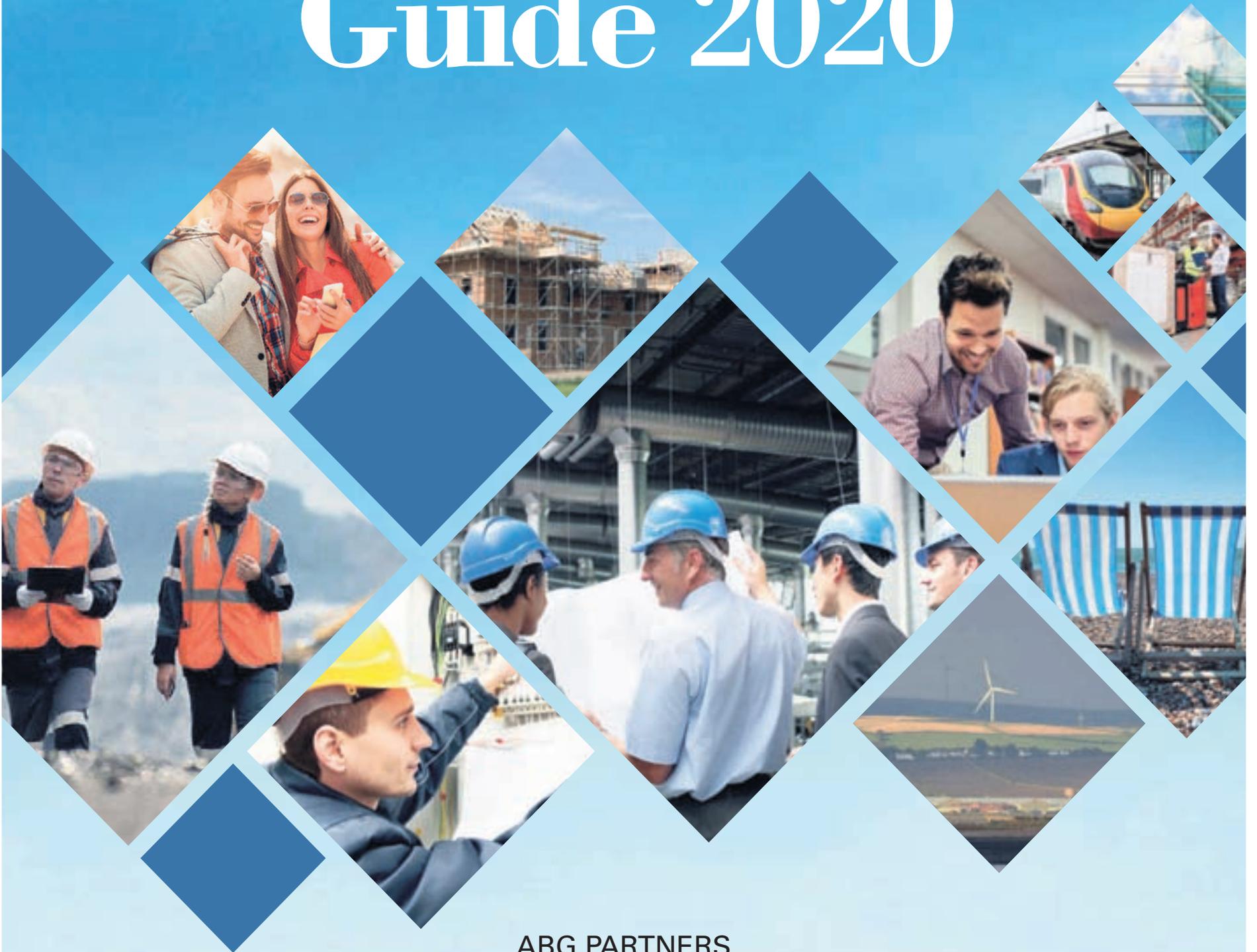


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IT was only 16 months ago, but it feels like we were in a different world. The last time business men and women from all over Devon, Cornwall and Somerset gathered to mark the launch of the *Western Morning News's Annual Business Guide* was in July 2019. Yes, Boris Johnson was Prime Minister but that day at Exeter racecourse seems like a lifetime away. Over the past 15 years, the *Annual Business Guide* has become one of the bellwethers of the region's economic performance, and the July launch date a significant date in the region's business calendar. The annual list of the region's Top 150 businesses is always much anticipated – which was a principal reason for us being determined to publish this year's list whatever coronavirus has thrown at us. This year's list is, as always, based on publicly available accounts, so the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic remain to be seen, but we, and our headline partners Francis Clark, were united in our belief that we should continue with this unique publication partnership. There will be no physical launch event this year, but on the morning on November 4 we will be

The times may have changed but together SW businesses will triumph over adversity, says Bill Martin



hosting a virtual gathering to discuss key learnings from this year's guide analysis as well as the region's challenge in fighting back and re-emerging from the chaos and confusion of corona. Look out for those details. This year's *ABG* gives us a taste of the challenge ahead, as well as useful insight into some of the resilience businesses in the region are showing. To stay in the game, all of us are having to adapt. The *Western Morning News*, and its parent company Reach PLC, have been in no way exempt. The summer saw Reach embark upon a significant transformation plan that resulted in nearly 500 people leaving the business and a number of new business streams and verticals established within our nationwide media operation. The transformation has seen more resource focused on our business platform *Business Live*, which has agreed to partner the *Western Morn-*

ing News and Francis Clark in this year's *Annual Business Guide*. This gives the region's publication significant national profile. The *Western Morning News* has a new editor – Philip Bowerman has become just the 14th editor of the newspaper in its 160-year history. I have moved into a new role, that of Marketplace Publisher for the whole of Reach's South division, which includes our daily titles in Devon and Cornwall, as well as Bristol, Somerset and Gloucester. Our digital operation in the South West is now run by Audience and Content director Jacqui Merrington. That operation has become quite something. Our six *Live* websites now command more than 70 million page views each month, generated by 250,000 loyal users. They have more than 1 million Facebook followers, in excess of 400,000 Twitter followers

and more than 100,000 people are using Instagram to access our content. All of these audiences are growing. They are engaged, vocal, often critical, but have given new relevance and new life to regional journalism. Circulation of our print titles, which collapsed in the first few days of lockdown, has come back strongly and is now showing more stability than we have seen for some years. Increasingly our titles are working across all platforms on campaigns that stand alongside business and champion the aspirations of the region. We led the call for tourists to #comebacklater at the start of lockdown, and for the region to #Welcomeback our visitors as soon as this was possible. Thousands of businesses signed up to our #therewithyou campaign during the toughest months, and hundreds of thousands of people signed up to our Thanks A Million campaign which saluted the heroes in our NHS. Our *Live* sites in Devon, Cornwall and Plymouth this year signed up to the *Western Morning News's* 'Back The Great South West' campaign, which is now in its fifth year and still supported by our co-founders, Pennon. Less than a

year ago, the newspaper led a delegation of South West businesses to Downing Street, and secured the backing of Prime Minister Johnson. Progress since then has, frankly, been slow but that led all South West MPs to sign a letter to the PM in the summer, urging him to recognise the Great South West as an economic region in its own right – like the Northern Powerhouse and the Midlands Engine. Despite the challenges of the pandemic, the region remains uniquely positioned to respond to the Government's levelling up agenda and play a key role in Covid-19 resurgence and the intention to 'build back greener.' All the indications in this guide are that the region's businesses are willing to tackle the challenges head on with innovation and flexibility. I hope you enjoy reading it. I look forward to seeing many of you at our virtual event on November 4, and in the meantime would like to thank all of our partners who have worked so hard to ensure the publication of the *Annual Business Guide 2020* goes ahead. Particular thanks to Francis Clark, and the team at *Business Live*.

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> St Ives is quiet as the government warns against people travelling to Cornwall during pandemic restrictions
Greg Martin

Many changes are here to stay

IT'S often said that businesses loathe uncertainty, and in that respect 2020 will be remembered as an *annus horribilis*.

The challenges for those running businesses during the Covid-19 pandemic are unlike anything in living memory. It is rare that all areas of a business are under such pressure of constant change at once for so long, needing significant senior leadership input. All business functions have been under strain, including IT, marketing, HR and finance, as well as operational delivery teams. One of the biggest problems is not knowing when the crisis will end and we can move into the recovery phase.

For some sectors, particularly tourism and hospitality, their ability to trade has been switched off or restricted at short notice. Retail and other services have also been severely impacted by reduced footfall in town and city centres.

Despite the massive economic shock of Covid-19, the South West business community appears to have held up relatively well so far,

In a time of so much uncertainty, the need for businesses to be alert and proactive is greater than ever, writes **Andrew Killick**, partner and head of corporate finance at PKF Francis Clark



thanks in large part to the various government support schemes. To date we have not seen a significant increase in business failures or huge numbers of redundancies, but perhaps the worst is yet to come.

What's clear is that many of the changes wrought by the pandemic are here to stay. We recently conducted a South West Business Resilience Survey, which found only 14% of respondents expected to return to business as usual. A third expect to emerge from Covid-19 with a different business model.

Rather than hunkering down and waiting for the storm to blow over, business leaders are taking decisive action. Encouragingly, we found 75% planning to review their strategy in response to the pandemic - something we are helping clients to do through our Covid Business Review process.

While 25% expected to make redundancies, an impressive 48% of respondents plan to launch new products or services, showing that South West businesses are seeking out opportunities, as well as taking

steps to mitigate the impact of Covid-19.

Topping the list of concerns for those polled was the prospect of a second wave of Covid-19 or a local lockdown. Now the dreaded second wave seems to be coming to pass, businesses will be watching anxiously to see if the measures to contain it

Rather than waiting for the storm to blow over, business leaders are taking action

ANDREW KILLICK

are tightened further during the autumn and winter, and if so what impact this will have on them.

The next most frequently cited risks keeping business leaders awake were customers going out of business and weak consumer demand - both linked to the economic impact of Covid-19.

Only in fourth place came the

prospect of a no-deal Brexit. When you consider that the end of the transition period is fast approaching, this goes to show what an extraordinary year it has been.

Amid all this uncertainty, activity levels in the South West deals market have broadly reflected the decline seen across the UK. Experian Market IQ's M&A Review for Q2 2020 reported only 83 completed deals in the South West, a decline of 44% on the prior year. By far the largest of these was Pennon Group's £4.2bn sale of Viridor, its waste management subsidiary, to a US private equity firm.

At PKF Francis Clark, we were pleased to be ranked as the South West's most active financial adviser in the first half of 2020, having advised on deals in a wide range of sectors, including energy, manufacturing, retail and IT. Our corporate finance team is seeing a growing appetite for transactions, particularly as those quality businesses that are well-placed to capitalise on the 'new normal' look to press ahead with their growth plans.

Dawn of a new era for Pennon

A new chief executive, a £20 million windfall for customers, the £4.2 billion sale of Viridor, and, of course, the coronavirus crisis – it's been some year for the Westcountry's biggest business, writes William Telford

SOUTH West Water (SWW) may have taken a £10 million hit during the Covid-19 lockdown, particularly as some business demand drained away, but the company was expecting this and parent firm Pennon Group Plc promises it is on track to deliver "resilient" financial results in 2021.

The utilities giant sits at number one in the *Western Morning News*/PKF Francis Clark list of the South West's 150 largest companies, with a pre-Covid turnover of £1.39 billion and 4,853 employees.

Most of them continued working throughout the March 23-imposed lockdown and the firm has no plans to abandon offices, even though some staff are working from home.

And it is looking beyond the current crisis, with big plans to invest, in new technology and environmental improvements, and in its workforce, and by using some of the proceeds of its Viridor sale to pay down debt and bolster its pension scheme.

And then there is the £20 million handout to customers, a bonus from the Exeter-headquartered firm's over-performance on its 2015-2020 business plan, which customers can choose to take as shares in the company or a £20 bill reduction.

That is part of a scheme called WaterShare+, a feature of SWW's 2020-2025 New Deal business plan, and to be overseen by Lib-Dem peer Lord Taylor.

Other highlights of the New Deal include lower bills, additional support for those most in need, and more than £1 billion of extra spending to improve services, including the biggest environmental improvement programme for 15 years.

So, a lot for new chief executive Susan Davy to get her teeth into. She took over at Pennon in the autumn, replacing Chris Loughlin, who stepped down after a four-year tenure. But Ms Davy is not new to the company, she has been with the company for 13 years and stepped up from being chief finance officer.

She is also not the only new face at the top. Gill Rider, a former head of the civil service capability group in the Cabinet Office, also took over as chair from Sir John Parker, who departed after five years.

Ms Davy said she is looking forward to getting stuck into the new



> Mayflower Treatment Works, Plymouth, is operated by South West Water



> Susan Davy, the newly appointed CEO of Pennon Group

five-year plan and hinted at the possibility of acquiring more companies, after the successful lassoing of Bournemouth Water in 2015.

"We are looking for growth opportunities in the UK water sector," she said. But when pressed on whether that did, indeed, mean more acquisitions, she would only say: "We are going to do what's in the best interests of shareholders in terms of being efficient with the proceeds from Viridor."

The sale of the recycling and waste disposal arm in July 2020, to investment firm Planets UK Bidco, brought in £4.2 billion and Pennon has a plan for the cash, including shrinking its £900 million debt pile.

"We will be using the cash to make sure we have an efficient balance sheet," Ms Davy said. "We will pay down £900 million of our debt. We have paid off about £580 million so far. And we will be putting £36 mil-

lion into the pension scheme."

Environmental improvements are also high on the to-do list. SWW has a new Mayflower treatment plant in Roborough, Plymouth, which supersedes the Crownhill operation, and the firm is investing new technology, some now already in operation at the new works.

But there is always more to do, such as reducing leakage by 15% and work to get services "up to standard" in the Isles of Scilly.

Ms Davy stressed the importance of the environmental goal and said: "We need to protect and enhance it. We have more to do. We have great

We are looking for growth opportunities in the UK water sector

SUSAN DAVY

stats around bathing water, but in some other areas, like pollution performance, it needs to be better, and we will be spending to make investments."

Pennon is also planning to become involved in the Government's Kickstarter Scheme to help young people find employment.

"We are looking at 50 placements," Ms Davy said. "We are hoping to support people back into work through that scheme. As a responsible employer in the South West we want to make sure we can do that."

And responsibility to the workforce is vital for SWW and Pennon, and Ms Davy stressed how the firm

had been keen to support staff during the worst months of the pandemic contagion.

"I want to give a massive thank you to all our team that kept us operating since March," she said. "They did a fantastic job. More than 95% of our operations have been continuing. Certain aspects we stopped doing, meter reading for example.

"But during the hot dry spell the team were keeping up with market demand, and with people coming into the region.

"I have been out and about meeting the teams and seeing the work they have done," she added. "We have been supporting people to make sure they are safe and have taken measures to achieve that.

"The majority of staff in the fields teams, labs and on the operational side, came into work, but office staff were working at home."

However, the number returning to offices has been "ramping up" and Ms Davy said: "The people want to come back. But we are mindful. We have 40% to 45% of staff in our offices because we are doing social distancing. Some of our call centre staff have been working from home."

In September Pennon's trading statement showed coronavirus had taken a large gulp, £10 million worth, from demand during the lockdown months.

This was mainly due to reduced demand from businesses, and Ms Davy said: "We have seen slightly more demand from households with people being at home, but from the business side there was about 15% downturn in volumes and demand. That has come back a bit now but is

probably about 15% lower. In April and May some customers in the leisure industry were not operating. But demand is coming back."

And the share offer to customers is now under way, with Ms Davy explaining: "We are not issuing new shares, we will buy them on the market. I'm really excited about it."

And that could spell a new era for the company. Pennon already has about 20,000 shareholders, funds and investors, and now wants any of its one million customers to join their ranks.

"If we get more than 20,000 it doubles our register," Ms Davy said. "Customers would be more connected with us. And, alongside the share scheme, we will have quarterly meetings where the public can ask questions of the management team."

She added: "We have been accruing a pot of £20 million and talked to customers about how they wanted to receive that. Some said a rebate, but a number of customers said they would quite like the offer of shares in the company. So we looked at that a bit more and 77% of customers we asked who said they would like the option of shares, did not have any shares already.

"A lot of customers did not know how to go about it, so we thought we'd put in place this scheme to allow customers to have share ownership and make it as easy as possible for them to take up that option."

And the offer could be repeated with Ms Davy saying: "For the next five years we will run the scheme again, it will be a continuing scheme, when we do well we will add to the pot going forward."

Devon



> A man passing a sign advertising the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme

Dominic Lipinski

Devon's recovery is now gathering momentum

LIKE the rest of the country, Devon's hopes of a sustained recovery are being hindered by rising Covid-19 numbers, the threat of further lockdowns and subsequent ongoing economic uncertainty.

Coronavirus has already accounted for well-known shops, restaurants and cafes, not to mention sounding the death-knell for Exeter-based airline Flybe - which was the largest regional carrier in the UK at the time of its demise.

Tourism - a mainstay for both Devon and the South West as a whole - has taken a pummeling due to travel restrictions, including the vital summer period.

In total, 92% of businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector were affected by the crisis.

All the while, the continued threat of a no-deal Brexit continues to lurk in the background.

Nationally, a recovery of sorts is well underway. Fresh Government figures showed growth of 2.1% across the UK.

However, those numbers were below those forecast - especially as they include the boost given to the economy by the Eat Out to Help Out

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic has inevitably left the economic landscape of Devon looking vastly different to that of 12 months ago, writes Howard Lloyd

scheme - and leave the UK economy still 9.2% smaller than before the pandemic hit.

Figures suggest a mixed picture for the economy in Devon. The county's economy has contracted by 8% in terms of productivity, while unemployment has now gone above the 6% mark - well above the national average of 4.1%.

There has also been a rise in the universal claimant rate of nearly 5% between March and August.

That makes for some glum reading.

However, the recovery in Devon is gathering momentum.

Digital, health and care, social economy and clean growth sectors are among the sectors that are already showing signs of healthy recovery and new growth following the downturn, having been less

impacted by the Covid-19 crisis and benefiting from the opportunities around home working, digital literacy, local purchasing and care demand that the crisis has created.

An urgent £6 million economic recovery programme for Devon is also being discussed by county councillors to try and stabilise the county economically over what Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said will be a 'bumpy' period until Christmas.

It would provide help and support in four key areas - small and medium enterprises, employment and skills, the green recovery and the hardest hit towns and communities.

Devon's cabinet member for economy and skills, councillor Rufus Gilbert, said: "This financial investment will support the economic recovery of our hardest hit places, enterprises



and individuals. Together, we can grasp opportunities to build back better, to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economy."

Mr Gilbert said the exact measures would depend on how the pandemic developed, but would include supporting businesses to become more resilient and improve their digital skills, targeting key sectors such as tourism, retail and health and care, helping hospitality businesses to improve the skills of their workforce, supporting farmers to diversify, improving skills and training, stimu-

lating new business start-ups and also supporting individuals with redeployment and employment support.

A small and medium business support package has also been drawn up to help owners adapt their business models, with a particular focus on rural and micro businesses and key sectors such as tourism, retail and health and care.

A 'Made in Devon' scheme has been put forward to push the quality of Devon produce, while a dedicated programme of support to farmers to



> A row of empty deck chairs beside a Devon beach savoilic



> Coronavirus sounded the death-knell for Exeter-based airline Flybe Phil Dye

help diversify their businesses is also in the works.

Team Devon, a public and private sector partnership drawing in expertise from business, education, skills and public sector organisations, have also pledged to rebuild the county's economy to be stronger, more inclusive and sustainable.

The programmes and projects listed in its prospectus have the potential to create 30,000 new jobs, 80,000 new training places and secure investment of £550 million, generating £2.8 billion of additional economic output.

These are encouraging steps, but with the recovery in the county expected to be slow until at least 2023, they will by no means provide a silver bullet to the ongoing challenges Devon faces.

The reality is that Devon is more susceptible to the impact of coronavirus than many other counties. A national report assessed Devon as the fourth most vulnerable county in England. Every district, except Exeter, was more vulnerable than the England average.

This means that the county does face a rocky road as it looks to recover from a pandemic that has had unimaginable consequences when it first appeared on UK shores less than a year ago.

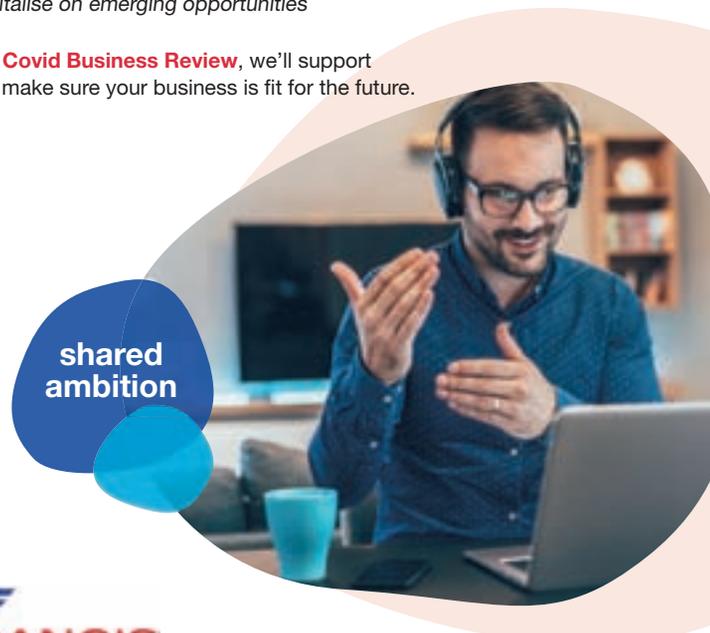
However, Devon's geographical setting, versatility and economic prosperity in pre-Covid times - combined with targeted local and national government measures - all suggest that the county can emerge stronger once coronavirus is behind us.

Tourism – a mainstay for both Devon and the South West as a whole – has taken a pummelling due to travel restrictions, including the vital summer period. In total, 92% of businesses in the tourism and hospitality sector were affected

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Exeter



► Artist's impression of the proposed rebuilding of The Royal Clarence Hotel

On track to become a net zero carbon city

There can be no doubt that nothing has ever quite affected businesses in such a devastating way than the coronavirus pandemic, but Exeter intends to lead the way by continuing to be ambitious in its recovery plans and future offerings, writes **Anita Merritt**

EXETER is firmly pressing ahead with becoming a Net Zero Carbon city by 2030, along with the opening of a new state-of-the-art leisure complex and new Exeter Bus Station next year.

Exeter City Council Leader Phil Bialyk said: "A lot has happened since I contributed to the *Western Morning News* Annual Business Guide last year.

"Since then we have declared a Climate Emergency in Exeter and set the ambitious target of creating a Net Zero Carbon city by 2030. This will shape everything we do going forward.

"We have, of course, also experienced the coronavirus crisis. This is still very much an ongoing situation with cases rising again across the country, and the virus continues to have an impact on all of our lives in a way that would have been almost impossible to imagine a year ago.

"I am extremely proud of the way

our city responded to the crisis, and how we continue to respond, with residents, communities, businesses and organisations all coming together to support each other during the most difficult times.

