

Business FOCUS

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Official Magazine of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce

Winter 2023/24

ARORA HOTELS

Upgrading Luton Hoo to Put Town and County on the Map



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Business FOCUS

Official Magazine of Bedfordshire
Chamber of Commerce

Our Partners



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Welcome

Welcome to the Winter edition of Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce Business Focus Magazine.

Reflecting on the past few months, we have witnessed significant progress on two major projects right here in Bedfordshire. First, the green light was granted for the expansion of London Luton Airport, that will see annual passenger count rise from 18 million to 19 million. Furthermore, another exciting milestone was reached as planning approval was secured for the ambitious plans of Home of Production to establish a cutting-edge film and television studio at the Quest Pit Site.

With Marshall Aerospace having their outline planning application approved earlier this year, paving the way for the relocation of its UK Headquarters to a new facility at Cranfield, it's proving that this is an exciting time for Bedfordshire.

These developments not only boost our regional connectivity but also promises enhanced opportunities for businesses and communities alike. And I'm pretty confident that there is much more to come!

Place Shaping and Inward Investment, are two pivotal forces that shape the very essence of our organisation. Attracting and retaining businesses, entrepreneurs, and innovators who see the potential in our region. It's about fostering an environment that encourages economic growth, job creation, and collaboration. When we invest in our communities, we create a ripple effect of positive change, benefitting not only businesses but also the individuals who call this place home.

In this edition, we feature the ambitious plans of Luton Hoo, Golf & Spa, East-West Rail shining a light on the investment and opportunities Bedford can expect from the project and the Forest of Marston Vale Trust showcasing why they are at the forefront of environmentally led regeneration in the county. Place shaping and inward investment at its finest.

In our own news I am delighted to announce we have a new Strategic Partner onboard at the Chamber. Ryan is the largest firm in the world dedicated exclusively to business taxes, Ryan's services extend from innovation funding support to a whole realm of business tax services that can add real value to our members.

2024 is shaping up to be another year filled with both opportunities and challenges. You'll see from us a calendar packed with a diverse and exciting array of events. From Meet the Buyer to the prestigious SME Bedfordshire Business Awards, and the introduction of new Sector Insight Groups, there are more ways than ever to make connections, raise your profile and make the most of the year ahead.

Thank you for being part of this journey. Together, we will shape a better, more prosperous future.

#workingtogether #achievingmore

Justin Richardson

Chief Executive
Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce



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Richard Cooper

Chairman of Bedfordshire
Chamber of Commerce

The Chairman's **VIEW**

"Constant Be" is the Bedfordshire County motto, taken from the John Bunyan poem. My interpretation of this is always showing up and persisting, even in the face of adversity. And no-one does this better, in my opinion, than the SME businesses in Bedfordshire.

Because ultimately, things aren't constant. We have seen so much change over recent years and 2023 has been no exception, but Bedfordshire business is thriving.

We have many global companies here in the county who call this home, from entrepreneurial start ups with innovative world-changing concepts, through to world leaders in research, development and manufacturing.

Whilst I shan't mention again the recent success of our Luton football team (!) the expansion story continues in Luton with London Luton Airport delivering substantial growth to the local economy and providing thousands of extra jobs. We have a lot to celebrate despite the tougher times we are in.

Of course, to fill these jobs and ensure longevity of the businesses and the careers of those working there, we need investment in our people and training. This is where Bedfordshire is really spoilt for choice with the University of Bedfordshire, Cranfield University & Business School, as well as many other top quality educational institutions on our doorstep, catering for all industries and disciplines and celebrating diversity.

So come wind, come weather ... Bedfordshire will Contant Be!

Richard Cooper

“We have many global companies here in the county who call this home, from entrepreneurial start ups with innovative world-changing concepts, through to world leaders in research, development and manufacturing.”

INTRODUCING RYAN Our New Strategic Partner

We are proud to welcome Ryan, the tax services specialists, as our newest Strategic Partner! As the largest firm in the world dedicated exclusively to business taxes, Ryan's services extend from innovation funding support to a whole realm of business tax services that can add value to your company.

Bedfordshire Chamber Chief Executive, Justin Richardson had this to say about the recent announcement of the partnership.

"We are thrilled to welcome Ryan into the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce network as our latest Strategic Partner. This collaboration signifies a real commitment to innovation and growth within our local business community, their leading expertise in specialist tax relief will undoubtedly add real value to members."



At the Chamber, we know that today is only the beginning of a partnership that will bloom, it's a partnership that not only adds to the growing network of reputable business that work with the Chamber, but also another way that we can add value to our membership offering, by putting our members on the doorstep of businesses that are here to help them.

LAUNCH EVENT

JANUARY 17TH
THE PAVILION, LUTON
















Chamber **EVENTS**

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 2024:



Connect **OVER COFFEE**

including launch of the 2024
SME Bedfordshire Business Awards

17th January 2024 | 9.30am – 11.15am

The Pavilion, Luton

Free of Charge Event



NATIONAL NETWORKING ONLINE with Greater Manchester and Dorset Chambers

31st January 2024 | 8.50am – 10.30am

Online Virtual Meeting

Member Only Event: Free of charge

Kindly sponsored by



Connect **OVER COFFEE**

Kindly sponsored by

8th February 2024 | 9.30am – 11.15am

King's House, Bedford

Members: Free of Charge | Non Members: £25 + VAT



Meet **THE BUYER**

14th February 2024

Online Virtual Meeting

Member Only Event: Free of charge



SME Bedfordshire **BUSINESS AWARDS 2024** **MASTERCLASS**

27th February 2024 | 9.30am – 11.15am

Wrest Park Enterprise, Silsoe

Free of Charge Event

Kindly sponsored by



To book your places and for further information call 01582 522448
or visit www.chamber-business.com/events/chamber-events

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 for the economic climate for businesses in Bedfordshire and beyond.

