

# Birmingham Business

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November/December 2024



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# The importance of a financial roadmap and plan

The world of investing can often be a volatile place and never more than in recent years. It is completely natural to react to the newspaper headlines and be absorbed by the sensationalism portrayed. If not rationalised, this can lead to poor financial decision making. It is at times like these however, when having a sound financial plan in place will help you stay on track to achieve your financial aspirations.

Here at Succession Wealth, we know that the path to financial wellbeing is different for everyone. This is why our services are tailored around your needs, aspirations, and dreams. We'll work with you to build a personal financial plan and a cashflow model that is bespoke to you and designed to help you achieve your individual ambitions.

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We use highly detailed, comprehensive cashflow modelling software to illustrate what might happen to your finances in the future. This critical element of the financial

planning process can act as a roadmap and can help you to become and remain financially well organised, determine your lifetime goals, and minimise tax liabilities. It focuses on where your money needs to go to when aiming to fulfil your future goals, ensuring that you are always thinking holistically.

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Do you want to build up an emergency fund, save for retirement, generate investments that will provide you with an income, growth, or all of the above?

Budgeting lies at the heart of any robust financial plan. Working together we create a budget that enables you to track your income, expenses, and savings diligently. This awareness fosters responsible spending habits and empowers you to make informed decisions and avoid the pitfalls of debt accumulation and financial strain.

## Planning for the future

A financial plan can act as a safeguard against unforeseen circumstances. Life is full of uncertainties, and having a contingency plan in place provides a financial buffer. Emergency funds, insurance protection and estate planning are integral components that can help

shield you and your family from the unexpected, providing a sense of security and peace of mind.

Investing wisely is another cornerstone of a comprehensive financial plan. By aligning investment strategies with individual goals, risk tolerance, and your time horizon, you can potentially grow wealth over time. A well-constructed investment plan diversifies risk, mitigating the impact of market fluctuations and ensuring a more resilient financial portfolio.

## Peace of mind

The benefits of a financial roadmap extend beyond individual wealth - a well-structured financial plan can provide a real sense of peace of mind. Knowing that there is a clear roadmap in place, tailored to your financial goals and circumstances, can help to alleviate the stress and uncertainty that often accompanies financial matters. It brings a reassuring calmness, offering confidence that you can face unexpected challenges or changes. This allows you to focus on daily life without the constant burden of financial anxiety.

In essence, a financial plan empowers individuals to take control of their financial destinies. Short-term objectives can be achieved while keeping the long-term vision in focus. The discipline instilled by such planning can not only help foster financial success but also promote a mindset of continuous improvement and adaptability in the face of economic and personal changes.

In conclusion, the importance of having a financial plan cannot be overstated. It serves as a compass, guiding individuals through the complexities of financial management. From budgeting and saving to investing and protecting against uncertainties, a well-crafted financial plan is an invaluable tool in navigating the path to financial prosperity.

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# Birmingham Business

## Welcome

Until the US presidential election results hogged the headlines, the talk of the town – certainly in business terms – was Labour's first Budget.

The Budget lived up to its billing as the most impactful in years – decades even – and even with the leaks and briefings, shockwaves were felt in parts of the business world as the new chancellor announced a raft of finance-raising measures.

Budgets are never ideal for everyone, and in the hours and days following, social media channels were humming with furious employers, especially those SME owners with a high staff count but whose already tight margins were about to be squeezed further by their NI contributions.

Over the following few pages we look at it in more detail with the help of respected and opinionated thought leaders.

The Budget's prospects formed part of an article written by our new columnist, Paul Faulkner. I couldn't be more pleased that this vastly respected business leader has joined our team of writers and look forward to reading his wise and insightful words for a long time to come.

The life sciences and healthcare sector in Birmingham is one which has quietly been holding its own against other better-know industry hotbeds for some time now.

This edition's cover story looks in detail at the creation of the UK's newest life sciences hub – the Precision Health Technology Accelerator – which is forming part of the first phase of the keenly anticipated Birmingham Health Innovation Campus.

The charismatic Professor Gino Martini heads the team behind the PHTA and he explains why he expects this state-of-the-art facility will bring enormous benefits both to the life sciences sector in the region and also healthcare in the country as a whole.

Another inspirational Birmingham figure who has had a major influence across various spectrums – media, charity, education, you name it – is Anita Bhalla. As part of his series profiling the figures behind some of the remarkable charities in the region, Jon Griffin meets Bhalla, the current CEO of B:Music and much more besides.

It has been an issue of contrast for Jon, who also thoroughly enjoyed interviewing the founder and boss of the region's largest security firm. Iain McCallister has quite a story to tell.

Our next edition will hitting the streets in January, so it only remains for me to wish you a very happy and healthy festive period, and here's to calm waters and growth for all in 2025.

By HENRY CARPENTER  
Editor

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talking point

talking point

Birmingham Business has been gauging the response of tax specialists and thought leaders to the chancellor’s measures announced on October 30, and get their opinions on

# What the Budget means for the business world



By BEVERLEY SCOTT and CHRIS BARLOW, partners at financial services firm MHA



“Uninspired.”

“Very safe.”

“Kicking the problem down the road.”

“Businesses are on pause.”

“Not as bad as it could have been.”

“Trying to please everyone and not really succeeding with anyone.”

These are just some of the reactions we heard from our clients in the days after Rachel Reeves sat down in the House of Commons having just revealed the details of the first Labour Budget for 14 years and indeed the first ever by a woman.

Our initial reactions were the same. This was a Budget aimed for the masses and it was pretty clear that businesses up and down the country were due to pick up the tab.

It’s been a long wait for Reeves and her team since the general election. At over 100 days it is apparently the longest gap ever and there was a huge relief from our clients that finally the speculation about the Budget is over.

## Least worst option

And most businesses did accept that something had to be done – they know there is a problem that needs to be fixed with the UK’s finances. And as accountants and tax advisers we see why the NIC increase for business was chosen to do much of the heavy lifting in terms of revenue raising. It’s easy to introduce and the current weakness of any political opposition to the Government means it will probably be accepted across the country as the least worst option.

Some of the worst scare stories around CGT and IHT have been watered down in some clever expectation management but there are still many wealth creators who will feel economic pain. Without doubt all of us hope that this is a one-off event.

## A triple whammy for business

But at a time when the economy needs growth and the government keeps talking about how to achieve growth

via investment it seems short sighted to hammer the very people who are going to provide that growth – entrepreneurs and business.

Hitting individuals with the funds to invest, as well as a triple whammy for business of an increase in NICs, a rise in the minimum wage and no expectation of a cut in corporate tax is not creating an environment to attract a wave of investment into the UK which the economy so keenly needs.

## What there was to like

That’s not to say we didn’t welcome aspects of the Budget. I could hear the sighs of relief from businesses across the West Midlands when we heard that HS2 would be going all the way to directly to Euston rather than a parking lot in north west London. And similarly, there was broad consensus that the extension of the Black Country metro could only benefit the region. And of course, as he’s an ex-accountant, we welcomed the new funding, expected to be worth hundreds

**“A common complaint we have heard these past few days is that despite this emphasis on long-term planning, too much of the policy initiatives that Reeves announced were subject to further consultations.”**

of millions of pounds, that will be given to Richard Parker and his executive in April 2025. It was good to see the West Midlands along with Manchester be the first two regions to access this cash.

Hauliers and others who work in our supply chains will also be pleased that Reeves didn't increase fuel duty as was widely feared.

And in general, we welcomed the emphasis on long term planning and the confirmation of the corporate tax road map from the chancellor – too much recent government thinking has been for the here and now and short-term political goals.

## The words were right but the actions were light

A common complaint we have heard these past few days is that despite this emphasis on long-term planning, too much of the policy initiatives that Reeves announced were subject to further consultations. Kicking the can further down the road is understandable when there is little money to pay for anything sparkly and new but it did seem that sometimes the Budget was all about the headlines and not about the actual detail. As our clients said at the beginning of this article, they fear that with a few exceptions Reeves was trying to please multiple audiences but ending up satisfying none.

## Manufacturing

We have already mentioned the triple whammy for companies across the UK. One particular concern that we have already had discussions with clients about is the proposal to close the gap between minimum wage paid to different ages of workers.

Given the decreasing incentive for an employer to hire more junior staff we feel this may have unintended consequences and be detrimental to the employment chances of younger people. And taken a stage further if the wage bill for employers overall is set to increase by more than 10% on average according to our calculations it may quicken further investment in AI with a potential consequential effect on employment.

Business owners across the UK have also been impacted by the changes to Business Asset Disposal Relief although the £1m threshold has been held meaning that it was not as bad as had previously been feared. The changes to business rates relief will again impact business owners as

will bringing pensions into Inheritance Tax thresholds.

However, there were some real missed opportunities. There were no changes to research and development or the Patent Box. The latter sits well with R&D and is a very generous relief but doesn't get used a great deal and could have been revamped to make it easier to access. At the same time though the announcement of a further commitment to skills has come as welcome news. We must hope that this will plug the widening skills gap that the manufacturing industry faces. The shortage of skills has been a perennial Achilles heel for manufacturers for years.

## Sector by sector

We could analyse every sector with a presence in the West Midlands. Instead, we have chosen to focus on four with resonance in Birmingham and the region. Manufacturing and wider industrial, construction, retail and the public sector.

## Industrial strategy is a silver lining

One silver lining that has been announced in recent weeks is further formalisation on the commitment to introduce an industrial strategy which also includes SMEs and significant spending commitments for aerospace, automotive and life sciences. Hopefully, this will encourage much-needed overseas investment that the UK manufacturing sector requires to allow it to grow to its full potential.

Manufacturers and commentators have long called for this to address long-held challenges within the sector relating to skills and the inability to plan long-term due to changing government priorities, taxation rules, including those relating to investment and R&D, and legislation (including that which affects trading with the rest of Europe).

## Housing on hold

In broad terms the Budget will have come as welcome news broadly to the construction industry. It has kickstarted a programme for much-needed affordable housing and infrastructure as Rachel Reeves has highlighted both areas as a priority for the Labour government. That said our clients will be awaiting further announcements on Labour's Housing Strategy that is due to be announced in the Spring, particularly as

construction was omitted as one of the eight key growth sectors in the industrial strategy we have referred to above.

## Retail

While manufacturing and construction found plenty to like in the Budget the same could not be said for retail. Particularly given that the UK already has higher business rates compared to most of Europe and a bricks and mortar model already struggling against online competitors, the reduction in the business rates discount from 75% to 40% from April 2025 will increase pressure on the sector. Given that these businesses by their nature employ more staff, the increase in employers NI and increase in minimum wage will only exacerbate the situation.

Combine all these factors with a possible fall in consumer confidence as many feel their disposable income has fallen (real or perceived), we are concerned that the current hollowing out of many of our city centres including Birmingham will only become more exaggerated with smaller retailers especially being unable to weather the storm. We do run the risk that we have a young generation growing up who will miss out on the in-person shopping experience that a healthy and diverse High Street can provide.

Nor will 1p off a pint lead to any meaningful recovery in the leisure and nightlife in the region. Again, the twin challenges of higher wage bills for employers and a cost of living crisis that has only reduced rather than evaporated mean a sector under severe pressure.

## Public sector

The real winner of the first Labour Budget for the first 14 years was unsurprisingly the public sector. Birmingham has some of the best and most well-known hospitals in the country and they and their staff would surely have welcomed the major new investments planned for the NHS by the Chancellor. Other public sector workers will similarly be buoyed by the big-ticket announcements on transport and infrastructure.

## The devil is in the detail

So, plenty to appreciate for local business but an awful lot to have concerns about. It's an old cliché but it really does seem like the devil will be in the detail. Will the Birmingham corporate world give Reeves the benefit of the doubt?

Come back next Halloween.

# For business owners and individuals



By DAWN OLIVER and  
BRADLEY QUIN, partners  
at law firm Ladders



The chancellor says the measures set out in the Budget aim to 'restore economic stability' and will help rebuild Britain by boosting public investment by over £100 billion over the next five years. Some of these changes will come as shock to business owners, many of whom will be heavily impacted by the £40 billion worth of tax rises announced. However, with change comes opportunity and through early, judicious planning, there are ways businesses can structure their affairs to mitigate the impact of the changes and preserve business continuity across the generations.

## Key changes for businesses

As well as the notable increase in employers' National Insurance contributions, from 13.8% to 15% from April 2025 and the very significant reduction in the threshold at which its payable (from £9,100 to £5,000), the government announced a significant reduction in Business Relief (BR, formerly known as Business Property Relief) and Agricultural Property Relief (APR). In a major shift impacting many family-owned businesses and farms, 100% relief will be restricted to the first £1 million and thereafter assets over £1 million will get 50% relief, with an effective rate of inheritance tax (IHT) at 20%.

The measures, which will take effect from 6 April 2026, will apply not only to charges on individuals' deaths but also affect lifetime transfers into trusts or gifts to individuals, where the donor does not survive for seven years, in addition to decennial and other charges for relevant property trusts.

According to the government, the changes are not expected to affect almost three quarters of estates claiming Agricultural Property Relief and the majority of estates claiming Business Relief in 2026 and 2027. Specifically, the reforms are expected to affect around 2000

estates each year from 2026 to 2027. These figures are being challenged by bodies representing those affected (such as the NFU), which contend that far more families will feel the impact.

It is important therefore that all businesses likely to be affected take prompt action to ensure they are not included in these statistics. Another change for business owners is the increase in Capital Gains Tax from 20% to 24% for higher rate taxpayers and from 10% to 18% for basic rate taxpayers. Some commentators feel that the modest rise in Capital Gains Tax is the first of further rises.

The Capital Gains Tax rate under Business Asset Disposal Relief (BADR, formerly Entrepreneurs' Relief), will remain at 10% this year, rising to 14% from April 2025 and 18% in 2026. The measure means that business owners with plans to sell may look to do this sooner rather than later, before the tax rate under BADR almost doubles by 2027. It is crucial, however, that business owners do not rush into the sale of a business. Specialist legal advice and support is essential from the due diligence stage, right the way through to completion.

## Planning opportunities

In light of the changes announced, businesses will need to prioritise succession planning, particularly for assets exceeding £1 million, by considering transfers to the next generation at least 7 years before death to maximise inheritance tax efficiency, rather than relying on passing assets via a will.

Evaluating partnership and company structures may also facilitate a smooth transition of equity in the business, whilst preserving some level of control and potentially, income, for the parents through appropriate share structures.

For married couples, there may be the option to restructure wills to ensure that assets qualifying for APR or BR on the first death pass directly to the next generation

rather than to the surviving spouse, thereby minimising the value held in the latter's estate.

Equalising business assets between spouses may also help secure relief on the first death and maximise the overall available reliefs. Indeed, never has the equalisation of estates between a married couple been more important, even in cases where the spouse is not working in the business.

Moreover, lifetime gifts or trusts are likely to be at the forefront of tax planning going forward.

Gifts of business assets during your lifetime may offer an effective vehicle for transferring them to the next generation in a tax-efficient manner, whilst ensuring continuity and control. An alternative to family trusts is Family Investment Companies (FICs). These are private limited companies established with the purpose of managing family wealth and are emerging as a popular inheritance tax planning strategy amongst high-net-worth families.

## Early is better

Whilst we await the finer detail of the new announcements, the main takeaway is that businesses need to consider succession and estate planning earlier than ever before, with a greater focus on lifetime planning rather than a reliance on transferring assets via wills.

The Budget certainly brings challenges for business owners and will require re-evaluation of existing estate and succession plans. However, with appropriate preparation at an early stage, many of the potential inheritance tax liabilities can be managed and mitigated in such a way as to reduce the overall liability.

## About the authors

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HOSPITALITY

# Hospitality at Villa Park

## Aston Villa unveils newly refurbished and expanded experiences

On the heels of a historic season on the pitch, Aston Villa Football Club is offering newly refurbished premium hospitality spaces throughout Villa Park. The wide array of offerings means fans and corporate guests have more options and more ways to indulge in top-tier amenities befitting the world-class football club that we are.

These stunning spaces are setting a new standard in hospitality, honouring Aston Villa's rich heritage with a modern vision that elevates matchday hospitality and redefines how fans experience Villa Park.

Most importantly, we have something for everyone. Our variety of hospitality options provides fans with greater choice than ever before, from traditional seating to bespoke luxury suites and immersive GA+ experiences.

"We're thrilled to unveil our newly refurbished hospitality areas at Villa Park," said Laura Worsley, Aston Villa's Head of Hospitality. "These spaces are designed to give fans more choice and flexibility, whether they want a high-end, exclusive experience or something more relaxed and communal. Villa Park has always been a place where fans come together, and our new hospitality options reflect that tradition while enhancing it for the modern era."

### The Aston

One of the standout offerings in this new development is The Aston, a beautifully appointed hospitality suite that epitomises sophistication. The Aston captures the spirit of Villa Park, with interiors that celebrate the club's heritage while presenting a contemporary aesthetic. With views of the pitch and the iconic Holte End, The Aston offers a VIP experience that is



second to none, promising a memorable setting for fans who want an immersive and luxurious matchday experience.