"Like many people, and many businesses, the council has been hit hard by the impact of Covid-19 and have had to make tough choices in order to balance the books, both in the current financial year and in the years ahead.

"In these difficult times, the easy thing to do would be to scale back our ambitions for our city, but I will not let that happen.

"Exeter was thriving before the crisis and I am determined that the success we have all enjoyed over recent years will continue.

"As we continue our recovery from lockdown it is crucial that we pioneer transformational programmes to address active lifestyles, clean growth, active travel, innovation,

housing supply and a carbon neutral city. Put simply, we want to be at the forefront of the UK's recovery from the crisis.

"For a long time, Exeter has long been a city where businesses and key organisations work closely together. This partnership approach has never been more important than it is now. The collaborative approach we have taken with our partners on the Place Board is key to recovery.

"But we don't simply want to return to where we were; we plan to facilitate a sustainable recovery, one which helps to deliver a carbon neutral future. We have a lot of plans. The buildings that we are creating here in Exeter are to Passivhaus standards, reducing carbon by up to

90% and reducing the bills for households. We are bringing forward 500 council houses in the coming years all built to that standard.

"We will be at the forefront of retrofitting existing properties across the city to be highly energy efficient and low carbon, great reducing fuel bills and bringing clean growth to Exeter, with good skilled jobs and new apprenticeships in the technology of the future.

"Our major investment in the city centre could not have come at a better time. The success the city has enjoyed over recent years has allowed us to fund a new state-of-the-art leisure complex and a new Exeter Bus Station in the city centre. Both will open next year and I

couldn't be more pleased. It is increasingly recognised that leisure will play a big part in increasing the sustainability of city centres, and Exeter is at the forefront of this. It will be a catalyst for further redevelopment of the wider bus station site, as we bring forward our plans for City Point, a mixed use development including housing, retail and office space.

"So there's lots to look forward to, despite the uncertain times we find ourselves in. Exeter continues to be an excellent and sought-after location for businesses, with a first class city centre with a leading retail sector and thriving independent stores.

"We continue to receive enquiries from top national operators who





> The city is pressing ahead with plans for a new state-of-the-art leisure complex and bus station

The easy thing would be to scale back our ambitions, but I won't let that happen

PHIL BIALYK

want to come to Exeter. Our city is where businesses want to be. It is a great place for business and we will be working hard in collaboration with our partners to ensure that it stays that way."

The same optimism is echoed by Laura McFayden, Exeter Chamber board director and employment and HR partner, Stephens Scown. She said: "Exeter has an incredibly resil-

ient economy, a thriving tech sector, is leading the way in sustainability and offers a work/life balance that can't be beaten.

"We are extremely proud of the independent business sector in Exeter, the entrepreneurial spirit that can be found across all sectors and the adaptability of all business that ensures our strong regional economy. Exeter is one of the top three UK cities for relocation as many people re-evaluate their living space post-Covid. We expect to see a large amount of growth throughout the city over the coming months and years. The city also has a vibrant and supportive eco-system of businesses that have proven themselves able to weather any storm.

"In terms of the coronavirus pandemic, Exeter's business community has been fast to adapt. The strength of the city is evident as we see exciting new projects pushing forward including the much-anticipated bus station redevelopment.

"Exeter is not simply weathering the pandemic but is actively contributing to the fight against it with the recent news that the city's Nightingale Hospital is being used to carry out a vital Covid-19 vaccine study."

Reflecting over how businesses have coped during the pandemic Emily Gibbon, interim Exeter BID manager said: "What came out of the first stages of the Covid Crisis stage was the passion and determination that small business owners have.

"Many businesses embraced online trading for the first time, and they also started to reach out via social media, growing their online audience. What was also noticeable was the community. People, businesses, charities were wanting to work together to keep the morale up and to get through things together.

"Partnerships around the city were reconnected via online meetings, with recovery groups lead by the city council forming and other groups such as Exeter Chamber of Commerce, Exeter City Futures, Exeter Homeless Partnership and ourselves, In Exeter, reaching out to support. With many of us working from home - this will undoubtedly continue, but will be a positive thing.

"The redevelopment of the former House of Fraser and the confirmed purchase of the site of the Royal Clarence Hotel are huge successes for the city centre for 2020. New small businesses have been opening during the pandemic, such as Soapdaze and How on Earth Deli, and there are a few new ones coming to the Guildhall too. This supports the fact that Exeter City Centre is strong and vibrant and worth investing in.

"The footfall and car parking figures were hugely hit this year, but they have slowly recovered and are now at 80% of the 2019 figures. People are coming to the city to enjoy its offerings, be it culture, retail, leisure, for work or exercise. This is very positive."

Torbay



> The new Epic centre in Paignton is an £8m high tech business centre at the hub of a bid to develop the 'Silicon Riviera' TDA

Regeneration will help to boost the local economy

The demolition of Torquay's massive Palace Hotel is symbolic of all that's happening in Torbay in 2020 - it's been a sad and savage year for many, but as the once-grand building has slowly been demolished, a luxury modern hotel is set to rise from the rubble, writes Colleen Smith

COVID-19 has slowed down the pace of development but the tide is about to turn in the Bay with the long-awaited opening of the £35m Torwood Street development within the next few weeks.

The finishing touches are now being added to the Hampton by Hilton 130-bed hotel. The site which has been an eyesore since a fire in the 1970s will also include new offices and food and drink units on the street level opposite Park Lane nightclub, near the clock tower on the harbour. The building will be fronted by an exotic and emblematic five metre tall Riviera palm tree growing through the front entrance canopy on Torwood Street.

The double-headed Torbay Palm has already been bought and is ready to be planted as workmen finish constructing the circular planter. The tree will grow from street level outside the glass lobby, then up through a hole cut in the concrete canopy and it will be backlit by a two storey high LED window.

The development by the THAT group - led by Peter Tisdale and Ray Kelvin, boss of fashion giants Ted Baker - includes a £9m commercial loan from Torbay Council.

The council has invested heavily in the harbourside end of town - also purchasing Debenhams next door and Fleet Walk shopping precinct - both for undisclosed sums. There is a vision to create a Mediterranean-style plaza around the harbourside

and lead Torbay out of the doldrums of the early Noughties.

Meanwhile it's out with the old and in with the new at a string of hotels which have been flattened to make way for £150m-worth of hyper modern hotels by the Singapore-based Fragrance Group.

The developers have now demolished the Palace Hotel plot at Babbacombe, the prime seafront Corbyn Head Hotel spot in Torquay and the twin Park Hotel and Lighthouse locations on Esplanade Road, overlooking Paignton Green.

The Palace is expected to be completed by 2023, Park Hotel in August 2021, the Lighthouse in September 2021 and Corbyn Head will take between 18-22 months to build when it gets started. In total, the four ultra-modern hotels will provide more than 600 rooms.

In another boost for Torbay a string of local hotels have been voted among the world's best tourist accommodation - with The 25 voted the top B&B in the world for the second year running and the Ascot House is the UK's best small hotel - many others are in the top 25 TripAdvisor Travellers' Choice 2020 awards.

Torbay Council is doing its all to protect the town centre, despite the loss of major high street names including Boots, Starbucks and Pizza Express at the bottom of town, H&M in Union Street and Mothercare at Wren Park.

The purchase of Fleet Walk's 32 shops and the multi-storey car park are part of the council's plans to regenerate Torbay's ailing town centres and help boost the local economy.

Steve Darling, leader of Torbay Council, said: "The purchase of Fleet Walk Shopping Centre gives the council an opportunity to regenerate and improve a major part of Torquay town centre.

"We are delighted that our decision to create the Economic Growth Fund programme is having such immediate impact.

"This purchase is not about making money, it's about regeneration and improving the economy."

The council also helped in the £1.3 million revamp of Harbour Lights restaurant by St Austell Brewery. Torbay Council owns the Paignton harbour site, which connects Paignton beach and the harbourside. The local authority invested £600,000 in the restoration of the listed building.

Silicon Riviera

The new Epic centre at Paignton - an £8m high tech business centre - and the nearby South Devon College Hi-Tech & Digital building are the hub of a bid to develop the 'Silicon Riviera'.

The Epic centre (Electronic and Photonics Innovation Centre) has been purpose-built for businesses in the growing sector.

The building in the White Rock



Business Park has 40 units - 27 offices and 13 labs alongside other support facilities.

Nearby a £10m factory is being built at Paignton's new Claylands Business Park. The new facility will provide 6,000m² of employment space, and will be home to multinational manufacturing company Casting Support Systems (CSS) Group which has been busy during the Covid-19 crisis, manufacturing products for the pharmaceutical industry.

Fishing

Brixham tops the charts as England's most valuable fishing port, with a staggering £36 million worth of fish landed in the last year and plans for expansion are being laid for next year.

Figures published in September by the Marine Management Organisation showed the port was the nation's number one in 2019.

Jim Portus, the Brixham-based chief executive of the South Western Fish Producer Organisation, says Brixham is 'alive and kicking' despite the double jeopardy of Covid-19.

He welcomed the figures but warned: "The Covid-19 pandemic of 2020 will have tested to the limit the

resilience of fishing communities.

"Much of the production of cuttlefish, scallops, crabs and prime flatfish species sole and plaice is exported to the Continent and further afield.

"Exports of crabs to China were halted in the early New Year as the coronavirus caused widespread travel and business restrictions.

"As hotels and restaurants closed

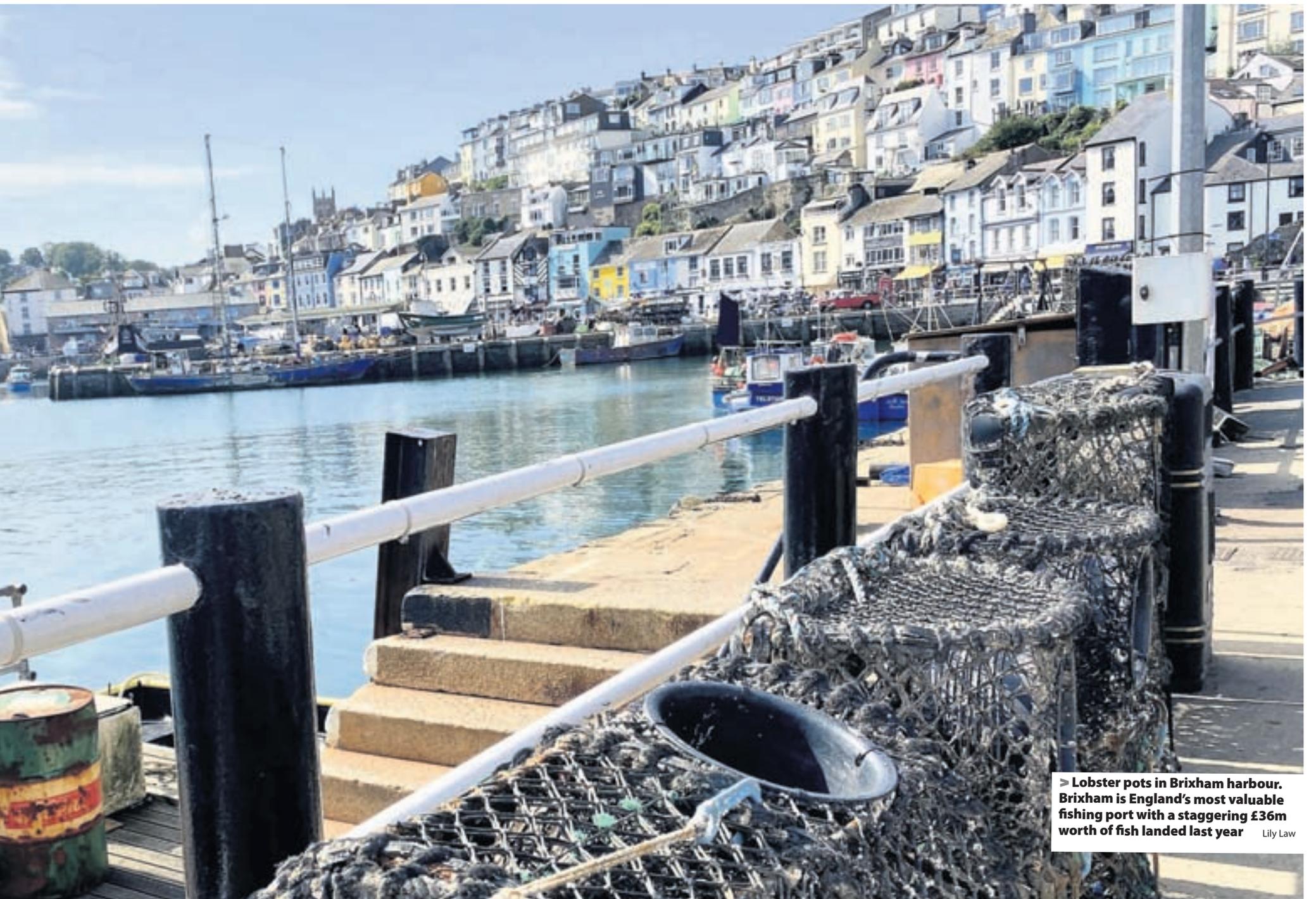
Brixham is alive, kicking and preparing to thrive. I for one am very excited

JIM PORTUS

their doors, so the flow of seafood to our valued customers slowed to a trickle."

He also welcomed the government's Covid-19 support package the Fisheries Response Fund which had been rolled out to the fishing and seafood sectors but, he said: "As with all schemes there were cracks through which some businesses fell."

Domestic consumption of UK-



► Lobster pots in Brixham harbour. Brixham is England's most valuable fishing port with a staggering £36m worth of fish landed last year Lily Law

caught and landed fish had risen, and the re-opening of bars and restaurants helped.

"The winter months are often bumper times, with cuttlefish being the regular 'Black Gold' of Brixham for the past 20 years. If that market fails to bounce back, there may be some real and deep economic hardship."

Mr Portus said that Brexit negotiations, in which fishing played a major part, had brought uncertainty to the industry.

"This time we are heading for the door of EU exit and our status as an independent coastal state must not be fettered by being shackled to the terms of the Common Fisheries Policy that for decades has put our fishermen at such disadvantage.

"I remain hopeful and optimistic that the outcome in just a few weeks will be for the great benefit of the UK and will put UK fishermen on a sound footing for re-building our fleets and ports to the vibrancy they once enjoyed.

"These have been tremendously febrile times under the shadow of Covid-19 and through the negotiations of Brexit, but Brixham is alive,



► Impression of the new Crossways at Paignton, by the Architects Design Group Guy Henderson

kicking and preparing to thrive.

"There are some wonderful plans already being considered for expansion and I for one am very excited for the future of the port and the region."

Torbay Hospital

Medical and healthcare is well recognised and a new boost came with the recent Government announcement of a £400m investment at Torbay Hospital. The Torbay and South

Devon NHS Foundation Trust, which runs Torbay Hospital, employs around 6,000 people.

The trust said: "We will not just be rebuilding Torbay Hospital. We are planning a fundamental review of the ways that we support the people of Torbay and South Devon to live healthier lives and how we provide care when they need it."

The Government says its invest-

ment at Torbay Hospital in Torquay will see a new smaller acute hospital for urgent and emergency care.

There will also be a separate new unit for planned specialist care and surgery, known as 'elective' procedures.

Torquay town centre regeneration

A new train station link at Edginswell is part of £25m regeneration plans for Torquay. Torbay Coun-

cil has been given a £750,000 Government cash boost to begin the Town Investment Plan.

The accelerated funding will allow it to make a start ahead of a decision on the Town Deal, bid expected in the coming weeks.

Schemes include improvements at Upton Park, Princess Gardens, Rock Walk illuminations along the sea front and links to the proposed new rail station near Torbay Hospital.

Paignton Crossways

At the same time a bid for £19million from the Government's Future High Streets Fund will boost Paignton town centre, including the conversion of the derelict eyesore Crossways shopping centre into 90 affordable flats. Improvement schemes are also planned for Paignton Station Square, Torbay Road, Crossways and Victoria Centre, and bringing Paignton Picture House back into use.

The council said in a statement: "The Council has shown that Future High Streets Funding of £19.2 million would be matched by other private and public investment into Paignton town centre totalling £140m."

Plymouth

Plymouth, the Ocean City, is

It was supposed to be Plymouth's year. The Mayflower 400 commemorations were expected to put the city front and centre of the world's media and bring a wave of tourists. But that was before Covid-19 arrived in the UK, writes **William Telford**

SINCE the nation went into lockdown on March 23 the city, like everywhere in the UK, caught an economic cold that left it feeling a little sorry for itself.

Businesses have closed down, jobs have been lost, projects have been put on hold. And when the students quit their digs it left the economy short of £25.2million.

In June it was revealed that 30,400 workers were furloughed on the Government's Job Retention Scheme, and a further 8,200 self-employed people were claiming a combined £22.8million under the Self-Employment Income Support Scheme. In September, there were 11,403 people claiming Universal Credit, a 98% rise on a year earlier.

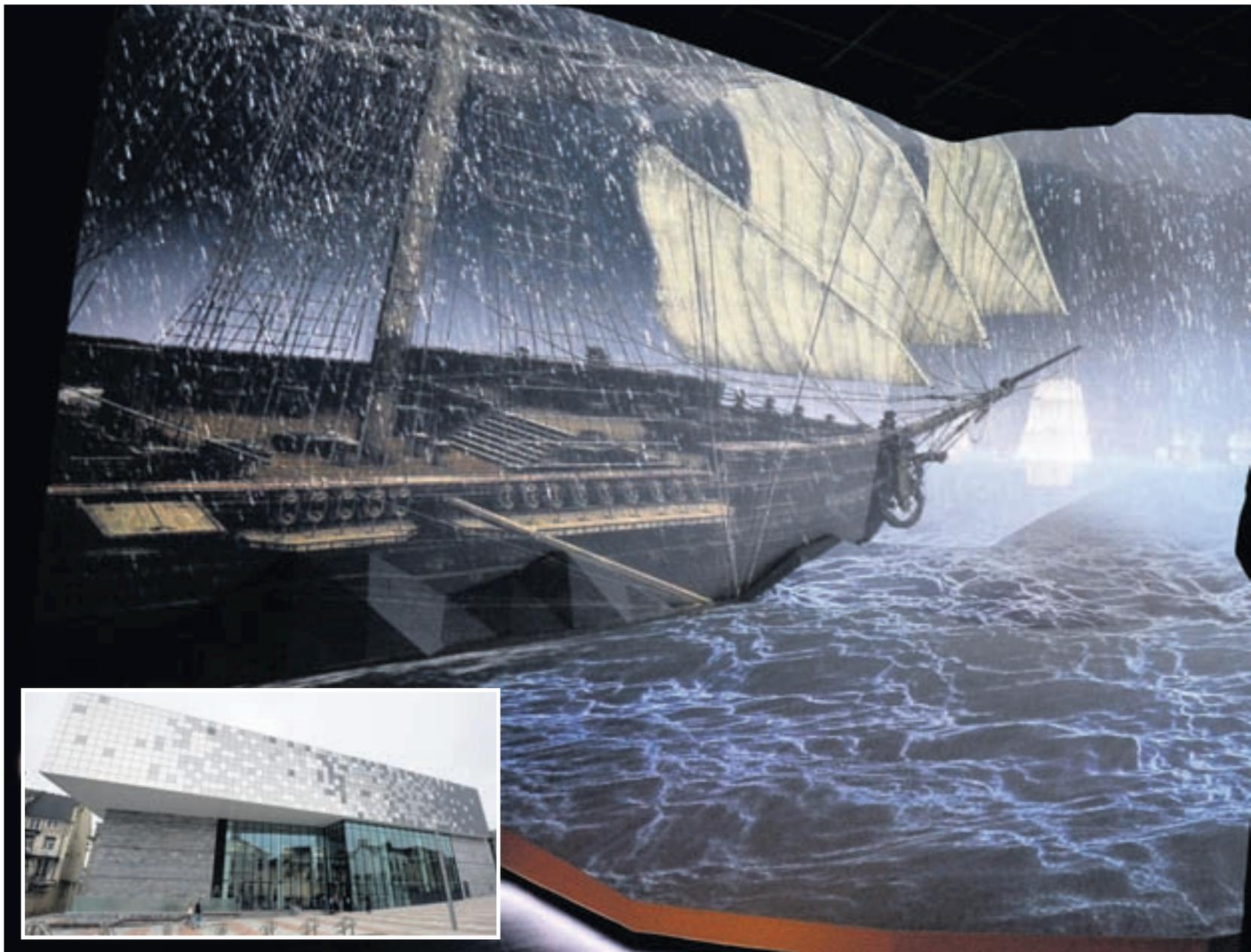
The £48million The Box cultural centre was put on ice, the retail heart of the city closed save for a few "essential" retailers, pubs and clubs and restaurants shut, sport stopped, the curtain came down at Plymouth Theatre Royal, cinemas stopped showing movies with the Cineworld at the £53million The Barcode closed until 2021, and even some of the largest employers, including Princess Yachts, temporarily halted production.

But the city didn't die. It didn't even wind up on life support. Things kept ticking over and by September, with a little boost from Eat Out to Help Out, the city was back on its feet, and only a little shaky.

The Box finally opened, to acclaim, the £1million Mayflower Autonomous Ship was built and took to the water and will blaze a trail to the States in 2021, and Antony Gormley's Look II statue was unveiled, leading to a public debate on how much it cost. Plymouth Sound was also named as the site of the UK's first National Marine Park.

All this helped put the city on the map, and should reap future rewards by attracting visitors and investors.

And Plymouth City Council came up with its Resurgam plan, which includes the city building its way out of recession, with a £1billion pipeline of capital projects still very much on schedule.



And it is a strong construction sector, and a powerful public sector and manufacturing base, coupled with a future tourism draw and perhaps a spin-off windfall from wealthy urbanites wanting to relocate, which are seen by many to be Plymouth's salvation at a time when other cities are in a poorer state of health.

Dr Steven Brand, associate professor of economics, at the University of Plymouth, said: "The austerity that followed the last global economic shock hit Plymouth relatively hard as an economy dependent on the public sector.

"In contrast, a dependence on public sector jobs is arguably something of an advantage in relation to the Covid-19 shock, as these jobs were more secure within-crisis, and indeed, should be more secure post-crisis, relative to private sector employment. It, of course, remains to be seen whether there will be a further austerity drive in response to Covid-19, but I think that unlikely."

Dr Brand, who heads the university's Department of Accounting, Economics and Finance, acknowledges

the disappointment 2020 was for the city, but also its potential to benefit from the capital and planning that went into it.

"The year was, of course, supposed to be a point in time when Plymouth celebrated its heritage on a global stage with the Mayflower 2020 celebration," he said. "Clearly, both public and private sectors had invested significantly in relation to Mayflower 2020 years ahead of the Covid-19 crisis - and this investment will sadly not have yielded its expected short-run return - and probably will afford a lower expected medium-term return. Neither too will the city benefit from the wider legacy effects of exposure on a global stage.

"Nevertheless, major projects such as The Box and The Barcode have at least reached fruition - and indeed represent significant assets in the portfolio of the city's future destination-offer.

