

A GUIDE TO THE REGION'S COMMERCE, INDUSTRY AND MONEY MATTERS In association with: **TD Thomas Dudley**

## FirstPort set to open new offices

The UK's biggest residential property manager is officially opening its new offices in Halesowen tomorrow.

The move will see 50 FirstPort employees move to Trinity Point, on New Road, to create a new centralised hub for the business.

The staff there will work as part of FirstPort's customer service team, supporting customers across the 173,000 homes it manages in England, Wales and Scotland, including nearly 60,000 specialised retirement properties.

Tomorrow's lunchtime event will see former West Bromwich Albion and England football player, Tony Brown, join FirstPort's executive team as well as residents and employees from local FirstPort developments, Pegasus Court in Sutton Coldfield and Lytleton House in Dudley, to celebrate the official opening.

Nigel Howell, FirstPort CEO, said: "At FirstPort, we are continuously striving to deliver industry-leading customer service and we are delighted to be opening our new office in Halesowen which will support these efforts."

FirstPort manages general leasehold properties across 2,340 developments and retirement properties across 1,450 sites

## ISME stages experts event

The Institute of Sheet Metal Engineering is holding a meet the expert day in Birmingham this week.

It is taking place in the Think-tank, Curzon Street, on Friday.

The event is intended to encourage youngsters to think about career opportunities in the sheet metal forming sector.

The ISME annual general meeting and gold medal dinner is being held on May 11 at Aston Wood Golf Club and its annual skills competition at Coventry Motor Museum on June 15.

ISME is based in the Black Country and anyone wishing to get involved can contact Adrian Nicklin on 07774 260126.

## £9.7m to unlock SME potential

SME manufacturers in the West Midlands have been given a major boost this week with news that a new £9.7m business support initiative is officially live and looking to support thousands of companies.

The Manufacturing Growth Programme (MGP), which is funded by ERDF and delivered by Economic Growth Solutions (EGS), is promising to fill the void left by MAS by providing access to specialist assistance to help firms grow and improve.

This will be achieved through a 19-strong network of experienced manufacturing growth managers, access to industry specialists and the opportunity to apply for grants of up to £3,500.

Support can be used for leadership and management training, R&D, lean manufacturing, productivity and capacity, quality systems and supply chain development and is open to all SME manufacturers in the West Midlands.

"Since MAS was abruptly



Business support: Martin Coats and Lorraine Holmes from the Manufacturing Growth Programme

axed at the end of 2015, manufacturers have not had access to a support programme that is tailored to their exact requirements and delivered by people who know the sector," explained

Lorraine Holmes, chief executive officer of EGS.

"This has all changed with the official launch of MGP and we now have funding in place to help firms tackle operational

issues, make the most of new opportunities and boost the skills of their workforce."

She continued: "The programme has to be delivered by March 2019 so we want compa-

nies to come forward and take advantage of this assistance. It's never been easier as the process is quick and the scope of support can be tailored to meet the exact needs of the business."

MGP's network of manufacturing growth managers will be the first point of call and will work with firms on completing a strategic business review and developing an action plan.

### Expert

This will highlight the areas of improvement required and, from there, a number of industry specialists will be explored before the client chooses the expert they want to work with to complete the project.

The programme, which offers grants of 35% of the total project cost, is also working closely with a number of LEPs and their respective Growth Hubs to ensure manufacturers are signposted to other initiatives that may be able to help.

For further information, visit <http://www.manufacturinggrowthprogramme.co.uk/> or follow @mfggrowthp on twitter



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# Hague move will mean expansion and jobs

Report by John Corser  
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**A family-owned Willenhall business with 46 years of West Midlands special bolting manufacturing history behind it is relocating to a nearby site as it invests in new plant.**

Hague Fasteners, currently employing 16 in a unit on Watery Lane Industrial Estate is moving its business operations to a new custom refitted manufacturing facility. The total investment will approach seven figures.

Jon and Claire Hague, the husband-

and-wife team that run the 46-year-old business that originally started in Bradley, have, sealed a deal on the purchase of a new manufacturing site at the end of January. It is just two miles from the existing factory.

A significant redevelopment of the new facility is underway that will see Hague Fasteners relocate in the second quarter of 2017.

The new site is almost three times the size of the existing operation at Watery Lane and enables major investment in new plant. The expansion will also create a number of new jobs in the local area which has seen a number of other fastener manufacturers close down since the turn of the year.

Mr Hague, the managing director, said five to six would be recruited immediately and a similar number of the following 12 months.

Hague Fasteners have been at its current location for a decade that has seen continued year-on-year growth.

"We had reached capacity and were keeping an eye out for a suitable shell to move to," said Mr Hague.

The move to the new factory enables a doubling of production capacity that will see faster production times and a continued commitment to reliability.

"We are proud to see our success continue with the purchase of our new site. The complete re-design and renovation works of our new headquarters is now underway enabling us to move forward with the next exciting phase in our growth as a dominant force in high integrity special fastener manufacturing," said Mr Hague, who has two sons in the business.

Hague Fasteners also intends to continue its investment in bringing ap-

prentices through from local schools to encourage students to move into the industry.

Mrs Hague said: "When Hague stepped away from trying to compete with inferior imports 12 years ago, we had to reinvent the business and prove the model. We know from customer feedback that what we do is very special in a saturated market.

"Our customers know that reliability and integrity are what's important and it is these morals that have driven us to personally invest in a much improved infrastructure."

Hague supplies components for prestigious oil and gas, transport and infrastructure projects. International sales now account for about 50 per cent of its business

Hague Fasteners was formed by the late John Hague, Mr Hague's father.





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