

# IMReview 2020 21



06 IM GROUP RESPONDS  
TO COVID-19

30 ISUZU UK LOOKS FORWARD  
WITH THE ALL-NEW D-MAX

32 IM PROPERTIES FORGE AHEAD  
AT MERCIA PARK

[imgroup.co.uk](http://imgroup.co.uk)



## ISUZU UK

Dramatic and designed to create excitement around the all-new D-Max pick-up truck that will go on sale in March 2021, this striking advertisement couldn't fail to create a buzz among dealers, existing customers and prospective buyers! Unashamedly a 'next-level' pick-up that is smarter, stronger and safer than predecessors – and competitors – the message is register now to avoid missing out on an amazing vehicle... And those who do register their interest ensure they receive a steady flow of updates on what the all-new D-Max offers.

**ISUZU**  
THE PICK-UP  
PROFESSIONALS

## THE ALL-NEW ISUZU D-MAX



COMING SOON TO A  
SHOWROOM NEAR YOU

Stay updated. Visit [isuzu.co.uk](https://isuzu.co.uk) for more information.

# SAFETY FIRST FIRST FIRST

Equipped with a host of driver assistance technologies as standard, including Driver Monitoring System and EyeSight, the all-new Subaru Forester e-BOXER is our safest SUV ever. Judging by the awards we aren't the only ones that think so. **Drive safe.**



BETTER where it MATTERS!

## SUBARU UK

In January we launched the all new Forester to the UK market, advertising on TV, radio and digital channels. We also entered a partnership with the Guardian, launching a series of content focused around our core brand pillar: safety. We sell some of the safest cars on the road today and safety messaging has been integral in our marketing communications in recent years. Throughout 2020, safety in all elements of everyday life has become a particularly hot topic – making the content that we've created with the Guardian more relevant than ever. This advert was published in January, reinforcing the award-winning safety credentials of our newest model.



Over the past few years, one of the more common words written in these pages has been the 'B' word – Brexit.

In this, of all years – the one where we actually left the EU and are in the process of either doing or not doing a leaving deal – the ironic twist has been that this B-word has hardly been uttered here. Instead, a totally new word has arrived. Covid-19. My, how we've discussed that particular topic!

The novel coronavirus announced its arrival with extreme force. When original reports were coming out of China about this new disease, I guess we were similar to much of the western world in imagining, like the 2002 SARS epidemic, we would be spared. Soon, though, the first-hand details we began to receive from our own China office made certain that we should prepare.

One of our reporters, Doug Wallace, learned while undertaking interviews for this Review that a common theme across all parts of the IM Group was that nobody panicked. By the time UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced his March 23rd lockdown, we had already laid plans about how to keep the business secure, operational and effective, even if the then threat turned into a global pandemic.

Two more 'C's' became even more critical than normal – cash and communication. We knew that we would have to plan our cash flow, assuming no income for three months and substantially reduced income for some time after that. Our finance

teams worked hard, remotely, to make sure we understood the impact the UK lockdown would have on our business, plus the different approaches taken in the Nordic region, China and the USA.

We also instinctively knew that communication amongst the management team was going to be critical. We set up a daily 11am Teams call where all senior management would log-on and make sure we didn't lose touch with one another. This turned out to be oh-so-important because, as the lockdown story twisted and turned, we'd had so much conversation 'under our belts' that we knew exactly how each other felt. As time wore on we had discussed what we needed to do over what seemed like a hundred different eventualities.

Our first instinct was not to close the business but think about our customers, especially those who would need our services and were involved in key industries or were key workers. While so many companies simply drew down the shutters, we felt we could not responsibly do that. From that initial thought, so many of the key decisions we made became more natural.

You never know the real strength of your company until it meets a stern test: 2008 was one. This was most certainly another!

We are not perfect. But our culture and values – integrity, respect, commitment and togetherness – have really been in evidence this year. I remember



ANDREW EDMISTON, MANAGING DIRECTOR, IM GROUP

discussing in 2019 the values within the company. "When tough times come, your values guide your actions instinctively". I had no idea those words were going to be so relevant, so soon.

This edition of IM Review showcases how the company has risen to the unique challenge Covid has brought to us. There are still no guarantees, and we have no-doubt had some 'help from above', but I want to publicly say how much I am grateful to our amazing staff for working together to put the group in such a positive situation.

A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A Edmiston'.





04

**04 WELCOME TO THE NEW NORMAL**

IM Group's response to the Covid-19 crisis.

**10 DOUBLE TOP AWARDS FOR FORESTER**

Yet more awards for Subaru's Forester e-BOXER in 2020.

**14 HASELEY MANOR - THE ENDING OF A CHAPTER**

The final luxury apartments at Haseley Manor to be sold in early 2021.

**16 AND THE WINNER IS...**

Another big year of awards for the Isuzu D-Max.

**18 ANDREW'S WEEKLY VIDEOS**

A vital communication tool during the pandemic.

**20 A MILLION STORIES OF HOPE**

The incredible plan for a unique structure near IM Group's former HQ.

**26 PICK UP AND CARRY ON**

How Isuzu's D-Max met challenges head on.



26

**32 GIANT MACHINES CARVE THE WAY FOR JOBS**

Work paves the way for one of Britain's largest-ever pre-let deals.

**36 SHAREEN JILKA – A DAY IN THE LIFE**

A baptism of fire for IM Group's Head of Risk & Governance.

**38 COVID BOOSTS OUTREACH WORK**

Grace Foundation and IM staff ensure youngsters are not forgotten.

**40 THIRD BITE BY 'BILLION DOLLAR MAN'**

Gymshark take a third unit at Blythe Valley Park.

**44 D-MAX KEEPS ON DELIVERING...**

Isuzu's D-Max helps to keep Britain going through the tough times.

**48 20 YEARS AND COUNTING**

David Challinor on 20 years at the IM Group.



51

**51 A NEW ERA FOR SPITFIRE**

The award-winning housebuilder is set for a major revamp in 2021.

**56 GREAT STAFF, GREAT BUSINESS, GREAT FUTURE**

Specialist Motor Finance find new ways of working.

**60 KEEPING THE CAR BUSINESS ROLLING**

Nothing stops the work of the Sheerness Vehicle Import Centre.

**64 IT'S ALL ABOUT GIVING**

IM staff's magnificent response in face of pandemic's demands.

**66 IM NORDIC GIVES COVID-19 THE COLD SHOULDER**

The Malmö-based team overcame extreme challenges in six countries.

**70 FLAGSHIP CENTRE EMERGES STRONG**

Corners of Brookfield became a beacon of hope for thousands of Americans.

**74 SUBARU IRELAND PIONEERS NEW WAY OF SELLING**

A brand new online purchasing system for Subaru Ireland customers.

**77 WANT ACTION? JOHN'S YOUR MAN**

Subaru UK's new Managing Director is relishing the challenge ahead.

**84 CHINA BUSINESS POWERING BACK**

Business Development looks to expand opportunities in China market and beyond.

**87 FUTURE IN FOCUS**

Andrew Edmiston looks to the future.

77



56



**C**ovid-19 has infected countless millions of people worldwide and claimed in excess of 1.5 million lives. It's wrecked economies and caused huge social disruption. And the IM Group has not been immune to the dreadful disease.

Yet IM, just as everyone in the UK and beyond, has had to learn to live with the terrible virus lurking in the back of every aspect of the business. Covid has also accelerated change, focused attention on how businesses operate across the Group and opened opportunities to new ways of working. The virus has, and is, creating a 'new normal' for the company as well as for everyone.

#### So what is the 'new normal'?

There is no dictionary definition. But several companies, including large organisations, have announced that they will not return to the normal office models again. Some have given up their London bases and Unilever, one of Britain's largest companies, is among firms saying it's unlikely to use all of its office space again.

Home-working has become the 'new normal' for thousands of lawyers, accountants and data-centre workers while on-line shopping now dominates the retail sector. But some of this was happening pre-Covid and not everyone sees business and commerce totally changing.

# WELCOME TO THE 'NEW NORMAL'



"The Covid virus has accentuated the pace of change of many things that were already happening," says Andrew Edmiston, IM Group Managing Director. "The move to electric cars and 'greener' more energy-efficient buildings seems accelerated.

"We are going to see the Government stimulate the economy with things such as major infrastructure projects. The environmental agenda is now at the centre of corporate, as well as social, thinking.

"Working from home is interesting. You can certainly see the appeal for many people. But for many others it's not suitable. Many miss the vitality of working in the office and the spontaneity of ideas that spring up at team meetings. Indeed, many find meeting with a team in an office far better than on-line conferences."

He also points out that ultra-modern offices, like IM Group's new HQ, attract some of the best candidates because of the working environment. "Businesses can't stand still and we, as a group

continually move forward. Maybe the 'new normal' is a combination of home and office working, although my final consideration is just how many people say they feel stifled by only working at home with its restricted human interaction."

Tim Wooldridge, Managing Director of IM Properties, points to the fast-growing trend of a new work/life balance – a kind of 'new living' beyond just 'new normal' working.

He explains: "Many people are no longer wedded to the office. Some of this was going on anyway but Covid has pushed it along. People in big cities, such as London, might only spend two or two-and-a-half days at their office and the rest of the time work at home.

"Many people are now moving further from the city to free up capital. They are buying properties closer to the countryside, or the coast, with maybe a small 'crash-pad' in the city. So we could end up with fewer people working permanently in offices, especially since many homes often have access to almost all the systems they'd have in the office."

Tim says the increasing move to on-line shopping holds an advantage for IM Properties. Although the property division builds traditional retail shops, it also specialises in the huge warehouse developments without which on-line shopping couldn't work.

He concludes: "Whatever your view on the 'new normal', we're perfectly positioned. As a company with strong presence in logistics, warehousing and housing sectors we're

prepared. Social lives and businesses will bounce back – we are seeing it now and I'm very optimistic about the future."

Pat Hanlon, IM's Treasury and Banking Consultant and a director Specialist Motor Finance, says that Covid has "shone a very bright light on our business and how we operate."

"We have learnt some hugely-important lessons by what we did during the national Covid lockdown. A key lesson being that we must keep in closer contact with all our customers, not just the ones who may be in arrears...

"What we found was that staff worked equally hard and efficiently at home. We learnt how important internal communications were and we are planning to survey our staff on a range of topics which could guide us on new ways of working."

Dean Faulkner, who manages IM's Vehicle Import Centre in Sheerness, said: "I don't think we will ever return to what the norm was. No one could have ever imagined how Covid would disrupt our lives.

"We had probably all got too complacent... Did we actually have our life values in the right order? Since Covid arrived the world has changed. We have become more focused on each other's responsibilities, inside and outside of work – we are all much more socially-responsible now.

"But the new norm has got to be better than the old one. I see us appreciating and helping each other more. I believe we are now much closer as a team at Sheerness and as a business." 📧

Covid has also accelerated change, focused attention on how businesses operate across the Group and opened opportunities to new ways of working.





# SAFETY FIRST – AND FAST!



IM GROUP'S GLOBAL HEADQUARTERS RESPONDED TO THE COVID-19 CRISIS  
EVEN BEFORE IT WAS DECLARED A CRISIS!

IM GROUP  
Doug Wallace

**H**uge challenges confronted businesses as rules and recommendations were upgraded on an almost-daily basis, particularly from March 23rd in the UK when Prime Minister Boris Johnson declared a national lockdown. He proclaimed in a TV address to the nation: "Coronavirus is the biggest threat this country has faced for decades – and this country is not alone. All over the world we are seeing the devastating impact of this invisible killer."

Even before March 23rd the IM Group was preparing urgent actions to what would become almost a national emergency. The company is renowned for being fast-moving and its ability to respond quickly and decisively went into overdrive. Sarah Coughlan, IM's Executive and HQ Office Manager, was tasked with Gary Hutton, the Group's Executive Director, to draw up and immediately put in place plans for IM's Covid fight-back.

Sarah explained how initial actions started a month before the lockdown: "We sent out travel advice to staff

The company is renowned for being fast-moving and its ability to respond quickly and decisively went into overdrive.

at the end of February when we realised that Covid was spreading into Europe. At the beginning of March, Sonia Hall our HR Manager, advised staff to use remote meetings where possible. Further information about travel, hygiene and cleaning regimes at The Gate was distributed.

"Visitor protocol, self-isolation and information about what to do if the office closed were fully explained. We had plans to operate with two teams working part-weeks at the office. However, this was never operated as IM quickly went into a full lockdown along with the rest of the country."

Sarah said staff were encouraged to work from home where possible even



prior to the lockdown. "Some needed to be in the office so we arranged for first-aiders to take their temperatures. Visitors were not allowed to come on site unless it was for business-critical reasons." Both the gym and The Bridge restaurant were shut as part of social-distancing precautions.

A lot of communication was done over Teams – Microsoft's video-conferencing tool – while policies were communicated by e-mail. Andrew Edmiston also did weekly company video updates to everyone.

Sarah and her colleagues worked to produce the first Covid-19 and Return-to-Work policies as early as February. More than 14 updated

versions followed as the pandemic shook the world.

Fast actions were called for and executed with almost military precision. Sarah recalled: "There were so many measures that needed to be put in place. We had to install additional signage and hand sanitizers as well as screens on desks. Some were difficult to source, particularly desk screens, as they were in such high demand. But luckily we were ahead of the curve. Suppliers said we were fortunate to have ordered early as it would have been extremely difficult even a few weeks later..."

"Specially-designed bespoke screens had to ☒



be made as we have sit/stand desks at The Gate and the reception desk was another challenge. We wanted all of our screens to fit in with our beautiful surroundings and in keeping with the office while ensuring maximum safety for our staff. We designed a lovely screen solution for the reception area and went with glass for durability. They are probably the best examples I have seen, being aesthetically pleasing while not too intrusive for our staff."

Sarah went on: "Nick Flavell in IT and I looked into several thermal camera solutions as we didn't want staff having to take temperatures of all their colleagues. Thermal cameras were not hard to find but it was about getting the right system for us. The camera we have is state-of-the-art and very easy to use. This was critical when more staff returned to work.

"An enhanced cleaning regime was put in place and a full-time cleaner was on site to clean rooms between meetings as well as all key touch-points every day."

Visitors to The Gate, including outside contractors, had to register in advance. They were issued with risk-assessment and visitor-guidance documents prior to arriving so that they knew what to

"Specially-designed bespoke screens had to be made as we have sit/stand desks at The Gate and the reception desk was another challenge."



SARAH COUGHLAN



GARY HUTTON

expect. Face coverings had to be worn on entry, hand sanitising gel applied and temperature taken with the thermal camera even before people reached the reception desk. The same rules applied to staff and visitors.

Sarah explained that IM's precautions went even further. "We had a green and red system for meeting rooms and booths. When someone used a room or table they flipped the sign to red to indicate it needed cleaning and no one should use it. Once cleaned, the sign was turned to green indicating it was ready to use.

"We did more Teams meetings and reduced the maximum number of attendees in meeting rooms so that people could socially distance. Staff in vulnerable categories were offered red wrist bands to remind others to take extra care to observe social distancing with them."

Walking in corridors in The Gate – even going to the toilets or to meetings – meant face coverings had to be worn.

Shareen Jilka joined the IM Group in the new role of Head of Risk and DPO during lockdown. Sarah said:

"Shareen was key in helping us put together our policies following the constantly-changing government guidelines. A lot of staff were furloughed so it was about making arrangements to see if the work that still needed to be done was being done."

Line managers set up group Teams meetings to ensure everyone felt included and kept in the loop. Senior managers were constantly updated on the actions taken in response to the crisis.

Throughout this stressful period Andrew Edmiston

filmed weekly videos to ensure everyone in the business was kept abreast of developments. This allowed staff remote from The Gate – those in Ireland, Nordic territories, the USA and China – to keep updated on IM's work that was still going on during lockdown.

Gradually, in early summer, some staff were able to return to work but against a backdrop of measures that Sarah – and a 'Return-to-Work Committee' formed in May – had put in place.

Sarah said: "The priority was always to keep people safe at

the office and minimise risks. Measures were put in place to ensure the safety of staff, visitors and contractors on site. We consulted with staff on the return-turn-to-work policy to get their input."

The 'Return-to-Work Committee' met regularly. "We reviewed policies as new rules came out all of the time, especially travel guidance."

Yet even all the stringent measures taken did not prevent an outbreak of Covid among IM staff. Several people, including Andrew Edmiston, were infected either at

"Coronavirus has been stressful for a lot of people – in the business and outside. But I feel our company values have been really important."

the office or elsewhere. Thankfully no-one appears to have been seriously ill. The Gate was closed for a week and re-opened to strictly-limited numbers.

Summing up the company's response to an incredible situation, Sarah said: "Coronavirus has been stressful for lots of people – in the business and outside. But I feel our company values have been really important. Being respectful of others' personal circumstances, pulling together to help each other – especially in dealing with increased



workloads – and commitment to our common cause and to the business have been hugely beneficial during this difficult time.

"I know many colleagues have gone above and beyond to support the business and each other. Our integrity also helped to guide us to do the right thing, even when it might have created obstacles or made it more difficult to achieve our goals.

"I feel so proud of the steps the company has taken to look after our safety." 📷



# DOUBLE-TOP AWARDS FOR FORESTER

It's been a double success for Subaru's Forester e-BOXER as the go-anywhere SUV added yet more awards during 2020 just a year after being launched.

Within months of being unveiled in 2019 the new Forester claimed glory with Euro NCAP's 'Best in Class' award in the small off-road and MPV category – not too surprising as the Forester, along with all other Subaru models, holds Euro NCAP's maximum five-star rating.

Now more prestigious trophies have been added to the car's awards cabinet: Forester e-BOXER won the 'Technology

Award' for its driver-monitoring system in the 2020 What Car? awards and did the double by being acclaimed 4x4 Magazine's 'Best Small SUV' of 2020.

The all-new e-BOXER is the first self-charging hybrid from Subaru. It's safer than even its predecessors and is fitted with an impressive catalogue of driver-assistance and safety features as standard. These include EyeSight driver-assist technology with pre-collision braking alongside adaptive cruise control and lane-departure warning. Subaru's

rear-vehicle detection and reverse-automatic-braking features are also part of the e-BOXER's standard package.

A brand new technology, Subaru's driver-monitoring system, uses facial recognition to detect if the driver's gaze has shifted away from the road and alerts vehicle occupants if this happens. Again, a standard and extremely useful safety feature. According to What Car?,



72% of drivers admit to being distracted when behind the wheel. The top-selling magazine praised Subaru's system calling it "the most advanced of its kind."

What Car? said in testing that Subaru's system proved to be more accurate at identifying when concentration was lost compared to other manufacturer's systems. The magazine's car testers also noted that the software aided things like the e-BOXER's seating position, door mirror angles and even air conditioning to the driver's preference.

Chris Graham from Subaru UK collected the major award at a black-tie dinner. He said: "We're fast-building a reputation for making some of the safest cars on the road today with class-leading safety technologies.

"We're thrilled that our commitment to building incredibly safe,



capable and reliable cars is being recognised across the industry."

4x4 Magazine was equally impressed with the car and awarded the e-BOXER the title of 'Best Small SUV of the Year 2020.' Subaru's new UK Managing Director, John Hurtig, said: "This is testimony to Subaru's on-going commitment to build cars that are incredibly safe, extremely capable and brilliantly reliable."