"If we set this in the context of the fall-out of the 2007 financial crisis, there was some sense that Plymouth had lost out to cities such as Cardiff in its share of the 'slush money' that

was around at the time, and, indeed, it was perhaps felt that Plymouth was the next card in the deck to receive investment when the crisis struck."

Dr Brand said that subsequently the city was left with abandoned projects, and highlighted the BBC studios that were due to be constructed at Sutton Harbour. But now a new plan, for the immense Sugar Quay tower and other developments, are back on the cards. And Dr Brand said: "There is no escaping the fact that the year 2020 has been a disaster for the majority of businesses. However, that is not something that is particularly pronounced in Plymouth relative to the nation."

Stuart Elford, chief executive of Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, is also clear about the impact the pandemic has had on Plymouth. "The leisure, tourism and hospitality sector has been severely dented, and this will be a real knock to confidence," he said, adding that businesses are stressing that they face an effective "three winters" in a row due to the loss of summer 2020

trade. And he said a "triple whammy" of events could send the city reeling. "At the end of the furlough scheme (at the end of October), we will see significant redundancies," he said.

"Then there is the end of the transition Brexit period (in January 2021). Businesses may not have time to react to whatever, deal or no deal, is coming. We still don't know what no deal means. The transition period was supposed to allow businesses to prepare, but there is still no certainty. Brexit will cause frustration for exporters, they need more clarity. Business can react to anything if only it knows what it is reacting to."

And he said many Plymouth firms will have taken on board Coronavirus Business Interruption and Bounce Back loans and said: "Businesses may struggle with repayments at a time of reduced demand."

He praised the firms that have continued despite the setbacks, and those that have adapted, diversified and found new markets. Nevertheless, he warned: "But there are those who through no fault of their own

becoming the City of Culture



► Visitors look around part of the 100 Journeys exhibit at The Box museum, a brand new multi-disciplinary arts and heritage space Finnbarr Webster

won't be able to survive." And he said: "This was supposed to be Plymouth's year - 2020, the year of Mayflower 400 and the Box opening - the world was supposed to be in Plymouth."

But he remains upbeat for the long term and said: "There is a real opportunity. Regionally we can position the South West as a fantastic tourist destination for 52 weeks of the year. People won't have foreign holidays and we can offer safely distanced vacations. So we need to adapt to offer all-seasons attractions and holidays. It's also a fantastic opportunity to show that we have excellent connectivity and you can base your business in the South West. Why commute for two hours of your day, when you can be in the South West, where you finish work and can be on the beach 10 minutes later? If we seize this opportunity this can be a real positive for the South West."

"It also needs Plymouth to stop being down on itself. We have an excellent quality of life and world-class attractions and great connectivity. So this is a massive opportuni-

ty for Plymouth. For years we have seen Plymouth as a city with potential, now it is realising its potential."

He said The Box, Barcode, the city's medical and marine business sectors, the Oceansgate Marine Enterprise Zone, and the Smart Sound initiative driving research and development of autonomous vessels, were all "massive strengths".

"I'm excited about the opportunities," he said.

And the council's Resurgam programme will play its part. The authority's leader, Labour's Tudor Evans, said: "Being a public sector town, for years Conservative MPs said we were too reliant on the public sector, but that reliance has meant we have not dipped as low as other places. Resurgam will save jobs and create jobs."

"The next year or two will be rocky, there is no doubt about that. But the Resurgam programme is vital."

And he added that Plymouth's manufacturing base remains strong, saying: "We are a marine superstar. Those companies are starting to produce. It's important."

Hospitality and leisure remains on life support, however. Cineworld has closed its expensive Barcode multiplex and Plymouth Theatre Royal, along with other theatres and music venues, has no clear date for when it can open economically due to social distancing restrictions.

Adrian Vinken, the theatre's chief executive, said the Eat Out to Help Out scheme in August helped the sector "bounce back very well", and this may even continue.

"The businesses lost 30% to 40% of turnover they would normally have. But there has been a bounce back," he said. "Staycation means we have been inundated. We want to extend the shoulder of the season, and the indications are that that is happening." He said the Box, the Mayflower Trail, Gormley's Look II would prove their worth and added: "We have assets we didn't have a year ago, all on the back of Mayflower 400."

And he stressed that the scheduling of at least seven cruise ships to visit the city in 2021, after scrapping their 2020 programme, was a major positive for Plymouth.



► Sir Antony Gormley attends the official unveiling of his LOOK II sculpture at West Hoe Pier Matt Gilley

Rural Economy / North Devon



► LiveWest, which manages 37,000 homes across the South West, has plans to provide 15,000 new homes in the region over the next 10 years Joe Giddens

Smaller towns see benefit as people work from home

LIKE every town and city in the UK, Newton Abbot emptied overnight at the start of lockdown.

The livestock market was cancelled, no-one set up their stalls in Market Square or Courtney Street. The shops remained closed, except for the supermarkets, chemists and other essential retailers.

But as shoppers started to return, the town slowly but surely welcomed new faces.

Sally Henley, town centre manager said: "There has been much talk about the creation of ghost towns with the desertion of office workers. That might be true of cities but we've seen the opposite in Newton Abbot.

"In Newton Abbot, we have never relied on office workers. Our core customers in town are people who live and work locally so we haven't missed a swathe of office workers.

"We have gained office workers who might have left Newton Abbot to go to work. While they have been working at home, they've come in to grab a few bits and pieces, take a breather and have a coffee or use the parks for a bit of space."

Research from the Centre for Cities suggests that some smaller town centres seem to have had fewer reductions in overall footfall than larger towns and cities. Shoppers are preferring to stay local while working from home and are keen to avoid

New research suggests some smaller town centres have had fewer reductions in footfall than larger towns and cities. Shoppers are preferring to stay local...

public transport.

A *Reinventing the High Street for Covid-19 Recovery* report by Sustrans recommends that capitalising on the increased use of smaller high streets is a way to economic recovery, along with reinventing high streets as places for people and ensuring equitable access for all ages and abilities.

A recent survey suggested 59% of consumers in Britain have used more local stores and services to help support them during lockdown.

These trends are likely to continue with reduced public transport capacity and government advice to stay local remaining in place.

Mrs Henley said: "People certainly shopped local to begin with, using the butcher and the greengrocer, but that has slipped a bit with people picking up their meat in the supermarket again while they're there.

"It's a hackneyed phrase but we need people to shop locally. I think the lockdown has shown people the value of their small shops and the value they have to the community as a whole."

And businesses have decided to open up on the high street during

lockdown, showing there is still opportunity to be had, she said.

But the issue of business rates remains a sticking point, she said. Until there is parity for bricks and mortar retailers with the online giants like Amazon - the high street will always suffer.

Dr Stephen Brand, associate professor of economics, agrees.

He said that the future of all high street shops remains in question - and CV19 has been something of a red-herring, although nevertheless a very real effect to the majority of businesses.

He said: "There is a far bigger issue - business rates - and this needs urgent reform if we are to sustain our high streets. The current arrangement is very outdated, arguably tied in to some very archaic rules.

"I would suggest that you need firstly to review business rates before you can begin to build an active 21st century high street."

Paul Crawford, chief executive of LiveWest, which manages 37,000 homes across the South West, with plans to provide 15,000 new homes in the region over the next 10 years,



said that many big employers will be looking at hybrid working arrangements for staff in the future that include time in the office and days at home.

And this will bring opportunities for smaller towns and villages.

And while there is evidence to suggest that city workers are relocating to rural areas because of new remote working arrangements, there is still huge pressure on decent, affordable housing stock in the region.

Mr Crawford said that the Covid-19 lockdown had halted work on its developments this year, with 700 homes completed rather than the hoped for 1,300 homes.

Of these, 200 are shared ownership, 80 on the open market and the rest for affordable rent.

He said: "We don't have the stock to meet the demand we are experiencing.

"At the moment, the housing market is being propped up by the relo-

Business rates need urgent reform if we are to sustain our high streets

DR STEPHEN BRAND

cation from urban areas to rural settings, low interest rates and the stamp duty holiday. But we are in a period of uncertainty because of Covid-19 and Brexit and the question for us is, how do we continue to build homes for sale, or shared ownership, in an uncertain housing market?

"We know that house prices are rising and one of the challenges in the South West is house prices are 11-12 times the average income and that is not abating, in fact that is going to continue with continuing employment certainty in the region. For a lot of people, getting on the



> An artist's impression of how a transformed Newton Abbot could look

PRIME MINISTER'S VISIT A BOOST TO NORTH DEVON

WHEN the Prime Minister makes a special trip to your region you know there must be something to get excited about.

Boris Johnson did just that in August when he rolled into North Devon to herald fresh investment at the Appledore Shipyard, writes Paul Greaves.

One of the world's most famous shipyards, Harland and Wolff, will now have its name attached to the yard on the estuary of the River Torridge. The future for the site looked bleak in 2019 when Appledore was closed by previous owner Babcock after 164 years, with the loss of about 200 jobs.

Mr Johnson heralded a £7m deal to reopen and rename the yard H&W Appledore. The new company is looking to use the North Devon shipyard for the construction of small and medium sized vessels, which it says is a growing market. They have already held career open days and say up to 350 employees will be needed.

"What we want to do is to ensure that there's a good enough stream of contracts coming through to drive jobs and growth here in Devon," the Prime Minister said.

And there can be no doubting the excitement – and relief – generated by the new investment.

The rebirth of Appledore over the next few years should be worth seeing and will have a knock-on effect for smaller businesses in the area.

Having a skilled workforce to call upon is important for any business looking to invest. That is being addressed by a new training hub for young people in Barnstaple. The facility at St Petroc's College is a satellite of the new £170m South West Institute of Technology centred in Exeter. Diane Dimond, principal and chief executive of Petroc said: "We are delighted to be part of this fantastic initiative for our region bringing specialised facilities and exciting career enabling opportunities to northern Devon through new and innovative curriculum."

The institute will offer top quality, higher level technical education, comparable to going to university.

One of those companies which spearheaded the bid, TDK-Lambda, has also promised a huge investment in its power supply manufacturing plant in Ilfracombe.

The £11.5m injection will be staged over the next three and a half years and boost production capacity by 50 percent. The original factory was built over 50 years ago with further expansion in the mid-1980s.

According to market research company Omdia, the global power supply market is forecast to reach almost \$26bn in 2024, driven by the rapidly expanding digitalisation of economies. "A lot of our customers are realising they need backup sites as Covid-19 can

shut sites down," said Martin Southam, marketing director at TDK-Lambda. "The US-China trade war has led to setting up alternative sites. We have two factories in Malaysia and we are setting up a plant in Thailand by the end of this year and we've always had a dual manufacturing strategy in TDK-Lambda and localise more for Europe and even supply the US from here."

Another successful business, Barnstaple's Applegate also has an eye on the future. The firm has been investing in research and development at the University of Exeter's Institute of Data Science and Artificial Intelligence, developing new machine learning technology. The partnership was awarded £50,000 as part of a £40 million Government investment. The result is a free, non-commercial service to match demand and supply for items such as PPE, sanitiser and others needed to address the pandemic. Not only will it provide ongoing support through the current crisis – it will address supply chain disruptions caused by future crises. The partnership shows the practical benefits that collaboration between academia and business can deliver.

Elsewhere, plans to transform a set of historic buildings into a riverside shopping centre with cafes and restaurants were unanimously approved by planners. Acorn Property Group and Wessex Investors' scheme for the regeneration of the Oliver Buildings at Anchorwood Bank in Barnstaple was supported by North Devon Council. The site on the south bank of the River Taw has been derelict for 10 years. The proposed scheme will see the existing buildings converted into 47 apartments, shops and restaurants, a new mixed-use four-storey block, and a second building which will have a mix of commercial and residential space.

Plans were also unveiled to transform an unloved landmark hotel in Great Torrington. The former Globe Hotel in the centre of Great Torrington has been closed for three years. The council and its partners want to reopen it as a boutique training hotel and co-working space.

It hasn't all been positive of course. Tourism and hospitality are big contributors to the North Devon economy and for those sectors it has been a tough year. Some attractions such as Watermouth Castle took the decision not to open at all for 2020. The area also has a disproportionately high number of self employed, they've been greatly aided by the Self-Employment Income Scheme but will be seeking sustainable forms of future activity, which for some may not be the same as pre-pandemic.



> How it was: a packed crowd of buyers around the ring at Cutcombe Market, Exmoor

offices and retail parks.

"That's not to say there haven't been lows this year. People are uncertain about what their future holds economically and, of course, there is the additional worry about loved ones and staff at risk from the virus."

The town's food and drink retail outlets diversified to offer takeaways and home deliveries, and have, in the process, continued to reach customers new and old in a different trading climate.

"It has been heartening to see our wide range of businesses doing their best to understand and implement new rules, even when these have been introduced with very little notice.

"It has also been rewarding to further extend BID's support role by providing risk assessment templates, cleanliness charters and advice about the grants and finance options available."

housing ladder is going to be a challenge."

In Camborne, one of the huge strengths has been a sense of community spirit.

BID Manager Anna Pascoe said: "We are lucky that our town mainly comprises small and medium businesses and so isn't suffering the ghost town effect of areas with large

Cornwall



Golden days ahead for a greener Cornwall

AS summer season hit, holidaymakers ditched the quarantine uncertainty of overseas travel and headed in their droves to the Cornish coast.

The county has welcomed two million visitors since lockdown restrictions were lifted in July and while the boom helped to mitigate some of the worst effects of the total lockdown in the spring, tourism businesses are still battling to survive the winter.

It remains a tough year for hospitality – the 10pm curfew and rule-of-six continues to pose a challenge for pubs, bars and holiday providers.

And the downturn has led to some big losses. Cornwall's Eden Project announced in September that it was to lose 169 staff after the attraction near St Austell lost £7m in the first quarter of the financial year due to the enforced three-month closure and subsequent restrictions on visitor numbers due to the pandemic.

In April, May and June the combined loss of the industry in Corn-

wall's tourism and hospitality sector has taken a battering because of Covid-19 but a 21st century gold rush and the green economy is providing reasons to be cheerful, writes Hannah Finch

wall was £750 million and if businesses had not been able to welcome guests again from July 4 it would have been worse, Malcolm Bell, Visit Cornwall's boss told a meeting of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership last month.

Mr Bell said that July and August had been good months for the industry and September "has been stonkingly good". But a reliance on tourism and leisure in Cornwall meant that the region is in need of ongoing financial support.

One of the biggest positives has been no increase in Covid-19 cases recorded as a result of the summer visitor influx.

And there is still confidence in Cornwall as a leading visitor destination. In July, The Pig Hotel group opened its £13million The Pig at Harlyn Bay, creating 80 jobs. The latest offering by the boutique hotel chain has been so sought after that reservation staff took 1,000 bookings in the first three hours of declaring its opening date and it is already fully booked for the coming months.

Elsewhere, one of Cornwall's oldest industries has been given a very modern boost.

Mining company Cornish Lithium drilling for a "21st century gold rush" smashed through a crowdfunder target to raise £3million – in just a few

hours. Cornish Lithium uses modern technology to evaluate the potential to responsibly extract vital battery metals in Cornwall, including lithium from the geothermal waters that circulate deep beneath historic mine workings.

According to the Volkswagen Group, lithium is the "irreplaceable element of the electric era," which makes lithium vitally important for the future economy as the world moves towards renewable energy sources and away from a reliance on fossil fuels.

As the UK aspires to be a leader in the move towards electric vehicles and renewable power in order to realise its net zero carbon ambitions by 2050, it will need significant quantities of lithium in order to build batteries for the domestic car industry.

Cornish Lithium is one of several companies exploring in the county and aims to establish a sustainable and environmentally-responsible

extraction industry. It is among a number of efforts in Cornwall making the transition to a green economy via renewable energy and battery power storage.

Last month's pledge by the Prime Minister to create 1GW of floating offshore wind energy by 2050 is being seen as a shot in the arm for Cornwall's green ambitions.

According to a report commissioned by the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), 1GW of floating offshore windfarms in the Celtic Sea could support 3,200 jobs in the South West and Wales and £682m of spend in the local supply chain by 2030, powering hundreds of thousands of homes.

A Cornwall-led £30m-plus funding bid for Government investment is being made next month to kickstart a floating offshore wind industry in the region.

Mark Duddridge, Chairman of the Cornwall and IoS LEP said that con-



► The Eden Project announced in September it was to lose 169 staff after the attraction near St Austell lost £7m in the first quarter
The Eden Project

tributing to a national green recovery will create new jobs and provide new skills as the nation recovers from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Cornwall has seen a third of its workforce furloughed since March – more than 84,000 people and the 13th highest rate in the UK.

At 77%, it's had one of the highest take-ups for the self-employed income support scheme. Universal credit claimants have almost doubled, to around 49,000 so far. More than 10,000 local businesses have taken out emergency loans. And almost 22,300 have received £251m in emergency grants.

Mr Duddridge said: "If Government is serious about levelling up and tackling the economic impact of coronavirus, then it needs to work with us as partners in that process and start sharing its thinking about the road ahead. We hope the promised Recovery and Devolution White Paper this autumn will give us that opportunity."



► The Cornish Lithium drill rig at the Gwennap test site
Neil Williams

Truro

Lots to celebrate as funding

Despite the obvious negative effects of the coronavirus pandemic and lockdown, the picture in Truro is looking far brighter than other towns and cities, writes Lee Trehwela

IN the short-term, the Eat Out to Help Out scheme saw Truro's restaurants, cafés and pubs rammed throughout August with a significant tourism spend throughout the summer.

And while there are the inevitable shop closures, there are also the green shoots of new businesses either moving into the city centre or expanding into bigger premises.

Perhaps the biggest positive for Truro – and one that could change the city's fortunes forever – is the formation of the Truro Town Deal Board, which is bidding for £25 million of government money to revive the high street.

The city recently received £750,000 for various projects.

Despite around 30 shops remaining closed after lockdown was lifted, business managers in Truro say it's by no means reflective of a city in decline.

In fact, there is a lot to celebrate, with many businesses moving to bigger premises and interest in such prime sites as the former Debenhams site on Lemon Quay.

Alun Jones, Truro Business Improvement District (BID) manager, said: "We realise that it's a very difficult time for the high street everywhere. However, even before coronavirus, as with other towns and cities, Truro saw a cycle of businesses opening and closing as well as some expansions.

"There were always around 30 businesses unoccupied in Truro, with fewer empty premises in the run-up to Christmas because of pop-up shops. During April and May, we did an audit which recorded 29 empty shops. Whilst it's sad to see businesses close, we're delighted to see a number of businesses expanding to bigger premises."

These include Colours Café and Wellbeing Centre moving to New Bridge Street, No 3 Lash and Brow House to Nalders Court, The Laser Room to Little Castle Street, Joli Boutique to a larger unit in the Pannier Market and the Red Elephant Beer Cellar to High Cross.

"We're pleased to see 1981 Barbers occupy the former Colour Café premises already. There have been some changes in Kenwyn Street with the Mandarin Garden Chinese restaurant moving to the downstairs premises, the new Thai and Asian food store opening up and The Cor-



> Truro is bidding for £25m of government money to revive the high street, and the city recently received £750,000 for various projects

Greg Martin

nish Vegan soon to be re-opening under new management," added Mr Jones. "Truro also has some exciting initiatives, like Manning's Pop-up Secret Garden and the plans to change the top floor of Lemon Street market into a dedicated food and drink hall. In addition, we're aware that there's been some interest in the former Debenhams unit."

He said that the mood had changed in the last month and more locals – who had stayed away during the summer – were back and shopping in Truro.

"There is a lot of talk out there of people bringing their Christmas shopping forward, which could mean a preference for the high street rather than online.

"Our marketing line for Christmas is 'Truro – Space To Shop'. We have the luxury of wide streets which other towns don't have."

Lucy Jones, co-chairman of Truro Chamber of Commerce, agreed that it's a positive picture in the city at the moment.



helps to ease the way ahead



Truro plans to bid for funds for regeneration projects, which could see a new harbour village and marina



The Truro branch of Debenhams closed permanently following the coronavirus outbreak

Cornwall Live

"I think that Truro, in comparison with other places, is not doing too badly," she said. "The loss of some of those high street businesses is more reflective of a national picture than it being Truro-specific."

"People are going online for what businesses like Next offer and Covid has increased that. Where Truro excels is with its independent shops and there's a growing trend for what they offer."

She added: "I actually think that Truro is doing slightly better than a number of similar places."

To add to the positivity, Truro has been awarded an initial £750,000 from the government's Towns Fund for an array of projects aimed at regeneration and boosting economic growth.

Bike parking across the city, a mobile stage, refurbished community centres and sports facilities are among the projects approved for the Accelerated Capital funding.

Inspired by the annual City of Lights community art project and lantern parade, a festive trail of light-up installations across Truro's shop windows this winter is another key project to be given a welcome cash boost. It's the first funding to be confirmed as Truro Town Deal board is busy shaping themes to form an

Where Truro excels is with its independent shops, there's a growing trend

LUCY JONES

investment plan to bid for at least another £25 million for regeneration projects, which could see a new harbour village and marina.

Truro is one of 101 towns to be selected to bid for the £3.6 billion Towns Fund set up by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Carole Theobald, chairman of Truro Town Deal board, said: "This first award of funding is incredibly welcome, and gives a flavour of the further projects we'll be bringing to life in the coming weeks as part of our larger bid."

"We selected each of these successful projects for their ability to strengthen our communities, improve our city as a place to live and work, as well as drive footfall and visitor numbers."

"Several are set to be delivered by the end of this year, so it's exciting that this funding will have an impact on Truro very soon."

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- Be agile in responding to the challenges ahead
- Capitalise on emerging opportunities

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Farming

Farmers feeding the nation in time of need

During these unprecedented times, the business of farming and producing quality, traceable food for the consumer has remained a constant, with the South West's vibrant network of local farm shops and food producers really coming to the fore in our time of need. **Athwenna Irons** finds out more

WHO doesn't love a farm shop? With a homely, rustic feel, abundant selection of fresh produce and considerably lower food miles on the clock, it's a world away from pushing a trolley up and down the squeaky clean aisles of your nearest supermarket store.

Guaranteeing provenance and traceability, without the crowding and queues, it's little wonder that many more people have discovered the benefits of shopping locally over the past few months, at a time when the fragility of complex supply chains was exposed for all to see - with scenes of panic buying and empty shelves making the national news.

With the big retailers struggling to cope at the height of the lockdown, our local farm shops and food producers were right there and ready to respond, adapting quickly to meet a sudden and rapid increase in demand. Research carried out by the Farm Retail Association (FRA) has found that 92% of farm retailers reported a "significant" rise in new customers coming through the doors since the Government first enforced restrictions in March.

The organisation, which champions the best farm shops and farmers' markets from across the UK, estimates that the country's network of farm shops has a combined turnover of more than £1.5 billion, including sales from farm shop cafés.

Some 79% of farm retailers polled said they had introduced a click-and-collect service because of coronavirus, including in the form of completely contactless drive-thrus. Another 67% said they had introduced home deliveries.

As a result, farm shops across the UK have processed an estimated 1.4 million-plus orders for home deliv-

ery or collection since the Government's lockdown measures began.