Alongside The Aston, Aston Villa has reimagined the matchday experience with innovative General Admission Plus (GA+) experiences, including The Terrace View, The Cells, and The Lower Grounds. These spaces cater to fans who seek an elevated atmosphere with added comfort and amenities, offering new ways to enjoy the game that go beyond a traditional seat.

### The Terrace View

The Terrace View brings fans close to the action while offering an immersive and lively atmosphere. This space, with access to the Holte Terrace at Villa Park, includes a large bar, ample seating, and a relaxed vibe ideal for groups and families looking to make the most of their matchday. It combines a modern terrace experience with Villa's renowned service, providing stunning views and an electric atmosphere.

### The Cells

For fans who want a unique, historic setting, The Cells is an inspired choice. Named after its origins as a holding cell area within Villa Park's foundation, The Cells offer a raw, industrial design blended

with modern amenities. This area is perfect for fans seeking a distinctive backdrop that fuses history and contemporary comfort. Each detail in The Cells reflects the club's storied past, creating a one-of-a-kind experience that appeals to both new and lifelong Villa supporters.

### The Lower Grounds

Located in the lower concourse of the Holte End, The Lower Grounds offer a welcoming, open environment with additional seating and concessions. This area is designed with flexibility in mind, allowing fans to gather, socialise, and share the excitement of the game. It provides a vibrant matchday setting for fans who prefer a more casual hospitality experience while still enjoying exclusive Villa Park comforts.

**The Aston, The Terrace View, The Cells, and The Lower** enrich the matchday experience, ensuring Villa Park remains an iconic destination for fans, families, and corporate guests.

We're committed to elevating the matchday experience here at Villa Park. We want to preserve our historic stadium and its legacy, all while building a world-class club and hospitality offerings to match.



advertisement feature

# Preventing harassment in the workplace

A new law has come into force requiring UK employers to take proactive steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace.

Ranjit Dhindsa (pictured), Birmingham office leader at law firm Fieldfisher is urging businesses to prepare for these changes to avoid potential legal and reputational risks.

The Worker Protection (Amendment of Equality Act 2010) Act 2023 introduces a new duty for employers to take 'reasonable

steps' to prevent sexual harassment of their employees.

"While the new duty may seem like a minor change, employers will be required to conduct much more than a box-ticking exercise," said Mrs Dhindsa.

"They must instil a culture of prevention and demonstrate tangible efforts to protect their employees. Otherwise, the organisation could not only face financial penalties, but also reputational damage."



# Funding boost for future female business leaders

A new accelerator has been created to provide a boost to the next wave of high-growth female-led start-ups.

The Fortuna Fellowship will see up to five female-led ventures potentially secure a share of £2 million investment.

The West Midlands Co-Investment Fund, which is managed by Midven, will provide £1 million as part of the programme's commitment to local female entrepreneurs.

Delivered in partnership with The 51% Club – a peer community to help the region's female founders scale – and other key partners, the Fortuna Fellowship will see the successful founders embark on a comprehensive 12-month growth programme.

Each will be paired with a mentor to support them as they take part in a tailored programme of workshops and

masterclasses delivered by industry experts.

Rupert Lyle, fund principal for the West Midlands Co-Investment Fund at Midven, said: "We are excited to launch the Fortuna Fellowship and provide a platform for talented female founders to thrive.

"Our goal is to empower these entrepreneurs and help them achieve their full potential with a programme that's designed to accelerate the growth of their businesses.

"This is unlike anything delivered before in the region and we want this to be a platform for more female-led businesses to thrive. Ahead of launching applications in January, we are reaching out to the region's ecosystem to come on board as investors and partners in this game-changing accelerator."



**Pictured from left are Liz Hobster of Midven, The 51% Club's Tara Attfield-Tomes, and Rupert Lyle, Midven**

# Investment secured for growth

Midlands law firm FBC Manby Bowdler has secured a £30 million investment to fund plans to double its size in the next 18 months.

The cash injection from Horizon Capital will fuel the expansion, which includes the creation of approximately 20 new jobs and the opening of a new office in Knowle.

FBC Manby Bowdler CEO Neil Lloyd (pictured) said the investment will further position the firm as a key player in the Midlands' legal sector.

"We are really excited about this investment which not only allows us to maintain our growth trajectory but also creates exciting opportunities for our people and clients.

"We will be broadening our range of services and this allows us to create centres of expertise across our expanded network.

"For our lawyers and trainees, this expansion means greater mobility within the firm. They will have the opportunity to work across different offices and specialities, gaining diverse experience to support their career progression."



**The Solihull BID team**

# Resounding support for Solihull BID

Solihull Business Improvement District will continue until at least 2030 after receiving resounding support from its business community.

Over 450 companies were balloted about the continuation of the not-for-profit business-funded organisation which was originally set up in 2010.

The BID received 93% backing by total number of votes and 96% support by rateable value of all properties that voted.

Melanie Palmer, chief executive of Solihull BID, said: "We are thrilled to be given the opportunity to serve the businesses and people of Solihull for a fourth term.

"The BID team and I are excited to start work on delivering five more years of projects that retain the status of Solihull at the forefront of success."

# Support available for older entrepreneurs

A dedicated new business support programme is coming to Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country with the aim of unleashing the potential of older entrepreneurs.

Silver Founders is looking to help 60 people aged 50-plus to start or develop their own business by giving them access to specialist advice and guidance.

Delivered by Oxford Innovation Advice, the five week in-person course will create an environment where like-minded people can work together to boost skillsets, explore sales and marketing, and understand different funding options they can tap into.

Vernon Hogg (pictured) of Oxford Innovation Advice said: "There are so many good ideas, so much experience and so

much business passion among the over-50s that goes unnoticed – that's why we wanted to create Silver Founders and bring it to potential entrepreneurs or early-stage firms in Birmingham, Solihull and the Black Country.

"We have put together a bespoke five weeks of in-person learning for up to 20 people per cohort. It is designed to walk them through the journey of turning an idea into a business and, for those already doing it, the opportunity to explore how they can grow quicker."

Silver Founders has been launched as part of Business Growth West Midlands Investment Readiness Programme and is funded by the West Midlands Combined Authority.



# National centre plans in discussion

A report on new plans to create a national centre of excellence for musical theatre in Birmingham are being discussed with local business leaders.

Southside Business Improvement District – which includes Birmingham Hippodrome Theatre within its boundaries – has been asked to provide input into a feasibility study looking at turning the idea into reality.

The study into a possible National Centre for Musical Theatre has been

commissioned by the Hippodrome, Arts Council England, Birmingham City Council, West Midlands Combined Authority, Birmingham City University and Royal Birmingham Conservatoire.

Julia Robinson, manager of Southside BID, said: "This is a very exciting development, not only for our area, but for Birmingham and the rest of the country as well.

"Birmingham has a very rich tradition of live theatre, not only on our doorstep with

the Hippodrome, but throughout the rest of the city centre. A National Centre for Musical Theatre would be ideally located in Birmingham.

"From Southside's perspective, we have a strategic ambition to drive sustainable development to provide new spaces for cultural businesses especially on Thorp and Station Streets, where there are currently cultural heritage buildings at risk. It is good for us and the entire city, so everyone wins."

# Profit in protection

If there was once an unfair stereotype of the security industry being run by dodgy, musclebound individuals, it is utterly dispelled by Iain McCallister, the boss of the region's largest security firm. This award-winning entrepreneur explains to JON GRIFFIN how he has grown his business into a multi-million-pound enterprise.

Pictured: Iain McCallister, right, with promoter Frank Warren

For a man who has rubbed shoulders with the likes of Mike Tyson, The Rolling Stones, The Who, Oasis and others, Iain McCallister is refreshingly dismissive of stardom.

Or as the 58-year-old former boxer explains: "Being starstruck is not me at all."

That's not entirely surprising as McCallister is – if he'll permit the description – a star in his own right, not that he is likely to see it that way.

This is a man who over the course of more than 30 years has established the biggest privately-owned security business in the West Midlands, employing 1,700 staff and generating a turnover of around £67 million annually.

Over three decades MAN Commercial Protection has mushroomed from humble beginnings back in the 1990s to become one of the region's undoubted business success stories, providing security for clients ranging from the aforementioned Stones to Taylor Swift, from guarding the Queen's funeral to the King's coronation.

It's a success story that may have gone under the radar for the average man in the street – McCallister himself describes MAN's growth as "an overnight success after 31 years". But the security firm's well-appointed 12,500 sq ft offices on an industrial estate in Shirley tell their own story of a company which has earned its stripes over time to establish an enviable reputation in what is still regarded as a volatile sector by often ill-informed outsiders.

McCallister himself learnt his trade the hard way, working for seven years as a doorman at one of Birmingham's best-known nightclubs of the 1980s, the famed Liberty's on Hagley Road.

It was an apprenticeship that has clearly served him and MAN well as he contemplates the extraordinary staying power and longevity of a proud family enterprise which today boasts clients throughout the UK from Aberdeen to Poole.

And the photographic evidence of MAN's roster of star names dotted around the Shirley premises also tells its own colourful story of a West Midlands firm with a hard-earned international reputation, protecting the likes of Frank Warren, Amir Khan, Mike Tyson, rock-and-roll royalty and dozens of other clients in the corporate world.

And whilst MAN has rarely hit the headlines in the same way as the likes

of Rover, Cadbury, HP Sauce, Aston Villa and Birmingham City football clubs, it has for decades more than punched above its weight – an apt expression perhaps given the firm's long-standing links to the world of boxing – in the highly competitive world of security.

The firm's story has its roots in County Down, Northern Ireland, birthplace of McCallister's parents, before his father Sam migrated to Birmingham to take up a job with the police in the mid-1960s.

McCallister recalls: "My dad stayed over here in the police all the way through to 1993, when he retired. My background was that I boxed to a good level. I was sparring with the likes of Roy Skeldon, known as the Tipton Slasher, who was the Midlands light heavyweight champion.

"In the early 90s I was doing well with security work, prior to starting MAN. I worked at Liberty's on the Hagley Road for seven years, manning the doors. At the time it was the best club in the city; it was known as the Stringfellows of Birmingham.

"I had to make a decision. In 1993 when my dad retired from the police he said 'we need to get you off the doors, why don't we set up a security firm?'

"We started trading in Hall Green in 1993 in an office a quarter the size of this. We never had any funding. We never had people investing in us. We had to start on the ground. For the first three or four years I was working nights on sites trying to get the business started."

The firm, named after the original founders Sam McCallister, Dave Atkins and Johnny Neighbour, gradually picked up contracts as it fought to establish itself – and fortunes improved still further thanks to Brum rock band Ocean Colour Scene.

"In 1995 my dad and I went to meet a guy called Chris Cradock, who had been in the police with my dad in Solihull," says McCallister.

"Chris's son was Steve Cradock, who was in Ocean Colour Scene. They said 'we are going out on tour in 1996, would Iain come and do the security?'

"I said 'Yes, 100 per cent'. Ocean Colour Scene went out on a big UK tour and then to America, Japan and Canada, and I looked after them all the way through."

This proved something of a game-changer for MAN, whilst around the same time the Birmingham firm linked up with another star name in the shape of world-renowned boxing promoter Frank Warren,





McCallister has become a star in his own right

still a client to this day.

McCallister looks back on those early years with wry amusement. “In those days in 1996 there wasn’t even the internet. We have got very young sales people who work for us now and they have tools like LinkedIn, Instagram and other social media platforms.

“When I went out on tour you had basically got the Yellow Pages and very, very little other knowledge with regards to trying to get more business.”

But even if his younger self had only his business acumen and determination – alongside the Yellow Pages – to drive the company further, the stars would soon become part of the MAN business portfolio.

In his trademark matter of fact style, the ex-boxer turned chief executive officer can reel off a string of household names who have relied on the Solihull firm for protection.

“With the Rolling Stones, we supported them with Ocean Colour Scene, we did the Bridges to Babylon tour. We did them at the old Wembley with the Twin Towers. With the Stones we had the pit and the stage at Wembley, about 100 of our staff were involved.

“We worked a lot with Oasis and The Who, we did the Quadrophenia tour; I worked with Daltrey and Townshend.

“We have done some big fights at Wembley. We looked after Tyson Fury in 2022, we have done six Saudi shows in the last 12 months. In September we did Anthony Joshua versus Daniel Dubious at Wembley. But boxing is less than 10

per cent of our business – it makes us different from our competitors – but it’s what 80 per cent of people want to talk about.”

So how does a hard-nosed character who once boxed and worked the doors at nightclubs adapt to handling the fragile egos of rock stars and the like?

McCallister chuckles with a deadpan response: “I worked with Mike Tyson, didn’t I?” Enough said . . .

“And we deal directly with the promoters – it always comes back to the

**“This is a story that is going to continue. We are now in our 31st year and we still have customers like Bristol Street Motors who were customers in the beginning.”**

promoters. Occasionally we mix with the stars but it’s a small part of the business that a lot of people like to talk about.

“We did Amir Khan’s wedding, the biggest Hello magazine wedding ever at the time. There were 4,000 wedding guests, a 16-foot wedding cake, helicopters and super cars.

“We were involved in the Queen’s funeral and the King’s coronation. We have a contract where we continue to work with Wembley – in the last 12 months we have done all the Taylor Swift shows and Coldplay.”

But it’s not all Taylor Swift and the Stones for MAN. “We look after distribution centres, we look after a lot of managing agents. If you walk into a building today on Colmore Row one of our officers could be in there working on reception.

“We look after different supply chain manufacturers, we look after firms from Pets at Home to the company that did the Covid vaccine. Those are the core MAN guarding hours, the contracted hours.”

But whilst McCallister can look back with considerable satisfaction on an undoubted West Midlands business success story – MAN recently picked up the Solihull Business of the Year accolade

and an Excellence in Training gong at the Solihull Awards 2024 – he would still like to see greater awareness and understanding of the security industry as a whole.

“A lot of people still have the wrong image of the security business, 100 per cent. I do after-dinner talks and podcasts and I always say the same thing – if you ever watch EastEnders or Coronation Street or Emmerdale and they have got a security guard featured, they always play on the fact that he’s up to no good – a drug dealer or in trouble. They never portray the good part of the business.”

To that end, McCallister is keen to stress the steps the security sector has taken in recent years to improve its public image and educate the man in the street about an industry too often associated in the past with violence and intimidation.

“We got involved two years ago with the British Security Industry Association to try to increase the profile of the industry. People don’t realise how important this industry is. You go to the airport, you have to go through security . . . going into different shops, retail, it’s all about security.

“In the old days you didn’t have to be licensed. Nowadays every single person has to be licensed. You have to do the training, you have to pass your licence. We have to do counter-terrorism training and first-aid training which a lot of people don’t realise. In 2023 we opened our training academy.”

McCallister is clearly impressed with the steps his industry has taken to shake off its outdated image.

“The industry has massively changed for the better. It has brought better people in and is providing more training – years ago security officers didn’t have to be first-aid trained.

“We are always looking at taking on the best in class, getting new people. It is



With Russian fighter Dmitry Bivol

great for me now because I am 58 and I see people working in my office who are as young as 19 or 20.”

And as new generations join the MAN family to play their own part in the 30-year-plus progress of this highly distinctive West Midlands group, McCallister is looking to a future of further growth and prosperity.

“This is a story that is going to continue. We are now in our 31st year and we still have customers like Bristol Street Motors

who were customers in the beginning.

“I was very proud that we had a great function last year to mark 30 years. I got Andy Bennett out of Ocean Colour Scene to come and do eight songs for us.

“But we are nowhere near where we want to be. I have just finished my year-end accounts to September 30 and our current turnover is £67 million, but we are actively looking at acquisitions.

“I want to get to that £100 million turnover.”



McCallister with Fabio Wardley



Working with Ocean Colour Scene proved a turning point for MAN Commercial



Iain and Traci McCallister at MAN’s 30th anniversary party

# A growing partnership with Mexico

Former Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce president Deb Leary has been appointed as Birmingham and the West Midlands' inaugural honorary consul to Mexico.

The appointment – made by Mexico's ambassador to the UK, Her Excellency Josefa Gonzalez-Blanco Ortiz-Mena, and approved by the Mexican government – is the first of its kind for Birmingham and the West Midlands.

It cements the growing partnership between the region and Mexico, which was forged during Mrs Leary's spell as GBCC president between 2021 and 2023.

Mrs Leary – the founder of threat intelligence specialists Forensic Pathways and a scale-up director in the GBCC's Innovate UK Edge team – will serve as a conduit between the West Midlands and Mexico in a bid to create economic, academic and cultural opportunities.

In addition, as president of the UK Women in Diplomacy Network, the ambassador presented Deb with a certificate of recognition in honour of her "unwavering commitment to fostering bilateral relations between Mexico and the UK, as she continues to inspire and empower women". "I am absolutely honoured to be

appointed Honorary Consul to Mexico," said Mrs Leary.

"Over the past three years the relationship between Birmingham, West Midlands and Mexico has grown significantly.

"Both myself and the ambassador recognise the growing opportunities for trade, collaboration and innovation.

"The UK is an island, but we should never have island mentality. In the world of global connectivity and global challenge, we are stronger together."

Birmingham and the West Midlands' relationship with Mexico has grown thanks to a programme of activities between the GBCC and the Mexican Embassy in London.

Mark Smith, president of the Global Chamber, said: "I would like to congratulate Deb Leary on her appointment.

