

a year in review  
07/08



Vivean Pomell, Brynels, Edgbaston, Birmingham

# Advantage West Midlands

The Regional Development Agency (RDA) for the West Midlands Region

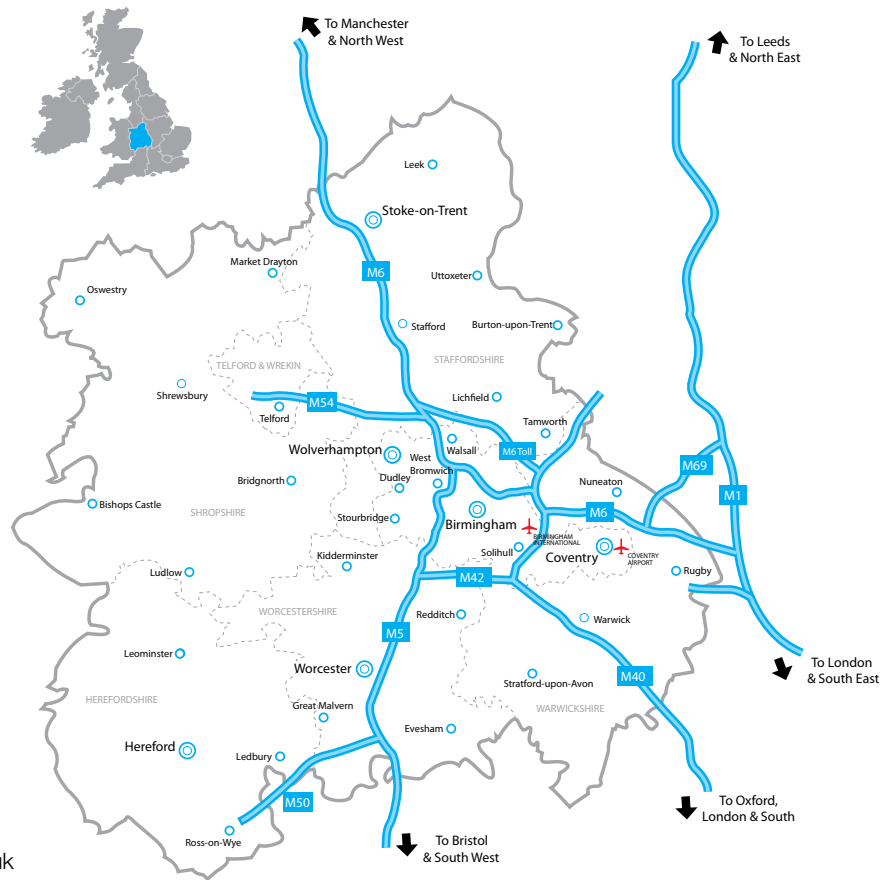
Advantage West Midlands is the Regional Development Agency (RDA) for the West Midlands and one of nine RDAs in England.

Our role is to lead the economic development of the West Midlands Region, working alongside public, private and voluntary sector partners to help our region to prosper. We build upon our region's many strengths and address our unique challenges.

Our key task is to lead the development and delivery of the **West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES)**, the framework for our region's growth. Through working in partnership, we speak with one voice for the region and make a far greater impact than we would acting in isolation.

We have an annual budget of over £300 million to invest in the West Midlands Region and, at any one time, we manage around 2,500 projects which change the lives of people across our region. We drive economic development by identifying where we can make the greatest impact, either by targeting specific needs or investing in success.

For more information visit [www.advantagewm.co.uk](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk)



Cover image: **Brynels** is a family run business which opened its first retail outlet in Edgbaston, Birmingham in 2007. Providing a range of bespoke and customised hats to their customers, Brynels' owner Vivean Pomell (pictured) was keen to extend her range.

Brynels had always been aware that hair loss through medical conditions such as alopecia and cancer treatments caused considerable embarrassment and stress to patients and that the imitation hair wigs currently available in the market did little or nothing to reduce this distress.

With the help of an **INDEX voucher**, Brynels asked the team at **University of Wolverhampton** to work with them to research and develop a new product which would line the wig and alleviate the itching often endured by the wearer, eventually developing this textile into imitation hair which could then be dyed to blend in with all skin types and colours.

Vivean has now developed a prototype which is both user and environmentally friendly and has applied for specialist help in new product design/new materials from the **Wolverhampton School of Art & Design**. She has also appointed a Patent Attorney to prepare and lodge a patent for the product.

The £64 million **Walsall Waterfront** scheme was given a vote of confidence by Minister for the West Midlands Liam Byrne during a fact-finding visit to see plans for new jobs and new homes in the Black Country.

**Advantage West Midlands** has officially handed over 1.2 hectares (2.9 acres) of derelict land to property developers Urban Splash - and a four-year programme of building work has now begun.

