

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

AUGUST 2020



**THE COSMETIC DENTAL CLINIC -  
THE UK'S FIRST BRANDED INVISALIGN CENTRE**

business | property | media | technology | education | motors | fashion | arts | leisure

issue 60

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*Dorothy, The Wizard of Oz*

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## FOREWORD

### Welcome to the August edition of Northern Insight.

As we all adjust to the "new normal" we are delighted to bring you another vibrant issue packed with content, expert opinion and features.

Our cover stars are the Cosmetic Dental Clinic, soon to celebrate their 15th anniversary, and one of the leading centres of their kind.

Amongst a plethora of terrific business articles, look out for Dr. David Cliff's piece on the notion of a "second wave" as well as our new Lawyer of the Month and Media Matters platforms.

Former Sunderland star Kieron Brady also talks candidly of his work as a consultant for the SP Bespoke company which specialises in helping people with addictions.

We also talk to Bob Arora, owner of the hugely popular Sachins restaurant, on launching a 'Sachins at Home' video series during lockdown to showcase to his customers how to prepare their favourite dishes.

Given the continued difficult circumstances, may I again thank all of our wonderful clients, contributors and suppliers for their fantastic support.

Stay safe and well. Till next month...

*M.J. Grahamslaw*  
Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher  
mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com



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## CREDITS

Managing Director - Michael Grahamslaw

Design - Lu O'Rourke

Accounts Manager - Lisa Grahamslaw

Lead Photography - Simon Williams, Crest Photography

Additional Photography - Laurence Sweeney

Editorial Contributors - Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw, Graham Courtney, Steve Russell, Barry Speker, David Fairlamb, Alex Nelson, Sophie Swift, Caroline Preston

Web Design - Mediaworks Social Media - Curtis Gabriel

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## INTU ELDON SQUARE APPOINTS NEW GENERAL MANAGER

intu has appointed Andrew Bradley as the new General Manager of intu Eldon Square, the retail heart of Newcastle city centre and one of the largest shopping destinations in the UK.

Originally from Scotland, Andrew joins the shopping destination with over thirty years of industry experience and retail knowledge. In 2012 Andy won 'UK Centre Manager of the Year', a

prestigious shopping centre industry award.

Gavin Prior, Operations Director at intu, said: "We're delighted to welcome Andrew to the team, Andrew comes with great experience managing shopping centres up and down the country. Most recently he has been managing The Bridges in Sunderland, so comes with a wealth of city centre and regional knowledge of the North East."



## TRAINING FIRM GOES VIRTUAL IN FOUR WEEKS

A North East training company's innovative approach to virtual training is helping get the region back to work.

Businesses and jobseekers struggling with the coronavirus downturn are turning to Geon Training's online expertise to help upskill staff working from home and get market-ready skills in key sectors.

By switching to virtual classrooms, Geon has recorded zero absences with all courses completed.

Geon Training specialises in fully funded, bespoke training programmes and offers its clients local employment opportunities, as well as CV coaching and careers advice.

The company has also started to provide the TQUK Level 2 Award in Prevention and Control of Infection, a qualification that many employers are now insisting on candidates having due to the pandemic.



## NORTH EAST BOILER COMPANY PLEDGES TO OFFSET HOUSEHOLD CO2

North East family-run heating company Gas Angel Heating has launched its new boiler and central heating cover plans with a pledge to plant trees every time a customer takes out or renews a policy.

The Newcastle-based company has recently launched Gas Angel Cover and has already had immediate sign-ups from a waiting list of customers.

Managing Director Amy Mooney said: "We are committed to doing everything we can to offset CO2 emissions. We decided that for every Gas Angel Cover plan taken out we would plant two trees with the non-profit global reforestation scheme Just One Tree."

The project plants trees in places like Madagascar, Indonesia and Nepal, helping to clean the air, filter water, stabilise soil and supply medicines.

## GLOBAL AWARD FOR ACCOMMODATING LOCAL BUSINESS

A Newcastle based family run business which prides itself on its passion for the region has received an award from a prestigious global industry magazine.

Founded 20 years ago, Week 2 Week Serviced Apartments is run by Claire Parry. As an alternative to hotels, the firm provides serviced apartments for both long and short stays across the North East.

The company has been recognised globally by Relocate Magazine who have awarded Week 2 Week a "highly commended" award, despite fierce competition from major players in the serviced accommodation field.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the apartments are now subject to new, even more stringent cleaning regimes including an innovative misting service which generates a fine mist of sanitiser onto surfaces.



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## SUMMERS-INMAN APPOINTED TO NHS P22 CAPITAL PROGRAMME

Award-winning construction and property consultancy Summers-Inman has been appointed as both NEC3 Project Manager and P22 Trust Cost Adviser for King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust.

The consultancy, which is well versed in developing strategic partnerships with NHS Trust organisations, was successful in securing these services following a competition via the P22 Framework, a construction procurement framework administered by the Department of Health and Social Care.

Summers-Inman will act as a key consultant for King's College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, one of London's largest and busiest teaching hospitals with a strong profile of local and specialist services.

Derek Brydon, Director of Health at Summers-Inman, will have responsibility for the delivery of services throughout the five-year capital programme.



## NORTH EAST SPECIALISTS ENGINEER NEW WORK

A North East firm of civil and structural engineers has secured a string of new contracts, reflecting continued strong demand for its services in the face of the coronavirus pandemic.

RWO, which has offices in Newcastle and Leeds, has secured an undisclosed six figure worth of orders in the last three months, which includes a civil and structural engineering groundwork contract for the development of 1,500 new houses across the North of England.

The firm has also supported the delivery of a new commercial storage unit with 8,000 car parking spaces in the Midlands, a multi-million-pound industrial development in Yorkshire and new data centre on the outskirts of London.

RWO now plans several senior appointments later this year to boost its current 19-strong workforce.



## HOUSING DEVELOPER INTRODUCES NEW STYLE OF HOMES IN FENHAM

The first homes at a new housing development in Fenham have now been released for sale, as part of Bellway's first-ever Artisan Collection development in Newcastle.

The housebuilder is bringing 39 four and five-bedroom detached family homes to The Grange, on a former vacant school site off Grange Road. Bellway's Artisan Collection is a brand-new range of house types, which have been named after traditional craft vocations.

The first homes available to reserve at The Grange are being sold from Bellway's nearby Ottermead at Jameson Manor development in Ponteland, which can currently be visited on an appointment-only basis or through a virtual tour online.

Currently on sale with prices starting from £349,995, the first homes are due to be completed early next year.

## CAVU CORPORATE FINANCE ADVISES H.I.G. CAPITAL AND VERNACARE

Newcastle-based corporate finance boutique Cavu Corporate Finance has advised H.I.G. Capital and its portfolio business Vernacare on the carve-out of the infection prevention business from Frontier Medical Group.

With a customer base across the UK and Europe, the acquired businesses are

industry-leaders in the infection prevention market providing an extensive range of sharps and clinical waste disposal solutions.

Established in 1964, Vernacare provides healthcare institutions with efficient, cost-effective and environmentally sound toileting and bathing solutions. With sales in over 60 countries, the business employs over 250 people globally.

Shawn Bone, Managing Director of Cavu Corporate Finance, commented: "Cavu is delighted to have advised H.I.G. and Vernacare on this strategic acquisition that will expand Vernacare's operations both domestically and internationally."



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## SOS GROUP REACHES £250,000 COMMUNITY SUPPORT MILESTONE

SOS Group celebrated donating an amazing £250,000 to charities, talented young individuals and community organisations by renewing our support for grass-roots sports charity, Sport Newcastle.

The total, donated since we set out in business, is a very significant milestone for our company, which began as a small, independent business in 2002. We now have 21 employees and are proud to count some of the biggest names in sport and industry as clients.

Throughout our history, SOS Group has always placed a strong emphasis on community involvement and we have always encouraged and helped others to pursue their ambitions. Over the last year, we have been actively involved in supporting over 30 community projects, charities and talented young individuals.

More than half of SOS Group's staff regularly engage in local grassroots activities, including all three of our directors, and we also provide financial contributions where required and give support 'in kind' by providing digital office equipment services at no cost.

Building on our backing of Sport Newcastle last year, we have now become a partner of the charity by donating £2,500 to support North East sporting talent and to help them to achieve their Olympic and Paralympic dreams.

Andrew Skelton, director at SOS Group, says: "We can't think of a better way to reach a total of



£250,000 donated to community activities than by supporting Sport Newcastle.

"There is a wealth of incredible sporting talent in this region and these committed young people deserve the chance to compete at the very top.

"We had our own ambitions as a company when we first set out and we've grown to work with high-profile clients including British Swimming and the IAAF World Athletics Championships. It feels right to help local talent achieve the very best they can, too."

Sport Newcastle has been supporting athletes throughout the region to higher levels of achievement for more than 50 years and is

encouraging more local young people to enjoy and participate in grass roots sports.

The charity is currently campaigning to raise £20,000, to aid local Olympic prospects to reach not only the Tokyo games, but also Paris in 2024 and Los Angeles in 2028.

Jonathan Edwards CBE, an Olympic, World, Commonwealth and European triple jump champion, is a Patron of Sport Newcastle.

Jonathan says: "Support from businesses is an essential part of our commitment to providing sporting opportunities for all.

"We're very pleased with the partnership commitment from SOS Group to support Sport Newcastle's endeavours in the North East and to enable our emerging sports talent to reach their full potential."

Matthew Squires, Sport Newcastle Fundraising Chair, adds: "We are delighted that Newcastle based SOS Group have teamed up with Sport Newcastle to help support us through our business partnership programme.

"We are reliant on the generous support of local businesses, trusts and individuals and we simply couldn't do the work we do with local sporting talent in the region without them."





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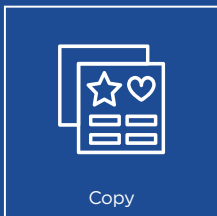
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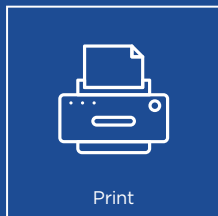
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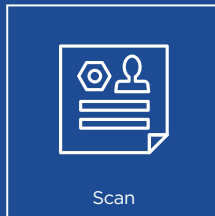
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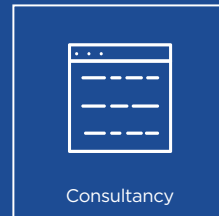
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From left: Simon Walker of Homes by Carlton with Scott Bibby, CoreHaus at Cathedral Gates

## COREHAUS TO INVEST IN NORTH EAST MANUFACTURING SITE

An innovative housing manufacturer is looking to invest in the North East creating a new manufacturing site and dozens of skilled jobs.

CoreHaus recently appointed Scott Bibby as project director to lead the plans to find a suitable factory unit – likely to be in County Durham or the surrounding area – to begin the manufacture of the unique modular homes which have already been successfully built and trialled in the region.

Scott, 34, who joined the company after four years as production manager at Hitachi Rail, will recruit a small core team initially before developing commercial partnerships to drive sales in the new product.

Recruitment has started for a production manager and engineer, with the company expecting to recruit more than a dozen technicians, apprentices and admin staff within the first 12 months.

The five-year plan will see CoreHaus producing 1,000 modular homes a year, which will result in more than 100 people working across the business.

CoreHaus is a joint-venture company between Carlton & Co Group, the parent company behind North East based Homes by Carlton, and national social enterprise Fusion21, specialists in public procurement for the built environment.

Scott Bibby said: "We already know there is interest and demand for our innovative product. The housing sector is screaming out for something that's both affordable and incorporates high-quality design within a modular frame.

"The concept was successfully piloted with Homes by Carlton at their Cathedral Gates site in County Durham and we are now looking to work together on other new housing developments across the region.

"We're also talking to housing associations about the product. Several have already told us they love the flexible, high-quality nature of the product. It is quick to build, easy to adapt and has a low-carbon footprint."

CoreHaus homes appear much like any traditional build. They differ to both standard brick-built homes as well as other modular designs because of the way they are constructed and assembled. CoreHaus is a flexible combination of being part modular, with a standard, engineered core, that can then be configured to meet customer requirements.

Scott added "Even before the pandemic and the current economic downturn it was well-known

that there's a huge shortage of high quality, and affordable homes in the UK. There is a massive void in the market for something like CoreHaus.

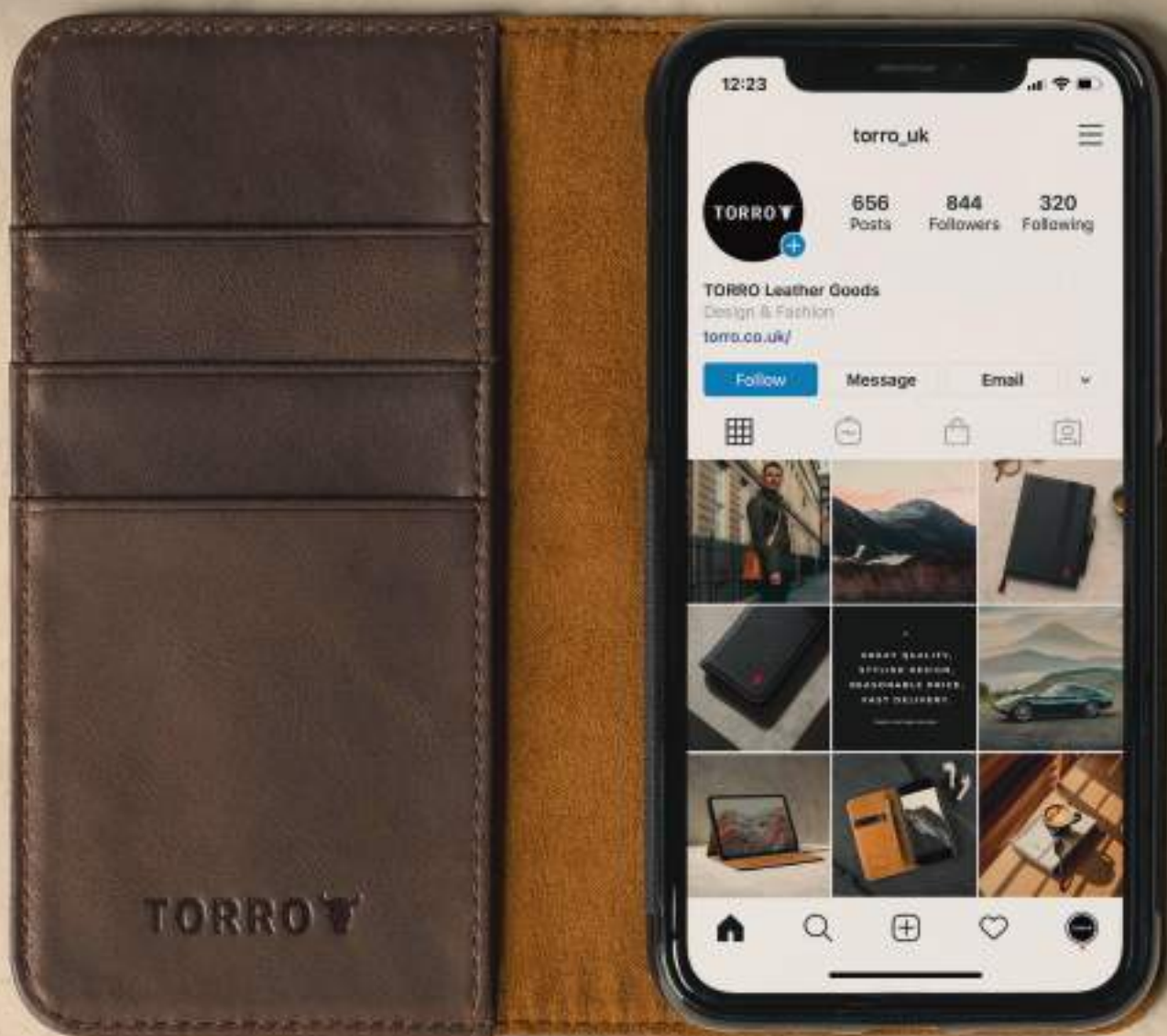
"Our light gauge steel-frame system ensures that CoreHaus can be used in both urban and rural locations with elevation treatments tailored to suit each setting, providing almost unlimited design potential. The standardised modular core means the house can be configured to provide either 2, 3 or four bedroom homes."


Due to the nature of its build, CoreHaus will adopt a different production methodology to most housebuilding. Technicians will be needed in the new factory who have engineering qualifications and are agile at problem solving in a technical environment.

Scott added: "Our production and designs draw on technical skills and innovation. We will be looking to recruit people from different industries to create a diverse workforce with a growth mindset. We need engineering skills and construction experience combined to succeed and have a real opportunity to break the current mould."

[www.corehaus.co.uk](http://www.corehaus.co.uk)

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## THE COSMETIC DENTAL CLINIC HAS SOMETHING BIG TO SMILE ABOUT

Almost fifteen years ago, Dr Darren Cannell and Dr Andy Stafford set up their own dental practice in Newcastle's Old Eldon Square. It has become one of the leading centres of its kind.

Two years ago they set up another practice in Durham....same high standards...same attention to details.

These are hi-tech practices using digital techniques which can, and do, change people's lives forever. Flick through the testimonials on their website and you'll have your suspicions confirmed.

One of their areas of expertise is called Invisalign® Clear Braces. If you are unhappy with the position and alignment of your teeth, this astonishing treatment will transform the way you look when you smile. For many people, the result is life-changing.

The Cosmetic Dental Clinic was the first practice in the region to be given 'Diamond II' status by Invisalign, but now they've gone one step further and The Cosmetic Dental Clinic has got something really big to smile about.

Invisalign® and Align Technology have selected The Cosmetic Dental Clinic in Newcastle as their first ever UK branded Invisalign Centre.

"This is a massive honour and something we're really proud of", said Darren Cannell. "Invisalign are the world leaders in clear aligner brace systems. We have been providing this treatment for over 15 years now...a system which is constantly evolving and something we truly believe in. We are delighted that we have been chosen to pioneer this latest concept".

It is quite apparent that when it comes to cosmetic dentistry, it doesn't come any better than the team at The Cosmetic Dental Clinic.

Darren explained, "The third floor at our Eldon Square practice is now fully dedicated to Invisalign. The latest digital systems have been installed which allows our team to abandon traditional impressions or moulds which many people find to be extremely uncomfortable. A 3D simulation is created of how your smile will appear. You'll be given an estimate of how long it will take to complete the course of treatment. Over subsequent weeks, you'll be provided with a series of aligners, which are almost invisible, that slowly move your teeth to the desired positions. The results really do change people's lives and how they feel about themselves."

The Covid-19 lockdown meant that Darren and Andy had to close both practices, but rather than sit still, they've been using that time to launch yet another new concept.

Are you nervous about visiting the dentist, embarrassed by the state of your teeth or simply too busy to schedule an initial consultation?

Well, there is now another option at The Cosmetic Dental Clinic.

"We undertook a USA-based course to understand virtual platforms and how to effectively deliver Virtual Consultations. Such has been the success of the work we've done, within six weeks we were the platform's 3rd biggest user in the World. We're now lying 2nd and getting enquiries from all over the UK", said Co-owner Andy Stafford.

It's a technique which means Darren, Andy and their team have been able to see patients and discuss how they would like their smile to look. The virtual process is done from the comfort of the patient's home. They take photos of their teeth and gums and then load everything via a simple link on The Cosmetic Dental Clinic website. The clinicians then provide a personalised and tailored video recording to demonstrate potential treatment options to help enquirers make a more informed choice as to how to achieve their smile goals.

It's a totally free consultation.

Darren added, "The recordings include examples of similar cases we've experienced and what we've done for the patients to restore their confidence and bring back their smile. The link can be accessed 24/7 with uploads only taking a couple of minutes which means this new workflow is extremely convenient for patients with very busy lives."

"A number of new clients have expressed that they found the virtual concept a welcome stepping stone to starting their treatment journey having previously put off a more traditional initial contact through fear of any potential face to face embarrassment. We have found such patients are then more comfortable about seeing us in person in the clinic."

### Interested?

Go onto their website...[www.thecosmeticedentalclinic.com](http://www.thecosmeticedentalclinic.com) and you'll see a link at the top of the page 'Free Virtual Consultation.'

Go on. Rediscover your smile with The Cosmetic Dental Clinic.





Damiano Rea



## DAMIANO REA

Managing Director, Heaton Property

At an early age Damiano Rea realised he had won the lottery of life. Born of Italian heritage to hard working owners of an Italian Restaurant and living in Heaton, an area where he still lives and works.

The restaurant was to figure large in Damiano's early life. At age seven he was decked out in a pristine white shirt with dickie bow tie helping clear tables and run errands for customers.

"Today my parents would have been arrested for child abuse and modern slavery but back then it was common for children to help out in a family business. Working in the restaurant gave me some of my happiest childhood memories. At seven years old I was trusted, I had responsibilities and I was helping the family enterprise. Our customers clearly liked the idea too, at seven I was making more in tips than I ever did as restaurant manager in my early twenties".

Damiano attended the Royal Grammar School in Jesmond where he studied music and quickly gravitated to the school orchestra. RGS would team up with Newcastle University orchestra playing Mendelssohn and Handel to a discerning classical music audience.

At this time a band leader called Johnny Taws was big on the North East club circuit playing big band and swing music. Johnny was a friend of Damiano's parents and would play the piano in the restaurant with Damiano accompanying him on bass. Contacts in the music industry led to Damiano being offered a contract to tour with a professional band in Europe and South Africa.

"For a young man this was a dream job. We toured the northern hemisphere in the summer and the southern hemisphere in the winter. For several years rain and cold were an alien concept".

Money earned from touring was enough for Damiano to start his property portfolio and the intention was to put his properties in the hands of a managing agent and continue with the band. But there was a problem. Damiano quickly realised there was no lettings agency in the area specialising in high-end lets for young professionals.

"In the late 90's Heaton was still the land of the grotty student bed-sit. I had a guiding principle that still underpins our business today. We will never let a property we would not be prepared to live in ourselves. This period marked the beginning of purpose build student and key worker accommodation in Newcastle and the writing was on the wall for bed-sit land. Since I could not find an agency that shared my vision, I left the band and setup Heaton Property".

Since then Heaton Property has gone from strength to strength, winning a prestigious Sunday Times Lettings Agency of the Year award in 2014. In addition to specialising in lettings for young professionals the agency boasts a maintenance and refurbishment team and a specialist block management division.

Plans for expansion were temporarily put on hold during the Covid-19 lockdown but even this setback had minimal impact on the business. Systems already in place allowed staffs to work from home and conduct virtual viewings employing a specialist 360 degree camera.

As we emerge from the dark days of lockdown the future looks bright for Heaton Property. Damiano concludes "It has been wonderful to watch the Heaton I love transform itself over the years. From being the poor relation of posher neighbours in Gosforth and Jesmond, Heaton is now a vibrant area with chic restaurants and speciality shops. The demographic is predominantly young professionals which means we are perfectly placed to offer them the high standard of accommodation they require. Restaurant manager to professional musician to lettings agency owner is not exactly a logical career path. But there is a common thread and one which should apply to any enterprise. A happy customer is the only customer to aim for".

Heaton Property was setup in 2005 and specialises in providing rental property for professionals in Newcastle upon Tyne and the surrounding areas.

In June 2014 the company won gold in the Times/Sunday Times Letting Agency of the Year Awards.

Heaton Property website: [www.heatonproperty.com](http://www.heatonproperty.com) Tel: 0191 240 0665 Email: [office@heatonproperty.com](mailto:office@heatonproperty.com)

The Big Interview...



# Worktraq

## Location Intelligence

### Introducing Worktraq

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The app enables you to better manage your team and their daily jobs/task by allocating work, jobs and tasks and also ensuring key information is captured for each task. The app also provides real-time information on events such as job start and job completion.

As jobs are entered into the system their location is mapped onto our system whether it's a retail park, hyper store carpark, chemical site or power station. This map is defined as a "geo-fence".

When your employee enters this area the geo-fence triggers events such as job start capturing date and time as well as location. You can specify items like before and after photographs are captured, perhaps RAMS are signed by site staff, client signatures are captured at completion of a job.

Each event can also trigger automated updates to your supervisors, managers and if required your clients to provide automated real-time updates. These events are stored within the cloud system and can be retrieved as part of audit reports which again can be shared with your clients to keep them up to date.

Worktraq's core functionality is comprehensive, but it is also possible to have bespoke modules and functions added to extend functions or interface with other applications and can be set to monitor different activities and locations.

The mobile app can be supplied on ruggedized and approved tablets that Worktraq provide or can be downloaded to a mobile phone or table (Android only at present).

### So why invest Real-time information at your fingertips?

Management and team co-ordinators are given real-time updates on progress of jobs and can immediately give this to client companies for

example when did a manned security guard last visit premises/site? when was our car park gritted by one of your gritter wagons? All this leads to faster and better customer service adding value to your offering.

### Audit trail of jobs

it's easy to provide reports, evidence to clients that you are providing the service you say you are, this can be via daily/weekly/monthly report and via automatic updates when events occur. Combined with signature capture from the client's representative you can ensure vital work for Health and Safety can be audited and easily retrieved and reported on, perhaps your clients need a weekly report of all gritting activities for their audit trail? Then send a weekly report with all the relevant information.

### Monitoring vehicle movement

Geofencing helps track your assets. It alerts you when a vehicle enters or moves out of a monitored area.

### Employee clock-in and clock-out

Geofences around your jobsite can help monitor employee movement as well.

**Jenny Driver**  
Warehouse Manager

3



## Would you like a demonstration?

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## Online records

All assignments have a compliance trail. If your staff are working on a customer site remotely, and you want to make sure vehicles stay within that perimeter the geofence can set an alarm when the perimeter is broken. Set the customer address a mandatory zone between time allocated for the assignment.

## 24hr management and backup

You can use this app any time day or night, the app is safe and secure within our UK data centre and as standard is backed up over evening – for high volume solutions we are able to offer a number of geographically diverse and or high availability solutions as required.

## Case Study – Gritting Company

the application is ran to control gritting work of private car parks such as on retail parks and supermarkets, etc.

As well as standard options such as tracking the gritters progress around the car park and being able to report this we also extended the functionality to automatically create jobs based on real-time weather information from the met office, this saved the client significant time for operators no longer having to create basic job information.

The driver only ever has the app and jobs appear on their tablet device, the manager has the access to the full app including CRM and assigns the vehicle to the driver, and the driver logs in, the client can then access information from the task starting.

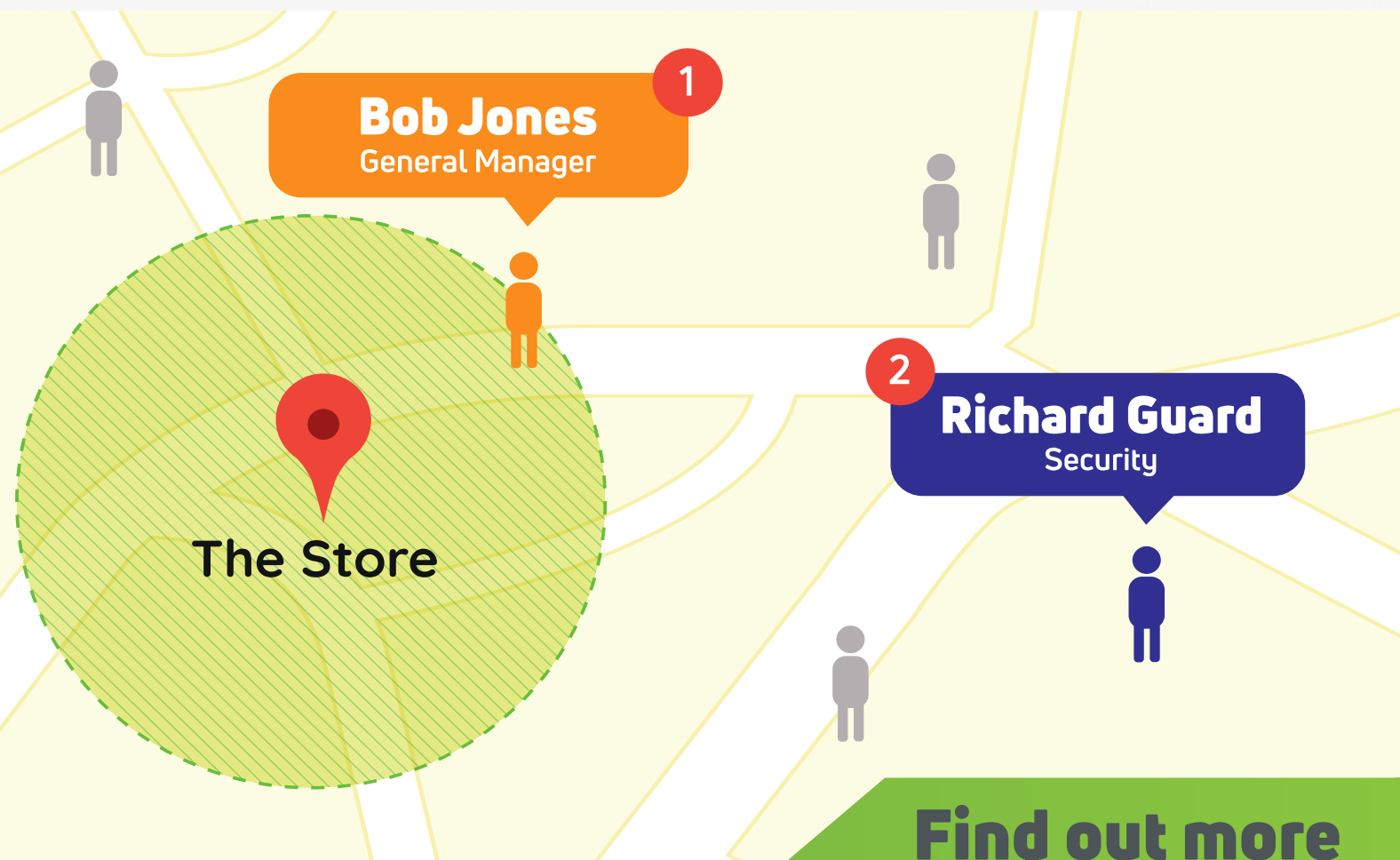
The driver entered the geofence and the app request interaction such as taking a picture, ticking a form on a questionnaire, the app registers the driver starting, in the midst of and once the assignment commenced. Once the job has been completed the driver then



gets another request for a photo/ fill in a small questionnaire and logout. The CRM then sends the client and the manager a certificate to say the job is completed – the staff member is then located another task and moves on to the next assignment.

## Costings

Each company depending on needs/size would be quoted a personalised set up fee but once the app is installed and the users trained, the cost would be a monthly retainer of £15 per user per month.



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Norton, TS20 2SA

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

## "THE SIGNIFICANT ROLE THAT EDUCATION AND SKILLS HAVE TO PLAY IN THE 'NEW NORMAL' AS THE ECONOMY STARTS ITS LONG ROAD TO RECOVERY CANNOT BE UNDERESTIMATED."

A bold statement perhaps, but one which David Gallagher, Chief Executive at education and skills charity, NCFE, believes whole-heartedly.

Blazing a trail for vocational and technical qualifications for over 170 years, Newcastle-headquartered NCFE has its roots firmly planted in education and skills, and has helped millions of learners across the UK and beyond to take their next steps in their lives and careers.

Having enjoyed a successful career in employment and skills for over 18 years, including roles in large public and private sector organisations, as well through establishing a number of new business start-ups, David Gallagher initially joined NCFE in 2018 as Managing Director of NCFE EPA Plus, leading a new team to deliver End-Point Assessment (EPA) solutions for apprenticeships.

Taking the reins of the business in March 2019 in his first Chief Executive position, David's enthusiasm and drive for creating positive change has seen the NCFE family of businesses grow and develop, with the welcoming of well-respected charity, Campaign for Learning, and building on the well-known qualification and assessment brands NCFE and CACHE, specialist diagnostic assessment provider, Skills Forward and peer-to-peer learning start-up, Peer Tutor.

All of NCFE's businesses contribute to supporting learners to achieve the best possible education, career and life outcomes, but to David, this is just the tip of the iceberg.

"In an economy in desperate need of a productivity boost, we must all take every opportunity to inject energy, optimism and belief into our sector to shape a better future through the power of education," David said.

"In the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic with mass unemployment and deep recession a looming reality for the UK economy, the post-16 education and skills sector has a vital role to play in supporting the economic recovery effort.

"In recent history, it is our young people who have suffered most during economic downturns. With research published throughout the lockdown period suggesting that the same will be true of the post-Covid labour market crisis, we need to do everything in our power to support young people to access high quality learning opportunities during this crisis so that they remain in education, employment or training."

To this end, encouraged by the Chancellor Rishi Sunak's announcement as part of the Economic Statement to include a new £2 billion scheme to create thousands of job placements for young people, NCFE has this month launched its new youth employment initiative.

Offering wraparound support for learners and Further Education colleges and training providers, the 'Go the distance' campaign aims to enable young people to understand their baseline skills, their potential and their goals, as well as identify areas where they can develop and improve. Through the FE Colleges and training providers that we partner with, learners will be able to access fundable packages of qualifications, mapped to meet their specific development needs.

"With the cohort of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training expected to double by 2021 and more than 2.8 million jobs and apprenticeship opportunities at risk for 18-24 year olds, keeping young people engaged in education through the provision of high-quality learning experiences during this time of reduced activity will be key to ensuring that they are equipped with the skillset and mind-set that they need to enter a more challenging job market when the time comes," David continued.

"High quality educational experiences build confidence, resilience and self-esteem and in turn, help to drive social mobility. And this is what matters to us most, supporting those with the greatest need. Which is why we're bringing all of our resources and experience to bear to enable to education and training sector to deliver the most possible value to learners. Through providing access to a range of high quality, industry-led qualifications, content and support services we want to play our part in ensuring that every young person has the opportunity to succeed.

"We hope that our youth employment initiative will provide precisely this, and will energise and inspire learners to explore their options, to upskill and reskill in anticipation of the challenges ahead and give them the confidence to pursue opportunities which come their way."





David Gallagher

# I'M KIERON BRADY AND I'M AN ALCOHOLIC

And I'm helping other alcoholics  
recover from the illness.

Kieron Brady was a Sunderland and Republic of Ireland footballer in the late 1980s and early 1990s. If you speak to any Sunderland fans who saw him playing for their club, they will tell you what a brilliant player he was. He only made 33 appearances for the first team but he achieved legendary status.

Sunderland favourite Michael Gray, a former teammate of Kieron's, describes him as the most talented player he's ever seen.

Sadly for Kieron, he developed a career-ending blood disorder. He was forced to retire from football at the age of just 21.

Over subsequent years Kieron began to rely on alcohol and around the age of 35 he accepted there was a serious problem.

Thankfully, Kieron is made of stern stuff. He faced-



up to his problems, sought advice, got help and hasn't touched a drop of alcohol for over eleven years. June 13th saw his 11th 'sober birthday.'

Kieron is now putting all of his experience of dealing with being an alcoholic into good use.

"It was tough, but I knew I had to sort myself out and that I could not do it without assistance" said Kieron who now works as a consultant for the SP Bespoke company which specialises in helping people with addictions. "The best way to help an alcoholic in my experience, is for another alcoholic to speak to them and provide guidance. They are more likely to pay attention if they know they're speaking to someone who has faced exactly the same problem."

Kieron received help from specialists. That was when he realised he could also help other alcoholics.

"The vast majority of alcoholics are just normal, everyday people who deteriorate in time as the illness progresses, with more regular drinking until it becomes a habit...a need...a desire which they can't do without. For many of those people, they will be anonymous members of society. The majority do not satisfy the broad public perception of an alcoholic.

However, alcoholics come from all walks of life and some will be well known. Perhaps they are sports people, film or TV stars, or from the world of business and finance. For many of those people,

they have a reputation which they'd rather protect. Rolling-up to a very public meeting to discuss their alcoholic addiction would be something they'd like to avoid. They are probably very reserved and reluctant to ask for help. They wouldn't want some sort of stigma."

Kieron and SP Bespoke can help that latter group of people. He or one of the other consultants will go to meet the alcoholic in the privacy of their own home. It will be up to the client who else attends the meeting. Perhaps they'd like other family members to be involved. However, if they'd prefer a private, one-to-one session, that is what SP Bespoke will do.

As well as dealing with alcohol, SP Bespoke also specialises in other addictions such as drugs, gambling and sex. They will help individuals deal with the issues, symptoms and consequences.

Kieron is now sober, but perhaps you know someone in business who needs help. Perhaps you are a business owner and already know that either you need personal help or that possibly one of your employees needs help.

The best place to start is by going onto the SP Bespoke website... [www.spbespoke.com](http://www.spbespoke.com)

You'll find details of how they can help plus relevant contact numbers.

Kieron Brady kicked his alcoholism. You can too.







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[www.astute.work](http://www.astute.work)



Stephen Hall

## THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

Earlier this month, the Office of National Statistics released its latest study in to the impact of COVID-19 in the UK regions. It showed the extent to which North East businesses have been affected during lockdown, with two thirds of the private sector showing a fall in turnover.

We asked Stephen Hall, office senior partner at Deloitte in Newcastle, to share some of his thoughts on these findings, what he thinks the region can do as the UK looks to try and recover, and some of his own experiences.

"There is no question that the North East has been hit hard by the effects of lockdown, but so has every nation and region. We are not alone, and I truly believe it will be those that look to collaborate – whether that is across sectors or geography – that will be best placed to recover.

"A few weeks ago, I was involved in something Deloitte, alongside techUK and Sage, have committed to undertake across the UK nations and regions. In fact, we were the first in Newcastle. Called a 'digital dialogue', this virtual interactive session was used to bring together private and public sector, businesses and regional leadership, to investigate the role that technology could play in our region's recovery.

"In the midst of a pandemic, more than 30

people attended that session and contributed their experiences but also, critically, their ideas. I saw passion, commitment and openness. I also saw positivity. If you read through the ONS report it shows that in the North East, 92% of the respondents are still trading. I know we have to be cautious with those figures, but there is a determination in our region, and I say that as someone born and bred here, that will also be integral to our recovery.

"COVID-19 is a crisis, but we need to do everything we can to find, and quickly respond to, any opportunity it brings. I have seen organisations pivot at speed and achieve in weeks what would have previously taken years, and digital transformation is one of those areas. Digital tech is something we are already strong in in this region, so the key will now be how the region can accelerate and utilise that, and ensure the development of skills to support it.

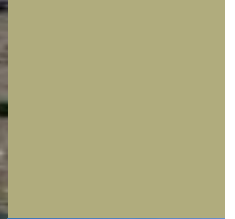
"It has, of course, also completely changed how

we work. The pandemic has fast-tracked the future of work by five-to-seven years, and we ourselves had to move 20,000 people in the UK, successfully, to remote working in mid-March.

"Like others, we have learnt a lot about the process and of course the benefits and challenges of working from home, many with caring responsibilities or feelings of isolation. These learnings, along with regular soundings with our people and insight into workforces of every generation and geography, will now influence our plans for the next phase of recovery and shape how we – and our clients – will work going forward.

"Whatever the outcome we will continue to play our part in the recovery of Newcastle and the North East. To help, in whatever way we can, to support and accelerate the opportunities of, and in, the region. I am proud of our business, and what our people and clients, continue to achieve despite these challenging times."





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## OPPORTUNITIES FOR OFFICE SPACE ARISE AS TENANTS RETURN TO A SAFE COMMERCE HOUSE

One of Middlesbrough's most desirable office spaces in the heart of Middlesbrough is offering some exciting new opportunities to businesses in the area as companies start to trade more normally.

Throughout the unprecedented coronavirus period, Commerce House has managed to ensure that tenants unable to work from home have had a safe environment to work from in the building, but as Middlesbrough gets back to some normality, the business community is still leading the way for safety standards.

Thanks to facilities manager Christine Huntington, the safety measures in the building are second to none, with increased sanitisation of the public areas, Plexiglass barriers in reception and a free-standing sanitiser unit for everyone entering the building to use.

Christine has also installed additional sanitiser stations throughout the site as well as antibacterial wipes for all tenants, visitors and contractors to use when working on site. Chairs in meeting areas have been reduced, each area is fully sanitised after any meeting and the reception area has been adjusted to ensure safety of staff and visitors alike.

Christine has provided the relevant PPE for her team to feel safe when working in and around the building i.e. face masks, gloves, bottles of sanitisers

and antibacterial wipes.

Christine said: "We have invested in a lot of changes to ensure everyone's safety. The way we will handle meetings has changed and we are rethinking our hot desk space.

"Also due to changes throughout the pandemic, we are now able to offer just two businesses in the region a choice of a two man office on level five or a four/five man office on level six, the much coveted floor with beautiful Parquet flooring throughout.

Tenants have also spoken out commending the team who look after the building on how well the building has managed their needs throughout the recent lockdown. Mina Debnath of Indigo Support said: "We have found working in the building to be safe during this time. It has not been possible to work from home at all times. The cleanliness and hygiene in the building is exceptional. The signage and information relating to COVID is easy to see and informative. The hand sanitiser and reminders are easily accessible."

Steve Cole of Colehouse Communications said: "The building has been really quick to adapt, from

the plexiglass barrier at reception and the hand sanitiser at all public doors and all other measures Christine has put in place. Me and my team feel very safe upon our visits and it is making our transition back into some office-based work much easier."

Tom Baker from Certax, a tenant in the building said: "Although the cleanliness of Commerce House is always to a high standard, the Commerce House team have gone above and beyond to take appropriate measures to ensure tenants and visitors are protected when entering the premises. Throughout the building are both sanitiser and signage, making it visible what was required from tenants and visitors to ensure all users of the premises would remain safe while in and around the building. Commerce House has acted quickly to put these measures in place. I particularly like the adjustments made to the reception area which has been adapted to keep safe both the tenants and Commerce House staff. I have also found the emails sent out with updates from Commerce House very useful and supportive."

**For more information on how to join this safe business community or view one of the available offices, please do get in touch with Christine on 01642 917 116.**



# READY FOR BUSINESS

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## KEEPING NORTH EAST BUSINESS CASCADING

One North East based company, which is a UK market leader in its field, has focused on helping businesses in the region during the pandemic to ensure that businesses here are supported so as to help them to both survive and thrive.

**Cascade Cash Management has taken an innovative approach to helping a good number of their suppliers, partners and associates in the region, continuing to put back into the economy whilst it deepens and extends relationships for the long term future good.**

The forward-thinking team, headed up by Dr Emma Black, specialise in delivering an independent and transparent cash management service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increased protection on deposits through a unique online portal.

The Cascade team of eleven administer cash savings on behalf of clients and depositors, who can also use the online portal to administer their own savings. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more, can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

As well as focusing on the wellbeing of clients, Cascade is developing a solid reputation as a good employer supporting colleagues through training and development, creating opportunities and encouraging team spirit. This ethos also expands to its team of consultants and suppliers. Dr Emma

Black explained: "When the global pandemic hit in March, we immediately regrouped and looked at ways to ensure we were positioned as a business to thrive over the coming months and years. A sense of urgency during these times becomes important and you need to be decisive and react at a fast pace to ensure you both protect and create value for the stakeholders of your business.

"Once we had enacted our continuity plan and all of our team were safe and well working from home, we then focused upon ensuring we reached out to our clients, partners and suppliers to ensure we offered our support to them during a challenging time for all.

"In reaching out, we benefitted from a shared perspective on things that were working well for local businesses and began to replicate these good wins at our end too. We work with some amazing local businesses that were founded and employ some very talented people and we wanted to help support and protect them too during this climate.

"We continue to work closely with Shout on bringing to life some of our exciting ideas for further developing our software particularly during a time of digital transformation in many sectors, with

Hedley McEwan on our brand communications and collateral, with Get Brindled on our PR and social media, with Protean Solutions on motivating and supporting our team and many others in the region and country, and on the property and office side, Commerce House in Middlesbrough, Kinetic Properties and The Town Hall in Wallsend, each of which is providing significant support in their own right for helping local businesses. I have also continued with my membership of Vistage, to support and develop my own business needs and talents, and it has been invaluable during this climate for ensuring we remain positioned to thrive.

"We have always aimed as people and as a business to be a supportive citizen in the North East and a force for good, considering the wellbeing of every one we come into contact with. Our team, including our external suppliers and partners are very important to us as well as very supportive customers. We are honoured to have been recognised and highly commended by The Financial Services Forum for exceptional customer care too and we will continue to do all we can to help others in the months and years ahead."

More information on Cascade and the team is available at [www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk)



# NORTH EAST OUTDOORS EXPO

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## NEW APPOINTMENT AND FOUR PROMOTIONS AT DURHAM LAW FIRM

Durham City's leading law firm Swinburne Maddison LLP has extended its award-winning Dispute Resolution team with the appointment of solicitor Lewis Brown.

Returning to his North East roots, Lewis joins Swinburne Maddison from a law firm in South Yorkshire. With experience across various dispute resolution matters, Lewis will enhance the range of legal support already on offer in the team.

The firm also celebrates the promotion of family solicitor Catherine Lowther to the position of Associate, as well as the appointment of three new Managing Associates: Sharney Randhawa (Employment), Nadine Walton (Private Client) and Abigail Zuk (Dispute Resolution).



## NORTH EAST ACCOUNTANT OF THE YEAR APPOINTED TO DIRECTOR

Nick Wilson, who holds the title of North East Accountant of the Year, has been promoted to the role of director at Robson Laidler Accountants, as the firm sets its sights on aiding businesses throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

With 11 years of experience at the company, chartered accountant Nick plays a main role in the advisory arm of the firm, providing business and personal development advice to clients.

The firm has helped its clients access millions of pounds in finance since the start of the pandemic with business advisory services including webinars on cashflow planning, minimising wastes and getting paid.



## MICHELLE MAKES MARKETING MOVE TO HAY & KILNER

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has strengthened its business development team with the recruitment of experienced marketeer Michelle McBride.

Michelle is joining the Newcastle-headquartered firm as a senior marketing manager and has worked in the legal sector for more than 15 years. She has particular expertise in the commercial and employment law sectors.

Jonathan Waters, Managing Partner at Hay & Kilner, said: "Michelle's knowledge and ideas will be central to communicating the comprehensive and evolving range of services that our expert teams offer and we're very glad to have her on our team."



## SINTONS LAWYER SCORES TOP MARKS GLOBALLY

A North East lawyer has received a global award in recognition of receiving the highest grade anywhere in the world in recent exams.

Lauren Fraser has received an Excellence Award from the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP) for her performance in her administration of estates assessment.

Lauren, a specialist wills, trusts and estates solicitor at Sintons, finished top amongst hundreds of lawyers around the world who sat the exam earlier this year.

With an extremely stringent assessment process, STEP is a highly esteemed international body which endorses professionals working in the field of trusts and estates for their quality.



## NEW LOOK FOR NORTH EAST ACCOUNTANCY FIRM

UHY Torgersens Chartered Accountants has changed its name to Torgersens Chartered Accountants and has adopted new branding to support this.

The change took place when the firm left the UHY Hacker Young network and became an independent practice.

Partner Martin Johnson explained: "After careful consideration it was decided that this would be the best way to offer our North East clients the most responsive and flexible service. We take great pride in our team and our commitment to North East businesses. The logo we have chosen has rich, warm colours and a honeycomb shape to reflect our culture of working together."

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# THE VALUE OF FINANCIAL ADVICE

Throughout our lives, we are all likely to face the need to take financial decisions that can have a major impact on our wealth. Whether you're buying your first home, becoming a parent for the first time, investing for the future, or about to retire – a carefully thought-through financial plan can make a positive difference, throughout your life – no matter what stage you're at.

You might think professional financial advice is only necessary when it comes to complex investments or pension planning, but even a seemingly straightforward financial goal could involve numerous decisions and a range of different products and providers.

## The numbers bear out

Over the years, research has produced some interesting findings that highlight the benefit of advice when taking major financial decisions. The results show that those who take advice are likely to accumulate more wealth, supported by increased saving and investing in equity assets, while those in retirement are likely to have more income, particularly at older ages.

One study highlighted that receiving professional financial advice over a five-year period\*, resulted in a total boost to wealth (in pensions and financial assets) of £47,7061.

Evidence suggests that fostering an ongoing relationship with an adviser leads to better



financial outcomes. Those who reported receiving advice at both time points in the analysis had nearly 50% higher average pension wealth than those who only received advice at the start\*\*.

Sadly, many people who buy complex investment, insurance and pension products don't take the hugely important step of asking a financial adviser for help before making their decision.

## True Value

Although the financial outcomes are important, we appreciate that the value of financial advice comes in different guises and can include enhancement of return on investment, peace of mind, achieving goals and realising opportunities, all combined with future security, ultimately ensuring you have enough money.

\*Between 2001 and 2006 \*\*ILC, The Value of Financial Advice, 2017



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# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PRIVATE EQUITY

As the agenda increasingly turns to economic recovery, Private Equity will provide much needed liquidity for some businesses to facilitate growth.

So how will the coronavirus crisis impact private equity investments and the wider M&A market? This was a key question going into and during the early parts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Initially, the unprecedented national lockdown had a sweeping impact on the majority of private equity deals and M&A activity with widespread disruption caused to almost all parts of the economy and society. This was evidenced by UK Gross Domestic Product ("GDP") which provides a measure of the economic performance, contracting by 2% in Q1 of 2020 (Jan-Mar) and by 20% in April according to the Office for National Statistics. The April GDP contraction was less than most economic forecasts that predicted up to 30% contraction, which evidenced the resilience of the UK economy during lockdown.

The impact on M&A for both trade buyers and private equity investors has been slightly different.

The M&A market witnessed a downturn in trade acquirer activity and this is likely to be a feature of the next 3-6 months as corporates focus on liquidity rather than acquisitions. The good news is the various Government Loan schemes and availability of equity from public markets has meant corporate balance sheets are on the whole in decent shape and that should in part drive UK economic recovery and in time further M&A. Some corporates may also seek to divest any non-core activities during this time to increase liquidity and streamline their commercial focus.

Within private equity, there was an initial short-term impact in the immediacy of lockdown albeit private equity deals have still taken place and we are witnessing a steady increase in private equity activity, especially in resilient sectors such as healthcare, technology-enabled businesses, e-commerce, food services, financial services, communications and IT, driven by large availability of capital.

The key driver of private equity investment and appetite is the quantum of dry powder in the market – recent estimates of which are c. \$2tn. Many private equity houses either raised new funds pre COVID-19 and in some cases during the pandemic, including August Equity closing a £300m fund, Elysian Capital first closing at £270m fund and Tenzing raising a new £400m fund. Other PE funds are also in the process



Shawn Bone

of raising fresh capital so the availability of capital is expanding not contracting at this time.

Private Equity fund deployment has centred around new investments as well as strategic bolt-ons for existing investments. Earlier stage investors such as venture capital and VCT funds remain active in pursuing new investments.

With the availability of large pools of capital and equity funding, the interest in resilient sectors is accelerating during this period despite the medium-term economic uncertainty, largely due to these sectors proving resilient during COVID-19 pandemic. Funders are keen to support businesses with the need for working capital funding, development and growth capital, businesses wishing to pursue an M&A strategy and also shareholder liquidity for owners who are seeking to de-risk and exit part of their shareholding.

Transactions that have concluded during the pandemic include the carve-out of Doby Verrolec backed by Chiltern Capital, the acquisition of Returnloads.net by Mandata which is backed by LDC,

the investment in Chill Insurance by Livingbridge and BGF's investment in IT migration software provider Juriba.

