

# SWINDON BUSINESS NEWS



We focus on Basepoint and the companies benefitting from managed workspace **PAGES 8 & 9**



Training has become more important than ever in the current economic conditions **PAGES 10 & 11**



The local area offers some great options for conference facilities **PAGE 6**

## News in Brief

### Employers offer more jobs

Demand from UK employers for new workers rose steadily in February. The number of new job opportunities increased by one per cent compared to January, with average salaries up by five per cent according to the Reed Job Index. However active job-seekers have flooded back into the job market in 2010 at a much faster rate than new jobs, as returning consumer confidence has released pent up demand. The number of applications per job averaged 19 in February, which was 50 per cent higher than last year according to the report.

### Parade retail success

The Parade Shopping Centre in Swindon, where work is now under way, is attracting top retailers. UKCPT, which owns the site, is demolishing the existing Bhs store in order to make way for 80,000 sq ft of prime new retail space which will include a 45,000 sq ft store for Bhs with six additional retail units. Top Shop is to take the unit on the corner of Bridge Street and The Parade will form a new 10,000 sq ft flagship store. River Island is taking another 9,000 sq ft store, leaving only four units vacant.

### Envos opens new office

Envos, the environmental management and compliance consultancy, has opened a new office in Swindon. Managed by regional director Andrew Watson, Envos will help local property owners and businesses meet new environmental legislation affecting commercial property to produce financial benefits from operating greener buildings. He points out that property consumes 49 per cent of all energy used in the UK and significantly contributes to carbon emissions. **Article, P14**

### April features in SBN

**Company Law**  
**Corporate Finance**  
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## Confidence surges among South West region's manufacturing companies

Optimism among manufacturers in the South West is on the rise, thanks to improving output and signs of growing order books.

The latest Manufacturing Outlook report, issued by EEF the manufacturers' organisation and BDO, shows that regional manufacturers are feeling at their most confident in over two years, with half predicting further improvements in trading conditions over the next three months.

Clive Turner, head of external affairs for the EEF South West Region said: "The survey lends credence to the view that this is going to be a slow-burn recovery, with manufacturers reporting steady total output and less volatility in employment."

The EEF survey shows that while total output trends in the region were



on a par with the previous quarter, prices, margins and capital expenditure indicators were all stronger, pointing to slowly improving trading conditions.

"These figures show that we have to be cautious about predicting a strong rebound, as a number of factors could knock growth off track," said Clive Turner.

"The recovery depends on world markets continuing to grow, and the financial system's ability to provide finance is yet to be fully tested. Investment plans are also likely to remain on hold until manufacturers get a better sense of how a new

government plans to repair the public finances."

Companies in the South West are, however, optimistic about the future - with 50 per cent anticipating better output and increasing order books over the next three months.

Jim Brown at BDO Bristol said: "It is great news to see so many positive indicators from the latest EEF/BDO survey."

"However manufacturers still need to be careful as working capital funding pressures from this growth in activity are applied to already strained balance sheets.

"In particular, manufacturers should be monitoring the health of all major customers, monitoring and acting if aged debts begin to mount and considering the security of their supply chain.

"But on a positive note UK manufacturers do look to be making impressive gains in exports and it is hoped that the weakness of the pound enables further inroads to be made in both the developed and the now fast-growing emerging markets."

## 'Hydrogen highway' a boost for Swindon

The Government has chosen Swindon for a major new scheme aimed at carbon-free motoring, and a local company is playing a major part in the development of enabling technology.

The M4 motorway from junction 15 to South Wales is to become Britain's first "hydrogen highway," with strategically placed refuelling points along the route for hydrogen fuelled and electric cars.

"Cleaning up our energy supply and the fuel we use for transport will give the UK the opportunity to develop the low carbon industries of the future," said Lord Hunt, Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change.

Speaking at fuel cell research specialists Johnson Matthey in Lydiard Fields, the minister added that the Swindon-based chemicals company would receive a share of £7.2m of funding to develop the hydrogen and fuel cell technology required.

"Fuel cells and hydrogen can play a key role in cutting CO2 emissions and reducing reliance on fossil fuels," he added.

Johnson Matthey Fuel Cells' MEA manufacturing facility in Swindon was completed in 2003. This purpose-built facility uses state of the art, flexible manufacturing methods to produce large volumes of fuel cell components for the hydrogen and methanol fuelled systems.

Johnson Matthey Fuel Cells is a world leader in the production of catalysed components for use in fuel cells, a technology for generating low carbon power.

During his visit, Lord Hunt announced the creation of the latest Low Carbon Economic Area (LCEA) for hydrogen energy in partnership with the South West Regional Development Agency. **Honda's new fuel system, P2**

## Council agrees to continue backing wi-fi project

Swindon Council's cabinet has agreed to continue investing in the company which will turn it into Britain's first wi-fi town.

Last autumn the council signed an agreement with Digital City, to invest a total of £450,000 in its ground-breaking project. Digital City, the Swindon-based next generation wireless network provider, is rolling out Signal, a wi-fi project to provide connectivity on the move, and a range of applications for businesses and the public sector, across the borough. An initial draw-down of £150,000 preceded the launch of the wi-fi service in Highworth in December 2009.

On Wednesday 10 March the council's cabinet agreed to sign off the rest of the loan, retaining £50,000 until Digital City has sold 100 private internet packages and 25 business

packages.

Councillor Bluh welcomed the decision. "This is an unashamedly commercial venture to support our budgets," said Councillor Bluh.

"This is not just a good commercial opportunity, but a great opportunity for Swindon. The whole county is watching us - this has gone global. Everyone who says they support this needs to stand behind it and make it the success that Swindon deserves."

Rikki Hunt of Digital City said he was pleased with the cabinet decision. "I'm very happy that the cabinet are behind this," said Mr Hunt.

Swindon Borough council will retain a 40 per cent share in Digital City until the loan is repaid in full, at which point the council's share will be 35 per cent.

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## Focus on Beacon Companies

# Beacon Companies at the forefront of SW region's economic growth

Beacon South West is a key business initiative of the South West of England Regional Development Agency (SWRDA) which aims to put the region's leading businesses at the forefront of economic growth.

To date, there are 217 companies across the South West with Beacon status, including Bristol International Airport, Dorset Cereals, Burts Potato Chips, Aardman Animations, UCAS, Mulberry, HJ Heinz Frozen Foods and the Midas Group.

Once accredited as a Beacon, the company can attend local "boardroom" sessions which, under Chatham House rules, bring companies together from a diverse range of industries and with a proven track record of success to offer a unique environment, promote good practice, share ideas and exchange experience.

As well as sharing experiences and best practice with peers, Beacon boardrooms have proven successful by encouraging some high profile companies to develop partnerships and stimulate regional growth by coming together to develop new products.

Wiltshire boasts 24 Beacon companies across a range of business sectors from education supply company, The Consortium, to renewable energy firm, Good Energy. Beacon project director, Sue Baker, explains: "The number of firms

striving for Beacon accreditation has not waned in the recession and we have seen an influx of companies hitting targets and meeting the Beacon values of innovation, entrepreneurship and best practice to achieve recognition."

Two such companies that have achieved Beacon status in the region include Morris Owen and Thring Townsend Lee & Pembertons.

Swindon-based accountancy firm Morris Owen was awarded Beacon status in recognition of its innovation and enterprise in its successful use of technology to replace traditional methods.

In 2004, the firm which has over 2,300 clients across a wide range of industry sectors, carried out a strategic review of its structure, culture and brand and, as a result, the 'new look' Morris Owen emerged. A dynamic fresh 'minimalist' image was created to complement, new people management, systems and processes.

For over a decade, Morris Owen has developed their Virtual Accounts Office (VAO) service for clients. VAO is an innovative accountants system, working on four different leading software packages, which allows customers remote access to accountancy services online; outsourcing a client's back office accounts function to Morris Owen's in-house team of VAO account managers and processors and

### Beacon companies in Wiltshire

include: Aster Group, Beard, Castleway Construction, Eastbrook Farm Organic Meats, Erebor, ESP Colour, Expolink Europe, Fascia Graphics, Good Energy, GWP Group, Huber Technology, Innotec Supplies (UK), Intrepid Travel, Mecserflex Monro Brands, Morris Owen, Nectar Imports, Parker Bullen, Playforce, Revive Vending, Romarsh, The Chord Company, The Consortium, The Tracklement Company, Thring Townsend Lee & Pembertons, UKL, Wentworth Wooden Jigsaw

replacing the in-house resource. The system allows clients to draw upon all Morris Owen's expertise and in certain areas has turned non chargeable staff into fee earners. This innovative approach in a traditional sector was something recognised by the Beacon validation process.

The service has grown steadily with numerous clients now using the system all over the globe, and with a retention rate of over 90 per cent, it compares very favourably to 70-80 per cent in traditional accountancy provision.

For further information visit: [www.beaconsw.org.uk](http://www.beaconsw.org.uk)

# Who treats industrial waste water? With Huber's help, you can

Huber Technology the wholly owned UK subsidiary of Hans Huber SE, celebrates its 17th anniversary this year of its direct representation within the UK market. Now with over 65 staff on board since inception it has further enhanced the facilities and backup required to support the vast range of equipment on offer and already installed within the UK market.

Huber Technology offers a full range of superior high quality stainless steel equipment designed, and manufactured in our extensive production facility in Germany. The range of products includes fine screen, coarse screens, and micro screens for achieving Solids Removal, Washing, Conveying and compacting of solids; Sludge Screening, Thickening and De-watering; Storm / River Intake Screening; Total Preliminary Treatment; Grit removal and

Washing; Enhanced Primary and Final Settlement; Membrane systems, Grease and Solids Removal; Tertiary Treatment, Energy Recovery Systems and Grey Water Recycling.

To cover the recycling and waste management Huber have a fully experienced, expanding and dedicated Industrial Division. This has been set up to fully support the ever increasing industrial waste water treatment needs due to new legislation drivers being brought about by the environmental situation throughout Europe. Huber has successful installations across a range of waste treatment applications and more recently has been particularly successful in the supply of plant for Bio Waste treatment and aggregate recycling. Huber has also developed an innovative gully waste and sewer grit treatment plant which allows washed sand and gravel to be

recycled from wastes which under the Landfill Directive is becoming more difficult to dispose of.

With Huber Technologies commitment to quality and service along with the new additions to the already considerable range of equipment and services increases the options on offer to the UK Water Market, making Huber Technology a one stop shop for your Water Treatment needs.

Its continuing support and involvement within the Beacon South West Group of companies has meant that Huber Technology has benefited from being involved in the sharing of best practice, ideas, and the exchange of experiences and business processes with local companies helping it to become one of the leading companies within its field.

For more details please contact: [www.huber.co.uk](http://www.huber.co.uk)

# Honda 'refuel at home' system now on trial

Honda recently began operation of a next generation solar hydrogen station prototype at the Los Angeles Center of Honda R&D Americas intended for ultimate use as a home refueling appliance capable of an overnight refill of fuel cell electric vehicles.

Designed as a single, integrated unit to fit in the user's garage, Honda's next generation Solar Hydrogen Station reduces the size of the system, while producing enough hydrogen via an 8-hour overnight fill for daily commuting (10,000 miles per year) for a fuel cell electric vehicle.

By creating a new high differential pressure electrolyzer, Honda engineers were able to eliminate the need for a compressor entirely - a world's first for a home use system.

