

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

JUNE 2021

ISSUE 69



**SYNERGI -**  
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# ON TRAQ WITH WORKTRAQ

## Cloud-based solution revolutionises workflow for plant hire firm

A plant hire firm is benefiting from a clever cloud-based solution which is enabling them to improve remote staff workflow.

Lucid Technology Solutions devised a new product called Worktraq – an all-in-one live project management software application that covers quoting, scheduling, tracking, and reporting. The cloud-based solution provides instant live management of projects and allocation of jobs, among other things.

CG Robinson, a family-run plant hire and sales firm, is one of Lucid's clients now benefiting from the solution.

The Stockton-based based had originally planned to use the application solely for their winter maintenance and gritting for their clients across the North-East region.

But Worktraq has also proven flexible enough to be used by other teams for other ongoing works, and is now being rolled out company wide.

Dean Clarke, managing director at Lucid, said: "After further consultation and working closely with the team at CG Robinson, we proposed the creation of a bespoke application to plan and allocate winter maintenance jobs to the team, and also offer a way of tracking and confirming job events with the use of Geo-Fencing and GPS.

"Staff members receive a list of jobs at the start of the day, but this jobs list is agile and can be added to and modified by a customer service team back at base as circumstances change.

"Jobs include all the details relevant to that site and can include RAMS and other documentation. Once the job is complete the staff member moves onto the next.

"All the information and evidence is stored in Worktraq, so managers or the customer service team can access up-to-the-minute information."

Full access to the app allows CG Robinson's team back at base to plan jobs allocate to drivers, vehicles or teams create new clients and sites as required.

The team also have full access to historic jobs and can send information onto clients as required. Worktraq can also alert team members and or clients to events such as job start or job complete depending on our client's needs.

Dean added: "We have a long history of cloud app development and Worktraq allows us to help our clients with a number of common business challenges."

"In particular an unintended benefit has been the removal of paper-based deliver notes or job sign off sheets that could carry the Covid 19 virus into the workplace."

"We will continue to develop and add new features

going forward – for example we have just added a chat function to the app as well as a calendar and there is an ever-growing development roadmap."

"As part of our long term commitment to help our clients grow Lucid will be working closely to enhance Worktraq over the coming months and years."

"And because its wholly owned by Lucid we are able to add bespoke elements and link to other pieces of software as and when required by our clients."

CG director Jai Robinson added: "We'd strongly recommend any company who needs to track, plan and manage your assets, vehicles, locations and people to make use of Worktraq – it has revolutionised our workflow."

"It makes our clients, managers and staffs daily work life so much easier – everyone knows what they are doing and when it needs to be done by."

Lucid, which is headquartered in Norton and has an Aycliffe base, has 30 years' experience offering IT advice and solutions for businesses across the North-East.



**Worktraq**  
Location Intelligence

## Would you like a demonstration?

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# Worktraq

Location Intelligence

## Transport, warehousing and storage package

Plan, manage and track vehicles, objects within the warehouse, containers, security onsite in real time with Worktraq.

Worktraq allows managers and clients to check progress on any locations that are geofenced 24/7 ensuring all lone workers/ equipment and assets are safe and following the correct HSE procedures.

### Whether you are:

- Supervising the Loading of vehicles
- Tracking vehicles and the drivers
- Organising delivery schedules and routes
- Organising the storage and dispatch of a range of goods
- Arranging for containers to be checked before shipping
- Arrange for containers to be collected from clients
- Tracking items in the warehouse
- Auditing missing items in the warehouse
- Dealing with instances of theft
- Ensuring safety, health and environmental standards are met throughout the operation.

## The advantages of Worktraq for transport, warehousing and storage companies are:

Built in fleet management to get the best out of your vehicles and equipment – can notify a manager when a vehicle leaves site and where it is on its route Full driver tracking with journey history and vehicles on your interface at once.

Monitoring and managing workforce remotely.

Better control and tracking on-road transport.

Recordings – see the location and progress of a vehicle at any date and time in the past.

Analyse performance and route effectiveness  
Paperless system.

Extra security around the warehouse - Worktraq can geofence around the warehouse. Any breach in the area can be instantly detected and diagnosed.

Real-time coordination - When the carrier enters the geofenced area, it can coordinate on a real-time basis

Supply chain management, with geofencing the applicant can organize the loading, unloading, and transportation with ease.

For containers we can see if there has been any unusual activity, If it is late coming in or going out or If the doors are open or shut.

Extras include: planned maintenance, MOT and insurance expiry, set up of reoccurring jobs, scheduling assistant.

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# FOREWORD

## Welcome to the June edition of Northern Insight

This is our biggest issue of the year to date and one we hope you enjoy.

Our cover stars are Synergi who reflect on supporting their customers through a challenging year and putting technologies in place to support growth.

In our ever growing Community section we look at the wonderful work of Childrens Cancer North, aiming to make life better for children suffering with cancer.

In a great two page feature also read how the passion of a North East couple led to one of the worlds most iconic restaurant brands opening in Newcastle.

Look out also for an exclusive interview with Lee Westwood, touring professional for Close House, reflecting on a superb 2020.

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

Stay safe and well. Till next month...

*M.J. Grahamslaw*

Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher  
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## NEW PROGRAMME OPENS GATEWAY TO AUTOMOTIVE SECTOR

SMEs hoping to break into the automotive sector can now tap into new support, thanks to an initiative from Supply Chain North East.

This month, Supply Chain North East will be running its second Back to Business Basics Marketing for Automotive Programme, after the success of the first programme, which took place in the spring.

The marketing programme is fully funded for eligible SMEs and is delivered by the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA) through Northumberland-based B2B marketing specialist Horizon Works.

The programme will help companies to understand the fundamental tools and techniques for successfully promoting, selling and distributing a product or service in the automotive sector.

Delegates will be able access training on marketing strategy, which will include guidance on marketing research, planning and choosing the right marketing channels, and learn about marketing essentials, such as brand building, PR and digital content.

As well as having the opportunity to expand their knowledge through a webinar series, SMEs will also benefit from bespoke marketing support from Horizon Works' marketing specialists.

The initiative is offering a series of funded programmes covering areas including sales and marketing, business strategy, resilience and wellbeing.



## ABCA WELCOMES INVESTMENT TO TARGET FURTHER SUCCESS

Leading fire and security firm ABCA Systems has welcomed a significant new investment from Trimountain Partners and its investor

partners, including The Vorsprung Partnership and Cambridge Capital Partners, to accelerate the Company's ambitious growth plans.

With over 30 years of experience behind it, ABCA is one of the UK's preminent fire and security experts, providing installation and maintenance across a broad range of fire and security systems. The firm serves a blue-chip client base that extends across several end-markets, including social housing, government, education, hospitality, healthcare and commercial.

Headquartered in Newcastle, with a national footprint and a workforce of over 170, ABCA is one of the most trusted and fastest growing companies in the fire and security sector.

The highly experienced team is led by Managing Director Phillip Miller. Philip commented: "I'm proud of ABCA's reputation of delivering outstanding service and value to its customers, reflected in the sustained and considerable period of growth that we've seen over the last few years. This investment from Trimountain will enable us to really accelerate our ambitious growth plans and further invest in our national infrastructure, systems and capabilities."



## NORTH EAST BUILDING SOCIETY NAMED AS ONE OF THE UK'S TOP 100 MID-SIZED COMPANIES

Darlington Building Society has been named as one of the UK's top 100 mid-sized companies to work for.

The Society has also been placed in the top 30 Best Financial Services companies nationally, as well as being one of the top 30 Best North-East companies to work for.

The impressive national ratings have been confirmed by Best Companies, a highly-respected organisation that specialises in measuring workforce engagement.

The Society was informed at the start of the year that it had been awarded an "outstanding" 2-star accreditation by Best Companies, which supplies information for The Times '100 Best Companies To Work For' list.

Niki Barker, the Society's Director, People and Culture, said: "We already knew that Darlington Building Society was a great place to work, but there is a feeling of immense pride to have it officially recognised on the national stage in this way. The award means a lot, but it is a by-product of what we have achieved by looking after staff, helping them to develop, and leading them through an extremely challenging year."

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## FLAGSHIP HEALTHCARE PROJECT SECURES FIRST STAGE FUNDING

A £210m national flagship science and healthcare project, to be delivered from the North East of England, has secured initial funding to support development of its ambitious plans.

The Early Diagnostics Institute (EDI) aims to create five early-stage diagnostic blood tests, using state-of-the-art machine learning techniques, which will be trialed and rolled out across the NHS.

Early diagnosis of disease often enables more effective patient treatment, and EDI's vision is to provide powerful early diagnostic capabilities that will save time, money and lives, as well as helping to relieve the significant healthcare pressures of an ageing population.

EDI plans to sell the tests world-wide under the NHS brand, and in turn it expects to bring millions of pounds worth of revenue funding back into the NHS.

The institute will target diseases particularly associated with ageing, primarily cancer, diabetes and dementias. Working in partnership with the North East's NHS Trusts and Universities, EDI will operate out of facilities in Newcastle and Darlington, with clinical work delivered throughout the region.

EDI has received first stage endorsement in the form of a £50k grant from the Government's Local Growth Fund, through the North East Local Enterprise Partnership.



## VERISURE EXCEEDS RECRUITMENT FORECAST

Europe's leading monitored alarm provider, Verisure, has trebled its first-year hire target, with the recruitment of close to 300 staff at its Newcastle Centre of Excellence in North Tyneside, and up to 100 new jobs on offer later this year.

The company, which arrived in the region in April 2020 with the pledge to create 1,000 jobs over a ten-year period, had only anticipated to recruit around 85 people in the first 12 months.

Verisure signed an 11-year lease at the 104,000 sq ft at Quorum Park in North Tyneside, which has been adapted to meet its needs. It initially took 22,000 sq ft and has now expanded into a further 13,000 sq ft to ensure the company offers best-in-class service to its growing portfolio of customers.

The vast majority of the jobs located at the North Tyneside site are in customer service, technical support, field operations, training, IT, telesales, HR and finance.

To further increase its market position, Verisure has now undertaken a multi-million-pound Sky TV advertising campaign aimed at the UK domestic market, playing a pivotal role within its commitment to customer service excellence.



## TEESSIDE ROPE ACCESS TRAINING SCHOOL LAUNCHES

TIS (NGA) LTD has recently boosted its grand expansion plans following a six-figure investment.

As well as becoming an accredited member of the Scaffolding Association, the Billingham-based service provider has also launched its own Rope Access Training School.

TIS, who operate from a bespoke facility on the Cowpen Lane Industrial Estate, has welcomed its first learners in a facility designed to create a life-like environment in rope access, coupled with a classroom for theory teaching.

Operations Director, Kevin Heilbron, said: "The first 18 months of trading have been predominantly as a rope access company. However, in September last year I teamed up with old partner Gary King, with a view to extend the portfolio of services provided to current and new clients. We now provide rope access, scaffolding, painting, insulation, fire protection and rescue services."

TIS has the necessary certifications and its new training centre is fully IRATA approved. All individuals who successfully complete the courses will receive the appropriate IRATA certificates and it is hoped there will be eight learners every week.

The training school will increase company revenue and provide TIS with the ability to upskill its own workforce, as well as help others into employment.

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L-R: Peter Joynson, Paul Burns and Justin Short.  
Photograph taken, with kind permission, at the Catalyst building,  
home of the National Innovation Centre for Data and the National Innovation Centre for Ageing.



# PUTTING THE 'i' IN MORE THAN JUST INNOVATION

Founded in 2013, cloud solutions and managed services provider Synergi was created to meet the fast-growing demands for cloud-based technologies in the North. Recognising the need for SMEs in the region to harness powerful enterprise-level solutions to empower innovation, growth, and agility, Synergi was launched to provide a next generation "born in the cloud" technology partner.

Last year saw the launch of their managed services practice, enabling Synergi to pair their cloud solutions with co-managed or fully-managed services. This evolution of the business means Synergi brings to the market a highly unique offering to small and medium businesses in the north. The ability to both deploy cloud software applications and provide first-class technical support to organisations as part of their managed service means Synergi is perfectly placed to drive productivity for organisations through automation, teamwork, business applications, and security-driven solutions.

Over the past eight years Synergi has grown, adapted, and innovated to remain at the forefront of modern technologies as cloud offerings have developed. As an award-winning, Microsoft Gold Partner and highly accredited organisation, working with best-in-class technology partners, Synergi has helped a wide variety of clients across multiple sectors seeing unprecedented growth since its inception.

A recent brand evolution from the business draws the eye to the recognisable 'i' within the Synergi logo. When they say they 'put the 'i' in more than just innovation' they mean it. Their breadth and depth of knowledge, underpinned by their modern take on technology, facilitates improved agility and streamlined processes which puts organisations in a strong position for future growth.

## The technology drivers in 2020

"The events of last year allowed CIOs to overcome any reluctance of moving mission critical workloads from on-premises to the cloud," said Sid Nag, research vice president at Gartner, the world's leading research and advisory company. This statement reflects the huge shift in mindset throughout 2020 which saw many organisations re-assess their IT strategies and technology roadmap.

The events of 2020 were the catalyst for many organisations to turn their focus to remote working, collaboration and data storage and security in the cloud. With an increasing number of tools connecting remote teams such as SharePoint, Microsoft Teams, Valo, and Box (to name but a few) it is easier than ever for teams to stay united, connected, and informed, no matter where or when they are working.

## Customer first approach

Synergi's commitment to customer success has been key from the outset. Working with best of breed technologies with highly trained and certified staff Synergi have the skills and talent to deliver solutions that work. Proud to work with some of the most recognisable names in the region including Northumbrian Water and Great North Air Ambulance, Synergi put the focus on the right technology to fit the organisation. Their approach to building long term relationships with their clients means implementing the right technologies to solve pain points and realise ambitions.

## A modern approach to technology

Synergi offers a number of security and managed service tools, allowing organisations to protect their data and follow best practice as set out by the Information Commissioners Office (ICO). Synergi's tools, time, and training can enhance the security of critical business data offering peace of mind. These cloud-driven solutions or managed services can then in turn improve security, boost productivity, engage employees, and foster a flexible and agile working environment that will allow businesses to differentiate themselves and remain competitive.

## Practice what you preach

Within the past year, Synergi has undertaken two key internal projects, evolving the company intranet and rolling out a number of technology-driven wellbeing changes. These projects have led to improved internal processes, and enabled the team to better inform and guide businesses who are seeking similar solutions.

## A continued vision

At the heart of Synergi's vision to create a next generation "born in the cloud" technology partner is its people; customers, partners and team Synergi. With a continued vision to support their customers' success as a trusted modern IT partner, Synergi are as focused on empowering their staff as they are their customers, providing industry leading training and a raft of benefits centred around work-life balance including a flexible working day and unlimited holidays for their team. Their learning-driven company culture supports their employees in staying up to date on the latest changes in the digital business landscape, meaning their team is always able to offer businesses the most up-to-date information and advice.

The past year has bolstered their message and plans for 2021 and beyond. For the team at Synergi supporting their customers through a challenging year and putting technologies in place to support growth to ensure continuity remains at the top of their agenda for the coming year.

**To find out more about what Synergi can do for you, contact Synergi today. Call 0191 4770365 or email [enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk)**





Rod Brasington



# PROSPER - HELPING SOCIAL HOUSING LANDLORDS TODAY, TOMORROW AND BEYOND

According to the government's Office for National Statistics, there are almost five million UK homes categorised as being in the social sector? Around two thirds are controlled by housing associations with the rest directly controlled by local authorities.

**Those five million homes are rented to families and individuals who need an affordable home...and every one of those properties needs to be maintained and modernised.**

It's a huge undertaking especially when some housing associations have over 30,000 properties.

No wonder those associations and local authorities need help when it comes to procuring a workforce and sourcing a whole raft of materials that may be required to complete a job.

That's where Prosper, a Newcastle based procurement specialist comes in.

"We're a procurement consultancy that works exclusively with the public sector," said Chief Executive Rod Brasington. "We offer a service that assists the local authority or housing association's own procurement department. We allow them to concentrate on running their business while we do the legwork to find the best companies and the best suppliers."

And it's worth pointing out that we're not talking about getting a local trader in to provide and install a new kitchen or bathroom or decorate a house. We're talking about finding a firm to supply, for example, 5000 kitchens, 10,000 window frames, 4,000 bathrooms or several tonnes of loft insulation. There needs to be a team of plumbers, builders and electricians to do the work too. And the houses need painting...all 27,308 of them!!!

"When a public sector organisation is looking to procure something like roofing, rewiring or some sort of building repair, they come to Prosper. We're governed by Government rules and regulations because everything to do with the public sector needs to be clear and above board. We have systems and solutions in place which are compliant with those regulations which means landlords can approach us, tell us what they need doing, and we then hit the ground running to find the best solutions. We've already done the background research and can quickly start finding the best options to pass onto the landlord. If the landlord tries to do all of this by themselves, it can take significantly longer to follow a compliant process."

Not everything comes down to price. When you are ordering 500 kitchens to be installed in people's homes, then the quality and delivery of the work is important. Prosper assess the cost of all tender submissions and add these to quality assessment scores to identify which Firm is ranked first and awarded the contract.

"Bearing in mind that when work is being undertaken on a property which already has tenants, they need to know when work will start and finish. It's important that firms keep to a schedule. Those that do...and also do a really good job and have provided good quality materials...may have contracts extended. Landlords recognise the benefit of works being delivered efficiently, on time and on budget, the cheapest price rarely provides these outcomes. "

Prosper also help local authorities and housing associations plan for the future. Some organisations plan for 20 or 30 years in advance.

"There is a massive drive for a reduction in the carbon footprint of every house in the UK. Every house in the UK should be EPC C rated by 2035. This is a massive undertaking for social housing. The landlords who we currently work with control up to 200,000 properties. That means we need 200,000 properties to have airtight windows and doors, full insulation, new heating systems, new roofing. Okay, some of the houses will be modern, but some are a century old.

This is daunting in terms of heating. Gas boilers will need to be replaced by something, but what? We're working closely with manufacturers and suppliers to see what they think will happen and what will be available. We're consulting the business community to see whether their solutions would work for housing. The whole green issue has to be taken seriously. Is there a labour force to do the work? Air source and ground source heat pumps aren't as easy to install as a gas boiler. We need to train operatives and make careers in the sector more attractive. We need to be ready to build for the future."

So, Prosper can not only help with your current requirements, they can also help you plan for the future.

***If you operate within the Public Sector, the best idea is to have a chat with the team at Prosper and find out what they can do for you. Go onto to their website, where you'll find all of their contact details plus information about what they do and how they do it.***

[www.prosper.uk.com](http://www.prosper.uk.com)

“  
...And the houses need painting...all 27,308 of them!..  
”

# INNOVATIVE RETAIL AND HOSPITALITY, A BUMPER RESIDENTIAL MARKET AND WHY REMOTE WORKING DOESN'T SUPPORT FUTURE TALENT

By Neil Hart, Group Managing Director,  
Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents

As the leading commercial and residential property firm in the North, our overall mission is to support local economy, business and communities with a full-service approach to residential and commercial property. Our vision is to work hand-in-hand with key organisations and people to support the ever-evolving built environment of our region, making it a consistently better place to live, work and socialise.

**Our work extends from selling homes to working closely with large organisations, local authorities, housing providers and banks, investors and more. Our services include Commercial Agency, Residential Agency, Valuations, Lease Renewals and Advisory, Property Management, Building Surveying, Land, Development & New Homes, Mortgages and Planning & Design from our sister company, BH Planning & Design.**

Since the appointment of our new board of directors in 2015, our approach to business has always been agile - so while the climate has been challenging since the pandemic hit, we felt well equipped to cope. We instantly took the decision to be more accessible for our client needs, extending our hours of remote availability and keeping clients up to date with regular communications. While Covid has shifted how many businesses will operate, one thing is clear, people need people and working digitally and remotely stifles individual professional and company growth.

Remote working helped businesses to tick over temporarily, partly due to the fact that many workers had already established workplace relationships and an understanding of their role in a real working environment. Team members had first-hand experience of working in their organisations with a good understanding of their company's structure and systems, as well as purpose and vision.

In many cases the dynamics were set, the roles of the team were well established and those who weren't furloughed and working from home were well aware of what was required of them. The real challenges of remote working come with company changes, inducting new people into a business, company growth and career progression and being able to provide clear and consistent guidance

to a team. As new talent starts to enter each industry, employees start to move around and companies continue to grow, it is imperative that they are given all of the tools which equip them to play a key role in a company, excel in their career and learn from their peers and managers – which is only available in a collaborative working environment.

While the hospitality and tourism market has remained closed for much of the past year, it is thought that pent up demand for a break away from home, restrictions on international travel and a renewed interest in the great outdoors of the UK means that a domestic tourism boom is on the horizon. Holidays abroad as we know them may not return to pre-Covid normality until 2024, and the limited options available to the public have encouraged people to look closer to home, with the expansion of operators paying testament to this. Our friends and clients at The Inn Collection Group have been successful on their ambitious acquisition campaign, resulting in the addition of several of its famous 'pubs with rooms' to its portfolio across Northumberland, the Lake District, Yorkshire, Wearside, and County Durham. The firm now looks to recruit a further 200 people to its team.

When it comes to our cities and the evolving built environment which drives forward direct, indirect and induced economic progress - the North has remained resilient, ambitious and prolific. Development in our cities continues as we look forward to pushing on with the North becoming an even more vibrant and prosperous environment to live, work and play.

In Newcastle city centre, the regeneration of Pilgrim Street will provide important rejuvenation in the heart of the region's capital. The plans from Taras Properties, the development vehicle of the Reuben brothers, will provide a catalyst for the



wider transformation of East Pilgrim Street to replace dilapidated buildings with news offices, bars, restaurants and more.

We were proud to recently play a part in this transformation, facilitating the sale of Yorkshire Chambers, a 22,000 sq ft office building based on 112-118 Pilgrim Street, which has been purchased by local businessman Andrew Ward. Following the completion of the multi-million-pound deal the offices will undergo a significant investment in its refurbishment. The purchase of Yorkshire Chambers has become another significant step in the regeneration of our city centre. This area is set to be a bustling hub for business and hospitality and will inject further life into our vibrant city following a challenging time.

Meanwhile in Sunderland, its highways scheme is reported to provide £17.1m boost for local SMEs, which is set to rise to £21.6m as the project nears completion. The Riverside Sunderland transformation project, a 33.2 hectares development which spans the River Wear, continues to move forward with more than £150m worth of investment currently on site which will total £350m by the end of the summer.





Neil Hart

The last Portfolio front cover was dedicated to the environmentally friendly and technologically advanced 1000 home development which is a key part of the Riverside Sunderland project. The development will create homes for 2,500 people across four communities and are set to be showcased at the Sunderland Future Living Expo in 2023.

Moving onto the retail sector, The Office for National Statistics recently disclosed that throughout March, a month in which there was only a modest relaxation of the curbs imposed across the UK to stop the spread of Covid-19, that retail sales rose by 5.4%. The most recent statistics available at the time of publishing indicate a higher than expected increase, which was predicted to be 1.5%, with sales in March 1.6% higher than they were before the pandemic began to have an impact on the economy in February 2020. This boost is certainly a positive indicator of what could be to come.

March's robust increase in retail sales showed that the economy is moving forward even before the reopening of the none-essential shops. The UK is creating a significant recovery drive heading into the summer months. Declining case numbers and

the success of the vaccine roll out has encouraged a confidence in 'getting back to the new normal'. A positive, yet still cautious, sentiment rolls out across the North, back up by information from research firm GfK which recently revealed that consumer confidence was now at its highest level since before April 2020.

The success of our local retail sector, and similarly in hospitality, has certainly been thanks to innovation and adapting to the market from operators. Consumers no longer simply want to buy, they want experiences and to come away with a sense of added value. Operators like STACK Newcastle and Seaburn have created retail and leisure experiences for visitors to enjoy – and are now reaping the rewards as two of the most popular destinations in the region.

In the residential property market, official data from HMRC showed a record-high 180,690 transactions recorded during March, which is double the total in March last year. Separate figures from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) shows that high demand is placing upward pressure on property values, with the UK average house price increasing by 8.6% over the year to February.

A significant factor in the heightened activity in the residential market would certainly be The Stamp Duty holiday, which continued to fuel the increase in house prices. The government's mortgage guarantee scheme will push demand higher as it attracts first-time buyers back to the market. There has been some nervousness regarding an anticipated price correction hurtling towards us like a steam train, however, the heightened demand should ensure that this doesn't happen.

While we've worked incredibly hard on behalf of our clients throughout the pandemic and have been fortunate enough to be able to persevere throughout, we're genuinely excited to be experiencing the forward movement in our economy and heightened activity which will allow us to continue our vision and mission. We're all sick of saying and hearing it – but the last year has been a challenge on a multitude of levels, but thanks to the dedication and tenacity of our local business community we know that our economy can recover.

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# CYBER INCIDENTS: AN OPPORTUNITY TO CHANGE?

By Helen Pyne, Senior Manager – Cyber Security at Deloitte

Businesses around the world are targeted by cyber criminals every day. Thankfully, not all will be successful, but others may be successful...with significant consequences.

**Imagine for a moment that today your business is hit by just such a cyber attack. Everything is normal, then suddenly people start standing up on the office floor complaining their computers have locked...demanding a ransom payment to allow system access. One by one every screen has gone blank; within 30 minutes every system is down. The IT department confirms it isn't just laptops and office machines that have been hit, but all of IT operations, applications and systems too.**

Weeks later somehow your business has recovered, it has been a challenging and costly journey, your people are exhausted, your share price may have fallen, but your business has survived. What happens next?

Many do not have the appetite to spend any further since the average cost of recovery from a significant cyber incident runs into the millions. Others see an opportunity to turn this into a competitive advantage. An opportunity to address and eliminate technical debt, to transform and optimise operations; becoming a more flexible and resilient business. Interestingly, the more damaging a cyber-attack is to business value in the long-term the more the business is motivated to invest in security for the future. As Winston Churchill once said, "never let a good crisis go to waste!"

Using an attack as a springboard to accelerate business transformation should be split into two categories; tactical and immediate changes, and longer-term transformation.

What are the top three tactical considerations? How can you put the fires out while also building future foundations?

## 1. Phase out your old unsupported IT

Smart businesses eliminate technical debt quickly then look to accelerate digital transformation. There is nothing like a cyber incident to drive the disposal of legacy IT. Now is the time to upgrade the IT you have been living with, the things that have been sitting on your risk register, not just for months but for years. Now is the time to stop sinking money on compensating security controls for old systems, it is not economical to continue. Agree a plan and retire the systems.

## 2. Go back to basics

A Ponemon Institute study estimated that almost 60% of breaches were due to a failure to fix known weaknesses. Look at the Center for Internet Security (CIS) Top 20 Critical Security Controls. Refer to the top five and do them well. Don't try to fix everything; seek help in determining your threats and make this an informed and threat-led process.

## 3. Look at risk, again

Some of your accepted risks may have materialised during the attack. Review your risks with a different lens, think about your threats, think about how you measure and assess risk and review all of your accepted risks. Technology debt (I repeat!) is almost always one of them, now is the time to fix it.

Whilst there are many other things you may seek to address in the short term such as response and recovery plans, most businesses would come to this conclusion themselves following a large incident. There's nothing like a live rehearsal to tell you that you don't know your lines!

## Strategic considerations – build the future:

Whilst you may attract negative publicity in the early days of an incident, you can also use the spotlight as a way to show your customers and stakeholders how seriously you are taking your responsibility to protect them as a result. Use the incident to build a secure future in line with your business goals. What is the business strategy, are you prioritising the risks most impactful to that strategy? Review and reshape your cyber strategy. Think about how new technologies can be used to do more than improve your back office and behind-the-scenes functions, they can transform your business into a more customer-centric operation and with good security it can pay dividends with increased customer confidence and loyalty.

### 1. Look at your business model

Paying off your technical debt will give you a foot-up to enabling innovation and adoption of new technology and services. By this I don't just mean cloud I mean the use of AI and automation, and flexible supply chains; thinking differently about how you operate.

### 2. Embed security into everything

Secure by design; it's all about designing security into your technology solution from the start, not as a last-minute add on.

Consider the security implications in any business change, it is cheaper in the long run and building in controls and resilience from the start will give you the confidence in your operations. If you embed a secure-by-design approach it then makes any change easier.

### 3. People

Embed a sustainable culture where everyone feels they have a responsibility to keep the business secure. Make sure that you have ownership and accountability at board level, invest in awareness training, ensure that your people don't fear reprisal for reporting incidents, and protect your business by keeping your IT and security teams up to date. This is one of the biggest challenges that all organisations face, it really isn't easy and requires ongoing commitment.

Cyber security in today's world is a challenge, keeping up with the attackers is hard, getting ahead of them even more so. Strong and reliable baseline security controls are good enough for most businesses most of the time, and without them they risk being another statistic. Don't let that be you... but remember if it does happen then think about whether you can use it as an opportunity for change.

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





Helen Pyne





## SUBSEA EXPERTS COMPLETE ACQUISITION TO FORM NEW JOINT VENTURE COMPANY

Al Gihaz Contracting has announced the acquisition of assets, Intellectual Property and the management systems of Enshore Subsea Ltd, a leading UK based subsea trenching company providing seabed intervention services to mega-projects around the world.

Led by local Management Directors Pierre Boyde, Wayne Pullen and William Stephenson, the new company will trade under the Enshore Subsea name, with the aim of forming a leading seabed intervention and construction management services provider.

Based out of an operational facility at the Port of Blyth and aiming to employ 40 people by the end of 2021, the joint venture will utilise the acquired specialist seabed intervention assets of the company and the skilled team to support the international energy industry, as well as aid the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's drive to generating 58.7GW of clean energy by 2030.

Services will include subsea engineering and construction management, skilled manpower supply and equipment rental for subsea trenching, seabed intervention, development of seabed tooling technology and submarine flexible product installation.

Corporate Finance and Tax advice was provided by Newcastle-based Rycroft Glenton, whilst legal advice was provided by commercial law firm Square One Law.



## JUICEBITZ SECURES SIX-FIGURE CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Online retailer JuiceBitz Audio Visual Ltd has received a follow-up investment of £150,000 from NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance, managed by FW Capital and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund.

The business, based in Filey, specialises in selling a range of audio-visual home entertainment and mobile device aftermarket accessories, including cables, adapters and powered solutions, many of which are designed in-house.

Founded by Managing Director Jai Corder in 2012, JuiceBitz has now sold over one million products since its launch and built up a strong following of loyal customers.

NPIF – FW Capital funding has secured the jobs of four full-time and one part-time staff members and created one further role at its premises in Hunmanby, Filey. It follows an initial £150,000 NPIF loan in 2019 to support its growth plans.

Jai said: "FW Capital and NPIF have been strong supporters of our business and we are delighted with the ongoing service we have received. Our collaboration with FW Capital has allowed us to build an extensive and high-quality product range and we continue to innovate and develop new lines as one of the most trusted suppliers in our market."

## TEES VALLEY BUSINESS SECURES SIGNIFICANT INVESTMENT

Independent fabrication and engineering firm Francis Brown Ltd has secured investment to help it join a major mining project.

The Stockton-based firm received a six-figure sum from the £10million Tees Valley Catalyst Fund (TVCF), managed by FW Capital for the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority. The funding will enable it to fulfil its bond requirements for a contract worth over £1m to fabricate 400 metres of mine shaft casings for Strabag AG at the Anglo American Woodsmith Mine project, in North Yorkshire.

This is the second major contract that Francis Brown has secured in relation to the Woodsmith Project, having already fabricated high tolerance steel formwork for casting of concrete for the mine shafts.

The Advance Payment Guarantee and Performance Bond means the company could enter into the contract and retain its working capital.

Francis Brown Ltd was founded in 1903. Now in its fourth generation of family ownership, the business is run by brothers Simon and Jamie Brown and MD Mark Roddy, who was appointed in 2017. The company's services include design and manufacture of pressure vessels, tanks and structural fabrications and their installation at customers' sites.



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*"WHAT IF WE DON'T CHANGE AT ALL...  
AND SOMETHING MAGICAL JUST HAPPENS?"*

## Liquidation and Insolvency is no joke.

Those in control of distressed businesses must proceed carefully.

Seeking the right advice, as early as possible, usually means more options and a concerned director being much better informed.

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L-R: Dr Emma Black and Amy Whyte

## CASCADE CALLS TO CASH HOLDERS TO HAVE A DUTY OF CARE

The team at Cascade Cash Management (Cascade) is championing the way forward for those with cash to be part of a savings community to do good for the UK - whilst partnering with a regionally based charity that helps older people to enjoy life.

**As we move into what could start to feel like a more 'normal' life, Cascade has over the last few months taken time to look at and recognise the impact of the pandemic on the UK.**

With many people having been furloughed or made redundant, people having to use food banks, and charities suffering as their fundraising has been hindered, now is the time Cascade says for those with cash to create a community that can help.

Historically, the UK is known for its apathy when it comes to savings. There is generally a low goodwill towards banks and building societies due to a lack of transparency and a perceived hassle to switch accounts.

Dr Emma Black, MD of Cascade, explains how a shift in that feeling by switching to the Cascade community can do good: "Savings rates are at an all time low, with the threat that they may even drop to a negative rate later this year. If this happens, it will be the first time to have ever occurred in the 327 year history of the Bank of England.

"We feel that those with excess cash have a duty of care to make sure it is put to work in the right place for the right reasons. Financial advisors have said to us that some of their high net-worth clients aren't interested in moving money for the sake of a few thousand pounds while interest rates are so low. Our response has been to emphasise the impact that the few thousand pounds can have for others and we've focussed on social responsibility.

"By working with us here at Cascade, you will be able to generate thousands of pounds of extra cash on your savings. If you don't see a value personally for that, then we encourage those people to do so to help others. Proceeds can be donated to support others and to raise funds for our charitable partner, Age UK Northumberland. You can do good and simultaneously increase your depositor protection using different banking licences for FSCS coverage. Two great reasons to do it!"

Through their partnership with Age UK Northumberland, Cascade is inviting those who aren't actually interested in earning more to make use of the Cascade portal and friendly team and to donate their "free money" earnings from it to the charity.

Clients can opt for as many savings accounts as they want and if they don't want the cash proceeds, then they can donate them to Age UK Northumberland, or another charity of their choice.

Dr Emma Black concluded: "We are urging people to think responsibly. If you don't want that "free money" from switching accounts, then do it anyway and give it away! Help others who do need it. If it doesn't need to be in your pocket, do good by putting it in theirs.

"We do all the work involved in the switch and simply require our clients to fund their new accounts. For those that introduce or refer other clients we are also offering the choice of £250

cashback to be held on account, or we will donate it in their name to Age UK Northumberland or a charity of our client's choice.

"A business in finance can be a business with purpose and we are determined to bring about that change! Show support by joining our savings community today."

Amy Whyte, head of charitable services at Age UK Northumberland, said: "This is a great idea and is two brilliant ways to generate funds for good causes.

"As well as Cascade giving £250 that could go into a charity for each introduction, the savings community willing to donate the money earned on their cash that they don't need will make a huge difference to the services that we can deliver to older people in our community.

"Every penny raised in the region is spent here, and not a lot of people appreciate that we are a stand alone small charity with a large charity name. To bring in funds from people and partnerships in the region will be our life's blood going forward, so please if you have money in an account that could be switched and do good, then speak with Cascade!"

**More information is available at**  
[www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk) and  
[www.ageuk-northumberland.org.uk](http://www.ageuk-northumberland.org.uk)



An abstract graphic featuring a central black circle. Surrounding this circle is a dense, chaotic splash of various colors including red, orange, yellow, green, and blue, resembling paint splatters or ink on a dark background. The colors are most concentrated around the central circle and fade out towards the edges of the frame.

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## MERCURY3 CONSULT EXPANDS OPERATIONS INTO TEESSIDE

Following significant growth since its inception in 2017, Mercury3 Consult has expanded its business into Middlesbrough; using its experience and knowledge to bring job opportunities, skills, development and training to the Tees Valley.

**Mercury3 Consult specialise in project, programme and engineering management and have appointed local Marton man Paul Jeffers to be Regional Director for the North East.**

Paul, who has worked for a number of multi-national organisations in senior management positions abroad and in the UK, has a wealth of engineering, management and leadership experience in a variety of industries; from rail to oil and gas, from heavy industry to renewable energy. Paul joined Mercury3 from a director role with a major international infrastructure provider, wanting to work with a progressive company where he could utilise his skills for the benefit of the area he is passionate about.

To be central to the action in Teesside and the surrounding region, Mercury3 Consult has secured an office in Commerce House for Paul and the regionally based team to work from.

Bringing an infrastructure and transport specialism, the North East team offer a variety of services to a variety of industries; specialising in project integration, change management and programme and engineering management services.

Paul said: "We identified a brilliant opportunity to develop the business whilst helping to give back to the community we are working within. With all the investment and exciting developments

planned for the Tees Valley it is something we all wanted to get involved in. I am delighted to join the team to build that offering in my own home area".

"Over the years my career has taken me far and wide, meaning it is 20 years since I had a home office in Middlesbrough. It is amazing to secure the office in Commerce House, as it is high end, in a great location and the facilities manager Christine has been brilliant with the support she has provided to us. The lift in the building offers our required accessibility, the boardroom is stunning and the fact it is close to the train station is a real bonus."

Commerce House is a Grade II listed building finished to the highest of specs. The building has quality kitchens and facilities for tenants, along with a business lounge, boardroom, hot desking and virtual tenancy. As a keen cyclist Paul is planning on cycling to work, made possible by the building having shower facilities.

Christine Huntington is looking forward to seeing how the company develops from its new base in the renovated TS1 building.

She said: "It is fabulous to be able to support a company that wants to move into the North East bringing an innovative service that is much needed. At Commerce House we will do

everything we can to support Paul and his team on their growth journey."

Ian Watson, director of Mercury3 Consult, said of the expansion: "Mercury3 Consult is passionate about developing a presence in the Tees Valley area. We pride ourselves on supplying 'People Driven Project Solutions' to our clients. With this focus we aim to bring employment and development opportunities into the local community.

"As part of our commitment, we have been working with Paul Jeffers, who is born and bred in the area. We are delighted to announce him as our Regional Director. With his help we have identified where we can support the region with our expertise. As part of our commitment, we want to partner with local charities and social enterprises and give back to the area. We recently supported Paul's North Sea dip fundraising effort, doubling his groups personal sponsorship total to £2100 for Zoe's Place, which is an amazing children's charity and one we hope to do more with in the future. We are also looking to help local sports clubs including Acklam Rugby Club."

**For more information on office space contact Christine@commerce-house.co.uk and to find out more about Mercury3 Consult offering visit [www.m3consult.co.uk](http://www.m3consult.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.

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# IS IT TIME YOU REVIEWED THE TAX EFFICIENCY OF YOUR COMPANY CAR FLEET?



The company car is a popular incentive that employers have offered their employees for many years. However, as a benefit-in-kind, there are tax implications associated with company cars – and also a number of opportunities for employers to save tax and National Insurance by utilising low emission vehicles.

## What is the background?

The tax rules for company cars are designed to encourage the use of low emission vehicles.

So exactly what are the tax benefits of low emission cars and is now the time to consider the move to zero or low-emission vehicles?

## What is the issue?

There are a number of opportunities for employers to save tax and National Insurance (NIC) by switching to cars which have relatively low emissions (measured with reference to their carbon dioxide levels).

For those who are currently driving in either petrol or diesel only vehicles, the car benefit tax rules are especially penal, with benefit in kind rates averaging 25% of original list price compared with the lower tax rates on offer for pure electric vehicles (1%) and hybrid vehicles (those using both electric and either petrol or diesel) which can be less than 14% depending on the amount they can travel on the electric part of their engine.

For example, a VW Passat GTE with CO<sub>2</sub> levels of 32 g/km and an electric only range of between 30 and 39 miles would have a benefit rate of 12% in 2021-22, equating to a taxable benefit of approximately £4,300.

In addition, as the tax and NIC rates climb for the provision of fuel for private journeys, there are useful incentives both in looking at reimbursement of the costs of private fuel or to move to vehicles which require charging rather than filling up at the pump.

## What do employers need to consider?

Employers need to consider the following:

- What are the average and actual emissions of their current fleet;
- What is the tax and NIC cost in providing employees with their current vehicles;
- Can they move towards a lower emissions fleet to utilise tax and NIC savings;
- Are there any advantages for 2020/21 tax year for employees to reimburse them for the costs of their private fuel; and
- Can they utilise the advantages of salary sacrifice or an employee car ownership plan (for their higher mileage drivers)? For example, a driver provided with a BMW I3 Hatchback 125 kW Auto would save approximately £225 per month by their employer providing this via salary sacrifice rather than the employee paying for the car privately.

In conjunction with this review, employers also

need to ensure that any compliance aspects of the changes are taken into consideration so that they are not building any unforeseen tax liability if HMRC were to undertake an employer compliance review in the future.

## How can UNW Help?

UNW can help employers consider their current company vehicle provision to assess:

- The employer's current tax and NIC costs of providing company cars and fuel;
- Whether the employer could consider any other options;
- What the costs of each option would be over the lifetime of the cars; and
- Providing ad-hoc advice for areas where HMRC typically find errors.

*If you would like more information about this, or any other employment tax related matters, please do not hesitate to get in touch with Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner, at [leemuter@unw.co.uk](mailto:leemuter@unw.co.uk) or Paul Tucker, Employment Taxes Senior Manager, at [paultucker@unw.co.uk](mailto:paultucker@unw.co.uk)*





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# THE BUY TO LET MORTGAGE MARKET HAS CHANGED

Getting a buy to let mortgage is easy right? All you need is a good credit history, a minimum of 20-25% deposit and a rental income or proposed rental income which is 125% of the new mortgage payment.

**Well no, not anymore, as the market is now very different, with many banks and building societies scrutinising applications in a similar way to "regulated" owner occupier mortgages.**

Firstly, consideration needs to be given over the structure of how to buy a buy to let property. Applicants can either buy in a Limited Company name or as an individual and in many ways, Limited Company applications now offer a number of tax advantages,

However, there can also potentially be benefits to buying any new property in the individual name of the person with the lower "earned" income or ideally the name of a non-working partner.

Most lenders require the mortgage applicant to have a certain level of earned income for example £25,000 as a minimum. However, this is not always the case as some lenders do not require a minimum level of earned / background income at all (other lending criteria will apply). Consequently, in a scenario where a higher rate tax payer and a non-earning partner are considering a new investment, they could secure significant income tax advantages if the property and mortgage can be secured in the sole name of the non-tax payer. In this case, buying in an individual name may be more beneficial.

In terms of how much can be borrowed, rental cover calculations (the proportion by which the rent covers mortgage interest) have also become much more complex and differ between Limited Company applications and individual applications. They can also differ dramatically between lenders and over different fixed rate terms. For example, those borrowing on a fixed rate of five years or more can often now borrow more than those clients choosing a two year fixed rate. Similarly, those buying through a Limited Company can often borrow more than those buying in an individual name.

And as a final point, anyone owning four or more mortgaged buy to let properties (either in a Limited Company or individual name) is now classed as a "Portfolio Landlord" which creates further complications!

We are not tax advisors and always advise all



borrowers to seek tax advice prior to chatting through the mortgage options. But given it is now such a complex area, a full review of underlying circumstances is most definitely needed - we can do this on an initial no obligation basis, so what have you got to lose?

Once all of these hurdles have been cleared and an in principle mortgage level established (which in some cases may be lower than a few years ago), an in depth review of the borrowers finances is undertaken by the mortgage lender looking at areas such as:-

- Salary or self-employed income.
- Personal borrowing levels.
- Residential mortgage balance and payment.
- Review of other buy to let borrowings
- Overall reliance on total rental income received.

Confused? We can understand why, but as ever,

changes to mortgage regulation can present opportunities as well as threats and independent mortgage advice in this market is now more important than ever before.

***If you would like to see what our clients have to say about us we have in excess of two hundred and thirty Google 5\* reviews on-line and on our website from satisfied clients.***

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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.*

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Martin Trinder, Owner, Lennon Properties, Northumberland

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“

...You should never hear  
these two words  
in any business. And  
you definitely should  
never, ever be saying  
them in yours...

”



# THE TWO MOST DANGEROUS WORDS IN BUSINESS

Clear customer avatars. Customer focus. Being market-led and understanding the client mindset. All these things bring us closer to the standards customers expect of us.

**But really, there is someone else's standards that are even more important to fix, focus on and follow.**

Our own.

In early 2021, Frank Skinner was interviewed by the BBC about his attitude and approach to religion. In one part of the discussion, coupled with a wry smile, Frank said he could never relate to the furore around the rising prevalence of CCTV. It is because, Frank explained, he was always under the gaze of his own God anyway. And it is this omnipresence that resulted in what Frank called his own 'good nature'.

'And another thing', Frank added, 'This other advice we hear, about dancing like no one's watching. I can't do that either. Because someone's always watching me', he quipped.

And that got us thinking. Not about our Gods watching us. But about our own conscience 'watching' us. Watching how we do business. Watching how we set our own standards.

And that led to an even scarier notion. It led us to the identification of the two most dangerous words in business.

Two Words.

Here's a great bit of guidance for business decision making. Whenever you have to make a decision in business, big or small, imagine your customer or client is stood next to you. Watching. Then ask yourself what they would want you to do in that moment.

Would they want you to take everything off the kitchen surface in your holiday let? Wiping every millimetre of the horizontal. Or would wiping around kettles and microwaves be ok? Would your client want you to distribute the printed notes with the two spelling mistakes you noticed? Or would they want you to correct and reprint? Would that customer venturing back to your bar want a 100% fresh pint? Or would they be OK with you topping up that overpour, secreted below the surface of the bar, from half an hour before?

It is times like these when we have a choice. It is times like these when we can do what all great businesses do, and do what we know would delight customers. Or of course we can default to the two most dangerous words in business. Two words that can be so very tempting sometimes. Especially when we're busy. But they are also two words that, in increasingly competitive markets, are very likely to finish our business off.

"It'll do."

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Michael Cantwell, Head of Corporate Finance at  
RMT Accountants & Business Advisors Ltd

## CHEMISTRY RIGHT FOR RSK GROUP'S ACQUISITION OF NEWCASTLE'S ENVIRESEARCH

A North East technical consultancy is under new ownership after being bought by an international integrated environmental, engineering and technical services business.

**RSK Group Ltd has acquired Newcastle-headquartered Enviresearch, which provides regulatory and risk assessment services to the global chemical industry, for an undisclosed sum.**

Enviresearch advises clients how to register products for sale that will protect our health, our homes and our food.

Its main speciality is the protection of crops from attack by insects, diseases and weeds while also implementing sustainable farming techniques and protecting the environment.

It works primarily with UK and European customers, but also has clients in international markets including North America, China, Japan and South East Asia, and has a subsidiary office in Portugal.

RSK Group Ltd provides a wide range of services which help organisations achieve their aspirations in a sustainable and efficient manner.

It employs more than 5,000 staff around the world and aims to be a world leader in the fields of environmental science, research, engineering and technical services.

Michael Cantwell of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors and John Nicholson of Mincoffs LLP advised the Enviresearch management team on the transaction.

Enviresearch was founded in 2001 by Newcastle

University graduate James Garratt and now employs around 20 people, most of whom are based at its city centre offices.

James Garratt says: "Enviresearch has been growing steadily for almost exactly two decades and we're very pleased to have found such a well-regarded firm to take it on into the next phase of its development.

"Our highly-skilled team's work is based around five areas of excellence - our clients, our colleagues, our future, our work and our community - and it was a challenge to find a company that reflected all of these values until we met RSK.

"The management team showed that they really understood and lived these values too and I felt they made an excellent fit with us.

"They are ambitious for growth and development, and the links that are now developing between Enviresearch and other elements of the RSK portfolio are already providing strong opportunities for knowledge sharing and new projects.

"The RMT and Mincoffs teams were essential partners in enabling this deal to be concluded successfully. Their expertise and proactivity kept everything on track, even during its most detailed phases, and also helped us enhance the business's management systems and processes to everyone's benefit."

Hassan Ahsan of the M&A team at RSK, adds: "We're delighted to welcome the Enviresearch team to RSK.

"The business' track record providing expert regulatory and risk assessment services to the global chemical industry is complementary to our existing workstreams but will greatly increase our position in these sectors.

"Its established presence in Portugal also strengthens our existing European footprint, which is a key aim for our growing business."

Michael Cantwell, head of corporate finance at RMT Accountants, says: "Enviresearch is a real North East success story which has taken regional expertise right around the world.

"We're very pleased to have helped James reap the rewards of two decades' commitment while also setting the business up to continue its growth journey as part of the RSK brand."

John Nicholson, partner in the corporate team at Mincoffs LLP, added "It has been a pleasure to represent James in the sale of Enviresearch to RSK. It presents the Enviresearch team with the opportunity to continue to grow as part of the RSK brand, and we look forward to seeing what the future holds."

