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A WORD FROM THE EDITOR

OWe're in full celebration mode this issue, with a focus on some inspiring success stories from organisations across Leicestershire.

Firstly, we've got the Real Entrepreneurs' Awards 2025 coming up and we've met some of the finalists who are making their mark in business. By the time you read this, the awards will have taken place, but we're excited to share the journeys of the incredible entrepreneurs who have pushed boundaries and found success in their fields. The Niche Business Awards 2025 then take place in September so we've written about the judges, the ceremony, and how it all comes together on the night. On the front cover is Airborne Mortgage Solutions. The man behind the operation, Kamlesh Lodhia, shares his insight into why mortgages are much more than just numbers and that they're also about the lifestyles we want to create. If you're looking to buy your first home or remortgage, he has some great advice.

When it comes to the big topic of suitability, we're saying 'leaf it to Leicester'. Our roundup of local initiatives proves the level of commitment from Leicester businesses around going green. There's also information from Herd on how businesses can take a more affordable approach to solar energy, helping save on costs while being kinder to the planet.

And for those of you looking to escape business, we've put together a list of relaxing getaways within three hours' drive of Leicester. There's a little lighter reading on true crime too! We've listed some local events and authors for true crime obsessives. And in a new regular feature, we've lined up some interesting local folk to answer our questions about life, hobbies, and white lies! Find the answers of our first interviewee on the very back page.

Follow Niche on LinkedIn, Facebook on Instagram for more updates and events.

Kerry

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Business

LEICESTERSHIRE News

GREAT CENTRAL RAILWAY PARTNERS WITH LOUGHBOROUGH COLLEGE TO OFFER T LEVEL INDUSTRY PLACEMENTS

Great Central Railway (GCR), the UK's only dual track heritage railway, has partnered with Loughborough College to provide industry placements for five T Level students. It's a two-year vocational qualification for students aged 16-19 designed to develop practical knowledge and skills aligned with industry needs.

David Ellard, Head of People Engagement at Great Central Railway, commented on the partnership: "This initiative allows us to share our expertise while giving students invaluable industry experience. By engaging them in real-world projects, we hope to inspire the next generation of professionals in heritage rail and beyond."

Following a successful trial last year with a student in the signal and telegraph team, GCR has expanded the initiative to include placements across multiple departments. The students will be working on projects and participating in the daily operations of the railway, in the infrastructure, permanent way, volunteer support, marketing, and carriage and wagon departments.

As part of the programme, students must complete 340 hours of industry placement, gaining first-hand experience in a real working environment. This initiative will offer valuable hands-on experience across various aspects of the heritage railway's operations, further strengthening the railway's commitment to skills development and community engagement.



The partnership with Loughborough College complements the Great Central Railway's existing apprenticeship scheme as well as its Key Stage 3 work experience which will be made up of at least seven participants this school year across loco, carriage and wagon, permanent way, and service delivery departments.

Combined with the development of new on-site classroom facilities for training and educational visits, it's a continued sign of their investment in creating the talent of tomorrow.

The GCR operate passenger trains and first-class dining car trains and offer the chance for visitors to drive a locomotive. Film crews visit the railway, and the national rail industry uses it for testing vehicles and training staff. The GCR is currently raising funds to connect two separate halves of the line back together, a multimillion-pound project called 'Reunification.' One of the biggest schemes in railway preservation in the UK, several elements have already been completed.

SPACE PARK LEICESTER LAUNCHES 3D PRINTING WORKSHOPS FOR BUSINESSES

A series of interactive 3D printing workshops will be launched to give companies the chance to discover how the technology could drive forward their businesses.

The workshops at Space Park Leicester will also feature hands-on activities and the chance for companies to gain a thorough understanding of the 3D printing market.

The University of Leicester's £100m science and innovation park has joined forces with 3D printing industry experts 3D Matters to offer the two-day workshops, called 'Additive Manufacturing; All hype, or an opportunity for your business to gain a competitive advantage over your competitors'.

Space Park Leicester's Professor Mark Sims said: "We support businesses and innovation in a variety of ways, from connecting companies to specific academic expertise and pioneering research and development to providing

access to funding programmes.

"More advanced and accessible forms of 3D printing are being adopted across a variety of fields and we hope these workshops will provide more businesses with the opportunity to discover what this technology could mean for them."

The course will be led by 3D Matters Managing Director Nathan Blake and will address attendees' specific requirements. Workshops will also explore 3D printing as a transformative technology, comparisons to traditional manufacturing processes, the aims and key aspects of 3D printing, and materials and printer models for specific requirements.

They will also include networking opportunities, and a one-hour post-course consultancy offer will be included in the price.

The two-day workshops will take place on May 14 and 15, September 23 and 24 and November 27 and 28.



LEICESTERSHIRE BUSINESS VOICE APPOINTS NEW CHAIR

Leicestershire Business Voice (LBV, a business advocacy group for Leicester and Leicestershire), has appointed Sue Tilley as its new Chair.

The founder and director of Sue Tilley Associates will direct the LBV board members as they develop and deliver a strategy to support the business community in Leicester and Leicestershire. This will include advocating for members and the wider business sector with key local, regional and national stakeholders, running a programme of strategic business-themed events throughout the year and growing the membership of LBV through the new 100 Club initiative.

Commenting on her new role, Sue said: "LBV is an ideal platform with which local businesses can get involved and make a difference. Through my professional work, I'm a strong advocate for business in Leicester and Leicestershire. I understand how important relationships are with key stakeholders such as councils, MPs and universities, and having been in a start-up business of my own, I'm passionate about driving opportunities for the local SME community."

Sue was previously Head of Inward Investment, Economic Strategy Manager - Business, Head of Business, Innovation and Partnerships, and Head of the Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP). Prior to that, she was Head of Inward Investment at Prospect Leicestershire.

3D PRINTING IMAGE: SPACE PARK LEICESTER



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Preventing People Problems

East Midlands Chamber Newsroom



10 years of Leicester Food Park

Leicester Food Park is celebrating a decade of supporting regional businesses on the road to success.

The 1.5-acre site, just off the outer ring road on the north-east edge of the city, is operated by the Chamber and has nine bespoke production units ranging from 1,000-5,000 sq ft.

Businesses based there range from an ice cream and sorbet manufacturer through to a tofu producer, and a Chinese delicacy producer. Some of the services provided to them include a business support centre and management hub with conference facilities, as well as technical support and the day-to-day help of dedicated on-site management.

Sisters Neelam and Nida Atique who run Dollies Cookies, moved into the park following the pandemic in 2020. They make 2-3,000 American-style artisan cookies each week along with their own brownies, which are sold online and wholesale. Neelam

said: "Business has been good and the benefit of being here rather than in a private unit is that the site management are there to support you."

Aatin Anadkat BEM is the co-founder of Positive Kitchen with his wife Helen, which makes plant-based, allergen-friendly food, which they supply wholesale and direct-to-consumer. Aatin said clients range from high-end retailers such as Selfridges to big events venues such as Wimbledon and Ascot, as well as e-commerce customers across the UK. He said: "It's great that Leicester has somewhere like this with food-grade facilities where you can get on with your work. One of the big things for us is whenever we bring people here, they can walk in and see that it is a clean, premium unit rather than, say, an old factory, in a railway arch somewhere."

The suite is run by the chamber on behalf of Leicester City Council. Chamber business solutions manager

Anit Karia, who oversees it, said: "The park is one-of-a-kind – and over the last 10 years, it has made a real difference to so many businesses in Leicester. It has brought so much value to the city, economically for the council and from an employment point-of-view around the Hamilton area.

"Many of the businesses based here have built up real momentum, and post-Covid many have adapted their models and moved into new areas such as e-commerce. Along the way I have supported them with advice and sign-posted them to different people to work with.

"One of the biggest benefits is the amount of business support the Chamber can provide, whether that's help with legislation or through networking – and we encourage everybody to collaborate. For example, we've helped one company here work with The Food Incubator, helping them extend the shelf-life of their products."



Enterprising Women Awards 2025 launched on International Women's Day

Getting more women into senior roles and financial empowerment were among topics discussed by 150

East Midlands businesswomen at Enterprising Women's International Women's Day Conference 2025.

The conference, at Mattioli Woods Welford Road Stadium, followed news that women occupy 43% of roles on company boards and 35% of leadership roles in FTSE 350 companies. The same FTSE Women Leaders Review report said more than 60% of FTSE 350 companies were within striking distance of the 40% target for women's representation in boardrooms.

Powered by East Midlands Chamber's Enterprising Women network, in conjunction with headline sponsor Mattioli Woods, the

conference included talks and panel discussions and marked the official launch of the 2025 Enterprising Women Awards.

A range of high-profile speakers gave inspirational talks including Leicester-based fashion retail expert and healthy living advocate Fiona Lambert. She said: "As a woman in leadership, I've always mentored and sponsored young women in businesses and made sure that they have no fear of failure, are willing to step out of their comfort zone and recognise that there's nothing holding them back and they can grow in any job they go to."

Former PPL PRS managing director and 2024 Enterprising Women Businesswoman of the Year Andrea Gray talked through her career journey and experiences. She said: "Events

like this are super important. For me, it makes me realise that it's not just me that worries or thinks I'm not good enough. If it was a group of men, the conversations would be different and the themes too. As women, many of us do suffer impostor syndrome – fear of failure or not being good enough."

Enterprising Women co-founder Eileen Perry MBE DL, who opened the conference with co-founder Jean Mountain, said: "In 2025 there shouldn't still be a gender pay gap. There shouldn't still be women wondering if they can make it or be recognised for their abilities. That means we cannot stop talking, we can't afford to take our foot off the gas."

Go to emc-dnl.co.uk to nominate someone in the Enterprising Women Awards 2025.

Reconnecting Nottingham, Leicester and Coventry by rail

East Midlands Chamber has joined political leaders across the Midlands in backing calls to reinstate direct trains between Nottingham, Leicester and Coventry, that campaigners say could be worth millions to the region and create thousands of jobs.

Bringing back the service – stopped in the early 2000s to allow work on the West Coast Line – would be worth £400m to the region and generate 3,000 jobs, according to Midlands Connect which hosted a conference to present their proposal at Coventry Transport Museum.

Political representatives from the Midlands were joined by East Midlands Chamber director of policy and insight Richard Blackmore, as the business case to reintroduce the service was made. Midlands Connect first submitted a Strategic Outline

Business Case to the Department for Transport in 2021.

Richard said: "Three important cities sit right next to each other – but not just geographically, they're already connected by tracks, stations and most importantly a business need.

"It's hard to believe you can no longer jump on a train in Nottingham or Leicester and get to Coventry on one train, when it was once possible, and Coventry and Birmingham have direct trains. 30% of people choose the train for that route, but only 3% bother from Nottingham or Leicester. Removing that service was a backward move and it's time that was righted. Connectivity is a key lever in the decision making of businesses to invest in a region as this facilitates the ability to attract talent, connect supply chains and drive economic growth."



Leicester City Mayor Peter Soulsby said: "With rail lines through Leicester at capacity, hindering the development of both passenger and freight trains, this scheme is urgently needed. By increasing rail freight capacity, the scheme will remove HGVs from the highway network, reducing carbon and improving air quality – which is great news for Leicester."



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THE DISPATCH

YOUR INSIDE TRACK ON LEICESTER'S LOGISTICS AND MANUFACTURING MOVES

MANUFACTURING TEAM TRANSITIONS TO FOUR-DAY WORKING WEEK

Leicester-based manufacturer Camloc Motion Control transitioned to a four-day working week in March, without reducing employee pay. The change adjusts the company's operating hours to 8am to 5:15pm, Monday to Thursday.

A company representative stated: "We firmly believe the decision is the right thing to do, and the way forward, for our employees and for Camloc as a business, and it is a move that has been widely welcomed. We are looking forward to the benefits it will bring."

The decision aims to enhance employee wellbeing and productivity, aligning with studies indicating that reduced working hours can boost efficiency and job satisfaction.

Company leaders state that the shift promotes a healthier work environment, benefiting both staff and clients through improved focus and creativity. The idea was first proposed in 2024 to the Camloc team with positive feedback from employees and customers.

Camloc's commitment to maintaining service quality during this transition has been recognised by the 4 Day Week Foundation, which awarded the company Silver Standard accreditation. This move reflects a growing trend among UK businesses adopting shorter workweeks to foster better work-life balance and employee satisfaction.

LOGISTICS PARK COULD CREATE THOUSANDS OF JOBS AND DRIVE INWARD INVESTMENT

Plans for the expansion of Mercia Park, which could create 1,700 onsite jobs and deliver an estimated £2.8m per year in business rates were submitted in February.

The planning application for the expansion of the site, which is near Junction 11 of the M42, has been prepared by leading Midlands property company, IM Properties, which developed Mercia Park.

Matthew Fox, Planning Director at IM Properties said: "Mercia Park has demonstrated that it is a leading location for business with excellent transport links and net zero-ready buildings, all within a high quality landscaped setting.

"Expansion of this important economic asset would capitalise on the profile and success of the site and provide much-needed new business space to help drive inward investment in Leicestershire."

The site, which employs more than 2,500 people, is the home of Jaguar Land Rover's Global Logistics Centre (Unipart) and a flagship facility for global transport and logistics company DSV.

If approved, the proposed expansion would provide much-needed space for businesses and build on the success of Mercia Park which has become an important economic asset, delivering

jobs as well as training and skills for people during construction and into operation.

North West Leicestershire District Council's draft Local Plan has proposed the land to the north of Junction 11, M42 as a potential allocation for strategic distribution, recognising that new development at this site could capitalise on the profile and infrastructure at Mercia Park.

The new site will continue to deliver high quality buildings set within extensive and accessible green infrastructure including woodland, wetlands and wildflower meadows.

Independent of the planning process for the expansion of Mercia Park, IM Properties is shaping proposals to create a new community fund to support projects that strengthen communities or improve the natural environment. The proposals form part of the business' Sustainable Futures framework which focuses on People, Planet and Place.

Established to support the first phase of the site, the Mercia Park Community Fund has helped to fund 81 local projects to date. Managed by Leicestershire and Rutland Community Foundation, the fund typically offered grants of up to £5,000 primarily to projects that strengthen communities or improve the natural environment.



IMAGE: MERCIA LOGISTICS PARK



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LEICESTER MADE TRADE SHOW TO SPOTLIGHT ETHICAL MANUFACTURING IN FASHION INDUSTRY

The Leicester Made trade show, a platform for sustainable fashion and ethical manufacturing, will return on Wednesday, May 14 at Athena, Queen Street, Leicester.

Organisers have announced that the event will gather key players from across the fashion and manufacturing sectors to address urgent industry challenges and opportunities, with a particular focus on sustainability and UK-based production.

Positioned as both a networking hub and a catalyst for change, Leicester Made aims to connect retail buyers with local ethical factories and brands. The 2025 edition will feature a full programme of keynote speakers, panel discussions, and interactive exhibitions. Attendees can expect robust debates on manufacturing innovation and the future of ethical supply chains, alongside a fashion show spotlighting emerging design talent from Leicester.

A significant feature of the event

will be the CEO Roundtable, a high-level forum bringing together industry leaders, government officials, and brand executives to discuss actionable strategies to revitalise British manufacturing. This forum is expected to produce tangible outcomes aimed at driving long-term transformation within the industry.

Leicester Made also has a strong community and educational focus, inviting local residents to engage with NGOs, support organisations, and academic institutions. A dedicated platform for schools, colleges, and universities will provide students with direct access to industry experts, aiming to inspire the next generation of ethical fashion leaders.

Hosted in a city known for its manufacturing heritage, Leicester Made 2025 organisers describe it as a movement towards a sustainable, innovative future for UK fashion.

To register interest in attending, contact beth@fashion-enter.com.



▲ ALL SHE WANTS CLOTHING



TILLEY'S TAKE

Sue Tilley's manufacturing update

BREXIT CHALLENGES LINGER FOR UK BUSINESSES

When speaking with businesses, it's clear that the logistics of doing business post-Brexit are still proving a real challenge.

Across sectors, companies continue to grapple with complex export documentation and rising postage costs. Where goods once flowed freely across borders, UK businesses now face a maze of paperwork, customs declarations, and VAT procedures that disrupt supply chains and erode profit margins.