This innovation also reduces the size of other key components to make the new station the world's most compact system, while improving system efficiency by more than 25 per cent (value calculated based on simulations) compared to the solar hydrogen station system it replaces.

Compatible with a Smart Grid energy system, the Honda Solar Hydrogen Station would enable users to refill their vehicle overnight without the requirement of hydrogen storage, which would lower CO2 emissions by using less expensive off-peak electrical power.

During daytime peak power times, the Solar Hydrogen Station can export renewable electricity to the grid, providing a cost benefit to the customer, while remaining energy neutral. Designed for simple, user-friendly operation, the intuitive system layout enables the user to easily lift and remove the fuel hose, with no hose coiling when the hose is returned to the dispenser unit.

Engineered for an 8-hour, slow fill for overnight refilling of a fuel cell electric vehicle, the home-use Solar

Hydrogen Station would replenish the hydrogen for a typical daily driving, meeting the commuting requirements of many drivers.

The system will employ a 48-panel, 6.0kW solar array which utilizes thin film solar cells composed of copper, indium, gallium and selenium (CIGS) produced by Honda Soltec Co, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Honda that was established for the mass production and sales of solar cells capable of efficient renewable electricity generation. Honda's unique solar cells reduce the amount of CO2 generated during production as compared to conventional solar cells.

Designed to support the needs of the future owners of fuel cell electric vehicles, the Honda Solar Hydrogen Station was also designed to complement a public network of fast fill hydrogen stations.

The Honda FCX Clarity electric vehicle is fast fill capable and offers an EPA-estimated driving range of 240 miles. With fast fill public stations providing 5-minute fueling time for longer trips, and the opportunity of convenient nighttime slow filling at home using a solar station with a Smart Grid connection, the Honda FCX Clarity can cover a wide range of driving demands from the daily commute to weekend trips.

A key strategy in creating a solar hydrogen station for home-use was to create a new lifestyle with convenient, clean, energy-efficient and sustainable home refueling, by addressing the need for refueling infrastructure that can advance the wider use of fuel cell electric vehicles by consumers.

The combination of a fuel cell electric vehicle and the solar hydrogen station could help lead to the establishment of a hydrogen society based on renewable energy, resulting in a major reduction of CO2 emissions and greater energy sustainability.

# Strong rise in Nationwide's consumer confidence index

Nationwide Building Society's latest Consumer Confidence Index has measured a six point rise in consumer confidence, taking the index to 80, the highest level since January 2008.

In addition, the Expectations index reached its highest ever level (115) following a six point climb.

The Present Situation index increase by four points to 27, whereas the Spending index declined by the same amount to 93.

The percentage of those who

believe the economic situation will be better in six months' time has increased to 39, having been 36 in January.

For the first time since September 2008 the proportion of those who think there will be fewer or not many jobs available in six months' time has fallen below 50 per cent, to 43 per cent.

Chief Economist Martin Gahbauer has said that optimism has triumphed over the small confidence dip at the end of last year and that now people have greater confidence in both the present and future.

The end of 2009 confidence dip has been attributed to the end of the Christmas sales and withdrawal of the lower VAT rate, which increased back to the standard rate of 17.5 per cent.

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## Stroud & Swindon in talks with Coventry

The country's third largest building society, Coventry, is in discussions with possibility of merging the Stroud & Swindon Building Society.

A successful deal would create a substantial sized society with assets of more than £20bn. However, negotiations are at an early stage and Coventry said there was no certainty of a deal, which would only go ahead if both organisations benefited.

Any merger, if agreed, would require, inter alia, the formal approval of Stroud & Swindon's savings and borrowing members as well as confirmation by the Financial Services Authority. No action is required by

members at this stage. Further updates will be given as appropriate.

Coventry Building Society is the third largest building society in the UK and has assets of £18.4bn. It has 1.2m members and operates nationally through a telephone contact centre, the internet and intermediary services. It maintains a network of 48 branches located throughout the Midlands.

Coventry Building Society recently reported extremely strong results for the year ended 31 December 2009. Highlights included profit before tax of £56.2m (2008 - £26.4).

Stroud & Swindon has assets in excess of £2.5bn. The society operates through a branch network of 22 offices and 21 agencies in the South West, complemented by a customer contact centre based in Gloucestershire and its website.

Stroud & Swindon continues to be well-funded and have robust capital ratios and strong liquidity.

Stroud and Swindon has 265,000 members, employs 400 people across its Stroud headquarters and branch network of 22 offices and 21 agencies in the south west.

## £6m research partnership launched

A new research initiative has been launched to accelerate the development of improved crops with higher yields and consistent, high quality products.

The £6m Crop Improvement Research Club (CIRC) is led by the North Star, Swindon-based Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC), the UK's largest public funder of agri-food research and includes the Scottish Government and 13 companies representing plant breeders, farmers and food processors.

## ISO won by Groundwell Logistics

Groundwell Logistics, formerly a division of Book Club Associates (BCA), which was established as an independent company last year, has been awarded ISO14001 accreditation.

Offering warehousing, order fulfilment and back office business services to the mail order and e-commerce, the company the now set to gain a competitive position in the local market. The prestigious award comes after an in-depth assessment of the company by certification inspectors, Anglo Japanese American (AJA) Registrars.

Book Club Associates is Britain's biggest mail order bookseller with more than 40 years experience of book order fulfilment. Groundwell Logistics, acts as a separate spin-off business and serves the mail order and E-commerce sectors.

BCA was acquired by a German investment firm at the beginning of 2009 and has continued to challenge its traditional business model as it divides the business into two clear offerings – order fulfilment logistics and direct to consumer book sales.

Mr Tony Day, managing director of Groundwell Logistics said recently: "Anyone who has seen our impressive operation and warehousing systems here in Swindon will have no doubt that we're ready to take on more work from third party clients.

"We are very experienced in both bulk distribution as well as the finely tuned business of getting unique and small orders out directly to the consumer's home. This expertise places us ideally as a leading distributor to support the burgeoning e-business sector and we look forward to rising to the challenge."

Groundwell Logistics will continue to fulfil orders in the UK and Europe for Britain's largest mail order book clubs. Their extensive warehousing, pick & pack and back office service facilities enable them to provide an unrivalled service to clients.

## Local armour company acquired by Ten Cate

Royal Ten Cate has agreed to acquire the armour company AML UK, based in Swindon.

The acquisition will provide TenCate with full access to the UK market for lightweight composite armour solutions. AML has annual sales of approximately £10m. The share purchase agreement is expected to be concluded this month.

The acquisition is an important step for TenCate in the formation of a Pan-European armouring organization. Together with TenCate Aerospace Composites and TenCate Advanced Armour in the USA, the organization offers an extensive portfolio of technologies and solutions to the global market place.

AML UK is a leading company in the armour market in the United Kingdom, the second largest market worldwide. The company is largely engaged in the design and production of vehicle armour materials. Furthermore it provides a range of products for the security market.

TenCate Advanced Armour designs and manufactures armour for vehicles (including aircraft and naval protection) for the UK Ministry of Defence and associated contractors. TenCate wishes to expand its position within this market – especially in the field of vehicle, aircraft and naval armour products – where major modernization and expansion programmes are planned for the future.

Frank Meurs, director TenCate Advanced Armour commented: "AML has an excellent reputation as a developer of revolutionary concepts and as an engineering partner for the prototyping and design of production processes. As a result of this, AML has become an important partner of the UK Government and its associated vehicle manufacturers and contractors. AML's complementary activities will support our existing business. TenCate will be able to contribute much to the further growth of the already well positioned AML activities."

## Fredericks Foundation launches 'lending hub'

A local foundation that helps people who have difficulties with securing business loans or investment via traditional means to start and grow their own businesses, has launched the Swindon and Wiltshire Lending Hub.

The charity provides a range of business support and microloan funding to new and small companies.

By making a significant three year investment, GWE Business West is supporting Fredericks Foundation to

establish a Lending Hub for Swindon and Wiltshire.

The launch of the Swindon and Wiltshire Lending Hub will be marked by events held across the area – the first on 29th April at Swindon's Steam Museum of the Great Western Railways. If you would like further information on Fredericks Foundation or would like to attend the launch, please telephone: 01793 698023.

## Local letting agent shortlisted for national award

Swindon Home Finders has been recognised as one of the top ten letting agents in the south of England.

Owner Sue Gidney and her staff from the firm's Commercial Road office have been shortlisted for the industry's prestigious Estate Agent of the Year Awards (ESTA) and have been invited to the national awards ceremony in London on 15th April.

The awards will be presented by TV presenter Phil Spencer, who fronts Channel 4's Location, Location, Location programme.

The Estas are unique because there is no judging panel of industry experts involved in selecting the winners. Instead, letting agents are

judged by their landlords on the effectiveness of their property management process, so winners have the satisfaction of knowing they have been voted "the best" by their own customers.

Sue Gidney said being shortlisted is a ringing endorsement by her own landlords.

"It's quite a tough competition, because for every landlord who doesn't vote you actually get a negative vote, which cancels out one of the positive votes," said Sue.

"We're thrilled to have got this far, are very grateful to our lovely landlords and are keeping our fingers crossed for the ceremony!"

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## Company Law

# Protecting against attack from former employees

Driving a business out of one of the worst recessions of recent times is a challenge for even the most experienced director. However, it will be even more of a challenge if former employees try to poach your staff and customers, use your confidential information or launch a website with a similar name to yours. Wiltshire-based law firm Withy King has seen its work load increase dramatically over the past few months as former employees set up their own businesses in competition with their previous employers and in some cases actively turn against them.

Fiona Lymant, an Associate in the Commercial Dispute Resolution team at Withy King, urges directors and business owners to make the time to review the terms of their employment contracts to ensure they are adequately protected. She also warns of the impact that defamatory statements can have on the reputation of a business or its products and warns businesses to act quickly if they think they are under attack.

### Restrictive Covenants

A restrictive covenant is a term of a contract which can restrict an employee's activities both during and after termination of their employment. A well drafted restrictive covenant may prevent an employee from soliciting customers or existing employees of the employer, dealing with customers of the employer, competing with the employer (if appropriate) or from using knowledge of technology or strategic information about the employer's business, suppliers or customer contacts that they have gained during their employment, for the benefit of their new employer or business.

However, a restrictive covenant will only be enforceable if an employer can show that it has a legitimate proprietary interest that is worthy of protection and that the protection it is seeking is reasonable. Otherwise the restrictive covenant will be held to be unenforceable for being in restraint of trade and contrary to public policy. For this reason, it is important that restrictive covenants are carefully drafted and tailored to each employer's particular circumstances with careful consideration being given to the restricted activities, the period of restriction and (if appropriate) the geographical extent of the restrictions necessary to protect the employer's legitimate interests.

### Confidential Information

Confidential information about an organisation's affairs and operation, such as information regarding sales, pricing and the terms of contracts with customers or suppliers, is important to any business. However, organisations may find that they do not have any protection for their confidential information once an employee leaves.

Whilst employees are subject to a general duty of confidentiality, after termination of their employment this



Fiona Lymant

duty will generally only apply to information tantamount to a trade secret (such as secret manufacturing processes, chemical formulae or special methods of construction) and it will not protect other commercially confidential information. The way that an employer can protect confidential information is by including appropriate confidentiality provisions in employment contracts that apply both during and after termination of employment.