Our latest results have been published and the outcome for Q3 2023 saw a contraction across all indicators with:

- Domestic sales and forward orders declining on the previous quarter with only 29% of respondents seeing an overall increase in sales for the period and 20% seeing advanced orders improve for the following quarter
- Export sales also declined with only 27% of local companies seeing an increase
- 84% of firms looking to recruit in quarter 3 experienced difficulties finding the right people
- Cashflow for local businesses declined with 26% of respondents seeing an improvement in the period.
- Companies were under pressure to raise prices due to labour cost increases, energy prices and the cost of raw materials.

The Bottom Line

Responding to the findings, Director General of the British Chambers of Commerce, Shevaun Haviland, said:

"Our research shows that business confidence has stabilised at much healthier levels following a rocky end to 2022. But the economic warning lights are still flashing.

"Firms are increasingly worried about interest rates, and while inflation concerns are falling, persistent wage pressures show we need a greater focus on relieving the UK's tight labour market.

"With manufacturing lagging behind services, and low rates of investment across the board, especially in the hospitality sector, it is clear more needs to be done to spur growth.

"After the disappointment of HS2, firms want to see clear signals from Government to encourage investment. This means putting in place a five-year rolling guarantee on the full expensing tax allowance to give business some much needed certainty."



Shevaun Haviland
Director General of the British
Chambers of Commerce

Member **FEATURE**

SURINDER ARORA

Upgrading Luton Hoo to Put Town and County on the Map

For Surinder Arora, Founder and Chairman of Arora Group, the project to upgrade and improve Luton Hoo – the hotel, golf, and spa complex with a stunning 18th century manor house at its heart – is much more than business as usual.

It all started with a day trip by his son and grandchildren to Whipsnade Zoo, on the way back from which they took a detour via the Hoo. A few hours later, Surinder received a call: “Dad, you’ve got to see this place...”

And his son had it right. Because driving through the gates for the first time a short while later, Surinder told us he felt something that, even with his vast experience in the property and hotel sector, he’d never felt before – an immediate sense that the place was, as he puts it, “very special”. And so he bought it – as seen.

We had the good fortune to speak to Surinder about his plans for Luton Hoo recently, and what emerges is his determination not only to turn the venue into a world-class destination, but, in so doing, to put Luton and Bedfordshire on the map – whilst also giving something back to its local communities.



Upgrading but conserving

Surinder is no stranger to the business of creating stunning venues and locations. High-end property and hotel developments are his stock-in-trade, and the Arora Group counts the InterContinental London, Crowne Plaza London Heathrow, and the World Business Centre Complex in its portfolio, along with many others.

However, Surinder is clear that the emphasis for Luton Hoo is on upgrading, not expanding. He wants to make every part of what’s there already worthy of global repute, but he also wants to conserve what’s unique about it.

His vision for the hotel, for example, is that it should not only attain, but exceed, the standard of the luxury Fairmont brand (there are only four such hotels in the UK, and 12 in Europe – and Surinder aims for Luton Hoo to be the best of them).

He’s also planning to upgrade the golf course to make it fit to host the 2032 Ryder Cup (he’s bidding for this at the moment) – an event that attracts 600 million TV viewers globally.

But at the same time, Surinder’s also working closely with Historic England and Central Bedfordshire Council to minimise changes to the manor house (only the bathrooms are in scope), and the 1,100 acres of grounds landscaped by the legendary Lancelot “Capability” Brown.

Much improved spa and conference facilities, upgrades to the wedding venue, and restoration of the lake to its former glory through dredging and de-silting are, equally, all part of the plan to help Luton Hoo work its magic at the top table of world hotel destinations.

And for Surinder, this is indeed almost a spiritual calling. “I feel blessed,” he says, “that my company has become the custodian of such an amazing property.”





Uplifting the town and its youth

Surinder notes that Luton is a Tier 1 town in the Government's levelling up policy, and he sees great potential for the Luton Hoo plans to deliver real benefit back into local communities – as his earlier projects in the Crawley and Gatwick areas did.

"I'm proposing to treble the number of employees at Luton Hoo, which will obviously be helpful to the local economy" he says, "but I want to go beyond that, and focus on making the place somewhere where young people in particular can gain experience, develop their skills, and further their ambitions."

To this end, he envisages involving local youth organisations in the development and running of the site. The lake, for example, is a prime asset for the local Sea Scouts and Sea Cadets, and one they could benefit from helping to manage.

The upgrades to the golf facilities will also include the founding of a golf academy to support and promote young sporting talent in the area.

Even the hotel itself will be, in Surinder's own words, "kid-friendly"!

Planning and permission underway

Surinder's plans for Luton Hoo are extensive and ambitious, and because of the site's Grade 1 Listed status, may require additional approval from the Secretary of State.

