

A Kent Invicta Chamber service

ASHFORD 2022/23

A programme of support for businesses located in Ashford that have the ambition and capacity to grow



www.scaleupashford.co.uk



Background and Vision

Scale Up Ashford is a partly-funded programme of support for businesses located in the borough that have the ambition and capacity to grow. The programme has been endorsed by The Scale Up Institute.

The Scale Up Ashford initiative was launched in September 2017 with funds from Ashford Borough Council, in order to support the development of economic prosperity across the borough.

The first programme of its kind in Kent, Scale Up Ashford is built upon proven core principles from the wider national initiative pioneered by the Scale Up Institute and specific business coaching methodologies.

The programme is delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce and advisors Jim Gorrie and Paul Hayes. The key principle is that businesses are given access to tailored, intensive support and expert networks, in order to grow their business, support job creation and prosperity, and create an average 15 percent increase in gross added value.

Since the initial six firms that took part in the pilot programme, which ran from September 2017 to April 2018, Scale Up Ashford has since been expanded, with a subsequent cohort completing the programme in 2019.

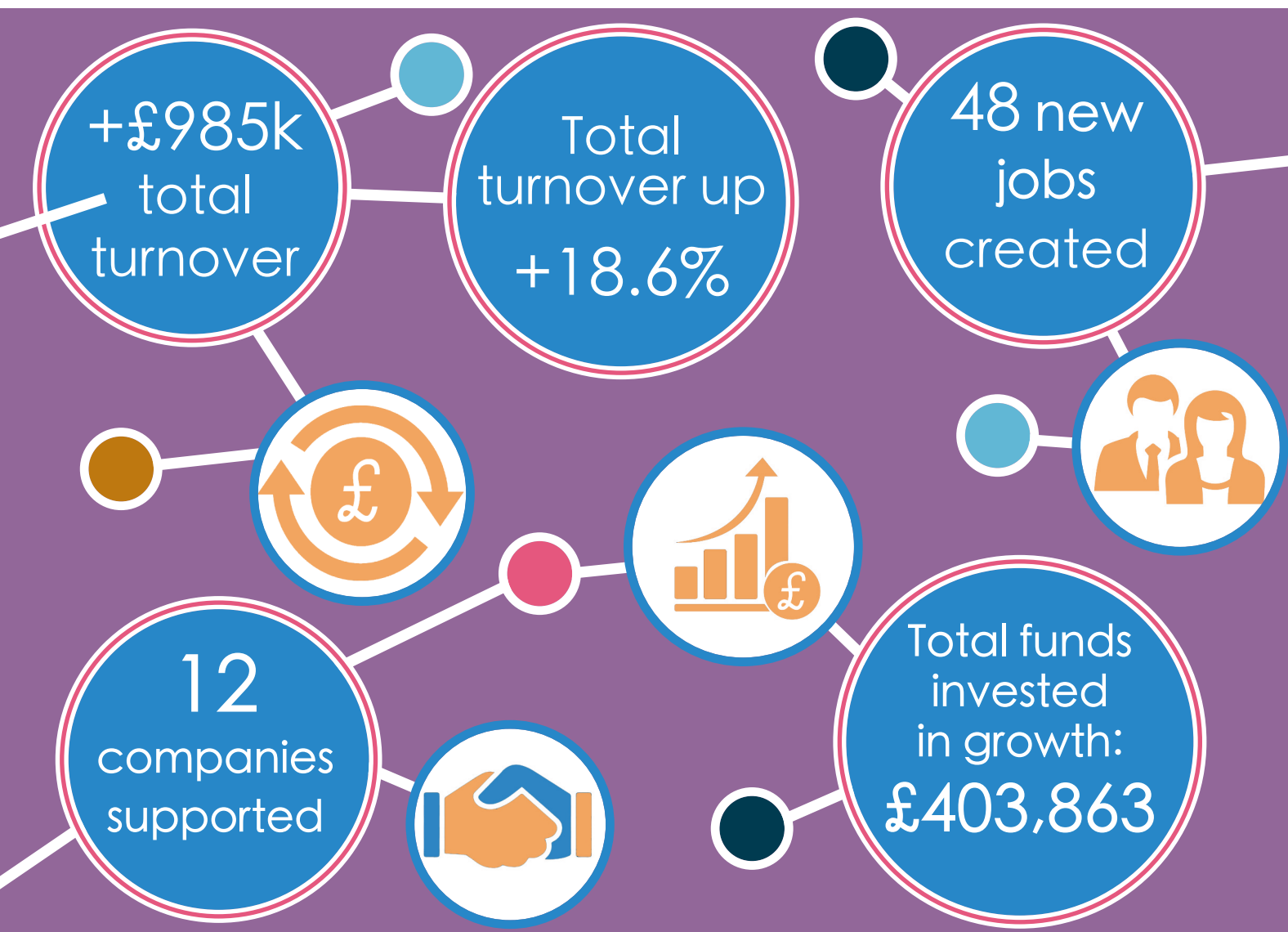
The latest group comprises 12 businesses from across the borough, 11 of which are profiled within this report. The Scale Up model has also been rolled out to further districts in Kent, including Folkestone and Hythe and select boroughs in west Kent.

Each firm is given one-to-one intensive business coaching every month and participants are supported with quality coaching delivered by experts, who also provide assistance with grant funding applications and access to networks and platforms to promote their business.