Businesses should also ensure that it is made abundantly clear to employees what information is confidential and if possible access to confidential information should be restricted by password or other appropriate means to ensure that only employees who have a need to access such information are given permission. It is also important to check that employment contracts give the right to demand the return of confidential information upon the termination of employment and, upon termination, any employer should make sure that confidential information is returned, including any laptop or other hardware issued to the employee or access to confidential information is immediately restricted.

### Defamation

Threats to your business reputation can come from competitors and disgruntled employees or ex-employees in the form of defamatory statements published about your business either on a website, an e-newsletter or in correspondence. Proceedings for defamation need to be brought within 1 year from the date of publication so if any organisation becomes aware that potentially defamatory statements have been published about its business, it should act quickly to take steps to protect its reputation.

Many of the issues related to the protection of an organisation's proprietary or commercial interests can be addressed with some forethought. Organisations are encouraged to think about what issues might arise when employees leave their employment and to put in place suitable safeguards wherever possible to prevent significant damage being caused to their business interests.

### Contact us

For further advice on the above matters or any commercial disputes, please contact Fiona Lymant or Chris Kane at Withy King on 01793 536526 or email: [fiona.lymant@withyking.co.uk](mailto:fiona.lymant@withyking.co.uk) or [chris.kane@withyking.co.uk](mailto:chris.kane@withyking.co.uk)

# Compromise agreements 'need care'

As many businesses will be aware, a compromise agreement is simply a special form of legal settlement that arises in an employment law context, *Lemon & Co points out*.

The general rule is that ordinary settlement agreements are invalid and employees can only give up statutory claims like unfair dismissal and discrimination if there is a valid compromise agreement.

There are various conditions that must be met for compromise agreements to be valid. The most important conditions are that the agreement is in writing; that it relates to particular legal claims; that the employee receives advice from an independent solicitor; and that the agreement confirms that the employee has received this independent legal advice.

In practice, compromise agreements often arise where there is a payment of enhanced redundancy pay or where relations between the employer and employee break down and there is no alternative but to negotiate an exit.

The conventional wisdom has been that compromise agreements represent a clean break and that there is no kind of legal redress that can be sought by an employee once the compromise agreement has been signed and concluded.

However, in the recent case of *Industrious Ltd v Horizon Recruitment Ltd* and another, the Employment Appeal Tribunal held that a compromise agreement might be invalid if it is based upon a misrepresentation.

For example, if the employer were to deliberately mislead an employee into accepting a compromise agreement on the basis of factual assertions that they knew to be untrue then the compromise agreement may be invalid and the employee may be able to proceed with claims for unfair dismissal.

This would be an unusual case but it does now seem that the Employment Tribunal will sometimes have to consider that there has been a misrepresentation before deciding whether there is a valid compromise agreement.

Lemon&Co has one of the most reputable Employment Law Teams in the area. Please contact Paul Archer or Lauren Harkin if you wish to discuss your specific employment law needs on 01793 527141 or alternatively email [Linda.Birrell@lemon-co.co.uk](mailto:Linda.Birrell@lemon-co.co.uk).

# Sick note to be replaced by fit note

On 6 April 2010, the traditional sick note will be replaced by a new 'fit note' to help more people return to work rather than be signed off work on long term sick leave.

The Statement of Fitness for Work, or the 'fit note' as it will be known, is a new medical statement that GPs will issue to people who are on sick leave for over seven days. It will focus on whether, with extra support from their employer, the employee can return to work earlier. It has been introduced to provide advice to employees about staying in work, as well as advising employers about what they can do to help employees return to work sooner.

# Relief for companies that are struck off

A company may have been struck off the register at Companies House for a number of reasons. They include the following:

- The company was no longer trading and its directors have applied to dissolve the company by filing a form at Companies House.

- The registrar at Companies House believed that the company was not carrying on business or in operation. This may have been because the company had failed to file its annual accounts or annual return at Companies House by the due date and the registrar had not received a response to any letters sent to the company within a certain time frame.

A consequence of this is that the Crown assumes ownership of any assets which were left in the company at the time it was struck off (as the company is deemed no longer to exist).

In the event that the directors did not want the company struck off or have subsequently changed their minds (eg because they had failed to transfer assets out of the company) the only option available to them prior to 1st October 2009 was to apply to the court to have the company restored. The process would typically take 6 to 8 weeks and sometimes longer and could be expensive to implement.

As from 1st October 2009, an application to the court may no longer be necessary. Instead, a former director / secretary or member of the company may apply directly to

Companies House to have the company restored provided that:

- The application is made within 6 years following dissolution.

- The company was carrying on business or in operation at the time it was struck off.

- If the Crown's representative gives his written consent to the company being restored (where the Crown owns assets previously owned by the company).

- The applicant has delivered to Companies House all documents necessary to bring its records up to date (and paid any outstanding late filing penalties).

The registrar may then restore the company and confirm this in writing. Once restored, the company is deemed to have continued in existence as if it had not been dissolved.

It was previously thought that only companies struck off on or after 1st October 2009 (under the new procedure) could take advantage of this cheaper and quicker process and that companies struck off prior to that date (under the old procedure) could only be restored by an application to the court. Companies House have recently clarified this confirming that the new procedure of applying directly to Companies House is available to them as well.

For further information, please feel free to contact Frank Scott-Ashe on 01793 615 011 or by email: [frank.scott-ashe@blbsolicitors.co.uk](mailto:frank.scott-ashe@blbsolicitors.co.uk).

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## Conveyancers expand into new branch of law

Two new firms have been set up by leading Swindon property lawyer Mary Hoffman in response to a growing demand from clients.

Mary, the driving force at Hoffman Male, has started two new sister companies to deal with wills and probate. TLC Probate Lawyers, a partnership with around 50 years combined legal experience, specialises in probate and administration, and Hoffman Wills deals with wills and those needing advice in areas such as lasting powers of attorney. Both new businesses operate from Hoffman Male's offices in Bath Road, Old Town.

Hoffman Male, almost certainly Swindon's largest specialist property law firm, evolved from Roger Male & Company, which started in Swindon more than 30 years ago. Its experienced team specialises solely in property and conveyancing throughout England and Wales.

Mary Hoffman said that many of the firm's clients return time and again and frequently asked if Hoffman Male would offer a wills and probate service.

"When people buy and sell houses they are often thinking of the future and their mind turns to the issue of wills," said Mary. "We were always being asked by our clients if this was something we could help with, so we decided to respond."

"We have clients who have instructed us literally dozens of times. They trust us and know that they will get the same level of expertise and service from TLC Probate Lawyers and Hoffman Wills as they have come to expect from Hoffman Male."

Mary and her team have been working hard to ensure they are all fully trained and qualified to deal



Mary Hoffman

with wills and probate. The service is already proving popular and Mary says that more staff will be taken on during the year to cope with demand.

"Making a will is something that we tend to put off for another day and yet it is probably the most important document that we will ever write," she said. "If you die without a will then it is likely that your estate will not be distributed in the way you would wish it to be, and a lot of it may well end up in the hands of the taxman."

Mary added: "Probate is the process of proving the validity of a will but if a person dies without making a will the process of winding up the estate can take a lot longer and is often the point where family disputes start."

For more information visit [www.hoffmanmale.co.uk](http://www.hoffmanmale.co.uk) or contact Mary Hoffman on 01793 538198.

## Lemon & Co Solicitors discuss the importance of customer service

In times of financial constraints the importance of customer service should become the lifeblood of any organisation. In fact, it could be true to say that in more affluent years standards of good customer service may be lowered in some organisations as it becomes less important to give value for money.

When it comes to running a business in a recession there can be no second chances in creating a positive environment for customers and driving every aspect of the company to meet their needs.

A good example is when looking at successful restaurants as, even when people are reining their money belts in, there are still those that pack their tables night after night. This is despite the fact that eating out is still considered by most to be a luxury.

It is fair to deduce that in these establishments customer service has been made paramount and that the diners are having their expectations not only met, but also raised. More often than not this experience makes people return time and again – providing a loyal customer base to build on.

At Lemon&Co Solicitors, we ensure that we put our clients at the heart of everything we do and as a long-standing partner, and now managing partner, I believe the first



Deirdre Moss, Managing Partner at Lemon&Co Solicitors

thing to get right is ensuring you invest in your own people.

This is true for staff throughout the business – for example, at Lemon&Co, we are incredibly fortunate to have a hardworking and loyal support team, who are the unsung heroes of the organisation and provide insight into our work in ways that are often priceless, for example having local knowledge and history that is second-to-none.

There are so many people who form an essential part of the customer service experience at Lemon&Co who are often the first point of contact on the telephones and at reception. For example, Mandy Staley in our Property department, Linda Birrell in our Employment team and Jemma Thwaites in our Family team – the list of dedicated employees could go on and on.

In fact, one of our employment

lawyers Lauren Harkin passed her solicitor's exams but started her career at Lemon&Co as a secretary in the Family department to wait for the right training role to come up. This duly happened and now she is a key player in the Employment team – something that is a real credit to both her and the firm.

And Lauren is now part of a team that, in my opinion, are the region's best lawyers – and again, not only because of the actual job they do, but because their vision is more far-reaching. For us, the main aim is to see the people that walk in the door, each with their own individual needs and concerns and their own independent set of circumstances, be catered for.

With this in mind, we recently refurbished our offices on Regent Circus to create a more customer-led experience. From the moment you visit our reception we hope to ensure you are well looked after and receive the best possible care both in terms of atmosphere and environment as well as service.

It is through these kinds of internal processes we aim to communicate what our business stands for and hope we have built a brand that is accessible, recognisable and reliable for our customers, so many of whom have been coming to us time and again.

For, although a lawyer's office might be a far cry from a packed restaurant, it is part of all our jobs to create the right menu and offer our clients not only what they want but also more than they expected.

### How can good customer service be achieved:

- Invest in people – employing the right people from the top right down to those working behind the scenes
- Work with the local community – ensure strong ties with your customer's locality and have good local knowledge
- Invest in your brand – investment in the identity of the firm is vital when presenting yourselves to clients
- Promote customer loyalty – special service to existing customers can mean the world



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## Conference Facilities

## Business News

### V Business offering one of Swindon's most convenient conference facilities

The conference and meeting facilities offered by V Business on a mezzanine floor above Swindon railway station, probably the most convenient location in town, is attracting and increasing number of companies.

In particular, many larger companies located in the town centre are making good use of the facilities for regional meetings, with company employees who travel from distant locations finding it a convenient meeting point.

In the bad winter weather, many preferred to travel by train and were therefore able to be in meetings only minutes after their arrival. For those preferring to travel by car, there is the large station car park very nearby, and short term parking outside the door.

For more information or bookings, call 01793 523576. Or visit: [www.v-premier.com](http://www.v-premier.com)



The centre offers complete conference and meetings services at competitive prices, with all the necessary visual and communications aids. Some town centre companies are also using the centre as an overspill meeting area when short of space in their own buildings, again because it is in walking distance and very convenient.

In recent months there has been a noticeable increase in the volume of clients using the facilities, and this is

expected to continue as economic activity accelerates.

Catering is part of the service, with lunches being ordered in as required, and during the day tea and coffee is provided with additional charge. There is audiovisual equipment in each of the three conference rooms, and Wi-Fi is being installed. Rooms can be booked for full or half days. For more information or bookings, call 01793 523576.

