

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

FEBRUARY 2022

ISSUE 76

IN THE DRIVING SEAT

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# FOREWORD

## Welcome to the February edition of Northern Insight.

After a lengthy break over the festive season it is great to get going again with one of our strongest magazines to date.

Our cover star is David Taylor, the new Managing Director of Howie White recruitment.

With live events resuming we cover the CMYK Christmas Golf Day and the NE Youth Burns Night, a fixture in the social calendar for over 25 years.

Amidst a plethora of business insight we speak to Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1, who talks about developing the City's iconic waterfront area.

Motoring makes a welcome return to our pages with terrific features on the BMWiX and the Bentley Super Suv and on our travels we revisit the lovely Muddler restaurant in Newcastle.

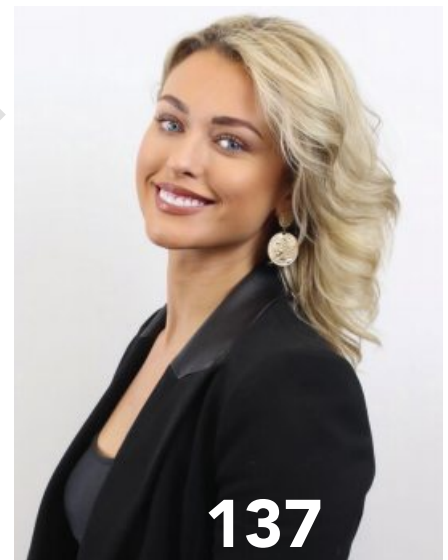
Overall a hugely enjoyable edition to compile and a terrific way to start the year.

*Thank you to everyone concerned for the great support.*

Stay safe and well. Until next month...

*M.J. Grahamslaw*

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## MINCOFFS SOLICITORS APPOINT COMMERCIAL DIRECTOR

Newcastle based law firm Mincoffs Solicitors has appointed Matthew Flinders as Commercial Director to support the firm's growth aspirations.

Matthew joins from RMT Accountants, where he was Head of Marketing and

Business Development, and brings with him an impressive range of experience having worked closely for many years with prominent businesses, banks, and many other intermediaries.

His role will be to oversee the marketing and business development function at Mincoffs, as well as assisting in the firm's ambitious growth plans, and he will be pivotal in helping to drive strategic goals and vision for the future.

Commenting on the appointment, Matthew said "The Mincoffs team have a fantastic reputation along with an enviable client list. I have worked closely with many of the team over the years and their culture and values are very much aligned to my own. This is a great opportunity to be part of something really exciting and I am looking forward to working with the team going forward"

Senior Partner Paul Hughes added "We are delighted to have Matthew on board. His appointment forms a crucial part of our strategy for growth. He brings with him a wealth of commercial expertise that will help to drive the firm forward."

## A SHORTLIST OF BUSINESSES FOR THE PRESTIGIOUS NORTH TYNESIDE BUSINESS AWARDS

The annual awards recognise the achievements of the best businesses in the borough and this year there will be special accolades for those that overcame the difficulties created by COVID.

This year there are four categories, and all category winners are automatically entered for the overall North Tyneside Business of the Year Award. The ceremony will take place on Wednesday 9th February 2022 at the Village Hotel where, in line with Public Health guidance, tickets for the event will be limited to finalists and sponsors only.

Finalists for the awards are:

Can Do, sponsored by Engie - Purple Chilli Ltd (Silent Disco 4U), Africawad Recycling CIC and Bash Academy

Diversification, supported by North Tyneside Council - Bash Academy, Roar Digital Marketing, Vineyard 72

New Business, sponsored by Tedco Business Support Ltd - Little Wood Walkers, Stay Coastal and Frontline Integrity

Heart of the Business, sponsored by Capita - Happy Planet Creative Arts CIC, Northburn Home Fragrance, Sammy Anne's

In addition to the four categories, the public can vote for the Heart of the Community Award which recognises the way that businesses support their local community. Previous winners have supported local initiatives and causes, employed local people, provided excellent customer service, and basically went the extra mile to be at the heart of their local community. The finalists in this category are Backworth based MBS Gardens, Hadrian Park, Wallsend's H & S Convenience Store and Jillys Home Bakes based in at the Rose Inn pub, Wallsend.

The North Tyneside Business Forum is run by a management group made up of members from various industry sectors in the Borough and gives support in the form of networking, events and signposting for growth and development. Membership is free and open to any business of any size with a trading address within North Tyneside. The Business Forum is supported by, but not run by North Tyneside Council.



## STUDENT'S VISIT TO ACCOUNTANTS ADDS UP TO GOOD CAREER ADVICE

The Newcastle office of a leading national accountancy firm has teamed up with a Consett based charity to help young people prepare for their future outside of school.

Haines Watts was established in the 1930's and has always promoted entrepreneurial spirit as one of its business aims. As part of their commitment to young people in the region they have partnered with Building Self-Belief to provide mentoring, workshops, and practical skills to help them find their way in the world of business.

Building Self Belief works around the North East with schools to improve the wellbeing of young people and supports them by building their self-belief by putting in place strategies, support, and advice to help them get the best possible start as they embark on adult life.

The charity is run by Education Consultant, and Chief Executive, Christine Thomas an ex-teacher who also runs an education consultancy 'Everything Educational,' with her teacher husband Peter.

Building Self-Belief's workshops and programmes for schools use a variety of content including team building activities, cultural projects, and educational experiential visits as well as discussions, creative writing, and self-reflection. The latest project saw Year 12 business students from Cardinal Hume Catholic School, Gateshead visit the Newcastle office of Haines Watts.

During the visit, the students attended workshops on how to write CVs, creating LinkedIn profiles and they also took part in mock interviews. This was the latest initiative from Haines Watts, with their team having also taken part in podcasts throughout 2021, about working in the financial and accounting sectors which the young people were able to download from the Building Self-Belief website.



## FAMILY BUSINESS INSURES A BRIGHT FUTURE FOR NORTH EAST TALENT

Opening its doors in 1972, family business Weir Insurance is celebrating 50 years in the region by creating job and training opportunities for ambitious local young people and giving back to youth charities.

Local businesses have been coming to North East based Weir Insurance Brokers for decades to insure their businesses, and

now husband and wife team Duncan and Karen Weir are thinking about the future generation.

Throughout 2022, every customer that successfully recommends another business will see a £50 donation made to one of three charities working across the North East region to help younger people. They are Teenage Cancer Trust, Shelter and one other local grass roots sport charity, which will change each month.

Weir Insurance is also creating several new jobs including apprenticeships and entry-level insurance roles.

Karen says: "Technology has changed the insurance world so much, so it's actually a great career choice for young tech-savvy people nowadays. Two out of three small businesses have been targeted by cybercrime and this means the industry needs new talent that understands the modern business risks.

Weir Insurance is an independent North East firm that works with businesses across the region and, as it celebrates 50 years, it has committed to remaining independent by recruiting and training the next generation of talent.

The firm has announced it intends to recruit five new apprentices over the next five years.



## SOUTH TYNESIDE COMPANY ACCELERATES OUT OF THE PANDEMIC THANKS TO COVID- RECOVERY GRANT

JC Events, based at One Trinity Green, was on a strong growth curve prior to the outbreak of Covid-19, designing and manufacturing exhibition stands and conference layouts and also supplying audio visual, props and room dressings for a vast range of clients in the public and private sectors.

Jacqui Chapman, who owns the business, realised that she would have to adapt very quickly if she was to continue her business. She took advice from the business support team at South Tyneside Council, devised a strategy that included developing virtual events, introduced a range of Safetouch products designed to prevent the proliferation of bacteria and also manufactured PPE equipment in the fight against Covid 19.

Jacqui Chapman, said: "I very much appreciated the support I received from South Tyneside Council and others such as my financial advisor, who brought to my attention the potential grants available through Open North Foundation. I was fascinated to learn that it was not a government-backed initiative but that it was a spontaneous and truly inspirational response from fellow businesspeople to help their own during one of the most catastrophic periods in modern Britain. The fact that this initiative came out of the North East made it all the more impressive.

"I am delighted to say all areas of our business are now operating at full capacity, we are once again working across the UK and we are most grateful for the £1,250 grant that allowed us to hire a van and so give us an additional resource during this time

To support the Open North Foundation with funding, please go to [opennorthfoundation.co.uk](http://opennorthfoundation.co.uk)

## NEW CHAIR APPOINTED TO NORTH EAST COLLEGE GROUP

The largest college group in the North East region has appointed its new chair.

Education Partnership North East (EPNE), which comprises Sunderland College, Hartlepool Sixth Form College and Northumberland College, has announced that its new group chair is James Stuart, an experienced senior leader who boasts an impressive track record working across a range of sectors.

James, who is founder and director of One Planet Consulting, a Darlington based business which supports senior leaders to develop sustainable sector and business strategies, was appointed following a rigorous recruitment process to replace outgoing chair Rob Lawson OBE.

James' appointment will see him work alongside chief executive, Ellen Thinnesen, and the group's senior leadership team, to shape the strategic direction of EPNE and ensure that the governing body offers robust and effective challenge and diversity of thinking.



Ellen Thinnesen OBE, chief executive of EPNE, said: "I am thrilled and delighted that James has agreed to join us as chair of the board, and bring his wealth of experience and expertise to help us on our exciting journey as an ambitious college group.

"We have taken great strides over the last few years, following mergers with Hartlepool Sixth Form College and more recently Northumberland College, and we have hugely exciting plans for further significant capital investment that will boost our estates and position us perfectly to support our students and communities in emerging industries, fuelling the green economy."

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## PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

By now - and forgive my cynicism - most of us will have left our 'new year, new me' vibes well and truly in January, with a nod to 'good effort'. But while many of us spend time looking at goals, how many of us create a written down plan and focus on the 'same but better' rather than new and different?

We constantly strive for the new and exciting but mastering a current skill is equally important. Economics, markets and industries can be and certainly have been in a constant state of flux. We too, are evolving, and I challenge one person who hasn't changed in some way in the last few years - we are not the same people we were nor are we operating in the same climate. The way we engage and technology changes; customer and maybe even our own expectations are also changing at a rate of knots.

So, like many things in life, to see a significant shift, we need to commit, to stay motivated, have a plan and to ensure we reflect on it. And that is where Continued Professional Development (CPD) comes in. A commitment to improve not only new skills but mastery, refinement and development of our existing ones. To in essence, take your learning to the next level both personally and professionally.

Entering Sales or Marketing 15 years ago would have required a remarkably different skillset than if you enter today. So, whilst CPD may be mandatory in many sectors; the sales industry has fallen behind. The requirement to upskill in existing roles, rather than just 'as and when'; is often overlooked so I am crowning 2022 as the Year of CPD for Sales Professionals.



Jessica Williams

When was the last time you developed a plan for yourself or indeed worked with your sales team to create one? How relevant are the skills now? How are you ensuring you maintain their effectiveness, keep up to speed with a changing market AND prioritise training needs alongside daily business duties?

CPD is now so widely accessible that we may overlook exactly what can constitute it... Whether it be certifications, qualifications, TEDtalks or staying up to date with industry news - continuous learning is key to improving and staying alert to the markets we work in.

Creating a CPD does not need to be complex or lengthy but should be realistic. One page with a simple template of month-by-month, theme-by-theme, desired outcomes and importantly - some form of metric to measure its success is all it needs to be. But it must be maintained and constantly evolve.

Training c2000 people in the last two years, we have learnt a lot about the crucial nature

of CPD, especially in the profession of sales. An active and engaged sales professional with a current and live CPD with specific KPIs, metrics and personal goals is more likely to be better engaged, provide a stronger performance, remain loyal and support others to do the same. As an endorsed training provider through the Institute of Sales Professionals ([www.the-isp.org](http://www.the-isp.org)) we provide a wide range of 30-minute CPD sessions aimed at the sales professional (even if you don't call yourself that!) Startups, small business owners who have to do it all - this is for you. We also offer in-house full days training, written and tailored to support your journey and ambitions.

Over the next 12 months I'll be bringing you a monthly column on my favourite subject, and one that is vital to all business - SALES. As anything, it's a conversation so let's connect, chat and grow together.

**Jessica@JustWilliamsLtd.co.uk**  
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## COVER STORY

## IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Howie White Resourcing appoint new Managing Director

When David Taylor joined Howie White Resourcing, straight out of university, he didn't predict that in nine short years that he would be at the helm of the first and only recruitment company that he has worked for.

Fast forward to 2022 and David is now the Managing Director, taking over from Fred Howie, who is taking a sideways step.

"Although I didn't realise it at the time, I now know that this was always Fred's plan, that at some point he would hand things over to someone else, but he needed to be 100 per cent certain that the new MD would ensure that the company continues to build and be successful." said David. "As far as our clients are concerned, nothing will change - and that's incredibly important because we have some clients who have been with us from the day we opened for business in 1999. They need to be certain that the level of service and attention to detail which we have become renowned for, will continue."

David is a rarity in the world of recruitment, in that he hasn't worked for another recruitment company and has no intention of going anywhere else. Anyone who has dealt with recruitment firms will know that it's highly unlikely that you'll speak to the same person twice. To say the industry has a reputation for people flitting from one firm to another, is an understatement.

"Clients like to build relationships with recruitment firms. You can't do that if the agency is continually changing staff. It's a merry-go-round. Clients need to have confidence that the person they are dealing with is up to the task. It's why here at Howie White Resourcing we have a core of around 30 clients who come back to us on a regular basis. It's also why nearly all of our new clients come from referrals. Clients like the way we operate and are more than happy to pass on our details. We take that as a massive compliment."

David is not one to rest on his laurels and, whilst respecting the successful business model that Howie White has worked to over the last 23 years, is keen to drive the business forward. Fred's ethos had always been that

"nothing beats face to face meetings with both clients and candidates." This still stands true to David who agrees and has no plans to change this method – "we know that candidates and clients alike benefit from face to face meetings. There are some things that can't be conveyed over email, phone or even web calls, however, we didn't anticipate COVID coming along and forcing us all to be more comfortable over a web chat."

Zoom, Skype, Teams – whatever your poison, we have all used them recently and David has seen potential in a new way to do business. "I will always be available for a face-to-face meeting, whether formal or over a coffee. However, there is definitely a place for hopping online to have a call. We have had clients hold first to final interviews over Zoom, presented shortlists over Skype and discussed job specs over Teams. They can be quicker, easier to fit in to people's busy diaries and give an alternative when we are being advised to work from home."

David, with Fred alongside him in a consultancy capacity are keeping Howie White's standards and successes of finding the right people for the right roles are the forefront of everything they do. From initial client meeting to discuss job requirements to shortlisting to interview processes – they are keen to be flexible in this ever-changing landscape. Fred himself has noticed a sudden shift in recruitment requirements in the last two years "since COVID hit, and working from home became the norm, we are increasingly seeing clients wanting to broaden their searches and cast the net further. It is now common practice for an employee to be present in the office once or twice a month but work from home the rest of the time. This has allowed us to fill more diverse and challenging roles by having a larger geographical scope."

It has also lead to a shift in the responsiveness of candidates, arguably it has never been easier to achieve a work/life balance. By working from home or hybrid working, we can choose breakfast with the kids over an hours commute to the office every day. One who fully appreciates this is David, with an eleven month old at home, he says "it's great to be able to be there at bed time every day, a luxury that working from home has afforded me."

So, it's all change. In the wider world and in the recruitment world. Except from the perspective of Howie White's clients where it is business as usual.

**To find out more about Howie White or discuss any opportunities, email [david@howiewhite.co.uk](mailto:david@howiewhite.co.uk)**

“

**...As far as  
our clients are  
concerned, nothing  
will change...**





**“  
...be kind on  
yourself, not just  
others...”**

# MAKING 2022 COUNT

Steve Black, also known as Blackie, is well known in the sporting world for his positive mind and fit body wellbeing approach. More recently he has been using his knowledge and extensive experience to help businesses, individuals, and community groups through his latest venture Protean Solutions.

Here, as 2022 has got off to strange start for many, he looks at how we make this year count and offers some tips on staying motivated through challenging times:

"We all thought 2022 would be a normal year, that by now we would see the end of lockdown threats, reduced numbers in infection and business would be flying again.

"Instead, more people than ever are infected with Covid-19, businesses are short staffed due to illness and self-isolations, people are spending and socialising differently and despite vaccine numbers climbing and death numbers falling every day we are still living under uncertainty over how we can operate day-to-day.

"Masks in the work environment help protect everyone but they visually remind all of the unusual circumstances we sadly find ourselves in and we are all feeling disappointed that things are not where we hoped they would be.

"BUT, let's look to a brighter thought stream. Things are improving. Businesses are still operating. Many companies have survived, some have thrived, and others are still stable. There is a lot of opportunity out there and it is currently an employee's market to find a dream role or for business owners to make their mark. I've seen some great innovations taking place with individuals and teams that I work with and that's been as a result of coming under great pressure, being forced out of comfort zones.

"One thing I have noticed is how the business community has pulled together – organisations working together to ensure the good of everyone. And there are a lot of heartening stories of how by supporting each other, we are succeeding.

"And that's where my tips for a fulfilling and motivated year start...Make yourself feel better by helping others. Build it into your daily list of things to do. Who can I help today? Where can I make a difference? By doing this you will feel better, and you will also get more back in return. As I've said before, the only thing you can't give away is kindness as it will always find its way back to you.

"Another tip is to be kind on yourself, not just others. Accept your limitations, focus on improvement, but always make time for you to rest and spend time with family, friends and doing something that makes you feel good. Life has to be a balance; without it we all fail. We must enjoy our journeys and we maximise that with great people around us playing to our strengths.

"I speak with such wonderful people and I share with them the benefits of finding yourself a coach, a buddy, a confidante, a mentor, a peer group, whatever you want to call it that fits. Talking solves a lot of mental health strains

and issues. None of us are islands or should try to cope alone, so having that rock or safe place in your life can be very appealing and can help you to refocus and obtain perspective. Often an outside opinion makes a challenge or issue seem not as big!

"I strongly encourage everyone to write everything down. I always start the day writing a plan setting my goals; and I end the day with a journal entry on how I feel I honestly performed and why. Self-reflection is very important.

"Cultivate a plan for yourself but don't be afraid to change it. This is where writing everything down helps. It will help you understand what is working, what isn't and assist your memory when you look back. Planning is good, but change can be better. Being too rigid can cause problems.

"Finally, look after yourself physically, don't neglect your body due to heavy work pressures – make sure it gets lots of water and regular, healthy intakes of food. This makes your brain all that sharper. Which all in all helps you succeed.

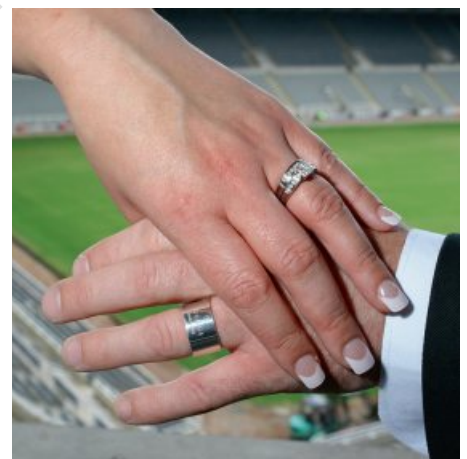
"Go and make 2022 count, be kind, enjoy life. God Bless you all."

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

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

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

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



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We recently became Hexham Racecourse's exclusive partner for catering and events planning which is testament to our team's expertise.

**For more information, to enquire about external catering and events planning, bus hire or to book please contact our events team on 0191 214 5588 or email [events@newcastle-falcons.co.uk](mailto:events@newcastle-falcons.co.uk)**

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EVENTSATFALCONS



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

## TIME NOT TIMING

The latter part of 2021 and early 2022 have been choppy waters for investors to sail. It will have made some readers wary of investing at all, others perhaps waiting for the ideal time to commit their savings.

Fact is you are unlikely to get it right. Timing when to be in or out of the markets has never been consistently achieved by even the greatest investors. The best known and most successful investor to date is Warren Buffet, "The Sage of Omaha" as he is also referred to. His approach is to buy and hold. He intends investing in the companies he buys "forever."

Many investment houses have looked at this issue. Last year Schroder produced an article with some interesting figures in it.

"If at the beginning of 1986 you had invested £1,000 in the FTSE 250 and left the investment alone for the next 35 years, it might have been worth £43,595 by January 2021 (bear in mind, of course, that past performance is no guarantee of future returns).

However, the outcome would have been very different if you had tried to time your entry in and out of the market.

During the same period, if you missed out on the FTSE250 index's 30 best days the same investment might now be worth £10,627, or £32,968 less, not adjusted for the effect of charges or inflation.

Over the last 35 years your original £1,000

investment in the FTSE 250 could have made:

- 11.4% per year if you stayed invested the whole time
- 9.5% per year if you missed the 10 best days
- 8.1% per year if you missed the 20 best days
- 7% per year if you missed the 30 best days

The 1.9% difference to annual returns between being invested the whole time and missing the 10 best days doesn't seem much. But the compounding effect builds up over time. If you had invested in the FTSE 250 it could have cost you more than £19,000 during that time."

I would make a couple of points here. This experience is repeated in all major markets throughout the world. Secondly, Schroder have chosen to illustrate the FTSE250 index which is referred to as "mid cap," i.e., the next 250 companies by way of market value below the top 100 in size, which sit in the FTSE100. It exaggerates the point as research, which we follow, has shown that smaller companies outperform larger companies over time, but not every year.

A critical issue is that human nature

encourages us to panic and want to sell our investments when markets have gone down and buy when the markets have gone up. Simply not the right thing to do!

The value in being advised comes from learning to avoid emotional investing and building a diverse investment strategy that you can have confidence in and hold the investments through all market conditions.

***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.***

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

***Peter Rutherford is a director at Rutherford Hughes Ltd. He can be contacted on 0191 229 9600 [peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com](mailto:peter.rutherford@rutherfordhughes.com)***

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Karl Pemberton

## MAKING A DIFFERENCE

The Institute of Directors (IoD) has lots to offer directors aspiring to be the best and to make a real difference in their communities.

Here we hear from member Karl Pemberton who is Managing Director of Active Chartered Financial Planners and also Chair for the IoD North East (South).

### Tell us about your role today.

Active Chartered Financial Planners is a family business which I joined having worked in banking for 12 years. We are independent financial advisors for the medium to high net worth, private client and business owner space. My role is about 30-40% client facing from the financial planning perspective, and I spend the remaining 60-70% of the time actually being the MD and running the business strategically.

### Why did you invest in your personal development via the IoD's Chartered Director programme?

As a business, we have grown each year since I joined in 2007. We thought we were doing well, we knew what we were doing, and that the journey would simply continue. However, in practical terms we soon realised that to continue our focus on being the best in our industry, we needed

to become 'better' directors. It meant the timing was right for me to focus on personal development through the IoD's Chartered Director programme. The ambition was to become a better managing director, run a better business and recruit the best financial advisors and other experts in their field. With that approach being scalable we could build out on that premise. I'm glad to say we've achieved exactly that.

### What impact has it has for your organisation?

After taking the IoD's Chartered Director programme, Active Chartered Financial Planners started to evolve significantly and we are now a multi million pound company in terms of turnover. Of course, we hadn't bargained for the COVID-19 pandemic which then hit but thankfully the learnings from the programme were at the forefront of my mind.

They were a great reminder that the fundamental principles of business are the same regardless of what you are selling and, to an extent, the circumstances in which you are selling. We focused on knowing the market, worked on the core governance

that drives the business, and focused hard on the finances and leadership. We even posted another record year last year, with all likelihood of a repeat performance this year. The IoD gave me such an education really - I wouldn't be where I am and the business wouldn't be where it is if it wasn't for them.

### You're the IoD North East (South) branch chair. Why is membership and volunteering with the organisation important to you?

Membership and volunteering is important to me because it helps create an ecosystem of resources that benefits all of us. Our members deserve access to improved knowledge, growth prospects for their own businesses and the benefit of access to the regional professional network. It is like having a professional little Black Book - interwoven connections that benefit members either directly or via referrals and collective problem solving.

Being branch chair also means the opportunity to shepherd the organisation in a direction of influence. This really matters in a geographical area like Teesside which I feel is professionally overlooked due to being in the geographical shadow of Newcastle and Leeds.

**To find out more about IoD membership and Chartered Director programme, please visit [www.ioD.com](http://www.ioD.com) or contact the local branch chair Sarah Waddington at [chair.nenorth@IoD.com](mailto:chair.nenorth@IoD.com)**



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Georgia Boddy

## THE ASPIRATIONAL MEMBERSHIP FOR 2022

2022 is going to be all about investing in ourselves, in our wellbeing, in our knowledge and in our ability to do and be the best we can. As part of that, individuals are looking for routes to access new, enhancing additions to their life.

In response, the fintech business with purpose, Cascade Cash Management has launched a new exclusive membership ideal for those who are aspirational about their own or their client's cash.

By joining the Cascade Community with the exclusive membership, participants receive complimentary access to exclusive Full Flow, Deep Dive and Rapid Networking Events featuring eminent guest speakers. Each event covers a hot topic in the world of finance, business or wellbeing and allows for networking as well as learning, complete with CPD accreditation!

Members also get access to Cascade's savings hotline number, ensuring direct contact to an expert who can answer questions about cash, savings, deposits and rates as well as receiving limitless access to Cascade's market leading dataset of live savings rates.

And as an added bonus, everyone who

joins get complimentary Pirkx membership offering online healthcare access, lifestyle benefits, discounts and vouchers. Georgia Boddy, Head of Operations at Cascade said:

"Cascade is all about capturing the essence of savings made simple – helping people reach their savings goals faster, smarter and happier. Many returns that could be gained on cash are being missed and some larger deposits aren't in the best place to be protected.

"With our Cascade Community we are creating an opportunity to look after cash better, and to look after wellbeing, taking stress away and giving access to things such as medical assistance and counselling, as well as great financial deals via Pirkx. Memberships need to have a positive impact and this all ties in with our commitment to be a business with purpose, supporting individuals, creating opportunity and building savings communities."

The events hosted by Cascade across 2022 are set to be informative and enjoyable, following the success of the Full Flow launch event in December with Jonny Wilkinson CBE and Prof Steve Black, also known as Blackie.

Dr Emma Black, Co-founder and CEO of Cascade said: "Pirkx is just one company we at Cascade will be partnering with, to bring exciting and exclusive benefits to our members, clients and customers. This is a time of development for our team as we focus on doing well, to do good. The Cascade Community is the start of the next steps of collaboration and focus to ensure simple, effective options for cash that improves lives."

***If you want to know more about Cascade Community then please contact the Cascader's on [Georgia.boddy@cascade.co.uk](mailto:Georgia.boddy@cascade.co.uk)***



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Paul Holborow

## RMT TECHNOLOGY GOING FOR GROWTH

The specialist technology sister company of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is going for growth in 2022 after capitalising on increasing demand for its services over the last two years.

Led by directors Paul Holborow and Mike Hayes, RMT Technology has worked primarily with SMEs across the North East but is increasingly helping clients in Yorkshire and the North West identify and implement hardware and software solutions which meet their specific business and operational needs.

The explosion in home working during the pandemic and the related need for remote, secure access to technology services has seen demand for RMT Technology's IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services increase significantly.

The business is looking to grow the team during 2022 and is already working on plans to operate in other parts of the UK.

Paul Holborow says: "The move to remote and home working over the last two years has brought the importance of data security, information management and technology infrastructure into very sharp focus. Our business has flourished as clients have needed to source robust new solutions to their changing technology needs.

"RMT Technology focuses on understanding what businesses want to achieve from both a commercial and operational point of view and then identifies technologies that will best suit those specific needs, whether these are cloud-based, 'on premise' solutions or a mix of both.

"We have a broad client base covering a wide range of

sectors which gives us a wealth of experience to draw upon. The development of our business will be achieved through us being able to demonstrate to clients and potential clients the benefits that technology solutions can deliver and, most importantly, a better appreciation of the commercial value they can add.

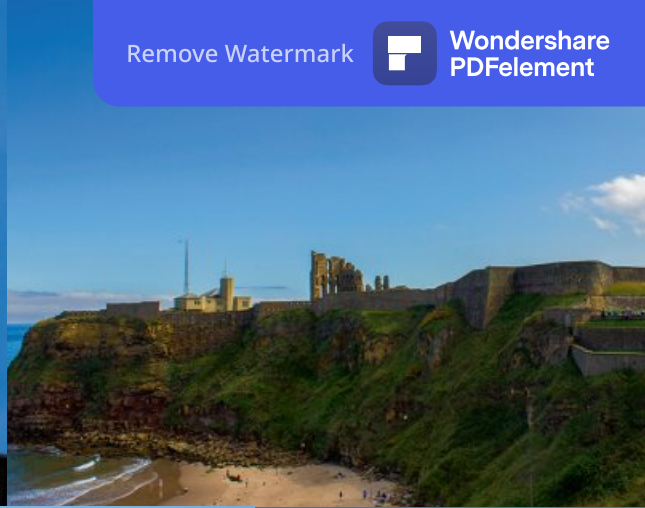
"Clients are continuing to invest in new on premise and cloud-based solutions, along with the essential security measures required to back them up, and we expect the emphasis on flexibility in the workplace to be the driver for this trend to continue.

"RMT Technology has a highly-skilled and qualified team, which we are looking to expand, to enable us to establish a presence in new locations as the business develops."

Stephen Slater, director of commercial services at RMT Accountants & Business Advisors, adds: "RMT Technology is an important part of our group and has the potential to grow significantly in a commercial environment where its services have never been more in demand."

**For further information on the services provided by RMT Technology, please call 0191 256 9550 or email [paul.holborow@rmttechnology.co.uk](mailto:paul.holborow@rmttechnology.co.uk)**





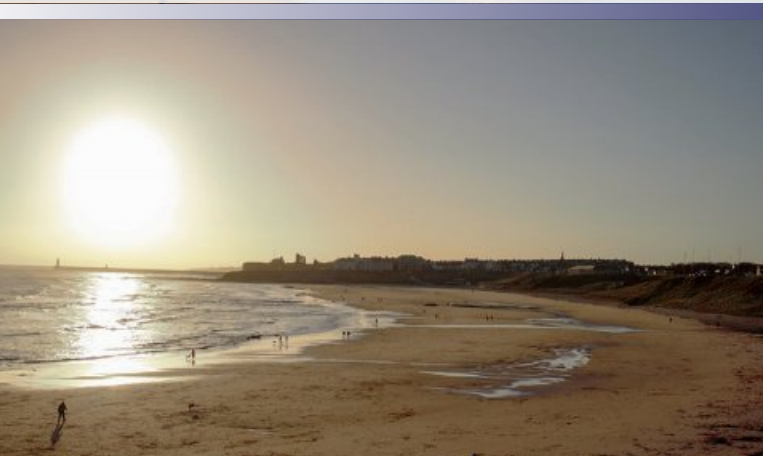
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## NUDGE MINDS THINKING OF GROWTH PLANS AFTER SECURING SECOND NEL INVESTMENT

Two North East entrepreneurs are looking to grow a second successful education sector business with the help of a further five-figure investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported By The European Regional Development Fund.

