



Shropshire Business LIVE – Weston Park's orangery was the stylish setting BeBold media and guests



Adrian Cooper makes a point



The SBLTV cameras were at the event to film the debates

Inspiring success – LIVE

The spectacular setting of Weston Park hosted the latest in the popular series of 'Shropshire Business LIVE' breakfast networking events.

The event was organised by wealth management company Throgmorton Associates of Shrewsbury, supported by Shropshire Business magazine and events company Yarrington.

As well as breakfast in the stately home's historic orangery, there were two Question Time-style panel debates featuring a diverse range of experts from local businesses.

The theme this time was 'Inspiring Success and Sustainability in Times of Adversity' – one debate looked at the spiralling cost-of-living crisis, and the other focused on sustainability and the quest to save energy and money by achieving Net Zero.

The Shropshire Business Live TV cameras were also there capturing highlights from the discussions.

Previous events in the series have been held at premium locations around the county such as Hawkstone Hall, Netley Hall, and Hencote estate.

Panel number one was made up of Nick Jones from Throgmorton Associates, Christopher Jones of Integrity Partnership, Karen McQuade from UK Foodhall in Shrewsbury, and Claire Moore of Peakes Travel Elite.

The panel acknowledged recruitment challenges as one of the extra challenges facing businesses across all sectors, exacerbated by one of the fallouts from the pandemic –



Networking – Allan Wilson and Adrian Cooper

people no longer wanting to work full-time, or requiring hybrid working conditions and more flexible hours.

Many businesses were currently too uncertain to plan too far ahead, and focusing merely on dealing with the issues of today, the panel felt.

Nick Jones warned: "Short termism can be dangerous for your long-term plans."

One of the key dilemmas for companies right now is whether they can afford to pass on their rising overheads to customers, without risking losing their business.

Karen said: "Now is the time to be really brave, and put the price increases through at the correct level and offer people the correct price increase with the value and quality of food you are providing, and give them that option."

"Instead of making everything smaller, or increasing the cheaper ingredients, I think we should still give people that quality option."

"Lots of food manufacturers are getting rid



The first panel debate discussed the cost of living

of it, thinking the consumer can't afford it – but I believe there is always a market for it."

And in summary, the panel's advice was – we've been through these problems before at times like the 1970s, and it could well get worse before it gets better.

But find things you do well, be confident in the quality of your product or service, and stick to your guns – get weekly cashflow forecasts, make sure you know exactly where your business is, and don't bury your head in the sand.

The second panel turned the spotlight on energy saving and sustainability issues, and was made up of Allan Wilson of Save Our Shropshire CIO, Mark Thompson of AceOn Group, Lee Duffy from Aico, and Adrian Cooper of Shropshire Council.

Allan laid out what he believes are three key foundations for running a more environmentally-responsible business: understanding your own carbon footprint,



Colin Sweeney, CEO of Weston Park

researching the eco credentials of your suppliers, and demonstrating to your own customers that you are making all efforts to do your bit for the planet, without compromising on the quality of your product or service.

Adrian Cooper acknowledged that, for some businesses, the zero carbon challenge seemed really daunting – and was viewed as an expensive commitment too.

"There is no need to do it all, but we can all do something. And if we all do something, that will add up to quite a lot."

A survey around the room showed that fewer than 10% currently drove an electric car, but nearly a third of people had considered it, but not yet taken the plunge.

And this, in part, was because of perceived blackspots in the required charging infrastructure.

Mark Thompson of AceOn described himself as an 'innovator and manufacturer of renewable energy and battery technologies' and said



Mark Savill and Teresa Maden

battery energy storage and electrification of cars was currently 'going through the roof'. He sits on the Government's Faraday Battery Challenge advisory group on new giga factories.

It's ten years since he appeared on TV show Dragon's Den seeking investment in his new power generator – and said improvements in energy storage technologies were becoming a 'game changer'.

He said there was a major role for education to play – from colleges and universities right the way down to primary school level – to ensure the next generation was properly informed and equipped for the evolving economy.

And he predicted that environmentally-friendly technology such as autonomous vehicles was going to increasingly become a realistic alternative for many businesses struggling with staff shortages.

Aico of Oswestry won the sustainability title at the county business awards this year, and the company's operation and learning

& development manager Lee Duffy said: "It's about just keeping it simple."

"We want to use small local businesses as our value chain, but we also want to use sustainable businesses – and sometimes these two things don't always sit hand-in-hand."

"So one thing we are trying to do is support local businesses to be green. We could throw a million pounds into electric vehicles, put a massive solar array on the roof, become carbon neutral and say 'that's it, we've done it'. But it's not about us doing it... it's about everybody doing it."

Rounding off the event, Nick Jones added: "These events are always a fantastic opportunity to network with like-minded companies who want to promote the best that Shropshire has to offer, share best practice, and pick up top tips from some of the best in the business."

"With our business community facing some unprecedented challenges from the rising cost of living and recovery from the pandemic, we felt the time was right for this popular networking event to get back on the road."

Sarah Mellor of Salopian Health and Safety won the prize draw for a bottle of fizz – when her feedback form was first to be drawn out of the hat.

● You can watch the panel debates on the latest episode of Shropshire Business Live TV – tune into the catch-up player at sbltv.co.uk

THE SHROPSHIRE BUSINESS LIVE PANELLISTS

- Mark Thompson – AceOn Group
- Adrian Cooper – Shropshire Council
- Lee Duffy – Aico
- Nick Jones – Throgmorton Associates
- Karen McQuade – UK Foodhall
- Claire Moore – Peakes Travel Elite
- Christopher Jones – Integrity Partnership
- Allan Wilson – Save Our Shropshire CIO

