



**BRITISH  
CHAMBERS  
OF COMMERCE**  
BUSINESS AWARDS

**UK Chamber of the Year**

# East Midlands Accelerator

Leicester City  
Case Studies 2022

Delivered in partnership with:



## A lasting legacy for accelerated business growth



The East Midlands Accelerator provided businesses in Leicester with the funding, training and advice needed to grow, create and safeguard jobs, and recover from the Covid pandemic.

The project received £1 million from the UK Government through the UK Community Renewal Fund (UKCRF), and was led by East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire) in partnership with the University of Leicester, De Montfort University and the Food & Drink Forum.

The project supported 382 businesses and delivered 916 business support interactions. Some 54 grants were awarded – valued at £435,845 – and 49 specialist Consultancy projects brokered. A total of two unemployed people were supported into work.

Matching businesses with the support they need, when they need it and how they need it – through the region's most comprehensive business ecosystem yet – is surely the most important legacy of the project, and will act as a springboard for growth in our region for many years to come.



**Diane Beresford**  
Deputy Chief Executive  
East Midlands Chamber  
(Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire)

## Achievements and Successes



2

People into employment/  
self-employment



54

Jobs safeguarded



26

Businesses using  
new products



67

Employment increase  
in businesses



10

New businesses created



52

Decarbonisation plans

Enjoying the fruits of their labour



## Green Tomato (Midlands) Ltd

<b>Sector</b>	Fruit and vegetable retail
<b>Location</b>	LE4
<b>Number of employees</b>	7
<b>Support received</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grant funding</li> <li>Kickstart wage subsidy</li> <li>Business Adviser support</li> <li>Help to Grow: Management training subsidy</li> <li>'Leaders of change' training</li> <li>Social media training</li> <li>Student placement (Net Zero)</li> <li>Sustainability audit</li> </ul>

### The Business

Established in 2020, Green Tomato is Leicester's first emission free, mobile greengrocery. Its nostalgic 1970s milk float draws in customers across Stoneygate, Knighton and Clarendon Park.

Granting residents access to high-quality fruit and vegetables at the kerbside and through online orders, is helping the city's households reduce their supermarket trips and their carbon footprint.



### Challenges

Like any fledgling family business seeking to grow at pace, there are four key barriers: finance, resources, time, and technical knowhow.

Nisha knew some of the business's processes were time and resource intensive. Stocktaking, for example, relied on two or three people and a series of Excel spreadsheets!

She also recognised that, as a self-taught businesswoman, she needed to invest in her own training and personal growth to get the business to the next level.

### Acceleration

Help from East Midlands Accelerator came in a number of ways.

Firstly, the Kickstart Accelerator allowed for the appointment of a new greengrocer / driver. In turn, this has freed up Nisha and her husband's afternoons, and has allowed them to invest their time in developing a new unit and kitting out a second float.

Secondly, a capital grant supported the company on its journey to digitise its processes using e-commerce platform Shopify.

Thirdly, it afforded the opportunity for Nisha to take advantage of the wealth of training programmes available as part of the project, including participating in the University of Leicester Business School's Help to Grow: Management Course.

Finally, it involved the business hosting a student from the University of Leicester. This 12-week placement and an in-depth sustainability audit recognised what the business had known for some time – that it is officially Carbon Positive.

### Impact

New staff and digital resources have released Nisha to work on the longer-term strategy of the business, and towards her dream of a Green Tomato float on every street in Leicester.

More immediately, participation in the East Midlands Accelerator project has positively impacted growth, with the University of Leicester campus a new addition to the business's float round.

Learn more about the business: [greentomato.club](https://greentomato.club)



"What a massive difference the East Midlands Accelerator project has made to our business! The time I've invested in every aspect of the project is already starting to pay dividends – in terms of how we've digitised our processes, developed personal confidence, become more active on social media, and all the training we've received on profit & loss, and analysing markets. As a relatively new micro business, we really couldn't have done this on our own."

**Nisha Ravat**

Owner



## A new way to navigate cruise travel



### Waterfront Publishing

Sector	Tourism
Location	Clarendon
Number of employees	1
Support received	Grant funding Zellar sustainability support

#### The Business

We are Waterfront was set up in 2013 as a services company for the travel industry in areas such as editorial, design and strategy.

During Covid, it pivoted from its B2B print magazines to a more creative agency approach, offering support to travel agencies and cruise lines. It has continued its successful transition to a digital platform with the launch of its new online travel agency which focuses on the 'new to cruise' traveller market.