Brian Mair and Diego Melo worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers in 2019 to secure a £40,000 Small Loan Fund investment which enabled them to implement their growth plans for Nudge Education, which helps disenfranchised young people reengage with education.

And they have now accessed a further £28,000 investment from the fund to assist with the expansion of Nudge Minds, a separate business which provides personalised therapeutic interventions for young people in need of support.

The investment is being used to help bring in specialist staff, support the firm's drive towards securing further industry accreditations, improving its website and enhancing its marketing activity.

Mike Guellard, investment executive at NEL Fund Managers, adds: "Brian and Diego are utilising their specialist sector knowledge to help hundreds of young people find ways to improve their personal situations and future prospects, and are building very successful businesses along the way."

It is designed to assist with the creation of over 1,200 new regional jobs in more than 320 SMEs over the life of the fund.

NEL is also responsible for investing the £18m North East Growth Capital Fund, which offers unsecured investments of up to £500,000 to established businesses looking to realise their growth potential.

## ALPHA CARD CREATES JOBS FOLLOWING NPIF – FW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Leeds-based manufacturer of printed marketing and communication materials Alpha Card Compact Media Ltd has secured a six-figure investment through NPIF - FW Capital Debt Finance, managed by FW Capital and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF).

An international exporter, Alpha Card has over 15 years' experience of manufacturing and distributing hundreds of millions of printed marketing materials, such as Z-Fold Cards and Infinity Folding Cards, throughout Europe, North America, Australia and Africa.

The investment from the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund will provide additional working capital for export growth and will allow the company to expand into



new markets. Funding will also lead to the creation of four new roles at the business, as it looks to grow the numbers of staff. The deal was facilitated by FW Capital Investment Executive Andy Castle.

FW Capital Investment Executive Andy Castle said: "We are delighted to support Alpha Card, a highly-regarded company that has the manufacturing expertise to deliver industry-leading products both quickly and efficiently. Alpha Card has created new jobs with this investment and has forecasted continued growth, meaning their important products can now be delivered to even more clients."



## MAVEN INVESTS £10 MILLION IN NORTH EAST BUSINESSES IN 2021

Maven celebrates a busy year investing in 18 local businesses across the region and creating and supporting 300 jobs

Maven Capital Partners ("Maven"), one of the UK's most active private equity houses, is delighted to announce that it has invested a total of £10 million in 18 dynamic, high growth businesses in the North East region in 2021. This significant level of investment has been achieved through Maven's management of regional funds in the North East, alongside its suite of private equity funds.

Local companies that received funding last year include innovative performance

marketing services provider, Leaf; specialist food and beverage canning, sterilisation and pasteurisation business, CRL Foods; and intelligent software solutions provider for rail and construction, Project Control Tools.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven, said: "We see the North East as a hotbed of innovation, brimming with ambitious entrepreneurs, who are being supported by a thriving business community. We are delighted to celebrate such a great achievement in 2021. We've invested in some exciting local businesses and, through Maven's multiple funding streams, have been able to back our portfolio at various stages of their growth journey.

"Despite the uncertain economic climate we're experiencing, it's been great to work with so many of the North East's innovative companies to help raise their profiles, secure major new contracts and raise the finance required to implement their growth strategies."



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## 2022 - WHAT NEXT FOR M&A?

2021 was a record-breaking period for mergers and acquisitions, with deal activity incredibly high due to a combination of factors.

Not only did fears about tax hikes stimulate a flurry of deals prior to 3 March 2021 but we also experienced a post lockdown "bounce" as deals previously placed on hold reactivated and multiple ownership and management teams emerged from their home offices with a desire to de-risk and ultimately move their assets onward.

Private Equity has also been a driving force behind deal flow, with a period of hiatus during spring 2020 leading to a back log of deals and ultimately in undeployed capital which needed to find a home - and this buyer population has therefore hit the pavement hard, with buy and build strategies becoming ever frequent and new investments now finding their way into sectors and teams which were perhaps ignored in years gone by.

**Momentum therefore exists and the start of 2022 appears no different, with some experts predicting comparable deal flow for 12-18 months.**

The landscape, however, remains fraught with risk and some of that risk is now beginning to crystallise. Government support schemes are now scaling back, with existing initiatives operating in their final months and offering much reduced cover for those lucky enough to qualify.

Further schemes will no doubt follow but these cannot be expected to match those initially introduced and hence we find ourselves in an era where risk lurks across supply chains and customer bases - and insolvency activity is now indicating the end has been reached for some. The movement in insolvency action is no surprise,

indebtedness in some quarters has ramped beyond a sustainable or viable level and the softening of rules and regulations permitting creditor action have now tightened back up. Compounded by the crown preference, which has received very little coverage, funders are now appraising their books with a higher degree of scrutiny and those seeking top up facilities or even looking to renew may start to face issues. For these reasons we are now seeing more accelerated transactions - the kind where trade and assets are brokered rather than share capital.

### Labour supply is a critical risk

Looking closer at supply we must also recognise that labour supply is perhaps a critical risk for most - with working patterns now completely different and some sectors in desperation as they look to compliment and replace their existing and lost team members. BREXIT is one issue behind this, but the consequences could be longer term in duration particularly when inflation is considered.

**2022 will therefore likely be a period where movement in businesses remains prevalent-** whether that be due to changes in ownership or for other reasons. We may well start to hear about a growing population of "losers" 'as well as "winners" - with risk reviews, due diligence, careful planning and more planning on top of that likely to be essential. Risk can feel like an intangible factor to assess, but the monetary impact is starting to be felt and the use of matrices and reliance on advisors could make a real difference in the coming months.



Private equity thirst will show no derailment and is going to be a key source of capital for M&A, with some investments also likely to be moved onward again - with the passage of investments throughout the PE ecosystem amongst operators in the UK and beyond.

Trade buyers with capital will remain active, and the endless number of cold approaches faced by some businesses will likely continue, with a worrying proportion of these buyers likely to include those without their own capital or a track record in executing such purchases. This may not be a bad thing and a volume of leveraged buy outs will commence but selling businesses will need to be wise and conscious as to the capabilities and backing of the approaching parties, not to mention the deliverability of their purported plans.

My advice is therefore simple - good luck for the year ahead and make the most of the growth opportunities which may present themselves, but do not lose sight of what your suppliers, customers and competitors are doing and keep your funder(s) onside. Approaches to acquire/transact with you should be assessed with caution and be sure that you understand and agree with all terms and conditions which may apply.

**For further advice please contact Lee Humble, Associate Partner, Corporate Finance at MHA Tait Walker on 0191 285 0321 [lee.humble@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:lee.humble@taitwalker.co.uk)**



## DELOITTE ADVISES ON £1.5BILLION OF FINANCING TRANSACTIONS IN THE SECOND HALF OF 2021

The northern Debt and Capital Advisory team at Deloitte has seen a surge in demand for credit solutions across its portfolio of clients.

Led by Anil Gupta, partner in the North, the team has advised on eight completed transactions in the six months to December 2021, with a number of high profile northern-based clients, including Zenith, Maria Mallaband, Shepherd Group, PureGym\* and multiple mid-market Private Equity houses.

Anil Gupta, partner in the Debt and Capital Advisory team at Deloitte, commented: "Whilst the M&A market was extremely buoyant in 2021, with leveraged loan issuance across Europe exceeding €100bn, the effects of the pandemic continued to impact a number of businesses and sectors.

"This has driven the supply of a broad range of credit structures which can address individual borrowers' requirements. A key trend of 2021 which will continue this year is credit investors' focus on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG), whether this be as part of the investor's client onboarding and diligence procedures, or via the loan documentation itself. ESG links to capital deployment is very likely to become mainstream in 2022, as borrower ESG strategies continue to gain momentum and investor scrutiny on how capital is deployed increases."

Deloitte continues to invest in its Debt and Capital Advisory team as it anticipates continued activity in 2022. This increased activity was echoed in the firm's latest survey of Chief Financial Officers, which suggests rising business confidence and capital investment. The team consists of over 100 people nationally and in the North it has recently grown with three new hires in the last six months, including Alexandra Cadar (formerly HSBC), David Dawber (formerly Santander) and Steve Webber (an internal hire) who is focused on securitisation and structured finance products nationally.

Adam Sookia, director in Debt and Capital Advisory at Deloitte in the North, said: "2021 was an encouraging year for financing activity; whilst the initial implications of the COVID-19 pandemic provided opportunities and challenges for multiple sectors, the aftermath has seen many of our clients prioritise debt led solutions to support their business priorities.



## HW GLOBAL ANNOUNCES FURTHER ACQUISITION AFTER ACQUIRING A MAJORITY SHAREHOLDING IN OSMII

HW Global has today announced a further acquisition in the digital recruitment market after securing a majority shareholding in Osmii.

The London-based development, cloud and digital recruitment specialist, which was founded by Xavier Osipczak and Neil Mitchell in 2011, places senior talent into disruptive start-ups, major software players and game-changing brands on a permanent, contract and interim basis.

CEO Spencer Jinks said: "Osmii is an exceptional business and fits perfectly within the HW Global group. Alongside Zebra People, Osmii will enable us to provide even greater support to our clients in the fast-moving digital and technology sectors that have quickly become a cornerstone of the global economy

Advising HW Global on the acquisition of Osmii was Newcastle-based RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) led by Partner and Head of Corporate Finance, Carl Swansbury, supported by CF Manager Connor McBride and CF Executive Ben Kain.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, said: "Since RGCF was engaged by HW Global in 2020 we have worked incredibly closely with its directors to identify businesses that would deliver upon its ambitions to enter new markets and increase market share. The digital sector is a fast-growing industry which requires expert staffing solutions and the combination of Zebra People and Osmii within the HW Global group will be of real benefit to the market, along with existing clients and candidates alike."

## NEL FUND MANAGERS INJECTS OVER £5.5M INTO NORTH EAST FIRMS IN BUSIEST EVER INVESTMENT YEAR

The North East's longest-standing business investor has made investments worth a total of over £5.5m in regional firms during what has been its busiest ever investment year.

NEL Fund Managers has complete 61 separate investments in businesses across Tyne & Wear, Northumberland and County Durham during 2021, at an average of more than one new deal every week, despite the team having to predominantly work separately and remotely through the year.

NEL is responsible for managing two elements of the £120m North East Fund Supported By The European Regional Development Fund - the £9m North East Small Loan Fund and the £18m North East Growth Capital Fund.



As a result of the investments made by NEL since the North East Fund was launched in 2018, an additional £4.8m of private sector leverage has been secured this year, while almost 250 new jobs have also been created.

Dr Yvonne Gale, chief executive at NEL Fund Managers, says: "There is never a shortage of strong business ideas coming out of the North East business community, and despite the many and varied challenges that we've all faced this year, we've been able to invest more than we ever have before in helping to bring these ideas to fruition."



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## CAVU CORPORATE FINANCE – RECORD BREAKING 2021

2021 was an extraordinary year for the M&A markets with a number of high profile deals completing in the North East. True Potential secured investment from Cinven, Carlyle Group invested in END Clothing, Fairstone secured further private equity backing from TA Associates and Tombola was acquired by Flutter Entertainment.

At Cavu, we had a fantastic 12 months which saw us advise on a record number of high quality transactions. We focus on delivering clients exceptional results, and we are pleased to have done that consistently throughout 2021 across a number of transaction types, including equity raises, cross-border transactions, and strategic acquisitions.

Cavu prides itself on establishing excellent long-term relationships with our clients and we are proud to have done that throughout our journey. 2021 was no different and saw us advise a number of our retained clients on important transactions, including advising the £450m turnover United Living (formerly Fastflow) and Elysian Capital on the acquisition of Great British Communications. This was the third acquisition we have advised United Living on following initially advising on the investment from Elysian in 2017.

We also advised the shareholders of J&B

Recycling on the sale to global waste-management provider, Urbaser. We initially advised J&B on the £7.5m BGF investment in 2014 and we were delighted to be retained to secure an excellent exit result for all shareholders with a sale to the Spanish buyer.

The corporate M&A market also remained buoyant throughout, and we also advised the shareholders of Cumbria-based premium cycling retailer, Wheelbase on the sale to FTSE 100 listed JD Sports Plc. The acquisition of Wheelbase was important in JD's expansion plans in the cycling market, at a time where the sector has been experiencing significant growth with a renewed focus on health and fitness.

Cavu also has vast experience of private equity transactions and has a market-leading reputation of delivering on such transactions. In 2021 we saw a number of businesses raise capital to supercharge growth.

For example, we advised the shareholders of

Bazaar Group on a £10m equity investment from Comhar Capital. The investment from Comhar Capital was important to the business to support international growth plans, and to continue its growth as a market-leading e-commerce furniture company.

We also advised BGF on the £14m equity investment into Bloom Procurement and HiComply on the £3m development capital investment from BGF to support scaling in a rapidly growing compliance software market.

We are pleased that 2022 has also got off to a great start with another cross-border transaction, advising Pacifica Group and Synova Capital on the sale of Pacifica Home Services to €3bn revenue German corporate Viessmann.

We expect the M&A market to be strong in the short to medium term and for valuations to remain high for the next 6-12 months. The outlook for the M&A market in the longer term is less certain but there remains a significant amount of dry powder within the private equity market seeking a home with businesses requiring development capital or business owners seeking to de-risk. We also expect corporates to continue pursuing strategic M&A opportunities.

This makes now the perfect time for entrepreneurs and business owners to consider their options.

The Cavu team would be delighted to meet to discuss your plans and aspirations and how M&A or private equity can help achieve your goals.

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

# EXPERIENCE BANK GROUP LAUNCHES NEW KEY MANAGER PEER GROUP



Peter Neal, founder of Experience Bank Group, is delighted to announce not one, but two opportunities for a number of the region's key managers to benefit from leading peer group access.

Employers who put forward their management team members can expect flourishing talent to grow, reaping rewards from individuals who will be given the accountability to become the best version of themselves.

Joining the Experience Bank Group's team to deliver the two cohorts are Stephen Green and Angela Huntley, who are also co-founders of CUBED Mindset. They both bring the knowledge and experience to deliver the key management peer groups which are based upon the core foundations of psychological safety, meaning members can expect to go on a rewarding journey of personal development and managerial peer learning.

Exploring personal growth areas such as emotional intelligence, perception, dynamics, leadership versus management, brand, culture and diversity, many business topics will also be covered. These include strategy, culture, employee engagement, customer experience, data, corporate storytelling, project management and more.

Peter, whose established peer groups for aspiring NEDs, Trustees and Board Advisors are extremely popular, said: "Peer groups are beginning to be the core to the success of many individual's careers. Many suggest

they are the future of management and leadership development. With that in mind we are keen to work with CEOs, MDs and their HR Leads in SMEs and charities who wish to invest in their brightest talent.

"I am really looking forward to seeing the impact Stephen and Angela bring and am excited to work with them throughout 2022 and beyond."

Peer groups involve working with like-minded people, effectively sharing knowledge, learning skills, finding solutions, and exploring ideas.

Stephen said: "Following a chance conversation with Peter that led to the creation of the new peer group programme, I can't wait to now start delivery. Each group has only ten to twelve places, so interested parties need to get in touch soon.

"The three of us share a lot of values, and agree on the value of good peer support groups. Taking people out of their comfort zone equals growth and development that benefit both the individual and their employer."

Another benefit of peer groups is the relationships that are formed between members. Angela said: "Having been working with peer group cohorts for a

number of years, it is so rewarding to see them flourish. If managers only learn from those who manage them, clones are created. This kind of investment brings to a company diversity in skills and approach, as well as building confidence, a sense of self and growing trust in the team. Soft skills are just as important as hard-edged business acumen, and a connected team will always perform well so we combine both into our sessions."

Experience Bank Group incorporates The Experience Bank philanthropic, social enterprise company along with a commercial venture providing three symbiotic services - EB Board Level Recruitment, EB High Performing Boards and EB Continuous Professional Development.

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 leadership team and boardroom but also optimum board performance with higher value creation.

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 about the new management peer group then visit [theexperiencebank.co.uk/management-peer-groups](https://theexperiencebank.co.uk/management-peer-groups) or call Peter on 07843 329393.**

# FOUR KEY UPDATES YOU NEED TO KNOW IF YOU'RE CLAIMING R&D TAX CREDITS

Jessica Brook, Tax Incentives and Reliefs Manager at Haines Watts discusses all of the vital changes you need to be aware of if you're claiming for R&D tax credits.

Jessica Brook

Innovation has long been cited as one of the critical factors for business success. And for those who have pushed the boundaries and adopted a forward-thinking approach, research and development tax relief can provide a real cashflow injection.

The relief will play a huge role in the Government's big plan to raise total R&D investment to 2.4% of the UK's GDP by 2027. So, it's crucial that our research and development tax relief scheme remains both competitive and up to date.

With this in mind, the Government opened a review into the scheme earlier this year. In the wake of this review and the Autumn Budget, the Government has decided to make some big changes to the UK's R&D tax relief schemes that will take effect from 1 April 2023. Whilst this may seem far away, early preparation will be key for ensuring future claim success.

## Data and cloud computing

After years of campaigning, the scope of R&D qualifying expenditure will finally be broadened to include license payments for datasets, cloud computing and data processing costs directly attributable to R&D activity.

This is a huge milestone for R&D tax relief –bringing the scheme up to date with the demands of modern-day innovation which is often highly dependent on data and cloud processing.

## Innovation in the UK

Any research and development activity which is subcontracted to third parties outside of the UK will no longer qualify for relief, and costs incurred on payments to externally provided workers will only qualify for relief if these workers are paid through a UK payroll.

This will go a long way in ensuring that innovation is UK-focussed. But if your business is currently claiming for R&D expenditure overseas, now is the time to start having conversations with your advisors to understand the impact of the new rules for your business and to ensure you're prepared for the changes.

## Anti-abuse and compliance measures

Over the last year, we've spoken out about the rising cases of improper and fraudulent R&D claims. Because the R&D advisory profession is unregulated, we've seen more unregulated advisors, who are not members of professional bodies, submitting dubious claims.

HMRC have already been making an active bid to address these claims. However, following the consultation on R&D, they have announced that they will be adding even more resource to the R&D tax compliance team and they will be setting up a cross-discipline team which solely focuses on tackling abuse.

HMRC will also be introducing a number of

new measures as of 1 April 2023 to improve compliance, including: all claims being submitted digitally; more detail required to substantiate claims; endorsement by senior officers in the business; and informing HMRC in advance if you're making a claim.

If you already work alongside our advisors, this change won't have a huge impact, as we already provide the level of detail necessitated by HMRC in our R&D reports.

## SME or RDEC?

There's also been further clarification on how the SME scheme will interact with Research and Development Expenditure Credits (RDEC). Going forward, it will be possible to make or increase RDEC claims where certain assessments have been made by HMRC.

Additionally, if your business is growing organically, and you're transitioning from small to large, you will be granted a one year grace period in which you can still retain your SME status.

## Supporting you with R&D tax relief

Whether you're looking for clarity on the new qualifying costs, advice on your overseas activities, or you're just looking for support with your claim, our incentive and reliefs team are on hand to support with you with all your R&D queries.

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

# THIS YEAR...

It's 2022. So here are 22 things to think about – this year. If you allow just one of them to make a difference, that's a good thing.

1. This year, I'll care less about how many different things I do, and more about how well I do what's in front of me.
2. This year, I'll remind myself that the thing to admire most about so many people's photographs of themselves online is neither their diet, fitness discipline nor wonderfully youthful expression. It's their Photoshop skills.
3. This year, I'll face front. I'll be inspired by the person I want to be in the future, not disappointed by any version of myself that I allowed myself to become in the past.
4. This year, the only things I'll look to improve in myself will be 100% because I don't love them and 0% because of how anybody else – at all – feels about them.
5. This year, I'll judge less. Remembering that when I think or articulate negative notions about other people, it says far more about me than it does about them.
6. This year (if I want to), I'll diet more – and talk about dieting less. And I'll go to the gym more – and talk about going to the gym less. (After all, it's me I'm doing it for).
7. This year, I'll remember that a failed goal does not mean a failed future. I'll go again.
8. This year, I'll be more positive about the impact I can have on the world. Because I'll focus less on what I don't have, and more on what I can do with what I do have.
9. This year, I'll pay more attention to who I surround myself with. The company I keep impacts who I become more powerfully than I imagine.
10. This year, when I get frightened, I'll write my fears down, examining also the worst-case scenario linked to each fear. It's unlikely that any outcome will be anywhere near as bad as I think.
11. This year, I'll not take things too seriously. Life is so, so short. (And anyhow. If I relax. Life is likely to be that little bit longer, anyway).
12. This year, I'll prepare myself for what I want to happen in my life. I can't always make what I want happen. But I can be ready when it does.
13. This year, I'll remind myself that the only time I have is now. Yesterday's gone. Tomorrow never actually arrives. So the sooner I invest in enjoying 'now' – the sooner I start living.
14. This year, each time I question, 'Is this all there is?' I'll recognise that (if I want to) this is a trigger to identify clearly, and plan to win, whatever I feel is missing.
15. This year, I'll say less. And I'll speak more slowly. That way, I'll be clearer. More precise. And more confident about what I just said.
16. This year, I might just take a good look at every individual thing I own. One. By. One. Asking myself which of them makes me truly happy. This will inform which I keep, which I give away – and maybe even how I buy or acquire things in the future.
17. This year, I'll accept once and for all that if I care more about comfort than I do about change – I am the only thing in the way of me living the life I say I want.
18. This year, I'll remind myself that not one person's 'real life' is as good as their 'social media life'. They're not going to show us the crappy bits now, are they?
19. ...and this year, I'll also remind myself that nobody really cares as much about my social media life as I do.
20. This year, I'll remember that me and my shortcomings are two completely different things. I am not 'a worrier'. I just worry sometimes. I'm fine – I probably just need to work on the trait that is holding me back.
21. This year, I'll remember that what I want is 'gotten', not 'given'. So I'll stop waiting – and start planning.
22. This year, I am the youngest I'll ever be again. Ever. And I am not too late for anything.

*Oh, and the last thing to consider is this.*

*Have a think about if 'This year' in any of the above statements was 'Last year' – where might you be today? Happy 2022.*

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







## MAVEN INVESTS £10 MILLION IN NORTH EAST BUSINESSES IN 2021

Maven celebrates a busy year investing in 18 local businesses across the region and creating and supporting 300 jobs.

Maven Capital Partners is delighted to announce that it has invested a total of £10 million in 18 dynamic, high growth businesses in the North East region in 2021. This significant level of investment has been achieved through Maven's management of regional funds in the North East, alongside its suite of private equity funds.

Local companies that received funding last year include innovative performance marketing services provider, Leaf, specialist food & beverage canning, sterilisation and pasteurisation business, CRL Foods, and intelligent software solutions for rail and construction, Project Control Tools.

Maven can support a variety of businesses across a range of sectors from technology to life sciences, and manufacturing and engineering to services and healthcare as well as a strong interest in backing businesses combatting climate change emissions. Developer of ultra-low-cost and lightweight flexible film for energy generation and storage, Power Roll, secured further funding from Maven last year to support its growing list of UK and international customers as well as invest in the development of its newly opened

manufacturing plant in Durham.

This significant level of investment has mainly been achieved through Maven's management of regional funds in the North East, the £20m Finance Durham Fund established by Durham County Council and the £27 million North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund.

In addition to the investments made on behalf of the regional funds, Maven has also successfully leveraged an additional £10 million in private sector finance for local businesses in 2021. As one of the UK's most active and well-resourced mid-market private equity firms in the industry, Maven has through the management of its VCT funds and private equity co-investor network, supported innovative intranet software, Oak Engage, and disruptive platform for sale and installation of boilers, Boiler Plan.

With one of the UK's fastest growing economies, a highly skilled workforce and home to four national centres of excellence, the region is experiencing one of the highest growth rates in business start-ups in the UK. The North East is now considered a pioneer in the development of electric vehicle

technology, a major centre for the renewable, offshore and subsea energy industries, and boasts a vibrant digital and tech sector.

Michael Vassallo, Investment Director at Maven, said: "We see the North East as a hotbed of innovation, brimming with ambitious entrepreneurs, who are being supported by a thriving business community. We are delighted to celebrate such a great achievement in 2021, we've invested in some exciting local businesses and through Maven's multiple funding streams have been able to back our portfolio at various stages of their growth journey.

"Despite the uncertain economic climate we're experiencing, it's been great to work with so many of the North East's innovative companies to help raise their profiles, secure major new contracts and raise the finance required to implement their growth strategies."

***If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, Maven may be able to help. Contact our local team on 0191 731 8595 or visit [mavencp.com](https://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**



From left - Bryan Hoare with Dan Smith and Norm Peterson of Growth Capital Ventures.

## INVESTMENT SECURED TO HELP DISRUPTIVE NORTH EAST TECH COMPANY REVOLUTIONISE AUDIENCE EXPERIENCES

An innovative North East based technology company has secured funding to transform the way audiences engage and experience leisure, visitor, and sporting attractions.

County Durham based Growth Capital Ventures has successfully facilitated £150,000 seed investment into n-gage.io, a highly customisable Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) audience engagement platform powering immersive, engaging, and educational mobile-web experiences.

The funds will be used to drive the development of the technology forward and support n-gage.io's market entry strategy. The funds are in addition to £150,000 worth of resource provided by Growth Capital Ventures through its GCV Labs venture builder division.

n-gage.io – led by entrepreneur Bryan Hoare and incubated by GCV Labs – aims to transform audience experiences through a highly customisable, data insight driven SaaS platform with an integrated mobile-web application. This will help operators deepen their audience and visitor engagement, deliver powerful insights, and increase customer lifetime value.

The County Durham business, whose team combines market leading technology with decades of experience in digital media and

mobile technology, has already begun work with a range of pilot customers across both the attraction and sport sectors.

Norm Peterson, co-founder and chief executive of Growth Capital Ventures, said: "Once developed, this new platform will give attraction and venue operators at all levels the ability to affordably embrace the power of technology to improve audience engagement both before, during and after a visit, with real-time evaluation tools to gain valuable insights.

"This has been a great opportunity to invest at an early stage and a highly scalable business focussed on innovation in digital media and mobile technology. This initial investment will accelerate the development of the technology and allow the company to scale up the team to drive the business forwards."

Around the world, venues and attractions are constantly evolving. In 2020, 84% of UK adults owned a smartphone. But with over 5,500 visitor attractions in England alone, contributing to over £56 billion in domestic day trip spending, only 18% were using any form of mobile app prior to the pandemic.

n-gage.io's founder and CEO Bryan Hoare said: "Mobile optimised experiences strive to increase engagement, yet many are still lacking innovation in technology and content delivery, failing to meet audience expectations. Covid-19 has highlighted the importance of technology more than ever; showing how important it is to maintain links with your audience when a national and global crisis disrupts business.

"While the pandemic has accelerated views around technology adoption, more needs to be done to address market affordability and ease of deployment where low levels of technical expertise and lack of resource are often barriers.

"We're developing n-gage.io to transform audience engagement and the visitor experience leading to more loyal and engaged customers for our clients.

"Through our technology we'll be improving the experience, deepening learning and engagement and building audience loyalty and ultimately revenues for the operator."

Bryan added: "We have proved the concept and have had constructive discussions with operators across sport and visitor attractions. We're working alongside a number of local pilot partners including Northumberland Zoo to help develop a digital experience with a focus on education."

Kate Dearlove, director of media and content at n-gage.io added: "Our content experiences can also provide focus, delivering engagement in such a way that people's lives are enriched. We can do so much more with technology for education, bringing our heritage and culture to life for community benefit."

**More information about n-gage.io can be found at [www.n-gage.io](http://www.n-gage.io)**



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

## Business Distress and Insolvency is no joke.

Those in control of distressed businesses must proceed carefully.

Seeking good early professional advice usually means more options, and always means that a concerned director is much better informed.

Northpoint is an established local firm with a personable, pragmatic approach to best assist in business distress situations with expertise in

restructuring and closure options.

We advise on and act in most situations, including advisory and formal instructions, with fixed fees in many cases.

**Call Greg Whitehead or Linda Farish for an initial confidential discussion with no obligation.**

*If your company has had a CBILS or Bounce Back loan and insolvency is a possibility we can provide early, sensible professional advice, based on significant recent experience of dealing with such cases.*

- Rescue/Restructure
- Voluntary Arrangement
- Administration
- Liquidation
- HMRC negotiation
- Law of Property Act
- Bankruptcy
- Partnerships



## Northpoint.

Licensed Insolvency Practitioners

**Greg Whitehead**

**Tel: 07900 241 464**

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Andrew Marsh

# WHAT WILL TREND IN BUSINESS THROUGHOUT 2022

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

Here, using his knowledge and experience, he projects on what the business trends will be in the region throughout 2022.

"2020 and 2021 saw many business models challenged and those with agile and diversified revenue streams were certainly the ones that showed themselves as more able to adapt. The period also highlighted trends that leaders used to quickly pivot to survive.

"Many of these leaders grew new core skills that will continue now to be used to drive innovation and success throughout 2022.

"The fight for talent also came to light. We are facing an employee's market at the moment, with furlough having made people reroute their careers and job trends showing a shortage in the likes of hospitality and construction. Throughout 2022 employers are going to be under pressure to present themselves as desirable places to work more than ever.

"Alongside this the trend in the importance of employee engagement and reconnection will need to grow – teams will need support in moving back to office environments as we move from working from home.

"Cash and Funding will also be a focus – Coronavirus Interruption Business Loans are now being repaid and pressure from rising energy bills and increased outgoings will get more intense so cash will be a major focus for all firms to rebuild their balances. Operations need to be resilient, and cash reserves go a long way to ensuring this.

"Many companies will follow a bounce back journey – This year will be exciting and offer opportunities to companies looking to grow and recover. This will create a new competitive landscape and behaviours in many sectors, creating more choice and creating a buyers market in some cases.

"In some industries, such as AI and Digital, growth will continue at pace. IOT remote technology, such as GUARDIAN® from Plexus Innovation will become must have technology, easing challenges and bringing a whole host of business solutions.