**Walsall Council** has already granted planning permission to the scheme, which will be delivered by Urban Splash and promoted by the **Walsall Regeneration Company**. Advantage West Midlands has provided £13.8 million of gap funding to kick-start this flagship project.

Pictured is (left to right) Mick Lavery, Chief Executive, Advantage West Midlands; Liam Byrne, West Midlands Regional Minister; and Dr Peter Cromar, Chief Executive, Walsall Regeneration Company.



Mick Lavery, Liam Byrne and Dr Peter Cromar, Walsall Regeneration Company

# chairman's review

Nick Paul

Once again, I am pleased to present the Advantage West Midlands Annual Review for 2007-08 which describes another year of achievement and progress for the Agency.

The single most important piece of work the Agency has conducted this financial year is the successful creation of the revised West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES).

This latest strategy is the most inclusive ever produced with more than 2,000 businesses, politicians and partners engaging and helping to shape our region's future.

It is built on a solid evidence base which we can use to measure progress towards closing the £10 billion output gap which the region faces compared to the national average.

I believe that together, as a region, we have a strategy which clearly shows the way forward. However, we can only make a major impact if we increase partnership working by aligning resources and remaining focused on the priority areas.

It was recently announced by the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor – an independent study of enterprise activity around the world – that there has been a 16 per cent increase in levels of entrepreneurial activity in our region over the past five years.

The West Midlands Enterprise Board has been advising Advantage West Midlands on business

support and our work to create an enterprise culture since 2005 and I know they will play a key role in continuing this excellent progress.

Clearly, the best performing organisations in the West Midlands are those who are using the skills and talents of their people to produce innovative, world-class products and services. We need more people in the region developing their skills to enable them and their companies to reach their full potential.

This is why the excellent work delivered by the Regional Skills Partnership is so important and the launch of the Regional Skills Action Plan is such a major step forward.

The Skills Action Plan spells out what each of the partners is going to do to close our skills gap, linking back to the priorities of the WMES.

Turning to innovation, the work of the Innovation and Technology Council (ITC) has strengthened the connections between our region's universities and businesses.

The ITC has been instrumental in supporting the early development and defining the goals of the Birmingham Science City Initiative which brings together regional universities in collaborative research programmes for the benefit of businesses in the West Midlands.

During the year, John Edwards decided to step down as Chief Executive and

the Board and I would like to thank John for his immense contribution and wish him every success for the future.

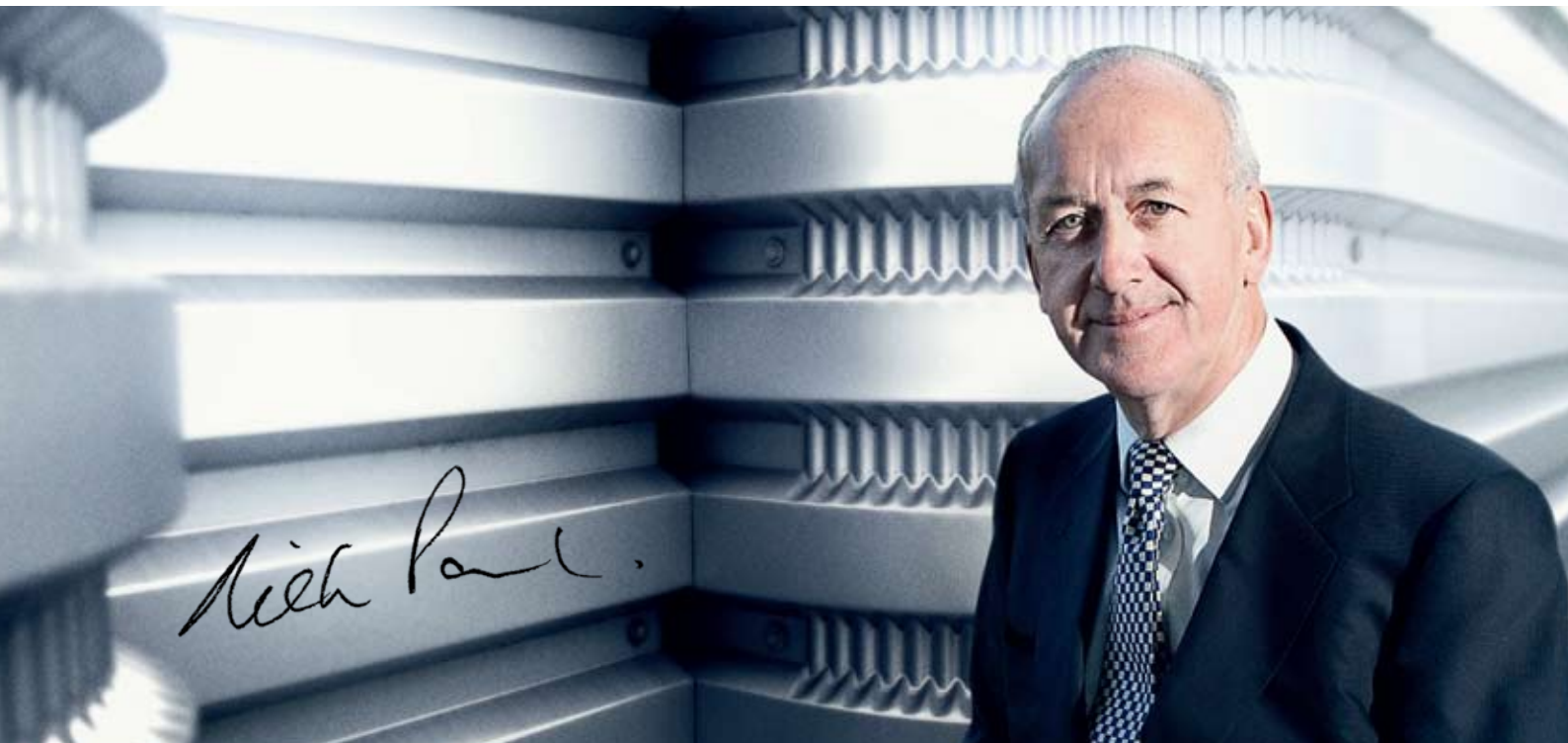
The Board is very fortunate that, in Mick Laverty, we have a replacement perfectly suited to build on John's achievements. Mick's commitment and contribution to Advantage West Midlands since he joined in 1999 has been outstanding. The Board and I know that Mick will provide real leadership, vision and inspiration.