Rob Copley, chairman of the Farm Retail Association, explained: "The last few months have clearly shown that farm retailers can react nimbly to customer demands because of their size, independence and direct relationships with local farmers.

"They have also shown that they are proactive, supportive members of their local communities. We have members who prepare and deliver ready meals to local community groups that support the most vulnerable members of society. Others are donating produce to local school hubs, front-line NHS staff and other key workers.

"As well as going above and beyond in this time of crisis, farm retailers are helping to keep the nation fed, offering easy access to fresh, nutritious and affordable British food. They are demonstrating that they are both caring neighbours and viable alternatives to the supermarkets, boasting shorter supply chains with lower carbon footprints."

Varying in appearance, from huge purpose-built barns to on-farm converted sheds, with fridges full of freshly bottled milk or butchered cuts of meat, the trend of increasing consumer demand has been felt across the South West.

Trevaskis Farm, run by the Eustice family at Connor Downs near Hayle, was one such business to rise to the challenge of the pandemic, quickly launching a home delivery service to address the needs of its local community. In the first two weeks alone, the team handled over 2,000 orders, providing elderly and vulnerable customers with everything they needed from fruit and vegetables to



bakery goods, dairy, fish and home-produced meat.

Owner of the business, Giles Eustice, said: "We were inundated with people phoning and emailing from all over the country - families in London calling because they had elderly parents in Cornwall who needed to isolate and they were desperately worried that they wouldn't be able to get food.

"The immediate closure of the restaurant was huge, it is a powerhouse of the business and a substantial part of our turnover, which went overnight. The easy call would have been to shut the doors and furlough, but

As well as going above and beyond in this crisis, farm retailers are keeping the nation fed

ROB COPLEY

we said no, people need feeding. We're a family and farm shop that has always been in the community, so we put ourselves right on the front-line and provided an emergency service. We allowed people to

shield and protect themselves, and ultimately not burden the health service."

At the other end of the size spectrum, The Meat Men, run by Somerset-based master butchers, Scott Cartwright and Edward Davies, took advantage of the lockdown as an opportunity to diversify and grow their business by launching a free local home delivery service - keeping customers safe and removing the need for them to venture out to the supermarket.

With no shop premises and bookings for their 'Somerset Steakhouse' catering stand cancelling fast, as



> Master butchers **Scott Cartwright** (left) and **Edward Davies** (right) established their own business, **The Meat Men**, in November 2018. As a result of the coronavirus crisis, the Somerset-based duo have introduced a free local home delivery service The Meat Men

agricultural shows and events fell victim to the virus restrictions, the pair had to act fast. Mr Cartwright explained: "Within the first two weeks, our home delivery service had been described by some customers as "life saving".

"Due to our safe delivery methods and practice, along with contactless card payment on the door, our orders doubled in the first two weeks and have increased by 30% each week thereafter."

After being forced to pour surplus milk away during the pandemic, the House family in Somerset decided to take action and open their own 'Milk

from the Moors' vending machine and farm shop. Based at Fowlers Plot Farm in Chedzoy, near Bridgwater, the new venture gives customers the chance to pick up all their essential food and drink items in one place, in the knowledge that they are supporting local farmers and buying fresh, quality produce.

They said: "The milk is sold in branded glass bottles which customers can re-use thereafter, so there is zero waste, making this a sustainable and environmentally-friendly enterprise. The milk vending machine and farm shop have already been very well received locally and we hope

there will be scope to build and grow the venture further as time goes on."

At this critical period of change for British and South West farming, with the Agriculture Bill set to be passed into law and Brexit trade negotiations continuing with countries across the world, there has never been a more important time to highlight the crucial role farmers play in feeding the nation and caring for the countryside.

So if you haven't already, pay a visit to your local farm shop, expand your culinary horizons and support the local farming community. You won't be disappointed.



> The House family have diversified their Somerset dairy farming business, with the launch of **Milk from the Moors** Milk from the Moors



> **Giles Eustice**, owner of **Trevaskis Farm** in **Connor Downs**, near Hayle Athwenna Irons

Transport

Restrictions on travel have had a huge impact

When orders come down from the very highest level that you must stay at home, the entire economy is inevitably affected – none more so than the transport sector, writes **Mike Smallcombe**

BEFORE the restrictions on people's movements had even been enforced by the prime minister, the South West's connectivity was severely impacted by the news in the early hours of March 5 that Flybe had collapsed into administration.

Exeter-headquartered Flybe operated routes from Cornwall Airport Newquay, Exeter Airport and Bristol Airport, providing vital connections to the rest of the country.

More than 2,000 jobs were immediately put at risk, 400 of which were in Exeter.

Cornwall, from where a rail journey to London takes five hours, lost its air link to the capital, which was reinstated for the summer months by British Airways.

With the collapse of Flybe, Cornwall Airport Newquay lost around 70% of its passenger operations overnight, while the airline accounted for over 80% of Exeter Airport's passenger traffic.

That was quickly followed by the lockdown, and both airports having to close its doors to passengers completely for more than three months.

"The financial impact of this has been devastating," said Pete Downes, managing director of Cornwall Airport Newquay.

"We have been forced to make very tough decisions to restructure our business and to request short-term funding support from Government in order to weather the storm through what is certain to be the most difficult winter that the aviation industry has ever suffered."

However, it has not all been doom and gloom – in a very challenging environment for aviation the region's airports have had a number of successes to celebrate as the airport teams work relentlessly to rebuild the route network and restore vital connectivity for the region.

In partnership with Cornwall

Council, Cornwall Airport Newquay has secured British Airways on the flagship Heathrow service, with daily flights and global connections; it attracted Eastern Airways as another new airline partner operating two new routes this summer and adding an important year-round route to Manchester, starting later this month.

New major airline partner Loganair has also confirmed five new destinations from the spring, including Manchester, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Newcastle and Aberdeen (via Newcastle). Loganair is also extending its footprint from Exeter, although the popular Exeter to Paris route is yet to be reinstated.

Cornwall Airport Newquay chief Mr Downes added that Cornwall's

We have been forced to make some very tough decisions to restructure

PETE DOWNES

enduring popularity as a visitor destination, coupled with increasing restrictions on international travel, delivered a staycation boom over the summer and many of its routes experienced much stronger demand than seen at other UK airports.

Mr Downes said: "There is no question that the aviation industry has been incredibly hard-hit by the pandemic and that it will take several years to recover. The importance of Cornwall Airport Newquay to the regional economy means that it will play a key role in supporting the region's ability to mount that recovery."

"To that end, work will continue to rebuild the route network, and we remain confident that once the UK starts to make progress in its battle to



> When Flybe collapsed, Cornwall Airport Newquay lost around 70% of its passenger operations overnight Hugh Hastings

beat Covid-19, we will bounce back even more strongly than before with a more diversified range of airline partners and a renewed purpose in serving Cornwall."

Brittany Ferries, meanwhile, was also heavily impacted by the pandemic, with passenger numbers dropping to less than a third of normal levels over the summer months. Several routes were cancelled, and the French firm received a €117m loan from its government.

After some green shoots began to appear in the early summer, Brittany Ferries was heavily impacted once more in early August, when the UK government announced anyone returning to the UK from France would have to isolate for 14 days.

Cherbourg, Le Havre and Saint-Malo crossings to Portsmouth are not currently running, nor is Cher-

bourg to Poole. There are three return trips per week from Plymouth to Roscoff until the end of October. Plymouth to Santander is operating a weekly service until November 2020, increasing to twice weekly from December 2020. The busiest route, Caen-Portsmouth, is unaffected until the end of October.

Brittany Ferries says it has a five-year recovery plan and welcomed the promise of a further €85million from the Normandy and Brittany regions, both of which are shareholders in the company that owns the ships.

In a Cornwall Council meeting in September, independent councillor Bert Biscoe asked for immediate concerns to be raised with the Prime Minister, demonstrating just how important Brittany Ferries is to the region.

"There is growing concern about the future viability of Brittany Ferries," Mr Biscoe told the meeting. "So much of the Cornish economy does rely on that link – that is goods going into Europe and people coming out of Europe, who support our tourism industry and so on. And it is incredibly important that we have that link. To be honest with you in commercial terms there would be very little point in having a bridge across the river unless that link was there to open up opportunities for us."

Brittany Ferries CEO Christophe Mathieu reassured passengers in a letter on the firm's website last month that he is confident it will be operating in 2021: "Next year is guaranteed. And I can assure you we are working hard to ensure we continue to serve you all in 2022 – and beyond."

Jobs diversity will see us through

Duncan Leslie, partner at PKF Francis Clark, analyses the top 150 list and looks at what's changed since last year

ONCE again the top 150 companies headquartered in Devon and Cornwall are ranked by turnover. Encouragingly, 42% of these businesses have seen their turnover grow by 10% or more this year.

The most dramatic change in this year's list is the absence of Flybe. Long established as one of the largest employers in the region, the Exeter-based airline sadly ceased trading in March after going into administration. Having held on to third place in last year's list, with a turnover of £752.6m and 2,159 employees, Flybe's high-profile demise was undeniably a major blow to the South West economy.

This is part of a wider issue following the collapse of Thomas Cook in 2019 and Monarch before that, so not specifically a South West phenomenon. This part of the travel sector looks to have some huge issues to work through. I fear we are likely to see more airlines succumb to the global pandemic, though, on a more positive note, domestic tourism could prosper in the context of reduced international travel.

The elephant in the room is, of course, Covid-19. Since the table is based on the latest publicly available accounts, the impact of the pandemic remains to be seen in these figures. Anecdotally, businesses in the region have shown great resilience so far, helped by the Government support schemes.

Notwithstanding the absence of Flybe, this year's top 150 have generated a collective £13.9bn in turnover, only marginally down on £14bn last year. This highlights the huge importance of these companies and their success to the economy of Devon and Cornwall.

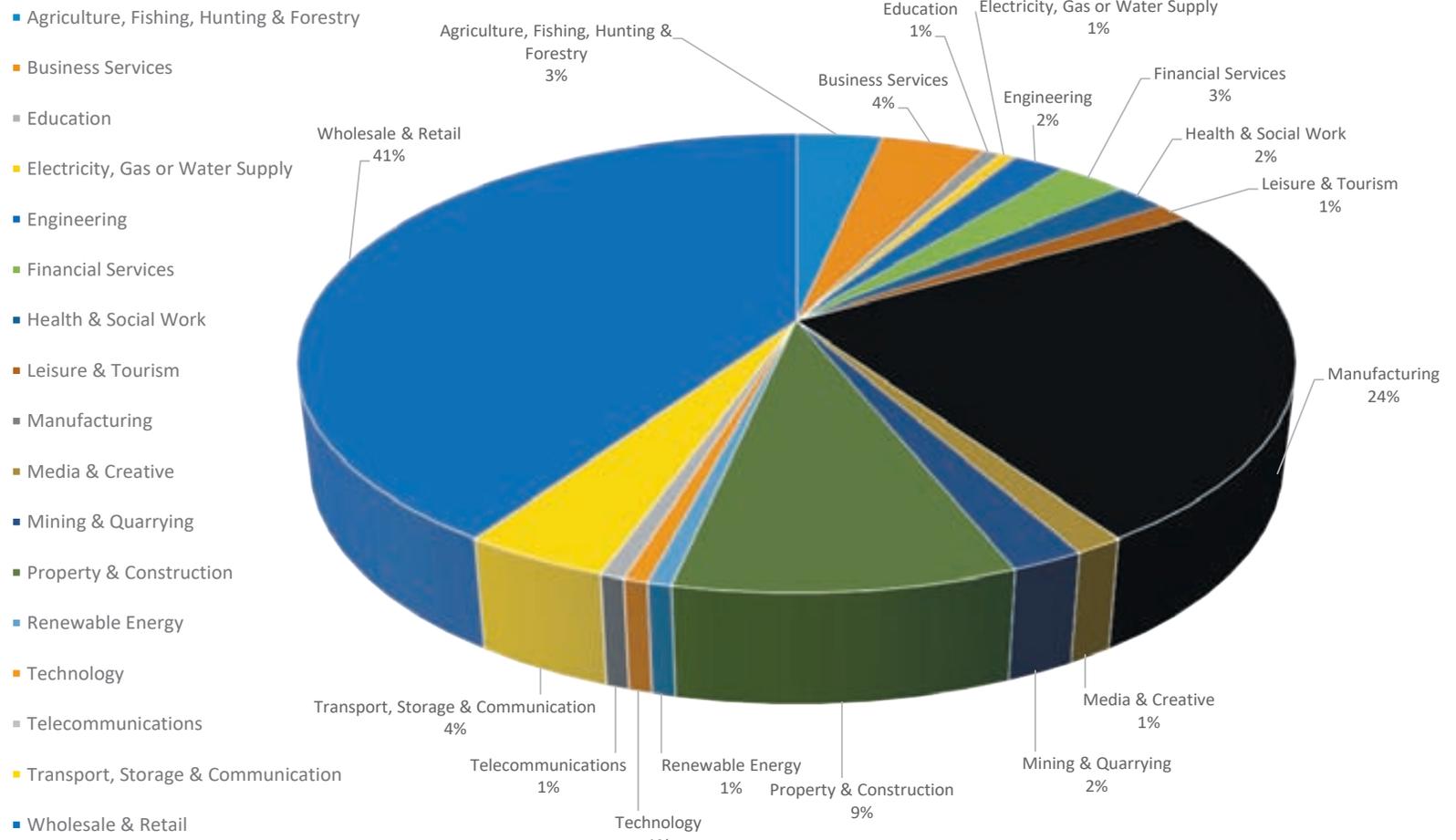
Pennon - owner of South West Water - retains its position at the top of the list, with revenues of £1.39bn. However, next year we can expect this summer's sale of Viridor, its waste management business, to be reflected in the group's turnover.

Completing the top three are Norton Group Holdings, owner of The Range superstores, and Devonport Royal Dockyard.

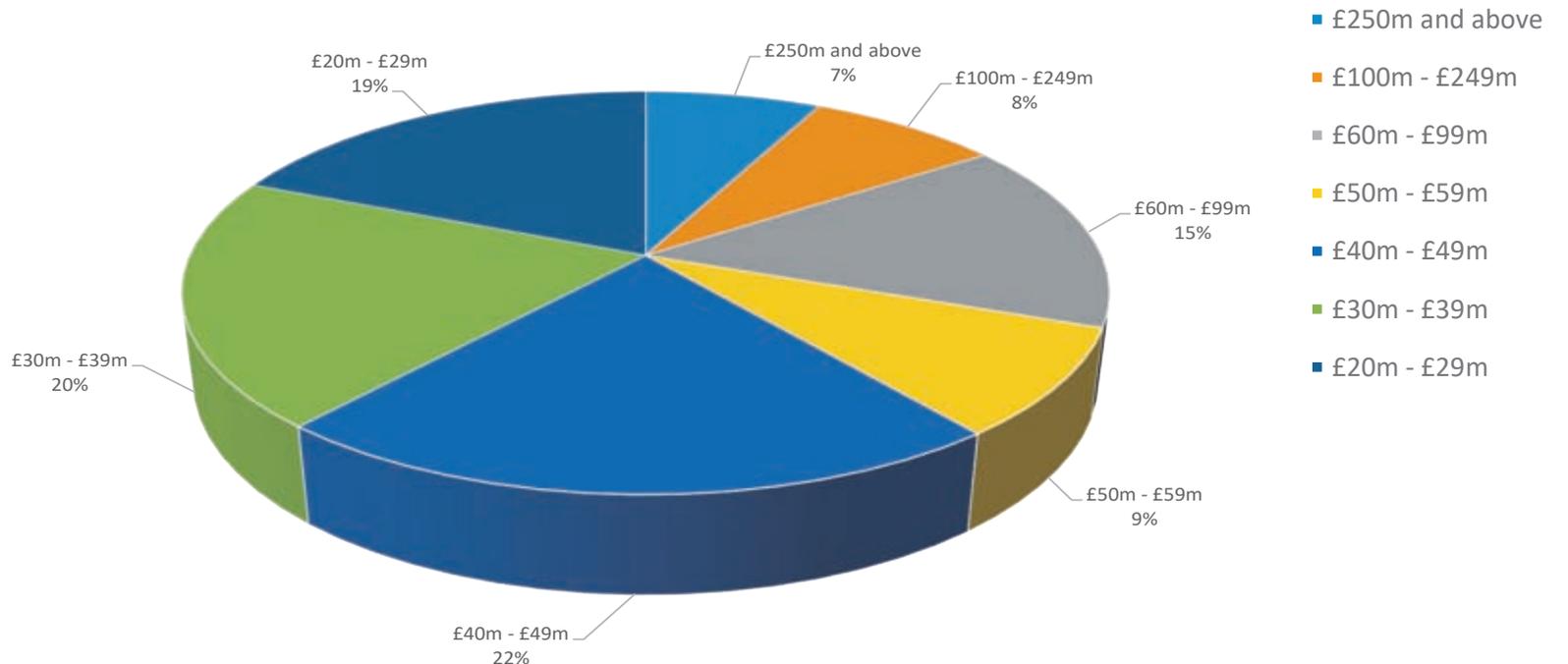
At the other end of the list, Cornish Mutual Assurance Company completes the top 150, with revenues of £23.6m.

There has been some movement in the top 20, notably Princess Yachts, Vospers of Plymouth, Gregory Distribution and Cambium Networks all climbing at least two places. There are two new entrants

Top 150 companies in Devon and Cornwall by sector



Top 150 companies in Devon and Cornwall by turnover



among this elite group - Scot Group and Troy (UK).

Total employment by the top 150 stands at 77,000 (2019: 75,000), with the top 20 making up over half of this figure. A fifth of the companies listed employ more than 500 people.

More than half of this year's new entrants come from the wholesale and retail and manufacturing sectors. The highest ranking new names

are Wrafton Laboratories and Murray Holdings (SW), who join the list in 42nd and 47th place respectively.

For those interested in cross-Tamar rivalry, 77% of the top 150 are headquartered in Devon and 23% in Cornwall - an identical split to 2019. However, Cornwall's total turnover contribution has risen by 4% to £2.7bn, while Devon's has decreased by 2% to £11.2bn, reflecting the loss

of Flybe. At a sector level, wholesale and retail accounts for 41% of the top 150 firms, with The Range, Helston Garages Group and Mole Valley Farmers leading the way.

Manufacturing firms make up 24% of the top 150 - with key players including Devonport Royal Dockyard, Dunbia (UK) and Norbord Europe - followed by property and construction, at 9%.

Devon and Cornwall's 150 biggest businesses represent 17 different industry sectors, highlighting the diverse employment base which has long been one of our region's economic strengths.

This has helped us to weather previous recessions and we remain optimistic that it will stand us in good stead once again in these uncertain times.

Top 150 Companies in Devon and Cornwall

2019	Company Name	County	Latest Accounts Date	Turnover Last available year	Number of Employees Last available year	Sector
1	PENNON GROUP PLC	Devon	Tuesday, March 31, 2020	£1,389,900,000.00	4,853	Electricity, Gas or Water Supply
2	NORTON GROUP HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, February 03, 2019	£942,679,000.00	10,089	Wholesale & Retail
3	DEVONPORT ROYAL DOCKYARD LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£705,243,000.00	5,541	Manufacturing
4	HELSTON GARAGES GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£643,371,000.00	1,145	Wholesale & Retail
5	MOLE VALLEY FARMERS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, September 30, 2019	£492,945,000.00	2,073	Wholesale & Retail
6	DUNBIA (UK)	Devon	Sunday, December 30, 2018	£488,614,569.00	1,703	Manufacturing
7	NORBORD EUROPE LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£387,783,000.00	735	Manufacturing
8	PRINCESS YACHTS (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£340,260,000.00	2,865	Manufacturing
9	CWC (UK HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£309,134,000.00	424	Wholesale & Retail
10	ACCORD-UK LTD	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£270,333,000.00	706	Manufacturing
11	MIDAS GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£259,341,000.00	537	Property & Construction
12	VOSPERS OF PLYMOUTH LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£248,175,360.00	632	Wholesale & Retail
13	GREGORY DISTRIBUTION (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, September 28, 2019	£238,894,000.00	2,492	Transport, Storage & Communication
14	IMERY'S MINERALS LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£194,287,000.00	1,073	Mining & Quarrying
15	ST.AUSTELL BREWERY COMPANY LIMITED	Cornwall	Saturday, December 29, 2018	£179,645,000.00	1,519	Manufacturing
16	CAMBIUM NETWORKS, LTD	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£171,606,576.00	105	Telecommunications
17	CORSERV LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£162,302,000.00	2,618	Property & Construction
18	SCOT GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£145,518,000.00	1,791	Wholesale & Retail
19	TROY (UK) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£143,579,969.00	123	Wholesale & Retail
20	APPLEBY WESTWARD GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£132,539,370.00	175	Wholesale & Retail / Transport, Storage & Communication
21	NEWCROSS HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£128,298,731.00	3,388	Health & Social Work
22	DE VAN AUTOMOTIVE LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£123,220,995.00	256	Wholesale & Retail
23	LIVEWELL SOUTHWEST CIC	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£122,309,320.00	2,396	Health & Social Work
24	PRO - DIRECT GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£99,334,895.00	472	Wholesale & Retail
25	HAWKINS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£88,828,054.00	246	Wholesale & Retail
26	GALPHARM INTERNATIONAL LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£85,960,000.00	67	Wholesale & Retail
27	CHARLES ROBERTSON (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, December 30, 2018	£83,415,472.00	1,119	Wholesale & Retail
28	WAINHOMES (SOUTH WEST) LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£82,379,000.00	120	Property & Construction
29	PENCARRIE LIMITED	Devon	Friday, December 28, 2018	£81,848,900.00	243	Wholesale & Retail
30	TOSHIBA CARRIER UK LTD.	Devon	Friday, November 30, 2018	£78,120,000.00	231	Transport, Storage & Communication
31	RITTAL-C S M LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£77,081,000.00	447	Manufacturing
32	CREDITON DAIRY LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, January 04, 2020	£74,485,000.00	145	Manufacturing
33	CENTRAX HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£74,379,974.00	304	Manufacturing
34	FTI MANAGEMENT LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£72,462,409.00	354	Wholesale & Retail / Property & Construction
35	BANDVULC TYRES LTD	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£71,827,941.00	361	Manufacturing
36	CHAMPION GROUNDWORKS LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, September 30, 2019	£71,646,192.00	358	Property & Construction
37	RIVERFORD ORGANIC FARMERS LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, April 27, 2019	£68,089,170.00	699	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
38	SEASALT HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	Saturday, February 02, 2019	£65,657,312.00	903	Wholesale & Retail
39	ATLANTIC INERTIAL SYSTEMS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£65,278,000.00	266	Manufacturing
40	CAVANNA GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Friday, November 30, 2018	£64,808,133.00	124	Property & Construction
41	WATSON-MARLOW LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£64,595,689.00	338	Manufacturing
42	WRAFTON LABORATORIES LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£64,250,000.00	523	Manufacturing
43	SEARCHFLOW LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£62,638,520.00	105	Property & Construction
44	HELTOR LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, August 31, 2019	£61,689,068.00	79	Wholesale & Retail (Oil / Fuel)
45	PERCY R BREND & SONS (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£61,589,084.00	1,203	Leisure & Tourism
46	MURRAY HOLDINGS (SW) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£60,326,246.00	173	wholesale & retail
47	PENDENNIS SHIPYARD (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£59,629,449.00	437	Manufacturing
48	ALLEN & HEATH LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£58,232,000.00	116	Wholesale & Retail
49	DCM (CORNWALL) LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£57,621,360.00	125	Wholesale & Retail
50	LANDMARK INFORMATION GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£57,444,202.00	362	Business Services (legal products and data supply)
51	KAWASAKI PRECISION MACHINERY (UK) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£57,017,036.00	266	Manufacturing
52	JOHN HEATHCOAT & COMPANY (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Friday, May 31, 2019	£55,923,000.00	480	Manufacturing
53	MITCHELL & WEBBER LIMITED	Cornwall	Saturday, November 30, 2019	£55,602,770.00	86	Wholesale & Retail (Oil / Fuel)
54	CORNISH FARM DAIRY LIMITED	Cornwall	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£55,280,551.00	234	Manufacturing
55	GOONVEAN HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, September 30, 2019	£52,422,447.00	470	Mining & Quarrying
56	CDF GROUP LTD	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£52,353,000.00	118	Technology
57	ROGER YOUNG LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£50,835,246.00	119	Wholesale & Retail
58	STILL MATERIALS HANDLING LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£50,735,000.00	214	Wholesale & Retail
59	STOVAX HEATING GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£50,429,120.00	321	Manufacturing
60	WESTCO PROPERTIES LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£49,450,000.00	14	Property & Construction
61	MJL CORNWALL LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£48,667,153.00	303	Property & Construction
62	BOTT LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£48,553,336.00	407	Manufacturing
63	ALLAN SICHEL LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£48,535,140.00	141	Wholesale & Retail
64	HARPER'S HOME MIX LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£48,411,661.00	72	Manufacturing
65	SNAPPFISH UK, LTD.	Devon	Thursday, February 28, 2019	£48,145,495.00	92	Wholesale & Retail
66	STEVE HOSKIN CONSTRUCTION LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£47,830,652.00	313	Engineering (civil) / Construction
67	WEST PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES CORNWALL LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£47,606,000.00	161	Manufacturing
68	GOODRIDGE LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£47,380,000.00	403	Wholesale & Retail
69	FOOT ANSTEY LLP	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£47,169,000.00	520	Business Services
70	COBELL LTD	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£47,053,325.00	50	Wholesale & Retail
71	A E STUART LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£46,120,840.00	218	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
72	CREDITON MILLING HOLDINGS LTD	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£45,760,349.00	72	Manufacturing
73	STIGA LTD	Devon	Friday, August 31, 2018	£45,623,174.00	47	Wholesale & Retail
74	PHILIP DENNIS FOODSERVICE (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, January 26, 2019	£45,426,612.00	296	Wholesale & Retail
75	ASHFORDS LLP	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£44,950,000.00	476	Business Services

