



OXFORDSHIRE BUSINESS SUMMIT 2 0 2 5

From Oxfordshire
to the Future:
Leadership Insights
for a
Changing World

A B4 production for OBS 2025
Compiled by Lisa Lloyd on behalf of B4 and the
Oxfordshire Business Summit www.obs2025.com

Thanks to the following for their contributions:

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INTRODUCTION

Ahead of the inaugural Oxfordshire Business Summit (OBS2025) at Blenheim Palace in May, I asked B4 Member Lisa LLOYD to put together a collection of articles reflecting how local organisations view the future of work. One of the key challenges that business owners face is people, whether that's recruiting, managing, retaining, rewarding....the list goes on. With the backdrop of political and economic uncertainty and the rapidly growing influence of AI, it's understandable why the key ingredients for most organisations of people and skills have never been such a struggle.

In this special collection of insights on the future of work, written by business leaders from a rich variety of sectors across Oxfordshire, we hear views from advanced manufacturing and scientific research to hospitality, finance, and public service. These contributors offer grounded perspectives shaped by both challenge and opportunity.

While their industries differ, a shared commitment unites them: to build organisations that are adaptive, inclusive, and resilient. These articles explore what it truly means to be "future-fit" in today's fast-evolving landscape.

This compilation doesn't offer abstract theory. It shares real examples of how Oxfordshire businesses are reimagining their cultures, empowering their people, and preparing for the challenges ahead—from developing emotionally intelligent leaders to embracing lifelong learning and building inclusive, people-first workplaces.

We hope these insights serve not only as inspiration but as a practical guide for

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organisations looking to navigate uncertainty with confidence and care. Oxfordshire's business community is not just responding to change—it's helping lead it.

I'm proud to have built B4, a community of brilliant businesses which celebrates its 20th anniversary next year. OBS2025 represents a crucial point in our timeline, a real opportunity to bring even more fantastic organisations together so that our collective learnings, experiences and insights can help even more organisations face the future with confidence. Business owners have experienced their fair share of left field shocks to the system over the past ten years in particular, but with challenge comes an even greater opportunity to grow together.

Thank you to Lisa and to all of the contributors for your honest reflections and forward-thinking perspectives.

Richard

R i c h a r d R o s s e r

CEO of B4 and founder of OBS2025

FOREWORD

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by Lisa LLOYD, Chartered Psychologist, It's Time for Change

What does it mean to be future-fit? - This is the question we posed to leaders from a range of organisations across Oxfordshire—spanning hospitality, heritage, environmental consultancy, science & technology, financial services, manufacturing, automotive innovation, & public service. While their sectors differ, the answers shared a striking commonality: a commitment to building organisations that are not only resilient & high-performing, but fundamentally human.

In these conversations, six interwoven themes emerged. These are echoed in global research, underscoring their relevance beyond our local context:

1. People-first cultures

Across the board, there's a deep awareness that performance starts with people. Wellbeing, inclusion, & belonging are not side notes - they are strategic imperatives. From thoughtful onboarding to supportive environments that encourage everyone to bring their whole selves to work, the message is clear: organisations that care for their people will attract & retain talent in a shifting world. This aligns with research that emphasises the need to build sustainable workplaces, catering for multi-generational needs & expectations for authenticity & mental wellbeing.

2. Evolving leadership for complex times

The next generation of leaders is being equipped not just with technical skills, but with emotional intelligence, empathy, & the ability to lead diverse, dispersed, & dynamic teams.

Leadership is becoming more human, more accountable, & more connected. That requires teams of leaders to be more cohesive & strategic as a collective. That requires specific development of knowledge, skills



& behaviours that enable the human side of business to excel in complex times.

3. Agility and lifelong learning

In a world where change is constant, the capacity to adapt is a superpower. Whether through digital upskilling, learning cultures, or flexible structures, organisations are focusing on how to stay agile. Readiness to pivot in response to fast-moving economic, political, or environmental shifts is critical.