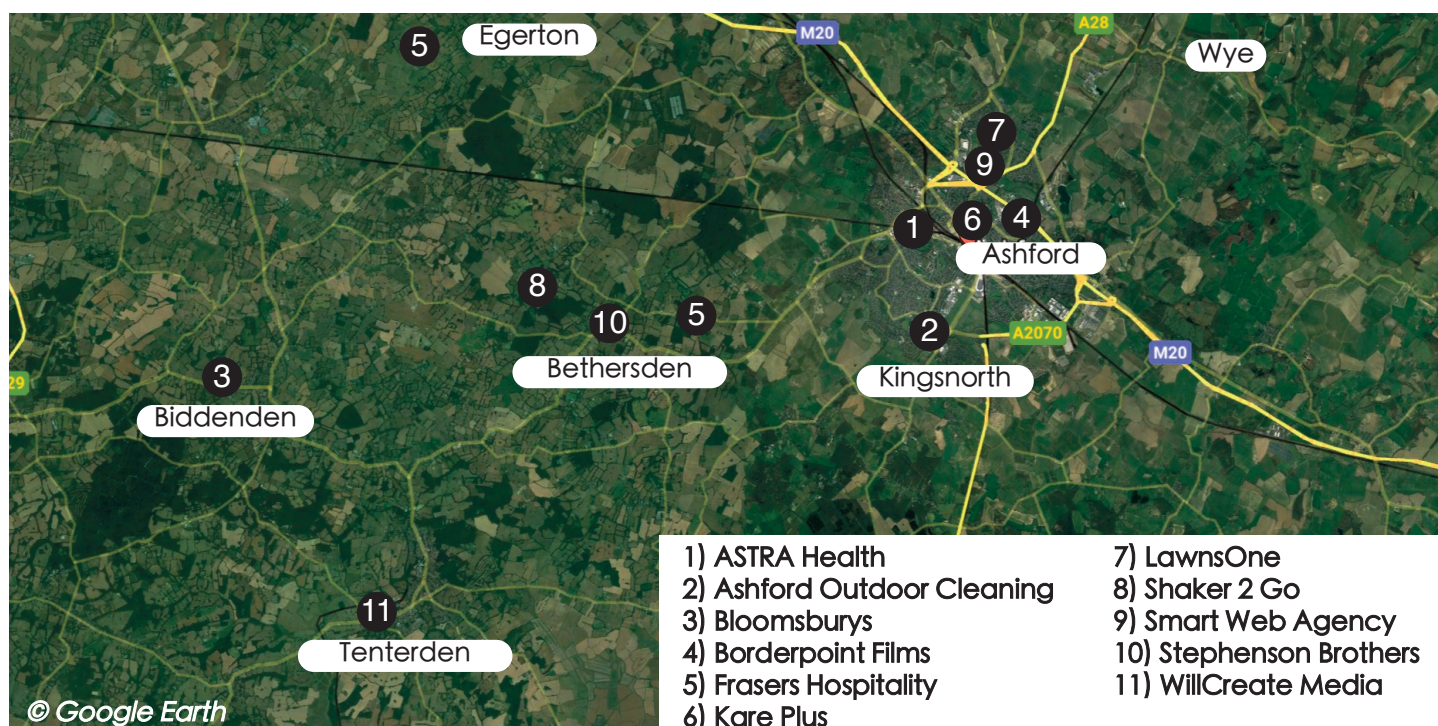
High-growth small businesses play a vital role in creating jobs and driving economic growth in the UK. The ambition of the Scale Up initiative is to make Britain the most fertile ground for businesses, not only to start up but also to scale up and grow. Research by the World Economic Forum shows that those start-ups that are able to successfully scale up their operations have a great impact on society, bringing new technology, innovative services and increased employment.

With the UK's departure from the European Union, there has never been a better time to invest in growing our domestic firms in order to create jobs and prosperity. To capitalise on the UK's long history as a trading nation and its vibrant entrepreneurial spirit, the country now needs to focus on how it supports its growing firms to scale up.

The Scale Up Ashford initiative aims to advance understanding of how to scale up a business, and how to build the most effective environment in which businesses can flourish. The programme promotes best practice, providing opportunities for scale up companies across a wide range of industry sectors to meet and share ideas.



Location of businesses profiled



Ashford Therapy & Rehabilitation Alliance

Sumin Moses and Ruth Jayakaran founded Ashford Therapy & Rehabilitation Alliance ten years ago, growing the company from a small clinic in Ashford to a team of ten people, working out of GP surgeries throughout Kent and offering a range of physiotherapy services.

Sumin discussed his time on the Scale Up Ashford programme: “I initially joined the scheme with hopes to increase our network and help us in our goals to grow the company physically by extending our current clinic space.

“The Scale Up programme offered us a lot more than that. Our coach offered insights which have helped us improve our overall business structure, focussing on people management and financial control.

“Self-management was a significant emphasis during our monthly sessions. When transitioning from a smaller company to a larger one, it's common to attempt to oversee everything as you did before. However, my coach helped me recognise that this approach could lead to burnout. Therefore, the most crucial lesson I've gained is the importance of taking breaks from the day-to-day to really plan and strategise.