Top 150 Companies in Devon and Cornwall

2019	Company Name	County	Latest Accounts Date	Turnover Last available year	Number of Employees Last available year	Sector
76	SUCCESSION WEALTH MANAGEMENT LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£44,903,000.00	?	Financial Services
77	121 BURTS SNACKS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£44,440,190.00	289	Manufacturing
78	103 GCP STUDENT LIVING PLC	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£44,410,000.00	124	Property & Construction
79	70 STYLES & BROWN LTD	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£44,146,123.00	286	Wholesale & Retail
80	81 FRANCIS CLARK LLP	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£44,111,000.00	615	Business Services
81	80 BARDEN CORPORATION(U.K.)LIMITED(THE)	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£43,785,106.00	391	Manufacturing
82	106 WILTON BRADLEY HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£43,666,221.00	222	Wholesale & Retail
83	105 NEAT EXPERTS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£43,270,453.00	69	Property & Construction
84	101 FLATCABLE LIMITED	Devon	Thursday, October 31, 2019	£43,055,710.00	29	Wholesale & Retail
85	92 WHITE ROSE UK LTD	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£43,045,403.00	1,183	Wholesale & Retail - Fast Food
86	66 VI - SPRING LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£43,016,000.00	232	Manufacturing
87	WFC CONTRACTORS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£42,531,740.00	59	Property & Construction
88	85 H R JASPER & SON (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£42,087,034.00	105	Manufacturing
89	95 TDK-LAMBDA UK LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£42,077,000.00	313	Manufacturing
90	89 GM COACHWORK LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£41,141,886.00	156	Wholesale & Retail
91	94 F W S CARTER & SONS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£40,854,000.00	173	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
92	88 SPAREX LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£40,848,604.00	178	Wholesale & Retail
93	90 MVV ENVIRONMENT DEVONPORT LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£39,528,366.00	32	Renewable Energy
94	93 H.TEMPEST LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£39,502,050.00	812	Media & Creative
95	98 MICHELMORES LLP	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£39,395,000.00	453	Business Services
96	131 CMOSTORES GROUP LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£38,640,604.00	80	Wholesale & Retail
97	78 SHARP'S BREWERY LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£38,159,857.00	139	Manufacturing
98	96 TWOFOUR BROADCAST LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£37,725,000.00	176	Media & Creative
99	110 JMC-GROUP LTD	Devon	Thursday, May 31, 2018	£37,275,770.00	39	Engineering
100	100 A.E. RODDA & SON GROUP LTD	Cornwall	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£36,848,000.00	153	Manufacturing
101	114 DEVON DOCTORS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£36,565,308.00	594	Health & Social Work
102	CLASSIC 14 HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£36,450,865.00	86	Property & Construction
103	97 ZEBRA MTD LIMITED	Devon	Thursday, January 31, 2019	£35,623,154.00	132	Wholesale & Retail
104	135 TOLCHARDS LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£35,478,654.00	121	Wholesale & Retail
105	77 WILLIAMSBUILD MANAGEMENT LIMITED	Devon	Wednesday, July 31, 2019	£35,057,419.00	129	Property & Construction
106	91 VISTGATE LIMITED	Cornwall	Friday, November 30, 2018	£35,024,692.00	149	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
107	111 WW (UK) LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£34,643,741.00	126	Wholesale & Retail
108	141 WORLDS APART HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£34,073,941.00	63	Manufacturing
109	107 FIRST SOUTH WEST LIMITED	Cornwall	Saturday, March 30, 2019	£34,021,000.00	734	Transport, Storage & Communication
110	118 XYZ MACHINE TOOLS (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£33,989,927.00	90	Wholesale & Retail
111	99 FALFISH (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£33,875,585.00	136	Wholesale & Retail
112	150 AMBERON LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£33,636,000.00	548	Wholesale & Retail
113	104 ROWES GARAGE LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£33,594,575.00	122	Wholesale & Retail
114	149 HARRIER PRINT LTD	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£33,459,331.00	?	Wholesale & Retail
115	119 COXCO HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£32,538,161.00	41	Wholesale & Retail
116	13 WRIGLEY COMPANY LIMITED(THE)	Devon	Saturday, December 29, 2018	£32,524,448.00	70	Manufacturing
117	117 E. & J. W. GLENDINNING (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, April 30, 2019	£32,367,429.00	231	Mining & Quarrying
118	116 EMBLEM HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£32,075,435.00	32	Business Services
119	69 TOMY UK CO., LTD.	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£32,050,000.00	80	Wholesale & Retail
120	115 MARSH HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£31,796,846.00	74	Wholesale & Retail
121	120 ET HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£31,761,012.00	250	Transport, Storage & Communication
122	127 MASONS FARM AND COUNTRY LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£30,869,390.00	91	Wholesale & Retail
123	CASTLE AIR LIMITED	Cornwall	Saturday, November 30, 2019	£29,151,152.00	84	Leisure & Tourism
124	123 HOME HARDWARE SOUTHWEST LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£29,036,874.00	168	Wholesale & Retail
125	VAPORMATIC U.K. LIMITED	Devon	Wednesday, October 31, 2018	£28,688,000.00	100	Wholesale & retail
126	136 RODGERS OF PLYMOUTH LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£28,425,210.00	99	Wholesale & Retail
127	126 SC GROUP-GLOBAL LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, August 31, 2019	£28,314,085.00	231	Manufacturing
128	129 M.J. BAKER FOODSERVICE LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£28,235,667.00	120	Wholesale & Retail
129	124 ROADFORM CIVIL ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED	Devon	Wednesday, October 31, 2018	£28,158,461.00	196	Engineering (civil)
130	133 MOLE AVON TRADING LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£27,877,000.00	162	Wholesale & Retail
131	122 Victoria Group Holdings Limited	Devon	Sunday, September 30, 2018	£27,707,000.00	249	Transport, Storage & Communication
132	137 KABA LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£27,498,842.00	118	Manufacturing
133	KANDYTOYS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Friday, November 30, 2018	£27,475,429.00	66	wholesale & retail
134	108 LONDON & DEVONSHIRE TRUST LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£27,445,701.00	76	Property & Construction
135	125 SCC (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Monday, December 31, 2018	£27,158,661.00	90	Wholesale & Retail
136	144 3T'S LEISURE LTD.	Devon	Thursday, October 31, 2019	£27,065,375.00	83	Wholesale & Retail
137	130 KINGDON HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Saturday, August 31, 2019	£26,982,196.00	137	Wholesale & Retail
138	112 HEMSLEY FRASER GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, December 31, 2018	£25,428,046.00	154	Education
139	138 NEWBERRY METALS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£25,357,003.00	51	Wholesale & Retail
140	140 BARRETT PARTNERSHIP LIMITED	Devon	Monday, September 30, 2019	£25,329,224.00	70	Wholesale & Retail
141	143 ARMADA INVESTMENTS LIMITED	Devon	Sunday, March 31, 2019	£25,067,296.00	23	Financial Services
142	JOHN FOWLER HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	Thursday, October 31, 2019	£24,445,804.00	304	Transport, Storage & Communication
143	ROTOLOK (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	Friday, May 31, 2019	£24,412,454.00	332	Manufacturing
144	CARLING TECHNOLOGIES LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£24,344,150.00	27	Manufacturing
145	TOR CURRENCY EXCHANGE LIMITED	Cornwall	Sunday, June 30, 2019	£24,250,000.00	86	Financial Services
146	SILICON SENSING SYSTEMS LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£23,958,000.00	14	Manufacturing
147	WESTCOUNTRY FOOD HOLDINGS LTD	Cornwall	Saturday, December 29, 2018	£23,871,378.00	188	Wholesale & retail
148	DALTER UK LIMITED	Devon	Tuesday, December 31, 2019	£23,737,893.00	9	Wholesale & retail
149	SOUTHERN ENGLAND FARMS LIMITED	Cornwall	Friday, May 31, 2019	£23,713,161.00	270	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
150	146 CORNISH MUTUAL ASSURANCE COMPANY,LIMITED	Cornwall	Monday, September 30, 2019	£23,649,128.00	110	Financial Services

League Table: Top 10 charities in the South West

Charities also hit by pandemic

Charities have also been hit by the pandemic, and their priorities have been brought sharply into focus

LIKE all sectors, charities have been hit hard by the pandemic – and perhaps no more so than the front line care sector, writes Hannah Finch.

Yet, Cornwall Care – which this year tops the list of charities in the region (see box below) – says that despite the challenges, the pandemic has brought into sharp focus the priorities for the organisation.

The charity had coronavirus outbreaks in four of its 16 homes and at a time when most staff were being confronted with the very human dilemma of running away or stepping up, that physically remote but mentally close connection proved hugely therapeutic.

Cornwall Care employs 1,500 staff and looks after around 650 elderly and vulnerable people in 16 care homes, together with another 500 in the community. Its current turnover is £42million.

By necessity, the crisis led to improved skill levels, encouraged mutual support and increased public understanding of what those in social care do and incentivised creativity. Technology has come into its own and, whilst never replacing human relationships, has an important part to play in maximising resources.

Like most crises, coronavirus has had its more positive aspects. From 10-year-old Mia Richardson who managed to raise more than £18,000 for residents at Blackwood home in Camborne by running the equivalent of Land's End to John O'Groats on her family's cross trainer, to furloughed volunteers from The Eden Project devoting their free time to transforming Cornwall Care gardens.

The Eden Trust – which operates The Eden Project – has had its own challenges this year. Coming in at



> Volunteers from Cornwall Care, Eden Project and Cornwall College Group work together to spruce up the garden at the Trevern care home in Falmouth

Cornwall Care

number two of the region's biggest charities, Eden announced it was cutting 169 jobs after losing £7million this year.

Third on the list is Theatre Royal Plymouth, and like arts venues

across the UK, the theatre has been forced to cancel shows and re-think its short term future unless social distancing rules are relaxed.

Chief executive Adrian Vinken said it is not economically viable to

open its main Lyric auditorium under the current restrictions.

The theatre put 100 jobs at risk in June 2020 after the coronavirus lockdown wiped out income, but was rescued by an £806,000 lifeline grant

from the Arts Council in July. Mr Vinken said at the time that this cash bought the venue "vital extra time" but now says hard decisions will have to be made before the end of the year if audiences can't return.

TOP TEN CHARITIES

2020	2019	Name	R/O County	Latest Accounts Date	Turnover Last available year	Number of Employees Last available year
1	1	CORNWALL CARE LIMITED	Cornwall	12/31/2019	35,415,000.00	721
2	2	THE EDEN TRUST	Cornwall	3/31/2019	30,247,000.00	461
3	3	THEATRE ROYAL (PLYMOUTH) LIMITED	Devon	3/31/2019	17,617,000.00	104
4	4	THE DARTINGTON HALL TRUST	Devon	3/31/2019	16,887,000.00	270
7	5	PLYMOUTH MARINE LABORATORY	Devon	3/31/2020	16,416,000.00	163
5		THE EXETER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE	Devon	12/31/2018	15,334,000.00	51
6	7	CHILDREN'S HOSPICE SOUTH WEST	Devon	3/31/2019	13,840,227.00	281
8	6	SOUTH WEST ENVIRONMENTAL PARKS LIMITED	Devon	10/31/2019	13,027,798.00	265
9	8	SHELTERBOX TRUST	Cornwall	12/31/2019	12,554,000.00	126
10	9	DEVON & CORNWALL AUTISTIC COMMUNITY TRUST	Cornwall	3/31/2018	11,263,999.00	473



> Theatre Royal Plymouth is lit in red to highlight the plight of the arts during the pandemic

Brewery 'on the long road back to recovery'



> Kevin Georgel, St Austell Brewery's chief executive

St Austell Brewery

TO say 2020 has been a tough year is possibly the understatement of the decade and one Westcountry company which has felt the squeeze these past 12 months has been St Austell Brewery.

The business was entering into a new chapter in its history and numbers were looking good when the pandemic hit back in March and put a lot of things on hold.

Before the lockdown was imposed on the nation on March 23 by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, St Austell Brewery saw Kevin Georgel join the business as chief executive following the retirement of James Staughton, who had led the business for 20 years.

Kevin, who was previously chief executive at Admiral Taverns, had also been a non-executive director at St Austell Brewery for four years.

In February, the family-owned independent brewery, which also owns Bath Ales, announced the acquisition of two iconic hotels in Devon - Dartmouth's Royal Castle Hotel and the Royal Seven Stars, in Totnes, as part of plans to strengthen and expand the firm's managed pub estate across the South West region.

In March, Andrew Turner joined the business in the newly created role of managing director of beer and brands. Having previously worked as trading director for Heineken UK, he now leads St Austell's own beer and wholesale drinks business.

Steve Worrall, who had worked at

It's been an extraordinary year for St Austell Brewery, which was hit hard when the pandemic took hold in March

the brewery as retail director for two years, became the managing director of pubs, inns and hotels.

"When the coronavirus crisis hit, and our pubs first closed, our income fell by 90%," said a spokesman. "During the first half of 2020, St Austell Brewery's turnover was significantly lower than the same time period in 2019. While trade was up at the start of the year, our income fell by 90% for the three months that pubs were forced to close."

St Austell Brewery has been an advocate of the furlough scheme and other government support packages from the start as it feared many businesses would go under if they were forced to close without any help from the Government.

The brewery said production had continued throughout lockdown, focusing solely on packaged brands. It meant that brewing staff were kept on while non-brewing staff were furloughed.

The spokesman added: "With increased precautionary measures in place, we continued to brew our core beers - including Tribute, Proper Job Korev - for supermarkets nationwide. We also delivered beers to customer's homes across the UK, via our online shop service.

"We have been very grateful for

the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme which - at one stage - enabled us to furlough 90% of our people. The scheme has been a vital support for the hospitality sector and enabled us to protect the regular income of all of our teams, while pubs remained closed."

Ironically there was a peak in demand for packaged beer during the lockdown with consumption at home, either purchased from supermarkets and local shops or through mail orders, rocketing.

The spokesman added: "During lockdown, there was a record increase in demand for our packaged beers. Due to the uplift in supermarket sales, and orders through our online shop, we experienced substantial year-on-year growth in the off-trade. However, our overall own beer sales still fell significantly during the first half of the year because there was no market for our cask and keg beers, while pubs remained closed."

He added: "We are now on the long road to recovery having reopened our pubs in July and recommenced cask production. However, we will still make a significant loss this year and know that there will be further challenges ahead for the hospitality sector."

While production levels have gone back to pre-lockdown levels, there remains a lot of uncertainty ahead, especially if further lockdowns, local, regional or even national, come into force, and additional restrictions are imposed on pubs, hotels and restaurants such as early closing time, or full closures.

He said: "Since reopening on July 4, we have worked tirelessly to adapt to new government guidelines and made significant investments to ensure our pubs are safe, regulated environments for our teams and customers.

"We'll continue to ensure this and look forward to extending a warm welcome to our locals and those visiting the Westcountry, throughout the colder months and into next year.

"However, we need more support that specifically targets the hospitality sector, which has been hit harder and for longer than other industries. If the government's latest restrictions are to remain in place for six months, we need the VAT cut and business rates holiday to be extended throughout 2021.

"Cutting beer duty would also offer wet-led pubs the urgent support they need, to keep their doors open."

He added: "The Eat Out to Help Out scheme was a great success during August, so we would also welcome a similar scheme next year, to help attract footfall and provide a

much-needed boost for consumer confidence."

While St Austell Brewery acquired two iconic Devon pubs and hotels this year, it said further growth of its pub portfolio is now on hold while the Covid-19 crisis is not under control.

The spokesman said: "While we're not ruling out any pub acquisitions, it's not our focus at this moment in time. We'll be looking to invest in our current collection of managed pubs, inns and hotels, to ensure that we continue to offer the best possible experiences for our customers."

It is not all doom and gloom however and he believes that if Covid is fairly under control come Easter 2021, events and festivals start again, and the staycation trend continues on its current growth trajectory, 2021 could be a boom year. And as the tourist season extends longer into the winter months, the recovery could start now.

"Tourism has always been vitally important to the economy in the South West - particularly during the summer months. This year, due to the rise in staycations, the region has become even more of a popular destination.

"Cornwall alone has attracted over two million visitors since lockdown restrictions were lifted in July. We're hoping to see this level of footfall again in 2021, and for people to continue booking Westcountry staycations throughout the autumn and winter."

Food & drink

Restaurants and pubs do their best to stay in business

Like everywhere else in the country, it has been a challenging year unlike any other for the food and drink sector in the South West, write **Lee Trehela** and **Tianna Corbin**

DURING difficult times, the hospitality industry has fought back.

During a curtailed summer - the government's Eat Out to Help Out scheme no doubt saw the economy get a much-needed boost.

However, many businesses and trade leaders argued that it came at the wrong time for a region that had no trouble filling dining spaces at the height of the summer season.

As a result, there is now a call for a new, flexible version of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme.

Kim Conchie, chief executive of Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, and Visit Cornwall chief executive Malcolm Bell are championing the idea and are lobbying Parliament.

Mr Conchie said: "It has been very busy in the hospitality sector and there have been people out spending money, but whether enough to make business owners hold their nerve with the prospect of winter in store, I simply don't know.

"What Malcolm Bell and I would like to see is a more agile manifestation of the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, so that the business owner can decide when and where the promotion applies, rather than the blanket Monday and Wednesday."

Some Cornish businesses have taken it upon themselves to introduce their own version of the scheme. Customers at eight pubs in the Helston, Lizard and Falmouth areas were given an automatic 20 per cent discount off food throughout October, through their Back to the Local scheme.

Matt Ferguson, landlord of the Queen's Arms at Breage and the Three Tuns at St Keverne - who came up with the idea - said: "The Eat Out to Help Out campaign from the Government was very successful but a lot of the feedback from it was that the locals and the regulars didn't necessarily get a chance to enjoy it in August.

"The goal for Back to the Local is that everyone gets a chance to benefit from a discount."

One of the most heartening aspects of the coronavirus pandemic was seeing so many people in hospitality rallying to help their local communities and front-line NHS workers. Whether that was such



► **Belinda Fuller, Mark Sear and Sarah Sear from the Golden Lion Inn at Stithians, which won a national Great British Pub Award for providing over 2,500 free meals to NHS staff and key workers**
St Austell Brewery

renowned chefs as Jack Stein and Paul Ainsworth providing meals for the people of Padstow and surrounding areas, Ben Quinn and his crew at Canteen in St Agnes feeding NHS staff at Treiske, or pubs like the Victoria Inn and the Rising Sun in Truro introducing ingenious takeaway services, it all made a difference to people's lives.

Two Cornish pubs were even recognised at this year's Great British Pub Awards - the Golden Lion Inn & Lakeside Restaurant in Stithians for the way it supported front-line workers, and the Bowgie at Crantock for ensuring the welfare of its staff during the pandemic.

Mitch Tonks, the owner of Rockfish, managed to save all 274 jobs across his restaurants along with having a video call with Prime Minister Boris Johnson to raise concerns of the food industry in the South West. He said: "My mantra was to thrive and survive at all costs whilst maintaining our reputation, including that of all our staff and suppliers."

Wanting to help others in the more rural areas such as the South West, Mitch had an hour-long video call

with the Prime Minister, who listened to his concerns about the food sector in the rural regions of the UK.

After deliberating, they came up with a way to help their suppliers who had nowhere to send their produce, and created weekly markets in which people went directly to the quay. They became 'events' for the locals to look forward to.

The restaurants were then allowed to re-open and Mitch had to ensure his sites were all Covid-19 safe and meet regulations set out by the government.

"We needed to win customer confidence, which we did," he added. "This was further helped by the Eat Out to Help Out scheme, which Rockfish took part in.

"Within 48 hours of our email to say we were partaking, we took 20,000 reservations at Rockfish from people wanting to take advantage of Rishi Sunak's generosity, it was crazy. I know this is the same for many others, too, I don't think I have seen Brixham, Torbay, Dartmouth, Plymouth, Poole and Weymouth so busy in my lifetime."

"Out of this will come some good,



people have changed their priorities and coronavirus will leave a legacy of enhanced focus and care in all our operations. Covid-19 has given us a chance to try new things, some we got right, some we got wrong."