This has also been a busy period for Cavu CF, having recently advised H.I.G Capital on the acquisition of Vernacare, a manufacturer of healthcare hygiene products and a supplier to the NHS from Palatine Private Equity, followed more recently by advising Vernacare on a strategic acquisition its first under H.I.G ownership. In addition we have advised a leading mid-market private equity fund on a new investment again in the Healthcare space making that three private equity transactions over the last few months.

Given the huge amount of capital in the market looking for a home, this makes it an ideal time to consider equity funding given equity terms are highly competitive and the cost of capital at a historic low. Specialising in the private equity markets has been a key theme over the last seven years at Cavu CF and we look forward to working with businesses over the coming months if they are interested in exploring a private equity investment.





## THE FUTURE OF INVESTING IN THE NEW NORMAL

If you follow Rutherford Hughes on LinkedIn or Facebook, you will notice that we are promoting ESG investing as a concept worthy of merit.

I should explain that ESG stands for Environment, Social and Governance. We covered the subject in the last Northern Insight edition, and it has everything to do with the companies you or your pension scheme are investing in.

ESG is a risk rating applied to a fund to indicate the potential for damaging the environment, how well employees and supply chains are looked after and how robustly the control mechanisms operate.

So why is it being revisited again so soon?

We are now just over halfway through a tumultuous year, one that we have not seen since the Financial Crisis, starting in late 2007. However bad things are and however long the pandemic lingers, we learn from our mistakes and we start again and make the World a better place to prosper, until the next time.

In 2007 it was the banks that were widely reported as the problem with reckless lending and a lack of liquidity. We corrected the problem by altering our diligence and capital adequacy. We separated the corporate and domestic lending from avaricious trading, and we recovered. We now must deal with the after-effects of a global pandemic but with a vaccine and an altered way of life we will recover again.

The point is recovery is not an option. Time scale is yet to be determined but recover we will.

The last 100 or so days has taught us some valuable lessons, some of which will stick in a reformed way we do business. Six months ago, you would have laughed at the justice system being conducted via Zoom or the thought you can no longer routinely make a Doctors' appointment without a video call.

The plain truth is before us, less office time, less commuting and more working from home yields less pollution and a superior work life balance.

Why ESG investing is so important is that it seeks to measure the progress of the businesses we invest in and how they care for the things that are increasingly important to us; the environment, the people and the strength of their operational control.

We at Rutherford Hughes have operated a portfolio management service with a tried and tested methodology proved over more than fifteen years. We have found, since the ESG ratings became available last year, an increasing number of consistent high performing funds have a low ESG risk rating.

We understand the trepidation of investing in uncertain times. Experience tells us that it is the right time to continue investing as in five years' time the World will be a different place.

The one thing we are absolutely sure of is that the

sustainability of the businesses we invest in will be the security of our future and that is why we think the ESG rating is so fundamental.

If you would like a without obligation chat about how you could make the best of ESG investing, then please call.

Rutherford Hughes Limited is here to support you. We want you to know that we are still working as normal, just not from the office quite so much. Feel free to email or call us on our mobiles which are as follows.

**David Hughes**

david.hughes@rutherfordhughes.com  
07803 777760

**Peter Rutherford**

peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com  
07717 205980

**Denise Graham**

denise.graham@rutherfordhughes.com  
07957 660493

If you would like a virtual "face to face" meeting, let us know and we will agree a time and date then send you an invitation with a link for a Zoom meeting. We can share documents and send you a transcript of the conversation, if you wish.

[www.rutherfordhughes.com](http://www.rutherfordhughes.com)

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Gary Lumby MBE with Paul Griffiths.



## CONSULTANCY AND FINANCIAL SERVICES TO SUPPORT BUSINESSES POST COVID

Marlin Corporate Finance, based on Preston Farm in Stockton on Tees, have been busy helping their existing and new clients raise funds to support them through the Covid 19 financial crisis.

Whether this is in the form of CBILS or Bounce Back Loans, or more traditional financial instruments such as Asset Finance or Property Finance. However, it is becoming increasingly obvious that some businesses and their owners will need longer term hands on support to help them rebuild revenue streams, pivot their Business Models, change their Customer Value Propositions and Marketing Strategies as well as look at their people resources and decide if they have the right people in the right roles, and in the right numbers to achieve trading success post Covid.

So Paul Griffiths, MD of Marlin has reviewed his own Business Model and with the help of his Consultant, Gary Lumby MBE, has created a new service that offers business owners support and advice to ensure that their businesses will not only Survive, but Thrive in post Covid trading.

Working with businesses to review their challenges and opportunities, Marlin will look at key areas of each business and develop a Business Growth Plan to ensure that profitable trading is achieved. This may or may not involve raising additional finance, so thereby tapping into Marlin's existing expertise and wide range of lender contacts, but it certainly will look at using the vast array of expertise and contacts that Gary and Paul have across their networks to bring opportunities and resources to the table for their clients.

Gary Lumby says 'In my wide portfolio of SME clients across the UK whom I advise on a daily basis, many have been able to either tweak their business models or make fundamental changes to them in order to Thrive.' He adds 'This may involve some of the following actions':

- Raising finance to support additional sales and marketing activities or to fund changes in working capital cycles.

- Recruiting new talent into existing or new roles to lift the employee capability benchmark.
- Look at cost cutting exercises to reduce overheads and improve margins.
- Pivot their products and services so that they are offering something new and varied as well as continuing with existing profitable trading activities
- Look at acquisitions and mergers to grow their business.
- Ensure that all employees are 'on the bus' when it comes to discretionary effort and are well rewarded and engaged.
- Have accessed all available support eternally either from central or local government and other quangos.
- Looked at developing and improving their Key Partners such as suppliers of products or professional services.

Paul Griffiths says 'Our role as Corporate Advisors is to work with management teams to help build a better business than pre Covid 19, whether that be by accessing additional finance if it is required or via our Consultancy Service giving hands on practical advice whenever and however it is required. We believe that businesses will require more support coming out of this crisis than going into it.'

Looking at the negative GDP figures and the rising unemployment numbers, business owners could be facing a deep recession and need to react and take steps to protect their businesses and their livelihoods. It is always lonely running a business and especially at the present time, equally no one person has all the answers, but by pooling knowledge and contacts, businesses working with Marlin will have a much better chance of Surviving and Thriving.





Steve Deutsch

## GBB: USING TECHNOLOGY TO DEEPEN CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

GBB is a new bank with a mission. It aims to transform the property sector outside of London by giving property developers and small construction companies the finance and support they need to develop commercial and residential projects.

**It says that technology will help it transform the traditional relationship between the bank and the customer.**

Steve Deutsch, CEO at GBB, said: "It is liberating to start with a blank sheet of paper. Many high street banks are creaking at the seams with legacy systems that aren't fit for purpose and certainly aren't built around the customer of tomorrow.

"Technology will transform the relationship between banks and their customers and the emerging fintech sector is already redefining people's expectations. At GBB we have the opportunity to build an eco-system of the best fintech available to make it enjoyable to do business with us."

The new bank will use the latest anti-money laundering and fraud management tools, along with integrated data to allow customers to open a savings account at the click of a button. It also claims it will be able to cut the amount of time

it takes to make lending decisions to a matter of days, in stark comparison to traditional banks.

Deutsch continued: "Perhaps unlike some of the emerging internet-only banks, we will use technology to help our colleagues to form close relationships with customers. They will be empowered with a deeper customer view and the tools to create better customer experiences."

Property developers seeking finance for schemes will have access to a regional network of experienced relationship managers who will take the time to understand their business and local market. More flexible lending criteria will be key to super-charging regional development.

GBB says it was inspired to launch the new bank by the lack of finance for property developers in the North East. It saw ambitious schemes flounder for the lack of finance.

It says lending rates will be significantly lower than

those available from alternative non-bank lending sources.

Deutsch said: "We know we are meeting a clear need in the market. The UK isn't building enough houses and the government remains committed to addressing this. SME property developers, in both the commercial and residential sectors, simply aren't getting the finance or relationship support they desperately need. We're going to change all that.

"We want to be a power for good and make a difference in the community. Here is an opportunity to raise the bar for everyone in the sector and the wider general public."

GBB believes the banking sector is ripe for disruption and the opportunity sits with combining the best of both worlds with the latest technology and experienced bank managers with time to understand their customers.

For more information, please visit [www.thegbb.co.uk](http://www.thegbb.co.uk)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## PAUL GILSENAN

MD, PSG Wealth Management

Coronavirus has had a seemingly unprecedented impact on businesses across the globe, but it is far from the only major event to have impacted financial markets. How does this crisis compare to others and are there simple tips investors can follow to shield from future turmoil?

### How common are economic crises?

More common than you may think. I began my career in financial services in 1999 and since then we have had the dot-com bubble bursting, 9/11, the global financial crisis, the European sovereign debt crisis, Brexit uncertainty and, of course, the Global Pandemic we are facing now.

As average life expectancy increases, so too will the number of unique events and market shocks that investors must endure. There are now some 15,000 centenarians in the UK and a baby born in 2020 has a 50% chance of living to 100, according to the Office for National Statistics.

There will be more economic crises in our lifetimes. However, the current crisis is unprecedented in that it has affected the whole world at more or less the same time. Previous crises were sector or geographically specific and were managed as such.

The whole world is in the same boat on this occasion and, as such, the response can also be unprecedented. It's a rare opportunity for the global community to work together to solve it.

### Are there any simple steps investors can follow to minimise risk?

Everyone should have a financial plan, it is this plan that should then dictate the investment strategy. Holding assets in cash has been sub-inflation for over 10 years now, however, cash remains a vital part of any successful long term plan. This includes basics such as having at least three months of income set aside in order to cover short-term needs and provide peace of mind. Saving regularly can also mean you benefit from pound cost averaging.

If an investor has a diverse portfolio, invested in a way that allows them to take capital or income as needed, they can take a level of risk to suit their personality and goals. Investors should also use the



Paul Gilsenan

various tax wrappers available in order to make their money work harder and review their plan regularly to keep it on track.

### What are the best reasons to use a financial advisor during times of crisis?

Human nature can be irrational. Many clients want to invest when markets have risen and cash out when markets fall. It can be hard at times like this, when there's so much 'noise' around investment markets, for investors to make the right decisions for good long-term outcomes.

A good financial advisor can take the emotion out of a decision and look at such an action in relation to their wider financial plan. This calms the decision making process and provides peace of mind to a client.

### Do you think the current crisis will lead to any long term changes for the financial industry?

Absolutely, I think all economies, companies and people have the potential to work differently after the pandemic. As a business owner, I have had time to take a step back and look at my company during this time.

Technology has been tested and worked well for many companies and I see no reason why everyone has to travel into one office all of the time in future. I think flexible working will be a bigger part of all of our lives, empowering employees to work at times and from locations to suit their lives will become the norm. These changes will inevitably lead to new opportunities in other areas too.

# DEFINITELY NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

As we come out of these unparalleled lockdown measures, we can reflect on the last four months and the impact that COVID-19 has had on our families, friends, businesses and employees.

There is no doubt that we have not seen anything like this in our lifetimes. Not even the banking crisis of 2008 comes close, such is the far-reaching impact that the current pandemic has had.

The intensity the business community has experienced during this COVID-19 interruption has been severe and business owners have worked tirelessly to protect their businesses and the jobs of their employees whilst taking advantage of the much-needed government support.

In the early stages of the pandemic we had a lot of posts on business' social media about continuing "business as usual". Well, what we have seen is that it is definitely NOT business as usual. As finance intermediaries we have seen funders focus on their own customer bases and in some instances cease any new business activity at all, whilst businesses are having to deal with zero turnover with no time to react and government guidance changing daily.

Even when the guidance became clearer, businesses were quick to realise that they were not all eligible for this lifeline support. Here at CCBS, we have provided guidance and advice, and raised some much-needed working capital for these North East businesses, struggling to get the support they need for one reason or another. Not only were we able to help them through this difficult time with advice and deals, but they also helped us by showing us the resilience of businesses in our region and we applaud them and thank them for that.

Below are some of the deals completed in lockdown which have had a significant and positive impact for our clients:

## Construction £2,100,000

Multi-facility refinance to replace existing funding and create £1,000,000 additional headroom for this non CBILS qualifying group.

## Construction £1,150,000

Multi facility refinance of existing assets in a CBILS asset facility and invoice finance facility to replace bank lending.

## Construction £50,000

New asset finance for new contract gains post lockdown.

## Manufacturing £150,000

Refinance of unencumbered plant and machinery to release working capital to allow implementation of the covid-19 recovery plan.

## Manufacturing £100,000

New client purchasing critical asset to meet demand as customers shorten supply chains by opting for UK suppliers. Non CBILS qualifying.

## Manufacturing £35,000

Additional working capital facility provided for this micro business to replace invoice finance line and create additional headroom.



Peter Cromarty

So, our focus for our clients as we come out of lockdown is heavily weighted towards working capital. This is the primary concern for many businesses and so we will be working with clients to improve their cash position over the next period of recovery.

Some areas we would suggest every business look at are as follows:

- Are there any assets in your business that can be refinanced to provide additional working capital?
- Are there any assets not being used that could be sold to raise additional cash?
- Maintain a 13-week rolling cashflow and keep it updated so you know exactly where you are from a cash position and can identify any potential shortfalls in time to take reparative action
- Credit control and other cash management areas must be a priority
- Have you explored all the government initiatives and areas of support and also looked at alternatives if you have not been successful in your application for them?
- Have you undertaken review of and implemented program a reduction program?

Being in business can be a lonely existence and the COVID-19 interruption has probably highlighted that more than any time in the last 10 years. But remember "a problem shared is a problem halved" and we are here to assist with all of your funding requirements.

Please don't hesitate to give us a call.

**Peter Cromarty**  
peter@ccbsg.co.uk 07715 409386

**Graeme Harrison**  
graeme@ccbsg.co.uk 07719 560356

**Matt Lister**  
matt@ccbsg.co.uk 07572 854284



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L-R – Mark Parkinson, Wealth Management Partner at MHA Tait Walker and Garrick Porteous, European Golfer on the golf course at Bamburgh Golf Club.

## MHA TAIT WALKER WEALTH MANAGEMENT TEAM ENTERS INTO NEW SPORTING PARTNERSHIP

MHA Tait Walker Wealth Management team has entered into a new partnership with Professional Golfer Garrick Porteous to offer support to the sporting community during turbulent times.

As golfing is now allowed under the new rules as the UK comes out of lockdown, the Wealth Management team at MHA Tait Walker felt it was important to support the region's young, talented sports stars.

Garrick, who originally hails from Morpeth in Northumberland, has been a member of Bamburgh Castle Golf Club since he was young. During his career, he has played golf for England's under 18s and was offered a golf scholarship with the University of Tennessee. He has since played golf across America, representing Tennessee in three NCAA Division 1 finals.

Garrick has also played for England Men's team in the Home Internationals and was selected for the England Elite Men's Squad and the Great Britain and Ireland (GB&I) Squad. This culminated in the young sportsman representing GB&I against America in the Walker Cup (2013), against Europe in the St Andrews Trophy (2012) and representing England in the World Team Championships for

the Eisenhower Trophy in 2012.

After victory in the British Amateur Championship, he played in The Open at Muirfield and then The Masters in 2014. He turned professional in 2015 which saw him win at The Astbury in Shropshire on the Europro Tour, before earning Challenge tour status in 2015 which saw him win in Prague in 2017. Last year's highlight saw Garrick qualify for the 148th open Championship at Royal Portrush in Northern Ireland.

He said: "The Covid-19 pandemic is the most challenging time the sports industry has ever witnessed, and we have all taken a big hit. However, as we return to a new normal, golf is the perfect social distance sport if the return is managed properly.

"I'm really enjoying competing again and I feel very fortunate I am able to play.

"It's been difficult trying to practice from home and I just feel very lucky that I'm able to improve my game."

Mark Parkinson, Wealth Management Partner at MHA Tait Walker, said: "As a firm, we are delighted to be able to partner with Garrick and look forward to watching his progress in the coming months.

"Garrick and his peers have been totally compromised by this pandemic and it is vital that as a regional business, we continue to support the people and communities in which we all live and work."

The firm's 70-strong Wealth Management and Tax teams work together to provide specialist advice for clients.

Mark added: "Many Wealth Management decisions are closely linked to taxes that need to be reviewed with a client's tax advisor. Our specialism is working with high net worth clients. By working together with the Tax team, we can provide client's with the assurance that we are working in their best interests. Ultimately we hope that this leads to a better client experience."



Steve Plaskitt

## WHY ARE THERE MORE MANAGEMENT BUY OUT OPPORTUNITIES DURING A PANDEMIC?

In our changing world, nothing is certain other than uncertainty.

The Covid 19 pandemic has changed the way that business has been done for many companies and forced many corporate groups and owners to reassess their lives, their goals and their business models.

For some owners this will mean retirement and letting the next generation take over, for other larger groups it may be that management will want to focus on core activities and to not be distracted by other smaller subsidiaries, or will be forced to sell assets in order to release cash, and some sadly, will run out of time and may have to go into administration.

As survival becomes a key focus for established businesses, so does getting the funding and business model right for new business. So, surely one would be crazy to lead a management buy out at this time when we are in the midst of what will become the largest recession ever?

**We have advised on more MBOs in the North East than any other firm.**

And yet, Management Buy Outs (MBOs) are starting to become popular and at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance we should know. We have advised on more MBOs in the North East than

any other firm and we are starting to see a trend towards more of these deals.

**The increase in the number of MBO opportunities is probably due to several factors coming together at the same time:**

- Covid 19 has meant that there are more good quality businesses coming on to the market.
- Overseas owners are finding it more difficult to manage UK assets and, with further change due to the end of Brexit transition arrangements, some are reassessing their UK investments.
- Existing trade buyers may be interested but probably only at low valuations, unless the fit with them is very strategic, and their management may be being encouraged to focus on survival rather than acquisition.
- Investors (private equity funders) have a lot of cash waiting to invest in the right businesses.
- If the alternative were for a company to close and for management to face losing their jobs, then they may be comfortable to take the plunge and run their own business.
- Other encouragement from Government, for example the tax efficiency of an owner selling to an

Employee Owned Trusts encourages more retiring owners to sell to management teams.

So, if you are part of an MBO team, you will be feeling a variety of emotions that may impact your decision making. If you have not gone through the process of an MBO before it can appear very daunting – will you be able to deliver the change required to make the business resilient; how can you operate without the previous owner; who will you recruit to bolster your team; what price should you pay for the business; and which funders would back you?

This is where a corporate finance adviser can help – guiding you through the process, assessing the right valuation and deal structure and providing the assistance with financial forecasts and business modelling so that you can develop a resilient business plan. Start taking advice early.

With so much change happening now, management teams and owners will both need to be ready to work together in a way that can be positive for them and importantly for their businesses.

**Steve Plaskitt is Partner at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance and has over twenty years of experience in the North East market.**

For more information please call 0191 285 0321 or email [steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk)



## WHY GENDER PAY GAP SHOULD STILL BE A PRIORITY DESPITE THE REPORTING SUSPENSION

The Government suspended the gender pay gap reporting deadline for April 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic, giving employers more time to report their gender pay gap whilst managing the effects of the global pandemic on their businesses.

With this suspension still in place, many companies will have deferred their preparations for their reporting of the 5 April 2019 snapshot date gender pay gap figures. The other consideration is reporting for next year now that the usual snapshot date has been and gone. Whilst some organisations will be busy preparing as usual to report in April 2021, many others may have decided not to focus on this right now due to the lack of information about what is now required of them. However, gender pay gap reporting will need to be back on the agenda as the Government has now said employers should get on and work on their figures which needed reporting earlier this year.

### Should you keep your gender pay gap reporting on your immediate agenda?

Despite the Government providing additional time to report this year, we think it's important that employers keep this issue on their agenda. Firstly, it is still a legal requirement to report each year – the 2020 deadline has merely been suspended, the requirement has not been removed altogether. Secondly, it is also important that issues around diversity and inclusion remain high on the business agenda, particularly from a trust and confidence and good governance point of view.

Organisations that are committed and can evidence their commitment to these equality and social justice issues will find themselves in a stronger position than those that cannot. This transparency in reporting on pay only goes to help employers demonstrate their commitment in this area.

### Ethnicity pay gap reporting

For those employers who want to go beyond their current legal obligations, it is interesting to learn that a recent petition calling for ethnicity pay gap reporting has obtained over 100,000 signatures. Many organisations will now be reviewing the opportunities they afford to black and minority ethnic employees and reviewing if they need to take any more strategic actions to improve these opportunities. Currently there is no legal requirement for employers to report on ethnicity pay but this is very likely to change in the future.

For those employers that are not recording and monitoring ethnicity



for diversity and inclusion purposes, now would be a good time to start. Before employers embark on this they should make sure their employee data privacy notices are up to date in order to support the collating, recording, and monitoring of this information.

### Will furloughing arrangements have affected gender pay gap reporting?

With many companies having had to put in place furloughing arrangements, it will be interesting to see how gender pay gap reporting is affected by these arrangements. Many organisations may find that their April salary data is not representative of a 'normal' pay period due to the specific measures they have had to take around furloughing and pay during that month. We await further guidance from government to find out whether reporting will be resumed as normal but, in the meantime, we recommend a continuing focus on this important business issue and the resumption of reporting.



**For more information on how RSM can help your organisation with gender pay gap reporting or any other HR issues throughout this challenging time, please contact Jude Lean at [jude.lean@rsmuk.com](mailto:jude.lean@rsmuk.com) or your usual RSM contact.**



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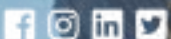
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## TWELVE MORE BUSINESSES COMPLETE ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM SCALE-UP PROGRAMME

The Entrepreneurs' Forum is celebrating the latest cohort of entrepreneurs to complete its Scale-up Leader's Academy as the six-month programme comes to an end.

Twelve North East entrepreneurs completed the Academy this week following a final session with Scale-up Leaders' Academy coach Ian Kinnery.

The twelve included: Samantha Read of APM Cleaning, Lee Quarzi of Lumo, Michael Beaton of DRS, Ben Tansey of re:heat, Sally Marshall of the Marshall Robertson Group, Nick Salloway of Qrious, Kim Binks of Apricity, Richie Gledson of Sky High Sports, Martin Wakefield of Wakefields, Dan Parker of Aspect Facades, Alisdair Beveridge of The Build Directory and Keian Sanchez of A Greener Solution.

The entrepreneurs make up the Academy's fourth cohort. Since its launch in 2017, the Academy has supported over 35 entrepreneurs across the North-East to focus on achieving sustainable high growth by creating a blueprint for future business success.

The second cohort of businesses, which were the subject of research conducted by Newcastle

University, reported a 140 per cent rise in operating profit, with an average increase in turnover of 13.2 per cent and a rise of 8.6 per cent in employment. A quarter of scale-ups participating in the programme also increased their level of export sales over the past 12 months.

Often delivered through physical workshops and coaching sessions, since March, the Academy has been delivered online, with speakers from across the country offering their expertise on areas such as leadership and branding through webinar and video conferencing platforms.

Jonathan Lamb, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "The Scale-up Leader's Academy is delivering a toolkit of invaluable knowledge to business owners that allows them to prepare for rapid and sustained business growth.

"Like our members, we've had to respond quickly to the changing environment. Consequently, our latest cohort has had a unique learning

experience, a combination of physical and virtual sessions as a result of the lockdown.

"The feedback so far has been fantastic and shows that our blend of individual learning, team-based workshops and expert-led sessions is helping our region's businesses to put the foundations in place to scale their businesses rapidly and sustainably."

Ian Kinnery, Gazelle International Scale-up Coach, said: "This year's cohort have been exceptional in the way they have dealt with the coronavirus crisis and still continued to learn and scale their businesses.

"Despite everything that has happened in the world we are still experiencing significant growth across the whole range of businesses represented."

Recruitment for the fifth cohort will begin in September 2020. Those interested in the Academy are encouraged to apply online via the Entrepreneurs' Forum website.

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Sam Read is a member of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, a group of like-minded people who come together at inspirational events to share best practice, create valuable connections and help each other to grow their businesses. For more information, visit [www.entrepreneursforum.net](http://www.entrepreneursforum.net)

An Entrepreneur Interview with...

## SAM READ

Managing director, APM Cleaning & Repair

### **Tell me about your background in business**

I couldn't have ever contemplated one day being the managing director of a cleaning company employing 60 people when, after leaving Harton Comprehensive in South Shields, I won a scholarship to study an HNC in electrical and electronic engineering – part of a programme designed to encourage more women into engineering.

However, starting my first job with telephone headset manufacturer GN Netcom, it was quickly apparent the world of electrical engineering wasn't for me. Tucked away in a room all by myself, my task was designing and building telephone testing equipment as part of the acoustic testing process.

I had the ability, but realised I was a people person with a passion for organisation and project management. Eventually, I became an internal auditor for the Danish firm – even learning to speak a little conversational Danish – before moving to South Shields circuit board manufacturer, Interconnection Systems, as a departmental production manager.

Here I was in my element, gaining a reputation as a 'numbers animal' with an ability to unblock production bottlenecks and to get things done.

However, after having my first son, the family moved to the south of England where I worked part-time in a logistics role at Chloride Power Protection in Southampton.

Following the arrival of my second son, we returned to the North East and, armed with a pot of cash from the house sale, I decided it was time to become my own boss and opted to buy a franchised domestic cleaning business.

### **How was APM Cleaning & Repair formed?**

The business was formed out of necessity when, in 2005, the franchisor failed and I took the decision to rebrand as APM Cleaning and continue on alone – using my managerial experience to impose my own high standards, processes and values on the business.

It was a steep learning curve as one of the reasons I'd originally chosen the franchise model was my lack of sales experience. I believed, wrongly, that I would be better supported in that department within the franchise system.

I refocused the business as a 'high-end' domestic cleaning business and quickly earned a reputation for reliability and delivering a quality service.

In those early days, I still recall driving to an appointment in my business suit, then changing into my 'work gear' to begin cleaning, then afterwards changing back before beginning the whole process again at the next appointment.

### **In your own words, what is it that APM Cleaning & Repair does?**

We provide commercial and domestic cleaning services, including carpet and upholstery cleaning, delivered on time and to an agreed specification. APM Cleaning has become an integral part of multiple first, second and final commercial building handover cleans, and our client list ranges from building contractors and property developers to shop fitters and private landlords. We are also a major player in the domestic market, offering a bespoke cleaning package for ABC1 households, with experience of servicing everything from studio flats to stately homes.

We also offer specialist services including infection control and medical cleaning, servicing local authority extra care facilities and social housing.

### **What is your proudest moment with the company?**

That would be winning the very first tender I submitted. It was particularly satisfying as I did not use a bid writer and the significant win involved Durham County Council. The other thing that fills me with pride is seeing

my cleaning staff progress and step up into management roles – which gives me the time and space I need to continue to grow the business. I strongly believe in investing in my staff and currently have four members of staff enrolled on the Entrepreneurs' Forum Scale-up Leader's Academy.

### **Is there a particular mistake you have made while in business? And how did you overcome/learn from it?**

I've made lots of mistakes over the years, one of which was remaining far too long with a second-rate accountant. The other was delegating tasks to people and then failing to manage them properly. In many ways, I'm still learning but that's nothing to be ashamed about, it is part of the process of growing a business and being an entrepreneur.

### **What is the USP of APM Cleaning & Repair?**

It has gained a reputation for outstanding customer service, excellent attention to detail, amazing flexibility, and responsiveness – and above all a professional 'can-do' attitude.

### **How has the firm grown and what do you attribute this to?**

For many years, the business grew organically – until around four years ago. With the family grown up, I was able to dedicate my time to creating a strategic plan, which is the key for growth, and creating the space and time to begin to implement it.

One of the things that differentiates us from other cleaning companies is the commitment of our 60-strong staff which are employed full-time. I'm pleased to pay above minimum wage and invest in training and development.

As a result, many have been with us since the start, almost unheard of in the cleaning industry, and display a real pride in their work – reflected by our glowing testimonials and the fact that we still retain many of our original clients.

Due to the growth in the business, we bought our first premises on the Team Valley four years ago and, while still retaining our domestic customers, I've aggressively pursued commercial clients – which now make up 60 percent of the business.

As well as Durham County Council, our clients include Karbon Homes, Castle and Coasts Housing Association, Newcastle City Council, Prosper and North Tyneside Council, Gateshead Council and more recently we have been granted a place on the NHS SBS framework. We subcontract for many major national development companies and are currently delivering the builders clean of Newcastle's landmark Hadrian's Tower.

Our business is overwhelmingly based in the North East, but I am currently looking to grow our activity in the North West, with plans to open a second office on Merseyside or the Wirral.

As a sideline, I also launched two new businesses. The first was Read Apartments, which specialises in providing serviced accommodation across the North East, North Wales and the Murcia region of Spain.

The second, a specialist surface repair business, has a real synergy with APM, in particular its commercial activity. Its qualified technicians can restore or repair all types of cracks, burns, dents, chips, and scratches on everything from worktops to floor tiles, bricks and stone to wood, laminates, and shower trays as part of a nationwide service.

### **Do you live by/do business by a certain motto?**

I don't but we all abide by the company's core values which were carefully crafted and considered. They revolve around honesty, approachability, hard work, adaptability, constant improvement – combined with a desire to treat everyone the way you would wish to be treated.



# TAURUS HAS GOT THE POWER

Taurus Utility Consultants are one of those firms that other firms need.

Why? Simple. If you are a senior person at a company...perhaps you're the owner or FD...and if someone asked you what you pay for your energy, would you be able to quote exactly what you pay or would it be a stab in the dark?

Be honest. Thought so. Most people see utility bills as one of those necessary evils. We all need gas, water, electricity and telecoms, and most of us simply cough-up when the bill arrives.

That is where Taurus Utility Consultants come in.

You've got better things to do than trawl through loads of confusing invoices and tariffs that make no sense. You need to do what you're good at... run your own business. Taurus do all of the donkey work for you. They do not have any preferred suppliers which means that they will find you the best possible rates. They're experts at what they do and they're obviously good at it. If you need some proof, you'll find that they are the number one utility consultant on the FreeIndex review website. Oh, and they've been number one for the last seven years. People obviously like the way the guys at Taurus Utility Consultants operate and are more than happy to let other people know about it.

Steve Dobson is the driving force behind Taurus.

"I set up Taurus Utility Consultants in 2010 and have grown the business from zero clients to almost 200. We have local, national and International clients. One of our biggest is Callaway Golf. ([www.eu.callawaygolf.com](http://www.eu.callawaygolf.com)). We look after energy bills at all of their UK manufacturing plants. We also deal with Klinge Chemicals...a world leader in specialist potassium chloride production ([www.klinge-chemicals.co.uk](http://www.klinge-chemicals.co.uk)). At the other end of the scale we have opticians (Walkers in Durham & Crook: [www.optician-durham.co.uk](http://www.optician-durham.co.uk)), restaurants (Caruso's, Stockton ([www.ristorantecarusos.co.uk](http://www.ristorantecarusos.co.uk)), hair salons ([www.ecohairsalondarlington.co.uk](http://www.ecohairsalondarlington.co.uk)) and numerous landlords who have a property portfolio like [www.mulgrave-estate.co.uk](http://www.mulgrave-estate.co.uk). To be honest, we can deal with anyone who gets an energy or utility bill, but the majority of our clients are from small and medium sized industrial and commercial businesses, who don't have an in-house expert."



Steve Dobson

Steve went to school in Guisborough and Redcar and represented the county at rugby and other sports. He followed a Sports Science & Psychology Degree. He is passionate about the rural economy and promoting competitive North East businesses.

"We have a long heritage in manufacturing and engineering across the North of England, and I am determined to make our British businesses great again."

Reputation is everything in the utilities business. Steve has worked with utilities for thirty years having opened all the Hollywood Bowl Ten Pin Bowling Centres in the UK in 1990, and some of his clients have been with him since day one. Taurus Utility Consultants is now ten years old and roughly half of his clients have been with Taurus for six to ten years and followed Steve when he set up the consultancy. This isn't surprising because when you chat with Steve, it's obvious that he and his firm really do care about British business...and North East business owners in particular. He wants to help them to be successful and more profitable with Taurus's solutions.

It's also important to note that Steve's business is a consultancy. Taurus is not an energy broker. He and his team of experts don't do cold calling or contacting firms and pestering them about their energy. Businesses small and large get in touch with Taurus for help and advice to outsource their utility procurement.

It's surprisingly simple to get the ball rolling. You just send Taurus Utility Consultants your latest energy bills. After that, sit back and wait to find out what sort of savings you will make.

Taurus is growing by reputation and referrals. Steve has appointed a right hand man in the shape of Dean Young. Dean was a broker. He's seen the other side of the utilities business and became disillusioned. He didn't want to be chasing people all of the time. He wanted to be with a company that firms could trust...where firms would simply say "You are the experts so you can look after everything for us"...and then have the confidence to let Taurus get on with it and do what they're plainly very good at; the testimonials on Google inform us of that.

They're also looking to create partnerships. In other words, once you've seen what Taurus Utility Consultants can do for you, why not spread the word and recommend. Taurus will then pay you a referral fee. So, you save money on your utility bills, and then earn money by recommending Taurus as an affiliate. It's a win-win situation, with UK business customers being at the heart of everything.

## Interested?

The best idea is to give Steve Dobson and his team a quick telephone call and they'll talk you through your issues and find out what you need. Call 01325 978697 or email [advice@taurusutilityconsultants.co.uk](mailto:advice@taurusutilityconsultants.co.uk)

**Go on. Let Taurus Utility Consultants take care of your bills and while you concentrate on running your business, Taurus will start saving you money and make you more profit.**

For more information visit their website [www.taurusutilityconsultants.co.uk](http://www.taurusutilityconsultants.co.uk)

## CHARITY BEGINS AT THE DON

Every year, Taurus Utility Consultants donate 10% of their profits to North East charities and CICs (community interest companies). The latest charity they're helping is The Don War Memorial Museum and Veterans Hub. It used to be based in a pub called "The Don" run by Julie Cooper. Julie knows how to run a pub...The Sun newspaper named it the best pub in Britain.

The walls were adorned with thousands of pieces of British Armed Forces memorabilia. She provided free tea and coffee for veterans.

Sadly, due to a rent rise, Julie had close The Don, Stockton, but she was determined not to let this unique collection of memorabilia disappear. She's moved into the St. Patrick's Community Centre in Thornaby and will continue to display all of the items and provide 24 hour support for UK veterans.

But she needs help.

Taurus Utility Consultants are doing their bit;

donating, sponsoring and advising on business challenges. Can you help, and make sure that this wonderful charitable museum can go from strength to strength and continue its marvellous work to help current and previous British Forces members.

**To contact Julie email  
[juliacooper2000@yahoo.it](mailto:juliacooper2000@yahoo.it)  
or call 07999 439064**

If you'd like to donate, visit her Facebook page

**[www.gofundme.com/f/messages-to-build-the-new-don-war-memorial-museum](http://www.gofundme.com/f/messages-to-build-the-new-don-war-memorial-museum)**



## UTILITY BILLS TOO MUCH?

**Send us your bills for forensic analysis  
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01325978697 or 01914772244



# REVOLUTION IN THE FE SECTOR KEY TO PROMOTING ECONOMIC RENEWAL IN AFTERMATH OF COVID-19

In the immediate aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is easy to forget that there were wider revolutionary forces at work on the UK's economy before the virus outbreak.

With issues such as Brexit, the rise of automation in the workplace, longer working lives, and poor UK productivity brought into even sharper focus, education and skills organisations, NCFE and Campaign for Learning (CfL), have jointly commissioned a new discussion paper which explores the actions Government needs to take to enable the skills and employment sector to respond to economic recession and mass unemployment and promote economic and social renewal.

Drawing on expertise from across the worlds of education, business and economics and mental health, the paper, titled 'Revolutionary Forces', urges Government to ensure that the plans outlined in its forthcoming post-16 white paper are sufficiently flexible to meet the immense changes facing the UK economy.

Promising to provide a 'vision' for the further education sector and hailed by Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson as 'revolutionary'; the white paper has been hotly anticipated by the FE sector since it was first announced back in April. Four months on however, the scope of the paper is still unknown.

Anticipating a comprehensive review, which will cover all aspects of post-16 education, including further and higher education, apprenticeships and adult and community learning, the authors of Revolutionary Forces address some of the key challenges facing the nation throughout the 2020s. It is vital that the Department for Education takes these issues into consideration when writing their recommendations.

Commenting on the paper's findings, David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE, said: "While the government rightly prioritised short term fixes



David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE.

to support the economy through the height of the Coronavirus outbreak, now is the time where we need to start looking forward at what needs to be done to restabilise the economy, taking all factors into account.

"The challenge facing the government is twofold. With the imminent threat of job losses, mass unemployment and huge shifts in how the UK does business in light of both Covid-19 and our impending withdrawal from the European Union, the government needs to act fast to enable the education and skills sector to respond to meet the needs of employers, adults and young people in the 2020s. At the same time, in order for the sector to play an active role in the longer term economic recovery effort, assurances must be made to improve the post-16 education and skills system.

"Our new discussion paper in partnership with the Campaign for Learning draws on expertise from across the sector to explore the policies that we hope to see introduced as part of the post-16 white paper which will provide the flexibility required to ensure learner success against a backdrop of uncertainty."

Julia Wright, National Director at Campaign for Learning, added: "There are dramatic and profound forces affecting our economy and society. Some are long-term, others like Covid-19 rapid. Together, they present a situation that requires radical thinking and swift action.

"As our experts show, post-16 education and skills has an integral role to play in the country's

economic recovery. Training and retraining will help people navigate employment so they stay in work and improve their prospects. Educational opportunities will help people get on, particularly full-time education for young people who are likely to have fewer options in the jobs market and be at risk of long-term unemployment. We hope the issues raised by our authors inform the discussion and thinking for the post-16 white paper."

Revolutionary Forces is the latest in a series of discussion papers published jointly by Newcastle-headquartered, NCFE, and Campaign for Learning.

The registered charities, both of which operate under the NCFE Group umbrella following the acquisition of CfL earlier this year, are committed to their joint purpose to promote and advance learning to increase social mobility and help learners of all ages to achieve their life and career goals.

Reacting to the paper, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Apprenticeships and Skills, Gillian Keegan MP, commented: "We welcome the findings of "Revolutionary Forces" as we develop these important reforms. We are absolutely committed to levelling up opportunity across the country, and will continue to do all we can to make sure no-one is left behind as a result of coronavirus.

"Further Education will play a vital role in delivering the high-quality skills employers need and that will support our economic recovery. We will announce more detail in the White Paper this autumn."

The Revolutionary Forces discussion paper is available to view and download now at [www.ncfe.org.uk](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)



# MINDFUL BUSINESS MATTERS

Last month's article focused on managing the minds of your furloughed workers, but how are you managing your own mind?

The Coronavirus epidemic has hit businesses hard. There are lots of facilities available to support those suffering with the physical effects of the virus but what about the effects on one's mental health. Where is the help there? As a business owner, there is a lot to consider and it's not just about now, but the knock-on effect on your cash flow further down the line. There are conflicting decisions that must be made. Do you risk taking your staff back on now in case there is a second wave and you lose the option to furlough? Are you having to make decisions to make good staff redundant or worse still, close your business? All of these things can play havoc with your thoughts and create sleepless nights, which further affects your mental wellbeing.

Focusing on your business and the impact is a great way of distracting you from what is really going on with yourself. It is so important to take time to reflect on how you are. Not taking note of your mental wellbeing now can have a much bigger impact on your mental health later down the line. Then who will be there to manage your business? Be your own observer and look for the changes in your behaviour. Are you more impatient than usual? Are you being short tempered with your staff or family? Are you fighting with dark thoughts? Does your heart race every time you think of the worst case scenario?

Then there is self-talk. How aware of you of your

internal dialogue? This is influenced by your subconscious mind, and it reveals your thoughts, beliefs, questions, and ideas.

Self-talk can be both negative and positive, depending on your personality. If you are an optimist, your self-talk may be more hopeful and positive whilst the opposite is generally true if you are more of a pessimist.

Positive thinking and optimism can be effective stress management tools, as well as providing you with some great health benefits. Before you can learn to practice more positive self-talk, you must first identify negative thinking.

This generally falls into four categories:

**Personalising** - You blame yourself for everything

**Magnifying** - You focus on the negative aspects of a situation, ignoring any or all of the positive

**Catastrophising** - You expect the worst, and you rarely let logic or reason persuade you otherwise

**Polarising** - You see the world in black and white, or good and bad. There's nothing in between and

no middle ground for processing and categorising life events

There are some things in life that you just can't control, however there are always solutions. They may not be the ones you want to hear but there are options. Firstly, know you are one of thousands going through the same issues - you aren't alone. Secondly, remember to breathe. Scientific studies have shown that correct breathing can help manage stress and stress-related conditions by soothing the autonomic nervous system. Breathing exercises can significantly reduce anxiety and reverse your body's natural reaction to stressful conditions, which will help you manage negative emotions and even physical pain more effectively. Be self-aware. What is your internal dialogue and how can you flip this around?

But most importantly talk! Talking through your options with someone who understands can help offload and often help you find a way forward - 'doom mongering' will not help you, your family or your business.

So dig deep, breathe through it, and talk!



Lisa Vescio

[www.lisavescio.com](http://www.lisavescio.com)

A guide in your quest for equilibrium  
in mind and business





Michelle Rainbow

## BUSINESS AND EDUCATION: WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD A POSITIVE FUTURE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

We may be well into the summer months, but the work being put in by North East colleges to support young people shows no signs of slowing.

**Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), gives an overview of how colleges have supported their students, local communities and business partners throughout COVID-19.**

During what must be the most difficult and unpredictable few months many young people have faced, colleges in the North East have consistently gone above and beyond to support not only their staff and students but also their local community.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, colleges have been open, making sure that vulnerable young people and children of key workers are safely accommodated on campus, providing remote provision and one-to-one learning, and looking after the wellbeing of their students.

In addition many colleges have also played an active role within their local community, quickly mobilising to produce PPE and opening up online learning to businesses, with furloughed staff being able to access free training on topics including project management and leadership.

And in turn, the team here at the North East LEP has moved quickly to help colleges weather the storm and adapt to the changing landscape of education and employment.

The North East is home to the country's only College Hub which brings colleges together to share learning, with a particular focus on making sure that young people in our region have access to the highest levels of careers guidance. In the last few months this focus has broadened and we've been using our College Hub network to quickly share information from the North East COVID-19 Economic Response Group, and from national organisations like the Association of Colleges, with college leadership teams.

The North East COVID-19 Economic Response Group is leading the economic recovery plan for the region and has gathered data on how COVID-19 has impacted on the job market and progression routes such as apprenticeships. Task-and-finish groups have been created to focus on key areas such as apprenticeship provision and higher level qualifications.

Changes to the job market, apprenticeships and the new T-Level qualifications, which roll out from September, will of course have a significant impact on the work colleges to do help young people transition into the workplace.

For students who are finishing their further education, this has been a hugely unsettling time

and colleges and employers have been working together to find new ways of help young people move successfully on to the next stage of their lives, whether that involves higher education, apprenticeships or employment.

This is one area where our network of Enterprise Advisers – business leaders who form a vital link between industry and education – has come into its own. Enterprise Advisers have been helping schools and colleges to put in place virtual work placements and trial new ways for young people to gain meaningful experience of the workplace.

We're also working with employers in a range of sectors – including automotive, health and life sciences, digital, and energy – to put together guidance for college staff and learners on the skills that employers are looking for in their future employees and how the sectors are likely to change in the future.

Many North East employers have stepped forward to work with the education sector as we move towards recovery from the pandemic together and there are plenty of opportunities for businesses of all types to work more closely with colleges, helping to shape a positive future for young people in our region.

**Find out more about the North East College Hub and opportunities for businesses and colleges to work together at [www.NorthEastAmbition.co.uk](http://www.NorthEastAmbition.co.uk)**



# AUTONOMOUS ROBOTICS STARTUP BOTSANDUS RAISES £2 MILLION FROM VC INVESTORS



The team at BotsAndUs

BotsAndUs, a London-based startup that provides full-stack robot systems for public spaces, has closed a £2 million equity funding round with legal advice provided by the corporate team at Newcastle based Mincoffs Solicitors.

Andrei Danescu, Adrian Negoita and Oana Jinga founded the company in 2015 with the vision of robot-human collaboration. The team has created robots that work alongside people in places such as large retail stores, shopping centres, office buildings and airports. Customers include MediaMarktSaturn, dnata, Heathrow Airport and British Airways. In addition to taking care of repetitive tasks, the robots provide round-the-clock customer service and on-site data collection and analysis.

The company secured its first institutional funding round during the coronavirus pandemic amid an increase in demand and enquiries for its service and was led by Kindred Capital and Capnamic Ventures, with participation from angel investors from the UK and the US. The company was also previously awarded funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme as well as Innovate UK.

With the new funding, BotsAndUs will grow the team, accelerate robot deployments and explore new products and services, in response to a recent surge in demand for automation. Specifically, the startup wants to develop automation solutions for indoor, dynamic spaces. These are unstructured environments where people traffic and excessive noise normally create challenges for autonomous robots.

Andrei Danescu, CEO at BotsAndUs, commented: "We are in a great position to accelerate achieving our mission and liberate businesses from dull, repetitive and now even dangerous work, so their employees can focus on the things that bring the most value. We are thrilled to have such trusted and experienced investors join our cause and support the next stage of our growth. The demand for automation and robotics has seen a significant raise driven by the current global events and we're in the best position to respond to it."

Corporate partner at Mincoffs Solicitors John Nicholson acted on behalf of BotsAndUs, assisted by solicitor Daniel Bell. John commented "We have acted for BotsAndUs since 2017. They are developing interesting and unique products. It has been a pleasure to watch them grow the company with such success. We wish them well with their exciting plans."

Russell Buckley, Partner at Kindred Capital said, "We've been following BotsAndUs' progress over the past few years and have been very impressed with the founders' ambition, innovative approach and ability to build a fantastic team around their mission. Their pioneering robotics and AI products are at the forefront of a much needed next wave of automation – bringing robots out of factories and warehouses so they can make an impact on businesses operating in a variety of indoor, crowded, public spaces."

## DIFFERENT STROKES FOR DIFFERENT FOLKS

As lockdown is eased, there is diversity of opinion about the notion of a "second wave".

It is almost certain to happen, it has been the pattern of virtually all epidemics in the past and the greatest death toll during the Spanish flu pandemic in the early 20th century was incurred during a second wave, where people in denial were dancing in the streets together, not observing social distancing et cetera. This means we have to recognise that whilst we seek to get things back to normal, we simply cannot put Covid-19 behind us.

Simple messages of stay at home, have become complicated by more nuanced messages that require interpretation. Many such messages are themselves evolving, part of scientific debate and often, contradictory. You can fly to Spain, but you can't connect with more than a limited number of households, for example.

In business, the impetus is to get back to normal. Reductions in social distancing requirements will contribute to that but it is only part of the story and will only affect partial relief. There is a premium, on lapses, tolerances and in particular a wait-and-see philosophy.

We are no different to consumers. Each one of them reacts to the world from a unique perspective and defend themselves when experiencing threat in different ways. There are people who want to stay on lockdown, to work from home even if that affects the team esprit de corps in the office, people who will insist on social distancing and those who let it slip. People who want to wear face masks, whether over the nose, symbolically around the chin and those who feel it's not necessary. We're all different, and it's important not to judge, but to recognise with kindness that people are doing the best they can in an uncertain situation. Whether reactions are ones of extreme caution and avoidance, or quite literally "mad abandon", we need to extend compassion and understanding. This must also be suffused with respect and due expressions of a duty of care to our customers, colleagues, stakeholders', families, friends and indeed, ourselves as we go about our business.

Denial is a powerful human defence mechanism.



Dr David Cliff

When things just get too complicated or appear insoluble or irreconcilable, it is easy just to go about as if little was happening, rather than dealing with the uncertainty one must contain. We need to face that, however, much we wish this pandemic away, this is unlikely to be the case. We can compartmentalise Covid-19 into a disease of the elderly with some unlucky younger ones, a once-in-a-lifetime event, something that predominates among certain ethnic or social groups and less so in others, something that affects men, the list appears to be added to daily. The fact remains we have a disease that is more virulent than seasonal flu and we know only slight increases in virulence overwhelms health systems.

The business consequences could last years. Some won't exist, others will prosper and grow exponentially. Take Sainsbury's, who have had record takings. As with any human event, the economic impacts create winners and losers, opportunities and threats, endings and beginnings. The health state of the nation will be affected, with chronic lasting illness amongst a significant number of those affected. None Covid related deaths will increase

as the health service, whilst not overwhelmed, has simply diverted its capacities away from key services, leaving many without the usual care available. For many, treatable morbidity, will change into mortality as a result. We eulogise the NHS, because of the personalities of the healers who dedicate themselves to us, but it remains a problematic and underfunded system, tossed around by the political ideology of successive governments. It is kept on life support by those who dare not do anything too radical to it lest they render themselves ineligible for office as a result of the public's love of the institution, only to ideologically tinker with it instead. It's a perfect storm.

Most of all the compassion in our communities, whether it's the postman dressed up as Superman, volunteering, donations to support hard pressed causes, or people entertaining on Tik Tok, needs to remain with us. We face the prospect of pandemics being a reality in our future, exacerbated by climate change. This is not a 'harbinger of doom' philosophy, but it is the realism we must now face as denial will not serve us well in the times to come!





## ABC 2020 Annual Awards and Dinner Ceremony

*Let's celebrate the significant contribution that the Asian community makes to the North East's health, economic and social wellbeing.*

*This year we have more of a reason to come together and demonstrate we are one community.*

*Nominate yourself or someone that you know who has made an impact by emailing [awards@abconnexions.org](mailto:awards@abconnexions.org) or enter online at [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org)*

*Confirmed speaker The Right Honourable Anne Marie Trevelyan Secretary of State for International Development*

*Our Awards Dinner will be held at Gosforth Park on the 1st October get your tickets early as spaces will now be limited.*

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Tune in to ABC Show Business each Friday morning between 9-11am [www.spicefm.co.uk](http://www.spicefm.co.uk)



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## COLOUR BLIND

In life we all have choices, lots of them. Who we interact with, and how, being a major one?  
**However, where we are born, and to whom, we have no choice or control of, whatsoever.**

Some of us are born into royalty and others into abject poverty. Some of us are born pinkish-white and others with varying skin colours across a spectrum to dark brown - I must admit I don't know anyone that is black or white yet that is the prevalent term to describe people!

**Over the centuries our skin colour has dictated how we are treated.** Which is downright wrong. But sadly, we cannot change the past and it is important for us to recognise this. Nor should we try to erase the past. By doing so we will easily forget the wrongs onto others. Historical education helps us make sure we look to the past to plan a better future.

Being born in Newcastle in the early 70's to Pakistani parents, **I had no choice in my colour.** Over the decades I had to deal with the consequences. All I ever wanted was to be liked and I did everything I could to fit in. Being the last one to be chosen onto a team in school because I was the odd one out - a different colour to everyone else - made me become competitive. Suffering constant abuse throughout childhood certainly had

its toll, but didn't faze me and made me focus on being the best I could.