Before Brexit, trading with European neighbours was relatively simple, with minimal bureaucracy and seamless movement within a single market. Now, every shipment requires meticulous compliance with rules of origin, and even the smallest mistake can cause costly border delays. Many companies have had to hire specialised staff or rely on customs brokers to manage the process, adding extra costs that hit smaller businesses the hardest. If these barriers weren't in place, the boost to both individual businesses and the UK economy would be substantial.

On top of this, rising postage and shipping costs add further pressure.

Major carriers such as Royal Mail, DPD, and FedEx have introduced surcharges to cover extra customs handling, making UK businesses less competitive compared to EU counterparts. Delays and unpredictable costs are frustrating customers, particularly in e-commerce, where fast and affordable delivery is critical to retaining business.

Despite these obstacles, the resilience and adaptability of UK businesses stand out. Many are investing in digital tools to streamline customs procedures, reducing errors and improving efficiency. Others are establishing distribution hubs in the EU to maintain competitive delivery times and pricing. While this requires significant investment, it provides a strategic way to overcome Brexit-related trade barriers.

There's also a growing shift towards local sourcing. With the cost and complexity of importing materials from Europe, many businesses are strengthening domestic supply chains, reducing reliance on international logistics while supporting the UK economy.

The challenges of export documentation and shipping costs continue to complicate trade, but what remains unchanged is the determination of UK businesses. They are finding new ways to adapt, innovate, and transform obstacles into opportunities. Removing these trade

barriers would undoubtedly improve profitability, but for now, it's the resilience of our business community that is driving success for the UK.



ABOUT SUE

From founding 'Classy Rags' to driving regional economic development in Leicester and Leicestershire, Sue's journey has been fuelled by a passion for innovation, manufacturing, collaboration and sustainable growth. Sue recently won the Outstanding Senior Female Executive award and was named Overall Winner Inspirational Female Leader in the 2024 East Midlands Women's Awards. Find more at suetilleyassociates.co.uk.

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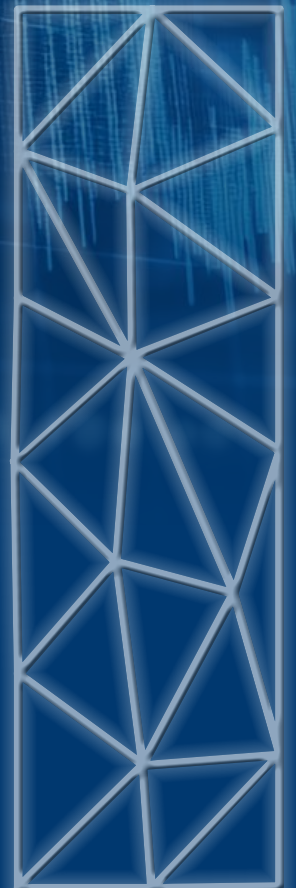
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Leaf it to Leicester!

GREENLIGHTING THOSE MAKING LEICESTER MORE SUSTAINABLE

GreenerFuture Leicestershire celebrated the launch of its new advisory service with a dynamic and engaging event hosted at the University of Leicester in January. The event brought together sustainability experts, local businesses, and community partners to explore how the service can support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in embedding sustainable practices into their operations.

Attendees were introduced to the advisory service, including a demonstration of the innovative self-assessment tool designed to guide SMEs on their sustainability journey.

Keynote speakers and panellists included industry leaders and sustainability champions:

- Anthony Midgely, Category Manager, University of Leicester Procurement Unit
- Rishi Madlani, expert on aligning environmental and financial sustainability
- Joe Billingham, SME owner of Belmont Press, who shared first-hand insights on the benefits of sustainability for small businesses
- Pamela Noakes, Group Sustainability Director at M&C Saatchi Group, who spoke about embedding the sustainability agenda into corporate culture

The event concluded with an interactive networking session. Theme stations

hosted by partners from the East Midlands Chamber, Leicestershire County Council Net Zero Team, De Montfort University, People Planet Pint/Pastry networking events and the University of Leicester Institute for Environmental Futures, providing an opportunity for attendees to connect, explore resources to benefit their business and share ideas over food and refreshments.

GreenerFuture Leicestershire's advisory service is designed to equip SMEs with the tools and knowledge to drive sustainability forward in their businesses.

Watch webinars from GreenerFuture on carbon jargon, making your business more sustainable, and more at greenerfutureleicestershire.co.uk/ resources.

Know a Net Zero Hero?

Do you know someone in Leicestershire who's making a real difference for our planet? The Net Zero Heroes scheme is on the lookout for local legends helping to protect the environment and inspire others to live more sustainably.

Whether it's a green-fingered gardener transforming spaces into lush community havens, a passionate educator teaching the next generation about the environment, or someone swapping their car keys for a bike helmet – Leicestershire County Council wants to shine a

spotlight on those going above and beyond to help the county reach net zero by 2050.

If you know someone who's doing their bit to tackle climate change, give them the recognition they deserve. Nominate your Net Zero Hero at leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/net-zero/nominate-your-net-zero-heroes.



UoL scores silver for sustainability

The University of Leicester has been recognised for its commitment to enhancing the environmental sustainability of its campus and operations.

EcoCampus, a UK-wide environmental management scheme for higher and further education, has awarded the University the Silver certificate. As part of the accreditation process, auditors visited Leicester’s campus to tour its facilities, interview members of staff, and review its environmental and sustainability policies and procedures.

The EcoCampus system covers all aspects of an institution’s operations including waste management, energy use, water efficiency, sustainable purchasing, construction and refurbishment, biodiversity, travel and community involvement.



Professor Sarah Davies, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Head of the College of Science and Engineering at the University of Leicester, said: “The Silver accreditation from EcoCampus is a testament to our ongoing commitment to sustainability, and reflects the excellent progress we are making to improve the University’s environmental performance.

“I would like to extend a big thank

you to the Estates and Campus Services teams and everyone involved in making the audit a success – it is truly a University-wide effort.

“Here At the University of Leicester, we are dedicated to reducing our environmental impact and continuously improving our practices to create a greener, more sustainable future for our students, staff and wider community.”

Sustainable DMU fashion research shown at huge global festival

Experts from De Montfort University will show their pioneering research into sustainable fashion at one of the biggest festivals in the world.

Professor Katie Normington, DMU’s Vice-Chancellor, will lead a series of DMU events at South by Southwest (SXSW) in Texas next week.

The annual event, held across the city of Austin, incorporates one of the biggest music festivals on the planet, alongside industry leading events on film, TV and technology.

Professor Normington said: “SXSW offers one of the biggest opportunities to really promote what we’re doing here at DMU and connect our research to some of the biggest industry figures there are. The breakthroughs we are developing here at DMU offer real, impactful ways to make technology and industry more sustainable and drive innovation in different fields. It is exciting to be representing the UK in this way.”

DMU is working with the UK Government’s Department for Business

and Trade (DBT), as part of its UK House campaign – a four-day programme of events at SXSW which will bring together innovative thinkers to forge partnerships and shape the future of the creative economy.

As part of this, DMU led two events on March 10, one on sustainable fashion and another on immersive technology experiences: one called Reimagining Fashion: Circular Design, Innovation, and Sustainability and the second called Shaping Tomorrow’s Immersive Experiences: Innovation, Research, and Future Skills.

The visit to SXSW came only weeks after DMU was named by the United Nations as chair of the global Academic Impact hub for Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11 – sustainable cities and communities. This means it will lead a team of other co-chair universities across the globe in helping to address issues like affordable housing, air pollution, clean water and sanitation, and renewable energy in cities worldwide.



“ THE BREAKTHROUGHS WE ARE DEVELOPING HERE AT DMU OFFER REAL, IMPACTFUL WAYS TO MAKE TECHNOLOGY AND INDUSTRY MORE SUSTAINABLE ”



Ahead of the Herd

Renewable energy has transformed dramatically, with solar panel costs dropping by an incredible 90% over the last ten years. This shift has made sustainability an achievable and financially sound goal for businesses of all sizes.

“A few years ago, businesses may have dismissed solar energy as an option due to high upfront expenses and lengthy payback periods,” explains Ross Kent, Director of Herd Energy.

“However, the affordability of modern solar solutions has dramatically shifted the equation. Reduced hardware costs, improved energy efficiency, and regional industry incentives now mean solar installations offer quicker returns on investment, often within just a few years.”

This financial shift couldn't have come at a better time, with energy prices continuing to rise. Locking in fixed energy costs through solar power provides businesses with a shield against future volatility, ensuring

stability in uncertain times. Beyond financial benefits, adopting solar energy also enhances a company's reputation.

“Customers, clients, employees and stakeholders are increasingly drawn to organisations demonstrating a genuine commitment to sustainability,” Ross adds. “Adopting renewable energy helps businesses align with global efforts to reduce carbon footprints, contributing to a greener future while building brand equity.”

While the solar energy market has matured into a practical and accessible solution, it hasn't been without its challenges. Concerns about the ethical practices behind renewable energy products, particularly solar panels, have grown in recent years. Issues such as exploitative labour, environmental degradation during raw material extraction, and opaque supply chains have raised questions about the true sustainability of these products.

For businesses striving to align with

“ THE AFFORDABILITY OF MODERN SOLAR SOLUTIONS HAS DRAMATICALLY SHIFTED THE EQUATION ”

both ethical and environmental goals, these issues present a significant dilemma. “Our role is to ensure businesses receive not only sound advice but also ethically sourced and high-quality products. Having spent 10 years working for renowned global manufacturers, I know what to look out for in ethical practice. We are not only passionate about finding sustainable solutions that return on investments, but also ensuring the ethical sourcing and that their investment aligns with their values.”

Financing solar energy through asset finance is a popular option, as are Power Purchase Agreements which, as Ross explains, is an “effective way to acquire a solar energy system without any upfront capital outlay”. He adds: “Power Purchase Agreements allow businesses to immediately reduce overheads by paying discounted rates for their roof-generated power. Whatever the financing model, most business owners can see an instant benefit, either as a tenant with a landlord or an owner occupier.”

So, that 90% drop in costs for solar panels combined with reputational benefits could encourage more businesses to go green responsibly whilst achieving tangible financial benefits. With solar costs at historic lows and the need for sustainability greater than ever, now could be the perfect time to make the switch.



How do I prepare for a financial crisis?



HANDLING BUSINESS PREDICAMENTS INVOLVING MONEY AND UNEXPECTED DOWNTURNS CAN BE A STRUGGLE. **JOHN HARLOW** OF HARLOW INSOLVENCY GIVES HIS ADVICE

Most business owners are aware that in order to keep control of the business's finances, they should prepare and maintain budgets and cash flow forecasts – and ideally, monthly management accounts. Business coaches will always stress the need to plan ahead and keep a cash buffer in order not only to pay the known bills, but also as an emergency fund in case of unexpected events outside their control. Business coaches will proclaim: "If you fail to prepare, then prepare to fail!"

Whilst this is evidently sound advice, many businesses struggle to find the time or finance to do this. If actual cash flow isn't strong enough, the business owner or director may find themselves utilising funds which don't belong to the company (such as PAYE deductions or VAT) in payment of everyday outgoings. This is a common scenario and will work fine until the day comes when some event outside their control presents them with a difficult problem and cash flow dries up. This event may be short term, perhaps due to a slow-paying customer or bad debt and may just be a blip in trade. It may, however, be something larger, like a

general downturn in trade within the industry or increases in the cost of living and energy costs. What then, if the business isn't able to repay the money it 'borrowed'?

The accountant is the natural first port of call for any business facing financial difficulty – but eventually, the time may arise when the situation is such that the accountant will suggest a referral to an Insolvency Practitioner (IP).

It is obviously nigh on impossible to predict some of these events and even the best prepared businesses will begin to struggle as the top line of their cash flow forecast evaporates.

From an IP's perspective therefore, the benefits of preparedness for a financial crisis will have passed by the time the business owner reacts to it. However, if they have taken heed of the usual advice relating to planning, forecasting and general governance, then there should be a period of time available to consider the options available. It is important therefore to ensure that any action they take once aware of the problem, won't have a negative impact on any of the stakeholders. This is particularly important in the case of a Limited Company, where the directors owe an overriding duty of care to both the company and its creditors.

This is where the question of whether the business is solvent or not is vitally important. There are twin tests for insolvency, one being the balance sheet test (where liabilities exceed assets) and the other being the cash flow test (whether the business can pay its debts as and when they fall due). If a business is insolvent, then it will be an offence to continue to trade if, by so doing, it will make the position worse for its creditors. This could leave a director open to actions for wrongful (or even fraudulent) trading.

Business owners may be tempted at this stage to try to ensure that certain favoured people get paid ahead of others, or they may sell off assets in the belief that by raising some cash, they can trade out of the problem. If such a sale is at an undervalue and the business subsequently fails, then these actions may open the owner or director up to personal liability. In the

“ ALL BUSINESS OWNERS AND DIRECTORS SHOULD BE AWARE OF WHAT MAY BEFALL THE UNWARY. NO ONE GOES INTO BUSINESS CONTEMPLATING FAILURE, BUT AS WE ALL KNOW, STUFF HAPPENS! ”

case of a director, it may lead to being disqualified from being a director for a period of years or facing a large fine. Sole traders, in worst case scenarios, may face personal bankruptcy.

So, as to the question of how to handle a financial crisis or unexpected downturn, all business owners and directors should be aware of what may befall the unwary. No one goes into business contemplating failure, but as we all know, stuff happens! Even though the importance of overall financial governance and preparedness may already have been drummed home by his or her financial advisors, it is

important that they are aware of the potential hazards that face them if the unexpected happens and they end up facing insolvency.

Forewarned is forearmed, and early discussion from an appropriate advisor could save more than just the business. Most IPs will provide free initial and confidential advice and will be able to steer them through the minefield of problem areas. If consulted early enough, the IP may be able to use the resources at their disposal to effect a rescue of the business or at least mitigate the detrimental effect on the creditors.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL IT'S TOO LATE...

Like a lifeboat, it's better if we respond to a 'pan-pan' (or URGENT) call, showing that a problem exists – rather than 'mayday', meaning that all other options are exhausted.

Call us if you are worried about your business cashflow; best case, we can set your mind at rest.

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John Harlow
BSc FIPA FABRP



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▲ HARDEEP MAHAL

Hardeep Mahal, like this writer, is passionate about the power of print. “In a world where digital marketing gets all the love, print still has its own unique charm,” the Director from multi-award-winning print company Minuteman Press told me. “It gives people something real to hold onto, and that makes a lasting impression.

“Physical materials keep working for your brand long after the initial contact. Digital messages are often forgotten, print gives you that tangible reminder of your brand’s value. Whether it’s a

poster to a branded hoodie, these tools ensure your business stays front and centre in people’s minds.

As competition for attention grows, print marketing could be the secret weapon your business needs. Now’s the time to invest in print that works hard for your brand long after the first impression.

Flyers

A marketing classic, flyers are cost-effective, eye-catching, and perfect for getting your message directly into people’s hands. With a clever design and a smart distribution strategy, flyers can spark interest and get people to take action instantly. Unlike digital ads, which can be easily ignored, a well-designed flyer demands attention.

Posters

Whether you’re promoting an event, launching a product, or just raising brand awareness, a striking poster in the right spot can reach thousands. It’s a visual reminder of your brand’s presence. With the right creative touch, posters can become artwork that resonates, turning public spaces into brand showcases.

Branded clothing

Branded clothing is a fun way to turn your team and customers into walking billboards. “A great design on clothing can turn it into a conversation starter,” says Hardeep. Custom apparel builds brand recognition wherever it’s worn, from the office to the streets. Plus, stylish, well-made promo clothing strengthens team unity and gives off a professional vibe. Your employees feel more connected to the brand, and your customers instantly recognise your team.

Merch

Mugs, tote bags, and pens keeps your brand visible every day. Practical and stylish, these items stay in use and keep your brand top of mind. Whether at home or in the office, these products ensure your business is always in view.

For tangible print, you can find all you need at: minuteman.com/uk/locations/england/oadby.