"Having an honorary consul for Mexico in the region sends the strongest positive message to West Midlands businesses that the ambassador and her country are serious about cementing business connections."

**Pictured: Her Excellency Josefa Gonzalez-Blanco Ortiz-Mena and Deb Leary**



news

interview



## What will the Budget mean for your business – and your family?

At Lodders, we're experts in helping businesses – and families with businesses – navigate the changing economic landscape that always follows a budget. Talk to us today about the best ways to protect the rewards of all your hard work and investment in the future, in business and in life.



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# A tale of Tenacity

Few people in the region are as well known, or respected, across as broad a spectrum of industries as Anita Bhalla. JON GRIFFIN meets this charismatic leader who has left an indelible mark on commercial, cultural, charitable and media organisations over the last four decades.

Anita Bhalla is reflecting with considerable pride and affection on her upbringing in 1960s suburban Birmingham.

“When I go and speak to students they all assume I went to public school, but I grew up in Selly Oak,” she says.

“My dad came here in 1963, the rest of us in '64. I was very small when I came here so I consider myself a Birmingham girl. I grew up, went to school here so I am a Brummie through and through.”

That Birmingham girl has made quite an impact on the West Midlands and further afield since she and her five siblings arrived from Kenya in an era of often volatile race relations as post-war Britain opened its doors to waves of immigrants seeking new lives thousands of miles from their birthplaces.

Today, 60 years later, she chairs two of Birmingham’s most prominent institutions – B:Music, the charity responsible for world-renowned artistic landmarks Symphony Hall and Town Hall – and Birmingham City University, the city’s second biggest campus with 33,000 students and 5,000 staff.

Over the course of a distinguished broadcasting career she was one of the pioneers behind the BBC’s Asian Network, helping turn the spotlight on an often thriving community previously ill-served by radio, television and the mainstream media in general.

Those sorts of high-profile roles – and several others she has held – would not have come her way had Bhalla not been determined to ruffle feathers along the way, including some members of the ethnic communities who had arrived in Britain in their tens of thousands in the same decade as her eight-strong family.



Anita Bhalla as a BBC correspondent in the late 1990s

Recalling her late 1970s pre-broadcasting days as a community relations officer in Leicester – then a hotbed of racial tension stoked by the far-right National Front in the face of a wave of immigration from Asia in particular – Bhalla proudly remembers the battles she once fought.

“I offended so many people. The Asian community because I was teaching our girls to run away, and the National Front smashed our offices. Asian men with placards demanded that I be sacked because they thought I was corrupting their girls.

“I offended everybody for trying to do what I thought was right – but that’s fine because it was for a good cause.”

It is now nearly 50 years since she took on adversaries as diverse as the National Front and intransigent Asian fathers in the name of good causes, and the Nairobi-born daughter of 60s immigrants is still taking up the cudgels on behalf of causes close to her heart.

Inspired by her parents’ example – her father became a shop steward at a Birmingham battery factory and her mother worked on the shopfloor at Cadbury’s – Bhalla’s character was forged on the streets of Selly Oak, long before she was stalking the corridors of power at the BBC and high-profile Birmingham institutions.

“My father had decided to take a bold step so we left our gorgeous house in Kenya and came to Selly Oak to live in a two up and two down. He came to Birmingham thinking naively he was going to get a job in an office or as a civil servant.

“But the only job he got was at Birmingham Battery, a foundry in Selly Oak, notorious for a really poor health and safety record. Because my dad could speak English he became a shop steward.

“In those days the new migrants hadn’t really settled and created networks, so our tiny house was always full of people coming to my dad for advice. My dad had a big, big heart.

“He would go around collecting students at Birmingham University who

didn’t have families here. On a Sunday night in our little terraced house my dad would go to the fish and chip shop and sit with the students who had arrived, and we would watch our little black and white telly.

“People ask why I get involved in charity and voluntary work . . . watching my father do what he did was amazing.”

The young Anita was similarly inspired by her mother’s determination to provide a secure family life and a good education for her six children.

“New to this country and managing all kinds of things, including racism, she brought up six of us in a terraced house.

“I remember one day my mum had stones thrown at her and her head was cut. But she was a fierce, fiery woman. Nothing was going to get to her.”

Ignoring her career teacher’s advice that she should become a traffic warden or a nurse, Bhalla trained as a teacher

**“I offended everybody for trying to do what I thought was right – but that’s fine because it was for a good cause.”**

at Birmingham University’s School of Education but would eventually cut her teeth in the workplace as a community relations officer in Leicester. There, she took on the likes of the National Front while fighting for the often neglected rights of young Asian women and Afro-Caribbean youths from poverty-stricken households.

Leicester’s loss became Birmingham’s gain when Bhalla returned to her adopted home city as a community worker in Handsworth, helping to set up a hostel for Asian girls and women. By then she had caught the attention of the BBC – and a 26-year association with Auntie was born as the community activist brought her vision and energy to the world of broadcasting, initially with the then BBC Radio Birmingham.

“I was presenting Asian programmes,” she says. “Our two-hour show used to get sackfuls of letters. But they didn’t take us

seriously until the BBC needed to find a way to develop Asian programmes, and I was offered the job of setting up the Asian Network here in the mid 1980s.

“I left the community worker’s job in Handsworth, thinking I was going to the BBC for six months to set up the Asian Network. I stayed for 26 years.”

More than a quarter of a century later, Bhalla is fiercely proud of the legacy of the BBC Asian Network. “I literally picked young people from the streets and trained them. It was the only way to find them. There were previously no young people from Asian backgrounds. Birmingham was at the cutting edge of all Asian programmes, TV and radio.”

Ever the pioneer and glass ceiling demolition exponent, she caused something of a stir within BBC circles when she refused to wear a sari on screen.

“I was brought in to represent young people and provide a young voice,” says Bhalla. “I didn’t wear saris and did my broadcasting in English.

“The producer told me later we used to get some horrendous mail from Asian men saying “take her off, she is corrupting our young people, she doesn’t wear our clothes, she doesn’t speak in our language”. I have kind of spent time offending people in my life, but all in a good cause.”

Other high-profile roles followed at the BBC, from a bi-media correspondent for TV and radio before climbing the ladder to head of political and community affairs for England and head of Public Space Broadcasting UK.

During her 26 years with the BBC, Bhalla had also worked in various civic roles. These included long-serving chair of the Midlands Arts Centre – where she helped oversee a £17.5 million fundraising effort to transform a rundown facility – a school governor, working with an Asian Resource centre and other civic duties. But she finally left the clutches of the BBC to join Andy Street as a board member at the Greater Birmingham and Solihull LEP to help champion the creative industries.

She would eventually become chair of the LEP and remains saddened by its recent demise. “It’s folly, it’s a mess. In this region we had one of the best functioning LEPs with money even at the end when I had to wind the organisation down. We were solvent, we left a legacy.”

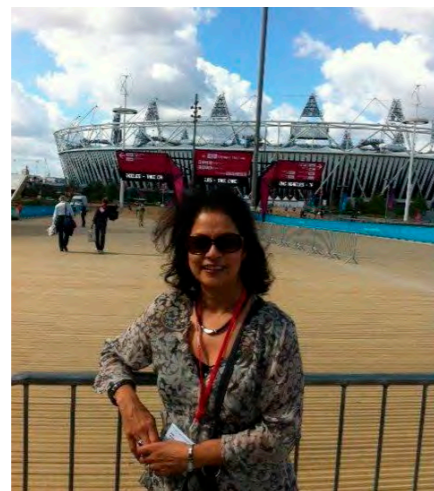
But with the closing of doors at the LEP



In Wolverhampton on Remembrance Day as high sheriff



During her year as high sheriff, she encouraged young people to play sport



Bhalla was head and editor of public space broadcasting for the BBC across the UK. Here she is in front of the Olympic Stadium



We are really pleased to announce that Paul Faulkner has joined Birmingham Business as a regular columnist.

In the unlikely event that an introduction is needed, Paul's career has seen him head organisations the size of Nottingham Forest and Aston Villa football clubs, and Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce. He has also held a senior role with the Richardson family group, and is co-founder of business consultancy Element45.

So we welcome Paul's astute business-related observations and the occasional words of advice he might offer . . . there are few better qualified to provide them.

# Ride the 'dragon of change'

While it is often said that business craves stability, we continually find that change and uncertainty are constants in our world.

That has certainly been well illustrated over the past decade. Starting with the uncertainty created by the announcement of the Brexit referendum in 2015 and the subsequent prolonged decoupling from Europe, we have then had a series of general elections, six prime ministers, a global pandemic and the emergence of a 'fractious' global geopolitical situation amongst other challenges. The latter is still evolving and, given modern global supply chains, has very real impacts on business as well as a terrible human cost.

As I write these words, print deadlines mean I am doing so just before a couple of scheduled events that are generating plenty of uncertainty around their outcomes and are likely to have a sizable impact on UK businesses and, in one case, the wider world.

First up we have the Budget at the end of October. By the time you read this we will of course know the detail and just how accurate all of the pre-Budget coverage and 'pitch rolling' has been.

I don't think that I am going out on a limb to say that I expect it to be something of a 'statement Budget' given that it is the first one of the new government, as well as the first ever to be delivered by a female chancellor. Whatever the content, given that the first person to hold the position is generally thought to be Eustace (He/Him) of Fauconberg in 1221 (thank you Wikipedia!) I think we can all agree that, at least, is a welcome and long overdue occurrence.

With that said, this Budget does feel

as though it has been in the news almost since the day the election result was confirmed and it has certainly created a lot of unhelpful uncertainty for business, providing a reason for actions and investment decisions to be delayed in many cases. With the economy crying out for growth, and growth being a core aim of the proposed industrial strategy, it is certainly to be hoped that once the detail of the Budget is in the rear-view mirror and has been worked through, fiscal policy can take a backseat for a while.

The Chancellor's moment in the spotlight will then be swiftly followed by the US election on November 5. This will undoubtedly provide some fireworks and compelling viewing, and whatever happens one hopes above all else that there is a safe and peaceful transition of power from President Biden to President #47.

With the debate between the Republicans and Democrats seeming so toxic and polarising, the sense that the US may 'zig or zag' in terms of how it interacts with the world, depending on who wins, is palpable.

While I'm sure that will be the case on a range of important topics, having lived and worked in the US for a number of years, personally I still subscribe to Warren Buffet's philosophy of 'never betting against America' whatever the outcome, and expect it to be the dominant global economy and superpower for a good while to come, whoever is sat in the Oval Office.

Still, with change and uncertainty as givens in the world, what can – and does – the stability-craving business community do?

In my experience the answer is that

it rolls up its collective sleeves, puffs out its cheeks and gets on with things. The resilience, ingenuity and ability of businesses to adapt and evolve is as much of a constant as uncertain operating conditions. This really is something that we should recognise and celebrate more as a country, not least as it is the taxes generated by our economy and businesses that go back to the Treasury in order to pay for our public services.

Early in my career a mentor told me that change was inevitable and so rather than fearing it one should embrace it and 'ride the dragon of change'. That idea has always stayed with me and has certainly been helpful in managing different points of my career, not least in an industry such as football where I worked for a decade and where change happens at an incredible pace.

I believe that same attitude and approach is true for the business community in general. In some ways that is inevitable, as the competitive nature of commerce means that you either adapt to conditions or die as an organisation. And while there will be winners and losers across the business community in the coming period, everyone will be straining every sinew to hit targets, innovate and achieve success in their particular industry.

So, with change an inevitability and more 'unknown unknowns' in the period ahead an absolute certainty, rather than fearing that uncertainty simply recognise that it is always going to happen.

Plan and prepare for contingencies, and then strap in, hold on tight and enjoy the ride on the 'dragon of change'!

and the newly refurbished MAC came the opening of other prominent Birmingham doors – in the shape of the Symphony Hall and Town Hall.

"I had always said that when we had finished the MAC rebuild and we were in the black, I would leave. It was time for me to come to Symphony Hall. I stepped down from the MAC in 2016.

"I was on the shadow board of Town Hall when it finally re-opened and the funds were raised to redevelop it. At the end of it we started thinking that it didn't make sense for the Symphony Hall to be here, Town Hall there, and for them to be programmed separately because of the clash . . . we were fishing in the same pond for audiences."

Bhalla, who admits she can be "quite persistent" when the occasion demands, persuaded the then leader of Birmingham City Council Sir Albert Bore to bring the Symphony Hall and Town Hall together under one new charitable banner in the guise of B:Music.

"It was one of the best things that has happened to the city centre. We brought in Nick Reed as our new CEO from Bridgewater Hall in Manchester and Nick absolutely got how a charity can work in a commercial way.

"We had a challenge – we are a charity but nobody sees us as a charity. They always thought we were part of the ICC. We had to do something to make ourselves financially viable but also to have an image that we are an arts organisation, not attached to a conference centre."

A £13.5 million fundraising campaign, backed by money from the Arts Council, the LEP and other sources, provided a new lease of life for the Symphony Hall, with new bars, performance space, a new entrance and cafe. The refurbishment of the hall survived its closure during Covid and the relaunch was delivered on time and within budget.



Leading an appeal to raise funds for the development of Symphony Hall

The reincarnations of both the previously mothballed Town Hall and the Symphony Hall notwithstanding, the chair of B:Music is keen to stress the organisation's charitable status and role in the community.

"We work with schools and have a summer school every year where young people come to play music. You don't have to read music, you don't have to have had lessons, you just come to one of our classes. I am passionate about music. I think it helps change lives.

"We can now open our new performance space to communities. It is being used by poets, by young people, black voices, it has become a real community space."

Bhalla, CEO Nick Reed and the management team are also keen to dispel the image of Symphony Hall as purely a classical music venue. "People forget that only 20 per cent of what we do is classical, the rest is rock, pop, comedy and other entertainment. I think the greatest message to get across is that we are a charity, whatever we earn goes back into running Town Hall and Symphony Hall."

At Town Hall the charity is overseeing a new fundraising archiving project to

preserve the memory of performers who once trod the boards at the venerable venue, with personal readings spotlighting Dickens to the Beatles, Lloyd George to Chuck Berry.

The stars may have come and gone down the years, but in 2024 Bhalla firmly believes the importance of inward investment into the city centre because of the presence of the Symphony Hall and Town Hall cannot be overstated.

"You talk to the likes of Arup and HSBC and they say the thing that attracts them is that their staff can have access to the REP, Town Hall, the Symphony Hall. The cultural offering to invest and come in is very powerful.

"I don't think the creative and culture sector is just a soft power, we are bigger than that. More than 1.2 million people come into the city for music tourism. That is hard cash coming in. We are not the icing on the cake – we are part of that economic cake."

And you could also argue that Anita Bhalla, the little girl who arrived in distant Birmingham from Kenya 60 years ago to watch her parents build a whole new life for the family, is helping to deliver that cake.



Outside the development of the new Symphony Hall



Joel Blake, Francesca Bagley, Sunjay Kohli, Alex Peart, Charlie Pendlebury, Charlotte Stanyer, Sophie Poduval-Morrell, Santina Bunting, Kasim Choudhry, Suzie Branch-Haddow, Samantha Strong, Iveta Pudilova, Aysha Bateman, Shereen Johal, Nadia Johnstone-Smith, Rory Pickin and Camelia Cara-Ion (in place of Money Chopra)



Becky Black, Charlotte Elliott, Sophie Poduval-Morrell, Anjum Khan and Lillian Elekan



Elliott Morrell, Tom Green, Rebecca Mander and Amardeep Gill

event

# Young Professional of the Year 2024

A 19-year-old engineering apprentice scooped the top prize of Greater Birmingham Young Professional of the Year 2024, becoming the youngest winner of the accolade.

Santina Bunting, apprentice in civil and ground engineering with engineering consultants Arup, took home the top prize at the Greater Birmingham Young Professional of the Year Awards which was organised by Future Faces Chamber of Commerce. She also triumphed in the Apprentice of the Year category.

The event was attended by nearly 500 people at the ICC in Birmingham city centre.

Other notable winners included: Charlotte Stanyer of Entec Si, who won the Digital, Technology and Innovation category; Alex Peart of KPMG who took the Environmental, Social and Governance award; Shoosmiths' Shereen Johal who won Legal; and Iveta Pudilova of Happy Autistic Lady who scooped the award for Start-ups, Enterprise and Entrepreneurship.

Suzie Branch-Haddow of Birmingham Metropolitan College was presented with the Future Faces President's Award.



