



NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

SEPTEMBER 2020

**MASTER DEBONAIR, EFFORTLESSLY STYLISH MENSWEAR**

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

issue 61



## 'Bridging the Gap between your current financial situation and your future financial goals'

Established in 2014, Seven Bridges IM Ltd are a firm of fully independent advisers with over 30 years combined experience in the financial sector.

As independent advisers we are able to offer advice on the broadest range of products and services, a significant benefit for both our individual and corporate clients. Whether it be for investment advice, retirement planning, protection needs or inheritance tax planning, we have many years experience in finding the most suitable solution for our clients' needs.

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Whether this provision is a legal requirement or a form of prudent wealth preservation, Seven Bridges IM will work with you holistically to provide a list of solutions to suit you and your firm.

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## FOREWORD

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

As we enter late Summer we are pleased to bring you another vibrant issue packed with expert opinion, features and quality editorial content.

Our cover star is the award winning independent menswear retailer Master Debonair who chart their impressive growth and future plans.

We also showcase charity champion Stewart Bailey's 11th Annual Golf Day at Linden Hall which raised money for the fantastic Great North Air Ambulance charity.

Amongst a plethora of business articles, we interview Paul McGowan and Gill Burgess who talk about their careers so far in our hugely popular Meet the Entrepreneur slot.

As the leisure sector re-emerges after lockdown we take a visit to the plush new bar and dining room Okana to review a great new addition to Newcastle City Centre.

These are challenging times for all businesses but we hope you find something in this issue to alleviate the gloom and to enjoy and enthuse.

Thank you to all concerned for your continued 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, Matthew Redshaw

Editorial Contributors - Jack Grahamslaw, Holly Grahamslaw, Graham Courtney, Steve Russell, Barry Speker, David Fairlamb, Alex Nelson, Antonia Brindle

Web Design - Mediaworks Social Media - Curtis Gabriel

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## GILLIAN HALL APPOINTED TO LEAD NORTH EAST INNOVATION BOARD

The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has appointed Gillian Hall as a new Chair to its Innovation Board. Gillian has more than 25 years' experience as a business owner, non-executive director and corporate lawyer.

Gillian commented: "By encouraging innovation, we can boost the region's productivity, create more jobs and make a positive difference to the lives of people in the North East.

"We will also be playing a role in the North East COVID-19 Economic Recovery Plan. I will be working with the team at the North East LEP and our partners across the region to support businesses and communities as they recover."

Innovation is one of the areas of focus within the North East Strategic Economic Plan, which intends to create a more productive economy and 100,000 more and better jobs in the North East by 2024.



## CREATIVE SOLUTIONS HELPS BUSINESSES DURING THE PANDEMIC

Learning and development specialist Dr Kym Drady is urging businesses to use creative thinking and skills to provide solutions to issues resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Kym's business, Creative Solutions, provides creativity training which gives people the skills and techniques to transform their thoughts and actions, enabling them to develop new processes to benefit their organisations.

Kym's practical and experiential intervention provides a new lens through which individuals, and in turn organisations, can visualise and create new solutions to address existing problems.

Kym commented: "It's very satisfying to see people develop and grow whilst being fully immersed in creative activities and having fun. Solving complex business problems isn't something that has to be done around the board room table. It's ok for adults to learn through play and creativity."



## BRITISH AWARDS FOR AN ENTREPRENEURIAL FAMILY

One family in the North East is celebrating as not just one but two of its members have been shortlisted in the Great British Entrepreneur Awards.

Father and daughter, Emma and Steve Black, are delighted to receive such an accolade in their respective categories.

Dr Emma Black is the Managing Director of Cascade Cash Management. Cascade is a leading cash savings and fintech company.

Emma and the team have built and launched an online savings portal and are delighted to have been shortlisted in the start-up entrepreneur of the year award category.

Steve Black is well known for his time working in the premier sporting industry. He supports those in the corporate world under his company Protean Solutions, ensuring that people stay agile of mind in work.

Steve and the Protean team have been shortlisted for the health and wellbeing entrepreneur of the year award category.

## COMPANY TAKEOVER IS MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

After years following parallel lives, two Newcastle mates have brought their businesses under one roof to create a formidable powerhouse in the fire and security sector.

Phillip Miller and Chris Pattinson met at school, play football for the same team and each took over their respective businesses from their dads.

Now, Phil's firm ABCA Systems, of Killingworth, has bought out Chris's firm Tyneside Security, installing old buddy Chris as Managing Director.

The move follows a bumper year of growth for fire and security experts ABCA, which employs 180 people. The firm, which specialises in access control, fire alarms, networking infrastructure and CCTV, saw a dramatic leap in turnover of more than 50 per cent to £23million last year.

Both Phil and Chris believe access to ABCA's training facilities, technical support and buying power will help take Tyneside Security's successful business model to the next level of growth.



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## GENERATOR SEEKS YOUNG ENTREPRENEURS FOR NEW YOUTH ADVISORY BOARD

North East-based music and business development agency, Generator, have launched a Youth Advisory Board.

Generator is a support agency for the music, tech and digital sectors in the North East. The agency's programmes include music support strand Tipping Point, which sees fully-funded masterclasses and residencies for emerging musicians, and Digital Union, a membership body for creative digital and tech businesses.

The organisation is looking for eight 18-25-year-olds to help form their new Generator Youth Advisory Board (GYAB).

As Generator's programmes are aimed at young and new artists, the organisation felt that they needed a representative board of those who they support. This not only brings a fresh new perspective but also gives young people an incredible developmental opportunity.

Each member of GYAB will be appointed for 1-3 years, with the view of up to two members joining the Generator Board after their first year.



## GLOBAL ENERGY SPECIALIST IN FINALS FOR LLOYDS BANK AWARDS

Global Procurement Group is a finalist in two categories in the prestigious 2020 Lloyds Bank National Business Awards.

The global energy specialist has reached the finals in The LDC Growth through Innovation Award and The Lloyds Bank Mid-Market Business of the Year Award.

Global Procurement Group unites and consolidates a wealth of energy expertise that spans Europe, the US and Asia. It specialises in energy management and procurement and world-leading technological innovation, enabling businesses to proactively manage their energy requirements, cutting costs, consumption and carbon.

The UK operation, Northern Gas and Power, continues to expand, recently taking four floors of a new, state-of-the-art Gateshead waterfront headquarters.

Group Finance Director, Chris Baty, said: "We're delighted to be a finalist in two categories in these prestigious awards. It represents the culmination of a massive effort over the last 12 months in what have been exceptionally challenging circumstances."



## NEW HUB FOR ENGINEERING AND INNOVATION NEARS COMPLETION

The redevelopment of a landmark Newcastle building, which will support future generations of engineers, has taken a step towards completion thanks to funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Grade II listed Neville Hall is due to reopen in spring 2021 as The Common Room, a new hub for innovation and engineering in the North East.

The project has recently received a grant of £170,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund Emergency Grant Scheme, set up to support organisations through the Covid-19 pandemic.

Liz Mayes, Chief Executive of The Common Room, said: "Thanks to the National Lottery, we can continue with the restoration and with our programme of learning activities, which has already engaged almost 2,000 children and young people."

New artist's impressions reveal how the historic spaces within the building will be restored, ready for use as events spaces for educational workshops, meetings and weddings.

## TIER ONE CAPITAL REPORT STRONG FIRST QUARTER

The owners of Newcastle-based wealth management and property lending experts, Tier One Capital, have reported a stronger than expected first quarter, despite turbulent COVID-19 financial trading conditions and the lockdown period.

Founding shareholder and Chief Executive, Ian McElroy, said: "While the region is undoubtedly suffering from the uncertainty created by COVID-19, we are delighted to be witnessing some green shoots of encouragement, including a £12m increase in our property lending pipeline and a breadth of financial activity across our client base.

"A large part of our recent performance is down to the strength of our senior management team and our wider team, who have all contributed to the informed and decisive decisions made during the last six months."



Tier One is now well positioned to significantly grow its specialist property lending services, attracting those looking for bespoke funding for residential and commercial property-based investment opportunities.



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# Public sector procurement? It makes sense to work with Prosper



## 2019-20

### Value for Money

- ◉ Average Saving per tender **11.02%**
- ◉ **40** hours of your resource saved per tender when engaging Prosper to work on your behalf
- ◉ **66%** of Contractors were SME's
- ◉ **50** Further Competitions completed
- ◉ Workstreams included:
  - ◉ Doors & Windows
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  - ◉ Employers Agent
  - ◉ Structural Engineers and New Build Development (Principal Contractors)
- ◉ New FM & Compliance DPS available with Frameworks for Asbestos Survey and Removals and Fire Safety Works to be launched by September 2020

### Retaining your spend in LOCAL Communities

- ◉ **70%** of appointed Contractors have their main base in the North East
- ◉ **20%** of appointed Contractors have a presence in the North East
- ◉ **LOCAL** jobs are created and sustained while employees spend their income in our local communities

### Contract Management

Contracts in 2019-20 generated an average Variation Rate of only **1.13%** demonstrating the effectiveness of Prosper expertise in creating specifications and pricing summaries that meet the delivery needs of partners.

### Social Value Dividend

The Social Value Dividend payment for the year was **£125,000**, since inception the fund has issued Dividends exceeding **£2.3m** to Landlord partners the equivalent of Social Value Generator income of **£18m** for local north east communities.

# PROSPER

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## WELCOME!

Here at Master Debonair, we've been highly proactive from lockdown onwards. During our worst trading period, we took the initiative to get a lot of things done from our to do list that would enhance the Master Debonair brand and add to the already fantastic customer experience available in our shops.

Come on in...





First up, we were finally granted 'Change of Use' planning permission to convert the first floor of our East Boldon shop from residential to commercial use which allowed us to move our Private Showroom (with bar!) from Head Office to above our flagship Boldon shop. It means we now have the full Master Debonair experience under one roof.

Since opening in April 2016, the shop looks very different now. Not only have we extended the stylish shop floor space from the original 800 sq ft to 2,500 sq ft in the last 12 months, we've also added casual wear to our signature formal wear collection so are really now looking forward to offering the full gentlemen's wardrobe.

In addition to this, later in the year we are even looking to put a barbers into the final spare room in the shop, so customers can walk out with a fresh haircut/beard trim along with a new outfit and feeling like a million dollars.

From day one, we took the decision not to stock well-known brands but instead find lesser known pieces that create our signature look in addition to being great quality at an affordable price. It means most of our customers come in and completely refresh their wardrobe.

Adding casualwear has really opened up our offering to gents around the region and ticks all the boxes from sharp suits, businesswear, smart casual and every day casual. Prices have been kept in line with our formal wear favourites, so for instance our three piece off-the-peg suits start at £205 whilst jeans and chinos are available from £35 and above. Personally, I've always had fun mixing formal wear with casual pieces and often joke that I get dressed in the dark as I don't stick to any traditions! Our company strapline is 'Outfitting Self Confidence' so if I feel confident in what I wear, I go for it. You'll often see me in a loud floral shirt under a tweed

waistcoat with a pair of dark jeans and contrast coloured brogues!

In July, I had an opportunity to move our current Chesterfield shop to a grander three-storey affair. I jumped on a train one Sunday, looked at the shop, signed the lease the following day and we were open three weeks later following a full refit. We like to move quickly although my wife and business partner Eve would say I like to move too quick! Our strategy has always been to open more stores across the UK within a one hour drive in affluent towns and villages where accessibility by travel links is easy.

So, following a highly productive lockdown, we now have private showrooms in our Chesterfield and East Boldon shops. In these outlets, we pride ourselves on creating an enjoyable retail experience in which customers can book out for the showroom for wedding party appointments or one-to-one personal styling sessions. This has always been something I've wanted to launch and gives customers the chance to drop in, design their own suits and shirts and receive their orders within four to six weeks. Of course, our expert team are on hand to help you with your styling and suggest outfits and custom tailor suits and shirts to your preference. The prices again are in-line with our existing pricing architecture with a custom tailored two piece starting at £299, a three piece at £369 and custom tailored shirts starting at around £80. A great service indeed for both the short and tall chaps as well as the one's in the middle like me!



Simon Whitaker, CEO,  
Master Debonair.





Catering for all shapes and sizes has always been important to us, but this service expands that offering further as we go up to a 56 inch chest in our tailored suit whereas off-the-peg suits typically range from 34 inch to 52 inch. Our in-house tailoring team can adjust off-the-peg suits to fit perfectly but this allows you to really personalise your suits and shirts.

The private showroom concept is great. Come in have a beer or a cup of tea and have the room to yourself. We've opened this up to everyone so if it's free, we get guys looking for prom suits, race day suits, wedding suits and stylish evening wear as well as girls, as we also tailor men's suits to fit the ladies.

During lockdown, we've also introduced virtual styling appointments which allows customers to video call a member of our team who will host this from one of our private showrooms. With the outbreak of Covid-19, we've really looked at ways to help our customers even more. Sessions give you the chance to treat yourself from the comfort of your own home whilst still enjoying the same expert advice and tailoring approach you would receive in store.

There's also our online store to buy from and an amazing customer service team to help our customers buy the right sizes and fit. The personal touch is so important and the volume of calls, emails, social media messages we field everyday never ceases to amaze. To me, it's really all about enhancing the customer experience and going that extra mile. Quality product is a given, but the brand and customer experience are the icing on the cake. Most of our customers are on first name terms with all our staff which makes it a proper family business. The Master Debonair family.





Geoff Maclauchlan

## PROTECTING YOUR BUSINESS IN A POST-COVID WORLD

Geoff Maclauchlan, Managing Director of Kingsmere Finance Directors, is no stranger to helping businesses navigate financial challenges.

With his Finance Director experience across a range of sectors, Geoff provides strategic financial and operational planning and management guidance to businesses aiming to increase their financial stability, efficiency and profitability, either on a part-time basis or with a project-led focus.

With the UK moving out of the coronavirus lockdown, Geoff spoke to Northern Insight on how businesses can protect themselves in a post-pandemic world:

We finally seem to be seeing a light at the end of the COVID-19 tunnel and things are slowly getting back to a new sense of normal. However, even though we have had an economic earthquake, the tsunami is still to follow. In the coming months businesses will need to look at how they are prepared to face the challenges ahead.

Many businesses have had the benefit of the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), bounceback loans and grants as well as the benefits of the Furlough scheme and VAT deferral. This may have led to complacency and a false sense of security about their cash position but that is likely to change.

In October or January there will be tax to pay on earlier more profitable years. In March, the deferred VAT payment will be due. We will also have situations where bounceback loans and CBILS will need to begin repayments by businesses that didn't really want to take on additional debt in the first place. There are also a range of other potential problems to address, whether that's customers no longer being viable, employment issues or interrupted supply chains.

There are a number of steps that businesses need to take to protect themselves now, rather than waiting until next year.

### Cash flow forecast

The most important aspect to consider is to have a cash flow forecast which lays out, as clearly as possible, the way forward.

It is often recommended that businesses should have a 13-week forecast in place but for this environment, that is not enough. For example, if you have had CBILS or a bounceback loan, in 13 weeks you will probably still be in a reasonably healthy position, what about after that?

We still don't know the full impact of lockdown, whether business will pick up quickly or if it'll be a long, painful process. Any cash flow forecast must illustrate when the money will run out and what preventative steps can be taken, ideally over 12 months.

### Business forecast

A business forecast to project how well or badly the business is likely to do in the coming months is also needed. It is best to adopt a fluid approach, enabling easy modification in response to what is an evolving situation and at the same time, always linking back to the cash forecast. This gives business owners and managers visibility on the ramifications of any policy changes and decisions made.

### Root-and-branch review

Now is a good time for business directors and managers to carry out a root-and-branch review,

examining every aspect of operations, from staffing levels, orders and overheads to minimising cost, money collecting from customers, as well as exploring more cost effective supply chain alternatives.

### Insurance

To protect businesses from the impact of key customers going 'bump', serious consideration should be given to taking out credit insurance.

As part of an overall costs rationalisation, all insurances relating to the business should be reviewed, where possible using an experienced broker rather than going online. Online providers may give cheaper quotes, however there can sometimes be gaps in the level of protection, something that businesses simply cannot afford now.

### Communication

The final stage is to focus on communication. Talk to staff and make sure that key people in the business are happy, secure and have the resources and support they need. Talk to the business' stakeholders, particularly the bank – it is essential that they know what management are doing, how it's being done and where and when their help might be needed.

Also talk to suppliers, landlords, local authorities and HMRC, all of whom have vested interest in the survival and longer-term success of the business.

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the challenges ahead, however by adopting a step by step and pragmatic approach now, businesses can increase their chances of survival and indeed success in the future.

For further details visit [www.kfdl.co.uk](http://www.kfdl.co.uk) or contact Geoff at [gm@kfdl.co.uk](mailto:gm@kfdl.co.uk)



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Andrew Skelton with  
Robyn Carlisle

## FANTASY ARTIST WITH REAL AMBITION

Even as a young child, art was very important to Robyn Carlisle and it became an essential way to share her feelings.

The 26-year-old from Chopwell has autism and finds some methods of communication difficult. She learned to speak later than her classmates and drawing helped her express her feelings at an early age.

Robyn's drawing skills have now developed to include advanced digital artwork and it remains crucial for her personal well-being, as well as for her future career.

Pauline Carlisle, Robyn's mam, says: "Even before she could talk,

Robyn used drawing as a way to communicate. At nursery, she couldn't explain to us how she felt but we'd know if she was upset because of the pictures she drew with thick, black angry lines.

"She has all this amazing creativity inside her. I find her fascinating to watch because she doesn't draw conventionally. Like most people, if I was drawing a figure, I'd start with the body and do an outline. But Robyn begins by doing with fingertips. She has a vision of what she wants and makes it happen. It just unfolds."



Now, through hard work and with specialist support, Robyn has progressed to achieve a degree in Digital Media from Newcastle College and she hopes her creativity and drawing skills could lead to a career in illustration and art.

Robyn mainly produces fantasy and 'dungeons and dragons' art and was given an unconditional offer to study at Newcastle College. With support from their Autism Academy, she studied animation and achieved a BA (Hons) in Digital Media.

To support her ambitions, technology and office management services company, SOS Group, has provided Robyn with a state-of-the-art laser printer, which can print onto a variety of stocks and weights, so she can produce high resolution prints and accept more commissions for work.

The Team Valley-based firm recently celebrated donating an amazing £250,000 to charities, talented young individuals and community organisations since they launched in 2002.

Andrew Skelton, director at SOS Group, says: "What an amazing young lady Robyn is. We're very proud to be able to support her as she develops her artwork into a career. We know how much it means to her personally and can see how talented she is.

"She's come a long way already and we have no doubt she has

a great future ahead of her. It's a pleasure to be able to help in some small way."

Throughout its history, SOS Group has always placed a strong emphasis on community involvement and has always encouraged and helped others to pursue their ambitions.

Over the last year, it has been actively involved in supporting over 30 community projects, charities and talented young individuals, like Robyn.

Robyn says: "Before I was given this, I used to just have a household printer. Now I can print higher quality pictures and get them out to people.

"When I was small, I learned to talk late and art was a way I could communicate. I could draw pictures that showed how I felt. It helps me focus and calms me when there's a sensory overload. I can put my headphones on and always have my drawing pad."

SOS Group supplies and maintains leading brand digital office equipment and offers a full range of office management services, including unified communications, IT support, document management, cost consultation and managed print services.



More of Robyn's work can be viewed on her website: [robinwing.artstation.com](http://robinwing.artstation.com)





## CHARITY GOLF DAY AT MACDONALD LINDEN HALL

Charity Champion Stewart Bailey broke the £700k fundraising landmark recently at his 11th annual charity golf day at Macdonald Linden Hall on Friday 21st August.

The event this year was in aid of the truly amazing Great North Air Ambulance Service.

It was another fantastic and well supported day with 80 golfers taking part and the event was topped off perfectly with Richard Walton having a "Hole in One" on the 15th, bagging himself a 25 grand cash prize for his efforts.











## PLEXUS INNOVATION

### Changing the Landscape of Compliance Management with Remote Technology...Plexus Innovation.

Two men in the North East are changing marketplace opinion regarding remote technology, by making their innovative solution the 'must have' tech for any company that needs to manage compliance data.

Ian Murray and Steve Todd, directors of Plexus Innovation, are successfully rolling out their innovative GUARDIAN® technology across a range of sectors including care homes, social housing, education, healthcare and hotels.

GUARDIAN® is a remote, automated measurement

and alert system that focuses on environmental data including temperature. Designed and manufactured in the UK by Plexus Innovation, GUARDIAN® is already making a huge difference to those who have invested in the technology.

Ideal in reducing the risk of Legionella and ensuring temperature in water or refrigeration units is at an optimum level to protect health, GUARDIAN® technology comprises of a combination of hardware, with remote monitoring software.

Ian and Steve both have a background in technology,

innovation, and product development, with a passion for bringing exciting new solutions to the marketplace.

This experience allowed them to understand how remote technology could overcome most of the challenges associated with human intervention within compliance management.

Ian said: "We had the idea that use of remote technology should really be commonplace within compliance and facilities management but we also realised that the technology needs to be cost effective, easy to use and the data effectively managed, in order for this to become a reality. We worked hard at getting those aspects right and now have a solution that delivers all three. Our monitoring software is tailored to ensure that clients can configure parameters, so they only get alerts that they want to know about, whether that be examples such as outlet usage profile, water flushing events or medical fridge doors left open.





Ian Murray and Steve Todd

"The remote measurement and alert system, which provides a digital alternative to manual checks, is now proven to be cost effective and reliable at providing accurate measurement. It provides real-time data with a full audit trail, issues alerts, reduces risk and detects a range of key issues not possible via manual measurement."

"One organisation already benefitting is Careline Lifestyles, where GUARDIAN® is taking pressure off the nursing team. Going forward, all care homes will be extra vigilant when it comes to compliance and risk to the health of their residents. GUARDIAN® remotely identifies risk from medical fridge and water services issues, enabling early intervention by compliance staff and provision of enhanced duty of care to residents. Especially at a time when nurses and care providers need to focus on their

residents even more than usual, GUARDIAN® frees up the staff to concentrate on care provision as it automatically detects operational issues which, for example, could result in dispensed medication waste and undiagnosed water system problems."

Believe Housing, one of the largest housing associations in the North of England, has also successfully implemented GUARDIAN® technology to reduce the risk to residents of 136 apartments across the region from the water born disease, Legionella. Throughout Covid 19 lockdown GUARDIAN® ensured that Believe Housing had uninterrupted compliance management.

Ian continued: "It is rewarding to see Believe Housing leading the way by introducing our technology to their industry. Social Housing providers are now seeing the benefits of using GUARDIAN® to better

manage Legionella compliance, provide enhanced duty of care to tenants and reduce operational costs as it tracks and defines water usage and temperature profile of each outlet."

Ian, Steve and the Plexus Innovation team are now on a mission to make remote technology across the services industry the norm, rather than niche. Steve said: "As technology specialists, we can focus on what we are good at and the science that we excel in. This then allows others, such as compliance and facilities managers; operational and maintenance teams, and nursing and care professionals to do their job better! It's a win, win situation."

GUARDIAN® is cost effective, reliable, gives accurate measurements and real-time data as well as being easy to install.

**For more information please contact Plexus Innovation on 0191 922 3969 or visit [www.plexus-innovation.com](http://www.plexus-innovation.com)**

StJames'  
SQUARE  
LAW FIRM





## INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEGAL TALENT

Commercial Law Firm, St James' Square are delighted to announce the launch of its first ever Graduate Recruitment Scheme. Scheduled to begin in October 2020, the two-year training programme offers talented graduates the opportunity to obtain necessary work experience, which is vital to continue their journey in becoming fully qualified solicitors.

Staff at the firm were thrilled to receive huge interest in the scheme, which is not surprising given that the successful graduates will receive one-to-one mentoring and guidance from some of the North East's top lawyers.

The training programme will see two graduates each year join the firm and form part of its strategic plan for long-term growth. The graduates will rotate between different legal teams, giving them valuable experience and knowledge of a wide range of legal areas. Upon successful completion of the scheme, each graduate will join one of the departments on a permanent basis.

Mark Roche, Practice Manager said, "We are extremely pleased to be able to offer more new opportunities at St James' Square. The Graduate Scheme is a win-win for everyone involved. Not only does it give graduates a fantastic opportunity to continue their legal training, but it also allows us to attract new talent into the business which in turn helps us grow and meet the demands of our clients."

The firm has a history of investing heavily in its staff and The Graduate Recruitment Scheme is welcome news amidst such tough times for graduates and businesses in general. St James' Square was established three years ago and,

given its significant investment in technology and forward thinking working practices, it has been able to respond to the demands and challenges of this year.

During the lockdown period two of its departments, Corporate and Commercial Services, and Debt Recovery, experienced significant and unexpected demand from clients and had to recruit new staff to meet the needs of those growing areas. Another department, Sports Services, was also kept extremely busy with the completion of a major contract. The team, which deals with the legal aspects of football transfers, recently assisted its sister company, St James' Square Sports Management in the transfer of the Greek National goalkeeper, Vasilis Barkas. The deal saw Barkas move from AEK Athens to Celtic Football Club for a transfer fee of £4.5 million. The transfer is a serious win for St James' Square and highlights the level at which the firm is operating.

Charity is very important to the whole team at St James' Square and this year has made it impossible to provide the usual level of support to their chosen charity of the year. The Chronicle Sunshine Fund will therefore be the firm's Charity of the year for 2020 and 2021. Partner Andrew Carser, explains, "We organise several large scale events each year

that help us raise a significant sum for charity. In 2019 we were able to raise over £40,000 for Heel and Toe, a North East based charity which helps disabled children and their families. However due to COVID-19 we have been unable to undertake many of our planned fundraising events and as a result we have taken the decision to extend our partnership with The Chronicle Sunshine Fund until the end of 2021. The work they do with children in our region is outstanding and we are delighted to continue supporting them."

Formed in 2017 and initially operating out of one room at Hoults Yard, St James' Square has expanded rapidly. The firm now employs over 30 staff, occupies 7,000 sq ft of Grade A premises at Esh Plaza and has a turnover exceeding £2.1 million. It has expanded its commercial departments to include services in HR & Employment, Corporate & Commercial Services, Dispute Resolution, Real Estate – Commercial Property, Real Estate – Residential Property, Corporate Recovery & Insolvency, Debt Recovery and Sports Services.

St James' Square Law Firm is open and visitors are welcome by appointment only.

Please call 0191 466 1000 for any query and we will be happy to assist.

[sjs-law.co.uk](http://sjs-law.co.uk)

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SPORTS MANAGEMENT



# NORTH EAST FOOTBALL AGENTS SCORE BIG WITH CELTIC F.C.



Photo credit: SNS Group

A North East based sports management company was left celebrating after completing the transfer of Greek International goalkeeper, Vasilis Barkas, from AEK Athens to Celtic F.C.

St James' Square Sports Management managed the transfer of the player, for a sum of £4.5 million, which was finalised at the end of July by agents Paul Monaghan and Mark Lynn.

Paul said, "Vasilis is an exceptional player with a bright future ahead of him. He will do a fantastic job at Celtic and I have no doubt he will be playing in top sides for many years to come. We wish him all the best during his time at Celtic FC."

The company operates on an intermediary basis for professional football players and clubs from around the world and whilst it offers many services to their clients, it is carving out a reputation for assisting players from abroad entering the Premier League.

With its head office in Newcastle the company has an international reach and its agents, who are fluent in several languages, regularly travel the world to build relationships with many of the top clubs. Recent trips to Madrid, Paris, Barcelona, Athens, Rome, New York and Ecuador have helped cement those relationships and take the business to a new level.

As a result, St James' Square Sports Management has seen demand for its services increase considerably and have recently completed several lucrative deals in the current transfer window. Since it launched in 2018, the company has been involved with many players and clubs, including Panathinaikos and Olympiacos in the Greek Super League, Wolverhampton Wanderers, Leeds United and Crystal Palace in the Premier League.

"Mark Lynn said "We are thrilled at the way the business has grown in such a short amount of time and we were delighted to have completed our most recent deal with Celtic FC. Our sister company St James' Square Law Firm provided all our legal needs and assisted us throughout the deal. Their commercial advice and knowledge has been invaluable and helped to provide a speedy and fully rounded service."

The company has also attracted several Ambassadors to the business. Footballing legends Nikos Dabizas & Colin Todd joined St James' Square Sports Management as brand ambassadors earlier this year.

Nikos, a former Greek international, Leicester City and Newcastle United player, has most recently held the position of Sporting Director at Panathinaikos FC. Nikos said, "The team at St James' Square Sports Management have a passion for the game and the drive to succeed, I'm delighted to be working with them."

Player turned manager, Colin Todd, has over 600 appearances for club and country winning the PFA Players' Player of the Year in 1975. His managerial career took him to Middlesbrough, Bolton Wanderers & Derby County. Colin said, "I've worked with many agents over the years and the team at St James' Square Sports Management are a cut above. I am looking forward to many years of partnership ahead."

St James' Square Sports Management has now partnered with several leading brands including car manufacturers Lamborghini and McLaren, luxury holiday providers Soneva and Sani and private jet companies Air Charter Service and Gulfstream.



## NORTH EAST DEAL MARKET SHOWING SIGNS OF RECOVERY

The market for corporate finance deals in the North East is showing signs of recovery, according to a leading local Corporate Finance expert who has just completed two transactions for North East businesses.

Graham Cornforth, Corporate Finance Partner with Baldwins in the North East, said: "An active deal making market is important to a strong economy and there are signs of an increase in the number of enquiries and activity, all of which points to a recovery in deal making.

"We have just completed two transactions in the last month, one the sale of a leading construction logistics services business and the other a deal in the engineering sector. These show that with the correct diligence and deal structure, buyers and sellers can still successfully secure a deal.

"Despite the lockdown, finance is readily available and there are always sellers looking to exit and buyers looking to expand their business."



## SINTONS APPOINTS NEW MANAGING PARTNER

Law firm Sintons has appointed Christopher Welch as a new managing partner.

Christopher takes up the position after 17 years with the firm, during which time he has become one of the most highly esteemed corporate lawyers in the North of England, acting for an array of leading businesses both locally and nationally.

Christopher is part of the firm's senior management team and has played a central role in major projects, including the firm's recent rebrand. He will combine his role as managing partner with client work ensuring that he is able to meet the needs of his loyal and longstanding client base.

Christopher said: "I am very pleased to be appointed to the role of managing partner and look forward to meeting the challenges ahead. We have a hugely capable team at Sintons with many talented, committed people I know I can put my trust in."



## HAY & KILNER ADDS ERICA TO CLINICAL NEGLIGENCE TEAM

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has added experienced practitioner Erica Hardy to its expert clinical negligence team.

Erica is joining the Newcastle-headquartered firm as a solicitor and is now working on a range of clinical, medical and dental cases with clients from around the region.

After completing her legal qualifications, Erica worked as a solicitor in private practice on behalf of a number of North East NHS trusts, carrying out defence work in clinical negligence cases.

Erica said: "Hay & Kilner has always had an excellent reputation for their clinical negligence work and when the opportunity came along to join, I was extremely keen to take it up. It's a very professional practice with a friendly and approachable team and also fits the profile of the sort of firm for which I was looking to work."

## NEW IFA REFERRAL BUSINESS LAUNCHED BY NORTH EAST FINANCIAL SPECIALIST

A business to help Independent Financial Advisors (IFA) build new long-term relationships with clients has been launched by a North East finance specialist.

Newcastle-based Wealth Provision has been established by stockbroker Nick Williams, who has more than 14 years expertise in the financial sector working for respected companies such as Brevin Dolphin and St. James's Place, alongside North East entrepreneur Richard Fowler.

The business provides referral generation services to help IFAs secure new work, whilst also helping consumers to understand the benefits of receiving independent financial advice.

Richard, who also owns North East maintenance services company Total Facilities Management, joined the enterprise after accessing IFA services from Nick.

Operating nationally, the start-up business is aiming to achieve significant growth in the coming years and is being advised by partner and head of corporate finance at RG Corporate Finance, Carl Swansbury.



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## DENISE GRAHAM

Wealth Manager at Rutherford Hughes

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Growing up I wanted to study law. I completed my work experience at a local firm of solicitors in Gateshead and worked there on weekends and during school holidays. When I was 16 my parents moved away from Gateshead, so I left home at a young age to stay in Gateshead. Then a career in financial services presented itself and I loved it, so I stayed.

### Tell us about your current role?

I am a Wealth Manager with Rutherford Hughes Ltd. I offer holistic financial planning advice. We are completely whole of market so I am not restricted in any way which means I can offer the best possible advice to my clients. We review market offerings from discretionary fund managers, multi asset managers, together with specialist products that may be appropriate for our clients' needs. We also offer our own in-house portfolio management service and together we can structure solutions to meet our clients' needs from individuals, companies, Trusts, Court of Protection, and pension schemes.

### How has your industry changed over the past decade?

Our industry has changed a lot over the last decade. The Financial Conduct Authority introduced the Retail Distribution Review in 2012 and the number of qualified financial advisers in the UK dramatically reduced because of the review. Commission was removed and clients must agree fees with the adviser. Regulation was tightened for advisers, but it was a positive exercise.

### What has been your proudest achievement so far?

My proudest achievements are definitely my two daughters, Charlotte and Harriet. Someone once told me that it was not possible to be a good mother and have a career. I have to say I completely disagreed. My friends call me Mary Poppins as I am always super organised and prepared for every occasion. All the working parents out there will confirm that you must always be prepared. I am proud that I have a great career, am a loving mum and have a social life too so you could say I am proud that I have managed to achieve a work life balance.

In business, it is looking after a growing group of clients who value the care and attention, I give them.

### What are you currently working on?

If you follow Rutherford Hughes on Facebook or LinkedIn, you will see that I have been quite busy doing marketing and creating promotional/educational videos. We are trying to create awareness of ESG Investing. ESG stands for Environmental, Social & Governance. People who are not familiar with this type of investment believe that it is an ethical investment and you are sacrificing growth potential in favour of being ethical, however that it is not correct. 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. The one thing we are 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. Clients no-longer need to compromise you can invest with a social conscience and achieve long term growth.

### How has the coronavirus pandemic affected your way of working?

When we first went into lockdown it was a challenge. I was attempting to work from home and home schooling my seven and five year olds, something that sounds easy in theory but very different in practice. I think most parents will relate to this. I created a working pattern around the girls and things became easier. Rutherford Hughes have always understood the needs and demands of busy clients and had an excellent business process which allows us to advise our clients without the need for face to face meetings and reviews that can interrupt their busy schedules. Our system does not require printing reams and reams of paper, so it was very easy for us to adapt our business process as we started to use Microsoft Teams more. Before the pandemic I was in the office pretty much every day, now I work from home a lot more. I feel that both clients and other professionals that I work with have accepted the challenges that the pandemic has thrown at us all and it's now acceptable for one of my children or even our cat to briefly join in on my online meetings from time to time.

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

Surround yourself with a good network of people. This is so true. You need to have good people around you to talk through challenges, to learn from them, for them to offer you help and support. If they are unable to help personally it is great for them to be able to say "I know someone who can help you with that" and of course to be advocates of your business and refer clients to you.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Getting the work life balance, being a single mum of two young children and working full time in a heavily regulated industry certainly does have its challenges. However, I also believe that if you want something badly enough you will find a way to achieve it.

### How do you like to unwind?

I love spending time with my daughters. We are very lucky in the North East to never really be more than a 30-minute drive to either the coast or the countryside. I live a stone's throw away from the beautiful Derwent Walk so we love to escape and get out in the fresh air.

### What book are you currently reading?

I am currently reading two books, "12 Rules for Life" by Jordan Peterson and "What they don't teach you at Harvard Business School" by Mark McCormack. I enjoy reading but you will rarely see me reading a story other than to my children. I prefer reading to learn new skills.





Denise Graham

# HMRC STATUTORY RESIDENCE TEST AND COVID-19: IMPORTANT CHANGES

By Jenna Ideson (Personal Tax Senior)  
at RMT Accountants & Business  
Advisors Ltd

The Statutory Residence Test (SRT) was introduced by HMRC and brought into effect in the Finance Act 2013 on 6 April 2013. The purpose of the test is to help determine the tax residence status of an individual within the UK tax year.

An individual's UK tax residence status affects whether they need to pay tax in the UK on their foreign income, or their UK sourced income only. Residence status can change from one tax year to the next, therefore it is imperative that any individual that spends periods of time outside of the UK reviews their residence status each tax year to avoid being caught out and reporting their status incorrectly.

The SRT considers the amount of time an individual spends in the UK, the connections they have to the UK and where relevant, the amount of days worked in the UK. The SRT is split into the following parts:

- Automatic overseas test
- Automatic UK test
- Sufficient ties test
- Split years

Each of the tests above have their own qualifying rules and must be considered in the above order. Application of the SRT and considering the parts of each test can be very complex, and we would advise speaking with a tax professional if you are unsure of how the rules apply to your own circumstances.

The UK is currently dealing with an unprecedented health crisis which has affected millions of individuals, including those who may usually work or live abroad for some or part of the UK tax year. Temporary changes to the SRT guidance have been introduced by HMRC to provide a more sympathetic approach from a tax perspective to those individuals who are forced to return to the UK or are stuck in the UK for issues relating to Covid-19, such as country border closures or having to self-isolate in the UK.

Generally, an individual's UK tax residence status will be determined by the amount of days spent in the UK in a tax year. Since the introduction of the SRT,

HMRC have allowed for an additional 60 days on top of your relevant day count if they can be attributed to "exceptional circumstances". This allows you to ignore up to an additional 60 days when calculating your UK day count, if the discounted days qualify as exceptional under HMRC's criteria.

Previously, HMRC guidance classed exceptional circumstances as a situation which is out of the individual's control and is preventing them from leaving the UK. This included situations such as civil unrest, natural disasters and sudden illness or injury. Situations such as planned surgery and marriages or births within the family do not count as exceptional, as HMRC would expect the individual to know in advance the days they would be spending in the UK and take them into account in their calculation of days.

The HMRC guidance on exceptional circumstances was updated in March 2020, shortly after the UK "lockdown" was announced. The exceptional circumstances rule has been broadened to allow an individual to discount up to an additional 60 days if the days are attributable to:

Time spent quarantined or advised by a health professional to self-isolate in the UK.

Told by official Government advice not to travel from the UK.

If you are unable to leave the UK due to international border closures.

If your overseas employer asks you to return to the UK temporarily.

Although the rules have been broadened to include the above circumstances, there are still various clauses and parts of the residence test which can and cannot be considered when determining the number of days spent in the UK. For example, if you usually qualify as a non-UK tax resident by qualifying for the third automatic overseas test, you can claim up to an extra 60 UK days on top of the usual permitted 90 days as exceptional circumstances. You cannot, however, apply the exceptional circumstances rule if you have a significant break from overseas working of 31 days or more.

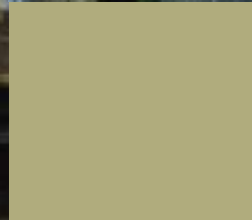
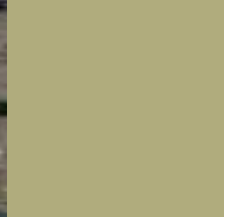
HMRC guidance must therefore be read in detail and applied to each individual's circumstances as there is no blanket approach.

Please note on 9 April 2020 in a letter to the Chair of the Treasury Committee, the Chancellor Rishi Sunak confirmed that time spent in the UK in the period 1 March 2020 to 1 June 2020 by individuals working on COVID-19 related activities will not count towards the residence tests and can be discounted. This includes doctors, nurses, anaesthetists and engineers working on ventilator design and production.



**For further information or assistance with anything highlighted in this article please contact: Jenna Ideson (Personal Tax Senior)  
e: [jenna.ideson@r-m-t.co.uk](mailto:jenna.ideson@r-m-t.co.uk) t: 0191 256 9500**





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## LUCKY OFFICE AVAILABLE AT COMMERCE HOUSE

An unusual opportunity to snap up a sixth floor office in Commerce House has arisen which has proven to be supremely lucky for previous tenants.

The office, which boasts stunning parquet floor and space for four or five people, has been a lucky charm for the last tenants, who have expanded into larger office space.

With great views of the city, the office space is part of one of the most luxurious business communities in the North East, based in the heart of Middlesbrough. The building also boasts a superior business lounge, boardroom, luxury kitchen and toilet facilities, hotdesking and virtual tenancy.

The office comes complete with furniture, full facilities management across the building and a manned reception. Christine Huntington, facilities manager for Commerce Chambers (owners of Commerce House) said: "This office really is the lucky charm in the building. It has had two previous tenants, both of whom have boomed to their next level of success and moved to larger space in Commerce House.

"With its original flooring and city views, it's a really special space. With prices starting from just £200 a desk, it's not going to be available for long, so if you are interested please do get in touch as soon as possible!"



Commerce House has all the safety precautions in place to ensure that tenants and visitors to the building are safe.

From Perspex in reception to hand sanitiser and directive signs around the building, with guidelines on distance and numbers allowed, the team have really gone the extra mile to ensure the building can function safely.

The meeting areas and boardroom are also available to rent, up to a maximum of eight people.

Christine concluded: "It's business as usual at Commerce House with everything in place to allow you and your business to flourish. To view the space please get in touch and we can arrange a socially distanced tour."

More information is available at [www.commerce-house.co.uk](http://www.commerce-house.co.uk)



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## CASCADE SHARES FIVE YEAR PLAN

Cascade Cash Management has revealed it's next exciting five year plan, which highlights the company's quest to ensure effortless financial savvy for all. Here, managing director Dr Emma Black, shares her sneak peek:

"When we started Cascade in 2012, we recognised that the financial services market was not functioning well leading to poor outcomes for savers and borrowers. We listened to our clients and started our journey towards ensuring that no one is worse off financially because they don't know about or can't access the right product or service.

"Often, the problem is borne in a disconnect between customers goals and aims and the financial products available on the market. Financial products are built by banks, for banks and often the customers goals and aims are not easily matched. There are literally hundreds of providers offering thousands of ever-changing products, each with its own onboarding process and risk management policy. Without transparent information that translates what should be considered in choosing between products, it's no wonder many customers are missing out.

"To articulate the disconnect between bank and customer, consider a young couple saving to buy their own home. From the couple's perspective, they wish to save to buy their dream home and once they have enough of a deposit, they wish to use that to buy the best home they can, then they'd like to live there and build their family home. The couple would like to make sure that they get the highest rate and depositor protection they can for their savings, and then they'd like a fair interest rate that they can comfortably service to own their own home when obtaining their mortgage. From the banks perspective, the bank wishes to pay the lowest rate it reasonably can to build its deposits book and then would like to lend that out at the highest rate it reasonably can to maximise its profits. It's this disconnect that causes a problem in financial services – banks seeking to maximise profits for shareholders and customers trying to access basic financial services at reasonable and fair levels.

"The regulator is aware of this disconnect and a series

of papers have been commissioned with regulatory guidance constantly being launched to try to ensure financial fairness for all. Cascade is aligned to the same goals. We are independent of any bank or building society and it's this independence that gives us our competitive advantage. We are structurally unbiased and agnostic over where a customer's money is placed. We are entirely aligned with our clients, seeking to get them the highest savings rate and depositor protection we can on their cash and we are now starting our journey to help our clients get the lowest borrowing rates and fairest terms available for their situation. We think this will help the regulator to improve competition in the market and lead to fairer outcomes for all.

"We intend to deliver our plan in three distinct phases. In phase one, our objective is to expand our reach, increasing our market share by reducing our minimum deposit to £50,000 in the first instance. We'll begin by building our mortgage and ISA datasets while continuing to develop our CascadePro (cash management for professionals) and CascadeData (savings analytics) services. In phase two, we will expand our offering by using our data and insight to design and launch bespoke savings and lending products while building our CascadeOpen digital banking platform. Finally, in phase three we are intent on transforming the market by offering a fully integrated savings, mortgages and loans platform with the option to expand our technology into new international markets too.

"Our end outcome is effortless financial savvy for all. For savers, we will continue to build and launch a fully integrated savings offering whereby mass market savers in the UK can create a Cascade profile through our mobile app. Savers will be able to determine their personal savings requirements and will be led through the flow for choosing which accounts they should have and how much they need to hold in each. Their money will be automatically taken from where it is currently held and placed in the right

amounts into their, also automatically opened and verified, new savings accounts. Within the Cascade app, savers will have access to a holistic view of all of their money. Their accounts will be constantly monitored against the market and adjusted to give them the best returns possible aligned to their bespoke situation. Cascade will fully digitise the administrative side of managing savings to reduce the hassle involved including bespoke requests for placing money on notice, enacting withdrawals, obtaining tax vouchers, notifying of audit requests and many other previously archaic processes. Cascade will help savers reach their savings goals.

