

- The voice of professionals in Coventry & Warwickshire
- Developing relationships that grow business
- Events that provide valuable business insights

Round up from our Chairman, Jon Wilby

My time as chairman got off to a busy start last autumn with a packed programme meeting people, visiting businesses and projects for behind the scenes insights. Our plans brought us into this year with plenty of momentum and several sold out events. Sadly, that all ground to a halt in March and this year has not been without its challenges, but like our members, we adapted to working remotely and quickly got into a new stride hosting online events.

We look back fondly on being able to visit the Albany Theatre in January and host a capacity breakfast with Andy Street just a week or so afterwards. In February we had a waiting list for our visit to the Fyffes banana factory and later in the month, held a leadership themed cross sector dinner with Nick Johnston. Our last gathering in person was a superb visit to the MTC at Ansty in early March which like many of our First Friday lunches included a private tour and look behind the scenes.

Our business breakfast in March with Professor David Bailey, Professor of Business Economics at Birmingham University had to be put on hold with just a few days notice as the world around us began to change.

March was also the last time our Board met in person, although thanks to Zoom, the pattern of our bi monthly meetings has continued unchanged. In April and May we hosted several discussions online, initially internally within the Board and then for members with a cross sector of Board members, to share what was working well (or not so well) and support one another as we began to adapt.

We moved our events online in May since when we have had the privilege of hearing from:

- In early June, Martin Reeves, Chief Executive, Coventry City Council and later in the same month Trish Willetts, Director Coventry BID and Rachel Baconnet Town Centres & Tourism Lead at Warwickshire County Council
- Laura Shoaf, Managing Director of Travel for West Midlands joined us in July
- In August, Martin Sutherland, Chief Executive of Coventry City of Culture Trust spoke to us
- September saw Professor Andy Hardy, CEO of University Hospitals Coventry & Warwickshire NHS Trust
- And just last month, in November we had over 30 attendees for our session with Nadhim Zahawi MP.



Breakfast Briefing in January with Andy Street



Jon Wilby and Andy Street, Mayor of the West Midlands



At the Albany Theatre for January's First Friday lunch



A visit to Fyffes banana factory in February



First Friday lunch at the MTC, Ansty in March

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We have received several invitations and offers to visit new, recently re-opened or quirky projects, businesses and locations which we will be taking up in 2021 as soon as we can begin planning physical events again. In addition, Professor Bailey very kindly agreed to reschedule our planned breakfast which we will be following up, and the two speakers at our planned cross sector dinner on AI and the Future of Professional Services also helpfully agreed to postpone rather than cancel. So we're ready to hit the ground running with a full roster of top people to hear from and fascinating places to visit.

One of this year's highlights was from a very different FirstPro last month. Originally scheduled to take place at Coombe Abbey in April, we hoped that some kind of physical gathering might be possible this autumn. In the end, our Board quickly decided that taking the Awards online with a fresh, light touch should be the aim. We were delighted to be joined by 140 attendees in celebrating as the winners were announced, and to see so much positive feedback about how much everyone enjoyed the new format. The video is now online here <https://youtu.be/6jLjblbAbVvk> and the edited highlights can be seen here <https://youtu.be/hzU-7qXxrVvk>. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Coombe Abbey for their support and understanding at a difficult time and we very much look forward to returning as soon as it's practical to do so.

During FirstPro we were delighted with the very special offer of a free overnight stay at the new Telegraph Hotel for members. Made by Ian Harrabin of Complex Development Projects (winner of last year's FirstPro Outstanding Achievement Award), it is available for FirstPro winners and sponsors, and members of Coventry & Warwickshire First upon payment of the subscription renewal invoice. FirstPro could not happen of course without our sponsors to whom I am incredibly grateful for continuing to support us - **Prime Accountants, CityFibre, CWLEP, Dafferns, HB&O, Integrity Wealth Solutions, Nimbus, SHMA and my own firm Band Hatton Button.**

And finally, I'd like to thank our members for taking part as often as you could this year, whilst juggling a whole new set of priorities, and to my fellow Board members for their support, ideas and enthusiasm.

We are lining up an active programme for 2021, whether it is online or in person. Let's hope we can all meet again before too long.

Kind regards,

Lorraine Walker



Announcing the winners of the FirstPro 2020 awards



Sharing city and town centre re-opening plans in June



Hearing from Professor Andy Hardy in September



Hearing from Nadhim Zahawi MP in November

If there are speakers you would like to hear from or places you would like to visit as part of our future events programme, we'd love to know, please email Lorraine@coventryfirst.co.uk