Looking forward, our collective challenge is to ensure that the WMES is central not only to all that we do, but also becomes central to all our partners' plans and their delivery. It is only then that we are likely to see the future vision for the West Midlands region become a reality to be a global centre where people and businesses choose to connect.

After almost six years as Chairman of Advantage West Midlands, this will be my final Chairman's statement.

It has taken six years and a great deal of hard work and determination by a lot of people for us to reach the stage where we are today, with a clear understanding of where we need to go and what we need to achieve.

My successor will be seeking to build on these achievements in order to close the £10 billion output gap. If he or she receives the same levels of energy, support and direction from the region that I enjoyed then this should be within our grasp.



“...our collective challenge is to ensure that the West Midlands Economic Strategy is central not only to all that we do, but also becomes central to all our partners’ plans and their delivery. ”

# chief executive's review

Mick Laverty



*“ I am proud of the work delivered by Advantage West Midlands and our partners over the past year and know that, as an organisation, we have never been in a better position to deliver on behalf of the region. ”*

It is a privilege to be writing this Chief Executive's statement for the Advantage West Midlands Annual Review, my first since being appointed to the post.

I am delighted to report that in all but one case, the core targets set for Advantage West Midlands for 2007-08 by Government were exceeded.

Working with our partners in our region, we have created or safeguarded over 17,600 jobs, with more than 12,200 businesses provided with the high-quality advice and assistance they need to develop and grow.

More than 150 hectares of redundant and derelict land have been brought back into productive economic use and more than 21,000 people were able to improve their skills through schemes supported or delivered by the Agency.

Only in business start-ups did we not fully meet the target, although our outturn of just over 1,300 is still within our target range and is a solid base upon which to build as we redouble our efforts next year.

Of course, outputs and data tell an important part of the story, but they are by no means the full story.

During my visits around the region the full impact of our strategic interventions begins to become clear.

This year has seen major milestones reached on a series of flagship projects delivered or supported by Advantage West Midlands and I have been able to see many of them first-hand.

In Birmingham, these projects include the development of Eastside Locks which is breathing new life into an underused quarter of the city; and the Longbridge Innovation Centre – the first phase of the Longbridge Technology Park.

We have also reached important milestones with two major sites - at i54 in Wolverhampton, where preparations for a major business park are well underway, and also at Ansty Park in Warwickshire which is being developed as a research and development park.

In enterprise, the Agency has overseen the successful reorganisation and launch of Business Link West Midlands which has made an excellent start to tackling underperformance in productivity and business start-ups in the region.

Delivery of economic development, as set out in the previous Economic Strategy 'Delivering Advantage', has continued apace through the Agency's three well-established Delivery Vehicles: Regeneration Zones, High Technology Corridors and Business Clusters.

Highlights of their work over the past 12 months have included the progress made by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership in beginning construction of Phase 3 at Keele Science Park, the launch of the Advanced Sensors programme in partnership with QinetiQ and the opening of the Serious Games Institute in Coventry.