I started demonstrating from an early age that I could be good at schooling and various other extra curricula activities too. Showcasing my skills and strengths rather than being judged on my colour, creed or religion. Sadly, this experience hasn't always been consistent and sometimes I had to disregard my heritage simply to fit in. My friends were predominantly White, and the area we lived in not so affluent. They would regularly call Asian people a "Paki" in offensive terms but then turn to me and say "not you Ammar, you are one of us". **I would grin and be happy at being accepted.** Not realising that I should have been calling them out for being racists.

Throughout my life I have continued to experience prejudice and even outright systemic racism and tokenism. Being chosen for a position so that a box can be ticked, or not being chosen because a box wasn't ticked, or simply being different. What is even worse, a lot of the time, people within these organisations are blind to the issues and don't even

know that it is happening. However, I am glad to say this is by exception. The vast majority want to change but still don't know how.

The current climate and focus on discrimination should hopefully lead to a positive change in our society. **However, for that to happen effectively, we need to take an approach of inclusion, understanding and respect for our differences.** I cannot believe that even now the vast majority of policies are created at an arm's length by individuals that have no experience of being the person they are trying to target. Whether that being gender, race of any other variant.

**The North East is filled with passionate, persevering and positive people from a variety of backgrounds.** We have worked and lived together for centuries, from Romans to Vikings, and Jocks and Geordies. Let's all come together and focus on making our region prosperous. **Let's start by becoming colour blind and accepting each other for our value and worth.**

**Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Chair of the IoD North East (North) and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.**





#### ABOUT US

We are the SME Centre of Excellence and have helped thousands of SMEs start, survive and thrive.

#### COVID SUPPORT

During the last 5 months we have set-up the Save Our SME campaign, to help hundreds' local businesses survive, providing free professional service' support. We are now supporting home workers and those impacted by COVID 19 by offering our facilities on very flexible terms. Get out of the house and rent any space from 1 hour upwards. We have high speed Internet, full video conferencing facilities and free tea/coffee all in a safe and secure environment with enhanced cleaning.

#### OUR PURPOSE

To bring together credible enterprise support and service delivery partners with the single goal of providing the right support, at the right time, for the right price for all SMEs to grow.

### Office Services

#### VIRTUAL OFFICE

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(Foreground left to right) chief executive North East Automotive Alliance, Paul Butler with chief executive at Hyperdrive Innovation, Chris Pennison. (Back row) left to right: Project manager at the North East Automotive Alliance, Stuart McGivern, plant manager at Adient, Raye Tate and deputy regional business unit leader at Marelli, Phil Wood.

## COVID-19 TASKFORCE SUPPORTS MEMBERS THROUGH THE PANDEMIC

A COVID-19 emergency response taskforce, launched by the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA), is providing crucial support for many of its members.

On the 18 March, early into the pandemic, the NEAA held its first COVID-19 emergency response group meeting. The group, which includes original equipment manufacturers (OEMs), tier 1 automotive suppliers and SMEs, came together to share information and best practice regarding company responses to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Paul Butler, chief executive, North East Automotive Alliance, said: "Very early into the pandemic Stephen Irish of Hyperdrive Innovation, an executive board member, requested we bring a group together to share information and strategies regarding how companies were tackling the pandemic.

"Stephen recognised the power of the cluster in bringing together global best practice from our multi-national member companies and sharing it across the network. The results are a clear demonstration of the agility and impact of the cluster working to support its members."

The group took advantage of digital technologies to meet virtually on a weekly basis. Initially focusing on how to manage the response to the coronavirus, the group shared best practice, discussed key issues and used the NEAA as a catalyst to engage with key government departments to raise issues and inform policy discussions.

Paul Butler, continued: "Since our launch the NEAA has acted on behalf of the region's automotive sector and we are engaged on many groups and boards – from the NELEP business growth board and skills advisory panel, to the automotive council

supply chain group, skills and regional engagement forum to the European automotive cluster network. Through these activities we can influence and inform policy discussions and response strategies, ensuring our member needs are represented.

"Our significant reach into industry was recognised by policy makers in government. We worked closely with government departments to gather critical information and feedback on policy decisions. This was particularly pertinent regarding the job retention scheme, where member opinions were canvassed and delivered within two hours prior to its announcement during the Prime Minister's briefing event that evening."

Once response strategies had been informed, the group quickly moved onto focusing its efforts on informing restart strategies. The health and safety of employees was of paramount importance. The outcome was a best practice check sheet which considered government advice and best practice from across the group and was distributed across the NEAA network, through the NELEP business growth board and provider network and UK and European automotive clusters.

Hyperdrive Innovation and ZF Automotive are two members actively involved in the taskforce.

Chris Pennison, chief executive, Hyperdrive Innovation, said: "Being part of the taskforce is proving extremely useful. It provides an opportunity for businesses in the supply chain to speak freely about how they are dealing with the challenges they

face. It is thought-provoking and very informative. We are all implementing the same procedures but with slight variations and it is those different perspectives that are so useful."

Robin Finley, plant manager, ZF Automotive, said: "There are various different automotive clusters around the country, but none covering the UK as a whole. We are aligned to the NEAA for the North East element and have significant input, which allows us to have some say in what gets to government.

"The NEAA is specific to the region and in these COVID times it has really come into its own, bringing best practice and company sharing of non-confidential information together, to make sure we are all on the same page and making the most of the furlough scheme for our businesses."

Paul Butler, commented: "The COVID-19 emergency response group was one of many other activities the cluster undertook to support members during these unprecedented times. To date, we have delivered 35 webinars, established a dedicated COVID-19 bulletin and webpage disseminating the latest information and guidance, supported government calls for vital equipment and PPE to support our frontline services and provided one to one support for member companies. The NEAA provides an unparalleled collaborative network where companies find benefit from leadership and co-ordination of activities of mutual benefit – our response to the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear demonstration of this."



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# RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

Steve Russell talks to Nicky Doherty, Programme Manager at Relationships Matter, an innovative, multi-agency project tackling the devastating long-term impact of family conflict.



The world has changed in so many ways since the COVID-19 crisis began, but among the most difficult challenges for many households during lockdown has been negotiating increased tensions within family relationships. Social media has been awash with jokes addressing the lighter side of the situation, but behind the memes lies a more serious issue. A 2017 NHS survey highlighted a strong link between how effectively a family communicates and the quality of children's mental health. The study echoes previous research, which has shown that this not only affects children in the short term, but in many cases, throughout their life.

For many of us, the gradual journey back to something resembling normality will likely yield an improvement in our relationships, but what of families living in households where a lack of effective communication extends well beyond the stresses of lockdown? Recognising the importance of the issue, and both the human and financial costs associated with poor family communication, the government set up the national Reducing Parental

Conflict Programme (known as Relationships Matter in the North East) in 2019, pledging up to £39m in funding for England. Developed by the DWP, it features eight face-to-face intervention techniques aimed at improving parental communication. In the north of our region, the programme is led by Relate, alongside Gateshead Council, Action for Children and Changing Futures North East. This covers Sunderland, Durham, Gateshead, Newcastle, Northumberland and South Tyneside, while Changing Futures North East leads the programme covering Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, Stockton and Hartlepool.

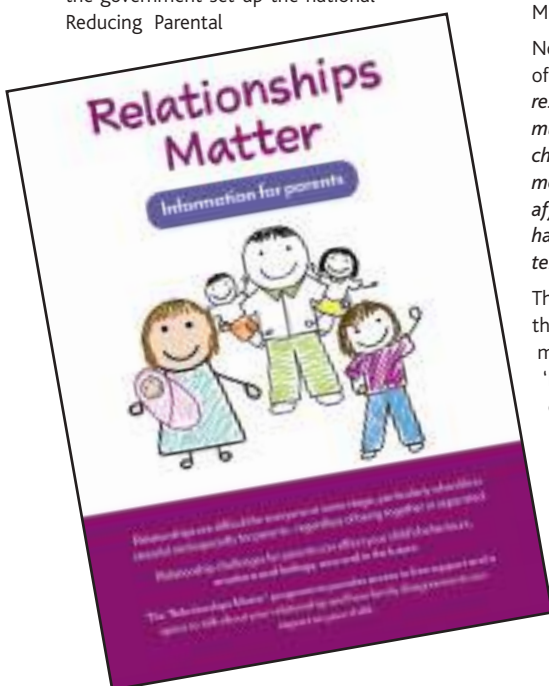
North East Programme Manager, Nicky Doherty of Relate, elaborates: *"The project was set up in response to lots of research which shows just how much of an impact parental conflict can have on a child's life chances. This includes their physical and mental wellbeing into adulthood, but it can also affect a person's ability to hold down a job, so it has a major impact both socially and in economic terms."*

The North East programme is focused on four of the eight interventions, which are delivered in a mix of couple and group formats. They range from 'Family Check Up', a short-term intervention delivered over three or four sessions, to 'Incredible Years', a more in-depth parenting programme requiring up to a six-month commitment. There are also two medium-term interventions which focus on parenting under pressure and parenting when separated. The project was just beginning to hit its stride when the COVID-19 crisis emerged, so how have the service's practitioners negotiated the challenges of lockdown?

Nicky explains: *"We're a face-to-face service, so it's been difficult, but we've adopted a range of measures such as the use of Zoom and Microsoft Teams to continue to support parents, and although there will always be a certain percentage of people who can't or won't engage with remote technologies, we've still been able to deliver vital interventions to many parents experiencing conflict with a lot of success."*

The service is available to parents or primary carers who have at least one child aged 0-18 years or a child with a disability, aged 0-25 years, or be expecting a first child. It's also available to young parents who are under the age of 18. One parent must live, work or use services within the North East region.

Relationships Matter has an initial two-year lifespan, which will run until mid-2021. By defining and testing specific interventions, the aim is to build an evidence base of effective strategies, which will inform future practice. Despite the obstacles caused by lockdown, there is tangible evidence that the service is making a real difference to people's lives. At the beginning of the process, parents are asked to set goals specific to their own circumstances, then chart their progress towards those goals as the programme develops. Case studies have shown that many participants have reported significant improvements in their relationships. Tellingly, one participant described the service as a "safety net", and it's the sort of safety net many more families are likely to need as the pandemic and its aftermath continue to exert unprecedented pressure on all aspects of domestic life.

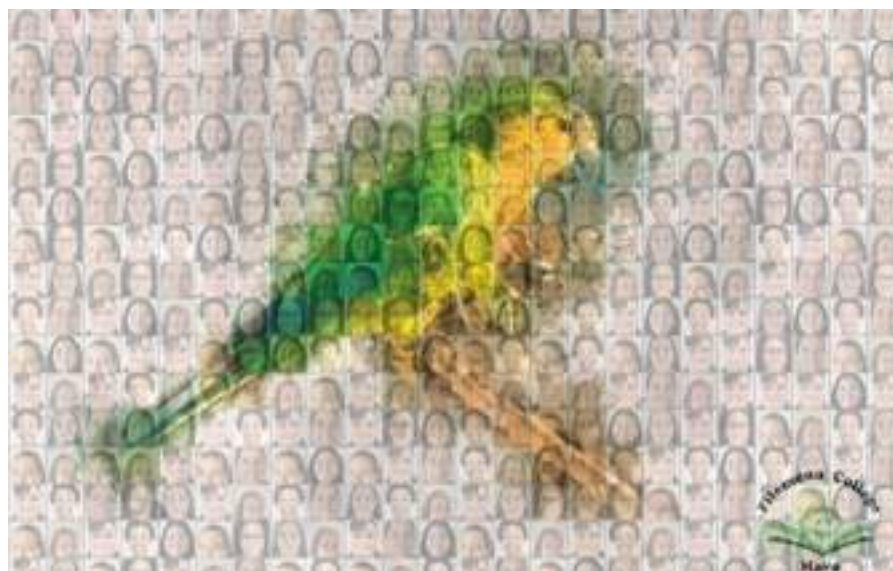


For more information visit [www.relate.org.uk/relationships-matter](http://www.relate.org.uk/relationships-matter)



"Parents from participating schools need to simply text or email their chosen photo of their child – full

The cost to the school is just £250. With a class of just 30 children, the school can more than double that return by selling them for £17.50 each, the average of what parents spend on end of year school photos. If you do it for a school year of 100 children, a school could make more than £1500!

[illegible]

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# RESILIENCE AND AGILITY ARE THE CITY'S NEW WATCHWORDS

History shows that pandemics and disease change cities.

The cholera epidemic of the 1800s led to huge investment in London with the creation of a new underground sewage system; the Spanish flu a century later revolutionised global public health. Infectious diseases spark worldwide change.

It is perhaps too early to tell the long-term effects of Covid but we can already see some physical changes to the cityscape that have happened because of the pandemic. Note the boom in cycle lanes across Newcastle and other major cities. Experts predict that this will be a lasting legacy as cities strive to reduce air pollution and car use.

Here in Newcastle, there have been other major changes that are not as visible but are equally transformational and have altered the way the city operates.

Flexibility and agility have become the watchwords for Newcastle as it emerges from the Covid lockdown and tackles the unprecedented challenges posed by the global pandemic.

In the eye of the storm, Newcastle embraced a new way of working. Collaboration and communication became the norm. Throughout lockdown, NE1 worked hand in hand with Newcastle City Council and with businesses to plan a future for the city, a shared vision of what Newcastle and the wider North East should look like post-Covid.

United by a common goal of opening the city safely and enabling businesses to operate within Covid guidelines galvanised everyone and infused the city with a new spirit of collaborative working and a desire to get things done.

Setting goals and agreeing combined approaches and solutions ensured that the city was able to respond quickly when the Government began to ease the lockdown. Newcastle has been ready to act at each stage because there was a clear strategy and a roadmap for returning to 'normal'. To do this successfully, Newcastle has had to adapt quickly and be flexible and agile in response to the hurdles thrown up by Covid.

Another positive to come out of the crisis is that Covid has broken some of the shackles of centralised



Adrian Waddell

Government control with more power devolved to local authorities. All regions, cities and BIDs across the UK have been lobbying for this to happen for some time knowing that decentralisation would allow decisions to be made quicker at a local level. If it had not been for Covid, the status quo would have remained.

Government changes designed to simplify licensing for outdoor spaces for pubs, restaurants and cafes are a prime example of this new way of working. Local councils have been encouraged to cut the red-tape and work with venues to allow them to set up more pavement cafes and outdoor areas to serve food and drink safely. Traditionally it would have taken eight weeks to seek permission for a new pavement café, or an extension of an existing one, but under the new rules, a decision will be given in just ten days. The aim is to help the food and drinks industry get back on its feet both safely and quickly.

With 20% of Newcastle's 300 licensees now looking to create more outside space – either in new provision, or to extend existing pavement cafes and beer gardens, the change will be dramatic in Newcastle city centre.

When the city fully emerges from the Covid crisis, it will look and feel different. Grey Street, Northumberland Street, the Quayside and the Bigg Market will all be transformed with more pavement cafes and outdoor eating. Parking bays and pavements will be adapted to make way for these new outdoor spaces, as businesses strive to open and operate viably while adhering to social distancing guidelines.

The pandemic's impact on city life will be far reaching. It is already accelerating changes that have long been considered like shutting streets to vehicle traffic, expanding pedestrian and bike only spaces and expanding public outdoor seating areas.

Newcastle city centre is changing. We are working with the council and businesses to develop plans for businesses to use more of the outside space. A radical but necessary move to ensure the reopening and survival of the food and drink sector, it wouldn't survive if capacity had to be cut by 50%.

NE1 is working closely with businesses, the council and with the police to make this work and to ensure that safety is the guiding principle.

The next step for the city is how do we harness this new spirit of collaborative and agile working. We need it to push forward, at pace, to deliver a collective vision for the city, one that underpins the next 30 years and spans other pillars of the city's future.

We need to follow the lead of other successful cities, like Copenhagen. The city pivoted in the 70s after the oil crisis with a move from cars to bikes and to the public realm being viewed as social infrastructure.

For Newcastle, post-pandemic, the challenge is to future-proof the city ensuring that the fundamentals are flexible and can be easily adapted.

The challenge is how do we harness collective working spanning the public/private sector to get to where we want to be in five years, instead of the next 30? We need to adopt the same approach to transforming the city's residential density and digital infrastructure as we did to expanding its pavement cafes.

I hope that the one lasting, positive legacy of Covid is that the city continues to work together around a common goal, with a clear idea of where we want to go, with everyone buying into a widely understood and ambitious vision for Newcastle.





## RONALD JAMES STAYS ON TOP IN 2020

The North's leading Digitech talent agency is changing the game for the sector, making 2020 their biggest year to date. With an upgraded strategy, Ronald James is helping businesses overcome the struggles of attracting highly-skilled tech professionals in the new year.

Ronald James Group is a specialist IT, Digital and Tech recruitment agency based in Gosforth, Newcastle upon Tyne, with offices in Boston, USA. Its tailored digital recruitment-marketing plan is cutting-edge, serving top clients to find the finest professionals for their businesses.

In 2019, the company hit its 4th anniversary with a growing team of over 20 recruitment and marketing experts. Over the years, Ronald James has built a successful series of partnerships with leading tech companies across The North and beyond; each client successfully increasing their talent pool through bespoke marketing strategies that target and engage with top-of-the-line candidates.

Tesco Bank, the agency's latest addition to its extensive client portfolio, has nominated Ronald James to lead their search for tech experts who will join their new tech hub at Quorum Business Park in 2020. It all starts with the correct inbound talent pool.

CEO, James Blackwell, explains: "From what I've seen (speaking to hundreds of business owners and heads of departments), companies with recruitment marketing strategies in place are over 30% more likely to hire greater quality employees". The company found that 70% of job-seekers regard an employer's brand as highly important in their decision to work for them. By correctly marketing clients to the top 15% of candidates, Ronald James brings businesses the best, most motivated talent, decreasing the chances of employee turnover greatly.

Digitech employers are finding it more and more difficult to attract and preserve high-quality talent in their field. After speaking with over 100 business owners in the North East digital and tech sector, the company spotted five key problem areas they were all experiencing:

- 1. Businesses lacks passionate coders.
- 2. Holding onto talented developers is becoming increasingly difficult.

- 3. Hiring costs are increasing.
- 4. Businesses are struggling to find and attract top developers.
- 5. Companies are falling behind on projects due to one or all of these issues above.

Ronald James tackles the root of the problem by tailoring clients' candidate outreach to specific engagement points within the sector. With its dynamic, unrivalled approach, the agency forecasts its biggest and most successful year in 2020, continuing to attract tech giants and expanding into the North West with targets of over £2 million.

Want to make your next career move? Get in touch with your CV today: [patricia@ronaldjamesgroup.com](mailto:patricia@ronaldjamesgroup.com)

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## BLUE CHIP CLEANING SERVICE FROM SILICON VALLEY EXPERIENCE



A former advertising and marketing manager who previously worked in California's Silicon Valley has used her life experience to grow her North Tyneside housekeeping business.

Helen Ross runs Holystone-based Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside, a professional home cleaning and housekeeping service with a premium level of customer care, eco-friendly products and exceptionally motivated staff.

Despite being only three years old, the business has won a number of professional accolades including Best New Business in the North Tyneside Business Awards.

With the COVID-19 crisis, Helen has set out to bring pioneering change to her sector. She currently has 11 members on her team and has just taken on her 50th regular customer. Every member of her team is uniformed, DBS checked and trained to a high standard.

## NEW PODCAST UNCOVERS THE GEORDIE SECRETS OF HAPPINESS



A new podcast series, *The Geordie Guide to Happiness*, is set to explore the secrets of happiness, with special guests and interviewees from Newcastle sharing what makes them smile.

Podcast Host and Creator, Alex Henry, explained: "We'll be talking to people who have been born and bred in Newcastle as well as some who have made the city their home, and trying to

uncover some of the things that we can all do to get more joy in our lives."

Some of the questions the podcast will explore include, how do we know when we're happy? And is happiness about a feeling of euphoria or is it more like a constant state of contentedness?

The podcast will also explore what's special about Newcastle and its surroundings.



## MARKET PLACE CAFE BATTLES PANDEMIC

A family run cafe which has been in business in Alnwick's Market Place for more than 30 years has vowed to battle through the pandemic.

Dean and Dot Jones took over the reins of Melvyn's cafe four years ago. The business had gone from strength to strength under their management until they were forced to close their doors.

Melvyn's is known for its fantastic 'big breakfasts' and range of coffees, as well as its friendly and welcoming community of regular patrons. Messages from some of these regulars helped Dean and Dot decide that they would reopen throughout the pandemic, but as a takeaway and with a reduced menu.

The cafe has now been given permission to place their outdoor seating back in the Market Place, observing strict social distancing rules and regulations.



## DONATIONS FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE MOORS RAILWAY'S CRISIS APPEAL

Loyal railway members from across the UK have shown their support for the North Yorkshire Moors Railway (NYMR), which has received over £350,000 in donations to help secure its future.

The railway's Crisis Appeal was launched in March to reach out to the public for financial support in response to coronavirus. Through a mixture of silent auctions, a virtual shop launch, Friday night quizzes and generous donations, a significant amount of money has now been raised to help the heritage attraction steam ahead.

Chris Price, General Manager at NYMR, commented: "The public support has been overwhelming and I'm optimistic about the railway's future. We are busy readying ourselves to be open for the summer and get our attraction up and running for the 2020 season."

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## **You have to ask the question – *is it time?***

**Is it time**, to give the same old, same old and look at developing yourself or your business? Developing new leadership skills of taking your business to the next level?

**Is it time to reconsider** your overall direction, your personal and business strategies and not only think out of the box, but re- explore the box completely? Did you ever really do that?

**Is it time to get some help**, advice and mentoring on your personal direction, your chosen career or dilemmas you face?

**Is it time to review life**, its direction and maybe find a new one? Is it time to consider something that troubles you deeply, perhaps a personal business challenge has been kicked down the road for far too long?

**Is it time to just stop looking** at an ad and pick the phone up and start working on these things?

**Is it time to stop telling stories** and start embracing realities?

**And how would you know?**

**Is it time for a meaningful discussion** with a third party who can walk the journey with you, both reducing the isolation of the challenge whilst providing savvy knowledge of life and business?

**If it isn't, and everything is just peachy, turn over.**

If there is a shred of doubt perhaps one of our exploratory sessions might help to see how you and/or your organisation can move forward. Let's face it you are just too important not to.



# Gedanken

*Gedanken - the German word for "thoughts".*

E: [actnow@gedanken.co.uk](mailto:actnow@gedanken.co.uk)

T: 0191 3051122



Vici Richardson and her son, Zak

## DISABILITY NORTH, PUSHING FORWARD

A Newcastle-based charity is undergoing a bold expansion across the North East - inspired by its inclusive ethos.

Disability North launched 35 years ago to speak out for disabled people across the region.

And this year, the team is going even further to increase services through the pandemic and beyond. Motivated by the need for independent, quality services designed by disabled people for disabled people: the charity has set up a Personal Assistant register, community care project and direct payment support service to empower the people it supports.

Chief executive Victoria Armstrong explained: "Now is the time to push forward, not hold back. We have an excellent team and their advice and expertise are in high demand.

"We have been offering a direct payment support service in Newcastle for years, but now we want to offer that same choice and excellence to families across the region.

"For anyone who's ever wondered how they can keep their ageing parents safe in their own home - this is what's needed.

"Everyone we have spoken to has been delighted that there is something good happening when times have been tough."

The Disability North team offer advice to disabled people and their family and carers. In particular, they support disabled people who employ personal assistants through the direct payments process. Direct payments allow people to choose and manage their own care in a way that's right for them.

Victoria said: "We stand for inclusion, independence, and choice - and we exist to make sure that becomes a reality for the people we support.

"Life is not one-size-fits all - a tailored care package can free people up to live the life they want to live.

"Some people think of disability as something that happens to a small minority, but the reality is that we are all living longer, and most of us will need good support at some stage."

The charity is staffed and governed by a team that have experienced disability first hand or who have a disabled family member. Vici Richardson has been part of that team for ten years and went through her own battle for son Zak, who has Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy and associated learning difficulties.

Vici said: "I faced many challenges to secure a personalised care plan for Zak. I had to work hard for him to get what he needs, and what makes him happy.

"I eventually wrote out a plan and fully costed it to show what we were asking for in the respite part was not more expensive and met the outcomes. The plan included funding site fees for our caravan so he could go and have short breaks there and it pays for his personal assistant to go with him. He loves it. We were also able to get him a National Trust pass because he loves going to places like Craggside.

"Because of this, I get the difficulties and challenges people face as well as the benefits. I like to think I can bring empathy as well as professional experience."

Vici is passionate about her job with Disability North - and promoting rights for disabled people.

She said: "It's about putting people in control, which has such a knock-on effect for everything else. It's good for your mental and emotional wellbeing which often improves physical health too. In the end, we are here to give people confidence and empower them.

"I strip it back for people so they can see it step-by-step. If you look at the whole thing it's really overwhelming but there are things you can do that build that bigger picture piece by piece.

"I think people just need reassurance. Yes, it's difficult and we need to recognise that, but it's about giving that support and reassurance so people know you're there at the end of the phone."


**The Disability North team recently heard from a man, too unwell to work, who was told he'd have to go for a work capability assessment.**

**His advisor, Jay, assured him he could continue shielding as face-to-face appointments were temporarily suspended.**

**She also took the time to fill in all of the paperwork he had to submit, discussing each answer, and reading them back to make sure he was happy with them.**

**From being frightened and stressed, this gentleman has now been supported and may even be eligible for Personal Independence Payment (PIP).**



A portrait of Victoria Armstrong, a woman with long blonde hair, smiling and looking slightly to the left. She is wearing a grey and white patterned sleeveless top. The background is a solid dark blue.

If your organisation would like to know more about building an inclusive workforce, the Disability North team are ready to help.

On Tuesday, September 15 from 10am to 11am, they are running a Disability in the Workplace webinar where you can learn more about legislation, policy-making and staff training.

To register for this free seminar, please go to [www.tinyurl.com/WorkplaceDisability](http://www.tinyurl.com/WorkplaceDisability)

Victoria Armstrong





Nicola Cook



# WHAT'S A UDP AND WHY YOU NEED ONE – ESPECIALLY NOW!

Whenever I start working with an ambitious business, the first question I always ask is; 'What's your UDP?' and after a few scratches of heads, I'm usually met with blank faces.

Let me be clear. A UDP is not a USP (Unique Selling Point), which is specific benefit tied to your product or service, whereas your UDP sits across your entire brand offering. It's the reason people chose you over a competitor. It's the secret sauce that sits behind your brand, it unites your culture and it's 'the thing' you're best known for.

## Why do you need one?

When supply outstrips demand as is the case in a recession, only those businesses who have a uniquely quantifiable point of difference will be able to hold their price AND grow out of the recession.

## The Four Criteria of a UDP?

As you begin to think about your UDP here are my four criteria;

### 1. Is it a true Point of Difference?

When I ask businesses to list out the individual benefits that make up their overall value proposition, they'll often include things such as, the quality of their service, or their people and culture. Naturally you should be proud of these, but your competitors would say the exact same thing and therefore your customers take it as a given.

If you're a products business, your UDP could be attached to the IP within your product, but if you're a service-based business, your UDP could be your methodology – the way you deliver your services. Or it could be your product/service mix. Perhaps you have some sector or geographical dominance.

You need to decide on your mountain, climb to the top, plant your flag, pee around it – and claim it as your own. What is the 'thing' you want all your target customers to know you for?

### 2. Is it Market Defendable?

Obviously if you own the product IP, then great – but often I instruct my clients to take it to the next level. Name the IP within the product. Create a logo or visual representation of what that means. Take Safe Solvents

(safesolvents.com) who under my guidance named the 'magic chemical reaction' within their core product as Ambimization.

And many of my service-based clients have been able to map out their delivery methodology, or their combination of services with a simple graphic supported by an agreed set of language to describe it. Trademark the 'method'. Follow it up with Thought Leadership, and supported content and you'll create Copyright around your UDP.

### 3. Is it Actionable?

A UDP is not a strapline. It has to transfer into actionable value you bring your target market. Plus, it must mirror the strategic direction you're taking – obviously, and everyone's individual Key Objectives should contain measurable outcomes that align with your UDP.

### 4. Can it be proven?

The claim you make as a result of your UDP should be backed up with proven quantifiable data, ideally from a 3rd party source. Because of your UDP you're able to demonstrate 'x' amount of increased value/cost savings/increased NPS scores/% efficiency...you get the idea. What's the biggest pain point of your target market? Does your UDP align to fulfil that need?

Without a clearly defined UDP, your growth will be limited to your capability to compete on price, or to the individual 1:1 client relationships you're able to build. Not that either of these sales tactics are not important, of course they are – every market has a price tolerance, but if you want to stop competing on price – you need a UDP. Likewise, unless you develop a UDP that communicates to your entire target audience, you'll be required to communicate your value proposition to every potential prospect in a 1:1 sales process. Draining resource and reducing productivity.

A strong UDP will elevate you above your competition, even if you're the challenger in a mature market, ensuring you're recession proof (and pandemic proof) and bring together under one clear value proposition the true benefit of your company.

**Nicola Cook is the CEO of Company Shortcuts. The UK's leading Sales Acceleration agency helping scale-ups build a profitable Sales Engine for Growth. Her waitlist is open and is currently taking new applications for 2021. If you're interested in finding out how she could help your business, for an application form contact [helen@companyshortcuts.com](mailto:helen@companyshortcuts.com)**

# AIRVIEW PARK LOOKS TO ATTRACT NATIONAL AND GLOBAL OCCUPIERS AS AIRPORT FLIGHTS RESUME



The return of some business routes to and from Newcastle International Airport has been welcomed by the developers of AirView Park as they look to attract national and international organisations now diversifying operations regionally, or establishing a UK base as part of their growth and recovery strategy.

Routes including Aberdeen, Amsterdam, Belfast, Paris and Southampton, have all resumed, and with more business flights to start very shortly, developers, Tynexe Commercial Ltd, is encouraging companies who may need a strategic North East location and operate globally to consider AirView Park, only minutes away from the airport.

The 175,000 sq ft site has already attracted UK homebuilder, Bellway, as its first anchor tenant, and with planning permission for up to four more bespoke office buildings (or alternatively a 150,000 sq ft premises), the potential to attract a major company to the region is high.

Mike Clark, Development Director of Tynexe Commercial Ltd and Dysart Developments, explained, "Connectivity to other parts of the UK, Europe and beyond has always been a key selling point of AirView Park as a commercial development, therefore having flights restart is a welcome sign for the site as well as the regional economy.

"There have been discussions over recent months as to how home working is the new way forward and how office space could become redundant, and



whilst true for some companies, this isn't necessarily accurate. A significant number of organisations will revert back to office-based working, and with many bigger companies now establishing smaller regional centres and geographical bases in and around the UK, we're in a great position to offer bespoke build or relocation options.

"As with Bellway, their new HQ building will not only support the wider North East region but will also allow them to stay closely connected with staff at other UK divisions across England, Scotland and Wales via the airport. This is a fantastic

example of how AirView Park can accommodate national and global companies looking at regional locations, and we're working with key partners like Invest North East and Invest Newcastle to attract such occupiers."

Nick Jones, Chief Executive of Newcastle International Airport, added, "The COVID-19 crisis has been a challenging time for all businesses, not least the Airport. Connectivity is extremely important for the region's economy and we were pleased to see a number of airlines restart their operations on the 1st of June, with more expected over the coming weeks and months.

"AirView Park will help to generate new jobs and significant economic benefits by creating more international trade opportunities for the region. Its location is second to none, on airport land just a few minutes from the terminal building. Newcastle International Airport is fully behind this project and we look forward to welcoming the businesses that decide to locate to the site."

AirView Park, located on the outskirts of Newcastle upon Tyne at Woosington, offers Enterprise Zone status.

**For more details, go to [www.airviewpark.co.uk](http://www.airviewpark.co.uk) (all commercial property enquiries to Angus White at Naylor Gavin Black on t: 0191 211 1551, e: [angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk](mailto:angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk)).**



# THE IMPORTANCE OF PEERS AND CPD FOR TOP MANAGEMENT

Andrew Marsh is a leading business mentor, company owner, Non Executive director and Vistage chair in the North East.

Throughout the last few months he has seen the ups and downs of many of the companies in the region and the changing face of business life.

Here, he shares with our readers the importance of MD's, Business Owners and CEO's having business peers and undertaking CPD (continuous professional development).

"Wise people learn when they can, fools learn when they must." A quote from the Duke of Wellington. And one of my favourite adages for life.

"My whole approach to business and to helping others in business stems from the wisdom behind this quote. As someone who has guided large multi million pound businesses through growth, and sits on the board of a number of North East businesses destined for great things, one of my biggest pieces of advice is to continually learn.

But that is hard when we have pressing deadlines, an endless to do list, family commitments, keeping control of the business day to day which can sometimes lead to low energy levels or worse. That's why so many leaders decide against formal CPD courses as its just one more thing to add to the list!

However, there is another way to learn without adding to the stress. Join a confidential peer group. A peer group is for like-minded executives to come together and tap into each other's insights and experiences to solve their challenges, learn and grow.

"Even if you are at the top of your ladder, you need other people, and you need to keep ahead of the game with new information and skills. Never, ever rest on your laurels. It is a lonely place at the top and feeling isolated does add pressure, that isn't needed, when making big decisions. That often leads to poor decisions too.

"Lots of people will give you advice as a CEO – many people will have opinions about your next move, but how many of them fully understand your position and advise without their own agenda?

"As a Vistage chair, it is so satisfying to see my members work through their issues, grasp opportunities and learn together. Our sessions boost



the mood, energy, performance and wellbeing for everyone involved. Being in the right group is a vital part in ensuring you get the insights that improves decision-making, and spurs faster company growth.

"There really is no need for anyone in business to feel alone. And CPD doesn't have to mean certified qualifications. Opening your mind and your heart to the right sessions where people share business experiences is a hugely rewarding practice and educational in a much more impactful way.

"My Vistage groups are a safe place, with structured meetings and 100% confidential, meaning that even the highest of fliers has a room full of people they can trust and speak openly with. Some incredibly challenging moments have been resolved in these groups which speaks volumes. There is a set criteria, meaning the peers you are matched with have relevant experience, and I personally work hard to foster quality interaction.

"Our peer advisory groups also have a strength in making its members truly accountable. The group members listen to you, to what you plan to do. Your fellow members not only expect you to deliver on it, but will also support, encourage and create sophisticated interactions to make it happen.

"As Vistage Chair, I am also the coach that guides the group and provides one on one coaching. These private sessions also boost confidence and ensure that no one is an island. I myself am a member of a Vistage Group filled with fellow Chairs from around the UK, meaning I am constantly stretching myself, learning from my peers to make my interaction with my members the best it can possibly be.

"So many Vistage members benefit from that, with one claiming that 'working with Andrew allows me

to be myself in business instead of worrying what the rest of the company expect me to be. I perform much better that way.'

"So my advice for the rest of the year and beyond? Open your mind to the power of peers, learn from each other to increase your knowledge to find more options, so you can make better decisions, and in turn you will boost your business and look after your own wellbeing – we have less than six months of 2020 left and we all need to make it count!"

## Testimonials from Andrew's Vistage group

"Being part of Andrew's VISTAGE group has undoubtedly made me a better leader. His advice and support over the last five years has been invaluable both to me as an individual and to believe housing. The recent work he has done with us as part of our Vistage insider programme and business skills group has resulted in our senior staff being better equipped to face the challenges that they will face over the coming year".

*Bill Fullen, CEO of Believe Housing*

"Taking part in Andrew's Vistage group video calls is very helpful. Andrew provides a great forum for MD's and business owners to share ideas and advice".

*Anika Ephraim*

Contact Andrew on [Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## RICHARD TOWNSEND

Director, T3 Security

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

The best answer that I can give you is that they were very vague. The only thing I knew was that I didn't want to work for anyone else. My father was self-employed and I suppose this rubbed off on me. After leaving school I worked in construction starting from the bottom up, from groundworks to shopfitting and then eventually project management.

### What attracted you to the world of security?

I was influenced by my uncle who was a doorman and attained my door badge licence when I was 18 years old at what was the hugely popular Venue in South Shields. The sense of camaraderie was fantastic and you literally never knew what each night would bring. I moved onto work at De Niro's which was owned by the same company Mason Entertainments and from there Durham then Newcastle Mood Nightclub it was here that I met my business partner Peter Moore.

### Tell us about your current role?

T3 was established a decade ago and initially ran from my spare room. In the early stages we operated the doors of Destiny in the Bigg Market and Mood in the Gate. Money was tight and we were asked if we could get some cleaners for mood nightclub, so myself and Peter decided to get our marigolds on and take on the role of cleaners after our shifts on the doors to boost our income. Long hard hours which strengthened our work ethic but great times. Looking back our growth has been astounding as we now have a 300 strong staff.

We now offer all aspects of security including health and safety, door supervisors, keyholding and alarm response, security guards and event support.

Peter looks after the office and I handle the operations side.

### How was your business adapted to coronavirus?

Obviously it has been a very difficult period and we were initially very concerned with the leisure sector going into lockdown and bars and restaurants closing. However we have adapted very well and worked with many major UK businesses and Government Health Trusts to combat the pandemic and the impact it has had on their organisations.

### What has been your proudest career moment so far?

Probably difficult to single one out but buying our own property and being able to walk around Newcastle City Centre and seeing the T3 brand everywhere has made me proud. Being asked to take on the Nightingale was very satisfying as well I must admit.

### What is the best advice you have been given?

"Never eat Yellow Snow" only kidding, the best advice I have been given was to always believe in yourself and if you don't enjoy what you do try something else. My granadad.

### Do you have any heroes or mentors?

My father who is a survivor and who gave me the inspiration to work for myself.

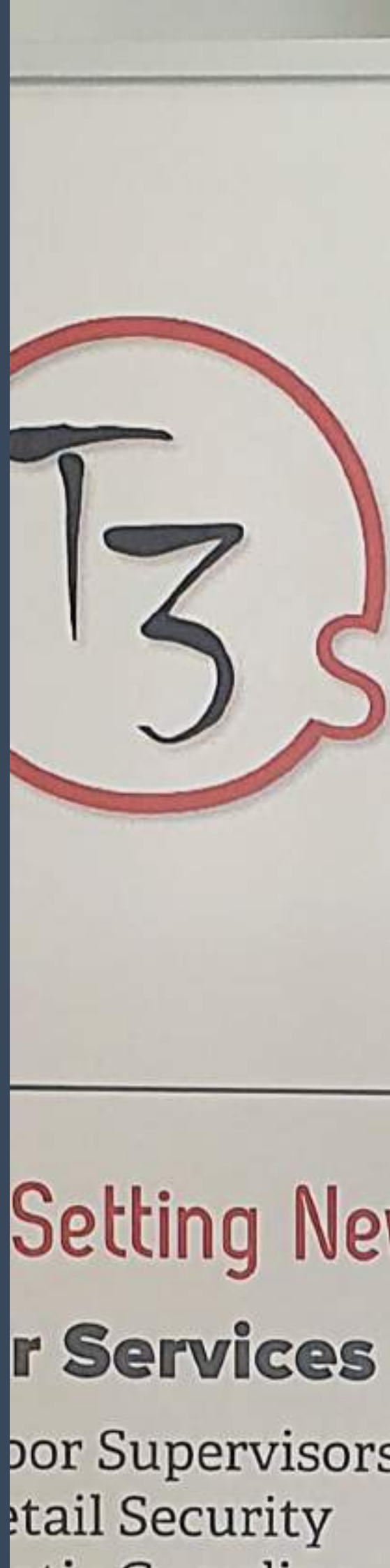
### What are the secrets of your success?

Hard work, dedication, pride in your work and never give up.

### How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with the family plays a big part in my life now, especially when I missed out on a lot of time when my kids were young due to working so many hours building the business. The gym and relaxing in the back garden in recent months.

For further information visit the website [www.t3security.co.uk](http://www.t3security.co.uk)







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# HOW TO NAVIGATE A CHANGING EMPLOYMENT MARKET

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares her thoughts on how you can navigate your way through a fast-changing recruitment and employment market.

At the start of 2020, the number of people working in the UK reached a record high of just over 32.5 million.

Since the coronavirus pandemic, 1 million businesses have taken advantage of the Government's furlough scheme, leading to 9.3 million people being told that their job is reliant upon salary support until a solution can be found. That is more than one in every four people.

As the furlough scheme phases out, it feels as though we are standing on the edge of a precipice. The employment market is facing a crisis unlike any we have seen in a very long time.

If not already, businesses will soon be forced to make some very difficult decisions as they begin to plan and rebuild for the future. There will be tough times ahead for many, and it is going to be critical that you strike the right balance between consolidation and aspiration to succeed.

As a recruiter, it pains me to talk about job cuts, but with a swift 'V' shaped economic bounce-back unlikely, the first question that needs to be asked is whether or not you can manage with fewer people in your team?

Contrary to this - and on a more positive note - there may also be new areas of specialism for your business, or skills and training you lack but now need to drive things forward.

Equally as important is making sure that your team emerges from lockdown as motivated and committed as ever. If they have been furloughed, do you know how they feel about returning to

work? If they worked throughout the epidemic, do they need time off to recharge their batteries before they go again?

Whatever their situation, the last few months will have been difficult for everyone in different ways. As a leader and manager, make sure you take time to reflect on their behaviour at an individual level. It will teach you an awful lot about their character, and knowing who you can count on in a crisis is a hugely important lesson to learn.

As time goes by and feeling safe enough to come into work becomes less of an obstacle, the biggest question is going to be around new models of working.

There looks set to be a huge uplift in demand for flexible and home working. It has been increasingly popular during the last few years, but now seems to be an expected norm for many people. Can you accommodate these new demands in your business, and do you even know what people would prefer to do going forward?

I suggest counselling opinion. What flexibility do staff want or need and, if they are going to work

from home permanently, do they have the right equipment and space to do this? There may be new health and safety aspects to consider.

You may also need to adjust to a new way of recruiting. Changing needs, coupled with higher unemployment, and softer skills becoming an essential requirement for the majority of roles (i.e. communication and self-motivation), means it may be time to review your strategy. Not to mention adopt new technologies to video interview and conduct virtual onboarding.

All in all, I think it is fair to say that 2020 has so far been a pretty tough year, to the point where it has forced almost every business in the world to adapt and change the way they operate. I do, however, believe we can take some positives from this.

Whether you view this as a temporary disruption or think it will lead to permanent change, we need to face the challenges head-on and, hopefully, if we can ask ourselves the right questions and surround ourselves with the right people, we can start to plan our recovery without delay.



Bryony Gibson

For public practice advice and expertise, get in touch:  
[bryony@bryonygibson.com](mailto:bryony@bryonygibson.com) | (0191) 375 9983.



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# A DAY IN THE LIFE OF...

## LEE BAKER

Founder of Newcastle Hand Painted Kitchens, the home of bespoke interiors, kitchens and bathrooms, tells us what an average day looks like for him.

### 6.20am

I set an alarm for 6:20 am every morning and put the news on the smart speaker whilst I wake up. I enjoy Radio 4 in the morning followed by a bit of sport radio on the way to work to see if the takeover of Newcastle United has happened yet. Spoiler alert. It hasn't!

Depending on whether I'm caring for my three wonderful children that morning, I shower and eat breakfast in the style of most parents - quickly, whilst simultaneously getting dressed. I also check my social channels for work enquiries. I probably receive around 50 pieces to deal with a day.

Two coffees down and I'm ready to rally the troops around 7am.

Depending on schedules i.e. schools/nursery or during the COVID-19 curve ball, home schooling, I organise the clothes whilst they're arguing over Peppa Pig, Horrible Histories, or who has the most corn flakes and we leave around 8am.

While the company is based in Newcastle, I work between York, Edinburgh and the north Pennines, with much of my work in rural locations. Long commutes generally bring into play my workshop in Newcastle so I try to undertake half the work there to cut down disruption for clients and truncated days.

### 9.30am

Today the kitchen I'm working on is in a lovely period property in County Durham and I'm around two weeks in so far. My clients moved in after a full refurbishment to the property only to be faced with a heartbreakingly bad paint job on the designer kitchen so I'm making sure this is returned to its former glory.

Hand painted kitchens are a booming market and a great way to give an old one a new lease of life. Environmentally, it's sound too, being less "make do and mend", more a restoration.



### 1pm

I break for a sandwich and to make and return calls. Not taking calls on site is a policy of mine.

Today I'm booking work for around two to three months ahead. My next job after this requires additional subcontractors so I need to firm their involvement up now.

One job needs a few changes to a plan so I use my iPad Pro and Apple Pencil to annotate a drawing /photograph/email it off and follow that up with a call. It's handy.

### 4.30pm

The project is complete. Even though I use a dust free Festool system which removes 99% of any dust created, I clear any waste or rubbish and

vacuum. The kitchen is back in play for my clients and ready for dinnertime.

### 6-7pm

Today, I'm having dinner with my parents and the kids and then it's home, bath, book and bed for the kids - simpler written, than doing!

### 8.15pm

Time to start the evening shift. More emails, socials and drawings for current and future works... and a glass of wine, a nice Italian red, ok two. I think I've earned it!

### 10.30pm

I watch a bit of TV to wind down then head to bed to dream of work, things to do with the kids and the week ahead.



## LOCAL CHARITY HELPING NORTHUMBERLAND STAY GREEN FINGERED

A mental health and learning disability charity is helping its service users and residents across Northumberland stay busy with gardening projects

Throughout lockdown, Blyth Star Enterprises' Stakeford Nurseries has delivered fresh produce, plants and flowers to residents of Blyth, Choppington and the surrounding areas.

Deliveries included 25 tomato plants to service users, who've tended to and grown plants at home. Such activities have helped individuals, who'd normally attend the Nurseries to work in a supported environment, stay focused and in a daily routine.

Throughout lockdown and as restrictions start to ease, staff from the Nurseries are checking in with everyone who'd normally be on site helping.

Daniel Hedley, horticultural services manager at the Nurseries said: "I'm really proud of everyone at the Nurseries, over the past few months

they've adapted to new working routines, caring for existing produce on site and making deliveries within the local area.

"Alongside keeping the Nurseries running, staff have reached out to our service users, ensuring that they're in a good place mentally and that they're staying green fingered.

"Lockdown has been difficult for many and gardening has become a welcome escape, several of our service users have started their own home DIY garden projects and have been caring for their tomato plants, taking the skills they've learnt on site and implementing them at home.

"Growing something from scratch and seeing its progress can be very rewarding and helps individuals stay focused and motivated. We're

hoping to welcome our service users and customers back on site in the coming months and are incredibly grateful for the ongoing support."

Gordon Moore MBE, CEO of Blyth Star Enterprises added: "Daniel and the team at Stakeford Nurseries have gone above and beyond for their service users whilst continuing to fulfil orders. All funds raised through sales of produce grown at the Nurseries are reinvested into the charity and help us continue to recover from the impacts of Covid-19.

"I'm proud of everyone for adapting, remaining connected and for most importantly, finding ways to get out there in the garden and implement their skills."

To find out more about Blyth Star Enterprises, visit: [www.blythstar.org.uk](http://www.blythstar.org.uk). To find out more about Stakeford Nurseries and the produce on sale, head to: [www.facebook.com/BlythStarEnterprises](https://www.facebook.com/BlythStarEnterprises).



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James Holloway

## NORTH EAST FIRMS OFFERED BUSINESS SUPPORT TO NAVIGATE ECONOMIC RECOVERY

The North East Fund is offering SMEs and owner managers across the region the opportunity to obtain information and informal guidance on what financial support is available and how to access it via free one-to-one virtual meetings with its team.

Engagement Officer, James Holloway, is asking North East businesses in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, and County Durham to get in touch should they require details on Government and local authority loans and grant schemes, and how to apply to help sustain their company in the new Covid-19 landscape.

Companies which have experienced greater demand for their products and services, or who may require funding to adapt their business to take advantage of new opportunities, are also advised to get in touch given that the North East Fund has helped to secure over £10m of investment for local SMEs since mid-March.

James, along with his colleague, Andrew Gibson, can also advise on UK-wide schemes, such as Innovate UK grants and the Future Fund, and are familiar with what is on offer across the whole North East region.

James explained, "Both Andrew and myself work very closely with regional economic development teams, support organisations and the wider business community, therefore we have access to a plethora of information which, now more than ever, is essential for company owners. We have established very close relationships with hundreds of regional SMEs who, in the past, have come to us for funding. However, if we can offer any general assistance and become the first point of

contact for owners trying to navigate challenging times and work through what's available to them, we'll very much do so.

"Whilst we can't provide short-term working capital or bridging loans to struggling companies, we can help to identify possible sources of such funding. One of our fund management companies, NEL, is now able to offer Coronavirus Business Interruption Loans (CBILs) so companies which may have been declined previously, or who may have already received a CBIL or Bounce Back loan but need additional finance to sustain or grow their business, should definitely to get in touch."

**To arrange a virtual one-to-one appointment with North East Fund representatives, please email: [James.holloway@northeastfund.org](mailto:James.holloway@northeastfund.org) (for Sunderland, Northumberland, South Tyneside and Newcastle-based companies) or [Andrew.gibson@northeastfund.org](mailto:Andrew.gibson@northeastfund.org) (for County Durham, North Tyneside, Gateshead and Newcastle-based companies). Alternatively go to [www.northeastfund.org](http://www.northeastfund.org) for details.**



# EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS & NORTHERN INSIGHT LUNCH CLUB



Exclusive Business and Northern Insight have an inspiring programme of speakers lined up from September onwards.

We very much hope to be able to deliver the autumn events in person, albeit with a few format amends, fingers crossed!

*Linda Hitman and Michael Grahamslaw*



## EXCLUSIVE

### BUSINESS

#### NEWCASTLE EVENTS

**SEPTEMBER 21st** - Alison Fellows, Commercial & Delivery Director - Tees Valley Combined Authority

**OCTOBER 19th** - Pouya Bostani, Entrepreneur Managing Director, Founder, Goldman Sachs 10KSB Alumni

**NOVEMBER 23rd** - John Thompson MBE, Chairman Thompsons of Prudhoe

#### WYNYARD HALL

**OCTOBER 12th** - Keith Miller, Managing Director Ecco Finishings Ltd

**NOVEMBER 9th** - Karl Pemberton, Managing Director, Active Chartered Financial Planners, Chair, Institute of Directors (NE South)

**DECEMBER 7th** - Mark Easby, Founder & Managing Director Better Brand Agency

#### VIRTUALLY EXCLUSIVE

In the absence of our in person networking events we have continued to meet via Zoom. Our Exclusive network is an incredible talent pool and we have drawn on this to deliver valuable advice, perspective, conversation and support. Non-members can book to join the events via our website

*During August we will have two further events:*

**AUGUST 6TH - ANDREW MEARS, COO**  
Talent 84 "Talent Agenda in the New Normal"

**AUGUST 20th - ANDREW MARSH, Managing Director**  
Marsh Business Transformation Ltd Vistage Chair, Coach, Non Executive Director, CEO  
"Staying effective in a challenging world"

Visit [www.Exclusivebusiness.net](http://www.Exclusivebusiness.net) for full details

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INSPIRING CONVERSATION & CONNECTIONS OVER A FINE LUNCH WITH EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS & NORTHERN INSIGHT

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## PATRICIA ALEXANDER

Managing Director, Shared Interest

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up I rather wanted to be a teacher. However, due to my mathematical abilities, I drifted into accountancy. My desire to have some sort of social impact was there from a very early age, which means I have been involved in the charitable sector for as long as I remember. I went on to begin my first Trustee role at a local charity when I was 28.