Print trends you can’t afford to miss

WHILE DIGITAL MARKETING STRATEGIES ARE STEALING THE SPOTLIGHT IN 2025, SOME OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE AND LASTING TOOLS ARE STILL ROOTED IN TRADITIONAL METHODS: PRINT MARKETING **WORDS BY EMILY MILLER**

flyer or a custom piece of merchandise, the impact of print marketing is undeniable and it’s definitely something businesses shouldn’t overlook.”

“In a crowded market, print marketing brings longevity and real value that digital ads can’t match, there’s no minimum order and we are known for our quick turnaround,” Hardeep adds. “I love the machinery; I am constantly investing in the latest gadgets in print! With the right design achieved to a high quality, your brand can stay visible for years.”

Print also builds trust. Tangible materials give your audience something they can hold, keep, and share, something that digital ads sometimes miss. From a well-placed

“ PRINT MARKETING BRINGS LONGEVITY AND REAL VALUE THAT DIGITAL ADS CAN’T MATCH ”

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Prioritising private medical insurance

THE LINK BETWEEN PRIVATE MEDICAL INSURANCE AND EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY AND ENGAGEMENT **WORDS BY EMILY MILLER**



“BUSINESSES THAT TAKE CARE OF THEIR EMPLOYEES SEE THE RETURNS IN LOYALTY, PERFORMANCE, AND A THRIVING WORKPLACE CULTURE”

Since March 2020, NHS waiting times have nearly doubled, soaring from four million to a staggering 7.6 million people waiting for treatment. This backlog means employees are left struggling with untreated medical conditions, leading to increased absenteeism, lower productivity, and declining morale.

As NHS waiting lists continue to grow at an alarming rate, businesses are rethinking their approach to employee wellbeing. Private medical insurance (PMI) has emerged for businesses to combat these challenges while enhancing their appeal to top talent. Gareth Carroll, Director at Bespoke Benefits, an agency to advise and manage employee benefits for corporate clients, explains: “Access to swift healthcare is not just about convenience; it’s about keeping employees healthy, engaged, and able to perform at their best.”

Attracting and retaining talent

The modern workforce is evolving, with young graduates and skilled professionals prioritising ethical workplaces that genuinely care about their wellbeing. Companies that provide competitive employee benefit packages, including PMI, stand out in the race for the best talent.

“We’re seeing a shift where the most talented individuals are actively

seeking employers that prioritise health and wellbeing,” says Gareth. “Businesses that ignore this, risk losing out on the brightest minds.”

This is particularly crucial for firms involved in headhunting or looking to secure the best in their industry. Offering comprehensive benefits signals to potential hires that a company values long-term employee health and satisfaction, making it a more attractive employer.

Productivity and engagement

Beyond talent acquisition, providing private medical insurance has a direct impact on productivity. Employees with quick access to healthcare experience shorter recovery times and less disruption to their work schedules. Gareth emphasises: “When employees know they can get the medical support they need without long delays, they’re more likely to stay focused, engaged, and committed to their roles.”

Additionally, PMI often includes preventative care options, reducing the likelihood of severe health issues developing in the first place. This proactive approach ensures a healthier, happier workforce that performs at peak efficiency.

More than goodwill

Offering medical insurance isn’t just an act of goodwill – it’s a strategic investment in a company’s future. Lower absenteeism, higher employee satisfaction, and a reputation as a caring employer all contribute to long-term business success. As Gareth succinctly puts it: “Businesses that take care of their employees see the returns in loyalty, performance, and a thriving workplace culture.” There’s more on this subject on the Bespoke Benefits site bespokebenefits.co.uk/knowledge-hub.

With NHS waiting times at an all-time high and workplace expectations shifting, companies must adapt. Investing in medical insurance might not be considered a luxury for much longer – it might, in fact, be more of a necessity for those serious about productivity, retention, and long-term growth.



We can help you attract your people

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▲ THE TEAM

Sahota & Sahota Solicitors celebrate **10** years

RELOCATION AFTER A
DECADE IN BUSINESS
MARKS A NEW
CHAPTER FOR THIS
LOCAL LAW FIRM

**WORDS BY
KERRY SMITH**

For Sahota & Sahota Solicitors, 2025 has already been a milestone year. After nearly a decade at their London Road office, the Leicester-based criminal law firm has taken a bold step forward, purchasing a Grade II listed building in New Walk. The move marks a significant upgrade, offering more space, better facilities, and a prime location near Leicester's key court centres: Leicester Magistrates' Court and Leicester Crown Court.

A decade ago, the firm set out with a vision to provide expert criminal

defence services and ensure that justice is accessible to all. The firm specialises in all aspects of criminal defence and road traffic matters, with a particular focus on serious crime including fraud, money laundering, murder, and drug conspiracies.

Founded on March 9, 2015, Sahota & Sahota gained Lexcel accreditation (a legal practice quality mark for client care, compliance and practice management) in its first year. They've since grown to currently employ six solicitors, two paralegals, one solicitor apprentice, and a dedicated team of business admin support staff.



▲ KALLY AND SIMONE SAHOTA

“ WE REMAIN STEADFAST IN OUR MISSION TO UPHOLD JUSTICE, PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF OUR CLIENTS, AND NAVIGATE THEM THROUGH THE COMPLEXITIES OF THE LEGAL SYSTEM ”



Regularly instructed in high-profile cases across England and Wales, their work frequently takes them to London’s Old Bailey, as well as courts in Manchester, Birmingham, and even as far as Swansea, Newcastle and Brighton. Long journeys are part of the job – Kally Sahota (who forms one half of the husband-and-wife duo behind the company name) recently found himself making the two-and-a-half-hour trek to Norwich for a case.

The firm work closely with and routinely instruct experts to assist in their cases, such as forensic accountants, pathologists, psychiatrists and drugs experts.

Led by Kally and Simone, Sahota & Sahota has come a long way since its beginnings. Reflecting on the last 10 years, Kally shared: “Our journey began with a humble start, with just one secretary and the two directors. Since then, we have grown into a closeknit team of skilled solicitors, proudly delivering results with integrity and dedication to our clients.”

Simone commented on the anniversary and the relocation: “Reaching our tenth anniversary is a moment of immense pride for the whole team. It has been an incredible journey, and we owe our success to the dedication of our team and the trust placed in us by our clients.”

The relocation to New Walk in its

tenth year had become a necessity, with the old premises having reached capacity. The new building, a former tech workspace, offers the room to grow, take on more staff, provide more comfortable client meeting spaces, and allows for investment in cutting-edge technology. They’ve installed a state-of-the-art Microsoft Teams system, making it possible for virtual meetings such as when they recently accommodated a meeting with a client in Thailand, a barrister in London, and a solicitor in Leicester to collaborate seamlessly.

Associate solicitor Nav Ubhi-Taylor said: “We remain steadfast in our mission to uphold justice, protect the rights of our clients, and navigate them through the complexities of the legal system. As we step into the future, we extend our gratitude to everyone who has been a part of our journey.”

Visit sahotasahota.co.uk to see more on Sahota & Sahota’s new chapter.



Family Wealth, Future-Proofed

How a family investment company can secure your legacy

A FAMILY INVESTMENT COMPANY (FIC) OFFERS A TAX-EFFICIENT WAY TO MANAGE AND GROW FAMILY WEALTH WHILE RETAINING CONTROL. IDEAL FOR SUCCESSION PLANNING AND ASSET PROTECTION, AN FIC CAN HELP SAFEGUARD WEALTH FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. DISCOVER IF IT'S THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOUR FAMILY

What is a Family Investment Company (FIC)?

An FIC is a private limited company designed to manage and invest family wealth in a structured, tax-efficient way. Typically, FICs are set up by parents or grandparents, who act as directors, while younger family members become shareholders, benefiting from the company's growth.

Unlike trading companies, FICs hold investments such as stocks, bonds, and property. A key feature is the share structure, allowing founders to retain control while distributing financial benefits among family members.

Benefits of a Family Investment Company

Tax Efficiency & Wealth Growth:

An FIC is a tax-efficient way to build wealth. Unlike personal income, taxed up to 45% (48% in Scotland), an FIC pays corporation tax at up to 25%. Additionally, UK dividends received by an FIC are usually tax-free, enhancing reinvestment opportunities.

By keeping profits within the company, families may be able to compound wealth more effectively when compared with personal ownership.

Succession Planning: FICs facilitate

the transfer of wealth whilst allowing founders to maintain control. Founders keep voting shares while gradually passing non-voting shares to family members.

Gifted shares to a Family Trust can reduce the founders' inheritance tax (IHT) liability if the donor survives seven years post-gift, helping protect family wealth for future generations.

Asset Protection: Investments held within an FIC are shielded from personal liabilities. Business owners can also separate trading risks from investment assets, and many FICs include a holding company for added protection.

Is an FIC Right for Your Family?

While FICs offer advantages, they may not suit all families:

- **Costs:** Setting up and running a FIC requires legal and administrative work, making them best suited for families with over £1 million in investable assets.
- **Investment Types:** Some tax-incentivised investments, like the Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS) or Business Property Relief (BPR), may be less tax-efficient within an FIC.
- **Property Considerations:** Residential property worth £500,000+



▲ SHAZIN TAYUB, DIRECTOR

in an FIC may attract the Annual Tax on Enveloped Dwellings (ATED), adding extra costs.

Tax rules, including inheritance and capital gains tax, should be reviewed with professional advice.

If you're considering an FIC, key steps include:

- 1. Incorporation:** Registering the company, drafting articles of association, and issuing shares.
- 2. Share Structure:** Founders typically hold voting shares while family members receive non-voting shares.
- 3. Funding:** Through capital injections or loans, the latter allowing flexible fund withdrawals.
- 4. Ongoing Management:** Compliance with company law, corporation tax, and efficient shareholder distributions.

How We Can Help?

Setting up and managing an FIC requires expertise. At Haines Watts, we help business owners and high-net-worth individuals structure wealth effectively. Whether for tax efficiency, succession planning, or asset protection, we can guide you every step of the way.

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A solution to divorce that's best for you and your family

I believe in a kinder, more peaceful approach to helping people through a separation or divorce. This was my motivation for establishing a specialist family law practice in Leicestershire and Rutland in 2020. It is also why Belderbos Solicitors is a member of Resolution, a community of family justice professionals who work with families and individuals to resolve issues in a constructive way.

It is, of course, inevitable that emotions will run high during a separation or divorce, but a neutral and safe environment can very often help you and your ex-partner make sensible decisions together about your future. A quote I read once summed up my goal perfectly: to provide advice and support that 'delivers a separate but intact family'.

Particularly where children are involved, this must be the desired outcome where possible, and it is best achieved, in my view, outside of the more confrontational setting of a court process.



James Belderbos, Director, Belderbos Solicitors

Resolving family matters out of court

Non-court dispute resolution (NCDR), as it is called, reduces the stress often caused by court and it gives you more control. It can also be more cost effective – the court process is very often a long, drawn out and expensive journey. Today, more than four out of five divorce cases will not end up before a judge. Indeed, the family law courts actively encourage people to resolve issues in a non-adversarial way.

We wholeheartedly support this approach and specialise in helping you take advantage of a range of out-of-court alternatives. These include:

- Mediation
- Collaborative law
- Arbitration
- Early neutral evaluation

When court is the only option

It is important to note, however, that staying out of court is not always possible in matters of family law. There are various situations for which NCDR is simply not suitable, such as domestic abuse and child protection

concerns. As much as we prefer non-court resolutions, a court application will sometimes be the best or only course of action open to you.

First and foremost, I am committed to getting the right outcome for my clients and I have successfully represented clients in court since qualification nearly 30 years ago. If court is your only option, I will help you to navigate the litigation process in the most effective and proportionate way possible. This is always, however, with an eye to ending that litigation and achieving settlement as soon as possible.

Talk to us today

If you are facing a relationship breakdown, talk to me or a member of my team at Belderbos Solicitors. With our calm, knowledgeable advice, you will have answers that help you to make informed decisions without worrying about things unnecessarily. We will use our extensive experience to tailor a solution that works hard to achieve the best outcome for you and your family.



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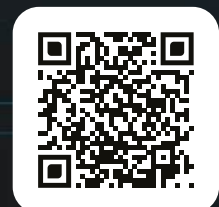
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Grandparents your rights to see your grandchildren

THERE'S OFTEN AN ASSUMPTION THAT GRANDPARENTS HAVE AUTOMATIC RIGHTS TO SEE THEIR GRANDCHILDREN. SENIOR ASSOCIATE AT NELSONS, **RINA MISTRY**, SAYS UNFORTUNATELY THIS IS NOT THE CASE



RINA MISTRY ▲

NEED ADVICE?

Should you need advice on family law matters, contact Rina on 0116 222 6666 or email rina.mistry@nelsonslaw.co.uk

The law does not give grandparents (maternal or paternal) any automatic rights to be in their grandchild's lives. This means that if parents choose to keep their children away from grandparents, they are free to do so. Nelsons' Senior Associate and solicitor Rina Mistry discusses what you can do if you find yourself in this situation.

Contact arrangements

Despite not having automatic rights, grandparents still have options available to them. The first – and usually the most effective option – is to try resolving all issues between the adults, whether it is directly or via the mediation process. The latter must be undertaken in any event, if issues cannot be resolved and you are compelled to consider an application to court. The situation can vary from case to case. It may be that the relationship between the adults has broken down or it may be that you as grandparents are concerned for the children, and in your attempt to intervene, you are denied any further time with the child.

If you are compelled to seek legal advice, then you will always be

asked whether you have attempted to speak with the parents of the child to try and resolve the issues. Further consideration will be applied as to whether correspondence from solicitors may assist to resolve the issues amicably.

Mediation

If an agreement cannot be reached and a referral to mediation has not yet been made, this will be the next step. Mediation is not only a better option to try and resolve the issues, but also far more cost-effective than making an application to court. You will need to attend a MIAM (Mediation Information and Assessment Meeting), which is compulsory. There are exemptions available, for example, if your grandchild is at significant risk of harm – but in most cases, the court will expect you to attempt to resolve issues in mediation.

Application to court

If mediation is considered inappropriate, breaks down, or is refused by the other party, then the only available option to you is making a formal application to court to resolve the child arrangements. This is the last option we advise. However, this may be the only available option if all else has failed.

As you hold no parental responsibility as a grandparent, you will need to first ask the court for permission before being able to make an application for a Child Arrangements Order. If the court grants you permission, then you can proceed with a formal application for a Child Arrangements Order. If, however, the court does not grant permission, then you will not be able to proceed further.

Like all applications, the court will consider each matter individually but must take into account the:

1. Nature of the application
2. Applicant's connection with the child
3. Risk of the proposed application disrupting the child's life to the extent that they would be harmed by it.

If court is the only option you feel is available, then we highly recommend you seek independent legal advice regarding your position and next steps.

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Growth shares grow in popularity

FAMILY BUSINESSES ARE LOOKING TO REDUCE THEIR TAX BILL FOLLOWING CHANGES TO BUSINESS PROPERTY RELIEF (BPR).

NICK WRIGHT, DIRECTOR WITH JERROMS MILLER SPECIALIST TAX, LOOKS AT HOW GROWTH SHARE SCHEMES WORK AND HOW PLANNED CUTS TO BPR HAVE INCREASED THEIR UPTAKE AMONG FAMILY BUSINESSES



NICK WRIGHT

Traditionally, growth shares have been used as a means of incentivising employees, although next year's proposed changes to Business Property Relief (BPR) have brought them into the realms of inheritance tax (IHT) and estate planning.

Growth shares give employees a stake in the future growth of the business they work for, and potentially with no income tax. Previously, they were often used as a means of incentivising employees in trading businesses that don't meet the conditions of Enterprise Management Incentives (EMIs) – probably the most tax efficient share options scheme there is.

However, employees with growth

shares are only entitled to a share in the capital value of a company if its market value goes up. They can have voting and dividend rights, but essentially their shares aren't worth anything on the day of issue. So, say the business's ordinary shares are worth £10. Growth shareholders will only see a benefit if the share value grows to above £10 each.

Until recently, Jerroms Miller typically dealt with two or three growth share enquiries per month, but that's more than doubled since the changes to Business Property Relief (BPR) were announced.

And, rather than employee incentivisation, we're seeing growth shares increasingly being used for inheritance tax and estate planning among all types of company.

BPR reform, which comes in from April 2026, will see relief cut to 50% on business assets above the £1m threshold. So, clients are looking at alternative ways to reduce their IHT exposure.