You will see many more excellent examples of progress made by the region working in partnership throughout this review.

Internally, one of my priorities as the new Chief Executive will be to embed continuous improvement into everything we do as an organisation.

In March 2007, the National Audit Office Independent Performance Assessment awarded Advantage West Midlands the highest possible rating of four out of four, concluding the Agency was 'performing strongly'.

Continuous improvement has been further driven by our commitment to Investors in Excellence and I am delighted to say that, in December 2007, the Agency achieved this standard.

On a national and strategic level, the Sub-National Review of Economic Development and Regeneration (SNR) was published by Government in July 2007.

SNR proposes a fundamental change in the way we and our partners work together, increasing democratic accountability and joining together even more strongly economic development and spatial planning into the Single Integrated Regional Strategy.

Clearly, these changes offer a significant opportunity for both the West Midlands and the Agency to build on the relationships we have already established with partners.

I am proud of the work delivered by Advantage West Midlands and our partners over the past year and know that we, as an organisation, have never been in a better position to deliver on behalf of the region.

# supporting business

## building a diverse and dynamic business base

Evidence shows that businesses that access support are more likely to survive and grow than those that do not. One of the primary roles of Advantage West Midlands is to invest in business support schemes that can help companies in different sectors to become more competitive and profitable.

### a year in review

- Working closely with a wide range of private, public and third sector organisations, **Business Link West Midlands** has made an excellent start to tackling underperformance in productivity and business start-ups in the region – providing support to over 85,000 regional enterprises.
- The enhanced **Manufacturing Advisory Service (MAS-WM)** has also met or exceeded all of its regional key performance indicators. The Visualisation and Imaging Network Project, being run by **Birmingham University**, has continued to support more than 100 companies to develop new high value products.
- The **West Midlands Enterprise Board** has overseen the continued development of the Centres of Enterprise Expertise which resulted in the launch of the **Women's Enterprise Centre of Expertise (WECOPE)**, which the Government has indicated should become a national centre of excellence.
- The first regional **Manufacturing Support Strategy** was developed, in partnership with manufacturing organisations and public sector partners. It is essential that West Midlands manufacturing moves from producing low value products to operating in high value knowledge-based markets, where it is able to compete globally.
- As a result of the implementation of the **Regional Finance Framework**, there is now a comprehensive range of initiatives aimed at improving access to finance for SMEs. Key achievements include £10.4 million invested through the venture capital funds; 14 **Business Angel** transactions totalling £1.5 million; **Investbx** successfully raised cash for its first client; £1.9 million of funds made available to **Community Development Finance Initiatives**; 88 offers of **Selective Finance Investment in England** grants totalling £10.7 million; and 26 offers of **Grants for Research and Development** totalling £2 million.
- The **Innovation and Technology Council** has continued to develop activity, developing an important role for the region in the national programmes of the **Technology Strategy Board (TSB)**. Through the Medical Technologies cluster, the region is playing a leading role in the TSB Innovation Platforms on Assisted Living to develop demonstrator properties, including **i-Health** in Sandwell, which is equipped with technologies that support people to remain in their homes longer as their health deteriorates.
- Over three years Advantage West Midlands has pledged £80 million to **Birmingham Science City**, specifically to support collaborative research between the region's universities. The **Hydrogen Energy** project is a collaboration between the **University of Birmingham** and the **University of Warwick** whilst the **Ocular Allergy** project, between **Aston University** and the **University of Worcester**, aims to characterise the types of ocular allergies and their treatments and to engage with businesses to improve their work with patients.
- **Channel 4** has selected Birmingham as a regional commissioning hub for its new digital media activity (4iP). With investment of £5 million from Advantage West Midlands, the £10 million hub will provide a fund for businesses to apply to for the creation of innovative digital media and represents an important recognition of the strength of the region in this field.
- In collaboration with **QinetiQ** a multi-million **Advanced Sensors** investment fund has been set up. It will create new business opportunities and exploit the considerable technical expertise and intellectual property that exists in the region.
- Advantage West Midlands remains committed to expanding and developing industries that can take advantage of the market opportunities opening up as a result of the growth in the global environmental economy. Highlights of our work this year include the build completion of the **Farming for Energy** Project in Eccleshall and the **Business Resource Efficiency and Waste Programme (BREW)**.

Julie Grant (pictured) founded **Plinkfizz Ltd** in June 2003, providing marketing and sales solutions to businesses of all sizes.

Initially working from home for a range of national and regional clients, Julie quickly identified the need for premises that reflected a professional approach, inspired creativity and would give her customers the wow factor.

