

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

FEBRUARY 2021

ISSUE 65

**HOWIE WHITE - FINDING TALENT IN  
A COVID ENVIRONMENT**

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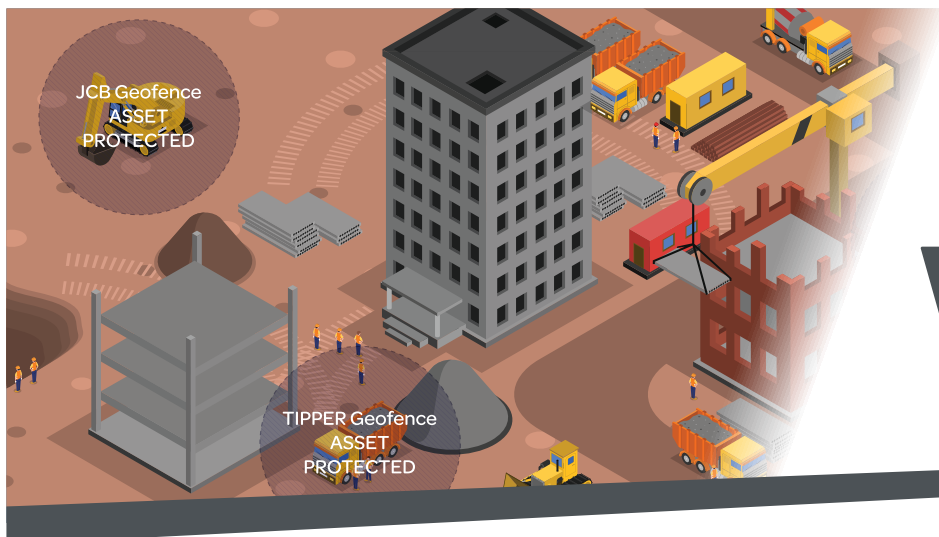
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# FOREWORD

## Welcome to the February edition of Northern Insight

With the country currently in the grip of lockdown 3.0 I am very proud to bring you our 65th edition which has been compiled in the most challenging of circumstances.

Our cover story focusses on Howie White Resourcing who turn 22 this year and have now completed over 1000 recruitment assignments, an amazing achievement for a small company.

We also chat again to our old friend Steve Black who talks about adopting a "lets have it attitude" to the unique challenges we currently face.

Look out for our new "My Weekend" and "Culture Club" features which are sure to prove popular in the months ahead as well as an enlarged education section.

Along with the usual plethora of insightful articles, critical comment and expert opinion we hope everyone finds something to enjoy.

Huge thanks as ever to all of our loyal clients, contributors and readers.

*Stay safe and well as one day we will meet again...*

*M.J. Grahamslaw*

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# CONTENTS

8-9 • Business News

10-11 • Cover Story

Howie White - Finding talent in a Covid environment

14 • Deals

18 • Recent Appointments

38 • Legal and Financial News

82 • My Weekend

86, 88 • Charity and Community News

100 • Technology News

108 • Property News

122 • Commercial Property News

126 • Media News

156 • Arts News

160-161 • Culture Club

162 • Leisure News

178 • Comment

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## FIRM RAISES OVER £170,000 FOR CHARITIES

A North East financial firm has raised over £170,000 for local and national charities to mark its centenary year in business.

Robson Laidler, accountants, business advisors and wealth managers, set itself an ambitious target back in 2016 to raise £100,000 for charity by the end of 2020 to celebrate its 100th year in business.

The firm, which employs 90 staff across two offices in Newcastle and Durham, also set out to support 100 different charities by doing 100 different activities. To help its staff achieve the target, Robson Laidler gave everyone a paid 'volunteering day' to work in the community.

The firm has announced it has smashed its target by raising £171,569.77 for 165 different charities and community projects in 123 different ways, including a sponsored Three Peaks Challenge, velodrome race and Coast to Coast.

Emma Thompson, who leads CSR at Robson Laidler, said: "Throughout the past four years our team has really pulled together to reach this target. It's a testament of the commitment and passion of our team that we not only reached it but smashed it! This year set us back with the pandemic but we still managed to find ways to support charities who needed it more than ever".

## GROUND-BREAKING COLLABORATION SUPPORTS HEALTHCARE SECTOR

A group of specialist companies have combined their expertise in security, container fit-out and hygiene to create a new, rapidly deployable laboratory and test facility solution for the healthcare sector.

Newcastle-based Modular Security Solutions has launched Steri-Pod, a containerised, self-cleaning, high security unit which offers a hygienic laboratory environment for applications such as Covid-19 testing and vaccinations.

Steri-Pod features UVC (Ultraviolet C) germicidal irradiation technology from Oldham-based infection control specialist Plasma Clean. This provides 24-hour protection, at a rate of 99.99%, against Covid viruses, bacteria, spores and fungi.

The units can be mounted on walls and ceilings and use UVC germicidal lamps which are designed to eliminate airborne microbes. They ensure that Steri-Pod can offer 24-hour disinfection



without the use of cleaning chemicals, which can be potentially harmful to the environment. Operational downtime is also reduced as there is no need for staff to leave a facility while cleaning takes place.

Modular Security Solutions' high security composite panels are used to line out the container.

Through Modular Security Solutions' partnership with Beaverfit Ltd, the company can also provide Steri-Pod as a bespoke fit-out package, which includes mechanical and electrical fit-out, ventilation, heating and cooling systems, storage options and alarm systems.



## MARSHALL & MCCOURT AIMS TO DRIVE THE REGION'S GREEN REVOLUTION

Marshall & McCourt, a rapidly growing business based in Stockton-on-Tees, is innovating green energy solutions for homeowners and businesses throughout the North East and Yorkshire.

The company has set out on a mission to reduce fuel poverty and carbon emissions by creating sustainable homes and organisations through the use of innovative renewable energy solutions.

Ryan Marshall, Managing Director of Marshall & McCourt, said: "With 80% of homes still heated by gas, government policies and funding continue to drive decarbonisation and the growth of the renewable energy technology, with the aim to meet the UK's commitment to the Net Zero by 2050".

In November 2020, Boris Johnson outlined a Ten Point Plan for a Green Industrial Revolution to ensure homes, schools and hospitals become greener, warmer and more energy efficient. The £2 billion Green Homes Grant will allow eligible homeowners to receive up to £10,000 financial support towards the cost of home insulation or low carbon heating measures.

The North East is set to lead the UK's Green Industrial Revolution as thousands of new highly-skilled green jobs are set to be created across the region and 2021 is seen as an important turning point in the fight against climate change.

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## NEWCASTLE FLIGHT SIM CENTRE OFFERS ULTIMATE COVID-FREE FLIGHT EXPERIENCE

A Newcastle husband and wife are flying high as they offer frustrated globetrotters the chance to fly their own aircraft anywhere in the world with no passport, travel restrictions or quarantine guaranteed.

The only catch: your genuine Boeing 737 cockpit will never actually leave the ground.

The award winning Flight Sim Centre is Europe's foremost and largest flight simulation centre and is located just outside Newcastle International Airport. It is regularly used to train professional pilots but also allows people to test the hyper-realistic equipment themselves.

The centre has four qualified instructors and has been operating since 2014 led by qualified pilots Neil and Amanda McCarthy.

Neil said: "2020 was a year unlike anything I have ever experienced in my entire flying career. We've just got to ride out the COVID storm and that's where places like the Flight Sim Centre can help people keep their dreams alive. I can tell you from the experience of being a pilot myself, that sitting in our Boeing-737 cockpit is the absolute nearest thing you can get to the real thing. You easily forget it's a simulator. It's amazing."

## PORT OF SUNDERLAND DIPS TOE INTO CRUISE SHIP MARKET

Tourists could soon sail into Port of Sunderland, after bosses confirmed it was exploring opportunities that exist in the cruise market.

Port director, Matthew Hunt, has said that, alongside its shipping and cargo operations, the port was looking at welcoming passenger ships, having already played host to a number of one-off port-calls in the past.

The comment comes after Port of Sunderland signed up to Cruise Britain, a business-to-business network for cruise ports looking to attract cruise ships to their shores.

Matthew said: "Port of Sunderland has, for many years, welcomed and hosted cruise ships and their passengers, and it is a market we are interested in exploring further, because we can clearly see its potential and believe that the city and region has much to offer visitors."

The move has been backed by chair of the port board and leader of Sunderland City Council, Graeme Miller.

He said: "Port of Sunderland is an increasingly important asset to the city, and one that can positively contribute to the wider economic development of Sunderland in so many ways. I warmly welcome the port exploring the cruise ships market."



## WORLD BEATING BICYCLE BROUGHT TO MARKET BY NORTH EAST COMPANY



A North East company has brought a British designed road bicycle to the market that offers a radical and revolutionary approach to the classic road bike design.

Vielo Sports, which was founded in 2017 by Ian Hughes and son Trevor, has partnered with investors including entrepreneur Ian Watson, chairman of Hadrian Healthcare, to launch the innovative Vielo R+1 road bike.

Following the success of the initial model the V+1 gravel bike, the new, progressive R+1 model has been designed by the Vielo team at its Gateshead headquarters.

Ian Hughes said: "Many bike brands sold in the UK are not built for the crumbling tarmac and potholes of British roads and do not consider the sheer variety of weather in different parts of the country. We decided to change all that by designing and building in-house a proper, high performance British bike, able to take British riding conditions in its stride.

"We are delighted that Ian was so impressed by the road bike he joined our investors in the business, and with the creative team we have at Vielo Sports, I am certain we will go from strength to strength."

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L-R: David Taylor with Fred Howie



# FINDING TALENT IN A COVID ENVIRONMENT

Howie White Resourcing turns 22 this year, with Fred Howie at the helm alongside Director David Taylor, the company is being steered into its third decade. Howie White have now completed over 1000 assignments – quite an achievement for a small company that prides itself on doing things properly.

**So, how has the pandemic affected the recruitment market?**

**For most, 2020 has been a year to put behind us and quickly forget. Some sectors have suffered horribly, and maybe irreparably, others have fared better, and some have thrived either by seizing the opportunity presented by the new landscape, or simply finding themselves in the right place at the right time.**

If there is one thing that lockdown has proven to Howie White, it is that when faced with no alternatives, they will adapt.

Drawing on their own experience, when the UK was plunged into lockdown in March 2020, everything seemed to stop in its tracks. Interviews were postponed, jobs went on hold and the market up and down the country went into hibernation for three months. Fred has worked in this industry for 35 years, seen recessions, boom and bust and the financial crash. But nothing like this.

David said "With the exception of a few specific sectors which underwent forced closure, there was no underlying issue with the economy. The demand was there and businesses had to find a way to supply that demand. Businesses still had a need for talent, if not more so when things got more difficult as they sought a competitive edge - and candidates still wanted to develop their careers".

Traditionally, the recruitment process in the UK is based on face to face meetings. Typically one meeting with the recruiter and then one or two between the candidate and prospective employer. It is perhaps not the most modern system, but it's been the way since the end of the second World War when interviews were the only way to see "the cut of one's jib" when most cv's said the same thing, for the previous six years - Armed Forces.

With meetings out of the question, Fred and David had to find a way to deliver the same personal service to both clients and candidates without the quality face to face time. David explains that 'Nothing beats meeting a candidate in person. We are able to assess the person and understand what makes them tick. The best part of the job has always been meeting people and not sitting behind a computer having that do all the work for you.'

As many people out there also had to do, Fred and David created Zoom accounts and gave it a go! Hardly rocket science, but getting a proper connection and feel for the individual is something that took a lot of practice. Such was their success and confidence in this new way of working, they have been able to advise clients on their own meetings with the candidates to assist with the structuring and format of online calls to get the best outcome for both parties. Fred and David have also assisted with offering solutions and advice for COVID secure face to face meetings ensuring that guidelines and compliance are at the forefront whilst allowing both the candidate and client to get a better feel of the potential fit before offers are made.

Fred went on to explain, 'We have now had a number of successful assignments where we haven't physically met the successful candidate. That's been a big step for a business that prides itself on meeting everybody we put forward. Ironically, we probably now spend more time with candidates than we did before'

When it comes to recruitment, only one thing matters to a client; find the best person. The candidate might not appear to be the ideal person in terms of their CV, but once a personal conversation takes place, it soon becomes obvious that they're more suitable than someone who perhaps, on paper, looks to fit the bill.

Fred Howie and David Taylor are experts in the recruitment field, working with their clients to find the best candidate for their business needs.

"We've grown with a lot of our clients and, thankfully, good news spreads fast," explained Fred. "We now work with companies, small and large, across the UK. We are also increasingly becoming an international recruiter. Although the use of technology is without doubt the biggest change that we've seen in the recruitment business, we still use a very personal approach. For example, we don't normally use Skype for conducting interviews - Covid has changed that and as with most businesses, we have had to adapt. However, once we can get back to interviewing candidates in person, we will - you learn a lot by meeting people".

Howie White recruit not only nationally but further afield into Europe and beyond. Applying the same personal and dedicated approach no matter where the role may be based. Clients and candidates alike can expect the same high quality service regardless of location.

For Fred and David, they hope that the success that they have enjoyed in the last two decades will continue, as they continue to set their own personal bar high in terms of setting standards in the recruitment industry. They have a strong reputation within the industry and their clients respect their opinions when it comes to recruitment.

**Get in touch with Fred Howie or David Taylor via email  
[fred@howiewhite.co.uk](mailto:fred@howiewhite.co.uk) or [david@howiewhite.co.uk](mailto:david@howiewhite.co.uk)**

“

...we have had  
to adapt...

”





Martin Wrightson

It's hard to think of a company or business category which hasn't been affected by the Coronavirus pandemic. Most will have been adversely affected... some will have managed to tread water...only a handful will have been able to grow.

## GET ACTIV AND KEEP YOUR COMPANY FIT FOR BUSINESS

**Everyone was hoping that once 2020 was out of the way that we could all start to regroup and move forward. Sadly, that's not going to happen quickly and the actual end date is by no means certain.**

Thankfully, help is at hand locally for small to medium sized owner-managed businesses in terms of guidance and financial assistance.

Martin Wrightson is one of the North East's most successful businessmen. He has a track record of going into businesses and dragging them up by the scruff of their neck.

"I've been involved in a wide variety of business sectors such as computing, software, printing and adhesives and have always tried to stay in the North East where I was born and bred," said Martin, "In January 2020 I sold my last business, UNIKA Innovation, to a US Private Equity firm but as I always enjoyed developing strategies to turnaround and transform businesses I decided it was time to give something back.

I want to offer my experience and, if everything looks right, I'd like to offer flexible financial backing via a new company I've just launched...Activ Investment Partners. I have a team of people behind me who have vast experience across a whole raft of disciplines which means we can help most businesses head out of lockdown with confidence."

Typically these local businesses will have underlying profits of between £300k to £1.5m pa. For those of you who would like the benefit of Martin's experience and the potential of his investment, it's worth pointing out that, for obvious reasons, Martin wants Activ Investment Partners to only get involved with businesses they know they can help and have had personal experience of dealing with. So he'll not be getting involved in retail, property, bleeding-edge technology or early start-ups.

He's keen to invest a financial stake in any company he's advising but Activ Investment Partners won't actually run the business. They use their experience to proactively support and encourage the current owners and management team to transform and grow their business in the right direction.

"Currently when I meet owners and founders I invariably find that there's a legacy as well as a funding issue. Some owners have successful businesses but post Credit Crunch and now post Covid have understandably lost the enthusiasm to take their business to the next level. Many do not have a strong succession plan but want to pass their business onto a safe and successful pair of hands. They need an exit plan and ideally a proactive investor that will support their loyal staff and customers."

Another driver for many owners who would like to confidently retire and put their feet up, is that new taxation rules will probably be introduced post lock-down. The government needs to balance the books; someone has to pay for all of the Covid support. Raising income tax or VAT would be unpopular, but Capital Gains Tax is politically less damaging. Having significantly reduced Entrepreneurs Relief in 2020 it is expected that Capital Gains Tax on company disposals will rise substantially this year.

Sadly post lock-down not all owners will be able to sell up and retire. For many their legacy issue is one of survival and firms must bear in mind that government funding and payment holidays will have to be repaid at some stage. They need to be prepared for when that bombshell hits and the sooner any financial difficulties are identified, the easier and quicker those stresses can be resolved. In many cases creditors will expect external investment and new management support, a "white knight" like Activ Investment Partners, before they agree to an owners restructure, turnaround and survival plan.

"We want to help open-minded North East businesses, anywhere from Northumberland to Teesside. In terms of investment, we'll put between £250k to £1m into each relevant business. Once we've invested and successfully transformed them, the next stage is to welcome other high nett worth individuals to join Activ Investment Partners. Some, like me, will have successfully sold their businesses and now want to proactively invest and use their experience supporting other local businesses. Okay, these people could invest in international stocks and shares, but getting actively involved in a local business offers more satisfaction as well as the potential for much higher returns."

There is undoubtedly a funding gap in the North East so the best idea to understand what is different about this approach is to visit the website...[www.activ-investment-partners.co.uk](http://www.activ-investment-partners.co.uk) You'll find further details plus some background on what Martin's company does and how they can help you.

Don't just cross your fingers and hope for the best. Contact them.

Get active with Activ Investment Partners.

**[www.activ-investment-partners.co.uk](http://www.activ-investment-partners.co.uk)**



## KPMG COMPLETES TEN TECH DEALS IN TEN WEEKS ACROSS THE NORTH

The deal advisory practice at KPMG in the North of England has completed 10 technology transactions in as many weeks as competition to invest in the region's top technology businesses continues apace.

The practice, led by partner Chris Stott, completed the transactions between October and December 2020.

The deals included: LDC and RIBA's sale of NBS to Byggfakta Group, Livingbridge's investment in Visualsoft, the NorthEdge Capital-backed buyout of Altia-ABM, the sale of Giacom to Digital Wholesale Solutions, the sale of RTL Telematics to AddSecure, Hudson Hill Capital's acquisition of InXpress, ELMO Software's acquisitions of Breathe HR and Webexpenses, and the sale of Mitrefinch to Advanced.

Rod Wilkinson, Head of Corporate Finance at KPMG in the North East, said: "The flurry of deal activity at the tail end of 2020 showed that even in the most challenging trading conditions, there are businesses that can really shine through and still attract significant investment."

"From all the transactions we've supported over the last quarter, technology-led enterprises have really stood out. The pandemic has emphasised the value of technology and the integral role that the sector's products and services now play in our economy."



## A SUCCESSFUL YEAR FOR HINDLEY CAPITAL

Hindley Capital have advised their clients North East Finance on their successful exit from 3 investments in the North East Technology Fund portfolio in as many weeks.

The team at Hindley Capital have advised North East Finance on deriving legacy value out of the North East Technology Fund. The North East Technology Fund was one of the component funds in the Finance for Business North East / JEREMIE programme, which invested some £160m in the region between 2010-2017.

The sale of North East Finance's shareholdings in Datum 360 to Business Growth Fund, Refract Software to US technology business Allego and Papertrail to private investors, were the result of some detailed negotiations in the latter half of 2020.

Whilst 2020 was a difficult year for many businesses, there was a high level of interest in technology businesses based in the North East, demonstrating the region's strength in the sector.

Peter Cromarty, of Hindley Capital, commented: "We are delighted to see these businesses move into the next phase of their development. It has been a pleasure to work with the management teams to help successfully complete these transactions and we wish them well in the future."



## NORTH EAST ED-TECH SPECIALIST COMPLETES MBO

North East headquartered eQuality Solutions (eQS) is embarking on a major growth strategy, having completed a management buy-out (MBO) of the business.

eQS secured substantial investment from London-based Shard Credit Partners to fund the MBO and to provide significant funds for follow on acquisitions. The business is well placed to grow with ambitious plans to triple revenue over the next three years through a rapid 'buy and build' strategy.

From its HQ in Hebburn, the business employs 40 full-time staff with 80 consultants operating nationwide, providing assistive technology equipment, training and its own software solutions that help to remove barriers to learning. The business has experienced rapid growth with revenues and Adjusted EBITDA expected to exceed £7m and £2m respectively in 2021.

Commenting on the MBO, CEO Andy Gough said: "eQS is the number one provider in this specialist and vitally important sector. We are confident, from the platform already established, we can grow the business across the UK and take advantage of the many new opportunities we see ahead."

Advising the eQS management team on the MBO was Carl Swansbury and Rhiannon Nightingale of RG Corporate Finance (RCGF), with tax advice from Simon Whiteside of RG Business Tax.



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# TORRO

TORRO, proud to be a North East based company, serving customers around the world with Luxury Leather Accessories. Despite the challenges faced by international brands in the last 12 months we were able to make a huge leap in the growth of our accessories line-up.



If this is what we can do in 2020, you will be as excited as we are to see what we can do in 2021.

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As we launch into a 2021 that looks unlike any year we have started before, Steve Black of Protean Solutions, says we need to adopt a "Let's Have It" attitude every single day to make sure we thrive.

## LET'S HAVE IT!

**His advice starts with the point of not wasting energy. We are in a global pandemic and life is the way it now is. We can't change that. But what we can change is how we deal with it. And how we structure ourselves within the environment we find ourselves in, while we are in the moment.**

Here Steve highlights his tips on being who you want to be, doing what you want to do, in as successful a manner as possible:

"As the chimes rang out at midnight, I spoke with my family on the phone and we promised each other that we would refuse to let 2021 break us. We agreed to embrace what the year threw at us and make the best of everything, knowing we will come out of it stronger. That is what we all need to do and how we will all thrive, if we apply some simple rules everyday to our working lives.

### Make a decision to get off the Pity Party Train

Sadly, things aren't how any of us would want them to be. Life is not supposed to be a game of solitaire, which is why many people are struggling. Without doubt we need company and we need support. We need our colleagues and peers.

But with a little mind shift, do you know what we can realise? That those people are all still there, just in a different format, so it's up to us, to each of us, to approach life differently.

However different things are, we must remind ourselves that these are not times for feeling sorry for ourselves. These are times for delivering, not procrastinating. It is surely a time to be decisive, focussed and action led.

If we get on the right train we can start adapting. We can keep in the game and keep momentum by building our enthusiasm. Momentum and attitude is infectious and the people in your life will be drawn to do business with you if you remain a beacon of hope, seizing this time as an opportunity to thrive, maximising the hand you have been dealt.

Stand up and say loud and clear that you are ready to take anything on, and you'll be surprised what comes your way!

### Clarity

To thrive in life and business, constant analysis is needed. An examination of what you are doing, what you should keep doing and what you need to start doing is essential for continual improvement and for creating a pathway to success.

Clarity is needed for roles now more than ever, with necessary changes in our communication methods. Everyone needs to be clear on what they are doing, who they are doing it with, how they are doing it and what the expected outcomes are.

Analyse as a team what works for you all individually and collectively, and pull together to examine performance on a day by day basis looking at how you can improve with better performances daily!

Communication and feedback are key – and if you spot something that isn't working, then simply stop doing it. Conserve that effort and energy for something that does work.

### Agility

We've all heard the expression 'the survival of the fittest'. 2020 and 2021 has changed that to 'the survival of the most agile'.

To be successful and happy we need to adapt and adjust. Those who are doing well didn't linger in their actions at the announce-

ment of the first lockdown. They dug deep, found change and became effective.

They evaluated their performance and kept joining in. By doing that, they kept the respect from their peers and customers/clients.

They committed to a certain high standard of work and positive attitude. That is attractive and the energy that you exude when doing so on a mission is palpable, people can feel the positivity and they in turn will feed off that.

### Performance

Plan your day, live that day and at the end of the day record and evaluate.

Evaluate your own performance critically and honestly, but also with a healthy dose of being supportive to yourself. I always ask people I support to consider three key elements:

1. How much real energy have you put into your day? If it was lagging, why so? Do you need more sleep, more self care or less distractions?
2. How well have you treated people today? Were you properly in each moment with them? Would they have felt the positivity and focus from you?
3. Have you nurtured relationships? Have you displayed trust, integrity and collectively made a positive impact?

I might have things left to do on my daily jobs list, but if I can say yes to these three points then it has been a good day!

Keep a journal and answer these questions at the end of each day. If you aren't happy, you can reflect on why and then make it better tomorrow!

### I'll be there for you

My first three points might sound exceptionally focussed and driven, which they are. My fourth point might sound a little self indulgent, which it isn't, as you will find if you start the good practice of self evaluation.

But what we as humans must never lose sight of is that the only thing we can't give away in life is kindness. And do you know why? Because when you give kindness you keep getting it back in multiples. Be the person you want others to be and encourage good behaviour in them. That is the ultimate goal for us. Tell people you will be there for them, follow that up and ensure you do what you commit to do, and just see what comes back your way!

"Most importantly to you all - please be safe and god bless."

Steve Black is a well-known face in the sporting world who has taken his expertise in making people fit in the mind as well as fit in the body through his corporate facing business, Protean Solutions.

Steve Black, or Blackie as he is better known, has been focussing lately on working with both individuals and organisations driving motivation, teamwork, leadership and excellence in the workplace.

His portfolio is impressive, with big names including Kevin Keegan, Rob Andrew, Jonny Wilkinson, Jonathan Edwards and Glen McCrory endorsing the former Newcastle Falcons and British Lions rugby coach. He now works with companies including Cascade Cash Management, The John McEnroe Academy and Fairstone to name a few.

**More information is available at [www.steveblack.co.uk](http://www.steveblack.co.uk)**





“

...Most importantly to  
you all - please be safe  
and god bless...

”





## NEW CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AT LAIDLAW SCHOOLS TRUST

Laidlaw Schools Trust (LST), a growing multi-academy trust in the North East, has recently appointed Ian Simpson as Chief Executive Officer. Ian, an experienced school leader with a track record of transforming schools across the country, will take up his post in April.

Susanna V. Kempe, Chair of Laidlaw Schools Trust, said: "We were looking for an exceptional educationalist and inspirational principal to lead LST through its next phase of growth so we are absolutely delighted to appoint Ian, who has the experience and unwavering determination to raise standards and transform the lives of all our pupils."

## PROMOTIONS AT NORTH EAST ENGINEERS

Newcastle-based civil and structural engineers RWO have promoted Ronnie Lamb to engineer and Vincent Wai to senior engineer as they continue to invest in resources and skills.

The move will see Ronnie and Vincent strengthen their involvement in highway and drainage design contracts for several of the company's clients in both Leeds and Newcastle. They will also be responsible for mentoring and training junior members, as well as providing on-going support to the senior management team.

Both bring extensive experience in civil and infrastructure engineering to the role having worked on a variety of projects with RWO.



## PROPERTY FIRM MAKES SENIOR APPOINTMENT

Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents have made a senior appointment to drive their strategic growth.

Industry expert Brian Ham joins the team as director of public sector consultancy to support the firm in expanding its services to Local Authorities, Housing Associations and Homes England.

Brian said: "My role will include supporting clients in accelerating development capabilities to meet the overwhelming need for new housing, while



## APPRENTICE LEWIS IN THE ZF DRIVING SEAT

Global automotive technology leader ZF has proven its commitment to investing in young talent after promoting one of its former apprentices into a permanent technician role.

Lewis Charlton, 21, joined the Peterlee company two and a half years ago as a quality technician apprentice. Lewis has impressed bosses with his attitude and work ethic, leading to the opportunity to move into a permanent role.

Lewis is now employed as a supplier quality coordinator and hopes the role will support his ambitions of becoming an engineer with the company in the next five years.



providing guidance which also helps to add value to such projects. I look forward to building on the successful foundations which Bradley Hall have created in this specific discipline within the sector."

## TWO NEW STAFF MAKE THEIR HOME AT TEESIDE ESTATE AGENTS

Recently rebranded estate agents, Clarke Munro, are continuing their growth plans with the appointment of a sales director and an apprentice.

The oldest estate agency in Teesside, Clarke Munro have now taken on Richard Towler as sales director and Kyle Tranter as an apprentice viewer.

Partner Wendy Clarke said: "Richard has a wealth of experience and we're looking forward to hearing his innovative ways to drive the department forward."

Partner Nicola Munro added: "Kyle is very much a people person so, with our intense training and his personality, we see a very bright future for him."



## Recruitment done the right way

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



# THREE KEY STEPS TO AVOID A CYBER ATTACK EVOLVING INTO A FULL SCALE BREACH

If you do not have an effective security solution in place, then the longer you wait, the longer you leave your critical data at greater risk. A rapid response to a cyber attack is crucial. So how should you be responding to the constant threat of a cyber attack?

## Step 1: Plan for potential incidents

Protecting your organisation shouldn't be reactive, it's about putting preventative measures in place before your security has been compromised. This step consists of two key stages. Firstly, you need to identify the key individuals that need to be involved in coordinating your security response, this should include more than just your security team. Security experts, Sophos, recommend that you put in place a method of communication for these stakeholders should normal channels of communications be impacted. Secondly, it is vital to identify your critical assets as this will inform the focus of your protection strategy. These stages allow you to prepare for any potential incident, establishing essential contacts and priority focuses. This information helps inform your second step, the deployment of protection tools.

## Step 2: Deploy protection tools

When deploying protection tools, you are looking to implement a strong response to both security threats and incidents. The first thing to consider is establishing your basics. It is good practice to



Paul Burns – CTO

ensure you have a content filter and Firewall, a secure WiFi setup, an endpoint solution that protects against both Malware and Ransomware, and a high-quality mail filtering solution. Sophos' solutions share intelligence between these tools, making them highly effective at isolation and containment.

Once your basics are in place, threat protection and response tools such as Sophos' Managed Threat Response service (MTR) can hunt, detect,

and respond to suspicious behaviour, validating potential threats and scoping their severity. Incident response tools such as Sophos' Rapid Response Service identify, neutralise, and contain active threats, eject adversaries to prevent further damage, and generate a post-incident threat summary report. By investing in such tools, you have the peace of mind of knowing that your organisation's data is being protected 24/7.

If the worst does occur, you should be certain that your data is securely backed up either within the cloud or on premises.

## Step 3: Invest in a Managed Service Partner

Many organisations do not have the resources to handle security incidents on their own. Consequently, it is advisable to enlist the help of a Managed Service Partner (MSP) who can work with you to understand the individual security needs of your organisation and protect your critical assets.

As a Sophos Gold Partner and Managed Service Provider, Synergi works in partnership with your organisation to offer either a co-managed approach or a fully outsourced model.

*To find out more about how to protect and secure your organisation, check out our website [www.teamsynergi.co.uk](http://www.teamsynergi.co.uk) or by emailing, [enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk) or calling 0191 4770365.*

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Neil Mullen



# ACCOUNTANT OF THE MONTH

In the latest series of features we chat to...

## NEIL MULLEN

Managing Director at chartered accountancy firm Mullen Stoker, based at Mandale Business Park in Durham.

### Did you always envisage a career in the industry?

Pretty much, yes.

When I left school, I had such a good bunch of friends, friends that I'm still close to now, and didn't want to leave them to go off to university.

When I told my dad that I didn't want to go he wasn't happy, but eventually agreed on the condition I got myself a job.

I knew manual work wasn't for me, but I was good with my head and numbers, so I wrote letters to local banks and accountants to see if there were any jobs going.

I was lucky to get an interview with a local firm and the boss said if I passed my A Levels, the job was mine.

I ended up being there for 18 years until I started Mullen Stoker with Gary Stoker.

### What has been your career path so far?

When I started working, I really struggled with the ACCA exams. The practical side was fine, I excelled at that, but just couldn't pass the exams for the job. My boss gave me a bit of a kick up the bum and told me if I didn't pass them, I needed to think about whether I was in the right career.

I eventually passed, although it did take me until I was about 24. I must have been doing something right though as he made me a partner in the firm at the age of 29!

As the business grew, I sat the Institute for Chartered Accountants' exams, which put the firm in a much stronger position to grow.

### How have you been helping clients throughout the coronavirus crisis?

Throughout the pandemic we've kept our communications channels open so our clients have been kept up to date about announcements and developments that have impacted them and their business.

Many of the businesses we work with were forced to furlough staff so being kept up to speed with financial information was vital - this was such a new thing for all of us and the feedback we got from clients was that they really appreciated us keeping in touch with them.

It's also fair to say that we won new clients during the pandemic because of the open and transparent approach we were taking - while some firms had gone off the radar, we were always available and as a result people were happy to recommend us.

### Who do you most respect in your industry?

I have to say my colleague Steve Hutton - he was my business partner back in the old firm and when he retired last year, he joined Mullen Stoker as a consultant. I really do value and respect his opinion and having someone of his experience within the business, especially from a compliance point of view, is invaluable.

### Which fictional lawyer would you most like to meet?

Judge Judy or Judge Rinder - do they count as fictional?

### What is your greatest strength?

Definitely looking after my team and supporting them in their development. I hope they'd say that too!

### What is your biggest weakness?

I beat myself up over small things. If I make any mistakes or get something wrong that I could have prevented, I'll overthink it. Even when I know that nine times out of ten, I can rectify it.

I also put much pressure on myself - I lie awake at night thinking what I need to do even if the deadline isn't pressing. It's just the way I am, I want to get things done.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

To support the continued growth of Mullen Stoker. We've actually just been contacted about taking on a big chunk of auditing work which will give a big boost to our plans for growth in 2021.

### How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

The next couple of years are going to be very tough as we try and recover from the coronavirus pandemic.

I do believe that many of the smaller firms we support will go, as the increases in tax will hit them so hard.

It's going to be a long road to recovery but hopefully in the next few years we will see the signs that things are picking back up.

[www.mullenstoker.co.uk](http://www.mullenstoker.co.uk)  
0191 3740300

“

Judge Judy or Judge Rinder - do they count as fictional?

”





Richard Bray

## TRANSFORMATION. AN IMPERATIVE? A BUZZWORD? A SKILL?

By Richard Bray, Partner and lead of North of England Consulting, Deloitte

Transformation is one of those words; it means everything and nothing at the same time. How many times have you heard phrases like, “we need to transform our business” or “those who adapt survive?”

**It is true, successful organisations adapt and change but it's extremely hard to do. The good news is there are tools and techniques organisations can use to increase the chances of success.**

As a consultant, transformation is my constant focus. Our reason for getting out of bed every morning is to help businesses, and wider society, thrive. Now is certainly the time that all regions across the UK need to recover and thrive. Forces such as digital, remote working, cyber, regulation and net-zero, to name just a few, are in play.

It's a truism that change is constant, and the pace is accelerating. In the spring of last year a meme did the rounds asking, “who was responsible for your organisation's digital transformation?” There were three options: CEO, CIO or COVID. COVID triumphed.

Whilst there is no single guidebook on successful transformations my colleagues and I have observed common traits:

1. True transformation needs realistic ambition. There is always a decision to make about how bold you want to, and importantly can,

be. Making that a conscious choice is critical, and it's very personal to each organisation. Spending enough, but not too much, time is vital. Articulating and explaining that ambition then follows.

2. Think big start small. There are many ways to achieve change. Do you go big bang? How much design and testing is needed before you act? Each transformation journey is different, and it requires skills to decide the right approach. That said, most successful transformations start with small changes, building momentum and learning through doing.
3. Authenticity wins every time. Successful transformations are led by visible, authentic and accountable leaders. Incentivising leaders to collaborate, instead of protecting their traditional functions and silos, is critical. The ‘hero’ leader model rarely, if ever, works.
4. Deliberate and structured. Transformation doesn't happen just because you have an ambition. It takes skills and focus on things like blueprints, plans, governance and tools.

You need the right people in the team to be successful, blending transformation experience with deep knowledge and passion for the organisation.

5. Remembering the programme ends. Transformation activity varies greatly in size, complexity and approach but they are critical endeavours for any organisation. It's easy to focus and get obsessed on the programme, which becomes an end in itself. It is important organisations create the culture, capability and confidence to sustain new ways of working and be better prepared to face ongoing change.

In fact, if you are interested in the topic, can I suggest the Elephant Trap Radar podcast? This is a short informal series on transformation by Deloitte partners Joel Bellman and Alex Massey.

My favourite proverb is a great way to summarise the essence of transformation. Believed to originate in Japan, it has stood the test of time.

“Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

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



# Grow your Business Overseas

The Department for International Trade North East are here to help you trade internationally, whether you are exporting for the first time or entering new markets.

Our 'Expanding North East Presence in International Markets' programme has been created to help eligible SMEs in the North East LEP area sell their products and services to overseas markets. This FREE and innovative service provides practical one-to-one support, from local International Trade Advisers. Your International Trade Adviser can help you identify suitable export markets and support business growth overseas by acting as an independent mentor for your business.

**To find out more or to arrange an appointment with your local International Trade Adviser contact the North East team at:**

**Email: [northeast@mobile.trade.gov.uk](mailto:northeast@mobile.trade.gov.uk)  
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# LOVE IS IN THE AIR

It's February and with Valentine's Day on the horizon thoughts turn to love.

*In the words of John Paul Young (1977)*

*Love is in the air, everywhere I look around  
Love is in the air, every sight and every sound  
And I don't know if I'm being foolish  
Don't know if I'm being wise  
But it's something that I must believe in....*

But do you still love your business? After all that businesses have been through in 2020 then it would be understandable if you were a little less in love with the way you spend your days. So maybe it's time to be wise, stand back and look around.

Obviously finances play a huge part in your business so that's always a good place to start and a few comparisons are good to start with. Has turnover increased or decreased during various lockdowns and tier restrictions and why? What has happened to your overheads and do you now have a new way of working? How can these changes be optimised to make the business profitable when the great day of re-opening dawns?

As an accountant I am obsessed with numbers and I just love spreadsheets (I know – Sad!) but they are useful. So putting numbers down in black and white helps to focus not just on reality but on dreams too. You have to be realistic though and if you're unsure of any calculations, look at



other businesses. What do they charge, how do they sell, are they a 'busy' business with good recommendations?

Calculations should not centre only around what you can charge for your products and services and

their associated direct costs. The overheads have to be scrutinised too. Many businesses and consumers have been forced to change the way they shop so you need to make sure that your business is keeping in step with market changes which may well involve some future investment. And don't forget that any funding, such as bounce back loans, does need to be repaid so has to be included in that all important cash flow.

When you have had a good look around your business it could be that you decide that the love affair is over and you need to go your separate ways, sad though that may be. But if it is still something that you must believe in, then start putting those plans in place and make sure you have a good business proposal for when the time is right.

Incidentally, in August 1992 'Love is in the Air (Ballroom Mix)' was released as the lead single from the 'Strictly Ballroom' soundtrack. So if we can't get back to business as it used to be just yet let's all dance like nobody is watching and start to get those steps in place.

***If you need help to waltz through your business plan contact CS Accounting  
0191 4879870 or info@csaccounting.co.uk***

## NORTH EAST FUND HAILS REGION'S SME RESILIENCE

**The North East Fund helped, during 2020, more than 100 regional companies raise £50m of funding despite the pandemic.**

Businesses across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham received £20m of investment direct from the Fund which then helped them to secure a further £30m of finance from other investors.

Investments were made in companies well placed to grow and create jobs, for example, those operating in the digital services and clean energy technology sectors. Others emerged from R&D projects of existing companies or from research undertaken by North East universities.

Additional investments were made in new projects created by entrepreneurs who have sold businesses and moved onto their next challenge. Furthermore, North East Fund investee, Refract Software, was acquired by a US company and is now intending to make the Newcastle-based firm its European HQ and create 100 more regional jobs.

Jason Hobbs, CEO of the North East Fund, commented, "The region's SMEs have shown incredible resilience and adaptability as the pandemic impacted every aspect of their operations. Prior to this, we'd invested in around 220 companies which have held up remarkably well, and we provided further funding to some to help manage the impacts of Covid-19 and to exploit new opportunities which arose.



"Our fund managers continued to invest in business and consumer services companies, and manufacturers. NEL Fund Managers delivered our Growth Capital and Small Loan Funds, and continues to provide loans from both under the CBILs scheme where the Government makes the first years' interest payments to reduce the cost to the SME.

"Our Small Loan Fund has supported over 100 companies, lending from £10k to £100k for all purposes including improving online systems and business premises, to acquiring new equipment.

"Although last year was extremely difficult, the challenges will continue this year too. However,

the tenacity and resilience shown by the North East's business community demonstrates that the region has the ability to overcome adversity and prosper."

The North East Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund and European Investment Bank, expects to invest a further £70m in around 300 more companies over the next few years across Northumberland, Tyne and Wear and County Durham.

***Free one-to-one information sessions are available to discuss funding and business support. For more details, go to [www.northeastfund.org](http://www.northeastfund.org)***





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# CASCADE CASH MANAGEMENT ANNOUNCES THE EXPANSION OF ITS MANAGEMENT TEAM



Jane Gray

A leading cash management company has strengthened its management team announcing the appointment of Jane Gray, who has joined the business as Executive Assistant and Office Manager.

**Jane joins the Cascade team with more than 20 years of experience of holding Executive Assistant and Office Manager roles, spanning industries such as Investment and Financial Services, Intranet & Web Development, Utilities Consultancy, Hotel, Hospitality & Event Management, and will be supporting Managing Director, Dr Emma Black, along with the senior leadership team.**

She brings vast experience of providing executive support at CEO and Board level, in key business areas such as Office Management, Finance Management, Legal and Compliance, Event Management, Human Resources, IT, Marketing and Sales and Business Development.

Despite a challenging year with the pandemic leading to a lower interest rate, Cascade Cash Management Limited has gone from strength

to strength not only winning esteemed industry awards but also securing new partners and high worth clients looking for increased depositor protection.

Jane said: "I am delighted to join the Cascade team at this exciting time of growth for the business. The calibre and depth of the experience of the team brings a truly exciting opportunity and I am very much looking forward to being part of the continued success and expansion of the business."

Cascade Cash Management is an independent and transparent service created to generate enhanced cash returns and increase protection on deposits through professional cash management. It boasts an online Fintech portal which is the only one of its kind in the UK. It allows independent and unbiased cash solutions meaning that clients don't

have to choose only one bank. With the online portal and Cascade's client support team, all banks are accessed quickly and easily, on a daily basis.

The Cascade team can administer funds through their unique portal on behalf of clients and depositors can use the portal to manage their own savings in one place, with the dedicated support of Cascade. These clients include individuals, companies and charities. Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and many more can also self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

A number of charities successfully use the service and such clients have earned significantly greater returns through the Cascade service.

**More information is available at [www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk)**



An abstract, high-energy background featuring a dense, chaotic splatter of various colors (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and white) against a solid black field. The splatters radiate from the center, creating a sense of movement and dynamism. In the center of this composition is a large, solid black circle.

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# COMMERCE HOUSE OPPORTUNITY TO MAKE 2021 SUCCESSFUL

Commerce House in Middlesbrough has released new, exciting opportunities to snap up an office in the luxury business community where you can work safely, without the stress of home working with family.

**The four available options include a five desk, an eight desk an 11 desk and a 12 desk office space, all which come ready to move into complete with furniture, high speed broadband, a fully maintained and serviced site which includes cleaning of the building, as well as communal areas and a manned reception.**

The building which was refurbished to an extremely high standard just a few years ago is in the desirable TS1 postcode and provides virtual tenancy, hot desking and has a fabulous Business Lounge and Boardroom for meeting purposes.

Commerce House has its very own onsite facilities manager, Christine Huntington, who not only manages the team and the building, but also oversees the tenant's requirements to ensure a seamless service.

She said: "Commerce House is simply a stunning building to run your business from for a fresh start in 2021. It has been likened to a five-star hotel due the quality of finish throughout the site, from entering Reception, Boardroom and communal areas such as the business lounge, kitchens, and WC's. Our tenants all say how impressed their clients are and how it has given them a boost in productivity, making their companies even more successful.

"We have focused very much on the current guidelines to make the building safe, and have hand sanitiser, safety screens, signage and policies in place to protect tenants, visitors and staff. Because of that, and the fact that you have control over your private workplace behind your



office door we are a sensible and safe choice for companies who don't want to work from home as it isn't viable or sensible for their business performance."

In the heart of Middlesbrough, Commerce House is a well-established building with lots of parking opportunities around it, situated right next to the train station, therefore ideal location for commuting.

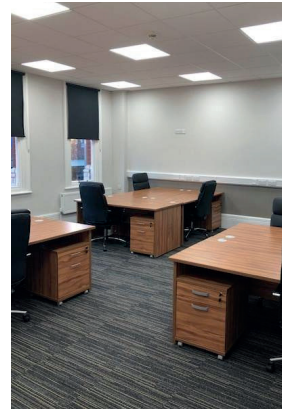
Meeting space, which is for use by tenants and outside companies that can be pre-book, includes the fabulous Chairman's Board Room and small meeting areas which are set up and laid out with social distancing in mind.

Christine concluded: "This is a very rare opportunity to snap up an office space that is as safe as working from home. We have had great interest with an office going just this week, and they won't be around for long, so if you are interested, please do get in touch on 01642 917116 to arrange a socially distanced, private viewing as soon as possible!"

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







## STUNNING OFFICE SPACE AVAILABLE!!

Commerce House, an iconic Grade II listed building ideally located in the heart of Middlesbrough, has a range of office space now available in its outstanding Business Community.

With enviable facilities, Commerce House offers the perfect opportunity for a head office, satellite office or to expand operations within the prestigious TS1 postcode.

Located directly opposite the train station making it a perfect location for commuting.

Impressive fully furnished serviced office space  
 Amazing boardroom AKA "The Chairman's Room"  
 Fabulous Business lounge  
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# RMT INVESTS IN HEALTHCARE TEAM TO MANAGE GROWING MEDICAL CLIENT BASE

The specialist healthcare division of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors has made a triple appointment as it brings in more resources to manage growing client demand and expected future growth.