“To help alleviate the pressure we have recruited admin staff and extra clinicians to help take on some of my workload.

“We are proud to have provided job opportunities to people in the Ashford area. Since joining the Scale Up programme we have increased our team by 30% meaning we are able to offer more clinics and a greater range of services, including private GP services.

“Our coach also helped us improve our communication with stakeholders. He showed me how to apply different approaches to negotiations during meetings to help us obtain contracts more confidently.

“He taught me to find and explain how we provide solutions to our client's problems instead of trying to sell our services to them. This has worked marvellously, and we have already taken on many new contracts since joining the Scale Up programme.

“We are in the process of expanding our clinic to the first floor to offer more rooms for practice. This will again mean recruiting additional physiotherapists. In the future, once we have strengthened and streamlined our services, I would love to extend outside of Kent.



Sumin concluded

“I would certainly recommend the Scale Up Ashford programme. The support we have received as a business has been extremely valuable.

“I believe that if everybody had access to this level of business coaching, it would irradicate the failure of companies in the first few years of trading.”

“

A common issue for any owner of a growing business is to keep trying to do what you started out doing, just with more people around you.

Sumin recognised this, and with the help of the Scale Up programme used current challenges and situations to consider options and further develop his business skills.

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Sumin has been very open to trying new approaches which has benefitted him and the business.

Jim Gorrie, Coach



Ashford Outdoor Cleaning

Ashford OC is a deep cleaning company, specialising in all aspects of commercial kitchen cleaning. Founded in 2009 by Darren and Angela Kingsnorth, the company quickly transitioned from offering a broad cleaning service, to specialising exclusively within the catering industry after obtaining a contract to maintain over 160 school kitchens.

Darren described his time on the Scale Up Ashford programme: "I first joined the programme with hopes of getting some guidance on whether we were taking the right steps to continue our growth.

"We had grown exponentially since we began, but this programme came at a good time to help us ensure that we continue to grow the company.

"Our coach took the time to understand how we were running the business and to learn about the industry that we work in. This really helped him tailor the course to us, ensuring we got the best out of our time on the programme.

"He taught us that having frequent business meetings were of key importance. Being a family run business it's easy to become complacent and not have the same formalities that would be present in other settings.

"These meetings really gave us a chance to discuss ideas with each other in a structured manner, ensuring that everyone was heard, and that each idea put in place helped work towards our end goals.

"We have put KPI's in place to ensure we keep a record of our finances and also to keep an eye on our marketing tools to ensure we are targeting the right clientele.

"Our coach helped us change our mindset when it came to social media marketing. Before I thought it would only target domestic clients which we were no longer trying to acquire, but he has opened our eyes to LinkedIn and other features on Facebook to help us better target our ideal clientele.

"We set annual goals which we broke into quarterly steps. Our coach pointed out I would always say 'We're getting there.' in which he would reply 'Where?' - as simple as this sounds, this really did make me aware that we were constantly pushing to scale up but didn't always put in strategies to achieve our goals.

"This programme has given us a great taste of the benefits of using a business coach. Before the Scale Up programme I would have overlooked the chance of gaining this external view of the business.

"Now I really am an advocate for getting business advice, even if you're doing well. It helps to have an independent, expert voice to outline the different avenues available to reach your goals.



Darren said:

“Since starting the programme I have enhanced the company in many different aspects. I have begun revamping the website, and launched a newsletter which is distributed to our regular clients.

“I am also looking to expand our fleet of vans along with our team to enable us to take on new work. Our staff headcount has grown by 50% in the last six months, and we have plans to continue to expand.

“I would highly recommend the Scale Up Ashford programme to all businesses in the area, the advice you receive is invaluable. I wish I could have had this opportunity when we first started out as I feel as though we would have had a much better starting foundation.”

“ *For any growing business it's important to have time to review, reflect, adjust, and action.*

Darren and Angela are moving the business forward, and by regularly reflecting on the progress made (via KPI's) they can reflect and recognise the things that are working, and adjust the things that aren't, in a timely manner.

Darren has also embraced more structure into his working week, giving him the freedom to spend time with staff and customers.

Jim Gorrie, Coach



Bloomsburys

Bloomsburys is a centre for like-minded businesses offering services connected to the wellness sector. Bloomsburys' site brings together a multitude of businesses generating a unique space for relaxation and wellbeing. Focussed on couple's retreats, they offer glamping, spa and beauty treatments, a fitness studio, an herbarium and a restaurant in the beautiful Kent countryside.

Russell Pay, Director of Bloomsburys, said: "My partner and I started this venture with no prior business experience, so over the last 20 years we have embarked on a steep learning curve. Since the Covid-19 Pandemic, where our business was completely devastated by the lockdowns, we have had to rethink our business model and this opportunity to join the Scale Up Ashford programme came at a perfect time for us to get the ball rolling again.

"Our coach helped us to identify our ideal destination for the business and create the path to reach it in terms of our business objectives. They assisted us in producing strategies for planning, emphasising the importance of keeping our end goal at the forefront of our minds. This approach allowed us to structure our journey more efficiently, working backwards systematically from our final objectives.

"Our coach held us accountable for our decisions during monthly meetings and guided us to set objectives and realistic, attainable steps. Our short-term goals included identifying suitable tenants to occupy space on our premises, enhancing our customers' experience by providing a diverse range of services on-site. We are making excellent progress in building a comprehensive selection of businesses that will complement our existing services.