But at a local level, planning permission for the golf course has been approved, and the site's potential contribution to the Government's levelling-up objectives bodes well for a rubber stamp from Westminster.

In Surinder's own words: "Our acquisition of Luton Hoo Hotel, Golf and Spa was always with the intention to curate a luxury leisure and hospitality experience on the estate. We want to continue building on the already rich history of Luton Hoo and to ensure that any future investment into the premises will bring economic benefit to Bedfordshire and surrounding areas."

From a venue that had been for sale for a good couple of years, to one poised to redefine what a luxury hotel destination means, Luton Hoo is about to enter an exciting new chapter in its 250-year history.



Member NEWS



East West Rail Connecting BEDFORDSHIRE & BEYOND

East West Rail (EWR) is a once in a generation opportunity to connect people and businesses in Bedfordshire with the thriving centres of Milton Keynes, Cambridge and Oxford. At the heart of EWR is a commitment to community, ensuring the new railway connects the people who live along the route to the things that matter, whilst unlocking the social and economic potential of the area. Here, we shine a light on the investment and opportunities Bedford can expect from the project.

Throughout history, new transport links have led to inward investment, growth, innovation and employment. From the lasting commercial impact of the historic Silk Road trade routes to the more recent reinvention of east London's Docklands following the introduction of the Docklands Light Railway and the Elizabeth Line, new connectivity has attracted investment and unlocked economic growth time and again.

These lessons should not be forgotten when considering the prospects of economic rejuvenation for Bedford. East West Rail (EWR) will by its very nature bring investment to the town, most notably through two modern and accessible stations, including a new station serving Bedford Hospital and a multi-million pound make-over of the Bedford Midland station, supporting the wider regeneration of the town centre.

But terms like 'regeneration' can sometimes be hard to visualise. In the early phases of development – and the Bedford-Cambridge leg of EWR is very much in the formative planning stages – ideas of inward investment tend not to be tangible. But here in Bedfordshire we don't have to look too far; EWR is being developed in three stages, so there are already glimpses elsewhere along the route of the potential opportunities for Bedford.

Bletchley's 'brighter future' – a sign of things to come?

Passenger services between Oxford and Bletchley are expected to start towards the end of 2025. Most of the track has been laid and its construction is well under budget. This has coincided with £23 million plans to regenerate Bletchley – centred around the Brunel shopping centre – with the prospect of direct rail links to Oxford and Cambridge seen by the MK Citizen as providing the 'biggest boost' to the town.

EWR will bring new gateways to the town, with east-west rail links interchanging with north-south rail links to London (much like Bedford). EWR is also bringing a new station entrance and a transport interchange with new links to the town centre. Combined with its plans to revamp the town centre, this will revitalise Bletchley's sense of place, attract investment and create new jobs.

Opportunities for Bedford

EWR means people in Bedford will have access to faster and more reliable east-west public transport. Today, journeys between Bedford and Cambridge take 50 to 75 minutes by road and two hours by train. EWR will cut this to just 35 minutes, which will make Bedford more attractive for business investment and job creation.

These faster, more frequent and more reliable transport links – combined with new and refurbished stations and improved access to the town centre – present the opportunity. The investment and opportunity underway in Bletchley give us the chance to visualise it.

*For more information on EWR, please visit
<https://eastwestrail.co.uk/benefits-of-ewr>*



One of Bedfordshire's Best **BESTBUSINESSWOMEN**

Local Luton businesswoman Ruth Robb, CEO of Azalea and qualified social worker, has won the Gold Award for Charity Champion in the Best Businesswomen Awards for 2023.

Ruth co-founded local Luton Christian charity Azalea in 2007 as part of a small team of volunteers working out of a church in Hightown, Luton to reach out to all those trapped in sex trafficking, primarily in Bedfordshire. For the last 15 years, she has led the organisation to grow significantly from nothing to a turnover of over £450,000 last year. She is well known to a wide range of local partners, including the Luton Borough Council, London Luton Airport and the Bedfordshire PCC, for tackling the local issues surrounding sex trafficking.

Azalea now employs nine full-time equivalent staff and over 80 volunteers. The charity has a 365-degree approach to tackling sex trafficking – child sexual abuse, child sexual exploitation, and adult, domestic and international sex trafficking. An early emphasis has been to tackle the demand, which is done through the successful Flint programme for male sex buyers. This strategy now reaches the core dysfunctions and solutions to eradicating domestic and international sex trafficking.

Through Ruth's commitment and dedication, the Azalea model has since developed into a national and international model, with a particular emphasis on Burundi, Greece, Hong Kong, Russia and South Africa.

www.azalea.org.uk



The Bedford Swan finds **A NEW NEST**

You may know that in the recent years Bedford Swan Hotel has undergone extensive refurbishments to ensure Bedford has an establishment for locals and visitors to be proud of. The latest project, which is intended to be released before the New Year, has seen the owners of Bedford Swan invest in Service Apartments, located on the High Street of Bedford, which will be launched under the name 'The Nest'. The Nest hopes to provide an incredible facility, for business and pleasure stays, offering a kitchen, workspace and living area all in one apartment and will hopefully be another huge asset in the local area.



