



## The green agenda and Great South West



**G7 Cornwall**  
United Kingdom 2021

► Prime Minister Boris Johnson (centre) is joined by world leaders at the G7 Summit in Cornwall in June last year

Leon Neal/Press Association

# Time is right for the South West

**T**HE delayed publication of the Levelling Up White Paper is due this month and, if a hint given by Prime Minister Boris Johnson last year materialises, it could mark the start of a £45 billion ambition to transform the economy in the South West.

Back in November, Mr Johnson promised that the Levelling Up White Paper would provide “an important step towards securing the formal recognition and funding that the Great South West campaign seeks”.

Economic leaders behind the Great South West movement’s net-zero plan say that the region can become the cutting edge of the Government’s Levelling Up agenda, creating 190,000 new jobs.

The mission is to transform the fortunes of the region which, with a population of over three million, is the size of Wales and, with an economy of £64 billion, bigger than Greater Manchester, but constrained by productivity output that is lower than both and over £12,000 per job lower than the UK average.

Held back by rural deprivation, an affordable housing crisis and poor social mobility, the region believes that its natural and research assets at sea and on land could be the key to transforming its fortunes – all it needs is the right backing.

David Ralph, chief executive of the Heart of the South West LEP, a key member of the Great South West

Partnership, said: “Levelling Up provides a real opportunity for the Great South West but we remain concerned that the opportunities and challenges of our area continue to be overlooked.

“We hope that, through recognition and our share of available funding, Levelling Up will enable local partners and local businesses to respond directly to both these opportunities and challenges without having to be reliant on the ‘dead hand of Whitehall’. It is local people who understand their local areas better, so it makes sense that it is they that develop and implement the right priorities and solutions.”

It is hoped that the PM’s nod to the region less than two months ago could signal this type of fresh impetus by the Government for the region’s plans. Mr Johnson’s comments came in a letter to the *Western Morning News* in November. He was responding to a letter to No 10 sent by Bill Martin, the newspaper’s Marketplace Publisher, and Editor Philip Bower in September. They urged him to act on his warm words about the Great South West campaign.

At the time, business leaders said they were “beyond frustrated” at the

lack of action on their business case. They had put the foundations in place in response to Brexit, and well before the pandemic hit in 2020.

Launched five years ago with the region’s biggest private sector employer, Pennon Plc, the #BackTheGreatSouthWest campaign went on to create the Great South West Partnership which has set out how it has the potential to become the ‘UK’s Natural Powerhouse’ in its Securing the Future prospectus that was taken to No 10 Downing Street in 2019.

Last year, the G7 Summit put the spotlight on Cornwall, and climate change came to the fore through Cop26 in Glasgow. It means that the South West’s plan to become the UK’s natural powerhouse economy is even more vital than ever, but its £2 million request from Government to progress its ambitions has so far come to nothing.

Speaking last year about the need for funding, Steve Hindley, chairman of the Great South West Partnership, said: “For the first time, the Great South West has set out a challenging low-carbon vision for our region, building on our strengths and key opportunities, and we have an active

All-Party Parliamentary Group set up to support the Great South West. We have consistently had warm words from No 10 and other ministers and we want to get on and achieve the same status as the other ‘Powerhouse’ regions and move forward with our blue and green agenda.”

There has been some good news this year – Plymouth and the South

*“We remain concerned that the opportunities and challenges of our area continue to be overlooked”*

**DAVID RALPH**

West has submitted its plans for a freeport deal, opening up tax benefits for the city’s high-value engineering and advanced manufacturing sectors and building on Plymouth’s strengths in marine and defence specialisms, and further opportunities in the space sector are being developed. It sees the area as a regional hub for trade and investment, jobs and regeneration, which will be committed to clean growth.

It is one of eight areas identified in the UK that the Government is keen to develop with a comprehensive package of measures, comprising tax reliefs, customs, business rates retention, planning, regeneration, innovation and trade and investment support.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said in his Autumn Budget in October that Cornwall would receive at least as much money from the long-awaited Shared Prosperity Fund as it would have got from the EU before Brexit.

Mark Duddridge, chairman of the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership, said in a December blog post: “The Levelling Up White Paper will set the framework for how we spend it. And whatever structures emerge, I think we can all agree that those investment decisions are best made locally, for one and all.”

Susan Davy, chief executive of Pennon Group, a key member of the Back the Great South West campaign, said: “We are looking forward to a renewed focus on levelling up and plans to support a green recovery and job creation as a truly national project, including in regions such as the South West.”

Pennon, the owner of South West Water, is helping its existing workforce gain new green skills, creating hundreds of additional jobs, and is offering graduate placements and planning 500 apprenticeships over the next five years.

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

**Pennon**

# ‘Why are we waiting?’



► Prime Minister  
Boris Johnson  
Tolga Akmen/Getty Images

I ONLY got into really serious trouble at school on two occasions; once for throwing a firework and the other for leading a loud and slightly aggressive chorus of the song “Why are we waiting?” as part of some irritating protest about the quality of school food.

Despite my school days scolding, it’s tempting to start another noisy rendition and get the whole of the South West to join in, after the latest “warm words” from the Prime Minister in respect of the Back the Great South West campaign. In response to our open letter asking for action rather than words on the region’s economic ambition, Mr Johnson told us that we must wait for the publication of the Government’s much delayed Levelling Up White Paper.

He also said that the White Paper would “provide an important step towards securing the recognition and funding that the Great South

## The Great South West deserves a fair deal from the Government, writes **Bill Martin**, Marketplace Publisher, Reach South



West campaign seeks”. They were promising words, but the suspicion remains that our region is low on the list of Government priorities – especially when compared with the ‘red wall’ constituencies of the north.

To be fair, this would not be a new thing. At its very outset, the Back the Great South West campaign was launched in order to lobby David Cameron’s Government to honour all the pledges both he and it had made to the region. And while it’s easy to understand why the Government and its Whitehall mandarins reckon they can get better political bang for their buck in the north, it still feels that here in the South West

they are looking a gift horse in the mouth.

The campaign has seen an unusual spirit of unity and common purpose developed across all sectors in the four counties of Devon, Cornwall, Somerset and Dorset. This has led to the formation of the Great South West partnership and the Great South West All Party Parliamentary Group.

The partnership prepared and published its Securing the Future prospectus, outlining a plan to create £45 billion in economic benefit and 190,000 new jobs in the region over the next 15 years. The original ask to Government has been for formal

recognition of the region as an economic entity – like the Northern Powerhouse – and for £2 million over three years to give the plan impetus. It doesn’t seem much.

More than two years ago, Mr Johnson’s business adviser, Andrew Griffith, invited this newspaper to lead a delegation of business leaders from the region to No 10 Downing Street to discuss the region’s aspirations. At that meeting, Johnson urged the region to be bold and pledged that he supported it in everything it was doing.

The region has a shared ambition to be the UK’s only exporter of green energy and the UK’s greenest economy – the first to net zero and to establish the region as the UK’s leader for the green and blue economy.

For the moment the region is uniquely placed, not only because of its carefully articulated ambition, but also because of the almost unheard of spirit of unity behind the Great

South West. Local authorities, MPs, public sector organisations and the private sector have been united behind the ambition. This unity will not last without progress.

With luck, the White Paper will be published this month, and there will then be clarity around what more the region needs to do in order to be given the support it needs to supercharge its progress.

The Great South West is a large and powerful economic entity that with the right support can become the cutting edge of the country’s levelling up and net zero agenda. It has done all that has been asked of it by Government. Collaboration with other regions will be key, but the Great South West’s mission is clear and should not be lost in any forced regionalisation with the Western Gateway. Today’s very clear message from the region to the Prime Minister remains the same: “It is time to Back The Great South West.”

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon



► The cost of shipping a container from the Far East to the UK has soared from £1,500 to over £20,000

Greg Martin

# Supply and demand still vital

**W**HAT a past year it has been! Few would have imagined you could pack so many extremes into 12 months, from lockdowns to record trading, and worries about high unemployment to a glut of job vacancies.

We have also seen inflation rocket to its highest level for over a decade and interest rates moving upwards for the first time in years. Shortages of computer chips and delivery drivers have disrupted supply chains, while significant volatility in demand has seen the cost of shipping a container from the Far East soar from £1,500 to over £20,000 - more expensive than many of the goods inside them.

What does all this mean for businesses and management teams? My theme last year was increased divergence - and this trend has gathered pace, with those forced to close their doors contrasting sharply with those who cannot meet the level of demand for their goods and services.

From our own perspective, in 30

Government restrictions, entrepreneurs' adaptability and an abundance of funding have widened the divide between winners and losers, writes **Andrew Killick**, partner and head of corporate finance at PKF Francis Clark



years of advising on corporate transactions I have never seen a time when buyers of businesses we are selling have been unable to obtain due diligence providers for weeks, or even months. We have undertaken far more vendor due diligence to help those business owners looking to sell to do so in a sensible timeframe, overcoming supply constraints in the professional services marketplace.

The divergence between different trading sectors is now extreme - and unlikely to be just for the short term. The key, therefore, is flexibility and adapting to the fast-changing environment that affects your business -

and this is highly unlikely to be linear.

Whilst those in their 50s and above will have seen several economic challenges in their careers, the fundamental difference during the recent downturn was the availability of money. With traditional banks, supported by the Government, understandably focusing on their existing customer base, the availability of equity and alternative finance was greater than ever before - by a staggering amount. In a time of low interest rates and high inflation, money sat around doing nothing is no longer earning a living - its purchasing power is going backwards.

With the greater quantity of money in the system, and the need to take risk to have any hope of generating a real return, the appetite for buying businesses has never been higher, with the basic principle of supply and demand driving up valuations.

Experian MarketIQ reported a "striking" bounceback in mergers and acquisitions activity in 2021, with the South West seeing a 40% year-on-year increase in deal volumes in the first nine months of the year.

The short-term outlook for 2022 is that high levels of transactions will continue, with no signs of a let-up

and many deals in the pipeline for Q1.

However, there are so many variables that could adversely affect the market - Covid-19, ongoing Brexit fall-out, contagion from major corporate debt defaults, capital gains tax increases, as well as supply shortages, inflation, interest rate rises and potential political change. All these could potentially cause disruption, though the sheer volume of funding still in the market may underpin the extent of any fall.

There will no doubt be more insolvencies, as the Government is unlikely to provide sufficient support to keep everything afloat. At the other end of the spectrum, certain sectors will retain their favoured status among investors and valuations will appear eye-watering to some.

Despite all the uncertainty, the basics of supply and demand still apply to all sectors. Spending time on assessing this to enable businesses to make the most of the opportunities that do arise will separate the winners and losers.

## #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
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# 1(2) NORTON GROUP HOLDINGS LIMITED (CDS SUPERSTORES LTD), PLYMOUTH, DEVON

TURNOVER: £1,352,486,016 EMPLOYEES: 12,480

**R**ETAIL magnate Chris Dawson's The Range chain of homeware stores saw sales leap by £352m during the worst of the Covid pandemic after his stores remained open as 'essential retailers'.

The hike in earnings to £1.35bn in 2020 led to after-tax profits for the Plymouth-headquartered company jumping to £145m - more than three times the £47m profit made the previous year.

It made so much money it was able to repay a bank loan of £102m. But it has not repaid about £36m it saved during the year-long rates relief holiday, though it does not have to do this.

And despite the financial bounty, no dividend was paid to Mr Dawson, or his share-holding wife Sarah, for the second successive year, after more than £60m was paid out to the couple during 2018 and 2019.

The accounts for Norton Group Holdings Ltd, the holding company which includes The Range, revealed that the year to the end of January 2021 presented "unprecedented challenges" for the company due to the Covid crisis.

But when the business was designated, somewhat controversially at the time, an essential retailer it 'made hay' during three lockdowns.

A strategic report penned by Mr Dawson said that "significant restrictions" were placed on stores in Wales and Ireland, limiting the products sold, but otherwise its outlets, some of which contain Iceland branches, were trading full tilt.

Mr Dawson's report said the hike in sales was due to "classification as an essential retailer and a full year of trading for the 20 stores opened in the prior year".

Mr Dawson admitted the business benefited from the Government's business rates holiday - saving a reported £36m - but insisted it used the savings to offset costs involved in making stores Covid safe.

And Mr Dawson also stressed a 10% discount for NHS staff during the pandemic amounted to more than £2.8m of savings for those key workers.

Another five stores opened in 2020/21, and created 1,747 jobs, and Mr Dawson predicts the company will create another 2,700 jobs in the next year. He expects 2021/22 will show further sales growth as the group "continues to explore all facets of retailing."



► Chris Dawson, centre, at the opening of the Range store in Paignton in 2019

Erin Black

# 2(6) DUNBIA (UK), HATHERLEIGH, DEVON

TURNOVER: £1,194,763,008 EMPLOYEES: 4,551

**B**ROTHERS Jim and Jack Dobson established Dungannon Meats, a premium butchers shop in Moygashel, Co Tyrone, Northern Ireland, in 1976, and the business has expanded through organic growth and via multiple acquisitions.

In July last year, Dawn Meats took full control of the Dunbia business after Jim Dobson's retirement.

It operates across 12 UK sites including Dunbia Treburley abattoir and processing plant in Launceston, and the Dunbia West

Devon abattoir at Hatherleigh.

Highlights this year include the launch of its Sustainable Farming programme and a win at the Great Taste Awards with its Rose County 35 Day Dry Aged Native Breed Cote de Boeuf.

The group's Sustainability Report

published in September reported a cut in greenhouse gases from its operations and supply chain by 248,000 tons in 2020 compared to 2016.

It uses 100% renewable electricity and has invested in refrigeration upgrades and lower emission ther-

mal energy generation.

Progress is being made right across the Dunbia supply chain, with 99% of livestock sourced from Red Tractor Assured farms in the UK. All of Dunbia's rigid plastic packaging trays now having a 90% average recycled content.

#1 auditor to top 150 businesses

## Top 10

## 3(2) DEVONPORT ROYAL DOCKYARD LIMITED (BABCOCK INTERNATIONAL LTD), PLYMOUTH, DEVON

TURNOVER: £790,812,992 EMPLOYEES: 5,665

**T**HE company which runs Plymouth's Devonport Dockyard is a subsidiary of engineering giant Babcock International Group Plc, which has the exclusive contract to refuel and refit all the Royal Navy nuclear submarines at Britain's single submarine refitting dock.

Devonport Royal Dockyard, in addition to maintaining and refitting

Royal Navy warships and submarines, also carries out other engineering services for the MoD.

Following a restructure of Babcock International's operating model the submarine and naval base services now are part of the company's Nuclear sector, while warship and other services remain in the Marine sector.

A new, five-year Future Maritime

Support Programme (FMSP) began in April 2021, with an option to extend the deal with the MoD for another two years, and includes deep maintenance of the Vanguard and Astute class submarines.

During 2021/22 the dockyard will be working on a Type 23 frigate refit and life extension and continuing with the deep maintenance and refuelling of the Trident sub.

The £600m project to refit and extend the life of Britain's fleet of Type 23 frigates has been ongoing at Devonport for the past few years with HMS Somerset leaving the huge Frigate Support Centre dry dock "sheds" in late 2020, with the space filled by HMS Sutherland, while HMS St Albans and HMS Iron Duke were also in mid-refit and upgrade.

Devonport Royal Dockyard is also

engaged in design work on the new generation of submarines, which will replace Vanguard, and surface ships and on "modernisation of infrastructure to support future submarine and warship programmes".

Work has now started on a £2bn rebuild of facilities at Devonport Dockyard which will create more than 600 construction jobs during the next five years.



> Babcock International, Devonport Dockyard, Plymouth

Matt Gilley

## 4(1) PENNON GROUP PLC, EXETER, DEVON

TURNOVER: £624,099,968 EMPLOYEES: 1,987

**E**XETER-BASED Pennon Group had a good end to the year, reporting a £90.4m pre-tax profit for the past six months to November - a 4.3% hike on the same period in Covid-hit 2020 - partly thanks to its acquisition of Bristol Water.

The parent firm of South West Water, Bournemouth Water and now Bristol Water, saw a profit increase on the £86.7m underlying profit made in the first six months of the 2020/21 financial year and also saw a 21.8% jump in revenue to £389.3m for H12021/22.

It was helped by the June 2021 acquisition of Bristol Water, which contributed to £41.6m to underlying revenue.

Underlying revenue was also helped by the recovery of non-household demand, as businesses opened up post-lockdown, and con-

tract wins for Pennon Water Services, the firm's business water division.

Pennon called the performance "resilient" after the Covid pandemic and Government imposed price cuts took a bite out of earnings in 2020/21.

In 2020, the firm welcomed its new chief executive Susan Davey, handed out a £20million windfall for customers and oversaw the £4.2billion sale of waste management operator, Viridor.

It announced 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.

The firm is one of only a handful on the FTSE 350 to have both a female Chief Executive and Chairman and is a key stakeholder in the

#BackTheGreatSouthWest campaign championing levelling up in the South West.

It has launched a Green Recovery Initiative which includes a plan to create up to 500 new jobs to support the local economy and to develop new green skills.

In September, it welcomed 26 graduates as part of South West Water's new Graduate Management Programme and also became one of the first companies to sign up to the Government's Kickstart scheme providing 50 six-month paid work placements to young people at risk of long-term unemployment.

It also signed up to support the #10,000 black interns initiative to offer black students placements that also improves the levels of ethnic diversity and talent across the industry.



> Susan Davey, CEO of Pennon Group

Tim Pestridge

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon

**5(4) HELSTON GARAGES GROUP LIMITED, HELSTON, CORNWALL**  
 TURNOVER: £511,569,984 EMPLOYEES: 1,094

**T**URNOVER for the firm is down from £643,371,000 on the previous year, but the position of Helston Garages Group remains strong as one of the most successful firms in Devon and Cornwall, slipping just one place in this year's list.

Car ownership in general has taken a backseat as more people ditch the commute during the pandemic and work from home.

But with a rural population and a patchy public transport network, confidence in car ownership remains relatively strong in the region.

Helston Garages Group operates 43 motor dealerships throughout Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset selling Audi, BMW, Ferrari, Maserati and Volkswagen.

Established in 1960, the family-run business has expanded from a single filling station and repairs workshop to one of the UK's top 25 dealerships.



**Coming soon...**  
**PKF Francis Clark's 2021/22 Deals Review**



Don't miss your essential guide to what's happening in the South West deals market, featuring key transactions and analysis from our experts.

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## Top 10

## 6(5) MOLE VALLEY FARMERS LIMITED, SOUTH MOLTON, DEVON

TURNOVER: £473,171,008 EMPLOYEES: 1,979

Roy Riley

**T**HIS South West retail firm is one of the UK's largest agricultural suppliers with holdings in Wales and more recently Scotland. This includes Mole Valley Farmers branches and Bridgman's stores across the South West, Mole Country Stores, Cox & Robinson farm direct outlets in the South and East of England, and manufacturing sites across England, and Scotland.

Formed by a band of disgruntled maverick farmers in South Molton, Mole Valley Farmers marked its 60th anniversary in 2020.

It welcomed new Chief Executive

Jack Cordery, who succeeded Andrew Jackson after he retired in 2019.

Mole Valley was classed as an essential retailer during the early stages of the pandemic and remained open during repeated lockdowns in 2020 and 2021.

It recently published its environmental roadmap to become carbon net zero by 2040.

It launched its Climate Positive Agriculture initiative helping farmers lower their farm's environmental footprint, including addressing the use of palm oil and soya in animal feeds.



## 7(7) NORBORD EUROPE LIMITED, SOUTH MOLTON, DEVON

TURNOVER: £365,416,992 EMPLOYEES: 654

**B**ASED in South Molton, Norbord Europe is the UK's number one engineered wood panel manufacturer and serves the housebuilding and construction industry with flooring, panelling and roofing. This world-leading manu-

facturer of engineered wood-based panel products has been supplying products to Europe for over 40 years.

It has three mills in the UK and one in Belgium. Its South Molton site manufactures particleboard, loft

flooring panels, Contiboard DIY shelving and flat pack furniture.

Norbord Europe is part of Norbord Incorporated, which was acquired by publicly listed Canada-owned timber firm West Fraser in February 2021.



# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

8(10)

**ACCORD-UK LTD, BARNSTAPLE, DEVON**  
 TURNOVER: £296,870,016 EMPLOYEES: 741

ONE of North Devon's biggest employers, this pharmaceutical company is involved in the development, manufacturing and distribution of pharmaceutical products to more than 70 countries.

During the early stages of the pandemic in 2020, managers recognised that its products would be in high demand.

It started the recruitment of a 'shadow workforce' - 50 new staff who were trained up and could step in to safeguard against staff sickness or shielding ensuring there was little disruption of its supply chain to the NHS and other stockists.

The facility employs more than 700 people making five billion tablets every year at its manufacturing plant in North Devon. It supplies generic medicines and is one of the fastest growing generic pharmaceutical companies in the UK and Ireland.

The Accord site in Barnstaple acts as the centre of its UK operations, helping to make a significant contribution nationally to the NHS, as well as locally to the community in Devon.

The site is one of the largest employers in Barnstaple and has an established apprenticeship programme.

The site is also a designated landing site for the Devon Air Ambulance Trust.