"Our coach's advice was truly valuable, especially when it came to planning and organisation. Their guidance helped us develop detailed forward plans and reports that have begun to play a crucial role in our activities.

"During our time on the programme, we were introduced to industry peers who faced similar challenges and experiences. It was useful to discuss shared experiences and alternative approaches with others to find fresh perspectives and new ideas, some of which have proved to be beneficial to us.

"Our coach approached the process with a highly collaborative attitude, creating a non-judgmental environment. His perceptive coaching style worked effectively with us.

"We have streamlined our services to refocus away from glamping and more on couple's retreats. This has meant we can concentrate on creating a truly high-quality experience for our guests but has also meant increased stability in the business.



Russell concluded:

“Our long-term goal is to produce a clear exit strategy to allow us to take early retirement. Although this is still a few years away, it feels great to have plans coming together for an easy handoff when the time comes.

“I cannot recommend the Scale Up programme enough, our coach was tremendous and, with a wealth of knowledge and experience behind him, he knew exactly what to help us put in place to simplify the business and create structure to our goals.”

“ *Russ and Claudia’s working partnership has achieved so much at their site in Biddenden, with plenty more to come.*

This popular hub of complementary wellbeing businesses serves a broad range of clients and continues to grow, with additional business/services planned for the near future.

With so much going on, supporting the daily activities with strong people, processes and systems, alongside a clear focus on the strategic priorities, will continue to yield returns.

Paul Hayes, Coach

Borderpoint Films

Borderpoint Films is a film and television production company based in Ashford, with a focus on producing specialist factual genre content, honing in on science, history and true crime documentaries. The company is diversifying into new areas of storytelling, in particular the use of immersive technologies such as virtual reality and augmented reality.

Dominic Rees-Roberts, Co-founder of Borderpoint Films said: "Establishing Border Point Films amidst the Covid-19 Pandemic was a challenging task. I committed a significant portion of our funds into acquiring the best quality equipment, a calculated risk that thankfully paid off. This investment ensured our clients received superior content quality, consequently bolstering our reputation.

"I initially joined the Scale Up Ashford programme to sustain our growth trajectory. Our coach adopted an approach that involved understanding our existing business practices while subtly guiding us to generate fresh ideas. It felt like a collaborative process rather than a rigid directive. He offered guidance, challenging our perspectives and equipping us to confidently implement the advice beyond the programme.

"Relocating to Ashford from London and transitioning from freelancing on group projects to overseeing my own commissions exposed a gap in industry connections. On my coach's advice, I began attending industry events, which was eye-opening and felt extremely worthwhile, as I was able to get a taste of what others in the industry were thinking and looking for. I came away from these events feeling really motivated.

"Since enrolling, we've moved to a dedicated office space, which has enabled a hybrid work model for our team. This alleviated personal pressure and enhanced my work-

life balance; the new workspace also fosters collaborative idea sharing, which has hugely benefitted us.

"We've grown our team by hiring a researcher and offering work experience to University of Kent students, harnessing the strong skill set coming out of the local area and providing the students with valuable industry experience.

"At a time where a lot of companies are tightening their belts, they are not necessarily looking for content creators. This has changed our approach to think less into selling but more about trying to foster creative and strategic partnerships.

"The business tools that were given to us as part of the programme offered structure to our plans, making them pragmatic and achievable; completing each step added further positive momentum. Our coach's insights motivated us to refine goals and identify solutions.

"Working in a creative industry, focussing on the business is often quite low down on the list of priorities. I was often coming up with new ideas before completing current projects, meaning I was creating this never-ending pile of projects which felt unattainable. Having an objective perspective has enabled us to gather clarity and refine our ideas, helping us to concentrate on the optimal projects for our business.



Dominic concluded:

“We are honoured to have been selected for this programme, it has been a great resource for us. Ashford should be noted for its proactive business centre and I am grateful to be part of a town where so much is invested in seeing businesses succeed.

“The Scale Up programme has supplied us with the right tools to overcome obstacles and a coach who tailored the whole process to our company, keeping us on the right tracks to move our business forward.”

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Dom's self-awareness and sensitivity to what is important (not just urgent) for the growth of his business, has certainly helped to shape the progress he has enjoyed under the Scale Up Ashford programme.

Professional contacts and interest developed through a wide range of collaborations, have provided Dom with yet more business opportunities. Whilst being a creative is all about ideas, being able to assess the commercial viability of those to rule in and those to rule out, and knowing what to do next, is where Dom stands out.

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Paul Hayes, Coach



FRASERS

Frasers

Frasers is a hospitality and events venue, made up of a hotel, holiday lets, restaurant and eco-barn which can host corporate events, training seminars, weddings and parties. Now owned by Lisa Fraser and her husband Adam, the estate is a family business with an eco-conscious heart.

Lisa has prioritised ecology and environmental considerations within the business, and over the past 30 years has focussed on developing the 300-acre estate into a haven for wildlife, and now provides advice and support to other companies looking to improve their eco credentials, an area of the business she is keen to expand.

Lisa Fraser said: “We first joined the Scale Up Ashford programme to gain an objective view of the company. Our coach inspired the team to collaboratively produce a mission statement which lists all our core objectives, an exercise that promoted positivity and buy-in throughout the team.

