

FTSE + 3.11 at 6005.18
Dow Jones + 55.5 at 11787.4
Nikkei + 3.82 at 10502.88
Currencies
£1 1.5867 dollars (1.5869)
£1 1.1929 euros (1.1939)
£1 131.48 yen (131.58)
Gold 1367.00 dollars/oz (1381.50)

Local shares

Atkins (WS).....	662	Northumbrian Water.....	319.5
Bellway	671.5	Persimmon	437.6
British Polythene Industries	247.5	Rok	0
Norman Broadbent.....	72	Severfield Rowen	303.5
Enterprise Inns.....	112.5	White Young Green	24.5
Heliuss Energy	21.25	Marstons	103.7
Northgate	297.75		

■ Prices from Brewin Dolphin - Teesside

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EXPANSION PLANS: Ben Timney and Rob Adams of Itchyrobot show one of their website designs to Simon Hamilton, left, regional manager of UK Steel Enterprise

Sector gets innovative forum boost

THE North-east's construction sector has received a major boost with the formation of a pioneering professional forum.

The initiative is led by national construction company Morgan Sindall, working with North-east law firm Watson Burton.

Stephen McLellan, solicitor within Watson Burton's Construction and Engineering group, and Miles Morgan, site manager at Morgan Sindall, have established the Construction Innovation Forum - a networking platform for young professionals within the North-east to share their views and ideas in relation to the industry.

The forum will host monthly meetings at which members discuss the challenges that currently face the construction industry. The forum will offer potential networking opportunities for members, share best practice and to look at innovative ways in which the industry can be improved, as well as providing a good learning environment for members.

Miles Morgan of Morgan Sindall said: "The main concept behind the Construction Innovation Forum is the need for innovation to move the industry forward. At each session, a different member of the group delivers a presentation dedicated to a particular topic, such as sustainability, risk management or relationship building. The forum is then able to produce a report that offers a fresh and informed perspective for our companies."

Stephen McLellan of Watson Burton said: "Our firm is passionate about doing our bit to help stimulate the recovery of the industry. We think that contributing to initiatives such as this is a good start in the right direction."

"The make up of the group is its strength, combining a youthful outlook with real experience from across the construction industry. The forum is able to offer a new perspective on traditional problems and new issues faced by the industry. I think that given the current climate, partnership work and the sharing of knowledge and ideas is more important than ever."

Within the first two months, the forum has already attracted 10 new members, with membership offered on an invitation only basis to representatives of varying sectors of the industry. Members include a contractor, consultants, engineers and architects, as well as a solicitor specialising in construction.

We're itching to grow

BEN Timney and Rob Adams are itching to get their expansion plans for 2011 in place as their website design and development company prepares to celebrate a successful first year.

Itchyrobot already has an impressive client list ranging from an RAF radar base, the University of Teesside, jewellery, clothing and training companies to UK Steel Enterprise and the Map Group.

"We are very pleased with the way our first year has gone as we haven't really had to actively seek work - it has come to us," said Ben. "Now we feel ready to move the business on to the next stage in its development."

The two University of Teesside graduates set up their business in UK Steel Enterprise's Innovation Centre on Redcar's Kirkleatham Business Park in March 2010.

There they have not only benefited from facilities and support tailored specifically to help new businesses such as theirs but also gained clients.

Itchyrobot - which was chosen from around 250 possible names to represent enthusiasm and accuracy - is now responsible for all UK Steel Enterprise's IT support to tenants at The Innovation Centre and is also working with some of the other 40 companies based there, creating websites or providing IT support for them or their clients.

"It was a real bonus to get premises, support and some contracts for our services all under one roof," said Rob. "Now we have a new business plan in place for 2011 and will be specifically targeting small and medium sized businesses in the North-east."

"Many of them now have elderly and rather dated websites but feel they cannot afford to spend thousands of pounds re-developing them at a time when budgets are stretched. With well developed systems and tested methods in place, we now feel able to offer unbeatable deals that will give companies a bespoke website and support for a year. It's a strategy that we believe will bring us clients

in sufficient numbers to grow our business right through the year."

Simon Hamilton, regional manager for UK Steel Enterprise, the Tata Steel subsidiary that supports new and developing businesses, said: "Some people were more cautious about starting new ventures in 2010 but Ben and Rob bring such complementary skills sets and talents to Itchyrobot and work so hard that we knew they would make it. We're delighted that our support has helped them make such a strong start."

With a successful partnership proving its worth at work, family life is also expanding for Creative Director Ben, 36, who lives in Redcar. Along with wife Karen and two-year-old daughter Olivia, he welcomed new baby Arthur just before Christmas.

Technical Director Rob, 33, lives in Guisborough with wife Heather and five-year-old daughter Erin.

■ www.uksteelerenterprise.co.uk
 ■ www.itchyrobot.co.uk

NETPark has resident expert

BUSINESSES on the region's largest science park aiming to expand or find a route to market are to be joined by one of the UK's most successful venture capital and intellectual property firms.

IP Group has links to 10 universities across the country and has helped raise more than £370m in funding for its clients in the last decade.

IP Group's Nick Edgar, who is an investment manager in the firm's Newcastle office, will become a resident expert in NETPark Net's finance zone and will also hold regular clinics there.

As well as advising business leaders on accessing financial backing, Mr Edgar will also be able to give them an insight into the dynamics of the £25m Finance for Business North East Technology Fund.

IP Group manages the fund which

was launched last year with the remit of supporting over 60 high growth companies in the region in the next five years through packages of between £50,000 and £1.25m.

Stewart Watkins, managing director of the County Durham Development Company, which operates NETPark on behalf of Durham County Council, said: "For entrepreneurs working within the science, engineering and technology sectors, accessing the investment needed to get their ideas off the ground is a daunting task."

"Having an expert of Nick's quality and the backing of the IP Group could significantly boost the future prospects of our member firms as they look to establish themselves and grow. This will be a real help to many of the innovative businesses that are rising out of NETPark, and will help put the region firmly on the science and technology map, in turn

helping to create more high-quality job opportunities in the North-east.

"This agreement is also another milestone in the ongoing development of NETPark Net, which continues to go from strength to strength."

Mr Edgar, who has a wealth of experience in helping develop both start-up and mature businesses, said: "Since IP Group moved into the North-east market earlier this year, we have been keen to unearth new opportunities and contribute to the regional economy, so this agreement allows us to do both."

NETPark Net offers its members access to lectures, clinics, drop-in surgeries and tailored business advice on a range of relevant subjects including routes to market, innovation management, access to finance and marketing and legal advice.

Its knowledge bank hosts podcasts,



NET EXPERTISE: Netpark and, right, Nick Edgar of IP Group

event proceedings, opportunities, ask an expert, news and networks. Companies can also use NETPark Net to open a virtual office with postal address, email, telephone number, hotdesking facilities and use of meeting rooms.
 ■ www.uknetpark.net