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# WINNING DEALMAKERS

MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance team are delighted to have won the Corporate Finance Advisory Firm of the Year award at the North East Dealmakers Awards 2020!



Steve Plaskitt

**The award is for the corporate finance firm based in the North East judged the most outstanding in advising North East-based businesses on completed transactions during the qualifying period (1st August 2019 – 31st July 2020).**

The team, which is led by Corporate Finance Partner Steve Plaskitt, had a very successful qualifying period, being involved in 26 transactions, including the two largest deals in the North East during 2020 - 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.

The judges were impressed with the clear focus on client relationships during the COVID pandemic, as well as meeting the growing demand from private equity for Data Analytics.

Steve Plaskitt, our Corporate Finance Partner, said: "Winning this award in such a hard year due to the pandemic and everyone having to work remotely is a true testament to the hard work, commitment and team work of the Corporate Finance Team. I'd also like to thank all of our clients, and everyone we

work with. This has been a real team effort and I am delighted to be recognised amongst such distinguished peers in the industry."

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# THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PENSIONS



The coronavirus pandemic has had an impact on nearly all aspects of people's lives, and their finances are no different.

**As the country locked down, swathes of people were furloughed under the government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme. Unfortunately, sectors such as hospitality and travel all but ground to a halt.**

## **Short-term gain for long term loss?**

As lockdown begins to ease, the government support schemes have become less generous or have been wound up completely. This has resulted in further financial hardship for many already struggling to cover costs. Some savers looking to plug the short-term shortfall have looked to their long-term savings to stay above water. However, even a short pause in pension saving can have serious long-term consequences. The situation has been exacerbated by unemployment and a lack of job opportunities. Therefore, some do not have the option of saving for retirement.

## **Opting out of workplace pensions**

It remains possible for newly enrolled members

of a workplace pension scheme to opt out. Before the pandemic, the national opt out rate was around 10%. This was far lower than the 30% rate which had been widely expected before automatic enrolment was introduced.

## **Pension holidays**

Recent research from Canada Life reveals that one in 10 workers have paused their pension contributions since the start of lockdown and a further 13% are considering doing so. Over a third (37 per cent) have done so to use the money for essential spending. 30 per cent paused contributions due to redundancy or furlough.

Savers paid 11% less into workplace DC schemes last year as the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic hit. This is according to the latest ONS data.

The figures show that employee contributions fell by 11% between quarter one (January to March) and quarter two (April to June) of 2020.

Over this same period employer contributions were down by 5%. The ONS data shows that growth in DC membership also slowed over this period. However, by the end of the June these workplace pensions still had 23m members (the same figure recorded three months earlier).

Hargreaves Lansdown senior analyst, Nathan Long, warns that any break in saving, whether through unemployment of paused contributions, can have "a big impact of someone by the time they get to retirement". "Broadly, if you have a three-year gap in your saving history over 50 years, it increases the amount you have to pay in by 1 per cent," he continues. "If you have a gap in your 30s, once your earnings have ramped up a bit, that can be equally harmful."

The analysis shows that even a short pause in pension contributions could have serious financial implications. A 30-year old earning £30,000 a year could lose as much as £45,000 from the potential future value of their pension if they halt contributions for three years.

***For further advice, please contact us at [advice@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:advice@taitwalker.co.uk)***





Paul Fraser


- The Northern Echo's former Chief Football Writer Paul Fraser aims to raise the profiles of clients
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# THE VALUE OF FINANCIAL ADVICE



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

One of the problems financial advisers face is being able to prove to a new or potential client that they are worth their fees. Existing clients are usually comfortable with this because they know and “feel” the value provided.

**I say “feel” because an element of what we provide is intangible. It is the comfort that the client feels by having someone they can bounce ideas off, that keeps them on track with their planning and makes them feel safe, or at least safer.**

However, whilst the warm fuzzy feelings are important, it is also possible for the adviser to make it more tangible and put figures on the value.

Sometime ago The Telegraph published an article about this very subject, concluding that individuals who took advice were significantly better off.

Investment giant, Vanguard, together with Standard Life and Royal London have individually produced their own studies. So have the academics, including the University of Montreal. All concluded that advisers add value, and it can be considerable. Standard life estimated it was an average value of £40,000.

The areas where advisers score are numerous and include tax planning, investment asset allocation, behavioural coaching, withdrawal strategies, investment selection and rebalancing.

Adding up the small percentage gains and based upon the lowest figures produced in any of the studies in each area, gives an enhanced annual return of around 2.5% per annum, after allowing for adviser charges.

As this benefit compounds year upon year, in the longer term the differences can be eyewatering.

By way of example, I was advising a lady with a relatively small fund but with a 25-year time horizon. We considered the appropriate asset allocation and what we could reasonably expect the markets to give us as a return. We also reduced some of the added value assumptions.

Over 25 years, the anticipated market return was 281.34% compared with 558.4% with the added value we could give. In money terms, her £75,000 would be £286,000, with standard market returns, compared with £493,000 with advice.

Clearly, these figures are a powerful illustration of the value of advice, but just an illustration, nonetheless. Inflation would also reduce the buying power of these sums.

One of the biggest added value factors is behavioural coaching and the reader may be wondering what I am on about. I sometimes refer to it as the “Don’t panic, Captain Mainwaring” factor. It is about avoiding knee-jerk decisions.

For example, clearly in March 2020 markets became more volatile as lockdown was imposed and the extent of the pandemic was realised. Naturally, a few of our clients were concerned and needed to know the best course of action. It was in fact the ideal opportunity to fall back upon cash reserves and to stop drawing from investments for

a few months. By the end of the year, portfolios had recovered and indeed 2020 was an excellent year for our portfolios despite the falls of late February and early March.

Significantly, by not panic selling we avoided the decision of when to get back into the market. That is called timing and is impossible to achieve consistently. Time in the market works better than timing the markets. There is research by the ton to back this up, yet human instinct pushes us to make emotional and wealth damaging decisions. Behavioural coaching seeks to avoid taking these destructive actions.

***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 www.rutherfordhughes.com***

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## *Why you should make 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 avoid any possible disputes between relatives. Most importantly is the peace of mind making a Will provides.

Being without a Will can cause many problems including.

- You cannot be sure those you would wish to benefit will actually do so.
- Your spouse/civil partner will not automatically inherit ALL of your Estate.
- 'Common Law' partners may not receive anything.
- Minor children could be taken into Care whilst Guardians are appointed.
- There could be lengthy delays for your Beneficiaries and disputes.
- You cannot prevent certain family members from benefiting.
- You will not be able to leave something to friends, colleagues or charities, which fall outside of the Rules of Intestacy.

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

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## NOT SO GRIM UP NORTH

Many of us within the business community have spent the last year (plus tax) focussing our attention on survival and working to mitigate risks brought on by COVID. To most, this has involved implementing contingencies, a bit of proactive planning and a whole lot of firefighting.

Throughout this period people's attention has quite rightly been on the here and now, but as we emerge from lockdown and the focus begins to shift back to normality, it's important for us to look to the future and the positive things to come out of the past 12 months. The outlook for the North East economy in particular is brighter than we may have thought it would be this time last year.

The first good news story of the year came by way of the budget announcements as part of the governments levelling up agenda which will have a massive positive impact across Teesside and Darlington. With so much government focus and investment currently happening in the region, this could be a period of economic renaissance for the North East.

Earlier this year Teesside was awarded Freeport status, making it the largest Freeport in the UK, with scope to create at least 18,000 jobs and providing a reported £3.4bn boost to the region. In addition to the creation of new jobs, government tax incentives for companies located within the Freeport area provide a huge opportunity for investment and growth. The new status will encourage new foreign investment whilst providing opportunities for businesses within the region that operate within the supply chain and supporting sectors.

As part of the same budget announcement, Darlington was named as being the new home of the Treasury, resulting in the relocation of 750 jobs to the area. Alongside this news, it was announced that the Department of International Trade will establish its new satellite headquarters in the area, creating hundreds more jobs and aiding to attract a new talent pool to the region. Of course, there is the large general positive impact this will have on the local economy, but it also creates opportunities for the professional community within the region due to their locality to the government.

Besides these new investments and opportunities, there is also the continued positive news stories we see from sectors such as tech and renewables in the North East.

In Q4 2020, the first of 12 UK tech cluster reports was released, with the focus being on the North

East. The report highlighted our region as a hotspot for immersive technology, artificial intelligence and industry 4.0 as well as bringing attention to the number of innovative companies, support organisations and facilities in the region. Over the years this has helped attract large established tech companies such as Tombola, Epic Games, RedHat, Ubisoft, Accenture and Turnitin, who operate from the region to take advantage of the abundant talent pool and relatively low operating costs. And of course, it would be remiss of me to close this paragraph without mentioning the little-known company Sage which has been a powerhouse within the tech sector for many years.

In recent months the region has also been creating waves in the sustainability and renewable sector (pun intended). Lithium-ion battery technology manufacturer Britishvolt has secured a £2.6bn investment to build its 'Gigafactory' in Blyth, with a potential float occurring later this year. The factory will not only give rise to around 3,000 jobs in the area but will also create significant demand for a regional supply chain and supporting infrastructure.

Britishvolt is one of several companies developing technology of this kind within the area, and a significant PE driven investment has recently occurred in a similar North East based business, potentially sparking a regional boom in such innovation-based design and manufacturing (that pun was a happy accident).

There have also been plans agreed to progress the development of the world's largest offshore windfarm, located 130km off the North East coast. The Dogger Bank Windfarm will create hundreds of jobs across Able Seaton Port in Hartlepool and its

operational base at the Port of Tyne.

Halfdan Brustad, vice president for Dogger Bank at Equinor, said: "We want Dogger Bank to be a flagship project that leads the way in both digitalisation and innovative technology, so it is a great honour to confirm that this project will be the first in the world to use these powerful turbines."

"The sheer scale of Dogger Bank brings huge opportunities to the UK. As well as being home to the world's largest offshore wind farm, the North East will benefit from hundreds of jobs and local supply chain opportunities. We look forward to working with our partners and suppliers to build up a skilled team in the area, to operate and maintain these turbines for the lifetime of the wind farm, from our new base which will be constructed at the Port of Tyne."

In summary, the past year has been tough to say the least, however, from a business perspective there is a genuine cause for optimism across the region. There have been some significant changes to our economic landscape over the past 12 months which could bring opportunities across all sectors and business types.

The immediate future will not be without its challenges, but this might be the time to start looking forward with some positivity. It's not so grim up north after all!

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# NORTH EAST FUND ANTICIPATES MORE WEARISIDE INVESTMENTS AS CITY REGENERATION TAKES SHAPE



As Sunderland starts to roll out major new regeneration and investment projects transforming the city centre and surrounding areas, the North East Fund is urging Wearside entrepreneurs, local SMEs and those with potential start-up ideas to consider the positive opportunities that may exist by becoming part of the City's rapidly changing landscape.

**Since its launch in 2018, the North East Fund has completed investments in 30 Sunderland-based companies which has helped them raise approximately £12m in funding.**

However, as new development projects like Riverside Sunderland (providing 1,000 new homes, one million sq ft of workspace and 8,000-10,000 potential jobs), the emerging central business district at St Mary's Boulevard (the former Vaux site, now home to The Beam and other future office schemes), and Seaburn with new commercial and hospitality venues, get underway, more investments are anticipated to be made by the Fund in the near future.

With many traditional businesses and industries still continuing to thrive in out of town areas, the commercial schemes now in construction will help bridge the gap further by also creating a new, stronger business community for the heart of the city centre, driving Sunderland forward as one of the UK's most attractive areas to live, work and visit.

James Holloway of the North East Fund, commented, "As one of the UK's top five locations for start-up companies, the North East Fund is keen to support Wearside-based SMEs, providing funding for growth or recovery, the development of new products and services, or for relocation to a City that is massively reinventing itself.

"Sunderland city centre has, for a long time, been predominantly a retail, leisure and hospitality-based hub, with a large proportion of the City's more traditional business activity taking place in out-of-town locations such as enterprise centres, industrial estates and business parks.

"Whilst smaller office-based companies have always had a presence in places such as Sunnyside, which

itself has seen huge, positive changes over recent years, these developments, especially the new urban quarter, will undoubtedly help attract larger firms to the City and the North East region, bringing more inward investment and encouraging increased activity within the local business community.

"Sunderland is a strategic location and these new projects also provide a great opportunity for much smaller, community-based enterprises to become part of a growing economy, from sole traders operating mobile catering companies to family-run businesses developing innovative technologies and products, for example. The North East Fund is already working closely with many Sunderland-based SMEs therefore given the rate of development across the City, now is the time to seriously consider any new business opportunities, plan a start-up enterprise or talk through any potential commercial ideas."

The North East Fund works closely with Sunderland City Council's economic development teams to support SMEs' business growth and enable owners to access the correct funding for growth at the right time.

Wearside companies including Clixifix, one of the UK's fastest growing property and construction technology firms, Mesma, based in Frederick Street, developing quality assurance software programmes for global organisations, Washington-based Advanced Electric Machines which creates revolutionary engine technology for the EV market, and local produce, food and drink e-commerce site, Best British Produce, have all benefitted from North East Fund investment to assist growth.

James added, "Best British Produce is a local family-run business which is going from strength to strength working with other local suppliers to grow

its product range and online audiences. It is one of the Fund's most recent investments, receiving £25,000 from our Small Loans Fund.

"At the other end of the scale is Advanced Electric Machines which is pioneering world-class technologies and innovations for the global EV market. The company recently received £900,000 from our Innovation Fund to help boost its UK production capacity. Both businesses are successes in their own right, and great examples of Sunderland-based companies doing really well.

"There is a huge mixture of businesses on Wearside that fly the flag for the North East from professional services, contact centres, software development and digital innovation companies to major automotive, engineering and manufacturing organisations, all of which support many thousands of jobs and mature supply chains.

"We're offering free confidential and no obligation 1-2-1 sessions for any business owners who would like to discuss requirements, whether this be for growth or recovery, R&D or a new start-up idea. The North East Fund can help SMEs find the correct support they need at the correct time, and provide the right access to funding. These are held daily and we urge anyone in a such a position to book a time slot."

**1-2-1 sessions are held weekdays between 9am and 5pm and are available by phone, videoconference, or in person once Government Covid-19 guidelines allow. Sunderland SMEs are asked to contact James Holloway at the North East Fund on 07395 791 653, email: [james.holloway@northeastfund.org](mailto:james.holloway@northeastfund.org) or go to [www.northeastfund.org](http://www.northeastfund.org).**





Jonathan Scott, Tax Partner at Haines Watts

## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

After a turbulent year – how can Food and Beverage manufacturers improve their cash flow and continue to innovate?

**The past 12 months have been a mixed bag for the food and drink sector: whilst in-home consumption soared in parts, out of home consumption - which typically has much higher margins - has been crippled through the closure of the hospitality industry and huge loss of pre-Christmas trade. Alongside this, the sector has faced disruption through Brexit and the perfect storm of issues that have created supply chain, raw material and labour issues, which the entire sector is still responding to.**

But as we look ahead to 2021, the alarming statistic from HMRC that despite the food and beverage industry being the largest single manufacturing sector and contributing 15.1% of GVA worth roughly £73.1 billion, only 1% of R&D claims have come from this sector over the last three years. Although Mintel did report recently that the number of Patents for immunity improving food development continues to rise.

Around 97% of the UK's Food and Beverage businesses are SMEs. For many, activities undertaken in relation to new product development and resolving technical challenges in this fast-moving sector often lead to substantial amounts of projects which could be eligible for tax rebates or

cash injection via R&D tax credits. However, the figures would suggest that many claims are not yet realised.

As cash flow continues to be a major concern for the 7,000+ SMEs operating in food manufacturing in the UK in 2021, how can you access important cash that could be locked away in your business?

In 2020, we helped claim over 50 million in R&D reliefs for UK businesses, with the average claim at £66,000.

So, if cash flow is keeping you up at night, what can you do to ease the burden, build reserves back up and ensure your business is in the best possible position to take advantage of the Government support that is available to you?

### Innovation in food and drink

Few industries innovate on the same scale as food and drink. Innovation is basically a way of life for food manufacturers. The need to anticipate and respond to consumer tastes and trends, to adapt to legislation, to find new ways to make processes more efficient, to make products healthier or use new, more sustainable ingredients, the reduction of meat content, the rise of veganism, removing common allergens... all this activity might be

'day-to-day' activity to you but it could qualify for generous tax relief.

This is where the challenge of making a successful, comprehensive R&D relief claim comes in, and where it's best to seek expert advice to ensure that you capture all qualifying activity and maximise the value of your claim.

Haines Watts has years of experience in analysing activity and making sure that claims are maximised.

A successful claim could lead to an actual cash injection for your business that could be used in whatever way you want: you could reinvest it in further innovation, or it could just go straight back into the business as working capital.

Regardless of where your business sits in the food and drink supply chain, we can help to identify the scale of innovation taking place at your company and help you to submit a qualifying claim.

### Never made an R&D claim before? That doesn't matter

Even if you're new to R&D relief claims, it doesn't matter: thousands of first-time R&D relief claims are made every year and we can look back retrospectively over two years for qualifying activity.

You could be sitting on more trapped cash than you realise, so why not speak to our advisors today who will be happy to explain our processes and give you a free estimate of what your claim could be worth.

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Prof. Boguslaw Obara and Bill Shepherd, two of the founders of gliff.ai

## gliff.ai TO MOVE TO NEXT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT WITH SUPPORT FROM BOARD ADVISORY TALENT SOURCED BY THE EXPERIENCE BANK

gliff.ai is positioned for next stage in development thanks to the latest round of recruitment of talent, sourced through philanthropic support from The Experience Bank.

**The exciting North East based company is now aiming to triple it's size in the next two years to employ 30 people and be a significant technology player in AI. The company's mission is to enable the best imaging AI possible by providing tools for high-quality data curation, annotation and audit.**

Founder, Bill Shepherd, currently employs 11 people at their Aykley Heads office, having doubled the size of the company during the last year of lockdowns. Now at the next stage for growth, Bill recognised that he needed support from people who "know things that he doesn't know and know things that he doesn't even know that he doesn't know."

Following an introduction from Kate Patton at TechNation, Bill met Peter Neal from Experience Bank Group, and Peter collated an advisory panel for gliff.ai bringing knowledge in medical, technology, innovation and finance.

With this new power of knowledge supporting gliff.ai, Bill is excited to take the company to the next level.

He said: "gliff.ai was born in the North East with a global outlook. We are aiming to supply to the medical and biology world only the best quality AI possible. This AI will be of huge support to surgeons for example, where they can store all their data for training and knowledge banking.

"We have recently secured seed funding to

develop our platform further and we are now planning future rounds of investment which will put us in the position to create AI that is fair, accountable, ethical and transparent. The pro-bono support of the advisory panel through The Experience Bank means we also have advocates who understand us and what we do. Peter has done an amazing job, and we look forward to working with him throughout our growth."

Gliff.ai's speciality is the analysis of biomedical images such as x-ray, CT, MRI or cell cultures. Based upon decades of work done at Durham University (UK), with research led by Dr Boguslaw Obara, a recognised expert in the field, the company's products ensure the best quality data is used in the preparation of AI.

Peter Neal, founder of The Experience Bank Group, specialises in bringing about significant change by introducing the right people through his commercial EB Strategic Talent Recruitment, as well as through the activities of The Experience Bank.

He said: "gliff.ai really stands out as one of the region's companies to watch. I have been delighted to help Bill with the right introductions and I know the board advisors who are now supporting him via our association, will help him get to where he wants to be."

Experience Bank Group incorporates The Experience Bank philanthropic, social enterprise

company along with a commercial venture providing two, symbiotic services - EB Board Level Recruitment and EB High Performing Boards.

With this combination of specialist expertise, the Experience Bank Group is uniquely positioned to help organisations ensure they have not only the right skills in the boardroom but also optimum board performance with higher value creation.

For founding entrepreneurs and small charities, the social enterprise company, The Experience Bank, has a carefully curated network of inspiring, experienced people who can add value to many start-up businesses and small charities, and can match entrepreneurs to board advisors and non-executives who support businesses to become investment-ready or to successfully achieve the next phase of commercialisation.

5% of all revenue from Experience Bank Group is gifted to The Experience Bank social enterprise to enable more start-ups, early-stage businesses, charities and social enterprises access to high quality, advisory and non-executive talent.

***If you are keen to know more, then visit [www.theexperiencebank.co.uk](http://www.theexperiencebank.co.uk).***

***To gain access to The Experience Bank or for recruitment of a senior management or board position, email [peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk](mailto:peter@theexperiencebank.co.uk) or call Peter on 07843 329393.***



# ACCOUNTANT OF THE MONTH

## NICK WILSON

North East Accountant of the Year  
Director, Robson Laidler

### What is your current role?

My title is Director at Robson Laidler but my role is very hands on. I enjoy making real connections and being in the thick of it with the team, clients, and businesses and helping them to grow.

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

I didn't. I was aiming for a more creative role in construction such as an architect but when I was ready to start my working life, the housing market crashed and the instability meant this wasn't the best option for me at the time. Maybe it is my creativeness that helps me in this industry too? Who knows. I'm always thinking outside the box to generate ideas to help businesses grow.

### What's been your career path so far?

This is pretty much all I have done other than a paper round when I was younger. I started by doing AAT, which is an accounting qualification that leads on to Chartered at a later date if you still want to progress, which is what I did. AAT was great for me as a school leaver that wanted to work, as I could learn both the theory and practical parts of being an accountant at the same time.

### How have you been helping clients throughout the pandemic?

Keeping in touch with our clients throughout the pandemic was our number one priority. We launched a 'keeping in touch' programme and ensured that every single client was contacted by phone, Teams or email on a regular basis.

Our purpose is to 'make a positive difference to people's lives' and so it was critical to our business strategy that we were able to make a difference when people needed us the most.

We also set up a designated WhatsApp Business Support group so clients and contacts could contact us 24/7. There was always a professional advisor able to answer queries day or night on things like, furlough, grant applications, funding support etc. Our coaching services also came to the forefront too – helping clients to pivot and plan for recovery.

### What has been your proudest career achievement?

This is a difficult question to answer. It's not that there is one that makes me prouder than another because at each stage of my journey so far, the achievements at that point meant such a lot to me. Passing my exams was the first one. Promotions through various stages of my career through to director and winning the North East Accountant of the year are amongst the highlights. Seeing clients do well also does makes me proud, seeing them taking my advice



Nick Wilson

on board and getting them over the hurdles of running a business makes me incredibly proud, some of which have made the North East's Fastest 50.

### What is your greatest strength?

Embracing change and helping others to do the same.

I help business owners to see change as opportunity and open their eyes to being receptive towards new ideas. Only when you embrace change can big things happen.

There is a lot of change in the world recently, including the accountancy industry, which will only continue as technology and computer intelligence increases.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

To lead people to break the mould of the current way accountants work and interact with people, and try doing things that haven't been done before.

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

I think it will be exactly the same but completely different!

People will still come to accountants for the preparation of accounts, tax returns and general compliance, but accountants will deliver much more than this – they will be more engrained into businesses as mentors, coaches and general sounding boards offering advice on areas like business strategy and change management.

[www.robson-laidler.co.uk](http://www.robson-laidler.co.uk)

**ROBSON / LAIDLER**  
ACCOUNTANTS



## MAVEN LEADS £1.5 MILLION FUNDING ROUND IN BOILER PLAN

A market disruptive platform that sells, installs and services boilers is to invest in a new operating platform following year-on-year growth

**Maven Capital Partners has led a £1.5 million investment in Boiler Plan (UK), a market disruptive online platform that sells, installs and services boilers across the UK.**

The transaction includes a £500,000 investment from the North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund and £250,000 investment from NPIF Maven Equity Finance, part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF), both funds are managed by Maven. A further £750,000 was invested on behalf of the Future Fund, a government scheme backed by the British Business Bank.

Today's funding will support Boiler Plan's long-term strategy to invest in its new operating platform to streamline efficiencies and infrastructure. This will allow the business to rapidly scale and continue to expand its customer reach. The investment will also support its new technical training centre in Featherstone and allow the platform to maximise its growth potential.

Maven has invested £3.9 million to date in Boiler Plan to fuel a number of growth opportunities and support the business as it achieved key milestones including the creation of over 60 jobs and a significant increase in turnover.

Boiler Plan's innovative online platform ([boilerplanuk.com](http://boilerplanuk.com)) supports the entire boiler sales process, handling everything from the choice of appliance, the initial home survey,



finance payment options, installation by a qualified engineer, and the ongoing maintenance and aftercare service. Its 'digital first' solution offers consumers a quick and convenient way to purchase a new boiler and have it installed by an expert engineer within 48 hours, removing any hassle or complications to the end buyer.

Gas-fuelled boilers remain the dominant source of domestic heating in the UK. Today there are 22 million households in the country that are heated by natural gas boilers compared to 17 million in 2000, and there is the potential for further growth as consumers increasingly opt for smart heating innovations to improve energy efficiency and control.

Peter Smith, Investment Associate at Maven, said: "It was a pleasure to work with Ian and the team and support their rapid growth. Our latest investment in Boiler Plan is a real testament to what the business has achieved so far, and the funding package is a great example of our regional funds working together to allow a Northern business to capitalise on new market opportunities across the UK. We have provided a bespoke finance solution and always aim to develop deal structures that create the best platform for future growth."

Ian Henderson, Managing Director and Founder of Boiler Plan said: "Both myself, our Directors and the whole team at Boiler Plan are delighted to receive this additional funding from Maven Capital Partners. The Maven team have been extremely supportive since their first investment in 2018 and they been there for us when we have needed them to further support our ambitious growth targets, both with follow on capital investment and strategic business decisions. This latest investment round will allow us to develop our software platform as well as create further jobs, which in turn will drive further efficiencies in our operating model and allow us to scale even faster."

**Contact Maven's local team today to access the finance or support your business needs to unlock its growth potential or visit [mavencp.com](http://mavencp.com) to find out more.**



# CREATING VALUE

Maven offers flexible debt and equity funding options to support dynamic SMEs across the UK, investing up to £15 million in a single transaction.

Maven funding can support a business at any stage of its growth cycle and cover a wide range of corporate activity including MBOs and buy-and-build strategies, as well as the provision of acquisition finance, development capital and replacement capital.



If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, we may be able to help. For more information please contact:

**Salvus House, Aykley Heads, Durham, DH1 5TS. T: 0191 731 8595**

**Earl Grey House, 75/85 Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF. T: 0191 731 8590**

Maven Capital Partners UK LLP is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, Firm Reference Number 495929

## NORTHERN GAS AND POWER APPOINTS SENIOR HIRE

Northern Gas and Power (NGP), part of Global Procurement Group, has appointed Latif Faiyaz as Head of Flexible Purchasing and Energy Strategy, a newly created position which aims to expand and evolve NGP's energy strategy as the company continues to grow, supporting its clients on the path to a net-zero carbon future.

Latif has over 10 years' experience in energy trading and services, including the development of carbon projects, international carbon trade and integrating energy services into supply contracts. He has previously worked at the Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation, LG Energy Group and Engie.

Latif's new role is to manage the risk of a customer's portfolio. This requires the development of a full energy strategy, long term budget planning and management of evolving forecasted consumption in periods of on-going instability.



## SAM MAKES A SMART MOVE WITH TRUSTEE APPOINTMENT

A charity, which helps unemployed women get back to work in the North East by providing interview coaching and clothing, has hired an experienced PR consultant and coach onto its Board of Trustees.

Smart Works Newcastle has appointed Sam Hook, who has run her own PR company, Uniquethinking, for the past 20 years and is now an experienced life and business coach specialising in helping women and their businesses to succeed.

Sam will be bringing her wealth of experience to Smart Works as it continues to help women to gain employment.

Smart Works helps thousands of women get back to work nation-wide each year through a referral network including Job Centre Plus and through coaching prior to securing an interview. Clothes and accessories are donated to the charity through professional women and retail partners including Hobbs, Marks and Spencer and John Lewis.

## FAB FOUR MAKE MOVE TO HAY & KILNER

North East leading independent law firm Hay & Kilner has welcomed Michael Scobie, Will Jarvis-Smith, Nicole Fenton and Kadie O'Neill to its expanding team, as it looks to build up the resources available to clients across its different departments.

Michael has been recruited to the firm's clinical negligence team as a senior associate and has almost a decade's experience in medical negligence.

Will is a commercial property specialist who has worked with a wide range of clients across the North East and has joined Hay & Kilner as an associate solicitor.

Nicole has joined Hay & Kilner as a trainee solicitor, with her first role in the clinical negligence department, whilst Kadie is now working as a marketing executive within the firm's business development team.



Fred Howie



David Taylor



## Recruitment done the right way

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





# SYNERGI MAKES KEY APPOINTMENTS



L-R: Heidi Joynson, Matthew Harding, Jennifer Young, Katy Bernstein, Lee Richardson, Steve Holt

Cloud solutions and managed services provider Synergi has made a series of key appointments aimed at supporting its growth plans, as it meets demand for modern cloud based technologies that underpin home and office flexible working models.

**With seven new recruits already in place across managed services, marketing and finance, customer support, consultancy and technical teams, Synergi's plans to create a further 10 new roles before the end of the year will see the business cement its position as the leading cloud solutions provider in the North.**

Headquartered at Metro Riverside Park in Gateshead, and with a presence in Scotland, Leeds and London, Synergi works with organisations across the UK, helping them to migrate from traditional IT systems to flexible cloud technologies which improve efficiency and control costs.

New marketing manager Katy Bernstein's new role will involve delivering a marketing strategy to spearhead growth in a marketplace where organisations in all sectors are looking to seize the competitive advantages that cloud services offer. Joining from another regional technology firm, Katy brings with her a decade of experience in integrated marketing in the business-to-business field.

Steve Holt joins as a customer success manager,



Katy Bernstein with Steve Holt

and his role will see him support the sales team and help clients experience a smooth transition to onboarding, using his background in technical consultancy, implementation and support.

Other new appointments include Alex Noddings, junior developer; Heidi Joynson, marketing executive; Jen Young, accounts; Lee Richardson, managed services consultant; and Matthew Harding, test engineer.

Synergi CEO Peter Joynson said the new recruits will help the business to meet demand from new and existing clients: "We have had an incredibly

busy 12 months helping clients to adapt to new ways of working, strengthening their security and improving their processes to support remote working.

Our latest team members will add depth and value to our already strong team, and support both our clients and our expansion plans. This growth supports our client acquisition strategy having onboarded over 25 new clients throughout 2020 and is continuing into 2021.

"Meeting our targets and continuing our year on year growth trajectory means attracting the right calibre of people and we have another set of new starters joining us shortly

We can offer fantastic career choices, including flexible working and unlimited holiday benefits, alongside industry leading training and certification.

"Our long term aim is to be the most modern and innovative choice for cloud solutions and managed services and the first class team we have in place will play a key part in helping us to achieve that."

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





Bryony Gibson

## HIRE RIGHT TO WIN ON CULTURE

Bryony Gibson, managing director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, talks about the role of values-based recruitment in driving long-term business success.

**According to Gallup, the number of people working full-time who are highly engaged and enthusiastic about their work is 15%.**

Pulling data from 155 countries, their 2017 research reveals a huge obstacle to creating high-performing teams while, at the same time, presenting an enormous opportunity due to the top 25% of companies also being 17% more productive and 21% more profitable.

And then along came COVID.

Bringing with it one of the greatest economic challenges of our time, the pandemic flipped the world on its head. It forced businesses to change overnight, to re-evaluate how they work and, in many cases, what they stand for.

When you think about it, it is all very sobering but, from my perspective, the big positive to come out of the chaos is that the importance of company culture as a key to long-term success is firmly back in the spotlight.

The culture of a business defines the working environment for employees and helps to guide their decision-making. It is the personality of an organisation and, regardless of the corporate values you have written down, is made up of the most commonly shared beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours in your team.

As we all look forward to the return of business growth, I urge you to take inspiration from many of the world's most successful companies when recruiting and explore the merits of value-based interviews as part of your process.

While competency to do the job is still important, being able to understand a person's motivation is the only way you can hope to determine whether they will fit well within a team and go on to thrive.

During the interview process, you must provide an opportunity for candidates to showcase their character. If done well, this will help you to understand whether their priorities match your goals and what it is that drives their behaviour.

Your mission is to find the perfect person, but the best candidates will always be well prepared and ready to make a good impression. With their guard up, it is your job to get under their skin. If people trust you, they will relax and make it easier for the conversation to flow into topics they have not rehearsed.

For many years, Timpson - the shoe repair business - has recruited entirely on personality. Priding themselves on great service, the outcome of an interview is the direct result of the cultural match of the Mr Men character your personality most resembles. It may sound crazy, but they live by this

rule, meaning you can turn up with the best CV in the world but if they think your 'Mr Grumpy', your journey will end there.

While Mr Men may not be right for you, uncovering unseen aspects of people's personality and behaviour during an interview is crucial to making the right choice, so try opening with a request for their personal and professional goals; and how they see the role fitting in with these.

Ask them to tell you about a situation that has brought out the best in them; giving examples of why they feel that makes them ideal for your company.

I like to find out who the smartest person they know is (and why). By getting people to explain this you will not only find out about their networks, but also the values and personality traits they aspire towards.

These are just examples. You will need to develop a series of questions that match your specific values but, whatever you end up with, try to remember that every interview is also a chance to find out more for both parties.

While you aim to work out what makes someone tick, they will most likely be doing the same to you, so make sure you do not forget to give a good impression of your business and the way it operates.

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



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# BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES IN PUBLIC PRACTICE...

### QUALIFIED ACCOUNTANT

Northumberland, upto £48,000pa

A Northumberland based accountancy firm is looking to strengthen their team with a qualified accountant. For those who enjoy the variety of general practice accounting this is without doubt a great opportunity, providing client facing advisory work from the outset.

This is a small yet modern accounting firm that has embraced cloud based technology and who is searching for an equally forward thinking Accountant who has qualified (ACA/ACCA) within an accounting firm.

Working with Xero and Quickbooks your role will support the Partner with the firms portfolio of clients which includes those ranging in size from £250k to £10million turnover, across a wide variety of sectors.

The position entails the delivery of statutory year end and management accounts and self-assessment returns. There will also be accounts review work and client meetings to deliver the final accounts. Other aspects to this role will see you supporting your clients internal accounting staff at month end to ensure their accounts systems are complete and working with clients to introduce cloud systems for those not yet engaged.

Whilst this position provides the work of a typical general practice accounting role, it also comes with the opportunity for succession for those who might have their sights upon owning their own firm in the future.

Approaching this recruitment with an open mind my client is interested to hear from anyone at a newly qualified level through to those with longer experience, who might be hungry for their role to evolve over time. For those who simply just enjoy practice accounts, this can also be accommodated.

### PERSONAL TAX COMPLIANCE MANAGER

County Durham, upto £40,000pa

A County Durham accountancy firm with a well established list of local clients from a varied number of business sectors is looking to appoint a Tax Manager to take responsibility for their compliance portfolio.

With experience and cultural fit at the forefront, my client is considering those available on both a full and part-time basis with flexibility to accommodate either.

Managing the firms compliance function, your remit will include the preparation and completion of tax returns for sole traders, partnerships, directors and HNWI's. Along with a small number of trust returns, providing advice to clients on an ad-hoc basis.

There will be client contact through face-to-face, video and phone calls, alongside liaison with HMRC, dealing with penalty appeals, enquiries and day-to-day queries.

Working alongside the Partners you will also be involved in providing day to day advice to clients on their personal tax affairs including tax codings, capital gains tax, inheritance tax and furlough payments.

We are looking for an experienced tax professional with a career in the practice sector, ideally with some staff supervision or coaching experience. Fully competent with all aspects of tax compliance. ATT and CTA are desirable but not essential.

### CLIENT DIRECTOR

Newcastle, £50,000pa

Modern, fresh and ambitious are just a few words that describe this forward thinking accountancy firm who are looking to further grow with the appointment of an additional Client Director to their team. Focused on delivering the future of accounting to the SME market this firm embrace all aspects of technology to advance their clients business growth.

As Client Director you will operate as a trusted advisor to your clients, helping them to grow, using your technical and relationship management skills to provide strategic thinking and business model support. You will provide them with the insight and effective financial processes to aid their expansion. A perfect role for those that want to put their practical and technical accounting experience to the test advising business owners.

Communication and creativity are essential attributes to bring to this position as you manage and provide accountability for your portfolio of clients with the help of a delivery team. In a full client facing role we are looking for a qualified accountant with a strong sense of commercialism, who has trained in the profession and is either still working within or perhaps gained a year or two experience in industry and now ready to return to a consulting position.

A highly driven firm who is without doubt going to appeal those hungry for progression, success and autonomy.

### AUDIT & ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT MANAGER

North East, c£36,000pa

Our client takes pride in the ethos of their firm, they put their employees and clients first and encourage collaboration and a voice for all. They are looking to attract an Audit & Accounts Senior ready for progression to Assistant Manager to join them.

Undertaking the position of Accounts & Audit Assistant Manager you will take responsibility for the delivery of accounts preparation and advice to some of the firms more complex clients. As part of the management team you will be involved in work planning, appraisals and guiding more junior team members with technical and day-to-day support.

You will take ownership of both planning and close meetings with your portfolio whilst also managing your audit teams throughout the audit cycle. As a Senior stepping into this role you will be given time to develop your skills, but you will hold a technical understanding of UK ISA's and FRS 102 to assist you with both audit and accounts reviews and managing staff resourcing across audits throughout the year.

With a minimum of three years working in an accounting practice you must demonstrate a good level of exposure to the essential elements of client service and delivery. Individuals are encouraged to drive their own career forward and enhance personal development so that you can lead, manage, motivate and coach other members of the team. Previous experience of coaching or supervision will therefore be beneficial.

The successful applicant will be either ACA or ACCA qualified with a hunger to remain in the profession. Those with pure audit experience will also be considered gaining the chance to develop your accounting skills. An amazing first step for a qualified into management, one not to miss.

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)



Andrew Marsh

## COMMUNICATION IS KEY TO MOVING FORWARD

Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage for the North East and Northumberland, NED for numerous businesses and charities; and successful entrepreneur, has committed to imparting his knowledge throughout 2021 to help business leaders come out of the last year with a solid view for the future.

**Here, in his latest article, he talks about communication and how important it is to focus on the right interaction and the right messages for future success.**

"Communication – a word that is used easily to convey a very simple act between humans. And a word for which the meaning in the last year has changed significantly.

"Until March 2020 we all felt face-to-face meetings and colleague interaction was the best way to do business. Virtual contact was shied away from a lot of the time, viewed mainly as a trendy, geeky thing to do. However, the overnight shift to virtual quickly replaced the thought out, slow, careful approaches we used to apply.

"Many held back and applied only non-verbal communication for the first few months, until they got savvy with virtual communication and truly had no option but to jump on the virtual band wagon.

"But, we all know it is significantly harder to get your message across in written form; emails and text sent in haste are often misunderstood or taken with the wrong tone, for example. Words can appear passive aggressive or dismissive. The wait time between a response can lead to more questions than answers. Tech impurities even interfere on virtual meeting platforms, thanks to wifi weakness, noise and feedback!

"In person, leaders can deliver instruction or action points with a smile, body language or eye contact, softening what could be a hard to swallow message. Going forward it is important to remember to transmit these personable skills into our

communication activity again, building confidence.

"Zoom, Google meet and Teams becoming 'the norm' has changed the way we communicate. They create a less formal approach which many of us have seen gives room for more heated discussions or for an individual to be borderline rude. Interrupting someone is much harder in person than online and on a virtual call it's easy to be distracted or not listening, especially if the camera is off. We also have all tended to book in back to back meetings without breaks, meaning we miss the water cooler moments. Juggling family, kids, pets and sharing space also posed massive challenges.

"As the world opens back up, we need to leave lazy or unproductive bad habits behind us. For those who could keep working with adaptation, not a lot changed as decisions were made and actions taken as always, but what about those who were closed or furloughed? They will now have the challenge of fitting into a world that has moved on somewhat.

"Yes, there will always be a place for virtual meetings as they definitely save on travel/time plus many will continue to work from home; but as we now meet back in the office it's important we remember how to communicate properly, bringing back healthy communication skills.

"Erica Dhawan sums the predicament up well in her thoughts about having to re-imagine collaboration. Her focus on connective intelligence is quite insightful and I agree with her that one of the best skills that leaders can learn in 2021, is how to leverage conversation intelligently to get things done in the new norm.

"She warns that part of the learning curve will be how to listen properly again. On the phone or on a virtual meeting, you have your own brain space so it's easy to let thoughts wander. Transfer that back to the boardroom, for example, and you are looking unprofessional. Focus needs to be sharpened.

"With connective intelligence skills, you will build a sense of purpose for the long term benefit. This involves asking questions as well as answering them, engaging as many people as possible, keeping a clear focus on who can help with what effectively. Peers groups like mine are ideal for this.

"You will also have to continuously communicate well with employees as they return to the workplace to get the best performance all round. Bring in new communication tools, such as staff newsletters or interim team meetings, to make sure everyone engages properly. Judging what needs to be face to face and what could be virtual will be key going forward. Organisations will benefit from a member of staff dedicated to just listening, ensuring those struggling or with residual worries have somewhere reassuring to turn.

"Communication should focus on rebuilding face-to-face productivity; and also protect your reputation as a leader and employer. Therefore, all communication should be clear and inspiring.

"Acknowledge the past year and then focus on the future. Build excitement, positivity, build trust and openness. Be sensitive to needs of your team and peers. Kindness is a word being thrown around a lot, instead of talking about it, demonstrate it! Lead from the top down and the respect/kindness will be returned throughout the entire team, back up.

"As an employer, you should engage with your team regularly now. Be transparent with your own fears and vision, and ask them to do the same. Do the same with stakeholders, and of course, you must review your policies to make sure they are all up to date for this brave new world.

"As a region, we need to pull together all our leaders to ensure we address emotion, acknowledge loss and move on with excellent communication that enables us to build a resilience for the future together!"

***If you need support in how to communicate as a leader then get in touch with Andrew at [andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk](mailto:andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk)***



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## A WORKFORCE FIT FOR THE FUTURE

How can we make sure that people in the North East are equipped with the skills that businesses will need in 10, 20 or 50 years' time? Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), talks about the work that is taking place to build a skilled, sustainable future for the North East.

**Each year, the skills team here at the North East LEP works with businesses, schools, colleges and training providers to make sure that young people in our region are given the best possible start to their careers.**

Everything we do is about building a stronger, brighter future for everyone in the North East, and by bringing business and education closer together, we can help make sure that the skills our young people gain match the needs of our business community.

As part of this vision, we've partnered with schools to embed the Good Careers Guidance benchmarks, which place employer engagement at the heart of careers education, and we've worked hard to reduce the impact of COVID-19 on businesses as they continue to provide apprenticeships, training opportunities, and work experience to young people.

We have recently reviewed our activity over the last year and I'm very pleased to say that, despite the challenges everyone has faced, and thanks to

the commitment of our local businesses, schools and colleges, we are still making strides towards ensuring that each and every young person in the North East has the chance to learn about the full range of careers opportunities available to them.

The support of the business community is essential in achieving this, and by working together I'm confident we can ensure that the skills of tomorrow's workforce matches the future needs of businesses.

Our work in schools is not just with older pupils; we've recently expanded the reach of the Good Careers Guidance Benchmarks to primary schools, working with a pilot group to adapt the framework to suit the needs of younger children, who can begin to form ideas about their future careers when they're as young as five.

Again, the involvement of employers has been essential, and businesses including automotive manufacturer Unipres, and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums, have worked with us to give primary pupils a taste of the world of work, helping to

broaden their horizons and raise their aspirations.

The North East LEP also helps employers to upskill their existing staff, and supports older workers to take stock of their skills and experience, signposting to training and advice that can help people to have rewarding careers for longer. This is particularly important as we see increasing digitalisation across all sectors, so our Skills Advisory Panel has a strong focus on future skills requirements, to make sure that the North East has an inclusive, digitally-enabled economy.

As we build back stronger following the impact of the pandemic, we will continue to work together with businesses, schools and training providers to help companies to grow and help people of all ages take full advantage of the increasing opportunities in our region.

***Find out more about the North East LEP's skills programmes at [northeastlep.co.uk](http://northeastlep.co.uk)***





**30 June 2021**

**Hilton Newcastle Gateshead**

## **1 DAY, 25+ EXPERT SPEAKERS**

**Great ideas happen when people come together.**

Give yourself the headspace to consider the bigger picture and reconvene with other business leaders at the North East's first in-person business event of the year.

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## BRENDA MCLEISH

CEO, Learning Curve Group

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was younger, I always wanted to be a teacher, so it's ironic that through my role I enable the education of so many people across the country. In fact, in my final school report my English teacher wrote "I'll see you in the classroom".

### Tell us about your current role?

I am the CEO of Learning Curve Group (LCG), one of the UK's largest training providers. I joined LCG in 2008 when the business had 40 staff and was turning over £1m. I became CEO in 2015 and I have driven significant growth within the business, which delivers an extensive range of educational services and training programmes across diverse industry sectors to learners across the country. Now in 2021, the business has grown to having 14 academies across the country and over 500 employees. Community is such a huge focus for me in my role at LCG. My vision to 'transform lives through learning' impacts over 200,000 learners every year, many of which are those who are hard-to-reach, and not in employment, education or training.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

One of my proudest business achievements was in 2019 when Learning Curve Group was announced on The Sunday Times' Top 100 Best Companies to work for list. For a business that has grown on such a large scale, from its North East roots into a national training provider, it's an incredible achievement to make such a prestigious list. It is even more rewarding to know that our staff enjoy working at LCG and that we have been able to keep that close family feel to the business even though we have so many staff across the country.

At the end of 2020 we achieved our mission of transforming one million lives through learning. One of our core values at LCG is putting 'learners at the centre of everything we do', so to know we have had a positive effect on so many lives is fantastic and puts into perspective everything we do. This was an incredible milestone to hit however, we aren't stopping there; our Purple People are continuing to work towards the next milestone!

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

The education industry has changed vastly in recent years. The apprenticeship reform and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 has been a challenge for training providers, but our ability to adapt and think innovatively led to the "think beyond the levy" concept, which works to encourage employers to utilise their levy while also taking advantage of other government funded training solutions 'beyond the levy'. This quickly established LCG as market leaders in the apprenticeship levy, working with blue chip

companies to transform their training and skills solutions.

### What are you currently working on?

We have recently completed the acquisition of Antrec Training which expands our reach to the Liverpool City Region and broadens our provision. Our plan is to continue to grow and make successful acquisitions so we will have further opportunities to transform even more lives through learning and deliver high quality training and education across the country.

We have also been working hard to expand our provision of online courses to suit business's needs. We have recently launched our Cyber Security level 2 course to help businesses tackle the digital skills gap. The digital industry is growing at a rapid pace, and it comes as no surprise that it continued to evolve throughout the pandemic with so many organisations switching to online ways of working. Therefore, we saw a need to introduce a short qualification which will appeal to the needs of businesses and individuals to strengthen their digital skills.

Currently we are working closely with over 200+ FE providers to support them with hitting their AEB funding target. We offer a range of services to colleges which includes, learning resources, online platforms, consultancy and subcontracting to ensure that they have what they need to provide high quality teaching and learning to the people who want to learn the most. We have seen such a high demand for learning recently and we want to ensure this can be provided.

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

My executive team of directors who I work with on a daily basis are the dream team! They come with such a wealth of experience and I can draw from their diverse backgrounds to truly lead this business to transform as many lives as possible. Outside of the board of directors we have over 500 members of staff at LCG who call themselves 'Purple People'. Our brand colour is purple and years ago, staff started calling themselves Purple People and it just stuck! I think it is great because it adds to the strong community feel here at LCG and makes us all feel part of something really special. I pride myself on being a hands-on CEO, I know all my 500+ Purple People's names and always have an open-door policy for any member of staff. One thing that is great about our workforce at LCG is our ability to work collaboratively towards the same goals.

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

The best piece of advice I was ever given was to understand what you are asking people to do before you ask them to do it. It is something that has really

stuck with me, and I often ask people to do things and if they say it's really difficult and can't be done and then I can say: "This is the way I would do it."

### What has been your biggest challenge?

The pandemic has definitely been one of the biggest challenges we have experienced at Learning Curve Group. However, I do believe the pandemic has also been one of our greatest educators yet. We have had to make a lot of changes to how we work and how we deliver our training programmes. We have moved our course delivery online and had our staff working from home throughout various education lockdowns. However, despite the events of the last year, we have seen some incredible success and growth. We achieved our mission of transforming one million lives through learning and we broke our record of the most monthly sign ups to our online courses three months running, Jan-March 2021, seeing over 6, 7 and 8,000 enrolments! We have also welcomed some new faces to the purple family with the acquisitions of Acorn Training Solutions and Antrec Training and... one week before the first lockdown, we welcomed the London Hairdressing Apprenticeship and London Beauty Training Academies.



