

Insight magazine

December 2025 / January 2026



Argyle expands regional presence with new Warrington office

Home care company named among Europe's top diversity leaders
Climbing 97 places in Financial Times report

Cheshire and Warrington
Aiming to be the fastest-growing region



■ L-R Richard Fraser-Williams (Business Wales) Derek McKeon (Market Inn), Ian Adams, Esther Rigby (both Bathgate). Picture: Kat Hannon.

£524k finance package supports launch of Market Inn accommodation

The historic Market Inn in Llangefni is set to launch its accommodation offer, with eight beautifully designed bedrooms available, thanks to a £524,000 funding package arranged by business finance specialists and Chamber member, Bathgate Business Finance.

The finance was supported by an £8,500 SPF grant, administered on behalf of the Isle of Anglesey County Council's by Menter Môn's Hwb Menter.

Following an introduction from Richard Fraser-Williams at Business Wales, Bathgate provided a loan from The Bathgate Capital Fund and worked with funders BCRS, Selina, 365 Business, and Reward to secure asset finance and loans to purchase kitchen equipment and furniture and facilitate extensive building works.

Originally built in the early 20th century, the inn has been a local landmark for generations, standing as a testament to Llangefni's rich heritage as a bustling market town.

In 2023, the venue was purchased by Derek McKeon, who has owned and ran neighbouring establishment The Foundry Vaults for more than 21 years.

He had a vision to renovate and modernise the venue and add accommodation, while maintaining architectural features such as its mansard roof and gabled dormers, preserving the building's history as a purpose-built town pub of the interwar years.

Early stages of the project were supported by grants, council funding and Derek's own investment, but the extensive bar and kitchen fit out and accommodation plans required additional funding.

Derek said: "I had my eye on the Market Inn as soon as it came up for sale, because I was certain of its potential. Securing additional finance while we were not trading was a real challenge, as the hospitality sector was seen as a bit of a gamble for many funders and banks, and most lenders wanted six to 12 months of trading figures.

"After coming to meet me at the venue, Esther Rigby from Bathgate immediately saw the potential for the Market Inn, with its history, the plan for a great food and bar offer and the addition of eight bedrooms, in an area where there is a lack of other accommodation on offer.

"Bathgate used their expertise in alternative finance and extensive network of funders to find solutions and really offered the personal touch. They were extremely hands-on, fully behind the project and at the venue all the time, making sure we got it over the line."

Market Inn reopened in December 2024 with a state-of-the-art kitchen, serving top-quality food crafted with the finest local produce, while work continued on the development of the eight bedrooms.

The recent £8.5k grant provided by the council allowed Derek to finance the final touches to the accommodations, with the eight en-suite bedrooms expected to launch in November 2025, so people visiting Llangefni for business or leisure, will have a beautiful, historic place to stay and relax.

Speaking of the deal, Esther said: "Derek has 30 years' experience in the industry and fantastic local knowledge through his ownership of The Foundry Vaults. There was also a real need for more, high-quality accommodation in the area, so we could see the potential for this to be a successful year-round business.

"He has completely modernised the Market Inn, while maintaining its historic features and charm that have made it a Llangefni landmark for generations. This kind of project is complex, and it takes time to find the right solutions, but we are pleased to have been able to bring funders from our network together, and provide finance from The Bathgate Capital Fund, to create a package that works for Market Inn.

"We're so excited for the launch of the new accommodation and wish Derek and his team the best for all their ambitious plans - we're sure it will be a roaring success."

Richard Fraser-Williams, from Business Wales, added: "It's been a pleasure working with Derek to bring the Market Inn back to life, and to develop a much-needed accommodation offer in Llangefni."

For more information, bookings and reservations, visit: market-inn.co.uk

For more information about Bathgate Business Finance visit bathgatebf.co.uk, call Esther Rigby on 07384 540714 or email esther@bathgatebf.co.uk

From the Chief Executive

Stephen Fitzsimons



When the Chancellor stood up to deliver the November Budget the headlines weren't great.

Government borrowing was higher than expected, rising to an eye watering £17.4bn in October. Retail sales fell by 1.1% for the same month as consumers held back on making major purchases. This was reflected in overall economic growth of just 0.1% for the third quarter of the calendar year, a depressing trend that has been the norm since the global financial crisis in 2008. The government aimed for growth, whilst paradoxically burdening businesses with higher living wage and national insurance costs.

So has anything changed? Only time will tell, although those (me!) taking advantage of electric

vehicles on a salary sacrifice scheme will feel an immediate hit on the daily commute. Smaller town centre retailers will appreciate the permanent business rate reduction and the traditional taxi firms will be able to compete more effectively with Uber. Thankfully, corporation tax remains unaffected, with enterprise tax incentives now rewarding early years start-ups. The nuclear sector will be encouraged by the objective of cutting red tape - vital for maintaining the cluster of major companies based at Birchwood Park.

However, the National Living and Minimum Wage have increased again to £12.71 and £10.85 respectively per hour. Politicians fail to appreciate that when this

happens, every other employee on the pay scale asks for their rates to be increased in order to maintain a competitive differential. One bakery owner told me that shop supervisors expect a certain gap in pay from shop assistants to justify the extra responsibility. This is then repeated with the Assistant Manager and Shop Manager so that every person in every outlet demands the same increase. This is the difference between growth and stagnation.

It feels like the current administration is already on thin ice with voters and the downgraded annual growth of 1.4 to 1.5% will make it difficult for the public to feel the benefit on a daily basis, other than (hopefully) a much needed improvement in

public services. Business doesn't really care who is in charge, so long as they have some certainty for their investment decisions. The Budget has at least laid out the issues and opportunities in equal measure. Warrington commerce will proceed with caution as it always has and we'll take the wins when they come.

Take care with the cold,
Stephen

Entries now open for High Sheriff of Cheshire Enterprise Awards

The 2025/2026 High Sheriff's Awards for Enterprise are now open for businesses, charities and individuals from Cheshire, including Warrington, to submit entries.

Launched by Joëlle Warren MBE DL, High Sheriff of Cheshire 2025/26, the awards are now in their 19th year in partnership with the University of Chester to celebrate innovation, initiative and impact across Cheshire, Halton and Warrington.

The Awards are open to businesses and charities of any size that are based in Cheshire West and Chester, Cheshire East, Halton and Warrington.

The winners of the region's premier enterprise awards will be announced at a special ceremony on Thursday, March 19 with guest speaker Paul McGee, the SUMO guy, at Churchill House, the home of the award-winning University of Chester Business School.