"For borrowers, we are building a full-service mortgage advisory platform whereby customers can log in to their mobile Cascade app and be guided through a seamless onboarding and mortgage requirements flow. Mortgage recommendations will be based on a combination of the user input requirements as well as Cascade's own database of customer service levels, rates, onboarding processes and time to mortgage offers for each provider. From the Cascade app, borrowers will have their mortgage constantly monitored against the market with timely notifications for their bespoke situation including better rates and when initial fixed term periods end. Obtaining a mortgage through Cascade will be the smoothest experience possible owed to the fact that we will have fully digitised the administrative side of mortgages including pulling data from historical bank statements, credit reference agencies and the land registry.

"We are raising £1m in our first phase on our journey to delivering our plan and are setting a maximum subscription per person of £50,000. Cascade is EIS eligible which means that there are attractive tax reliefs available to those that invest designed to encourage investment into new ventures which stand to create both growth and jobs to benefit the UK economy."

**For anyone interested to learn more about becoming a Cascade shareholder, please do get in touch and we'll be delighted to share more and welcome you into our investor community. More information is at [www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk)**





Bespoke Financial Director Terry Blackburn (front right) with Robson Laidler's Nick Wilson (front left) with the growing Bespoke Financial team.

## BOOM IN INSURANCE ENQUIRIES SEES NORTH EAST FIRM ON TARGET FOR £1M

A Newcastle-based insurance brokers has increased its turnover by 50% and doubled its workforce due to a boom in demand for its services since the coronavirus pandemic

Bespoke Financial Newcastle Limited, which is the brainchild of father-of-two Terry Blackburn, 31 from Newcastle, is now on track to reach over £1.2m by the end of the year after a rise in people taking out life insurance and income protection.

The company has also undergone an aggressive recruitment drive to service demand, bringing its total head count to 28 and hopes to increase this to 100 by the end of 2021.

Bespoke Financial Newcastle has had support and financial coaching advice from Robson Laidler Accountants who have put systems in place to help the business grow sustainably giving real time information, a cashflow forecast and operational review to allow it to recruit and make key business decisions as well as invaluable tax advice.

Terry Blackburn said: "Bespoke Financial was already on track to reach our targets but the beginning of the pandemic in March saw our enquiries escalate more than imaginable.

"I made the conscious decision to work harder than I've ever worked and saw it as an opportunity to really make the business flourish and with the power of marketing and social media our leads increased tenfold.

"The pandemic has made people aware of their own mortality and whilst people have been furloughed they have had more time to reflect and review their finances. People who have always been meaning to take out that policy but never got around to it, have done.

"Robson Laidler have been an invaluable source of guidance throughout the whole period, they gave me 24/7 support and financial insight into

how to ramp up the business efficiently as well as ongoing business coaching and tax advice.

"I also could not have grown the business at such speed without my staff who have all adapted so well and who also embraced the challenge of working for home whilst dealing with an unprecedented number of enquiries. I am so proud of everyone's achievements and have high aspirations for the next 12 months."

Nick Wilson head of Business Innovation at Robson Laidler said: "Bespoke Financial is an example of a business that has seized the opportunity that the pandemic has thrown at business owners and grasped it with both hands. With calculated measures in place to adapt and thrive at such speed including an operational review, Terry and his team have worked incredibly hard and deserve this success. I can't wait to see what the future holds for the business."

**Bespoke Financial Newcastle, which offers life and home insurance as well mortgages and income protection, are still recruiting. Anyone interested in a role are asked to go to: [bespokefinancialnewcastle.co.uk](https://www.bespokefinancialnewcastle.co.uk) For business acceleration go to: [www.robson-laidler.co.uk](https://www.robson-laidler.co.uk)**

## INCOME PROTECTION PAYS THE BILLS WHEN YOU CANNOT!

Ok, so we know why people insure their car - it's the law, similarly if you have a mortgage it is compulsory to insure the property.

Every other insurance is in theory optional, with many people choosing cover for pets, mobile phone and their household appliances either by their own choice, thinking it was compulsory or worse not even knowing what they are paying for each month!

However, very few people insure the very thing without which a pet, mobile phone or many household appliances would become a luxury, I am talking about protecting your income, salary, wage, whatever you want to call it, this is what pays the bills for most of us.

- What would happen if due to long term illness, injury or accident your income stopped? Take a look at your monthly net pay and then ask how long you might survive without it.
- If you are really lucky your employer will pay you for a period, maybe even full pay for the first six months of illness but what happens after that.
- Possibly you have savings, but how long would these last even in just maintaining your "essential" monthly outgoings.
- "My family would help" is another common response, maybe, but how long could this be sustained before tensions arise.

One of the main reasons for clients not taking cover is because there is a belief that the state would help them. But is this true? Not really, as Statutory Sick Pay is less than £100 per week for employees for a maximum period of 28 weeks and the self-employed receive absolutely nothing! After that, any future state benefits are means tested but are hardly generous, and if anything, likely to reduce over the longer term as the Government purse strings are stretched by other demands such as Coronavirus, the NHS, education etc.

Research by Legal & General in 2019 shows that employees on average have a 32 day deadline before money starts to run out and 46% of households have either no savings or savings of less than £1,500.



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

Income protection cover is an obvious solution, which can be tailored to your individual circumstances:

- To begin after any employer's sick pay ceases.
- To end in line with a mortgage being fully repaid or children finishing education.
- To increase in line with inflation.
- To be underwritten by the insurer at the time of application so that you know exactly what is covered and any exclusions.
- Provide an income in line with current net salary for the lifetime of the policy.

A good way to determine how much cover is required is to divide a recent bank statement into three categories;

- Monthly payments which are absolutely necessary for survival, eg mortgage, food and bills.
- Those outgoings that you would like to keep, eg: gym membership, Sky etc.
- Those that you can do without.

This helps to determine how much cover you ought to have in place to maintain your home and lifestyle.

Finally there is a myth that "these policies don't pay out when you need them". Recent statistics available from Legal & General for 2019 are as follows;

- 93% of income protection claims were paid out with those which weren't successful usually due to existing illnesses not being declared when applying for the policy

So taking things back to reality, pet insurance may well prove to be essential when your beloved cat, dog etc. is ill, but who feeds him/her if you are too ill to afford to?

Speak to us today about how you can improve your financial security. What have you got to lose?

If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have in excess of one hundred and fifty Google 5\* reviews on-line and on our website from satisfied clients ([www.innovatempl.co.uk](http://www.innovatempl.co.uk))!

**Paul Hardingham and Tony Ibson are Mortgage and Protection Advisers at Innovate Mortgages and Loans. Both have over 20 years of experience advising individuals and businesses across the North East of England. They can be contacted for bespoke advice at [paul@innovatempl.co.uk](mailto:paul@innovatempl.co.uk) or [tony@innovatempl.co.uk](mailto:tony@innovatempl.co.uk) or call 0191 284 3723.**

*Your home is at risk if you do not keep up repayments on a mortgage or other loan secured on it.*



# BUILDING FINANCIAL RESILIENCE

One notable theme evident throughout the coronavirus lockdown has been 'back to basics' with people displaying an increased appetite for the simpler things in life.

While not everyone has fully embraced Tom and Barbara's 'Good Life' philosophy, home baking, gardening and knitting have all enjoyed a notable renaissance.

## Lockdown lessons

Back to basics has also become a key personal finance theme. The economic impact of the pandemic has clearly resulted in many people's finances becoming severely stretched. As a result, a significant proportion of consumers have sought to change their financial habits by reducing expenses and becoming more mindful spenders.

## Dealing with debt

While good budgeting skills have become a necessity, it's also important not to ignore debt. Many have benefited from mortgage and other debt payment breaks, but these will not last forever. Going forward it's vital to keep up with repayments or, if you are struggling, consult a debt adviser. When it comes to lingering debt, the worst thing anyone can do is nothing.

## Financial fragility

Sadly, for some people, the pandemic has highlighted the fragile nature of their financial safety net. The last few decades have seen the burden of responsibility increasingly shift from state to individual, which has increased the importance of protection products in order to maintain both your and your family's financial security in uncertain times.

## Rainy day funds

The pandemic has also highlighted the need for emergency savings. If you don't have any, regular savings schemes can be a particularly good way to accumulate rainy day funds. If you do have savings, make sure you shop around for the best available rates rather than leaving funds stagnating in poorly paying accounts.



Graham Laverick

## Long-term goals

Although it's extremely easy to focus solely on short-term financial needs, it's also important not to lose sight of other financial goals. While finding money to fund longer-term plans such as retirement savings can be difficult, the cost of delay can ultimately prove even more expensive.

## Help at hand

The last few months have shown we never really know what's around the corner and also demonstrated the importance of being financially prepared for what may lie ahead. If you need assistance strengthening your financial resilience, please get in touch.

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## PROPERTY TAX CHANGES AS AT 6 APRIL 2020

Property is a very popular investment in the UK, much to the bemusement of other nations.

However, its attractions are being compromised by several tax changes which have recently taken effect. This is in addition to its lack of liquidity and being a potential liability rather than an asset.

### 1. Mortgage interest relief

Since 2017/18, higher rate tax relief on mortgage interest has gradually been phased out by 25% per tax year and has been replaced by a basic rate tax credit reduction from the taxpayer's tax bill.

With effect from 6 April 2020, the transitional reduction is complete. This means that no interest is now deductible from rental income and so no higher rate tax relief is available. As well as denying tax relief at higher rates, the change may cause a person's net income to exceed those critical points where tax allowances are lost or cut back causing them to suffer a higher tax liability. Such thresholds are:

- £100,000 (personal allowance),
- £50,000 (high income child benefit charge),
- £50,000 (higher rate tax – relevant for capital gains tax (CGT) and chargeable event gains on life policies), and
- £200,000 and £240,000 (pensions annual allowance taper reduction).

Taxpayers affected by these rules should consider maximising pension contributions to reduce net income.

How much a person may be able to pay in pension contributions will depend on that person's circumstances.

It is important to note that there are specific rules around calculating the thresholds for the pensions annual allowance taper reduction.

### 2. Date of payment of CGT on gains rising from residential property

The disposal of most residential property will be exempt from CGT because of the principal private residence exemption. However, where the property is an investment property or has not been occupied solely as a principal private residence throughout the whole period of ownership, taxable capital gains can arise.

Since 6 April 2020, a payment on account of any CGT due on the disposal of residential property situated in the UK, by a UK resident, must be made within 30 days of the completion date. HMRC have announced a relaxed and flexible approach on this new rule because of the problems that have arisen as a result of Covid-19. In particular, to let the new rules "bed in", the payment of CGT on transactions

completed after 5 April but before 30 June 2020, did not need to be made until 31 July 2020. Provided that the transaction was reported and the tax due was paid by this date, no late filing fees will apply but interest will accrue. For sales completed on or after 1 July, the 30-day rule applies with full force.

The disposal will also need to be reported in the self-assessment return that must be submitted, at the latest, by 31 January in the year following the tax year in which the gain arose. The precise CGT position for the tax year can then be calculated.

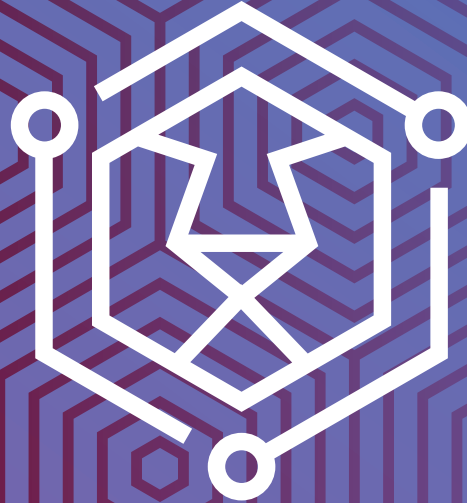
One way in which it has been possible to defer the date of payment of CGT has been to use CGT deferment relief by making an investment in an Enterprise Investment Scheme (EIS). It should be noted that, as a result of the 30-day payment rule, in the cases of the payment of CGT arising on the disposal of residential property it may now be necessary to pay the CGT and then recover it if a later EIS investment is made and CGT deferment relief is claimed.

Next month we will look at other aspects of property investment taxation.

**If you would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, David Hughes and Denise Graham. Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 [peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com](mailto:peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com)**

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## A TALE OF TWO PLUMBERS

It was 8:30 on a Tuesday morning and Bill's breakfast was disturbed by his phone ringing. 'Morning' said Ben, 'Any work on today?'. 'Aye, lad, we've a leak to fix' replied Bill. 'I'll come over then' said Ben 'We can do it together. It's grand to have some work to do after all this time'.

Flowers Plumbing & Heating was an established business run by Bill and Ben but work had been slow since the impact of COVID-19 and was taking some time to pick up again. They were relying on their previous reputation and returning customers.

They set off in Bill's van and soon found the cause of the leak but they needed the materials to fix it so they finished the cuppa they'd been given and headed off to their usual supplier. No luck there though so they drove across town to another supplier. 'Sorry mate' he said 'I've just sold the last one I had but I have some on order, they're down for delivery on Friday'. 'We probably need it before then' said Bill. 'Well, I can order one with special delivery' the supplier said 'but there's a £25 charge'. 'Hmm, OK' said Bill 'It's going to cut down our profit but a job's a job and needs must'.

Order duly placed, they set off back to their customer to patch up what they could and put bowls and rags in place to catch any drips. The next day they withdrew some cash and headed back across town mid morning to pick up the parts. Throwing the receipt from their supplier into the back of the van they headed back to their customer arriving just as the kettle boiled. Half an hour and another cuppa later they finished the job. 'How much do I owe you and do you take cards?' the customer asked. 'It's £125 but we don't take cards' Bill said. 'Oh dear, I don't have that much cash here, but I can pop to the cash point' she offered. 'No, don't worry' said Ben 'We'll send you an invoice and you can send us a cheque'.



'Another satisfied customer' said Ben as they headed off. 'Aye' agreed Bill 'And a good cuppa too. We've no more jobs today so we should really try to sort out some paperwork when we get back. The accountant's been on the phone again'. They both thought of the invoices they had to raise to customers using their trusty 'Word' template and a tidy out of the back of the van would be needed to find all their receipts. 'Just as well we've not been too busy' joked Ben. A mood of gloom descended....

Tuesday 8:30am and across town, Andy from WWM Plumbing & Heating heard his phone ping and picked it up to find an urgent referral from the trade agency he had signed up to. There had been a bit of paperwork to sign up but it was all done online and while it was quiet due to COVID-19 he had decided it would be a good investment to help pick up work when he could. And he'd been right, he'd had a steady stream of jobs. He'd set up a Facebook page too (with the help of the kids!) and had already had a few enquiries and positive reviews. So, a quick call and that job was booked in for later in the morning.

But first thing this morning he was heading off to a customer with a leak so he picked up his trusty sidekick Ted and off they went. The leak was simple enough to fix but he needed parts so he rang local suppliers and was lucky enough to find, on his second phone call, the last one in stock. A quick

card payment and the parts were ready for him to collect. 40 minutes round trip later he was back at the customer fixing the leak. The receipt from his supplier had been scanned and uploaded to his cloud accounts. 'How much do I owe you' she asked. 'It's £125' said Andy, 'I'll email you an invoice'. 'Excellent' said the customer 'Can I pay by card?' 'Not a problem' said Andy. In no time at all Ted had an invoice raised, card payment accepted and the accounting entries all done. The customer was over the moon and immediately put a recommendation on his trade site and on Facebook.

As he was about to head off his phone pinged again, another job and it wasn't even lunch time. By the time he got home he'd had three jobs, all completed, all paid and all accounted for. He could look back at the invoices he had raised, check how much materials had cost and check whether he needed to order anything for the jobs he had booked in for the next couple of days. The kids were pestering him to go and play football. 'Hang on a minute' he said 'I need to put the phone on charge'. As he plugged it in he said, to nobody in particular, that it hadn't been such a bad day. His phone pinged in recognition. 'And that's another thing' he thought 'I wish the wife wouldn't give everything a name. Ted's a stupid name for a phone!'

Don't work harder, work smarter. Get in touch to find out how.





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Steve Plaskitt

## VALUING MANAGEMENT BUY OUTS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

These are uncertain times.

North East businesses are having to simultaneously plan for opportunities arising from a quick v-shaped bounce back from the Pandemic whilst at the same time being realistic and preparing for a bumpier recovery with further waves of Covid19 impacting the economy. As we progress through summer it appears more unlikely that Boris Johnson's hopes of being through the Pandemic by Christmas will be realised.

Uncertainty presents both opportunities and risks for business and this can be seen currently in the recent upsurge in discussions around management buy outs (MBOs) in the North East.

There are becoming more opportunities for management to buy their companies from the shareholders – they represent good value for money as there is not always a strategic trade buyer option available for every company. Also, for larger Groups wanting to offload some of their assets in order to realise money and focus on core activities, offering management to explore an MBO becomes a viable strategy.

As the most active Corporate Finance adviser in the

region and having advised on many more MBOs than other firms over the years, we recognise there are other favourable market conditions for retiring vendors to sell to their management teams. There are many funders who can support MBOs with sound business plans and there are potential tax benefits for the vendors too. If planned correctly, MBOs may offer greater net value to the older shareholders as the use of employee owned trusts result in reduced Capital Gains Tax savings - though the Chancellor Rishi Sunak's ongoing review of Capital Gains Tax may mean that this will also change in the near future.

Some things however do not change - the fundamentals of structuring MBOs remain the same. The deal valuation must be set to keep management motivated and to make sure all parties – existing shareholders, the MBO team, the funders and the company - all can get what they want or something close to it. For the company it should not be overburdened by debt payments and it should have plenty of headroom in its funding facilities to allow for future bumps in the road – which are all too obvious whilst we remain in a global pandemic.

This is where Earn outs become more important. They are a method to find a valuation acceptable to all parties using the benefit of hindsight. In its simplest form the earn out allows for future payments to exiting shareholders based on future events, for example the price is increased dependent upon the level of turnover or profits earned in the first few years after the MBO. If trading suffers after the MBO then it is arguable for the goodwill at the time of the deal to be reduced. We have also seen deal structures where the goodwill or deal price is fixed but the payment terms are flexible, and the vendors may have to wait longer to receive payments if insufficient profits are available.

The level of earn outs may vary for each MBO – sometimes less than 10% of the deal price to over 50% in others. Every deal will be different – but the principles of addressing the deal structure remain the same. Ensure that your business plan and financial forecasts are prepared for the company to be resilient to have plenty of headroom. This will give a solid start to the business under new ownership and with oversight from a capable management team will ensure that the business can cope with whatever the future brings.

Steve Plaskitt is the head of corporate finance at MHA Tait Walker which has advised on more MBOs than anyone other firms in the North East in his eighteen years at the firm. In 2019 MHA Tait Walker won an Insider Dealmakers award for the MBO of Fabricom Offshore and in 2020 it has advised on the two largest deals in the North East in 2020 to date (including the sale of Orchard Information Systems Limited to MRI Software).

Steve Plaskitt can be contacted on 0191 285 0321 or [steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk).





## FIVE TIPS TO GET YOUR BUSINESS BOOMING

As the reports surface of the UK economy shrinking by over 20%, with over 600,000 job losses already and the furlough scheme winding down, you'd be forgiven for having a conservative outlook on business right now.

A recession seems inevitable and the relatively free flowing money at the turn of the year has very much dried up.

However, the opportunity for growth has never been greater and there is plenty of success stories out there. So how do you capitalise on these opportunities and become one of the 'lucky' businesses thriving through adversity?

Here are our five top tips:

### 1. Cost control

When every pound needs to stretch that little bit further, it's time to keep your costs down. Reduce usage of any resource you can, re-purpose resources that you can't get rid of, re-negotiate the prices on anything you still need and remove anything that is no longer making you money.

### 2. Adapt, don't recover

When business gets disrupted, most businesses focus nearly all their attention on how to recover their old services. Look forwards and you will see that the

business environment has moved.

It's not about hoping that old services become popular again, it's about adapting old services to make them better, more relevant, and more valuable to consumers today.

### 3. Stick to strategy

When the only constant is change itself, it can be easy to find your business further and further away from what you're aiming for. Detailed plans and forecasts are near enough impossible at the moment so strip your strategy back. Focus on your vision of where you want to be and then build a one-page-plan of how you are going to get there.

The plan should be a guide, not a rule book. Stick to what you are good at. Each adaptation should be to move you back in line with your vision, so it's your services and operations that adapt, not your strategy.

### 4. External solutions for internal problems

Keep track of what's going on around you, what looks like it works and what clearly doesn't. Competitor

analysis and product surround tools can be great for identifying opportunities to adapt, but in its simplest form just keep track of what your competitors are doing and don't be left behind.

Also, keep an eye on what businesses in other industries are doing. Whilst they might not be directly comparable to you, they might give you ideas you can adapt and apply.

### 5. Utilise support

They say that there are only seven types of story and every book is just an adaptation of these. Much the same can be said for business. The solution to your biggest challenge has probably been done by another business somewhere at some point.

In the hardest business conditions, we've ever faced, it's time to use the support that's available. Build a network of colleagues, professional acquaintances and business advisers and use the advice and support they can provide.

Established in 1937, MHA Tait Walker is the largest independent accountancy and advisory practice in the North East of England. The firm offers large corporates, owner-managed businesses, and individuals a complete set of accountancy and advisory services from taxation to corporate finance.

If you would like to discuss any of these points further, or see how our team might be able to support you, please contact us at [advice@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:advice@taitwalker.co.uk)



Abu Ali and Phil Williams



## WHAT'S YOUR PLAN?

"What's Your Plan?" - three simple words that can shape your company's future... and the first question asked by WilliamsAli Corporate Finance when they sit down to talk with a business owner or management team looking to take the next step.

Founding partners Abu Ali and Phil Williams provide a unique brand of commercial, intelligent advice to business owners and entrepreneurs across the North East and further afield. Their tailored service helps businesses and shareholders take control of their key transformational moments, whether starting up, winding down, looking to grow and secure funding or creating an exit strategy.

Since successfully completing their own buyout earlier this year, transforming from Leathers Corporate Finance to the newly branded WilliamsAli Corporate Finance, the company has continued to thrive despite the challenging recent backdrop. The main focus has been on cementing long term relationships, so that when clients need support, they know immediately where to go.

Both Phil and Abu are award-winning professional advisers and accountants, with extensive combined experience of deal-making, M&A, private equity, debt funding and financial leadership. Their practical experience of leading deal processes from start to finish, both in practice and from within industry, ensures they are perfectly equipped to deliver successful transactions for their growing list of major clients. Phil said:

"WilliamsAli offers a trusted, professional service of the highest quality to ambitious businesses in the region who are ready for their next step. Our independent, specialist service is geared towards business sales, acquisitions, private equity, fund raising and MBO's. Our unrelenting focus is on achieving our clients' objectives and building long term, rewarding and successful relationships."

The last twelve months have seen several excellent examples of this, with Abu and Phil acting as the lead advisers to deliver deal successes including Okkulo and Equiwatt.

Okkulo is an exciting and dynamic sports technology business. WilliamsAli has taken a close, day-to-day role in support of the management team and secured a complex and carefully planned initial funding round involving equity and debt finance from a number of angel investors. The business has thrived and Okkulo's technology is attracting international interest. Discussions with several Premier League and

European football teams are well underway as WilliamsAli continues to help to support and shape the strategy.

Equiwatt is a demand side response technology business, that has created a customer engagement platform designed to unlock the huge capacity potential of the domestic energy sector. WilliamsAli not only orchestrated a recently completed funding round worth a significant six figure sum, the firm has also been retained for ongoing support to help drive the project forward. Abu said:

"Okkulo and Equiwatt are perfect examples of our commitment to work intimately with businesses to ensure they are "deal ready", bringing to the table our many years of experience. We like to get our hands dirty and we believe passionately in the importance of understanding our clients and their businesses. We care, we work hard, and we get involved on many levels. Our commitment to the end result is absolute."

The pair of award-winning dealmakers have also been instrumental in other recent deal successes.

The private equity backed disposal of Smart Utility Management to Bionic was led from start to finish by the WilliamsAli team. The sale of the ambitious and high growth energy broker to the UK's largest consolidator – alongside Phil's extensive previous experience in the sector – have cemented WilliamsAli's industry credentials and has led to the firm building a growing client list of brokers and private equity firms active in the sector.

North-East based Ocean Coatings, a pioneering marine and offshore coatings developer, is now pursuing an exciting international growth plan thanks to development capital secured at the turn of the year by WilliamsAli. Phil concluded:

"These transactions show that North East entrepreneurs, investors and advisors can work together to create excellent outcomes. We are proud of every deal we have helped to deliver and we continue to meet new businesses every day who can benefit from our extensive knowledge and contacts. There is nothing more satisfying than finding out a client's plan and then helping them to shape, develop and deliver it."

## REIMAGINING PRODUCTIVITY AND RESILIENCE FOR THE 'NEW NORMAL'

As we all continue to navigate our way through the coronavirus pandemic, attention will invariably move from short-term action to reimagining how our businesses can operate and thrive in the medium and longer term.

With talk of returning to normal, there is an opportunity to move to a 'new normal', which is distinctly different but better than pre-coronavirus. For instance, many businesses have rapidly accelerated their thinking and actions on topics such as home working and use of digital technology.

Whilst it is still difficult to predict what the post-coronavirus period will look like, we can be confident that two topics will be ever-present at boardroom tables across the country: Productivity and Resilience.

### **The importance of resilience has now shifted**

Productivity improvement was a national priority before lock-down. Given what has happened in the first half of 2020, the need for increases in productivity at the national, business and individual level are now more vital than ever.

Resilience, on the other hand, has not been the top priority for many businesses in recent decades. A focus on efficiency (reducing costs), quality (providing great service with minimal mistakes), and agility (ability to respond flexibly and rapidly) has previously relegated resilience (continued performance in the face of disruptions) down the pecking order of business performance priorities. Resilience will no longer be the poor cousin post-coronavirus.

Following the financial crisis in 2007, many of the businesses that recovered quickly and performed best prompt and decisive action to improve operational effectiveness. In the short-term, they reduced costs, managed working capital and invested further in their key relationships (with customers, clients, employees and suppliers).

Whilst these actions will still be important, this particular crisis comes at a unique time where there is a convergence of a number of macro trends; a global economic downturn, unprecedented societal disruption, rapidly changing service expectations and the availability and accessibility of powerful digital technology. Each of these has the potential to reshape businesses, but in aggregate their effects may call for transformational responses from businesses.

### **Digital technologies are key for businesses to survive**

For those businesses where staff can work from home, we've seen the immediate value of digital communication and collaboration tools.



In the more medium term, we are seeing significantly increased demand for automation solutions such as Robotic Process Automation (RPA).

Businesses are using RPA and other forms of process automation to improve productivity (eg using RPA software bots to operate repetitive manual processes) and resilience (eg using attended automation bots to support staff in contact centres). Having experienced the pain of interruptions to service delivery, some business leaders are also considering the additional resilience benefits of having software robots as a 'backup digital workforce' to support in other disruptive scenarios or to cover peaks in demand for specific services and processes.

Regardless of the specific technology, we can be confident that businesses that utilise digital technologies as part of a well thought-out programme of improvement will be better placed to emerge successfully out of this crisis, potentially in a far more productive and resilient state than the previous 'normal'.



**For more information about how our technology and management consulting team can help your organisation benefit from the utilisation of digital technologies, please contact Darren Mee at [darren.mee@rsmuk.com](mailto:darren.mee@rsmuk.com)**





## CUSTOMER RESPONSIVENESS IS KEY TO POST-LOCKDOWN ECONOMIC SUCCESS, SAYS ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM PANEL

Business must respond to customers' changing needs and expectations if the economy is to bounce back from the pandemic, an Entrepreneurs' Forum panel event heard.

**Entrepreneurs operating within the North East's travel, hospitality, retail, and sport sectors agreed that creating a strong connection with customers and restoring confidence is key to achieving a quick recovery.**

The panel comprised Simon Whitaker of menswear retailer Master Debonair, Paul Blake, managing director of the Newcastle Eagles basketball franchise, Dan Foksett, founder and CEO of flooring specialists Connection Retail, Sally Marshall, director of pub and restaurant group the Marshall Robertson Group and Anne Bromley, joint managing director at leisure and corporate travel specialists, Travel Bureau.

Simon, who launched his business online four years ago, before opening 'destination' stores in South Boldon, Chesterfield and London, successfully traded online throughout lockdown, growing sales by 10 per cent. However, he estimates he lost around £700,000 in business due to the cancellation of 'peak' events, including weddings, school proms and the horse racing calendar.

He has responded to changing customer demand by expanding his casual range and introducing a bespoke tailoring service - while ensuring costs are in line with revenue.

"I am also focused on improving our instore experiences as well as using technology to bring our shops into peoples' homes. Demand is increasing and we are seeing appointments for wedding suits return to pre-virus levels, so things are looking up."

Paul Blake, who owns the Newcastle Eagles and is chairman of the foundation that operates the Arena, said it was still unclear when, as an indoor sports spectacle, it can reopen.

It also acts as an events venue - although fortunately most of the events booked have been postponed rather than cancelled and Eagles are currently working towards a possible October reopening.

He said: "We are a business built upon events and atmosphere and to run an event with no-one in the building is not commercially or financially viable. Whatever happens, customer confidence must be quickly restored."

Dan Foksett of Shildon-headquartered Connection Flooring said his business was fortunate to operate in the booming home improvement sector.

While its 19 stores around the UK were closed between March and June, sales shifted online. The company has now resumed its roll-out of stores but is investing in its online services after lockdown highlight the opportunities available.

"We are cautiously optimistic," he said. "There is a great deal of activity in the housing market that should keep things going next year - but everything is focused on meeting customer needs."

Sally Marshall, who runs The Ship in Redmarshall, near Stockton, said she had reduced the dining capacity by 12 to comply with social distancing measures. However, this created new opportunities by freeing up capacity in the

kitchen, allowing it to offer a restaurant-quality takeaway food service.

In addition, it has developed a booking app and invested in its outdoor areas in response to a shift in customer behaviour.

"Sales figures are better than pre-lockdown. Our customers have reacted well to the new normal to such an extent that reviews not only praise the quality of our food but our safety procedures. Regular communication with our customers, and achieving the right tone, has been hugely important."

Anne Bromley of Travel Bureau on Gosforth High Street, which reopened in June, said: "There is progress within the industry in terms of holiday insurance to cover COVID-19 and clearer consumer understanding of the financial protection afforded with refund credit notes. We have bookings for next year but, with an aging customer demographic, we need to develop a new database, although there are opportunities, as more people are choosing to use the expertise of a travel agent during these ever changing current circumstances."

"I have concerns over a second wave and the development of a vaccine, all of which will impact on whether customers feel safe to travel in future."

The panel event was chaired by Forum board member and former chief executive of Parkdean Resorts, John Waterworth. The next programme of events resumes in September.

An Entrepreneur Interview with...

## PAUL McGOWAN

Founder of Collingwood Legal,  
Newcastle

### Tell me about your background in business?

I am a solicitor specialising in employment law, with more than 25 years' experience in the legal profession. However, when I founded the firm a decade ago, I had limited knowledge of starting, running or scaling-up a business.

### How was Collingwood Legal formed?

Having worked for a large law firm dealing in every aspect of commercial legal work, I wanted to create a firm specialising in employment law – allowing us to focus on our area of expertise. We offer a comprehensive range of services, from managing business reorganisations to drafting key employment contracts, creating policy documents to dealing with employment tribunals. The firm is a reasonable size, but it retains the capacity to achieve results while maintaining a high level of personal service.

### What attracted you to the Scale-up Leader's Academy and how did it help?

I fully believe in the benefits of ongoing learning. I recognised the merit in acquiring skills that would help me to grow the business, as well engaging with my peers who were facing similar challenges.

The academy has helped clarify my thinking and has provided me with useful tools to run and grow a business – techniques I still use today. It also allowed me to develop supportive friendships as well as forge long-term business relationships.

Above all it allowed me to build a solid platform from which to create sustained growth.

### In your own words, what is it that Collingwood Legal does?

We are a specialist employment law firm that works with business clients and senior executives to resolve issues across sectors including education, SMEs, charities and social enterprise, manufacturing, health care and sport.

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

I'm immensely proud that Collingwood Legal is recognised as "Top Tier" and the best at what we do in this region by independent industry bible, Legal 500. In addition, we were named Law firm



Paul McGowan

of the Year (1 – 5 partners) in the 2019 Northern Law awards. From a personal point of view, I'm most proud of the talented team that represents the business.

### What is the USP of Collingwood Legal?

Small enough to care and large enough to battle.

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

The firm began with just me, a desk and a laptop in a small serviced office and has since grown to a team of 12. This has been achieved by our team's ability to forge strong client relationships and earning a reputation for excellence and delivering results.

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

We are a people business so developing client relationships and building trust is central to everything we do

### What are the future plans of Collingwood Legal?

The COVID crisis has given me the necessary space to consider the long-term strategy of the firm. However, it is essentially about continuing to do the great things we do – focusing on clients and using our expertise to deliver the right results. This methodology allows the firm to continue to grow organically, reflected by the fact that much of our business are repeat clients or via personal recommendations.

Paul McGowan 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)





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Gill Burgess

An Entrepreneur Interview with...

## GILL BURGESS

Managing director, r//evolution

### Tell me about your background in business.

I originally worked for a major marketing agency in the North West, where I gained a great deal of experience and the necessary confidence and desire to consider setting up my own agency.

### How was r//evolution formed?

Having returned to the North East, I set up r//evolution in 2003 – working from the family home in Corbridge before renting office space in Hexham, where I took on my first two members of staff. Having emerged from the recession of 2008/09, I decided to relocate to Gateshead's Northern Design Centre to both raise r//evolution's profile and recruit talent.

### What attracted you to the Scale-up Leader's Academy and how did it help?

I was looking to develop a blueprint to grow the business and the academy allowed me to do just this through a combination of delivered teaching, peer discussions and the sharing of business experience.

r//evolution achieved month on month growth due to the strategies and systems put in place as a direct result of the Scale-up Leader's Academy.

It helped me to embed these within the business to bring about long-term change.

One of the key things I learnt was the fundamental importance of attracting the right talent to the business. We have a stringent process for ensuring our staff possess the right attitude, in addition to the requisite technical skills.

A great example of this is director Adam Blenkinsop, who has been instrumental in helping achieve sustained growth and is always available to provide an invaluable second opinion.

### In your own words, what is it that r//evolution does?

We're revenue growth specialists, working with ambitious businesses throughout the UK to grow both faster and better.

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

I'm proudest whenever I see a member of the team excel in their role. I'm a great believer in nurturing people and allowing them to flourish.

### What is the USP of r//evolution?

We accelerate business growth by identifying both growth opportunities and growth barriers,

or friction points. We then scope and implement solutions to maximise growth. That may be around digital transformation, customer acquisition or customer nurturing.

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

We've grown the North East team and opened an additional office in Manchester in 2019. We have clients throughout the UK operating in every sector, but probably the strongest growth areas for us are tech and software.

The introduction of our 'Lift Off' Growth Sprint programme has contributed to our success. It focuses on revenue growth strategy, digital transformation, customer acquisition and customer nurturing to deliver accelerated performance in days instead of months.

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

Honesty and transparency are non-negotiable.

### What are the future plans of r//evolution?

In the current circumstances, businesses are having to look very carefully at their markets and at new revenue streams. We can help them to bounce back faster and stronger by identifying their best-fit opportunities and positioning themselves to penetrate new markets strongly, or to rebuild market share. So, certainly in the short term it's all about focusing on what we do well – and helping our clients to recover quickly and, beyond that, to thrive.

Gill Burgess 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)





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Paul Butler, CEO, North East Automotive Alliance

## VIRTUAL AUTOMOTIVE EXPORT WEEK IS LAUNCHED

The North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) has announced the launch of its first Automotive Export Week, to take place virtually between 14-18 September.

The NEAA is collaborating with Supply Chain North East and the Department for International Trade (DIT) to ensure the virtual event invites businesses at every stage of the process to explore key automotive markets, learn about all aspects of export, seek support from market specialists and trade champions, build contacts and meet potential customers.

There will be more than 40 events including country briefings, interactive panel discussions and workshops. In addition, the week will provide a platform for delegates to market their products and services to enable business matchmaking, collaboration and one-to-one networking.

Paul Butler, CEO, North East Automotive Alliance, said: "We are delighted to collaborate with Supply Chain North East and the Department for International Trade to demonstrate that the North East continues to be a key player in the global automotive sector.

"Over the past 30 years the region has established itself as a centre of excellence for automotive manufacturing. It is the second largest automotive region in the UK and accounts for 30% of UK passenger vehicles, 20% of Europe's electric passenger vehicles, 10% of all UK non-highway vehicles and produces 350,000 engines per year. More recently, it has established itself as a leading

location for electrification with strengths in battery manufacturing, power electronics, motors and drives.

"Automotive Export Week will feature country briefings from across the globe and creates the ideal opportunity for businesses to expand their sector knowledge and raise their company profile with a view to boosting sales overseas and speaking directly to specialist trade advisors."

Lawrence Davies MBE, automotive sector team, Department for International Trade, said: "I am delighted to be supporting Automotive Export Week this September. This is another example of the NEAA's proactive support for its members and willingness to collaborate with the wider UK sector. This event will bring together automotive country specialists from within the Department for International Trade and other supporting organisations and companies from across the North East and the UK. Companies at all stages of export will benefit from this amazing opportunity. The automotive sector remains the UK's largest exporter of industrial goods and I, for one, would like to see this continue."

Ljupcso Mihailovski, deputy director, CEE regional automotive head at Department for International Trade (DIT) said of his involvement in the event: "Our cooperation with the North East Automotive

Alliance for the past two years has been very intensive and productive. Together with my team from central Europe, a region including Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech R., Romania, Bulgaria and Serbia, we have engaged regularly with opportunities for the NEAA members in the region, mostly about Poland, although there is big potential to expand this to the other countries.

"In our session at the Automotive Export Week, we would like to give UK companies an overview of the automotive sector in the region, the effect of COVID-19 and opportunities as well as relevant events in the region. We are, of course, here to support UK businesses export to Europe, as well as assisting them in potential expansion in the region."

Paul Brooks, UK head of manufacturing & automotive at Santander UK, who will also join the event, said: "Our automotive sector is steeped in entrepreneurialism, with the UK continually ranking in the top ten for global car exports. The UK is integral to the international supply chain and this position has been bolstered by the innovation we see here in the North East. As a bank that has a footprint in markets around the world, we are excited to share our passion for supporting UK businesses with international expansion as we take part in Automotive Export Week."

To sign up for the Virtual Automotive Week, please register here: [automotive-export-week-2020.b2match.io](https://automotive-export-week-2020.b2match.io)



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# 'RAISING AWARENESS OF SUICIDE AND FOCUSING ON ITS PREVENTION IS VITAL'

In 2018, the Office for National Statistics registered 6,507 suicides - a 10.9% increase against the previous year's data. Devastatingly, in this same report period, the increase in deaths in the under 25s increased by 23.7%.

With 80% of young people recently saying that their mental health has been made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic and accompanying lockdown measures, now is the time to take action and do everything that we can to prevent further tragedy through the loss of life.

Taking a positive and proactive approach to these issues, Newcastle-based educational charity and national awarding organisation, NCFE, in partnership with mental health training social enterprise, Big Dog Little Dog (BDLD), online training content creator, LearnBox, and AELP, has launched a series of qualifications dedicated to suicide awareness and prevention.

While there has been a dramatic shift in attitudes towards mental health in recent years, many people still remain reluctant to discuss their feelings when they are struggling.

Recognising a gap in the market for a set of qualifications which would help to destigmatise conversations around mental health, London-based, BDLD training, approached NCFE about a collaborative project to develop the course content for a Level 2 and a Level 3 qualification.

Designed to provide learners with the skills to face conversations around mental health with confidence and positivity, the accredited qualifications are the first Ofqual-regulated Awards to be solely targeted at this sensitive and life-saving subject.

Built around BDLD's unique 'STEPS: Towards Suicide Reduction' model and developed in partnership with suicide survivors, the new qualifications will help learners to consider suicide risk and level of intent, and educate them on how to support individuals at risk and signposting them to professional services where appropriate.

"Education is key to understanding, which is why we're so passionate about our new project with NCFE. Raising awareness of suicide and focusing on its prevention is vital if we are to reduce the number of lives lost to mental ill health," said Kevin Moore, Co-Founder at BDLD.



David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE.

"It's perfectly natural to feel uneasy about having a conversation with someone who is having suicidal thoughts, or is planning to take their own life, but by moving conversations around mental health into the mainstream and providing people with the tools they need to identify suicide risk, we hope that our qualifications will go a long way towards reducing the stigma around suicide and encourage more people to have open and honest conversations about their feelings and plans so they can access the support they need before it's too late."

To maximise the reach and impact of the qualifications, NCFE and BDLD have teamed up with, LearnBox, to develop a digitised version of the Level 2 Award in Suicide Awareness.

"We are honoured and excited to be involved in this project and be working alongside NCFE and BDLD," said Lucy Dunleavy, CEO and Founder at LearnBox.

"With society evolving rapidly, especially now with Covid-19 having devastating effects on long-term and contributing factors to poor mental health, such as unemployment rates, poverty, health issues and social isolation, it's vital that we remove stigma and encourage conversations to help save lives.

"This qualification enables learners to gain in-depth understanding of the topic of Mental Health; ways to identify, ways to cope, and ways to overcome the multiple complex aspects involved. Delivering a digitised programme ensures that we can reach a wide audience to educate as many people as possible on the importance of this subject and achieve the largest impact."

David Gallagher, Chief Executive at NCFE, added: "The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the impact

that being alone and isolated and experiencing a feeling of helplessness can have on a person's mental health. By providing learners with the knowledge and skills to recognise the signs of suicidal depression and respond in a positive, solutions-focused manner, we hope to help reduce the number of lives lost to mental ill health.

"We are delighted to be working alongside the experts at BDLD and LearnBox to develop this crucially important new suite of suicide awareness and prevention qualifications. As an educational charity, we want to do everything we possibly can to make a positive difference in society. Once we understood the severity of the issue and that we could make a difference, we acted immediately. If we can be part of saving just one life, our investment will have been worthwhile. Hopefully, this programme will contribute to saving many more."

In order to evaluate the success of the qualifications post-launch, NCFE, BDLD and LearnBox have partnered with Katrina Thomas, a business psychologist from AELP, who will be measuring the impact of the qualifications within key demographics. Katrina commented:

"At AELP, we are keen to reach out to our member providers to share best practice on suicide prevention, which they can then implement in respect of both their staff and learners. AELP feel honoured to be working with NCFE, BDLD and LearnBox to change the stigma around the subject of suicide and mental health. This initiative is absolutely vital to break down the barriers, such as the reservation to talk about mental health issues. I am confident that when measuring the impact of this new qualification, the results will be very encouraging."

For more information, visit: [www.ncfe.org.uk](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)





Chris Fraser

## MEET THE TECH FIRM HELPING NORTH EAST BUSINESSES RECOVER FROM COVID-19 WITH THEIR OFFER OF FREE ULTRAFAST CONNECTIVITY

**A North East tech firm is offering support to businesses across the region as they work to bounce back from the Covid-19 crisis.**

Aspire Technology Solutions' managing director Chris Fraser said the company has been "lucky" in terms of the impact it has experienced during the pandemic, but wants to help those across the region who have had a more difficult time.

The Gateshead-based IT company has recently developed its own full fibre network throughout the region with a multi-million-pound investment in infrastructure, and has launched a new initiative to help North East businesses benefit from its high speeds and reliability.

With the pandemic prompting businesses of all sizes and sectors to work from home where possible, recent months have highlighted just how vital the right internet connection can be to day to day operations.

### **How is Aspire helping businesses?**

Until 30 September, North East businesses can take advantage of up to 12 months of free internet connectivity through Ultrafast Dedicated Connectivity (UDC). Aspire's UDC leased lines provide connectivity of up to 100 gigabits per

second (Gb/s), the fastest speeds and most reliable service available in the country.

In Aspire's bid to help local businesses increase efficiency and improve productivity during the current difficult climate, they can receive 12 months free on a new five-year UDC leased line contract, or six months free on a new three-year UDC leased line contract.

During the free period of connectivity, which will see businesses make savings of more than 16.5%, there will be no costs to pay for standard installation or rental.

### **Reliable connectivity is 'crucial' for businesses moving forward**

Businesses who may not have had adequate connectivity quickly felt the impact of this once the UK was in lockdown, and many have since been taking steps to shift investment to digital solutions where possible.