# LEARNING CURVE

## GROUP



Brenda McLeish

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

My heroes inside the business have got to be my fantastic 'purple people' who do incredible things every day to ensure we continue to transform lives through learning, whilst keeping learners at the centre of everything they do. LCG wouldn't be the business it is without the amazing people at the heart of it. One colleague who I've worked with for over 20 years and has been my friend and confidant throughout my career, is Gail Crossman, who leads on quality and performance at LCG and has been in the education sector for over thirty years. Nicole Bewley is another inspiring member of the senior team, she joined the business as its 5th employee and a business administration apprentice and has seen both her career and the business evolve in parallel. She has led great growth in many areas of the organisation and inspires others in her teams to progress and develop.

Outside of the business I have always been inspired by Barack Obama because he is such an inspirational leader. One of his quotes that really resonates with me is "A change is brought about when ordinary people do extraordinary things." I

think this quote describes what we do at LCG as we work hard every day to open up opportunities to learners across the country to achieve 'extraordinary things'. It doesn't matter what your background is, or what level you are at in your career, there is always the opportunity to keep learning and expanding your knowledge.

### What are your short, medium and long term plans for your business?

I could answer this question with just one word for each – grow, grow, grow! But that wouldn't make for good reading would it? We have some really ambitious growth plans for LCG over the next five years which, with the team we have here, I'm more than confident we can achieve. It's such an exciting time for our business. We want to double our turnover by 2025 which will mean expanding our provision further across the country to reach even more learners and likely mean doubling our head count too! Even more amazing Purple People transforming lives.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

I have to admit that I absolutely thrive in the work environment, but relaxing downtime is an essential

component of a happy and balanced life. I achieve that balance with visits to the gym - and regular spa days are something I just can't do without and of course, spending time with my family! I also have a love for shopping so I am very pleased to see the reopening of non-essential shops across the country.

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

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...grow, grow,  
grow...”

”





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## Pitch Perfect – Investment Readiness Programme for Growing SMEs

**Businesses from across the Tees Valley are being supported in raising investment capital to fuel their growth plans as they look to seize the opportunities in a post-pandemic world.**

Through the Tees Valley Pitch Perfect – Investment Readiness programme, businesses with high-growth potential can secure access to a team of experienced investment professionals with a track record in helping entrepreneurs grow their ventures faster and further than they imagined possible.

The programme - delivered by the Tees Valley Business Hub and forming part of the Teesside University Grow Tees Valley project - will deliver one-on-one coaching and workshops in securing investment, culminating in the opportunity to pitch to an audience of investors, who will include angel investors, venture capital figures and corporate investors.

Pitch Perfect, which launches in a virtual event on May 27, is the latest innovation to support businesses in the Tees Valley from the Tees Valley Business Hub - powered by the SME Centre for Excellence - since its launch last year.

Since that time, the Hub has supported hundreds of businesses across the Tees Valley area with their plans to start, survive and thrive, working alongside them to develop a tailored strategy to overcome the challenges of the pandemic and find the opportunities that lie within such difficult economic times.

"Access to finance is a subject we have heard many times as being a priority to businesses in the Tees Valley, whether that's to get back on track and refocus after the

enormous challenges of the past year, or else to capitalise on opportunities that have arisen in the market which they're keen to take advantage of," says Ammar Mirza CBE, Chair of the SME Centre for Excellence Group.

"We are dedicated to doing all we can to deliver the right support at the right time for Tees Valley businesses, so we are very pleased to be able to deliver this programme which will give bespoke advice to entrepreneurs about how they can raise investment and use it to fuel their growth.

"While this continues to be a turbulent time, for ambitious businesses, this is the time to look to the future and how they can make that happen. Our team at the Tees Valley Business Hub can help make that happen and, working alongside Grow Tees Valley and a range of stakeholders on this programme, will do all we can to deliver that."

Jordan Dargue, Chief Executive of Tees Valley Business Hub, says: "This programme is key for any business who is based in the Tees Valley and looking to raise finance in the next 12 to 18 months.

"You will receive expert advice and support from a team of investment professionals, along with specialist support, investment advice and introductions at the end of the programme. Our aim for the course of the programme is to help raise a minimum of £2m, create 100 jobs and promote inclusive growth."

Suhail Aslam, Project Director of Grow Tees Valley, adds: "We are delighted to be working with The SME Centre of Excellence and the Tees Valley Business Hub to deliver this exciting programme as part of the wider Teesside University Grow Tees Valley project.

"The Pitch Perfect – Investment Readiness programme will offer SMEs the opportunity to learn from experts about how to design, deliver and execute a proficient financial pitch to investment professionals."



L-R: Ammar Mirza CBE – Chair of SME CofE Group, Jordan Dargue – Chief Exec TVBH, Suhail Aslam – Grow Tees Valley Director and Tom McGee – owner X-Heat programme participant.

**\*The Pitch Perfect – Investment Readiness programme is live and accepting applications - sign up at [www.tvbh.co.uk/pitch-perfect](http://www.tvbh.co.uk/pitch-perfect)**

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Ammar Mirza CBE

## BACK TO LIFE, BACK TO AB NORMALITY

Monday 17th May was a great day. Millions of us within England flocked back to spaces and places that had been closed for months. It is a day that many will remember and celebrate, as we started to unlock the economy. For me, it is an extra special day, as it is my wedding anniversary.

**Given my wife's profession, how incredibly busy and in demand she is, and the fact it was a Monday, imagine my surprise when she announced she had taken the day off. The very same day I had arranged bi-lateral discovery virtual trade sessions between the North East and Netherlands.**

With some pleading and understanding on the part of others, I managed to clear the morning commitments. **The kids were clearly suspicious when mummy and daddy dropped them off at school and nursery, especially as they are usually connected to us at the hip night and day.**

By 10am we were sat at Mason and Rye in Fenwick's Newcastle, with strangers, tucking into an anniversary brunch. **It felt as if we shouldn't be there, both a sense of elation and trepidation.** We marked a significant day by doing something that traditionally would not be such a big deal. Having breakfast!

The Thursday of that week we attended the unofficial, in accordance with Covid rules, opening of the most incredible Indian Restaurant in the UK, Khai Khai set at the old Vujon restaurant site on Queen Street, Newcastle Quayside. Totally transformed with high-on £1m worth of

investment, and the menu curated by one of the youngest and first Michelin Star Indian Chefs in the World. **Jalf Ali has brought something to the North East that wouldn't be out of place in the heart of London or Delhi's 6-star hotels.**

**The event was black tie, and luckily the lights were dimmed low, as I bulged in all the wrong places.** Although took some comfort in knowing that I was not alone, as everyone complained that everything now feels too tight, as we are all so accustomed to lounge wear.

The weekend we managed to get into a local restaurant for an early tea. On Saturday, whilst I worked making up for playing truant on Monday, the wife took the kids to a soft play, and then we went to the Metro Centre and the Movies on the Sunday.

On the following Monday I got my second vaccination and then travelled the region visiting businesses in person and reacquainting with service partners, and supporting the launch of the Tees Tech Awards. **Which was great to actually meet people, physically.**

Appreciate that sharing my movements, literally, with you may sound peculiar. But these are very strange times. Plus I was incredibly impressed at

how lucky we are, to have done so many things within the first week of un-lockdown. As we move back to face to face, and doing things we had previously taken for granted, I certainly feel there is a sense of anxiety and apprehension.

There is a further sense of realisation that some of the habits and workings that were forced upon us through the pandemic, aren't all too bad. **Not worrying about getting stuck in traffic is one thing for certain, or being far more productive by adopting digital and spending more time with the family at home are all clear positives.**

However, we do need to get out, and get in, to support local businesses that have suffered so much. Let's get back to life and back to really meeting people. But let's do so safely, sensibly and securely. We aren't out of the woods yet. **And please do get vaccinated, it is the one thing that will make the biggest difference. God Bless, stay safe and be happy.**

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



# WHY CLIENT RETENTION IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS CLIENT ATTRACTION

Mullen Stoker has secured a string of new client wins in recent months, seeing its regional and national portfolio grow significantly. But as company director Stephen Green says, the team is just as proud that many of its clients have been with them from day one.

North East chartered accountancy and IT firm Mullen Stoker is riding high at the moment, having bucked the trend to report growth during the coronavirus pandemic.

And that growth shows no signs of slowing down as the country begins to return to normality, with many restrictions which have been in place for as long as we can remember now lifted.

Currently, the company is averaging at least one new client win per week, which is music to the directors' ears as they have put in place ambitious plans to grow across the North East, particularly in the north thanks to the appointment of Hexham rural and farming expert Cathy Eales.

However, as Stephen Green explains, client retention is just as, if not more, important and something Mullen Stoker is proud to say it is very good at.

Stephen said: "For any growing company, bringing in new business is essential. But what's the point if that new business simply replaces

existing clients?

"That is something many firms can be guilty of – they put all their focus on attracting new clients but it comes at the detriment of their existing portfolio.

"That's certainly not the case for Mullen Stoker and we are proud to say that many of our clients have been with us from day one. They stay with us because they are looked after and know they're the most important to us – that's the key, making sure every single client feels as valued as the next.

"When we have secured a client, whether that's today, a year ago or back when we first opened the business, we keep them because they know they get an excellent service.

"That was brought to the fore during the pandemic, when we ensured that we kept open communications channels with every client to keep them up to date with what was happening at national level – there was so many new schemes being introduced that we felt it was essential that we shared our expertise to help our clients through the challenges and changes presented by Covid.

"We also know it was this approach that did bring on board several new businesses – we were recommended by existing clients because of the way we operated – while many companies went



Stephen Green

off the radar, we remained in constant contact and were always available to help."

Mullen Stoker was founded 11 years ago by directors Neil Mullen and Gary Stoker and now employs 15 people from its offices at Mandale Business Park in Durham.

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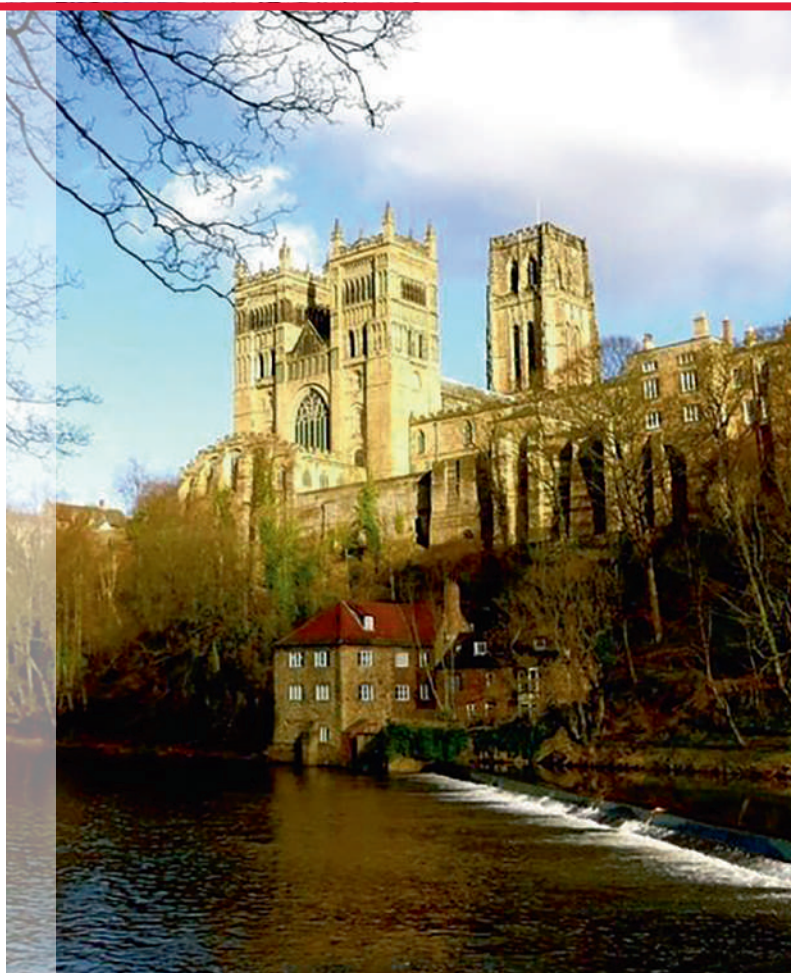
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# HAVE WE GOT EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND RESILIENCE THE WRONG WAY ROUND?



As an organisational psychologist, the number one question guaranteed to set me off ranting... "How can we hire more resilient people?"

So, after taking a couple of deep breaths to stop me actually exploding, I explain that they're asking the wrong question. The question they should be asking themselves - What is it about my organisation that is breaking people? Because you can hire the most resilient person on the planet, but if you put them into an environment that you need to be superhuman to survive in, they will leave. Or they will break.

"When a flower doesn't bloom, you fix the environment in which it grows, not the flower."

This quote from Alexander Den Heijer can help shift your perspective. It clearly identifies where you should direct your focus when a colleague is struggling to thrive in your company. So, if you're thinking that you need to bring in someone to help with resilience training or some kind of wellbeing support, ask yourself why your people are struggling to cope.

I love the Health & Safety Executive resources on

stress and stress risk assessments which ask some really powerful questions.

Is the work environment helpful or harmful? Is the workload achievable? Do the work patterns suit your employees?

How much control do your employees have over the way they do their work? Can they do it their way, or do they have to follow strict procedures?

How supported do they feel? Do they have the resources to do their job? Are there barriers in the way to achieving their goals? Are they coached by their managers?

What emphasis is placed on having positive relationships? How is conflict managed and unacceptable behaviour dealt with?

Does everyone understand what their responsibilities are? Do they know how their efforts contribute to the success of the company? Are they confident about who they need to speak to to get their job done?

How are changes in the company managed? Do they feel that they have a say? Do they understand the change and how they will be impacted by these changes?

To be happy, employees need to feel that they are supported, protected and that they belong. So before you put the onus on your employees to partake in resilience training, or wellbeing activities, it really might be worthwhile to ensure the environment isn't causing the problem.

Oh...and no amount of beanbags, yoga or free fruit Fridays are going to make up for a toxic work environment.

## About Work Pirates

Many business leaders have people problems they don't know how to solve. We created Work Pirates, which is like the A-Team, for organisations to give leaders the confidence, courage and tools to do things differently to tackle these problems, feel less stressed and have a happier, more innovative workplace with more empowered employees.

**Find out more at [workpirates.com](https://workpirates.com) or get in touch with Michelle at [michelle@workpirates.com](mailto:michelle@workpirates.com)**



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# GATHER.TOWN

Gartner's emerging impact trends, Reddit and more.

The team at Astute.Work are constantly curious about anything that might impact the world of business communications. Here managing director and management and PR consultant Sarah Waddington shares five things that caught her attention and might interest you and your organisation too.

## 1) Gather.town

As Stanford researchers are warning that Zoom fatigue is real, a newcomer to the market is hoping to disrupt the online meeting marketplace. Gather.town offers businesses the use of a customised virtual world designed like a retro video game, in which users choose their own avatar rather than having to show their own face.

Combining video calling with a 2D map, the intention is to create a fun digital space that allows people to socialise as well as work, with users able to walk around and talk to the people next to them. It's one of several virtual meeting startups vying to address the online fatigue issue so expect to hear more in the coming months.

## 2) Emerging technology and trends

Gartner's Emerging Technology and Trends Impact Report 2021 has identified four areas for product leaders to monitor in relation to interfaces and experiences, business enablers and productivity revolution.

Within the next one to three years, its experts believe advanced virtual assistants, sometimes referred to as AI conversational agents, will greatly expand into consumer lives, business interactions and operations. At the same time, transformer-based language models will improve translation, transcription and natural language generation.

Gartner says packaged business capabilities will hit the market in three to six years and it expects the widespread implementation of composable business to transform the way that traditional providers market, sell and deliver their solutions. Finally, within six to eight years it's predicting



Sarah Waddington

that AR cloud will have significant impact for every industry regardless of geography, providing a digital abstraction layer for people, places and things, ensuring seamless and ubiquitous experiences.

## 3) Reddit goes for growth

Internet giant Reddit is investing in new tech and experimenting with charging users in a bid to double its growth. After a successful fundraising round, the company has been trialling live video and audio offerings, as well as hosting livestreams for communities wanting to meet online. New moderation has also been introduced to enforce policies to counter longer-term issues around occasionally toxic communities.

## 4) Insta like counts

Instagram has launched a new test that will enable users to choose whether or not their posts display how many likes they've received. Its head Adam Mosseri has confirmed that the idea is to lessen the pressure for those who don't want to

see like counts and that they're exploring a similar experience for Facebook too. This could be a good move for businesses by way of forcing them to consider how they engage, rather than focus on vanity metrics.

## 5) Pandemic digital ad boom

The acceleration of the shift to digital advertising was an inevitable outcome of the pandemic but the financial results published by the large tech platforms show just how dramatic the shift has been. Amazon, Facebook and Google recorded a total ad revenue income of more than \$77 billion in Q1 2021. It is a total growth of 40% from the same period in 2020. Meanwhile Microsoft reported LinkedIn's ads business generated more than \$3 billion in revenue during the financial year ending March 2021. Digital advertising for brand promotion and reach has effectively become a pandemic tax on businesses.

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Dr. David Cliff



# MASTER OR SERVANT?

I remember as a child reading about Karel Čapek's 1921 "Rossum's Universal Robots" (RUR) introducing the notion of 'automated humans'.

**Equally as a child, Robbie the Robot, and no small amount of output by Gerry and Sylvia Anderson promised a future of drudgery avoidance, convenience and life enhancement through technology.**

Čapek's 1921 play is now a century old and much contemporary science fiction have suggested that automation and robotics will eventually result in artificial intelligence emulating human capabilities, achieving consciousness and competing with us as a species.

Away from these apocalyptic, "Terminator" types of script, my concern lies more with how we compete with each other and what we lose within our own conscious experience in a world of automation. Our current world remains a long way from the 'alternative humans' vision of the past and we have more automation than automatons in the form of systems, software, production and fulfilment platforms ably assisted with the advent of the online world and the growth of artificial intelligence.

Clearly production automation has served well to remove the some of the pain involved in repetitive, demeaning jobs. That said, the same processes that add to competitiveness, profitability and the bottom line, often come at the expense of jobs and communities. In a world of capitalism, especially those areas yet to be regulated, there are always human consequences.

In the online world, this is particularly true. Automation allows for worldwide trading to occur, often with little 'relational space' between customer and seller. Fine if it works well, but there are fewer consumer protections than in the face-to-face world especially where we contract within nation states. Equally, online automation can result in massive exploitation of people at risk of being the victims of fraud and other online criminal activity, than would ever occur in their own community.

Automation brings huge benefits to humanity, but it places distances between us also. At its worst, we can be reduced to units of data to be analysed for our buying patterns, to be pursued, coded into demographics and "funnelled" into the sales process. It can deny our humanity in favour of a simple numbers game.

The online community has connected the world, increased opportunity and allowed for greater collaboration. But equally, its poor regulation has resulted in large corporations banking billions with eye watering tax avoidance whilst ordinary individuals and traders are pursued by the functions of state with little compassion. The deficits of the online community, including, our risk of cybercrime, our invasion of privacy, being reduced to a data commodity, are still being realised over the benefits. But as with all innovation, change will eventually come if the ever-increasing downsides exceed the benefits gained, the cries of greater protection will be heard more loudly and if not responded to, many will simply change behaviours.

So, what is the importance of all this for business? Well, we are not all multinationals, but it is easy to be attracted into the notion that simple automation can improve our customer base and better connect with our customers. The growth of chat bots for example, have been significant in connecting with a range of customers who might otherwise 'bounce' off websites, but for many people, they repel and only a true human touch would seal the deal.

Interaction between business and their customers is always about a relationship which transcends the literal deal itself. It's about respect, understanding, social engagement, listening to needs and responding to these. Most importantly, it is about treating people as individuals, something in an increasingly "woke" society we demand. Congruency, respect, good service and an understanding of individuals is not something that can easily be reduced in algorithm and whilst automation can encompass some good things, like improving access to somebody's diary for example, it often makes for a pretty wooden complaints process.

Just like the 1921 play, wherein the thesis was very much that technology is a great servant not a master, if we allow it to dominate our operation or expect it to be the mainstay approach to better capitalise and profit from our dealings with customers, something essential is lost.

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“  
...as with all  
innovation, change  
will eventually come...  
”

# HARRISON FLAGPOLES, SIX GENERATIONS OF TENACITY AND INGENUITY

Newton Aycliffe-headquartered Harrison Flagpoles has been in business for 167 years. Northern Insight spoke to managing director, Adrian Harrison, to discover the reasons for his family company's continued success.

**It is rare for a family-run business founded in 1854 to still be operating successfully nearly 170 years later, but that is exactly what Harrison Flagpoles has managed to achieve.**

Thanks to a culture of tenacity and ingenuity, the company has evolved over six generations to become the UK's leading independent manufacturer of flags and flagpoles.

Today, the business manufactures 15,000 flagpoles a year at its Newton Aycliffe facility and has firmly established itself as the UK's leading flagpole authority. The company supplies and installs its products across the globe and has completed projects at iconic landmarks, including the Royal Albert Hall and Edinburgh Castle.

## Flying the family flag

Adrian Harrison, who took over the reins of the business from his father more than 20 years ago, explained: "It is our heritage, and the ability of the business to adapt to changing times, that make me most proud of where we stand today. It was my great, great, great grandfather, Samuel Harrison, who founded Harrison Steeplejacks in 1854.

"The business earned early fame, and notoriety, not just because it was a perilous profession to undertake, but because Samuel's son, William Edward Harrison, was the first man to ever scale Nelson's column in Trafalgar Square. He did so to decorate the monument in 1896 for the annual Trafalgar Day celebrations, recognising Nelson's victory at the Battle of Trafalgar over the French and Spanish fleet."

The steeplejack profession remained the focus of the family business, then based in Sheffield, for the next three generations, with family members eventually launching their own off shoot, Harrison Brothers' Steeplejacks in Darlington, shortly after World War Two.

## Continued expansion

Over the next fifty years, the business continued to expand, benefitting from the growth of the chemical and industrial plants in the north east of England.

The company eventually evolved to enter the flagpole business. Its expertise in scaling heights, instilled over years of operating in the steeplejack



Adrian Harrison

profession, was ideally suited to the growing demand for specialists capable of inspecting, repairing and replacing flagpoles.

Throughout the 1970s, the business sourced and imported flagpoles from Scandinavia and Canada to meet this demand, before taking the decision to begin manufacturing glassfibre flagpoles here in the UK in the 1980s.

Adrian continued: "When I took over the business, we focused in on the manufacture and installation of glassfibre, aluminium and stainless-steel flagpoles as the strategic direction for business.

"Concentrating our efforts on this allowed us to diversify our product range, move into new markets and provide custom, bespoke solutions to meet the needs of our clients, leading us to become the market leaders we are today."

Harrison Flagpoles is now part of the wider Harrison Group and sits alongside Harrison EDS, which specialises in outdoor branding and signage, and Harrison Creative, which serves the outdoor events branding market.

The expertise the business has accrued over its 167-year existence has also enabled a new venture into manufacturing frangible aviation masts through sister company Pollite, offering a new avenue for further growth and job creation.

## Looking to the future

"To continue to thrive, we need to adapt to new challenges and foremost among these is protecting the environment," said Adrian. "From a personal perspective, I feel a duty to think carefully about the impact of our operations and products on the environment.

"This mindset has led us to launching an eco-friendly range of branding products, including flags which are manufactured sustainably. We have also created the first upcycling scheme for flag materials and are preparing to launch a new collection and recycling service for our glassfibre flagpoles – helping our clients reduce their carbon footprints."

There is no doubt that it is Harrison Flagpoles' distinct culture of tenacity and ingenuity which has allowed the family business to thrive for nearly 170 years and this will underpin its future successes.

Adrian concluded: "We will continue to embrace change, seek out opportunities and deal with challenges whilst remaining committed to providing product expertise and manufacturing excellence from our Newton Aycliffe headquarters."

**To find out more about the company visit [www.flagpoles.co.uk](http://www.flagpoles.co.uk)**



# BUILD BACK FAIRER, STRONGER, AND BETTER

Saturday 8th May was World Fair Trade Day, and the World Fair Trade Organization promoted the message to 'build back fairer', following the disruption caused by Covid-19.

For Shared Interest, it also provides a valuable opportunity to reflect on the vital role farmers and workers play in providing the food we eat.

Here, Shared Interest Managing Director Patricia Alexander shares why this is the case.

**Shared Interest has over 10,000 members in the UK. Each member's investment is pooled to provide vital finance to businesses in 51 countries, supporting 352,122 people last year alone.**

By working together, we can really make a difference. As countries begin to recover from the effects of the pandemic, it is vital that we unite in alleviating the challenges faced by communities in the developing world. By providing access to finance we can help fair trade businesses to create a more stable and sustainable income for farmers.

Brazil nut co-operative Candela Peru has used Shared Interest finance for over 20 years, to support communities in the Peruvian Amazon. Candela works with Castañeros - nut gatherers living along the Madre de Dios River in the Peruvian rainforest, which is known for having the greatest diversity of plant and animal species on earth.

In 2003, the government granted a 40-year concession to the Castañeros, allowing them to farm the Brazil nut trees in clearly defined locations; securing not only livelihoods but the vested interest of the farmers in managing and protecting the rainforest.

Candela General Manager Gaston Vizcarra told us recently: "We truly have a unique relationship between our Castañeros and the forest, and Shared Interest helps that relationship to flourish. The rights to harvest the nuts, the finance to pay the farmers, the expertise to create wonderful products, and the routes we now have to market. Every part of the process is crucial, and we depend on each other to keep this circle connected."



Eulogio Puma Checore

Since 2001, Shared Interest has provided Candela with various types of loans, which have contributed to the growth and sustainability of the organisation and impacted positively on the livelihood of Brazil nut producers and harvesters, their families and communities. They have also continued to strengthen their range of other native Amazon products - all types of fruit - in order to ensure their sustainability.

World Fair Trade Day gives us the opportunity to pause and think about the huge obstacles farmers and workers like Candela Castañeros overcome each day, to provide the food on our tables. The theme of 'build back fairer' resonates with the work of Shared Interest.

People are at the core of our work – our supporters, our customers, and our team based across three continents. We look forward to working together, to not only build back fairer, but to build back better and stronger so that farmers and artisans across the globe can continue to provide for themselves and their families.

In addition to the travel, movement, and health implications imposed by the pandemic, we know the impact of climate change on developing world communities is a huge threat. At government



Patricia Alexander

level, there are not the resources to provide grants and funding to cover trade losses, and at grassroots level, people do not earn enough to cover their basic needs.

Shared Interest exists to provide financial support so that more people can earn a fair living, and in turn afford the health and education support that their families deserve. We believe that trade justice should be a reality for all communities, and by supporting fair trade producers, we can help ensure that the people who provide the large majority of our food, receive the price they have earned in return."

***If you would like to learn more about Shared Interest and Candela, please visit [www.shared-interest.com](http://www.shared-interest.com), call 0191 233 9102, or email [membership@shared-interest.com](mailto:membership@shared-interest.com)***

As Newcastle starts to return to normal with the reopening of leisure and non-essential retail, we await the last piece of the jigsaw, the return of office workers. We have missed these workers who add vibrancy to the city and contribute massively to its economic fortunes. Their absence has been keenly felt.

## A RETURN TO THE OFFICE

By Adrian Waddell, Chief Executive, NE1 Ltd

**Office workers were among the first to move to home-working at the start of lockdown and sparked a change in working practices that is expected to remain for the foreseeable future. A recent survey of our business members showed that 88% expect to continue with a blended approach to home/office working in the future.**

Knowing the city's office population is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels, NE1 is working collaboratively with businesses, the City Council and other partners to devise ways of encouraging people back to the city. Our collaborative approach has already delivered positive results with Grey Street and other streets transformed with new pavement cafes and outdoor dining areas which were fast-tracked and ready for when lockdown eased. Significant upgrades to public spaces are also planned for the coming months and businesses, particularly in hospitality, leisure and retail are all working hard to adapt their offer to suit changing appetites.

Together these changes will help Newcastle provide an attractive and warm welcome for shoppers, tourists and office workers for many years to come and will ensure that the city continues to adapt to compete with the lure of home-working, giving people compelling reasons to return.

Talking to several business leaders in the city, they echo our views that the changes to office life are likely to be semi-permanent and that many workers will need encouragement to return to the city. Nigel Emmerson, Head of the Newcastle office at transatlantic firm Womble Bond Dickinson said: "Now that normality is settling back in, we know the office is going to be a very different place from the one we left and we can expect there to be a blend of home and office working well into the future. We are currently planning an office relocation and Covid has given us the opportunity to review the type of office we need and how we can shape the new space to create the optimum conditions for our business, our people and our clients. Our plans will reflect the fact that a large proportion of our people want to work from home at least some of the week. We know that face-to-face, in-person interaction is needed at times and that some people want to be in the office regularly so a hybrid work model is here to stay and flexibility will be key."

During lockdown we witnessed what has been called the 'great workplace experiment' when almost overnight, virtually every industry sector was forced to close and take their work home. Commercial property specialist, Paddy Matheson, Partner at Knight Frank explained; "The pandemic accelerated transformational change in office life that would otherwise have taken several more years to happen organically.

"Now, as we look to return to the office, people are talking about what the post-pandemic office will look like. What is clear is that it won't be one size fits all, instead it will be

a hybrid of home/office working with companies investing more in their office space and applying new criteria in their search. With less space needed, we are already finding greater emphasis being placed on environmental and well-being considerations and how in the long run these will enhance staff retention.

Digital companies were perhaps better placed than most to contend with the enforced remote working that Covid created, a fact that was not lost on Arwen Duddington, Chief Operating Officer at ZeroLight. Arwen said: "As a digital company we were perhaps more prepared than most for lockdown. We have staff all over the world and none of our clients, or partners are in the UK, let alone the region so our digital framework and working patterns for remote team working were already well established.

"Staff have worked at home throughout lockdown and our productivity has remained the same as pre-pandemic. As we plan our return, we are looking at a new hybrid working model which will give staff individual choice whether to work at home or go to the studio for certain desk-based activities. We trust our employees and are happy to let them decide where best suits them to do their work. It is modern, innovative and a new approach which matches our company values.

"We know this approach and the ability to work remotely will have other benefits including widening our recruitment pool and improving staff retention. By trusting our employees and not restricting them to work under particular conditions we will get the best results."

So as we emerge from lockdown, businesses will be returning to offices across the city, many embracing more flexible ways of working. Meanwhile, we will continue our efforts to enhance the city centre offer and have set our sights on not only supporting existing businesses to return and to grow but encouraging new ones to relocate here. That way, even allowing for the effects of WFH, the overall population of office workers in the city day to day will hopefully increase."

[www.newcastle1ltd.com](http://www.newcastle1ltd.com)



A portrait of a middle-aged man with short, light brown hair, wearing glasses and a dark suit with a pink shirt and a green tie. He is smiling slightly. The background is a plain, light grey.

“

...Together these changes  
will help Newcastle provide  
an attractive and warm  
welcome for shoppers,  
tourists and office workers  
for many years to come...

”

Adrian Waddell



# GPG DIRECTOR WINS ENERGY SERVICES LEADER AWARD FOR DEDICATION TO CONTINUALLY IMPROVING COMPLIANCE STANDARDS

Leah Barrett, Global Procurement Group's (GPG) Global Operations Director, has been voted the Energy Services Leader of the Year by the prestigious CEO Today publication.

**In the 2021 Business Women of the Year Awards, CEO Today's C-Suite readership voted her the Leading Female in the Utilities sector for her dedicated commitment to compliance and customer and supplier relationships.**

GPG operates across three continents providing professional, expert support on procurement and energy management to its 20,000 customers. Its growing portfolio of energy assets currently stands at 30TWhs. Headcount for end of 2021 is projected to be circa 1,000 people, with a further recruitment drive taking place throughout the summer in advance of its move into its stunning new HQ on Gateshead Quays. Northern Gas and Power (NGP) is the UK arm of the global group set up in 2012 by founder and CEO Fokhrul Islam.

A stellar array of awards helps reinforce the work the business does on behalf of its customers and also its people. Its dedicated focus to work/life balance was recognised in Glassdoor's recent 2020 lockdown survey, where it came 2nd nationally above Google and Sky Gaming. Its philosophy of meritocracy means the business frequently promotes from within, with Leah Barrett providing an excellent case in point.

At just 28, Leah is one of the youngest female business leaders in the global utilities sector. Leah joined NGP in 2016 as a Sales Team Manager, where her focus on customer service was quickly recognised. A year later she was promoted to Service Operations Director, where she was tasked with building on the already stringent compliance standards in the sales journey. In 2019, she was

promoted again, this time to Global Operations Director, with a greater emphasis on the French and American operations, ensuring a consistency of standards across the global group.

A key component of Leah's role is the implementation of quality and compliance standards that ensure the very highest levels of transparency for GPG's customers. It has created an independent compliance department which contacts all its customers once a contract has been agreed, to reconfirm all details and ensure complete satisfaction in the process.

She helped oversee the development and implementation of a bespoke 100-point checklist to raise the industry standard, monitoring the group's sales processes end-to-end, creating a self-regulatory framework to strengthen trust and transparency.

The checklist includes cross referencing contract validity, cost-comparison checks, termination agreements and bill validation; right through to extensive call-listening to ensure full compliance with protocols. Regular energy consumption checks are undertaken via customer invoices to ensure its offers are as accurate as possible. The business provides its energy supplier network with unrestricted access to its internal systems,

including the ability to access all compliance calls.

Leah states: "Our customers need absolute confidence in the contracts NGP broker on their behalf and a clear understanding of what specialist support they can rely on throughout the contract. We developed our own bespoke CRM system to integrate strict compliance processes, so every single contract negotiated meets our rigorous standards."

Delivering 'energy with ethics' has been the bedrock of Northern Gas and Power's philosophy since its inception in 2012. NGP's comprehensive framework of relationships with suppliers across the energy spectrum allows it to tailor its advice and support, whether for a small start-up with a single site requirement, to a multinational corporation with hundreds of sites.

Commenting on the success of all the business leader winners, CEO Today Editor-in-chief, Mark Palmer, said "At CEO Today, we are honoured to be able to celebrate the world's most powerful female CEOs and leaders who are leading the way for women around the globe and are changing the business world for the better."

**For further information about Northern Gas and Power, please visit [NGPltd.co.uk](http://NGPltd.co.uk)**



Leah Barrett



# BILL QUAY VILLAGE SHOP

Bringing the Bill Quay Community Back Together!

The Wardley Hotel in Bill Quay is opening a village shop and community hub to bring the residents together and provide essential services to those who need it. It will be called the Bill Quay Village shop and will sell food basics and essential items.

Owner, Wendy Donkin, is looking to collaborate with small local business owners who sell craft items that can be sold in the shop. They have recently teamed up with a local bakery, Bill Quay Blondies. The shop and community hub will also create around five new jobs.

Wendy Donkin has been the owner of the Wardley Hotel for the last eight years and felt this was something that Bill Quay was missing.

She said: "We had a shop in Bill Quay many years ago and it was a lifeline for a lot of people. The estate has a high proportion of elderly residents who can't make it up to the regular shops, that's why we will also be offering a delivery service to those who need it."

Now that government guidelines permit, the upstairs of the pub has opened new co-working spaces, so residents that are working from home can do so socially. The hub also hosts craft groups, bingo afternoons, book and games swaps and more, as well as a takeaway café service in the beer garden.

Wendy concluded, "Our biggest aim is to make the Wardley Hotel a hub and a pub and bring the local community back together again after a challenging year of not being able to socialise how we usually would."



# CONVERGE LAUNCHED TO AMPLIFY CONTENT



James Tennant

**A new platform has successfully launched, breaking the mold of online white noise, following its development to find the best way to amplify the reach of online content.**

Aimed at inhouse marketers, PR and marketing agencies and content generators, Converge.Today is an innovative platform that leverages content to bigger national and global audiences on a daily basis.

Ideal for those wanting to expand news reach and announcements for their company or as an individual, Converge.Today is a simple to use publishing option, with a low cost monthly subscription.

James Tennant is the man behind the company which has attracted attention from serial entrepreneur and Non-Executive Director, Andrew Marsh.

He said: "Converge is a self-publishing platform, but with a wider direct reach to those who you want to hear your story. Subscribed to receive our monthly email bulletins and see the content published is a range of professionals and journalists all looking for their next contributor or scoop.

"It's an easy-to-use platform, with great reporting mechanisms, meaning you can follow how many people have viewed your content and when."

By signing up as a contributor, marketers can

upload copy, images, weblinks, videos and rich content for no extra fee. The content is ideal to share across social media as published on a professional platform and the best bit is that it shares your website and social media contact details too, so that if the right journalists see your story, they can easily get in touch!

Andrew, who is always looking for the next big technology break through, said: "When I met James and he told me about Converge, I thought this has potential. Even now it is launched, the platform is being constantly developed to bring more functionality to those who are currently using it. Its proposition and value is only going to grow."

The platform allows you to post several articles a month, depending on which package you choose, and the reach of the platform is in the millions.

James concluded: "We also amplify articles from members giving guidance, insight and perspectives on business topics, supporting driving traffic and engagement further. When we launched the company, we discovered that the reason most content isn't amplified to its full potential is due to the creator's lack of time – Converge addresses this beautifully and feedback from users is that it is having a positive impact on their content strategy!"

**More information is available at  
[www.converge.today](http://www.converge.today)**

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CGI of the proposed first building as part of phase two at AirView Park.

## PLANS FOR PHASE TWO DEVELOPMENT SUBMITTED BY AIRVIEW PARK

Plans to construct a new multi-million pound office scheme for North East companies to launch, scale-up or take advantage of global trade and export links have been submitted to Newcastle City Council by Tynexe Commercial Ltd, developers of AirView Park.

The application, which will become phase two of AirView Park next to Newcastle International Airport, proposes a new, 18,000 sq ft office development consisting of two buildings. The first will be a 10,200 sq ft shared workspace facility providing a 'centre of excellence' with international trade links and exporting expertise for SMEs.

Tynexe Commercial Ltd has agreed terms with operator, International Space Station (ISS) Holdings Limited, for the building, with a scheme currently being designed to meet the company's vision to enable, enhance and drive the region's growth. It will accommodate up to 190 desks, offer leased offices of varying size and provide conference suites, hot desking, global trade business services as well as digitally-advanced facilities.

The second building will be a smaller, speculative 7,000 sq ft office scheme available for multiple shared occupancy or potentially, for one company as a strategic regional office or HQ base.

Construction could start imminently if planning permission is granted by the Council with a programme of works anticipated to be complete by Spring 2022. Construction on the second building would commence thereafter or alternatively alongside depending upon any single occupier's requirements.

Mike Clark, Director of Tynexe Commercial Ltd, commented, "Our plans for phase two will offer SMEs seeking to maximise trade between the UK



L-R: Mark Hunt, CFO of Newcastle International Airport with Mike Clark, Director of Tynexe Commercial, developer of AirView Park on phase two of the site.

and the rest of the world unrivalled connectivity to global trade links and a very strategic North East base from which to operate. We're very much driving the site forward with positivity and optimism, working closely with International Space Station Holdings Ltd having submitted the planning application. We're delivering a scheme which the market demands.

"The last year has been challenging for many companies however, we have seen continued enquiries from businesses across various sectors planning ahead and looking for a strategic site regionally. This has been for both growth and expansion purposes as well as downsizing to accommodate hybrid working. We've already attracted Bellway plc which built its new national head office at AirView Park last year, so phase two could enable us to support local innovative and emerging SMEs creating jobs and further growth, as

well as potentially attracting more national names to the City and the North East."

AirView Park, located at Wooslington only minutes from Newcastle International Airport, is currently one of the region's most active commercial property developments. Specification for the first 10,200 sq ft building, if granted, includes modern reception and communal areas, 'break-out' social spaces, parking for multiple vehicles, EV charging points, cycling facilities and sensitive landscaping at the 175,000 sq ft site.

Mark Hunt, Chief Financial Officer of Newcastle International Airport, said, "We are delighted with the proposed scheme to construct a new multi-million pound 'centre of excellence' on the AirView Park site. It has been a difficult 12 months for businesses across the region, however there is now a feeling of light at the end of the tunnel.

"AirView Park not only offers an attractive office environment for businesses and their workforce, but as international travel also recovers, organisations will be able to easily access markets across the globe thanks to the Airport's wide portfolio of airlines and destinations."

***AirView Park offers unrivalled connectivity for national and international business travel. For more details, please contact Angus White at Naylor's Gavin Black on t: 0191 211 1551, e: [angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk](mailto:angus@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk) or go to [www.airviewpark.co.uk](http://www.airviewpark.co.uk)***





## LONG COVID

It is a term we have heard flying around the news and taking over the headlines in the past few months, but what does it really mean and how can you support employees who are suffering from the condition?

**Though the immediate effects of COVID-19 are well-known, we hear less about the people who are still suffering from symptoms months after contracting the virus. The crisis has intensified the challenges for many people's physical and mental health and has impacted on our social connections as well as making us very aware of our financial security.**

'Long COVID' is a term which is used after four weeks if your symptoms continue and prevent you from doing normal activities. The Office for National Statistics estimates that one in five people have symptoms after five weeks, and one in ten have symptoms for twelve weeks or longer after acute COVID-19 infection.

These symptoms and the long-term damage of COVID-19 on health and wellbeing remains poorly understood. Reported symptoms vary from breathlessness and heart problems to muscle pain and even neurological problems such as difficulty concentrating, fever and mental health issues.

Some people have been unable to work since they first contracted coronavirus, whilst others are working reduced hours or working remotely until they feel well enough to return. However, in some worst-case scenarios, employees face losing their jobs as a result of long-term sick leave.

Given the physical and emotional impact of the condition, it is important as an employer to know how to help and support your employees who could be experiencing symptoms.

### Is 'long COVID' a recognised condition?

Although certain people would class long term Covid as a recognised medical condition the concept is still going through a long formal procedure within the medical profession and there

is not yet a diagnostic code for long COVID which can cause problems for some employees who are struggling to get the support they need from their employer. Some employers may have classed the illness as fatigue or other generic types of sickness because long COVID does not currently exist in their HR system.

### How can you support your employees?

Whilst long COVID is a very complex and relatively uncommon issue, it is an issue that could affect your workforce, so it is important to be prepared.

We advise that you invest in health assessments and consider various ways to support employees who may be struggling. Firstly, managers should approach each employee who has stated they have long COVID individually and should avoid using a blanket approach. Start by discussing individual affects and symptoms, then from here you can tailor your approach based on the support they need.

If they are able to work, it is important that you enable them to do so by ensuring they have the equipment they need to carry out their work remotely if it's possible for them to do so. Employers should be sympathetic to the situation and try their best to accommodate the employee's needs by making reasonable adjustments or tweaks to working practices, such as reduced hours.

People with long-term health conditions, including long COVID, often need flexibility in order to manage their condition during the working day. By offering support and flexibility to the individual, they are more likely to feel confident and engaged.

### Other adjustments to consider could be:

- Temporary alterations to workload, for instance giving fewer tasks than normal or allowing more

time for work to be completed.

- Providing a clear line of supervision and a 'buddy' system.
- Time off for health appointments.
- Working from home some, or all of, the time.

As we have indicated, there are many symptoms and medical professionals appear to be clear there is no set amount of time it will take people to be 100% fighting fit again. Add to this the increasing realisation that Covid-19 will be something we have to live with as part of our future, you should regularly review your plan by taking into account multiple scenarios and timelines.

### Failure to support employees suffering with long COVID.

In a worst-case scenario, if you fail to acknowledge the impact of long COVID on your employees, you could face an employment tribunal for not providing sufficient support to a staff member with a long-term health problem.

It can also be difficult to encourage staff to return to work if they have suffered from a long-term illness, especially if they haven't received adequate support. Employees may feel disengaged and undervalued and may question whether they want to return to work at all.

### To Conclude!

In short, long COVID should be treated as a long-term illness, although it hasn't officially been recognised as such. Providing lots of support and flexibility wherever possible will not go unnoticed. Your employee is more likely to remain engaged and committed to their work if they feel they are being supported through a very difficult period. The key takeaway here is not to adopt a 'one size fits all' approach when speaking to your employees because of the varied symptoms they could be experiencing.

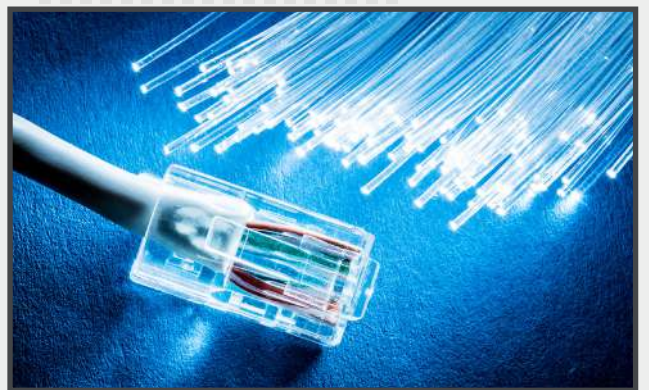
Finally, be kind and patient.

***If you have any HR queries, whether related to COVID-19 or something else entirely, get in touch today and speak to one of the team. Email: [info@holgatehr.co.uk](mailto:info@holgatehr.co.uk) or call 0191 236 1459.***

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Sarah Pittendrigh

## BUSINESSWOMAN OFFERS COACHING TO BE FORMIDABLE OVER FORTY

An award-winning North East entrepreneur and breakthrough coach is sharing the secrets of her success with her own signature training programme.

**Sarah Pittendrigh, a mum-of-one from Northumberland, founded luxury wedding and event styling business Simply Bows and Chair Covers in 2009, and has since franchised the firm, with 10 offices around the UK.**

Along with her husband, she has also diversified their family farm by converting the traditional stone buildings into a stunning development of eight barn style homes, which have now been sold.

However, during lockdown, with Simply Bows and Chair Covers unable to trade, she found herself at a crossroads.

Sarah said: "When the world stopped, I looked back at the last 20 years and realised I'd worked so hard and been so busy facilitating everyone and everything else that I'd lost the most important piece of the puzzle – me.

"I decided to work on myself as I would my businesses and used the method I'd drawn upon to build and scale them, to refocus myself and to reframe my own personal goals."

The result has now become Formidable Over Forty, her one-to-one breakthrough programme for female founders and businesswomen who are trying to juggle busy careers with family life.

Sarah, who was named the Daily Mail NatWest Everywoman Female Entrepreneur of the year 2015, said: "My road to success was definitely bumpy, and

I went through redundancy, bankruptcy and serious ill-health along the way.

"However, I bounced back stronger than ever, and that's why I'm passionate about working with other women who are struggling to find the right balance and have lost sight of their purpose, to help them be the best they can be too.

"My clients range from women CEOs running multi-million-pound businesses and owner managers right through to women returning to their careers after a gap whilst raising their family – a real cross section."

The six-week Formidable Over Forty programme offers delegates one-to-one coaching with Sarah herself, to work through their challenges and identify what is holding them or their business back. It is an opportunity for them to claim back some time to invest in themselves.

Sarah added: "I understand the challenges these successful women face, both financially and mentally, because I've been through it all myself.

"My coaching isn't by the book; the programme is based on my tried-and-tested I Can method, which I used on myself when I found myself questioning my future at 49.

"My mission now is to share this powerful tool with other women so they can move forward in a more purposeful and meaningful way."

Joanna Feeley, CEO of Trend Bible, is one of the

women who has benefited from Sarah's coaching.

She said: "I have thoroughly enjoyed working with Sarah – I feel like a different person! There's nothing like having a coach who really understands the unique complexities of being a female business owner."

Founder of bespoke events company, Moonflower Events, Gemma Hinze found her passion for her business once again thanks to the Formidable Over Forty programme.

She said: "Sarah helped me to find a version of myself that I had only hoped existed. I have become the person that now has self-belief, confidence and a strong can-do attitude. I now feel ready to chase and achieve the dreams and goals that I once allowed myself to believe were not possible."

Sarah added: "It's so important to me to be able to share some of my hard-won knowledge – but I'm not stopping here.

"I am looking to add two retreats a year to the programme, where women can step away from their business to create space for clear thinking to identify and design an action plan for growth and their future goals and aspirations."

**For more information about Sarah or to enrol on a course, visit [www.sarahpittendrigh.com](http://www.sarahpittendrigh.com) or email [sarah@sarahpittendrigh.com](mailto:sarah@sarahpittendrigh.com)**





Josh Gill with Patrick Randall

## A TECH REVOLUTION – FOR WATER RETAILERS

In April 2017, the UK's water retail market opened for business – the single biggest change to the water sector since privatisation.