The seven categories which will be judged by a panel of senior members of the business community are:

- High Sheriff's Award for

Innovation sponsored by EA Technology

- High Sheriff's Award for Sustainable Development sponsored by Grosvenor
- High Sheriff's Award for Promoting Social Mobility sponsored by University of Chester
- High Sheriff's Award for Outstanding Community Engagement sponsored by Cheshire Community Foundation
- High Sheriff's Award for Outstanding Family Business
- High Sheriff's Award for Young Person in Business sponsored by Barlows
- High Sheriff's Award for Excellence in Enterprise sponsored by Mornflake

Joëlle Warren MBE DL, High Sheriff of Cheshire 2025/26, said: "Applying for the High Sheriff's Awards for Enterprise is a great way for charities and businesses to showcase and receive recognition for their achievements. I've heard from past winners that winning one of the awards has not only served

as validation of their commitment to excellence and innovation, but it's led to opportunities for further innovation and development. I know from over 25 years in business and charity leadership in Cheshire myself, there are lots of great businesses and charities across the county that would be worthy recipients so I hope they'll apply."

Kirstie Simpson, Dean of Chester Business School, said: "The High Sheriff's Awards for Enterprise serve as a highlight in the Cheshire

business calendar, bringing us together to acknowledge the remarkable accomplishments of businesses and other organisations within our county. The University takes real pride in supporting the vital work undertaken by Cheshire businesses to bolster the regional economy."

Entries close on Wednesday, January 14 2026. For full terms and conditions to enter please visit: www.chester.ac.uk/about/high-sheriffs-awards-for-enterprise/



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Stephen Fitzsimons, Chief Executive

Prepare your business for pension reforms

By Leavitt Walmsley Associates

The Government's upcoming pension reforms are designed to help savers achieve better retirement outcomes. They'll also bring significant changes for employers too under The Pension Schemes Bill, which is currently progressing through Parliament. The Bill sets out a series of updates to how workplace pensions will be managed, regulated and consolidated over the coming years.

According to Government estimates, the average worker could be £29,000 better off in retirement once the changes are fully implemented. Here's our blog by our Payroll Services team with everything you need to know.

What are the changes to workplace pensions?

The pension reforms focus on improving value for money, increasing transparency, and simplifying how pension schemes are managed. Key changes include:

- Consolidation of small pension pots under £1,000 into larger, better-value schemes
- Tougher standards for pension providers, who will need to prove their schemes deliver good long-term returns for members
- A move towards larger "megafund" schemes, designed to reduce costs and improve investment opportunities
- New guided retirement products, helping savers make informed decisions when drawing their pensions
- Improved access to pension information through online dashboards that show all savings in one place.

Together, these measures are intended to make pensions fairer, more efficient, and better suited to long-term financial wellbeing.

Why are pension reforms being introduced?

The reforms aim to make pension saving fairer, simpler and more valuable for employees.

For employers, the changes will mean new compliance responsibilities and greater focus on scheme performance. The Government's workplace pensions roadmap highlights several priorities:

- Consolidating smaller pension pots into larger, better-value schemes
- Setting minimum size and performance standards for default schemes
- Requiring pension providers to prove value for money
- Improving saver engagement through pensions dashboards
- Introducing guided retirement products to support better decisions in later life.

These steps are intended to strengthen the UK pension system, improve long-term returns and

ensure employees are getting the most from their savings.

When do the employer pension reforms come into effect?

Timings will depend on when the Pension Schemes Bill passes through Parliament, but the roadmap suggests a phased rollout between 2026 and 2030 for most defined contribution (DC) scheme measures.

Defined benefit (DB) scheme reforms including potential access to surpluses and changes to the Pension Protection Fund levy, are likely to follow between 2027 and 2028.

The key message from Government is that the direction of travel is clear: larger, better-governed pension schemes offering stronger value for savers. Employers should start preparing now to ensure their chosen scheme aligns with that vision.

Automatic consolidation of small pension pots

A major part of the reform is automatic consolidation.

Small pension pots (typically under £1,000), often created when employees move jobs, will be automatically merged into larger, authorised schemes that meet "good value" standards.

For employers, this will reduce the administrative burden of tracking multiple small, inactive pots, and may simplify payroll reporting in the long term.

Pension schemes must prove value for money

Under the new rules, pension providers will need to demonstrate that they offer long-term value, not just low fees. The focus will shift to outcomes such as how well the scheme performs for savers over time.

Employers will need to ensure their default pension scheme meets these requirements. If it doesn't, you may be required to switch to a different scheme that does. A poorly performing pension scheme could also harm your reputation as an employer and affect staff retention.

Details on consolidation and 'megafund' reforms

The roadmap sets out an ambition for a smaller number of large-scale "megafund" pension schemes by 2030, each managing at least £25 billion in assets.

This move aims to reduce fragmentation, lower costs, and increase investment opportunities for schemes – but it also means smaller schemes may need to merge or transfer members.

Employers should check with their pension provider to understand:

- Whether their scheme meets the expected size and value thresholds
- If future consolidation could affect their existing workplace pension arrangements



Leavitt Walmsley Associates
CHARTERED CERTIFIED ACCOUNTANTS

- How employee benefits and contributions might be managed during any transfer.

Supporting employees in retirement: guided defaults and CDC options

The reforms will also introduce guided retirement default products to help savers make better decisions when drawing their pension.

This means schemes will have to provide clear, practical options at retirement age, reducing the risk of savers making poor investment or withdrawal choices.

In addition, Collective Defined Contribution (CDC) schemes which share investment risk more evenly across members, will be extended to allow multi-employer participation. This could become a new option for some employers in the years ahead.

Improving engagement through pensions dashboards

The introduction of pensions dashboards remains a key feature of the roadmap.

These online platforms will allow employees to view all their pension pots in one place – including workplace and state pensions – helping them keep track of savings and plan for the future.

Employers may start to receive more questions from staff once dashboards are widely available, so being prepared to explain how your company pension scheme fits into the bigger picture will be helpful.

Why pension reforms matter to your business

These reforms will have a direct impact on how employers manage their workplace schemes and communicate benefits to staff. Here are some of the key points to consider for your business:

- Compliance: Schemes that fail to meet value-for-money standards may require changes or replacement.
- Retention and recruitment: A high-quality pension scheme remains one of the most valued employee benefits.

- Operational impact: Consolidation and dashboard reporting may streamline some administrative tasks but require system updates in the short term.