"Being connected to a reliable network is crucial for businesses to remain productive during this time. We've seen a number of customers who didn't have the right connectivity and in the first week of lockdown they struggled with core performance" said Chris.

Chris insists there's still an opportunity for businesses to be "pro-active" as they adapt their businesses for the future, and explained: "The customers who have UDC have reaped the benefits of strong connectivity. We know how difficult the current climate is for businesses across the North East as they adapt to the new normal and we want to offer support where we can to help them to remain competitive".

### **Can all businesses benefit from UDC solutions?**

Aspire's UDC offering can provide the right all-important connectivity for small start-ups to large businesses, and the company has provided services to businesses across the spectrum.

Chris explained: "UDC contracts can start out as a small and more cost-effective solution and as your business scales it can scale with you."

Aspire's full fibre 100 gigabit-capable network will allow businesses to take a huge step forward in their communication and cloud capabilities, ensuring they are fully future-proofed. The reduced prices mean local businesses can take advantage of world-class connectivity, at a time when it is most needed.

**For more information and to claim Aspire's offer, visit their website: [www.aspirets.com/udc-offer](http://www.aspirets.com/udc-offer)**



Michelle Rainbow

## CHANGING THE NARRATIVE AROUND PROSPECTS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

With the economic impact of COVID-19 hitting the headlines, a new project is underway to mitigate the effect on young people's career aspirations and mental health. Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, tells us more.

With constant access to news and social media, it would be easy to think that the future looks bleak for young people who are beginning to think about applying for jobs, apprenticeships or further education.

At the click of a button, we can see endless reports and conversation about the impact of COVID-19 on the jobs market and the economy.

We know that many students spend upwards of six hours a day on social media\* and one danger of this constant news cycle is that it could have a negative impact on young people's ambitions and mental health.

While it's true that we are facing huge challenges, and that many young people's expectations have been turned on their heads, there is still good news out there and there are still opportunities for young people as they move on from school, college or university and look to the next stage of their lives.

As part of our region-wide response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are beginning a new programme of work, looking at changing the

narrative around the prospects for young people today.

While we in no way want to ignore the challenges, we do want to make sure that no one's aspirations are lowered and that no one is discouraged from pursuing their dream job, apprenticeship, or college or university place. We want to make sure that young people in the North East hear about the support available, and to make sure that their questions, worries and opinions are being heard.

Over the next few weeks we'll be finding out more about what young people are saying and working with employers to help young people understand the real picture around careers opportunities in our region.

What we already know is that there is optimism amongst young people.

The recent Unifrog report investigating the effect of the pandemic on students' wellbeing found that, while students reported that the situation has had a clear impact on their education (with one in two saying the pandemic has negatively affected their

motivation to study and do well), 70% reported feeling positive or optimistic about the future.

We also know that young people have skills and attributes that employers are looking for. Many are skilled in navigating digital tech and the online world, and many are flexible and can adapt quickly to new situations. This doesn't just stand them in good stead when it comes to job interviews, but is also a valuable skillset for those who might choose the self-employment route.

During the last recession we saw the emergence of a wave of new businesses, many started by young founders. Promoting entrepreneurialism and letting young people know that self-employment is a viable route open to them is at the forefront of our work with schools and colleges, as we aim to make sure that all pupils in our region have access to top quality careers guidance. Again, we know there are challenges – young business leaders often find it difficult to access finance, for example – but there are start-up loans and financial support out there, and we can help young people to access it.

For those young people who are returning to school or college in September, we want to make sure that careers guidance is a priority and that it helps young people to explore the full range of pathways open to them including self-employment and non-traditional careers.

Working together with schools, colleges and employers, we aim to help young people understand that their skills are valuable, help them to choose the pathway that's right for them, and help all young people to achieve their ambitions.

Find out more about the North East LEP's works with schools, colleges and employers at [www.northeastambition.co.uk](http://www.northeastambition.co.uk)

\*Findings from the Unifrog COVID-19 impact report, investigating the effect of the pandemic on students' wellbeing and next steps.





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# TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO DREAM...

Business and personal change expert Dr David Cliff explores the value of sleep and some things to improve it.

Many are 'guilted' by the can-do success stories of driven, early risers existing on a handful of hours sleep. The reality is whatever the hyperbole, research is fairly unequivocal: human beings evolved to need around eight hours sleep a day.

Modern life creates pressures that encourage neglect of the sleep cycle. Reclaiming our sleep, is a vital step towards our enjoyment of life, productivity and mental health. We neglect it at our peril. Here are a few thoughts on how to improve the situation.

● **Prioritise sleep.** Avoid fitting it in around other things in your day and neglecting it when needed. Sure, crying babies and similar have their implicit priorities but we often cut into sleep to ensure we have other experiences that are optional extras in life. Our 'fear of missing out' often costs sleep.

● **Avoid caffeine and alcohol.** 'Old chestnut' advice sure, but it's importance cannot be overstated. We should approach sleep in terms of what takes us away from it and what takes us towards it. Caffeine definitely is in the wrong direction of travel! Alcohol messes with blood sugar levels and often makes people eat, messing with them again. Alcohol also suppresses dreams and REM sleep. It also dehydrates the body creating a wake-up call in the night to rehydrate.

● **Habits and rituals.** Just as children get off to bed more successfully with sleep rituals and processes, so do we. We are creatures of association and doing things that are associated with winding down is important.

● **Diurnal rhythms.** Like it or not, we self-synchronise much more to sunrise and sunset than to a timepiece or diary. The brain chemistry that sets you off to sleep, peaks around about 9.30pm which means if you delay settling for too long, you miss the 'sleep boat'. People in traditional societies appear to go to bed earlier and rise earlier than people in developed countries. This reflects a natural survival strategy. In our primitive past we could neither gather food in the dark nor avoid predators- sleeping through the hours of darkness and waking shortly after dawn makes sense. Ironically, those societies sleep better. Up to 30% of people in developed countries have difficulty with sleep whilst less than 3% less developed parts of the world do.

● **Temperature.** Being too warm inhibits sleep. You are more likely to go to sleep in a cool room ideally, on or a little above 17°C is optimal. Keep hands and feet warm however as temperature drop at the extremities will encourage us to stay awake, it's a survival mechanism to avoid frostbite!



Dr David Cliff

● **Light quality.** Just as sunrise and sunset are important to us, sleeping in darkness matters. There is now so much light pollution, without the room being appropriately dark, we do not sleep. Light gives subtle signals to the brain as to the time of day. Consequently, if we expose ourselves to sources of artificial light, particularly the blue white lights that so many LED streetlights give off, we are giving the wrong signal to our brains as to what time it is. We can compound this, with the use of phones, tablets, televisions and other light sources.

● **Value sleep.** Many mental health problems involve people being depressed, fragmented and in unproductive states. We all know the effect that just a single poor night's sleep can have on our mood and abilities.

● **Address snoring.** It is said that snoring is a listener's problem, oh no it's not, with so many people having serious health challenges as a result of sleep apnoea and similar.

● **Intelligent exercise.** It is usually hard to get to sleep having just been to the gym. Equally, if your

blood sugar's through the roof with lack of physical activity through your day, sleep will not come easily either. We all need at least a modest amount of exercise through our day to ensure we don't retire 'pumped' or with nowhere to expend energies other than thrashing about.

● **Avoid problematising sleep.** Too many nights are lost to people beating themselves up because they can't sleep, do something else until you feel tired and don't fret about it.

● **Detach from outside stimuli.** Resolve not to answer the phones, emails, texts, and social media from early/mid evening at the very latest. Anything unsaid can be said tomorrow, probably benefiting from both a cool off and the subconscious processing that happens in sleep anyway that often makes things look better in the morning.

Despite publications aplenty on sleep, it remains a problem for many. Yet a few simple adjustments can make a huge difference. Seriously consider the value of sleep in your life and do something to invest in it. Pleasant dreams!





Ammar Mirza CBE

## BOX TIK TOK

The video sharing phenomena that is Tik Tok has certainly created a storm. One of the fastest growing companies – recently valued at \$50 billion - that appears to have benefited from COVID 19 and the lockdown.

**Beaming humour down our phones and showcasing hidden talents or simply outright fails for everyone to see.**

This article isn't about Tik Tok but more about ticking boxes. An exercise sadly adopted by lots of organisations when it comes to equality, inclusion and equal opportunity. Having raised the challenges experienced by lots of Black and Ethnic Minority Ethnic (BaME) individuals across the globe and more locally, including myself, **there is sadly an even worse infliction, which involves simply ticking boxes.** Tokenism!

Tokenism is an approach where communities or individuals are engaged with organisations simply to tick a box and not for any other reason. Whether that is gender, colour, less able or any other range of characteristics, individuals being asked to join boards, or representative bodies so

that someone somewhere can say they engaged a particular community group.

I would argue that Tokenism is worse than racism. **A hidden form of discrimination that prevents meaningful engagement.** Not allowing for the value or merits of person being engaged to be truly realised. Encouraging organisations to simply say they are doing their bit as they have someone of colour or a disabled person on their board. Or that they have commissioned a survey or some level of promotion that simply translates existing materials to demonstrate they are committed to inclusion.

One of the challenges with Tokenism is that lots of organisations simply don't realise this is what they are doing, and the vast majority **are doing this for the right reasons**, but using the wrong approach. That is why we must adopt a truly person-centred approach when designing and developing inclusion

activities, with the ambition of ensuring long-term structural changes.

I don't represent every person of colour nor would a person in a wheel chair represent every less-abled person. There are a whole host of additional socio and economic factors that must be taken into account. This said, we need to start somewhere and there is no doubt that some engagement is absolutely better than none. **But adequate and appropriate representation alongside equal opportunity are key in developing a more inclusive community.**

One of the most compelling books that was shared with me recently is entitled "White Fragility" written by a white woman, I would argue it is a must read. Although controversial and focused primarily on the USA, there are some amazing facts and insights that can help us all move the needle forward on creating a just and inclusive society.

**I need to highlight I am not turning into a militant**, nor am I about to start a mass protest, but all of the inequality that exists needs to be addressed. I would like to support individuals and organisations, to do so with patience, perseverance and positivity. Whether that is race, gender or being less able, everyone should have the same chances and opportunities as anybody else. **Let's all come together and do more Tik Tokking rather than Tick Boxing!**

**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.**





Ammar Mirza CBE with Phil Andrew

## UNLOCKING ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS AWARDS DINNER 2020

The 11th anniversary Asian Business Connexions (ABC) Awards can now be beamed globally making the event bigger and better thanks to the support of Great Annual Savings Group who are now headline sponsor.

County Durham-based Great Annual Savings Group (GAS) has worked with ABC members for more than four years and, having supported the event for the last three years, has become headline sponsor again for 2020.

The sponsorship will allow ABC, a not for profit social enterprise to make the celebration of diversity and success the biggest yet by broadcasting the event live across the globe.

Understandably the event has had to be reduced in size and scope due to the pandemic, which was causing the organisation real challenges, as over 350 guests were expected at the Gala dinner. However, with the use of technology and financial support from GAS, the event will now be delivered both virtually and physically allowing for even more people to share in the celebrations.

The event is currently planned to take place on Thursday 1 October 2020 at the Gainford Groups' County Hotel, Newcastle, and will showcase the significant contribution of the Asian community across the public, private and third sectors, together with a number of guests attending, subject to government guidelines.

The number of submissions this year to the awards

has been overwhelming, with a special "people's award" organised through Spice FM which will see members of the public voting for their favourite nominee.

Ammar Mirza CBE, Chairman and Founder of Asian Business Connexions, said: "The ABC Awards are all about recognising and celebrating the significant and sustained contribution of the Asian community and I'd like to thank GAS for their support as a forward-thinking business in the North East that is demonstrating its commitment to inclusion and diversity".

"I always say we don't shout about how unique we are in our region enough, so I'd like to thank GAS' CEO Brad Groves and Director Phil Andrew, with whom I've worked for a few years, for their help in ensuring this critical event takes place.

"Phil understands our network and is linking in with a lot of our members to add value and help them develop in a challenging economic climate.

"That's why events like this are so important. We need to celebrate our successes and show the world what a vibrant, diverse and exciting community we have in the North East. I'm also thrilled to announce that we are extending the Asian Women Enterprising

#AWESome Campaign this year with a focus on championing #inclusionbydefault. The AWESome women have made a huge impact and I am very grateful to each of them. Our plans are to increase the number to 100 by year end."

Phil Andrew, Associate Corporate Director at GAS, said: "2020 marks the fourth of Great Annual Savings (GAS) supporting the Asian Business Connexions (ABC) Awards, it's an initiative we're very proud to champion.

The awards represent vibrant diversity and progression for the North East, which is mirrored in the trajectory of GAS, making the partnership a great fit. After celebrating the awards tenth anniversary last year, we're excited to see what the future holds for Asian Business Connexions and how our partnership can evolve."

The ABC Awards are now recognised as the foremost Asian celebration across the North East of England. The keynote speaker for the evening is the Right Honourable Secretary of State for International Development Ann-Marie Trevelyan MP and other supporters include Gainford Group, SME Centre of Excellence, North East LEP, Radical Panda and Newcastle College Group.

To find out more or to make a nomination please visit [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org)



# ABC AWARDS DINNER

IN ASSOCIATION WITH



*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 the County Hotel on the 1st October get your tickets early as spaces will now be limited.*

Email: [info@abconnexions.org](mailto:info@abconnexions.org) | Web: [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org)  
The Beacon, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9PN  
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## PEARSON ENGINEERING SETS GOLD STANDARD FOR ARMED FORCES SUPPORT

A Newcastle-based engineering firm has been recognised by the government for the work it does to support the armed forces community.

Pearson Engineering has received a prestigious Gold Award from the Ministry of Defence for its commitment to supporting reservists, veterans, cadet force adult volunteers and their family members.

As providers of life-saving equipment to armed forces around the world, Pearson Engineering has a long-established reputation for proactively championing those in active service and veterans. Several of the firm's 76 employees based at the Armstrong Works on Scotswood Road are themselves veterans and Pearson Engineering actively promotes the value of hiring former armed forces personnel to other employers.

One of the ways in which Pearson Engineering supports the military is through the Armed Forces Covenant, which is a commitment to ensuring that those who serve or who have served in the armed forces, and their families, are treated fairly and with respect. Pearson Engineering is a signatory of the covenant and recently hosted an awareness raising event for other local employers which saw another seven firms make similar commitments.

The firm also supports its employee reservists to undertake military training with full pay, hosts study days for local army units, provides financial

and in-kind support to British military charities and provides skills development activities for veterans and various recruitment initiatives.

Craig Priday, managing director at Pearson Engineering said: "I'm extremely pleased and proud that Pearson Engineering has been chosen to receive this important award. The Armed Forces Covenant initiative has been a great way for the company to demonstrate our long-term commitment to the armed forces."

David Eccles, assistant North East employer engagement director for the Ministry of Defence said: "We are very pleased that Pearson Engineering has been recognised by being awarded the Ministry of Defence's Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS) Gold Award – the scheme's highest accolade.

"The Defence ERS encourages employers to support defence and inspire others to do the same and Pearson Engineering has certainly demonstrated that.

"For the two years I have been personally associated with the firm, it has shown a clear understanding of what there is to gain in employing military veterans and it has been exceptionally supportive to employees who are members of the Reserve Forces.

"The ERS encompasses Bronze, Silver and Gold awards for employer organisations that pledge, demonstrate or advocate support to support to Defence and the Armed Forces community, and align their values within the Armed Forces Covenant.

Pearson Engineering HR manager, Elizabeth Hubuck, added: "We were excited to be told of our Gold Award in this scheme as it recognises the hard work of the company and our employees in actively promoting Pearson Engineering as a great place for defence people to work.

"We are committed to supporting the community that we serve and we are glad to be able to actively promote skills and opportunities for reservists, veterans, volunteers and their partners. They bring a rich and diverse experience to industry and it is important that we repay that. I know that this special accolade will further inspire us to advocate on behalf of the MoD's Employer's Recognition Scheme."

Established in 1985, Pearson Engineering is part of The Reece Group. It is a world leader in the design and manufacture of equipment involved in vehicle protection, obstacle, mine and IED clearance and gap crossing.



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# BUSINESS PILOT HELPS BUSINESSES TAKE OFF

A leading figure in the region's business world has launched her own consultancy to help others succeed in the shadow of COVID-19.

Karen Goldfinch from Whitley Bay is a founder member and current Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum which will soon celebrate its tenth anniversary. The forum offers business support and guidance to its members and represents more than 1200 businesses of all sizes.

Her expertise in retail spans 35 years and a previous position as Chair of the Whitley Bay Chamber of Trade has given Karen a wealth of experience that she has used to help others during the recent pandemic.

Professionally, she has owned retail outlets in Whitley Bay and now runs two businesses, "Made to Treasure Events", a bespoke wedding stationery and events management company based in North Shields which she started 18 years ago and her new business consultancy, "Your Business Pilot," supporting SME's and start-ups.

"Throughout my working life, I've always been seen as the reassuring voice, encouraging and supporting others, it seems my catchphrase is 'we'll get there'. When it came to choosing a business name the idea of 'getting there' had to be included," said Karen.

Your Business Pilot offers a wide range of services and support for solo, micro and small businesses at the start of their journey or further on their route needing help to get on the right path. The business model is based on the theme of an airline.

For start up's, Karen has her "Pilot Scheme" which helps prepare the groundwork for fledgling businesses about to take off and covers important aspects such as market research, finances, planning and networking. More established businesses can opt for Business Class, First Class or the Executive Lounge which all offer customised support depending on the client's needs. including target setting, merchandising, accountability and marketing advice and support.



Karen can be contacted at [Karen@yourbusinesspilot.co.uk](mailto:Karen@yourbusinesspilot.co.uk) or by telephone 07870 228064

For PR information: Keith Newman [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) 07814 397951 [www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)

## MAJOR GROWTH AND EXPANSION RESULTS IN LEADING INSPECTION SERVICES TEAM REACHING REGIONAL FINALS OF NATIONAL AWARDS

A highly qualified North East based engineer is commending the performance of his team this week after reaching the regional finals in two categories in the Great British Entrepreneurial Awards (GBEA).

Peter Lyons is the founder of NECIT Services. He, his wife Cherelle and the 15 strong team have grown the company to be global leaders in the delivery of a comprehensive range of Quality Assurance and Quality Control services. The company works across 75 countries, utilising the skills of over 3000 worldwide inspectors to ensure client's projects are delivered on time, within budget and to global quality standards.

Peter is an experienced engineering and inspection professional that has himself trained over 1000 inspectors worldwide. Prior to setting up NECIT Services in 2009, Peter delivered specialist quality expertise on highly respected projects and is qualified through CSWIP, BGAS and PCN.

And now NECIT Services, which has recently opened a new office in Houston, Texas has been recognised by the judges at GBEA, being shortlisted for both the Family Business Entrepreneur of the year and the Scale up Entrepreneur of the year.

Peter, who has lectured extensively on engineering inspection for The Welding Institute (TWI) and



continues to serve as a voting member on the CSWIP Welding, Specialist and Practitioner Management Committee, said: "Despite the pandemic, 2020 has been an amazing year so far for our business. Our inspection, auditing and expediting services positioned us, our inspectors and many in our client's companies as key workers.

"We have worked hard as a team to overcome the current global challenges and are tracking at 13 percent above our planned target of £2.7million turnover for this year. We are proud to have retained 100 percent of our client base and are actively expanding the team across the UK, USA and Asia as well as investing in system solutions.

"To be in the regional finals in two such strong categories of GBEA is the icing on the cake and is

testament to the hard work that every single member of our team puts in every day. It is an exciting time for NECIT Services."

Founded in 2013, the Great British Entrepreneur Awards acknowledges the hard work and inspiring stories of entrepreneurs and businesses in the United Kingdom. This year there was a 'phenomenal number of applications' in both categories NECIT Services is shortlisted in. Anne Boden, CEO of Starling Bank who is sponsoring the awards, said: "These entrepreneurs have gone above and beyond in order to allow their business to flourish in these extremely difficult times, it is a true honour to congratulate each and every one of them."

Started by Peter and Cherelle at their kitchen table, NECIT Services has grown massively over the last three years. Diversifying to support upstream, midstream and downstream inspection, NECIT Services is proud to deliver fully coordinated inspection services to many of the world's leading engineering companies.

The team are now on the Worley delivery platform and are viewed as a trusted reliable partner in the oil and gas, renewables, nuclear and power arenas. The company has achieved a record 70% YOY increase in revenue since 2018. That growth continues into 2020 and beyond.

More information is on [www.necit-services.com](http://www.necit-services.com)

# TIMELESS TRUTHS FOR YOUNG AND OLD AS PANDEMIC RECOVERY SEES MENTAL HEALTH INCREASES

An award winning business woman has released two books with the aim of supporting people in the community of all ages, that boost, support and allow people of the world to see their true potentials.

'Bola Oyelakin is the exceptional author of "You Need To Know" and "You Are Too Loaded to Fail". Here, Anna Toms, reviews both books and their merits in today's extraordinary challenges:

"Aimed at professionals and business people, "You Are Too Loaded To Fail" is a handbook on finding your best self and overcoming mediocrity. It encourages people to remember that they are too loaded with good things to fail at life.

"The pocket sized book is ideal for carrying, for dipping into at any time of need. The book is not only motivating, it encourages deep questioning of yourself in a positive light, helping see a clearer future.

"Covering topics on beating low self esteem, inferiority and anxiety, the books theme is a simple truth that everyone has something to offer. Yes there are religious mentions, but this book goes further than preaching that God has a plan. It's an encourager to find your own driver and belief, a motivator in understanding the only time you fail, is when you give up trying.

"One of the most useful parts of the book which I personally kept returning to read was the success principles. Words such as discovery, diligence,



'Bola Oyelakin

positive, develop, persistence and giving illiterate the chapter and raise a true feeling of wellbeing and determination for the reader. I nodded in agreement throughout reading the pitfalls to avoid and looked deep inside myself for the excuses to failure, realising a lot about my own behaviour.

"As a business person this book could change your philosophy. It could raise you up, refocus you and help you move past doubt. It will be an enjoyable read and I defy it not to resonate on some level with

everyone.

"'Bola's next book, "You Need to Know" is pegged as must-read for every young person. It claims to share Timeless Truths and support personal development. As a mother to someone in the audience for this book, I was keen to see how the motivation structure differed from 'Bola's more adult offering.

"My favourite part of this book is the 'stop-gap' pages as I call them. The pages that ask just questions. 'Bola has referred to them as Think About It pages. They are thought provoking without being unnecessarily deep, perfect for the teenage mind.

"'You Need To Know" moves between being a series of lessons in a handbook, to being a journal, encouraging the reader to apply their own life to what they have just learnt.

"No stone is left unturned, from personal grooming, relationships, sex, self esteem, making things happen with good time planning and even goal setting. Even though 'Bola is Nigerian and one of the chapters is aimed at the youth of her home country, the content of the rest of the book is, in my opinion, very apt to all young people across the UK. I believe it could help many who at the moment are struggling with the changes we have all had to adapt to in 2020.

"Well written, with easy to read balanced content, I would recommend both of 'Bola's debut books. I also understand there is a new book in the offing, and I look forward to having the pleasure of reading that too."

**'Bola's books are available on Amazon.**



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# YOUR CITY NEEDS YOU TO EAT OUT TO HELP OUT

By Adrian Waddell,  
Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd

If there has been one good thing to come from Covid it is the desire, almost a movement, to buy and support local enterprise and business.

In the midst of lockdown people were forced to shop locally and many vowed to continue to support businesses that provided a lifeline at the height of the crisis once things started to return to normal.

The Government's Eat out to Help Out scheme has been seen by many as an embodiment of this movement encouraging the public to do their bit to boost the local economy and support the restaurant industry, which has been one of the hardest hit by the Coronavirus crisis.

Here in Newcastle, the scheme has been extremely well received and quickly gained momentum. Participating restaurants have been busy from Monday to Wednesday the moment the offer was available. On launch day on the 4th August, footfall in the city was up, making it the busiest Monday since lockdown in March.

People of the North East love dining out and who doesn't love a bargain, so the Eat out to Help Out scheme has ticked all the boxes for hungry Geordies.

The scheme has helped kick start a return to a new normal – a safe and socially distanced one. We need people back in Newcastle enjoying meals at restaurants, taking longer, perhaps more generous lunch breaks and staying late after work to dine out in the evening. Not only do restaurants need the custom, the city needs the added vibrancy and life that people bring. The city's economy is interconnected across all sectors and, as a whole, depends on people playing their part and contributing.

Throughout lockdown we lobbied Government for extra support for the hospitality sector knowing that it would be slower to recover as social distancing limits operating capacity.

We were delighted when the Chancellor announced

the VAT cut for the hospitality sector and the novel Eat Out to Help Out initiative. Having seen the early results we are now hopeful that incentivising people's first meal out post-Covid will persuade them that it is safe to keep coming back once the scheme is over.

Many city centre restaurants were quick to sign up for the scheme and have been delighted by the response. Huge investments have made venues Covid-safe with new layouts, Perspex screens, reduced table numbers and new booking systems in place.

Legislative changes to licensing laws have also allowed many to make more of their outdoor seating areas either extending existing spaces, or creating new ones to give them more space to accommodate customers. Some have gone to great lengths to create innovative and themed outdoor areas that are helping attract custom.

We hope that all these measures will be the boost the city needs and will be enough to bring people back to support local businesses and the restaurant industry, which makes a huge and vital contribution to Newcastle's economy.

Newcastle depends heavily on its hospitality sector. It is a cornerstone of the city centre's mixed and exciting offer, as well as being a huge city centre employer. Over 6,500 people work in hospitality in Newcastle alone.

Venues across the North East have invested heavily in making sure they are safe to reopen, people now need to come back to support the recovery.



Adrian Waddell

At NE1, we have been doing all we can to support the industry and city centre businesses promoting the Eat out to Help Out campaign with our own marketing campaign and supporting participating restaurants. We have also been working closely with Newcastle city council and with businesses to support licensing applications to allow businesses to create new or bigger outdoor dining terraces.

And to offer the public greater reassurance that it is safe to return, we have been working with Newcastle University and the City Council to develop an innovative, How Busy Is Toon website. Using real time data, the website shows how busy it is on Northumberland Street plus remaining capacity in city centre car parks. Using the website people can monitor footfall and make informed decisions, helping plan their trip into Newcastle and where to park.

The site has been extremely popular, with over 25,000 visits to the site since its launch. It has also received significant interest from other local authorities and organisations across the country and is going into the next phase of development having just received funding from the government's Local Digital Fund.

The website is a great example of how an innovative idea developed here in Newcastle is improving public confidence in using the city. This combined with the Eat out to Help Out scheme will, we hope, help people feel confident about visiting the city centre and will provide vital support to the city's economy.



## 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 find 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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## DURHAM STUDENT NAMED INTERNATIONAL AAT STUDENT OF THE YEAR

Local student Devonne Burn has been named Student of the Year at the Association of Accounting Technicians (AAT) awards.

Devonne is currently studying the AAT professional diploma in accounting at New College Durham. She was shortlisted for the award following her achievement of a distinction on both the foundation certificate in accounting and the advanced diploma in accounting. Devonne scored exceptionally high marks in all units, whilst working full time as an Accounts Manager at CCL Office Ltd.

Devonne's tutor, Carol Smith, commented: "We are delighted for Devonne. She was a real pleasure to teach and a truly dedicated student who was always polite and focussed."

"Over the last two years we have won student of the year, apprentice of the year and medium training provider of the year. This demonstrates the outstanding work of our students and the AAT team at New College Durham."

## LOCAL PLANNING FIRM CONTINUES SUPPORT FOR GRASS ROOTS SPORT

A leading North East Planning and Design firm has pledged to continue its support for a local County Durham Cricket Club.

BH Planning and Design, sister company of leading North East property firm Bradley Hall, has extended its official sponsorship of Hunwick Cricket Club, which provides sporting opportunities for hundreds of local people.

The sponsorship will be used to provide equipment and towards the upkeep of the grounds, allowing a



## FISH AND CHIPS AT HARBOUR VIEW

The world may have changed because of COVID-19 but one thing that will never change is the quality of fish and chips at Harbour View in Seaton Sluice.

Rated as one of the UK's top five fish and chip restaurants by Trip Advisor, the Harbour View in Seaton Sluice is the only place to go for Britain's favourite meal.

Only the best quality Icelandic Atlantic fish is served and the size of it is legendary, proving that sometimes high standards and quantity do go hand in hand.

It's also the place to be for celebrity spotting as in recent months Ant Mcpartlin, Si King, Ray Laidlaw, Sam Fender, Malcolm MacDonald and Kim Tserkezie have all visited.

For more information and booking, visit their website at [www.the-harbour-view.com](http://www.the-harbour-view.com) or call 0191 237 2478.



## NEW CHAPTER FOR NE YOUTH WITH RELOCATION TO BLAYDON

NE Youth have recently announced their relocation to Blaydon. Having spent 85 years in the West End of Newcastle they were presented with a perfect opportunity for a change.

NE Youth have been supporting young people across the region for over eight decades. Coming out of lockdown, they are very aware that young people will be in need of extra support. A new office heralds the start of a next chapter for the charity.

Jon Niblo, CEO at NE Youth, said: "We are delighted to have moved to the Borough of Gateshead which will present many new opportunities. We urge local businesses to arrange a visit to our new offices, have a look round and learn about what we do."

NE Youth are celebrating their 85th anniversary in 2020 and they aim to raise £85K which will go towards supporting more young people.



better-quality environment for its users.

Chris Pratt, Club Captain and Committee Member at Hunwick, said: "This sponsorship is incredibly important to the club and we are delighted to have started up again following a long layoff."

"The support allows us to provide opportunities for the local community, especially its children and young adults with their physical and mental wellbeing. We are very grateful for the kind donation from BH Planning & Design."

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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".*

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# THIS BUSINESS CLUB IS JUST MINT

It's a phrase that started in the North East but is now used nationally...

"This is really mint." "What a mint idea." You are totally mint."

You'll know a few variations on the theme.

**Someone who definitely knows one is Nicola Jayne Little because she owns the MINT Business Club.**

A lot of you reading this will have been to numerous business club meetings. Some of you will have enjoyed them; some of you won't. Nicola attended meetings but felt as though something was missing because they weren't really geared to businesses like hers.

What about the self-employed and small business owners?

Nicola wanted to do something for them that focused on learning how to run a business. MINT Business Club was born.

"MINT is the membership club for solo and micro business owners who want to keep learning, keep growing and be part of a community of people who just 'get it', said Nicola. "Whether you work on your own as a self-employed solo, or in a micro-business with fewer than 10 in your team, MINT Business Club offers you the training, support and advice you need to be MINT."

As with a lot of businesses, MINT Business Club has changed in recent months courtesy of the Coronavirus pandemic. Nicola and her team used to stage regular face to face meetings where she'd lead training and give members the opportunity to get together, chat and do business.

That's all changed. MINT is now an online business community until we see Covid-19 ease dramatically, although she has started hosting small groups meeting in her garden in a safely controlled environment.

"It's up to our 180 members as to when we return to face to face meetings and training sessions," adds Nicola. "They'll tell us when they're comfortable for things to return to as near normal as possible. Until then, we shall continue with our weekly Zoom training sessions."

At the turn of the year, if you'd said to Nicola that her business club would be an online community within four months and would not be having any face to face meetings, she wouldn't have believed you. That, of course, is something which applies to almost every business. Nobody could envisage what we've all been through. Put it this way, if you are still operating in precisely the same manner and without any aftereffects of the last few months, you are extremely fortunate.

And the same applies to MINT Business Club. Nicola, like a lot of you who run a small business, is in exactly the same position. She has had to move with the times.

"Circumstances have forced us to change the way MINT operates, but we've adapted and it's worked really well. Our members thoroughly enjoy it. I would anticipate that in the future we will have a mixture of what we used to do and what we are doing now. We'll probably have social meetings in a face to face setting but do the vast majority of training online. For example, we've had up to 70 people attending online training at once, something that wouldn't have been possible regularly in a physical training session.

It works, although I must admit that Zoom meetings will never totally replace our normal gatherings for the simple reason that you cannot replicate online the sort of buzz a room full of people creates. You don't get the banter because when more than one person is speaking on Zoom or Skype, it can get a bit confusing. However, for the purposes of a training session where I or one of the team are speaking for the vast majority of the time, it works really well."

Actually, the 180 members are getting more value for money for the simple reason that Nicola and her team are providing more online sessions than could ever be provided in a face to face setting.

So, what does MINT Business Club give you? Weekly training sessions fall in six categories. Nicola calls them the 'Pillars of running a MINT Business'. They're MINT MINDSet, which helps you focus on what you're doing; Business Foundations, Money, Marketing (including Digital Marketing and Social Media), Sales and Business Growth.

All training is delivered online by MINT trainers, experts and members. Every session is recorded and made available to re-watch within a couple of days of the session with a transcript of every session to ensure inclusivity.

There's a real sense of 'family' about MINT Business Group. Everyone can keep in touch via a private Facebook group and of course via the video meetings.

There are mentors who provide one-to-one support every Monday in "MINT MYTime" sessions. The mentors have various areas of expertise and are available to all members.

Specially focussed training sessions are provided by some of MINT's sponsors. The North East Loan Fund and Valued Accountancy work with MINT to deliver an additional, funded training course entitled 'Let's Talk About Money.'

In other words, MINT Business Club is mint at what they do....they provide support, help and training...and a sense of community to solo and small business owners.

"There are five million self-employed people out there, and they are largely overlooked. By a quirk of fate, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced almost every business to change. More people are working from home which has required a greater level of trust from managers, customers and colleagues. The self-employed are innovative but they invariably have a core skill which generates most of their income. The actual running of their business can be where things go wrong. That's where we aim to help....and all of our members want to help too.

MINT Business Club is about the members...it's for the members...the club IS the members.

Yes, things have changed over the past few months, but we are MINT at what we do...our members are MINT at what they do....and together we can get through this and forge ahead to a future that'll be totally MINT."

**For more details on the MINT Business Club, log onto [www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk](http://www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk) or follow their social channels @MINTBizClub. You'll find a stack of MINT information and a MINT welcoming video from the very MINT Nicola.**





Nicola Jayne Little





Nicola Cook

# KNOW THY AVATAR

It's a simple enough concept - know your customer, but in my experience most growing businesses give this concept lip service when bottoming out their Sales Strategy.

Last month I talked about the importance of having a clearly defined UDP – a Unique Differentiating Proposition and this month I want to draw your attention to the flip side of the same coin – your Customer Avatar.

An Avatar is the word I use to describe your Business Customer. The companies who buy from you. Within those businesses lie your Customer Personas, the individual people who purchase and a term more commonly used by marketers, especially if you sell B2C.

Often, when I ask my clients to articulate their target customer, they'll give me a run-down of their current client list. They may have gone as far as to break their clients into Gold, Silver or Bronze accounts, but very few have gone much further than that.

In a growing business there's lots to think about, starting with recognising that the customers that have got you from where you were to where you are now – may not be the same customers you need to attract to achieve your next tier of growth.

Clearly defining your Avatar set allows you to develop your 'Content Marketing Strategy' and the tactics to deploy it. It guides your internal Sales Governance, including defining your own 'Barriers to Entry' and clarity around the business you don't accept, as well as allow you to decide on your most effective 'Routes to Market' and the most profitable ways to reach your target customer. So – lots of reasons to ensure you spend some time bottoming this out.

What is it about your current best customer that makes them the perfect fit for your business and if you could find more of them, how would you identify them, reach them and duplicate and scale up the effort to market and sell to them? If you don't have a current 'best' customer, who is your ideal target avatar moving forward?

Avatars need to be grouped into categories where they share similar variables, and although there is a whole host of questions you can ask to tease out their reasons for buying from you and not your competitors and their triggers in the sale and so on, use the following three criteria to determine your hierarchy.

1. Business Characteristics
2. Market Sector/Geography
3. Pain Points

## Business Characteristics

Are your target customers of a similar size, be that – turnover, profit, number of employees, locations or any other identifiable business characteristics. Perhaps you can group your potential prospects into two or three different Avatars based on these variables.

## Market Sector/Geography

Is this the defining criteria that trumps the previous example? Choosing a sector can add real drive to your sales strategy and help develop a focused route to market but make your sector specialisms too narrow and you open yourself up to risk if one of those sectors fails. Likewise, attempting to be specialists in too many sectors will spread you too thin. My advice – pick three.

## Pain Points

Do your customers regardless of size or sector, share a clearly definable pain point? Something that you can market to? If so, then perhaps Pain Points could be the primary criteria through which you break down your Avatar set.

Aim for a suite of between three and five clearly defined Avatars that everyone in your business understands, identifies and knows how you sell to them. Better yet, name your Avatars after real customers, so your people can easily relate to them.

AND ensure these definitions, qualification criteria, and subsequent customer journeys and so forth, are documented in your own internal Sales Bible, so everyone in your business sings from the same song sheet.

Without this clarity, you run the risk of unfocused sales and marketing activity draining your resources and your people accepting leads and potential new business that hold your company back rather than springboard your growth.

**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@companys shortcuts.com](mailto:helen@companys shortcuts.com)**



# EXPERT PLANNING, COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TEAM ON BOARD TO MARKET AIRVIEW PARK



Developers behind AirView Park, a new business park development next to Newcastle International Airport, have appointed a highly experienced planning, communications and commercial property team to market the site and attract potential new occupiers to the North East.

The professional collaboration brings together some of the region's top property experts including Sadler Brown Architects, Creative Streak Design, Fusion PR Creative and Naylor's Gavin Black, who all work on behalf of local, national and global clients in the construction, regeneration and commercial property sectors.

The team will provide Tynexe Commercial Ltd, developers of AirView Park, with innovative planning, design and build, and architectural expertise, creative branding, design, digital, and strategic communications activities, as well as specialist commercial property intelligence to promote the 175,000 sq ft, out-of-town site.

Activities will be delivered in line with and adapt to changing market conditions, while engaging key stakeholders to promote bespoke build

opportunities for companies looking for flexible office accommodation or a new regional centre.

Mike Clark, Director of Tynexe Commercial Ltd and Dysart Developments Ltd, commented, "It is essential, especially in the current economic climate, that we place ourselves in the very best position we can and engage with stakeholders and potential new occupiers to put this development on the map. We are very much looking ahead with optimism, and whilst AirView Park may need to adapt to a changing marketplace in terms of what build opportunities it offers, it is essential that we work with our partners, including Newcastle International Airport and Newcastle City Council, to create the best possible prospects.

"The appointed team have a proven track record in their individual fields and by having

a collaborative and coordinated approach, we can deliver tactical and strategic activities to hopefully attract the next tenants."

National homebuilder, Bellway, has become the site's first anchor tenant having chosen AirView Park for its new headquarters. The multi-million pound, 21,000 sq ft building will be home to approximately 80 employees once complete, and will connect 22 divisions across England, Scotland and Wales given its proximity to the airport, A1 and Newcastle Central Station.

The development has planning permission for up to four more bespoke office buildings or alternatively, 150,000 sq ft premises. It also offers Enterprise Zone status.

For more details, please contact Angus White at Naylor's Gavin Black on t: 0191 211 1551, e: [angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk](mailto:angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk) or go to [www.airviewpark.co.uk](http://www.airviewpark.co.uk)





## THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING POSITIVE PEERS

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 the importance of MD's, Business Owners and CEO's having peers, and how important it is to find a peer or peer group that has a positive impact.

"The North East is a resilient business community, that faces a specific set of challenges across our extended geography. Our range of industries and skill sets are so wide spread, and we are often hit by slumps harder than elsewhere in the country.

"But in recent years what has emerged is that we are strong folk and, most importantly, we want to help each other. The North East is no place for unhealthy wall building competition, it is a place where we support, and encourage, others to do well.

"That is what at Vistage, in a nutshell, we exceed in.

"Our talent for matching peers who can support, champion and embolden each other is time proven. Our peer advisory groups have a strength in numbers, which means not only do they pull together, but that no-one ever feels alone in a challenging time."

Whilst help and support from Vistage and its peer groups can focus on a company or organisational challenge, many times Andrew and the peer groups help on a personal level too. He explains:



"For me it isn't all about selling the membership. I don't have to do that as the benefit speak loudly and those who do join, recommend it no end. For me, when I reach out personally, it's about feeling good at the end of the day. I help many people who don't at that time feel in a position to join Vistage, because I feel that what goes around, comes around."

A woman who is testament to that is Anika Ephraim. Anika was MD of a engineering company

in the North East up until recently. When her personal circumstances changed she decided to move home, back to the North West and she is now looking for her next challenge. However, the change would have been a lot harder if she didn't have people on her side.

Andrew Marsh works with Anika, who joined his free peer group during lockdown, giving her advice and support, and mentoring her in her new choices. Anika said: "When I first met Andrew it was with a view to joining his Vistage group. And one day I will. But when my circumstances changed, Andrew offered to help me independently. He is helping make connections in my new area, as I have been away for 20 years, and he is sharing his network. He is extremely generous with his time, almost philanthropic with it. His support is building my confidence and giving a sense of normality to what are huge changes!"

Andrew is also leading the way with EB High Performing Boards, where he examines the effectiveness and performance of organizations' boards. He donates part of his revenue to The Experience Bank, where startups and charities are supported. He said: "Change brings about opportunity, but if you are too close to a situation you sometimes can't see that. That's when a positive peer or peer group really comes into its own. They will keep your mindset right and knowing you have the right people in your corner gives you added heart."

Andrew can be reached via his LinkedIn page, or at [vistage.co.uk/chair/andrew-marsh](https://vistage.co.uk/chair/andrew-marsh)



Jade Business Park

## THE ROAD TO BUSINESS RECOVERY

Sarah Slaven, interim Managing Director at Business Durham, describes the help available to businesses to enable them to get back on track following the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is a challenging time for businesses as we enter the recovery phase of COVID-19. Here, in Business Durham our passionate team is working tirelessly with businesses to address the challenges arising from the pandemic while supporting them on the road back to recovery.

When we went into lockdown many businesses experienced an initial shock, so it was vital that we responded by helping them to adapt and thrive. We adapted our ways of working too and tailored our support to meet the needs of our county's economy.

It can be very lonely running a business during a crisis, so we used our relationships and knowledge of the business community to help companies find the most relevant information and solutions to the challenges they faced.

Business Durham is built around our experienced team which has geographical and sector specific areas of expertise, and its depth of knowledge has been invaluable.

I'm extremely proud of the team, as they quickly adapted to new working conditions during lockdown and rose to the challenge of helping businesses through this period of uncertainty. Their commitment and passion to help businesses has been fantastic, and they have all gone the extra mile to ensure we continue to deliver high quality services.

As the economic development arm of Durham County Council, we aim to be the trusted point of contact for companies with advice on growth opportunities, funding sources, support and information, premises, innovation, new markets and networking. Our success is underpinned by a commitment to develop long-term relationships with our businesses and support them through both the good and bad times.

We recognise that the months ahead are going to be very challenging, and as we move into the recovery phase it is vital that we continue to support businesses to grow, thrive and create jobs.

So far, we have been able to link up companies to help them find solutions for their business challenges, as well as seize new opportunities emerging from the pandemic. We offer a range of support programmes so there are a lot of different ways we can help.

Digital Drive was one programme that companies could immediately benefit from. Initially, a £4m initiative to help SMEs to maximise their growth potential and sustainability through digital technology, we have secured an additional £2.34m of funding to continue to June 2023. The programme offers free business support including digital health checks, masterclasses, workshops and grant funding of up to 40% of the cost of a digital project.

Digital Drive has played an important role in helping business to adapt to home working and providing the equipment and infrastructure for their employees. Since March we have seen a significant increase in applications and have made 104 grant offers to businesses across the county to help them use technology effectively.

We also have the Durham Business Opportunities Programme (DBOP). Since it was established in 2016 DBOP has run sector specific support programmes focusing on business areas identified as having high growth potential. The DBOP Construction - Routes to Success Programme was launched this summer supporting SMEs in the construction industry supply chain to access contracts in new markets.

While the County Durham Growth Fund offers capital grants to SMEs to help accelerate growth. Established in April 2019 as a £4.9m capital grant scheme, we have secured an additional £4m to continue until June 2023 with companies already reaping the benefits of that fund.

Our team has been playing a key role in helping companies find premises within our extensive property portfolio. While there has been national uncertainty about commercial property and office space, we have seen an increase in enquiries about premises, particularly industrial units. With some tenants needing to continue working, especially at North East Technology Park, it's fantastic to see some of them expanding into new spaces and our first tenant moving into Jade Business Park.

As we move towards recovery, our job is to build confidence that there's a strong economic future. There will be challenges ahead but we need to stay positive. We have a strong, resilient business community and by supporting each other we can survive and thrive together.