#### Challenges

Moving from a service to a retail business means engaging with the client base in a completely different way. Being part of a particularly competitive industry, the business recognised it needed to come up with a fresh and engaging approach.

#### Acceleration

An East Midlands Accelerator grant has funded the design of a new cruise holiday website.

Investment in this area means customers have access to a searchable website where they can tailor their holiday. Developing a website that also takes bookings would have proved financially prohibitive for this fledging business. Instead, the business has partnered with the Hays Independence Group so that it can piggyback on this powerhouse's commercial deals and have access to their booking system. This approach presents the most cost-effective way of getting the service quickly to market.

Sustainable hydrogen-fuelled cruise travel may be some years off but the business is keen to see what it can do to reduce its own carbon footprint. It is already reducing its use of resources in making the switch from hardcopy publications to a digital offer. Signing up to one of the Chamber's 400 free annual licences to the Zellar sustainability platform will help the business identify and measure other areas of improvement.

#### Impact

The grant funding means the business can invest in other areas that are critical to the early success of this new venture. This includes the recruitment of a social media manager who will be responsible for generating new leads through pay-per-click advertising, producing informative content, and social media activity – all of which give the business the best opportunity to win early traction.

Learn more about the business: [wearewaterfront.com](http://wearewaterfront.com)



"The cruise market has massive potential so now's the perfect time to launch our new offer. East Midlands Accelerator has allowed us to push forward ahead of schedule, so that we can capture early interest before the peak booking season in the new year. It's the perfect springboard for our Covid recovery."

**Sam Ballard**  
Managing Director

*A fresh approach to business growth*



## Bru Leicester

<b>Sector</b>	Hospitality, retail and manufacture	<b>Number of employees</b>	12
<b>Location</b>	Granby Street	<b>Support received</b>	Grant funding Business Adviser support Zellar sustainability support

### The Business

Bru Leicester was founded in 2014 as a café and coffee shop, open from early morning to late night. It serves its own blends of coffee, brunch and lunch items, along with a wide range of desserts, including hand-made gelato and vegan sorbets.



### Challenges

Its Granby Street location was originally very quiet, with a large number of empty units. Slowly but surely, it's undergone something of a renaissance. Bru's unique, quirky interior fits in well in an area gaining a city-wide reputation for food, desserts and coffee.

The pandemic, however, presented a huge challenge and significant day-by-day uncertainty. The business used Covid downtime as an opportunity to pour energy into refurbishment and new product development, as well as into thinking on efficiencies.

It's an approach that has paid off, and now the business is looking to build on the organic growth of its sales and customer numbers.

### Acceleration

The business identified efficiencies in overhauling its fridge and freezer units, but it could not afford to invest in both.

The East Midlands Accelerator grant meant the purchase of one was not at the expense of the other.

The new fridge and freezer facilities have significantly streamlined the stock-taking process, negating the need to access a number of separate fridges and freezers. It has also allowed the business to store more stock, which has reduced the number of deliveries from four to two each week. This has, in turn, reduced carbon and congestion in this busy high street location.

### Impact

Replacing a very labour-intensive process of stocktaking and accepting deliveries with a more streamlined process gives the business the opportunity to create a new front-of-house role and attract even more customers to the café for business meetings, interviews and general socialising.

Signing up to the Chamber's offer of free one-year access to the Zellar sustainability platform also means the business can make public its pledges to sustainability. This includes its recent switch from plastic to sustainable wooden cutlery.

Learn more about the business: [brucoffee.co.uk/locations/leicester/](http://brucoffee.co.uk/locations/leicester/)



"We're always looking at how we can improve efficiencies within our business and always with a firm focus on customer experience. This has been our first interaction with the Chamber, and we've found its support hugely valuable. The Accelerator project and joining as a Chamber member will, help us to develop at an even greater pace."

**Junaid Makda**  
Managing Director



## Manufacturing efficiency firmly on display



### RDD Europe Ltd

<b>Sector</b>	Retail display manufacturing
<b>Location</b>	LE1
<b>Number of employees</b>	52
<b>Support received</b>	Grant funding Business Adviser support Carbon Literacy training Environmental Management and Accreditation training and consultancy Zellar sustainability support

### The Business

RDD Europe Ltd is a point-of-sale, design development and manufacturing company based in Leicester. Its display stands are used by well-known brands across a variety of retail sectors including health & beauty and consumer electronics.

