

COVID-19: Warwickshire County Council Support for Business Recovery

Survive, Sustain & Grow Programme

Bonds Lifestyle brought back from the brink by SSG support

During the darkest days of the pandemic, with another lockdown biting deep into revenue streams, Bonds Lifestyle was one of many businesses forced to consider taking the biggest and most heartbreaking decision of all - closing their doors for good.

It would have been truly devastating for Richard and Zoe Biggs to shut the doors on a dream they had built up over seven years. They dreaded having to tell their treasured 25-strong team that their jobs had gone.

They didn't have to.

Bonds Lifestyle gritted it out. The lifestyle store and brasserie, in Evesham Road, Stratford-upon-Avon, not only survived but is now looking ahead with renewed confidence after receiving experts business support.

Richard and Zoe received strategic advice and support from the Coventry and Warwickshire Local Enterprise Partnership Growth Hub. Then they engaged with Warwickshire County Council's Survive, Sustain & Grow programme and, upon advice from SSG consultant Steph Winter, drew up and delivered a strategy which will secure the business...and keep that dream alive.

Richard explains:

"The idea of Bonds started seven years ago when I was sitting on yet another long-haul flight travelling back home after working in New York. I had received the phone call you dread when working away from home, that my wife had been taken ill and was in hospital, and I needed to get home fast. I had hardly seen my then nine-year-old daughter due to always working overseas or being just away and it dawned on me that we needed to change our lifestyle.

"The old antiques centre just outside Stratford was up for sale and we thought 'let's go for it.' Ever since, Bonds has been on the journey from an old, tired antiques centre to what it is now. We have grown year on year, from three employees at the beginning to now over 25.

"When Covid hit, we were our usual positive selves thinking it's just a blip, but it was soon apparent that it was not. It destroyed our cash flow. Back then the entire grant help available was based on business rate valuations and ours were over the threshold so we got virtually nothing, except furlough, for which we are so grateful as it truly saved the team we are so proud of and were dreading would have to make redundant.



To find out more, contact us on:

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"The frightening thing about running a business is how fast the cash in the bank runs out when the cashflow cycle stops. It's very alarming and through this period we took a lot of advice from Warwickshire County Council. Following this advice we subscribed to the Government CBIL's loan and took it with the hope we would not need it, so put it in the reserves just in case.

"Trade between lockdown 1 and 2 was tremendous and, like many, we thought we were out of the woods. How wrong were we, Lockdown 2 and Tier 3, in what retailers call the 'Golden Quarter' was crippling. November is historically our second best trading month of the year...we were closed!

"Being both a Non-Essential Retailer and in the Hospitality sector was like a double whammy. In Lockdown 3 we were really hurting. We were in severe financial difficulties and came that close to closing the entire business. It was only thanks to support from many quarters, and sound, experienced advice from WCC, that we picked ourselves up.

"We decided to increase our borrowings to renovate the store, so when customers came back, they would see we have been progressive, creative, and adapted the business to today's consumer trends. Alongside that, we set about working on business's online presence, which we had neglected. Once again WCC came to our aid and we engaged onto the Survive, Sustain and Grow program. This was invaluable in us understanding modern online platforms and thanks to this support and a subsequent grant from WCC we have embarked on a hugely significant strategic website and digital infrastructure program.

"We are indebted to Warwickshire County Council as its support has been invaluable in being able to ride out what has been an unprecedented economic time."

Jagdish Soor, Lead SSG Consultant for WCC: "The pandemic had a massive effect on Bonds Lifestyle and the outcome could have been devastating. The Survive, Sustain and Grow programme provided in-depth, focused advice to the business but also a grant that has assisted in the implementation of a significant investment into online retailing. This type of foresight and support provided by WCC has helped to saved enterprises and jobs within the region through these uncertain times."

The Survive, Sustain & Grow Programme

Survive, Sustain and Grow is a new support programme for businesses most affected by the Covid-19 crisis. Open to all small businesses in Warwickshire with a focus on retail, tourism, hospitality and leisure, the programme offers a tailored one-to-one recovery support package through a network of specialist consultants.

Find out more [information on SSG](#)

Fill out the [expression of interest form](#)

For information about other support for your business, contact the [CWLEP Growth Hub](#)

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