### Local hairdresser wins national beauty award

Local hairdresser, OMG has won Best Small Beauty Salon and Best Small Employer at this year's Professional Beauty Awards, held in the prestigious five star Hilton Hotel, London.

The best of the beauty industry were recognised with a coveted Professional Beauty Award at the glamorous awards held in London on Monday 8 March 2010.

The Professional Beauty Awards are the most prestigious awards for the beauty, nails and spa industries, recognising those who make a real difference to the beauty industry and to encourage their development.

Shortlisted salons and spas were visited and interviewed by a member of the editorial team to see first-hand what their businesses are all about. All of them were also mystery shopped. Therapists, nail professionals and make-up artists were trade tested, and our employer finalists were grilled Dragon's Den style.

The Awards proved to be a fantastic night, bringing together over

550 beauty professionals to honour those who have performed outstandingly over the last year. Co-creator of Smack the Pony, actress and comedienne, Sally Phillips hosted the ceremony and guests enjoyed the post awards disco until the early hours.

Jenni Middleton, editor of Professional Beauty magazine commented:

"Our expectation was that we'd see standards drop this year. Times are tough, it's hard to keep motivated and it's even harder to get money in the till to spend on the little flourishes that set you apart.

But what the mystery shoppers, my editorial team and our judges have consistently found is that the standard has been even higher this year. When the going gets tough, the tough cleanse, tone and moisturise."

Big winners on the night included Cupcake Mum, Gentlemen's Tonic and OMG Hair and Beauty. The Outstanding Contribution to the Industry award went to the well deserved, Noella Gabriel.

### Trader Media Group choose local firm for conference

Venues Event Management has recently been appointed to organise Trader Media Group's annual Leadership Conference in May 2010. The event, which will host over 100 delegates, is intended to deliver the five year business plan to the company's senior business leaders as well as focusing on customer service.

Trader Media Group is one of Europe's largest specialist media publishers, producing over 70 leading classified titles, a selection of popular and profitable websites and operates several high-volume printing businesses.

The two day conference will be taking place at The Crowne Plaza,

Blanchardstown, Dublin. This venue was selected primarily because previously the event has been held at locations in England and the client wanted a change of scenery that didn't require the primarily UK based attendees to travel too far.

Ligia Kowalska, Internal Communications Manager at Trader Media Group commented:

"We have been working with Venues Event Management for just over a year now and we invited them to pitch for this, one of our most high profile and key conferences. During their presentation, Venues Event Management demonstrated excellent commercial value and a dynamic creative approach to delivery."

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## Pay up or pay more

Pay on time or pay extra – that's the new rule the taxman is bringing in from April 6 for all late PAYE payments. Swindon chartered accountants Morris Owen are warning that from this date, all employers and contractors – regardless of the number of employees they have – will be charged penalties by HM Revenue & Customs for late PAYE payments.

Whether it's late payment of Income Tax, National Insurance Contributions, Construction Industry or Student Loan deductions, all employers will face a penalty if they miss the new payment deadline.

Penalties will range from one per cent to 10 per cent of the total due and will depend on the number of times payments are late and how late they are. Previously these penalties only applied to employers with more than 250 employees.

Peter Crozier, a Tax Consultant at Morris Owen, said: "PAYE payments are usually due on the 19th or 22nd of each month. Payments due in May 2010 will be the first to fall within this new regime. Employers who pay PAYE quarterly will also have to abide by the new rules."

He continued: "The taxman will be more lenient on those who only

make one late payment in a tax year, so long as it's not more than six months late and the employer has a reasonable excuse. Whether the excuse is reasonable will depend on their circumstances."

Penalties will not be charged if the employer has agreed a payment plan with the Revenue in advance, but in these situations it is crucial the employer approaches the Revenue before the payment becomes due to agree a payment plan.

Peter said: "Where payment dates fall on a weekend or bank holiday, the employer should ensure payment reaches the Revenue on the last working day before. Employers need to have systems in place to ensure payments are made on time. This is something we can help employers with here at Morris Owen."

"The first penalty letters will not be issued until May 2011, so employers may get a nasty surprise then if they aren't made aware of this now."

Under the current system, interest is only charged on PAYE paid late once the tax year has finished, but the Revenue has indicated it may charge interest on monthly PAYE payments from April 2012.

## Paying too much for your rates?

With the next general rating revaluation due to be implemented on 1st April 2010, many businesses are expected to receive significant increases in the rateable value they will be liable to pay for their property.

Rateable values are expected to increase by around 20% in the South West, which is the largest regional increase outside of Greater London. Anthony Cohen of Monahans Chartered Accountants advises any business which thinks it is paying too much to contact him. "Monahans has introduced a joint initiative with Alder King whereby we will review your business rates and where they are excessive, make an appeal on your behalf."

"There may also be opportunities to appeal against your business rates if you feel they were too high for the previous 5 year period, if you have empty property, if your property is in



Anthony Cohen

a poor state of repair or if you have a brand new property. And this won't cost you a penny, as we work on a no win no fee basis, so if no savings are made you won't have to pay anything."

Contact me on 01793 818300 or email anthony@monahans.co.uk if you would like to discuss this further.



## Retirement hopes for small business owners

Small business owners say their retirement prospects are finally beginning to improve as the UK begins to emerge from recession.

But the latest quarterly survey of more than 1,000 businesses, carried out by Clifton Asset Management (CAM), also reveals that attitudes vary considerably in different parts of the country.

Some 77 per cent of business owners say their retirement is further away now than it was a year ago – slightly down on the 80 per cent recorded three months ago.

But the differing speed at which recovery is under way in different regions is reflected in the fact that in the East Midlands, 90 per cent say their retirement hopes have receded, up from 83 per cent, with the figure in the North East holding steady at 86 per cent. By contrast, in the South West only 68 per cent of business owners now view their retirement as having moved further away, down 13 per cent.

The main reasons given for delaying retirement are tougher trading and market conditions (55 per cent) and declining property and pension values (23 per cent).

In terms of retirement age, 60-65 remains the most popular option in the survey, with 18 per cent saying they have no plans to retire, down from 22 per cent.

The latest CAM survey also asked business owners who would win the forthcoming General Election if they were the only voters. Over two-thirds – 67 per cent – said the Conservatives would win power – compared to just 6 per cent who named Labour.

And in line with previous surveys, a majority of SMEs said the Government's Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) scheme had failed to improve bank lending or facilities for businesses. Only 7 per cent of firms said they had been successful in accessing finance through the EFG.

Neil Greenaway, managing director at Clifton Asset Management, said: "How people view their retirement prospects is a crucial part of our survey, so a fall – albeit small – in the number of business owners who see retirement moving further away has to be good news."

"We are now officially out of recession and no doubt this affects how people see their retirement prospects, although the wide variations between different parts of the country highlight how some regions are performing better than others."

London (70 per cent) and the South East (65 per cent) remain the most optimistic regions in terms of business owners' views of their area being better placed for economic recovery than the UK as a whole, with Wales and the North East the least optimistic (25 per cent and 29 per cent respectively).

## VAT and entertaining - an opportunity

A recent announcement from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has presented a potential opportunity for businesses to recover VAT on entertainment costs.

Under existing rules, businesses are unable to recover VAT incurred on entertaining UK customers. However a challenge currently before the European Court could result in this treatment being overturned.

A decision is expected later in the Spring and those affected have until 31 March 2010 to submit claims backdated to 1 April 2006 under the newly extended time limits.

The case involves the Dutch VAT legislation but the Dutch and UK legislation are similarly structured and therefore there is a possibility that if the ECJ Rules in favour of the Dutch taxpayers then the judgement might also apply to the UK.

"In some cases very substantial amounts may be involved. We

recommend that businesses with potentially large claims act now to make protective claims and maximise potential repayments from HMRC, although the position on entertaining both staff and overseas customers is unaffected," said Martin Gurney, Tax Partner at Haines Watts Chartered Accountants in Swindon.

"Our specialist VAT team has extensive knowledge in addition to many years experience working in the VAT arena."

"Our approach to working with clients is wholly practical, with the benefits to clients being both significant backdated VAT refunds and improved VAT recovery for the future," said Mr Gurney.

If you simply require further information or would like assistance to prepare and submit a claim, please contact Martin Gurney on 01793 533838 or email: msgurney@hwca.com



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## Focus on Basepoint

# Cost-effective solutions offered at Datalibrium

Despite the adverse economic conditions in 2009 Datalibrium has been one of the companies who have managed to weather the storm with a combination of timing, solid teamwork and a dash of good luck.

Riding off the back of successful software implementation for companies such as Smiths News and Book Club Associates, Datalibrium have successfully produced tailored software to assist the banking group UBS, built a program to ensure the efficient provision of locum doctors both in the UK and abroad, and set up a cutting edge heart disease prevention solution for consultant cardiologists

These successes are born from chief software architect David Daley's (picture shown) approach to rapid prototyping software development; allowing companies to construct software solutions starting with simple spreadsheets and working up to fully developed applications.

Of course non of this would be effective without a solid hardware



David Daley

backbone and again Datalibrium has managed to push forward with its service allowing companies to have the reassurance of onsite engineering support or even hosting entire businesses on its virtual office platform.

Simple, cost effective solutions, that is the motto that ensured Datalibrium offered its clients the best products available on 2009, heres hoping they can match the performance and growth in 2010.



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# Basepoint wins Best Business Award for customer focus

Basepoint Business Centres, which operates Basepoint's Swindon business centre in Westlea, is delighted to have won a Best Business Award for its customer services.

The Best Business awards ([www.bestbusinessawards.co.uk](http://www.bestbusinessawards.co.uk)) aim to highlight and reward business excellence across both the public and private sectors, and Basepoint won the award for "Best Customer Focus" after going above and beyond simply offering managed workspace.

Chairman of the judges, Andrew Areoff, commented: "Rather than simply locating businesses, it is Basepoint's aim to add value that sets them apart. They take great pride in, and notice of, what their customers need from them in order to improve their overall experience. Basepoint continuously strives to improve and build upon their success which is to be admired."

Basepoint achieves its outstanding customer focus by offering its customers a range of added benefits. These include hosting local networking events, flexible terms based on customer feedback and a 'business portal' to give small businesses who occupy workspace in its centres the buying power of a



major group, allowing them to achieve discounts usually reserved for large companies.

Brian Andrews, Basepoint's executive director, commented: "We pride ourselves on customer service and have spent a lot of time developing our systems and processes so that we can deliver outstanding service to our clients. Not only that, but our centre managers are an intrinsic part of the business, ensuring that our licensees are well looked after. I would like to express my thanks to all those who work at Basepoint and continue to ensure the business is a success."

Basepoint Centres Ltd is one of the UK's leading developers and operators of business centres for small, medium and start-up companies, providing space to businesses ranging in size from sole traders to 12 employees or more. There are currently 26 active Basepoint centres across the south of England and West Midlands reaching as far east as Ipswich, and as far west as Exeter, with yet more locations being considered.

For more information on Basepoint, or to find a centre near you, visit [www.basepoint.co.uk](http://www.basepoint.co.uk) or telephone: 01753 853515.

# Continued success through the passed year for local developer

Gyrus Developments, the property development and construction company based at Basepoint, has bucked the trend in the past year, completing a mixed use scheme in Tidworth and starting two successful property projects, one at Cardigan in Wales and the second at Stanmore in London.

Despite difficult conditions in the industry, Gyrus embarked on a three-phase housing development in Wales, having secured a property contract with a private owner which has proved to be beneficial to both sides.

