

# BUSINESS

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**By SHAUN GRAY**  
President of Burton & District Chamber of Commerce and European Managing Director of Burton-based Gihno Group

It was what I would describe as tentatively encouraging for the business community when the Office for National Statistics (ONS) reported in February that the UK economy narrowly avoided a recession in the second half of last year.

As many of you may know, a recession is defined as when the economy contracts for two consecutive three-month periods.

Whilst the economy shrank between July and September, the ONS reported that output between October and December was flat at zero per cent, although in December alone the economy fell by 0.5 per cent, partly due to strikes across health, trains and the Royal Mail.

As reported widely in the media, the Bank of England still expects the UK to enter recession this year, and it has been predicted it could be shallower. However, as a Chamber, we know this will do little to boost the confidence of businesses who continue to battle rocketing energy bills, labour market disruption and rising interest rates, all of which are having an impact on consumer spending and long-term growth.

However, time is of the essence and the policy team of the Chambers of Commerce is working hard on behalf of the business community to lobby the Government to take decisive action at the upcoming budget to tackle crippling cost pressures and help create a much-needed platform of growth.

Getting back to growth and starting to remove the barriers that are out of the control of the business community is very important right now.

One of those barriers that is continuing to add pressure is the high volume of West Midlands residents leaving the workforce.

The inactivity rate - which measures the number of working-age adults who are out of the jobs market - now stands at 21.9 per cent.

The Chamber is encouraging employers and stakeholders to work together to get talented individuals to return to work.

The Local Skills Improvement Plan for the West Midlands, currently being delivered by the three regional Chambers, will be key to facilitating direct and dynamic working arrangements between employers and providers to deliver the skills employers need, now and in the future.

You can help inform local skills provision by completing the West Midlands Local Skills Improvement plan survey online at <https://www.>



## Business difficulties are still concerning



Government need to take decisive action at the upcoming budget to tackle crippling cost pressures and help create a much-needed platform of growth.

[surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SQHCPQR](https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/SQHCPQR).

Of course, whilst businesses rightly tackle challenges closer to home, there are many opportunities to trade internationally.

At Gihno, we export 85 per cent of our components across the world, and we were delighted to be named founding patron of the Greater Birmingham Global Chamber of Commerce, which will provide opportunities in more international markets for businesses.

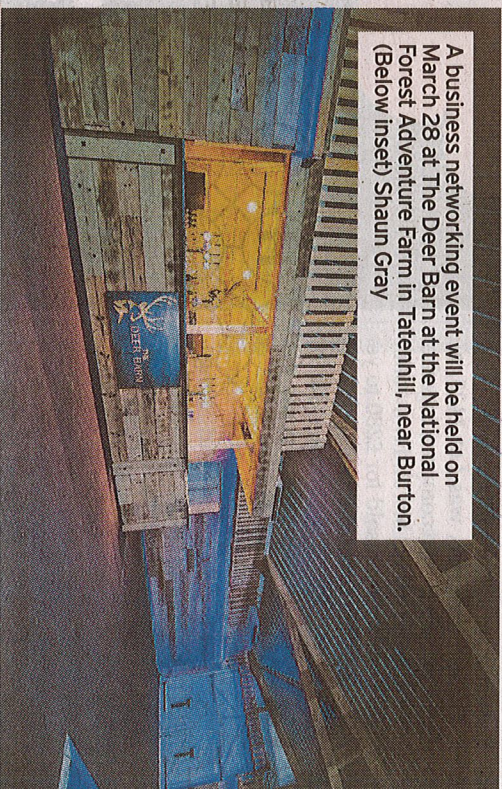
The scheme officially opens on April 1, and anyone interested should please get in touch for a chat.

Closer to home I would like to recognise some of the good work taking place in our own local area.

Opening a new business is challenging at any time, so it was fantastic that Salloway Property Consultants confirmed the letting of



A business networking event will be held on March 28 at The Deer Barn at the National Forest Adventure Farm in Tatenhill, near Burton. (Below inset) Shaun Gray



a town centre retail unit to new start-up Chai Tea Shop with Asian Street Food. Good luck to owner Iqra Qadir-Khan as he starts on this new adventure located in the heart of the town centre, within close proximity of the Octagon and Cooper's Square

Shopping Centres, Burton & South Derbyshire College and a convenient distance from the High Street and Market Place.

A big thank you goes to local accountancy firm Alexander Accountancy who ran a quiz night and raised £2,400 for our very deserving YMCA Burton.

Congratulations to Burton-based Hardy Signs who reached the finals of the Greater Birmingham Chamber of Commerce business awards in the Excellence in Manufacturing category.

The Gihno team is delighted to be named as a finalist too, but in the Excellence in International Business category. The winners will be announced at an awards ceremony at the ICC in Birmingham on Thursday, March 16.

There are several events coming up in March, including business networking on the 28th at The Deer Barn at the National Forest Adventure Farm in Tatenhill, near Burton.

If you would like to attend, get in touch with Richard Brooks at [r.brooks@birmingham-chambers.com](mailto:r.brooks@birmingham-chambers.com)

There is also a special International Women's Day (IWD) event tomorrow to celebrate the progress made towards women's equality and reflect on areas where change is still needed.

And finally, we are delighted to welcome the following businesses as members of the Burton & District Chamber of Commerce: Smartfits Installation, All Wills & Trusts Limited, Result Hub Ltd, Rob Page Consulting and Quality Leadership Ltd.

They are joining more than 100 companies across Burton and Uttoxeter, and over 2,500 across the broader region.

If you would like more information on Burton & District Chamber of Commerce, or to attend one of our networking events, please feel free to contact me at [shaun.gray@gihno-group.com](mailto:shaun.gray@gihno-group.com), or Richard Brooks on [r.brooks@birmingham-chambers.com](mailto:r.brooks@birmingham-chambers.com).