"Supply chain issues for some sectors however will remain. Electrical components, building materials and container shortages for example will continue to slow traction in certain industries who will need to box clever looking for alternatives.

"ESG is a seriously hot topic too. There is a raise in BCorp Investors now wanting KPIs and performance metrics, with carbon neutral not being enough anymore. Net Zero is the aim to be focused upon.

"Authenticity is also a refreshing trend we must now all embrace. Brands are under pressure to use business as a force for good, and they need to connect more with their employees and customers as outlined by BCorp. Drivers to be better for the community, for people and for the planet will bring more need to be welcoming diversity to boards and executive teams with open arms. I myself will be supporting existing and new clients with making sure that they are doing more than ticking a box in this important consideration.

"For businesses to thrive in the current and future market, diversity in an executive and non-executive team is becoming a paramount requirement. Only through diversity can an organisation see that big picture and be driving a strategy of inclusion. A mix of experience and opinions in age, gender, culture, background, qualifications and energy is needed for this. As Nellie Borrero said:

"Diversity is a fact, but inclusion is a choice we make every day. As leaders, we have to put out the message that we embrace and not just tolerate diversity."

"As well as ensuring diversity, board performance will need to be monitored throughout 2022 – there is an upwards trend being driven by organisations such as The Experience Bank Group in the region to ensure that advisors and NEDS are performing and driving value to the business.

"Another growth area, which after initially finding success on online and is now returning to face to face meetings is Peer Groups. There are a range of Peer Groups from pure networking, to more nurturing mentoring arenas to those who also teach new skills as well provide support from a trusted network of like minded executives. The key decision makers can no longer ignore their own development in training and development – its proven.

"The real benefit of a peer group should be making its members truly accountable. The group members listen to you, to what you plan to do. Your fellow members not only expect you to deliver on it, but will also support, encourage and create sophisticated interactions to make it happen. Many peer groups now also have a buddy system which allow for closer interaction, holding each other to account whilst coaching and supporting each other. A good facilitator will change your buddy regularly to allow you develop more meaningful business relationships.

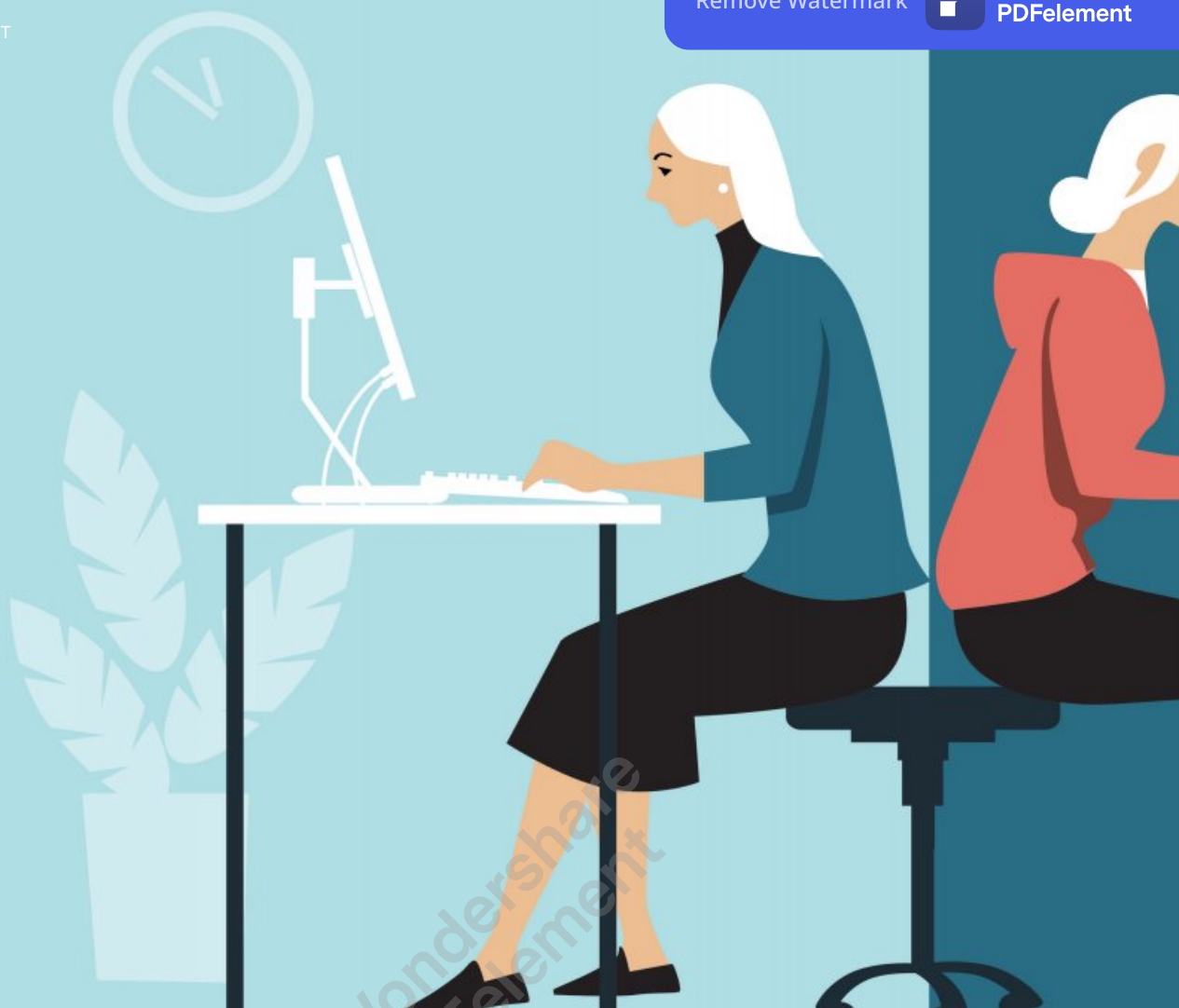
"As a Vistage chair, it is so satisfying to see my members work through their issues, grasp opportunities and learn together. Our sessions boost the mood, energy, performance and wellbeing for everyone involved. Being in the right group is a vital part in ensuring you get the insights that improves decision-making and spurs faster company growth, and when introducing someone to a new group, that is always forefront of my mind!

"Vistage has recently released new statistics that highlights that during the most difficult times, Vistage CEO members grew their annual revenue on average by 4.6% in 2020, while non-members with comparable small and medium sized businesses saw revenue decrease by 4.7%. An analysis by Dun and Bradstreet also clearly shows that Vistage members grow 2.2 times faster than non-members.

"Group learning for self-improvement is also high on the agenda now. There really is no need for anyone in business to feel alone. And CPD doesn't have to mean certified qualifications. Opening your mind and your heart to the right sessions where people share business experiences is a hugely rewarding practice and educational in a much more impactful way. Again, your group facilitator should have activities and learning experiences that enhance your onboarding of new ideas and information.

"One thing for sure is that there won't be a trend of sitting still and doing nothing. Our region is driven, and every day our business community shows its resilience. 2022 will be a very interesting year."

**If you are looking for support or advice on peer groups, learning, mentoring or developing a diverse board and executive team, you can contact Andrew on [Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk](mailto:Andrew.marsh@vistagechair.co.uk)**



## HYBRID WORKING ARRANGEMENTS FOR EMPLOYEES

What can employers  
reimburse for employees?

*The travel and working restrictions introduced as part of the response to the Covid-19 pandemic, and which led to employees working more at home rather than in the office, has accelerated the move towards a hybrid working model after restrictions have been eased.*

This has been particularly noticeable in respect of employers being more tolerant in allowing some employees the choice of where they want to work in between working from home and/or working in the office, often agreeing a “hybrid” arrangement in working between two locations – home and office.

In addition, the government has recently announced the intention to change employment law so that employees have the right to request more flexible working from the first day of their new employment.

The result of the change in working arrangements leads to a number of tax and NIC implications and employers have asked a number of questions related to what areas they can pay for employees, and whether there are any tax/NIC pitfalls in doing so.

### **What are the key questions employers need to consider?**

*Can I reimburse employees tax free for travel from home to the office?*

In many cases the answer to this question will be “no”!

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) usually regards travel from an employees’ home to their “permanent workplace” as “ordinary commuting”. If an employer meets the cost of any travel, accommodation and/or subsistence (including items such as hotels near the workplace) in relation to ordinary commuting those will be taxable and liable

to NIC.

The tax expression “permanent workplace” is not defined in the legislation and is subject to interpretation. It is typically the place where an employee is usually required by their employer to perform the duties of their employment. The issue with home workers is that they often perform duties from home as a personal choice, rather than as a formal requirement of their job.

Two of the key considerations when moving to a hybrid situation are where is the permanent workplace, and has it changed.

There are many permutations in relation to hybrid arrangement including employees who will be working:

- wherever they wish, with complete flexibility on which days they attend the office/work at home; or
- specific days at home and specific days at an office location; or
- a set number of days at home and a set number of days at an office.

It is important to consider the agreed working arrangements and travel patterns and also, where appropriate, the position prior to March 2020. It is possible that the determination of a permanent workplace for an employee who was employed during the pandemic could be different from a longstanding employee.



Finally, it must be remembered that if an employer incorrectly pays expenses free of tax and NICs they will be liable for any subsequent liability, plus interest and potential financial penalties of up to 100% of the liability.

#### **Can I pay for home office equipment for employees who work at home?**

The requirement to work from home has, in some instances, required employers to provide equipment to employees who are working remotely.

Under existing tax rules, where an employer provides an employee with home office equipment (for example a desk or printer) for the sole purpose of enabling the employee to work, and any private use of that equipment is insignificant, the provision of the equipment should be exempt from tax and NIC.

Prior to the pandemic, this exemption was conditional on the employer retaining ownership of the equipment. A tax liability could have arisen if ownership of the home office equipment passed to the employee.

The government announced that from March 2020 a temporary tax and NIC exemption applied to ensure that no tax liability arises where employers reimburse employees for personal spending on home office equipment. This temporary exemption is provided on two conditions:

- the employee is working from home as

a result of the coronavirus outbreak, and needs the equipment to work effectively; and

- the employer's offer of reimbursement is made available to all its employees on broadly similar terms.

While this relief was originally intended to apply for the 2020/21 tax year only, it has been extended until 5 April 2022.

#### **Can I reimburse employees for any home expenses?**

Household expenses are likely to have increased for those who have been working from home as a result of lockdown.

Employers need to decide whether it is appropriate to contribute towards these additional costs, or whether it is reasonable to conclude that they are balanced by the reduced costs of commuting.

Under pre-pandemic rules, where the employee is working from home under a "homeworking" arrangement, and additional household costs are incurred in carrying out employment duties, the employer can either:

- reimburse the employee for actual reasonable additional household expenses (such as electricity, gas, etc); or
- pay an HMRC-agreed tax and NIC-free allowance of up to £26 per month (or £6 per week).

The "actual costs" exemption does not extend to fixed costs (such as council tax or

rent) unrelated to whether the employee is home or office based.

As the administrative costs of identifying and then reimbursing the additional household costs often outweigh any benefits of the expense itself, most employers would use the second option and decide to pay the tax and NIC free allowance of £26 per month. This is subject to there being a formal homeworking arrangement in place, under which the employee regularly performs some, or all, employment duties at home.

For a hybrid arrangement, HMRC guidance states that where an employee agrees to work three days each week on the employer's premises and two days at home, it is accepted that they are "regularly" working from home and the full tax-free allowance can be paid for the entire week. HMRC also confirms that no apportionment of the £26 per month is required if the employee works from home for only part of the week.

Where the employer decides not to pay the allowance, HMRC has temporarily allowed employees in that situation to make direct claims for tax relief using the £6 per week as an allowance until 5 April 2022.

***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, UNW Employment Taxes Partner at [leemuter@unw.co.uk](mailto:leemuter@unw.co.uk)***



## IN CONVERSATION WITH...

### JACK SPOOR

Business advisor at Robson Laidler

Jack provides personal and business development coaching to clients, helping them to reach their goals. Jack co-leads the Business Accelerator team at Robson Laidler, which is over 100 years old and has recently become the region's first B Corp, balancing purpose as well as profit.

**What were your career ambitions growing up?**

Well after the obligatory stage that all 5-year-old boys go through, of wanting to be an Astronaut Cowboy Fireman Footballer, I never really had a clear career ambition. Having said that, three things have always stuck with me when growing up; firstly, I have always wanted to help people, which is why I toyed with being a doctor, until I realised how smart you needed to be! Secondly, I have always been inspired by my dad, who has the most incredible entrepreneurial spirit. Thirdly, I have always enjoyed team sports, particularly rugby. So inadvertently, my current role has dovetailed well into those three areas. As I get to work in an innovative team that helps entrepreneurial business owners improve and grow. No wonder I enjoy it so much.

**Tell us about your current role?**

My job title is Business Advisor, which sits in our Business Accelerator team. I have more freedom than most accountants as I am not involved in any compliance-based work, like year-end accounts and audits or tax returns. I am the person clients come to help solve their burning issues within their business. Sometimes those are financial issues, which require a bit of accountancy work in pulling together a budget or a forecast. Other times, it is something totally unrelated, where I help clients find solutions and hold them accountable in achieving them.

**What is your proudest business achievement?**

There are a couple. Firstly, getting my professional qualification. That maybe underwhelming for some, but after years of hard work, to finally get them out the way was a huge cause for celebration.

The second was launching our Research and Development service line back in 2019. It was a project that I took ownership of, and two and half years down the line, we are seeing real signs of success - not just in the number of claims we are doing for clients, but a noticeable cultural shift within the firm towards a more proactive client service.

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

I think technology has been a decisive factor other the past decade. Even eight years ago, when I was an accounts trainee, we were still dealing with a significant number of clients that had old fashion ledger cashbooks and the cliché shoebox of receipts. In fairness, we still have some clients like this! However, the rise of cloud accounting software like Xero has made it more accessible and user friendly for clients.

With further regulatory changes coming in the next few years due to Making Tax Digital technology and advisory work behind it will be the way forward for the world of accountancy.

**What are you currently working on?**

One interesting R&D claim that I am working on at the moment is with a Middlesbrough-based firm that is developing a prototype that converts human waste into electricity, drinking water and fertiliser, which can be used in third world countries.

In terms of my coaching clients, I am working closely with an e-commerce business, which has exploded in the past 12-months. We are working on scaling their team, upskilling management and developing processes to match their size.

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

The Business Accelerator team comprises of myself and my colleague Bob Evans. He has a wealth of accountancy experience in both practice and industry, so is a great person to bounce ideas off. We are also assisted by a couple of Directors, Nick Wilson and Martin Wardle, who really understand the importance and impact of the advisory concept.

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

It is something that I have been told multiple times by various mentors, but I have only recently noted its true value: "Pick up

the phone". How are you expected to be a trusted advisor to your clients if you don't know them? This shouldn't be used as an opportunity to push a product or service, just a chance to understand the problems that a client is facing and make a real connection with them. Often, we will pick up the phone to just ask "How are you doing?" It exponentially improves your ability to show you care and provide pro-active support.

**What has been your biggest challenge?**

I have been known to get caught in the moment and allow myself to easily get talked into various endurance. So far, I have run the Great North Run twice, cycled the Coast 2 Coast and walked the Yorkshire Three Peaks all on a bit of whim. The hardest challenge was the 24-hour Velodrome Challenge in February 2020. With no track cycling experience between us, Robson Laidler entered a team of six into the race, which had two professional squads competing. You can imagine the carnage! It was the most terrifying, tiring and fatiguing experience of my life. Getting up at 4am, after 15 minutes sleep, to cycle around in a circle, dodging 30 other riders on a bike with no brakes, is something I never want to repeat. But all for a great charitable cause!

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

Outside of business, I always take inspiration from my sister. Diagnosed with Cystic Fibrosis as a baby, she has suffered a lifetime of sickness and hospital visits. Up until the start of this year when she started a newly approved drug, she had a lung function in the low 30s and was on the verge of joining the transplant list. Despite this, she has fought not only this terrible disease, she has defied the odds and travelled the world raising tens of thousands of pounds for worthy causes. She is my inspiration every day.

Within business, was my grandfather. Who despite becoming a paraplegic at aged 38, rose to become the senior partner of the Newcastle branch of Arthur Young (now EY). He was the smartest man I have ever met, a renowned fundraiser and activist for disabled rights and all-round gentleman. I would also crowbar in Will Greenwood, the ex-England rugby player. The 2003 Rugby World Cup played a huge part of my childhood and I had a particular affinity to Will as he went to the same school as I did. He qualifies as a businessman as I have just read his latest book "World Class," which explores the similarities of high performance in sport and business.

**How do you unwind outside of work?**

I love to cook; it is my way to unwind at the end of the day. I think most people tried to get creative in the kitchen during the various lockdowns, be it banana breads or sough dough starters. For me it was home-curing bacon. Boredom makes us do some curious things!

Another lockdown habit that has stuck is exercise. I have managed to persuade myself to fall back in love with running, although my times may beg to differ.

**Favourite Book and Boxset?**

Showing some local pride, I have been reading the DCI Ryan Series by L J Ross, which are set in the North East. To kill two birds with one stone, I have read and watched the complete works of Sharpe by Bernard Cornwell. I highly recommend.

In terms of my favourite Boxset, it has to be *The Wire*. The series chronicles the tribulations of a post-industrial American city, viewed from the perspectives of both the police and their targets.

[www.robson-laidler.co.uk/accelerator](http://www.robson-laidler.co.uk/accelerator)  
[jspoor@robson-laidler.co.uk](mailto:jspoor@robson-laidler.co.uk)



## NE YOUTH TARTAN UP FOR BURNS NIGHT

NE Youth have been hosting a Burns Night event for over 25 years. Last year's hootananny was cancelled which meant all the stops were pulled out for this year. David Nichol, CEO at Nichol Associates- who sponsored the night had a few words to say about their involvement:

"The last 18 months have been challenging on everyone, especially young people- it gave us time to have a bit of reflection and we looked at ways of supporting others. Nichol Associates decided to support NE Youth. It started with sponsoring the golf day last year (after seeing a post on LinkedIn) it was great as it got our staff out of the office, which was really good for their well being. We then sponsored some of the awards at the Project with Pride Awards in November and I was blown away! It showcased and highlighted everything that's great about the charity and their talent members- we walked away feeling very humbled. It gives me immense pride to be associated with such a brilliant charity. I'm hoping we can build an every lasting relationship with NE Youth over the years. I would thoroughly recommend other organisations to get involved to help make a positive difference in the life of young people."

Anna Foster from BBC Newcastle was the host for the evening- there was entertainment from Care to Dance, the Robert Whitehead Scottish band got everyone up reeling & gigging and Discography played an amazing set to finish the night off.

Jon Niblo, CEO of NE Youth commented: "After a difficult couple of years we are back with a bang! Burns Night has always been an important date in our calendar and we wanted to up the ante this year! The entertainment was absolutely incredible, the guests were totally up for it and we raised over £17k on the night. This means that over the last 25 years we have raised in excess of £500k which is unbelievable! Big thanks to Jo Shallcross, Anna Foster, Care to Dance, Robert Whitehead, Discography, all the staff at the Grand Hotel and of course, our sponsors, Nichol Associates."





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## ALEXIS AND MICHAEL SECURE SOLICITOR ROLES AFTER COMPLETING HAY & KILNER TRAINING CONTRACTS

Two young North East lawyers have been appointed as solicitors by North East law firm Hay & Kilner after successfully completing a two-year training programme.

Alexis Wood and Michael Taylor have both undertaken four blocks of six months in different departments within the Newcastle-headquartered firm, which helped them gain a range of practical legal experience and identify their particular strengths and areas of interest.

Alexis and Michael undertook training seats across Hay & Kilner's clinical negligence, commercial property, private client and construction teams before settling on joining its private client and clinical negligence teams respectively.

Alongside their on-the-job learning, they also completed the Professional Skills Course at Northumbria University, which is a mandatory qualification run by the Solicitors Regulation Authority which must be successfully undertaken prior to an individual practicing as a solicitor.



Michael holds a law degree from Durham University and a Legal Practice Course qualification from Northumbria University, while Alexis took a chemistry degree at Durham University before deciding on a change of career direction.

She spent a year working as a paralegal in Hay & Kilner's residential property unit before beginning her traineeship, a position she took on after completing her Graduate Diploma in Law and Legal Practice Course qualifications at Northumbria

Alison Hall, partner and head of the private client department at Hay & Kilner, says: "Alexis and Michael have proven themselves to be extremely capable young solicitors and we're very glad to have them as part of the team."

## MHA TAIT WALKER STRENGTHENS CORPORATE FINANCE TEAM

Following a record year in 2021, which saw the team complete over £100m worth of deals for North East businesses, MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance has further strengthened its team with the appointment of John Aitken as Corporate Finance Senior Executive.

John has a breadth of experience across financial, project and change management, and brings with him over 12 years accountancy and project management experience, having previously worked for the NHS and Newcastle Building Society.

Steve Plaskitt Head of Corporate Finance said: "John Aitken is a great fit for MHA Tait Walker Corporate Finance and on the back of our busiest ever year last year we are pleased that we are able to continue



to attract new work and new talent into our team."

Lee Humble, Associate Partner added: "We are delighted to welcome John to the team and look forward to working with him. The last twelve months has seen an immense volume of activity and we head into 2022 with a stable of clients looking to execute across the first half of the year."



## BOXING CLUB PULLS NO PUNCHES

A historic local boxing club is celebrating after signing a 99-year lease on new premises in Sunderland.

Sunderland Amateur Boxing Club has relocated to Havelock Tower, situated on the city's Hylton Road, in a move that will not only place the club in a more central location, but will also provide more space and improved facilities.

Formed in 1968, Sunderland Amateur Boxing Club had previously operated from Barnes Junior School and has seen a number of famous faces move through its ranks including Olympian Tony Jeffries and England Boxing National Junior Champion Laylie Heath.

The club has pulled no punches and invested heavily in the refit, taking it from an unused Duke of Edinburgh Awards Centre to a state-of-the-art boxing gym.

Club Chairman Owen McGhin said: "We're very excited about this move and the opportunities that it will bring for the club.

"We've always been committed to bringing the benefits of boxing training for positive mental and physical health, and we're proud of the work we've done in the city over the last 53 years.

"We're ready to produce even more great local boxing talent in our new home."

Giles McCourt, associate solicitor and real estate expert at Muckle LLP, negotiated the lease on behalf of the club and said: "I am delighted to have been able to support the team at Sunderland Amateur Boxing Club as they move to their new gym.

Keith said: "Working with Giles and the team at Muckle has been fantastic. Giles has made the whole process so easy, and his experience and expertise were vital in securing the site of our new home."



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# SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH

## MARK HIPKIN

Partner with Alderson Law LLP

### Which area of the law do you work in?

I have always lived and practised on Tyneside. I have worked in many areas of the law in the past but have always concentrated on civil litigation and particularly personal injury. I now have a niche practice within our full service legal firm acting for motorcyclists, scooterists and cyclists and all things two-wheeled. I write a light-hearted biker review on a new model of motorcycle or scooter each month in a regional magazine.

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

I did from about the age of 14. My uncle was training to be a lawyer and it seemed a very interesting job. I had also always wanted to join the army and at the age of 25 I was sponsored for a short service commission in an infantry regiment. I eventually decided it was not for me and I should have done it earlier, when I was 18.

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

I completed my Articles at John Brennan & Co and received a fantastic grounding in dealing with all manner of legal disciplines and people. I was then made a Junior Partner. After nine years I left to start my own business at the age of 31 and was a sole practitioner for 25 years as Hipkin & Co in Whitley Bay. I was approached to merge with Alderson Law LLP and did so in 2015. This enabled me to further develop my niche personal injury practice. I mostly act in complex, often vigorously defended and life-changing, accident cases. I have also had a background in commercial litigation, mergers and acquisitions and dealt with most forms of legal aid in my career. I have lectured start-ups on the legal "do's and don'ts" of opening their first business. I am still a member of the Law Society's 'Lawyers for Your Business' scheme and I was the Local Law Society's President in 2011.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

There have been many from my own start-up and 33 years later, it's now Covid-19. Between that there have been numerous recessions and, like any other business or profession, you have to adapt, look ahead, be flexible and always try to do the right thing. In terms of casework, I took a class action against the owners and the advisors of a scam property investment scheme which took up eight years of my working career and saw all of the claims through to a very good and successful conclusion for all clients. That included an intense three day mediation! Most recently, I have achieved £1M plus compensation packages for seriously injured motorcyclists to enable them to rebuild their lives and obtain single level accommodation so that they are looked after in the future.

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

I have a respect for values rather than particular people. Sometimes someone in particular will embody those values. It can be a QC, sometimes one of the team of

trusted barristers that I use, sometimes it's the medical and liability experts I use and sometimes it's my own clients and their witnesses and other times it may be mediators, evaluators and judges. Those who take the time to properly and fully prepare for whatever they need to do, engage with me and the other side, and just do their job properly with no fuss, no edge, are approachable and listen. I am a great fan of all forms of Alternative Dispute Resolution.

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

It would have to be Atticus Finch, played by Gregory Peck in 'To Kill a Mockingbird'. That character, both in film and book form, embodied those qualities.

### What is your greatest strength?

Perseverance until I achieve a successful outcome or the best outcome possible for each client.

### What is your biggest weakness?

Never giving up!

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

The law and the legal profession always changes and will continue to change. It will give me great pleasure to continue and continually do my best in my niche practice area and our firm would like to develop those plans regionally. I would also like to mentor and pass on my experience to younger lawyers and give them a chance to develop and succeed.

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

I believe the core values and qualities required are the same as when I first walked into a solicitor's office as an articulated clerk in 1980. The way that the work is delivered has changed enormously. I remember that first fax machine, golf-ball typewriters and the first huge PCs and everything before and after. Lawyers, however, are very adaptable and have been throughout the ages. There is no substitute for sound and proper advice, given after a full consideration of the facts and grounded representation to every client.

### How do you like to unwind?

Apart from my love of two wheels (I have completed the Coast to Coast and Coast and Castles cycle routes and I am now down to just one motorbike!), I enjoy practising martial arts and am a Second Dan in Tang Soo Do (The Way of the Chinese Hand) which is a form of Korean Karate. I also practise Tai Chi and enjoy spending time with my wife Carol, three children, our new grandson and my 16 year old Sprocker Spaniel. Yin and Yang!

0191 2533509

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





Alison Walton

## MUCKLE LLP LANDS DEAL WITH TEES VALLEY COMBINED AUTHORITY

Leading North East law firm Muckle LLP is backing the region's growth plans following the appointment of a four-year contract to deliver services to Tees Valley Combined Authority.

Muckle LLP will be one of seven law firms to provide services for all the organisations within the Tees Valley Combined Authority Group, including the Teesworks site and Teesside International Airport, to help it deliver a range of ambitious projects.

As part of the four-year deal, Muckle LLP will be offering a range of services and initiatives for the wider good of the Tees Valley to support young people, communities and businesses in the area. These include mentoring programmes, volunteering services on a pro bono basis, offering careers advice, engaging with schools, colleges, and universities to help young people, businesses and charities.

The deal comes at an exciting time of significant development and ambitious growth for the Tees Valley region, and the contract win will see Muckle LLP providing

specialist legal advice across all departments of its business.

Alison Walton, Partner in the commercial team and head of Public Procurement, said: "Supporting people, communities and businesses across the whole of the North East is at the heart of everything we do, and we're delighted to have been appointed to support the Tees Valley Combined Authority Group.

"This is such an exciting appointment for us and we're proud and honoured to be playing our part in supporting charities, communities and organisations across the Tees Valley region.

"Our specialist legal skills are second to none and as a nationally-renowned firm we are looking forward to supporting some of the Tees Valley's most ambitious projects at such an important time for the region."

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: "We're delighted to have signed Muckle LLP as part of our new legal framework to support the game-changing projects we're delivering across Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool, including Teesworks, the Teesside Freeport, our airport and much more.

"They will not only help support us with their expert advice, but they're going further to make sure local people across the Tees Valley feel the benefit, by offering things such as local business support, skills workshops and interview training, and careers guidance, as well as committing to traineeships and apprenticeships and work experience to help inspire the next generation of would-be lawyers."

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## BILL DRYDEN

PGS Law LLP in South Shields

As the football transfer window comes to an end, it is a local solicitors practice based in South Shields which has made the biggest move in January – to new premises as part of its expansion plan and the local council's 365 Regeneration Scheme.

PGS Law LLP, previously based at two neighbouring offices at Waterloo Square and Coronation Street in South Shields, has just moved on 17th January into Law Court Chambers at 22 Denmark Centre on Fowler Street; the old Yorkshire Bank building, to support South Tyneside Council's regeneration of Waterloo Square and Fowler Street.

Managing Partner, Bill Dryden, tells us the reason for the move and what changes this will entail:

"The new office, which will showpiece significant investment from the partnership, will give us the opportunity to grow as a business, increase staff opportunities, and provide an enhanced experience for our clients. Moving to a new, more spacious building, where we will all be under one roof, will allow us to increase the services currently on offer and pool our knowledge to provide a level of legal expertise our clients will truly benefit from."

**So, the new premises are only a stone's throw away from your old offices. Why did you decide on the new location?**

"We have served the people of South Shields and the surrounding areas for generations. We are proud of being a leading high street firm and we want to be in the heart of the town so that our existing clients and potential new clients alike can know that we are close by for whenever they need us. Our investment, together with the plans of the council, shows that we believe South Tyneside is a place to live, grow, and do business. The building is a fantastic new workspace for us which will add a new dynamic to our way of working. We cannot wait to welcome clients old and new."

PGS Law has a long and proud history and its roots can be traced back to 1879 through a series of mergers incorporating Newlands Newlands & Co, Donald Harvey & Co, as well as Patterson Glenton & Stracey Solicitors.

The 142-year-old business remains a stalwart of South Tyneside and has proudly serviced generations of families who are confident that, when dealing with PGS Law, they really do get 'Guidance You Can Trust'.

**What does the hierarchy at PGS Law LLP currently look like?**

"The business currently has five partners, including me. I am their wills, probate, and trusts specialist and also notary public. I am also joined by Tony Ward who deals with our clients' litigation and personal injury issues, Keith Swan and Ian Farrer who both work on residential and commercial property, and Carolyne Hargreaves who heads up the family law division."