Sarah Slaven was part of the team that established Business Durham in 2012. In her previous Operations Director role, she led business engagement, inward investment, and enterprise activities.

She implemented the £20m Finance Durham Fund with Maven Capital Partners, which has made 17 investments totaling £5.4 million into 11 dynamic businesses; and secured £10 million ERDF funding for projects including the Durham Business Opportunities Programme, Digital Drive County Durham and the County Durham Growth Fund.

Sarah was instrumental in setting up the Durham City Incubator, a unique collaboration between Business Durham, Durham University and New College Durham to retain graduate talent and support enterprise.

Digital Drive, DBOP and Durham City Incubator receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund.









Bryony Gibson

## THE NEW FUTURE OF WORK

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, considers the new ways we are working and the skills we will need to succeed.

**It is obvious that the world of work is changing but, in truth, it has been changing for some time.**

Driven by continuous digital innovation, we have been witnessing a shift in workplace culture for many years. The speed and scale of this global pandemic has simply accelerated it beyond belief.

The way we work, the places we work in, and the skills we are going to need to be successful in business must all be reconsidered.

Homeworking is the new norm, with many people's uncertainty around this as a serious long-term strategy superseded after seeing the productivity gains that can be made when people are encouraged to fully integrate their work and personal life.

The trust required to do this has been forced in many cases, but it is something that will be in high demand long after this crisis, which means employee engagement must also become a priority.

Employee engagement and productivity have always gone hand in hand, no matter where people work, and, with flexibility in high-demand, organisations must do all they can to help managers develop the skills they need to lead a dispersed team.

Whether through training or regular communication,

it is important to get everyone involved as much as possible. You will also need to find a way to routinely monitor your team's motivation and level of commitment if you want to retain them in the long-term.

Contrary to investing in people, the idea that machines are going to take all our jobs isn't something new but does seem more prevalent than ever due to the complexity and constraints around people and space.

Big data, artificial intelligence, robotics, automation and global connectivity are just some of the solutions being fast-tracked by businesses, with advances in these fields offering the opportunity to transform the way they operate and make cost-effective productivity gains in the process. However, this does not have to have the knock-on effect of mass unemployment.

If we focus not only on the application of new digital improvements but also on how these advancements will affect jobs and talent in the workplace, it is possible to adapt working practices so that they help people to develop the skills they need to thrive alongside machines, rather than be replaced by them.

Most jobs consist of around 20 to 30 different kinds of activity and, while some may be easily replaced by technology, it's unlikely that every aspect will be, so rather than be made obsolete, it could be that most jobs will simply change.

This means if you're a business leader or manager, you have a responsibility to begin redesigning the way your company not only works with technology but the environment in which people operate and the way you recruit and manage talent.

How will your working models change when there is no longer a need for physical proximity to colleagues? Will you join the growing number of companies who are crowd-sourcing people with the skills they need for a particular contract? Perhaps you'll utilise the more and more skilled people who are choosing to work as freelancers so they can pick and choose projects they are passionate about?

Whatever you do, it seems that, in the future, successful careers will most likely be built around learning and skills rather than specific jobs and, if that is the case, we will all need to be recruiting people who not only have the right attitude and outlook but who can also solve problems, lead well, communicate expertly and have excellent technological skills.

Emotional intelligence, empathy, curiosity and the understanding and creative application of what we can do with the information that computers create will also be critical to the new way of working, which is also going to mean companies have to operate in a nimble and agile way – thinking big, but acting small.

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

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## JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC PRACTICE...

### QUALIFIED COMMERCIAL ACCOUNTANT

North Tyneside, circa £35,000

**A leading accounting practice is looking to appoint a qualified accountant to join their growing team.**

With a business culture centred around people development, this is the perfect opportunity for someone who is ambitious, hard working, enjoys training and learning from others, and who is keen to advance their career.

In your day-to-day role, you will manage a portfolio of clients with the support of a small team, ensuring timely delivery of both year end statutory and monthly management accounts for a diverse selection of SME businesses.

With responsibility of your own clients, you will be given the autonomy and support you need to deliver at the highest level, which is why we are looking for an individual who has a minimum of four years practice experience.

As you will be working from home as well as the office, first-class communication skills are essential, as is a mindset that welcomes change and embraces new technology.

### ACCOUNTS SENIOR

Durham, £24 - 28,000pa

**With a positive outlook and an increase in work, this well established accountancy practice in County Durham - with a first class reputation - are looking to appoint an Accounts Senior.**

Working with a predominantly local client base of SMEs across a wide range of sectors, you will play a supporting role with the completion of year end statutory accounts.

Whilst you will undoubtedly develop in this role, we are seeking an accounting professional with previous or current experience who is, to a certain extent, able to hit the ground running with accounts preparation.

Working within their local office (at social distance), we are seeking someone who is able to work full-time and has experience with Sage and/or Xero, and welcome applications from those who are mid-AAT or recently qualified, with a minimum of three years experience in an accountancy practice environment.

Those working towards their ACCA or ACA will also be supported, but the practical experience is the most valuable.

### TAX ACCOUNTANT

Newcastle, £40,000 - 47,000pa  
plus car allowance

**A rare opportunity has arisen for a tax and accounting professional to join an in-house tax team in Newcastle.**

Offering a very attractive career path and comprehensive salary and benefits package, we are looking for a Qualified Accountant or Tax Advisor who has experience and an understanding of both specialist areas.

Working as part of a wider tax team, you will be responsible for all UK group corporate tax compliance, and will assist with adhoc tax planning projects such as capital allowances, R&D and M&A work.

Tasked with ensuring the company's tax strategy is optimised in line with transfer pricing, you will also provide support and tax advice to the business on a wide variety of matters, and identify new opportunities.

As such, it is important that applicants are qualified (ACA/ ACCA) and, ideally, have gained corporate tax experience in either an accounting firm or industry, with a thorough knowledge of UK GAAP, IFRS and FRS101.

Awareness of international tax issues and a wider accounting appreciation will enable you to work closely with tax and finance both locally and nationally.

### PERSONAL TAX SENIOR

Northumberland, £24 - 30,000pa,  
flexible hours

**Due to an increase in tax consulting projects, we are searching for an experienced tax professional who can take ownership of this north-west Newcastle based accountancy practice's tax compliance function.**

We look to welcome a Tax Senior who is confident and knowledgeable in the completion of personal tax returns for Directors, Partnerships, HNWI's and Trusts.

Tax compliance extends to cover P11D's, Trust Regulations, Capital Gains Tax returns and Corporation tax compliance, and you may even find yourself supporting the Partner with SDLT and group restructures at busy times.

Whilst training is available (ATT / CTA supported for those studying), we are looking for an experienced personal tax professional who would revel in a small friendly and focused firm, and enjoy flexibility with hours in return for taking an element of responsibility for everyday office life.

History in an accounting firm completing tax returns is a priority and, while we are open to all applicants with the relevant skills, this is likely to appeal most to those who enjoy compliance and are not seeking continued fast progression.

**To express an interest in any of the above vacancies, or for a confidential discussion about your career in professional practice, please contact Bryony Gibson, Bryony Gibson Consulting, on 0191 375 9983 or [bryony@bryongibson.com](mailto:bryony@bryongibson.com)**





Kieran Porter and Alex Williams

## STANDBY TO SOLVE HEALTH STAFFING NEEDS

The last few months has shown everyone just how important the people are who work in health and social care.

Whether it be nurses, care assistants or support workers based in hospitals, care homes or out in the community, each and every one of them has in some shape or form, helped the country....and are still helping...as we all get to terms with the Coronavirus.

However, there are bound to be times when extra staff are required. Perhaps there is a sudden rush of residents who need attention; perhaps several members of staff are either ill or due to take annual leave. Either way, it means that a vacancy needs filling.

Some of those vacancies may be just for a couple of days or possibly for a couple of months. Filling those vacancies is a time consuming job which a lot of organisations struggle with.

That's where the team at Standby Healthcare come in.

They are on hand 24 hours a day, seven days a week to solve your staffing problems. They have an enormous database of experienced healthcare and social care professionals who are ready to help out at short notice.

"It's all about trust," said director Kieran Porter "We know all of our clients first hand and know what sort of people will suit their needs and fit in with the workplace surroundings. Most people who work

within health and social care are part of a team so we ensure that all staff we recommend are capable of doing the job and able to fit in with the rest of the staff."

At any one moment, Standby Healthcare has a pool of around 250 people who are ready at short notice to fill a vacancy. The office staff are available at any time of day to help you find someone who can assist and hopefully solve your staffing problem.

"It's often as short as just a couple of hours notice," added Director, Alex Williams. "For example we can take a call in the middle of the night from a care home where a member of staff has possibly taken ill or been forced to attend to a family problem, and there is a desperate need for someone to go and help. We then contact one of the experienced care workers on our books who can basically drop everything and travel to the care home. They are used to hitting the ground running and, thanks to their experience, will fit in straight away."

Standby Healthcare is part of a group. One of the other companies within the group is Watson Black Search and Selection. If you are looking to fill a permanent position within healthcare, Watson Black are experts in the field. They are a specialist recruitment agency who, as with Standby Healthcare, are experienced when it comes to finding the right people to fill health and social care roles. Whereas

Standby Healthcare tends to largely deal with filling short to medium term healthcare positions....the clue is in the word 'standby'...Watson Black are purely for companies who need full time staff members.

"Watson Black is aimed at filling roles such as staff nurses, care home managers and CEOs," said Director, Kieran Porter. "We offer a bespoke talent sourcing service which will ensure placing high-calibre professionals who will add value to any business. We are the partner of choice to many of the High Street social and healthcare names across the UK. We have a team of experienced recruitment professionals who know the sort of person they are looking for and ensure that we make an appointment with complete confidence in the quality of any candidate."

Both Standby Healthcare and Watson Black are based in Newcastle. Whilst the majority of Standby Healthcare's temporary support is focussed across the North, Watson Black is skilled at finding the right people on a national basis.

The best idea is to check out their websites. You'll find more details about each company plus a list of latest vacancies. They're also keen to hear from anyone who would like to be included on their list of people who'd be willing to work part-time in health and social care or may be searching for a new permanent role.

Log onto [www.standbyhealthcare.com](http://www.standbyhealthcare.com) and [www.watsonblack.co.uk](http://www.watsonblack.co.uk)

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## SHOUT ABOUT IT

For 85 years NE Youth have been quietly supporting young people across the North East. With over 1 million young people helped they've decided to turn the volume up for their 85th anniversary and let the world know what they do.

### Why was the charity founded?

1935 (Originally as the Northumberland Association of Boys Clubs).

### Which area do you cover?

Following our re-brand in 2016 the Charity now covers the whole of the North East.

### Tell us about your team?

Our staff team are amazing and I am so proud of them particularly how well they have responded to recent challenges in relation to Covid 19. We have some great leaders and characters in our team and everyone works incredibly hard to ensure better outcomes for young people. As the organisation has grown and adapted, the Board have shown real courage to make key and timely appointments to ensure that the structure is fit for purpose and our strategy can be achieved. The organisation has a genuine commitment to the professional development and well-being of staff.

### What type of fundraising events do you have?

Our events are a mix of long standing traditional ones that have served us incredibly well such as our Annual Clay Pigeon Shoot, Burns Night Ball and Charity Golf Day. In addition we have started to introduce other key events in to the calendar including our International Women's Day annual event held in March, Great North Run entries, challenge events and a river cruise networking event.

### What have been your proudest moments so far?

Having come through the system and attended and volunteered at local boys clubs/youth clubs my proudest moment was to be appointed to the post

of CEO. I feel incredibly privileged to be the CEO of this amazing charity with such a rich history of supporting youth organisations and young people for over 85 years. I will not pretend that it's all been plain sailing and in the early years there were some huge cultural problem to tackle however I am incredibly proud of what we have all achieved together.

### Who are your main trustees and patrons?

Our Board of Trustees/Directors (led by our Chair) Fiona Lees-Millais are a group of incredibly experienced and well-connected individuals. Our President His Grace the Duke of Northumberland

still also plays a key role particularly during our key anniversary years. We have two ambassadors who have done a great job and they are Police and Crime Commissioner Kim McGuinness and Show Racism the Red Card Gary Bennett.

### What are you currently working on?

One of our current key priorities is the establishment of the North East Youth Alliance (NEYA) in collaboration with Youth Focus North East. The primary aim of this initiative is to strengthen the Youth Sector in the North East by encouraging youth organisations to work more collaboratively. The NEYA has received nearly £1M over five years from the National lottery. Early work will focus on developing two place based hubs in Birtley and East Cleveland.

### What does the future hold?

An incredibly difficult question to answer as the Charitable Sector is always under extreme pressure and competition for funding is a huge concern. That said I believe that NE Youth are a well-led and governed Charity with a huge amount of experience at both Board level and within the staff team. Our vision is clear and we have continued to grow and improve during an extended period of austerity and cuts.

### How do you get involved?

There are many ways to get involved either as a volunteer working on the front line with young people or using skills and experience to work behind the scenes with our member youth and community projects. We are also always looking for new local businesses to support our fundraising activities.



Jon Niblo



Further information can be found on our website [www.neyouth.org.uk](http://www.neyouth.org.uk)

# EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS & NORTHERN INSIGHT LUNCH CLUB

Exclusive Business and Northern Insight have an inspiring programme of speakers to address our networking events from the autumn onwards.

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

*Linda Hitman and  
Michael Grahamslaw*



## EXCLUSIVE BUSINESS

### NEWCASTLE EVENTS

**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 September we will have two further events:*

**September 3rd** - Jason Knights MD,  
Blue Kangaroo Design, Building a brand overseas

**September 17th** - Ian Kinnery CEO,  
Kinnery, "What got you here won't get you there"



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

### Have you joined the Exclusive Members Club?

An influential group of individuals who understand the importance of relationship building and collaboration.

Contact [Linda@exclusivebusiness.net](mailto:Linda@exclusivebusiness.net) visit [www.exclusivebusiness.net](http://www.exclusivebusiness.net)

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





Andrew Gibbison

## RECRUITING THE RIGHT WAY

BMC Recruitment Group in Newcastle is a firm with a strong set of beliefs. They find the right person for the right role, and pride themselves on doing all they can personally and professionally to ensure they're doing recruitment the right way.

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It's not simply a case of feeding data into a computer and matching job requirements to a CV. The applicant needs to be the best version of themselves to do any role the justice it deserves, and to match the ethos of a company and thrive within the workplace atmosphere. Square pegs in square holes.

BMC are simply excellent at what they do, and their client list reads like a who's who of business...names like Taylor Wimpey, Deloitte, Procter & Gamble, Arriva, PWC, Kier, the NHS etc.

But what about the person who is actually sorting out the recruitment in the first place?

Working for a recruitment agency is infamously stressful. You're trying to enhance an individual's career as well as improve a client's business with the best employee they could possibly find.

Someone who knows all about stress and mental wellbeing is BMC Recruitment's Operations Director, Andrew Gibbison.

Andrew openly admits that he has had mental health issues in the past, but he's also taken the huge step of being very public about it. He now devotes his spare time to doing his utmost to help other people who might be struggling in private.

"It's so important that we break down the stigma around mental health," said Andrew. "Let's face it, suicide is still high up on the 'stigma' list. I wanted to kill myself and tried twice. However, I soon realised through taking therapy, support at home and other regular things I could look forward to such as time with loved ones and playing basketball, that life is worth living and the black clouds hovering over you do clear, making way for brighter days."

Andrew is now a champion for the Mental Health in Recruitment organisation. Their aim is to 'remove discrimination and normalise conversations and action around mental health in the industry.' The hope is that recruitment firms incorporate mental wellness into their strategy.

"If you're an employer, it's important to invest in training around those issues. Let's encourage conversation and proactive behaviour so we can improve the lives of those suffering inwardly," adds Andrew.

BMC are practicing what they preach, too. In ensuring they provide a safe and valid space for conversations about the mental health of their consultants, they're also passionate about raising these topics and advising their clients the same. Slowly but surely, they're advocating a clear message that stress manifests itself in ways as individual as each employee. They as a company recognise that 2020 has been a pivotal time to take care of those looking for a new job. A lot of applicants have simply found themselves in need of work, and the repercussions of being made redundant are financial difficulties.

*continued...*





In his Operational Director role with the recruitment agency, Andrew was quick to recognise that stress and anxiety could be quick to build up throughout the interview process. "We knew that could seriously affect how an applicant might perform. BMC's hope is that our approach to business will encourage employers to be aware of this climate, and continue to take it into consideration."

Andrew is also heavily involved in podcasts and writing articles. He has a firm belief that any platform he or BMC's consultants build should be used not only for the benefit of the business, but for the benefit of anyone looking to invest in their services. "We're lucky enough to be an agency who always want to go the extra mile – we don't feel pressured to, it's just something we all inherently want to offer. The recruitment process for us starts with what is best for the candidate to ensure they aren't exposed to professional burn out, and they aren't taking a role for the wrong reasons."

Andrew and BMC believe that the more you have both your client's and candidate's best interests at heart, the more everyone can start trusting the recruitment process again.

He adds "We've seen recruitment in our sectors: Construction, Finance, Executive and Tech were too focussed on hitting numbers and not on the livelihoods of the people we spoke to. All businesses need to make

money, but the retention of staff who feel able to integrate their mental and physical health with their career is priceless. Once we took the time to understand pain points of clients who didn't understand why staff were leaving, and job seekers who were too scared to speak up about their issues, we found the perfect balance that made our team as strong as it is now. We're really proud of what we do."

Andrew is currently promoting mental health website Qwel (qwel.co) – "Netflix content meets Peloton's fitness for your mind."

He adds "At Qwel we don't consider ourselves a solution to your problems – we want to help you find the right advice for you, which mirrors what we do at BMC. There are too many businesses claiming to have all solutions for all issues, and the same can be said for mental health outlets. It simply isn't one size fits all. We feel this is irresponsible since there isn't one way to work through your issues. If you wanted to change our physical health you address factors affecting it. Mental health is the same."

BMC have taken the past few months to, literally, get their head in the game. Once Andrew addressed and ensured each consultant understood the trials, tribulations and celebrations of their industries, they could continue to move forward in the best way. The best jobs for the best people at the best time – for job seekers and employers alike.

**For further information about BMC Recruitment Group, go onto their website [www.bmcrecruitmentgroup.com](http://www.bmcrecruitmentgroup.com) email [enquiries@bmcrecruitmentgroup.com](mailto:enquiries@bmcrecruitmentgroup.com) or get in touch with Andrew directly at [andrew.gibbison@bmcrecruitmentgroup.com](mailto:andrew.gibbison@bmcrecruitmentgroup.com)**





## NORTHERN GAS AND POWER LAUNCHES BRAND-NEW GLOBAL CAREERS SITE

Award-winning Northern Gas and Power has launched a brand-new Careers site and is recruiting more than 150 Energy Consultants nationally, including options to work from home – testament to the success of its remote-working strategy during Covid-19.

**Adapting quickly to the situation, Northern Gas and Power invested substantially in essential equipment and technology, enabling over 90% of its global workforce to work from home.**

The business is now in a position to focus on exciting future growth plans with a significant recruitment drive in place for Energy Consultants for its offices in Gateshead, Newcastle and Leeds, as well as home-working roles nationally. With its global HQ based on Gateshead Quays, its newly-launched Careers site features a range of new positions across its global operations in the UK, Malta, Paris, India and Texas.

The new Careers site provides a snapshot of life at Northern Gas and Power; its unique culture, commitment to work-life balance and what it's like to become part of the NGP Family. At Northern Gas and Power, colleagues have access to an unlimited earning potential, fantastic incentives, wide-ranging benefits packages and industry-leading training schemes.

Northern Gas and Power's, Global People Director, Scott High explained "We know some people have unfortunately suffered job losses during this tough time. We do not take for granted our fortunate position, to be able to offer a range of exciting opportunities giving people the chance to build their career again – all of which are featured on our new Careers site.

"We have extremely ambitious growth plans with numerous home-working Energy Consultant positions across the UK. We want to speak to experienced professionals today!

"We offer unrivalled salaries, uncapped commissions, excellent work-life balance, and the best incentives in the industry which include illustrious events, amazing trips abroad and the month of December off paid. Not to mention exciting opportunities for people to progress within an award-winning company ranked in the top five in UK for fastest-growing international sales (2020 Sunday Times HSBC International Track 200) as well as awards for best place to work."

To find out more about all of the exciting global opportunities available, visit [www.ngpcareers.com](http://www.ngpcareers.com) or email an up-to-date CV to [changeyourlife@ngpltd.co.uk](mailto:changeyourlife@ngpltd.co.uk)

A key factor in Northern Gas and Power's success, and one which sets it apart from others, is the development of new in-house technologies, ranging from online pricing engines to cloud-based energy monitoring and targeting systems and the company's internal CRM systems.

Northern Gas and Power launched brand-new, smart-grid connected online comparison site [BusinessEnergyQuotes.com](http://BusinessEnergyQuotes.com) to focus on the SME sector in the UK. Its smart-grid technology means it takes just seconds to bring customers the most competitive energy tariffs from over 21 business energy suppliers, giving small businesses access to fairer and better energy pricing.



### **BusinessEnergyQuotes.com - Not Just A Pretty Interface!**

New, exciting [BusinessEnergyQuotes.com](http://BusinessEnergyQuotes.com) is not a typical business energy comparison website. Using smart-grid connectivity, it provides the fastest and most accurate quotes that could save hundreds of pounds for businesses. Business Energy Quotes is the only dedicated business energy price comparison website in the industry. Quotes can be secured completely online, with no call-backs and no waiting.

[BusinessEnergyQuotes.com](http://BusinessEnergyQuotes.com) is not just a pretty interface; it does all of the hard work for you. With smart-grid connectivity, it provides unique access to your business' consumption data from the UK electricity market. Business Energy Quotes will quickly trawl through the energy market to arrive at the most competitive, accurate and suitable tariff for your business.

Just enter a postcode and current contract end date and within ten seconds, you're presented with the best offers available on the market, from over twenty suppliers. You can even search for "Green Only" offers to help reduce your carbon footprint. On average, Business Energy Quotes can provide around 30% more quotes with savings than its competitors, giving far greater choice to businesses.

[BusinessEnergyQuotes.com](http://BusinessEnergyQuotes.com) is a powerful comparison engine which caters for all types of business electricity, including Half-Hourly business energy meters – a UK first. Renewing business energy contracts is typically a lengthy process, often taking weeks to conclude. But now, with Business Energy Quotes, a quick ten-second search will find your best tariff. Then you can secure it all 100% online – the whole contract can be secured with an e-signature in under three minutes – allowing you to get back on with your day job! There's no need to negotiate with brokers, no phone calls to make and no need to wait around. Business Energy Quotes' goal is to make your switching experience seamless and frustration-free!

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*Northern Gas and Power continues to implement the most rigorous Covid-19 safety measures during its new recruitment drive and growth plans.*



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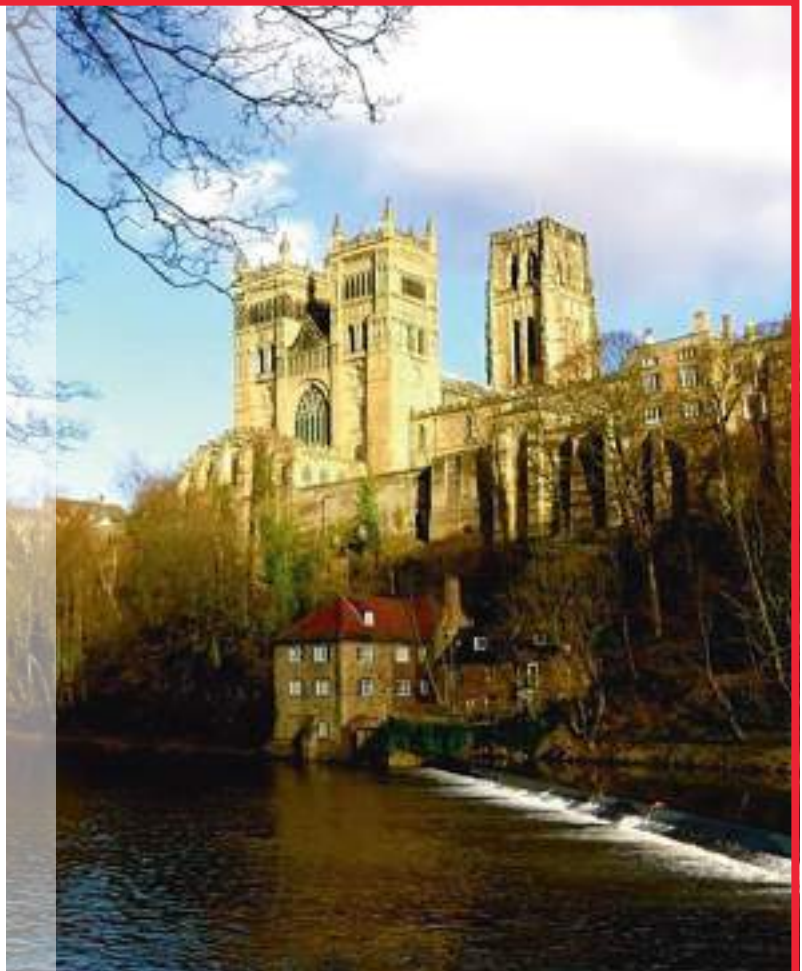
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Peter Kerr

## EMBRACING THE POWER OF OKRS TO DRIVE FINTECH GROWTH

By Peter Kerr, MD of AuxinOKR, a leading UK OKR coaching consultancy

**Ambitious tech start-ups share many common character traits and challenges in their drive for growth.**

**While growing to be strong they're also at their most fragile and vulnerable. Culture, productivity and alignment can be in a state of flux. At worse this volatile mix can prove lethal for a young tech company.**

In the world of financial tech companies, or fintech, there's the added matter of complexity. These companies and their products can be very complicated; and with complexity it's easy to add confusion into the mix.

All too often they start with a great idea only to then lose focus. As soon as their well-prepared plans first encounter a real customer there can be a tendency for the leadership team to change direction and deviate from the original strategic vision.

Fintech companies can also have a diverse group of investors backing the project and it's important to maintain clear communications to maintain their trust and support.

While there is no magic formula for managing the pains of growth there are goal-setting processes that the most successful companies often turn to.

At AuxinOKR we work with those companies that have turned to an increasingly well-known tool –

OKRs. This management framework, built around objectives and key results, is as easy for a start-up to adopt as a large corporate. In truth, it's probably easier for a high-growth start-up because they're not yet weighed down by cultural behaviours and inflexible organisational structures.

OKRs are flexible enough to work for fintech start-ups and powerful enough to scale as the company grows. There is no one-size fits all. You have to work out how to make OKRs work best for you. That's where our coaching can help. Common to all high growth companies is the need to maintain agility as they expand their numbers of staff.

Our fintech clients are finding OKRs highly valuable as they pursue the goals identified within their scale-up strategies. From Curve who are going through C series funding to Nivaura who are at the beginning of their growth journey, having secured the backing of the London Stock Exchange and three of the Magic Circle law firms in the City.

The fact tech companies are usually founded by those used to using agile methods in tech development is a real advantage especially if they can maintain their agility as they implement strategy as they rapidly expand.

One of the big powers of OKRs is their ability to help drive communication from internal teams to external stakeholders. They can be the perfect way of explaining to employees what you want to get done and a way to keep everyone moving ahead as a team.

For those companies with investors on board, OKRs have the advantage of creating transparency across a business and accountability for decision-making. They bring clarity. They allow the owner or senior management team to articulate to all employees a company's strategy and mission but in a way that's relevant to them at a personal level.

OKRs are a tool to motivate people. It's very easy for those working in fintech companies creating products and digital platforms to operate in silos; and then for one silo not to communicate with another. OKRs, when executed properly, introduce transparency and prevent silo working.

Such open working methods also ensure that everyone is clear about priorities and who is doing what; it ensures that the CEO can quickly see everything that's going on in a complex organisation at any one time.

All high-performance OKR systems have some similar features:

- Key results always have measurable outcomes that can be tracked.
- Goal setting becomes a habit and changes how people think about their work.
- Objectives are ambitious and stretch everyone beyond their limits.

Sometimes, although perhaps not often, increasing revenue might not be the most important objective within a fintech company. If, for example, it's about increasing user retention on a platform, you need to be able to communicate this message to everyone in an organisation from teams to your board and to investors. OKRs give you that power.

# 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.

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## PAUL JENNINGS

Chief Executive, North P&I Club

160 years and counting: marine insurance provider North P&I Club's Paul Jennings talks about the Club's history and why resilience is at the heart of success

Based in Newcastle upon Tyne since 1860, marine mutual liability insurer North P&I Club is celebrating a milestone achievement this year - its 160th anniversary. Set against a backdrop of the global pandemic, 2020 has certainly been a challenging year for many, and the maritime industry is certainly not immune to the effects of COVID-19.

However, the importance the organisation places on resilience and their inherently northern culture have enabled North to carry on with their purpose: to enable those we insure – shipowners, our Members – to trade with confidence.

The North East of England has a rich maritime history, and we have been a part of that history, right from the creation of the first indemnity association. North is one of the world's first marine mutual insurance companies, set up to provide personal injury and collision liability cover for steamships. Today, North is one of the world's leading maritime insurers, with more than 12% in global market share. Put simply, that means that one in every 8 merchant ships that trade around the world are insured by North.

Shipping insurance is vitally important to our everyday lives. From the food imported and sold in our supermarkets to the clothes we buy on the high street, over 90% of global trade is by sea, and marine insurance is a crucial part of that supply chain. Without the financial support and documentation we provide, ships just couldn't move around the world.

Throughout the last 160 years, we've seen our region change beyond recognition. From a shipping and coal powerhouse, to a vibrant hub of digital and service industry activity that defines the North East today.



In the 160 years of our business, we've seen the true heart of the North East evolve. Our regional economy may have changed dramatically over the centuries, but the devotion of our communities to supporting those in need and recognising the importance and value of hard work has never wavered.

No-one could have foreseen how dramatically COVID-19 has changed our economy and society over the last few

months. However, what has become clear is how quickly businesses, organisations and individuals in the North East have come together to support those in need. We're proud to be part of a regional business community that has pulled together to support families, SMEs, key workers and individuals since the outbreak began.

As a business, we choose to stay here in Newcastle upon Tyne due to the resilience of the business community and the strength of our regional culture, a strength that emanates across the globe in the markets we operate. We see these traits as a competitive advantage; what is often referred to as the 'North Way' by the shipowners we insure has been a key factor in our 160-year success.

I am really proud of our teams in the UK and overseas as they have demonstrated what it means to come together as one, focusing on wellbeing and collaboration during these unprecedented times. From motivational blogs to tips on working from home, and even remote virtual exercise classes, we're working hard to help the North team stay positive and motivated.

Despite the fact that 2020 will go down in history as a year of uncertainty in which we had to put our lives 'on hold', we can take pride in the fact that there are so many attributes that make both North and the business community in our region unique - our heritage, our sense of community, and our resilience.



For more information on North P&I Club, please visit [www.nepia.com](http://www.nepia.com)



Paul Jennings





Patricia Alexander

## WE WANT TO BE PART OF THE PEOPLE HELPING THOSE IN NEED

Like many other international development organisations, Newcastle-based social lender, Shared Interest has faced challenges over recent months due to the impact of coronavirus.

Here, Shared Interest Managing Director, Patricia Alexander explains why their charity, Shared Interest Foundation, relaunched a special fund to help producers during and beyond the pandemic.

"As Covid-19 continues to affect countries across the globe, it remains unclear how developing world communities will cope with the health, economic, and social hardship caused. What we do know, is that, in addition to restrictions on movement and trade, people are dealing with floods, droughts and delayed harvests, which are threatening livelihoods and increasing household food insecurity.

The Shared Interest Livelihood Security Fund was launched a decade ago by our charity, Shared Interest Foundation. It was initially set up to help producers in the developing world recover from shocks that may affect the smooth running of their businesses, and subsequently impact their livelihoods. A shock being defined, in this instance, as a natural disaster, economic downturn, and political, social or health related crises. These events all undermine producer groups' sustainability and eliminate any progress they have made towards lifting themselves out of poverty.

During an era when the United Nations has tripled the sum needed to avert a Covid-19 catastrophe in the world's poorest nations, the Livelihood Security Fund will now enable us to support producers during and beyond the pandemic, while remaining true to our mission.

Shared Interest Society and Foundation have decades of experience in supporting producers in Africa and Latin America, and our in-country teams and partners in these regions mean that we can gain insight of the challenges faced.

We hope that, through the Fund, we can help farmers and workers survive the additional economic and social hardship caused by Covid-19.

We have identified several types of support, which could be provided. These range from the provision of hand sanitiser and other protective items, to the supply of seeds, farming tools, and equipment.

Many producers are not only facing risks to their health and livelihood because of the virus, but are also dealing with the effects of travel restrictions on their supply of food and other essential items.

We need to help producers to find ways to increase the resilience of their businesses, but first we must support them in overcoming the hardship they face.

We heard from our first beneficiary, Bukonzo Organic Farmers Co-operative Union (BOCU), in March as news arrived that they were helping their local community, in the Kasese region of Uganda, to cope with the impact of coronavirus.

As a large coffee co-operative, Bukonzo supports the livelihoods of over 3,000 farmers, and they decided to distribute food supplies to supplement those delivered by the Ugandan government. Not long

after we received this news, Bukonzo contacted us once again but this time, they needed urgent aid after severe flooding hit their village and the surrounding area. Heavy rainfall caused five rivers to burst their banks. Over 35,000 people were displaced, including Bukonzo members and their families.

"The Fund is in place to help sustain businesses and support income levels, but in the first instance we must respond to basic needs. In the case of Bukonzo, this meant providing food and shelter for farmers and additional support for pregnant women and children. Some have lost everything in the floods and are sleeping in schools and churches.

Before Bukonzo members can begin to rebuild their farms, general wellbeing is of utmost importance as they not only fight the current threat of Covid-19, but also the water-related diseases that follow this type of flooding.

We are pleased to have received news of Bukonzo successfully distributing the food supplies and shelter materials provided by the Fund. We will remain in close contact with them over coming weeks.

Once Bukonzo overcomes the immediate difficulties faced, they will need to deal with ongoing issues caused by the pandemic. We know from our work with farmers and artisans that many are continuing to feel the effects of disrupted services due to lockdown restrictions.

The co-operative provides income for thousands of farmers, and its survival is vital to the future of the community. Thank you to everyone who has donated to the Livelihood Security Fund so far, and helped Bukonzo on their journey to recovery. We know from speaking to the co-operative that they will want to return to its role of improving the lives of farmers.

As General Manager, Josinta Kabughho says: "We want to be part of the people supporting those in need."

If you would like to read more about the Livelihood Security Fund, and find out how you can help, please visit [shared-interest.com/livelihood-security-fund](https://shared-interest.com/livelihood-security-fund)

## STYLE AND GROWTH AS COVID START-UP BUSINESS FLOURISHES

Blyth-based start-up business, DW Styling, has flourished despite being established at the beginning of a global pandemic.

This has been helped by two Northumberland-based business support programmes - Business Northumberland and Northumberland Covid Business Response Programme (NCBRP) both delivered by Advance Northumberland.

With over 30 years of experience in the retail industry Debbie Waddle, managing director of DW Styling, established her business at the beginning of March 2020 and boasts a host of services including: style consultancy, personal styling, wardrobe decluttering and outfit sourcing for special occasions.

Covid-19 hit and Debbie knew she needed to alter the way her new business would run, but she was still determined to follow her dream.

She heard about Business Northumberland through a friend and after registering to the programme in June has since attended six fully funded virtual digital workshops including in Microsoft Excel, Search Engine Optimisation, Social Media and Pinterest.

Debbie said: "Business Northumberland has given me the confidence to do things I wouldn't have done previously, like setting up paid ads which has helped my reach of customers. I have worked really hard on getting more followers on Instagram and expanding my online presences since attending the workshops."

Business Northumberland provides support to small and medium enterprises across the North East who are looking to sustain and grow their business online. The fully funded support programme is funded by the European Regional Development Fund and Advance Northumberland, so there is no cost to eligible businesses when accessing the support.

After working with Business Northumberland Debbie was then introduced to NCBRP.

NCBRP is a new service for businesses that have been adversely affected by COVID-19. The Project is funded by the North of Tyne Combined Authority and delivered by Advance Northumberland on behalf of Northumberland County Council and the Northumberland Business Hub. It has two elements - Business Advantage and Digital Advantage.

Debbie signed up to the Business Advantage element of the new programme and gained 12 hours of one to one support with a dedicated coach. This focused on business planning and helping her to understand which direction DW Styling should take to ensure maximum coverage and engagement with potential customers, while adhering to social distancing rules.

For more information about Business Northumberland and/or the NCBRP fund, please email [business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk](mailto:business@advancenorthumberland.co.uk) or visit [www.businessnorthumberland.co.uk](http://www.businessnorthumberland.co.uk) or [www.northumberlandbusinessresponse.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandbusinessresponse.co.uk)



Debbie Waddle

Debbie continues: "Creating a business plan has supported the growth of my business. I didn't have one in place prior to the support from NCBRP and now I have something to look, follow and look back on to help continue to grow my business, connections and online presence.

"The support has been really valuable, without it I wouldn't be as far as I am now. I would recommend any business to apply to these Covid response programmes, even if you think you know everything about a subject, there will be something you don't and it can set you on the right path. Register for as many courses as you can!"

Emerging out of lockdown with a successful business plan, full ecommerce website and a new found confidence with social media, Debbie can look forward to the continued growth of her business and attending more digitally focused workshops.

Cllr Richard Wearmouth, Chair of Advance Northumberland and Cabinet Member for Economic Development at Northumberland County Council said: "It is great news that Debbie has not only benefited from existing Business Northumberland support but has very quickly become one of the first enterprises in the county to benefit from new support through the Northumberland Covid Business Response Programme.

"We are doing everything that we can to support businesses across Northumberland to cope with and recover from the impacts of Covid-19. I encourage business owners to take a look at these programmes, or to get in touch with us to discuss their needs."





# HR ADVICE PROVES CRITICAL AS CHOCOLATE MANUFACTURER PIVOTS TO AN ONLINE SERVICE DURING THE PANDEMIC



L-R: Jayne Hart, director, The HR Dept Newcastle with Cathy Stephenson, director, Sweetdreams and managing director Matthew Stephenson.

Following a dramatic fall in sales of 60% at the start of the pandemic, Cramlington-based chocolate manufacturer, Sweetdreams, turned to The HR Dept Newcastle for guidance on constantly evolving government advice, whilst also pivoting its business model to adapt to differing customers needs and new routes to market an online operation.

Sweetdreams, is a leading UK confectionery manufacturer and panning and coatings specialist, that makes the popular retail brand, Choc Nibbles, as well as supplying high quality confectionery to leading retailers throughout the UK.

Managing director, Matthew Stephenson, said: "We had to adjust and adapt to the lockdown, without knowing how long it would last or what affect it would have on Sweetdreams. Knowing The HR Dept Newcastle would manage key people issues, including the furloughing of all staff, meant I could focus on the commercial aspects of the business.

"Since 2017, we had seen significant growth across the business and in March of this year we were 20% up in turnover from the previous year, with that set to continue.

"Then came the pandemic. As an essential service we could not shut down but I immediately furloughed all 16 staff, except myself. Like many other businesses, we did not know what to expect next.

"Our customers are traditional sweet shops, independent retailers and leading UK high street stores and this market disappeared with the closure of the shops.

"During the first week of the lockdown I didn't sleep, my only focus being to save the business and that meant pivoting our offering almost overnight.

"Being a smaller, more agile business, meant we could look to new opportunities and markets, whilst

also working closely with our customer base on what they needed, whether that meant smaller production runs, product innovation or just someone to talk to.

"It was this entrepreneurial, flexible approach, that allowed us to get back on track very quickly and by the end of April we secured a large, one-off contract to a major UK food brand, as well as creating a new online sales channel via Amazon and our own website [www.sweetdreamsconfectionery.com](http://www.sweetdreamsconfectionery.com). Dovetail this with a strong customer base which was also reacting positively to the challenges they were facing, enabled us to come out of this period profitably and allowed us the time to bring furloughed members of the team back to work.

"April, saw our production turnover drop by 60% but by the end of May we were close to last year's numbers and, thankfully, June started to show growth again. During this time, we worked very closely with The HR Dept Newcastle, whose hands-on advice and expertise was critical when it came to planning. We covered everything from a doomsday scenario to growth.

"At a time when it was heads down, the constantly evolving government advice could have been overwhelming, so it was crucial we had clear and consistent HR advice. Our team at The HR Dept Newcastle provided us with precise and very timely information, which meant the implementation process was superfast.

"Without this essential external support, I fear we

may have been distracted from our key strategic goal of restructuring our business delivery model. This was an excellent partnership that was tested to the full during what was a time of unparalleled pressure and has assisted us to save the business and move forward with even greater confidence."

The HR Dept Newcastle was established in 2014 by director, Jayne Hart and is part of a national franchise of HR Depts across the UK, Ireland and Australia. Jayne and her team of HR advisors provide outsourced HR and employment law advice and support to small and medium sized businesses in the North East.

Jayne Hart, said: "Matt's story is one of resilience. Like all businesses, large or small, we have all had to adapt rapidly to a new business climate and a level of uncertainty which none of us have been through before.

"The team have worked closely with Sweetdreams and all our clients by keeping on top of government guidance and translating it in a way which was easy to digest.

"I have also tried to be there for clients by simply listening to them and understanding their needs. I am a small business owner going through exactly the same thing, so I can relate.

"It is of huge satisfaction to see how we have supported and added value to Sweetdreams and we will continue to do so in the months ahead."

# FOUR PENSION SCAM TACTICS TO WATCH OUT FOR

It was reported recently that MPs are being urged to begin an enquiry into pension scams.



Luke Watkinson, Joslin Rhodes Financial Adviser

This is following reports that one in three Britons have been the target of a scam during lockdown, with the coronavirus pandemic multiplying the risk of fraud.

But, how can we make sure we're not one of those victims?

Here's our top four scam fraudster tactics to be wary of:

- 1. Before 55** – it's not possible to get access to your pension funds before the age of 55, so if they're claiming this it's likely a scam and you should be wary.
- 2. Overseas investments** – equally you should be cautious of anyone claiming to be able to give you fantastic overseas returns. You should only invest in things you understand. All legitimate pension retirement and investment companies will only invest in regulated UK investments in-line with your expectations.
- 3. Cold calling** – did you know that cold calling about your pensions is illegal in the UK? But, this won't stop scammers trying it, so if you get a call out the blue and you've not filled in information online, they're probably a scammer trying their luck.
- 4. Guaranteed returns** – anyone who claims guaranteed returns of any kind are scammers. There's no such thing as a guarantee in investing, so be cautious of any claims that are too good to be true.

Ultimately, these scammers are very sophisticated and will try every tactic they can to get you to part with your money. If you're unsure always check the Financial Conduct Authority Register. All regulated financial services in the UK are registered as it's a legal requirement and the FCA are the regulators and moderators of the industry.

Visit [JoslinRhodes.co.uk](https://www.JoslinRhodes.co.uk) if you'd like more information on this or anything else regarding your pensions and retirement planning.

*Investments can go down as well as up, you may not get back what you put in.*

## RETURNING TO WORK AFTER LOCKDOWN

Employers have recently been given discretion to decide if all staff in office-based businesses who can work from home should carry on doing so or whether they will return to the workplace.

Therefore, we've set out some immediate considerations for employers to reflect on.

### 1. Return to work?

The first and most important step is to carry out risk assessments to determine if it is safe for your team to return. Once this has been done, then communicate the practical measures you are taking on a regular basis to help reassure staff that their health, well-being and safety is your top priority. Equally, make sure employees are clear about what rules and procedures they should follow both in the workplace and at home, especially if they begin to feel unwell.

On the other hand, if your team have been productive and successful whilst homeworking, consider if this should simply continue until you know if there will be a second wave or perhaps until the end of the year when social distancing may be relaxed.

### 2. Consider re-orientation or re-induction processes

It will be vital to have some form of re-induction for returning staff. Encourage and support managers to have a one to one return meetings, where a key focus is on health, safety and well-



being to facilitate an effective return to the workplace. This is especially important for those who have been furloughed, and should cover topics such as changes in company services or procedures, how specific customer queries or issues are being addressed, or changes in supply arrangements, as well as any changes to their work duties or tasks.

### 3. Culture check

Finally, it will be important for you to ensure that the organisation culture is inclusive. There is a chance the pandemic has had an unequal impact

across the workforce in many ways. The uneven nature of people's work, personal experiences, perhaps pay has been affected and the challenging nature of the lockdown and ongoing uncertainty, means there could be potential for some negative feelings creeping into the employment relations climate.