### **This development allowed businesses, charities and public sector organisations to shop around for the best deal.**

However, like any industry, this change hasn't been without its sticking points; here, Patrick Randall, head of product at Everflow Tech, discusses how retailers can harness technology to their advantage.

Our CEO, Josh Gill, set up independent retailer Everflow Water in 2015. Everflow Tech is his response to the difficulties it faced.

Quotations could take up to a week to produce, billing software had to be manually updated and brokers were unable to manage the complete customer journey in one place – all of which took time, cost money and allowed for human error.

The more complexity that was involved in billing or quoting, the more contact end customers needed to have with their retailers, pushing up the cost to serve for every SPID. This meant retailers – ourselves included – found themselves in a situation where profits were simply eaten up by service costs.

We also note that it can traditionally be hard for retailers to stay on top of balancing what they are charging their customers with what they are being charged by the market.

It was these issues that Josh and his (at the time) small team wanted to ameliorate, creating their own technology in the absence of anything else.

This technology evolved into our award-winning retail sales, billing and customer management platform for the water retail market, and Everflow Tech was launched as a standalone venture in 2018, selling the software externally for other water retailers and their customers to benefit from.

### **What retailers want**

As a relatively new entrant to the world of utilities competition, the water market could be seen to be lagging behind, particularly when it comes to innovation.

In fact, as recently as 2019, Ofwat said it expected the industry to be making technological advances and to be working with a culture of innovation.

And with cost-savings for consumers traditionally lower than for other utilities, retailers need to be offering something more.

What's more, consumers have had a taste of the power of technology, and they've come to expect nothing less from retailers across the board.

Another key issue is rising levels of arrears, which are likely to increase bad debt beyond margins that retailers originally allowed for when the market was created.

In such a low-margin industry, there is a limit to the amount of debt retailers can take on, especially as recovering costs can be a very slow process.

Ofwat has signalled that this issue could be addressed as early as this year, with a mechanism for recovering bad debt to be established during 2021/22.

The market needs simple solutions to better serve the end user, and we were perfectly placed to develop those solutions. Our software is designed for the water retail market, by the water retail market.

As well as simple billing, clear-to-understand workflows, and a revenue assurance system to allow retailers to quickly compare market charges, Everflow has also introduced a complete debt solution, allowing missed payment dates to drive

late payment charges and escalations automatically.

Retailers are able to design and put out their own bill and quotes, tailoring customer journey and experience – whatever the circumstances.

### **What does the future hold?**

Automation is key to any industry; we're heading into an age of driverless cars and smart homes, and we need to catch up.

The Internet of Things – a network of physical objects connected to each other – means human error (and effort) can effectively be removed from many everyday tasks, which goes for meter readings too.

However the water market is still not leveraging previously emerged technology in the form of smart meters to provide accurate billing.

Consumers are also becoming more empowered, both to ask for information and change their preferences if they don't like what they learn.

Retailers need to be armed with this information now – and, at Everflow Tech, we're putting that information at their fingertips.

Our strong bond with Everflow Water, along with other key customers, means we have a direct interest in making sure our systems serve the water market in the best way they can.

For us, the goal is to make sure retailers on our platform can grow as much as possible, leaving behind laborious daily processes to focus on strategic growth and, most importantly, helping their customers.

[www.everflowwater.com](http://www.everflowwater.com)  
[www.everflowtech.co.uk](http://www.everflowtech.co.uk)  
[www.everflowgroup.co.uk](http://www.everflowgroup.co.uk)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## SARAH WHARRIER

Regional Sales Director, CMYK Digital

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I was always very academic at school but never really had a career ambition as such...after university I worked in property for a number of years, firstly as a mortgage adviser and then selling international real estate. After the property crash in 2008 I made the change to move away from property to go to a B2B environment...which is how I ended up in the Managed Print sector, and the rest as they say is history!

### Tell us about your current role?

I started my current role as Regional Sales Director for CMYK in January 2021. I was recruited alongside my colleague Craig Pratt to assist the business in opening up their Newcastle office. My role is focussed on building on our client base here in the North East, developing relationships with customers, strategic partners and suppliers, and getting the CMYK brand out there in our region.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Without a shadow of a doubt, taking the leap of faith to join the CMYK team and open up the new office in the middle of the pandemic! I think Covid made a lot of us reassess things, whether that be around our careers or life in general. Having quiet time at the beginning of the pandemic made me sit back and realise I was ready for a new challenge. We have got a lot of hard work ahead of us but I really have faith in the business and the team I work with, and I am proud to be a part of it.

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

There has been a lot of change in our industry over the last decade and that has only been accelerated with the pandemic and the need for agile working. Businesses want to move away from paper heavy processes and have a need to improve their document workflows using scanning, digitisation and software. There has also been a need to increase security around print and scan due to GDPR and agile/remote working.



Sarah Wharrier

### What are you currently working on?

The main focus at the moment for our Newcastle branch is generating new business, so I'm spending a lot of time speaking to customers, contacts and new potential clients, we are also working on building some fantastic strategic partnerships which will help us to achieve our business goals.

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

What can I say, the CMYK team are just fantastic! It's one of the things that stood out to me when I was first introduced to the business and why I was so keen to be a part of their journey. All of the staff are highly skilled, professional and go above and beyond for our customers. Everyone works together as a team and the service provided to our customers is exceptional.

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

I think the best piece of advice I have been given is to simply 'believe in yourself'. This is something I have had to work on over the years but I'm definitely at the point now where I do... I think with age and experience you become more confident in yourself and your own skills and abilities.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

I would say definitely starting our new business venture for the CMYK regional office in the middle of a global pandemic! Let's face it, the way business is carried out has been turned on its head over the last 12 months! I'm excited for the world to open up again, so I can get out to see clients and have a cuppa and a chat rather than doing Teams meetings. Might not be able to shake hands mind but can touch elbows! The part of my role that I love the most is being out and about

meeting people, so I can't wait for this to become the norm again soon.

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

I think I would class Richard Branson as my business hero, I love following his social media posts, let's face it, he's a business legend and I really admire the way he rewards his staff and holds them in such high regard. As he says 'If you take care of your employees then they will take care of your business...simple as that!' My hero outside of business, there is no contest...my mother.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

Outside of work I love spending time with my horses which has been my life-long hobby since I was a little girl- and I compete on weekends when I can at show-jumping competitions. I love being outdoors and so most of my spare time is spent with the horses or walking the dog, or with family and friends. I love to cook and have people over for food and drinks... I'm definitely classed as the 'feeder' in our family!

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

Favourite book has to be the *Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. I read it a few times when I was younger and I've just bought it to read again! Perhaps I'm a feminist at heart! I don't watch much TV but when I do it usually involves binge watching a boxset...I loved *Homeland*...I also loved *Schitt's Creek*, I found it absolutely hilarious...I just love the characters and it's so easy to watch!

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Lynne Yousef, founder of Escape Interventions with Daniel Amess (Activity Worker) and Saheb (front).

## THE BERNICIA FOUNDATION AIDS YOUNG PEOPLE'S CHARITY FOLLOWING RISE IN COUNSELLING DEMAND

A South Tyneside young people's counselling and support services charity is calling for help to fund ongoing operational costs after a challenging year aiding more than 300 families and children facing difficulties.

**South Shields-based, Escape Intervention Services, is seeing rising demand for its services post-lockdown from young people aged from 4 to 25 years living locally. Many are suffering from anxiety and mental ill health, are experiencing abuse including sexual, domestic and online bullying, need social support to help find a job or develop new skills, receive play therapy and 1-2-1 counselling, or are looking for a mentor outside of their family unit to overcome personal issues or trauma.**

The charity recently received £9,000 from The Bernicia Foundation, a charitable trust set up by Bernicia housing association to provide North East community projects, charities and individuals looking to achieve personal goals with funding.

This much-needed donation has been integral for staff and volunteers to deliver counselling services during and post-lockdown given Lynne Yousef, who founded Escape Intervention Services 16 years ago, is seeing more and more young people reaching out for help.

She explained, "It's a worrying situation and one that is never going to go away unless we find better ways to support and fund charities like ours who are delivering crucial support services to young people in the area. The donation from The Bernicia Foundation has been an absolute lifeline for us, especially over the last year, and has meant that we could cover overheads and staff costs at a time when many families and young people are facing huge difficulties and relying heavily on us.

"Sadly, South Tyneside is in the top 10% of most deprived communities amongst local authorities in the UK. It's a vicious circle for young people whose families are struggling, are at a social disadvantage

or have other complex needs, therefore the work and support we provide at a community and grass roots level, holistically, is crucial. It's often a person's only lifeline to improve their situation or receive positive mentoring.

"However, this all comes at a cost, and whilst we receive many fantastic kind gestures of equipment, toys and volunteer time, for example, which are most definitely needed and greatly received, it's the day-to-day running costs and staff wages that are often overlooked and don't receive external funding.

"We're like any other business with overheads. We currently have 12 qualified counselling staff and additional seasonal volunteers who despite giving their time for free, are still an expenditure to the charity. Therefore, monetary donations like that from The Bernicia Foundation are hugely appreciated. Without the hard work of our employees and volunteers, we simply could not provide the assistance that so many people in South Tyneside need."

One young person who has accessed the services of Escape Interventions is Saheb (15). He was introduced to the charity by Epinay Business & Enterprise School (which caters for children with special educational needs) as his autism, panic disorder and obsessive compulsive behaviour was impacting both his school and family life. Saheb has received counselling support for the past year as well as participated in outdoor activities which has helped boost his self-esteem and become more confident. He has also joined the charity's young person's steering group and now acts as a peer mentor supporting other vulnerable children.

He said, "I came to Escape as I was feeling angry, upset and frustrated. All of the staff have supported

me. They didn't judge me but just listened and helped."

Escape Interventions is also seeing children of a much younger age now being referred, often due to anxiety being present at home or requiring play therapy to help develop social skills. Some are also young carers who help parents and family members while others may have experienced loss and bereavement, especially due to Covid.

Lynne added, "There is so much potential in these young people and it's so important not to lose sight of that. By fully engaging with them, giving them the support, stability and positive mentoring they need, and guiding them through the tough times, we can help them to overcome their problems and achieve their goals."

The Bernicia Foundation has allocated more than £465,000 in funds over the last 18 months to projects across the North East including £9,000 to Escape Interventions. Its next round of funding opens on Monday 5 July.

Kevin Haddrick of The Bernicia Foundation, said, "Lynne and Escape Interventions deliver remarkable work for South Tyneside families and young people, therefore we were delighted to be able to help in this way. It's a fantastic organisation and we'd encourage other similar charities, volunteer community groups or individuals to apply to the Foundation for funds."

***Additionally, any company, entrepreneur or fundraiser wishing to support Escape Interventions and make a monetary donation to assist with delivery of their services should contact Lynne Yousef on t: 0191 4276353 or e: [info@escapeintervention.org.uk](mailto:info@escapeintervention.org.uk)***



Image credit: Highlights PR

L-R: Nicola Robson, Wendy and her daughter at b.Village

## FRAGRANCE BUSINESS EXPANSION IS NOTHING TO SNIFF AT

The sweet smell of success has enabled a Cramlington mother and daughter duo to move their business into a brand new facility with warehousing and office space creating record breaking sales all over the UK of their unique fragrance products.

Prior to forming Northburn, Wendy Gray originally ran a beauty business and decided to grow the business by introducing luxury scented candles to sell to her clients. Her products were so well received that in 2014 her daughter Laura, who worked as a fashion stylist joined the business and the pair worked together from home to develop new fragrances for their growing customer base. The Brand creates all of their own fragrance blends, and then produces a range of products including Eau De Parfum, Home fragrance and bath bombs.

"Our online work went through the roof and we outgrew our workspace," said Wendy. "We had taken on three additional staff and knew we would have to expand further but finding the right business premises was a real issue as we needed a workshop, office space and warehousing facilities."

Wendy and Laura discovered b.Village – a unique concept incorporating office and warehousing space. b.village Cramlington is the first in a network of business communities where totally flexible, energy-efficient, low start-up cost workspace comes packaged with onsite gym, recreation, catering and conference facilities.

"b.Village has totally helped our business to expand," said Wendy. "Our facilities are excellent including ultra fast broadband and there is a hub where we can meet clients once the COVID restrictions are lifted."

For more information: [www.North-burn.co.uk](http://www.North-burn.co.uk) and [www.bvillage.co.uk](http://www.bvillage.co.uk)

## NEW YORK, NEW COURSE, NEW DESIGNS FOR NORTHUMBERLAND MILLINER

A Northumbrian milliner has shared her craft making expertise to a world-wide audience as well as helping a charity dedicated to improving the quality of life for people in need in New York.

Margaret Woodliff Wright set up her business, The Northumberland Milliner at Doxford Newhouses near Alnwick after graduating with high distinctions in Couture Millinery from Leeds Arts University. Her reputation for inspirational and fashionable couture millinery has seen her designs exhibited world-wide, with her creations being frequently seen on international catwalk shows, and nearer to home at the prestigious London Hat Week.

Now, St. George's Society of New York - one of the USA's oldest charities established in 1770, in partnership with the UK Crafts Council invited her carry out a 90-minute virtual event where masterclass attendees could learn about her craft as well as make an item under the care and guidance of her expert eye. The theme of the workshop was to incorporate some typically British heritage themes and Margaret choose one of the more subtle British icons – the red rose.

"I'm really enjoyed sharing my Northumberland millinery skills with people from all over the world," said Margaret. "The class is ideal for all abilities and beginners will enjoy the step-by-step process I've developed for the event. We used traditional techniques to create a small hat, which feature a red felt rose all enhanced by a froth of ivory veiling. The rose itself can either be attached to a beret button (which is also included in the



Margaret Woodliff Wright

Image credit: The Bigger Picture Agency

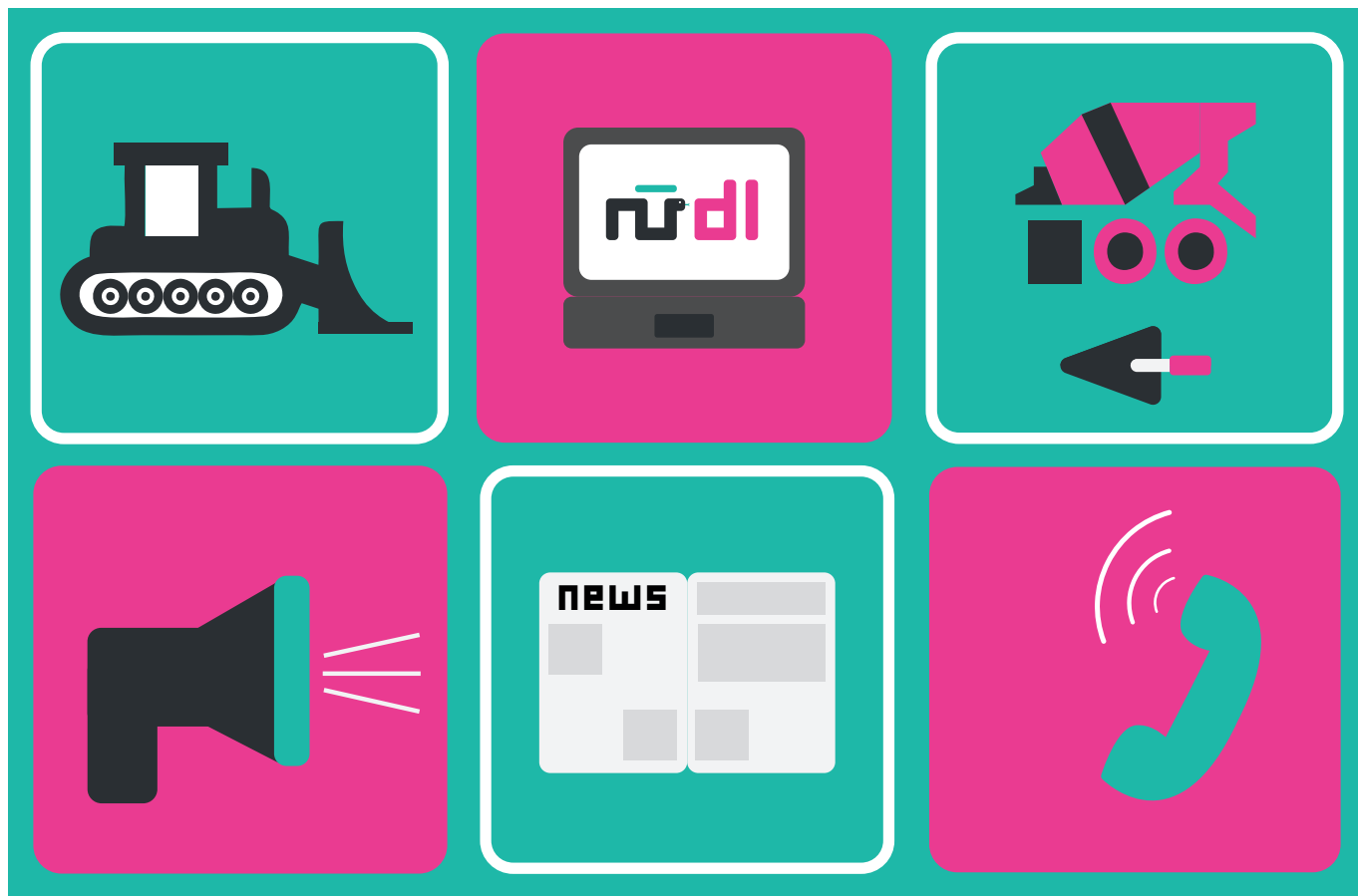
kit) or worn as a lapel brooch."

The master class has inspired Margaret to create similar online courses for others too based on the national emblems of the United Kingdom. Her courses will help people to make designs based

on the Welsh dragon (green and ivory), Scottish Saltire (blue and ivory) as well as the English red rose.

For more information: [www.margaretwoodliffwright.com](http://www.margaretwoodliffwright.com)





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# TIME FOR REFLECTION? SIX MONTHS INTO 2021 HOW ARE YOU DOING?

Why would you stop and reflect on the last six months, how could that benefit you?

**Taking time to stop and really reflect on what you have achieved and what gaps you still have is key for your personal and business development. If you don't pause and look back, you might miss key pieces of learning and some important lessons. Taking time to do this helps you retain your focus, sharpens your thinking and gives you a reference point in your journey towards your goals.**

Most people believe they do pause and reflect, but it is very easy for you to miss things (especially the positive things) that you have achieved. Having said that, it's hard to believe that we are already half way through 2021. With a changed way of working and different set of demands being put on from a personal and business perspective time seems to fly away at an increasing pace. That's why I am encouraging you to sit down this June and look back at the previous six months.

How do you go about doing this effectively?

- Take time away from where you normally work.
- Remove as much technology as possible.
- Look at your goals for the year and see how you are progressing against them.
- Identify what has caused you the biggest challenges over the last six months.
- Identify your biggest achievements each month (two or more per month if you can).

Taking time away from your normal workplace can very often free your mind, giving you a new perspective on your reflections. I often enjoy a drive or a walk to free my mind of the day to day buzz. I can then sit down with a cup of tea and make some notes on everything on my mind (effectively a download of everything my brain played over on my drive or walk).



Nevil Tynemouth

Not relying on technology but making hand written notes means your brain has time to dwell on thoughts, ideas and outcomes. You will no doubt need to check calendars, emails and a host of apps to remind you of the last six months but starting with the pen and paper helps your mind liberate the most important points for you.

I mentioned in an article at the start of the year the importance of having a plan and reflecting on it. I love to reflect on plans on a regular basis. A six month deep dive into your goals and progression really helps clarify where you are and what you need to do to get the best out of the next six months. Most people also find they have made more progress and achieved more than they expect.

Identifying and documenting your biggest challenges and learning points from the last six months is a major step in growth and development for you and your business. If you can clearly articulate what these points are you can recognise how you might change your approach going forward. You will spot opportunities to tackle things in a different way and you will recognise opportunities to grow and develop.

Pausing and identifying your big wins and major successes appears to more of a challenge for most people. For some reason we seem to forget all of the great things we have done, don't see how much we have achieved and fail to recognise how far we have travelled. The technical reason

for this is that our brains prefer to hold onto the challenging memories (the danger areas) rather than the positive outcomes. In effect the primitive part of our brains still wants to protect us from danger. You need to get comfortable in reflecting on your successes, noting down the business and personal wins. These could be big or small things that you or your business has achieved since the start of 2021. Whatever they are you need to make a note of them and reflect on your achievements and take a moment to log them and remind yourself of where you have been and what you have done so far.

When you have done all of this you will be in the perfect position to give yourself answers to two of the most powerful questions you can ask yourself:

What didn't work well for me over the last six months and how do I change this?

What did I do well over the last six months and how do I repeat this?

When you have all of your notes, thoughts, ideas and answers to these two critical questions you are ready to set sail for the next six months. You are ready to move towards your goals and leave behind what you have been challenged by.

**To contact Nevil, email him: [nevil@newresults.co.uk](mailto:nevil@newresults.co.uk), connect with him on LinkedIn or visit [www.newresults.co.uk](http://www.newresults.co.uk)**






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# OH'S HYBRID WORKING MODEL: A CREATIVE RESPONSE TO THE NEW NORMAL

Over the past year, the global pandemic has transformed our everyday working lives. Businesses have increasingly abandoned the traditional office environment, and working from home has become the new normal.

**With the joys of Teams and Zoom calls dominating our working day and online get-togethers replacing after-work drinks down the pub, we have all had to adapt to new ways of working.**

As the vaccine rollout continues and something resembling normality starts to emerge after the lockdown restrictions lift, we have decided to adopt a new hybrid working model at Onyx Health in response to the way the world has changed.

Our hybrid model offers the OH team greater choice over their working practices and a new creative studio to really get those ideas flowing. We recognise that the pandemic has affected people's work-life balance; working from home has all too often ended up being living at work. Under our new hybrid model, our team will be able to combine the benefits of home and studio working, splitting their time between the two.

At Onyx Health, we pride ourselves on being a caring company. We put staff wellbeing at the heart of our ethos as an agency. During all three lockdowns, we rolled out a staff-wide wellbeing programme with access to online resources as part of our duty of care as a business. We set up the OH Training Academy to ensure our team continued to learn from each other as well as external experts in their field. We decided to build on these initiatives' success by investing in a new creative space now that the pandemic is finally coming to an end.

Our new working environment is more a creative studio than a typical office space. While we have traditional fixtures and fittings like desks and



Karen Winterhalter

chairs, we have invested in IT to allow our team to be completely agile to work from any of the innovative workspaces within the studio or at home.

We all know that the best ideas happen when different people work together collaboratively; our new working environment enables exactly that. The OH studio is a space without boundaries that allows our team to bounce ideas off each other to deliver the best results for our clients. We also want to encourage our clients to come to our studio to spend time with us, working through ideas for their campaigns, so they are part of the collaboration process.

Now that the heat of the pandemic has passed, we felt there was a need to bring the team back together so we can work more collaboratively. As an agency, we have grown rapidly during lockdown, winning several new clients. Whilst this has been great for the agency, it has meant that many of our latest recruits to the team have never met in person. Online inductions can only achieve so much; nothing beats that rapport and connection you only get with face-to-face interaction.

We have planned a series of staff away days and staff get-togethers over the next few months to reignite that sense of team spirit and positive office culture. Our team has worked incredibly hard during the pandemic, but many people are sick and tired of being stuck in the house every day and want to get back to normality.

Working in isolation indefinitely is not good for the mental health and the wellbeing of our team. Our new working model strikes a balance between home and studio-based work, giving the team a better work-life balance.

Some of our senior team have young families, and juggling their working day with childcare is challenging at the best of times; our new model offers greater flexibility for people who need to work at home regularly due to family commitments.

We have always tried to strike a balance between being casual and professional as an agency, and that's why we have come up with a solution that offers the best of both worlds.

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Sarah and Stephen Waddington with Madge.





# THE KING AND QUEEN OF THE CAMPERVAN

Last year was crowned the 'year of the campervan' as demand for hires rose due to COVID-enforced staycations. With the government understandably slow to relax travel rules, 2021 is expected to be even busier.

**This spring, management and PR consultants Sarah and Stephen Waddington realised their own dream of starting a rental business, [www.northeastcampervanrental.co.uk](http://www.northeastcampervanrental.co.uk).**

Chatting to Sarah and Stephen Waddington, their excitement about their new venture is palpable. Only a couple of months in, the couple have been blown away by the interest in their new business, which they run in parallel with their own agencies, Astute.Work and Wadds.Inc.

Most of all though, it's clear they're loving the freedom that comes with owning a campervan – and enjoying sharing that experience with other people too.

"It all happened pretty quickly – we'd been talking about it a while and I think having been forced to stay locally for so long spurred us into action," said Stephen. "It got to February and the urge to get out and about again was overwhelming. We'd rented a campervan the Autumn before and loved it, so the seed had been firmly planted then. After a little bit of research on the internet, our minds were set."

Sarah and Stephen decided to choose a freshly converted 2018 VW Transporter 6 with all the latest mod cons. "We wanted something eye catching with relatively low mileage with the rental business in mind."

In Acapulco blue, with orange highlights, the campervan features a rock and roll bed and a Skyline pop up top in gloss black which means it can sleep two to four people. A sleek kitchen features a dual hob and sink unit and the van is fitted with air conditioning and a diesel heater so you're well catered for, whatever the British weather.

"We've called her Paris as I was determined to have springtime in Paris one way or another," said Sarah with a laugh, adding that camping in a van makes it much easier to escape the cold and wet than a tent. "That said, we offer an awning too, which provides even more space and when we travel with the kids, we tend to sleep in there and leave them to it."

Camping Britain has reported record seasonal bookings for camping pitches, with holiday makers keen to explore the UK after foreign travel has been cancelled. It's certainly something that the Waddingtons have noticed when making their own bookings. "We've had to be pretty organised and book quite far in advance to secure the electric pitches we want and we've been advising our guests to do the same," said Sarah.

Campervans are particularly popular as they're seen as a safe way to travel and offer flexibility of destination. There are no quarantine requirements and campsites often provide toilet and shower facilities, if like with Paris, these aren't included with the hire. Self-catering meals also avoids the social distancing rules and booking needs of pubs and restaurants and it can be a lot of fun when you have a gas stove with a view.



"One of the things we love most is the buzz people get from a stay away in the van," said Stephen. "There is something special about campervan life in that it literally transports you away from the stress of day-to-day life. You live in the moment, there's an exhilaration to it and you get bitten by the bug. It's lovely to hear guests talk about the proper break they had, even just on a weekend hire. You can pick up the van at 4pm and be pitched up somewhere completely different by 7pm. It's perfect."

With enquiries coming in apace, the Waddingtons are hopeful that summer 2021 will soon be booked out. "We're feeling really positive about how the year is shaping up. It's also nice to know that a booking with us is enabling people to explore some of the UK's loveliest spots, which means they're also investing in the local economy. That's great for everyone."

**To find out more about Sarah and Stephen's campervan, Paris, availability and how to book, visit [www.northeastcampervanrental.co.uk](http://www.northeastcampervanrental.co.uk)**







## BUSINESSES CELEBRATED IN CHARITY AWARDS

Businesses from across the region have been presented Shared Value Awards by homelessness charity Oasis Community Housing, in recognition of their corporate partnerships that go far beyond the traditional CSR reciprocity model.

"It's the little things that enable us to offer people somewhere they feel they belong, not just a roof overhead," explains David Smith, Chief Executive at Oasis Community Housing. "From financial support to businesses' gifts of time as well as thoughtful donations, it's all of these things that make us incredibly proud of our corporate partnerships."

"In return, because of our charitable strategic positioning in some of the toughest sections of society, we hope our lasting social and operational solutions can also provide useful insights for the businesses we work with."

The charity's 2021 Shared Value Award winners include: Armadillo Self Storage, Clarion Futures, Fine & Country, Gentoo, Giraffe Lets, Karbon Homes, Muckle LLP, NTE Limited, Skipton Building Society and Tolent.



## YOUTH PROJECTS JOIN FORCES TO COMBAT RISE IN POOR MENTAL HEALTH FOR STANLEY YOUTH

A trio of Stanley projects have pledged to help young people after research showed a decline in their mental health during the pandemic.

The report, published by Stanley Area Youth Consortium, found that young people in the area were experiencing increased anxiety, social isolation and worry about the future, with girls faring worse than boys. In total 231 young children were interviewed for the report, which targeted those aged seven to 18-years old.

Now Oxhill Youth Club, Stanley Area Young People's Club and Stars Youth and Community have joined together to provide counselling, support and a positive programme of activities to combat these issues, and their action plan has been awarded £80,000 from Stanley Community Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund.

SAYC spokesperson Darren McMahon said: "Our report highlights the real need to support our children and young people to overcome the effects of the pandemic. We've listened to their concerns and responded, offering a new, engaging and bigger programme of activity, open to everyone regardless of where they live or their background."

The majority of all age groups surveyed – 68 per cent - were sad at least some of the time and 65 per cent were worried all or some of the time. Physical health has also suffered, with 57 per cent of all age groups and both sexes having done less exercise since the pandemic. Worryingly, the younger age group also played less during the pandemic, while older girls fared the worst in terms of self-esteem and confidence. In addition, they spent more time on social media and less time exercising than the boys who were surveyed.

Girls' mental health seems to have been hit harder than boys across all age groups, but particularly in the older one. Their self-esteem and confidence in their abilities is considerably lower than the boys surveyed, and they feel less listened to, spending significantly more time on social media and less time exercising than boys.

Stanley Area Youth Consortium was founded four years ago to offer training, joint activities, support sessions and trips to children and young people across the Stanley area. All consortium members offer trips and activities open to other youth club members and children and young people in the wider Stanley area. They also offer volunteering opportunities for children, young people and adults and encourage peer support and engagement.



## COVID RECOVERY GRANT HELPS FOOD STYLIST

Home economist and food stylist, Jill Weatherburn from Low Fell, is hungry for success having gained a Covid recovery grant of £1,350 from Open North Foundation, after her business suffered badly during the pandemic.

Jill has over 30 years' experience in the food stylist and home economist industry and travels the UK to provide her expertise at a range of events.

By keeping up-to-date with the latest food trends, she shares advice on cookery, nutrition and good health to a range of audiences. Her home economist services include live cookery demonstrations and creating and developing recipes.



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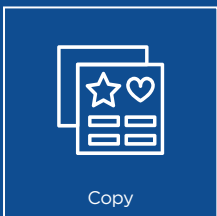
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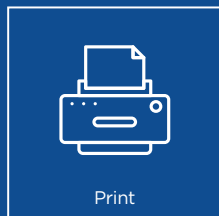
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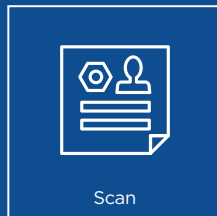
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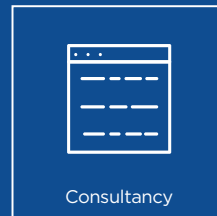
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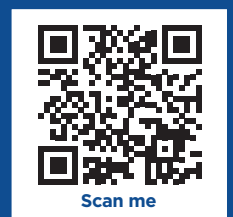
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# CHILDREN'S CANCER NORTH

By Chris Peacock, Chairman

Aim to make life better for children suffering with cancer through the provision of dedicated support for individuals and their families and by funding leading research and clinical trials.

## **Tell us about Children's Cancer North:**

Children's Cancer North is an independent charity with over 40 years of heritage in supporting individuals and families affected by childhood cancer in the North East and Cumbria. Newly formed in 2021 following the merging of the North of England Children's Cancer Research and Children's Cancer Fund, our charities have collectively raised over £40 million since 1979.

To add a bit of context, around 50 years ago, three-quarters of children diagnosed with cancer sadly died. Today, more than three-quarters survive. Our work has been instrumental in driving these positive recovery rates across the UK.

## **The new entity brings together two charities. Why was the merger needed?**

Having worked closely with the trustees of both charities for many years, it has always been clear that our aims to dramatically improve the lives of children with cancer were core to us all, so it has felt entirely natural to join together now.

By coming together as Children's Cancer North, we can be more efficient, have greater impact and be a driver for change because we will have more influence, a "bigger" voice and ultimately do more to improve lives of children with cancer.

## **What do you do that makes such a difference to the lives of young people and families affected by childhood cancer?**

We fund valuable work being led by the Centre for Cancer at Newcastle University.

Since 2016, the Wolfson Centre for Childhood Cancer Research based at the University has hosted the North East Children's Cancer research team. The facility provides a centre of excellence where expert clinical and research teams come

together to advance their understanding of how to treat childhood cancers.

This unique approach directly links clinical professionals at Great North Children's Hospital with University academics and scientists, enabling patients across the North of England and beyond to participate in early-stage trials.

Newcastle's childhood cancer research team is now one of the leading authorities worldwide and is recognised as an international centre of excellence.

In addition, we provide support for individuals and their families, including financial support for bereaved families, as well as on-ward activities and initiatives which significantly improve the quality of life for children and young people going through difficult treatment.

As a childhood cancer survivor myself, I know first-hand how difficult life is both as a patient, and for parents and siblings. This lived experience is what drives me and the charity to make life better for those going through now what I and my family did 40 years ago.

## **Have you big ambitions and targets for Children's Cancer North?**

The most urgent focus for 2021 and 2022 will be in support of recovery post-COVID. Children and families facing cancer need ongoing support, which has been limited in the last year, and we are committed to improving their lives both throughout treatment, at home and in the community.



Chris Peacock

Our next target is to raise £2 million in 3 years to continue funding revolutionary research and to transform the children's cancer wards at the Great North Children's Hospital - to bring the latest technology and interactive play areas to help make life a bit easier for those going through the toughest of times.

We will fund specialists to deliver on-ward activities including music therapy, and animation, celebrations such as parties and social outings for teenagers - all of which contribute to a more positive ward experience.

## **How can people get involved and support the charity?**

There are so many ways people can help support our work and get involved – from making a donation, volunteering, setting up a fundraising event, participating in one of our events (or a partner event such as the Great North Run), or choosing Children's Cancer North as your company's charity of the year.

Every bit of support will help us to achieve our ambition to transform the experience for children on the wards and fund research that makes a real difference to young lives across the region.

*To find out more about Children's Cancer North, the vital work we do and the children and families we help, head to our website: [childrenscancernorth.org.uk](http://childrenscancernorth.org.uk)*



# NEWLY APPOINTED AMBASSADOR PLEDGES £5,000 TO SUPPORT COVID-HIT NORTH EAST BUSINESS



Alan Ferguson

Alan Ferguson OBE, director of Fergusons Transport, has pledged £5,000 and his continued support for Covid-hit small firms looking for a road map to success, in his new role as ambassador at Open North Foundation.

**Born in Blyth, the former president of the North East Chamber of Commerce, is current chair of the Blyth Town Deal Board and spearheaded its £25 million bid towards regeneration, with the outcome pending later this year.**

Established in 1926, family-run, Fergusons Transport is the largest privately owned haulier in the North East. Its portfolio of customers comprises local, national and international companies from all sectors of industry, including Nissan and Amazon. With headquarters in Cramlington, it operates from several locations throughout the UK and also specialises in warehousing, logistics, removals and self-storage.

A private sector-led, not-for profit company, established in summer 2020, Open North Foundation assists small firms in the North East looking to recover from the pandemic. Businesses that meet strict criteria, receive grants ranging from £1000 to £5000, that are donated by companies and individuals in the region, plus in-kind support such as marketing, HR and finance. Directors, ambassadors and supporters of the Foundation provide their time pro bono.

Alan Ferguson, said: "Fergusons Transport has operated for nearly 100 years, assisting thousands

of companies in the region and forging strong relationships. We believe that all businesses should look after the relationships they build in good times, during the bad times. Business doesn't purely exist for what we can take from it. It operates to support all in its community and the North East is famed for looking after its own, lifting up those who need assistance when things get hard.

"The region's business community is extremely interconnected, we are all separated by just one or two contacts. The successes and struggles of one business have a ripple effect and is why initiatives such as Open North Foundation are so important."

Open North Foundation has provided grants to a number of local businesses including Chester-le-Street-based, Physio4U, Jarrow-based, boutique talent agency and professional academy, SHIELDS Agency and the Great North Eastern Brewery. Beneficiaries, such as Stokesley-based, Tk's Café and Catering, can also gain from the strategic partnership between Open North Foundation and Northumbria University, giving access to tens of thousands of pounds of business training support, via Northumbria's Newcastle Business School.

Richard Swart, chair, Open North Foundation, said:

"Alan brings a wealth of business knowledge and contacts as ambassador. There are very few people in the North East business world that haven't heard of Fergusons Transport. It is a true regional success story that has not forgotten its local roots, despite truly impressive national and international growth.

"Alan's support will be a huge asset in helping us further our reach and the very generous donation will be used to assist businesses which, with a little bit of support, will continue to bring great benefit to our local economy and community.

"As lockdown continues to ease and businesses are able to resume a more normal way of operating, we will still be surrounded by somewhat of a safety net, due to the furlough scheme. When it stops at the end of September, there will be untold disruption and discomfort as businesses look to find their feet.

"Therefore, I would encourage all individuals and organisations that can pledge support, whether this be financial, in-kind, or both, to do so. The future of North East business depends on how we come together over the foreseeable future."

**For more information about Open North Foundation, visit [opennorthfoundation.co.uk](http://opennorthfoundation.co.uk)**

# FOOD POVERTY CHARITY EXPANDS INTO BLAYDON

**Feeding Families** is a food poverty charity that supports local communities in the North East of England. The organisation started by matching families over the festive period. Donor families give hampers to recipient families who were unable to afford the extra luxuries.

This has grown year on year and in December 2020 8,014 families were supported. 3,500 were manually matched families by us and the rest we made up hampers in our packing centres with donated items and they were distributed by other organisations such as social services etc. When Covid19 hit last year there was a sudden need for emergency food provision.

The organisation offers a year-round service, supporting those experiencing food poverty with 'Emergency Food Boxes'. Each box provides families with three days of food until they can access another service. Currently they send out 700 boxes a month (each box supports two people), however the organisation expects the demand to increase in the coming months and had just moved into a second unit in Blaydon.

Juliet Sanders CEO: "We are excited to have moved into our new long-term home in Blaydon which will be both our headquarters and packing centre. Having a base will mean we can do so much more! Not only will we be able to pack more boxes, but we can run projects that support



families in other ways. It is a massive step forwards for our small charity. Made possible by the kindness of supporters."

Ways business and individuals can support Feeding Families:

- Donating the food, we need a constant flow. Could you organise a food collection in your street/work?

- We need help with the flooring, signage, and electricals in the new unit.
- Volunteering - we need support with box packing, regional deliveries and community collection.
- Donating via our website [www.feedingfamilies.org.uk](http://www.feedingfamilies.org.uk).
- By organising a fundraising event.
- 'Liking' and sharing our Facebook page.

## WHAT DO WE WANT FOR OUR CHILDREN FROM OUR EDUCATION SYSTEM?

**In this past month, we've seen the power that a group of individuals who are passionate about something can have when they come together to fight for change. I'm of course talking about football and the proposed European Super League, but apply this principle to almost anything and the outcome is the same; when we act together with a united voice, it can actually lead to significant change.**

This has made me think about what we could achieve in education if we could unite people around a common cause, so I ask you, what do we want for our children from our education system?

One of my priorities would be to create an education system which places equal value on the full range of qualifications and subjects available to learners. In my opinion, our current education system is too narrow in its focus and is heavily weighted towards measuring success in 'academic' subjects such as English and Maths, leading to vocational and technical qualifications often being seen as the 'poor relations'.

As the UK starts down its road to economic recovery in the aftermath of Covid-19, many people will find themselves in need of training to enable them to 'upskill' or 'reskill' to find work. Vocational and technical qualifications have already been highlighted as critical to the country's regeneration, so perhaps now is the perfect opportunity for a reset of the entire education system?

A recent Think Tank report suggests that 48% of parents would prefer their child to get a vocational qualification over going to university when they leave school. This encourages me to think that many people would welcome a review of our national curriculum to create an equal playing field for academic and vocational qualifications.

Reform will only happen however if enough people are willing to come together and support the case for change. This brings us back to the original question; what do we want for our children from our education system? If football supporters can bring down the European Super League in just 48



Alan Hardie

hours, then why can't we raise our voices to challenge educational reform for our children?

**Alan Hardie is CEO at Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust (NCEAT), a multi-academy Trust which serves South East Northumberland. For more information, visit [www.ncea.org.uk](http://www.ncea.org.uk)**



# BUSINESS AS UNUSUAL: WHY THE RETURN TO WORK DOESN'T MEAN THE END OF THE 'NEW NORMAL'

The past year or so has posed many challenges, both personally and professionally. This has highlighted not only how truly resilient individuals and businesses are, but also how essential this resilience is in maintaining successful business operations. As we return to the workplace, it is evident that this return to an office space does not mean a return to our old ways of working. The string of lockdowns we have experienced must be a learning opportunity. It is possible that businesses may have to unexpectedly operate entirely remotely again and therefore it is imperative for organisations to continue to prioritise the agility of their operations. So, how can this be achieved?

Boston Consulting Group's 'The Digital Path to Business Resilience' suggests that businesses require resilience over six dimensions: protecting and growing the top line, developing agile operations, enabling people, accelerating data and digital platforms, enhancing cyber security, and strengthening financials. Microsoft suggest that by accelerating change in these areas, leaders will be able to operate more productively, working smarter rather than harder, and therefore can achieve more. When approaching these changes, it can be beneficial to prioritise, beginning with immediate security and continuity concerns, then exploring your current ambitions, and finally investing to build sustainable, future-proof operations that tackle all six of these resilience dimensions.



Paul Burns

Thankfully, organisations can rest easy knowing that there are already tested and reliable strategic technologies (at both SME and enterprise levels) that can help them achieve this business resilience. These technologies fall under four main categories: automation, remote and agile teamwork, security, and cloud migration. For most organisations this means making the move to pay-as-you-go, utility-based, cloud computing, embracing data-powered tools and processes, and cultivating an individually suited plan for

co-managed or fully managed services. We saw in the initial move to remote working that the organisations with these technologies in place saw less operational disruption. This is likely due to the ease of integration and unification of cloud-based tools, allowing employees to access all their necessary tools easily and remotely. For example, from within Microsoft 365 users can access the automation and business intelligence capabilities of the Power Platform, support agile teamwork using a SharePoint intranet and Microsoft Teams, all whilst being protected by a suite of security tools. Protecting your organisation from further disruption needn't be complicated, nor expensive and with business resilience becoming a foundational requirement of daily business operations, now is the time to act.

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## SQUARE ONE LAW'S 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Commercial law firm Square One Law has marked its 10-year anniversary with a series of promotions and new appointments to its team.

Among the promotions are Eleanor Wilkinson, from the Employment team, and Vicky Lowrie, from the Litigation team, who have both been made Partner.

The firm, which has offices in Newcastle, Teesside and Leeds,

has also promoted Hayley Davidson from the Corporate team, and Francesca Lilley, from the Employment team, to Associate.

At Square One Law's Leeds office, which opened in 2020, the firm has welcomed new Partner Kate Johnson and Associate Merissa Galley to its Property team.

Ian Gilthorpe, Senior Partner, said: "Teamwork is a huge part of Square One Law. I am delighted to say that all our people continued to provide excellent support and service delivery to our clients despite the challenges of the pandemic, which makes these promotions very well deserved."



## RGCF CONTINUES TO GROW WITH FURTHER PLANS TO HIRE

North East based Ryecroft Glenton Corporate Finance (RGCF) has marked its 10th year anniversary with plans to further grow its team to meet the increasing demand for its strategic corporate finance advice.

Currently with a team of nineteen, including four partners, the Newcastle-based, multi award winning, full-service CF boutique, which advises clients on all aspects of growth, change and transformation, including acquisitions and disposals, MBOs, MBIs, debt and equity fundraising, is planning to recruit further in the next 12 months.

RGCF was established by experienced dealmaker Carl Swansbury in May 2011 and has grown into a major dealmaking force in the region.

Carl said: "Through our innovative approach, we have built a solid and growing client base, which has led to the continual growth of our firm. RGCF is now keen to bring on board senior dealmakers to help us achieve our strategic growth objectives."



## NORTH EAST MANUFACTURERS RIDING WAVE OF OPTIMISM

Optimism is swelling among North East manufacturers as 72% are confident that it will take less than 12 months for operations to return to pre-Covid levels.

The figures, from a new survey released by MHA, suggest manufacturers are emerging from the worst effects of Brexit and the Covid-19 pandemic. MHA is a network of independent regional accountancy firms with more than 30 offices across the UK.

Almost three-quarters of the region's manufacturers believe the Government 'did enough' to support manufacturers during the pandemic.

Alastair Wilson, Partner and Manufacturing Specialist at MHA Tait Walker, said: "These survey results give us encouraging news and suggest that for the North East's manufacturers, the impact of both the pandemic and Brexit are starting to ease. Investment programmes for plant and machinery which had been put on hold have started to be put back into action and confidence is recovering."



## HAINES WATTS RECOGNISED AS ONE OF THE REGION'S TOP 20 COMPANIES

Haines Watts North East is celebrating having been named one of the region's top companies

to work for by Best Companies.

The achievement sees the North East region move into the top 20 for the first time, whilst Haines Watts has also been listed as the 7th Best Accountancy Firm to work for.

Over the past 12 months, Haines Watts has introduced a number of measures to help support their teams' welfare during the pandemic, such as a series of mindfulness, yoga and stress awareness training sessions.

Regional Managing Partner, Donna Bulmer, said: "We are delighted to have been named as one of the top 20 companies to work for in the North East. We have made major investments into our people, culture and support systems and want to ensure Haines Watts provides a safe and positive environment in which our team can flourish."

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# LAWYER OF THE MONTH

## JACQUELINE EMMERSON

Director, Emmersons Solicitors

### Which area of the law do you work in?

I work in our Private Client Team covering Wills, Probate, Lasting Power of Attorney and Elderly Client matters. I tend to specialise in looking after the affairs of older clients who have no one else to help them. I also deal with all aspects of divorce law in particular complicated cases involving multiple investments, pensions and businesses.

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

I wanted to be a lawyer from the age of thirteen.

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

Initially I started off following a traditional route. As soon as I left Chester College of Law I obtained Articles of Clerkship with Wheldon Houlby and Scott in South Shields which then became Ward Hadaway. After I qualified as a solicitor I then took off round the world and ended up working in such diverse jobs as debt collector and working on a fishing trawler. The latter I gave up the day we brought up dozens of sea snakes in the nets!

When I returned to this country I built up expertise in a number of areas of law including Personal Injury and Medical Law, which had always been my passion, housing and general Civil Litigation. I ended up helping out with Family Law and Wills and Probate and realised that I really liked people centred law.

Having hit a glass ceiling I decided to set up on my own when I was 31. I started with no clients at all and lived on fresh air for a couple of years.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

The big recession of 2007 onwards was an absolute killer. The financial pressure was unbelievable and left me and my husband, who is my Co-Director, exhausted.

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

Quieter lawyers, who are respectful and who send conciliatory letters and have a let's get this settled attitude. As opposed to lawyers who fight and battle for the sake of their egos.

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

Calista Flockhart from Ally McBeal. She always has a head full of music like me.

### What is your greatest strength?

Dogged determination, without it I would have given up years ago.

### What is your biggest weakness?

Slowing down when the pressure is off. I now realise that I thrive on adrenaline and so I find it difficult to keep plodding along.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

To win the national Law Society Excellence Award for Private Client work. We have been shortlisted for this twice, an amazing thing in itself. We have also won Law Firm of the Year and I have won the Lifetime Achievement Award at the Wearside Women in Business Awards but winning the Private Client Award will amount to the ultimate achievement for me.

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

To be frank I have now been in this profession for 32 years and it hasn't really changed that much. It is better for women than it was when I started but there are still sole practitioners, medium sized firms and large firms just as there ever was and I think that will remain the same.

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“

...I wanted to be a lawyer from the age of thirteen...

”





Jacqueline Emmerson

## THE RIGHT TO BREATHE

Landlords seeking recovery of their property must now include 'breathing space' for tenants struggling to pay debt

**The pandemic has prompted numerous measures by the government to assist tenants that are struggling to keep up with their rent. The latest is the series of measures imposed is the introduction of 'breathing space' for tenants struggling to pay debt.**

As of Tuesday May 4th, Landlords must include details of the recently-introduced 'breathing space' debt scheme when seeking possession of their property from tenants who have not paid rent, this applies to both residential and commercial leases.

There are two types of breathing space:

- **Standard breathing space** - available to anyone and lasts up to 60 days; and
- **Mental health crisis breathing space** - only available to a person receiving mental health crisis treatment and lasts as long as the mental health treatment plus an additional 30 days.