Beating off strong competition, the e-BOXER impressed the judging panel at 4x4 Magazine with its wide range of safety technologies, on-road drivability and off-road capability. Magazine editor Alan Kidd, said: "Subaru's new global platform is the gift that keeps on giving.



"This is testimony to Subaru's on-going commitment to build cars that are incredibly safe, extremely capable and brilliantly reliable."

It means the all-new Forester has a roomier cabin than ever, as well as being almost unbelievably entertaining to drive – and one of the safest family vehicles in the world. That's a hat-trick to be proud of!"

John Hurtig added: "These accolades are testimony to a great product and our vision to produce cars that truly are better where it matters." ■



IM PROPERTIES  
Milo Torsdden

Kevin Ashfield celebrated 20 years with IM Properties by collecting two prestigious Industrial Agents Society awards.

The Society recognised the significance of the huge employment park being developed by IM at Mercia Park off Junction 11 of the M42 by proclaiming it 'Deal of the Year – Over 250,000 sq ft'. IM Properties was also awarded the 'Developer of the Year' title.

Society members cast their votes in recognition of the continued successes of the business over the past 12 months and its contribution to the industry.

Kevin, who is IM Properties' UK Development Director, said: "It's fantastic to be recognised for the hard work and perseverance as well as the whole team effort that went into the Mercia Park deal.

"Mercia Park will result in something hugely significant for the region, but to be declared the Developer of the Year makes me extremely proud of the team. We always push to achieve what we set out to



JASON JASPER (LEFT) AND KEVIN ASHFIELD

## Top property awards

and deliver schemes that we can be proud of. I would like to say a massive thank you to the judges and the members who voted for us."

IM Properties received further recognition at the Midlands Insider Residential Property Awards in November 2020, winning The Whitmore Collection' Apartment and Development of the Year title for their build-to-rent apartment complex in Newhall Square. The scheme, built in conjunction with Legal & General, sits next to a canal

in the heart of Birmingham's Jeweller Quarter.

The judges said: "This is an exceptional project that undersold itself. Modern and with plenty of public space that used the canal on the site to its best advantage."

Jason Jasper, Project Director for IM Properties said: "This was a very complex scheme and a major undertaking from both a technical and creative perspective. It retains the unique period and design features of the buildings

and blends high-quality contemporary specification of the apartments with great attention to detail.

IM's new HQ, The Gate, was also highly commended twice in the West Midlands Institution of Civil Engineers 2020 awards. Judges of the Large Project Award said: "An impressive landmark building exceptionally well project-managed to ensure it was delivered in such a short space of time." The Gate was highly commended in the Sustainability sector. 🏡

IM PROPERTIES  
Toni-Lee Mields

Fore Business Park, where the IM Group's global headquarters is based, is now fully occupied after a blue-chip company took new offices on the last remaining plot.

Collins Aerospace, which already has one office on the business park, pre-let a 23,700 sq ft unit on the development in August 2020. It has a top A-rate Energy Performance Certificate and will house offices alongside research and development laboratories.

The office development was completed by IM Properties' in-house project delivery team during one of the highly-pressurised Covid pandemic months.

Majella Lynch, Project Director for IM Properties, said: "Constructing the building throughout the pandemic presented new challenges for our teams. We are proud to have delivered a high-quality building for Collins Aerospace despite this uncertainty."

Collins Aerospace is a division within the American-based multi-international Raytheon Technologies group, one of the largest aerospace and defence companies in the world.



MAJELLA LYNCH (LEFT)  
WITH CLAIRE WRIGHT

## Fore Park now full

Collins itself was formed by the merger of UTC Aerospace Systems with Rockwell Collins.

Claire Wright, Business Services Manager for Collins Aerospace said: "We are delighted with our new building at Fore Business Park, which grows our operation in Solihull. The link with our existing building at Fore Park gives us a versatile base to cater to the needs of our future operations."

Alongside the Collins Aerospace building, IM has

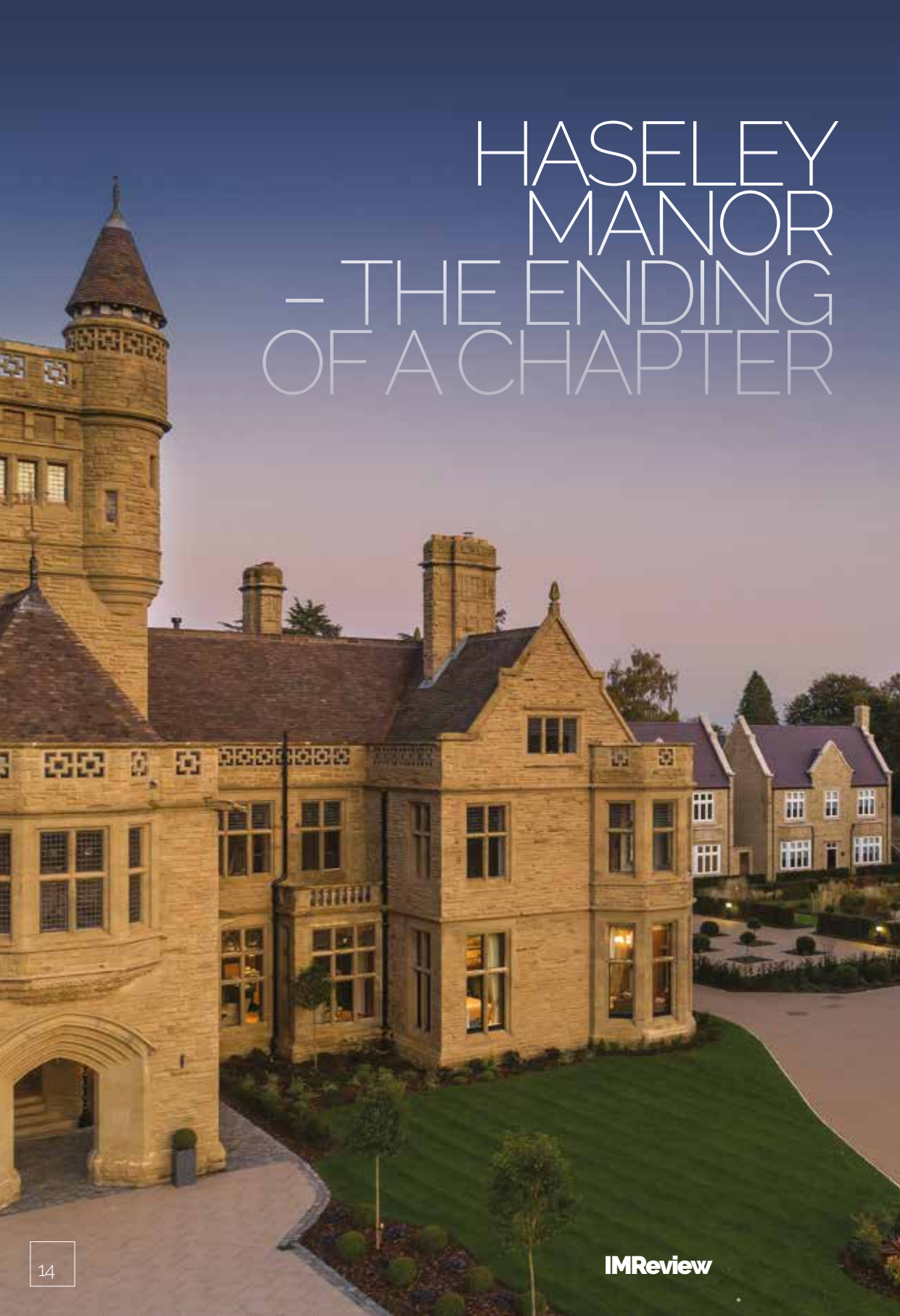
"We are delighted with our new building at Fore Business Park, which grows our operation in Solihull."

built a 222-space multi-storey car park providing an overspill for existing occupiers at Fore Business Park, which is situated off Junction 4 of the M42. The location is within minutes of Birmingham Airport and has regular bus services to Dorridge and Solihull train stations.

Aerospace companies seem to like offices built by IM Properties. GKN Aerospace took a 11,403 sq ft unit for its new UK head office at the nearby Blythe Valley Park development in 2019. 🏡



# HASELEY MANOR – THE ENDING OF A CHAPTER



SPITFIRE BESPOKE HOMES  
Keith Read

**E**arly 2021 will see the ending of a significant chapter in the story of IM Properties when the final luxury apartment in the elegant, gothic-style, Haseley Manor – home to IM's property company for almost 20 years – is sold. However, the site, just outside Warwick, will retain three links with IM Group.

But more on that later...

When Lord Edmiston acquired Haseley Manor in 1994 as the base for his IM Properties business, staff were initially accommodated in the Manor itself together with other organisations occupying the serviced office suites. Among previous owners of the Manor house and estate had been the British Motor Corporation (later to become British Leyland) who used it as a training college. BL constructed a single-story bungalow-type office building in the grounds.

On 1st June 1998, IM Properties staff moved into the bungalow. It was also the day that a fresh-faced young man named Tim Wooldridge, today Managing Director of the company, started work

for IM Properties. "I was to work in that building for 14 years until we moved to Coleshill in 2012," says Tim. "So my formative years in the company were spent in that building at Haseley. I was promoted to Estates Manager while I was there. Then I was promoted to Investment Director in that building and, eventually, I became Managing Director of IM Properties.

"There were some really good times at Haseley, although the office wasn't very nice. It was a weird sort of bungalow and not a great building in which to be. But what made up for that was the setting... It was just glorious. No matter how stressful work could be, that setting was incredibly calming.



"I've always found the Manor building the most gorgeous of properties with its Gothic architecture, stained-glass windows and gargoyles."



Arriving in the morning you'd see deer, foxes and pheasants on the driveway.

"It's such a beautiful place that it was a good part of the reason why I decided to buy one of the 12 new-build houses on the site. I've always found the Manor building the most gorgeous of properties with its Gothic architecture, stained-glass windows and gargoyles – and my house is directly next to the Manor and looks on to it! On top of that you are surrounded by greenery and fields."

All nine of the new-build homes have been bought and six of the 12 apartments have been purchased with two more very close to being

sold. Tim expects that the remaining four apartments will be completed and sold by March 2021. "The whole of the site will have been sold in the coming year," he adds.

So what about the links with Haseley that IM will retain?

"Ah," says Tim, "...that's quite interesting. Not only have I bought one of the homes at Haseley, Gary Spicer from Grace Academy has bought one and Matt Whitbrook from Spitfire Bespoke Homes has also bought an apartment. So you could say that the only part that IM will retain is the three of us who live there!" he jokes. 🏡





# AND THE WINNER IS...

Isuzu's D-max won some of the top automotive industry awards during 2020 – but it's given company officials a bit of a headache.

Calling the D-Max an award-winner is a huge understatement. Even multi-award winner hardly recognises the go-anywhere truck's credentials and now Isuzu officials are struggling to keep track of the total number of 'gongs' – and finding a trophy cabinet large enough to display the honours!

Six trophies were added to the tally in 2020. So it seems as if the D-Max has won a grand total of 31. Or is it 32 prestigious awards since it was launched in 2012?

In 2020 Trade Van Driver recognised the D-Max with its Best Workhorse Pick-Up title – it's the eighth year in a row that the Isuzu captured the award.

A panel of eight journalists on the magazine, which is dedicated to owner-drivers and small fleet operators,



backed by a cross-section of readers, were mightily impressed with the pick-up in this highly-competitive sector.

In presenting the award, Trade Van Driver said: "There may be a host of 4x4 rivals stacked up against it offering all kinds of luxuries, but for traders who are strapped for cash – yet need a rock-solid, reliable off-roader – the D-Max fits the bill ideally.

"It's strong, practical and built-to-last, yet it won't break the bank buying it. A worthy winner for the eighth year running in the view of the judges."

Hardly had 2020 got under way before the awards started to roll in. First to arrive was the prestigious What Van? magazine 'Pick-up of the Year' award. And again it wasn't the first time that the D-Max had won this title – 2020 was the third-consecutive year that saw Isuzu lift the trophy.

What Van? editor and judge, James Dallas, said: "With competitive prices, an injection

of lifestyle sophistication to complement proven off-road and workhorse ability, a full range of body styles and a frugal engine that requires no AdBlue, the Isuzu D-Max has deservedly won a hat-trick of Pick-up-of-the-Year prizes."

Isuzu UK Managing Director, William Brown, added: "This third consecutive award for the Isuzu D-Max is a testimony to the great product which our customers already love and trust. Isuzu is proud to make reliable and quality vehicles for the professionals who need them, and this award highlights that the Isuzu truly is a step above the rest."

That accolade was hot on the heels of being crowned 'Pick-up-of-the-Year' in the Commercial Fleet Awards for the second year where the D-Max emerged victorious, beating strong competition from all its rivals.

At the 4x4 magazine awards night the D-Max drove away with two top trophies – the special Isuzu D-Max XTR won

the 'Best Off-Road 2020' title while the Huntsman accessory pack claimed the 'Best Model in 2020' for highly specialized kit – the second year in a row that the Huntsman took this prize.

Isuzu UK Head of Marketing, George Wallis, said: "These two awards from 4x4 magazine add to our growing set of trophies and are further testimony to the great product, which our customers love and trust."

Just as 2019 closed the D-Max squeezed in the 'Van/Truck-of-the-Year' for a second consecutive year at the 'On The Tools' Awards. At a gala dinner, CEO of On The Tools, Lee Wilcox, said: "Huge congratulations to all of the team at Isuzu for being recognised within their field." 🏆



Even before the World Health Organisation declared Covid-19 a pandemic, IM Group Managing Director, Andrew Edmiston, knew that communication with staff would be crucial as the company took on, and stood up to, the challenges that would inevitably hit business communities around the world.

For a past master of communication – Andrew’s Speakeasies, when staff assemble to hear about developments and important moves within the business, are legend – it was an easy conclusion. But how to do it when some staff would be furloughed and others would be working from home? And what about IM teams based in Ireland, the Nordic territories, America and China?

“Speakeasies were definitely not going to be possible,” says Andrew. “The inspiration for a weekly video for staff was that I knew we were all going to be locked down and that a number of people would be furloughed. I didn’t want those people to become disconnected from the business at a

time when furlough rules meant they couldn’t work, even from home. “I didn’t want us to lose our shape. I wanted to keep a spread of information running through the business. Being out of the office inevitably means that you miss out on a lot that’s going on. I also wanted people to see

“I didn’t want us to lose our shape. I wanted to keep a spread of information running through the business.”

the faces of their leaders and be kept up to date.” So, using his mobile phone, Andrew filmed the first of what was to become a weekly video, usually about 10 minutes long, and often involving other members of the Group’s senior management. Filming took place in different

locations in The Gate, in a special ‘Cosworth’ Subaru, outdoors under an umbrella in the pouring rain and at IM’s Ryder Street premises where the all-new Isuzu D-Max was revealed to staff!

Nothing was scripted. “Often the inspiration for that particular video would come on the day I shot it!” says Andrew. He even filmed staff about life in furlough. When Ted Thomas, who works in the after-sales and technical areas, returned to work Andrew talked to him about his experience and how he felt.

But perhaps the most significant video was one filmed beside a tree at Andrew’s home. “Most of our garden is green,” explained Andrew to viewers. “But this particular tree is red. When the leaves come out they are the most amazing shade of red and I believe there’s a message in this tree. I know what’s going to happen – I know the leaves will be red. It’s early in the year and it doesn’t look much at the moment. But I know what it’s going to do.

“Businesses go through those cycles of ups and downs and we know what our business is designed to do. So it’s important if you are furloughed to keep in contact;

keep in touch so that we know what we need to do when we come back [to work]. We may not know exactly what’s going to happen in the future but we know that, like this tree, what’s inside is going to come out and it’s going to be beautiful!

“We know the metal that our company is made of; we know how our company works and we know the attitude that we’ve used to make us successful so far. I can’t tell you exactly how that’s going to look in the future. But I do know that if we focus on keeping everything in place – and on keeping the relationship that we have with each other strong through this pandemic – when it comes time to crank the handle again we’re going to do it even better than anybody else!”

Feedback has been positive. For Pieter Stockman, IT Manager for IM Nordic, they have become a social event when he and his wife sit down every Friday evening with a glass of wine to watch the latest news from Andrew.

“When it comes time to crank the handle again we’re going to do it even better than anybody else.”



Meanwhile, at IM’s Sheerness vehicle-import and preparation centre, Logistics Operations Manager Dean Faulkner says the videos have been especially important during the pandemic: “Just watching Andrew’s weekly updates has changed many of our views. Every week there’s been something new happening or someone going that extra mile... We feel privileged to work for such a great business.”

Beijing is 8,000 miles away from The Gate and staff there look forward to each week’s video. Office co-ordinator, Sunny Lu, told me: “We think it is marvelous to receive the latest news and stories from the top management team in the most direct way. We can better understand the current business climate, advantages we have and the risks that the company faces. We’ve taken information shared by Andrew and his guests as guidance to our future plans.”

Sunny says she and her colleagues would be thrilled if Andrew’s weekly video became a regular feature of IM communications in the future. 📺

# ANDREW'S WEEKLY VIDEOS

ANDREW EDMISTON (LEFT)  
WITH MANAGING DIRECTOR  
OF INTERNATIONAL MOTORS  
TORBJÖRN LILLRUD





# A MILLION STORIES OF HOPE



169FT TALL AND MADE FROM A MILLION BRICKS AT COLESHILL MANOR ESTATE, WHICH UNTIL 2019 WAS THE LOCATION OF IM GROUP'S HEADQUARTERS.





IM GROUP  
Keith Read

What have a former Leicester City Football Club chaplain, a toothbrush, a word from God, Google Maps, a dental practice, a phone App message and one of Andrew Edmiston's long-held dreams got in common?

The answer is a striking and unique structure that will rise 169ft above the ground at Coleshill Manor estate which, until 2019, was the location of IM Group's headquarters. Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer – twice the height of the Angel of the North – is designed as a monument to answered prayers and its location means it will be visible to millions of motorists, train passengers, air travellers and arrivals at its visitor centre.

For Andrew Edmiston it will be the manifestation of a vision he first considered in 2003. However, the concept of Eternal Wall was conceived by Richard Gamble, former chaplain at Leicester City FC who, in April 2004, carried a cross round Leicestershire. "I walked 77 miles to get people to think about Jesus at Easter time rather than think bunnies and Easter eggs," explains Richard.



RICHARD GAMBLE

"I didn't talk to people – just carried the cross and prayed to God to ask what he wanted me to do next. As I walked a thought flashed through my mind about building a wall in which every brick represented an answered prayer.

The concept of Eternal Wall was conceived by Richard Gamble, former chaplain at Leicester City FC.

"I'm not a very practical person and didn't know where to start. All I could do was pray, on and off, for the next 10 years, always thinking about it – but not knowing how to get going. Then, six years ago, I sold my software business and worked at Leicester City Football Club as Chaplain when it came to me that now was the time to get started on my wall project. So I ran a global design competition with the Royal Institute of British Architects and got down to five potential designs out of 133 entries

from 28 countries. But to get to the final design I needed land. What do you do?"

Richard's answer was, as usual, to pray. And while he was at a conference in California an American lady, who had no knowledge of his wall project, approached him and said that she had a message from God for him. The message was that God had some heavenly land that he'd prepared for Eternal Wall.