Anthony Byrne of Gyrus said: "In an uncertain market, we offered a deal under which we shared the risks with the landowner, and so far we have successfully built 12

houses which are now being sold. In subsequent phases we may build up to 50 more."

By dealing directly with landowners, he believes it can be more beneficial to both sides, with greater certainty about the eventual outcome.

In London, the concurrent project has involved the removal of around 300 lorry loads of earth and the construction of a basement swimming pool within a private house. This has been achieved at a cost of around 10 per cent below London budgeted cost, through the use of Wiltshire-based resources. Future projects include social housing and other structured projects.

Gyrus moved a little less than a year ago to Basepoint and finds the location and efficiency very much to their liking, as well as the benefit

of larger premises.

For more information, contact Gyrus on 01793 608765



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## IT specialist, first company established at Basepoint

Local IT specialist Sensata Ltd was the first company to be established at Basepoint Business Centre in West Swindon and has moved to larger premises on three occasions as their business expands.

The company, a Microsoft Certified Partner and a Microsoft Certified Small Business Specialist, provides a full range of professional IT services, including hardware, software and maintenance, with clients mostly in the Wiltshire area with a number of other clients further afield.

Sensata specialises in meeting the precise needs of their clients, covering all levels of support which can include: Telephone, Remote and Premier. The first provides telephone support for those just needing a little extra assistance.

The second is the handling and solving of issues both over the telephone and remotely over the internet. The third is a full service including the same as remote, with on-site support when required.



Paul Griffiths

Sensata also has the ability to proactively monitor its clients IT systems remotely, this enables them to anticipate and rectify issues before they happen keeping their clients systems fully operational. Sensata is also a certified Document Management and Scanning solutions provider.

Business Development Manager Paul Griffiths said: "In today's current climate, it is essential our clients are able to focus on their core business and not have to worry about the smooth running of their IT infrastructure."

For many companies, Sensata has provided and installed complete systems, including hardware, software and telephone systems, and continues to provide the exact level of support required.

For more information, call Sensata on 0845 014 1500.

## Basepoint scoops another award for exceptional customer service

Basepoint Business Centres Ltd, which operates Basepoint's Swindon business centre in Westlea, is delighted to have been 'highly commended' in this year's Real Business Customer Kings Awards, an honour presented to those companies who go the extra mile to create a truly memorable customer experience.

The Customer Kings judges were looking for innovation, ingenuity and imagination in the entries and, above all, wanted to see concrete proof that the techniques resulted in improved customer engagement. Of Basepoint's entry, Real Business' Charles Orton Jones, commented: "Basepoint really does go the extra mile. For a service which could easily have followed a similar business model to a number of its competitors, Basepoint has made a huge effort in placing its customers at the heart of the business and created a number of tailored services to try and meet the customers every need. Basepoint really does offer an attractive proposition to small businesses."

Basepoint achieves its outstanding customer focus by offering its customers a range of added benefits. These include hosting local networking events, flexible terms based on customer feedback and a 'business portal' to give small businesses who occupy workspace in its centres the buying power of a major group, allowing them to achieve discounts usually reserved

### The benefits of serviced offices and managed workspace

Serviced and managed workspace comprises units designed to provide accommodation for small businesses to help them get started. The units are usually for service or light manufacturing uses and are normally based in refurbished or purpose-built premises.

Many serviced and managed workspaces are run in association with local enterprise agencies, which can provide you with advice, training, and information. Some workspaces specialise in particular types of business, such as design or IT. Typical services on offer can include:

- Reception facilities.
- Secretarial support.
- Meeting rooms.
- Kitchens and catering services.
- Mail franking and collection.
- Fax and photocopying.
- E-mail and Internet facilities.
- Telephones.
- Office cleaning.
- Presentation or conferencing equipment hire and supply.
- Car parking facilities.
- Security.
- Business advice and support.

Some of the advantages to this type of accommodation include an easy-in, easy-out licence (often the type where you are committed to just one month's notice), and the fact that the servicing side of things is taken care of by a designated professional, so heating, security, and electricity are generally not your concern.



Lyn Chapman and Beverley Reynolds

for large companies.

Brian Andrews, Basepoint's executive director, commented: "Rather than simply housing businesses, we aim to add value by offering a range of services and extras, which our dedicated centre management teams take great pride in delivering. We listen to our licensees needs and have spent a lot of time developing our systems and processes so that we can deliver outstanding service to our clients. This enables their companies to grow and develop, something which is of benefit not only to them, but to the wider economy. We are delighted to be

recognised for our customer service and will continuously strive to improve and build upon our success."

Basepoint Centres Ltd is one of the UK's leading developers and operators of business centres for start-up and SMEs, providing managed space and services to a broad range of companies. There are currently 26 active Basepoint centres across the south of England and West Midlands, with yet more locations being considered.

For more information on Basepoint and its centres, please visit: [www.basepoint.co.uk](http://www.basepoint.co.uk) or telephone head office on: 01753 853515.

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**Roy Smart FCCA and Ridgeway Business Services Chartered Certified Accountants**

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For further details call Lyn on 01793 608800 [swindon@basepoint.co.uk](mailto:swindon@basepoint.co.uk)



## Leisure



## IT recruitment agency sponsors expedition to the North Pole

Outsource UK is sponsoring Minna Halse on her 20,000 mile expedition to the North Pole this March.

Minna will be trekking and skiing her way from Resolute Bay in Canada across the frozen seas to the North Pole to raise money for the charity, 'Teen Challenge UK'.

The route will take Minna and her group between various islands in the high Canadian arctic, past Polar Bear Pass before moving north to the final destination, Deer Bay of Ellef Ringnes Island. The team will be unsupported on their venture and will be carrying all the kit and food needed to survive - 40° Celsius temperatures.

The team of 12 will be carrying 12 sledges, four tents, bedding and food to keep them fully energised on their 30-day journey.

Paul Jameson, managing director of Outsource UK, commented: "It is great to see such passion and commitment and all for a worthy cause. Minna and her friends have spent their weekends training, packing food and equipment and even undergoing shotgun training as protection in case polar bears get too close for comfort! With just a few weeks to go, we wish the team the best of luck and look forward to seeing the pictures."

## Estate agents climb mountain to raise money for charity

Local estate agents, Adrian Quinton and Peter Barefoot have raised £6,000 for a Swindon charity by climbing Mount Kilimanjaro.

The charity, TWIGS - Therapeutic Work In Gardening is based at Cheney manor and aims to give people who experience mental health problems the chance to regain confidence and self-esteem and to learn new skills. TWIGS is a stepping stone to recovery, further education and returning to work.

Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania at 19,340 feet is not only Africa's highest point - often referred to as the roof of Africa - but also the world's tallest free standing mountain. It came into the limelight last year when TV celebrities climbed the mountain for Comic Relief's Red Nose day.

Peter Barefoot said: "getting to the top of Kili was especially hard going on the last day of the seven day



Adrian Quinton and Peter Barefoot at the summit of Mt Kilimanjaro

Trek. Oxygen levels were less than 50% of the levels at lower altitude and slowly slowly was the order of the day. Adrian and I both felt a huge sense of achievement when we shook hands at the summit. We both agreed it was the hardest thing either of us had ever done."

## Sponsors sought for disabled riding school in Cirencester

Watershed Riding for the Disabled at Cirencester is seeking corporat sponsors from the Swindon and Cirencester area ensure the continued provision of riding for disabled people.

Riding is one of the favourite activities undertaken by disabled people, often run by dedicated helpers, but it requires more funding than many other activities.

The Cirencester group provides for small groups of about five riders who get an opportunity to ride either in our outdoor enclosed arena or to go out on a ride in the surrounding countryside. Each rider has one or two helpers accompanying them to ensure that they are safe.

One of the organisers, Bob Merrill, said "The rides last for anything up to an hour and a half and the pleasure the riders get is wonderful to see. They are able to achieve something they may never have expected.

"Our riders are aged from 6 to 60; they come to us from Paternoster school, a school for children with severe learning needs, Chesterton Halt day care centre, residential homes or with their parents. We run separate groups for adults and children."

Contact Bob Merrill on 01285 771496 or 07866 972389 or email watershedrda@googlemail.com

## Training

## Fast Forward offers a new range of free management courses

Fast Forward, the business services division of New College, offers an extensive range of professional training and development programmes for businesses in Swindon and Wiltshire.

The Fast Forward Team is dedicated to meeting the needs of their customers, and can develop tailor made solutions to improve the skills of employees to deliver measurable financial and operational improvements.

Fast Forward is launching an exciting new initiative offering a series of free, one-day training courses over the next few months for managers and owners of small businesses employing fewer than 50 members of staff. Courses currently available include Finance for Non-Financial Managers, Introduction to Leadership and Management, and Achieving Objectives through Time Management. Training courses include lunch, and are available on various dates in April, May, June and July. To find out how Fast Forward can help your business, please call 0808 178 3895, or email info@fastforwardonline.net.

Sinclair Brown, Business



Sinclair Brown

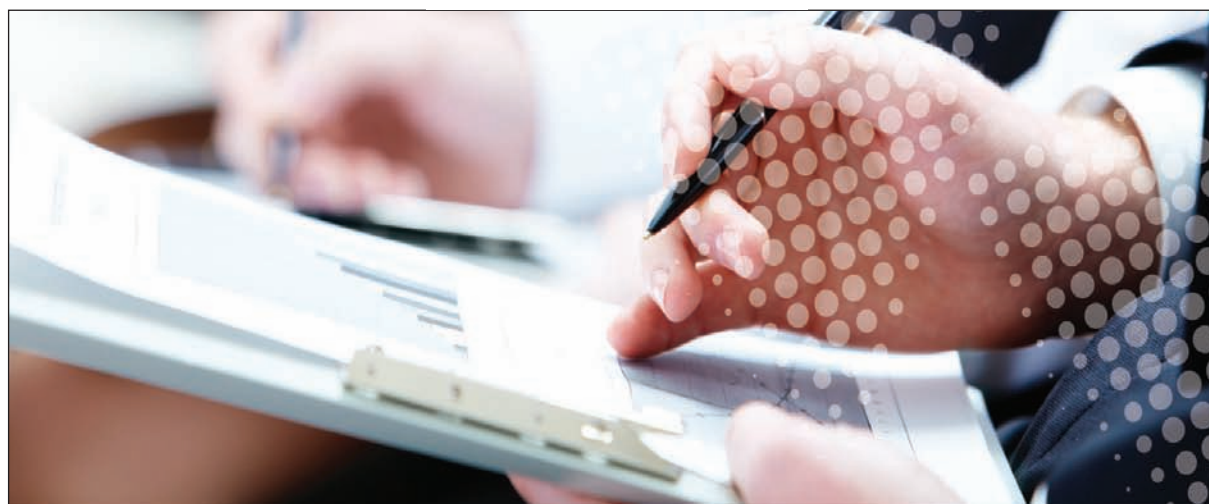
Services Manager at Fast Forward, said: "We have launched these new courses to support smaller businesses in the region over the next few months so that they can continue to train and develop their employees through the recession, at a time when it is difficult for many to be able to

afford it.

"With the well publicised issues in public sector finances the availability of fully funded training will continue to reduce in the coming months and years, so Fast Forward is keen to continue its support for businesses in the Swindon area, and to continue to help business managers to improve their employees' skills and business prospects as a result. The full range of courses and programmes we offer are designed to suit the specific needs of employers in the region, following our close contacts with the business community."