This requires creative thinking and resilience as top skills, alongside the know-how and intention to lead people through change and uncertainty with a workforce that chooses to follow.

4. Inclusion and equity as growth drivers

Inclusion is recognised as essential to innovation, resilience, and relevance. Leaders spoke about the ongoing work to build inclusive teams & representative leadership, in psychologically safe environments where all voices are heard & valued.

The belief is that doing so results in better thinking & better outcomes. While global headlines about political resistance to EDI may cast doubt on the future of inclusion, the message from Oxfordshire is resolute: our organisations remain committed to building workplaces where equity & belonging are not negotiable.

5. Technology as an enabler, not a threat

Whether harnessing AI, automating processes, or designing smarter workspaces, technology is seen as a tool to enhance - not replace - human potential. There is a curiosity, & caution, around the role of AI. Leaders speak about the importance of ensuring its thoughtful implementation, & the importance of trust, communication, & support during technological developments. It is recognised that in turn this will provide greater capacity for connection & creativity. The message is clear about the need to ensure tech serves people, & not the other way around. This reinforces global reports that highlight the balance between digital integration, the distinct qualities that humans bring to business, & the wellbeing of the workforce.

6. Purpose and sustainability

There's a growing conviction that business must be a force for good. Whether through environmental responsibility, public service, or meaningful work, these organisations are striving to make a positive impact, locally and globally. Purpose is becoming a magnet for talent and a compass for decision-making – it has a significant role to play as a key driver of business success.

Preparing for the future

The Oxfordshire organisations we spoke to are taking active steps to prepare their people, at every stage of the employee journey, for the future of work. Leaders are being equipped to navigate complexity with empathy, emotional agility, and purpose, while managers are being supported to develop coaching mindsets, inclusive team cultures, and accountability for development. For new employees and early-career professionals, there's a strong emphasis on adaptability, robust onboarding, and exposure to values-led, growth-oriented cultures.

These organisations are not just reacting to the future; they are helping to shape it, through the way they nurture talent, invest in their people, and weave technology and inclusion into the very fabric of their leadership and culture.

[Find out more: www.itstimeforchange.co.uk](http://www.itstimeforchange.co.uk)



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BLenheim PALACE



In the next 5–10 years, Blenheim is set to evolve into an even more inclusive, sustainable, and people-centred organisation. Our commitment to apprenticeship programmes and professional development for staff will play a vital role in developing internal talent and ensuring long-term success.

Technology will continue to enhance both the visitor and employee experience. From refining our Smart Visitor Management System to advancing our SMART Rostering tools, we're focused on creating smoother, more intuitive systems that empower our people to thrive.

Crucially, we're not just keeping pace with employment legislation—we're staying ahead of it. By proactively aligning with new laws, we can create an environment where people feel safe, supported, and empowered to grow. Maintaining our Top 100 Employer status isn't just about recognition—it's about consistently listening to our people, acting on their feedback, and ensuring every voice matters.

Wellbeing is at the heart of our people strategy. We're proud of the exceptional wellbeing provision we've built, and we'll continue to invest in it—ensuring that every individual at Blenheim feels they are able to bring their whole self to work.

What Excites Us About the Future

We're energised by the journey ahead. There's huge potential in deepening our inclusive culture and continuing with our EDI journey, preparing our leaders for tomorrow's challenges, and driving innovation through improved systems and smarter processes. It's an exciting time to build on our strengths and explore new ways of working that better reflect our people's needs, ambitions, and potential.

What We're Mindful Of

As we move forward, we remain alert to the pace of change. With shifting employment landscapes, rapid advancements in technology, and evolving employee expectations, staying agile is key. We recognise the importance of:



- Keeping training and development relevant
- Providing inclusive support at every stage of the employee journey
- Engaging everyone in our sustainability and impact goals

Building a Future-Fit Blenheim

We're putting serious energy into future-proofing our workforce. That means robust succession planning across all levels of the organisation and a strong emphasis on growing our own—through structured development, career pathways, and personal growth opportunities.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) remain a top priority. We're embedding these principles into every layer of our work and fostering an environment where differences are celebrated and supported. We're also embracing the opportunities offered by AI—ensuring it's implemented in a thoughtful, human-centred

way that enhances, rather than replaces, the personal connections that define Blenheim's culture.