She found that in the form of **Hothouse** – a project funded by the **North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone** – which was part of the winning portfolio of initiatives which resulted in North Staffordshire being crowned winner of **Enterprising Britain 2007**.

Julie also found support in the professional services network **Finest**, another project supported by the North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone. Finest has enabled Julie to network with other companies and grow both her associates and client base.

Following a successful four years in business, Julie now employs a team of experts and has over 50 national and local clients.



Julie Grant, Plinkfizz Ltd, North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone

# developing skills

## promoting a learning and skilful region

The best performing organisations in the West Midlands are those who are using the skills and talents of their people to produce innovative, world-class products and services. We need more people in the region developing their skills to enable them and their companies to reach their full potential.

### a year in review

- Working with members of the **Regional Skills Partnership (RSP)**, including the **Learning and Skills Council**, the **Skills Action Plan** was launched. The document builds on the skills aspects from the WMES and sets out targets for the region over the next three years including more apprenticeships and increasing the number of graduates recruited by West Midlands businesses.
- For the first time a clear, shared understanding of the size and nature of the challenges faced and a sense of how the region will perform into the future is available thanks to high-quality research funded by partners within the **West Midlands Regional Skills Partnership (RSP)**. A key aspect of the partners' data work is the updated skills performance index - a means of tracking the region's overall performance compared with other regions. The West Midlands has improved its overall performance, and importantly has closed the gap on the England average from 7 percentage points (in 2003) to 1 percentage point (in 2007). However there are a number of other challenges to address including the substantial numbers of people with no formal qualifications – 16.4% of the working age population, the highest figure in England.
- Capital investment in learning facilities has included support given to the development of 29 workplace based learning centres across the West Midlands.
- The Agency is developing infrastructure for several major educational facilities as part of wider regeneration schemes including the clearance of the former Worcester Royal Infirmary site to make way for a new city centre campus for the **University of Worcester**. In addition **Birmingham City University** is consolidating much of its activity to the **Learning and Leisure Quarter in Eastside**.
- In Further Education and with Agency assistance, **Bournville College** has announced it is moving to new premises at Longbridge. The first phase of development at **Hereford Learning Village** has been completed and funding has been agreed to support the redevelopment of **Newcastle College** in North Staffordshire.
- In February 2008 work began to roll out a new specialist brokerage service through **Business Link West Midlands** which focuses on helping to build the capacity of the senior management teams and improving the skills of more than 1,100 leaders and managers. The work builds on the experiences of a successful **Leadership and Management** pilot programme in 2006/07.
- The Agency and the **Learning and Skills Council** have put in place arrangements to integrate the Skills Brokerage Service (**Train to Gain**) with the Business Link business brokerage service. This went live in April 2007 and is one of the first of its kind in England
- The Agency has worked with partners to develop, commission and begin to deliver a programme of work aimed at increasing the productivity of businesses and the regional economy by ensuring that they have the higher level skills they need to produce higher value added goods and services. The work has been data-driven and informed by research that points to a deficiency, compared to other regions, of 70,000 highly skilled people in the regional workforce and a short fall of 3,000 each year entering work.
- The Agency has commissioned a number of specific activities including an extra 600 student work experience placements through **Graduate Advantage**; a recruitment service to place graduates into jobs in small and medium sized businesses; and further support for graduates to start their own businesses.
- A pilot service – **Graduate Works** - has also been commissioned to support businesses in the professional and financial services sector that employ graduates in North Staffordshire.
- The Agency funds **RegenWM** as the key regional body for promoting good practice and better skills across the regeneration sector and continued to support and fund the **West Midlands Centre for Constructing Excellence (WMCCE)**.

Harmish Chander (pictured) from Wolverhampton graduated from **Coventry University** with a degree in Graphic Design.

He secured a role at Blaz Media at Aston Science Park through **Graduate Advantage**, one project within a suite of activities designed to provide employment opportunities within West Midlands' small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) to over 3,000 graduates in the region.

Blaz Media approached Graduate Advantage when the opportunity for a graduate creative designer became available.

Simon Kaguramamba, Harmish's supervisor, is delighted with the new addition to the team and believes that Harmish has played a key role in helping the business expand as Harmish is able to front a lot of the day to day projects now, which leaves Simon free to develop the business further.



Harmish Chander, Graduate Advantage, Aston Business School, Birmingham

# building infrastructure

## creating the conditions for growth

This year the Agency has played a key role in acquiring, reclaiming and reusing under-utilised and derelict sites, as well as promoting high quality design and development.

The Agency also works to influence both national and regional transport-related policy and strategies and identify ways in which funding and investment can be secured to ensure the early delivery of schemes in the region.