**Adam Gilroy, Esther Adesina and Lydia Dawes have all joined Gosforth-based RMT Healthcare and are now working with a range of medical and healthcare businesses to help them manage their income streams and financial processes as efficiently as possible.**

Adam was previously an emergency care physician and has spent the last 12 years working in hospital A&E departments and walk-in centres across the North East while also running his own video production company as a side venture.

Esther, who has taken up a new tax senior role with RMT Healthcare, originally qualified as both a solicitor and barrister in her native Nigeria before moving to England to study for a Masters degree in international tax law at Bournemouth University.

On graduation, she switched tracks to begin a career in the accountancy sector, working with two leading firms in south west England before moving to the North East to be closer to her family, and is a member of both the Association of Taxation Technicians and the Chartered Institute of Taxation.

After completing a Mathematics degree at Newcastle University, Lydia began her career with an accountancy practice in the south of the region while working towards gaining chartered status by completing her professional qualifications.

Having also moved back to Tyneside to be closer to her family, Lydia had been looking for a career opening to help her gain experience in a specific sector.

Adam Gilroy says: "Healthcare businesses can derive their income from a wide range of areas other than the direct patient care services they offer, such as medico-legal work, medical reporting, physiotherapy and radiology, and there are financial and contract issues to deal with around all of them.



"When I decided it was time for a career change, I wanted to find something where I could use both my medical knowledge and the financial experience I'd picked up running my own businesses, and the specialist healthcare services that RMT provide fit the bill extremely well.

"Both my medical background and my experience of running my own business give me the insight needed to help healthcare providers structure themselves in the best possible ways, and to see clearly how their financial performance reflects and impacts on the services they provide."

Esther Adesina adds: "The taxation knowledge I've accumulated through both my legal and accountancy career so far has helped me lay strong foundations on which to base the next stage of my career.

"There are a lot of interesting new things to learn about taxation in a healthcare setting and I'm really enjoying getting to know both the sector and my new colleagues."

Lydia Dawes says: "The work I've done so far has given me a solid general grounding in finance and accountancy, and I wanted my next move to help me develop some more specialised knowledge.

"I've always been interested in the medical and healthcare sectors, and joining RMT Healthcare will give me the chance to build relationships with clients that are right at the heart of it."

RMT Healthcare is acknowledged one of the UK's leading specialist medical and healthcare accountancy practices and already the largest dedicated specialist team outside London, which acts for well over 1,000 medical professionals both within and outside the North East.

It has seen significant growth over the last year as it has helped an increasing number of clients manage the financial implications and requirements of dealing with the pandemic.

Maxine Pott, director at RMT Healthcare, adds: "The continuing safe provision of clinical services has obviously been a real challenge for many healthcare businesses this year and our team has been working extremely hard to ensure they can stay fully focused on their day-to-day duties while we keep their finances in proper order.

"Demand for our services has grown substantially this year and we've been bringing in additional resources to ensure we can help clients stay on top of the financial side of their operations in the most demanding of circumstances.

"Our new recruits each bring an impressive range of skills and experience with them, and with an expectation that our healthcare business will continue to grow next year, we're very pleased to have them onboard."

"Having someone with Adam's combination of clinical and financial knowledge on board is a huge benefit to our team and our clients, and his insight will be extremely valuable as we continue to develop our business."

RMT Accountants provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its accountancy, specialist tax, medical and healthcare, corporate finance and recovery and insolvency teams, and works with UK companies of all sizes both within and outside the North East, as well as with a range of international clients.

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## NEW YEAR – NEW MORTGAGE?

For many of us, 2020 was a strange year financially and economically with the headlines being dominated by one ongoing saga of...well you know it without me saying it!

**Alternatively, 2020 may have been a year where you intended to (and perhaps did!) lose weight, drink less, exercise more etc. All of these aims should be applauded, but financial health and wellbeing should also be at the top of the New Year agenda.**

The newspaper headlines often focus on savings which can be made by reviewing areas such as utility bills and costs of shopping, areas which can produce a gradual saving each month over time. Many of these ideas are also targeted by the price comparison sites as they offer small savings in a quick and easy manner.

A mortgage review though can produce significant savings both month on month by lowering repayments, and long term by securing a lower rate and possibly reducing the mortgage term. To many, it may seem a daunting prospect, however, by using a mortgage broker, much of this pain and time can be removed.

After an initial no obligation conversation in the region of 45 minutes, a good quality broker will know whether they are able to assist and also broadly how much you might be able to save or perhaps raise capital to clear credit commitments, fund a Buy to Let, help children



Paul Hardingham, Director of Innovate Mortgages and Loans

etc. In addition, they will deal with the lender and all of the paperwork so that you don't have to be too concerned, and your time investment is kept to a minimum.

Given everything that is going on with both Covid-19 and Brexit, now really is a good time to review the biggest financial transaction that any of us ever undertake. The Bank of England base rate is currently at an historic low of 0.1% and in turn mortgage interest rates are low. So as we enter a potentially volatile period for the UK financially why not take this early opportunity of a no obligation mortgage review to establish your options and make this one of your New Year's resolutions that is actually kept?

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*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 2843723.*

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



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## LOCKDOWN 3 BUSINESS SUPPORT

**Cash support is available to businesses over the next few months.**

**Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS)** extended to 30 April 2021. Deadline for submitting funding requests is 14 days after the end of the calendar month the wages were paid for, so by 14 February 2021 for wages relating to periods in January 2020.

**COVID-19 Business Interruption Loan Schemes** available until 31 March 2021. No interest payable in the first year.

**Bounce Back Loans** require no repayments at all in the first 12 months.

**Retail, leisure, and hospitality sector grants** when these businesses are permitted to open again, they will be able to apply for a grant of £2,100 per month.

**SEISS grants** fourth round coming up

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L-R: Peter Rutherford, Denise Graham and David Hughes



# SPRING CLEAN YOUR FINANCES AND MAKE 2021 BETTER

Time to think about the spring clean.

**I write this in early January, and you will be reading it in February, and it is too early to spring clean the house with dark and damp days still to come.**

**The same, however, does not apply to your finances.**

A New Year is a time to aim for better things and spring is a time of renewal. Why not apply these principles to your pensions and investments?

Many believe that 2020 was a terrible year for investments. The FTSE100 index was down by around -14.3% over the period. In reality, our clients found that 2020 was a very profitable year indeed, many with a 20%+ gain over the year, net of charges. Our outperformance is not a one off either.

How did we achieve such impressive returns? Well, that is a secret, but one we are prepared to share with you.

This is not just our year in the sun, we have been operating the same diversified global strategy for many years and have consistently outperformed our peers throughout.

The logic behind the success is as it should be, a simple reliance on employing consistent above average performing fund managers from each investment sector. We ensure diversity throughout the established global markets by including small and mid-cap exposure in all our portfolios.

We believe as important, we have no property funds or managers using multi asset strategies to call the market. We do not believe they offer consistent performance and ultimately prefer to be in control of investment selection.

For people seeking a sustainable approach, last year we introduced an ESG rating to our portfolios that allows individuals to consciously invest in companies that are likely to succeed because of their environmental and social awareness. This is a growing trend appealing to individuals and institutions alike.

So how can we help you spring clean your finances?

We have the technology to compare what you have in your pension, your ISA's, Trust funds or general investments with what we can offer you in a spring-cleaned approach to investing.

We are offering a free no obligation service until the end of the 20/21 financial year for all those with £250,000 or more invested. If you believe it would be useful to have a second look at what you are doing, we are happy to oblige.

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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Andrew Moorby

## GREEN RECOVERY PLAN COULD HELP TO BOOST THE NORTH EAST ECONOMY

Andrew Moorby, Managing Partner at MHA Tait Walker and Head of the Teesside office discusses how the Government's Green Recovery plan could help to boost the North East economy, provided we take advantage of the opportunities now.

**We are in a period of great uncertainty with the pandemic disrupting all our plans and another national lockdown. In the short term, it is vital that businesses ensure that they have sufficient cash to see them through the current uncertainties and that they have taken the necessary actions to cope with the Brexit Deal, holding enough stock, having the correct VAT and duty registrations etc.**

It may seem that cashflow management and preparing for our new relationship with the EU and the rest of the world is enough, but should we be going further?

### **With change comes opportunity.**

The world is changing rapidly and what was once a safe industry may not be so in the future. But with change comes opportunity. The Government wants to see us become Net Zero. They hope to see a Green Recovery. The North East is a prime location to benefit from new industries. We have great ports with easy access to the North Sea which has the highest average wind speeds in Europe and is therefore an ideal location to benefit from offshore wind. We also have a great tradition for engineering and construction as well as five great universities.

Using our long history for engineering excellence, we are ideally placed to benefit from building the offshore wind farms and the infrastructure that is necessary to harness this power. But it is not just engineering that will benefit from a Green Recovery. New building technologies will be necessary to make structures more energy efficient and use less energy in their construction. The transport industry will need huge investment to create the necessary zero carbon infrastructure.

We have an opportunity to take our existing skills and make them relevant to the 21st century Plans to make Tees Valley carbon neutral will attract industries to the area keen to take advantage of the infrastructure for carbon capture and storage that they hope to have available.

### **We have an opportunity to take our existing skills and make them relevant to the 21st century.**

But we need to move now, or others will do so before us. Whilst Government initiatives and funding, such as the Green Homes Grant program, will help some to make the change it will take local business owners working alongside local government to create the right conditions to allow firms to leverage and learn from one another to

reinvigorate our local economy.

### **The Tees Valley is leading the way for the region.**

If you look at the Tees Valley area there have been a string of high-profile announcements over recent weeks. In October 2020 there was an announcement in relation to a carbon capture, utilisation and storage project, a project run by some of the world's largest oil companies, as they seek to diversify away from oil into the new industries. Tees Port has announced a second waste to energy plant attracting £430k of new private investment. ReNew ELP has won a £4.4m grant from Innovate UK to build a world first plastic recycling plant at Wilton. These are just some examples of the great things that are going on around us,

The opportunities are there but we need to evolve and adapt if we are to get the full benefit of the changes. Local and national government can provide funding and create the right conditions to start the process of change, but we must move quickly if we are to take advantage of this.

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# A RECORD YEAR FOR MHA TAIT WALKER CORPORATE FINANCE



MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance team are celebrating a record year in 2020 completing over £100m worth of deals for North East businesses.

Despite the current economic climate due to the pandemic, the team, which is led by Corporate Finance Partner Steve Plaskitt, has advised on 22 deals both nationally and internationally, as well as being ranked by Experian as the 2nd most active Corporate Finance advisory firm in North East during the first 9 months of 2020 in the MarketIQ M&A League Tables. The team was also recently shortlisted for four Insider Dealmaker Awards including Corporate Finance Advisory Firm of the Year.

It advised on two of the largest corporate transactions in the North East in the year and both were companies sold to US buyers. North East Manufacturers HTL Group and a strategic international acquisition for Orchard Information Systems, a leading provider of software solutions to the UK housing sector, as well as

Northumbrian Roads Limited to LafargeHolcim Group and other sales of SMEs to UK plc's and private equity backed acquisitive groups.

Steve Plaskitt, Partner at MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance said: "2020 was a year unlike any other in living memory and the impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic spreading across the world and its impact upon UK businesses and the M&A activity has been massive.

"Yet within the world of SMEs in the North there have been some success stories, some great examples of new investment, of new business models and of M&A transactions.

"We worked extremely hard in difficult circumstances to complete some key strategic deals for North East businesses helping them to grow their businesses.

"Our clients are planning for the future and

looking for opportunities to develop their businesses. Looking forward to 2021 there is genuine and realistic hope that the UK can return to a new normal in the second half of the year. M&A activity will continue to be vendor-initiated management buy outs for non-core trading assets or sales of companies to tax effective Employee Ownership Trusts. Similarly, overseas buyers, cash rich public companies and UK Private Equity funds will be able to offer great value for niche, resilient businesses in IT, manufacturing, and utility services.

"Our view is that good management teams and businesses with strong cashflows, underpinned by a sound business model will continue to attract domestic and international interest from trade buyers in 2021."

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## NEW CONVENIENCE STORE OPENS FOLLOWING SIX-FIGURE FW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

A new Co-op convenience store recently opened in Shildon, following a £780,000 investment by FW Capital, which manages the North East Property Fund.

Local firm James Southern Real Estate Ltd secured the loan to facilitate the construction of the 3,800 sq.ft retail unit for the Co-op on the site of the former Dale Road car showroom.

The North East Property Fund was established

with the aim of supporting the development of small-scale property schemes and is backed by Santander and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.

The fund offers loans from £250,000 up to £1m for residential and non-speculative commercial developments in Tyne and Wear, Northumberland and County Durham. It can provide up to 100% of build costs for suitable schemes with repayment terms available up to two years.

Tony Cullen, Investment Executive at FW Capital, said: "We are delighted to have supported this development, which will benefit the local community and provide employment in Shildon for many years to come. This is a great example of how the North East Property Fund is able to finance commercial schemes and support the creation of local jobs."

## RYECROFT GLENTON EXTENDS SUPPORT OF PRIMARY CARE RECRUITMENT

Leading North East business and tax advisory firm Ryecroft Glenton is to extend its support of Primary Care Recruitment, which has secured a place to supply staff on two separate NHS Framework agreements.

Founded 28 years ago by registered general nurse Joanne Wood and her husband Brad, Gosforth-based Primary Care Recruitment is one of the North East and Cumbria's largest nursing and care staffing companies, and the only business in the region to supply staff through the new frameworks.

With the support of RG Corporate Finance, the firm recently secured a six-figure funding package to expand operations, which led to it securing places on both the Workforce Alliance Framework and the Health Trust Europe Framework.



Following on from that successful project, Ryecroft Glenton has been appointed to provide a range of ongoing business advisory services, including accountancy and business tax advice, to enable the directors to focus on the growth of the business.

Specialising in mental health care, Primary Care Recruitment already works with the NHS and private sector clients throughout the North East. The new framework agreements mean that they are registered to supply nurses and other staff to the NHS nationally.

## TIER ONE CAPITAL RELEASES £10M NEW FUNDING TO NORTH EAST PROPERTY MARKET

Tier One Capital, the North East-based wealth management and property lending specialist, has announced a further £10m of funds to help stimulate the region's commercial and residential property markets.

In response to recent access to funding concerns expressed by developers, the substantial funds are being made available through the London Stock Exchange listed investment fund TOC Property Backed Lending Trust PLC (PBLT), which is managed by Tier One and specialises in providing finance to the property development and construction sector.

The funds will help support the government's ambition to 'build back better' after the coronavirus pandemic, generating economic activity through the creation of new homes and premises for businesses.

Ian McElroy, Chief Executive of Tier One, said: "By releasing this substantial amount of funds we want to contribute to the renewed optimism that is starting to appear in the economy by helping to stimulate the North East property development market."

"We have a strong track record of providing high quality, experienced property developers with an alternative source of reliable, bespoke and flexible funding, which also offers longer term positive returns for investors."



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# NORTH EAST WEALTH MANAGEMENT COMPANY FUELS NEW GROWTH WITH OFFICE MOVE AND RECRUITMENT DRIVE



A Tyneside-based financial advice company is set to create a dozen new jobs in 2021 having moved to a larger purpose-built HQ in Gateshead.

**Seven Bridges IM has started the New Year by confirming the launch of its new base in Team Valley – which is twice the size of its former home – as the company continues to realise its scale-up potential in the face of COVID-19.**

The firm hopes to use its old site – also on the Team Valley – as a training facility for the new recruits it expects to bring into the company in the months ahead.

Seven Bridges, founded by Managing Director Ryan Parker, has also today announced the arrival of five members of staff who will join the company with immediate effect, in a bid to help expand its client reach in the New Year.

This follows the news in the summer of last year that the firm had acquired the North East IFA Pension Matters, bringing with it 600 new clients and £110m in assets under management.

Despite the onslaught of the global pandemic, Seven Bridges has said it wants to help reach as many people as possible next year who are worried about how to best manage their wealth as the world recovers from a gruelling pandemic.

Speaking about the firm's latest recruits and headquarters, Managing Director, Ryan Parker, said: "The business has grown steadily over the past few years, and I think both the acquisition and the impact of COVID-19 has put us in touch with many more people who want to navigate their finances professionally.

"It was time to relocate to a more ambitious premises to bring all existing employees back to

the workplace safely and within a COVID secure environment.

"We still felt there was a requirement for further members of the team to assist with the growing business enquiries. All of our recruits have exuded positivity and a strong willingness to learn and grow within the firm.

"We firmly believe that the team at Seven Bridges operates as a mini family and we immediately felt our new team members would bring innovative ideas and would strengthen our client offering.

"Our new facility means we can remain in our native Gateshead but we can now provide our clients with COVID secure meeting rooms on the ground floor. I feel the new office provides Seven Bridges with a concrete stepping stone to the next stage of our growth plans and can remain our 'new home' for many more years."

Seven Bridges' new administrative assistant, the 25-year-old Anelia Sheytanova from London, continues: "I've moved to Newcastle from the City to work for a dynamic and driven company with a clear vision. I decided to join Seven Bridges because I understand it to be a company that is going places and I'm confident working here will help my personal development and will allow me to grow as a person.

"I'm impressed with the professionalism and the work culture within the company and saw it as a place to learn from industry experts as well as work alongside friendly and helpful individuals."

Anelia is joined by Bianca Chibanda (Junior

Paraplanner), Lauren Philpot (Administrator), Kris Cousins (wealth manager) and Michael Davidson (wealth manager).

Looking ahead to the next 12 months, Ryan Parker believes the company will continue to expand its team and service reach while remaining flexible and agile to the demands that COVID-19 may place on the company.

He added: "Over the next 12 months it is likely we will bring at least three new members to the team. We want to expand our Paraplanning department and will be focusing on extensive training; something we are very keen to explore as we move through next year.

"Given the ongoing impact of COVID-19, 2020 was a struggle for most businesses and Seven Bridges is certainly not an exception to this.

"The first half of the year brought with it many unknowns; and it proved paramount to dig deep and adapt. We're looking forward to a more stable financial year for everyone going forward and we're pleased to be at the forefront of wealth management in the North East of England."

Seven Bridges is a fully independent investment management company providing its clients with a broad range of products and services, including tax planning, investment advice, protection needs and retirement planning.

It offers expert advice and personalised solutions to both private and corporate clients in Newcastle and nationwide.

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

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## THE IMPORTANCE OF MAKING A WILL

You can put off making a Will until it is too late and this poses all sorts of problems for the people left behind.

**Not making a Will could mean that some, or all of your Inheritance either goes to the wrong person, or to the state. Making a Will enables you to plan exactly what will happen to your property (Estate) following your demise. This ensures that those you would like to benefit actually do so, in accordance with your wishes, and at the same time avoiding any possible disputes between relatives. Most importantly is the peace of mind making a Will provides.**

In the time it takes to read this, someone, somewhere will have died Intestate - that is, without leaving a valid Will.

If you don't have a Will For those people who have died Intestate, the government has written a standard Will, which will almost certainly contradict what their wishes would have been...

- **To my Family.** I hereby leave you all several months, possibly years, of financial hardship and expense, whilst you go to unnecessary lengths to sort out my affairs.

- **To my Spouse/Partner.** I hereby leave you some (but probably not all) of what I own.

- **To my Children.** I hereby leave you the remainder of my Estate and give you the authority to enforce the sale of any part of it (including the family home) to realise your Inheritance.

- **To Social Services.** If my children are orphaned, I give you the authority of Guardianship and the power to choose who shall look after them, including allocating them to foster parents.

- **To the Tax Man.** I hereby leave you all the Tax that I could have avoided and given to my family.

- **To my Bank and/or Solicitor.** I hereby authorise you to charge whatever you feel necessary, to sort out the mess that I have left behind. I realise that this could make you one of the major Beneficiaries of my Estate.

- **To everyone else I leave you nothing!**

The absence of a Will can cause problems, heartbreak, financial hardship and unnecessary expense for your family, at the very worst possible time.

For a small investment of time and money you can choose exactly what you want in your Will, protecting your loved ones whilst enjoying peace of mind.

In the United Kingdom, every individual is allowed to leave his or her estate to whomever they want on their death. This is achieved by preparing a Will. Wills vary in complexity due to what is intended to be achieved, but in essence all have the same basic features.

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# ELMWOODS LAW & MEDIATION



Angela Curran



Jonathon Stokes

Launched in a pandemic? They must be mad. This wasn't a view shared by solicitors Jonathon Stokes and Angela Curran.

**Friends for over 20 years, it was a lightbulb moment over a cup of coffee that sealed the deal for Angela to join Jonathon's existing practice and develop a boutique dispute resolution practice.**

Elmwoods Law & Mediation opened its doors in June 2020 and has already expanded necessitating a move into larger offices at Hoults Yard on the Ouseburn.

Collectively they have over 60 years' experience in litigation in areas ranging from commercial litigation through contested probate to clinical negligence.

They are also both qualified mediators. The new practice has been busy undertaking mediations by videolink during the pandemic. Neither were confident that this would work and were nervous about the technology and lack of face to face contact. The process has, however, proven to be very successful.

Angela was really unsure about the effectiveness of remote mediation but is now a total convert after having conducted all mediations remotely for eight months during the lockdown. There are the obvious cost benefits to all the parties in not having to travel plus it's less stressful because the participants are in familiar surroundings. Elmwoods settlement rate for remote mediation has actually been higher than for face to face mediations. The message, says Angela, is more than ever we need to be creative about the manner in which we seek to resolve disputes. Not unsurprisingly, both urge people to consider mediation generally as an alternate to long, drawn out litigation. Each is keen for prospective litigants to understand how the flexibility of mediation, and the settlement options it gives, could assist them far more than the 'win or lose' outcome of a trial.

Angela, a clinical negligence solicitor, has been busy since June with no perceivable change in pace in



Coco the Cavapoo

her litigation work as a result of the pandemic. One noticeable feature has been the increasing number of enquiries from people worried about the effect of delay in medical treatment that the pandemic has caused. Her view is that the scale of this will become increasingly clear over the next few years and reminds people that the NHS is still open for business.

The practices employment and HR team have been particularly busy since June. Employment law is a core part of the business but HR issues have become very significant over the summer months.

Jonathon explained that many micro and small businesses cannot afford an HR department and we have found ourselves giving HR support to many such businesses who have really needed this during

the pandemic. We are able to offer this through our in-house HR professionals as well as the traditional employment and tribunal advice through our employment lawyers. Small businesses have sought our advice on a range of matters from grants, loans, the furlough scheme, self-isolation and day to day issues through to assisting them with restructuring and, regrettably, the redundancy process.

It was in fact this HR need that produced the recent expansion when in September 2020 the practice brought local HR consultancy, Hadrian HR, under its wing to form part of the Elmwoods business.

Solicitor, Paul Lott, who heads HR services at Elmwoods and works closely with Hadrian's HR and employment law specialist Deb Tweedy (as chartered member CIPD), is of the view that the provision of HR support to small business clients is the way forward. It has been challenging and full on during the pandemic. The clients have been incredibly appreciative of help with often confusing schemes and procedures.

Hadrian HR offers an HR support package which has proven very popular and is tailored to the size and particular needs of each business. Essentially it allows a business to pay a monthly fee which purchases a raft of documentation and a fixed number of hours support per month. These hours can be rolled over to subsequent months if unused.

Disappointed at not being able to have a traditional launch party mid pandemic Jonathon and Angela did consider a zoom champagne reception but for this occasion decided there were absolutely no benefits, so opted for a cup of tea instead. However, they will be having a bash for their supporters as soon as the restrictions are lifted.

***If you would like more information about the practice and its' services, contact either [jonathon.stokes@elmwoods.co.uk](mailto:jonathon.stokes@elmwoods.co.uk) or [angela.curran@elmwoods.co.uk](mailto:angela.curran@elmwoods.co.uk)***





Joanne Milne

## JOANNE PLOUGHS A NEW FURROW TO JOIN HAY & KILNER LAW FIRM

Experienced solicitor Joanne Milne is making a new start in the new year by joining North East law firm Hay & Kilner.

**Joanne has moved to the Newcastle-headquartered firm as a partner in its private client team and specialises in dealing with a wide range of agricultural and rural issues, including land and property transactions, succession planning and estate management.**

She has worked for well-known firms within the North East legal sector for the whole of her career and has focused on the agricultural and rural sector for well over a decade.

Joanne Milne says: "Agricultural, rural and farming businesses all have their own unique set of challenges and opportunities, and need specialised advice and guidance to ensure they're operating as efficiently as possible.

"The career path that I've followed has given me a great deal of experience in helping rural firms

do just that, as well as enabling me to build a network of contacts across the region that can offer additional specialist services whenever the need arises.

"I've come across many members of the Hay & Kilner team during my professional life and have always been impressed by the quality of their expertise and client service, so the opportunity to join them was one I couldn't turn down.

"The firm has the necessary stature to offer a comprehensive range of legal services under one roof while also being small enough to ensure the team can build close working relationships with their clients, which brings tangible benefits to all parties."

Established in 1946, Hay & Kilner is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides a full range of legal services to businesses

and individuals from both within and outside the region.

Alison Hall, partner and head of the agricultural & rural department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, adds: "Joanne has an impressive industry reputation and brings a huge range of knowledge and experience with her that will be extremely useful to our rural and agricultural clients during a period of great change and challenge.

"Our strong reputation in this sector is built on offering the kind of specialist expertise that clients need to thrive and Joanne's appointment gives us an even greater depth of knowledge on which they can draw."

**To find out how Joanne can help, please get in touch at [joanne.milne@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:joanne.milne@hay-kilner.co.uk) or on 0191 227 6631.**





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Paul McGowan

## BREXIT AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS - A TRADE DEAL AND A TRADE OFF

31st December 2020 marked both the end of 2020 and the conclusion of the Brexit transition period, which brought the UK's membership of the European Union to an end.

Just a week previously, on Christmas Eve, the Government announced that a trade deal had been successfully reached with the EU. While the details of the trade deal are still being scrutinised, the impact of Brexit on employment law going forward is now slightly clearer and it may be possible to say with some more certainty than in the past four years what will happen to employment law in the future.

### **What commitments did the UK Government make in respect of existing employment rights?**

The trade agreement stipulates that the UK Government is free to make changes to employment rights, so UK employment law may begin to diverge from EU law in certain areas and the Government may choose to introduce new legislation to enact such changes. However, a crucial point of the trade agreement just reached is that the UK must not reduce or weaken the level of EU derived employment rights, which existed in the UK prior to Brexit, in a way that would have a "material impact on trade or investment".

### **What does "Material impact on trade or investment" mean?**

It remains to be seen what type of divergence from existing employment law standards would meet this definition. However, the important point

is that if the UK Government were to introduce changes which materially impacted trade or investment, then the EU could look to resolve this via an arbitration process and by taking "appropriate rebalancing measures", which could potentially include the imposition of trade tariffs.

In practical terms this means that the continued terms of the trade agreement are effectively contingent on these preserved employment rights and the UK will need to be careful in considering any future changes it seeks to make to employment rights. This condition has likely been included to ensure the continuity of the "level playing field" of each member state's workforce. This common set of rules and standards is based on the idea that no one country within the customs union is able to gain a competitive advantage over other member states by utilising cheaper employment standards.

### **What to expect in the future?**

Going forward, it is clear that the UK can choose to deviate from existing EU law and the Government may look to take such steps to demonstrate its clear divergence from EU law in a way that demonstrates its newly regained sovereignty. However, in practice the UK will not have absolute freedom to change all of its employment laws if it also wishes to maintain the trade deal just agreed. The UK government will need to take care to ensure that any such a

deviation from EU based rights would not cause a material effect upon trade or investment between the UK and EU.

Whilst UK courts and tribunals will no longer be bound to follow new European Court of Justice decisions (issued in 2021 and beyond) the UK Withdrawal Act indicates that the UK courts may still have "regard" to them where relevant. This means that EU case decisions may still remain of relevance to ongoing UK employment rights when UK courts make judgments on domestic employment rights.

My view is that in practice it is unlikely that there will be any significant changes to existing employment law which is derived from EU law, especially in areas such as working time or discrimination laws. Any future changes are more likely to be to the form of such laws and not so much the main substance, so as to ensure compliance with the terms of the new Brexit trade agreement. As a prediction, possible early targets for reform could include a change regarding the calculation of holiday pay for those whose pay fluctuates and some reform of the rules which apply to business transfers.

*Paul McGowan is the founder and Principal Solicitor at Newcastle based employment law specialists Collingwood Legal.  
Email: paul.mcgowan@collingwoodlegal.com  
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# SHAREHOLDER PROTECTION

## Shareholders Agreements

### What is a shareholders agreement?

A shareholders agreement is a document that governs the relationship between shareholders of a company. It sets out the rights and obligations of the shareholders, sets out what a company can and can't do and regulates the sale of shares in a company.

### Why do need a shareholders agreement?

It is easy to assume that nothing will go wrong in the future and hopefully nothing will.

However, if a situation arises in future where there is a disagreement, for e.g. if one shareholder acts in a dishonest manner then there is normally not a lot that you can do to make them transfer their shares unless there are specific provisions contained within the documentation.

If you are going into a new venture with someone, a shareholders agreement also gives you more confidence about your future relationships with them and helps avoid costly litigation in future.

### Who needs one?

Whilst the shareholders agreement is recommended for every company, there are certain situations in which it might be more of a necessity. For example:

- Where an employee is issued shares or granted a share option as an incentive for their loyalty - in such a case you need to ensure that there is a carefully drafted shareholders agreement in place which provides for share transfer provisions to apply in the event that they cease to become an employee.
- 'Dragons Den' type scenario – A third party investing money into your business. In such a scenario, the investor will want some control over the company to protect their financial stake.
- A company that offers professional services (Solicitors, financial advisers etc.) where a carefully drafted shareholders agreement will contain provisions so that if one of the shareholders is struck off or has their practising certificate terminated, then the other shareholders would be able to force a transfer of that person's shares.

### How does the shareholders agreement protect a minority shareholder?

Without a shareholders' agreement, a minority shareholder (one owning less than 50% of the shares) will generally on their own have little control or say in the running of the company.

Being a minority shareholder and having a shareholders' agreement that includes the requirement for all shareholders to approve certain decisions ensures that you have a say in the important decisions that impact the company could give protection to minority shareholders. This affords the Shareholders the opportunity to decide on what is a crucial matter, as to whether key decisions under the Shareholder Agreement itself, should require a 'majority' or 'unanimous' vote.

### How does a shareholders agreement protect the majority shareholder?

If a majority shareholder wants to sell their shares but a minority shareholder is unwilling to agree then including a provision forcing that minority shareholder to sell their shares is important otherwise the minority shareholder could hold the majority shareholders to ransom. This is often referred to as a "drag along" provision. This will then allow



Jess Fenwick

the majority shareholder to realise their investment at a time and price that they feel is appropriate.

### What does it cover?

You can expect to see the following clauses in a carefully drafted shareholders agreement:

- Restrictions on share transfers so that you consent to who your fellow shareholders are.
- A requirement that shareholders consent is obtained for all key strategic decisions and expenditure made by the company.
- Restrictive covenants imposed on a shareholder to stop them from competing against the company after they have ceased to be a shareholder.
- Dispute resolution procedures.

### Is there a 'standard form' of shareholders agreement?

There are several 'off-the-shelf' agreements available for free download on the Internet. However, it is strongly advisable to have a well thought through agreement drafted to protect the specific situation at hand and the needs of the individual business.

Every situation requires careful thought and professional advice to ensure that the documentation is suitable for the intended purpose.

**Contact Sweeney Miller Law's commercial department for further advice on enquiries@sweineymiller.co.uk or 03459005401**

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# PROBATE - HOW MUCH DO YOU CHARGE?

by Jacqueline Emmerson

When I am drafting wills on behalf of clients we discuss the issue of Executors. An Executor is of course the person who handles all of the paperwork and administration when someone dies.

**They are expected to apply for a Grant of Probate and thereafter gather in the assets of the estate, pay all creditors - including tax - and distribute the remainder to the beneficiaries. If you want to appoint someone who knows what they are doing, who can work quickly and who takes away the stress from your family then it would be a good idea to appoint a solicitor. Hence the question, how much do you charge?**

Well that depends very much upon you. Are you organised? You may think that you are, your house may be neat and tidy - always a great start from our point of view. You may have left a list of some bank accounts and shares that you have, even better as very few of our clients seem to take any notice of their shareholdings. But let me give you an indication of differences in price.

A three bedroomed property which is neat and tidy and with most paperwork in one room. It will take about four to six hours for three of our staff to search that house for jewellery, collate ornaments, search for paperwork, share certificates, coin collections, musical instruments etc. We have to search everywhere, how do we know whether of not you hid gold sovereigns down the back of a drawer, and people do hide cash and other valuables.

If you were very organised you would have all paperwork in one draw or cabinet with a list of your old accounts/investments indicating that those accounts had been closed down. This will immediately cut down on costs as we won't have to spend time locating paperwork. There is a world of difference between us going through fifteen years of old bills or being presented with a neat orderly collection of up to date paperwork. If you have asked a family member to be your executor this is what you are asking them to attend to unless they then appoint a solicitor upon your death.

What state a property is in will hugely affect how much we charge. You are probably not aware of how much a skip or junk removal van can cost. We have just received a quote for over £12,000 for a company to clear out a house. It's in such bad condition that builders cannot tell what the structure of the building is like. In fact the person who lived in the property tried for a long time to sell the property themselves. I know that once it's cleaned up and the garden tidied that we can make tens of thousands more on this property. It's in a



Jacqueline Emmerson

beautiful location with a mature 50 foot private garden.

The thing is, people's mental health can deteriorate quite quickly once other family members pass away. We once went to a small house that was so packed with rubbish that we couldn't even tell if there was a bathroom or not. The family had taken one look at the place and instructed us to act. It took six staff from our Clear and Clean team four long days to clear out that house. They filled eight skips. But they also cleaned the house from top to bottom, thus it was immediately ready for sale and sold within days of being placed upon the market. According to the neighbour that house had been as neat as a pin when the lady of the house was alive. She predeceased her husband by three years and things had declined that much in such a short space of time.

Therefore, I think the correct question to ask is how much added value can we as solicitors bring to the estate. A few months ago we sorted out a house that had not been modernised since the 1950's. No modern kitchen or bathroom, no central heating. But we organised everything very quickly and using sealed bids we obtained £65,000 over the asking price within three days of the property going on the market for sale. We are particular as to which estate agents we use as well. A good agent will have a little black book full of their contacts who they can alert as soon as they have a property coming to market.

I know that everyone does not live their lives in order to save probate legal fees but at the moment, as we are all stuck in the house in any event, is it not a good idea to organise your paperwork? Whilst you are at it you might decide to rearrange some of your contracts. If you are preparing a list of utility companies with account numbers what about negotiating yourself a better deal.

If you have gold sovereigns are they hidden all over the house, will I have to look down the back of drawers to find them or could you store them with your jewellery? Do you have an old watch? In days gone by as soon as a man qualified from his apprenticeship he would buy himself a decent watch. Those watches are often left lying in cupboards but they can be worth a fortune. Gold is also quite valuable at the moment and it's worth taking it down to the gold dealers in town to sell it. I bet you have a pile of broken gold earrings, or an old ring. Why not cash in your money now and, when this is all over take yourself off for a few days holiday. That way I won't be charging your estate for the time taken to go and sell your gold, sovereigns or jewellery. A win win situation.

***If you require any help then please don't hesitate to contact me on  
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## STRUGGLING WITH THE HR DEMANDS OF YOUR BUSINESS?

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### EMPLOYEES

- Do your employees have a valid contract of employment and are they compliant with the ever-changing demands of Employment Law?

We can provide a review of your current employment contracts and also assist in the drafting of new or variations to suit your business needs.

### FURLOUGH

- The current Furlough scheme has been extended until the end of April 2021.

We can provide your business with support and advice to ensure that you are prepared in respect of your workforce needs.

### REDUNDANCY

- Has your business suffered a detriment as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and are you concerned as to whether you need to consider redundancies?

We can provide you with the support and advice your business requires to ensure you make an informed decision as to the options available.



Should you require assistance with any employment matter or other business needs, please contact **Stephanie Doughty** today on **0191 2961777** or [stephanie.doughty@hindle-campbell.co.uk](mailto:stephanie.doughty@hindle-campbell.co.uk) for a free 30-minute consultation.







## RADICAL CHANGES TO PUBLIC TENDERING AHEAD?

Alison Walton, Partner and Head of Public Procurement at Muckle LLP, explains the new Government proposals to reform public procurement law, but will they really make life easier for businesses bidding for public sector work?

**Public sector tendering gets a bad rap. It is often seen as cumbersome and inefficient with high bidding costs and unsatisfactory systems to challenge results. Following Brexit, the Government has seized the opportunity to reform the way in which the public sector does business.**

Free from the shackles of prescriptive EU Directives on tender processes, the Government has an obligation only to comply with principles of tendering laid out in the World Trade Organisation GPA and the UK and EU Trade and Co-operation Agreement concluded just before Christmas, both of which lay down much less prescriptive requirements.

Following the expiry of the Brexit transition period in December, gone is the obligation to use the Official Journal of the European Union (OJEU) to advertise public opportunities, with a national portal replacing that requirement called "Find a Tender Service".

### A fairer process for public procurement

Shortly before Christmas the Government published a green paper, a consultation on how it proposes to reform the public tendering system in the UK to make life easier for bidders and public bodies alike. It invites comments on its proposals from anyone with an interest in public procurement by 10 March 2021.

The proposals are crafted around key themes of transparency, value for money and fair treatment of suppliers and are intended to streamline and simplify the complex framework of Regulations that currently govern public spending.

Interestingly, the proposals do not cover health sector procurement, which has been left to the Department for Health and Social Care to review separately.

### Complete transparency, a step too far?

Some of the proposals might be seen as fairly radical. For example, there is a proposal to scrap standstill debrief letters, which provide tailored feedback on the tenders.

This would be replaced by a fully transparent process where authorities must publish the names of all bidders, the basis of the award decision, all tenders received (with commercially sensitive information redacted), and all evaluation reports, notes and scoring.

Whilst we can see how this will significantly assist those bidders wishing to delve into the probity of the process, and will undoubtedly change the face of procurement litigation, this could be a significant concern for bidders who may be reluctant for their competitors to be able to see which contracts they have bid for, their scoring and the content of those bids.

### Limit on damages

The focus of the remedies for challenges to tender processes is set to change. The government proposes creating more scope for pre-contractual remedies, allowing bidders more chance of requiring a re-run of parts of the tender process to give them an opportunity to win the contract, rather than simply to claim damages for lost profits after contract award.

If a bidder does make a claim for financial compensation, it's proposed that this is limited to the recovery of its own legal costs and 1.5 times its bid costs only with no reference to loss of profits except in special circumstances.

### Other proposals include:

- Simplifying the system into one set of regulations.



Alison Walton

- Introducing only two types of tender process – negotiated and non-negotiated (together with a process allowing direct award without tenders in urgent or crisis situations).
- Publishing a notice each time a public contract is amended.
- Introducing more scope for social and environmental evaluation criteria to be used.
- Making it easier for authorities to be able to take account of poor performance in previous contracts.
- Streamline the court process and introduce a tribunal appeal for certain types of procurement challenge.

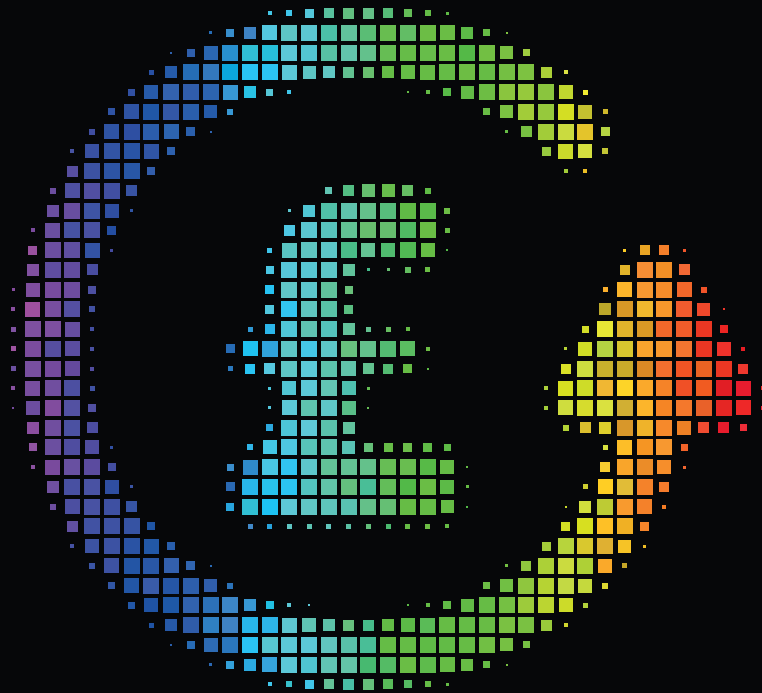
Overall the proposals seem to meet their stated aim of providing a balanced and fair system which is more efficient for all involved. The proposals are at first consultation stage and it is inevitable that they will go through some considerable scrutiny and changes before becoming law.

If you wish to give your views, the consultation remains open for email responses until March and can be accessed at [gov.uk](https://gov.uk)

**To find out more, contact Alison Walton, partner and head of procurement at Muckle LLP, on 0191 211 7850 or [alison.walton@muckle-llp.com](mailto:alison.walton@muckle-llp.com)**



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# INVESTING IN THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEGAL TALENT



The Partners and Heads of Department at St James' Square

Commercial law firm St James' Square sees a rise in demand for its annual Trainee Solicitor Recruitment Scheme.

**Now in its second year, the Trainee Solicitor Recruitment Scheme begins in September 2021. The two-year training programme offers talented graduates the opportunity to obtain the necessary training, guidance and work experience to qualify as solicitors.**

The inaugural scheme launched in 2020 and received a huge amount of interest. This was not surprising given that the successful graduates receive one-to-one mentoring and guidance from some of the North East's top lawyers.

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

Mark Roche, practice manager, says: "We are extremely pleased to be able to offer more new and exciting 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."



L-R: Samuel Scott  
Josh Campbell

The firm has a history of investing heavily in its staff and the graduate recruitment scheme is welcome news for graduates during a particularly difficult final year at university.

The 2020 scheme saw the recruitment of trainee solicitors, Samuel Scott (left) and Josh Campbell (right), who have joined the employment and HR department and the corporate and commercial services department, respectively.

First year trainee, Josh said: "St James' Square has been incredibly supportive since my first day. I have been involved in some high-profile corporate work from day one and have had hands on supervision from expert lawyers. I am currently within the Corporate and Commercial Services department and it is extremely exciting to put into practice many years of my academic studies.

From the very first interview, it was made clear that St James' Square will support and facilitate your ambitions wherever possible. It is a very exciting place to work."

Samuel continued: "The training contract at St James' Square is very fulfilling. The firm is keen to provide increasing responsibility to its trainees right from the off. My favourite aspects of the firm are its close-knit environment, everyone is very approachable and happy to answer any questions I may have, and its supervision. It really is first rate."

St James' Square was established three years ago and, given its significant investment in technology and forward-thinking working practices, it has been well placed to respond to the demands and challenges of the pandemic.

The firm has expanded rapidly since it began operating in 2017. St James' Square now employs over 30 staff, occupies 7,000 sq ft of Grade A premises at Esh Plaza and has a turnover exceeding £2.5 million. It has expanded its commercial departments to include services in employment and HR, corporate and commercial services, dispute resolution, real estate – commercial property, real estate – residential property, corporate recovery and insolvency, debt recovery and sports services.

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# LESSONS LEARNED IN AN EXTRAORDINARY YEAR



Bryony Gibson

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, reflects on the lessons she has learned during the lockdown, in and outside of work.

**It was March when the Prime Minister laid down the most significant restrictions on British people in living memory. Businesses closed. I learned the word furlough. Zoom became a verb. And we were told we "must stay at home" for the first time.**

Since then, it has been quite a ride. Juggling home-schooling for two children when running a business. Suddenly being thrown into a shared office with my husband and children. Not being able to visit friends and relatives, and all the while trying to move to a new house.

Positively, the business has remained strong with people continuing to rely on their accountant, but the last 12 months must go down as one of the toughest so here are five of the things I've learned so far:

## Be kind

After speaking to people looking for a new career move, it's clear that some enjoy lockdown, but many find it challenging. I think after so much enforced isolation, people simply want what is best for themselves and their families.

While we don't have to agree with each other, or even understand everyone's perspective, I think we need to try to at least listen and respond with compassion.

Furlough, redundancy, working from home, being

scared to work in the office, unable to see family, losing someone close; while we are all going through the same pandemic, we are not going through it in the same way. Our experiences are unique, so we need to keep that in mind and try to be kinder.

## We're more resilient than we think

I was about to move to a new house in March. Eight months, two moves, a summer in a holiday let locked down with two children a dog later, and we finally arrived at our (now forever) home.

It is amazing what you can get through if you have a good enough reason and I don't think any of us should under-estimate the stress the last year has placed upon us but despite that I see people making the most of the situation in the most ingenious ways every day on social media and I believe we will continue to do so until things finally return to 'normal'.

## We all need a positive mindset

As part of my role I talk, reassure, and offer support to people moving job daily. In such a difficult time, finding ways to maintain a positive mindset has never been more important. It keeps people motivated, allows them to remain productive when working at home, and stimulates self-esteem resulting in a happier outlook.