Our people-first approach runs through everything we do. Managers receive the tools and training they need to lead with empathy, integrity, and accountability. And every new joiner benefits from an onboarding process designed to make them feel welcome, informed, and equipped to succeed.

Above all, we believe in creating a workplace where people feel proud to belong—where they're heard, supported, and inspired to grow. That's the future we're building at Blenheim and Pye, together.

Megan Carter
People Director (Chartered MCIPD)

[Find out more: www.blenheimpalace.com](http://www.blenheimpalace.com)



NICHOLSONS

Nicholsons is a dynamic and creative environmental contracting and consultancy company designing, building and maintaining beautiful spaces that enhance nature through the following divisions:

- Landscapes and Gardens – Design, Build and Maintenance
- Forestry, Woodland & Tree Management
- Ecosystem Services – Ecology, Natural Capital and soils

Nicholsons has offices in Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Gloucestershire with a team of 200 employees and supporting subcontractor partnerships, working with private domestic, high-end commercial and public sector clients.

What does Nicholson's look like in 5-10 years & what are you doing to be future fit?

As Liz and Niel (owners) work towards an exit strategy, discussions are underway to bring

Nicholsons into an Employee Ownership Trust (EOT). This move seeks to preserve Nicholson's values and culture for the future and attract and retain the best team. This will inevitably present its challenges such as the complex administration and ensuring continual employee engagement.

In March 2025, Nicholson's launched elemental, the green design tool, in collaboration with industry partners to support fellow designers in designing with climate consciousness. By 2030, we dare to dream that elemental will not only be fully embedded within the industry but be a supportive aspect of the planning process.

What are you most excited about for the future of work in your business?

Our integrated service offer enables clients to deliver complex projects from one team. Our pragmatic approach plays out well in supporting clients through increasingly complex legislation in planning and

delivering ecosystems.

The New National Forest is proposed in the west including the Cotswolds and this presents a significant opportunity for our forestry division.

What are you most worried about for your people?

- Economic climate
- Cost of living
- The unpredictability of nature & climate change and the risks this brings to our service offer. climate change initiatives carry risks, e.g. planting in drought and climatic uncertainty in addition to emerging pest threats e.g. Ash dieback and Oak processionary moth.
- Change in government could cause disruption in grants, lack of governance and emerging policy could be too slow to capture energy in the market for Natural Capital.
- Skills shortage in the industry – makes recruitment challenging.