**Are you planning to add any additional staff to the PGS family?**

"Currently, we're at 24 members of staff, but we do have plans to expand. I have been with the firm since 1987, along with many of my colleagues. Longevity in the business seems to be a positive of working with PGS Law, so we're confident that our operating numbers will increase to 30 by the end of 2022. It is our intention to hire a new wills and probate practitioner as well as administrative staff in the new office, continuing in our commitment to the growth in the area. Our firm also prides itself on its internal training and career opportunities, offering all employees an excellent salary package. We have a solid reputation for giving our staff the opportunity to grow within the business, harnessing the talent of the individual. We're proud to work with solid institutions and offer apprenticeships to students, Kickstart programmes, as well as presenting administrative staff the opportunity to further their careers."

**The changes sound exciting. Is there anything else the firm is doing that you can tell us about?**

"By working with the public and the businesses we serve at PGS Law, we see this move as an opportunity to expand our good work within the region and become even more involved with what matters most to our clients and their communities. We're already active within the Chloe and Liam Together Forever Trust, Daft as a Brush, the Customs House, Cancer Connections, as well as the Pier to Pier run to name a few. In addition to this, our partners are also trustees of the W A Handley Trust; Wilf Handley was the inventor of Domestos and his endowment provides regular annual support for many North East charities, including everything from social care, health, educational, religious, cultural, and environmental organisations."



**For further information on the services PGS Law LLP has to offer, call its offices on 0191 456 0281 or visit its website at [www.pgslaw.co.uk](http://www.pgslaw.co.uk)**

A portrait of a middle-aged man with glasses, wearing a blue suit, white shirt, and a red patterned tie. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. A large, faint watermark reading "Wondershare PDFelement" is diagonally across the image.

“

**...We cannot wait  
to welcome clients  
old and new...**



Surbhi Vedhara and Jessica Fenwick

## NEW YEAR, NEW OFFICE FOR EXPANDING LAW FIRM

As part of the realisation of its ongoing growth strategy, North East solicitors, Sweeney Miller Law marks the New Year by relocating its Newcastle branch to much larger offices.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Sweeney Miller Law continued to attract new clients and instructions across both its Newcastle and Sunderland offices, accelerating the decision to relocate its Newcastle Office. Maintaining its growth momentum, on 4th January 2022 Sweeney Miller's Newcastle team moved into Bulman House, Regent Centre, Gosforth. The Newcastle branch now occupies 4400 square feet of office space across two floors in a prime location off Gosforth High Street. The new premises has its own reception area, a suite of meeting rooms, kitchen and spacious staff break out area.

The additional space will enable the firm to develop its services on Tyneside for both individual and business clients across its key practice areas of conveyancing, commercial property, company and commercial, family law, dispute resolution, private client and landlord and tenant. As well as providing space for the firm's continued expansion, with improved transport links and car parking, the new offices are more accessible to its clients and staff.

Reflecting the firm's commitment to staff development and continued growth, the new offices include a dedicated space for the delivery of its own bespoke inhouse training programme. The initiative provides school leavers and graduates with structured, vocational based learning, ensuring consistency in service standards, procedures, communication skills, administration, technical expertise, as well as embedding the firm's core values.

Staffing at the growing firm has increased by 15% in the last three years reaching nearly 75, and with a strategic commitment to scaling the business, its pipeline of future talent currently includes five trainee solicitors, one solicitor apprentice, six apprentices and 23 paralegals.

In collaboration with Newcastle University, the Sweeney

Miller Scholarship annual grant scholarship has recently been established. Under the scheme, successful student applicants receive a £1000 scholarship together with the opportunity of two weeks paid work experience at the Newcastle office providing an insight to working life at a busy law firm.

The office move is the next chapter in Sweeney Miller Law's rapid evolution since it was established in Sunderland by Paul Miller in 2002. In response to increasing client demand, a second office was opened in Newcastle in 2014 which the firm has now outgrown.

In addition to its strong client base in the North, the firm is instructed by individuals and businesses from across the UK, including London. The firm's focus on service excellence and growing reputation has helped to attract instructions involving large commercial landlords, including PLCs, extensive property development projects, business sales, acquisitions, mergers and management buyouts, as well as exceptional growth in domestic conveyancing, private client and family work leading to a 25% increase in turnover in the firm's latest financial year.

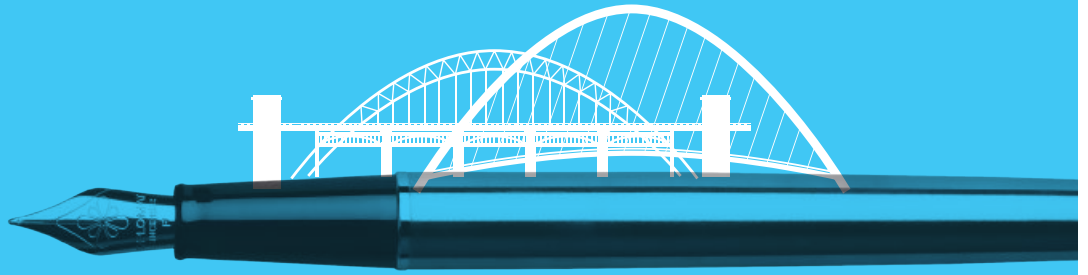
The office expansion follows the recent restructuring of the firm's management with Surbhi Vedhara taking on the role of Managing Partner and Jessica Fenwick and Damien Todd joining Surbhi as Equity Partners, whilst founder Paul Miller stepped into a training and business development consultancy role at the firm.

Commenting on the move, Surbhi said, 'We have seen unprecedented growth since opening up the Newcastle office in 2014 in Spaceworks. Whilst that office served us well and allowed us to achieve a good market share in Newcastle, it is now time to look at the next chapter by getting much larger premises with more room for growth. We are delighted with the opportunities that Bulman House presents for us and very much look forward to what the future holds.'

Jess adds, 'We are very excited to continue the growth of the firm from Bulman House and hope to be able to welcome clients to the new office as soon as it is safe to do so.'

**To find out more, visit [www.sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://www.sweeneymiller.co.uk) or call 0345 900 5401.**

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# SOCIAL MEDIA AND EMPLOYEE MISCONDUCT

Helen Scott is an Associate Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Helen Scott considers how employers can manage employee misconduct on social media platforms.



Helen Scott

Social media increasingly forms part of our daily interactions, both inside and outside of work, with a reported 77.9% of the UK population using social media. Employers are increasingly faced with the challenge of managing matters when employees act inappropriately online. Social media incidents can be particularly difficult to address as they can give rise to arguments from the employee about matters being unrelated to work where they take place using employees' own accounts outside of the workplace.

## Conduct Inside or Outside of Work?

Where behaviour occurs on social media outside of work, what can an employer do? In general, conduct outside of work can in some circumstances justify disciplinary action including dismissal. The key question is whether such conduct potentially relates to the employment relationship? This could be because the nature of the conduct affects the employee's work or relationships at work. For example, bullying posts between employees outside of work, has left one feeling unable to work with the other. Or the employment relationship may be sufficiently impacted by potential damage to the employer's reputation in the case of derogatory posts about the employer.

If the conduct involves use of the employer's technology or social media account, those cases are generally more straightforward and usually involve looking at whether the employee has misused work equipment by inappropriately using them for personal matters or posting inappropriate/misguided comments. Whether action is justified in these cases will generally depend upon the extent of the misuse and whether expectations have been clearly communicated in a policy.

## Social Media Posts

If an employer is faced with an incident involving an employee posting to their own social media account using their own device, can that ever be misconduct relating to the employment relationship? There have been cases whereby disciplinary action, and even dismissal, has been found to be fair for these types of offences. The decisions very much

depend on the facts of the case, but tend to involve an assessment of the following factors:-

- **The nature and content of the comments or images** - Comments or images posted which are highly offensive or discriminatory by the opinions expressed or way in which they are expressed may be more likely to warrant action. Further, posts which are derogatory or bullying towards other staff members are likely to impact upon employment relationships and may provide grounds for action.
- **Is the social media account linked to the employer in any way?** - If the organisation is named as an employer or otherwise, or any imagery shown links to the organisation, there may be grounds to argue potential reputational damage.
- **Who has access to the post?** - If the account is a closed private social media account which only a limited number of others can see and no other employee could access, then there may not be grounds for action. However, if the account is public or can be accessed by other employees, this may be a relevant factor supporting potential reputational damage or misconduct.
- **What is the extent or likelihood of damage to the business's reputation?** - Is there evidence of reputational damage or likely reputational damage? Employers should not however take a disproportionate view of the damage or potential damage to their reputation, just because a post which does not put them in the best light comes into the public arena.
- **What information has been given to employees about expectations regarding use of personal social media and reputation?** - This is a key factor as if it has not been made clear in any policy or communication about acceptable conduct

including social media then any disciplinary action is more likely to be considered unfair or unjustified.

It can be possible to justify disciplinary action against employees, and in some cases dismiss for social media offences, but the particular facts and impact upon the organisation and employment relationship have to be carefully assessed before proceeding.

## Action

To be in the best position to address this type of misconduct, it is essential to have clear policies and rules to set out the standards expected, what will be considered misconduct and (where appropriate) that such expectations and rules may extend to personal social media. Employers should have in place policies addressing such matters, ensuring they are up to date to address social media, to include: -

- Social Media Policy;
- Electronic Information and Communications Systems Policy;
- Disciplinary Policy;
- Anti-harassment and Bullying Policy; and
- Equal Opportunities Policy.

The outcome of cases involving allegations of misconduct on social media tend to turn on their particular facts, so specific advice on a case is recommended.

*Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training and legal advice to organisations on all areas of employment law, including HR management skills, dealing with instances of employee misconduct and drafting appropriate policies.*

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Ammar Mirza CBE

## GOOD THINGS COME TO THOSE THAT CREATE

Since the start of the pandemic, I have been advocating the need for business owners to look at how they operate. Review their business model.

For those that have, we have seen sustainability and significant growth. Even multi-million-pound growth. For those that have not, a steady decline and in many an instance, death.

The need to review your business model isn't something new. In fact, the fastest growing and most successful organisations in the world constantly review and renew their business model. They innovate and those that don't, simply die.

Just look at the likes of Kodak, Blockbusters, Toys R Us and Compaq. All multi-national organisations that failed to consider the changing environment and consumer behaviour.

But what is a business model? Why and how do you review it? I respect that this may sound like me teaching you how to suck eggs – although I have never sucked an egg, nor would I have a clue on how or even why you would do so – but a business model is how your organisation operates.

A business model defines who your customers are, what you are selling, how you produce your offering, and why your business is profitable. Who-what-how-why describes a business model of which the first – who and what – address its external aspects, and the second two – how and why – address its internal dimensions.

Creating, capturing and delivering value, ultimately your business model should be 1) desirable – people want to buy what you have to offer. 2) feasible – you should be able to deliver your product or service. 3) viable – you should be able to sustain your business and generate profit.

Simply put, a business model, and consequently a business, fails when the value is no longer being created, captured or delivered. And the Pandemic has accelerated the need for businesses to review their business model, especially when there are so many environmental factors that should be causing concern. Including inflation, supply chain, labour shortages, digital transformation, change in consumer habits and so much more.

So how do you innovate your business model rather than just your product or service?

Having spent the last 30 years innovating

with some of the best minds in the world, alongside tracking the most innovative companies, and methodologies, we have created the Power of 3™ approach, which focuses on developing personal, professional and organisational capacity and capability. Exploring and renewing at least two of the who-what-why-how aspects of the business and innovating the whole value proposition – Desirability, Feasibility and Viability, the programme concentrates on the three biggest influencers to growth – Skillset, Mindset and Toolset.

Using Design Thinking methodology and years of experience developing and delivering Accelerator, Scale-up, Start-up, Investor Readiness and Business Model Innovation programmes to hundreds of organisations, we now have the secret formula to organisational success. And we have accredited the programme as a level 6 qualification to provide a quality standard.

So, what does this all mean. Well, like one of my childhood heroes the Six Million Dollar Man. We have the capability. We have the technology. We have the expertise to innovate and create bionic business models. We can create better, faster and stronger businesses. And we all know that good things come to those that create.

**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.**



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### Promote

Meet Ministers, High Commissioners and other leaders to promote you and your organisation. Feature in our media and marketing that can get a unique message out to an audience of over 1 million. Showcase your offer to the whole community.

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## ACHIEVING SUCCESS WITH BUSINESS MODEL INNOVATION

We've all seen the movies where the main characters are trying to pull off an elaborate heist. To make sure it works, they all gather around the blueprints (and maybe a 3D model) of the building where the jewel, or safe, or secret document, is kept so that they can prepare for every eventuality. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't, but films always need some kind of drama.

In real life, you want to cut out as much drama as possible, especially when starting your business. You need to plan carefully

and follow it up with a successful heist! A business model is a blueprint for how your business functions. It shows you every angle and allows you to examine the potential weaknesses and strengths of your business, as well as innovate and take advantage of market gaps.

Like a blueprint, your business model should show the essential building blocks of your business. For example, who will your customers be? What is your value proposition, that is, what are you offering to customers that they can't get elsewhere? How will you make money? What resources will you need? Fill in each section accurately and in as much detail as possible to best assess your plan. Research your market and customers to help you. Once you have filled in all the necessary building blocks, you can then use them to assess three things: desirability (do people actually want it), feasibility (it is possible to do) and viability (will it make money) of your business. Your business model is validated if it can do all three!

Once your business model is finalised, don't put it away and never look at it again. Business models should be reviewed frequently to keep them up-to-date and relevant. Let's take a famous example: Netflix. Over 200 million people are currently subscribed to Netflix worldwide and a large part of that is down to the company's successful business model... and business remodelling. Did you know that Netflix actually launched in 1997? The original business model was an online DVD rental service which, in 2006, had grown to 5 million members. In 2007, though, Netflix began to introduce the model that we know today with a streaming service alongside DVD rentals. By 2012, they were making their own content and, by 2016, the now-exclusively-streaming service had launched in over 190 countries across the globe. As you can see, Netflix's business model has changed significantly since its launch to take into account new market opportunities and current trends and technologies. (Netflix's rival failed to adapt to changing environments and went bankrupt in 2010.)

**One of the tools you can use to help you create a business model is the Business Model Canvas. To find out more about this and how we can help you to start, survive and thrive, contact us at [www.smecofe.com](http://www.smecofe.com)**

## ARE YOU WELL BEING YOU?

New year, a time when many of us promise to make a fresh start, adopt a healthier mind-set and look for ways to improve our mental health and wellbeing.

Finder survey, Dec 2021 reported "54% of the UK population will set a New Year's resolution in 2022 - 28 million people. A quarter of the UK will make a health-focused resolution for 2022."

SSCL is the largest provider of business-critical support services to Government, Police and Defence. We pay 550,000 public sector employees each month and process billions of pounds of public sector funds.

The health and wellbeing of our people and providing a safe and healthy workplace is high on our agenda and continues to be of paramount importance. We understand the importance of supporting our colleagues and last year made our own health-focused resolutions to support our colleagues.

And we are delighted that our wellbeing programme and campaigns attracted national recognition – winning Best Coronavirus Crisis Response at the 2021 Chartered Institute for Payroll Professionals (CIPP) Awards for remaining fully operational and maintaining resilience in delivery of HR, Payroll and supplier payments. We did this whilst also ensuring the health and wellbeing of our colleagues throughout the pandemic, most of whom had been swiftly relocated to working from home. Award judges said they could not commend SSCL highly enough for the scale of operations, getting our colleagues set up at home so quickly and effectively.

SSCL also received a Highly Commended in the Best Wellbeing Initiative for Business Culture category at the Business Culture Annual Awards 2021, for the huge amount of work invested into people engagement across all our UK sites throughout the pandemic and beyond.



Our health and wellbeing campaigns have covered a range of topics, all aimed at reducing stress, supporting our people through new practices, initiatives, and technology.

Colleagues can now benefit from access to Mental Health First Aiders – a scheme that involves colleagues trained to support anyone who wants additional help.

Social activity programmes - from games and quizzes to yoga and fitness classes to health and wellbeing advice - delivered through a series of campaigns, wellbeing bulletins and webinars to technology advice and employee and manager guides – we created a whole host of information, videos and bulletins.

### How do we know what we did worked?

SSCL is dedicated to continual people engagement. We regularly interact with

over 2,800 employees to make sure we are providing the right tools and resources to benefit their health and wellbeing. We regularly measure effectiveness via surveys, temperature checks, and employee feedback and this is something that will continue.

Feedback from surveys conducted has been superb, with 84% of colleagues letting us know that they have felt supported in their work/life balance and a further 95% informing us that we have successfully looked out for their wellbeing during COVID-19.

**We are incredibly proud of the success of the support we've been able to offer our people and will continue to build on this in 2022. To find out more about SSCL go to: [sscl.com](https://sscl.com)**

EST 1971

# East Durham

## Funeral Service

★★★★★



In 1971, Barrie Lee opened the first branch in Horden, with the aim to provide the communities of East Durham a personal and caring funeral service. 50 years on, the company is now run by son-in-law, Philip Maddison, along with his children, Tom and Ellen, who all proudly acknowledge the milestone anniversary and thank the generations of families who trust in East Durham Funeral Service to provide their loved ones with the best possible service.

### A message from Philip:

“ Having worked in the business since the age of 18, I took over completely in 2001. I was delighted to be joined by my children Tom and Ellen, making us third-generation funeral directors. Alongside our great team here, we now have further four branches, with our head office at The Manse, Peterlee.

### Let our family assist your family, in your hour of need.

Although the funeral industry has certainly changed over the last 50 years, you can continue to put your trust in us to use our expertise to deliver the professional service that your family deserves, whether that's for a traditional funeral or one entirely bespoke.

★★★★★

To mark our **50th Anniversary** we have a **special offer of £360 discount** on any new pre-paid funeral plans.

With a funeral plan, not only will you be **protecting your loved ones** against unexpected costs, but you will also remove any uncertainty with regards to your final wishes. All with the peace of mind of knowing everything is secured at **today's prices**.

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- Luxury silver Jaguar fleet
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- Members of the British Institute of Embalmers
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**Horden**  
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# WORLD LEADING ARCHITECTS HAVE QUAYSIDE IN THEIR SIGHTS

By Stephen Patterson, Chief Executive of NE1 Ltd

The time has come for people to have their say on what's needed on Newcastle's Quayside. As huge transformations continue across the city, NE1 has turned its attention to the city's waterfront, teaming up with world-leading architects, Gehl, to develop a vision for this iconic area that is shaped by the public's wants and desires. A consultation exercise has been launched to gather public views and ideas on what could be done to transform the Quayside now and for future generations.

The area has been on NE1's radar since the company launched in 2009. The Quayside is the jewel in the city's crown and now is the perfect time to bring the area into focus. With £750 million of development planned for the north and south banks of the river over the next five to ten years, it is beholden on us to ensure that the public realm keeps pace with this investment and development, and that we seize the opportunity to develop a bold and ambitious vision for the Quayside, which improves the area for years to come.

Who better to help the city reimagine and plan a future for Newcastle's iconic Quayside, than the world-leading architects for 'place making', Gehl Architects? With a stellar track record of city transformations across the globe, Gehl have been appointed to work with the people of Newcastle, local businesses and other stakeholders to help map out a vision for the area. The aim is to shape a plan that is individual, and authentic to the area's history, geography, architecture and neighbourhoods but most of all, one that reflects the hopes and dreams of the local community.

Gehl excels in bringing places to life and creating cities that people want to live and spend time in. They have delivered visionary transformations in Copenhagen and in Melbourne, while their work in New York with NYC's Department of Transport (DOT) paved the way for pedestrianising Times' Square. We are delighted that we are now working with them and the people of Newcastle to deliver an ambitious plan for the Quayside and how it could be transformed.

The starting point for this exciting project is a major fact-finding exercise and public consultation programme that launched at the beginning of January. Starting with an online questionnaire to garner a wide range of views, ideas, and wish-lists from the public and major stakeholders on the future development of the Quayside. Following the survey, Gehl will run a series of workshops with residents, businesses, and other major stakeholders to explore the themes and ideas identified. They will report on their findings in early spring, identifying the key themes for how the area can evolve in the future.

Maximising the potential of Newcastle's Quayside and its waterfront has always been one of our key priorities and we have channelled a significant amount of effort and focused activations in this area over the years, from the creation of NE1's Newcastle City Marina, to our much-loved summer activity programmes including the Quayside Seaside and last summer's more extensive, linear park with light installations, artwork, and furniture,

spanning a one kilometre stretch of the Quayside. The stunning Laser Light City display from award-winning light artist, Seb Lee-Delisle over the New Year period was another of our initiatives designed to showcase the area and demonstrate the Quayside's potential, as well as giving a flavour of how the area could look permanently.

We know that the planned investment for the Quayside over the next decade will transform the area, but we want to ensure that the public realm, the spaces in between the buildings, keep pace with the commercial regeneration. It is the civic spaces that stitch amazing developments together and we need to think and plan to ensure that the Quayside, in its entirety, is equipped for the future. We need to be bold, ambitious and visionary and we need ideas that position Newcastle's Quayside among the best waterfront destinations in the world. We already rank highly and have some of the best natural assets in our iconic views, architecture old and new, and our bridges, all that's needed now is ambition and to set our sights on transforming the area for the future.

Everyone has their own thoughts and views on what we love, and what could be better about Newcastle's Quayside. Now is the time to share them. We want to hear from as many people as possible about what they want to see on the Quayside, and we want people to be passionate, bold, and ambitious. We are excited by the possibilities that the Quayside presents.

The Quayside is an iconic location that is recognised the world over and has all the hallmarks for success, but there is still huge untapped potential. An important next step is to strengthen the waterfront and create a Quayside that is liveable, accessible, and better connected.

Gehl's international perspective and experience will help tease out and define the city's aspirations, ambitions, and views and then go on to develop a unique vision for the Quayside.

It's an exciting time and we are looking forward to working with Gehl and the people of Newcastle to help articulate what the future will look like.

[www.newcastlene1ltd.com](http://www.newcastlene1ltd.com)

“

...we are  
excited by the  
possibilities that  
the Quayside  
presents...



L-R: Clint Robertson, Brian Nesbitt and Neil Rule.

# ACCESS2 FOR SECURE ACCESS TO

One of the most important aspects of any building, is its security. We take it for granted. It's also very easy to miss one particular feature. Think about it. When you approach a building you will invariably have to enter via some sort of door.

Once inside you will probably have to go to a room. It could be a storeroom in a warehouse, a classroom in a school, an office in a business centre, a secure area in a financial or military establishment, a laboratory or medical area in a hospital or a bedroom in a hotel.

Worked it out yet? Door. Security. Yep....it's the lock.

And we're very fortunate to have a world leading lock manufacturer here in the North East. Access2.

They're a highly specialised team who work to provide innovative security solutions to businesses of all sizes. They supply locks worldwide and are a market leader in the UK.

Leading from the front are Managing Director Neil Rule; Sales Director Clint Robertson and Finance Director Brian Nesbitt. They're all highly experienced and highly respected in the hardware industry and sit on leading committees which govern UK product standards which are rated as the best in the world. .

The locks manufactured and supplied by Access2 fit into two categories...mechanical and electronic. They have the trade name of Tigris.

The Tigris range of mechanical locks feature a cylinder and key locking mechanism.

Tigris electronic locks generally include a door handle. The lock is operated by a variety of methods including smartphone, card, fingerprint or via a keypad which requires a pin code security number to be logged in.

Electronic locks are particularly useful for when access is required for a limited period of time. This could be for property such as an Airbnb, holiday lets or a rental property particularly useful where keys to access the property may have been held in an external key box. The lock at a holiday let, for example, can accept a unique code, sent in advance to the guest for the duration of a particular stay. When those holidaymakers move on, the code times out and the lock is ready for use by the next tenants with a new code. These locks and handles make temporary access simple and effective. The lock can even be activated and changed by Wi-Fi, Bluetooth or via an app on a mobile phone. Clever huh?

As well as providing locks for individuals and small companies, Access2 also works with some of the world's leading hotel chains and provides locks for new-build and refurbished properties. Some office blocks and hotels have hundreds of bedrooms. This is where Access2 has enjoyed incredible success because their Confident electronic range not only allows guests or employees to access a particular room via a code card or mobile phone app, the locking mechanism can also be operated and updated from a central source. Every door can be centrally controlled and every operation recorded.

This of course eliminates the need for a key.

However, for the ultimate in security, Access2 will supply barrel locks which are key operated and it is here where Access2 has made its name over the last 20 years.

Access2 is the UK's leader when it comes to master keyed cylinder locks. These are locks where, for example, an office block, hospital, university etc has numerous doors, all of which need a separate lock. Each lock has a different key. But, there will also be a master key which will open all doors. If you go for the Access2 Tigris Premier lock, you could have up to a staggering 36,000 different locks.... and they can all be opened with a single master key.

Needless to say that security standards of all Access2 locks are industry leading.

"We are incredibly proud of our reputation," said Managing Director Neil Rule. "We are not only renowned for producing locks of the highest quality and with the very best levels of security and integrity, but we also have a reputation for ensuring that our locks are delivered on time and with the full back-up of our engineering team. Our products are usually fitted at the closing stages of a build phase and we fully appreciate that in something like a major building project, timing is critical. We always ensure that our locks are delivered on schedule."

"We work closely with commercial, retail, finance, military, banking, hospitality, education and healthcare sectors," adds Sales Director, Clint Robertson. "In terms of education I'd guess that you'll find Access2 locks at over 5000 schools, colleges and universities in over a hundred different countries. When it comes to hotels, we've been working recently on some really big projects in the UK, Middle East and Hong Kong. You'll find our locks at financial centres as far afield as Qatar, China and Ireland as well as across the UK."

And if you needed an example of how highly Access2 locks are rated in terms of security, you may be 'unfortunate' enough to spot them in police stations, prisons, courts and police and ambulance headquarters. They even supply equipment to the Royal Navy, British Army and Royal Air Force as well as security facilities worldwide.

And don't assume that Access2 locks won't fit with your décor in a house or hotel. Wrong. Give Access2 an example of the colour you would perhaps like the lock to blend into and they'll colour match it.

Interested?

Access2...the company that's key for secure locks.

When it comes to access and security, Access2 is a world leader.....and they're based here in the North East on the North Tyne Industrial Estate at Benton on the outskirts of Newcastle.

**The best idea is to speak to the team at Access2 and they will explain precisely what they can do for you. Call 0191 215 0530, or email [enquiries@access2.com](mailto:enquiries@access2.com)**

**We'd also recommend that you go onto their website to check out the Access2 range.**

**Log onto [www.access2.com](http://www.access2.com)**





Bryony Gibson

## HOW TO DECIDE IF A NEW JOB IS RIGHT FOR YOU

Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, shares her thoughts on what you need to ask yourself before accepting a new job.

The job market has endured a lot of upheaval in the past two years but, for now, it is being firmly driven by candidate availability.

In the world of accountancy, there are far more opportunities in Public Practice than people who are looking for a new challenge.

It is fabulous news for ambitious, skilled professionals who can present themselves well. They have a pick of fantastic positions and a new job offer is never far away, but this can also become a slightly double-edged sword.

After 20 years working in the North East

recruitment market, right now, when a good candidate reaches out to me and is sure they want to move, quite often I can help them to secure a job offer within a matter of days. And for many, this is far too fast.

From the time they decided to start looking to when they receive the offer, they haven't had the time to feel like they have explored their options properly and, while I would only put them forward for something I think fits with what it is they said they wanted, moving jobs is a big decision and they need to be sure the offer is the right one for them.

When speaking to people about this, I always ask them to consider several different elements before making their decision:

1. Firstly, take a moment to make sure you have enough information to be able to make a choice. Have you researched the company thoroughly? Did you ask all of the questions you wanted to at the interview? Once a role has been offered, don't be afraid to ask for further information. You could even arrange to go into the office for a tour so you can get a feel for the place and culture. At this stage, you are in the driving seat, so do whatever it takes to give you the peace of mind you need.

2. Be honest with yourself and discuss any doubts you have, however small they seem, with the business, your recruiter, or family and friends.

3. Once you have an offer, go back to your original reasons for leaving your current role. Consider carefully whether you are satisfied

that the new job and business is going to meet your objectives.

4. It is very easy to get carried away with the financials. A great offer may sway your decision making, but try to remember that salaries can change, especially if you are in the right company and doing a good job.

5. Think about the long-term. Do you want progression and if so, is there a path in place for you? What is it that you ultimately want to achieve, and how will having this experience on your CV influence your options in three to five years?

6. Try not to be too influenced by emotions. You must put yourself at the centre of the decision-making process and think practically, as the impact of your happiness at work has an enormous bearing on so much of your life.

7. We all have the best of intentions when it comes to work-life balance but will the new role give you the balance you want? If not, do the benefits outweigh the sacrifice?

8. A little compromise can sometimes be okay, providing that it aligns with your bigger picture and goals. This is particularly useful to remember if you are considering a number of different offers at once.

Above all else, a new career move should excite you. That's why I would also say don't be afraid to listen to your gut a little too. You know yourself better than anyone so, if it feels right deep down, and the rational analysis checks out, then it's time to make the change.

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



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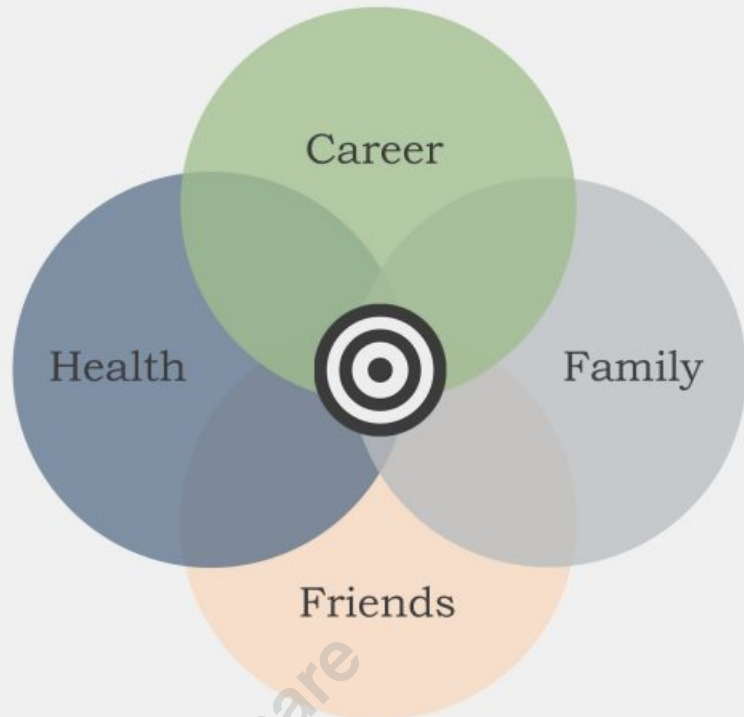
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# BERNICIA TOP MARKS UNDERPIN £120M HOMES INVESTMENT PLANS



Chief Executive of Bernicia, John Johnston.