It's up to each individual to find their way of

releasing stress and keeping positive, so I can't speak for anyone else, but I find exercise and fresh air when walking my dog is a real tonic.

## Video Interviews aren't that bad

I'm still not sure video calls will ever truly replace face-to-face meetings in recruitment but, as Zoom and Microsoft Teams take over the business world, there have been some strong benefits from the new way of working.

Not least is the convenience, but there has also been an important need for people to develop keen listening skills; not to mention the ability to unmute themselves!

## We are better together

Separation is not the way I like to live. I miss personal interaction (not to mention shopping and lying on a beach in the sun somewhere hot!). When we get out of this, I plan to make more time to spend with family and those who matter most.

And as things continue to change quickly, I have learned to make the most of the moment, taking opportunities to see friends whenever they arise.

There are, of course, many other valuable lessons I have learned, including the importance of showing gratitude, to be thankful for simple pleasures, and to be prepared for anything – including the return of business as usual soon, I hope.

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



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## SENIOR OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC PRACTICE...

### GENERAL PRACTICE PARTNER

#### Newcastle

Having enjoyed progressive growth year-on-year, the time is right to invite a new Partner into the senior team of this fast-growing accounting firm. With a strong team of staff and great work culture, this is an attractive opportunity for an enthusiastic and ambitious professionally qualified Accountant.

With a team that is energetic and passionate, and who place their clients at the forefront of everything they do, we are looking for an individual with a number of years post qualification experience in general practice accounting and advisory, accounting standards and its application.

Leading with your own client base (mainly SME) you will provide a full advisory service with the help of other key service lines within the firm. First-class communication and an ability to develop and nurture relationships is critical to the success of this appointment, alongside robust technical knowledge.

Whilst you will have an established portfolio, we would look for the successful individual to develop their market further, building reputation and new business.

As a leader and part of the senior management group, you will be involved in the strategic decision making of the firm at the same time as leading an accounting team to help you deliver the day-to-day work with both reviewing and development of staff.

This is an enviable opportunity for those seeking a Partner role in practice and is readily available for those operating at senior manager level and above. The role enjoys a great mix of business development, technical work and will suit a commercial client-focused individual.

### CORPORATE TAX ASSOCIATE PARTNER

#### Newcastle

The perfect opportunity for an aspiring Corporate Tax Senior Manager or Director who is looking to secure Partnership in the near future. We are working with a local accounting firm as they look to appoint a Corporate Tax Associate Partner to take over an existing client portfolio of OMB's and Plc's in a full technical and advisory capacity.

Advice will cover all aspects of corporate tax planning in conjunction with a private client specialist and will include planning and transactional work ranging from corporate restructuring, capital allowances, M&A, management buy-out, SDLT and capital allowances.

We would look for the individual to grow their team around them, working with both existing clients as well as engaging in the local market to win new work. Mindful we are looking for a future Partner, business development will be a skill you enjoy and a passion you hold to expand the business

We are seeking an individual with strong technical corporate tax knowledge, most likely from a mid to large tier firm or Big 4, with exposure to owner managed businesses. Your portfolio of experience will include company restructuring, shareholder tax planning, employee share schemes, management buy-outs and M&A. We are looking for someone who is ACA/CTA qualified with considerable years proven experience behind them.

As an individual you will be ambitious to reach Partner level and lead a team. A driven self-starter with the ability to form relationships easily, both with your colleagues and clients is a must.

### TAX SENIOR MANAGER/MANAGER

#### Newcastle

With exciting change on the horizon this is a good time to join this local accounting firm as they continue to service a client base across the UK. Enjoying growth, they are looking for a qualified tax advisor to support the senior management team.

Working with Owner Managed Businesses tax advice will, at times, cover a wide mix, however, our preference is for a corporate tax specialist to compliment other members in the firm. As an ambitious self-starter you will lead the day-to-day management of staff and compliance review and support on advisory projects.

Either a Chartered Tax Advisor or Qualified Accountant you will hold a strong base of knowledge and experience in corporate and business tax, able to oversee the delivery of compliance, billing, WIP, the completion of more complex returns and review.

Working with both local and national clients, projects are varied and will include R&D, capital allowances, acquisitions, EIS and share schemes to name but a few. For those looking to transition their career this is a great opportunity to gain exposure in managing a team as well as becoming involved in some really interesting tax projects.

We would welcome interest from those either at the start of their advisory career or those able to win new work from the outset. Part of a close knit team, we are looking for an enthusiastic individual with drive who is able to work to a common goal and on their own initiative.

### AUDIT ASSOCIATE PARTNER

#### Newcastle

A large accounting firm with a local presence in Newcastle are looking to strengthen their audit team with an additional Audit Partner as they continue to win new work.

We are looking to attract an Audit Senior Manager or Director looking for a pathway to Partner within a 1-2 year period. With a hive of energy and excitement growing throughout the firm this is a great place to be.

To mirror this environment we are looking for an equally driven and motivated individual who can join fresh to the team and help with the continued growth of their audit services.

Working closely with the partner group, assuming responsibility for all aspects of the audit process across the commercial sector, you will be instrumental in the team development and helping to win further work.

We are seeking a strong technical individual with private sector experience either from Big 4, national or a mid-tier firm who is ready to shape their own future. Qualified ACA/ACCA is essential whereas RI would be an advantage. We would support anyone wishing to reach this status.

With autonomy and a direct route to Partnership, this is a fabulous opportunity for those confident enough to make the jump.

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@bryonygibson.com](mailto:bryony@bryonygibson.com)





## ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM UNVEILS FIRST ONLINE-ONLY EVENTS PROGRAMME

Business strategy for the new era, managing staff during uncertain times and digital transformation are among the themes of key events being delivered by the Entrepreneurs' Forum in its first online-only events programme.

**The programme, which covers January to March 2021, includes webinars, panel discussions, social events, round tables and exchange events all designed to inform and unite the North East's business community.**

'2021: Year of the Entrepreneur' kicks off the programme on Thursday 21st January which will invite members and partners of the organisation to share their predictions for the year ahead.

Delivered by James Robson MBE, chair of the Forum, the event will also see Brian Palmer (Tharsus) and Aman Chahal (TaperedPlus) share their ambitions for the region and their future scale-up plans.

The 3-month events programme places emphasis on webinars and exchange events where speakers will offer thought-provoking talks and interactive workshops to help Forum members build practical plans that enable them to innovate and scale.

Webinars cover topics such as digital transformation, employee financial wellbeing and onboarding during a pandemic while the first exchange event of the year – 'Hitting Reset' – will see international speakers share how entrepreneurs' can plan ahead and develop their business strategies in uncertain times.

The first panel discussion of the year will focus on managing staff in 2021. Members will also have the opportunity to join in several round table discussions on topics such as commercial property, angel investment and business development.

In addition, the programme includes several online social events and includes the ever-popular mentoring sessions as well as an e-commerce group for those with online businesses.

Jonathan Lamb, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum said: "We've been listening to, and focusing on, the needs of our members

and partners and have developed our January to March programme to offer advice, support and inspiration to our members as we head into 2021.

"It's been a tricky start to the year for many, but our members have shown that taking a couple of hours of their business and working on it with their peers is a great way to spark new ideas, discover innovative business solutions and make useful new connections.

"The events planned for January to March will help our members plan for the months ahead, placing emphasis on innovation, investment and leadership. Our focus now is on delivering these events to the highest calibre while also planning our April – July events programme."

The Entrepreneurs' Forum brings together like-minded business owners to share experience and help each other grow their companies faster.

[www.entrepreneursforum.net](http://www.entrepreneursforum.net)





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An SME Centre of Excellence  
Special Feature...



# Re-Focusing on the Future The New World Order



## HOW DO WE GET BACK TO THE FUTURE?



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# COVID - FOR BETTER OR WORSE...

The full impact of COVID has still not been realised nigh-on one year on from when the virus was first discovered. Yet there has been the biggest shift since time started on how, where, when and why we do business, as we all start to acknowledge that things will never return back to a pre-COVID world.

## Welcome to the NEW WORLD ORDER-

our special feature not only illustrates the impact of COVID, but more importantly, what we have done to help support local organisations across the North East and Teesvalley, and critically what individuals and organisations should do, to now prepare for the future.

At the start of the Pandemic the SME Centre of Excellence was one of the first organisations to galvanise the positive sentiment that a crisis brings. Organisations and businesses realising we needed to help one another. We created and launched the #SaveOurSME campaign. Over 300 professional service providers came together with a shared sense of purpose. **Since March 2020 over 10,000 hours of support has been delivered to SMEs across the North East of England** through the SME Centre of Excellence network, partners and programmes.

Our May 2020 Northern Insight special feature suggested, wrongly, that we should start preparing to come out of the pandemic. However, the invaluable insights, advice and guidance to help SMEs prepare for the future was as appropriate now as it was then. **Starting with three options that all organisations had - innovate, hibernate or liquidate.** Sadly, not only did we see so many organisations forced to liquidate, but some of those that had purposefully hibernated not surviving either due to running out of money, forced to close through lockdowns or a combination of both.



SME Centre of Excellence Northern Insight  
Special Feature May 2020

We shared three specific recommendations on what businesses should do when trying to get back to work - **restore, refresh and reboot** - and whilst the whole of society has seen us stutter, and as yet not fully start, the advice remains relevant and worth revisiting. In addition, we have a range of predications on what business will experience and how we can better prepare.



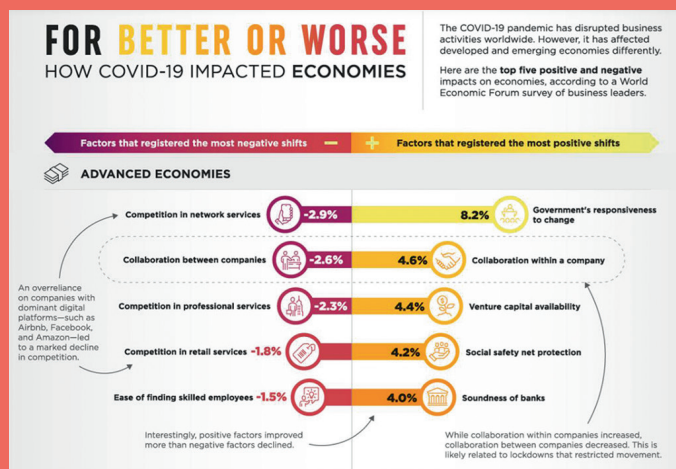
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# THE IMPACT OF COVID...



with, and those without, getting wider than it has ever been.

Unlike a scenario of having just a better car, home, job or even a pair of in-trend trainers at school, in comparison to other people, digital poverty means you cannot even live, work or school like those that are digitally connected. **Without a suitable digital device and equally importantly access to data, you are isolated in every way, feeling utterly helpless and hapless, as even the vast majority of the support on offer is pushed through digital channels.**

Lots of experts argue that COVID hasn't brought about any dramatic change in habits, beliefs or approaches, yet, simply illuminated and amplified existing behaviours and trends. Whether it was how we shopped, socialised or worked more virtually, one thing is for sure, things have changed forever.

**However, not everything has been all bad.** More of us are getting out for daily walks and exercise. There has been an increase in people learning new skills including cooking and baking. Innovation has led our public and private sector to deliver services in new ways. **A vaccine, that would normally take years, if not decades, was developed and deployed within months.**

Never have we experienced such blistering adoption of technology, as we have done so in the last 10 months. Arguably for the first time in history, **technology has struggled to keep up with the change in how we work, live and play.** Whether that is infrastructure or bandwidth, through to digital platforms having been developed for a different lifestyle and working world, to what we find ourselves in now. The whole world was never meant to work, live, play, and school from home, virtually.

**Gone is the initial "we are all in this together" view,** and very quickly during the summer we realised that we were sharing the same planet, but living polarised lives. The divide between those

## POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE IMPACT OF COVID

**Family time** – More people have been forced to spend time at home. Which in turn has led to more of us doing things as a collective family that we would not have done previously.

**Passion Economy** – The 1000%+ rise in digital economy has led to more people being able to set up a business based on their passion or interest as an alternative to a mainstream job.

**Environment** – Scientists from across the world have united behind the positive impact COVID has had on the environment. With less travel comes less pollution with us all breathing in cleaner air.

**Community** – We all came out connected and supported our neighbours and neighbourhoods. The NHS and associated Care Sectors saw the largest rise in volunteering since the NHS was created.

**Productivity** – The UK has historically been behind other European countries in productivity of its workforce. The shift to a digital economy has seen more efficiencies and output per person than prior to the Pandemic.

**Hygiene** – Being clean and conscientious is no longer a nice to be, but has become an absolute necessary. Resulting in a huge reduction in other viruses and germs being spread between people.

**Inequality** – Women, BaME and Disabled people have been impacted far more than others. Black people and Pakistani men twice as likely to die than White people. More women and BaME have lost their jobs compared to men.

**Economy** – Whilst undoubtedly there have been some major winners within the UK's digital community, the overall impact of the pandemic has seen some of the biggest job losses ever experienced.

**Poverty** – 14.5million (more than 1 in 5) are classed as living in poverty. With the North East being at the top of the list. COVID has amplified the impact and created additional challenges due to home schooling.

**Uncertainty** – the biggest challenge that the pandemic has illuminated is the level of uncertainty that exists in all aspects of life. Without knowing when, people are unable to plan for how or what.

**Crime** – traditional crime like burglary and theft may have seen a reduction however, online fraud, domestic violence and abuse has seen some of the largest increases recorded, with a number of crimes allegedly not reported.

**Mental Health** – Social isolation, financial worries and trying to balance a homework, homelife and home-school balance have led to medical experts suggesting a mental health pandemic is on the horizon.



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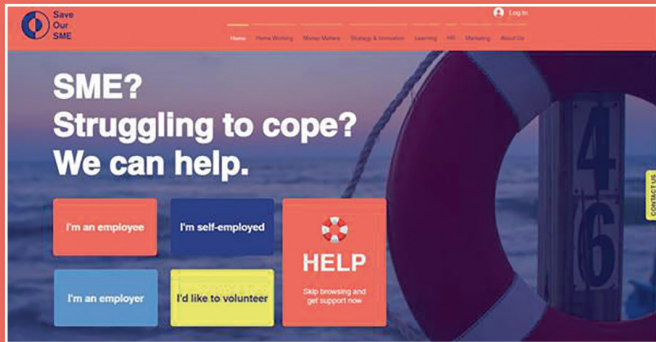


# PLANS, PIVOTS AND POSITIVITY

**The SME Centre of Excellence (CofE) was one of the first organisations within the UK to create a positive action orientated campaign to support Small to Medium Enterprises (SMEs) across the North East of England. Our headline of supported activities demonstrates the impact we have made in a collaborative way working with partners and support agencies to help those that most need advice, support and guidance:**

## March 2020

As the nation goes into lockdown the SME CofE launches the #SaveOurSMEs campaign. Bringing together 300 service providers and professional support organisations to provide free advice to help individuals and organisations in need. All of the SME CofE team work around the clock to recruit professionals and create a platform that provides relevant and responsive information.



## April 2020

The SME CofE team pivots its Digital City Accelerator Programme to online delivery and successfully delivers the much-needed programme to early-stage businesses. Using best in class technology to facilitate and deliver the programme, the Accelerator is so well received that a further two programmes are delivered in 2020 supporting over 35 businesses, providing them with the foundations to start and sustain a high growth business even in a Pandemic.

Food and Drink North East provides critical assistance to the food and leisure industry. The SME CofE provides additional support and promotion to the cluster including helping it find a dedicated home at the Beacon in Newcastle.

Show Business on Spice FM is broadcast live each week from home, ensuring a critical medium to communicate with the community is maintained. All government announcements are interpreted and shared with listeners in a clear and easily understood manner.

## May 2020

Recognising that the Black Asian and Minority Ethnic community is the hardest hit by the Pandemic, Asian Business Connexions a not-for-profit social enterprise starts a dedicated engagement programme. Reaching out to and supporting those individuals that are defined as the hardest to reach. The initiative and support offered prevents a number of businesses from failing.

## June 2020

As the country starts to come out of the lockdown the SME Centre of Excellence ensures the business centre has adopted government guidelines in creating a safe working environment. These working practices are shared with hundreds of organisations across the North East through the #SaveourSME platform, which had now become a critical resource for businesses.

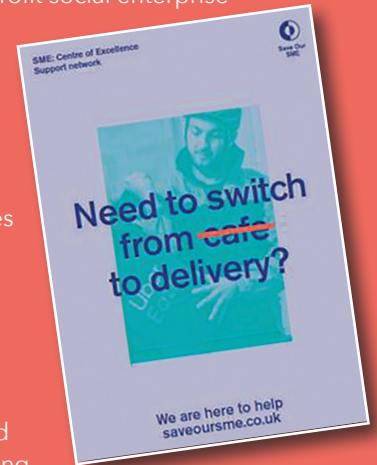
The first ever Armed Forces Covenant Virtual signing is promoted, supported and hosted by the SME with a number of North East organisations coming together to sign up to the voluntary pledge.

## July 2020

Digital City Scale Programme, which was meant to start in March, kicks off helping Tees Valley based businesses with all of the support they need to thrive. The programme is attended by over 12 businesses that continued to grow throughout the Pandemic and as a result of the programme have gone on to innovate, digitally transform and access new markets.

Tees Valley Business Hub is established in Tees Valley. A dedicated support service focused on Tees Valley, the Hub brings together some of the foremost business support and investment experts to help Tees Valley businesses start, survive and thrive.

The hugely popular ABCurry Clubs are launched online providing a fun and engaging opportunity for people to come together and network. The multi award winning chef Federico from Dabbawal provides a live demonstration encouraging people at home to try new recipes and make their own curry. A platform for the Virtual Curry Club is established.



Save Our  
SME

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## August 2020

Recognising that unless businesses adopt digital, they will not survive, and as the government creates and launches a hugely successful scheme to help the Leisure and Hospitality sector- Eat out to help out - the SME CoFE connects businesses that have yet to adopt digital technology with digital experts.

The SME Centre of Excellence offers easy access to business support including office space to those forced to work from home. The centre in Ponteland reaches capacity and the virtual office service is a lifeline for those that no longer need a physical office, but want to maintain a distance from their home.

## September 2020

Amidst the pandemic the inaugural Sports Tech Global Conference, which was meant to be a major event with over 5,000 people attending was delivered virtually, with the SME Centre of Excellence providing support, including establishing the legal entity in the North East. Guest speakers included Sir Les Ferdinand and the event was broadcast live across the Globe.

## October 2020

Digital Transformation support is provisioned for those businesses that have not realised the need or benefit to offer their products or services online. The digital transformation programmes help a large number of organisations survive plugging in the best technical expertise from across the North East.

Supporting the All-Party-Parliamentary-Group (APPG) for BAME Business, the SME CoFE helps represent the North East of England in national conversations that lead to demonstrable impact.

## November 2020

The Asian Business Connexions Annual Awards are hosted virtually recognising over 30 finalists from across the public, private and third sectors who have made a significant and sustained impact on the whole of the North East. The event is broadcast live globally making it the most inclusive ABC Award ceremony ever hosted.

## December 2020

Business Model Innovation, Grow Tees Valley and Peer Network programmes are launched to help individuals and organisations address their challenges and exploit opportunities. The range of support on offer is person centred and provides a tailored roadmap to help businesses start, survive and thrive.

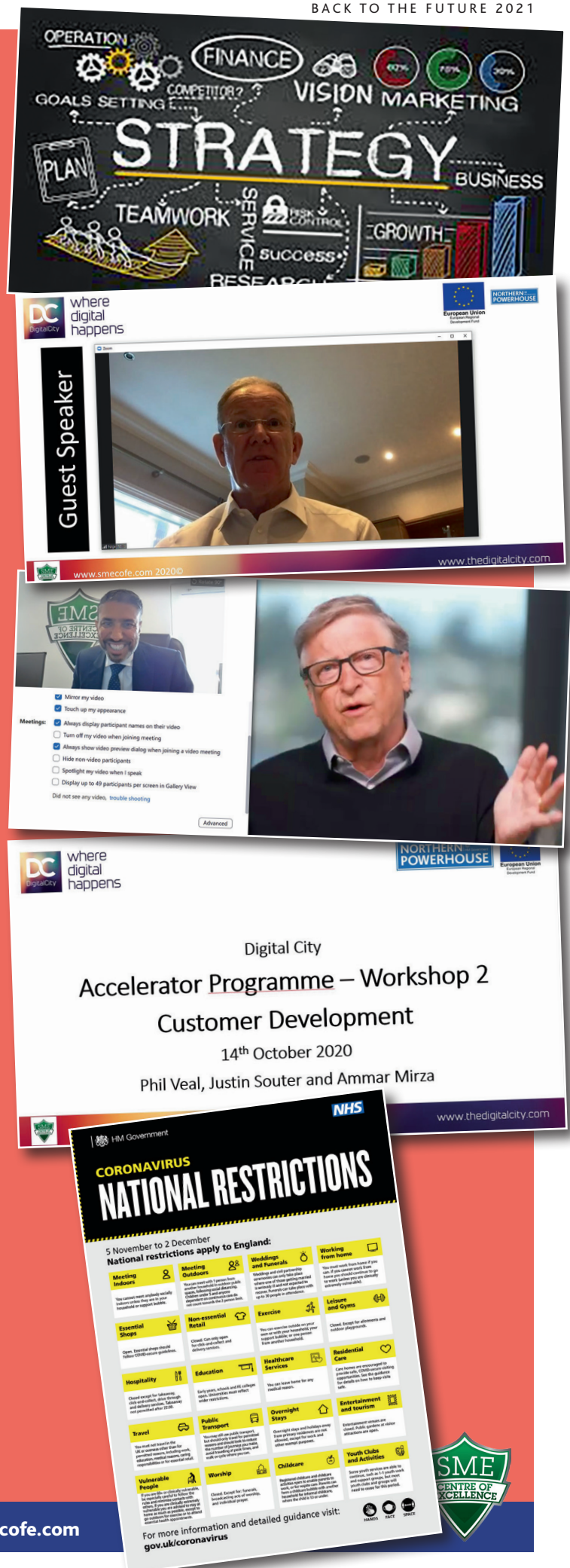
## January 2021

Working with a range of partners and innovation specialists a holistic business support offer has been created that provides the right support at the right time for individuals and organisations to survive and thrive.



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# THE POWER OF P

**As we look to the future, one thing we can guarantee, is that uncertainty and change will remain indefinitely. The unforeseen 3 lockdowns that we have all suffered from have led to so many businesses making the wrong choices at the wrong time, ultimately leading to failure.**

**How do you prepare a plan when you don't know what you are planning for?**

**Plan** - The key to ensuring a future is to understand clearly where you are right now and prepare for the worst. Work out what cash reserves and income you have, and how much you need to survive. Identify and access all of the support that is available, make sure you exhaust all avenues.

Having identified your financial position and if there is a substantive gap, with it unlikely that your business will be able to generate income, then you need to make some tough decisions. The last thing you can afford to do from a personal and professional point of view is flog a dead horse, and assume it will get up and start running.

"The wealth of knowledge and expertise on hand from Ammar and the SME Centre of Excellence is second to none, and the Accelerator programme has allowed me to tap into this immensely valuable resource to furthermore ensure my business has the best possible start on route to success."

**Matt Sibley, Forward As One**

For those businesses that have a future you need to get back to basics. Be clear on what products and services generate the most profit - remember turnover is vanity and profit is sanity. Usually, it is those profit generating products or services that deliver the most value. Revisit your business model and focus purely on value driven activities making sure you have validated the desirability, feasibility and viability of your business. Develop a plan and concentrate on delivering it.

**Persevere** - Due to the unpredictability of everything around you, if you have a fully validated business model that clearly delivers value then you should focus on this relentlessly. As we have seen over the past 11 months, it those individuals and businesses that have jumped from one thing to another, without fully

understanding their customers' needs that have failed.

**Patience** - One thing that the Pandemic has amplified and illuminated is how impatient we have all become.

Whether that is digitally driven - broadband speeds - or simply down to the level of work and life we are trying to balance, our tempers become frayed far easier. As a consequence, if we don't immediately get the results from our business plan we tend to jump on to the next idea. Once you have a validated plan stick to it and remain patient.

**Positivity** - In a world full of problems, challenges, issues, trials and tribulations, it is very easy to get caught up in the negativity and just see problems. Being confident and competent requires a positive outlook. Unsurprisingly we are all seeking out people and organisations that make us smile and add value.

"Using the SME Centre of Excellence enables us to have a professional shop front for our business. I have always found the team extremely responsive and easy to communicate with. We were attracted to them due to their high profile presence on Ponteland Main Street and extremely competitive rates and they haven't disappointed." **Noel Miland, CommuniCloud**

**Adopt a gratitude attitude** - In a day that is filled with frenzied, frenetic and frantic behaviour try even to take five minutes out for yourself. Set a timer for every two hours and spend just one minute closing your eyes and breathing. Start the day by writing down one thing you are grateful for and end the day with one thing that made you smile. You will be shocked how these five, six minutes can help transform how you feel and act, ultimately benefiting you and your business.

**Above all else, reach out and ask for support. The SME Centre of Excellence team and partners have all of the advice, guidance and support to help you with all of the suggestions above and so much more to help you start, survive and thrive.**

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# QRIOUS AND TWO NEW COLLABORATIVE CORPORATE PARTNERSHIPS



Jonathan Lamb  
(Entrepreneurs Forum)



Nick Salloway  
(Qrious)



Joe Routledge  
(Lumo)

Qrious is thrilled to announce two new collaborative corporate partnerships designed to drive digital transformation and innovation across the North East.

**The Entrepreneurs Forum is a not-for-profit organisation bringing together hundreds of like-minded business owners to share experience and help each other grow their companies faster. They provide a vibrant environment where entrepreneurs feel empowered to innovate and grow their businesses. That's where Qrious come in, as the Entrepreneurs Forum's newest technology partner, supporting entrepreneurs in creating innovative services and product experiences to drive growth in their organisations.**

Qrious' MD, Nick Salloway, said: "The Entrepreneurs' Forum has an exciting vision for the future. It has the talent and diversity within its membership to make a real difference as the regional economy continues to change and evolve. We're delighted to be working in partnership with the EF team to support ambitious North East businesses with the critical challenge of designing new operating models that will see them thrive in a digital-first world. We hope our contribution as corporate partners will help deliver positive change for the Forum's members and their businesses."

Jonathan Lamb, Chief Executive for Entrepreneurs Forum, added: "Qrious is an

ambitious and innovative business whose aim is to inspire and enable businesses to compete and thrive in a rapidly changing digital world. They represent everything our corporate partnership stands for and we're looking forward to working with the Qrious team on helping our members to realise their digital ambitions. All partnerships demonstrate the importance of collaboration to succeed, and the announcement of our new corporate and collaboration partner marks an exciting period of growth for the Forum."

Qrious has also formed a collaborative partnership with Lumo Tax.

Lumo's mission is to support innovation across the UK, describing themselves as 'innovation's number one fan'. In collaboration with Qrious, they will support any organisation working with us on UX projects or digital transformation programs to celebrate and share innovation initiatives with HMRC and reward those efforts in the form of R&D tax credits that will subsidise the cost of innovative projects.

Qrious' Programme Director, Kathryn Blight, said: "Some organisations are unaware that R&D tax credits can support the capital cost of work they do with us to improve their business using digital

technologies. Lumo is a very forward-thinking business, with a focus on innovation which spoke to us. Partnering with Lumo will enable us to help ambitious companies by providing them with an option to subsidise some or even all of their work with us through R&D tax claims. We hope this partnership will help move digital transformation, service design and user experience innovation to the top of the North East business agenda."

Joe Routledge, an Innovation Specialist at Lumo, said: "Working with Qrious is a natural partnership with Lumo. Their focus on utilising technology to improve businesses is a natural fit with Lumo and our focus on ensuring clients maximise their ROI on these projects through Research and Development Tax Credits, Patent Box and capital allowance schemes. Through our support the Qrious team understand how their work and costs can be supported through their clients R&D tax credits, working with Lumo we ensure a seamless solution in which we work with both the client and Qrious team to ensure a smooth and efficient service."

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

# NAVIGATING THE JOURNEY FROM SCHOOL TO WORK: FINDING THE WAY IN A CHANGING WORLD



Michelle Rainbow

Flexible working, digitalisation and short term contracts – as the world of work changes, how can schools and employers make sure young people are equipped to navigate the full range of options open to them?

**Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) takes a look at some of the challenges and opportunities.**

"In a world where job opportunities and patterns of working are changing fast, the need for increased access to different forms of career learning and careers guidance is critical." – Youth Employment UK.

As the independent social enterprise Youth Employment UK said in its annual Youth Voice census report, which gauges how young people of all backgrounds feel about education, training, experience, work and prospects in the UK today, the world of work is changing.

Young people who leave education have a much broader range of options that we may have done when we entered the workplace. The skills and attributes needed in today's workplace have changed and are as equally important as qualifications, as roles evolve to reflect the opportunities due to AI and digitalisation. And young people have a host of new ways of communicating with potential employers, and of gaining experience of work – especially in light of COVID-19, as we see more employers making use of virtual tours and online content matched to curriculum.

Apprenticeships, self-employment, traineeships, or further study at college or university are just some of the options open to students who are moving on from school. Working patterns are changing as well, with a rise in flexible working, short term roles and portfolio careers, and it's vital that we help young people to understand and navigate these changes and to be able to view them as positive.

All of this means that schools and employers face new challenges when it comes to helping young people understand the range of options open to them, and giving them the confidence to articulate their goals and hopes for the future.

So how can we work together as a region to give our future workforce the best possible start in their careers?

Here in the North East, the skills team at the North East LEP works in partnership with employers and training providers, and with more than 200 schools, from Northumberland to County Durham.

We partner with business leaders who form our network of Enterprise Advisers – people who volunteer their time and knowledge to work with leadership teams in local schools to bring work and education closer together. And we run regular Careers Leaders meetings where we share the latest information on the labour market and trends in the way we work in our region.

We know that many schools in our region are already doing fantastic work when it comes to careers guidance, but we're also very aware of the pressure schools are under right now as they deliver online learning at the same time as welcoming vulnerable pupils and the children of key workers into school.

That's why the support we get from employers is vital and we are very grateful for it.

As the pandemic put limits on in-person work experience, we saw a rise in virtual tours and video footage, which can be a great way of bringing the workplace into the classroom and giving pupils a real life insight into different roles within your business. And of course there are benefits to your business as well, as you build better links with your future workforce and raise awareness of exciting opportunities in your sector.

From large corporations to SMEs and micro-businesses, employers of all sizes and in all sectors can play a role in helping young people navigate their options.

***If you want to get involved you can find out more about the North East LEP's work with schools and employers at [www.northeastlep.co.uk](http://www.northeastlep.co.uk)***



For over 85 years NE Youth have been making a positive difference in the lives of young people, now more than any time we need your support



Visit: [www.neyouth.org.uk](http://www.neyouth.org.uk) to learn more or email: [jon@neyouth.org.uk](mailto:jon@neyouth.org.uk)



## FAMILY OF KYLE DILKS ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO OPEN UP ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH

The family and friends of 21-year-old Kyle Dilks, who died very unexpectedly in October, are hoping sharing their experiences about their devastating loss will encourage others to be more open about mental health.

Kyle very sadly took his own life in October. A former player at Cramlington United Football Club, Kyle was a fan of the club and a regular spectator.

Now, a board promoting the work of the If U Care Share charity, which has provided support to the Dilks family following Kyle's death, was unveiled pitch-side at Cramlington United in the hope that it would reach others who need help.

Neil Dilks, Kyle's dad, said: "It's difficult to put into words how we've been affected by Kyle's loss. It's really important to have support there for anyone who finds themselves in this situation and If U Care Share have helped us as a family. Our message to anyone feeling hopeless or desperate is to talk about it."

If U Care Share provides emotional and practical support to those who are experiencing thoughts of suicide and those impacted by suspected suicide. The charity, which launched in 2005, works alongside schools,



Andrew Skelton (Director of SOS Group), Neil, Corey and Kelly Dilks (Kyle's dad, brother and mam) and Shirley Smith (a founder of If U Care Share)

businesses and sports clubs to provide advice on mental health.

The If U Care Share board at the Northburn Sports and Community Centre ground was suggested by Andrew Skelton, formerly a coach Cramlington United and a friend of the Dilks family.

Andrew, a Director at office technology firm SOS Group, says: "Kyle was a regular at the club and was such an upbeat lad and always full of fun. His death has knocked everyone for six."

"Earlier in the year our company, SOS Group, offered to pay for an advertising board at the ground and after hearing about the support If U Care Share gave Kyle's family, we decided to sponsor a board for the charity, too."

"This club is somewhere people come together as a community. Hopefully, seeing the If U Care Share messages along the pitch-side might help someone who finds themselves in a difficult place and encourage them to talk about it."

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

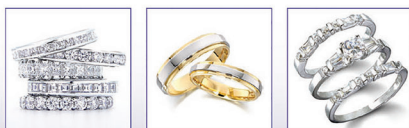
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# GOVERNMENT FUNDED SCHEME AND LOCAL RECRUITMENT SPECIALISTS SUPPORT ALMOST 2,000 LOCAL PEOPLE INTO EMPLOYMENT



Since its inception here in the North East on 5th October 2020, the Work and Health Programme: Job Entry Targeted Support (WHP JETS) scheme, led by Reed in Partnership, has already seen almost 2,000 skilled local people find jobs with businesses across the North East.

**Designed to support those who have found themselves out of work due to Covid-19, Reed in Partnership's recently launched recruitment and training service, which is fully funded by the Government, provides job-ready candidates across a variety of industries, including:**

- Logistics, transport and distribution
- Professional, business and financial services
- Manufacturing
- Creative and digital
- Health and Social Care
- Construction and more

The WHP JETS scheme sees highly skilled individuals equipped with the latest relevant industry-backed training, at no cost to the recruiting organisation. The expert team at Reed in Partnership recognise these individuals are highly skilled assets for local businesses and through the WHP JETS scheme, update their existing competencies with the latest relevant industry-backed training to ensure that they are ready to hit the ground running.

A stepped process ensures businesses and

individuals alike are supported to achieve their potential. Through close consultation between the WHP JETS team and each business, objectives and growth needs are established; then the identification of suitable candidates from the large WHP JETS talent pool unites businesses and relevant skilled staff; plus screening, interviewing, induction and tailored training programmes are also provided at no cost to the recruiting organisation.

This government-backed scheme represents a huge cost saving for companies who could otherwise spend on average £4,500 on a recruitment agency – they can access the same service and support through WHP JETS, for free.

Nicola Whelan, head of delivery support at Reed in Partnership, said: "Now in its fourth month of delivery, the rate at which our team has collaborated with local businesses and matched their needs to our growing pool of talented candidates is astonishing.

"Welcoming 14,903 referrals and 9,673 starts on programme and a phenomenal 1,897 job starts since 5th October, each skilled WHP JETS

participant has worked closely with our expert employment advisers to develop a personal plan of action aligned to each recruiting company's needs."

Nicola added: "Our team has a wealth of experience of working with employers of all sizes, across multiple sectors. We're ready to support businesses with the provision of highly trained staff to underpin business needs, so urge organisations to contact us to explore the fully funded support available."

This scheme signifies an opportunity to not only benefit from support fully funded by the Government, but to be proud of the fact that you are also supporting local communities. The skilled workforce you're looking for is right here, and they're ready for everything.

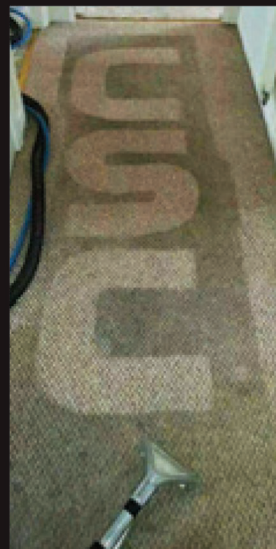
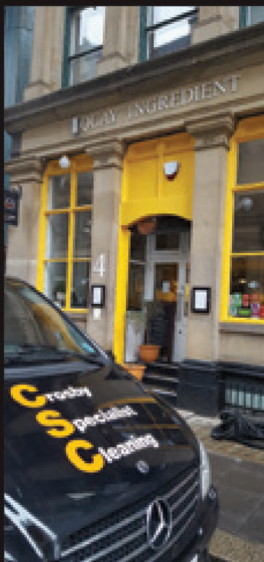
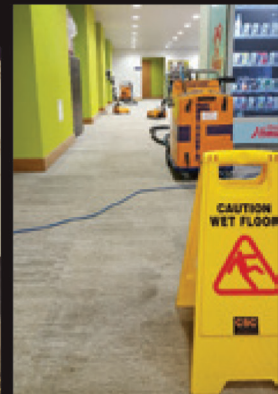
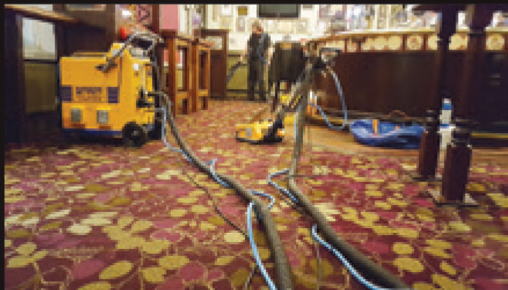
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# LEADING NORTH EAST HR CONSULTANCY CONTINUES TO INNOVATE AND BRING PEACE OF MIND TO THEIR CLIENTS

As a company Inspired HR have quickly built a reputation within the North East for delivering a high standard of HR support through their innovative, enthusiastic and no-nonsense approach to HR.

Last year brought many challenges for HR professionals with the constantly changing legal guidance around Covid-19. However, Inspired HR have continued to deliver high standards of service to their clients during this very difficult period, ensuring their clients had one less thing to worry about.

January has been a great start to the year for Inspired HR with them formally being recognised for their high standards nationally as well as employing their own in-house Employment Law Solicitor. Here we find out about this recognition as well as introduce you to their new Senior Employment Law Solicitor - Julie Barry.

## Platinum Status Awarded by the HRI

Following a recent accreditation assessment by the HRI, who are the UK body for Independent HR companies, Inspired HR have been recognised for their high standards and become one of the first UK companies to be awarded Platinum Status. So, what does this status mean for Inspired HR clients and what does it assure them of:

- That Inspired HR are competent, qualified and professional.
- That the company is well run with good financial and risk practices in place.
- That client information and data security are well managed and fully GDPR compliant.
- That the company has established systems to manage case load, projects and client files.

Managing Director – Nikki Masterman says she is extremely proud of this recent award as it recognises the high standards the business and the team deliver on every client matter.

## Julie Barry joins the team as their first in-house Senior Employment Law Solicitor

With the substantial increase in claims received in 2020 by employment tribunals and an even bigger increase expected in 2021, it is no surprise to know that Inspired HR have considered how they can continue to support their clients with additional and value for money services.

And following changes made by the Solicitor Regulation Authority (SRA) in 2019 it has allowed Inspired HR to now employ their own regulated Solicitor to support their clients.

Julie shares her thoughts about Inspired HR as well as an insight into her experience prior to joining the team with us here:

## What attracted you to Inspired HR?

I wanted to join a team that was focussed on providing a high-quality service to their clients, within a company that was already successful and expanding. Client care and quality of service are most important to me



Julie Barry

when I think about job satisfaction. From the moment I spoke to Nikki, I knew she had the same values and motivations as me. She has developed an innovative business model that is unique and going places within the UK. Everything they do is bespoke to their client's needs and I knew it was perfect for me. I'm excited to have joined the team.

## What do you bring to the table?

Over 17 years of legal experience along with a love for Employment Law.

## Tell us about the Inspired HR team?

They love what they do and are incredibly welcoming - I already feel like I'm part of the Inspired HR family. There is so much talent in the team and I love that they encourage each other to share ideas. Even in my first week my ideas were received with enthusiasm. I feel like I can really contribute to their ongoing growth & success and I plan to be involved in a way that has never been possible for me in previous roles.

## What do you think 2021 will bring for businesses?

It is going to be tough, especially for SMEs. However, with Inspired HR on their side I just know they are getting the best possible chance at surviving the challenges they will face.

## What does the future hold for you?

My future is Inspired HR! Our long-term plan is to provide a nationwide service that is way ahead of the competition and I have no doubt we will achieve it.

[www.inspired-hr.co.uk](http://www.inspired-hr.co.uk)







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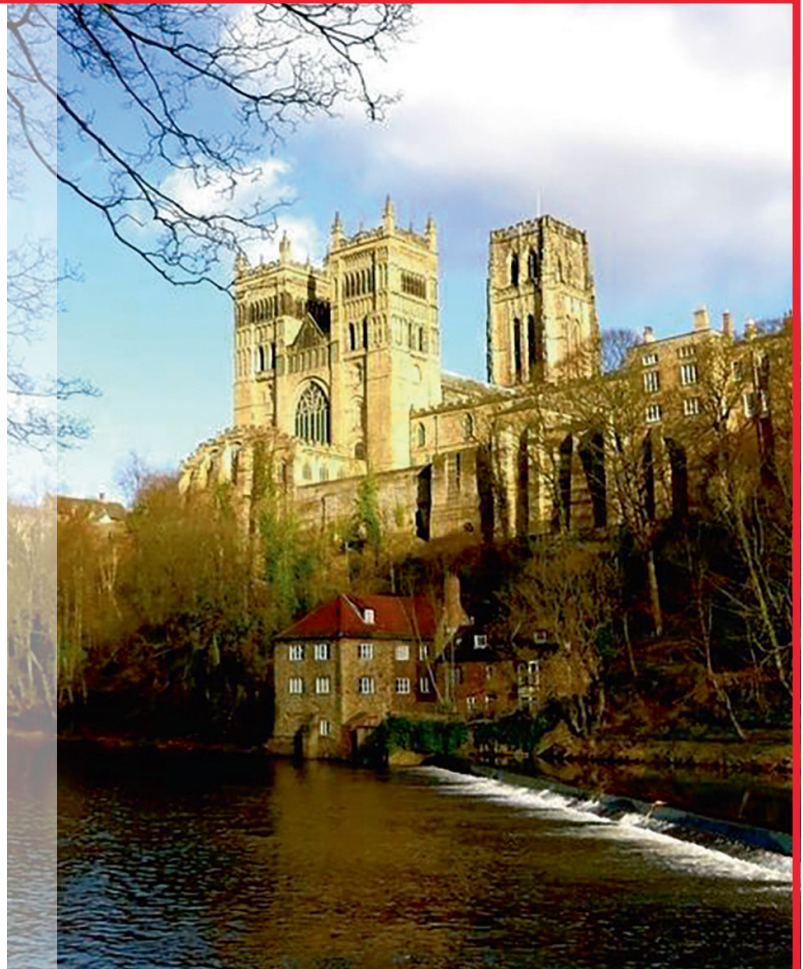
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# FOCUS ON...

Northern Insight chats to

## CLAIRE BARBER

CEO, CLAIRE BARBER PR

### So you've gone international, tell us more...

We are the Global PR Agency for the largest conservation park in history, Noah's Ark in South Africa. The founders (British & South African) aim is to save every species on the planet. What PR agency wouldn't want this account? We planned in a global campaign with a 10 minute exclusive with Good Morning Britain. It was live to the South African bush with the world's foremost elephant expert. The work behind the scenes was immense. Ultimately we will be responsible for taking on PR agencies around the world as it grows. It is about the people (and the animals), be it international or here in the North East. It is about life balance and it's a lot of fun.

### What was your first ever job?

I was an intern at McCann's in the early 80's. Back then it was called Royds Manchester and located in a vast country house in Prestbury, Cheshire. I was trained by the best talent in the business, in their worldwide flagship agency. It was my lucky break.

### What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?

"You make your own luck in this life," Michael Barber (Dad). Sadly he died in 2019 but he never lost his business verve. He was tough but fair. He also told me to, "never be intimidated by talent." Graham Wylie also told me to have at least 14 clients (easier said than done GW!)



Gok Wan: Filming at ITV This Morning



Claire Barber

### Something we wouldn't know about you?

I am one of those rare creatures who actually won a holiday on ITV This Morning! It was when I first moved to the North East, 23 years ago!

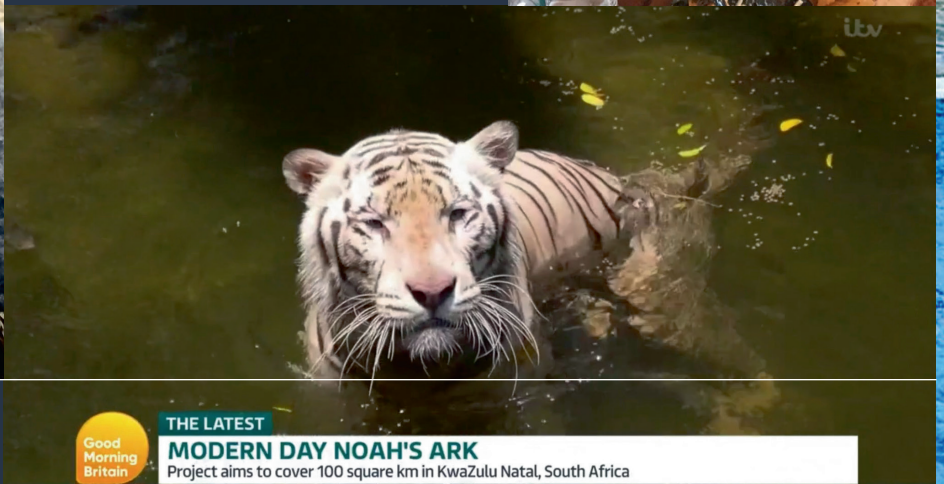
I was stalked before I moved up here. It was horrific. It was the year before the stalking laws and it changed me for a while.