- Financial opportunities: Well-funded DB schemes could benefit from new rules allowing controlled access to surplus funds once the reforms are enacted.

How employers can prepare now for pension reforms

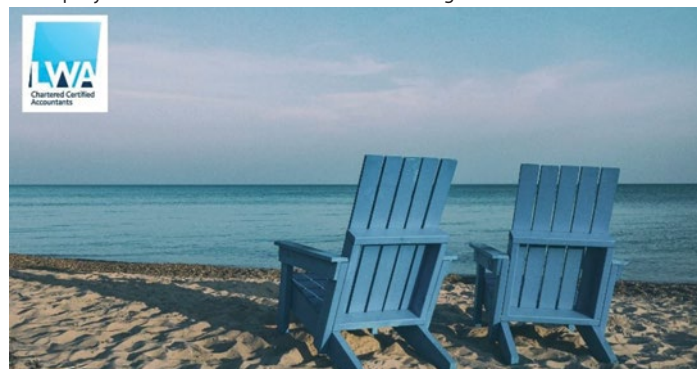
It is a good idea for employers to take a few practical steps to ensure that both your pension arrangements, and your employees, are ready for the changes ahead:

- Speak to your pension adviser: They can help you assess whether your scheme meets the upcoming standards and advise on next steps.
- Review your pension provider: Ask how they're preparing for consolidation, guided retirement options and dashboard integration.
- Communicate with employees: Keep staff informed as changes roll out to maintain confidence in your benefits package.
- Re-evaluate your pension strategy: This is a good time to consider how your pension scheme supports employee wellbeing and retention.

Pensions Reforms Support from the Payroll Services and Corporate Tax Teams at LWA Accountants & Business Advisors

By taking early action, employers can stay ahead of the upcoming changes to workplace pensions, protect compliance, and continue offering a pension scheme that supports employees' long-term financial wellbeing.

For further information, advice or support bespoke to your business, you can speak to the Payroll Services or Corporate Tax teams at LWA, on 0161 905 1801 in our Manchester office, or 01925 830 830 for our Warrington branch.



Home care company named among Europe's top diversity leaders by the Financial Times

Local home care company Home Instead has been recognised as one of Europe's leading champions of workplace diversity in the Financial Times Diversity Leaders 2026 report, climbing 97 places to rank 312th out of 800 companies across the continent.

The company also placed seventh in the Healthcare (Social) sector, confirming its position as a key national employer driving inclusive growth.

With its National Office in Warrington, Home Instead delivers exceptional home-based care across the country through its franchise network and was recently announced as the third best employer in the UK, as featured in the Financial Times Best Employers 2025 list.

Since 2019, the FT-Statista survey has analysed thousands of companies across Europe, drawing heavily on employee feedback and independent data. Metrics assessed include representation of women in leadership, diversity-focused communications and overall inclusivity culture.

Home Instead employs a diverse team across its nationwide network,

reflecting the communities it serves. Beyond its core care services, the company actively supports and celebrates events such as Pride Month, International Women's Day, and local cultural occasions, building a workplace that values individuality and collaboration.

Martin Jones MBE, CEO of Home Instead UK and International commented: "We are thrilled that our continued commitment to diversity has once again been recognised in the Financial Times Diversity Leaders ranking. Inclusivity is at the heart of everything we do, and it's rewarding to know our employees value and experience this in their day-to-day work. Representing the UK home care industry in this prestigious ranking is a great honour, and we remain committed to championing diversity as we continue to grow."

This recognition further cements Home Instead's reputation as a trusted local employer, business leader and advocate for equality, making a positive difference both in the workplace and across the wider community.

To find out more about Home Instead please call: 01925 358715 or visit www.homeinstead.co.uk



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HELP TO GROW: MANAGEMENT

Accelerate your business performance, resilience, and leadership.

A practical, 12-week development programme for senior leaders of small and medium-sized businesses delivered by Liverpool Business School.

- 12 sessions
- £750 fee (90% funded)
- 50 hours over 12 weeks
- Blended learning
- Peer networking and 1:1 mentoring

HELP TO GROW
MANAGEMENT COURSE



WHO IS IT FOR?

Leaders, founders or senior managers in UK-based SMEs (5–249 employees) operating for over a year. Up to two people per organisation (if employing 10–249 people).

WHAT YOU'LL GAIN

- Bespoke business growth plan
- Strategic and operational leadership skills
- Insights into innovation, marketing, finance, and team development
- Support from a mentor and a network of peers
- Tools for immediate and long-term business improvement.

ELIGIBILITY SUMMARY

- UK-based SME (5–249 employees)
- Profitable Charities and CICs
- Operating for at least one year
- Senior leader with at least one direct report

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN: Programme Structure and Content

The programme is delivered over 12 structured sessions, designed to build your confidence, capabilities and business strategy.

Strategies for Growth and Innovation

Sessions 1–3

- Strategy and Innovation
- Digital Transformation
- Exploring New Markets

Engaging with Customers

Sessions 4–6

- Vision, Mission and Values
- Developing a Marketing Strategy
- Building a Brand

Building a Sustainable and Agile Business

Sessions 7–9

- Organisational Design
- Leading Change and Employee Engagement
- Creating a High-Performance Culture

Operational Efficiency and Financial Management

Sessions 10–12

- Improving Operations
- Financial Management
- Implementing Your Growth Action Plan

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■ Today Team founder Jamie Boyd with Tim Beswick and Martin Lever.

Today Team founder adds Elite Logistics to multi-million-pound portfolio

A former Warrington Wolves player has acquired a second logistics business in just three years.

Jamie Boyd, 44, has officially taken over Elite Logistics in an asset-based deal – adding to his multi-million-pound same-day courier company, Today Team.

The Risley-based entrepreneur, who is celebrating 20 years on the road this year, added Speedy Courier Services to his portfolio over the summer of 2023.

“I know how a good courier business works – having built Today Team from scratch and just one van,” said Jamie, who turned to logistics after a knee injury ended his rugby-playing career.

“All the learning we took from

acquiring Speedy Courier Services gave me the confidence to secure Elite Logistics – a fantastic business founded by two young entrepreneurs who have pivoted into the fitness industry. My goal now is to complete a hat-trick, so I’m actively looking to make a third deal – putting us firmly on track to reach £5m turnover by 2028.”

Operating out of Barnsley in Yorkshire, Elite Logistics was set up 10 years ago by Tim Beswick and Martin Lever, who built the company into a nationwide operation. On exiting the courier industry, Tim said they were keen to ensure their customers were left in safe hands.