He shared the news with his team back in the UK who were praying for the project.

Sue Bigby, who headed the prayer team, said she was going to pray for more detail and find out where the heavenly land was located. "One day, when she was brushing her teeth and thinking about the promise of land she felt the word 'Lansdown' come into her mind," says Richard. "When she entered the word on Google Maps a dental practice popped up! Above the dental practice was the M6 and, above that, was this mass of land – Coleshill Manor, owned by IM."

Prior to this, Richard had met Gary Spicer, who was deeply involved with Andrew's charitable Trust – Imagine the Day – and is Executive Director of the Grace Academies established by IM Group founder and Chairman, Lord Edmiston. Just a couple of weeks before Sue revealed she'd discovered the Coleshill Manor land, Richard got an e-mail saying that Andrew Edmiston would like to meet him.

During that meeting, Richard discovered that six months before his Easter Walk, Andrew had set up a Christian charity and that one of its aims was to build a Christian landmark. However, he didn't tell Andrew that Sue had circled the Coleshill Manor land when she

Googled 'Lansdown' because he didn't want to manipulate the situation. Subsequently he had another meeting with Andrew who, on this occasion, was accompanied by his father who told Richard that he would donate a piece of land to the project. "At this point I told Andrew about Sue and her 'finding' the Coleshill Manor land, although I didn't identify the specific piece of land on the site."

Further meetings took place with Tim Wooldridge, Managing Director of IM Properties, who outlined a suitable piece of land on the company's Blythe Valley development near Solihull. After several months of anticipation, Richard learned that the site Tim proposed would not be viable. However, he suggested another piece of land on the Blythe site. "Horribly, a few months later, I got a call saying that the second piece of land would not work either... At this point I'm tearing my hair out because it had been on the go nearly a year. I'd had no experience of this industry. But I have since learned that things don't always move quickly!

"Anyway, Lewis Payne from IM Properties got someone looking for a suitable piece of land and that search zeroed on Coleshill Manor. ☑

## Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer

**Standing 169ft tall and made from a million bricks, Eternal Wall of Answered Prayer will be seen up to six miles away and by 500,000 journeys every week.** It is expected to attract 300,000 visitors every year contributing £9.3 million to the local economy.

Sixty new jobs will be created during the two-year construction programme and, on completion, 20 full-time positions in the visitor centre, cafe and 24-hour on-site chaplaincy support service. West Midlands Mayor, Andy Street, describes Eternal Wall as ".....an incredibly ambitious and stunning project, a real statement and a landmark for the Midlands. It is an incredibly progressive and ambitious piece of architecture."

Eternal Wall takes the form of a Möbius strip. The 'eternal surface' is formed by taking a ribbon, giving it a half-twist, and then joining the ends to form a loop. The winner of the Eternal Wall design competition was Paul Bulkeley, founder of Snug Architects of Southampton.

The project will be entirely donor and crowd-funded with each brick representing a prayer answered. A phone App will enable visitors to unlock each brick's associated story.

To donate or share an answered prayer, go to [www.eternalwall.org.uk](http://www.eternalwall.org.uk)





A piece of land there was initially identified. But it was ruled out because of a pipeline. A couple of months later IM came back and said they'd found the right piece which, miraculously, was the exact same piece of land that Sue had circled!

"Having said that, there's an even more amazing part to this story," says Richard. "We were on the site with an investor and the BBC, which is making a documentary about the project. We were standing by where I thought the entrance might be and one of my team said she wondered how the what3words App would identify the three-metre square in which I was standing.

IM Properties have been really supportive through the planning process while Andrew's charity has shown absolutely mind-blowing generosity.

"Normally, the App generates three utterly random words – penguin-electricity-shed for example. But when she ran the App it came up with occupy-lands-congratulations. Incredible! And getting planning permission was pretty incredible. Initially the North Warwickshire Council response was, shall we say, hostile... But when it eventually came to the vote there were 13 for and one abstention! Lewis Paine was hugely supporting throughout the process and told me that to get planning permission on Green Belt is a pretty high bar.

"When Sue had circled the land she said either this is it, or the people who own it are highly significant to the project," says Richard. "And what happened is both. Not only the gift of the land, which was incredibly generous, but IM Properties have been really supportive through the planning process while Andrew's charity has shown absolutely mind-blowing generosity. On top of that we benefited from IM Group expertise that Andrew has facilitated to help us build something that's never been built before..."

Andrew says that Richard's pitch at their first meeting was quite appealing. "He told me it was a crazy idea and for a



long time he kept resisting it. But God wouldn't let him put it down and he eventually gave in and decided to start. Richard told me that if I wanted to get involved, that would be great. If I didn't want anything to do with it, then no worries at all because he knew that God would line up the right people to be involved...

"That was quite a good pitch because it left me thinking that he's quite relaxed about whatever answer I give and, of course, he didn't know that several years earlier I'd had a similar idea. Naturally I was very interested and spoke to my father about the idea of us giving some land. I knew that we'd have some that we couldn't really

use commercially but a project like this might get planning permission.

"Dad was interested too. I remember a board meeting with our property team. The guys rightly raised questions as to whether planning would ever be granted and whether funds would be raised. But my father insisted. He said: 'God is either behind the project – and it will happen – or God's not in it and they won't be able to use it and we'll just get the land back.' He recalled times where he'd seen people achieve remarkable things because of their belief in God.

"Lots of the things that our guys rightly identified as potential problems have been overcome. For example, everyone knew planning permission would be difficult but it has recently been granted. So it's already been quite a remarkable story. But when you listen to Richard talk about the miracle happenings along the project's journey, it all seems to fit. Why? Because if you are going to have a monument that talks about God's ability to answer prayer, the monument itself – which we hope will be completed in time for the 2022 Commonwealth Games in Birmingham – should be an answered prayer too!" 🙏

ISUZU UK  
Harlan Casnough

## Wales take to the field in new Isuzu kit

Isuzu's hugely-successful shirt sponsorship of the Welsh Rugby Union is the deal that keeps on giving – even Covid-19 couldn't beat it!

Despite the restarted Guinness Six Nations Championship played in empty almost-silent stadia, millions of rugby fans across the world saw Isuzu emblazoned across the shirts of both the Welsh men's team and Wales Women.

The four-year sponsorship shirt deal was one of the biggest in the sport's history when it was unveiled in 2017 and is still recognised as a one of the top commercial deals in any UK sport.

Both home and away version of the Welsh kits are embossed with the Isuzu name. Even the unveiling ceremony had to take place virtually due to Covid restrictions.

Jonathan Davies and Ross Moriarty were joined 'virtually' by Wales Women captain Siwan Lillicrap and Gwen Crabb to show off the new

kit, made by WRU's new technical partner, Macron. It will give £6-million worth of kit free to community rugby clubs in Wales during the next six years.

The teams had to train in 'bubbles' in the run up to the restart of the championships due to Covid rules. But fans in Wales, where the game is closer to a religion than a sport, along with millions of fellow rugby fans around the world were glued to television sets for the Six Nations.

In the last match before Covid halted the championship in March, Scotland hammered France 28-17, which blew the race for the Championship title apart. Seven months later, in a Super Saturday decider, England lifted the crown but only after France beat Ireland 35-27 while England beat Italy 34-5.

Wales play the game with the grit, determination and fire and that marks out every individual player who pulls on the famous Welsh jersey.



ALUN WYN JONES BECAME THE GAME'S MOST CAPPED INTERNATIONAL WHEN HE MADE HIS 149TH TEST APPEARANCE IN THE SIX NATIONS MATCH, LEADING WALES AGAINST SCOTLAND

And the latest versions have interesting details. The home red shirt has unique features with the red dragon embossed across the lower back and embossed patterns on the sleeve transforms the shape of the WRU three-feather logo into 'dragon scales.' The Welsh word ANRHYDEDD (honour) is embossed on the collar. The away version has another Welsh word, ANGERDD (passion) on the collar.

William Brown, Managing Director of Isuzu UK, said: "Wales is dominated by agriculture and the Welsh character is strong and straightforward,

characteristics shared with Isuzu."

George Wallis, Isuzu UK's Head of Marketing, added: "The sponsorship really was, and continues to be, the perfect marriage. We have many farmers in Wales who rely on the D-Max as part of the essential tools to keep their businesses going.

"During the national lockdowns, farmers kept working to keep Britain fed and our Isuzu dealers remained open as essential back-up. They were recognised as essential workers. In many ways the D-Max was classed as an essential vehicle." 🇬🇧



# PICKUP AND CARRY ON



HAVING MET THE CHALLENGES OF COVID-19  
HEAD-ON, ISUZU UK IS LOOKING FORWARD  
WITH A NEW D-MAX LAUNCHING IN EARLY 2021.





ISUZU UK  
Tony Garuth

**A**s saying dating back to the mid-1500s declares: It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good. And that's just how William Brown, Managing Director of Isuzu UK, sees the effect of Covid-19 on his business. "There have been huge challenges to the business this year, he says. "But we've tried to look at any upside – not to take advantage of the situation but to try to do the best for our dealers and customers and for the country.

"When the pandemic struck the government ordered showrooms to be closed and it felt like most manufacturers and dealerships simply closed, preferring to wait until they could open again. We had to make a similar decision. Did we tell our dealers that we were closed or did we remain open? Because our product is a commercial vehicle the position was slightly different to car companies. Many of our customers are key-workers and essential services and would be continuing to work to support the country to get through the pandemic.

"Farmers were still producing food, all the utility companies were functioning because electricity, water and gas were essential for everyone and the emergency services – many of whom use the Isuzu D-Max – could not stop working. So we did a pivot and decided to remain open to support our dealers who were supporting their customers. We felt we should turn a negative into a positive and face head-on any challenges in doing so."

George Wallis, Head of Marketing for Isuzu, says that throughout the lock-down Isuzu UK focused on keeping Britain working safely. "We are, after all, a working brand and we were very keen to do just that. As soon as the showrooms reopened in June we launched a new retail campaign – Pick-up and Carry On – to continue the spirit."

WILLIAM BROWN

"We felt we should turn a negative into a positive and face head-on any challenges in doing so."



Having shut down all its paid-for media promotions, Isuzu switched to social media with videos to keep news of its activities – and D-Max – in the public domain. It even put D-Max 'Kids Zone' colouring and drawing pages on the Internet together with competitions to keep young children occupied!

With showrooms closed, Isuzu asked its 97 dealers to keep their workshops open and devised Covid-safe strategies for undertaking test-drives, selling D-Max pick-ups and workshop maintenance. All but a handful decided to back the move, which was a success. Not only were Isuzu dealers caring for D-Max pick-ups, many found themselves working on rival manufacturers' commercial vehicles when their owners found their local dealer workshop closed!

Even though showrooms were closed, Isuzu was still able to sell vehicles by employing the 'click-and-collect' conditions laid down by the government. Everything had to be done in a Covid-safe way. As a result, while almost every rival manufacturer's sales were virtually nil in April and May, Isuzu's market share rocketed. "Our market share was so

amazing that the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders called us when they were compiling their monthly statistics to check that our figures were correct!" revealed William. "In April the D-Max was the sixth best-selling vehicle in the UK!"

Most of April and May sales were to fleet customers although a few retail sales were recorded. Among the fleet customers who expressed their appreciation of Isuzu's decision to stay open was the RAC. "They've started to buy our D-Max for use as recovery vehicles and are, effectively, the fifth emergency service," explains William. "They e-mailed to thank us for remaining open during the lock-down when most of their other commercial-vehicle partners were closed. It meant that they could keep essential-users and key workers' on the road when their vehicles broke down."

Before the pandemic struck Isuzu was planning to have launched its new D-Max during September 2020. As a result of lock-down, here and at manufacturing plants, everything had to be paused. The dealer-launch of the virtually all-new D-Max is

The dealer-launch of the virtually all-new D-Max is now scheduled for February 2021 with customers able to buy new models soon after.

now scheduled for February 2021 with customers able to buy new models soon after.

The five-month delay would, in 'normal' times, have brought serious problems for Isuzu and its UK dealers in meeting new-vehicle demand. However, with the slowed volume of sales during lock-down and the previously-ordered substantial stock, William is confident that there will be a smooth run-out of the existing model and introduction of the replacement vehicle. "Fortunately, stocks of D-Max will last until the new model arrives. So we're in a pretty good position," says William. Another example of It's An Ill Wind... 🌪️



NEW D-MAX MODEL,  
LAUNCHING FEBRUARY 2021





ISUZU UK  
Bill Trudloor Jnr

**M people are nothing if not innovative.** And when the Covid pandemic ruled out a traditional preview of the all-new D-Max for Isuzu dealers the team came up trumps with a successful solution. A traditional Peep Show – those slatted Victorian cylinders that brought something to life for viewers – overcame lockdown to bring the new pick-up to life! Held in the IM Group's stand-alone, purpose-built training academy at

The Gate over four days during October, the show was open to any of the 97 Isuzu dealers wishing to attend. For those that couldn't make it to the academy, there was the option of 'watching virtually' with cameras scanning whatever they wanted to see of the exciting new pick-up truck.

"The show was organised by Lucy Holloway, our Head of Communications and Debbie Warne, our Group Events Manager," said George Wallis, Isuzu's Head of Marketing. "Thirty-five dealers attended and they were given one-hour Covid-safe slots for their peep at the new model. Dealers were restricted to maximum groups of four, although most were just two with Lucy and Liam Campbell, our Isuzu Product and PR Manager, giving presentations on the new D-Max.

## ALL-NEW D-MAX WOWS ISUZU DEALERS

"In virtually every area of the new model there is an improvement. Refinement, comfort, technology and design features have all been bettered."

"The reaction from dealers was massively positive and prompted a significant increase in the pre-order bank," added George.

The event was hosted by William Brown, Isuzu UK Managing Director, Alan Able, the Head of Sales, Melissa Butcher, Sales Manager and Alex Kearney and Tom Priest who are new-vehicle Sales Executives. A full-scale dealer launch is planned for 2021. Details are being kept under wraps to preserve the surprise element – something that has become a hallmark of Isuzu dealer launches over the years.

So what did dealers see?

Almost everything on the 2021 D-Max – which has been under development for almost six years – is new. All that is carried over is the well-respected and efficient drive-line introduced on the current D-Max a couple of years ago. And even that has been further-upgraded to meet the latest emission standards.

"All the key capabilities of the current D-Max, which are so important to our customers, remain," explained William. "However, in virtually every area of the new model there is an improvement.

Refinement, comfort, technology and design features have all been bettered. When you consider that the current model has won many awards and almost 30,000 customers love it, having a new model that is better in almost every area gives us so much confidence that we can grow our sales."

William's target is 10,000 annual sales by 2025. However, another 'favourable wind' means that he is hoping to achieve this even sooner. "Mitsubishi, which last year sold 10,000 of its L200 pick-ups in the UK, has announced

that it is pulling out of the UK and European markets. This means that if the pick-up market here remains at the same level, there are 10,000 Mitsubishi customers out there and up for grabs..."

It also means that there will be many Mitsubishi dealers without a product to sell – a fact that Isuzu has not been slow in recognising. "We've identified areas where we are weak or have open points and we've contacted Mitsubishi dealers in those areas to see if there is any interest in joining us. Not only that, we've been approached by many

Mitsubishi dealers who see D-Max as an excellent pick-up. However, we've had to turn a lot of them down because we've already got dealers in those locations."

Mitsubishi's withdrawal from the market will almost certainly prove to be something that will, in the long term, help Isuzu. "We anticipate a number of former Mitsubishi dealers joining the Isuzu network in the next four months," says William. 📍



LUCY HOLLOWAY



# GIANT MACHINES CARVE THE WAY FOR JOBS

One of the largest earth movers in the world was brought in as work started on a major IM Properties project that will support almost 3,500 jobs and generate millions of pounds for local economies in the heart of Britain.

Mercia Park is an ambitious 238-acre employment park just off Junction 11 of the M42 motorway in Leicestershire. It is planned as a new global parts business for Jaguar Land Rover and a key logistics complex for freight forwarders DSV. Together they would form what will be one of the largest

warehouse complexes in Europe and give a massive boost to the economy of an area that is desperate for investment and jobs.

If all goes to plan IM will be delivering Britain's largest ever industrial pre-let. And before it was even marketed, companies were knocking on IM's door, eager to locate units at Mercia Park which is perfectly located at the heart of the country's interlinked motorway network.

Groundworks started in May 2020 and Winvic Construction, one of the UK's leading civil

construction groups, brought in a giant crawler-excavator to speed progress on part of the initial £21-million infrastructure work where more than 1-million cubic metres of earth is being excavated. However, earth that the giant 90-tonne Volvo EC950 machine will help to move is not being dumped. Instead, most will be used on the site to create screening bunds. The bucket capacity of the Volvo, the largest machine of its kind ever used in the UK, is a staggering 39,900kg.

In the spring of 2020 Winvic began installing 7,500-metres of underground drainage, making highway improvements to the site as well as undertaking extensive landscaping. A new 30-acre woodland is being created. Most of the infrastructure work is schedule to be completed by December 2021.

Around 170 construction workers will be employed building Mercia Park. The size of the task is so large that construction could take up to three years. When completed Mercia Park will generate more than £7-million in business rates for the region and add an

estimated £139-million of gross value to the area. IM Properties has contributed a £350,000 fund to strengthen local community projects and to further-improve the natural environment.

Jaguar Land Rover, Britain's biggest car maker, immediately saw the advantage of the employment park, which sits alongside Junction 11 of the M42 at Appleby Magna between Tamworth and Ashby-de-la-Zouch. It is the ideal location for easy access to the nation's interlinked motorway network.

JLR's global parts business supplies more than 80 countries worldwide and a move to Mercia Park would make the supply chain ultra-efficient. It would give the car company 269,418 square metres of vital space for parts storage with five warehouses forming a giant complex. Two of the warehouse units will cover 92,903 square metres and the smallest will be 18,580 square metres. When fully operational the complex will allow JLR to supply 170,000 individual spare parts to its global customers. Many of the parts come from the company's UK-based suppliers. ☐





Around 170 construction workers will be employed building Mercia Park. The size of the task is so large that construction could take up to three years.



ARTIST IMPRESSION OF THE PROPOSED BUILDINGS



JLR could begin transferring operations to the new facility in 2022 with full completion by early 2023. More than 1,200 workers could be needed from day one of operations with more than 3,000 jobs potentially created within a few years.

Key export markets for JLR parts include North and South America, Europe, Africa and much of Asia as well as the UK home market. The new complex could also act as a master site for a big distribution centre in Shanghai.

The site would allow Jaguar Land Rover to integrate its separate Jaguar and Land Rover operations

When completed Mercia Park will generate more than £7-million in business rates for the region and add an estimated £139-million of gross value to the area.

into one single common logistics platform, leading to a more efficient and sustainable supply chain.

Nearly two years of background work by IM Properties has gone into the warehouse project. The company has owned the site since 2016 as part of its strategic-land investment along the M42 corridor. Kevin Ashfield, UK Development Director at IM Properties, said: "Jaguar Land Rover stated at the planning committee stage that this is the only site that can do the job, due to the bespoke set of requirements.

"We are now focussed on delivering this facility and creating a high-quality,

sustainable scheme and great place to work with long-lasting social and economic benefits for the local area. We will draw on our considerable experience of designing, building and operating successful business parks across the Midlands and will continue our dialogue with adjoining communities. We've already launched our Community Fund."