Kasim Choudhry, Amber Sandhu, Santina Bunting and Richard Behan

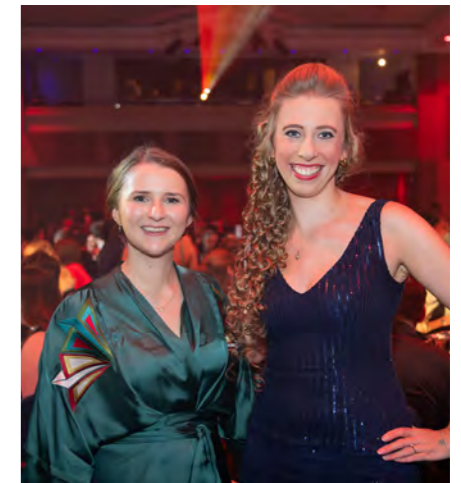


Anwar Khattak and Kasim Choudhry

Anjum Khan and Lillian Elekan



PJ Ellis



Henrietta Brealey and Alice Kinder



Tom Bower, Jasmine Caine, Faye Jacklin, Sarah Griffiths, Wesley Foster, Kasim Choudhry, Amy Jacklin, Sophie Poduval-Morrell, Adam Gadsby, Katrina Raipuri, Freya Dearman and Nadia Johnstone-Smith



Will Crawford, Amy Jacklin and Tom Bower



Marcella Meehan, Demi Philbin, Kamila Rafiqi, Henry Wilkinson and Keerti Rajput

event



# LIFE SCIENCES

## SPECIAL REPORT

**The West Midlands' capabilities as a leader in the life sciences sector are almost limitless.**

**This is a region where private organisations, academic institutions and public bodies come together to improve health outcomes through a combination of a world-class R&D programme and a willingness to embrace new technologies and connectivity.**

**As this special report makes very clear, Birmingham is backing up its words by putting them into meaningful action.**

# The future awakens

**DAVID KIDNEY, executive chair of WM Health Technologies Cluster, assesses what tech is already bringing to the life sciences and healthcare in the region**



This year's health-tech day annual conference was held, as always, during Birmingham Tech Week.

The health technologies cluster partnered with the cluster organisation for our region's creative industries, Create Central, and the expert organisation for innovation and NHS engagement, Health Innovation West Midlands to bring to a wide audience The Future Awakens.

We aimed to show that technologies once thought to be in the future are in fact here now. From AI-driven healthcare solutions to XR applications in medical training, these technologies are revolutionising patient care and healthcare delivery already.

And therefore, businesses not yet invested need to keep up with these developments or face going backwards in comparison with their competitors.

## What is the health-tech – or life sciences – sector in the West Midlands?

Health technologies businesses form a vital part of our regional economy, driving innovation and growth. Recent research we commissioned identifies 614 health

technologies companies within the WMCA area.

The sector is heavily oriented towards life sciences and digital health, with strong presence in data infrastructure, services and software development. Key sector verticals include data infrastructure software and services, SaaS for healthcare, and human health services.

These 614 companies contribute an estimated £6.1 billion in turnover to the WMCA, with the sector employing 14,000 people. These companies generate around £5.2 billion in Gross Value Added, which equates to an estimated £86,350 for GVA per employee (a figure which encompasses all companies within the data set, regardless of their geographical location).

Nearly 91% of the identified companies are classed as small and medium-sized enterprises, with a significant proportion of them (45%) being micro-companies, highlighting the sector's entrepreneurial nature and need for targeted support, especially with scaling up.

Reflecting advanced skills requirements, the average salary for roles in the health technologies sector is £57,500 – 93% above the average

advertised salary for all other roles in the WMCA area, emphasising the value placed on specialised health technology roles.

Health technologies companies are heavily clustered around key urban centres, including universities, and science parks – particularly around Birmingham and Coventry. This concentration facilitates the 'cluster effect', boosting collaboration and innovation.

## Reasons to be cheerful and optimistic

During 2024, there has been a noticeable 'wait and see' effect – waiting on the mayoral election, waiting on the result of the General Election, and waiting for the first Budget post-election. Investments were put on hold, stability and incentive were much sought after.

I would not categorise the Budget we eventually got as business-friendly, with its rises in labour costs, but we can take encouragement from the intention to invest in infrastructure and to support innovation, productivity gains and economic growth.

After stellar news on inward investment in 2022-23 – the West Midlands was the

UK's top regional location for attracting foreign direct investment outside London – we only went and repeated this feat in 2023-24.

The previous government encouraged innovation in health-tech and med-tech in the West Midlands with a one-third share of £100 million for an Innovation Accelerator. The Budget contained the welcome news that this Innovation Accelerator will continue for at least a further year beyond its previous deadline of March 2025.

The Budget also confirmed ongoing funding for R&D public funding and R&D tax credits and continuation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. Funding was also released for the new Investment Zone supporting advanced manufacturing in the West Midlands and associated clusters like life sciences.

The Knowledge Quarter site in Birmingham is to be part of this Investment Zone. In addition, we will soon see the opening of the first of six planned towers on the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus. These two locations, plus (in later years) the new health-tech hub as part of the proposed Arden Cross development, will give us an unprecedented pipeline of land for a burgeoning life sciences sector.

## Specific opportunities for growth

And so to the theme of 'The Future Awakens'.

When we look at how artificial intelligence is benefiting patient care, as well as changing business practice and sharpening competitive edge, we see speed is of the essence.

Of course, there are downsides of developments in AI to guard against – threat to privacy, bias in the data inputted and regulatory (and legal) uncertainty – but these can be addressed in the design of systems. Gains may be hugely beneficial in faster diagnoses, faster interrogation of databases, faster responses to patients' needs.

Examples of applications here in the West Midlands include:

University Hospitals Coventry and Warwickshire (JHCW) NHS Trust is harnessing AI to significantly reduce the number of missed appointments at University Hospital, Coventry.

PathLAKE Plus aims to bring digital pathology and AI to the NHS on a clinical scale. In addition, the project looks to safeguard and support future research into digital pathology and AI.

MiiCare launched Monica, a voice-based conversational AI in healthcare, to elevate patient care and boost health outcomes directly from home.

The easy-to-use Tribe platform connects those who can help with those who need help and helps upskill volunteers to offer wider support to their communities.

Companies like Emedately and Imobisoft here in the West Midlands can help businesses to access secure, privately hosted large language models and other easy-to-use AI applications.

At our event, speakers and audience participants identified the potential of AI to enhance precision diagnostics and personalised treatment plans and the integration of AI into healthcare professionals' practices. Positive strategies were presented that will enable AI to improve patient engagement and treatment adherence.

Of course, the ethical implications of AI in healthcare are important and our health-tech WM ambassador, Lisa Page, a partner in law firm Penningtons, took us through the legal frameworks necessary for regulating AI in healthcare.

As for fears of AI, including the unknown areas it may lead us into, there was reassurance in the matter-of-fact treatment of the subject, recognising the need – and desirability – of balancing the promise of AI with the need for maintaining confidentiality, respect for ethical considerations and maintaining the human touch in healthcare.

XR (extended reality) is the umbrella term for virtual reality, augmented reality and mixed reality systems. These are increasingly being used in medical training, mental health therapies and broader wellbeing applications.

Examples of state of the art developments in the sector led by the West Midlands include:

■ Future medicine and vaccine makers will be able to develop their skills using virtual reality thanks to the RESILIENCE Centre of Excellence for UK Medicines Manufacturing Skills led by University of Birmingham with partners across the UK

■ Student paramedics in the West Midlands are the first in the country to perfect their emergency driving using a virtual reality simulator.

■ BCU researcher Dr Andrew Wilson has worked with NHS trusts to develop a virtual reality app which allows medical students to learn complex ophthalmology diagnosis.

■ Hollywood Gaming offers a wide range of immersive experiences, increasing effects to include 3D video capture, spatial audio, motion, wind, heat/cold and olfactory.

■ Greener Games create VR experiences for recreation and health, and Virtual Decisions provide a safe space for making critical decisions, aiming to enhance

everyone's quality of life and well-being.

There is enormous potential of XR to improve patient outcomes, especially in under-served areas, and its role in patient education and engagement is already well-established.

At our event, we debated strategies for making XR technologies accessible to all and how we can address resistance to XR adoption in the public sector and wider community. What we can say is that XR is revolutionising therapeutic treatments, rehabilitation and mental health therapies through immersive experiences, and this can only be a good thing.

We are a region fizzing with ideas to improve patients' and citizens' lives. Innovate UK has awarded 80 grants totalling £35.4 million to firms involved in health technologies here, with notable projects including work on ocular bandages, voice-based AI symptom tracking, and a new therapy treatment centre.

## Kick start for health-tech

Our cluster manager, Emma Yeap, has secured funding for a programme called 'kick start for health tech'. This is a new collaborative offer from our Health Technologies Cluster and Birmingham Enterprise Community, with support from a wide range of partners and stakeholders.

We will support aspiring entrepreneurs and innovators with new health-tech ideas for products and services with tailored advice, guidance and mentoring.

We are open for applications from individuals with innovative ideas in health technology, businesses looking to pivot into the health-tech sector and suppliers seeking to diversify their offerings.

This is very much modelled on the successful innovation accelerator and is our contribution to its succession planning, to make sure our region will continue to have sustainable support programmes for health-tech innovators long into the future.

Anyone interested in what is on offer – no-cost work packages designed to equip participants with essential skills and knowledge around creating valuable products and commercialising them – should contact Emma.

## In conclusion

As we enter a New Year, there is a sense of a new determination to make progress – in the UK economy at large, in our region's economy, and in our life sciences sector, too.

We are a sector ready for the challenge, willing to embrace growth and well able to innovate successfully.

# Easing growing pains in life science

The number of life science businesses in the Midlands has grown considerably over the last decade, turning the region into a powerhouse of enterprise and innovation. But startups can face growing pains as they transition to full commercialisation. Here, industry risk specialists from WTW discuss how to maximise the opportunities while avoiding the pitfalls.

The Midlands has emerged as a major force in life science in recent years with some of the country's biggest clinical units and a fast-growing research and development base. The region includes the West Midlands Regional Genetics Laboratory, which is the largest genomics lab in the UK, according to Birmingham Women's and Children's NHS Foundation Trust.

A key part of this success story has been an impressive rate of new enterprise creation – almost half of the 1,300 companies operating in the sector have started up since 2013, many originating as spin outs from research-intensive universities such as Birmingham and Warwick.

For new life science businesses, the journey from lab bench to commercialisation, then growth and expansion, can be lengthy and complex. Not only do they have a big hill to climb getting their products, devices and treatments approved, they must also negotiate hidden complexity in everything from funding to supply chain partnerships, expanding into new markets and protecting their intellectual property (IP).

Investing time in planning now, to understand the potential challenges and how to manage them, can avoid problems further down the line. In this article, WTW's risk specialists examine some of the issues firms can face and share their thoughts on how to smooth the growth and transition journey.

## Scaling up and building supply chains

Most young companies don't have the scale or resources to manufacture their products and bring them to market. Companies will need to work with key suppliers such as contract manufacturing organisations (CMOs) and contract research organisations (CROs).

But building these relationships can be challenging, as each partner, and the processes they use, need to be carefully vetted – as do second tier suppliers of raw materials and active ingredients.



Neil Emerson



Carron Higgins

"The complexity involved in on boarding partners can make life science companies highly dependent on single suppliers, and therefore vulnerable to any disruption affecting them," says Neil Emerson, WTW GB life science practice leader. "To overcome these challenges, organisations need to build resilience into their planning. Often, dual sourcing is impractical, so ensure you have enough contingent inventory available to cover any interruption to supply."

Carron Higgins, from WTW, who engages regularly with insurance companies to seek solutions for life sciences organisations adds: "Make sure you have clear terms in your supplier contracts outlining responsibilities in the event of a failure to supply. Insurance can also help bridge the gap, providing cover against interruption directly flowing from an event at a contractor, supplier or logistics location."

## Navigating clinical trials and regulation

Managing the rigorous process to get drugs and medical devices tested and approved is a huge undertaking. New methods, such as virtual and decentralised trials can make it easier to recruit participants and retain them through the trial period.

However, they also come with risks. For example, not seeing patients face to face can make it harder to ensure informed consent and verify that patients have adhered to the rules and guidelines. New government rules are expected to make data from clinical trials more transparent and accessible to patients, which could

bring more changes in the way trials are organised.

"Growing life science companies need to be fully aware of the regulatory pathway for their product, how the different types of clinical trials work, how upcoming changes will affect them, and the associated risks," says Edward Hunter, WTW life science broking leader.

"Be sure to get regulatory input early, to help you guide the design of your clinical trials or preclinical studies. If you are planning trials abroad, make sure you understand local requirements, such as obtaining approvals from local ethics committees, and that your insurance will extend to those territories."

Organisations should also keep abreast of latest regulatory requirements in everything from patient safety to marketing and product messaging. The burden is only likely to increase as regulations change, with significant updates to medical device regulations and EU product liability rules, as well as artificial intelligence (AI) directives and Collective Redress legislation coming down the line.

## Funding the transition

With long development timelines, keeping a steady supply of funding is one of the most challenging tasks in the early stages of commercialisation. At each stage, the next round of funding may be conditional on hitting project milestones and timescales.

Seeking new funding can also bring risk as it results in dilution of ownership. In return, investors demand significant

**"Build resilience into your planning and make sure you have sufficient contingent inventory available to cover any interruption to supply."**

**Neil Emerson, WTW GB life science practice leader**



**"Consider regulatory input early, to help you guide the design of your clinical trials or preclinical studies."**

**Edward Hunter, WTW life science broking leader**

equity or control over company decisions. Organisations also need to factor in the cost of compliance, which can be much higher than in other sectors. All of this needs to be managed carefully.

"Be conservative and carefully manage cash flow, ensuring you have enough runway to reach key milestones," says Higgins. "Make sure you have clear financial milestones and a buffer for unexpected delays or expenses."

## Expanding into new markets

As they grow, life science companies want to enter new markets and territories for their products. Many companies are attracted to set up operations in large global markets such as the US or China.

But expanding abroad means complying with completely different sets of regulations and approvals in those countries, as well as local regulations on everything from employment to the environment. Without adequate forward planning, this can tie

companies up in red tape and threaten the viability of the enterprise.

"It's important to understand these issues upfront, as non-compliance can lead to delays, financial penalties and more," says Emerson. "WTW has offices throughout the globe who understand the local requirements and are able to offer local advice."

## Protecting intellectual property

Intellectual property (IP) underpins most of the drugs, medical devices and technologies that power the life science businesses. Protecting that IP through patents and trademarks does not eliminate all risks. For example, what would happen if a key patent or trademark was found to be unenforceable or if trade secrets walked out the door with a departing employee?

Organisations entering into partnerships, collaborations and expanding abroad must also think about how to protect trade secrets, what licensing or technology

**"Be conservative and carefully manage cash flow, ensuring you have enough runway to reach key milestones."**

**Carron Higgins, WTW life sciences broker**

## Birmingham and Midlands life science cluster

- Almost 1,300 businesses, 17% of UK total and 93% more than in 2013.
- 78 high growth companies (12% of UK) and 17 £100m+ turnover companies (23% of UK).
- 15% of UK health and life sciences incorporations between 2017 and 2022 have a Midlands location.
- 11 Midlands universities with high research ranking in relevant subjects.

(Source: Midlands Engine partnership 2023)

transfer agreements, international IP protection and confidentiality agreements are necessary?

"Some of these risks can be transferred to insurance policies," says Hunter. "While there is a lack of appetite for IP risks for big pharma, cover can be available for smaller growth companies and some new technologies, novel drugs and treatments."

## Harnessing the power of AI

AI has huge potential to transform life science, drawing insights from massive datasets to drive everything from faster and more accurate diagnostics to new drug discovery and development. It can also help companies on the growth and transition journey by speeding up clinical trial processes and helping to identify suitable candidates to target for recruitment into trials.

Other possibilities include using AI in smart manufacturing and supply chain applications to identify process bottlenecks, quality control issues and proactively suggest corrective actions, as well as predicting customer demand in real time and coordinating supplier actions to meet it.

Emerson explained: "AI is not about cutting corners, but it can remove some of the pain from regulatory processes and accelerate operational activities, with the potential to save time and cost and can reduce risk for new and growing life science companies."

## How WTW can help

WTW is a risk, insurance and HR management firm with over 700 life science clients. Our specialists have a deep understanding of the changes impacting the life science industry and can partner with you to create solutions that mitigate and transfer risk.



For more information or to access our **Global Life Science Risk Report 2024**, based on a global survey of life science leaders, contact Neil Emerson at [Neil.Emerson@wtwco.com](mailto:Neil.Emerson@wtwco.com)

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# An ecosystem for the ages

When the Precision Health Technology Accelerator is declared officially open for business at the beginning of 2025, Professor Gino Martini and his team will be spearheading a state-of-the-art facility which is set to provide a huge shot in the arm for the life sciences sector and the city in general. HENRY CARPENTER catches up with him shortly before the project crosses the finishing line.

It won't have escaped the notice of thousands of motorists that something big has been brewing at the former derelict factory site in Selly Oak, just below the retail park.

What they have been witnessing on their travels is the development of the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus which – it is no exaggeration to say – has the potential to establish the city's credentials as right at the top of the UK's leading life sciences economic hubs.

It sits smack in the middle of Birmingham's medical heartlands where much of the city's life sciences activity operates. The 10-acre brownfield site lies just a few hundred yards from the QE and within spitting distance of many other healthcare-related institutions. With the main campus of the University of Birmingham and its medical school all a stone's throw away, academics, business owners, researchers and clinicians – and, lest we forget, the NHS – sit cheek by jowl in this healthcare ecosystem.

And if the life sciences industry has on the face of it been something of a sleeping giant, the development of BHIC is a symbol that it is waking up. The estate is a world-class life science campus which will establish the city as a leading economic hub for life sciences.