Finally, whether employees return to work or continue to work from home, don't forget to keep the team connection and fun element you worked so hard to achieve during lockdown going.

If you have any HR related questions we would be delighted to help so get in touch on 0191 236 1459 or [info@holgatehr.co.uk](mailto:info@holgatehr.co.uk)





## PHILANTHROPIC ORGANISATION EXPANDED TO BE BEACON OF LIGHT

Helping Founding Entrepreneurs, SME's and Charities

A philanthropic organisation, The Experience Bank, has expanded in a bid to raise further funds, which in turn can help more start-up companies, growing SME's and charities with senior recruitment, board positioning and board effectiveness.

Originally set up by Peter Neal as The Experience Bank, the newly named and expanded Experience Bank Group now incorporates The Experience Bank social enterprise company (Philanthropic support), along with a commercial venture providing two, symbiotic services - EB Board Level Recruitment and EB High Performing Boards. With this combination of specialist expertise, the Experience Bank Group is uniquely positioned to help organisations ensure they have not only the right skills in the boardroom but also optimum board performance with higher value creation.

Peter has joined forces with Andrew Marsh and between the pair they have committed to gifting a percentage from the commercial ventures to boost helping even more organisations through the philanthropic social enterprise.

Peter, who has over 25 years experience in the SME and charity sector, said: "There is a recognition by SMEs and charities, brought into sharp focus by the current difficulties and the challenge of planning a return to

sustainable growth, that they should regularly review the skillsets of their senior team and the value being added by the board.

"With our experience we are well aligned and empathetic to those needs. We find the right executives and non-executives for organisations, using well-honed intuition, insight and imaginative candidate sourcing - we believe that brilliant boards build brilliant businesses and getting this right is key to success."

For founding entrepreneurs and small charities, the social enterprise company, The Experience Bank, has a carefully curated network of inspiring, experienced people who can add value to many start-up businesses and small charities, and can match entrepreneurs to non-execs who support businesses to become investment-ready or to successfully achieve the next phase of commercialisation.

Andrew Marsh, who is focusing on EB High Performing Boards has over 25 years in board level positions and is an active non-exec himself. More recently, Andrew has undertaken several board effectiveness reviews for SMEs, scale-ups, charities and NFPs. As chair of Vistage and a number of boards, Andrew's experience places him in an ideal position to shape effective boards. He said: "We refocus organisations to improve their

performance by evaluating their board practices. We use independent, objective, board evaluation audits and practical, pragmatic development and improvement programmes that are both unique and dynamic.

"A recent Harvard Business Review article, which quotes a study by Lodestone (2020 private company board compensation survey) states that 91% of those surveyed identified an increase in EBITDA (profits) and revenues after they introduced their new board structures.

"Both Peter and I work under the same ethics and our mission is to help people. Therefore, our values and mission align to enable North East businesses and charities to thrive and perform through not only the placement of talented individuals but through an independent, objective evaluation. The process also offers sensitive support, structures, processes and assistance in getting the dynamics right to achieve optimum results.

"Our promise to gift 5% of all revenue to The Experience Bank social enterprise will enable more start-ups, early stage businesses, charities and social enterprises access to top notch, non-executive talent too."

**If you are keen to know more, then visit [www.theexperiencebank.co.uk](http://www.theexperiencebank.co.uk).**

**To gain access to The Experience Bank or for recruitment of a senior management or board position, email [peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk](mailto:peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk) or call Peter on 07843 329393.**

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three times a day."  
*Somerset Maugham*  
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Dominic Elsworth

# LAWYER OF THE MONTH

## DOMINIC ELSWORTH

Hargreaves Elsworth

### Which area of the law do you work in?

I am a Patent Attorney working in the area of intellectual property law, principally: patents, trade marks, designs and technology licensing.

### Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

No, the profession of a patent attorney is quite obscure. I think only a child of a patent attorney could envisage this career. I read an article in a newspaper about someone who was a patent attorney when I was in my second year at university. It sounded interesting and my career went from there.

### What has been your career path so far?

You need a first degree in engineering or science to do this job. I read agricultural engineering at the University of Newcastle. My first job after graduating in 1990 was as a Patent Examiner at the European Patent Office in the Hague (Netherlands). Whilst at the European Patent Office I completed a Masters degree at the University of London in intellectual property law. I worked in private practice for a few years where I qualified as a patent attorney in 1997. In 1998 I went to work for AGCO Corp a large US public company manufacturing agricultural equipment, including the global brand Massey Ferguson. The experience I gained working as part of an in-house legal team has been invaluable ever since.

In 2001 I got married, moved from the Midlands to the North East and set up Hargreaves Elsworth. In the following 19 years we have built up a solid practice serving mainly North East businesses and clients from the USA.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

We weathered the 2008 crash and are weathering the COVID 19 pandemic. We have been very lucky with our members of staff, the right people have come along at the right moments.

### Who do you most respect in your industry?

One of my inventor clients, the late David MacDonald. He is the only person I have met who had a fundamental grasp of maths, physics, chemistry and biology. A meeting with him exercised the brain like nothing else and his way of conducting business was old school.

### Which fictional lawyer would you most like to meet?

Atticus Finch, who shares his Christian name with one of my sons. I studied, "To Kill a Mocking Bird" for O-level English Literature. It was the one interesting book of the four we studied.

### What is your greatest strength?

Willingness to give a straight answer to a question.

### What is your biggest weakness?

Too much coffee.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

I would like to take a case to the Enlarged Board of Appeal at the European Patent Office (and win). There are only a handful of cases each year, so the chance of any individual patent attorney representing on one is slim.

### How do you see your industry evolving in the next ten years?

I think we will see the demise of the office to a large extent. The office will become a place to meet people with a handful of support staff. Everyone else will work from home or be out visiting clients.



## AVOIDING REDUNDANCIES. WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

With the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme due to close at the end of October, employers may already be considering if job losses could be on the horizon, and if steps can be taken to avoid job losses.

Many large employers, such as British Airways, Hays Travel and WH Smith have already announced job cuts. Citizens Advice has said it has seen an increase in demand for redundancy advice, and ACAS reported that calls to its redundancy advice line nearly tripled in June and July. Unfortunately, with Government support to businesses diminishing and with the continuing effect that the coronavirus pandemic is having on business, the next few months are unlikely to be much different. A recent research study has even suggested that as many as one in three UK employers expect to make staff redundant between July and September.

We at Collingwood Legal have a wealth of experience in managing redundancy situations and are here to tell you that it may not be all "doom and gloom" for employers. There are lots of options which employers could, and should, have in mind before taking the decision to make compulsory redundancies. We have set out some examples below:

- Agreeing flexible working with employees such as working reduced hours or job shares;
- If contracts of employment permit it, asking employees for a short period to stop working (temporary lay-off) or work reduced hours (short time working);



Helen Scott

- Reducing overtime, or stopping it altogether;
- Providing retraining for employees to do other jobs within the organisation;
- Offering voluntary redundancy or early retirement to all employees; and
- Putting a freeze on recruitment.

As well as these options potentially having the positive effect of avoiding compulsory redundancies, from an employer's perspective, it is important that the above options, as well as any other alternatives to redundancy, are seen to be considered when conducting a fair redundancy process. This is because should an employee bring a claim to an employment tribunal, a tribunal would look at what efforts the employer made to pursue alternatives to redundancy.

Should after exploring ways to avoid compulsory redundancies, they cannot unfortunately be avoided, then an employer must ensure that it carries out a legally compliant redundancy process notifying employees that they are redundant. Broadly this includes:-

- Identifying the business case for why redundancies are necessary;
- Warning and consulting with the affected employees;
- Fairly identifying and selecting employees from an appropriate selection pool; and
- Searching for and, if available, offering alternative employment.

If an employer proposes to dismiss twenty or more employees as redundant within a period of 90 days, then there are additional strict requirements to carry out a collective consultation.

Making redundancies is often a challenging time for all concerned, and with employees potentially struggling to find new employment in a difficult job market, loss of earnings' awards for successful unfair dismissal claims are likely to be more significant, and employees may be more likely to challenge the dismissal. Careful planning and management, particularly exploring ways to avoid or reduce redundancies, is therefore recommended before embarking on a redundancy exercise.

**If you need any advice or assistance on putting in place alternatives to avoid redundancies or making compulsory redundancies, or any other employment law or HR advice, contact me at [helen.scott@collingwoodlegal.com](mailto:helen.scott@collingwoodlegal.com) or on 0191 282 2880.**



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## GILES McCOURT

The commercial property lawyer at Newcastle based Muckle LLP talks Sunderland AFC, Tiny Lives and why pancakes with the family is the breakfast of champions.

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

Relationships are key to our business and that world doesn't stop because it's the weekend. There are times that I have to work at weekends, but it doesn't bother me, I see it as part of the service we provide. I am also the Vice Chair of The Tiny Lives Trust and I sometimes need weekends to catch up on emails and the goings on of the charity, if I haven't been able to during the week.

### Do you find it hard to switch off at weekends?

I live in Sunderland and have a lot of clients from the area, so it can be hard to switch off on a Friday. But then family life takes over and, having five year old twins, suddenly it's easy not to think about work!

### What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

Spending time with my wife and the twins. The legal profession is not 9-5. Add the daily commute to that and I don't normally spend many waking hours at home during the week. I also like to cook, it helps me switch off. I make a mean lasagne from scratch!

### Of a weekend, you'll usually find me...

It depends on what the kids schedule allows, but during the football season I can often be found at the Stadium of Light. I also like to catch up with friends and family. A lot of my friends have kids of a similar age, so it's a lot easier to fit socialising in.

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I like to do a spin class first thing, if I can make the 6:30am class. I also help organise the running club at work - the Muckle Runners - so I try to squeeze in a run, but it's always a battle to get up! The kids aren't up too early at weekends, usually around 8-8:30am which I suppose is a lie in.



Giles McCourt

### Big night out or a night in the house?

I like both! I am pretty easy going and don't really plan my social diary too far ahead. My house tends to be the social hub for my family so there is always someone calling in. I do like a night out, but I can no longer do the hangovers, which I cannot remember getting when I was in my 20's!

### Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

Football and motor racing are top of my list, but I also like rugby. I played when I was younger and have recently played in a couple of charity touch rugby tournaments (my brain moves at the same pace as it did, but my legs don't). I play golf, if you can call it that. I am not a serious golfer, it's more a social thing for me. I really enjoy the chance to catch up with people.

### Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

I like all kinds of food and love to try new cuisines. I am quite adventurous, especially anything oriental or far eastern. I am a big fan of The Rib Room or Fusion at Ramside Hall and the Flying Pizza in Leeds (I have family in Leeds). But there are some great Italian restaurants in Sunderland where I live and there is nothing better than a good old authentic pasta dish.

### What's the best thing about weekends?

Breakfast with my wife and the twins. I always make breakfast at weekends, which is usually pancakes. It may only be half an hour or so, but it's one of the few chances we get to sit down as a family to eat and it's as if the frenzy of the working week didn't happen.

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# THE MAGICAL CONSENT ORDER

Most people who are going through a Divorce right now, or who have been divorced and have used a solicitor will have heard of a Consent Order.

As a Divorce Solicitor I see this as being the magical document. It is the end of a negotiated process and the document that protects you from further claims being made against you by your spouse. It is in many ways more important than a Decree Absolute.

## What is a Consent Order?

Well the clue is in the name. It is an order of the court which sets out an agreement reached between you and your spouse in relation to your finances. The court expect the agreement to be fair taking into account your current assets, including housing, business assets, pensions, savings & investments, current income and any debts that you may have.

My simple aim is to swap financial information with my clients' spouses solicitors. I say simple but there is often a lot of work involved to compile this information. I will ask my client to provide written evidence in support of all those items that we are expected to disclose by way of full and frank disclosure. There is a list on the last page of what is known as Form E. Take a look and if you are about to begin divorce proceedings then compiling this information for your solicitor will save you a lot in legal fees. This form is used as a bench mark for the collection of information.

In particular I would expect to see all bank statements going back a year. That way I can look for unusual payments. One of my clients, "Christine" was sure that her husband was filtering money away. When I looked at his bank statements I could see money going out to another previously unknown account. I queried this and after following quite an audit trail it transpired that Christine's husband owned another house, in which he frequently stayed with another woman and their secret child.

I might commonly spot sudden frequent amounts of cash being removed from an account in the months before one party says that they want the marriage to end. Or people frequently "forget" to mention their terminal grant received when leaving the armed forces. Or the life policy that has an encashment value.

Regarding pensions, it is not good enough to just accept that the parties will split their pensions on

a fifty fifty basis in the case of longer marriages. Let's say two pensions are valued at 100,000 each. But if one of them is a civil service pension then the payment received for life may be far higher than a private pension. The correct way to address the issue of valuable pensions is to have them valued by an actuary who can advise as to the % of pension which should be transferred to one party from the other.

The name Consent Order implies that everything runs smoothly and that there is no ongoing angst in the background. Sometimes this is not the case. The couple may not get along at all. There is often a huge disparity at the start of a case in relation to financial expectations. I may have a client who has been married for forty years and who decides that they are not going to give their spouse any of their pension. If that spouse has a low pension and very little by way of savings and income then I'm afraid that any court would see things differently. My job is to manage your expectations and those of your spouse and their solicitor. I have been a divorce lawyer for 30 years and I have a very good idea as to what a judge will and will not order by way of a Financial Settlement.

There are parameters within which judges will operate. There is no set formula for any of this. I have to advance the arguments that suit your circumstances and needs or those of your children. I always have in mind what a judge must consider if this matter were being heard at court. These are some of the criteria;

- Income, earning capacity, property and other resources which each spouse has or is likely to

have in the foreseeable future, including in the case of earning capacity any increase in that capacity it would be reasonable to expect the spouse to take steps to acquire.

- The financial needs, obligations and responsibilities which each spouse has or is likely to have in the foreseeable future.
- The standard of living enjoyed during the marriage.
- The ages of each of the spouses and the length of the marriage.
- Any physical or mental disability of either spouse.
- The contributions which each spouse has made or is likely to make in the foreseeable future towards the welfare of the family, including any contribution by looking after the home or caring for the family.
- The financial needs of any child.
- Any physical or mental disability of any child.
- The manner in which any child was being educated and in which the couple expected the child to be educated or trained.

If I can reach a settlement on your behalf, without the need to attend court then I would say that is the best option. You have just avoided the cost of court, the length of time it takes to finalise a matter and you will both probably feel a lot better as you will have been instrumental in negotiating a settlement rather than having one imposed upon you by the court.



Jacqueline Emmerson

**If you require any help or advice relating to a financial settlement upon divorce then please don't hesitate to contact me on 0191 2846989 Newcastle or 0191 5676667 Sunderland or [je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk)**



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## HR TO HEART – WE'RE ALL IN THIS TOGETHER

Chris Maddock, partner Head of the Employment Team at commercial law firm Muckle LLP, discusses the value of a HR problem shared during COVID-19.

The power of collaboration is not something that I ever thought as an employment lawyer I would be writing about at my desk (ahem...kitchen table) on a sunny Friday - but the last few months have told me to never rule anything out!

This article is inspired by the resourcefulness, practicality and resilience that the North East and Cumbria community of HR professionals has shown throughout lockdown, which in turn gives me real hope for the future.

### Weathering the storm

At the beginning of 2020 no employer could have envisaged the issues thrown up by the responses needed to COVID-19.

When the pandemic arrived we saw a surge in demand for employment law advice; the need to understand and practically apply Government guidance as it frequently changed, often from hour to hour; and managing the uncertainty of what the near, medium and long term future looked like for us and our clients.

What became apparent early on during the response to COVID-19 was the sheer volume of information that employers were grappling with. Many HR leaders had to make decisions in isolation, based on an overload of information, and rely on their intuition as to what the right thing was to do.

The situation we all faced was the same, but with very different implications for each of us. One client aptly likened it to "us all being in the same storm, but in boats of different shapes and sizes".

Very rapidly we adapted to daily team knowledge sharing meetings, pulling together the information we needed from multiple news, political and legal



Chris Maddock

channels. The 10am daily CBI webinar became a team "must do" given the accuracy of its predictions, with the notes that we compiled on the latest position quickly being circulated to work colleagues, business partners and clients.

This helped with taking the daily decisions needed to weather the storm, but it did not equip HR leaders with the support that they needed for themselves. Nor did it provide a forum to plan for the future.

### Help for HR leaders

This idea was shared by others and early during lockdown Maureen Brown of Sullivan Brown Resourcing Partners asked me, together with Jules Smith of People Science Consulting, to take part in an online networking session to help support local HR leaders for as long as needed.

The first meetings took place with no agenda – other than to talk openly and to all commit to help each other as best we could. Little did we think that when we started the first session on 23 April, that by August we would have 24 sessions and over 31 hours of content under our belts, with more to come in September!

The sessions have morphed over time as the needs for HR leaders have changed – from initial furlough considerations and pooling of responses to common practical issues, to managing communication and remote working, to organisational planning, to managing physical and mental health and diversity and inclusion considerations.

All of the topics we have covered have been identified by those attending and the goodwill of over 20 external contributors from a range of organisations across the country has also shown what can be achieved from collective effort.

The sessions have provided a huge amount of discussion and learning, with many contributors sharing their personal stories, ideas and approaches.

### Want to take part?

There's still the opportunity for HR managers to get involved in the discussions and shape what we cover into the Autumn. Topics already requested include helping managers to coach employees remotely and helping employers to understand the Government's new Kickstart Scheme.

The sessions start again from 8 September and Mo, Jules and I will keep to our promise and continue to provide the sessions for as long as is needed. Who knows how long that will be, but it's never too late to join the conversation.

If you are a HR leader interested in taking part in future sessions, please contact [melanie.irding@sullivanbrown.co.uk](mailto:melanie.irding@sullivanbrown.co.uk). Or for any employment legal advice and support, contact [chris.maddock@muckle-llp.com](mailto:chris.maddock@muckle-llp.com)



## Virtual employment law updates

Wondering what the future holds for HR and the world of work? Join our employment lawyers live for the latest insight into COVID-19, Brexit and everything in-between at our virtual employment roadshows.

**When:** 5 topical sessions on Wednesdays, starting 23rd September

**Time:** 9.30am - 11.00am

**Where:** Online, from the comfort of your own personal space

**Cost:** Free

## book your place

Visit [www.muckle-llp.com/events](http://www.muckle-llp.com/events) to learn more and register, contact Anisha on 0191 211 7865 or email [events@muckle-llp.com](mailto:events@muckle-llp.com)





## BUYING A LEASEHOLD PROPERTY – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

With all the bad press that residential leasehold properties have received lately, one might wonder if there is any point in buying a leasehold property at all!

Why not abolish leaseholds and simplify land purchase with just freehold ownership. Unfortunately, it is not that simple. Under English Law, if there is an obligation to pay towards repair and maintenance of common items such as common grounds, lifts, main structure etc. then the system of leaseholds makes it easier for the landlord to collect such payments from successive owners of the properties. Therefore, there is still a place for leaseholds, particularly in the case of apartment blocks with communal areas.

### What are the issues?

Essentially, leasehold means that you do not own the ground on which your property is situated. You have permission from the landowner (freeholder) to stay in the property for a certain number of years (called the 'term') as long as you comply with the terms and conditions set out by the freeholder in a document called the 'lease'. There are certain statutory measures that assist leaseholders but other than that, the protection offered to leaseholders is largely what is provided for in the lease. Let's have a look at some of the recent issues that have caused a stir in the Conveyancing market that you should be aware of when buying leasehold properties.

### The Ground Rent Scandal

A relatively recent development with leasehold properties is that the vast majority of lenders now refuse to lend against leases that contain 'escalating ground rent provisions'. This is where the ground rent multiplies at certain intervals. This is for two reasons. Firstly, because the value of the freehold is increased as a result of such clauses and makes the cost of extending a lease much higher. Secondly, where the ground rent has a potential to go beyond £250 (or £1,000 in London), then, under the current law, the lease can be classed as what is known as an 'AST' which makes it easier for the Landlord to gain possession of the property. Whilst this what not what the law-makers intended, this is the position in law at the moment and, until it is changed,

leasehold properties with escalating ground rents are likely to be un-mortgageable.

### Lease extensions

Leases are often granted for an initial term of 99 years (although there is no reason why they can't be granted for a different term) and they need to be extended well before the term is up as most lenders require a certain minimum term when they agree to a mortgage. Leaseholders have a legal right to extend their lease upon paying a premium. One of the factors used in calculating the premium is something called 'marriage value' which comes into play when there are less than 80 years remaining on the lease term. This marriage value greatly increases the premium payable to extend the lease. Therefore, leases that have a short remaining term are often un-mortgageable until the term is extended, often at a great cost.

### Cladding

Since Grenfell, most lenders now insist that any cladding on apartment buildings must be form EWS 1 (or equivalent) compliant. This has caused a great deal of anguish to those flat-tenants who now find that they are unable to sell or mortgage any leasehold apartments in buildings that do not meet these requirements.

Every situation requires careful thought and professional advice to ensure that you and your assets are fully protected.

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miller** **LAW**

For a no obligation chat, contact our Leasehold Experts on 0345 900 5401 or email [enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@sweeneymiller.co.uk) and talk to our conveyancing team.



## BUSINESSES PACK INTO STACK

Sunderland's hotly anticipated leisure venue STACK Seaburn has revealed that its commercial units are almost full, after an influx of tenants signed on the dotted line to take space.

Just three of the 22 units at the seaside venue remain vacant, after a large number of businesses, many of them Sunderland based, committed to take space.

Units have been snapped up by many food and drink operators including local favourites Downey's Fish & Chips and Healthy Thaim, as well as various gin and wine bars. A range of lifestyle businesses are also taking space, including Woofs n Scruffs, a dog grooming and supplies business, and Hair & Skin, who will be offering laser therapies, hair and beauty services.

STACK's units are built from shipping containers that are assembled to make an enclosed village that can operate in all weather conditions, offering an exciting new destination for socialising and events.



## BELLWAY BEGINS WORK ON FINAL HOMES AT DURHAM GOLF COURSE SITE

Bellway Durham has begun work on the last nine plots at The Green, a new housing development being built on a former golf course in Durham.

The Green forms part of the wider redevelopment of the former Mount Oswald Golf Course. Almost 300 homes, new student accommodation for Durham University, a GP surgery and a convenience store will be delivered, alongside 25 acres of public open space.

Plans have also been submitted to restore the Grade II listed Oswald Manor House on the site into a new history centre which would house the local archives.

Bellway started construction work on The Green, a development of 54 four and five-bedroom houses, just over two years ago. The final homes are due to be completed by the end of the year and all properties on the site have now been sold.



## INTEREST IN UNIQUE HOUSING DEVELOPING CONTINUES TO GROW

A desire to live in the heart of a community has led to a surge of interest in a unique Newcastle housing development.

Steenberg's Yard at the Lower Ouseburn Valley is on course to be completed in summer 2021, as building work has continued despite the problems caused by COVID-19.

Those involved with the scheme have seen a huge amount of interest from people wanting the convenience of living close to the city centre, in a place which has the benefits of urban greenery and waterside living.

The new development is creating contemporary living spaces which also give a nod to the local historic warehouses in the conservation area. When completed, Steenberg's Yard will offer 28 duplex two and three bedroomed homes, all with outdoor terraces.

People who have registered their interest in the properties are now being offered a socially distanced meeting to secure their home.

## PREMIUM OFFICE DEVELOPMENT LAUNCHES IN GATESHEAD

Interest from office-hunters is predicted to be high for a new £2m Gateshead office development that boasts Grade A space adjacent to the iconic Tyne Bridge.

Adderstone Group have appointed Knight Frank to market its 5,259 sq. ft Tyne Bridge House office space, situated on Bottle Bank, which could accommodate up to around 50 staff.

With over 20 million cars passing it every year, Tyne Bridge House will be Newcastle and Gateshead's most prominent office location, delivering a significant benefit for the occupier's brand.

Tyne Bridge House will have a spectacular full height curved glazed façade and a double-height reception with a feature spiral staircase leading to a roof terrace with panoramic views, as well as parking, cycle storage and shower facilities. The site is just a three-minute walk from Gateshead Metro Station, providing connections across the North East.

The property is under construction and due to be completed Q4 2020.



- Commercial Rent Reviews and Lease Renewals -
- Schedules of Dilapidation and Condition -
- Rating Challenges -
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Tel: 0191 462 6 264



## IN LATER LIFE CHOICE REALLY DOES MATTER

At every stage of life, there are many questions that homeowners must answer. With more than one in five of us now aged 60 or over, one such question is where to live later in life. Specialist property developer, Pegasus may well have the answer, especially for Newcastle's later living market.

Pegasus' Jesmond Assembly is Lifestory's latest development in the heart of Jesmond, one of Newcastle's most vibrant neighbourhoods. Designed by award-winning Newcastle architect FaulknerBrown, the exclusive collection of one and two-bedroom homes epitomise an innovative and stylish approach to later living: your own apartment in a place you can truly call home thanks to an ethos driven by community, exceptional service and wellbeing. Pegasus quite simply creates high-end homes ideal for a new generation of later living home buyers who want to remain independent.

Part of Pegasus' ethos has also been rethinking and reinventing the communities and ways in which we live as we get older and Jesmond Assembly takes this to a whole new level with interiors that convey contemporary chic, elegance, and an understated wow factor. We are not getting old in the way that we used to, which is the appeal of Pegasus Jesmond Assembly. It is about moving or perhaps relocating to start the next chapter of your life and providing the opportunity to downsize to move up the luxury property ladder, the opposite of how many of us have come to view the concept.

Living at Pegasus Jesmond Assembly is a lifestyle choice and can be whatever owners want it to be. A secure "lock up a leave" while you travel on your next adventure or an enviable location from which to make the most of Newcastle's incredible culture, cuisine and entertainment. Whatever your reason for moving home, this beautiful neighbourhood in the heart of Jesmond has everything discerning and independent over sixties might look for in their next move.

The development enjoys a prime position on one of Jesmond's elegant, leafy avenues. As anyone in Newcastle knows, the neighbourhood has become one of the city's finest districts with boutique shops, cafes, restaurants and many attractions. Jesmond Metro is a two-minute walk from the development making it easy to get wherever the fancy takes you.

The new building is designed to enhance the character of Eskdale Terrace and the wider Conservation Area, using modern forms influenced by traditional architecture. The site on which Jesmond Assembly has been created is of historic interest having once been home to Central Newcastle High School for Girls. The name Jesmond Assembly celebrates the trailblazing heritage of the school perfectly evoking the area's history while the architecture reflects its future.

Stepping through the impressive entrance, owners will be greeted by a series of elegant and welcoming shared areas which offer a high-end experience. Here, owners will be able to make the most of socialising or entertaining guests in the inviting communal lounge or the beautiful landscaped terrace to the rear of the building. Owners of one of the contemporary and spacious homes will also enjoy a 24-hour concierge style service, where the on-site team of 'Lifehosts' make all the difference to living at Jesmond Assembly.

The development provides a guest suite for visiting family and friends offering a place to retreat after enjoying a delicious bite to eat in the on-site social kitchen or the delights of Newcastle.

The stunning show home due to launch this September, will give potential purchasers the opportunity to see first-hand the light, contemporary and spacious homes available. The selection of one and two bedroom homes, some with Juliet balconies or terraces, offer open plan living areas, beautiful contemporary kitchens, well-appointed bedrooms with fitted wardrobes and bright, modern bathrooms. To view the development is to discover the exceptionally high specification and high standard of service which owners at Pegasus Jesmond Assembly can expect from taking care of building maintenance inside and out to ensuring the support provided is always tailored to owners needs.



PEGASUS  
JESMOND ASSEMBLY

Part of **Lifestory**

**Pegasus Jesmond Assembly is later living, but not as we know it and beyond the comfort and elegance, the overriding sense is one of community. To explore your options at Pegasus Jesmond Assembly call 0191 247 4463 or visit [Lifestory.group/Pegasus](https://lifestory.group/Pegasus). Prices at Jesmond Assembly start from £300,000 for a one-bedroom home.**







## HOW TO MAKE YOUR OFFICE FIT FOR THE NEW NORMAL

Ian Tew, Partner at Knight Frank Newcastle, shares his expertise on improving offices.

### The Covid-19 pandemic has shone a huge spotlight on offices.

On their relevance – do we even need them? On their functions – what do we need them for? Exactly?

On their attractiveness. How do we make them places people want to return to?

So, I'll tell you what we're seeing. The trends. And, some solutions.

There are many physical changes – large and small – you can make to help achieve an office that works for you.

#### Achieving agile

We are seeing the trend for enabling an 'agile workforce' rocket. This has been on the rise for some time, influenced by technology and staff demands, but the pandemic has accelerated the need for it.

Being 'agile' basically means, offices need to support employees to work how, where and when they choose – by giving them all the technology and tools they need to do this.

We have recently been working for a professional services firm on a refurbishment and the client has changed their requirement due to Covid-19. They are taking less space than originally planned because their team is enjoying working from home. Their goal now, is to make their office higher quality and a better, more enjoyable, inspiring experience for their people.

There is an ever-hastening trend of replacing 'owned desks' with different types of space depending on the task.

Landlords are likely to see an increased demand for space that has already been, or will be, fitted-out. This could be a consequence of financial pressures

on a business, or because moving into a quality space that is already complete and Covid-safe – is easier.

We are actively working on creating some of these 'enhanced rentals' for clients and predicting more of this to come. Whether that be marketed in a finished form. Or fitted-out as part of a transaction deal.

#### Technology

Tech has a huge role to play in supporting safer, user-friendly office spaces in security, health and managing the environment we work in.

Simple changes are possible. Such as the use of available apps to enable work-station bookings. Apps that show you when your office is busy, and which parts of it are less populated etc. All very clever.

There are simple sensors that automate taps, doors and flushes for hygiene.

There is a new focus on expanding integration of these things and to make more use of intelligence, including sensors that monitor users' temperatures, for example.

There is a need to significantly reduce touch points in an office. Businesses are installing temporary devices to enable opening doors with your feet. Superloos are on the rise because they help us socially distance by including a sink and toilet in one space. The list goes on...

There is a new emphasis on increasing ventilation rates, air filtration and air monitoring.

Microbe resistant surfaces are growing in demand. Paperless and clutter-free offices that are easily cleaned, are being enabled.

#### Re-inventing redundant space

And finally, the spaces within offices are being

reinvented and repurposed to make them more suited to a socially-distanced world. This doesn't have to be limiting and, with well-considered design, can add attractive features to offices, including in space that was previously deemed redundant.

For example, roof spaces and outside land is being turned into alfresco or partially covered areas for employees to meet and work. Basements and stairwells are being looked at in a different light – can these be used in a more useful way, too? Cycle storage, possibly?

Interior walls are coming down and being re-configured to minimise bustle.

#### Make your office about people

More than ever before, your office space needs to be attractive. If you want your employees back in the office, we are advising that you find out what they miss about it. Respond and adapt.

Is it the collaboration? The social interaction? If so, how can you physically change your spaces to enable this, in a safer way?

Do they appreciate a change of scenery? Could your office be more inspiring?

We're noticing a trend for office interiors that enliven and improve user wellbeing. For instance, by introducing nature, like plant walls. By embracing the bold and ditching the boring.

There's growing evidence that quality and well-thought-out workplaces which incorporate natural elements like plants, light, colours and shapes, have noticeable — and measurable — benefits.

There's generally room for improvement in every office.

Ian Tew works in the Building Consultancy and Project Management team at Knight Frank in Newcastle.  
He can be contacted at [ian.tew@knightfrank.com](mailto:ian.tew@knightfrank.com) 0191 594 5012.



PEGASUS  
JESMOND ASSEMBLY

# WELCOME TO THE NEXT CHAPTER OF YOUR LIFE



Computer generated image is indicative only.

One and two bedroom later living homes located in the heart of Jesmond, now available to purchase off-plan.

Book an appointment to view our show home due to be open in September. If you exchange in 2020 we will pay your service charge for the first year.\*

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\*Terms and Conditions apply, please speak to our Sales Team for more information. Prices correct at time of going to print. August 2020.



# Bright & Good News

## IN THE HOUSING MARKET



COACH HOUSE



LANESBOROUGH COURT



SYCAMORE SQUARE

IN A TIME WHEN WE RECEIVE A ROLLERCOASTER OF GOOD AND BAD NEWS ON A NEAR DAILY BASIS IN RESPECT TO THE VIRUS AND THE PANDEMIC, ALONG WITH HOLIDAY COMPANIES AND TRAVEL ARRANGEMENTS, IT IS NICE TO KNOW THAT ONE PART OF THE ECONOMY IS STARTING TO HAVE A BRIGHT FUTURE. THE HOUSING MARKET TOOK ITS HIT DURING THE PANDEMIC AND THE LOCKDOWN,

**AND I AM NOW DELIGHTED TO REPORT THAT AS OF JUNE 1ST THE HOUSING MARKET HAS VERY MUCH “BOUNCED BACK”.**

**O**ur June figures throughout the company are 125% of target and were a good reaction to the early return of sales from the lockdown measures. On a brighter note, our July figures are 205% of our performance last year, and 235% of our target this year. July has certainly been an extremely busy time for all the offices, who are collectively experiencing excessive demand for properties throughout the region. The demand is uniform throughout all of the business divisions. Our lettings operation has been extremely busy with people looking for high quality homes and looking to move very quickly. The demand from excellent tenants is superb and we are extremely pleased with the response to recent instructions. The residential sales market cannot cope with some of the excessive demand and, due to the high levels, we have seen exceptional best and final offer situations. It is not unusual now for us to see 10% to 20% more than the original asking price being offered simply because of the demand, where perhaps 40 or 50 people are looking at the same property and are very much wanting to purchase it as quickly as possible. This is a true “free” market which dictates the value and it always happens in a time when excess demand meets low supply. We are doing our very best to market our houses comprehensively and achieve the best price for our clients, and certainly do this in a fair and equitable way, and ‘best and final offers’ is the fairest way of transacting such excessive demand. It finds out the real value of property compared to what we may have originally experienced 6 or 12 months ago.

The new homes market continues to build large numbers of buyers and we are very excited about the imminent launch of our superb scheme, Jesmond Assembly on Eskdale Terrace, in the heart of Jesmond, for those young of age at 60 years and more. The apartments provide a stunning state of the art pied-a-terre and a fabulous base for those that wish to spend more time travelling and locking up their home in Newcastle. The former Sanderson Hospital site, set back from Salters Road, Sycamore Square, is now also beginning to take shape. The foundations are being prepared and the site is currently underway for its exciting construction. We expect to reveal some opening prices and sales on this site in the early Autumn of this year. Both sites can be closely followed, and enquiries given, by contacting Ashleigh Sundin on 0191 2233500. Throughout the region we are seeing some fabulous properties coming on to our books for sale and many of these are being snapped up. One of the prime examples in Gosforth is a state-of-the-art loft apartment at the very trendy and sought after Lanesborough Court. The conversion of this beautiful period building created one or two very ‘one-off’ loft apartments, one of which has come on to the market at a guide price of £375,000. It is a truly exceptional and beautiful apartment, with open plan living, galleried bedrooms and state-of-the-art bathroom and kitchen fittings, as well as outstanding lighting, chrome balustrades and beautiful tiling. The property is available immediately and should be viewed as

quickly as possible to appreciate its outstanding presentation.

In Hexham, the development of the Coach House on the Corbridge road, leading out to the east of Hexham, is also creating a large amount of interest and activity. The clients have now completed this scheme and it is being offered at outstanding value for money, with four and five bedroom detached houses available from £429,000, with the larger style properties being offered at £525,000, which is great value. This price level also hits the current stamp duty incentive, which is available until March 2021, giving people £15,000 saving on their purchase at around £500,000. The remaining houses are available through Julie Douglas at our Ponteland Office on 01661 823951 and viewings are quickly taking place, so buyers should act with good haste.

Wherever we focus our property interests throughout the region at the moment the activity levels are strong and homeowners should take comfort that property values are rising. I wish all of our readers a safe and secure summer, in the knowledge that good practices are being supported by all of our offices and our team of colleagues, who very happily carry out distanced viewings and full PPE viewings for all of our clients.

If I can be of any assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me personally.

**Duncan Young**  
Chairman

[duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:duncan.young@sandersonyoung.co.uk)





## Seaton Burn House Seaton Burn, Newcastle

Seaton Burn House represents an exceptional and rare opportunity to purchase a superb Grade II listed Georgian mansion in 30 acres of private, beautifully maintained grounds. This substantial country retreat, formerly Bellway plc's Head Office, is surrounded by farmland, has many period features, an impressive south facing aspect and numerous outbuildings which include additional accommodation.



**Price Guide:** Price on Application

**rare!** From Sanderson Young

**Ashleigh Sundin**  
 ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk  
**rare! Office:** 0191 223 3500  
 www.sandersonyoung.co.uk







## THE RED HOUSE, APPERLEY ROAD, STOCKSFIELD



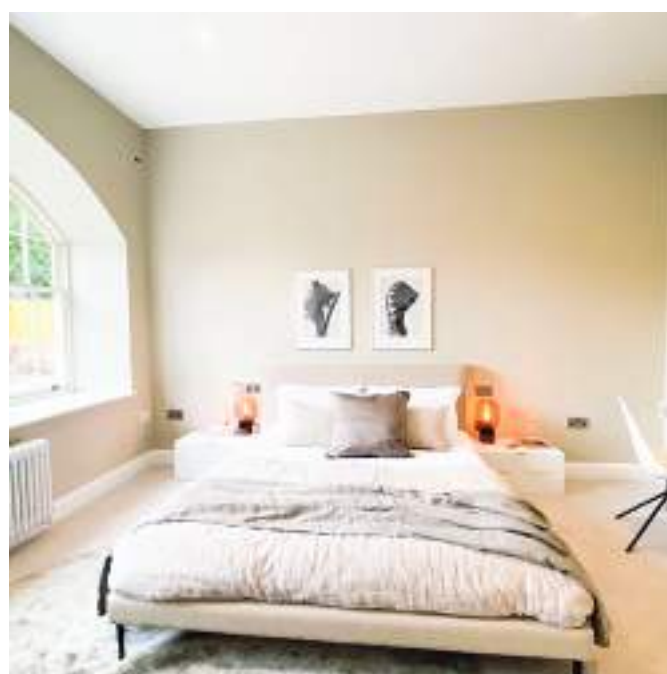
## PRICE ON APPLICATION

The Red House is a magnificent stone built period property of impressive proportions. Originally built in 1897, fine details of the Victorian era are evident including ornately carved wooden barge boards to the roof line and mullioned windows. The current owners have carried out extensive work to bring back the grace and style associated with the period, blending stylish contemporary design and traditional features. High quality fixtures and fittings combine with beautiful décor to create a stunning five bedroom mansion with wonderfully appointed principal reception rooms, a stunning open plan kitchen, dining and family room and a luxurious leisure complex with swimming pool. Externally, the grounds of circa 1.85 acres include rolling lawns, a sun terrace the full width of the property, mature trees and shrubs, a formal fish pond, a sunken kitchen garden, and a detached garage and double car port with games room.



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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**BY APPOINTMENT ONLY**





## HOW THE NEW HOMES AT LAMBTON PARK ARE CREATING A LASTING LEGACY

Miller Homes at Lambton Park is a brand new and exclusive community unlike any other development of new build homes.

Located within Lambton Estate in Chester-le-Street, once complete the development will comprise 106 high-quality homes. A collection of three, four and five-bedroom homes are available to buyers now as well as two-bedroom apartments.

The homes are completely bespoke and were designed to be in keeping with the heritage and landscape of the iconic Estate, by renowned architect and interior designer, Ben Pentreath.

Developers Miller Homes worked with North East architect Pod to create these special homes and ensure they will have a lasting legacy. One of Pod's directors, Adam Lee, talks about the architectural decisions behind the homes to bring this unique community to life.

"Developing in the grounds of a country estate with an architectural history dating back to King Stephen of England (1096-1154) adds such a rich and unique heritage, making it a truly unparalleled development. It is not about recreating historical buildings, it is about learning from and honouring the knowledge and examples of tradition and attempting to follow those patterns, creating wonderful public spaces, beautiful streets and a vibrant community.

"It was really interesting to work together with Ben Pentreath on his vision for the homes. Ben, through his classical training and extensive work with H.R.H The Prince of Wales's urban extension to Dorchester has provided

invaluable guidance and knowledge throughout each stage of the development. The relationship has flourished into a dynamic team working partnership with constant contact, analysis and feedback, all working together to deliver this bespoke development for Miller Homes.

"Each area of the development is defined by an architectural period. The local area has provided wonderful examples; St. Barnabas Lodge on the estate in particular, showcases beautiful red brick detailing, decorative ridge tiles, and many other elaborate details, that have given inspiration for the homes' design."

Some of the first buyers to start a new life at Lambton Park were Anne and Ed Parrott. They had spent more than a year searching for a new home, when they finally spotted the home that they knew immediately was for them.

Anne said: "We wanted a change and to move to a new area that was a little more connected and closer to more amenities but still had the same quiet country feel to where we were living before.

"We'd been searching for a new house for months, visiting developments all across County Durham and North Yorkshire. We originally wanted to move to Richmond but then we spotted the new Miller Homes development at Lambton Park. I mentioned to Ed that they looked like a house we used to live in, somewhere we were really fond of, and right away we knew we had to go visit."

For more details visit [www.millerhomes.co.uk/new-homes/north-east/lambton-park-lambton-park.aspx](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk/new-homes/north-east/lambton-park-lambton-park.aspx)



Anne and Ed fell in love with The Aspen five-bedroom home. "We knew it was the right fit for us after looking round for the first time. It has such a large spacious living room, large bedrooms and a lovely big kitchen and dining area. Not to mention the double garage - we could live in that alone! There's a study too which I've actually turned into a nice quiet sitting room where I like to read. We love living here."

The couple moved into their new home in June and took advantage of Miller Homes' Part Exchange scheme\* to sell their former property.

Andrew Somerville, sales director at Miller Homes North East, said: "The Lambton Estate is a beautiful area, full of large open spaces, woodland, wildlife and nature. To live on its doorstep would be a dream for any homeowner who loves the countryside. I can see why Anne and Ed were so quick to fall for the area.

"When we create our developments, we ensure they reflect and encompass the local area, while offering homeowners access to the amenities and services they need. Although they are new build properties, we worked with Ben Pentreath and the Pod team to make sure each of our homes at Lambton Park are designed to keep that historical feel of the iconic Lambton Estate area, while providing modern living on the inside. They are new homes that offer a historical charm. I'm really glad Anne and Ed have settled in well and are so happy in their new surroundings."

The show home at Miller Homes at Lambton Park



Anne Parrott





# 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. 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.

**Book an  
appointment:**  
**03330 605 825**  
**[www.millerhomes.co.uk](http://www.millerhomes.co.uk)**

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County Durham  
DH3 4AN

**Sales Centre open:**  
**7 days a week,**  
**10.30am - 5.30pm**



# millier homes

## The History

Lambton Park, the ancestral seat of the Earls of Durham, is one of the most intriguing historic places in the County capturing, as it does, the changing story of the Region.

The beginnings of the Estate as it is seen today lie with the first Earl of Durham, who designed the Park in the then popular Picturesque style. Buildings, from the Castle to the many cottages, were carefully conceived within this landscape-led design.

Lambton Park is still evolving. The traditional estate enterprises of farming and forestry sit alongside a growing residential and business community. It is this special combination of community, heritage and landscape that sets Lambton Park apart.

\*Part Exchange is subject to availability, status and eligibility. All offers are plot specific and subject to Miller Homes' standard terms and conditions. These are limited offers and may be withdrawn without notice. Estate Agent's fees paid for following instruction made by or on behalf of Miller Homes. No reimbursement will be made for marketing fees or Energy Performance Certificate or Home Report instructed prior to reservation.

\*\*Offer is subject to a satisfactory homebuyers report. Your present home must meet certain basic qualifying criteria to be eligible for Part Exchange.

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## REVISING THE PLANNING SYSTEM – A FALSE DAWN OR A TRUE CHANGE?

Architect, Neil Turner, looks at proposed changes to the planning system.

Following Boris' call to 'build, build, build', the government announced a shake-up of the planning system at the beginning of August. This was followed by the housing minister, Robert Jenrick, outlining proposals for a new zonal planning system which would see hospitals, offices and schools granted automatic permission across areas of the country, with the promise of new jobs in construction and design cited by the minister.

Under the proposed changes, councils would be able to designate three zones, - 'growth', 'renewal' and 'protection'. The plans are due out for consultation this summer and include ideas such as new development corporations taking over planning from local authorities. I think we have seen this before but nonetheless the new corporations can buy land, grant permissions, and sell it on, all for the benefit of the public purse.