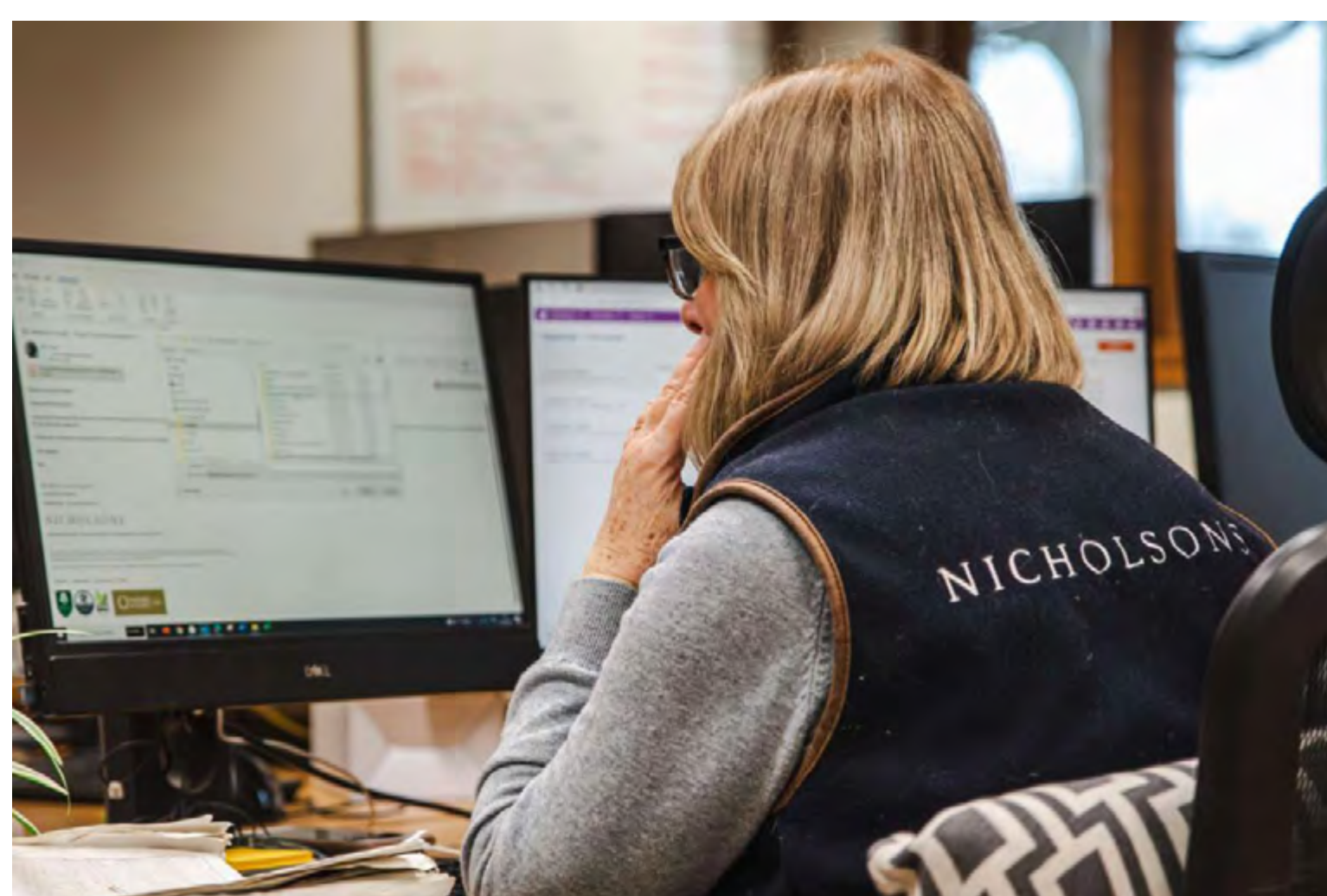
How are you preparing your workforce?

- Diversity in leadership continues to be a problem.
- Increasingly policy and government change challenges business. Good business starts and ends with people. We believe in growing our own talent and we need to continue to invest in the soft skills training of managers and team leaders.

We are looking to bridge the current skills gap by investing time into supporting the next generation of environmentalists. This includes supporting work experience students and attending careers fairs as well as nurturing new starters through a robust induction programme and creating an inclusive working environment.

- All employees- ISO 9001 – clear systems and processes, project excellence frameworks enable our whole team to do their best work. Right first time!
- We aim to achieve Investors in People Platinum by 2026. It is ALL about our people.

[Find out more: www.nicholsonsgb.com](http://www.nicholsonsgb.com)



WISE INVESTMENT

Planning for the Future of Work and Wealth



At Wise Investment, we're no strangers to change. Financial markets evolve, client needs shift, and regulations adapt. So, it's perhaps no surprise that we view the future of work through a lens of preparedness and possibility.

Looking ahead 5–10 years, we anticipate a more flexible, digitally integrated business. While personal connection remains central to our client relationships, we expect hybrid working models to be the norm, supported by smarter systems that improve collaboration and productivity. Our office will be less about desks and more about connection, a hub for meaningful conversations, creativity and team development.

We're particularly excited about the opportunities technology offers, not to replace people, but to enhance the human aspects of our work. Tools powered by AI will help free up time for deeper thinking, richer client interactions, & better decision-making. It's a future that plays to our strengths: expertise, integrity & empathy.