"In some ways, coronavirus has become a watershed to consider and re-prioritise and also remind us of our fragility not only in business but of ourselves too."

Now all eyes are on the immediate future, and that means Christmas. The festive period could be make or break for food and drink businesses which have survived the coronavirus pandemic so far.

So says Ruth Huxley, managing director of Rockfish in Truro.

The businesswoman and passionate Cornish food supporter - who once ran the Cornwall Food Festival on the city's Lemon Quay - believes the sector has been struck like never before and, while there have been winners and losers, even those who emerge on the other side of a fraught season could be hit harder still if support is not there at Christmas.

"I think, for many businesses in the food and drink sector, Christmas

will be make or break," she said. "That final push will be vital to get us through the shoulder months of January, February and March, so it would be great for the lockdown support we received to continue at Christmas.

"It is about supporting local business and local jobs."

Ruth, who set up the Great Cornish Food Store beside Waitrose in Truro four years ago, believes the signs are good, pointing to support from residents and holiday-makers continuing in the months ahead - but admitted it had been tough.

Her own business has been forced to adapt and review its strategy as the pandemic took its toll - 25% of the workforce were laid off, the café and toilets were closed, the store was rearranged and its range of products was reviewed.

"I found pressing the stop button quite cathartic, in a way," she added. "It was a moment when we took stock of our business. I think a lot of people have done the same.

"Some businesses who had perhaps been fragile before Covid-19 will have gone under. It probably was



➤ **Ruth Huxley, founder of the Great Cornish Food Store in Truro**
Great Cornish Food Store

the final straw for them. It is sad as it means that people will have lost their jobs, but for many others it has provided an opportunity to rethink their business."

Sara Pla-Berenguer, from Small World in Torquay, said that their establishment was shocked at how busy they had been since reopening in July. She said: "We've actually put loads of different flags in between tables instead of the generic boring plastic ones. It's some fun and adds a bit of colour to the restaurant and I quite like it."

"I was so paranoid that I was even wearing two masks at the beginning, it was horrible but now I'm used to it. Wearing a mask is part of me."

"Usually we'd be closing at midnight and even still taking bookings at 10 pm, but now we can't. As a business, the curfew isn't good, but with our mental health, it's a lot better."

"It's important to always look on the bright side. We need to remember that we're all in this together and no one is 100% truly safe. It's not just one person's job or responsibility, it's all of us," Sara added.



➤ **Rockfish boss Mitch Tonks**

Sharp's Brewery strives hard to thrive during tough times



THE year 2020 has undoubtedly been hugely challenging for the beer industry, and for cask ale in particular.

Cask ale is a unique, live product which is only found in pubs, bars and restaurants and, in the case of Cornwall's Sharp's Brewery, accounts for the majority of their brewing output.

The closure of pubs during the national lockdown, plus reduced capacity on reopening and ongoing uncertainty, has meant that the business has naturally been through some testing times.

There have also been several highs this year, however. Most recently, the team were delighted to have been awarded six medals at the coveted World Beer Awards, including 'World's Best' in its category for Sea Fury. Head Brewer Aaron McClure said: "These awards are an enormous achievement showing that our brewing practices and procedures are world class".

In the summer, Sharp's launched their first non-alcoholic beer, Doom Bar Zero, following two years of brewing trials. The first 0.0% scale amber ale in the UK market, Doom Bar Zero has already won a silver medal at the World Beer Awards and enjoyed strong sales performance, being the second-biggest seller in the no and low alcohol category where it is sold.

The performance of the brand's flagship beer, Doom Bar, has also been strong in the Off Trade, with a value increase of 14.9% this year versus 2019 in single bottle, and 8.4% increase in six-pack.

In the On Trade (pubs, bars and restaurants), overall volume is of course down, due to the forced hospitality closures during lockdown. Cask beer is also more vulnerable than other packaged beer (bottle, can and keg) due to its short shelf-life and uniqueness to pubs.

On the upside for Sharp's, there is huge strength in the Doom Bar

brand, which has grown its share of the cask beer category to 11% (an increase of 0.8%). This growth is symptomatic of customers seeking the reassurance of trusted, successful well-known brands.

Investment in the site at Rock continues and, in September, the brewery team installed a new Pilsner malt silo, enabling them to increase production of Offshore pilsner in line with demand, which has been growing exponentially in the On Trade (some weeks have seen an increase of 20% versus 2019).

While the brewery's strategy of focusing on their core portfolio of beers (Doom Bar, Offshore and Atlantic) has been a success, it has meant that production of smaller, limited-release beers has been temporarily put on hold. This is the area in which brewers can get most creative, so the team cannot wait to get back to innovating and experimenting with brewing a fuller range of beers in the near future.

Another impact of the pandemic this year is that Sharp's usually packed events plan has been decimated, with all planned public events being cancelled. Events such as the Padstow Christmas Festival are normally highlights in the brewery calendar and the team are looking forward to support local and national events again as soon as they can.

While there have been some tough times this year for the whole brewing industry, a huge positive for Sharp's is the strength of its brands and its people. While the switch from drinking in pubs to drinking at home had an impact on cask beer sales, Sharp's saw online beer orders increase by a huge 639% on average from March to September.

The flexibility and agility shown in the face of the challenges to brewery operations has been inspiring, and Sharp's are in a strong position to head into 2021 with all the tools to bring continued success.

Financial packages keep tourism afloat...

OLIVIER VERGNAULT looks at an industry which is praying for a bumper 2021 in order to recoup the losses of a 'devastating' year for the region's tourism sector

CORNWALL and Devon's beaches, national parks and attractions may have been packed to the rafters this summer, but the influx of tourists we have seen flocking to the region since the coronavirus lockdown was eased off and hotels and restaurants were allowed to reopen, cannot hide one fact - 2020 has been a devastating year for the tourism sector.

'Challenging' and 'devastating' are the key words heard muttered by tourism industry chiefs in Cornwall and Devon, as hoteliers, restaurateurs and attraction owners catch their breath after a few manic summer months and take stock - or rather look at their empty pockets.

According to Visit Devon and Visit Cornwall, the annual estimated turnover loss for the year is £1.3bn in Devon and £800m in Cornwall. In the Duchy that's about 40% down on a normal year.

"It's been devastating," Visit Cornwall chief executive Malcolm Bell said. "Even with an extended season and efforts made by all of us to encourage visitors to come down in the autumn and winter, the sector is unlikely to recoup any of the losses it

made. The reason we're not all jumping off a cliff, though, is that the various financial packages from the government such as the furlough scheme or reduced VAT rate have really helped keep businesses afloat."

Sally Everton, Mr Bell's counterpart in Devon agrees, adding that outdoor attractions have fared better than indoor ones which were further constrained by restrictions and social distancing measures to be Covid-19 safe.

She said that despite the financial help from Whitehall, three hotels in the county went bust and many more jobs have been lost. Only in September, Eden Project announced that it was making 169 redundancies, while Paignton Zoo announced 130 job cuts, with the Minack theatre also announcing 19 job losses. Many more hotels and restaurants have done the same. Many attractions and hotels have lost more than £1m in turnover year on year.

Mrs Everton said: "The loss of business over the summer across all the tourism and hospitality sector has been immense, and despite the press saying that Devon and Cornwall were bursting at the seams, it



> The Watergate Bay Hotel hopes to return to being packed out again

Lewis Harrison-Pinder@pindygr

Greg Martin



STAYCATIONS WAY FORWARD FOR HOLIDAY PARKS

BUSINESS was going really well for John Fowler Holiday Parks – it had been investing heavily in new accommodation and had expanded its portfolio with the purchase of Llanridian Holiday Park on the Gower peninsula – bringing the number of parks to 12 across Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Wales.

Managing director John Fowler explained: “We really felt the business was moving forward and advanced bookings were up by 8% on the previous year. It seemed that the domestic staycation market was quite buoyant and there was a lot of interest in the service that we offered, and there still is.”

Figures for this year’s *Annual Business Guide: Top 150 Businesses in Devon and Cornwall* show that John Fowler Holdings’ turnover for 2019 was £24,445,804 – making a debut on the list at number 142.

“But then lockdown hit,” said Mr Fowler.

“One minute we were busy, open and taking bookings and the next

we were completely shut down. Our call centre went from taking bookings to issuing refunds.

“Luckily a lot of loyal customers just wished to postpone their holidays but anyone who wanted a refund was able to do so.

“Thankfully, because of the government support, all of our 500 staff were kept on furlough while the core staff on the parks kept them maintained and tidy.”

The parks re-opened again on July 12 but some aspects of the business, like entertainment and amusement arcades, remain closed though swimming pools have reopened.

Mr Fowler said: “Demand has been really good and as soon as shutdown lifted, our business resumed immediately. Bookings have been good and the main thing people want is our holidays in our lodges and caravans, which naturally mean that people can get away, but still social distance to comply with the Covid restrictions.

“We invested heavily prior to

Covid-19. The three and a half months that we were closed, we will never make that money back but we are more fortunate than most. If we can keep our parks running then we will be quite content.

“We think staycations are here to stay, especially for the short term but I think a lot depends on the sector stepping up to deliver a quality park that people want to return to.

“This year, a lot of people will have tried a park holiday for the first time and we want them to come back again and again.

“It has got to be good enough to rival a holiday abroad.”

He said that bookings at the moment remain strong for next year and all staff are back and working.

“Our priority is to ensure that we are ready to react to the demand that should come back for next season, we need to be able to deal with all the enquiries and make sure our parks are ready to go.”



> **John Fowler Holiday Parks say bookings are strong for next year and all staff are back working**

was but with much less capacity (some as low as 50%) to enable social distancing and it is estimated that the annual turnover loss in Devon is £1.3bn. It’s eye watering.”

Both counties may have seen an influx of day trippers, but local residents have largely stayed away from their own counties for fear of the tourist throngs bringing the coronavirus in with them.

Numbers for locals are down by as much as 40% for some attractions while seasonal income, during the school holidays, also massively reduced as attractions, restaurants and hotels were forced to shrink capacity due to social distancing measures and regulations.

Two summer storms did not help and greatly reduced the days of trading for outdoor attractions, at a time when indoor attractions were at maximum capacity and could not take in the slack.

There have been many grumblings in the industry about who came on holiday to Devon and Cornwall and how these visitors behaved.

Mr Bell said: “We want people to come to Cornwall on holiday of course. But we want visitors to come

down here because they want to be in Cornwall and share the county with us who live here, not because they couldn’t go to Benidorm.”

He admits that lessons need to be learnt and all in the tourism sector will be working more closely with local authorities, the police, the health services and RNLI to ensure the mistakes made in 2020 do not happen again in 2021.

Mr Bell added: “Next year could be a bumper year indeed but there is no guarantee. In an ideal scenario Covid-19 is under control, people come here because it is their first choice and those who would rather be Spain are in Spain, and there is no recession.”

There are a lot of ‘ifs’ to ensuring that 2021 is not a crippling year again for the tourism sector, but should we continue to manage the pandemic, capacity in hotels and restaurants will go back up to 100%, events such as weddings and music festivals will happen again and trade across the sector will pick up.

More food, more booze and more ice creams, pasties and cream teas will be consumed and the industry will make some money again rather

than haemorrhage it out like it’s been the case since March 23.

Christmas could be make or break for food and drink businesses that have survived the coronavirus pandemic so far – and they will need our help. That’s the view of Ruth Huxley, managing director of the Great Cornish Food Store.

The businesswoman and passionate Cornish food supporter, believes the sector has been struck like never before and, while there have been winners and losers, even those who emerge on the other side of a fraught season could be hit harder still if support is not there at Christmas.

“I think, for many businesses in the food and drink sector, Christmas will be make or break,” she said. “That final push will be vital to get us through the shoulder months of January, February and March.

“So it would be great for the lockdown support we received to continue at Christmas. It is about supporting local business and local jobs.”

Will Ashworth, owner of the Watergate Bay hotel outside Newquay, believes that while there are a lot of ‘ifs’ in the equation, especially surrounding future coronavirus

restrictions or whether there will be a recession, 2021 is indeed shaping up to be a fully booked season. He said: “Bookings for next year are already 20% up on the same period last year.”

The prominent hotelier believes the season will extend longer into the autumn and winter months as demand for UK holidays has rocketed this year in view of the various restrictions on foreign travel brought on by Covid-19.

“Let’s all be honest about this. We had a devastating loss of revenues this year but whatever we think or make of the government, the level of support in place for the tourism sector has been excellent and has gone a long way to helping the whole industry get back on its feet. By the end of the year we will still be down in revenues but it could have been a lot worse. Many businesses could have gone under.”

What the industry is asking for is the help that was promised by the government to continue into the New Year, as well as encouraging people to come in the winter months when there are still many things that can be done and enjoyed in both

Devon and Cornwall – at a time that is generally cheaper.

Both Mr Bell and Mrs Everton are calling on the government to keep the VAT threshold down to 5%, as it was this summer, until August 2021 as a way to make the region even more attractive early on and encourage even more people to book their next year’s holidays early. They are asking for the furlough scheme or something similar to be extended throughout winter to help retain key staff full time, an extension of the business rate holiday, an extension of the repayment terms on the bounce back loans, and an extension to the Eat Out to Help Out scheme in October and November to cushion the blow for restaurants and pubs.

“We’re working on a campaign to attract visitors to Cornwall in the winter months,” Mr Bell said. “It’s all those 50 things you can do any day of the week in October, November and all the other shoulder months.

“It won’t make up the losses made this year but if by March next year the sector can claw back £200m it will give us the necessary start to get ready for what could be, if all goes well, a very good year.”

Universities and Colleges



> City College Plymouth
City College Plymouth

Universities and colleges investing in future of region

WHILE the coronavirus pandemic this year has certainly had a huge impact on all industries, and has slowed-down some planned new-builds and expansion works in the region, there are lots of developments to look forward to in 2021, thanks to Devon and Cornwall's universities and colleges.

The region's education providers have really put their money where their mouth is, with some investing millions of pounds in new facilities for students and learners, while others have upped their student support services in the wake of Covid-19.

In Plymouth, plans for an innovative new Engineering and Design facility show the University of Plymouth's investment in its students and its future, while University of Exeter's ambitious programme of upcoming developments are set to support the University's aim of being a global-100 research university.

In Cornwall, Falmouth University and the University of Exeter are investing in shared spaces at Penryn Campus to improve and increase the provisions on offer to learners.

And in the further education sphere, City College Plymouth and Exeter College are investing thousands in enhanced facilities and opportunities for students.

The University of Plymouth has shared its vision for a new cutting-

Education providers in the region are leading the way when it comes to investment, research, innovation and inspiring students and staff, writes Molly Dowrick

edge Engineering and Design facility, a state-of-the-art space full of flexible teaching spaces and "innovative research-enabled resources," aimed to inspire creativity and collaboration on its city centre campus.

University leaders envisage creating an environment that supports "forward-looking teaching programmes" that attract greater numbers of motivated students and meet the future needs of industries across the UK.

Head of the School of Engineering, Professor Deborah Graves OBE says: "This new building will offer a state-of-the-art setting to inspire the engineers of tomorrow, giving us the ultimate place to bring together students, academics and industry in an environment that not only benefits them but also society as a whole."

Plus, the multi-million pound transformation of Plymouth Railway Station is underway near the University campus, incorporating the construction of a brand new home for the University's Allied Health Professions and nursing and midwifery departments.

Once completed, the building will house top-of-the-range inter-professional clinical skills facilities and be used to train future nurses, midwives, paramedics, physiotherapists and other health professionals.

University of Plymouth Vice-Chancellor, Professor Judith Petts CBE says the new building plays an important part in the University's plans to "transform" its campus and reimagine university teaching and research spaces for the 21st century, while "making a significant investment in educating tomorrow's health professionals for the region and beyond."

At University of Exeter, leaders have invested £6.5m in the refurbishment and equipment at the University's new "Harrison" engineering building and an additional £13.5m on its maintenance work.

Set to be completed by December 2021, the new building will see improvements to workshop space, facilities and equipment, and the remodelling of laboratory spaces to support the delivery of the newly redesigned Engineering curriculum.



University of Exeter has also invested millions in a new project with Falmouth University to improve and enhance the Cornwall campuses. With match-funding from Falmouth University, the two universities are investing £11.7m into world-class research facilities on the Cornwall campuses, and developing the Penryn campus' infrastructure, teaching facilities and social spaces.

Meanwhile in the further education sphere, Exeter College has great developments on the horizon.

The new Digital and Data Centre, set to open in early 2021, comes as part of a wider South West plan to revolutionise technical education across the region.

The new £10.3million complex has been match-funded by the college and will focus on providing education opportunities in the digital sector, including employer-led curriculum programmes and courses around cyber-security, software development and data analytics, while providing a nationally significant "digital learning centre".

And work continues on the College's long-term £70m masterplan to improve education provisions in Exeter, including an epic extension of the College's Construction Centre.

With the introduction of the new 'T Level' qualifications - which have been launched by government to help improve the teaching of technical education and enable students to directly enter the work place after finishing their course at college or sixth form - Exeter College's Construction Centre has been expanded and upgraded to help the college offer more technical courses to its students.

Exeter College is currently the only education provider in Devon offering T Levels, with courses available in Construction, Digital, and Education and Childcare.

Learners at City College Plymouth are also benefitting from continual investment in facilities and opportunities.

In March 2020, City College Plymouth committed to working with Google to provide online learning

Universities and Colleges



> The Roland Levinsky building at the University of Plymouth campus
Lloyd Russell

opportunities and a range of world-leading technologies, including Google Meet, G Suite and Google Enterprise, to enable students and staff to connect, collaborate and share their ideas and knowledge in a digitally immersive and inclusive environment.

As well as this, the college has become a member of the recently formed South West Institute of Technology (SWIoT) and received a £2.1 million investment from the Institute, enabling City College Plymouth to expand the courses and apprenticeships it offers in higher-level technical skills, with a particular focus on STEAM subjects (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics) and its up to the minute facilities and opportunities for learners.

Not only is the college investing in new purpose-built, state-of-the-art facilities at the Oceansgate Marine Enterprise Zone in the heart of Plymouth's marine industry, but it has also devised innovative new university-led programmes in conjunction

with local employers.

The College's new Marine Autonomous Vehicle foundation degree and a new Higher National Certificate for the manufacturing maintenance sector will benefit from the new facilities, while new degrees in applied computer science and game design have also been rolled out at the college.

Plus, the college has secured £350,000 from the government's Getting Building Fund for a new Welding Centre for Excellence, has been awarded over £52,000 from Maritime Research and Innovation UK for new marine hybrid power and propulsion systems, £146,000 of funding to empower college leaders to become 'digital leaders' - and over €500,000 this year for students and staff to take part in fully-funded projects to develop their skills abroad through the Erasmus+ scheme.

With so many projects on the horizon for Devon and Cornwall's education providers in 2021, it's clear leaders and learners have a successful year to look forward to.



> The Penryn campus at the University of Exeter
Exeter University

Public Sector

Balancing the books during time of crisis

Local councils say they are facing an 'unprecedented financial challenge' this year, with the uncertainties caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the economic recession and Brexit, writes **Charlotte Becquart**

AS well as maintaining their usual services, councils have had to deal with the coronavirus pandemic in the last ten months – liaise with other agencies, make rapid decisions about resources, protect the most vulnerable and try to keep businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure industry afloat.

The financial impact of the virus was such that, in Cornwall, councillors had to draw up what they described as one of their "toughest budgets" ever.

Cornwall Council is looking to cut 200 jobs out of its 5,500 staff members as well as increase its share of the council tax by 1.99% – the maximum currently allowed without having to hold a referendum.

Councillor Adam Paynter, deputy leader of the council and portfolio holder for Resources and Finance, said: "We don't want there to be any compulsory redundancies. We are planning to have natural turnover where people retire or move into a new job and not filling vacant posts."

Cornwall Council spends over £1 billion annually. Its priorities for the

next 12 months will be health, homes and infrastructure, connecting people, a cleaner and greener Cornwall and more devolution.

The council also plans to save £58 million over the next four years.

"This year, we have faced one of our biggest challenges yet, the Covid-19 pandemic," a budget report to the Cabinet reads. "The council has risen to this challenge, but it has brought into focus the need to make sure our priorities as a council are going to help Cornwall and its residents move forward and not just back to the way things were."

The draft budget for 2021/2022 is now under public consultation. Cllr Paynter said: "This budget includes some really hard choices we have had to make while we face these current financial demands."

"Our highest priority will always be our residents, especially those who are most vulnerable and have been most affected by the pandemic. This budget reflects that, making sure the money is prioritised to those services."

Meanwhile, across the border,



Devon County Council has spent an extra £47 million on measures related to Covid-19, with £3 million of this not being covered by Government grants.

"It's impossible to divorce the Covid-19 pandemic from the rest of our operations," a spokesperson for the council said. "We had already invested heavily in IT, which meant

many of our staff could continue to provide services for the people of Devon whilst working remotely at home. Our front-line staff continued to operate in the community looking after the old, the young and the vulnerable. The vast majority of our schools stayed open throughout lockdown to care for the children of key workers and the vulnerable.

"County council leader John Hart chaired Team Devon, which brought together district, town and parish councils with other partners to coordinate a swift and comprehensive response to the people most affected by the pandemic."

The council, which employs 4,094 full-time equivalent staff, is forecasting a £4.5 million budget deficit for

HOW THE CORNWALL SKILLS HUB PROVIDES THE TOOLS TO GROW YOUR BUSINESS

STARTING a new business is a daunting prospect at the best of times. Starting a new business while in the middle of a pandemic, well, that certainly bucks the trend set by the majority who batted down the hatches.

Michael Kleinman not only started his new venture, Cornwall Property Consultancy, while on furlough during lockdown, the savvy property specialist has seen his business thrive in its first months of operation.

Cornwall Property Consultancy

aims to do the heavy lifting for those interested in either buying or renting a property in Cornwall. From his base in Camborne, Michael is Cornwall's Phil and Kirsty in one, showing clients through potential options before negotiating either the lease or sale, recommending solicitors and mortgage companies, before finally liaising with all parties through to the handing over of keys.

This is knowledge and a set of skills that Michael already had. However, it was the business nous and digital marketing know-how

that saw him approach the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Skills Hub for assistance.

With independent, impartial and expert support, the Skills Hub can act as the critical friend for your business needs, allowing their expert team to find a tailored training solution that fits just right.

"I have many years of work skills as an employee, but I have no experience in running a business or managing financials. I've got the basics in a Facebook page, Instagram and website and have set

up my own Facebook group to try and direct people to my Facebook page, but what I need now is to take my business to the next level and new skills can help do that," Michael said.

The demand for people looking to make the move to Cornwall has sky-rocketed during the Covid-19 period, as many look to shift away from larger cities and towns in a world where working remotely is quickly becoming the norm. "One estate agent I was speaking to says their enquiries were up 71% year on

year, so this period has been both good and bad," he added.

With a new business, new skills and an increased digital presence, Michael is feeling extremely positive regarding the future of Cornwall Property Consultancy. "It's getting the message out that I am here. That is the thing that I need help with most," he said.