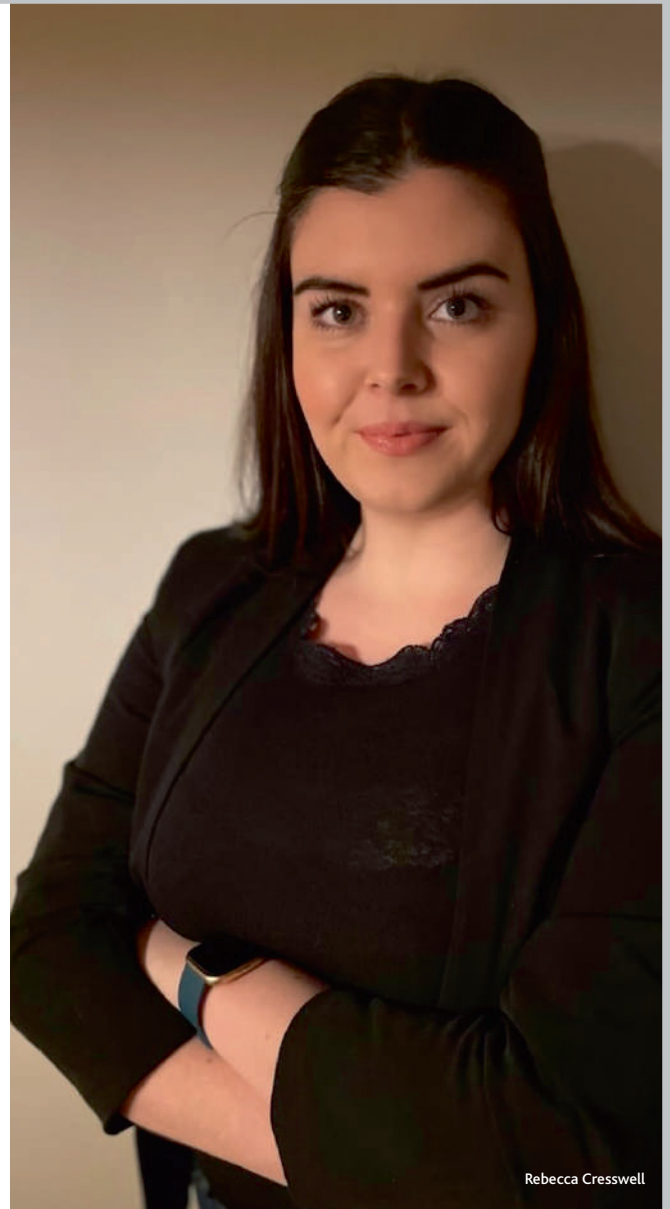
During this time the tenant is protected from most enforcement action and contact from creditors, and freezing most interest and charges on their debts. The debts will include credit card providers, store cards, loans, overdrafts, bills, which means landlords will be added to the list of creditors. The tenant must have at least one qualifying debt owed to a creditor, and this must be included in the application for the breathing space to be considered.

The debt advisor must consider whether the tenant has sufficient funds or income to discharge or liquidate their debt as it falls due; whether the tenant would benefit from or is eligible for a debt solution; and whether the breathing space is necessary for the debt advisor to assess which debt solution would be appropriate.

For a mental health crisis breathing space to be started, the debt advisor must consider whether the tenant is unable to repay some or all of their debt as it falls due; whether a mental health crisis breathing space would be appropriate; and whether an approved mental health professional has provided evidence that the tenant is receiving mental health crisis treatment.

A mental health crisis breathing space lasts for as long as the mental health treatment is ongoing plus 30 days which means the breathing space period could be significant if there are tenants suffering significant mental health problems. Given the stretch the NHS are already under due to the pandemic, we consider this element to be extremely detrimental to landlords as the treatment could be delayed, and the tenant could be having ongoing treatment for a significant time.

Whilst we fully appreciate that many people across the UK are struggling financially and may be unable to pay rent, and we hope the legislation will help those genuinely in need and provide the extra time to pay the debt, the new legislation does not take into account landlords who are also struggling and losing their only source of income. Tenants have had the benefit of various Government backed loans and job retention



Rebecca Cresswell

schemes throughout the pandemic however a large number of Landlords have been left high and dry with no income and no Government support. There are also, unfortunately, a small number of tenants who simply choose not to pay rent.

If you as a landlord are notified of breathing space having been started, you need to carry out a creditor search and check that your rent arrears are correct. You must ensure your letting agent is aware of these rules and if you are notified of breathing space to avoid additional costs of your agent chasing rental payments and serving incorrect notices. It is therefore essential that you obtain specialist advice on this matter to ensure that you are in the best legal position as possible. Our specialist Landlord and Tenant team in Sweeney Miller Law can work side by side with you to ensure the best possible outcome.

**For further advice, contact Rebecca on 0345 900 5401 or by email: [rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk)**

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# UK CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER ISSUES LAWSUIT AGAINST TIKTOK



A former children's commissioner has filed a class action lawsuit against popular video sharing app TikTok over how the app collects and uses children's personal data.

**It's alleged TikTok has processed children's personal data (including dates of birth, phone numbers, email addresses, photographs and browsing history) without sufficient warning or transparency since May 2018 – breaching both UK data protection law and the GDPR. If successful, the lawsuit could seek compensation for millions of affected users totalling billions of pounds.**

It's also alleged that both children and their parents/guardians had no knowledge that such personal data was being collected.

In response, the video-sharing app said: "Privacy and safety are top priorities for TikTok and we have robust policies, processes and technologies in place to help protect all users, and our teenage users in particular. We believe the claims lack merit and intend to vigorously defend the action."

TikTok's UK policies prohibit app use for children who are under 13. However, official figures

suggest many under 13s use the video sharing platform.

The upcoming TikTok lawsuit serves as a reminder that the landscape regarding children's data in the UK is about to undergo a transformation with the introduction of the Age Appropriate Design Code (Children's Code) in September 2021. Under the Children's Code designers, developers and providers of online services (such as TikTok) will have to take more responsibility for children's privacy and data rights, and to provide proper safeguards for children when they're online.

Elizabeth Denham, Information Commissioner, said: "The Children's Code makes it clear that kids are not like adults online, and their data needs greater protections. We want children to be online, learning and playing and experiencing the world, but with the right protections in place."

Organisations now have until 2 September 2021 to comply and put children's privacy at the heart of their design.

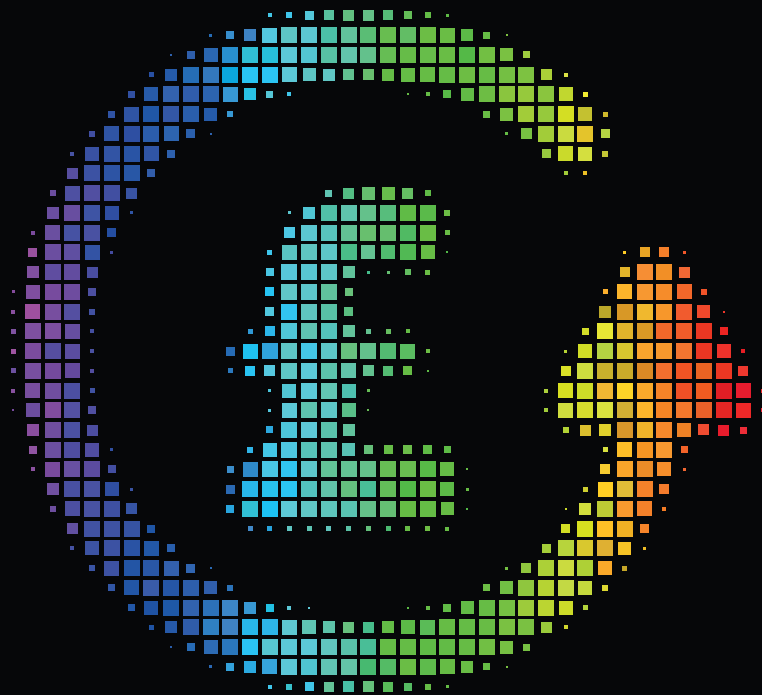


Alex Craig  
Partner and head  
of commercial  
Muckle LLP

***If your business processes children's data or you think your business might be affected, contact Alex Craig on 0191 211 7911 or email [alex.craig@muckle-llp.com](mailto:alex.craig@muckle-llp.com)***



# time to recover



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# MANAGING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS IN 2021



Paul McGowan

Paul McGowan, Principal Solicitor at specialist employment law firm Collingwood Legal considers how managers should look to approach difficult conversations with employees during the pandemic.

**The Covid-19 pandemic has presented a number of challenges to organisations looking to manage their staff. Remote working has meant that managers are having to manage their line reports via Zoom and Microsoft teams. Whilst this might be fine for everyday, informal catch-up meetings it also means managers are having to have difficult conversations with their employees/line reports over these virtual platforms.**

This can range from conversations about performance, to frictions within their teams that might lead to potential workplace disputes. These types of conversation are ideally best had in person, however this has been limited by the pandemic. New starters within an organisation are meeting their team remotely and existing employees are having to meet new team members virtually, without having previously met them in person. This can potentially make difficult conversations even harder for managers to have with their employees.

## **What factors should managers consider when faced with a workplace issue?**

When confronting a difficult situation at work, managers should look to establish the facts. They should reflect on what they already know about the person involved, including any relevant issues that they previously faced. For example, if there is a performance related issue, has the employee

had any issues with their performance in the past? If not, is there something that may be out of character for the employee, suggesting there may be something going on with them? Managers should assess the situation and bear in mind wider external factors before jumping to conclusions.

If an issue can be resolved informally first, then this is often the best way to approach matters without a need to escalate things further. If a meeting with an employee is necessary to better understand the situation, it could be better to try and catch an employee at the end of another meeting, or otherwise schedule one to discuss the issues informally. However, there are some issues which must be addressed at a formal meeting with an employee, so that they can be dealt with and documented appropriately.

The manager may wish to get support from HR, but it is important that these types of situations can be dealt with routinely by line managers and involvement from HR should normally be limited to where there are other complex issues involved. Any relevant internal policies should be consulted to ensure compliance and the manager should plan their meeting with the employee. A face to face meeting is preferred when discussing difficult matters, however the impact of the pandemic and increased home working of many employees may call for a virtual meeting.

## **What should managers have in mind during any meeting with an employee?**

Having a broad outline of what you want to discuss, and a framework for how this will be approached, is always useful for these types of meetings. An introduction to set the tone is important, the issues should be stated, and any evidence should be presented, and the employee should be given an opportunity to respond and explain their account. It is then important with any meeting of this type to agree a way forward and the employee should be asked about their suggestions for ways to resolve matters. It is important that a manager's involvement does not end there and you should look to arrange a follow-up meeting and monitor any progress, continuing to provide support to the employee if necessary. Documenting this is particularly important in evidencing that any issue has been appropriately dealt with and that the employee remains adequately supported.

*Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training to organisations on all areas of employment law, including HR management skills such as training line managers in how to have difficult conversations with their line reports and how to get the best out of their team. Collingwoodlegal.com  
Contact: paul.mcgowan@collingwoodlegal.com; tel: 0191 2822 882.*





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# GETTING EVERYTHING IN LINE WHEN YOU'RE SELLING ONLINE

By Paul Armstrong, senior associate in the specialist corporate & commercial team at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle



Paul Armstrong



The pandemic has accelerated or predicated a wide range of changes for businesses of every size, especially in how they sell their goods and services online.

**At the beginning of last year many firms didn't have an established online selling presence, while others only had a basic and peripheral resource in place which seemed more like an afterthought than something designed to make a tangible difference to their operations.**

Losing the capacity to sell through their regular channels for months at a time has forced many business owners to rethink their online operations and to consider how they can do things differently.

But while it can be fairly easy to set up online selling, booking and payment systems, doing so brings with it a number of legal, procedural and technical issues that business owners might not have come across before, and which need to be managed properly to avoid problems further down the line.

We've been working with a growing number of clients to ensure they've got everything in order, and a number of key considerations have emerged along the way.

A basic starting point is to ensure the terms and conditions under which you're selling to customers remain fit for purpose in relation to any new systems you're introducing.

For example, how are you managing the flow and security of the data that you'll be collecting as part of your new online order process?

Engaging with third party providers is often the easiest route for businesses to choose when looking to enhance their online presence, but these relationships need to be set up and managed properly.

Data management issues often loom large in these arrangements and need careful thought. What sort of data will you need to share to make the systems work, do you need to update your terms with existing customers in light of new processes, and what arrangements do your chosen third-party providers have in place to protect your customers' data?

This latter point is especially important – while you might not have direct control of the providers' systems, it will be you that comes under fire if any problems arise at their end, and your reputation that could suffer as a result.

Similarly, if a third party provider's systems go down, how quickly will they be fixed and how will the financial and operational consequences of customer sales being delayed or lost be addressed?

Getting all the right contractual details in place for your third-party relationships from the very beginning will help you to avoid problems in the future, and can usually be done quickly and inexpensively.

The design and functionality of any e-commerce website or app you develop also needs to be carefully considered. If they resemble the existing resources provided by your commercial rivals too closely, you could easily find yourself open to charges of infringing their intellectual property, a situation which can have very costly consequences.

And if you do launch an app, managing any location tracking facilities included in its architecture in accordance with privacy laws is absolutely essential.

Selling online has made a huge difference to the fortunes of many businesses over the last year and could have a transformational impact on your operations.

Your online strategy is more likely to succeed if you have all your legal bases covered right from the beginning. Time and money spent getting off to the right start in this area will help to ensure that the investment in your online presence pays off.

**For further information on Hay & Kilner Law Firm's corporate and commercial services, please contact Paul Armstrong on 0191 232 8345 or via [paularmstrong@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:paularmstrong@hay-kilner.co.uk)**





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# COERCIVE CONTROL, CRIMINAL



Jacqueline Emmerson

There has been a lot in the news recently about coercive control which is now a criminal offence. In the criminal courts this is a new arena and of course the burden of proof that the prosecution must reach is quite high compared to the situation in divorce courts.

**What amounts to coercive control will be different in each instance. In the case of Mr and Mrs Marsden, the wife complained that her husband had told her what to wear, had prevented her from seeing her children and had controlled all elements of their finances. In other cases a spouse will control all phone calls, will prevent their partner from meeting friends. I have come across cases where the house is bugged so that all conversations were listened to, or clients who had to account for their whereabouts all day long. Similar to the case of Ruth Dodsworth the TV Presenter. Her husband would ring her dozens of times a day to check up on her.**

The important thing about the new offence of coercive control is that the abusive partner can be sent to jail. This will at least give the victim some time and space to start on the road to recovery and a new life. But not every case requires this.

There has been protection under the law for this type of behaviour for decades. Many many times I have sought injunctions on behalf of my clients when they have suffered physical or mental abuse at the hands of their partners. I can tell you it's a brave day when a man or woman walks through my door to seek help. I know that what they are doing is very difficult. I see my job as being to help my clients plan an escape, either on an urgent basis or with a slightly longer term plan.

One of the earliest cases I dealt with in my career involved a lady whose husband was very violent towards her and the children. They were all terrified of him. My client had no money and no job. Her

husband was actually quite well off but of course part of his control was keeping his wife short of money at all times. It was clear to me that my client had mild learning difficulties. So much so that she had no idea that what was happening to her was actually rape.

I still wonder how she plucked up the courage to come and see me. However, in short I was able to obtain an injunction preventing her husband from returning to the house and from intimidating her and the children further. I put her in touch with the local women's refuge who offered her counselling and I then set about obtaining a divorce and a financial settlement which allowed my client and the children to stay in their home with enough money to live on.

I know that for many of you reading this it's very hard to even recognise that you are being abused, or if you have realised then how are you going to extricate yourself and your children, if you have any, from this situation. I know that you may well be living with typical patterns of behaviour, he or she only becomes angry when drunk or high on drugs, they always apologise the next day. Or it was my fault that he smashed his fist through the door, I shouldn't have started the argument. Or I don't want to admit that my girlfriend stabbed me with a can opener, I'm a bouncer after all, how would that look.

So where to start? At Emmersons Solicitors our family lawyers offer a Next Steps in Divorce and Separation appointment. The idea is that we discuss your current situation including accommodation, income and savings of both you and your partner,

the levels of control or violence. We then help you to come up with a plan. It might be that you are going to move savings or save up on the quiet for a deposit for rented accommodation. This would be a stop gap only until you obtain a proper financial settlement. It might be putting you in touch with a counsellor. It might be an injunction to remove your partner from the matrimonial home or we might help you to report matters to the police.

In any event the idea is to give you all of the information you will need in order to plan ahead. Some clients take advantage of this initial advice and then we don't see them for months whilst they go away and think about things. But that's fine, that's why we offer our Fixed Fee Initial Divorce interviews. They are designed to be cost effective. We don't offer free interviews as we want to spend a decent amount of time with our clients covering all options. I have worked at firms before where we were so packed to the gunnels with people seeking free advice that we couldn't get to the files of our ongoing clients. So we have designed a scheme that works well for us and for our clients. We find that clients have a huge sense of relief when they have been to see us. They leave with the feeling that all is not lost and that there are ways out of their situation.

I know it is a difficult journey, but I always ask my clients to try to look ahead. To the time when their lives are back on track and when I am just a distant memory. If you need help then please don't hesitate to contact me. I can help you to move on with your life.

[je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk)





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## ROAMING TECHNOLOGY KEEPS CUSTOMERS SAFE



Following the Covid-19 pandemic, a Durham based digital entrepreneur has adapted his pioneering ROAM LOCAL APP to keep shoppers and revellers safe.

Using state of the art algorithms and data collection techniques, Andrew Bartlett has developed the app, which gives users essential information about shops and services based on their GPS location, including up to date offers, opening times and the ability to order items to collect instore or deliver to a home address.

The ROAM LOCAL APP also monitors COVID compliance, highlighting the measures premises have put in place to keep customers safe. It shows where members of the public are gathering within retail outlets and restaurants so that people can avoid crowds or queues while social distancing remains in place. The app now has more 80,000 users in the UK.

Users and businesses can download the app for free from [roam-local.co.uk](http://roam-local.co.uk).



## CITYFIBRE FUTURE-PROOFS MIDDLESBROUGH'S DIGITAL FOUNDATIONS

CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full fibre platform, has broken ground on a new infrastructure roll out that will future-proof Middlesbrough's digital needs, with full fibre connectivity within reach of almost every home and business.

Construction of the £42m town-wide full fibre network has begun in Brambles Farm and Thortree and is being delivered by Map Group (UK) on behalf of CityFibre. The team will use a range of construction methods, while working in close partnership with Middlesbrough Council and local communities to deliver a fast rollout and minimise potential disruption.

Each area will take a few weeks to complete however, construction teams will typically only be outside each home for two to three days and CityFibre will be in touch by mail ahead of any work starting.

The overall project is expected to reach completion by 2024 but the first services will go live for people to take advantage of much sooner.

As the network is completed in each neighbourhood, services will be available from an increasing range of broadband providers. CityFibre is already working with launch partner Vodafone to supply full fibre infrastructure, while TalkTalk and other providers are expected to join in the future.



## RAZORBLUE DOUBLES TEAM WITH LATEST APPOINTMENT

North East-headquartered managed IT service provider razorblue has appointed a well-known business development specialist to support its continued growth, meaning that the company has doubled its sales and marketing team in the last year alone.

Having seen 363% growth over the last five years, razorblue has welcomed Louise Gilbey to the team as Business Development Manager, tasked with growing the company's impressive client base which is currently made up of around 500 businesses across the UK.

Louise has built a strong reputation over the last few years, working for well-known companies and curating an impressive network.

Louise said: "I've been aware of razorblue by its excellent reputation over the years and I love the company's drive to provide not just solutions and services, but the best possible customer experience. I'm thrilled to be working with such a dedicated team and can't wait to get stuck in."

Dan Kitchen, CEO of razorblue, said: "Louise has an impressive track record in business development and is well-known across the North East region. Having her on board really sets us up to continue growing and supporting businesses across the UK. I know she will be a great asset to razorblue."

## Our team gives you peace of mind.

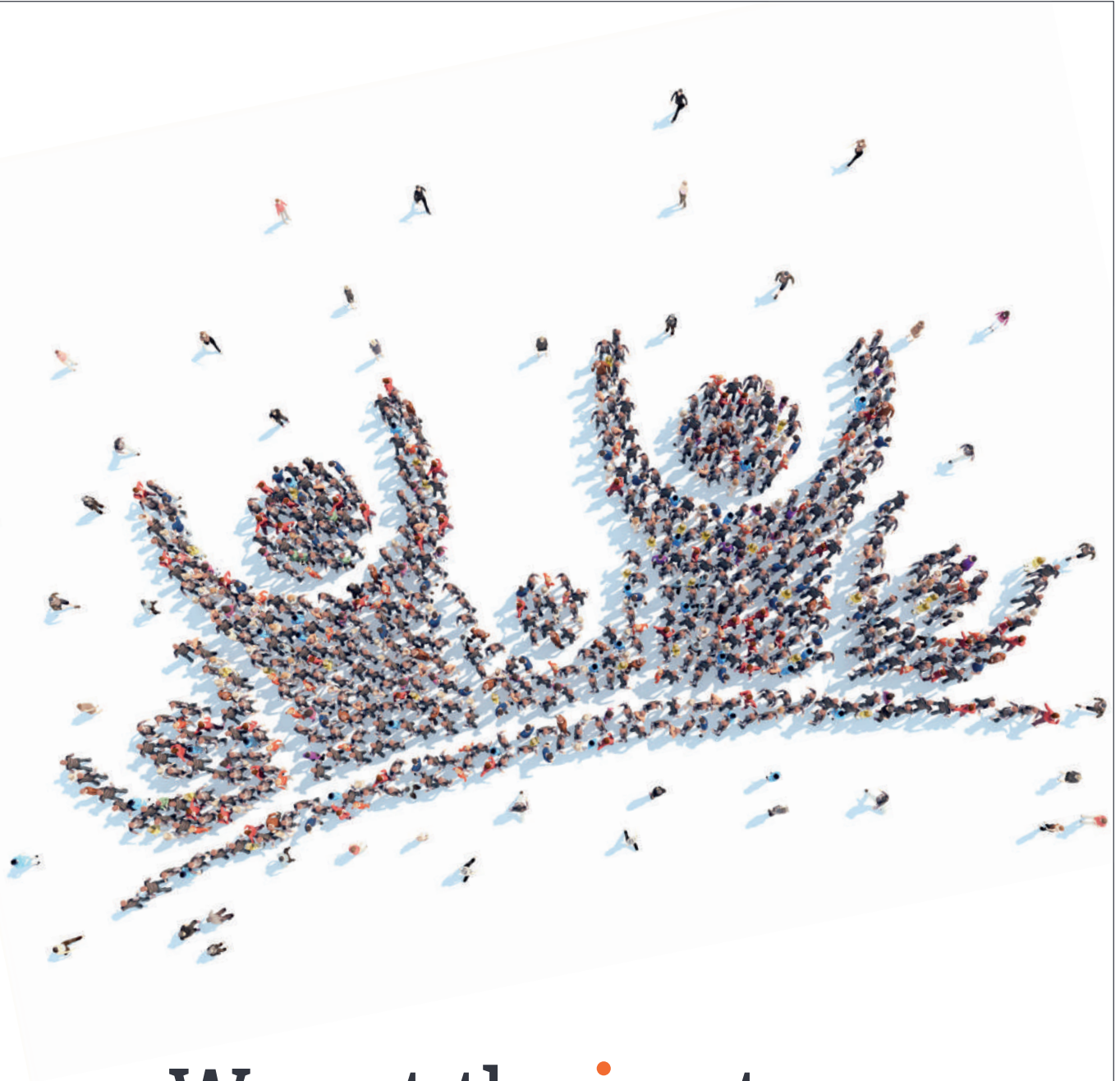
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## FULL FIBRE MATTERS

How CityFibre is rolling out gigabit-capable broadband to transform and futureproof the North East.

**One of the biggest lessons from months of national lockdown has been the critical importance of digital connectivity in keeping businesses running. Yes, Zoom fatigue has become a recognisable condition, and the likelihood of returning to office life soon remains slim, but, with quality digital connectivity, many of us can keep busy and productive from the comfort of our own home.**

For some, however, using apps like Skype and Zoom has been a frustrating experience, with lagging, buffering and dropped connections proving a regular occurrence. This is, sadly, the reality for many citizens across the North East and the UK as a whole, given that just 15 per cent of homes nationwide have access to futureproof full fibre network infrastructure.

As the UK's third national digital infrastructure platform, CityFibre is providing a solution by building game-changing networks across the country – including in Newcastle, North Tyneside and Middlesbrough.

### Powering our ambitions

Often when providers mention fibre, they are actually referring to connections that are only partly fibre (known as Fibre-to-the-Cabinet). These usually include some copper wiring for the final stretch to your home, a major factor in lagging and dropped connections.

Full fibre is different, with fibre connections used for the entire length of the journey, straight into your home or business. That allows for Gigabit-capable 'lightning speed' services and superior reliability.

The UK is making real progress in the adoption of full fibre, but, we still lag behind our global neighbours. In 2019, the UK ranked 34th in the worldwide broadband speed table, behind a host of European countries. The average speed in the UK

was 22.37Mbps, which compared unfavourably to Sweden – Europe's top ranked country – which had an average speed of 55.18Mbps.

It's imperative we make up ground especially when you consider how data hungry we are as a nation. In fact, we're expected to consume more data than any other Western European country over the next four years.

### The difference full fibre can make

Full fibre is revolutionising life in the UK. Only full fibre technology is future proof and will enable you to have the best broadband service available.

Full fibre broadband, unlike other broadband alternatives is unique and can make your online life better in three distinct ways.

- **Speed** - consistently faster than copper based ADSL broadband or partial fibre optic solutions such as FTTC with speeds currently of up to 900meg but in the coming years even faster with 5gig and even 10gig services on the horizon.
- **Quality** - deploying brand new end to end fibre technology means less to go wrong and measurably less faults than other broadband services. Unlike ADSL technology, full fibre broadband is resistant to adverse weather such as flooding. End to end fibre enables direct connection to the exchange so you won't be sharing your fibre with hundreds of your neighbours so your service is consistent.
- **Symmetrical** - download and upload videos (Zoom/Teams) at high quality. The true killer application for full fibre, a unique technology that allows the same gigafast speed whether you are downloading or uploading information. Say goodbye to grainy, blurred or frozen video streams for good!

With our 'new normal' anticipating over 30% more of us working from home as well the office, widescale full fibre connectivity gives employees

the confidence to work from home without worrying about their connection, providing essential quality and ultimate flexibility and reassurance.

Those benefits extend further still, with our full fibre network set to underpin the North East's implementation of Smart City solutions. With full fibre, it's possible for local authorities to support a range of programmes that make a genuine difference for all citizens. There are plenty of examples across the globe, from digital tech making parking problems a thing of the past in South Korea's biggest city, smart waste management trucks on New York's roads or revolutionising the use of public transport in Iceland.

In the North East, implementation will be driven by the specific needs of the local population, whether that's a focus on traffic management, CCTV or something else entirely. What we do know is this will all be powered by full fibre.

### Adding value to the North East

The future isn't as far away as you may think. Together with our contractors, IQA Elecnor and MAP Group, we have been building across the Newcastle, North Tyneside and Middlesbrough and many residents are already making use of their full fibre connection to great effect.

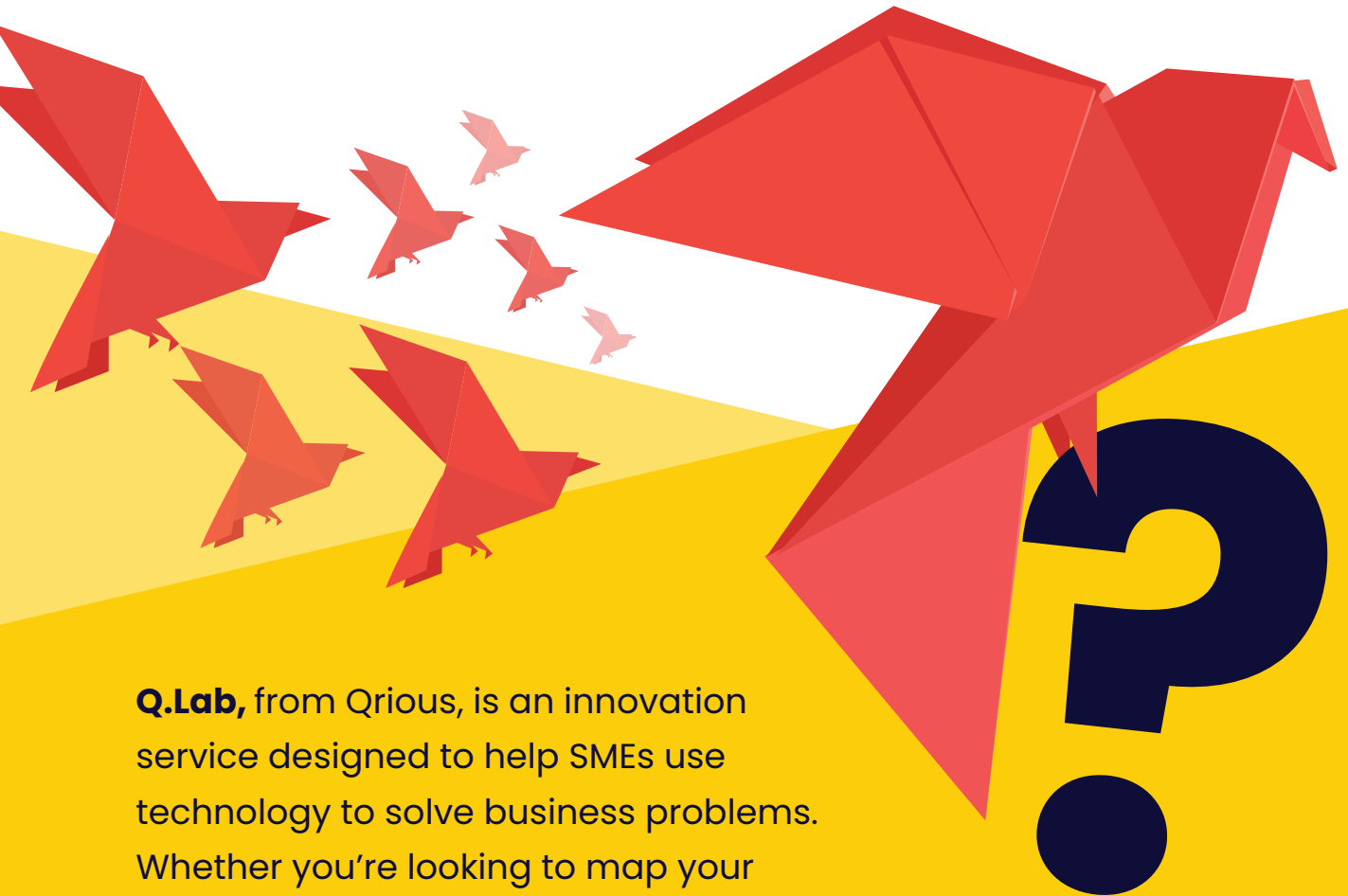
In a period of uncertainty, one thing we know for sure is that quality broadband has never been more valuable – and with full fibre, we can ensure that the North East has the connectivity it needs to emerge from this challenging period in a stronger position than ever before.

**Register your interest today to be one of the first to get access to one of the fastest and most reliable broadband service in the North East.**  
[cityfibre.com/northerninsight](http://cityfibre.com/northerninsight)



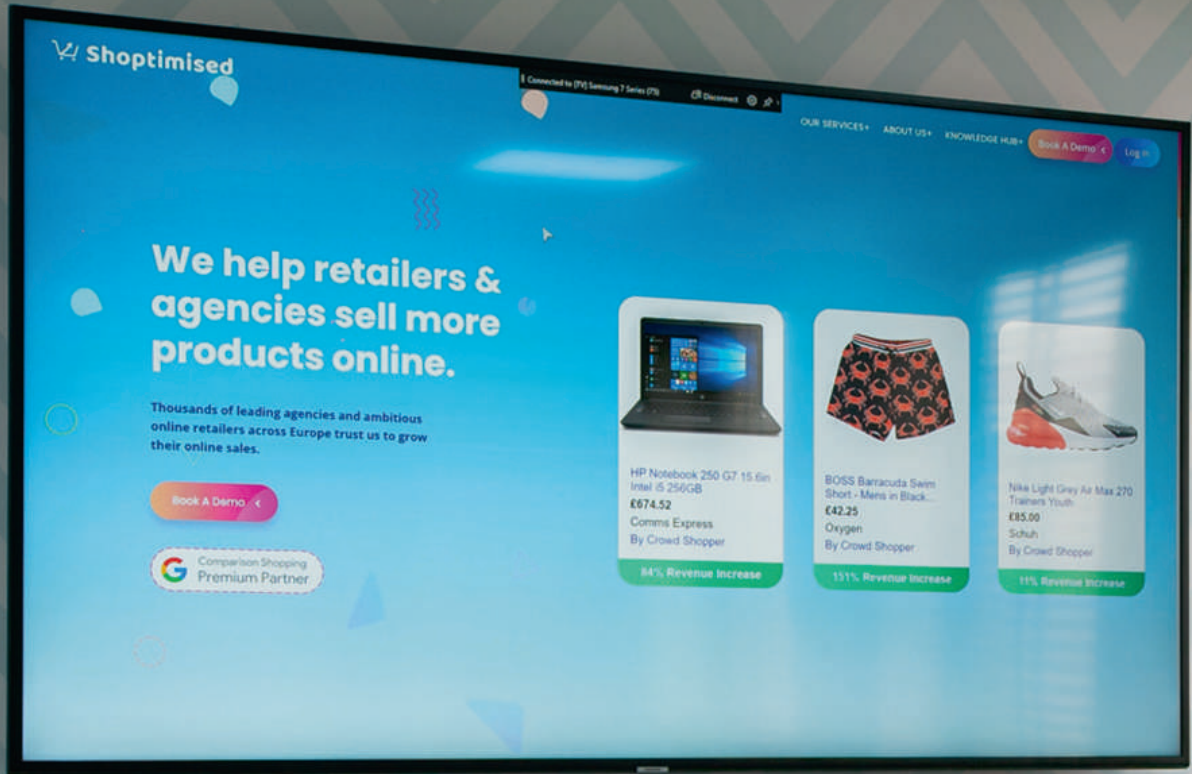


# What's your problem?



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To find out more visit  
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 **Shoptimised**  
**#WeMove**



The North East firm helping retailers boost their online sales.

## DON'T SHOP AROUND. GET SHOPTIMISED

How often does something come about when a problem needs to be resolved? In a lot of circumstances you probably have to muddle through or simply accept that what you currently have is what you'll continue to have.

**That's the situation John Cave found himself in when working for a digital agency. He worked closely with his clients but knew that what was on offer wasn't really doing what they wanted or needed. He looked around for solutions and discovered two things.**

1. There really wasn't anything suitable that was readily available. Zilch.

**Or**

2. Although not ideal, possible solutions were so expensive that it would have meant any potential profits would be wiped out.

Thankfully John isn't the sort of person who'll take no for an answer.

"It was so frustrating," said John, "I got on well with my clients and was desperate to help. It really was a case of looking closely at the problem and then devising a solution. At the time, I was helping to run a PPC...Pay Per Click...agency. We were looking after Google Shopping for over 50 clients but soon realised that one of the biggest problems was that we had no control over the feeds which are used to market their products. This is so important because a product feed will invariably decide whether an ecommerce campaign is a success or failure. You have to get it right otherwise you're wasting your time and money."

Consequently, in February 2018, Shoptimised was formed. John put a team together and produced their own software.

It's been a huge success. Shoptimised now works with over 600 retailers and 300 digital agencies in over 13 different countries. It's anticipated that by the end of this year Shoptimised will have broken into the North American market. They've already established a base in Canada.

Last year's turnover was £998,000. This year's turnover is looking to pass the £2million mark. As for the level of current success for their clients, it's staggering to report that Shoptimised is averaging £1.8m incremental sales every month. Wow.

The size of the client and the nature of their business is irrelevant. If a single person operation or a multi-national conglomerate has something to sell, they will find that Shoptimised will work for them and boost sales.

Oh, and talking of 'them', you'll recognise Crocs, Schuh, Cotswold Outdoors, Moonpig, ScS, TJ Hughes. The list is endless.

"There are probably only 20 firms like us across the globe," adds John. "We can sell to anyone who sells online but we're finding that our clients are actually a bit like us in that they want to find solutions and are innovative in their approach. They continue to look at different ways in which they can get into various markets to sell their products.

A typical firm is one which has something that needs to be sold but, for one reason or another, it's sticking. We can then offer them two of our services...Product Feed Optimisation and

Incremental Sales Software. Our optimisation system software is incredibly powerful but also, crucially, it's affordable. It allows firms to take control of their product feeds and make a profit. You won't need to hire a software developer or get a third party to do everything for you. Thousands of products can be quickly optimised to ensure they attract sales.



Our Incremental Sales Software is simple to use and hugely cost effective. Did you know that when using Google Shopping, on average 54.4% of the products in your Product Feed get no clicks and a further 33.5% of products do not convert into sales? For a retailer, this could mean very limited Google Shopping growth... if any. Our software looks at products they've not been able to sell for the last 30-60 days. These items are then pushed to other retailers. It's a performance based product...clients only pay for the sales we generate."

Shoptimised is a company on the move. They've recently taken office space at the Silverlink on North Tyneside and their staff numbers could double over the next 12 months. They had eight members of staff when the UK went into lockdown and now have 17. They're looking to appoint various digital experts and PHP developers as well as taking on customer service staff.

So...would you like to boost your sales?

***The best idea is to have a chat with John and his team at Shoptimised. They'll analyse what you're hoping to achieve and then give you a plan of action. It's definitely worth checking out their website for more information... [www.shoptimised.com](http://www.shoptimised.com), it explains everything with some really good videos.***

***Call 0191 249 8740 or email [hello@shoptimised.com](mailto:hello@shoptimised.com)***



Daniel Wilson-Etheridge

## PREPARING TO SUPPORT NEW WAYS OF WORKING

Tech specialist Wilson-Etheridge is celebrating its third anniversary in what has been a roller-coaster journey. Director Daniel Wilson-Etheridge explains his journey from start-up and how the business has grown and responded through a pandemic.

### How have the last three years been since launching in 2018?

It has been an abundance of emotions, ups and downs. But I would not change any decision I made when starting Wilson-Etheridge three years ago.

### Have your original plans altered; if so, how?

The plan has always been the same, but the way W-E have succeeded to date is through our ability to adapt and overcome. The line definitely isn't as straight as the initial plan, but the goal is the same.

### What do you know today, you didn't three years ago?

I started Wilson-Etheridge with one arrow in my quiver. Specialising in SharePoint, one area of Microsoft 365. Now Wilson-Etheridge offer full specialist Microsoft 365 consultancy, development and support.

### What's has been your most satisfying job to date?

The most satisfying job will have been our time working with alongside Corporate Project Solutions and Microsoft themselves. Here we had the pleasure of working with and introducing a UK county council to various tools within the Microsoft 365 environment to ensure they could work safe within the current pandemic climate.

### What has been the most challenging period since you set up?

This definitely has to be having a pandemic for your company's second

birthday. Adapting our payment plans and how we work, once the initial dust had settled we were ready to assist other companies in their transition to the new forced way of working.

### Who are your typical clients today?

We have a range of private and public clients, operating across many industries and specialities.

### How is homeworking affecting your business?

W-E was born ready, from day one we have been cloud based, with the services we provide we promote remote working and collaboration.

### How do you see tech developing in the next few years?

I see a lot more remote work happening. The pandemic has opened a lot of minds providing companies with lots to explore. I have talked to a few companies with mixed views on renewing building leases.

### What do you hope to achieve in the next three years?

More steady growth and ventures in to other Microsoft products. W-E are also launching our Paper to PowerApp campaign to digitise and streamline paper/ outdated forms and processes, guaranteeing quick ROI.

*More details at [www.wilson-etheridge.com](http://www.wilson-etheridge.com)*



# HICOMPLY HELPS COMPANIES GET SECURE



L-R: Ed Bartlett CEO and David Warren, Chief Commercial Officer.

The fast moving pace of technology means that companies today can theoretically do everything quicker, more efficiently and without the need for masses of paper documents.

**But with every benefit there's often a downside – and this often manifests itself as simply not taking the right kind of security precautions to protect their data.**

This is an international problem and according to IBM the average cost of a data breach in 2020 was a staggering £2.9m – an amount which could have a serious impact on any business.

But luckily help is at hand, thanks to a County Durham company which is providing its services worldwide.

Hicomply may be relatively new but it comes with impeccable credentials. Its founders – Ed Bartlett, Nick and Marius Van Aswegen – have worked extensively in the industry and previously founded and successfully created Kykcloud, a surveying software application.

These skills have been utilised in the creation of Hicomply, a unique software solution which helps companies manage their information security.

This SaaS (software as a service) platform is being

positively received by businesses across a whole range of sectors – and a range of countries.

For CEO Ed Bartlett the interest in Hicomply's solution confirms for him the need for companies to "fully understand the importance of managing their cyber security risk."

What has also made the platform so appealing is that Hicomply can also help clients achieve the all-important certification, ISO 27001, which is the international standard for managing information security.

"Being able to achieve ISO27001 is becoming an increasingly common client requirement for technology vendors," said Ed.

"And we are able to help our clients prepare for this in half the time, which is really strong selling point."

This is not only vital to make customers feel confident and secure but it is often a pre-requisite for anyone wanting to go after lucrative tenders, where it usually a necessary qualification.

In fact there's a long list of benefits that using the platform brings - including formalising and improving information security programs, increasing operational efficiency and managing data breaches.

A security breach may not be something that businesses give much thought to or may believe that "it couldn't happen" to them.

The truth of the matter however is there is an ever-increasing risk to companies operating in all sectors and of all sizes.

For every well publicised breach – think graphic tool company, Canva, where four million of their users' details were hacked to Ebay back in 2014 where 145 million users were compromised – there are hundreds of others which barely hit the headlines.

And it's not just about the actual damage – it's the loss of trust and reputation which may never be repaired.

"Our information security software enables businesses to secure their data more efficiently and win more business, while reducing the risk of costly data breaches and ICO fines."

**For further details visit [www.hicomply.com](http://www.hicomply.com)**



## LOCAL WALLPAPER RETAILER ON A ROLL

**I Love Wallpaper has announced an 85% rise in turnover, as lockdown makeovers show no sign of slowing.**

The British family-run wallpaper retailer designs and manufactures affordable, contemporary wallpapers with prices starting from just £10 a roll. Based in Hartlepool, the business has expanded rapidly to meet demand and now employs 52 warehouse and head office staff, an increase of 40% on pre-lockdown levels. Sales show that customers have been tackling larger-scale projects since lockdown began on 23rd March 2020, ordering on average 20% more rolls than pre-lockdown levels. When it comes to regional decorating hot spots, 30% of lockdown orders to date have been shipped to London.

Decorators in the capital have been opting for bright botanical and tropical printed wallpapers, like the Palma Tropical and Tropicana Floral Leaf designs. Heading further North, those in Newcastle and Liverpool have opted for neutral and metallic colour palettes - as popularised on Instagram - with Zara Shimmer Metallic Wallpaper coming out as the top choice.

Alice Henderson, I Love Wallpaper's Head of Product Design said: "It has been business as usual for us during the pandemic."



## ARCHITECT WORKS WITH COUNCIL ON NEW £8.3M LOW CARBON PROJECT

**A team of consultants, led by the Durham-based, award-winning architect, Howarth Litchfield, is delivering an innovative £8.3m low carbon project on behalf of Durham County Council on a site at Annfield Plain, Co Durham.**

The Morrison Busty Low Carbon Depot will become a low carbon site with a large scale three-megawatt solar farm and battery storage plant located in an adjacent green field.

The idea is that the solar farm will power the depot's services, which include new electric vehicle charge points for the council's transition to electric vehicles in its fleet.

A private wire and control network will also be created and thermal upgrades to two buildings will be undertaken.

To win the tender, Howarth Litchfield put a team of local consultants together, minimising the carbon footprint of its team by using professional firms from its supply chain which the practice has worked with on many earlier occasions.

Howarth Litchfield is acting as lead consultant as well as providing architecture and principal designer services; TGA, consulting engineers, are providing general mechanical and electrical support, specialist solar technology support and advice on engineering and building performance, while multidisciplinary engineering consultancy, Cundall, is providing civil engineering and geo technical advice.



## MULTI-MILLION POUND REDEVELOPMENT OF LAMBTON ESTATE TAKES MAJOR STEPS FORWARD

**The community of new homes taking shape as part of the £15m redevelopment of Lambton Estate is now over halfway built and renovation works to key areas of the historic Estate have started to complete.**

Miller Homes at Lambton Park is the first development of new homes to be built on the Estate. The first phase of 72 homes is almost complete and residents are continuing to move in, while work has started on the second phase. The 109-home development is attracting buyers from as far as London to relocate to the region.

Work is also ongoing elsewhere within the privately-owned Estate to open it up further to the public for the first time in many years, enhancing the exclusive lifestyle offering for residents of the new homes.

A planning application has been submitted by the Estate to create a vibrant community hub for residents and visitors to be known as Bowes Gate. The complex will be adjacent to the new homes and bring a range of quality amenities to the immediate area. Plans include a high street of independent local shops such as a bakery, delicatessen and butcher, as well as a standalone café/bistro to be called The Pavilion, and units which could accommodate office space or businesses like a wellness centre.

Aisling Ramshaw, sales director at Miller Homes North East, said: "Our new community of homes is really coming together and residents are enjoying their new surroundings, which includes access to 11km of beautiful walks around the Estate. Homes with great outdoor space and amenities close by are more in demand than ever which is exactly what Lambton Estate offers in an incredible setting.

"The exciting new addition of Bowes Gate on the doorstep of our residents will open up a brilliant selection of shops, somewhere to relax with a coffee and meet friends, and connect with local businesses. Those who move into our new homes are also enjoying a new lifestyle and have a unique opportunity to be part of the future of Lambton Estate, which is becoming a special place to live, work and visit."



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# MISSION TO TRANSFORM NEW BUILD HOUSING ACROSS UK

With a growing focus on Modern Methods of Construction (MMC) across the building sector, we spoke to Scott Bibby, MD of modular steel housebuilder CoreHaus, at the vanguard of this movement from his base in the North East.

## What are Modern Methods of Construction?

Simplistically MMC is the latest and most innovative ways in which we build. The phrase has been utilised for decades and is unfortunately commonly associated to post war prefabricated homes. Presently the reality is that the delivery model for construction has advanced to a position which offers multiple solutions to traditional challenges. This ranges from full volumetric homes in which units arrive on site 100% complete, right through to on site process and product improvements such as conveyor belts for bricks and engineered bracketry.

## Why is the government committed to encouraging more MMC?

Historically the government has supported MMC due to skill/materials shortages and the demand for more housing (post war UK). Recently the drive for MMC is about much more than this with a need to overcome multiple challenges and improve quality, cost, speed, and sustainability. It was a great political move to create an MMC task force to help spearhead the national effort.

## How does CoreHaus fit into this?

CoreHaus utilises a pod and panelised approach in a smart and innovative way. This allows the full benefits of offsite manufacturing whilst maintaining high levels of flexibility in our solutions. We believe our product offers the answers to each of the previously mentioned challenges in which the industry currently seeks answers for.

## What makes you different to other modular housebuilders?

Our hybrid solutions are unique and allow us to advertise flexibility as standard. We have



intentionally designed our process to negate transport escort vehicles and other restrictions with harder to reach sites. Our product allows infinite choice on external finish with options for internal layouts to suit our customer preferences. To my knowledge, nobody else in the industry currently offers this.

## How is the market responding to MMC and your offer?

Lots of people do not like change and unfortunately this can sometimes be the barrier between a great idea and its successful implementation. That said, I have spoken with almost every housing provider or contractor in the North East now and each occasion has been very positive. I believe the market is finally ready for CoreHaus and MMC. The benefits will only grow with its continued application and acceptance.

## How does MMC affect the skilled people you need?

Personally, I have experience in multiple sectors including, construction, aerospace, rail, military,

and manufacturing. I feel MMC has offered me the opportunity to fully utilise my past and I know this to be true for everyone employed by CoreHaus. I truly believe people are the most important element of a successful business and am proud to say that our employees are a diverse, multi skilled and highly talented family with a team ethic that any prestigious sports club would be proud of.

## What are your ambitions for CoreHaus?

Our objectives which are focused on People, Reputation, Quality, and our Product, combined with our core values which are Commitment, Openness, Revolutionary and Excellence directly support our mission at CoreHaus, which is to transform new build housing delivery. This mission involves the delivery of 1000 high quality, sustainable and affordable homes per year in five years' time. We are a social enterprise and would like to maximise the positive impact that we have in the areas we work. In summary, build great homes that people want to live in, improve the lives of those around us, support the housing crisis and tackle climate change...easy!