What is of real interest is the proposed simplification of the current planning system. Since 1945, the planning system has grown ever more complex with even the simplest scheme now requiring multiple reports to satisfy the local authority.

Under the proposed system, a council would check applications were in line with local development plans. All designs would be checked against design codes which would be incorporated into the local plans.

Therefore, faster permissions are promised, especially in designated 'growth' zones once a design is in line with a local development plan. Other zones include 'renewal' (brown field sites in urban areas) and 'protection' (green belt land and areas of outstanding beauty).



Neil Turner

I am interested to see how this is to be defined. Over the years a number of design codes have come and gone because they can never be more than a guide. Who is going to police this standard?

It's my long-held view that good design is specific to a place, a view, and a skill to interpret this information into a specific building design. Producing design guides may assist the public on illustrations of quality but I remain suspicious that they can become a lazy way of defining design quality.

The government wants to speed up development control to aid the economy and I agree, the system

has morphed out of control. An industry of planning consultants has grown and are now required to talk the language to planners for applications.

Recently I have submitted applications for medical centres, town houses, an individual house, and a Church and the one thing they had in common was a ridiculous amount of reports, irrespective of the size or complexity of the applications. These reports cost money, time and effort from both the client and architect. On one application I had a report for virtually every letter in the alphabet!

So, I applaud the minister for saying we should simplify the system, but I have heard it before.

Dividing a map into areas to create three types of zones is not going to be done overnight. Councils have been working on local plans, in some cases, for many years.

Development corporations can work well with the right energetic and knowledgeable leaders and I would encourage this approach in the North East.

My simple approach is cut the red tape, reduce the madness for reports on everything into a simplified planning assessment based on quality. Once approved, let a scheme come forward with detail conditions on the land and its surroundings. Why do we expect all developers to spend up front, only to be rejected? The conditions or confirmations can be laid out like a menu for approval. This will incentivise the developers -large and small - to complete their approvals prior to start on site. We can then free up our planning system to create planning zones that will allow economic recovery and the right development.

Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [neil.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:neil.turner@hlpuk.com). [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)

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Over 65s group enjoying the lunch club.

## BERNICIA FOUNDATION CASH BOOST HELPS TACKLE LONELINESS IN GATESHEAD

A charity that provides lonely and isolated older people with a place to come together and socialise is one of the first organisations to be awarded a grant from The Bernicia Foundation, a £1m funding programme that supports people and communities in the North East.

Teams and Bensham Community Care has received £6000 from the Foundation's Inclusion Grant to support its activities that bring together people aged 65 or over.

The organisation, which is celebrating its 30th year, hosted around 90 people each week pre-lockdown and is aiming to resume its clubs again in September. Those attending enjoy home-cooked meals and entertainment such as quizzes and games, while also chatting with friends old and new.

Additionally, a twice-weekly lunch club for men, many of whom are widowers, encouraged them to get out and about and share their feelings of loss with other males going through the same thing.

Michelle Scott, a Trustee at Teams and Bensham, said: "Our lunch clubs are really popular and the Day Centre makes a huge difference to the lives of people who come here – many who would otherwise go days without seeing or speaking to anyone. They're a social lifeline for people who simply don't have the friendship and support we all need to live happy and fulfilling lives.

"We're delighted to have a successful application for the Inclusion Grant and thank the Bernicia Foundation for their generosity. The money will go towards the running of the lunch clubs once again and activities such as arts and crafts, providing



Chrissie Bate (Left) taking part in activities at the club

the meals and maintaining the minibus service for those who otherwise wouldn't be able to attend the club."

Chrissie Bate (92) first came to the Teams & Bensham Community Care charity over 25 years ago, starting with weekly aquafit sessions at a local swimming pool and a weekly exercise class, and attends the Tuesday lunch club for crafts.

She said: "I really enjoy my craft group. We have learnt so much about card making, we've even done wedding invitations for one of the charity's volunteers - if I say so myself, they were beautiful. We have also made stained glass windows, one of which is in the local doctor's surgery and three others are in our day centre windows where the lunch clubs are held, showing what our club is about.

"I have made so many friends and it's great that the project minibus picks us up at our door and then brings us home again. During the Covid-19 crisis, it has been difficult not being able to go out or have any visitors, just seeing my family through the window. More recently they come and sit in the back garden.

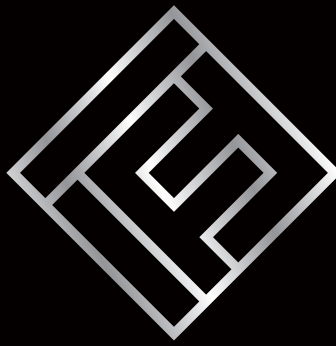
"I have missed going to the Tuesday lunch club and chatting and laughing with the group. Hopefully it won't be long before we are all back enjoying each other's company again and having a good catch up."

Andrea Malcolm, executive director of people, homes and communities, added: "Teams and Bensham Community Care is a really great organisation and we're pleased to support such a vital service that is clearly well-loved and valued by its members.

"Loneliness and isolation are very real problems that affect both peoples' mental and physical health and so it's hugely important that places like the Day Centre have the financial support to continue to be there for their local community."

The Bernicia Foundation encourages applications from organisations committed to delivering real community benefits, such as tackling loneliness and accessing employment opportunities, as well as providing support for young talent to flourish.

For more information visit [www.berniciafoundation.com](http://www.berniciafoundation.com)



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Laura Ruxton

## DUNWOODIE ARCHITECTS - BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE

Most architectural practices tend to operate in a broad range of construction sectors. However, some become recognised for one particular field.

That is the case with Newcastle-based Dunwoodie Architects.

Okay, they are skilled in designing offices, retail, commercial & residential; they design new hotels and produce plans for hotel developments. In the retail sector they have worked with Marks and Spencer, Asda, Sainsbury's. They have worked on the Stack leisure development & the Newgate Centre in the centre of Newcastle and are currently completing Stack Seaburn which is soon to open.

But the heart of their expertise can historically be found in the public sector and in particular the healthcare sector.

"Since Dunwoodie Architects was founded in 1990, we have always been heavily involved in architectural work for the NHS and private healthcare," said joint director & owner, Laura Ruxton. "Our founder, Mike Dunwoodie, had previously been working closely with the Northern Regional Health Authority but when the organisation was dissolved he saw an opportunity to work with some of the new authorities around the UK. He brought together a team of individuals with a wealth of experience in the healthcare sector so that we have now, 30 years later, become recognised as one of the leading specialist architects in the country for working with health authorities, although the company has also now expanded into the commercial, retail and residential sectors."

Laura, who came to Newcastle in 2006 via her home country of Colombia, and Switzerland where she concluded her architecture and business qualifications, has been with Dunwoodie Architects for her entire career. She was also instrumental in merging Dunwoodie with Swift Architects, owned by Peter Swift, in 2017.

A quick scan of their website...[www.dunwoodiearchitects.co.uk](http://www.dunwoodiearchitects.co.uk)...will show the level of importance the company places on its work for the public health sector. Their portfolio of projects with the NHS, hospitals, care homes, health centres, GP surgeries and other healthcare providers is extensive.

In our region they provided architectural services for North Tyneside General and South Tyneside hospitals,

University Hospital Durham, North Tees and Hartlepool hospitals, Sunderland Royal Infirmary and Queen Elizabeth in Gateshead. They are currently working with the RVI in Newcastle on their new multi-storey car park.

Elsewhere around the country you will find Dunwoodie Architects' work at hospitals in Hull, Scarborough and Sheffield.

Good news obviously spreads far and wide because the business has also worked for hospitals in Canada and has recently completed work for the planning and design of a new €100m Outpatient Department at the Mater Dei Hospital in Malta.

It has now got to the stage that Dunwoodie Architects is seen as an industry leader when it comes to working within the health sector.

"We believe in creating architecture that makes a significant contribution to the quality of the built environment, our surroundings and places in which we live and work," added Laura. "Through our architecture we aim to create spaces and environments that have a positive impact on people's lives, be it living, working, socialising or healing. This is especially important with hospitals, surgeries and healthcare centres. These buildings need to serve a variety of purposes but principally they are a place of work for the staff and a place where the general public go for treatment and care. We need to make sure that the building 'works' for both parties. The staff need to have the space and facilities while the general public need to feel comfortable in the environment.

Working for the NHS and other healthcare providers can be complicated because there are invariably a whole host of specifications, constraints & criteria which have to be met. Thankfully, 30 years of experience in this sector allows us to anticipate a lot of the potential pitfalls and move the project on quickly."

In other words, Dunwoodie Architects are the classic example of...'been there - done it.'

Dunwoodie Architects. They had designs on the past; now they're building for the future.

**Do you have a project that you'd like to discuss?**

You can contact Laura, Peter and their team at Dunwoodie Architects by calling 0191 3758838 or emailing [info@dunwoodiearchitects.co.uk](mailto:info@dunwoodiearchitects.co.uk)





Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

## BANANA BREAD AND DOGS CHASING CARS

The law of unforeseen consequences has been hard at work during the Covid-19 crisis with locked-down people discovering talents they never imagined they possessed. Plaster and some building materials are in short supply due to a rush of DIY activity, some unlikely social media stars have emerged and enough banana bread has been made to feed a sizeable army.

Interesting times too in the property sector. On the commercial side, some tough rent negotiations are ongoing and there is an anticipation of voids in the leisure, entertainment and hospitality sectors as small businesses are forced to close their doors. Office accommodation is one to watch as businesses discover some workers are happier and more productive working from home.

Empty offices can now be converted to residential premises without the need for planning permission by applying for Permitted Development Rights (PDR). This is a great idea on paper, providing an easy route to convert empty offices into much needed inner-city accommodation. Unfortunately, unscrupulous landlords have used PDR to create tiny living spaces, often with no windows or natural ventilation. These properties have been referred to as 'the slums of the future' and it remains to be seen if there is will on the part of Government to regulate PDRs.

Our block management division has had an interesting time of it with a flood of instructions from owners of blocks of flats. There seem to be two factors in play here. First, a number of large block management companies have simply run up the shutters since the beginning of lockdown. Phones and emails go unanswered, maintenance is neglected yet leaseholders are still expected to pay a management fee.

Second, people with time on their hands can research precisely what it is they are getting for that fee, then how easy it is to take back control of their block management. This latter is relatively easy by enacting Right to Manage legislation. But for leaseholders, it can be a bit like a dog chasing a car. When he catches it, what is he going to do with it?

Block management is a complicated business for leaseholders. Each leaseholder needs to have a share

in the limited company setup to manage the block. The lease is governed by Landlord and Tenant law, the limited company by Company Law. While these two systems run roughly in parallel, there are grey areas and here be dragons.

In a recent example, a leaseholder demanded from us personal details on all other leaseholders in the block. We thought this an unreasonable request so the matter ended up in the High Court. We won. The same leaseholder brought the same action in another block in Greater Manchester. He won.

In both cases barristers put the case for either side and the learned judges reached a decision. Or rather, they reached two different decisions on the same set of facts. If the legal experts cannot agree on an interpretation, what chance has the layman? Hence our rush of instructions and a halt to banana bread production.

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.

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## **3-bed detached house for sale on Esperley Avenue, Newcastle Great Park**

**£235,000**

This property is a Taylor Wimpey design with spacious hallway, lounge, kitchen/diner, WC and utility room. On the first floor there is a spacious master bedroom with dressing area, en-suite, bedrooms two and three and the family bathroom. The property is heated by gas, has upvc throughout, radiators and light fittings in all rooms.



## **3-bed mid-terrace house for sale on Elemore Close, Newcastle Great Park**

**£199,950**

This property, built in 2012, is a Taylor Wimpey design. The house style is split over 3 floors, fully UPVC double glazed with gas combination boiler central heating. All rooms equipped with radiators and light fittings. This property is beautifully presented throughout. Television and telephone points installed.

## **4-bed terraced house for sale on Wolsingham Road, Gosforth**

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Ground floor comprising of hallway, sitting room, dining room and kitchen/family room to the rear. The first floor has bedrooms two, three and four plus the family bathroom and the laundry room. The second floor has bedroom one and the en-suite. The property is heated by gas and has Hive heating control. There are radiators and light fittings in all rooms. The property benefits from having CCTV front and back for additional security.



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Maddy Houghton

## LIFELONG LEARNING IS THE KEY TO UNLOCKING A CAREER YOU LOVE

Discussing the importance of continued professional development, Maddy Houghton, Head of Delivery at Fabric, shares her experience of driving her marketing career progression, and her advice for those looking to do the same.

Fresh out of university four years ago, I knew I wanted to get into marketing, but I didn't know how. Like many I'd chosen to do a degree in a subject that I loved (English Literature) and, at 19 didn't think too much about the career prospects that would be available to me afterwards. I spent a long time evading the 'so you're going to be a teacher question' and instead put all my energy into researching professional development courses that would help me enter a career path I loved.

I spent hours seeking out learning opportunities hoping they would make me more desirable to employers and gained a lot of knowledge of the industry. But what I never got, was real exposure into what the jobs I wanted entailed beyond the job description. When I eventually got into marketing, I didn't have a practical understanding of what I needed to do to stand out.

Looking back, it's clear that the learning experiences that were available to me were all focused around academic learning. This wasn't something I thought to challenge as it was what was so familiar after all my years in education. And still now, the idea of professional development for many can catapult us back to our school days – it's often perceived as something we have to do rather than an amazing

opportunity to upskill and transform the way we work. But if we seize these opportunities and look for courses that offer practical skills, tools and methods that we can apply to our every day, we can breathe new life into our careers. It just takes some digging.

Rather than looking for big industry names for the sake of a certificate, look at the level of practicality you can get out of a course. Speak to your management team and relay the benefits of how continued development can make a difference within your organisation. A valuable course should enable you to apply new learnings directly in your role. You should therefore be able to make your case for investing in external training by explaining the impact it can have on your organisation. Of course, theory is important but there's a fine line between what's necessary to know and what's academic fluff.

This is why we set out to develop Fabric – an organisation that empowers the most ambitious marketers to thrive in their career. Having secured my first agency role in 2017, I was mentored by Lisa Eaton, founder of Unwritten and was taught an approach to marketing that has enabled me to deliver winning strategies for organisations throughout the North East. We soon thought that

this was something that could help many people in the industry gain the practical knowledge and skills to accelerate their career.

Over the last decade, the role of the marketer has changed significantly. It's no longer enough to focus on traditional advertising methods, there has to be a direct correlation between marketing spend and business impact. That's why we built a programme that supports marketers to build a measurable integrated marketing strategy for their own organisation, centred around business objectives. After our combined 20 years in industry, it's the course Lisa and I wish had been made available to us right at the start of our career.

No matter which stage you're at in your career, it's always important to keep learning and embrace the ongoing need to replenish your skills. But it's also important to do so in a way that is beneficial beyond academia. By undertaking courses focused around building experience as well as knowledge, you can gain insights into different aspects of your role and spark interests that could take your career in a new direction. You can also learn new skills to make a bigger impact within your current organisation to move your career forward.



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## DURHAM MARKETING CAMPAIGN AIMS TO GET TOURISM BACK ON TRACK

Destination management organisation Visit County Durham has launched a marketing campaign that promotes Durham as being 'Worth the Wait', inspiring visitors from within the region to choose the county for a day visit or staycation.

As consumer confidence starts to slowly return, the campaign showcases the range of experiences to be found in the county, from family fun and the great outdoors, to coast and countryside getaways and unique shopping experiences.

The campaign also provides a free promotional platform for Visit County Durham Partners and visitor economy businesses, with hundreds featured on the dedicated 'Worth the Wait' website.

Michelle Gorman, Managing Director of Visit County Durham, said: "As people enjoy spending more time with loved ones, we want to encourage them to choose Durham. The 'Worth the Wait' campaign will showcase the county and inspire residents of the North East to choose Durham."



## NORTH EAST DESIGN AGENCY DOCVINCI TARGETS PROFESSIONAL SERVICE FIRMS

A brand-new design agency co-founded during lockdown by Newcastle local Dan Graham has set an ambitious mission of livening-up tired, old documents and videos from professional service firms around the UK.

Specifically targeted at accountants, financial advisers and solicitors in the UK, the founders of docVinci (Dan Graham and Rohan Sivajoti) have vowed to revolutionise the documents and videos of professional service firms into an art form to help them with their branding.

Both directors of North East based financial planning firm Postcard Planning, the docVinci founders understand the challenges met by professional services when it comes to design.

In an attempt to keep things simple, docVinci have decided to use a blanket pricing structure. Graham commented: "It's £47 an hour, no more, no less. Fixed pricing is the simplest way to do business and we wanted to keep it simple, too."



## O APPOINTS NEW DIGITAL LEAD AS IT CONTINUES GROWTH PLANS

Creative communications agency O has grown its senior team with the appointment of a digital account director, as the agency celebrates 15 years in business.

Digital specialist Steve Maybury joins O's team to expand its digital services, including SEO, paid and organic social media management and creative content marketing.

Steve brings 18 years' experience working in communications, with a focus on content marketing, digital PR and SEO, lead generation and impact measurement.

Steve said: "This is a challenging time for businesses but an exciting phase for digital communications and marketing which is coming to the fore as a way to help businesses differentiate and recover post-lockdown."

"I'm looking forward to working with such a great portfolio of national and international brands and local businesses, as well as working with the team to help get our clients in the best position possible to face the future head on."

## HORIZON WORKS ANNOUNCES NEW PARTNERSHIP

B2B marketing agency Horizon Works has underlined its support for innovative North East businesses, by joining Innovation SuperNetwork as a partner.

Innovation SuperNetwork is a 'network of networks' which brings together more than 50 partners and 5000+ businesses to generate fresh ideas, new market opportunities, knowledge and money to support SMEs in the North East.

Horizon Works, which is headquartered at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington, offers marketing, strategy, PR, digital and creative services. The firm works across sectors including manufacturing, technology and the public sector.

Through the partnership, Horizon Works will be supporting Innovation SuperNetwork by offering marketing expertise to the SMEs it works with and delivering webinars and workshops as part of the network's activities.

The Innovation SuperNetwork's current projects include the Climate Change Innovation Accelerator, the Rural Innovation Programme, Innovation Challenge 8 and an Access to Finance Programme. The network is also hosting VentureFest North East in March 2021.



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## “WAS BEN & JERRY’S CRITICISM OF PRITI PATEL JUST CYNICAL MARKETING?”

As Francis Urquhart, played by Ian Richardson, said in the BBC’s adaption of Michael Dobbs’ ‘House of Cards’ in 1990, “You might think that. I couldn’t possible comment.”

It is, however, a subject that PR and Marketing professionals will endlessly argue over with their views inevitably influenced by their own political opinions. There is, however, a larger question behind the tragedy of immigrants making the dangerous Channel crossing and the Government’s spat with the ice cream makers of how should brands react to political controversy and current affairs – should they stay clear, should they broadcast their own views or should they exploit them as marketing opportunities?

First, some background. On August 11th, in response to the Home Secretary’s tough approach to immigrants crossing the Channel, Ben and Jerry’s UK, used its Twitter account to broadcast to 58,000 followers that she should ‘show more humanity’ to the unfortunate individuals and that ‘people wouldn’t make the dangerous journeys if they had any choice.’ Various Government figures then responded in turn by branding Ben & Jerry’s as ‘over-priced junk food’ whilst Tory Party Chairman, James Cleverly, accused the company of ‘statistically inaccurate virtue signalling.’

Although B&J’s was established in 1978 by Californian friends Ben Cohen and Jerry Greenfield, its success meant it had long ceased to be the hippie cottage industry it had originated as and had been bought out by the multinational Unilever

in 2000. Interestingly, however, the brand kept to the founders’ philosophy of ‘trying to make a difference’, famously campaigning for gay marriage rights in Australia in 2017, against President Trump’s wall on the Mexican border, boycotting Facebook in the US in June because of racism and hate speech and being a vocal supporter of the Black Lives Matter movement. Unilever itself had also sided with the UK Government just in February when it agreed to stop marketing ice cream to children in the light of the obesity crisis.

Now whether this tweet was a marketing ploy, honest feelings of humanity or what is now known as ‘virtue signalling’ or publicly sharing a view on a social or political issue to gain approval and acknowledgement of their own humanity, thereby passively rebuking those who don’t share this view, is a matter of debate.

There’s little doubt that the spat enormously raised the brand’s profile and most probably caused a spike in sales (although, in truth, the heat wave of that week was probably more responsible...) whilst for the Government, who were looking to change the immigration and asylum laws to deter the crossings in line with their Brexit promises, the additional publicity was probably also quite welcome. Stuck in the middle, however, were the unfortunate and desperate individuals who were

being trafficked by ruthless gangs and risking their lives to attempt the crossing in small boats.

A survey carried out by the PR industry trade revealed PR professionals were evenly divided on their views as to whether the brand was right to criticise the Government but it was later revealed that the online survey had been overwhelmingly in support of the brand’s action until Conservative activists had hijacked it by forwarding to non-industry party supporters!

I personally believe that brands do have social responsibilities and should be robust enough to address social justice issues and stand up for what they believe. By doing so they are putting purpose at the heart of what they do, but, as politicians know to their cost, they have to be consistent in this and be absolutely sure there’s no skeletons in their own closet which could attract claims of hypocrisy.

The chink in Unilever’s armour of its contribution to deforestation for soy cultivation, was largely missed by the furious Conservative media whilst the complexities of international law and asylum, coupled with a Government intent on scoring points in the run-up to Brexit, made this whole issue a potential minefield, which I may well have advised clients to avoid...

**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.**





Catherine Challen

## COMPANIES URGED TO INVEST IN CORONA-PROOF CONTENT MARKETING

Teesside copywriting firm Blue Streak Content is helping local firms through uncertain times.

At Blue Streak Content, we've been helping many of our clients to drive sales and enhance exposure levels throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Although many business owners are hesitant to invest in content marketing during these testing times, companies can experience substantial benefits.

### BOOSTING BRAND EXPOSURE

People still need to buy products and services during pandemics. With consumers spending more time at home searching for things to purchase, there's no better time to invest in content marketing. Regular blogs and articles can help companies maintain and boost their visibility so they can be found when customers search for relevant terms. With so many people preferring to make purchases from the safety of their homes, now is the perfect time to reach out to these consumers.

### SETTING REALISTIC MARKETING GOALS

When we start working with a client, we'll encourage them to think about what they want to accomplish over a short period of time. Working together,

we help them to establish a short-term plan with measurable goals and set achievable yet challenging targets to hit. With the UK now officially in recession, businesses may need to be prepared to reevaluate and adapt their strategy if the right results aren't being seen. At Blue Streak Content, we're always honest and upfront with our clients, and we'll let them know if elements of their content marketing campaign need to be tweaked.

We also recognise that firms may need to adapt their content marketing solutions in response to changing financial situations. We can sit down with you and develop a customised marketing solution that meets your business's needs and budget during these tough times.

### SERVING A RANGE OF INDUSTRIES

The team at Blue Streak have helped several companies to climb the search engine rankings in recent months. Clients include online retailers, home improvement firms, caterers, and video production companies, amongst many others. Blue Streak Content has been providing copywriting services to UK companies all of sizes for more than a decade. Why not get in touch to find out how we can help your business reach its full potential?

Catherine Challen, Blue Streak Content, [www.bluestreakcontent.com](http://www.bluestreakcontent.com), 07771802870

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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 **Sarah Waddington**, Managing Director of management, PR and marketing agency Astute.Work

## Did you always envisage a career in the media industry?

Absolutely. While I hedged my bets by reading a joint honours degree in French and Media at the University of Leeds, the decision was made when I completed two public relations internships during the four year course. I loved the work and knew I'd found my chosen career.

## What has been your career path so far?

My second work placement was at Tyne Tees Television and I was fortunate to be offered a role there in the Regional Affairs team once I graduated. I then moved to a PR consultancy before taking up increasingly senior roles at a variety of full-service marketing agencies.

The best bit has been setting up my own business 12 years ago and developing the offer every year.

Today Astute.Work specialises in helping management teams rationalise their offer, simplify positioning, manage change, build capacity and demonstrate accountable leadership to build reputation and trust. It's very fulfilling and the Coronavirus pandemic has only increased demand for our services.

## What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Probably not the biggest but the most regularly trying are poor briefs, lousy budgets, overblown expectations and a lack of understanding of public relations generally. If an organisation wants to build reputation and social capital alongside its bottom line, it's not an overnight affair. It takes a leadership mindset adjustment, investment and time.

## Who do you most respect in your industry?

Anyone who creates content and builds communities. Right now, I'm in awe of Elizabeth Bananuka who launched BME PR Pros, a community for black, Asian, mixed race and ethnic minority PR practitioners. She's since launched The Blueprint, a diversity mark that helps organisations attract, retain and nurture diverse talent, while helping talented BAME comms pros to find employers committed to supporting them to achieve their career dreams.

Amazing, right?

## Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

I love Bradley Jackson in The Morning Show, played by Reese Witherspoon. She can't bear inequality and is passionate about fighting for social justice. I totally relate.

## How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

Astute.Work was unique when it launched over a decade ago as it is based on a virtual business model. This may be more common now, but it meant it was business as usual for us when COVID-19 hit. We were able to advise clients on the transition

to homeworking, communication models and tools and maintaining organisational culture, among other things.

Outside of that, Astute.Work has its own podcast, My Friends In The North, and we quickly used this as a basis for sharing public information at the start of the crisis, interviewing many of the region's leaders who shared what interventions were taking place and where people could go for help.

## What is your greatest strength?

Fortitude. My background and family have helped me develop an ability to get up and go again, even when it's tough. Sometimes you've just got to put one foot in front of the other until the situation changes, which it always does.

## What is your biggest weakness?

I've three. Number one is impatience, number two is expecting too much of myself and number three is an apparent inability to build in enough downtime!

## What has been your proudest achievement?

Outside of my two boys, it's creating a series of books and community called #FutureProof. This is aimed at reasserting public relations as a strategic management function and it reaches PR and business people alike. The content is all available free of charge via [www.futureproofingcomms.co.uk](http://www.futureproofingcomms.co.uk), something that matters to me as I'm all for social mobility.

## What are your remaining career aspirations?

On the subject of social mobility, I am keen to launch a Community Interest Company called Socially Mobile that helps public relations practitioners from disadvantaged backgrounds secure the skills they need to become strategic professionals and improve their employment opportunities. It's been in the works sometime now but I'm hoping to make it a reality this year so watch this space.

## How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

I believe that the COVID-19 pandemic and exit from the European Union is a great opportunity for management and PR practitioners to demonstrate their value to business. We can help with horizon scanning, data gathering, risk management and strategic planning, as well as with the decision-making that helps organisations manage turbulence and prepare for sustainability and growth. I really hope businesses recognise what strategic practitioners can bring to the role and procure accordingly.



Sarah Waddington



# RADAR CLIENT'S POSITIVE WAVELENGTH

Members of Highlights PR's RADAR programme have seen some positive outcomes from the COVID-19 pandemic. Here we see how their businesses have changed and how they are helping others.



Andrew Bartlett, founder of the Roam Local Campaign is revolutionising the way we look and interact with local destinations. His Roam App has been providing huge support to independent businesses by providing local destinations with the latest in App technology.

*"The Roam App is a destination guide on mobile devices phone and allows our users access to local information no matter where they are. When a business claims their listing on Roam it effectively acts as their own app, but with a much larger ecosystem that has algorithms to drive customer engagement and additional footfall. The campaign has a huge focus on providing local businesses with a free to use tool to retain customers."* [roam-local.co.uk](http://roam-local.co.uk)



Neil Fraser from Northumberland Wills and Probate now has a toolkit that includes a protective visor, surgical gloves and a facemask!

*"Lockdown forced us to get into the 21st century when unheard of video conferencing became the norm. We had to change our ways but it certainly saved us travel costs and we passed that on to our customers. I was loving three weeks to the gallon for sure! Now lockdown has eased, we are again able to visit customers face-to-face in their homes but as many are in their older years, we are taking additional precautions such as PPE and sending everything out in advance to reduce the time we need to be physically present. Going forward, we're equally happy to do video meetings and pass on the savings. And another advantage of that - It means you don't need to tidy up!"*

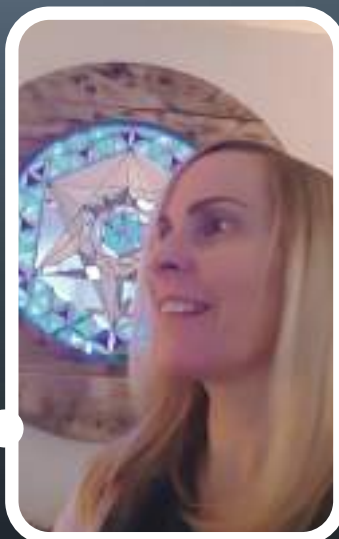
[www.northumberlandwills.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandwills.co.uk)



Daniel Wilkinson's Blyth based business DW Media has literally found new marketplaces during the pandemic.

*"We've been busy helping a market in Arbroath, Scotland get online by providing wi-fi connections for traders so that they could take card payments as the mobile data signal in that area wasn't strong enough. It's great to be able to help small businesses with technology."*

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



Sara Young is an Integrative Psychotherapist, EMDR therapist, and Neurotherapist and she has formed the CIC, Changing Minds with Pick Up a Penny to offer a multidisciplinary range of mental health interventions for children, young people and their families.

*"The positive experience we've had is that we were able to secure Covid-19 funding through the lottery fund. This allowed us to work with children, young people and adults throughout lockdown and to carry out crucial trauma work related to the pandemic."*

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

Ross Parker from Seven Keys Estate Agents said:

*"Throughout the pandemic, we've worked harder than ever and emerged better off amidst worries at the beginning of March. Across the Estate Agency and Seven Bridges Investment Management, we've taken on an extra 100 managed properties and secured a substantial takeover to acquire an extra 600 clients, dealing with individual's private pensions within the IFA business."*

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



Jackie Wilson from Brickhouse Media Services helps SMEs tell their stories by writing, re-evaluating, refreshing and revising content for websites, marketing texts, e-books or specialist articles.

*"My business has been around for just over six years - and there've been a lot of ups and downs, as with most small independent companies. Strangely (because it was not at all expected), in the months since Covid-19 turned our working days upside down, Brickhouse Media Services has done well. And I suspect that this may have something to do with (panic-driven) focus - on maintaining client relationships despite lockdown and on making sure I'm still 'findable' for those that are looking. I'm in some degree a virus survivor - and look forward to applying what I've learned to help others."*



Eleanor Baggaley from The Snowdrop Story says that Covid-19 has given her a positive push in the right direction to get things done.

*"I'd like to say I've had the time to do it all but caring for three children whilst running my businesses has meant time has been tight and I've had to be creative. The last few months have made me look closely at what I offer and how to improve. I have taken my baby/toddler signing and sensory classes online, creating a parents' e-learning platform full of activities for parents to do with their children in their own time. I am seriously considering keeping it this way to support families beyond the North East and reach those parents who work full time and/ or cannot make classes in person."*

*"For my children's books, I'm taking on-board their messages to believe in my own dreams, being grateful for this time and the opportunities it's provided, I'm looking at ways to expand their reach and help more young children to build their confidence, explore their emotions and understand how to include others who might be a little bit different."*

Classes information at [www.TheSnowdropStory.co.uk](http://www.TheSnowdropStory.co.uk), book information at [www.EleanorBaggaley.com](http://www.EleanorBaggaley.com)

To become part of the Highlights PR RADAR programme contact [Keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:Keith@highlightspr.co.uk) 07814 397951

## Are you on the media's RADAR?

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- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
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Contact Keith Newman for more details.

Visit him on his floating office

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07814 397951

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Wayne Halton

# 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...

## WAYNE HALTON

Director and owner of MHW PR, a leading business-to-business communications consultancy which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary during lockdown.

### Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

I always fancied becoming a war correspondent. It wasn't to be. After study and uni, I managed to become a journalist – but only got as far as Wrexham, Chester, Newcastle and Darlington. After around seven years I left the business desk and newsroom to move into PR.

### What is your favourite aspect of the job?

Juggling lots of balls. Like a newsroom, few days are ever the same in PR and communications. Best made plans can be blown apart; it's how you respond. I love working with businesses who want to be better. I enjoy listening to their growing pains, while getting to understand their complex issues and helping them reach their goals. It's still good to be tested. And it's better still to see a plan come together.

### What has been your career defining moment?

There have been many small moments. Leaving newspapers and changing career was one. Years later, in 2000, came the big step of setting up MHW PR with two pals (Alasdair Mitchell and Ian Watson). And then building and developing a strong B2B consultancy over 20 years. Lots of highs and, of course, some lows. I've been fortunate to work with some outstanding clients – in property, healthcare, manufacturing, education and business services. Many of these have been with me on the journey for a significant part of the last 20 years.

### How do you measure success?

Retaining long-lasting client relationships and winning work through referrals. Paying the bills. Managing a decent work-life-balance. The latter has fluctuated over the years but is much better today.

### What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

So much has changed and yet the fundamentals haven't. Technology has been the biggest disruptor. My career has moved from working on typewriters with ink ribbons to using PCs and iPads. The internet has opened many new channels to market for clients. These changes have thrown up exciting opportunities along with some challenges. For too many these days there is a tendency to jump into tactics and the latest shiny new thing. I like to believe a fundamental that hasn't altered is the need to assess a client's situation and come up with a strategy to reach the audiences they need to influence.

### How has your skillset developed accordingly?

As I've been acquiring new knowledge and skills, I've been unlearning some. For instance, I barely use the 100-word a minute short-hand skill I once had. You need to stay relevant in a changing landscape. There's a bigger toolkit of communications tricks these days; and there's a plethora of tactics. The real challenge is understanding which tactics, when combined in a cohesive strategy, do the best job for the client. Specialist, trade and technical media continues to have a role for many of our clients. The tools may alter but good thinking is always needed. As long as businesses have problems with their profile and reputation there will always be a need for experienced, strategic thinking.

### Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

Conservative, no. But I'm no gambler. I work the averages.

### To what would you attribute your success?

Setting a low bar! And surrounding myself with good people.

### What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

Intolerance. It remains a work in progress. I can also be a little too blunt for my own good.

### How do you remain motivated?

I remain curious, reading and listening a lot. Liaising with clients always throws up new, interesting scenarios and problems to resolve. I also try to mix with interesting, quirky people. These include some young guns in the creative digital sector (Steven Symonds at NE6 Studio), old guns in graphic design (Craig Hutton, Room8Design) and others who have a leftfield perspective. If you surround yourself with smart, enthusiastic people then life can be fun and rewarding.

### Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

I suppose I like to be respected. In truth, I don't lose sleep over it. I refer to something Dr David Cliff of Gedanken wrote in the last issue of Northern Insight: 'Worrying about what others think shackles thinking and dampens the imagination.'

### I'll retire when...

I lose my mojo; and then I'll finally devote time to beekeeping.





## WAYS TO ADVANCE YOUR CAREER WITH CIM QUALIFICATIONS

For this edition, we decided to turn the spotlight back on to our MD, Veronica Swindale, who is leading her team in preparation for the new September term.

### Why do people do Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) qualifications?

The main reason is to gain skills and knowledge. They might want to get a job in marketing or communications or to develop their career.

People find the fact that you can gain a CIM Award (one module in about three months) or a whole qualification (three modules in about nine months) attractive. Studying also links you to a group of people doing similar work which helps you build your network of the future. Both these reasons help you to develop your marketing career. It's a competitive marketplace where CIM qualifications are still asked for and recognised as a key asset by employers.

### When is the best time to start studying for CIM qualifications?

Genuinely you can start at school! The CIM Foundation Certificate in Professional Marketing/Digital Marketing sits well, for example, with A-Level Business Studies. Or you can do it between your exams finishing in June and the beginning of the autumn term. It can be a great way to add another 'A' level qualification to your CV and enhance your 'personal statement' for university.

If working rather than studying at university, is your

preference. the CIM suite of qualifications provides the ideal way to secure affordable professional skills and allow you to earn as you learn. Some candidates continue their studies to the higher levels and can complete the equivalent to a BA Hons qualification in marketing before their school friends have left university to join the job market.

If you are already at university, irrespective of which degree you are studying, you might find it useful to consider some or all of the CIM Certificate in Professional Marketing/Digital Marketing. There aren't many disciplines that don't have marketing at their core, and it is an asset to be able to look at things from a customer or service user perspective (which is what marketers have to do).

If you have a degree in marketing or management already, then the logical step is to study for the CIM Diploma in Professional Marketing/Digital Marketing. All of the assessments for this qualification and above are company-based assignments which usually relate to very relevant aspects of the day job.

Employers notice a difference in the thought processes and behaviours of their employees doing these qualifications, and of course, the new strategic thinking they are bringing to the workplace has an economic impact on the business too. Your CV will

have a BA Hons equivalent qualification also. If you studied at a Graduate Gateway University in the past five years, you might gain exemptions from the first module of study.

If you are lucky to enough to have any of the above already and/or five to ten years hands-on marketing management experience, then the next challenge for you could be the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme. A Masters level programme which encourages delegates to use the right analytical tools and thought processes to identify the strategic options open to the business and develop suitable plans for identifying and managing business growth. One of the elective modules, which can be studied on its own, is Consultancy. To have a recognised qualification in Consultancy as a practising Chartered Marketer is certainly a great differentiator. Delegates on all these programmes genuinely make a difference to the strategic direction of the companies in which they work. And, all these modules are assignment-based so thankfully no exams!

The icing on the cake is that people love the graduation ceremony each year for all Diploma and Marketing Leadership graduates and putting DipM after their name.

### When can I sign up?

Because we run a quarterly rolling programme so it's possible to enrol any time of year. We have pivoted our delivery to virtual teaching and interactive webinars and all modules start September, January, April and June.

If you have time on your hands right now, it could be an ideal motivator to get your course underway for your first module. One step at a time, you will be amazed how quickly the time flies, and how soon you are receiving your final certificates of completion!

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Araminta Hartley  
PR and Media Officer  
Great North Air Ambulance Service  
CIPR Professional PR Diploma (L7)

"Completing this qualification has increased my knowledge and understanding of PR theories and concepts, I now feel more confident in creating and managing effective PR campaigns which strategically support my organisation's goals and objectives."

Lauren Watson  
Marketing Manager  
Crystallised  
CIM Certificate in Professional Marketing (L4)

"Studying this qualification has helped me to achieve a solid understanding of the theories behind marketing. Boosting my confidence to support the arts and culture organisations I work with and in turn, contributing to a promotion at work!"

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## DISCOVER HOW SOCIAL MEDIA CAN HELP YOU STAY CONNECTED

North East social, digital and design agency, Curtis Gabriel explain how social media can help you and your business stay connected during these tumultuous times.

While nearly everything came to a halt in early 2020, social media never slowed down. In fact, roughly half of consumers report using social more since the coronavirus pandemic began.

Within the space of months our world has dramatically shifted in what has been a defining moment in our lives. Everything has been affected, from how we work and shop to how we socialise and do business.

We don't know what the future holds and accept that nobody else does either. We do know there isn't one covid-19 story, there are 7.8 billion, and as others have said, this is a good time to ask questions and adapt the way we all work.

Discover how social media has helped our clients;

### **1. Social is an essential tool for businesses.**

Social media has been an essential tool for many of our clients during covid-19 from communicating key business updates, new initiatives and reassurance messages as business begin to reopen. We are seeing our clients connecting with the audiences better than ever before and on a more emotional level.

### **2. Stay connected despite the (social) distance**

When the world feels unstable, people search for answers and a port in the storm, throughout the pandemic one of our top priorities was ensuring that our clients stayed connected with their customers and communities on social. No matter what industry you're in, you need to keep in touch and be transparent with your customers. Consider how you can use your social network to help your business and others.

### **3. Build personal connections**

Many industries have faced major disruption during 2020 from retail to hospitality, while we may not be communicating as often face to face social media offers a cost effective and impactful platform to build personal connections with your customers. Focus on one-on-one interactions with people and businesses to build long term relationship people will remember long after covid-19.

### **4. Give your audience what they want and need**

Social media is now more important than ever. It enables your brand to stay connected despite our current environment. The key is finding what your audience needs during this time both emotionally and physically. Do they want to be sold to right now? Would your product or service be valuable to them right now? Maybe your ideal customer just needs some feel good stories or wants to know how your brand is supporting its community.

### **5. Customers turn to social with Covid-19 queries**

We have seen a significant increase in the number of inbound customer enquiries over recent months as customers turn to social in search of answers and support. We have shown our clients how powerful social media can be for providing customer support and helping to ease tensions and concerns.

Whether your business is well established on social media or looking for a new channel to communicate with your customers, consider how you can adapt to business as unusual.

For more information visit [www.curtisgabriel.com](http://www.curtisgabriel.com)



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## SUPERFAST BROADBAND FOR RURAL AREAS

Alnwick-based rural broadband and IT solutions specialist Alncom is urging those living in rural areas of Northumberland and the Scottish Borders with poor internet connections to apply for the gigabit voucher scheme.

The scheme is part of the government's election pledge to bring broadband speeds of up to 1,000Mbps to the whole country by 2025.

Homes and businesses in rural areas of the UK may be eligible for funding towards the cost of installing gigabit-capable broadband when part of a group scheme.

Rural premises with broadband speeds of less than 100Mbps can use vouchers worth £1,500 per home and up to £3,500 for each SME to support the cost of installing new fast and reliable connections.

Alncom Managing Director, Stephen Pinchen, said: "The COVID-19 pandemic has shown how important it is to have access to superfast broadband. Being connected is key to communicating with family, working from home and allowing our rural economy to grow.

"As world leading internet specialists, we understand the demand for this therefore, we must stress that if anyone is interested to contact us soon as time is running out to take part."



## VISUALSOFT KICKS OFF FIRST FOOTBALL CLUB WEBSITE FOR MIDDLESBROUGH

North East based eCommerce agency Visualsoft has scored its first-ever eCommerce website for a sports club, with the launch of an all-new site for Middlesbrough FC.

Visualsoft drew on its substantial experience across retail and fashion websites to develop the site. Shoppers can purchase the club's official merchandise including a range of kit, sporting equipment, fashion garments, homeware, souvenirs and gifts.

Middlesbrough FC chose Visualsoft's Enterprise+ Shared Success service, which incorporates ongoing marketing services across search engine optimisation, conversion rate optimisation and social media, as well as the website build, hosting and maintenance. The new website will receive four comprehensive health checks every year.

Supporters will also be delighted with the addition of the shirt personalisation feature later this year, which allows fans to customise their kits with sleeve patches, names and numbers so they can proudly display their club support, tailored to their exact requirements.

Jo-Ann Swinnerton, Head of Retail at Middlesbrough FC, said: "Visualsoft really understood what we were trying to achieve in terms of reaching out to our fans, making the most of the great relationship we already have and generating new lines of revenue through online sales."



## SALESFORCE PARTNERSHIP SPARKS RECRUITMENT DRIVE FOR UK TECH FIRM

Saggezza, a global technology solutions provider and consulting firm, has underlined its UK expansion plans after signing a new partnership with software giant Salesforce.

The company, which provides software solutions and systems integrations for clients, has launched a new, dedicated Salesforce Practice as it continues to improve its service offering to clients.

The Practice will be headed up by tech veteran Jeff Pigatto, based at the company's global HQ in Chicago. However, much of the work will be serviced by Saggezza's Global Delivery Centre, based in Sunderland, with a range of Salesforce-specific roles to be created thereafter.

Saggezza, which employs more than 60 talented tech employees at its Sunderland Software Centre base, announced plans earlier this year to double its headcount in the North East over the next 24 months. The partnership with Salesforce will act as a catalyst in helping the company realise its ambitions.

Martin Williams, Saggezza's UK Managing Director, said: "Saggezza prides itself on helping its clients create innovative software solutions that enable them to achieve their goals. The addition of a dedicated Salesforce Practice will allow us to continue doing just that, integrating a trusted solution that will offer a world-class customer journey."

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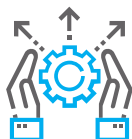


# Life after Lockdown - **Are you technology ready?**

**There is a new normal to our working lives and smart organisations are making sure their IT is lean, secure and able to offer employees all the tools they need.**

As the business world starts to focus on the future, we take a look at three key trends to emerge during the last few months, and their effect on ICT Infrastructures and their management.

- **Security has finally become a board level responsibility.**
- **Demand for managed services model rises.**
- **Increased appetite for cloud.**



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## LIFE AFTER LOCKDOWN – ARE YOU TECHNOLOGY READY?

Back in April Microsoft's Chief Executive Satya Nadella was reported as saying the effect of the Coronavirus crisis was 'two years worth of digital transformation in two months.'