But we're also mindful of the risks. The pace of change can leave people behind, overwhelmed by new tools, unsure of how to adapt, or anxious about their value in a changing workplace. As a people-first business, we see it as our responsibility to support our team emotionally and practically as we evolve.

To stay future-fit, we're investing in more than just technology. We're focusing on resilience, emotional intelligence, and ethical leadership. We're building a learning culture where curiosity is celebrated and development is continuous, not a tick-box, but a mindset.

For leaders, that means nurturing a clear sense of purpose and the confidence to lead with both head and heart. For managers, we're emphasising adaptability and inclusive communication. And for new starters, many entering the workforce in a post-pandemic world of hybrid norms, we're prioritising mentorship, structure and community, ensuring they have a strong foundation to grow from.

The future of work won't be a straight line, but with openness, integrity, and foresight, we believe we can shape a workplace that's not only fit for the future but also one where people thrive.



WISE INVESTMENT

Alexandra Rae, CEO, Wise Investment

[Find out more: www.wiseinvestment.co.uk](http://www.wiseinvestment.co.uk)



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INTERTRONICS

Prediction is very difficult – especially if it's about the future.” I agree with Nils Bohr, the Nobel laureate in Physics. I think it is especially difficult for an SME in today's world to predict the future for their business. Large corporates routinely make five year or ten year or longer business plans, but that's because they can't move much faster than that. You can't stop a supertanker in less than five miles. A small business can pivot much more easily... and will probably have to. Any business owner doing a recent PESTEL analysis (looking at the political, economic, social, technological, environmental, and legal changes in their external macro-environment) will see significant movements in one or more of these areas which buffet their world and present new risks to consider. And the changes are coming with increasing frequency and with more immediate impact. A combination of resiliency and agility is required.

Productivity is going to be key, as employing more people just gets more tricky (legislation and taxes). So taking the advantage of digital platforms is needed. And that means getting our people more fluent in tech, across all roles: upskilling in data, AI, automation, cybersecurity, communications, software tools, &c. AI will take some job roles, but not the jobs of people who know how to use AI effectively. I have never regretted any of the investment we have made in IT. We need it to leverage the talent we retain and cherish, and have the ability to do more with our smaller, more empowered teams.

Bringing the next generation into the workplace requires careful thought. It is not just flexible and hybrid work patterns which can cause upheaval to our existing business cultures. Employee's expectations of work are developing. People think that Gen Z lack drive or resilience, but I think they need to be motivated more carefully. I like Dan Pink's theory about the three key elements of intrinsic motivation for younger people: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. A business



with a powerful vision, strong values, and a learning and development culture will attract the best young people. Then we need to bring them into our business with messaging about how to thrive in our culture. I read somewhere that we need to “normalise productive discomfort”; stress is natural and can be a source of energy. Feedback is the breakfast of champions, so get used to our practice of radical candour.

Globalisation is over, apparently. Events and geopolitics over the last few years have highlighted the risks associated with long, complex supply chains



which are easily disrupted. Attention is increasingly focussed on the carbon cost of shipping products around the world. Maybe we are less likely to tolerate poor environmental impact in order to save a few pennies.

There has been talk of near-shoring and re-shoring of manufacturing for quite a few years now, and it may finally be happening. Reports say that UK companies are set to spend \$650 billion over the next three years moving their supply chains and manufacturing closer to home. A survey of 1,400 major global businesses, found these international companies planning to shift more of their operations to the UK amid a growing preference to have more of a presence in “allied” countries and to be closer to their end customers. The UK is currently the 12th largest manufacturing nation in the world, and a significant player in advanced sectors like aerospace, pharmaceuticals, and emerging technologies. As a supplier to businesses like these, we can expect growth to come.