Top marks from tenants and industry experts are underpinning new plans by Bernicia to invest £120m into new and existing homes over the next four years.

The North East housing association, with 14,000 properties across the region, is finalising its new corporate strategy which sets out its investment priorities until 2026.

The new strategy will go live next March with tenants' views and needs at the heart of it, providing more input into the strategic direction of the business than ever before.

More than 92% of tenants said they are satisfied with the repair and maintenance of their homes in Bernicia's latest annual review of tenant opinion.

Furthermore, a report by social housing industry experts TPAS (Tenants' Participation Advisory Service) examining Bernicia's customer involvement work revealed it met all national engagement standards, pinpointing excellence in governance and transparency, scrutiny and business and strategy.

Bernicia undertook a wide-ranging consultation exercise – 'Your Say, Services Your Way', and the results are now influencing how services will be tailored to meet tenants' changing needs within the new

strategy. This includes building more new homes, modernisation of existing properties, keeping estates well maintained, greater investments in training and employability initiatives and a wide range of opportunities for tenants to become involved with and influence Bernicia.

The TPAS report concluded that the organisation has 'clear expectations of a tenant first culture that influences service delivery through strong and effective leadership', and that 'staff have a real positive commitment, and this was shown through their behaviours and attitudes both to colleagues and with tenants. Tenants' influence and voice is evidenced in all strategic decisions'.

Bernicia, with its head office in Ashington, employs over 550 staff, providing homes and services to more than 60,000 residents. The company recorded a turnover of more than £75m in the last financial year.

Bernicia's tenant voice is heard and responded to by directors and board on business areas across the company, ensuring

people's needs are at the heart of decision making and reflected in services delivered.

John Johnston, Bernicia Chief Executive, said: "The positive feedback from our tenants and TPAS was great validation of our real commitment to ensure our tenants play a central role in shaping our new strategy. We believe we make better decisions by working together.

"We recognise that to deliver exceptional services we must listen to our customers, understand their needs and involve them in setting clear service standards and in the monitoring of our performance against them.

"Our commitment to ensure our tenants' voice plays a central part in our governance arrangements and decision making goes back many years. We work closely with our tenants because it's the right thing to do, and because it enriches understanding, supports the development of a shared sense of common purpose and makes us a stronger and better organisation."

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

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L-R: Danielle Barry, Mark Henderson, Nicola Halse.

## A YEAR OF GROWTH PLANNED FOR COMPLIANT

Sunderland based ISO consultancy, Compliant, have certainly started the year the way they mean to go on with several new contracts already signed in January.

Following a fresh rebrand and updates to their website, the company, who provide support to businesses throughout the UK, have already seen an increase in enquiries.

The company are certainly not one to stand still however, director, Mark Henderson, who is himself a BSI trained lead auditor, has plans to further expand the business in 2022 following an increased demand for their services during the last two years.

Mark commented, 'Due to our continued success, we are looking to invest further in the company throughout 2022 and help as many businesses as we can to gain valuable ISO certifications.

Following the pandemic, many businesses are looking to invest and we have seen a particular increase in enquiries from companies who

want to tender for public sector contracts but then realise they require ISO certifications. Far from being a resource draining and expensive project, by working with ourselves, we offer monthly payment plan options and pride ourselves on our personal service, being with the company every step of the way, we're also immensely proud of our 100% success rate for our clients gaining UKAS accreditations.

We have invested heavily in our rebrand and updated our website to include a chat feature, online quote calculator and many blogs containing useful advice and guidance. Useful video guides providing advice and answers to frequently asked questions are also being planned which will be freely available on our website.

We're delighted to have also expanded our offering to include support on sector specific ISO certifications such as ISO 13485 for medical devices and ISO 22000 for food standards. We are continuing to build a formidable reputation for first-class customer service and this is being reflected in an increased number of enquiries and turnover.

Our team is also continuing to expand with our marketing manager, Danielle, becoming further involved with our clients and assisting with surveillance audits while our sales manager, Nicola, concentrates on increasing our turnover and attracting new clients.

We're confident that by continuing to provide a no-nonsense, competitively priced business model, we can look forward to a successful 2022 and another year of outstanding growth.

**To find out more about Compliant's services or to receive a no-obligation proposal, visit their website at [www.compliantfm.com](http://www.compliantfm.com)**



Ian Lowes

## BOUNCE BACK IN MATURITIES FOR INVESTORS IN UK STRUCTURED PRODUCTS DURING 2021

Investors have seen a significant return in performance among maturing structured products during the financial roller-coaster of 2021, a new UK report reveals.

**More than 91% of retail structured financial products that matured during 2021 saw positive returns, with 7.6% of maturities returning capital only.**

Among a total of 529 product maturities only six plans realised a capital loss in 2021, and all were share-linked plans. This compares against 16 among only 235 structured product maturities in 2020 realising a capital loss when the markets were much more volatile.

In 2021, the 529 products that matured

represented a 125% increase on the previous year. The increase was in large part due to the market correction following the crash in March 2020, which meant that many of the autocall products saw their potential maturity that year rolled on to subsequent years, with commensurate, increased returns. Three quarters of all plans maturing in 2021 were autocalls, whereas in 2020 such products accounted for just 37% of maturities.

Nevertheless, these headline figures show a marked improvement in performance and maturities compared to 2020, according to the latest analysis featured in the Structured Products Annual Performance Review 2021, produced by Newcastle-based Lowes Financial Management, a leading UK financial adviser. The report provides a comprehensive overview of all UK retail structured product maturities throughout the preceding calendar year. It provides an independent summary of the best and worst performing products.

Ian Lowes, MD of Lowes Financial Management, said: "Structured products once again have produced sterling returns for investors, doing what they say on the tin. Despite the turbulence and uncertainty caused by the coronavirus pandemic, 483 delivered positive returns for investors, 40 returned capital only and just six lost capital. The latter were all, high risk plans linked to individual shares, which Lowes had previously forecast would mature negatively."

The Annual Performance Review shows that average annualised performance across all products (capital-at-risk and deposit plans) was 6.20% over an average duration of 3.39 years with an upper quartile average return of 9.34% and lower quartile of 2.56%.

Overall, the average annualised return for capital-at-risk plans was 6.82%, with a top

quartile average of 9.57% and lower quartile, 4.23%. For deposit plans, the quartile returns were respectively 4.87% and nil (solely returning capital).

For context, the average annualised returns for all 2020 maturities, including deposits, was 3.52%, against 5.73% in 2019 and 6.33% in 2018.

Consistent with recent years, the FTSE 100 Index in isolation was the most prevalent underlying measurement used, accounting for 62% of all maturities.

Ian Lowes explained: "There's no denying that coronavirus and its worldwide socioeconomic impacts have been colossal during that last couple of years. In 2020, we suffered one of the worst performances and returns in maturities since the aftermath of the financial crash of 2008/9 – and yet it was still a successful year for retail structured products.

"Maturities have done extremely well in 2021. The benefit of deferred autocalls in 2020 came through last year helping investors secure a strong return."

Lowes, which has frequently been recognised as amongst the best UK investment advisers in various national awards, has become one of only a few specialists in the structured products sector. As well as analysing the performance of all structured products and data covering more than 8,000 plans, Lowes has its own process for identifying 'Preferred' plans – those they view to be the best available on the market at the time of launch.

Ian Lowes added: "We are delighted with the inflation-beating performance of our 'Preferred' plans. More generally, the structured products sector continues to evolve and develop. Many plans regularly outperform other investment products, while providing contingent capital protection against market falls. They can no longer be dismissed by any independent investment adviser."

**A copy of the Annual Performance Review can be found by clicking here: [www.Lowes.co.uk/SPReview2022](http://www.Lowes.co.uk/SPReview2022)**



# UPSKILLING STAFF DURING THE PANDEMIC



Yvonne Gale (left) and NEL Fund Managers apprentice, Abigail Cook.

What are the benefits of continuing to deliver apprenticeships – despite the impact of COVID – for employers? One North East business explains the effect apprenticeships can have on skills, staff retention and business performance.

We know that businesses have a lot on their plates at the moment, adjusting to new ways of working and navigating the ongoing challenges brought by the pandemic. But despite that, many have continued to offer apprenticeships for school leavers, and to use higher-level apprenticeships as a way of upskilling their existing staff.

One North East business which has prioritised apprenticeships is Newcastle-based NEL Fund Managers, which offers loans and investments to businesses in the region. Abigail Cook completed her Level 4 apprenticeship in Accounting – which is equivalent to a foundation degree – during the pandemic, and is now progressing on to Level 7, which is at postgraduate level.

As Yvonne Gale, Chief Executive Officer at NEL Fund Managers, said: “During the early stages of the Coronavirus pandemic everything was temporarily disrupted and for people in a developmental role it’s important they don’t feel like they’re going to be left on the sidelines.

“Apprenticeships could have been something that was easily left on the shelf but we didn’t want to do that; we felt it was really important to keep pushing to make

sure it continued.”

So what does a business gain from continuing to offer apprenticeships? Yvonne explains: “Although we do a lot of learning in the workplace, I think it’s really important people have external learning as well. People in a developmental role will bring improvements to processes as they go, so if they’re only learning in the workplace, where are they going to get that knowledge? We really want people to experience that cross-pollination from training in the workplace in addition to the external perspectives offered through an apprenticeship.

“The other benefit is that apprenticeships offer a structured programme and for small businesses, it’s quite difficult to deliver a three-year structured training programme. Going onto a planned apprenticeship means someone takes on the care of that structured programme for us, and makes sure it happens.”

Apprenticeships aren’t just for school leavers – they can also be used to upskill existing staff and can have a positive effect on staff retention.

“NEL Fund Managers focuses a lot of emphasis on staff retention; over 50% of

our staff has been with us for 10 years or more. You can’t just assume people will stay, you have to offer them progression and the best way to do that is through training. We’re keen to support people who want to continue to learn and develop because we want to keep those members of staff and we want to keep their skills too,” said Yvonne.

And there’s a financial benefit to apprenticeships as well. For employers whose pay bill is less than £3 million a year, you pay just 5% towards the cost of training an apprentice.

“The apprenticeship system really works for us as an employer. The course Abigail is currently doing – had we been paying that ourselves – would cost £20k. For a small business that’s a huge amount of money. Because of the apprenticeship system we’ve been able to get that for 5% of the cost – so it costs us £1k for a £20k piece of training,” said Yvonne Gale.

**The North East Local Enterprise Partnership offers advice for businesses on employing apprentices. Visit [www.northeastambition.co.uk](http://www.northeastambition.co.uk) to find out more.**



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# OculusHR

“

**...Building and  
maintaining a  
strong HR  
strategy is key...**

# SPOTLIGHT ON A YEAR OF PHENOMENAL GROWTH AT OCULUS HR

A leading Sunderland based HR agency have their sights set on further expansion in 2022 following a strong year of growth.

Oculus HR provides innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs and their dedicated and holistic HR approach throughout recent and turbulent months has in turn driven their own organisational expansion.

Founded eight years ago by Managing Director, Louise Kennedy, Oculus HR are committed to creating value to businesses, in particular SMEs to invest and develop their HR strategy. The team at Oculus HR have gone from strength to strength with their tailored HR support services seeing an increase in monthly retainers by nearly 40% and geographical client expansion across the UK including Liverpool and Cornwall.

Recent trends show that HR is becoming ever more needed with a wide variety of legislative changes in addition to variations in working practices. It is vital that businesses are fully aware of HR and its changing landscape and the expert team at Oculus HR have been on hand at a very poignant time when organisations have needed to survive and grow.

Louise Kennedy, Managing Director at Oculus HR said: "Building and maintaining a strong HR strategy is key, the market conditions have been ever changing and it is vital to have up-to-date advice and guidance on hand, our clients have benefited from tailored support, even though we are an outsourced provider we pride ourselves on becoming a part of the businesses and a key support mechanism.

It is vital for businesses to invest in their HR practices, now even more so than ever, our clients have seen a very tangible return on investment and the feedback has been great to hear."

Oculus HR offer human resources support and employment law advice to companies of varying sizes across a number of industrial and business sectors. 2021 saw the launch of Oculus Health and Safety due to demand from their growing client base and a new service of Masterclasses for Line Managers - The HR package which includes 10 different courses.

2022 promises more growth and expansion with the exciting new launch of HR to Go, a service where business owners can purchase packages, alongside the further growth of Oculus Health and Safety which is headed up by business partner, Eddie Kennedy. With new employees set to join the team, plans for an office relocation are also on the horizon.

Louise added: "2022 is looking bright for Oculus HR and promises to be a period of further growth, I'm really happy with the direction that the business is going in. We have a number of exciting new projects recently launched and also in the pipeline and we are committed to having all the right mechanisms in place to support our clients, we will continue to keep innovation at the heart of our support packages.

An increase in remote working, alongside legislative changes and teamed with the enhanced awareness around mental health mean that businesses need to have tailor-made advice readily available and to hand, we have proven to be a vital piece of our client's 'jigsaw' so to speak."

With Louise's background in the automotive and manufacturing sectors, Oculus HR has established an international business reputation working with clients such as Foundation of Light, NBT Group, Ashford Orthodontics, Aphrodite, Pub Culture, Sunderland GP practices to name but a few.

For all the latest industry news sign up to their regular newsletter which covers hot topics from managing the menopause, health and safety to mental health awareness in the workplace. The team also offer a free HR review of current company HR documentation, to book a review contact [louise@oculus-hr.co.uk](mailto:louise@oculus-hr.co.uk)

**To find out more visit [oculus-hr.co.uk](https://oculus-hr.co.uk) and [oculus-healthandsafety.co.uk](https://oculus-healthandsafety.co.uk)**



Simon Howatson and Laura Middleton

## CODE AND THE OFFICE ROCKS ANNOUNCE COLLABORATION TO DRIVE DIGITAL SKILLS IN THE REGION

Sunderland based content marketers, THE OFFICE ROCKS have today unveiled an exciting collaboration with CODE, a national digital skills academy based in Sunderland, which will see the two innovative companies work together to support in the upskilling of the next generation of digital rock stars.

As a leading provider in the North East, Code works with companies of all sizes throughout England to upskill their staff, supporting firms to find the best way to use their Apprenticeship Levy. Code provides a range of accredited training solutions around digital skills, such as digital support technicians, cyber security technologists, software developers and network engineers.

After securing a three-year contract as a part of the ESF North East Workforce Skills Programme, Code have recruited the team at The Office Rocks to creatively drive their digital marketing campaign to ensure maximum impact and engagement.

With the founder and Managing Director, Laura Middleton at the helm, The Office Rocks creates and delivers successful and highly targeted marketing campaigns to ensure a brand's maximum exposure, traffic and sales. With clients on the books including Tesco, Mamas & Papas, Nike, Boohoo, Paperchase and Sainsburys to name but a few, The Office Rocks has successfully created and grown a host of online communities across their portfolio, with a weekly reach of 8m+ and driving over £33m to clients in the process.

Laura Middleton, Managing Director, The

Office Rocks said: "Over the years we have developed a number of online communities across a range of genres, these platforms have seen exceptional growth, the stats speak volumes and we are delighted to now be working with the highly skilled and passionate team over at Code to further grow their digital marketing capabilities."

The parent company behind the sale of e-commerce business WHAT ABOUT THIS (WAT), The Office Rocks has created and grown substantially over the last six years by leveraging their expertise in community building and digital marketing, with shining star Bump, Baby & You taking centre stage as one of the largest digital communities in the mother and baby arena in the UK, with the community topping a seven million reach.

As an established and trusted provider, Code have supported an array of employers across the region with upskilling their workforce and key employers like Northumbrian Water, go-centric, Ilke Homes, Rebuyer and Seriös Group have seen the direct benefits. With The Office Rocks on board the creative team will look to also target the younger generation of employees to inspire the next generation of 'digital rock stars'.

Laura added: "Through our expertise in driving community engagement, we will be utilising a host of methods to ensure we are reaching both employers and also employees via creative content creation, predominantly through TikTok, which we've seen provide phenomenal impact and outcomes for our clients – we also want to inspire young employees to make the approach to their employers and ask to be upskilled."

Code is the apprenticeships division of Rebuyer, which works with companies across the UK to recycle their old IT equipment to protect the environment. The company is also behind Donate Digital, a long-term project to bridge the digital divide in the North East that came to fruition during lockdown for children who didn't have devices to access the internet.

Simon Howatson, founder of Code said: "We are delighted to join forces with The Office Rocks to help drive our digital campaign, Laura is a passionate advocate for digital skills and their creative approach to community development and engagement is a great asset for Code to have on board as we work in collaboration with consortium partners to upskill the region, through the North East Workforce Skills programme.

Companies are increasingly recognising the importance of digital skills in their workforce and as specialists in digital training, we are looking forward to unlocking the opportunity to drive business efficiency and effectiveness across organisations through digital training, alongside ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of their people."

The North East Workforce Skills Programme is a European Social Fund (ESF) project, delivered by a consortium of Further and Higher Education providers in the North East, led by the University of Sunderland. The programme supports employees across the Tyne and Wear and Northumberland area through highly tailored training and development solutions for businesses, from learning basic skills right up to degree level.

**More information visit: [code-academy.co.uk](https://code-academy.co.uk)  
[www.theofficerocks.com](https://www.theofficerocks.com)**

# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION



Chris Murray

## CHRIS MURRAY

Chief Operations Officer, Gray Fox Consulting

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

I'm originally from Newcastle, grew up in Gateshead and now live in Gosforth.

### What do you think it means to be a business person in the North East of England?

From a regional point of view our strong business community is apparent. It is a supportive environment to work within. The region's infrastructure is expanding and with customers in London and across the UK, we have easy access to them.

### What is your favourite place to visit in the North East?

Bamburgh is one of my top spots. I also think you can't beat Newcastle Quayside – day or night, there is always a lively atmosphere with some great locations to wine and dine.

We also have great cultural venues within the city, The Sage and The Baltic being prominent examples.

### Where do you like to eat out?

I always have a great experience dining out at Six at the top of the Gateshead Baltic, while Broad Chare and Café 21 on the Quayside, are also two of my favourite restaurants.

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

I don't think it did in the past but the landscape is definitely changing and will continue to change. The recent takeover of Newcastle United will attract more investment into the city and this will overflow into the region.

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

Yes. I have been fortunate to work in Zurich, Prague, Amsterdam and I have worked across the UK. I have an affinity with Zurich as it had a familiar feel to Newcastle and the Quayside. It is a relaxed city where the people are friendly and there is a warm community spirit.

[wearegrayfox.co.uk](http://wearegrayfox.co.uk)



Mike Clark (front) of Tynexe Commercial, developers of AirView Park, with Peter Reek, Project Manager (left), and David Tait, Site Manager (centre), both of Brims Construction.

## CONSTRUCTION STARTS ON PHASE TWO AT AIRVIEW PARK

Construction has now started on phase two of AirView Park after planning permission was granted by Newcastle City Council for a new multi-million pound office development on the outskirts of the city.

Tynexe Commercial Ltd, the developers behind AirView Park, will deliver a new 20,000 sq ft scheme at the 175,000 sq ft site next to Newcastle International Airport.

It will consist of two buildings, the first being a 10,200 sq ft digitally-enabled centre of excellence and shared workspace facility to help new start-ups launch, and regional SMEs scale up and take advantage of global trade and export opportunities.

The second building will offer high quality commercial space for multiple occupancy lease or alternatively, as a single occupancy head office base, ideal for expanding companies or those looking for a strategic North East location next to main transport routes and international business links.

Local North East construction company, Brims, has been appointed as the main contractor for phase two which is hoped will attract many new organisations to the site and the region. Initial ground and enabling works have started including the excavation of plots 2A and B to formation level, with build activity on plot 2A also underway. A full programme of construction is expected to last eleven months with completion of the first building anticipated in the autumn.

Mike Clark, Director of Tynexe Commercial Limited, developers of AirView Park,

commented, "This is another fantastic addition to AirView Park as well as the North East's business landscape. As one of the region's most strategic sites, the development will fully support local SMEs as well as attract new organisations to the region to further strengthen economic growth, international trade potential and recovery.

"We're delighted to have appointed Brims Construction as the main contractor for phase two, which again helps to support and protect local jobs including those within wider supply chain organisations. Brims has vast experience creating high quality industrial and commercial schemes, and so work onsite will now move at speed. Initial groundworks have started on the first building and by the end of the year, we will have a new scheme that delivers the very best facilities for potential occupiers."

AirView Park, located at Wooslington next to Newcastle International Airport, has already attracted Bellway plc. The national homebuilder completed its new national HQ building as part of phase one with office space for more than 80 Group employees.

Peter Reek, Project Manager of Brims Construction at AirView Park, added, "Activity is progressing well on site with the groundworks and drainage installations

currently underway. Further ground clearance works are planned for the rest of the month whilst the erection of structural steel frames for phase 2A are due to commence at the end of January. This is a great scheme for Brims to be involved with and one that is expected to be popular once built."

Brims Construction is a privately-owned construction company with a turnover of £26.5m. The Sunderland-based firm, which employs 83 permanent staff, has solid experience across many sectors delivering new projects and repeat business for commercial, industrial, retail, leisure, health, residential, education and public sector clients. AirView Park is the latest development for Tynexe Commercial Ltd.

Director, Richard Wood, added, "AirView Park is a very exciting scheme with high quality commercial space planned. We've worked with the client and members of their team previously, and we're confident that Brims represents the final piece in the jigsaw in bringing together a very successful team and project delivery for everyone involved."

AirView Park is one of the region's most active and important commercial property developments. The North East Local Enterprise Partnership (NELEP), which supports major capital investments to promote innovation, economic and skills infrastructure, and sustainable transport as part of the North East Growth Deal, has allocated an agreed Getting Building Fund grant of £944,294 to the site.

**For more details regarding phase two or bespoke-build, commercial property opportunities, please contact Jessica Ross at Naylors Gavin Black on t: 07702 528 881, e: [jessica@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk](mailto:jessica@naylorsgavinblack.co.uk) or go to [www.airviewpark.co.uk](http://www.airviewpark.co.uk)**



Joanne Howe

## CHANGE IS AS GOOD AS A REST

***"Change is the only constant" - Greek philosopher, Heraclitus of Ephesus.***

**I get asked all the time by busy business owners, "Is it always this hard to implement change?" And of course, the answer is yes. I said when Sir Alex Ferguson left Manchester United that they wouldn't win anything for at least the next three years. Coming from a family of gamblers I wish I'd gone to Ladbrokes at the time!**

Running a business, a school, a hospital, a care home, a football club or a manufacturing business, is like being on a journey. As the leader of the business we have to ensure that we have all the right staff, in the right seats, facing the right way and doing the right jobs. Change is constant and here's some of the twists and turns you might encounter along the way?

- **Culture** – Culture comes from the top.

- **Accountability** – Ironically the larger a company is, the more limited their accountability becomes.
- **Management** – This is simply getting the job done through the use of resources. Using the football analogy again- just because you're a brilliant footballer doesn't mean you're going to be a brilliant manager.
- **Vision** – Set the vision and values and get

everyone to buy into them.

- **80/20** – Your business is only as good as your weakest member of staff. Do you know who this is and what are you doing about it?
- **Performance** – Know your data and know what products are actually making you money. Don't be a busy fool. Reward the workers and deal with the shirkers.
- **Get started** – Have the difficult conversations you've been putting off.

Most business owners have far too much to do, they need daily focus and excellent organisation skills to allow them more time to make more money. Join our mentoring programme to help bring clarity, boost confidence and build capability.

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## A BUSINESS ON THE RISE!

Rise Elevator, one of the UK's most innovative elevator businesses is leading the way in lift services across the nation with innovative designs, strategic partnerships, and a new state of the art showroom.

The Gateshead based company has been successfully delivering lift auditing, lift repairs and lift installation services since 2019. Its team of professional engineers are led by local businessman Kris McGough, who has over 20 years industry experience.

As part of its commitment to innovation Rise Elevator also provides bespoke lift refurbishments, passenger release training, stairlift installation and repair, LOLER and PUWER inspections and training from a unique training centre based in the North East.

### What Rise Elevator offers

Rise Elevator's main service area is lift installation and refurbishment. The company delivers lift installations and refurbishments to commercial properties and residential spaces, with the aim of making areas more accessible.

Alongside passenger lifts, Rise Elevator is also qualified to install car and good lifts to a high industry standard, with safety always being the highest priority. An example of the business' car lift solutions can be seen at its Gateshead showroom.

The company prides itself on delivering both safe, modern and functional refurbishments as well as attractive interior redesigns that make lifts memorable and beautiful.

Rise Elevator, MD Kris commented "After setting up in 2019 we have seen an unprecedented increase in demand for our services, especially within the healthcare industry.

Our main markets are the NHS and Health Trusts, although we also offer services to commercial clients and domestic customers, especially those vulnerable individuals who need support with access.

As a business we aim to provide access to those most vulnerable, including patients with conditions such as dementia or claustrophobia and are passionate about supporting the communities in which we work.

We always assess each individual or client's unique situation before making recommendations. The most important thing for us is providing solutions that we know will make an incredible difference for the end user."

### Lifts for healthcare

Lifts in the healthcare sector are used for a wide range of purposes, from enabling access for the elderly to transporting equipment between floors and maintaining a high level of security.

When fitting a new lift or replacing an existing one within the healthcare industry, Rise Elevator urges clients to consider its wider usage and make sure the result is fit-for-purpose.

Reliable and safe lift accessibility is vital in a range of healthcare facilities. From the inclusion of braille on lift buttons to the fitting of secure handles throughout the lift, Rise Elevator helps clients to ensure their lift is accessible to all potential users.

There are also a series of strict regulations as detailed in the Equality Act 2010 regarding wheelchair accessibility in lifts. Every building owner must make 'reasonable adjustments for disabled people' and this is just as relevant in care homes, where both residents and visitors may require wheelchair access to any floor of the building as well as handrails and other adaptations.

In a healthcare facility, a lift is more than just a means of accessing each floor – it's an extra layer of security to keep patients, residents, visitors, and staff safe.

### Training

Under LOLER Regulations, businesses must ensure that they have made suitable arrangements for the safe release of passengers trapped in a lift. According to the Lift and Escalator Industry Association (LEIA), the lift owner must take responsibility

to appoint training and competent people to carry out a safe release.

Rise Elevator recommends regular lift maintenance and audits to reduce the risk of any operational issues with commercial lifts.

The company's Passenger Release Training equips staff with the knowledge they need to deal with the unlikely event of being trapped in a lift.

### Lift renovations

Rise Elevator is recognised for transforming spaces into more than just lifts. One of its latest refurbishment jobs was for Alnwick Infirmary; a heritage-rich building in a region renowned for culture and history.

The business created a comforting space for vulnerable patients, NHS staff and visitors alike. The full interior refurbishment sees a large photograph of Alnwick Castle placed inside the cab – making it feel more open and 'outdoors' than a traditional lift. Rise Elevator, Business Development Manager, Joe Routledge explained "we work closely with clients, guiding them through the technical jargon around lift repairs and the legal requirements modern lifts need, laying out our step-by-step process to getting the job done.

Accessible design caters for those with impaired movement, failing eyesight or those experiencing hearing issues. It's a must for public buildings such as hospitals but is often ignored in the home until it is needed.

That's why we are proud to be the only provider in the North East to have partnered with leading lift manufacturer, Terry Lifts."

### Domestic lifts

As the UK's population ages, building features in homes that mean a buyer can live in a home long into their elderly years means creating longer-lasting independence.

Rise Elevator's domestic lift partner, Terry Lifts has over 50 years' experience in the lift industry and possesses unique capabilities in design, manufacturing, project management and after-care.

Safety is at the forefront of Terry Lifts' lift designs; going beyond rigorous testing standards to improve passenger safety on all lifts. A range of Terry Lifts can be viewed at Rise Elevator's inviting, new showroom in Gateshead.

**For more information on any of Rise Elevator's commercial or domestic services contact Joe Routledge at [joe@rise-elevator.co.uk](mailto:joe@rise-elevator.co.uk) or visit their website [www.riseelevator.co.uk](http://www.riseelevator.co.uk)**





## NORTHUMBERLAND SCHOOLBOY NAMED UK'S YOUNG NEIGHBOUR OF THE YEAR AFTER BEING INSPIRED BY MARCUS RASHFORD

Noah Macdonald from Wylam won the national award for his fundraising efforts to help those in need.

Inspired by Marcus Rashford free school meal campaign- aimed to ensure that children from low income families did not go hungry, he organised a charity walk to raise money for FAR ( Fenham Association of Residents) and to raise awareness of the issues of food poverty. Noah raised over £800 in one weekend, enlisting the help of his friends and family to complete an 8 mile walk. His mum Dee helped to publicise his fundraising campaign across social media which lead to donations from all across the UK and abroad.

Noah also did another longer walk in December after seeing the news about the refugees dying while trying to cross the channel. He was so upset about it he decided to raise some money for NEST, a charity in Newcastle who help refugees who come to live in the North East. He raised over £620 which went towards buying some presents for the refugee children for Christmas.

Noah said: "I am so happy to win this award- its amazing! People like Marcus Rashford really inspire me to help others. Its not fair that some children dont have enough food or wont get any presents. In think if we all did something small the world would be a better place."

Charles Offord, MD of Co-op Insurance said: "The next generation is in very safe hands if Noah's story is anything to go by."

*\*Marcus Rashford went on to tweet about Noah to his five millions followers!*



## NORTHERN CHILDREN OF COURAGE AWARDS

The big hearts and courage of North East children and young people who have overcome barriers, achieved something extraordinary or helped and supported others have been highlighted at an award celebration.

Last year's Northern Children of Courage Awards were cancelled due to COVID, so the organisers decided to bring the winners together to present them with their much-deserved accolades.

Organised and supported for the third year by The St. James's Place Charitable Foundation, the awards were split over two age categories (under 12 and 13-17 years old), and presented in six categories:

Outstanding Bravery, Fundraising Award, Special Recognition, Young Carer of the Year Award, Sporting Achievement and Care Team Award – to an adult team for care and support above and beyond expectations.

Mark Beverley from the St. James's Place Charitable Foundation was proud of each of the children who won an award.

"These young people are remarkable and are an inspiration to us all. We all have things going on in our lives but the courage these young people have shown is amazing and they all deserve the recognition they've received."

The winners were Tyler Ridley , Donna Swan, Lyla O'Donovan, Calum Lane Tingle, Louis Rich, Ellie Renton, Sean Benyon, Tanya Wilson and Erin Cockburn.