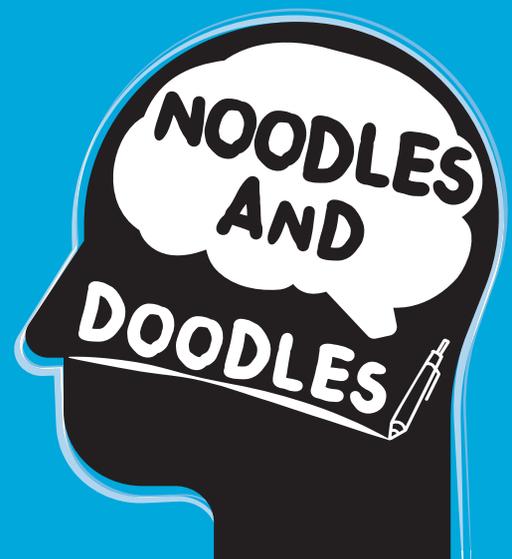


► The Accord factory at Whiddon Valley in Barnstaple

**PKF**  
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**CLARK**  
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# A podcast about business success stories

Hear the inside story of the Eden Project, Mindful Chef, Watergate Bay, Lightfoot, Granny Gothards and more.



## Top 10

## 9(11) MIDAS GROUP LIMITED, EXETER, DEVON

TURNOVER: £291,267,008 EMPLOYEES: 498

ONE of the UK's largest privately-owned construction and property services companies, Midas has grown to become one of the UK's largest independent construction and property services providers, with offices in Indian Queens in Cornwall, Exeter, Newton Abbot, Bristol, Newport in South Wales and Southampton.

A flagship build this year has been Exeter's new £6.6million zero-carbon office and laboratory building, the Ada Lovelace Building on Exeter Science Park.

It has also started work on a £6.3million STEM and Health Skills Centre for Truro and Penwith College, Cornwall which will train the aerospace, space, creative, energy, mining and health sector workers of tomorrow.

It has also worked on the first phase of the Oceansgate marine enterprise project in South Yard, Plymouth, and a series of schemes across Cornwall and Devon including the Gateway Retail Park at Marsh Mills in Plymouth, Cornwall's archive centre Kresen Kernow, a Premier Inn for Wadebridge and the £17million Hi-Tech and Digital Centre at South Devon College.

The projects mark an upturn after the pandemic in 2020 led to the firm making a £2m loss - its first in 40 years of trading.

During the period, disruption, including lockdowns, had an adverse effect on revenue and profit with some projects ceasing work temporarily and significant work taking place to develop and successfully



> 2020 topping out ceremony of the Ada Lovelace building, Exeter Science Park. From left: David Bird, Heart of the South West LEP; Andy McAdam, Midas; Nick Ames, Chair of the Exeter Science Park Board; Paul Arnott, Leader of East Devon District Council; Naomi Harnett, Exeter and East Devon Enterprise Zone Programme Manager

GUY NEWMAN

implement plans to safeguard the health, safety and wellbeing of employees and contractors, in compliance with government and Construction Leadership

Council guidance.

It reported in June this year that it had maintained a strong order book.

This, combined with positions on 45 frameworks, which includes the

Department for Education and Southern Construction frameworks, as well as recent appointments to the £10bn GLA Retrofit Accelerator for Homes Initiative and the £350m ABRI

Residential Framework, meant it was confident of returning to pre-pandemic revenues of circa £250m per annum. The group continues to operate with no debt.

## 10(8) PRINCESS YACHTS (HOLDINGS) LTD, PLYMOUTH, DEVON

TURNOVER: £244,440,992 EMPLOYEES: 2,910

THE UK's largest luxury boat builder Princess Yachts revealed a US\$1bn order book in 2021 and said production is struggling to keep up with demand.

The Plymouth manufacturer revealed a "record-setting commercial performance" with sales rate surpassing production rate, driving record low distributor stock levels.

It said almost all production through to the end of 2022 and more than 60% of 2023 production is already covered by orders. By October 2021 it had already sold 20 of its flagship Superfly X95 and had 57 orders for the new Y72 model which launched during summer.

The company is poised for further growth with the new Y95, X80, and V50 already in produc-

tion, as well as five further new model launches by the end of 2022.

And, despite being in a Covid-19 recovery phase, intensive recruitment continues with increased investment in skills training and award-winning apprenticeship programmes.

The firm said it has faced challenges from the Covid-19 pandemic and ongoing supply chain

issues affecting the UK. Turnover and profits dipped in 2020 as the company was affected by a temporary Covid-related closure.

But it bounced back strongly and despite ongoing challenges retail sales have grown to the highest levels in the history of the company, with an order book exceeding US\$1bn.

With record low distributor stock levels globally - equivalent

to one to two weeks of stock - and production almost completely covered by orders into the second half of 2023, the company said it is in a unique commercial position.

Although 2020 turnover reduced to £244m from 2019's full year turnover of £314m, the company reported a "significantly improved" financial performance in 2021 and expects even stronger results in 2022.



> Princess yachts' range of vessels

Princess Yachts

# #BacktheGreatSouthWest

## Profiles



> Managing partner Andrew Richards welcomes PKF Francis Clark's latest intake of trainees

# Recruitment key for businesses in West region

**F**OR the third year in a row, PKF Francis Clark has partnered with the Western Morning News to produce this list of the Top 150 businesses in Devon and Cornwall.

We believe it's important to celebrate the contribution these companies make to the regional economy, with their combined turnover of £13.75 billion and more than 80,000 employees across the South West and beyond.

Once again, we're delighted to see many of our clients ranked among the region's largest businesses, and we're proud to play our part in supporting their success.

I'm also pleased to say our share of the audit market has continued to grow year-on-year. We now audit 27% of businesses on the Top 150 list – as many as the Big 4 accountancy

Attracting and developing talent is key to sustained success, says Glenn Nicol, partner and head of corporate services at PKF Francis Clark



firms combined. Having climbed six places to 74th in the Top 150, PKF Francis Clark is the largest professional services firm rooted here in the far South West. Occupying the space between smaller regional firms and the Big 4 enables us to offer clients the best of both worlds – local knowledge and personal service combined with real breadth of expertise.

To do this, we need to recruit and retain the best people, which is why being recognised as a great place to work is a strategic priority for us as a firm. The past year has been a record one for recruitment at PKF Francis Clark, with 48 new trainees joining alongside many senior hires. We're pleased to provide opportunities for people to achieve their career ambitions without leaving the wonderful

region we call home.

As a firm, our holistic service to clients extends far beyond audit work, important though this is. In times of great change, the role of trusted advisers is critical in helping owners and management teams navigate through the ongoing challenges they face.

Our corporate finance team are among the most active dealmakers in the South West, often working closely with our colleagues in the PKF International network to help clients complete cross-border transactions, such as online florist Bloom & Wild's acquisitions of businesses in the Netherlands and France last year.

Meanwhile, our tax advisory services are always in demand, and our specialist VAT and customs team have been especially busy helping businesses get to grips with post-

Brexit trading arrangements.

Cyber security is another area where our in-house experts help clients understand and manage the growing risk of cyber crime, which affects four in 10 UK businesses annually.

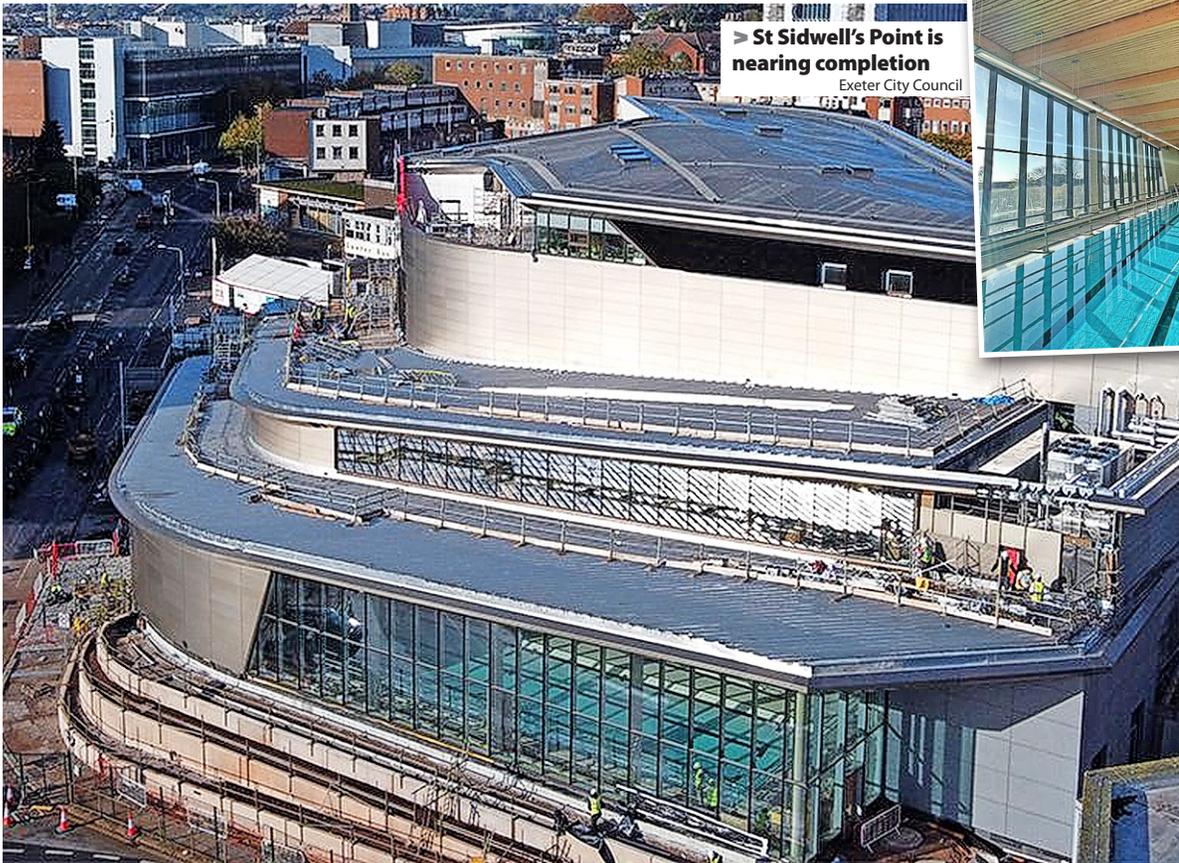
As we look to the future, the environmental, social and governance (ESG) agenda is an increasingly important matter for us all. As a firm, annual volunteering days for all staff and partners are just one of the ways we aim to make a positive impact on the amazing communities and environment in which we live and work.

Our people have shown great resilience and adaptability in rising to the challenges of the pandemic, and we look forward to continuing to help our clients achieve their ambitions, whatever risks and opportunities 2022 brings.

## #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon

## Exeter



► St Sidwell's Point is nearing completion  
Exeter City Council

# Plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the city

**W**ELCOME additions have included the new bus station which opened last summer, and in the coming months the doors of new leisure centre St Sidwell's Point will be opening for the first time.

On the outskirts of Exeter, Sandy Park's multi-million pound hotel is nearing completion.

The £35million Sandy Park Hotel is now a permanent feature, particularly for motorists on the M5 which passes close by.

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, which has resulted in the sad loss of many businesses - both national chains and much-loved independents - the city seems to be bouncing back with vacant retail units becoming occupied again, and the hospitality industry is fighting to get back to where it once was.

The pandemic has also seen demand for housing - both to buy and rent - rapidly soar in Exeter. It has perhaps never been such a sought after city to live in, and there are no signs of that demand easing any time soon.

Among those extremely positive about the city's future is councillor

The fast-changing landscape of Exeter is evident across the city from the emergence of huge new housing developments to new buildings dominating the city centre skyline, writes Anita Merritt

Phil Bialyk, the leader of Exeter City Council.

He said: "Exeter has plenty of reasons to be optimistic as we emerge from the pandemic and work towards our priorities of a full and sustainable recovery while delivering on our commitment to create a Net Zero Carbon city by 2030.

"The long term viability of the city centre is so important, and we are working hard with businesses, with our partners including the Chamber of Commerce and in Exeter, to ensure Exeter remains a top national destination.

"We cannot rely simply on retail in these rapidly changing times, and successful places understand that leisure and culture are so important in creating sustainable locations.

"That's why the council-funded redevelopment of Exeter's bus sta-

tion site is so important. The new Exeter Bus Station opened in July, right next to the new St Sidwell's Point leisure centre, which is due to open in the next couple of months.

"St Sidwell's Point will attract many thousands of extra visits to the city centre, in the same way the RAMM museum does, and will play an important role in helping the long term sustainability of our city.

"We are creating a very prestigious facility in a very key location, and that will be so important for the future.

"This is a £50million redevelopment - the biggest single investment the council has made in our city in a generation.

"These much-needed new facilities will give a massive boost to the city and will play a vital role in our recovery, by supporting the city cen-



tre and acting as a catalyst for the redevelopment of the wider area.

"St Sidwell's Point will be one of the best facilities of its kind anywhere in Europe, and it is so exciting to think it will soon be open.

"By working in collaboration we give ourselves the best possible chance of a sustainable recovery for the whole city. It is crucial in realising our wider social, economic and environmental ambitions and our commitment to delivering a Net Zero Carbon city by 2030.

"That's why the Place Board is so important. This unique partnership brings together all the most influential public and private sector organisations and employers in the city to work for a common goal, to bring prosperity for everyone in Exeter. It has been central in creating Exeter's

post-pandemic Recovery Plan.

"Footfall in the city centre has returned strongly, and that's great to see. But there's no room for complacency in what remains very difficult times for many.

"Our hard work in attracting top retailers over the last decade has served Exeter well. All the indicators suggest our economy remains very strong, and our city centre has managed to avoid the very high levels of closures seen at many locations around the country.

"We will continue to ensure, particularly through our partnerships with Exeter College and the university, that the workforce in Exeter has the skills needed for the jobs of the future.

"Our Exeter Works hub near the Civic Centre is a good example of the



support we can give in providing information on jobs and training.

"It houses the Youth Hub Devon, which offers targeted employment and training advice to people aged 16-24. The service, funded by the City Council, County Council and the Department of Work and Pensions, is for the many young people whose plans might have changed because of the pandemic.

"We also organise the very successful Exeter Jobs Fair at the Corn Exchange, in partnership with Exeter Jobcentre, to match those looking for work with employers looking to recruit new staff.

"So we have plenty of reasons to be upbeat in Exeter, with much to look forward to in the year ahead, if we all continue to work together for the good of the city."

With life in Exeter now largely back to 'normal', it seems a long time ago since the high streets felt eerily quiet during lockdown.

A popular shopping destination in the city people have been flocking back to is Princesshay which has reported a strong recovery month to month as more people step out to shop and socialise.

Hannah Overton, Princesshay marketing and commercial manager, said: "We've been using this last six months to welcome back visitors but also to partner with our friends across the city for outdoor events from the RAMM, who will be appearing with its Museum at Large event, to a host of city organisations for our recent sustainability event.

"It's a relief to be able to get together and collaborate again after

so much planning on Zoom calls. We're seeing a lot of enthusiasm from visitors."

Princesshay is known for its community events, perhaps even more so for its incredible Christmas light displays which lifted hearts and minds last year during the second lockdown. Thankfully, there are plans for a similar spectacle this year.

Hannah said: "We're very privileged to occupy such a central space in the city and want to do all we can to make people's trips out that bit more special and memorable.

"We are looking forward to a Christmas season that will hopefully see shoppers enjoying those Christmas shopping traditions that we all missed out on last year.

"Beyond Christmas and into 2022

we have some exciting plans in the pipeline for events and activities, in partnership with our retailers, restaurants and friends across the city, that bring about those connections that we have all missed so much."

This year people have also made a return to the city thanks to Exeter Chamber, the region's leading independent business membership organisation. It has welcomed more than 800 people to 26 venues over 32 events.

Clodagh Murphy, chair of Exeter Chamber, said: "As we continue to rebuild from the pandemic, we've come back together as a business community in Exeter.

"At Exeter Chamber we've used the period to make some important changes, starting with redefining our purpose - to provide the support and

insight our members need to drive their success and contribute to our thriving regional economy."

The chamber's focus for the coming months is to prioritise key areas which impact business - the economy, skills, sustainability and infrastructure.

It has reported it has seen the job markets boom, with peaks of nearly 10,000 job vacancies within a 25-mile radius of the city. From hospitality to data scientists, there are roles in a wide range of sectors plus many flourishing, fast-growing companies that are recruiting for skilled workforces.

Clodagh added: "Exeter has an incredibly resilient economy and as a business community working together, we'll continue to rebuild and emerge stronger than ever."

## Torbay

# Redevelopment is key to the area's regeneration

It's been a summer of hope in Torbay after the ravages of the coronavirus pandemic caused the mass closure of hotels and businesses last winter, writes **Colleen Smith**



> Brixham Fish Market managing director Barry Young

Matt Austin Images

**F**OR once the Bay has good reason to be hopeful with millions of pounds investment in the high streets and the 'staycation' boom which turned back the clock in the resort to its 1970's tourism heyday.

In Brixham the boom is largely driven by the fish market which goes from strength to strength. Once again this year fishermen have landed the biggest value of fish of any port in the country. And that success story is having a knock-on effect all around the bustling harbourside, with businesses and eateries all reporting busy times.

"This sleepy little town down here on the coast of Devon is a massive success story," said Brixham market managing director Barry Young.

The business sector is hoping for Government levelling-up funding to create up to 275 new high-tech jobs with a new Electronics & Photonics Production Park at land at Torbay Business Park, off Long Road. The move builds on the success of the existing Electronics and Photonics Innovation Centre.

Torbay Council has also signed a contract with DIY retail giants Wickes to bring a new store to Edginswell business park at the end of 2022.

In Torquay the £22m Town Deal windfall has been described as a "once in a generation opportunity" for transformation which the council says is key to unlocking £135m to regenerate the fading seaside town.

The sweeping vision includes changes for the use of the Town Hall, Pavilion, Pavilion car park, the Haldon Centre, Union Street, Market Street, Upton Park and the new train station planned for Edginswell.

The Pavilion redevelopment is key to the larger regeneration of the waterfront. Torbay Council, through its economic development company TDA, is working with lease-holder Marina Developments Ltd (MDL) to develop a scheme to fully restore the Pavilion. Builders are now about to move in and MDL Marinas, who hold the 125-year lease from the Council, propose to erect scaffolding and a temporary roof while detailed structural survey work is carried out.

It's one more small step forward in a year which started badly with as major businesses collapsed nationally. The closure of Debenhams in



May was a blow to Torquay harbourside, leaving a run of prime real estate empty.

But the tide has begun to turn, the empty Pizza Express has been taken over by Boston Tea Party and US food giants Taco Bell are applying for change of use at the former Boots store.

In Paignton the £13.36m Future High Streets Funding is set to kick start the transformation of the town centre - although there is still much discussion about the best way to do that. But the council has finally crossed the final hurdle in the demolition of the biggest blot on the town centre, the largely derelict Crossways.

The year also saw the opening of the giant new Castings Support Systems factory on the outskirts of Paignton. It supplies high-tech parts for aerospace and defence giants including Rolls Royce.

The purpose-built factory off the ring road is the start of the £10m Claylands Business Park which will provide up to 120,000 sq ft of employment space.

Deputy council leader Darren Cowell added: "We expect that Claylands Business Park will provide a significant boost to the economy.

"This type of active development is to help meet the shortage of suitable premises which has held back Torbay's economy in recent years."

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► A view of the Pavilion and Torquay harbour from the observation wheel

Ed Oldfield

CSS says the new facility will enable it to expand its global market share. It supplies Rolls Royce Gas Turbines and other world-renowned companies, providing complex tooling, technical mouldings and composite components.

It comes against a background of booming property prices all around the Bay as home working means a change of lifestyle and mass migration from London and the Midlands. Estate agents believe that posh Dartmouth and Salcombe have begun to price themselves out of the market, and buyers have looked along the coast to discover more realistic house prices in Torquay, Paignton and Brixham.

South Devon is ranked number nine of the top 10 Zoopla property searches. The online real estate website says that in 2021 the average

*We expect that Claylands Business Park will provide a significant boost to the economy*

**DARREN COWELL**

home in sought-after South Devon will set you back £513,576 - the fourth highest average price in the top 10.

In the hotel sector, after a string of

shocking closures, good news began to emerge as the promised tourism boom became a reality.

In Torwood Street the Hamilton by Hilton hotel finally opened after 32 months of stop-start building work hit by the coronavirus lockdowns. Behind it on The Terrace car park the £11m new 120-bedroom Premier Inn hotel main frame is rising out of the ground.

And after the shock of Shearings Hotels' collapse owing more than £200m at the start of the Covid lockdown in Spring 2020, three of the group's Torquay hotels reopened - The Esplanade in Paignton, the Torbay Hotel near the Pavilion and the Tor Park near Torquay police station

are now all part of the Coast and Country Hotel Collection.

And the upmarket Brownsword Hotel group announced ambitious plans to transform The Imperial Hotel (once one of the country's best five star establishments) into a 'luxury hotel and destination spa'.

Meanwhile the Singapore-based Fragrance Group is continuing its £120million investment in four new hotels in the Bay. The Palace Hotel and Corbyn Head Hotel have both been raised to the ground in Torquay and the consortium has yet to begin their rebuild.

But in Paignton work is nearing completion on both the twin Park Hotel and Lighthouse locations on

Esplanade Road, overlooking Paignton Green. The twin hotels will be run by Accor Hotels, with the Park Hotel replacement (161 rooms) under the 4-star Mercure brand and the hotel on the Lighthouse site (119 rooms) under the 3\* Ibis Styles brand.

For Brixham there was another long-overdue piece of good news with the award of £675,000 to initiate plans to redevelop the town centre car park. Since the demolition of the car park in 2004, various schemes have been considered for the site. The council says it hopes the funding can kick-start a project for up to 70 residential units on the site with no loss of parking.

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## Plymouth

# Wind in city's sails as it plots a course of growth

IT was a disaster that didn't happen. Plymouth, like the UK as a whole, avoided a Covid-induced recession in 2021 thanks to an immense public sector bailout and the resilience of its private sector companies, writes William Telford.