Which does lead to thoughts about customers. Their expectations are changing too. B2B customers are requiring the levels of service they now get as consumers and customers of Uber and Amazon; certainly for purely transactional trade. Easy, intuitive, transparent, and immediate. Our e-commerce business

continues to grow, albeit slowly, but with intent. But for the most part, as a business we add lots of value through a consultative sales process, and for high-value, complex transactions, that is still very important to our success and a differentiator. These days, customers and prospects undertake the majority of their buying journey through online research before they contact us – as much as 80% or more of the decision-making process. When they do contact us, we need to provide credible and expert answers to their questions. We won’t succeed in our aspiration to be their results-focussed trusted advisors unless we arm our sales teams with ongoing and experiential training. We have a dedicated learning and development resource to support this, and to help us grow by taking advantage of the abundant learning opportunities which present themselves to us every day.



Peter Swanson
Founder & Chair, Intertronics

[Find out more: www.intertronics.co.uk](http://www.intertronics.co.uk)

BELMOND LE MANOIR



Forward-wind 5-10 years, how does your organisation look different to how it does now?

I think the next 5 – 10 years will be a really exciting period for Le Manoir. There are plans to make physical upgrades to the property as well as developing and innovating across the departments to keep improving our guest experience.

From a people perspective, we want to ensure we are providing comprehensive training to our existing team while continuing to attract the top talent that can take the business forward.

The culture is a big part of Le Manoir and we will continue to foster a collaborative and respectful environment where all employees feel comfortable to share ideas and contribute to the collective ambitions of the hotel.

The founding values of Le Manoir were built on 'doing things the right way'. We have been a pioneer in sustainability and this is something we

will be investing further in remain a leader in this area.

10 years feels a long way off in the hospitality world but our ambition is for Le Manoir to be positioned as one of the best country house hotels in the world and a global destination property.

What are you most excited about for the future of work in your business?

I'm excited about the hospitality and travel industry in general, as it is constantly changing and adapting to the market trends and guest's travel patterns – it's keeps things interesting! For Le Manoir specifically, I am excited by the ambition of our leadership and the relentless pursuit of excellence and appetite to improve.



What are you most worried about for your people?

It is really the external factors that I'm most apprehensive about, as leisure travel is for most a luxury, rather than a necessity. So when there are global conflicts, economic downturns and as we saw with the pandemic, these can affect the business levels significantly which subsequently impact the workforce required.

What are the key areas you're developing to be future fit?

We are investing in technology in different areas of the business which will keep us operating as efficiently as possible behind the scenes, and for areas like sustainability and in the gardens.

We are constantly looking at the training of the team to give them the skills to be flexible and adaptable and be able to operate efficiently across different parts of the business.

How are you preparing your workforce (or are you still figuring this out), specifically:

- **For leaders?**

Similar to the above, we have specific training for leaders, which while covers the key skills in the role but also focusses on the human element of being a leader and understanding how to motivate and drive the team forward.

- **For Managers?**

For managers, the focus we have on them is to try and develop their teams. To give them accountability but also teach and grow their skillset and confidence ready for the next step.