## How do you relax away from work?

If you had asked me four years ago, I might have said a sport or activity. With two sons at home, aged one and three, I rarely get an opportunity to relax. That said, I am very hands-on with the boys and find them highly entertaining (most of the time). I totally switch off from work when I am with my family which is so important for a good work life balance.

For more information visit [www.corehaus.co.uk](http://www.corehaus.co.uk)





Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

## DA VINCI AND THE BLACK DEATH

Manifold is the benefit of Italian heritage. At the age of five you are Masterchef, having trailed Grandma around the kitchen for years. By your early teens, elegant clothes, shoes and accessories appear as if by magic.

**In later life, you may enjoy an Amaro Aversa while reflecting that you might be related to Da Vinci or Michelangelo (a DNA test indicates I may be related to both. And Cicero).**

All good until eighteen months ago when I started getting alarming reports from friends and family in Italy. The UK press was reporting the pandemic ripping through. A three-minute clip on the evening news. But the news I was getting was truly alarming. Critical patients treated in hospital corridors or in ambulances parked outside. The army drafted in to ship bodies from the north of Italy to the south because crematoria were overwhelmed.

People were isolating at home, scared to go out. There were concerns about paying the rent or mortgage with no work. And while Britain, at the time was complacent about this new threat, it was obvious to me that trouble was in the post. That the nightmare visited upon my friends and family in Italy would soon wash up on the white cliffs of Dover.

So, I turned for help to nobody's favourite

emergency service. Our insurance underwriters. I spoke to the chaps in pink shirts and arranged to insure all our landlords for rent guarantee protection. This means, if a tenant is unable to pay their rent, the landlord is compensated. I did this to protect both landlords and tenants. If a landlord has a void due to no fault of their own, they should be protected. Equally, if a tenant cannot work due to the Black Death, they should be protected.

Today, Government has enacted legislation to protect tenants from eviction due to debt. It is estimated some 700,000 rental tenants will benefit from this protection. Mostly, people just going about their life until Covid dropped them off a cliff and into nightmare. It is upon us in the rental management sector to ensure tenants keep their homes and landlords receive the income to sustain their business.

The rental sector is stepping up. While small landlords with a few properties in their pension pot are taking advantage of the hothouse market to cash their chips, the big boys are stepping in. Investment experts Knight Knox predict 27% of

landlords are going to expand their portfolio over the coming twelve months.

These are not 'Mom & Pop' landlords. Rather banks, hedge funds and investors with a long-term view. People who understand that investment in improving property will guarantee return over time. Good news for tenants who may expect a high standard and professionals there to support them.

As managing agents, we are in a unique position. Both supplier (landlord) and customer (tenant) are our clients. While the landlord is the big boy, it is the tenant who generates revenue so best we nurture them. I will leave the last word to my Italian ancestor Cicero who said, "A man who has a garden and a library has everything he needs".

**[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.





# PURE INSPIRATION



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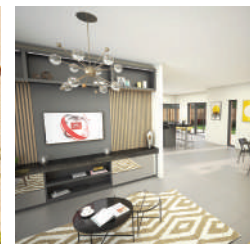
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## SYCAMORE SQUARE, GOSFORTH



### PHASE 1 SOLD OUT IN ONE WEEK!

Nestled in a secluded enclave, **SYCAMORE SQUARE** offers a stunning collection of **CONTEMPORARY AND STYLISH HOMES** in a sought after address, with easy access to all the amenities Gosforth has to offer. **THIS EXCLUSIVE DEVELOPMENT, THE MOST DISTINCTIVE IN THE HEART OF GOSFORTH IN THE LAST 40 YEARS**, provides just 23 houses and 14 apartments in a **PRIVATE RESIDENTIAL SQUARE** which will retain a tranquil air surrounded by the original trees as well as additional sympathetic landscaping.

Detached homes offer 4 or 5 bedrooms, townhouses all have 4 bedrooms over 3 floors and there are two stunning 4 bedroom dormer bungalows at the entrance to the square. The finish and specification would be as you would expect in a development of this calibre, en-suites and dressing rooms come as standard in the master suite, family spaces open out onto spacious and private gardens and each house has designated parking with some styles also offering integral garages.

The luxury apartments, built over 3 floors, come with lift access and offer a range of sizes and configurations to suit everyone from spacious 2 bedrooms/ 2 bathrooms to luxury 3 bedrooms complete with roof terrace.

Architecturally designed for a modern contemporary lifestyle and boasting the latest in-home technology, this eagerly awaited development offers the perfect location for family life, retirement and young adults alike.

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£279,950

Fawdon Close, Red House Farm,  
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£365,000

Warkworth Woods, Great Park,  
Gosforth



Offers Over £350,000

Field House, Red House Farm,  
Gosforth



Offers Over £350,000

Featherstone Grove, Great Park,  
Gosforth



Offers Over £345,000

Montagu Avenue,  
Gosforth



Offers Over £325,000





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### GUIDE PRICE: £2.2 MILLION

This magnificent, luxury family home has an attractive wide frontage on Darras Road and occupies a mature, stylishly landscaped garden plot of approximately 0.6 acres. The impressive property boasts individually designed accommodation of over 6000 sq ft including six bedrooms, the master with a private balcony, five bathrooms, a magnificent large family kitchen/living room and garden room and a fabulous games room with bespoke bar and seating area. The many bespoke design features include beautiful Italian porcelain flooring, walnut internal doors, a curved staircase with glass balustrades, superb contoured ceilings and feature lighting throughout. Externally, there are beautiful symmetrical lawns and pathways, mature trees and shrubs, external lighting, an extensive open courtyard providing parking for numerous cars and a triple plus garage with excellent storage space above.

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 2233500 [ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk) [www.sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://www.sandersonyoung.co.uk)





# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## CATRIONA LINGWOOD

Chief Executive at Constructing Excellence in the North East.

### Tell us about your role at Constructing Excellence North East.

My title is chief executive but my role could be classed as 'chief, cook and bottle washer' which might be more apt with having to be fairly hands on as part of a small, regional team. No day is the same, well before Covid-19 struck anyway. One day I would find myself speaking to students about what amazing opportunities the construction industry has to offer them to going out on a building site to look at new interventions, hosting events of varying kinds including CPD seminars to capacity packed awards dinners not to mention the networking that goes on via the events and our own independent networking events.

### What services does the organisation provide?

Constructing Excellence in the North East is a business support organisation, seeking to improve performance, shift perceptions and, together with the industry, form a powerful voice for change in order to achieve a better built environment.

We provide workshops, seminars but also capture knowledge and disseminate this to the wider industry so they may learn from their peers. We have a great young professionals network, Generation4Change (G4C), that crosses the whole of the built environment and we have two very vibrant groups in the region, one based in the North East LEP area the other in the Tees Valley. Encouraging, nurturing and retaining talent in the region is absolutely paramount for regional and industry growth.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

The initiation and development of our awards programme has to be my proudest business achievement. When we were first established it was suggested by our then board that this would be a good way to showcase best practice in the industry and encourage others to follow suit. Our first awards in 2005 only had four categories. This has developed into the suite of awards we now have including the prestigious Projects of the Year. The G4C Awards has been a more recent development, but I have to say is probably one of my favourites, as recognising and rewarding the brilliant talent in our region is awe inspiring.

### What challenges have you encountered?

Well, you could say an unprecedented pandemic, which no one had ever anticipated but we have muddled through together as a sector. Apart from that, I think our biggest challenge has been survival. Back in 2003 we were established with support from One NorthEast, the Regional Development Agency but then the great recession hit in 2008 following the 2007/08 global credit crunch. This hit the construction industry hard but those who believed in what we were trying to achieve stayed with us. Then, to make things worse, the RDA was abolished after the General Election in May 2010, so we had to rely on funding from a struggling industry. We are still here delivering services, so I thank a forward-thinking industry for the continued support.

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

Wow, where do I start? Back in early 2000s there were over 500 job related deaths a year in our industry. Building projects were delivered late, over budget and quality was seriously lacking. With the focus on Construction Key Performance Indicators I'm pleased to say things have improved emphatically with job related deaths falling to 30, an all-time low, in 2019. However, there are new challenges to address including mental and physical wellbeing and by far the biggest challenge ever is the climate emergency and what the industry and property sector can do to address this.

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

In the region it has to be John Hays, founder of Hays Travel. We all have our sporting and entertainment heroes and I'm privileged to have

met some of mine including Jonny Wilkinson in 2004 following the England World Cup win and Newcastle Falcons Powergen Cup victories. I met Niall Quinn in 2017 and had the immense pleasure of walking Hadrian's Wall with him, well part of it, anyway.

However, true heroes to me are those that do completely selfless things for others without receiving or expecting any reward. In this you can include lifeboat crew, mountain rescue and our medical and emergency services.

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

Nothing changes, nothing changes.

Or, as Henry Ford said *"If you do what you've always done, you get what you always got."*

Constructing Excellence is a platform to stimulate debate and drive much needed change in the construction sector. Our members, from the entire supply chain, share a vision for change through innovation and collaboration.

### How do you like to unwind?

Well, it's no secret that I like a glass of something sparkling with friends. However, over the last year in lockdown and not being able to go too far I have rediscovered my love of walking and have found some amazing places virtually on my doorstep. I also run, although not very fast, and like to support others starting out on their running journey in my role as a run leader with Washington Running Club. I am also a member of the Core Team at Herrington Country Parkrun and literally can't wait for its restart in June 2021.

[www.cene.org.uk](http://www.cene.org.uk)



Catriona Lingwood



## LIFE AS A FEMALE ARCHITECT

Laura Ruxton, Director at Dunwoodie Architects shares some of her experiences as a female architect in a male dominated construction industry.

**I was recently interviewed by a University student who was researching the subject 'Females in Architecture'. It was only when I was thinking about my answers that it occurred to me that women in architecture is a subject that perhaps doesn't get the attention that it deserves. I graduated from Architecture in Colombia where the majority of architects are women. It is traditionally a career where women find a place and men tend to gravitate more towards engineering as a profession. This was certainly the case 20 years ago when I graduated.**

It is possibly unfair to generalise based upon an unfortunate experience I had whilst working as a student in an architect's office in Switzerland where I was treated with total disrespect and sent to do the senior partner's personal shopping without so much as a please or thank you. Rightly or wrongly, at this early stage of my career this led me to believe that women in architecture must be seen more as personal assistants regardless of their level of qualifications and that would remain with you throughout your career. Consequently, as a result of this experience, I was braced for

something similar when I arrived in the UK.

My professional experience in this country has been entirely with Dunwoodie Architects and since I started I have always felt listened to and appreciated. I started as an architectural assistant while I converted my degree from Colombia via the Architect's Registration Board and then completed my final Part 3 qualification at Newcastle University, whilst at the same time starting a family and trying to settle in what was for me a foreign country. I have now been working in the UK for 15 years and in that period I have only ever worked with two other female architects. Clearly there are now many more female architects out there but the unbalance between male and female architects is still, in my opinion, quite significant.

I have been in a meeting where I have felt physically threatened by a male client, who, despite knowing his argument was wrong, could not bring himself to accept that a 35 year old woman knew more about contract management than he did so he just lashed out in anger rather than accept his failings in that area. I felt totally intimidated, despite considering myself to be

a reasonably strong woman, so much so that I struggled to hold myself together until after the meeting when I broke down in tears due to the pressure he had put me under. This surely cannot be acceptable in this day and age and I think I can fairly safely say that he would have reacted very differently if I had been a man.

Fortunately those are just a couple of uncomfortable and inappropriate experiences I have had in my career to date. Overall, I think the good experiences significantly outnumber the bad ones and I have encountered far more instances of tolerant and supportive people on my journey in architecture so far. I am very lucky to have such an incredibly supportive team around me including Peter Swift, my fellow Director, who has been extremely helpful. Female architects face a lot of challenges, least of all we must work harder just to convince others that we are just as capable as any other male architect but, in all honesty, being surrounded by a team that cares and supports you along the way can make all the difference.

At the end of the day, these are just my own personal experiences and I'm sure other women in architecture will have faced other challenges or maybe none of them, but after speaking to other female architects the one constant is having to prove yourself time and again. The feeling of having to work harder for others to listen to you and acknowledge that maybe we are just as capable. However, I'm not frightened of the challenge!

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





Matt Hoy

## WHAT DO YOU GET WHEN YOU GET WHAT YOU PAY FOR?

By Matt Hoy, Director of Estate Agency, Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents

In a world where budget and online estate agencies are opening every day, and where competition on the high street can create opportunity for sellers to negotiate on fees, there is potentially a deal to be had when listing your house for sale – but does this saving on costs actually represent best value when considering the final sale price for your property?

**Commission is a word that online-based estate agencies are working hard to make taboo – even investing in big budget TV campaigns to do so. At the time of writing, with demand outstripping supply in the post-lockdown property market, high street agency fee levels are also under pressure from estate agents competing with one another for new business.**

The age-old adage 'you get what you pay for' might seem like a convenient defence from those who are still charging more – but is selling your house really something you want to do on the cheap? The 'Savings Calculator' on the website for online agents Purplebricks suggests a saving of £2,766 could be possible when selling a home at the value of the UK average house price. At face value, this figure could be an attractive proposition for many, but is this a figure quickly eclipsed by a lower sale price if the job isn't done correctly.

Telephone enquiries from new buyers still outweigh email enquiries by nearly 2:1, and that first point of contact is vital to converting prospective applicants into viewers. Having initial enquiries fielded by a call centre hundreds of miles away can be detrimental to viewer numbers which ultimately has a knock-on effect with the time taken to achieve a sale for your home and the overall value achieved. The Advisory offers independent expert advice for house sellers and reports on average that a local high street agent generates 48% more viewings and 64% more offers than their online counterparts, resulting in a 5% average uplift in sale price – £12,575 on the average UK house price, immediately contextualising the £2,766 'saving' promised by the Purplebricks website.

There are many instances where a prudent customer would do well to seek out low cost, high volume businesses, but perhaps typically not in the service industry and certainly not when selling an asset of such considerable price. It is essential to take the right steps as making the wrong choice could cost you thousands of pounds. The reality is that estate agents are expert individuals that are working for you, getting paid only after a successful transaction and at a rate which is directly proportional to the value they helped you achieve on your home, not some kind of enemy or otherwise necessary evil as portrayed by some of the online competition.

The commission which is demonised by these low cost, high volume agencies, is a fantastic incentive to achieve the best result possible for the seller. Choosing the high street agent that will half the fee quotes offered by its competition might seem like an easy decision when you are first considering selling, but with more homes than ever selling for in-excess of the original asking prices, will you end up wishing the person handling the process was twice as motivated to see you get the best result?

Of course the 5% uplift in agreed sales price reported by TheAdvisory will be largely due to high street agencies typically employing local individuals with a better grasp on the locality they are working in and the first-hand knowledge of the properties they are dealing with. Having a concentrated and targeted geographical area ensures a much deeper knowledge which can be relied upon to provide the best service.

It almost goes without saying but is still worth noting that the advertised savings become much

larger as you advance up the price brackets into higher priced homes, but so do the potential losses. Naturally, the higher something is priced the smaller the potential purchaser audience becomes. One missed opportunity could cost a seller a considerable amount time and money and that is before considering how this is extrapolated across connected purchases.

So what do you get when you 'get what you pay for'? A team of local individuals in a centralized location on the busiest high streets with prime window advertising, online coverage with maximized conversion rates from those who do respond to your advertisements, professional photography, energy performance certification, floorplans, high quality brochures, accompanied viewings as standard, a mortgage team on hand to qualify applicants, chartered valuation and building surveyors in the building to help manage the outcome of survey results, not having to ask or wonder what might cost more but knowing that the people you have employed are working with you toward a common goal, rather than acting merely as an introductory vehicle for anyone who picks up the phone.

Competition is good, and serves to focus minds and drive progression in the industry. Just make sure you consider properly what represents best value when faced with alleged savings and consider the importance of the human mechanism involved with transactions of such emotional and monetary significance.

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

# IMPOSING OUR VISIONS

By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield



Neil Turner

I recently read that the Housing Secretary, Robert Jenrick, had made some strong statements on architects under his forthcoming overhaul of the English planning statement.

**He has argued that in future, any buildings developed 'should be locally popular' and that the 'built environment' shouldn't be imposed upon local communities; it shouldn't just be something which is the dream of an architect or what is fashionable to a certain type of person. He argued that we don't listen to people's views' and believes power should be wrested from architects and planners who ignore the view of the public.**

Strong stuff Mr Jenrick!

Behind this headline of architect bashing, there are some (potentially) useful changes. For example, local authorities will be responsible for creating design codes to help define what is locally popular and historically important to an area.

It is vital to ask local communities what they want and how things should look but they will need to rely on advice from trained professionals to guide our planning committees to come to decisions. In my experience it has never been harder to get planning permission through an increasingly complex process.

I would welcome some streamlining of the

system and the ability of experienced planners/conservation offices to offer guidance, help and informed decisions. The planning system is struggling, especially in this last year with a lack of resource.

So, who is going to write these design codes and set good standards? Yes, you guessed it. It will need planners and architects!

I think Mr Jenrick missed the point entirely. Architects and planners train for a long time to be able to offer advice, opinions, and good design. In fact, in our RIBA professional code of conduct, the first section is integrity: 'Members shall consistently promote and protect the public interest and social purpose, taking into account future generations.'

If we really want the best design in our communities then shouldn't we use talented and experienced help, just as I would not want to go to the pub for a medical consultation or the bookies for financial assistance?

Therefore, why don't we insist that all planning applications have an architect signing off the design? If we are to increase standards in our

communities, this would make sense. I bet the vast majority of people do not realise how many applications are completed by people with no experience, or use names similar to 'architect', to imply a formal training.

I am saddened when I see housing designs that are plain, poorly proportioned, and not of our time. The lack of a talented architect on the job is often the reason. I certainly don't impose designs on people as I am employed by clients who live in those communities and guide me. The challenge and fascination of this profession is to take a brief, a budget and create the best product – irrespective of whether it is a house, factory, or medical centre.

If we are to raise the bar, improve our local communities and create popular design, then call in the professionals – the design professionals.

**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)**



# ALMOST HALF OF FIRMS PLAN TO IMPROVE QUALITY OF THEIR OFFICES



Photo credit: Copemico on Unsplash

A survey of 400 firms reveals companies are looking to offices to boost employee wellbeing, collaboration and attract talent. 46% plan to improve the workplace amenities for staff, post-pandemic. 65% of firms plan to grow or stabilise their office portfolio within three years.

**According to new research by Knight Frank, businesses are planning to improve their workplaces, post-pandemic, to revitalise their brand and culture - which will see improved amenities for employees.**

Knight Frank's second edition of its (Y)OUR SPACE report draws on responses from almost 400 businesses with a combined headcount in excess of 10 million, providing an insight into workplace strategies and real estate requirements.

The survey results show that firms are beginning to look beyond the pandemic, evaluating the experience of the past year and thinking about how to enhance their workplaces for the future.

New amenities and better service from landlords are top demands

The research reveals companies will embrace a new era of agile working by enhancing their offices, not abandoning them.

Over the next three years, 47% of firms will seek to improve the quality of the space they occupy. With 46% looking to improve the amenities available to employees within the workplace.

Fifty-five percent of respondents said they will create more collaborative spaces within their offices. And over half said they will implement 'hot desking', despite Covid-19 having largely

prevented desk-sharing over the past year.

Of the amenities occupiers will look to bring to their workplaces post-pandemic, dedicated mental health facilities and click & collect services have risen into the top five priorities, whilst facilities supporting wellbeing dominate the list:

1. On site food and beverage (65%)
2. Gym facilities (47%)
3. Cycle storage (46%)
4. Mental health facilities, such as sanctuary spaces (45%)
5. Click and collect facilities (45%)

Occupiers' biggest frustrations with their landlords are a lack of flexibility (29%) and a lack of innovation in the product or service (21%). This highlights the need for landlords to invest in their office buildings, property management and tenant services.

Patrick Matheson, Partner at Knight Frank, comments: "Firms want to give employees the best of both worlds, allowing them to work flexibly, but making their offices the best possible experience, which means delivering higher quality and more engaging workplaces.

"Well-designed offices can boost productivity, creativity, and a firm's ability to attract and on-board talent, especially graduates."

## Offices remain essential to corporate culture

Despite over a year of restricted access to offices, businesses continue to identify their workplaces as an essential component of their corporate identity and vital for retaining and reinvigorating their people, post-pandemic.

Office space is also increasingly seen as a tool for improving employee wellbeing, collaboration, and talent attraction and retention, with each of these categories referenced by 37% of firms.

The need to improve office amenities or adjust workplace strategies will see up to one-in-four firms relocate their corporate headquarters after the pandemic.

Almost two-fifths of firms said it is either likely, very likely or definite that they will relocate their HQ within the next three years. This sets the scene for significant activity in the office market and competition for the highest quality and best located space in the coming years.

Patrick adds: "There will be a flight to better quality space, we're already seeing this on the ground."

**Knight Frank's (Y)OUR SPACE Report is available at [www.knightfrank.com](http://www.knightfrank.com)**



## AWARD-WINNING CONSULTANCY TO PROJECT MANAGE GROUNDBREAKING NET ZERO PROJECT

Award-winning construction and property consultancy, Summers-Inman has been appointed by Teesside University to a £13.5m research and innovation facility which will support the region's ongoing drive for clean energy and sustainability.

The firm's appointment in a multidisciplinary role to Net Zero Industry Innovation Centre (NZIIC) follows successful completion of past projects for the University, including National Horizons Centre, the Student Life building and the Cornell Quarter.

Plans to develop the NZIIC were unveiled by Teesside University and the Tees Valley Mayor and Combined Authority in March. Other partners include the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and The Welding Institute.

The news follows several announcements in hydrogen and clean energy for the Tees Valley, including confirmation that BP will set up a 'blue hydrogen' production facility on Teesside and the UK's Hydrogen Transport Centre which will be constructed next door to The Welding Institute.

The new NZIIC is part of the latest development at the expanding Net Zero Innovation Hub, spearheaded by Teesside University, which is based on the Tees Advanced Manufacturing Park (TeesAMP) in Middlesbrough.



## TOLENT COMPLETE MULTI-MILLION POUND ACUTE CARDIAC CARE WARD AT RVI HOSPITAL

A multi-million pound purpose-built facility for patients with heart conditions has opened its doors at the Royal Victoria Infirmary Hospital in Newcastle.

Gateshead-based contractor Tolent handed over the £2.5m acute cardiac care unit back in March.

Works included the merging of two existing wards which were completely redesigned by P+HS Architects to support a new model of care and features dementia friendly décor.

Dr Ifti Haq, consultant cardiologist and head of cardiology at the RVI, said:

"This is an extremely positive step towards providing our patients with greater streamlined care."

"The new layout of our acute cardiac unit means that we can offer heart patients significantly enhanced care and importantly, in the right place at the right time."

The new unit has three distinct treatment zones including: a new four-bay cardiac day unit, a brand new coronary care unit with six cubicles for patients who need high dependency care and a 17-bedded ward for patients who need to stay in hospital for specialist care.

Working closely with the Newcastle Hospitals Trusts Estates Team, Tolent completed works in 25 weeks.

David Thompson, regional director for Tolent, said: "It was a pleasure to work with the Estates Team again on our fourth successful refurbishment project at the RVI and Freeman hospitals in the last 12 months.

"Our team on site demonstrated once again their ability in delivering a much-needed care facility whilst working in a live hospital environment, during a global pandemic, to exceptional quality and in the time frame that the Trust needed. Well done to all involved."



## SUNDERLAND HOTEL RISES FROM THE GROUND

Steel frames that will form the basis of the newest addition to the Sunderland city centre skyline are rising from the ground.

The new 120-bed Holiday Inn Hotel at Keel Square is taking shape, after the metal frame was erected, setting out the basis of the structure, which will stand four storeys high.

The development, which is being brought forward by Cairn Group, is expected to open its doors in spring 2022, and will feature active ground floor spaces that will be occupied by cafes and eateries, with upper floors providing attractive accommodation for business and leisure visitors.



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## HYBRID! WHAT DOES HYBRID MEAN TO YOU?

If I had said “Furlough” to you in January last year you would have thought I probably meant “Furlong”. It’s a new word we all learnt in lockdown. Likewise, the word Hybrid is becoming more and more common in our vocabulary but like many words, it means different things to different people.

Probably the most common use recently has been Hybrid cars, i.e. those that run on petrol or diesel as well as electric – the Toyota Prius being of course the obvious example although every manufacturer now seems to make at least one.

However, within the fringes of my own profession in property, there has been a growing move towards what is called Hybrid Estate Agency. This is the agencies that operate with a limited physical presence but with most of their operations being done remotely online – different to the traditional estate agents who still use online as part of their offering but maintain local offices in communities, and different to the purely online operations with no accessible physical presence.

We are also seeing Hybrid in a lot of retail trades, and whereas some business have gone entirely online (notably the vestiges of the Arcadia Empire and Debenhams), a lot of traders are doing a general mix. Now we are also seeing Hybrid working in the office environment where people work part time from an office and part time from home. My views on the importance of the High Street are fairly well known, in that I believe we need to do all we can to keep it lively and relevant in a changing world but I do see issues with this Hybrid working for white collar workers.

I see an issue for their customers as well as for their staff. I don’t think I am anything like alone in my frustration trying to deal with any organisation on the phone or via email when each call or email is dealt with by a different person, who quite often doesn’t seem to have full knowledge of the case in hand. It makes things considerably less efficient and leads to resentment on behalf of the caller/ emailer who finds it frustrating not to get a direct answer to a direct question.



Philip Bowe

The other issue is that we are invading people’s private spaces. If workers are expected to work some days in the working week from a shop or dedicated office and sometimes from home, then they need to have at their fingertips all the relevant information at home. They need the space and frankly I don’t think this works for many people. I have my own business and so I have a small computer and printer at home but 90% of my paperwork – make that 99% – is in the office. I know many people at least attempt to work paperless, but because I have old documents such as leases where legally originals are required we need to keep them in filing cabinets in physical form. I don’t have copies of those at home because firstly I don’t have the space and secondly my home is my sanctuary. And that is speaking as a business owner. In the case of an employee, why should they have their private space invaded by work? I leave my office desk somewhat untidy on an evening as can my assistant (or to be more honest I can leave my desk an absolute mess and she can leave hers somewhat untidy) – but if we work from home, unless we do have a dedicated private room, everything needs to be cleared

away at the end of every evening and reset out in the morning. What about children playing when we are working from home? Children who are old enough to be left on their own for a short time well by their very nature be a potential nuisance if they are playing, chattering or making a mess when we are trying to work. That is what adolescence is all about.

So my thoughts are that whereas Hybrid cars maybe better than purely fossil fuel powered cars, and there may be a place for Hybrid Estate Agency, Retail and Office work, I do think that it needs very careful consideration for the sake of all concerned; though really I believe we need to maintain shops and offices for the mental wellbeing of all the employees as well as the customers.

*If you disagree, tell me! If you agree, tell me! I also write on my LinkedIn profile every Wednesday morning at about 8.30 – follow me at [linkedin.com/in/philipbowe](https://www.linkedin.com/in/philipbowe).*

[www.bivbowes.co.uk](http://www.bivbowes.co.uk) Tel: 0191 462 6 264

# RISING STAR

In the latest of our series of interviews with up and coming young professionals we meet...

## ALEXANDER DICKINSON

Director of WDL Builders

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

When I was younger, I was very interested in history. I wanted to do something with this but after a while I decided it was too academic for me. I decided to follow in my dad's and older brother's footsteps and move into construction and I am really enjoying it.

### Tell us about your current role?

I am a Director of WDL. I spend my days sorting out the company's finances, tracking payments that go in and out of the business, meeting with customers and writing quotes for potential new jobs. I also visit our sites during the day to make sure that each job is progressing to schedule and that everything is running smoothly. During particularly busy days I also help by picking up materials and tools for the guys on the sites.

### What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

At the moment, it is the current state of world affairs as due to things like COVID, Brexit, etc. there is a shortage of supplies so that has delayed a few jobs and raised the prices of materials. It has been quite a challenge organising around these shortages/price increases.

### What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

My biggest weakness is making small talk with people I am not familiar with. I am known to be quite a quiet person at times, so I sometimes find this difficult. I feel that I manage it quite well at work as I pushed myself to talk to people more confidently and so far it has worked out well.

### What are you currently working on?

Currently our biggest project is an extension on a house in Gosforth, and we are also working on a garage conversion in the West End, along with numerous smaller projects.

### Tell us about your team?

My team consists of the lads on the sites - these are the guys who do the construction and decorating on the jobs, the office staff - the people who help communicate with customers and sort out invoicing etc (and the dogs).



Alexander Dickinson

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

The best bit of advice I have been given that applies to business would be to take criticism/feedback and put it to use. If I am given feedback or criticism I will try and think about how I can use it to improve in the future which has been very useful for me.

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

Inside of business, I would say a hero of mine is Steve Jobs as he helped to revolutionise the technology industry and brought tech, that we all use on a daily basis, into our lives.

Outside of business my hero would probably be Henry Cavill. He has been involved in many things that I have come to love. Both in my younger years when he played Superman and recent times he has played The Witcher in the Netflix series.

### Where do you see yourself in five years time?

Being relatively new to the construction industry, in five years time I would like to see myself being more familiar with the industry and how it

operates so I can help guide WDL into the future. I have already learned a lot in my short time here.

### How do you like to unwind outside of work?

When I am not working, I like to spend time with my friends. I generally play Xbox with them or go to the pub for a few drinks and watch the football. I also like to spend time with my girlfriend watching TV and films.

### Favourite Book and Box Set?

My favourite book is *The Witcher* series of books. These are books that one of my favourite games are based on. I played the games before reading the books and loved how much more of an in-depth view of the Witcher world and characters it gave.

My favourite boxset is a show called *Grimm*. It is a show about a detective who has the ability to see mythological creatures, who hide amongst people, for what they really are, and solving crimes which usually involve them. It combines two of my favourite things, crime shows and fantasy. I recently finished rewatching it.

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



The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy!



Hi everyone, the weather is improving and everyone seems much happier. They keep talking about something called Covid but all I know is that we are getting out for longer walks to different places.

It was my birthday last month and daddy bought me a new bed – but Cally ate it so she is in the doghouse again (forgive the pun).

Our cousin Dexter is coming for a sleepover next weekend so that should be fun.

I will let you know how it went in next month's magazine.

Mike Hunt from Alnwick asks: ***I live in a Victorian house with solid walls (no cavity). Why don't the inside walls get damp?***

A: This generally works very well. Victorian houses had the added advantage of being built with lime mortar and lime plaster, which are soft, breathable materials, which allow this cycle of wetting and drying to take place without any notable or extreme dampness "events" taking place.

The outer leaf of a cavity wall, on the other hand, is supposed to repel the rainwater, meaning that the inner leaf always stays dry. But cavity walls are mostly built with cement mortar, which is hard and non-breathable. So when incident rainwater penetrates, rather than being absorbed, it tends to dribble down the inner face of the brick outer leaf.

This all worked perfectly well until a few years ago, when some bright spark had the idea of blowing absorbent fluffy material into the cavities. Contrary to the insulation manufacturers' claims, retro-fit cavity wall insulation can allow water to cross cavities, where it shows up as damp patches on the internal surfaces, resulting in mould growth and decorative damage. This is a potentially huge problem, with some three million UK homes possibly at risk.

**Please send me your  
building queries through facebook -  
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Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at  
Northern Insight on  
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# Hey You!

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# COMMISSIONERS QUAY

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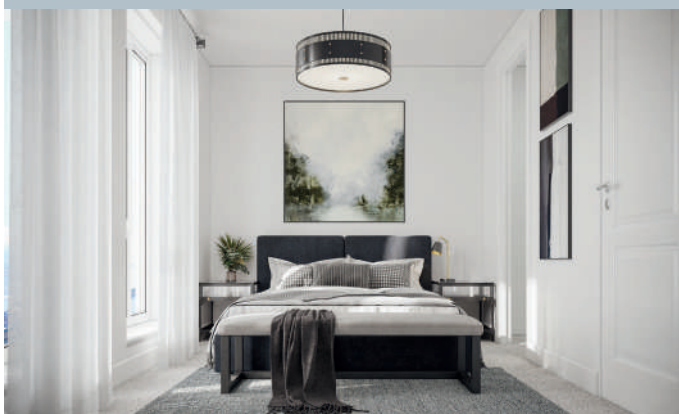
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Karpet Mills are pleased to invite customers to the new premium flooring showroom after latest lockdown ends.

## YOU'RE INVITED...

Karpet Mills, the North East's leading Carpet and Flooring retailer, are delighted to announce that all stores are now open for business again after the latest lockdown, including the NEW Designer Flooring Premium Showroom at their Kingston Park branch in Newcastle.

**All six stores have successfully re-opened, with COVID measures still in place to help customers shop with confidence, and early signs have been extremely positive, with footfall numbers incredibly high.**

"The coronavirus crisis and subsequent national lockdowns have had an significant impact on the flooring sector, but I am absolutely thrilled to announce that we are fully back open for business and here to help anyone who requires carpets and flooring," says Joel Dickinson, Karpet Mills director.

"It goes without saying that the entire world has (almost without exception) had to adjust to the impact of COVID-19. However, our company has been established for over 140 years and although this is the biggest crisis we have had to face in our family's living memory previous generations in our company have overcome enormous obstacles including two World Wars."

The first enforced lockdown in 2020 came just as Karpet Mills had launched their new premium Designer Flooring showroom in Kingston Park, Newcastle. The new 10,000 sqft showroom displays the highest quality floor coverings available in today's market, including famous names such as Amtico, Axminster, Crucial Trading to name just a few.

In addition to having the North-East's largest selection of premium flooring on display, the new showroom also features state-of-the-art design software from both Hugh Mackay & Amtico, allowing customers to create completely bespoke carpets and flooring, and even providing them with visual representations of how their new flooring will look in their home.

"This will be a real game changer for us, and we're excited for people to finally get the chance to see it" says Joel.

"Our Designer Flooring Showroom at our Karpet Mills branch in Hexham has had great success since its launch in early 2018, so it has always been the plan to open up further showrooms and expand the business. The new Designer Flooring showroom will allow us to provide customers with the largest selection of premium flooring brands in the North East."

Karpet Mills combines the experience gleaned from over a 140 years trading with the modern-day expectations of quality and service to provide the full package for every customer. All branches (Kingston Park, Gateshead, Hetton-Le-Hole, Hexham and Benton) are open for trade seven days a week. Please be aware that all stores now feature new measures, in accordance with Government advice and guidelines, to ensure the safety of all customers and staff at all times.



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



“  
...This will be a  
real gamechanger  
for us...  
”

Joel Dickinson





## MEDIAWORKS WINS PRESTIGIOUS ACCOLADE FOR LEISURE LAKES BIKES SEARCH CAMPAIGN

Future facing digital marketing agency, Mediaworks, is celebrating after its work for Leisure Lakes Bikes was crowned winner of the best sports and leisure campaign at The Drum Search Awards 2021.

The Drum awarded Mediaworks as a result of successfully increasing Leisure Lakes Bikes' revenue through data-driven search visibility. The win also marks the second successive year in which Mediaworks has been awarded the accolade; in addition to receiving the more recent UK Dev Award for the best Third Sector website.

The resulting digital approach successfully exceeded Leisure Lakes Bikes' target of £4.8 million in sales over the course of 2020, delivering £6.39 million in revenue.



## MARKETING AGENCY WINS A DOZEN NEW CLIENTS IN AS MANY WEEKS

North East based marketing agency, Narrative, has welcomed a wealth of new clients so far this year, adding a new client every week from January to March 2021.

These new clients span numerous sectors, including law, housing, hospitality and local authorities, and include Durham County

Council, ForHousing, National Institute for Health Research, Recovery Connections and the North East Procurement Organisation (NEPO).

Narrative successfully tendered and pitched for an array of opportunities aligned to their ambitious growth plans for 2021, and triumphantly secured a dozen new contracts in as many weeks.

Chosen to strengthen each company's on and offline positioning, elevate brand stories and inject new life into their marketing and PR strategies; using a combination of creative design, paid media, technical SEO, PR and content marketing, Narrative is already making an impact for their new clients.

The plethora of new client wins further add to Narrative's current array of existing clients, about which MD Kieron Goldsborough, expressed his excitement:

"It's fantastic to be partnering with so many exceptional businesses, whose motivations and innovative mindsets align so closely to our own. In what has been a difficult 12 months for many businesses, it is reassuring to see that businesses are beginning to kickstart their marketing programmes again and there is such a variety of projects out there for the North East agencies to get their teeth into.

"Onboarding these organisations is very exciting, as is welcoming them to our repertoire of valued clients."



## INSPIRED APPOINTMENT

**Marc Cranston has joined Inspired Agency as Director of Business Development.**

With 11 years' experience in business development, Cranston has a well-known and respected reputation within the digital marketing industry.

Having played a key role in the business growth of another North East-based digital agency, Marc is looking to reproduce the same success at Inspired by building and elevating Inspired's business development division.

Marc said "I'm really excited to start the next chapter in my career. Inspired Agency is the perfect place for me to take on this new challenge and responsibility; I have always admired the way Inspired work and their fantastic client retention which is second to none in the region. I'm driven by building meaningful relationships with my clients and adding real value to their marketing campaigns, an ethos which aligns perfectly with Inspired's approach."



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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## PAUL FRASER

Owner of Rephrase PR and Media

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

Like thousands of others, my ambitions all centred on becoming a professional footballer growing up in Seaton Carew. Having played to a decent standard, district and a trial here and there, it was always a dream of mine as a schoolboy. Unfortunately that never materialised but my love for football and sport did take me down the media path. A broadcasting and media management course led me to the Hartlepool Mail on work experience and to journalism college. The rest, as they say, is history.

### Tell us about your current role?

After 19 years progressing to Chief Football/Golf Writer at The Northern Echo, covering matches across the country and in Europe when teams did well, I built up an extensive list of contacts within the worlds of sport and business as well as in the local and national media industry. That provided the platform to set up Rephrase PR and Media Services in October last year. Now I enjoy working with clients, including individuals, businesses and in education, to help raise their profile, tailored to the specific requirements they have in mind.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

At this moment in time, seven months in, it has to be having the nerve to create my own business - particularly during a pandemic - and making it work during such times. Having had the idea in mind for a number of years, it was important to get the timing right. It felt right, despite what was going on in the world, and I am extremely grateful to those who have believed in me, including clients, family and friends.

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

Knowing how a newsroom works, it is more important than ever to work with newsdesks and clients to try to cater for everyone's needs. Social media and the development of better websites provides every company with its own platform to create news and promote what they offer. On top of that, linking well with the various other media outlets can help your brand grow like never before.

### What are you currently working on?

There are lots of things going on month-to-month at Rephrase, with regular clients expanding and tapping into new areas. I have been proud recently to help Hartlepool's Orangebox Training Solutions shout about how they are rolling out courses across the country - and as far away as Dubai. Just last week Hartlepool College of Further Education was the centre of a media frenzy surrounding the May by-election too. Another of my clients, Evolution Risk Assurance, is delivering immersive training to global players such as BP and Thermofisher.

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

We are just a small team right now. I provide tailored consultancy to my clients and Bianca keeps the paper work in check, as well as running social media accounts. I do have all areas covered, with videographers, graphic designers and photographers all on hand to meet the demands of each client. Let's see what the future holds.

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

Business can be like missing a penalty. Not all of the penalties you take will find the net, but just make sure you're confident to be on the

spot to take another - and if you take it properly then you've done your bit and you'll more than likely score.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Like I alluded to earlier, it has to be stepping up and launching my business during a pandemic. A lot of my work has had to be done over the phone or on Zoom, even with new clients who I haven't met before face-to-face.

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

Football and sport is about to come up again here! There's a theme running through this isn't there?

When I was younger it was Kenny Dalglish and his No.7 shirt for Liverpool. Nowadays I try to listen to as many opinions as possible to help me grow as a person and as a business owner. And if you can surround yourself with people you like to work with and who you trust, everything stands a better chance of working.



Paul with Kenny Dalglish

### How do you unwind outside of work?

If I get a chance, with three children aged 16, 12 and a one-year-old, you mean, while running a business too? But I do try! I still like to stay reasonably fit by running on a morning and playing football at Over-35s or Over 40s level. Golf is a love of mine too and I'm a member at Seaton Carew Golf Club, where I can see the fairways from my office window. Oh, and wine (and beer).

### Favourite Book and Boxset?

Any crime drama and you're likely to have me sucked in. I loved Prison Break when that first came out and 24. I am a Line of Duty fan and anything else that crops up along those lines you will quite easily get me hooked. Books wise I am a big fan of an autobiography, but James Patterson's Alex Cross series is top drawer too.

*If you would like to work with Paul Fraser and Rephrase please check out [www.rephrasemedia.com](http://www.rephrasemedia.com) or email [info@rephrasemedia.com](mailto:info@rephrasemedia.com)*



Lizzie Selby

Photo: Nick Georgiou Photography



# MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS...

## LIZZIE SELBY

Managing Director, Peachy Digital

### Did you always envisage a career in the Marketing and Media industry?

Not at all! At school I considered accountancy but then when the time came to go to University, I realised that it really wasn't for me. Marketing happened by accident a few years later.

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

After deciding not to go to University, I muddled my way through a few jobs in admin and sales. My final admin position was at an insurance underwriting company local to home. That company was bought out by Jardine Lloyd Thompson and my role was going to be made redundant, so the then Marketing Manager asked if I would like to work with her. With a young child and bills to pay I jumped at the opportunity and discovered that I absolutely loved marketing! Since then, I have worked in marketing for an insurance network, an IT company, The Wensleydale Creamery, agencies and then set up my own business, Peachy Digital.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Along the way there have been plenty of challenges, but by far the biggest has to be heading into a pandemic just two months after starting Peachy Digital. I'm sure it's the same for most people, it was just such an uncertain time for everyone. The most bizarre thing many people will have experienced in their lives and in addition to the concerns over the effect on my business and those that we work with, it made me worry about my family and friends. Many of us know people who have lost loved ones to the virus and it's certainly been a difficult time for people from all walks of life. Home schooling while running a business was an eye-opener for sure, I take my hat off to teachers – they do an incredible job!

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

To be honest, everyone turning up day after day and giving it their all. Marketing is a passion, not just a job.

### Which fictional media character can you most relate to?

Very much giving away my geeky side here, but Merida from Disney's 'Brave'. She's strong, determined and lets absolutely nothing and no one get in her way. While I think she's leagues ahead of me in achieving that, it's what I aspire to.

### How have you adapted your business during the coronavirus crisis and supported clients?

We're very lucky in that we can do almost everything remotely and digitally, so the biggest change we made was stopping those face-to-face meetings and moving them to Zoom and Teams. We've been able to deliver what our clients have needed, when they have needed it and bizarrely, we are working with several businesses whom we have never physically met! But above all, we've worked flexibly to help our clients navigate through these uncharted waters.

### What is your greatest strength?

Well...I know every word to the rap in the Mýa, Christina Aguilera, P!nk and Lil' Kim cover of Lady Marmalade! But on a more serious note, I think it would have to be plate spinning. I'm definitely not the first one to achieve it and certainly won't be the last but juggling building and running a business with keeping our house looking

mostly presentable and being a mum and wife, while still making time for friends and a whole host of other things – it's full on. My day often begins at 5am and I just keep going until the day's tasks are completed.

### What is your biggest weakness?

I have a complete inability to say no to food – especially cheese! Now that the world is opening up again and restrictions are lifting, almost every meeting I'm booking in involves a meal. I'd like to say it's because I'm keen to support an industry that has been hit very hard by the pandemic, and while that is absolutely true, I have to confess that it's also because I just love to eat!

### What has been your proudest achievement?

For Peachy Digital to date, it would have to be the press release we did for Coupland Leather. What started as a fantastic story sent to local media really grew wings and took off. It was everywhere and resulted in huge amounts of coverage including a TV interview, two glossy magazine features and it was even picked up by a leather magazine in Italy.

Outside of work though, my children. They're my motivation every day. I have two daughters and my husband has a son and daughter, so it's pretty hectic in our house!

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

I never, ever want to stop learning. Our industry moves at speed and it's crucial that we keep on top of the changes, but more than that I want to keep developing and cultivating my knowledge. I don't think you can ever truly be an expert in marketing because it doesn't stay still long enough, but what you can be is a specialist who is committed to CPD. Actually, regular CPD is part of our everyday life at Peachy Digital and each member of staff has their own training log. I'd love to add some more qualifications to my belt and keep growing the business – my youngest often tells me she wants to work in the company 'when she's older' (she's seven). I would absolutely love to see that happen!

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

With the exponential growth of the Internet of Things, I think marketing will become ever more diverse. We are seeing such monumental changes happening at lightning speed – new platforms, new technology and an audience that isn't afraid to tell brands what they do and don't like. As such, I think the marketing industry will continue to be led by pioneers who really set the tone for these changes and we're only going to see greater creativity and functionality across the sector.

### Lizzie Selby

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# CREO COMMS EXPANDS ITS TEAM

A Sunderland communication consultancy has appointed two new team members after seeing increased demand for its services.

**Growing comms and creative agency, Creo Comms, which recently moved to a new office on Foyle Street, has welcomed Alice Clark as a designer and Beth Dixon as a junior client partner.**

Alice is a multi-disciplined illustrator and graphic designer, who has worked both in-house and as a freelancer with clients ranging from *The LA Times* to local independent businesses. In her role, Alice will create engaging artwork for print and digital platforms, leading and supporting on creative projects.

She said: "I was so excited when I was offered the job. I can't wait to get involved in some of the amazing projects Creo Comms is working on. I know, together, we'll create outstanding work that really showcases the best the North East has to offer."

Beth Dixon was appointed at the same time, and joins Creo after more than three years of agency experience. A journalism graduate and experienced copywriter, she will support on a variety of client accounts and Creo's growing roster of social media clients.

Beth said: "I am really looking forward to contributing to Creo's success and embracing their creative approach to PR and communications. It's great to be working in my hometown and supporting clients from the city, as well as a number of projects we deliver for clients across the country."

The team is settling into its new headquarters on Foyle Street - a four-storey building which comprises office space, hot desking facilities, a board room and editing suites - where they deliver dynamic comms services to an array of clients including Sunderland City Council, Legal & General, Castles & Coasts Housing Association and the Department for International Trade.

Louise Bradford, managing director of Creo Comms, added: "I'm delighted to welcome Alice and Beth to the team.

"Their experience, passion and personality shone through during the



(L-R) Designer Alice Clark and junior client partner Beth Dixon outside of the new office on Foyle Street

recruitment process, despite it all being done virtually, and we're looking forward to introducing them to our clients, who will no doubt be as impressed as I am by their work."

Creo offers PR and communications support, as well as design, social media marketing, web design and video production.

**To find out more about Creo Comms, visit: [www.creocomms.co.uk](http://www.creocomms.co.uk)**



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Food and drink marketing is a true specialism of ours. From foodie PR to social media management, strategy development, profile building and more, we've worked with companies of all sizes across the industry.

Peachy Digital is a fun and slightly sassy marketing agency working with a wealth of clients across the UK and in several industries, with a specialism in food & drink. We work across the full marketing mix, both on and offline, and services include social media management, PR, email marketing, content creation and strategy development.

Our fundamental ethos is marketing 'without the fuzz' – no jargon, no nonsense, just clearly defined strategies that deliver.

We believe in working in a way which is relaxed and friendly while remaining completely professional – you won't find us in power suits but you can be sure we'll develop high quality marketing communications that will work towards our clients' business goals.

For more information call **01677 252120** or email **info@peachydigital.co.uk**



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# FOCUSSING ON YOUR STRENGTHS WHILE ADDING VALUE

As MHW PR celebrates its 21st anniversary we spoke to director and founder Wayne Halton about surviving a pandemic and managing to adapt to ensure the consultancy came through stronger.

It's been said before, but the pandemic allowed many business people, me included, to reflect, review and refine. A combination of some strategic thinking and implementation combined with a few moments of good fortune, allowed MHW to get through 2020 unscathed, to bounce into 2021 in a stronger position. The steps we took were straightforward:

## Talk, talk, talk

Lockdowns curtailed meetings but I consciously spent more time on the phone or in Zoom, Google or Teams meetings. Reaching out, keeping contact and talking seemed really important, maintaining and strengthening relationships with colleagues, clients and partners.

## Be responsive; add value

In tough times you must be even more sensitive and responsive to client needs. When you have a shock to the economy, everyone starts to look at their cost base and analyse value. Sometimes you must be prepared to give more for the same. This is where strong relationships count; if you know your clients well you can adapt and continue to add value; if you have good suppliers and partners, you can each call-in favours of the other.

## Review business objectives; set goals

That first lockdown was an uncertain and anxious time with many clients taking a deep breath and pausing. Normal activity was suspended for several weeks which gave everyone time to reflect. I managed to use the time wisely, reading some business books while looking closely at my own consultancy. 'Time out' allowed me to clarify where I wanted to position MHW and understand the means to achieving some new goals. I set myself personal targets and introduced a basic tracking device to better manage my own time,

to ensure my daily activity was visible and could be adjusted.

