former Bhs store started last year.

A new 45,000 sq ft Bhs store opened recently and when USC opens next month it will trade alongside other high street names including Topshop, River Island and Monsoon.

River Island's 9,500 sq ft flagship outlet in the Ignis/SPG scheme has been chosen to trial its new store fit out.

The Parade, owned by UK Commercial Property Trust, has a total of 300,000 sq ft of retail space with national chains such as Debenhams, Peacocks and Superdrug.

David Rodger of Ignis said: "The retail line-up in the new development is especially strong. We will continue to invest in The Parade and further improvements are planned including upgrading the public realm."

Adam Markwell of SPG added: "Swindon has transformed itself recently and The Parade is at the centre of this new development."

Property adviser GVA and Lunson Mitchenall acted for Ignis and SPG while CBRE acted for USC.



Much needed revamp: New traders set up shop in Town Centre

Flexible lease on offer at Swindon business park Office available at Tri-Centre building

A prime office suite of 3,773 sq ft has been brought to the market at Units 53 to 54 Kembrey Park through letting agents Colliers International and Alder King.

Kembrey Park, which is home to a number of well known businesses including Motorola and Thames Water, is widely recognised as Swindon's premier business park with high quality offices and on site facilities including a hotel, a pub, a health club and a sandwich/coffee shop.

It is very well landscaped and 24-hour on-site security provides an impressive managed environment.

James Gregory, partner at Alder King, said: "Our clients have fitted the suite out to a high standard and therefore a future occupier can move in to a high quality office suite in a prime location almost immediately. They will also have the benefit of taking a flexible lease as only two years remains on the current lease but a new longer term could be negotiated with the landlord."

For further details about this prime office suite with 15 allocated car parking spaces, contact Alder King on 01793 615477 or Colliers International on 0117 917 2000.

A fifth-floor office suite has become available in Swindon town centre's landmark Tri-Centre office development.

Built in the 1980s for financial services group Allied Dunbar, the three-building scheme is now occupied by Zurich and Openwork - both of which have their roots in Allied Dunbar - and outsourcing group Capita.

Owners URS/Scott Wilson have appointed property consultants Alder King to let 8,277 sq ft in Tri-Centre 3. Alder King believes the suite will attract interest from a company in the professional services or corporate sector.

Alder King partner James Gregory said: "The Tri-Centre is a prestigious office address of excellent quality. The offices can be leased with or without furniture so an interested party can literally move straight in."

For further information contact James on 01793 428106 or visit www.alderking.com

In Gear

Four years of low-cost motoring

Honda is introducing four years free servicing and roadside assistance on a range of models to help drive down the cost of new car ownership. This offer is available on CR-Z, Insight and British-built Jazz (excluding Jazz Hybrid), Civic and CR-V orders until the end of September.



- Four years complimentary servicing and roadside assistance on wide range of models
- Lower monthly payments with four year finance options including a 0 per cent HP and 6.4 per cent PCP
- New Jazz now available from just £117 per month
- Honda Civic 1.4 Type S available from £12,995

Complimenting the free servicing and roadside assistance is a range of four year finance options designed to bring down the cost of a new Honda into lower monthly payments. A four year 0 per cent HP means a customer can drive away a new Jazz for only £117 per month or a Civic for £162.



E-type Britain's favourite sports car

The iconic Jaguar E-type – celebrating its 50th anniversary this year – has been voted the UK's favourite sports car by race-goers and classic car fans.

Almost 3,000 visitors to an on-line poll voted for their favourite from a list of 15 hopefuls. The E-type sprinted into an early lead and at the chequered flag had claimed nearly one in four votes to beat the evergreen Morgan into second place. The brutal TVR Griffith claimed the final podium spot in third.

The poll was run by the organisers of the Silverstone Classic, the world's largest classic motorsport festival which takes over the Northampton circuit over the weekend of 22-24 July.

"Britain is famous for its sportscars but until now no one has ever been able to say which one is the best. That's a long-running debate we have now put to rest," said Silverstone Classic event director, Nick Wigley.

And the result is fitting, for the E-type's birthday is being marked at this month's Silverstone Classic with two headline races with up to 58 examples taking to the grid. The organisers are also hoping to set a world record with a cavalcade of 1,000 road-going examples parading around the 3.66-mile long Grand Prix circuit.

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Chris Kane

Solicitor cheats death on ascent

Swindon lawyer Chris Kane believes he is lucky to be alive having collapsed during a charity climb of Mount Kilimanjaro.

The 49-year-old partner at Withy King was just 4,000 ft from the summit of Africa's highest peak when he lost consciousness from a combination of altitude sickness and acute dehydration.

