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Official Magazine of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Summer 2026

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Official Magazine of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce

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Working together, achieving more.

Welcome

...to the Summer edition of Business Focus Magazine.

As the better weather begins to arrive, the outlook for business still feels overcast with more gathering storm clouds than clear blues skies look to be on the horizon for the economy.

Global instability continues to shape trading conditions, with supply chain disruption, rising geopolitical tensions and shifting trade patterns all feeding into a more uncertain outlook. At the same time, businesses are navigating domestic policy change, particularly around employment legislation, where clarity and practical implementation will be critical.

The message coming through strongly from the British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) is clear: economic security, trade resilience and a genuinely pro-business policy environment must now move from discussion to delivery. For many firms, the challenge is no longer just managing cost pressures, but operating confidently in a world where uncertainty is the norm rather than the exception.

Yet, alongside this national picture, there is a very different story unfolding here in Bedfordshire. We have seen real momentum in bringing together business, policy and delivery partners to ensure our area is ready to capitalise on the scale of opportunity ahead. From our first Creative Sector roundtable, helping shape the future of a key growth industry, to ongoing engagement with Government and the BCC on the Employment Rights Act, we are making sure the voice of local business is heard at every level.

Crucially, we are also seeing stronger alignment across transport, skills and investment. Discussions around the Midland Mainline have reinforced just how central infrastructure is to unlocking growth, while collaboration with partners including The Bedford College Group, DfE, DWP and Skills England is helping to ensure our workforce is prepared for what's coming next.

That work is already translating into tangible action. The launch of **BedX**: Bedfordshire Opportunity Exchange brought together over 400 business leaders, all focused on one thing: how to access and benefit from the significant pipeline of investment coming into our region - from Universal Destinations & Experiences and Luton Rising's airport expansion plans, to wider national opportunities such as Sizewell C.

This is what delivery looks like locally: not just talking about growth, but creating the connections, insight and practical support that enable businesses to compete and win. Because the opportunity ahead is significant, but it will favour those who are prepared, visible and ready to engage.

Our role as a Chamber remains clear: to ensure local businesses are not on the sidelines of this growth, but at the heart of it. As always, we are here to connect you to opportunity, represent your voice and provide the practical support you need to grow.

Together, let's make sure Bedfordshire is ready for what comes next.

Justin Richardson

Chief Executive Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce



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The Chairman's VIEW

Rod J Calvert OBE DL

Chairman of Bedfordshire
Chamber of Commerce

Much is rightly being said about the impact of Artificial Intelligence on our lives and businesses. As humans, we are naturally resistant to change, and the faster it comes, the harder it is to absorb. Change can create uncertainty and fear, but it also opens the door to significant opportunity.

In many respects, AI represents the next industrial revolution, whether we label it as such or not. History offers countless examples of transformative change: from the transition of the Stone Age to the Bronze Age, taking thousands of years, to the advent of the printing press, steam power, the internal combustion engine, telecommunications, the transistor, the internet and smartphones. The pace of change and innovation is accelerating and hard to cope with at a personal level. Each wave of innovation sparked concern about jobs, economic disruption and social upheaval. Yet each ultimately drove progress, creating new industries, improving productivity and raising living standards.

As the pace of change accelerates, adapting becomes more challenging. We can see this even within our own families, where generational gaps in understanding new technologies continue to widen. Increasingly, answers come from chatbots rather than traditional sources of wisdom.

And yet, history consistently shows that people adapt. With each technological leap, we shift towards more productive and valuable uses of our time. Those who embrace change tend to benefit most, but even those who hesitate often find that new opportunities emerge, albeit in different forms.

So what of AI? If history is any guide, we can expect new industries, new roles, many of which we cannot yet even imagine, with continued improvements in productivity and prosperity. Businesses will evolve, and entrepreneurs, particularly early adopters, will play a leading role.

Amid all this change, one constant remains: business is fundamentally about people. Trust is built through personal interaction. Yet we must ask ourselves, are we losing those interpersonal skills? Are we too quick to send a message instead of making a call? And in a world of deepfakes and misinformation, can we and do we always trust what we see on a screen?

This is where your Chamber of Commerce plays a vital role. By creating opportunities for genuine, face-to-face engagement, through conferences, exhibitions, networking events, trade fairs and business awards, we bring real people together. These are the environments where trust is established and meaningful business relationships are formed. Technology can enhance and streamline business, but it cannot replace the human connection at its core.

We remain committed to ensuring that the Chamber continues to lead in fostering these opportunities, helping our members connect, collaborate, and thrive.

I look forward to seeing you in person soon.

Rod J Calvert

“ Change can create uncertainty and fear, but it also opens the door to significant opportunity. ”

“ Amid all this change, one constant remains: business is fundamentally about people. Trust is built through personal interaction. ”



Bedfordshire unites as BedX launches to support businesses ahead of major regional investment

More than 400 business leaders from across Bedfordshire came together at King's House in Bedford for the official launch of **BedX** – Bedfordshire Opportunity Exchange, a new business-led initiative designed to help local companies prepare for and engage with a significant pipeline of regional investment.