“We faced a really difficult situation with the business during the Covid-19 Pandemic. Having just invested over a million pounds into a new state-of-the-art eco-barn events venue, the national lockdowns really came at a terrible time for us. Just as we were beginning to bloom into the realms of eco-estate and turn the business from a focus on hospitality to a whole new venture, we were halted.

“Now that we have the chance to start up again with renewed direction, the support we have received from the Scale Up Ashford programme has been really valuable to ensure we move forward on the right tracks.

“Our coach was impartial but also informative, not telling us what to do, but helping us shift our mindset to make informed decisions for ourselves. We set goals and then unpicked the plans to understand how we were going to achieve our objectives and also why we wanted to.

“We're striving to secure more corporate clients and aim to operate at maximum capacity throughout the week, not only to boost revenue but also to optimise energy efficiency by accommodating many people at once.

“The site is powered by over 55% renewable energy and runs at net-carbon neutral. We grow a lot of our own produce, and we work with local farmers and over 50 other local businesses. We have always been advocates for sustainability, and eventually our goal is to become an educational resource for other companies looking to learn about how to become self-sufficient and lower their carbon footprint.

“During our time on the programme, we have harnessed our marketing in the right areas, such as utilising low-cost social media channels to directly target and engage with potential clients online.

“We have launched tours of the estate and regularly invite companies to visit and learn about how to embark on their own sustainability journey. For example, I recently gave a talk to Coty, a global cosmetic manufacturer based in Ashford, on sustainable working at a training session using our facilities. I then visited their site and helped them plan and design a cutting/vegetable garden for their staff to relax in. We are currently exploring opportunities to work together on an ongoing basis, such as participating on our new Carbon-credit initiative.



Lisa added:

“Whilst on the programme, we have doubled our staff headcount and have appointed an events manager to ensure that we have the capacity to expand our offer and take on new clients. We are now also relaunching our external catering services, offering high-quality dishes with low food-mileage ingredients.

“The Scale Up programme instilled flexibility in our business model ensuring we were reaching our full potential. Our coach gave us valuable guidance and played an important role in steering our success throughout what has been a challenging time.”

“ *The lockdown was tough on the hospitality industry, but Lisa embraced the opportunity to pivot into other channels that would be in line with the ‘Frasers’ brand.*

Lisa is a champion for having an environmentally responsible business model and was happy to use the Scale Up support to reflect on the current activities such as marketing, whether they were getting the desired response and return on investment, and what would be the marketing strategy moving forward. ”

Lisa also got the team involved in re-establishing the company’s founding values.

Jim Gorrie, Coach

Kare Plus Ashford

Kare Plus Ashford is a franchise of the Kare Plus agency company, owned by Paul Tiltman. The company focusses on supplying high-quality care and support services across a number of residential establishments across Kent, looking after those who require supported living at any age.

Kare Plus Ashford has been trading since January 2016 and has two businesses under one umbrella; a recruitment agency supplying healthcare workers into locum roles and a regulating service supplying home care for the community through local councils and by private means.

The company employs around 120 care staff in the field, and one of the most substantial parts of the business is delivering training to the team, which ensures compliance in all of their operations.

Paul said: "When I joined the Scale Up Ashford programme, my primary goal was to gain an objective view of the business from a business coach's perspective. It was essential to learn new and improved methods of running the business.

"Having managed multiple businesses over many years, this programme provided a valuable opportunity to realign my skills and ensure I was providing the best strategies for my company.

"The programme allowed me to allocate time specifically for future planning, which is often challenging due to the daily demands of managing the business.

"The Scale Up programme enabled me to take time to sit down with my senior staff, evaluate areas for improvement, and devise strategies to achieve our goals moving forward.

"Our coach took a holistic approach, prompting us with questions rather than simply dictating what needed to change. This approach empowered us to develop our own thoughts and equipped us with the necessary tools to implement the changes and continue to make improvements after our involvement with the programme finished.

"During our initial meetings, we broke down our primary goals into manageable steps, which we reviewed and ticked off each month, streamlining our methodology.

"These goals included expanding the business, such as via potential infrastructure investments, as well as diversifying our services to specialise in more complex care.

"Since joining the Scale Up programme, our revenue has consistently increased month after month, and we are on track to achieve our financial goals for this year.

"Another significant change within our company since embarking on the Scale Up Ashford programme has been the improvement in team morale. We have shifted our perspective on how to respond positively to challenges.

"Rather than reacting impulsively, we ensure we now take the time to assess situations, devise action plans, and approach difficult scenarios strategically and calmly.



Paul concluded:

“Our business coach provided us with invaluable insight and experience, and I would love to continue working with him beyond the programme. As we aim to grow our SME into a larger company, it is essential to establish appropriate, effective structures throughout the business.

“Our coach encouraged us to strategically evaluate each plan before taking action and facilitated stakeholder meetings to discuss and improve our operational processes. We consider ourselves fortunate to have been part of this programme as it has hugely influenced our mindset when approaching business tasks.”

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The Senior Team with KarePlus Ashford were open to input from the start, and quickly responded to the challenge to evolve old thinking to create new opportunities.

Their regular meetings of ‘Plan, Do, Review, Acknowledge, Learn, Adjust (and Repeat)’ enabled the team to shift from feeling on the back foot to being on the front foot.

