

Sponsored
by



HAZLEWOODS LLP
BUSINESS ADVISERS & CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS

Top 100, 2008

A man on a mission

Chas Fellows will play an important role in driving Gloucestershire's economy over the next two years. Sue Bradley spoke to him

THE new chairman of Gloucestershire First is a man on a mission. Chas Fellows sees economic vitality as critical to the long-term success of the county and wants to ensure a strong and sustainable environment for enterprise during his two-year tenure.

Unlike his predecessor – Lincoln Financial's managing director Michael Tallett-Williams – 62-year-old Chas's working career might seem an unlikely background for a future business leader. After 23 years as a warrant officer in the RAF, his return to "civvy street" saw him running a pub, delivering the mail, working with people overcoming head injuries and managing council cleansing contracts.

Nevertheless, it did not take him long after entering local government more than a decade ago to show he was a man with an eye for the big picture, not least during his dynamic leadership of Stroud District Council.

Chas's new role sees him heading an organisation which works with a number of partners, including the public and private sectors, higher education centres and voluntary and community groups, to develop and support the economic wellbeing of the county.

And while most people would interpret Gloucestershire's unemployment rate of less than two per cent as a sign the county is doing well, there is no room for complacency.

That's why Gloucestershire First is working to secure money from the South West Regional Development Agency and other bodies to attract new businesses to the area and ensure workers have the right skills to make the most of job opportunities in the years ahead.

"Gloucestershire is an attractive place in which to do business," said Chas.

"The workforce is generally quite dedicated and enjoys coming to work, and Gloucestershire itself is a very nice place to live.

"The county enjoys good access with other parts of the country thanks to the M5 and M4, rail links with the rest of the South West and close proximity to two international airports.

"The county has a high proportion of micro businesses, with five or fewer people, as well as several larger companies.

"But while we have a fairly good industry base, with companies like GE Aviation (formerly Smiths Aerospace) and Renishaw, the thing that is lacking is a centre of excellence for engineering where people can train. We have the potential for one but as yet we haven't got the momentum we would like to see.

"What is encouraging is that the University of Gloucestershire and the colleges are looking at addressing the skills need in the business sector in Gloucestershire so that it can be incorporated into the curriculum."

Other areas for improvement include the transport infrastructure of the county, with better links between the north and south and an end to bottlenecks such as the one at Nettleton Bottom. Chas sees Gloucestershire's creative industries as one of the key areas for expansion in the future.

"At present the value of these industries is around £800 million but there is the potential to expand by a further £150 million," he said.

Gloucestershire First has done much to encourage new business to the county over the last few years.

Particularly successful initiatives include the Gloucestershire Food Vision which has seen the county promoted around the world and led to improvements in the skills of catering workers.

Meanwhile Park Life provides support services to small businesses on industrial estates, such as human resources and accountancy, and organises events at which manufacturing companies can meet buyers from both inside the county and elsewhere in the UK.

If there's one thing about Gloucestershire First that Chas would like to see improved, however, it would have to be its profile among the general public.

"I think more people should be aware of the work the organisation is doing and, more importantly, the work it can do and has the capacity to do," he said.