Growth shares offer a lot of flexibility. I'm currently working with a married couple whose trading company is worth £1.7m. At the moment, the husband holds 90% of the shares and his wife 10%, but we're changing this so they both hold what is known as freezer shares, 50/50 – effectively freezing their capital rights to a maximum £1m each.

We're then issuing growth shares to the couple's children – in this case with voting rights to one of the sons as he's actively involved in the business. As soon as the company's market value exceeds £2m, then it will fall outside the parents' estate for tax purposes. Both parents' Wills are also being changed to ensure the £1 million threshold is utilised in full for each of them.

In estate planning, growth share schemes are attractive as they take future growth out of the equation and there are no tax charges up front.

Nick has wide experience of share schemes and can guide you through the process. Please contact nickwright@jerromsmiller.co.uk for more information and advice, or call us on 0121 693 5000. You can talk to us whether you're looking to incentivise your employees or, as a business owner, would like to use growth shares to reduce your estate's tax liability ahead of BPR changes.

“GROWTH SHARES GIVE EMPLOYEES A STAKE IN THE FUTURE GROWTH OF THE BUSINESS THEY WORK FOR, AND POTENTIALLY WITH NO INCOME TAX

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WHY IS MY WEBSITE SO PAINFULLY SLOW?!

We all know there's nothing worse than your marketing efforts leading prospects to your website for them to only give up and exit because of the slow loading speed. There are lots of factors to consider that could be causing this issue. Page builders often add bloated code and unnecessary plugins, un-optimised images take too long to load, and poor hosting can limit your site's performance. Excessive HTTP requests, lack of caching, outdated software, and missing content delivery networks (CDNs) can also slow things down. A major issue that also comes with a slow website is that it directly impacts Google's SEO rankings, meaning a slow site could also be costing you traffic and customers!

DO I REALLY NEED WEBSITE MAINTENANCE?

We get asked this question a lot, and completely understand that if your website seems to be running fine, it can feel that maintenance is just another unnecessary cost. But neglecting it can lead to serious issues down the line. Regular updates keep your site secure, as outdated software is a prime target for hackers. Broken links, slow performance, and un-optimised content can creep in over time, negatively affecting user experience and SEO rankings. Plus, search engines favour well-maintained sites, meaning maintenance isn't just about fixing problems, it also helps keep your website visible and competitive.

HOW DO I STOP MY WEBSITE FROM BREAKING EVERY TIME I UPDATE IT?

This is quite a common issue, unfortunately. Firstly, we recommend you always back up your site before making changes. This way, you can restore it if anything goes wrong. It's a good idea to test updates in a staging environment before applying them to your live site to catch potential issues early. Make sure to keep your plugins, themes, and core software updated, but avoid unnecessary or outdated ones that can cause conflicts.

I PAID FOR HOSTING, SO WHY DOES MY SITE STILL CRASH?!

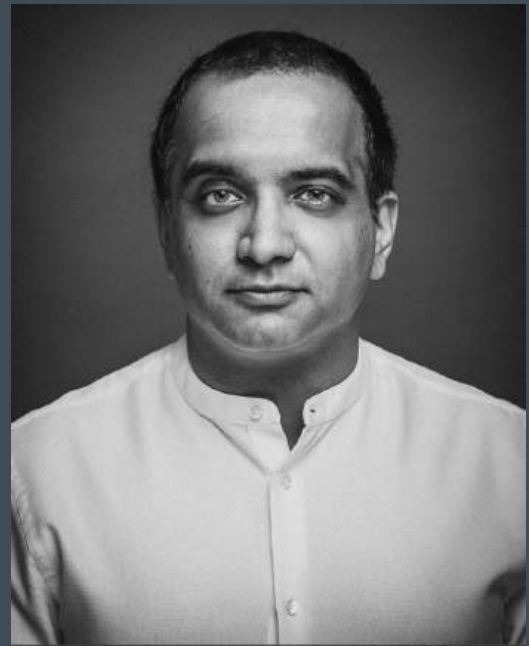
Paying for hosting is just the start; your website's stability depends on the type and quality of hosting you choose. Shared hosting, while cost-effective, means your site competes for resources with others, making it more vulnerable to crashes during traffic spikes. Poor server configurations, outdated software, or excessive plugins can also overload your site. Security vulnerabilities, DDoS attacks, or insufficient bandwidth could be other culprits. To prevent downtime, consider upgrading to a more robust hosting plan, optimising your website, and implementing proper security measures. Cheap prices can mean cheap hosting.

WHAT'S THE BEST WAY TO KEEP MY WEBSITE SECURE?

No matter if you store sensitive data or not, your website could still be targeted by hackers. The easiest way to keep your website safe is through regular updates. Things such as outdated plugins, themes, and software are common entry points for attacks. Always make sure you are using strong passwords and enable two-factor authentication to protect admin access. Installing an SSL certificate encrypts data and boosts trust, while regular backups ensure you can restore your site if something goes wrong. A good security plugin can also help detect and block threats before they become a problem.

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The Niche Business Awards 2025 are coming

IT'S THAT TIME OF YEAR AGAIN! THE NICHE BUSINESS AWARDS 2025 ARE JUST AROUND THE CORNER, AND WE COULDN'T BE MORE EXCITED!

If you've ever attended the Niche Business Awards before, you'll know it's a night packed with energy, celebration, and all-around good vibes. The awards shine a spotlight on the best and brightest in Leicester, and this year promises to be no different; it's going to be huge!

The Niche Business Awards are always a hugely fun time as most of you will know. Think dazzling gowns, sharp suits, electric atmosphere, and a crowd full of talent and innovation. It's a chance to network, toast to achievements, and enjoy the brilliant entertainment that always accompanies the evening. Whether you're a nominee, a guest, or simply there to soak in the excitement, the Niche Business Awards never disappoint.

This year's event is shaping up to be even more spectacular, with an amazing theme of Bollywood, expect fantastic live entertainment, and a packed line-up of businesses and entrepreneurs eager to take the spotlight. You'll be rubbing shoulders with industry leaders and hearing the stories behind some of the most exciting Leicestershire-based businesses.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank our headline sponsor Trident. Your support is invaluable and plays a key role in making this event a success. We are truly grateful for your partnership and for helping us celebrate the incredible talent and achievements within the business community. We look forward to a fantastic evening and appreciate your dedication to supporting local businesses and the wider industry.

A thank you also to our ambassadors: Hollingsworth Solicitors, BP Legal, She Inspires, The Beautiful Pubs Collective, and Sanjay Foods. Your support is truly appreciated, and we are grateful for your commitment to championing local businesses.

So, what are you waiting for? Don't hang about ticket-less for too long as they are in high demand, and we want to make sure you don't miss out on what's sure to be an unforgettable night. Secure your tickets now and join us in celebrating the amazing people who are making waves in business.

Get ready for a night of fun, inspiration, and a bit of friendly competition. We can't wait to see you there!

When: September 5, 2025

Where: Athena Leicester

Theme: Bollywood

Tickets: To reserve yours, email charlotte@crossproductions.co.uk

Our judges this year



Adam Burrage

Managing Director at Trident

Adam Burrage joined Trident in 2006, a family business established in 1988, originally offering printing and graphic design services. Over time, Trident evolved into a full-service agency, now providing a comprehensive range of digital marketing solutions. Adam took over the day-to-day operations of Trident in 2020, leading the company's growth in web design, SEO, and digital marketing, helping businesses of all sizes thrive. The core mission remains the same as it was in 1988: to deliver the best possible results for their customers.



Yasin El Ashrafi

Mentor & Entrepreneur

Yasin El Ashrafi is a multi-award-winning mentor and entrepreneur based in Leicester, known for his contributions to the music and community sectors. He is the owner of HQ Recording Studio and HQ Familia record label, as well as a Director at HQ CAN (Community Arts Network). Yasin manages eight artists, helping them reach their full potential. Featured in The Sunday Times Alternative Rich List 2018, Yasin's remarkable journey has inspired many, especially young adults facing challenges.



Sarah Harrison

City Centre Director at Leicester City Council

Sarah Harrison is the City Centre Director at Leicester City Council, where she plays a crucial role in the growth and development of the city centre. With a wealth of experience in urban development, Sarah is committed to improving Leicester's infrastructure, attracting businesses, and enhancing the experience for residents and visitors. She works closely with local organisations to implement transformative projects and create a sustainable future for the city, aiming to make Leicester a thriving and accessible hub for all.



Bhumika Parmar

Founder & Director at BP Legal Solicitors

Bhumika Parmar is the founder and Director of BP Legal Solicitors, which she established in 2009. With over 24 years of experience in conveyancing, commercial property, matrimonial matters, and immigration law, Bhumika has built a remarkable reputation as a forward-thinking solicitor in Leicester. She has led high-profile cases, including one that became a key legal precedent. In 2022, she acquired Solicitors4Landlords and, in 2023, became the President of the Leicestershire Law Society.



Tim Grainger

Director at Weatherwise Services

Tim Grainger founded Weatherwise Services after working in sales, recruitment, and property management. Established in 2017 with 37 sites under management, Weatherwise Services now operates 15 vehicles, servicing 400 sites nightly. The company continues to grow, maintaining an ethical and customer-focused approach. Tim is a strong advocate for environmental sustainability and the circular economy. Outside of work, he is a sports enthusiast, particularly passionate about cricket.



Nick Megson

Managing Director at Abacus Flooring Solutions

Nick Megson is the Managing Director of Abacus Flooring Solutions Limited, a company he founded in Leicestershire in 2020. With over 30 years of experience in the resin flooring industry, Nick developed Abaplas, an award-winning resin flooring system made from 100% recycled plastic, eliminating the need for silica sand. His innovation has earned him numerous accolades, including a Green World Award. Nick also serves on the board of the Resin Flooring Association (FeRFA), helping establish industry standards.



Beth Grundy

Head of Marketing & PR at PPL PRS

Beth Grundy is Head of Marketing & PR at PPL PRS, the creators of TheMusicLicence, which ensures that music creators are fairly compensated for their work. With over 17 years of experience in B2B sales and marketing, Beth is an active member of the Leicester and East Midlands business community, participating in judging various awards, such as Generation Next, Enterprising Women, and East Midlands Chambers. She has previously designed and delivered training programmes and has expertise in process improvement and project management.



Aime Ayrehart

Lead Consultant & Founder of Ninja HR

Aime Ayrehart is the Lead Consultant and founder of Ninja HR, a trading name of Armillan Ltd, created to help employers thrive by supporting their staff. With 20 years of experience in HR, including roles in the NHS and local authorities, Aime has helped create opportunities for young people through the Government’s Kickstart Scheme. Aime holds degrees in law, psychology, and an MA in HR. She has also taught HR at postgraduate level, bringing a wealth of knowledge to her consultancy work.



The business event of the year is back bigger and more spectacular than ever. Join us on **September 5, 2025** when the Athena Leicester will be transformed into a Bollywood movie scene celebrating local excellence.

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Bhimika Parmar, Director

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Relationships as the foundation

In just over a year, Holders Estate Agents have become a name to watch in the growing Leicestershire property market. Founded by Rebecca Holders, the agency has grown at an impressive pace, thanks to its personalised service and genuine commitment to putting clients first.

Rebecca is enthused by nominations in the Entrepreneur of the Year, Rising Star, Best New Business, and Best Small Business categories as well as finalist in the Midlands' Real Entrepreneur Awards in the Start-up Entrepreneur Category: "It's amazing to feel seen for the hard work that's gone into building this business, especially as it's still so young," she shares. Her words reflect the determination and drive that have powered the company's early success.

From day one, the agency set out to deliver a friendly, approachable service that feels personal to each client. Whether helping first-time buyers take their first steps onto the property ladder or supporting sellers through big moves, Holders Estate Agents say they've focused on creating relationship-led experiences. This people-first approach has not

“ THE RECOGNITION WE'VE RECEIVED SO FAR HAS BEEN INCREDIBLE, BUT FOR US, THIS IS JUST THE BEGINNING ”

only resonated with clients but has also fuelled the company's rapid expansion.

As demand for their services has grown, so too has the business, with new offices opening to serve an ever-expanding customer base. Rebecca's passion for changing the way relationships within the property market work is an important thread in everything the agency does, and it's what is creating a winning appeal.

"Our goal has always been to redefine how clients experience the buying, selling, and renting process by putting people first. It's this approach that continues to drive our growth and sets us apart in the industry. It's about building lasting relationships that make the whole process smooth and enjoyable."

Rebecca believes that understanding the local market is only part of the equation. "We combine our knowledge of the area with a clear vision for what it looks like to have good relationships. That balance is the backbone of our success. Every client has unique needs, and we pride ourselves on staying adaptable in a fast-moving market to meet those needs."

Looking ahead, Rebecca is optimistic about the future. "The recognition we've received so far has been incredible, but for us, this is just the beginning. We're focused on continuing to raise the bar in estate agency standards and providing the kind of service that keeps clients coming back."

Holders Estate Agents is fast



▲ REBECCA HOLDERS

proving that a combination of passion, dedication, and exceptional service is a winning formula. "For us, success comes naturally when you genuinely care about your clients. We're excited for what's next, the next chapter promises to be just as exciting as the first, as we move into applying our relationship building ethos with the lettings market too," Rebecca adds.

holdersestateagents.co.uk



The New Era of Mental Health

Mental health talking therapies have undergone significant advancements in recent years, evolving to meet the unique challenges of each individual rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. As awareness grows, the demand for specialised, accessible treatments has never been greater. According to Mind Charity, over 2 million people in the UK struggle with mental health daily, and the staggering 6.4 million referrals for talking therapies highlight the urgent need for effective support.

Rutland House Counselling and Psychotherapy (RHCP) is at the forefront of this change, offering a

“NO TWO INDIVIDUALS ARE ALIKE AND THEIR PATH TO WELLBEING SHOULD REFLECT THAT”

diverse range of therapies tailored to each client's needs. Matt Barton at RHCP explains: “As mental health issues evolve, so must our therapies. No two individuals are alike, and their path to well-being should reflect that.”

RHCP's therapists employ a variety of modern and nuanced approaches: Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is widely used for anxiety, panic, OCD, and chronic pain, helping individuals challenge negative thought patterns and develop healthier coping

mechanisms. “CBT reframes negative thoughts, providing both immediate relief and long-term benefits,” says Matt.

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing) is particularly effective for PTSD, allowing individuals to process traumatic memories through groundbreaking advancements in scientific research showing which bilateral stimulation reduces the emotional charge of the traumatic incidents. “EMDR helps people heal from distressing memories and restores stability,” Matt adds.

Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT) is crucial for those struggling with self-harm, suicidality, or addiction, focusing on emotional regulation and impulse control. “DBT helps manage emotions and build healthier relationships,” says Matt. Anger Management Programmes teach how to regulate and express anger in constructive ways, leading to improved communication and relationships.

With mental health support often difficult to access, RHCP is making a real difference by offering low-cost therapy from just £30 per session, ensuring help is available when it's most needed.

Beyond delivering evidence-based treatments, RHCP is also dedicated to reducing pressure on the NHS by providing specialist training for businesses, healthcare organisations and therapists. By equipping workplaces with essential mental health tools, they're helping organisations create healthier, more supportive environments.



▲ MATT BARTON

RHCP's impact has not gone unnoticed. They've been nominated for the Niche Business Awards 2025 in two categories: Small Business and Professional Services.

They're also gearing up for an exciting rebrand: “With an exciting move to new, bigger and better premises in coming months we are also planning a fresh rebrand. We're excited for what is ahead and committed to remaining a modern and responsive mental health service as we grow.”