BINGO! Now, That's Charity in Action











Kids in Action and Mecca Bingo Luton joined forces for an unforgettable charity bingo night, igniting joy and hope within the local community. The event, held at the Mecca Bingo hall in Luton, was a resounding success, with the dual aim of raising funds for the Kids in Action organisation and fostering as well as kicking back and having fun on a Saturday night! Enthusiastic participants, including families, friends, and dedicated supporters, gathered for an evening filled with laughter, excitement, and the thrill of the game. The vibrant atmosphere was complemented by a heartfelt video from Kids in Action, emphasizing the impact of the organization's work in supporting children with disabilities. Together, they raised an incredible amount of £800 on the night! This remarkable achievement exemplifies the power of collaboration and the profound impact of collective efforts in making a difference in the lives of those in need.

www.kidsinaction.org.uk | www.meccabingo.com/bingo-clubs/luton



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Benefits to your business:

- ✓ Government funding will pay 95% of the training cost
- ✓ 92% of companies that have taken on apprentices believe this leads to a more motivated and satisfied workforce
- ✓ 86% said apprenticeships helped them develop skills relevant to their organisation
- ✓ 80% have seen a significant increase in employee retention

Source: "Understanding apprenticeship benefits and funding" (apprenticeships.gov.uk)



**For more information and enquiries,
scan the QR code or visit:**

www.beds.ac.uk/contact-apprenticeships



THE AI REVOLUTION IS HERE Fliweel.tech takes the lead

Fliweel.tech, a specialised AI and automation consultancy for business processes, recently joined forces with the Bedfordshire Education AI Network (BEAN), a network comprising over 10 schools, to showcase the impact of AI on education. The gathering was hosted by Bedford Modern School and invited Fliweel.tech to unpack several AI use cases to enhance the teaching, learning, and back-office functions.

Andy Paul, the founder and experienced data scientist, showed how AI could revolutionise learning and teaching experience. Some of the use cases included AI-powered student grade prediction for educators and students to anticipate performance trends, generative AI in crafting student reports, streamlining the report-writing process, and hyper-personalised learning, which adapts to individual student needs, fostering more engaging and efficient learning environments.

In addition to its educational impact, Fliweel.tech aims to streamline back-office functions in organisations across many other sectors. Some back-office use cases included:

- *Email writing assistants using generative AI to enhance communication efficiency while keeping email conversation context and brand tone.*
- *Intelligent document processing uses machine learning to automate tasks such as purchase orders, forms, IDs, and invoices, reducing administrative overhead.*
- *Conversational chatbots, employed in online and internal support functions, to offer real-time assistance and connected to internal systems (e.g. HR, IT, or Finance) to reduce time and cost in responding to frequent requests.*

The partnership between Fliweel.tech and BEAN underscores their collective mission: to usher in an era where AI empowers educators, enriches the student experience, and optimises administrative workflows, all guided by ethics and governance.

Fliweel.tech's collaboration with BEAN, represents a significant stride towards reshaping the teaching and learning experience as well as back-office processes.

Connect with Fliweel.tech to explore how AI can transform your organisation.

Working together, achieving more.

MELISSA MASON

University of Bedfordshire Award Winner

Local businesswoman Melissa Mason was awarded a one-year membership to the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce for her work self-publishing educational children's books at a Dragon's Den-style pitching competition hosted by the University of Bedfordshire.

The competition was part of the institution's involvement in the national Pathways4Recovery initiative, which aims to provide economically inactive and unemployed individuals with the opportunity to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions by removing financial barriers.



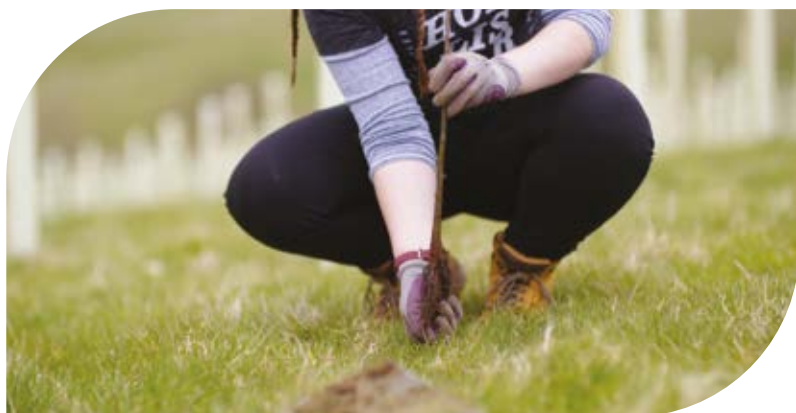
Held on the University's Luton campus by the Research & Innovation Service (RIS), a group of entrepreneurs were given the opportunity to share their business ideas and practice their pitching skills in front of a panel of judges that included Mohammad Azam, Senior Lecturer and MBA Portfolio Lead at the University – and industry experts such as Debbie Lewis, Regional Ecosystem Manager for NatWest Business.

This event is just one of the ways that the University is dedicated to supporting start-ups and businesses through RIS. Bedfordshire was recently recognised for its entrepreneurial achievements, ranking first in a study of the UK's most entrepreneurial universities.