Led by the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, alongside several top independent local businesses, **BedX** has been created in direct response to feedback from the business community, with companies calling for clearer visibility of opportunity, improved access to supply chains and practical support to help them compete.

The launch event brought together a wide range of organisations shaping the region's economic future. Representatives from Universal Destinations & Experiences (UDX) and Luton Rising, owner of London Luton Airport, Suffolk Chamber Supply Chain engagement for Sizewell C, were joined by panel contributors including The Bedford College Group, Bedford Borough Council and THSP, offering insight into upcoming programmes and procurement pathways.

The event marked an important moment for Bedfordshire, with speakers highlighting the scale of opportunity emerging across the region. With major developments progressing at pace, the level of investment and potential economic impact is expected to grow significantly in the coming years.

Justin Richardson, CEO of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, said: *"There is a real sense that Bedfordshire is entering a period of significant opportunity, but the businesses that benefit will be those that are ready to engage with it. **BedX** is about making sure our business community has the insight, connections and practical support needed to take that next step with confidence."*

BedX has evolved from a steering group established in 2025 and is now a business-led initiative supported by the Chamber. It brings together organisations from across sectors including construction, logistics, professional services and manufacturing, reflecting the breadth of Bedfordshire's economy.

The initiative focuses on helping businesses understand where opportunities will emerge, navigate complex, multi-tiered supply chains and build the capability needed to compete. While major developments such as the proposed Universal project are a key part of the landscape, they sit alongside a broader pipeline of infrastructure, regeneration and commercial growth that will create opportunities across multiple sectors.

For many businesses, these opportunities will sit within Tier 2 and Tier 3 supply chains, where preparation, positioning and visibility are critical to success. **BedX** has been designed to support businesses in becoming 'tender ready', with access to practical tools including the **BedX** Tender Readiness Diagnostic, alongside a programme of webinars and workshops focused on procurement, scaling and supply chain engagement.

Importantly, **BedX** is open to all businesses across Bedfordshire, regardless of size or sector. Its aim is to act as a central point of connection, ensuring that no business misses out through lack of awareness or preparation.

Following the launch, **BedX** will continue to deliver a programme of activity to support businesses, including webinars, workshops and further supply chain engagement opportunities, helping to maintain momentum and build long-term capability across the region.

For more information about **BedX** and how to get involved, visit chamber-business.com/bedx

Chamber NEWS



Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce is delighted to announce that, from 1st June, Machins Solicitors will become the latest sponsor of the Chamber's growing NXTGen Network, joining existing sponsor AEGIS Group of Companies in supporting the initiative.

The NXTGen Network has quickly established itself as a vibrant platform dedicated to supporting and connecting the next generation of business professionals across Bedfordshire. Through networking events, professional development opportunities and collaborative initiatives, the network aims to inspire young talent and encourage future business leaders throughout the region.

Machins Solicitors' sponsorship marks an exciting new chapter for the network, bringing together organisations committed to supporting growth, innovation and professional development within the local business community.

The Chamber is thrilled to welcome Machins Solicitors on board and looks forward to working closely with their team, alongside AEGIS Group of Companies, to further enhance opportunities for NXTGen members. Their support will help the network continue to expand its reach, deliver engaging events and provide valuable experiences for emerging professionals across Bedfordshire.

THE NXTGEN NETWORK

powered by



Veruth Holding's 2026 BURSARY AWARD

This year's Engineering Bursary Awards once again shone a spotlight on the exceptional young talent emerging from Luton.

Delivered in partnership between David Sheridan of Veruth Holdings and Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, the bursary continues to play a vital role in supporting students as they take their next steps into engineering at university.

The award ceremony was held at Luton Sixth Form College on Wednesday 6th May and brought together judges, students and representatives from local schools and colleges to celebrate achievement and ambition among the next generation of engineers.

Reflecting the exceptional standard of entries this year, David Sheridan also chose to recognise three outstanding runners-up, who shared a combined £5,000 per year of study.

This year's overall winner was Iman Khatri of Luton Sixth Form College.

Commenting on this year's awards, David Sheridan highlighted that this year was an exceptional year for quality of applications, noting how impressed he was with the use of the applicants own initiative to do things both inside and outside of college in their own time.

The event was a proud celebration of this year's achievements, and we look forward to seeing the continued success of these talented students and to next year's awards.

In the last 16 years we are delighted that over £250k has been awarded through this Bursary scheme to local students.



Better together.

You'll find plenty of opportunities to connect with other Bedfordshire Chamber members and local businesses at our range of upcoming events. Here are just a few of the scheduled events in 2026:



Members **SUMMER RECEPTION**

10th June – 4.30pm – 7pm

Cranfield University

MEMBERS ONLY – Free of Charge

Headline Sponsor: MOSS



MEET, EAT, CONNECT, Repeat

30th June – 4pm – 6pm

Southill Tea Rooms, Nr. Biggleswade

Members: Free of Charge

Non-Members: £25.00 + VAT

Kindly hosted by Creme Brew Lait



NXTGen **PRESENTING WITH IMPACT**

16th June – 10am – 12 noon

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Luton

Members: £15.00 + VAT

Non-Members: £30.00 + VAT

Kindly supported by SalesGeek



CONNECT Over Coffee

11th August – 9.30am – 11.15am

Amazon, Dunstable

Members: Free of Charge

Non-Members: £25.00 + VAT

Kindly hosted by Amazon



Supply Chain Connect **SIZEWELL C**

24th June

1-2-1 drop in session with Supply Chain Advisers

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, Luton

Free of Charge



BEHIND THE SCENES Essential Workwear

14th September – 9.30am – 11.00am

Essential Workwear, Dunstable

Free of Charge event

Kindly hosted by Essential Workwear



To book or for further information call 01582 522448 or visit my.chamber-business.com/events



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"The service received has always been professional and personable unlike dealing with those large faceless companies. Queries are responded to and quickly addressed as Carly and her team do care about the upkeep of their portfolios and the service they provide."