Don't suffer in silence, an NHS waiting list isn't the only option as Matt shares: “Consider private therapy via RHCP so you can get the help at the time of need and treatment that's right for you. Enjoy your life to the fullest!”

rhcp.org.uk

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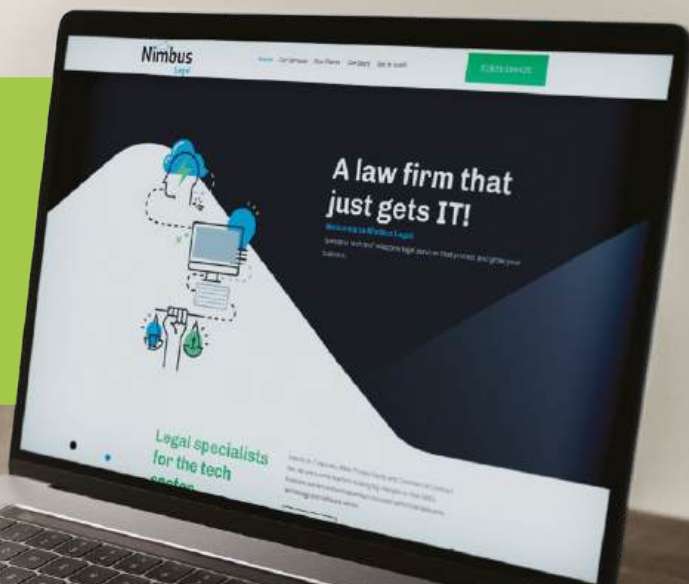


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Master of mental wellbeing

As the Practice Manager at Hollingsworths Solicitors, Mandy Bradbury's impact is said to reach far beyond the daily operations of the firm itself. Her nomination in the Rising Star category at the Niche Business Awards 2025 is a testament to her dedication to her role and to the wider business and community in Leicestershire.

Mandy's solid commitment to supporting others was recognised in 2024 when she won Support Staff of the Year at the Leicestershire Law Society Awards. The accolade highlights her exceptional contributions to the legal profession, but it's her ongoing passion for mental health awareness that truly sets her apart. What's more, Mandy has recently been appointed as one of the first ever Wellbeing Champions at the Leicestershire Law Society – a role that perfectly aligns with her advocacy for mental health support.

Leicestershire Law Society shared Mandy's appointment on Instagram, stating: "Mandy is passionate about creating a supportive environment where law workers, at all levels, can thrive both personally and professionally, and be the best version of themselves."

A keen supporter of mental health charity Lamp, Mandy consistently uses her platform on LinkedIn to raise awareness and champion others before herself. Whether organising

charity events or providing a listening ear to colleagues, she is a driving force for positive change for the business community and legal sector workers in particular.

Speaking on her nomination, Mandy said: "I am delighted to have been nominated for the Rising Star category. It came as a welcome surprise. I just like to get on with my role as Practice Manager at Hollingsworths, ensuring the clients receive excellent service and are looked after along their client journey. I do enjoy the marketing side of the role, particularly the charity-related events."

Company Director Greg Hollingsworth praised Mandy's dedication, saying: "I was so pleased that Mandy was nominated. The work that she does inside and outside the office can sometimes go unnoticed. I am particularly proud of the work that she has done as a Leicestershire Law Society Wellbeing Champion – Mandy has been shining a light on the importance of good mental health in the workplace. It's something that she is really passionate about here, and for her to have the chance to do that externally has been great to see."

Mandy's nomination shines a deserved spotlight on her invaluable contributions, making her a standout contender in this year's Rising Star category.



▲ MANDY BRADBURY

“ MANDY HAS BEEN SHINING A LIGHT ON THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE ”



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THE REAL ENTREPRENEURS' AWARDS 2025

BY THE TIME YOU READ THIS, THE REAL ENTREPRENEURS' AWARDS 2025 WILL HAVE

TAKEN PLACE. NICHE INTERVIEWED WITH SOME OF THE FINALISTS WORDS BY EMILY MILLER

Taking place on April 10 at Leonardo Hotel Hinckley Island, the Real Entrepreneurs' Awards are slightly different this year.

Rather than a formal evening event, guests will gather for a sophisticated afternoon tea. But no matter the format, the awards always celebrate the trailblazers, innovators, and hardworking entrepreneurs who are revolutionising business. It's a powerful celebration of the drive, passion, and resilience that fuel entrepreneurial success.

But that's not all, as this year's event brings even more to the table. The awards will feature a thrilling Pitching Platform sponsored by Nelsons, where start-up businesses will have the opportunity to showcase their ideas and innovations to a panel of expert judges and a live audience. This unique platform provides aspiring entrepreneurs with the chance to present their ventures in front of industry professionals, gaining invaluable exposure and feedback.

The Real Entrepreneurs' Awards are more than just a time filled with accolades; they're a chance for entrepreneurs to step into the spotlight and receive the recognition they truly deserve. Winning an award is a game-changing moment. It's not just about the trophy, it's also about showcasing the countless hours of hard work,

creativity, and persistence that go into building a business. For entrepreneurs, these awards mean increased credibility, greater visibility, and the opportunity to network with other powerhouse leaders in the industry.

So, whether you're attending, rooting for a nominee, or just following along on social media, this event is going to be one for the books. Get ready to follow the action as we roll out live updates throughout the event and in the weeks after on our social media channels!

In the meantime, take a look at our interviews with some of the amazing finalists to find out exactly what put them in that position...

THIS YEAR'S FINALISTS

ENTREPRENEUR FOR GOOD

Sponsored by Kazzoo IT Solutions
Tania Gerard Tania Gerard Digital
Learie Gonsalves One Building Solution
Simon Sansome/Clive Cooper Snowball

THE ENTREPRENEURS' ENTREPRENEUR

Sponsored by AGR Law
Zinhiya Ganeshpanchan Zinhiya Trust/She Inspires
Nick Megson Abacus Flooring Solutions
Elaine Penhaul Lemon and Lime Interiors

SCALE-UP ENTREPRENEUR

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James Bowers Enicor
Sam Cooper The TSD Group
Thomas Cropper Tuk In Foods

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Inzar Haq Insight Consultancy and Landmark Property Solutions
Jane Hearst The National Centre for Creative Health
Claire Zwozny-Bestwick CRZyBest

INTERNATIONAL ENTREPRENEUR

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Jonathan Jones SDE Group
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CURRY CREATORS BECOME TUK OF THE TOWN



ONE OF THE 'SCALE-UP ENTREPRENEUR OF THE YEAR' FINALISTS SHARES THEIR JOURNEY FROM FINANCE TO LEADING A SUCCESSFUL FOOD BRAND – AND IT'S A STORY OF PERSEVERANCE, RISK-TAKING, AND A DEEP PASSION FOR HIGH-QUALITY INDIAN CUISINE

his way up in several roles. But his entrepreneurial ambition never faded. Partnering with a neighbour, he launched his first restaurant, only to see it fail. "That was a really rocky time," he admits. "I found myself in a difficult position, but I wasn't ready to give up."

Determined to pursue his long-held dream, Thomas raised financing and launched Tuk In Foods, a brand dedicated to high-quality, convenient Indian meals. The product took off, and after relocating production from Cornwall to Leicester in 2018, the company has grown rapidly. Today, Tuk In Foods employs over 60 staff and continues to expand.

On his award finalist status, he remains humble: "It's been a huge ambition of mine to raise the brand. But I am never going to be the face of it – it's the incredible team around me who inspire me every day. We all share a passion for high-quality food."

Despite his achievements, he admits to struggling with imposter syndrome, a feeling many entrepreneurs can relate to. "Like so many in business, I sometimes doubt myself. But with the right team and the ability to take risks, anything is possible."

His story serves as an inspiration to entrepreneurs across the UK, demonstrating that with resilience, adaptability, and a clear vision, even the most ambitious dreams born in random moments can become reality.

Find Tuk In Foods at major supermarkets and outlets across the UK.



▲ THOMAS CROPPER

THE TUK TEAM ▼

Tuk In Foods founder Thomas Cropper developed a love for Indian food in the early 2000s, when his mother returned from a trip to India and introduced him to authentic home-made dishes.

"I was hooked from the first bite," he recalls. However, it wasn't until a moment outside London King's Cross Station, eating a ham and cheese baguette, that he realised a gap in the market. "I just thought, 'Why isn't there an easy, healthy way to enjoy great Indian food on the go?'"

Armed with an engineering degree from Cambridge, Thomas embarked on a varied career in finance, working



tukinfoods.com

A ZEST FOR HOME STAGING SUCCESS

'ENTREPRENEURS' ENTREPRENEUR' FINALIST, PROPERTY EXPERT AND HOME STAGING MAESTRO ELAINE PENHAUL HAS PROVEN THAT A COMBINATION OF A KEEN STRATEGIC MIND, ADAPTABILITY, AND A PASSION CAN TURN AN IDEA INTO A THRIVING BUSINESS

Elaine Penhaul's career trajectory in home staging (and becoming the owner of the largest home staging business in the UK outside of London) is far from conventional. Starting as a maths graduate, she became a teacher whilst raising a busy family. She eventually began picking up on property development expertise from her then-husband.

After her marriage ended, she found herself with a natural eye for design and her maths degree came in handy for budgeting when helping friends revamp their homes before selling. What started as informal advice soon turned into a fully-fledged business.

"I never set out to be a home staging entrepreneur," Elaine admits. "But I've always had a low boredom threshold and a strategic brain. I love solving problems, and home staging turned out to be the perfect blend of creativity and data-driven decision-making."

Her business, Lemon and Lime Interiors, is built on the principle that home staging isn't just about making a house look pretty, but rather increasing profitability. Elaine uses her maths background to track data within her business to show clients the financial

impact of presenting a property effectively.

"Reframing a property can make a huge financial difference," she explains. "Many people don't realise how much value they're leaving on the table by not staging their homes properly. With the right tweaks, they can sell faster and for a higher price."

Elaine's entrepreneurial spirit is characterised by dynamism, strategic thinking, and an ability to delegate. "I'm rubbish at detail," she laughs. "But I've learned to surround myself with people who excel in areas I don't. The key to a successful business is recognising what you're good at and letting others handle the rest."

Her diverse career portfolio spanning education, property, and business coaching has given her a unique perspective on growth and innovation. "I never would have imagined this path when I graduated," she reflects. "It would have been so helpful to understand my strengths earlier on. But that's the beauty of entrepreneurship, it's full of surprises."

Beyond running a successful business, Elaine is also an author,



▲ ELAINE PENHAUL

having written two books on home staging and property marketing. Her expertise has made her a sought-after speaker and consultant in the industry. She is passionate about educating homeowners and estate agents alike, ensuring that more people can benefit from the power of staging.

Elaine's journey is a testament to the power of resilience, adaptability, and strategic thinking. As she stands among the finalists for the Entrepreneurs' Entrepreneur award, her success serves as an inspiration to business owners and aspiring entrepreneurs. In the ever-changing world of property, she has carved out a niche and has redefined the value of home staging, proving that numbers and design are the ultimate combination.

lemonandlimeinteriors.co.uk/leicester

CHALLENGES OF LIFE CAN REFINE YOU



A FINALIST IN THE ENTREPRENEURIAL EDUCATOR CATEGORY, AMANDA RIDDLE EXEMPLIFIES RESILIENCE AND STRENGTH. AS THE FOUNDER OF OUTLOOK PARTNERSHIPS UK, SHE EMPOWERS OTHERS TO UNLOCK THEIR POTENTIAL, PROVING THAT CHALLENGES, RATHER THAN HOLDING YOU BACK, CAN REFINE YOU FOR GREATER SUCCESS



▲ AMANDA RIDDLE

Amanda Riddle isn't your average entrepreneur. As the driving force behind Outlook Partnerships UK, she's known for her uplifting spirit, strength-focused learning approach and her unwavering belief that everyone has the potential to succeed. But beyond her professional achievements, Amanda's own journey is what truly sets her apart.

Recently named a finalist in the Entrepreneurial Educator category, Amanda is still processing the honour. "I was genuinely lost for words when I heard about the nomination," she laughs. "Helping people unlock their potential and empowering them to succeed is what I do and keeps me going."

But Amanda's path hasn't been without its hurdles. Last year, she faced a life-changing cancer diagnosis. Instead of letting it hold her back, she chose to see the experience as an opportunity for growth.

"When I was diagnosed, everything shifted. But I firmly believe tough times can fuel growth. Challenges don't have to define you; they can refine you. My experience only deepened my belief in the work I do."

Her positivity is infectious. Amanda's determination to continue

supporting others throughout her own battle is nothing short of inspiring. Her story proves that with the right mindset, adversity can be transformed into strength.

Amanda's approach to business is as refreshing as her outlook on life. Known amongst colleagues and friends for her inquisitive and dynamic approach to problem solving, Amanda believes that true growth comes from playing to your strengths and not trying to fix what isn't broken.

"So many learning and development methods focus on changing people, altering behaviour or character," Amanda explains. "But I see far more value in helping people recognise and use the strengths they already have. When you focus on what works, you unlock potential in a much more authentic and sustainable way."

As a Learning Consultancy Business, her company facilitates change through a range of tailored training solutions aligned to business needs at every level in the organisation: Leadership Programmes, Emotional Intelligence Programmes, Relationship Intelligence, High Impact Workshops, and 121 Coaching; all of which are delivered with a personable touch.

"No two businesses or individuals are the same," she says. "We take time

to understand what makes each client unique and build strategies that will work for them long-term."

Retirement doesn't appear to be an option: "For me, what I do isn't just a profession, it's a passion I can't see myself walking away from anytime soon. I appreciate my time off too, whether that's walking, spending time with family and friends, pottering around in the garden, being away in our new caravan or being more daring and doing a zip-line!"

Her message is simple but powerful: "Success isn't about avoiding challenges, it's about learning and growing from them. If my story can inspire others to keep going, no matter what, then I know I'm doing exactly what I'm meant to do."

Amanda Riddle's story is one of resilience, passion, and purpose. Her positive outlook, personalised coaching style, and inspiring leadership are sure to continue making a meaningful impact.

outlookpartnerships.co.uk

A MAN CHANGING LIVES BORN FROM THE ADVERSITY OF HIS OWN

ONE MAN'S REMARKABLE JOURNEY FROM HARDSHIP TO SUCCESS SHOWCASES TRUE RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION. FROM OVERCOMING PERSONAL TRAUMA TO PIONEERING A SAFER, SUSTAINABLE FLOORING SOLUTION, HIS STORY INSPIRES OTHERS TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES AND MAKE A LASTING IMPACT ON THE WORLD



▲ NICK MEGSON

Nick Megson is a man who has fought his way from rock bottom to industry leader – a story that moved this writer to tears. With over 21 business awards, including being a finalist in the Real Entrepreneurs' Awards 2025, he is incredibly proud of how far he has come. His emotive journey is one of resilience, reinvention, and remarkable courage.

Seven and a half years ago, Nick arrived in Leicester with just £20 in his pocket. He and his wife sold their home in Yorkshire and started over. After 30 years in the flooring industry, he had 'made others very rich' through his knowledge, expertise, and drive, but with fear often ruling the show, he was never in control of his own destiny. But then he did just that.

In 2020, he took the bold step to start his own business. But behind the scenes, he was battling something far bigger that had been holding him back.

"For 48 years, not a day went by when I didn't wish it was my last," Nick bravely shares.

At 11 years old, he was a victim of

sexual abuse, which led to decades of living two lives: one where he appeared functional and successful, and another where he struggled with the crushing burden of trauma. By 2019, he was at his lowest point.

Then, he found Hollie Jordan, a clinical hypnotherapist, and everything changed. "September 6, 2019, was the day everything turned around. After hypnotherapy, I went from wanting to die every day to wanting to live until I'm at least 100."

With a new lease on life, Nick aligned his business with who he truly is. He didn't just want to run a flooring company; he wanted to make a difference.

Abacus Flooring has pioneered a world-first silica-free flooring material made from recycled plastic. Traditional flooring can be hazardous due to silica, a material known to cause fatal lung diseases. Nick developed a machine that removes silica from flooring, making it safer for workers and more sustainable for the planet.

Nick's journey from despair

to success has made him deeply committed to helping others. He supports countless charities, gives talks on mental health and resilience, and helps others overcome their own struggles.

"I don't want to hold onto everything, I want to give back because that's how you keep more in life, in the end."

Now, Nick describes himself as the happiest man alive. He finds joy in simple things like playing golf (badly, he jokes), spending time with loved ones and building up the business and those around him.

"I started to live when I came here to Leicester," he says. "This is where I'll be buried. It's home."

Many entrepreneurs say they want to make a difference, but few actually do. Nick Megson is one of the rare ones. Seeing someone turn so much adversity into something truly inspiring is incredibly humbling. He's a survivor, an innovator, and a man changing lives born from the adversity of his own.