Chris Fox, event co-host and RIS Pathways Project Manager, said: "It was brilliant to host this event which was dedicated to celebrating the remarkable participants of the University of Bedfordshire's Pathways4Recovery initiative. Luton's outstanding achievement in attracting start-up ventures and for sustaining a thriving ecosystem of independent and sustainable businesses is testament to the collaborative efforts between the University and our regional partners."

melmasebooks.wixsite.com/mel-mase-books

Member NEWS



Championing Trees for Climate

As a catalyst for change, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust has been planting trees and championing the creation of new woodland and green spaces for over twenty-five years.

The Forest vision is rooted in positively exploiting the incredible power and versatility of trees and woodlands to deliver environmentally-led regeneration; attracting inward investment, providing opportunities for leisure and employment, and engendering a sense of place and a pride in those who live and work within the Forest – all while providing the significant landscape, biodiversity, wellbeing, and quality of life benefits the creation of the Forest brings.

Working with local communities, the private and public sector, over two million trees have already been planted, growing tree cover from just 3.6% when the Forest was designated to well over 15% today. Along the way, a dozen publicly accessible community woodlands have been created, and every £1 invested in the creation of the Forest has returned £11 worth of environmental, social and economic benefits to the local area.

Last winter projects delivered through the Trust created nearly 120 hectares of new tree planting. This incredible achievement for the Trust's Forest Creation Team was an area three and half times larger than had ever been planted in a single season before and equates to over 150,000 trees and nearly 7km of hedgerow. This year's planting season is already underway, with an even more ambitious target of 200 hectares.

This boost in planting has been made possible by Trees for Climate, a multi-million pound woodland creation programme, developed by England's Community Forests and funded by Defra through the Government's Nature for Climate Fund. As an expert advisor, trusted delivery partner and funder in one local organisation, the Forest of Marston Vale Trust is able to help landowners and community groups enhance their land through woodland creation. The Trust takes a flexible approach to support and funding, listening to landowners and working with them to assess potential planting ideas and help develop schemes that will fit with their business and environmental objectives.

The Trust also has a strong history of forging mutually rewarding partnerships with local businesses. As companies become more conscious than ever of their environmental impact, an increasing number are discovering the opportunities working with the Trust can bring, and how supporting the Forest can directly benefit their own environmental ambitions.

Ultimately, creating the Forest of Marston Vale isn't only about transforming the landscape, it's also boosting the local economy, growing a new sense of place in communities and helping set the scene for future growth and prosperity; transforming perceptions and prospects, and making life better for people, for wildlife and for the planet.

Trees for Climate funding is still available, and the Trust's Forest Creation Team are actively seeking landowners and community groups interested in planting on their land. To find out more email treesforclimate@marstonvale.org



MAKING HEADWAY with Acquired Brain Injured

An acquired brain injury (ABI) can happen to anyone at any time. The effects can be life changing. Our clients have a range of backgrounds and life experiences but what connects them is their brain injury and enjoyment in coming to Headway Luton.

Earlier this year, we were awarded a small grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund administered by Luton Council. Over the course of 10 weeks, clients with the support of professional artists Mary Hearne and Kym Wilson-Huxley, created a large map of Luton focusing on Luton's hat making and brewery industries.

Each client created their own mini hat or beer mat which represented parts of Luton that were meaningful to them. Sandra used to work in Olney Hats in Luton and gave us advice on materials and decoration. Millie is a scientist with great attention to detail and led the making of the woven hats. Steve is a great LTFC fan and made sure the club was represented in the works. Richard is a local historian and helped with the research. Our final piece is available to view at Luton Central Library by the stairs. Come on by, take a look and see what you can spot!

headwayluton.com



A GEM OF A GIN

One of Bedfordshire's hidden gems is Willow Tree Gin which is produced by Mary Vincent and the team at Bedfordshire's first Gin distillery. On site there is unique equipment specifically designed for small batch gin to be designed and made by those who want to experience the distilling process. For those who would rather have a more laidback approach to their drinks and leave it to the professionals there is a bar and the option for cocktail mixing evenings.

However, it is that time of year where there is the known challenge of having to work out what you can do in terms of client gifts along with what you can do for your staff to thank them for all their hard work. Look no further than Willow Tree to solve both these challenges, with a range of gifts at various values that will enable you to convey just how much your clients mean to your business, without going against their anti-bribery policy!

You can always expect gin and tonics on a visit and even be catered for cocktails, gin themed games and presentations. There is everything you could need for groups of up to 20.

www.willowtreedistilling.co.uk



Member NEWS

BEDFORD PHARMACIST WINS Prestigious Pharmacy Industry Award

Baljit Kaur was awarded the Pharmacy Business Development Award for her innovative work at Bedford's Smarta Healthcare pharmacy and health clinic, at the Pharmacy Business Awards this month.

As co-founder and director of pharmacy services, Baljit impressed the judges with her development of the popular AskMyPharmacist advice service, where members of the public can arrange free consultations with a healthcare professional, either by video call or phone.

Smarta Healthcare's free door-to-door medicine delivery service was also highly praised for its focus on providing isolated members of the Bedfordshire community, with access to pharmacy and health services.

Baljit said: "I'm very excited that the projects the Smarta Healthcare team has worked so hard on have been recognised by respected professionals in the pharmacy industry. The AskMyPharmacist service has increased the Bedfordshire community's access to expert health advice and medicine at a time of immense pressure on NHS services. GP surgery waiting times have escalated, and many patients contacting us have not been able to get help with their conditions. We've been able to bridge the gap where other services are overwhelmed and provide a valuable service to the Bedfordshire community."