### Tell us about your current role

I consider myself very lucky to be in a role that brings together my experience and skills with a passion to make a difference. Over 11,500 people in the UK share this passion, and invest their money in Shared Interest. Our co-operative ethos means that our members are highly engaged - they are also extremely loyal and have continued to support us throughout the pandemic, many have invested further and we reached £45m in Share Capital in July. However, that does not mean that we can rest on our laurels. The huge demand for our finance in the developing world means that we must continue to grow investment, and the biggest motivation is the real and tangible difference our work makes to communities around the world. When you hear that an African village has electricity for the first time, because of Shared Interest support, that is really something special.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Seeing the growth of the organisation during my time here. Thanks to the dedication and commitment of everyone involved - both in the UK and overseas - I am proud that the organisation has been recognised with a Queen's Award for the third time, during our 30th year.

You cannot achieve anything without a great team and that is what we have at Shared Interest.

When I arrived, we had no overseas offices and managed everything from our Newcastle headquarters. We now have a regional team in Costa Rica, Kenya, Ghana, and Peru. Their presence has been vital in growing our direct lending to smallholder farmers and handcraft organisations. Around 70% of our customers have no other social finance and rely solely on us.

### How has your industry changed in the last decade?

It been fantastic to see Fairtrade become more mainstream. Last year was declared a landmark by the Fairtrade Foundation in terms of consumer awareness, and it is good to see that shoppers now recognise there are more options available than just coffee, bananas and chocolate as sales increased in products ranging from flowers to gold. Sadly, the handcraft sector was already suffering before the pandemic due to declining sales, and producers in Asia - most particularly India and Bangladesh - have been badly hit by cancelled orders from the retail sector as countries went into lockdown. We are one of the only social lenders to support small handcraft groups, offering facilities below \$500K. Our main lending criteria focuses on the ten Fair Trade Principles set out by the World Fairtrade Organization (WFTO).

### What are you currently working on?

I am happy to say that it is business as usual at Shared Interest. The entire team is working remotely, and everyone is committed to getting our finance to communities that need it now more than ever. We are able to keep our investors fully informed of what is happening in each region, and we know

from our team on the ground, that the situation changes daily and can differ vastly from country to country. In direct response to the impact of Covid-19 in Africa and Latin America, our charity has relaunched its Livelihood Security Fund to support producers during and beyond the crisis, to enable them to continue trading.

### Tell us about the team you work with?

An organisation can only be successful with the right people involved, and Shared Interest has a brilliant team behind it. Although we remain small with a team of 39, including 13 colleagues overseas, our impact grows year on year. The team has adapted seamlessly to remote working, remaining in close contact with customers, and finding new ways to keep members engaged. We have a set of positive statements on our walls in the office. One of them reads: 'We consider the impact of our actions on the environment and community, as well as each other', and I think that reflects our working culture perfectly.

### What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

When we speak to our lending customers, we often receive some sage pieces of advice that we could apply to our own working lives. For instance, Chino Henriquez, who has steered Chilean co-operative, Apicoop, through some life-changing challenges, including diversification from honey into blueberries says: "The way we work we have learned from the bees. Back to back. Shoulder to shoulder. If we are capable of putting into practice 1% of the way that bees in a hive work together, I believe we could solve 99% of our problems."

### What has been your biggest challenge?

There have been many but a couple of instances really stand out. For instance, in 2007, during the financial crisis, the interest earned on our Share Capital was wiped out overnight. We went on to face severe fluctuations in exchange rates following the European referendum in 2016. As the majority of our investment is in Pound Sterling but over 90% of our finance is provided in other currencies, this was quite a challenge. I don't think anyone expected a bigger challenge than Brexit but here we are facing the impact of Covid-19. However, I always say challenges make you stronger and more resilient.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

I have admired many people - and what they all have in common is the positive difference they have made on others' lives. One of them is Shared Interest Founder, Mark Hayes, who sadly passed away in December last year but his legacy lives on. It is quite simple - the organisation would not be here today without Mark's inspiring input.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I am finding new ways to unwind at the moment because the things I usually do to relax, like going to the theatre and out for dinner, have not been possible. I make sure I go out for a daily walk and have met with friends for a socially distanced lunch in the garden. Fortunately, I can still enjoy a glass of Fairtrade wine at the weekend!

### Favourite Book/CD/DVD

I love a good mystery and my favourite detective is Sherlock Holmes. I enjoyed the books and the TV series so much that I named my cats Sherlock and Moriarty.





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Patricia Alexander

# IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THE ENERGY MARKET

The impact of COVID-19 has created unprecedented economic and social consequences globally. COVID-19 has significantly affected all aspects of life, including the energy sector.

Though we are nearing the end of some economic and social restrictions, the consequences may have indelibly impacted the behaviour of the energy market. Fortunately, there are tentative signs of an economic revival as businesses begin to resume operations, which means many could now capitalise on the developments on the energy market.

Commercial activity has been curtailed for many businesses and firms since the UK's lockdown, with the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development forecasting an alarming 11.5% slump in UK GDP, far greater than the falls in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and the US, the Paris-based thinktank said.

The new reality compels businesses to better manage costs and expenses and secure their futures or risk financial collapse amid growing concerns about the "worst recession since World War II" as we begin the post COVID-19 recovery. The time afforded to businesses as a result of lockdown has been a great opportunity to regulate and scrutinise commercial operations to identify and remedy inefficiencies.

This report looks at how the energy market has been affected, and what businesses are still able to do to capitalise and manage energy expenses efficiently.

## Is it appropriate to buy energy now?

COVID-19 has caused companies in the UK to urgently review their operations in order to maintain financial stability through months of inaction. The Furlough scheme, business grants, VAT deferrals and interruption loans have gone some way to protect businesses, but a more obvious and straightforward solution has been neglected: the cost of energy.

Often overlooked, energy costs constitute the single most critical supply element for the smooth output and operation of any business, especially in services such as the industrial sector. Energy costs for the manufacturing industry often represent the second or third highest expenditure, after labour costs or materials. Manufacturers have saved money through the lower demand for materials, and government-sanctioned financial assistance has relieved some payrolls, but what is being done about energy costs?

The global energy market is currently sitting at a 70-year low. Some perceptive energy managers have managed to capitalise on this by locking in long-term fixed energy contracts at a heavily reduced premium, allowing them to budget and forecast responsibly over the long-term with discounted energy rates.

Live data from wholesale energy markets indicate that the grid is struggling to manage a massive oversupply of electricity and is also facing difficulties in depositing the excess supply, leading to UK electricity markets plunging into the negative 66 times. The data would indicate that securing a new, long-term energy deal in this market could give businesses a financial advantage over idle competitors as we begin an economic recovery.

## Why should I buy energy now? Is it the right time to buy energy?

Global economic uncertainty has led to a collapse in the demand for energy. With the lower demand, energy prices have fallen considerably. Data from wholesale energy markets, trading in Megawatt Hours, indicate the true imprint of COVID-19 on energy markets. Energy markets peaked at £68.27 per MWh in 2019 but have now dropped to as little as £42.67 per MWh in April 2020 – a colossal decrease of 35.5% in price. The recent imprint COVID-19 has left on the UK energy markets can be seen in the radical decline below:

## Why is this happening to the energy market?

International energy suppliers are bracing themselves for a sharp fall in revenues. As suppliers are struggling to sell viable quantities of energy in the current climate, we can expect the low energy price trend to continue well into mid-to-late 2020.

As well as the lack of demand, the steep drop in prices in the energy forum is down to the immense inventories of gas supplied to the global market with larger UK businesses reaping the rewards. Record hauls of gas are flooding the UK market from Qatar, Russia and the US. Analysts predict gas contracts are expected to fall by up to 30% in 2020 as the UK expects to receive an energy surplus at record levels.

Russia, Europe's largest gas supplier, sustains its colossal flow of gas to Europe in order to establish market dominance and obtain a stronger economic foothold in the gas extraction industry. In March 2020, Gazprom (Europe's largest gas supplier) celebrated the highest-on-record share of the gas market, at a commanding 36.7%. Gazprom is keen to maintain its control of the market and has pledged to fight off challenges from the US and Saudi Arabia by continuing its generous flow of energy into Europe.

## Will the market recover?

The market is beginning its recovery. Recent government easing of economic restrictions will see

the demand for energy increase, meaning inevitable increasing energy prices towards previous levels.

Similar to the 2008 recession, greater economic activity and adaptations in financial policy will help to stabilise global markets. Some financial reports even indicate that UK GDP could return to positive growth of 4.5% by 2021.

## Summary:

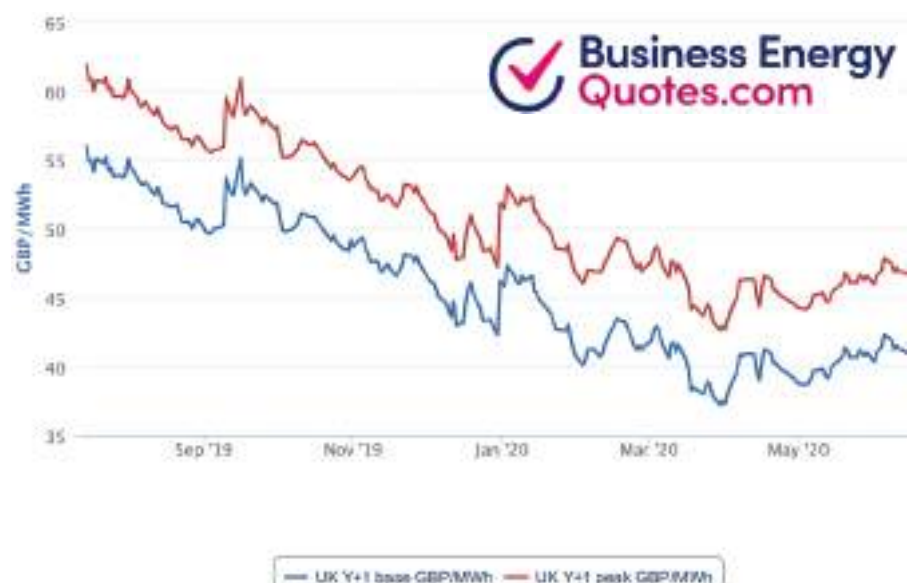
- Commercial activity declined sharply from COVID-19 onset, reducing demand for energy
- Lack of energy demand and excess energy supply resulted in market crash; energy markets currently at 70-year low
- Consequently, energy prices now heavily reduced; reviewing energy contracts now may lead to future savings.
- Economic recovery expected by 2021 – prices on wholesale markets may stabilise within six months.

## I've read the data, now what should I do?

To capitalise on the condition of the energy market, businesses should review their energy contracts now. Reviewing quotes on the market from suppliers may lead to significant savings going forward. The window on this opportunity may be closing as the economy begins to recover.

All businesses, including SMEs and sole traders are able to use the new, smart-grid connected, business energy price comparison website BusinessEnergyQuotes.com. BusinessEnergyQuotes.com is a free, no obligation comparison engine which uses smart-grid connectivity to find a business' meter, and actual energy consumption, using just a postcode. Using smart technology allows BusinessEnergyQuotes.com to calculate day and night splits, or evening and weekend usage, to offer businesses the most accurate renewal quotes in the industry. BusinessEnergyQuotes.com is a free, 100% online service which can secure business energy renewals in under three minutes.

SMEs and sole traders will have had to adapt to the challenges Covid presented. Agility is vital to their return to growth. Ability to save costs will also allow them to build up their business and customer base again. The speed and simplicity of BusinessEnergyQuotes.com enables them to secure a better business energy deal online in under three minutes - allowing them to get on with the day job and develop their business further.





## DRIVING A WELL-OILED MACHINE

Leading North East management business consultancy AuxinOKR is bucking a national trend by expanding during the pandemic. Its MD Peter Kerr explains how his firm is helping corporates survive and grow in this difficult climate.

### How are you expanding when many other business consultancies are slimming down?

There are two main reasons for our expansion. We are growing our existing client accounts so we need great coaches to continue to deliver value to our customers. And, we're thinking long-term. OKRs are crossing the chasm. They are becoming mainstream. We are receiving enquiries from businesses across all sectors and of all sizes. Now is the time to bring highly talented coaches to help us grow the business and service this demand.

### How did AuxinOKR start and what's the grand plan?

The Auxin brand pre-dates AuxinOKR. It was created by my fellow director David Anderson. The current management team all worked together on a wide range of business coaching projects. We were invited to pitch for an OKR coaching project which brought the concept of objectives and key results to our attention. We tried it for ourselves and we were hooked. We reviewed the market and saw a gap for a specialist OKR coaching firm in the UK. That was three years ago and we've been on an amazing journey ever since that taken us all over the world and in the board rooms of several blue-chip companies.

### What are you offering that others aren't?

We don't look at it that way. We offer what our clients need. Every business is unique, so we tailor how to implement OKRs to suit the business. This means ensuring the foundations are right to give OKRs the best chance of working. The only big difference we have noticed is that we are in for the long haul while other coaches just set the scene and then let the business themselves take care of the implementation.



Peter Kerr

### Can you briefly explain what OKRs are?

OKRs is a goal-setting framework just like SMART and lots of others. OKR stands for Objectives and Key Results. The objective is an aspiration. It is a place you want your business to be in the future. The key results are quantitative. The KRs are the metrics we will use to measure our progress towards achieving the goal. The difference between SMART goals and OKRs is that SMART goals help you manage day to day tasks whilst OKRs are the big things the company is trying to achieve. OKRs are closely aligned with innovation and finding new ways to do achieve very ambitious outcomes.

### How can OKRs help a business during an economic downturn?

To answer that I need to draw on the OKR superpowers referred to by John Doerr the author of Measure What Matters. OKRs give businesses focus. When trading conditions are challenging it's important to understand what needs to be now, next and later. Ensuring everyone is aligned to what the business is trying to achieve leads to belief and accountability. When combined they create a workforce that is committed to working to help the

organisation to achieve its goals. Having the right information to make an informed decision is vital. We need to closely track the data that is available to us as business leaders. Finally, when faced with business problems we have never faced before we need to stretch ourselves. Teams need to be ambitious and innovative.

### What sort of businesses are you helping?

A wide range of businesses ranging from rapidly scaling fintech start-ups backed by the London Stock Exchange, to 184-year-old blue-chip insurance companies. We also work with not for profits and many tech companies who have been early adopters of the OKR framework due to OKRs strong ties to Silicon Valley.

### What does the next 12 months look like for AuxinOKR?

Our own OKR for this year was to become 'a well-oiled machine'. We are making great progress on this and hiring new talent will allow us to increase the number of businesses we can help. I guess the focus for next year will be fuelling the well-oiled machine!

For more details visit [www.auxinokr.com](http://www.auxinokr.com)

# HOW TO BE KIND TO YOUR EMPLOYEES DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

Has the world ever been more uncertain? Even before Covid19, work was making our wellbeing worse. According to the CIPD Good Work Survey there are worrying levels of work-related poor health.

About a quarter of workers report that their job has a negative impact on their mental or physical health. One in five say that they always or often feel 'exhausted' at work, a similar proportion say they are under 'excessive pressure' and one in ten say they are 'miserable'.

Work isn't working for so many people; things are broken, people are broken, leaders are overwhelmed. People are scared, anxious, and worried about their futures.

## Looking at a recent CIPD survey...

- **38%** of furloughed workers think it likely they'll lose their job in the next 12 months.
- **39%** think their financial security has worsened since the COVID-19 outbreak – rising to 57% for furloughed workers.
- **44%** are anxious about returning to work, rising to 62% for those with underlying health conditions.
- **53%** with increased caring responsibilities are anxious about returning.
- **31%** of respondents felt anxious about commuting, rising to 52% in London.

Do these statistics surprise you? As a leader in an organisation, maybe you're feeling the same way too? Add worries about your organisation, markets, customers, the political landscape and caring responsibilities too? What can you do to ensure you're being kind to your employees during these difficult times?

## Prioritise your own self-care

Clients are always surprised when we mention this first. When leaders are faced with a crisis they have a tendency to dive in and start helping other people; looking after everyone and completely neglecting themselves by just ploughing on.

We've spoken to many business and HR leaders this year who are struggling with their mental health, they're exhausted. They've spent so much effort and energy making sure that their people are ok and leading them through these uncertain and volatile times, while also juggling caring responsibilities.

You're not infallible. It's not selfish to look after yourself, it's crucial - you can't pour from an empty cup! Take time away from work, spend time doing fun things - spending time in nature, arts and crafts, playing games, ordering a takeaway or watching a movie. Schedule it in. Make it a priority.

If you are feeling like you are struggling to cope, you're not alone. You need to find a professional to speak to.

## Understand what happens to you when under pressure

Self-awareness is so important. When people are under pressure, their behaviour may change. When you're under pressure, do you find yourself becoming more irritable, frustrated with interruptions, become a micromanager, struggle to make decisions or bury yourself in work?

It may be useful to ask people around you how they know when you're under pressure. Get some feedback to see how you can ensure that your behaviour is not making the situation worse for your employees. Bringing your under-pressure-behaviours into consciousness will mitigate the risk of you having an adverse impact on people around you.

## Lose the ego & tell your people the truth!

Let's face it, nobody knows what's going to happen in the future... who planned for a global pandemic? During periods of rapid change and uncertainty, leaders need to be willing to stretch themselves out of their comfort zone, lose the ego and be open-minded enough to rapidly learn and embrace new concepts.

Nobody expects leaders to be able to predict the future and have all the answers, but we look to leaders to give us clues about how to behave. Role-model the behaviour you wish to see in your people.

When you don't know something, you've got to admit that you don't know and are making the best decisions you can with the best available evidence. Don't be afraid to admit you are making things up as you go along - you can't know everything! And don't be afraid to change your decision when you discover more information - be honest, it'll be appreciated.

## Communicate and listen

Feeling a sense of belonging is so important. Do your employees feel that two-way channels of communication are open to them? Do they feel listened to? Have you asked them?

When we are feeling insecure in our work due to instability, people get worried. Our brains crave stability so will literally make things up to have some certainty. This is how you get rumours, which function to make sense of something that's already unclear. Rumours help explain a confusing element of the world. But the impact of rumours can be devastating to organisations. This is why clear communication is so important.

## Give your people an outlet to share how they are feeling

Giving people a safe space to ask questions and share how they feel is crucial in times like this. For some daily check-ins work, for others they are happy to be left alone to get on with their work and a less frequent chat works for them.

Don't assume you know what's best, make sure you ask people what they want and listen to them. Do they want check-in calls on a 1-2-1 or team basis? Give them options.

Everyone reacts differently to change and uncertainty, some get really anxious and stressed while others are surprisingly resilient and seem to almost enjoy it.

When giving people this safe space, it's crucial to know when you've gone from a listening ear to a scenario where someone needs professional help - and how to signpost them.

These proactive suggestions should help you create an environment of trust and a feeling of belonging, which will give employees a sense of being listened to and cared about. After all, this is what we all need right now.

## Work Pirates

A collective of people professionals collaborating to solve people problems in organisations. We want to make work better for everyone. Happiness in work is the goal.

Get in touch to speak about our support programmes to help organisations navigate these choppy seas.





# STAYING POWER...

Longevity in business is something to be admired. In this series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.

This month we chat to...

## Dr DAVID CLIFF

Managing Director of Gedanken Limited

David is a consultant, coach, mentor, counsellor, mental health specialist and frequently referred to as a "thought provocateur". He has spent his life helping people and organisations to grow and prosper.

### Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

My father said he would get me a job in the shipyards with him if I wanted. I didn't really like the idea of that but had few reference structures as to what I wanted to do. For a while I thought science was the way forward as I had a flair for that. My career has included being a legal executive, salesperson, social worker, team leader, counsellor, trainer, health service director, CEO of a charity and other roles. I like to think of this as being "eclectic" and brings many insights into what I do. Running through all of this, was a constant theme of both experiencing life and work for myself and developing others around me.

### What is your favourite aspect of the job?

Without doubt, seeing people effect change, find a way forward that just didn't exist before we spoke, discovering something new about themselves. I love working to find a direction of travel for individuals or organisations, when perhaps there were roadblocks before.

### What has been your career defining moment?

Realising that we define ourselves every day with every thought and there are no career defining moments really. I was however overjoyed being named the Entrepreneurs Forum Mentor of the year and getting my doctorate within the same period.

### How do you measure success?

Entrepreneurs love this type of question, but I fear I'm probably going to disappoint here. For me success is realising the more I know, the more I am aware of how little I know. Every expansion into knowledge and awareness is a humbling one.

### What are the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

Coaching and mentoring have evolved into a far more acceptable and valuable activity for organisations and individuals to have, with an evidence base that shows it works. Sadly, some coaching has also gone into franchise-like arrangements with people able to take on the role with as little as a weekend's training. This often leaves me (and colleagues) picking up the pieces of others disenchanted clients.

### How has your skill set developed accordingly?

You must listen; you have to be someone who walks with the client and the journey. It's about understanding and recognising that people are doing the best they can to express their lives on their own personal journey. Within organisations, systemic awareness, suffused with social and evolutionary psychology insights is a boon. Neuro-linguistic programming is something I have also integrated into practice. Relevant research skills are vital these days.

### Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

Difficult, as these terms are all context sensitive. I guess I've had so many Buddhist influences in my life that the proper response is probably that of trying to effect a "Middle Path". Balance is important in all things for me, both work/life, risk, relational and more.

### What would you attribute to your success?

I'm going to rely on others views rather than my own view here. Someone once approached me to oversee a project recently saying that I had been

described by his colleague as possessing the qualities of tenacity, creativity and ethics. Others say I seem to think differently to a lot of people, and I can analyse and reframe people's experiences or approach with this ability particularly well.

### What are your biggest weaknesses and how do you manage these?

My very dear cat companion, Lola, who you don't manage as much as recognise the slave status Homo Sapiens are viewed in by Felis Catus! Best get that out the way first!

Sometimes I let the intrinsic interest of a project get in the way of payment as the intellectual, emotional and spiritual journey, are for me much more important than the fiscal recompense. The truth is I'm not particularly motivated by money. I've dealt with some of the poorest people in our communities and found them happier than the richest. I have coached and supported extraordinarily unhappy millionaires and seen the sheer raw joy of possibility in somebody with no money in the bank but with a solid embryonic business idea. More are richer than they realise in a nation where half the population cannot raise £500 without extortionate interest and where increasing swathes go to food banks. How do I manage this? I have to retain in constant awareness of who I am by choice and central to that is compassion for others. That extends to animals and the planet and I find myself increasingly involved in charities and other movements to help them plan and become more sustainable. Around 15% of my time goes out pro bono.

Oh, yes Magnum Ice Creams (rationed). I'm not ashamed!

### How do you remain motivated?

Charles Darwin said that "a man who dares to waste one hour of time has not discovered the value of life". I'm generous with my time but I realise it is the most precious commodity. It needs to be used meaningfully and consciously, not passively or in behaviours that are distraction. I also believe in people's natural tendency to grow when the environment is right for them and always strive to create this. In any professional consultation, I always ensure that the person leaving me leaves with something of personal or organisational value from the encounter, without exception.

### Would you like to be liked or respected?

My first response is I'm truly not bothered. Without any disrespect, I gave up being concerned what other people thought of me long ago, it shackles thinking and dampens the imagination. I'm always frank, politely direct and respectfully honest in my dealings with people. Ethics also really matter to me. So, I guess if I did have to choose it would be to be respected. NLP theorist Robert Dilts' talks about there being two types of people, amiable and credible. I would prefer the latter. Popularity is one thing, but one has to do what one has to do in both business and professional life.

### I'll retire when:

When I rest, I rust. If life is a journey, how can you retire from that in any total sense? Retirement for me, is nothing but a transition into doing other things that are meaningful. I have been doing that all my life, so the term "retire" is unhelpful in this context. The Spanish term for retirement is 'Jubilación' literally a transition into doing things that are more joyous, a celebration. I think I can buy into that far more. Yes, I will work on, selectively and my jubilation is there with me anyway. That won't change any time soon!





Dr David Cliff





Karen Winterhalter



# ONYX HEALTH'S 10 YEAR STORY – A NORTH EAST AGENCY WITH AN INTERNATIONAL REACH

By Karen Winterhalter, Onyx Health Managing Director

**I started my PR career in London back in the 90s, it was the era of the big blockbuster drugs, when PR was all about media relations, and coverage was measured in column inches and press cuttings.**

I was lucky enough to work for some of the biggest names in the business as European Director at Webber Shandwick, and Managing Director for Burson Marsteller's healthcare division. I developed a passion for healthcare and pharmaceutical PR, delivering coverage to drive sales.

I grew tired of the bright lights of London and decided to move back to my native North East to set up my own agency, Onyx Health in 2010. I was driven by a desire to help up-and-coming SME's in the healthcare, medtech, and life science sectors to break into the market.

Over the past 10 years, we have grown into a thriving healthcare marketing communications agency with North East roots and an international reach

Our agency has a fantastic office culture that I am very proud of. We place a big emphasis on physical and mental wellbeing at Onyx Health. Our staff have access to private healthcare, regular lunchtime runs and boot camp sessions, as well as gym memberships. We also have regular wellbeing sessions and a positive attitude towards mental health, creating a caring culture where people can share their problems.

Diversity and culture also plays a huge role at Onyx Health, making it a great place to find talent. We're not just another generic PR agency, we're powered by our specialist knowledge of the healthcare sector to create success. We have a dynamic team made up of digital specialists, PhD scientists, communications professionals with global experience and creative designers. We are also a genuinely international office in terms of our client reach and staff, with native French and Spanish speakers in the team.

These strong foundations coupled with our new digital offering have been critical to steering the agency through the COVID-19 crisis. At Onyx Health we have seen the pandemic as an opportunity to do things differently, rethinking the way we communicate to stay at the cutting edge. Digital transformation has been reshaping the healthcare industry in recent years, that coupled with the decline of traditional marketing

tactics has created a new communication landscape. With limited access to healthcare professionals caused by the COVID-19 crisis, this created a communication challenge for our clients

That's why we have launched our Interactive Learning Environment in response to the crisis. The ILE is a unique immersive digital experience using the latest VR and AR techniques for enhanced engagement and interactivity. It provides a limitless virtual space that companies can continuously adapt and improve. It is accessible worldwide at any time, allowing client to reach a global audience.

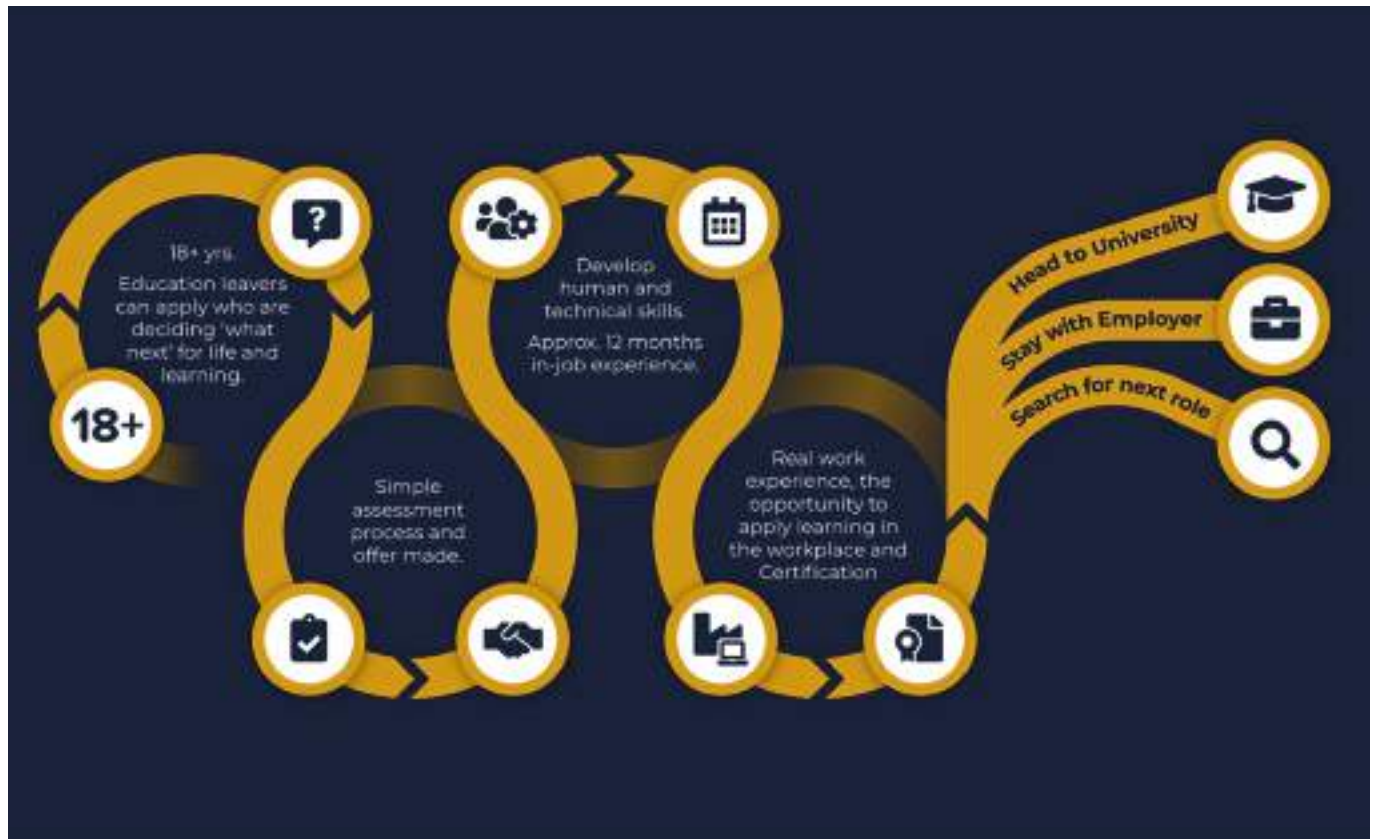
ILE has all the features of traditional offline engagement without the limitations, including product demonstration, virtual exhibition stands and much more. It will enable our clients to continue to communicate with healthcare professionals during and after the current crisis and get ahead of the game. This has already reaped rewards for the agency and will be a key driver in our future business growth. Our growth plans also involve working with the right people who can bring something unique to the agency.

One of the golden rules of PR is to know the value of relationships, it's about having a personal rapport with your clients and making sure you leave the door open for future opportunities. Onyx Health have recently set up a strategic partnership with Jeff Winton Associates based in the United States.

Jeff is someone I've known for many years, as a former client of Ketchum in the 90's when he worked for the pharmaceutical giant Pfizer. Jeff is well renowned in the corporate communications world with a wealth of experience in the global pharmaceutical and healthcare market. I am delighted to be working with him again after all these years. This new partnership will enable us to share clients, pool our expertise and extend our international reach.

Onyx Health has come a long way in the past 10 years, we have grown, flourished and continued to thrive despite a challenging economic climate. Our healthcare expertise and decision to diversify into digital has helped us power through the coronavirus crisis, winning new clients and expanding our agency. We have got ambitious plans for the year ahead, so watch this space.

# CREATING OPPORTUNITY FOR GENERATION 2020



The COVID-19 health pandemic and ensuing economic pandemic has disproportionately affected the Generation 2020.

This cohort of young people are faced with a shortage of opportunity as they enter the world of work. Following the government's post COVID-19 announcement about apprenticeships and placements, employers have an opportunity now to reach out and upskill young people in line with the skills they need. Taking the initiative now will pay dividends to your brand in the long run.

Recently the Prime Minister unveiled a plan for economic recovery. It included a new 'opportunity guarantee' that will ensure every young person has the chance of an apprenticeship or a placement to "maintain the skills and confidence they need to find the job that is right for them." While this is promising, it's a government intervention that can't be delivered by the government alone. The public and private sectors will need to work together to create opportunities for young people leaving education and to avoid creating a forgotten Generation 2020.

## Aligning development to in-demand skills

We know from our work at The Opportunity Group that organisations typically want the same people with the same in-demand skill sets, leaving others underemployed or unemployed. COVID-19 has exposed and exacerbated skills gaps but that doesn't mean there is a lack of talent. Just that

certain skills sets are in demand and that the 'skills gap' exists between those who were looking for jobs and the jobs that needed to be filled. In this Post pandemic world, the average number of applications per job is 250 with 5% of those applicants having the right skills and experience needed for the role (Glassdoor).

Some argue this is an education issue, which it certainly is in part, but the most in-demand skills like resilience, agile thought, creativity are not taught in Schools or Universities nor highly valued in our current education system. Post-pandemic, I hear again and again from employers that they're looking for human skills rather than educational capability through grades. There is an opportunity now for businesses to organise programmes that are aligned to in-demand skills.

I believe that businesses can better prepare for the future by taking more responsibility for growing talent with the skills and capabilities that they need to fill their talent gaps. In the post-pandemic world, it's not realistic to expect to receive young employees 'ready-made' straight from education. The vast diversity of skills in demand, newly emerging skills and soft skills are best developed in the workplace. Taking initiative to widen the opportunity landscape for Generation 2020 will pay dividends and now is the time to take the initiative.

## Building brand equity

Both future hires and customers will remember how organisations acted during the COVID-19 crisis. Some brands, like Aldi, will be remembered for their positive step to make immediate payments to suppliers. Others will pay the price of doing the opposite. 92% of employees said they would consider leaving their current job if offered a role at a company with an excellent corporate reputation (corporate responsibility magazine). Young talent is so in tune with organisations' values and legacy that a failure to act compassionately and ethically now will result in a vastly reduced talent pool in the future. Building employer brand equity by reaching out to young talent will create a lasting impact with potential hires and customers long beyond COVID-19.

By focussing on growth and longer term planning, companies can build their future talent pools and capability in a cost effective and low risk way now by accepting a small number of young people on a year long programme during which they can learn a valuable skill and work on projects.

Alok Sharma, the business secretary stated that "the cost of inaction now could potentially be more than the cost of action today."

To find out more about how investing in young people now can support Generation 2020 and improve your organisation's competitiveness, take a look at what we do at The Opportunity Group: [www.theopportunity.global/about-us](http://www.theopportunity.global/about-us)



# Business Support & Funding

If your business is based in County Durham, we are the first point of contact for information and support to help your business thrive and grow.

## We can help you with:

- + Starting or growing your business
- + Finding commercial office and industrial premises
- + Accessing funding and finance
- + Apprenticeships, skills and training
- + Networking opportunities
- + Relocation support
- + Finding new markets

## Contact us today

T +44 (0) 3000 261 261  
E [enquiries@businessdurham.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@businessdurham.co.uk)  
W [businessdurham.co.uk](http://businessdurham.co.uk)



Photo: Sarah Slaven,  
Managing Director, Business Durham

Business Durham is the economic  
development arm of Durham County Council.



# MANAGING THE MINEFIELD THAT IS REDUNDANCY



Jayne Hart

At the time of writing, 29% of UK businesses to cut jobs in next three months, according to a British Chambers of Commerce survey. Clearly, redundancies are on the rise and as the furlough scheme phases out, those numbers are likely to increase.

**For a business owner who clearly never went into business to make redundancies, the process is beset with issues not experienced before and emotions that can be overwhelming.**

I cannot emphasise enough that from the outset there is a proper process that must always be followed and documented (check out the ACAS website for free advice). Make technical errors in this process and you could be hit with unfair dismissal claims. These can be expensive with up to 52 weeks' gross pay being awarded. A lack of knowledge will not be a defence.

## Pitfalls to avoid

Key pitfalls to be wary of include not having the correct selection pools (pooling defines the roles to be made redundant and the people in those roles), selecting a person rather than a role (so even if you are desperate to remove Fred from your business resist the urge), not consulting early enough and meaningfully (remember, consulting is a two way conversation, not simply telling the employee what will happen), not adhering to consultation timescales and finally, selection criteria which discriminates against anyone with a protected characteristic (for example a disability or pregnancy).

## To zoom or not to zoom?

What is different right now is how you deliver the news and the speed that businesses are moving. Many companies have been turning to video calls.

There is no legal barrier to doing this, but you need to be mindful of how you use platforms like Zoom. One story told on BBC News featured an employee who was made redundant in a group call with 15 other people which she found nor surprisingly difficult to deal with. She felt it led to her failing to ask important questions. A high-risk strategy as employees have a right to individual consultation.

## The human touch

Assuming you are using the technology legally and following the correct processes, then we come on to the human touch. For example, we would advise never to do this on a Friday. The person hearing the news tends to not take all the details in and will later have many questions. How will they pay the mortgage? Etc. If it's done on a Friday, there is usually no one available for two days to answer these questions.

Before making the call think about the person. Do they live alone? Are they shielding? What support can you give them?

You probably already know that video calls can be awkward, so factor this into your approach. There are fewer cues available to pick up on body language than in a face-to-face meeting. Yet it is harder for people (I mean you not just the employee!) to hide if they are upset than during a telephone call. There is also greater potential for embarrassing interruptions, or poorly timed screen freezing or lags.

If you have followed the correct processes it will not be a total surprise when you formally tell them they are being made redundant. Consultation calls exploring the options will have already taken place and this will have given them some chance to process the situation. This should help, but still take care to deliver the news sensitively. Providing outplacement support even if it is just helping to write their CV will make a world of difference to them and make the process less stressful for you.

Redundancy is never going to be the best of experiences but hopefully following the above may make the experience a little better for all concerned.



# CHARITY CALLS FOR 'FRIENDS OF WAG'

North East charities have been going through a torrid time during the coronavirus outbreak.

We spoke to Diane Morton, chair and founder of Wag & Company, a regional charity that is adjusting its business model to secure a future and continue to grow.

## Can you explain why you set up Wag and Co?

We knew that the main visiting dog charities were not able to visit people in their own homes. This meant that if you were a dog lover, elderly, with health issues, maybe bereaved and isolated and could no longer have a dog of your own any more, the only way you could have a visit would be in a care or medical establishment of some kind.

While we understood the safeguarding difficulties of visiting people alone in their own homes, they didn't feel insurmountable and knowing what a difference a friend with a furry friend for a chat and a cuddle can make in just a couple of hours a week, it felt like a problem worth solving.

## How was the charity developing before the pandemic?

By the end of this March we had 393 volunteers, we had made over 74,000 friend visits and nearly 3,000 North East people were benefitting. We had 107 1:1 home placements and we were actively visiting 237 care and medical placements with 89 more on our waiting lists.

With 50 applicants in the pipeline we were on target to hit our March 21 target of 500 volunteers making a big dent in our continuously growing waiting lists.

This was set to be our best fundraising year with more Wag runners than ever before in the Great North Run, walkers in the Great North Dog Walk and we were set to celebrate our 5th Walk for Wag at the Kielder Waterside, our main fundraising event.

## How has COVID-19 impacted on the charity?

Our visiting activities were temporarily suspended in March. Our recruitment activities have slowed down, dog assessments aren't possible, our



L-R: Volunteer Sean Malone with his friendship dog Alfie and Diane Morton chair and founder of Wag and Company.

fundraising income has pretty much dried up. Our annual Walk for Wag at Kielder on September 19 has just been cancelled.

Everyone has risen to the challenge of virtual befriending rather than physical befriending and we are inspired by the efforts of all our volunteers to keep in touch with their friends. Some are doing shopping, dogs are FaceTiming, regularly phoning, sending cards, books, photos, cakes; trying to make sure that everyone knows we're thinking about them and we'll be back with them just as soon as we can.

## What new projects and changes have you made to protect the charity?

We never charge for our services for fear of the most in need missing out, so we rely totally on the generosity of people. To help encourage support, we've launched some new digitally enabled ways to do it.

These include a regular giving scheme, Friends of Wag, where individuals, community care or nursing homes and corporates can all contribute. Also, we've launched 'Walk for Wag Anywhere' instead of our physical walk at Kielder, asking supporters

to create their own socially distanced walks on September 19. We'll all walk for Wag separately but together in spirit, to end loneliness.

We are developing a new online Giving in Memory Tribute 'Remembering with Love' which we'll launch in August and an E:shop for September.

## Going forwards, what sort of support do you need?

We really need our new digitally enabled income generation schemes to succeed. We're trying to make it really easy for everyone who loves what we do to chip in to help us do it safely and sustainably, from as little as £5 a month. Then we need many more volunteers.

## Where do you see the charity in 12 months-time?

Back on track. Visiting again and supporting our elderly friends who have been so badly affected by the isolation required by Covid-19 restrictions. Recovering from the loss of some of our friends during our absence, growing again, and meeting the need. We want 500 visiting Wag teams, half-way to our 2030 target of 1000 to go some way to ending loneliness for older dog lovers in our region.

For more details: [www.wagandcompany.co.uk](http://www.wagandcompany.co.uk)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## ALEX WILLIAMS AND KIERAN PORTER

Standby Group is a multi disciplined employee focussed recruitment business that specialises in permanent and temporary recruitment solutions across Health and Social Care.

Michael Grahamslaw spoke to co founders Alex Williams and Kieran Porter to look at the story so far.

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

**Alex:** I was born into an entrepreneurial background and despite a childhood dream of wanting to be a Formula One racing driver, my main aspiration was always to form my own company and work for myself.

**Kieran:** Throughout school life I wanted to be a PE Teacher but after university, I took a job on a whim for a credit service business. This was a hard core sales job with huge call volumes which gave me great grounding for the world of recruitment.

### How did you come to form Standby Group?

**Alex:** I had seen a gap in the market for a specialist healthcare recruitment brand and decided to take the opportunity to try and create something great. Kieran's partner is from the North East and this is how our paths first crossed after he settled in the region. We initially launched Standby Healthcare to specialise in the supply of Care Assistants, Support Workers and Registered Nurses and aid clients with temporary 24/7 cover.

We wanted to form new divisions within this umbrella, so Kieran built a function for a permanent recruitment solution which has become Watson Black and sits as a separate brand within the Group.

### What services do you offer?

**Kieran:** With our local and national in depth market sector knowledge, combined with our outstanding team of highly experienced consultants, we aim to make the process of finding your next Carer and Staff Nurse to CEO very simple. We offer a bespoke talent sourcing service which ensures high calibre professionals who will add to your business. Everything we do is conducted with total honesty and transparency.

### How have you adapted to coronavirus?

**Alex:** All of our team made a good transition to working from home although our office is now fully operational

again. We have made significant investment in the business with the intention on coming out of the other side of the pandemic stronger and better equipped for the years ahead.

### Tell us about your team?

**Kieran:** We have a 10 strong team of healthcare recruiters, compliance & admin but are always looking to speak to experienced consultants with the aim to further grow our team.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

**Alex:** Office working vs home working. Luckily We were equipped to deal with the transition from the off and admittedly I was set in my ways with the mindset our team work from the office. The trust in our team was repaid tenfold through C-19 and has changed my operational outlook.

**Kieran:** Dealing with an ever changing marketplace which can be difficult. Social care and recruitment change so fast so being the first to adapt is imperative.

### Where do you see the business in five years time?

**Alex:** Turnover of £15-20 million, launch of two more brands and a multi office network covering Sunderland, Washington, Durham, Darlington and Northumberland.

### What is the best business advice you have been given?

**Alex:** Grow organically and when the time is right.

**Kieran:** Using a rugby analogy, When gaps appear, take the opportunity to move forward rather than continuing sideways.

### How do you like to unwind?

**Alex:** Friday night beers and odd round of golf.

**Kieran:** Golf, rugby and family time with my daughter, Iris and fiancé, Alice.

For further information visit the website [www.watsonblack.co.uk](http://www.watsonblack.co.uk) or [www.standbyhealthcare.com](http://www.standbyhealthcare.com)





Alex Williams and Kieran Porter



L-R: Mark Clancey with Mark Catterall.





Mark Catterall and Mark Clancey with their latest digital screen at the Tyne Bridge, Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Installed and powered by cutting edge intelligent software, that will see over 56,000 vehicles (and growing) drive past the location daily.

**"It's never been more important to fast track your brand, product or service to the market and this is where the Smart Media Group can help businesses right now."**

*MD Mark Catterall*

With recent account wins including JD, American Golf and the Great Run company, the Smart Media Group are leading the way in helping businesses fast track leads to their business and strengthening their brand.

Managing Director Mark Catterall said; "in this climate businesses have to be especially savvy & use their budgets wisely as results are critical. We urge our clients not to spend more but to spend smarter. Through our innovative planning software & industry knowledge we ensure every campaign is perfect in connecting with the consumer at the right time, in the right place with the right message".

The Smart Media Group have diversified the business after a record year, with their specialist areas of expertise split across four sub brands, Smart Outdoor, Smart Media, Smart Vision and Smart Events. Responding to the challenging market, MD Mark Catterall and Director Mark Clancey have also developed a unique, contactless sanitising unit with a digital advertising screen to directly reach customers with a message that can be changed in real time.

**Smart Outdoor:** The leading provider of large format digital out of home advertising screens in the North-East of England with 44% market share in the region.

**Smart Media:** Specialists in hyper local planning for the perfect mixed media model, all based on local, regional, national and international catchments.

**Smart Vision:** The screen sales arm of the business and as market leaders, Smart Vision buy, ship and install large LED screens for venues which include Sticky Wicket, Wonderbar and Boulevard in the North-East.

**Smart Events:** A highly visible LED solution to support events. Hardwick Live, Screen on the Green with NE1 and football fan zones at Time Square have all successfully benefitted from the LED screens.

Former Scottish Business Woman of the Year, Gillian Godsell, who has recently joined the team said; "We're keen for businesses to realise that we can offer real results and fast. I'm delighted to be joining such a successful and experienced team. They are growing rapidly because of the results the clients are experiencing".

### COVID19 SMART SANITISER LCD UNITS WITH INTELLIGENT DIGITAL SCREENS

Not content to sit on their laurels during lockdown and keen to break into world markets, directors Mark Catterall and Mark Clancey have worked closely with manufacturers in the Far East developing a Smart Sanitiser [www.smartoutdoor.co.uk/smartsanitiser](http://www.smartoutdoor.co.uk/smartsanitiser). A contactless sanitiser unit with an intelligent digital screen, built in, to help businesses reopen safely, but maximise that customer facing opportunity with a bespoke brand message that can be updated in real time. Director Mark Clancey said; "There's no doubt that sanitisers are here to stay for some time and we felt this was a unique opportunity to reach customers".

[smartsanitiser.co.uk](http://smartsanitiser.co.uk)



## SMART OUTDOOR APPOINTS NEW BUSINESS DIRECTOR & HEAD OF FINANCE

Founded in 2019 by Mark Catterall, the leading North East and Scottish DOOH (digital out of home) specialist, estate owner & media buyer, Smart Outdoor announce four new members of their team.

Joining Smart Outdoor will be:

**Former Scottish Business Woman of the Year, Director Gillian Godsell, who will continue to grow Smart Outdoor's presence in Scotland and the North East building on the company's extensive media buying expertise.**

Finance Manager Nina Evans who brings an unparalleled understanding of the OOH market and will work strategically to enhance profitability and ensure internal financial and operational efficiency.

Highly experienced Finance and Sales Coordinator Gemma Hoy will support sales as the company increases their footprint in the UK.

Account Director Sean Leyland joins the team at Smart Outdoor to develop media sales. Formerly working at Metro Radio, Smooth Radio and Clear Channel, Sean brings 15 years of media sales experience and knowledge of the North East media landscape.

Commercial Director Mark Clancey said "we are one of the few companies expanding in the current climate and are delighted to welcome all four new team members to Smart Outdoor. It coincides with the launch of our latest digital site located on the iconic Tyne Bridge. With over 56,000 cars passing through the city every day, this is a fast "eyes on" for companies to strengthen brand and promote their business or product. Watch this space".

[www.smartoutdoor.co.uk](http://www.smartoutdoor.co.uk)





Gary Forrest

## WORK RESUMES ON NEWCASTLE'S NEWEST ICON

Northern Insight caught up with Gary Forrest, chairman of High Street Group, the Tyneside business leading the development of Newcastle's tallest tower, to find out what the future has in store for this landmark project.

**Towering above the beating heart of Newcastle is Hadrian's Tower, a new city icon. A beacon of the ambition of the North East, and of the man behind High Street Group, the company responsible for the multi-million-pound scheme.**

Gary Forrest is a proud North Easterner. It is clear that, despite already expanding his business into Manchester and Birmingham among other places, Newcastle is a place where Gary is keen to make a mark. And Hadrian's Tower will do just that.

One of the North East's most eagerly anticipated developments in decades, Hadrian's Tower looms over St James' Park, in the heart of Newcastle city centre, and is set to become the most sought-after residential address in the region, once work on the 27-storey development concludes in the Autumn.

The vision of High Street Group - an award-winning family of companies specialising in private rental schemes, property construction, and hospitality - company chairman, Gary Forrest, believes the £40m development will herald a new dawn for his beloved hometown.

"Since its formation in 2006, The High Street Group has worked on numerous high-profile property developments across the UK, but this is by far our proudest achievement," Gary tells Northern Insight.

"It's a really symbolic development - its size, scale and quality all serve to demonstrate the ambition we have for the city, and we are proud that Hadrian's Tower will raise the bar in Newcastle, providing a standard of living that we consider to be unique."

Gary adds: "When the lockdown was imposed and

construction sites the length and breadth of the UK were brought to a halt, many people were left wondering what would happen to the majority of the region's unfinished developments, including Hadrian's Tower.

"However, thanks to the resilience of the UK's construction sector, the industry was soon able to adapt to the 'new normal', embracing social distancing measures to keep Britain building in as responsible and safe a manner as possible. So, the Tower has continued to progress, keeping us on course to open later this year."

Standing taller than the Angel of the North, Newcastle's largest tower is breathtaking in scale, boasting panoramic views of one of the country's most magnificent skylines while providing residents with all of the added benefits of staying in a 7-star hotel.

Work started on the construction of Hadrian's Tower back in 2018 with the appointment of Tolent to lead the ambitious regeneration project, which was previously a brownfield site left vacant for over a decade. When work is complete in the Autumn, it is set to redefine luxurious living.

Dubbed a 'Hometel' by its developers, Hadrian's Tower will comprise 161 open-plan apartments, consisting of one, two and three bed apartments and four penthouses, as well as 3Sixty, a rooftop Laurent Perrier champagne bar and restaurant, the first of its kind in the North East.

Forrest explains: "Newcastle is a world-class city in almost every aspect, therefore it's only fitting that it

has a world-class address such as Hadrian's Tower as it looks to strengthen its position as one of the best cities in the world to live, work and play."

A landmark of true architectural innovation, the thorough attention to detail - for which The High Street Group has become known - has led to the most cutting-edge smart technology being woven into the fabric of the building since work on the development began."

Many luxury developments claim to deliver excellence. Hadrian's Tower has set its sights on defining it. Boasting the fastest residential broadband and wi-fi speeds in the city, each homeowner will have access to an array of facilities to make their day-to-day life that little bit easier, meaning they can focus on their work and wellbeing, while the technology takes care of mundane everyday chores.

"The ultra-fast full fibre optic cabling installed in the building will be 25 times faster than the UK average and the fastest residential broadband in the city, making working from home as seamless as working from the office," Gary says.