- Director of the RMC at Raleigh street Nottingham

QES Quarterly ECONOMIC SURVEY REPORT

Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce Quarterly Economic Survey (QES) forms part of the British Chamber of Commerce's national survey and is the principal business survey in the UK. Its results are closely watched by both the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee and the Treasury. The data reveals a timely and accurate snapshot of the economic climate for businesses in Bedfordshire and beyond.

Q1 2026 Findings

One Earthquake After Another

The Quarterly Economic Survey is described as a snapshot but in reality, it's closer to a seismograph - tracking the tremors running through the economy with precision. And over time, the pattern is clear: not one shock, but a series of them, each leaving its mark.

After the EU referendum, the signal wasn't collapse - it was hesitation. Investment stalled, confidence drifted, decisions were delayed. Then came Covid, where the data showed something very different: a sudden stop. Sales, orders and cashflow all fell at once.

The recovery brought its own pressures. Demand returned, but supply couldn't keep up. Recruitment challenges and rising costs became the dominant story - intensified by the war in Ukraine. The mini-budget in 2022 triggered a sharp drop in confidence, while the 2024 Autumn Budget tightened conditions further, adding to cost pressures and caution.

Since then, the picture has been one of persistence. Not crisis - but not recovery either.

Shaky ground, not momentum

The Q1 2026 results reflect exactly that. Locally, the data shows an economy holding steady - but going nowhere fast. Just

27% of businesses reported increased UK sales, while half saw no change. Forward orders are weaker still, with only 19% reporting growth. Demand is not falling away - but it isn't building either.

Exports continue to struggle. Only 18% of firms saw growth overseas, while 36% reported a decline, underscoring the continued impact of global uncertainty.

Cashflow tells a more concerning story. Only 8% of businesses saw improvement, while nearly four in ten reported a decline. Day-to-day trading conditions remain tight.

Holding back, not pushing forward

Perhaps most telling is investment. A striking 95% of firms reported no change in plant and machinery investment. Businesses are not retreating - but they are not committing either. And while 63% of businesses expect turnover to improve, profitability tells a different story, with 30% expecting it to fall. Growth may return - but margins remain under pressure.

Costs still driving behaviour

Costs continue to dominate decision-making. Labour remains the biggest pressure, alongside utilities and overheads. Looking ahead, 63% of firms expect to raise prices - clear evidence that inflationary pressure has not gone away. Taxation is now the top concern locally, followed by inflation and business rates - highlighting the growing weight of the domestic cost environment. Recruitment challenges persist too. While fewer firms are hiring, over half of those who do still struggle to find the right people.

The Bottom Line

Responding to the findings, Head of Research at the British Chambers of Commerce, David Bharier, said:

"Even before the latest escalation in the Middle East, business sentiment remained fragile and stuck in a low-growth phase.

"Most SMEs continue to report no improvement in key indicators such as investment and cash flow. Sentiment remains largely unchanged since the 2024 Budget, which saw a permanent increase in the labour cost base for firms.

"Businesses face a fresh wave of employer costs and burdens from this month, causing further pressure and uncertainty.

"But the Iran conflict is now the major factor that could detail fragile progress. We are already seeing early impacts, with firms reporting rising energy and shipping costs, echoing the initial stages of previous global shocks.

"In the longer term, breaking out of this low-momentum cycle will require delivering the industrial strategy, boosting and diversifying our exports, and the broader adoption of AI to drive productivity."



David Bharier
Head of Research at the British
Chambers of Commerce

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GREENWOOD DRONES

Enters Its Third Year with Continued Growth and Industry Recognition

As Greenwood Drones enters its third year of operation, the company continues to build a strong reputation for delivering high-quality aerial services across a wide range of industries.

Founded in Bedfordshire, Greenwood Drones has quickly established itself as a trusted operator within the UK drone sector. Working across construction, landscaping, infrastructure, media, and marketing, the business provides aerial photography and cinematography, FPV video, surveying and inspection services, as well as handheld media, supporting a wide range of creative and commercial projects.

Over the past three years, the company has worked with a diverse portfolio of clients, ranging from leading regional businesses to nationally recognised organisations. Local partnerships include companies such as Frosts Landscaping & Construction, based in Milton Keynes, Shellmar in Bedfordshire, and the Forest of Marston Vale. Alongside this, Greenwood Drones has collaborated on projects connected to organisations including Arsenal FC, AG Barr, and Strutt & Parker, as well as supporting charitable organisations such as Sue Ryder and Guide Dogs.