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These new approaches and behaviours have been embedded over the period of the Scale Up support, providing solid foundations for sustainable future growth.

Paul Hayes, Coach

LawnsOne

After several years in the landscaping industry, Martin and Heather Ashdown made the decision to branch out and specialise in lawn care, establishing LawnsOne in 2004. Focussing on rejuvenating lawns with a programme of fertilisers and weed control, LawnsOne has become a trusted name in lawn care throughout Kent and London.

The company works primarily with residential customers, but also work on larger, commercial projects such as The Charterhouse, The Museum of the Home in London and The Oxford University Press. The company is also a keen supporter of charities and community initiatives, key considerations that remain at the heart of many of its projects.

Martin Ashdown, Owner of LawnsOne, discussed his time on the Scale Up Ashford programme: "When we joined the Scale Up Ashford programme, our main aim was to achieve sustainable growth that would enable us to continue supporting our other objectives, such as our charity work.

"We needed to ensure our business remained financially viable to continue with these charitable projects, and the Scale Up Ashford programme came at just the right time for us.

"Through the programme, we focussed on refining our business processes, ensuring our goals were well-defined and taking the necessary steps to achieve them. Having a coach to approve our existing plans and guide us in making the right business decisions at the right time was tremendously helpful.

"Since starting the Scale Up programme, we've implemented regular meetings within the company to enhance communication and consistency. This helps everything run more smoothly and allows us to identify and address any issues promptly.

"Our coach provided us with invaluable business tools to improve communication within the company, ensuring that information is effectively conveyed to our team and clients. We've also sharpened our marketing focus, which has increased our visibility among potential clients.

"At LawnsOne, our team is at the heart of everything we do, and we work hard to provide them with opportunities to progress their careers whenever possible. We will continue to prioritise the well-being of our team as we grow sustainably.

"We recently expanded our headcount by over 30% and are now looking to recruit more members by the end of the year. Based on my past experiences, I've learned that it's not always best to hire based solely on skills.

"We can always train the right people to meet our high standards. So, we now look to hire individuals whose personalities align with our company ethos, ensuring our clients receive the best customer service.

"In terms of future plans, we're committed to keeping the business fresh and we strive to continuously challenge ourselves. We're researching the acquisition of additional lawn businesses to further enhance our client base.



Martin concluded:

“The Scale Up Ashford programme has been instrumental in our growth journey. Having a third-party perspective on our business from someone who's not familiar with our industry has been invaluable in challenging our existing ways of working.

“Embracing the suggested changes has led to significant benefits for us. We're so impressed with our coach's support that we have decided to continue our partnership beyond the programme.”

“ *Recognising the value of an engaged team for any business, Martin and Heather have clearly defined values that are dear to them and their team.*

By taking time to reflect on these and how they impact the day-to-day business they can bring their values to life, resulting in engaged staff and an even better experience to customers.

” *Open to challenge, Martin and Heather are continuing to evolve their business with one eye on the present and one eye on the future which will support their continued growth.*

Jim Gorrie, Coach

Shaker2go

Shaker2Go offers bespoke, made-to-measure kitchen cabinet doors, plinths, and hardware, providing everyone, whether a tradesman or DIY enthusiast, with the opportunity to purchase high-quality, handmade, custom and standard fit products at a trade price.

Founded by Phil Temple, who initially trained as a carpenter and later transitioned into cabinetry, Shaker2Go was founded in 2015, building on Phil's prior experience of crafting bespoke doors for clients.

Phil said: "Many companies experience a growth plateau around five years into trading, feeling like they've reached their maximum potential and uncertain about how to scale up further. From an insider's perspective, discovering new avenues for further growth becomes challenging. Recognising the importance of gaining an objective view of the business, I knew seeking guidance from a mentor was essential.

"I had been looking for a business coach for the last few years, and this opportunity from the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce came about to join the Scale Up Ashford programme which has proved invaluable to us. Our coach arrived at the perfect time as we shifted to retail-only operations. He brought business acumen, structured our long-term goals, and helped delegate work to other team members, freeing me to concentrate more on business structuring.

"We used to produce our stock on-site, but we recently made a strategic shift to focus solely on retail. By sourcing our products throughout the UK, we maintain control over manufacturing, ensuring the highest quality for our clients. This change has alleviated significant pressure and resolved issues related to damage during delivery.

"The Scale Up programme provided us with tried and tested advice from a coach with a wealth of knowledge and experience. It

helped me overcome hesitancy in decision-making, fostering confidence in my ability to drive the business forward. Now, I tackle challenges by working backward from the solution, ensuring we can overcome any hurdles that may arise.

"We were supplied with fantastic business tools, keeping us on track with our monthly goals leading up to achieving our overall annual objectives. We focussed on our sole business value, creating a paradigm, moving forward confidently with the resources needed to execute our plans. This established a clear and defining approach to all of our decisions, strategies, and actions.

"We set an annual goal to optimise sales, breaking it down into twelve tasks with detailed plans to accomplish each one. Additionally, we implemented failsafe measures, including a critical task list, to ensure the business remains viable and operational even without my direct involvement, making it potentially attractive for future sale.