“We were looking for a seamless handover – a buyer with the experience and infrastructure to

deliver the same reliability we have built our reputation on,” said Tim.

“Today Team is the perfect fit. Jamie has walked a similar founder journey to us. He knows what’s at stake in our industry, where every delivery counts. We wish him well and have no doubt that our customers are in the best possible hands.”

Initial priorities for Today Team are integrating Elite Logistics’ day-to-day operations into Today Team’s systems and processes – a project Jamie is personally leading.

“I’m getting hands on because, as I’ve learned over the years, you need to understand any business from the inside out before making any strategic decisions,” he

explained. “I’ve got an excellent team who are primed to deliver the best possible onboarding experience to customers – and that’s our focus for the foreseeable future.”

Having marked 20 years in business in May and welcomed his first child over the summer, Jamie said this latest acquisition is yet another cause for celebration in a year filled with personal and professional milestones.

“Elite Logistics is an excellent addition to what we’ve got going on at Today Team,” said Jamie. “I am hopeful that, by this time next year, I’ll have completed another acquisition. I’m open to serious conversations with owner-operators who are ready to activate their exit strategy.”

United Utilities announces more partners to support record investment

Warrington-based United Utilities has announced the partners on its Motor Control Centre (MCC) Framework to support delivery of its £13.7bn AMP8 investment programme.

Through the new framework United Utilities has increased the numbers of its MCC supply chain partners to six. Following a competitive tender process, Lloyd Morris, WH

Good, RSE, Quantum, Cema and Bridges have been appointed.

MCC panels are critical for the successful operation of major assets in both water and wastewater networks. The framework secures a robust supply chain to provide a range of modularised products and as well as bespoke solutions.

With a focus on improved

efficiencies including shorter lead times the MCC partners will play a crucial role in delivering the scale of capital projects being delivered in AMP8 and support business as usual requirements.

Jane Simpson, Capital Delivery Director at United Utilities, said: “MCC panels play an incredibly important role in helping us deliver water and wastewater services to

three million people across the North West.

“AMP8 sees us delivering an unprecedented level of investment upgrading and introducing new infrastructure. It is vital that we are supported by partners who can develop bespoke solutions where needed yet also help us establish a suite of modularised products for adoption.”

Warrington's Own Buses celebrates double awards success

Warrington's Own Buses is celebrating a remarkable double success after receiving top honours at two major industry award ceremonies in London.

The company was named Winner of the Best Fleet Electrification Initiative at the prestigious EVIE (Electric Vehicle Innovation & Excellence) Awards, recognising its bold and successful transition to an all-electric bus fleet. On the same evening, Warrington's Own Buses was also Highly Commended in the Exemplary Contribution to Net Zero category at the National Transport Awards.

These accolades highlight Warrington's Own Buses' commitment to delivering cleaner, greener and more sustainable transport for the town. The company completed the roll out of its all-electric fleets earlier this year, supported by investment from the Department of Transport's Zero Emission Bus Regional Areas (ZEBRA) scheme and Warrington Borough Council, making Warrington one of the first towns in the UK to fully electrify its bus network.

Ben Wakerley, Managing Director of Warrington's Own Buses, said: "We're incredibly proud to receive national recognition for our work to decarbonise Warrington's bus network. Electrifying our fleet has been a major undertaking, made possible by the dedication of our team and our strong partnership

with Warrington Borough Council. These awards are a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together to deliver a cleaner, brighter future for local transport."

Councillor Hans Mundry, Leader of Warrington Borough Council, said: "Congratulations to Warrington's Own Buses for their fantastic double success. It's a great achievement, highlighting the company's successful commitment to a sustainable future for our town."

"Warrington's transition to an all-electric bus fleet is bringing huge environmental benefits for our town, including a reduction in carbon emissions and an improvement in local air quality, along with quiet, smooth, and comfortable journeys for all our passengers."

"It's fantastic to see this transformation receiving national praise, further solidifying Warrington's Own Buses' position as a national leader in green public transport."

The EVIE Awards celebrate excellence and innovation across the UK's electric vehicle industry. The National Transport Awards honour outstanding achievements in UK transport and infrastructure.

Warrington's Own Buses' success at both events reinforces its position as a national leader in sustainable, forward-thinking public transport.



■ Lynda Cookson (Head of Facilities & Safety) and Karl Hutchison (Engineering Director) at the EVIE Awards.

Local charities to be helped by new AI partnership

Cheshire Community Foundation (CCF) has launched an innovative collaboration to bring the transformative power of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to the voluntary sector across Cheshire and Warrington.

This strategic alliance with Warrington-based consultancy, Insightful AI, aims to equip smaller charities with the tools and expertise to adopt AI both safely and efficiently.

Ben Sefton, co-founder of Insightful AI, has been appointed as CCF's new Chief AI Officer on a pro-bono basis. This move makes CCF one of the first community foundations in the UK to dedicate a leadership role to AI strategy.

Ben said: "We're building frameworks that smaller charities can adapt themselves. By embedding ethics and governance from the start, we can help the sector harness AI's potential while maintaining the trust communities expect from their local charities."

The initial phase of the partnership will focus on embedding AI

capabilities within the Cheshire Community Foundation itself. Following this, the program will scale up to offer support, tailored training, and practical frameworks to hundreds of voluntary organisations throughout the region.

Mel Sproston, Chief Executive of CCF, highlighted the foundation's unique position: "As investment flows into the North West's tech sector, Community Foundations are uniquely placed to maximise community benefit."

"This partnership strengthens our capability to adopt AI safely and extends that expertise across the voluntary sector."

"We're excited to bridge the gap between tech innovation and community impact."

A core component of all upcoming initiatives will be a strong emphasis on risk management, regulatory compliance, and ethical usage. Training programs are scheduled to commence in 2026, following the completion of initial pilot schemes.



■ Ben Sefton.

Cheshire and Warrington aims to be the fastest-growing region

Cheshire and Warrington is aiming to become the UK's healthiest, most sustainable, inclusive and fastest-growing region by 2045, following approval of an ambitious economic strategy by the area's Combined Authority Shadow Board.

The board has backed the Sustainable and Inclusive Economic Strategy (SIES), a blueprint to deliver the highest rate of economic and productivity growth in the north, slash carbon emissions by 4.5 million tonnes annually by 2030, and expand access to transport, digital infrastructure and quality housing while reducing poverty.