This breadth of work has taken the business across a wide variety of environments. Operations have been carried out in complex urban settings including London, Birmingham, Luton, and Milton Keynes, as well as along the coast in locations such as Kent and Plymouth. Closer to home, Greenwood Drones continues to work extensively across rural Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire, and Buckinghamshire.

Working across such a diverse range of locations and industries has provided the company with a unique perspective, offering insight into sectors that would otherwise remain unseen. From producing high-end media content to conducting detailed surveys and inspections, as well as delivering fly-throughs, interviews, and visual tours, Greenwood Drones has developed a well-rounded and highly adaptable service offering.

Operating under full CAA authorisation, the company places a strong emphasis on safety, compliance, and professionalism, consistently demonstrating its ability to plan and execute operations in challenging environments, including dense urban areas, live sites, and controlled airspace.

From Award Winner to Awards Sponsor

In 2025, the company's founder, Harvey Greenwood, was recognised as Young Business Person of the Year at the SME Bedfordshire Business Awards, a milestone that reflected both the growth of Greenwood Drones and the entrepreneurial drive behind it.

Now, as Greenwood Drones returns to the SME Bedfordshire Business Awards 2026 as a sponsor, the journey comes full circle, as founder Harvey Greenwood explains.

"Speaking personally, this is something I'm incredibly proud of. Winning Young Business Person of the Year 2025 was a defining moment. It validated the hard work, the sleepless nights, and everything that has gone into building Greenwood Drones from the ground up. It wasn't just recognition of the business's growth, but of the commitment, determination, and ambition behind it. To now return as a sponsor is an immense honour and a genuine privilege supporting the very awards that recognised that journey.

Bedfordshire has a strong and supportive business community, and through Greenwood Drones I've had the opportunity to network, build relationships, and work alongside so many incredible people and organisations. While it may be a relatively small county, it has so much to offer and is home to an exceptional range of businesses doing remarkable things."

Looking Ahead

As Greenwood Drones moves into its third year, the focus remains on continued growth, delivering high-quality work, and expanding its presence across both creative and technical sectors.

With increasing demand for professional drone services, combined with a proven track record across multiple industries and environments, the company is well-positioned for continued success while remaining grounded in the values that have driven its journey so far.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all clients, partners, friends and collaborators who have supported Greenwood Drones. Their trust and continued support have been fundamental to the company's growth and development.

Looking ahead, Greenwood Drones is excited for what the future holds as we continue to build strong relationships, take on new challenges, and deliver work that pushes both creative and technical boundaries.



greemwooddrones.co.uk

Member NEWS

Championing Women Through Collaboration

Now in its third successful year, Championing Women through Collaboration returns on 30th September 2026 for an inspiring afternoon of connection, conversation and opportunity at the beautiful Bedford Swan Hotel. Hosted jointly by the Women In Business Network, The Athena Network and Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, this growing annual event brings together ambitious women from across the region to celebrate the power of collaboration in business.

Taking place from 10.30am to 2.30pm, the event is designed for women in business who want to expand their network, build meaningful relationships and gain fresh inspiration from like-minded professionals. Whether you are an established business owner, an entrepreneur at the start of your journey, or a professional looking to grow your connections, this is an event not to be missed.

Guests will enjoy a dynamic programme featuring guest speaker, Nicky Perfect BEM. Nicky spent 31 years as a Metropolitan police officer and the last 10 of those years as an international hostage and crisis negotiator. There will also be an energising speed networking session, giving everyone the chance to meet a wide range of new contacts in a relaxed and supportive environment. A delicious two-course lunch is included, offering even more opportunity to continue conversations

Championing Women through Collaboration showcases what can happen when organisations come together with a shared purpose: to support, empower and elevate women in business.

Tickets are priced at £35 for members of Women In Business Network, The Athena Network and Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, and £45 for non-members.

Spaces are expected to fill quickly, so early booking is strongly recommended as only 70 tickets are available. You can book here <https://bit.ly/4uxn5Mj>



ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS Not Alcoholics Invisible!

At upcoming Chamber of Commerce events, you may notice a new and more visible presence from an organisation that has quietly supported people for almost 80 years: Alcoholics Anonymous. At a national level, we recognised that "anonymous" had gradually begun to look like "invisible", and so we are taking steps to engage more openly with the business community, offering clarity, accessibility, and genuine partnership.

In a fast paced society, it's rare to encounter a service that is both completely free and entirely without catch. Understandably, many people assume that if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is. AA is an exception. We provide employers with cost free support, information, and lived experience at a time when an estimated 17 million UK working days are lost annually to alcohol related issues, carrying a financial impact of around £7 billion. AA does not claim a monopoly on treatment, but it does offer two significant advantages: it is free, and it works for those who choose to engage with it.

When you see us at upcoming events, we warmly invite you to stop by, ask questions, and explore how AA can support the wellbeing of your workforce.





Strengthening local education through partnership:

TWO SCHOOLS JOIN HEART ACADEMIES TRUST

HEART Academies Trust is pleased to welcome two new schools into its growing family, as Goldington Green Academy and Wilstead Primary School begin their next chapter as part of the Trust.