After completing her Masters Degree, Baljit moved to Bedford in 1999 and worked as a consultant pharmacist for high street pharmacies.

Recognising a need to provide pharmacy and health services for people isolated and unable to access local healthcare within Bedford, Baljit set up Smarta Healthcare with her husband Harjinder in 2015 at Priory Business Park. It has grown to include a health clinic offering a range of services from travel vaccinations to corporate employee health and wellbeing services. Last year the pharmacy expanded its premises at Priory Business Park and invested in state-of-the-art technology to improve dispensing processes, whilst freeing up time for healthcare professionals to provide personable clinical services.
smartahealthcare.co.uk



An advertisement for Travel Counsellors for business. The background is a large image of a man in a dark suit and tie, holding a mobile phone to his ear. In the top left corner, there is a circular inset portrait of a man in a blue suit. The text "For business travel management" is written in white over the background image. Below this, the phrase "Make the smart move..." is written in a large, white, serif font. At the bottom left, the contact information "Tel: 01234 581066" and "E-mail: marco.williams@travelcounsellors.com" is listed in white. At the bottom right, the Travel Counsellors logo is displayed, consisting of a stylized 'C' icon and the text "travel counsellors for business".

K CONSULTANTS

Celebrating a Decade of Transformational Business Consultancy

It's time to crack open the fizz at one of the region's leading business consultancy firms, K Consultants. Independent Sage Systems experts, Kay and Jon Waller, are delighted to announce the 10th anniversary of the formation of their consultancy. This milestone underlines the company's longstanding commitment to their clients – 10 years of applying their passion for business systems to transform their clients' operational processes. Thanks in no small part to the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce, who's assistance and events have helped spread the word!

A Decade of Empowering Businesses

Although Kay and Jon established K Consultants 10 years ago, the couple's collective experience in the business sector spans a full 60 years. They've been working with Sage products from the early days of DOS & Retrieve 4GL, Sovereign & Sterling through to the Latest Sage 200, Sage 50 & Sage Payroll.

So – what's the secret of their longevity?

"It's no secret!" laughs Kay, "Just the simple fact that Jon and I enjoy an enduring passion for business. We love learning about how different businesses operate – how they work, their successes and challenges."

Business transformation through process improvement

"And it's more than that," adds Jon. "We're fascinated by business people too. "Part of our consultation work involves finding out about their goals and what makes them tick. Then, we're all about business transformation through process improvement ... helping businesses make the most of their Sage systems to get what they want. You could say that our DNA lies in business empowerment."

In the last decade, K Consultants has led and supported the transformation of countless businesses. They have carved a niche in providing expert advice and specialist Sage solutions across numerous sectors, from Aero to Zoological and everything in between including steel production, catering, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, and education to name a few.

K Consultants prides itself on a personal, approachable, and flexible approach to consultancy. This tenth anniversary stands as a testament to their dedication to the principles of business empowerment and their commitment to their clients' success.



Powering Businesses through Passion & Expertise

Key Features of K Consultants' Consultancy Services include bespoke solutions catering to businesses' unique requirements; expert advice and guidance on process improvement and credit control; and Specialised Sage consultancy to streamline accounting, financial and business operations.

Kay and Jon are united in their sense of gratitude to all their clients and suppliers, past and current – as well as to their many networking friends in the business community.

What do the next ten years hold for K Consultant's dynamic founders, Kay and Jon Waller? Their response ... "More of the same – bringing more success to more clients than ever before!"

K Consultants & Co. Ltd – The Sage Business Architects – making the very best of Sage systems – transforming business through business process improvement.

*Find out more. Contact Kay or Jon Waller
01234 818 028 | info@kconsultants.co*

NAVIGATING THE WORLD OF LOCAL BUSINESS INSURANCE

At NFU Mutual Bedfordshire agency our aim is to build strong long-lasting business relationships with our commercial clients based on quality advice and first-class service.

Tailored insurance solutions to help protect you and your business as it grows.

Contact us on **01234 824901** to book a face-to-face consultation.



C E J Fisher, G J Lilley, L A M Bourke & T Church is an appointed representative of The National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society Limited (No. 111982).



Are you experiencing high staff absence due to care duties?

At Home Instead we understand. Often staff are juggling their career, a family and care duties for an elderly loved one. At Home Instead, we have developed a Care Conversation programme built on our experience – offering employers a way to support their staff before their individual care responsibilities become problematic - both for them and for you! Ultimately, the investment in caregiving support is an investment in the success of your business. Call us on 01582 742275 to book a chat with our friendly team

homeinstead.co.uk/luton-bedfordshire



HEY THERE, GIFT-GIVERS!

At The Little Branding Company, we get it – every person's gift needs are as unique as a unicorn in a tuxedo! That's why we're handing you the keys to the kingdom of customization. It's time to unleash your creativity and assemble your very own customized gift set.

We've got a treasure trove of eco-friendly, low-impact gifts for you to pick and choose from. It's like a pick 'n' mix candy store for gift-giving!

Whether you're on a mission to dazzle your corporate crew, treat your hardworking employees, or shower your loyal customers with appreciation, we are your trusty sidekick with the perfect set, just waiting for your imagination to run wild!