A 20-man team strapped him to a stretcher and ran the 22 miles to the foot of the mountain, from where he was rushed by ambulance to the nearest hospital.

Chris, who was scaling the Tanzanian mountain as part of an organised fund-raising exercise for Help for Heroes, said: "The first I knew about what had happened was when I woke up 16 hours later in hospital with a drip in my arm. "I then learnt that I'd

lost consciousness and that medics had feared for my life as I was so seriously dehydrated."

Chris had been in training for months for the trek and was in peak physical condition. He already climbed 16,000 ft when his efforts came to an unexpected halt.

"I am feeling much stronger now and am very thankful to those who came to my aid," said Chris, who heads Withy King's dispute resolution department.

"I feel incredibly lucky – but also frustrated that I didn't reach the summit. I really wanted to reach the top with the rest of the climbers, both for my own personal goal and for those who sponsored me and donated to the cause. However, I am just happy to be

home safe." Despite not completing the climb Chris still raised more than £17,000 for the charity, which helps wounded service men and women.

He said: "I want to say a huge thank you to all of the firms that have sponsored me, especially considering the unexpected outcome!"

Help for Heroes is a brilliant charity and I am proud to have been able to raise money for such a worthy cause."

Chris was part of a 41-strong team including David Barnes, the former England Saxon rugby player and chairman of the Rugby Players' Association.

Donations can still be made by contacting Chris on 07976 573 013, email chris.kane@withyking.co.uk

Cultural attache launches business group to boost China-UK trade

Trade with China is being encouraged by a new business organisation launched by a group of Swindon firms.

The UK China Business Consortium supports Chinese companies considering investing in the UK and British companies looking to trade with or expand into Hong Kong and China.

The consortium comprises commercial law firm Clark Holt, commercial property experts Whitmarsh Lockhart, PR and marketing consultancy Vox and trademark and IP specialists Haseltine Lake, the only firm not based in Swindon.

The group was officially launched by Chinese cultural attache Li Zhang at Swindon's museum and art gallery to coincide with an exhibition of art from China never previously on public view.

Cutting the ribbon to open the exhibition, Mr Zhang welcomed the link-up, which he said would provide potential investors in both countries with expert advice.

This will be on corporate and commercial law and intellectual property protection in China and in Europe, expertise in commercial land and property, and support with PR, strategic relationships, corporate social responsibility and digital communications.

The event was attended by the Mayor of Swindon, councillor Ray Ballman, and members of the region's British and Chinese business communities.

Sue Pycroft of Vox said the consortium will help make doing business with Britain easier for Chinese companies who want to invest here.

"Clark Holt and Haseltine Lake are already highly experienced in doing business with China and have strong presences and ties there already, which is very helpful," said Sue, who with other members of the consortium visited the Pearl River Delta and Beijing last autumn as part of a UKTI-backed delegation.

"We strongly believe that the South West has a tremendous amount to offer new businesses, and China's emergence as a major global player brings exciting opportunities for companies such as ourselves involved in facilitating and promoting new commercial presences in the region."

UKTI market visit leader Chen Wu, who also attended the opening, welcomed the formation of the consortium.

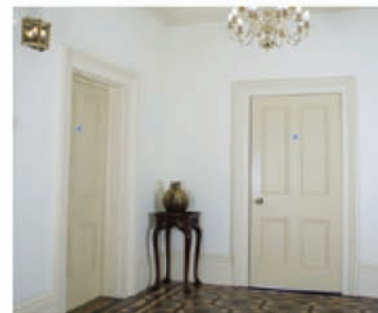
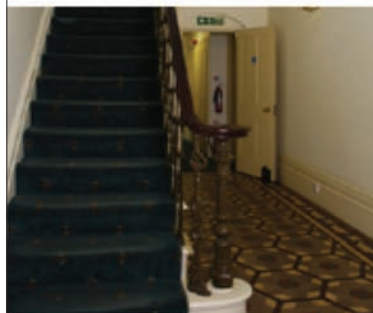
"The South West and Swindon has much to offer Chinese businesses in terms of investment opportunities, transport links, quality of commercial property and quality of life," said Chen.

* Art from China, a unique opportunity to see Chinese art owned by private collectors and never before shown in public, is a free exhibition at the Swindon Museum and Art Gallery, Bath Road, Old Town. It runs until August 13, 2011. www.uk-chinabusinessconsortium.com



▲ Jeremy Holt of solicitors Clark Holt, joins Chinese cultural attache Li Zhang at the launch where art from China never previously on public view is being displayed

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