"Our own mobile app will also allow residents to remotely manage their heating, order room service from the 3Sixty lounge, arrange cleaning and even have their pets looked after while they're out of town.

"Newcastle is a city steeped in heritage with an established economy, world-class culture and vibrant night-life - and we hope Hadrian's Tower will further bolster the city's already magnificent offering as we look to continue building on the city's success."

**To find out more about Hadrian's Tower or to sign up to receive viewing information, simply visit: [hadriantower.com](https://www.hadriantower.com)**

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Robert Gibson



# THE R WORD

Whether the R stands for Recession, Recovery, Redundancy or Restructure, one thing that is almost guaranteed, is that the majority of businesses in the North East will feel pain from one, if not all four at some point...and, if not already.

Who could've planned for the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic? Most businesses plan for an IT failure, a flood or at the most extreme end of business continuity scenario's, a terrorist attack. Planning scenarios for a virus until this year didn't feature at all; it will now.

Whilst the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (furlough scheme) continues to support businesses nationally, and the relaxation of lockdown for some sectors will see some stimulation to income revenue, what is clear to most businesses (and to many who are furloughed too, no doubt) is that there are grey skies forming over the economy in the Autumn and inevitably a high percentage of those employees furloughed will not have jobs to return to.

Whilst the majority of our enquiries received at Samuel Phillips Law since mid-March have fallen into four clear categories;

- Divorce and child arrangements
- Wills, Lasting Powers of Attorney and Probate
- Commercial Litigation and Business Law
- Employment matters

It is the latter category which we anticipate large numbers of business owners needing the help of a lawyer, come late summer.

So...the R Word.

Since the introduction of the furlough scheme, many employers have simply placed staff onto the scheme as soon as it was clear that they could not sustain the resource as it was. A huge thank you to Rishi Sunak, because if he had not created such a scheme at that time, panic would have set in and thousands upon thousands would've simply become redundant overnight and cue the sound of a stampede of employees off to ACAS with a potential Employment Tribunal claim for wrongful dismissal and who knows what else. You get the picture, but in panic mode, most good practice, procedures and policies often get overlooked. Let's not forget how daunting and fear-inducing lockdown was in March, and how that impacted business owners who simply could not trade, or set up remote working, even partially... mistakes will have been made.

What is positive however, is that the furlough scheme remains in place, although it will change month on month until it expires at the end of October. This has given vital support to employees and employers alike, but now is the time for employers to plan for the Autumn and consider their options when it comes to their workforce, contracts and places of work.

## What should Employers consider?

**Contracts of Employment** – when were your contracts last reviewed? If you are changing places of work, working hours, working patterns or looking for staff to take a cut in wages during the crisis and beyond, you must get your contracts updated. Be mindful to ensure that you avoid ambiguous terms and covenants that could

be abused, or worse still, challenged by an Employment Tribunal.

**Changing places of work** - are you setting up staff for longer-term home-working? Do you have robust policies to support home-working? How are you going to monitor your staff? Do you have the IT in place to ensure total data and IT security? You may need to review and update your Staff Handbooks – sooner, rather than later; no one wishes a GDPR breach upon themselves!

**Restructure** – can you sustain your business once the furlough scheme ends under your current business model and workforce? Can you diversify your value proposition? Utilise support from your accountant to review your forecasts, cash flow, budget and overhead. Talk to your bank; have you taken advantage of the loan schemes introduced by the Government? Have you spoken to the Business department at your Local Authority to understand whether you qualify for any financial support for rates or business recovery grants? What about contacting local Business Support Agencies to explore other funded support; there is still funding available.

And, last but not least...

**Redundancy.** A tough, and often the most difficult decision to make. Employees are more than just colleagues in many businesses and we become rather attached to our workforce over time. However, as with all decisions that our business community are faced with right now, it has to be about business survival and if making a reduction to the workforce will help with survival, then that must be considered. Whilst you may feel you don't have options, you actually do and getting support from an expert might just give you the comfort and help you need.

At Samuel Phillips Law, our Senior Partner Robert Gibson, has produced a number of bite sized videos about the topic of Redundancy. Each video focusses on each element of Redundancy, including selection criteria, different types of redundancy, settlement agreements and such like. He also provides alternatives to making redundancies with some thought provoking suggestions and ideas.

As a very experienced employment lawyer and advocate, having represented high numbers of clients at Employment Tribunals, Robert explains the pro's and con's to all scenarios. His legal vlogs and blogs since lockdown began have gone viral on LinkedIn and he receives excellent feedback from the business community about his common sense approach and easy to understand advice. To view Robert's videos, or read his latest blogs on all employment matters, please go to [www.samuelphillips.co.uk/blog](http://www.samuelphillips.co.uk/blog)

If you are considering making changes to your business and you need some initial advice before doing so, please contact 0191 2328451 and the team will be delighted to arrange a confidential, no obligation telephone consultation. At times such as these, despite how daunting, there is support available, and just talking about it to someone who understands can make a huge difference.

# WHAT WILL BREXIT MEAN FOR YOUR TRADE MARKS?

The deadline for requesting an extension to the transition period under the EU Withdrawal Agreement has now passed and therefore 31 December 2020 now looks more likely than ever to be the end to the transition period of the UK leaving the EU.

In terms of intellectual property, this will mean:- Owners of existing EU Trade Mark ("TM") registrations and Community Design registrations will be issued automatically and without charge by the UK Government, comparable UK registrations, mirroring the same details and dates, prior to the final Exit Date of 31 December 2020;

Owners of existing EU Trade Mark applications and Community Design applications at 31 December 2020 will have a nine month period until 30 September 2021 to request comparable UK applications mirroring the same details as their EU applications but will have to pay official fees for the applications; and:

Comparable UK registrations due for renewal in the six month window after the Exit Date will still need to be renewed in the UK, even if the EU renewal was undertaken in advance of 31 December 2020 (in the six month period in advance of the final renewal date).

## Do trade mark or design owners have to take any action now?

If you are intending on launching a new product in the second half of this year or 2021, it is useful to bear in mind that an EU trade mark application is unlikely, if filed now, to achieve registration prior to 31 December 2020. This is due to the fact that it can



take six to nine months to achieve registration and the backlog of applications at the EUIPO, due to the coronavirus crisis, may slow down the registration process in the latter half of this year. As such, if an entity currently only files an EU application, they must understand that going forward, there is a risk it will have to additionally take the step of requesting a UK comparable application to be issued and pay the fees. If a UK comparable application has to be requested this will delay registration in the UK, which

would not occur if a national UK application was sought at the outset. If the UK market is important, it would be wise to seek a national UK trade mark application.

EU Design registration is a much faster process, being a deposit system, and therefore is less of an issue. An EU design application filed in early November 2020 could be registered by 31 December 2020. Separate UK and EU registrations will be required after the transition period for both trade marks and designs.

## What about .eu domain names?

If you have registered a .eu domain name, check you/ your business can still hold it after the final Exit Date i.e. the end of the transition period – as it needs to be held by an EU individual or entity with an address in an EU member state. A two month period to alter details will be allowed.

## What about custom watches?

If counterfeits are an issue for your business, separate customs watches will be required for the EU and UK after the end of the transition period.

With offices in six European countries and direct representation rights in 15 countries, Murgitroyd is well placed to support your business during these uncertain times.

For more information, please contact Eleanor Coates: [Eleanor.coates@murgitroyd.com](mailto:Eleanor.coates@murgitroyd.com) or visit [murgitroyd.com/brexit](https://murgitroyd.com/brexit)

# IS NOW THE TIME TO CHANGE YOUR LIFE?

We've been through so much change over the last few months.

Sometimes it feels like we're living on the set of a Hollywood blockbuster, so it's no wonder many have been examining their lives to see whether it's going the way they want.

But, there's one thing for certain, a global pandemic and the tragic loss of life really makes us realise what's important.

Maybe that's realising being a slave to your job isn't something you want to do till you drop. But, that brings about the question of what you want to do instead, and for many, this is where the difficulty lies.

When you've spent so many years working long hours and being too exhausted to do much else, it's hard to imagine your life any other way. And, that's before you consider the money side.

## So, what's the answer?

Well, it lies in looking at what pensions, savings and investments

you have and working out if you have enough to fund the lifestyle you want.

Plus, when you consider that today's retirees don't waste away their golden years sitting at home, they get out doing all those hobbies they've always wanted to.

In fact, today's retirees are very much living life to the full.

## So, how do you know how much you'll need?

This is a matter of planning. After all, you can't see how much you need without first looking at what you want your money to do for you.

## That's where we come in.

So, if you've been thinking that now's the time to get the retirement future you want, let us help you work out how to get it – you might be surprised at the result.

All initial consultations are no obligation, so there's no harm seeing if we can help.



Luke Watkinson, Financial Planner

Visit [joslinrhodes.co.uk](https://joslinrhodes.co.uk) or give us a call on 0191 249 4257 and we'll chat about how we can help you.

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# KEEPING ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF REDUNDANCY RULES

With more and more redundancies being announced by businesses around the North East and across the UK, Sarah Hall, partner in the employment team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, offers advice on risk areas when managing what can be a complex and emotional process.

Over the last few weeks, it's seemed like every second news story has been about the latest well-known business to announce dozens, hundreds or even thousands of pandemic-related redundancies.

Research carried out in April by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development found that one in every four UK employers were expecting to make permanent redundancies because of the coronavirus crisis – and we're now seeing these expectations turning into reality on a daily basis.

It's reasonable to expect that the number of proposed redundancies will unfortunately continue to increase for the foreseeable future, especially as businesses look towards the end of the furlough scheme in October and start to plan what resources they are likely to need in the future.

It's essential that any employers in this position plan their approach to potential redundancies very carefully, so that the costs of making them aren't increased by expensive procedural mistakes which result in additional compensation payments.

There are many potential problems that need to be identified and addressed at the earliest possible opportunity, so that the redundancy process can be well thought-out, objective and ultimately successful.

For example, presenting redundancy proposals as final decisions prior to consultation, rather than 'proposals,' or not considering alternatives to compulsory redundancy, including voluntary redundancies, could lead to problems further down the line.

There must be a 30-day consultation period with representatives (and notification to the Secretary of State for BEIS) before any notice of redundancy is given when more than 20 employees may be made redundant, and if 100 or more redundancies are proposed, the minimum consultation period is at least 45 days.

The pool of employees being considered for redundancy should not be drawn up too narrowly, especially if it is done solely by reference to job title without proper consideration of the individuals' duties. Other employees who carry out similar types

of work or who have interchangeable skills should also be considered for inclusion in the pool to ensure fairness.

While employers will of course want to ensure that the process retains the best employees in terms of skills and expertise to meet the future needs of the business, including only unpopular or difficult employees in a redundancy process without justification could lead to issues arising as the process progresses.

The selection criteria used must be objective and verifiable by reference to data, such as appraisals, and two assessors should ideally be used to diminish the risk of subjectivity, with at least one of them having direct knowledge of the relevant employees.

Employers must also ensure that the selection criteria are not discriminatory. Using "last in, first out" as the main criteria for selection, for example, could discriminate against staff by reason of their age.

Not including employees who are on maternity leave in the pool could be prejudicial to those who

are, while selecting them for redundancy because they are on maternity leave would make the dismissal automatically unfair and amount to sex discrimination.

Depending on the circumstances, employers may also need to consider whether an employee whose job is redundant should be redeployed to another existing job, with the employee in that job instead being made redundant.

Notice of any final meeting at which dismissal is to be considered must be given in writing together with any provisional scoring on which selection of redundancy has been based.

Evidence must be available to objectively justify this scoring, while it is essential that employees are able to state their case before any final decision is made and can appeal the resulting decision.

These are just some of the many potential pitfalls that can form part of any redundancy procedure and if you're facing this process, it makes sense to take professional advice on how to manage to minimise the chances of making any costly mistakes.



Sarah Hall

**For further information on the services provided by Hay & Kilner Law Firm's specialist employment team, please contact**

**Sarah Hall on 0191 232 8730 or via [sarah.hall@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:sarah.hall@hay-kilner.co.uk)**

*NB: This article is not legal advice; it is intended to provide information of general interest about current legal issues. Please contact us to discuss how the contents of the article may affect you*



# LAWYER OF THE MONTH

JULIA  
MIDDLETON

## Which area of the law do you work in?

Family law - mainly divorce, finances and private children matters. I also am a collaborative lawyer and mediator.

## Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

As a child I initially wanted to be a hairdresser, and then a fiction writer. I decided I wanted to be a lawyer when I was about 13 years old and watched repeats of LA Law and was attracted to making witnesses cry in cross examination and the power suits the women wore!

## What has been your career path so far?

I trained with a sole practitioner in my native South Shields, worked as a newly qualified family solicitor briefly in Manchester and Gateshead then worked for 13 ½ years at Ward Hadaway in the family department before joining EMG in 2017. I am Head of the Family Team here at EMG and I became a Director at the firm in April 2020. In this role I feel I can make a real difference and give input to the growth strategy alongside the firm's other Directors.

## What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

There has been a huge level of change in the profession from when I trained to now - it is almost like a different career. Initially I did not



Julia and Spocky Dog, which is the firm's mascot. Bought at auction in aid of St Oswald's Hospice.

have an email address or work mobile phone and so managing client expectations was very different. There was less emphasis on business development as there was a lot of work due to readily available legal aid in family law. Having said that there was little opportunity to develop and enhance other skills such as mediation, arbitration and collaboration.

## Who do you most respect in your industry?

Any person that juggles children, career and having a life!

## Which fictional lawyer would you most like to meet?

Very low brow but probably Harvey Specter from Suits.

## What is your greatest strength?

Ability to listen (I think).

## What is your biggest weakness?

Not finishing a task before starting another.

## What are your remaining career aspirations?

To become an accredited family mediator which I am working towards now.

## How do you see your industry evolving in the next ten years?

I think most divorces, financial matters and private law children cases with no safeguarding issues will be dealt with out of the court arena - through dispute resolution such as mediation or arbitration.

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## SIMON DARBY

Managing Director, SD Legal Services

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always wanted to be a director of a company and always wanted to do something that I enjoyed and was good at.

### Tell us about your current role?

I am the Managing Director of SD Legal Services Ltd providing nationwide process serving and tracing services to over 100 clients including the majority of the law firms in the North East.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

We re-branded in January 2018 with new logo, website, branding etc. We then sponsored the Northern Law Awards and in June that year I saw my logo and company branding up on big screens at the Hilton in front of 400 people. It was a very proud moment.

### How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus pandemic?

We have continued to provide a first class service for our clients throughout the pandemic. Some urgent papers such as Injunctions and Non-Molestation Orders were served where possible via alternative means such as WhatsApp. During the lockdown we have also spent a huge amount of time streamlining our processes, increasing the size of our trace team and marketing. This marketing has already seen us welcome 15 new clients on board during lockdown.

### What are you currently working on?

We are currently working on a lot of exciting projects. We have a few partnerships to announce shortly, we are organising our first drinks event for November which will bring together professionals from a large number of law firms in the area together in one room. We are also making improvements to our website and doing a huge amount of advertising including sending out 100 folders to law firms nationwide.

### Tell us about the team you work with?

As well as having a pool of agents nationwide which serve papers on behalf of our clients, Stacey Nottingham of Bombshell Design is our design and marketing guru and we also have a dedicated trace team. I still manage all the day to day running of the company, business development, serve papers in the North East and meet with clients.



Simon Darby

### What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

A friend of mine once said that you should not wait until business is quiet to do marketing but to carry on marketing even when you are busy. In the last two years, despite generally working between 12-15 hours a day I still do some form of marketing/social media work every day. I would also like to add that since being given this advice, I have never had a quiet day!

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Keeping all the plates spinning is the biggest challenge, overseeing a large caseload and also dealing with business development and making sure we still provide an incredible service whilst increasing our client base.

### Who are your heroes inside and outside of business?

Inside business it is Jamie Waller, Entrepreneur, Author and Philanthropist who has worked his way

up from being an enforcement agent on the road to being an incredibly successful businessman. Outside of business, my three sons have been involved in competitive swimming for 14 years, my eldest at national level so I find the likes of local girl Aimee Willmott (whom my sons trained with) and legends such as Michael Phelps and Adam Peaty as being an inspiration. In fact anyone who works extremely hard and makes a success of themselves whether it be in business or sports inspires me.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I don't tend to have a lot of down time to be honest but I follow a lot of sports, I like cars, BBQs with the family and I love to spend as much time in a villa in Cyprus as I can.

### Favourite Book/CD/DVD?

I don't tend to read but do enjoy watching Netflix and listening to music. I have a hugely eclectic taste in music ranging from rap to country.

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M: 07832 238441

E: [SDLEGALSERVICES@BTINTERNET.COM](mailto:SDLEGALSERVICES@BTINTERNET.COM)

SUITE 67  
58 LOW FRIAR STREET  
NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE  
NE1 5UD

PO Box 67  
GUISBOROUGH  
CLEVELAND  
TS14 7WY

DX :  
60005 GUISBOROUGH



## THE BEGINNING OF THE END

For many of our clients, instructing us to begin divorce proceedings is the end of a process. You may have decided months or even years ago that your marriage was at an end. You have mentally prepared for this and now you just want a Decree Absolute in your hand and your finances sorted out overnight.

Other clients are under enormous pressure from their spouses to just accept this offer now. Otherwise the offer will be withdrawn and you'll end up with nothing. I have only had one case, in thirty years, where one party left court with nothing. The reason for that was that they had access to a large sum of money and had already spent quite a bit of it before my client instructed me. We were able to persuade a judge that my client should now receive the balance.

So why does the divorce process take so long? Well, just talking about a divorce is not the same thing as issuing divorce proceedings. You must have your marriage certificate available, you must provide your solicitor with the reason for the divorce. Some clients are reticent about this, it can take them a while to agree the particulars that will be included in the petition. Others are quietly struggling, for all the alleged haste this is actually a huge emotional step to take. I might not hear back from a client for a few weeks. This is fine, I need to proceed at a pace that is comfortable for my client.

Once the Divorce Petition has been issued we are then in the hands of the court system; It can take some weeks for the court to issue proceedings. When we receive notice we also know that the Respondent will have received the documents. They must then complete their response. But are they working away, do they need to see a solicitor themselves, maybe they need some thinking time.

Until the Respondent sends back their documents to the court I cannot apply for Decree Nisi, unless I pursue the protracted process of Bailiff Service. Unfortunately because all of the courts are so short staffed any application takes weeks.

Decree Nisi is an important stage in the divorce process. A judge must confirm whether or not they will grant this. It takes weeks to obtain a Decree Nisi. In the meantime, whilst the divorce process has been trundling along you will have had the opportunity to try to reach agreement about your matrimonial finances. In some cases this can be done quickly. There may be limited assets, no children and an agreement in principle between you and your spouse.



Jacqueline Emmerson

On the other hand there may be multiple assets. In some cases the matrimonial home is in the name of only one of you. I have had clients tell me that their spouse says they are entitled to nothing from the house because it's not in their name. Or you will get nothing from my pension, it's mine. Funnily enough, this type of thing has been going on for a long time and so somebody decided to pass the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1973. A nifty statute that we divorce lawyers have been referring to ever since.

The court must look at the needs of the parties and of any children of the family. It must take into account the income and earning capacity of the parties, the assets already owned etc. Nowhere in the act does it say that because the house is in Johnny's name it is his to keep. Nowhere does it say that because a pension is in Karen's name only that she can keep it all.

It can take quite some time to come up with the correct valuations for assets. Obtaining the Cash Equivalent Value of a pension can take up to 12 weeks. What about the value of a business?

This should be properly valued not just a guesstimate. This is a time consuming activity.

Debts must also be taken into account. How did they

arise? Frequently I come across a situation where all of the debt is in one party's name. This doesn't really matter whilst you are happily married and doing everything for the family unit but if your marriage is at an end you do not want to be left with debt that was incurred for the benefit of all of you. Was the loan to improve the house, buy your spouse a car etc?

Once a deal has been agreed then, in order to protect you both from any further financial claims, a Consent Order should be drawn up. This sets out the terms of the agreement and must be supported by a financial summary. Not a made up summary, not any old figures. This is an important document that the judge will need to see in order to determine whether or not the agreement is fair. You are signing the document to say that it is the truth, if you lie the agreement can be set aside.

A Consent Order cannot be submitted to the court until after Decree Nisi has been granted. It is usual to wait until after a Consent Order has been sealed by the court before applying for Decree Absolute.

As you can see, there is a great deal to attend to. You need both patience and resilience to see the process through to the end especially if you are facing threats that you'll get nothing!

**If you need help with any of these issues then please don't hesitate to contact me on 0191 284 6989/567 6667 or [je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk)**





Victoria Walton, Partner, Swinburne Maddison LLP

## CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE COMMERCIAL PROPERTY SECTOR – WILL IT BE ENOUGH?

The government has introduced a new code of practice which aims to provide clarity and reassurance to commercial landlords and tenants over outstanding payments and to encourage both parties to work together to protect viable businesses during the pandemic.

The code will apply across the whole of the UK until 24th June 2021 and covers all sectors, including offices, retail and hospitality. These are the key takeaways:-

### Four Principles

The code is based on four central principles:-

- Transparency and collaboration
- A unified approach
- Government support
- Acting reasonably and responsibly

### Not legally binding

Compliance with the code is entirely voluntary at this time and does not change the underlying legal relationship or lease contracts between landlord and tenant. It is simply intended to reinforce and promote good practice between both parties as they each deal with income shocks caused by the pandemic.

### Tenants should pay in full if they can

Tenants are still liable for all covenants and payment obligations under the lease (unless this is renegotiated by agreement with landlords) and tenants who are in a position to pay in full should do so. Those who are unable to pay in full should seek agreement with their landlord to pay what they can and, applying the four principles outlined

above, landlords should support their tenants where reasonably possible.

### Agreeing concessions

Tenants seeking concessions should be clear with their landlords about why this is needed and should also be prepared to make reasonable concessions of their own e.g. offering extended terms in return for rent deferment). Landlords should provide concessions where they reasonably can and landlords seeking to refuse concessions should be clear with their tenants about why they are doing so.

### Practical options

The code provides a number of suggestions for ways in which landlords and tenants might be able to move forward with their negotiations and reach an agreement which is mutually acceptable to both parties. These include: the payment of the rents over shorter payment periods for a set time (e.g. monthly rather than quarterly) including provision for their payment in arrears; allowing for all or part of the rent to be paid as a proportion of turnover of the site, incorporating any period during which the site was closed; and Landlords drawing from rent deposits without requiring deposits be 'topped up' by the tenant before it is realistic and reasonable to do so.

### Service Charges

Service charges should be reduced where lack of use of a property during the lockdown period has lowered the costs incurred by the landlord and this reduction should be passed on to tenants as soon as possible.

Whilst landlords and tenants across the UK will no doubt welcome some guidance as to their respective rights and obligations during this unprecedented time, there is still some doubt over whether this voluntary code goes far enough to have any real impact.

There are certainly some reasons to be hopeful. The code has been widely endorsed by a number of leading organisations within the commercial property sector – including The British Chambers of Commerce, the British Property Federation and RICS – and, given the weight of its industry backing, individuals may think twice about ignoring it.

It is also possible that, for any party who is unwilling to consider any reasonable concessions, the very existence of the code may be enough to weaken their position in any future court proceedings where the conduct of the parties is a consideration, if it is shown that they did not act in accordance with the guidelines.

As with so much at the moment, only time will tell.

**If you require any further advice in respect of the code or assistance in documenting any agreed variations to your lease, please contact Victoria Walton by email at [vew@swinburnemaddison.co.uk](mailto:vew@swinburnemaddison.co.uk) or by telephone on 0191 384 2441.**

## LASTING POWERS OF ATTORNEY FOR YOUR BUSINESS

To protect your interests, and those of your business, you should consider making a business LPA.

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Many will be aware of Lasting Powers of Attorney (LPA's) and the part they play in helping your loved ones to manage your financial affairs and care requirements if you reach a stage where you are not able to do this yourself.

What is less well-known however, is the use of LPA's to protect the interests of business owners and their companies. It is critically important to consider what would happen to your business if you were unable to make decisions.

Have you ever thought about what would happen to your business if you lost mental capacity? Unfortunately, anyone could lose the ability to make decisions independently due to serious illness or an accident.

There is no automatic right to deal with another person's affairs, whether in a personal or business capacity. The disruption to your business could be disastrous if you have not appointed an attorney. Business LPAs can appoint one or more 'Business Guardians' who can oversee the running of the business for a short or extended period.

Can you imagine – no one would be able to sign documents on your behalf, no one could access your bank accounts, no one could authorise staff payments or pay suppliers, the list goes on! It

would be wrong to assume that a family member or a business colleague would have the authority to make decisions on your behalf and this could leave your business exposed to risk.

Shareholders, partners and sole traders are some of the most common business owners who can benefit from appointing an attorney. Although partnerships will be subject to a Partnership Agreement, in order to avoid a potentially difficult situation in circumstances where a partner lacks mental capacity, the partners should all think about putting in place a business lasting power of attorney.

This is something you cannot afford not to do. The implications of not appointing a business attorney could be catastrophic for your business. If you were to lose mental capacity (without having made an LPA), it would be necessary for someone to make an application to the Court of Protection to request that the court appoint them as deputy to make the necessary decisions on your behalf. This process can take several months and is considerably more expensive than making a business LPA.

Business LPAs should be the foundation of a strategic business continuity plan.



Louise Miller

**Our friendly Wills and Probate Team headed by Partner Louise Miller would be delighted to assist. Please contact Louise on 0191 281 6151 or email [lmiller@mincoffs.co.uk](mailto:lmiller@mincoffs.co.uk)**



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## EXPERIENCE SQUARED: A WINNING FORMULA

Bringing together a combination of experience, expertise and exuberance is going to give any business a real edge over its competitors.

That is exactly what Clarke Mairs LLP, a Newcastle based law firm, have recognised in their latest hire - someone for whom experience is a middle name. His first and last names may also sound familiar to many people across the North East - Gordon Brown.

Clarke Mairs, formed in 2007, has grown steadily as a partner-led commercial law firm, building on its original core strengths of commercial property, litigation and insolvency to now offer expertise across the commercial legal spectrum, as well as an expert Private Client Department, headed by Partner Rachel Swinburne.

Gordon was introduced to the firm after they had recruited a former Partner of Gordon's, James Godden, from his previous firm. James joined early last year, with a reputation and expertise in property litigation that was a must-have for the business. At that time Gordon was a Consultant to his previous firm, having stepped down from partnership in 2013, handing over the reins to current partners of a firm Gordon had set up in 1981 and grown into a multi-million pound turnover business when he stood down.

Tim Clarke, Partner at Clarke Mairs said: "You don't achieve what Gordon did without having something special, and we quickly recognised that when we first met him. As a High Street legal practice, with Gordon as Senior Partner, Gordon Brown Law Firm became one of the most recognised and respected brands in the region"

That experience and expertise, along with the contacts Gordon has, made it a mission for Clarke Mairs to bring Gordon on board, re-uniting him with James Godden, as well as with an assistant solicitor who had also joined from his previous firm, Amir Hussain, to continue working with James. It was a real coup therefore when Gordon decided to accept Clarke Mairs' proposal.

Gordon said: "I was flattered to be approached by

Clarke Mairs. Obviously, James had done a great PR role for me. I had known of the firm for some time, but when we had discussions it was their approach to business that really got me - they do things the right way, and focus on their strengths".

"The trust of a client is hard-earned but so rewarding," added Gordon. "I'm privileged to continue to act for many clients over decades, when their business has grown alongside mine. I knew if I were to make a move then it would have to be to an exceptional firm who could justify the faith those clients have in me. I'm happy that I've found that with Clarke Mairs - a commercial firm with a strong cohort of commercial lawyers with excellent skills and attitude complimentary to those I aim to offer. Clarke Mairs offer me a new opportunity which I'm excited about."

Clarke Mairs aim is to continue growth, looking to their local market as the next area for that growth, having historically a far larger client base out of the region. Gordon's recruitment strengthens their existing marketing and networking policy. Gordon accepts that whilst Clarke Mairs may see him as another ambassador for the firm, he doesn't intend to be working any less as a client advisor than he was in his former role.

"I want to leave a legacy here," added Gordon. "I enjoy my work. I hope that those who have sought me out in the past will continue to do so as I carry on offering practical advice borne out of experience. Clarke Mairs will be a good new home for me and those who I represent. As business emerges from the Covid-19 lockdown, it is a good time to enter a new era".

There's no doubting that Gordon Brown is a man on a mission. "Tim and the Clarke Mairs team have a clear plan to drive their business forward and I am excited to have a part to play in that".

We think the local business sector will be hearing a lot more about Clarke Mairs LLP in the years to come.





L-R: Tim Clarke, Gordon Brown, James Godden.

## DEALING WITH A DIFFICULT DIVORCE

You may have heard that a "non-fault" divorce is now possible, although it is not expected to come into force until autumn 2021. It has been a long process in which lawyers have fought hard for a "non-fault" divorce and, unfortunately, we have an even longer wait. As a result of this, couples are still forced to use the other grounds for divorce, which often are as a result of "unreasonable behaviour". This creates tension between couples as the court require the party filing for divorce to state the reasons why they want to end their marriage based on their former partner's behaviour.

However, some clients want to state their former partner's behaviour if it has been the direct cause of the breakdown of the marriage. Unfortunately, many relationships suffer from controlling and abusive behaviour over many years which often makes it difficult to break away from the devastating cycle. Often, couples who have endured controlling relationships experience the most difficult divorces as the control is lost when one leaves the relationship. Frequently, couples try and resolve issues involving the family home, their children, and other assets between themselves, but it can often lead to more conflict and animosity which could affect how the case may unfold when one partner can no longer restrict the other.

At Sweeney miller, we have helped many clients who experience conflict upon separating from their partner and we recognise the difficult situations very quickly. Every case is unique which is why we need to speak with you direct and obtain a full picture of your family life from the outset and guide you through the settlement process.

If your former spouse is refusing to engage in any communication creating stress and uncertainty, you should seek to find a family lawyer as soon as possible so that you can reach an agreement and move on with your life. We will engage with your former partner at an early stage and set reasonably deadlines for responses so that the process is not drawn out unnecessarily. We will also take away the pressure of dealing with the divorce and finances yourself, which can often save a co-parenting relationship for your child's future.

You may feel unable to reach agreement even on minor points, increasing tension between you, when your former partner is unwilling to cooperate or listen to your point of view. It is important to remember that most couples going through a divorce find it an extremely difficult and draining situation which is why it is useful to instruct a family lawyer to represent you.



We are clear from the start of the process regarding our fees and you can set a limit on how much assistance you require to resolve issues relating to your finances, the children or both. If an agreement cannot be reached through negotiation, we can issue court proceedings on your behalf so that the matter will come to an end. The court set strict timeframes in which both parties must comply therefore you will always have the end result in sight.

Our family law specialists will work with you direct and tailor your case to your needs, at your own pace. We recognise that no divorce is the same and we want to help you through the process.

**sweeney  
miller** **LAW**

**Should you have any family law queries, you can contact our team direct via our website, by email at [rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk), or you can now text or WhatsApp on 07593549864.**





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Offering services to both Individuals and Businesses, with a continued commitment to customer service Sweeney Miller Law pride ourselves on being a friendly and approachable legal business.

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# GOVERNMENT MEASURES TO PROTECT BUSINESSES – ARE YOU AFFECTED?

Alex Blenkinsop, commercial dispute resolution lawyer at Muckle LLP, explains how the new measures impact businesses on both sides of the debt ledger.

In the current environment, a number of businesses are facing difficulties enforcing their debts or making funds available to satisfy payments that are falling due.

In normal circumstances, there are a number of methods available to businesses to put pressure on their debtors and for debtors, these can be difficult to deal with.

If you're trying to enforce a debt or struggling to pay one, the government has introduced new legislation in the form of the Corporate Insolvency & Governance Act 2020 which may make it more difficult to recover a debt or give you some time to find the necessary funds depending on what side of the debt you find your business on.

Either way, it is useful to have an awareness of the current government guidance and the impact it may have on your business.

## Statutory demands

A statutory demand is a formal demand for payment which if unsatisfied within 21 days, would give you the entitlement to apply to court for the winding up of your customer's company.

At the time of writing, a creditor cannot petition for the winding up of a company on the basis of a statutory demand served during the period between 1 March 2020 and 30 September 2020.

There is no prohibition on serving a statutory demand during that period but it cannot be relied upon to support a winding up petition, which means a statutory demand is unlikely to have the same impact in encouraging payments as it would previously have done.



Alex Blenkinsop

For debtors, this is good news in that it reduces the risk of a creditor being able to petition for the winding up of the business on the basis of an unsatisfied statutory demand.

## Winding up petitions

In normal circumstances, if a debtor does not satisfy a debt once the statutory demand or shorter period for payment has expired, you could petition for the company to be wound up.

This is an extreme option and should not be used simply to enforce a debt. Ultimately, if a company is wound up, its assets will be divided amongst its creditors and the creditors will recover only part of the debt.

You should always exercise caution when considering petitioning for the winding up of a business but particularly during the period specified by the new

Corporate Insolvency & Governance Act.

Until 30 September 2020 creditors are also prohibited from petitioning for the winding-up of a debtor company unless they reasonably believe that the company's inability to pay its debts is not the result of coronavirus. A number of debtors will have been adversely impacted by the pandemic and proving that the reason the debtor cannot pay its debts is unrelated to COVID-19 will not be easy in most cases.

## Court proceedings

It is still open to creditors in most cases to issue court proceedings in respect of an unpaid debt although consideration should always be given to whether the debtor is likely to be able to meet any court order.

## Best course of action?

The appropriate course of action whether you are the debtor or creditor will depend on the circumstances – the ability of the party to repay, the contractual terms, the relationship between the parties and now, the limitations under the Act.

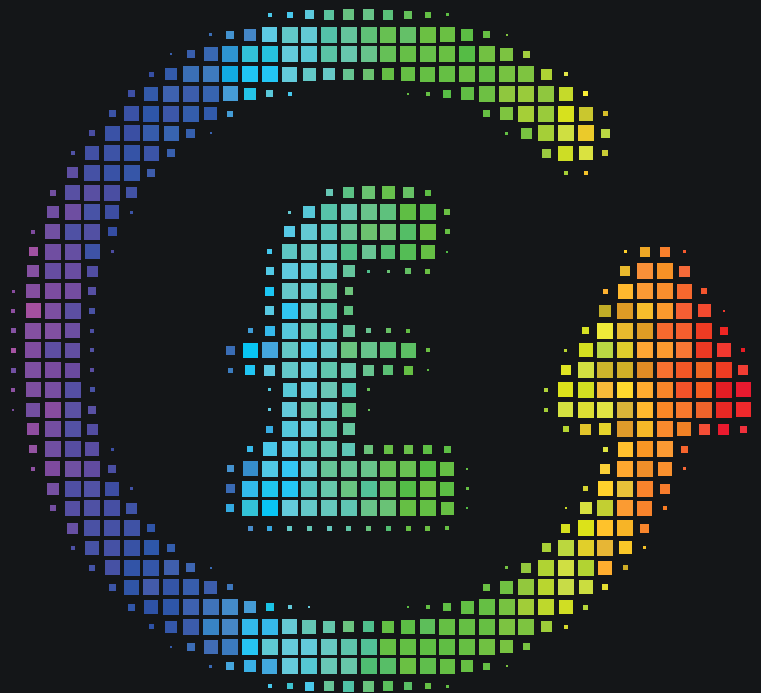
It is therefore sensible to take legal advice before embarking on a course of action as some of the above can have costs consequences if deployed inappropriately. And if you do have outstanding debts, it is important to start collecting these as soon as possible to give yourself the best chance of recovery.

Our dispute resolution team advise on contractual disputes including claims for unpaid sums and can provide you with advice and support. We also have an award winning debt recovery team that can support you in pursuing debts, even during challenging times such as these.

**For more information or to discuss any issues facing your business please contact Alex Blenkinsop on 0191 211 7997 or email [alex.blenkinsop@muckle-llp.com](mailto:alex.blenkinsop@muckle-llp.com) for a free consultation.**



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Senior Management Team



L-R: Lee Brewster, Steve Hope and Paul Armstrong



# THE MORTON GROUP LAYS FOUNDATIONS FOR SUSTAINED GROWTH

Restructure leads to promotions and new job opportunities.

Newcastle-based The Morton Group has successfully completed its move to a new business structure in line with its long-term business plan designed to ensure continued growth, leading to several internal promotions and new job opportunities.

The Morton Group is a wholly-owned family business specialising in property development, construction, residential home development and sales as well as the ownership and operation of successful leisure accommodation and facilities business. This means that it can act as both developer and contractor on building projects.

Established in 2016, Morton Group's unique vision and approach means it can bring together employees' expertise, push the boundaries and deliver exceptional returns for its investors.

Consisting of LOK Developments, Kapex Construction and Regents Gate Homes, Morton Group is behind several exciting new developments across the North East and the UK. These include Regents Plaza and Sycamore Square in Gosforth, All Saints Church in Newcastle and Montague Court in Hexham.

The group of companies has grown rapidly over the last three years and following implementation of the next phase of the business plan is set for future success and continued growth.

**Darren Neil** has been promoted to the role of Finance Director and member of the Senior Management Team at Kapex Construction. Darren, from Bishop Auckland in County Durham, joined Kapex Construction in November 2018 as a Financial Controller. A highly motivated senior accountant with wide multi sector experience, Darren has strong credentials in finance business partnering in the construction industry, including large scale offshore construction projects (oil, gas and renewables) and ERP system implementations.



Darren Neil FD

Kapex Construction recently celebrated its third anniversary with its best ever annual results, with turnover rising by 277% in year 3 (April 2019 – March 2020). With a forecast increase of 250% in the next 12 months, the business has a confirmed order book of around £40million.

**Paul Armstrong** – the first ever employee of Kapex Construction – has been promoted to the position of Contracts Manager in recognition of his commitment and dedication to the business. He is now responsible for 3rd party contracts ranging in value from £500,000 plus. Paul has worked in the construction industry since he left school, is a plasterer by trade and has a good knowledge of other trades,

with an HNC Certificate and three years at Northumbria University studying construction and engineering project management.

Former Site Manager **Steve Hope**, from Killingworth, has been promoted to Project Manager after just 12 months at Kapex Construction, and is now responsible for small works and maintenance up to £500,000.

**Lee Brewster** has been appointed to the role of Contracts Manager and he is now responsible for the delivery of construction projects for LOK developments and in-house projects.

Embarking on the next phase of planned growth, The Morton Group is currently recruiting for a series of job roles including bid coordinator, document controller, as well as quantity surveyor and senior quantity surveyor positions. Additional roles include health and safety manager, civils contract manager and a number of finance positions.

CEO Gary Morton said: "Over the last three years we've experienced phenomenal growth and our exceptional team have been instrumental to the success of our business.

"I'm delighted to promote from within the company and I offer my personal congratulations to them all as these appointments are very well deserved.

"I believe it is important to recognise our talent as it is our team's experience, expertise and dedication that makes our company special. With over 300 years of industry experience, we bring together the best minds in construction and development to deliver exceptional projects.

"I am certain that our next phase of growth will make us fit for the future and will enable us to achieve greater success and continued growth over the coming years. We have some incredible projects in the pipeline and it's an exciting time for us at The Morton Group."

To find out more about The Morton Group and its companies, investment or recruitment opportunities, please visit [www.themortongroup.co.uk](http://www.themortongroup.co.uk)

# NEWCASTLE OFFICE MARKET HOLDS STRONG IN Q2, BUCKING UK TREND

Research by Knight Frank reveals Newcastle is the only UK regional city centre it operates in\*, not to have suffered a quarter-on-quarter drop in office take-up through lockdown.

Despite the disruption the coronavirus pandemic has caused across the UK office markets, overall take-up across the North East in April, May and June held-up fairly well, according to the latest figures.

In Newcastle city centre there was 35,272 sq. ft. of office space take-up across four deals in Q2, which is marginally above the Q1 total.

Total office take-up (city centre and out of town) for Q2 across the region was 226,327 sq. ft. This is compared to 201,956 in Q1 2020, which is a 12% increase. However, when compared to the quarterly average across 2019 (234,578 sq. ft.) this is marginally down at 3.5%.

Partner, Office Agency, at Knight Frank Newcastle, Patrick Matheson, comments: "We are buoyed by the quarter two data because Newcastle city centre has clearly held-up better than expected, especially compared to other UK cities but we're cautiously optimistic because we know the figures include several deals which were due to complete in quarter one but were delayed."

A new city-wide headline rent of £26 per sq. ft. was achieved at Newcastle Helix in the 19,000 sq. ft. letting at Lumen to Homes England. Other city centre deals included Pegasus Planning taking 3,200 sq. ft. at Gainsborough House on Grey Street and Samuel Knight International taking 9,838 sq. ft. at City Quadrant.

Out-of-town take-up hit 191,001 sq. ft. which was an increase of 14.27% from Q1. This was achieved in 15 transactions. Riga, the new 53,000 sq. ft. building developed by Gateshead Council, saw the most noteworthy deal with 30,000 sq. ft. being pre-let to Northern Gas and Power at a rent of £18 psf. Quorum Park also achieved several new lettings totalling 46,937 sq. ft. which included 35,000 sq. ft. to Shared Services Connected.

Patrick adds: "In terms of new enquiries, there were 30 new office requirements recorded across the North East market in Q2, which is encouraging. We are seeing office viewing requests increase week-on-week as pent up demand for office space that built during lockdown, converts into action."

\*Knight Frank operates in London (excluded from data), Aberdeen, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Newcastle, Sheffield, Leeds, Manchester, Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff.



L-R: Peter Bowden, Office Head at Knight Frank and Elizabeth Fletcher, Associate.

## KNIGHT FRANK WINS CONTRACTS TO MANAGE THREE FLAGSHIP NORTH EAST OFFICES

Knight Frank Newcastle has won a string of major property management contracts which will see them manage three of the North East's flagship office developments.

Sunderland City Council has appointed Knight Frank to run its 60,000 sq. ft. office building, The Beam. The Beam is the first office building to be developed at Riverside Sunderland - a ground-breaking mixed-use development on the site of Sunderland's historic city centre brewery.

The team has also won an instruction to manage 80,000 sq. ft. of office space at St Ann's Wharf and 40,000 sq. ft. at Sandgate House on the Quayside in Newcastle, as well as two office buildings in York, on behalf of F & N Guernsey Ltd.

Knight Frank Newcastle's property asset management team is the largest in the region and manages 19.2m sq. ft. of commercial space in the North East comprising industrial estates, including

Team Valley, offices, business parks and shopping centres.

Head of Office and Partner, Peter Bowden, said: "To be appointed to manage these major office schemes is a big achievement. At this point in time, due to the pandemic, it's been a bit of a baptism of fire working with the occupiers and making the buildings Covid-secure."

Knight Frank LLP is the leading independent global property consultancy. Its Newcastle office has a 76-strong team who provide property management, office and industrial buildings agency, building consultancy, ratings and lease advisory and property valuations.

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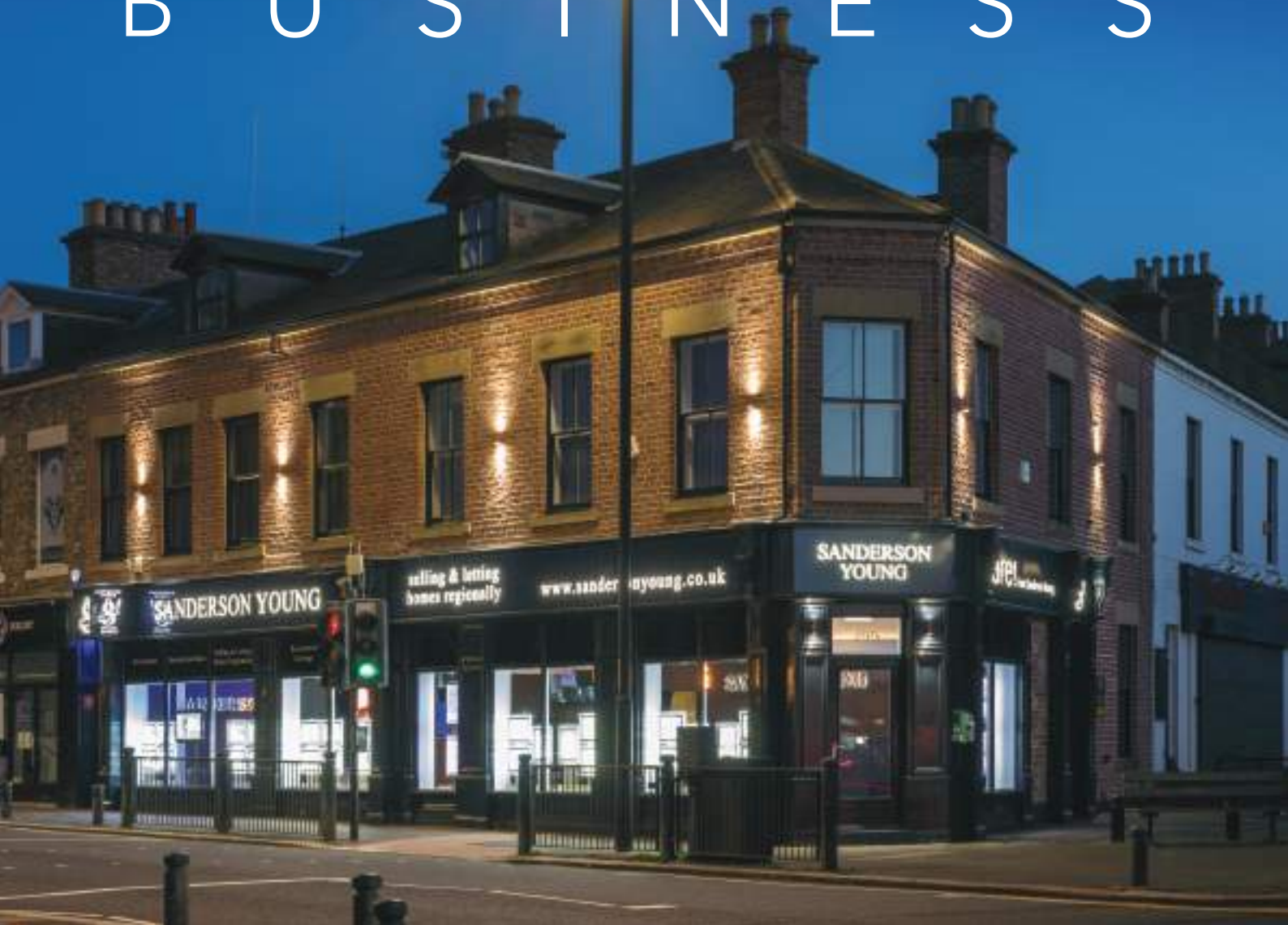
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# B U S I N E S S



## "THE HIGH STREET IS NO MORE"

IS A STATEMENT WE HAVE HEARD SOME SCEPTICS AND ONLINE-SHOP ADVOCATES DETERMINEDLY VOICE IN RECENT YEARS; HOWEVER, IT SEEMS THAT NOW, MORE THAN EVER, PEOPLE HAVE REALISED THE IMPORTANCE OF THEIR LOCAL HIGH STREETS AND THE NEED TO KEEP SUCH DISTRICTS ALIVE AND THRIVING FOR THE GOOD OF US ALL.

S anderson Young has always seen the need for a regional office network, where our clients are able to receive face-to-face expert advice whether that be for sales, lettings or financial services, with our professional team taking the time to build relationships and get our clients moving. The opportunity of expansion arose at the start of the year for our flagship regional branch on Gosforth High Street and we are delighted to finally open our doors to our valued clients. Our extended premises at 95 High Street now occupies the full corner building and is set over three floors, which houses several divisions of the company, as well as being the firm's corporate headquarters. With the expansion and refurbishment starting just before national lockdown, due to Covid-19, it was a

IT WAS A TIME TO CONSIDER HOW THIS BRANCH MAY BE UTILISED IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT, AND HAS CERTAINLY ENABLED US TO RESPOND TO THE "NEW NORMAL"







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CREATED  
BOOTHS WHICH  
PROVIDE A  
"BREAKOUT  
SPACE" FOR  
OUR TEAM TO  
MEET WITH  
CLIENTS SAFELY...



know to be on the market. Our newly designed Gosforth branch also enables the initial property search to be done at a safe distance, before taking the next steps to arrange viewings. This in turn has made our valued vendors and landlords feel more comfortable in accepting visits to their properties, knowing that we have fully qualified our clients and are sending the right people through the door at the stage it is necessary. Technology has proven itself to be fundamental over the last few months, and it has certainly provided us with a greater insight into how we can serve our clients more effectively and efficiently. We have invested heavily in-branch in the best tech to assist our clients, utilising video call, large screens, where our clients can watch virtual tours, drone footage to provide an overview of external space and the property's surroundings, as well as using e-brochures and digitising viewing and valuation diary appointments. We are committed to providing our clients with a service level that is second-to-none and the use of technology will not replace our team but will strengthen it and allow us to offer a dynamic edge. Coming into the second half of 2020, where many of us feel as if we have written off the first half of the year, and our home needs may well have seen a definite shift, we are certainly finding the property market boom across the region, particularly in certain "hot-spots" and all our branches are open and willing to provide our clients with a safe and rewarding experience.

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time to consider how this branch may be utilised in a changing environment, and has certainly enabled us to respond to the "new normal" we find ourselves in. Our ground floor office space has been transformed, with window displays showcasing a wealth of residential homes and new development schemes throughout the region, where clients are able to browse freely. Internally, we have created booths which provide a "breakout space" for our team to meet with clients safely and tailor their property search in more detail. Scheduled appointments with the relevant property expert enable us to provide a bespoke service and take the time to build an essential rapport with our clients. In this current market, there is a need to maximise the time spent and drill down to our clients' list of "must-haves", as well as suggest possible options for a home move that they may not have even considered or

WE ARE COMMITTED TO PROVIDING OUR CLIENTS WITH A SERVICE LEVEL THAT IS SECOND-TO-NONE AND THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY WILL NOT REPLACE OUR TEAM BUT WILL STRENGTHEN IT AND ALLOW US TO OFFER A DYNAMIC EDGE.





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Brooklands is a magnificent, newly built luxury home, occupying a private garden site of approximately 0.83 acres with secure gated entrance and a triple garage with apartment/annexe over. This impressive family home has been beautifully constructed, designed and styled by the owners with great attention to detail. The versatile accommodation extends to over 13,500 sq ft including eight bedrooms, six bathrooms, a stunning open plan kitchen/breakfast/dining and living area with three sets of bi-fold doors, as well as four further reception rooms. The magnificent leisure suite has a state of the art swimming pool, a gym/entertaining space and 'his and hers' shower rooms. Brooklands has been designed to enjoy its stunning, south facing outside space as much as the indoor space with granite terraces, gazebo seating area with food prep area, wine fridge and pizza oven, ideal for outside entertaining.



Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 2233500 [ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk) [www.sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://www.sandersonyoung.co.uk)



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Finished to an exceptionally high standard and specification, each of these stylish 4 and 5 bedroom family homes has lovely individual features. Situated toward the edge of the historic market town of Hexham, the development has easy access to a range of local amenities, the A69 for commuting, and direct rail links to Newcastle and Carlisle.



**ALL ENQUIRIES TO SANDERSON YOUNG'S PONTELAND OFFICE:**

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# Call Lambton Park your home.



