



**Business
LIFE**

STAMFORD

RIVER WELLAND

Georgian Gem

Superbly located, serving a wide catchment area and well-placed for commuters, this historic Georgian town has a lively business scene.

Words: Glynis Fox Photographs: Mick Fox

Stamford's economy benefits from having a good mix of retailers, along with manufacturers and service businesses, which provide the everyday essentials and employment for locals and shoppers from the villages on its doorstep.

While no-one has been immune from the recession, the town also appears to have been holding its own and, while some names have disappeared, new enterprises are springing-up in their place.

Stamford Chamber of Trade has a 100-strong membership and continually works with other movers and shakers to make sure that the town keeps moving forward in the twenty-first century, without losing its obvious old world charm.

And its vice president Andrew Leech - a partner in Richardson Surveyors which handles both residential and commercial property - said there are always projects underway, which are designed to make the town more attractive and commercially vibrant for traders, tourists and shoppers.

"Stamford is a very pleasant area in which to live and we were the first Conservation town in the whole of the country which is why people are here in the first place. There is also a variety of national and local retailers and some key major employers," he said.

Stamford is in a great location, being so close to the A1. Road links are excellent, the town boasts good schools, and people wishing to work away, are within easy reach of Peterborough or

Cambridge. It is also a good home base for people who want to live in a beautiful area which also allows them to comfortably commute to London.

So how is such an historic and attractive town faring in the current tough climate?

"There is a recession and that is putting huge pressure on retailers, but secondly there is a turnover of shops because leases are coming to an end. Some traders are giving up, of course, but businesses change. That's life and you cannot get away from those factors," said Mr Leech.

"But there are new people coming in. For instance, Joules has just opened in St Mary's Hill.

Orange has brought its name to the High Street and another newcomer is

Stamford Independent Travel in St Paul's Street," said Mr Leech.

"The independent family business has always been our strength. And the buzz and ambience of Stamford regularly attracts shoppers within a catchment area of at least twenty miles," he added.

Many of today's towns and cities have gone down the route of setting-up their own business improvement district (BID). BIDs involve traders shelling out a levy, separately to their business rates. This is used to fund all sorts of initiatives and events aimed at boosting footfall and, in turn, trade.

But Mr Leech said that, although this concept has been discussed on several occasions, there are currently no plans for a BID for Stamford. In fact, where the town has needed to make improvements, its movers and shakers have chased grant aid and added it to private finance to get projects underway.

"At the east end of the High Street, in the area leading to Marks & Spencer, there are access issues over deliveries and also disabled parking problems. We have put together a solution with local traders, the town council and county highways, to create a £30,000 scheme to improve the situation by early next year," said Mr Leech.

Stamford Chamber also commissioned Stamford 3000 – a discussion document, whereby outside consultants took a microscope to this historic town and looked at ways in which it could be made more attractive and work more efficiently.

The end result was a large booklet, detailing the view of independent "outsiders", and it has provided a good starting point for medium-to-long term discussions about Stamford's future.

With Stamford's key concerns revolving around transport issues and car parking, the consultants looked at approach roads to the town and ways of making better use of the River Welland, which flows through its centre. They also explored the use of public art and street furniture.

All sorts of initiatives have been discussed, including the importance of an Eastern Relief Road for Stamford, to take traffic around the outside of its historic heart, and another public car park, including the possibility of underground parking.

Stamford is literally bursting at the seams with history, and is one of the places where Queen Eleanor of Castile's cortege stopped on its way to her final resting place in London.

As was traditional, everywhere the cortege stopped an Eleanor Cross was built, but all that remains of Stamford's historic version is a rose-shaped fragment, kept in the town's museum.

Now Stamford boasts a modern-day Eleanor Cross, which takes the form of an impressive thirty-foot high obelisk, built in the town's Sheep Market area – right outside Andrew Leech's offices. The design of the rose featured on the original cross has been incorporated into the new design.

Continued on page 60

ANDREW LEECH (VICE-PRESIDENT
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE)



HIGH STREET



THE GEORGE

STAMFORD TIMELINE

Stamford – described by many as the finest stone town in England – was one of the first to produce wheel-thrown pottery that had been glazed.

By the Middle Ages, its claim to fame was wool and cloth and, specifically, a woven material called Haberget.

The growing prosperity of the town meant it was soon able to boast a castle, fourteen churches, two monastic institutions and four friaries.

But the shift of the wool trade to East Anglia went on to hit the town hard, and it was left to the prosperous families of the time to turn around its fortunes.

One figure of note was William Browne, who is remembered for founding an almshouse in the town.

In the sixteenth century another, William Cecil – who became secretary of state to Queen Elizabeth 1 - left his own memorial in the shape of Burghley House, which was built between 1565 and 1587.