The strategy harnesses the region's existing economic firepower—nearly one million residents and over 41,000 businesses including national strengths in clean energy, life sciences and advanced manufacturing—to accelerate clean energy leadership, restore nature, and create opportunities for all.

CLlr Nick Mannion, deputy chair of the Cheshire and Warrington Combined Authority Shadow Board said: "We're building from a position of strength, with productivity already outpacing the rest of the North West and the national average. Devolution gives us the

tools to turn that advantage into transformational growth, with more local control over the decisions that shape our communities' futures in both rural and urban areas."

The strategy arrives as the region prepares to establish a Mayoral Combined Authority early next year, unlocking at least £650

million in funding over 30 years and transferring key powers over transport, economy and skills from Whitehall to local leaders. Residents will elect their first Mayor in May 2027.

Developed through summer consultation and backed by expert analysis, the 81-page blueprint

maps how regional leaders will partner with government and business to deliver the vision.

For more information about the Cheshire and Warrington devolution programme, visit cheshireandwarringtondevolution.com



Chamber treated to healthy Asian meals

A very hungry Chamber team was excited to receive delivery of We Need Good Food's latest culinary creations. Established in 2023 by Hong Kongers Michael Woo and Herbert Chow, their mission is to bring traditional, healthy Asian food to UK consumers.

Chef Anson prepares the meals daily from premises in Warrington before freezing and transporting across the UK. Only the finest natural ingredients are used to prepare delicious gourmet ramen with authentic tastes across Asia, including Malaysian chicken,

Japanese Tonkotsu Pork and spicy mala tang.

Michael Woo commented: "We chose to set up in Warrington because it is strategically located between Manchester and Liverpool, bridging the realms of commerce and the arts. We are extremely rigorous about the quality of our food, striving to provide an exceptional dining experience at a reasonable price. From selecting ingredients to perfecting the seasoning, we spend a lot of time finding the right combinations to enhance the

flavors and depth of our dishes."

Carolyn Kasangwa, Digital Marketing Manager at Warrington Chamber Plus added: "The team couldn't wait to receive a delivery from We Need Good Food. The dishes were really easy to prepare

and the Singapore seafood laksa was really good."

Ramen can be purchased online at www.weneedgoodfood.com or from several retail outlets across the north west.



New virtual assistant franchise will support businesses across Warrington

Warrington's business community is set to benefit from a brand-new source of professional support as local entrepreneur Melanie Pollard launches the region's first Alchemy Virtual Assistance (VA) franchise.

The new hub, based in Warrington, will provide flexible, high-quality virtual assistant and business support services to professionals and growing companies across Warrington and the North West, helping them save time, improve efficiency, and focus on what matters most – running and expanding their businesses.

With more than 25 years' experience as a Legal PA, Paralegal, and Business Support Specialist, Melanie brings a wealth of knowledge and professionalism to her new venture. After a successful corporate career, she is now using her expertise to empower other business owners through trusted remote administration, project coordination, marketing assistance, and executive PA services.

Melanie said, "Having worked in corporate environments for many years, I know the pressures that small business owners and busy professionals face every day. I wanted to use my skills to make a real difference and to help local enterprises thrive. Alchemy VA gives me the freedom to build something meaningful here in Warrington while being part of a supportive, values-led community."

Her services will cover everything from diary and inbox management, document drafting, transcription, and event coordination, to social media and marketing support. As a recently qualified Menopause Coach and long-standing Treasurer and Trustee of a local children's

theatre charity, Melanie's approach is rooted in empathy, care, and community spirit – qualities that resonate strongly across Warrington's business network.

Alchemy Virtual Assistance, founded in 2016 by Suzy Sanders, is the UK's only family-run VA franchise network, supporting entrepreneurs, small businesses, and professionals nationwide. Since franchising in 2019, the company has expanded to nine regional hubs, each built on its founding principles of professionalism, compassion, and integrity.

Alchemy VA Founder, Suzy Sanders, said: "We're thrilled to welcome Melanie to the Alchemy family. Her professionalism, warmth, and commitment to helping others perfectly embody our values. Warrington is a dynamic hub for innovation and enterprise, and Melanie is ideally placed to support and strengthen that network."

Melanie's Warrington hub represents a key milestone in Alchemy's national expansion and underscores the growing demand for flexible, people-focused business support across the North West.

Members of the Warrington Chamber of Commerce are encouraged to connect with Melanie to learn how virtual assistance can help streamline their operations and unlock new opportunities for growth.

For more information about Alchemy Virtual Assistance, their services, or franchise opportunities, visit www.alchemyva.co.uk or contact Melanie directly at melanie.pollard@alchemyva.co.uk



Calling all community-first businesses: join Living Well Warrington!

Are you a local business or sole trader working to make life healthier, happier, or more connected in Warrington? If so, you are exactly who this is for.

Living Well Warrington is an online, national award-winning platform, built in partnership with local health and wellbeing organisations. Together, we are building a vibrant, town-wide network of businesses and services dedicated to wellbeing, connection, and community support, and we are opening the door to those who share these values.

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Join Living Well Warrington today – and help build a stronger, healthier, more connected community.

Get started now visit www.livingwellwarrington.org/business or email the team at lww@warringtonva.org.uk to find out if your business is eligible for membership.



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Promote your local business on Living Well Warrington with a 'Community-first Business Package', for a small fee* supporting the running costs.

*Some exemptions apply, visit the site for details

livingwellwarrington.org/business

Warrington digital marketing agency Beech achieves prestigious B Corp standard

Beech Web Services Limited has become one of just over 2,500 UK organisations to achieve B Corporation certification, joining the global movement of businesses committed to social and environmental responsibility, as well as good governance.

Following a rigorous assessment process spanning several months, the Warrington-based digital marketing agency received official B Corp certification on 31st July 2025. The achievement recognises Beech's commitment to operating ethically and sustainably while delivering successful digital marketing services to clients across the UK.

Founded in 2011 by Roz Healey, Beech has grown organically from a flexible work solution for a single parent into a thriving four-person agency. The company specialises in creating sustainable WordPress websites and promoting them through SEO, paid advertising, social media management, and email marketing.

The B Corp certification process required Beech to answer over 200 detailed questions about its operations, provide extensive documentary evidence, and achieve a score above 80 in the final assessment. The company also updated their articles

of association to commit to operating for the benefit of the community and the planet, not just shareholders.