## LAMBTON PARK

The impressive main boulevard is the gateway to Miller Homes at Lambton Park off Chester Road, and was inspired by existing residential properties and designed to create a magnificent entrance to the development.

The residential scheme forms part of the wider redevelopment of Lambton Park, which will help to maintain the Estate's legacy whilst opening some areas to the public. Amongst the plans are new offices, retail and community space, and conservation works which include the restoration of Lambton Castle, its stables, and Lamb Bridge. Public footpaths in the previously private park will also be opened up for walks.



### The Lifestyle

Meandering through 1,000 acres of historic park and woodland, 15km of footpaths provide an oasis of calm and tranquillity. Adjacent to open parkland and enjoying panoramic views across to Lambton Castle, the Ridge Walk leads down to black drive which heads along the bank of the River Wear from Lamb Bridge to the new bridge. The network of footpaths provide a variety of accessible routes for you to enjoy.



Lambton Park is just two miles from junction 63 of the A1(M) and a 20-minute drive from Durham, Tyneside and the beautiful North East coast.



Clockwise: Lambton Park main boulevard, open parkland walks, Lamb Bridge, Lambton Castle.



## The Superb Design

The formation and character of these new homes is of upmost importance in providing a unique and thoughtfully designed space for a new community to grow. Entirely bespoke, the design includes features such as red brick detailing, sash windows and decorative ridge tiles all inspired by existing residential properties on the estate. The development has been designed by renowned architect and interior designer Ben Pentreath.

Red brick detailing, sash windows  
and decorative ridge tiles



## Testimonial

“ Lambton Park's first homeowner says: "Owning a Miller home at Lambton Park is more than a home, it's a whole new lifestyle. We moved from a 4-bedroom to a 1-bedroom home. The homes are beautiful and moving here is the best decision we have ever made!"

It feels very special to be the first homeowners on the development. It made Christmas and seeing in the New Year in our new home a time we'll never forget. We're excited to see the rest of the homes being built and welcoming neighbours in the coming months, as well as being part of a proud community and the Estate's next chapter. ”

Alison and Malcom  
in their Lambton Park home.



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Swap your old house for a brand new Miller home with our Part Exchange\* scheme and take the uncertainty and stress out of moving. There's no chain, or any estate agent fees and you'll receive a fair offer based on an independent valuation. Enjoy a guaranteed buyer\*\*, no deposit on exchange and a decision usually within 7 days.

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Architect's illustration of the proposed Fold House, courtesy of Howarth Litchfield

## DESIGNING A ONE-OFF HOUSE

Most people watch *Grand Designs* and dream of building their own house. In whatever form, this ambition takes some bravery, conviction, and not least money.

**I have worked with many inspiring clients as they seek to create their dream home in the North East and beyond.**

Increasingly the houses are becoming more environmental and sophisticated, so that cutting-edge design is as important as the energy to build them and their on-going running costs. We are entering a phase when heating systems, cars and energy generation are all fast-changing technologies.

Some clients aim to build in the cities and others in the countryside. Both offer challenges. They must adhere to the planning legislation of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) as well as local authority requirements for conservation areas, specific issues and sensitivities.

In the countryside development is permitted so long as it meets the requirements of Paragraph 79 of the NPPF, which sets out specific requirements in terms of rural workers, using a historic building or disused building. One of the further criteria is when a 'design is of exceptional quality, in that it 'is truly outstanding or innovative'.

The policy provision for new houses in the countryside presents an exciting opportunity to achieve planning permission for houses that are of an exceptional quality of design.



Neil Turner

We are working on a proposal - Fold House - in Northumberland's Green Belt under these criteria and the client's ambition is to create a truly superb piece of architecture located in a beautiful, natural landscape setting. The building will look like a modern farmhouse set into a farmer's pasture field. The other aspect is the innovation and defining

what is innovative. On Fold House the client is maximising solar heating and creating an earth battery by means of storing heat in the summer, for use in the winter. It will be a climate positive house - using less energy than it generates.

So why go to the bother of doing all this? These houses carry on an English tradition of country house building, with an emphasis on quality of architecture and workmanship to create something special. The raising of design standards can then benefit all rural design and national housing. The use of innovative construction methods, technology and design can teach us so much. They are the formula one cars of housing. Just as the car manufacturers use racing cars to trial new technology, so we need houses to experiment. We need to develop new, cleaner more energy efficient houses.

It is easy to criticise and comment on these one-off house proposals - like Fold House they invite commentary. We are all adjusting to a new world, developing new ways to build and live. We must focus on new house types, so that we are able to preserve the best of the old country houses as well.

This tradition of developing new, unique houses must continue for the benefit of us all in the development of the mass housing of tomorrow.

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Wah Akram and Steve Taylor

## OPTIMUM FLOORING SOLUTIONS - THEY'VE GOT IT LAID

It was all going so well for school friends Wah Akram and Steve Taylor. They got the keys to the premises where they were going to open their new Optimum Flooring Solutions store. Both provided financial commitment to the business with Steve bringing 15 years of know-how and experience in flooring.

They spent the next month organising stock and making sure their store, which is perfectly situated next to Morrisons supermarket in the Collingwood Centre at North Shields, was ready to start providing the latest in flooring solutions for the people of the North East.

At the end of February they opened for business and by lunchtime had already secured half a dozen excellent orders. The only snag was that at teatime, Boris Johnson announced that all shops were to close. They'd been in business for a grand total of eight hours.

Fast forward three months and Optimum Flooring Solutions is back and open for business.

"It wasn't the ideal way to launch our business partnership but I suppose you could say that things can only get better," said Wah Akram. "Steve and I had been planning to open our own flooring business for ages and were so excited when we finally got the keys and could start planning. And then the Covid-19 lockdown knocked us for six."

Thankfully, Wah and Steve could still keep planning for the future...from a safe distance of course.

One thing that was always going to be top of the agenda for both of them was customer service. Wah has a really successful home care business where, obviously, dealing with people is of the utmost importance. He knows how to look after people and ensure that they're satisfied with everything. He intends to carry that ethos into the way Optimum Flooring Solutions operates.

It's a similar story with Steve Taylor. "I've spent my entire career working with customers and ensuring they get the right product and the right standard of workmanship. Going through the mass of different types of flooring can be intimidating for customers. They have an inkling of what they'd like but the vast majority of people are totally unaware of what's on the market and what would perhaps look better and be more suitable. Also, whenever we are going to be fitting the flooring, we always conduct a site visit. It allows us to ensure that everything

will be perfect and that the flooring the customer has chosen will be up to the job"

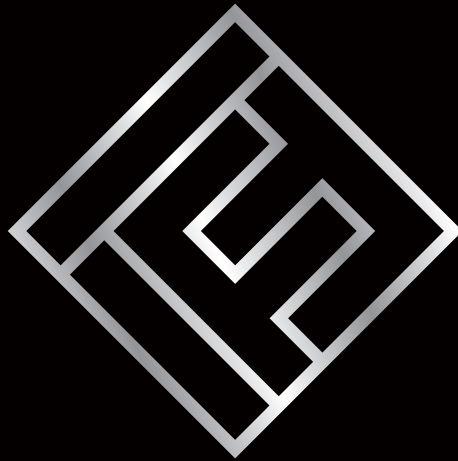
Optimum Flooring Solutions is not purely for private customers. They also provide flooring solutions to the trade, retail and commercial businesses. They can take care of new internal doors, fittings, staircases, door furniture and all adhesives. As you would expect, Optimum Flooring Solutions take care of everything. Once you have decided on which type and colour of flooring you would like, they'll put wheels in motion to get everything sorted...and of course they'll take care of fitting too.

They are also hugely proud of being a company that focusses on sustainability. Their flooring products are all responsibly sourced and everything is done with the utmost care to be as eco-friendly as possible.

Optimum Flooring Solutions - they'll get you covered.

**So...thinking of changing your floor? The best idea is to get in touch with Wah Akram and Steve Taylor at Optimum Flooring Solutions. Call them on 0191 250 8480. You'll also find them on Facebook where Steve gives some nifty demonstrations. [www.facebook.com/optimumflooringsolutions](https://www.facebook.com/optimumflooringsolutions)**





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# PROPERTY PEOPLE

## CLAIRE PARRY

Managing Director, Week 2 Week Serviced Apartments

### **Did you always envisage a career in property?**

Not at all however, it is an area I have always been interested in. The serviced apartment industry is influenced by property, travel, and hospitality so there is plenty of variation and I love how diverse it is!

### **What attracted you to your current role?**

An opportunity to drive the family business forward using my corporate experience through diversity and work around my family at the same time. In addition, the opportunity to share my passion for the North East Region and growth.

### **What changes have you seen in the market since you started?**

A huge increase in self-managed properties and technology being essential to any operation.

### **How have you adapted your business during the Coronavirus pandemic?**

Prior to lockdown we adapted our future strategy to welcome different types of guests and included a more stringent cleaning and sanitising protocol specifically for safety due to COVID19. During the pandemic we have been supporting in-house guests and essential workers which we continue to do so.

### **How would you advise people looking to buy or rent property?**

At Week2Week we provide serviced apartment management and hosted property management which is a diverse approach offering a great ROI as an alternative to hotel stays for travellers. We look for good standard accommodation where the building lease permits short lets. We work with property owners and clients with rent to rents where subletting is permitted, or you can white label our services and grow your brand. Location is key! I would be very happy to discuss property management opportunities, please contact the office on 01912813129 to arrange a coffee and chat.

### **Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?**

The North East is often forgotten (it feels) and focus is more on different UK regions however, during lockdown

and with the regular use of Zoom we have opened many doors to network and collaborate with our London centric peers and further afield. It is wonderful to be part of a wider network but even better for it to be accessible without travel and still be personable.

We are now welcoming visitors to enjoy city breaks and staycations in Newcastle and surrounding areas as well as business travellers. Our apartments are an excellent safe base to explore the region and its' heritage, or just relax in for a change of scenery. Our locations are ideal to visit one of our many beaches too and enjoy local traditions – just remember your bucket and spade!

### **What's your fondest memory of a career in the property industry?**

The sky's the limit! From awards to company hierarchies, we do not let the fact we are a small company put us off anything. We are a small family business with a large reach. People are important, they are at the heart of everything that we do from looking after our in-house guests and our regular customers to our friendly team and trusted partners. We work with an abundance of people throughout the UK of which I am very proud of.

### **What are your remaining career aspirations?**

To continue to be a North East brand leader in serviced apartments and an industry "go to" for all things short lets.

### **Where's the best place to live in the North East, and why?**

The North East is an accessible place, an ideal hub for the UK in fact for heritage and exploring. I am very proud of the region and I love that we are close to the city but never too far from the countryside and coast! My favourite places are Jesmond and Gosforth where I grew up.

### **When not working, how do you like to relax?**

When I am not at work I like to relax with my family, friends, and crazy cocker spaniel whether that is exploring outdoors or at home. I love family holidays abroad too and when I find time, crafting.





Claire Parry with Tom.





## PROMOTIONS ANNOUNCED AT KNIGHT FRANK NEWCASTLE

Global commercial property consultancy Knight Frank has announced three promotions at its 76-strong Newcastle office.

Commercial leases specialist, Emily Seager, has been promoted to Partner after almost five years in the business. Emily negotiates rent reviews, lease renewals and lease restructures and has almost 15 years' experience.

Tom Jackson, who works in the firm's building

consultancy team, has been promoted to Associate whilst Jamie Wilson, who works on property investments and land acquisition across the capital markets and residential development teams, has been boosted to Senior Surveyor.

Head of Office, Peter Bowden, said: "It's always a happy time of the year when Knight Frank announces its promotions. Emily, Tom and Jamie are thoroughly deserving of their new positions and I'm looking forward to seeing what they achieve."

## NEW £11M COUNTY DURHAM DEVELOPMENT GETS GREEN LIGHT

Plans for a new £11m residential development at Syke Road in Burnopfield have been given the green light.

The development by Akenside Developments will see proposals proceed for 46 three, four and five bedroom homes and bungalows, which have been approved by Durham County Council.

The scheme will see the first properties released in early 2021, plugging a gap in the market for families looking to live in larger, more energy efficient properties.

The development will also spearhead an increased contribution to the local economy as upwards of



£1.4m is estimated to be spent in shops and on other community services and facilities.

More than 50 new construction jobs could also be created as onsite work gets underway.

## RICKY BUYS INTO CAREER MOVE TO HAY & KILNER

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has bolstered its award-winning commercial property team with the appointment of Ricky Handa.

Ricky is joining the Newcastle-headquartered firm as an associate solicitor and has worked across a wide range of projects and industry sectors in his career to date.

After studying for his law degree at Northumbria University, Ricky completed his training with Square One Law in Newcastle before spearheading the growth of the commercial property team at Millican Law.

Nicola Tiffen, Partner and Head of Commercial Property at Hay & Kilner, said: "Ricky is a well-regarded practitioner with a growing reputation within the North East commercial property sector. He is an excellent addition to the team."



## NEW GATESHEAD QUAYS DETAILS ANNOUNCED

New details have been revealed about the international conference and exhibition centre due to open in winter 2023 on Gateshead Quays.

New CGI videos and imagery show that the UK's newest international conference and exhibition centre will be capable of hosting up to 5,000 delegates with a high level of flexibility across a suite of dedicated spaces.

Hailed as one of the country's most exciting developments, the £260m project will also include a 12,500-capacity arena, two hotels, bars, restaurants and other public spaces.

A full planning application has been submitted for the 80,000 sq ft development, positioned between the BALTIC and Sage Gateshead. If agreed at planning, Gateshead Quays will create approximately 2,000 jobs and inject a much needed £60m into the regional economy each year.

- Commercial Rent Reviews and Lease Renewals -
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## WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In the last Northern Insight, Mike kindly published a blurb about me celebrating 40 years in commercial property. It does mean that I have been around longer than most in the profession.

Which is why when COVID 19 hit us, and the government took all of the extensive and drastic steps they did, many people asked me: "What did you do last time?"

Well, even for me and most of my generation, there hasn't been a "last time". This has been a first for everyone. But now as we slowly emerge from the worst effects, it is clear everybody had to look at life in a different way.

Obviously consumers have adapted very suddenly two major changes - an almost cashless economy and a huge swing to online purchases (online sales grew from 19.1% of total sales to 33.4% between January and May this year, and of course many people were paying by card in physical shops as well). Both of these, and especially the second, have huge ramifications. We have seen the collapse of retailers such as Oasis/Warehouse and Cath Kidston and restaurant chains are downsizing their operations on a unprecedented scale - witness Zizzi, Carluccios and Frankie & Benny's. Of course Intu, the owners of Eldon Square and Metro Centre, fell into receivership in June.

Undoubtedly there will still be a demand for shops, because some items are more "touchy feely". People want to smell perfumes and aftershaves, and feel the quality and fit of clothes. They still want to look at the cuts of meat and look at the actual size of ornaments to see if they would fit in their homes. But if retailers sales volumes fall, so must rents.

Landlords need to be prepared for a downturn and work with their tenants to get the best for everyone in this "new world".



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## THE REAL LIVING WAGE AND EOTHEN HOMES

Why do we pay the living wage?



The real living wage is set by an independent organisation which bases its hourly rate on the actual cost of living – in the North East this is currently £9.30 per hour.

As a registered charity, committing to the real living wage was a significant business decision but one we were keen to make so we could invest in our staff and give them the financial reward they deserve.

Care workers are often portrayed as low skilled, which determines the pay across the sector. We can't change this as it is set by the government. But we can ensure we show how much we value our staff's skills and commitment by paying them this real living wage.

Due to an ageing population, residents come to us later in life or stay with us for longer, and their health often deteriorates physically and mentally. This means our staff have to be fully trained and competent to deal with individual needs right through to end of life, and this brings with it a series of physical and emotional challenges.

Our amazing staff tackle these challenges head-on, and show an incredible amount of passion for their job. They care for our residents like they were their own family. Their work deserves to be rewarded with a decent rate of pay.

Being a real living wage employer has given us a platform to stand out in the health & social care sector, and has helped us to attract and retain a wonderful workforce, making Eothen Homes an employer of choice.

Tel: 0191 281 9100 Email: [recruitment@eothernhomes.org.uk](mailto:recruitment@eothernhomes.org.uk)



Covered balconies and large windows give superb external views to this Durham home.

## HOW THE PANDEMIC COULD AFFECT THE DESIGN OF HOMES

Nicky Watson, Director of Newcastle-based JDDK Architects, explains how architects are focused on the design of spaces considering the lessons learnt by our present knowledge of this world-changing pandemic and begins with the design of our homes.

"Historically, pandemics have had far-reaching effects beyond the direct health of the population into additional and sometimes surprising sectors - the cholera outbreaks in C18th London were mapped leading to the discovery that the bacteria were water borne and transmitted through the public water supply, leading to the construction of modern sewage systems, whilst research into the air-spread Tuberculosis (TB) bacteria led to the realisation of the importance of cleaning surfaces.

"So whilst the Covid-19 virus may not be completely understood yet, the indirect effects of the pandemic are already being manifested in all aspects of life from shopping to work, from travel to education and from leisure to the design of our homes.

"The design of living spaces is probably the most important aspect of architecture for many people, especially considering most of us have spent the major part of the past four months in them and may well continue to do so. We are really interested in how we design living spaces and their localities in response to the restrictions imposed by, and the lessons learnt from, the virus to create homes for a future where the threat or reality of the virus remains.

"We need to think carefully about designs for new houses, however as apparently 80% of the homes we will be living in by 2050 have already been built, we also need to consider how we adapt and retrofit changes to existing homes. Changes to our thinking about the design of homes must also be achievable regardless of house type/size or tenure - whether the property is rented or owned. Practically, however, there's a vast difference to what can be achieved in a two-bedroom apartment in a 50-year-old tower block and a modern detached home but even the smallest changes can make

a big difference to both the quality of our lives at home and controlling virus transmission.

"Our aim is to design homes that create more resilience to the spread of infection and support differing and longer periods of occupation for different purposes, for example: working from home; home schooling; maybe accommodating more occupants as the family returns to the home as a refuge; and supporting multi generations with their own specific needs. Homes that are good for our health and wellbeing.

"Starting with the outside, external spaces are as important as the internal ones, as the pandemic has now proven the therapeutic benefits of nature and outdoor space, as well as its importance as a safe meeting, socialising and exercising place. The inclusion of easily accessible balconies, yards, roof terraces, communal or private gardens is key - ideally with covered areas to give shelter for year-round use, and if at all possible accessible to visitors without having to pass through the home.

"Considering the layout of the inside of our homes - let's start at the front door. Continued contagion fears will raise the importance of the design of the home's arrival zone or entrance, ensuring that it is the barrier between the potential danger of outside and the home sanctuary. Space for removing and storing outdoor coats, bags and shoes should be allowed for and ideally somewhere close by to wash hands, or at least conveniently locate hand sanitiser - a well-positioned shelf will do. Defining this arrival zone can be done through changes in floor finish, partial enclosure with walls or glazed screens or where there is sufficient space the traditional lobby will be perfect to contain these functions. Incorporating a secure delivery area, accessible from both outside and internally, would be a great addition, facilitating safe postal and other products delivery.





"We may see internal floor areas of new homes increase as they are designed to accommodate larger numbers of people for longer periods. Where this isn't the case, be it in existing houses or new ones, we need to be clever about designing so that the layout can be more flexible for the different and more intense uses the home may have to serve – living, work, leisure, education, exercise and as a sanctuary.

"Whilst open plan has been extremely popular in recent years it can have its drawbacks in terms of lack of privacy and acoustic separation for home working and home schooling, so quiet work spaces should be included in house designs – this could be a separate room entirely – a study or snug space, or simply a defined area in a bedroom (alcoves are useful for this) or part of the open plan space that can be shut off temporarily with, say, moveable partitions. Noises from kitchens can be particularly disturbing to work so we may find increased separation of this space from other living spaces may be more of the norm in the future. Such separation is likely to also enhance the ability to maintain levels of hygiene where food is prepared, an important factor in mitigating virus transmission. Designs will need careful consideration to retain the ability to be social in the kitchen whilst retaining hygienic separation for food preparation.

"The quality of our home working and living spaces become more and more important when we are spending more time in them. Good levels of daylight, a source of fresh air and views to the outside are all key to our well-being. Increasingly, therefore, spaces used in the day will be given the best aspect

to achieve these requirements – maybe located on upper floors for example, where there are opportunities for better daylight and views, with sleeping areas on the more enclosed and often cooler ground floors.

"Bringing natural light into the home will be a priority throughout with as much visual connection to the external environment as possible and increased use of 'garden rooms' linked to covered external areas and conservatories so that the gap between indoor and outdoor is blurred and even internal spaces can be used for food growing.

"Increased and ingenious storage space will become a requirement. Not only reflecting a greater number of inhabitants, but also to facilitate spaces being able to have more than one function, for example a home school, and then an indoor gym, and then a TV Lounge. Interior furniture will be multi-functional too. For example, a sofa will fold away to make space for a gym mat, or a work desk hinged to the wall can be flattened when the family come together in the evening and so need more space. Increased storage in kitchens will be very helpful in managing problems of supply when we are making fewer trips to the shops so buying more at a time – we predict the return of the old-fashioned pantry.

"Architects have learnt from the health sector where more consideration is given to the performance of finishes, with anti-bacterial materials for ironmongery and solid surfaces which are easily cleaned. Similarly paint on doors, frames and banisters etc (ie touch points) could have anti-bacterial properties.



Balconies to apartments to reconnect to the external environment



Design can maximise space and light.



Connections and communal spaces are designed to reduce social isolation.

"Whilst the time we are in our home increases, we use more electricity and heat – so increased insulation and use of renewable energy sources, particularly solar power, will be critical in reducing the impact of fuel poverty. Water supplies may also be limited or more expensive so rainwater harvesting and recycling will become common as may the use of 'living' roofs to provide better insulation and carbon capture.

"Our neighbours have become and will continue to be an increasingly important part of our social bubbles. Our homes and the spaces outside them will support greater (safe) interaction between us and our neighbours and members of our communities as well as provide private sanctuary. We will prevent the social isolation that a pandemic can bring by being able to see activity outside our front doors, we will have separated outdoor spaces that have visual and acoustic connections with others, as well as shared outdoor spaces that will be designed to be suitable for all members of our communities – old and young.

"If we can use the tragedy and devastation of the pandemic as a catalyst for change as many politicians currently now promise and loudly proclaim, by adapting our current homes and building better homes for the future, then maybe some good may yet come from Covid-19."

Nicky Watson, [www.jddk.co.uk](http://www.jddk.co.uk) 0191 2860811  
[millmount@jddk.co.uk](mailto:millmount@jddk.co.uk)

## BIRD HOUSE PROPERTIES

How Great Park's favourite property agent has thrived during the pandemic.

Well-known and loved in Newcastle's luxurious Great Park Estate, Catherine and Derek Porter are now expanding their successful property agency business further afield, after making the most of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Around five years ago, an opportunity arose for Catherine and Derek, to open Bird House Properties on the new Great Park Estate. Living there themselves, and having had over 50 years combined experience in the sales and customer service industry, the couple set out to pair people with their dream homes, via a personalised, second-to-none service.

Knowing how stressful the property ladder can be, their core values, knowledge of the housing market and dedicated personal service, meant that Catherine and Derek quickly outsold all other agents in Newcastle Great Park, making them the best-selling agent in the area.

Being hit by COVID-19, like all in the property industry, Catherine and Derek soon became aware of the beneficial situation they were in, already running their business from home. Unlike other agents, with expensive shop fronts, the couple built their family-run reputation organically in the area, whilst working from home, so while everyone was adapting to their 'new norm', this already was normality for the Porters.

Competitors were working on how to run their business and employees from home, whilst Catherine and Derek already had this under control and did not have to let standards slip, pushing them even more in to the forefront.

According to Catherine, their success all comes down to their personalised service and flexibility;

"Our speciality is that we care. Coming from a background outside of real estate, it gives us the benefit of being experienced in sales and looking after our clients largest commodity, without some of the old habits of traditional estate agents.

"As a family-run business, we know what's most important to our clients, so we put ourselves in your position to ensure you get exactly the right 'nest' for your 'chicks'"

Over the last five years, Bird House Properties has only gone from strength to strength, bringing in hundreds of impeccable reviews and accolades from local residents. Now, their plans are to expand further across Newcastle, to the areas of Gosforth, Wideopen, Kingston Park and Brunswick Green.

The services provided by the agents include purchasing properties, selling properties and renting properties, with a large portion of the Great Park Estate having already benefitted from their assistance.

Being an accredited SAFEagent, Bird House Properties also has strong relationships with reliable and reputable landlords in area, ensuring that all rental clients also receive the first class personalised service.

Having built their business around their family values, there's no doubt that you can trust Bird House Properties with your nest.







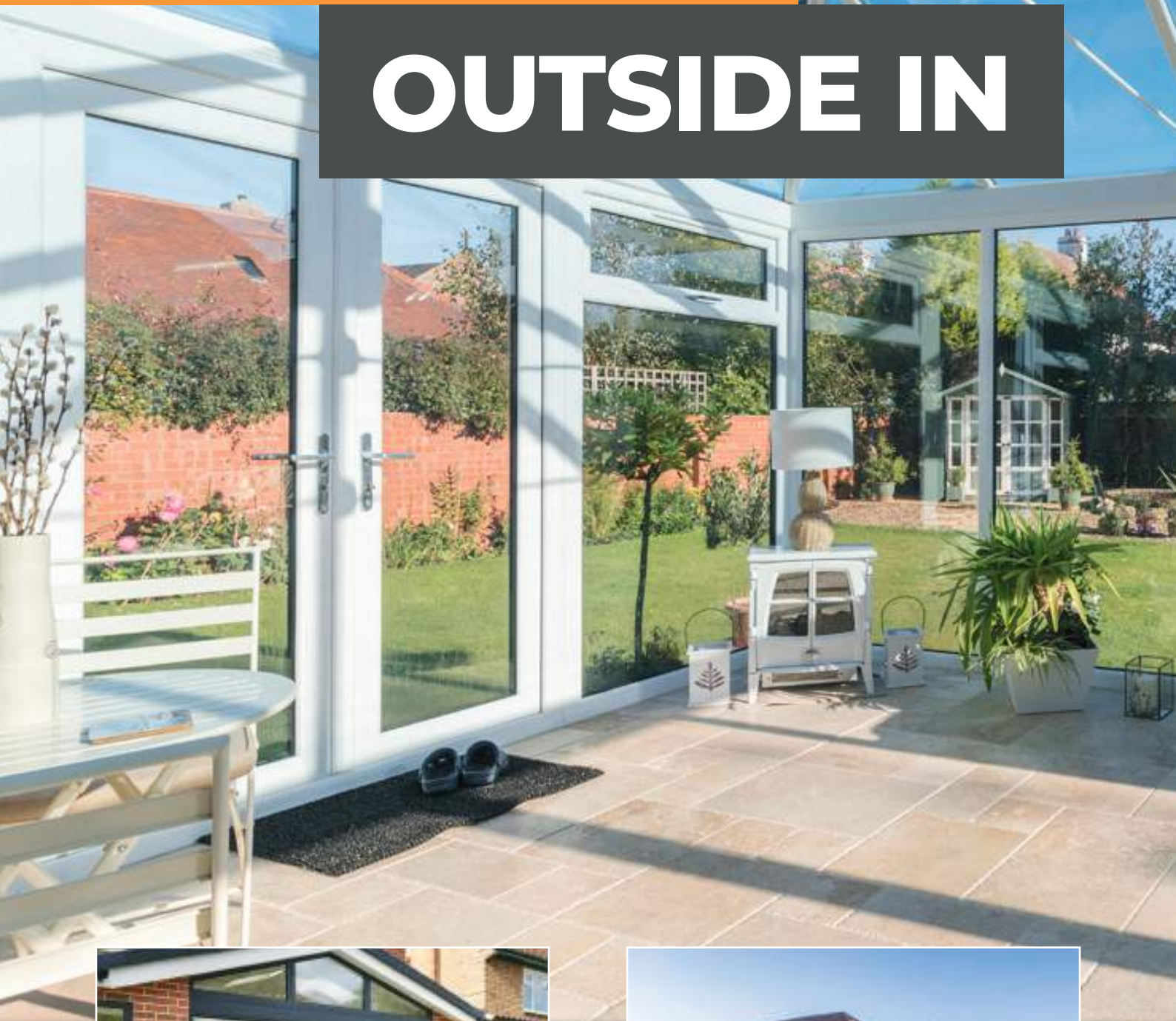
Derek and Catherine Porter





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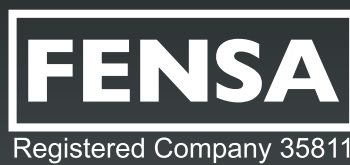
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Joel Dickinson

## NEW MEASURES IN PLACE, BUT IT'S BUSINESS AS USUAL

Karpet Mills re-open all stores post lockdown.

**Karpet Mills, the North East leading Carpet and Flooring retailer, are delighted to announce that all stores are now open for business again after lockdown, including the NEW Designer Flooring Premium Showroom at their Kingston Park branch in Newcastle.**

All six stores have successfully re-opened, with new measures in place to help customers shop with confidence, and early signs have been extremely positive, with all staff now returning from furlough due to customer demand.

"The coronavirus crisis has had an enormous impact on our retail business, but I am absolutely thrilled to announce that we are fully back open for business and here to help anyone who requires carpets and flooring." Says Joel Dickinson, Karpet Mills director. "It goes without saying that the entire world has (almost without exception) had to adjust to the impact of COVID-19. However, our company has been established for over 140 years and although this is the biggest crisis we have had to face in our family's living memory previous generations in our company have overcome enormous obstacles including two World Wars".

The enforced lockdown came just as Karpet Mills had launched their new premium Designer Flooring showroom in Kingston Park, Newcastle. The new 10,000 sqft showroom displays the highest quality floor coverings available in today's market, including famous names such as Amtico, Axminster, Crucial Trading to name just a few.

In addition to having the North-East largest selection of premium flooring on display, the new showroom also features state-of-the-art design software from both Hugh Mackay & Amtico, allowing customers to create completely bespoke carpets and flooring, and even providing them with visual representations of how their new flooring will look in their home.

"This will be a real game changer for us" says Karpet Mills director Joel Dickinson. "Our Designer Flooring Showroom at our Karpet Mills branch in Hexham has had great success since its launch in early 2018, so it has always been the plan to open up

further showrooms and expand the business. The new Designer Flooring showroom will allow us to provide customers with the largest selection of premium flooring brands in the North East."

The move marks further expansion for the Karpet Mills brand, who have invested heavily in recent years with two new stores in Hexham & Benton, brand-new purpose-built head office facility, and a full renovation of their Durham branch based in Hetton-le-Hole.

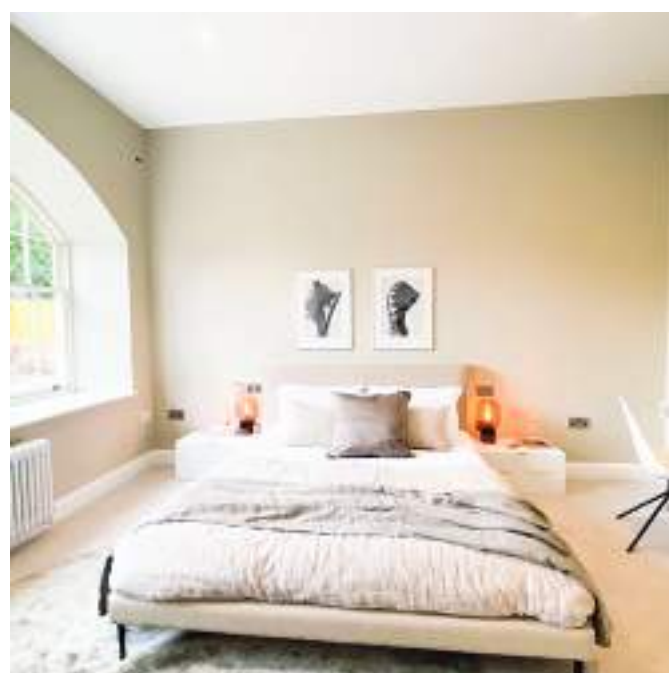
Karpet Mills combines the experience gleaned from over a 140 years trading with the modern-day expectations of quality and service to provide the full package for every customer. All branches (Kingston Park, Gateshead, Hetton-Le-Hole, Hexham and now Benton) are open for trade seven days a week. Please be aware that all stores now features new measures, in accordance with Government advice and guidelines, to ensure the safety of all customers and staff at all times.











62 – 70 THE DRIVE  
GOSFORTH  
NEWCASTLE  
NE3 4AR

T / 0191 01234 567



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**BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**





## MEDIAWORKS UNVEILS NEW DIGITAL EXPERIENCE FOR HOME GROUP

Award-winning digital marketing agency Mediaworks has completed a year-long project with Home Group, the UK's leading provider of high-quality housing, health and social care.

The project will deliver accessible and personalised online content to Home Group's customers, enabling them to quickly find the information they are looking for through online search and complete their transactions online.

At the heart of the project was the redesign and optimisation of their website. It was developed in close consultation with the housing association's customer groups to create an improved online experience.

Other key features include improved navigation and personalisation tools which deliver user-specific content for visitors to the website dependent on where in the UK they logged on from.

## BUILDING CHARITIES' BRANDS THROUGH LOCKDOWN AND BEYOND

After supporting the region's charities during the coronavirus crisis, a North East PR agency has announced it will continue to donate a portion of profits to good causes as the country emerges from lockdown.

Darlington-based Harvey & Hugo decided to donate 20 per cent from the fee of all new Pay-as-Hugo PR and marketing services to a charity of the clients' choice.

Raising £600 for charities including Daisy Chain and Suited and Booted, the scheme proved such a success that Harvey & Hugo has decided to extend



it, now pledging to donate five per cent.

The firm's Pay-as-Hugo services aim to make PR and marketing services accessible to all, by removing contracts and breaking down services into fixed-fee, bite-sized products.



## UNWRITTEN'S MADDY HOUGHTON APPOINTED TO THE COMMON ROOM YOUTH BOARD

Following her appointment as Head of Delivery at Unwritten Group, Maddy Houghton has been appointed to join the Youth Board of The Common Room.

The Common Room was established as a charity in 2017 to lead the restoration of Neville Hall in Newcastle city centre. The charity will support the region's future economic growth and provide a broad range of unique public spaces for events, lectures, weddings and more.

The purpose of the Youth Board for under 30s is to influence the content and delivery of The Common Room's core programme and activity in the region.

Within her role, Maddy will contribute her marketing and education expertise to shape the content of the core programme, which includes education and apprentices, oral history, STEM engagement and heritage.



## MAGAZINE FIRM SUPPLEMENTS BUSINESS EXPANSION

A North East magazine subscription and distribution firm has seen a marked increase in the number of publications being delivered to homes throughout the country leading to a change in the company's business model.

Gateshead-based Unique Magazines delivers a choice of more than 3,500 magazine titles to thousands of readers in 160 countries all over the world.

The recent lockdown seen a dramatic rise in magazine subscriptions leading to MD John Porrett expanding his business with a recruitment campaign looking for a management accountant, a digital marketing manager and an in-house web developer.

John has also redesigned his warehouse space with social distancing rules in place to cater for the general public to call in to buy and collect their favourite weekly, monthly or quarterly periodical.

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# CREO COMMS



## “ARE BRANDED FACEMASKS A WORTHWHILE MARKETING INVESTMENT?”

Interesting question and with the wearing of non-clinical facemasks looking set to become a legal necessity for access to both public transport and many other facilities, bang on trend! How interesting that a question like this would have been ludicrous just six months ago and a sign of how fast our world has changed...?

So, let's forget the pandemic for a moment and go back to the basics of branded promotional products – old fashioned basics that you won't find in Google Analytics and all the other digital marketing tools now promoted as critical for survival and that have turned the Mad Men of advertising into the Maths Men of marketing. To be successful, promotional items have to perform a function for the recipient, whether this be as a pen, screwdriver or USB stick to name but a few examples. If the recipient wants it, uses it and finds it useful, the sender will have got their sales message over – if not, they'll have wasted their money.

Promotional items can be incredibly successful with the most recent and extreme example being the baseball hat worn by Donald Trump on his 2016 presidential election campaign. The 'Make America Great Again' or MAGA, as it is now referred to, patriotic campaign slogan resonated with millions of Americans and helped produce Trump's surprise victory – even though both Clinton and Ronald Regan had previously used it. Wearing the baseball

cap was mimicked by millions with sales of the cap (at \$25.00 each) raising funds for Trump's campaign. Trump didn't have to say a word at many of his rallies (many may wish he hadn't...) as the cap said it all.

Johnson and Cummings should maybe have followed his example with their various slogans over recent months, although changing the message so often would have presented difficulties...

So, could it work on a facemask? Absolutely, yes! Dependent on the sector you work in and the sales message you brand the mask, you will be producing walking billboards of brand ambassadors who are obviously willing to spread the word and promote your brand.

But, as in many such questions, it's always best to ask the real experts. In response, Charlie Parker, Managing Director of Parkers Promotional Products, commented, "We're seeing incredible demand for branded facemasks across a whole range of sectors including education, transport, leisure and various service industries. It's important to note, however, the different types of facemask – our branded items are cloth which can be washed and reused – they're designed to stop the wearer spreading the virus through coughs and sneezes and are not the PPE required by the NHS and care sector which help protect the wearer."

"They are now a legal requirement which people need so rather than risk infection by sourcing them in shops, it's convenient to be given one and they're not just useful, they're mandatory so as long as they don't violently disagree with being associated with the brand, recipients are more than happy to wear them."

Branded facemasks will become hugely popular and are already featuring with the 'Black Lives Matter' campaign making particularly successful use of them with priceless media coverage of demonstrators in early June. The message and design of its layout is still critical and organisations thinking of investing in facemasks as promotional items, should think carefully about the message they wish to promote, which may not always be exactly the same as their mission statement but be specific to protection against the spread of the virus.

In the USA, they have already become fashion accessories with Disney selling character masks and sports leagues like NBA and NFL selling licensed team logo masks with many organisations donating profits to medical and humanitarian causes. Fashion brands here are developing their own masks whilst other organisations like EasyJet are supplying children's masks to passengers. Like them or not, facemasks are here to stay and can be a great way to promote your brand.

**Do you need some assistance with your marketing, PR or design? Do you need to review your strategy or do you want to know how we can help your business? Talk to us. Email your questions anonymously to us today [hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk](mailto:hello@silverbulletmarketing.co.uk) or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.**



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**why  
don't  
you**



Lockdown and Covid-19 have prompted businesses to reflect and build greater resilience into operations.

Business as usual has gone for the foreseeable.

*Doing the same is no longer an option.*

Now is probably the time to review and change your PR and marketing.

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# Media Matters

In a new series of features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry.

This month we meet **Daniel O'Mahoney**, Managing Director, Bradley O'Mahoney Public Relations

## Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

No. I flirted with a few different options and also did a law degree, but I did not feel I had sufficient levels of concentration for the legal sector and the heavy reading that goes with it. I was fortunate enough to get a start in journalism, via regional newspapers in Northumberland and Kent.

## What has been your career path so far?

After a three year stint in journalism, I entered public relations and have worked exclusively in the agency world ever since. This saw me take up appointments in central London, Kent and Harrogate before returning to the North East where I formed Bradley O'Mahoney Public Relations with Tony Bradley. It is our 30 year anniversary next year. Tony and I were together for the best part of 20 years during which time he became the first PR consultant from the North East to be appointed national President of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. We built a strong brand that has represented many familiar names such as Warburtons, McAlpine, Ernst & Young, Irwin Mitchel, Vickers, KLM, DFDS, One NorthEast, Verisure, Arup, Maersk, Northern Gas Networks, Sage software, AkzoNobel, Newcastle and Sunderland Colleges and nearly all of the region's universities.

## What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

The biggest challenge was building a brand from scratch back in the early 1990s, especially when I had returned to the region with no local contacts and just one client, a Japanese company based in Essex. I was more impatient and demanding back in those days and found it frustrating that we could not grow quicker than I wished. It took a number of years to become truly established and then the opportunities flowed in.

The first 20 years seem almost sedate compared to the last ten, where we have faced uncertainty and challenge on a scale probably never seen before. By that I mean the financial crisis, Brexit and now the pandemic. It has been hard work swashbuckling our way through that toxic mixture.

## Who do you most respect in your industry?

There are lots of companies and sole traders providing a great service and I applaud them all. If I had to pick some names it would be those who have not attempted to provide a diluted multi service offering but have stayed true to their area of specialism and have been resilient enough to be around nearly as long as us. I think it is better to specialise in a clearly defined area than to try and be a jack of all trades. So, hats off to MHW, Karol and Recognition.

## What is your greatest strength?

I think I can get to the crux of a client-related issue fairly quickly. I dislike jargon and complexity and try to keep things very simple and clear. I am also capable of standing my ground, when I think it is needed.

## What is your biggest weakness?

I don't know if it is a weakness but I find it very hard to resist any organisation or individual that comes to me for help. It is a good thing to help others, but it can involve lots of time. Right now I am supporting a high profile charity with PR and communications and chair a Catholic education trust, which comprised four schools at the beginning of this year and will reach 34 schools in two years. That is a huge challenge, one that is both exciting and daunting in equal measure and currently involves inordinate amounts of time.

## What has been your proudest achievement?

There have been many great moments with clients and colleagues over my career. However, I would have to say that the introduction of my two daughters Sarah and Jane into the business and having the opportunity to mentor them and see them flourish, has given me the greatest level of satisfaction.

## What are your remaining career aspirations?

I keep thinking that I should start to step back a little but I find that hard. I love working with clients and helping them to build their businesses and brands. I also still get an immense thrill out of converting new business, the fact that someone makes a decision to appoint me or the business, is a great feeling.

## How do you see your industry evolving in the next ten years?

It's hard to know where the PR industry will be in the next ten years, especially when you consider how much it has changed in the last ten with the digital revolution. The opportunities are very exciting but I do worry that there is today far more emphasis on tactical delivery than the development of clear and coherent PR and communications strategies, out of which the tactical activity should come. Social channels have in many ways enabled this, as many companies now have multiple channels to communicate through and instead of carefully considering their approach and strategy they simply 'push' content as fast as they can.





Daniel O'Mahoney



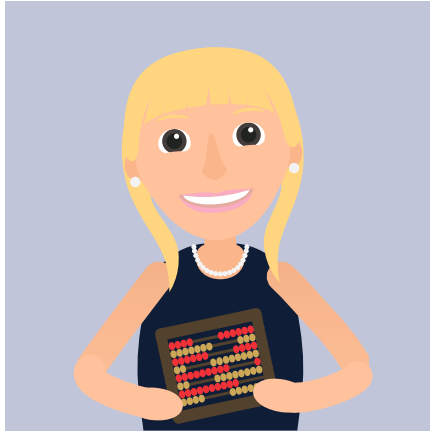
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# BUILDING STRONGER BUSINESSES IN THE FACE OF ADVERSITY

Reflecting on how she has used the last few months to drive forward her commitment to investing in the future, Lisa Eaton, Managing Director of integrated communications agency Unwritten Group, shares her advice for building a resilient business.

This pandemic was certainly a curveball, and although it posed a bigger threat than most of us have experienced before, as business leaders we're used to having obstacles thrown at us. These challenges drive a change in thinking and present an opportunity to demonstrate resilience and innovation.

As we emerge from this crisis, we face another set of challenges. Rising unemployment levels will impact everyone, but particularly women, whose unemployment rate is almost 3% higher than men's. Reassessing business strategy is tough for everyone, but in order to protect our workforce equally, we must consider what we can do to build stronger businesses that will survive the recovery phase.

## Adapt for the future

The disproportionate impact of unemployment on women is, in part, due to them taking the lead on additional childcare and household responsibilities. As a business managed by women, empowering our staff to have a healthy home life balance was crucial to us going forward.

After the overwhelming success of remote working, and to make flexible working permanent, we're leasing a new Unwritten HQ. The modern, collaborative space is perfect for supporting the team in working between the office and home, in a way that supports their lifestyles.

It's still possible to progress your long-term business goals whilst you adapt to unexpected circumstances – just keep in mind how to make them sustainable for your team.

## Refocus, reimagine and rebuild

The crisis, for Unwritten, saw a significant reduction in our usual work. Of course, this sparked anxieties over what this meant for us and our future.



Lisa Eaton

Instead of dwelling on worries, we worked on achieving our vision and focused resources into new projects; ones that we believed would strengthen our business model. Using our time to create something new provided a change of pace that re-energised our team and gave us all a morale boost that carried us through those first weeks of uncertainty, and we're now well into the development stages of a lucrative and exciting new arm of the business.

Refocusing on creating new projects or divisions is a great way to diversify and build a stronger business model. It's an ideal time for businesses to explore untapped markets and build new audiences, expanding reach and potential for growth.

It's also worth considering taking advantage of advertising costs that are lower than usual at the moment to use this time to position and promote your business and offer. Marketing remains an excellent catalyst for growing sales pipelines, stabilising your business during times of uncertainty.

## Lean on your network

When lockdown was enforced, networking opportunities ground to a halt. Attending a membership event or popping to see a business

associate became impossible but having a network of support was more vital than ever.

Instead, through Zooms, our North East colleagues quickly united to spark a pivot from panic to productivity. We shared our fears and contingency plans and helped each other navigate the biggest challenge we had collectively faced. This inspiring group of business leaders have empowered me to stay positive and focused. I feel incredibly grateful to have a close circle of brilliantly supportive peers, and to be immersed in the community we're all part of.

Talk to those you trust, take their advice and use their support. We have all seen what the power of community can do, so now is the time to embrace it.

For us, facing this crisis with a resilient mindset has had a snowball effect of creating more determination than ever to push the boundaries and progress our mission to make Unwritten the very best it can be; for our team and for our clients. With this goal in mind, we're pressing on with our long-term strategy.

As we continue to speculate what the remainder of this year will bring, I'm proud to say that the only direction we're looking in, is onwards and upwards.



# Refocus Reimagine Rebuild

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## REALISE THE POWER OF SOCIAL MEDIA

North east based social, digital and design agency Curtis Gabriel work with over 200 clients across four continents. Discover how they have helped their clients realise the power of social media.

### AC Hotel Belfast

This beautiful riverside hotel located in Northern Ireland came to Curtis Gabriel looking for support prior to opening. The hotel required both brand awareness and traffic to their website to help generate bookings, but ultimately, they also wanted to grow their audience on social media.

### How we helped?

After completing thorough research and completing a competitor analysis, Curtis Gabriel provided a social strategy document which would meet their aims and objectives during the launch period.

### What we did?

We used our social media content to promote the hotel opening, as well as the fact this was the first and only AC Hotel to launch in Northern Ireland. By using high quality images to showcase

the stunning riverside location as well as the fantastic Michelin Star award-winning chef – Jean Christophe Novelli restaurant, Novelli at City Quays, we were able to profile the hotel as the ultimate place to stay in Northern Ireland.

To create more exposure for the hotel, we shared local PR content, positive news stories, human interest content and shared competitions. During 2019 the hotels social media content received 2.47 million impressions and received 129,901 engagements.

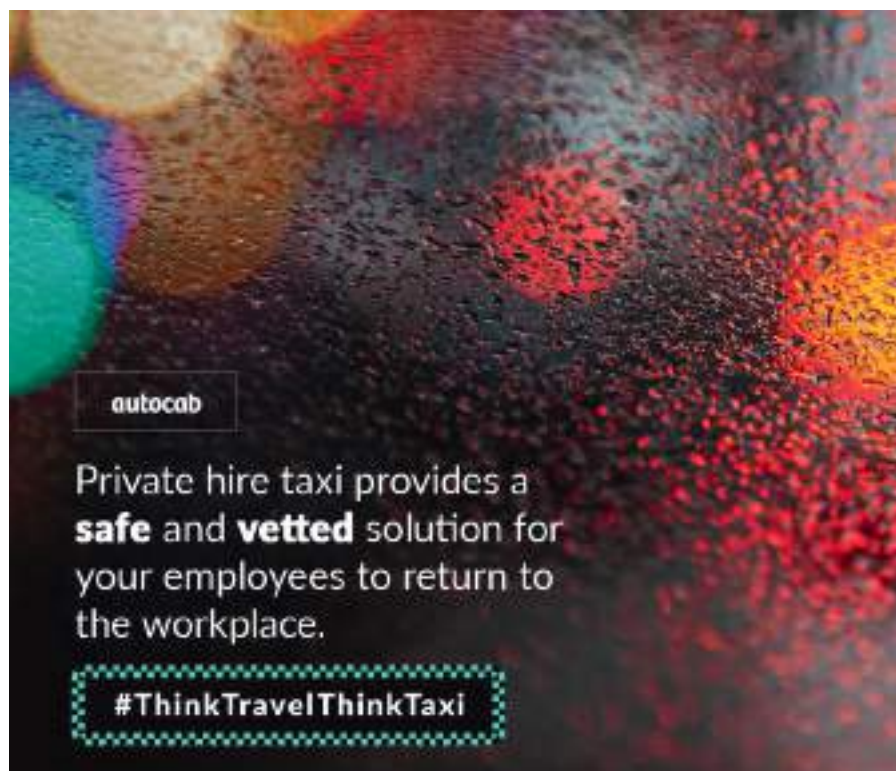
### Impact of Covid-19

In recent months we have supported the hotel through the covid-19 pandemic with our 24/7 account management handling a spike in customer service enquiries, our content is now promoting the re-opening of the hotel as the perfect venue for a visit to Belfast.



Visit [www.curtisgabriel.com](http://www.curtisgabriel.com) to discover more client success stories.





## CURTIS GABRIEL LAUNCH INDUSTRY LEADING - THINK TRAVEL THINK TAXI CAMPAIGN

Our client, Autocab – is the No. 1 supplier of taxi booking & dispatch systems in the world. Having sold their first system in 1991, Autocab has grown to become the largest supplier of booking & dispatch systems in the world today.



Their bespoke cloud-based SaaS solutions help power over 1500 companies across the world. Over 25 years of taxi company-inspired features have been built into their system to ensure it is the best booking & dispatch system on the market. Headquartered in Manchester, UK their customers are located all over the world. In addition to their flagship product Ghost, Autocab have since broadened their range of services to include taxi company branded apps, analytics, bespoke phone systems as well as a range of web and social media solutions for private hire taxi, limousine and ground transportation companies of all sizes.

Launched with the best interests of the UK taxi industry at heart, Curtis Gabriel helped raise awareness of the Think Travel Think Taxi campaign during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### How we did it

Autocab's #ThinkTravelThinkTaxi awareness campaign was launched with the best interests of the UK taxi industry at heart, and we are incredibly proud to have been part of the team who devised the concept and supported its inception.

Our social media campaigns to promote nationwide awareness has received incredible results, with our launch video reaching over 1.5 million on Facebook alone.

This umbrella campaign also houses The Safe Taxi and Private Hire Charter – a promise by the UK Private Hire Taxi and Mini-Cab industry to adhere to the very highest standards of sanitation. To date, our social media campaigns encouraging signatories have contributed to over 200 companies pledging their allegiance to the Charter.

In the first three months since being tasked to head up Autocab's awareness campaign we have recorded 2.5 million social impressions, 30,115 social engagement and 4,900 website visits.