A famous artist drew me when I was rock pooling as a child and handed it to my parents when they were packing up the buckets and spades on holiday in Llandudno. It's still on the wall now.

I owned Bibbys restaurant with the former executive head chef of Newcastle United Football Club.



Claire with her beloved dad



THE LATEST

### MODERN DAY NOAH'S ARK

Project aims to cover 100 square km in KwaZulu Natal, South Africa



### What would you tell your younger self?

Have more children, they are the best friends you never lose.

### Tell us about your new company?

It's linked to the gaming industry, AR and VR at the highest level. It's a 360 degree swerve to the PR and it has developed because of my international work. I have partnered with two people worldwide and one here in the North East.

### Any memorable moments that you would like to share?

Launching the world's number one golfer, Lee Westwood with the world's media at Close House. Lee arrived by helicopter to be greeted on the lawn by Alan Shearer and Graham Wylie. I was in charge of all the PR and set up the whole operation.

### Tell us about you, your home life, what do you do at the weekend?

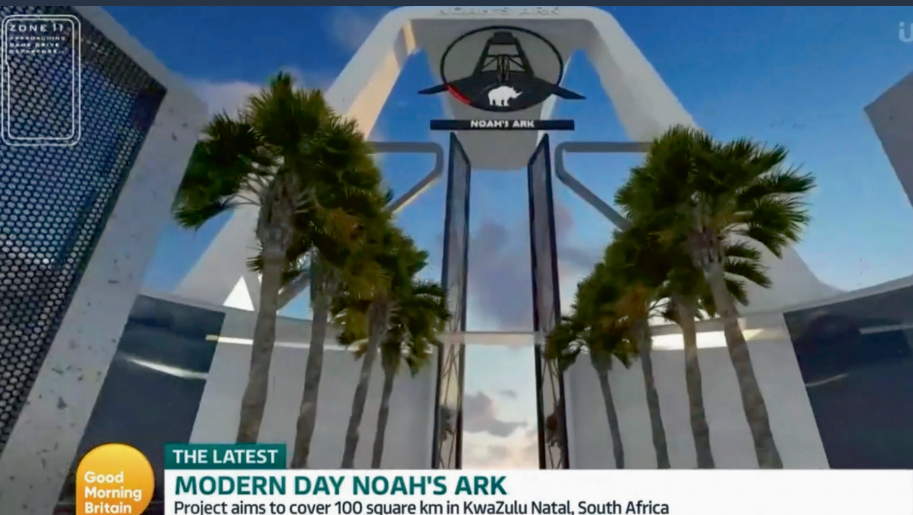
I am married to a sea survival expert. He can fight fires, foiled a pirate attack, is a rescue diver and drives boats on The Tyne for a living. Is this work? I love cooking, painting, baking cakes and we have a little rowing boat. The sea and water plays a big part in our downtime. I've got two daughters and two little grandchildren. Life is good.

Thank you, Claire Barber.

[www.clairebarber.com](http://www.clairebarber.com) [claire@clairebarber.com](mailto:claire@clairebarber.com) [@clairebarberpr](https://twitter.com/clairebarberpr)



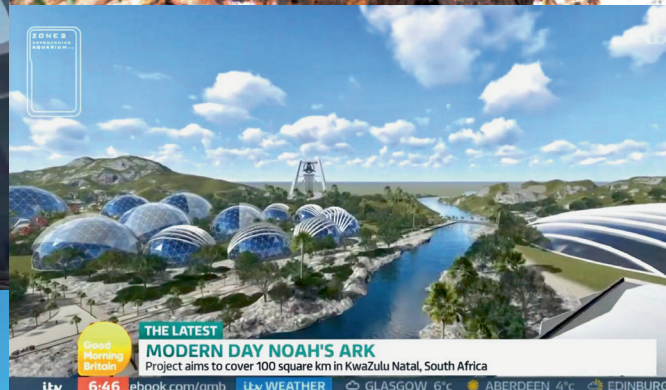
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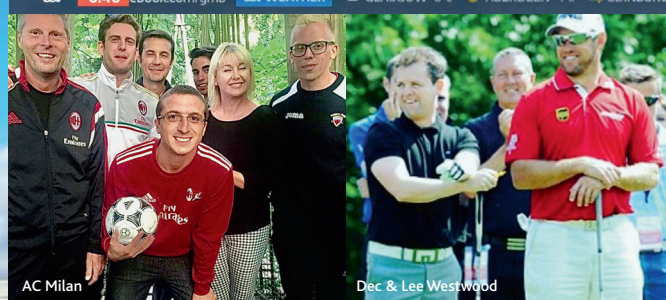
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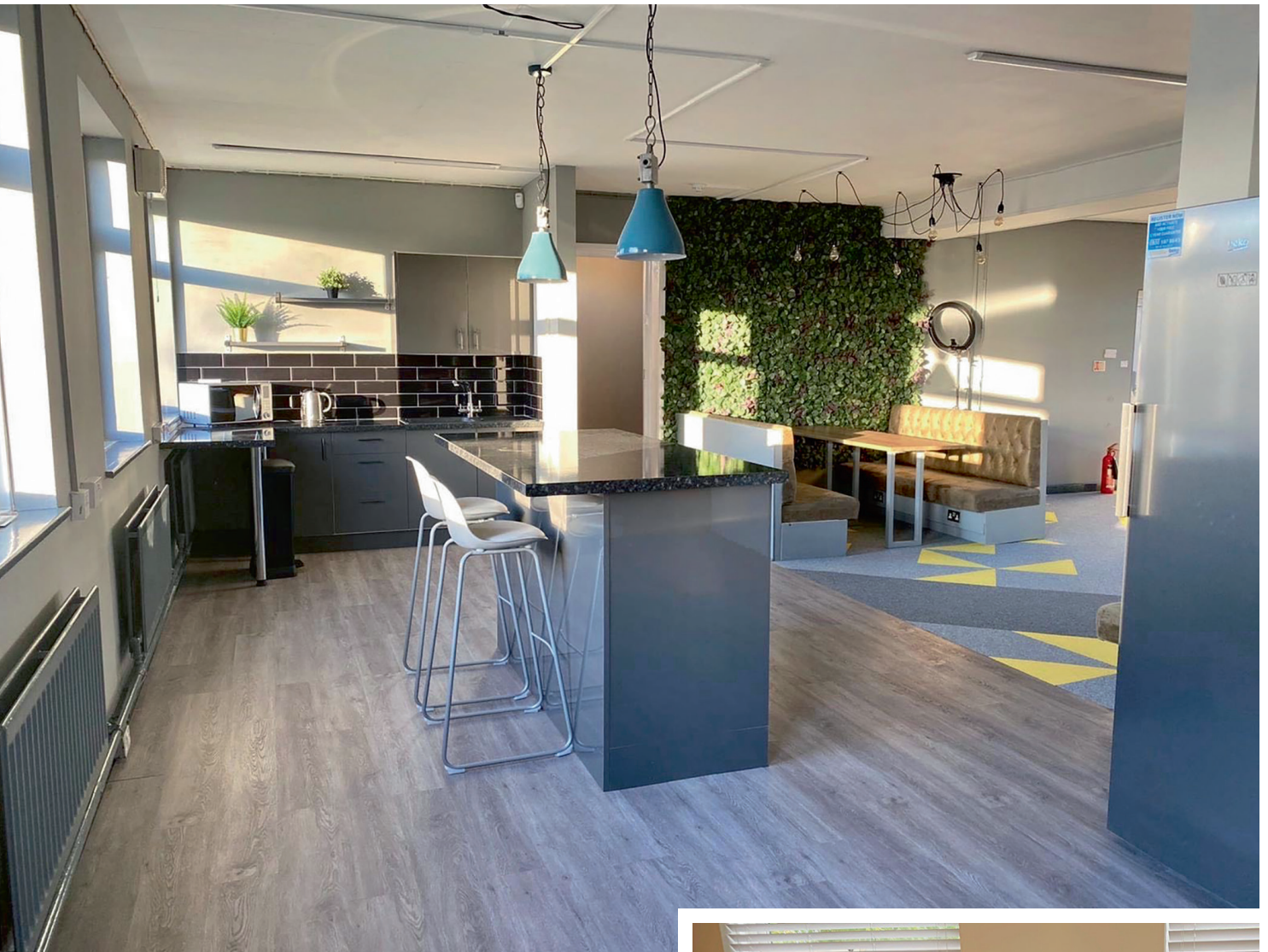
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L-R Scott Bibby of CoreHaus; Sarah Slaven of Business Durham; and Cllr Carl Marshall of Durham County Council

## MODULAR BUILDER COREHAUS ESTABLISHES FIRST UK MANUFACTURING SITE

Innovative modular housebuilder, CoreHaus, is opening its first UK manufacturing site at a County Durham business park as part of its scale-up plans.

**CoreHaus has secured its new 20,000 sq ft unit at Jade Business Park, in Murton near Seaham, and recruited a highly skilled team to start production of its unique modular homes, which have already been successfully trialled in the North East of England.**

CoreHaus will now be able to expand production and perform a greater scope of work including the assembly of steel frames that are central to its modular homes. The company's five-year plan will see CoreHaus producing 1,000 modular homes a year, resulting in more than 100 people working across the business.

Managing director of CoreHaus, Scott Bibby, said: "With such a great facility situated in the heart of the North East and at such a competitive rate, it made perfect sense to set up our manufacturing site at Jade Business Park.

"County Durham has a highly skilled and rich labour market which we have already begun to take advantage of. This has allowed us to employ a diverse, highly competent and experienced team from the surrounding area which will allow best practice from multiple industries to be deployed into our products.

"As a social enterprise the generation of social value is highly important to us. The support from Business Durham and the Council has been fantastic so far, we look forward to strengthening this relationship and building upon it further in the future."

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

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

Scott Bibby added: "We have been really pleased with the interest and early demand shown for our innovative product. The concept was successfully piloted with Homes by Carlton at a site in County Durham last summer and we are now looking to work together on other new housing

developments across the region.

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

Sarah Slaven, Interim managing director at Business Durham, said: "It's fantastic that CoreHaus have chosen to open their first UK manufacturing site at Jade Business Park, joining Sumitomo Electric Wiring Systems Europe in the first phase of the park."

Cllr Carl Marshall, Durham County Council's cabinet member for economic regeneration, said: "We are delighted to welcome CoreHaus to Jade Business Park. As the economy continues to feel the impact of Covid-19 it is vital we support economic growth and job creation. Creating high quality facilities to encourage businesses to move to the county is key to generating new opportunities for County Durham residents. We look forward to welcoming further businesses to this premier development in the near future."

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



## IN CONVERSATION WITH...



Neil Henry

### NEIL HENRY

Director, HLA Services

#### Tell us about your role at HLA Services?

As well as overseeing the general day-to-day operations of the business, I'm also the director of the service department, which oversees the maintenance and repair side of the business.

#### What services does the company provide?

We provide essential compliance and operational services including heating, general and specialist ventilation, air conditioning, plumbing, water hygiene, refrigeration and catering equipment and mechanical and electrical services, as well as more specialist services such as car charging points and air source heat pumps.

#### What's your proudest business achievement?

Winning two Sunderland Echo Portfolio Awards.

#### What challenges have you encountered?

Since we started in 2003 we have encountered so many challenges including the 2008 economic crash and subsequent recession, Brexit and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### How has the industry changed since you arrived at the company?

There have been huge changes in the way we work - compliance, health and safety and vast changes in legislation regarding refrigerant gases.

#### Who are your heroes in and out of business?

I'm really inspired by Charlie Mullins of Pimlico Plumbers, who has taken a family run, small firm, to be a huge business and, of course, the late, great, John Hays of Hays Travel, a valued customer of ours and an inspiration to what hard work can achieve.

#### Is there a mantra you always aspire to do business by?

If you work hard you will get what you deserve, there's no shortcut to success.

#### How do you like to unwind?

In normal times, a good long walk in the countryside with the family or a quiet pint in the local pub and, of course, watching Sunderland AFC (that's more stressful than work, though!)

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



# NEW PET OWNERS

By Vet Doctor, Sarah Elizabeth Stead BVM&S MRCVS PgCert SAS

With a new pet comes new responsibility, so here are some things you need to know when bringing your new pet home.

**Did you know it is a legal requirement to have your dog microchipped? Whilst it is not a legal requirement for cats, we do highly recommend it - yes, especially if your cat is a house cat. Cats by nature love to explore and house cats, which get the chance to escape, will likely not know their way home, so it's important get them microchipped as soon as possible.**

Vaccinations are also an imperative part of your new pet's first few weeks at home. Your pet pooch should ideally receive their first dose at eight weeks old and their second dose at 10-12 weeks depending on the vaccine chosen, or for kittens nine weeks then 12 weeks. We recommend waiting a further one week following their vaccine, before letting them outside. This prevents them from picking up dangerous viruses and diseases from other animals.

Do your research! Every species, breed and individual animal is unique and you will need to train them to live with you, this takes time and patience, but with the right research and a little trial and error, you will get there. Don't give up.

Whatever species your new addition is, it will need the appropriate care to ensure it lives a long and healthy life. At Sore Paws Veterinary Clinic, the aim is to prevent illnesses occurring to reduce the chance of the animals needing treatment.

That's where our Practice Health Plan comes in, for just £14.50 upwards, depending on species and weight, your pet will receive all the preventative care they need from top-class veterinarians. The plans include; health checks and vaccinations, flea and tick prevention, worm prevention, kennel cough vaccines, comprehensive six-month health checks, nail clips and anal



sac expressions. Plus, you can benefit from unlimited consultations for just £5 extra a month and discounts on a number of services, products and insurance options.

At Sore Paws, the team are dedicated to making sure your pets receive the best treatment possible, so don't hesitate to contact us if you have any concerns about your beloved furry family member.

Doctor Sarah Elizabeth Stead and the Sore Paws Veterinary Clinics teams in Winlaton and Newton Aycliffe are an independent, family-run practices that pride themselves in providing quality care for your pets, at affordable prices.

**For more information about Sore Paws visit the website: [sorepawsveterinaryclinic.co.uk](http://sorepawsveterinaryclinic.co.uk)**



## The continued adventures of Ziggy!

**Happy New Year! Having had two weeks in front of the fire toasting my tail, it was good to get back to work. We are so busy that I have hardly had a minute to sit down and write this column! We are currently undertaking a cellar conversion in Tynemouth, along with major repairs to a house in Wallsend. Anyway, a few people have been in touch with their problems and I hope to get back to them as soon as possible.**

**Jemma from Alnwick writes as follows:**

**Q:** My property has Artex ceilings which looks very dated nowadays. I've heard that having them plaster skimmed is messy and expensive and can also look odd because the edges of the coving disappear. Is there an alternative?

**A:** Artex is a brand of textured paint used to make decorative patterns on plasterboard, or to cover up cracks in old ceilings (although this is rarely successful). Other brands are Wondertex, Suretex and Newtex, but they all tend to get referred to as 'Artex'. The big problem with these textured finishes is that they may contain asbestos. The Artex brand itself was still being manufactured with chrysotile ("white asbestos") as recently as 1984. So textured finishes should not be drilled or dry-sanded, as the asbestos fibres could be released into the air and inhaled. The amount of chrysotile included in the mix was small, and there is still something of a debate over exactly how dangerous chrysotile

might be. Some experts even claim it is chemically identical to talcum powder, and that it has been unfairly tarnished by the "asbestos" label.

However, the view in the construction industry is that any asbestos product should be treated with caution, and the HSE insists that the chrysotile used in textured coatings has the potential to be a human carcinogen. Since the coating binds the asbestos into a solid material, and as long as the material is not damaged, there is little or no danger of the fibres being released into the air, and thence finding their way into occupants' lungs. There is no statutory requirement for such coatings to be removed, and HSE advice is that as long as the coating is in good condition, it is usually safer to leave it undisturbed and in place, rather than risk releasing fibres into the air by removing it.

My advice would be to leave the Artex where it is and overboard it with plaster board and skim it. This will alleviate any danger and encapsulate any asbestos forever. Some people will advise that the Artex can be unbonded and then skimmed, however in my experience this is not always successful as the Artex below pulls off with the additional weight.

Regarding the coving, most ornate designs have one or two steps in the detail so plasterboarding does not interfere with the overall design. Most modern houses have 'Gyproc' coving which can easily be removed and replaced.



**Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: [wdlnortheast.co.uk](http://wdlnortheast.co.uk) or through my Dads good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on [mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com](mailto:mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com)**



# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION



Kieran Porter and Alex Williams

Northern Insight talks to...

## ALEX WILLIAMS AND KIERAN PORTER

Directors at Watson Black Search and Selection

A multi-disciplined, employee focused recruitment business that specialises in permanent and interim recruitment across Health & Social Care.

**Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?**

**Kieran:** I'm a Shropshire lad, I think that makes me a Salopian. Born in Shrewsbury but I think since then, I've become a bit of a nomad. I moved to Leeds at 19 and spent seven years there before moving to the North East. My partner is from Blyth and eventually she wanted to move home and so the conversation was... 'I'm going, do you want to come too?'

**What do you think it means to be a businessperson in the North East of England?**

**Alex:** The North East is such a tight knit market, you find that everyone knows everyone but also, everyone is, most of the time, willing to help. To be a business person here, it allows such great opportunity to lead from the front and allow the sector we want to build in to grow.

**What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?**

**Alex:** I think it's great that you can be in the city centre and then drive just 15 minutes and you're at the coast or countryside! During the original lockdown, a lot of my exercise time was running along the coast and I loved it.

**Do you have a favourite hotspot for a business meeting?**

For some reason, it used to be Motel One but now I guess its changed. Pre covid, it was usually Blakes as you could do 'two birds one stone' and eat breakfast

at the same time. Now, it's from the comfort of the computer screen either at home or in the office.

**Where do you like to eat out in the region?**

**Alex:** I like my food, so does Kieran of course. I'm a huge fan of Sunday Roast from a good country pub but also, you wouldn't find me saying no to eating (most nights) at somewhere like Porter House for a steak, Sohe, Haveli.

**Kieran:** The North East has so many different options for food but there are so many great country pubs in the countryside and in the city, some great options for good Tapas.

**Where do you like to unwind within the North East?**

**Alex:** At the beginning of lockdown, I invested in two things: a bike and a golf membership! Getting out on both the bike and the course allowed me to really relax away from the work environment to be with my thoughts. Often, when the mind is clear from the daily stressors, it can free up the ability to rationalise.

**Are the people really friendlier?**

**Kieran:** I have to be careful on this one...but yes, I'm sure they are. Although I think it's sometimes maybe that Geordies are just chattier. It's a little similar to the town I come from in the fact that the people that live here are often from smaller communities and have a higher sense of togetherness rather than the 'big city' mentality.

**What do you think is the best view in the North East?**

**Kieran:** Have you ever been to Thrunton woods and stood close to the top, that's pretty spectacular.

**Alex:** If you're on the beach at Bamburgh Castle looking up at it from a distance, there is something quite surreal about its size and surroundings.

**Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?**

**Kieran:** The North East whilst geographically vast, is actually made up of quite condensed areas which depending on your given career path, can provide its own challenges. However, in the short time I've lived here, I've seen so many businesses adapt and change to suit the environment. Now, in other areas which are more densely populated, perhaps you would think there is more opportunity because people wouldn't have to travel as far to take it. People in the North East are grafters and work for reward!

**Have you had any experience of working elsewhere and how did it compare?**

**Kieran:** I lived in Leeds for several years and absolutely loved it. My journey in recruitment started there with a sector leader and they moulded me to become the recruiter or person in business that I am today and so, it holds a special place with me. My working life now and then are completely different so I'm not sure they're comparable.

*standby.group*





## HOW TO SURVIVE LOCKDOWN 3.0

By Michelle Minnikin, Chartered Business Psychologist, Work Pirates & Inspiration North

I'm not sure about you... but I'm finding this year fairly tricky. So, what can you do about this? How can you survive lockdown 3.0? It's been a difficult time for EVERYONE. Here are my tips!

**Self-care** - Self-care is key. You cannot pour from an empty cup. You need to have an idea of what fills you up, where you get energy – is it spending time connecting with people or is it spending time alone? Make a list of all these things. Schedule them in and make it a non-negotiable!

**Boundaries** - Related to self-care is an awareness of your boundaries. I believe that on the whole, we have not been taught how to recognise and fiercely guard our boundaries. To find what your boundaries are...write a list of all the things that bother you. Go through them and devise a plan.

**Stop comparison** - Everyone has their big stuff going on. Inflicting the "you should be grateful because..." on yourself while you are going through a tough time isn't helpful.

**Focus on your strengths** - We have been brought up to focus on the stuff we're not good at, not necessarily the things we are awesome at. Knowing your strengths is so important. What do you do that doesn't feel like work? When do you lose track of time?

**Quit perfectionism** - Done is better than perfect.

Perfectionism takes up so much time, energy and effort. Ask yourself what good enough is. And attempt to do that. Tell people what you are doing. This is really scary. And takes some courage. Ask for feedback as you go, so you know what acceptable is.

**Find some role-models** - Who embodies who you want to be? And before making a decision, have a think about what your role model would do. How they would behave. Then role model the behaviour you want to see.

**Stop worrying about everything** - Control what you can control and let the other stuff go! Get a sheet of paper, draw three concentric circles. In the middle circle write things you can control. In the second circle write about things you can influence and in the outer circle, things you can not control. Then visualise all the things in the outer circle floating away like clouds. It helps.

**Limit social media** - Limit time spent on social media - there are screen time apps you use with the kids – set them for yourself too. Remember when you're on social media you are comparing your insides with other people's outsides.

**Limit news** - And limit exposure to news, particularly first thing on a morning. Because, let's face it – it's never particularly positive, we need to unhook from having to know what is going on ALL the time.

**Get good support** - Get yourself some good support networks, both internal and external to your organisation. We are social animals and need connection and belonging. While we can't necessarily go places to find friends at the moment. Think about your interests and search for networks that share a similar interest and get yourself along. We run monthly Work Pirates Gatherings and fortnightly Happy Cafes, talking about these types of topics. Get in touch to find out more.

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# NORTHERN ACCELERATOR, DRIVING GROWTH THROUGH INNOVATION IN A YEAR OF UNCERTAINTY

By Edwin Milligan, Northern Accelerator, Project Manager



Edwin Milligan

There's no simple way to describe 2020: the year the world turned upside down. A year packed with setbacks and challenges, which saw business closures, redundancies and lockdowns dominate the headlines. 2020 was a year of transition, of changing mindsets and, most importantly, a year of evolution, but we never lost our sense of optimism and belief in our ability to overcome the obstacles.

**At Northern Accelerator, we are passionate about translating world-class university research into thriving spin-out businesses that boost the North East economy. 2020 was no exception.**

Our North East university partnership comprises Durham, Newcastle, Northumbria and Sunderland Universities. Like everyone else, our plans for 2020 were cast into uncertainty when the COVID-19 pandemic hit us in March. We knew it would be challenging, but we were driven by a determination to continue developing our range of funding and support to help our academics achieve commercial impact with their research. We demonstrated to our funders (Research England and the European Regional Development Fund), the region and rest of the UK that Northern Accelerator could continue to thrive in this challenging environment.

In 2020 Northern Accelerator partners spun out seven technology-led businesses, several during the first national lockdown. These included: Dragonfly Insulation, specialising in manufacturing aerogels with potential applications in thermal insulation with improved fire resistance; ScubaTx who are developing a breakthrough platform for the preservation of human organs; and XR Therapeutics, who have developed immersive reality technology for use with patients with autism.

Northern Accelerator spin-outs contributed to the innovation response to COVID-19. PulmoBioMed, led by Dr Sterghios Moschos of Northumbria University, has created a non-invasive sampling device that uses biological samples in human breath to diagnose diseases and be used at airports to help monitor the spread of the virus. Atelerix has been granted government funding, through Innovate UK, to help fight COVID-19 by developing its hydrogel technology, providing an innovative storage kit to preserve swab samples at room temperature, significantly extending test sample viability. It has immediate implications in global coronavirus efforts and could be a monumental step to stabilising swab samples used to diagnose a plethora of medical conditions.

During the lockdown, much of the work on our proof-of-concept projects was put on hold due to restricted access to research facilities. Research teams made what progress they could while working remotely. Project delivery plans were adapted to ensure they achieved target outputs on the resumption of activity and within the limitations imposed by new working environments. We knew we had to adapt to overcome the challenges that we were facing. We developed our academic training offer for online delivery. Our innovation assessments continued, and we carried on recruiting executives to support our

emerging spin-outs despite the additional challenge of working remotely. As well as adapting our ongoing operations, we also realised our long-term ambition of establishing a university spin-out fund.

In August 2020 we launched a new £1.7m Seed Investment Fund to support North East university spin-outs with high growth potential. The fund, managed by Northstar Ventures, has already made investments totalling £674,000 in three businesses: AMLo Biosciences, who have developed diagnostics for early-stage skin cancer; gliff.ai, an artificial intelligence business who specialise in the analysis of imaging technology for X-rays, CT and MRI scans; and Advanced Electric Machines, who design and build sustainable electric motors. All three investments were part of larger fund-raising rounds. Northern Accelerator has generated a very healthy investment pipeline. Northstar Ventures is actively working with other Northern Accelerator spin-outs with strong commercial potential to invest the remainder of the Seed Investment Fund in 2021.

Accelerated progress to investment readiness is a key benefit of Northern Accelerator's highly regarded Executives into Business programme. University spin-outs who engaged with the programme has also leveraged major six-figure investment from other sources. These include biotech company Magnitude Biosciences who secured £250,000, and innovative tissue engineering technology business 3D Bio-tissues, who received £420,000 worth of investment in 2020.

Having the right funding and innovation infrastructure in place on a regional level is vital to create the conditions for spin-out businesses to grow and flourish, and Northern Accelerator plays an important part in the ecosystem.

We achieved a lot in 2020, despite a very challenging operating environment. We're not resting on our laurels, however, and we have exciting plans for 2021. We will continue to provide start-up support to our burgeoning pipeline of spin-outs. We will continue, and hopefully expand, our training for academics and our Executives into Business programme. Our key objective is to use our Seed Investment Fund as a cornerstone to raising a much larger North East Universities Innovation Fund, which we expect to be in a position to launch this year. This fund aims to massively boost the commercialisation of research in the region, building ambitious scalable businesses that will have high societal impact and create 'more and better jobs'. As 2021 unfolds, Northern Accelerator is well placed to contribute to an innovation-led recovery in the region.

[www.northernaccelerator.org](http://www.northernaccelerator.org)





“  
...the right funding and  
innovation infrastructure  
in place on a regional  
level is vital ...

”



# MY WEEKEND

We find out what Astute.Work management and PR consultant

## SARAH WADDINGTON

gets up to on a typical weekend.

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

I work every other weekend, but for good reason. I have two boys and they split their time equally between our house and their Dad's. When they are with me, my workday is generally fixed around their school hours so I can make the most of my time with them and I guard our weekends carefully to ensure we have quality time.

I make up my hours on alternate weekends, when I also work on my side hustle #FutureProof, which is a community I set up to share best practice and aid social mobility in public relations.

At the moment I'm taking part in a Cambridge Judge executive education programme and I have assignments to complete most weekends. It's just as well I have a very supportive husband who works in the same field and understands the pressures.

### Are most weekends the same?

Weekends with the kids tend to follow a similar format. As a blended family, we have a busy household and we like to get out and about to keep everyone occupied. There's usually a long dog walk by the coast at some point, followed by a late afternoon trip to the swimming pool (when we're not in lockdown). Saturday night is family film night when we argue over what to watch - or if it's summer, you'll find us outside in the hot tub with a BBQ and firepit on the go.

Sundays are all about a slow morning when homework is completed and household jobs are carried out. The afternoon has one focus: roast dinner. That's the one part that never changes.

When it's just Stephen and I, we'll plan our



Sarah Waddington

weekend around our work and it might involve a long walk further afield or a date night somewhere treatful. While we miss the kids, we also make the most of our time together.

### Do you find it hard to switch off?

There is a beautiful Brian Bilston poem called Serenity Prayer in which he calls for a "slow news day, a quiet, subdued day, in which nothing much happens of note".

The world of public relations and reputation management can be very reactive and is often dependant on the media agenda. For me a no news day from time to time would make it much easier to switch off.

### What do you do at a weekend which you can't fit in through the week?

I learned early on as a business owner with young kids, that to manage my mental health I'd have to unlearn everything I'd been taught about schedules and create my own. As such, every day contains a bit of everything: childcare, work,

exercise and fun. The challenge is not letting self-care slip.

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

Morning exercise with a recovery lie in once or twice a week although I'm still never in bed past 8am.

### Big night out or a night in the house?

I'm trying to remember what a big night out feels like. Anyone?

### Do you watch or play sport at a weekend?

I'm not much of a spectator. I run most days and try to do a body pump or balance class two or three times a week. I also swim with the kids although admittedly that's more a case of messing around in the pool rather than serious exercise.

### What's the best thing about weekends?

That's easy. I turn email off. I consider emails the bane of my life.

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





# A new Business Recovery Grant is now available for businesses in County Durham

- + Is your business based in County Durham?
- + Has it been affected by the pandemic?
- + Do you have a plan to recover from those effects?

The Durham Business Recovery Grant is designed to help business owners realise their plans for recovery.

To find out if your business is eligible visit us at [www.businessdurham.co.uk/dbrg](http://www.businessdurham.co.uk/dbrg)



# £5 MILLION GRANT SET TO BOOST RECOVERY OF COUNTY DURHAM BUSINESSES

## WHO CAN APPLY FOR A DURHAM BUSINESS RECOVERY GRANT

*Eligible County Durham businesses must have:*

- A significant presence, but less than 250 employees in County Durham
- Been established before 11 March 2020
- Registration to pay tax on profit
- A business bank account
- Experienced significant adverse impact from Covid-19
- Solvency
- A credible and costed recovery plan
- Can fund their share of the recovery plan



L-R: Sarah Slaven, Interim Managing Director of Business Durham, Cllr Simon Henig, Leader of Durham County Council and Cllr Carl Marshall Durham County Council's cabinet member for economic regeneration.

The Durham Business Recovery Grant will help County Durham businesses to adapt and recover from the Covid-19 pandemic by supporting them as they develop new ways of working.

Durham County Council has launched a new £5 million grant to help businesses to implement recovery plans to overcome the effects of the coronavirus pandemic.





**The COVID-19 crisis has had a significant impact on the economy and recovery is likely to take time, particularly with the current lockdown and potential for further tiered restrictions in the future. Businesses continue to face challenges in being able to return to normal trading, as well as increased costs of adapting workplaces and methods of operation, at the same time as suffering reduced levels of income.**

Unlike previous grants announced by the government, the new £5 million council funded Durham Business Recovery Grant will support County Durham businesses in their efforts to adapt and recover, to meet their current challenges and to develop new ways of working.

The grant scheme, overseen by Business Durham, the economic development arm of Durham County Council, aims to provide financial assistance for the implementation of business recovery plans; helping firms that have a credible plan to adapt and recover but require additional financial support to be able to implement it.

The scheme offers grants from £1,000 up to a maximum of £40,000 and will contribute 75% towards eligible recovery plan costs, with the business expected to meet a quarter of the project cost.

The grant scheme is open to companies across County Durham, in all sectors and varying in size from micro-businesses to those employing up to 250 people in the County. Businesses must also have been established prior to March 11, 2020.

The Durham Business Recovery Grant Scheme will support more than 880 firms and have the potential to safeguard over 1,760 jobs, across the county.

Cllr Simon Henig, Leader of Durham County Council, said: "The coronavirus pandemic is having a significant and ongoing impact on businesses and the economy across County Durham and with current and the potential for further lockdown restrictions it is vital we do what we can to help businesses recover. In recognising that challenge, Durham County Council has agreed to provide a substantial £5 million worth of grant support for the new Durham Business Recovery Grant scheme.

"This is a significant investment for the Council, which together with our plans to

increase County Durham's social value and community wealth building demonstrates our commitment to local businesses and developing a sustainable economy for the long term."

Cllr Carl Marshall Durham County Council's cabinet member for economic regeneration, said: "During the coronavirus pandemic County Durham businesses have displayed significant resilience in rising to the challenges both lockdowns and tiered restrictions have brought. Many of them have demonstrated tremendous agility, adaptability and innovation, which has enabled them to diversify to survive by selling to new markets and manufacturing different products.

"Through the support from the Durham Business Recovery Grant, we can ensure businesses with recovery plans can access the necessary financial assistance to move forward, enabling them to adapt and thrive while safeguarding jobs. By supporting companies in our county, we are in turn ensuring our economy is resilient and in the best possible shape to in time recover from the impact of the pandemic."

Sarah Slaven, interim Managing Director of Business Durham, said: "The months ahead are going to continue to be challenging for businesses, but we know companies across their County need to look ahead and develop their plans to adapt and recover. The Durham Business Recovery Grant will provide much needed financial support to enable companies to take their plans forward. The grant will be available in tranches, so we suggest companies take some time to develop a credible plan and make use of advice available from Business Durham and other support providers before applying for the funding.

"The Durham Business Recovery Grant differs from government grants as it is designed to help businesses achieve their plans for new ways of working. We are looking for businesses from all sectors with a credible plan to look to the future and hope this grant, along with all the other support available from Business Durham, Government and other organisations, can help business thrive in 2021."

**For further information on the Durham Business Recovery Grant and to check eligibility criteria, visit [www.businessdurham.co.uk/dbrg](http://www.businessdurham.co.uk/dbrg)**





## AMY'S DIVERSITY ETHOS IS A CUT ABOVE

A new hair salon in Whitley Bay is ensuring that everyone, regardless of race, gender, disability or sexuality, enjoys a warm welcome, relaxing environment and a safe space to go without any prejudices.

Professional stylist, Amy Bishenden from Wallsend, has opened Finch on Station Road Whitley Bay and together with her partner Katie Raven, they look set to lead by example in the fields of inclusivity and eco friendly hairdressing.

Amy's passion for hairdressing has previously seen her work for top salons in the south and she's been trained by some of the biggest names in hairdressing including L'Oréal.

Amy has introduced gender neutral pricing to counteract the traditional method of women being charged one price and men being charged at usually a lower price.

The salon also has a number of eco-friendly features including LED lighting, biodegradable towels and glass containers. All products are sourced locally wherever possible.



## CHARITY LAUNCHES NEW SUPPORT SERVICE FOR DISABLED PEOPLE

A North East charity has launched a new service to help disabled people struggling to find the consistent support they need, especially during the pandemic.

Disability North's new Personal Assistant Register now makes it easier for people to manage their own care staff direct, rather than relying on traditional council-funded or private care agencies. The register can also help those looking to employ their own support find a personal assistant, for instance if their current employee has to self-isolate or has child care issues.

Vici Richardson, who heads up the new service, commented: "The problem is that becoming an employer involves hiring, managing, and record-keeping. Our Support Service removes the stress. We help with all the necessary paperwork and support people to find the best person."

Disability North's recruitment service can quickly advertise positions to potential employees. More than 70 personal assistants are already on the register.



## NORTH TYNESIDE'S COMMUNITY SPIRITED BUSINESSES HONOURED

Two North Tyneside businesses have received awards for their community work and the way they have adapted to the COVID crisis in a YouTube virtual ceremony.

The annual North Tyneside Business Forum Awards celebrate the huge contribution that businesses make to the local economy, making North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit.

The Heart of the Community Award recognises businesses which show that it is not just the cash flow of a business that counts, it's about making a positive difference to the borough. The winning business was H&S Convenience Store in Wallsend for the way they engaged with their customers, helping them through the worst of the pandemic.

The Elected Mayor Norma Redfearn CBE Spirit of North Tyneside Award celebrated businesses who have adapted and innovated during the Covid-19 pandemic. The award was won by Yoga Tribe NE whose work with isolated and pregnant women was highlighted.

## NORTH EAST YOUTH ALLIANCE CREATES NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

The North East Youth Alliance was set up in June 2020 with £1 million funding from the National Lottery. Their remit is to support the development of the people and organisations working to improve the lives of young people across the region.

As part of the Lottery funding, the North East Youth Alliance has two full time youth voice workers who work with young people and professionals.

The funding means they have capacity to work with organisations to develop positive approaches to the ways young people have a voice, at a local and strong regional level.

The Alliance are in the middle of hosting virtual consultations with professionals from across the region. This is an opportunity to find out what they have been doing as part of their youth voice element, to share thoughts and ideas and to explore next steps.



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# RECOVERY CONNECTIONS

## Who are Recovery Connections?

Recovery Connections is a peer-led, substance use recovery organisation and registered charity, based in Middlesbrough. In addition to our residential rehabilitation programme, community based recovery support and 1-2-1 support, we also work to raise the profile of recovery and challenging stigma is a key aim of everything we do. In addition to the main charity, we also have a set of four social enterprise businesses: Fork in the Road Cafe, Fork in the Road-Stage One, Bloom Florists and 131 The Venue.

## Why was the charity founded?

Originally Hope North East, Recovery Connections was founded in 2008 by members of the local recovery community to support people at every stage of their recovery journey. We offer a range of opportunities that can help build recovery capital and achieve lasting positive change. We focus on individual strengths and have a 'do with' rather than a 'do for' approach to support. We believe in and support all pathways to recovery.

## Which area do you cover?

Recovery Connections is based in Middlesbrough, but also has partnership contracts in Gateshead and Stockton, with more to go live in 2021.

## What type of fundraising events do you have?

Traditional charity fundraising events is an area we haven't developed due to capacity within the charity and the struggle we are faced with due to the stigma associated with recovery. Addiction is heavily stigmatized and the population in general can mistakenly see it as a life choice. We work exceptionally hard to raise awareness of addiction being a health issue - one that's chronic and progressive.

## What have been your proudest moments so far?

In 2019 we were rated as Outstanding by the Care Quality Commission for our rehabilitation service in Middlesbrough - as a small charity this was a huge achievement. We pride ourselves on providing the best possible services and support to people who need us. As a lived experience recovery organisation, the voice of the community we support is essential to ensure what we do is relevant and of a high standard.

Opening the doors of our social enterprise hub was



Participants at the FAVOR UK Recovery Walk 2019 in Middlesbrough.



another proud moment; employment is a huge barrier for our community. We wanted a high street business in Fork, 131 & Bloom that provides a high quality offer giving people a fair chance in life while raising awareness of recovery.

## Who are your main trustees and patrons?

Ruth Hicks chairs both the charity and social enterprise. Ruth has had a lifelong career in social care and in retirement supports a number of charities as a chairperson and trustee.

Dot Smith, CEO has been with Recovery Connections for five years and has led the charity to its current success, providing support in three areas of the North East and increasing turnover by over 50%.

## What are you currently working on?

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, we moved our community timetable entirely online. The virtual timetable still runs seven days a week and offers a range of groups including structured recovery meetings as well as cooking classes and coffee mornings.

From the social enterprise perspective the pandemic has been catastrophic in the first year of trading. We have been able to operate Bloom Florist online and introduced three volunteer opportunities. We are exploring the potential to pivot Fork in the Road to provide a 'meals on wheels' service to our vulnerable community members and this will give us a scalable business model providing high quality, nutritious and affordable food to people who need it.



## What does the future hold?

The past year has been something of a struggle. We will keep doing what we do across the North East, offering valuable and much-needed support to people struggling with addiction. The social enterprise is a challenge - the pandemic has created a situation none of us could have predicted, we are determined to survive and fulfill our mission of helping people gain valuable work experience, training and meaningful employment.

## How do you support RC and get involved?

There are a few ways for businesses and individuals to get involved and support us if they'd like to, details can be found on our website and we regularly post opportunities for people to assist us on our social media channels.

**Volunteering:** Volunteering is available across the organisation, notably within our community garden which once restrictions are relaxed welcomes volunteers to help with current projects. We also welcome donations of materials such as timber, paving slabs and other outdoor materials.

**Joining the board as a trustee,** we would especially welcome people with experience of the financial sector, human resources and PR.

**Social Enterprise:** Supporting our social enterprise businesses is a great way to support the charity indirectly. With two cafes, an event space and a florist to choose from, there's something for everyone.

[www.recoveryconnections.org.uk](http://www.recoveryconnections.org.uk)



Dot Smith, CEO of Recovery Connections with previous Fork in the Road owner, Andy Preston.





## GNAAS LAUNCHES BUSINESS CLUB

The man behind the jet suit paramedic concept will be the first speaker at a new networking group aimed at connecting Northern businesses.

The Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS) are launching a business club to unite businesses from the region and give them the chance to hear from expert speakers.

Membership fees from the GNAAS Business Club (GBC) will go towards helping GNAAS continue to provide life-saving critical care to patients in the region. GBC will also allow businesses to network and establish a sense of unity and togetherness.

The first event will be a free taster session taking place virtually on 11 February, with guest speaker Andy Mawson, director of operations and paramedic at GNAAS.

GBC members will be invited to networking events throughout the year and get access to exclusive benefits such as discounted rates on GNAAS' world class facilities hire and social media support.



## MEDAL MONTH CHALLENGE!

John Shallcross OBE was one of NE Youth's longest standing trustees, who raised over a £1m for the charity. John sadly passed away last March due to Covid-19 and, along with his daughter, Jo, and in partnership with Reason To, the firm wants to do something positive by celebrating his life and the difference he made to NE Youth.

NE Youth are therefore launching the Medal Month Challenge in February. The challenge will allow participants to keep mentally fit and raise vital funds for some of the most disadvantaged young people across the north east.

The challenge is to have completed a marathon by the 21st February, John's birthday. To cover the distance you need to run, walk, ride, scoot, wheelchair, sledge, or even crawl 2km a day.

The cost of entry is £10 per person. For more information about the three medal options available and to sign up visit [www.neyouth.org.uk/product/medal-month/](http://www.neyouth.org.uk/product/medal-month/).



## EMMA DOES DARLINGTON BUILDING SOCIETY PROUD

A caring employee at Darlington Building Society has said how volunteering to help tackle loneliness in the community has enriched her life.

Emma Robinson, who works as a People Talent Officer for Darlington Building Society, started volunteering as a befriender for Age UK North Yorkshire and Darlington in October.

Since then, Emma has developed a special bond with Carmen, a 70-year-old woman living alone in the Darlington area. Emma calls Carmen once a week, and was able to meet her face to face under social distancing rules at Christmas.

Emma has also offered to help Age UK with meals deliveries, dog walking and shopping collections.

Andrew Craddock, Chief Executive of Darlington Building Society, said: "Being part of the communities we serve is such an important part of our ethos, and it's fantastic to see caring employees like Emma making such a difference to people's lives."

## HEALTHWATCH AWARD FOR "PUTTING RESIDENTS FIRST"



A Newcastle residential home has been awarded a prestigious Healthwatch Newcastle Star Award for their work keeping residents safe during the pandemic.

Healthwatch Newcastle gathers the views and experiences of children and adults on local health and social care services. When they receive positive feedback about a health or social care provider, they look at awarding a Healthwatch Star in recognition of the work done to help others.

Whorlton Grange Residential Care Home in Westerhope received the award for "putting their residents first during the COVID pandemic and making everyone safe and comfortable."

The home took steps to minimise risk to their residents including live internet video calls to families, the building of a new pod area for visitors and a strict adherence to government guidelines. The residents also experienced lots of home-made entertainment including singing, dancing and games to make things as normal as possible.



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## IS IT OKAY TO 'SPY' ON YOUR EMPLOYEES?

In this article we wanted to share with you a topical issue that many HR professionals are currently debating.

**As we all know, working from home is now considered the 'new normal' and we have all heard of Orwell's 'Big Brother', but did we ever think it would mean that businesses would be monitoring employees' computer usage without them even realising or consenting?**

Employee tech monitoring vendors such as Prodoscope and Hubstaff have reported that during the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of businesses trialling their software has more than doubled and there has been a massive 87% increase in online queries surrounding 'surveillance software' since the initial nationwide lockdown was announced in March last year.

Some employee monitoring tools observe the amount of time employees spent on certain websites and applications, such as Slack, Facebook and YouTube. Others are able to take screenshots of employee's computer monitors at random times to make sure they are on task. In extreme cases, employers are monitoring every key their employees press or observing their employees' screens in real time using applications such as TeamViewer.

Whilst it may be understandable why many businesses are taking this route (and we have no doubt that an element of employee monitoring tools is an effective method for maintaining a consistently high level of productivity during these unprecedented times) some comment it is a quick

fix to a problem that was sprung on organisations almost overnight.

In addition, implementing such tools could lead to damaged employee relations. Monitoring working hours or computer usage may be considered as a lack of trust from your employees' perspective and it's unlikely that these feelings will dissipate when they return to the office.

In some cases, implementing a degree of employee monitoring may be the right decision, however, we recommend taking steps to improve engagement and productivity through other means before turning to technology. For instance, line managers should be regularly checking in with their team members not only to ensure they are on task, but also to provide support and connection, which many of us have been missing since being plunged into a further lockdown.

Employers should also show understanding for those who are underperforming during these times given the events of 2020. Members of your workforce could have a multitude of reasons for reduced productivity. If, prior to the outbreak, they were a reliable member of the team, there could be external factors causing their underperformance. In addition, managers should be careful about what data they choose to use from a performance management perspective, as such data should only be used as part of the process if the employee has been fully informed

and is aware of the performance exceptions.