But wait, there's more! Our sets aren't just for decking the halls at Christmastime; they're the ultimate sidekicks for all your festive shindigs. Need a little gift magic for an anniversary, to welcome new colleagues, show some love, or launch a hot-off-the-press product, service, or business? We've got your back!

Not only can you brand these boxes with your logo or personal touch, but we'll even sprinkle in a dash of extra charm. Add your recipient's name to one of the products, include a heartfelt personal note to make it extra special. You can even wrap it all up in custom sleeves and gift wrapping that'll make your gift shine like a disco ball at a party!

And that's not all, folks! Check out these out-of-the-box ideas from some of our savvy customers:

- **Seasonal gifting:** Bring joy no matter the season!
- **Product launches:** Make a grand entrance with a stylish gift.
- **Anniversary celebrations:** Cheers to the milestones!
- **Event giveaways:** Amp up your events with memorable swag.
- **Customer appreciation:** Say 'thank you' in the most unforgettable way!

So, what are you waiting for? It's time to get creative and start creating your world of gifting adventures!

To find out more or to get some custom visuals of your very own custom gift box, drop us an email to jo@thelittlebrandingcompany.co.uk or give us a call on 07852 951425



Have you had the care conversation with your staff – is their absenteeism affecting your business growth? Have you needed to have a 'care conversation with your staff'?

It is highly likely you will at some stage, with an increasing role of 'informal caregiver' supporting individuals and family members. Currently, 10.6 million informal carers are recorded in the UK*. Many of these, are employed, and juggle both roles – often with difficulty.

Staff find that caring for a loved one, where illness, disability or older life increases their dependence, frequently increases absences in the workplace, and in turn employers see a significant impact on the business.

Employees may be reluctant to discuss their care burden for fear of losing their job, trying to deal with problems that caring can bring, experiencing isolation, which leads to a dip in their morale and their mental health overall.

This "dip" in good health often leads to staff absence, with colleagues feeling resentful when covering for their colleagues. Reduced productivity, disruption of project timelines and broken client relationships can increase business costs and lose you valuable staff.

At Home Instead we have developed a Care Conversation programme built on our experience – offering employers a way to support their staff before their individual care responsibilities become problematic – both for them and for you!

Ultimately, the investment in caregiving support is an investment in the success of your business.

To discuss this for your Company – please call 01582 742275 or email luton@homeinstead.co.uk

*source Carers Trust

UNPARALLELED SUPPORT TO THE MS COMMUNITY and a Therapy Centre providing with ambitions to do so much more

Building on 40 years of supporting people living with MS to realise more active and satisfying lives, we have a new vision to increase and enhance the support we offer to the MS community whilst also extending our scope to support people living with other conditions.

The range of high-quality therapies that we provide to the MS community are similarly beneficial for people living with other conditions such as Parkinson's and stroke recovery. Talking to other local and national charities has identified a real need for this due to lack of provision elsewhere.

We have been able to provide so many therapies over the past 40 years thanks to the amazing support we receive from our members, the local community, local businesses and charitable trusts. Now, more than ever, we need your support to realise this ambitious vision. We believe we have an incredible future working with other local and National charities to support people living with a range of conditions, and maximising the benefit we bring to the local community.

To realise this vision, we wish to extend and improve our Bedford Therapy Centre so that we have the capacity to increase the range of therapies that we offer, and deliver them to more people.

If you would like to help us to continue to support people living with MS and to realise our vision of supporting so many more people in the community, please follow this link to our Just Giving page and make whatever donation you can.



Centre users say...

MS member: *"The MS Therapy Centre has given me hope. If I need help, it's the first port of call. It is always nice to know that the therapies are there when I need them. It feels like a family unit and provides the kindest most professional people who always make you feel so welcome on a personal level."*

Parkinson's member: *"I recently joined the MS Therapy Centre as part of a trial. It's amazing, the support I've received already in a few short weeks just isn't available for people with Parkinson's anywhere else."*



Call for businesses to offer WORK EXPERIENCE

New movement Bedford Giving is calling on local businesses to offer work experience as part of its World of Work project.

Bedford Giving is a collaboration of eight founding partners, established to create life opportunities for young people in Bedford.

It has already launched a Career Mentoring Programme for 13 to 15-year-olds and its next project focuses on work experience.

Project Director Sam Baker said: "There are many benefits to employers in offering work experience, as well as those for the young person on the placement.

"You can build a talent pipeline, learn from a fresh young mindset, build your brand in the local area by demonstrating your commitment to the next generation and give employees development opportunities through supporting work experience students.

"For the young person, experiences of the workplace give them the chance to develop essential skills and explore careers available to them. Finding work experience is often the student's responsibility, and that's hard if your family has limited contacts. We have been working closely with local schools to develop our programme and we are now engaging with and supporting local businesses to increase opportunities for experience of the workplace.

"We have developed a handy guide for employers. Often businesses are put off worrying about insurance or health and safety, but there are many easy solutions we can guide you through."

To view the Employer Work Experience Pack and find out more about joining the World of World Programme visit www.bedfordgiving.org.uk



New MEMBERS

Better Together
Working together, achieving more

We would like to extend a very warm welcome to all **New MEMBERS** of the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce. You can learn more about becoming a member and all of the associated benefits by calling us now on 01582 522448 or by emailing your enquiry to info@chamber-business.com

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Reach Society

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Tokko Youth Space

tokko.co.uk

Tokko is a dynamic charity based in Luton which supports young people aged 13-19 (up to 24 with SEN or a disability) to advance in life, feel safe and bring a reality to their imaginative ideas.