Fast Forward offers a wide variety of courses and qualifications on business focussed subjects ranging from Essential Business Skills, IT, Leadership and Management, Project Management, Finance, Childcare, Communication Skills and Health and Safety. These programmes are delivered by professional tutors who have years of experience in both the public and private sectors.

For more information, please call the Fast Forward team on 0808 178 3895.



## Need Management Training?

Working in an organisation with under 50 staff?

You may be eligible for **FREE** one-day training

### Finance for Non-Financial Managers

Provides an overview of how the current financial climate affects your business with a guide to what is profit and what is cash. How to plan and budget effectively; quick wins - short-term savings vs long-term cash planning.

Tue 9.00-5.00pm 27-Apr

### Introduction to Leadership and Management

Bitesize modules from the ILM Level 3 in Leadership and Management curriculum. Includes; solving problems and making decisions, effective meetings for managers, marketing basics and managing customer services. This is not an accredited course.

Wed 9.00-5.00pm 28-Apr

### Achieving Objectives through Time Management

A unit from the ILM Level 3 in Leadership and Management to include ILM registration, and accreditation. This allows you to continue on to study for and complete the full qualification at your own cost.

Thu 9.00-5.00pm 29-Apr

Alternative dates available in May, June and July

Venue: Queens Drive - Lunch provided

To find out more or to register call:

**0808 178 3895**

Fast Forward  
Training and Development



## College teams up with 'Greenie' to raise money for charity

Swindon College invited Heart FM's 'Greenie' - member of the Breakfast Show crew alongside Jez and Roo - to work at Swindon College on Friday 12 March 2010 as part of the radio station's Have a Heart charity fundraising campaign.

Greenie bravely agreed to work the lunchtime shift in the college refectory clearing food and drink from tables used by hundreds of students and staff over the lunch hour between 12-1pm! He also helped the refectory staff who serve the food behind the counters and proved a big hit with staff and

students alike.

In return, Swindon College were delighted to be able to make a donation towards the Have a Heart campaign, which supports charities helping local children. Many students and staff also made generous donations on the day.

Have a Heart is totally focused on grass roots projects to raise funds in the Swindon and Wiltshire community making a difference to the lives of local kids; those who are vulnerable, face adversity, suffer from illness or are deprived of the childhood that every child deserves.

## Grow your own talent with Business First

Local employers are being urged to "grow their own" talent after researchers at Cranfield School of Management discovered that investing in staff training not only saves money but is more effective than shopping around for new employees with the desirable skills set. The research shows that even in a recession - with training budgets often the first to be cut - training is key to continued growth and success.

The case for staff development programmes is compelling. Effective training can reduce staff turnover, improve motivation, increase productivity and help boost customer satisfaction. And the best news is most training is free or subsidised and can be delivered in your own workplace to your staff. So whether you are a Senior Manager looking to improve the performance of your company supply chain or an aspiring Team Leader, Business First at Swindon College can provide the training solutions to meet your

future aspirations.

Further research has shown that with the current economic downturn putting more emphasis than ever on businesses to remain competitive, many employers believe that taking on an apprentice is a sound long-term business investment. Apprentices make young, enthusiastic and cost-effective employees and Swindon College offers programmes in the following areas: Accounting, Business Administration, Construction, Engineering, Electrical Installation, Motor Vehicle, Catering, Hairdressing, Bricklaying, Plumbing, Carpentry, Painting & Decorating and Sports & Leisure.

To discuss how we can help you identify any skills gaps in your company and deliver training courses designed to meet your individual needs, contact the Business First Team on 01793 498250 or email: [businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk](mailto:businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk).

## Business Link providing access to valuable skills needed for success

In the current economic climate many businesses are realising that the quality of their staff is what sets them apart from competitors and determines their success.

To survive firms must be at their best. They must be flexible, innovative and responsive to opportunities and threats. This can only be achieved by constantly evaluating and developing the skills of the workforce.

Business Link, the business advice and support service, offers free impartial advice and practical solutions to employers to help improve internal staffing issues from leadership and management skills, to training, recruitment and apprenticeship advice.

Never before has Business Link placed such a focus on skills.

### Apprenticeships

As skills shortages are still one of the biggest threats to UK businesses, some employers are looking into taking on apprentices as a way of taking control of staff training and development.

Apprentices do not have to be employed externally. They can be existing members of staff who could benefit from a structured training programme.

Apprenticeships can help businesses across all industries by offering a route to harness fresh talent.

Some businesses find that employing apprentices is the most cost effective and productive way to enhance and grow their team, improve quality and service, fill in skills gaps and motivate their workforce.

81% of employers who take on apprentices say that they make their workplace more productive and a further 92% of employers say that apprentices contribute to a more motivated and satisfied workforce.

Having the right skills for a job is crucial. It is up to the management team to have the appropriate training systems in place so that their staff can learn, develop and grow to better themselves and in turn the business.

"Business Link is here to help, from providing advice on when and

how to recruit apprentices to putting you in touch with the appropriate training programme," said business adviser Dave Richardson, who works closely with Swindon businesses.

### Leadership and Management

However, it is not just junior members of staff or new recruits that need training and guidance. The senior management team may also benefit from Business Link's services.

Business Link's Leadership and Management Advisory Service works closely with management teams to produce and implement innovative and challenging personal development plans.

Since the service began in August 2008, more than 2,500 businesses have contacted the Leadership and Management Advisory Service, which has provided grants of up to £1,000 to businesses as an incentive for managers to improve their leadership potential.

Business Link's leadership and management team also advise businesses on their training needs and how to measure and review professional business performance.

To find out more about the Business Link Skills Service, call us on 0845 600 9966 or visit the website:

[www.businesslink.gov.uk/southwest](http://www.businesslink.gov.uk/southwest)

Having the right skills for a job is crucial. It is up to the management team to have the appropriate training systems in place so that their staff can learn, develop and grow to better themselves and in turn the business.

## Skills support for your business



The Business Link Skills Service can help your business achieve:

- A more motivated and engaged workforce
- Lower turnover of staff
- Higher levels of profit
- Less wastage
- Improved quality

0845 600 9966

[skills@businesslinksw.co.uk](mailto:skills@businesslinksw.co.uk)

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**Apprenticeships**

For more information on courses or Apprenticeships, please contact the Business First Team on (01793) 498250 email: [businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk](mailto:businessfirst@swindon-college.ac.uk)

North Star Avenue, Swindon SN2 1DY T 0800 731 2250  
[www.swindon-college.ac.uk](http://www.swindon-college.ac.uk)



## Design and Marketing

### Brandish Creative Promotions seeking to promote branding

Brandish Creative Promotions is Swindon's new home grown promotions agency. With a modest investment of £5,000, 23 year old Thomas George-Priston is already looking to expand by employing local talent.

Swindon is developing a strong reputation when it comes to business with a flurry of recent activity and plenty of exciting plans in the pipeline. Brandish management see the need and potential for local branding and promotion experts increasing in the years ahead.

Mr George-Priston confirmed the

news adding: "We are on the lookout for creative young professionals at the top of their game - professionals that believe in Swindon and intend to stay here and make their mark." He added: "We intend to bring a business focus to their talent".

Brandish research figures shows that Swindon has talented young people skilled in Photoshop, Illustrator, Flash, Dreamweaver and Logic. It is these skills that promote businesses and help them to realise their goals, while injecting a boost to the creative and artistic offerings available in Swindon.



### Honda strengthens UK firepower

Honda Motor Europe has significantly strengthened its marketing operation to provide greater strategic leadership and expertise to the 27 markets it serves from the company's headquarters at Langley, near Slough.

As part of a "root and branch" reform, Tom Gardner has been appointed to the role of Head of European Marketing, Honda Motor Europe (moving from Head of Marketing, Honda (UK), Cars). Tom will lead an expanded team, working closely with the in-country marketing departments to build a national media schedule and creative. Tom's team is also charged with developing the long range marketing strategy for the business.

Starcom Mediavest has been appointed as Honda's European media buying agency.

Ian Armstrong has moved across to Honda Motor Europe as Manager - European Communications from his previous role in Honda (UK), Cars.

### Sales expert required at web specialist

Rubber Dragon have been developing websites and web publishing systems in Swindon for almost 10 years and following the launch of a new Content Management System (CMS) they are seeking to partner with a local company with expertise in selling IT systems to media and publishing firms such as newspapers and magazines.

The new CMS has been custom built for Swindon Link Magazine - www.swindonlink.com - and allows multiple administrators to easily add content such as news stories, features, events and advertising. The system also includes a links directory, a photo gallery and classified ads section. User interaction is also an important part of the offer: website users themselves are able to comment on

stories and add content.

"We have always been focused on design, functionality and creating compelling websites," said Chris Bulzacki, managing director at Rubber Dragon. "Whilst this has helped us to build up a loyal client base, we have missed out on higher value projects because we just aren't sales orientated. However we believe we've developed an exciting vehicle for newspaper and magazine publishers to easily and clearly deliver their unique content and generate increased advertising revenues, now we need to work with someone who can effectively explain that to prospects and convert their interest into sales."

Full details at: [www.rubberdragon.com/cms](http://www.rubberdragon.com/cms)

### An automatic choice for design

Swindon-based Creative Climate design have experienced a very busy start to 2010.

As well as working on exciting projects for new clients they have been heavily involved in the design & launch of a major new innovation in the dishwashing market.

The major project for Finish 'Quantumatic' product launch has seen them designing point of sale, launch material and promotional items for the UK's major supermarkets and electrical retailers.

Finish Quantumatic is the world's first fully automatic refillable dishwasher detergent dispenser and it's unique proposition and technical advantage has needed to be communicated to consumers in an imaginative, eye catching and educational manner.

Finish Quantumatic clips easily into a dishwasher basket and dispenses a single dose of detergent into the dishwasher with every wash thereby doing away with the need to

add tablets or detergent to the dishwasher for every wash.

One of the briefs greatest challenges was how to communicate the uniqueness and convenience of the new product and how it benefits users of dishwashers. Creative Climate has also been involved in creating training and launch materials for supermarket and retailer staff.

In addition to the launch of Quantumatic, Creative Climate's work for Finish incorporates the entire dishwash range and includes packaging, pos, advertising and promotions.

Creative Climate takes great pride in their ability to work on significant projects, to tight deadlines and yet consistently deliver them on time and on budget.

For further information on Creative Climate please go to [www.creativeclimate.co.uk](http://www.creativeclimate.co.uk) [info@creativeclimate.co.uk](mailto:info@creativeclimate.co.uk) or call 01793 773999.

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## Top quality wheel refurbishment offered by local Wheel Specialist

In these uncertain times few can afford the luxury of buying a new car, but that's where The Wheel Specialist comes in.

March will see the launch of The Wheel Specialist – Swindon. James Pattinson and his team of specialist technicians will be providing Wiltshire with a top quality total wheel refurbishment service.

Why buy new? Breathe new life into your existing car by having your wheels professionally refurbished at The Wheel Specialist. Scuffed, curbed, corroded or damaged wheels can be transformed into their factory-fresh former selves, or try something bespoke if you fancy something a little more unique.

For over 30 years The Wheel Specialist has been providing quality affordable durable refurbishments to both public and trade.