"To reinforce our team and to streamline operations, we embarked on a journey to strengthen our approach to our daily operations. Over the last six months, as part of the Scale Up programme, we welcomed a PA on board. This change has transformed the way we work, allowing us to overhaul our previous manual order fulfilment system into an efficient, environmentally positive online process. The newly established computer system also allows us all to work remotely, fostering a flexible work environment and reducing overhead costs.



"We are now planning to create sister companies, Wardrobes2Go and Kitchens2Go, expanding our scope to offer full kitchens and wardrobe kits to our clients. We are in the process of scheduling a launch for these two additional companies, fully scaling up the company umbrella.

Phil concluded:

"The Scale Up programme has taught me how to strategise and optimise my time as a businessperson, leading me to be confident in the direction of my company.

"Unlike other business courses or events I've attended in the past, this programme was fully tailored to me and my business needs. The intensity of the information received surpassed all my expectations, making it the best and most effective use of my time."

“ *Phil displayed laser focus right from the start of the Scale Up Ashford programme and has applied this consistently to date, with all matters within his control.*

Where areas outside of his control caused occasional challenges (e.g. client ordering errors and poor supplier performance) Phil handled these with a calm solution focussed disposition and a personal touch.

Our routine of regular reflection and monthly goal setting has given Phil time back, to launch his 2nd business and line up the 3rd ahead of schedule. Almost as if we had planned it! **”**

Paul Hayes, Coach

Smart Web Agency

Smart Web Agency is a software development company founded by Rehan Ahmed in 2019. Leveraging his extensive experience in managing software development teams, Rehan established his own company and, using his expertise along with the support of his dedicated staff, the business has gone on to experience remarkable growth, forging strong relationships with clients across the globe.

Smart Web Agency specialises in creating web applications and websites tailored for businesses in need of software solutions for point of sale management, customer relationship management, and digital marketing campaigns, with a key strength being event management apps.

Rehan said: "Since starting Smart Web Agency, we have witnessed exponential growth year after year, doubling our revenue and income. Currently, we have two full-time employees based in the UK, and we also regularly use external companies for design, quality assurance, virtual assistance, and marketing support.

"Our work currently focusses on tech companies in the Middle East, particularly businesses involved in event management across Oman and Abu Dhabi. By offering bilingual software solutions, we have become the preferred supplier for these companies, which is incredibly gratifying for our business.

"Joining the Scale Up Ashford programme was a natural step for me as I recognised the need for additional support in scaling my business. While I excel as a software engineer and director of a growing company, the business aspects didn't come as naturally to me. Despite the progress I had made, I felt that the guidance of a business coach through the Scale Up programme would provide the necessary structure and propel the business beyond its current stage.

"The greatest benefit I have found from the Scale Up programme is the clarity it has brought to my business. I now have a clear understanding of our pricing points, objectives, plans, and how to initiate projects. Previously, our pricing was predominantly customer-driven, which meant often undervaluing the quality of work we provided. Thanks to my coach on the Scale Up programme, I learned how to price our services in a way that attracts clients while also doing justice to our expertise. Being more selective about our target client base has also steered us towards ideal projects and clientele.

"Another fantastic outcome of this programme has been the ability to define clear objectives and outline the future trajectory of the business. With the assistance of my coach, I have developed a comprehensive business plan meaning that I am now in a position to approach investors with a view to taking the business to a new level.

"The Scale Up scheme has also played a significant role in streamlining our processes. I was advised to compartmentalise each stage of our projects, allowing us to work efficiently and provide an exceptional service to our clients. From this, we have been able to take on more work as we can now plan projects in a more strategic manner, lessening the workload.

"My coach has also emphasised the importance of delegating tasks to members



to my team. While I have always been hands-on as a director, it became clear that enabling my team to take over the day-to-day tasks would allow me to focus on accelerating our growth. By following this advice, we are now looking to expand our team by hiring local people from the Ashford area.

“Since starting on the Scale Up Ashford programme, we have witnessed a 10% increase in turnover from our first quarter, just by implementing these small yet clearly impactful operational changes.

Rehan concluded:

“My coach tailored his advice to suit my needs, focussing my sessions more on practices rather than business tools, as I lacked the knowledge of how to effectively market and sell our services. His key guidance to me was to never undervalue the services we provide. Now I feel confident in my abilities as a business owner, juggling all aspects of the company. Gaining clarity through strategic approaches has been more beneficial than I could have imagined.”

“ *Being great at what you do will only take you so far when running a business, and it's to Rehan's credit that he recognised the areas that needed addressing to further grow the business and sought support and advice.*

By focussing on having a plan, who is the target market and valuing the service you provide, Rehan has grown the business further and I look forward to seeing how things progress.

Jim Gorrie, Coach



Stevenson Brothers

Stevenson Brothers is a rocking horse company based in Bethersden founded by twin brothers Marc and Tony in 1982. They have since made thousands of bespoke rocking horses, including for some high-profile clients, including the late Queen Elizabeth II, Zara Philips, & Dame Joanna Lumley along with many more famous owners.

Specialising in making replicas, around 50% of Stevenson Bros' orders are based on the likeness of their client's real horses.

The uniqueness of Stevenson Bros lies not only in the exceptional craftsmanship but also in the company's commitment to traditional values. Every single rocking horse is produced in their two workshops in Bethersden & High Halden, with skilled local craftspeople working on-site to meticulously assemble each piece. The company consists of nine full-time staff members, along with, Partner Susan Russell, who joined Marc and Tony to help manage the day-to-day operations of the business.