The city entered the year in a sorry state; the Mayflower 400 commemorations had been put on ice, as had the opening of the £40m The Box cultural sector, businesses were in lockdown, jobs had been lost, and key development projects were on hold.

But, a year on, and despite the ongoing coronavirus crisis, the economy has not withered and fears that the UK would be pitched into a 1930s style economic depression proved to be unfounded. That is not to say that there may not be trouble ahead.

The high street, and that includes some of Plymouth city centre, looks like having another difficult year in 2022, and inflation, rising interest rates, supply chain problems, a shortage of workers, a potential wave of insolvencies, and on-going Brexit issues, could all cause headaches in 2022. And there are the ongoing uncertainties around the Covid pandemic, climate change and global economic growth to factor in. But, as it stands, Plymouth is holding its head above water, adjusting to the "new normal" of a Covid-affected world and looking forward to at least some good times in 2022.

That is because 2021 could be seen as the starting point for a post-Covid recovery. The Mayflower 400 celebrations, albeit without the global fanfare and hoped-for tourist boost, went ahead after all and certainly buoyed the mood of the city.

The SailGP yachting event put Plymouth in front of the world, thanks to global TV coverage, and boosted city coffers by £6.9m. And it is set to return in 2022, bringing a further water-borne bonanza. And The Box opened, attracting 100,000 visitors by September, with Stuart Elford, chief executive of Devon and Plymouth Chamber of Commerce, saying: "That was a massive success. An investment of national significance." He added: "It's also given Plymouth the confidence to make other investments and I hope that momentum continues." Mr Elford also highlighted the significance of Plymouth being named as site of the UK's first National Marine Park.

In 2021, the Park in the Sea, as it is now known, was awarded £9.5m from the National Lottery Heritage Fund Horizon Awards to fully develop the scheme. "It comprises everything by the sea in one, including the military, hospitality, everything," Mr Elford said. "And it gives Plymouth an identity and will instill civic pride." The other momentous, and some-

what unexpected, announcement came from Chancellor Rishi Sunak, when he named Plymouth as epicenter of a new tax-break Freeport. The outline business case for the Plymouth and South Devon Freezone was submitted to the Government at the close of the year and progress is expected in 2022 on what could bring Plymouth £100m in investments and more than 1,000 jobs.

Tim Jones, chairman of the South West Business Council, described the announcement as "the bit of luck that Plymouth deserved" and added: "It also attracted a lot of national attention." Mr Jones also highlighted how Plymouth's power-brokers sharpened their focus and worked together to tackle the Covid menace's impact on the economy. "Planning has been an exceptionally good area," he said. "There has hardly been a hiccup. There has been a much more joined up approach."

Indeed, Plymouth's public sector reacted swiftly and successfully to the crisis, with the council launching a Resurgam Charter seeking to encourage businesses to spend and employ locally, thus benefiting the community and environment. And the council handled the distribution of the Government's enormous Covid life support programme for businesses.

In what the authority described as a "herculean effort" it paid out £92m, in more than 19,000 separate payments to 7,440 businesses, from 16 different Government grant schemes, helping enterprises survive and recover from Covid-restricted operations.

There was also significant progress on a £1bn pipeline of capital projects, with work starting on the £7m upgrade of the city centre in New George Street and Old Town Street.

Meanwhile, the University of Plymouth made progress on its creation of the Intercity Place health campus in the ramshackle office tower at the railway station. That will form a key part of an overall £80m redevelopment of the terminus, including a new car park and hotel, which will bookend the city centre.

At the other end of the main central business district there is planned

a £25m West End Health and Wellbeing Centre, on what is now the shabby Colin Campbell Court car park. Plans were submitted at the end of the year following public consultations. Other significant highlights during the year included the opening of Devonport's Market Hall with its attractive immersive video dome, following a £7.6m upgrade from social enterprise Real Ideas.

And there was the renewing of the Plymouth Waterfront Partnership's Business Improvement District, with a new plan envisaging £1.8m being raised in levies and ploughed into the economy.

However, there are some clouds in sight, with the recently published UK Powerhouse report saying Exeter is predicted to be the South West's business superstar of 2022 with Plymouth underperforming.

Plymouth lies at number 33, of the UK's top 50 cities, for growth, with a GVA of £5.4bn by the end of Q4 2021.

But the report predicts it will slip to number 41 and into the bottom 10 of the 50 cities in the table, by the end of 2022 with only a modest £100m, or 2.3% increase in output.

Presently lying at number 34 for employment growth, a 1.6% rise by the end of 2021, Britain's Ocean City will remain stuck in this position with only a 1% rise in jobs by the end of 2022, the report predicts. But at least jobs are being created - and it looks as if the problem will be filling them.

In October, Plymouth's 7,611 claimant count was down by 3,467 year-on-year, a 31% decline and just before the end of the year the website Totaljobs revealed there were 6,827 jobs unfilled within 10 miles of Plymouth. With a "perfect storm" of issues - including an ageing workforce, the increase in delivery, warehouse and supermarket jobs, the Covid pandemic, and even Brexit - being blamed for the shortage of candidates, Plymouth businesses held a summit, at City College Plymouth in November, and an action plan will now be produced in 2022 to tackle the problem over the next five years.

A new generation of workers will be needed to fill jobs in established and growing firms, and also among the wave of start-ups created during lockdown, many of them in Plym-

outh bedrooms and sheds. The Growthion report in mid 2021, revealed 1,500 start-ups had been created in the city in just a year, and Companies House registrations reached 634 in the first six months of the year.

Another ongoing issue is Plymouth city centre - which has more empty shops for its size than almost any city in the UK, a new study has shown. A survey by tech firm Property Inspect, has found Britain's Ocean City has the fourth highest number of empty shops of the 50 cities and towns investigated. Currently stores which once housed the likes of Burton, Dorothy Perkins and Poundworld are sitting empty. It recently lost its Bonmarche fashion outlet.

But there have been new arrivals, including such names as B&M, and some imaginative uses for former retail spaces, such as hotels and even a church. The city lost its huge Debenhams department store in 2021, but the five-storey pile is now under offer for £3.5m. There are also empty units in the British Land-owned Drake Circus Shopping Centre, where Game recently closed its outlet.

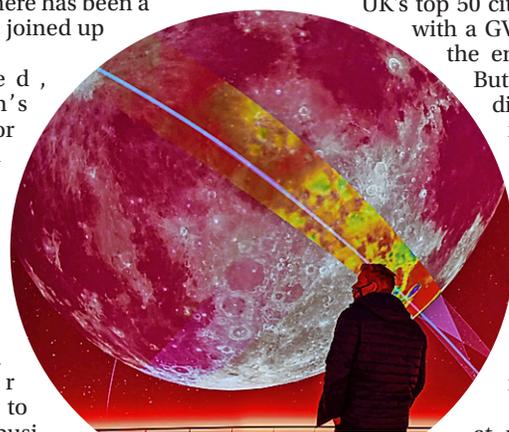
But the mall has also attracted new names including three Watches of Switzerland outlets, each featuring a different brand, and fashion stores Tommy Hilfiger and Boss. And, of course, there is the aforementioned city centre upgrade to look forward to too. Work is also expected to progress on a new Civic Square, with a revamp of the Guildhall, in 2022.

That is just one of an impressive number of infrastructure and development projects which will be progressing in 2022, including work on the Forder Valley transport scheme, on a new block of flats at Sutton Harbour, with a new hotel development at Millbay under way already.

The ongoing regeneration of the Royal William Yard will continue with the expected completion of the first phase of the Melville building redevelopment. Meanwhile, full production could start at the Hemerdon tungsten, tin and aggregates mine, and significant projects at Derriford Hospital and the main University of Plymouth campus will continue.

But perhaps the most important is the beginning of a £2bn long-term project to rebuild facilities at Devonport Dockyard, which is set to have a major economic impact on the city for more than a decade and underpin defence giant Babcock International Group's commitment to Plymouth and the thousands of jobs it supports.

So, whatever Covid and all other uncertainties throw at Plymouth, it is clear the city is not going anywhere, other than forwards.



Inside Devonport Market Hall with its immersive dome  
Erin Black



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# Plymouth

► Team New Zealand and Great Britain pass Plymouth Hoe during SailGP racing in July



## Devon

# Staycations boost piled pressure

**I**N the last 12-months across Devon and Cornwall, we watched as businesses both old and new were hit by the pandemic; the property market went bananas, tourism was booming and a political meeting of utmost importance took place right on our doorstep.

People from all walks of life were tested as restrictions forced the closure of all non-essential retail, hospitality and personal-care services.

According to research from the Local Data Company (LDC), almost 500 stores disappeared from the South West in the first six months of 2021.

LDC reports that high street retailers were one of the 'more resilient' areas of business in comparison to others, seeing a reduction in the loss

**Devon benefitted from the staycation tourism boom, but it had knock-on effects on the availability of homes to let and property prices, Chloe Parkman reports**

of occupied units from 1.4% in H1 2020 to 0.8% in H1 2021 - the first period where lockdown saw non-essential retail close once more for an extended period.

These figures were evident with the disappearance of many of our High Street retailers including Debenhams, Paperchase, and Dorothy Perkins.

According to LDC, vacancy has risen by 1% across all Great Britain's region's compared with the previous year and in the South West, vacancy

sits at more than 14%. However, the study does reveal that seaside towns were shown to be relatively resilient throughout the pandemic due to the surging popularity of 'staycations'.

And arguably, after a gloomy year of restrictions, it was a breath of fresh air when tourism began to 'boom'.

Beaches, restaurants and hotels were jam-packed with visitors as they flocked to the glorious seaside towns dotted across the two counties.

A study from Barclays Bank revealed that Devon and Cornwall - at one point dubbed 'Benidorm on steroids' - were in for a £3billion staycation bonanza with an estimated 23 million Brits holidaying in the UK.

And, of course, this boom was an absolute lifeline for many businesses.

Totnes MP Anthony Mangnall said: "This summer's influx of visitors left our tourism and hospitality sectors exhausted but buoyant with an extraordinary level of custom.

"The 'Great British Staycation' has boosted not just the tourism sector but the whole economy. For example, farmers and fishermen have benefitted from higher prices and even higher levels of demand

for homegrown and locally caught British produce.

"After a busy summer season, now is the time to turn our attention to the future to ensure businesses continue to benefit."

But with this tourism boom, came the problem of staff shortages, of which Covid-19 and Brexit shared equal blame.

Hardest of all was the 'pingdemic' as staff members across the region were being instructed to self-isolate by the NHS Track and Trace app.

Ten percent of businesses in Torbay were forced to close back in July due to the shortages, meanwhile the CBI business group urged the government to take urgent action to tackle the shortage of workers, warning that labour supply prob-



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# on properties available to rent

lems could last up to two years.

And the challenges didn't end there.

As Airbnb bookings soared, so did that of second home sales, and many landlords began to switch to holiday lettings.

South Hams District Council (SHDC) even said it had "no choice" but to declare a housing crisis due to soaring prices and the lack of available rental property.

Cllr Judy Pearce said: "House prices had already become way out of reach for ordinary people in the South Hams before the pandemic, but most people could find somewhere to rent.

"The 'flight' from urban environments and the now firm possibility of home working has pushed up

house prices and made things far worse. At the same time, the constraints of 'staycationing' rather than going abroad means that anywhere at all rentable as holiday

*We must continue to promote our heritage, our culture and highlight the 'Devon brand'*

accommodation has become an Airbnb, or similar, meaning that many rented properties otherwise suitable for living in full time are now not available.

"There are now hundreds of short-

term holiday lets in the main coastal areas, but nothing available for normal lets. Many businesses have not been able to function at full capacity because of a shortage of labour. The acute shortage of long-term letting properties has not helped at all.

"We realise that just building more houses is not the answer. We are calling on the government to bring in regulations to restrict short term Airbnb type lettings as in the London area.

"A separate planning class for short term lets would help enormously as the local planning authority could then have some control of this, especially where the accommodation was suitable for permanent residency.

"We shall also be working with the housing associations to try to get the

best possible occupancy of their houses. South Hams District council runs its own letting agency called Seamoor Lettings.

"We charge less commission than a normal agency meaning that owners still get as much rent, but the tenant pays less, making properties a bit more affordable. Any landlords interested should contact us."

It's fair to say that overall 2021 has certainly been a landmark one, but with many issues still at the surface, what can we expect for the next 12 months?

MP for Totnes and South Devon Anthony Mangnall adds: "Experts predict that the staycation trend will continue this year, but we must ensure that Devon stays on the map as a domestic tourist destination.

"We must continue to promote our heritage, our culture and perhaps most importantly to highlight the 'Devon brand.' This can and will be done through local authorities, politicians and public organisations, but it can also be achieved through individuals and businesses supporting local producers.

"Organisations such as Food and Drink Devon are key in highlighting and promoting the very best of what we produce here in Devon. We cannot waste the opportunity to promote what Devon has to offer.

"One drawback of the tourism boom is its contribution to the local housing crisis, with an increase in Airbnbs and holiday homes leading to a lack of affordable housing for local people."



> An aerial view of Salcombe, a popular visitor destination

Peter Cade

## Cornwall

**W**HILE it certainly has not been plain sailing for Cornwall's business community during 2021, there is no denying that with the G7 Summit being held in Carbis Bay, the Tour of Britain starting in the Duchy and so many TV programmes showing Cornwall to the world, the global spotlight has truly been fixed on Cornwall this past year.

Businesses are generally resilient and will adapt the best they can to whatever is thrown at them.

Covid has changed the way we work and for many working from home and achieving a greater work-life balance has been

While 2020 was certainly marked by Covid, 2021 – which started with a lockdown – was not the year when the pandemic went away. Restrictions on trade, staffing issues, the so-called 'pingdemic', a supply chain out of sync and the rising cost of materials, fuel and other commodities meant Cornwall's business community had to batten down and get on with it the best it could, writes **Olivier Vergnault**

transformative and the spotlight cast on the Duchy by TV programmes, the G7 Summit and the Tour of Britain will have contributed to the attractiveness of Cornwall as a place to live and work. The buoyant housing market and associated construction sector are testament to that attractiveness.

For business leaders across the board, while the past 12 months haven't been as bad as previously feared in terms of companies going

bust or rising unemployment, the county could still be in for more rough times ahead – especially for firms which may have been slow to adapt to new practices, embrace technology or automation for example.

Across all sectors, businesses will soon have to repay their 'bounce back loans' from the Government at a time when wages have gone up, VAT is increasing, and inflation could reach 6% in 2022 as the cost of everything from petrol to materials

continues to go up – all of which could have an impact on growth and job creation in the coming months.

"While it hasn't been as bad as feared," said Kim Conchie, chief executive of the Cornwall Chamber of Commerce, "there is still a worry about the VAT increase, bounce back loans having to be repaid, inflation and higher wages and all those extra costs which could impact productivity."

While the furlough scheme launched last year has saved many businesses and jobs, its phasing out has not had the dreaded effect of driving unemployment up. It is also too early to say whether

the changes to Universal Credit will drive more people into work.

Some industries such as tech, software development or game design, or even food retail, have gone through the Covid pandemic without batting an eyelid. Others such as accountancy and legal or property and construction have been busier than ever.

For Mr Conchie, despite issues around the pandemic, supply chains or Brexit, there are many reasons to remain optimistic.

"Cornwall's profile has certainly been high this year and we're increasingly being seen as a place where we can do serious business while enjoying good food with friends or going to the beach after work. I think the attractiveness of Cornwall in terms of work-life balance could be the true legacy of both the pandemic and the G7."

Eric Nicholls, chairman of the Cornwall Manufacturing Group and CEO of Spirals UK staircase-manufacturing business in Helston, is also optimistic as a whole.

There are about 1,100 manufacturing companies in Cornwall, employing 16,000 staff, accounting for



> The Eden Project has become one of the most recognisable icons of Cornwall, and showcased the county to the world when it hosted a reception as part of the G7 Summit

Hufton+Crow/View Pictures/Universal Images Group/Getty Images

£7.4bn GVA.

Many manufacturers will have pivoted to join the 'war effort' on Covid and shown their expertise and skills. His sector has had to face challenges in terms of disrupted supply chains and access to materials, the cost of which – especially timber and steel – has been going up and up. However the biggest challenge that remains is that of a shortage of skilled staff.

From Saltash-based Composite Integration who have diversified to make PPE equipment to Smith's Metals in Redruth who are a critical supplier to Falmouth's Watson-Marlow Fluid Technology Group (WMFTG), who themselves are an essential provider in the pharmaceutical supply chain, across to St Austell-based Polymermedics, who are manufacturing over 40 million tamper seals for drug vials every week, every corner of Cornwall has a manufacturer supporting the health and care sector.

Meanwhile Penryn-based European Springs and Pressings are making catheter clips, Teddington Systems are making water isolation valves for the Nightingale Hospital, Bodmin based CHX Products have designed

tools and are injection moulding 5,000 PPE face shields a week with Fitzgerald Lighting making lights for Basildon hospital.

However, for many manufacturers the pandemic has led to full order books but growth has been hampered by staffing issues.

Mr Nicholls said that pre-Covid the unemployment rate was about 1.8% and while there were staff around, the recruitment pool was tight. With Covid, lockdowns, furlough schemes and the increased fear some people may have of losing their jobs, a perfect storm has however been brewing where firms are working flat out but can't expand because they haven't got the staff to do so.

"I am generally optimistic. There are still some choppy waters ahead of us but the logistic problems will sort themselves out. The skills and staffing issue is a longer term challenge. The sector is already working to address it and the answer is certainly not the recruitment of cheap labour from abroad. That's why we are working with Cornwall College

and Truro and Penwith College and universities to address the skills shortage so we train and recruit the local workforce that we need. We need to train our own people. The education providers are already doing a great job but we need to link up with them even better."

Mr Nicholls said there was this misconception that the manufacturing sector was about having hundreds of low paid workers hammer sheets of metal all day long when it is increasingly high tech, with robotics, precision engineering, automation and software design coming along which all require highly skilled and well paid jobs.

"We want to ensure young people understand that there are hundreds of jobs available in the manufacturing sector," he added. "Including in sales and admin and high tech jobs too. We as a sector tend to pay 30% more than the average paid job and offer long term careers."

He believes the new T-levels will make a difference in the coming years and already the conversation is shifting among young people and

their parents that apprenticeships are a good route into employment.

For the tourism sector, which supports one in five jobs in Cornwall and contributes about 12% to the local economy, 2021 has been more stressful than ever.

"The previous year it was all a big surprise and no-one really knew what was happening," Malcolm Bell, chief executive of Visit Cornwall, said. "But Christmas was disturbed, then we lost five months of trade including Easter. There was the 'pingdemic' and some serious staffing issues. No-one has had time to relax. Some businesses have done very well but others like the events, festivals and weddings sector have suffered the most."

Mr Bell believes the hospitality and tourism sector is not yet out of the woods as we go into 2022 but relying on eight weeks of an increasingly busier and mad summer is not the way to go, a sentiment shared by the industry across Europe too.

"2022 will continue to be a challenging year," Mr Bell said. "It's not about being negative. If customers

have less disposable income and there is increased competition again from foreign holidays it could be challenging for businesses here and people in the tourism sector will have to work harder to attract visitors to Cornwall. That's why we need to look at ways to extend the season."

From working holidays to encouraging people to come on health and fitness holidays, the pandemic and the changed working practices that came with it mean there are new markets to tap into.

Mr Bell believes that if the number of visitors increased by just 10% in the shoulder months, it would not be big enough to have a negative impact on local residents and the county's infrastructure, but could add another £200m into the economy and extend jobs and careers through the year.

For Mr Conchie the next few months will be about ensuring Cornwall continues to lobby the Government hard so talks of levelling up the economy do not pass the county by and that measures are taken to sort out a problematic housing market.



# Differing sectors adapt to emerging opportunities

## Truro



> An artist's impression of the planned Pydar Street redevelopment in Truro

# County town's brighter future

**S**OME would argue Truro has been hibernating. It certainly feels that way, with the high street having been decimated even before the pandemic.

Empty shop fronts have been a common feature for years now, followed by Covid being the nail in the coffin for so many more.

As any Truronian will notice, this trend is starting to be reversed and, while it's a cliché, new life is genuinely being breathed into the city.

New shops are springing up where mere husks were, and the amazing newly-renovated Hall for Cornwall has finally reopened after so many delays.

And beyond that, there are some serious changes coming.

Firstly, there's the Pydar Street regeneration project. The plans were finally approved at the end of September, with £170m pledged to it.

The South side of Pydar Street is iconic, bustling and a beloved part of the city - the north side is a total contrast.

It's currently drab, grey, and with a set of currently empty offices left

If what we're told is to be believed, Cornwall's county town has a very bright future. With funds, plans, and developments coming out of Truro's metaphorical ears, the city certainly looks to be on the up, writes **Edward Church**

behind by the former Carrick District Council.

The project, however, should turn things around. A total of 320 homes will be built, 35 per cent of which will be much-needed affordable housing.

400 student bed spaces will also be put in, alongside a Falmouth University hub, parking and commercial units including shops and restaurants.

The disused Carrick house is going to be totally removed and replaced with a more modern-looking building which will transform the look of this underappreciated part of the city.

Alun Jones, head of Truro Busi-

ness Improvement District (BID), said the Pydar project will do more than just beautify the area.

"That area has been under utilised for several years," he said. "It'll create an extension, we're keen to extend - not conflict - with the city centre."

"A city centre needs footfall, and it'll get it with the new residents, workers and students."

"There's no plans there for large scale retail. Little perceived competition, won't be a shopping centre. It'll compliment the town centre."