Both partnerships are built on a shared commitment to high standards, strong community links and the belief that collaboration between schools helps improve outcomes for children and young people.

Goldington Green Academy joins the Trust with a focus on building on its strengths while benefiting from shared expertise, strong governance and wider professional development opportunities. Wilstead Primary School formally joined on 1 March, following a carefully planned transition designed to ensure continuity for pupils, families and staff. In both schools, day-to-day life remains unchanged, with their individual ethos and leadership continuing to guide their work.

David Morris, CEO of HEART Academies Trust, said: "We are delighted to welcome both schools. By working together, we can support our staff, strengthen our schools and improve life chances for the communities we serve."

As the Trust continues to grow, so does its ambition to remove barriers to learning and create opportunities for every child to succeed. Many young people face challenges that impact their education and future prospects, and partnerships with local businesses play a vital role in addressing these challenges.

There are a number of meaningful ways organisations and individuals can get involved – from volunteering time and expertise, mentoring young people, to sponsoring programmes and initiatives that directly support learning and wellbeing. Together, these opportunities help equip students with the skills, confidence and experiences they need to thrive.

If you would like to support your local schools and help create opportunities for young people across Bedfordshire, please contact Roz Bowen, Fundraising Manager at HEART Academies Trust on rbowen@heartacademiestrust.co.uk to find out how you can get involved.

Learn more about HEART Academies Trust at www.heartacademiestrust.co.uk

Working together, achieving more.



SMALL FOREST, BIG IMPACT 10 million trees planted

A major environmental milestone has been reached, as England's Community Forests celebrate the planting of 10 million trees. The achievement comes through the Trees for Climate programme, funded by UK Government via the Nature for Climate Fund, and delivered by England's 15 Community Forests. As the smallest Forest in the network, Bedfordshire's Forest of Marston Vale has made a significant contribution to the achievement.

For 30+ years, the Trust has been transforming the landscape, turning former industrial land into thriving green spaces and through Trees for Climate, has been able to expand its reach offering landowners, farmers and community groups free advice and support, combined with an attractive funding package, to transform their land through tree planting and woodland creation.

James Russell, Forest Director says, "This milestone reflects the passion and dedication of Community Forests across England. We're proud to play our part and we'll continue delivering an ambitious tree planting programme, tackling climate change by capturing carbon and reducing flood risks as well as enhancing the well-being of local communities; creating greener, healthier spaces, strengthening local communities' connection with nature, supporting mental and physical health, and fostering a sense of community pride.

To commemorate the occasion, each Community Forest planted a ceremonial "10 millionth tree." In the Forest of Marston Vale, that honour went to long-time volunteer David Pryor, who planted the tree at College Wood in Silsoe.

For the Forest of Marston Vale Trust this milestone is just another step on the journey to deliver 30% tree cover across the Forest area – one tree at a time!

You can play a part in this journey too as there are many ways you can protect and support your local Community Forest – visiting the Forest Centre in Marston Moretaine, becoming a Corporate Friend of the Forest or choosing the Forest Centre for your meetings, events, and conferences, to name a few.

Visit the website Forest of Marston Vale - Trees Make Life Better or email robina.ballard-davis@marstonvale.org to share in our success!

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FROM BEAN TO TREE

The Bedford College Group Partners with Wooden Hill Coffee

The Bedford College Group, with campuses across Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, has partnered with Wooden Hill Coffee as its new coffee supplier across its campuses, marking the start of a collaboration focused on quality, sustainability and supporting local initiatives.

To celebrate the new partnership, representatives from The Bedford College Group joined Wooden Hill Coffee in planting their own tree at a tree-planting event in Silsoe, Bedfordshire. The event forms part of Wooden Hill Coffee's long-running environmental initiative, which sees the company plant a tree for every 100kg of coffee it roasts.

The tree planting, which took place last week, brought together businesses and organisations from across the region. This year, Wooden Hill Coffee has committed to planting 400 trees as part of the initiative, helping to restore local woodland and support biodiversity across Bedfordshire.

Wooden Hill Coffee, based in Millbrook, has been running its tree planting programme since 2016. Over the past decade, the initiative has helped plant more than 2,000 trees locally, with support from customers and partners across the region.

Robin Sibley, owner of Wooden Hill Coffee, said: "We launched our tree initiative in 2016 with a clear mission: to build a coffee company that gives back, not just to the farmers who grow our beans, but to the environment and the community around us.

At Wooden Hill, we believe great coffee should have a positive impact. That's why we work to be as carbon-conscious as possible

while supporting both our local area and the communities where our coffee is grown.

For every 100kg of coffee we roast, we plant a tree. So far, that commitment has helped us plant over 2,000 trees right here in Bedfordshire.

Every cup of Wooden Hill coffee does more than taste great, it helps grow a forest."

The partnership will see Wooden Hill Coffee served across The Bedford College Group's campuses in Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire, supporting the Group's focus on sustainability, high-quality ingredients and educating students about responsible food and drink choices.

Hannah Mbabazi, Group Head of Catering at The Bedford College Group, said: "I'm proud to have introduced Wooden Hill Coffee as our new coffee partner across our campuses. Catering in further education is about far more than simply fuelling students for the day ahead, it's about educating them about food, quality ingredients, sustainability, and the role great hospitality plays in our communities.