Sitting alongside the proposed JLR facilities will be a logistics complex for freight forwarders DSV, which also instantly recognised the merits of the employment park location. IM Properties has exchanged contracts for DSV to acquire 27-acres

of the park so that it can deliver a new 41,806-square-metre stainable, flagship campus to which it can relocate and consolidate its operations in the Midlands. DSV says its new hub will support around 400 jobs.

Kevin Ashfield added: "We have an excellent land supply and a long-established reputation for delivering best-in-class schemes. With our strong financial backing and agility we, as a private property company, are able to move on sites as soon as the opportunities arise. We're naturally extremely pleased to be bringing this opportunity forward in the Midlands. It's an opportunity

"It's an opportunity to retain jobs in the region and will contribute to its long-term economic growth."

to retain jobs in the region and will contribute to its long-term economic growth."

A transport strategy is also being introduced to minimise impact on local roads and improve accessibility to Mercia Park. Extensive landscaping includes the planting of more than 30,000 trees while recreational paths, cycle-ways and wetland features will also be part of the huge site.

Mercia Park could reduce freight movements by 25 percent with linked reductions in HGV-miles, energy, fuel and carbon emissions from its new occupants. The new central warehouse complex will also

reduce order-to-receipt times for customers – a vital requirement in the vastly competitive modern economy.

Junction 11 is one of several large-scale strategic sites IMP has acquired for potential occupiers. Together, the sites are capable of delivering more than 1,393,545 square metres of logistics space, primarily in the Midlands. 📍



To say that Shareen Jilka's arrival at IM earlier this year was a baptism of fire is a massive understatement.

Having accepted the position of Group Head of Risk & Governance and Data Protection Officer in mid-January she had to work her full notice before reporting for duty at The Gate on 21st April – bang in the middle of the company's extensive Covid protection activities.

"Since I arrived at The Gate, the No 1 priority has been Covid," says Shareen. "However, as IM Group's Data Protection Officer I also had to identify what the business had in place and then implement processes for GDPR compliance." The General Data Protection Regulations, introduced by the EU in May 2018, are strict and apply across commerce and industry. The regulations – like those covering the actions companies must take to counter the Covid-19 pandemic – are taken very seriously and at the highest level within IM. There are 99 articles within GDPR that Shareen has to implement within the business.

"As Head of Risk, the job entails ensuring that internal governance and risk management standards are maintained across the Group," explains Shareen. "I've been heavily involved helping Gary Hutton, our Executive Director, develop and keep up to date IM's Covid-safe return-to-work policies. The UK has been very heavily regulated when

it comes to Covid. But it's not been easy with guidance constantly changing. So I have to keep up to date with those changes and constantly assess risk in order to issue the correct guidance to staff and, of course, visitors."

Among Shareen's other duties is attendance at Board meetings, regularly updating Directors on what risks the business

could be exposed to, and recommending appropriate actions. "There has also been a recent restructuring within the company, so I have additionally taken on responsibilities from some of the staff who have left," she adds.

And if that's not a baptism of fire, right in the middle of Shareen's first few weeks at IM, she had to self-isolate

for two weeks because her doctor – whom she'd visited – tested positive for Covid-19! Fortunately, Shareen's test came back negative. "But it was an extremely stressful time," she admits.

Having grown up in South Africa, where she went to University, Shareen trained as a chartered accountant with PricewaterhouseCoopers in Johannesburg. After qualifying she took up an option of a year-long PwC secondment to California to look after implementation of the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002 in US. The legislation was designed to improve governance and control, among other things, after some headline-catching accounting scandals including Enron and WorldCom. Shareen was fully trained in Sarbanes-Oxley while in the US. "That's how I developed my love of risk and governance, making it my specialisation," she says.

After returning to South Africa and, 12 months later, moving to PwC in Birmingham, Shareen faced two hefty shocks to her system: "After living in South Africa and California, wet and windy Birmingham was a real shock," she says. "I had to dig out my winter clothes! But it was the culture that was the biggest

shock. California wasn't so different to South Africa, but the British culture did shock my system. However, having now lived here for almost 14 years I certainly feel I'm a Midlander by adoption."

Life in the UK also brought two sons, aged 10 and 12, for whom she devotes as much time as possible. But when they stay with their dad, and she has time truly to herself, she admits to a secret: "I love a siesta! My life is pretty much six-days-a-week with 12-hour shifts. So I really enjoy a little nap! Perhaps IM will invest in some of those Google Nap Pods!"

"I love a siesta! My life is pretty much six-days-a-week with 12-hour shifts. So I really enjoy a little nap!"

What brought Shareen to IM Group? "I loved my previous job but it was extremely demanding with 16-hour days and weekends when I wanted to spend time with my boys," she says. Then, quite randomly one evening, at 11pm when I was writing a report, I decided right, it's time for a change! I sent my CV to a friend who, I discovered, is the recruitment agent for the IM Group. A couple of weeks later she sent me the IM job profile with the message: 'How's this job for a change for 2020?'

"Initially I was apprehensive about the move into industry, but I said okay, let's go for it and the rest is history!"

So having initially been somewhat cool toward the IM Group job, what did attract Shareen to the company?

"It's all about how invested the Group is in its employees and its values – making the office a second home through investment in staff facilities, like the gym, restaurant and the social elements. Obviously, they have been taken away by Covid. But even working through the Covid policies when we were preparing the office, it was only the best, state-of-the-art equipment to protect out staff." 🏢

"After living in South Africa and California, wet and windy Birmingham was a real shock."



## Shareen Jilka A Day In The Life



# COVID BOOSTS OUTREACH WORK

**C**ovid-19 put huge pressure on the humanitarian work of the Grace Foundation, yet led to some surprisingly-positive outcomes.

It sounds counter-intuitive but the charity, founded by Lord Edmiston, saw both a big increase in its workload yet some amazing results from its outreach work with young people and families in need.

For more than a decade three Grace Academies in some of the most challenging parts of the West Midlands benefited directly from the charity. Help and opportunities were given to approximately 2,500 students. During 2020 that increased to more than 5,000 youngsters following the academies' merger with the larger Tove Learning Trust, which does similar work.

When Covid hit the UK in early 2020 the stress and financial hardship under the country's lockdown had a much more severe impact on the vulnerable. Youngsters, particularly those in



**"Colleagues responded magnificently giving up their time, energy and, often their cash and materials to help those in need."**

less-affluent areas, struggled with much higher instances of emotional turmoil.

It was against this backdrop that teachers and support staff at the five Tove/Grace-supported academies swung into action to deliver additional care and support, backed by direct financial help to families where needed.

Judi Wood, Director of Corporate and Social Responsibility at the IM Group, said the response had been uplifting. "It's not just at the Grace Foundation, but across the Group that colleagues responded magnificently giving up

their time, energy and, often their cash and materials to help those in need.

"We faced an increasing wave of demand from some of the most vulnerable in our local communities. However, staff across the entire business stepped forward in their droves to volunteer to help."

Rather than reducing, the charitable activities across IM Group increased with the demands of Covid. This resulted in even more work being carried out. And Grace Foundation has ambitious plans to expand its reach even further in the future.

Plans for a 'pastoral recovery' programme for the academies were scoped out and introduced for the autumn 2020 term and most remained open for vulnerable students throughout the lockdown.

Detailed 'Covid-secure' plans were drawn up over the summer and put in place for the 2020-2021 academic year. A wholesale review of programmes under the Ethos banner was carried out



for each institution, taking into account living and learning with Covid. Ethos is a holistic programme that helps students to develop their character and values and to build healthy relationships against a backdrop of Christian principles.

Courses have already started and will be built on, including topics for youngsters such as resilience, self-worth, anxiety, anger-management, knife-crime, sexual relationships and the risks of pornography. There were also programmes for parents and families, such as building stronger relationships with teenagers and insight into the characteristics of the developing teenage brain.

Judi said: "This was vital because Covid brought about a new reality to every aspect of life, especially for youngsters. So a new set of toolkits was built to address these highly-unusual circumstances that no-one could have predicted as we entered 2020."

In addition to the IM Group's normal funding for the Grace Foundation, an additional £13,000 was spent during the UK's lockdown period to assist 108 vulnerable families. More than 500 direct

actions to help to students and families were made during the summer across various academy catchment areas.

Despite all the pressures and challenges, feedback from students and their families gave everyone involved added confidence that they were making a real difference to the lives of people who could so easily have been overlooked.

One parent of a vulnerable Year-7 student wrote: "I just wanted to say thank you for today. It really was just a case of finding someone who listens, understands and wants to try to help. I understand there is no magic wand to make it all better. But thank you for your support."

Gary Spicer, Grace Foundation's Executive Director, oversaw the distribution of funds. He said: "An example of practical help was a single mother with four children unable to

**"I just wanted to say thank you for today. It really was just a case of finding someone who listens, understands and wants to try to help."**

cope due to financial issues. She was given gifts of carpets that the household desperately needed but couldn't afford.

"The gesture stirred her so deeply that she has addressed her fears for the future and reached out and asked for further help. That was a big step forward for a woman who, previously,



just couldn't see a way out and was disappearing into a well of depression."

Some of the people helped had been in even-more-challenging circumstances. But none was left isolated and all offered help. If that wasn't enough, the Grace Foundation is already actively looking at spreading the outreach work in the future with outline plans made for beyond 2022.

Gary Spicer concluded: "I would like to say a big thank-you to all staff for serving the young people in such challenging times. We look forward to seeing our programme expanding with students being supported and encouraged." 📧



IM PROPERTIES  
Doug Wallace

# THIRD BITE BY 'BILLION- DOLLAR MAN'

Gymshark, one of Britain's most outstanding business successes and now valued at £1 billion, has invested in a third unit on IM's flagship Blythe Valley Park.

The gym apparel company has witnessed exponential growth. In just eight years Gymshark has grown from a garage start-up to a multi-award winning company with sales in 170 countries worldwide. And IM Properties' Blythe Valley development has been at the centre of the firm's remarkable growth.

Having been hugely impressed with Blythe Valley Park, Gymshark decided to open a new global headquarters and took a prime 42,000 sq ft of Grade-A space on a 10-year lease in 2018. Just six months later the firm took a second unit, this time a 31,000 sq ft high-specification industrial unit, one of just five on the Connexion campus within Blythe Valley.

In August 2020 Gymshark was back for a third bite at Blythe Valley. This



IMReview



"The modern, industrial space at Connexion gives us the freedom to offer a creative working environment."

time it has taken a 56,888 sq ft unit, also on the Connexion development. The deal marks the final letting at this unique logistics hub, which forms part of the wider business estate in a 120-acre parkland setting.

Paul Richardson, Gymshark's Executive Chairman, said: "The modern, industrial space at Connexion gives us the freedom to offer a creative working environment for our research and design team and helps to attract and

retain some of world's best talent as we expand our global presence.

"The final unit at Connexion was too good an opportunity to miss out on. We all love the setting at Blythe Valley, the green open spaces, the opportunity to get out and walk or run. It's the ideal location for us and means we can remain in the region we're committed to."

Blythe Valley Park is off Junction 4 of the M42 motorway, just a mile or so from the IM Group's global headquarters on the outskirts of Solihull.

Gymshark was founded by fitness fanatic Ben Francis while he was still a 19-year-old studying international business and management at Aston University and earning £5-an-hour delivering pizza to help fund his fledgling business. He began screen-printing gym kit in his parents' garage.

Ben never completed his degree as Gymshark quickly became the fastest-growing business in Britain. By the age of 24 he had become a multi-millionaire and now, aged 28, Ben is reputed to have a personal wealth of £700-million.

In August 2020 Gymshark sold a 21-percent stake in the company to US private equity firm General Atlantic in a deal that valued the company in excess of £1-billion. Ben still owns more than 70 percent of the company.

He stepped down as Chief Executive Officer of Gymshark in 2015 and took on the role of the firm's Chief Brand Officer. He still works 12-hour days interspaced with work-outs in his home gym and runs.

In 2019 Ben served on the UK Government's Business Council for



PAUL RICHARDSON WITH RACHAEL CLARKE

Entrepreneurs and Gymshark has collected numerous awards and plaudits in its relatively short history.

Today Gymshark has customers in 170 countries worldwide and there are no signs of it slowing down as the company sells around £42 million of sports wear a year.

The firm sells half of its products in North America and has ambitious growth plans including opening an office complex in Denver, Colorado.

Rachael Clarke, IM Properties Development Manager, said: "Gymshark's letting at Blythe Valley Park reflects a growing number of occupiers who have innovation at their core and want industrial space and better working environments with a wider site focus on amenity and wellbeing.

"This is a break from convention for the industrial and logistics sector and an evolution we are looking to lead, taking our experiences at Connexion to another level with exciting new large-scale schemes coming forward." 📍



# HEALTHY LIVING AND WORKING

A flagship development designed around a balanced work/life environment is attracting firms with employee wellbeing at the core of their businesses.

IM Properties' Blythe Valley Park integrated development of offices, last-mile logistics, amenities and homes is set in a 122-acre parkland location.

Although Blythe Valley sits amid fields and woodland it is just minutes away from one of Britain's busiest motorways, the M42, and is on the outskirts of Birmingham, the UK's second-largest city. Birmingham's international airport is just a short drive away.

Blythe Valley Park was developed by IM to break the

design mould of traditional business parks. Up to 750 homes are being built at the site and pathways and cycle routes through the parkland means that many residents can take 'the green way' to commute to work.

At lunchtime business users can take a stroll or go for a jog in the green corridors cutting across the site and the office and commercial buildings incorporate the latest green technologies.

It will become a test-bed for a new energy-saving streetlight system that is designed to reduce the use of electricity by up to 62.5 percent. This green emphasis is a major contributor to the health and wellbeing of everyone who uses Blythe Valley.



At lunchtime business users can take a stroll or go for a jog in the green corridors cutting across the site.

Recently some prominent companies with health as part of their core businesses have taken units at the site.

Global medical technology company, Arthrex, currently based in Sheffield, is relocating its UK headquarters to a new 17,100 sq ft office building. The company has pioneered the field of arthroscopy or keyhole surgery and develops more than 1,000 innovative products and procedures each year.

Its new UK HQ is being purpose-built for Arthrex by IM Properties' contractor,

the Benniman Group. Work started in January 2020 with plans for completion by Christmas 2020. It will be the fourth purpose-built office on the site for IM's customers.

Paul Bosworth from Arthrex said: "Blythe Valley Park provides the perfect location for the future of our business, balancing a best-in-class working environment, accessibility for our clients and quality of life for our employees. The environment will improve productivity for our business and will assist in our ability to retain and attract talent."

Evac+Chair International, which manufactures the world's leading evacuation chair and a range of patient transportation products, moved to Blythe Valley's Connexion site in May 2020.

The firm exports to more than 50 countries and settled on a 38,233 sq ft unit at Connexion.

Gerard Wallace, Evac+Chair International's Managing Director, said: "We are extremely excited about our new, larger premises. Our primary goal is to be the undisputed, world-class leader in the design, development and manufacture of life safety products, whether that be for building residents in the



event of an emergency, or critical-care patients during emergency transportation.

"The new factory, warehouse and office space will enable us to continue on this mission, whilst we better-position the business for continued growth.

"Connexion is a fantastic scheme which will help to facilitate the future growth of Evac+Chair International and, as a result, the safety of buildings, occupants and the transportation of patients worldwide."

The Evac+Chair was invented by David Egen in 1982 with the specific aim of helping to save the lives of disabled people in an emergency. He designed the chair for his wife, who had polio as a

child, after she had needed to be evacuated from the 38th floor of a skyscraper in Manhattan, New York.

He realised the urgent need for a dedicated piece of life-saving equipment for disabled people to enable them to be easily evacuated from tall buildings. He wanted to develop a hybrid of a cart, stretcher and chair that could go down stairs easily and be controlled by one person.

The rescue chair, described as a 'lifeboat for skyscrapers' in the Journal of the Industrial

Designers Society of America, has earned its place in the 9/11 Memorial Museum in New York for doing just that.

Rachael Clarke, IM Properties Development Manager, said: "Connexion has struck a chord with occupiers looking to reflect the innovative nature of their businesses.

"It's set a new benchmark for industrial units in the Midlands and its success underpins IM Properties' pioneering approach, always looking to deliver best-in-class and be at the forefront of new trends." ■



NEW ARTHREX HQ CGI



ISUZU UK  
Charles Miller

# D-MAX KEEPS ON DELIVERING... (WHEN OTHERS DON'T)

Isuzu's ultra-tough D-Max became a national hero helping to keep Britain going through tough times.

The go-anywhere, do-anything pick-up allowed emergency services to respond, power companies to operate and construction firms to build while the majority of Britain's business were forced to close due to the Covid pandemic.

Western Power Distribution relies on a fleet of D-Max

models to service and maintain power lines and substations serving nearly 8 million homes and businesses across a swathe of the UK.

Rugged terrain, including the mountainous Brecon Beacons and the remote Dartmoor National Park, are within the 21,000 square miles covered by the distributor which has ordered a further 96 D-Max's to join its fleet.

Jane Nicholson, Fleet Technical Specialist at Western Power said: "We've run D-Max pick-ups for five years been constantly impressed by this extremely tough and capable vehicle. The fleet service team at Isuzu have always gone the extra mile to develop a tailored solution for our very specialist requirements."

Glendale a leading provider of grounds and estate-

management services has run D-Max's for six years. Most of its work is carried out in challenging conditions, requiring crew and equipment to be carried across muddy, slippery ground. In July it ordered a further 19 – all in the company's trademark lime-green colour.

Stuart Darbyshire, Commercial Director for Glendale, said: "Reliability is one of the key attributes

Most of its work is carried out in challenging conditions, requiring crew and equipment to be carried across muddy, slippery ground.

we look for in a vehicle. The D-Max has proved itself since joining our fleet. It's capable off-road and able to carry and tow a lot of equipment. The Isuzu fleet service team has always provided a professional package, able to source extra kit and adapt vehicles to our requirements with very short lead times."

Firbank Isuzu at Hollingworth, near Manchester, lent its D-Max demonstrator to help get cooked meals to families in food poverty during the first lockdown. Open Kitchen MCR, a not-for-profit catering company, helped feed 1,200 Manchester people in need and the elderly using food intended for conferences which were postponed.

Director Corin Bell said: "We only had one van so with the D-Max we were

able to distribute twice as much food. It's been a real lifeline. Without it we'd struggled to cope with the surge in demand. The D-Max meant we've put dinners on the tables of twice as many people!"

Isuzu UK made commitments to help during the pandemic. In addition to keeping workshops open for essential services, Isuzu pledged to loan its fleet and demonstrator vehicles, free of charge, to organisations getting food and medicines to people in need and those in hard-to reach-areas.

The company backed Britain's builders too, supplying craftsmen with an essential tool – the D-Max. Renowned as 'the pick-up professionals' Isuzu has sold thousands of D-Max's to builders, plumbers, plasterers, electricians, carpenters and ground-workers. In 2020 it renewed its partnership with the Federation of Master Builders, the building sector's trade association.