Mr Jones explained that Truro is already performing better than people might think.

Businesses are telling BID they are performing better than in 2019,

despite the pandemic, and the city centre now has a below regional average of empty units - at 8 per cent (compared to an average of 13 per cent).

Mr Jones continued: "We have a fair bit of activity in empty units, new names coming into the town."

"And relocations which all suggests there's confidence in the business community. The town centre is a destination, in Truro's case, for retail, for professional services, for health and beauty, for leisure, night time economy, and with the reopening of Hall for Cornwall - to see a show."

This, he added, has had a great knock-on effect on the bars and other shops nearby which rely on a night time economy particularly hit by lockdowns.

Also in the city centre is the trialling of the pedestrianisation planters, which despite a mixed public response were not, as some predicted, immediately destroyed and vandalised.

Then there's the Truro Towns fund, which was promised £23.6m

from the £3.6bn total Government pot.

Where Truro's riverside by Lemon Quay is currently rather bare, a bustling harbour is planned with more boats encouraged to ferry people.

The area is planned to have pubs, restaurants and furniture, landscaping and even more performance spaces, in one of the city's biggest open areas.

A business innovation centre is also planned for Pydar, and around the corner Boscawen Park will also be getting a slice of the money.

A sports hub is planned there which will include an indoor play area, climbing wall and fitness suite.

Some of the £23m will be put towards repurposing unused buildings in the city.

These will be made into workspaces, and many others into accommodation above shops.

Local businesses can certainly look forward to a lot in Truro. Be it more footfall, more skilled workers, or more jobs - it seems the city has a bright future ahead of it.

# One third grow revenue in challenging period



Duncan Leslie, partner at PKF Francis Clark, casts an eye over this year's list of Devon and Cornwall's 150 biggest companies

**T**HE past two years have been challenging, whichever sector you are in. Many businesses have been in survival mode as the pandemic has tested operations, sales and marketing, IT, HR and finance teams through constant change.

It is rare for businesses to have to engage with all of these teams to the extent that has been required over such a sustained period. For companies to remain joined up in their approach and focussed on key goals has been a massive challenge. It has been draining for everyone.

Having become used to a benign economy for over a decade, we are now faced with inflation at its highest level in a generation. It's a new challenge for many business leaders. Cost pressures and resource constraints look set to be with us for a while, so things aren't about to get any easier.

So how have Devon and Cornwall's biggest businesses been faring?

As usual, this year's Top 150 list is based on the latest publicly available accounts when data was extracted from Experian (in November 2021), meaning the vast majority of businesses have reported on at least part of the pandemic period.

The three largest sectors - accounting for 108 of the Top 150 - are: wholesale & retail; manufacturing; and property & construction. We have taken a closer look at how businesses in these key sectors have performed since last time (so excluding new entrants to the Top 150).

It's been a mixed picture for retailers. This perhaps reflects supply chain issues and Covid's uneven impact on demand for different products. On average, this group of businesses increased their turnover by 6%, though there were wide variations between winners and losers, as more than half of retailers saw sales fall.

Similarly, almost half the manufacturers increased their turnover, while the rest saw reductions of between 4% and 35%. Among the biggest movers is Dunbia (UK), which has climbed four places to second in the Top 150 after achieving 145% growth in turnover over the past two years. Excluding

this outlier, the average movement in turnover for the manufacturing cohort was -2%.

Property & construction had a tougher year, with a 10% drop in turnover the average performance, reflecting the closure of sites during Covid. Of the 13 businesses still in the Top 150 since last time, 10 saw revenue declines. Only three posted growth figures, though in one case this was due to an extension of its accounting period, while the other two were yet to report on the pandemic.

Speaking of key sectors, it's notable that leisure and tourism has only three representatives in the Top 150. So when we talk about our region's tourism industry, we're really talking about a vast number of small businesses. This underlines the importance of organisations like Visit Devon, Visit Cornwall and the South West Tourism Alliance in lobbying on policy issues, such as the reduced rate of VAT.

Looking at the Top 150 as a whole, total employee numbers have risen almost 5% to 80,618. The 20 largest businesses account for 57% of all employment.

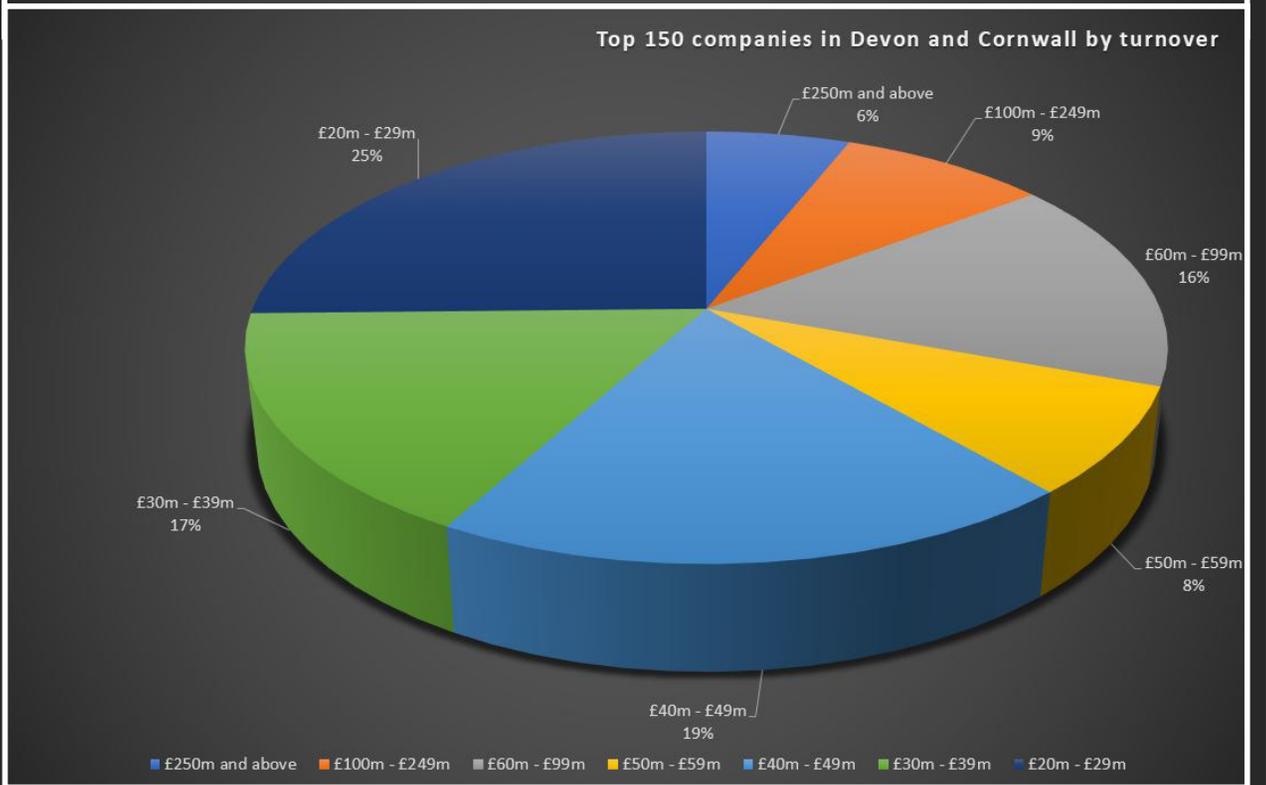
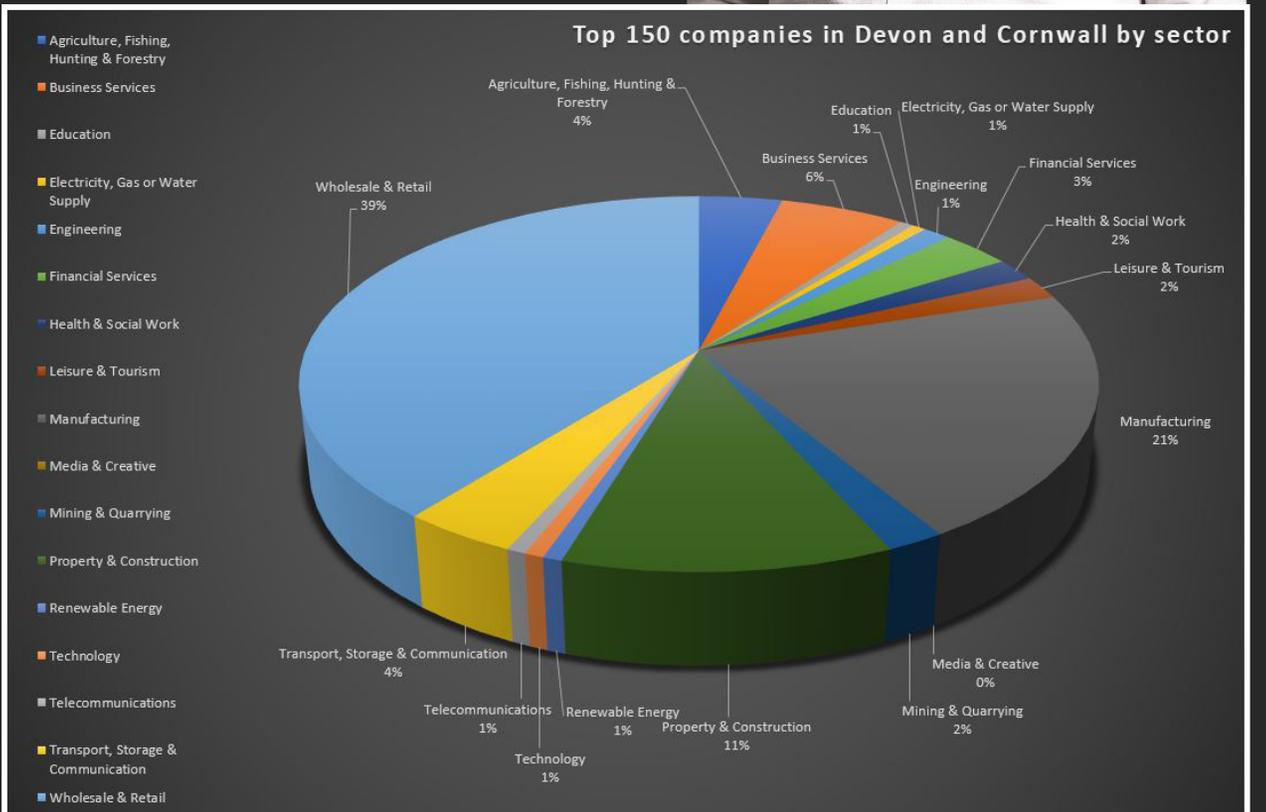
Total turnover is down slightly, to £13.75bn (2020: £13.89bn). However, year-on-year comparisons are skewed by the 24 new entrants on this year's list.

One contributor to this overall reduction in turnover is Pennon Group's sale of Viridor, completed in July 2020. The Exeter-headquartered Plc's turnover was down 55%, while its £814m acquisition of Bristol Water Holdings - announced in June 2021 - is yet to be reflected in its full-year revenues.

Other eye-catching deals include the £969m acquisition of Exeter-based GCP Student Living by newly-formed Gemini Jersey IV.

Pennon has slipped from first to fourth in the Top 150, relinquishing its crown to Norton Group Holdings, owner of The Range, which remains the largest employer. Sales at its superstores have grown by 43% in two years.

My final takeaway is that nearly a third of Top 150 companies grew revenues by more than 10% - a strong performance in these difficult times.



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## Top 150

2020	Company Name	County	Latest Accounts Date	Total Sales / Turnover (Period 1)	Number of Employees (Period 1)	Sector	
1	2	NORTON GROUP HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Jan 2021	£1,352,486,016.00	12,480	Wholesale & Retail
2	6	DUNBIA (UK)	Devon	03 Jan 2021	£1,194,763,008.00	4,551	Manufacturing
3	3	DEVONPORT ROYAL DOCKYARD LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£790,812,992.00	5,665	Manufacturing
4	1	PENNON GROUP PLC	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£624,099,968.00	1,987	Electricity, Gas or Water Supply
5	4	HELSTON GARAGES GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£511,569,984.00	1,094	Wholesale & Retail
6	5	MOLE VALLEY FARMERS LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£473,171,008.00	1,979	Wholesale & Retail
7	7	NORBORD EUROPE LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£365,416,992.00	654	Manufacturing
8	10	ACCORD-UK LTD	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£296,870,016.00	741	Manufacturing
9	11	MIDAS GROUP LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£291,267,008.00	498	Property & Construction
10	8	PRINCESS YACHTS (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£244,440,992.00	2,910	Manufacturing
11	13	GREGORY DISTRIBUTION (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	03 Oct 2020	£238,299,008.00	2,340	Transport, Storage & Communication
12	12	VOSPERS OF PLYMOUTH LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£222,418,768.00	610	Wholesale & Retail
13	19	TROY (UK) LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£210,351,792.00	210	Wholesale & Retail
14	16	CAMBUM NETWORKS, LTD	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£194,577,952.00	102	Telecommunications
15	14	IMERYS MINERALS LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2019	£175,439,008.00	1,007	Mining & Quarrying
16	20	APPLEBY WESTWARD GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£154,492,992.00	159	Wholesale & Retail / Transport, Storage & Communication
17	17	CORSERV LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Mar 2020	£151,030,000.00	2,766	Property & Construction
18		COMPU B LTD	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£142,411,296.00	465	Wholesale & Retail
19	23	LIVEWELL SOUTHWEST CIC	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£138,119,488.00	2,481	Health & Social Work
20	21	NEWCROSS HEALTHCARE SOLUTIONS LIMITED	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£134,665,024.00	3,454	Health & Social Work
21	15	ST.AUSTELL BREWERY COMPANY LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£117,626,000.00	1,596	Manufacturing
22	22	DE VAN AUTOMOTIVE LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£111,851,272.00	263	Wholesale & Retail
23	26	GALPHARM INTERNATIONAL LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£93,397,000.00	74	Wholesale & Retail
24	24	PRO - DIRECT GROUP LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£92,074,160.00	412	Wholesale & Retail
25	32	CREDITON DAIRY LIMITED	Devon	04 Jan 2020	£87,332,000.00	148	Manufacturing
26	41	WATSON-MARLOW LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£86,233,000.00	410	Manufacturing
27	42	WRAFTON LABORATORIES LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£82,020,000.00	592	Manufacturing
28	39	ATLANTIC INERTIAL SYSTEMS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£81,534,000.00	348	Manufacturing
29	27	WAIN HOMES (SOUTH WEST) LIMITED	Devon	27 Sep 2020	£79,392,000.00	119	Property & Construction
30	29	PENCARRIE LIMITED	Devon	25 Dec 2020	£78,451,992.00	293	Wholesale & Retail
31	18	SCOT GROUP LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£76,954,000.00	1,832	Wholesale & Retail
32	37	RIVERFORD ORGANIC FARMERS LIMITED	Devon	02 May 2020	£75,675,792.00	719	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
33	38	SEASALT HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	01 Feb 2020	£75,373,536.00	1,063	Wholesale & Retail
34	25	HAWKINS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Jun 2020	£72,432,104.00	242	Wholesale & Retail
35	90	GM COACHWORK LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£72,214,224.00	180	Wholesale & Retail
36	114	HARRIER LLC	Devon	02 Jan 2021	£71,421,897.00	325	Wholesale & Retail
37	35	BANDVULC TYRES LTD	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£68,615,608.00	324	Manufacturing
38	30	TOSHIBA CARRIER UK LTD.	Devon	30 Nov 2019	£66,697,000.00	240	Transport, Storage & Communication
39	112	CORE HIGHWAYS GROUP LIMITED	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£65,125,000.00	930	Wholesale & Retail
40	65	SNAPFISH UK, LTD.	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£64,822,504.00	23	Wholesale & Retail
41	31	RITTAL-C S M LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£63,956,000.00	462	Manufacturing
42	48	ALLEN & HEATH LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Mar 2020	£63,673,000.00	121	Wholesale & Retail
43	82	WILTON BRADLEY HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£62,417,680.00	210	Wholesale & Retail
44	33	CENTRAX HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£60,181,440.00	300	Manufacturing
45	27	CHARLES ROBERTSON (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	27 Dec 2020	£60,047,328.00	879	Wholesale & Retail
46	45	PERCY R BREND & SONS (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£60,002,556.00	1,177	Leisure & Tourism
47	51	KAWASAKI PRECISION MACHINERY (UK) LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£58,805,352.00	279	Manufacturing
48	56	CDF GROUP LTD	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£57,965,000.00	123	Technology
49	77	BURTS SNACKS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£57,357,252.00	346	Manufacturing
50	46	MURRAY HOLDINGS (SW) LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£56,959,608.00	177	wholesale & retail
51	58	STILL MATERIALS HANDLING LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£55,243,000.00	188	Wholesale & Retail
52	76	SUCCESSION WEALTH MANAGEMENT LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£54,314,000.00		Financial Services
53	52	JOHN HEATHCOAT & COMPANY (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	31 May 2020	£53,827,000.00	473	Manufacturing
54	50	LANDMARK INFORMATION GROUP LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£53,441,820.00	411	Business Services (legal products and data supply)
55	96	CMOSTORES GROUP LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£52,351,400.00	112	Wholesale & Retail
56	54	CORNISH FARM DAIRY LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Apr 2020	£52,073,952.00	257	Manufacturing
57	44	HELTOR LIMITED	Devon	31 Aug 2020	£50,410,060.00	80	Wholesale & Retail (Oil / Fuel)
58	84	FLATCABLE LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£50,156,956.00	44	Wholesale & Retail
59	47	PENDENNIS SHIPYARD (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2019	£49,501,672.00	445	Manufacturing
60	85	WHITE ROSE UK LTD	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£49,152,396.00	1,328	Wholesale & Retail - Fast Food
61	64	HARPER'S HOME MIX LIMITED	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£49,092,296.00	85	Manufacturing
62	91	F W S CARTER & SONS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£48,926,000.00	181	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
63	93	MVV ENVIRONMENT DEVONPORT LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£48,665,604.00	32	Renewable Energy
64	55	GOONVEAN HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£48,081,364.00	457	Mining & Quarrying
65	57	ROGER YOUNG LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£47,924,212.00	120	Wholesale & Retail
66	60	WESTCO PROPERTIES LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£47,763,000.00		Property & Construction
67	49	DCM (CORNWALL) LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£47,497,000.00	125	Wholesale & Retail
68	40	CAVANNA GROUP LIMITED	Devon	30 Nov 2020	£47,250,676.00	132	Property & Construction
69	36	CHAMPION GROUNDWORKS LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£47,147,360.00	376	Property & Construction
70	83	NEAT EXPERTS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£46,719,272.00	71	Property & Construction
71	92	SPAREX LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£46,581,344.00	180	Wholesale & Retail
72	73	STIGA LTD	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£46,580,496.00	46	Wholesale & Retail
73	79	STYLES & BROWN LTD	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£46,578,184.00	281	Wholesale & Retail
74	80	FRANCIS CLARK LLP	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£46,495,000.00	644	Business Services
75	69	FOOT ANSTEY LLP	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£46,452,000.00	519	Business Services

