

Business Barometer Wiltshire

Working in partnership with

Wiltshire Council
Where everybody matters

Barometer results...

TURNOVER

Wiltshire businesses who responded to Withy King's Barometer are growing, with more than half (53 per cent) predicting an increase in turnover in the second quarter (April-June) and a further 37 per cent expecting it to stay the same. This is slightly down on the first quarter (Jan-March) when 61 per cent of respondents predicted a rise and 31 per cent expected turnover to remain the same.

HEADCOUNT

Headcount continued to rise, albeit at a slower rate, with over one-third (34 per cent) seeing an increase over the last 12 months compared to 42 per cent in the previous quarter. A further 55 per cent of respondents reported no change in employee numbers, the same as last quarter. Job prospects are on the rise with 32 per cent planning to recruit in the second quarter when compared to 22 per cent in the first quarter; the majority (62 per cent) expect to maintain existing staffing levels and six per cent anticipate a reduction.

INVESTMENT

Over three-quarters (76 per cent) are planning to invest during the second quarter, roughly the same (77 per cent) as in the first quarter of 2013 and up from 60 per cent in the final quarter of 2012. Businesses are investing heavily in marketing and business development (81 per cent) although many are also investing in people (43 per cent), premises (29 per cent) and research and development (21 per cent).

ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

Wiltshire business leaders (38 per cent) said they were still increasingly optimistic about the outlook for 2013, but less so than they were during the first quarter of the year (56 per cent). Almost half (48 per cent) thought the outlook was static while 14 per cent said it was increasingly negative.

42 per cent are more confident about their business prospects than they were 12 months ago, while 40 per cent feel about the same.

Join Barometer

We want to hear your views. The Wiltshire Business Barometer is a survey designed to provide an insight into how the region's businesses are faring and hear owner-managers' views on the 'hot' topics of the day.

The results are published via the local media and interested parties are encouraged to contribute.

There are prize incentives, opportunities for publicity and online activities. To get involved, visit our LinkedIn group entitled Wiltshire Business Barometer.

Welcome to Withy King's Wiltshire Business Barometer, a quarterly survey designed to give businesses a voice and provide insights into local and national issues. In this special edition with Wiltshire Council, we look at the pros and cons of Wiltshire as a business location

Revitalising Wiltshire's market towns

MORE than half the businesses (55 per cent) who responded to Withy King's latest Wiltshire Business Barometer highlighted Wiltshire Council's Market Town Regeneration Programme as the most beneficial in attracting new investment to the county.

This was closely followed by developing workforce skills (52 per cent) and improving and promoting employment along the



M4 corridor (50 per cent).

Tim Martienssen, Head of Service Delivery at Wiltshire Council, offers an insight into how the Market Town Regeneration Programme works. "All our towns are individual with different populations, markets, issues and needs. But they all have to evolve if they are to compete with nearby cities and out-of-town shopping malls. We work closely with every Wiltshire town council to ensure they have a clear action plan which tackles current challenges and sets out a means to achieve their vision.

"One of the first things we did was to enable each town to undertake benchmarking research, compar-

ing their economic performance with similar towns in other parts of the UK and learning from their successes.

"We have launched a number of initiatives, each designed to achieve different objectives.

For example, our Wiltshire 100 programme sees us working with the largest employers in Wiltshire to ensure we understand their issues and are meeting their needs.

We are also looking at ways to increase the amount of incubation space available for start-up businesses.

We want to help them make the transition from home office to an environment where they can network with like-minded companies and discover the means to grow."



The newly launched market in Fore Street, Trowbridge

Marlborough in the spotlight

DESPITE already having a strong base in Swindon, Withy King believes it is important to not only maintain but expand its presence in Marlborough and is committed to building a long-term future there.

Robert Collins, pictured, a residential property partner based in Withy King's Marlborough office and a former President of the Marlborough Chamber of Commerce, shares his views on the town where he has worked for 21 years.

"Over the past decade, Marlborough has attracted several quality fashion shops similar to those found in Swindon Outlet village. While this has undoubtedly been good for business, high street rents have risen, limiting the



opportunities for new and smaller, independent shops and office-based businesses.

"Like other towns, we have seen the development of a new business park which we were originally assured was for non-retail use. Tesco has since opened a large store there and many traders fear the temptation of free parking and other amenities will entice people away from the high street.

"Marlborough relies on larger firms, such as Withy King and Brewin Dolphin, to support the International Jazz Festival and other local events and organisations such as the Chamber of Commerce. However, the shortage of office space in the town itself means that few new large firms can be persuaded to invest, preferring Swindon instead. Remedial action is needed to reverse this trend.

"I am presently canvassing estate agents about what steps we could be taking to make Marlborough a centre of concentric influence – so that outlying villages turn to us rather



Out-of-town stores and free parking could entice people way from Marlborough High Street

than other towns or cities.

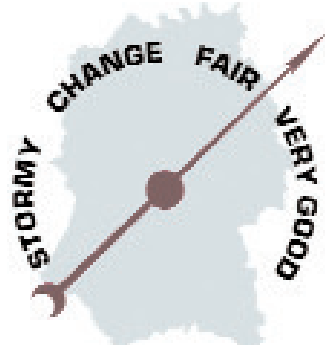
"Agents and lawyers support this notion but we would like to attract more accountants and banks to create a composite mix of services.

"The real problem comes back to the availability of land, offices and premises together with a shortage of quality hotel accommoda-

tion. It's interesting to reflect that the low cost and availability of land and property were cited by many Barometer respondents as one of Wiltshire's key strengths. This may well be true for the cities but here in our market towns, the picture is very different and a fresh approach is needed to

draw businesses in and keep them here."