It is being delivered through a collaboration between the University of Birmingham and developer Bruntwood SciTech. Several years in the making, the first phase of the campus is on the cusp of completion with the first tenants expected to be in place by the end of January 2025.

The top three floors of the seven-story building will be occupied by the Precision Health Technology Accelerator, a 70,000 sq ft facility which is the anchor tenant of No. 1 BHIC.

It is the largest accelerator in the UK for the life sciences sector, and its strapline is 'empowering health innovation'.

It has not been without its hiccups, but now the finishing line is in sight the levels of anticipation among its stakeholders, not to mention the team tasked with operating it, are sky high.

Enter Professor Gino Martini, the chief executive of the PHTA. Martini is an engaging character with both the credentials and character traits his

employer, the University of Birmingham, was looking for to oversee this enormously important project. This is a plain-speaking scouser who is unafraid to call a spade a spade or roll up his sleeves in the quest to get things done.

He's a doer, and it's easy to see why he was given the job of delivering a world-class commercial hub for the life and health sciences. We'll come to his formidable CV a little later.

It is a drizzly autumn day when we meet, but Martini's face lights up when he discusses the reasons why he took on the PHTA CEO role.

Having worked in London, Oxford and other better-known life sciences centres, Martini wasn't sure what to expect when he arrived for the interview. By his own admission, he had little idea what Birmingham had to offer as a city or its prospects as an epicentre for the industry.

"I remember doing the interview with the university, and then realising I was the favoured candidate," he recalls.

"They took me out for a walk around the area. At the end of it, I asked two questions. The first was where do I sign? The second was, where have you guys been?"

"My point was that there is a great deal more to the region than manufacturing. It has a fantastic life sciences heritage across the region, it has the biggest hospitals, a huge and diverse patient population, you've got Birmingham Health Partners and huge trusts all united in a common cause – and that's what we are able to access."

We are looking at a computer-generated image of how the 10-acre site is projected to look on completion – and this gives a clue as to what prompted his enthusiasm.

"What we are selling is an ecosystem as part of a magnificent master plan. The BHIC covers this 10-acre site and this is phase one," he adds, pointing to a seven-storey block at the hospital end of the campus.

"But look at the ecosystem. You've got one of the largest hospitals in the UK, a private hospital, a medical school, various medical institutes, the university and its train station . . . it's just so unique both in term of scale and what we're doing."

Which is what, exactly? We get the part about the campus as a whole, but what will

Now the PHTA is complete, CEO Professor Gino Martini can look ahead for the facility fulfilling its stated ambition of empowering innovation



**A CGI aerial view of the BHIC site. The PHTA occupies the upper three stories of the building at northern tip of the estate, nearest to the Queen Elizabeth Hospital**

the PHTA specifically be offering?

In terms of the basic physical environment, there are wet and dry laboratories, flexible office spaces, prototype and small-batch manufacturing facilities, training suites, meeting spaces and so forth.

But this is before the human involvement – the clinical expertise, the talent pool, the commercial experience – which when combined with the environment is expected to create a world-class ecosystem.

“When you work with PHTA, you’re not just renting space,” says Martini. “You’re tapping into the expertise of a thriving cluster of health excellence, infrastructure, clinical leadership and entrepreneurial skills.

“You’re harnessing the power of existing partnerships between the NHS, academia, citizens and industry partnerships to deliver innovation in therapies, diagnostics and devices at pace and scale.

“It is a signature life science research facility, and provides a route for businesses to access integrated health innovation assets.

“What we’re trying to do is create a national and international resource where people come and work together.

“It’s about collaboration, with businesses of all sizes from the worlds of biopharma and med-tech partnering with PHTA’s clinical-academic teams to integrate, analyse and interpret data sets and basic science.

“PHTA will allow our industry partners

to rapidly develop, test and validate new products and services.”

I wonder what the profile of the PHTA tenants is likely to be. The likelihood is that it will be a variety of businesses, large and small, some from the region, many from further afield including overseas, all wanting to tap into the expertise, collaborative spirit and perfect geography to commercialise ideas and accelerate the development of therapies and technologies.

In many ways, despite seeing the PHTA through from concept to completion, Martini’s work has only just begun. He is responsible for helping growing businesses to succeed, through making connections to multi-disciplinary opinion leaders and providing commercialisation



**CGI of the dry lab**

**“PHTA will allow our industry partners to rapidly develop, test and validate new products and services.”**

support and expertise.

You would be hard stretched to find someone as qualified as Martini for the job in hand. His CV is almost bespoke for the role, encompassing as it does the worlds of industry, academia and the public sector.

He joined PHTA from the Royal Pharmaceutical Society where, as chief scientist, he played a pivotal role in supporting pharmacists during the pandemic.

An experienced academic and industrial pharmacist, he has extensive expertise in oncology, rare and infectious diseases, and drug development – as well as policy development and external advocacy.

His career began with senior scientist roles at Scherer Drug Delivery Systems and SmithKline Beecham, before joining

GSK where he rose to senior directorship roles within a 10-year stint.

His academic credentials are scarcely less impressive. Formerly professor of pharmaceutical innovation at King’s College London, he also has an MBA specialising in SME success and business failure – awarded with distinction from the University of Liverpool.

He is a past chair of the Industrial Pharmacists Group of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society, and past president of the European Industrial Pharmacists Group.

Believe it or not, that is only a summary – but it does give an idea why the University of Birmingham was so keen to appoint him.

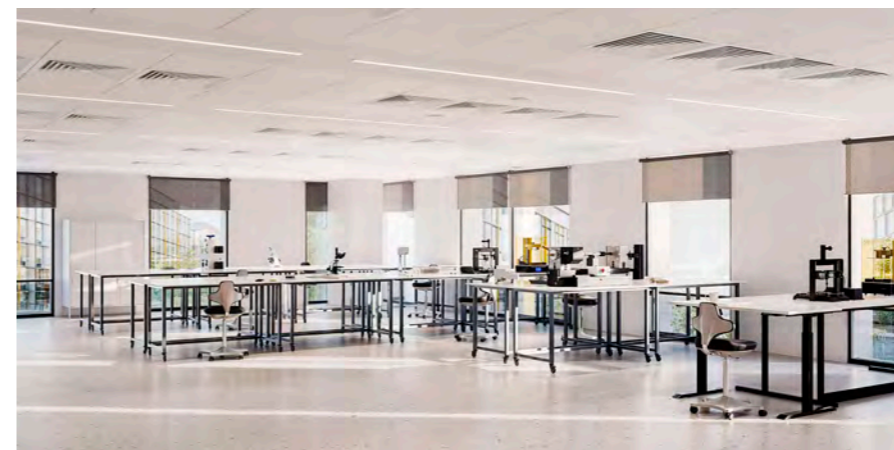
“One of the reasons why I was approached was because I’d worked in industry, academia and a public body, and also because I’ve done a lot of work in building ecosystems,” he says.

“They wanted someone who could act as a conduit between academia and industry, and someone to try to bring skills from one sector to the other.”

The PHTA is fulfilling other roles of huge benefit to the economy of the region. One of these is providing space for start-ups to breathe and grow; too many have left the region.

It is also helping to meet demand.

**CGIs of the various laboratories at the PHTA**



There is a massive shortage of brand-new laboratories with most organisations using existing buildings or old pharma sites. Martini reckons that there's a shortage of one million square feet of bespoke laboratory space in Oxford, and a similar amount in Cambridge.

As well as the raft of collaborative and commercial opportunities the PHTA is expected to open up, it will also be fulfilling essential clinical purposes of benefit to society as a whole.

We are joined by one of the key members of the PHTA team, Becky Bishop, who is the accelerator's industry trials lead, and she will be operating from the third floor of the accelerator where she will be working with industry to design complex trials for cancer.

As she says, clinical testing is a crucial part of the healthcare pathway, and people will be "able to access the NHS, access clinicians devising diagnostic tests, access great brains and cancer clinical trials testing; we have training space on the fourth floor . . . when you think about it, it's really exciting."

She is similarly enthusiastic about the geography of the PHTA.

"We have got the largest paediatric oncology trials unit in the region right here at the University," she says.

She also makes the point that it is not just the size of the patient population which provides the life sciences industry with real ballast, but also its diversity in gender, age and backgrounds.

"There is a real stability to the population here. There are 90 languages spoken, and 40 per cent are below the age of 16 which makes it a really unique community.

"A new medical device or new therapeutic will not come onto the market without testing it for patients' safety. It just doesn't happen."

Bishop says that a number of industry heavyweights have already signed up to collaborate over trials, and one major tenant is the university's Clinical Immunology Service.

This, we are told, "provides a comprehensive range of accredited lab services to facilitate NHS diagnostic testing, clinical trials and the development of new diagnostics". It is also a major testing centre for various diseases.

While he has a pride in the PHTA, the wider campus and the city's life science's sphere as a whole, Martini is a firm advocate for collaboration with the likes of Oxford and Cambridge – for the good of healthcare in general.

"We should stop competing as silos and should instead form regional superclusters," he says. "We should be working co-operatively and collaboratively in a way to solve problems for the nation in healthcare and life sciences.

"Boston has an eight-mile-long innovation zone. Go to China and it takes an hour just to leave the innovation zone. That's how big these things are.



**Pictured from left are chief business officer Dr Mark Wilson, chief of staff Natasha Cotterell, CEO Professor Gino Martini, laboratory specialist Sharjeel Kayani, and PHTA industry trials lead Becky Bishop**

We can compete because of our fantastic academics and our ability to collaborate across the region. That's my wider ambition."

He is also quick to praise the University of Birmingham and the PHTA board of directors.

"While the PHTA is a subsidiary of the university, there has been no pressure to fill the facility quickly – it's about filling it right. It has got to be right for the ecosystem and the nation.

"We're about 50 per cent full and I'm not unhappy with that, given the obstacles and challenges we have had to face. But this is a long-term strategic play, and the university and the PHTA Board have been really supportive."

I get the impression that it has been a tiring, at times exasperating, few years for Martini and his team, and occasionally it

has felt like he has been pushing a rock uphill.

But, overall, there must be enormous satisfaction in what he has achieved.

"If they wanted someone just to rent out space they would have got a real estate professional with a letting background in to do it.

"This job is very varied, from overseeing a building to choosing the tenants, managing expectations, understanding service charges, tenancy, and even choosing furnishings."

All of his work in getting the project to this stage has now come to fruition, so what are his overriding emotions now that he has reached the finishing line?

A pause. "Trepidation," he says slowly. "Trepidation fused with real excitement. I just want to deliver it really, really well."



# Embracing innovation in healthcare

**HELEN HUNT, assistant programme manager at Health Innovation West Midlands, assesses the impact of point of care ultrasound**



In the evolving landscape of healthcare, integrating innovative technologies is paramount and can support the NHS in addressing pressing challenges such as, improving access to care, waiting times and staffing capacity, while streamlining operational efficiency.

One area of care making significant strides in revolutionising the diagnostic pathway is ultrasound technology. By enhancing diagnostic capabilities, ultrasounds are improving patient outcomes and overall quality of care. Traditionally, ultrasound scans required patients to wait for appointments in radiology, delaying crucial treatment – particularly important when treating children with haemophilia at risk of joint bleeds.

In January 2023, 21.3% of people waiting for a non-obstetric ultrasound waited over six weeks, highlighting systemic challenges in healthcare delivery. This situation underscores the urgent need for advancements in ultrasound technology; by enhancing diagnostic capabilities, ultrasounds will improve patient outcomes and overall quality of care from the NHS workforce.

## Streamlining patient care

In the West Midlands we are seeing a huge push to help improve this. One such initiative is the Point of Care Ultrasound (POCUS) project, designed to enhance patient care and streamline processes within the NHS.

POCUS is an independent device engineered for the rapid capturing of ultrasound images directly at a patient's bedside, facilitating timely diagnostic evaluation. It represents a revolutionary advancement in diagnostics and patient management.

The aim is to provide healthcare professionals, such as nurses and physiotherapists, with the tools and knowledge to feel empowered making clinical decisions. This empowerment is critical in managing acute conditions such as joint bleeds in paediatric patients, where timely diagnosis and treatment are vital. With POCUS, immediate interventions can be provided, enhancing the patient journey.

I have long been a major advocate for POCUS and have been lucky to represent this concept at innovation events to spread

the knowledge and successes from the project to other parts of the nation. Recently I joined a panel with fellow medical leaders to talk about how human factors help support clinical outcomes and reduce errors effectively.

By employing appreciative inquiry approaches, we can positively disrupt patient pathways, improving treatments and empower more staff to help advance tools such as POCUS into new medical settings.

## Innovation in action

At Birmingham Children's Hospital, a trial was conducted in the paediatric haemophilia department that showcased how POCUS can effectively support a nurse-led ultrasound approach. This has significantly enhanced the diagnosis and management of children with suspected joint bleeds.

By applying a human factors framework, the BCH team tackled key challenges and improved the patient pathway. 33% of patients who had ultrasounds confirmed joint bleeds and received factor medication, while 50% of those who didn't have scans were still prescribed medication as a precaution – meaning that 23% of patients might be receiving medication unnecessarily.

This success in training staff in conducting point of care scans, is helping to reduce the number of unnecessary prescriptions and cutting down patient wait times, thus easing the burden on radiology services.

In Wolverhampton, for instance, patients seen in need of chest scans often rely on ambulance transport to reach the hospital, which can delay timely care. To further enhance urgent community response teams, we want to start seeing the implementation of POCUS.

This will ensure patients are being managed in their comfort of their own home, therefore pressure is taken away from busy emergency departments. This could truly make a difference in addressing these issues and enhancing patient outcomes, allowing diagnosis and treatment to be made sooner.

In our trial at BCH, we saw how POCUS effectively reduced ultrasound wait times getting patients treatment faster, reassuring parents and carers. In the West Midlands,

58% of Medtech sites are at an advanced funding stage (Stage 4+), meaning they have secured significant financial backing to enhance patient care through technology and improve diagnosis and treatment.

Supported by the Health Innovation West Midlands innovator team, this initiative is set for further growth and expansion into other regions. Junior doctors will graduate with POCUS training, while senior doctors are actively incorporating it into their practice. This positive transition to effective ultrasound technologies is demonstrating that it complements, rather than interferes, with medical roles.

## Barriers holding back distribution

The main barrier hindering the distribution of this type of solution is not the training itself but supplying adequate mentorship for clinicians. Ensuring that nurses and clinicians have access to experienced mentors is crucial for the successful implementation of this technology, and to its overall success for making a greater change to NHS systems.

In an ideal scenario, we will see a vast number of mentors, creating a robust support system that empowers healthcare professionals to utilise POCUS effectively.

## A future-forward approach

My utopia is a future where POCUS is implemented across all hospital wards and where this life-changing technology is made accessible to all healthcare bodies. By making these kinds of devices widely accessible, hospitals can drastically reduce waiting times for ultrasound procedures and enhance the overall efficiency of diagnostics.

Distribution of POCUS will streamline workflows for healthcare staff, delivering timely and effective treatment. Ultimately, the integration of POCUS into routine practice is set to elevate the standard of care, ensuring that patients receive the attention and services they need without delay.

Together, stakeholders can bring the future of healthcare forward for staff and patients today, to improve and support the lives of those who depend on the National Healthcare System.

# The importance of intellectual property for the life sciences industry

insight

insight



## Experts from IP specialists Forresters reveal how patents and trade marks can be used to drive revenue and attract investment

### Why is the life sciences sector in the West Midlands so exciting right now?

With an ecosystem which includes world-class hospitals, leading universities and a network of research and development facilities, the West Midlands is quickly becoming a key centre for life sciences innovation.

Particularly, there is increased focus on innovation and collaboration in the region which is helping to boost the life sciences sector more than ever.

The major investment in the sector in the West Midlands is evidenced by the West Midlands Health Tech Innovation Accelerator. Funded by the Department for Science, Innovation and Technology, in partnership with Innovate UK and the West Midlands Combined Authority, it can award grants of up to £150,000 for health innovations. The WMHTIA brings together key partners within the life sciences ecosystem to help accelerate the commercialisation of life sciences technologies to market.

The West Midlands is also home to the Birmingham Health Partners, a strategic alliance between the University of Birmingham, Aston University, six hospitals in the region and the Health

Innovation West Midlands. This partnership provides multi-disciplinary assistance with the clinical application of life sciences innovation, for example, by supporting regulatory compliance, grant applications, funding and industry collaborations.

There is also a continued drive for collaboration in the region, as evidenced by the Birmingham Health Innovation Campus which will provide a critical link between academia, the NHS and industry to encourage new innovations to reach the forefront of healthcare. The Medilink Midlands network provides specialist business support and partnership events for life sciences companies to boost the life sciences community and develop partnerships within the region.

There is a wealth of laboratory space in the region, including the Institute of Translational Medicine, the BioHub Birmingham, The University of Wolverhampton Science Park and the University of Warwick Science Park. The West Midlands also has a cluster of clinical trials facilities including the Birmingham Clinical Trials Unit and the Cancer Research UK Clinical Trials Unit, which together form the Birmingham Centre for Clinical Trials, one of the largest clinical

trials hubs in the UK, which has experience from small Phase I trials of new therapies right through to international multi-centred randomised trials.

With all this on our doorstep, the West Midlands provides a great place for life sciences companies to thrive.