Roz Healey MSc, Director of Beech, commented: "We'd seen much larger companies achieving B Corp certification, and it felt like something we could only dream of. When our Development Manager, Sophy, asked, 'Why don't we do it?', it was the catalyst we needed. Achieving this milestone without external consultants, just through our small team's commitment and determination, makes us incredibly proud."

The certification validates Beech's existing approach to business, including its sustainable practices, long-term support for local charity Creating Adventures and partnership with the TEDxWarrington event. Its focus on building sustainable websites and operating ethically aligns perfectly with the values of B Corp.

For Beech clients, the B Corp certification provides clear evidence they're working with a values-driven, stable, and well-managed agency. Research from B Lab shows that small and medium-sized UK B Corps in 2024 saw a 23.2% increase in turnover, compared to the national average of 16.8%.

Roz added: "I think B Corp certification is a fantastic way of signalling to others that we are serious about what we do and that we are not prepared to pursue profit at the expense of our community or the planet. This is just the next step for Beech in our journey towards operating as ethically and successfully as possible."

Now officially B Corp certified, Beech is well-placed to connect with larger businesses and work on more substantial projects, particularly with organisations that share its sustainable values.

The company continues to support local businesses and charities while maintaining its commitment to ethical digital marketing practices.

For organisations looking for a values-driven digital marketing partner, Beech Web Services offers comprehensive services from their Warrington base, supported by talented virtual workers and consultants across the UK.

To find out more about Beech Web Services Limited or to discuss a digital marketing project, visit www.beechwebservices.co.uk



Investing in local: Warrington Chamber chooses local clothing supplier for new corporate wear

Warrington Chamber has appointed Cactus Clothing to produce its corporate clothing under the new Chamber Plus Branding.

Established in 2005, Cactus has been supplying a variety of work and educational wear from its Culcheth base. Customers include local schools, hotels, construction companies and corporate headquarters.

The Chamber team has received polo shirts featuring an embroidered two-colour design of the new logo which will be live with the relaunched website on the 1st January 2026.

Chamber Chief Executive, Stephen

Fitzsimons commented: "It's really important that we look to our local supplier base when procuring a product or service, be it a photocopier, website or branded clothing. The Cactus team attend many of our regular events and we wanted to repay some of that loyalty with an investment of our own".

Cactus Director, Raghu Kankonkar added: "We have been supporting local companies for over 20 years so it's great to see our shirts being a part of the Chamber's latest evolution. We're looking forward to extending our range across Warrington and the north west".

For all your clothing branding needs, www.cactusclothing.co.uk



Birchwood Park celebrates North West's role supporting UK's first small modular nuclear reactors

Birchwood Park has welcomed the UK government's decision to pioneer small modular reactors, which will significantly boost the North West's nuclear industry.

The government announced that the reactors, which will be located in Wylfa, Anglesey, are to be constructed by Rolls-Royce SMR who are based at Birchwood Park.

The reactors are expected to deliver power for the equivalent of around 3 million homes as part of the government's clean energy superpower mission.

Commenting on the news, Martin O'Rourke, Commercial Director at Birchwood Park, said: "This announcement from the government will have a significant, positive impact for the North West's economy as we play our part in the UK's clean energy strategy.

"Our region is home to the UK's leading nuclear engineering, innovation, and testing facilities, as well as the country's largest concentration of nuclear jobs – with over 6,000 nuclear specialists and 30+ organisations located on the Park alone.

"The economic potential of the North Wales site expands well

beyond its borders – helping to unlock exponential growth for the North West, which will only accelerate as the role of nuclear expands. At Birchwood, we will ensure we are ready to work with our occupiers to harness this potential."

Birchwood Park forms a key site in the Cheshire Science Corridor and is one of the UK's largest hubs for the nuclear services industry. The site contains over 500,000 sq. ft of development land with outlined planning consent.

It is home to the Northern Nuclear Alliance (NNA), which also has

welcomed the UK government's decision to pioneer small modular nuclear reactors.

NNA Chair, Rachel O'Donnell commented: "The announcement signals a bold step from Government in revitalising Britain's nuclear industry, recognising the indispensable role nuclear will play in our energy strategy.

"The NNA and our 60-plus member organisations across the North West are ready to support the small modular reactor rollout, by bringing our world-class supply chain, manufacturing heritage and operational expertise.

Together we will ensure the UK not only meets domestic energy needs, but competes globally in nuclear innovation, job creation and industrial growth.

"We look forward to working with government, the selected small modular reactor technology providers and supply-chain stakeholders across the UK to maximise regional benefit, and to realise a sustainable, high-skills future for the North West."

To learn more about Birchwood Park, visit: www.birchwoodpark.co.uk



Lymm firm launches high voltage division to drive growth

Lymm-headquartered Key Integrated Services, one of the fastest growing specialist engineering companies in the UK, has launched a high voltage (HV) division to help expand its operations.

The new offer supplements the company's existing low voltage (LV) electrical expertise and will enable the business to offer complete electrical engineering services to customers across the UK.

"The launch of the HV division was the next logical step in the evolution of our business," says Saul Beresford, director at Key Integrated Services. "For a while now, we've had customers asking whether we could take on HV work given our reputation in the LV space. And the answer now is a resounding yes. To aid the success of the division, we've recruited Gavin Price, a veteran in the HV space with an enviable list of industry contacts, to ensure we hit the ground running."

The new HV division will offer a range of services including Distribution Network Operator (DNO) applications and full HV design and consultancy as well as installation, commissioning and ongoing maintenance and operation of HV infrastructure. These new services will enable Key Integrated Services to

strengthen its relationships with customers in sectors including data centres, energy, industrial and manufacturing as well as explore new opportunities in other industries.

Industry veteran Gavin Price has joined the company to head up the division. He has more than 20 years working in the HV space with experience gained at companies such as UK Power Networks, Ipsium and RSK Utility Consulting. Alongside holding key certifications including IOSH Managing Safely and APM project management, he has a wealth of expertise in managing the effective completion of both contestable and non-contestable works.

"The opportunity to join Key Integrated Services was just too good to miss", comments Gavin Price. "The company has an exceptional track record in delivering high quality mechanical and electrical engineering projects and I'm looking forward to building a dynamic HV Division focused on growth and operational excellence. On a personal note, I've reached a point in my career where I'm seeking the opportunity to build something within an organisation that upholds exceptional values and champions innovation."

For further information about Key Integrated Services, visit keyis.com



■ Gavin Price.



Engineering and construction firm wins employer of the year accolade

Bilfinger UK is celebrating after being recognised for its contribution to industry at the 13th annual Engineering Construction Industry (ECI) Training and Development Awards in London.