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That's a wrap!

Love Business Expo 2025



INDUSTRY LEADERS REFLECT ON THE EVENT, SHARING THEIR THOUGHTS ON WHAT MADE THIS YEAR'S EXPO STANDOUT



EMA Training Ltd, the new owners of the Love Business Expo, promised us another brilliant exhibition in their first year of hosting, and that's exactly what they delivered. With a full house of exhibitors, first-class speakers, impressive sponsors and hundreds of delegates, the Love Business Expo 2025 did not disappoint.

Now in its twelfth year, the expo has firmly established itself as one of the biggest East Midlands business exhibitions in the calendar, bringing together businesses from a multitude of industries and sectors in all shapes and sizes.

Cross Productions were proud to be named as Associate Sponsor of the 2025 expo. Jenny Cross, CEO of Cross Productions, said: "Love Business Expo 2025 was a fantastic opportunity for us at Cross Productions. Not only did we pick up six new pieces of business, but we also raised our profile and got the brand out there. It was also a great opportunity for some of our newer team members to develop their networking skills in a lively and engaging environment. A brilliant event that delivered real results."

Gemma Orton, Strategic Partnerships & Marketing Director at EMA Training, said: "The biggest highlight for me this year has been to witness the number of new relationships being built due to this wonderful event bringing professionals together from all corners of the region. There aren't

many events that successfully bring together Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire and that's really special.

"This year, we had a really short amount of time to bring the event together and the team worked incredibly hard to do so. I can now say that, following the positive feedback we've received since the event, it really had been worth it".

East Midlands Chamber of Commerce were once again Headline Sponsors of the event. The Chamber's President, Dawn Whitemore (who was also one of the panel speakers at the event) said: "Getting businesses and educators together at events like this is essential, as we don't do enough talking. It's not just about getting people together; it's about making sure the conversation goes the right way and is impactful. For me, that is essential".

Gemma went on to talk about the future of the Love Business Expo: "This is only the beginning for us. I'm really looking forward to being able to explore and implement some of the ideas that we have and to continue to elevate it, along with working so much closer with our key partners and exhibitors. The expo has a fantastic foundation and it's our job to continue to evolve and grow it year after year in line with the needs of the region."

The date is already set for 2026. Pop Thursday, February 12, 2026 in your calendars and email the team at info@lovebusinessseastmidlands.com to secure an exhibition space.

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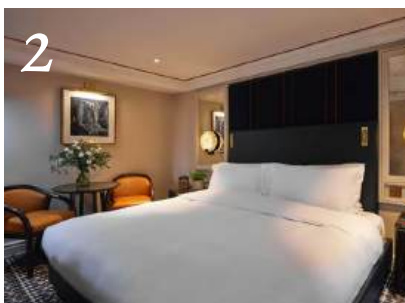
5 getaways within 3 hours of Leicester

If you're looking to escape the hustle and bustle of everyday life and immerse yourself in relaxation and romance, you're in luck! Within just three hours' drive from Leicester, there are numerous luxurious spa resorts and charming getaway spots that offer everything from rejuvenating treatments to picturesque settings

Ragdale Hall Spa

Leicestershire

This local gem is one of the UK's top wellness destinations with over 40 years of experience in providing the finest in spa services. Ragdale's stunning surroundings, set in 13 acres of beautiful countryside, create a peaceful atmosphere that's perfect for couples. Treat yourself to a candlelit dinner at the on-site restaurant after a luxurious spa treatment or unwind in the rooftop infinity pool while enjoying panoramic views of the lush landscape. This tranquil retreat combines relaxation and romance, all within a short drive from home.



The Mayfair Townhouse



London
If you're seeking a luxurious urban retreat, The Mayfair Townhouse offers an opulent, romantic setting right in the heart of London. This chic, stylish hotel combines classic British design with modern flair, making it ideal for a romantic weekend. The hotel offers a private spa suite, perfect for a couple's treatment, alongside a curated selection of indulgent therapies. Afterward, explore the world-class museums, intimate restaurants, and exceptional theatres of London. It's the perfect destination for a romantic city escape with a touch of pampering.

The Scarlet

Cornwall

Nestled on the rugged coastline of Cornwall, The Scarlet is a luxurious eco-friendly spa that offers breathtaking ocean views. A mere three-hour drive from Leicester, this stunning clifftop retreat offers a range of natural, rejuvenating treatments designed to melt away stress. The unique location means you'll wake up to the sound of waves crashing and have access to beach walks at your doorstep. The signature Spa Garden is a tranquil haven for couples, with an outdoor hot tub, sauna, and thermal suites. The hotel's commitment to sustainability only adds to the experience, ensuring your getaway is both luxurious and eco-conscious.



Low Wood Bay Resort

The Lake District

For those who enjoy both the serenity of nature and top-tier spa treatments, the Lake District in Cumbria offers an unbeatable combination of stunning scenery and world-class relaxation. Just under three hours' drive from Leicester, this UNESCO World Heritage site is home to several boutique hotels with spa facilities. One standout is the Low Wood Bay Resort & Spa, which boasts a tranquil lakeside setting with a fabulous spa overlooking Lake Windermere. Enjoy a couples' massage, unwind in the hydrotherapy pool, or stroll hand-in-hand along the lake, in the beauty of the Lake District.



A Devon escape

► Mercure Paignton Hotel Devon

And now for something a little further away... This is our wild card as it's actually around four hours away, but we couldn't resist including it! The route straight down the M5 makes it an easy journey to the English Riviera where you'll find that sea air, sandy beaches, and a posh hotel makes those miles disappear pretty quickly, if you're staying three nights or more.

Despite its polished, businessy feel, the Mercure Paignton Hotel had plenty of families staying over February half-term. Clearly, it's a hit for those wanting a reliable, comfy base close to everything. The whole place was spotless and didn't feel crowded, even at busy times. Our room was impressively spacious, complete with a massive TV, stylish wet room, and floor to ceiling windows for a gorgeous view of the sea.

The hotel's spa – despite no pool

– is a charming experience. It's the brainchild of Mel, who personally designed the calming space. She greeted us herself and introduced her love of Thalgo products that she uses in every treatment. I went for a mini facial and an Indian head massage while my partner had a back, neck, and shoulder massage. You can tell Mel has put a lot of thought and care into creating a relaxing experience backed by years of working in high-end spas.

Breakfast is served with sea views and a direct line of sight to the pier. Offering pastries, a full English buffet, cereals, and fruit, it does the job, but we didn't find anything spectacular to write about here.

There's loads to do in the area. Bygones Museum is an entertaining find, and Kents Cavern Prehistoric Caves are worth a visit. The seaweed-



covered rocks of Fairy Cove, just over the Ivy-laden red harbour wall is the prettiest beach corner you'll find all year – and after a slight tumble down a rock pool, the general manager back at the hotel was attentive with plasters and sanitiser. The Spinning Wheel pub next door has live music four nights a week as well as The Cantina, while Costero Lounge is a sophisticated spot for a cocktail.

Dinner was a success for our steak lover and there was some extra effort for my vegetarian self. The rib-eye steak with peppercorn sauce, triple-cooked chips, and a glass of Flagstone Longitude Shiraz (recommended by the general manager) was spot on. Vegetarian options, however, were a bit lacking with just one main. Our brilliant waiter Alex suggested choosing ingredients from the menu for the chef to make a special dish out of. I ended up with a lovely butternut squash tart with herby potatoes and minted peas.

Paignton's Mercure offers a stylish seaside stay for a romantic escape, a family-friendly base, or just a change of scenery from Leicester life. The rooms, spa, location, activities and kind staff make this a getaway to remember.



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A day in the life of...



For Liberal Democrat Councillor and HIT Technology founder **Paul Hartshorn**, the day begins long before he opens his laptop or checks his phone

7am

Paul wakes up, feeds the dog, but breakfast isn't on the agenda for him. While many tout it as the most important meal of the day, Paul's stomach needs more time to wake up than he does. Instead, he uses this quiet hour to mentally prepare for what lies ahead.

8am

It's time to check those emails. Staying up to date is key, and he makes it a point to respond to anything pressing right away.

9am

Paul dives into a Teams meeting with a new client to discuss a project plan for their Syspro installation, a four-month-long endeavour that will require careful coordination. The next hour, from 10-11am is spent catching up with the managing director of HIT Technology to review updates on various projects.

1pm

Paul sits down for lunch, ensuring he's fuelled for the long night ahead as it will be a while before he gets the chance to eat again. Hosting his radio show takes energy, so he eats a little extra to stay sharp. As he eats, he catches up on the news, making final tweaks to his radio notes, which he's refined throughout the week. At the same time, he handles urgent casework in his role as a District councillor, responding to emails and addressing pressing issues

12pm

Paul transitions into a demo session of Syspro, showcasing its ERP capabilities to a potential new customer.

2pm

Paul is in another meeting - this time with Hannah, the Neighbourhood Lead for Mental Health with the NHS. They're working together to establish a community hub in Blaby to support those facing mental health challenges. It's a meaningful initiative, and Paul's contributions are helping shape a valuable resource for the community.

3pm

Paul shifts gears again to meet with representatives from The Manufacturer magazine, discussing plans for their participation in the Manufacturing Digitalisation Summit 2025.

4pm

Paul takes a much-needed pause, heading out for a walk with his dog. This brief window of solitude provides an opportunity to clear his head and recharge.

10pm

While he aims to be in bed before midnight, life doesn't always cooperate.. And tomorrow? It all starts again at pace.

5pm

Paul finally unwinds. He eats, showers, and catches up on the news. Often, he uses this time to draft and schedule Facebook posts for the following day and respond to any lingering emails.

Paul is on the road, driving to Harborough FM. He arrives 30 minutes early to set up and prepare for his radio show, which kicks off at **6pm**. For three hours, Paul entertains listeners with music, conversation, and his unique on-air energy, wrapping up the show at **9pm**.



The modern Freemason

For centuries, Freemasonry has carried an air of mystery. It's been depicted in films, whispered about in conspiracy theories, and often misunderstood. But what does it really mean to be a Freemason in the UK today?

WORDS BY EMILY MILLER

Freemasonry's reputation for secrecy isn't entirely unwarranted. "There are three secrets that are divulged on your first day," Stuart Kellock, a long-standing member of Commercial Lodge 1391 in Leicestershire reveals. "One of them is a handshake!" I apologise for my chuckle here. He laughs and warmly tells me I'm not in trouble for that.

While the meetings and ceremonies may seem mysterious to outsiders, Stuart explains: "The traditions are part of the rich history of Freemasonry, but they are by no means of exclusion. We are about community." Today, the organisation is far more open, with lodges welcoming more members than ever.

Despite the myths, becoming

a Freemason is remarkably straightforward. Any man aged 18 or older can apply, regardless of background, profession, or beliefs. The organisation thrives on diversity, with members from all walks of life forming strong bonds through shared values and purpose.

"It's a place where men can form lifelong friendships," Stuart says. "We support each other, both personally and professionally, and we share a real sense of camaraderie." It's a structured, friendly group that encourages

personal growth and giving back to the wider community.

Freemasons follow four key principles: integrity, friendship, respect, and service. Members commit to being upstanding individuals in both their personal and professional lives. They form a close-knit support network that extends beyond the walls of the lodge, looking out for one another in times of need. "If a fellow Mason or their family is struggling, we rally round," Stuart explains. "That's what part of being a member means."

At a time when community feels frighteningly fractured to this writer, I reflect that what I am learning about the organisation is refreshing. "For men in particular, if we are experiencing difficulty, we can tend to close off rather than open up. The friendships in the Freemasons are real – they are a place where we trust one another and really do talk to each other."

One of the most significant and lesser-known aspects of Freemasonry is its charitable work. Across the UK, Freemasons contribute millions of pounds to local causes, funding everything from hospital equipment to food banks; they are one of the UK's largest givers to charity – I am shocked. "Helping others is a huge part of what we do. We organise fundraising events all the time and work closely with local charities; we just go about it all very much under the radar!"

While ceremonies and traditions are an essential part of Freemasonry, they are only one aspect.

"Social gatherings and collaborative projects create an environment where members can grow and connect. Being a member has become such an important part of my life."

For those curious about joining, Stuart encourages meeting existing Masons to learn more. You can also email him at stuart.kellock@live.com or call the Leicestershire and Rutland Headquarters on 0116 254 5325.

“Helping others is a huge part of what we do. We organise fundraising events all the time and work closely with local charities”

Gates family cultivates new growth in Hinckley

Creating a 'Woodlands' wonderland, the family behind Gates Garden Centre recently opened their second establishment, Gates Woodlands Hinckley



For over 75 years, the Gates name has been synonymous with horticultural excellence and a passion for creating exceptional customer experiences. Established in 1948 by Fred and Ivy Gates, what began as a humble market garden in Cold Overton, near to Oakham, has blossomed into an award-winning rural garden centre. Now, this thriving family business is embarking on a new chapter, bringing its unique blend of tradition and innovation to Hinckley with the acquisition and transformation of the former Dobbies Stapleton, now known as Gates Woodlands Hinckley.

This exciting expansion marks a significant milestone for Gates Garden Centre, building on the resounding success of their flagship Oakham store.

"The Gates team are excited to collaborate with their new colleagues, enhancing and expanding the existing infrastructure to deliver the signature

Gates brand experience at this much-loved Garden Centre," comments Nigel Gates, grandson of founders Fred and Ivy. This commitment to preserving the heritage of the original Garden Centre, while infusing it with the Gates touch is central to their vision for the Hinckley site.

Every springtime, Gates' Oakham store becomes a destination in its own right, renowned for its extensive collection of plants, shrubs, and specimen trees, solidifying its position as one of the region's premier garden centres. Their celebrated Christmas shop draws visitors from across the region from October onwards, while the Gates Farm Shop, recently crowned the UK's best by the Garden Centre Association, and the exceptional dining experience at the Garden Restaurant in Oakham, have become local favourites.

These hallmarks of the Gates



FRED AND IVY GATES

experience are set to be replicated at Gates Woodlands Hinckley. The team says customers can look forward to the same commitment to quality, passion for horticulture, and dedication to creating a welcoming and enjoyable atmosphere. And in a nod to the family's heritage, the new restaurant will be named Fred & Ivy's, a fitting tribute to the couple whose vision laid the foundation for this remarkable success story, from their walled Victorian Garden and Greenhouses in Cold Overton, Oakham in 1948.

The acquisition of the Hinckley site is an investment in the local community. While the existing team will remain in place, the expansion of products and services has led to a recruitment drive, creating new jobs and opportunities within the local community.

The transformation of Dobbies Stapleton into Gates Woodlands Hinckley is a testament to the enduring strength of family values and a commitment to excellence. From a small market garden nurtured by Fred and Ivy to a thriving rural garden centre and now, a new venture in Hinckley, Nigel and Jack Gates (great-grandchild of Fred and Ivy) continue to cultivate growth in their business and the communities they serve. This is more than just a garden centre – it's a legacy in bloom.

Gates Woodlands Hinckley, LE9 8JE opened on February 26, for the public to enjoy.



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DIY SOS

transforms Leicester girl's home

A family home in Aylestone has undergone a life-changing transformation thanks to BBC's DIY SOS, to support eight-year-old Isla, who lives with a rare genetic bone disorder

Isla, aged eight from Aylestone, was born with mandibuloacral dysplasia, a condition that makes her bones brittle and causes premature aging. Her condition affects her mobility and independence, making everyday tasks like reaching light switches and using the bathroom difficult. Her mother, Stacey, has long wanted to adapt the house but lacked the resources and expertise.

That changed when DIY SOS stepped in. The renovation team was joined by 160 volunteers – out of the 1,000 plus who applied, nearly breaking records for the show – to complete the ambitious project in just eight days.

In a Facebook Reel for BBC Leicester, DIY SOS presenter Nick Knowles said during the build: "Congratulations Leicester. We always think it's a little bit of a health check; how good is your community spirit in your area? Well, I can tell you, Leicester is alive and well and kicking.

"...The welcome from the neighbours has been so supportive in the area. The bakeries bringing down sausage rolls and things, we've got Salvation Army doing teas and coffees, and as a result, this amazing group of people have actually built an amazing home."