On a personal level, we are excited about the increased focus on digital health solutions within the life sciences and med-tech sector, using software and artificial intelligence to improve diagnosis, imaging and provide personalised treatment options to patients. We feel very privileged to be based in Birmingham, the heart of the West Midlands, working to help companies within the sector protect their innovations. It is very exciting seeing the growth of Life Sciences companies within the region.

### What is intellectual property?

Intellectual property (IP) means creations of the mind, including inventions; designs and symbols; the name of a company, product or brand; and computer software.

IP is protected in law by several different intellectual property rights, such as patents, design rights, trade marks and copyright. These intellectual property rights often overlap, but in simple terms

patents protect technical innovations, such as new products, manufacturing methods, apparatuses or even new therapeutic uses of known compounds; design rights protect the appearance of things, such as the new look of a medical device or a mobile application user interface; trade marks protect words, sounds, logos and colours and are therefore crucial in protecting a business's brand; and copyright covers original works of authorship so is often the most relevant intellectual property right when it comes to protecting computer software, engineering drawings, websites, instruction manuals and so forth.

**Why is intellectual property so important?** In short, IP encourages innovation, thereby contributing to economic growth which can ultimately lead to the creation of new jobs.

IP laws also provide a legal framework to allow intellectual property right owners to obtain adequate remedies should their innovations be copied or stolen.

An intellectual property right, once in place, can be used to prevent unauthorised use by another party of any act that falls within the scope of the right in question. This, in turn, means that the owner of the intellectual property right can reap the financial rewards of their innovation, for example by charging a premium price for their innovation over the term of the intellectual property right or by authorising another party to use their innovation by granting a licence in return for royalty payments.

### Dr Mark Connell Partner UK and European patent attorney

Mark is primarily involved in drafting and prosecuting patent applications. He has extensive experience in providing freedom to operate advice. He also represents clients in hearings before the European Patent Office.

Mark has a background in chemistry and is experienced in metallurgy, composite materials, and polymer chemistry, with a particular focus on adhesives and functional coatings. He has a dedicated interest in medical devices, such as ostomy devices, stents, and catheters. He also advises several of our cleantech clients.

Typically, he works with SMEs and family-owned businesses. He particularly enjoys working with companies that have not had much prior experience with IP, so that he can work closely with them to develop an IP strategy that best fits their needs.



### Can owning intellectual property rights be used to attract investment?

Absolutely! There is a direct link between owning intellectual property rights and the ability for start-ups to raise funds.

In a study by the EU Intellectual Property Office and the European Patent Office it was concluded that "The filing of patent and trade mark applications in the seed or early growth stage is associated with a higher likelihood of subsequent VC funding. This effect is particularly important in the early stage, with a 4.3 times higher likelihood of funding for startups that filed for trade marks, and a 6.4 times higher

likelihood of funding for start-ups that filed for patents. Start-ups that filed for both trade marks and patents show the highest likelihood of funding in both the seed and the early stage". [source – "Patents, trade marks and startup finance – Funding and exit performance of European startups" – October 2023].

Anecdotally, we have seen evidence of this with our direct clients.

In one case we had a client who received funding of approximately £100,000 which, almost certainly, would not have been awarded had they not filed any patent or trade mark applications.

**“Intellectual property encourages innovation, thereby contributing to economic growth which can ultimately lead to the creation of new jobs.”**



**Aside from enforcing intellectual property rights, what else can be done with them?**

It is actually possible to reduce a business's tax bill using a patent.

An often-overlooked scheme, which applies to owners of patent rights (not design rights, trade marks or copyright), is the Patent Box. The Patent Box is a tax break designed to incentivise R&D in the UK.

Under this government scheme, UK businesses can benefit from a reduced rate of corporation tax (10% instead of 25%) in relation to profits earned from patented inventions. This tax reduction includes profits earned from export sales so for some businesses there can be significant

advantages in engaging this scheme.

It is important to note that a business can claim both R&D tax credits and tax relief through the Patent Box so that financial rewards can be obtained at different stages of the innovation cycle.

**Is there anything else that businesses should be thinking about from an intellectual property perspective?**

Yes, the intellectual property rights of other parties.

A business may have a very strong IP portfolio, but it may not be able to commercialise its innovation due to the existence of earlier third-party rights.

Having sufficient regard to third party

rights and any risks associated with these rights can be crucial to the success of any business. Investors in particular will expect at least an appreciation of the risk exposure that they will face should they choose to invest.

Conducting a 'freedom-to-operate' search is one way to gain an appreciation of any existing intellectual property rights that could present a risk going forward.

**Is life sciences a specialism of Forresters?**

Yes! Forresters is a full-service intellectual property firm and can help with all aspects of IP protection.

We have a number of life science specialists based in Birmingham, with extensive legal and technical knowledge. Our team includes Kate Wilson, who has a background in cell and molecular biology and has specialist knowledge protecting biotechnological inventions, and Mark Connell, who has a background in chemistry and a dedicated interest in protecting medical devices. We also have in-house AI and software specialists who have a wealth of experience assisting with AI-related life sciences innovations.

We have expertise handling inventions in all areas of life sciences subject-matter and work with a range of clients at different stages of the business journey, from start-ups and SMEs, universities and large multinational corporations.

We are heavily involved in the Medilink Midlands network and we are also one of the delivery partners of the WMHTIA, offering bespoke IP support to those businesses in need.

**Kate Wilson**  
Senior associate  
UK and European patent attorney

Kate represents clients at the UK Intellectual Property Office and European Patent Office on a wide range of biotechnology & pharmaceutical matters.

Kate works in all areas of Biotechnology, with a particular focus on genetic engineering, CRISPR/Cas9 gene therapy, stem cell technology, antibodies and vaccine technology, and cannabis-derived therapeutics.

She works with individuals, start-ups, university spin-outs, research organisations and multinational companies. She enjoys working with such a wide range of clients, tailoring her advice to ensure that each client's commercial needs are met.

Kate is passionate about improving diversity and inclusion within the intellectual property industry and co-chairs Forresters' Equality and Diversity working group.



# Revolutionary new technique developed at Aston University

An Aston University researcher has developed a new technique using light which could revolutionise non-invasive medical diagnostics and optical communication.

The research showcases how a type of light called the Orbital Angular Momentum (OAM) can be harnessed to improve imaging and data transmission through skin and other biological tissues.

A team led by Professor Igor Meglinski found that OAM light has unmatched sensitivity and accuracy that could result in making procedures such as surgery or biopsies unnecessary. In addition it could enable doctors to track the progression of diseases and plan appropriate treatment options.

OAM is defined as a type of structured

light beams, which are light fields with a tailored spatial structure. Often referred to as vortex beams, they have previously been applied to a number of developments in different applications including astronomy, microscopy, imaging, metrology, sensing, and optical communications.

Professor Meglinski in collaboration with researchers from the University of Oulu, Finland, conducted the research which is detailed in the paper 'Phase preservation of orbital angular momentum of light in multiple scattering environment' published in the Nature journal Light Science & Application.

Professor Meglinski, who is based at Aston Institute of Photonic Technologies, said: "By showing that OAM light can travel through turbid or cloudy

and scattering media, the study opens up new possibilities for advanced biomedical applications.

"For example, this technology could lead to more accurate and non-invasive ways to monitor blood glucose levels, providing an easier and less painful method for people with diabetes."

The research team conducted a series of controlled experiments, transmitting OAM beams through media with varying levels of turbidity and refractive indices. They used advanced detection techniques, including interferometry and digital holography to capture and analyse the light's behaviour. They found that the consistency between experimental results and theoretical models highlighted the ability of the OAM-based approach.

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# Queen of matcha

**Monique Farquharson has traversed the globe in her quest for knowledge and, ultimately, success. Her journey over several years has seen her move from Jamaica to Japan before finally settling in Birmingham, where she has launched her business, the Matcha Yaad. HENRY CARPENTER catches up with her.**

When Monique Farquharson talks you through her career path, you wonder how she managed to cope with it all while retaining her sanity.

She has the answer to that, and it lies in the very product which she has been pouring her considerable efforts into over the last seven years or so: matcha, that health-boosting powder whose qualities have long been recognised in other parts of the world but have only recently been catching on in the UK.

At one point, when she was living in Japan, she was holding down two jobs and completing an MBA course . . . all in different continents. We'll come to the details later but suffice to say that if ever she needed a boost of energy and clarity of thought, it was then.

"Every time I drink matcha I have a little bit more clarity and I can focus better," she says. "If I don't drink it, I'm just all over the place!"

Now, settled firmly in Birmingham, Monique's different matcha products – whether the powder itself or infused canned drinks – are winning her awards, plaudits and lining the shelves of more and more stockists across the country.

It certainly wasn't the taste which attracted Monique to it in the first place.

"I am not going to lie, I hated matcha when I first tried it," says the ebullient entrepreneur.

This was when she was a student in her birth country of Jamaica, working her socks off for a degree in actuarial science – which encompassed heavy mathematics and advanced computer coding. It was a tough and demanding degree, and she was finding herself in a permanent state of exhaustion.

"I was super tired," she says, looking back on this pivotal moment. "I started drinking a lot of coffee, but that led to heart palpitations and didn't really help at all.

"Some women I know then introduced me to matcha, which I hated at first. But I

knew it was meant to have health benefits so I started to experiment with it a little and introduced it to Jamaican flavours to make it more palatable.

"That's when I fell in love with matcha. It completely transformed everything. I was much more productive and my grades were amazing – which was quite surprising because it was a really tough degree.

"It was then that I thought, I might have found something here. And I haven't been able to shut up about matcha since."

That was in 2017. Fast-forward seven years and this most upbeat of individuals has travelled across the world in the name of research, before coming to the UK in the midst of the pandemic and launching her business in earnest.

The Matcha Yaad – Yaad meaning home in Jamaican patois – produces matcha-infused drinks with the dual purpose of being delicious to the taste, but also extremely good for you.

Earlier this autumn, one of Monique's creations – the Matcha Ginger Refresher



**The Ginger Refresher won the UK New Product of the Year category of the Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards 2024**

**“I could start to see where I could grow the matcha company far beyond where it is even now. I feel I am just at the tip of the iceberg with the drinks but in Japan you can see that matcha transcends so many different industries.”**



– won the UK New Product of the Year category of the Speciality & Fine Food Fair Awards 2024.

Having sampled it myself, I can testify that it is indeed gingery, refreshing and meets the category’s criteria of ‘demonstrating creativity and innovation at the heart of its concept’.

The Matcha Yaad has been listed as one of the top 25 rising stars of the food industry, and the Ginger Refresher was the top-performing product and overall best-selling drink in the spring edition of Rate the Store.

Monique has worked with brands such as Meta, Invesco and Disney . . . this is heady stuff, and it’s patently obvious that Matcha Yaad drinks are gaining real traction in the notoriously difficult food and beverages industry.

To get the company to where it is now, Monique has fully immersed herself in learning about all aspects of the matcha industry, researching the products and understanding the finer details of running a business.

She has taken no short cuts. Not

everyone has the courage and conviction which has seen her leave home in Jamaica, travel to Japan for two years and then settle here in Birmingham.

We go back to that period when she was a student who happened upon the health and wellbeing properties of matcha.

“I started sharing it with different people, and when they confirmed that it worked with them as well, I thought maybe I should start a business,” she recalls.

“So I started working for a start-up company in the hospitality industry for a while because I wanted to understand the world of business.”

Conveniently, the company also had a tea business which gave Monique an insight into marketing a product similar to matcha. Cashflow was lean at the time so she left this job to work at an insurance company, bringing in much of what she had learned at university.

In the background though, she was steadily working out what she could do with matcha.

“I launched the first matcha business in Jamaica, first selling drinks through a juice bar,” she says. “I then started importing more matcha, putting it in various stores across the country. The company started growing quite quickly.

“I was on local television a couple times, and in the newspapers as well. That was when it became apparent that people automatically assumed that I must have ventured to Japan.”

But it was when others asked Monique if it could be packaged so they could take it away that she decided to take the plunge and head to Japan. One of the reasons was that there was a problem to resolve – because matcha is a suspension powder – in other words, it doesn’t dissolve – how could it be successfully put in a canned drink?

She quit her insurance job and moved to Japan, but kept the matcha business going in Jamaica, leaving her team to run it.

An income was needed in Japan whilst she conducted her research, and that was provided by a job teaching English.

But the primary reason for Monique to

be in Japan was for matcha research.

“I went to the farms and factories, I met the suppliers and I had a tea sensor, a lovely lady with 50-odd years of experience in tea. She was an expert in matcha and taught me how drinking it in Japan differed when done culturally and commercially.

“I learned so much. It’s in hair products, skin care products and all sorts of other stuff. I could start to see where I could grow the matcha company far beyond where it is even now. I feel I am just at the tip of the iceberg with the drinks but in Japan you can see that matcha transcends so many different industries.”

It wasn’t long into her stint in Japan that a colleague told her about an enterprise scholarship at Aston University in the UK. If successful, she could basically go to university for free.

“I didn’t have anything to lose at that point in time,” says Monique. “It wasn’t that I was aiming for the UK – it was just a case of seeing how it went. So I applied for the scholarship and it just so happened that I got it.”

A move to the UK in 2020 beckoned – but that was scuppered by the Covid pandemic. However, she continued the course online from Japan – and this was

when she was forced to perform the demanding juggling act of continuing her job there, overseeing her business in Jamaica and working on the full-time MBA course at Aston University.

Working between three massively contrasting time zones, she was forced to work on her MBA in the middle of the night. “It was all quite intense,” she says, euphemistically.

Monique arrived in the UK in March 2021 where she completed her MBA and won the university’s Global MBA Student of the Year accolade. She registered the Matcha Yaad as a business, though wanted to keep her powder dry – so to speak – before officially launching it “until I understood the UK market a little bit better”.

“During 2021 and 2022 I was travelling to London a lot – and all over the UK – to see where matcha was being sold. I think when I came to the UK there were probably two matcha cafes here. Now there are about 14.

“I was also searching to see if anyone had managed to do any types of products commercially with matcha, which they hadn’t yet.”

Just when she thought she would break new ground in the matcha market

in the belief no one else had cottoned on to its commercial possibilities, Monique found herself watching the BBC show Dragon’s Den – and witnessing one of the entrepreneurs appealing for investment had produced a ready-to-drink matcha beverage.

Far from being disheartened, this allowed Monique and the Matcha Yaad “to ride their wave” as “they were doing much of the heavy lifting!”.

This coincided with Monique getting a job at professional services firm Accenture.

“This was ideal for me because I am the customer loyalty insights manager for one of their major clients. This allows me to understand the mindset of the British consumer and what drives their loyalty towards a brand.

“Last year was when everything started to come together. All sorts of things happened, including getting a grant from Coventry University to do a proof of concept for the ginger drink, which was great because I wanted to test the formulation.

“I also found a great manufacturer. We started off with a very tiny batch which I took to all sorts of different events just to get feedback from customers to see what they thought of the recipe.

“And then about a year ago the Walt Disney company showed interest and invited us their office in London. At about the same time we received a nomination for product of the year at the Coffee Innovation Expo.

“A further grant came our way from Fiserv which we used to do the rebranding and in March this year we launched with proper production – and ever since things have been going crazy.”

Aforementioned awards and accolades have followed, as did further products, including the popular peach-flavoured matcha tea.

Which brings us to the present day, and the Monique is able to reflect on a whirlwind few years which have left her energised, rather than weary.

“This is a dream I have had for years, ever since I encountered matcha in Jamaica,” she says.

“I knew that I was on to something and I could see it developing into something big but I just didn’t know how to do it.

“Now things are falling into place and it is starting to come to fruition – coming alive, if you will – and I am just so excited.”

The world seems a little brighter with Monique Farquharson in it. And if matcha has contributed at all to her sunny disposition, maybe all of us could benefit from it.



**Monique is excited about what the future holds for Matcha Yaad**



# Report predicts profitability boost

news

Businesses in Greater Birmingham are predicting a turnover and profitability boost in the coming months amidst an economic environment 'marked by both caution and optimism', according to a report issued by Greater Birmingham Chambers of Commerce.

The GBCC's latest Quarterly Business Report indicates a buoyancy among firms about the prospect of increasing their turnover and profitability.

The Q3 report, sponsored by Birmingham City University, reveals 65% of businesses expect to increase their turnover over the next 12 months – up from 58% in Q2 – while 25% expect it to remain constant and just 10% anticipate a decrease.

A total of 57% expect profitability to improve over the coming year, a 2% increase on the previous quarter.

GBCC chief executive Henrietta Brealey, pictured, said the figures are "a testament to the underlying resilience of local businesses".

Recruitment activity was relatively stable during Q3 – with 30% of firms increasing their headcount (up 1% from Q2) and 11% experiencing a decrease (unchanged from Q2).

It was a particularly challenging quarter for the manufacturing sector – of the 59% of firms who attempted to recruit, 85% reported difficulties.

Ms Brealey added: "From a local perspective, domestic sales activity fell slightly compared to the last quarter.

"Export sales continue to suffer from geopolitical tension as the trade deficit widened from a national perspective over



Henrietta Brealey

the summer.

"Recruitment activity remained stable in Q3 but ingrained challenges remain for those attempting to hire.