James, Shelley and Nick make the perfect team. Brothers James and Nick have a real passion for cars "I have been a car enthusiast for years, my passion for cars and motorbikes drove me to open my own wheel refurbishment business, having the opportunity to work with my brother and fiancé gives me the confidence of a secure and reliable team" says James.

Nick explains "What makes us different is that we refurbish the whole wheel, some smart repair systems only touch up the face and can give a temporary resolution to the problem, we fully prepare the



The Wheel Specialist team

wheels to remove damage and corrosion before applying a durable powder coat, this ensures long lasting

## Atlas Landscaping to build upon 7 years of steady growth

Atlas Landscaping, the maintenance specialist, is based on the prestigious Kembrey Business Park. The company has experienced steady growth over the past seven years with sites ranging from Wales to London and anywhere in between.

Atlas is very positive and enthusiastic about the future and is looking forward to building new relationships with businesses who are looking for cost-effective and reliable, good quality landscape maintenance.

Atlas is a full contracting member of BALI (The British Association of Landscape Industries) which is a two-year process to join, showing the commitment of Atlas to quality workmanship and further improvement of its excellent reputation with existing and potential

protection. By using such superb quality processes I know that the people of Swindon will be blown away by the results" Shelley adds "It's just so easy to do, simply drive in or drop off, there is no need to be without your car for days you can have your new look wheels in just one day, plus they are fully guaranteed!"

For an instant quote call James on 0845 302 1947 or visit their website [www.thewheelspecialist.co.uk](http://www.thewheelspecialist.co.uk)

new customers.

The company said: "We are able to offer a full landscape maintenance service, which means more than grass and hedge cutting. It can include weed control on hard and soft surfaces, moss clearing, signage cleaning, litter picking and gutter clearing.

"We also offer a full landscaping design to completion service, tree surgery and the supply of mulch and top soil."

Atlas is offering two free months of maintenance to companies taking out an annual contract. For further information and to request a free brochure, please contact Atlas Landscaping on 01793 693641 or email: [jasonkelham@atlaslandscapingltd.co.uk](mailto:jasonkelham@atlaslandscapingltd.co.uk) or visit: [www.atlaslandscapingltd.co.uk](http://www.atlaslandscapingltd.co.uk)



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## Emnico secures Charity Business IT contract

Emnico's continued growth in providing pro-active services has seen a number of local businesses bringing IT work back to Swindon with Charity Business Ltd another example of this trend.

Darren Beggan, Emnico Technologies, said "It is great that local businesses are bringing IT work back to Swindon and can recognise our ability and knowledge to manage their IT. Our engineers go through regular training and certifications in recognised industry technologies. We are able to resolve issues timely and efficiently and more importantly understand the underlying issue to prevent occurrences. At a business level we pride ourselves in being able to add value through comprehensive reporting including trend analysis and recommendations becoming a true Managed Services Provider".

Valerie Austin, Non Executive Director of Charity Business Ltd, explained "Our aim is to provide business thinking to charities. We do this by offering a wide range of services including payroll, invoicing, consultancy, investment advice and online payments as well as free training seminars. Therefore our business is so dependent on IT because of the volume of data we process and the range of services we deliver to our clients. We expect a

responsive approach for all IT related queries regardless of the issue. Emnico's approach was refreshing for an IT Service provider, underpinned by a Service Level Agreement and monthly reporting of the work supported. This allows us to have a more in depth understanding of our IT and align this to our business objectives".

Charity Business currently services 137 not-for-profit clients (for example, Keep Britain Tidy, The National Trust and student unions like King's College London and Angela Ruskin). They provide dedicated back-office finance solutions that help charities run more efficiently and effectively – often saving them 40% on their operating costs.

More information about Charity Business can be found at [www.charitybusiness.com](http://www.charitybusiness.com) or can be contacted on 01793 554209.

Emnico provides a full range of support services including Dedicated Help Desk, On Site Support, IT Security, Working alongside an existing IT Department, Software Development and procurement advice and supply. Emnico employs 18 people and is a Microsoft Certified Partner and Small Business Specialist.

More information about Emnico can be found at [www.emnico.com](http://www.emnico.com) or can be contacted on 01793 614700.



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## Property

# Office market analysis from local expert yields positive outlook

By James Gregory, Partner, Alder King

I recently read an article written by one of the town's more pessimistic property professionals saying that enquiries are up, the worst is over and we are out of recession. So we must be! But is a rise in new enquiries the same as a rise in activity? It must be positive - because without an improvement in confidence, company hatches remain battened down and no movement, in either direction, is bad for the property market and the wider economy.

There has not been the wide scale downsizing and resultant market activity that Landlords had hoped for at the start of the recession. Staying battened down is logical despite employees having been laid off because it can be more cost effective to have too much office space than relocate to smaller premises. This is due to the overall relocation costs including in particular the high cost of moving IT facilities.

To a large degree, therefore, we have become reliant on companies moving either because they need more space or they require a better overall layout. We are witnessing a rise in the number of smaller enquiries albeit off a relatively low base (I won't dwell on the low 2009 take up figures) and these companies in many cases are taking the opportunity to secure on fantastic terms better office premises than they currently occupy. But beware - as supply is being taken up leasing terms are hardening already. Some



Nationwide HQ

of the deals that were available just a few months ago are not necessarily available now.

It is disappointing that 2010 has not, to date, brought about a deluge of new large enquiries although some of the old chestnuts have come back to life and have not yet been satisfied. Whilst Swindon has a fantastic CV of employers it amazes me that more companies don't look more closely at locating here. Purely from a cost perspective, when compared to Reading or Bristol, it makes sense. The cost of the occupiers' accommodation is not the only consideration and Swindon has a lot more to offer besides cost competitive office space.

There are some bold plans for redevelopment and refurbishment programmes in The Town. An increase in activity and ultimately product will attract further investment. In the immediate term, let us hope that the risk taken by

Amalgamated Berkshire Holding's virtual rebuild at Station Square is rewarded. And I am sure I am not the only person looking forward to witnessing the start of the Muse Developments proposals which will see dramatic realigning of roads and the relocation of the bus station before the greatest investment in new town centre offices for Swindon takes place. Something which is long overdue.

As Forward Swindon is born, all the various stakeholders will hopefully be able to sing with one voice to the benefit of Swindon as a whole. With a wider remit than the deceased New Swindon Company, this new body will cover the whole of Swindon and not just selected areas of the town centre. Hopefully Forward Swindon will ensure that proposed development and investment is seen in a positive light and for the overall benefit of The Town.

## New Envos office for Swindon

Property consumes 49 per cent of all energy used in the UK and significantly contributes to carbon emissions.

Energy-use audits can identify cost saving actions to cut bills, reduce carbon footprints and are generally quickly self-financing.

Property owners and occupiers can now take constructive steps to improve the energy efficiency of their buildings, significantly reducing their maintenance and energy costs, improve profitability and make buildings more attractive to potential buyers or tenants.

To meet this increasing need, Envos, the environmental management and compliance consultancy, has opened a new office in Swindon.

Managed by regional director,

Andrew Watson, Envos will help local property owners and businesses meet new environmental legislation affecting commercial property to produce financial benefits from operating greener buildings.

Envos recently completed a Carbon2020TM audit for Bytes Technology Group and managing director Neil Murphy says he can already see the value. "The Envos Audit has identified a minimum saving of 20 per cent of our energy costs if we undertake simple and relatively cost effective energy efficiency measures. The Envos Carbon2020TM Report sets out what should be a priority for us and includes calculations and what return we get for our money."

Andrew Watson added: "Inefficient buildings seriously

damage profit margins as well as the environment. With Ofgem predicting energy prices to rise by a further 60 per cent by 2016, Envos can really help small or medium sized organisations who will feel the pinch."

To enable local businesses limit their exposure to increasing energy costs, Envos' Swindon office will undertake a no obligation initial onsite survey and provide a 25 per cent discount for their next 10 local clients, with a full money back guarantee if their report does not produce energy savings measures to cover the cost of the initial audit

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## Commercial property report for Swindon

Property consultants Alder King have released Market Monitor 2010, an annual research report analysing the commercial property market in Swindon and other key regional locations across the South West of England and South Wales.

The report notes that the market in Swindon witnessed a drop in office take up, with 131,000 sq ft let or sold during 2009. The most significant letting of the year was the acquisition of 36,500 sq ft at Auckland House in Lydiard Fields by RWE Renewables. The Bank of New York also confirmed its commitment to Swindon with a 25,000 sq ft lease renewal in the town centre. Rents for office space both in town and out of town locations increased to £15.75 per sq ft and £18.50 per sq ft respectively.

The industrial market also saw take up decrease on 2008 levels to 616,000 sq ft. James Gregory, partner at Alder King said: "There were few large industrial deals in 2009 as occupier confidence was hit by the recession and problems in the car industry affected Honda, one of Swindon's largest employers. However several deals did complete towards the end of the year mainly at South Marston which helped to boost



take up.

"Industrial supply reached its highest level in five years but this statistic is not as bad as it would first appear. It follows the collapse of Woolworths which released a 650,000 sq ft warehouse at Dorcan onto the market."

Prime retail rents decreased in Swindon's town centre and the proposed Regent Place development was put on hold after the demise of Modus which was a great disappointment for the town. In the out of town retail market rents increased to £28 per sq ft and M&S opened in the North Orbital Retail Park, strengthening the scheme's tenant line up.

## Matchbox Services expands at Isis Trading Estate

Whitmarsh Lockhart has completed a new five year lease on Unit 9 Isis Trading Estate to Matchbox Services on behalf of Industrious.

Matchbox Services offer in-house and outwork solutions for mailing campaigns, fulfilment and pick and pack. Gary Dee of Matchbox Services commented: "We were already operating from a smaller unit on the estate but due to lack of space with various new contracts won, the landlord was able to offer a simple surrender of the old lease and a new lease on a bigger unit within the space

of two weeks."

Gareth Evans of Industrious commented: "We feel it's very important to react quickly to tenants needs and allow them the ability to grow and prosper in a difficult market. It's important to work closely and build a good landlord and tenant relationship and we hope that Matchbox can continue to grow on this or one of our other estates in the future."

The property comprised an 8,000 sq ft warehouse and the quoting rent was £36,000 per annum.

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## Expansion for TDG at South Marston Park

European logistics company TDG, which is now a fully integrated part of Honda's operations, has taken Unit 11D Broadmoor Road, South Marston Park to facilitate its expansion plans.

TDG has taken a sub-lease of the 89,412 sq ft distribution facility, due to expire in July 2012, at a rent of £463,000 per annum. The deal was negotiated by commercial property consultancy Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH), on behalf of Telereal Trillium.

South Marston Park is a well established industrial estate situated approximately five miles north of junction 15 of the M4 motorway and is home to several international occupiers including Honda, Aldi, Marks & Spencer and Nissin.

Tim Beare, senior surveyor at LSH's Bristol office, commented: "This deal represents the second largest transaction of existing industrial space in Swindon over the last 12 months. It is very good news for the local market, and specifically the estate itself, which has noticeably

## Honda supplier moves into bigger premises to further expansion

struggled through the economic decline due to high vacancy levels. South Marston Park remains a popular location for TDG because of its proximity to the regional road network and the Honda factory. Above all the competing space, we were able to provide the most suitable package for TDG to present the best option to service this specific contract."