That being said, there will be cases of employees who are enjoying the freedoms of working from home a little bit too much. Employers should therefore focus on individuals on a case-by-case basis, opening honest discussions with them and checking on their wellbeing before assuming the worst.

From a legal perspective, the use of monitoring software is somewhat unclear and therefore we would advise that employers be transparent with their employees if they choose to use such tools to monitor employee productivity. An employer should also ensure that their obligations under data protection laws are factored in and seek advice if they are unsure. Be open with your staff and explain what personal data will be collected, what it will be used for and how long it will be kept. Failure to do so could undoubtedly lead to a rise in court cases, with employees feeling that their employer has violated their privacy. Finally, ensure you have clear written policies and procedures in place regarding monitoring at work.

This topic will no doubt be something to debate for some time to come. If you'd like to discuss any aspect of monitoring employees at work, get in touch and we would love to chat.

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



# GHANA'S COSTLY WAIT FOR UK TRADE DEAL



Patricia Alexander

This month, Shared Interest Managing Director Patricia Alexander tells us about the challenges faced by businesses currently importing into the UK, in the face of Covid and Brexit restrictions.

**As the UK finally approved its trade agreement with the European Union (EU) on 30th December, it transpired that trade deals between the UK and some countries had not been finalised in time for Britain exiting the EU the following day.**

As I write this article, Ghana is one of the countries still hoping to finalise a free trade agreement but is operating under interim terms as negotiations take place. While they wait, their exports will be categorised under Britain's Generalised Scheme of Preferences, which face import fees, albeit at a reduced rate as a developing country. Under these requirements, Fairtrade bananas carry tariffs equivalent to 9.5p/kg, where previously no tariff applied.

The Ghanaian government is asking for the country's main exports such as bananas, pineapples, and cocoa, to continue the tariff-free conditions, which were in place when Britain was a member of the EU.

Shared Interest provides much needed finance to farmers in Ghana, and this latest challenge will be an additional blow to businesses already under pressure. You may have heard in October last year that Nestlé announced KitKat bars in the UK and Ireland would no longer be certified Fairtrade. The Chief Executive of the Fairtrade Foundation

referred to their decision as "profoundly disappointing" and cocoa farmers in West Africa were "devastated" by the news.

As the Managing Director of an organisation that works closely with smallholder farmers across the globe to provide much needed finance, I knew immediately that this move would have a huge impact on people, co-operatives, and communities.

Two thirds of chocolate consumed worldwide includes beans from West Africa, where cocoa production is a way of life, and for many, sadly there is no other source of income.

A typical farmer, working outside fair trade, lives on around 75p per day. That is below the World Bank's extreme poverty line of about £1.40. When we consider that cocoa producers currently only receive about 6% of the value of the global chocolate industry, it gives some indication of the imbalance of wealth in supply chains.

Aside from the challenges faced environmentally and economically, farmers are also facing the health and infrastructure challenges caused by Covid-19. News from our regional team in West Africa is that co-operatives in Ghana have been making serious efforts to reduce the impact on the cocoa sector, which they describe as their economic lifeline.



There are now concerns that current trade tariffs caused by Brexit will see the country's farmers priced out of the British market completely.

The lack of a signed deal means that fees currently apply to goods such as Ghanaian bananas and processed cocoa products, which will likely be passed to the farmers and workers.

We know that, following Brexit, the first Fairtrade product shipped into the UK from Ghana arrived in early January. The shipment contained 185 metric tonnes of bananas and the tariff amounted to more than £17,500.

As this article goes to print, it is encouraging to hear that we are close to a trade agreement as Ghana imports a high percentage of its goods into the UK. Official data shows that this equalled trade to the value of £498m in 2019, a big part of which was cocoa and fruit. Our main concern is that producers have built business models that rely significantly on tariff-free export operations, and they will not be able to survive the current duties imposed.

[www.shared-interest.com](http://www.shared-interest.com)



# ONE STEP AHEAD; OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD NOW AHEAD OF THE RECOVERY AT AIRVIEW PARK



**New commercial developments, like the North East's AirView Park next to Newcastle International Airport, could not have predicted the year that lay ahead at the beginning of 2020.**

However, as 2021 gets off to a similar start, albeit with slightly different lockdown restrictions in part, companies including Tynexe Commercial Ltd, the developers behind the scheme, continue to drive forward with confidence and optimism, delivering opportunities for businesses who may be in a position to plan (and potentially build) now, ready for the recovery.

The 175,000 sq ft development has already attracted a well-known anchor tenant. Construction resumed on Bellway plc's purpose-built HQ in June of last year, and AirView Park officially welcomed the national homebuilder in August when work on the 21,000 sq ft building was complete.

Other positive signs were welcomed too despite the pandemic including the airport welcoming back business routes to London Heathrow, Amsterdam, Aberdeen, Dusseldorf and Paris. This saw additional commercial property enquiries despite a very unpredictable and unstable market, with businesses

considering out-of-town locations and national companies looking to the North East as a strategic base.

Mike Clark of Tynexe Commercial Ltd, explained, "We could never have predicted last year to turn out the way it has, and despite the situation which the country is still facing, we're looking ahead this year with the same determination and optimism."

"AirView Park is in a very fortunate position, offering a prime location for road and air connectivity. For commercial schemes like ours only partly out of the ground, it also provides a lot of flexibility, and those businesses in a fortunate enough position to do so can potentially kick-start their long-term plans, build for the future now, and reap the rewards later down the line."

"Despite everything, there's also an underlying confidence here in the North East and we're continuing to work closely with a number of potential occupiers to deliver the second phase of the scheme later this year."

***AirView Park offers Enterprise Zone status and can deliver bespoke, design-led office buildings for individual organisations. For details contact Angus White at Naylor Gavin Black on t: 0191 211 1551, e: angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk or go to [www.airviewpark.co.uk](http://www.airviewpark.co.uk)***

## OFFICE LETTINGS SHOWCASE SPECTRUM'S AGILE ABILITY TO ADAPT TO COVID CLIMATE

**It is fair to say 2020 was a tough year for businesses in all corners of the globe, and 2021 shows no signs of being any less challenging.**

But while many firms struggled to adapt to the COVID-19 restrictive climate, Spectrum Business Park in Seaham has emerged stronger for it.

Developer Paul Wellstead explains why...

"Flexible and home working have become a way of life for some time, as businesses were forced to change the way they operate to ensure they remain operational during the ongoing coronavirus pandemic."

Office occupation as we know it had to adapt – no longer could businesses have packed floor spaces, with their full contingency on site. Instead agile working is what it's all about.

And that has forced many companies to look at their existing set up – with some real game changing results.

Two great examples of this can be found at Spectrum Business Park, within the buildings occupied by Great Annual Savings Group (GAS) and believe housing.

GAS has undergone a £3m investment project on site, which has quadrupled its current space and

allowed them to create hundreds more jobs. The fit out of the company's expanded space at Spectrum 6, and the move into full occupation of Spectrum 7, is super high end – demonstrating not only a commitment to creating a stimulating and relaxed office space for the workforce, but also creating a space which complies with Government guidelines around social distancing.

It's the type of office space that will attract talent – GAS have really thought about the space they occupy to create an environment that allows for both office and home working, with networking space available for team sessions that require multiple attendees, whilst still observing social distancing.

The same can be said for believe housing, which recently invested in additional space at Spectrum 4 to bring all their regional offices together under one roof.

The organisation's facilities are seriously ground-breaking, challenging perceptions of what office space should look like. The attention to detail in every corner of the building is superb – believe has created an environment that perfectly brings together flexible working with facilities that will certainly motivate their staff when they're working on site.



Paul Wellstead

Agile working is here to stay and Spectrum Business Park is very much leading the way in showcasing how employers can adapt to create a better, efficient, and more relaxed working environment for their workforce.

We will look back on COVID as the shock to the system that propelled how companies engage and value their staff to the next level. The "Office: Evolved" will be central to this employee focused renaissance, meaning the days of simple rows of desks are well and truly over.

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



Paul Fraser

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# PLANNING YOUR STRATEGY IN UNCERTAIN TIMES



Nevil Tynemouth

Just looking at the uncertain times we operate in, it could feel like a waste of precious time and effort to put together any sort of strategy or plan. In fact, this could be the ideal time for you to either review, update or start your strategy planning.

## Why plan?

The process of planning has a huge benefits for you and your organisation, investing time to do this can help you in:

**Exploring ideas and alternatives.** Just thinking through your ideas and goals starts the process of thinking through how you can achieve these things. That process can be liberating in times of change.

**Clarify your thoughts and getting those ideas, thoughts, goals and aspirations out of your head.** Our brains are often ticking away an unconscious level, solving problems thinking through plans, strategies and goals, so getting these out and capturing them is a great thing to do.

**Taking some time to tap into these thoughts** can help you capture these new ideas, thoughts and perspectives. In turbulent times, we often see the world, goals and barriers in a different light, why not use this opportunity to capture these new and fresh perspectives?

**Documenting your ideas and plans** for you and those around you can help give you and your team clarity and communicate more effectively. It may help you and your teams change your thinking to a more longer term outlook, raising you above current challenges.

## Why plan now with so many unknowns?

With so many unknowns I am seeing individuals and companies lose sight of what is important to them and what they are looking to achieve. Taking time to plan can really help you regain focus on these things.

Taking time to plan can help you and your team

clarify a range of approaches and solutions, it may even help you come up with new solutions to problems that you couldn't previously see (how many organisations said that home working was impossible before the first lockdown, and how many other new solutions could come out of the current environment).

There is less thinking time needed! You have already explored alternatives, ideas and thoughts, so as the world changes around you so you can flex your approach and plan.

## How do you go about planning?

One opportunity we have at the minute is a little more reflective time, and I have to admit I am massive fan of a walk and a think. No technology, no agenda, simply time to mull over ideas and play with new concepts and approaches.

If you prefer, try just a brain dump, producing a mind map or your ideas, lay them out on a whiteboard or make good use of a pack of post it notes.

But what exactly can help you frame your thoughts and plans. There are two approaches I like:

1. **End game plans.** What is the end game for me and my business (you can't be there forever), so let's plan what your exit, or your end game looks like. What do you want that to look like, feel like and when do you want that to happen?
2. **Play in the perfect space!** Think about a time frame, say five years from today and spend some (not all) of your time thinking about what a perfect position would be for you in that time frame. Top tip here – most people

think too small and underestimate what can be achieved in five years.

## Finally, what should you produce?

A plan that brings your goals and aspirations to life, something you will use regularly and the simplest visual representation of your plan and strategy, perhaps a one-page document. Once you have this, it will be something you can use day to day, share with others and make part of your day to day and week to week thinking and activities, this really brings your plans to life.

I am working with a number of individuals, business owners and teams at the minute and here are some of the things that I am hearing as benefit of taking the time to plan right now:

"It's made me stop and think about what I have achieved this year and how I can repeat it next year."

"Linking my personal and business goals has given me real clarity on what is most important to me"

"It's saved me time and helped me focus on what I need to achieve"

I know planning can be tough at the best of times, and feel doubly challenging given what we are facing. Having said that I encourage you to think about your own plans, goals and aspirations from a personal and business perspective and start mapping your personal strategy to make this happen.

Yes, these are uncertain times, so investing time now in planning will help you and your business grow, develop and move towards your own goals.

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# ONWARDS AND UPWARDS

So the maxim goes. It's an inspiring call with a general sense of a better future implied within. We look to vague maxims like this for inspiration and the market derives from such phrases notions of economic models that are rapidly becoming redundant as we face a planetary crisis.

**Consumption was once the colloquial term for tuberculosis, an almost certain killer in the 19th and early 20th centuries. We are now facing another form of 'consumption' with evidence of plastics in the deepest parts of the oceans and global warming which the scientific community indicates needs to be addressed radically and urgently. It is more pervasive than 'Victorian' consumption and potentially far more deadly, involving many species in addition to our own.**

The simple imperative of economic priorities around human prosperity, cannot subordinate the well-being of the biosphere. The patterns of consumption that line the pockets of the unethically acquisitive often sacrifice a greater goal: the sustainability of where we live, for ourselves and other species. In my coaching career, I have spent many hours with leaders examining the nature of ethics, corporate responsibility and a far more personal imperative, a sense of legacy. Often these issues, all value driven, can seem in conflict with one another when the bottom-line imperatives are considered by boards, cost accountants and others. Reconciling our leaders to the fact that a sustainable planet involves new value sets, that are not incompatible with wealth generation can be an uphill struggle, as people often seek out coaches in the first place because they tend to do what they have always done but are looking to explore possible different approaches.

The central tenet here is the personal responsibility of everyone. This starts with those who seek to generate and acquire wealth through the products and services they provide and their delivery. Issues of how sustainable the activity is, its carbon footprint, the impact on species, the ethical treatment of workforces both here and abroad, the decision to keep operations local or cut costs through 'offshoring' and arguably, just how much wealth should one person acquire. Then there's the end consumer, with issues of the credentials of the goods and services purchased. Again, how sustainable, recyclable, ethically produced are they? In terms of products, how reliable, repairable and upgradable are the items concerned and are we prepared to pay a little more in order to achieve something that lasts and is produced responsibly.

We need to consider global markets: is it worth, for example, containering so many goods across from a China we are becoming dangerously reliant upon when they can be produced locally but cost a little more, given wage differentials?

Yes, sustainability is a complex debate none of us can shirk. We need to examine our attitudes to a 'throwaway society'. How much are we prepared to fairly pay workers overseas, do you leave car engines idling while stationary, add another layer rather than turning the heating up and just how many clothes or other paraphernalia do you need in your life to feel good about yourself? It requires an insight to recognise that the products you buy today, bin tomorrow, may directly or indirectly account for the loss of species, the exploitation of humans and animals elsewhere, even fire and flood!

This thinking requires an engagement and a level of public information and knowledge that enables people to start to make the right decisions. It matters that Volkswagen and others are true about the emissions from their vehicles, the same is true

about every product. There is a challenge ahead, as we struggle to even get food labelling accurate for those with serious allergies or to protect our kids from obesity.

Our inability to link cause and effect, to take personal responsibility and for governments and others to generate the information citizens need, is a major challenge ahead and a crucial part of the ecological agenda. Without it, the responsible fly blind, the irresponsible cannot be challenged or educated and the greedy ride roughshod over us all.

And yet there is much to be hopeful for as we go forward. Greta Thunberg's campaigning has received global recognition. We saw great action over CFCs in the 70s and 80s with evidence of the ozone layer now repairing itself. Many species have been reintroduced as conservation and rewilding programs develop. But we still need to wake up in order to not suffer the consequences of a failed responsibility: more death, disease, famine and market generated international conflict as we unleash our own four horsemen while simultaneously uploading the latest post-apocalyptic film on Netflix!

In all of the misery of Coronavirus, a much bigger agenda is at large and simply cannot be neglected by what is in the immediate foreground of our awareness. Indeed, decades of 'kicking the can' of creating a sustainable, protected planet down the road in favour of whatever is staring us in the face has got us to this sad position.

This November the UK hosts the COP26 world summit on climate change. It is to be hoped that Mr Johnson and vested minions do not hijack this agenda and give us 'world beating' hyperbole, fops and palliatives instead of truly radical measures for change. Post Brexit, one way to express our new 'freedom' is to lead the world in seriously addressing these challenges. It would be great for people, other species, the environment and ultimately, for business.

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

“  
...We need to examine  
our attitudes to a  
‘throwaway society’...  
”





Dr. David Cliff





“

...not the average, stale office environment, but something modern and fresh, with cutting-edge design, material and décor...

”



# GLOBAL PROCUREMENT GROUP CREATES A STUNNING WORKING SPACE FOR ITS PEOPLE, WITH NEW GLOBAL HQ

Global Procurement Group – which comprises leading UK energy consultancy Northern Gas and Power – has invested £2million+ in a new UK HQ; creating an inspiring modern office environment, as it continues its expansion.

Global Procurement Group, trading in the UK as Northern Gas and Power, is taking four floors (30,000 square feet) of grade-A commercial property on Gateshead waterfront, close to its current HQ at Baltic Place. It is the biggest commercial office project in the northeast for the past five years. Staff are due to move into the new Riga building later this year as final preparations and plans are made.

From its creation in 2013 by founder Fokhrul Islam, the business has consistently grown revenue and headcount; relocating its HQ in 2015 to Baltimore House and a year later to bigger space at Baltic Place – both on Gateshead Quays. Headcount has grown consistently, from one in 2013, to 40 in 2015, then 75 a year later, reaching 140 in 2017. During this period the business set up operations in France and Texas. Global headcount surpasses 700 today and is set to continue growing, leading to investment in a new, bigger and even better HQ.

With a stunning glass façade, the HQ's waterfront location offers sweeping vistas across the Tyne gorge and its iconic bridges, providing inspirational views for staff, and industry partners and suppliers alike.

Internally, the bar has been set extremely high, using state-of-the-art equipment, materials, seating, sound systems and screens. Combined with this will be a strong emphasis on promoting a healthy 'work-life balance' with staff well-being at the heart of its design. Global Procurement Group takes staff well-being extremely seriously and recently came above Google, Sage PLC and Sky Betting / Gambling, reaching second throughout the entire UK for work-life balance, judged by Glassdoor.

A central feature of Riga is the ground floor 'Feel Well Deli', providing a completely different kind of café-experience. 'Feel Well Deli' will be serving up a variety of freshly-prepared meals; and after work, fresh, nutritious meal boxes for staff who do not feel like cooking at home.

In collaboration with Tri Construction and AMH Workspace, the interior design sets completely new standards in quality, including a Zen-Zone with bespoke ergonomically-crafted seating areas to give its people a choice of spaces to enjoy down-time together. A 'living' wall and range of natural plants bring the outside, inside and help create a full sensory experience.

Next to The Zen-Zone, an immersive Gaming area is complete with PlayStations, Xboxes, VR gaming, pool tables and foosball, to keep break times exciting and enjoyable.

Martin Nicholson, Northern Gas and Power Global Business Development Director, said "We take our staff well-being extremely seriously and wanted to create an

amazing environment that promotes a healthy, happy work-life balance. Using the highest design standards, latest new material and products and investing millions in new tech and equipment, we've created an open, vibrant space, carefully crafted to give staff a variety of chill-out spaces, where they can recharge, ready to re-focus for the day.

"This is not the average, stale office environment, but something modern and fresh, with cutting-edge design, material and décor to create an unbeatable environment where our people will thrive and love their work."

Heather Baxter from AMH Workspace said "The heartbeat of Northern Gas and Power and its amazing success is down to the incredible performance of their people. The Directors were absolutely committed to building a space that not only invigorates success and drives their teams but rewards them too, through its design, ambience and amenities.

"We studied how the teams at Northern Gas and Power worked, how they interacted and observed their energy and creativity on the sales floor. The new space is inspiring, with furniture solutions that help people connect and collaborate and support agile ways of working. It's definitely one of the most creative spaces we've ever worked on."

Gateshead Council Leader, Martin Gannon, said: "It's great to see successful businesses such as Northern Gas and Power not only reinvest in the region, but also create such a stand-out environment for their staff. It's clear they have their staff's well-being at heart with an interior design that has been carefully crafted to offer an amazing environment, with healthy dining, relaxation and fun break-out zones. It also offers stunning views across the Gateshead Millennium Bridge and the River Tyne. It is a global HQ fitting of an aspiring, growing global operation."

Guy Currey, Invest North East England, Director, said "We're delighted that Northern Gas and Power is continuing to prosper in the north east, investing in new stunning property, and in the region's talented workforce. The scale of growth has been exceptional and it's great to see a business of this magnitude invest further in new HQ facilities for its people, creating an industry-leading working environment."

Externally the office's location boasts excellent amenities, closely linked to Newcastle and the Tyne waterfront bars and restaurants. For a global group of companies it offers close proximity to major UK and international transport hubs – Newcastle train station and Newcastle International airport.

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





# SUCCESS IS IN THE WATER AT EVERFLOW



Everflow Group directors: COO Adam Straker, CEO Josh Gill, CFO James Cleave, CTO Paul Williams

An innovative Teesside utilities group has started the year strong after adding to its team and increasing turnover in 2020.

**The Everflow Group, which is made up of business water retailer Everflow Water and software company Everflow Tech, was set up by managing director Josh Gill in 2015 with headquarters in Wynyard Business Park, and a branch in Nuneaton, Warwickshire, which opened in 2019.**

Despite the difficulties caused by Covid-19, the group has continued to grow, investing in both its existing team and new members of staff.

Josh said: "We added about 28 new roles in 2020, which represents an increase of more than 50 per cent.

"We also doubled the office space we have in Wynyard to accommodate the growth, while continuing to invest significantly in our tech software platform, Eclipse.

"And while, like all businesses, Covid-19 has had an impact on us and our activity, we still recorded turnover of £57m for 2020, up 16 per cent on the previous year."

With a continuing commitment to investing in its people, as well as a growing focus on the tech arm

of the group, two key appointments this year were Leeanne Hedley as head of talent, along with John Millichap as head of client services at Everflow Tech.

Josh said: "We recognised that we were going to experience significant growth and we recruited Leeanne to ensure that we could continue to invest in our people and keep our culture and values protected as we scale.

"Leeanne really understands people and what motivates them. She puts a smile on everyone's face as she's incredibly energetic and charismatic, but she has a real focus on giving clarity to people on how their roles contribute to the overall success of the business.

"As head of client services, John brings a wealth of experience when it comes to business process management and continuous improvement, which will help us drive forward the quality of our output in software development."

The firm was also added to the latest Crown Commercial Service retail water framework, giving it the opportunity to tender for public sector

projects. The agreement, which runs for four years until the end of November 2024, has an estimated value of £2bn.

Josh said: "I'm really pleased we all made it through 2020 in such a strong position, especially with being added to the CCS framework, although having to scale back some of our growth plans due to the pandemic has been frustrating.

"However, we continued to prioritise growth and taking on customers, recognising that the period represented both a risk but also a huge opportunity.

"In 2021, recruitment will be continuing across the board, and we aim hope to grow the team by another 20 per cent in the next 12 months.

"We could not have achieved the success we have without our key relationships with brokers and customers alike so we'd like to thank them all, and the whole Everflow team is looking forward to seeing what 2021 brings."

**[info@everflowgroup.co.uk](mailto:info@everflowgroup.co.uk)  
07884438935**



# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## JOSH GILL

CEO, Everflow Group

### Why did you launch Everflow?

I set up Everflow for a couple of reasons. One was to create jobs and a workplace that people enjoyed coming to, and that benefitted the people spending the majority of their time there. I've worked in plenty of places where it's not been fun, and I didn't want that for my business.

Secondly, people were overcomplicating water for customers, they weren't using technology to its best advantage, so we set out to make water simple.

### What has been your proudest moment in business so far?

We employ nearly 80 people and, like I said, one of the reasons for starting Everflow was to create a good workplace. At the end of last year, I expected our employee net promoter score (a metric to assess employee satisfaction) to have declined due to the upheaval Covid brought, but it had actually gone up to +77.

Anything over 60 is classed as world-leading, so that's my biggest achievement by a mile, over and above turnover and all the financial metrics, which are clearly phenomenal, having grown turnover from just under £3m to close to £60m in the space of three years.

### What is the best part of what you do?

Well, it used to be being in the office, back when that was a thing!

I love the fun we have that was part of our working lives and the way we do what we do. We have a great team that work well together and put customers first, and it's cool that my work involves hanging out with those people.

I also really enjoy trying to figure out what steps we can take next to automate more and more – it's an interesting challenge to think about how we can drive further efficiencies.

### What has been the greatest challenge to you in business?

Probably having the confidence to believe in myself as the business has grown. Managing a



Josh Gill

team of six is considerably different to leading a team of 80+, and I'm always questioning myself.

No matter how good your controls and reporting are within a business, and ours are exceptional for a business of our age, it is always difficult letting go of control, and accepting that things aren't going to fall apart, no matter what stage of business you're at – it gets harder and harder the bigger you get.

### What has being in business taught you about yourself?

That every person can manage more than they think they can. Most people aren't willing to push themselves as hard as they could – that's why there are very few elite athletes, because people aren't necessarily willing to push themselves and that's the same in business.

You can always go further than you think.

### Who is your business inspiration?

John Elliott, the founder of Ebac, in Newton Aycliffe. He announced he would be leaving his business to employees and I thought that was really cool.

Shortly after I launched Everflow, I reached out to him, and he invited me to go and look around – I thought it was amazing that he took time out of his busy schedule to chat with me.

I asked him what advice he'd give to me as someone just starting out, and he said:

"Whatever you do don't be flexible, because flexibility will kill your business."

That really resonated with me because, at the time, we were always trying to do more than we should, overcomplicating things, accepting brokers on different terms, and so everything took too much time.

John's advice was to always be clear what your offer is and people can take it or leave it, so we changed to be way less flexible and that was one thing that really helped us grow quickly.

### What mantra do you live by?

This might sound weird, but I always said to myself that I would never grow up, by which I mean that I'd never lose that sense of fun, of not taking things too seriously.

Growing up, a lot of the adults I knew did, and would lose that sense of wonder and excitement about life. I promised myself if I ever found myself in that situation, I'd change the situation.

I sometimes worry that the business is getting too corporate, and it grates, so I'm always trying to balance the need for control and making it more light-hearted.

It's a difficult task, it was easier when we were smaller, but one I'm not willing to give up on.

**info@everflowgroup.co.uk**  
**07884438935**





## £3M TRAINING BOOST FOR COLLEGE

World-class facilities that will deliver unparalleled learning opportunities for North East students are set to move forward, after a successful £3m bid to the Government.

Sunderland College will be rolling out prestigious new T Levels from a cutting-edge immersive environment, after the Government confirmed it will fund the transformation of a space within its Bede Campus. The 1920s Bede Building will see its old hall undergo a complete refurbishment, with the inclusion of a sophisticated, 360 degree immersive visualisation dome that will allow students to train in a number of virtual reality environments.

The dome will create virtual realities for students studying in several technical disciplines. The major refurbishment will also include the creation of an amphitheatre-style seated area and a number of innovation suites and flexible spaces for employer led training.

Ellen Thinnesen, chief executive of Education Partnership North East, which includes Sunderland College, said: "I am absolutely thrilled that we have secured funding to develop what will become a leading technical skills and digital innovation centre.

North East firm Malcolm Hollis has been appointed to oversee the major development.



## BOARD ROLE FOR EXPERIENCED TECH LEADER

Saggezza's operations director has joined an influential board that is leading the development of the North East tech sector.

Rob Gwyther, who joined Sunderland-based Saggezza in July, has been appointed to the board of Dynamo, a collective that was formed to drive the growth of digital in the region. He will sit alongside some of the leading lights in digital and tech, helping to attract more businesses to the region and nurture the development of companies currently operating in the field in the North East.

Rob commented: "My background in consulting, working with a broad range of clients, means I can bring a different perspective to the board. I am really excited to be able to represent such an innovative, agile business that I know can be a real driving force in the growth of the North East tech sector."



## CLOUD EXPERTS SEE OVER 30% SALES GROWTH TO HIT £4M TURNOVER

Cloud expert Synergi has boosted turnover from £3m to £4m, taking staff numbers to 40 on the back of a series of new contract wins. The firm has also announced plans to hit over £5m this year as part of a move to restructure delivery of its services for both SMEs and enterprise organisations.

The Gateshead-based business works with local and national organisations looking to move from traditional IT to advanced cloud and digital solutions that improve efficiency and drive innovation.

Its latest regional wins include an 'In Memory' remembrance portal for St Oswald's Hospice service users and an infrastructure environment modernisation project for construction firm Metnor.

The last three months have seen the firm secure 12 new contract wins for its fully managed IT service. The business has almost doubled staff numbers in the last 18 months.



## MULLER STOKER'S IT DIVISION GROWS AS WORKING FROM HOME CONTINUES

North East Chartered Accountancy firm Mullen Stoker has seen demand for its IT services rapidly increase as more people are required to work from home.

Whilst many companies have been operating a flexible working policy since the start of the pandemic, the continued and tighter restrictions have forced more employers to look at their day-to-day operations.

Several companies have decided now is the time to undertake a full review of their IT systems to ensure a streamlined and efficient service is maintained by all staff.

Gary Stoker, who heads up Durham-based Mullen Stoker's IT department, said: "Since the very first lockdown in March 2020, many businesses have had to implement more flexible working policies. This new way of working has presented many advantages to these businesses in these unusual times. Many are seeing increased productivity from staff, and in some cases, reductions in their monthly overheads."

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## ARE YOU GIVING YOUR TEAM THE BEST REMOTE WORKING EXPERIENCE?

Working from home has now become a way of life for around half of the British workforce, according to figures from the Office for National Statistics.

**Employers are preparing for a hybrid work environment that is likely to be here to stay, with 50% of UK respondents in a Cisco survey of 3000 IT decision makers stating that more than half of their workforce will continue to be remote workers in the future.**

In March 2020, employers were quick to make sure the health, safety and wellbeing bases were covered by supporting their people through tactics including regular news bulletins, wellness packs and online social events, not all were as quick to put the right technology tools in place.

When staff have the right equipment needed to work from home they are more effective, and less prone to the extra stress caused by a change to their usual work environment and circumstances.

### Cloud

A large proportion of organisations quickly increased their level of cloud adoption as the pandemic took hold. This made the switch to giving staff any time, anywhere access to the systems, tools and information they could expect in their usual office environment much smoother.

It also supported intelligent and responsive unified communications (UC) platforms, bringing together voice, video, personal and team messaging, voicemail, and content sharing to promote a smooth and easy flow of communication.

### Security

With many families using the home broadband connection, the security risk was instantly elevated to high. One of the safest ways to protect your business systems and data is to make sure staff are connected via a secure virtual private network. A VPN coupled with a two factor authentication

product allows users to securely access all their usual IT systems and data by creating an encrypted network connection, and then the users authenticate themselves and the device, encrypting data in transit between the user and whatever services they are accessing.

### Collaboration tools

Cloud also supports a wide range of collaborative tools for sharing and saving documents and files, to make sure all the information people are using is delivered in real time, removing the need to email information around the team for comments and amends. Having live information to work with prevents wasted time, increases efficiency and reduces uncertainty.

### Video conferencing

There cannot be many people who are not familiar with some type of video conferencing platform by now, even if they did originally need to rope in a digital native in the house to help them get started. Business users have flocked to the market leaders Microsoft's Teams, and Cisco's Webex, while others have used free software such as Zoom and WhatsApp. As cyber security experts we would stress that while some of the widely used free tools are useful for the consumer, they can bring with them security issues.

### Headsets

Customers expect seamless, high quality sound when talking to your staff, and bad audio is bad business. Headsets with noise cancelling features allow people to communicate clearly in any remote sound environment and to fully concentrate, especially if they are working from an area that the rest of the family use, such as a dining room

or kitchen. Headsets such as the EPOS Sennheiser deliver excellent communication experiences with comfortable headsets that deliver rich, natural sound and clear speech. Investing in high quality headsets is a good move for your staff and your customers.

### Tech support

Your people need reassurance they have a continuing level of tech support, wherever they are working from. Back in Spring 2020 our own technical support desk saw a 30% uplift in the number of incidents logged, until users got to grips with the new way of working.

As the pandemic progressed and working remotely became standard, some employers opted to create an IT helpdesk portal for basic first line support, backed up by expert support staff on hand remotely via email, phone and video.

Sometimes only face to face (socially distanced of course) will do. We supply services key to critical national infrastructure so our own field and service engineers have continued to make site visits when it is necessary and safe to do so. We carry out pre-visit checks and only visit sites once they have passed those checks and comply with the government guidelines to keep everyone safe.

### Talk to our experts

Whatever your working environment currently looks like, make sure your people have the right systems, support and technology in place. Talk to our unified communications team to maintain productivity and keep the wheels of your business turning smoothly.

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



# DISRUPTIVE NORTH EAST TECH COMPANY AIMING TO REVOLUTIONISE CUSTOMER EXPERIENCES



An innovative North East based immersive technology company is aiming to transform the way customers engage and experience entertainment, sport, visitor attractions, hospitality and retail.

**Fame Media Tech – led by entrepreneur Bryan Hoare – is on a mission to transform customer experiences through mobile and content technology to help operators create more engaged and loyal customers, fans and visitors.**

The County Durham business, whose team combines market leading technology with decades of experience in publishing and digital media, has already started to create innovative content experiences for millions of mobile users around the world and is now about to embark on the next stage of development.

Existing mobile optimised experiences strive to increase engagement, yet many lack technology and content engagement and miss customer expectations. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of technology more than ever; showing how important it is to maintain links with customers when a national and global crisis disrupts normal business.

Fame Media Tech is planning to build a mobile technology platform - called n-gage.io – a highly customisable Software as a Service (SaaS) platform which when combined with storytelling and innovation in digital media and extended reality (XR) will positively influence behaviour, enhance engagement, and improve customer loyalty.

Founder and CEO Bryan Hoare said: "We're part of the 'Audience of the Future' revolution, where storytelling and innovation in digital media and

mobile technology come together to captivate and engage audiences.

"Customers, visitors, fans and guests' expectations are changing; we expect more standout moments where immersive technology and content combine to enhance our experiences. We're developing the technology to transform the visitor, fan and customer experience leading to more loyal and engaged customers for our clients.

"Through our technology we'll be improving the experience, deepening engagement and building customer loyalty and ultimately revenues for the operator.

"We have proved the concept and have had constructive discussions with operators across sport, hospitality and visitor attractions. We're already providing content to global businesses such as Vodacom, Uber and MTN, to create more engaging experiences. We now need to secure investor funding to scale up to the next level."

Kate Dearlove, director of media and content and former international editorial sales manager at Getty Images added: "Our content experiences can also provide focus to the preservation of community heritage, delivering engagement in such a way that people's lives are enriched. We can do so much more with technology, bringing our heritage and culture to life for community benefit."

The Fame Media Tech competitive advantage also extends to the use of a unique UK trademark –

The Walk of Fame, owned by brand ambassador David Courtney. A renowned songwriter and music producer, David is working with Fame Media Tech to target his network across sport, music, hospitality, film and TV.

Fame Media Tech is working closely with North East based fintech company Growth Capital Ventures (GCV) to secure investment to develop its innovative technology platform. GCV aims to raise seed funding via its GrowthFunders.com co-investment platform.

Growth Funders has already successfully raised investment from institutional and individual investors for a portfolio of companies that includes B-North, Hive.HR, Intelligence Fusion, QikServe and Homes by Carlton.

Craig Peterson, director at GCV and interim chairman of Fame Media Tech, explained: "Fame Media Tech is a highly entrepreneurial technology business with a clear focus on development and growth.

"This is a great opportunity to invest at an early stage in a highly scalable business focussed on innovation in digital media and mobile technology. The investment will accelerate the development of the technology and allow the company to scale up the team to drive the business forwards."

**More information about Fame Media Tech can be found at [www.famemediatech.com](http://www.famemediatech.com)**



Digital Innovation company's CEO explains why SMEs are in prime position to harness the power of tech and automation in 2021.

## HEY! MR SMALL BUSINESS OWNER...

Founder and CEO Muhammad Ali from Uptivity chats to us about how technology is shaping the new normal and why small businesses are in good standing to thrive.



Muhammad Ali, Founder & CEO.

### What is Uptivity and how can SMEs benefit?

Uptivity Apps are a suite of affordable and ready-made cloud and mobile apps that work together to bring online orders, streamlining businesses' operations, meeting quality standards, and staying compliant.

Our strength is to build technology that fills gaps within business processes, enabling them to grow and scale.

Whatever your sector, we have a ready-made app for that.

### What are the emerging shifts for 2021 and how SME's can benefit?

Currently, all thriving businesses are increasingly reliant on tech. Decision makers attitudes towards tech are changing fast. Growing businesses in difficult times are harnessing technology to their advantage instead of investing in brick & mortar assets. Customers and consumers are also more open to using technology. Previously SME's relied on in-store customers; however, as the pandemic has resulted in a large percentage of consumers buying online, businesses need to adapt to survive.

### We all hear about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML). How can they help SME's in practical terms?

Ever wondered how flight ticket prices are calculated based on seasons? Heard about self-driving cars? It's all done with AI and ML.

The apps and systems SME's use collect information

at various points, which is then processed with ML and AI to predict patterns, pricing and behaviours such as what products customer buy, when, and at what price point.

Similarly, it can also be used to determine what time and costs it takes for your team to buy supplies, manufacture, and deliver so you can adjust your sales and margins.

SME's can start their journey on AI now to be able to make right business decisions in months and years to come to make right strategic decisions on suppliers, staff, pricing, customers etc.

### What about Blockchain, how can that help SME's?

Blockchain is predominantly known for cryptocurrency but it's actually a very useful tool in other sectors. Food supply chains for instance, use Blockchain to assure the source, ingredients and food quality information is updated by various handlers. Giving buyers assurance that the information on the label has been verified by different parties.

SME's can also use Blockchain to get more information on their supplies and offer more transparency to their customers increasing brand image and loyalty.

### Can you give practical examples?

1. In Property and Maintenance, lots of equipment needs regular checking, testing and maintaining. AI can help property managers predict the next breakdown based on repair histories.

2. In Healthcare, AI can help keep track of patient's medical history and requirements, ensuring healthcare professionals are best informed to make the right decisions based on accurately collected information; promoting a better quality of life.
3. In retail, marketing and sales trends can be predicted using AI based on previous years' data to help business owners make informed decisions.
4. In recruitment, workers' past work ethics can be verified anonymously, without relying on previous employers' references. This opens doors for transparency and a high-quality customer experience.

Ultimately, Blockchain can help verify the authenticity of information provided by contractors, health workers, food handlers, delivery drivers etc.

### Why should SMEs take this into account now?

SMEs often feel these solutions are too advanced for their businesses but starting now will reap the benefits in the future.

These technologies are now affordable and easy to implement, and SME's are best equipped to adapt because of quick decision-making and agility.

Automation for SMEs will help make smart decisions at the right time to stay competitive and responsive.

### How can Uptivity help SMEs with digital transformation?

With years of experience working with different sizes of businesses and in different sectors, we enable SME's to start their journey with technology.

We work as your technology advisors to ensure your business sales and operations are running like clockwork.

Our apps empower your staff to input information directly, gathering it accurately and in real-time, and eliminating the reliance on paper and spreadsheets. This step alone gives SME's control of their information instantly to make decisions, but also helps in future decision-making using AI and ML.

### What is your latest contribution to supporting North East businesses through the 'new normal'?

We realised the challenges faced by local businesses during lockdown and the impact it had on their sales. Marketplace giants such as Amazon, eBay, Shopify, and Just Eat take commission on sales and offer no direct interaction with customers. With our latest app Just Sell, we offer an alternative so that SME's can sell directly to their customers with their own branded app and web-shop. Not only do we charge zero commission, but also include operational efficiency apps for SME's to manage their stock, deliveries, orders and promotions.

**Learn more about how Uptivity can benefit your business.**

Visit our website at [www.uptivity.co.uk](http://www.uptivity.co.uk) or contact [hello@uptivity.co.uk](mailto:hello@uptivity.co.uk)



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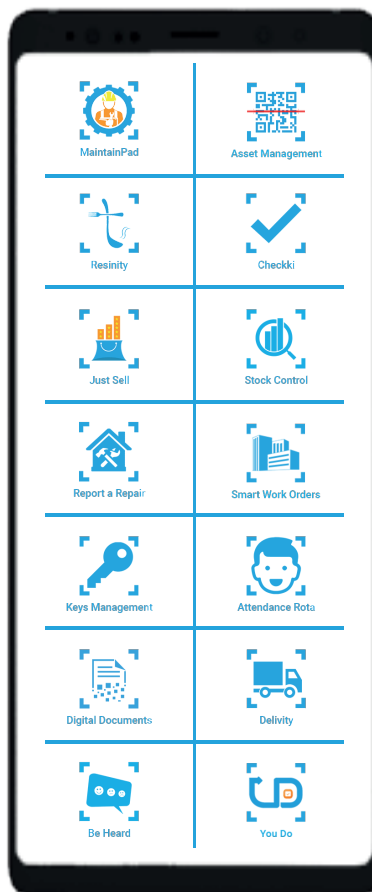
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## YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

### WES CLOUGH

Marketing and Design, Activ Technology

#### Did you grow up in the North East or did you decide to relocate here in later life?

I was born and bred in Ashington, Northumberland. I left to attend University in Leeds and really enjoyed my time there but I always planned to come back home after I finished my degree. I currently live in North Tyneside where I have spent the past 10 years.

#### What do you think it means to be a business person in the North East of England?

Throughout my years working in the North East - particularly during my time here at Activ Technology - I'm amazed that I am still discovering the sheer diversity within business in the North East. The potential to work with and support immensely different companies and industries is entirely possible in our small geographical area. Being an active part of this cluster of talent is something I'm very proud of.

#### What is your favourite aspect of life in the North East?

A few years ago, a new southern based colleague who I was meeting for the first time after a company merger, spoke openly about his reservations on having to spend a portion of his time working North of the M25. Long story short, after a few days working in the North East he admitted he was astounded by our infrastructure, professionalism, food, venues, scenery and, most importantly, he apologised for being so dismissive and, dare I say, ignorant. He quickly turned in to a passionate advocate for working in the North East.

There is a reason why the people of our region are known for their fierce loyalty to the area and why it keeps calling us back when we leave. I am certainly testament to that.

#### Where do you like to eat out in the region?

I'm a massive fan of the fish quay in North Shields, whether it's for breakfast with a coffee, fish and chips by the sea or outstanding food



# Activ

technology



Wes Clough

and drinks with a lively atmosphere. There are many venues to choose from and a short walk along the sea front takes you into Tynemouth, where your options grow even wider.

#### Are the people really friendlier?

Without a doubt. I have friends and colleagues that have moved here from elsewhere in the UK and from Europe. We must be doing something right for them to choose the North East! The region is historically working-class, meaning its people have community spirit and a generosity that is second to none. We really know what matters in life and strive to work extremely hard whilst keeping the mood light with our famous humour.

#### What do you think is the best view in the North East?

I was lucky enough to stand on the ship's bridge of both King Seaways and Princess Seaways, when working for DFDS. The view as you come along the coast from Hartlepool all the way into the mouth of the Tyne is enough to take anyone's breath away.

#### Do you think living and working in the North East offers the same opportunities as elsewhere in the UK?

Absolutely, you only need to look at the continued growth here in Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland. New buildings, new companies, new entertainment venues, new travel options and new ventures. The North East is definitely not one for standing still.

#### Have you had any experience of working elsewhere and how did it compare?

In the past, I have worked on projects in Denmark, Holland and France with team members from all across Europe. I found the cooperative approach to how we work here in the North East to be very simpatico with our European neighbours. It made me appreciative that we in the North East can be relied upon to provide a professional service and deliver a job well done, regardless of where in the world it may be needed.

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



# STUDENT CRIBS PARTNER WITH ATV TO IMPROVE TECH IN NEW PROPERTIES



The largest provider of student accommodation in Newcastle, Jesmond, Heaton and Sandyford has partnered with a local aerial and cable company to upgrade all their properties in the area so that students have access to improved at-home studying facilities.

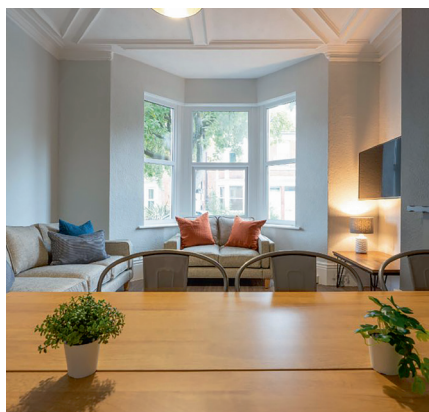
**Student Cribbs appointed ATV Aerial and Satellite Company Ltd and the father and son team have been focusing on improving the aerials, cabling, and broadband signals for 686 students in the city and surrounding area.**

The large task covered 175 properties, which Students Cribbs acquired from a established local landlord during their expansion into Newcastle around two years ago. The units range from one bedroom flats to eight bedroom houses.

Tom Ferber, director of Student Cribbs, said: "The Student Cribbs model is built upon supplying high specification, quality houses that look cool and are where students would really want to live, with interiors that they identify with. We regularly undertake cosmetic refurbishments to keep them smart and cutting edge, fit for use.

"We were delighted to expand our portfolio in Newcastle with these properties and two years on, it was time for refurbishment. We refreshed the kitchens, bathrooms, décor and flooring, and as we saw the emergence of remote lectures / learning due to the pandemic, we decided to invest in an upgrade of these facilities."

Grant and Blaine Smith of ATV Aerial and Satellite Company have visited all 175 properties, ascertaining what cabling needed upgrading and taking a look from a student perspective on where the TVs should be and the best positioning for the property for the broadband routers. Grant said:



"We worked closely with the other contractors and fitted communal TV's in optimum places, ensured all the bedrooms had TV points and rewired many routers to make sure they are positioned in a place that benefit the whole of the property. Where needed we fitted TP Links to improve connectivity and removed redundant cable boxes and wires too. Our signal checking was robust and we are delighted to say the process has been a success."

Student Cribbs specialise in student housing across the UK. Tom concluded: "The work that ATV undertook for us is not something that just anyone can do – they have the right expertise and understand the right cabling and end use. As a



team they have been very proactive, worked well with other contractors and have delivered on time and in budget. We are very impressed and thankful that ATV have done a great job!"

ATV Aerial and Satellite Company are a family run business that covers the majority of the North East with services including aerial repair and installation, dish repair and installation; Broadband and 4g boosting; TV set up, wall hanging and cabling; CCTV and bird protection roof caging.