## a year in review

- The Agency has worked with partners to bring forward the development of **Birmingham New Street** – the ‘**Gateway Plus**’ scheme.
- The first phase of development of the **Longbridge Technology Park** – the Innovation Centre – was officially opened by Regional Minister Liam Byrne. The centre provides accommodation for new or growing technology-based businesses.
- At Eastside **Goodman International** has been appointed as a development partner and outline planning permission for the Eastside Locks element of the scheme has been submitted.
- The development of a major Research & Development and Innovation Park at **Ansty Park**, including **Ericsson’s European Technical Centre**.
- The Agency entered into a partnership with Langtree to create the **PxP Property Regeneration Partnership**, a limited partnership with the private sector, to accelerate the delivery of objectives and allow scarce resources to be focused upon higher priorities.
- Plans for the i54 site near Wolverhampton were developed, comprising single, high quality manufacturing use and a mix of office, high technology and manufacturing accommodation.
- **Urban Splash** has commenced work on the first phase of the 6.5 hectare **Walsall Waterfront** development that is expected to deliver almost 1,000 jobs to the area.
- In the Rural Regeneration Zone the focus of the Agency’s investment has included the provision of sites and buildings to stimulate new enterprise and business expansion. The first phase of the Enterprise Centre Network, delivered through partnership with the private sector, is nearing completion with developments in Shrewsbury, Ludlow, Leominster and Rotherwas.
- The Agency is supporting a number of major projects that will have a significant impact across the region. These include supporting the reshaping and enhancement of urban centres (such as **Stoke-on-Trent city centre**), redevelopment of iconic buildings (**The Royal Shakespeare Theatre**) and area-based regeneration initiatives in both urban and rural areas (**Edgar Street Grid, Hereford**).
- The Agency also continued to support a number of initiatives to promote and plan the re-use of brownfield land. The first **Centre of Excellence for Land Reclamation** was funded by the Agency and launched through **RegenWM** to identify and share good practice and to build the capacity of local and regional partners in land reclamation.
- The Agency is the lead Regional Development Agency on Transport, bringing together the views of the nine English RDAs into one voice for Government. Key achievements this year include continuing to work with partners to support **Birmingham International Airport’s** runway extension; and research to inform the development of a new and innovative Agency programme for funding regional infrastructure.
- Basic level broadband infrastructure is now available region-wide and the focus has now shifted to encouraging business take-up and usage. The Agency has funded a £3 million e-business adoption programme which is being delivered by the **National B2B Centre** and **IT Futures** projects.
- The Agency, in partnership with other key regional players, undertook a key piece of research in order to understand required housing numbers and their distribution in relation to economic growth. This will be built upon in order to understand the further implication of land supply and infrastructure.

In 2007, leading telecoms company **Ericsson** announced its decision to build a new Research and Development centre at **Ansty Park** near Coventry, Warwickshire. The centre will provide specific, purpose-built accommodation for the company's highly skilled technology workers in its midlands-based research and development operations.

Advantage West Midlands, which worked closely with Ericsson on its expansion plans, hopes that Ansty Park will eventually become home to over 5,000 high technology-based jobs, with a total investment of around £500 million.

Ericsson's presence establishes Ansty Park as an international location in the West Midlands.

Ansty Park's many unique strengths include the proximity of two leading universities, the presence of a highly skilled workforce, the availability of world-class accommodation and second-to-none accessibility through six major motorways nearby, as well as two international airports.

Vernon Blunt (pictured) is Head of Real Estate at Ericsson.



Vernon Blunt, Ericsson, Ansty Park, Coventry, Warwickshire

# improving quality of life

## regenerating communities

The Agency and its partners continue to work hard to remove barriers to inclusion and have formed the regional Economic Inclusion Panel to lead on this work.

### a year in review

- The Agency has invested £79 million in the region's six **Regeneration Zones** to support the development and delivery of projects that will transform the local and sub-regional economies.

The **University Hospital Employment Hub** has assisted 190 people to find a job this year. This project is supported by both the **Arc of Opportunity** and **East Birmingham North Solihull Regeneration Zones** and provides a specialist facility to access employment and skills in the health and social care sector.

In the Rural Regeneration Zone, the first multi-use centre was completed in Dorrington, Shropshire. The project, which is being run as a social enterprise, includes a health centre, community hall, meeting rooms, kitchen/bar and changing rooms for nearby playing fields.