The next awards will take place on Friday 6th May at Gateshead Hilton, please contact [danny@change4r.co.uk](mailto:danny@change4r.co.uk) for nomination forms.

## A CERTIFICATE OF APPRECIATION

Alnwick Rotary Club President, Joy Palmer Cooper presented Abbeyfield House Care Home in Alnwick with a certificate of appreciation for the efforts made by staff members during the pandemic to keep their residents safe.

The certificate coincides with the results of a survey taken by staff, families and residents looking at the way that Abbeyfield House handled the pandemic. The survey showed that 100 percent of those surveyed were happy that their loved ones had been well cared for during the pandemic and every resident that responded said that they had felt safe and protected.

Abbeyfield House took immediate steps to curtail any infections as Heather Dixon, General Manager explained: "Like a lot of care homes, we did have a COVID outbreak, but we were able to control the spread



quickly and minimised the number of residents affected. We had previously done a lot of pre planning so that we had everything in place to deal with any outbreak. Specialist cleansing was carried out by a contractor, and we carried out more regular cleaning regime to minimise the spread.

"I'm very proud of our staff who have done a marvellous job in very challenging circumstances to ensure our residents were looked after as best as we could in line with the constantly changing regulations."



## Let video tell your story...

Turps Film is a North-East based video production agency, focused on creating authentic content for businesses who are looking to generate ROI, build awareness and drive engagement.

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# HOW BUSINESSES CAN MITIGATE AGAINST ENERGY PRICE RISES IN 2022



The UK has experienced soaring energy prices since March 2021. At the end of last year, power prices have hovered near the £220 per MWh tag.

Northern Gas and Power offers specialist energy management services for its 22,000 customers and is part of Global Procurement Group (GPG) - a global energy consultancy that helps businesses across three continents manage their energy more effectively on their journey to a net zero carbon future.

The company and its energy experts have watched closely as the energy crisis has developed and worked hard to support its customers navigate this complex situation.

These record prices we are experiencing have troubled businesses across the UK. The food and beverage and fertiliser industries, for example, have struggled to meet product demands because of tight and expensive energy supplies. Power-hungry sectors such as steel, glass, and chemicals have battled soaring gas and electricity costs that have caused higher prices of goods.

## Why are energy prices so high?

A combination of factors – low wind generation, low European storage, intermittent Russian supplies, post-pandemic demand surges, competitive LNG markets abroad, power system outages, and cold temperatures, to name a few – consistently pushed prices to record heights during the back half of 2021. These bullish trends are expected to continue in 2022.

In the face of these challenges, businesses who either must renew their business energy contracts soon or in coming years can protect their budgets and bottom lines this winter and next year by procuring more wisely, adjusting operations during off-peak periods, powering down idle or unused equipment, and improving energy efficiency.

## What can cause energy prices to dip?

With the Omicron challenge persisting, some European countries (at time of writing) have in place certain Covid restrictions and lockdown measures. Decreased energy demand in Europe reduces incentives for the UK to export to Europe, which in turn lowers prices in the UK.

Warmer winter temperatures could cap some of the rises currently evident in the UK gas and power market. If demand falls below seasonal norms, drops in gas prices are likely outcomes.

## What can your business do?

Procure the right contract type at the right time.

If you are looking to procure a new contract in or after April 2022, pursuing a flexible contract is a viable option. Moving into the spring months mean less demand for heating.

Ramnikh Kular, Energy Trader at Northern Gas and Power, notes that "The market could be 'overvalued' at this point, and, conditionally, a warmer winter will significantly reduce energy prices from April 2022 onwards."

Latif Faiyaz, Head of Flexible Purchasing at Northern Gas and Power, added: "This gives you the option to sell back your energy and then rebuy it at a lower rate when the market does eventually fall."

If you are needing to procure sooner (up to March 2022), opting for a long-term fixed contract will help reduce prices. This method of power purchasing is known as "cost averaging".

"If you take a three- or five-year deal," says

Latif Faiyaz, "the average unit rate you'll pay will be significantly lower than that of a one-year deal."

## Monitor your energy consumption and waste

Businesses right now can reduce their energy bills through energy management and monitoring.

Energy management is the process of monitoring, controlling, and optimising energy in a building, site, or organisation to satisfy both economic and environmental requirements.

"Businesses have the opportunity to identify where their energy is being consumed with advanced energy monitoring systems," says Latif Faiyaz. "These can spot inefficiencies in seconds which businesses can address immediately, making significant savings in the long run."

Energy management systems, such as GPG's ClearVUE allow businesses through data-rich and easy-to-use graphs and reports to gain visibility of exactly how much energy their business is using and losing, enabling them to improve cost and carbon efficiencies and their net zero credentials.

One of the easiest ways to reduce energy cost is to optimise the way in which it is already used. Businesses can become more efficient by reducing energy consumption – switching off lights and charging points, PCs and equipment, or using energy-intensive machinery only when required.

***If you are keen to identify opportunities to save energy in 2022 and beyond, we are available to provide support, on +44 (0)3 300 300 800.***

***[www.ngpltd.co.uk](http://www.ngpltd.co.uk)  
[www.clearvue.business](http://www.clearvue.business)***



Latif Faiyaz



## COVID RECOVERY GRANT GIVES EQUESTRIAN CENTRE A JUMP START

A family run, Whitley Bay-based equestrian centre, is galloping forward, thanks to a Covid recovery grant from Open North Foundation.

The £1,500 will be used to train members of the 10-strong team whose skills need updating following the pandemic and large amounts of time spent on furlough.

Murton Equestrian Centre is a 5-star licensed riding centre owned by Derek and Leigh Belbin, which prides itself in offering riding lessons in a safe and relaxed environment, for adults and children.

With 25 horses, it has a large indoor arena with a spacious viewing gallery, an outdoor arena and a level show jumping paddock. With facilities that offer all year-round riding, the centre is a highly commended by the British Horse Society (BHS).

Open North Foundation was established in July 2020 and is a direct response from the business community in the North East to provide financial and in-kind support to small businesses in the region directly hit by the pandemic. It relies on the generosity of companies and organisations to provide donations and has a structure of a board of directors, ambassadors and supporters, all of whom provide their services free of charge.

## NEW MENTAL HEALTH SERVICE SUPPORTING THOSE IN DISTRESS TO LAUNCH IN TEESSIDE

A leading North East mental health charity, Mental Health Concern, has announced it will launch a new mental health crisis service in Teesside, called Together in a Crisis, in March. Together in a Crisis will provide personalised, flexible support for people who are experiencing a period of distress in their lives.

In partnership with Tees, Esk and Wear Valley NHS Trust, Mental Health Concern will work alongside the NHS mental health crisis team, to provide additional non-clinical support to people whose life circumstances are contributing to their distress. These circumstances could include long-term medical conditions, bereavement, unemployment, addiction, or housing difficulties. The support offered will be based on individual circumstance and could include emotional support and help to

access community resources, such as talking therapies, debt advice, training or education, and other support services.

The support begins with an initial conversation with a member of the Together in a Crisis team, to identify the priorities and actions needed to support the person. Each person will be assigned a dedicated link worker for the duration of their support.

Mental Health Concern will be recruiting a number of people from the area to provide the service, including those with lived experience of mental ill-health and distress. This will be the first service of its kind in Teesside and will support at least 480 people each year.



## BETH KICKSTARTS THE NEW YEAR WITH JOB OFFER

What a way to start 2022- Beth Simmonite is now a staff member of The Activity Den, a charity in Co Durham. The Activity Den runs projects, youth clubs and activities for children and young people of all ages in Tanfield Lea, Stanley.

Beth joined the charity on the governments Kickstart Scheme in June 2021. The Kickstart Scheme is open to people that are aged 16-24 who are claiming Universal Credit and are at risk of long-term unemployment. Kickstart jobs are funded by the Government to offer exciting opportunities for young people to gain valuable work experience.

Beth bosses were so impressed with her tenacious attitude and ability to learn on the job that they have found funding to keep for on for at least a year.

Beth said: "I truly love my job and have never been happier. I enjoy every second I get to spend with the kids and feel so lucky to know such amazing members of staff. It has been an incredible journey that has opened up so many opportunities for me. I can't wait to see what the future holds."

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



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David Cliff

## IS THAT REALLY YOU?

Much is spoken of imposter syndrome these days, but when we start to explore it, it is much more complex than just a simple label.

Broadly speaking imposter syndrome refers to the sense of being less entitled to what everyone is doing or experiencing at the time, perhaps even fraudulent in one's social/organisational position. At it's very worst it can make one feel one is effectively doing things under false pretences or "faking", with anxieties of being discovered.

It can happen to anyone, and is associated with anxiety, self-doubt, erosion of self-image, second-guessing oneself and avoidable stress. It interferes with forming a reasonable appraisal of ones qualities, juxtaposed with the environments they are presented in.

Those of you who know me know that "syndromising" is not my style. I believe there's an overuse of pseudo-illness type terminology, which fills consulting rooms but achieves little else. The truth is this issue appears nowhere in diagnostic criteria although can be subsumed under anxiety disorders, social phobias, and the like. The reality is there are multiple realities and ethics demand we have a real debate about this.

Just as Nietzsche highlighted the value of declaring what we consider our worst qualities as perhaps our best, my view of the imposter phenomenon is that it is actually a healthy sign. Here are a few thoughts around this:

Firstly, there is desire that things in life should be pleasant, and you should have a progressively upward vector of confidence and competency as you proceed through life gaining wisdom and expertise.

However desirable, this is a false notion. Careers do not proceed in this way and often people have to transfer their skills across sectors. As you gain experience through life, if anything, the world is less certain than it was with simpler, less informed understandings of it. That state of awareness has its attendant stresses.

Secondly, we live in a world that celebrates extroversion however many people are primarily introvert and have their right to be heard, participate and influence. Indeed, we all have extrovert/introvert tendencies and these manifest themselves in context specific ways. The 'party animal' may struggle with the presentation and vice versa. Some people get their energy from the people around them, others from within, we are all different. Our introversion tendencies, tend to make us more self-reflective and sensitive to the perceptions of others. In some situations, this may be a positive advantage but equally in others it can paralyse. Conscience and confidence are often context dependent.

Next, no one likes to be rejected - avoiding it is programmed into us. Yet putting yourself out there, perhaps coming up with a view that is at odds with others, is the way thinking develops and new paradigms of understanding are born. We have an evolutionary fear of rejection, at more primitive times it affects our survival prospects, but in a modern world, 'disruption' is celebrated, but we have to surmount concerns as to what other people think in order to be truly free to be a disruptor.

Finally, there is no one reality. In a diverse world with multiple perspectives, we are going to get people who will agree and disagree with this. Equally, if our role and function in an organisation, family or community is to simply 'fit in' then we never need to put ourselves out there in ways that will get noticed. We simply become 'friends of fog', followers looking for a leader, never leaders ourselves.

It then becomes axiomatic that the experience what we call colloquially "imposter syndrome" actually involves courageous people with views and ideas, seek to advocate these, advance thinking and self-promote whilst running the risk of rejection and having to balance a perfectly natural fear of failure that is so present in people as to be commonplace not pathological.

In my view, when people feel perhaps they should not be where they are, it is to recognise the opportunities the modern world brings. We no longer exist in a purely rules-based world wherein doing the time, working through the ranks and accepting ritual and convention as a way to expand our careers and social standing. Radically different views, new ways, need styles of presentation that often challenge people, businesses, societies and cultures in ways that we have never previously seen. That sense of not necessarily being entitled to be there, calls into question our value fundamentally as improved human rights and increased opportunities to be socially mobile in systems that were once made for only the compliant, privileged few. The fact that we expose ourselves to challenges that are a personal stretch or brings challenge to an organisational culture that has had traditional rites of passage, is bound to render us in situations where we must rely more upon on our own internal resources, whilst finding external ones upon which we can rely.

So here it is, imposter syndrome may not be a "syndrome" as such, but may be a reflection of modern social mobility, a move away from traditional rule-based meritocratic thinking into a modern world that has greater opportunity for all. Those who seek to exploit it by improving their careers, challenging previous oppression or simply wishing to define themselves as different, will inevitably have attendant anxieties when challenging norms both within themselves and within the social systems they engage with.

It's like a lot of things I have found in the personal development and coaching field - if you hope to feel confident and competent and don't get that, it's probably a sign that you are facing challenges and growing!

Give me, any day, the uncertain person who with humility proceeds anyway, challenges thinking, speaks the truth clearly, represents change and perhaps hopes nobody notices the tremor in their voice or perhaps that flushing around the throat! Sure, if their experience is horribly disabling due to uniquely personal issues there is help. My real concern however lies in ensuring we create within organisations cultural changes that truly promote high support where there is high challenge. Changes which recognise that people putting themselves out there, need support, acceptance, great feedback, which welcome debate, celebrate difference and eschew stereotypes!



# CHARITY OF THE MONTH

In the latest of these popular series of features we talk to...

## **TYNESIDE OUTDOORS**

Tyneside Outdoors was founded to fill the gap left by the closure of the National Trust Inner City Project. Two of the Youth and Community Workers from that project, Gerard New and Kath Lohfink, set out to create the new charity to meet the needs of disadvantaged communities on Tyneside through the provision of Youth and Community Work activities out-of-doors.

**Which area do you cover?**

We wanted our name to 'do what it says on the tin' so Tyneside had to be our focus. We love the wider region's outdoor spaces and try our best to get further afield when time allows, at weekends or school holidays, however, our focus is on enjoying the benefits of the brilliant outdoor spaces we have on Tyneside. These include: Local parks like Hodgkin Park where we host our West End Outdoors Youth Group - taking fortnightly trips out to other local outdoor spaces for a range of activities; Orienteering at Prudhoe or Beach Volleyball at South Shields or Kite Flying on the Town Moor for example. We run a weekly outdoor games sessions in Walker Park, with the aim of helping young people there enjoy some active fun in their local park. In Temple Park, South Shields, we run the Temple Raiders young people's bike group. This group is about having as much fun as we can on a bike - this currently involves taking part in a novice series of BMX racing over the winter months but bike repairs, bike games and rides out from South Shields form the mainstay of the group's activities.

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

In previous years we've hosted a number of fundraising events including a sponsored bike ride The Tyne TO'er from Hexham to Newcastle. However, one of our favoured fundraising activities is Tea for TO, a coffee morning-type event but involving Tea for TO, which can be hosted by anyone to raise funds for specific group projects or to support TO's other activities. However, as with many of our activities these have been impacted by the Coronavirus pandemic meaning we've not been able to make the most of these.

**How have you adapted during the Coronavirus pandemic?**

As an outdoors organisation we were ideally placed to take advantage of the need to take activities outdoors. Whilst we had to take our group meetings online during the strictest lockdown measures we were able to meet with our groups outdoors fairly regularly during most of the pandemic. Our use of a minibus became almost impossible as this restricted our group size to only four young people - a trip to go mountain biking in Chopwell in December 2020 for our Temple Raiders took three minibuses, plus two shuttle runs in between, to get our group of 13 young people there and back.

We adapted some of our activities to ensure social distancing, however, most of our activities were well suited to fit in with the restrictions and we experienced very little change in our offer.

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

Our biggest achievements have stemmed from our BMX Track Heritage Project in Temple Park, South Shields. This project started from a conversation with a young man about his use of the BMX Dirt Track built in 1983. Young people involved in that project helped to undertake the first archaeological survey of a BMX Track in the UK. They also took centre stage in a documentary created for the project with Archaeosoup Productions. During this project we also hosted a number of Big Bike Revival events, funded by Cycling UK and re-cycled more than 30 bikes, mostly BMXs, donated by Recycle-y-Bike in Newcastle, to give to young people in the South Tyneside area, for free. Because of that one conversation with a young man in the park we now have our Temple Raiders bike group with its own logo and racing jerseys.

**Who are your main trustees and patrons?**

In starting off TO we had great support from colleagues, parents and former youth group members, many of whom were happy to sign up as Trustees to support the new charity. This support was instrumental. Setting up a new charity during the early years of austerity, when numerous other organisations were closing, was a big struggle. Whilst it is still a struggle and our Trustees are key to helping us achieve our success, we're still looking for more support to help the organisation build on its successes.

**What are you currently working on?**

We've just secured enough funding to buy our own minibus, a key priority for our work in the future; to reduce hire costs, consolidate our work with our current groups and to develop new work. Our



next priority is to find a base for the organisation. As an outdoors organisation this was always a low priority. However, despite our ability to work from home for most administrative functions we now need a base to house our ever-growing outdoors equipment resources - there really is a limit to how many bikes you can fit in a garden shed. A new base would also provide a place to meet with, support and develop our growing team of staff and volunteers.

**What does the future hold?**

It's difficult to talk about feeling positive about the future for the charity as this essentially means the issues we've been trying to tackle have either worsened or we've added more complexity to them. The Coronavirus pandemic highlighted the need for greater emphasis on using our outdoor spaces more, to exercise more and to take care of our mental health. The impact on the mental health of young people became a major concern and it was a real worry to us during the darker days of lockdowns.

The Build Back Greener agenda is another situation where the climate crisis may become an opportunity for TO to promote it's already low-environmental-impact activities as options for a cleaner and greener lifestyle. This, coupled with the impending financial situation particularly for low income households could see TO turning its attention to promoting its already low carbon, low cost activities as a source of help and support for residents in disadvantaged areas of Tyneside.

**How do you get involved?**

TO's work is currently targeted in three geographical areas, West Newcastle (Elswick, Benwell and Scotswood), East Newcastle (Walker Park) and South Shields (Temple Park). Young people living in or close to those areas are encouraged to get involved. Parents are asked to complete a group membership form, and weekly consent forms provide information about the dates, times and locations of each group's weekly activities.

All our activities are provided for free. We've been keen from the very start that our activities should be free for anyone to attend, there should never be a charge to enjoy the outdoors. The free-to-attend principle means that young people enjoying our activities, which in some cases take place in their local parks, don't face any financial barriers.

We are also very keen to encourage support from volunteers in face-to-face settings with young people and to support our development and administration activities that underpin our work outdoors, for example with marketing and communications or fundraising.

**To gain more information about TO's work and how to get involved please visit our website: [www.tynesideoutdoors.org.uk](http://www.tynesideoutdoors.org.uk) or email us [info@tynesideoutdoors.org.uk](mailto:info@tynesideoutdoors.org.uk)**

# COUNTY DURHAM GROWTH FUND HELPS 17 FIRMS ACCELERATE GROWTH

The County Durham Growth Fund awarded £1.98 million in grants to 17 companies from across the county last year, which will create 278 new jobs.

2021 proved to be a successful year in terms of demand for the £8.9 million capital grant scheme, which provides financial support to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in County Durham to help accelerate their growth. The fund is managed by Business Durham, the business support service of Durham County Council in partnership with UMi.

As well as the £1.98 million grants awarded to SMEs and businesses, the Fund leveraged a further £3.1million in private sector investment.

Each of the 17 companies supported secured a sizeable investment grant to help them buy new machinery and equipment, increase capacity, develop new products or move into larger premises.

The capital grant funding supports both established and new businesses who are looking to either expand or set up new operations in County Durham.

Peterlee based EB Granite received a grant to invest in new machinery to improve efficiency and increase capacity. Mark Ellis co-founder of the company said: "The business has grown every year since it was set up and the demand for our services was continuing to increase. We knew there

was scope to bring in a lot more work but the machinery we had was outdated, around a decade old, and just wasn't working as quickly and efficiently as we needed it to.

"We know we have an excellent reputation within the industry and people travel from all over the region for our products and services. The demand is there and with the investment we've made in the new machinery, with the funding we received from the Durham County Council programme, we know we're now ideally placed to bring in bigger contracts that often require a faster turnaround."

North East Bi-Folds Ltd received a grant to extend the company's current premises in Seaham together with investing in additional plant and machinery. Andrea Meah, from the company said: "We'd grown rapidly and had reached a point where we were supplying most of the house-builders in the North East. However, we needed more space and the machinery we were using was old and was starting to malfunction, so we knew if we were to continue to grow, we needed to invest.

"Our accountant suggested that we apply to the County Durham Growth Fund for grant support and thankfully we were successful."





North East Bi-Folds

Cllr James Rowlandson, Cabinet Member for Resources, Investments and Assets at Durham County Council, said: "These companies are great examples of the innovative and ambitious small and medium-sized businesses located across our area and we at Durham County Council are very proud to have been able to support them, as they expand and flourish. It is by investing in ambitious firms like these that we will be able to ensure healthy economic growth and plenty of job creation for County Durham now and in the future."

The 17 companies securing a grant in 2021 are:

- Maintenance, groundskeeping, cleaning and distribution company, AAA UK.
- Engineering company Ashgarth Engineering.
- Fabrication firm ATT Fabrications Limited.
- Horse-riding equipment and clothing specialist, Aztec Diamond Limited.
- Conduit Construction Network Limited, which manufactures door-sets, screens and ironmongery.
- Innovative modular housebuilder, CoreHaus Ltd.
- Manufacturer of kitchen surfaces, hearths and vanity tops EB Granite.
- EV Smart which designs and installs electric vehicle charging points.
- Finnish sauna specialists, Finnmark Saunas.
- Workwear, PPE and safety products company Industrial Workwear.
- Bi-fold door manufacturer North East Bi-Folds Limited.
- Solar energy generation technology company Power Roll Limited.
- Pragmatic Printing Limited which manufactures innovative integrated circuits.
- Supplier of commercial catering equipment RG Distributors T/A ECatering.
- Close proximity radiographer pioneer SafeRad.
- T.O. Mounter & Sons, which manufacture wooden sleepers, logs and pallets.
- Engineering firm Teescraft Engineering Ltd, which produces precision components for power related applications.

The fund is delivered by Business Durham in partnership with Umi. All successful grant applications are appraised by UNW LLP, an independent firm of chartered accountants and business advisers. The funding has been secured from the England European Regional Development Fund as part of the European Structural and Investment Funds Growth Programme 2014-2020.

**To check eligibility and get help with the application process contact UMi on either 0191 7161006 or 07443 231757, or visit [www.countydurhamgrowthfund.co.uk](http://www.countydurhamgrowthfund.co.uk)**

# IS IT TIME TO CHANGE YOUR VIEW ON BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT?

Let's work out where you are starting from:

- How do you really feel about Business Development?
- How do you really feel if we call it what it really is, sales?

Many professionals stay away from any part of business development (sales), finding and growing new clients just based on how they feel. Is this you, or does it sound like someone around you?

Very often this happens as people have a negative emotional association with business development. Call it sales and people tend to have a hugely negative emotional association and want to run in the opposite direction!

I've often seen people who have this negative association do everything they possibly can to avoid meeting new clients and growing their business. It might sound strange to you, and you might be reading this shaking your head, but very often this avoidance is at an unconscious level. Pause for two minutes and answer these questions honestly:

- Have you ever delayed picking up the phone to follow up on an introduction?
- Did you ever find yourself "too busy" to attend a useful networking event or conference?
- Have you ever not mentioned an additional service or product to an existing client (even when deep down you think you should)?

It's not uncommon for people to do this. It could be you or it could be the team around you. It's important that we all acknowledge and understand this. It's critical that you



Nevil Tynemouth

address this and make sure you know how to deal with this in a positive and productive way.

The first thing we need to do is to reframe your views on both "business development" and "sales". Rather than the outdated view of sales that we all seem to have, how about you think about your activity as helping, serving, and supporting your clients. Pause and think about business, business growth and what you do for your clients. When you act in a professional way, focusing on positive outcomes for your clients and doing the right thing for them, then you are absolutely helping, serving and supporting them.

This shift in how you view your activity can really help you focus on your own approach to business development. When you embrace the approach of helping, serving and supporting your clients you feel more confident and authentic when you are:

- Picking up the phone to speak to new clients.

- Asking for referrals.
- Introducing new products, services and solutions to your clients.
- Asking for additional pieces of work.
- Simply asking for a new piece of work, asking a client to go ahead.

Everything listed above are the things that I see professionals avoiding on a daily, weekly and monthly basis. A shift in how you view your activity and new focus on appreciating your role in helping, serving and supporting your client makes all of these things far more comfortable.

Isn't it time you changed your view on business development and isn't it time you and your team focus on business development in a more authentic way?

**To contact Nevil email him:**  
**[nevil@newresults.co.uk](mailto:nevil@newresults.co.uk), connect with him on LinkedIn or visit the website [www.newresults.co.uk](http://www.newresults.co.uk)**

# ALCOHOL RELATED ABSENCE COSTS THE UK BILLIONS EACH YEAR

Statistics show the increase of alcohol related absence is increasing, with lockdown having a dramatic effect on how much individuals are drinking more. Given this it is surprising that some employers still see drug or alcohol issues as something to be addressed only if, or when, they begin to affect an individual's performance, or it becomes a disciplinary matter.

Drug and alcohol misuse are considerable issues within society and therefore also in the workplace. They are significant health, safety and employee wellbeing concerns and it is important that employers have preventative and supportive measures in place.

## So what can employers be putting in place?

**Have a policy** – this should set out what is acceptable and what the consequences of contravening the policy will be. It should also include where an employee can go if they have a problem and set out where they can get help.

**Have a culture where individuals feel they are able to ask for support** – having the policy is essential, but creating an environment where people know if they ask for help they will be supported is important too. Your policy should set out who staff can talk to and what kind of support is available to them. No-one is suggesting a stay at the Priory should be offered but allowing time off during the day to attend meetings/counselling or signposting to an Employee Assistance Programme could be invaluable.

**Train line managers** – managers can play a critical role in both helping prevent issues and in providing support when a problem with alcohol or drugs emerges. Training line managers to recognise the symptoms of drug and alcohol problems, and hold those difficult conversations,

can be the most effective measure to help prevent misuse. In addition, line managers should be reminded to treat the disclosure of a problem in a non-judgemental way and maintain confidentiality wherever possible.

**Focus on prevention** – aspects of work can be associated with drug and alcohol use, so employers should regularly assess workloads, stress levels and working conditions. For any wellbeing initiatives remember to factor in encouraging healthy lifestyles and provide support for people to try and prevent potential problems escalating. Finally, managers should consider the implications of encouraging a drinking culture. We know we can use alcohol to celebrate, commiserate and induct people into the team, but always reflect on whether that is the right message to send. One size has never fitted all - so a balanced approach to such activities will be a good starting point!

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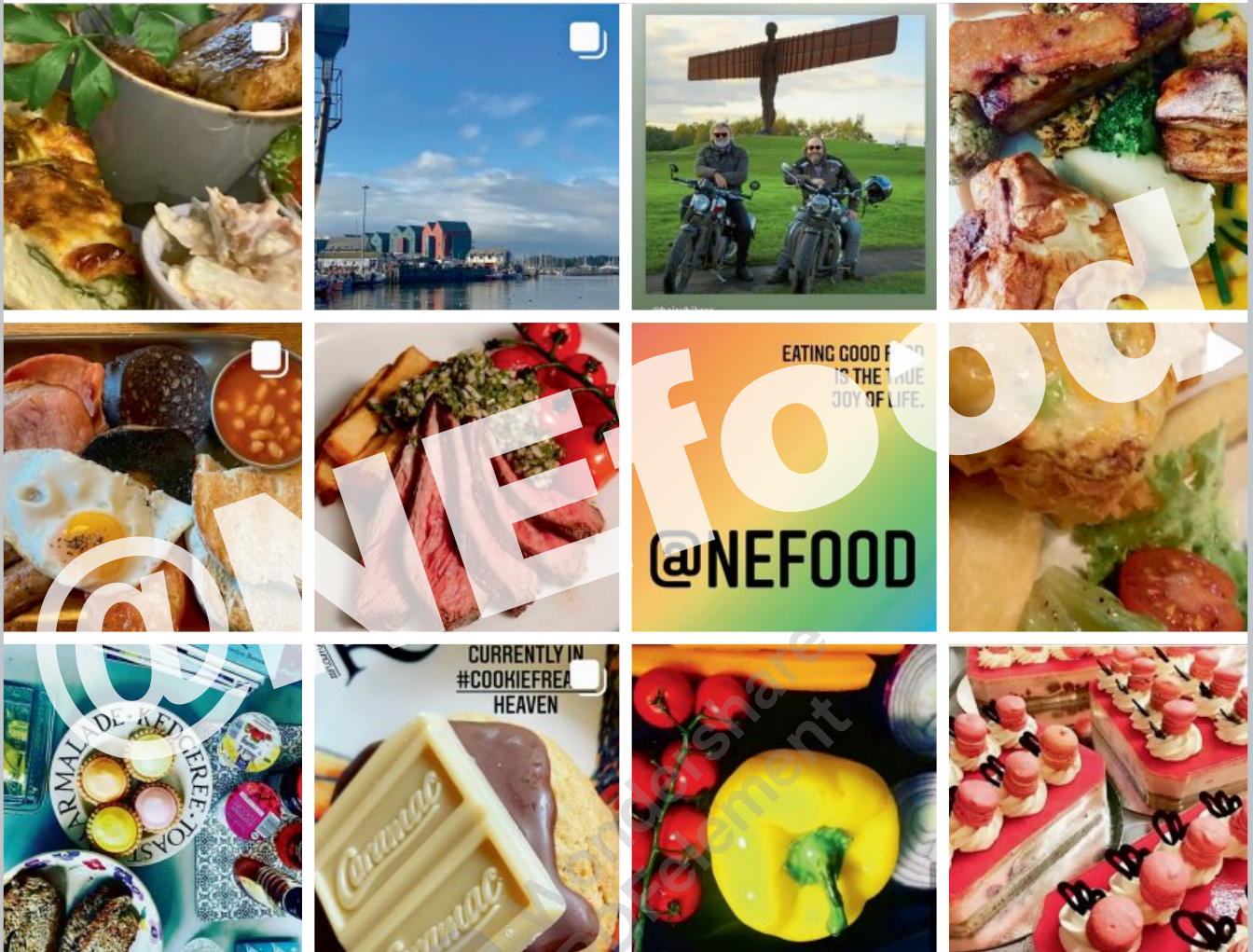
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Northern Insight talks to...



## INSTAGRAM FOOD BLOGGERS @NEFOOD

If there's one thing we all adore, then surely it's food. ESPECIALLY after being confined to our homes, wary to go out this past year or so. Where we used to venture out to a café or a restaurant, now we can be spotted bookmarking our favourite recipes, reels and photos, sharing our homemade creations and every morsel that passes our lips.

Whether we dine out or in, documenting every last detail of yesterday's supper, the fab new food place down the road, or the kids homemade bakes, we are almost all food bloggers in some form and if you're not doing it, well it's probably because you're swiping through right now.