## Clarify the business you want, and don't want

Looking at the consultancy and our client profile allowed me to identify areas we needed to strengthen and just as importantly sectors and clients we should no longer waste time against. For instance, going forwards we will not be seeking work in the retail or hospitality sectors. We're really focusing our energy on building our fintech, manufacturing and built environment portfolios.

## Recognise your strengths and play to them

MHW knows its strengths, good strategic thinking and effective execution in the business-to-business environment. We will not pretend to offer services that are beyond our skill set; we have an excellent network of preferred suppliers who we introduce to provide specialist communication services when required - whether that's building websites, SEO or digital marketing. Our skill is understanding how it all fits together and where one should have a bias over another tactic in the communications mix.

## Team work

Key to any success is a good team. MHW has a small but highly experienced group of PR

specialists. I can trust each one to crack on and deliver a great service to each client. This core team is strengthened by partnerships with great communication specialists like NE6, Roome8Design, SD Advertising and Cameo Digital (to name a few).

## Refresh marketing materials

During the early part of the pandemic, I took time to invest and refresh our own marketing and advertising materials. We created and launched a new website during the last year, with the support of Steven Symonds and his team at NE6. Elsewhere, working with Craig Hutton at Room8Design, we created a new suite of advertising ideas along with some digital assets for social media platforms.

## Enjoy what you do

And finally, you've got to enjoy what you do. I'm hugely grateful to have some superb clients who are enjoyable to work with. I'm also lucky to have good work colleagues, along with a bunch of pals in the comms industry who are enthusiastic and fun to be around. You've got to have some fun in this mad world!

**More detail about MHW PR and their services:**  
[www.mhwpr.co.uk](http://www.mhwpr.co.uk)





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Keith Newman

## DOES SIZE MATTER?

Recently I took some of my friends on an evening cruise on my floating office - Highlights. We left Newcastle and sailed down the Tyne to the river mouth.

**On the way we passed a huge cruise liner and it struck me that even though she is thousands of tonnes larger than my boat she still does the same thing - gets people from A to B.**

That got me thinking about selecting a good PR company - is size everything or is it what you do with it that matters? Highlights PR is basically me, no extra copywriters, no big offices or associated costs. Just me.

Granted, that makes it harder for me to deal with workload and I can't be in two places at the same time but my customers know who they are dealing with and who is writing their stories on their behalf.

So, when you consider PR think about whether you want a personal service where you are the most important person in my business or you want to be a number on a big balance sheet?

Oh and one more thing...the cruise liner may be huge and luxurious but no one on board that night saw the pod of dolphins in the river mouth that we did! Added bonus!

Small for me every time. For a chat onboard Highlights, (Dolphins not guaranteed but a great coffee is) get in touch!

**Keith@highlightspr.co.uk 07814 397951 www.highlightspr.co.uk**

## WILD CAMP CHALLENGE GETS PULSE BEATING

A charity helping to improve the lives and treatment of people in the north of England who are dealing with blood cancer has sent out a challenge to people who want to test themselves against the great outdoors.

**Bright Red are based at Newcastle's Freeman Hospital and receive no government funding. They rely entirely on fund raisers to help them with their work. As life gets back to normal, the charity is asking people to take part in sponsored 24-hour wild camping challenges in the summer months in Northumberland.**

Charity Manager, Lisa Saxton said: "This is great fun and not too physical at all. It's great for everyone to feel at one with nature and raise funds at the same time."

The charity funds Haematology Nurse Specialists at the Frirage Hospital in Northallerton, the Northern Centre for Cancer Care at the Freeman Hospital, Sunderland Royal Hospital, Wansbeck General Hospital, North Tyneside General Hospital and at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Gateshead. All donations are used exclusively for the benefit of people in the region.

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# ...IT'S NICE TO BE NICE...

Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what the nicest thing their customers had said to them.



"Simply that we have changed the way they do business."

**Cheryl Spears**  
Lucid Technology Solutions  
[www.lucidgrp.co.uk](http://www.lucidgrp.co.uk)

"A fabulous collection from a very talented designer. Beautifully made, a showcase for quality handmade accessories. Excellent customer service and superb attention to detail. Highly recommended!"

**Margaret Woodliff Wright**  
The Northumberland Milliner  
[www.margaretwoodliffwright.com](http://www.margaretwoodliffwright.com)



"Throughout the Covid lockdowns, MINT Business Club has given us something to focus on and look forward to better times in our business."

**Nicola Jayne**  
Little MINT  
Business Club



"I'm writing because I bought the emotional eating audiobook...and I have absolutely loved your techniques. I've been working on it for three weeks now (not every day, even) and I have to say that my life has changed drastically in the food department. My emotional eating habits are gone. I am making the best food decisions of my life! I used to have a deep fear of going on a diet because I was terrified of feeling deprived of a food that I wanted. I made all of my food decisions based on my moods and what I "felt" like eating. Food was always my reward, my entertainment, my comfort - now I can say that I don't feel that way at all. I've started eating healthy foods and avoiding all of my old bad favorites, and I don't even miss them!"

**Anne Morrison, Therapist and Coach**  
[www.annemorrison.co.uk](http://www.annemorrison.co.uk)



"I pride myself in having a positive approach with clients and when they send feedback about this it is amazing. We recently finished a promo video with a client and they messaged afterwards and said how comfortable they felt during filming and how professional we were. We approach all our clients asking for honest reviews and we are pleased to say we hold a five star rating on Google and Facebook."

**Dan Wilkinson, DW Media**  
[www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)



"Neil possesses a wealth of knowledge regarding his industry and through his advice and wise counsel, I have been able to advise my elderly mother on how to structure her Will to navigate a path through some difficult family dynamics. For this we will be forever in his debt. For these reasons I would highly recommend Neil to anyone who needs a Will, Probate, Power of Attorney, or setting up of a Trust."

**Neil Fraser**  
[www.Northlandwills.co.uk](http://www.Northlandwills.co.uk)



"Getting away from everything and everyone was just amazing! No phone, No signal we just sat and laughed, joked and actually talked to each other!!!"

**Paul Kirkpatrick, Off The Grid**  
[www.off-the-grid-cic.uk](http://www.off-the-grid-cic.uk)

To find out about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call on 07814 39 79 51. [www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)



## FIVE REASONS TO REVIEW YOUR MARKETING RIGHT NOW

There is so much opportunity in 2021 that it would be a CRIME not to review your marketing right now and optimise the opportunities presented to us.

As a Chartered Marketer Veronica Swindale, Managing Director of nesma suggests the five key areas she thinks we should be focussing on.

**So, what's changing? Markets, customers' priorities, employees' expectations, ways of working, skill requirements, supply chains and the world at large; There's not much that isn't changing, to be fair, making it a good time to take stock of what you are doing and look at what you should be doing.**

### COMMUNICATION

The working climate has been full of uncertainty, and it is essential to be talking regularly to each and every one of your employees, so they know where they stand and what the business is doing in the short and longer terms. Capable and confident employees are happier and more productive. Customers and connected stakeholders such as suppliers and funders should be kept up to date at every twist and turn so that there is no disconnect to where you are now and where these people perceive you to be.

### RESEARCH

Due to these changes, it is critical to research how your employees feel,

explore what the market is and discover what the market is doing. There have been seismic shifts in consumer behaviour, predominantly driven by online retail, but even professional services, charities, and the arts have learnt to operate online. What is the impact of this on what you used to offer? And how do you meet the current demand?

Only today, I have had a virtual dance class online, completed a full day's work and had a consultation with my GP – all based at home – and millions around the world are doing the same. The customers' priorities need to be analysed, so we have a chance of meeting them!

### INVESTMENT

Achieving these shifts requires you to invest your own time planning your offering carefully, ensuring that you have the technology, skills, and resources to deliver it. Don't try to do everything yourself. Look at outsourcing key activities such as communications, bookkeeping or IT and use accountancy and CRM systems that improve efficiency. This way, you can focus on the business without being tied up in the business. Larger organisations would benefit from reviewing McKinsey's 7S framework, which analyses the company's Shared Values to ensure the right Strategy, Structure, and Systems





are in place to achieve them, supported by sufficient resources and Staff with the right Skills and Style to deliver them.

#### MEASUREMENT

Let's start with some key objectives. Whilst we all want either more business or more customers or more followers – or all of these – we cannot measure them effectively if we don't articulate what we want to achieve. To suggest a 20% uplift in enquiries and a 5% shift in conversions throughout the next financial year in a specific sector is much easier to measure. However, to achieve that, we also need to say 20% compared to what the figure is now. Make sure your social media is quality, not quantity (sanity versus vanity metrics). And as the saying goes, 'you can't manage what you don't measure'!

#### EXPERIENCE

Finally, put yourself in your customer's shoes and think about how they know about you, how they find you and what it's like to be your customer. Jot down what you would expect your customer to experience and then actually put yourself or a mystery shopper through the process. How long to answer the phone/email, how long to make a decision/provide information, how long to deliver the product or service? Would they recommend you to family or friends? If so, why, if not, why not? Now compare your customer's potential experience against what they might experience with a near competitor. What are the gaps in what you offer compared to your competitor's offering? Are they positive or negative gaps? Do your customers know why you are better? How are you going to tell them?

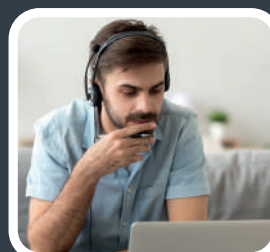
*Veronica will be sharing more in-depth insights around customer experience and customer journey mapping in the North East of England Chamber's Forum at North East Expo at 10 am on 1 July.*

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## SMART OUTDOOR SPREADS KINDNESS DURING COVID PANDEMIC

Fast-growing out of home media business Smart Outdoor has given the gift of kindness to a host of charities, providing more than £50,000 worth of free advertising in the last 12 months.

**The digital media firm, which is based in Sunderland, has provided brand-boosting ads across its network of screens to a range of charities, to help them through a challenging 12 months.**

The business - which reaches 12.5 million people a week through its 227 screens across the North East, North Yorkshire and Scotland - has supported charitable campaigns including Feed The Bairsns, a campaign to help feed families during the pandemic, as well as Parkinsons UK, a charity that is close to the heart of Smart Outdoor founder Mark Catterall.

The company - which plans to increase its consumer reach to 28 million people per week by this time next year - has donated screen-time across high-impact digital advertising channels at the Tyne Tunnel, Stack Seaburn and Newcastle and the A19 among others.

The screens have helped the brands raise awareness of their campaigns, delivering important messages to consumers travelling throughout the North East and Scotland, and were served alongside campaigns from Smart Outdoors' impressive client roster, which includes American Golf, Statsport, JD and Castore among others.

Mark said: "We're a commercial business, but one



Mark Catterall

that really does want to give something back, and it's tremendous to be able to support causes that are important to us.

"We've backed campaigns to support people during Covid, health related charities, and public safety initiatives just to make a difference. We know how effective outdoor advertising is, and especially as we come out of lockdown, our reach will grow significantly as people enjoy their new-found freedoms after a tough year."

"We have been only too happy to lend our support to charities and campaigns that make a positive difference."

Smart Outdoor, which is part of a wider group of Smart businesses that support customers to digitally connect with local communities nationwide, was set up by Mark Catterall just over two years ago, and already it employs 19 people. It has prominent large-screen sites across

the North East, North Yorkshire and Central Scotland.

The company operates prominent North East screens at the Tyne Bridge, Whitemare Pool and Sunderland's St Mary's Boulevard. As well as large format digital screens, sister company Smart Sanitiser will roll out a network of more than 1,000 smaller screens at gyms and service stations across the UK.

"Our reach is growing month by month, meaning we can deliver yet-more value to charitable partners and good causes. It feels really good to use the business to drive social good, particularly after the challenges so many have faced over the past year. We'll continue to do our bit as we grow."

**To find out more about Smart Outdoor, visit [www.smartoutdoor.co.uk](http://www.smartoutdoor.co.uk)**






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## “WILL CINEMA ADVERTISING EVER RECOVER TO PRE-PANDEMIC LEVELS?”

The Covid-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on many sectors and possibly none more so that the entertainment industry, particularly cinemas which closed their doors in March last year and are only re-opening on May 17th. Whilst there's been some attempts at open air screenings, the sector has essentially been closed for 14 months.

2019 had been a boom year for UK cinema advertising with a spend of £228.3m, so the fall in 2020 was dramatic – down some 80% to just £45.7m – BUT, the same source, Statista, predicts a steady recovery to £118.7m this year, steadily rising to £188.4m in 2024. Of course, these figures are only predictions and will be depend on the control of the virus, but it can be seen the advertising trade not only believes in cinema advertising but also in its gradual recovery.

During the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, there has been some interesting developments in how films are distributed which will affect the predicted recovery, or not, of the sector, but first, who chooses cinema advertising and why?

As might be expected, the top ten cinema advertisers are the corporate giants of Apple, McDonalds, Amazon, Sky, Samsung, BGL Group (Insurance), Procter & Gamble, Reckitt Benckiser (Health & Hygiene) together with the automotive brands, Audi and BMW. Together these 10 brands accounted for around one third of the UK's total cinema advertising in 2019 with other global, national and regional brands making up the remainder – so what's the attraction?

Firstly, the pre-pandemic viewing figures are impressive – according to industry body, Cinema First, there were 176m cinema admissions in 2019 with the blockbusters like 'Avengers Endgame' and 'Joker' drawing in the crowds. Moreover, it's

estimated that 78% of the UK make six trips per year to the cinema and 80% of these viewers are in their seats for the start of the advertisement reel with more than 90% there by the time it ends.

Secondly, cinema provides an uniquely immersive experience, with the majority of the audience feeling the advertisements, as a build up to the main feature, are part of this. There's no phones, no dogs barking, no opportunity or desire to pause for breaks – it's a full on visual and aural experience that takes the audience out of their everyday life for the period of the film. There's also the communal experience of shared viewing – regardless of the quality of the movie – which is something that's impossible to replicate elsewhere, for studios and brands alike. So, it's no surprise, that the cinema is cited as one of the activities the public are most keen to return to after lockdown, ranking alongside holidays and seeing friends.

As such, there's a massive and receptive audience there for advertisers and all this despite the growth of alternative streaming services such as Netflix, Disney and Amazon Prime. Whilst initial production costs are considerable, modern media buying systems enable advertisers to precisely target demographic or geographic audience groups via the individual film they support - advertisers purchase the desired number of views which are delivered by using admissions data to ensure they get the views paid for.

In 2020, however, not only were there only 44m

cinema admissions, but consumers had also become accustomed to the alternative of new subscription video-on-demand (VOD) services, with blockbusters like 'Wonder Woman 1984' and the latest 'Godzilla vs Kong' among the movies that studios effectively cut their losses on to keep the pipeline clear for future releases. Netflix, in particular has spent huge amounts acquiring first streaming rights but this trend seems unlikely to outlast the pandemic despite growing VOD revenue from advertisers.

On the horizon, of course, are the delayed blockbusters, particularly the latest James Bond: 'No Time To Die', due for September release and widely predicted to become not only the most expensive UK Premier, with £10m set aside just for the launch event, but also the highest grossing film of all times.

The final factor, however, is not so positive and this concerns supply rather than demand - the number of cinemas that have survived to reopen. Whilst the furlough scheme has kept staff currently in employment, it remains to be seen what will happen when this ends.

**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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## TIMETABLE TO TURNTABLE PROMOTES YOUTH WELL BEING

A Northumberland outdoor education provider is getting down with the kids to improve young people's aspirations through the medium of music.

Ashington based Off the Grid Adventures works primarily with young people who don't access mainstream education services or those who have been turned away previously. Their work with harder to reach young people includes one to one mentoring, team working skills and outdoor activities including gardening, bush craft, overnight camping and archery.

Now however, thanks to support from UK Youth Funding, a new pilot project aimed at improving teenager's emotional health and wellbeing is being trialled in the Newbiggin by the Sea and Ashington areas. The Decks and Music project reaches out to teenagers who have been shut away in their bedroom during lockdown and are finding it difficult to adjust to their lack of normal schooling and social interaction.

CEO of Off the Grid Adventures, Paul Kirkpatrick has enlisted the help of three local celebrity DJs and MCs to inspire young people into taking an interest in music and the benefits that it brings.

Jamie Burt aka MC Bertie from Newbiggin by the Sea, Jimmy Mason aka MC Rockeye from North Shields Meadowell Estate and Cramlington DJ Dan Herbison (DJ Herby) all grew up in similar surroundings to the young people they are now helping. Each of them has had their fair share of tragedy, tough upbringing and bad fortune in their lives including getting into trouble with the law in their formative years.

The three are experts in a form of music called Makina which had its origins in Spain with a bouncing tempo ranging from 150 to 18 beats per minute. Lyrics are based on personal life experiences and the music genre has been popular in the North East for more than 30 years.

MC Rockeye said: "The kids we are working with now are similar to what we were when we were young. We were always in trouble and if someone had been about to harness our energy through music perhaps our lives would've been different. Makina and music saved us, and we hope to pass on our skills to these young people and make a difference. Get them engaged and it keeps them out of trouble."



## FUNDRAISING AT NEWCASTLE PREPARATORY SCHOOL

**Social responsibility is something that is strongly promoted at Newcastle Preparatory School with children instilled with a strong sense of community.**

As well as recently raising funds for Children North East during a reading challenge, donating to The People's Kitchen, and also supporting the local Jesmond library, some individual children have also made a fantastic effort in supporting the NHS. Ethan Cockburn, aged nine raised an amazing £785 for the Great North Air Ambulance Service. He completed eight runs and covered 32 miles in total.

The school also has its very own mini celebrity Romir Sehgal, aged 6, who appeared on ITV News recently to commemorate the late Sir Captain Tom Moore. He was inspired by Captain Tom to cycle for the NHS. The school is very proud of Romir and of the determination and kindness which he has shown at such a young age.



## BARNARD CASTLE SCHOOL STUDENT SECURES FALCONS CONTRACT

Barnard Castle School student and open-side flanker Guy Pepper is enjoying a double celebration after joining Falcons' senior academy and securing an offer from Durham University to read a degree in sport and exercise science.

He is the latest in a string of Barnard Castle School boys given their first professional contracts by the club over the years, following the likes of Alex and Mathew Tait, Freddie Lockwood and Lee Dickson, who has since

returned to the school as director of rugby. 'Barney' currently has seven players in the Falcons Junior Academy and many younger ones moving up through the ranks.

Guy said: "I would like to play at the highest level possible, for the Falcons and England, and was so pleased and relieved to be offered a contract and a place at Durham University.

"It has been a strange year because of the pandemic with all fixtures cancelled, but at school we are a close group and have worked to support each other, as we turned up for training knowing there were no games to play."

Lee Dickson added: "Guy is an unbelievably hard worker with the right attitude to sport and school life, who, in my opinion, is very gifted with a bright future. The first time I watched him I knew he had something special."



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David Tickner

## HOMEWORK - COULD DO BETTER

By David Tickner, Headmaster at Newcastle School for Boys

Recent months required children's academic learning to take place at home like never before.

**Even prior to the coronavirus pandemic, most parents and children would have experienced a stressful evening on the back of a difficult, frustrating or uncertain homework task.**

I confess that as a child I rather enjoyed homework but can still recall the tears and shouting it could induce in my household during the younger years of my time at secondary school. Back then, Religious Education often seemed to be the cause. Perhaps the questions posed were just too difficult? How could I – a twelve-year-old – answer them when neither my parents nor thousands of years of profound thought and religious experience could?

Excessive stress does not create optimal conditions for learning. However, research indicates that when deployed effectively, homework is likely to have a positive impact on student achievement. It shouldn't be set simply to follow blindly a timetable or school policy.

Homework should have a clear academic purpose explicitly stated. This aids student motivation and can be helpful for parents to understand what is being pursued. Homework can be undertaken for a variety of reasons, including to help teachers check students' understanding as well as practice and application for students.

With care, homework can also be used for pre-learning – to check for existing knowledge or understanding and possible misconceptions prior to new learning. Some caution should be sounded here. For some children and their parents, new learning can be particularly disorientating and therefore is not always suited to the home environment.

Good homework is not disconnected from the ongoing learning that is taking place in school. It should form an integral part of that learning and complement it rather than being a one-off or standalone activity. It can also be helpful where homework tasks introduce elements of choice for children as this gives them greater agency and can aid their motivation.

Homework divides parental opinion and particularly the extent to which it should or shouldn't occupy children's lives outside of school. It's not unusual for different parents with children in the same class to complain at the same time of too much and too little homework.

What may take one child five minutes can – for a variety of reasons – take another 40 minutes – perhaps because they are struggling with the task or are being overly conscientious.

A few years ago, around our launch of a new online homework platform, we held a series of parent events that discussed and sought parental views on homework. It became clear that one parent's too much is another's too little and we quickly realised that it is not possible to keep everyone happy when it comes to homework.

Some homework can be overkill: 30 questions when ten would do; a five-page assignment when something much shorter would also aid learning and assessment. Less can be more.

It can be useful for homework to be designed as time- rather than task-based. Parameters such as 'this should take you around 15 minutes but don't spend longer than 30 minutes' can be helpful to both students and parents. We have always advised

as a school that if homework is becoming an undue source of stress and upset, stop and send the teacher a note to this effect. The issue can always be picked up in class the next day.

How much should parents assist children with homework? Parental 'help' – sometimes sub-contracted to private tutors – almost always derives from the best intentions. Where this 'support' oversteps the mark, it can distort the picture and send children forward with shaky foundations.

What can be more helpful is for parents to involve themselves, assisting with organisation – particularly for boys – or offering feedback where invited, but not doing it for them. Homework shouldn't require parents to attempt to teach. This can be confusing for children particularly where methodologies may be different. Tasks should not be so completely out of reach for children for this to be necessary.

Whilst many parents were understandably relieved to send their children back to school early in the spring, homework will continue to have an important role to play post-Covid – helping to close gaps in learning, offering opportunities for review and consolidation and for frequent checks of understanding. Done well it will support further academic progress.

**Newcastle School for Boys is an independent school for boys aged 3 to 18 in its Nursery to Sixth Form provision based in Gosforth.**

**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)**





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## A RETURN TO SOME SEMBLANCE OF NORMALITY

We know that after so much disruption over the last year and so much loss, for many people life will have changed significantly.

**Many more are likely to continue to be cautious about the recent relaxation of some elements of the Covid lockdown measures. While we cannot be complacent about the continuing risk, including from new variants, this relaxation has started to give us early hope of a return to some semblance of normality.**

For many children that I speak to at the gate on their way into school, sports afternoons can be the highlight of their day that they are most looking forward to, however inspiring their lessons may be. It has therefore been a joy to see sporting fixtures returning to the school programme this term, even if the weather has not been kind to cricketers – our very first match managing sixteen overs before the heavens opened and I was reminded of my father-in-law who always used to refer to cricket as “the English rain dance”. Nonetheless we have already had matches against other local schools in tennis and hockey and netball too, providing a welcome variation from the last year’s routine of remote learning and bubbles.

We are now also able to start running school trips again, which are such an important part of a holistic education. Indeed, trips often help young people to grow in confidence and provide some of the more lasting memories that alumni recall from their school days. While major overseas trips are unlikely to happen in the short term, owing to uncertainty about ongoing quarantine restrictions

and the planning lead time, in the near future we already anticipate residential trips closer to home such as Duke of Edinburgh award training, a Cadet Force exercise and a Year 6 outdoors camp.

Some elements of live performance are also starting to open up, albeit with restrictions such as audience sizes still in place. It was a real privilege to watch some A level and GCSE devised drama pieces performed live on stage recently and I was delighted by how our young people continue to be so creative, in spite of the disruption they will have had to their opportunities to rehearse. While, sadly, we have so far been unable to invite parents to be present at these performances, over the last year we have learnt to be creative about streaming events and have had far wider reach than we might ever have imagined with members of the RGS community even joining us from other continents.

I have previously written about the resilience and independent learning skills that pupils will have developed over recent months. However, when Covid restrictions are long gone, there will be many positive lessons that we will take forwards that represent a radical improvement on what was done pre-Covid. For example, while it will be important for parents to be welcomed onto the school site regularly for community events, academic parents’ evenings are likely to remain online owing to the convenience making it easier for more hard-working parents to attend

scheduled appointments, not to mention the privacy of them being able to speak with teachers without those waiting next in line listening in to the conversation.

Some textbook publishers had already planned to discontinue print in favour of online versions and a number of schools are now exploring the option of delivering entire courses remotely. For most children, the benefits of human interaction with contemporaries in person mean that daily trips to the school gate will continue to be important but pupils will be much more likely to carry a device into school than a heavy bag of books. Even those teachers who previously might have been reluctant users of IT are now more than capable of streaming lessons or uploading and marking assignments online. Online assessments will also enable learners to move at their own pace and provide much more insight on their progress and tailored support. Even snow days may be a thing of the past, as many schools should be able to move seamlessly online for remote lessons. Who would ever have imagined little more than a year ago that something so awful as a Covid pandemic would provide such a catalyst for positive change?

*For more information on our bursary or partnership programmes, please contact [development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](mailto:development@rgs.newcastle.sch.uk) [www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)*





# Whole School Open Day

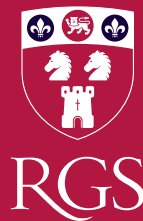
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# JUNE IS A LOVE SONG, SWEETLY SUNG - SOMETIMES ON THE PYRAMID STAGE

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School.

The month of June is often a glorious one in the UK, despite the sporadic appearance of 'liquid sunshine'. This June should be one of great relief and joyfulness given that, at the time of writing, 'Freedom Day' of 21 June is very much at the top of most people's agenda.

**I am sure that the date is no accident: it is the day after the Summer Solstice, the longest night of the year and denotes the beginning of summer in the Northern Hemisphere, astronomically speaking, bringing positivity and light to what have been very dark and sombre days indeed.**

June is a month that has some wonderfully, quirky 'Awareness' Days and events, and we will be revisiting them again, hopefully. One of my favourites is National Insect Week, which starts on 25 June. I used to have a horror of any sort of 'creepy crawlly' and this aversion stayed with me until a backpacking trip to India in my early 30s made me realise that if I screamed every time something 'insecty' came near me, I would have no voice left. After this experience, I found myself rather partial to things entomological and now have a penchant for ants, realising that their collaborative efforts and work ethic are much to be admired. Another great day to celebrate is Wrong Trousers Day on 24 June, where people pay a £1 in order to have the 'right to look wrong' to raise money for children in hospitals and hospices throughout the UK. It is a laudable cause and one to which the 1980s should give backpay to, considering that whole decade was a paean to the right to look wrong, if my old school and college photographs are anything to go by.

Of course, if you have any musical nous, you will know that Glastonbury Festival usually takes place in June, in the years when it runs. This year, you



Simone Niblock

may have already seen it on live stream, as it is being held in May, another casualty of COVID. I have spent many hours in the company of friends who have waxed lyrical about the wonders of Glasto, but I must admit that the thought of being there is an unattractive proposition. Despite Jo Whitley's assertions, and the introduction of 'glamping' as a 'thing', it still seems to me that I would spend the weekend looking for the cleanest washrooms- and failing miserably- and trying to avoid 'trustafarians' who see it as a quasi-religious experience. I love Glastonbury as a town and climbing the Tor on a misty October morning has been one of the spiritual highlights of my life so far. However, my idea of watching the festival is edited highlights on BBC 2 with a cup of herbal tea and the remote on mute for the 'edgier' groups, only turning the sound up when 'legends'

such as Barry Gibb or Shirley Bassey come on.

For us as a school, June is usually the month that denotes the middle and end of public examinations, Sports Days, Upper Sixth Leavers' Service, open events and concerts. As we all know, none of this could take place IRL last year but we are now able to plan 'face-to-face' celebrations to commemorate the end of the key stages for our current students. We are also planning Open Days, play readings, concerts and other celebrations to congratulate students and staff who have had a year and a half like no other. All shall be well and all manner of things shall be well...

**Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email [enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk) to find out more or arrange a visit.**





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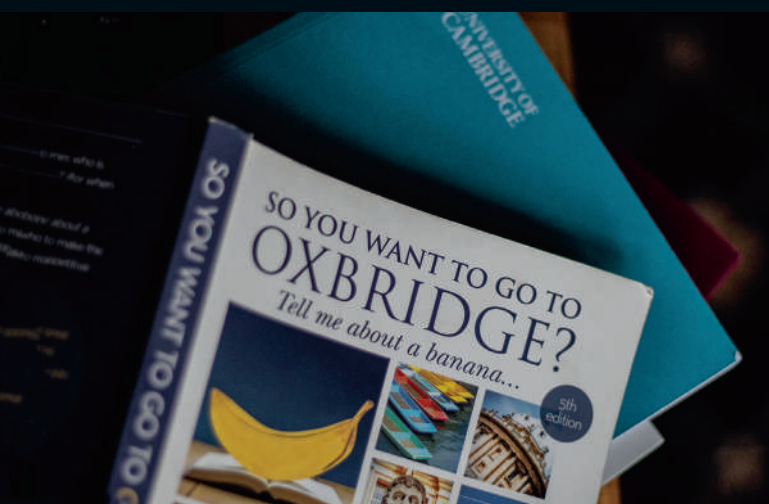
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Despite all the educational challenges faced in this global pandemic, in February 2021 QE received its highest number of student offers to Oxbridge to date, for nine students across an array of subjects.



The Careers education and support provided to our students at QE is extensive. From careers lessons and university trips through to one-to-one interviews and bespoke careers advice, all of our students benefit from an experienced and qualified team of Careers professionals. The careers team work closely with a number of higher education institutions, apprenticeship providers, employers and with the armed forces to ensure that students have the most up-to-date information and knowledge of career opportunities.

Our dedicated QE Futures programme is a whole school approach to careers guidance, aimed at supporting students to make informed decisions about their future. For those academic scholars intending to apply to G5 universities (Oxbridge, LSE, UCL, Imperial) or medicine/dentistry/veterinary courses, a comprehensive programme is offered in support of providing a strong and successful application.

Oxford and Cambridge are highly competitive world-class universities located in the UK. UK Medical Schools are equally competitive. Good A Level grades are not enough to guarantee admission to one of these prestigious institutions. They have extra requirements including admissions tests, interviews, work experience, wider reading and research projects. These components require a lot of extra preparation.

For Oxbridge students, this dedicated programme consists of a combination of online and in-person tuition from experienced

consultants and subject-specific Cambridge and Oxford tutors to maximise the students' chances of admission. Students also benefit from access to interview practice, admission test preparation and small group meetings take place to discuss their wider reading and work experience plans to ensure they remain on track to produce a competitive application.

Visiting speakers, university trips and the university convention also form part of our provision to ensure our students have access to the best possible information to guide them through the most important phase of their academic careers to date.

All students in the College – one of the two Senior Schools at QE, with a highly academic focus and a curriculum designed to stretch and challenge – choose a supercurricular option at the start of each year. These may link to certain academic subjects such as economics or history, may allow them to develop their skills within a particular creative area such as music performance or playing high level sport, or may support them in entering specific careers in the future such as medicine or law. This is an invaluable experience in terms of developing student curiosity and enthusiasm, and the ability to engage in debate and discussion, and all of which contribute to a strong and successful Oxbridge application.

This summer we are also delighted to be once again offering Campus Tours\* in-person, for families looking to explore QE as an independent school option for their child. To arrange a tour, email our friendly Admissions Team on [admissions@qe.org](mailto:admissions@qe.org)

*\*Subject to and following Government Guidance*

**To find out more about QE's approach to education as we support our students to achieve their aspirations; through the quality of teaching delivered, extensive extra-curricular opportunities offered, and strong pastoral care provided, visit: [www.qe.org](http://www.qe.org).**









## WHAT EVER GETS YOU THROUGH!

What was it that got you through the latest pandemic lockdown? Was it the bracing walks in the country, navigating the traditional “four seasons in one day” springtime weather? Was it the latest baking fad, encompassing a variety of artisanal breads and pastries? Or was it a DIY project; perhaps that garden bar that means you could entertain five of your closest friends (or members of another household) without infringing government guidelines?

For some of you it may have been all of those things. For many of us, however, what got us through – not only the latest lockdown but all the way through since March of last year – were what we have read, watched or listened to in the comfort of our own home media centres or front rooms. Confined to our homes for 23 hours a day, we have been more reliant than ever on the steady stream of media input either through our televisions, iPads or readers. For some it was the latest Netflix blockbuster, for others it was this year’s Oscar contenders and, for the more traditionalist amongst us, turning the pages of a novel.

So, it was with some dismay that the news that the government was consulting on plans to cut funding for arts subjects in higher education by up to 50%. Arts funding, according to Gavin Williamson, does not align with the “strategic priorities” of the sector which, in an increasingly utilitarian approach to higher education, is focussing much more on the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) world. Although “supporting the NHS” is rather cynically shoehorned in as the reason for doing so, this latest development follows the trend over a number of years towards the supposedly more “value for money” subjects.

I should declare that I am a physics graduate and of course I see the value of having a society of well-qualified engineers, scientists and others who



Kieran McLaughlin

are able to lead on technological innovation. There are of course benefits to studying the sciences which translate across many other occupations: analytical skills, a high level of numeracy and the ability to see through complex projects.

However, the idea that only STEM subjects are worth funding in large amounts reflects a depressing vision of the role of what universities are for. Whilst of course universities have a role to play in the nation’s economy, the idea that only subjects which have a readily measurable impact on GSP are legitimate is a corrosive one.

It is, of course, a wholly invalid one too. In the latest study produced by the government itself (admittedly a pre-pandemic one) valued the creative industries in the UK at over £100bn; this reflected a growth rate of twice that of the rest of the economy. Somewhat revealingly, the Secretary of State for Digital, Media, Creatives and Sport said, “We’re doing all we can to support the

sector’s talent and entrepreneurship as we build a Britain that is fit for future [sic].”

Now it seems that Britain wants a different future; in doing so we risk destroying that which the rest of the world marvels at. Britain’s cultural history, from Shakespeare to Sheeran, Milton to My Bloody Valentine, is hugely rich and enriching. However, in a 21st century where it is increasingly difficult to make a living as a creative artist (remember, one stream of a song on Spotify earns its creator around 0.2p in revenue), those who make those songs, programmes and films need our support. They need it no more so at the grassroots and beginners’ level and I, for one, hope the decision to cut is reversed.

**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)**





## 360 DEGREE FILM COMES FULL CIRCLE FOR THEATRE COMPANY

New cinematic photography technology is helping to bring a classic Tyneside based play to life and reach brand new audiences who are unable to enjoy it in its original theatrical setting.

North Shields based Harriet Ghost and Micky McGregor run Blowin' a Hooley Theatre and have previously toured Tom Hadaway's classic play *The Filleting Machine* to pubs, working man's clubs, community centers, heritage venues and theatres across Tyneside. Set on North Shields Ridges Estate (now Meadow Well Estate) in the 1980s, the play centers around the Rutter family and the threat to the father's job as a fish filleter due to the onset of new technology.

The play was originally performed in the round so that audiences could feel more engaged but now, using 360-degree camera technology, it is being filmed with a special camera placed in the center of the set which allows viewers to become totally immersed in the production. Viewed on laptops, tablets, smart phones and VR headsets, the watcher can change viewing angles and watch from different perspectives.

"This is an exciting project for us and will be one of the first examples of theatre meeting 360 film. I think this project will massively benefit audiences who aren't ready to come into theatres just yet because of COVID and it is free to everyone to view thanks to our funding from Arts Council England," said Harriet.

Award winning film maker Maria Caruana Galizia from Candle & Bell based in Gateshead took a business decision to invest in the new technology during lockdown and used the time to learn all about how the cameras operated.

"Once we realised how effective the technology was, we looked at who would be a good fit to work with and as Blowin' a Hooley are a very forward-thinking theatre company, they were the obvious choice. I'm excited to have this opportunity to experiment with this new medium and look forward to reaching a new audience who want to experience film and drama in different ways," she said.

The play stars Micky and Harriet as Ma and Da and following Blowin' a Hooley's pledge to champion North East artists, they have cast two talented actors from the region, Virginia Johnson and William Wyn Davies.

The 360-degree film of the *Filleting Machine* will be available in the Spring.



## SHE'S ONE IN A MILLION'

Professional singer Anna Reay has collaborated with Nigeria's biggest star, Flavour Nabania, in the recording of a charity single 'She's One in a Million' which was released last month. The song is in memory of Valerie Olalemi, who, at only eight years old, sadly lost her life to a rare disease called Chronic Granulomatous Disease (CGD).

North East based, Anna is usually found performing with her band at corporate events, theatre shows or cruise ships. However, owing to the Pandemic, all her gigs were cancelled and Anna pivoted her usual business and started Annagrams, doorstep performances and virtual greeting songs. This led her to be asked to sing in the street for Valerie's socially distanced funeral in April last year. The song she performed was Valerie's favourite, 'Virtuous Woman' which was originally written and recorded by Flavour. Since then, Anna was asked to record the song changing the lyrics to suit a little girl. The song is now called 'She's One In A Million' and her family think of it as Valerie's anthem. Flavour heard about the story and wanted to be involved hence the collaboration between Nigeria and the UK.

Anna said "It is always sad to be asked to sing at a funeral but when it is for a child it is heartbreaking. I was proud and pleased to be involved in this project and help raise awareness of this dreadful disease. It was a real privilege to work with Flavour, I love the song and it is a fitting tribute to a lovely little girl."

## COMEDY CIRCUS SHOW GETS BIG TOP FESTIVAL SLOT

A comedy entertainer proficient in three languages is using an additional verbal means of communication to engage with his audience – laughter

Glasgow based Tonino Scalia is a French-Italian performer who has successfully converted his one-man circus show into an online mime and theatre experience for young audiences. Now, Tonino's comedic reach is about to be catapulted to a world-wide audience when he performs at the prestigious online Brighton Fringe Festival - the largest open-access arts festival in England.

The Webcam Circus Show was born following the first lock down in 2020, when Tonino was no longer able to perform to a live audience. He devised and performed a live interactive online performance for families and children with himself playing the parts of two characters, ringmaster Mr. Loyal and Ninetto the clown. The show uniquely combines live performance with video to create an engaging and interactive family entertainment experience keeping young audiences digitally engaged with improbable jugglery acts, unforgettable drama games and family orientated fun.

Tonino Scalia's Webcam Circus Show introduces its audience to the magic of circus through comedy and runs at various times throughout June up to Sunday June 27th.



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Mary Ann Rogers





# THE ARTIST'S YEAR

By Mary Ann Rogers

Welcoming visitors back into the gallery after all the uncertainty and lockdowns of the past year is taking a bit of getting used to! My main problem at the moment is that I have become accustomed to simply leaving for a walk or a swim whenever I feel, but I am having to remember that the gallery is 'officially' open now, which means someone needs to be here!



As I write, there are still some restrictions in place, and the hotels, B&B's and guest houses are not yet open. We are extremely lucky to have good relationships with local hoteliers etc, who regularly direct their visitors to the gallery as something really nice to do on a rainy day.

As ever, we optimistically plan for and plant up a huge vegetable garden, which has spread over the years to include a poly tunnel, and several raised beds. Dreams of tender sugar snap peas, long sweet carrots and a winter's supply of potatoes are shattered with monotonous regularity, as pests, rodents, insects, birds and disease seem to always get there first. Last year our runner beans were looking promising - reaching the tops of the eight foot high poles, flowers all set, some small bean pods even...when some unknown, evil creature severed the stalk at the base of each plant over a period of a few days!! Peas, mangetouts and sugar snaps were sown, sprouted then eaten by mice or pigeons, then re sown... Moles weaving their dastardly tunnels up and down our rich, fertile soil ruined rows of seedlings. Chickens and guinea fowl storm the ramparts and use the garden as their dusting bowl even!!!

The wildlife we battle against in the garden also provide great entertainment, as well as inspiration for painting. During the winter we saw otters twice at one of my regular swimming spots. Now we see mandarin ducks, an alien species, but so bright and colourful. Also goosanders, geese, dippers and oystercatchers which make such a lot of noise at this time of year!

I am spotting hares more and more when out walking the hills near home. They sit so tight when undisturbed, only leaping up and racing off if they fear for their life, when they usually create a 'loop' or 'figure of eight' diversion, ultimately bringing them back near to the spot where they began.

People often express shock when they discover I swim throughout the year in nearby rivers and lakes, and some are anxious about what lies under the surface. This has never bothered me, and apart from little fish, freshwater mussels and one eel, it is quite rare to see anything. However, last week as I swam in the nearby river, I saw through my goggles a wiggling thing which was either a small eel or a large leech RIGHT in front of me.

I am trying very hard to put that memory at the very back of my mind now!

Now that so many people have been vaccinated, and the level of covid is so low, it feels safe to plan for an exhibition here in the summer, and we are now intending to kick it off over the weekend 14th & 15th August. It's traditionally a time when many people are away on holiday, but things are very different now, and we hope it will be a lovely busy fun filled weekend with bubbly, cake, sunshine and a gallery full of beautiful paintings, prints and gifts to browse. At last, something to look forward to!

**Mary Ann Rogers Gallery**  
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# CULTURE CLUB

## BRONWYN MOGIE

Marketing and Communications Manager for Careline Lifestyles, an independent provider of high-quality nursing and residential care who operate nine homes from Teesside to North Northumberland.

### Who is your favourite author and why?

Neville Goddard - he's a new thought author from the 50s and 60s. I love reading his views and opinions on how the mind and world works around us. For anyone who is fascinated by the laws of attraction, I'd recommend that they pick up one of his books. My favourite is *The Law and Promise*.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

*Tom Walker - You & I*. I love this song, hearing it makes me happy. Every time I hear it on the radio it feels like it gives me good luck!

*Chuck Berry - Johnny B. Goode*. This reminds me of my dad showing me all of his favourite records from when he was younger, plus we'd watch *Back to the Future* a lot and it's featured in there as well as sci fi series *Quantum Leap* all the time. It's a timeless classic.

*Destiny's Child - Independent Woman*. I listened to it on replay when I bought my first house and I felt really independent.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

*Leonardo DiCaprio*.

Apart from his good looks and charm, he's an incredible actor who naturally fits any character he plays. My favourite characters that he has played are those in *The Wolf of Wall Street* and *Shutter Island*.

### What are your top three films?

*I Feel Pretty* - the perfect feel-good film.

*Triple Frontier* - a modern action thriller.

*Purely Belta* - a funny film about Newcastle United football fans.



Bronwyn Mogie

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

*Thomas Moore - Love's Young Dream*, for the romantic in me.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

I think everyone loves *Friends*, the characters are so real, and the show makes you feel as if they really are your own friends. For classic British comedy you can't get any better than *Only Fools and Horses*. Who could forget Rodney and Del running through the streets dressed as Batman and Robin? For drama, I've really enjoyed *The Crown*. The series delves into the lives of the Royal Family and I'm already looking forward to the next series to binge watch.

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

*Freddie Mercury*. His Live Aid performance was fantastic - I wish I had been there. I also love art and I'm saving up to buy a painting from each of these fantastic artists as they're just amazing!

*Cj Hendry, Sophie Tea, Megan Hess*.

### What is your favourite venue?

St. James Park for my football club but really anywhere in Newcastle. I take a huge interest in Newcastle's history and it's fascinating to me learning about Richard Grainger, John Dobson and more of the North East's greatest figures. I'm

quite passionate about learning more about the history of our city. The High-Level Bridge being my favourite structure, the first bridge in the world to combine rail and road. Amazing. Then we have Mosely Street, the world's first public road to be lit by electric incandescent light it's just fascinating. I could talk about our city's history all day.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

I love listening to the piano, but I can actually play the clarinet.

### From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

As I'm into art, I guess that a one-to-one dinner with Banksy would be my ideal. It would be great to see who he (or she) is and discuss the artwork that they create. Art is so important as a way to express yourself both by doing and also by seeing. At Careline Lifestyles we are producing art murals in all of our care homes for our residents to enjoy. Who knows, I might even ask Banksy to do one for me!

**Careline Lifestyles, One Central Parkway,  
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# OUT AND ABOUT - PENRITH FOR ULLSWATER



Map Credited to 42 Creative.

Outdoor tourist attractions in England could reopen from 12th April and my second excursion was on the 21st to Penrith, using the line from Newcastle to Carlisle, where there is the choice of five directions to travel. Penrith is £32.10 from Chester-le-Street which is ok for a day return, but you can return within a month - much better than buying two singles, as you have to on some routes. (If there is no suitable fare from your local station, get a separate ticket from Newcastle, and feel free to email me for advice.)

Unusually we were a bit late into Carlisle, but still in plenty of time for my Avanti train to London, next stop Penrith. I enjoyed a cup of coffee from "Caffeine Rush" which is a little trike dispensing coffee which I have used for over twenty years.

The train arrived in Penrith on time, and I had about thirty minutes before the Stagecoach bus 508 set off towards Windermere, just time to explore the ruins of Penrith Castle directly opposite, and the pleasant park, complete with crazy golf, surrounding it. I was just going to Pooley Bridge to join the steamer sailing at 1230, but would be returning from Aira Force down the west side of the lake, so the driver suggested I bought the Penrith and Ullswater Dayrider for £8.50 to give me unlimited travel, and cheaper than two singles.

Pooley Bridge has just gained a new bridge to replace the stone one dating from 1764 which collapsed following Storm Desmond in 2015. The new bridge opened in 2020, and the pavement is marked with the names of many families and businesses. I could not tell which way the river was flowing, but Ullswater drains into the River Eamont, then into the River Eden through Wetheral and Carlisle and out into the Solway Firth. The pier for the Ullswater Steamers is just outside the village (indeed the 508 bus stops southbound only right outside). Diesel powered nowadays, the boats are crewed by friendly and professional crews which made the cruise a pleasure.

The vessel for the first cruise down the length of the lake was the MV Western Belle, latest to join the five heritage vessels on Ullswater, built in Great Yarmouth in 1935. The Western Belle cruised on Tamar and Yealm river excursions in Devon for 50 years. She joined the fleet of the "Steamers" in July 2011. A pair of RAF fighters zoomed overhead and I observed to my neighbours that this was the most tranquil of the lakes. The deck was covered with canvas, affording some shelter, and the journey to Glenridding via Howtown took just less than an hour. A quick pint of Hobgoblin at the Glenridding Hotel, and I was back to the pier to join the MV Lady Wakefield to Aira Force. Built in 1949 in Dartmouth, she worked on the River Dart before her arrival at Ullswater in 2007 where she was fully restored and renamed by HRH Princess Alexandra.

National Trust owned Aira Force is a series of waterfalls, and there are a series of walks going further up the river valley. I went only about half way up to avail myself of the popular (open air) tea room close to the bus stop on the way down. I made an extra bus journey down to Patterdale and back to get full value for my Dayrider, and the return bus dropped just me off at Penrith station for my return trains across the Pennines in the golden hour shortly before sunset.

Alex Nelson alex@nationalrail.com www.ullswater-steamers.co.uk

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk)

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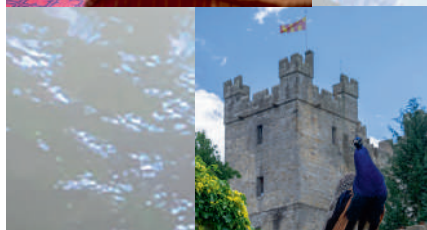
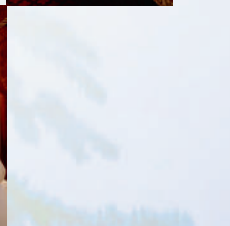
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## NORTH TYNESIDE BUSINESS FORUM MEMBER BAKES OFF TO GOOD START

Ingredients including skill, dedication, great customer service and a pinch of support and advice from North Tyneside Business Forum have helped a new bakery business.

Originally formed from home in lockdown, Eli's Bakery has whisked up so much new business that they have moved into new premises with demand for their Portuguese speciality bread and pastries constantly exceeding supply.

In December 2018, Sylvester Spinelli and his partner Ana Ribeiro baked their first bread based on the homemade, full of flavour loaves they used to eat as children. Just over a year ago, their first child Eli was born. With the couple working from home and looking after their newborn, they created a number of recipes which were tried and tested on family and friends. The positive feedback was amazing and the couple decided to produce the bread and pastries commercially.

"Working from home was great in the sense that we were close by for Eli but it was difficult to produce the quantities of food needed from our small kitchen. We decided to do two things – firstly to name the business after Eli and then find a suitable premises to upscale our work," said Sylvester.

With support from North Tyneside Business Forum and The Business Factory, the couple found a unit in Killingworth and created Eli's Bakery.

"We have gained a large customer base from the nearby industrial estates and beyond. Customers are coming to us from West Moor, Killingworth and even Newcastle to taste our speciality breads and cakes. We have chosen the right place for the business and we are grateful to everyone who has helped us on our journey."