Top 150

2020	Company Name	County	Latest Accounts Date	Total Sales / Turnover (Period 1)	Number of Employees (Period 1)	Sector	
76	87	WFC CONTRACTORS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£45,940,560.00	60	Property & Construction
77	88	H R JASPER & SON (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Mar 2020	£45,912,760.00	105	Manufacturing
78	53	MITCHELL & WEBBER LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Nov 2020	£45,400,524.00	90	Wholesale & Retail (Oil / Fuel)
79	75	ASHFORDS LLP	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£44,845,000.00	466	Business Services
80	43	SEARCHFLOW LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£44,706,176.00	121	Property & Construction
81	71	A E STUART NO2 LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£44,559,552.00	249	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
82		BAKER ESTATES LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£43,621,872.00	70	Property & Construction
83	115	COXCO HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£43,393,600.00	36	Wholesale & Retail
84	68	GOODRIDGE LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£42,937,000.00	373	Wholesale & Retail
85	72	CMC HOLDINGS (SW) LTD	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£42,709,696.00	80	Manufacturing
86	67	WEST PHARMACEUTICAL SERVICES CORNWALL LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£42,051,000.00	187	Manufacturing
87	66	STEVE HOSKIN CONSTRUCTION LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£41,913,160.00	328	Engineering (civil) / Construction
88	101	DEVON DOCTORS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£39,144,872.00	631	Health & Social Work
89	111	FALFISH LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Mar 2021	£38,770,000.00	152	Wholesale & Retail
90		BURRINGTON ESTATES (RS) LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£38,472,868.00	0	Property & Construction
91	95	MICHELMORES LLP	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£38,472,436.00	473	Business Services
92		BRAY LEINO LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£38,467,284.00	208	Business Services
93	100	A.E. RODDA & SON GROUP LTD	Cornwall	31 Mar 2020	£38,375,000.00	149	Manufacturing
94	89	TDK-LAMBDA UK LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£38,190,000.00	313	Manufacturing
95	86	VI - SPRING LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£38,161,000.00	204	Manufacturing
96	61	MJL CORNWALL LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£37,932,800.00	271	Property & Construction
97	119	TOMY UK CO., LTD.	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£37,540,000.00	81	Wholesale & Retail
98	121	ET HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£36,518,164.00	354	Transport, Storage & Communication
99	78	GCP STUDENT LIVING PLC	Devon	30 Jun 2021	£36,293,000.00	135	Property & Construction
100		OCEAN HOLDINGS SOUTH WEST LTD	Cornwall	30 Nov 2020	£36,192,664.00	88	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
101		REGIONAL & CITY AIRPORTS (INVESTMENTS) LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2021	£35,700,000.00	770	Property & Construction
102	62	BOTT LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£35,630,852.00	395	Manufacturing
103		ST. PIRAN'S SCHOOL (GB) LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	£34,701,736.00	136	Education
104		WILDFIRE INVESTMENTS LTD (ROUTENOTE)	Cornwall	31 Mar 2021	£34,392,732.00	64	Business Services
105	109	FIRST SOUTH WEST LIMITED	Cornwall	28 Mar 2020	£33,626,000.00	719	Transport, Storage & Communication
106	107	WW (UK) LIMITED	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£33,494,696.00	137	Wholesale & Retail
107	105	WILLIAMS BUILD MANAGEMENT LIMITED	Devon	31 Jul 2020	£33,070,108.00	131	Property & Construction
108	63	ALLAN SICHEL LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£32,989,198.00	138	Wholesale & Retail
109		FLUID BRANDING HOLDINGS LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Jul 2020	£32,498,542.00	79	Manufacturing
110	81	BARDEN CORPORATION(U.K.)LIMITED(THE)	Devon	31 Dec 2019	£31,467,834.00	347	Manufacturing
111	102	CLASSIC 14 HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£31,337,950.00	93	Property & Construction
112	122	MASONS FARM AND COUNTRY LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£30,472,044.00	98	Wholesale & Retail
113	59	GAZCO LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£29,969,422.00	162	Wholesale & Retail
114	118	EMBLEM HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£29,803,508.00	31	Business Services
115	103	ZEBRA MTD LIMITED	Devon	31 Jan 2021	£29,538,694.00	142	Wholesale & Retail
116		VICTORIA PORTS LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£28,916,000.00	246	Transport, Storage & Communication
117	125	VAPORMATIC U.K. LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£28,327,000.00	103	Wholesale & retail
118	129	ROADFORM CIVIL ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£28,172,382.00	205	Engineering (civil)
119	120	MARSH HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£27,674,488.00	73	Wholesale & Retail
120	124	HOME HARDWARE SOUTHWEST LIMITED	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£27,362,606.00	165	Wholesale & Retail
121	130	MOLE AVON TRADING LIMITED	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£27,353,000.00	172	Wholesale & Retail
122	141	ARMADA INVESTMENTS LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£27,296,840.00	24	Financial Services
123	117	E. & J. W. GLENDINNING (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£26,884,652.00	228	Mining & Quarrying
124	143	ROTOLOK (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	31 May 2020	£26,839,196.00	375	Manufacturing
125		FEEDCO LTD	Devon	30 Apr 2020	£26,814,884.00	34	Wholesale & Retail
126		DUO GROUP (U.K.) LTD	Devon	30 Jun 2020	£26,783,762.00	100	Business Services
127		OXYGEN HOUSE GROUP LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£26,639,000.00	261	Financial Services
128	148	DALTER UK LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£26,571,262.00	9	Wholesale & retail
129	123	CASTLE AIR LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Nov 2020	£26,398,276.00	80	Leisure & Tourism
130		OTTER NURSERIES LIMITED	Devon	03 Jan 2021	£25,726,106.00	485	Wholesale & Retail
131	133	KANDYTOYS HOLDINGS LIMITED	Devon	30 Nov 2020	£25,703,380.00	70	wholesale & retail
132	113	ROWES GARAGE LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£25,214,364.00	120	Wholesale & Retail
133		KENSA GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Apr 2021	£25,139,100.00	111	Manufacturing
134	149	SOUTHERN ENGLAND FARMS LIMITED	Cornwall	31 May 2020	£25,102,014.00	279	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
135		SMALLRIDGE BROS LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£24,696,756.00	77	Wholesale & Retail
136		WATERDANCE LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2020	£24,167,000.00	18	Agriculture, Fishing, Hunting & Forestry
137	136	3T'S LEISURE LTD.	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£24,153,996.00	73	Wholesale & Retail
138		HALSE SOUTH WEST LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£24,128,196.00	40	Wholesale & Retail
139	150	CORNISH MUTUAL ASSURANCE COMPANY,LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	£23,861,800.00	107	Financial Services
140	145	TOR CURRENCY EXCHANGE LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Jun 2020	£23,686,000.00	85	Financial Services
141	127	SC GROUP-GLOBAL LIMITED	Devon	31 Aug 2020	£23,578,896.00	233	Manufacturing
142		CORNWALL GROUP LIMITED	Cornwall	30 Jun 2021	£23,509,512.00	264	Wholesale & Retail
143		THE TRAVEL CHAPTER LIMITED	Devon	31 Oct 2020	£23,419,892.00	311	Leisure & Tourism
144	140	BARRETT PARTNERSHIP LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£23,126,128.00	66	Wholesale & Retail
145	126	RODGERS OF PLYMOUTH LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£22,800,004.00	93	Wholesale & Retail
146	135	SCC (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£22,796,840.00	80	Wholesale & Retail
147		CONWAY BAILEY TRANSPORT LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Jan 2021	£22,409,580.00	200	Transport, Storage & Communication
148		CLADCO PROFILES LTD.	Devon	31 Jan 2020	£22,388,706.00	63	Wholesale & Retail
149		BLUE CEDAR HOMES LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	£22,158,108.00	12	Property & Construction
150		FORTHGLADE FOODS LIMITED	Devon	30 Sep 2020	£22,102,416.00	143	Manufacturing

## Top ten charities and biggest movers

# Rising stars in a difficult year

FOR the first time this year, this publication charts the firms that have seen the biggest climb up the ladder in the Top 150.

It is no mean feat in a pandemic year to increase turnover, sustain momentum, growth and create jobs.

At the top of the list is GM Coachworks, based in Newton Abbot, Devon. The firm, which specialises in the conversion and supply of mobility vehicles, has rocketed to number 35 on the list from 90 in 2020.

In October, the firm opened its

new multi-million pound manufacturing facility in Heathfield, Newton Abbot at the former home of British Ceramic Tile. The latest expansion comes on the heels of strong year-on-year growth for the firm and will allow increased production to meet growing customer demand.

Other notable names on the list include Burts Snacks that has gone from number 77 to 48. The Plymouth-based manufacturer shifted £57.3m of crisps in a year to become the UK's fastest growing independent "snacking" company - despite the Covid pandemic.

## Biggest movers

	Company Name	Total Sales / Turnover (Period 1)	2021 Rank	2020 Rank	Movement
1	GM COACHWORK LIMITED	£72,214,224.00	35	90	55
2	CMOSTORES GROUP LIMITED	£52,351,400.00	54	96	42
3	WILTON BRADLEY HOLDINGS LIMITED	£62,417,680.00	42	82	40
4	COXCO HOLDINGS LIMITED	£43,393,600.00	82	115	33
5	MVV ENVIRONMENT DEVONPORT LIMITED	£48,665,604.00	62	93	31
6	F W S CARTER & SONS LIMITED	£48,926,000.00	61	91	30
7	BURTS SNACKS LIMITED	£57,357,252.00	48	77	29
8	FLATCABLE LIMITED	£50,156,956.00	57	84	27
9	SNAPFISH UK, LTD.	£64,822,504.00	39	65	26
10	WHITE ROSE UK LTD	£49,152,396.00	59	85	26
11	SUCCESSION WEALTH MANAGEMENT LIMITED	£54,314,000.00	51	76	25
12	E T HOLDINGS LIMITED	£36,518,164.00	97	121	24
13	TOMY UK CO., LTD.	£37,540,000.00	96	119	23
14	SPAREX LIMITED	£46,581,344.00	70	92	22
15	DALTER UK LIMITED	£26,571,262.00	127	148	21
16	ARMADA INVESTMENTS LIMITED	£27,296,840.00	121	141	20
17	ROTOLOK (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	£26,839,196.00	123	143	20
18	SOUTHERN ENGLAND FARMS LIMITED	£25,102,014.00	133	149	16
19	WATSON-MARLOW LIMITED	£86,233,000.00	26	41	15
20	WRAFTON LABORATORIES LIMITED	£82,020,000.00	27	42	15
21	NEAT EXPERTS HOLDINGS LIMITED	£46,719,272.00	69	83	14
22	DEVON DOCTORS LIMITED	£39,144,872.00	87	101	14
23	WFC CONTRACTORS LIMITED	£45,940,560.00	75	87	12
24	H R JASPER & SON (HOLDINGS) LIMITED	£45,912,760.00	76	88	12
25	ROADFORM CIVIL ENGINEERING COMPANY LIMITED	£28,172,382.00	117	129	12

## Top 10 charities

2021	2020	Name	R/O County	Latest Accounts Date	Turnover Last available year	Number of Employees Last available year
1	1	CORNWALL CARE LIMITED	Cornwall	31 Dec 2019	35,415,000.00	1,297
2	2	THE EDEN TRUST	Cornwall	31 Mar 2020	32,987,000.00	499
3	4	DARTINGTON HALL TRUST(THE)	Devon	31 Aug 2020	20,057,000.00	247
4	6	CHILDREN'S HOSPICE SOUTH WEST	Devon	31 Mar 2020	18,785,933.00	359
5	3	THEATRE ROYAL (PLYMOUTH) LIMITED	Devon	31 Mar 2021	16,658,167.00	310
6	5	THE EXETER DIOCESAN BOARD OF FINANCE LIMITED	Devon	31 Dec 2020	16,507,000.00	69
7	10	DEVON & CORNWALL AUTISTIC COMMUNITY TRUST	Cornwall	30 Sep 2020	15,331,440.00	508
8	7	PLYMOUTH MARINE LABORATORY	Devon	31 Mar 2021	14,281,000.00	177
9	9	SHELTERBOX TRUST	Cornwall	31 Dec 2020	13,977,000.00	125
10		HOSPISCARE	Devon	31 Mar 2020	12,660,789.00	286



> MVV Environment Devonport, lit up to support Help For Heroes' Cut the Clock mental health campaign



> Dave McNulty, managing director at Burts Snacks



> The Messenger statue outside Theatre Royal Plymouth, which has bounced back after lockdowns

Erin Black

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon

# Education grips tech challenge

**W**HEN the first lockdown in March 2020 hit, education leaders were suddenly faced with looking after students and staff in a world turned on its head.

Ten months on, England went into lockdown again on January 6, 2021. This time round, the logistics of remote learning had been ironed out but the long term effects of the pandemic on health and wellbeing were being acutely felt across the board.

Sean Mackney, Principal of Petroc College that had campuses in Barnstaple and Tiverton, said: "Caring for staff mental health has increased, as it should."

"That has a double benefit - helping you respond in difficult situations and building resilience into the organisation."

Concern for organisational health is vital as we plan for an uncertain and complex future where risks are increased. "All in all, our people did an amazing job in difficult circumstances, and I'm truly grateful to them for that," he said.

As with the rise of home working and internet shopping, the pandemic has accelerated trends that were already underway.

Nowadays, students on the whole are not expected to be in class for every session.

And shifts in technology mean that courses - particularly for vocational learning - are more suited for life outside the classroom.

Mr Mackney said: "There has been significant development in technologies supporting the shift from purely classroom teaching toward 'blended' learning where teaching is mixed with remote learning and mentoring."

"This is not simply a response to covid, it's a mix of what works for students today and what employers

The challenges of the pandemic on education have been far from straightforward over the past 12 months, but if there has been any silver lining it is that colleges and universities at least had experience under their belt, writes Hannah Finch

are asking for."

And it is an area that is moving fast. Petroc has partnered with AI firms that use technology which learns how an individual student learns and presents content that works specifically for them.

It is being rolled out to adult learners of maths and English.

Mr Mackney explained: "Another idea we're exploring is Microsoft HoloLens - holographic immersive technology - that helps students grasp concepts more quickly through spatial visualisation."

"As the economy recovers, such approaches should benefit anyone studying for higher-level qualifications in construction, engineering, and healthcare, all of which are likely to be much in demand."

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, Exeter College celebrated the official opening of its South West Institute of Technology in July 2021.

The Institute of Technology Digital and Data Centre opened with the aim of widening opportunities in the industry, training a new talent pool and driving economic growth for the region.

It provides employer-led education opportunities in the digital sector, including courses around data analytics, cyber security, software development, Esports and providing training for Apple's app development.

Institutes of Technology (IoTs) are a key component of the government's plans to reform technical education, putting both employer and student needs at the heart of the system. They will provide

employers with a skilled workforce and students with a clear route to technical employment.

John Laramy CBE, Exeter College's Principal and Chief Executive said: "This is a vital development for our city and region, it is critical that we equip our students and apprentices with the skills of the future that are in such demand from employers."

The South West Institute of Technology (SWIoT) is an innovative collaboration between colleges, universities and employers, with each educational partner aiming to meet the specific skills needed in their locality.

*It is critical to equip our students and apprentices with the skills of the future*

JOHN LARAMY

The SWIoT draws on expertise from a group of 'anchor employers' who will lead its strategic direction and ensure focus on the latest industry skills - they include Oxygen House and the Met Office in Exeter.

At the University of Plymouth, latest accounts show its finances held up well despite what it described as "a uniquely challenging higher education landscape due to the continuing global pandemic".

The report, for the 2020/21 financial year, shows its pre-tax surplus rose by £2.7m from the £4.4m profit in 2020. That in itself was a recovery

from a loss of £17million a year earlier. Income also rose, to £239.4m, up by 5% on 2019/20's £228m and close to the £241.5m it earned in 2019.

The turnaround in fortunes was put down to a number of factors including a £4.8m increase in research income and an increase in tuition fee income of £2.3m as a result of improved student retention and higher postgraduate student numbers.

There was also additional funding body income of £3.3m and savings of £2.9m - mainly due to events that did not take place as a result of Covid-19 including travel and education visits.

The receipt of £1.6m of Covid-19 capital and revenue funding from the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) was, however, offset by the £0.7m reduction in residences, catering and conferences income due to reduced on-campus footfall, and a proportion of waived accommodation fees.

Prof Judith Petts, the university's vice chancellor and chief executive, has not had a pay rise, her salary remaining at £271,273.

Meanwhile, tuition fee income from students increased by £2.3m compared to 2019/20, mainly due to the increase in postgraduate numbers. Overall, the university had 18,000 students.

The report said: "This year saw increased competition following elevated A level results and reduced international activity. Uncertainty around A level outcomes is expected to continue in 2021/22."

"The university strategy is to focus

on quality and to increase overall student numbers whilst looking specifically to grow both the postgraduate and international offering, including through new online opportunities."

The university's strategy is now to increase the postgraduate student population, and to increase student numbers during the next five years with a focus on the international and postgraduate market. The report said: "The focus is on achieving a level of financial stability to enable the university to operate effectively against the background of uncertainty created by the global pandemic and other events outside of the university's control."

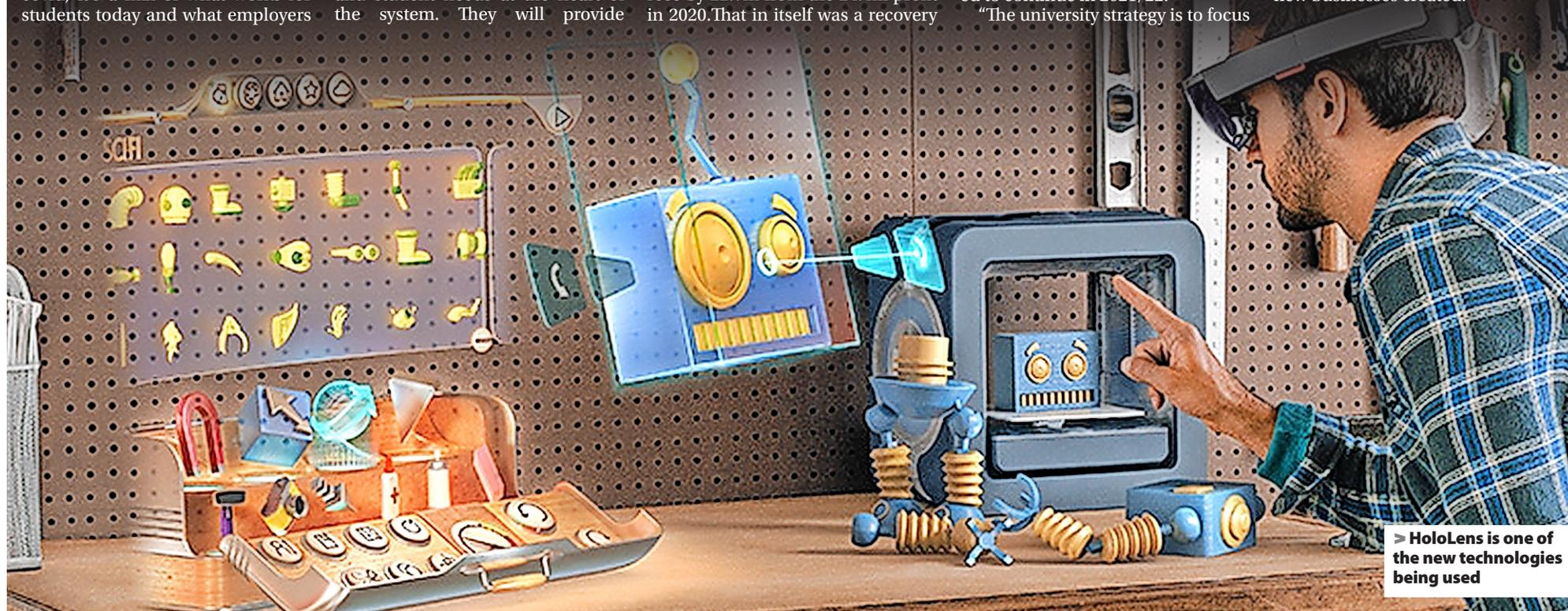
Meanwhile, there have been good results for Cornwall's Falmouth University.

A new study reveals that it has produced more start-up businesses than any higher education institution outside London.

The university, which has comedian Dawn French as chancellor, was listed third in the University Start-up League, a table produced by the UK's leading business financial platform Tide.

Falmouth University has produced 1,135 graduate start-ups since 2014/15, according to the research. The figure was only beaten by the Royal College of Art, with 1,665 start-ups, and Kingston University's 1,630.

The only other South West university to feature in the top 50 was Bristol's University of the West of England (UWE), at number 47 with 161 new businesses created.



► HoloLens is one of the new technologies being used

#1 auditor to top 150 businesses

PKF  
FRANCIS  
CLARK  
Shared Ambition



# Opportunities and threats amid pressure of lockdown

**T**HE hospitality industry has faced blow after blow during the Covid-19 pandemic which gripped the nation this past year.

The country faced three national lockdowns and ever-changing tier restrictions to battle, it hasn't been an easy ride for businesses.

Many had to shut their doors with others adapting and changing to offer different services to try and stay afloat.

So how have businesses fared before, during and after the lockdowns - and what have they learnt going forward?

We spoke to a number of different businesses, from delivery services to chain restaurants to find out how some survived and some thrived during the pandemic.

One business that has thrived throughout the pandemic is a vegetable box delivery service: Veg in a Box.

Owner Julie Corcutt says the business is a family company supporting local farmers and suppliers by delivering produce across the county.

The venture has been running for

**Eve Watson reports on how food and drink businesses in the South West have survived and thrived during the pandemic**

nine years, and the company has won countless awards in the South West.

Julie and husband Bela live on a farm and are surrounded by produce, and after making a veg box for a friend for his birthday one year, the idea of Veg in a Box was born.

The woman, who also owns the Devon Meat Box Company which delivers meat straight to customers' doors, said that lockdown grew the business exponentially.

"I was really really lucky through lockdown as customers were so pleased with what they had that they all stayed with us so that was really good news," she said. "I could give my staff more permanent jobs which has been really wonderful.

"We've all worked really hard and I never rest. I've always got another

plan up my sleeve and we support as many other local producers and suppliers as we can."

The business boss says that the lockdown was the busiest the company has ever been, but customers have stayed loyal as restrictions lifted.

Julie said: "We worked all the way through lockdown. We did really go all guns blazing. It was just like having Christmas every day all through the lockdowns.

"I can't say it wasn't hard work though. At one stage I looked at all the orders that had been delivered and it was nearly up to the ceiling. I looked at my sister and said, 'are we going to be able to do all that?'

"She said, 'we'll do it, we'll do as many as we can every day'. And we did it. What's nice is all of those peo-

ple have stayed with us, they haven't gone back to the supermarkets. People are more eager now to support local because we looked after them when they needed us."

The family-run business turned over a staggering £1 million last year.

"I never thought in my wildest dreams it would come to this, we actually turned over £1m last year. You can imagine how much we had to make to turn that money over.

"We're only a little team, there's about 10 of us. We're all crackers, we eat a lot of cake and the kettle is always on. That's why it works! We never pretend to be someone we're not. We're very hands on as well."

Impressively, the company was already fully booked up for Christmas.

Julie explained that her Christmas club goes down a treat with customers, and she's busy preparing for the busy months.

"Because I've taken on more staff over the last year I'm able to do a lot more for Christmas," Julie said, last month.

"I've actually already bought all of

the Christmas meat ready for this year. I didn't want to leave anything to chance, we've already booked all our swedes, parsnips, sprouts, we've paid upfront for everything this year."

The veg lover said that it was the first year that customers were having a frozen turkey.

"[It's] simply because our supplier hasn't got European workers here so we're having to have the turkeys done each week, we have 40 delivered each week.

"They're all being frozen, so we've had to buy a lot more freezers but at least everyone will have a turkey this Christmas. It might be frozen but at least they'll have one!

"I pay my suppliers all year round so I'm really confident nothing will go wrong.

"I'll leave the supermarkets to do their thing, but we're all sorted!"

"We've bucked the trend, we never shut down and worked all the way through, we just grew."