The Warrington-headquartered company received the Large Employer of the Year award at a prestigious ceremony at Glaziers Hall to honour the very best of engineering construction talent.

The event, organised by the Engineering Construction Industry Training Board (ECITB) and hosted by Dr Maggie Aderin-Pocock, brought together industry leaders, as well as the rising stars of tomorrow, for a celebration of excellence in training and development in the ECI.

The ECI spans sectors that focus on the construction, maintenance and decommissioning of heavy industry, such as many of those Bilfinger operates in like oil and gas, nuclear, power generation, pharmaceuticals and chemicals.

As one of the UK's largest providers

of engineering and maintenance services and employing more than 4,000 skilled professionals nationwide, Bilfinger was recognised by the judges for its commitment to investing in its people to "keep up with the fast-paced changes of the industry".

The company, which has operations spanning the UK, including Aberdeen, was praised for the value it places on the "critical importance of a safe, skilled and experienced workforce" and its efforts to build a sustainable pipeline of talent to meet the evolving demands of the energy sector.

In particular, judges highlighted Bilfinger's commitment to hire 400 new entrants by 2028; its upskill programmes for semi-skilled workers; and its leadership role on the Connected Competence scheme.

Bilfinger was handed the trophy by award category sponsor, Sellafield Ltd.

Stephanie Broadley, Training and

Competency Manager at Bilfinger UK, said: "I am thrilled that we have won as we didn't expect it.

"It's wonderful to be recognised by industry like this, but for us it doesn't matter if we win awards or not as we operate at this level all the time.

"Our aim is to ensure that our people are competent, know what they're doing and are happy in our workforce."

A judging panel of industry representatives – made up of Tracey Shelley (BCECA), John Simpson (ECIA), Mark Riley (Phillips 66 Limited), Steve Hunt (Altrad) and Helen Woodward Davies (EDF Energy) – picked the overall winners based on the significant contributions they have made both to the ECI and their own organisations.

ECITB Chief Executive Andrew Hockley said: "As the industry-led skills body for engineering construction, we are committed to developing the skills needed for the delivery of critical

infrastructure projects, energy security and net zero ambitions across Great Britain.

"We spoke of this commitment when launching our new strategy, Leading Industry Learning, back in September, which outlined how we will help to address skills shortages and support industry growth amid an increasingly complex and fast-changing external environment.

"We highlighted how achieving the outcomes from our 2026-30 strategy will require collaboration and commitment well beyond the ECITB alone.

"It fills me with great hope, therefore, to see this commitment to skills development showcased throughout industry in the inspiring entries we received this year for the awards.

"Congratulations to Bilfinger UK and to all the winners and finalists, who are great examples of these success stories over the past year and set standards to which we all aspire."

CRIMPIT – one of the fastest growing businesses in the North

WARRINGTON-based CRIMPIT has been recognised as one of the 50 fastest-growing businesses in the North of England by the UK Fast Growth Index for 2025.

The achievement underlines the Winwick Quay company's significant impact on its market and its capacity for growth and innovation.

While fast growth firms represent a small fraction of all companies, they contribute to a significant proportion of new jobs and prosperity in the UK economy every year. They are also often at the cutting edge in their respective industries, bringing innovative products, services, and processes to the market and, as a result, making a tremendous contribution to their sector.

All the firms on the list have been entered for the UK Fast Growth Awards being held in London on November 26 where the winners will be recognised as the fastest

growing in their sectors and their regions.

Mike Harper, founder of CRIMPIT, said: "2025 has been one of the most exciting years in our journey so far. We've expanded our product range and also gone global.

"This is all still managed from our HQ here in Warrington, so we're delighted to be recognised as one of the region's fastest growing companies. Our products are proving enduringly popular and with lots of brilliant partnerships with other food innovators, we will keep building on this popularity – both locally and globally."

Professor Dylan Jones-Evans, founder of the UK Fast Growth Index said: "The UK Fast Growth Index demonstrates how a small number of fast-growing firms such as CRIMPIT can make a substantial contribution to the UK's economic landscape, providing real examples of how innovation, enterprise and sheer hard work can make a

real difference in all sectors from construction to financial services to technology.

"This small group of businesses that grow quickly continue to

play a significant role in driving economic growth. They create jobs and contribute to the economic development of the communities in which they are based. "



■ Founder Mike Harper with co-founder Ian Critchlow.

Argyle expands regional presence with new Warrington office

Argyle has further strengthened its presence across the North West with the opening of a new office at the Genesis Centre in Birchwood.

Strategically positioned in one of the region's key development hubs, the new office enables Argyle to support its growing portfolio of surfacing, civils, and adoptions projects across Warrington and the wider North West.

"Birchwood is home to many of

our clients and partners, making it the perfect base to support our regional growth," said Ben Shaw, Director at Argyle. "Having a local base here means we can work more closely with our clients, particularly as neighbouring Birchwood Park continues to be a focal point for housebuilding and development in the North West."

The move follows Argyle's appointment to the Warrington Borough Council Highways

Capital Works Framework, where the company will deliver key infrastructure and civil engineering schemes over the coming years.

It also builds on the acquisition of Lornford Construction in 2023, which has further strengthened the Argyle Group's geographical reach across Crewe, the North Midlands, and North Wales.

"This growth marks another exciting chapter for Argyle,"

added Ben. "By increasing our footprint in the North West, we can strengthen relationships, enhance responsiveness, and continue delivering the high-standard, reliable service we're known for."

With this expansion, Argyle reinforces its commitment to building long-term partnerships, improving infrastructure, and investing in the communities it serves.



Kemtile welcomes back Jay Livingstone

Kemtile has welcomed Jay Livingstone back as Sales and Business Development Manager to help drive sales in Scotland and the North of England.

Kemtile is one of the UK's leading specifiers and installers of industrial hygienic flooring has over 40 years of trading experience in the UK, specialising in single source hygienic flooring and wall solutions.

It offers a full turnkey service from groundworks to finish, including drainage systems, kerbs, guardrails, and wall protection products, to suit a variety of manufacturing environments with a focus on longevity, quality and compliance.

Jay has enjoyed a 25-year career in sales and worked across pretty much all aspects of flooring from installations, contracting, estimating, project management, national business development and more.

He commented: "There is not much I have not seen and experienced. Having worked for the company before, I know I will be back

working with a team of highly skilled flooring specialists with an excellent reputation. I have jumped at the chance to get back involved with former colleagues and friends."