### Challenges

The pandemic changed the retail environment considerably. Existing markets are under pressure as shopping habits change and competition becomes ever fiercer.

The business sees investment as key to maintaining competitive advantage – in new technology such as bespoke ERP software, new equipment such as 5 axis cnc’s and skills training for employees. It has developed in-house capability through an investment in industrial-scale flat-board printing, meaning it can retain control of quality assurance at all stages of the process.

### Acceleration

Undertaking end-to-end processes demands razor-sharp focus on continual productivity, efficiency, and capacity improvements; something which the business knew it could achieve through specialist training in advanced Lean Management.

An East Midlands Accelerator grant has allowed the business to employ Lean Management Consultants to drive and embed improvements through the work of workshop and fabrication operatives.

Of course, efficiency goes hand in hand with sustainability and uses fewer resources. Participating in the University of Derby’s carbon literacy and iE environmental management & accreditation training and consultancy means the business can now work towards the Bronze level of the Investors in the Environment standard, as well as formally implement a company environmental policy and appoint green champions.

Signing up to the Zellar sustainability platform is another decisive step which will help the business monitor all its green goals in one place.

### Impact

Driving manufacturing efficiencies in this way means that jobs can be started and finished on time, with downtime eradicated and profitability enhanced. So much so, that it has already led to the appointment of a new, full-time Fabricator.

Learn more about the business: [rdd-creative.co.uk](http://rdd-creative.co.uk)



“As a manufacturer working in a highly competitive market, we’re continually looking at innovative ways in which we can differentiate ourselves; whether that be a sharper focus on lean management to help us deliver in the most profitable way possible, or investing in sustainable practices to give us the edge when it comes to bidding or quoting for contracts. And all thanks to support from East Midlands Accelerator!”

**Deborah Walker**  
Managing Director

An affection for confection!



## Cocoa Amore

<b>Sector</b>	Food manufacture and retail
<b>Location</b>	LE1
<b>Number of employees</b>	6
<b>Support received</b>	Growth voucher Specialist Business Adviser support

## Challenges

It is a business with a high level of raw material and packaging costs, and an international supply chain that has seen significant disruption. This has made the company re-think its reliance on China for its packaging, and how it might become more resilient as well as play its part in reducing carbon footprint.

## The Business

Cocoa Amore first opened its doors in the heart of Leicester's city centre in 2013. The independent business quickly developed a brand synonymous with quality and value. It offers an extensive product range of fine handcrafted chocolates, workshops, hot chocolate, and vegan & vegetarian options, and now has a second store on the Belvoir Castle estate, and a third store in Grantham.

It has collaborated with Cadbury and Visa on their recent TV, billboard and social media campaigns, and has a reputation for enriching the lives of sustainable cocoa farmers.

## Acceleration

An East Midlands Accelerator growth voucher has enabled the business to employ the services of Gartree Press – a well-regarded local company that has, for many years, been a leader in technical know-how, equipment and expertise.

The support has allowed the business to tap into specialist consultancy on producing a range of sustainable and recyclable packaging for its chocolate. This has included the design of new packaging, creation of prototypes for packaging, creation of knife forms and blanks, and printing and cutting multiple chocolate box sizes and foil block boxes.

## Impact

Sourcing packaging closer to home and taking ownership of printing and personalising its own boxes, safeguards the business from the uncertainties of cost, quality and delays. It also gives a welcome boost to a local supplier.

Learn more about the business:  
[cocoa-amore.co.uk](http://cocoa-amore.co.uk)



“The growth voucher has allowed us to accelerate in an area we knew we had to address; taking ownership of our supply chain. Bringing packaging in-house means we have much greater control of its look and feel, with the added benefit of creating bespoke designs for different customers – very much a part of our handcrafted approach. Without affordable packaging, we’re simply not able to sell our products. Ultimately, investment in this area has helped to safeguard the livelihoods of six members of staff.”

**Peter Gardner**  
Managing Director



## Switched on to healthier infrared radiant heating



### Kiasa UK Ltd

**Sector** Storage and distribution of electric space heaters

**Location** LE3

**Number of employees** 5

**Support received** Grant funding  
Business Adviser support  
Kickstart wage subsidy  
Zellar sustainability support

### The Business

Kiasa UK Ltd stores and distributes indoor and outdoor infrared heaters.

Its customers include homeowners and businesses seeking to switch to healthier heating and save energy – whether that be to heat large extensions, listed properties where heat pumps are not permitted, yoga centres or saunas.