Another business which has seen stratospheric growth since the pandemic is Devon Hampers.



Adam Fox-Edwards is the brain behind the venture, which enables people to send a taste of Devon to wherever they desire.

From fresh scones, cream and jam to pasties and beer, Devon Hampers can deliver goodies to your door.

The family-owned business which operates in Lifton at Milford Farm is right in the middle of the countryside, and on the edge of Dartmoor.

Adam says he started hampers seven years ago as a sideline to a business he had at the time, and grew it steadily.

The business boss and CEO said: "We were always an online platform, nearly all of our sales were online and earning about 20 percent a year up until lockdown one.

"Thereafter, my traditional business had to shut down like everyone else but the hamper business then took off like a rocket and our sales had risen by a factor of 10. Not 10%, but by a factor of 10.

"Our business has grown exponentially, our peak was last Christmas. We had gone from two part time workers to 25 full time workers.

"From sending out a few hampers each month we were sending out between 500 and 1,000 a day.

"Ours really is a big success story in terms of businesses that are thriving."

A third of the company's business comes from corporate clients such as banks and insurance companies which are keeping in touch with staff.

Devon Hampers has now received orders from a staggering 100,000 customers.

Many of these ordered multiple times or large corporate orders of up to 1,000 hampers and so the company has also passed a milestone last month of delivering over 250,000 hampers.

Adam added: "We've built our own bakery, our own photo studio and so the business has just grown. Within six months of lockdown starting, Devon Hampers had grown to be bigger than the hotel company that had been on that site for years.

"Most of our suppliers are local. Some who would've gone through furlough themselves, like our jam

manufacturer for cream teas.

"We were going from using 30 pots of jam a week to using batches of 2,000, our demand was so big. He was bringing pots of jam to us and they were barely cool enough to put the label on. We had that much demand for cream teas.

"It's authentic, we bake the scones here everyday, the pasties and pies

*We worked all the way through lockdown. We did really go all guns blazing*

**JULIE CORCUTT,  
VEG IN A BOX**

fresh on the farm and in our own bakery and send them out by night by a courier. Then customers can enjoy a delicious cream tea or a pasty and beer lunch."

The business prides itself on using local suppliers and produce to deliver its hampers.

"It's been a great success story

during lockdown. We've bucked the trend, we never shut down and worked all the way through, we just grew. It was bizarre at the time, the rest of the world was furloughed and we were coming to work every day."

The pandemic hasn't been an easy ride for some, especially restaurants and pubs.

CEO of Bistrot Pierre Nick White has said it was a difficult time for his company, and the business still fears another lockdown.

Bistrot Pierre, which has venues in Plymouth and Torquay, elected to close before the lockdown as there were concerns about hospitality businesses spreading the virus.

"It was a horrendously difficult time, and one I wouldn't want to go back to," he said.

"The rules were changing, there was lots of hearsay, that was a particularly difficult time."

The CEO explained that during the lockdown, time was spent on the business and making it better.

The teams focused on virtual training, menus and developing out-

side areas for diners. When the restaurants were finally able to reopen in April, the venues focused on safety, and spent big on masks, sanitiser and perspex screens to keep staff and customers safe.

Due to reduced capacity and outdoor dining only to begin with, Nick says the teams worked extra hard to deliver food to its customers.

He said: "The miles some of the team walked to outside balconies and seating was just phenomenal. We were excited about getting reopened, but we've always been fearful of another lockdown, even now.

"We have a very different attitude to business, we look at the cash we have and want to make sure we could survive another lockdown. It's made business in general a lot more focused on survival.

"Pre-pandemic if you had a bad weather weekend whether it snows or rains it's a disaster, but we've learnt to weather several months of lockdown, so it's an extra level of resilience

"I don't think anyone imagined we'd ever have."

## Tourism

# Tourism industry hoping staycation boom is here to stay



After more than a year of lockdowns, it was no surprise to see the region's tourism industry inundated with more city-dwellers seeking a seaside break than ever before, writes Lisa Letcher

**D**URING the busiest times of 2021, namely Bank Holiday weekends and the summer holidays, travel operators were warning of booking surges as reservations were up 136 per cent on like periods in previous years.

When the government's road-map out of lockdown was first revealed in February, The Rest Easy Group, which includes Snap-trip, Big Cottages and Dog Friendly Cottages, says demand on its sites grew "within minutes".

People could not wait to get their hands on a post-lockdown staycation - in whatever capacity was available to them.

In Cornwall that meant some were unable to secure reservations for places they had visited years on end thanks to inflated prices, elevated demand and simply not

enough accommodation to go around. In Devon, there were talks of people triple booking holidays through fear that one would be cancelled.

The region was packed to the rafters.

Lucy and Dale Jinks run Truabode, a private self-catering holiday let business on the north coast. The couple said they have been blown away with how successful their venture has been since embarking on it only a year before the pandemic struck.

While many businesses were terrified of the repercussions of Covid, as the owners of two self-contained holiday homes in Cornwall, they couldn't have been in a better position as demand for self-catering holidays soared as we came out of each lockdown.

Speaking of the sheer desire for holidays last year, Lucy said: "We've never struggled to get bookings"

"Last year we just got booked up so quickly for summer, it was crazy. As soon as Boris said hospitality was reopening, it was just booked, and quite far in advance as well."

She said the first cottage they purchased, known as The Little Cottage, remains fully booked until November of this year, with not a single night free this summer.

The third and newest property they manage sold clean out within seven days of first appearing online in July - they didn't need to market it.

Andrew Nicholson and wife Teresa run Penvith Barns, a bed and breakfast and holiday com-

plex near Looe. He explained that lockdowns and forced closures left a big hole to fill for many in the sector, but that it was worth the challenge and improvements undergone in those times have set

*My message to businesses is hope for the best, but plan for a more competitive world*

them up for future seasons.

"We had been forcibly closed for a while and we tried to make the most of those opportunities to expand the business and so we

have built yurts and we hunkered down and really started thinking about the future."

But that's not to say that domestic holiday popularity will continue into the next business year.

Malcolm Bell, Visit Cornwall's chief executive says it's the "two-billion pound question".

"I'm certainly not worrying about next year but the figures normally for Cornwall are that something like 40-45 per cent of visitors every year are people that have come the previous year," he explained. "So very loyal visitors."

"Then 40-45 per cent are people

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Pennon

► Beaches like Perranporth in Cornwall were packed last year

Greg Martin



who come normally every two to five years, and then you get 10-15 per cent who are new, first time visitors."

The tourism board is waiting on results from its annual visitor survey which gives an insight into people's reactions from this year - but the concern is how many local visitors will actually return.

He fears that an increase in popularity could put Cornwall at risk of becoming a "cheaper" holiday destination in the eyes of visitors.

"My message to businesses is to

hope for the best but plan for a more competitive world," he explained. "There has been a lot of positivity from people this year about coming back and we can build on that, but don't take it for granted."

The staycation boom saw not only an uptake in people running holiday homes and Airbnbs, but the number of farms offering pop-up campsites also soared last year, boosted by a change to government planning policy and rising demand for staycations.

New regulations allow farmers in England to operate a campsite without planning permission up to 56 days - double the usual 28-day limit - until the end of 2021. It was a bold move to encourage domestic holidays.

In 2019, only half of Britons planned to spend their main summer holiday in the UK.

In 2021, that proportion has risen to 62% per cent.

It's thought that around 23 million people were expected to enjoy staycations throughout the sum-

mer in the UK, a £30 billion boom for the domestic holiday sector, according to Sykes Holiday Cottages' 2021 Staycation Index.

This would mean Devon and Cornwall alone would have been in line for a £3 billion staycation bonanza, but time will tell if this pattern is set to continue.

"I'm reasonably optimistic but my two orange warning lights are the cost of living crisis, and on the back of that is people's disposable income," Mr Bell explained.

"We really don't know where

consumer confidence will be."

Overseas competition is another uncertainty. "Will overseas competition go vicious on price," he said. "There will be a big desire to go abroad but it's on the issue of affordability".

"This year there was an inertia around businesses that had a long waiting list of people who wanted to stay here," he said, explaining it could be easy to get comfortable, but there is every chance this theme might not be mirrored for next year."

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon

## Farming

# Farmers resilient as subsidy support changes loom

Farmers are facing some of their greatest challenges yet, feeding a growing population and protecting the environment as subsidy support is phased out and uncertainty rules the marketplace. Athwenna Irons reports

**W**HEN change is in the air, opportunity abounds for those light-footed and quick-thinking doers.

Agriculture is a prime example of an industry that has always embraced such entrepreneurial spirit, adapting to and emerging from Covid-19 and other challenges in a dignified manner.

At the height of lockdown restrictions, the Westcountry's farm shops and food producers were right there and ready to respond, adapting quickly to meet a sudden and rapid increase in demand - so much so that public backing of the nation's farmers has subsequently soared to a record high.

According to the results from the 2021 Farmer Favourability Survey, commissioned by the National Farmers' Union (NFU) earlier this year, 75% of the 2,000 respondents said they "trust British food more than food from the rest of the world", with 73% admitting that they "often or always look specifically for British food when shopping" - the highest figure seen to date since the start of the survey in 2012.

And similarly to 2020, 88% of the public feel that it is "important that Britain has a productive farming industry".

While this will have served as a welcome morale boost, the daily grind of tending livestock and tilling soils continues for our countryside custodians come rain or shine, pandemic or no pandemic.

A big part of the job description is dealing with market volatility, with most farmers having little or no influence over the price they might receive for their products. But output prices have "held up very well" over the last twelve months says Brian Harvey, partner and agricultural accountant at PKF Francis Clark. "At present, we are still seeing the farm gate price of milk, wheat, rape, beef and lamb remaining well above that seen in 2020.

"Despite this, I am not expecting to see the sector generating bumper profits for the current year as, in terms of inputs, we are currently seeing what can only be described as a perfect storm."

Mr Harvey, who is based in the firm's Truro office, explains that at present, the cost of fertiliser and sprays, red diesel, seed, livestock feed, farm machinery, types, wire, plastic, wood are all costing more, and in certain cases "considerably more than ever before". He continued: "This is clearly denting the farmers hard

earned margin and this is on the assumption that the farmer can get hold of it in the first place."

Echoing this, Mel Squires, regional director of the South West NFU, says: "Brexit, Covid-19 and some of our labour challenges aside, I think we've had a better than expected season of gathering in forage and crops. Speaking to most farmers, they would probably tell you that a year ago it was feeling quite challenging. Now, many are feeling lucky to have had the breaks in the weather and the opportunities that they have."

However, Mel believes the outlook for the next 12 months will be tinged with a deeper concern, namely the ongoing uncertainty that surrounds the seven-year transition away from the Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and direct subsidies, which will be replaced by payments for 'public goods' - services that agriculture can provide to society that are not delivered by the market.

*This change in policy represents the biggest transformation for farmers in generations*

Indeed, the NFU has already called on the Government to postpone BPS reductions in 2022 and 2023, expressing concerns after the National Audit Office reported that Defra (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) had not yet published detailed objectives or ensured adequate incentive for farmers' participation in the new Environmental Land Management (ELM) scheme, expected to replace BPS when fully operational in 2024.

According to Defra's roadmap, farmers who receive less than £30,000 a year will see their BPS money cut by 5% in December, with progressive reductions to 50% by 2024. For larger farms, the cuts will be much bigger. For example, a farm business that currently receives more than £150,000 in subsidies will face a 25% reduction this year, climbing to a hefty 70% cut in 2024.

Minette Batters, president of the NFU, commented: "This change in agricultural policy represents the biggest transformation for farmers in generations, and the

NFU and its members want - and need - this transition to be a success. But I really fear for the future success of farming in this country if the government presses ahead with its current timetable to transition to its new agriculture policy schemes which simply aren't ready. That's why we are calling for a postponement to the BPS reductions in 2022 and 2023, alongside a thorough review, to ensure the new policies and schemes are ready with clear incentives and objectives.

"It's crucial they give farmers and growers the confidence to invest, provide fairer market returns, reward environmental delivery, and realise our shared ambition of producing climate-friendly food for markets at home and abroad."

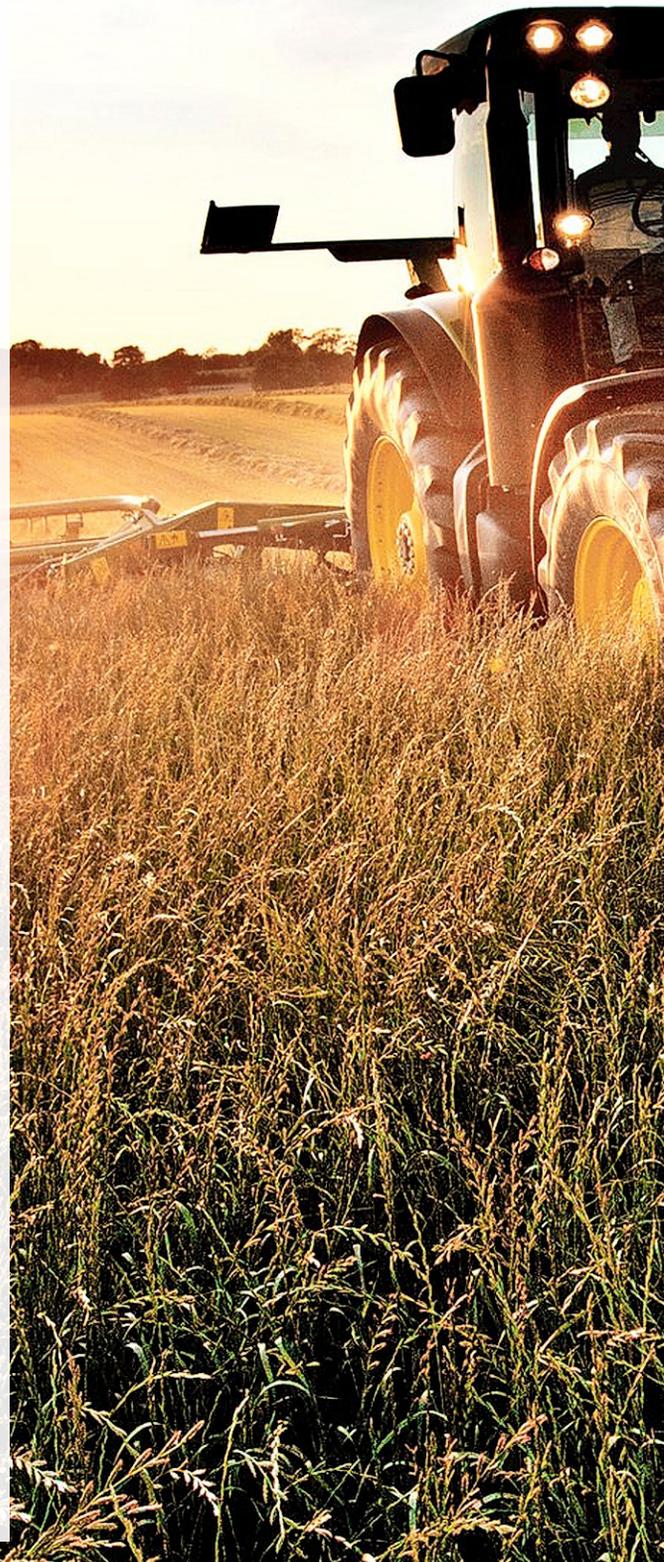
As well as changes to subsidies, Defra are proposing to offer farmers who wish to retire or leave the industry the option of taking a lump sum payment, capped at £100,000, in place of any further direct payments. And in 2024, direct payments will be 'delinked', meaning recipients will no longer have to farm the land to receive their BPS claim.

But Edward Richardson, from the charity Farm Cornwall, believes the lump sum exit scheme will only apply to a "very narrow band" of farmers. "For the small 100-acre farmer, whose got a £10,000 BPS, they're only going to be 2.35x that, so to retire on £23,500 isn't even going to buy you a car," he explains. "So for the tenant farmer or the small farmer, the retirement scheme isn't going to be for them.

"It's going to be for a band of farmers in the middle who are probably farming 400-500 acres and will receive a reasonable lump sum to retire on. For the bigger farmer, there's still more money to be made out of the ELM scheme, so they're not going to be interested in it either."

With such challenges in the year ahead, and longer term, farm businesses will need to be both resilient and adaptable. Writing in the Andersons Outlook 2021 report, agricultural consultant Richard King says: "There are still great opportunities to improve financial performance in all sectors of our industry. Without the distorting effects of direct support, there can be a greater focus on the areas of activity on farm that actually make a profit.

"Over time a stronger, more resilient industry should result, able to meet many of the other challenges that lie ahead."





► Prices have held up well but farmers are facing increasing costs  
Glenn Blackburn

#BacktheGreat SouthWest



# Transport



**T**HE past 12 months have been good for our region's transport infrastructure as projects like the dualling of the A30 in Cornwall got under way and phase one of the new Dawlish sea wall was completed.

National Highways, formerly known as Highways England, started work on the £330m A30 dualling project between Carland Cross and Chiverton Cross.

In addition to the three-year scheme, the firm also unveiled a £200m infrastructure spending package this financial year to improve road safety.

Responsible for motorways and major A-roads, National Highways said the money will fund vital infrastructure and boost both connections and local economies post pandemic with the M5, M4, A30 and A38 all benefitting.

Funded from the Government's Road Investment Strategy, Highways England said it will spend £200 million during the financial year on more than 121 schemes stretching from Bristol, South Gloucestershire,

## The last 12 months have seen significant investment in the region's roads and rail network - with several major projects underway reports **Olivier Vergnault**

North Somerset, Bath and North East Somerset, Wiltshire, Dorset, Gloucestershire, Somerset, Devon, down to Cornwall.

The firm said the cash is in addition to the A30 dualling scheme in Cornwall and A303 dualling scheme in Sparkford which are both under construction.

National Highways regional director, Andrew Page-Dove, said: "Hundreds of thousands of drivers use our roads every day for work journeys, home deliveries and the movement of goods and services, so it's essential we keep them in good condition to ensure safety and reliability.

"With this investment, we will continue to deliver the essential maintenance and upgrades throughout the region to improve safety and help keep drivers on the move."

On the A38, some £2.89 million will go towards the Mowhay project to see the current footbridge modified for both cyclists and walkers, while another project will also start on the A38 in Plymouth.

Mr Page-Dove said Covid and Brexit had not slowed the work down and it's been full steam ahead for projects which have seen 200 miles of road being resurfaced throughout the region between April 2020 and March 2021. In addition 42 miles of barriers, 950 miles of road markings and 31 miles of drainage, 91,000 road studs, 150 lights and 29 new traffic lights, along with installing 93 new traffic signs have been changed or upgraded and 22,000 road signs have been inspected while 12,500 miles of walked inspections have been carried out.

Roads are not the only part of the region's infrastructure to undergo serious investment. Network Rail has also been busy.

Work to ensure the storm-battered Dawlish seafront and railway line which connects Exeter to Plymouth and Cornwall is future-proofed is continuing apace.

The company recently finished the remaining upgrades to the first section of new sea wall at Dawlish with the installation of new low energy LED lighting and concrete seating along the sea wall.

Construction of this first section of the new bigger sea wall - which stretches along Marine Parade west of Dawlish station - started in May 2019 and was completed last July before being officially opened by the Rail Minister a year ago.

Work on the second section of the new sea wall - which is 415m in length and stretches between the Colonnade breakwater west of the station to the Coastguard breakwater east of the station - began last November and is still underway.

Construction of this £80m govern-

ment-funded upgrade is expected to be finished by 2023 and once complete will provide greater protection to the railway and town of Dawlish from rising sea levels and extreme weather.

Also to improve the resilience of the region's rail network, which was shown to remain fragile again when Cornwall was cut off from the rest of

*It is essential we keep the roads in good condition to ensure safety and reliability*

**ANDREW PAGE-DOVE**

the country after a Tesco lorry smashed into a rail bridge in Plymouth, forcing Network Rail and GWR to carry out lengthy safety checks, the Dartmoor Line has now been reopened.

For the first time in nearly 50 years, regular passenger services are running again on the Dartmoor Line, connecting Okehampton to Exeter.



# Vital investment in region's roads and rail infrastructure



► The first section of new sea wall at Dawlish with low energy LED lighting and concrete seating  
Network Rail

Services launched on Saturday November 20, 2021, marking the first reopening under the Government's Restoring Your Railway programme which is exploring ways to return old lines and stations to service across the country.

The £40m project, funded by the Department for Transport, connects Exeter St Davids, Crediton and Okehampton, which GWR said will boost local businesses, the tourism sector, and provide greater access to education and work for thousands of people who live locally.

Mark Hopwood, GWR managing director, said: "The project will be helping to bring social and economic benefits to the local area and will reinforce the positive impact the railway can have on the communities we serve."

At the other end of the region, the St Erth to St Ives branch line also received a £3m refit which Network Rail said at the time was the largest track investment in the Duchy since the 1950s.

The work was carried out ahead of the G7 Summit taking place in Car-

bis Bay in June with Network Rail renewing the track on the St Ives Bay line between Carbis Bay and St Ives.

Around 1.5 miles of new track was laid, along with 3,600 new sleepers and over 400 tonnes of new ballast – the stones that support the track.

Lee Hildreth, Network Rail project manager, said: "This important work will undoubtedly have a positive impact on the local community by helping to provide a more reliable railway for passengers in Cornwall."

Also ahead of the G7 Summit, the government announced a £7.8m improvement package to Newquay Airport.

The work included strengthening existing taxiways and aprons and extending apron areas and ground lighting.

It also means that the airport can now accommodate larger aircraft, enabling them to manoeuvre and park safely around the airport while also facilitating future use by the reusable rocket-launching aircraft which will operate from the spaceport.