Local agent Loveday and Loveday acted as joint agents on the disposal and Alastair Andrews, industrial partner from the firm, added: "Swindon remains a great location for many occupiers and particularly those within the distribution sector who can take advantage of its excellent links to the UK's national motorway network."

## Carter Jonas to close residential office

Re-organisation and development of its Wiltshire business is bringing an office rationalisation for property consultancy Carter Jonas in Swindon.

The firm is to close its residential sales and lettings office in Wood Street, Old Town, but retain Little London Court, where its professional services team has been based for several years.

The residential business will transfer to its other offices in Wiltshire under the leadership of residential partner Rory O'Neill in Marlborough. Carol Conway will continue to manage the lettings business across the county.

"We will continue to offer a first class service to our residential clients across Wiltshire. We are hoping that a number of staff from Wood Street will be able to relocate to other Carter Jonas offices," said Mr. O'Neill.

Swindon remains an important location for Carter Jonas as a key commercial office together with valuation and building consultancy teams are based at the Little London Court premises. This office also houses the national hub for the firm's Infrastructures business.

Mark Granger, Carter Jonas chief executive, commented, "The 20-strong team in Little London Court includes highly specialised surveyors who have been based in Swindon for many years. This expanding team makes a significant contribution to our business, not only in Wiltshire but also across the UK."

## Howard Tenens' environmental focus

Local supply chain management company, Howard Tenens has sourced a new sustainable building in Dagenham, known as Voltaic, illustrating the benefits of environmentally sound facilities.

The building is 233,000 sq ft in size with 10,000 sq ft of office space and is strategically positioned near to the main road, rail and air networks and is part of London Gateway. It will be used exclusively for Coca-Cola Enterprises, the world's largest marketer, producer and distributor of The Coca-Cola company's products.

Voltaic incorporates many environmentally-friendly and sustainable initiatives as part of both Howard Tenens and CCE's ethos to reduce the impact of their operations on the environment.

There are solar photovoltaic roof panels which provide energy from a renewable source, minimising the use of fossil fuels and reducing the reliance on the electrical grid distribution system; equally the energy produced is free of carbon emissions, saving 7.13 tonnes of CO2 per annum.

Sky-lights cover 15 per cent of the roof, against an industry norm of 10 per cent; this provides increased natural light to the warehouse floor, reducing the need for electric lighting, saving 59.02 tonnes of CO2 per annum. This is the optimum percentage of natural light that can be introduced without damaging the products which are stored in the warehouse.

## Survey shows increase in Q4 letting activity

The latest RICS Commercial Market Survey, for the final quarter of 2009, reports improved letting activity for commercial property for the second consecutive quarter.

The improved activity is led by better tenant demand for office and industrial properties, but with retail still lagging behind, and tenant demand still in decline across most regions. The survey also reports that the rate of increase in vacant space is starting to reduce with the turnaround led by office space in London, where supply declined for the first time since Q4, 2007.

The survey also reports development completions continuing to ease back further and development activity continuing to fall across all sectors, albeit not as fast as previously.

However, confidence in the outlook for future letting activity continues to improve, with the greatest increase in confidence led by the office market, followed by the industrial sector.

Surveyors' rental expectations suggest some improvement in future rental values during 2010 across all three sectors. Also, investment transactions rose at a notably faster pace in Q4.

RICS Survey contributor, Andrew Kilpatrick, partner of Thompsons, reports on the Swindon property market:

"Despite market conditions remaining challenging in Swindon's main sectors of the commercial property market, Swindon has managed to secure some significant deals, the latest of which is the letting of the 170,000 sq ft former Early Learning Centre warehouse at South Marston, the largest warehouse deal of the year. Other large space enquiries currently in the market, if secured, may give 2010 a welcome kickstart.

However, the level of occupier enquiries dipped during November and any recovery in the commercial property market seems heavily dependent upon improved economic conditions, which, so far, are not looking particularly imminent.

The usual post-Christmas increase in retail properties coming to the market is anticipated, to add to an increase supply from recent casualties such as First Quench/Threshers/Wine Rack/Bottoms Up and Blacks.

The continuing scarcity of quality investment properties is holding back increased activity in that market sector".

## South West construction experts gather to discuss region's future

Some of the country's, and the region's top construction professionals gathered recently in Bristol to discuss the South West's future with regard to the built environment.

"The Great Debate" is a joint

initiative by RICS, Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) and the Institution of Civil Engineers. Sponsored by Arup and Clarke Willmott, the venue was Arup, Bristol.

## Alder King named region's 'most active property agent'

Alder King Property Consultants has been named "Most Active Regional Agent in Bristol, Bath and Swindon" at an awards ceremony held by property magazine Estates Gazette, at Hotel du Vin in Bristol last Friday.

The award was based on the number of deals completed by individual firms in Bristol Bath and Swindon from 1 February 2009 to 31 January 2010. Alder King achieved the most deals in the region, fighting off competition from other regional firms to win the award.

James Gregory, partner at Alder King commented: "We are delighted to have been named the most active regional agent in Bristol Bath and Swindon and to have our local expertise recognised.

"2009 was a tough year for the commercial property market, but deals were done and we are already seeing enquiry and activity levels increase as we progress into 2010. We are pleased to advise on some of the most important developments in the region and I would like to thank the members of our team for their hard work in securing this important

award."

Despite tough marketing conditions the Alder King's Swindon agency team transacted over 50 properties including the disposal of former Cynergy premises, a 57,000 sq ft industrial unit on the Groundwell Industrial Estate in Swindon. They also completed a 13,800 sq ft disposal of premises in the D Building at Europa Industrial park on behalf of Howard Tenens.

In the town centre Alder King negotiated an office letting of nearly 10,000 sq ft at Holbrook House to Threadneedle Investments. They also let a number of shop premises to a wide range of retailers including Prospect Hospice, Inkplus, a Polish Deli, Bloomfields Fine Foods and Spotlight Dancewear.

Alder King is the leading provider of valuation, development, agency and planning expertise in the South West. Employing over 150 staff, they have offices in Bristol, Cardiff, Gloucester, Swindon, Taunton, Exeter and Truro and their experts work across the entire South West.

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## Accountants hit out at Tory plans to scrap current PAYE system

A leading payroll expert is warning that Tory plans to scrap the current PAYE (pay as you earn) scheme are 'seriously flawed' and will do nothing to help employers and their staff.

According to Angela Brake, head of payroll at Bath-based Target Chartered Accountants, the proposals to create a new automated bank-based system to deduct income tax and NIC directly from employees' pay will increase the potential for error and could bring an already over stretched HMRC to the brink of collapse.

She said: "If the Tory plans went through, it would represent the biggest shake up of the tax system since the Second World War.

"Although the idea of making PAYE easier for employers to administer is to be encouraged, there are major problems with what the Tory's are proposing.

"For starters, employers are required to keep records available for checking by HMRC going back over a seven year period, so payroll software or database would still need to be in place," Angela explains.

"Therefore, the Tory claim that the new system would save businesses up to £5.5bn a year by reducing their 'administrative burden' is fundamentally wrong, as they will still be required to produce gross payment records.

"The degree of 'administrative burden' on employers is also open to debate. Given the free PAYE software that is currently available through HMRC, calculating income tax and NIC is very straightforward for employers," she adds.

Angela said that whilst there are no obvious benefits for employers, the biggest worry was that by introducing a third party, there would be a greater potential for error which will leave employees vulnerable.

"Non-taxable payments would need to be recognised independently of taxable salary and not taxed as a gross payment to the employee," Angela explains. "If this is not properly planned out, then employees could suffer as a result of incorrect deductions on non-taxable payments.

"There are also net deductions that have to be made, such as Child Support Agency, Attachment of Earnings Order, pension and social club deductions. All these would impact on how a gross payment could be made direct to an employee's bank to allow for the correct PAYE to be deducted," she said.

Angela claims that the employee would stand to lose most as a result of the proposed changes: "It is not clear who an employee would contact if they thought there had been an incorrect deduction. This could

cause hardship if certain cases were not dealt with promptly," she explains.

"Along with administrative errors in distinguishing the taxable and non-taxable payments, there could be problems for the banks trying to recognise the difference between salary and pensions when it comes to National Insurance (NI), as well as monitoring employees reaching state retirement age, when employees NI is immediately non-deductible," Angela said.

"It is expecting a lot of the banks in terms of administration; for example, how would they know the employee's contractual frequency of salary payments to understand the level of tax and NIC deductions.

"Statutory payments and recovery of maternity, paternity and sickness pay are also other areas of concern and it is not clear who would have responsibility for issuing P45 details when an employee moves jobs," she adds.

Angela says it is likely that the changes would only serve to increase workloads for an already over stretched HMRC.

"The new proposals would require single person year end returns, rather than one return per company. This would create massive amounts of work for HMRC at a time when it is reducing staffing levels," she said.

"A huge change like this has the potential to bring the system to the brink of collapse. It will also increase the burden on banks and reduce the amount of time that they can spend on more profitable work.

"Any new system needs to recognise the professional payroll employees currently in operation, who are working very effectively to reduce the burden of HMRC," Angela warns. "If anything employers should be legally required to use an accredited payroll bureau and HMRC should be offering a credit against PAYE to cover the cost to a company of employing us!"

## ACT wins business award

ACT has won the Wiltshire Business of the Year – International category last week, achieved thanks to the company's success in implementing visitor pass schemes all over the world.

ACT developed their first smart card transaction systems in 1998, concentrating on delivering card based solutions to the loyalty and tourism markets.

When the UK standard for interoperable smart transport schemes, ITS0, was developed in 2001, ACT drew on their expertise in smart cards and transaction management to develop the ACT HOPS, an ITS0 certified back office transaction system.

To enhance delivery of end to end smart card services for their clients, ACT also developed a Customer Management System (CMS), which, as well as managing the card and cardholder details, provides the crucial link between card transaction data and the individual card holder.



## South West must expect a slow recovery, says RDA economist

The South West economy did not suffer as badly as several other regions in the recession but it may also not rebound as quickly with implications for jobs, one of the region's leading economists has warned.

The region tends to follow rather than to lead and its upturn is likely to be constrained, especially if there are severe government cutbacks in areas particularly important to the South West, writes Nigel Jump, Chief Economist at the South West RDA (Regional Development Agency) in the agency's Quarterly Economics Review February 2010.

Nevertheless, he says the immediate South West outlook is for a slow recovery to get underway in 2010.

While regional surveys suggest that output in the South West stabilised and began to rise in the middle of last year, ahead of the UK overall, Mr Jump says: "Many South West companies still talk of weak demand, spare capacity and cost pressures on margins. As a result, job shedding, albeit at a slower rate than earlier, is more likely than new hiring."

Mr Jump also notes that in the past quarter the South West output and employment readings have slipped below the UK average in the Purchasing Managers' Index of regional economic activity.

"We did not fall as far as some regions in the recession but we are also not coming out of it as fast... This relative pattern might be expected but it remains a matter of some concern that the South West will be a follower rather than a leader in the recovery."

"Once again, this highlights the structural, competitive weaknesses in the South West economy, such as low engagement or aspiration in developing knowledge-based sectors through investment in access, innovation and skills. There is still market failure, and therefore, development work to do in South West England," he adds.

Elsewhere in the Review, Mr Jump sounds the alarm over the "astounding" rise in UK indebtedness over the past decade.

And in spite of last month's return to growth in the broader UK economy, he says to "expect a period in the doldrums that does not feel much like a recovery."

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