This partnership reflects our commitment to offering students and staff a high-quality, ethically sourced product while also creating opportunities to inspire the next generation to value great food and drink."

By partnering with a local supplier that prioritises sustainability and community impact, The Bedford College Group is strengthening its commitment to responsible sourcing while supporting local businesses and environmental initiatives.

If you would like to find out more about The Bedford College Group, follow this link: <https://bedfordcollegigroup.ac.uk/>

You can find more information about Wooden Hill Coffee and their initiative here: <https://woodenhillcoffee.co.uk/>



Member NEWS



Blues
Foundation

GIVING YOUNG PEOPLE A NEW PERSPECTIVE THROUGH SPORT

After six years in operation, Bedford Blues Foundation is more determined than ever to help young people thrive. Since launching operationally in April 2020, the Foundation has worked hard to establish its programmes across our community and ensure they leave a lasting legacy in the town.

We've taken a look back at our journey so far and we could not be prouder and thankful to the people who have supported the Foundation.

Work towards creating the charitable arm of Bedford Blues started in 2018, formed by founding Trustees James Stonor, Bedford Blues Director, and the clubs Chief Executive Officer, Gareth Alred.

Now, the Foundation has a launched a series of videos to give our community a greater understanding of the work it does to support young people

Since its inception, the Foundation has grown significantly and now engages over 7,500 children each year.

From projects designed to boost girls access to rugby and feed off England's recent World Cup success, to school rugby coaching created to nurture the next crop of local talented players.

To targeted interventions that uses the sports values to address mental health challenges, behaviour in the classroom and improve life skills for young people.

This is where local professional sport can be so powerful, through rugby's core values, we see how these can transform a young person's perspective on life and attitude towards their own development. One student said:

"I didn't realise how much I needed these sessions until I stopped coming. They help my mental wellbeing."

The Foundation's programmes are vast, working directly with local schools and organisations where the team can make a significant difference.

Rory Ward, professional player for Bedford Blues, and Sport and Inclusion Mentor for Blues Foundation said: "I'm really passionate about the work, I'm helping people who are less fortunate than others. I think my work has helped me improve as a player too, just because I throw myself into it so wholeheartedly, it takes all my attention and helps me switch off from rugby.

I also feel the responsibility I have, in promoting the club to young people, When I'm at the club I'm present and trying to help in any way I can. I hope I'm making a difference. The work keeps me enjoying my rugby because it gives me purpose and proves that sport can make a lasting difference to peoples lives."

As a club and Foundation, we are delighted with the impact the charity has had in the first six years of its existence. We are passionate and determined to continue this momentum and continue making a difference to young people locally.

Can you enable our programmes to reach more young people? Our team are passionate about developing skills, preparing the next generation with the tools to succeed in their careers.

With demand rising, the Foundation is expanding with increased demand in particular from its disability provision, primary school work and support in further education. To continue growing, it needs the community's help, whether through sponsoring a student, volunteering, attending events or selecting the Foundation as your Charity of the Year.

To get involved, contact:
mike@bluesfoundation.org.uk
or tom@bluesfoundation.org.uk

Scan the QR code for details of our corporate sponsorship opportunities



CHARITY BORN ON A HOSPITAL WARD

Celebrates 10 Years of Changing Lives

A charity that began with a simple act of kindness on a hospital ward is marking a decade of impact across the region, including continued support for patients in Bedfordshire. The Lewis Foundation has been delivering free comfort packs to patients at Bedford Hospital's Primrose Unit and Palliative Care wards since 2018, helping to ensure those undergoing cancer treatment feel supported and remembered during difficult times. Founded in 2016 by Lorraine and Lee Lewis after their own family's experience of cancer care, the organisation has grown from a grassroots initiative into a regionally recognised charity. Today, it provides more than 2,000 gift packs every month to 17 hospitals, including Bedford and Luton & Dunstable Hospitals. Each pack contains practical items such as toiletries and overnight essentials, alongside thoughtful additions like letter-writing kits and radios, designed to improve patient wellbeing. Beyond hospital support, the charity also runs retail and hospitality ventures that help fund its work, alongside inclusive programmes offering work placement opportunities for volunteers of all backgrounds. Lorraine Lewis, co-founder and CEO of The Lewis Foundation, said: "Reaching our 10th anniversary is incredibly emotional for us. Every gift pack delivered represents kindness from our community and this milestone is as much about our volunteers and supporters as it is about us."

Businesses interested in partnering with The Lewis Foundation can get in touch by emailing hello@thelewisfoundation.co.uk.



THE ARCHITECTURE OF HOPE

A Different Approach to Leading Through Uncertainty

In today's fast-changing environment, organisations are constantly navigating uncertainty. Strategy, process and experience all play a role, but increasingly, they are not enough on their own. Local business owner and leadership consultant Steve Botterill, founder of Resourceful People Group, believes there is another factor that often determines how individuals and organisations respond in these moments: HOPE.

Not as a vague or passive concept, but as something more practical – something that can be recognised, shared and even actively facilitated.