**More information on the two companies can be found at [www.student-cribs.com](http://www.student-cribs.com) and [www.atvaerialandsatellitecompany.co.uk](http://www.atvaerialandsatellitecompany.co.uk)**





## WALTON ROBINSON URGES GOVERNMENT TO OUTLINE SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Walton Robinson, the Newcastle-based property agency, is urging the government to outline a package of support measures for students in private rented accommodation facing hardship or difficulties due to the Coronavirus pandemic.

The call comes as the latest national lockdown has reduced the number of students returning to university, many of whom will be unable to return until at least mid-February.

As one of the city's leading estate and letting agents, with a growing portfolio of student accommodation, Walton Robinson has urged the government to take action to ensure that students in private accommodation are able to fulfill their contractual obligations.

By providing direct financial support to students, the government would also be protecting landlords, who rely upon this income in order to continue offering accommodation to students, as well as keeping up with the maintenance of properties.

Mark Smith, Operations Director of Walton Robinson, commented: "We urge the government to outline a package of support measures for students in private rented accommodation so that, in cases of genuine hardship, they are able to fulfill their contractual obligations without undue distraction from their studies."

## NEW SHOWHOME UNVEILED AT YARM DEVELOPMENT

A new showhome has opened its doors at Bellway's Conyers Green development in Yarm.

The Acacia is one of several four-bedroom detached house styles being built at the site off Green Lane, where around 75 per cent of the homes have been sold.

The showhome is now open for appointment-only viewings to give prospective buyers an opportunity to look inside a finished house at the development.

Bellway is building a total of 168 homes at Conyers Green, which includes a range of three, four and five-bedroom properties for sale.

Oliver Wray, Sales Manager for Bellway Durham, said: "Conyers Green has been an extremely popular development. The nearest primary and secondary schools are both located within half a mile of the development, so there has been keen interest from buyers with children. The wide range



of spacious four-bedroom houses at Conyers Green are designed with family living in mind.

"The home features an impressive open-plan kitchen, dining and family area which spans the width of the property, as well as a separate living room, utility room and internal garage. Three of the four bedrooms are doubles and two have en suites, giving growing families all the space and privacy they need."



## ARCHITECT CELEBRATES COMPLETION OF LISTED RESIDENTIAL SCHEME IN GOSFORTH

Award-winning Durham-based architect, Howarth Litchfield, is celebrating the completion of an exclusive residential scheme in one of Gosforth's most desirable streets.

Plans for the conversion of the listed Coach House, situated on The Drive and within Gosforth's conservation area, were conceived by the building's owner and developer, Chris Summers of McDougall Dods Properties.

Howarth Litchfield has a proven track record for its heritage work with many recent successful projects to its credit including the upgrading and refurbishment of the Grade 1 listed Acklam Hall in Tees Valley to create a hotel, leisure and restaurant venue.

This experience provided a firm foundation for the redevelopment of The Coach House where every effort has been made to retain and reuse the original materials including the existing pitched roofs of Westmorland natural slate. Existing roof timbers have also been strategically exposed in key areas to respect the historic fabric and provide warm living spaces.

The completed development comprises three two-bedroom and one three-bedroom open plan apartments, two three-bedroom houses, centrally positioned in each wing of the building and overlooking the courtyard, and two three-bedroom bungalows positioned to the rear of The Coach House and offering private gardens.

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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

## THE GHOST OF MEDIEVAL LAW

The Middle Ages was a quiet time for my Italian ancestors, aside from famine, pestilence and war.

**The Roman Empire was a distant memory and it would be ages before Hollywood offered us parts as Mafia gangsters. So, Italians turned to creating great art. Here in England our ancestors turned to creating strange laws.**

Some of these laws made sense. Requiring all men to practice with a longbow meant England had a standing army equipped with state-of-the-art weaponry. Some laws were rather more left-field. One still on the statutes requires any whale or sturgeon caught to be delivered to the monarch. Personally, I would have gone for chickens but I am sure they had good reason to choose inedible sea monsters.

While most of the sillier medieval laws have been repealed, the effect of some may be felt down the ages. No more so than in the property sector. An example could be the collection of rents on holy days such as Michaelmas and Christmas day. The idea originated because medieval landlords knew their serfs would be off work on holy days so were able to pop by with their bag of groats to pay the rent.

The practice is alive and well today. Not because it is a sensible way to conduct business. Simply

because it has always been done that way. And there is danger in blindly following practices because our ancestors thought they were a good idea.

Another example is discrimination against DSS tenants. A landlord putting 'No DSS' on a rental advertisement is breaking the law since it is discrimination. Yet mortgage providers are able to insert a clause in the agreement indicating a breach of contract if the landlord rents to DSS tenants. This leaves the landlord with no choice but to discriminate.

And so, we come to the recent announcement that Government finally intends to end the leasehold scandal. Changes to the law create the right to extend a lease to 990 years, saving tens of thousands of pounds in unfair fees. Many in the industry have waited decades for this welcome news. Now we wait to see how it will pan out in practice.

The Leasehold Reform Act of 2002 introduced Commonhold, a system where the freehold is divided equally between the owners in a block of flats. Eleven years later in 2013, I approached our solicitor to setup a commonhold arrangement for

a small block of flats we'd developed. I was told virtually no mortgage provider would agree to lend to a flat that was Commonhold.

Informal research on my part indicated the mortgage providers had not addressed the commonhold issue because they had no precedent and were reluctant to be first to establish one.

"Freehold is what we have always done so we shall stick to that". Ever the optimist I look forward to helping leaseholders escape the invidious freehold trap. But I will be keeping an eye on "It's the way we have always done it" brigade.

I leave the last word to the formidable Grace Hopper, Rear Admiral in the US navy who said "The most dangerous phrase in the English language is 'We've always done it this way'".

**[www.heatonproperty.com](http://www.heatonproperty.com)  
0191 240 0665  
[office@heatonproperty.com](mailto:office@heatonproperty.com)**

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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# PANDEMIC BRINGS UNEXPECTED BOOST TO NORTH EAST HOUSING MARKET



A decade after the North East saw a record low number of new homes being built, housebuilding in the region is positively booming.

**In 2010, just 4,510\* new homes were built in the North East. This was a knock-on effect of the 2008 crash when many housing developers abruptly stopped buying land. New homes numbers have risen very slowly since then – reaching 8,870\* in 2019, which almost matches the last peak seen in 2007 of 8,920\* homes.**

It is rational to assume that the economic impact of the pandemic and its threat to people's jobs would have dampened the housing market. Yet quite the opposite has transpired.

A number of different factors have married to create the perfect storm for driving-up demand for new homes. And the rise in working-from-home is one of them.

Undoubtedly, the stamp duty holiday and the government's Help to Buy scheme have been a significant stimulus for the market. This coupled with an abundance of people locked-down in their homes for months (pondering their next house move or extension) has seen some housebuilders pull out all the stops to accelerate their build programmes.

"Of course, there was negative disruption caused by the first lockdown in terms of restrictions on people's movements and some delays to construction," says James Platts, residential land specialist at Knight Frank.

"People couldn't do viewings or visit show homes but the upside was, people had additional time to think and browse the internet. And - as it turns out - many were sick of seeing the same four walls and were thinking of moving."

North East family-run housebuilder, Cussins, which was established in the 1920's and is responsible for many of the region's most prestigious addresses, is enjoying a heyday. The firm even switched some of

its builds to timber frame construction to ensure they are completed by the March 31 stamp duty holiday deadline.

The speed of the build is around 30% quicker with timber, compared to a brick build. This is because a timber frame can be partly pre-cut, modulated and built to precision. Time is also saved on clearing away less building debris.

Land director at Cussins, Steve Willcock, talks us through the last 12 months: "The first two months of 2020 were very positive, with buyer confidence at a high after the election.

"The Coronavirus pandemic immediately impacted both production and sales, with many of our key suppliers closing down and mortgage valuations halted. By late spring, some semblance of normality returned with suppliers re-opening for business and the backlog of mortgage valuations swiftly resolved.

"Since that time we have seen a surge in sales interest which far exceeded our recovery expectations. There is some evidence that this is partly attributable to purchasers placing a higher value on common features of our homes, including additional space for home working, larger gardens and more rural locations."

## Residential land supply

The availability of land across the North East is a tale of mixed fortunes says Sandra Manson, senior director at built environment consultants, Pegasus Group: "Whilst strategic sites identified by numerous Local Authorities and a large quantity of extant planning permissions across the region could lead to the impression that there is sufficient land to meet housing need, this is not the situation on the ground.

"Issues include consents in areas that the market

and consumers do not necessarily want to build/buy in and large strategic sites which come with significant complexities and challenges to delivery. Throw in restrictive planning policies, including tight Green Belt boundaries across a lot of the region, and the availability of land that can meet the next raft of housing need is looking scarce. This is, and will continue to be, a challenge if we want to maintain housing supply which is critical to our economic and infrastructure success as a region."

James Platts, partner at Knight Frank, adds: "Since the pandemic we've seen a bit of a split – interest in residential land is still relatively high from regional builders but has tapered off slightly from the national firms as uncertainty kicked-in.

"However, the need to look at medium and longer term strategic land, as well as short term delivery is still essential if we are to maintain the pipeline, which can take years to work through the planning system."

## 2021

James Platts comments: "The end of the stamp duty holiday coincides with a scaling back of the Help-to-Buy scheme, as well as the introduction of higher taxes for overseas purchasers and the ending of government support for employers. All of which could weigh on housing activity after March this year.

"What happens with Covid-19 will, of course, have an impact but the arrival of the vaccine is making the horizon look sunnier. What's pretty certain is that – because of the multiplier effect that moving house has on the economy - keeping the housing market moving will undoubtedly play an important role in supporting the economic recovery."

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





## Frosterley House Front Street, Frosterley, Bishop Auckland, County Durham

Frosterley House is a highly impressive, beautiful country house, situated in the heart of the village of Frosterley, just to the east of Stanhope. The property provides a Grade II listed stone built family home, with separate stone detached Barn and Coach House, an impressive 1 ½ acres of gardens and paddock, a range of outbuildings, and an attractive cobbled courtyard with parking for many cars.

In more recent years, The Barn and The Coach House have been converted into private residential dwellings, run as successful holiday cottages, and providing a superb income stream.

Frosterley is a lovely village and is only a short distance from the A68 providing links between the Tyne Valley and Darlington.

**Price Guide: £985,000** 🏠 8 🏠 4 🏠 6 (All 3 Properties)

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# WELCOME TO Jesmond Assembly *Meet Lifehost Kim*

WE ARE GEARING UP TO LAUNCH OUR JESMOND ASSEMBLY COMMUNITY IN MARCH AND STARTING TO PUT THE FINISHING TOUCHES IN PLACE READY TO WELCOME THE NEW COMMUNITY. WE HAVE ALSO RECENTLY WELCOMED KIM SMITH-CRYER TO THE LIFESTORY FAMILY WHO WILL BE JESMOND ASSEMBLY'S DEDICATED LIFEHOST. WE CAUGHT UP WITH KIM TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ROLE OF A LIFEHOST AND HOW SHE IS PREPARING TO WELCOME THE NEW COMMUNITY.



KIM SMITH-CRYER  
LIFEHOST

## **CAN YOU TELL US WHAT YOUR ROLE AS A LIFEHOST ENTAILS?**

The role of a Lifehost involves the management of the building and its community. There are many important elements in the role and lots of multitasking. Once homeowners and Lifestory members are welcomed into their new home, it is very important to make them feel relaxed, especially with how overwhelming the moving process is. I'm here to ensure their safety, build a community and arrange social events.

## **WHAT WILL A DAY IN YOUR ROLE AS A LIFEHOST TYPICALLY ENTAIL?**

No day will be the same but there will be regular tasks such as safety checks, building maintenance, greeting the community, and assisting with any issues or queries. I will make sure everything is running smoothly and everyone is happy!

## **HOW ARE YOU PREPARING TO WELCOME THE NEW COMMUNITY TO JESMOND ASSEMBLY?**

I am doing a lot of training and planning, learning the ins and outs of the building and health and safety. I am also familiarising myself with the local area. There are many businesses and suppliers in Jesmond, some lovely cafes, and shops to visit. I will make sure I am fully prepared with all useful information for when the community needs it.

I will work with Rose, our Sales Advisor, as the journey transitions. It is so important to make the community feel welcome, run through the core functions and information, from what to do in an emergency to how the heating works. We will make sure new homeowners are relaxed and comfortable, provide them with some lunch then show them around their new home.

## **WHAT ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO IN YOUR LIFEHOST ROLE?**

Being the 'heart of the community'. One Lifehost recently described our role as this and it will stay with me. My previous experience means I understand the importance of building trusting relationships with people. When you are appreciated, they let you know, and it is incredibly rewarding. I'm looking forward to sharing great moments and making memories.

## **WHAT ARE THE KEY HIGHLIGHTS OF LIVING AT JESMOND ASSEMBLY?**

Pegasus Jesmond Assembly has so much to offer with it being located in such a beautiful and friendly part of the North East. With the city on your doorstep, there's access to everything you need.

The building has been designed with certain amenities for its community to enjoy, particularly the communal areas. It's aesthetically pleasing with a lovely ambience. The beautiful landscaping with outdoor seating will be fantastic in the warmer weather and the big open fire will be so cosy and enjoyed in the cooler seasons. There are plenty of great spaces to relax in. I'm really looking forward to arranging activities and bringing people together to make the most of these spaces.

## **WHAT ARE YOUR FAVOURITE FEATURES OF JESMOND ASSEMBLY?**

I really like the garden terrace; I think it will be lovely to see everyone enjoying it. The large planters with the lavender will cast such a wonderful fragrance. I'm sure there will be many books and newspapers read out there or next to the fire on the other side of the door.

“

*Once homeowners and Lifestory members are welcomed into their new home, it is very important to make them feel relaxed, especially with how overwhelming the moving process is.*





### WHAT DO YOU LOVE ABOUT JESMOND AND NEWCASTLE?

Newcastle is rich in culture and incredibly friendly. I love art and design so appreciate the buildings and galleries. I'm also quite a foodie so really enjoy going to the festivals, restaurants, and bars. I've celebrated many special occasions in the area, growing up not too far away in Northumberland which is also renowned for its beauty and rich heritage.

The buzz of the city is always exciting, so you're never stuck for something to do. It's a perfect combination with the laid-back stylish suburb of Jesmond. If you want peace, quiet and relaxation, you've got the best of both worlds.

### ANY LOCAL AREA RECOMMENDATIONS YOU'LL BE SUGGESTING TO VISIT?

The most popular and closest is Jesmond Dene where you can enjoy walking, see the falls, woodlands, and petting zoo. You can also pop into Jesmond Dene

House for afternoon tea or casual dining in front of the cosy open fires.

Exhibition Park is only ten minutes away on foot, you can stroll around the Victorian bandstand and small boating lake. There are free tennis courts and croquet lawns, the new botanical themed Urban Green Café opens in Spring and not forgetting a visit to Wylam micro-brewery. If you're up for something a bit further out, hop on the Metro and head over to Tynemouth for some fresh sea air. Enjoy fish and chips on the beach, see the Priory and castle or visit the markets.

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“

*You can also pop into Jesmond Dene House for afternoon tea or casual dining in front of the cosy open fires.*



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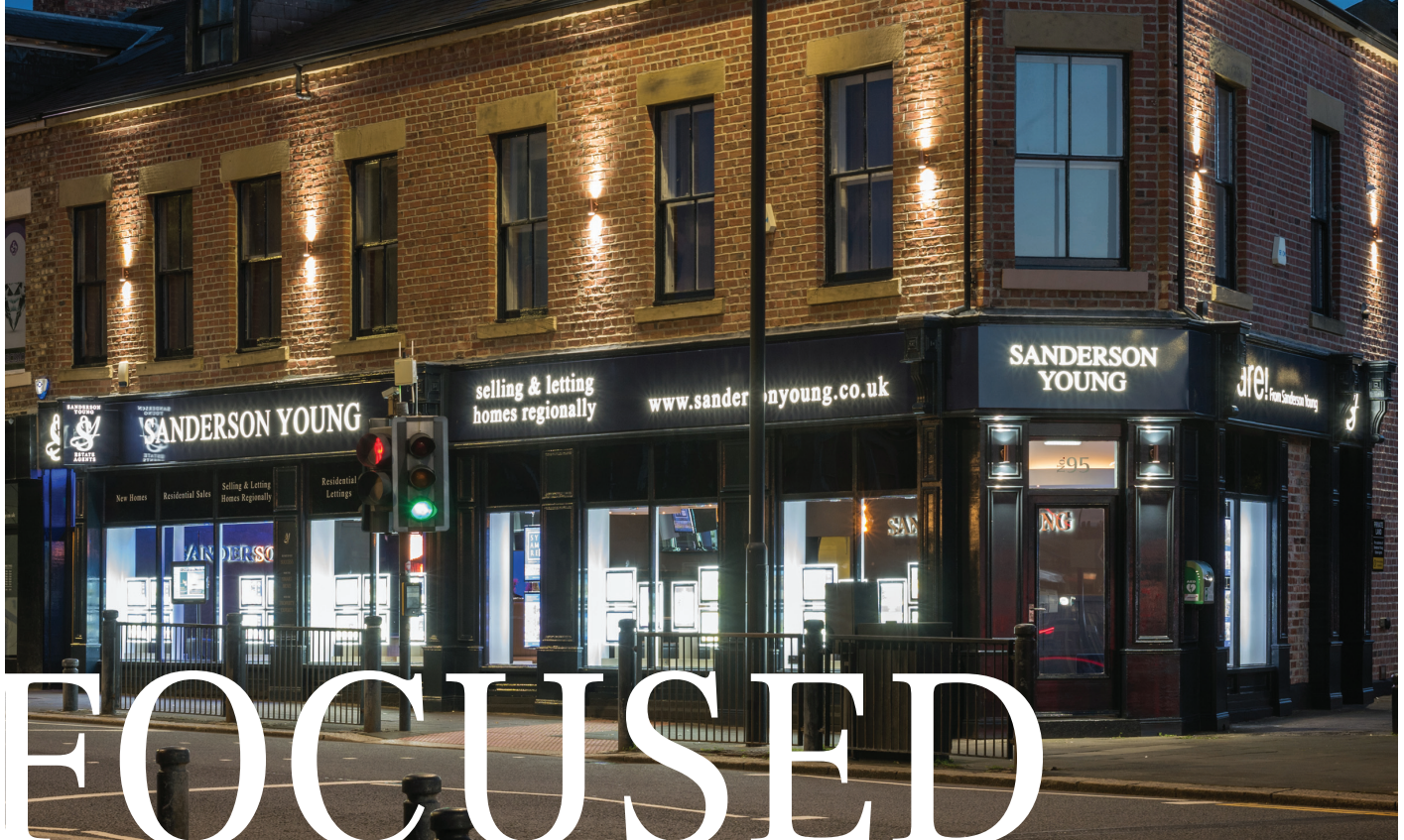
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# FOCUSED ON THE FUTURE

**2020 WAS A YEAR THAT NO ONE COULD HAVE PREDICTED,** AND DESPITE THE ONGOING SITUATION CAUSING A WAVE OF ECONOMIC INSTABILITY THROUGHOUT THE WORLD, INTERESTINGLY, THE AVERAGE PRICE OF A HOME IN THE UK ROSE BY 6% LAST YEAR, THIS IS AN ANNUAL RATE OF INCREASE WHICH IS USUALLY ASSOCIATED WITH A FAST-GROWING ECONOMY.



GREG MCCARTHY  
REGIONAL VALUER

“

*With what was first considered as a mini boom by the industry, I feel that this has gone further than many predicted and, although we have certainly seen a slight easing in the frenzy of activity from last summer, I believe that we will start to pick up pace again throughout 2021.*

We have, of course, seen some specific reasons as to why house prices have risen. Rishi Sunak's temporary stamp duty holiday being one major defining factor, this combined with the fact that a huge amount of us have felt an impact from a year of homeworking and home-schooling, which has led many people to re-evaluate their current living situations and housing requirements. There is also a third factor, which is that, fortunately, some clients and families have been able to afford to purchase a new home because they have saved a large amount of their disposable income whilst working from home. We have also seen an increase in demand from buyers who are wanting to re-locate back to their native north east because families are now revaluating lifestyle and the need for family support.

With what was first considered as a mini boom by the industry, I feel that this has gone further than many predicted, although we have certainly seen a slight easing in the frenzy of activity from last summer, I believe that we will start to pick up pace again throughout 2021. Should the UK economy get back onto a firmer footing and hopefully the regional jobs market picks up, supported by the optimism brought about by the new vaccine programme, which thankfully seems to be showing early signs of success, there is confidence in our industry that this momentum will continue throughout 2021.

We, as a company, have seen no dramatic sign of the housing market slowing just yet, in part I believe that this is a result from the effect last year when mortgage approvals for new home purchases rose to the highest levels since summer 2007 (according to the Bank of England's latest credit data). In addition to the stamp duty break, interestingly, the average effective interest rate on new mortgage borrowing was only 1.83% in November, again according to the BoE, an increase on the previous month but still extremely low.

As a company, and due to the government ruling through the pandemic, we have been fortunate in that we have been able to continue functioning, and we have helped

many of our vendors and buyers progress their sales throughout this difficult and stressful time. It has been a case of carefully and consistently adapting to ensure that we can continue to operate efficiently but with the focus on the safety of our clients and our colleagues always at the forefront of what we do.

Here at Sanderson Young, I am proud of us as a team, we have continued to work well under the immense pressure of this past year and as a company we have found some positive aspects to the lockdown. It has shown us that it is possible to sustain our business, working in alternative ways and being able to find new methods of operating to enable us to stay as connected as possible with our clients and colleagues. If nothing else, this new period of lockdown has shown us that it is viable to conduct many of our normal processes in a different manner and, although we still find some challenges around how to achieve this seamlessly, we have also found many successful and innovative ways of conducting our everyday business. For example, we have been offering virtual valuations and viewings, which have proved popular, as this alternative method means there is no need for face-to-face meetings which some clients prefer at present.

With the market continuing to stabilise and confidence still high, we are hopeful that the period through to Easter, and indeed later into 2021, will be the highest potential boom in the property market for some time. Taking these potential outcomes into account, there will clearly be a need for closely controlled business planning which we feel, with the experience we have gained over the last lockdown, more equipped than ever to be able to take on.

If you are looking to make your next move, I feel that now is the right time. Please don't hesitate to contact myself or a member of the sales team here at Sanderson Young and we can provide you with up-to-date market insight and the right way to start your moving journey.

WE LOOK FORWARD TO A BETTER 2021 FOR ALL!





# WEEK 2 WEEK

## SERVICED APARTMENTS

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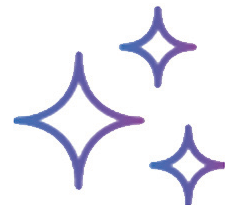
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# PROPERTY PEOPLE



## AN INTERVIEW WITH KATHRYN KENT

New Homes Manager, Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents

### Given the current climate and the impact of Covid-19 – what do you feel people are now looking for in a new home?

There's the obvious key features which are popular, including gardens and home offices. Many are looking to get away from the 'hustle and bustle' of the big cities and towns, so throughout this year we have most definitely experienced heightened demand for homes in rural or coastal areas.

### How is the new homes market performing?

It goes without saying there have been challenges this year. We've followed government guidelines vigilantly throughout, however, it was still important for us to be on hand to enthusiastically market properties and provide advice and support to potential buyers during every stage of lockdown. The Stamp Duty Holiday encouraged buyers, and sellers, to act quickly to take the opportunity to save up to £15,000.

We're seeing some fantastic schemes being approved and pop up across the region, ranging from starter homes to luxury family properties.

We've recently been appointed to market a range of exciting developments, including apartments and houses at The Coach House, Gosforth and a development of 45 homes in Beadnell by North East housebuilder Bondgate Homes.

### What do you predict for the future of new-build homes in the region?

We will most certainly see the steady increase in demand for homes in the countryside or by the sea. We have been delighted to have marketed a range of outstanding and luxurious homes in areas such as Craster and Lesbury.



In contrast, Covid-19 has had a huge impact on increasing loneliness while raising an appreciation for family and friends. As an example, Sunderland's Riverside project is promoting the idea of connectivity, and living in communities which provide communal outdoor areas and a concentration on closer access to local amenities. The popularity of solo living is growing, so a need for social interaction may be higher.

The current climate has had a big impact on flexible working and as this continues the need for assigned spaces will be required. Many have spent a long time at home with their partners and families, and the need for personal space and clearly defined purposes for areas throughout the

home will be higher in demand, for example not using the kitchen table as an office.

### Has the pandemic changed the way in which you market properties?

Slightly, however we provide bespoke and innovative campaigns for each of our developments, so our marketing is always moving forward regardless.

Throughout this year we have noted a stark increase in online activity – September saw our website traffic skyrocket by 72% year-on-year.

Despite most people not getting 'out and about' as much, footfall on our high streets has continued. Our branches are placed in the key towns and high streets within the North East, so we still have a lot of visibility and passing footfall.

We use Rightmove to market our properties, which gains a significantly higher amount of traffic and enquiries than other property portals. Our high-quality photography and brochures really help properties to stand out. Obviously we haven't been able to do many open events this year, however we've adapted to delivering safe, socially distanced viewings.

Alongside the rest of the business, our New Homes department has an already established multi-faceted approach to marketing. We work closely with our in-house marketing specialist and digital experts to provide bespoke marketing schedules which span across print, digital, social media and content led platforms which are specifically designed for and aimed at relevant and target demographics.

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# GOING GREEN - NOT TO SO EASY TO ACHIEVE BUT CAN REALLY BENEFIT OUR REGION

By Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield



Tree Tops, Riding Mill - refurbishment of an existing dwelling and an award-winning design by Howarth Litchfield



A house in Hambleton, North Yorkshire, designed for a private client

Every day we wake up and hear more news on the climate, energy efficiency changes, deadlines to achieve a reduction in something, but how do we achieve this and how can it benefit the North East?

**A recent survey showed that to achieve genuine change and get to Zero emissions would take a 41% change in technology, a 16% change in pure behavioural change and a 43% shift in both behaviour and technology combined.**

I have written before that change often has to be combined with incentives and grants; so that the average house owner is encouraged to use greater insulation, PV panels or more efficient boilers like air source heating.

The government's latest scheme is worth looking at - the Green Homes Grant 2020 - which will pay two third of the costs up to £5000 on various home improvements. However, like many headlining grants, it sounds great but is a disappointment on the options and forces you to use contractors from a prescribed list. My own son got quotes for insulating his house gable that were 25% higher through this grant than if he were to pay direct.

We have also seen the recent announcement of cars being all electric from 2030, which is an ambitious target from central government as we have nearly 40 million cars in the UK alone. All electric cars are still expensive, their range often limited and the infrastructure to charge them frequently does not work - I reckon one in three chargers does not work.

So, am I being negative? No. I believe that we have a direction, but it needs more incentives, more encouragement from central and local government. New industries and technologies will be needed, some we know about and others yet to



Fold House in Riding Mill, designed for a private client

be developed. The region should be putting itself forward as the perfect location to develop the products and technologies we need to achieve the zero carbon targets.

We have recently seen the announcement about Britishvolt constructing a lithium battery plant in Blyth, the biggest new factory in the Northeast since Nissan in 1984. The factory will even use renewable energy generated in Norway to power it. This factory will hopefully generate a huge number of direct and indirect jobs in the North East. This region is well placed to be in the new high-tech industrial revolution.

The manufacture of wind turbine factories has grown in this area, as we are strategically placed with our ports, industrial heritage, and geographical location to take advantage of this energy source. We have recently been commissioned at HL on a massive industrial complex for building specialist equipment for the green energy sector - one of our biggest ever commissions. We are positive about our practice and the job opportunities that are coming along from the net carbon targets.

We also need the skills and workforce to be supplied to these new industries. So, our region needs the education facilities, houses, and infrastructure to support people living and working



Neil Turner

in the area. These new green technologies can therefore become the fuel for the North East to achieve a green zero carbon economy.

**Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**

*Images supplied are houses designed by Howarth Litchfield in which energy efficient design and green technology are paramount.*



# LEASEHOLD LESSONS

As everybody knows, most of my work is in the commercial property field but this time I'm writing about residential for a change. I hope that I'm not treading on the feet of Damiano Rea in doing this and hopefully what I say will complement his article this month.

There will be many readers of this magazine who live in Leasehold properties, mainly flats and apartments but some in Leasehold houses also. Of those people, the majority will have no issues with the Freeholder who will be organising Insurance for the property, general communal maintenance and other matters which take a headache away from them. However, there is also a significant minority who will be suffering at the hands of rapacious Freeholders who see Leasehold as an extra source of revenue when developing a housing estate.

The first Act of Parliament to make major changes to the Leasehold system was the Leasehold Reform Act 1967. Later, the Leasehold Reform Housing and Urban Development Act 1993 gave Leaseholders the right to extend their leases on flats and to buy the Freehold of their 'block' if 50% or more agree. Why would people want to buy the headache from the Freeholders? For some people it is a way of getting more control and of course, lenders have always been reluctant to lend against short-term Leasehold residential property. However, with the rise of the new style Freeholder this need has become more important as the Leaseholders find themselves embroiled in time-consuming and very expensive litigation against Freeholders – often with little chance of success – to argue draconian terms in their property contract. Some housebuilders will sell the house Freehold but the gardens to the front and rear will be Leasehold. There will be a requirement to maintain these gardens but no right to change their use. Want to put an extra driveway on? You need permission – and that will cost. Haven't maintained the gardens to a standard the Freeholder requires? They may send their own gardeners in – at your cost. Some of the Freehold titles include equally or more oppressive terms requiring regular redecoration, in a colour to be agreed with the Freeholder, and even just to get the consent to redecorate at the required time might cost. It's all become incredibly nasty over the last 20 years or so.

There is new legislation due to come on the Statute Books this year, and under this, Leaseholds will be for a term of 990 years and so the urgent need to buy Freeholds before the expiry of the lease will become redundant. I imagine that there will be additional legislation brought into place in time



Philip Bowe

to deal with the most swingeing terms in existing leases and to bring existing leases into line with new leases to be granted from the 2022 change. However, if you are looking at buying a flat or a house, I suggest that you get full and proper advice from your solicitor and also from a competent professional surveyor. In the meantime, I would urge anybody having problems with service charges now, contact a solicitor or a surveyor without delay and get whichever you contact to put you in touch with the other professional. Together they can analyse your lease to see what is fair, what is unfair, and then challenge that for you. Your home is generally speaking your biggest investment, so it is in your interests to ensure you get the best advice with regard to it.

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## NEW JOBS ON THE WAY IN NORTHUMBERLAND

New jobs are soon to be created on a 10-acre site in Northumberland following a deal by the region's largest independent commercial property consultancy.

Naylors Gavin Black has secured a new five-year letting for the 100,000 sq.ft premises which are to be used as a factory and warehouse by new tenant Merit.

Located at Nelson Industrial Estate in Cramlington, the building which was formerly occupied by plastic manufacturer Jaycare, has been out of use for several years but will now be a strategic site for Merit's ongoing projects.

Owned by private investor Hollowvale Ltd, the building, which has a secure yard area and is served by the nearby A189, provides an additional factory for Merit, whose head office is on Northumberland Business Park.

Keith Stewart, Partner at Naylors Gavin Black, said: "After falling into disrepair and laying empty for such a long period, it will be fantastic to see this space help a successful local company grow further. The area is a great one for businesses and employers of all kinds, with a number of other commercial estates and many local amenities only a short distance away."



## WORK BEGINS ON TRANSFORMATION OF DARLINGTON VICTORIAN MARKET

Wharton Construction has begun work on the first phase to transform Darlington's historic indoor market.

Over the next three months, it will install an eco-friendly biomass boiler, provide an enhanced entrance off West Row and create additional public toilets.

The Darlington-based firm will also re-purpose a third of the current retail area, constructing six new purpose-built stalls to create a street food area, together with a bar and events stage.

Some of the building's features previously hidden from view will now be revealed including the installation of reinforced glass floor panels to allow visitors a glimpse into the underground vaults.

The family-run firm was appointed lead contractor for phase one of the Darlington Victorian Market project by Market Asset Management (MAM).

Later phases will involve opening up the vaults to create a space for restaurants and bars, together with the creation of the Temperate Garden, a glass structure at the eastern side of the building that will be filled with greenery where visitors can eat, drink, and relax.

Whilst continuing to offer sales outlets for independent retailers, fresh food stalls, local growers and artisan producers, the refurbished market will also include a new mezzanine business centre.

## TRANSFORMATION UNVEILED ON £5.4M GOSFORTH REGENT CENTRE APARTMENTS

A new look has been unveiled for a Newcastle former office block as scaffolding is removed by Kapex Construction.

Eldon House at Gosforth's Regent Centre is undergoing a £5.37million transformation to redevelop the former vacant office building into 66 luxury apartments.

Kapex Construction, part of Newcastle-based Morton Group, was appointed by Regent Centre owners Omnia Property Group to deliver its 2nd phase of its residential scheme, with Broadfield Project Management acting as client representative.

Construction work started on the Eldon House development, which will create a mix of one and two bedroom apartments over 8 floors, in March 2020. The extensive redevelopment project was originally due to complete in Spring 2021 but despite lockdown it is scheduled for completion in early 2021.

Work on the scheme involves the complete removal of the existing façade, new cladding of the existing structure, thermal upgrades, a complete new MEP installation and an internal fit out.

It will be the second 'office to residential' conversion at the Regent Centre - the first being Northumbria House - and will be available to rent through Omnia Space. The area is known to be popular with students and employees based within the business park.



- Commercial Rent Reviews and Lease Renewals -
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# DUNWOODIE ARCHITECTS' DIRECTOR, PETER SWIFT, DISCUSSES COVID 19 & IT'S IMPACT ON HEALTHCARE ARCHITECTURE



Peter Swift

There is no doubt that Covid 19 is having, & will continue to have for some considerable time, a significant impact not only upon our working lives, but also upon our working environments.

**The demand for office space will inevitably take a hit and the type & location of office space post Covid will most likely need to be different to reflect the changes in our attitude towards travelling & working in close proximity to others when so many people have now become used to working successfully from home.**

It may have come as a surprise that this transition has been successfully achieved and business has still been 'getting done' but the design of office space and other buildings where people interact is going to have to be reconsidered to encourage people back into what they can consider to be safe environments. People are inherently social animals so the desire to congregate isn't going to magically disappear. Instead, the built environment is going to have to respond to these needs whether it be office space, the hospitality and leisure industry, residential, care or health.

From our point of view at DWA, as a Practice with over 30 years experience in the healthcare sector, we are already seeing a change in approach to the design of hospital facilities. For example, we are involved with one NHS Trust which has asked us to reconfigure their main entrance to make it 'Covid safe'. Interestingly, they don't see this as a short

term fix and everything will revert back to 'normal' post Covid. They see these changes as being part of the 'new normal' and the changes are here for the long term, being driven by lessons learned during the pandemic and how patients and the public have interacted in the hospital's public spaces.

For example, segregation of people coming into and leaving hospital so their paths do not cross, installation of handwashing stations, screened areas, reduced sitting areas so people are not encouraged to stay, and speaking to people as they arrive to check they have valid reasons to be in the hospital. This is likely to involve re-allocation of resources so that qualified medical staff are on the front line at the hospital receptions to make accurate assessments of individuals' needs as they arrive. This potentially means creating 'holding areas' where patients can wait prior to discussing their particular needs before being given an allocated time to attend an appropriate department or someone comes to collect them.

Other implications may involve reassessing the design and layout of toilet & hand washing/ sanitisation provision throughout entire hospital sites as well as other important matters such as how to safely accommodate visitors to hospitals

whilst minimising social interaction. Ward design may need to change to accommodate less people and therefore less visitors. WC provision for patients may need to be reassessed to avoid long walks to toilets. Smaller self contained wards with en-suites may become the new accepted norm.

Covid 19 will leave a long-lasting imprint on our lives, not only with recovered patients & the sad loss of so many lives, but in the longer term healthcare facilities will need to adapt with consequent changes to our built environment. It isn't always going to be easy to make such changes within existing settings but the design of new healthcare environments are already incorporating such changes at initial design stage. This may lead to booking hospital appointments via an app on your mobile or being assessed over the phone to minimise personal contact and reduce unnecessary hospital visits. Perhaps the silver lining, if there could possibly be one to come out of the pandemic, is that people may reassess whether they actually need to physically attend hospital in person and we may end up with a more efficient NHS which many people have called for consistently over the years.

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



# Home SWEET

★ HOME ★

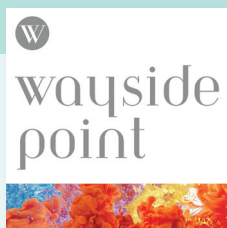
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BLYTH  
2 AND 3 BEDROOM  
MODERN HOMES



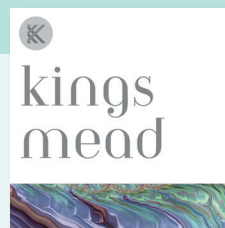
CRAMLINGTON  
3 AND 4 BEDROOM  
FAMILY HOMES



ELLINGTON  
2, 3 AND 4 BEDROOM  
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## GLOBAL ACCOUNT WIN FOR NE COMMS AGENCY CLAIRE BARBER PR

NE PR agency Claire Barber PR, has been appointed as the global comms agency for the largest and most technically advanced conservation project in history, The Noah's Ark Foundation, South Africa.

The Noah's Ark Foundation is a state-of-the-art animal and ecological conservation park, set to preserve every species on the planet. In planning for over four years, the park will cover 100 square kilometres of land in South

Africa, with geodomes recreating eco systems for species around the world.

Co-founded by Richard Prinsloo Curson, a film crew and photographic team have been following every aspect of the Noah's Ark journey. A 12-part television series was broadcasted in the UK and distributed to broadcasters globally in January 2021, with a second series planned.

Claire Barber PR Limited is based in the North of England. Clients have included The Duchess of Northumberland and The Alnwick Garden, British entrepreneur and businessman Sir Graham Wylie, Anton du Beke, The Alan Shearer Foundation, The Children's Heart Unit at The Freeman Hospital, Ant & Dec and many more.



## MEDIA TRAINING ZOOMS ON

Keith Newman runs Newcastle and Morpeth based Highlights PR. The firm has a wide range of clients including Bright and Beautiful North Tyneside, Geon Training, Ignite Gas Training and Vigeo Property Hub.

The entertainment industry also benefits from Highlights PR's knowledge and experience, with the firm establishing relationships with the Sunday for Sammy Trust, Scattered Pictures, Blowin' a Hooley Theatre and many musicians and authors. Charities and organisations, including The People's Kitchen, Healthwatch and Disability North, also benefit from good PR and support.

Keith represents his clients which includes crisis management for large multinationals and national charities. He has also regularly appeared on TV and radio in his own right.

Pre lockdown, Keith ran successful radio media training courses for Radio Northumberland where he is a volunteer presenter. Now, Keith has adapted the course for Zoom audiences. The course covers all of the essential basics for radio, podcasts and TV, as well as preparation tips, tips on self-confidence and how to answer media questions under pressure.

To find out more about the course, contact Keith via email on Keith@highlightspr.co.uk or call 07814 397951. You can also visit the website on www.highlightspr.co.uk.



## MHW KICKS OFF 2021 WITH HAT-TRICK OF WINS

Leading North East business-to-business PR consultancy, MHW PR, has started the new year with a trio of new business projects. The three new clients are Lowes Financial Management, VLS (vehicle lease and services) and Careers College North East.

The work includes copywriting a new website for VLS, creating a video for the regional Careers College and a media relations campaign around a new, annual report on the performance of structured financial products during 2020 for Lowes.

Wayne Halton, Owner and Director at MHW, said: "There's no doubting we're in a tough, volatile market so it's a genuine pleasure to pick up some interesting pieces of work with three new clients."

"Video storytelling has become quite a trend during the pandemic, and we've helped manage the creation of more than a dozen videos for different clients during the last six months. Careers College North East is just the latest example."

"The work with Lowes is more ambitious and involves a campaign of media relations with national and specialist financial and investor media."

MHW, established more than 20 years ago, has a strong B2B background and current clients include Express Engineering, Royston Diesel Power and Growth Capital Ventures.



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## MAGAZINES FOR SCHOOLS PUTS FUN INTO LEARNING

A new subscription service for teachers and schools providing quality learning resources without the need for hours of planning has been launched by Gateshead based Unique Group.

The service, "Magazines for Schools" has been successfully trialled with Wingrove Primary School in Newcastle who are using the magazines to combine education and entertainment benefits for their pupils.

Founder of Magazines for Schools, John Porrett said: 'The education world is going through very difficult times at the moment and when schools return to normal, teaching staff will need every resource available to them to support learning.

"Reading for pleasure is an important aspect of learning and the magazines that we provide are highly educational and fun so that the whole class will enjoy the learning experience. As part of the service we also provide customisable, easy-to-use, Key Stage 2 lesson resources complete with key assessment focuses."

Every month multiple copies of a specially chosen independent educational magazine are distributed to participating schools along with bespoke lesson resources that can be used with the magazines. Each resource has a slide show that can be easily adapted including notes and recommendations. Made for Key Stage 2 using key assessment focuses to guide them, each pack has reading comprehensions and formatted questions that students can engage with.

Examples of the magazines supplied are Cubic, Anorak, Eco Kids Planet, Horrible Histories and Brilliant Brainz. All are suitable for primary school



Taqwaa, from Wingrove Primary School.

children and cover a range of subjects including literacy, science, numeracy and art which help to get children excited about learning.

Jane Mullarkey, Head Teacher at Newcastle's Wingrove Primary School has trialled the subscription with excellent results:

"Using the magazines with the children has ignited their curiosity in the world around them. They are excited to have their own copy to thumb

through at their own pace and are eager to share their newfound knowledge with the staff. The magazines are accessible for all abilities and have supported the "reading for pleasure" agenda."

**For more information about the subscription service for schools** [www.magazinesforschools.co.uk](http://www.magazinesforschools.co.uk) or contact Unique Magazines on 0345 3036750.





Stacey Sweeney



# MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS

In the latest of our series of 'Marketing and Media Matters' features Northern Insight talks to leading figures in the region's media industry.

This month we meet...

## STACEY SWEENEY

Owner, Scarlett Butterfly Media

### Did you always envisage a career in the Media industry?

The short answer would be no. When I was young, I switched between wanting to be a Teacher or a Marine Biologist, that being said, I have always loved film making. Some of my earliest memories are of my Brother and myself making videos on the camcorder, then I would "edit" them on the old 'Windows Movie Maker'. I really fell in love with it during my A Levels as I took Media Studies. I then went on to do a Media Production degree which reinforced this as a career choice in my head.

### What has been your career path so far?

Prior to launching Scarlet Butterfly Media in 2017, I worked alongside my Dad as a second shooter for his professional wedding photography work. We now work as a team on weddings.

I also supported myself by working part time in the Retail and Hospitality sectors, which gave me a great insight into customer service and problem solving.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

I feel my biggest challenges have been overcoming doubts in respect to confidence and self-belief, lack of business connections, and addressing people's assumptions including the stereotyping as a young female in business. I have spent considerable time focusing on my self-development in these areas, which has helped me, especially in the area of running a commercial business.

### Who do you most respect in your industry?

This is probably not the answer you were wanting, but there is no one person in particular. I respect anyone who works hard and produces great work in any creative industry.

### Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

There are a few different characters that I connect with, but if I had to pick one, it would be the role that Cameron Diaz played in the Rom-Com film 'The Holiday'. She is an Editing Director and when I first saw the film I thought I'd love that job.

### How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

It has been difficult, as it has been for many, as most of our work involves face to face interaction. We have had to cancel or reschedule a number of our jobs however, we have adapted to meet demand. Our bread and butter used to be producing short promotional videos for SME's, but we have seen more enquiries from the Property and Education sectors. This, together with our work with Charities, including Open North Foundation and NE Youth, has kept us busy. We are also fortunate to receive regular photography assignments from Northern Insight Magazine.

### What is your greatest strength?

I find this sort of question difficult to answer, however, feedback from my clients is that my biggest strength is I take the time to understand their needs.

Asking the right questions, listening to their answers and taking onboard their ideas, so I fulfil their requirements. I enjoy a real collaborative approach to my work.

### What is your biggest weakness?

I am sure that many in the creative industry will agree with my next answer. I am the biggest critic of my own work. When editing I become a perfectionist and there are similarities to being a painter, you need to know when to put the brush down.

### What has been your proudest achievement?

Does getting 'Student of the Year' one time in High School count? If not, then my proudest achievement for me would be starting up a business from scratch and how the company has grown over the past 4 years, to such an extent that we now have several clients who are listed in the North East's Top 250 businesses.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

I work with a network of great freelancers, however I would like to build my own team of in-house creatives including sound engineers, editors and camera operators. I would also like to continue to grow the business and expand our client base. From a personal perspective, I want to explore more of the Documentary style of filming and grow my own skillset in that area.

### How do you see your industry evolving in the next 10 years?

It will be technology driven, with changes to the way people consume media, including crossovers between; Animation, CGI and Holograms. I believe there will also be a growth in VR technology. There will be improvements in our 'tools of the trade' such as cameras and editing software, but the fundamentals are still about helping businesses to communicate effectively with their clients. My role is to keep pace with the technology changes and to stand out from the crowd.