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# Are you ready for Business as *unusual*?

'You can guide your business out of COVID19 with the support of quality social media and digital marketing, ensuring you are prepared to fight for your previous customers, maximise new opportunities and pivoting where necessary.'

- Life is going to be different for a while, those business who adapt and enhance their product, service and marketing will enjoy the most success.
- It needs to be accepted that business will not go back to 'normal', there will be a New Normal - Business as *unusual*.
- Traditional revenue streams will potentially be hard fought for. Customers will expect new and adjusted services and standards. This will create opportunity for new revenue streams and markets.
- Social media and digital marketing will be the most cost-effective way of targeting new audiences and achieving success for new and existing business development opportunities.
- The COVID19 lockdown has presented this opportunity with a shift in consumer paradigm. Increased value has been placed on local community and acts of generosity and charity, along with services to support this or living in the new normal.
- Those sitting within the heart of their community and audience, providing essential products/services and operationally accommodating a desire for increased standards of sanitization and social distancing will prevail. A trusted brand well established in the market and community at the forefront of customers minds will only maximise this success.
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Claire Riley: Executive Director of Communications and Corporate Affairs Northumbria Health NHS Foundation Trust. Claire has extensive experience in business, marketing and communications across both the public and private sectors. She was named as a 'North East marketing great' in 2017 after being included in the list of the 50 leading marketing professionals published by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM).

## WORKING THROUGH A CRISIS

Veronica Swindale, FCIM, MCIPR and Managing Director of nesma caught up with Claire virtually over a much-needed cuppa to gain some insight into how life has been while managing communications for the Trust over the past four months.

Claire, it is precisely a year since we appeared together in Northern Insight and who could have imagined that we would have been having this discussion back then? We all know these have been unprecedented times and of course we are not over them yet.

**Can you give us an idea of what it has been like managing the communications activity for the NHS in the region?**

I don't think I have ever experienced anything like this in my career to date. The intensity, the volume, the pace, the focus, the complexity, the highs and the lows, the overwhelming sadness and fear. The humbling support from the public, partners and local businesses, the amazing staff – and everything in-between.

Unprecedented is a word that has been used many times, but I don't believe it articulates what we all have, and continue to, go through. It still feels too early to analyse the good the bad and the ugly from a communications point of view, but I could not be prouder of my team and how they have been steadfast in their approach which, day in day out, has focussed on patients, the public and staff.

Throughout this, we have managed to maintain high levels of public and staff engagement – which has been no mean feat.

I would also highlight how, as a region, we mobilised

the communications effort to ensure consistency and impact – despite some people centrally not wanting us to do this.

**There are many challenges here, what was the biggest for you?**

One of the biggest frustrations, however, has been linked to announcements made during the daily briefings, that directly impacted on the NHS and its staff, without having any heads up. We had to change important procedures for safety reasons, like usage of PPE, very quickly.

**From a management perspective, what was new for you to have to implement?**

I suppose this would be the nature of a major incident. Typical incidents are short term – this has been high intensity over a long period; therefore, management approaches have needed to adapt to deal with resilience and continuity.

We had to quickly create team 'bubbles' to reduce the number of people in the office on any given day and work out how to balance the needs and requirements of the job alongside adhering to the rules re social distancing etc.

**What positives would you like to share with our readers?**

Much has been written over the years regarding lack of community cohesion and/or fractured

society, and I think COVID:19 brought people together. Supporting and looking after each other, talking to neighbours, shopping for neighbours or those in need. Members of the public, schools and business have donated so much to the NHS it has been overwhelming and humbling in equal measure. The selflessness of people donating their time to make PPE for staff and patients has been incredible and who can forget the efforts of Captain Tom?

One final but significant point I would make would be how amazing the media have been in our region. The support and collaboration we have had from our local journalists (print and broadcast) have been brilliant. They have worked with us, within the constraints we have had, to ensure we sensibly position the challenging and vital stories and have helped us to provide a clear message to the public throughout.

**Any personal lessons learned?**

Get rest when you can and don't worry about the ironing pile! Many of us who work in communications have had to keep working during Covid:19. Whether that is in or out of the office, key worker or not. I know that it has been impossible to have much if any, time off this year. But we still need to look after our resilience, mental health and professionalism.



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# WE'VE HIGHLIGHTED YOUR BUSINESS - THE HOUSE OF RUHR

**This month I've been working with a retired police officer with a very interesting story to tell.**

Bryn Jones from Sunderland set up his Houghton-Le-Spring business, House of Ruhr as the result of a friendship with German police officer Peter Meinken whose family own a distillery in the town of Wanne-Eickel in the Ruhr Valley.

The Eicker and Callen Distillery dates back to 1749. Every Gin is hand crafted and triple distilled to give it its unique flavour. The spirits are distilled using local botanical ingredients grown in a local nature reserve.

Both Bryn's hometown of Sunderland and Wanne-Eickel share a lot of similarities including a rich coal mining heritage.

"We have "Bergmann" Gin which is the German word for miner and contains Goji Berry, Physalis and Yerba Leaf amongst its botanicals while "Vogel," the German word for bird, represents the yellow canaries that saved so many miners lives from coal gas and this has a more lemon flavoured base," said Bryn.

The third Gin, "Renton" is named after Bryn's maternal, great, great grandfather Captain James Ogilvie Renton who was lost at sea in 1871 and whose body was never found.

Bryn was recently contacted by David Renton, a

customer in Ireland who wanted a bottle of Renton for his father's 80th birthday. His dad was the third generation in his family to be called James Ogilvie Renton and bizarrely Bryn discovered that he had a new fourth cousin.



"I couldn't believe that a bottle of Gin could connect families together – it's sometimes called "mothers ruin" but in this case it's more like "families united," said Bryn.

Each of the three Gins distributed by the House of Ruhr is limited in number to just 2500 and every bottle is individually numbered and hand signed by the German distillers before they hand fix the labels to the bottles. They are available at The House of Ruhr website [www.houseofruhr.co.uk](http://www.houseofruhr.co.uk)

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## ALL ROAMS LEAD TO SALES ON THE HIGH STREET

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, many businesses are tentatively starting to open their doors and one Durham based digital entrepreneur is driving customers back to the High Street using the latest app technology.

Former jockey Andrew Bartlett has developed the ROAM app which gives users essential information about shops and services based on their GPS location. This includes up to date offers and opening times, as well as the ability to order items to collect instore or for home delivery.

For business users, the app shares offers, menus, news and loyalty deals direct to customers. The free app can now also monitor where members of the public are gathering within retail outlets so that people can avoid crowds while social distancing remains in place.



## REVVIS MAKES FIRST APPOINTMENT IN THE NORTH

revvis, a brand-new state of the art software application, has recruited an experienced chartered surveyor and developer to run its operations in the North.

Duncan McGregor will be based in Newcastle to help property firms in the North of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland enhance their customer engagement and increase sales.

Filling a gap in the market, revvis allows users to view and design the interior and exterior of a property to their own style before it is even built. Users can make changes in real time alone or with friends, family or colleagues, supported with instructional videos on YouTube.

With its remote use and detailed virtualisation capabilities, the software is ideal as the property market gets back to business in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic.



## MD IS WALKING 500 MILES, THEN 500 MORE

Taking inspiration from The Proclaimers, a North East managing director challenged himself to walk 500 miles, then 500 more, to support a local charity during the Covid-19 lockdown.

John Burns, who owns the office solutions provider Diamond Group, decided to take on the challenge after ditching the car at the beginning of lockdown and walking the six miles from his home in Washington to his office in Team Valley and back.

Seeing this not only as an opportunity to get fit but also raise some vital funds for charity Age UK Northumberland, John set himself a 1,000 mile, and £1,000, target. John hopes to complete his challenge by the end of August.



## AGILE WORKING TO BE MORE COMMON AFTER COVID-19 CRISIS

Cramlington-based IT company TruStack, which has helped more than 200 North East companies work from home during lockdown, is predicting that agile working will become increasingly common in the future.

TruStack surveyed its clients to discover the impact of agile working and whether businesses are likely to encourage more employees to work away from the office in the months and years to come.

Seventy five percent of those surveyed said they expected employees to carry out more agile working in the future, while 100% said they had a more positive view of agile working as a result of Covid-19.

Among other products and services, TruStack also enabled its customers to work from home by providing hardware such as laptops, software, enhanced security and unified communications.

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## SECURING YOUR BUSINESS IN THE NEW NORMAL

After the urgent task of rapidly enabling people to work from home at short notice and on a scale never seen before, many of the region's organisations should now be taking time to stand back and assess the true security of their remote work environments.

Given the volume and complexity of identities, data, applications, devices, and infrastructures, it's not surprising that employers want the confidence that their organisation really is fully protected and that their users can connect to the business environment securely and with confidence.

It's worth noting that most remote home users connect to their business environment via the internet using their home broadband connection, which is shared with other members of the home. Every business should note that the internet by default is an open system accessible by all and is by its nature invariably insecure. That's why taking your security seriously and managing the risk is of utmost importance. While achieving connectivity for remote users was always the first priority, achieving this securely should be the goal of every business.

Our work as security, data centre and cloud experts takes us under the skin of hundreds of the region's businesses. Common questions we are asked include:

- How can we help employees stay safe from COVID-19 themed phishing attacks?
- How do we keep work files from being left behind on employee home computers?
- How do I make sure the devices my employees use are secure?
- Is there an easier way for employees to securely access on-premises applications? How do we enable a good remote desktop experience?

- How can we do all this while minimising costs and complexity?

The big vendors have been quick to respond to the sudden change in the market, accelerating development times on a battalion of new tools and services to help organisations protect themselves against threat.

The emphasis is on developing increasingly sophisticated 'zero trust' security tools, which do not trust any internal or external device that is trying to connect to your systems. One tool that has become common in both our business and personal lives is multi-factor authentication (MFA) where we need to present several pieces of evidence, for example a password and then a code sent to our mobiles, before we can proceed to log in to a cloud or internet-connected application.

Cisco is leading the way in this area with its latest Duo tool, developed in response to organisations looking for a reliable, secure and easy-to-manage, MFA tool that can simply bolt on to existing infrastructures, at a lower cost than anything currently on the market.

Duo validates users and devices, gives visibility over devices across all platforms, and provides secure access to all apps, whether they are on premise or in the cloud, supporting your staff by helping them to keep your organisation and its information safe online.

Staying with Cisco, we're also seeing a surge in

demand for Cisco Umbrella, a secure internet gateway providing first line defence against internet threats, wherever your users are, and however they are connecting. In the past, desktops, business apps and critical infrastructure were all located behind the firewall. But right now so much more is happening off-network and if you rely on perimeter security alone, you are at risk.

Microsoft's new Intune product is set to re-write the book on cloud-based mobile device and application management, with its ability to ensure all your company-owned and bring-your-own devices are managed and always up to date, with the most flexible, scalable control over any Windows, Apple, and Android devices.

With so many available IT management options to choose from, and a pressing need to focus on business issues as we begin to rebuild the economy, it is unsurprising that the managed services market is seeing unprecedented growth.

The advantages of working with a managed services partner who takes responsibility for whatever level of your IT infrastructure fits best with your business are that it frees up your in-house resources, maintains high levels of expertise across a broad range of specialisms, and offers you a fixed and predictable cost base.

Why not talk to our experts and get your free business security review now, to make sure your organisation is prepared for the brave new world?



# Overcoming “online fatigue” with Direct Mail

The use of direct mail is more relevant than ever - especially during the Coronavirus outbreak.

In fact, **64%\*** of UK consumers say how well companies respond to Covid-19 will have a huge impact on the likelihood of purchasing from them in the future. A huge **88%\*** expect clear details from brands on how they can access their products or services while **61%\*** say simply hearing from a company on their response to coronavirus is comforting.

This presents the opportunity to reach them with direct mail. With more consumers using social media to stay connected with family and friends and updated about the current crisis, many brands are facing the challenge of “online fatigue”. Digital marketing campaigns are failing to make an impact on consumers.

Direct mail is an effective way to combat digital fatigue because it cuts through the noise and gets your message in front of customers. Its tangibility means mail is observed and creates a memorable impression, so customers are more likely to take action.



With modern digital printing technologies, mail pieces can be personalised to each individual, in turn helping to boost your engagement rates.

Mail also has the ability to detail long, complex messages, making it the perfect medium to inform your customers on how your business is responding to Covid-19.

So whether you're looking to welcome customers back in store, update them on your Covid-19 safety measures or just want to let them know your brand is still there, MetroMail can help to deliver your message.

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\* Source: Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report March 2020

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## EMMA CROWE

Managing Director of Social+

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Until about the age of 15 I wanted to work in the theatre in the West End. I have always loved Music and Dance. However, I realised that in reality it was really more of a dream, after graduating from Northumbria University I decided on a different path. From its inception I have loved social media which I find fascinating. I originally started in Social Media working with a wi-fi product for Social+ before becoming MD and we are now an established arm of the Unite Group which has Managed IT services, Telecomms and digital marketing all under one roof.

### Tell us about your current role?

I currently work across all aspects of Social+ mainly focusing on the Social media, Training and Networking side of the business.

Having an online presence is so important but equally important is how you use it. We work with clients to develop a strategy for their business, create engaging content, build and maintain websites and implement management training.

### How has your industry changed over the past decade?

People are far more aware of social media and the need to use it for their business. The digital world is constantly evolving which create exciting opportunities for all businesses. Our aim is to offer specialist expert help to ensure it is used effectively and correctly.

### What has been your proudest achievement so far?

Creating a business that allows me the flexibility to not miss out on my two children growing up.

### What are you currently working on?

We have added an arm to the business called 1Network and the aim, medium to long term, is to establish this as a national platform. 1Network allows you to have face to face weekly meetings but also continue this online and build your online network while enhancing your businesses social media and online presence.



Emma Crowe

Digital Marketing and SEO has been very important during lockdown. We are also offering a free website audit to allow companies to see how their sites are performing and how they can be improved.

### Tell us about your team?

Myself and Danielle Archbold head up the Social+ side of The Unite Group. We have known each other for 15 years, so working together was always going to go one of two ways. Almost two years in and it couldn't have come together any better. We are also part of a 13 strong team at the Unite Group in which there is a never a dull moment, looking forward to getting back into the office with everyone.

### What is the best piece of business advice you have been given?

Work on yourself as well as your business! Knowing why you do what you do and the most productive way to work as an individual and

then working to find the same for your team is invaluable.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

With social media a lot of people know the tools so feel this is something they can do themselves. Educating clients to fully understand and use social media correctly so that they gain the best results has been hard but I do love that light bulb moment.

### How do you like to unwind?

I have coached Gymnastics for the last 15 years and that is my go to, to unwind.

### Favourite...

**Book** - *Start with Why* by Simon Sinek. Recommended to me not long ago and has made me view the way I am in business very differently.

**CD** - I can be found singing along in the car to any Musical!

**DVD** - Hunger Games.

For further information visit the website [www.social-plus.media](http://www.social-plus.media)



# GO BACK TO WORK SAFELY, DIFFERENTLY AND DIGITALLY – RE-OPENING THE WORKPLACE

What does going back to work involve for many of us now?

The last four months has undeniably changed the working environment, with managers and owners in every industry, and every size of business, in every location having to work through the implications of having employees return to work, return to the office or work from home/remotely. Organisations are having to change and implement new procedures, new processes and new policies to manage workspaces and ensure the safety of their teams. It's a huge shift in mindset and raises all sorts of new challenges.

For example – I read recently that paper will soon be thought of as a biological agent! A little farfetched perhaps, but think about it – do you really want to accept paper money from someone you don't know? Many retailers have already made the shift to only accepting card transactions for health reasons. Will people turn away from paper based processes and ask why their employer or service provider isn't automating all paper-reliant processes? Will they want to accept paper based contracts from your business, if they don't know who's handled it – or be asked to sign something physically and hand it back to another person (with or without gloves) if it's not necessary to do so? If we're having to come up with processes for not sharing phones/pens/pads/break out areas in the office, then it stands to reason that



Justin Short

we will need to eliminate paper and move it around digitally using workflows, document generation processes and eSignature tools.

At Synergi we've been thinking about this a great deal – not just as we physically prepare our own office – but also the processes that we're having to deploy. We've had to re-arrange desks and re-think our social

areas, not to mention shutting down the microwave and instigating rotating work schedules – we want to welcome back to the office all those who want to come, but we have to do it safely and effectively. Essentially we need to prepare for continued Work from Home and prepare for Return to Office.

Our experience is that process automation is the cornerstone of this operation. It honestly isn't as daunting as you might think to automate and optimise paper-based processes. Your high frequency contact processes are the ones that should be automated first, and this can be done with solutions that incorporate simple and easy to use robotic process automation (RPA) tools. Solutions such as Nintex exist for this. This is actually a great opportunity to re-define the role paper plays in your organisation, and re-think the whole end-to-end flow of your processes – don't just replicate your manual processes and automate them – grab this opportunity to really reflect on and streamline your processes.

We have recently won a Nintex partner of the year award for the 5th year running, and are offering a series of Business Transformation packs to help with automating those processes needed for the return to office challenge. These include Daily Check Ins, PPE ordering and despatch, Desk Allocation, Rotas, Site Visits and more. We're happy to chat through how this works with you. The important thing is to ensure not only business continuity, but also employee safety and welfare.

To find out more check out our website, [www.teamsynergi.co.uk](http://www.teamsynergi.co.uk), or get in touch by calling 0191 4770365 or email [enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk).



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# AGILE RESPONSE TO SUPPORT CHANGING TECH AND IT NEEDS



Daniel Wilson and wife Amy.

Tech specialist Wilson-Etheridge should have been celebrating a business anniversary when lockdown struck.

Director Daniel Wilson explains how the pandemic prompted him to pivot and reimagine his offer to SMEs and clients.

## What was the original plan when you launched in 2018?

The original plan remains the same; but we have altered the offer. We're being more flexible in an uncertain economic climate. When I left the RAF in early 2018 from an IT role, I fell into some contract work. I knew I didn't want to be an 'out of the box' contractor and wanted to run and build a business that delivered cloud-based services. I created Wilson-Etheridge which combines my name with my wife Amy's name. Within a short space of time we were successfully doing contract work for large corporates.

More recently we've introduced a pay-as-you-go (PAYG) offer to appeal to SMEs.

## Explain your core offer and services

Primarily we're a Microsoft 365 specialist. We provide the full service from licence reselling to design and development, consultation and implementation to ongoing maintenance support. There's also a training provision for those who require it. We typically work on monthly or annual contracts; but our new PAYG service means we can also provide quick, high-impact support and

interventions for those that have more limited budgets.

## What sort of clients are you attracting?

Prior to COVID-19 striking and the lockdown we were getting a steady range of work from corporates and reasonably large companies. Much of it was direct and some through IT providers. We continue to work with a global recruitment group as well as an international oil and gas safety specialist. We're starting to see an interest in cloud services and support from smaller companies.

## What has been the impact of the pandemic?

Business remains steady for us. Our contracts keep me and my team reasonably busy. But it's fair to say everyone is a little more uncertain and cautious about the future. We've just got to keep delivering the best service we can and hope the economy recovers quickly. There will always be a need for IT and tech support. If anything, the pandemic has accelerated digital transformation within many companies.

## How have you responded?

The pandemic did make us stop and review our business model. We need to remain focused on our core contracts while also getting busy securing new work. At the same time, we recognise there will be a lot of companies needing tech support but

reluctant to commit to fixed monthly or annual fees when times might be hard. So, during lockdown, we launched our PAYG service to support companies working in a Microsoft 365 environment.

## Explain PAYG and the benefits

It's a simple offer that most SMEs get. Small enterprises need flexibility and cost-effective solutions. We allow customers to pay by the hour – whether it's troubleshooting, support or development. They simply pay as they use our service. They're not locked into any contract – there's zero commitment for the user. It's perfect for a start-up, a small business or even those people working remotely from home – which is only likely to increase. We can help – supporting them remotely or on site.

## How do the next 12 months look?

We're getting more referral work, so I'm quietly confident we'll keep on steadily attracting contract work while also securing more PAYG customers. While the future looks a little uncertain, I'd like to grow my network of sub-contractors and eventually start to recruit a small direct team of Microsoft 365 specialists to expand the business. Whatever the health of the economy, there is always a need to develop and maintain technical systems and equipment across all businesses.

More details at [www.wilson-etheridge.com](http://www.wilson-etheridge.com)





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# SMART SCIENCE



Erika Leadbeater, managing director at TSG Marine.

## Bringing smart science used to protect premieriership footballers to the offshore market in the fight against Covid-19.

Tyneside-based marine engineering specialists, TSG Marine, is taking the latest molecular technology offshore to support the energy sector on its journey out of the Covid-19 crisis.

Utilising the same smart science used to protect premieriership football players and staff in stadiums, TSG Marine has secured a deal to make the technology available to oil and gas, marine and renewable assets operating in the North Sea and beyond.

Energy companies have been particularly hard hit during the pandemic and ensuring offshore teams and their families are protected against the transmission of the Covid-19 virus is critical.

Going beyond disinfecting an environment, TSG Marine is deploying a rapid sanitisation system which not only renders a workplace virus-free but a molecular layer, when applied to surfaces, kills all viral, bacterial, mould and organisms for up to 30 days.

TSG Marine's Protect+ is a process based on science, using the physiology of viruses, bacteria,

mould and organisms against them.

When applied to a surface, ZOONO® leaves behind a mono-molecular layer that bonds to the surface. These molecules form a barrier of positively charged microscopic spines that attract and pierce pathogens causing them to break up with lethal effect. This layer of molecular antimicrobial spines is laboratory tested to carry on working for up to 30 days on surfaces and isn't disrupted by regular cleaning practices.

TSG Marine, managing director, Erika Leadbeater, said: "We're working with companies in the offshore energy sector as they plan their route out of the COVID-19 crisis. It's important we establish new ways of working that protect their teams and we believe this technology is the solution.

"We work with our customers to design the most appropriate programme for their facilities to reduce risk, identifying high transmission areas, utilising fogging for maximum coverage and spray application for exterior locations. With training

and supplies of top-up fluids for high contact areas, we will work with the infield personnel to educate and inform, keeping their environment safe. On completion, our technicians will issue a certificate of sanitation which customers can use to help reassure workers of their safety.

"We are also bringing temperature monitoring equipment, as we've seen deployed in airports, to help the industry test workers joining facilities for signs of infection. This not only reduces the spread of the virus but ensures those workers showing signs of infection are not putting their own health at risk by travelling offshore."

This non-contact, fast screening process, utilises artificial intelligence to detect elevated temperatures in up to 30 people a second with an accuracy range of +/-0.5°C. Together with TSG Marine's expertise in marine and offshore environments, this technology can be applied to make the offshore industry safer amidst a public health crisis that is challenging all companies to change the way they do things.

To find out more about TSG Marine and the Protect+ service visit [www.tsgmarine.co.uk/protect](http://www.tsgmarine.co.uk/protect)

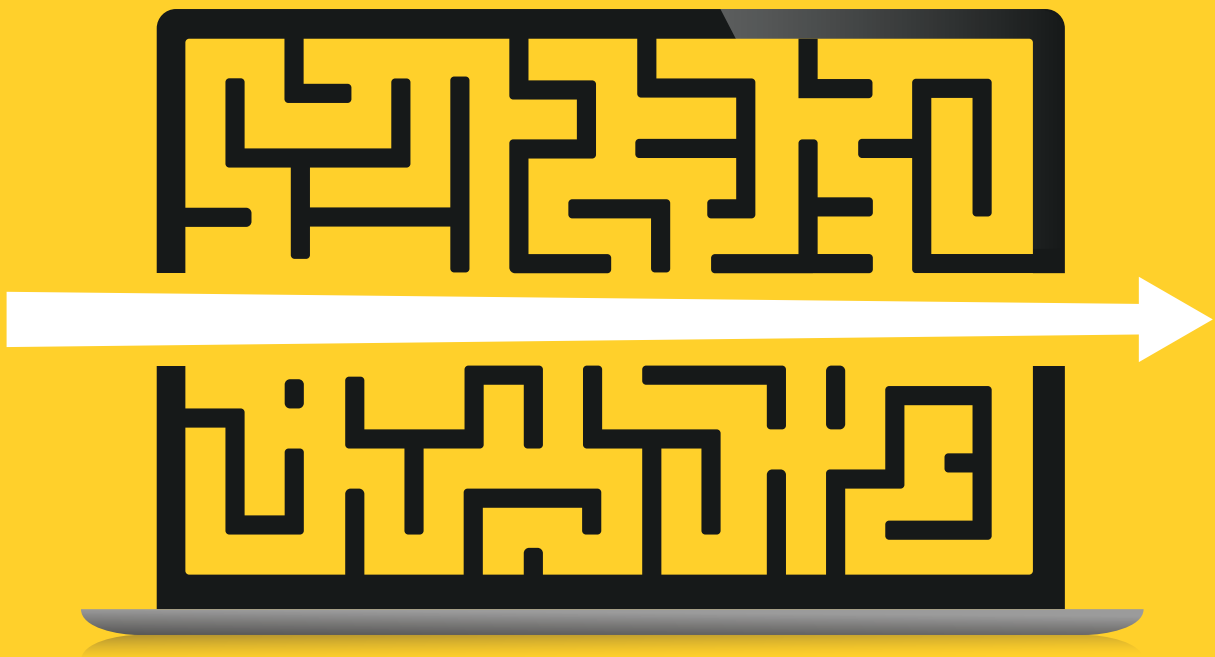


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# WHY DIGITAL MARKETING IS MORE VITAL THAN EVER

In an age where everything happens online, the quality of marketing can make or break a business

Standing out from the crowd in a crowded online space can sometimes feel like an impossible task in 2020. With so much noise in the digital sphere, you'd be forgiven for wondering how you have a chance of being heard. Having led a North East digital marketing agency for many years, I can tell you that effective digital marketing isn't about who can shout the loudest, but rather who understands their audience and knows how to offer something authentic, credible and of genuine value.

## It's 2020: everyone is online

More than 4.5 billion people – that's more than half the world's population – were using the Internet at the start of 2020. In fact, the Office of National Statistics reports that 87% of adults used the Internet daily in 2019.

For modern businesses, it's clear that digital marketing channels can no longer be ignored. And as lockdown has shown us, even those industries that have always relied on face-to-face interactions, print marketing and physical interactions can thrive online.

Digital marketing has a crucial role to play in helping businesses establish a strong web presence and build trust with their audience. As a Newcastle based digital agency, we're often approached by companies that have something valuable to say, but perhaps don't know how to convey their messaging in a way that will engage prospects.

A quick look at a sparse and barely touched company blog often tells us why a new client's website may not be performing as well as it could. A well-constructed blog creates a hub for thought leadership pieces, advice articles and other great material that will help to set a business apart from its competition. It will also significantly contribute to a website's performance in search engine rankings.

We regularly support our clients to create informative and insightful content that helps to drive traffic to their website. And you might be surprised to hear how often a casual website visitor is convinced to get



Michael Knowles

in touch off the back of an engaging article. For those not convinced of the value of running a website blog, it's worth noting that recent research carried out by Hubspot showed that companies investing in their own blog received 97% more links to their website than businesses that didn't.

## Reputation is everything, and people do their digging on Google

A brand is only as good as its reputation, and when people are considering the products or services of a business they haven't used before, their first instinct is usually to 'Google it'.

This form of audit has become the norm and the truth is, if you aren't presenting yourself in a credible light via your website and social media accounts, then you're likely to be missing out on new business. In fact, one study from 2016, suggested that 47% of buyers choose to read three to five pieces of brand content before engaging with a sales rep.

Conversely, an informative website that's easy to navigate, filled with engaging and exciting content, will help to provide your potential customers with reassurance and peace of mind.

## Upping your content game in the face of digitalisation

There's been plenty of talk about digitalisation in recent weeks as businesses have scrambled to take their services, products and experiences online. And

as all facets of the business world grab a foothold in the digital space, organisations will need to place more emphasis on their blogging and content creation.

For those companies that have historically traded on a local scale from physical premises, the challenge now is to offer the same personal touch and sense of community through a device or computer that they have always been able to offer in person.

For a local butcher, this might be a recipe article posted online that would previously have been shared over the counter; for an independent financial advisor it might be valuable market insight that would until now have been discussed over a coffee.

While it's important to acknowledge that the Pandemic won't always restrict traditional business practices, my belief is that digitalisation is here to stay – and that means that businesses must work as hard to build and consolidate relationships online as they have always done in the physical world.

If you are looking for a Newcastle based digital agency to help you negotiate the fast-changing marketing landscape, ROAR Digital Marketing is here to support you. Creating your own blog or planning a content marketing strategy doesn't have to be difficult, and with our help it can be entirely hassle-free.

Visit: [roardigitalmarketing.co.uk](https://roardigitalmarketing.co.uk) or get in touch by calling 0191 486 26 06 or by dropping us an email at [info@roardigitalmarketing.co.uk](mailto:info@roardigitalmarketing.co.uk)



# MIND THE GAP

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headmaster at Durham School

The impact of the coronavirus pandemic will be far-reaching and long-lasting. The full health, social and emotional cost of the disease is still unknown, but it is clear that we have all been touched one way or another.

One group that has been uniquely affected are those eighteen-year olds who were planning to go to university this year. I wrote previously about the epidemic's effect on the anticlimactic end to their time at school; it struck me that it was rather like a prize fighter who, after months of training, technique and motivational psychology, steps into the ring only to watch his opponent trip on his bootlace and knock himself out on one of the corner posts.

Adding to their discomfort, those school leavers who were looking to move on to the next phase of their education face a dilemma. Do they continue with their plans to go to university and face a term or even a year of a socially distanced environment, with contact limited to small group tutorials and the occasional Zoom call? Or, do they wait and see till next year; reapply and take that evergreen staple of student life, the gap year.

It is not an easy choice. Certainly, the latter option seems attractive. Who wants a sterile experience of a quasi-distance learning experience, with all of the isolation that would involve? For many young people, university is a life-changing experience defined in their first term. Meeting people from different backgrounds, sitting in student rooms long into the night having pretentious conversations, trying out new experiences both intellectual and not; all of these make university life exhilarating. A Freshers' Week conducted via Microsoft Teams not quite so appealing.

However, deferring a place – or withdrawing altogether – is problematic. The competition for places in 2021 is likely to be the fiercest we have seen in many years. There will be another round of school-leavers who will enter the fray (an increased number demographically next year) and the overseas students who make up increasingly more of the undergraduate intake will be likely



Kieran McLaughlin

to return in force. Getting a place at that Russell group university will be a much stiffer challenge next time round, particularly when we are likely to see an unseemly scramble for students on results day this year even from the most prestigious institutions. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and it will be tempting indeed for youngsters to claim a place at an institution that may feel out of their reach even now.

To those for whom the prospect of a first term in lockdown is intolerable, the question arises of how they will spend their unexpected year off. Whilst the experience of the last three months stuck at home with their parents is likely to have inspired many to flee as soon as they can, the traditional year backpacking round the world seems risky. The

alternative of working behind a bar for a year is likely to be tricky too, as they will be competing against those who have sadly lost their jobs in the epidemic.

There is of course no right answer for these men and women and what they decide to do will no doubt be informed by their own individual experiences and ambitions. In general, my advice would be to go for it. It may be a weird start, but university life is, if not quite a marathon, then a middle-distance race rather than a sprint. All things shall pass and that includes this pandemic; it will be a buyers' market more than ever before in August, and students are much more of a prized commodity than they perhaps realise.

For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email [admissions@durhamschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@durhamschool.co.uk) or visit [www.durhamschool.co.uk](http://www.durhamschool.co.uk)

# DELIVERING THROUGH LOCKDOWN

By David Tickner, Headmaster at  
Newcastle School for Boys

One of our school aims is to  
develop boys and young men of  
excellent character.

For Newcastle School for Boys, this is much more than the sometimes empty rhetoric of school aims published on a website or in a glossy prospectus. It is part of the everyday activity and language of our school - something that both boys and staff would recognise and reference regularly.

To support us in this, we have devised a character compass that captures the six key virtues we are seeking to develop: community, integrity, resilience, courage, leadership and empathy.

It might be assumed that during the recent weeks and months of lockdown and the scramble to grasp new technology and to continue delivering academic lessons, that there wouldn't have been much time for this. Quite the reverse: it has never been more important.

Resilience has been key in our response to the challenges of coronavirus and lockdown. The resilience of our boys, staff and parents has been quite remarkable. Sure, life has been different. It simply isn't possible to deliver the full school experience remotely, but I am proud of how close we have been to achieving that. Resilience hasn't just been about working remotely or learning how to use new technologies. It has also been about finding new ways of achieving things that might otherwise have been abandoned.

In addition to providing live lessons, we have continued to run regular and frequent pastoral support sessions for boys in their class and tutor groups. Initially this was achieved online but as lockdown has eased, we have been able to do this face-to-face in school. Throughout lockdown, we have also delivered multiple weekly assemblies online with parents now able to access those as part of the audience.

Each May, we hold a concert showcasing the very best of the School's music across our Junior and



David Tickner

Senior Schools. This was still able to go ahead in an online format. Similarly, our annual prize day – a celebration of the School's and the boys' achievements marking the end of the academic year. Whilst we would have loved to host this event in the sunshine at South Northumberland Cricket Club again, it too has gone ahead in a digital format but still with awards and prizes, guest speakers and an impressive speech from our head boy.

The end of our term has allowed the chance to run a carefully managed and socially distanced sports activity week for boys in Years 7, 8 and 9. This will mean that nearly all of our boys have been able to attend school at some point since lockdown began. Our Junior School fully reopened for all year groups on 15th June.

We are now looking forward to and preparing for September when we hope that school, and life in general, can be less restrictive and that we will be able to see all boys in all year groups in school on a full-time basis. That is what we are planning towards, as well as doing some sensible contingency planning should things change before then or during the coming months.

The need to keep all children engaged in their

learning to ensure their continued academic progress to support their futures as well as promoting their wellbeing through contact with their peers and teachers is abundantly clear.

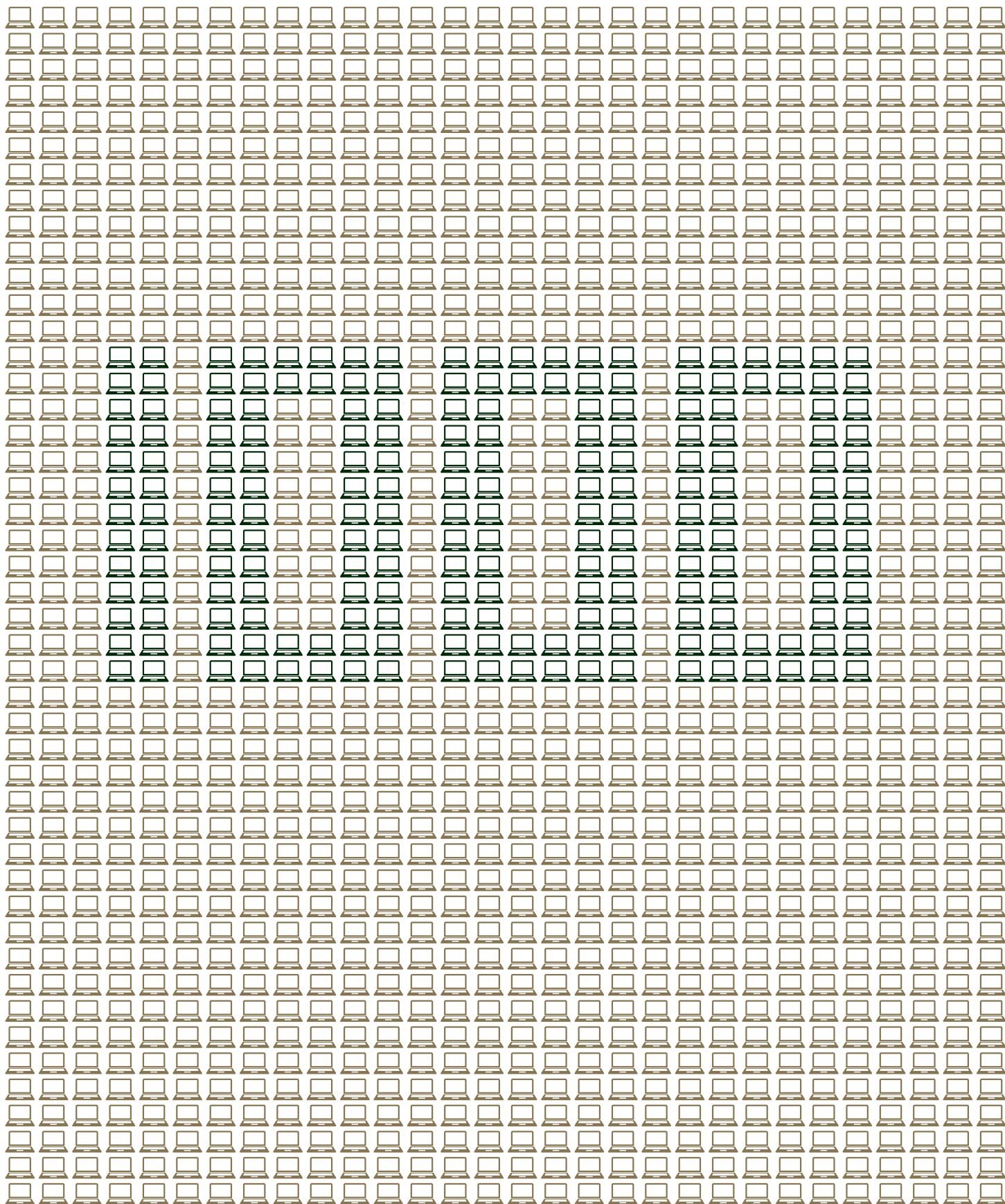
The autumn also marks the start of the main period of recruitment and application for boys seeking places. Recent years have seen an increase in demand for those places. Each year, in September and October, we host our open days and plan to do so again this year. However, just as in many other areas, we need to build in resilience and contingency. So our open days will go ahead but, if necessary, they will be supplemented by technology to ensure that all those who are interested in Newcastle School for Boys have the opportunity to explore everything that we offer and have continued to do so in recent months.

**Junior School Open Day**  
**Saturday 26th September**

**Senior School Open Day**  
**Saturday 3rd October**

For further information, please visit [newcastleschool.co.uk](http://newcastleschool.co.uk) or contact [admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk)





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# WHAT I LEARNED IN LOCKDOWN

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls

When we are able to look back on this period in our lives with some degree of equanimity, these are some of the key things that I will make sure that I remember:

An online school community can never be as good as one IRL, but it is amazing what an institution can do *in extremis*. Within a few days, as with many other schools, my pupils and staff had to make Teams their new 'bestie' and rapidly learned how to utilise the platform to have lessons, assemblies, concerts and 'hang outs'. Although we are all desperate to be back together in September, we have all gained valuable online skills that we can certainly adapt in the future.

Zoom calls are not a patch on face-to face-contact, but they make you realise that there really is no excuse not to be in touch with people you have not seen in a while, particularly those who may be struggling with personal circumstances.

Podcasts are a brilliant way of avoiding the human brain becoming atrophied. During periods when even a bookworm like me found it difficult to concentrate on extended prose, certain Radio 4 podcasts fed my weary mind, and they also provided a welcome distraction from the tedium of my exercise bike as I attempted to avoid the Corona 10 (lbs).

During my daily hour of exercise during the strict lockdown period, I increasingly appreciated the glorious beauty of the city of Durham. Even as the overgrown brambles and the nettles threatened to attack my ankles, I enjoyed the peaceful silence of the lanes and the abundance of foliage as my husband and I walked around the environs of the Cathedral, an area that is usually saturated with tourists and shoppers.

Finally, this strange period of our lives has reiterated to me that whilst human beings are capable of being selfish and venal, we are also able to be altruistic, and innovative, to come together for the common good. I sincerely hope that we have all realised this as the world wakes up to our 'new normal'.



Simone Niblock

Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email [enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk) to find out more or arrange a visit.

## PROTEAN SOLUTIONS SUPPORTS CASCADE

A well-known face in the sporting world has taken his expertise in making people fit in the mind as well as fit in the body into a new business, Protean Solutions.

Steve Black, or Blackie as he is better known, has been working since his retirement as a sports coach with both individuals and organisations focusing on motivation, teamwork, leadership and excellence in the workplace.

His portfolio is impressive, with big names including Kevin Keegan and Glen McCrory endorsing the former Newcastle Falcons and British Lions rugby coach.

One of the first to benefit from Steve's support was Cascade Cash Management, who presently support over £600m of UK savers cash. The team were delighted when he agreed to undertake sessions with them via Teams as they all began working remotely due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

As well as working closely with the senior management of Cascade Cash Management, Steve has focussed on the entire team's wellbeing and related performance, including the administration staff and client managers. Steve said:

"To be protean means that you are able to adapt and thrive in different forms and I think this is very apt in the current climate. I've always started by finding out what people want to achieve in their chosen field and then I've designed and prescribed a bespoke solution to help them to reach their goals.

"Generally my aim with Protean Solutions is to support and sustain the workforce in the North East and further afield with their personal quality control. Taking my knowledge as a leading coach, I can support individuals in the sporting world and also individuals or teams in the business world.



"The holistic approach of what I do looks at everything from thoughts and feelings, to habits, confidence, beliefs and then essentially how everything bundles up into effectiveness, results and excellence from both a mental and physical standpoint."

Cascade Cash Management has its roots in the North East and is now a national independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increased protection on deposits through professional cash management, built on unique financial technology in a rapidly evolving market.

The Cascade team of eleven administer cash savings on behalf of clients and depositors, who can also use the portal to administer their own savings. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more, can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

Emma Hutchinson, Client Support Manager at Cascade, commented on the support given by Steve:

"The challenges of working from home and handling your job through a pandemic are fairly intense, so it has been a time where the support of someone so motivating and focussed has positively encouraged me.

"I have been able to analyse how I feel, look at my performance and use the experience to improve the results I am achieving for the company.

"Most companies at this time have been customer focussed to ensure their survival and whilst that top service is always important to us, it is also very reassuring to work for a business that cares about its employees just as much! Bringing Steve in to support us shows us that our wellbeing is important to the management."

More information is available by emailing Steve on [steve@steveblack.co.uk](mailto:steve@steveblack.co.uk) or by contacting Antonia Brindle of Get Brindled on 07702 214391.





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From alterations to delivery of purchases, the service leaves no stone unturned as it meets all of your style requirement, making your shopping experience simpler and a lot more enjoyable. During the appointment, our stylists will take you through the styling process from start to finish and answer any questions you may have so you can feel confident in your curated edit.

Thinking of giving it a go? The service is completely free with no obligation to buy. Relax in your own private showroom while we do all the hard work for you!

If you don't have the time to come into store, no problem. We are now offering one-to-one virtual styling appointments. This session will give you the chance to treat yourself from the comfort of your home, enjoying the same expert advice and tailored approach you would receive in store.



To book your private styling appointment contact our customer service team on 0191 6911616 or email: [customerservice@masterdebonair.com](mailto:customerservice@masterdebonair.com)



## BMW GETS ALL SWOOPY

The BMW 2 Series Gran Coupé is here. Right. Here's today's homework. How many model variations are in the BMW range?' Before you start searching, have a guess at the number.



Put it this way, you'll go from 1 Series to 8 Series. You'll discover small hatchbacks, saloons of all sizes, two door coupés, four door coupés (called Gran Coupé), convertibles, estates (BMW calls them Touring), five and seven seat MPVs (these are called Active Tourer and Grand Tourer), SUVs (the X range), bigger five door hatchbacks (Gran Turismo) and there's the electric i range and Z4 Sports car.

After that you can work through the various trim levels, M Sport models and of course petrol or diesel power.

And that's before you come to selecting a colour.

Phew.

To save you the bother, we had a quick flick through the list and got bored when we reached 392.

So, why have such a massive range?

Simple...BMW not only like to have something for everyone, they also want to give owners/drivers the option to migrate up and down the range. For example, you may need a family sized BMW, but once you've got shot of the kids, you might decide to move into a coupé or convertible. You may have started with a small hatchback but then move out to the sticks and want a 4x4.

The latest of the body styles is Gran Coupé and the most recent version to hit UK streets is the 2 Series Gran Coupé. It's basically a 1 Series that is available as a four door coupé with a sloping lower roofline and a boot. You also get a new-look front grille, different headlights and completely different rear styling.

It's being launched because BMW is seeing more downsizing. They wanted to offer a premium, small compact but with a four door coupé body. It's a smart-looking thing and, although based on the

1 Series feels almost as roomy as the 3 Series. The additional room is gained because under the bonnet you will find a rarity: a transverse, front wheel drive engine and transmission. BMW purists needed smelling salts when the 1 Series was launched, but it confounded the critics by being a really sweet car to drive.

So, bearing in mind that the 2 Series has the same oily bits, this Gran Coupé is also hugely enjoyable to punt around.

At the moment, there are three versions....218i, 220d, and 235i. The 235i gets xDrive all-wheel drive as standard. It needs the additional traction too because the 2.0 litre petrol engine chucks out 306hp. Sounds good too. The 218i, powered by a three-cylinder 1.5 litre petrol engine, develops 140hp while the 220d with a 2.0 litre diesel engine ups the ante to 190hp. The 218i gets a 6-speed manual 'box as standard while the other two have an 8-speed auto.

What does that mean in terms of performance and economy?

The 218i is going to be the biggest seller in the UK. 0-60 takes 8.7 seconds; top speed 140mph and with a fuel return of 47.1mpg. It's a good all-rounder.

If you intend racking up the miles, go for the 220d which stretches economy to 57mpg. It's also quicker than the 218i with 0-60 dropping to 7.5 seconds.

The pick of the range if you want to make this 2 Series Gran Coupé into a long distance express, is the M235i xDrive. It's quick with 0-60 taking just 4.9 seconds. Whereas the other two models are available with standard or sport suspension, the M235i gets adaptive suspension. It's good and gives you the option of cushy or sporty ride. Having said that, the other two have slightly softer dampers than the 1 Series which means the ride is never harsh.

There are three trim variants: Sport, M Sport and M Performance which is reserved for the M235i xDrive model. Needless to say that build quality is superb. You also get a stack of safety kit included as standard across the range. There's a great touchscreen which controls just about everything, but thankfully there's also the BMW iDrive which is a wheel behind the gear lever which you use to scroll through items on the touchscreen. Why every other manufacturer hasn't nicked this idea is beyond me.

I shan't bother listing all of the goodies other than to say that you get sat nav, air con and parking assistance.

It's interesting that BMW really is trying to give buyers as many options as possible. The BMW 1 Series on which this Gran Coupé is largely based in terms of the mechanical gubbins, is almost exactly the same price if you go for the same engine and trim levels. So, it's a case of do you prefer a hatchback or a swoopy coupé saloon. The BMW 2 Series Gran Coupé has a slightly better ride but, because of the sloping roofline, there's less height in the rear seats for passengers. Apart from that it really does come down to a personal preference in terms of styling. You pays your money...you takes your choice.

Visit the Lloyd Newcastle website [www.lloydmotorgroup.com/BMW](http://www.lloydmotorgroup.com/BMW) for various contact details.





## HYBRID BMW SHOWS THE WAY TO GO

Going electric is the latest buzz amongst the car manufacturers. They want to be seen to be having plenty of 'green' options within their range. Electric cars are actually good fun to drive. They're quick, spookily quiet and, obviously, economical.

But they're not for everyone.

The general rule of thumb is that if you do a lot of miles, get a diesel. If you do low-ish mileage and you are a private buyer, go petrol. If you can live with limited mileage and nagging range anxiety, consider electric. However, if you fall somewhere in-between and particularly if you are a business driver, you should seriously consider a hybrid.

And bearing in mind that the BMW 3 Series is recognised as being one of the best cars to drive and own, it's easy to see why the BMW 330e hybrid is a winner and is likely to become one of the top sellers in the entire BMW range.

So, what's not to love about the BMW 330e?

Quick bit of simple education. This BMW 330e is a PHEV...Plug-in Hybrid Electric Vehicle. You have a standard combustion engine mated to a battery powered electric motor. Both work in tandem, although for the ultimate in economy you can travel for about 35 miles on battery power alone. You can charge the battery at home, at work or at a public charging station. The battery will also recharge whenever you decelerate.

Let's start with the obvious stuff. Under the bonnet

you'll find the familiar tried and trusted 2 litre petrol 181bhp engine which appears across the BMW range. However you then need to add into the equation 111bhp which comes from an electric motor. You can boost this by 39bhp over a 10 second period for extra performance which means you can develop a total 288bhp. 0-60mph takes around 6 seconds...it's quick. Top speed is 143mph. Everything goes through an 8-speed auto 'box. You can choose from rear wheel drive or you can choose all-wheel xDrive. There's also an estate Touring version.

Two additional details are important. First, if you are a company car driver, there are massive savings in terms of BIK - benefit in kind.

Second is the level of fuel economy. If you have a charger at home and a charger at your destination, and you're regular trip is, say, 30 miles, then you can travel along without using any petrol. You're weekly commute will cost peanuts in terms of electric charging. Of course, if you need to travel further, the petrol engine cuts in seamlessly.

Make full use of the battery and the hybrid system and you can achieve a staggering 176mpg. Granted, you're unlikely to get anywhere near that, but if you can make use of the battery power, you should be

able to manage into the 70s mpg without too much trouble. Impressive huh?

Elsewhere, this is standard BMW 3 Series territory which is good news all round. Every BMW 3 Series is great to drive. The handling is wonderfully controlled. The suspension soaks up lumps and bumps and gives keen drivers the chance to enjoy themselves.

In terms of interior kit, the 330e is impressive. You get auxiliary heating and air conditioning as standard. This allows you to have the car warm or cool before you get in. Everything is programmed via a smart phone. There's also satellite navigation, Bluetooth, rear camera and parking sensors. The cracking audio system includes DAB radio. To be honest, there's no real need to dip into the extra brochure.

Overall the BMW 330e is a welcome addition to the BMW range. Actually, it'll probably succeed at the expense of some other 3 Series models. However, it'll certainly succeed at the expense of cars from other manufacturers.

Great to drive, economical, quick and with a decent level of standard kit, this rates as one of the best hybrid cars available....anywhere.

Prices for the BMW 330e start from £39,840



Visit the Lloyd Newcastle website [www.lloydmotorgroup.com/BMW](http://www.lloydmotorgroup.com/BMW) for various contact details.









## FINDING MY FIZZ – A SPARKLING ADVENTURE THROUGH CHAMPAGNE

By Caroline Preston

I'm fortunate really, during the Coronavirus pandemic that's been such a horror for many I've been able to work from home and have been keeping well. I'm thankful for that but as a travel obsessed adventurer it's also been a nightmare. With cancelled trips and no possibility of 2020 travel in sight I felt as though my bubble had well and truly burst.

---

Gradually virus cases reduced and talks of air-bridges emerged, there was hope at last and cautious planning began for the green light to go...

True to myself on the first day permitted I was already at dawn on the road... destination? Dover Ferry Port and my gateway to the biggest stockist of much needed bubbles...France, more specifically the Champagne-Ardenne region responsible for the most famous of all the fizz, Champagne.