This thinking has led to the creation of The Architecture of Hope, a new book that blends a modern, illustrated parable with practical frameworks drawn from real-world experience. The book explores how hope can act as a form of "infrastructure" during times of change, helping individuals and teams maintain direction, connection and momentum.

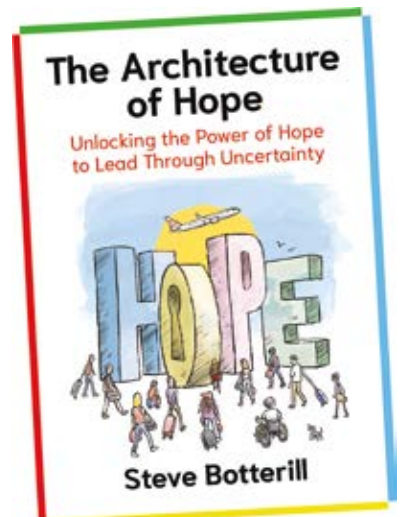
Drawing on Steve's work across leadership, change and organisational development, as well as insights from established research and partner frameworks, the book is designed to be accessible not only to leaders, but to anyone navigating change in their role or organisation.

Endorsed by leading voices in adaptability, reinvention, wellbeing and leadership, The Architecture of Hope offers a fresh perspective on how we approach uncertainty – moving beyond traditional models to something more human, practical and applicable.

As organisations continue to face ongoing disruption and transformation, the ability to recognise and harness hope may prove to be a critical capability – not just for leaders, but across entire teams.

The Architecture of Hope is now available, with further information accessible via local bookshops and online retailers.

Please contact us to find out more about this or how we can help you become 'People First & Change Ready' via 01234 989100 / stevebotterill@resourcefulpeoplegroup.com | www.resourcefulpeoplegroup.com



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Talk UK Telecom launches new sister company **FOCUSED ON BUSINESS ENERGY**

Over the years, we've supported businesses across Bedfordshire and the surrounding areas with their connectivity needs through Talk UK from mobiles and broadband to phone systems and ongoing support.

During that time, more and more one thing has increasingly come to the forefront in conversations with local businesses: rising operational costs and the growing need to operate smarter, more efficiently and more sustainably.

As technology continues evolving and more businesses invest in cloud systems, electric vehicles and smarter ways of working, energy is becoming a far more important part of long-term business strategy.

That's one of the reasons we've taken the decision to launch our new sister company, Talk UK Energy.

Although we have supported customers with electric and gas services behind the scenes for some time now, we felt now was the right moment to create a dedicated business focused not just on energy contracts, but on helping organisations better understand how they consume, optimise and future proof energy across their operations.

For us, this isn't simply about electric and gas contracts. It's about helping businesses start thinking differently about the future and how to become more self sufficient over time.

We'll be helping businesses look more closely at how energy is being consumed across their operations, where unnecessary usage may be happening, and how smarter optimisation can help reduce both waste and long term costs. Many modern devices, equipment, machinery and systems simply do not require the level of energy being drawn from the grid, and small inefficiencies across a business can quickly build into significant operational expense over time.

From energy optimisation and renewable technologies through to exploring ways to become less reliant on the grid, there are now more opportunities than ever for businesses to operate smarter, greener and more sustainably whilst keeping costs under control.

As the world around us continues evolving, businesses have an opportunity to help themselves by embracing smarter infrastructure, greater resilience and more self sufficient ways of operating placing themselves in a stronger position for the future.

We're incredibly excited about what the future holds for Talk UK Energy within the Talk UK family and look forward to continuing to support businesses across Bedfordshire in a new and evolving area of business operations.

As always, the way we do business matters to us. Relationships, trust and doing the right thing for the customer remain at the centre of everything we do.

Justine Marudias, Director, Talk UK Telecom & Talk UK Energy
0330 332 2332 | www.talkuktelecom.co.uk



Exciting times at **CHUMS**

At CHUMS, we have always believed that strong communities are built when people can access the right support at the right time. As the needs of children, young people, adults and families continue to evolve, so too does the way we respond. Alongside the charity services we are known and trusted for, we are developing new ways to reach more people, offer more choice and build a stronger, more sustainable future. An important part of that next chapter is being shaped by **CHUMS Direct**, **Mindjurny** and our **Family Wellbeing Programme**.

CHUMS Direct is creating a simpler and quicker route into support, giving individuals and families easier access to trusted services, workshops and practical help – regardless of location.

Mindjurny represents an exciting step forward in digital early intervention and well-being support, helping us reach people earlier with flexible, accessible and evidence-informed support before challenges escalate.

Alongside this, our **Family Wellbeing Programme** is designed to support employers who want to take a more joined-up approach to wellbeing, recognising that pressures at home and at work are often closely connected. It offers organisations a practical and values-led way to support their people while also contributing to stronger communities. Grab an introductory offer now, 20% discount available on our Family Wellbeing Programmes until end of June.

Together, these developments reflect an exciting period of growth for CHUMS. They show how we are combining trusted people-led support with innovation, accessibility, and community partnership to build a more modern and blended model of care.

For us, this is about more than growth. It is about continuing to deliver meaningful impact, supporting more families in more ways, and helping create healthier workplaces and more resilient communities.