In a single day that same month more than 200 million people took part in Teams meetings, and the product now has over 75 million daily users.

Numbers such as these mark the most unusual economic circumstances in living memory, as organisations use all the tech tools at their disposal to adapt and remain open for business.

As the business world starts to focus on the future, we take a look at three key trends to emerge during the last few months, and their effect on ICT infrastructures and their management.

### **Demand for managed services models rises**

The business environment during the first half of 2020 has brought home the complexities involved in managing a multi-faceted IT infrastructure, and forced business owners managing their IT in-house to question their approach.

The crisis has highlighted the value of managed services partners (MSPs), who quickly transformed into essential service partners, stepping up to support clients throughout the immediate crisis and beyond.

The priority was getting users securely up and running from home locations, and maintaining a secure, highly available IT infrastructure. Having an MSP taking the strain and delivering IT as a flexible service proved invaluable to organisations struggling to deliver products and services to their own customers.

In our own business we have seen a combination of organisations extending the scope of their managed services contract, and in some cases accelerating support and development plans so they emerge stronger and leaner.

While we are all still feeling our way through the new normal, it is more vital than ever that organisations seek out smarter ways to ensure the IT supports the business goals, particularly for those that have been forced to pivot into a new model targeting new markets.

The MSP market thrived during the last recession, thanks to organisations looking for ways to cut operational and infrastructure costs, and economic experts are predicting a similar upturn in quarters three and four of 2020, despite a global economic downturn.

### **Increased appetite for cloud**

The last few months have shown the key role that cloud services can play in enabling day to day operations, supporting innovation, improving efficiency and driving growth.

Market experts say that global spending on cloud infrastructure in quarter two of 2020 rose by 31% to £27billion, as businesses looked to cloud based services to support them through lockdown. In 2019 a Google survey revealed that more than half of the C-suite respondents said cloud would meet three quarters of their IT needs by 2029 and it will be interesting to see how lockdown affects the results of the next survey in the series.

As cloud experts with two decades of experience, we are very open about the fact it may not be the right solution for every business. Yes, it can have a significant effect, but it needs to be carefully thought through and implemented with help from experts in on and off-premise, public and private cloud solutions, if you are to see maximum return on investment.

### **Security has finally become a board level responsibility**

The rapid shift to remote working for a huge proportion of the UK workforce has seen cyber security switch from being seen as an IT issue to being regarded as a strategic risk management issue.

Pre-pandemic, cyber security may not have been given the emphasis it warrants, but we have seen a dramatic increase in the number of boards suddenly becoming focussed on security, and the potential damage a cyber attack could have on the organisation, its customers and partners.

It is now very common for topics such as ransomware, phishing and denial-of-service attacks, which were once the sole province of the IT steering group, to be on board level agendas. Directors and senior managers have become very aware that it is a case of when, not if, their business is attacked, and the measures they should be taking to mitigate risk.

IT managers are reporting that proactive management of cyber risk now tops of everyone's concerns, as we work together to protect key information assets and balance accessibility with security.

### **What does the future hold for your business?**

As the dust begins to settle and we move forward, there are some big decisions to be made, including the chance to do things differently. Smart organisations are already gearing up in the race to take advantage of new opportunities. Don't be left behind, talk to our experts about a technology roadmap to help your organisation survive and thrive.



## NORTH EAST CHARITY CLIMBING NEW HEIGHTS WITH HELP FROM QRIOUS

Staff at business transformation and customer experience company Qrious have volunteered their time to help a leading North East based charity hit by Covid-19 create a virtual fundraising event using new technology.

North of England Children's Cancer Research (NECCR) was forced to postpone its annual Children's Cancer Run, due to Covid-19. The run is a staple in the North East events calendar and usually takes place at Newcastle Racecourse in May. Through the run, around £300,000 is raised annually by individuals and families. In the past four decades, over £30 million has been raised by the public which has helped to establish the North East as world-leaders in childhood cancer research, helping to reverse children's survival rates from 20% then to over 80% today.

The event forms the NECCR's main fundraising activity of the year and has left a significant gap in its 2020 calendar.

Teaming up with innovation specialists Qrious, based at Hoults Yard in Newcastle, NECCR decided to look towards better technology instead to organise a virtual climbing event to help the charity continue to raise much-needed funds.

Employees at Qrious volunteered their time and spent two weeks completing an innovation sprint to help NECCR develop the fundraising idea. During the fortnight they created an innovative and unique new App to help participants track their climbing elevation as they raise money.

'The Climb' will take place in October 2020. Through the App, participants will be able to measure their climbing progress in real-time, tracking their ascent as they reach elevations equivalent to The Angel of the North, Ben Nevis or even the world's highest peak, Mount Everest. Features within the App will allow fundraisers to see the panoramic view from the top of each climb as well as set goals and track progress.

James Brown is Innovation and Strategy Director at Qrious and was instrumental in delivering the project. He said; "I am immensely proud of how the Qrious team collaborated – despite having to work remotely – volunteering their time to create this powerful new tool that will help NECCR continue to fundraise remotely.

"Many charities have been hit hard by Covid-19. Their usual mass-participation fundraising events have been cancelled or postponed and that has huge implications for their ability to raise money and in this case advance research into children's cancer.

"We wanted to help find a way around this major problem and joined

forces with NECCR to find a solution. It was a really enjoyable and inspiring project – we were able to put our creative thinking and technical expertise to the test.

"Over an intense two-week period, through close collaboration, we ran the innovation sprint, creating the concept, developing and testing a prototype App with users. When the App goes live in October, it will deliver a fun solution that The Climb fundraising will centre around. Not only will individuals be able to set personal goals and track their progress in real-time, but NECCR will also be able to see a cumulative 'world view' of how participation in the virtual event is going.

"Covid-19 has forced us all to think laterally, and out of necessity many charities and businesses are finding new solutions that allow them to bring communities together for the greater good, without being physically close. We're proud of the results and hope the money raised will support NECCR to continue their vital work."

Heather Peacock from the charity commented "Covid-19 has meant we've seen a 70% drop in annual income for the charity and it's forced us to look at fundraising in new ways. Early in July, the team came up with the concept of The Climb and we then approached Qrious for help to make the event more engaging and interesting for participants.

We wanted to do something that would enhance the experience of the virtual challenge and were absolutely delighted when Qrious said that they would be willing to help.

It's not a small undertaking and we've had to be very mindful that the team have volunteered their time, and that we've been working to tight timescales, but the speedy and collaborative effort has been very rewarding and we can't wait to see it get used when the challenge starts in October!"

**Qrious**



North of England  
Children's Cancer  
Research  
Registered charity no. 510335

Registration for The Climb for opens in September via the NECCR website [www.neccr.org.uk/events](http://www.neccr.org.uk/events). For further information email [contactus@neccr.org.uk](mailto:contactus@neccr.org.uk)

If your charity could benefit from technology that enables virtual events and fundraising, contact Qrious on [hello@qrious.co.uk](mailto:hello@qrious.co.uk) or call 0191 338 8090.





## LUCID OFFERING IT PEACE OF MIND FOR YOUR BUSINESS

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a nightmare for most firms, but if it has taught us one thing (amongst many) it is just how much we rely on computers and the internet.

Many of you reading this are probably still working from home. Some of you will have decided to do it permanently. One thing's for certain, the way you operate on a daily basis, even if you are back into the work place, is almost guaranteed to be different.

One thing hasn't changed. We all still need to have contact with the rest of the world.

Hands-up how many, over the last few months, have had their first ever Zoom or Skype meeting? Despite being very sceptical, how many actually thought it went quite well and might avoid unnecessary business trips in the future.

For some of you, the way you do business will probably have changed immeasurably....for ever.

And in amongst all of that, did you take your IT for granted? Yep.... thought so.

Without a fully functioning IT set-up, most of us would have been stranded. We are also probably sending more information online via file sharing software. Video calls have become the norm.

But is your IT up to the job? Is it secure? Have you had the dreaded blue screen or spent hours staring at 'the little wheel of insanity'?

And if you had to get something sorted by an outside company, did they do the right job, did they do it properly and you were fairly charged?

This is where Lucid Technology Solutions come in. They're based at Norton on Teesside and with offices in Newton Aycliffe and Gateshead's Team Valley. They are a full service IT solutions company and offer the whole raft of services that you would expect such as software development, CCTV, internet support, data recovery, telecoms, security solutions, door access, computer repairs and computer backup. They can even provide thermal body cameras.

However, they also offer something else which is probably the most important detail of all.

### Peace of mind.

"It sounds harsh, but IT and computer ignorance is the biggest problem that most people face," said Lucid Sales Director, Cheryl Spears. "It's only when something goes wrong that we tend to get involved. It doesn't matter whether you are a multi-national firm,

small local business or someone working alone at home, you need to have IT back-up and you need to stay ahead of the game."

She's right. It's a bit like when your home or property is burgled. The general reaction is for people to then get a burglar alarm or CCTV installed. Wouldn't it have been a better idea to have those things installed in the first place and therefore prevent the burglary happening at all?

### Wise after the event

Staying with the ignorance theme, the biggest problem is that most of us don't really know what sort of problems we can face until it's too late, and most of us don't really know what can be done to prevent those problems. Trying to do some research generally leaves you totally baffled by 'technology-speak'. We know we need IT support and antivirus software but what do we really need to suit and how much should we pay.

Lucid Technology Group can sort everything. You can be confident too. They were originally called Yarm Computers and have been around for over 30 years. You don't survive in the IT world for that length of time without being good at what you do and reputable. In fact, they're one of the longest established IT companies in the North East.

You'll get some good old fashioned clear talking and proper advice.

"Cyber security is critical," added Cheryl. "We'd always recommend the very best antivirus software like ESET and Malwarebytes. After set-up you're paying around £10 per month. We'd also recommend using a VPN line which is a secure line between your computer and the cloud. This is especially important for people who're working from home or out on the road and are involved in legal or financial businesses."

Lucid is also launching Worktraq. This will allow clients and business owners to track vehicles and workers. The data will allow all parties to keep a track of the work being done and monitor progress and receive an alert once finished. Clever huh?

The best idea is to speak to Cheryl and her team to discuss what you need and, more importantly, what they can do for you. Go onto their website for all contact details and discover how Lucid Technology Group can help you steer clear of any nasty clouds.









# Worktraq

## Location Intelligence

### Introducing Worktraq

**Do you want to gain a competitive advantage with location intelligence?**  
**Want to know where your employees, drivers, guards are?**  
**Worktraq could be the answer!**

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?

Please contact the sales department on 01642 792567  
01325 582121 • 0191 8160444 or email [Info@worktraq.co.uk](mailto:Info@worktraq.co.uk)

## 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.

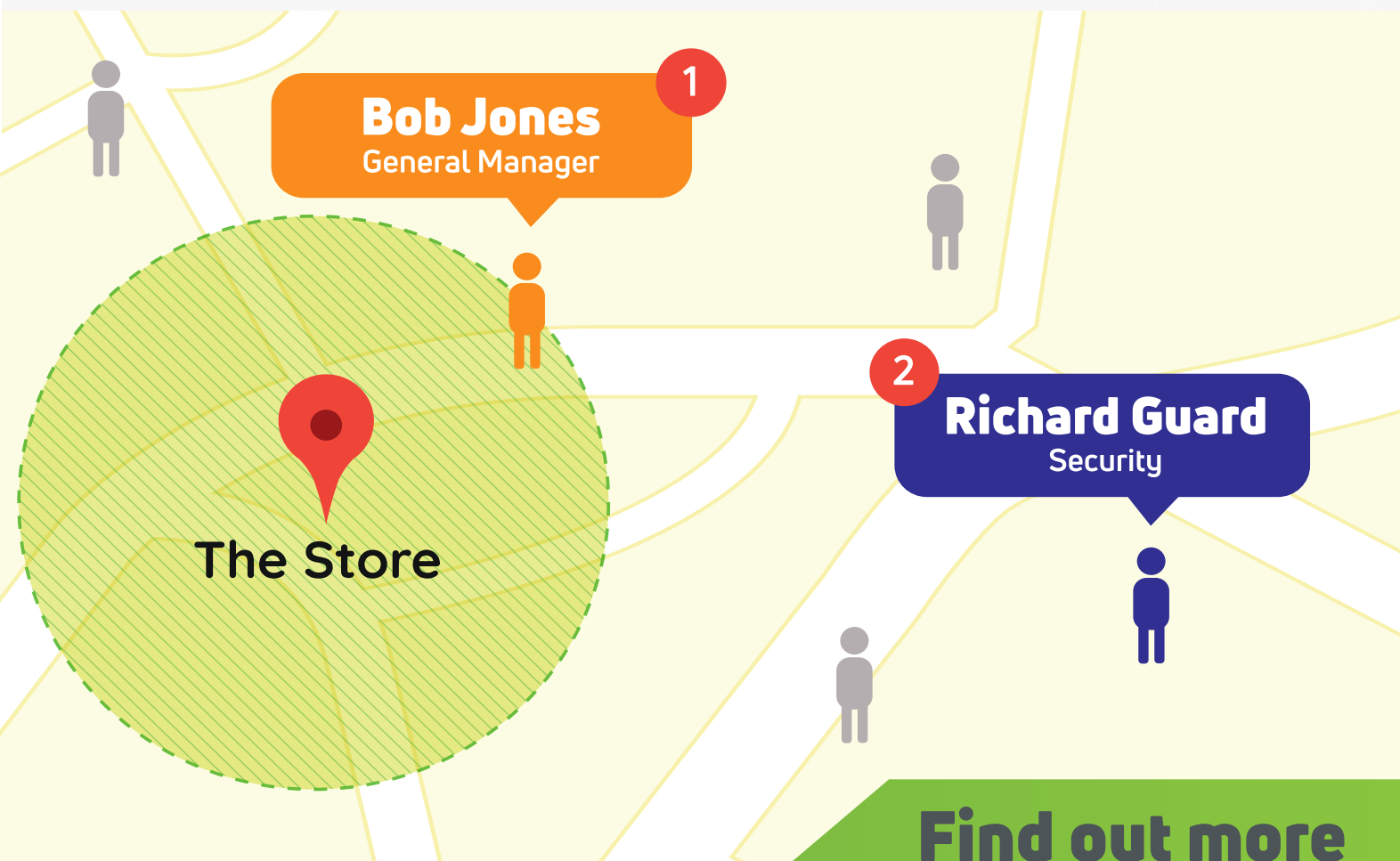
The driver entered the geofence and the app request interaction such as taking a picture, ticking a form on a questionnaire, the app registers the driver starting, in the midst of and once the assignment commenced. Once the job has been completed the driver then



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.



The Gatehouse,  
84 Billingham Rd,  
Norton, TS20 2SA

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



## IN CONVERSATION WITH...

### MARK ROBERTSON

Operations Manager,  
Aero Networks

#### **What were your career ambitions growing up?**

I suppose when I realised I couldn't be an astronaut I plumped for going into Graphic Design after doing a degree at Newport University. I enjoyed various roles at two different printers as a Mac Operator, Studio Manager and Account Manager which I particularly loved as I enjoyed attaining new business.

#### **Tell us about your current role?**

I met Aero MD, Paul Curry, in 2009 when he installed an FTP server at the firm I was with. We hit it off and he asked me if I fancied a change and I suppose the rest, as they say, is history. I joined the company as an Account Manager and am now the Operations Manager with a remit to make sure clients are happy, that things are done in a timely fashion and the business runs smoothly.

#### **How has the industry evolved?**

Everything can now be stored in a cloud environment which helps clients to have greater flexibility and the ability to work from home which has obviously been crucial during the pandemic.

#### **What has been your proudest business achievement?**

Helping a local charity break away from the Council to form their own independent entity. This was a great learning curve to see how the Council worked. We were able to give the charity cost effective solutions and brought an ease to their IT which was very important.



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

In the world of IT make sure the best way forward is the simplest route.

#### **What are you currently working on?**

Moving a customer away from the Council and rehousing within the City Library. Lots of challenges to overcome but making good progress.

#### **Who are your Heroes and Mentors?**

My father who was a very wise man and good

friend. In the world of Art it would be Picasso who constantly sought change and through cubism brought a new way of thinking.

#### **How do you like to unwind?**

Time with the family, a glass of beer, walking the dogs and camping outdoors.

#### **Favourite Book/CD/DVD?**

**Book:** *The Shining* by Stephen King.

**CD:** *Master of Puppets* by Metallica.

**DVD:** *Star Wars*.

[www.aeroit.cloud](http://www.aeroit.cloud)



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# SECURITY IN THE TIME OF COVID

Tips for Protecting yourself and your data

## Why is Security so Important Right Now?

Businesses are currently experiencing a new digital era of working – an era that's presence has arguably been foregrounded by the coronavirus pandemic and the consequent rise in remote working. With this modern iteration of digital business comes a number of concerns: how to improve agility, automation, collaboration, data access and more. But whether you're embracing a cloud or hybrid solution there is one factor that's value cannot be overstated. Security. With organisations seeing a sudden move to remote working followed by partial return to office, IT managers are left trying to support a variety of working cases and ensure security whilst potentially working remotely themselves. On top of this, alongside the rise of Covid we have seen a rise in cybercrime, adding yet another weight to the shoulders of those managers. The peace of mind a reliable security solution can provide is truly invaluable.

## A Wolf in Sheep's clothing?

### Security attacks and Internal leaks

You could argue that security has always been invaluable to a business and this is absolutely true, so why stress the need for digital security now? Alongside the notable rise in cybercrime, it is important to also acknowledge the sophistication of cybercrime currently. If organisations like Twitter, Garmin and Teesside Council can get caught out, there's nothing to say that this couldn't happen to an organisation of any shape or size. The biggest increase in cyber-attacks during lockdown has been in spear phishing attacks. Spear phishing is the malicious sending of emails seemingly from a trusted sender in order to convince employees to

provide access and reveal confidential information. Whilst many users are now clued in enough to know not to open an email with a strange subject from an unknown sender, they are still likely to open an email that appears to be from Tim in accounting – Why wouldn't they? So preventing these attacks is vital.

## Yet another stressor?

When it comes to security, Synergi's mission statement is simple: prevention over cure. By investing in appropriate security tools not only do you majorly reduce the risk of a successful cyber-attack, you also offer peace of mind to both users and managers. Ultimately implementing a digital security solution is a lot less stressful and a lot more affordable than having to deal with the aftermath of a data leak. So how do you implement a successful security solution? Each organisation will have its own idiosyncrasies so be sure to conduct a thorough cybersecurity audit of

your business and use your findings to inform not only your preventative solution choices but your education and training of users. It's imperative that all users are educated on how to work securely and that this training builds from the basics up. A useful exercise to implement is a security drill in which you periodically run a spoof phishing campaign, simulating a potential threat to security. This exercise will highlight which employees are still in need of training and guidance, ensuring that your organisation is always maintaining an informed and secure position.

## What if the worst does happen?

It's vital to be able to rely on a readily available and fully tested backup and disaster recovery strategy aligned to your business recovery point and time objectives (RPO and RTO). These should be defined per service or application that you need to recover. Not sure where to start? That's where a managed service provider comes in.



Justin Short

To find out more about potential security risks and how you can protect yourself and your data, get in touch today by emailing [enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk) or calling 0191 4770365.

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# synergi



## Get in touch

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[enquires@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquires@teamsynergi.co.uk)





Daniel Wilson

## THE GROWING POWER OF MICROSOFT 365

By Daniel Wilson, Director at Wilson-Etheridge

There's a good reason that Microsoft has become one of the biggest tech companies in the world. They're good at what they do and create products that work for business.

And just as importantly, Microsoft is constantly innovating and responding to market conditions – such as addressing the threats and opportunities that have arisen with the change in office working to home working during the pandemic.

As a Microsoft 365 specialist consultancy we know its power and the huge potential it offers businesses – from start-ups to corporates.

Microsoft 365 is an extensive, ever-evolving suite of tools designed to help any company or organisation adopt more productive and collaborative ways of working. Microsoft 365 brings together best-in-class Office apps with powerful cloud services, device management, advanced security and much more.

During the pandemic and lockdown many business people have turned to video conferencing tools to keep in touch with employees and customers. For many, that meant jumping on Microsoft Teams.

And because the browser version of Teams is free, your interviewees don't have to download any extra apps or create accounts to join the call. Teams has allowed businesses to talk to anyone, anywhere and anytime.

Both Microsoft 365 and Microsoft Teams recently celebrated their third anniversaries and to mark the occasion there have been a series of feature enhancements.

Enhancements to the Power Platform experience in Teams make it easier to create, deploy, and manage apps, as well as visualize data, without ever leaving Teams.

The new Power BI app for Teams will provide a more streamlined experience for accessing Power BI reports in Teams, making it easier to collaborate with data. The app also provides new ways to connect insight into action with sample reports, automation, and easy sharing experiences.

Developers and independent software vendors will now be able to integrate their apps and services with Teams meetings, giving users more options to host collaborative and interactive meetings. Partners will be able to bring their apps directly within the Teams meeting experience.

In July, Microsoft announced new device management and monitoring options for Microsoft Teams Rooms Standard and Premium to deliver high-quality calling and meeting experiences. As a part of Microsoft Teams Rooms Standard, there are now enhanced management capabilities for Teams meeting devices to make it easier for partners and IT admins to deploy and manage a fleet of devices, including improvements across device set-up and bulk management tasks.

A few months ago, the tech giant announced

Microsoft Lists, a Microsoft 365 app that helps you track issues, assets, routines, contacts, inventory, and more using customizable views, rules, and comments to keep everyone in sync. Microsoft Lists Home (web app) is being rolled out with eight ready-made templates. It will also be available in Microsoft Teams this month along with three additional industry templates. A Lists mobile app for iOS is expected later this year.

Elsewhere, Microsoft has looked at enhancements to protecting data and mitigating threats. The shift to hybrid work models has increased the need for organisations to re-evaluate their security and risk management practices.

With more employees accessing corporate data on home computers or sharing and collaborating in new ways, organisations could be at greater risk for data leaks or other risks. Microsoft has responded by releasing new solutions and features to better protect your devices and users, mitigate insider threats, and help ensure seamless and secure deployments.

Building on Microsoft Information Protection, Endpoint DLP extends the existing DLP capabilities in Microsoft 365 to your devices, helping you to meet compliance requirements and protect sensitive information.

More details at [www.wilson-etheridge.com](http://www.wilson-etheridge.com)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## DEAN DIXON

Director, Unite Communications

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I suppose it would have been nice to be a pilot but I'm no good at flying! I had few ambitions growing up but computers were always a passion and a hobby, so I decided to make a career out of it. I was a fairly late developer not knowing really what I wanted to do with my life and I was about 23 before I really decided a career in IT was for me.

### Tell us about your career path and current role?

My career started working as an IT technician in Benfield school while studying for my MCSA certification. Following that I went to work for a small Newcastle based IT company as a systems engineer.

That was really my first exposure to SME IT systems. It was very different from working in a school – lots of different technology solutions, lots of different personalities. No two days were the same and I loved it – I met lots of fantastic people in my time there and forged professional and personal relationships that I still have today. As we were a small company I ended up wearing a few hats, alongside the technical work so I used to get involved in sales and project management too, which gave me well rounded knowledge of how most of the business worked.

A few years ago, Mike and I were approached about the possibility of starting up a new firm and we jumped at the chance to venture out on our own. Things went from strength to strength and after a couple of years of growing the business, we ended up merging with Unite Communications to form The Unite Group so that we could offer connectivity and telecommunications as well as our existing IT services.



We'd known the guys at Unite Communications for years and we all got on really well, so it was a bit of a no-brainer really. My role now at board level is to work on ideas and strategies to take us to the next level, but my day to day role is meeting with prospective new clients and account management for our existing clients. I do still get involved in technical projects though, as that is a light that still burns bright with me!

### How has your industry changed?

Technology is evolving virtually on a daily basis and the Covid 19 crisis has shown the need for further tech support and confirmed the value of what we bring. It's difficult to know what the post-covid world looks like, but it will almost certainly mean more online collaboration, video conferencing and calls and cloud technologies – It's something that has been growing for a number of years, but has now accelerated wildly in the current climate. Fortunately we're ideally placed to be able to assist people in that transition.

### What has been your proudest business achievement?

Undoubtedly starting my own business. I am cautious by nature so to leave a stable job was terrifying and something I didn't take lightly.

### What are you currently working on?

Two exciting new projects including recruiting for and opening a new London office.

### Tell us about your team?

My main working colleagues are the "lead machine" Paul Sykes; we work together closely to improve our brand and bring in new clients and partners. Mike Tennant, our Technical Director who is probably the most intelligent person I've ever met and technically superb – we work together on the more complex projects for new and existing clients. And Callum who is a fellow director and takes charge of overseeing the telephony side of the business.

### What is the best business advice you have received?

Be the best, not the cheapest. Customer service is everything.

### What is the biggest challenge you have faced?

Starting a business from scratch with no clients.

### How do you like to unwind?

Three kids keep me busy and before lockdown I was a very keen snooker and squash player.

### Favourite Book/CD/DVD

**Book:** *Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* by Douglas Adams.

**CD:** Not a big music fan!

**DVD:** *Breaking Bad*.

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



# COVID-19: A CYBERSECURITY OPPORTUNITY

Businesses across the world are adapting to the Coronavirus pandemic, with the majority either implementing remote working or putting measures in place for reduced workforces to carry on in their place of work. However, with such a big change, comes an even bigger risk from hackers and cybercriminals alike, but does it also hit the reset button for cybersecurity and give it the much-needed attention it needs?

It tops the list for the most talked about topic in 2020 and it's been on the front of every newspaper, news channel, Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn feed – we simply can't escape it, but the main thing to point out here is that it's not going anywhere fast. Yup, I'm talking about COVID-19, and yes, you read that right, it's here to stay.

COVID-19 is now a part of our everyday lives, it's become the 'new normal', whatever that is, but with or without a vaccination, we already have and will continue to adapt to the new way of living, but more so, adapt to the new way of working.

In a recent survey from the folk at (ISC)<sup>2</sup>, they revealed that 96% of respondents' organisations had closed their physical work environments and moved to remote work-from-home policies, highlighting how many businesses across the globe are adapting in these unprecedented times.

Having the ability to introduce work-from-home policies and enable remote working for staff isn't anything new, but for many who'll say they've done it for years with the simple idea of taking your laptop, monitors and phone home being suffice, are wrong, in fact, you're the most vulnerable and are at serious risk from being attacked.

## Risk, What Risk?

Picture this, you're rushing about trying to juggle the kids' breakfast and getting dressed when you realise you have minutes to spare before your weekly meeting with the boss. Frantically rushing about, you click on any link that gets you onto that meeting on time, however, that link you just clicked installed a piece of malware onto your machine without you even knowing – scary, right?

In the same survey, the (ISC)<sup>2</sup> also reported that 23% of respondents said cybersecurity incidents experienced by their organisation have increased since transitioning to remote work, with some tracking as many as double the number of incidents – not even worth thinking about the damage caused.



It's no wonder we're seeing malware and phishing attacks increase tenfold since the start of the pandemic, in fact, the NCSC (National Cyber Security Centre) has removed thousands upon thousands of scam sites since the beginning of the outbreak, all with the hope of deceiving the public out of their hard-earned cash.

But here's the confusing bit, over 81% of respondents also said that security was an essential function at this time, yet we're still seeing businesses fall to their knees because they've only talked about it and not acted on the matter, begging the question, can you afford to take the risk?

## Whose Responsibility Is It Anyway?

Whether you're reading this an employer or an employee, equally, the answer is the same, it's YOUR responsibility.

Your home devices are again, your responsibility, but when it comes to work computers, laptops and mobile devices, it's the responsibility of the employer.

If you're an employee with a work machine connected at home with no form of cybersecurity solution in place, stop what you're doing and let your employer know the risks, even share this article, but if you're the employer, listen up.

Think about the fundamentals of your business, what it is you do, what service you provide, and to who, think of all your assets, whether it be technology or data, think about what you've got to lose? As that's exactly what you will, lose.

They're all valuable and essential to the running of your business, and without them, what do you have? I'm not just talking about the financial loss from your GDPR-related fine or from a piece of technology becoming redundant, I'm talking about

the reputational damage, ask yourself, would you survive?

Now you should be asking yourself, is that worth the risk?

The answer is NO. Absolutely NO. One hundred, million percent NO. So why are so many still choosing to ignore the responsibility? Is it a case of, "it'll never happen to us", "they'll not target a little company in the North East like us", well that's where you're wrong, you're a hackers dream, the low hanging fruit, an "absolute belter" as they'd say on the streets of the region, but it is now your responsibility to change that and protect your business once and for all.

## Clouds and Umbrellas. What?

I'm not talking about rainclouds nor the things to stop you getting wet, I'm talking about a cloud-based security solution called Umbrella from the clever folk at Cisco.

Cloud-delivered, Cisco Umbrella offers flexible security when and how you need it. It combines multiple security functions into one solution, so you can extend protection to devices, remote users, and distributed locations anywhere. Umbrella is the easiest way to effectively protect your users everywhere in minutes.

In a nutshell, Cisco Umbrella protects your business and users from malware and phishing, a cloud-based firewall to stop threats as they happen – giving you ultimate peace of mind for when you do get attacked, as it's a matter of when not if.

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Image: Dan Aziz

## DIGITAL INVESTMENT DRIVES GROWTH AT PIN POINT RECRUITMENT

Economic adversity can bring out the best in a company, with its leadership team rising to the challenge.

This certainly appears true of national recruitment group Pin Point, which has its UK head office located in Gateshead.

During the last six months the company has relocated its HQ, appointed a new MD, restructured its sales team, taken the full impact of Covid-19 on the chin and accelerated its investment in digitising many of its processes and systems.

"During times of crisis companies bend or reshape and diversify. In the last financial recession, we set up a healthcare division which has become a major driver in the growth of the business," said Stephen Hall, who recently returned to Pin Point as MD after leaving several years ago.

"We are weathering the current storm well. Like all business we have taken some financial strain through lockdown as our recruitment clients made changes to working practices and numbers. Like most UK businesses we utilised the furlough scheme for a small number of staff, and made redundancies in certain areas, mainly in back office functions.

"The cuts have been made in areas which will not affect our front-line service or customer experience. We have definitely weathered the eye of the storm and are driving through this crisis by winning new business and growing existing relationships, ensuring we come back stronger and more effective" he said.

Pin Point offers a range of recruitment services to a broad spread of industry sectors from industrial

and commercial to technical and healthcare. The company provides a national service from six regional operations including offices in Birmingham, Bristol, Middlesbrough Stoke and Aberdeen.

A key part of the drive to return the business back to growth and help deliver a new strategic vision is a digital transformation programme. In the last 12 months, the company realised it needed to make better use of technology to provide added value to clients while better supporting an expanding business network.

Pin Point's director of IT Terry Carney originally thought an off-the-shelf software solution for several processes that included HR, wages and client engagement would be ideal. He was unable to find anything suitable and took on the challenge of leading the development of their own solution.

Newcastle-based digital products studio NE6 was appointed months before the coronavirus outbreak to create a bespoke solution and one that could scale and develop with Pin Point.

Steven Gibbons, director at NE6, said: "We got to work and after a few months developed Pin Point's own pay slip portal, built in React JS. The client quickly saw some immediate business benefits, including time and money savings. A typical data input process that originally took around 8 minutes can now be done within a minute."

NE6 started the process of automating the onboarding of candidates for employment. Registration forms – some of which could be 40

pages long – were moved online and streamlined.

MD Stephen Hall explained: "We were already impressed by NE6 and their investment in the task. When the coronavirus outbreak hit, we needed to accelerate things. The relationship between Pin Point and NE6 really took off. They were both responsive and proactive. They rose to a challenge and took time and trouble to understand our needs in a difficult period. They have been outstanding, and we look forward to developing our plans with them.

"The new levels of automation have made the process of remote working more effective and streamlined our processes for the future."

Steven Gibbons, of NE6, added: "Ultimately, we're providing Pin Point with a highly bespoke digital solution that wraps around the needs of the business. We're releasing time for consultants to develop more time for customer relationships and business development while making it easier for candidates to engage and onboard with Pin Point."

In the coming year Pin Point aims to develop and expand the number of consultants in its national offices, expanding its offer into new sectors such as IT and tech while establishing a national business development team, to further develop national accounts.

Digital transformation – designed and driven by NE6 – is behind the strategic vision for growth for Pin Point.

For more details about digital transformation, visit [www.ne6.studio](http://www.ne6.studio)



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## MIXED GRADES

By the time you read this, thousands of 16 and 18-year-olds will have received their GCSE and A-level results for this year.

These grades are unique in the history of school qualifications in that they were not awarded through examinations, but through a mix of teacher predictions ("centre assessed grades") and statistical moderation carried out by exam boards.

As I write, I am keenly anticipating the outcome of both sets of results this year. Media interest is high, not least because Scottish Highers were awarded on the same basis earlier in the summer and caused huge controversy when almost one quarter of the CAGs were revised downwards. This was felt particularly keenly by schools with a significant number of disadvantaged pupils, whose grades were altered most frequently. There have been protests by pupils and widespread condemnation. Will the same have been repeated in England by the time you read this?

In evaluating the fairness of the process, we need to go back to the beginning when the decision to scrap the exams was made. The die was cast when Ofqual, the body that regulates exam boards, stated that grades awarded this year had to be of equal value to those awarded in normal circumstances; if the grades awarded this year, they argued, were to have any credibility they needed to be awarded in roughly the same proportions as normal to avoid the dreaded grade inflation. A reasonable view, but one which immediately sets up a problem.

Teachers are only human; we want the best for our pupils and tend to overpredict the results for our pupils. This means some moderation of the grades is needed to avoid soaring numbers of top grades and pass rates. In many ways this is understandable and indeed fair; every year there are youngsters who underperform for a variety of reasons – exam nerves, lack of preparation, misreading questions and so on. They are often hard to identify in advance and no teacher will roll the dice to decide which of their pupils this year would have fallen



Kieran McLaughlin

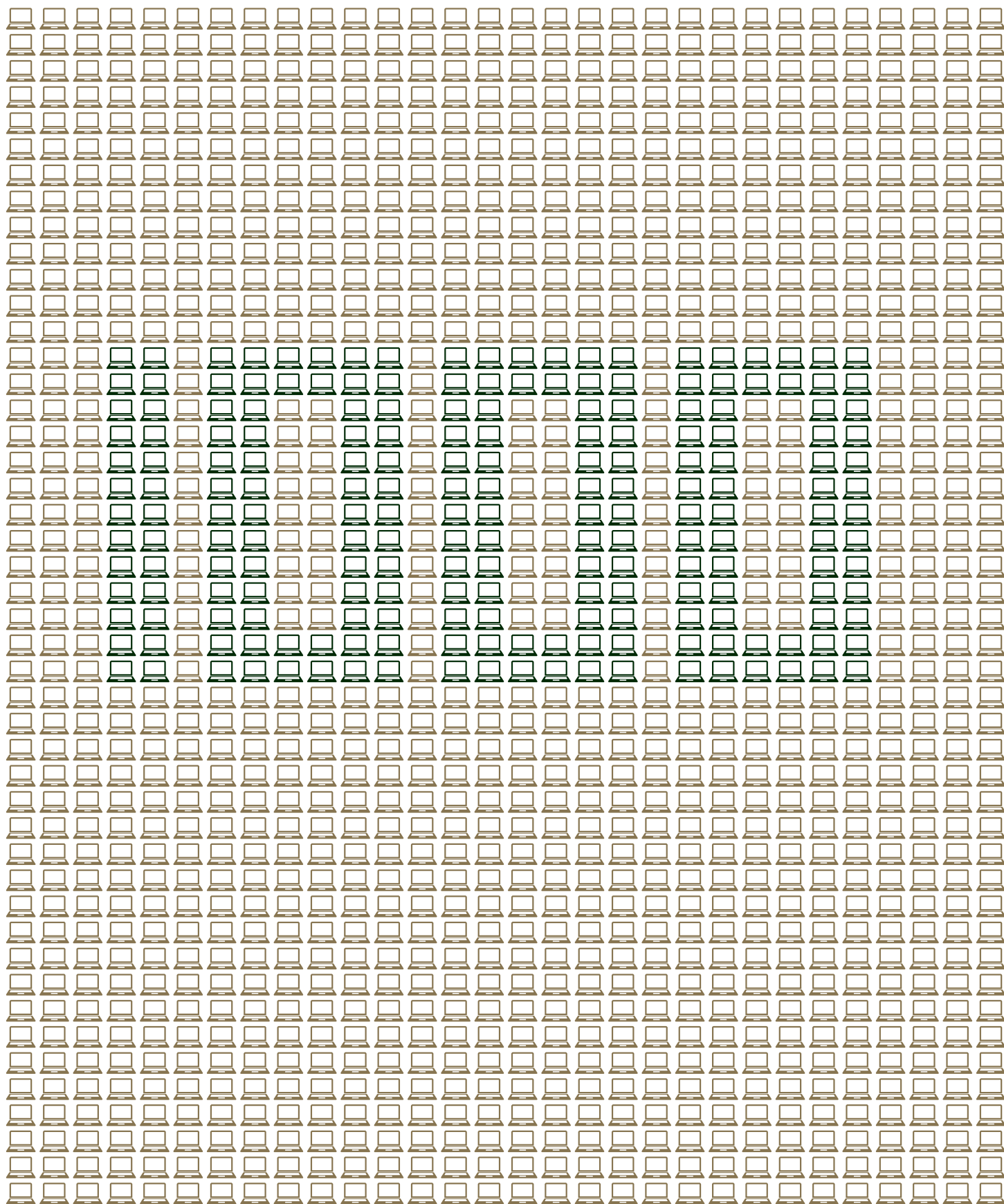
into that category. The problem comes with the method used to adjust which is based on each school's results in each subject over the past three years. So, in a very real sense, the grades are awarded to this year's candidates are framed by the results gained by previous pupils at that school in the past three years. How can this be fair?

Well, in many ways it can be. For large schools with similar intakes year-on-year, then broadly speaking the pupils will generally get what they would have got and the impact should be fairly minimal. The problem will be for the outliers; exceptional pupils or an exceptionally gifted group of pupils will be moderated down because of less successful cohorts in previous years. Schools that have worked hard to improve exam results will be less likely to see

the fruits of those labours but will be moderated so they are in line with previous performances. On an individual basis, hardworking pupils who tend to go to pieces in exams will benefit; last-minute crammers who have exemplified indolence over most of the last two years will not.

So, not so controversial after all? Maybe, maybe not. The system works well across the board and will lead to results patterns that are in line with previous years. However, this year's candidates will not be too interested in year on year patterns and statistical consistency; they will be interested in their grades and what they mean for their futures. Many will feel cheated by the system and suitably outraged. Yet more casualties of this horrible pandemic.

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)



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# SEPTEMBER SONG

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School for Girls

By the time you read this, the new school year will have started. Unfortunately, not being clairvoyant, I am unable to predict what the R rate will be by then, or if areas of the country will be under partial lockdowns. However, in the words of my favourite 80s ballad, I know this much is true:

When they return, all girls at my school will welcomed back with open arms, albeit with those arms at a safe distance. Via Teams meetings last term, I vowed to some KS3 girls that I had missed their chatter so much that I would never again tell them off for talking in assembly. They knew I didn't mean it, of course, but they did understand that, without their lively presence and *joie de vivre*, their school was a ghost of its former self during the Summer Term.

This new academic year will be disrupted, but I know that our school community will maintain our sense of togetherness that is integral to our school ethos. Our recent Facebook campaign noted that: "When the world stopped, we kept going"; this sentiment will continue, despite 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune' that might be unceremoniously chucked at all of us if a second wave strikes. We may not be able to host certain events in our usual manner, but we will find a way of doing a virtual replacement. Last term, all of us who would have previously shuddered at the sheer thought of talking on camera in the past grappled with bad lighting, wobbly chins (that might have just been me, to be fair) and sheer stage fright to produce online videos, open days, award ceremonies and presentations.

Finally, it is a truth universally acknowledged that teachers will have been using a great deal of the summer holidays to plan and prepare for the learning they will be delivering in the year ahead. Therefore, I hope the beginning of term went well and that you are able to embrace any challenges that this brave new world of ours presents. Bonne chance!



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.



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## PLAY IT AGAIN STAN

Actress, playwright and autism activist, Alison Stanley, talks to Steve Russell about her passion for theatre in education, and why she's collaborating with one of Tyneside's most infamous figures.

Sex is hard work. Not, I hasten to add, an embittered personal reflection, but the title of an eye-opening memoir, currently being adapted for the stage by Alison Stanley. Written by a former Newcastle sex worker, the book is a frank account of her journey from chat line girl to disgraced brothel madam. Controversial territory, but Alison has built her reputation on challenging drama, so readily accepted when she was approached to develop it into a play:

*What really interested me was how she viewed her career. Stereotypically, people think of sex workers as having been forced into it via drug or alcohol problems, but she simply saw it as an alternative to the nine to five.*

As in many of Stanley's works, the character will be anchored in domesticity, challenging the notion of sex workers as immoral outsiders, by depicting an ordinary woman struggling with the humdrum of life. There's also comic exploration of the juxtaposition between fantasy and reality. Alison elaborates:

*There's a scene where she is on the phone to a gentleman, pretending to be sexy while doing the ironing, with a bowl of water and some bananas nearby for realistic sound effects!*

The nature of those sound effects shall remain unsaid, but the play will certainly shine a light on some peculiar proclivities! Socially conscious drama has become Alison's forte, and she's hoping to emulate the success of past works, *Bedsocks* and *Secrets* and *The Life of Reilly*. As a mother to an autistic son, the latter was deeply personal, exploring autism as lived by an average North East family. The ground-breaking play - in which she also starred - received rave reviews upon its debut at Northern Stage, and a packed-out 2019 tour would follow, including a run at Edinburgh



Alison Stanley

Fringe. Building on this success, she's developing a series of children's books featuring the Reilly character, and a big-screen version of the play is currently in pre-production, with filming set to begin in 2021:

*The screenplay is ready, and we've got a great team at Try Hard Films working on it, with Daymon Britton lined up to direct. Existing investment will be supplemented by another fundraising ball early next year. It'll be set in Newcastle, with some of the shoots potentially in Teesside.*

Everything under the Reilly banner forms part of Life of Reilly CIC, a social project established to raise awareness of autism, and provide support and resources to those whose lives are touched by the condition. Alison founded CIC alongside close friends, Christine Stephenson and Kelly Best, who also have autistic children. Driven by personal experience, they operate programmes designed to increase awareness and tolerance. Really Reilly is a theatrical production which visits schools, teaching children about autistic behaviours, with post-performance workshops reinforcing its message. There are also workshops designed for parents, grandparents, and others in the support network of a child with autism. Naturally, COVID-19 has disrupted their schedule, but Alison immediately began innovating:

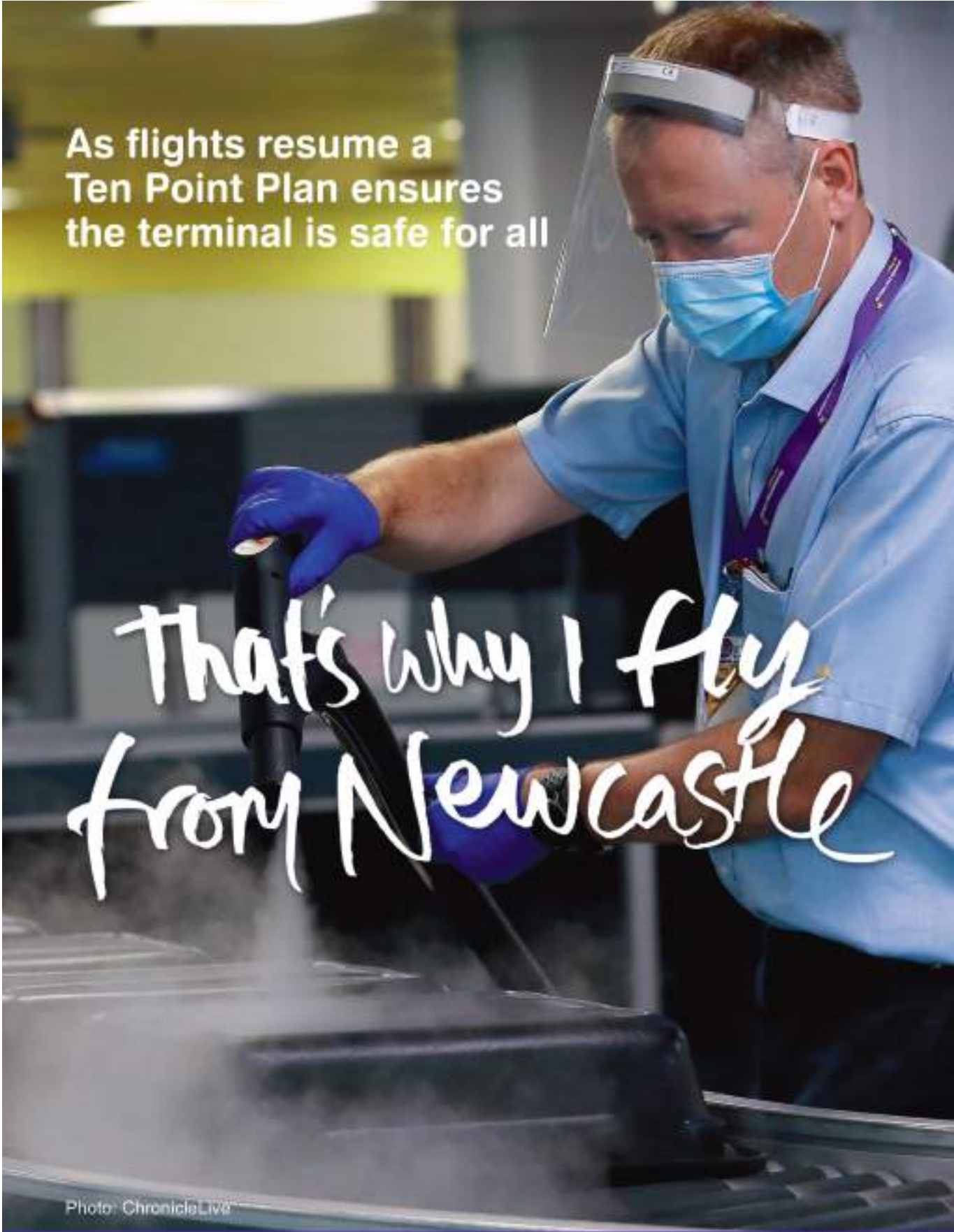
*To keep a strong online presence, we had the actors from the stage version of The Life of Reilly read monologues from the original script, then I developed that by writing lockdown specific monologues to show the challenges and coping strategies of families living with autism.*

Featured on their Facebook page (The Life of Reilly NE CIC), the darkly comic monologues document the additional pressures arising from a condition to which routine and familiarity are so crucial. One features the bully character from the play, delving into her background and why she displays bullying behaviour. It's a theme Alison has decided to expand upon:

*I'm in discussions with some domestic abuse charities about a theatre in education project around bullying, and I'm writing a play on the same theme, which will hopefully be brought to the stage next year.*

She's also working on a pantomime, featuring an autistic Goldilocks, and a series of children's books based on an autistic female character, something she feels is under-represented in the media.