Meanwhile, 984 extra horsepower was added to York Racecourse – known to racing fans as Knavesmire – which now has a string of six D-Max pick-ups as behind-the-scene workhorses. York Van Centre supplied the pick-ups that are used by course doctors, vets and judges and for moving bulky equipment. The vehicles pack a total of 984 horsepower and joined the racecourse crew in July when it re-opened with races held behind closed doors.

William Derby, Chief Executive and Clerk of the Course, said: "The Utility model allows us to transport more equipment while the top-of-the-range Blade provides comfort and luxury."

Specialist cherry picker convertor, CPL, can get to places others can't reach – thanks to the D-Max. CPL is a market leader in access platforms and converts around 300 vehicles a year to cherry pickers – the vast majority based on the D-Max. It was the first firm to be awarded approved convertor status by Isuzu UK and in 2020 was named Platinum Partner in recognition of the longstanding relationship.

The CPL conversion includes a 3.5-tonne suspension upgrade, has a working height of 13.1 metres and an outreach of 6.2 metres. CPL also builds a chipper tipper, known as an ATAT, mounted on a D-Max. This is a favourite with tree surgeons thanks to its 50-degree tipping body and 1300-kg payload. ☐







CPL recently saw a doubling of conversions with the supply of 78 cherry pickers to Openreach to help keep Britain's broadband connected.

Tipper bodies are rare on trucks the size of the D-Max, but this conversion has been introduced in-house by Isuzu UK. Based on the Utility Extended Cab, the conversion is a cost-effective solution for customers who need a tough and reliable tipper with off-road capabilities.

The conversion has a durable, lightweight tipper body. The load bed is 1,977mm long by 1,800mm with a rugged 'Tippadeck' bed with interlocking alloy floor panels. Sideboards and tailboard are in lightweight alloy. A wander-lead controller is used to activate the electro-hydraulic power-pack that lifts the body. Aimed at tree surgeons, landscape architects and construction companies, the tipping gear and sub-frame are galvanised.

Alan Able, Head of Sales at Isuzu UK, said: "The tipper conversion is one example of how we're

"The tipper conversion is one example of how we're continuously innovating and the conversion shows the adaptability of the D-Max."

continuously innovating and the conversion shows the adaptability of the D-Max."

Children's favourite, Tractor Ted, has a new helper down on the farm – the rugged D-Max. Tractor Ted features in a range of YouTube videos aimed at educating children about farming. Alongside the bright green comic tractor character is a real-life farmer, Tom Wheeler, who runs a 700-acre organic farm in Somerset. Now helping real-life farmer Tom is a real-life Isuzu D-Max Utah!

Tractor Ted became a phenomenal success through the videos. The D-Max is put through its paces on many

of Tractor Ted's adventures alongside Midge the dog and Merlin the pony. Away from the cameras, the D-Max Utah mucks in with Tom running his farm where its one-tonne payload and 3.5-tonne towing capacity are used to transport machinery and produce.

Tom said: "The D-Max is a tough, hard-working workhorse with the comfort of a family car. I can carry dogs, sheep or fencing stakes in the back and still carry the kids in the cab! I already drove an Isuzu before replacing it with a Utah after hill-sheep farming friends recommended it." 🚚

IM GROUP  
Milo Torsdden

**While the consequences and demands of the Covid pandemic – and how to safely deal with them – have dominated business life in 2020, planning for IM Group's long-term future remained important for Managing Director, Andrew Edmiston.** "It's something I've had in mind for a few years," he says.

Conscious that future leaders of the business were already working for IM, Andrew started to think about how they could be better-prepared not only for when they took over, but also for their continuing journey through the business."

Identifying in advance which employees would be running the business in a couple of decades' time is impossible, admits Andrew: "If you tried, you'd probably get it wrong! Therefore we had to do something with a wider group of people knowing that some would stay with the business and become part of the future senior management team."

Enter IM Group's Leadership Lunches!

"It seemed obvious to me that because we already

spent time at lunch talking about the business it wouldn't cost anything to have the management team talking to some of the people who are younger in the business," he explains. "Those interested in leadership and growing their own capabilities, perhaps with a view to staying with the business and moving into more-senior leadership roles."

"About 15 of us had lunch together and Tim Wooldridge and I talked about vision."

Andrew had already started something similar in his charity – Imagine the Day – when, on six weekends a year, a group of people are taken through a project called The Lions. "Each weekend is quite intensive," says Andrew. "We bring in people who run organisations or who are entrepreneurs and put a course together. This exposes Lions delegates to individuals who have done successful things in quite an intense environment."

## Leadership lunches

His thoughts naturally turned to replicating what The Lions courses did but at Leadership Lunches for staff who could become IM's senior managers of the future. "We wouldn't talk about what people's roles were or the technical side of the business and their jobs, we'd focus specifically on leadership."

Originally, the first of the Leadership Lunches was scheduled for the beginning of the year just as Covid-19 struck. This delayed the launch. However, towards the end of September it was decided to hold the first. "It went pretty well," says Andrew. "About 15 of us had lunch together and Tim Wooldridge and I talked about vision, how you create a vision and how you manage people into a vision. We talked about our own journeys to where we've arrived."

"The session over lunch took the format of an interview with Judi Wood, IM Group's CSR Director, asking Andrew and Tim questions. This led to questions from the group.

"We were very open and it was a no-holds-barred environment," says Andrew. "People could ask whatever they liked – about our own



strengths and weaknesses... when did we think we'd done well... when did we think we didn't do so well... how did we resolve difficulties... how did we deal with things when they haven't quite gone our way..."

In future Leadership Lunches, members of the management will talk about different themes, says Andrew. "But the format will generally be the same – over lunch, being interviewed and answering questions. It will always be an honest look at the subject from the management team, not just talking about the rosy times but about the hard and gritty times too." 🍴



# 20 YEARS AND COUNTING

**D**avid Challinor, Managing Director of Specialist Motor Finance, is leaving the company in July after 20 years in one of the most demanding roles in the IM Group.

Yet in a highly-pressurised, fast-changing and highly regulated business David has remained ever-positive and can even reflect on some truly comic moments amid it all.

Imagine giving a very serious presentation to VIP clients and seeing a rat drop dead at the door the guests were about to leave from. How do you cope with that? Or staging a fanfare 'doors-open-for-business' event to then find the office had no doors due to repairs!

How do you remain calm and professional when the night before a crucial meeting with your bankers a gypsy camp sets up in your office car park? Too late to cancel the meeting

David had to greet his guests "as half-dressed children were running wild outside and a particularly hairy man was having a full-body wash using a washing-up bowl on a table outside his caravan!"

David, in true stiff-upper-lip British style, smiled politely, exuded confidence and got on with the job. It seems nothing could distract him from his business mission and that's just as well because alongside all these hilarious moments David has been confronted with some of the toughest challenges in the financial world.

But throughout the journey David had a key ally – Lord Edmiston, the IM Group's chairman. David explained: "I had worked in banking for 20 years in senior roles and, along with four colleagues, started The Funding Corporation (TFC) in 2000 in Chester.

"We had the knowledge and experience but needed to raise significant levels of equity capital and an agreed banking debt. We expected the equity capital to come from private equity or an institutional investor and spent five months giving many presentations to interested parties."

"We opened for business on 1st October 2001 with 30 staff. We had raised more than £100m and were ready to write lots of loans!"

But it was proving tough until, through a connection with IM Finance, Jim Rowley (the original TFC MD), David and his management colleagues were invited to present a business plan to Lord Edmiston and members of the IM board.

David recalls: "We were invited to Ryder Street (on our way to yet another presentation in London) to present to Lord Edmiston. Following a successful meeting, he said he would be interested in speaking to us again."

After more negotiations a business agreement was made with the IM Group: "We signed-up in May 2001

and that enabled us to secure the bank funding," said David. "So we set about formally launching TFC.

"At the time this was the largest independent financial services start-up in the UK. Once we had secured the funding we were able to recruit staff and purchase equipment. With the additional support from IM we could buy and refurbish our own office."

David became Operations Director and took on a huge range of responsibilities including new business processing, credit underwriting, collections, compliance, IT, HR and facilities management.

He said: "I sourced and purchased the new offices, managed the refurbishment project, set up all IT infrastructure, implemented the loans processing system, recruited the operational staff and ensured we had all the necessary written policies and procedures.

"We opened for business on 1st October 2001 with 30 staff. We had raised more than £100 million and were ready to write lots of loans!"

As the fledgling business grew (eventually to 400) David became the firm's General Manager in 2008, taking on additional responsibilities. He was appointed Managing Director in 2010.

In David's two decades at SMF and its predecessors he steered the company through tough times. He identifies four key challenges. "Firstly, the availability of funding to a start up business. Secondly, unforeseen changes in the law that allowed individuals to enter into Individual Voluntary Arrangements (IVAs). Thirdly, the global financial

crisis in 2008 and fourthly the impact of Covid, which is still unfolding.

"Initially, the lending business was split, 80-percent prime and 20-percent sub-prime, but the low-margin prime hire purchase and unsecured personal loans businesses could only be profitable with huge lending that would be difficult to generate. Effectively we would be competing directly with banks."

The introduction of IVAs – a simpler form of bankruptcy – led to a significant change in customers' attitude to insolvency and saw a massive take up: "This led to an unsustainable increase in bad debt," said David. "That alone was enough to make the prime businesses unprofitable but it coincided with the end of PPI and together, they were catastrophic. It forced us to exit all prime businesses and make redundancies in a very difficult period.

"That left TFC solely as a sub-prime lender, writing loans originated by a small number of dealers supported by a field-based sales team and our own retailer, ACF Car Finance."

In 2008, the global financial crisis struck. "The credit crunch impacted on our funding arrangements and once again we were lucky to have the backing of Lord Edmiston and the IM Group which was able to provide further finance and allow for an orderly run-off period, which is only now nearing its end."

IM's support helped save parts of the business. "But we still had to exit field-based sales operations and concentrate solely on writing loans introduced by ACF," explained David "Eventually, the remaining activities ☐





“We successfully reduced the IM funding, staff numbers doubled and the loan book – which started at zero – is now at £134 million!”

proved unviable. One option would have been stark, closing TFC altogether – but we had 50 staff and a still sizeable loan book to collect on.”

While many would have thrown in the towel, David remained deeply committed to the staff, the lending company and the IM Group, which he knew did not quit.

He made a bold decision and took it to IM and Lord Edmiston: “I proposed that we re-entered dealer finance, a business we had exited in 2008, and start again from scratch.”

His proposal was supported and David and his team set about re-inventing the business. “We designed a new product, developed systems and started writing business as SMF in May 2015,” he said. “Again, Lord Edmiston and the IM Group helped us by agreeing to provide the necessary funding as it was unlikely

we could secure bank funding for this new business. The deal was that we needed to prove that we had a long-term profitable and sustainable business.

“After hitting all our major milestones, and delivering consecutive years of profit, we successfully reduced the IM funding, staff numbers doubled and the loan book – which started at zero – is now at £134 million!” said a very proud David.

Then fate, this time in the form of Covid, threw yet another challenge at David and SMF. But again he came through. After all, if a dead rat and a hairy-chested gypsy were not going to stand in his way, a pandemic crisis certainly wasn’t!

With customers facing financial hardship as a result of Covid, paying car loans was a major issue. But David’s team worked closely with them. He said: “Encouragingly many have restarted payments and we feel confident that we can get the majority back on track. As a result we expect to post a profit, before tax, for the year only slightly down on 2019.”

The ever-positive David says SMF has a bright future. “We have built on past experiences and started to increase automation in most areas to improve efficiencies. But we recognise there is still work to do. Our lending has been careful and responsible. However, we must continue to explore new finance products and new markets as well as partnership arrangements and other joint ventures.”

After leaving, David will look for new challenges while continuing to live in Chester with his wife Jane. They have a daughter, Sophie. 🐶



# A NEW ERA FOR SPITFIRE



THE AWARD-WINNING HOUSE BUILDER IS SET FOR A MAJOR REVAMP IN 2021.



Spitfire, IM's award-winning house-building wing, is about to take off and soar towards a new era.

A major revamp of the business will mean that from the spring of 2021 Spitfire will be able to start to build more homes, create more jobs and become more profitable.

It's the biggest and most exciting change to the house builder since it was formed in 2010 and will see two types of future developments while retaining Spitfire's well-earned reputation for outstanding quality homes.

From the first quarter of 2021 Spitfire Bespoke Homes will be rebranded to become Spitfire Homes. However, some smaller schemes will be marketed as 'Spitfire Homes – the Bespoke Collection'.

Spitfire's Managing Director, Ben Leather, explained that the name change is far more than just a re-branding exercise. "Spitfire currently has 14 live developments and each one is different," he explains. "That creates too much burden on the supply chain, which is already under resourced, and puts added pressure on our



staff to consistently deliver the high quality product our customers expect.

"It means a huge amount of time is spent on product design and procurement for individual homes. This is very demanding and limits the time we can spend focusing more on the customer and their experience buying a Spitfire home."

The totally bespoke approach results in exceptional homes but the pressures mean that Spitfire developments are often not nearly as profitable as they could be. It also

SPITFIRE  
HOMES

"Bespoke is what our brand is built on and gives us that recognition with customers and industry peers,"

means that Spitfire has to concentrate on smaller development sites, often of just seven to 30 homes, putting yet more demands on costs and resources.

"Given the type and specification of homes that Spitfire currently builds we can only operate in high-value areas," Ben says. "These areas are normally characterised by very strict planning guidelines that mean securing permissions for new developments is very difficult and time consuming. The developments are

mostly small and have very prescriptive requirements.

"For these reasons the totally 'bespoke' model is impossible to scale-up when delivering hundreds of new homes per annum, instead of the 100 or so that the business is currently building."

So how do you overcome the dilemma of still building outstanding, high-quality premium homes while looking to triple the number you build each year? Spitfire's award-winning team has, of course, found a perfect solution.

Ben explains: "We have developed a new standardised range of one- to four-bedroom homes across a variety of sizes. These same designs will be used on most developments from the new launch although there will be exceptions where planning authorities require amendments due to local design guides, such as in the Cotswolds."

However, Spitfire's famous 'bespoke' name is not being



BEN LEATHER



abandoned altogether: "Bespoke is what our brand is built on and gives us that recognition with customers and industry peers," he maintains. "Attention to detail across everything we do – from design, procurement, specification and finish to delivering on customer expectations – sets us apart. If you pay a premium price you expect a premium product and service.

"We will continue to do a smaller number of 'bespoke' developments and they will be branded 'Spitfire Homes – the Bespoke Collection.' A small number of 'bespoke' schemes enables us to retain a high-degree of exclusiveness and allows us, as a team, to be creative and retain that spark for why we do house building.

"It certainly doesn't mean that properties built by Spitfire Homes will lose the exceptionally high build quality that is part of our reputation and

why our developments sell out so quickly.

"But during the coming years we will do fewer 'bespoke' schemes and more standardised homes. By 2025 we will aim to build approximately 350 new homes a year, of which around 90 percent will be to our new standardised designs. The remaining 10 percent will be bespoke."

One of the company's largest developments to date is in Stratford-Upon-Avon where work started in late 2019 and will be completed in phases by 2022. Consilio is a development of 135 properties on Loxley Road, one of the town's premier roads.

In Q1 2021 it will be re-marketed under the 'Spitfire Homes – the Bespoke Collection' banner. Homes were being bought off-plan even prior to building work starting. Some families are expected ☐



to move in to their three- or four-bedroom homes before Christmas. Houses currently under construction range in price between £350,000 and £925,000, with homes in the final phase overlooking Stratford Golf Club expected to sell for in excess of £1 million.

Covid regulations meant that work at the site had to be stopped for a month during the first UK national lockdown in the spring and builders have had to cope with the notoriously fickle weather. However, since returning to work the development is back on target.

Ben's team did face another challenge. UK Chancellor Rishi Sunak's move to suspend stamp duty until April 2021 on homes costing up to £500,000 created a double-edged sword. "On one hand it has created more demand," says Ben. "But on the other hand, sourcing building materials has become a challenge due to scarcity of supply with the end of March 2021 creating a 'cliff edge' for the industry.

"The ending of the stamp duty holiday and the Help-to-Buy scheme changing at the same time meant that all the big volume house builders were in a mad rush to get as many houses completed as

"We are moving to developments of 40 to 200 homes, from traditionally much-smaller sites. But we will still be offering 12 or 13 distinctive house styles."

possible. So they started a clamour for materials which created shortages – timber is a particular issue." The Consilio development was hit by the knock-on effect of other Covid repercussions, says Ben: "We had off-site highways work that required completion by Warwickshire County Council. That got delayed due to Covid, which delayed the completion of our first homes for customers." But again Ben and his team coped.

Although Consilio – the Latin verb for 'to create with purpose and intent' – is a large development, there are



CONSILIO, LOXLEY ROAD, STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

larger ones in the pipeline: "We are currently working on land opportunities and planning applications that will provide approximately 575 new homes with a combined development value of £180 million," says Ben. "We will start delivering these from 2022 onwards."

He still sees the majority of Spitfire's future sites being in the Midlands region, the house builder's traditional base. And most developments will be within an hour's drive of the IM Group's global HQ in Solihull.

Tim Wooldridge, Managing Director of IM Properties division under which

Spitfire sits, said: "It really is an exciting future for Spitfire and we have a brilliant way forward.

"If you look at our Broadway development we had 75 houses and 73 different designs, which just didn't make sense. We are moving to developments of 40 to 200 homes, from traditionally much-smaller sites. But we will still be offering 12 or 13 distinctive house styles.

"We have already identified sites for new developments including one for 180 homes between Coventry and Balsall Common and another for 200 homes near Cheltenham." 📍

# CONSILIO

STRATFORD-UPON-AVON

## DESIGN BY DEFINITION

Now available to view.

An eclectic mix of contemporary homes within walking distance of the historic town centre of Stratford-upon-Avon.

[spitfirepg.co.uk/consilio](https://spitfirepg.co.uk/consilio)  
07384 510965





### SPITFIRE

bespoke homes

#### SPITFIRE BESPOKE HOMES

This advert was created to help establish the Consilio development brand within the local Stratford-Upon-Avon market. With a number of local competitors, it is particularly important for Spitfire Bespoke Homes to communicate the premium associated with the brand and the superiority of the homes – particularly in terms of design and specification. Being stylish and design-led, the advertisement is synonymous with the properties available at Consilio.



# GREAT STAFF GREAT BUSINESS GREAT FUTURE

**In a part of IM's business faced with probably more immediate Covid-19 pressures than any other, the team of nearly 100 dedicated staff simply found new ways to work against a backdrop of fast-evolving regulatory changes and huge customer concern.**

But it went much further. Specialist Motor Finance (SMF) remained open for new business helping key workers, including nurses, hospital staff, police officers, care workers and others, to buy cars vital for them to get to work during the national lockdown and beyond.

As well as helping these customers to carry out their valuable work, SMF also supported its partners who were introducing business on a daily basis enabling it to write new loans.

Pat Hanlon, IM's Treasury and Banking Consultant, works closely with SMF and is now a director. He was very impressed with the efforts of the customer-facing staff. "I never saw anyone panic as the Covid crisis unfolded. What I did

witness was real dedication, skill and sheer hard work from a team facing unparalleled pressures."

The pressures also stress-tested SMF's credit score card that has been in place for two years. Results showed it performed exceptionally well, proving that the business is a cautious and responsible lender.

