

## Enterprise Club open for business

The Enterprise Club, based at the Eastern Enterprise Hub in Ipswich, has held its first session.

Around 20 delegates attended the first meeting of the club, which was launched by Ben Gummer, MP for Ipswich, and is supported by Jobcentre Plus. The club offers coaching, mentoring and peer-to-peer support for people out of the workplace for a variety of reasons and looking to start their own business.

Meeting once a month, the club will concentrate on a different business skillset each time, with sessions led by established entrepreneurs, business leaders and specialists in a wide range of disciplines such as finance, governance and marketing.

The first session was hosted by Steve Flory, of Hudson Signs, and retailer Cathy Lowe, of Ipswich-based Love One, and focused on the key challenges facing would-be entrepreneurs and the motivation needed to start a business.

Celia Hodson, Eastern Enterprise Hub Chief Executive, said; "We are so fortunate to have such positive and committed business leaders who are keen to share their experiences and expertise to help people face up to the challenge of starting a business."

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## More than just networking ...

Networking has a new relevance for businesses – thanks to a communication platform aimed at supporting SMEs.



A company founded by Norfolk businessman Andy Fisher in 2010, ipatter.com, claims to have corrected the shortfalls of other social networking sites, making it more relevant to businesses by a blend of opportunities and advice through online and offline channels.

The company says that face-to-face networking and social networking need to be about more than just exchanging business cards or having thousands of followers. Networking facilitators need to give businesses practical advice as well as the

opportunities to connect with customers and target audiences.

New features being offered by ipatter.com include masterclasses, books, educational events and roadshows to supplement the online communication platform.

Chris Batten, CEO, said: "Our experience shows that businesses need support to encourage growth. It will give businesses an innovative new, and cost-effective, method of support".

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## Town survives store wars

According to Nicola Sexton, of Nicola Sexton Shoes, in Abbeygate, exclusivity is the answer. "The Italian and Spanish brands I sell are exclusive to me, and are very popular. Since I opened 19 months ago, I haven't taken a breath. I now also stock my own brand pumps, which fly off the shelves, and I offer a bespoke service on wedding shoes. I launched my website last July and I am now getting orders from all over the world."

With increasing retail competition from places such as the new Westfield centre in Stratford, next to the London's Olympic Park, how does a town like Bury St Edmunds hold its ground?

Round the corner, at Six Whiting Street, the website is also an important part of the sales generation for this men's designer clothes shop. "The key to our success," says Oliver Swift, "is that we carry a huge brand portfolio, online and in stock."

A local resident agrees: "Six Whiting Street is a fantastic shop with really helpful staff. It's like a slice of London fashion in Bury St Edmunds," he said.

At Cabana, in Hatter Street, Jackie Over has made an asset out of personal service in a niche market. She opened Cabana in 2006 for people who cruise or go away in the winter. The shop stocks stylish swimwear all year round.

Beach music plays in the background, and the atmosphere is warm and welcoming whatever the temperature outside. She also offers a personal lingerie service.