Jay Rajpara first identified the benefits of infrared heating for a family member suffering with arthritis. He soon realised there was a gap in the market. After working on the venture alongside full-time employment for some time, he made the leap to self-employment in 2018.

### Challenges

The business faces two key challenges.

Firstly, how to get to the next level in terms of sales. It was clear its very basic Wix website would need replacing if the business were to fulfil its ambitions to increase monthly sales by some 10-20%.

Secondly, how to ensure it has the skills needed to operate effectively.

### Acceleration

An East Midlands Accelerator grant gave the business a welcome boost.

The funding allowed for the development of a new Shopify e-commerce website within only a couple of months. With SEO optimisation, new product pages and specialised copywriter support, the site is expected to increase B2C sales in particular. It not only presents a welcome new sales channel, but a live chat function for the benefit of potential and existing customers alike.

The support has also meant that team member, Chloe – who joined the business as part of the Chamber’s original Kickstart programme – could be offered a long-term role to further support the business with its marketing activities.

### Impact

Being able to attract more business through a direct B2C channel and engage with clients in a more streamlined way, frees up resources in other areas. This includes producing more content-rich blogs with the aim of generating more sales enquiries.

Through its access to the Zellar sustainability platform, the business is able to proudly promote its green credentials – including its investment in LED lighting, an energy-efficient boiler and, of course, its own infrared heating system.

It is this green commitment that has already won the business recognition within the wider region, having made the shortlist for the ‘Environmental Impact’ category of the Chamber’s Business Awards (Leicestershire).

Learn more about the business: [kiasa.co.uk](http://kiasa.co.uk)



“The boost from the Chamber has been immediate; both in terms of our online presence and retaining the staff needed to grow our business.”

**Jay Rajpara**  
Director



Space to create



## Baker ST Cakes

<b>Sector</b>	Food manufacture and retail
<b>Location</b>	Stoneygate
<b>Number of employees</b>	4
<b>Support received</b>	Grant funding Business Adviser support



### The Business

Baker St Cakes – The Macaron & Cake Boutique is a Parisian-inspired boutique, selling a wide selection of artisan patisserie and macarons. The business enjoyed humble beginnings when husband and wife, Naeem and Nailah Mohamed began baking in their home kitchen alongside their full-time jobs. In 2016, the couple opened their first boutique café and shop. They now have three stores nationwide, and continue to grow.

### Challenges

The business has won various awards, including The Observer Food Monthly Awards 2019, and Tripadvisor’s Travellers’ Choice 2021. It has also been featured in Sainsbury’s Bake Magazine, The Guardian, by BBC East Midlands, and on Nadiya’s Everyday Baking on BBC2 and BBC iPlayer.

Such widespread recognition and a focused commitment to social media activity means the business now has some 30,000 Instagram followers; many of whom take regular advantage of the business’s online UK delivery service.

Despite seeing a huge surge in popularity – including the growth of its takeout products during the pandemic – cashflow issues have delayed investment in the café and shop. Order volumes may have surged but updates to the kitchen – which remains largely unchanged since it was first fitted some seven years ago – have not kept pace.

### Acceleration

An East Midlands Accelerator grant has financed a much-anticipated upgrade to the kitchen. It has introduced new, slimline tables, a new central work area, a new freezer and cold room, and heavy equipment; all of which give the business capacity to serve more customers and conduct more research and development into its ever-growing range of cakes and pastries.



### Impact

Without the grant, the business would not have been able to carry out the renovation and refurbishment work for at least another year. Even then, the rising cost of raw materials and energy would probably have put a further halt on investment.

Being able to introduce the changes needed – and at pace – means there has been no impact on the business’s cashflow and that it can continue staffing at current levels. This, in turn, means the owners can focus their energies on, rather than in, the business.