In fact 2020 started very well for the motor-finance wing of IM which, just a year earlier, had been through a major overhaul. From January to March business was strong. The loan book was up by 27 percent and profits 20 percent ahead of Q1 2019. But when Covid struck, and the national lockdown imposed, SMF was faced with a completely new ball game with regulatory guidance that couldn't be ignored.

Pat explained: "With most of the nation at a standstill, people being furloughed and some losing jobs, the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) effectively stepped in and ordered

hire-purchase finance companies (and mortgage and credit card providers) to give all customers an automatic three-month repayment holiday.

"It was the right thing to do but put enormous strain on our operations and finances and threw our business model for 2020 out of the window."

Later the FCA extended the repayment holiday plan. However, take up was very much lower as household finances improved.

An increasing number of SMF customers were able to keep up with payments as they were either still in work, had returned to work or found new jobs. In total, around 20 percent of the firm's customers took advantage of the deferral. By the end of October this had reduced significantly.

Although SMF is a finance company, the entire staff are always aware that people are at the centre of it. As David Challinor says: "It's always important for us to look after our customers and the Covid crisis just emphasised that.

David is equally proud that SMF retained almost every single member of staff throughout all the Covid turmoil.



PAT HANLON

"We are technically still the owners of the cars against which they have taken out a loan. But our interest goes far beyond that. During the crisis our teams, by now working at home, made up to 50 percent more calls to customers than in pre-Covid days.

"That massive effort paid off in the form of customer loyalty. It helped to keep people in their cars and because we understood their prospects better, we could provide the most appropriate support for them."

Pat added: "We kept a very open dialogue with customers and our bankers were aware of our strong financial position overall. As a result, we were in a position to carry on lending every single

day during the crisis while some other – often larger – peers in the industry were forced to shut their books to new business.

"Our customers included key workers who, during the lockdown, kept Britain going – doctors, nurses, hospital staff but also delivery drivers and supermarket staff. These people needed cars to get them to work and finance to purchase their cars. So we certainly did our own small bit to help the country and the economy face up to such a huge challenge.

"The SMF staff went above and beyond and both Lord Edmiston and Andrew Edmiston have said how proud they are of the role David Challinor and his teams played."

David is equally proud that SMF retained almost every single member of staff throughout all the Covid turmoil. At times all of the staff worked entirely from their homes while productivity and work attendance remained amazingly high. "Our people faced their own stresses and demands," he said. "Often they were balancing looking after kids, elderly parents and even neighbours while getting on with work they would normally be doing in our office."

One huge stroke of good luck helped SMF. Just 10 days before the March 23rd lockdown was imposed a new computer system went live. This was vital to the collections and development teams and allowed seamless working from home.

Pat recalled: "It would have been impossible to get nearly 100 people working in our office with social-distancing rules, so the new computer system arrived just in time." ☑



Gradually SMF business has returned to near pre-Covid crisis times. In normal times around 94 percent of customers are up to date with payments. By October the figure had recovered to 85 percent with an improving trend.

The crisis, although probably robbing SMF's long-term growth plans of about a year and reducing profits by £3 million, also threw up important lessons. Pat explained: "It's shone a very bright light on our business and how we operate. We have learnt some hugely important lessons.

"We need to accelerate automation and materially improve efficiency in our operations as well as increase our agility. Simply put, our decision-making process became a lot less bureaucratic and much faster as we moved through the crisis. We need to capture that for the future and continue to improve on it.

"Also, if you take a step back, the vast majority of our customers pay on time; but we don't keep in touch with them. Changing that will build respect and confidence and that generates more than just goodwill."

Pat looks back on 2020 saying: "Covid has been horrendous for everyone and it threw up a huge 'ask' for SMF staff. But they responded brilliantly. We have learnt much, and are still learning. But in a strange way, when the book is written at the end of all of this, it will show that Covid will have made us stronger and better.

"As we move into the next phase, which unfortunately will see a significant rise in unemployment, we remain to provide the most appropriate customer support. At the same time, we believe there will be opportunities for growth as we are now relatively stronger than our competitors." 📧

"Our customers included key workers who, during the lockdown, kept Britain going – doctors, nurses, hospital staff but also delivery drivers and supermarket staff."

ISUZU UK  
Charles Miller

## Superbike rider now has a super D-Max

Carl 'Foggy' Fogarty, one of the world's greatest motorcycle racers, has found his ideal four-wheeled partner – a rather special Isuzu D-Max.

Foggy was an outstanding rider winning the World Superbike championship title four times in the 1990s and clocked up 59 race victories.

He was forced to retire from the track in 2000 after receiving multiple injuries in a horrendous accident competing at the Philip Island circuit in Australia. Throughout his race-track and Isle of Man TT career, Foggy was renowned for ultra-fast speed through bends and corners.

Adrenaline still pumps through the Lancashire-based ace's veins after quitting racing. He loves adventure. So when it came to a vehicle to match his lifestyle, Isuzu's Walton Summit Truck Centre near Preston, had the answer – a fantastic D-Max XTR.

It's a truly stunning vehicle with off-road capabilities to fit Foggy's lifestyle. He personalised the black XTR with a raft



CARL FOGARTY (LEFT) WITH NIGEL PERPLUS

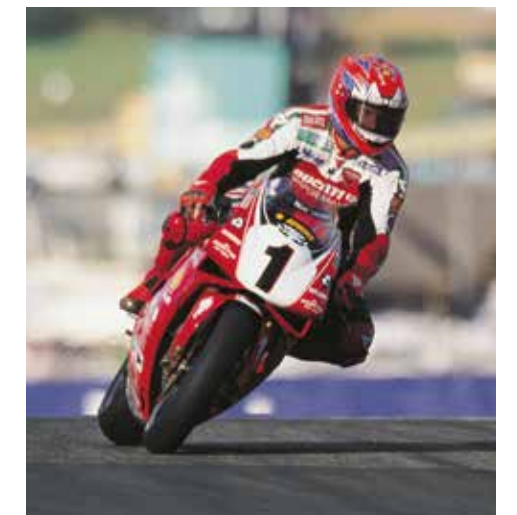
of special extras including an XTR Style Pack consisting of a black mountain top roller cover and black sports roof bars.

Satin-black 17-inch alloy wheels with a heavy-duty design are fitted with Pirelli Scorpion All-Terrain Plus tyres that look good and provide brilliant traction.

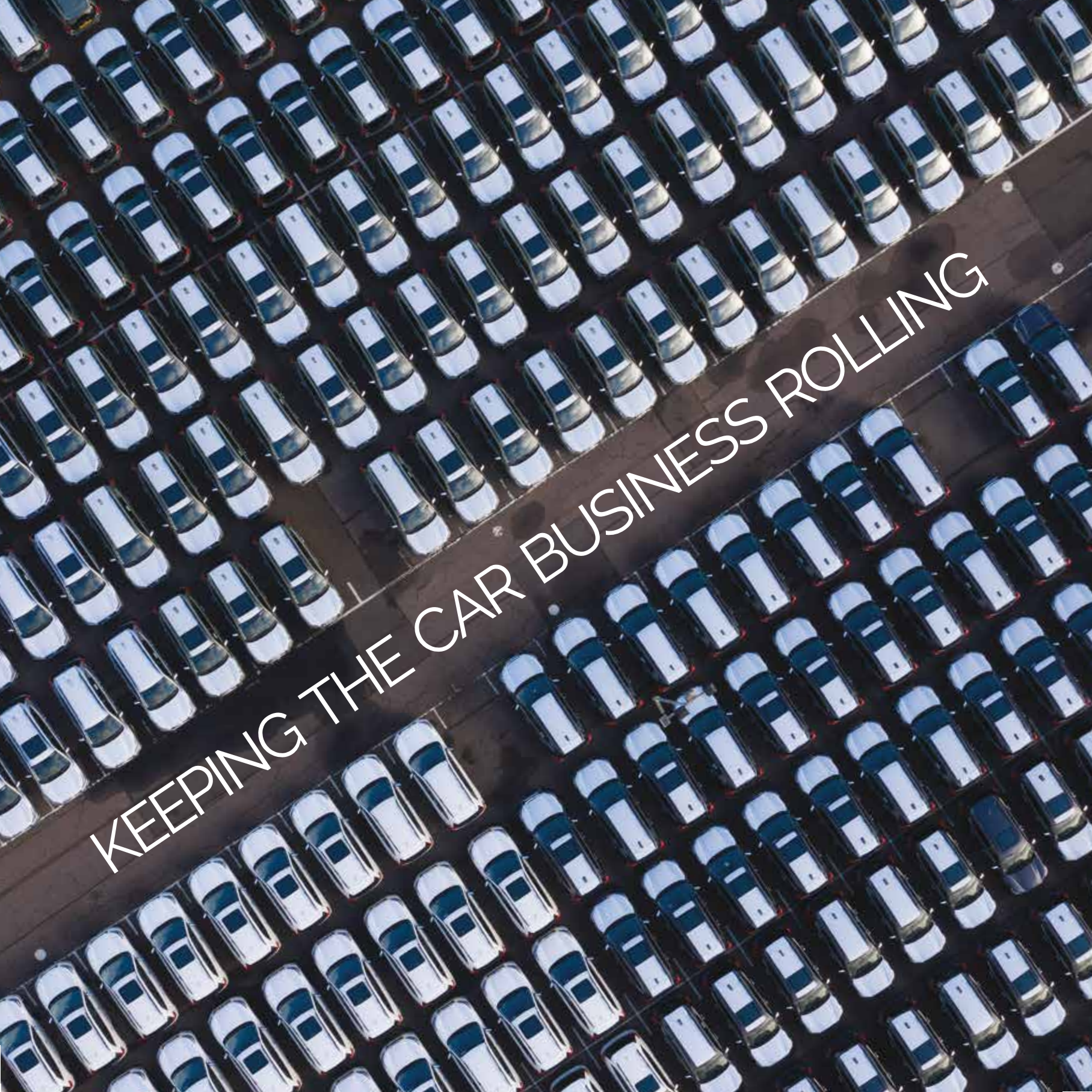
He collected the XTR amid the Covid-19 lockdown, throughout which Walton Summit Truck Centre remained open. Many of the dealer's customers are essential workers.

Nigel Perplus, Commercial Director at the dealership, said: "Foggy was asked to wash his hands and maintained social distancing. He signed the paperwork using his own pen and the keys were presented in a tray. Foggy is a racing legend and the XTR is the perfect truck for him."

Foggy was thrilled saying: "I love anything with an engine and I live for the outdoors so the XTR suits me down to the ground. It's got real character and stands out from the crowd. Can't wait to take it off-road!" 📧







# KEEPING THE CAR BUSINESS ROLLING

SHEERNESS VEHICLE IMPORT CENTRE  
Doug Wallace

**D**ean Faulkner, who manages IM's Sheerness Vehicle Import Centre, is closer to the Covid-19 crisis than most – his wife is a nurse-practitioner and was involved in 'Hot Covid Clinics'.

So while Dean faced the enormous logistics task of running the 32-acre, five-workshop site, where up to 10,000 Subaru and Isuzu models arrive each year, his wife Claire was working one day a week at a Covid 'Hot Clinic'. These were set up to assess and fast-track patients to see GPs. The other four days she worked at her GP surgery. Nurse-practitioners are specially trained and have higher levels of responsibility than registered nurses. Unlike other nurses, nurse-practitioners can write prescriptions.

One of the major challenges the pandemic has thrown at everyone is that it's an ever-changing picture. Although Dean and Claire each have experienced this in different ways, they've both done so on a daily basis since

March 23 when the national lockdown was ordered.

Dean led a team that put in an immediate Covid Action Plan after painstakingly conducting risk assessments for all areas of the Sheerness operation. The sheer size and complexity of the import and logistics business meant a mountain of work had to be gone through. Forget normal working days – Dean and his fellow managers worked extremely long hours daily to ensure everyone would be safe.

Although safety is massively important it was only a part of the challenge. The Sheerness operation is a fast-moving service environment and much of the specialist work they do is on vehicles – particularly the Isuzu D-Max – destined for front-line emergency and vital-service customers.

Initially the Sheerness workforce was reduced by 50 percent and office staff split into two teams, each working alternate weeks either on site or from home. The site holds just under 6,000 vehicles and in the past two years has seen a £1.5-million investment



DEAN FAULKNER

The site holds just under 6,000 vehicles and in the past two years has seen a £1.5-million investment to provide new facilities.

to provide new facilities. Three technical workshops, a brand new body shop and an under-seal treatment plant boosted the operation which is located less than two miles from the Port of Sheerness, one of the busiest in Britain.

But this complexity added to the task faced by Dean and his team. He recalls: "Many companies and suppliers just shut up shop without speaking to us when the lockdown was announced.

"We had vehicles on transporters that were aborted, transport systems shut down and many dealers were closed when we tried to deliver vehicles. On top of that, fleet customers were pressurising us to deliver vehicles vitally needed to keep the country running. It was a logistical nightmare!"

Yet the Sheerness team rose to the challenge. "They were magnificent and we managed to fulfil urgent orders and deliveries," he said. But having dealt fantastically with the initial emergency, the Sheerness operation faced tough restrictions that had to be met to allow work to carry on





“One of our strengths is being able to offer the customer a one-stop shop. Whatever they need, our team can provide the solution.”



on – something Dean and his staff were determined to do.

By mid-April 70 percent of the workforce had to be furloughed and the normal seven-day week, four-shift work pattern had to be abandoned. That meant urgent skills training had to be put in place for the remaining staff. But all that would have been pointless without solving the huge logistic problem of finding a new-vehicle delivery system.

Dean said: “A massive amount of work went in. Many calls and late nights were put in to find a solution. However, our values came firmly to the fore and we are always thinking outside the box. We can face situations like Covid and turn them into positives by

“On average we process around 700 vehicles each month, which equates to more than 5,000 hours of work. Yearly we process around 10,000 Subaru and Isuzu vehicles.”

finding solutions, delivering vehicles and supporting our business and the country.”

More behind-the-scenes effort was spent on allocating safe individual workstations to staff and working with suppliers to ensure that correct PPE and signage was in place. The IM Group headquarters staff also helped by ordering protective workstation screens and providing guidance on getting through such challenging times.

“Tighter working restriction ensured we maintained the critical orders, but on top of this we had to start our brand new body-shop operation,” explained Dean. “This was pressure at a high level – few staff, none

of our suppliers open and urgently-needed vehicles to repair.” However, within four weeks his team had started working on vehicles and today the body-shop is fully operational working more than 200 hours per week.

IM’s Sheerness operation started 15 years ago and has not stood still since. “We have seen a full change in terms of what we did then to what we do now,” explained Dean. “One of our strengths is being able to offer the customer a one-stop shop. Whatever they need, our team can provide the solution.

“Isuzu is a typical example. We used to have high-storage volume and low intervention. Now we have a smaller stock with high intervention. Some

of the enhancements we carry out take longer than it takes the factory to build the vehicle!” he adds. “It is specialised work and we’ve seen incredible growth in demand. We offer much more than our competitors and that’s thanks to the Group’s vision and investment.”

So just how much work is involved in preparing a vehicle?

“Every vehicle has some sort of intervention work carried out, from a simple upgrade on security to the full conversion to our top-of-the range Isuzu Blade Edition,” explained Dean. “On average we process around 700 vehicles each month, which equates to more than 5,000 hours of work. Yearly

we process around 10,000 Subaru and Isuzu vehicles.

“What we do varies from just a few simple enhancements taking an hour right up to full conversions that take 40 hours per vehicle. Fleet business has been a great success for us. We now offer a one-stop shop where we can design, approve and fit exactly what the customer requires.”

Sheerness has qualified for the N1 and second-stage approval requirements, which means the operation is an approved centre for conversions prior to vehicles being registered in UK. The work undertaken is of such high-quality that customers will almost certainly think their vehicles have arrived straight from the factory.

“What we do varies from just a few simple enhancements taking an hour right up to full conversions that take 40 hours per vehicle.”

Alongside the normal and specialist conversion work, Sheerness also takes care of more than 50 press-fleet vehicles and vehicles prepared for shows and events.

Sadly, as a result of Covid and despite returning to fuller working conditions, there has been a 30 percent reduction in contract work at Sheerness. Pre-Covid the 18 IM staff were supported by up to 50 contract workers, filling roles such as technical, operational planning, management, office administration and logistic movements. But Dean is confident that 2021 will see a return to maximum capacity and the re-start of 24/7 operations. 📧



# IT'S ALL ABOUT GIVING

**H**elping others has always been part of the moral compass guiding corporate life at IM Group.

The Edmiston family has donated several million pounds to charities during the 40-plus-year history of the company, one of Britain's most successful private, family-run businesses. But it is not just about money; time, energy and love have also been shared with equal openness.

These values percolate throughout the business and are shared by members of staff across every division of IM. The appointment last year of Judi Wood to the new post of Director of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) for the Group, not only acknowledged this but could not have come at a more appropriate time with Covid-19 just over the horizon.

Less than 18 months later, Judi finds herself riding the crest of a tsunami of goodwill – one of the positive outcomes of the Covid crisis that hit local communities as well as the nation.

She said: "We already had a wide range of charitable activities across the Group and were planning to further-develop them. But one of the

startling, and perhaps unexpected reactions to the pandemic were the many staff volunteering offers of help.

"When some of the staff were on furlough, and could have been sitting comfortably at home, it was heart-warming to see their immediate response with offers of all kinds of help."

CSR had already been more-formally activated with Judi's guidance across four broad fronts within IM under the headings: Employees, Community, Environment and Marketplace. All are underpinned by the Groups' purpose and values.

Reaching out to the community has always been a part of IM's philosophy long before such terms as 'corporate social responsibility' became part of the vernacular. There have been, and continues to be, a host of education and charitable involvements between sectors of the business and communities.

But it is the scale, sincerity and speed of response by staff once the effects of Covid on communities became clear that has highlighted the character of IM's people.



One example is the urgent help given to Birmingham and Solihull Women's Aid, a charity supporting women and children who have suffered domestic abuse. Judi explained: "Many of our staff were having clear-outs while at home and their excess has been put to good use.

"Instances of abuse increased during lockdown and many victims urgently needed re-homing. Some of our staff donated bedding, furniture, kitchen equipment and other goods to help. A team then collected and delivered the items to the vulnerable families.

"When some of the staff were on furlough, and could have been sitting comfortably at home, it was heart-warming to see their immediate response with offers of all kinds of help."



JULIETTE MAGGS (INTERNATIONAL MOTORS)  
AND SIMON REED (IM PROPERTIES) WITH  
A THANK YOU CARD FROM BSWA

"We had staff checking on their elderly neighbours and collecting food and medical prescriptions for them. Some staff, who had to self-isolate, took the time to regularly telephone vulnerable people in their neighbourhood for a chat so that they weren't left isolated."

Other IM staff volunteered to help work alongside food banks, packing or delivering food supplies to people in need. "All of this happened when many of the IM staff had their own domestic demands, looking after children or elderly relatives", said Judi.

This huge outreach of help wasn't just happening with staff based at IM's headquarters. A helping hand from IM staff reached out on projects as far away as China.

Judi highlighted what happened: "Away from the big cities and particularly in the remote mountain regions, schools had been forced to close for months and were not able to offer any alternative means of continuing the education of their pupils and had limited supplies. Our staff in China organised supplies of books and other educational materials to help with lessons while further materials have been provided by schools with which IM works to inspire and educate young people.