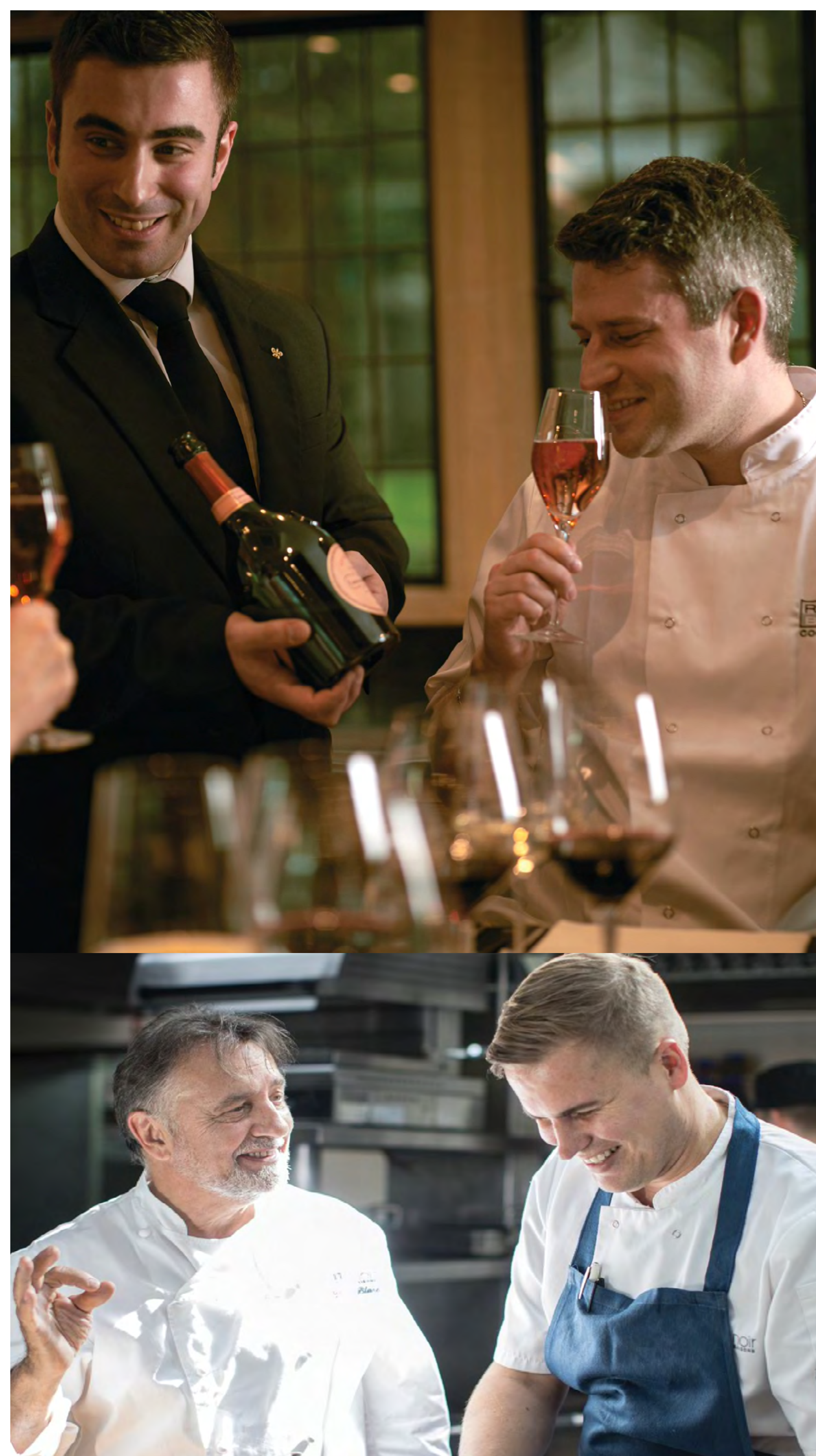
- **For new employees starting out in the world of work?**

This is really where the adaptability is really

important and giving new employees the core skills across the hotel which will also provide the employee, and the employer flexibility to progress in different directions throughout the organisation.

Jamie Purcell,
Director of Sales, Le Manoir Aux Quat'Saisons

[Find out more: www.belmond.com/hotels/europe/uk/oxfordshire/belmond-le-manoir-aux-quat-saisons/](http://www.belmond.com/hotels/europe/uk/oxfordshire/belmond-le-manoir-aux-quat-saisons/)





OXFORD NORTH

Oxford North: pioneering the future of work in science, technology and innovation

The future of work has been meticulously considered in the development of Oxford North, a pioneering innovation district located in Oxford, specifically designed to offer state-of-the-art laboratories and workspaces surrounded by amenities, parks and public art that we hope will facilitate and boost groundbreaking advancements in science and technology over the next century.

Fast forward to the next five to ten years, we see a landscape where science and technology companies will be sharing spaces, collaborating and thriving in an innovation community which benefits from partnerships and engagement.

These organisations are already evolving from traditional structures to more agile entities that leverage advanced technologies such as machine learning and automation to stream line operations.