The nineteenth century saw the introduction of the Great North Railway, but it bypassed Stamford and ultimately the town missed out on a lot of potential economic growth. However, that is part of the reason why the town remains so unspoilt.

In the 1960s, its exceptional character was recognised by the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments and in 1967, Stamford became the first Conservation area in England.

Today its uniqueness has made it attractive to both tourists and shoppers. Stamford has also attracted media producers and film stars, as an ideal location for films such as *Pride & Prejudice* and the television drama *Middlemarch*.



Continued from page 57

Mr Leech said the landmark sculpture, known as the Eleanor Spire, came about as part of the Gateway Project. At the turn of the Millennium, local people were asked how they would like their town to look by the year 2015.

After extensive consultations, the Stamford Town Partnership - which is made up of councillors, business people and voluntary sector representatives – and which at that time was known as Stamford Vision, was given the job of realising these ambitions.

The Gateway Project included the redesign and transformation of Red Lion Square and Sheep Market, which are seen as important areas for visitors arriving in the town by car, or train.

Eleanor Spire artists Wolfgang Buttress has said the stone and bronze sculpture commemorates a great story of medieval love and the stone fragment from the original cross, still in the town's museum, inspired the artwork.

Students from Stamford New College, Stamford High School and the Queen Eleanor Technical College all got involved in this special project and the Technology College students produced Haiku – short poems – which can be seen on benches near the monument and also in Red Lion Square, where a Milestone, sculpted in Clipsham stone, has been installed.

The Stamford Gateway project was funded by a range of partners, including the County Council, East Midlands Tourism and Arts Council East Midlands.

Candlesticks
HOTEL
& RESTAURANT
Runner up in House of Townend Best Restaurant

- ◆ Superb location ◆ Elegant surroundings
- ◆ Dine in comfort ◆ Excellent cuisine

1 Church Lane, Stamford, Lincs PE9 2JU
Tel: 01780 764033 Fax: 01780 756071
E-mail: pinto@breathmail.net
www.candlestickshotel.co.uk

FOR YOUR
CHRISTMAS
PORTRAITS
CONTACT

don lambert PHOTOGRAPHER
01780757673 www.donlambert.co.uk

TOWN TRADERS

Change seems to be the only constant for many of today's market towns – but happily Stamford continues to boast its share of longer-standing businesses.

And one of the best-known has to be Dawson's of Stamford, which has been going for more than thirty years.

Started by John Dawson in his garage, back in 1974, it has been based in St Peter's Hill since 1976, and predominantly specialises in modern and antique silver jewellery, antique furniture and clocks.

Managing Director Mr Dawson employs six full-timers and two part-timers.

"Stamford is unique and almost situated in no-man's land, so we tend to be slightly independent," he said.

"Recession-wise, I don't think the town has suffered as much as some other parts of the UK. Anyway, as a business we have been here before. In 1976, when we bought St Peter's Hill, there was a major recession and interest rates were at about twenty per cent.

"There was another in 1989. But we are still here, and we will be at the end of this slowdown.

"In the last few weeks, we have sold big items of antique silver. We get visited by Dutch and American tourists, as well as local shoppers and we benefit from the independent travel trade, which attracts people to places such as Hambleton Hall and Burghley House."

Dawson's stock is international, features items designed to appeal to a wide range of buyers and includes "own label" pieces. People are drawn to the business through word-of-mouth recommendation and because members of their family have shopped there for many years.

The Fine Food Store in St Mary's Street, Stamford, was started by Jenny Fitzpatrick in 2003, a former Shell LiveWIRE Young Entrepreneur of the Year. A runaway success story, it has gone on to build a real name for itself and to provide work for eighteen part-timers.

"We are predominantly a coffee shop, which also offers a takeaway service. But we are also a food retailer and a confectioner and we sell various items in the shop," said Ms Fitzpatrick.

Since launching, she has expanded to add a delightful "secret garden" area, and she plans to offer her rising stream of loyal customers cakes and deli items by mail order from the New Year.

Another well-known business in the town is the butchery business Nelsons. Its original shop in Red Lion Square has been trading since 1826. Harold Nelson acquired the business in 1924 and went on to win more than fifty Gold medals for his Melton Mowbray pork pies, made in the cellar below the shop.

He retired in 1952 and sold the business to Frank Gilman – who in 1959 built a pie factory in the town's Alma Place. Today his nephew Guy Gilman is at the helm of a company which has two shops in Stamford – Red Lion Square and Broad Street – outlets in Oakham and Uppingham and two mobile shops, serving village communities.

On the manufacturing front, one of Stamford's biggest employers is Cummins Generator Technologies.