"Now that staff are returning to the offices, mentoring programmes between them and young people have been established. This is done by staff in their own time. As Riding for the Disabled (in the UK) reopens, albeit in a limited way, our staff at Specialist Motor Finance are

engaging with a project to support those young people. They are also developing financial educational links in schools and young offenders' establishments."

"There have been some remarkable and often spontaneous acts of kindness," says Judi. "No-one told our staff to do this, they just did. That strength of character – and the urge to 'do the right thing' – is one of the contributions my colleagues bring to the business every day. With the launch in the New Year of the CSR Website – listing activities alongside personal development of business and leadership skills – I'm sure that the impact of CSR will be of benefit to many more." ■



# IM NORDIC GIVES COVID-19 THE COLD SHOULDER



**R**unning a business across six countries is demanding enough at the best of times. But throw in the mayhem caused by Covid-19 and many might have been tempted to give up!

IM Nordic faced a huge range of different restrictions imposed, altered, lifted and changed many times. Yet somehow the dedicated Malmö-based team managed to stay on top of myriad complications and emerge stronger.

Christer Blomdell, Managing Director of IM Nordic, looks

at a map of the region he covers and reflects on how his team responded to the toughest challenge thrown at it since the company was established in 1991.

Sweden was perceived as the odd-man-out in Europe by adopting a 'herd-immunity' policy on Covid while almost every other territory clamped down on all aspects of daily life. However the real picture was not as clear as that. Some quite large companies scaled-back operations to tick-over mode.

Christer explained that the Swedish model didn't really

help the IM Nordic operation because the six countries in his portfolio had such different approaches: "Sweden did not have a national lockdown but customer demand for cars decreased significantly due to uncertainties about the future," he explains. "Even with no formal lockdown, people were not going out as much. The authorities were recommending caution so we didn't see many customers."

"Denmark had a small lockdown and closed the borders. Restaurants were shut at 10pm and people had to wear face mask on public transport. So dealers

there were affected in the same way as Sweden."

Finland had a very quick lockdown, mainly in the south. The military controlled roads in areas that were ordered to lockdown totally: "During the spring most dealer activities stopped and sales staff across all our brands were sent home on furlough," says Christer. "Sales dried up but they have come back to 80 percent since lockdown ended."

The Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania all had similarly-tough lockdowns. People were not allowed to cross borders and car

sales dropped dramatically. However, Christer is positive. He said: "When they opened again people continued to be cautious. Sales are still down about 20 percent but there are better signs now."

"We are used to adapting. Even before Covid each of the markets had different tax systems, cultures and languages. When Covid struck we had to follow the guidelines in each country and we worked together with the local dealers to follow the new rules."

"At IM Nordic we had to stop travelling outside of Sweden. Our marketing investments were reduced as the market was not there. However we made sure we kept in contact with staff and dealers in all countries via digital media and phone."

More recently some borders have re-opened says Christer: "It means we have started to travel again even if less than before. Digital media worked well for us but there is nothing to replace a face-to-face meeting."

"We had people on partial furlough until the end of summer and avoided redundancies. The degree of furlough varied depending on individual functions."

All the hard work the IM Nordic team put in during the darkest days of the pandemic to keep in contact with dealers and customers paid dividends. "We have seen sales coming back after a very slow first eight months of the year," says Christer. "In September we launched quite aggressive sales campaigns, which have been successful. Forester has been really valued and appreciated by customers who bought it. Overall, there is a positive attitude in the network."

He gives particular praise to the after-sales side of the business. "I would like to pay a tribute to all our after-sales

colleagues. They carried the business through this difficult period and delivered first-class customer service every day along with our fantastic warehouse staff. They had a high workload throughout the year and still delivered a service level of more than 95 percent of the norm."

"Every person in IM Nordic did their part to take us through a very tough time and we are now looking at the future with a positive mindset!"

Looking to 2021, Christer says there are plenty of reasons to be positive. "The introduction of the brand new Isuzu D-Max is on-going and we have just

received a show car. This is a vehicle that will help us get above a 10-percent market share in the pick-up segment. Today we are at 7 percent."

"We have started planning for the all-new Subaru Outback that will be on the market in April. Outback is one of our most important models and it's a great update! We are really excited."

He also hints at what could be more exciting news for IM Nordic in 2021. "Regarding new brands, we have been presented with numerous opportunities during this year and, together with Business Development, we are putting a lot of work into making some of them come to life. However, I think it's a little too early to say which ones..."

CHRISTER BLOMDELL



"Every person in IM Nordic did their part to take us through a very tough time and we are now looking at the future with a positive mindset!"



## SUBARU SWEDEN

The message in this advertisement – ‘Get More of What You Like’ – says it all..! In the past 14 years Swedish Subaru customers have placed the marque in the top-three manufacturers in the country’s annual ‘most satisfied’ survey organised by Vi Bilägares AutoIndex. No other brand that has managed that feat. And it’s no coincidence that customers are satisfied Subaru makes cars that last and are never compromised on safety or comfort – just the result of long-term hard work. It invites the reader to become one of Sweden’s most satisfied car owners too.



# SVERIGES MEST NÖJDA BILÄGARE

**FÅ UT MER AV DET DU TYCKER OM**

Det våra kunder är mest nöjda med är att vi gör bilar som håller, och att vi aldrig kompromissar med säkerhet, framkomlighet och komfort. Det bästa vi har att erbjuda är standard i alla våra bilar.

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IM GROUP  
Doug Wallace

# Building CSR bridges

**B**ehind the usual business measurements of profit margins, turnover and stock audits, a new driving force is emerging with wide-ranging influences. Corporate Social Responsibility, or CSR, is now seen as just as important as traditional ways of valuing a company’s ‘worth’ and is increasingly used by customers and other firms considering doing business.

The IM Group has always had CSR activities in the background. Until recently these had been informal, but the appointment of Judi Wood in 2019 as the Group’s CSR Director has seen a new, structured approach.

CRS now operates under four umbrella headings: Employees; Community; Environment and Marketplace. There is a degree of overlap, but all share the common aim of helping to develop the company and its staff in the broadest sense. Some observers say that CSR opens a window into the ‘social heart’ of a company.

Under ‘Employees’, a new CSR website – to be launched in March 2021 – will work alongside the professional development of staff and the

updated appraisal process. Retired staff have already begun to participate in mentoring and other CSR activities with their wisdom and experience benefitting young people as they continue their education in these challenging times.

Intentional leadership programmes have been launched alongside an updated educational ambassador scheme where IM staff directly help youngsters in various communities. This sees the vision and purpose of the IM Group’s outreach aims come to fruition.

Educational Ambassadors, working alongside Grace Foundation and all areas of the IM Group business, have been able to offer to schools TRACK – Training, Recourses, Activities and Consultancy Knowledge.

Mente, an international professional mental health support programme, was introduced to help staff assess, and to cope with stress and mental health issues. This has been of great benefit to staff and their families dealing with unprecedented stress during 2020.

Judi said: “All these combine to offer development opportunities and promote inclusiveness to everyone in the business. It’s a toolkit that will expand and be updated on a regular basis.”

‘Community’ highlights what every area of the business is doing to help the community in which it works or with which it is associated.

Under the ‘Environment’ heading, particular focus during 2020 for many area of the business has been setting their sustainable and environmental goals.

Finally, the title ‘Marketplace’ covers areas such as developing a Thrive-at-Work scheme. In partnership with the West Midlands Combined Authority, the scheme champions wellbeing at work – both physical and mental. Safety at work and the promotion of healthy lifestyles, is also included. IM is actively working towards achieving a recognised national award in this area.

Marketplace also includes work across the group on modern anti-slavery policies. “This is far broader than it might at first appear,” explains Judi. “It covers an

audit of all our supply chains across every division of our business and in every country in which we work or where we obtain parts or supplies.

“CSR is now fundamental to business. It gives companies and their staff a more-rounded, inclusive character, backed by firm guidelines and regulations. It also helps people and companies to develop and progress, which is exactly what the IM Group is doing. CSR is also a way for potential customers and business partners to hold up a mirror to the business.”



JUDI WOOD



# FLAGSHIP CENTRE EMERGES STRONG



A \$200-million shopping complex modeled on a British town centre became a 'beacon of hope' for thousands of Americans in 2020.

While swathes of the USA were caught in a plethora of troubles, managers at The Corners of Brookfield simply dealt with all the challenges. Could it have been down to the guiding hand of town-centre experience at the IM Properties flagship American development?

The mixed-use centre, anchored by a luxury department store and gourmet grocer, opened in 2017. It has shops, restaurants, bars, entertainment venues – including a movie theatre

and comedy club – and 244 apartments. The Corners of Brookfield, west of Milwaukee, has become a thriving town community rather than just a giant retail outlet.

But 2020 threw up huge challenges. Besides Covid-19 it faced a seven-week lockdown, a typical Wisconsin winter with 54 inches of snow, a 'retail apocalypse' due to massive changes to shopping patterns, civil unrest and protests. All this against the backdrop of one

of the most divisive elections in American history. Add to that the reputation that Americans are the most demanding customers in the world and the scale of 2020's issues is stark.

British-born Robert Gould, Vice President of IM's American operations, traces the hurdles his team have faced and how they emerged from 2020 to face a positive outlook on 2021.

He said: "There was a seven-week lockdown in

Now the store is vibrant and flooded with light and activity. It is the fastest-growing Sendik's by comparable sales growth in their chain of 17 stores.

March but essential retailers, including our grocer Sendik's, restaurants (limited to take-outs) and our opticians Wisconsin Vision, were allowed to remain open to provide vital services to the public and our 400 apartment residents.

"We had five new stores under construction, maintenance to undertake, trash to move daily, snow to clear and access to maintain for residents. Bathrooms, stairways, elevators, escalators and ☒





touchpoints had to be kept clean. We are a partly-outdoor venue and people were walking their dogs and exercising on the property. The Corners is private property but it's a very public space. The right thing to do was to keep it clean.

"The crisis was an opportunity to win the hearts and minds of our residents, customers and stakeholders who saw the efforts we took to keep them safe. Cleaning schedules were increased significantly and we maintained a very visible presence even though non-essential services and stores were closed.

"When we did reopen, we had a head start on enclosed shopping centres because we never totally closed and had been preaching and practising safety and hygiene. We expanded outdoor dining massively and that brought a buzz and atmosphere which became infectious. People wanted to be outside after weeks of being confined at home."

As the spring turned to summer visitor numbers increased significantly as people saw The Corners as a safe gathering place. "We even had people traveling 100 miles from Chicago to enjoy being with us," said Robert.



"We reopened 99.4 percent of our leased floor area and, since May, have opened four new stores and restaurants."

In a very charged atmosphere in May, protests were spreading across many cities and high-profile locations, including shopping centres, were subject of many protests. The Corners was not exempt although when 150 protesters turned up everything passed off peacefully. Rob said: "We didn't know what to expect although we had witnessed some ugly scenes of riot and looting in cities across America. I witnessed a great deal of professionalism amongst our centre management and security team which contributed to a safe and peaceful outcome.

"Covid tested the whole retail industry. Tenants across the retail industry sought rent relief and/or bankruptcy protection and landlords

have not been immune to what was described as the 'retail apocalypse'.

"Many shopping malls were severely distressed as anchor-tenants and chain stores closed. However, we reopened 99.4 percent of our leased floor area and, since May, have opened four new stores and restaurants. We hope to open the completed Improv Comedy Club in early 2021."

From mid-May Rob says an estimated 40,000 customers a week visited The Corners with many stores back to pre-pandemic sales – ahead of the same period in 2019.

He added: "Data shows that The Corners is punching well above its weight with greater or similar levels of traffic to centres triple our size. That

has to be a vote of confidence in what we do and the relevance of our tenant mix.

"Our apartment occupancy and recovery of rents have remained robust despite mass furloughs. We have consistently been 95 percent-plus occupied since March 2019.

"It's pretty clear that people love living above our town centre. Demand has not missed a beat and the residential element is clearly supportive of restaurants, entertainment and retail in this mixed use format."

Looking more broadly, Rob says: "Other shopping destinations are likely to have to go through a very painful evolution to downsize retail and create the unique sense of community we enjoy.

"I believe we will be long-term beneficiaries from this period of change as retailers see mixed-use projects with their wide offering of restaurants,



entertainment and residential being the future of their bricks-and-mortar portfolio.

"Pulling this off is taking longer than we had thought and the disruption in retail has been the biggest challenge. We didn't get everything right with the original design or delivery. But we did the right thing and corrected that."

Rob highlights the Sendik's luxury grocery store: "It was the best-kept secret at The Corners as it was accessed only from the lower parking level. We recognised that wasn't working and we put it right. Now the store is vibrant and flooded with light and activity. It is the fastest-growing Sendik's by comparable sales growth in their chain of 17 stores in the Milwaukee metro.

"We have managed to place The Corners at the heart of the community and that sense of place, comfort and almost homeliness is rare."

"Sendik's has been great to work with. It's rewarding to maintain the confidence of the owners and see the store prosper and blossom. This is a great example of what can be achieved with vision and a sense of partnership. A succesful grocery store is a key element of a mixed-use development and we noticed an increase in traffic almost instantly."

Returning to his main theme, Rob adds: "More than ever we have seen the benefits of developing a deep sense of community around our centre. This extends to our family of tenants, their staff, the apartment residents, customers, and residents of the town of Brookfield and beyond.

"Coronavirus has added to that sense of place, a sense of civic pride and belonging. People want to be here, not just to shop or dine, but to live, relax and interact here. We have managed to place The Corners at the heart of the community and that sense of place, comfort and almost homeliness is rare, particularly in a master-planned project. If we could bottle it, we could sell it by the pallet to many landlords!

"Our apartments have been so successful that there's an opportunity to further-develop and expand onto neighboring land we have under contract. We are looking at an even wider mix of uses which will add to the sustainability and that sense of community at The Corners." 📍





SUBARU IRELAND  
Doug Wallace

# SUBARU IRELAND PIONEERS NEW WAY OF SELLING

Subaru in Ireland will pioneer a new way of selling cars in 2021 bringing huge advantages to customers.

It will allow new-car buyers to purchase on-line from the comfort of their own home. While many manufacturers have tried this, with varying degrees of success, none has gone as far as the sophisticated Subaru Ireland model, which offers huge benefits.

One key advantage of the advanced system is that customers will be able to get instant part-exchange valuations. They will be able to select a new car, get a part-exchange deal and get their new Subaru delivered to their home without getting off their sofas!

Pat Ryan, Managing Director of Subaru Ireland, said: "We're very excited about the launch of this new system and we believe this

is the first time that this has been done in Ireland.

"Many other brands have tried it but none has been able to offer the advances we have made. A part-exchange valuation on-line is a first and the customer will then be able to get finance approval on-line. They can purchase a new car and get it delivered to their door all from their own sofa.

"The timing is opportune given that the Covid second wave is upon us! It gives a new meaning to the term 'home shopping' and we are really excited to be rolling this out."

Behind the scenes a huge amount of work went in to developing and tailoring the system. Specialist external consultants were called in and their highly-detailed report was shared with Subaru dealers who gave their feedback to ensure the new system worked as smoothly as possible.

The new website was shared with Subaru colleagues in Japan and IM's IT specialists were heavily involved in the development: "I must commend Pieter Stockman, from IM Nordic, who was central to ensuring this project was delivered on time and within budget," said Pat.



It will allow new-car buyers to purchase on-line from the comfort of their own home.

IM opened the Subaru operation in Ireland in 1984 and Pat Ryan took on the responsibility for the brand in 2019. He said: "Subaru is the safest, most reliable, most capable brand in Ireland. We're looking to grow our volumes significantly next year and it's a very exciting time to be working with the brand."

Alongside the new Subaru car-ordering and distribution system there was a detailed analysis of every dealership in the Ireland network. Pat explained that this was vital as the whole automotive sector was facing massive challenges. "Given the costs of producing new cars, and particularly hybrids and EVs, we have to examine every facet of the distribution chain to minimise costs," he explained.

"Everyone in the distribution chain is being challenged in relation to their margins. We have to focus on becoming leaner and more efficient in order to survive."



Dealer business cases had to be made across the network and although there were casualties, Pat is confident that the new systems will help Subaru to grow again. He predicts that actions taken now will mean that new opportunities will open in the future.

"Subaru is the safest, most reliable, most capable brand in Ireland. We're looking to grow our volumes significantly next year and it's a very exciting time to be working with the brand."


"I am passionate about the brand and I know that as long as we move with the times, Subaru will become hugely successful," he says. "We are taking a major step in the right direction now and our future is bright."

In the build up to the launch of the new website Subaru mounted a huge PR campaign focusing on digital and radio marketing. Local radio plays a major role in communications in Ireland where it has a stronger reach than local radio in the UK. 📻




**FORESTER**



**XV**




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#### SUBARU IRELAND

This advertisement gets straight to the point as it heralds the brand's pioneering method of selecting, ordering and financing a new Subaru online. It emphasises the new purchasing journey is as extraordinary as Subaru's unique models with the ability to even obtain an online trade-in and finance.



**WANT ACTION?  
JOHN'S YOUR MAN**

**SUBARU UK'S NEW MANAGING DIRECTOR IS RELISHING THE CHALLENGE AHEAD.**



John Hurtig, Subaru UK's new Managing Director, loves a challenge – an ideal qualification for taking on one of the toughest roles in the UK motor industry.

John took up his role in August 2020 and even in the high-volume September UK registration-plate-change month, saw Subaru record the largest fall in sales of any car brand in Britain. Year-to-date figures then were more than 67 percent down on the same period in 2019.

Yet John does not try to hide from the figures or the scale of the task facing him. He relishes it.

He moved from his previous position as Brand Director of Subaru Nordic where the brand had phenomenal success across six countries. Which is why John is staggered at the brand's current status in the UK.

He is passionate about Subaru and owns one privately. "It's a fantastic brand with brilliant products," he says. "Subaru's are tough, totally reliable, amazingly good value, great to drive and to tow with and have really good levels of comfort and equipment.

"It was the high build quality and amazing capability that first won it for me. Subaru's are, like many Japanese marques, premium quality and it has made Subaru one of the top-selling brands in the USA, in Scandinavia and elsewhere. So why not the UK?"

"It was the high build quality and amazing capability that first won it for me."



As John gets into his stride he becomes almost evangelical. But along with his obvious and sincere admiration for Subaru, he's also got a steely strike of realism. "I know what's ahead and in one way the solution is simple – just three words: sales, sales, sales," he said.

Interestingly he believes one of the factors that has held Subaru back in Britain in recent years is the brand's history here. He explained: "Subaru had a fantastic rallying success and it made the Impreza one of the cars that youngsters lusted after. I know – I was one of them!

"But Subaru really isn't a sports brand. We make SUVs and crossovers and that's the way ahead."

That's among the messages John has to convey, both to UK car buyers and his dealer network. But the out-spoken Subaru champion has other messages for his dealers. He warns: "It's going to be tough, very tough, and there will be tears and no doubt fights along the way. But if the dealers can share the vision, I know that we can make it together. The product is just too good."

Interestingly, John didn't start in the automotive business. At one time he ran a yacht-charter business in the Greek isles! That experience came in useful when he was asked to take on the distribution of Evinrude outboard motors for Sweden and Norway.