## THE NORTHUMBERLAND ARMS WINS TOP AWARD FROM TRIPADVISOR



A leading North East venue is celebrating being listed in the top 10 percent of hotels worldwide, ahead of reopening for overnight stays.

The Northumberland Arms, at Felton, has been named a 2021 Travellers' Choice Award Winner by the world's largest travel platform, Tripadvisor.

Presented to those which have stood out for their service, the award recognises venues which have "earned positive traveller reviews and ratings over the last year" and delivered "fantastic experiences to travellers around the globe."

The Northumberland Arms is home to six boutique bedrooms, which have recently been renovated with new soft furnishings, TVs and lighting to provide a luxury base for a staycation in the region.

Also known for its food offering, the menu features pub classics, street food and sandwiches, with dishes including Northumberland Arms house ribeye, slow cooked pork belly, harissa spiced lamb flat breads, char sui beef noodles and the superfood salad.

And diners will also be able to make the most of good weather this summer, with a beer garden offering stunning views across the River Coquet and a 16th century bridge.

Stuart Young of the Northumberland Pub Co, which operates The Northumberland Arms, is delighted to be recognised for their commitment to the guest experience.

"Being named in the top 10 percent of hotels worldwide is a fantastic achievement and we are very grateful that our guests have reviewed us so highly on the platform," he said.



## INNSIDE CELEBRATIONS

INNSIDE Newcastle will celebrate its new Quayside location with a tribute to the 'people of the city' and a nod to the culture, communities and industries that they

represent. The INNSIDERS of Newcastle campaign will bring together a small collective of the city's cultural leaders who are making a difference in the field that they operate in, from bakeries and artists to musicians and MPs.

Shining a spotlight on 18 individuals in the city, in celebration of INNSIDE Newcastle's opening, the campaign will capture the community through the lens and culminate in a spectacular public art exhibition, revealing the INNSIDERS of Newcastle on Thursday 24 June.

INNSIDE Newcastle will collaborate with local award-winning photographer Megan Jepson and local videographer and content creator, Ben Hale to capture the portraits and a behind-the-scenes glimpse into the lifestyles of each of the INNSIDERS; both will help to curate the art exhibition, which will be displayed for three consecutive nights at INNSIDE Newcastle.

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# MAKING AN EVENT TO REMEMBER AT THE COMMON ROOM



For anyone planning an event in Newcastle – from a board meeting to a conference – a new city centre venue, which combines the region's rich heritage with state-of-the-art facilities, will soon be available to book.

**The Common Room is the new name for the building on Westgate Road close to the Central Station, which many people will have known in the past as The Mining Institute.**

Built in the late 1800s for The North of England Institute of Mining and Mechanical Engineers, the Common Room has undergone a two-year refurbishment and is due to reopen this summer.

"Thanks to National Lottery Players, a grant of £5,050,000 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund combined with grants from other funders has meant that we've been able to secure the future of this amazing building and create a new hub for innovation and engineering in Newcastle," explained Nicky Sherman, Sales and Marketing Manager at The Common Room.

"As well as safeguarding its stunning original features, we've also been able to bring the event spaces totally up to date – for example by incorporating live streaming technology – so when it reopens, The Common Room will provide a beautiful and functional venue for all sorts of events."

Spaces available for hire within The Common Room include the spectacular Wood Hall, with its glass ceiling and huge stained glass windows, which holds up to 150 people for a reception or 120 for a presentation or dinner.

The smaller Edwardian Lecture Theatre offers



a unique space for talks, performances and presentations, and is where 19th century innovators delivered their ground-breaking lectures on engineering.

A suite of smaller spaces offer flexible options for meetings or break-out spaces and the newly created '5 Quarter' Café Bar which can be found

on the ground floor of the building will also provide the perfect place for an after-work cocktail or welcome pint.

"Every inch of The Common Room is steeped in history and heritage and showcases the best of the North East," said Nicky. "Whether you're inviting guests from overseas, or wanting to bring your team together in a central location, we'll be able to help ensure your event runs smoothly and is remembered for all the right reasons."

As well as venue hire, The Common Room is offering a range of corporate partnership and sponsorship options, including room naming opportunities.

***The Common Room of the Great North was established in 2017 to manage the redevelopment and refurbishment of the former Mining Institute building following an award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund of £4.1m. Further awards have now increased the total support to £5,050,000 and additional funder support has increased the overall support to £7.1m. See photographs and virtual tours of The Common Room, make an enquiry, or arrange a viewing at [www.thecommonroom.org.uk](http://www.thecommonroom.org.uk)***

***The Common Room, Neville Hall, Westgate Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 1SE.***



# WHETHER IT IS FAMILY PARTIES, WORK TEAM BUILDING OR JUST THE LOVE OF THE 1920'S - COLONEL PORTERS IS THE PLACE TO GO



This month we are taking cautious steps back to 'normality'. At Colonel Porters, situated at the bottom of Dean Street, they have dusted the chandeliers, shined the cocktail glasses and are ready to welcome customers back into their exquisite emporium.

Bold, bright and beautiful, Colonel Porters Emporium is a shining jewel in the crown of Newcastle's bar and restaurant scene. Think *The Great Gatsby* with an eclectic twist. Fabulous

cocktails, great ales and yummy food. A perfect setting for a party, wedding reception or a corporate do - there really isn't anywhere else quite like it in the Newcastle.

For many its a time to re-connect with their work colleagues after only seeing them on Zoom for the last year. Colonel Porters offers a great setting for team building/re connecting sessions, use the Union Bar or Archie Secret Disco to host your team, maybe try a cocktail masterclass and

finish off with some live music (bespoke packages available). One doesn't want to mention the C word (Christmas) but party slots are getting booked up already...there's a lot of time to be made up!

Archie's Lab aka the Secret Disco is a perfect room to host a family party, wedding or indeed any kind of celebration or gathering. Hidden away behind a booked - filled wall up to 100 people can party privately.

For those who like a bit of history- master brewing ran in Colonel Porter's family, so following his time in military service, he teamed up with Chief Chemist Archie Jones, and took up the challenge of creating a brand new ale. Their complementary skills and three years of dedication and refining, hidden away and in secrecy in Archie's Lab, resulted in the star of ales launching in 1927 - Newcastle Brown Ale (aka Dog, Journey into Space, Lunatic's Broth).

**Book online [www.colonelporters.co.uk](http://www.colonelporters.co.uk) or email: [Cheryl.flowers@wonderbar-newcastle.co.uk](mailto:Cheryl.flowers@wonderbar-newcastle.co.uk) or to talk fabulous decadent parties, marvellous corporate do's or you just fancy a chat about your favourite 1920's ditty... call Sian on: 0191 2617600.**



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## THE MUDDLER By Michael Grahamslaw

On the return of “dine inside” hospitality, we were fortunate enough to visit The Muddler – Grey Street’s glittering portal to the East which boasts one of the finest interiors in the city.

**The restaurant serves a parade of Pan Asian cuisines and inventive cocktails against a brilliant backdrop of brown, black and gold.**

For those unfamiliar, The Muddler derives its name from the pestle & mortar like implement used to bash cocktails with which means that cocktails here are something of a speciality. We took note and kicked off with a ‘Sesame Old Fashioned’ featuring sesame bourbon and chocolate bitters and a ‘Pandan Espresso Martini’ – a fragrant reworking of the modern classic featuring the South East Asian tropical plant.

The menu looked equally inviting as we took up our table in an alcove of burnished gold. The team have created a winning mix centred around small plates of dim sum, chargrilled robata, tempura and Asian classics in addition to main plates and a sprawling sushi menu.

Diners can order a sharing selection or revert to tradition with a starter and main course approach. Old habits certainly die hard for my son Jack and I, so we chose the latter.

As is his wont, Jack kicked off with king prawns enlivened by lime, lemongrass, garlic, red chilli and sesame oil. These looked great nestled with an Asian side salad and tasted even better.

Spring rolls meanwhile arrived for yours truly featuring aromatic duck, hand rolled with real aplomb and served with a dark, flavourful hoisin

sauce possessing that telling depth of flavour.

These small plates were of supremely good quality and offer great value on a Monday to Friday with three small plates available for £15.00 from 11am – 5pm.

Main courses arrived shortly thereafter. Jack picked a stunning Massaman beef fillet. Beef skewers served with a curried puree with oyster mushrooms and crispy shallots. I meanwhile tucked into the Teriyaki chicken – a new favourite of mine done very well here marinated in a medley of garlic, ginger, sake, mirin and coriander.

Totally replete, we swerved desserts in favour of two bracing espressos. However, we did file a mental note away to return to sample the unabashedly calorific ginger creme brulee not to mention the Miso chocolate tart.

This could be a little while as some readers may be aware I am about to make it a trilogy of Great North Runs!

Thankfully, The Muddler is leading the pack in luxurious, exciting, yet affordable dinning in the North East: delivering instagrammable Pan Asian food from its elegant base in the heart of the city.

This is a restaurant offering style and substance in abundance.

**For more information and to book, visit [www.themuddlernewcastle.co.uk](http://www.themuddlernewcastle.co.uk)**





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Les Reay (Owner, Catering Units) hands over their bespoke vehicle to Zak of Tango Durham, which has recently opened.



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# EVENTS ARE A CRUCIAL PART OF OUR COMMUNITIES AND OUR ECONOMY

With the global events industry shut down overnight when lockdown hit in March 2020, the impact across the sector has been devastating. But many businesses have reacted quickly, finding new ways to prosper and embracing the new virtual world.

**North East event management firm, Saward Marketing & Events, is still going strong today despite their order book being decimated last March when the Covid lockdown was imposed. MD Jack Saward drew on his experience and ability to address the situation quickly and effectively - a trait shared by many industry leaders- and his business has survived what we all hope is the worst of the effects of the pandemic.**

As an established event professional with over 20 yrs experience, Jack reflected on the 12 months since the last event they were part of for a customer, in Las Vegas in March 2020.

"Our industry has faced huge challenges but that's what we enjoy, we are proactive and solution focused. Our daily routine is always looking to ensure our clients receive the best possible experience and service, so the last year was just another situation we had to face head on and come out of as strong as we possibly could," he explained.

"A worrying number of my industry peers have lost their businesses or jobs over the last year, it's been tough for everyone involved in this sector. We've had to think outside the box to find ways to ensure that our customers have been supported during this time. It has been a struggle but I guess we are one of the lucky ones."

The business has delivered a number of online virtual events, produced new videos for clients and continued to provide PR and marketing support to customers both in the UK and overseas. Offering our customers a 'professional cuddle' has been vital because they have also faced their own challenges.

"Whilst the events industry has struggled, with little or no government support, we've found ways to use our skills and contacts to ensure our customers continue to develop and showcase their products and services."

One of these customers is North East based ConMech Engineers. MD Christine Ames commented "Jack has been an invaluable resource to us since our very first exhibition back in 2013, helping us to stand out from the competition in live events and trade shows in the UK and abroad, which has resulted in a significant increase in the recognition of our brand.

"Then COVID-19 landed, and with no live events to plan for Jack has been able to guide us through the maze of digital marketing. From building booths for digital events and producing new marketing materials, Jack's vision and knowledge is second to none. As well as his professionalism and expertise, he's also one of the most genuine people you could ever hope to work with."

Whilst at a very big exhibition in Las Vegas in March last year, Jack watched as the bright lights began to switch off, hotels began to close and flights were cancelled. He made it back home just in time and, since then he has lived and breathed the painful experiences that his entire sector has faced. But after continuing to participate in a number of industry panel discussions and speaking so positively about his industry, he was talked into

starting a podcast. Not something that was ever on his agenda, he needed some convincing, but The Events Insight podcast was launched in October 2020 and, since then it has developed into something far bigger than imagined.

Downloaded across all six continents and in over 30 countries (and counting), listeners have had the opportunity to tune in and become re-energised about their industry.

The 30 – 40 minutes of conversation that Jack has with his co-host, PR/event organizer Ellan Campbell-Swann and a different event industry expert each week, has led to guest lecturer opportunities in Further Education establishments across the country. Jack is a passionate mentor, so these discussions have offered him the opportunity to help nurture future event professionals and communicate with a larger audience to ensure they remain positive and enthused about the industry for which he cares so deeply.

Jack acknowledged "We still have a way to go to build confidence and see crowds back at sporting and music events, companies and visitors at trade fairs and even businesses actively organising their next national or international conferences, but we're getting there. We just need to plan effectively and take all the necessary steps to ensure the appropriate guidance is followed."

"Many of my customers have contacted me recently asking for our thoughts and it's been a similar message to each of them; start the conversation and start the planning NOW, we need to be proactive, not reactive, and, as a company, we'll be there to help them along that journey as we always have been."

**For more details about Saward Marketing & Events please contact them on [admin@saward-me.com](mailto:admin@saward-me.com) or via their website or one of their social media profiles.**

“

...Offering our customers a 'professional cuddle' has been vital because they have also faced their own challenges....

”





Jack Saward

# MEET THE GM

## ANNA WADCOCK

General Manager,  
Maldron Hotel Newcastle

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

Hospitality was definitely a career by chance, I took on a role whilst studying and fell in love with the buzz of working in hotels and never looked back.

### Briefly tell us about your career path so far?

I started as a receptionist in 2000, gradually working my way up through different roles within the hotel from reservations, operations and to my first GM role at a property near Manchester Airport in 2010. Since then I've managed a variety of different styles of property, from country house hotel's with golf courses, spa resorts and then large city centre properties around different areas of the country.

### You are now General Manager at the Maldron Hotel. Tell us about the range of facilities you have?

My property is one of the largest in the city with 265 bedrooms, four meeting rooms with video conferencing facilities, Grain & Grill restaurant, bar and beautiful courtyard. Our location is a great asset as we are the most central four star hotel in Newcastle. Our guests love being so close to what our amazing city has to offer, from the shops and nightlife to the great transport connections for business visits. Each room is designed with comfort in mind, our beds are bespoke to the group and amazingly comfortable, lovely rainforest showers and TVs with chrome cast. Our food is fantastic with great dining options and the breakfast the next day is lovely, plenty of choice and very tasty.

### How did you adapt to working through the pandemic?

The team have been amazing, we initially went down to a core team of nine people who worked across all the functions around the clock, the rest of the team were furloughed and for that support from the government I am eternally grateful as having only opened and built the team up within the 18 months prior to the pandemic, it was heart wrenching to see the team go off for an unknown period of time.



Anna Wadcock

The core team were quite simply superstars! We all cooked, cleaned bedrooms and did everything we needed to keep the hotel operating for the reduced number of guests we had in house. We have looked after doctors from the RVI after nightshifts who have needed some crucial sleep, from key workers who have kept the country moving and many who have had loved ones in hospitals nearby. We have been very proud to be able to care for these guests during such a difficult time.

### Tell us about your team?

I am extremely proud of the team here at the hotel, we are very much a work family and this past year has proved this even more. Everyone has operated out of their comfort zones on a regular basis but with such positivity and a can-do attitude. They have rolled with every adjustment that we had to encounter, the tiers, curfews and more recently delivering outside dining in the Newcastle weather! Now we have indoor hospitality back its wonderful to have guests around the hotel properly again.

### Now we are returning to some normality what are your future plans?

As we were only in our second year of trading when everything hit, it is all about rebuilding the business and fully establishing ourselves in the city. Not only as an accommodation & hospitality

venue but also as a part of the community and as a key employer and creator of careers. We work closely with Newcastle United Foundation and their Prince's Trust programmes and we are looking at other options we can work together on to assist rebuilding people's perceptions of hospitality as a career. Hospitality has had such a rough road this past year, so we are reengaging with the workforce and also looking at who could choose hospitality as a career path following their schooling.

### What is the Maldron's greatest asset?

Without question it is our team, the smiling faces that greet the clients daily and work tirelessly to deliver our fantastic level of service. I thoroughly enjoy working with my team here and its just great to have them all back now.

### Away from the Hotel how do you like to unwind?

Spending time with friends and family, especially since we have not been able to do that properly over the past year.

### What is your favourite book and boxset?

I love a good crime novel and same goes really from a series point of view, I love *Vera* and who from the North East doesn't?

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# SACHINS RESTAURANT IS BACK OPEN FOR BUSINESS – FINALLY!

A message from Chef/Owner, Bob Arora:



"I think it's safe to say we have all missed the feeling of dining inside a restaurant. After a year of living pretty much the same day on repeat, it's nice to have a bit of normality back into our lives. And as much as we know you've all enjoyed the Sachins Heat and Eat takeaway service from the comfort of our own homes, we are now back to business serving you our finest Punjabi cuisine at our beautiful location on Forth Banks, Newcastle.

"We've also been overwhelmed with the success of our street food offering, Sachins Roadside, which offers socially-distanced outdoor dining from our extensive restaurant menu, so when the sun is shining, you can make the most of it, whilst dining out on our delicious authentic Punjabi cuisine!

"Like many restaurants and bars, Team Sachins adapted well to the lockdown rules, but after the government gave the go-ahead that hospitality could open indoors from 17th May, our doors have been well and truly open, and oh boy, have you welcomed us back. We've loved seeing our regulars back - It's as if they've never been away!"

We know what you're thinking, you can't wait to pop by and pay them a visit! Bob and his team have worked tirelessly, like many in the hospitality industry, to open the restaurant and get it back up and running, so it would be rude not to see what Sachins has to offer.

Sitting just minutes away from Newcastle's famous Quayside with its atmospheric interior, we're sure you will feel that dining out buzz that we have all been missing.

A final message from Bob – "Let's just hope that Boris keeps us open for good this time! See you soon."

**Sachins Restaurant, Forth Banks, Newcastle upon Tyne**  
[www.sachins.co.uk](http://www.sachins.co.uk) 0191 232 4660.

## LIFE AT JAM PRINTS & MARKETING: AS A UNIVERSITY STUDENT

Here at JAM we believe that everyone deserves a chance and some of our very best employees have been students straight from university, that have little experience, but lots of get-go. This month, we're handing over the mic to our two placement students, Kristen and Rosalind, to find out why it's so important to give young professionals a chance...

**Kristen, 21, Northumbria University...**

When it came to finding a placement, it was anything but an easy experience, and I quickly came to realise that many places simply do not have the time for students.

On the search for my final year placement, I was hit with the same automated reply 'sorry we don't take on students' several times. It was so disappointing reading those responses, because I really wanted to work hard for these companies, but I wasn't even given a chance.

After searching for some time, JAM Prints & Marketing got back to me and were happy to get me in. Being only a small team, I've had the chance to work with real clients and gain practice in multiple areas, something not many internships will offer.

My placement at JAM has allowed me to work one-on-one and get a real feel for what it would be like to work in the marketing industry. And most importantly, I haven't just been assigned as the tea and coffee maker!

It's been great getting the chance to experience life as a Jammy Dodger and they couldn't have welcomed me to the team better. Thank you JAM!

**Rosalind, 20, Northumbria University...**

Getting your foot into the marketing world can be difficult, especially as so many 'entry-level' jobs these days require one or more years of experience, which is nearly impossible to achieve when you are studying full time for a degree. However, getting real work-experience is invaluable.



From starting at the company in October, I had little to no experience in marketing and it was all completely new to me, but I knew it was something I wanted to pursue. Fast-forward to now, as I graduate from university, I am proud to say that I have the skillset and portfolio I need to be able to enter the job market with confidence.

This wouldn't have been possible without JAM, as they have mentored me over the last eight months and trusted me with important, hands-on tasks that have been indispensable in building my confidence. Already, so many more doors have opened up for me, which I would have never been able to consider without my work experience.

I have loved every second working at JAM, and I am thankful I got the opportunity to discover my potential and passion for marketing!

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





## A KIDS TREAT WITH THE BAKERS BOX

If you're looking for something to get the kids attention or even looking to keep the big kids entertained, then you should give The Baker's Box a go. We had the pleasure of making Jammie Dodger scones with our four grandchildren this weekend and boy did they go down a storm.

The Baker's Box is a company based in Gateshead which sources high quality ingredients for you to make delicious baked goodies at home, and when I say high quality, they really are. The taste of the finished product was as good as any specialist bakers that we've bought cakes from.

All you have to do is add water, jam and a dusting of flour – pop them in the oven and job's a good'n! The kids absolutely loved making them and it kept grandad entertained too.

The kit came with instructions, ingredients and a private message from the owner, which I thought was a lovely touch. The owner of the business is Marcus and he is passionate about sourcing and supplying the best ingredients he can.

**Definitely worth checking out: [www.thebakersbox.co.uk](http://www.thebakersbox.co.uk)**



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# WL DISTILLERY WINS SILVER AT PRESTIGIOUS 2021 LONDON SPIRITS COMPETITION

County Durham based WL Distillery have been awarded the Silver medal at the London Spirits Competition 2021 for their debut 1st Edition Gin. Now in its fourth year, the prestigious competition is an annual judging of international spirits organised by the Beverage Trade Network and the Silver medal is an ultimate endorsement in the global spirits industry.

The independent small-batch producer, WL Distillery continues to make a splash in the gin market with nature at the forefront of their ethos. The distillery are just six months into production of their highly anticipated 1st Edition gin, a refreshing gin infusion boasting an indulgent aroma infused with garden botanicals, touches of apple, pear, raspberries, blackberries and those all-important juniper berries.

The London Spirits Competition looks to recognise, reward and help promote spirits brands that have successfully been created to identify with and target a specific spirits drinker. Spirits were judged on the basis of three primary criteria and WL Distillery scored highly in the three judging aspects of quality, value and packaging.

Scott Wilson-Laing, WL Distillery said, "We are delighted that our 1st Edition Gin has been awarded Silver at such a prestigious spirits competition. Like many businesses 2020 was a difficult time which saw production put on hold due to the pandemic and a refocus in business strategy. We are just six months into production and the demand for our gin continues to be strong. We have a number of exciting plans in the pipeline and look forward to



Scott Wilson-Laing

unveiling these in the coming months."

The judging panel of 2021 was drawn from leading spirits industry professionals with direct commercial buying responsibility. This establishes the winners at the competition to be agreeable to the on-premise trade and consumer alike and makes an award from the London Spirits Competition a coveted one.

CEO Sid Patel of event organiser Beverage Trade Network said, "Spirits brands consumers are looking

for an round experience when drinking a spirit. The spirit needs to hit all the right notes to be enjoyed again and again. So, at the London Spirits Competition, we evaluate spirits that contribute to a spirit's overall drinkability. Along with the quality, spirits are assessed for their appearance and value."

Scott Wilson-Laing, WL Distillery added, "We are committed to ensuring a fresh and classic authentic gin experience for customers.

The Silver medal demonstrates that the spirits we are making are the kind that bar managers and mixologists want to stock and spirits drinkers enjoy drinking."

With ingredients taking centre stage, WL Distillery take great interest in nature and the beauty that it represents. Each bottle is infused with nature using handpicked, measured botanicals and natural mineral spring water to ensure the freshest, most authentic taste. The distillery is committed to combining their passion for gin with capturing the charm and nature of the region. Distilled in the North East, from start to finish the gin is expertly monitored and created, by hand in the distillery.

Alongside the award-winning 1st Edition gin, the distillery found great success with their popular limited-edition Christmas and Valentine themed gin gift sets. With in-store presence in Fenwick's over Christmas and listings in Vogue magazine, the explosion of flavours from the new distillery continues to be a hit with customers.

Shop online at [www.wldistillery.com](http://www.wldistillery.com)

## The award winning gin company that's making a big SPLASH



WL Distillery is an independent producer of hand crafted premium spirits.

Located in the North East of England we focus on the distillation of small batch unique gins.



Visit our online shop to  
see our unique products.

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

# £350,000 UPGRADE TO THE MANOR HOUSE HOTEL



The £350,000 refurbishment programme has included the heated indoor pool.

The Manor House Hotel in West Auckland, County Durham, reopens on 17th May following an extensive £350,000 refurbishment programme which has seen the creation of improved spa facilities including a heated indoor pool, sauna, steam room, jacuzzi and new beauty therapy facilities to complement the fully equipped gym and relaxation areas.

Reputed to have been Henry VIII's hunting lodge and home to the Eden family, the Grade I listed Manor House, sometimes also referred to as Auckland Old Hall or West Auckland Hall, continued as a family home until 1914 when the local vicar, Rev Lomax, turned the property into an orphanage before it was refurbished into a hotel. The site was also home to the famous West Auckland Brewery from 1840 to 1877 when it was taken over by the Cameron Brewery of West Hartlepool and finally ceased brewing in 1962.

The hotel was purchased by STR Enterprises in 1997, as Managing Director of his family owned leisure group, Chris Sanderson, explained, "As a hospitality company, we're interested in unique buildings whose potential hasn't been realised for one reason or another but can be achieved with investment and great service. The Manor House had it all in abundance – an incredible building in a great location but a little run-down so it fitted all our criteria. We've been constantly upgrading and improving the building since we purchased it but decided to use the break in business that the Pandemic forced upon us to bring forward our investment programme to refurbish the 30 bedrooms, install a new plant room and completely upgrade the Spa to create an even better offer for our customers."

The location, just off the A68 running through the village, is not only on the heart of the



Staff of the Manor House Hotel & Spa get ready to welcome back guests (foreground, Angela Thomas and STR Enterprises Executive Chef, Harry Baillie).

superb County Durham rural landscape but also surrounded by local food producers, as Angela Thomas, Group Operations Manager, continued: "We have some of the country's finest food producers right on our doorstep and try to use local and seasonal food wherever we can so that we can become almost a shop front for the local economy and plan to hold food fairs once we can

get over the current restrictions later this year."

"Probably our main market is the wedding sector and we see the enhanced Spa as a great attraction for guests to enjoy our facilities before and after the actual ceremony in our historic King's Hall – as part of this we've also redesigned the bridal suite to link via a private dining area to two other bedrooms where parents and in-laws can stay as another unique offering. It's all about differentiating the Manor House from other venues and future plans include the possible provision of a second function area in a purpose-built barn venue within the grounds."

"What's also very exciting is the possibility of restarting brewing on site. We've had the original West Auckland Brewery well tested for quality and volume and are looking to begin discussions with brewers who are interested in reviving the famous brand."

The Hotel is also looking to boost employment back to its pre-Covid numbers of up to 60 full-time staff and has already begun recruitment for senior personnel.

The STR Enterprises estate includes The Victoria Hotel, Bamburgh, The Honest Lawyer Hotel, Durham, Point Cottages in Bamburgh, The Quayside Exchange, Sunderland, The Centurion Bar in Newcastle and Centurion Park, Wallsend.

[www.strhotels.co.uk/manor-house-hotel](http://www.strhotels.co.uk/manor-house-hotel)





# WEEK 2 WEEK

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“

...a lot of work but  
so worth it...

”





The passion of a North East couple for one of the world's most iconic restaurant brands has led to it opening in the North East...

## ROCKING ALL THE WAY TO NEWCASTLE

It didn't matter wherever David and Penny Tilly went in the world: from UK to Europe, from Singapore to Malaysia to Thailand – there was always one constant.

**"If there was a city which had a Hard Rock Café in it, then we'd always go," said Penny.**

**"We just love everything about it."**

For most people that would have been more than enough – the opportunity to visit their favorite restaurant in every conceivable location.

But these North East entrepreneurs wanted to take their devotion one step further and they have finally fulfilled their dream, bringing Hard Rock to the North East.

The road to Newcastle's Hard Rock Café – elegantly situated in the historic Guildhall at the Quayside – has not been the smoothest one, not least because this is Penny and David's first foray into hospitality.

But it is a lesson in how passion, determination and the entrepreneurial spirit can absolutely pay off.

David and Penny had both worked initially in the healthcare industry.

They are used to talking risks, using their experience to set up their own company in 1998 manufacturing essential products for use in hospitals and care homes.

They took a huge gamble back then and were having to face the fact that the business they had ploughed all their savings into may cost them dearly – until an order came in from a local hospital which set them on the path to success.

Care-Ability continued to build its reputation and growth, with the couple eventually selling out and looking for their next project.

It was after returning from holiday and they were sitting outside a bar on Grey St Newcastle that Penny lamented the fact that it's a shame there was no Hard Rock Café closer to home as we could just do with a visit for some great music, food and drink.

"I decided to have a look on the Hard Rock website, and it stated they weren't planning to offer franchises," in the U.K. she said.

"So, I thought that was the end of that idea."

However reluctant to give up their dream, the couple were presented with the opportunity to speak direct to Hard Rock International whilst sat in Hard Rock Café Kuala Lumpur through a family member from Australia who they were holidaying with. After returning David had a conversation with Hard Rock International in Orlando who then arranged a visit to Newcastle to assess the possibility of bringing the brand to the city.

Supported by agencies such as NGI and NE1 the first tentative steps were taken towards bringing a Hard Rock to the Newcastle begun.

First of all, finding a possible location was key and David and Penny went to look at the Guildhall situated on the Quayside.

Despite the fact it is a Grade I listed building – with all of the restrictions that come with that – the pair believed it was the perfect location.

The challenges have been many – not least because of the little matter of a global pandemic which hit Hard Rock as it has with all hospitality – along with creating the high standards that the world has come to expect.

But anyone who visits will be in no doubt it has been worth the wait.

The restaurant can take up to 180 covers on two levels, offering many of Hard Rock's signature dishes and a few specials to reflect the latest opening.

The requisite Hard Rock – Rock Shop full of merchandise is also on site and Hard Rock wouldn't be a Hard Rock without the glass displays filled with fascinating rock and roll memorabilia.

Now open, this fantastic enterprise is down to the sheer tenacity of David and Penny.

"It's been a lot of work but so worth it," said Penny.

"And now we don't have to go quite as far to enjoy Hard Rock Cafe!"

**For further information visit**

**[www.hardrockcafe.com/location/newcastle](http://www.hardrockcafe.com/location/newcastle)**





## WHY DO BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

This saying upsets me, it is so wrong, isn't it? But unfortunately, it is a fact.

I do not like it one little bit and I want to challenge and change it.

**The voluntary sector, charities, society, you and me, really depend upon the kind people that give their time and energy everyday to support and help others and make a difference in the world. The world would struggle so significantly without the work delivered in kind.**

Throughout my years running a business, facing my own adversities, and investing in the third sector I have witnessed the many wonderful individuals that give to society, but I have learnt many are struggling too, some have significant challenges themselves. Government data shows that many of those individuals volunteering are living in deprivation or classed as disadvantaged.

This bothers me. I do not want to live in a society that takes, takes, takes. Don't kind people deserve a helping hand? I want to live in a world filled with gratitude, one that provides the opportunity for kind people to also live an inclusive life.

As a School Governor I focus on Inclusion, ensuring the children in our care receive a fair education, equal opportunities, and the support they need to overcome their challenges and achieve their full potential and beyond. One of the resources to enable us to deliver an inclusion education is a government fund called Pupil Premium. Brilliant, yes, it is very much needed, and it makes a difference. But there is no such pot of money for adults, adults who face disadvantaged barriers and lack opportunities. There is not a body/fund that identifies their challenges and identify ways to help them overcome them.



There are 14.4 million people living in deprivation in the UK, 18% of adults are classed as disadvantaged. These are figures we can change, and I want to help change them.

A solution! An economy of kindness whereby we protect, sustain, and celebrate kind people, kind businesses and kind causes to make a more inclusive kinder lifestyle for all. Supporting consumers to make kinder lifestyle choices whilst helping them make savings within their personal finances, supporting businesses to deliver their purpose whilst helping them increase their trade and profit and the positive impact of this interaction will create a fund, a

kindness fund, designed to give thanks to the kind individuals society depends upon, remove their disadvantaged barriers, and provide them with opportunities.

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# I CAN FINALLY SMILE AGAIN!

I have always been fortunate enough to have lovely white teeth, which until the last couple of years, were consistently like that, but as a 'rough brusher' I had managed to erode the enamel from the front two upper teeth, which I learnt isn't the best thing to do! I have never smoked, only drink tea and coffee very occasionally, steer clear of red wine and although I do have fizzy drinks, I have the no-sugar variety and try and drink through a straw, whenever possible, so when the dentine started showing on my front two teeth, I found myself smiling less and even when I did smile, it wouldn't be a toothy one. I didn't realise that beneath the enamel is dentine, which unfortunately isn't white, it's a creamy yellow colour.

I became more and more conscious of this so sought help. Highly recommended to me by a good friend was Dr. Ayesha Ali, who operates from My Dentist in Wallsend. I rang the clinic and booked myself an appointment with her. The team at My Dentist are absolutely spot on and I felt in good hands from the get-go.

I was advised of the suggested treatment, which started with a visit to the hygienist. A painless process, which only took about 30 minutes and I could see the difference straight away. The following visits were to get my teeth whitening kit which I needed to carry out at home. This involves two stages - the first to take moulds of my teeth, and the second to receive the whitening trays, which to you and I means the soft plastic sculptures bespoke-made to fit comfortably around your teeth during the whitening process. Again, totally painless and once the course was completed, I had lovely white teeth, except the two that I had taken down to the dentine!

The final treatment was the composite bonding, which is the placement of white filling onto the tooth surface to change the shape/structure and appearance of the two damaged teeth. I was in the dentists chair the longest on this visit, about 90 minutes in all, however, there was still no pain. When Dr. Ali had finished, to say I was over the moon would be an understatement. My teeth were taken back to what they were prior to my vigorous over-brushing days!



Every visit to My Dentist I encountered during my treatment was handled superbly, from the receptionist booking my appointments to the absolute fantastic service of Dr. Ayesha Ali and her team. I honestly cannot recommend them enough.

I feel confident in my smile again now and feel like I have been given a new lease of smiley-life. If I could give them 20 out of 10 I would!

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Ryan McAlinden

**To celebrate being fully open and as a way of thanking the key workers who helped us all to get through the pandemic they are offering one 30 minutes back, neck and shoulder massage for £25 instead of £40 Offer expires 30th June 2021. Call Ryan on: 07717063214 to book.**





# *Championships, Challenge & Charm. New members welcome*

## The Northumberland Golf Club



Founded in 1898, **The Northumberland Golf Club** is steeped in golfing history, designed in golf's Golden Age by Colt and Braid, the world famous golf architects. The friendly club regularly hosts national and regional championships, including the Open Regional Qualifier.

Its challenging course set in and alongside Newcastle Racecourse, is constantly evolving but is still accessible to a wide range of golfers. It is a pleasure to play all year round.

Please get in touch on 0191 236 2498 or visit



[thengc.co.uk](http://thengc.co.uk)



*The*  
**Northumberland**  
GOLF CLUB





## CLOSE HOUSE CELEBRATE 10TH ANNIVERSARY

Club members braved the Spring showers last month to join owner Sir Graham Wylie and Close House staff from all areas of the business to celebrate its 10th anniversary.

The special members tournament was held 10 years to the day that then, World No. 1 and Attached Touring Professional Lee Westwood opened the Colt Course and No.19 clubhouse. Attended by over 250 members throughout the day, members enjoyed drinks out on the course and dined on No.19's famous Ultimate Burger, served outside from the grill, albeit a bit soggy from the downpours! What a great way to mark this special day, and here's to many more successful years to come.







# TORRO

LUXURY GOLF ACCESSORIES [TORRO.CO.UK](https://torro.co.uk)





Chris Robinson pictured with Lee Westwood at Close House.



Lee Westwood, the touring professional from Close House in April celebrated his 48th birthday and with Sir Graham Wylie, the owner of the superb Close House complex, spent time together at the club and reflected on Westy's superb record in 2020.

## WESTWOOD IN WONDERLAND

By Chris Robinson

**Ten years ago Sir Graham had such fabulous foresight to create the magnificent Colt and Filly courses under Westwood's name, where they enjoy playing together when he's home from the main European and the PGA Tours.**

The golf world questions how long the evergreen Westwood will remain at the top of the tree? He said: "I'll keep going as long as I can, but I'm often asked when will I join the Seniors Tour? If I keep in good form I'll play into my 50's but if I can't remain in the top tier I'll probably then join the Seniors."

He continued: "This month I'm focusing on the US PGA (May 20-23) The Ocean Course, Kiawah Island, followed by the US OPEN (June 17-20) Torres Pines, then the climax to the season, the 43rd Ryder Cup (Sept 24-26) played over the Straits Course, Whistling Straits, Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where I'm playing for a record 11th time. I've always had an ambition to Captain the European Team and it's whispered I'm in the frame for the 2023 match to be played at the Marco Simone Golf and Country Club course near Rome. It would be great if I was Captain but the potential problem is I could still be playing!"

The only missing piece of the jigsaw with Westwood's game is his failure to win a Major Championship. Will he put the record straight in next month's Open Championship at Royal St. George's?

He said: "I'm not too confident as I've never been particularly keen on the course, so will just have to wait and see if I can successfully adapt my game to it!"

Westwood continued: "I often I feel I spend more time in the air than a bird and have suffered jet-lag for 20 years! I also have two very large cases to go with my clubs and often require assistance from the airport ground staff."

Westy's a consistent and repetitive straight driver of the ball, but from the tee currently plays second fiddle to the US Open's defending champion Bryson De Chambeau, who as seen on TV, hits the ball a country mile!

Westwood said: "Bryson's a good friend of mine and he's really good for the game-like a modern Tiger Woods. We had two battle royals in the Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill and the Players' Championship at TPC Sawgrass in Florida, where by a single stroke I was runner-up both times!"

Lee Westwood has a charming caddy in his fiancée Helen Storey - they intend to marry but they haven't found time as they're nearly always on Tour! Maybe later in the year?

They are comfortably settled in Jesmond, Newcastle upon Tyne, and while treading the fairways on the course are very relaxed and often talk about things like: "Where are we going for dinner to-night or "I wonder if we'll get a holiday this year?"

Helen keeps Westy relaxed who said: "I don't need a caddy to club me as I've been doing that for so many years I can work it out myself. Initially, Helen's knowledge of the game wasn't great, but now she's worth her weight in gold."

Westwood finds Close House a magnificent golf complex, which is the brainchild of Sir Graham Wylie, where he's shown impeccable attention to detail throughout and is celebrating 10 years with Lee Westwood and the fabulous Colt and Filly courses which bear his name.

Sir Graham said: "Each year Lee spends several days at the club and stages clinics, talk-ins etc. which are popular with our members. When he's able to play, we have tussles on the course and with my modest handicap we recently won by 1-hole in the first round of the men's doubles competition and are up for the next round later this month."

Westwood's 19-year-old son Sam also caddies for Dad - a highlight being at this year's Masters at Augusta - but he now keeps his head down with business studies at Newcastle University.

Sir Graham and Lee Westwood have really put Close House and North East golf on the map, particularly with staging the fabulous British Masters, which was hosted by Lee.

Here's to continued success all round.



Lee Westwood-third time winner-and Helen Storey with the 2020 Race to Dubai Trophy.



Lee Westwood and Sir Graham Wylie, owner of Close House, pictured at the 2020 Betfred British Masters.





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### Length of course

Over 6000 yards

### Course Type

Parkland

### Facilities

Championship golf course, Pro Shop, changing rooms, Linden tree pub, Driving range, Chipping Green, Practice Net, Putting green and Halfway hut

### Longest Drive

I would normally recommend to people our par 5 16th, late in the round so gives players opportunity to really let rip depending on how the score card is looking.

### Toughest Hole

13th hole and also our signature hole, very tricky double dogleg with rough, trees and water surrounding the green.... smart positional play is defiantly key here!

### Signature Hole

13th hole.

### Course Record

Championship blue tee's is held by Ashley Mansell 65 during Europro tour event in 2019

### Competitions

We currently have 2 opens planned, with more to be confirmed soon. [brsgolf.com/lindenhall/opens\\_home.php](http://brsgolf.com/lindenhall/opens_home.php)

### Prices

Weekday £20, Weekend £25 (Twilight rates available)

### Contact - Richard Suttie, Director of golf

[golf@macdonald-hotels.co.uk](mailto:golf@macdonald-hotels.co.uk)



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Jade Flynn is definitely one to watch, as she puts the final touches to the latest venture; hair extension training, named Hair Boss Academy, she talks to Jackie Marston about her future plans.

## ONE TO WATCH!

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I always knew that I wanted to have my own business so that I could set my pace, trends and rules. It just so happened I fell in love with hair. When I first trained in hair extensions they were a fairly up and coming trend. Nothing like what they are today.



### Tell us about your current role?

Currently, I am the proud owner Hair Boss Hair Extensions, (formerly @Jadeywig) serving my clients for over 16 years. I'm very fortunate to have such a loyal client base, but you often find in this industry, if you do a good job, clients stay with you for a long time.

I have recently qualified as a trainer and I am just launching Hair Boss Training Academy which offers fully accredited courses in all aspects of hair extensions, covering all main techniques as well as business advice for new starters. This is to allow my students the chance to set up their own successful business, something that really wasn't on the market when I started my company. I wish there had been a course that showed me how to market, advertise set up social media etc., as that is a huge part of running a successful business.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

I am so proud of everything that I have achieved so far, from building my business from working in my little kitchen after work to now designing my own salon, and seeing my vision come to life exactly how I imagined. From just doing friends and families hair to building the most loyal following of wonderful clients. I take nothing that I have done for granted. But I think my proudest moment is what I am working on at the moment which is launching my own brand of hair extensions. This is something I have been working towards for the past 16 years and is finally coming to fruition.

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

The hair industry has changed so much over the past 10 years, fashions are always changing and it's important to be constantly retraining in order to keep up with the latest techniques and trends. The biggest change has been how popular hair extensions have become! Literally so popular now with all age ranges, they have become a must-have accessory for many now.

### What are you currently working on?

Currently the launch of my training academy is taking up a big chunk of my time, but this is something that I have been planning throughout lockdown, so it gave me an opportunity to focus all of my attention on it, without other work distractions. I am so excited to start the teaching though, it has always been a passion of mine and I think it will be a great challenge for me. I am also working behind the scenes on launching my own line of products including my very own hair brand, so it really is a case of watch this space! This really has been years in the making and a huge goal of mine, so I am super excited! Watch this space...

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

Never Quit. I don't know anyone who hasn't at some point wanted to give up, a bad day, a bad week, a big setback, but if I had given up back then I wouldn't be where I am now, so I would say perseverance is key!

### What has been your biggest business challenge?

My biggest challenge is always remaining current, with the hair extension industry becoming so saturated, and salons popping up everywhere it's harder than ever to stay ahead of the game, especially in the current climate. Educating myself is key, so that I can then educate others. It's a fast-moving industry, but I endeavor to always keep up.

### Who are your biggest heroes outside of work?

My biggest inspiration is and always will be my sister, Alex. She works as a signal director on the trains and is both level-headed and caring. She is always available to offer help and advice, no matter what she has on her own plate. She really is an inspiration and my hero. My daughter Tallulah is also an inspiration, she's the reason I work so hard and who all of this for.

### How do you unwind outside of work?

My favourite thing to do outside of work is cuddle up with a good book and a glass of wine, but I have been known to kick my heels, occasionally!

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really pretty



“

...I take nothing  
that I have done  
for granted...

”



## GET REGULAR

Regular exercise can reduce your chances of dying from Covid or other infectious diseases by over a third and you are also 31% less likely to catch the virus.

**The world's first study into exercise and Covid immunity suggests you need to exercise for at least 30 mins a day for five days a week or a combined amount of 150 mins a week.**

The intensity of your workout should be to the point you are out of breath but can still hold a conversation. Walking, running, cycling and strength exercises are ideal.

Such physical activity can also make vaccines up to 40% more effective, an international team of researchers, led by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), concluded.

They also found the first line of defence of the immune system is strengthened through exercise. This study is hugely significant as it could help cut the number of people contracting and dying from Covid.

It is well documented that exercise helps boost your immune system and is your key to health, wellbeing and longevity of life and this only strengthens that argument.

Now is the time to prioritise and schedule exercise into your daily life. Many of you who have dug your head into the sand and led unhealthy lives over decades, have been hit the hardest, some with tragic outcomes.

Being more aware of your health by eating better and adding exercise into your life can easily become the norm. Once habits are formed they become a natural part of your daily life.

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David Fairlamb

## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

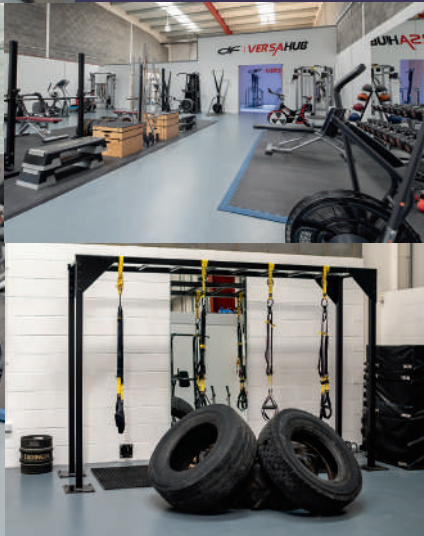
*The pandemic is a huge reminder that we can't take our health for granted and unhealthy habits will catch up with us at any point.*



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## BARRY SPEKER'S COMMENT

17th May announced not only the return of the hug but also the opportunity to enjoy again the pleasures of dining out. This enabled the long awaited resumption of the monthly meetings of the Gosforth Curry Club. A splendid time was 'A-Had' by all.

**I can recommend a visit to The Blackbird in Ponteland. Excellently run by Stuart and Sue Young, the venue no longer has to rely on its heated tepee but can offer inside hospitality.**

It remains to be seen whether the woke movement results in renaming the business as The Bird. This follows Vaulkards changing the name of The Blackie Boy pub in Newcastle's Groat Market (established 1894) to 'Swarley's'. They feel that the former name 'may be misconstrued in today's climate'.

Return to some normality is enabling the courts and tribunals to deal with the build up of cases although in truth the system kept going remarkably well during the pandemic. This was enabled by dedication and adaptability with many hearings by video and telephone. These remained fair and just but I welcome the increased number of in-person hearings rather than a version of Zoom.

Another gesture at making a kinder society has come from *The Beano*, Britain's longest running comic. One of the characters in the Bash Street Kids, Frederick Brown, will no longer be referred to by the nickname 'Fatty'. This is to discourage children from being tempted to use the nickname for their peers 'in a mean way'. In future he will be referred to as Freddy.

Such protection from fatism and lookism is not yet established by the Law (consolidated in the Equality Act 2010) which outlaws discrimination on grounds of sex, race, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation and other protected characteristics.

It seems that many nicknames will now attract approbrium - spotty, titch, lofty, skinny, lardy, ginger, carrot heed - and no Beam me up Scottie? Is it still permitted to Bash Bashir?

The offensive description 'in a mean way' by some Newcastle United supporters of manager Steve Bruce by reference to his girth (as well as to formerly managing Sunderland) is divisive and unfortunate.

Despite prophets of doom predicting relegation for months, the team rallied and achieved survival in the Premier League in the end quite comfortably.

Celebration can not fairly omit appreciation of Steve Bruce's role. Although describing himself as not 'everyone's cup of tea', his resilience and



Barry Speker

lifelong commitment to his team cannot be denied. If Rafa had achieved this there would be calls for another statue at SJP.

Bob Dylan's 80th birthday has been an occasion for widespread celebration and acknowledgment of his achievements and his position as the greatest songwriter of the 20th century. When I became an avid fan of the protesting troubadour in the 1960s, I could not have believed he would ultimately be awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

My early years playing the guitar gave me the legacy of still remembering all the words of *Like a Rolling Stone*, *Masters of War*, *Hey Mr Tambourine Man*, *Positively 4th Street*, *The Times They are A'Changing* and many more.

I first saw him live at the Odeon in Newcastle in 1968 when he reverted to an electric guitar for the second half, greeted by jeers of 'traitor'.

Always his own man he has continued down his

freewheelin' path, across country, folk, rock and beyond.

The Middle East ceasefire is welcomed by all. What is very unwelcome is conflating views on the conflict to produce appalling anti Semitic abuse on the streets of London, campuses and elsewhere on social media. As well as placards at the demonstrations bearing flagrant anti-Semitic slogans, there was a uniformed female Metropolitan police officer joining the anti-Israel chanting and gesturing.

This is not what is expected of our police force who are there to protect the whole community and are expected to do so without 'fear or favour'. They should show no support for any side in a political demonstration, whether it is Extinction Rebellion, Black Lives Matter or Boycotting Israel.

[barryspeker@hotmail.com](mailto:barryspeker@hotmail.com)





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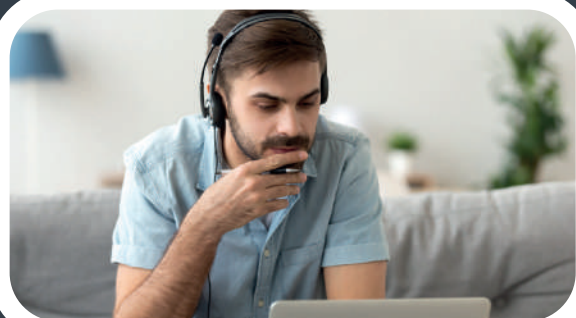
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