Does your business need help in adapting and pivoting to this new way of working? Call the Skills Hub on 01209 708 660 or visit www.ciosgrowthhub.com/the-skills-hub



> The Box attraction has given Plymouth's profile a big boost

Matt Gilley/Plymouth Live

the 2020/2021 financial year. Budget monitoring reports for the position at month four went before the council's cabinet last month.

County Treasurer Mary Davis said that, if the over-spend materialises, then it can be accommodated by not making the 2020/21 planned contribution to reserves of £4.5 million, but she added that it was against her instincts to carry a negative reserve that is growing, but it was what central Government continued to tell them to do.

Ms Davis's report added: "The level of uncertainty and pressures being faced by the public sector this year are greater than ever before. The projected forecast of break-even is welcomed but there remain significant far-reaching risks associated with the impact of the pandemic which could be financially destabilising."

Devon County Council is already planning how it can lead the economic recovery. "We are launching a £6 million economic recovery plan that will target four key areas, support for small and medium enterprises, employment and skills, green

recovery and towns and hardest-hit places," the council spokesperson continued.

"We are buying the former Flybe Training Academy and working with Exeter College to provide skills and training opportunities. We are also committed to being carbon-neutral by 2030 and are leading engagement with our communities and residents."

In Plymouth, the city council is proud to have seen several of its big projects coming to fruition despite the pandemic.

Council leader Tudor Evans said: "While Covid-19 has changed the timescales, it has not changed what we are doing. We've had an incredible couple of weeks in spite of Covid: The Box opening, Look II being unveiled, the Mayflower autonomous vessel launch, but we've also done lots of other work to get to this point. This work is not just about visitors, it is about helping families here enjoy our fabulous city and learn more about its amazing history."

The council also has plans to jump-start the local economy and regenerate the city. In May, it

pledged to lead from the front the city's economic recovery programme out of the Covid-19 lockdown and announced plans to help Plymouth's businesses get back to work through Resurgam - a programme to oversee recovery across all sectors.

Cllr Evans said at the time: "This is the biggest economic challenge this city has faced since the Blitz, but I am certain we can rise to the challenge."

"Over the last few years we have made huge strides in creating and sustaining jobs and prosperity. We have great partnerships across the city. We need to harness the energy and expertise that we have built up - not just from within the council - but across key business organisations and companies to work together to make sure Plymouth is ready to reemerge from the lockdown."

"We will also be looking at how the Council's own economic footprint can help restart the economy through our procurement, capital programme and projects pipeline. If we can get these restarted quickly, it will be an immediate and massive boost to the economy."



> The Mayflower Autonomous Ship was introduced to the public in Plymouth this year

Manufacturing

‘Brexit deal essential to protect jobs and firms’

With Brexit kicking in on January 1, deals being seemingly reneged on, and of course the uncertainties surrounding Covid-19 and a possible recession looming, it does not look great for the region’s manufacturers, writes **Olivier Vergnault**

ACCORDING to Make UK/BDO Manufacturing Outlook Q3 survey, investment intentions fell by a balance of -31% in the last quarter of the year.

The average SME in South West has lost 38% of their income as a result of Covid-19. Many SMEs in Devon and Cornwall are reporting significant losses due to Covid-19, with 32% seeing a decrease of more than 70% of their income. Meanwhile 14% of SMEs in the region have said the health of their business has already been damaged long-term.

While not reaching the levels of cutbacks seen during the financial crisis as yet, the trend downwards is following a similar pattern to that seen at the time and reflects the difficult picture for the aerospace sector in particular which accounts for a fifth of regional output.

Looking forward, given the impact on the sector, Make UK is now forecasting that manufacturing output will fall by almost 11% (10.9%) this year while it has downgraded its forecast for recovery in 2021 by more than a full percentage point from 6.2% to 5.1%. GDP is forecast to fall by -8.5% this year before recovering by +10.1% in 2021.

However, the national manufacturers’ body has warned that given the uncertainty surrounding the Brexit negotiations and the very real possibility of ‘no deal’, the combination of that outcome with the continued impact of the pandemic could cause further damage to investment prospects in the latter part of the year.

Jim Davison, region director for Make UK in the South West, said: “Manufacturing has begun to climb away from the abyss that it stared into earlier in the year. But, make no mistake it is going to be a long haul back towards normal trading condi-

tions, with talk of a V shaped recovery nothing more than fanciful.

“Having emerged from three years of political uncertainty at the end of last year, increasing talk of a final ‘no deal’ exit from the EU would be a final nail in the coffin for many companies.

“If we are to avoid this, and the avalanche of job losses that would follow in already hard hit areas and sectors, it is essential that the first step towards a fuller recovery is provided by a comprehensive trade agreement with the EU.”

Businesses however have welcomed the announcement by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak in his Winter Economy Plan at the end of September, which aims to find an alternative to the furlough scheme that was due to come and an end in October.

The new Job Support Scheme, starting in November, will mean the government will pay part of workers’ wages who have lost hours while a VAT cut to 5% will remain in place until next Easter.

The cut in VAT to 5% for the hospitality and tourism sector will be extended until 31 March and that too has been welcome to promote demand and help business rebuild their cash reserves through the tough winter months.

Kim Conchie, chief executive of Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, said the future ways to doing business will suit Cornwall better than the old 20th century model and while we are going through tough times now, there is hope for future growth too.

Eric Nicholls, the chairman of the Cornwall Manufacturing Group, said it has been a mixed picture for its members with manufacturers supplying the aeronautic and automotive industries suffering the most when those supplying the health and





► Manufacturing, already worried about Brexit, was dealt a double whammy by the pandemic

Ben Birchall

'Getting a good Brexit deal... will help protect tens of thousands of businesses across the region'

DEBORAH FRASER, CBI SOUTH WEST DIRECTOR

hospital sectors 'working flat out'.

He said 80% of the members had made use of the furlough scheme and would do so again if it is proposed in another form by the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

However he admitted that it had been tough and 60% of members had made redundancies with one in 10 jobs lost in the sector in Cornwall since the start of pandemic.

Mr Nicholls said: "It has been a challenging year but not as bad as some sectors like tourism, leisure or hospitality. Our members are saying they have reduced order books and that's a concern. Any furlough 2.0 scheme will be helpful in retaining staff even on a part-time basis so order books can be fulfilled.

"I think going into next year could be tough especially its impact supply chains. As for Brexit, a lot of the details are still missing but most firms are prepared as much as they can by now so it shouldn't be the problem we thought it would be a year ago."

For Mr Conchie added: "We are looking better in Cornwall than the national average. Cornish businesses are naturally resilient and used to run on thin margins rather than fat cats. Our SMEs are well embedded in their communities and will do what they can to avoid redundancies.

"People have been looking at innovative and creative ways to work differently or even create new businesses to avoid any recession. I think if our local businesses can hold their nerves until next spring we should be OK."

Some businesses have been forced to operate at 60% or 70% capacity because of social distancing regulations while others have still not reopened.

One such business to have seen production stop overnight was Bott in Bude which specialises in workplace storage solutions. On March 24, production was shut down and only gradually reopened in May.

CEO Nick Smith said: "We are a family company with a resilient balance sheet. When we announced the shut-down, we decided to top up the furlough payment until the end of May.

"Unfortunately, with the clear volume reduction, we had to 'right size' the business and sadly we will have lost 41 employees. At the start of the lockdown, furlough clearly helped, but we took the difficult action early. I do fear for those 'zombie' businesses who have used furlough to drag out the inevitable."

Mr Conchie believes businesses need to remain confident, which may be easier said than done in view of the situation with the pandemic and faltering Brexit negotiations.

He said: "We are at an unprecedented moment in history when after giving our word we show some

cavalier attitude to a deal we have signed. Our standing in the world could be damaged by this and that doesn't fill businesses with confidence.

"Some precision manufacturers in the Duchy who export all over Europe are worried about the implications of Brexit, especially if it leads to countries like France or Italy deciding to do their own.

"If Covid-19 is kept under control I think the tourism industry could see a bumper year next year which is good for Cornwall. Brexit may actually help on that front as people will look to staycations again.

"I have no doubt that the hospitality industry will once again push the boat out to offer a first class service to visitors next year."

He said the service sector had also shown signs of having adapted remarkably well to the 'new normal' and seemed unaffected with estate agents for example enjoying a boom time. He added: "I'm not expecting a cliff edge at the end of October when a third of people will lose their jobs. But I think the furlough scheme needs to be applied with greater agility."

Mr Smith believes supporting the British manufacturing, innovation and continued investment, will be key in the coming months, especially as we head into further unknown with Brexit. He said: "Backing British manufacturing is definitely a strong message for all our stakeholders, particularly with Brexit looming. We will block and tackle those things outside of our control, but we are accelerating our efforts for the things we can control. I would like to think by the end of 2021, we start to get back to 90% of pre-Covid volumes.

Matthew Sewell, Head of Manufacturing at BDO in the South West echoed the sentiment, adding: "Other countries do provide good examples of consistent long term support to their manufacturing sectors. The UK should look to adopt a similar approach."

Deborah Fraser, CBI South West Director, said without an agreement with the EU, UK firms could face tariffs of up to 16.4%, burdening them with extra costs and paperwork.

This will divert company resources from investment planning and spending for growth, to managing and mitigating red tape.

She said: "Getting a good Brexit deal would be an immediate boost to confidence in the South West. It will help protect tens of thousands of businesses across the region already under huge pressure from the pandemic, not least in industries like advanced engineering and manufacturing, green technology and digital and cyber technologies. Getting a deal requires political leadership and compromise from both sides, which is needed urgently in the coming weeks."

Princess Yachts

Plotting profitable course through troubled waters



> Princess Yachts can boast a growing range of vessels

Princess Yachts

Plymouth-based Princess Yachts International Ltd, the UK's largest yacht maker, has launched a trailblazing new vessel and is already planning an equally stylish sister ship as it bounces back from the coronavirus lockdown, writes **William Telford**

PRINCESS Yachts has completed sea trials for the X95, and is now working on unleashing the slightly smaller X80.

The company, which employs more than 3,000 workers in the Ocean City, said it has "re-written the rules" on yacht design with the X95 - and now has done it again.

Princess Yachts has stressed its "aggressive investment strategy", and the company's record financial position and full order book are the reasons it has been able to create such high-spec new yacht designs.

The manufacturer sent 98% of staff home and carried out a "controlled shutdown" in March after coming under increasing pressure from the workforce and public to cease operations.

The company began returning to production in early May and is now working on fulfilling its order book for 2020 and 2021.

At the start of June, it launched the X95, which came with its own on-

board cinema and, of course, a Sky-lounge.

The X80 is due to take to the water in 2021, becoming the second member of the X Class Superfly family.

Princess toasted international sales of £263.8 million in 2018 - and has been growing exports at an average of 33% per year over two years, on total sales of £340.3 million.

In 2018, the company launched six new models, including the carbon fibre R35 sports boat. It announced record profits of £30 million in June, 2019, and set records for yacht sales and employment.

In January this year, it enjoyed "unprecedented stand visitor numbers and levels of sales" across its range throughout the eight-day Boot Düsseldorf 2020 show in Germany.

At that time it had an order book of £0.6 billion, and it was reported the company had brought in advisers so it can obtain a cash infusion from shareholders and keep up with mounting orders.



Babcock battles hard to keep core business in sound shape



> Devonport Dockyard, which is owned by engineering giant Babcock

Western Morning News

THE defence and aerospace company Babcock, which operates the huge dockyards at Devonport in Plymouth and Rosyth in Scotland, said the coronavirus pandemic had caused underlying revenue to fall for the first quarter of 2020 by 11% compared with 2019.

Part of this was due to the company's 2018 loss of the Magnox contract with the Government to clean up nuclear reactor sites, and weakness in the firm's land adjacent market short-cycle businesses, including South Africa.

Covid-19 also had a "significant impact" on the financial results in the period, the firm said. Necessary safety constraints on close-proximity working had a significant impact on costs and efficiency, directly impacting margins and profitability.

Restricted access to customer sites, complex safety measures, reduced numbers of staff on site, changed shift patterns and additional costs led to slower progress on some work streams, which impacted margins on some of Babcock's long-term contracts.

It meant underlying operating profit for the first quarter was about

It has been another stormy year for engineering giant Babcock International Group PLC, which scrapped its dividend after seeing revenues decimated during the coronavirus pandemic, writes William Telford

40% lower than in 2019. About half of this profit reduction was due to lower levels of productivity in the core business and the company said uncertainty around the duration and extent of the impact of Covid-19 on productivity, margins and pipeline development meant the board made the "exceptional" decision not to pay a final dividend for the financial year ended March 31, 2020.

The firm did, however, point to an order book at June 30 of £17.3 billion and a bid pipeline of about £17 billion and orders in the quarter were £0.7 billion, and in July the company secured about £500 million of new contracts in its aviation business, helped by the delays in bid decisions beginning to clear.

In 2019, the company shut its Appledore shipyard, in North Devon, saw share prices tumble, and twice

had to fend off a hostile merger plan from outsourcing rival Serco. It also revealed an extra £10 million tax hit due to Brexit and the restructuring of its aerial emergency services business. That was after it was extruded from the FTSE 100, in 2018, with Just Eat gobbling up its place.

Chairman Mike Turner left the firm after 11 years as chairman and Ruth Cairnie, a former Royal Dutch Shell executive, became the first chairwoman of the FTSE 250 firm.

It has a new chief executive now, with David Lockwood taking over in September from Archie Bethel, who stepped down after 16 years with the company. Mr Lockwood, aged 58, was previously chief executive of Cobham Plc, running one of the UK's largest defence companies and a leading global technology and services innovator for three years.

> Appledore Shipyard was closed by Babcock last year



Retail

SW retail sector in 'strong position for recovery'

LONG-STANDING businesses such as Edinburgh Woollen Mill, Marks & Spencer and Debenhams have all faced uncertainty, with store closures, redundancies and job losses looming.

John Lewis also announced it would permanently close eight of its stores for the first time, but its Sidwell Street shop in Exeter survived the cuts - despite fears it would not reopen again.

The closures of Laura Ashley in Plymouth, Exeter, Barnstaple and Truro and the Cath Kidston Stores in Plymouth, St Ives and Exeter, also hit the South West hard.

Both brands blamed the impact of coronavirus for tipping the companies over the edge.

Other huge retail losses across the region have included Café Thorntons, Lawsons, Brighthouse, Pets at Home, M&Co, Clintons, Carphone Warehouse and Skinny Dip.

Many small and independent businesses have also been forced to cease trading, including Steckfensters in Penzance, which earned glowing reviews and articles in *Time Out*, *The Guardian* and *The Times*, as well as featuring on television programmes.

In total, more than nine billion pounds has been lost in fashion, home and non-food retail sales so far this year, with the Centre For Retail Research finding nearly 14,000 shops across the UK had permanently closed.

However, things are beginning to look a bit more positive for retail.

On the day of writing, the BRC-KPMG Retail Sales Monitor showed that during the month of September, total sales increased by 5.6%.

Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium (BRC), said: "September saw a big improvement in retail sales growth, however sales over the last six months are still down on the previous year."

The BRC-KPMG report revealed the strongest monthly sales growth for retailers since December 2009, as like-for-like UK retail sales grew by 6.1%.

The figures also revealed a 4.2% increase on the amount being spent on clothes as shoppers bought more items online during the month.

The Centre for Cities high street recovery tracker also showed the areas in the South West were beginning to recover from the effects of the coronavirus lockdown.

The retail sector has been plagued with doom and gloom during 2020, with streams of famous names plunged into financial crisis, writes **Katie Timms**



► MD Liz Lawson and her father John. The firm has closed its branch in Plymouth

Plymouth ranked in at number 10 for the areas with the highest recovery spending rate, with data showing more people are travelling from outside the city than they were before lockdown - but many are still shopping online.

The British Retail Consortium said the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the trend of people moving to online shopping, due to stores closing during lockdown.

A South West BRC spokesperson said: "Prior to coronavirus, the proportion of retail sales made online had grown from 5% in 2008 to 19% by March 2020.

"Coronavirus accelerated this change. When many stores were forced to close, online retail became a lifeline for us all, with one in every three pounds - from food to fashion - spent online in May."

Plymouth City Centre Manager, Steve Hughes, explained that during the height of the lockdown, Plymouth was 80% down on footfall.

This has now improved and the city is 31% behind the footfall figures for 2019.

"I think we are doing better than many cities and hope we are in a strong position for recovery," Mr Hughes said.

The Centre for Cities report showed that Exeter is recovering at a slower rate than Plymouth, but is improving at a faster rate than bigger cities such as Birmingham, Cardiff and Bristol.

Mr Hughes added: "I think in terms of recovery, Plymouth is doing quite well. Although footfall is down, people seem to be spending a bit more.

"I think that may be due to the pent-up demand. So, you know, half the people came out of lockdown. They thought, 'I need to buy some new clothes,' or 'I've been so bored, I need to go out for a meal.' So I think that report seems to indicate that we're actually doing a bit better than Exeter at the moment, in terms of emerging from Covid.

"Exeter is suffering a bit more than us. Plymouth so far has been very lucky, because the infection rate remains very low compared with other areas of the country.

"So, we obviously haven't been hit in the way that places like Newcastle, Manchester and Leeds have been.

"You know, that could change tomorrow, it could change next week, or hopefully, we might get away with it."

Mr Hughes said he believed Plymouth is "in a really strong position", with many visitor attractions opening, such as The Box, the £60million Plymouth Cross hotel and student block and the new stores going into the Barcode, which in turn will bring more people into the city centre.

There is still an uncertainty around a further lockdown impacting the retail industry if non-essential stores are asked to close again.

Devon County Council last week unveiled its urgent £6million economic recovery plan to support businesses, in response to the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

Devon County Council leader John Hart said: "Clearly we are still in a battle with coronavirus as the rising number of cases in Exeter has shown this week. Rates across the rest of Devon remain low and we must all pull together to keep it that way and to keep people healthy and safe.

"But we also have to take urgent steps to address the economic health of our county, our communities and our people and to plan for the future."

Devon's Cabinet member for the economy, Rufus Gilbert, said: "This



financial investment will support the economic recovery of our hardest hit places, enterprises and individuals.

"Together we can grasp opportunities to build back better, to build a more resilient, inclusive and sustainable economy."

Mr Gilbert said the exact measures would depend on how the pandemic developed but would include supporting businesses to become more resilient and improve their digital skills, as well as targeting key sectors such as retail.

Cornwall Council also announced help during the lockdown, with Cornwall's Business Improvement Districts offered a council cash flow support by way of an interest free loan, up to £600,000, to aid the recovery of town centres.

Funding will come from the council's £4m ring-fenced Town Centre

Regeneration budget with the agreement that the money is paid back by the BIDs by 2022.

Richard Wilcox, Falmouth BID manager and Co-Chair of the Cornwall BIDs group, said: "This is very good news and we are pleased to be working alongside Cornwall Council to provide extensive further support to our Cornish businesses and towns at this crucial time.

"A collaborative approach is what's needed and this news acknowledges the integral part that BIDs will play in the extensive recovery and revitalisation plans that are being formulated for our communities.

"I'd like to also highlight the work of my colleagues across Cornwall; a really good example of the town management industry in the region working productively together to help secure this funding boost."



> John Lewis announced it would permanently close eight of its stores for the first time, but its Sidwell Street shop in Exeter survived the cuts
BRIDGET BATCHELOR



> Seasalt was named last year as the 14th fastest growing retail store in Devon and Cornwall CHS UGC

CLOSURES DESPITE SALES SURGE

CORNISH fashion brand Seasalt Ltd closed three of its South West stores, even though it is in profit and saw a sales surge over Christmas.

The company, named last year as the 14th fastest growing in Devon and Cornwall, closed its outlets in Salcombe in Devon, Clarks Village in Somerset, and Guernsey in the Channel Islands.

But it has opened a new store in St Andrews, Scotland and a sustainable concept store in Norwich.

Seasalt has around 70 UK and Ireland stores and an online site.

The company had positive sales growth over Christmas across all

channels for the five weeks to January 4, 2020.

Online sales leaped 13% and UK stores saw a 15% sales increase year-on-year. International sales were also up, by 43% over the Christmas period. In November 2019, Seasalt announced pre-tax profits had jumped to £2.5million with a turnover growth of 29% to £66million.

In June 2019 it opened its first international store in Clonakilty, Ireland. In addition, online sales jumped 35% with strong growth in Germany and the USA. There was a 21% hike in active online customers too, attracted by 12 collections over the year.

RIVERFORD'S VEG BOXES TAKE OFF

DEMAND for Riverford home deliveries went through the roof when lockdown hit, with the Staverton-based business reporting sales akin to the Christmas rush.

Riverford was forced to close its shop to new customers, concentrating on its core registered customers and simplified its range to meet demand.

The trend of ethical buying remains strong and big news this year for Riverford is becoming certified B Corp. B Corp is a trusted symbol for ethical businesses that uphold the highest social and environmental standards.

Riverford became employee owned in May 2018, a move that its CEO Rob Haward said at the time has given the company a "huge forward momentum" and increased engagement with customers, media and employees, now co-owners. But with Brexit ever closer on the horizon, Riverford is planning for short term disruption but should fare well because of its direct and long-term relationships with suppliers, the location in the South West means it can benefit from the low-freight route between Plymouth and Roscoff and the veg box concept meaning supply can vary weekly depending on availability.



> Riverford experienced a 'Christmas rush' for its organic veg boxes during lockdown
Riverford

Profiles



> Tom Roach, partner at PKF Francis Clark, and Malcolm Bell, chief executive of Visit Cornwall, launching the Share a Smile campaign at the Eden Project

Toby Weller

Doing our best to take good care of our clients

IT IS always a source of pride to see many of our clients feature in the Western Morning News's prestigious list of Devon and Cornwall's top 150 businesses. These dynamic businesses are the engine of our region's economy, and we thrive on working closely with our clients – whatever their size – to achieve their ambitions.

I'm particularly pleased to report that we now audit more than a quarter of the firms on the top 150 list. With 39 audit clients among the top 150 – up from 36 last year – we have the largest market share of any accountancy firm, including the Big Four, and three times that of the next regional firm.

Our holistic service to clients extends far beyond audit work, important though this is. In times of great upheaval like the current pandemic, the role of trusted advisers is critical in helping owners and management teams to plot a course through stormy waters.

With our Covid Business Review service, we're working with businesses and charities both to overcome immediate financial pressures and ensure they have the right business model to succeed in the post-pandemic world. This process entails

Glenn Nicol, partner and head of corporate services at PKF Francis Clark, reflects on an eventful year for the firm



a comprehensive assessment of your existing assets, analysis of how your marketplace is changing and a fundamental review of how your assets and skills could be used to exploit new opportunities. In this way, we have helped clients to restructure their businesses and access the funding they need.

As one of the largest professional services firms in the region, PKF Francis Clark has itself climbed one place to 80th in this year's top 150 list, with turnover having grown 7% to £44.1m. With 615 staff across our eight offices – in Exeter, Plymouth, Torquay, Truro, Taunton, Bristol, Poole and Salisbury – we are the 25th largest employer on the list. We are proud to play our part in creating quality employment opportunities within the region and supporting our people to achieve their career ambitions. Recently we have continued to recruit to our graduate pro-

gramme, as well as making a number of senior appointments and promotions to strengthen our teams.