- The Agency has continued to support regional third sector infrastructure bodies with the aim of helping to increase the capacity of the region's communities. The Agency, through sub regional arrangements, has intervened where it has been appropriate with examples such as the **Nexus** programme providing grants of up to £5,000 to develop service provision. One of the projects is the **Redundant Building Grants** programme which has helped **Ledbury Cottage Hospital** to support the conversion of the former hospital into small flats by a Registered Social Landlord.
- Advantage West Midlands sponsored the largest **Social Enterprise Convention** outside of London in January 2008 bringing together over 200 key stakeholders in Social Enterprise.
- The Agency has worked closely with the West Midlands Regional Assembly to align the partially revised **West Midlands Spatial Strategy** with the new West Midlands Economic Strategy.
- An emerging example of joined up delivery at local level is the formation of the **North Staffordshire Regeneration Partnership** of which the Agency is a member. This unique partnership brings together: **North Staffordshire Regeneration Zone**, **RENEW North Staffordshire** and key regeneration activities of the local council. One of the priority projects is the City Centre Development.
- The **Rural Access to Services Programme (RASP)** concentrated on the delivery of services within localities rather than provision of transport solutions to move people to central service delivery points. The **Wheels to Work** project continues to deliver effectively and demand is growing for its services.
- Advantage West Midlands is a member of the **Regional Health Partnership** and has contributed towards the development and launch of the **Regional Health and Well Being Strategy** and Action Plan. The Agency is re-focusing its efforts on the economic development role of the health sector and is working with partners to identify the potential for joint working. This includes supporting **NHS West Midlands** in the development of up to three **Academic Health Science Centres** aligning such activity to the Science City and medical technology cluster programmes; and working to realise procurement opportunities from the health sector for SMEs and social enterprises.
- Through the **West Midlands Market Towns Initiative (MTI)**, the Agency has provided funding to enable local partnerships to deliver programmes of regeneration activity in towns including Wellington, Cleobury Mortimer and Stourport.

Colin Hughes (pictured) is an independent management consultant and also a director of **Stourport Forward Limited**, the organisation set up to deliver the Market Towns Programme in Stourport, which is funded by **Advantage West Midlands**.

One of the flagship projects of the programme has been the £3.2 million restoration of Stourport Canal Basins, which has received funding from the **Heritage Lottery Fund**, Advantage West Midlands and **British Waterways**.

Colin is an active member and trustee of a local well known pantomime group and leads a team of community volunteers

who run costume guided history walks along the canal and throughout the town.

Stourport Forward and British Waterways have won a clutch of awards including a special Outstanding Achievement Award from the **British Urban Regeneration Awards (BURA)** Waterways Renaissance Awards Panel for the “transformation of Stourport-on-Severn.”

The town has already seen an increase in visitors to the basins and Stourport Forward is continuing to work in close partnership with Advantage West Midlands and other local partners to enhance this picturesque canal and riverside heritage destination.



Colin Hughes, Stourport Forward Limited, Stourport

# speaking from the heart

## creating a powerful voice for the region

Advantage West Midlands is a champion for the West Midlands and works to influence external impressions of the region. Perception changing campaigns are developed and delivered to target business, media and Government audiences within the UK and overseas.

### a year in review

- The latest **West Midlands Regional Champions** campaign '**Have you Ever**' was rolled out across the region securing the support of over 300 fully signed-up regional Champions, while the Ambassadors programme continued to bring together influential leaders to promote and support the region through attendance at a series of regional events and through media articles.
- The launch of the latest phase of business facing activity took place at '**The Place to Connect**' at **MIPIM 2008**, the world's largest international property event. A range of mechanisms were employed to gain business representatives' buy-in to the benefits and strengths of the region including showcasing the latest regional film '**Enjoy Yourself**'.
- The Agency undertakes research to inform policy development across a range of areas but the primary vehicle for developing and improving the regional evidence base is the **West Midlands Regional Observatory**. The Observatory is supported by Advantage West Midlands and other regional partners. A key achievement during the year included production of the 2007 State of the Region Update Report, focusing on climate change and changing population demographics.
- The '**Anything is Possible – At the Heart of it All**' brand, created in 2007 to deliver regional marketing messages across Europe, received the accolades of **Best Interbuild Stand Award 2007** and received the Bronze Perfect Stand Award at **CEPIF 2007 in Poland**.
- The development of a newly aligned regional signature to create 'one voice' for the region resulted in the creation of a new '**The Heart of England, West Midlands Region**' brand, incorporating the emotive strength of 'The Heart of England' tourism identity and building upon the previous business, media and government facing regional signature.
- In a record year for inward investment, the Agency was directly involved in 44 projects – an increase of 15 per cent on 2006-07 - which saw 2,792 jobs created and 469 safeguarded in the West Midlands.
- Over 500 business leaders, politicians and leading figures from the public sector from across the region attended the Advantage West Midlands' annual conference on 9th November 2007 at the ICC, Birmingham.
- **A new West Midlands Regional European Strategy** has been produced in order to give a more comprehensive approach to European working in the region. The strategy sets out four priorities for the next five years: single market, research and development, the environment and social cohesion, and identifies actions and delivery vehicles for achieving its objectives. The implementation of the Strategy will be supported by a new structure and governance on European working in the region. The partnership work with the Polish region of Lower Silesia has blossomed. The region is working closely with their scientific and technical universities and their proposed Innovation and Business Park.

