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# Stratford-on-Avon Business Conference 2026



*Driving growth and ambition across the District*



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# Welcome

Stratford-on-Avon District remains proud of its connection to Shakespeare, whose legacy continues to attract visitors and drive a strong tourism economy. This long standing cultural heritage enhances the area's reputation and contributes to sustain commercial growth across the District.

Stratford-on-Avon offers an environment where businesses of all sizes can thrive. With a combination of historic character, modern infrastructure, and proactive leadership in land use, planning, and economic development, the District is increasingly recognised as a prime location for commercial property investment and new inward investment opportunities.

Located in the heart of South Warwickshire, the District benefits from direct access to London, Birmingham, and other key hubs via the M40, the Chiltern Main Line, and soon HS2. This level of connectivity strengthens regional links, supports commercial property values, and encourages continued commercial development. Approximately 95% of the UK population is reachable within a four-hour drivetime, offering businesses exceptional market access.

This strategic position not only supports companies seeking to operate in national and international markets but also maintains strong demand for high quality commercial property. The District's resilient economy is underpinned by a diverse and established business base, contributing to consistent commercial returns.

Stratford-on-Avon's commercial property sector serves a broad mix of independent retailers, national chains, industrial firms, and professional SMEs across Advanced Manufacturing, Rail Technology, Agri Tech, and related supply chains. The area also supports major automotive brands—including Jaguar Land Rover, Aston Martin, Polestar and TATA—alongside key innovation assets such as the UK Battery Industrialisation Centre.

We encourage you to make the most of today's event by engaging with fellow delegates, sharing insights, and forming meaningful connections with partners and speakers. I hope you leave with practical guidance, a clearer sense of opportunity, and the confidence to take your business forward.

**This business conference is organised by Stratford-on-Avon District Council with the support of the Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub.**

## Today's Agenda

- 8.00am Registration, Breakfast and Networking
- 9.00am Welcome and opening remarks
- 9.05am Will Grocott MSc, MBA and Eve Baker from GTI Systems
- 9.20am Councillor George Cowcher from Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- John Careford from Stratford-on-Avon District Council
- 9.35am Tracy Sherratt from British Business Bank
- 9.50am Simon Hood and Charlene Mitchell-Hood from Sooper Books
- 10.05am Slido Question Time
- 10.10am Comfort break and opportunity to visit exhibitors
- 10.30am William Tse from Warwickshire County Council
- 10.45am Doug King from Yelo Enterprises
- 11.15am Panel Session
- Councillor George Cowcher (SDC)
  - Tracy Sherratt (British Business Bank)
  - William Tse (WCC)
  - Corin Crane (CW Chamber of Commerce)
  - Rob Harrison (FSB)
- 11.55am Closing remarks
- 12.00pm Refreshments, Networking and Exhibition until 1.00pm

Let us have your views on business matters that affect your business and the District.

<https://online1.snapsurveys.com/business26conf>

Business Rate payers will be receiving a paper copy in the post soon but you can complete digitally too.



## Your Host



### **Sandra Godley OBE**

Sandra Godley OBE is an award winning broadcaster, singer/songwriter, entrepreneur and community leader.

Recognised by His Majesty the King for her services to charities and the arts, Sandra has also recently been appointed President of the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce.

## Today's speakers

This business conference brings together speakers from a range of sectors including finance, skills and business support.



### **Will Grocott MSc, MBA** **GTI Systems**

GTI Systems is a UK-based clean technology innovator driving the circular economy for zero-emission vehicles and electronics through advanced reuse, recovery and remanufacturing solutions.

Will Grocott MSc, MBA, Programme Director, leads GTI Systems' delivery of high-impact programmes, bringing deep expertise in engineering, business transformation and sustainable innovation across the automotive and aerospace sectors.



### **Eve Baker** **GTI Systems**

Eve Baker, Executive Assistant, supports programme delivery through effective coordination and communication, drawing on experience in Formula-E battery assembly and a strong foundation in Programme Management.



### **Councillor George Cowcher, Deputy Leader Stratford-on-Avon District Council**

George Cowcher, born in Stratford, is Deputy Leader of Stratford District Council and Portfolio Holder for Planning and Economic Development. He is also County Councillor for Wellesbourne and the Liberal Democrat shadow Transport Spokesperson. A chartered town planner focused on economic development, he worked for IDC in Stratford, in the Middle East, and held senior roles in major Regional Development Agencies and Chambers of Commerce. He lives in Wellesbourne.



