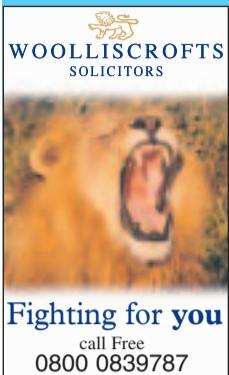


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Caudwell Group plans to open 100 new stores



JOBS BOOM ON THE CARDS

BY DAVID ELKS
BUSINESS EDITOR

MOBILE phone retailer Phones 4u is poised to expand its shop empire by up to 30 per cent as part of a major jobs-boosting investment programme.

The company — part of the Stoke-based Caudwell Group — is looking at opening up to 100 new shops to add to its existing chain of 350 stores.

The move comes as the company, which employs around 1,000 people in North Staffordshire, has increased its market share and is now targeting its number one rival, Carphone Warehouse.

The nationwide store expansion plan is likely to secure existing jobs

and could spark fresh recruitment at the company's call centre and headquarter operations in Newcastle.

News of the proposals emerged at the company's sales conference in Birmingham, although the company has remained tight-lipped.

It comes a month after investment bank NM Rothschild was appointed as advisors for a strategic review of the group.

It prompted speculation that Mr Caudwell was seeking a sale of the Phones 4u busi-

ness with a price tag of between £800 million and £1 billion.

The Sentinel has already reported how the company is looking to take on an extra 500 permanent staff and invest £3 million on its stores to increase capacity.

A delegate at the conference told The Sentinel: "We've heard plans for a large investment in the group to deal with expansion of Phones 4u, which may lead to up to 100 branches. It is fantastic news."

A Caudwell Group spokesman declined to comment on the store openings but Tim Whiting, group managing director for the

Caudwell Group, said: "There is some big news around the corner, but I can't tell you what it is at the moment."

He revealed that the business last weekend sold more contracts than at any other time in its history.

Mr Whiting said figures remained confidential, but added: "Overall volume is up and that's why we are putting in more desks to meet that additional demand."

"This has been a fantastic year for Phones4U — we now have real momentum but there is still much to do."

"We have ambitions to be the number one mobile phone retailer in the UK. What we have achieved shows we are well under way."

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