Coinciding with the launch of an updated [Visitor Economy Strategy](#), Advantage West Midlands invited commercial visitor tourism partners to showcase the very best of what the region has to offer at the [British Travel Trade Fair](#) at the NEC, Birmingham in March 2008.

The resulting exhibition was a gallery-style display of heart installations, bringing to life the region's position as the '[Heart of England](#)'. The gallery included a chocolate heart from [Cadbury World](#) and a heart made of roses representing the [Royal Shakespeare Company](#).

Tourism and leisure is a vital industry in the West Midlands regional economy, generating approximately £6 billion in visitor spend and supporting around 115,000 jobs. The revision of the Visitor Economy Strategy was led by Advantage West Midlands on behalf of the [Tourism West Midlands](#) Regional Partnership Board and closely aligns to the actions outlined in the AWM-led [Regional Marketing Strategy](#).

Pictured is Laura Whitehouse of Cadbury World.



Laura Whitehouse, Operations Team Member, Cadbury World, Birmingham

# outputs

Advantage West Midlands consolidated outputs to year ending 31 March 2008

Target set by Government	Target	Achieved
1. Jobs created and safeguarded (the total number of job opportunities directly attributable to our activity).	15,500	17,622
2. Employment support – number of people assisted to get a job.	5,000	6,000
3. Business creation – businesses created and demonstrating growth after 12 months and businesses attracted to the region.	1,580	1,307
4. Business support – businesses assisted to improve their performance.	12,000	12,240
4a Business support – businesses within the region engaged with new collaborations with the UK knowledge base.	750	773
5. Regeneration – public and private investment levered.		
(i) Total (£m)	£200m	£203m
(ii) Proportion of private leverage (%)	63	82
5a Regeneration - brownfield land reclaimed or redeveloped	150ha	157ha
6. Skills – number of people assisted in their skills as a result of an RDA programme.	21,000	21,630
6a. Skills – number of adults gaining basic skills as part of the Skills for Life Strategy.	6	421
6b. Skills – number of adults in the workforce who lack a full Level 2 or equivalent qualification who are then supported to achieve this.	220	562
7. Number of graduates gaining employment in the private sector as a result of Agency intervention.	100	111
8. Number of people in the workforce who increase their management and leadership skills.	700	849

# connecting to success

## West Midlands Economic Strategy

December 2007 saw the official launch of the West Midlands Economic Strategy (WMES) – Connecting to Success – following the most inclusive consultation process yet.

The West Midlands Economic Strategy sets out what the West Midlands needs to do to close the £10 billion output gap the region faces compared to the UK average.

The West Midlands economy is influenced by a complex range of interrelated factors. To address these factors, this Strategy focuses on the three main components of the economy - Business, Place and People.

- **Business** refers to the contribution that 'businesses' (a term used in its widest sense and including social enterprises and not-for-profit organisations) make to the productivity and growth of the regional economy, and to the demand for employment of the region's workforce.
- **Place** refers on the role of place in both attracting and enabling economic growth (i.e. high-quality locations and environments which encourage businesses and a highly skilled workforce); but also in dissuading or constraining economic activity (poor-quality environments can limit investment, reduce aspirations and lead to negative stereotyping).

- **People** refers to the contribution of the region's population and their skills to the sustainable growth and increased productivity of the West Midlands economy; and to ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to develop their full potential.

A successful and vibrant economy requires a balanced and strong contribution from all three components. It is impossible to influence the drivers of economic growth and achieve long-term prosperity without positive improvement in all three areas. A healthy and dynamic business base is essential to creating wealth and employment, but it is dependent upon a strong supply of high-quality human capital and consumers. Finally, neither businesses nor individuals will prosper unless the location where they are based meets their particular needs.

In common with other regions, the West Midlands faces a number of global challenges. These are:

- Climate change
- Continued globalisation
- Demographic change
- The march of technology.

The West Midlands also faces a set of challenges that are more specific to the region. These relate to:

- Skills
- Enterprise
- Innovation
- Economic inclusion
- Transport.

These challenges are a core focus of the Strategy. Its development has also been underpinned by three underlying principles, which are embedded across the Strategy:

- Pursuing equality, reaping the benefits of diversity
- Valuing the natural environment
- Supporting urban and rural renaissance.



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3 Priestley Wharf • Holt Street • Aston Science Park • Birmingham B7 4BN  
Tel: +44(0)121 380 3500 • Fax: +44(0)121 380 3501 • [www.advantagewm.co.uk](http://www.advantagewm.co.uk)

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