So here we are. It all started years ago, before it became a thing to be a #foodblogger – despite being firmly in the North East, we were keen to analyse the New York food scene. Food trucks over there were all the rage. Top chefs were unable to pay the high rents, hence the best food in the world made and served straight from a truck in the city. We were inspired.

It was a lot of fun sharing photos and ideas and we started out on Twitter, moving to Insta when it took off. We knew how to take the photos. It was the next best thing to having the restaurants and everywhere we went, we critiqued the food. If it wasn't up to scratch, we wouldn't share it unless it was horrendous – we have been there, we had been that young restaurant owner and it doesn't always go smoothly.

So now, as well as running our #foodstagram account @nefood we consult to the industry (all the fun & none of the stress), but seriously we couldn't bear not to be involved in some way. We chat about travel too, but it's a lot to cram in, so sometimes we're quiet.

Our message? Be nice, the chefs work insane hours, it's hot and pressurised. Your server has probably been on their feet for hours too. So don't forget to leave a tip.

**Give us a follow on Instagram  
@NEfood and tag #nefood next time  
you take that all important foodie pic,  
before you take a bite.**

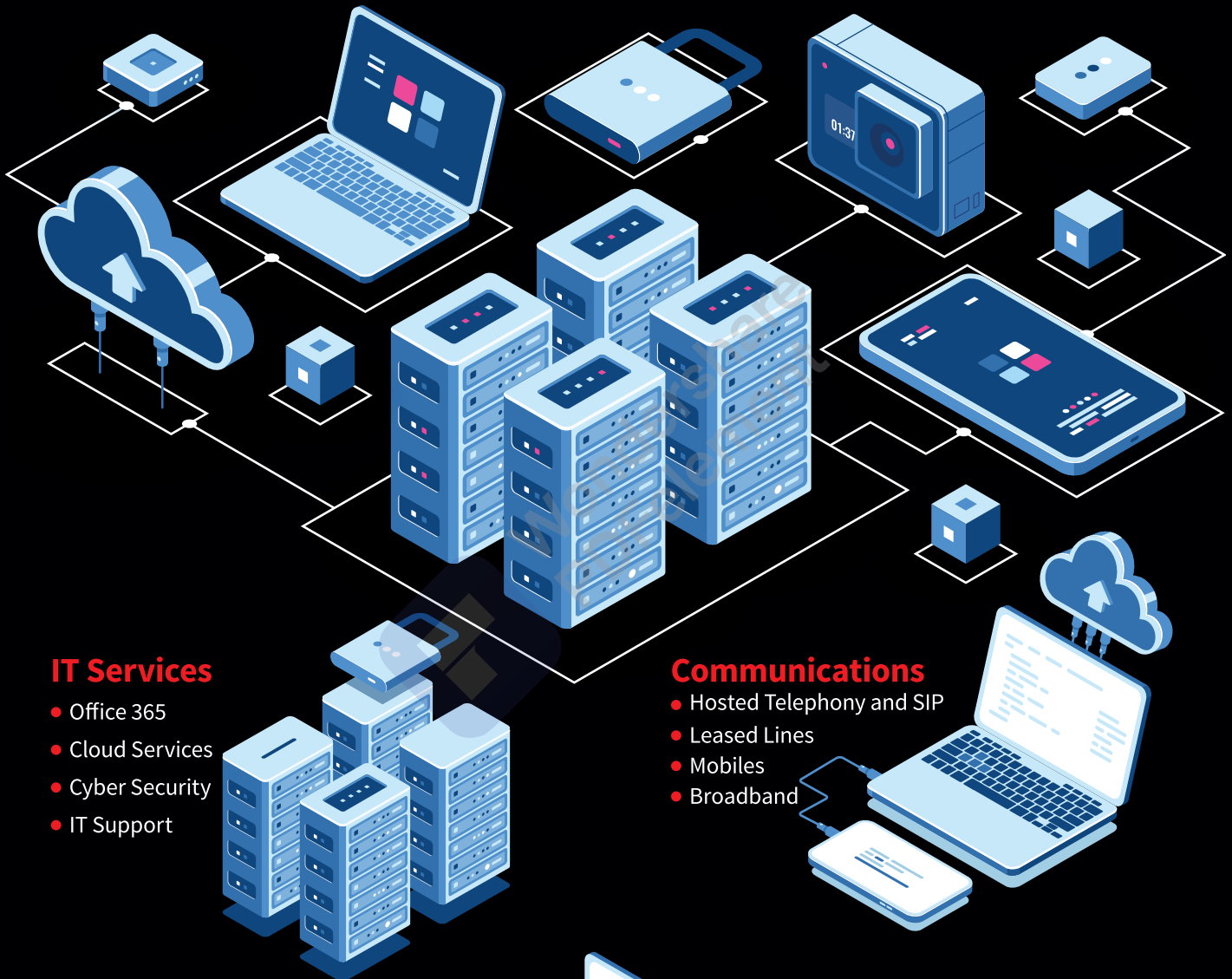
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## GATESHEAD TECH SPECIALIST REPORTS SUCCESSFUL YEAR AS IT EYES FURTHER GROWTH IN 2022

New work for Hitachi Rail, a national construction firm and Europe's oldest floating warship is driving growth for one of the region's leading technology specialists.

The projects are the latest in a line of successes for Gateshead's Advantex, which has seen robust growth in 2021 on the back of new product introductions and investment in a highly skilled workforce.

It has also secured a strong pipeline of orders into the future as a raft of professional, education and industrial clients look to benefit from the company's IT, network and connectivity services to develop their own operations and secure efficiencies and competitive advantages.



The firm, which currently employs 50 people at its Follingsby Park head office, is eyeing additional growth and expansion, targeting a £6 million turnover in the next 12 months as the economy continues to see demand for greater remote working, cloud usage, and new cybersecurity measures.

Advantex has continued to supply and support Hitachi Rail's network infrastructure

at network depots across the country, which includes new access control systems and IP camera work. Elsewhere, work for national construction firm Galliford Try under the Government's Priority School Building Programme (PSBP) has helped to cement growth as schools across the North of England are kitted out with new education technology.

The firm has also completed digital cable connectivity work onboard HMS Trincomalee, which is the centrepiece of the popular maritime exhibition in Hartlepool and Europe's oldest floating warship.

Stephen O'Connell, sales director at Advantex, said: "We're working with clients long-term to meet their strategic requirements through technology, infrastructure and connectivity investment. We anticipate continued strong demand from all sectors in 2022 as organisations look to migrate to new digital technologies to secure greater connectivity, long term cost savings and ultimately, scalability as their own operations develop."



## CITYFIBRE CHOOSES GCU UK LTD TO LEAD £42M FULL FIBRE ROLLOUT ACROSS GATESHEAD

CityFibre, the UK's largest independent full fibre platform, has announced the appointment of GCU UK Ltd to lead its £42m investment in digital infrastructure across Gateshead.

CityFibre is building new and better digital infrastructure for up to eight million homes and businesses through its up to £4bn Gigabit City Investment Programme. It is set to invest £42m in a new town-wide network that will bring full fibre connectivity – the best technology for the job – within reach of almost every home and business in Gateshead.

Full fibre networks, unlike many of the copper-based 'fibre broadband' services available today, use 100% fibre optic cables to carry data at light speed all the way from the home to the point of connection. This gives users speeds of up to 1,000 Mbps for upload and download, near limitless bandwidth and connectivity users can depend on.

Construction work on the full fibre network will begin in February 2022. As work is completed in each neighbourhood, internet service providers (ISPs) will 'light up the network' with some of the fastest and most competitive broadband packages available in terms of both data and price. At its peak the project could create up to 200 new construction jobs locally.



## US OWNED TECH COMPANY EXPANDS WITH NEWCASTLE HEADQUARTERS CREATING 100'S OF JOBS

A global leader in security operations has announced the opening of its Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) headquarters in Newcastle, following a period of continued expansion and rapid growth for the business.

Founded in Silicon Valley and now based in Minnesota, Arctic Wolf's Newcastle city centre headquarters will bring hundreds of jobs to the city over the next three years, aiming to tap into the region's growing pool of world-class technology talent.

To meet the accelerating demand the business is seeing for cloud-native security operations across the UK and Europe, Arctic Wolf will begin initially hiring 30 new roles for the office, set to open in 2022 in line with local COVID-19 guidelines.

Invest Newcastle, part of NewcastleGateshead Initiative, worked with Arctic Wolf to secure the move to the region, and showcased the region's top assets which see Newcastle recognised as one of the UK's 12 tech hotspots as well as being named as the UK's smartest city in the Smart City Global Index.

## Our team gives you peace of mind.

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**synergi**

# THE YEAR OF AGILITY: WHY BUSINESSES ARE CHOOSING MICROSOFT DYNAMICS

If the past two years have proven anything it is that agility is something organisations must practice in order to grow and thrive.

With home-based and hybrid working becoming the norm for many businesses, it is important to look at how we can harness cloud solutions, not just out of necessity but for the innovative potential they bring. One such solution that is delivering an improved business applications suite is the Microsoft Dynamics platform.

So, what is it? Microsoft Dynamics is a modern, scalable business platform that encompasses both traditional CRM and



Lee Mills  
Practice Director – Dynamics

ERP functions for businesses in all industry sectors. It's recognised as a leader by Gartner, Forrester, and Nucleus Research, and is relied upon by small to medium businesses across the globe. More regionally, Unifi has a fast-growing client

base who are benefitting from the agility Microsoft Dynamics brings. It is highly scalable and can be easily tailored to suit your needs, using the productivity tools of Office 365 such as the Power Platform.

Being a modern cloud platform Dynamics is accessible securely from wherever your staff should work. This flexibility ensures key business metrics such as pipeline management and other financial reports are accessible in real time. Dynamics is a very important innovation within the Microsoft suite and is now commanding the attention of business owners and financial professionals across many sectors.

Whilst Synergi continues to support businesses in modernising their processes, and improved team collaboration, its Dynamics practice, Unifi, is committed to supporting organisations in their migration and adoption of Microsoft Dynamics. We are helping manufacturers, wholesalers and service industries to achieve the agility that their back-office users require but many existing legacy accounting platforms restrict.

**To reach out to our team of Microsoft Dynamics specialists, call 0191 4770365, email [enquiries@teamunifi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamunifi.co.uk), or visit [www.teamunifi.co.uk](http://www.teamunifi.co.uk)**

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With Microsoft Dynamics

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# TALKING TECH AND DIGITAL

This month we talk to...

## JACK PULLEIN AND JAMES McLOUGHLIN

Technology Solutions Consultants

### What attracted you to your current role?

**JACK:** I knew the role would offer me the opportunity to interact with and help so many different businesses across every sector. I chose Synergi as they offered a unique, all-encompassing stack of digital solutions including managed IT services, cloud solutions and Microsoft Dynamics via our brand, Unifi. I was also attracted to the culture within Synergi, it was clear from my first day that the relationships between Synergi, its staff and customers come above anything else. This ethos combined with the ability to help companies grow through technology makes it a very rewarding place to work.

### How important has Technology been during the Coronavirus pandemic?

**JAMES:** Technology has been a saviour to many, if not almost all businesses throughout the pandemic. Modern cloud technology is revolutionising the way in which we work, the opportunity for change has never been greater and affordable to all businesses regardless of size. Whether it's been an organisation-wide transformation to the digital world or the wider adoption of the Microsoft Office 365 platform to ensure collaboration and productivity to name a few, its clear technology is playing an integral part in business empowerment and success. Synergi has helped our customers navigate technology throughout the pandemic, and continues to do so into 2022 and beyond.

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

**JACK:** I would certainly recommend the technology and IT sector to anyone. It is an exciting time to be in this industry with the real breadth of innovative solutions that are available to truly help and empower businesses and their employees to work more effectively and efficiently. Synergi offers a fantastic graduate scheme and career progression across all departments – check out our website for current opportunities!

### Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

**JACK:** One of the most exciting projects I am currently working on is putting a plan together for a business which has had minimal to no technology or innovation spend over the last decade. As a result, it has been exciting to be able to go and demonstrate the variety of solutions the organisation could potentially adopt, many of which they didn't know were possible or as easy and 'hassle free' to switch to before they reached out to Synergi.

The opportunity is huge for businesses to transform in 2022. We are introducing ourselves to organisations in the region who are looking to modernise, empower their staff and streamline their processes and operations. We're taking the time to listen, understand pain points and ambitions to really make a difference to our existing and new customers. We're keen to make more new connections and help educate organisations across the North East as the year progresses.

### Which technologies should businesses consider in 2022?

**JAMES:** Keeping people connected, empowering collaboration, and ensuring productivity is crucial as we continue to navigate hybrid and remote working styles. We often speak about 'the modern workplace' which involves embracing technology to work together in an open and productive digital environment. I think organisations should be considering Microsoft Teams and SharePoint, adopting intranets for news and document sharing to name but a few. Cyber security is also really a hot topic at the moment and one to put high on the agenda in 2022. Our highly accredited managed services experts are helping lots of customers to improve security to the necessary levels.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

**JACK:** My aspirations going forward are to continue to grow our client base and Synergi. I have been shocked since joining at the number of businesses held back and restricting their growth through failing to adopt new technology and often due to a lack of understanding and awareness. So my aspiration would be to inform and advise more of these businesses and help them grow and develop.

### What piece of technology would you be lost without?

**JAMES:** I think I would be lost without my phone and laptop as these are the devices that keep me connected wherever I am. As you'd expect as a Microsoft Gold Partner, we utilise the full Microsoft environment and have a fantastic digital workplace for keeping the team connected and secure which is great for remote working.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

**JACK:** This is a tough one. I have always been inspired by entrepreneurs, people who have had an idea or a passion and have built something from nothing. I think that is why this job and the ability to help business grow and reach their potential was so appealing that you can be a small part of that company's journey and watch them grow.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

**JAMES:** I'm a big fitness fanatic, some may not see it as relaxing, but I like to keep myself occupied by going to the gym.

**JACK:** In my spare time away from work I like to relax by watching and playing sport. From playing and refereeing rugby to coaching football nearly all my spare time is spent doing some form of sport.

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



Jack Pullein and  
James McLoughlin



# ARE YOU READY FOR HYBRID WORKING?

As we look to the future, we see our offices as places for collaboration between both in-person and remote meeting participants.

Enabling the hybrid workforce to be successful requires technology that is flexible and simple enough for any employee to use.

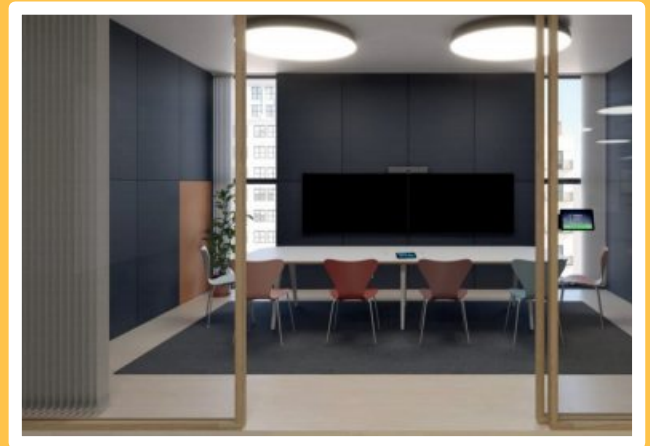
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## CMYK CHRISTMAS GOLF DAY AT CLOSE HOUSE

The region's leading Business Technology provider CMYK warmly welcomed guests to their Christmas Golf Day in December, held at Close House the official venue for the 2017 and 2020 British Masters.

The day started with a hearty festive breakfast, before guests were welcomed by Craig Pratt, Regional Director at CMYK. Golfers headed off for 18 holes on the magnificent Lee Westwood Filly Course. Cold but with plenty of sunshine and festive golfing fun all the teams had a brilliant day. CMYK's Golf Day concluded with Christmas lunch, refreshments and prize giving.

Craig commented; "Huge thank you again to our clients, partners and guests who attended. Your support throughout 2021 has been amazing and we are truly grateful. Special thanks to our partner and client

Close House for hosting our event and congratulations to all of the prize winners."





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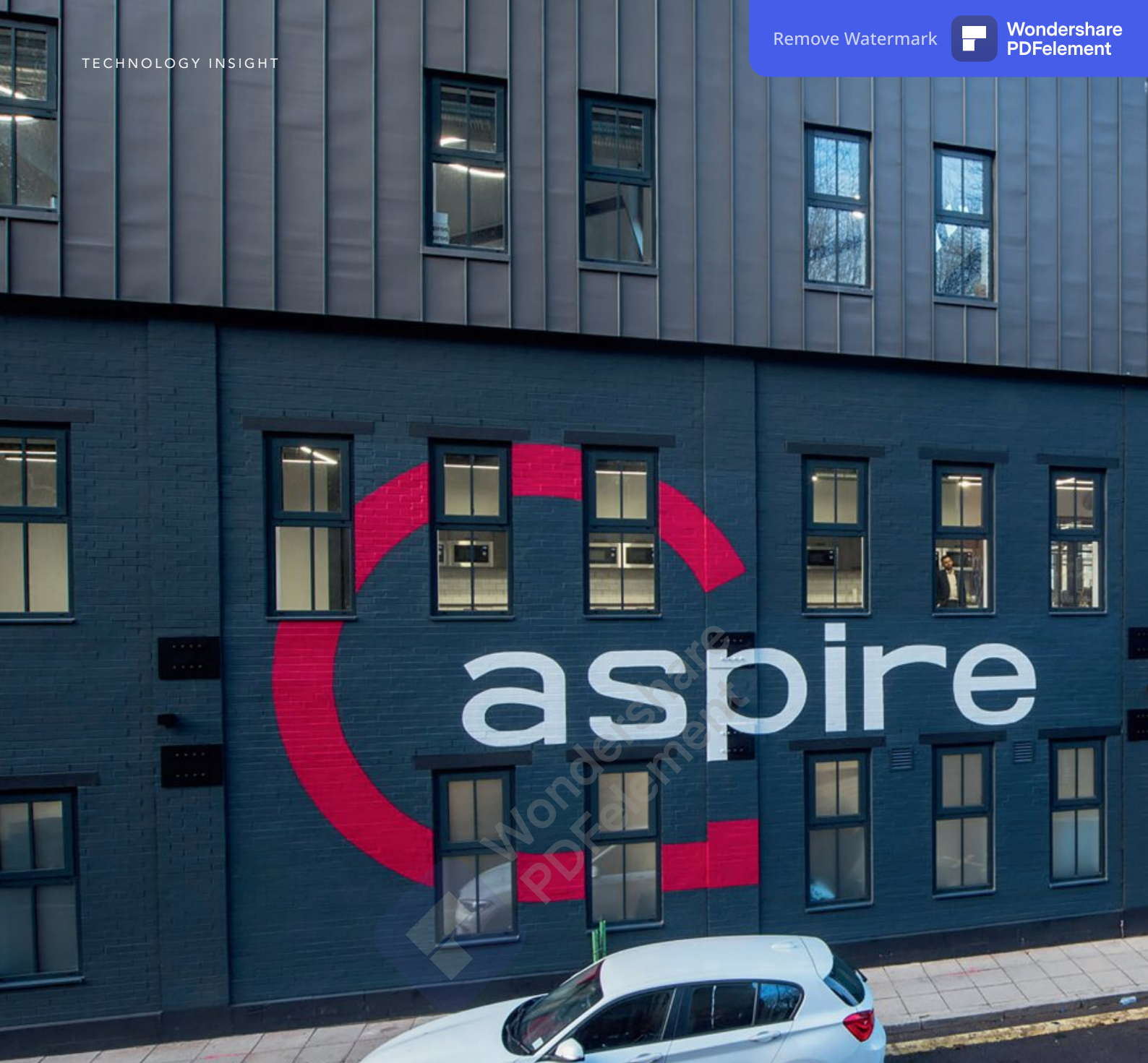
### More Information



01642 792567



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



## TECH GIANT ASPIRE STEPS UP OPERATIONS AS IT OPENS RIVERSIDE HEAD OFFICE

The former North East company of the year has invested heavily in staff and infrastructure.

As an award-winning IT managed service provider and internet service provider (ISP), Aspire delivers leading technology solutions across a range of solutions, including cloud, connectivity, technical support, cyber security and professional services. The company already has a large network of customers across the UK, and has seen significant growth, as it supported a wide range of businesses with the switch to home working in 2020.

The 15-year-old business has published accounts for their financial year ended 2021, showing rise in turnover to £24.7m.

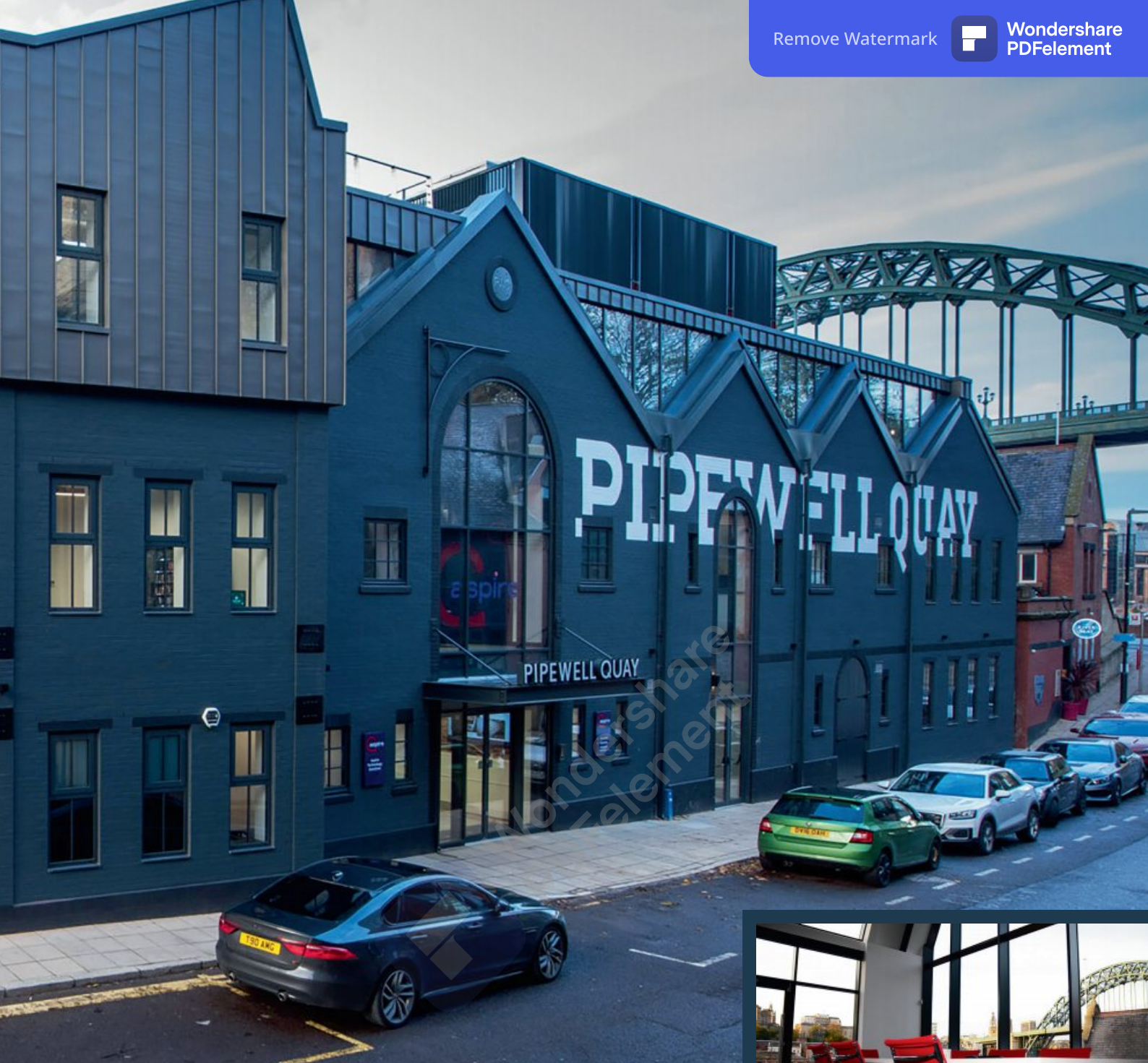
Aspire, who were crowned North East business of the year 2020, has recently opened its new HQ at the 30,000 sq ft Pipewell Quay development, based on the site of the former iconic Baja Beach Club, Gateshead Quays.

Pipewell Quay was designed by award-

winning Newcastle-based architects Ryder, and has undergone significant redevelopment by Adderstone Group. The building, which spans three floors, incorporates state of the art office space, break-out zones and meeting rooms, each aptly named after influential innovators from tech and the North East.

Known for its dedication to each and every customer, Aspire ensures its services are second to none, through strategic investment and forward thinking. One of the key drivers of their growth has been their multi-million-pound investment in a full fibre North East network, known as UDC (Ultrafast Dedicated Connectivity).

UDC is a next generation, affordable leased line internet connectivity solution with dedicated bandwidth levels of up to 100 gigabits per second. These are some of the fastest connectivity speeds available in the UK, combined with extremely low latency.



The company vision is to 'deliver technology like no other' and ensuring businesses have fast, reliable internet access to is the cornerstone of that promise.

Today, Aspire steps up its operations with ambitious plans for the year ahead. They plan to create more than 150 North East jobs across their new Gateshead HQ and a new base at Fusion Hive, a business and innovation centre based on Stockton's Northshore.

The firm have invested heavily in a new self-service cloud platform, set to launch in early 2022. Partnering with industry leaders VMware, they will offer a best-in-class solution to deploy the very latest cloud technologies. Running on an Active-Active configuration, the platform will continue to function even in the event of a hardware failure.

Managing director Chris Fraser added:

"Aspire has gone from strength to strength. In addition to investment in headcount; we've also invested heavily in products and infrastructure. We continue to grow our Ultrafast Dedicated Connectivity (UDC) full fibre network, ensuring North East businesses can benefit from the fastest connectivity in the country. And, we're also set to launch our exciting new private cloud solution. This will ensure customers benefit from all the efficiencies and advantages that transition to the cloud can provide, whilst keeping them at the cutting edge of innovation.

"A huge thanks is owed to everyone who has helped us on our journey. Our success wouldn't be possible without a great group of colleagues, customers and partners. I'm really excited about the next 12 months as we continue to deliver our ambitions plans".

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



# ToneAlly

The world's first percussion tool which focuses on the vertical movement of the drum stick.

"It gives players the discipline of getting a good and consistent stick action!"

Evelyn Glennie



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**BBC**

DRAGONS' DEN



SCAN ME





## £1.9M NEWBIGGIN SPORTS AND COMMUNITY CENTRE REFURBISHMENT STARTS ON SITE

Construction work is now underway to refurbish and remodel the Newbiggin Sports and Community Centre with the award-winning architect, Howarth Litchfield, responsible for architecture and interior design and Brims Construction (Brims), the appointed building contractor.

Both firms won the work from Northumberland County Council and Active Northumberland following a competitive tender which was awarded based on an assessment of experience and ability.

The £1.9m scheme is one of a series of investments by Northumberland County Council across the county's sports facilities aimed at providing local communities with much improved leisure amenities.

## REDEVELOPMENT OF FORMER CITY CENTRE BANK GETS GREEN LIGHT

A new multi-million pound residential and hospitality development on the site of the former Allied Irish Bank (AIB) headquarters in Newcastle will go ahead following planning and listed building approval.

The news will see the former AIB North East office at 9 – 17 Collingwood Street, which has been vacant for nearly nine years, transformed into a ground and mezzanine floor bar and restaurant complex.

Twelve serviced apartments will also be built above on the first and third floors, providing high quality accommodation to meet the strong demand for city centre living space.

Plans for an onsite concierge, a gym and cycle storage will also move forward as part of an 'exciting' project that will see most



of the existing frontage and infrastructure retained, while the overall space is boosted by the addition of a third-floor extension to the rear façade.

Project developer Portland Real Estate Group has appointed a main contractor to carry out the redevelopment. This is predicted to create a number of jobs during the initial construction phase with further jobs to be created by both the service apartment and restaurant/bar operators.

The initial phase of onsite construction work will start imminently with the occupiers and guests expected to be welcomed towards the end of the year.

North East planning firm Hedley Planning Services has worked with Portland Real Estate Group to secure approval for the development from Newcastle City Council's planning committee.

Managing director Sean Hedley, said: "This is great news, bringing a well-known site in an attractive location back into use and securing its long-term future. The new development with its nearby transport links and easy walking distance to a range of facilities and services, will significantly contribute to the vibrancy and vitality of the local economic sector."

## IDP INVESTS IN A CARBON NEUTRAL FUTURE WITH ITS FOUR LATEST APPOINTMENTS

Award-winning masterplanning and architecture firm, ID Partnership (IDP), is investing in a carbon neutral future through the appointment of two new equity partners and two associates.

Current equity partners Roger Copestake and Keith Dillon are delighted to announce that Scott Ritchie and Hugh Daglish, both urban designers, who have worked at IDP for 18 years and 7 years respectively, have been made equity partners with responsibility for setting out IDP's targets for its own zero carbon strategy as well as ensuring more sustainable and energy efficient solutions lie at the heart of all project delivery.

Grace Paul and Paul Cassidy, promoted to associates, will be heavily involved in the delivery of carbon zero housing strategies for the practice's many residential development clients and will help shape the IDP vision for a more sustainable future.



With over 40 years of experience, although Newcastle-based, IDP sees itself as a national practice working with a range of leading housing developers, landowners and public sector organisations across the UK such as Barratt, Cussins, Keepmoat, Home Group, Thirteen and Homes England.



# NEW FOR 2022


**NEW**


## Silvertop House Minsteracres, Northumberland

Silvertop House is a stylish stone built farmhouse, positioned within circa 5 acres of land, with equestrian facilities including a manège, stable block and large paddocks. This delightful, detached 5 bedroom period home has been fully refurbished and has superb far reaching countryside views.

**All enquiries:**

Ashleigh Sundin

[ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**rare! Office:** 0191 223 3500

**Price Guide:** Price on Application

# FRESH STOCK FRESH OPPORTUNITIES

# SANDERSON YOUNG



NEW



## Hazelwood Road Great Park, Gosforth

Impressive detached family home offering stylish modern living! This substantial property boasts circa 3600 sq ft of living space over three floors, including six bedrooms, five bathrooms and a recently refurbished kitchen/dining/family space. EPC: B

**Price Guide:** Offers over £750,000

julie.summerbell@sandersonyoung.co.uk

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



NEW



## Queensway Darras Hall, Ponteland

A fabulous, four double bedroom detached house, occupying a lovely 0.25 acre corner site in this quiet cul de sac off Eastern Way. This excellent family home has been substantially extended in 2018 by the owners and offers superb accommodation. EPC: C

**Price Guide:** £725,000

julie.douglas@sandersonyoung.co.uk

**Ponteland Office:** 01661 823 951



NEW



## Woodbine Road Gosforth

This impressive, period family home is situated to the south backing side of highly sought after Woodbine Road, within the very heart of Gosforth. The four bedroom, three storey property boasts over 2000 sq ft of accommodation with beautiful features.