"Despite the national fall in the rate of inflation, price pressures remain prevalent for the majority of businesses across the region with investment in both training and capex falling across both indicators in the last three months.

"Nevertheless, business confidence across profitability and turnover projections remains strong.

"With the publication of the Autumn Budget, the Government will now need to work closely with the business community to ensure that their blueprint for growth remains anchored in pragmatism and takes into account the various challenges local firms continue to face."

## Business climate remains difficult

A rise in the number of monthly company insolvencies in England and Wales does not reflect the seeds of recovery which are beginning to germinate in the Midlands business economy.

This is according to the Midlands branch of insolvency and restructuring body R3 and follows latest monthly statistics published by the insolvency service.

These show that corporate insolvencies increased by 1.5% in September 2024 to a total of 1,973 compared to August's total of 1,943, but decreased by 7.4% compared to the September 2023 figure of 2,130.

R3 Midlands chair Stephen Rome, a partner at Penningtons Manches Cooper in Birmingham, said: "Although corporate insolvencies have risen by a small percentage compared to last month, there have been some positive indications for the local marketplace, with construction output increasing, retail sales volumes continuing to rise in August and consumers spending more in the hospitality sector in September.

"Across the wider local economy, however, the business climate remains difficult as almost every firm faces a

multitude of issues, including ongoing cost challenges and uncertainty around announcements in the Budget.

"Also of significant concern are the potential knock-on effects of the conflict in the Middle East, particularly for local companies in the energy, manufacturing and retail sectors.

"Increasing instability could further disrupt trade routes, impacting on the supply of imports or exports. Businesses will have to weigh up whether they pass any cost increase onto customers or absorb it themselves."

news



Pictured from left are Mary McNeny, Floss Fisher, Jack Cook and Kiran Kaur

## Thousands raised for children's charity

A Birmingham law firm has raised £3,500 for a local children's charity through a fundraising quiz and networking event.

Staff from mfg Solicitors raised the four-figure sum for The Buddy Bag Foundation, a charity which supports hundreds of children every year who have fled violent situations at home.

Chris Piggott, Birmingham partner at

mfg Solicitors said: "We were delighted to see so many teams come along for a fun night of networking, and of course to raise funds for a charity which does so much for young people and families in and around Birmingham.

"The everyday essentials they provide to support young people, such as toiletries and pyjamas, really does make a huge difference.

"The support from the Birmingham business community has been exceptional, from the donation of prizes for the raffle which were outstanding, to those businesses who attended and supported on the night in great numbers."

The event saw 25 teams taking part in the quiz which was held at The Stable in John Bright Street.



■ Brussels Airlines has resumed flights from Birmingham Airport, operating six times a week.

These regular weekly services are intended to offer convenient flight times and will use an A319 aircraft.

Adam Parker, senior aviation manager of Birmingham Airport, said: "Brussels Airlines has been a partner of Birmingham Airport for many years, first serving the region in 1992.

"This service will ensure both business and leisure passengers have easy access to the Belgium capital."

■ Midlands-based fashion brand Lounge has partnered with Changemakers – the Birmingham Children's Hospital charity – at the highest Pioneer level.

This will see Lounge donate £150,000 to the charity, over the next three years.

Focused on supporting the lives of the children and families at the hospital, the Changemakers are a group made up of philanthropists, leaders and businesses, all with the collective mission to deliver state-of-the-art, life-saving equipment for the hospital.



# City centre move for Rudells

## Patek Philippe agent opening boutique store on New Street

advertisement feature

These are “very exciting times”, admits Jon Weston, the managing director of Rudell the Jewellers.

Jon is referring to a first for the West Midlands jewellers – a Rudells outlet in Birmingham’s city centre, next to the Burlington Hotel on New Street to be exact.

Rudells have been a much-loved part of the West Midlands’ high-end jewellery scene since the 1930s, with their shops in Harborne and Wolverhampton selling top-brand watches and other precious items for discerning clientele who have often included generations of the same family.

But this is a new opportunity – neither Harborne nor Wolverhampton can compete with Birmingham city centre for footfall or prestige. And what underpins it is what Jon refers to as its anchor – the iconic brand Patek Philippe. Rudells is Patek Philippe’s sole Birmingham agent. “So, with respect to Harborne and Wolverhampton, we need to be in the city centre,” says Jon.

“I am really excited by the opportunity to be honest, and we are on course for opening in November since we took on the site in May this year. Our team

of shopfitters from Esprit have been wonderful!”

The idea of taking on a city-centre site had actually been germinating for several years, and Jon first looked at the outlet some six years ago. It ticked all the boxes in terms of size and position, and it had an ideal frontage.

“In our industry, we always want as much as we can get in terms of fabulous windows, for obvious reasons,” he says.

“What you don’t want is a narrow unit that’s got a small window at the front and a really long narrow interior. In 2022 the agents indicated they were softly marketing it and things have moved along swiftly since then.”

What was key to Jon’s decision to take on the site was Patek Philippe’s response.

“I invited Patek Philippe to come up and have a look at it, back in February 2023, and they were absolutely thrilled with the idea.

“The world’s number-one watch brand must have representation in the city centre. Now that we are moving Patek Philippe there, along with several other top-level brands we sell, the Birmingham shopping public will have the best experience

available to them where watches and jewellery are concerned.

“So for me, taking on the site on New Street was a no-brainer. It is just a magical opportunity.”

Jon also makes the point that the location in the city centre is a particularly good spot on New Street, next to the Burlington Hotel.

This is, in itself, not without significance. The hotel – or what was originally the Midland Hotel – has always been a popular destination for travellers from other parts of the country to stay when visiting the city.

As Jon says: “I was chatting with a couple of new clients, based down in London, and I pointed out that they can get to New Street from Euston in an hour and a half. We are only 100 metres from the station.

“So there’s the location, and also the footfall, which is huge compared to Harborne and Wolverhampton if I’m honest.

“It’s incredibly impressive premises – but it’s our job to entice the public in and show them what we are all about.”

Let’s find out a little more what visitors to the new Rudells in New Street will find.



Jon Weston



Computer generated images of the new store

advertisement feature

**“We are completing the jigsaw and complementing the whole jewellery offer in Birmingham, because what we’re not doing is taking brands down there that other people are already selling. So we’re making a wider choice available to the discerning public.”**

First of all, it’s a reasonably large showroom, amounting to approximately 4,000 sq ft, spread over two floors. There will be recurring motifs from Rudells’ existing showrooms – we can expect maple and Canadian walnut, and mocha and cream colours with eye-catching splashes of colour.

The staircase will be a feature in itself – “elegant and glass panelled”, according to Jon.

But what about the brands? The ground floor will be occupied predominantly by Patek Philippe, but customers can expect to find jewellery from the likes of Chopard, Fope, Messika, Georg Jensen – and Marco Bicego – pearls from Mikimoto and pens from Mont Blanc.

So it isn’t all the Patek Philippe show. However, Jon’s excitement levels rise when discussing the space devoted to the legendary watchmaker – and his descriptions go some way to illustrate the focus on the whole customer experience at Rudells.

“Their area is beautiful, quite exquisite,” says Jon. “There’s a viewing area, a private consultation area and a VIP area, in which we will have a dining table able to seat eight people.

“So if we’re doing private launches of particular models, we can entertain the clients there with some outside catering.

“And if you have four or five members of a family, we can sit them down very easily at the table here and it just makes the

whole experience far more pleasurable for them.”

Jon uses the term ‘experience’ a lot, to differentiate buying an item at Rudells as beyond a straight over-the-till transaction, and he fully recognises that some of the items the showroom has to offer are special gifts to last not only one lifetime – but possibly for future generations as well.

To give this sort of occasion the level of drama it deserves, the team at Rudells are installing what they call a ‘reveal cabinet’ in the Birmingham store.

Jon explains: “Let’s say there’s a member of the family you want to surprise, and you have bought them a wonderful gift. We put that in a frosted glass cabinet.

“You come and sit down, we get the champagne open, have a bit of a chat and then do the reveal. We press a button and the glass goes from frosty to transparent, revealing the item. I think you’ll find this is a first in Birmingham.”

The utmost care has been taken in the

staffing of the Birmingham showroom. Jon has been careful to ensure that while the experience and expertise necessary for the new showroom has been drafted in from Harborne and Wolverhampton and externally, ensuring all three sites will continue to operate seamlessly.

The brands on sale in Birmingham have also been chosen carefully.

“We are completing the jigsaw and complementing the whole jewellery offer in Birmingham, because what we’re not doing is taking brands down there that other people are already selling. So we’re making a wider choice available to the discerning public.

“I know and feel that Birmingham will become our new flagship store for sure. And I think it has huge potential, or I wouldn’t even be entertaining the idea of going there.

“We very much look forward to welcoming our clients both old and new. “These are very exciting times.”



# Fundraising dinner

The Kids' Village Gala dinner was held at the Grand Hotel and raised over £119,000 as part of its fundraising to build Kids' Village, the UK's first holiday village exclusively for critically ill children and their families to enjoy a short respite holiday.

Hosted by Heart FM presenter Ed James, the dinner had over 200 guests in attendance who enjoyed entertainment and fundraising activity throughout the evening, as well as hearing more about Kids' Village and project progress from co-founder Sam Fletcher-Goodwin, CEO Katrina Cooke and Kids' Village chairman Doug Wright MBE DL.

Fundraising on the night included a live and silent auction, raffle and live pledges.

Right: Sam Fletcher-Goodwin explaining the story of Kids' Village  
Inset: Henry Carpenter



Kiran Franklin, Hanna Fletcher, Ellie Fletcher and Nikki Franklin



Nasir Awan and Paul Faulkner



Tom and Charlotte Shepherd



Doug Wright, Katrina Cooke, Sam Fletcher-Goodwin and Ed James



Jaspaal Bains, Mahmudur Jaigirdar, Mabs Ali and Bal Padda



Mike Hopkins and Ninder Johal



Tom Shepherd, Matt Jones and Ed James



Amy Kiernan and Tim Andrews



Amina Hussain, Doug Wright and Inez Brown



Guests taking to the dance floor

# IT company moving to Billiards Building

property

Softcat, the FTSE 250 IT company, has agreed a lease for 9,000 sq ft of office space at the newly refurbished Billiards Building in Birmingham's central business district.

The company, which provides IT infrastructure solutions to the public and private sectors, has signed a 10-year lease on the whole of the 7th floor with landlord Grosvenor. It will relocate from its current office at Interchange Place on Edmund Street, where it has been based since 2019.

Joint agents CBRE and JLL advised Grosvenor on the letting. LSH acted for Softcat.

Billiards Building, previously known as 134 Edmund Street, was acquired by Grosvenor in 2021. The 79,000 sq ft Grade A office has been upgraded as part of a £35 million capital investment programme to transform the organisation's 500,000 sq ft regional office portfolio.

The building now features a new reception and business lounge, café, gym and yoga studio, and communal roof terrace. A new M&E system and wider energy efficiency improvements, including replacing the building's gas-powered system to fully electric, have also significantly improved its operational energy usage. As a result, it has achieved net zero status and EPC 'A' rating.

Fergus Evans, Grosvenor office portfolio director, said: "Securing net zero status demonstrates how existing buildings can



be successfully refurbished to create environmentally friendly, energy efficient Grade A office space.

"We are seeing strong demand for buildings which offer outstanding amenities and industry leading environmental performance in fantastic locations, which is reflected in the interest we have received from occupiers at Billiards Building."

Theo Holmes, senior director and head of office agency at CBRE in Birmingham, said: "Today's corporate occupiers want and

expect more from their office, whether that's in the quality of the space, the provision of onsite amenities or the building's green credentials.

"The refurbishment of the Billiards Building means it now meets all the needs of the modern, discerning office occupier. Furthermore, the flexible floor plates enable the building to react to changing business needs, offering fully fitted and traditional solutions and a range of suite sizes for businesses to scale up."

## Promotions at CBRE

Real estate consultancy CBRE has promoted nine staff at its Birmingham office.

Dan Grigg, who works in the rating team, Stuart Eustace, head of residential capital markets, and Lydia Dutton, regional sustainability lead, have been promoted from director to senior director.

CBRE has also promoted Alex Crawshaw and Ryan Woodcock, who both work in property management, and Mark McFadden, planning and development, to director, while Jeevan Duggal, Adnan Ijaz and Laura Sinstadt have been promoted to data enablement lead, associate engineer

and senior surveyor respectively.

Will Ventham, head of the firm's Birmingham office, said: "The promotions recognise the individual achievements and collective contribution each person has made to the business.

"CBRE places great importance on investing in its people and I am pleased that all eight have been rewarded."

**Pictured from left are Will Ventham, Mark McFadden, Dan Grigg, Lydia Dutton and Ryan Woodcock**



## New lease of life for building

An empty building in the heart of China Town in the city centre has been given new life by a coffee-loving entrepreneur.

J&H Coffee, which was due to open in November, occupies two storeys of the building in Bromsgrove Street.

It is the brainchild of Annie Zhao, who said customers will be given more of an interactive experience than in standard coffee shops, with trained baristas on hand to provide a huge selection of coffees.

There will be seating areas on both the ground and first floors, as well as a library area and meeting room. Customers will also be able to take beverages away from the counter on the ground floor.

"I have wanted to open my own coffee shop for some time," said Annie.

"We have worked very hard to create several comfortable areas of contrasting character to make the experience of visiting J&H Coffee as pleasurable as possible."



## Development reaches milestone moment



Midlands-based developer Elevate Property Group and project managers Build Fifty 5 have reached a milestone with the completion of the main structure of Chapman's Yard in Birmingham city centre.

The team, who were joined by selling agents Knight Frank, hosted a topping out ceremony at the Upper Gough Street site to mark the occasion.

Once completed, Chapman's Yard will have 112 apartments consisting of one and two-bedroom flats and duplexes.

David Hofton, sales and marketing

director at Elevate Property Group, said: "This is an exciting moment to have reached this key milestone at Chapman's Yard.

"The topping out event recognises the effort and teamwork invested in creating the building."

Liam Smith, partner at Knight Frank, said: "We are delighted to have been a part of this key stage in the construction of Chapman's Yard. The team is looking forward to bringing this city centre scheme to the market."

## Next phase gets underway

Work on the next phase of a high-profile urban development scheme in Birmingham will get underway this month.

Keon Homes, working in partnership with sister company Cameron Homes and housing association Midland Heart, has agreed a land-led deal to commence works on phases 3A, B and C on the Icknield Port Loop Development, building 124 units over the next two years.

Part of the broader urban regeneration development, these phases will see construction of two, three and four-bedroom homes, alongside a small apartment block that straddles the canal corner.

"As a Brummie born and bred, I'm delighted that we have found a solution that will eventually bring this next phase of the project to life," said Warren Bolton,

director of Keon Homes.

"It has been nine months in the making, but thanks to our strong partnership with Midland Heart and our ability to bring our sister business Cameron Homes into the mix, we were able to meet all the expectations and are now looking to build this flagship scheme out.

"There is a desperate need for more affordable homes in the city and Icknield Port Loop was starting to meet some of these requirements. This is not just about 'bricks and mortar', this is about creating a thriving community that is just 15 minutes' walk from everything Birmingham has to offer and will boast fantastic open spaces."

The firm is expecting the scheme to take just under two years to complete, with the first properties set to be handed over in Spring 2025.

property

# Longbridge reopens

property

The home of the former West Works car factory in Longbridge – birthplace of the iconic Mini car – has reopened to the public for the first time in almost two decades, after master developer St. Modwen handed over 27 acres of public realm.

The 75-acre mixed-use site encompasses Longbridge Business Park and will ultimately see the delivery of over 340 new homes by St. Modwen Homes.

It is now open to the public, giving residents access to large open park spaces, a rejuvenated river corridor, and over 2.5 km of cycle and footpaths.

Throughout the route, interactive trail boards have been installed giving information on the local ecosystem and the rich history of the region.

In addition, the West Works project has undertaken an extensive tree-planting initiative, with over 3,000 new trees planted across the property replacing the once concrete factory floor.

Sarwjit Sambhi, CEO of St. Modwen, said: "The success of our Longbridge

regeneration project demonstrates what can be achieved through collaboration between the public and private sectors.

"Our vision for the region has always been to provide a diverse range of development which can benefit both the local community and businesses.

"Having already attracted industry-leading global businesses to Longbridge Business Park, we will shortly be delivering much-needed houses on the site."

Longbridge Business Park, a specialised hub for science, technology, medicine and precision engineering, is positioned within the West Works site as the centre of innovation and entrepreneurship in the region.

With five R&D businesses already established at the park, the project aims to generate up to 5,000 new jobs.

The West Works site was an integral part of the former MG Rover plant, once the largest car factory in Europe, but is now part of St. Modwen's wider £1 billion regeneration of the 468-acre Longbridge site, which it acquired in 2005.

## Plans for logistics space submitted

Plans have been submitted to speculatively build 270,000 sq ft of Grade A urban logistics space on a former automotive component manufacturing site in Erdington.

The development is a joint venture between developer Chancerygate and specialist sustainable and impact investor Bridge Fund Management.



## Law firm moves to Snowhill

Law firm Trowers & Hamlin's Birmingham office is relocating from 10 Colmore Row to One Snowhill after signing a 10-year lease at the 17,000 sq ft premises.

