



insider
**ECONOMIC
FORUM**
COVENTRY &
WARWICKSHIRE

BARD GAMES

How can Coventry and Warwickshire build on an international reputation for car making, video games and Shakespeare?

PANEL ONE

- **Michael Collins**
sales and marketing director, Penso
- **Peter Deeley**
managing director, Deeley
- **Professor Sylvester Arnab**
professor in game science,
Coventry University

WHAT ARE THE BIGGEST OPPORTUNITIES AND BARRIERS?

Sylvester Arnab The gaming cluster in and around Leamington Spa – known as Silicon Spa – has been around for quite a while and is the third-biggest in the country behind London and Dundee. Coventry University was the first university in the world to create a serious gaming institute to build on the potential of that part of the sector. It has created a fantastic amount of research, which has benefited businesses around the world. Gaming is worth more than £180m to this area, and globally serious

gaming was worth \$2.6bn in 2016 and is set to grow even bigger. We need to do a lot more to explore its huge potential.

Michael Collins We're an SME automotive supplier with a lot of focus on technology. But there are some OEM (original equipment manufacturer) brands in the region, such as Jaguar Land Rover and Aston Martin, who can Hoover up staff and offer better packages to skilled employees. We work with universities to tap into their graduates and take on ten apprentices each year. We offer a diverse career path for engineers, because we also work in rail and defence.

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Professor Sylvester Arnab



Peter Deeley



Michael Collins

Peter Deeley As a region we have to upgrade the existing property stock, but as a construction company we're sometimes met with differing expectations about what the costs of doing this are. Some people still think they should be paying what they were five years ago. There also needs to be a balance between huge warehouses and manufacturing. We need more examples of engineering-based developments like MIRA.

HOW DO WE SELL COVENTRY AND WARWICKSHIRE TO THE WORLD?

Collins We should be shouting about what we have a lot more, particularly given we're heading towards uncertain waters with Brexit. We have Jaguar Land Rover and Aston Martin and some of the UK's leading academic institutions, as well as really good smaller high-value manufacturing businesses that offer a lot in terms of exports.

Arnab It's about selling the whole package to people in London and overseas, but it's also about keeping the skills here. As a university we produce 40 to 50 gaming graduates each year, but last year we only managed to retain three or four of them to work in Silicon Spa. More needs to be done to address this issue. We need to highlight our reputation as a university; we have moved up in the rankings from 27th to 12th in the UK this year. That's a great achievement.

Deeley One of our Coventry engineering clients lost a major order to China on some hi-tech work. A year later that order came

"We need to retain skills. Of our 40 to 50 gaming graduates last year, three or four stayed to work locally."

Sylvester Arnab

back to the business, because they realised it was the best in the world at what it did. We have world-class skills and we need to do more to highlight this globally.

IS THE AREA DOING ENOUGH TO DEVELOP THE SKILLS OF TOMORROW?

Arnab Coding was put on the school curriculum in 2014. Schools have also set up coding clubs, which are being attended by more than 80,000 children. But we need to learn from other countries, too. In Finland they don't look at coding as a single subject; it's embedded in all subjects. There's a school in New York which uses gaming and game design as part of learning. The gaming sector requires a wide range of skills, from design flair to technical knowhow – skills which need to be honed in youngsters.

Collins We need a lot more people doing coding, because of the drive towards autonomy. We do a lot of programmes in primary schools to try to engage young people sooner. The technology is changing at a pace I've never seen before. The

internet of things means cars can find out where the nearest empty parking space is. KPMG predicts that autonomous vehicles will be worth £51bn a year to the UK economy, and create 25,000 jobs, by 2030.

Deeley The construction sector is moving slowly forward when it comes to technology, such as offsite construction. Better technology means we'll be able to create taller buildings: while ten to 12 storeys has been the norm in regional cities such as Coventry, people are now looking at 20 to 22 storeys.



PANEL TWO

■ **David Cockroft**

director of city centre and major projects, Coventry City Council

■ **Peter Butlin**

lead on finance and property, Warwickshire County Council

■ **Nick Abell**

chairman, Wright Hassall and vice-chair, Coventry & Warwickshire LEP

WHAT WOULD BE THE WIDER BENEFITS OF COVENTRY WINNING UK CITY OF CULTURE 2021?

David Cockroft The bid is a great showcase for the whole region; we've got some great assets, such as Shakespeare and Warwick Castle. Hull has benefited by hundreds of millions of pounds from being UK City of Culture 2017, and bidding cities that didn't win put a lot of effort into redefining what they had as culture. Even if we don't win, it'll mean we've a much better understanding of what we can offer culturally. Coventry has had an issue with perception. This process can help improve that.

Nick Abell This is a real game-changer for the region, and can bring massive investment. There'll also be wider benefits which can't be measured in pounds and pence. For years Coventry has struggled with its image; The Specials recorded *Ghost Town* for a reason and we've found it hard to shake that off. Winning the title would go a long way to finally laying that ghost to rest.

Peter Butlin Stratford-upon-Avon is probably the second most popular tourism destination after London. We need to spread that to other parts of the region, such as Coventry, the home of the UK motor industry, Rugby, where there's the World Rugby Hall of Fame, and north Warwickshire, the home of George Eliot.

HOW CAN COVENTRY & WARWICKSHIRE BENEFIT FROM THE WEST MIDLANDS COMBINED AUTHORITY AND MIDLANDS ENGINE?

Abell As an LEP we've been very good at attracting money from government. Now we have to work within the combined authority and influence it. That's where the economic injections from government are now going to come. I sit on the combined authority's investment board and I'll be pushing hard for Coventry and Warwickshire.

The Midlands Engine is really all about branding this area to international investors. It provides a combined voice; it needs to be quite simple and shout loud for the Midlands. My concern is Coventry and Warwickshire LEP is agile and enterprise-led, and if you have a body like Midlands Engine feeding down about what different areas should be doing, you stifle enterprise.

Butlin We've found that although Warwickshire is not a full member of the combined authority, we've been listened to just as much as full members. West Midlands mayor Andy Street is a good listener and is not Birmingham-centric. A lot of what the Midlands Engine is about is improving connectivity between the west and east of the region. You can drive from Coventry to Leicester in 25 minutes, but by train it takes more than two hours. This badly needs to be addressed. It's also about ensuring the region has the skills and funding to grow. At the moment the Midlands Engine is a bit of a hollow vessel, gradually being filled up. For example, I see it playing a big role in the major changes needed from the ban on the internal combustion engine in 2040.

Cockroft I can't work out whether the West Midlands Combined Authority or Midlands Engine will be the new regional development agency. At the moment, the Midlands Engine feels like a branding exercise.

WHAT IMPACT WILL HS2 HAVE?

Butlin Sixty per cent of HS2 will be in Warwickshire and Buckinghamshire. The building process will have a massive impact. The shovels will be in the ground at the end of this year and we've got eight years of work ahead. We're making sure much of the £1bn they're going to spend on the Warwickshire section will stay in the county.

Abell The main positive for this area is HS2 is going to make Birmingham Airport a much more significant international hub.

HOW DO YOU MAKE COVENTRY A MORE ATTRACTIVE PLACE TO LIVE AND VISIT?

Cockroft We need to ensure the city centre doesn't shut at 5pm. The City Centre South scheme aims to address this, creating a bigger night-time economy by focusing on new restaurants and shops. Things are changing: there's been significant investment, including JP Morgan. It's also about attracting more people. The train station now connects better with the city centre, we have the Friargate scheme, One Friargate will be occupied in October and Two Friargate looks like it will be built next year.



Peter Butlin



Nick Abell



David Cockroft

