

# BUSINESS

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## IN BRIEF

### Addressing safety on the farm this week

THE Farm Safety Foundation is holding its ninth annual Farm Safety Week until July 23, a campaign that aims to draw attention to and reduce the injury risk farmers across the UK face on a daily basis.

With long hours, intense physical labour, low pay and at the mercy of the elements, farming is a difficult industry to work in but still nearly half a million workers are choosing to be farmers today.

Yet, for a workforce that accounts for a mere 1% of Britain's working population, the industry accounts for nearly a quarter of all workplace fatal injuries, giving it the poorest safety record of any occupation.

Unfortunately, farm safety is an issue rarely discussed outside of agricultural circles but, according to the UK's leading farm safety charity, the Farm Safety Foundation, this is exactly what we should be doing.

Now in its ninth year, Farm Safety Week brings together five countries over five days with one clear goal – to speak up for safety and encourage farmers to rethink risk so we can reduce the number of life-changing and life-ending incidents happening on our farms.

### Brand Britain and the impact of Brexit deal

SIX months on from Brexit, new research from leading business and financial adviser Grant Thornton UK LLP finds that almost three-quarters (74%) of mid-sized businesses in the West Midlands believe Brexit has strengthened "Brand Britain".

In a survey of mid-sized businesses, Grant Thornton found that "Brand Britain" is considered to be an advantage to West Midlands based firms looking to venture into new international markets, with 74% of the region's businesses believing it is helpful when trading internationally and only 4% disagreeing.

While Brexit posed a level of uncertainty to many businesses at the start of the year, most (58%) of those surveyed believed that they were well prepared for the impacts felt from Brexit so far.

But the transition has not come without its challenges. The research identifies the impacts felt from Brexit in the region's mid-market over the past six months including setting up new overseas operations, trade compliance issues, VAT compliance and haulage costs.

By **STEPHEN SINFIELD**  
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BURTON small businesses have been bucking the trend thanks to a network group set up to support entrepreneurship in the town.

Business Focus Burton was started three years ago by four independent firms to support local small businesses following statistics which show many firms fail within the first five years.

The group offers peer support, guidance, expert advice and business referrals to help independent firms and encourage entrepreneurship.

Since then, the group, which has more than doubled its members, has seen thousands of pounds invested in to Burton firms with one business trebling its turnover thanks to the support it provides.

Philip Levy, who runs Open Formula, based in Branston, says without the much-needed mentorship, like many others, his business wouldn't have survived the last few years while mortgage adviser Allan Robertson, of Equity Select, based in Stretton, found the connections invaluable after moving from Scotland to Burton in 2018 and is now taking on staff to keep up with demand.

According to Federation of Small Business statistics, small businesses make up 99.3% of all businesses in the UK – at the start of 2020 5.94million small businesses – with 59% of all businesses being sole traders.

Unfortunately, more than half of all businesses fail within the first five years with the latest statistics from the Office of National Statistics (ONS) showing only 42.4% of businesses started in 2013 were still trading five years later in 2018.

Business Focus Burton was created to bridge that gap and not only provide financial business opportunities but support new firms with ongoing advice and guidance to buck the trend and help local businesses get past the five year milestone.

Talking about his experience Philip Levy, of Open Formula, said: "When I first started my company five years ago it was hard to get the balance right. I had four years of website development and had worked on numerous industry web platforms.

"But as a sole trader it was a whole new learning curve focusing on the full range of business skills needed.

"Overnight you suddenly have to be a marketing expert, accountant, sales person and I was finding the business being very busy but not necessarily finding the right pricing structure or knowing how to keep a steady stream of clients.

"Latterly, as the business has grown, I have had support from the group and group related training courses to structure and thin out my customer base in the right way, increasing profitability.



Members of Business Focus Burton meeting at Branston Golf and Country Club

## Group offers a helping hand for small businesses

"Meeting the team at Business Focus Burton it was like I suddenly had a team of experts around me – people who knew and understood my pain points, could offer practical advice and make sure I steered the business in the right way."

Three years on and Open Formula has trebled its turnover, created lasting business collaborations with other local firms, had some great social events with them and built long lasting friendships.

Mr Robertson has found his business has benefited from a range of expertise within the group which has resulted in over £14,000 of business in the last two years as his company grows taking on extra staff to keep up with demand.

He said: "Being able to talk to other members about ideas or business plans over breakfast where none of them are your competition and all of them want you to succeed really makes a difference.

"This encourages members to be

more open and normally results in solutions being found to what could otherwise feel like difficult problems when you are too close to the source."

Stuart Reynolds, who lives in Burton and runs Midlands firm Quadros Financial Solutions, has seen a 28% increase in business since joining and has found the support invaluable.

He said: "Not only are the group there for referrals but for help and direction, too, I have been able to approach members for advice and guidance. "It has also been a great confidence builder allowing me to practice and become more confident with presentations and public speaking."

As the group celebrates its third year anniversary the committee are now looking at offering more targeted events through out the year to continue supporting and helping local businesses to thrive.

"Since we started, the group has

kept growing and now has over 20 regular members," said Richard Barry, of marketing and design agency Forty49, based in Tutbury, who is one of the founding members.

"We are all like-minded business people who not only share business but support one another to grow both financially but personally as well.

"Running a business can be lonely and it is important to have a good support network around you to help you learn new skills, offer advice and help you grow in confidence.

"It is great to be marking three years in the town and we are looking forward to offering a variety of new events this year to further grow the group."

Founded in July 2018 Business Focus Burton, which has now more than doubled in size, meets every week at Branston Golf and Country Club on a Thursday morning to share business, advice and tips to support business growth in the town.

The group has a one seat policy and is always looking for new members allowing guests to visit to decide if the group is for them before joining.

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