To discuss partnership opportunities or find out more about our growing offer, please contact Ella Preece at ella.preece@chums.uk.com.



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LLA inspires students to Reach for the Sky

Prize winners of London Luton Airport's (LLA) 'Reach for the Sky' school competition today took to the skies for a once-in-a-lifetime trip on Cranfield University's Saab340B National Flying Laboratory Centre (NFLC). The competition, supported by a £90,000 'Reach for the Sky' grant from the Department for Transport (DfT) and Civil Aviation Authority (CAA), aims to inspire the next generation of aviation professionals and widen access to careers for underrepresented groups.

The one-hour NFLC flight between LLA and Cranfield University was organised for 20 winning students from the 16+ competition category, who enjoyed a unique opportunity to explore the 'flying classroom and laboratory' which is used by aeronautical students from over 20 universities.

Upon arrival at Cranfield, the students joined competition winners from the 11-15 age category for an exclusive behind-the-scenes tour of the University's world-leading, Digital Aviation Research and Technology Centre (DARTEC). The group's design skills were also put to the test during a paper aircraft session with Dr Yicheng Sun, a research fellow in Aerospace Vehicle Design at Cranfield, and the UK national record holder for the longest-distance paper aircraft flight.

LLA's Reach for the Sky competition is the latest initiative to come from the airport's transformative Classroom to Careers* education and skills development programme. Classroom to Careers aims to inspire local young people, open clear pathways into work and equip students with vital transferable skills, real world industry insight and hands on exposure to aviation, sustainability, STEM and airport operations. The programme is delivered by LLA's Community team and volunteers from across the airport, in collaboration with not-for-profit organisation Skills Builder and Luton Council's Children, Families and Education team.

Alberto Martin, Chief Executive Officer at London Luton Airport, said: "This collaboration between London Luton Airport and Cranfield University has provided a wonderful platform to celebrate the

talent, aspiration and imagination of local young people who share our passion for aviation. It was a pleasure to welcome the winning students to LLA today, ahead of their unique learning opportunity on board Cranfield's state-of-the-art NFLC. The Reach for the Sky competition was made possible by funding from the DfT and CAA and is another example of the ways in which an airport at the heart of a community can strengthen skills and create exciting career pathways for local young people. The quality of the submissions was hugely impressive, and we hope that today's celebrations will continue to inspire all the winners."

Aviation, Decarbonisation, and Maritime Minister Keir Mather said: "The Government is securing UK aviation's future by inspiring young people from all backgrounds to see the sector as a place to build their careers. Our £90,000 investment in this fantastic initiative is showing young people from disadvantaged backgrounds different routes into aviation – breaking down barriers to opportunity, supporting skills and opportunities that deliver growth, and encouraging the next generation to aim for the sky."

Cranfield University's NFLC is a fully instrumented aircraft which supplies passengers with real-time data about a range of performance parameters. Fitted with an Aspire 400 satellite communications system, the aircraft has a unique capability for STEM outreach and research, as aircraft data can be transmitted in real time to anywhere in the world.

Professor Anna Smallwood, Head of the Centre for Air Transport Management at Cranfield University, said: "The NFLC is unique – Cranfield is the only university in Europe with a flying classroom like this. It's an amazing tool for teaching and research, but it's also there to inspire the next generation to come and work in aviation. It's been fantastic to have been part of the Reach for the Sky challenge alongside London Luton Airport, CAA and the DfT, and I hope that we'll see some of the children who are here today back at Cranfield one day to help shape the future of aviation."





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BEDFORDSHIRE IS EVOLVING

Are businesses ready to compete for talent?

Bedfordshire is entering a period of significant transformation. Major developments – including Universal Studios, town centre regeneration, the Power Court development and the expansion of London Luton Airport, signal more than growth – they represent a fundamental shift in the regional economy.

With tens of thousands of new jobs expected, opportunity is increasing and so is competition.

Across the region, business leaders are asking the same questions:

Will we retain our best people?

Can we compete with larger, better-funded organisations?

Will attracting the right skills become more difficult?

These are not hypothetical concerns. In high-growth markets, talent becomes more selective, more mobile and harder to secure.

The organisations that succeed in this environment don't wait. They act early, reassessing how they attract, hire, and retain people. Because talent doesn't simply follow opportunity. It follows culture, leadership, reputation and experience.

This shift is also redefining the role of recruitment. Hiring is no longer just operational, it's strategic. Businesses are moving away from transactional approaches and towards partnerships that provide long term value.



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embrace.org.uk

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NOAH Enterprise

- 👤 Dave Buttress
- ✉ dave.buttress@noahenterprise.org
- 👉 noahenterprise.org



NOAH Enterprise is a Bedfordshire-based charity walking alongside people facing homelessness, hardship and social exclusion. We offer a warm welcome with hot meals and tailored support, including training, employment and housing pathways so people can regain hope, rebuild their lives and move towards lasting stability.

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Hannah Tyers is the founder of Soulful Co, delivering practical workshops and programmes that improve wellbeing, connection and human development. Working with schools, teams, and communities, Soulful Co focuses on simple, effective tools from Hannah's lived experience that create real behaviour change, helping people feel better, work better, and build stronger, more connected environments.

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