He brings a wide range of contacts into the role and is looking forward to meeting new people and responding to fresh challenges. He added: "I believe respect in life is earned through hard work."

He joins Kemtile at an exciting time for the business with ambitious growth targets – now part of the international Stonhard Group – still led by the vastly experienced Jamie Cook. Jay again: "Jamie has taught me so much about professionalism and that working as a team is fundamental to success."

On Jay's return Jamie Cook commented: "We are delighted to have a man of Jay's experience back in the fold. He brings years of connections, an understanding of what makes a great industrial floor across a range of sectors, and having worked across many roles, can sell with confidence."

He will play an important part in achieving our goals in the next few years."

When Jay is not working, he is

usually playing football, golf or enjoying the martial art, Taekwondo. He also likes cars and hiking and experiencing different cultures on his travels.



B-engineering strengthens governance with latest appointment

B-engineering has appointed David O'Byrne as Non-Executive Director, bringing over four decades of experience, with a deep commitment to customer and colleague care, values that are at the heart of B-engineering's mission.

David has an impressive career journey, directing Europe's biggest supplier of full facilities management services to one of the big four supermarkets, Asda. Whilst leading a team of over 11,000, he secured a ten-year contract extension worth £2.2 billion, with an additional contract extension of five years for another major retailer, M&S.

David stated: "My legacy of working with city facilities has helped me to realise the benefit of working with customer centric and colleague caring owners and operators. Whilst my ambition was to silently disappear into retirement, I'm delighted to work with Rob and Vicki, owners of Birchwood-based B-engineering. Their values align perfectly with mine, so I know this is going to be an enjoyable venture."

With David O'Byrne on board, B-engineering is confident that his leadership and dedication to care will enhance the company's growth and success.

Rob Ditchfield, B-engineering's MD

commented: "We're delighted to welcome David to the team as we continue our growth journey. Our business is built on supporting leading facilities management companies, and having someone

with David's deep understanding of the client side and their expectations of contractors like us will be invaluable in helping us deliver the highest standard of service to our FM partners."



■ Rob Ditchfield, David O'Byrne, Victoria Ditchfield, Craig Johnson.

New look to the mornings at Cheshire's Mix 56

Cheshire's Mix 56 now has a new look to its morning radio slot.

Breakfast presenter Smithy joined Ian James, who previously presented the mid-morning show to form the new 'Smithy and Ian at Breakfast' show, from 7am to 10am Monday to Thursday. The new pairing promises more focus on local stories and a great mix of music to get the day started for listeners across Cheshire.

Ian James said: "Joining Smithy on breakfast is incredibly exciting. We can't wait to bring plenty of energy, laughs, and great tunes to help people start their mornings with a smile"

Following breakfast, the station will keep the energy flowing as Phil Roberts steps into the 10am to 1pm slot with his own mix of classic hits, community features,

and conversation. Phil, a well-known voice on the local radio scene and former Marcher Sound/MFM breakfast presenter will bring his trademark charm and enthusiasm to the late morning audience.

Station Director Paul Smith said: "We're absolutely thrilled to refresh our morning offering. This new lineup strengthens our commitment to providing vibrant, local radio that connects our listeners to the heart of life in Cheshire. Phil is a great addition to our team and is at home in Cheshire where he used to broadcast to on Marcher Sound /MFM"

Smithy and Ian at Breakfast launches Monday 3rd November, followed by Phil Roberts in the morning slot from 10am. Tune in on DAB, online, or via the Mix 56 app.



■ Smithy and Ian.



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info@warrington-chamber.co.uk

Amentum wins prime positions on multi-billion-pound Sellafield Decommissioning Framework

With nuclear laboratories and engineering test facilities in Warrington, Amentum has secured positions on a new multi-billion-pound framework to deliver expert decommissioning solutions for the Sellafield nuclear site.

Under the 15-year Decommissioning and Nuclear Waste Partnership (DNWP), Amentum will carry out remediation work on disused facilities and retrieve hazardous waste from legacy ponds on the site in Cumbria, England.

After competitive tendering, Sellafield Ltd selected Amentum as the remediation partner for work inside the site's High Security Area and also selected The Decommissioning Alliance (TDA), a joint venture comprising Amentum, AtkinsRéalis and Westinghouse, as pond retrievals partner. The share of the work that could be awarded to Amentum is up to an estimated value of £1.4 billion (\$1.9 billion USD).

"We will bring world-class, multidisciplinary, end-to-end engineering and project management capabilities to the UK's most significant nuclear legacy challenges while also delivering outstanding performance on safety,

collaboration, social impact and key supply chain management," said Loren Jones, senior vice president, Amentum Energy & Environment-International.

"Our reputation for safe, reliable delivery and the unceasing drive for innovation to answer our client's evolving needs make us the ideal partner to advance the Sellafield mission," said Mark Whitney, president of Amentum Energy & Environment.

As remediation partner, Amentum's focus will be on waste-led decommissioning, including clearance of redundant buildings to make land available for beneficial re-use and preparatory decommissioning work on the UK's oldest nuclear reactor complexes and fuel handling facilities.

Amentum will deploy a full suite of technical offerings during remediation to optimise end-states integration including: digital visualisation to aid engineering design; geospatial data analysis for topographical surveys; robotics and augmented reality; and Threadsafe, an AI-based tool which uses natural language processing and knowledge graphs to map relationships in

interlinked document sets such as nuclear safety cases.

As ponds partner, TDA will retrieve hazardous radiological material from the First Generation Magnox Storage Pond and the Pile Fuel Storage Pond, so that it can be treated and moved to modern storage and disposal facilities.

To accelerate retrievals, Amentum will deploy pioneering, robot-operated technology such as the Bulk Sludge Retrieval Tool, a vacuum suction system for safely removing radioactive sludge from nuclear fuel ponds and pumping it away for processing and packaging. Remotely operated vehicles will be used for inspection, sampling, retrieval, cutting and handling of waste in high-radiation zones, enabling

safer and more efficient high-hazard reduction, while innovative methods for transferring radioactive waste from storage skips into shielded containers will improve efficiency by reducing overall volumes.

The DNWP framework covers operational nuclear facilities and those which are undergoing post-operational clean out, decommissioning and demolition.

Sellafield Ltd expects spending on remediation to increase between now and 2040, subject to public spending constraints, as more facilities on the site cease operations. The DNWP framework will be Sellafield's route to market for end-to-end, high-hazard risk reduction programs.



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