Partner and head of the Birmingham office Yetunde Dania said: "We are very excited about moving to our new office.

"It brings an enhanced new working environment for our staff and vibrant space for our clients. The move demonstrates our ongoing commitment to the city, remaining in the same business district to not only continue being accessible for clients, but also to accommodate for our continued growth.

"It also supports our firmwide growth strategy and our mission to be more sustainable as a business."

The partners intend to develop a scheme comprising 22 leasehold units ranging from 4,500 sq ft to 60,000 sq ft.

The proposed development – named Torque – will be located on Chester Road in Erdington, on the outskirts of Birmingham city centre and close to both junction 5 and 6 of the M6. It has a projected gross development value of £77 million.

Neighbouring occupiers to the proposed development include Jaguar Land Rover, Volvo and Selco Builders Warehouse, as well as further retail and industrial parks.

Chancerygate development manager Rob Watts said: "There is unsatisfied demand from SME occupiers in Birmingham and across the West Midlands for high quality, sustainable urban logistics units in prime locations.

"Torque will aim to satisfy this through providing flexibly sized, high specification space on what is regarded as one of the city's most prominent sites.

"Our proposed plans will regenerate a redundant building into new Grade A accommodation."

# First phase complete

Developer Watkin Jones has completed on the first phase of its 551-bed BTR scheme in Sherlock Quarter in Birmingham.

The first phase of 125 units was delivered on behalf of Get Living and is part of a broader six-building development set to be completed later this year.

Sherlock Quarter – formerly known as Maker's Yard – is built on a former brownfield site and provides a mix of one, two and three-bedroom apartments for rent and 27 affordable homes in this phase.

Spread over two eight-storey buildings, amenities include a gym, co-working space, social lounges, a landscaped podium and a double-height sky lounge.

Richard Harris of Watkin Jones said: "We are pleased to announce the practical completion and handover of the first phase of Sherlock Quarter, a key component of a larger build-to-rent development to our client Get Living.

"The development helps to address the housing shortage in Birmingham, and in partnership with Get Living, we have successfully delivered the first sustainable rental homes in Sherlock Quarter."



property

## Plans for self-storage facility announced

Leading commercial developer and investor Woodbourne Group has announced plans to build a pipeline of self-storage facilities – beginning with a multi-million-pound development in the West Midlands.

The firm will start with the £9 million redevelopment of a 1.03-acre site at Pedmore Road in Brierley Hill.

Tani Dulay, CEO of Woodbourne Group, said: "We have secured planning permission in Brierley Hill, marking our entry into the self-storage sector."

A 31,750 sq ft industrial building will be repurposed to create a 50,000 sq ft of self storage, bringing investment to the area and generating new employment opportunities.

The development will involve re-cladding, re-roofing and re-configuring the entrances.

Located on Pedmore Road, Dudley, the site is currently used as a factory producing pipe fittings.

Cushman & Wakefield is advising Woodbourne Group on its self-storage pipeline.





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JULY



SOCIAL SOFTBALL SHOWDOWN  
SEPTEMBER



LEGENDS & LUNCH: FESTIVE CELEBRATION  
NOVEMBER

# Bears Business Club relaunches

## Exciting networking opportunities for Midlands SMEs at Edgbaston Stadium

Companies across the Midlands can access more networking opportunities than ever before at the iconic Edgbaston Stadium after Warwickshire County Cricket Club relaunched its Bears Business Club – sponsored by Intercity. The Bears Business Club – made up of SMEs across a variety of sectors – has made a name for itself in the last three years as one of the region’s foremost business communities, connecting local corporates through the power of sport, with a unique offering distinct from typical networking environments.

New for 2025, members will receive access to six events across the year, including a launch event, business exhibition and matchday hospitality experience, plus dedicated networking opportunities featuring a range of guest speakers – all for just a £500 + VAT one off fee.

The revamped 2025 schedule will



provide year-round networking and promotional opportunities, with events set to take place in February, April, June, July, September & November.

Around 250 delegates, representing more than 80 companies, have attended four events so far this year.

And with the introduction of a more

accessible membership category, Sales Manager George Shakespeare expects increased interest from SMEs that are keen to make connections and build their business profile.

He said: “All our events have an underlying networking focus, including high-performance sport and business panels, cricket hospitality, and forums featuring a range of guests.

“We want to make networking as accessible as possible to SMEs, providing a hub to engage with likeminded companies. The aim is to provide a breeding ground for SMEs to grow, creating a network of regional contacts of which they can lean upon and develop reciprocal business relationships.

“At a price point of £500, our aim is to give smaller enterprises the opportunity to get involved in what we are building here. The Bears Business Club is open to all, no barriers, and with innovation and diversity at its core.”

All new Bears Business Club members will also be ‘capped’ – as Warwickshire players are when making their debuts – and presented with a digital cap for use online and across their social channels.

For more information and to register interest, visit <https://edgbaston.com/commercial/bears-business-club/>

New members signing up before Friday 29th November will receive access to an additional exclusive event, taking place on Tuesday 3rd December 2024.



advertisement feature

For more information, contact [commercial@edgbaston.com](mailto:commercial@edgbaston.com)



# IPF Midlands annual dinner

Left: Jonathan Devaney, Marcus Brigstocke and Clare Thomas



Paul Bishton and Sue Forster

The Investment Property Forum Midlands held its annual dinner at Birmingham's International Convention Centre.

The black-tie event was sponsored by property consultants Fisher German, law firm Hill Dickinson, warehousing and industrial space provider Indurent and Lloyds Bank.

IPF Midlands chairman, Jonathan Devaney, presented Simon Robinson, who heads BNP's Birmingham office, with an award for services to the property investment community.

The IPF's 460 members and guests were entertained by Marcus Brigstocke, comedian, writer, actor and presenter.



Henry Bellfield, Hapri Yorke-Brooks and Michele Bakarce



Steve Compton, Mark Booth and Adam Smith



Julie Craig, Rhiannon Williams, Ellis Goodwin and Jo Russell



Richard Round, Dominic Goold, Clare Thomas and Rupert Young



Simon Robinson and Jonathan Devaney



Richard Suart and Stephen Manners

## Anthony Collins' new legal director

Social purpose law firm Anthony Collins has appointed a new legal director in the form of Joe Mulrenan from HCR Law as part of the ongoing expansion of its corporate team.

Joe has over 10 years' experience in supporting dealmaking activity, advising organisations in the health and social care sector such as specialist care, supported living and children's care.

As well as advising specialist care providers, he has acted for many financial institutions and entrepreneurs, supporting them through a variety of complex mergers and acquisitions transactions. His experience also spans the manufacturing and communications sectors.

Laura Jordan, partner and head of corporate at Anthony Collins, said: "Joe joins our expanding corporate team with a strong track record and reputation in the mid-market space for his consistency in supporting and completing deals successfully.

"This strategic addition to our team comes at a period of significant growth as we respond to market demand."



## Senior team strengthened at asset management company

Birmingham-based consultancy and asset management company Switch Management has strengthened its senior team with the appointment of Sigita Pjampite as regional director of sales.

Sigita brings over 10 years' experience in hospitality and sales and has held positions at UK hotel groups including Hilton Hotels & Resorts and Marriott Hotel.

Her most recent role was sales manager at Unique Venues Birmingham, where she managed distinctive event spaces across the city, including the Library of Birmingham and The Rep.

In her new position, Sigita will focus on driving sales across the business's asset portfolio, including its flagship hotel Park Regis Birmingham and the recently

opened aparthotel Birmingham.

She said: "Joining the team at Switch Management is a significant moment in my career.

"My priority is to showcase the strengths of our asset portfolio to help accelerate new business opportunities, and I look forward to bringing my sector knowledge and expertise to the role."

Managing director John Angus said: "We are further strengthening our sales team with the appointment of Sigita, who brings a wealth of hospitality experience to the role.

"Following the launch of aparthotel Birmingham this year, and as the business continues to diversify, our investment in new talent is crucial in helping us achieve our growth plans."

## Appointment bolsters housebuilder's planning department

A Birmingham-based housebuilder has bolstered its planning team with the appointment of a new team member.

Phoebe Conway joins the team at Persimmon as a planner, working to progress the submission of planning applications, planning conditions, and processing Section 106 agreements. She will work with consultants and architects on a daily basis, as well as attending meetings with local authorities to deliver homes across the region.

A graduate of the University of Birmingham, Phoebe previously worked as a planner at Marrons and Ilke Homes, allowing her to gain experience both in-house and at a consultancy.

Nick Wilkins, technical director at Persimmon Homes Central, said: "Phoebe's skills and experience will be a real asset to Persimmon Central and the business overall."



## Three new partners join Midlands office of law firm

HCR Law has announced the appointment of three new partners and a legal director across its Midlands offices.

Terry Cooper, Lisa Kemp and Claire Pottinger join the firm as partners, while Katie Maxwell-Stuart takes on the role of legal director.

The Birmingham office has welcomed

Terry and Katie to its private client team.

Katie, a specialist in disputed wills, trusts and estates solicitor with over 15 years of experience, returns to HCR Law, where she began her career as a trainee in 2006. Terry is one of several recent new hires to the private client team, bringing over 30 years of experience in advising business leaders

and individuals, with specialisms including inheritance tax planning.

Lisa and Claire both join HCR's Worcester office, led by Charlotte Thornton-Smith.

Rebecca Leask, partner and head of the firm's Birmingham office, said "These hires are significant for us and the services we provide to our clients nationally."



Pictured from left are Rebecca Leask, Charlotte Thornton-Smith, Terry Cooper, Claire Pottinger, Katie Maxwell-Stuart, Lisa Kemp, Michael Stokes and Beth King-Smith

## New management team unveiled



From left are Adam Taylor, Jonathan Walsh and Ryan Brown

**GMI Construction Group has unveiled a new management team for its Midlands operation.**

Adam Taylor has been named as the new regional director for the Midlands.

Having spent 13 years with GMI, Adam has been heavily involved in the establishment and subsequent growth of the company's presence in the Midlands, which began in 2018.

The role of commercial director for the Midlands has been awarded to Ryan Brown, who entered the industry in 2000 as a quantity surveyor and joined GMI almost three years ago.

Both Adam and Ryan will lead the regional operation working closely with construction director Jonathan Walsh.

Gareth Jones, group managing director, said: "I am pleased to see Adam step into this role, which is a testament to his dedication and the significant impact he has made in establishing GMI as a major player in the Midlands.

"His leadership and expertise will be invaluable as we continue to grow our presence in the region. With Adam, Jonathan and Ryan at the helm, I am confident that the Midlands team will reach new heights."



## Hospitality veteran joins the Belfry

**The Belfry Hotel & Resort has appointed hospitality veteran Katie Niland as commercial director.**

With a background in hospitality spanning more than three decades, and 10 years of experience as sales director at The Belfry behind her, Katie will oversee the sales, revenue, resort desk and marketing teams.

She was awarded a place on the Boutique Hotelier Power List in 2022 in recognition of her contribution to the industry, and is a member of multiple associations, frequently speaking on panels and at events.

Katie said: "This is an incredible opportunity. I have a fantastic team around me and I know there will be no limit to what we can achieve. As we cement The Belfry's reputation as a world-class leisure and events destination, I am energised for the task ahead and excited by its potential."

## Gateley Legal expands real estate team



Lee McBride and Rebecca Sherwin

**Gateley Legal has bolstered its national real estate team with the appointment of Lee McBride as a partner at its Birmingham office.**

Lee brings more than 30 years of commercial real estate and environmental law experience to the team. He joins following three years with Ladders Solicitors LLP, and prior to that spent 25 years at Gowling WLG.

He was head of environmental law at both firms and has advised a wide range of industries including retail, defence, automotive, residential and affordable housing, finance and industrial.

In his role at Gateley Legal, his expertise is expected to enhance the company's environmental services across the commercial and residential property sectors, as well as supporting on corporate transactions and regulatory matters.

Rebecca Sherwin, partner and national head of real estate at Gateley Legal, said: "Lee brings valuable experience spanning a wide range of sectors and his due diligence and environmental expertise will not only develop our market leading real estate team, but also provide support for our other property services and wider legal offering."

## Evelyn Partners gains associate director

**Wealth management and professional services group Evelyn Partners has announced the appointment of Rachel Bleakley as an associate director in its Birmingham financial planning team.**

Before joining, Rachel was a wealth planner at Succession Wealth. She has also worked for Fisher Investments and Chase de Vere Medical.

Her primary focus at Evelyn Partners will be to help female business owners, entrepreneurs and executives with their retirement planning and general wealth management.

Niraj Vyas, managing partner at Evelyn

Partners, said: "I am delighted to welcome Rachel to our growing team of financial planners across the Midlands.

"Her passion and commitment towards supporting female entrepreneurs in particular will undoubtedly allow us to better serve this important segment of the market."

Rachel added: "I am really excited to be joining the Birmingham financial planning team.

"I look forward to working with my new colleagues to provide individuals, particularly female businesswomen, with financial advice."

# Five minutes with...



## B.D. Dalton II

Strategic director, Rockfine Group

downtime

### In one sentence, what does your role involve?

Building and protecting wealth for business owners through wealth management and strategic consulting.

### How long have you been in your current job?

27 years

### Please give a summary of your professional career to date.

My career kicked off at Walmart in its management acceleration programme, stationed in Lakewood, Washington. From there I dived into the financial world, joining Edward Jones Investments in 1997, where I quickly became a partner. In 2002 I made the move across the pond to the UK, where I led initiatives for Edward Jones across the Midlands. Fast forward to 2009, when Edward Jones exited the UK, I took the opportunity to establish our own wealth firm, now known as Temple Row. In 2012 I founded Rockfine, shifting focus to helping business owners sell their companies for top value.

### Did further/higher education set you up well for your particular vocation?

Higher education was essential to get qualified, especially in finance. I went to university in the States to study international business, but I would say that while education laid the groundwork, most of my learning came from real-world experience and constant adaptation in a fast-changing environment.

### How is your job impacted by uncertainties in the economy?

Here's the funny thing: when the economy shifts, people with wealth need even more advice. Adversity creates opportunity, especially for the wealthy. The economic rollercoaster, whether it's driven by taxes or market shifts, tends to create new avenues for strategic planning and growth. The wealthy often come out stronger when times are tough.

### What's your view of artificial intelligence – an opportunity, threat, or bit of both?

It's an amazing opportunity, no question. But I'm also cautious. If AI goes unchecked, we could hit the singularity way faster than we're ready for. With planning and oversight, AI is a game-changer, especially for industries like wealth management where data and efficiency drive results.

### Social media platform of choice, and why?

LinkedIn takes the top spot for me. It's the perfect hub for professional connections and thought leadership. My second choice

would be YouTube, especially for podcasts and video content. I've had incredible conversations with people like Jay Abraham and Dr Allan Barnard, and YouTube helps extend those insights to a global audience.

### How do you hope your colleagues would describe you?

Energetic, connected, and what I like to call myself—a 'lazy over achiever'. I love getting things done, but I'm all about working smarter, not harder. My colleagues hopefully see me as someone who keeps things moving but doesn't burn out in the process.

### Highlights of your career so far?

I've picked up a few awards along the way, but the real highlight has been creating businesses and building teams at Rockfine and Temple Row that allow me to live the life I love. I can take one holiday a month and still feel confident my clients are in great hands. Balancing my professional life with my personal life – my clients, team and family – is the real success for me.

### Any particular faux pas or embarrassing moments in your career you would prefer to forget?

Every career has its moments, but nothing too dramatic that I would lose sleep over. You learn more from the hiccups than from smooth sailing, right? I loved my time at Edward Jones and I was once on the BBC talking about what I thought was cabbies and it ended up actually being Cadbury's, so I looked stupid on TV.

### Pet hates?

Top of the list: people who don't respond to emails or WhatsApp messages, lateness, and – my personal favourite – people telling me how busy they are. Everyone's busy, but it's about how you manage your time that counts. We call them 'pet peeves' in the US.

### If you could go back and give your younger self some wise advice, what would it be?

Hold onto those Amazon shares! But in all seriousness, invest more in yourself, be patient, and always remember that success doesn't happen overnight. It's a long game, and the best returns come from persistence and smart decisions.

### How do you relax away from work?

The gym is my go-to for stress relief, and I love lifting weights. When I'm not working out you'll find me travelling, enjoying good food, and sipping wine with my family and friends.

### Tell us something about you that most people probably wouldn't know.

I'm an Eagle Scout, I can juggle, and I spent a year living in Spain. Random skills and life experiences can sometimes take people by surprise!

### You can take one book, one film, and one CD onto a desert island – what would they be?

For books, I'd take The Compound Effect for business inspiration, and The Prophet or The Art of War for personal growth. My film would have to be Monty Python and the Holy Grail – a bit of humour is essential. For music, the Beastie Boys Anthology would keep my energy levels high.

### Your five dream dinner party guests, dead or alive?

My Grandpa Doc would definitely be at the table, along with Elon Musk, General Franco, Leonardo da Vinci and Baron Rothschild. The conversations would be as diverse as the personalities.

### What would you choose to eat for your last supper?

Tapas, hands down. You get a little bit of everything... variety is the spice of life!



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