Even knowing little about that industry, John took sales from zero to a market share of five and then 10 percent in three years. He also worked for Honda in Sweden and, as a result of his performance, was asked to take on a role at Honda Europe, based in Slough, where he was responsible for Honda power products and motorcycle sales.

His family background is the military. His father is an officer and so was his grandfather. John did service in Sweden's Coastal Rangers unit of the country's Amphibious Corps. But ask more about what he did in this special operations unit and for once he has little to say. "Let's just say I served on several missions," is all he admits.

Spending seven years in the military, John rose to the rank of Captain before deciding



JOHN HURTIG AND FAMILY

to leave to broaden his horizon. He recalls this time in his life as 'boys to men' and, along the way, went to university specialising in human resources and law.

He's still keen on an adventurous outdoor life and lists hunting and diving among his hobbies. John and his wife, Anna, have also built four homes while a wooden summer house is in the process of being constructed whenever he can get back to his Swedish home in Höllviken, south of Malmö.

Back in August John had planned on working in the UK from Monday to Thursday and flying to Sweden for weekends with Anna and their children, Max aged three and daughter Lykke, aged seven.

But those plans became a victim of Covid as the lack of flights, travel restrictions and quarantine regulations meant that John was stranded in the UK. Never deterred, he has thrown himself at cracking the Subaru sales issues.

While he did a lot of behind-the-scenes work and went out on a mission to

meet as many Subaru dealers as possible, John deliberately kept his first few months in his new job low key. He explained: "Subaru in the UK has seen so many changes in leadership over the years that I didn't want to be seen as the new saviour that would make everything right overnight.

"It's going to be hard work. If it were easy I wouldn't be here so I want to get down to it."

Looking to future products, John plays his cards close to his chest. "To be honest Subaru has never pretended to be the first with drive-trains. We've got the great Boxer engine and four-wheel-drive technology, but it's well known that Subaru and Toyota are working together on EVs."

He won't be drawn on detailed timing, but reassures future buyers: "EVs are coming. So the future could be interesting..."

He's also realistic about a UK sales revival. "Subaru isn't a brand for everyone," he admits. "If you are a



young person, living in central London, why would you need a 4x4 car with the rugged capabilities of a Subaru?

"But the image of Subarus being just for older buyers and people such as vets in rural areas is equally wrong. Young families – particularly now – like an active lifestyle. They're not out every weekend climbing K2, but they like outdoor adventure trips and I believe that Subaru is the best car for their needs." 📧

**Footnote:** Subaru sales bucked the trend in the UK car market in October. Official figures issued by the Society of Motor Manufacturers & Traders showed that Subaru sales increased by 12.5 percent while the market dropped by 1.6 percent. New-car sales in Britain were almost 31 percent down from January to October.



# HELPING SPEED VITAL MEDICAL SUPPLIES

**A decision taken seven years ago has proved to be a shrewd and highly-successful investment by IM Properties.**

Back in 2013 the property wing of IM acquired a 90-acre site just three miles from the centre of Birmingham and went on to develop The Hub – helping to fulfil the city's urgent need for warehousing and logistics centres vital for 'last-mile' deliveries to the heart of Britain's second city.

Interest in the development – which is also home to Birmingham's new Wholesale

Markets, specifically built by IM Properties for Birmingham City Council in a joint partnership – was strong from the outset. It sits as a keystone in the council's ambitious targets under Birmingham City Council's 20-year 'Big City Plan.' The council's vision was for the creation of more than 50,000 new jobs built on new businesses contributing around £2.1 billion to the local economy each year. A central part of that plan was for badly-needed warehousing for the fast-growing service sector.

Even the Covid pandemic could not stand in the way of the success of The Hub. In August 2020, right in the middle of the rising crisis, IM Properties let the final large unit on the development. UPS Healthcare's Polar Speed company, one of the UK's leading temperature-controlled supply chains, took a 15-year lease on a 100,529 sq ft unit for its new warehouse and transportation hub in the Midlands.

It will allow Polar Speed to offer direct-to-pharmacy, direct-to-hospital and direct-

to-patient distribution of vital pharmaceutical supplies with the addition of 23 new routes to the firm's delivery network in the region.

Polar Speed's unit, called Hub 100, is state-of-the-art for medical supplies, offering temperature-controlled warehouse space of 2°C to 8°C and 15°C to 25°C and frozen storage ranging from -20°C to -80°C. The unit has space for 8,000 pallets.

The letting is one of the largest industrial deals in the city since the Covid lockdown began and reflects

the on-going resilience of this sector in the region.

As IM Review went to press, just two smaller units of 30,000 sq ft and 22,000 sq ft remain at The Hub while the Polar Speed unit completed nearly 300,000 sq ft of speculative space constructed and let at the development.

The Hub has easy access to the main A34 and to the A38 Aston Expressway, which link Birmingham city centre with the M6 motorway at Spaghetti Junction. Immediately opposite the site is Witton railway station with trains to Birmingham's revamped New Street station taking less than 10 minutes.

Other high-profile names which have taken space at

The Hub include TNT, and Kitchencraft. The famous Birmingham firm now has 4,000 lines of kitchen and home wares and sells in more than 80 countries with a turnover of £50 million.

**Polar Speed's unit, called Hub 100, is state-of-the-art for medical supplies, offering temperature-controlled warehouse space of 2°C to 8°C and 15°C to 25°C and frozen storage.**

Argos on-line occupies the UK's first Electricity Cost Neutral Buildings ([ecn.co.uk](http://ecn.co.uk)) which was pioneered and delivered by IM Properties in 2017 at The Hub.

Richard Sykes, Development Manager for IM Properties, said: "The new hub provides final-mile delivery solutions for Polar Speed's customers. Less than three miles north of Birmingham city centre, it is about as prime as you can get. Their long-term commitment to Hub 100 evidences the quality of our speculative building as well as the wider industrial park.

"The letting will be welcomed by the city and the region, attracting significant inward investment from Polar Speed at a time when the local economy is looking for a

much-needed boost," adds Richard. "We're pleased to let the final large unit at The Hub and will now be concentrating on attracting what we believe will be smaller local operators looking to expand."

Doaa Fathallah, Senior Vice President of Polar Speed added: "Polar Speed has undergone a tremendous period of growth while providing innovative solutions to bring our clients closer to their patients.

"This new hub is a next step in ensuring that we are proactively anticipating clients' needs for capacity and will provide fully-regulated, end-to-end services, to 98 percent of UK postcodes." ■



# IM CITROËN IRELAND ENDS ON A HIGH NOTE

After five years of successfully building the Citroën brand in Ireland, IM's contract with Groupe PSA is due to end on 31st March 2021.

This follows a move by Citroën's parent company to rationalise its European operations. With the increase in costs of manufacturing and tighter margins for all brands, PSA made the decision to have one importer for all its brands in each of its European markets.

"My staff have put their hearts and souls into turning this business round and we have made huge strides in the past two years."

In 2015, when IM won the rights to sell Citroën cars and vans in Ireland, it inherited a brand that was struggling in the Republic. During the



PAT RYAN AT IM'S ORIGINAL DUBLIN CITROËN SHOWROOM

next five years IM invested huge amounts of money, time and resources to resurrect the Gallic brand.

Pat Ryan, who heads IM's vehicle operations in Ireland, reflects on the huge human investment too: "It's acknowledged that IM inherited a totally-different Citroën operation to the much-healthier one that we will be handing on," he says.

"I have to praise the huge efforts of my staff and our dedicated dealer network. They put their hearts and souls into turning this business round and we had made huge strides in the past two years with an expanded dealer network. We had even-more-ambitious plans for the future.

"So when PSA made its move it was a real shock. We have

put everything, and more, into making Citroën a force to be reckoned with here. Our customers have been happy and loyal. We have a great dealer network and we had many other car dealerships across Ireland approach us.

IM invested huge amounts of money, time and resources to resurrect the Gallic brand.

"It is testament to our excellent performance that we have exceeded 2019's registrations of cars and vans in a market that has declined by 22 percent. We are the fastest-growing mainstream brand in Ireland. We accelerated sales of the Berlingo, for example, to become the second-best selling van in Ireland and just 150 units less than the sector leader."

Pat pointed out that by October 2020 Citroën had exceeded the total 2019

full-year sales figures from the 23 dealerships in the Republic. He said: "We have been approached by firms in Ireland keen to open a Citroën dealership under the IM umbrella because we had earned such a good reputation for being great to work with. Our style of being open, honest and ambitious were respected and, of course, we and our dealerships were being increasingly profitable. It's such a shame."

Pat, who hails from Limerick, became Managing Director of both Subaru and Citroën in Ireland in 2017, is a man with the automotive business coursing through his veins. He is a graduate of University College, Dublin where he studied mechanical engineering.

His baptism in the auto industry started in the heart of the modern car industry working for Nissan in Japan where he specialised in designing automatic gearboxes. He went on to work for JATCO, another Japanese transmission specialist, but this time



IM'S ORIGINAL DUBLIN CITROËN SHOWROOM

based in Warwick in the UK. There he worked on a number of projects, including automatic gearboxes for Jaguar Land Rover.

During his career Pat took an MBA and progressed to working with several brands before joining IM's operation.

As IM Review was going to press it was understood that Groupe PSA had awarded the Citroën and DS brand franchise in Ireland to the Gowan Group, which previously held the franchises

to distribute Citroën cars and vans across the country.

It was also understood that, following discussions between IM UK and Gowan, the majority of IM jobs would transfer to Gowan, which would also maintain the existing dealership network.

Pat said: "IM are relieved that the people responsible for driving the success of the Citroën brand will be actively involved going forward. Gowan will be responsible for the DS brand

"IM are relieved that the people responsible for driving the success of the Citroën brand will be actively involved going forward."

effective immediately and are planning on opening up a new DS Salon imminently."

Andrew Edmiston, Managing Director of the IM Group, paid tribute to the IM Citroën staff and dealerships. He said: "We are disappointed that we have to give up the franchise in Ireland having put so much time, hard work and financial support into the operation.

"We had turned the brand around in Ireland and the last year or so had seen some really good signs of things getting even stronger. I would like to pay tribute to Pat, his staff and the dealerships for their outstanding work and commitment." 📸



# CHINA BUSINESS POWERING BACK

**M**any people might be nervous about sitting in Martin Dalton's office in the heart of Beijing.

China was the country where Covid-19 is said to have originated. But Martin, IM's Director of Business Development who runs the Group's Chinese operations, is the epitome of calmness. He merely says that the business will end 2020

ahead of target and looks forward to 2021 with relish!

Yet behind that cool, calm exterior lies a story of a tremendous effort by Martin and his team to overcome everything that was thrown at them. Two total national lockdowns and an inevitable slowdown in the Chinese economy left the team undaunted.

In true understatement Martin says: "It's been an interesting year for Business

Development as we have coped with two lockdowns totalling around six months."

China went into lockdown during the Chinese New Year at the end of January 2020 – an important marker in the Chinese national calendar when almost the entire country goes on holiday: "So essentially our Beijing office did not reopen after the long holiday," he explains. "And with the domestic travel restrictions imposed then, it meant our Chinese staff – who had travelled away during the holiday – could not return!

"Eventually our office reopened in March, just as the UK went into lockdown. And with travel restrictions remaining, all Chinese domestic business travel was on hold until well into April."

You might think that a three-month forced office closure would have a severe impact on the China business performance. However, the picture was far more positive. "Actually the impact on our operations was not as bad

as you might expect," says Martin. "We have field-based engineers spread across China working on our Vehicle Certification Agency (VCA) business. So as soon as customers located near to our engineers reopened, we were able to resume work almost immediately."

The VCA business has come back so strongly that Martin is now looking to recruit more engineers to cope with additional work. This is mainly due to China's drive to export more vehicles, especially to Europe.

With more than 20 years experience of the cycle of commerce in China, Martin had already mapped out his business model: "This was important and it's why we budgeted for very little income for the first quarter. This was mainly down to the Chinese New Year holiday. So the initial lack of income, and then restarting the business following lockdown, was largely in line with our planning."

Taking a measured view of business in China, Martin observes: "The Chinese economy had been struggling for a number of reasons prior to Covid-19. So the impact of lockdown was a double whammy. But I'm happy to say that our Vehicle

Certification Agency and trading operations have emerged from lockdown very well. They will finish 2020 ahead of budget."

IM's Autoglym business in China proved more stubborn to restart, especially as a good number of Martin's customers were not allowed to open until July. "But we saw signs it was returning to normality from October," he said.

Re-opening the Beijing Office in Tongzhou, not far from the staggering new \$17-billion Beijing Daxing International Airport, proved to be a challenge: "Very strict criteria were laid down by the Beijing City Government and the

**"One thing that Covid has taught us is that we can operate and grow in the face of disruption and that with hard work and determination anything is possible!"**

Central Government," he says. "But our Chinese colleagues embraced these temporary rules and regulations in the interests of getting the office reopened as soon as possible.

"Given the nature of our office it allowed us to socially-distance staff, which meant opening up an unused office floor to ensure that everyone could return."

Martin says that by late October it appeared that the Covid situation in China was under control: "Most of our colleagues have had several negative tests and life is starting to return to normal. Many of the restrictions still in force in Europe have now been lifted here."

Back in the UK one additional staff member, Gurjit Sohal (known as GJ) joined the Business Development division in September as a PPE Telesales Executive: "This is a new project where we have sourced high-quality products aimed at businesses to help protection against Covid infection," says Martin. "She was recruited to sell high-quality PPE – mainly face masks – which we sourced in China. Initially this was to get our own business up and running after lockdown. But after that we decided to roll it out as a new business opportunity."

In conclusion Martin said: "The lockdown presented many challenges. I am immensely proud of the Business Development teams, both in the UK and China. Our Chinese colleagues adapted to working from home quickly, as did the UK staff, but were also very keen to get back to the office and to get the business back to as 'normal' as possible.

"One thing that Covid has taught us is that we can operate and grow in the face of disruption and that with hard work and determination anything is possible!" 🇬🇧



# Bright dawn of 2021

**As 2020 draws to a close Martin Dalton says 2021 could be a really significant year for the IM Group with new ventures on the horizon.**

As the Group's Director of Business Development, a lot of Martin's work is carried out quietly in the background. While the day-to-day aspects of all IM's business divisions tend to be immediate, much of Martin's work involves taking a long-term approach, developing contacts, nurturing potential deals and, above all, being diplomatic.

However, 2021 could see several of these slow-maturing deals come to

fruition – and some may surprise many people!

Martin said: "Despite a double lockdown in China work never really stopped in terms of overall business development and the search for new automotive franchises.

"Work intensified with Great Wall in the past few months as they look to launch Wey, their new-energy-vehicle brand, into Europe. Hopefully we will see the fruit of this work in the coming months."

The Wey brand, the fourth in Great Wall's stable, was named by Jack Wey, the billionaire chairman of Great

Wall, after his family. Great Wall is recognised as one the fastest-growing automotive companies in China and the Wey brand pitches itself as China's first true luxury brand.

Versions of Wey SUVs were unveiled at the Frankfurt Motor Show in 2019. That promoted the UK's Autocar magazine to comment: "Wey's entry into Europe will be one of the most intriguing yet for a Chinese car maker given that it was set up with the express intention of global exports

**"Wey's entry into Europe will be one of the most intriguing yet for a Chinese car maker."**

and is trying to position itself as a maker of quality and desirable SUV models."

Alongside internal combustion engine SUVs, Wey has developed electric versions and these are expected to be launched in Europe in 2021. Germany is likely to be the first market with others following.

Martin has been busy elsewhere too. "We are working with another high-profile Chinese brand that we hope to secure for Sweden," he reveals. "We are also seeing a number of global manufacturers, and are looking closely at how they distribute product.

"We have a number of conversations running that we are hopeful of coming to reality, including a sports car manufacturer and a high-profile truck manufacturer. So as Torbjörn Lillrud, the International Motors Managing Director likes to put it, we are really 'going outside of the box' in order to secure great opportunities for International Motors." 🚗



THE WEY VV7 SUV

IMReview

# FUTURE IN FOCUS

**Between the time that I wrote the introduction to this edition of IM Review and sitting down to write this regular piece that ends the Review, something new (for me) but perhaps predictable, happened. I tested positive for Covid-19.**

It is, perhaps, fitting that this happened, given the extent to which Covid has dominated the working year at IM Group. Despite our extensive preparations and the amount of thought, time and money we have given to protecting staff at our HQ, we had a mini outbreak of Covid

during November. Thankfully, and as has been the theme of this year, there was no panic involved and the policies and procedures we had put into place were put into action. We closed the office for a week during half term, following which, another national lockdown was announced.

Once bitten, twice shy, as the saying goes. Despite a national, collective groan at Boris's new lockdown announcement, we felt even better prepared than for the first lockdown. We instinctively knew what we needed to say in terms of guidance to our car dealers; we knew how to move ☑



forward with our Spitfire sites and how to manage the movements and requirements of our other businesses and our own staff. But this article is supposed to be about the future I hear you say?

The thing is, the future has always been what we make of it. I'm used to working on the principle that much of what affects our business life, we don't get to decide – taxation, regulation, competitor activity and such like. But in this season, the period over which this proves true is massively shortened! Nobody can say 'next month, or next week, we will do this or that'. It changes so quickly. What we can always influence, though, is our reactions and responses. The real change, and the way to deal with the near future, is to make sure we react and respond quickly.

### So, the future?

In many ways, a crisis like Covid is designed to extract the best from a company like ours. Does that mean it doesn't hurt? Of course not. There are lots of things that have really hurt this year, not least of which is the redundancies we made during 2020. I'm therefore not going to offer some cleverly-scripted, motivational phrase or sentence. Instead I'm



going to offer a reminder that I had, from my own Covid experience, of a truth I know. Thankfully, Covid was very mild for me and really only lasted a couple of days. When trying to find information on the internet about what to expect, most of what you look at is, subconsciously or otherwise, designed to frighten the life out of you.

Here's the truth I know; I believe it is important not to worry about tomorrow – today already has enough to occupy your efforts. Worry is debilitating and has a nasty habit of bringing about some of the things you were worried about in the first place. Instead, be vigilant, be purposeful, be confident and do your best. React to what you know and can reasonably

predict, not what you are afraid might happen. And, above all, remember that we always get to decide how we respond. So let's make sure we do decide – plan, act, react – and not just let the world 'happen' to us.

I'll finish with a short story of something I remember from many years ago. I was in Zimbabwe and went white-water rafting on the Zambezi. Turns out that is a pretty dangerous thing to do. The instructions given are that if you fall out of the raft in a rapid, it's impossible to swim against the flow, but you can swim across it. This is important to do so that the raft 'captain' can guide you which way to swim so that you avoid rocks and other dangerous

We should not try to rage or fight against what is impossible but instead look to exert enough control to steer to safety and continue the exciting ride.

things that he can see from the raft but you cannot.

When I fell out, I remembered what he said and found that, yes, while it was impossible to swim against the flow, I could be guided to safety by remembering that not being able to swim against the flow does not mean you have no control at all. He told me to swim right, then left, then right again. Once we were through the rapid and into calmer water, I clambered back on board (quickly – there were crocodiles in the calm water!)

The lesson is that we should not try to rage or fight against what is impossible but instead look to exert enough control to steer to safety and continue the exciting ride. That is what I believe we will do. 🍀