In addition to its dedication to traditional craftsmanship, the Stevenson's are also firmly committed to eco-friendly practices. For every rocking horse created, the company ensures that an oak sapling is supplied to each customer. This thoughtful gesture serves to replenish the oak used in the horses.

Over the years, more than 9,000 saplings have been planted by happy owners in the British Isles, demonstrating a firm commitment to improving the environment. As they venture into new opportunities and expand their business, Marc and Tony intend to continue their environmentally conscious efforts.

Marc Stevenson said: "We were invited to take part in the Scale Up Ashford programme through the Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce following plans for our new business extension.

"We have a planning application in the works to build a new workshop, showroom, museum, café, classroom and farm shop at our site in High Halden. After all these years, we thought it was about time to relocate to our larger site in High Halden. This move allows us to showcase the fantastic rocking horses we have created, share the fascinating stories behind the famous ones and celebrate the memorable moments we've experienced, all exhibited in our new Museum.

"Our business coach took the time to really understand the depth of our business, and even attended a trade show with us to fully understand the way we operate. He advised us to focus on sales staff, so our next step is to recruit people to help drive our sales and to create a management team beneath us to assist with managing and growing the business. Once the new site is open, we will also be recruiting staff to run the museum and café.

"We have since launched a new website bringing this traditional company into the 21st Century and helping to ensure we stay visible to global potential clients. The website has also been designed with e-commerce capabilities, giving us another avenue to market our products.

"We intend to use our coach's services again once our long-term goals of opening the museum and café come to fruition. Coming from years of rocking horse making and running this business, I think it would be extremely valuable to obtain advice around the running of the café and farm shop.



Marc concluded:

“The Scale Up Ashford programme is a fantastic resource for any company that needs guidance from a true business expert.

“The mentors on the programme have a wealth of experience behind them, having been involved with a multitude of different industries and they always ensure to take the time to understand each one, even something as unique as ours.

“If you get the opportunity to be involved with this scheme, I wholly recommend that you take it.”

“ Marc was open to me attending a trade show to give me firsthand experience of the richness and complexities of the sales process for this rare, special and exceptionally personal service.

A particular manner and set of knowledge and people skills are required to ensure absolute customer satisfaction with their own personalised, unique rocking horse.

Marc has since managed to secure a suitable salesperson on a trial basis, so I look forward to hearing all about further progress in due course.

Paul Hayes, Coach



WillCreate Media

WillCreate Media is a multi-media advertising agency that offers a broad range of services to its clients, all of which are provided in-house. Laura Featherstonhaugh and Simon Williams founded WillCreate 13 years ago, initially specialising in marketing for the automotive industry.

Laura said: “We joined the Scale Up Ashford programme with hopes for a business coach to guide us through new business strategies and to gain an objective view of our management style. Although Simon and I have built a successful company we have never had any formal training in business management, so when the opportunity was granted to us, we were eager to join the scheme.

“As an agency, we’re using our expertise and time to fulfil the needs of our clients, so finding opportunities to focus on our own business can become challenging.

“To overcome this, our coach recommended that we come away from our non-hierarchical team and to put in place managers throughout each of our departments. This has helped enormously with freeing up Simon and I from some of the day-to-day tasks to allow us to focus more on business strategy.

“The most notable benefit from the Scale Up Ashford programme has been simultaneously structuring our team and processes. Holding regular meetings, with a defined list of actions and goals, means that all team members know what they are responsible for, meaning that we’re all held accountable for making progress.

“Since embarking on the Scale Up programme we have increased our turnover and also increased our team headcount by almost 40%, meaning that we are fully equipped to take on bigger contracts whilst ensuring the best quality for our regular clients.

“Our coach realised our in-depth knowledge of the advertising industry, and instead of telling us that we needed to put targets in place or making us change the way we operate, he just instilled confidence in us to put our knowledge into practice. He made us see that we already have the business skills and ideas, but he just guided us to put the processes in place.



Laura concluded:

“We highly recommend the Scale Up Ashford programme to any business, regardless of their current position.

“Despite our established position in our field, the invaluable support from our coach over the past few months has been remarkable.

“The process resulted in tangible actions that have made a significant difference. The objective perspective from an external business mentor, with an extensive wealth of knowledge, reaffirming our strategies, has also boosted our confidence to sustain our growth momentum.”

“

I'm always impressed when successful business owners are willing to seek advice and support.

Simon and Laura have a wealth of experience in the advertising industry, and by talking about their stresses and pain points, and having a sounding board for potential solutions, they have implemented several changes that have reaped big benefits for their customers, their staff and themselves.

Jim Gorrie, Coach

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The programme is funded by Ashford Borough Council as part of its continued commitment to developing economic prosperity across the borough. The programme is delivered by Kent Invicta Chamber of Commerce.

Selected businesses will receive an agreed number of hours of free consultancy, access to free business growth tools, access to funded and part -funded local expertise.

Your appointed consultant can clarify the details of the programme and the council's expectations prior to joining the programme.

If you are interested in taking part in the next Ashford Scale Up programme, please visit our website to find out more

www.scaleupashford.co.uk