Accountancy has faced its share of disruption during the pandemic, albeit not to the same extent as some sectors. Fortunately, our significant

'We were excited to launch the Share a Smile campaign to support South West leisure and tourism'

investment in IT over recent years enabled us to move swiftly to remote working, so we have been able to continue supporting our clients seamlessly. An important part of our role has been helping business leaders to navigate and access the wide variety of support schemes.

Our colleagues in FC Payroll Solutions and FC Financial Planning have likewise been working hard to support clients throughout a turbulent year for employers and investors. To take one example, the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme has been a lifeline for many but inevitably created extra administrative burdens. Our payroll teams helped by taking care of complex calculations to ensure that thousands of our clients' employees were paid correctly and on time every month.

More recently, we were excited to launch the Share a Smile campaign to support South West leisure and tourism businesses. With many clients in the sector, we know that lockdown and subsequent restrictions have had a major impact on a vital part of our region's economy. By encouraging people to recommend their favourite local businesses on Instagram and Twitter – using the hash tag #ShareaSmileSW – the campaign aims to help drive footfall during the quieter autumn and winter months.

All of the above emphasises our ongoing investment in the region across many initiatives to help enable the South West to thrive in these unusual times.

DAWSON'S THE RANGE IS BOOMING

RETAIL magnate Chris Dawson, a former market trader now among Britain's most recognisable business faces, kept his The Range empire trading during the lockdown, saying stressing the stores sold essential items such as groceries, cleaning products, non-prescription medicines and toilet roll.

This received some criticism from the public, but probably not The Range's thousands of customers, who continued to use more than 175 stores, including three in Mr Dawson's home city, Plymouth.

In early 2019, he gave Plymouth the third of those, a £2 million superstore at Derriford which created 80 jobs. The Range, which Mr Dawson once described as "a poor man's John Lewis", now employs more than 10,000 people and has a turnover that has risen from 2019's £869 million. It made £101 million in profit in 2019.

Sitting at number 67 in the Sunday Times Rich List, with a fortune of £2.05 billion, Mr Dawson, or more accurately his wife Sarah, saw their wealth rise by £60 million pre-pandemic.

That is because Mr Dawson has followed the lead taken by his compeer Sir Philip Green by signing over the discount giant to his 57-year-old wife, who is based in Jersey. The couple met when he sold her an £8.99 watch for a bargain £5 outside a pub.

Staying in the global market

Leading player in Cornwall's china clay industry adapts and reacts to challenges of extraordinary year

DESPITE some obvious challenges, one local business continues to make headways on global markets.

The UK operations of Imerys have managed to keep their head above water despite tougher trading conditions brought on by Covid-19 restrictions and uncertainties around the world.

Despite the months of lockdown and disrupted supply chains, Imerys has continued to be a key part of what is a global business of more than 16,000 employees spanning more than 250 sites in 50 countries.

In Devon and Cornwall, the business employs close to 1,000 people, making it one of the largest employers in the region, with 80% of production exported to more than 75 countries worldwide.

Imerys operates 18 active quarry and industrial facilities in Devon and Cornwall and pumps an estimated £100 million into the local economy annually.

Based at Par Moor, near St Austell, the firm's activities in Cornwall focus on kaolin (china clay) extraction and processing, with the UK being the world's third largest producer and exporter of kaolin after Brazil and the USA. China clay from Cornwall supplies the ceramics, performance minerals and refractory markets and the paper-making industry. Everyday materials that we use like tableware, sanitary ware and paint contain china clay.

The china clay industry has a hugely important part in the history of Mid Cornwall, dating back almost 275 years, with the area being affectionately known as Clay Country.

Today, it remains a globally important industry which continues to play a key role in the economy, land-



► The planned second phase of the West Carclaze Garden Village in St Austell

scape and lives of people living and working in the Mid Cornwall area.

The world-leading company has successfully re-positioned its Cornish product portfolio to reflect the changes in lower demand in Cornish clays from the paper-making industry, and focused more on the ceramics and performance minerals markets (such as paints, rubbers, polymers and cosmetics).

The internationally acclaimed science and technology function based at Imerys's Technology Centre-UK, at Par Moor, employs more than 50

highly skilled scientists and technicians exploring new and emerging markets and end uses for locally produced china clay products, as well as other minerals Imerys has interests in globally.

Where land is no longer required for mining use, Imerys is carrying out award-winning restoration schemes and supporting the regeneration of clay country through the West Carclaze Garden Village project, as well as providing land for key infrastructure projects such as the A391 improvement at Carludon.

Ashley Shopland, Imerys UK General Manager, said: "This year has presented challenges for families and businesses across the world and we have all had to adapt. We have been able to keep all operations open throughout the period despite the constraints we are all under, and a market that has fallen significantly, but hopefully temporarily, through the period."

"As a very local company with the benefit of a major global parent behind us, we remain incredibly proud of an industry which plays an

important role in the lives of the people who live and work here and continues to make a highly significant contribution to the Cornish economy.

"We work with local communities and charities and actively support local businesses and organisations, annually spending almost £40 million with around 200 suppliers with a base in Cornwall. When added to what we pay to our employees and pensioners, this amounts to around £100 million being injected into the local economy annually."

GREGORY TRUCKS ARE ON RIGHT ROAD

GREGORY Distribution (Holdings) Limited celebrated its centenary year in 2019 after starting life in North Tawton, Devon, with a single Model T Ford Truck, writes William Telford.

Like most firms, Gregory has been hit by the Covid-19 downturn, announcing in May that it had to make 100 redundancies. It is still one of the region's biggest employers, operating 36 depots across the UK.

Its latest acquisition is the 75,500sq ft high-bay warehouse at PowerPark 38, the new name for the former British Ceramic Tile factory in Heathfield. BCT went into administration with the loss of 300 jobs in 2019 and the site had been vacant since.

At the time, Gregory said it was making 20 staff redundant because of the collapse of

BCT, which was one of its clients. The facility will be used by Gregory for the storage and distribution of up to 12,000 pallets.

The firm has a fleet of more than 750 vehicles and 1,200 trailers, and has more than 400 customers ranging from local companies to large, multi-national organisations, and lists many national brand names amongst its customers. Its vehicles cover 75 million miles every year.

Chief executive John Gregory, aged 62, runs the company, which was started by his grandfather. In 2018, it acquired ARR Craib Transport Ltd, whose headquarters are in Aberdeen, with additional operations in Cumbernauld, Stockton-on-Tees and Great Yarmouth. It also acquired the Scottish firm Highland Haulage, based in Inverness.



► Gregory Distribution Limited has shown its own way of acknowledging front-line workers this year

Gregory Distribution

Construction

Building industry picks up the baton

The construction trade has been doing its best to shed a tarnished image and emerge as standard-bearer in the post-pandemic economy. By **William Telford**

THE South West's construction industry is emerging, like NHS staff and centenarian fundraiser Sir Captain Tom Moore, as a Covid-19 era hero.

Building firms rallied to create Nightingale Hospitals in Plymouth and Exeter at double-quick time and the sector is leading the nation's fightback against recession.

Although Westcountry housing developments temporarily stopped, other business and infrastructure sites were soon back in action following the March 23 lockdown decree, and continued to provide jobs and an shot in the arm for the ailing UK economy.

Now Prime Minister Boris Johnson wants the UK to "build back better" and will boost spending on infrastructure as he plans to "level up" the nation economically.

That will be good news for the Westcountry, where key industry figures are confident the sector will be a post-pandemic pulse-raiser.

They point to important and ongoing large-scale developments, led by the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station in Somerset, the Sherford and Cranbrook housing schemes in Plymouth and Exeter, and others in the pipeline such as the planned A303 upgrade.

The industry is also likely to emerge from the Covid-19 period with a focus on greener and even higher-quality construction. That is not to say there are no challenges, with some firms concerned about supply chain issues, particularly with full Brexit looming, and the fear that local procurement may be overlooked.

But, overall, the industry remains upbeat and buoyant, with Constructing Excellence South West chairman Andrew Carpenter saying: "We are in a really good position."

He explained: "Construction probably recovered better and faster than any other sector. We are nearly back to 100% for infrastructure and housing. Productivity is very high.

"Most sites closed for a week or two and put in place social-distancing measures, but, once they were in place, were able to return to work."

He added that, pre-pandemic, the sector had an image problem but its work on essential projects won the nation over and even "put it on a pedestal."

"The major obstacle was public perception, but we were considered a vital industry, particularly for our work for health and education," he said. "Until Covid, public perception was not that good, but the way we came together and delivered the Nightingale Hospitals put construction on a pedestal."

He said the industry has now emerged as a united front, and is able to lobby the Government effectively. "We have never seen the UK construction industry more joined up, right through to ministers and Government. Post-Covid, we should not be the same industry that went in," he added.

Mr Carpenter said that process will include a push for net-zero carbon targets, a move towards greater quality and safety, post-Grenfell, and opportunities in new areas such as off-site construction, the creation of elements such as modules and panels in factories.

"The leading exponents are in the South West," he said. "Cornwall is rife with timber frame."

Then there will be the changes wrought by the coronavirus pandemic, such as the need to repurpose buildings in city centres where retail and office space may need a fresh future.

"Are people going to go back into shops? Not to the same degree," Mr Carpenter said. "So the other thing that will create jobs is the regeneration of city centres.

"We have seen the move away from office working in the city centres, though it will come back to a degree. But many people now working from home will not want to travel back into Plymouth or Exeter day in,



day out. We will see a lot of city-centre office locations made into accommodation, and that will be a refurbishment opportunity for many companies."

He feels suburban 'hubs' for working and business could become a new feature, along with the need for more e-commerce warehousing.

"There will be the creation of hubs," he said, "and we are also going to see an increase in warehouses, and distribution depots are going to be a growth area.

"The whole of construction in the South West is very rosy going forward," he concluded, "and, if you look at Boris Johnson's Build Back Better, he is saying the construction industry will bring us out of this."

The sentiment is shared by the Federation of Master Builders, which said the initial lockdown saw construction work across the region drop by 40%.

By May, this left more than 60% of businesses reliant on Government support, such as the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme under which workers were on furlough. But Phil Hodge, FMB South director, said that

has changed, and he added: "Fortunately, from what many of our members have been telling us, there is evidence of a bounce-back for the sector in the South West as we move into autumn, with pent-up demand driving building activity near to capacity.

"However, FMB builders in the South West are reporting difficulties in the supply of some key materials, with further concerns surrounding the availability of supplies once our exit from the EU completes at the end of the year."

He said the FMB welcomed the Government's Green Homes Grants scheme, which will support further activity within the sector, and also "encourages the formulation of a deeper national retrofit strategy that can support continued and stable investment in the longer term."

Mark Duddridge, chair of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership, also highlighted the importance of the sector, but has some concerns too.

"The construction industry has a vital part to play in supporting growth and is quite literally the founda-

tion on which so much economic activity is built," he said.

"The sector has proved resilient in the face of Covid-19 but there remain longer-term issues, including an ageing workforce and the need to upskill as the climate emergency drives rapid changes in technology.

"Our focus is on working with the industry to help address these challenges and opportunities so that it continues to support a prosperous and sustainable economy across Cornwall and Scilly."

Among the key firms working in the region's construction sector, the consultancy Ward Williams Associates has been involved in many high-profile developments, including the new The Wave inland surfing destination near Bristol.

It highlighted major projects in the region that have continued despite the challenges of Covid including several in Cornwall such as the Carlyon Bay redevelopment (developer CEG), the West Carclaze Garden Village (developer ECO-BOS), and major housing projects at Newquay, Redruth and Launceston (developer Treveth).



> The new town of Sherford is helping to keep the construction industry busy

Penny Cross

But the firm, which has seven South West offices, including in Plymouth and Truro, is just hoping the bounty from a national building boom filters down to local levels.

"As an industry and as individual businesses, we have faced unforeseen challenges in the past eight months," a WWA spokesperson said. "But the construction community in the South West has been united in remaining positive and supporting each other to ensure the sector remains strong and resilient."

"The Construction Industry Council (CLC) quickly issued Site Operating Procedures during Covid-19 which have been regularly updated as the situation has developed."

"Buildings and infrastructure schemes that were on site have largely continued, in some form, to be constructed."

But WWA said that there is a concern about the lower number of new starts on site and the commissioning of new projects in the early stages of concept and design.

"The pipeline of new projects is a worry for all construction businesses in the South West, particularly the smaller businesses," the spokesperson said. "Although the Government is promoting the Build Back Better ethos, we are not seeing many of these 'big spend' projects in this region and certainly not accessible to smaller, regional businesses."

"Our public sector clients have been

proactive in getting back on site quickly and safely. Regional initiatives in the public sector, such as Plymouth City Council's Resurgam programme, have sought to encourage local procurement and support recovery. The fruition of these initiatives will be critical to South West-based SMEs, and in many cases the make or break.

"The merit of using local suppliers has been evident on many projects including Market Hall, in Devonport; and The Box, also in Plymouth."

"The Nightingale Hospital in Exeter was delivered within an incredibly short programme including WWA, Stride Treglown, Service Design Solutions, TClarke and BAM Construction."

"We are still seeing large Government construction-related frameworks such as Crown Commercial Services Consultants Framework requiring applicants to provide national coverage."

"Any framework that requires national coverage will be problematic for SMEs. With new Social Value legislation due in January, 2021, we are promised that the new approach will mean more opportunities for SMEs and social enterprises to win Government contracts."

WWA has maintained a core Covid response team that continuously monitors the Government and industry advice. The team has assessed and communicated the potential impact of any changes to staff, clients and fellow professionals.

"Communication has always been a key factor in the delivery of successful projects, right now it's probably the most important," the spokesperson said. "We are constantly heartened and encouraged by how the South West construction industry has responded to the pandemic, camaraderie in the true sense of the word."

Another leading company, Plymouth's Service Design Solution, also had to react rapidly when Covid arrived in the UK.

A spokesperson said: "Lockdown was a worry for our business as well as the rest of the industry. Overnight, many clients and our peers were working from home, or on furlough, making communication more challenging."

"We had a strong pipeline of work and our investment in technology allowed for continuity of the delivery of projects, taking us through the initial stage of lockdown."

The firm's expertise in healthcare engineering, and the depth of its resources, meant it was approached to work on NHS Nightingale, in Exeter.

"This required a significant amount of resource to develop the design of the building's mechanical and electrical engineering systems," the spokesperson said. "At a similar time, the Government suggested that construction should carry on and act as the accelerator to kick-start the economy."

"This has resulted in clients returning to us with projects which have received additional Govern-



> The inside of the NHS Nightingale Hospital Exeter taking shape

ment funding, or 'shovel-ready'. In addition, there was funding released for further Covid response facilities at a number of the region's hospital estates. Our experience at Nightingale demonstrated our expertise in delivering complex projects of this nature.

"We currently see a positive upturn in work until the end of the year. However, our concern would be with the Government's long-term strategy and investment in construction when considered in the wider context of the huge

national debt that has been caused by the pandemic. We see the construction industry as an enabler to invest in cross-cutting themes, create new jobs for young people, and offer opportunities for decarbonisation of building stock."

"The South West has many talented and skilled construction businesses. We would welcome Government initiatives to make these companies preferred suppliers, to develop and support our local economy and keep work and jobs within our region."

Apprenticeships

Work Experience

Kickstart Scheme

Traineeships

Industry Placements

T Levels

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Technology

Rapid digital transformation

If there is one sector which does not seem to have been affected by the coronavirus pandemic, it is our region's varied and agile tech industry, writes **Olivier Vergnault**

FOR many businesses, having to find new ways to do business, which in many cases has included offering new contactless and online forms of payment, upgrading their website or pivoting their business entirely to full e-commerce, South West tech businesses have not only avoided the Covid crunch - but may well have saved many others too.

Dan Pritchard, Tech South West co-founder, believes the regional tech cluster, which has more than 2,000 business members, from the Isles of Scilly to Bristol, is best placed to reap the benefits of rapid digital transformation brought about by the pandemic.

He believes new opportunities and innovation are well underway.

Dan said: "Technology has saved businesses. Uncertainty leads to opportunity and it's already happening; companies pivoting, shifting their offering, finding new markets."

According to Tech South West, some 4,170 online shops opened in the South West during the pandemic, more, in relation to the total number of businesses in the region, than any other part of the UK.

With a new £5m innovation centre set for Taunton, expansion at Exeter and Plymouth Science Parks, the breakthrough of more tech startups from Falmouth University's Launchpad programme, the new Centre of Technology and Innovation Excellence in North Devon and Gravity development at Junction 23 of the M5, the long term future looks bright for the region's tech industry.

Toby Parkins, chairman of Tech South West and co-founding director of software firm Headforwards in Pool, said: "Tech companies are making big decisions.

"Many have realised they don't have to be in London paying premium rent. It's the perfect fit for the South West. We're not talking big industrial units that impact the landscape. Clean tech is low visibility, high pay and rapid growth."

Paul Coles is BT Group English Regions Director and on the Tech South West steering group.

"We rightly talk about investment for the region but need to put digital skills at the forefront. Farming, fishing, food and tourism are staples of our economy, yet Covid has shown they are vulnerable. We have to be innovative and creative across every sector.



"Farming has been innovating for centuries and you can see it now with the emergence of agritech. Investment and innovation needs to accelerate if we are to really thrive economically."

Despite the pandemic, 2020 has been a good year overall for the sector and many tech service companies have never been busier.

Paula Byers, founder of cloud app integration firm LimeCloud and tech cluster Digital Northern Devon, said: "The service side has been inundated. Digital transformation has advanced hugely. It's not just tech firms.

"All sectors - NHS frontline services, manufacturing, retail and many more - have been adopting digital solutions, not least of course, for remote working. That's highlighted the vulnerability of rural broadband in many areas."

In a turbulent year companies have moved quickly to adopt technologies to support their operations.

Alongside helping clients to adapt, Exeter-based IT and tech strategy and support specialists Timewade were already running a free technology group for South West businesses.

Covid-19 changed everything. Managing director Julian Wills launched the Technology for Success group in late 2019 after running a regional tech survey.

"It was startling. There was a clear divide between companies considering technology across their whole business, and those who definitely were not. Now we're seeing that play out to full effect."

Unsurprisingly, those taking a more strategic approach were seeing the greatest productivity benefits.

Lockdown saw Timewade expand the free support for SMEs, launching a webinar series and SME Business Summit with partners including Bishop Fleming and Stephens Scown LLP, and ramping up free resources on a new technologyforsuccess.co.uk website. A 2020 tech survey of

SMEs has just been completed.

Julian adds: "Looking at the early results, investment in technology is going up and there are new challenges. Cyber security and data control are priorities, areas that probably slipped during lockdown but are imperative to business resilience, especially with remote and blended working here to stay.

"When you are relying on home broadband and various kit, new solutions are needed."

He added: "Electronic trading is now a priority and 80% have already identified new opportunities. We are having to think differently. How business leaders embrace the right technology solutions will be key to so much in the months ahead."

However it is not the perfect rosy picture for all tech companies and many fear that further growth could be hampered by a lack of investment in infrastructure and digital skills. In addition, some tech firms supporting struggling industries such as avi-

ation or automotive industries have also suffered.

Kate Doodson, joint chief executive of East Devon's Cosmic, said: "Many people rely on colleagues or an IT department to get through a standard day and now they are working from home they have been really struggling. There is suddenly a reliance on technology that there hasn't been before."

The tech sector has been the fastest growing part of the region's economy for several years now. But there have been 'winners and losers'.

Paula adds: "It is very much feast and famine. Aspects of advanced engineering in aviation have struggled. For some, it has been dire.

"But overall tech is agile and resilient. In the long term, we have an amazing opportunity. Our expertise in clean tech fits perfectly with our National Parks, coastline, Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and UNESCO Biosphere. If we really want to rebuild the economy in a

brought about by pandemic



► Exeter-based IT and tech strategy and support specialists Timewade were already running a free technology group for South West businesses

Timewade

way that least impacts our environment, it has to be through the tech sector.”

Digital infrastructure for the South West is considered essential in helping to close the productivity gap with other UK regions. And it's not just cities that are the focus of major upgrades.

Backed by £250million investment, Exeter-based Jurassic Fibre is on target to provide world-class broadband connectivity to over 300,000 premises across the South West by 2024.

In the last year, the company has recruited over 150 employees and completed a state-of-the-art network covering 15,000 residential and business premises in Exmouth and villages to the East of Exeter.

They are now extending their network to Taunton and Honiton, as part of a five-year plan to introduce full-fibre ultrafast broadband to villages and towns across Devon, Somerset and Dorset.

CEO Michael Maltby said: “We live ‘tech-driven’ lives. There is an increased requirement for more efficient and faster broadband, particularly since the pandemic, with UK data consumption rising on average by 21% every year.

“The South West has long lagged behind the rest of the UK for fibre-to-the-premises availability, and our aim is to create a major step change in daily Internet use for people living and working in the region.

“A migration has started from towns and suburbs, convenient for five-day office working, to areas in the South West offering a higher all round quality of life, underpinned by the availability of fibre-to-the-premises Internet connectivity.

“As the roll-out of the railways in the 19th century defined the winners and losers for the next one hundred years, the roll-out of fibre-to-the-premises networks will do the same in the 21st century. Our intention is the SW will be one of the winners.”



► Plymouth Science Park
Tony Cobley Photography

REGION'S SCIENCE PARKS LIGHT THE WAY AHEAD

UNDERPINNING much of the region's innovation, and with a track record of attracting companies from beyond the South West, Plymouth and Exeter science parks continue to evolve in unprecedented times.

Over the summer, Plymouth Science Park welcomed a number of specialist firms to the park's growing tech, academic and medical cluster.

Israeli medical-technology start-up Eye Control uses artificial intelligence-powered eye-tracking and technology to help locked-in and ventilated patients communicate through eye movements. Modus Laboratories, relocating from the Thames Valley, are a contract research company for the oral healthcare industry, combining scientific discovery with

customer research and development. Close to 100 organisations now operate from what is the region's largest science park, with more to be announced in the coming months.

Ian McFadzen, CEO of Plymouth Science Park, said: “The pandemic has shown just how vital cutting-edge science and technology is to every part of our economy. These are tough but exciting times. The collaboration and knowledge exchange being facilitated by both us and Exeter Science Park with our universities and other key partners, will be instrumental in delivering a resilient economic resurgence.”

Exeter Science Park has reopened to tenants and guests, transforming the site into a Covid-secure environment.

Dr Sally Basker, CEO of Exeter Science Park, said: “We've been working hard to create a demonstrably safe and pleasant working environment and community space for our staff, tenants and guests. This includes launching Exeter Science Park Connect, the digital hub for the Science Park allowing tenants and visitors to connect, collaborate and access services virtually. We're pleased to be welcoming back tenants and guests to a Covid-secure environment.

“As we look ahead, we'll be completing work on the 20,000 square foot Ada Lovelace Building in early 2021, and beginning work on a third Grow-on Building. We're continuing to provide high quality office and laboratory spaces.”

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