A self-confessed diva since childhood, Alison Stanley was born to entertain, but it's her passion to inspire social change which really seems to drive her prodigious output. As one of her characters might say, 'keep gannin lass'!



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## LET ME ENTERTAIN YOU

The head of a North East entertainment company talks about sharing a stage with Shirley Bassey and Cliff Richard – and how she missed out on appearing with Frank Sinatra.

In an unassuming warehouse somewhere in Sunderland lies an Aladdin's cave of costumes.

Row upon row of bejewelled stagewear – around 3000 in all – are neatly stacked, available at a moment's notice to bring to life more than 50 years of music through every conceivable genre.

This is the world of Timeless Theatre Productions, set up by Sunderland-born Marie Adele Summers and who runs the business with partner, Colin Francis.

The current situation with Covid-19 has been particularly hard on the live entertainment industry, and particularly for companies like Timeless which relies on touring the UK's theatres and providing entertainers for some of the world's top cruise ships.

But as theatrical stalwarts and with "the show must go on" mentality, the couple are set to diversify and simply look for new outlets for their considerable talents until some kind of normality has been resumed.

"It has been a very tough time for anyone working in this industry," said Marie.

"With theatres closed and no cruises taking place, then that's a huge source of our business gone, at least temporarily."

That's not to say the pair have stopped working for one minute however. In the words of a famous song,

they've "picked themselves up, dusted themselves off and started all over again."

The pair are now diversifying into socially distanced events, offering a range of professional entertainment and speciality acts for charity fund raisers, outdoor shows – in fact everywhere and anywhere people are in need of an occasion which needs an added wow factor.

Their credentials are impeccable, with Marie taking her first dance steps at the age of four.

"I used to go along with my sister Anne (who is also a professional singer) was in her dance class and I used to stand at the back of the class and copy so they eventually let me join," she revealed.

It was singing that was Marie's first love however and it was following an appearance on the tv talent show, Opportunity Knocks, with Bob Monkhouse that the offers started to flood in.

These were the days when cabaret was king and she was invited to become a regular at the then-famous Caesar's Palace just outside of London, performing alongside such names as Shirley Bassey, Cliff Richard and Bobby Davro.

It was after one of the performances that Marie was approached by a man called Sol Kerzner who told her he owned a resort in South Africa and thought she should come and perform there.

Little did she know at the time that this was the entrepreneur behind the famous Sun City, where musical legends such as Frank Sinatra and Liza Minelli were regular performers.

"I told him that I was very happy where I was," recalled Marie.

"It was only afterwards that I fully realised who I could have been performing alongside!"

After her stint in London the cruise ships beckoned, with Marie and her partner Colin being regulars for more than 12 years.

She's lost count of how many countries and how many world cruises she's done, although she laughingly recounts that "I've been through the Panama Canal 52 times!"

The pair decided eventually to head back to the North East and set up Timeless, becoming a huge hit on the regional theatre circuit and also sending their own shows to countries as far away as India.

While the entertainment industry may take some time to get back on its feet, Marie and Colin are ready to take any opportunities that come their way.

"We have so many talented people working with us and we have so much we can offer that we're hopeful that it won't be too long until everything starts to get moving again," she said.



For further information visit [www.timelesstheatre.co.uk](http://www.timelesstheatre.co.uk)

## THE BISTRO BRINGING A TASTE OF SPAIN TO THE NORTH EAST

Spain may have been off the cards for most of us this summer, but you don't have to travel far to get a real taste of the Med.

La Vina, located in Cleaton, is by day a quaint café, serving all of your favourite cakes, bakes and homecooked meals, perfect for a lunch date or a quiet cuppa. But by night, La Vina transforms in to a Spanish-style bistro, with a delicious tapas menu and wine selection on offer.

Whether your preference is authentic Patatas Bravas, delicious Gambas or Spanish Frittata, you can enjoy it all and more with La Vina's special offer – Any five tapas for £30 – plus, you can even add a bottle of house wine or two beers for just £5.

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At La Vina, they believe that sharing is caring, so why not try out the Paella for two? With choices including chicken and chorizo, king prawn and calamari or vegetarian, you can enjoy a romantic, Spanish date night, right here in the North East.

So if you're craving that European get-away, you don't need to, take a visit to La Vina for a little Spanish break that's sure to satisfy the crave.



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## NEW CHILDREN'S TV SERIES PLANNED FOR THE NORTH EAST

Ella and Sir Whoopsalot is a new project from Tyneside-based actress, presenter, writer and producer Kim Tserkezie, whose media production company Scattered Pictures promotes inclusion and showcases emerging and diverse talent from the region.

IMG's production arm has signed on to co-produce the show, which has also been awarded development funding from the Young Audiences Content Fund at the BFI.

Ella and Sir Whoopsalot tells the story of an eight-year-old disabled girl who lives in a historic castle and befriends a 1,000-year-old knight, who she shares many fun adventures with. The series is aimed at an audience aged seven and under and it is hoped that production could start early in 2021.



## STREET FOOD BUSINESS EXPANDS INTO SECOND SITE

A fast-growing street food business has established its second North East site as it continues to expand across the region.

Acropolis has built a huge following for its range of Greek street food, including gyros, souvlaki and mezze, through its base in Newcastle's Grainger Market, in addition to its regular pop-ups at the likes of Quayside Market and Tynemouth Market.

Now, Acropolis has added a second permanent site to its portfolio by opening in the Stack shipping container development in Newcastle, joining the array of independent traders at the venue.

Acropolis turned to the specialist real estate team at Sintons for support in acquiring their unit within Stack.



## A SUNDAY NIGHT IN WITH SAMMY

Following the astonishing success of the 2020 sell-out 20th Anniversary shows at the Newcastle Utilita Arena in February, the Sunday for Sammy team have released the long-awaited DVD of the shows.

More than 12,000 fans flocked to the Arena for the shows which saw the return of Jimmy Nail, as well as appearances from cast members including Johnny Vegas, Joe McEldevry and Tim Healy.

In addition to the full performance, the DVD also features a 30-minute documentary, 'The Making of Sunday for Sammy'. This was produced by final year students from the University of Sunderland who were given behind the scenes access of the show.

The DVD is available from JG Windows Newcastle and Metrocentre and online.



## NORTH EAST ENTREPRENEURS CAPITALISE ON AT-HOME EATING AND DRINKING

North East entrepreneurs, who launched a new start up selling gin, rum and vodka boxes during Covid-19, have had sales from across the UK, as the nation's habits become more home-based.

Valda and Paul Goodfellow invested a six-figure sum into setting up Taste Club Limited in April, with business partners Liam Goodfellow and Georga Spottiswood.

Valda said: "A Taste Club box contains all of the elements to create happy memories, from great nights in to family celebrations. We are insanely passionate about food and drink and working with quality brands. Having lived and worked in the North East our whole life, Paul and I felt it was hugely important that we invested in our local economy."

## THE BOYS ARE BACK IN TOWN

A boyband supergroup will be entertaining al fresco diners this month when a popular County Durham fundraiser returns.

As part of its Outdoor Summer Sessions programme, Hardwick Hall Hotel, at Sedgfield, is hosting its 17th annual Oyster Festival on 11 September, with a new format to maintain social distancing.

And those heading to the outdoor charity event will be treated to a performance from headliner Boyzlife, made up of hugely successful former boyband members Keith Duffy of Boyzone and Brian McFadden of Westlife.

Tickets cost £120pp plus VAT, with private booth seating for parties of six, and includes a three-course Fruits de Mer menu, with a reception drink and free flowing Guinness, lagers and wine.



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## OH OKANA!

By Michael Grahamslaw

As Newcastle begins to wake up following lockdown restrictions, a steady stream of new venues are popping up around the city.

One such venue is Okana, a plush new bar and dining rooms which occupies the iconic former Union Rooms site on Westgate Road.

Striking navy blue canopies now adorn the building's impressive façade, hinting at the luxury which lies within, whilst the interior has had a trendy facelift whilst still retaining many of its original features.

For those familiar with the old Union Rooms, the old divided floor plan remains in place and now comprises a cocktail lounge, snug restaurant, sizeable smoking terrace and of course, the capacious, marbled bar area for which the venue was so renowned. All in all, Okana oozes style and possesses the feel of a chic city centre hangout where one can unwind with friends, sip cocktails, enjoy food and get full of tanked beer in front of the live sport.

Uniquely, the bar is also blazing a trail in the city with its optional offering of CBD oil infused dishes and cocktails inspired by similar, runaway success venues in London and Amsterdam.

The oil, which is a £2.50 supplement, is derived from the cannabis plant and is lauded for its healthy benefits like reduced joint pain and easing anxiety, without any of the psychoactive effects associated with a marijuana high.

This had certainly piqued my interest so I pitched up one Tuesday afternoon with my son Jack and found the venue in full "eat out to help out" swing.

Following a warm welcome, we settled down in the cocktail lounge in the centre of the building and observed a menu brimming with choice. In addition to a backbone of British dishes (often featuring many quirky inflections), there's a parade of different flavours on offer including tapas, sandwiches, burgers, pizzas and chargrilled rotisserie dishes.

Whilst amongst the CBD-friendly dishes, diners can

enjoy smoked paprika chicken popcorn, crispy hens egg with spinach and blue cheese rarebit, the luxury gourmet burger with melting beef and cheese and even the traditional beer battered cod and chips. Now never was there a greater symbol of modern Britain than that.

Kicking off, Jack chose the slow-cooked belly pork goujons with a dunk-friendly pot of spiced gravy. Stacked up in a Jenga-like structure with a tangle of side salad and a smear of beetroot puree, these looked great and tasted even better packed with that rich, gamey satisfaction.

I chose the maple glazed chicken wings, delicately spiced for extra oomph and served with a board of additional dipping sauces including smoky barbecue and a thousand island dressing.

With so much on offer for main course, the seafood linguine was a gamble but one which paid off emphatically. Plump king prawns met chunks of fresh crab in a white wine garlic sauce showered with extra chilli and bursting with flavour.

Jack was also seemingly at a loss at what to order so went ahead and ordered everything. A "pimp my board" tapas selection arrived four dishes strong, comprising garlic butter chorizo prawns, spiced lamb and apricot koftas, porcini and ricotta wellington parcels and a selection of Chef's Italian cured meats so good it would make Tony Soprano blush.

The CBD theme also extends to the dessert menu where one can enjoy tiramisu, Eton mess and chocolate fondant all with a few droplets of the good stuff should they so wish. A bracing espresso and an Old Fashioned cocktail would suffice for Jack and I though as we soaked up the atmosphere in the glass-ceilinged cocktail area.

On first visit then, this would appear to be a venue with a lot going for it. Coupled with a stellar food



& drink offering, is an enthusiastic approach to trial new events and promotions – we visited a few days prior to a bank holiday hip hop brunch. In fact the various rooms make for a versatile space which lends itself to a number of occasions, be it morning coffee, a pit stop after work or party evening.

Whilst all dishes may comply with the maximum 0.2% legal THC limit, this exciting new venue has begun life on a high.

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

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## IT'S ALL STACKING UP ON SUNDERLAND'S SEAFRONT

Located on the magnificent Seaburn coastline in Sunderland, STACK Seaburn opens to the public on Friday 4th September. The new social hub features a vibrant line up of bars, street food and lifestyle businesses right on the seafront.

The trendy new space, developed by Danieli Holdings, is built from shipping containers that are assembled to make an enclosed open-air village, with stretched tents providing protection from the elements and a central plaza area for drinking, eating and entertainment.

Suitable for all of the family, including the dog, it's a place to come together and socialise...safely!

The food and drink providers include:

- **Downey's Fish & Chips** - serving the best locally produced fish & chips in the area.
- **Acropolis** - multi award winning Greek street food.
- **Chapos Tacos** - traditional Mexican street food made from family recipes passed down through generations.
- **Boojie Burger** - classic American burgers, smashed and stacked full of flavour.
- **Yolo Coffee & Kitchen** - serving breakfast, brunch, lunch and great tasting coffee.
- **Healthy Thaim** - Healthy food with a Thai twist.
- **Farah's Italiano** - Italian street food serving fresh homemade pasta and Piadina's.
- **Holy Duck** - Loaded duck fries and wraps galore.
- **Longhorns Smokehouse** - all about the meat - rubbed, pulled, BBQ'd and more.
- **ZZA Pizzeria** - classic Italian thin and crispy pizzas.
- **The Little Cakery** - providing delicious treats ranging from homemade cakes and traybakes to fresh scones and gourmet brownies.

### Bars

- **Barley & Me**
- **Heineken**
- **Yolo (Wine & Cocktail Bar)**
- **Hop House 13**
- **The Gin Cabinet (Gin Bar)**



And they are joined by a host of lifestyle businesses including:

- **Woofs n Scruffs** - dog grooming, self-serve baths and dog supplies.
- **Games Cabin** - computer gaming.

Neill Winch, CEO at Danieli Holdings, said he was proud to bring the STACK concept to his hometown of Sunderland following the scheme's success in Newcastle.

He said: "I'm delighted with the line-up of businesses we have been able to bring to STACK Seaburn. It really is testament to the confidence people have in the STACK concept that so many street food traders

and lifestyle companies have signed up to take a unit during what has been the most challenging period imaginable for the sector.

"STACK offers a unique experience to customers, which ensures they keep coming back time and time again. The variety of food, drink and services on offer makes the place vibrant and welcoming all year round. And with a full line up of entertainment planned to include; live music, quizzes, dog days and wellness events, there is something for everyone."

The container scheme is also well suited to operating under the current circumstances with social distancing measures in place. Neill added: "The fact we are essentially an outdoor venue and we can space the tables out to ensure social distancing gives people the confidence they can come out to socialise and feel safe at the same time."

"Pre-bookings, table service and COVID marshals have all worked well to keep customers safe at our Newcastle scheme, and we will be introducing the same operating procedures at STACK Seaburn."

Many of the businesses that have signed up to take space in STACK are Sunderland traders, keen to take advantage of the stunning seaside location which attracts excellent footfall throughout the year.

Councillor Graeme Miller, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: "We have a stunning seaside that will be greatly enhanced by the arrival of this exciting line-up of traders, who will bring something new and different to the area."

"STACK's success demonstrates the growing confidence that businesses have in this city. Residents are fiercely proud of our seaside and they support it, and visitors are increasingly attracted to the area - and we'll continue to see that appeal grow, as we create a better offer for families and friends to enjoy."

STACK is one of a number of positive seaside developments set to move forward, transforming the area into a vibrant place to live and play.



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"Emma Parsons: Can't thank the staff at Sore Paws enough for looking after my cat Dobby after he had a run in with a car last week. Even though we weren't registered with them and they were about to close for the evening, they saw him and gave him a thorough examination with a follow up appointment the next day. Fortunately, his injuries weren't as bad as we thought, and he is now doing okay (although he has used up one of his 9 lives). I would 100% recommend Sore Paws"

"Louise Heslop: Sarah was lovely with Charlie, he can be a grumpy growly terrier, but he approved and even gave Sarah kisses. He accepted treats from Sarah, which is unusual, so he must have really liked her. I would definitely recommend"



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# OUT & ABOUT - HORDEN, DURHAM HERITAGE COAST



Britain's newest railway station opened in the North East on Monday 29th June. It's at Horden on the Durham Coast line between Middlesbrough and Newcastle, situated between Seaham and Hartlepool stations.

I took a visit there when the station was only three weeks old with the intention of walking the coastal path north to Seaham along the cliff tops and alongside the railway. It is a walk that takes over three hours to do, whereas the train only takes eight minutes. There are not many options at Horden, but further north there is much choice of footpaths – generally alongside the railway is the most direct and along the wiggly route of the coastline is longer, but more scenic.

Since it is not yet marked on any maps, I was unsure where the new station actually was, but it's at grid reference NZ 447 412, somewhat south of where I expected, but the 1140 train from Newcastle arrived punctually at 1217. Passengers from the south, e.g. Darlington and Yarm, can change at Thornaby to access the Durham Coast Line. Before it opened, it was known as Horden Peterlee, but was opened as just Horden which has caused some confusion. My phone's text messaging translated the three letter code for Horden, HRE, as RYE in East Sussex. And asking for Horden gave a message that info on the London Underground station at Morden could not be given. It will no doubt get sorted soon!

The new station had only four cars in a substantial car park, but on the same day the Prime Minister announced that railways were not just for essential journeys. I headed north along a wide paved track north to join the coastal path through the fragrant wooded glade named Warren House Gill, accessed via the County council tip and the sewage works. After the Gill there's a sharp left up steep steps to the cliff top and an exhilarating walk along the towards Fox Hole Dene. You go inland here to cross the dene and can either use the coastal path or go direct alongside the railway.

When Tom Wright became Bishop of Durham in 2003 I was asked to plan a walk and bus/rail ride round the diocese over six days which included part of this walk, in that case southbound from Seaham to Easington Colliery. It was decided that the senior staff (archdeacons, Bishop's council members etc.) would all do this walk together and in the area of Hawthorn Dene we got temporarily lost. At the time it was case of too many Chiefs and not enough Indians. Is that phrase even acceptable these days?

Luckily the signposting has been improved since those days and it was no problem to walk down below the railway bridge and over the little bridge in the Dene and along the fields until the large industrial estate at Seaham eventually came into view. I chose the coast route here to round off the day.

I began walking at 1230 and arrived at Seaham Harbour at 1615 at the office of my accountant where I was able to drop off some papers. It was then a further ten minutes up the old track to Seaham station for the train back to Newcastle

at 1720. There were some young people (all wearing masks) going for a night out in Newcastle, which previously would have been prohibited. When you have the opportunity to have a day out by train, take it with both hands. You never know if there is to be another lockdown.

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk)

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# SUITS YOU SIR!

By Jackie Marston

When you hear the words made-to-measure tailored suits, it makes you think immediately of the likes of Saville Row in London, but what if you were to be offered the same quality, service and tailoring here in the North East?

I caught up with self-made entrepreneur, Jack Smith, the founder of made-to-measure bespoke suits and menswear brand, Walton & Sutherland.

## **Jack, tell me how you got into the tailoring industry?**

It was my grandfather Phillip Walton that inspired my passion for luxury menswear from a very early age. A real fashionista of his time, he was always smartly dressed and took great pride in his appearance. He wore fine, expertly tailored suits every day and I just adored the fact that he oozed class. He was also a wonderful role-model and taught me that if I want something bad enough, then I have to be prepared to work hard for it.

## **Where did you do your training?**

I learnt my trade from working for one of the world's most reputable menswear brands, where I was able to develop my knowledge and skills of made-to-measure. I wanted to take quality, service and my reputation to the next level, hence Walton & Sutherland was born.

When you get a Walton & Sutherland made-to-measure suit you really feel like you're wearing a quality product and we make the whole experience a pleasant one, from start-to-finish.

## **How is the business doing?**

Incredibly well. We're just in the process of opening our first store, in Durham at the beginning of November. Business is booming and our reputation means that we have quite a good celebrity following, and not just from the North East. At present, we work from our clients' homes, offering a truly personal experience, however with the demand outgrowing my personal capabilities, it's the right time to expand and train our staff to work from the store as well as on the road. We try and make the whole process as easy as possible for anyone wanting a tailored suit, so it is split into a simple four step process: Consultation • Initial Fitting • 2nd Fitting • Final Result & Aftercare.

## **How can our readers get in touch?**

Our e-commerce website is live and we have a range of clothing and accessories on there, however if someone wants something very special and they would like a made-to-measure suit, then they can complete the Walton & Sutherland enquiry form.



Walton & Sutherland, Usher Historic House & Chapels, Woodland Road, Durham, DH7 9RH. 07703 186 983. [www.waltonsutherland.com](http://www.waltonsutherland.com)

Image: Nathan McDine





## BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL

By Michael Grahamslaw

As we now adjust to the 'new normal', it didn't long for Father and Son to make their comeback review at one of Newcastle's star venues.

Whilst for many, eating out has understandably dropped down the list of priorities, many of the region's restaurateurs have worked tirelessly to comply with government restrictions and are back in a socially-distanced full flow.

One such eatery is The Hudson, the County Hotel's all-day kitchen and late night cocktail bar. Occupying a prime location opposite Central Station, this imposing railway hotel has had a new lease of life breathed into it in recent years as part of an expansive £8 million regeneration programme by the Gainford Group.

The venue offers a la carte dining along with a sleek bar area, a stylish space with a pumping atmosphere which is the perfect place to kick back over a couple of cocktails before or after your meal.

In a nod to the region's heritage, the restaurant borrows the name of George Hudson, a 19th century railway financier and close pal of locomotion maestro, George Stephenson.

The romance of the railway has been subtly reflected in the décor with shiny brass rails and cosy velvet booths meeting some of the more modern touches (an impressive open kitchen lends spectacle) which today characterise the vibrant nightlife of Newcastle.

Following lockdown restrictions, a trip into town felt something of a 'city break' yet a buoyant lunchtime atmosphere and the clink of wine glasses soon had us rediscovering that palpable 'dining out' magic.

The menu at The Hudson makes for eclectic company with sharing platters, a la carte dishes, stylish Asian fusion options and hearty hotel classic combining to create the desired all-day dining appeal.

In order to get the full experience, diners are encouraged to order multiple sharing dishes to sample between guests.

Following suit, Jack and I ordered a sharing plank of bread and olives whilst surveying the menu more closely, before

abandoning all and adopting a "get your own son" starter/main course approach.

Kicking off, Jack chose the honey glazed tiger prawns, a perfect marriage between sweet and savoury flavours, enlivened by fresh chilli and coconut sambal. A generous eight plump prawns sat atop a shredded Asian salad and proved the perfect way to begin.

I opted for Scotland via South East Asia with Steamed Mussels bathed in a piquant Thai Green curry broth. This packed an outstanding depth of flavour and was dutifully mopped up with another fat hunk of crusty bread.

Between courses, we were waited on superbly by Restaurant Manager, Paul, who is a warm and welcoming presence. Paul has clearly been instrumental in restoring the restaurant to its pre-lockdown heights and also proved a dab hand at recharging our glasses with a silky and seductive Argentinian Malbec.

I continued the globetrotting theme with a delicious platter of lime and chilli seared steak fajitas. Pre-rolled with panache, these spared me the embarrassment of my usual tortilla origami and tasted great too, especially when loaded with avocado, salsa tomatoes and herb yoghurt.

Jack plucked one straight "from the grill" and was wading into his favourite peppercorn steak with real gusto which was also supplemented by a bowl of truffle and parmesan fries. Whilst this restaurant excels in hearty hotel classics, it is little touches like this which bring a real touch of class.

Being our first 'proper' meal out post-lockdown, we lacked the requisite 'match fitness' to put away a full 3 courses but filed a mental note to sample both the hot chocolate fondant and the Hudson Eton Mess on our next visit.

Leaving totally replete, we both agreed that the team deserve huge credit for creating a dining space every bit as safe as it is stylish whilst still maintaining the high standard of cooking which has cemented its place in the city as an instant classic. This iconic railway hotel remains on the right track.

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





# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## SHAH CHOUDHURY

Owner of Zeera Indian restaurant, South Shields, Tyne & Wear.

### **Did you always envisage a career in the industry?**

Yes, I did. I started my own business in 2007. Zeera was my first restaurant. Prior to that, I had worked for the Star of India in Ocean Road as their head waiter. It gave me a taste of what I wanted to do as a career and I loved that the clients came back time and time again and appreciated my good service.

### **What is your favourite aspect of the job?**

By far, it is making the diners happy. If you work in the hospitality industry – you have to be prepared to give it your all. I do love that our clients come back time and time again, so we must be doing something right at Zeera.

### **How do you measure success?**

Most people would say monetary terms to this, however this is not my God. I measure my success in the fact that I have a business that I love, I can provide comfortably for my family and that our customers choose to come to us. For me, that's far more important than money.

### **What has been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?**

Normally there would be a list of changes that I could list here, as the hospitality industry changes all the time, but to be honest, the most challenging thing to change recently is obviously Covid-19. This has really tested everyone and sadly, there will be many businesses who will not come out of it. We have had to diversify what we do massively during this pandemic and we've offered a take-away only service, a delivery service, a DIY curry kit for people to make restaurant-quality curries at home as well as the re-opening of the restaurants under strict government guidelines. We either adapt or die, we chose to adapt.

### **How has your skillset developed accordingly?**

Well it's certainly made me a lot more of a problem-solver than I was beforehand. Thankfully, we had the help of our marketing company; JAM Prints & Marketing during this time and as we've adjusted what we are offering, they have

quickly ensured that our customers are aware of it, so we made a great team. Sales were steady during this time and it kept us from having to put more of our staff on furlough.

### **Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?**

A risk-taker, definitely. I see an opportunity, then I go for it. I follow the mantra of any Michelin Star restaurant and always aim to be the best at what we do. I try to be different and I try and be creative. If you are not moving forward – then you are standing still, is my motto.

### **To what would you attribute your success?**

Working hard and always striving for perfection. I will not give up. I see every problem as a challenge and I believe that my glass is half full, not half empty.

### **What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?**

Manpower is my biggest weakness. I try and do everything myself and I can be reluctant to delegate, but I am getting better at this and outsourcing more of the business' requirements than I used to. Older is definitely wiser in my case!

### **How do you remain motivated?**

I am generally a positive person, so staying motivated is easy enough for me. I find my enthusiasm also rubs off on people too, so I am able to pass this on and motivate those around me.

### **Would you prefer to be liked or respected?**

Respected. In our culture, respect is very important. It is possible to be both though, and I do strive for that.

### **I'll retire when?**

I have enough money to live comfortably with my family. Work hard and enjoy your life is what we all aim for, but I also want to provide for my family so they can get the lifestyle they deserve.







## AS THE CLOCK STRUCK 12!

The cake had not been cut, no champagne had been sipped and no lovers had waltzed across the dance floor, there was no glass slipper to find and the glimmer of the fairy tale slipped beyond the horizon.

On Friday 31st July at 12.54pm my phone starting ringing, the first call from BBC London eager to find out my views on the latest Government update and wishing for direct contact with couple's due to host a celebration the very next day.

I explained as I had done previously that I had protected all my clients and postponed their weddings to 2021. I went on to explain the emotional and financial distress for couples and their families with this last-minute decision. I was sympathetic and upbeat, announcing that 2021 will be the year of the wedding.

What I did not say was that by protecting my clients I took the impact professionally and personally not just for 2020 but for 2021 too. What I also did not point out was the damage created in that moment that Friday to the industry.

The Government had delayed measures due to come into effect on 1st August, inclusive of hosting a Wedding Reception. What did this mean for the industry with less than 24-hours' notice?

After months of devastation, emotional and financial distress and watching other hospitality

sectors awaken, August was due to bring much relief for the wedding sector. The Government live update came at Midday, concluding just before 1pm on Friday 31st July.

By this point, wedding cakes would have been baked, decorated and ready to deliver, florists would have been up at the crack of dawn to purchase all the flowers from the market and will have been well on their way creating florals structures and arrangements, caterers will have ordered and received food produce and will have been prepping away in their kitchens, venues will have ceased utilising the Furlough Scheme and brought service staff back to work to set up in preparation for the commencement of celebrations, marquees will have been fully installed with all services and furniture hire in place, toilets shipped in and generators delivered, bar companies will have stocked fridges, filled pumps and have all the glassware polished squeaky clean, Make-up artists looking to kick-start their return to work with Bridal Make-up were given the double blow that they can't return to work at all just yet. I could continue but you get the picture.



Michelle Jones

The media spun a tale of woe for couple's countrywide as the industry went into meltdown, small independent businesses, many of which have received no help or support at all from the different schemes available, had been left stranded with all the glitz but no Ball to attend, a huge hole in their pockets and a great big question mark over the survival of their business.

Of course, people will always get married and I am a fair believer that love will conquer, I am hopeful that an industry that provides so much care and attention will be showered in confetti come 2022 and as always I offer support to my colleagues, stay strong and keep smiling.



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## ON YOUR BIKE!

Cycling in Britain saw a huge rise in popularity during lockdown as the public changed their lifestyles due to coronavirus.

The government announced a two billion pound package in May to help and encourage more people to walk and cycle as commuters face the challenges of going back to work in the months ahead. They said they would be working closely with local authorities to have more efficient cycle areas and encourage more people to cycle to work.

Reduced public transport and a desire to exercise more during lockdown has encouraged the UK to buy a staggering 1.3 million bikes during lockdown, the majority of consumers who have bought a bike in the last few months were thinking of buying one anyway with the crisis pushing them into making a purchase, helped by cycling stores remaining open throughout lockdown.

Bike retailers are one of the few business sectors to have received a boost from the coronavirus pandemic, having remained open during lockdown after being deemed essential businesses, with many stores experiencing mammoth increases in sales and struggling to keep up with demand.

Data found on Google trends suggests that people are searching for bikes to buy, more than ever. Whether it be brand new or second hand, people sought to take advantage of the exercise freedoms allowed during the pandemic while the UK Government encouraged the population to avoid using public transport. Government data detailing the change in transport use over the lockdown period has shown cycling levels rose up to 300% on some days.



David Fairlamb

Keen to promote the health, environmental and social distancing benefits of cycling, the government has issued a £250 million emergency fund to introduce pop-up bike lanes and other road upgrades, in addition to the existing Cycle to Work scheme, which gives employees a discount of 25-39% on new bikes. That scheme has been extended to cover e-Bikes as well, meaning that cyclists can cover longer distances by getting assistance on those tougher stretches.

Cycling seemed to be reborn after the 2012

London Olympics but this has taken its popularity to a new level.

Look to take advantage of the government schemes and keep your exercise embedded in your new norm. If you are new to cycling or a cyclist who thinks its ok to not wear a helmet, please think again - bikes and helmets go together, please take your safety seriously, I have seen way too many people not wearing them - the consequences of which can be life changing.

### DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*The North East of England is a stunning place, go and explore it on your bike, the positivity for your health and wellbeing is huge.*

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## THE GOLF FACTORY EXPANDS TO NEW PREMISES

The Golf Factory, which offers the biggest selection of quality new and used golf equipment in the North East of England, has expanded into new premises at Stephenson Industrial Estate, Killingworth, Tyne and Wear.

Previously based on the West Road, Newcastle the new-improved Golf Factory offers golfers a full repair service centre, practice putting green, indoor swing room and simulator and stocks a vast array of both new and used golf equipment.

The move to new state-of-the-art premises follows a sustained period of growth in customer demand for the Golf Factory, and is part of a wider business plan to also grow online sales and awareness nationally.

Ronnie Tweedy, Co-owner of the Golf Factory, said: "This is a milestone in the history of our journey so far and everyone connected to the store and its development. The Golf Factory started out as a hobby of mine 7 years ago buying and selling golf equipment from my home conservatory.

"Since then we have grown significantly and have assembled a great team of golf experts and staff in store. We have invested substantially in the new shop alterations, repair centre, putting green and simulator and now provide golfers with an unrivalled and seamless golf retail experience.

"I am also immensely proud that I managed to prize my fellow golfers and customers, Newcastle United and England football legend, Alan Shearer and Olympic triple-jump world record holder Jonathan Edwards, away from the golf course to officially open the new store."

Alan Shearer, said: "The new facilities are very impressive. I met Ronnie on the golf-course at Close House a few years ago and a regular customer of the Golf Factory and wish Ronnie and the team every success in the future."

Jonathan Edwards, said: "Like most golfers I'm forever trying to improve my game and reduce my handicap. The vast array of new and used equipment and new facilities are very impressive and I'm delighted to help support this local business and its development."

Along with a great selection of golf equipment, the new-improved Golf Factory also provides golfers with a full repair service for all golf clubs plus refurbishment and regrooving service. A regripping service for clubs and putters is available while you wait.



For further information contact the Golf Factory on 0191 217 0519, [www.thegolffactory.co.uk](http://www.thegolffactory.co.uk) or facebook: TheGolfFactoryNE

# GREAT SPORTING READS

Against all odds and amidst the coronavirus pandemic, the 2020 English International cricket season has been a triumph with thrilling series played against West Indies and Pakistan.

Off the park the fayre has been no less appetising with some terrific Summer reads released. Michael Grahamslaw takes a look at two of them.

## Morgan's Men

By Nick Hoult and Steve James

From English cricket's embarrassing failure at the 2015 World Cup to their heart stopping victory four years later, this book vividly describes how the team became the most aggressive limited overs side in the world, led by their inspirational captain Eoin Morgan, whose vision and determination to succeed captured the imagination of the nation.

We follow England's journey from Bangladesh to Barbados, from Melbourne to Manchester, to learn the story of the team's rebirth and the innovative new strategies and tactics that helped them become the best in the world, culminating in a World Cup Final widely regarded as the most thrilling one day match of all time.

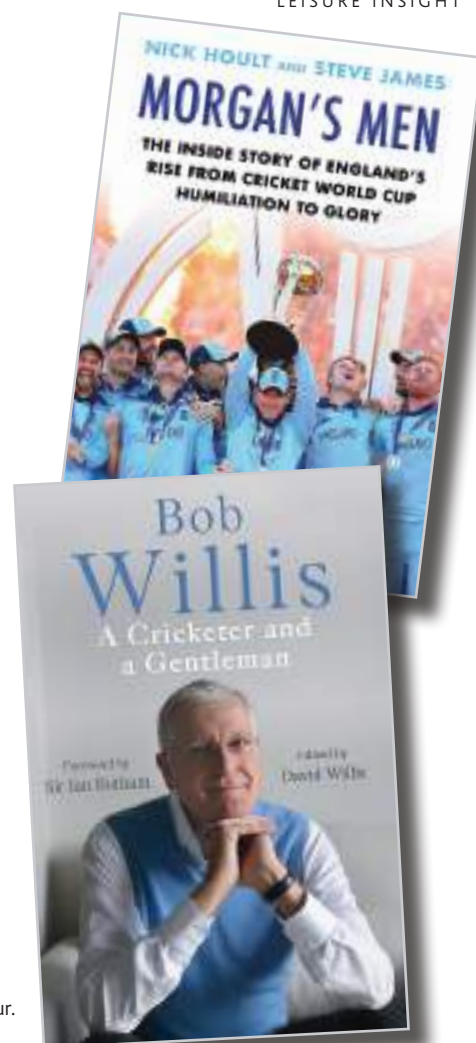
## A Cricketer and a Gentleman

Edited by David Willis

Following his passing in 2019, tributes to Bob Willis came flooding in from throughout the cricketing world and beyond. His career spanned decades, from his days as a cricketer for England to his time as a pundit on Sky TV. This autobiography includes never before seen writing from Bob alongside contributions from key figures, as well as a detailed account of the great England victory over Australia at Headingley in 1981.

The book was edited by Bob's brother David and great friend Sir Ian Botham has written the foreword.

A fitting tribute to someone widely known as a kind and generous man, with a mischievous sense of humour.



# REAL HOT YOGA





Studio Opening Autumn 2020



## ON THE TEE BOX -

# BELLINGHAM GOLF CLUB

### Location

Bellingham Golf Club (established 1893) is found on the north east edge of the village of Bellingham, capital of The North Tyne, some 17 miles north west of Hexham on the B6320.

### Setting

Bellingham's highly regarded 18 hole golf course, par 70, overlooks the village of Bellingham with stunning views extending up the North Tyne Valley towards Kielder Water and the Scottish Border.

### Length of course

White Tees 6,093 yards. Yellow Tees 5,902 yards. Red Tees 5,190 yards

### Course Type

A parkland course, Bellingham occupies some 130 acres of undulating land, with streams, ravines and trees of many different varieties. The course was extended from 9 to 18 holes in 1996-the transition is unnoticeable, so well has the old and new blended together.

### Facilities

Friendly clubhouse with bar and locker rooms and

outside decking with great views of the village and its surroundings. There is a six bay driving range where you can hone your swing for £2 for 20 balls.

### Longest Drive

At the 15th, a 406 yards par four beast over a prominent ridge, most players are pleased to be left with a wood or long iron for their second. The big boys shorten the hole by whacking their drive over the massive oak tree on the left side of the fairway. If they hit a good tee shot a wedge will do for the second. If they get it wrong its play a provisional ball and get ready to write at least a six on the card!

### Toughest Hole

The 18th is a 374 yard par four called Boggle Hole. Legend has it that the Boggle was where witches gathered! Whilst the hole is not long, it requires a straight tee shot of about 220 yards and then an iron (usually into the wind) across two deep ravines to a raised green. Many good cards have been wrecked by The Boggle Hole!

### Signature Hole

The 12th is a beautiful par four of 347 yards. It is down hill all the way to a tricky green with a

stream at the front and bank at the back and jungle on either side. Many players keep the driver in the bag here.

### Course Record

63 by Ryan Hyland

### Competitions

Competitions run every Thursday, Saturday and Sunday for the men and on Saturdays and some Sundays for the ladies. There is a highly popular nine hole mixed sweep on Tuesday evenings in the summer months. Details of gents, ladies and mixed opens are on Golf Empire and on [www.bellinghamgolfclub.com](http://www.bellinghamgolfclub.com).

### Prices

Weekdays £20 pp per round  
Weekends £25 pp per round  
Winter £10-£15pp per round

Buggies for hire-see website

Membership from 1st November 2020 to 31 October 2021 £290plus affiliation fees for first year.

Country/Second Club membership from 1st November 2020 to 31 October 2021 £220.



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# Barry Speker

COMMENT WITH...

barryspeker@hotmail.com



“  
**...Talkin’  
‘bout my  
generation...**  
”



In the battle of the space race in the 1960s, the challenge between the USA and Russia was characterised as ‘Our German scientists are better than your German scientists’. Rather like the playground tussle between schoolboys ‘My Dad’s bigger than your Dad’.

This has reappeared in today’s cut-throat retail market. John Lewis Partnership is changing it’s 95 year old price promise of being ‘Never Knowingly Undersold’.

This can not be sustained in the face of online giants offering goods at lower prices. We await the new motto but this will include a new deal with Amazon or similar, following the end of the Waitrose cooperation with Ocado (now teamed up with M&S). Will John Lewis be boasting ‘Our online conglomerate is bigger than yours’?

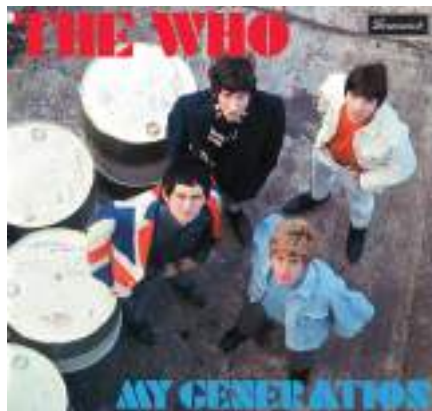
Meanwhile the white vans proliferate and clog the suburbs.

The close season is usually a time for premier league players to have some rest in Mustique or the Seychelles; to enjoy respite from the media spotlight and intrusive searching social media which tracks them and their WAGs every minute.

The break has been rather different for Manchester United and England defender Harry Maguire. On holiday on the Greek island of Mykonos, he is accused of attacking a police officer and getting into a violent incident. When he flew to Greece he worried that he might have to go into Covid isolation but did not expect to end up being red-carded, sin-binned, de-passported, handcuffed and repatriated; not to mention the wrath of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer and the selection problem for England boss Gareth Southgate.

A staycation would have been a wise move Harry - something like Boris Johnson’s walking holiday in Applecross in the Scottish Highlands opposite the Isle of Skye. Only 600 miles from No 10. A place you can keep out of trouble and away from exam fiascos, A-Levels, GCSEs, school reopening and talk of two trillions. Incidentally are ‘trillions’ now part of the national curriculum? The irony is that with GCSEs results, it turns out that NOT being taught for six months, leads to better exams results. So, school IS overrated! Thanks to Henning Wehn for that!

There has been much activity as a result of the public responding to the Government’s sponsored ‘Eat Out to Help Out’ scheme. The £10 a head discount has been a great boon to restaurants struggling to survive. How this fits with the PM’s anti-obesity drive is as yet unclear, but in the meantime we must all do our bit. Get out there and do some big eating. As Shakespeare wrote in Henry V, ‘For Rishi, England and St GORGE’!



Margaret Thatcher was adamant in 1980 that the ‘Lady’s not for Turning’. She would not change her policy on liberalisation of the economy. There would be no U-turn. The present Government is accused of successive U-turns - no shutdown - but then it happens; wait for herd immunity but let’s not; face-masks are dangerous and don’t help, but now they’re compulsory; we need an algorithm and can’t rely on teachers’ predictions, but yes we will, and so on.

Yet this can be a virtue. We all hear of new political leaders being in ‘listening mode’ whilst deciding on what policies should be adopted and announced. Well the Government is certainly listening and, if the clamour is loud enough, then a U-turn there shall be. That’s democracy.

It is a good thing that the non-existent money-tree which Labour believed existed has now been discovered by the Chancellor - the 2 Trillion and still counting.

“Talkin’ ‘bout my generation”, sang The Who. A generation is a sizeable group usually well recognised. As a baby boomer one of those born between 1945 and 1964 post war, we are used to being categorised as over- privileged and the cause of all economic ills.

But new generations are getting narrower. I was just getting used to identifying the Millenials (born 1980 to 1996) who are followed briskly by Generation Z (born 1996 to 2010) but following this there is now Generation Alpha (born 2010 to 2025). They are known as The Children of Millennials and are predicted to be the best educated, most technically immersed, wealthiest and tech savvy. But will they also be the Covid Generation dealing with the repayment of the trillions?

There is always talk of the silly season, illustrated by very strange cases in the courts - including Meghan suing over quotes from letters she wrote to her father, the bizarre action by Johnny Depp, (the original but perhaps no longer Captain Irate of the Caribbean) and the Amanda Staveley £1.5billion Barclays commission claim (when her time could be spent progressing a deal for the purchase of Newcastle United). The good (?) news is that some lawyers are doing very well.

During a few days on judicial duties in London I could see that despite the talk of so many people working from home, the traffic on the roads is as bad as ever. This is contributed to no doubt by many people staying off public transport. It is worrying to see deserted streets in the centre of Newcastle, with further plans to remove cars and make room for the non-existent hordes of cyclists.

There was a very welcome U-turn by Gateshead Council in reversing the plan to convert the dual-carriage flyover onto the Tyne Bridge into a cycle lane. Sensible people power has prevailed.



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