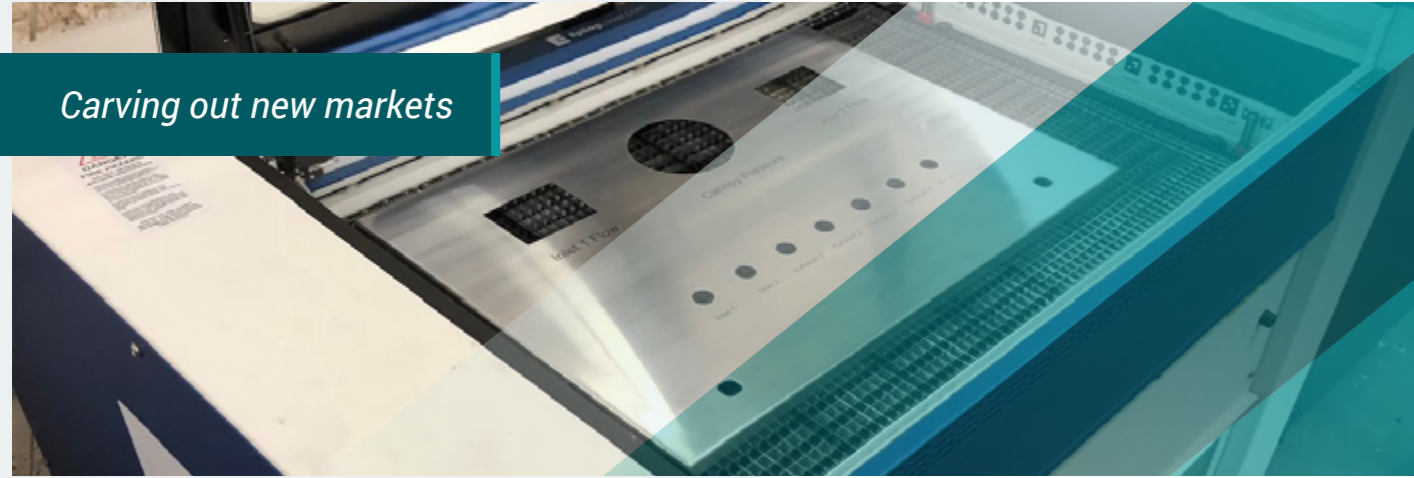
Learn more about the business: [bakerstcakes.co.uk](http://bakerstcakes.co.uk)



“Support from East Midlands Accelerator has had an immediate impact on futureproofing our business at a time when costs are only increasing.”

**Naeem Mohamed**  
Co-owner

## Carving out new markets



## Total Industrial Engraving

<b>Sector</b>	Manufacturing – Industrial Engraving
<b>Location</b>	LE2
<b>Number of employees</b>	6
<b>Support received</b>	Grant funding Kickstart wage subsidy Zellar sustainability support

### The Business

Total Industrial Engraving Ltd is a family-run business that provides industrial engraving of mostly plastic (traffolyte type) labels and some stainless steel (laser engraved).

Its B2B customers include large electrical contractors and solar farms, as well as engineering firms and point-of-sale retailers.

### Challenges

MD Tanya Gordon joined the business at the age of 19 when she took over from her father. In 2013, the company underwent a rebrand to put a firmer focus on its industrial credentials. Its turnover doubled quickly as a result, and growth has been sustained at a reasonable pace ever since.

Like any manufacturing business, however, there is a constant need for quicker, bigger and better.

### Acceleration

An East Midlands Accelerator grant has allowed for the purchase of a new laser engraving machine. It means the business can take on large jobs which otherwise would not have been possible or which would have taken longer on the mechanical engraving machine.

Increasing its number of machines from two to three means the business can take on more engraving jobs at any one time.

Of course, it also needs the staff in place to run the machines.

A second benefit of Accelerator support has been a wage subsidy that means staff member Ryan, who was first introduced to the business on the Chamber's Kickstart project, can now be offered a permanent role.

### Impact

Being able to turn around jobs at pace undoubtedly makes the business more competitive. The new machine has, in fact, already helped to secure the business's third biggest customer.

The business is also looking to improve on its track record in sustainable practice by taking advantage of one of the Chamber's free annual licences to the Zellar platform. Here it is able to put on proud display its commitment to choosing materials with a higher percentage of recycled materials, as well as its commitment to packaging reuse.

Learn more about the business: [totalindustrialengraving.co.uk](http://totalindustrialengraving.co.uk)



“Without early support from the Chamber we would not have found Ryan. And he is becoming our fastest learning engraver! Now we're looking at what other support we can tap into through our Chamber membership, and from Innovate UK and the East Midlands Manufacturing Network. The support we've had, and the support we anticipate, will help us to develop our goal to be known as the 'go to' company for industrial engraving.”

**Tanya Gordon**  
Managing Director





East Midlands Chamber (Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Leicestershire)

☎ 0333 320 0333

🌐 [www.emc-dnl.co.uk](http://www.emc-dnl.co.uk)

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