► Work on the new section of the A30 between Chiverton Cross and Carland Cross  
Greg Martin

## Manufacturing

# Positive outlook as producers stay resilient

Factories have been hit with a non-stop combination of body blows in 2021 - but it appears that the South West's manufacturers are entering the new year far from being stretched out on the canvas, writes **William Telford**

**A** NEW report from IHS Markit and the Chartered Institute of Procurement and Supply has revealed UK factory output ended 2021 hampered by Covid restrictions and with Brexit issues hampering exports and pushing up costs.

And in the South West, as across the nation, manufacturers are also struggling with an ongoing skills shortage and general lack of staff.

Yet, despite this, the region's factories have proved to be resilient and were looking at a buoyant new year, with indicators of growth at the end of 2021.

In December 2021 a study from business adviser BDO and manufacturers' organisation Make UK revealed South West manufacturers were being hit by "eye-watering" inflation while a continued downturn in the aerospace sector, still constrained by global Covid issues, hit factories too.

However, the quarterly Manufacturing Outlook survey showed most indicators remained positive with total orders reasonably positive as was export performance.

The jobs outlook was fairly positive too, although the big challenge for companies remained in attracting and retaining talent.

And although firms were considering cutting back on investment in 2022, despite Chancellor Rishi Sunak extending the Annual Investment Allowance in the Autumn Budget, and escalating inflationary pressures forcing companies to raise prices, Make UK nevertheless forecast growth for South West manufacturing in 2021 of +6.9% and growth in 2022 of +3.3%.

Make UK's Regional Manufacturing Outlook report was published in mid 2021 and revealed just how vital the sector is to the South West, factory production making it the UK's

sixth-largest region in terms of gross value add (GVA).

The South West accounts for 7.3% of the UK's total output, with the manufacturing industry here contributing to 0.8% of the UK's total output.

The South West generates 10.8% of its regional output from manufacturing activity, which is similar to the UK average of 9.9%

Three major subsectors account for just under half of the South West's manufacturing output.

The largest is the Transport Equipment industry, with 22.4% of all manufacturing output. This is followed by Food & Drink at 13.3%, and then the Electronics subsector at 9.4%.

There were 227,000 manufacturing jobs in the South West in 2020, accounting for 8% of the region's total workforce and 0.7% of the UK's total workforce.

This was a decrease of 18,000, likely exacerbated by the impact of Covid-19 on employment but the situation improved in 2021.

In 2020, the South West accounted for 6% of the UK's total goods exports.

The region's dependence on the EU for exports declined marginally from 44% to 40% of exported goods journeying to the EU annually. This is significantly below the UK average of 48% and also makes the South West the UK region the least dependent on EU exports.

The next largest destination for South West's goods is North America, accounting for 23% of goods exports, followed by Asia and Oceania which accounts for 19% of goods exports.

The South West's overall productivity was the 4th best in the UK, at 89.5% (UK=100). Manufacturing productivity is at 94.2% of the UK aver-

age, ranking 8th across all regions and nations.

At the Plymouth Manufacturers Group's Christmas Lecture, in December 2021, Mike Snaith, PMG chairman and chief operating officer of Plessey Semiconductors, neatly summarised the year from the point of view of Britain's Ocean City, one of the nation's leading manufacturing locations.

Mr Snaith stressed how manufacturing remains an important part of both Plymouth's economy, and the

UK economy, with the sector now contributing close to £1bn every year into the Plymouth economy.

"That is an amazing 16% of the total," Mr Snaith said.

"A far greater proportion than the national average which is just short of 10%."

He said that just over one in eight people work in manufacturing and engineering in Plymouth and added: "At 13.9% that's the highest concentration of manufacturing and engineering employment in any English

city, south of the Midlands."

Mr Snaith said: "Manufacturing continued throughout the pandemic. Some of our members closed briefly in order to make their work environments Covid secure, but despite these extremely testing times, our sector is in a period of significant growth.

"So much so, that an issue affecting most of our members is being able to fill our collective numerous vacancies at various skill levels.

"In terms of talent development,



## #BacktheGreat SouthWest

**Pennon**

> Manufacturing is in a period of growth. Despite the obstacles that a pandemic brings

NanoStock



members continue to offer apprenticeships with a large number of apprentices having started this September. And we're looking forward to holding our Apprentice and Graduate Jobs Fair during National Careers Week next March."

Mr Snaith continued: "Manufacturing is in a period of growth. Despite the obstacles that a pandemic brings, positivity is winning through as several of our members have made noteworthy investment in their businesses this year."

He highlighted HellermannTyton which has broken ground on phase II of a major expansion of its Derriford factory which is expected to create 100 jobs.

The multi-million-pound investment will see its site at the Plymouth International Medical and Technology Park double in size to support market growth and increase its capacity.

And he also spotlighted SMEs such as Meddings Group, which celebrated 80 years in 2021, and has

undertaken a significant investment programme which included spending more than £1.4m on capital equipment and facilities to enhance the company's machining and fabrication capabilities.

Another SME, Oakmount Control Systems Ltd, moved its head office to new premises in Plymouth, a key step in a plan to allow expansion and support increased demand for its services.

Mr Snaith said: "These are just a few examples of the many members

who are investing in new machinery, site expansion, talent development and retention, alongside undertaking R&D collaborations and bringing new products to market.

"All the while, around us, we see continued investment in the city through local economic partnerships and a variety of funding awards.

"Some of our members are, of course, eyeing up the emerging plan for Plymouth's freeport status with particular interest.

"It is also reassuring that our relationship with the University of Plymouth is continuing to strengthen.

"We know that, together, we can better enable the advancement of knowledge and the transformation of lives.

"Through our joint initiatives we can help both the business community and the university solve real-world challenges.

"So, we're excited as to what our collaborations could bring this coming year."

# #BacktheGreat SouthWest

  
Pennon

## Retail

# Independents show way back for town's centre

Newquay, on Cornwall's Atlantic coast, enjoys global fame for its surfing, and the party lifestyle that goes with it. But the town's reliance on tourism and hospitality meant two out of three jobs were affected as it became one of the places hardest hit by the Covid shutdown. Now it is facing new challenges, and seeing some surprising changes, following the lifting of pandemic restrictions, writes Ed Oldfield

**T**HE shopping streets were crowded with visitors on a mild half-term afternoon at the end of October, with the main town car parks full. All day long, wet-suit-clad surfers padded barefoot down the hill to Towan Beach, joining hundreds already in the water riding the famous waves.

Shop owners report a "crazy" summer and a longer holiday season extending into the autumn, after restrictions were lifted in July and staycationers poured in. But the bars, hotels, shops and restaurants have struggled to find enough staff, partly blamed on Cornwall's housing crisis.

Seasonal workers, attracted by the town's work hard, play hard ethos, have found places to rent in short supply, and have been competing with local people for the dwindling supply. Property prices have soared, fuelled by people moving out of the cities, and the demand for second homes. Owners have been selling up, or switching to holiday lets as prices rocketed.

People moving to Newquay from London, Manchester and Birmingham, have triggered a rise in shared offices for remote workers setting up in the high street. And as big name traders have moved out, independents have increasingly taken over the empty units.

The latest Cornwall Council survey for Newquay showed that in 2020, the number of shops fell to the lowest recorded level, with a drop in food and drink outlets, and the lowest recorded number of offices. The year the pandemic arrived saw the departure of national retailers Clinton Cards, Carphone Warehouse and jeweller H Samuel. Five restaurants and cafes closed, including Frankie and Benny's at the five-year-old development known as The Ark, following the closure of Prezzo's in 2019.

But business leaders in the town paint a more optimistic picture, and say the post-pandemic recovery has seen the increase in empty units reversed in recent months, with new

shops replacing the disappearing national retailers.

Visitors questioned in a random survey said parking was in short supply in the town centre, although the large Tregunnel long stay car park, five minutes' walk away, was mostly empty. One said Newquay was "lovely", but they struggled to find parking.

A visitor from Perranporth, back in the town after several years, said the beach end of the centre had a nice feel, but the farther away she went, it felt dated and old, and the streets "could do with being a little bit cleaner". She added she would like to see more independents, rather than big brand names.

Crystal Alcorta, 21, on a student placement at the Headland Hotel, said there was little in the town for the young, and wanted to see fashion brands like H&M and Zara.

She and colleague Kristy Hawkins, 30, reception supervisor at the hotel, said there was also a need for more charity shops, with cheap items for lower paid locals.

Kristy, standing opposite the closed Clinton Cards, said she felt the high street was "dead", with more shops closing each year.

Tucked away in Crescent Lane, just off the main shopping drag of Bank Street, Sebastian Venn and Claire Heron-Maxwell set up Sprout Health Foods five years ago. When the pandemic arrived, they adapted quickly to offer an online click and collect service, and adapted an outside courtyard to extend the cafe seating area.

Specialising in ethical goods, seasonal produce and Cornish products, they also host events, from poetry nights to wellness workshops, which have restarted after the lifting of pandemic restrictions. The business has been able to continue to support six employees, with no one sent on furlough.

Mr Venn said the shop and cafe had a base of regular customers year-round. He felt the personal touch, providing advice and expertise, plus events creating a commu-

nity, was the way forward for retailers to reverse declining footfall caused by a switch in shopping habits.

He said: "When there are lots of empty units, it definitely makes it harder for us. I think it is a huge challenge we are facing, but I think there is definitely a kind of customer that will always be there, people who want shopping as a real experience, and to speak to real people who have an expertise."

He said Newquay had seen a "crazy" summer, with the town busier than ever, and he had heard of other businesses which had been left frustrated by the difficulty finding enough staff.

Further along Bank Street, named after the financial institutions which have now all moved out, the mayor of Newquay Louis Gardner has opened a shop and cafe selling exclusively Cornish produce. His store, called The Old Counting House Deli, opened in August in the former branch of HSBC, another example of independent businesses moving in after big names leave.

The last bank to move out of Bank Street was Barclays, which shut in October 2020, citing the shift to online banking. Just down the road, a gin company is reported to be interested in taking over the closed Vodafone store.

Mr Gardner, a former Royal Navy officer, is the representative for Newquay Central and Pentire on Cornwall Council, has been mayor of the town since May 2020, and is a member and former chair of Newquay's Town Team.

The Conservative councillor was upbeat about Newquay's prospects, pointing out that the town is bucking the national trend for empty shops. He said: "We benefited massively from the staycation thing, people who would have gone abroad came to Newquay."

"Newquay was ready for a change in the retail sector for a long time. What we have seen is the big high street companies move out, and we are getting more independents. I



think people still want to shop, but we have to give them that experience that they can't get elsewhere.

"Covid has forced us in a different direction. People realise they cannot rely on the big companies and big supermarkets. It was the independents that stepped to the fore, so a lot of those independents are being rewarded with loyalty now, and it is also part of the more national move towards people wanting lower food miles - people want local goods and traceability."

Local businessman Andy Cole is chair of the Newquay Town Team, and a director of the Newquay BID - the Business Improvement District, set up after a vote and funded by a levy on local businesses to help the town grow and thrive. It is now six months into its third five-year term, and sets out its vision as "sustaining Newquay as a leading visitor destination for tourism, business and living to create a progressive, adaptable and resilient economy".

The visitor economy is uppermost in the mind of Mr Cole, who describes Newquay as a "young person's town", and points out the importance of Newquay as a global

brand, with events like the Boardmasters Festival, Cornwall Pride and Newquay Fish Festival, leading the way. The number of empty shops has fallen in the 12 months to August 2021, reversing a trend going back over several years. The latest year-on-year footfall figures show Newquay performing much better than the regional and national average through the summer and into September, especially compared to pre-Covid 2019.

Mr Cole said business had seen big problems recruiting enough seasonal staff, with some struggling to stay open as workers went down with Covid or had to self-isolate. But he was optimistic that the return of major events next year would support the impetus for a sustained recovery.

He said: "We are always trying to encourage new businesses, and local community businesses I think are the way forward, as a personal point of view. From the Town Team, we are looking to understand what the community and businesses are looking to for the future."

Mr Cole pointed out a shift in use in the high street to see the opening



> Holidaymakers visit shops and cafes on a rainy day in Newquay, Cornwall  
Hugh Hastings

of more shared office space, with users taking advantage of remote working, needing high quality connections to the rest of the UK and the United States. He also highlighted the opening by the town council of start-up shop units at Killacourt, alongside a green open space overlooking Towan Beach. It has provided opportunities for small businesses but has been controversial, with a campaign against changing the traditional open space.

Mr Cole said: "We can all think we know what is going to happen, but Covid has given everybody an opportunity to look at their way of doing business in a different light. It has given a lot of businesses an opportunity to develop a new structure."

Newquay has been one of the first places to host a visit from the government-backed High Streets Task Force, when representatives visited in September, supporting the efforts of the Town Team to deliver a new development framework.

Commenting on Newquay's future, Task Force representative Joe Barratt said: "We discussed some of the key challenges, including hous-

ing, staffing, and the accessibility of Newquay as a destination, within Cornwall and nationally.

"The Town Team have used Task Force research and tools to prioritise what is a complex set of opportunities and we look forward to seeing the new development framework that will help to do that. We witnessed first hand the passion and commitment that the local community has for Newquay and that is a key strength for the future."

Meanwhile Newquay BID has launched two surveys to gather information, one for residents of Newquay and another for those who live outside the town, with prizes to be won at random, including a £600 luxury stay at the Pentire Hotel and five £100 Cornish Hampers from family-run Newquay firm, The Cornwall Hamper Company.

In a separate scheme, Cornwall Council set up a £4million Town Centre Revitalisation Fund in 2020, for the towns which missed out on the main government funding streams, of the Town Deal and Future High Streets Fund, including Newquay.

The government has put revitalis-

ing town centres high on its list of priorities in the economic recovery. Plans are being worked up across Devon and Cornwall to rethink the traditional high streets, with a shift towards leisure. The decline in bricks and mortar retailers triggered by the rise of the internet started long before Covid-19.

The shutdown during the pandemic had a devastating impact, but the government is hoping targeted financial support will speed up the transition helping to breathe life back into the high streets.

The uptick following the reopening of the economy has been patchy. The fuel crisis of late September, with uncertainty around the supply as filling stations ran out, appears to have deterred motorists from heading to the shops.

Retailers were hoping that early Christmas shopping following concerns of the supply chain might see an early boost to the last quarter of the year.

In Cornwall, four towns are in line for up to £185million of investment under the government's Town Deal programme. Penzance (£21.5million), Camborne (£23.7million) and

St Ives (£19.9million) were added to the list of successful bidders, following the announcement in April of £23.6million for Truro. The funding will pave the way for plans to transform high streets, improve transport and digital connectivity, and develop skills and culture.

Meanwhile Penzance was also allocated a further £10.4million from the government's £830million Future High Streets Fund to regenerate the high street, by bringing back vacant retail units into use, providing town-wide WiFi and delivering new homes and workspaces.

In Devon, Torquay was one of the first seven towns in England to be announced as winners under the scheme, receiving an allocation of £22million announced in October 2020, unlocking a total of £135million of investment.

The Future High Streets Fund in Devon also saw £12million for Plymouth, £6.5million for Barnstaple, £9.2million for Newton Abbot, and £13.4million for Paignton.

In Plymouth, the £12million of Future High Streets money will fund redevelopment plans for the former Civic Centre and Guildhall. The project will create an international conference centre in the basement of the Civic Centre for up to 800 delegates and a Creative Hub for the University of Plymouth, delivered by developer Urban Splash.

Proposals for the historic Guildhall on the other side of the Civic Square include improvements to create a modern multi-purpose events venue. The £4million city council project would include internal alterations and improvements to catering, IT, sound and lighting for the listed building.

Manchester-headquartered developer Urban Splash is planning to create 144 homes by converting the 14-floor tower block at the Civic Centre. The scheme was given planning permission in January 2020, four years after the developer bought the empty listed former council HQ building for a token £1.

The two projects, along with a separate £3million upgrade of the Civic Square situated between the two buildings, will help regenerate the city centre and support the post-Covid economic recovery.

To the north of the city centre, an £80 million project is already underway to transform Plymouth Railway Station. The first phase of the Brunel Plaza plan is the planned conversion of the 11-storey Intercity House to education use for the University of Plymouth.

The redundant RISC building would also be demolished to make way for a new multi-storey car park. A new hotel is on the cards for the site of the old multi-storey, which will be knocked down, and the station concourse itself will be revamped in a phased programme, with a new public space outside the station, better parking, bus and taxi facilities, education, office and leisure space.

The tower block will be known as Intercity Place and the plans include a top-floor viewing platform and "halo of light" to act as a beacon for the city. The scheme also includes better links to Plymouth city centre

nearby. Improvements are also starting in New George Street, from Armada Way to the House of Fraser Service Yard, followed by a second phase in upper New George Street and Old Town Street to St Andrews Cross in January 2022. The upgrade will include tree planting, children's play space, on-street retail, with an improved connection between Drake Circus and The Barcode.

In Torquay, part of Torbay, which is the most deprived council area in the region, according to government figures on health, housing and the economy, work has already got under way on some of the projects under the £22million Town Deal.

The sweeping vision includes changes for the use of the Town Hall, Pavilion, Pavilion car park, the Haldon Centre, Union Street, Market Street, Upton Park, and the new train station planned for Edginswell.

A key project is a plan to restore Torquay's landmark Pavilion, a Grade II Listed building on the seafront near the harbour. The plans have taken a step forward following the submission of an application for listed building consent to Torbay Council, which will enable vital survey work to take place.

The application, lodged by MDL Marinas which leases the Pavilion from Torbay Council, proposes scaffolding and a temporary roof to be placed over the historic 1912 building to allow for detailed structural survey work to be carried out.

The temporary roof will protect the building from further deterioration ahead of winter whilst the scaffolding will allow a surveyor to assess the extent of repairs required to stabilise and eventually restore the Pavilion. Security hoardings are also expected to be put up around the site.

Council leader Steve Darling said: "The Pavilion is one of Torbay's most loved and iconic buildings. Together with TDA and MDL we are passionate about developing a scheme to fully restore the Pavilion. These initial surveys are the first steps in moving the restoration project forward to get the Pavilion back into a condition where it can once again be developed into a harbourside attraction."

Elsewhere in the town, work has taken place on improving Upton Park alongside Lymington Road, as well as upgrades to Princess Gardens and Royal Terrace Gardens on the seafront.

The plans to improve the public realm in The Strand alongside the harbour will tie in with redevelopment of the former flagship Debenhams building, which was bought by the council in 2020 ahead of the collapse of the retailer.

The building is set to be demolished and replaced with flats, shops and restaurants, although the canopy over the pavement outside is set to be retained.

Plans are also being worked on for improvements in the town centre in Union Street, where a cinema is being planned in the former BHS store.

Torbay's Conservative MP Kevin Foster said: "It is about making town centres the places you want to go to, with more leisure, and retailers more suited for the 21st century, with good quality accommodation."

# Building on strong foundations across the Westcountry

After a difficult 2020, when South West construction projects were shut down for a time by Covid restrictions, the region's building industry rebounded strongly in 2021 - but with a few high-profile casualties, writes William Telford



► An artist's impression of The Workshed, which will provide new workspace for Cornwall's digital and creative industries sectors on part of the former Liskeard Cattle Market site

**A**FTER a difficult 2020, when South West construction projects were shut down for a time by Covid restrictions, the region's building industry rebounded strongly in 2021 - but with a few high-profile casualties, writes William Telford.

Compared to the early days of Covid-19 restrictions, 2021 has felt more like a pre-pandemic year. But there has been a worrying trend in insolvencies in the industry, with some big names going belly up.

These have included Henry W Pollard and Sons Ltd, which went into liquidation leaving debts of more than £10m and buildings unfinished including Plymouth's £13m Teesra House apartment block.

Fortunately, work was restarted at the building, at the Mount Wise estate, two months after Pollard's collapse, when family-run Brady Construction Services, which has offices at the Millfields in Plymouth, took over.

Meanwhile, Plymouth's URBN Construction Ltd left debts of more than £2.5m when it went bust in May 2021.

And construction of a multi-million-pound block of Plymouth waterfront retirement flats was left more than a year behind schedule after the contractor brought in to build it collapsed into administration.

The charitable Abbeyfield Society, which is behind the eight-storey Mayflower Court tower at Millbay, said it has been hit by "unforeseen circumstances" and construction delays and it then emerged Wales-headquartered WRW Construction had gone into administration in July 2021 citing "significant financial stress".

Another example of how Covid hit the industry came when South West construction giant Midas Group blamed pandemic disruption for causing it to make a £2m loss - its first in 40 years of trading.

But it bounced back somewhat when Midas Construction - which has bases in Plymouth, Bristol, Cornwall and Devon - was appointed to a new £5.16bn public sector house-building framework which could allow it to tap into lucrative contracts.

These stories perhaps encapsulate the ups and downs facing the industry. After a 14% contraction in 2020, British construction output is expected to have grown by almost 15% in 2021 - with forecasts of a 5% growth in 2022.

A construction industry trends report, by global insurance company Atradius, said commercial construction activity was hampered in 2021 by low demand for shops and offices, but growth was provided by house building and large public infrastructure projects.

On the downside, the same report mentioned the shortage of materials and inflation squeezing profit margins, fueling fears of further insolvencies during 2022.

Atradius predicted UK construction industry insolvencies could increase by as much as 25% during the first half of 2022, and rated its outlook for the industry as "poor".

The skills shortage bit to such an extent that it was revealed Plymouth businesses were struggling to fill 2,000 jobs in the city - and are drawing up an action plan to tackle the problem.