For further information about Marlborough initiatives, visit www.transition-marlborough.org and www.welovemarborough.co.uk The official development group is the Marlborough Area Development Trust at www.madt.co.uk



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Why Wiltshire's a great place to do business

Call for public sector to join local supply chains

SMALL businesses are calling on Wiltshire Council to help grow the local economy by making its procurement processes more accessible.

David McCormick runs two renewable energy businesses, Optimum Heat and Rural Heat, from a site near Marlborough. David's companies supply, install and maintain commercial and domestic biomass boilers and he believes he and other local companies are ideally placed to help Wiltshire Council achieve its targets for installing biomass boilers in schools across the county.

"There is plenty of support available to encourage businesses to form local supply chains. I'd like to see the council become a link in these chains and take steps to allow small businesses to work with them."

Richard Howells is managing director of Dynamisys, an IT consultancy in Wootton Bassett set up in 2000 to help companies develop and manage their systems using a modern, agile, way of working. "Local and national government suffer from the same IT problems as the private sector businesses I work for; the difference is that I don't seem to be able get into Wiltshire Council to discuss their issues and recommend solutions," he said.

Vow to change procurement procedures

WILTSHIRE Council has pledged to make changes which will see its procurement of local companies' products and services rival those of the best councils in the UK.

The organisation, which employs around 13,000 people in Wiltshire, including 8,000 in schools, is currently re-writing all its procurement guidelines, including a directive which supports any Council employee looking to procure services to include at least one quote from a local supplier.

"We are very aware of the procurement challenges which some smaller businesses have encountered and want to reassure them that we are working hard to change the way we do things," said Tim Martiensen.

"We are looking to move all our procurement procedures to a single approach which can be scaled to suit both small and large procurements. It is a priority for the Council and an area which we are actively working to improve."

VIEW PUBLIC SECTOR CONTRACTS ONLINE

Wiltshire Council is urging businesses to visit the South West Procurement Portal via www.buywiltshire.co.uk/contracts, to register and search for public sector contracts and sign up for email alerts.

MOST of the businesses which took part in the latest barometer were launched in Wiltshire.

A total of 86 per cent taking part in the survey were founded in the county, with the remaining 13 per cent relocated to Wiltshire from elsewhere in the UK.

WHY WILTSHIRE?

Over half the businesses chose Wiltshire for its qual-

ity of life and environment (54 per cent) and access to customers (51 per cent).

Access to the M4 and other trunk roads, proximity to London and the cost and availability of commercial land and property were also key factors.

Strengths

- Quality of life and environment (88 per cent)
- Proximity to London (77

per cent)

- Transport accessibility (68 per cent)
- Access to train stations, airports and ports (63 per cent)

Weaknesses

- Quality of telecommunications and broadband (49 per cent)
- Higher education provision (40 per cent)

Responding to the weak-

ness findings above, Ian Baker, Wiltshire Online Programme Manager at the Council, said: "Improving broadband connections is a priority for Wiltshire Council and is being addressed through major investment to ensure a minimum of 91 per cent of Wiltshire premises are able to receive superfast broadband and 100 per cent of

premises will have access to a minimum of standard broadband by March 2016."

The Swindon & Wiltshire LEP, meanwhile, has an objective to increase higher education places across the area.

■ To find out more about the latest commercial properties available in your area, visit www.investinwiltshire.org.uk

Join in free business expo

COMPANIES from across the region will be showcasing their expertise at the Wiltshire Business Expo 2013 at Trowbridge Civic Centre on June 20 (8.30am-5.30pm).

Guests include Jade Nash, pictured, a finalist in the BBC's The Apprentice last year, David Bradley, Longleat chief executive and Paul Johnson, chairman of the Swindon and Wiltshire LEP.

There will be 85 businesses exhibiting which will give companies an opportunity to network, as well as workshops and seminars running.

For more information visit www.wiltshirebusiness-expo.co.uk.

One firm's certainly Raising the Baa

WILTSHIRE business owners and senior managers (42 per cent) are feeling increasingly confident about their prospects over the next 12 months compared to the previous year, according to Withy King's latest Wiltshire Business Barometer.

Raising the Baa is one such company whose creativity, entrepreneurial spirit and sheer determination are enabling them to prosper despite the depressing national picture.

Established just over a year ago by Bromham-based contract shepherd, Chris Farnsworth, Raising the Baa provides an unusual and highly effective team building and training experience for companies, clubs and other groups - by getting them to work together and herd sheep

into a pen!

Raising the Baa took off in March 2012 when Chris got involved with Swindon charity Inner Flame which was looking for new ways to inspire teenagers and build their confidence. Chris invited the group over to a field where he was working and got them to help him herd sheep. The event proved so successful that Chris and his partner, Caroline Palmer, pictured, who has an extensive background in marketing, business development,

training and personal coaching, decided to develop the idea into a business.

"Herding sheep takes people outside their comfort zone and puts them on a level playing field. It forces them to think laterally and find solutions to a shared problem in unfamiliar circumstances," said Chris, who still works as a contract shepherd when he isn't facilitating events. "People learn a huge amount about themselves as well as each other because unless they are committed, the sheep just won't co-operate. It's fas-

inating to see what strategies they come up with to get the sheep into the pen.

"Every training programme is tailored to suit the client's specific requirements. We will increase the challenge or provide more support and direction to ensure everyone achieves a positive outcome. The activity is filmed from different angles for discussion and coaching afterwards. This enables delegates to review their performance from different perspectives, including the sheep's"

The company would now like to attract other contract shepherds and executive coaches to optimise its expansion nationwide and in other English-speaking countries. It is currently looking for funding to take the business to the next level.