Modifications included a downstairs bathroom, lowered light switches and door handles, and extra handrails, all of which were aimed at helping Isla move



around more freely and safely.

Many Leicester-based organisations were involved in the project, including Samworth Brothers which catered hot food to volunteers; GH Services supplied and fitted TVs, projectors and Apple products; Aley Shopfitting helped with construction work; and many more.

with community spirit, and we're proud to have been part of it. A real labour of love."

Anotnia Doyle, a photographer who helped capture the work behind the scenes for Isla's family, said on LinkedIn: "The whole project is incredibly well organised, from the road closures, rerouted buses, parking for the

“It was a rewarding project filled with community spirit, and we're proud to have been part of it. A real labour of love”

On behalf of volunteers from Direct Electrical, employee Namrata Tanna said: "We handled the complete 'rip-out' of old wiring and installed the new system, including wiring, back boxes, lights, switches, and sockets inside and out, along with medical sockets in Isla's room. Collaborating with other electricians, the Direct Electrical team worked from start to finish, completing three months of work in just seven days for Isla. It was a rewarding project filled

tradesmen/women, access to the street/house for lorries carrying materials, there are catering vans to ensure that everyone is fed and the DIY SOS team are more than happy to mingle and chat, while managing the build."

Stacey told BBC Radio Leicester: "It already has changed our lives. I have that peace of mind knowing Isla's needs will be met when we go back into that house."

The DIY SOS episode featuring Isla and her family is expected to air this year.

Turning mortgages into memories

Buying a home is a big deal, but many don't realise it's not just about investing in your future, it's cementing your lifestyle, and the foundation of your life. Emily Miller caught up with leading mortgage broker of Airborne Mortgage Solutions to find out why advising on the numbers is more human than you'd think

A home is where you'll build memories, dream big, and watch your family grow. Getting a mortgage is one of the first steps in a home ownership journey and for many of us it can be a confusing start. Whilst of course the aim of the game is securing the funds, it's about so much more about as director and advisor Kamlesh Lodhia explains, "Buying a home is such a significant life milestone, and the decision-making process goes far beyond just the numbers. It's about understanding the person, their goals, and how their mortgage fits into their broader lifestyle."

Affordability is always at the heart of any mortgage decision. However, it's not simply about making sure you can afford the initial payments; it's about taking into consideration the long-term implications of the mortgage on your finances and lifestyle.

Kamlesh stresses: "It's crucial to think beyond just the monthly payment. You need to consider how a mortgage fits within your lifestyle both now and in the future. For instance, if you're planning for a growing family, or maybe looking at a career change, how will that impact your income or ability to make payments?"

As interest rates fluctuate and economic circumstances shift, it's important to factor in any possible changes that could affect your financial situation. Whether it's the possibility of job changes, starting a family, or even personal health concerns, being aware of how these factors may affect your long-term affordability is vital. "We encourage our clients to think holistically, to envision where they'll be in the coming years, and how their mortgage should support those life changes, not just the immediate present."

A home is a place where memories are created, where families grow, and where significant moments of life unfold. Buying a home is often tied to personal dreams and aspirations, and the mortgage that supports it should align with these deeper emotional elements.


"When people choose a home, it's often a reflection of where they want to be in their life. Whether it's a cosy starter home or a forever home, it's about aligning the mortgage with their dreams, not just what they can afford right now."

The process of securing a mortgage is built on this understanding of the emotional connection people have with

their homes. Kamlesh explains: "We don't just want to help people get into a property. We want to ensure they're getting into a property that they feel is right for them in the long run. It's about creating a sense of stability and security, not just financial, but emotional as well. There's no question 'too silly', anything that I can do to alleviate worries when it comes to the mortgage application process I will absolutely do."

When considering mortgages, one option that I know I hadn't ever considered before was opting for a longer-term mortgage. Kamlesh explains: "While it may seem like a longer commitment, it can have significant benefits, especially in the short term. By going for a longer-term mortgage, you can reduce your monthly payments, making it easier to manage your budget without compromising on the type of home you want."

"If your lifestyle allows and you're in a position to pay off your mortgage earlier, you always have that flexibility to do so without penalty. It's a great way to balance your current financial needs with your long-term goals and it's often an option that many people overlook."



“Life is unpredictable, and it’s not always easy to foresee exactly where you’ll be in five, 10, or 20 years”

This approach is particularly beneficial for people who are in the early stages of their careers, raising families, or those with unpredictable incomes. A longer-term mortgage can give them the breathing room needed to navigate their financial commitments while ensuring they aren’t stretching themselves too thin each month.

As Kamlesh points out: “The beauty of longer-term mortgages is their flexibility. Life is unpredictable, and it’s not always easy to foresee exactly where you’ll be in five, 10, or 20 years. Having a mortgage that offers flexibility means you can adjust your payments to suit your changing circumstances. If you’re in a position to make larger payments later on, you can pay off the loan faster. If not, your monthly payments remain manageable.”

“We listen to our clients, and we listen to their stories,” says Kamlesh. “They often come to us as clients and leave as friends. We want our clients to feel confident in their home purchase, knowing that they’ve made a decision that will support their lifestyle now and in the years to come.”

Visit airbornemortgagesolutions.co.uk to find more mortgage options and tips for the future.

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Housing market heats up

Buyer demand is rising, mortgage rates are stabilising, and the market is buzzing. Harry Singh of Fine & Country shares key insights with Kerry Smith on what's driving East Midlands property trends



HARRY SINGH

The East Midlands housing market has seen a promising start to 2025, with buyer activity remaining strong despite mortgage rates staying relatively high. According to Harry Singh, a property expert at Fine & Country in Leicestershire, the current market dynamics are driven by a mix of increased demand, a rise in available properties, and evolving economic conditions.

"The beginning of the year has been encouraging, with many buyers eager to move before the reduced stamp duty deadline in March," Harry explains. "Sales momentum has continued into spring, a season traditionally associated with high market activity.

With longer daylight hours and improved kerb appeal, this is an ideal time for both buyers and sellers."

Historically, spring has been the most active season for property transactions. Over the past three years, 27% of annual sales took place in spring, the highest proportion compared to other seasons. Singh highlights that February and March are the best months to list a home, with two-thirds of properties listed in these months successfully completing a sale.

"The data shows that February and January tend to have the fastest turnaround, with an average of 51 days to find a buyer, closely followed by March and April at 52 days."

One significant development shaping the market is the recent adjustment in interest rates. The Bank of England has lowered the base rate from 4.75% to 4.5% in response to slowing inflation, which now stands at 2.5%. Harry believes that while interest rates are forecast to decrease further to 3.75% by the end of the year, mortgage rates will remain within the 4-5% range.

Harry points out that prime markets in Loughborough and Chesterfield are currently leading in performance. He says: "There's a clear appetite among consumers to move in the next two years. Around 22% of renters and nearly a fifth of homeowners are considering a move, while a quarter of people are watching the market closely."

Despite strong market activity, price growth is expected to remain moderate. Forecasts indicate a 3.1% rise in property values over 2025, influenced by mortgage rate stability and the availability of homes. The north-south divide in house price growth is likely to persist according to Harry. However, the East Midlands is showing positive signs, with annual price growth improving from 0.4% in Q3 2024 to 2.6% in Q4.

"With steady demand, a good supply of homes, and a stable economic outlook, the East Midlands remains an attractive location for buyers and sellers alike," Harry concludes. "The market is in a strong position for those looking to make a move in 2025."





Jamie Marcus Way, Cottage Farm, OADBY LE2 4RZ

Ideally positioned on the highly sought after Cottage Farm development, by Messrs Bloor Homes, is this four bedroom detached home boasting an attractive corner plot. EPC B **Guide Price £550,000**



Jamie Marcus Way, Cottage Farm, OADBY LE2 4RZ

Ideally located within the sought after Cottage Farm development is this stylish three bedroom, three storey home. EPC B **Guide Price £375,000**



Rawlings Court, OADBY LE2 4UU

Offered to the market for the first time since the property was built is this handsome four bedroom detached home located within the ever popular Oadby Grange development. EPC D **Guide Price £425,000**



Woodlands Court

On offer is this handsome four bedroom extended home boasting over 1400 sqft within the ever popular Oadby Grange development. EPC C **Offers Over £375,000**



Heythrop Close, OADBY LE2 4SL

Occupying an enviable plot within the highly sought after Oadby Grange is this handsome, extended detached family home. EPC B **Offers over £600,000**



Fernie Close, OADBY LE2 4SJ

A handsome four bedroom home boasting one of the Oadby Granges' largest plots. Owned for over 30 years the property is the ideal family home with endless potential. EPC C **Guide Price £575,000**



Fenwick Road, OADBY LE2 4UF
Rent: £1,495 PCM : 4 Bedroom House



Green View, OADBY LE2 1AT
Rent: £3,295 PCM : 5 Bedroom House



Chaucer Street, LE2 1HD
Rent: £2,595 PCM : 7 Bedroom House



Ship Avenue, LE3 2YB
Rent £1,485 PCM : 4 Bedroom House



Uplands Road, OADBY LE2 4NQ
Rent: £1,275 PCM : 3 Bedroom House



Stillington Cres, HAMILTON LE5 1BR
Rent 1,495 PCM : 4 Bedroom House



The Broadway, OADBY LE2 2HF
Rent: £2,500 PCM : 5 Bedroom House



Morland Avenue, OADBY LE2 2PF
Rent: £1,695 PCM : 3 Bedroom House



The Laurels Main Street, PEATLING PARVA LE17

The Laurels has been a home for hundreds of years. Originally constructed in 1785, it is a dwelling of immense elegance and historical charm that has been carefully nurtured and renovated to its period eminence by its present owners. EPC D **Guide Price £1,595,000**



The Pines Cranmer Lane, NORTH KILWORTH LE17

Nestled in a quiet location without any through traffic and within a conservation area in North Kilworth, this spacious property has been nurtured and styled by its present owners of ten years to create a family home. EPC C **Offers over £930,000**



Shirley Road, STONEYGATE LE2

A stunning 4-bed, 2-bath home in sought-after Stoneygate, featuring three reception rooms, a fantastic dining-kitchen, and a lovely private garden. EPC D **Guide Price £875,000**



Quickthorns, OADBY LE2

Exceptional 4-bed executive home in a private cul-de-sac off Manor Road, Oadby. Features elegant interiors, landscaped gardens, double garage, garden office, and approved loft plans. A rare chance for luxury family living in a sought-after location. EPC C **Offers over £1,100,000**



Woodlands Close, STRETTON HALL LE2

Discover luxury living in this 5-bedroom detached home in Stretton Hall, Oadby. Featuring high-end finishes, a spacious Alexander Lewis kitchen, and approved plans for future enhancements. Perfectly blending elegance with modern functionality. EPC C **Offers over £1,150,000**



Hebe House, BURTON OVERY LE8

Hebe House, The Lea is a stunning property, surrounded by rolling fields and a real feeling of space. This large, seven-bedroomed, detached family home is nestled in 1 acres (approx.) of beautifully landscaped gardens. EPC B **Offers over £1,600,000**



The Oak House, ARNESBY, LE8

A fabulous, light-filled, individual home offering versatile open-plan living, 4/5 bedrooms, a delightful garden, and secure parking for several cars. With a detached building offering annexe potential, it's perfect for family living. EPC C **Guide Price £1,250,000**



Buzzard Barn, SAPCOTE LE9

'An executive home with rural surroundings.' Buzzard Barn is approached along a quiet, privately retained driveway, edged along one boundary with an established hedge. Open countryside abounds. EPC B **Offers over £850,000**



Sackville Gardens, STONEYGATE LE2

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What makes good development?

Growth, growth, growth

Demand exceeds supply for UK housing, so pressure to build more homes is greater than ever – but what defines good development?

Dr Andrew Golland, Housing Viability Specialist and Section 106 Negotiator looks at the challenges shaping the future of housing

The focus of government at the moment is on growth. And the route to this is through house building. Huge green field housing sites are going to be allocated through the planning system, new 'garden cities' planned and, wherever possible, sites in the urban areas regenerated.

But whilst the focus is on getting stuff built, what is critical is how it will be developed and ultimately, what makes 'good development'?

'Good' development

In my view, 'good' development meets three criteria. It delivers margins for developers, land uplift for those who own sites, and, critically, it delivers the necessary infrastructure for local communities in the form of roads, schools, affordable housing, recreation areas and biodiversity.

It is taken as read that new housing should be well designed and planned within new development.

The tricky bit is getting the balance right between developers, landowners, and the community. It was first a Labour government, which in 1947 strove to get this balance.

The Planning Acts made it clear that where planning consent is given, the uplift in land value is created by the efforts of the community and as such, new development should be properly supported. Because development rights in this country are effectively nationalised, this still applies and local planning authorities seek, via what are known as 'Section 106 agreements' to mitigate the impacts of new development via the provision of local amenities and housing of an affordable nature for local people.

Where does all this go wrong?

It is quite easy to describe the perfect development – where all concerned are happy. It is more common, however, to end up encountering situations where few are happy; and very often this happens to the local authority and community.

Historically, problems in achieving successful development have been created largely by local politics. Local politicians won't allocate land for housing in face of local opposition – NIMBY (Not In My Back Yard) voices. Where this happens, not enough land is allocated through the planning system, meaning landowners with allocations hold all the cards.

When developers come to do deals with landowners, the prices agreed on do not allow enough to provide for all the community facilities set out in the local authority's planning policies. Where local authorities dig their heels in, a developer will have recourse to the Planning Inspectorate who takes one look at an authority's lack of land supply and comes down in favour of the developer. Goodbye affordable housing, goodbye schools, goodbye roads, goodbye playing fields, etc, etc.

There is a large irony here, because new developments are very often opposed by local people on the grounds that that they don't provide these facilities; yet it is their own opposition to new development that means new schemes are under-provided for.

What is the answer?

Government thinks it has the answer. It has changed the rules on land release. Instead of the number of houses needed being calculated by reference to population change, local authorities will now need to make sure their housing stock is increased annually by 1%. In conjunction, government believes it can compel farmers and other landowners to release land for housing, which includes all the necessary local infrastructure.

It's not going to work, simply because there is not enough land being allocated through the system. Government are planning for 300,000 homes per year. If they want developments supported with local facilities, it needs to be



“There is an expectation that by building more homes, the price of housing for youngsters and others entering the market will fall to an affordable level. This won't happen”

closer to a million.

Moreover, there is an expectation that by building more homes, the price of housing for youngsters and others entering the market will fall to an affordable level. This also won't happen. All the best and most recent research shows that we will need to build far more than the current target to get anything more than the most paltry reductions in prices. Prices are set in the secondhand market.

Lessons for Leicester and the county

Strategic planning across local authority boundaries all but collapsed under the last government. It therefore needs resurrecting – and not least, right here in the city and county.

The problems for the city are evident – not enough land, and sites that are not viable. In large measure, the lack of viability relates to existing use values; as an example, factories or offices making way for residential. In these instances, the land value created by consent for housing doesn't cover the value of the employment use or building. So, there are difficulties, although it should be stated that many urban authorities including the city, Blaby, Oadby and Wigston have not made the most of development opportunities where the market is strong.

The knock-on effect from the city's

housing challenges is now for the rural authorities – Harborough, Charnwood, Melton, Hinckley and Bosworth and North West Leicestershire. These authorities really need to increase land supply in order to deliver well balanced and successful new development. But they are mainly going to have to do this on green field.

From a pure viability viewpoint, the uplift is huge. Taking an authority like Harborough for example, a new build is around £300,000 on average; less build costs means a plot worth around £100,000. Farmland would transact at less than £1,000 for the 'plot'. So the returns are huge and there is very ample scope to deliver all the necessary community facilities.

But it isn't going to happen unless the authorities really commit to develop. And worryingly, the market may also stymie new house building. Currently, build costs are rising faster than house prices, meaning developers are jittery.

I hope we do get the political consensus we need to deliver good housing development. Those of us lucky enough to own a home need to recognise that its value is largely down to a public process of planning which, in turn, will hopefully deliver good housing for those less well-off and those in the emerging generations.

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- **Take That Tribute Night:** Celebrate the season with a tribute to one of the UK's most iconic bands.
- **Christmas Conference Delegate Packages:** Add some holiday cheer to your corporate events.
- **Festive Afternoon Teas:** Indulge in traditional Christmas treats in an elegant setting.
- **New Year's Eve Party:** Ring in 2026 with a spectacular celebration.