But in other parts of the sector there was huge growth, particularly in the supply chain. One of the success stories of the year was the progress of Plymouth-headquartered building and DIY e-commerce retailer CMO Group Plc.

The company said it was in line for even more growth after raising more than £27m from a share offer in July and will use the cash to create jobs. Now the UK's largest online-only retailer of building materials, it saw sales soar in 2021 as it benefited from a lockdown boom in DIY.

And South West building supplies company RGB Building Supplies was bought by a national chain to form a £250million business.

There were also many exciting building projects under way in the South West during 2021, with several of them continuing into the new year.

In Plymouth, work began on the new University of Plymouth's Inter-city Place scheme, transforming the office block at the railway station into a campus that will be used to train future nurses, midwives, paramedics, physiotherapists, and other

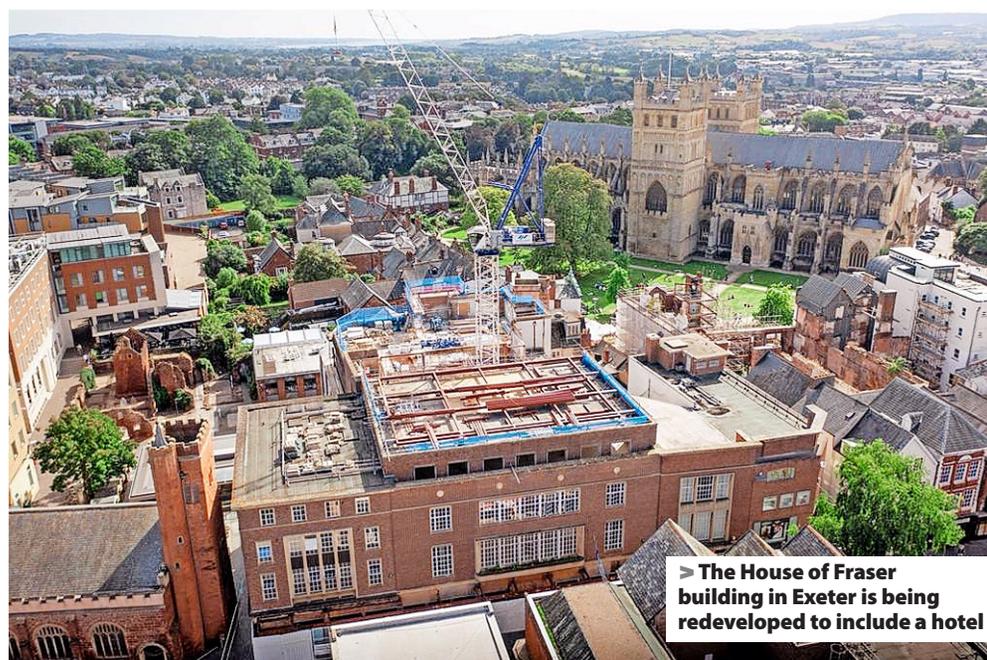
allied health professionals. It is part of an ambitious wider scheme to upgrade the railway station and create a Brunel Plaza which will eventually see a new multi-storey car park, a hotel, and two further University of Plymouth campus buildings.

Nearby, the university continues with redevelopment of its main campus and in 2021 work started on construction of a huge engineering and design centre which could lead the way to creation of an "urban park" in the heart of the campus.

In the city centre itself, work began to "refresh" the area around Old Town Street and New George Street, as part of a £7m investment which will see dated eighties landscaping removed.

As work started at one end of the city centre, it ended at another with completion of work on the £6.2m boulevard at Millbay.

As that was completed, work began on the city's newest hotel which will sit alongside it. The construction of a six-storey hotel, which will become a Moxy, is now well under way with Mitnija, one of Lithuania's largest construction firms,



► The House of Fraser building in Exeter is being redeveloped to include a hotel



► Renovation by Real Ideas on The Market Hall at Devonport has seen the installation of a state-of-the-art immersive dome



Burrington Estates completed construction of 30 business units at the newly named Eurotech Park just eight months later.

As for other major projects which were embarked on, work started on ex-BBC chief Greg Dyke's £35m transformation of a Victorian Fort Bovisand into homes and businesses - with the first properties due for completion in 2022.

Plymouth manufacturer HellermannTyton broke ground on phase II of a major expansion of its factory which is expected to create 100 jobs. The multi-million-pound investment will see its site at the Plymouth International Medical and Technology Park, in Derriford, double in size to support market growth and increase its capacity.

The first phase of the restoration of Plymouth's Grade 1 listed Melville building is scheduled to be completed by mid-2022 with new occupiers lining up to join restaurant Hub Box and the Everyman cinema.

Market research firm IBISWorld said, in a report, that the sector with the highest concentration of work in the South West was "dam, harbour and other water project construction", ahead of "site preparation".

And indeed work has started on a £2bn rebuild of facilities at Devonport Dockyard which will create more than 600 construction jobs during the next five years.

Also on the waterfront of Britain's Ocean City, Sutton Harbour Group Plc launched work on the long-awaited Harbour Arch Quay block of flats with main construction due to begin in early 2022.

Exeter was also a hive of activity in 2021, where construction started on a £24m development of 160 homes on the outskirts of the city. Barratt Homes' Victoria Heights project, in Alphington, will be made up of two-, three- and four-bedroom homes.

There was also the start of work on a £40m redevelopment of the former House of Fraser building in the city centre, to be turned into a hotel, bars, restaurant and spa.

Work is also on track at one of the first of the "shovel ready" projects funded by the Government - Exeter Science Park's £5m "green" building the Grow-Out Space.

And the £6.6m zero-carbon Ada Lovelace office and laboratory building opened at Exeter Science Park. It is expected to bring jobs to Exeter and East Devon and will help to drive productivity and economic growth.

Work also got under way at Exeter Logistics Park on construction of a huge warehouse which will become a DHL parcel distribution centre and create dozens of jobs. Commercial property developer Stoford is constructing two buildings that will deliver a combined 83,500sq ft of industrial/logistics accommodation at the park, on the former Hayes Farm, Clyst Honiton.

The £35m four-star Marriott Courtyard hotel is set to welcome its first guests in February 2022. Construction began in early 2020 on the eight-storey, L-shaped hotel which has become a landmark close to the Sandy Park Exeter junction of the M5 motorway.

Completed in 2021 was the redevelopment of the Georgian Winslade Manor house on the outskirts of Exeter. It opened as an office and restaurant hub following its £2m refurbishment and sits at the heart of the 86-acre development of offices, homes and leisure facilities at Winslade Park, Clyst St Mary. Once complete, it will have an expected market value of £80m.

Elsewhere in Devon, construction started on a £16m rebuild at Exmouth Community College - one

of largest schools in the UK. Main construction commenced at the Devon site with BAM Construction appointed to create the new facilities.

The conference centre at Devon's 11th Century Benedictine monastery Buckfast Abbey reopened its events space after a £2m revamp and the University of Exeter's £2.4m "subterranean" computer science building was also completed on time.

There are some huge road projects on the way too, not least the £1.7bn upgrade of the A303 at Stonehenge. Highways England is to continue working on the A303 upgrade and Stonehenge tunnel project and is anticipating awarding a £60m contract - despite the High Court ruling against the development.

And in Cornwall, the £330m upgrade of the A30, from Chiverton to Carland Cross, reached several milestones.

Also in Cornwall, work began to regenerate the former Liskeard Cattle Market and create a £4.4m hub for digital and creative industries, and a project was started on the first of more than 600 homes to be built across the duchy by developers Trevelth as part of a major house building programme.

Work also started on a development of 43 homes spread between two Cornish villages. The housing is being built for Ocean Housing Group by construction firm Gilbert & Goode at sites in St Teath, in north

Cornwall, and Trewoon near St Austell. Work has also begun on a project to build 125 new homes in the west Cornwall coastal town of Hayle.

A new £2million business park in Porthleven welcomed its first occupants with the arrival of Origin Coffee, one of the UK's longest standing specialist coffee makers, and engineering company Porthleven Metalwork relocated to the new Foundry Business Park.

Construction started on a £2m Aviation Centre which will play a crucial role when future space missions take off from Spaceport Cornwall. The Corserv Group developed the feasibility and secured funding for the Aviation Centre and will manage the construction contract with delivery partner Wilmott Dixon.

Work on Cornwall's £6.3m "shovel-ready" STEM centre is due to be completed by Spring 2022. The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) and Health Skills Centre for North and East Cornwall is being built in Bodmin by Truro and Penwith College and is designed to train the aerospace, space, creative, energy, mining and health sector workers of tomorrow.

In Truro, Cornwall, there will be a £170m redevelopment of the city centre and the Devon town of Ivybridge is to undergo a £9m regeneration which will include the building of an Aldi supermarket, and construction work is about to start on a "new community" of 86 homes in Tiverton.

And huge hospital rebuilds in Exeter, Truro and Plymouth will continue too, including a £19million extension and improvements to the emergency department at Royal Devon and Exeter Hospital and the £30m extension at Truro's Royal Cornwall Hospital.

And, the saga of Plymouth's ghost tower, the Crescent Point student flats, may take a new turn in 2022, after it was sold to an unnamed buyer for £11m. The huge double block of student flats in Notte Street has never been lived in. An unnamed purchaser has already paid a deposit and contracts will be exchanged in February 2022, with plans to carry out repairs to defects in the towering buildings.



► How the western entrance to the new A303 tunnel near Stonehenge could look

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# The Growth Hub is helping SMEs take climate action to protect the planet

OPERATIONS MANAGER KIRSTY MILES-MUSGRAVE EXPLAINS HOW THE CORNWALL AND ISLES OF SCILLY GROWTH HUB CAN SUPPORT YOUR BUSINESS IN REDUCING ITS CARBON FOOTPRINT



Kirsty Miles-Musgrave, the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Growth Hub's operations manager

WITH the ink barely dry on the COP26 agreement to accelerate action on climate change, small businesses are asking how they can play their part in cutting their carbon footprint.

No matter what size your business, we can all do our bit to cut carbon emissions and help protect the planet from the impacts of global warming.

At the Growth Hub we are seeing more and more enquiries from small and medium-sized businesses asking how they can take climate action, whether that's through curbing their own emissions or bringing green solutions to market.

Many business owners already take steps to reduce their carbon footprint at home, like recycling, buying electricity from a green supplier or fitting LED bulbs. But making the crossover to their own business can be more of a challenge.

That's where the Growth Hub can help businesses make the first steps of their low carbon journey. We offer free and impartial help to new and established businesses in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly by signposting them to support and advice.

Every Local Enterprise Partnership area has a Growth Hub, so there's similar support available wherever you are in the region.

Cutting emissions can save your business money and give you a competitive advantage.

Customers – be they consumers or corporates – are becoming more discerning about what action their suppliers are taking on climate and want to see positive action.

It's also about future-proofing your business. There are legislative changes coming that you can start thinking about now. For example, from 2030 you won't be able to buy new petrol and diesel vans in the UK. How will that impact your business? Could it be a business opportunity?

One of the excellent online resources we point businesses to is the Government-backed SME Climate Hub. It offers a range of tools and resources to support small businesses in reducing their carbon emissions and has specific actions for businesses in different sectors including agriculture, manufacturing, retail, construction, tech and hospitality.

Taking the first step is always the hardest. Once you have, there's lots of support on your low carbon journey.

## CASE STUDY

Lizzie Lay runs Sparrows and Sycamores Forest School in Liskeard. She teaches youngsters, aged from three to 24, to respect their surroundings and look after our natural habitats.

"Being a Forest School Leader I try to be as sustainable as possible," said Lizzie.



Forest School teacher Lizzie Lay and her daughter Daisy

"Doing the little things can make a big difference in the long run."

Lizzie tries to keep her carbon footprint down by minimising use of resources including:

- Advertising her events online, printing only a handful of flyers to minimise her use of paper.
- Teaching her students to 'leave no trace' to enable the woodland to function as it should.
- Using good quality, re-usable plastic items for serving food.
- Keeping a supply of waterproofs and wellington boots for children to borrow, so they don't need to buy new when they have a growth spurt.
- Encouraging car sharing to the woodland site, or else holding events on sites within walking distance of town centres.

## CASE STUDY

Steve and Sarah Moss run Little Gwendreath Holiday Cottages on the Lizard Peninsula. The surrounding area is a national nature reserve, a Site of Special Scientific Interest and an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty.

Steve and Sarah said: "We are very conscious that everything we do has an impact and we want to tread as lightly as we can. We are passionate about minimising our footprint and inspiring our guests to make small changes."

The couple have cut their carbon emissions by:

- Switching to a renewable energy supplier, as well as generating their own energy.
- Experimenting with nature-based carbon removal by rewilding the cottage grounds and building wildlife houses.
- Undertaking a supply chain review to ensure zero single use plastic items in the cottages, and ensuring suppliers have a similar ethos.
- Using rainwater harvested from cottage roofs to water the garden.
- Installing three electric vehicle charging points (from a UK company).
- Setting up a 'Borrow Box,' full of buckets, spades and body boards for guests to use.
- Encouraging guests to recycle and use food composting caddies.
- Supporting Friends of Kennack Sands by taking part in monthly beach cleans and providing pickers and rubbish bags for guests to take part in two-minute beach cleans.

**To find out how the Growth Hub can help your business visit [ciosgrowthhub.com](https://ciosgrowthhub.com) or telephone 01209-708660.**

*The Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Growth Hub is part-funded by the European Regional Development Fund and match funded by Cornwall Council, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership.*

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## Going Green

**Green credentials can be an important part of your business.**

Growth Hub can help your business take its first steps on a low carbon journey. We offer free and impartial help to new and established businesses like yours, across Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, by signposting to support and advice.

### Curio Spirits

Rubina Tyler-Street



Sit back and think about the things you can do straight away and then work towards the longer term. If we all take it in stages, we'll get there. 》》

### SeaGriffin Games

Caitlin Russell and Matt Tweed



We are just a small company, but every little action helps. If we can find ways to make our product carbon neutral, then hopefully it will pave the way for others to follow. 》》

### Pengelly Farmhouse B&B

Ben Hughes



It's a sign of the times, something we should all be doing and increasingly what guests are looking for. 》》

# Technology



**#Back**the**Great SouthWest**



# Tech sector continues to fly

The tech sector in Devon and Cornwall is growing faster than any other part of the region's economy and this is why, writes Joe Bevan

**A**CCORDING to figures from Tech Nation, investment in the South West tech sector grew from £458m in 2019 to £525m in 2020, despite the adverse impacts of Covid-19 and other events.

Gross value added (GVA) figures for the tech sector in Devon and Cornwall run to over £1.06bn in economic output. For comparison, that's over twice the value of the entire UK fishing industry. At an individual level, the Devon and Cornwall tech community generates over £50,000 GVA per worker, compared to the regional average of £23,000 across all sectors, and salaries in tech are typically around 30% higher than the regional average.

Startups are emerging across the region, fueled by vibrant tech hubs and the depth of expertise in the region. There are countless examples.

Drug discovery firm Amprologix was formed in 2018 as a spinout from the University of Plymouth. One year later the company won a £1.2 million contract from the Department for Health and Social Care to accelerate its work developing new antibiotics, and in early 2021 moved to Plymouth Science Park to join the park's growing health tech cluster.

Codices Interactive, based in Penryn, creates online shows and digital tools for streamers. Just three years after launching at the Falmouth Launchpad incubation hub in 2018, the company's products are used by over 2 million online players and

almost 14,000 streamers, from over 150 countries, every month.

Dashboard Ltd, based at Exeter Science Park, uses Internet of Things (IoT) technology to help businesses increase efficiency and become more sustainable. The company has regional presences in London and also Cornwall, which it describes as "one of the UK's burgeoning technology hubs."

Successful tech companies are emerging across Devon and Cornwall, but there are challenges. Access to funding and availability of talent are two obstacles.

In their recently published Startup Scene Report, Tech South West found that 81% of tech leaders in the region considered access to funding for startups to be "fair" or "poor", with only 19% rating it as "good". For availability of tech talent, 55% deemed it "fair" or "poor" with 1 in 10 rating it as "very poor".

Anthony Peake is the CEO of Exeter-based insurtech firm Intelligent AI, founded in 2020 during the pandemic and recent winner of the ACORD Global Innovation Challenge. Anthony said: "We recently secured almost £1m in funding from RLC Ventures, FomCap and angel investors, including £295,000 Innovate UK grants. But the process was not easy.

"I delivered over 70 investor pitches in 3 months, while running the business and pushing hard on the marketing. Learning about SEIS/EIS, due diligence, term sheets, shareholder agreements, how to

negotiate with investors, and how to secure good legal support is not an easy proposition while running a business. The funding landscape could definitely be made easier to navigate for startups, and the facilitation of greater knowledge sharing between companies that have gone through the process would be of great help."

These findings are not anomalies. The Tech Leaders' Brand Insights Report, published in October by South West-based tech marketing specialists Astley Media, revealed similar results. Over 30 tech CEOs and key tech players from across the region were interviewed for the report. When asked what challenges or barriers they faced, the top two responses were "access to funding", at 19%, and "skills shortage" at a mighty 40%. By comparison, only 3% cited "post-pandemic uncertainty".

"The tech sector, despite outstripping other areas of the economy in terms of growth, clearly has its challenges" said Caroline Orr, Marketing Director at Astley Media. "These challenges are long-term and embedded, and the solutions must go beyond post-pandemic recovery or quick fixes.

"Increasing the availability of tech talent and improving access to funding will require a joined-up approach across the sector, with tech hubs and clusters working together to showcase investment opportunities, support young people into tech roles and increase

## CASE STUDY: JURASSIC FIBRE

INNOVATION is taking place in rural areas too. Jurassic Fibre is a 100% privately funded startup rolling out full fibre broadband in rural areas across Devon, Somerset and West Dorset.

The company has grown to 300 employees in under three years, having secured £250m of investment from fern trading Limited, and at the height of the



pandemic was named Best New Internet Provider at the 2020 ISP Awards.

In 2021 the company connected its 1000th customer.

awareness among startups and scaleup companies about potential sources of funding and how to access them."

The region is not lacking for tech hubs: Plymouth Science Park, Exeter Science Park, Oceansgate in Plymouth, Torbay's Electronics and Photonics Innovation Centre; university hubs like Falmouth Launchpad and the SETSquared Partnership; virtual acceleration programmes like the Tech South West StartUp Studio; world-leading centres of innovation like Spaceport Cornwall and the Met Office; and new or in-progress sites such as Cornwall's FibreHub or the Innovation Centre in Taunton.

The continued growth of tech hubs and university clusters will be key to solving the talent crisis and improving access to funding, according to Tech South West.

Dan Pritchard, director of Tech South West, said: "We are working in partnership with key players in Cornwall, Devon and the wider region to bolster support networks, increase awareness of opportunities in the sector, facilitate knowledge-sharing and attract investment into the region."

The newly built FibreHub near Camborne, due to officially open next month, will provide a space for technology leaders in the area to share their expertise and for future generations to learn essential digital skills and discover the technology careers available to them.

Toby Parkins, director of Cornish software firm Headforwards who is also chair of Tech South West, said: "The speed at which the FibreHub has almost completely filled to capacity by innovative businesses, ahead of its official opening next month, demonstrates the depth of the sector and the willingness of the tech community to move forward after a brief slowdown during the pandemic."

Among the organisations moving to the new site is Software Cornwall, which promotes and supports the

county's growing tech community with education as a key focus. Members of the cluster are currently working with Cornwall College to improve the college's degree course in Computing and Programming, ensuring the content of the course is integrated with industry requirements and that students are getting the very best training possible from the programme.

Mr Parkins continued: "Education courses should evolve with industry to reflect current skills requirements in the business landscape. And the tech sector moves fast. Software Cornwall members are working with Cornwall College to develop strong ties between education providers and industry leaders, to ensure students are learning the most up-to-date skills and knowledge so they are fully prepared for careers in tech."

Other initiatives coordinated by Software Cornwall include the Agile on the Beach annual conference, an internationally acclaimed agile software conference that brings international thought leaders to the South West to share their knowledge and upskill the region.

New initiatives like the South West Funding Advisory Board (FAB) are emerging to enhance the region's potential. Led by Tech South West with support from the British Business Bank, the FAB will provide a one-stop shop for tech founders to get the funding advice they need, and for investors to make contact with new companies with growth potential. The programme is the result of research conducted by Tech South West into the funding challenges faced by startups, and is expected to streamline the process for new companies to secure funding and improve the success rate of emerging tech firms.

On top of this, a major new research project has been commissioned by Tech South West to produce the first full region-wide report into the South West tech sector.

## CASE STUDY: DATA DUOPOLY

DATA Duopoly was founded by Tanuvi Ethunandan and Erin Morris, who met at the Launchpad Incubator programme in Falmouth University in 2018. The pair used their data-driven and creative mindsets to solve a genuine problem in the visitor attraction industry: queuing.

After countless user interviews, plenty of prototyping and sheer determination Tanuvi and Erin created the XplorIT product range to bring the focus back on enjoying time with loved ones at a venue, rather than being stuck in a queue.

Tanuvi said: "Being in Cornwall allowed us to immerse ourselves in the space sector and see the opportunities of satellite data. We use GPS in our XplorIT platform to optimise visitor flow around a venue (think Waze for footfall traffic on-site)! We successfully closed a c.£250k seed funding round with support from the European Space Agency and Aerospace Cornwall. The South West tech cluster is thriving, and we have been able to access a network of tech expertise via the University.

"Our close links with the HE sector enabled us to pivot our existing technology to help students and staff return to campus safely post lockdown, and we are now piloting XplorCAMPUS with Falmouth University. We are excited to use our technology to help as many venues as possible."



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**Nigel Widdowson, CFO, Tungsten West**

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