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

07852 990362

“

...there are similarities to being a painter, you need to know when to put the brush down...

”



In a new approach to her monthly column, Astute.Work's managing director and management and PR consultant Sarah Waddington shares five things that she's found useful and you might too.

## TRUST, TENDERING, HOME SCHOOLING AND BRAND PURPOSE

Here at Astute.Work, we regularly bookmark articles, apps, books, podcasts and academic research that help our thinking and practice. Here I've curated five from January that piqued my interest because of their implications for the world of business communications.

### 1) Malcolm Gladwell's Talking to Strangers

I'm a new convert to Audible and Malcolm Gladwell's Talking to Strangers has been a great place to start. Through a series of case studies, Gladwell teaches us about how we read the human behaviours and motives of people we don't know – and his insight is equally applicable to those we do.

The biggest lesson relates to Truth Default Theory. According to the book, our human lie detectors are naturally set to off, even when there are red flags. We don't want to believe that people are lying to us so we rationalise facts and allow bias to creep into our decision-making. It's an important lesson for anyone in operational risk management – and particularly interesting when the concept is applied to political campaigning. Could this potentially explain why so many people voted for Trump?

### 2) Parent Ping

Here's one for the parents out there struggling with home schooling and lockdown. Parent Ping is a daily survey app which helps you learn about how other parents are dealing with life. In exchange for answering two simple questions, you get access to survey results and daily reads which help to improve your relationship with your child(ren) and help them get the most out of education as possible.

As well as being one of the best modern surveying tools out there and therefore worth a look for best practice, the app is good for knowing things like how parents are feeling about the home schooling juggle and how supportive employers are being in general.

### 3) The Cummings Effect

A University College London paper published in the Lancet which researched the views of 40,000 people has found that public faith in the Government dropped steeply after Dominic Cummings broke lockdown rules last year.

As reported in the Guardian, experts now say that rule flouting has become more commonplace because of this erosion of trust. As a professional communicator this comes as no surprise. Building trust requires effective leadership, transparency, shared values and consistency of behaviour, all of which have been completely lacking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### 4) Public Sector Procurement

Tracker Intelligence has published a guide extolling the benefits of engaging earlier to increase the chances of success with public sector procurement.

According to the team at Tracker, building relationships with the organisations you want to win work with can help you influence the objectives and requirements of a contract before the official notice is published and educate the buyer on your products and services, as well as your particular market.

### 5) Brand Purpose

A Brandwatch survey on brand purpose has reported that 52% of consumers think it's 'very important' that a brand proactively makes the world a better place. Virtue signalling is seen as far less important than positive action.

Its findings are borne out by Edelman's Trust Barometer, which has a whole online section dedicated to what COVID-19 means for business and communicators. This states that "In uncertain environments like this, trust in institutions – businesses, organisations and governments – becomes even more critical. Strong leadership and decisive action are needed to earn that trust and shape our post-crisis future."

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

“  
...human lie detectors are  
naturally set to off...  
”





Sarah Waddington



# WHAT IS A PROGRESSIVE WEB APP?



## ASK Silver Bullet

It's interesting that we're increasingly receiving questions about digital marketing – whether this is due to the Covid-19 pandemic giving people more time and interest in the new alchemy or simply a reflection of its growing importance in marketing to many sectors is unclear, but probably a result of both?

**So, Progressive Web Apps (PWA's) are, in essence, websites which act and feel like native applications and are the next generation of sites/apps which combine the convenience of native apps with the power of websites. They have the potential to revolutionise how we all interact with brands via our mobile phones by delivering information via the website rather than a specific application and, as such, they deliver a better user experience with lower data consumption, a boon where mobile data is expensive. They're also available directly from the web so companies don't have to pay Google or Apple fees for them to be published on their app stores.**

They have several additional advantages, the first of which is ease of use – a US study showed that a traditional app loses 20% of its users at every step between the user's first contact and starting to use the app - you have to find the app in the app store, ignoring the various competing adverts, then download it, then install and then begin to use it – with a PWA, users can immediately start to use it.

As they are websites, they also benefit from SEO and can have far greater online visibility. They can still be stored and accessed via an icon on your mobile screen (so there's no problems about

remembering the URL), they work extremely fast as you don't have to access their specific server each time you access the app and, thanks to caching abilities, can function offline when there is little or no Internet access. Finally, they don't need constant updating as this is carried out at source.

Although they were developed in 2015, they've only recently begun to really take off, backed by Google, with such highly popular sites like Uber, Pinterest, Twitter and Spotify now accessed by PWA's. Possibly one of the main reasons for the current popularity is that the latest change in the Google algorithm will boost the ranking of those sites with faster page downloading when it comes into operation early next year.

But, do they work? Undoubtedly, yes – George, the clothing brand, saw a 31% increase in conversion on its mobile site once they upgraded to a PWA, whilst their new PWA helped Debenhams deliver a 40% increase in mobile revenue and a 20% increase in conversions. Tinder cut load times from almost 12 seconds to under five seconds with their PWA which is 90% smaller than their previous app.

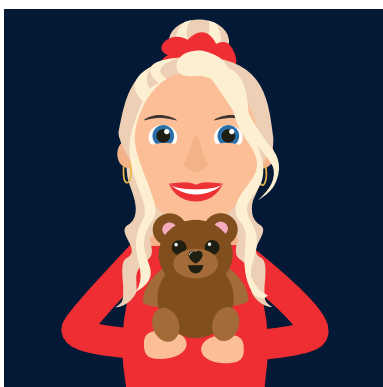
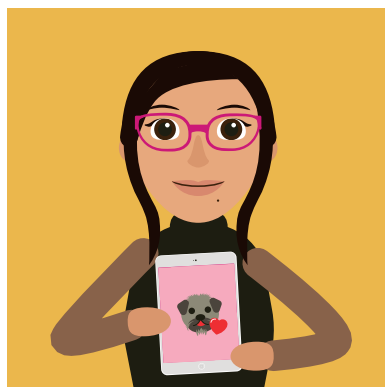
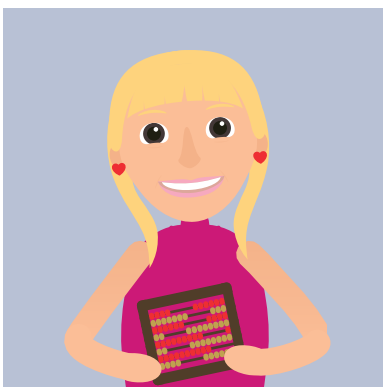
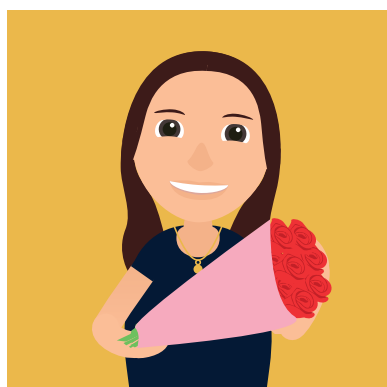
On the downside of WPA's, there are, at present, fewer developers and companies offering them. There's also an understandable inertia to move from traditional websites and apps – after all, if

you've just spent many thousands of pounds on developing your website and a traditional app for online commerce, you want to be damn sure the new WPA is going to generate substantially increased revenue to pay for its development. They also use more battery power as they use complex coding.

The ability for them to be stand-alone rather than sourced through App Store or Google Play is a double-edged sword in that they require investment in SEO to be visible online but they don't have the competition of similar apps available in these locations. At the end of the day, the choice of going down the PWA route should depend on whether you NEED one – if you're focusing purely on mobile devices, a native app will cover your needs but if you're aiming at desktop or web platforms and are starting from scratch, investing in a PWA may well be the better option.

***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 or Tweet us (not so anonymously) @SilverBulletPR.***





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# YOU'VE "HIGHLIGHTED" US IN THE MEDIA - MVS NORTHUMBRIA



Highlights PR is a successful PR agency run by Keith Newman. Uniquely, their office is a boat based on the River Tyne.

Keith is a member of the nautical charity, the Maritime Volunteer Service. The Northumbria Unit have thanked two north east organisations for their support.

The unit's nautical equipment which isn't being used during lockdown has been stored by Fergusons at their Fergy Space in Cramlington while their rigid inflatable boat 'Northumberland Freemason' has been given secure space within

Newcastle College's Energy Academy at Wallsend. Pre-Covid, Newcastle College donated classroom space to the unit so that they could hold lectures and presentations in the right environment for training.

The MVS trains its members (many of whom have had no previous connection with the sea) in nautical skills and supports the community and port authorities by providing safety patrols that

contribute to compliance with Port Marine Safety Code.

Nationally, the MVS has more than 25 active units spread around the UK coastline at major port and river areas, with more units planned. Northumbria Unit is based at St Peter's Marina on the Tyne although their vessels can operate from the Tweed to the Tees.

*Anyone wishing to know more about the MVS can email [angela@mvs-northumbria.org.uk](mailto:angela@mvs-northumbria.org.uk)*

*For a no obligation chat about your PR, call Keith on 07814 397951 or email [Keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:Keith@highlightspr.co.uk)*

## Are you on the media's RADAR?

You can be... for less than the price of a couple of coffees a week!

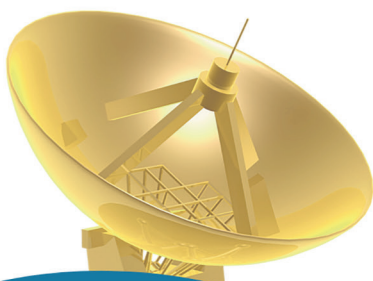
**Become a member of Highlights PR's RADAR programme.**

**Benefit from more than 15 years in the PR industry.**

**Get your name out to local and national press, TV, radio, magazines and more.**

**Special bonus for RADAR clients:**

- Interview on Radio Northumberland
- Crisis PR management advice
- Feature in Highlights PR's newsletter
- Exclusive offers on PR, media training and more
- LED advert beamed from the floating office



**Contact Keith Newman for more details.**

Visit him on his floating office

[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

07814 397951

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





# WE LOVE OUR BUSINESS

Love is in the air this Valentine's Day so Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members what they love about their job.



"It's the look of surprise and then delight when my client realises that their reaction to that old event or the unwanted feeling has gone or is so insignificant it doesn't bother them anymore."

**Anne Morrison**  
Therapist and Coach

"Understanding colour and style is the basis of a life skill that boosts personal confidence and can save you money. I love it when a client 'gets it' during our sessions with their 'light bulb' moment. When weeks later, a client calls to say they how excited they are about making confident clothing choices for the new season, a particular work or social purpose, it is immensely satisfying."

**Lucienne Gage**  
Next Chapter Styling

"What I love about my job is helping those in need especially where other agents won't assist due to the high percentage of people being in receipt of benefits. Many of our tenants have been in a homeless position and may have issues where they need extra support to sustain their tenancy, but we can offer this and assist the council's homeless teams in rehousing their more vulnerable clients."

**Nicky Middleton**  
Director Usworth Property Management



"What I love most about my job is the team we have at Lucid Technology Solutions. We have grown stronger over the pandemic and we have worked together to deliver an outstanding service to our customers. I am really proud to be a part of it!!"

**Steve Air**, Lucid Technology Solutions

"I love being able to help people adjust and adapt to new technologies."

**Cheryl Spears**,  
Sales Director Lucid Technology Solutions

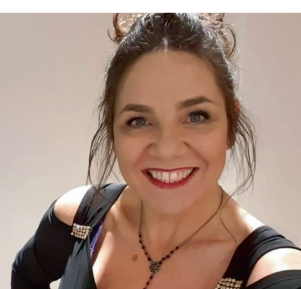


"When I was a child my mother bought me a toy sailboat. Though it's long gone, in my mind and in my work, I've never really stopped playing with it."

**Mike Nicholson**  
Shipmove

"Furthering the sense of independent pride within local communities - being able to put a spotlight on some really amazing individuals and what they have to offer."

**Andrew Bartlett**  
Managing Director of ROAM app



"I love Valentine's Day because new-born babies are the result of much love. My photo shots with parents are popular and it's all about the heart bowl and love feet shots!"

**Tina Small**  
Captured Forever Photography



"The MINT community who keep me on my toes, the opportunity to always keep learning new skills and working from home so I can get out for a walk in the countryside every day!"

**Nicola Jayne**  
Little MINT Business Club



"My top three values are love, honesty and loyalty. I love helping my clients gain clarity and confidence on how they can reach their financial goals, but above all I love to help them create more time and memories with their families which is amazing."

**Debbie Dorans**  
Managing Director Vigeo Property Hub

To find out more about becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call him on 07814 397951





## KEEP EVOLVING YOUR SKILLS

The rapidly changing workplace makes acquiring new skills even more exciting. Veronica Swindale, MD at nesma, reminds us how important it is to continue evolving and growing our skills. As after all, learning is also really good for our health, minds, and bodies.

**As every good marketer and communicator knows, relevancy is critical for genuine customer engagement.**

Apart from the ever-evolving UK campaigns: Hands-Face-Space etc. the defining moment for me last March regarding Covid was seeing armed police in Italy stopping city dogwalkers at night. "They have to walk their dog if they live in a city and have no garden!" my wholly empathetic dog-owning self, yelled at the TV, but nevertheless, I got the point and realised things were serious.

The next day nesma, as agile as ever, sprang into action. Now was the time to put everything we teach into practice: firstly stakeholders – Tutor call: if we went online for all our teaching would you be up for it? Yes came

the resounding reply. Next, shout out to all our students: if we do all our teaching online for the foreseeable future, would you be able to attend? Despite the uncertain times, the vast majority said yes definitely, others were being furloughed so weren't too sure but, guess what, we then started to get calls from others saying 'I'm going to be on furlough so have some time, can I study with you?' So it was yes, yes, yes.

Nearly a year down the line we have seen whole qualifications studied since the pandemic started. We are so proud to have helped marketers and communicators studying for their CIM and CIPR qualifications to succeed in shoring up their career choices. Despite some sectors flailing (but we always knew they would), others are blossoming thick and fast.



Those that had pressed the pause button in March were all back with us by September. Having got our market penetration sorted, we wanted to continue our relationship and keep in touch with our clients, so we identified some beneficial short courses to complement our delivery qualifications.

Everyone needs to understand Microsoft 365 to work more efficiently and collaboratively; everyone needs to know how social media works and how it can improve your business communications. So we created a programme of Know-How and Do. Which includes free taster sessions to give you 10 top tips on things you always wondered about but maybe weren't sure of how. Followed by bite-sized 1.5-hour interactive workshops to get your sleeves rolled up and stuck into working more efficiently and effectively in the workplace, whatever sector or wherever that might be.

We are working in partnership with some of the North East region's leading lights such as IQIT, Digital Allies, DRG, Projects Studio, People Power, and contributors from further afield.

As we have already said, 'The times they are a-changing' and everyone and every business need to evolve to optimise the newly arising opportunities. Whether its Microsoft Teams, Facebook, Market Research, What's New in Marketing, Redefining your Why through Mission, Vision and Values, Storytelling, Copywriting or Internal Comms or anything else you would like us to cover.

Check out our Know-How and Do Workshops on [www.nesma.co.uk](http://www.nesma.co.uk), which are all currently interactive online sessions which we look forward to delivering face to face again once we have won the battle with Covid.

## KNOW-HOW SESSIONS ALREADY IN THE CALENDAR

### Collaborating with colleagues with Teams

Monday 1st February

### Teams and channels

Monday 1st February

### Schedule and hold effective team meetings

Monday 1st February

### Identifying why you are in business

Tuesday 2nd March

### Your value and purpose proposition

Tuesday 2nd March

### Communicating your value and purpose

Tuesday 2nd March

### Optimising your Social Media copy

Wednesday 12th May

### Using Canva to craft visuals

Wednesday 12th May

### Using Facebook's Creator Studio

Wednesday 12th May

### People Power Conference

Wednesday 30th June

# nesma

BUILDING MARKETING KNOW-HOW

## KNOW-HOW & DO

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Management and Leadership  
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**ENLARGE YOUR AUDIENCE**



What are you waiting for?

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# Who said classroom chairs are boring?

School is now home. We've ensured online lessons are conducted following the regular school timetables, without any disruption. Our teachers are always on hand to help the children and are in constant touch with parents updating them on progress and ensuring a child's academic growth remains unaffected through these challenging times. A family takes care of one another and as a school with deep rooted family values, we've made sure our children are supported well and they continue to receive quality education and pastoral care. *As for the classroom chairs, we've let them have their fun.*



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# PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS NEED SUPPORT AND ADVICE



Scott Biggs

Scott Biggs, Education Specialist, highlights challenges and possible steps forward for the Sector

**One of the biggest challenges facing the primary school sector is catching up the gaps in pupils education missed during the Covid pandemic in the UK, with school closures rocking the sector again.**

Scott Biggs, an education specialist with over a decade of experience on the front-line of teaching, highlights where teachers need help and how Headteachers can calmly administer the changes needed to address the challenges that will be faced in the sector going forward.

"Education has always been a given in our lifetime in the UK. There has rarely been a time when schools were closed and children could not access education. However, with the recent impact of the covid pandemic, the education profession has had to be resilient.

"Teachers have faced over 30 different guidance documents and announcements since February, with over 100 coronavirus updates for the sector, meaning teams have had to be agile to tick the right boxes. Many of these updates happened days before the new term, which caused a frantic reactive challenge for a sector that is well known for proactive planning. During the Christmas break, teachers were preparing and planning for mass testing and come the new year, after one day in school, guidance changed again and teams needed to react quickly to enact home learning.

"It is great testament to the entire sector that safe guidance was developed and put into practice so quickly to keep pupils and staff as Covid free as possible. The resounding agreement is that staff just want to do their jobs! Many are now trying to strike the right balance between giving children

enough learning to minimize the gap with also understanding that parents are often juggling both siblings and their own working commitments so strong communication lines and feedback between parents and staff is as important as ever.

"Each school is unique but the effects of the global pandemic on the education community are clear. Primary School Headteachers must continue to drive standards and support staff acknowledging their hard work and efforts in the face of continuing adversity.

It is really important to acknowledge and display understanding that the pandemic affects everyone. It is not just about the loss of the learning but also the resulting stress and anxiety that could prove to be a long-term issue. I have heard stories of children having nightmares around returning to school because their patterns have changed so much, so we must ensure children and staff are supported back gradually into a normal routine.

"Primary Schools must provide time for the staff and children to talk about the changes and what is going on in the world, in their town, in the school and at home. Every child and staff member should be provided with a route to help and guidance. Staff should have a source they trust that they can speak to in confidence. Children should be able to speak one on one with teachers and those teachers should be able to access professional help for the child if they feel it is needed. Drop in sessions are helpful for keeping communication lines open between staff and parents.

"Each school should have in place, or have on site, access to a qualified counsellor. The school should have designated personnel who have been

previously trained or are undergoing specific training. Bespoke support plans are incredibly important right now, even more so than catching up on the curriculum. This ideally should be expanded to the parents, to create a holistic approach to supporting families.

"Teaching should not shy away from the harsh truths that we currently live in. Sharing experiences and stories should be encouraged and our experiences at all ages should be learnt from.

"Teachers need to facilitate the forming of friendships in different ways. By creating structure and routine, children can know their safe circles and bubbles. This provides stability to all and means that the environment within can be more relaxed, reflecting a strong degree of normality for them.

"Affirming videos, advice, tips and model changes should be shared so that children take in the guidance through more than one medium. Social media is great for keeping connections and relationships going.

"Calm explanations to children will help schools to support a gradual move back to normality. When we resume and if mass testing continues, then dedicated nurses or trained professionals in each school will help to provide a reassurance and lessen any fears about the testing process."

Scott is happy to talk with schools on an individual basis on any issues or queries on keeping COVID safe structures rolling successfully.

**You can contact him on**  
[scott@intrinsicintegrity.co.uk](mailto:scott@intrinsicintegrity.co.uk) or you can  
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# IN CONVERSATION WITH

Northern Insight talks about the challenges faced through the Covid 19 pandemic with...

## FIONA COLEMAN

Headteacher, Newcastle Preparatory School

### How has the school adapted to the Coronavirus Crisis?

If this recent pandemic has taught us nothing else it is that we can all be inspired to learn new things, even in the most difficult and challenging of situations. When the first announcement of lockdown came in March, our plans for further developing our virtual learning platform accelerated and we have not looked back since. The challenge of delivering blended learning from Nursery to Year 6, inspired us all to work harder, find solutions and think outside of the box. Our whole school discovered new talents including the power of technology to help make things happen. But it was the human touch behind the technology that continues to shine through with teachers and parents working together to help children continue to learn, to engage and to succeed.

### What are you currently working on?

With closure number 2 coming into force at the beginning of January it is once again all hands on deck to roll out remote learning for our children who are at home whilst also remaining open for our Key workers and vulnerable children. The key throughout this period and beyond has been to widen up communication channels between parents and children so that people feel supported and they know that school is still there to offer support and guidance. The partnership between home and school was vital during 2020 and will be something that we are continually working on as we enter into 2021.

### What have you learned about yourself this year?

It goes without saying that this year has been a year of challenges and it has reinforced what I already knew. That a good leader, leads through example and is only as good as the team that surrounds them. I am extremely fortunate to be part of a strong team who I can rely on when the going gets tough and who are willing to go that extra mile. I also learnt that self-care is extremely important and by taking that time to exercise, lead a healthy life-style and switch off every now and again, has meant I have had the energy and resilience to face whatever comes my way.

### Which regional businesses have you admired in their responses to the pandemic?

It is difficult to single out any one business as I am full of admiration to everyone in our local sector who have adapted creatively to the serious challenges which they have faced. However, I am particularly proud of the way my colleagues within Senior Schools have coped with the enormous challenges they have been faced with, including introducing flow testing on a large scale and responding to the ever-changing policy regarding public exams. The resilience and determination that they have shown, working tirelessly for the benefit of their school communities has been next to none.

### What can the education sector learn from this difficult period?

There are many lessons to be learnt including that schools are a vital part of the community within which they are placed. The unpredictability of 2020 has taught us that the support of others and collective endeavour has been more important than

ever. School communities have flourished during this time where people have gone out of their way to show kindness, empathy and understanding towards one another. From supporting our most vulnerable to addressing inequalities within the system; these actions have re-affirmed that change is possible if we speak with one voice.

The Pandemic has also taught us to re-evaluate what is important in life.

It was recognised early on that it was an impossible task for families to balance the demands of work with home schooling and something had to give. The need to slow down and take stock has led us all to question the value of a knowledge - based curriculum driven by targets.

Helping children to cope with life, including its ups and downs came to the forefront during 2020. The education sector will need to respond to an increased demand to support our children and their mental health both now and into the future. Providing a broad and inspiring curriculum with plenty of opportunities for enrichment, problem solving, collaboration and simply having fun, is a priority.

### Any New Year hopes or resolutions?

I will not be alone in hoping that the vaccine continues to be rolled out and that it enables us all to return to some sense of normality. I also hope that our heightened sense of what a fragile world we live in leads to some positive changes right across society.

### What does the School have planned for 2021?

Education for social responsibility will be our focus for 2021. Taking into consideration what we have lived through in 2020, it is essential that our children continue to develop their understanding of the global world. NPS will be encouraging and facilitating our children to have an understanding of the challenges of the future and as school we will be looking at ways that we can make a positive impact on the world we live in.

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“  
...the pandemic has also  
taught us to re-evaluate  
what is important in life...  
”





Fiona Coleman



# FINDING MOTIVATION DURING A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

By Dan Howard FIEP, Managing Director at Skills Forward, Operations Director - Learning for Work at NCFE

A key part of being able to find and stay in sustainable employment is to be able to stay motivated, take initiative and remain persistent. More than ever before, this is a big ask of jobseekers.

Lots of talented, capable, and willing professionals have been dealt a confidence knock as they find themselves unemployed, through redundancy or otherwise. Young people who had hopes of summer jobs and work experience have missed out on that valuable experience, and there are also those who are struggling with the emotional limbo of furlough. In a job market that is not on their side, these feelings of disappointment and fear are compounded the longer the situation continues.

## Finding motivation: the sectors are signalling growth

Although many jobs and sectors have been hit hard, there are businesses that have thrived, either by adapting their current provision or launching new products or services to meet demand.

Climate change is a significant political and economic issue and one which received much fanfare when it was reported that emissions fell during lockdown. To see this trend continue and to have a lasting effect on climate change, significant investment has been levelled towards a 'Green Industrial Revolution', a 10-point plan launched by Prime Minister Boris Johnson, including 250,000 new jobs in the UK.

Now that many businesses are embracing flexible working, this has opened the doors to a more diverse range of applicants. Flexible working is an attractive benefit to many, in particular those who can now more easily manage their families, disabled workers or those with chronic illnesses, and remote workers who don't want to or cannot afford to move to a major city.

Logistics, warehousing, and distribution have been integral to our management of lockdown and how we now procure our goods. This demand has led to significant investment in more sites around the country, including often overlooked areas such as the North East, the West Midlands and Corby, creating much needed job opportunities.



Dan Howard

## Education, science, and outer space

During the pandemic, we've certainly come to understand the phrase "knowledge is power". Our teachers have kept the nation educated and the profession has been met with a surge in applications; meeting the target for trainee teachers for the first time in eight years.

Alongside this, we have all been left in awe of the doctors, nurses, and healthcare professionals who have worked tirelessly to keep us safe and well. This valiant effort has encouraged an increase in student nurse applications. Now, scientists have developed a vaccine in just 9 months. This amazing feat of human intelligence and our need to encourage a world-leading approach to virus control, has spurred investment by the UK Government in 2 new 'megalabs' creating 4,000 jobs.

Our collective renewed passion for all things STEM has the potential to go to infinity and beyond, with the government investing in three new space projects.

## Instilling motivation in job seekers

Staying motivated is a considered effort and exceptionally difficult in the current climate, and we all need to be reminded of this when we feel like we are getting it wrong – I know I certainly do! These are my personal tips for increasing motivation at this difficult time.

Stay SMART with manageable goals - Setting realistic targets with manageable expectations is crucial to ensure you don't set yourself up for failure. Start small, build up and reward yourself with something positive like picking up the phone to a friend or going for a walk.

See no evil, speak to evil, hear no evil - Although we are all complex beings, how we think and behave is affected by what we consume or who or what we are exposed to. This includes people, media, TV shows, so consider who and what you are surrounding yourself with. Everyone needs to vent from time to time but be sure not to get into a negativity relay race, passing on negativity from person to person and locked in a cycle of doom.

Speaking of doom – stop doom scrolling! We've all done it, and the consumption of negative reports, press and social media can be addictive. It validates our own negative feelings, but it will not help us to feel any differently. Also, fiction is mixed with fact and we should be very careful about what media we consume and its legitimacy.

Seek enrichment - Once you've cut out the noise, seek out those who offer a positive outlook. To find enrichment, seek out snackable blogs, podcasts or Ted Talks that aren't overwhelming or too taxing. It doesn't have to be related to your circumstance, sector, or field of interest – just listening to someone talk passionately about their vocation can stir motivation in yourself.

At NCFE, we're determined to play our part in helping people to train, find, stay and progress in work in spite of the current economic and labour market context. Developing motivation is a key component of NCFE's 'go the distance' initiative, where we're tackling the big issues when it comes to youth employment in the current economic climate.

For more information on NCFE's qualifications visit [www.ncfe.org.uk](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)



# EXAM REFORM

By David Tickner, Headmaster at  
Newcastle School for Boys

“

Sweet are the uses of adversity,  
Which like the toad, ugly and  
venomous, wears yet a precious  
jewel in his head.

*from As You Like It*

”

**There is no doubt that coronavirus has presented schools with many challenges. Within an ever-changing landscape, schools have had to establish and deliver remote teaching and learning alongside continued onsite provision for the children of key workers or those who are vulnerable; provide assessments to replace cancelled examinations and roll out COVID testing.**

Mass vaccination offers us a hopeful way forward in a post-coronavirus world. But what opportunities has the pandemic presented? What will we have learned?

Until recently, the government had clung firmly to the notion that public exams must take place in schools and colleges in England this summer. But A levels and GCSEs have now been cancelled for a second year running and we wait to see how they will be replaced this summer. Hopefully, lessons will have been learnt and we won't see again the shambolic arrangements that prevailed last year.

When we eventually escape this awful pandemic, it would be wrong just to default back to how exams were. The cycle has been broken and we have an opportunity to overhaul our exams system to ensure it is fit for purpose.

It has been interesting to observe students' reactions when exams have been cancelled. Uncertainty breeds anxiety and frustration. Some lose their focus and motivation. They start to question the purpose in continuing to study if there are no examinations. This isn't entirely down to youthful fecklessness. It's because we have allowed exams to override children's relationships with learning. We are starting to see the cost of this in their wellbeing and mental health.

We have lost sight of the intrinsic value of learning, including as a progressive activity that allows access to ever higher learning and content. It is, of course, vital that we preserve challenge

and academic rigour. This is important for all sorts of reasons including in identifying and preparing the next generation of doctors and scientists, who have served us so well in this pandemic.

It is also time to acknowledge that schools are charged with so many other things in addition to delivering qualifications. Whilst helping to create a fairer and more equal society, they are also expected to deliver, amongst other things, mental health, wellbeing and character traits such as resilience.

And what about the form of assessment itself? The pandemic has reduced the debate to a binary one. Exams versus teacher assessment. Does it have to be either or? Is there no room for the best elements of both? The government regularly points to exams as the fairest form of assessment. On the face of it, exams present an apparent level playing field but that's not to say they are entirely fair or accurate.

At Newcastle School for Boys, we are pioneering our own sixth form curriculum in partnership with neighbouring independent girls' school, Westfield. For now, at least, A levels remain at its heart, but we also recognise vocational qualifications - more suited to some of our students - as well as other academic enrichment that requires interest and

passion beyond the taught curriculum and that question often asked by students - do we need to know this for the exam?

We are trying to place equal value on the opportunity for our students to develop skills and attributes desperately sought by modern employers: creativity, collaborative working, problem-solving, communication and resilience. At the same time, we are seeking to develop life skills such as financial management and a degree of domestic capability.

It is early days, and we are learning a great deal as we go. We have but the resources of two smaller independent schools but hope that the national debate can now move beyond the narrow form of assessment that is examinations - devised and implemented in the earlier part of last century - towards a more modern, sophisticated, and fit for purpose system.

Coronavirus has brought much hardship and suffering. Its legacy must be an opportunity to rethink and refresh what drives education and how, what and when we assess.

**For more information about Newcastle School for Boys, visit [www.newcastleschool.co.uk](http://www.newcastleschool.co.uk) or contact [admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@newcastleschool.co.uk)**

David Tickner





## REASONS TO BE CHEERFUL PART 3 -

To be sung to the tune of 'My Favourite Things' in homage to *I'm Sorry, I Haven't a Clue...*

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher,  
Durham High School

By the time you read this, we will still probably be in lockdown, with all the implications of what this means for our physical and psychological wellbeing. However, in the spirit of the late, great Ian Dury, there are reasons to be cheerful during this period, and here a few of my favourite things that I prize:

**1. Jane Austen.** An obsessive Austen fan from the age of eight, I return to her *oeuvre* again and again, having read *Pride and Prejudice* at least 25 times. What would I do without the consolation of her wit, wisdom and the devastating Mr Darcy? Without her, life would not be as bearable and, heaven forfend, Colin Firth would have been known as a mildly interesting, quite posh character actor, as opposed to the mega-star he is today. Can we imagine now a life without that lake scene in the 1995 adaptation?

**2. Tsundoku.** I only found this wonderful concept on a Facebook Book Club last year. This is the practice of buying more books than you will probably ever read, and the infinite joy of this. I have been, unknowingly, a practitioner of this art since early adulthood, when I finally had enough money to buy books on a whim, without having to save up carefully beforehand to purchase them lovingly and carefully, one at a time. These days, most of this *tsukondu* for me takes place on Kindle and iBooks, as, having moved to a new house relatively recently, I have not yet had my dream bookshelves installed and there is no room on my current shelves for any IRL books. Flicking through these ebooks yesterday, I was amazed at some of the titles I have downloaded but not yet read, and perhaps never will. My 'favourites' include a book on the history of Saudi Arabia and a biography of Eric Cantona...

**3. Eighties pop music.** I am a quintessential child of the 80s, with the entire decade being my rite of passage from primary school to university.



Simone Niblock

Anything by Wham! is guaranteed to perk me up, and A-Ha's 'Take on Me' casts my mind fondly back to a time when backcombed perms were *de rigeur* and my hair reeked of Coconut Hair Gel from the Body Shop.

**4. Pandas.** Pandas are notoriously lazy and seem to have an aversion to the propagation of their own species. However, they are undeniably endearing and, apparently, watching them is very good for calming nerves. This is certainly what CNN believes; it has a thirty-second interlude between programmes called 30 Seconds of Calm, and my favourite is one of pandas chomping on bamboo and falling over each other, in an adorably unself-conscious way.

**5. Trainers and other flat shoes.** Being a girl of the 80s- see above- it is without shame that

I freely admit to possessing vertiginous white stilettos in my time, plus a very fetching pair of pastel pink ones. They have long gone, but I still own dozens of pairs of heels plus wedges, kitten heels and platforms. However, in lockdown, I am very happy to eschew all such vanities, especially as trainers are, according to *The Sunday Times*, the height of fashion: even Chanel and Dior are now making trainers that are a sell out with the *beau monde*. Therefore, across the globe, female feet are sighing with collective relief, and bunion specialists are losing trade quicker than one can say Jimmy Choo.

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Gravin Blackstone



# IN CONVERSATION WITH

Northern Insight talks to...

## GAVIN BLACKSTONE

Bursar at Bootham School, York

### In a sentence, how would you describe the year 2020?

The single most challenging year for businesses in living memory.

### How has the school adapted to the Coronavirus Crisis?

Like all schools we have had to adapt in ways which would have been impossible to predict before the pandemic struck. In order to preserve our high standards of education we needed to be agile in our response and creative in our methods whilst adhering to all the necessary but stringent safety requirements put in place. There have been differing challenges since the first period of lockdown during the last summer term. Whilst we have been able to teach on site we have had to adapt to working in student year group 'bubbles', in zoned areas of the school. Cleaning regimes have been intensive and planned around the school timetable to ensure sanitisation between lessons. The serving of lunches and management of the dining room has been a challenge to ensure social distancing. We have had to provide PPE and detailed guidance for teachers to ensure their safety, altering the layouts of all classrooms to ensure appropriate distancing.

Probably the most significant challenge has been during the times when restrictions have meant the majority of students have not been able to be on site. Our teachers have had to skilfully adapt the way in which lessons are delivered via remote technology and students have had to learn to work at home.

### What are you currently working on?

My main focus at the moment is undertaking detailed planning to ensure the ongoing financial stability and resilience of the school. Like many independent schools and businesses across the country, the pandemic has had a significant financial impact and there will inevitably be challenges arising in some of our key business areas, for example the overseas boarding market. However, we have been able to respond robustly to the many challenges faced to date and are in a good position to continue to do so. At the same time, we are looking strategically to the future and a lot of work is continuing to enhance the school's facilities in key areas such as the completion of our sixth form upgrade and development of our sports pitches. These are exciting and important projects which are a fantastic distraction from the day to day response to Covid!

### What have you learned about yourself this year?

From my experience of juggling working from home with home schooling for my three sons, I have certainly learned that I do not have the patience to be a teacher! More seriously, I have learned that you are only as good as the team around you and I am lucky to work with colleagues who have worked tirelessly to ensure the success of the school in such difficult times.

### What has been your proudest moment in the last 12 months?

The first day of the academic year in September when we successfully re-opened the school after weeks of intense preparations. Everybody felt as safe as possible and seeing our students return on site after being away for what felt a very long time was a joy to behold.

### Which regional businesses have you admired in their responses to the pandemic?

I greatly admire all the local interdependent shops in York and that is why Bootham School is delighted to be the main sponsor of Indie York.

These shops and businesses help give York a unique character which makes it so appealing to all our international boarding families. It has been very difficult to see the devastating impact of the pandemic on many of these independent businesses and I sincerely hope that there is a positive light at the end of the tunnel in the very near future.

### What can the education sector learn from this difficult period?

I think that there are positives that can be taken from new ways of teaching and learning that have been necessarily developed during periods of lockdown. Development of the use of technology in teaching can be built upon and enhanced in the future when we are fully returned to the classroom. Additionally, schools are hugely important communities for students, parents and staff and I believe that our periods of enforced absence will remind us of the real importance of community and togetherness for the future.

### Any New Year hopes or resolutions?

Sadly I have seen many families severely impacted by a dreadful 2020. My hopes and prayers are that they remain positive and 2021 brings far better fortune as the world returns to relative normality as quickly as it can.

### What does the School have planned for 2021?

Operationally, the focus continues to be on providing a seamless education for all our students in such strange times. We are continuing to develop our facilities and a priority is completing the upgrade of all the bedrooms in our boarding houses. Looking to the future we have begun to prepare for the very exciting prospect of Bootham's bi-centenary year in 2023 which will be a time of huge celebration and is something to really look forward to.

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





## AN ETON MESS

The newspapers have over the past few months been, quite under tasty daily, consumed by the twin challenges of COVID and Brexit. However, occupying a good many column inches, and opinion pieces in the broadsheets, has been the saga of the case of the Eton teacher recently dismissed over a talk which he ultimately didn't deliver to pupils at the prestigious school.

For those of you who may have missed it, the issue revolved around an online talk written and presented by Will Knowland, an English teacher at the school, entitled "The Patriarchy Paradox". After concern was raised around its contents, chiefly around some rather eyebrow raising assertions of the roles of men and women in 21st century society, the Headmaster repeatedly asked the teacher to take it down from his YouTube channel; the teacher refused and was subsequently dismissed. Cue a quite extraordinary furore which played out over a couple of months in the newspapers and other journalistic organs.

What is it about this case that merited such attention and reaction? Inevitably, much of the explanation for the response is wrapped up in the word, indeed the concept, of Eton itself. No other school in the country, probably even the world, has such a power to demand attention in such a way; whether it likes it or not, Eton has a brand recognition within the industry something akin to what Manchester United or Coca-cola enjoy in theirs.

The case itself scarcely merits much attention. The talk itself was hardly the intellectual triumph some hailed it as; it is still available to watch on YouTube but, to spare you the time, it is something more likely to be produced by a clever sixth former to provoke a reaction from his classmates than a serious academic work. The school received legal advice that the material contravened elements of the Equality Act; despite this the teacher insisted on keeping the talk online and the rest felt somewhat inevitable. In most schools this would scare let alone have troubled the local newspapers.

But this is Eton, so there is an outcry. A school which has educated so many of the powers that be, an institution which is emblematic of the



Kieran McLaughlin



establishments, a school which educated its pupils in the "effortless superiority" so many of them will need as they glide through their careers in politics, the civil service and the media (sometimes at the same time). For its admirers, it's a school that provides a world-leading education, facilitating the development of our natural leaders and forging the networks they need for their future lives; to its detractors, it is the emblem of privilege and entitlement, which puts mediocre intellects in positions which they would be denied in a properly meritocratic society. Either way, these perceptions of Eton encapsulate an element of British society which is as readily identifiable as cricket on the village green or afternoon tea and in the 21st century, is as anachronistic.

There is no doubt that many of Eton's pupils are hugely privileged by any measure. The assumption that they are all identical, junior versions of, say,


Jacob Rees-Mogg is as outdated as his top hat. Public schools such as Eton are changing and have changed. This isn't because of an outbreak of "wokeism" from trendy teachers who are bringing down the enemy from within; it's because attitudes from our young people and their teachers reflect the values of the world around them. Much of Eton's supposedly woke agenda would not look out of place on any school's PSHE curriculum and it, like many of its fellow public schools, are working hard to widen access to a more diverse range of pupils from more diverse backgrounds. Perhaps it is that which frightens elements of the fourth estate so much.

**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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# THE PERFECT STORM

In his first blog for Northern Insights Magazine, Geoffrey Stanford, Head of the Royal Grammar School Newcastle, reflects on the 'perfect storm' of issues challenging schools and the glimmers of hope ahead.

Much has been written about the multitude of pandemic-related challenges faced by schools, and of course the profound effect that the pressures have had on individuals. From parents juggling professional lives and now also full-time home-schooling; teachers who have quickly had to adapt to educate, motivate and inspire their young charges through a camera lens; and students of all ages who have now experienced remote learning, to greater or lesser extent, for almost a year. The situation is, admittedly, not ideal for anyone but perhaps time will show this most challenging period has created opportunities for us all to learn...

Good teaching and learning involves significant human interaction and developing positive relationships between teachers, pupils and their peers that are most easily formed face to face, in a school environment. Every teacher will know that magical moment when a connection is made, when a young person lights up, enthused by a new concept or idea shared in class. That moment is, undoubtedly, what drove us into teaching. To find the same connection online requires more resourcefulness, innovation and, not least, energy from teachers. I have been tremendously impressed with how RGS staff have relentlessly pursued the delivery of outstanding teaching through a balance of live lessons online and offscreen tasks. I am sure teachers across the region have worked as hard to reach every child, even the most reluctant of learners.

Perhaps most challenging for teachers is the delivery of lessons to those online, whilst simultaneously supporting students at school. At RGS, the demographic of our parents means that almost a third have keyworker status, a consequence of so many working in the NHS. Equally one in 20 of our students attends on a means-tested bursary, many of which are vulnerable and need to attend school. The pandemic has shone a spotlight on the needs of those who are most vulnerable and I hope that a consequence of the pandemic is a greater focus on social mobility. It has certainly redoubled our commitment to finding ways to make even more means-tested bursaries available in order for deserving individuals to access our highly academic education at RGS.

Alongside heroic teachers, I applaud our pupils for developing effective new habits for learning independently. Perhaps a silver lining of this most challenging time is that students are learning new organisational and learning skills which will serve them well for the future. I see our young people organising themselves, planning and managing their time, and taking a greater responsibility for their



learning than was ever required of them. I wonder if this pandemic generation, will be more self-reliant and resilient than any before them.

RGS pupils' written reflections on their experiences that are included in their reports make fascinating reading, demonstrating the resilience that they have shown in recent months. However, one cannot underestimate the mental health effects of the pandemic on young people everywhere. These have been substantial and are going to continue to be challenging for the foreseeable future. I am very proud of the pastoral support that we have been able to provide to our pupils at RGS in helping them get through the challenges they face. For students everywhere maintaining some degree of normality and routine helps in all of this, along with encouraging them to keep up non-academic activities too. This includes participating in co-curricular activities such as musical ensembles that continue practising and recording for broadcast concerts through to engaging in regular sporting activity. While traditional school sports fixtures have not been possible this year, we have continued to encourage pupils to take part in sports competitions and different forms of healthy exercise, even when operating remotely, which has encouraged many pupils who may not have been so engaged with a more traditional diet of team sports.

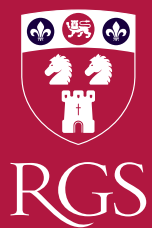
The cancellation of exams and the recent

publication of the Ofqual consultation on how grades should be given in the summer is the next challenge that school leaders will have to wrestle with. In a normal year, grades are determined by examiners and exam boards take responsibility for any appeals. In 2020, the algorithm being discredited and the consequent reversion to centre assessed grades placed schools at the heart of the appeal process. This year it will be important for exam boards properly to moderate the evidence that schools put forward in support of their grade recommendations, and also take responsibility for any appeals that are made. In the absence of this process of standardisation there is likely to be grade inflation that devalues the significant efforts so many young people have been making. This in turn will also put additional pressure on the 2021 UCAS admissions process, that is already stretched by dealing with the deferrals from the 2020 process.

Despite the variety of challenges we all face, it remains a privilege to work with our children who generally continue to be cheerful, enthusiastic and motivated. The rollout of the vaccine provides hope of a return to normality in due course and even the simple fact of daylight getting longer again will lift spirits. I remain optimistic that, as a community, we will work together and not only survive, but thrive, through whatever lies ahead.

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)





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**SCHOOLS  
GUIDE  
2021**

NORTHEAST  
INDEPENDENT  
SECONDARY  
SCHOOL  
OF THE DECADE





## A 21ST CENTURY ICON

The Land Rover Defender has been around in various guises since 1948. The original version was simply called a Land Rover; the word 'Defender' didn't appear until 1991. It was to avoid confusion with the newly launched Land Rover Discovery.

It doesn't really matter what you call it because this serious all-wheel drive, off-road vehicle is an icon. Put it this way, if you need to head off the tarmac into the rough and soggy stuff, none come better than a Land Rover Defender.

It applied to the previous model and it applies to this latest model.

Of course, every Defender will spend most of its life trundling through town traffic, negotiating country lanes, and being a general workhorse. However, the outgoing model was never really suited to fast motorway work or long holiday trips. That is where this brand new Defender really scores.

It's available in either three (short wheelbase) or five door (long wheelbase) guise. All-wheel drive is standard, naturally. For those who need space rather than seats and will probably use the Defender as a workhorse, there is a hard top version. We prefer the five door Defender 110 which has six interior seats. You can get an accessory to match almost every lifestyle. There are approaching 200 options. There are four engine choices...we'd go for the 2.0 litre diesel. There's also 2.0 litre and 3.0 litre petrol engines and you can go for an extremely economical PHEV (plug-in hybrid electric vehicle). The diesel version we tried managed around 33mpg. 0-60 takes 8.7 seconds and there's a top speed of 117mph. Power goes via an 8-speed auto 'box. It's great fun to drive. If you are fortunate enough to be able to have a Defender as a company car, the PHEV model would make sense.