### **John Careford, Head of Development Stratford-on-Avon District Council**

John is a Chartered Town Planner and Head of Development at Stratford on Avon District Council, overseeing planning, building control, economic development, investment, town centres and tourism. He is embedding closer integration between planning and economic development having spearheaded the joint South Warwickshire Economic Strategy and leading the emerging South Warwickshire Local Plan to 2050.



### **Tracy Sherratt, West Midlands Senior Manager British Business Bank**

Tracy is the West Midlands Senior Manager for the UK Network of British Business Bank. The UK Network seeks to enhance business finance ecosystems across the UK so smaller businesses, wherever they are, can grow and prosper.



**Simon Hood**  
**Sooper Books**

Sooper Books is an award winning children’s audio platform offering original, screen free stories that inspire imagination and support family wellbeing.

Co Founder & CEO Simon Hood created the Sooper Books platform after seeking better audio stories for his daughter. Leading product, storytelling strategy and growth, Simon famously secured investment from all five Dragons with his wife Charlene.



**Charlene Mitchell-Hood**  
**Sooper Books**

Co Founder & Creative Director Charlene Mitchell-Hood shapes Sooper Books’ characters, worlds and visual identity, and as illustrator and designer, ensures every story feels magical and emotionally rich for families worldwide.



**William Tse**  
**Warwickshire County Council**

As Employability Service Team Manager at Warwickshire County Council, William brings extensive experience in contract management and collaborative partnership working. Including expertise in external funding, multidisciplinary project management, sustainable place making initiatives, business support, skills development, and employability services.



**Doug King**  
**Yelo Enterprises**

Doug is an experienced commodities trader with over 32 years in global markets, having led major petroleum and commodity divisions at Cargill, Crown Resources and the Merchant Commodity Fund. Now co owner of RCMA Group and Yelo Enterprises, he helped build the UK's first major oilseed rape processing plant in decades. He is also the owner of Coventry City Football Club and the CBS Arena. Doug is passionate about sport, the arts and ballet, and is married with five children.

## Other Panel Members



**Corin Crane, Group Chief Executive**  
**Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of**  
**Commerce**

Corin is Group Chief Executive of the Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce. He previously led the Leicester & Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership, managing major regeneration and SME funding, and later headed the Black Country Chamber of Commerce. He also chaired the European Structural Funds Committee that oversees £90m of funds for SME growth and skills.



**Rob Harrison, Chair for West Midlands**  
**Federation of Small Businesses**

Rob Harrison is Chair to the West Midlands for the Federation of Small Businesses. He has also run his own business, Glued, for the last 22 years and is in the process of launching another business thanks to the support of an Innovate UK Creative and Immersive grant. Rob is an advocate for small businesses, the pivotal role they play as the seedbed for the success of tomorrow's economy and as a crucial part of local communities.

## Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Economic Development Team



**Business**  
Stratford-on-Avon

Given its strategic and central location to all of the most important business and infrastructural connections, South Warwickshire's economic growth strategy and framework highlighted in the South Warwickshire Economic Strategy will continue to impact on the three themes - People, Productivity and Place, which are effectively the economic drivers for the area's future success.

Whilst the Local Plan reflects the vision and aspirations and provides a long-term framework up to 2050, Stratford-on-Avon's District Council's Economic Development Team is charged with delivering the business support required for sustainable growth.

The Economic Development team, together with network partners, supports the growth of this sustainable local economy. It works with businesses to facilitate growth, investment and employment across the District.

The Council's Economic Development activity includes:

- Supporting SMEs
- Coordinating workshops, events and business engagement
- Signposting to funding, grants and support programmes
- Working with partners to address skills and productivity

To find out more about business support contact the Economic Development Team on **economy@stratford-dc.gov.uk** Tel: **01789 267575**

## Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub



Coventry and Warwickshire Growth Hub works in partnership with Stratford-on-Avon District Council's Economic Development Team and is an important partner in helping support SMEs. It enables them to access the wide range of fully funded business advice, funding and grants, training, mentoring and business planning support that business owners could benefit from.

For further information and how you can benefit from this partnership contact **support@cwgrowthhub.co.uk** Tel: **0300 0603747**