Enhanced collaboration across disciplines benefits from well designed buildings with larger shared spaces, access to events spaces, amenity rich with more informal break out spaces.

At Oxford North we are delivering a new 100 seater town hall, alongside open collaboration spaces and an 80 seater café, all connected to a wonderful two acre park providing an amazing environment to foster relationships. Tailored building design solutions are complimented by flexible remote working options, benefiting from technological advancements, fostering a culture of innovation.

As I contemplate the future of work, I am most excited about the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. The convergence of life sciences with AI and quantum computing promises not only significant advancements in medical research but also breakthroughs that could redefine our understanding of human health and disease.



Simon Ruck Oxford North Managing Director

We seek to support employee well-being amidst this rapid transformation. To be future-fit, we adopt:

1. Continuous learning: emphasising lifelong learning opportunities for employees across all levels ensures they remain adaptable amidst an evolving technological landscape.
2. Diversity & inclusion: fostering diverse teams not only enhances creativity but also broadens perspectives essential for innovative problem-solving.
3. Health & well-being initiatives: creating inspiring and light filled workplaces and outdoor spaces and instituting robust mental health support systems is crucial as we adapt to new working paradigms.

As we build our on-site team to support our future companies based here, we're preparing our workforce for this dynamic future:

- For leaders: we are promoting programmes focusing on emotional intelligence and transformational leadership styles capable of navigating complexities within diverse teams.
- For managers: training is centred around coaching

methodologies that empower them to foster autonomy while cultivating an inclusive team environment.

- For new hires entering the workforce: orientating them not only physically to this new district but also understanding the vision so they can thrive and feel part of this unique place.

Ultimately, as we head towards opening in autumn this year together as a collective effort at Oxford North, it is vital we prioritise both innovation and humanity within this exciting new place.

Simon Ruck,
Managing Director, Oxford North

[Find out more: www.oxfordnorth.com](http://www.oxfordnorth.com)

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

It is a huge privilege to work in public service. What we do, and whether we do it well, matters to whether citizens are enabled to live their best lives.

There is a very well used quote from Eric Jackson, a senior officer in the then London County Council. As it reaches its 80th anniversary, what he wrote in 1945 bears repeating:

“What councils have to do is to keep the place tidy and fit to live in, to see that the streets are swept, that the houses are properly built, to provide parks and gardens for the recreation of young and old, to educate children, to tend to the sick, and to care for the poor and the aged...It is a fine job, necessary, and one well worth doing. Without it, no civilised country can carry on, or call itself civilised.”

Whilst we might now question the slightly imperial overtones in the final sentence, and while many would point to the increasing complexity of public service delivery, who could disagree here with the overarching sentiment of a work force in-service to the public? Key challenges for the future are firstly, how we maintain such an ethic of service within an incredibly constrained external environment; secondly, how we share, evolve and grow this ethic with future generations of the team; and finally, how we make sure this ethic is relevant



and accessible to everyone within our community.

At the County Council we have boiled this down to three statements. We aim to be:

1. An Employer of choice - all of our colleagues

will recommend working for the council.
People will aspire to work for us and proactively seek employment.

2. A Partner of choice - we will develop purposeful, collaborative and impactful relationships with our partners to deliver the best outcomes for our residents.

3. A Place shaper of choice - we will convene public, private and community partners to design the future of our county. Our residents will take pride in where they live and will be happy with the facilities and services available to them.

It is a big ambition, and to get there we will need to:

1. Demonstrate that we can deliver – with a pace that matches the dynamism of the local economy and the needs of our community

2. Maximise our transparency – so that in common with many other organisations, what we do is far more visible and understood by the community and the potential workforce of the future

3. Become far more inclusive – walking the hard miles of change so that our workforce and leadership becomes more representative of the communities we serve. We will do this not just because it is just, but so we have diversity of experience, thought and approach, in order to deliver the best possible outcomes for residents.

Robin Rogers
Director of Economy and Place

Oxfordshire County Council

[Find out more: www.oxfordshire.gov.uk](http://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk)



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