Prices start at £45,600 but, when looking at the competition, bear in mind that this Landy comes fully kitted out. Air suspension is standard on the 110, as is a 3D surround camera, satellite navigation, air con and a host of driving assistance gadgets. One option is 'Advanced Tow Assist' which allows you to reverse a trailer while the Defender takes care of the steering. The interior is really comfy and super stylish. Owners of the old Defender won't recognise a thing.

The latest Defender is a revelation. It manages to stay faithful to the previous model in terms of off-road capability, but is now bang up to date. It merges city chic with the ability to get down and dirty. It will still shrug off the worst that the British weather can throw at it and go places where a mountain goat would think twice.

It will look equally at home outside your favourite restaurant on the Quayside, dropping the kids off at school, ferrying friends and family to the Theatre Royal or reversing a boat into Lake Windermere.

The icon is alive and well.

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







## THE HOLLIES ANNOUNCE AUTUMN 2021 TOUR

Legendary icons of British rock, The Hollies, have announced a huge UK tour for Autumn 2021.

Famed for their soaring, distinctive melodies and brilliantly crafted songs, 'The Road Is Long' UK Tour will see the band perform their best-known hits including 'He Ain't Heavy, He's My Brother', 'The Air That I Breathe' and 'Sorry Suzanne'.

Starting at the Aberdeen Music Hall on Sunday 19th September, the tour will take in a further 21 venues around the country including a night at Newcastle O2 City Hall on 21st September.

Celebrated as one of the most influential bands from the 1960s British Invasion era alongside the likes of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the Hollies have had over 20 world-wide hits, including number one singles in both the US and UK.

Tickets are available from [ticketmaster.com](https://www.ticketmaster.com) or venue box offices, with VIP packages also available.



## LOCAL DANCE SCHOOL KEEPS CHILDREN LEARNING WITH FREE ONLINE CLASSES

Tiny Toes Ballet, which holds children's dance classes in Newcastle, is offering all children free online classes to help support parents and teachers who are home schooling due to lockdown. Its eight-week course of classes combines drama, dance, cookery and more, and is aimed at children aged seven and under.

The Free Lockdown Programme provides online weekly activities including Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) activities. Tiny Toes Ballet is the UK's first pre-school ballet programme to be fully integrated with the Early Years Foundation Stage curriculum.

Kathryn O'Neill, who runs the Newcastle Tiny Toes Ballet franchise, said: "Every week we'll provide a dance class, a role play and drama class and a practical learning activity, including arts and crafts and cooking classes from Cook Stars. The resources also come with a downloadable activity and a parental letter to explain the purpose of each weekly programme."



## BLOWIN' A HOOLEY'S HURRICANE FORCE PLANS FOR 2021

With two back-to-back regional tours originally booked March - July 2020, Blowin' A Hooley theatre company have spent much of their time planning and strategising how and when their theatre work can recommence since their rehearsals were cancelled during the first lockdown.

The company's military theatre project, 'Notice to Move', has been in development since 2018 which has seen the company working with North East armed forces veterans and organisations to create a play based on their experiences. Scheduled to tour barracks, community venues and theatres, 'Notice to Move' tells the story of six soldiers about to be deployed.

With support from Arts Council, Armed Forces Covenant Fund, Sunday for Sammy, Trusthouse Charitable, Cedarwood Trust and Northumberland Widows Sons & Reivers, Blowin' A Hooley are finally looking forward to continuing their work with local veterans and service personnel to share 'Notice to Move' with North East audiences in 2021-2022.

To find out more and follow their progress, visit [www.hooleytheatre.com](https://www.hooleytheatre.com) and Hooley Theatre on Facebook.

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# MEET THE ARTIST

## KIERAN FLITTON

Voice-over artist

### Why did you decide to pursue a career in voice acting?

My earliest memories are video games, and anime. I spent Summer Breaks absorbed in Final Fantasy, Chrono Trigger, and the Secret of Evermore. Watching Heero Yuy tear up Relena Peacecraft's letter, seeing Lucy battle with her trauma and aspirations, or Kei Kusanagi blunder into romance with a cicada chorus.

This was MY Shakespeare. And it turns out that these characters weren't brought to life on a stage, or on a film set. They came to life in studios and recording booths. Voice acting is my bifrost. It takes me to other realms. And I knew I wanted to go there since before I knew anything else.

### How have you adapted to working through the pandemic?

The pandemic introduced challenges for sure. It threw all our plans out of the window for a while. I was set to head to LA, before the world started isolating itself. Some dreams were shuffled a little further down the board, like an ever moving goal post. But, every cloud has a silver lining. The infrastructure of the industry changed to accommodate remote recording, and some of the best opportunities I've had came from this chaos. Studio work shifted to home studio, and location became a secondary thought as production houses start to introduce software for remote performance. My career hasn't slowed down. I think life isn't always just bad, or just good. There's always a balance.

### What are you currently working on?

I just wrapped an anime that is releasing every Sunday. That was incredible. I was able to cover so much range with the character - cool, goofy, angry, and funny! I'm also always working on several audiobooks at any given time. There's a few games I'm working on - RTS, RPG, and VN. Not to mention the great character voices I get to do for children's media.

### What do you most enjoy about your work?

The characters. Their feelings. The relationships. They're so real. To me, and to the audience. Acting is not fake. It's almost truer than reality. Digging deep to bring out those vast depths of joy, pain, and anger? To convey falling in love, or express loss? In reality we're kind of encouraged from an early age to mute ourselves and not cause a scene. My work allows me to become, and feel, in the greatest quantities.

### What is the most challenging aspect?

Time, and patience. Acting is a numbers game. It's less about getting a perfect hit every time, and



Kieran Flitton

more about swinging away as much as you can. There are challenges linked to geography that only movement can cross. It's a profession that requires a lot of you. And you have to be prepared to give that. To move where you're needed. To invest the time. It's not a sure path for those without strong conviction and the ability to sacrifice.

### What is your proudest career moment so far?

Oh, voicing Yota Murakami in the show Gleipnir, for sure! Yota is near and dear to my heart as a character. He's this cool guy with an easy smile, but an abyss of anger and abandonment in him. Voice acting allows you to be anything - but there's something magical in playing close to the sleeve. Yota was my first significant character role in an anime, and the experience I had recording for him - the collaboration with my director, the INCREDIBLE Amber Lee Connors, was priceless. We really plumbed the depth of expression as a team.

### Do you think the North East offers a good platform for voice artists?

There is a certain "character" the North East produces. Our voices are the voices of grit and honesty. We're the blunt truth. And that's always been a valuable sound, whether you're selling life insurance, or portraying a wayward prince of a northern kingdom. I think the people who come from the north are primed for acting. And we've seen that in some of the best character actors

of the small screen! We're more often than not, bombastic, and not afraid to express. Terrific clay. Though I doubt many people know this is a valid career path. You kind of have to find it yourself. I hope more people do.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

Cloud Strife, Trowa Barton, Yukito Kunisaki, and Heathcliff, to name a few. These are the people that taught me about perseverance, and myself. That there are different kinds of strength. As an actor I've always tried to go my own way. Characters are what guide me. And there is a truth in them, that's often louder than the whispered reality.

### Where do you hope to be in five years time?

In Los Angeles, California. Sharing an apartment with good friends and peers. Working for some of the best and greatest studios and franchises there. In transformative video game, animation, and commercial projects. It's where all my opportunities are pulling me, and it's a place I've always felt a connection to. Fortunately, I have a compass now, pointing the way there.

### How do you like to unwind?

Give me a Visual Novel, an RPG, a good book, or maybe a Ghibli movie? Some quiet time to sit and watch the world. To connect with media that inspires me, and reminds me what it's all about.

[kieranflitton.com](http://kieranflitton.com)





## LIFE IS RETURNING TO A SIMILAR RHYTHM

By Mary Ann Rogers

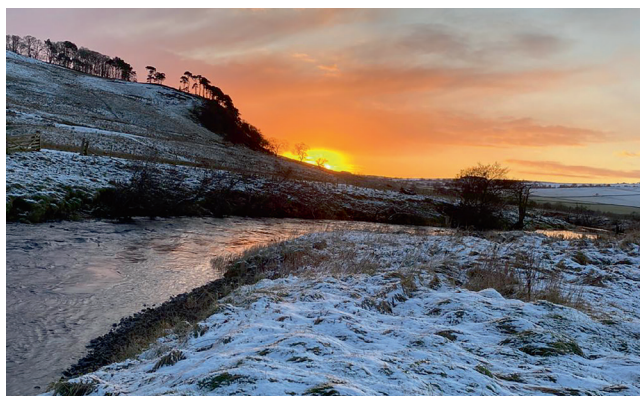
Its feeling a bit like groundhog day round here. Another year with the dark cloud of a pandemic sitting firmly over the country, bringing uncertainty, fear and sadness. The vaccine means that there does indeed seem to be an end in sight, which is hopeful.

In a normal year, we would be in the throes of designing the catalogue to take to 'Spring Fair' – the biggest international trade show of the year, and the main opportunity to catch up with our customers with galleries, shops and venues and create new partnerships. We also meticulously design the layout of the stand, all the tools and props for the 'build', so that when we turn up at the National Exhibition Centre at Birmingham, everything runs as smoothly as possible.

Here at Mary Ann Rogers Gallery everyone is heaving a big sigh of relief after the busiest pre-Christmas season ever. Things have been very different this year, and our usual rush of visitors in the month before Christmas was reduced to a trickle - even after restrictions were lifted in December, allowing us to welcome visitors into the gallery.







We had expected this, and decided to focus our efforts towards online sales, and upgraded the mail order catalogue, giving much more space for photographs of prints, gifts etc and plenty of clear description and pricing. This plan paid off, and we found ourselves working 12 hour days for the eight weeks before Christmas, with extra staff working outside normal hours to keep on top of the orders.

One of the most valuable relationships we have is with our shipping agent, who offers us a range of services and prices to suit every item. Along with Royal Mail, this ensured that everything from framed original paintings to teapots reached their destinations safely, and in one piece, whether it was to Belgium or Belfast.

When Christmas day finally arrived, and family doing their own thing this year, the long-suffering Fifey (husband) and I took sandwiches and a flask in a rucksack and set off for a snowy walk from home up into the hills beyond East Woodburn to find a cairn on top of a hill, where a little carved stone can be found with the date of Queen Victoria's Jubilee, and details of the bonfire lit to celebrate this event. A very alternative Christmas, and a welcome change from the usual feasting, bordering on gluttony!

The conditions since Christmas have been perfect for indulging in almost daily river swims, with excitement rising as the temperature plummeted to a recent low of minus 11, and ice covered the water. This created perfect conditions for axe wielding maniacs to hack out channels for swimming in super low temperatures. Not everyone's cup of tea though!

Life is returning to a similar rhythm to the first lockdown now that the festive frenzy is just a memory....painting, live interactive facebook videos, more painting, long walks/river swims and repeat!

[www.marogers.com](http://www.marogers.com)  
01434 270216





Karen Goldfinch



# CULTURE CLUB

In a new series of features, we learn more about the North East business community's varied cultural tastes.

## KAREN GOLDFINCH

Chair of North Tyneside Business Forum

She runs two successful businesses, an events management company and a consultancy, Karen Goldfinch - Your Business Pilot.

### Who is your favourite author and why?

**Ann Cleeves.** As a fellow Whitley Bay resident, the work Ann has done to raise the profile of our region has been amazing. Adapting her Vera books for TV has brought her passion for the area to everyone showcasing our fabulous coastline, countryside and towns.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

**Faithless, Insomnia** - for when you need a boost as this always gets me motivated.

**At Last, Etta James** - my wind down choice and always calming.

**David Bowie, Let's Dance** - I have to join in with it.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

**Doris Day.** I'm thinking back to me as a little girl watching films on a weekend. I loved the fun, happy go lucky characters she played all with a little bit of attitude. Her songs were probably the first ones I remember singing along to like 'Don't eat the daisy's', or 'The Deadwood Stage'.

### What are your top three films?

**Top Gun.** I'm an 80's girl, so the music, styling, fashion, the bikes and the story were all aspirational to me as a teenager. Perhaps this has influenced me now, with Karen Goldfinch - Your Business Pilot.

**I Daniel Blake.** It's an honest, hard hitting, gritty film, upsetting and unsettling at times but the kind of film you come away from still thinking about it days, weeks and months later.

**Jurassic Park.** Not necessarily for the films themselves but for the part they've played in our family. With two boys aged 16 and 29 this series of films have been part of our family since the original film came out.

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

Scott Tyrell's **Round Here**, a tribute about the North East of England written for Sunday for Sammy. It has and I think always will have a lasting impression on me. I first came across Scott whilst working on an event together, and hearing his poems read out at Newcastle Cathedral changed the way I look at poetry.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

I don't watch many box sets as I prefer to watch music documentaries or concerts, the latest being Peter Gabriel, Johnny Cash, Ella Fitzgerald and Ian Dury. My music choice is quite diverse so there's always something to find.

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Having a diverse mix of musical tastes there's a lot to think about. From a performance point of view Pink is quite something, theatrical, daring and able to deliver her vocals at the same time. I could also watch Muddy Waters, Eric Clapton or Lindsey Buckingham in his Fleetwood Mac days playing guitar all day long.

### What is your favourite venue?

**Newcastle City Hall.** I've had the pleasure of being involved with events here as I work with Sunday for Sammy, so this place will always be special to me. The history of the venue is fantastic, an enormous list of big names that come here to perform over the years, from Count Bassie to AC-DC, Lindisfarne and of course Sunday for Sammy, it's a place that's special for so many of us in the North East.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I'm lucky in that I've played many different instruments over the years, keyboards, guitar, drums and some orchestral instruments from my school days. I'm torn between guitar or drums, they both make a huge difference to a piece of music and are equally versatile.

### From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

**Ella Fitzgerald, Stephen Fry, Marilyn Monroe and David Bowie.** All fascinating characters in their own right, with interesting history and upbringing yet have all reached great heights, no matter what has stood in their way.

“  
...my music choice is quite  
diverse so there's always  
something to find...  
”





## NEW TRADER SQUEEZES INTO STACK

STACK Seaburn have announced So Smooth Co. as the latest trader to snap up one of their shipping container units, who hope to delight customers with their smoothie and juice bar, whilst also offering a health and wellbeing hub for all ages.

So Smooth Co. is the brainchild of Callum Christie and Glen Watson whose goal is to help everyone achieve a better positive life balance. Their smoothies and other products are blended using all-natural ingredients and contain zero additives or sugars.

The business also has plans to work alongside community sports, fitness and health clubs to provide a wellbeing hub in a location that is popular for outdoor exercise and activities.

STACK Seaburn is currently closed under the current lockdown but many of its tenants are still open for click & collect and delivery. So Smooth Co. plan to open as soon as they have completed their fit out.



## SUSHI BAR ROLLS INTO WHITLEY BAY

A new concept in Japanese sushi dining is set to launch in Whitley Bay after planning has been given the green light from North Tyneside Council.

Successful North East Sushi Bar Sushi Me Rollin', currently located at Newcastle's STACK complex, is to open a second outlet on Station Road to meet its growing demand.

Rolled fresh to order, Sushi Me Rollin' was forced to close its doors due to the pandemic last March but with advice from Robson Laidler Business Advisors, it pivoted its business model to offer a takeaway service.

Bringing two new jobs to the area, the new sushi bar is expected to open its doors as a takeaway service in March. It will feature a secret garden for diners to enjoy its handcrafted food alfresco and once government restrictions are lifted, there will be room for 8-12 people to eat indoors.



## NEW £2M ROOFTOP BAR AND RESTAURANT FOR NEWCASTLE

Pictures have recently been unveiled for a new £2m rooftop bar and restaurant in Newcastle city centre. Named ABOVE, the venue is set to wow customers when it opens later this year.

Situated on the roof of the renowned Vermont Hotel, ABOVE will offer an experience unlike anything in the UK with 360-degree views of the city and stunning interior design. The venue

will cater for various events including weddings, private parties and corporate gatherings. ABOVE will also be adaptable to all weather conditions with the construction of a unique retractable glass roof.

The venue is owned by Gainford Group, who manage the Vermont Hotel as well as other well-known regional brands including Aveika and Livello.

Gainford Group hope that the venue will be ready for visitors once lockdown restrictions have been lifted. The venue will also contribute to the region's economy with the creation of 50 jobs.

## RESTAURANT FUSES THE FAR EAST AND THE NORTH EAST

Diners craving a taste of Asia can enjoy their favourite food in the comfort of their own home, thanks to a new initiative from a leading North East venue.

The pan-Asian fusion restaurant at County Durham's Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa has launched a home delivery, Fusion to Go, service.

Locked down food lovers can now access a whole menu of curries, salads, bento boxes and appetisers at the click of a button. Choices from the restaurant include a wide range of starters like Vietnamese duck spring rolls and steamed dim sum, as well as main courses including bang bang chicken and pad Thai. There is also a wide choice of vegetarian dishes.

In addition, a traditional Sunday lunch collection service is being offered by Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa's sister venue, Bowburn Hall Hotel.

# THE HARBOUR VIEW



## Trip Advisor's Best Fish and Chips in the North of England

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH

Michael Grahamslaw talks about life, lockdown and future plans with...

## MARGARET LIVINGSTONE EVANS

Executive General Manager,  
Langley Castle Hotel

### Describe in one word 2020?

Challenging!

Undoubtedly the most difficult year of my career although things did end on a lovely high with the birth of our first Grandchild!

### Prior to the current lockdown how had the Hotel adapted to working through the threat of Covid 19?

When we reopened in July we experienced record occupancy with many people visiting the Castle for the first time and discovering the delights of Tyne Valley and Northumberland. With full Covid measures in place guests felt safe and comfortable. We took payment prior to arrival to minimise reception contact and dinner orders could be placed from bedrooms which customers seemed to really appreciate as well as many other covid tweaks.

### How have you adapted to remote working?

I still visit the castle for security purposes but when at home have enjoyed learning new skills. The most important thing at this time has been



Margaret Livingstone Evans



to keep up the morale of the team and ensure no negativity as we will eventually get through this and come out stronger for the experience.

### What have you learned about yourself through this year?

I pride myself on being a people person and a massive part of what I enjoy has been taken away. However I suppose I have been forced to be adaptable and learn to do things despite constraints. When we reopened we did incredibly well. We put together an unbelievable marketing report which gained mention in 260 newspapers and even garnered Government recognition. I was very proud that both Langley Castle and Northumberland were portrayed in such a positive way, it was mentioned by a number of our guests particularly those from the South of England.

Lockdown has also given me the opportunity to create 'Bubble Weddings' which have proved very successful in the current climate.

### Is there anything the hospitality sector can learn from this period?

Not to take anything for granted and how fragile society is. I am extremely proud of how quickly hospitality as whole adapted and changed in many different ways as and when required. I do



think we will see a boom in leisure and tourism when we get to the other side of the pandemic and it is important to retain positivity in the meantime.

### Any New Year hopes or resolutions?

Only that I get to see our new Granddaughter and that that our daughters wedding at the Castle goes ahead in May.

### Assuming we return to normality what have you got planned?

We are very busy finding new dates for those with existing weddings and 2022 is shaping up to be an enormous year. We have also invested in four private domes for the grounds which can be utilised when we reopen for afternoon teas. We can even recreate Christmas if people want us to. We are also developing new street food menus which can be used for a variety of events. On a lighter note I have also been developing stories for a podcast for the younger generation on our own "Langley Bear" which has been great fun. Despite the current lockdown it's certainly enough to keep us busy in anticipation of a more positive second half of the year.

For more information visit the website  
[www.langleycastle.com](http://www.langleycastle.com)





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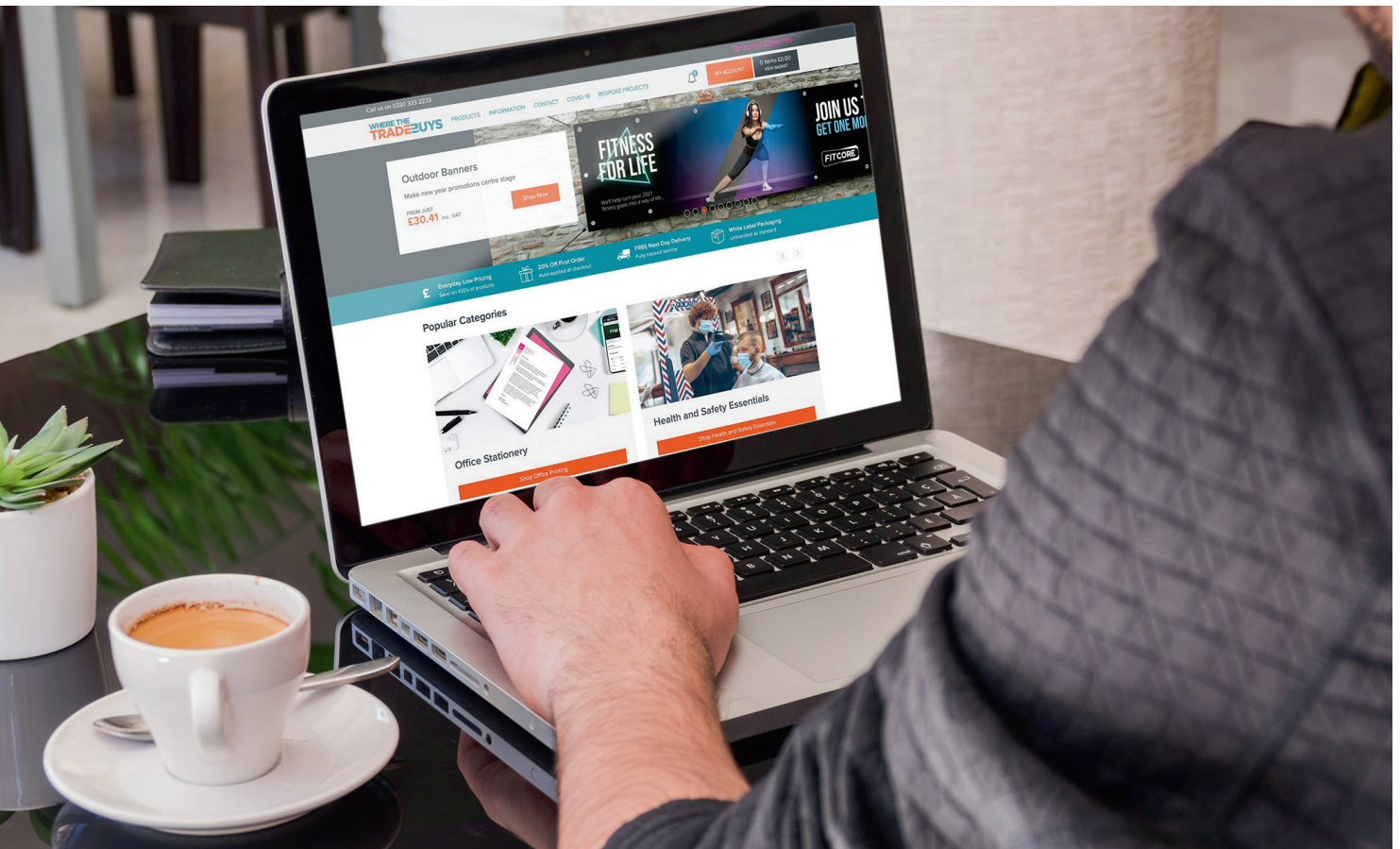
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## WHERE THE TRADE BUYS

There's never been a more important time for businesses to keep themselves front of mind with their customers. North East online print portal, Where The Trade Buys, has some top tips about how to survive in these tough times...

**It's no surprise that 2020 was one of the worst years for many businesses, trying to keep their heads above water in the face of the spectre of Covid-19.**

Constant closures for retail and hospitality, the tier system and lockdowns – all had a huge impact on the economy.

They're just some of the reasons why finding ways to stay in touch with existing customers – and winning new ones – is vital to any organisation which is looking to the future.

And it's at the heart of a number of initiatives created by online print portal, Where The Trade Buys.

The company, which has a base in Sunderland and in Dagenham, has blazed a trail throughout the past year with a whole range of products and services designed to help businesses through the toughest of times.

From introducing a split delivery system so that customers can easily have products sent to a whole host of addresses to some much-needed fun items like two metre long Christmas crackers, WTTB has earned its place as one of the UK's leading print organisations.

Mindful of the on-going challenges that businesses are facing, the company's latest innovation is offering targeted door drop marketing campaigns

so that information can be tailored to hit the most receptive audience.

Gary Peeling, CEO of Where The Trade Buys, believes this is an invaluable tool in helping to raise awareness and – more importantly – translating that awareness into sales.

"Door drop campaigns offer a unique opportunity to deliver a hard-hitting message and call to action directly to a customer's home," he said.

"It's cost effective and is a method of marketing that makes an instant impression, rapid response and also builds brand exposure."

Gone are the days when door drop marketing was all about shoving a leaflet randomly through a letter box.

WTTB has a scientific approach, using its data management tools to target a specific geographical area or to hit a particular demographic.

It's a valuable way to ensure that marketing spend hits the mark and hits the right audience for whatever a business wants to offer.

Gary also advises companies to think beyond just using social media to promote their products and services.

"It's worth remembering that there are lots of people out there who don't use social media, plus

the fact that it's such an overcrowded market that your message can get lost," he said. "There's a huge number of offline customers and businesses should not forget using some more traditional forms of marketing to engage them."

The majority of shops may not be open – but that doesn't mean that their owners can't use their shop windows to place posters or notices with information, particularly if people can order over the phone or there's a click and collect option.

Flyers and leaflets can still be distributed – perhaps something friends or family can post through letterboxes on their daily exercise.

There's never been a more important time to be inventive, look to the future and encourage people to engage.

"Keeping the local economy thriving is certainly more important than ever," said Gary.

"While small business owners will have to work much harder in order to secure those all-important clients and customers during the lockdown period, it can be done – and doing it properly could mean that your business comes back bigger and better than ever once the restrictions are lifted."

**For further information on all products and services visit [www.wherethetradebuys.co.uk](http://www.wherethetradebuys.co.uk)**



# A LITTLE TASTE OF ITALY

By Jackie Marston

I can't say I'm much of a pizza lover to be honest, but after a Facebook post caught my eye, with authentic looking Italian-style pizzas, I thought, wow, they look amazing.

None of that greasy, dripping with cheese, thick, soggy bottom chip-shop style pizzas for this place, these ones looked thin, crispy, authentic and just like the ones hubby and I had in Rome, so we decided to give them a try. The place is called Sugar and Slice and is based at Park View in Whitley Bay.

We placed our order the day before and told them we'd be collecting, although they do offer delivery. As I waited for them to be finished off, the owner, Anthony told me that he runs the place and makes all the pizzas himself, by hand. Very impressive so far. The ingredients he told me he sources as many locally as he can, but he also imports some specifically from Sicily, as it's authenticity is so important to him.

I ordered the Fitzeroni, which is pepperoni, nduja (a spreadable pork from Italy), cherry peppers, buffalo mozzarella, burrata, san Marzano tomatoes, haberna flakes finished off with chilli infused oil. There wasn't an inch of this pizza that wasn't covered in pepperoni and the smell was off the scale. The car journey home was the longest in history and I couldn't wait to tuck in. Rich ordered Colony, which is buffalo mozzarella, pepperoni, sea salt flakes, san Marzano tomatoes, chilli infused maple and chilli flakes. Sides were Maldon sea salt flakes on hand cut wedged chips and a garlic bread, which came with truffle oil on it. There were three dips served with these as we couldn't choose just one, miso garlic and rosemary aioli, fermented chilli aioli and smoked garlic aioli.

I never thought it would be possible to get a take-away that tasted as good as what we ate in Italy, but oh boy these were amazing. Chips, perfectly salted and the dips gave you a different taste explosion with every mouthful. The garlic bread was no-ordinary garlic bread either – it oozed butter and truffle oil, but still remained crispy on the bottom. The pizzas however took on a life of their own, they were packed full of flavour. There was far too much food for just the



two of us, so we enlisted the help of our grown-up children who polished off the remainder.

They also serve a selection of desserts, so we had one between us. We chose the cinnamon infused dough with 70% Becolade noir chocolate and roasted pecan nuts. This is served hot and is amazing. We served it with ice cream and the combination was a dessert to die for. Very rich, creamy and the crunchy nuts complemented it perfectly.

As I mentioned earlier, this is no ordinary pizza place, with its stone-built pizza oven, it's a paradise for pizza-lovers everywhere. If you like authenticity in your food, this is one place you should definitely consider.

**Sugar & Slice – 133 Park View, Whitley Bay, NE26 3RG**  
0191 253 7831 [www.sugarandslice.co.uk](http://www.sugarandslice.co.uk)



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Michelle Jones

## BE KIND TO OTHERS TO BE KIND TO YOURSELF

Kindness is our secret weapon to a healthy and happy existence; I know this for a fact!

**I have managed chronic physical and mental illness all my adult life and although, yes, I do need medical treatment and support, in equal measure it has been my charity and voluntary work that has had an incredible impact on my overall wellbeing, health and lifestyle.**

It was with this understanding I imagined, well, day-dreamed for quite some time about creating a community business that would harness kindness with all its power, to create an impact on a huge scale. An impact on people, on businesses, on charities, on the economy, on communities, on the environment; on the whole of society.

Did you know, however, that there are proven scientific benefits of being kind?

Kindness increases self-esteem, empathy, and compassion, and improves mood. It can decrease blood pressure and cortisol, which directly impacts stress levels. Acts of kindness produce endorphins, the brain's natural painkiller, which improves aches and pains. People who give themselves in a balanced way also tend to be healthier and live longer. Happy soul, happy heart, happy life so to speak.

Even just witnessing kindness produces oxytocin, known as the 'love hormone'. You know that gorgeous warm fuzzy feeling of love, kindness releases that hormone. We cannot give out hugs at

the moment but can share kindness, who doesn't want to feel warm and fuzzy? It helps social anxiety and boosts optimism too.

Harvard studies have shown that those who are altruistic, feel stronger and more energetic after helping others as well as feeling calmer and less depressed, increasing self-worth and overall, are happier.

Kindness stimulates the production of Serotonin, the feel-good chemical which heals, calms, and makes you happy. Anti-depressants also produce Serotonin hence their significance in the treatment of mental health illnesses. I was initially prescribed anti-depressants for a couple of years for the treatment of Agoraphobia and OCD as a young adult and again due to suffering hormonal imbalances linked to Endometriosis, so I understand whole-heartedly the impact of Serotonin. Kindness provides it in abundance. Personally, I have benefited from the natural production of Serotonin through being consciously kind by volunteering and helping others, it has had a significant impact on my ability to manage my illnesses, positively improving the quality of my life.

I have experienced the phenomenon 'Helpers High' so many times, it actually becomes quite addictive. The act of being kind to another person lights up your brains pleasure and rewards centre, fireworks

of pleasures going crazy. It is almost like you are the one receiving the kind deed. Both individuals, the giver and receiver feel an equal positivity that is just so, well, awesome, you both feel awesome.

Author of 'Raising Happiness' Christine Carter found "People who volunteer tend to experience fewer aches and pains. Giving help to others protects overall health twice as much as aspirin protects against heart disease. People 55 and older who volunteer for two or more organisations have an impressive 44% lower likelihood of dying early, and that is after sifting out every other contributing factor, including physical health, exercise, gender, habits like smoking, marital status and many more. This is a stronger effect than exercising four times a week or going to church."

Isn't it a shame kindness can't be prescribed! But I am optimistic that the community business I am developing will deliver much opportunity to give and receive much kindness, I want to dish it out like confetti.

When we give ourselves, everything from life is significantly improved. Be kind to you!

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# LUXURY MADE-TO-MEASURE BOUTIQUE OPENS IN DURHAM, LOCKDOWN TWO DAYS LATER



Durham-born Jack Smith has finally opened his first menswear and tailoring boutique, Walton and Sutherland, following a successful number of years offering a travelling tailoring service, only to be forced to close just two days later, following the latest Covid Restrictions.

**Walton and Sutherland opened their new modern-contemporary boutique, in a new and exciting location, Ushaw Historic House and Gardens, Durham on Tuesday 29th December following three unsuccessful attempts from March 2020 onwards.**

Originally built in the 1800's Ushaw House is filled with historic architecture and surrounded by ornate chapels and gardens, in-fitting with Walton and Sutherland's luxury concept.

Jack Smith, owner of Walton and Sutherland, recognised the importance of continuing the company's Durham heritage, which is so personal to the brand's image, while in keeping with its stylish take on menswear.

The boutique's new concept offers an exclusive by-appointment-only experience, which enables guests to browse the latest collections and enjoy a personal service for their made-to-measure experience, guided the whole way by one of Walton and Sutherland's experienced tailors and stylists.

Owner, Jack Smith, said; "After a difficult year for everyone, and plenty of challenges for ourselves, we were delighted to finally be able to welcome existing and new customers in-store. To say we're devastated that after just two days, and seeing our customers during that time, we're having to close is an understatement. We've been positive all the way through and although this is our third attempt at opening, we were all still in very good spirits and look forward to welcoming our loyal clientele after this Tier 4 lockdown has ended.

The boutique, which has been unable to open due to the on-going pandemic, has undergone many months of design, investment and help from friends and family, to create an inspirational, luxury space, within the heart of Durham.



Jack concluded: "Although we are temporarily closed, like many other businesses, we will not be beaten and will be soon back offering our bespoke service soon."

Walton & Sutherland, located at Ushaw Historic House and Gardens, in Durham, is now open for appointments.

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# NORTH EAST OPHTHALMOLOGISTS INVEST IN PATIENT EXPERIENCE



Consultant Eye Surgeons Partnership (CESP) North East has invested in specialist equipment to further enhance and streamline cataract patients' experience at a Newcastle hospital.

**A trio of Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital ophthalmologists, Dr Nicholas Strong, Dr Ayad Shafiq, and Dr Krishnamoorthy Narayanan, the three partners in North East's CESP, recently invested in a high-tech Yttrium Aluminium Garnet (YAG) laser costing over £30,000.**

Cataract surgery is the most commonly performed operation in the UK, each year around 400,000 operations take place in England. Following surgery approximately 5 to 10% of all patients will develop posterior capsular opacification (PCO). PCO occurs as scar tissue develops behind the replacement lens, resulting in cloudy, deteriorating eyesight once again.

PCO can be corrected easily by a YAG laser capsulotomy, a simple and painless outpatient procedure in which the laser creates a gap in the cloudy tissue. YAG capsulotomy results in the restoration of eyesight to its previous level, almost immediately.

Prior to the pandemic, Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital would refer those needing the YAG laser procedure to a neighbouring hospital, as the site did not have its own laser. This process used to work well and wait times were minimal but due to the ongoing pandemic, waitlists have increased and the equipment has become harder to access.

Now that the hospital has its own YAG Laser it is possible for patients to be seen and treated in a single visit, often within 10 days of referral. Dr Strong explained: "Losing your eyesight for any reason is a huge handicap. Many patients who develop PCO are unable to read, go outside or drive because of their poor eyesight.

"Patients can find having to wait for further surgery incredibly frustrating and difficult. Many struggle coming to terms with the loss of their



eyesight once again, especially as PCO is so easily treated.

"What's important for those who develop PCO, is the ability to correct it and restore vision quickly and this is what influenced us to purchase the YAG laser. Now we have everything under one roof and we are able to see, assess and treat our patients in a single visit.

"This avoids the need for patients to make multiple visits, to different hospitals and means they don't have to wait for extended periods of time. There is essentially no waiting time and all patients are being offered a date within two weeks."

Cataracts can affect people of all ages, but are often associated primarily with people of retirement age. It's estimated that 2.5 million people aged 65 and over in England and Wales have some form of visual impairment caused by cataracts\*. Pressure on NHS services due to the pandemic has meant that waiting times for cataract surgery and laser treatment of PCO have gone up dramatically. Many are now deciding to use their health insurance or to pay as they go in order to access treatment as quickly as possible.

Despite the pandemic, patients are still able to visit Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital for cataract and YAG laser procedures. The hospital is following government guidelines, has implemented their own safety measures and is a Covid-19-free-site. CESP emphasise that they are doing everything they can to keep patients and the hospital safe.

When a patient books a YAG laser appointment, they're sent eyedrops which they can administer themselves prior to the procedure. Previously patients would have the drops administered on site and would be sent to a waiting zone whilst their eye/eyes dilate. The new process means patients are now seen, assessed and treated in a single visit to one consultation room.

Patients and those considering surgery at Nuffield Health Newcastle are being asked to report to the reception desk on arrival and that they do so only 5-10 minutes before their designated appointment. This way the hospital is able to minimise how many people are on site at one time, keep track of where everyone is and ensure that social distancing is adhered to at all times.

Consultant Eye Surgeons Partnership North East is a partnership of ophthalmologists based in Newcastle, with over 50 years of experience as NHS consultants between them. The partnership collectively performs over 1,000 cataract operations per year at Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital.

**For more information on CESP, Nuffield Health Newcastle, cataract surgery and COP visit:**  
[www.cataractsurgeonsnewcastle.com](http://www.cataractsurgeonsnewcastle.com) and/or  
[www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/newcastle-upon-tyne/treatments/cataract-surgery](http://www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/newcastle-upon-tyne/treatments/cataract-surgery).





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Nuffield Health Tees Hospital Director Steve Sharp

## HOSPITAL DIRECTOR LOOKS AHEAD

Following a year unlike any other, a North East hospital director reflects upon staff and community efforts, as well as a new way of working.

**At the beginning of the pandemic, Nuffield Health Tees Hospital, along with 31 other Nuffield sites, began talks with local NHS Trusts, to explore how independent hospitals could support the NHS through the coronavirus outbreak.**

Nuffield Health Tees Hospital worked closely with the North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Trust, as well as the South Tees Hospitals NHS Trust, primarily The James Cook University Hospital, to better understand areas of care needing additional support. It was decided that non-Covid NHS patients would use the Stockton-on-Tees based hospital to proceed with and continue scheduled treatment.

Nuffield Health, the UK's largest healthcare charity, also made the decision to offer the NHS further support through use of its clinicians, support services and clinical equipment. For the first time, the independent sector reallocated almost its entire national hospital capacity to the NHS.

The move enabled local NHS Trusts to shift their focus to the treatment and care of Covid-19 patients. Due to the site's use, Nuffield Health Tees Hospital was unable to treat or see many

existing patients, self-paying patients or those wishing to access services through health insurance.

Steve Sharp, Nuffield Health Tees Hospital director, explained: "Although we were unable to offer our services to those wishing to pay and to those using health insurance for a number of months in the first half of the year, the reaction we received from the local community was very understanding and supportive.

"We received news in July that we'd be able to offer elective care to all patients, but this didn't mean an end to our work with the NHS, we continued to support them through the use of our site and services. As we move forward through 2021, we will work with the NHS to tackle waitlists.

"This isn't the first time we've worked in conjunction with the NHS as the NHS has always used private companies, as well as voluntary organisations and social enterprises, to deliver its services. However, this is the first time we've given the NHS such a high proportion of our theatre capacity which was a completely new way of working for our staff.

"We really have been blown away by everyone's determination to combat Covid-19, our staff stepped up and completed additional training where needed, in order to deliver much needed NHS procedures. The hospital site has remained very positive and connected and even on the most challenging of days, staff were actively supporting one another and keeping spirits high.

"We normally get involved with many local causes and complete fundraising events such as the Great North Run, which was understandably cancelled last year. This didn't deter us, we looked to support our surrounding communities in different ways including food donations.

"Businesses and causes across the North East stepped up to support us through kind gestures such as the production and delivery of scrubs bags, which helped keep scrubs contained, easier to transport and clean. With the roll out of a Covid-19 vaccine, we're hoping for an overall smoother year in which we can interact freely with our families and friends."

**To find out more about Nuffield Health Tees Hospital, visit: [www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/tees](http://www.nuffieldhealth.com/hospitals/tees).**



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## EXERCISE REALLY IS THE PERFECT TONIC

Exercise your way through Lockdown 3 to make you feel happier and increase your energy levels.

**The monotony of your day to day routine and not being unable to have any contact with anyone outside your bubble can sometimes leave you feeling deflated and listless.**

On days like this, where energy seems low, the last thing you want to do is exercise, but this is exactly the time you should be and getting a boost of the feel good chemical, that makes you happier.

When you workout and stay active on a regular basis, it's not just a coincidence that you feel less stressed, less anxious and generally happier....

I have many clients who train before big events in order to feel more positive, alert, happier and need a quick confidence boost, here are just a few other examples that can help you through Lockdown 3:

**School** - Children who train in the morning, especially at the moment, mean they are much more alert and ready for their day, especially as they get no stimulation from other children.

**Mentality** - If you are going through a difficult time eg a relative is ill, training helps keep you mentally strong and therefore able to deal with situations much easier.

**Insomnia** - Training helps regulate sleeping patterns, this is a common issue at the moment as many of you are out of your normal routine.

**Stress** - The pandemic has caused huge amounts of stress and anxiety from all angles, training during these times will help to alleviate stress and keep you feeling positive.



David Fairlamb

**Morning Training** - Many businessmen and women like to train first thing in the morning because they know they are much more efficient throughout the rest of the day.

**Just do it** - Exercising during the pandemic will give you a real sense of well-being, achievement and self-worth.

Those who do exercise regularly know how big a part it plays both physically and mentally in every aspect of their life.

Give yourself a big endorphin boost by exercising, you may have forgotten how good you can actually feel.

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## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*Exercise evokes more initiative, more energy and more happiness*



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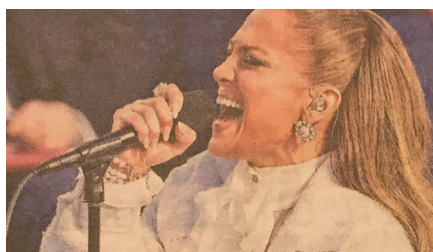
COMMENT WITH...

# Barry Speker

barryspeker@hotmail.com



“  
**...Shades of  
Freddie Kruger  
or Alien?...**  
”



**Happy New Year to you all and may 2021 get us back to life as we want it to be - soon!**

The inauguration of Joe Biden as the 46th President of the United States was memorable in many respects, including Donald Trump's repudiation of many well established traditions. Most notably he did not attend the ceremony but left for Florida on Air Force One after making his farewell speech. He extended good luck wishes to the new administration and said 'We will be back, in some form'. Shades of Freddie Kruger or Alien?

Ascending the steps of the Presidential jet to the sound of Village People playing YMCA this was followed, as the plane took off, by Frank Sinatra's My Way. No false news. Perhaps DT should have selected John Denver's Leaving on a Jet Plane?

He did not eschew the presidential power from Article II section 2 of the Constitution to grant reprieves to criminals. This power was created by the founding fathers as a democratic check on the judicial system. (It does not entitle a President to protect himself from impeachment).

Donald Trump granted 73 pardons (including Steve Bannon) and 70 commutations, the successful recipients including people convicted of fraud, tax evasion, corruption and weapons offences. Our own judicial system manages to exist without such a bizarre 'check'.

New First Lady Dr Jill Biden will no doubt cope with the omission of the customary invitation to tea in the White House with her predecessor - an occasion when Melania could have introduced her to the staff and explained the central heating controls.

The inauguration was not as dull as the adverse descriptions of Biden suggested. His speech urged unity, an end to the uncivil war and a commitment to alliances - as well as overcoming the pandemic and the economic crisis. The razzmatazz was provided by Lady Gaga wearing a vast red bustle and a giant gold albatross and belting out The Star-Spangled Banner through a solid gold microphone. After the Pledge of Allegiance came Jennifer Lopez singing This Land is Your Land, the 1940 Woody Guthrie protest against inequalities and the Great Depression. Joe certainly has an eye, and an ear, for divas.

The Government has been facing criticisms throughout the pandemic, some justified and some unfair. The successful vaccination programme has proceeded at a rate which few thought possible, with over four million people having received their first jab.

Israel is the world leader in mass vaccination and in the position to produce early data on the effects of delaying the second dose. This

suggests that the effectiveness of the Pfizer vaccine could be as low as 33% after the single dose (rather than the Government's 89% figure).

Some urgent decision-making is needed to 'follow the science' in case there is unwise use of all the vaccine for first doses, when this may not give adequate protection.

Vaccination may not be the beginning of the end of the pandemic but if it is to be even the end of the beginning, we must have confidence that vaccine is used to best effect.

My history studies included Catherine the Great. Sky Atlantic's series The Great tells a rather different story. It is billed as a comedy-drama loosely based on the rise of Catherine and may not be a helpful supplement to A-level online learning - but, what the hell, the A levels have been cancelled.

Slightly more realistic is series 2 of The Bay. Having binge-watched it all - spoiler alert, how can a small town solicitors' practice in Morecambe Bay, be involved with murders, drug factories, dysfunctional families...? say no more, but well worth seeing. An even odder family appears in Finding Alice, particularly Nigel Havers as the clueless solicitor and Joanna Lumley as Patsy revisited.

My February recommendation is The Last Days of John Lennon by James Patterson. It is a tribute by the American writer who has sold more than 300 million books.

An enthusiastic fan of Lennon and the Beatles, Patterson lived in a block close to the Dakota Building in Manhattan where Lennon was shot in 1980. The book, extensively researched, goes right through the careers of the Beatles and their contemporaries. It also features the important musical role played by Phil Spector who coincidentally died on January 16 this year. There is also mention of Gerry Marsden who died on 3 January. A statue of him is planned to be erected in Liverpool overlooking the Ferry across the Mersey (that is of Marsden rather than Spector).





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