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Member PROFILES

Member PROFILES are provided as part of membership to the Bedfordshire Chamber of Commerce. You can learn more about becoming a member, so you too can enjoy this and a host of other benefits, simply by calling us now on 01582 522448 or by emailing info@chamber-business.com




ADA Cosmetics

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ADA Cosmetics is a provider of hotel amenities – we develop, manufacture, and distribute our products within the UK and worldwide. We deliver sustainable dispenser solutions and a renowned house of brands. We supply cruise lines, restaurants, leisure facilities, offices, and corporate gifting in addition to hotels of any size.





Metro Supply Chain

 Stuart Ager
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 sager@metroscg.com



For almost 50 years, Metro Supply Chain has been helping global brands drive impactful and sustainable business outcomes through innovative, end-to-end supply chain solutions within a culture that supports communities, protects the environment, and enables our team to thrive. In 2023, we received the prestigious Best Managed Companies award for strategic expertise, culture of innovation and commitment to people and local communities.




Creonate Manufacturing

 Kevin Woolston
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Contract manufacturing services including reagent and buffer production, IVD and medical device manufacture, material deposition, assembly, kitting, warehouse storage and dispatch. Our secure and ISO compliant facility is over 30,000 sq ft and fully flexible to meet your needs.





NC VA Services

 Nicola Collard
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I am a freelance personal assistant that offers remote administration and operational support to busy business owners. I work with clients who understand the value in outsourcing their admin needs either on a monthly basis or for ad hoc projects.



HR-Blossoms Ltd

 Eva Phillips
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 info@hr-blossoms.co.uk
 hr-blossoms.co.uk



HR-Blossoms prides itself in cutting out the 'HR Bolloxology' and works with organisations to create an understanding of the minefield known as Human Resources. At the same time, we keep things simple and direct and have diversity at the heart of everything we do. Our motto is 'People before Process'.




NFU Mutual Bedfordshire Agency

 01234 824901
 nfumutual.co.uk/agent-offices/bedford/



At NFU Mutual Bedfordshire agency our aim is to build strong long-lasting business relationships with our commercial clients based on quality advice and first-class service. We can tailor insurance solutions to help protect you and your business as it grows and develops. Contact us on 01234 824901 to book a face-to-face consultation.





Mel Mase Books Enterprise

 Melissa Mason
 melmasebooks@yahoo.com
 melmasebooks.wixsite.com/mel-mase-books



Mel Mase Books Enterprise, based in Luton, UK, creates children's books that celebrate diversity and representation. Our mission is to champion diversity. We also explore various genres, share poetry, interview entrepreneurs, and offer a range of diverse merchandise, from clothing to mugs and hats.

NAH Foods Ltd

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Company focus: Healthier alternative food items, keto, low carb, low sugar. Brand owners of Eat Water, Keto Chef, Keto Skinny, Shaakahari and Chef2Plate. Importers and manufacturers of fresh meals with 60-day shelf life and higher retention of nutrients using patented Swedish technology.

Novoform UK Ltd

👤 Brad Barley
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Novoform is one of the largest European manufacturers of garage doors and operators to the private, trade and industrial sectors. European sales exceed 600 million Euros, employing 3,000 people with manufacturing facilities in 16 European countries and the UK (Luton). Novoform is part of the Japanese Sanwa Holdings Group.

RSP UK Suction Excavators Ltd

👤 Hannah Keep
 ✉ sales@rsp-uk.co.uk
 🌐 rsp-uk.co.uk



RSP UK was founded in 2016, as the UK subsidiary of the RSP group, who have been manufacturing premium suction excavators since 1993. Since 2016, RSP UK has grown to 40 employees and is a trailblazer for technology that improves safety and efficiency across the construction, engineering, and utilities sectors.

ORAAPHARMA LTD

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PMC is a world-leading producer of professional and audiophile loudspeakers in Bedfordshire, with a subsidiary in the USA. Our designs include pioneering technology that provides unequalled accuracy and clarity that feature in the world's premier music and film studios, mastering facilities, and the homes of discerning music lovers.

RBB Consulting Services

👤 Mark Baker
 ☎ 01525 221469
 ✉ mark@rbbscs.net
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Do you want to know how to grow and improve your business and see your sales and profits increase? We are Business Growth Experts who provide a range of business advisory and mentoring services that have helped both local SMEs and established enterprise businesses grow and expand.

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👤 Nigel Webb
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WF Telematics sources systems and products for businesses that help them look after their vehicles and protect their most important assets. Specialising in Vehicle Tracking, Asset Tracking, Stolen Vehicle Tracking, and AdBlue, WF Telematics fuel business success through efficiency, security, and competitive pricing.

RSCF Ltd t/a Reach Society

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 ✉ info@reachsociety.com
 🌐 reachsociety.com



Reach Society is a QAVS award winning social enterprise that encourages, motivates and inspires young people to develop their potential to make viable transitions into adult life. We do so via large inspirational events which showcase pathways to success. In each event the key participants are dozens of employers (from all 3 sectors) and scores of volunteer role models who interact with hundreds of young people.



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