Legend has it in 1688 Monk and Cellar Master Dom Perignon discovered the presence of bubbles in wine by accident. Having experimented blending different grapes for improved flavour he noticed a continuing fermentation in the bottles causing bubbles. Perceived as a failure the Monks despaired, but Dom did not give up. On tasting this 'bubbly' creation he cried out "come quickly, brothers! I am tasting the stars!" A light effervescent wine was created but there was a problem...exploding bottles everywhere.

Dom set about solving the problems, first a stronger heavier bottle and second cork stoppers to avoid blow outs. The changes worked and Champagne was born.

A century later, Veuve Nicole Clicquot (Veuve meaning widow) inherited her husband's champagne business. An advanced woman for her years she began perfecting processes to improve the wine. She reduced bubble build up by 'riddling' where semi inverted bottles are turned by hand over time. Nicole also perfected the 'disgorgement' process where sediment stored in the tip of the fermenting bottle is quickly released then instantly re-corked to retain the liquid. Still used today these processes are followed by the most prestigious champagne houses that still turn their bottles by hand.

A 2.5 hour journey from Dunkirk we arrived in Reims the unofficial city of Champagne and our first stop Taittinger. Owning 288 hectares of vineyards it's one of the world's most famous champagne brands. Our expert guide at was Annelise and our tour starts with a short film of Taittinger past and present. Next we descend gradually into the ancient chalk caves some 18 meters underground. Still perfectly intact we see here stocks of ageing bottles and learn about the process the 'Taittinger way', fascinating.

Walking the caves we notice numerous etchings scratched into the cave walls, a stark and humbling reminder of the soldiers that hid, rested and recuperated here during both world wars.

Now for the much anticipated tasting, we headed to the elegantly furnished tasting room. Gracefully we savoured each divine taster noting the subtle differences guided by Annelise, just like wine champagne can be paired with culinary flavours or simply enjoyed on its own.

Before leaving we visited the small gift shop where a selection of tasteful branded products and of course bottles can be purchased, a fantastic day. Group tours from €25 per person, for booking [www.taittinger.com/en/visit](http://www.taittinger.com/en/visit).

That evening we ventured into the city for a bite to eat, our destination Place Drouet-d'Erlon was a street almost entirely filled with food offerings. Tired out we devoured Thai food at Pitaya Street Food [www.pitayaresto.fr](http://www.pitayaresto.fr) but given more time I'd visit the highly rated La Vigneraie [www.vigneraie.com](http://www.vigneraie.com) which offers gourmet cuisine of the region.

After dinner we wandered the short distance to the magnificent Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Reims, sitting in the warm air we watched the changing lights of the building as the sun set.

Most people will have heard of Moët, Taittinger, Dom Perignon etc but few know there are over 300 producers of Champagne in this region from large producers to independent and boutique. Driving through the gorgeous vineyard clad countryside my next stop would be medium size producer Maison Gardet in the tiny picture perfect village of Chigny-les-Roses.

Maison Gardet combines 21st century technology with the tradition to produce champagne of the highest quality. Each bottle is aged a minimum of three years producing an elegant champagne with fine bubbles. The Gardet House features a beautiful ornate sun room, furnished patio and tasting lounge for visitors. Tours available in advance [www.champagne-gardet.com](http://www.champagne-gardet.com)

Having now moved our base from Reims to rural Hermonville a small village in the heart of the Champagne region we spent the next few days touring the countryside, walking by the magnificent Champagne Houses of Epernay on the elite Avenue de Champagne and enjoying the parks and architecture of the small official capital city, Chalons en Champagne.

Hermonville is on the 'route touristique du champagne' a driving route that will take you past many small producers of champagne with the opportunity at some to call in, taste and buy. Our accommodation in Hermonville was no basic affair, in this part of France it had to be a Chateau. Independently owned Chateau d'Hermonville was our choice an elegantly refurbished private B&B with superb hosts [www.chambredhotelsreims.com](http://www.chambredhotelsreims.com)

Walking distance from our B&B was Champagne Minière run by two brothers, an emerging grower in the region. Passionate about quality and environmental sustainability we tasted their champagne 'Influence' creamy and round with hints of yellow fruits and citrus. That was another bottle crammed into our already full car...

As we rounded up our trip I reflected on how hospitable and friendly were the people and businesses we'd met, so ready to show their passion for the vines. Despite the face mask etiquette which was remarkably well organised we felt fully revitalised, perhaps something to do with those magical bubbles. Could this year be a vintage year? With so much yet to see surely this warrants a return visit...



## THE FUTURE OF THEATRE

"We are not worried about the future. We are just worried about getting there." Philip Bernays, Chief Executive of the Theatre Royal, Newcastle talks to Sophie Swift on coping with the Coronavirus pandemic.

Since the UK went into lockdown, the world has become a vastly different, and often difficult place to inhabit. People were forced to spend more time indoors and work from home where possible. Many businesses had to adapt their trading methods or stop working altogether. These issues have weighed heavily upon the UK's theatre industry and have now reached breaking point. By the end of 2020 it has been predicted that 70% of the UK's theatres could be closed for good and this is a problem that needs to be addressed quickly.

On 29th May, the Society of London Theatre (SOLT) and UK Theatre submitted a paper to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport informing them of the current circumstances theatres across the UK are facing as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The paper presents two main points. It acknowledges that social distancing in theatres cannot work. The Theatre Royal Newcastle can hold up to 1247 paying customers, but with social distancing measures it can only hold 350. As a result, theatres across the UK would make huge losses and would not generate enough income to cover the costs of the shows they are offering. SOLT and UK Theatre have requested financial support from the government to help "plug the gap" as Philip Bernays, Chief Executive at the Theatre Royal Newcastle points out. The aid, if

offered by the government, will give theatres much needed support between furlough ending and theatres opening.

Although theatres may not be at the top of the Government's concern list amid a global pandemic, they should be. Across the UK, theatres contribute substantially to the social, cultural and educational sectors of our society. Theatre is a massive part of our national identity and contributes heavily to the British economy. More people see a theatre show each year than attend all league football matches in the whole of the UK. At the Theatre Royal Newcastle, they have more ticket holders than St James' Park, making theatre bigger than football. The theatre industry adds greatly to tourism and to the UK's night-time economy; around 37,000 people see a show in the West End every night and a quarter of audience members are from overseas. Not only do these figures illustrate the importance of theatre in the UK culturally, but they also outline the economic impacts we could face if 70% of our theatres close.

I spoke with Philip Bernays from the Theatre Royal to discuss these issues and how they may impact the North East. Having held the position at the theatre since 2005 and being one of UK Theatres' board members, Philip knows the industry well. He commented on how "blessed" we are in Newcastle

to be surrounded by five incredibly different theatres; as well as admitting that "there would be a real hole without the Royal" and that "Newcastle would not be the same sort of city it once was and wants to be". Philip acknowledged that he was fearful for the theatre when saying "we are not worried about the future, we are just worried about getting there". Although theatre buildings can reopen from 4th July, live performances are not allowed. Ultimately the Theatre Royal requires the confidence of the public to get them through this difficult time; they need tickets to be sold. Performances have been cancelled until 24th November 2020, there are many shows available for 2021, when hopefully the worst of the coronavirus pandemic will have subsided. The Theatre Royal also takes donations via their 'Acts of Kindness' programmes, which offer more creative ways to give, such as seat naming and joining the Friends of the Theatre Royal community group.

When the pandemic entered our daily lives in March it felt as though the world had stopped turning. As the restrictions are slowly lifting, we have the opportunity to decide how the future could look and we must take steps to ensure that theatres are part of that future. The Theatre Royal first opened its doors to the public of Newcastle in 1788, please do not let them close in 2020.

[www.theatreroyal.co.uk](http://www.theatreroyal.co.uk)





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## UNLOCKING OUR CREATIVITY

By Mary Ann Rogers, Artist/Gallery Owner

My heart goes out to people who have lost their loved ones before their time due to C-19, but personally, it has been the first time in my entire adult life when all the commitments, deadlines, events, anxiety about completing things in time etc have come to a halt, and the days stretched quietly and scarily ahead, as every important date on my diary was cancelled, and staff stayed home to home tutor and look after their young children.

My daily routine became quite structured- painting from 8am - 4pm, then I would go for a five mile circular walk with two of our sausage dogs, followed often by a swim in the river near home and playing with my waterproof camera, then supper, telly, bath and bed - SO simple!

This has been a remarkable period of time for me as an artist. For once, time has simply not been an issue, and I have completed more large paintings than ever. Watercolour paintings are not traditionally very big - size is dictated by practical considerations, which include maximum size of available paper, mountboard, glass etc. I have been making paintings a full metre wide, as I have been confident that I will have time to work steadily through to completion.

After a few days of lockdown, I was cajoled into

doing a 'live' facebook video, just painting and talking about my work. Lots of people were stuck at home, bored, and picking up pastimes and interests including painting. After the first live video, the next one seemed easier, and I received lots of enthusiastic messages. The videos ended up taking place every day at 12, with high numbers of viewers!!! As my days were empty of commitments, it became a natural 'pre-lunch' pause in the day, to prop up the ipad, get some clean water and do some fun, live 'broad brush' painting, with lots of tips and encouragement for beginners and experienced painters alike.

Like all self-employed people, I was terrified about how I would get through this pandemic financially, but very quickly the government support reassured me that my staff could stay home, but still get paid. I am accustomed to taking every hit on the nose - and believe me, there have been a few hits over the years- so this was just amazing. I realise that many people who work in the arts have not been so fortunate, and there are some who will ultimately lose their jobs, but I have managed to find a way through so far, and we are now almost back to normal, the next major step will be to announce that we are open to visitors, and simultaneously launch three new prints and four new cards! Exciting times ahead.



New paintings and limited edition prints can be viewed at: [www.marogers.com](http://www.marogers.com)  
Check gallery opening times: 01434 270216





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## CULTURE FUSION FROM INDIE BAND METIS BRINGS HIGH MERITS

If someone gives you the chance to listen to up and coming young indie band Metis from County Durham, you'd be mad to turn it down.

Metis are definitely going places as can be seen by BBC Tees making their original track 'Turn It Down' their record of the week and the band winning a prestigious Battle of the Bands competition at Newcastle University recently.

Coming from the heartland of Durham, the band aged 19 to 25, all live locally in Darlington, Barnard Castle, Coxhoe and Newton Aycliffe and have built up a steadily increasing following since they formed in 2014.

The unusually named Metis are Elliot Fenwick on vocals, Andrew Archer on rhythm guitar, Daniel Smith on lead guitar, Liam Samson on bass and Sam Graham on drums.

Their name has a number of meanings including a person of mixed indigenous and Euro-American ancestry, mixed blood, the Greek Goddess of Wise Counsel and the band's favourite "a fusion of culture."

Their sound certainly contains a fusion of culture with influences spanning Oasis, Arctic Monkeys, Stereophonics through to Catfish and the Bottlemen and early punk and new wave. The bands songs are written primarily by Daniel.

Andrew said: "I joined the band after I watched college bands play at events in Darlington.

My early musical influences came from my parents as I was brought up on 70's punk bands like the

Ramones and The Clash and 90's bands like Oasis. I think my personal musical taste resonates around the 90's and early 2000's and I still regularly listen to and play Oasis, Stereophonics, Nirvana tracks etc and I think this has influenced the style of music that we play in the band as it definitely comes through in our sound."

Drummer Sam has been playing drums since he was just seven years old and is now studying chemistry at Newcastle University where he also represents the university at rugby and American football. When he's not pounding the skins with Metis he does a lot of climbing and mountaineering and he's climbed Mount Kilimanjaro making him the band's 'action man'.

The band's debut EP, "Lost and Found" is due to be released soon and contains the tracks Turn it Down, Marilyn and Drive.

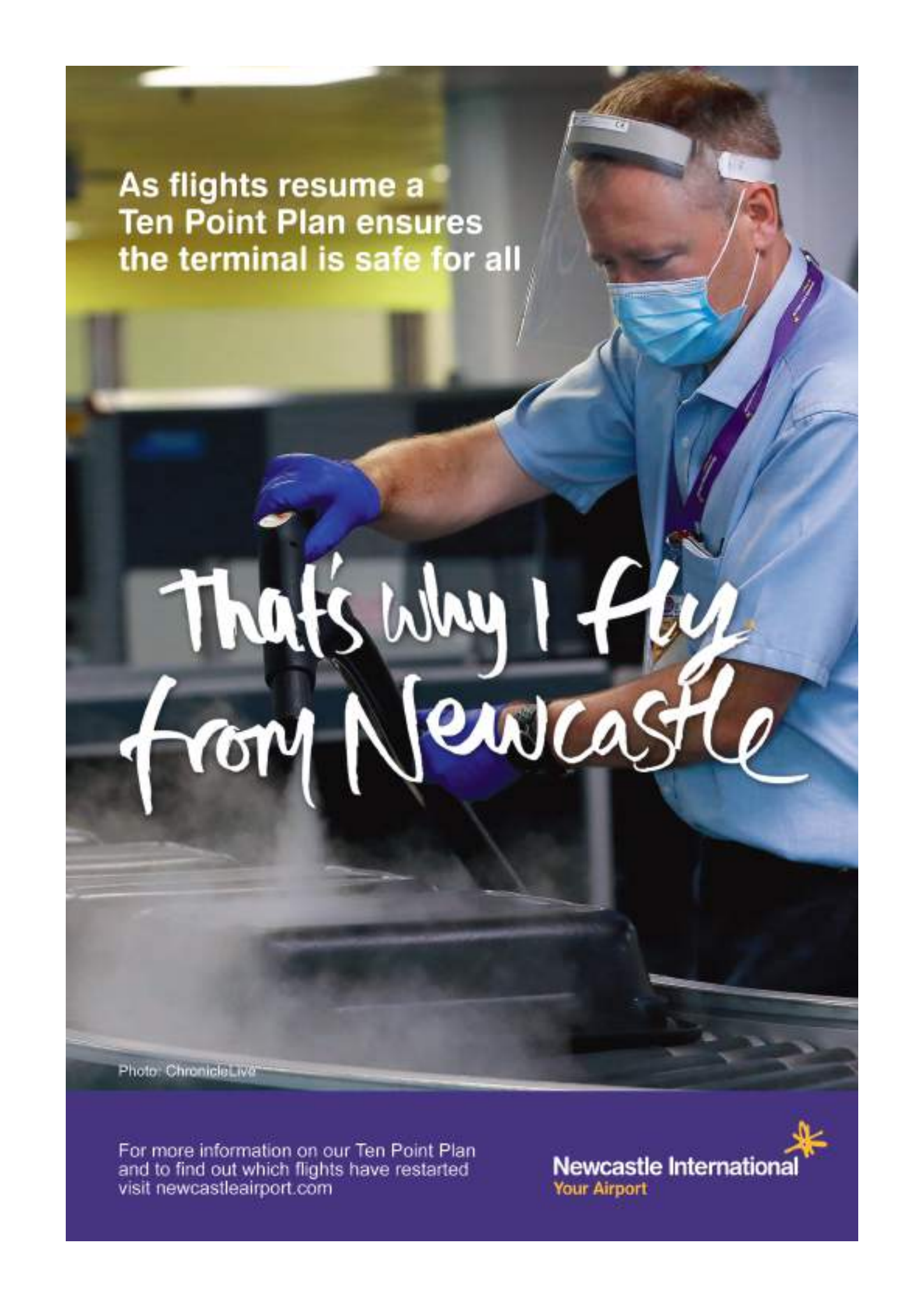
Singer Elliot is looking forward to getting the EP out and getting back on the gig circuit when COVID-19 restrictions are lifted.

"The pandemic has been devastating for a lot of people and from our point of view it's stopped us getting our music out there. There's nothing like the feeling we get playing live and seeing people singing along to our songs. We feel that the time is right to release the EP and see where the next chapter in Metis's history takes us," said Elliot.



[www.metisband.com](http://www.metisband.com) [@metisband](https://www.instagram.com/metisband) [@Metisofficial](https://www.facebook.com/Metisofficial)





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## SEAHAM HALL WELCOMES DURHAM INTERNATIONAL CRICKETER AS AMBASSADOR

In support of his local roots in the North East community, international cricketer and England vice-captain Ben Stokes has been announced as the official brand ambassador for Seaham Hall and its new Residences at Seaham Hall launch campaign.

Overlooking the rugged Durham Heritage Coast, 24 luxury lodge Residences will soon be unveiled at Seaham Hall. Available for purchase, owners will have the opportunity to use the Residences themselves and/or to rent them to visitors through Seaham Hall.

Each luxury Residence features its own spacious terrace, floor-to-ceiling windows, luxury interiors and private parking for two cars. Guests at the Residences will have full access to Seaham Hall's facilities and concierge service during their stays, together with other local benefits, including reduced green fees at nearby Sharpley Golf Course.

## THE TWICE BREWED INN UNVEILS THE RESULTS OF HARD WORK DURING LOCKDOWN

Cherished Northumberland pub The Twice Brewed Inn has been welcoming customers back since the UK lockdown restrictions have been eased.

Regular customers at the popular Hadrian's Wall haunt have been enjoying seeing the impressive

results of an extension and refurbishment project.

A bar extension allows customers to spread out while enjoying a pint inside, whilst a significant increase in the number of benches outside means anyone looking to socially distance outdoors is more than well catered for.

The existing bar area has also been refurbished, including a new fireplace, lighting and colour scheme, as well as the addition of an outdoor pizza kitchen.

All visitors are asked to observe social distancing guidelines and a full table service is in operation.



## WORK RESTARTS ON SEABURN INN

Inn Collection Group's Seaburn Inn is once again rising from the ground, after the company's contractor, Metnor Construction, resumed work following the UK lockdown.

The 40-room inn had been progressing well before strict COVID-19 measures meant work was forced to come to a halt. However, relaxed guidelines and

reduced social distancing requirements mean that it is now possible for the construction team to get back on site.

Construction of the three-storey venue, which will include a bar and dining area and children's play park for customers, is now expected to conclude in spring 2021.

The news follows the announcement by STACK operator, Danieli Holdings, that construction of its venue is back underway and that plans are afoot to open in time for the August Bank Holiday weekend.



## THE DINING SOCIETY PRESENTS WINE BY THE TYNE

The Dining Society have unveiled a new venture which is set to delight wine lovers in the region. Billed as a "traditional wine tasting experience in an untraditional setting", Wine by The Tyne will be landing on Tyneside in November this year.

Set to take place on the same site as Christmas Tyne on Wesley Square, families and friends will be able to enjoy an array of world wines in their own personalised dining pods.

The custom-made transparent dining pods are complete with indoor heating, a personal speaker system and free Wi-Fi. Hosting up to ten people per pod, guests will have the chance to enjoy four expertly chosen wines, paired perfectly with a choice of sharing board including fish, meat, cheese and a vegan option.

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# EVENTS COMPANY DIVERSIFIES TO KEEP WORKPLACES SAFE

A forward-thinking North East events company is warning businesses not to panic buy to make their premises safe without taking some expert advice.

JC Events, based in South Shields but which worked on events and exhibitions across the UK before COVID-19, believes many companies are panicking ahead of being able to re-open to install measures which are either unsuitable for their needs or that aren't required.

And now the company is using its expertise – coupled with specific coronavirus training – to offer packages tailored to individual needs.

It is sending out its own specifically trained COVID-19 officer to view everywhere from doctors' surgeries to hairdressing salons, who is then devising the ideal package for their specific needs.

"With the imminent opening of retail and then beauty and hairdressing salons, everyone wants to ensure their premises is safe," said Jacqui Chapman, owner of JC Events.

"But a lot of people aren't actually sure of what they need and don't need which is why we have done specific training and we can not only advise them on what is best for them, but we can also provide it all."



JC Events can provide and install all the necessary equipment required, along with providing the business with a COVID-19 safety merit so their staff and customers can be reassured their employer/company is abiding by all the necessary legislation.

The company, which is known for its eye-catching

exhibition stands and signage, has turned its skills into creating complete workplace safety packages – with the option of bespoke packages for anyone with more specific requirements.

JC Events is offering PPE, signage, purpose built protective screens and booths and mobile sanitisation solutions, with each offering tailored to a specific industry.

Solutions for hairdressers and beauty salons, retailers and leisure outlets, doctors' surgeries and vets and factories, warehouses and offices have been put together, taking into account the challenges each outlet will face.

Jacqui believes the company's years of experience installing and building for the conference and events industry put it in the perfect place to help.

"We are just using our existing skills to help companies and businesses get back on their feet again and to help them operate in a safe way," she said.

"As well as the invaluable experience we can offer, it's the fact that everything they need is in one place and if the package doesn't quite meet their requirements, we can simply build whatever they want."

JC Events has also created a safe conference and events package which will allow up to 150 guests to gather safely, including tables with Perspex dividers which can be used as soon as larger groups of people are allowed to meet.

"We know this is a very worrying time for everyone so we are hoping to help businesses who are having to adapt and need some professional support," said Jacqui.

Anyone wanting further information can email [jacqui@jc-events.co.uk](mailto:jacqui@jc-events.co.uk) or call 0191 481 3462.

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## SACHINS UNDER LOCKDOWN

There was no stopping Bob Arora, owner of Sachins Indian Restaurant, this lockdown. Putting his spare time to good use, Bob has helped people all over the world get in to the kitchen with his restaurant recipes.

When the restaurant, located on Newcastle's Forth Banks, had to close due to COVID-19 in March, Bob wasted no time in keeping his loyal customer's entertained and well-fed, in a different, socially-distant way.

Sachins At Home was a weekly video series, which were held live on Facebook and Instagram, and showed Bob demonstrating how to make some of his customer's favourite dishes and family recipes in his own kitchen. From his vegan Chana Daal to a Sachins' favourite duo – Bob's Mum and Dad's curries.

Shared across the globe, followers and viewers have raved about the recipes and shared hundreds of pictures of their recreations.

Don't worry if you missed the live viewings, all of Bob's lockdown recipes are still available on the Sachins Facebook and Instagram pages - bloopers and all! - @SachinsNCL

After the success of his customers enjoying Sachins at Home, and some logistical planning, Bob also launched

his new Heat and Eat takeaway service, cooked by himself in the Sachins kitchen. The Heat and Eat service consists of a weekly changing menu from which customers can enjoy a 3-course meal of Sachins favourites, for just £35 for two.

The meals are cooked and cooled, ready to be reheated or frozen at home, so you can enjoy at your pleasure, and are available for collection from Thursday – Saturday.

Thanks to the support from Sachins customers and followers, Bob has now been able to reopen the restaurant, in accordance to Government guidelines, and will also continue with the successful Heat and Eat takeaway service.

The restaurant has undergone some changes, to ensure the safety of customers and employees, including a reduction in capacity to just 30 diners at any one time, known as 'Sachins Club of 30'.

To also ensure everybody's safety, the restaurant now has reduced opening hours, fitted PVC safety screens and COVID-19 staff training.



You can now book your table at Sachins or order your Heat and Eat takeaway by visiting the website [www.sachins.co.uk](http://www.sachins.co.uk) or by calling 0191 261 9035/0191 232 4660. Don't forget to check out Bob's demos on Facebook and Instagram @SachinsNCL.





## TO WED OR NOT TO WED

It's felt a bit like love was cancelled for a few months. With weddings postponed and celebrations halted and even the planning journey dented, all the joy the industry celebrates disappeared.

**It's been a difficult few months for all of us and as the light of normality starts to glimmer, what does that mean for you and your wedding?**

As of the 4th July those magical words 'I Do' will be heard around the country yet again.

This was simply the best news for those who just want to be married and I will be delighted to watch couples take their vows and begin their new chapter in life together.

But for those that dreamt, planned and paid for a wedding with all the trimmings it's a different story. The relaxation of the Government Guidelines is only in relation to ceremonies, limited to 30 guests and a two metre social distancing rule (at the time of writing). You are still prevented from hosting a celebration, not even a wee Toast at the end of the ceremony, and the rules are quite strict. In line with social distancing, only groups of up to two households indoors, or up to six people from different households outdoors. There are also quite a few rules regarding the ceremony i.e. no singing and vows must be spoken softly; for up to date guidance please refer to [www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships/covid-19-guidance-for-small-marriages-and-civil-partnerships).



Michelle Jones

The weddings of 2020 will certainly be unique!

If the thought of a ceremony without all your guests followed by no dancing and warm embraces is unbearable, your first point of communication needs to be with your venue. All venues are managing this situation completely differently, it is

crucial you understand the position your venue is taking. As we progress through the year, hopefully, we'll see further positive changes, with this in mind please do note, your venue is unlikely to discuss a wedding planned for the Autumn.

It is important communications are in writing/ email with your venue and you set out your wishes.

Some venues have contacted couple's due to get married later in the year to advise they no longer have space in 2021 or 2022, preventing couple's from postponing. Please seek legal advice if this is the case especially if you do not have the support of an independent wedding planner.

Some venues are also sending new T&C's to clients, again, please seek legal advice before signing if you do not have the support of an independent wedding planner.

I wish you all much luck and fun on your new wedding experiences. To those couple's who will walk up the aisle in the coming months, I wish you much love on the first day of your married life.



Socially Distanced Wedding



## LOCAL CAFÉ OWNERS HELP FEED ELDERLY COMMUNITY FOR FREE DURING LOCKDOWN

Sister cafés, La Vina in Cleadon and No.4 in East Boldon, joined forces to feed the isolating elderly for free, throughout the coronavirus lockdown.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the cafes were forced to close their doors in March, but kept their kitchen open to feed those in need by providing free meals, with free delivery, to the local elderly who were isolating.

The husband and wife duo, Sean and Danielle McCann, took it upon themselves to cook and deliver around 40 meals per day across South Tyneside, including healthy, hearty dishes like soups, pies, curries and more.



Danielle McCann delivering to the vulnerable.

Due to the closure of the cafes, the pair had to take over the roles from their employees, with Sean taking the role of Chef and Danielle taking on the deliveries. Together, they successfully fed hundreds of their local elderly, keeping them safe during the pandemic.

Danielle, who is a recently retired NHS nurse, volunteered to return to the NHS to help out on the frontline in her position as a paediatric nurse, however the need wasn't there for children requiring treatment for Covid-19, so her services were not required.

She added; "Although I volunteered to return to the frontline in nursing, my services weren't required, but I wasn't about to be deterred. We were in a fortunate place to be able to provide help to vulnerable people, and with the uncertainty and worry on everyone's minds, we

wanted to help out where we could.

"Although we are back open, our help in the community won't stop. We'll do everything we possibly can to assist where we can. Team spirit is what's getting us through this."

After delivering over 1000 free meals in East Boldon and Cleadon, the pair reopened their restaurant delivery service to public, whilst selflessly continuing to deliver free meals to those who needed it.

Now, both La Vina and No.4 have reopened their restaurants for dine in service, (No.4 with a complete make-over) and with all precautions in place in accordance with the Government's guidelines, Danielle and Sean hope to get both venues into some sort of resemblance of normality.

To book a table or to find out more, give La Vina / No.4 a call on 0191 536 8624 / 0191 250 5523.







## QUICK ON THE DRAW

Steve Russell talks to record-breaking caricaturist, graphic designer and digital artist, Paul Slattery, about his storied career and the power of grand ambitions.

Claude Bristol once wrote "you have to think big to be big" and it's a philosophy ingrained into the DNA of many a successful entrepreneur. However, no one has interpreted the mantra quite so literally as legendary artist, Paul Slattery. Paul spent the early part of his career in advertising, including stints with Newcastle Evening Chronicle, Newcastle College and spells working in London and the Netherlands. However, he found his niche in the mid-1990s, when he established himself as a live-caricaturist. Over the next few years he regularly performed at high-profile events across the UK, but it was a casual suggestion over a convivial beverage with Northern Insight's very own Michael Grahamslaw, which would really put him on the map. Paul recounts the tale:

*In 1998 Mike was doing my PR and we used to meet every week in Fitzgeralds on Grey Street. I was trying to think of ideas to really make a splash and raise my profile, and one day I said to him 'why don't I do a massive, world-record sized caricature of Ruud Gullit, with 60-foot dreadlocks and hang it from the Tyne Bridge? No, in fact we'll do Alan Shearer!'. Mike just looked at me like I'd had one too many, but the next morning he rang me to say he thought it was a great idea and it went from there!*

Mike duly contacted Guinness, who confirmed that, providing certain conditions were met, it would indeed become a recognised world record, and the pair set to work making it happen, a feat which Paul soon realised may be harder to achieve than he'd first imagined:

*The first challenge was to find somewhere that I could actually paint the thing! After trying a few venues, The Mayfair eventually allowed me to use their space. It turned out to be ideal, as I'd do some painting then jog up to the balcony every few minutes to check that the dimensions were right!*

Paul admits to some 'what have I done?' moments during the process, but eventually, and amidst much media fanfare, he became a world-record holder on May 5th, 1999, raising significant funds for the NSPCC in the process. The record has been broken since, but Paul remains proud of the achievement, and he's taken pleasure from seeing other artists across the world embrace his idea. The subject of Paul's epic work, Newcastle's iconic number 9, took it all in good fun, but he admits to being star-struck upon meeting Mr Shearer:

*Mike and I went to the training ground to meet him to discuss the idea and I remember being absolutely terrified. He came over to introduce himself and I went to pieces!*

The exposure and opportunities which came in the wake of his world record, ensured that being star-struck became a rare occurrence, having gone on to work with luminaries across the globe. Indeed, his adventures have even inspired him to pen a book of memoirs, a tome which promises plenty of celebrity-infused entertainment!

Paul explains his motivation:

*A big part of my work is live events, so when the lockdown hit I thought 'crikey, what am I going to do?' but I've had a blast over my career and collected plenty of great stories along the way, so I've spent a lot of time over the past few months working on what will be my first book.*

Paul has also been hard at work on his online store, which boasts a fantastic range of merchandise, featuring some of his best caricatures over the years, as well as original artwork and sports memorabilia.

Although chiefly known as a caricaturist, browsing through his website is a reminder of just how much of the North East is adorned with his artwork. He's painted countless murals, with The Split Chimp and The Red House in Newcastle and Ramside Hall in Durham among the many venues to have featured his work. He also offers a range of graphic design services, including corporate imaging branding, digital mural design and even digital caricaturing.

He's certainly kept himself busy since the world pressed the pause button, but like live acts everywhere, he can't wait to get back to what he loves best. As lockdown continues to ease, he's hoping to return to live work later in the year, and he's currently taking bookings for the winter season. His "mix and mingle" entertainment certainly offers something a little different to any wedding, party or corporate event. Intriguingly, he's also planning to resurrect his fabulous "Scribbling Connoisseurs" evenings, which combine art tuition with haute-cuisine. Paul explains:

*I first launched Scribbling Connoisseurs ten years ago with the Fisherman's Lodge in Jesmond Dene, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Basically, I would give people a snapshot of what I do and teach them some illustration techniques, whilst they enjoyed some fantastic food. My fiancé is a chef, and through her contacts, I'm working on reviving the idea. It's one for the future, but if we can pull it off, the events will feature some amazing and well-known culinary talents.*

Twenty years after his most ambitious feat, it seems Paul is still thinking big, and more power to him. In person, he's almost a living embodiment of one of his myriad caricatures. Fun, engaging and fizzing with mischievous energy. He left me with the distinct impression that it will take more than a global pandemic to halt this particular creative dynamo!





## THE SELFLESS RESTAURANT OWNER WHO'S BEEN FEEDING THE VULNERABLE THROUGHOUT LOCKDOWN

Known for its luxurious interiors and delicious Indian cuisine, Zeera restaurant in South Shields was forced to close its doors in March, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but continued to deliver hot meals to their local, vulnerable community throughout the pandemic.

Working alongside local community food bank and crisis response team, Hebburn Helps, the Indian restaurant helped to feed three families in need, who couldn't reach their usual resources due to coronavirus.

Each family which was fed with Zeera's healthy, wholesome dishes, were suffering in their own way due to the pandemic. One is the family of a young boy going through Chemotherapy, another a low income family with a disable child and lastly, an NHS worker.

Shahanoor Choudhry, owner of Zeera restaurant, also set out to deliver meals to his local South Tyneside Hospital on a weekly basis, to give back to those who were giving their all for our safety.

His kind gestures did not go unnoticed either, with

South Tyneside Council granting the restaurant with a Love South Tyneside award.

But, that's not what it's about, explained Shah, "We didn't do this to receive accolades, we didn't do this for attention, we did this because we care about our community and we were in a situation where we had the means to help, so that's what we did."

"Although the restaurant is now back open, and our takeaway service is still booming, we will not forget about those who needs us, and we'll be doing everything in our power to continue to help out where we can."

Zeera, located on Ocean Road, is now open to the public, with social distancing and safety precautions in place, in accordance with Government guidelines. Their takeaway and 'Indian Drive Thru' services will

also be continuing to offer an option to those who aren't quite ready to venture out yet.

Whilst locked down, Shah noticed the interest his customers had in his traditional recipes, and so he launched a brand new concept – The DIY Curry Kit – in which customers receive all the ingredients, plus a recipe card, to make a Zeera meal at home.

"Lockdown has been hard on everyone, and I was receiving lots of interest from our customers who were trying to recreate an Indian restaurant meal from home. So we've made it easy, and fun, with our DIY Curry Kit."

"It's a great 'Saturday night in' and something different to do, whilst people are still not comfortable to dine out."

**To book a table, order a meal or order your own DIY Curry Kit, simply give Zeera a call on 0191 456 1811 and keep an eye on their Facebook page for more updates @ZeeraSouthShields.**



# OUT & ABOUT - BERWICK-UPON-TWEED



On the many occasions I have been to visit Berwick, I have always turned right out of the station to follow Castlegate into the town centre. This time, I turned left over the railway, looking out for the 1937 Coronation Bridge on the left, through which runs a footpath downhill to the north bank of the River Tweed.

I was walking the new three mile Tweed and Coast nature trail, supported by many local bodies and charitable foundations, and devised by the local U3A. There are fourteen information boards on the trail which runs through Berwick and Tweedmouth via the docks to Spittal beach so the path is part riverside, urban, industrial, dunes and seaside promenade. Spittal has a long and wide expanse of sandy beach, and is rather nicer than the name might imply. In the 1800s it was a popular spa. A similar trail about L.S. Lowry, the artist, is available.

There is plenty of wildlife to see and the information boards are attractive and, notably, are changed for each season four times a year to keep the content relevant. A simple idea, but I have not seen it done before in practice. The group organising the trail has just installed the summer versions of the boards. One told of the 2m long *Pholiderpeton* fossil – might have been useful for helping social distancing.

I passed through the ruins of Berwick Castle at low level and was impressed by the grandeur of the Royal Border Bridge, which was officially opened by Queen Victoria on 29th August 1850 on her way to Balmoral, a process which took only twelve minutes from her train arriving to continuing over the border, 2.5 miles further north. (It was a good day for rail openings: she had opened Newcastle Central station earlier the same day.) I continued into town under the 1928 Royal Tweed Bridge which relieved most of the traffic on the Berwick Old Bridge of

1633, which I crossed to Tweedmouth. Road traffic had to trundle through the town until the opening of the A1 Berwick bypass in 1984.

It's much quieter now, and although the population is around 12,000 you would think it were bigger owing to the large number of villages in both England and Scotland which look to it as their local centre. I was originally intending to visit after the pubs and restaurants reopened on 4th July, but I reckoned that since Berwick pubs were the closest for locked down Scots up to 300 miles away it might be wiser to visit beforehand. I enjoyed fish and chips at the Cannon near the station and ate them in Castle Vale Park with its view of the rail bridge, but I could have sat out at the open air café in Spittal. On the nature trail you also pass the Berwick Shellfish which had a good range of seafood. They offer to put it in a polystyrene box with ice for just £1 extra to take home.

From Spittal there is a choice of walking back along Main Street and over the river to town, or use the Borders Buses route B1, which runs half-hourly (hourly on Sundays). If you don't want to visit the town centre, the bus goes back close to the station. I spotted the Spittal War Memorial off Main Street and behind it a fountain which was an iron-rich chalybeate spa, but there was no indication whether the water was safe to drink. So I didn't.

*Alex Nelson travelled to Berwick from Newcastle with CrossCountry for £9.90 and returned with LNER for £8.20.*





Carol Harkus and family.

## SOUTH SHIELDS' FAMILY'S BEST CATCH OF THE DAY

Local entrepreneurs, based in South Shields, have cast their net a little wider and are opening a new restaurant and take-away venue in their hometown's Ocean Road.

Husband-and-wife team; Bill and Carol Harkus, along with their children Rebecca (26), Rachel (28), Sarah (30) and Liam (22) currently run their own successful leaflet distribution company, Pace, which was established in 2015 and works with local companies to get their marketing materials to homes and businesses within the region.

Due to the success of this, they've decided to go one step further and have undertaken the premises in Ocean Road, formally known as Burger 31 to open their very own fish and chip take-away and 80-cover licensed restaurant August 2020 for fish and chips, pizzas, kebabs, burgers, salads, breakfasts and afternoon teas and will be the latest restaurant to open on the iconic South Tyneside street.

Although it is an uncertain time for any business

to start to operate, especially in the hospitality industry, the family are optimistic that the locals will get behind them and support their latest venture.

Rachel, who is heading up the operation is delighted with their latest acquisition and is determined the licensed restaurant and take-away will be a success.

She told us: "Although the timing isn't perfect, we were hoping to open at the beginning of April, we have ensured that this time has prepared us to plan our strategy and make the necessary arrangements to make it a great place to dine on Ocean Road.

"Competition is all around us, but we're determined to ensure that we're giving a great experience and serving first-class food and drinks, which will keep the loyal customers coming back

for more. "We're also offering a delivery service, so if you want to enjoy our great good, in the comfort of your own home, then we can supply that too!"

Although the outbreak of Covid-19, the family are determined not to let this stop their plans and are ploughing ahead with the new venue.

The venue is spread over two floors and the upstairs can be hired out for private functions, as well as a fully-functional two-storey restaurant at busy periods.

Rachel concluded: "As a family-orientated company owner, it's a privilege to grow our little empire and open our second business together. We're a close-knit family and this is just the icing on the cake for all of us. We're all so very excited for the future."

**Tel: 0191 4558005**





The reconfigure course enables 6, 12 and 18 hole games.

## PLANNING APPLICATION FOR £13m WALLSEND GOLF CENTRE

Acting on behalf of their clients, Harrison Golf and Leisure (HG&L), Newcastle Ltd, WYG Planning have reapplied to North Tyneside Council for Planning Permission for the new £13 golf-based leisure facility at Centurion Park, WallSEND which will include the reconfiguration of the existing Golf Course and the development of an innovative new Golf Centre, the first of its kind in the UK.

The Centurion Golf Centre concept is designed to deliver golf to a younger and more diverse market by combining a full length golf range with a radical reconfiguration of the golf course which will enable 6, 12 and 18 hole games and a substantial investment in comprehensive drainage and other measures including two new ponds and new planting to enhance biodiversity.

At the heart of the facility will be the £13m Centurion Golf Centre, combining the facilities of a traditional driving range with state-of-the-art virtual reality digital technology. The advanced digital technology tracking equipment, from market leader, Foresight UK, transposes players' shots onto digital screens which can show a number of virtual reality games or a selection of world-renowned golf courses.

The two storey building has been designed by Newcastle-based Nicholson Nairn Architects and, upon planning permission, is to be constructed by Robertson Construction, relying almost entirely upon a local supply chain of sub-contractors. It will have 54 well-furnished golf bays complete with first class, brand golf clubs and an automated golf ball dispense system fronting the driving range at Ground Floor and First Floor levels. Additional facilities extending

to the rear of the bays contain a sports bar and restaurant, golf pro-shop, changing facilities, golf academy, kitchen, function/meeting rooms and associated offices. The building will also provide the new WallSEND Golf Club locker rooms to provide natural linkage with the course whilst the application also includes off-street parking facilities, accessed from the adjacent West Street.

Phil Harrison, Director of HG&L Newcastle Ltd, commented, "We were extremely disappointed when our original application was refused at the start of the Coronavirus lockdown threat, but have taken all the objections on board and repositioned the range to face west along the Coast Road. We have also completely redesigned the golf course in line with the latest PGA thinking to reverse the decline of traditional golf clubs by attracting new members to new forms of the game.

"The Centre is a fantastic concept which is attractive not only to experienced golfers who can use it as a traditional driving range to practice, a coaching aid or just the fun of playing different courses in a virtual reality mode, but also to complete novices who can learn to play golf here whilst still having fun playing different games.

Chris Sanderson, Director of STR Enterprises Ltd, who will manage the facility added, "Centurion Park is the perfect site for us to launch the new concept and the end result will be an innovative and professionally designed course with a truly superb facility in the Golf Centre which will provide some 100 jobs and create a £4m per year local supply chain when fully operational in addition to the 60 jobs created by the construction period.

"The development not only secures the long term future of golf at Centurion Park, which is currently stagnating with falling membership, but will also become a visitor attraction in its own right, drawing both golfers wanting year round facilities and families and young people new to the game. Its use as a corporate hospitality and community venue adds further value."

The WallSEND facility will be the first in the UK with HG&L intending to launch further sites nationwide in the near future.

Upon a successful application, construction can begin later this Autumn allowing the Centurion Golf Centre facility to open in Autumn 2021.

[centuriongolfcentre.co.uk](http://centuriongolfcentre.co.uk)



The new Centurion park Golf Centre will include extensive hospitality facilities.



The proposed Centurion Golf Centre driving range at Centurion Park, WallSEND

# SUPPORTING YOUR TEAM AFTER LOCKDOWN



The last few months have been stressful and challenging in many, many ways. Collectively we've experienced an existential trauma, having all been confronted with our mortality, the mortality of our loved ones and the fact that ultimately, we are not in control.

As the scientists begin to get a better handle on the physical risks of the coronavirus and the country slowly reopens, the psychological impact of the pandemic remains to be seen. As with any traumatic experience, the emotional fallout only truly hits once the crisis itself has passed, and so, whether we're conscious of it right now or not, it's more than likely that we'll all encounter some kind of emotional aftershock.

As employers it's important that we be both conscious of and prepared for this. It is highly probable that our teams will require extra support over the coming months and so putting measures in place now could go a long way in promoting good mental health in the long term.

Openly acknowledging the challenges that we've faced and the ways in which the pandemic could impact emotional wellbeing is a good starting point. This will go a long way in creating a culture of understanding and compassion, so anyone who is struggling feels able to reach out for support straight away.

The key emotional difficulties to be aware of post-lockdown are grief, low mood, anxiety and irritability. Alongside the strong possibility that at least some of your workforce will have lost loved ones in the pandemic, some may also be struggling with the loss of the way life was before. Whilst the country is slowly opening up again, life is by



Dr Rhian Lewis

no means returning to normal and, right now, no one knows if it ever will. Social distancing and the omnipresence of PPE make being out in the world feel pretty strange. Much has changed and many imperceptible freedoms that we used to take for granted, like being able to walk down the street without having to be alert, have been lost. Some of your team may need help to process this more subtle, unspoken grief for the world before COVID. Grief can manifest in many ways. Sadness and low

mood are the most obvious signs, but symptoms of anxiety are also common.

Similarly, many of your employees may be experiencing anxiety about the return to work and the busyness that went before. These anxieties may take many forms, from the fear of exposure to the coronavirus, to worries about their ability to cope with their workload, or the broader uncertainty that we're now faced with as a country. For many, the pandemic has pulled the rug out from underneath their feet, throwing their plans up in the air and this uncertainty about the future can be a major stressor.

Remember not all employees will feel able to let you know that they're struggling so watch out for changes in behaviour such as withdrawal, compulsive tidying and irritability and check in with them to see how they're doing. Whilst many will find their own way through these challenges, others may require professional support to get back on track.

Our team at The Clearing are here to help. Talking things through with a counsellor can make a huge difference. It allows us space to make sense of how we're feeling so we can process and release the difficult emotions. In doing so we begin to feel lighter, then we develop greater self-awareness and then we become more resilient.

**If you'd like to arrange individual support for yourself or an employee, or to explore workplace counselling options for your organisation, visit [theclearing.org.uk](https://theclearing.org.uk) or contact our office on 0751 408 4909.**



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## MIX IT UP

For the first time in many months I am not specifically relating my article to coronavirus times.

I want to discuss how you are able to hold onto your fitness throughout the year. Of course this means consistency and having the ability to mix your training up knowing at any point, due to your base fitness, you could adapt and go for any specific target.

Whether it's general fitness, weight loss or you are training for a specific event you can't expect to flog your body by training everyday and be at the peak of your fitness 365 days a year.

You need to be smart, but unfortunately most people do not look at the bigger picture they want results there and then. For many it's a mad rush to lose weight, post Xmas and pre summer, the rest of the year they don't bother. Long term this will catch up with you physically because as you get older your body can't realistically make those sorts of changes in such a short space of time, it also becomes dangerous for your health and you are more lightly to sustain an injury. Likewise mentally, the thought of another year having made no long term positive changes to your health and fitness could potentially have a negative effect.

So how can you counteract this and train sensibly throughout the year and enjoy it:

- I call it ticking over, by this I mean, try to train 2-3 times a week all year round at a level you enjoy. This alongside a healthier food regime will, over time, reap the benefits with the way you look and feel and is your key to longevity.
- Mix your training up, try different types of training eg at DF Fitness we have Private Personal training, Small group classes in one of our 3 private gyms, we have a unique private Outdoor Gym, Strength sessions, Beach Bootcamps, Indoor Bootcamps and Versa Climber classes. This type of variation means you can chop and choose each week. The variation breaks the



David Fairlamb

monotony and gives you an opportunity to work on all types of strength and fitness. Remember your body will get used to one way of training, therefore mixing things up is beneficial.

- With a broad base of training throughout the year you know at any point you want to specifically work on something eg weight loss, strength, speed or endurance you can do it quickly and safely.
- Working at the same pace is good for health and wellbeing plus gives you a good all year round fitness level. This base of fitness means you can up the intensity at any time making you fitter

and stronger very quickly. This empowers you and gives you self confidence and belief, not just in the gym but also in your day to day life.

- Knowing your body means you should know when to rest, when to push if you are going for a specific target and how to adapt your training depending on how you feel during sessions.

If you feel good, push on and realise what you are capable of, other days it can feel tougher than normal, therefore make a sensible decision depending how you feel. You may surprise yourself by the end of this session and find some boost of energy to finish strongly.

### DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*Regular exercise is not just something you need to do to improve your health, consistent exercise is absolutely essential because the length and quality of your life depends on it.*





## THE NORTHUMBERLAND GOLF CLUB

The Northumberland Golf Club offers a premier membership experience with a wonderful golf course, first class practice facilities and a traditional Clubhouse overlooking the 18th green, a great place to relax after a game of golf with a drink and food from our first class catering. There is an enjoyable golfing atmosphere in our Main Lounge and Spike Bar.

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## ON THE TEE BOX - BACKWORTH GOLF CLUB

You are always assured a warm welcome at Backworth Golf Club as we are known as one of the friendliest courses in the County. Although we only have 10 holes, most are extremely challenging with small greens and tight entrances protected by bunkers and water and some of the best County players have cut their teeth at Backworth over the years.

In an increasingly hectic life we are superbly suitable for those who do not have the time to play 18 holes.

Although members have the tee booked on a Tuesday and Saturday for a few hours it is possible for visitors to play most days.

When you have finished your round why not come into the Hall and enjoy some food or a drink?

### **Location -**

Situated just off the A19 in the village of Backworth.

### **Setting -**

Heavily wooded area within the grounds of Backworth Hall.

### **Length of course -**

5,939 yds.

### **Facilities -**

Buggy hire, bar, restaurant, function rooms.

### **Toughest Hole -**

Hole 9 (369 yds)  
A difficult par 4 closing hole.

### **Longest Drive -**

Hole 7  
A par 5 hole which gives you the opportunity to open your shoulders and hit out towards a wide fairway.

### **Signature Hole -**

Hole 3  
A short par 3 surrounded by mature trees and heavily protected by bunkers.

### **Prices -**

April to October  
9 holes Midweek £12  
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# COMMENT WITH... Barry Speker

barryspeker@hotmail.com



“  
**...he recreated  
classic album  
covers by stars  
such as...**  
”



Real evidence of ending the lockdown occurred when I was able to go to Salon 66 for the first time since March. I was getting accustomed to my re-enacted Bob Dylan 1960s wild look. Ian has restored the more acceptable coiffured look of the 21st century.

It is debatable whether these superficial vanities (I have not missed the nail bars) have any importance, when face to face meetings have been replaced by stay at home interactions on Zoom, Teams, Skype and Starleaf. I have not used cuff-links for over four months.

Although churches, mosques, synagogues and temples are gradually reopening, they will be far from the usual communal uplifting experiences. Fears about droplets and microdroplets from singing and chanting means no hymns or choirs. The 150 hymns from the Old Testament featured in Jewish and Christian services will be only read - humming may be permitted.

Choirs are all on hold. How will Gareth Malone cope?

Plans are proceeding for films about Covid in the style of *Cantagion* (2011). There is already a mini-series *Love in the Time of Corona* (not featuring the Government's scientific adviser) and a Canadian thriller called *Corona*. Sex scenes were shot with masks, latex gloves and hand sanitiser. A new coronavirus film about the UK experience is awaited - Michael Sheen as Boris, Matt Lucas as Hancock and Rowan Atkinson as Dom C. Suitable title would be 'With the Benefit of Hindsight' or 'Don't Look Back in Anger'.

The urgent plea to secure the survival of pubs, restaurants, coffee shops and all retail is encouraging us all to get out there and socialise, but suitably distanced! Table service at the pub. Get a cappuccino to save the economy! Fast food subsidised by Rishi but only if calorie controlled. Essential now to wear hot sticky masks in shops a full five months after it would have had any meaningful effect.

'George Orwell famously wrote 'If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear'. What is seen as a sinister new cult of dogmatic intolerance has been a worrying sight in the UK as in the USA. It silences debate, seeks to impose conformity, whips up hysteria and violence and crushes dissenting views.

Self appointed cultural commissars are divorced from British mainstream and seek to bully on the internet and elsewhere, pressing for no-

platforming speakers holding different views and for dismissal from office because of views which conflict or are not sufficiently in line with the extremist group. An example is J K Rowling who faces boycott by her publishers and being subjected to horrendous misogynistic abuse - for having the temerity to challenge the fashionable transgender ideology.

A letter from 153 philosophers, writers and intellectuals has denounced the 'intolerant climate' of public discourse. They argue that the way to defeat ideas is by exposure, argument and persuasion, not by trying to silence them or wish them away.

It is hoped that when 'normal' life returns, our traditional fairness, balance and tolerance will be restored.

A particularly heartwarming story of the lockdown was the imaginative project by my son Robert which has gone viral on the internet. At Sydmar Lodge Care Home in London where he is Activities Coordinator, he recreated classic album covers by stars such as Adele, Madonna, Queen, Michael Jackson, Springsteen, Bowie, Rag n Bone Man and others. He took pictures of willing residents in their 80s and 90s with suitable makeup, costumes and settings to produce the stunning images.

Millions of views on Twitter and Instagram and the images have gone worldwide. Interviews on BBC, NBC, CNN, Canada, Australia, Japan, Israel, Turkey and all over Europe. The amazing reaction was to the positivity and the attention given to residents of care homes during a crisis particularly hard for these very elderly people and those caring for them. It gave the residents and their families (who were unable to visit) such enjoyment and comfort. I am very proud of what Robert does - and in the midst of this their third daughter arrived. Welcome Olivia!





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