WINSTANLEY HOUSE

Winstanley House will be hosting an array of festive events, ensuring there's something for everyone.

Here's what to look forward to:

- **Shared Party Nights:** Available from the 27th November through to the 3rd January.
- **Take That Tribute Night:** Sing and dance to your favorite hits this Christmas.
- **Christmas Conference Delegate Packages:** Make your business meetings merry.
- **Afternoon Tea with Santa:** A magical experience for the little ones to meet Santa himself.
- **ABBA Christmas Party Night:** Dance the night away with the sounds of ABBA.
- **Black Iron Festive Menu:** Enjoy seasonal dining at Black Iron from the 17th November.
- **Christmas Day at Black Iron and in Our Grand Ballroom:** Experience the ultimate Christmas Day feast.
- **Festive Afternoon Teas at Black Iron:** A festive twist on our award-winning fare.
- **Black Iron at Home Christmas Boxes:** Available to order until the 16th December for collection on the 23rd and 24th.
- **New Year's Eve Party:** Ring in 2026 with a spectacular celebration.
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CULTURE

HOOKED ON TRUE CRIME

Leicester's dark history and upcoming events Words by Kerry Smith

T rue crime has become a cultural obsession in recent years with books, podcasts, documentaries, and immersive theatre experiences captivating audiences across the UK. Living here in Leicester, the city where DNA fingerprinting was discovered and first used to convict a murderer, we have a long and complex history with crime and forensic science, so we're bound to have some sort of community with an inquisitiveness towards the subject.

But what is it about murder and mystery that intrigues us so much? Dr Matt Hopkins, Professor in Criminology at University of Leicester, says it's down to our evolutionary history.

"Generally, research refers to the notion of 'morbid curiosity' and why humans often seem to be fascinated by evil, murder and violence," he tells us. From my own experience of watching true crime series, I know this dark appeal stems from a desire to uncover the who, what, why, where, when, and how, along with a natural nosiness to peek at the skeletons inside other people's closets.

"Research suggests the level of curiosity can depend on personality traits. It's part of the evolutionary process to help us to identify threats, and process what threat looks like. Some refer to reaffirming our disgust at something. So, often by seeing or watching something repulsive, we actually reaffirm our moral compass, sense of what is wrong, and disgust. Of course, there can be a concern that

watching lots of violence – such as via social media – can have the effect of normalising it."

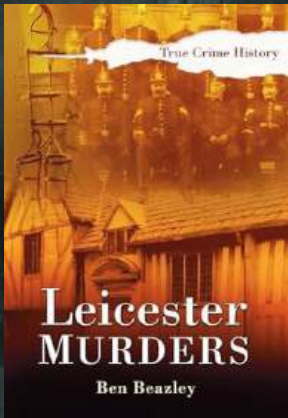
This raises questions about how true crime seeps into our daily lives, from the accounts we follow, and podcasts we listen to, to the growing number of true crime-themed events and activities happening right here in Leicester. For true crime enthusiasts, there are several upcoming events and books that explore Leicester's darker past, which serve to educate as well as to entertain.

Whether you prefer reading about historic cases or stepping into the courtroom yourself, Leicester has a range of media to provide a fascinating glimpse into the world of crime, justice, and the human psyche.

We'll leave this list right here for you to make up your own mind about engaging with the true crime genre.

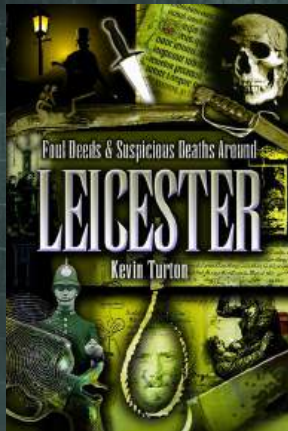
BOOKS ON LEICESTER'S CRIMINAL PAST

For those wanting to dive into the city's history, two books provide deep insight into Leicester's most notorious crimes.



Leicester Murders (Sutton True Crime History) by Ben Beazley

This book explores infamous murder cases from the mid-1800s to the 1950s, including the brutal killing of John Paas in 1832 and the controversial case of Archie Johnson in 1912. Written by former policeman and historian Ben Beazley, it offers a unique perspective on how crime and justice evolved in Leicester.



Foul Deeds and Suspicious Deaths Around Leicester by Kevin Turton

This collection of baffling and sinister crimes from Leicestershire's history delves into cases that were investigated long before modern forensic science. Turton recounts true stories from a time when guilt or innocence had to be determined without DNA profiling or modern investigative techniques.



THE RE-TRIAL OF HANNAH READ

TRUE CRIME EVENTS IN LEICESTER

For those looking to immerse themselves in crime stories in a more interactive way, there are several events lined up.

The Re-Trial of Hannah Read

April 26, 2025 at Guildhall

This event recreates the 1825 trial of Hannah Read, who was accused of murdering her husband by pushing him into the Grand Union Canal. The audience will serve as a modern jury, determining whether she would still be found guilty today. Read was the last woman in Leicester to be publicly executed and dissected after death, making her case a particularly chilling part of local history.

Murder Trial Tonight

May 10 & 11 at Athena

An immersive theatre production where audience members become the jury in a live murder trial. This interactive experience brings true crime stories to life, allowing the audience to play a crucial role in deciding the verdict.

Manhunter and Mindhunter

May 19 at The Little Theatre

A two-man show exploring the psychology of serial killers, with a focus on notorious criminal Levi Bellfield. Featuring true crime experts who have appeared on UK television, this production promises an in-depth analysis of some of the most infamous murder cases.



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HIGHCROSS HIGH STREET ENTRANCE PLAN

LEADING HIGHCROSS INTO A NEW ERA

Sarah Harrison, City Centre Director, met with the new senior team at Highcross to learn about the exciting plans to 'breathe new life' into the centre



HELEN BEVINS, MICHELLE MENEZES AND KIRSTY FREUDENREICH

Michelle Menezes joined Highcross Leicester as Centre Director at the beginning of January and is evidently keen to make her mark, commenting that her new challenge is "a fab way to start the new year with a fresh, exciting venture".

However, Michelle remembers Highcross from many years ago, where she was given her first opportunity to work in large retail with New Look. Having joined the team as a Deputy Manager, Michelle then went on to hold a number of senior retail roles, more recently holding the position of Shopping Centre Manager at Princesshay in Exeter, where she helped the centre become one of the best-loved retail destinations in the UK.

The Highcross management team has been further bolstered by the appointments of Kirsty Freudenreich as Head of Operations, who has a career in retail spanning 18 years; and leading the way on the marketing strategy is Helen Bevins, Senior Marketing Manager, who has over 20 years marketing experience.

These are exciting times ahead for Highcross. Along with developing the current brand offering, Michelle and the team acknowledge that there is a need to invest in the centre's

infrastructure, enhance connections with local stakeholders, and strengthen the team – focusing particularly on local talent.

Michelle says: “I want Highcross to be viewed as more than just a shopping and leisure destination: a place where people come, spend time together and create memories. It’s a part of the fabric of Leicester; a place where people have been meeting, working and spending time together. I am excited that I am in a position to lead the centre into this new era, to see it really thrive.”

The first step was a brand refresh. In 2024, the Highcross team undertook extensive research and market insight into the Highcross Leicester brand at that time, this insight powered the development of their new look. The main objective being to enhance the brand’s perception and to resonate more with the local community.

The new brand positioning for Highcross is that the centre is viewed as more than just shopping. Helen explains: “Highcross is more than just a collection of shops, we are a meeting place where anyone and everyone can come and relax, gather and hang out – just like a home. The place where our visitors get the latest essential must-have item and grab a midday meal deal, but where they also come to connect with their community through sport, music, culture, food, drink and art.”

Phase one of the new brand rollout started in December 2024, with revitalised imagery and messaging being installed throughout the centre. The big reveal on February 22 saw the centre dressed with phase two of the new visuals and messaging. It launched with a bang with local musicians, acoustic sets, and a vintage tearoom where visitors were treated to ‘a cuppa and a cake’. One lucky visitor won a Golden Ticket and took home a bundle of goodies sponsored by some Highcross businesses. A further 30 lucky visitors received BID Leicester gift cards.

Next will be the development of the four fantastic new



HIGHCROSS SHOPPING CENTRE

entrances to the centre. Emphasising the city’s cultural heritage, the entrances will be a celebration of Leicester’s vibrant fashion and textiles legacy.

Highcross plans to continue to excite this year, particularly in relation to new brands. Butterwick Bakery and Castore opened their doors in 2024, and Mango is one of the latest to announce it will be opening over the coming months.

And it won’t stop there. Working with the landlords, and property managing agents Savills, Michelle and the team have lots of exciting plans to breathe new life into the centre, designed to attract more visitors and have a positive impact on the wider city.

The team and Michelle have already developed relationships with key organisations such as BID Leicester, Leicester City Council, Leicester City Football Club, Cosmopolitan Arts, Leicester Comedy Festival, and Leicester Riders to name a few.

Highcross was a key partner of Light Up Leicester and welcomed and delighted visitors to the centre with the stunning art installation ‘Flux’. The centre is proud to be a key sponsor of LOROS’ STOMP Around Leicester – where the city will be home to a trail of huge Elephant sculptures that are vibrantly painted by local and well-known artists.

The Highcross team has created a calendar packed with events, pop-up experiences and incentives for their visitors to come and enjoy. They are also working with local organisations on community events, exhibitions and outreach events to support the Leicestershire community.

Michelle added: “My goal, as Centre Director, is to create an exciting, contemporary and welcoming space that staff are proud to work at, residents are happy to live near, and shoppers can’t wait to visit. In fact, we have already taken steps in doing this.”

The team at Highcross very much looks forward to further strengthening relationships with the city and county. If you’re interested in finding out more, get in touch with Michelle on michelle.menezes@highcrossleicester.com.



HIGHCROSS EAST GATES ENTRANCE PLAN



ELEVATE GAME NIGHTS WITH LEICESTER RIDERS' 1967 HOSPITALITY

Looking to create a memorable experience for your clients, colleagues or business partners?

Winner for the Best Value Experience in The Padded Seat 2024 Awards, the Leicester Riders' 1967 Club Hospitality packages at the Mattioli Arena is the ultimate way to blend thrilling basketball action with premium corporate entertainment.

Why Choose 1967 Club Hospitality

For just £90+vat per game, the 1967 Club transforms game night into an unforgettable event. Book a table for up to 10 guests and enjoy exclusive perks designed to impress.

Begin your evening with VIP access, mingling with sponsors, club officials and other guests in an exclusive setting.

Upon arrival, enjoy a complimentary drink, choosing from beers, wines or soft beverages, served at a private bar.

Before the game, sit down to a locally-sourced two-course meal designed to impress, followed by a unique opportunity to hear from the team with a pre-game Q&A session.

When it's time for tip-off, take your premium seat close to the action, with courtside and baseline views offering an unparalleled experience.



After the final buzzer, return to the lounge to reflect on the game, network with players, sponsors and guests and enjoy the relaxed post-game atmosphere.

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Food Bank & Pantry Open 3 times a week

Mental Health Day Centre Creative activities, gentle exercise and a welcoming community, we help people rebuild their lives



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Corporate Donations Help fund our hot meal service, food bank and mental health support.

Sponsorship Opportunities Partner with us to support a specific programme and showcase your commitment to social impact.

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TOGETHER, WE CAN CHANGE LIVES. THANK YOU, FOR YOUR SUPPORT!

NO PLACE TO CALL HOME

The latest national figures suggest that more than 64,000 young people aged 16-24 were assessed as homeless or at risk by their local authorities last year in England and Wales. These growing numbers don't include countless others who sofa-surf with friends or relatives, hiding their struggle from public view

Safe and sound at YMCA

Every young person living at YMCA Leicestershire has faced challenges in their lives that have left them vulnerable. It can involve a combination of family relationship breakdown, abuse, economic pressure or poor mental health. The charity houses 117 young people – a fresh start begins with a safe and secure place to live, but grows into so much more.

In 2025, the challenge of youth homelessness demands more than temporary fixes. It requires systemic change, community involvement and a commitment to never look away. Behind every statistic is a young person with hopes, dreams and untapped potential.

3 impactful ways to make a difference

Become a Roomsponsor

With a gift of £12 per month, you can provide a young person with a range of support; from bedding, towels and toiletries to emotional support and help to find a job.

Join the Charity Golf Day on July 3

With birdies, bogeys and food aplenty, the golf day is not just a networking or team building opportunity – it's *driving* change.

Elevate your corporate social responsibility (CSR)

Collaborating with YMCA Leicestershire could include fundraising, advocating, pro-bono work, developing work or skills opportunities for young people, or even a night out at The Y Theatre. Charity partnerships help businesses to make a meaningful impact in their local community and inspire employees and stakeholders with shared values and purpose. Join us in shaping a brighter future for young people.

fundraising@ymcaleics.org.uk
www.ymcaleics.org.uk



RUBY'S STORY

"I was working full time, then I was made redundant and being so young, I had nowhere to go. I was a child living in an adult's world and I didn't have the greatest of family backgrounds. I was on the streets, just out there trying to survive; who wanted to employ somebody that was homeless and had no qualifications? Moving into YMCA brought with it consistency and stability and that's what changed for me. If it wasn't for staff there, I don't know where I would be."

Ruby has come full circle now working as a YMCA Transitions Coach, guiding other young people, providing a listening ear and offering real hope for the future. She's also training with the Football Association, developing football activities for residents and running the London Marathon.

Watch Ruby's story and more at
www.youtube.com/@ymcaleics

10 QUESTIONS FOR...

MATT BARTON

Business Relations Coordinator at Rutland House Counselling and Psychotherapy, and Bungee Leicester fitness instructor

1 What's a funny memory from your childhood that still makes you smile?

I remember jumping through puddles as a toddler, splashing around, then jumping into a large pothole. The water splashed over my head, and my parents had to pull me out. While it wasn't funny for them, I laugh now at how oblivious I was, happily playing, only to end up drenched!

2 What's your biggest pet peeve?

Airport culture! I like to be stress-free on holiday, so you won't catch me lining up an hour before boarding or emptying my backpack at security. I also don't stand as soon as the seatbelt sign turns off. I just want people to relax! Ironically, my partner says I'm so laid-back that he won't let me go to the loo when they announce: 'final call'.

3 If you could have any superpower for a day, what would you choose and why?

I'd love to communicate with dogs. I'd like to know what my dog is thinking when he sighs or barks. I'd take him on an adventure, treating him to whatever he wanted, and make sure he has the best day ever!

4 What's a guilty pleasure you just can't give up?

Tea! I drink about 10 cups a day, milky with no sugar. It's my comfort drink, and I can't give it up!

5 Who's the most interesting person you've ever met?

I think everyone is interesting. I love hearing people's stories. Working in mental health, I hear shocking stories, but the resilience of those recovering from trauma is inspiring. Even if they aren't ready to heal yet, their journeys make you appreciate life and encourage you to live it fully.

6 What's the nicest compliment you've ever received?

As a part-time fitness instructor, it's lovely to motivate people to find the right exercise for them. Some of the nicest compliments I've received include: "His energy and enthusiasm are infectious!" and "Matt's class is a highlight of my week." Being told I'm an asset to a company is also a lovely recognition.

7 What's a little lie you've told recently that you don't feel bad about?

I sometimes say I'm late due to traffic, but the truth is, I'm usually chasing a goodbye kiss from my dog before I leave.

8 Where's your favourite place in Leicester, and why?

Beacon Hill! The views are stunning, and it's peaceful. It's the perfect spot to walk my dog, Rory, and unwind from the hustle and bustle of life.

9 What's been the holiday of your lifetime so far?

Tokyo, Japan! The mix of traditional temples and futuristic technology, combined with anime culture, was fascinating. The city is spotless, despite no bins in sight, and I loved seeing people in suits finishing their day with karaoke. The themed cafés were unforgettable, from Otter Cafés to Maid Cafés.

10 What's your current recent TV show/film/book/podcast?

I'm binge-watching all the seasons of Family Guy. It's nothing ground-breaking, but it's a fun, light-hearted show I can always enjoy.



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