**Price Guide:** Offers over £585,000

gill.cockburn@sandersonyoung.co.uk

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



NEW



## Seaspray Bernicia Way, Beadnell

Beautifully presented, two bedroom detached single storey home, just a short distance from the beach in this sought after village. This lovely property has been finished to an excellent standard and is utilised as a successful holiday let. EPC: C

**Price Guide:** Offers over £375,000

gillian.greaves@sandersonyoung.co.uk

**Alnwick Office:** 01665 600 170

# NEW FOR 2022



## Douglas Avenue Gosforth

A charming, four bedroom, semi detached house with attractive, mature gardens to three sides and a detached garage/workshop. This much loved property requires some modernisation and offers great potential to extend and create a larger family home. EPC: E

**Price Guide:** Offers over £600,000

[gill.cockburn@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:gill.cockburn@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



## Sturdee Gardens High West Jesmond

This delightful, 1930s semi detached family home is perfectly placed for access to excellent schooling, a Metro station and the café culture of Jesmond. The four bedroom property is well presented/extended with a wonderful open plan kitchen/family space.

**Price Guide:** Offers over £465,000

[lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



## Lanesborough Court Gosforth

This excellent, stone built mid terrace is ideally located within this landmark gated development, providing excellent access to everything central Gosforth has to offer. The three bedroom property is well presented throughout and has a south facing terrace.

**Price Guide:** Offers over £295,000

[rebecca.novak@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:rebecca.novak@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



## Knights Road Warkworth

Immaculately presented, five bedroom detached home, occupying a generous corner site on the edge of the development, with fabulous views across adjoining countryside towards the sea. This beautiful home has been substantially upgraded and remodelled. EPC: B

**Price Guide:** Offers over £525,000

[alison.oxley@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:alison.oxley@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

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### **Brindles Manse Seahouses**

A stylish, immaculately presented four bed/ four ensuite detached house, finished to an exceptional standard. This deceptively spacious stone built home would be ideal as a main home, second home, commercial holiday let/investment or B & B. EPC: C

**Price Guide:** Offers over £500,000

[alison.oxley@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:alison.oxley@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**Alnwick Office:** 01665 600 170



### **Oakhurst Drive Gosforth**

This great semi detached family home is ideally located to the west backing side of Oakhurst Drive. The three bedroom property offers ideal family living with generous gardens, close to the Town Moor and the amenities of Gosforth High Street. EPC: D

**Price Guide:** Offers over £390,000

[lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:lizzie.beattie@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

**Gosforth Office:** 0191 213 0033



# Sssh!

## LOOKING TO BUY OR SELL OFF MARKET?

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## BEAMISH PARK GARDENS, BEAMISH, COUNTY DURHAM



### PRICE GUIDE £1.75 MILLION

Beamish Park Gardens is a magnificent country home, developed by the owners and their architects from a former bath house and gardener's cottage. This outstanding property sits within its walled gardens which date back to the early 18th century, and was recognised at the Durham CC Environment Awards as Joint Built Environment Category Winner. The redevelopment of Beamish Park Gardens has very successfully taken place in recent years and now provides a stunning, luxury, larger family home with beautiful architecture and many fine features including original fireplaces, oak beams and a bespoke staircase. The grounds extend to 3.25 acres and include a building plot with Listed Building Consent to create another luxury, single storey home, extending to 4400 sq ft, if desired, with its own private entrance landscaped gardens and paddock.

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 223 3500

[ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk)

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



# SPRING INTO ACTION

As we begin this year with the hope of better days ahead, January is the perfect time to get some of those mislaid plans from 2021 into order, and perhaps 2022 will be your year to move?

It may be that you've just started the search for your new home, or maybe you've been patiently looking for some time, the positive news here at Sanderson Young is that we are already starting to see more properties, in prime North East locations, for you to choose from.

However, as prices continue to exceed all of our expectations and demand still being so high, it seems that you are not alone in this high paced home moving market and suddenly patience doesn't always seem such a virtue. So what can you expect from the market in 2022 and how can we help you get ahead of the curve?

Begin today. Its an old saying but "getting all your ducks in a row" is very true in house sales and that in part is what we are here to help you with. When you have finally made the decision to move, which is a big one in itself, it may seem that you, your laptop and Rightmove are all that's needed, but when you do find that dream home you need to be prepared and you need the right team behind you.

Here at Sanderson Young we have a team of knowledgeable and highly experienced staff from our experienced valuers who will help you determine price and strategy, to the wonderful sales team who are dedicated to finding you a buyer as well as your new home, through to our outstanding sales progressors who will literally take your hand and lead you through to the finish line.

In this current market, you will most likely be competing against other



Greg McCarthy

clients who may be in a stronger position to move more quickly, this is likely to mean that you may miss out on the home you want. To place yourself in the best possible position you need to ensure that your current house is either on the market or at the very least ready to be listed, before even starting the search for your new home.

So when you feel the time is right, make that call and get our team in and let's get you moving.

**Greg McCarthy, Regional Valuer, Sanderson Young**

**T: 0191 2233500** **Greg.McCarthy@sandersonyoung.co.uk**

The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy!



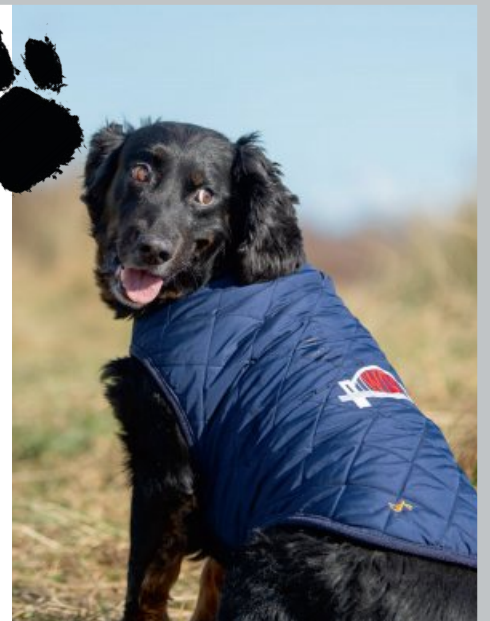
*Hi everyone, Ziggy here. Already February and we are rushed off our feet. The weather is being kind. We went for a long walk on the beach yesterday but I got in trouble when I tried to steal a fisherman's sandwiches – he was not pleased. Uncle James is going skiing soon so cousin Dexter is coming for a whole week – that will be fun. We think my sister may be having puppies – she is being scanned next week. More next month.*

George from Denton Burn asks:

**Q.** The felted flat roof of my rear extension is leaking, and a number of firms are offering apparently foolproof solutions, such as fibreglass, rubber membranes, and jointless glassfibre-reinforced plastic coverings. These systems are all promoted with a variety of impressive-looking glossy brochures and promises of 25-year guarantees.

**A.** Flat roofs in Britain are notorious for leaking, and the problem does not usually lie with the roof covering material, but with poor workmanship. 'Flat' roofs actually need a fall of at least four degrees, a requirement which is often neglected. And if the timber roof joists are not thick enough, they can sag in the middle, allowing water to pond, and find its way through any minor defect.

The problem with most of the 'instant fix' flat roof repairs on the market is that they simply cover the existing leaking flat roof with a new waterproof coating, which will not remedy the underlying causes of the leak. This is throwing good money after bad. The GRP (glassfibre-reinforced polyester) and glassfibre flat roofing systems are often advertised as having 'no joints', as if this was an advantage, but in fact a large flat roof area exposed to sunlight should always have movement joints to cope with thermal expansion. If there are no joints then there may be expansion damage later on. And the 25-year 'guarantees' are usually meaningless. Also, the prices charged by these companies are often greater than the cost of getting the roof re-covered properly using tried and tested traditional methods. Modern high-tensile roofing felts should last for fifty years if they are installed properly.



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





“

**...Little did anyone  
know we had  
some sixteen  
months of  
lockdown ahead  
of us...**

## DAMIANO REA

Managing Director, Heaton Property

Heaton Property managing director Damiano Rea was born and raised in Heaton where he helped out in the family run Italian restaurant from an early age. What goes around comes around and the restaurant was recently relaunched by his brother Zeno as Punto Italian Kitchen.

Damiano attended the Royal Grammar School where he developed an enduring friendship with Liam Stewart. While Damiano chose a career as a professional musician and toured the world, Liam secured a job in the design sector, travelling between London, New York, Los Angeles and Istanbul. When a family came along, Liam settled in London working for estate agent Foxtons.

Then the 'goes around, comes around' thing happened again. On a trip back to Newcastle, Liam caught up with Damiano and announced his desire to move his family back to Heaton. But he did not have a job. It was hardly a lightbulb moment but the friends realised Liam had experience in a leading London estate agent and Damiano was looking to turn his lettings agency into a full-service estate agency. The deal was done before the dessert menu arrived.

Damiano says: "The last time I did the Big Interview was in August 2020 and my amazing psychic abilities appear to have deserted me. I confidently announced "As we emerge from the dark days of Covid lockdown..." Little did anyone know we had some sixteen months of lockdown ahead of us.

"With those dark days now firmly behind us, we can finally look to the future with a spring in our step. Our sales division is going great guns under Liam and we are getting instructions from Gosforth and Jesmond in addition to Heaton and Ouseburn. Many of these are personal recommendations. In addition to a wealth of experience, Liam brings nice to the table. He is just a nice guy. We always try to hire nice, although it is not something anyone puts on their CV. Nice helps the job run smoothly and in the event of conflict, nice resolves it nicely.

"Our block management division is taking on ever bigger properties and the hours of midnight oil I burned getting my head around complex block management law is paying off. For our lettings division, the Covid lockdown has proved something of a boon, as staffs have perfected the 'virtual viewing' using a specialist 360-degree camera.

"It was a lovely bonus late last year when we won a gold award in the Property Academy Best Estate Agent Guide (BEAG) in association with Rightmove. This puts us in the top five percent of UK lettings and estate agencies and confirms my belief in nice. Nice people win awards for their companies, ratty people less so.

"All our efforts are helped by our location. Heaton continues to be an attractive destination for both residents and start-up, young businesses. Ouseburn, once our dowdy, post-industrial neighbour has regenerated with astonishing speed, recently being designated "the hippest place in the UK" by a national newspaper.

"So, this time round I can say with more confidence, "as we emerge from the dark days of Covid lockdown..." Were you to ask me how I summarise the coming months for Heaton, Ouseburn and Heaton Property, I could do so in two words. Nice. Nice.

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...The Big Interview...

# ARE CITY CENTRE TRANSPORT SYSTEMS SUPPORTING THE LOCAL ECONOMY? By Neil Hart



Neil Hart

Despite a global pandemic, plans to change the built environment in our city centres are being announced constantly. Some of our local authorities are recognising the range of opportunities to develop our city centres and vastly improve our economies by creating the vibrant business, hospitality and retail hubs that people need and want – for which travel infrastructure plays a key role.

The North East Transport Plan, which maps out a region-wide strategy due to be completed in 2035, showcases the promises being made by the North East Combined Authority and The North of Tyne Combined Authority to move to a 'green, healthy, dynamic and thriving North East' – but does the document cover elements which will help support a better economy? Arguably not.

The report outlines that 'Cars are our region's most used form of transport and car ownership in the North East is increasing, leading to more traffic congestion and vehicle emissions.' In the report, there isn't any detail on electronic vehicles and how our transport infrastructure could accommodate having more vehicles in our city centres. Bradley Hall has recently purchased three electric vehicles as part of our fleet - and we have since found out that there are only three charging points in the centre. That, coupled with the average six-month wait to have home chargers fitted showcases that the big push to convert to EV isn't being supported.

Parking in our region's capital, Newcastle city centre, has also been a sore subject for our local business community and shoppers alike. It was recently announced that the "Alive After Five" initiative, which gives motorists charge-free access to seven popular city centre car parks after 5pm and has been credited with boosting the Tyneside economy by hundreds of millions of pounds, is expected to be dropped at most of its current locations as council bosses try to put an end to "perverse incentives" for "unnecessary car travel." – as reported by The Journal. It was also reported that the council is set to spend £50m on pedestrianising Grey Street and Blakett Street – which doesn't seem well-spent. Surely, spending £50m on more EV charging points would bring down carbon emissions and offer professional services and shoppers more opportunities to make and spend more money within our city centres.

Public transport certainly isn't providing the answer. I am sure that many of us would appreciate being able to get the bus to work, stay there all day and get the bus home – but that isn't the way the world works anymore

for most. In our current busy lifestyles, where parents need the car on hand for multiple school runs, or for busy workers and business people who need to rush to and from appointments – the aging bus and metro system is simply not an option.

But what does this all mean for our region's 19,000 local professional service businesses – many of which have team members who need to easily travel to and from meetings and appointments, or for the shopper who needs to buy bulky and heavier goods from their local department store? It is well known that throughout the Covid pandemic Amazon thrived, and now many are conditioned to the ease of ordering a variety of goods online. So what do those who can now do to attract people back into our city centres now it's 'business as usual' – certainly not make parking more difficult.

Sunderland City Council is leading the way on this, with parking options playing a key part in its redevelopment of the city centre via an eye-catching 650 space carpark. They are also working hard to attract people from the outskirts to the city centre through building new bridges and routes in for vehicles.

If our local authorities don't act accordingly and look at the big picture instead of creating isolated, idealistic and superficial plans, many businesses will exit the city centre for a location with more convenient parking options. The dots must be joined to protect our economy.

**Read the full article at**  
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# PROPERTY PEOPLE



Mark Small

In the latest of our popular series of features we talk to...

## MARK SMALL

Managing Director at Signature North East.

### Did you always envisage a career in property?

Yes! From a very young age I have a huge passion for property and love to research the history and character of a building. I also have a particular interest in interior design.

### Tell us about your career path so far?

At sixteen I started with Sanderson Young, moving onto Your Move as a trainee valuer, working my way up to being a Valuation Manager over a period of six years. I was then head hunted by Countrywide, operating and running their branch in Jesmond selling properties up to the value of two million. I was then promoted to Area Director covering eighteen locations across the North East and overseeing financial services. In 2010 I launched my own company, Signature by Mark Small and Signature Finance. In 2013 I created and launched Signature Law having sourced the very best lawyers in the industry, enabling all services to clients under one roof.

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

My proudest moment so far is of course the success of all Signature brands. The most rewarding would be the Signature Charity Balls we have held over the years, raising over a quarter of a million for different charities.

### How would you advise people looking to buy a property?

Ultimately as the future of estate agency is online, my recommendation would be to register with all internet portals (i.e. Rightmove, On the market, Zoopla) to receive property alerts and secure a viewing at the earliest opportunity.

### You recently launched the signature lounge within your Whitley Bay branch where people can buy a coffee, lunch, dinner or drinks. What was the impetus behind this and how has it been received?

Over the years it has become apparent that buyers and vendors very rarely walk into a branch anymore. 96% of all property transactions are either done over the phone or internet. I wanted to create a high end estate agency with a lounge/food establishment bringing the local clientele and holiday makers into one venue. In 2021 Signature Lounge was created, we have since been inundated with table bookings which has had a fantastic synergy with Signature North East Estate Agency and Financial

Services. It is also lovely to see a constant stream of customers spreading the word about Signature.

### Tell us about the most exciting thing you are currently working on?

The most exciting project I will be working on in 2022 is creating a luxury residential development, with properties ranging up to the value of 2.5 million per unit.

### What's your favourite place to live in the North East and why?

My favourite place that I have lived to date is Percy Gardens in Tynemouth. The stunning views from the property across the coast and the priory castle were incredible.

### What does 2022 have in store for signature North East?

Currently we cover 19 locations across the North East of England. I would like to expand on this by offering our services to more locations.

### When not working how do you like to relax?

I like to spend my spare time visiting various spa hotels across the UK. I also enjoy countryside walks with my dogs and have a great interest in flying, I have recently been working on my private pilot's licence.

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## BACK TO WORK BOYS AND GIRLS!

As I write this, this week Boris Johnson advised on the 19th January that people should return to work and from the 27th January facemasks are no longer compulsory in shops and on public transport in England.

Obviously this is causing more division in society with some employers wanting people back immediately in places of work, some looking at ways of hybrid working, and employees having different views about returning to places of work rather than "WFH".

Personally I feel there is a need to return to "places of work" in a thought out manner as it is important for our economy. Covid has robbed many lives, but it's effects have been far less damaging to life than the headlines suggested. In 2021 there were 582,422 deaths recorded in England and Wales. In 2019 the figure was 530,841 and in 2018 541,589. Average annual deaths were 532,077 in the five years up to 2019 and 595,212 in the two years following. There was a serious increase in April 2020 when over 88,000 deaths were recorded against typical April figures of around 43,000 and this difference alone accounts for nearly 45,000 deaths. Yes 63,135 deaths is too many, but it isn't quite as headline grabbing as the 500 to 1,000 deaths a day we were being told about at the time. I'm not going to deny that Covid exists or that it isn't serious (I contracted it in August last year and it was pretty nasty); but we do need to deal with it in a responsible manner.

We talk about the decline of our towns and cities and everyone is sad about this. I would draw an analogy to when local village pubs close, there's always the people who bemoan it because they went there "EVERY Christmas and EVERY birthday." People working from home may not come into the towns and cities very often but if they're working from usual office bases they will be frequenting the shops and leisure facilities.

HMRC are moving more than 9000 people into Newcastle city centre in the Pilgrims Quarter scheme when the property is

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Phil Bowe

complete. Obviously most of these people are moving from other outlying offices but it will still be a good boost for Newcastle as our main city.

The new Britishvolt factory in Blyth will employ over 3,000 people itself and this with the associated jobs it will create will give a terrific boost to Southeast Northumberland. Will this, with the new railway line, restore prosperity to Blyth town centre?

Town centres and retail parks provide the lifeblood of any economy. It is trade in goods and services that feeds everything. If we can get towns to flourish, we will generate more jobs, better jobs and more money in the country. David Davis, in Prime Minister's Questions, quoted Leo Amery to Neville Chamberlain "In the name of God, go" – and this is what I would say – "In the name of God, go – back to your offices, to the shops, to the pubs, restaurants and leisure facilities."

I have spoken above about what I believe are the economic benefits of co-working "the way we used to." Working from home by definition means working alone, and Zoom calls or Teams meetings are no substitute for face-to-face contact. I believe in offices, I believe in town centres, and I believe in people. I think working with others, face to face (but maybe a little further apart than before) is going to help people's mental health. And let's be honest - mental health, though rarely spoken about, is the real wealth we all want.

***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).***

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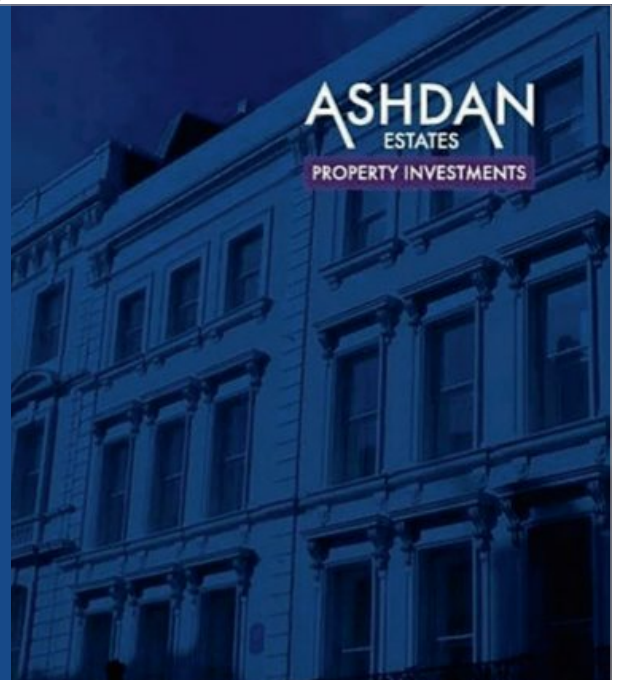
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# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

## JOSH BROWN

Senior Chartered Building Surveyor  
at Silverstone Building Consultancy

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

I am North East born and bred. I grew up in Benton, Newcastle.

### What do you think it means to be a business person in the North East of England?

The North East is built on nurturing and developing relationships. We are a small region and, in our sector, business is very much won via word of mouth and a strong reputation to deliver high-quality work.

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

The location. We are close to beaches, the countryside and city centres. Take Newcastle, for instance, it is big enough to have everything you need, yet it is also compact in size to walk around easily.

### Where do you like to eat out?

I enjoy the variety of places the region has to offer. There are lots of independent places at the coast like The Beehive pub which boasts views of St Mary's Island and is also a lovely grade II listed building. If I'm in Newcastle though, Dobson and Parnell and Blackfriars are some of my favourites.

### Are the people really friendlier?

I would say so but then I am biased being from the region!

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

From my own experience, yes. There are probably more opportunities in larger markets such as London, but I believe the North East offers the same opportunities if you are ambitious and driven enough to find them.

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

I worked in Carlisle for a little while and I wouldn't exactly class the North East as overly fast paced but this was a little too slow for my liking. The North West boasts some beautiful scenery and great driving roads in and around the lake district though.

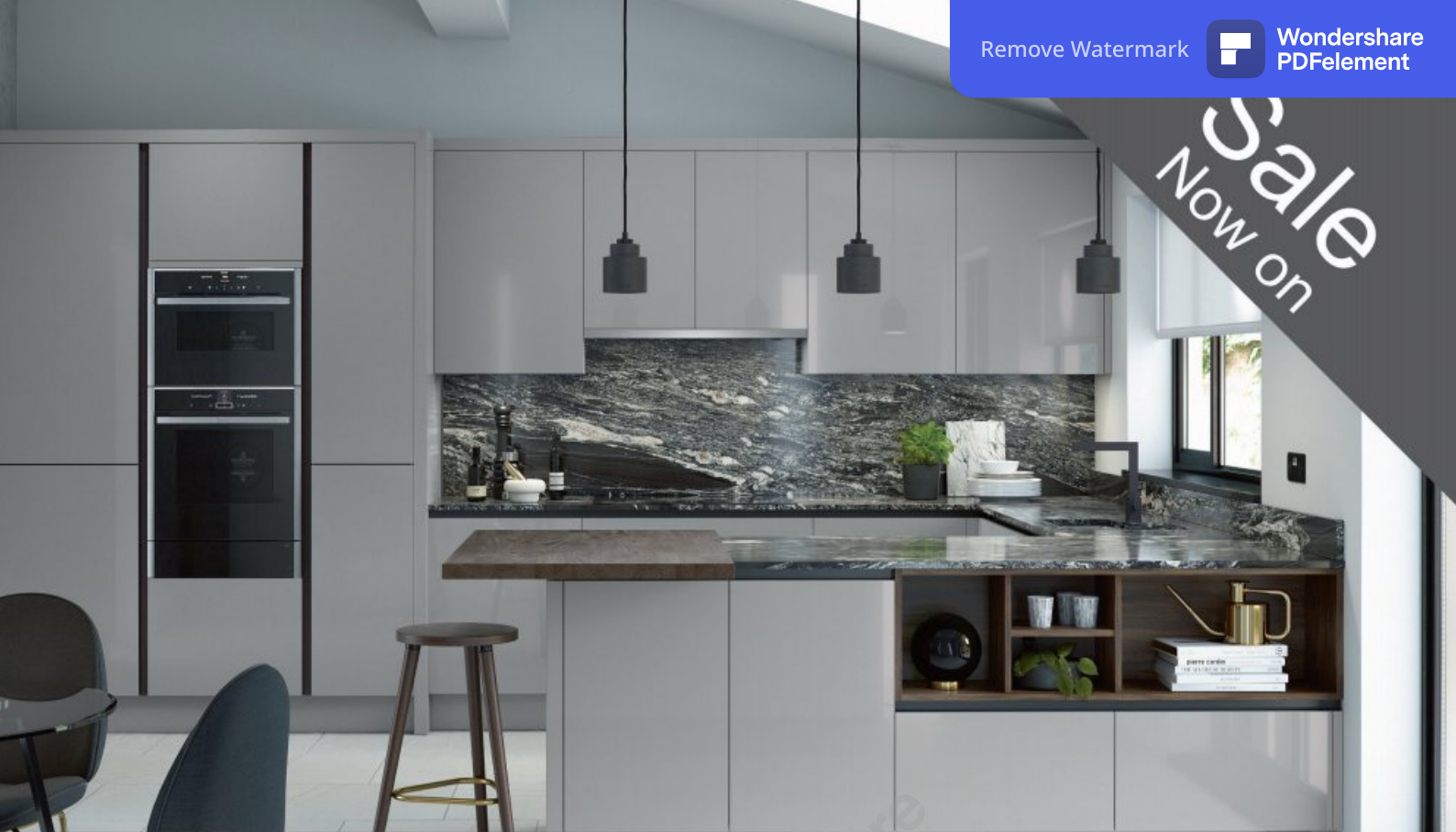
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Josh Brown

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# 2022 WORKPLACE TRENDS: FIVE PREDICTIONS FOR THE YEAR AHEAD

The workplace has undergone one of the most disruptive shifts in recent history, and its evolution is likely to continue. What key trends will shape 2022? Knight Frank predicts these five factors will be prevalent in the year ahead.

## The flight to quality will prevail

Businesses have been pursuing higher-quality spaces for a few years now and this trend shows no sign of slowing down.

This will be driven by a few factors including attracting employees back to the office; workforce recruitment and retention; and sustainability credentials.

Employees want to work in environments that enrich their days, and as employers compete with working-from-home settings, the office experience needs to be worth the commute.

Think ergonomic furniture, high-end designs and amenity-rich spaces. These will range from wellness facilities such as gyms, social areas, and training and development facilities.

Patrick Matheson, partner at Knight Frank, explains: "Location is a big part of the office experience, too. Workers want to be in locations which are well-connected, but also offer a wealth of cafes, shops, restaurants and bars.

"In line with the office experience, branding is something that clients are also keen to use the office for. Businesses want to have a space that actually helps them rebuild their brand identity that was lost during remote months."

## Sustainability will grow significantly in importance

ESG has climbed up the corporate agenda – with a significant focus on the environmental aspect.

Patrick says: "In 2022, businesses will become more aware of the ways in which office space can help them achieve their net zero targets. We speak with occupiers every day and the conversation around sustainability is becoming front and centre. We are seeing that it is not just the large corporates that are focusing on

sustainability to meet their targets, but the smaller regional businesses are also making this an important criteria in selecting an office, as they understand the importance their staff place on the environment and sustainability."

## Tech will take centre stage

We've already seen the rise of desk-booking apps to help manage footfall, but this is just the beginning.

In a hybrid world where workers are split between the home and the office, having the right video conferencing tools – and enough bookable meeting rooms to manage noise – will be paramount. Tech can enhance the office experience by making our working lives seamless, whether that's helping us locate co-workers, providing community apps or checking amenity availability.

Likewise, sensors will be used more in offices. On a basic level, this is automatic lights that switch off to save energy when no movement is detected, or personal temperature controls that allow employees to alter their desk environments. But on a larger scale, for office space strategies, data is at the heart of all good decision making – tech can give you an informed, analytical approach.

## Health and wellbeing will be imperative

We've watched health climb up the agenda because of the pandemic, but a holistic effort to maintain and support employee wellbeing will prevail in 2022. The cost of burnout is well-documented, and as workers reframe their idea of ambition, they're beginning to chase work-lives that support them in new ways.

More businesses will look at providing wellbeing programmes, and offices will support these. From fresh fruit and spaces that encourage social interactions, right up to

corporate spa passes for larger companies.

A big part of wellbeing is our connection to community, and with some businesses only sourcing office space for 50% capacity, company-wide meet ups will become a lot more important.

Patrick says: "A lot of SMEs want the ability to host monthly meet-ups for all employees. In doing so, they'll ensure everyone feels connected, seen, and supported. That's why access to event space is a growing priority."

## Agile environments will overtake rows of desks

There's been a shift in the general working layout of offices, and this is only set to continue.

"We've seen businesses move away from rows of desks and individual workstations to a design more focused on communal space, collaboration areas, Zoom rooms, and other non-traditional working layouts," adds Patrick.

In 2022, the role of the office will continue to celebrate the human parts of business – notably, collaboration, which is much harder to maintain in a remote world.

Agile working involves having a variety of work settings from which employees have the freedom and flexibility to choose from, depending on which is most appropriate for what they need to achieve.

Again, as employers compete with WFH environments, providing employees with a range of spaces – some of which even replicate the quiet comfort of working from home – will be key.

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Neil Turner

## AN ENDANGERED SPECIES – THE LOCAL AUTHORITY TOWN PLANNER

By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield

I start the new year with a real concern. Is the local town planner becoming extinct? I fear they are becoming as rare as red squirrels.

We work with many consultant town planners and local authority planning authorities, as we navigate the planning laws to achieve permissions for our clients. However, when we submit for applications, the timescales for (virtually) all of them is getting longer and longer. Clients are rightly becoming frustrated by this, and the programming of projects is thus made harder with larger risks.

If we cannot get permissions through in a reasonable timescale then it has an impact on the wider economy and confidence, not just our own work. The impact of this process is therefore critical for jobs in the construction sector, for growth and wellbeing.

So, what is the reason? Well, we receive many return emails and letters (from local authorities) telling us that due to the pandemic and the shortage of planning staff, the applications cannot be dealt with in the appropriate timescales. We are then left guessing as to when pre-applications, applications and conditional confirmations are going to be issued.

Have all the planners moved over from the local authorities to become planning consultants, I wonder? I suspect this is part

of the problem. Maybe the grey squirrels are overtaking the red squirrels? (I am sure planning consultants will not want to be called grey squirrels – I do apologise for my analogy!)

This is a real concern, as we need well trained, professional, experienced planning staff who can cope with the volume of applications and give good, reasoned advice.

A good planning service is needed for our town and country to maintain the quality of our built environment. As architects we naturally think the built environment is determined by clever design, but it's equally improved by the protection of the planning role to make sure approved schemes achieve the requirements of national planning policy as well as local criteria and advance our enjoyment of buildings, roads and facilities.

It is too easy to criticise as every organisation, company and client have had to cope and create new regimes that work over the last two years. We have worked hard at HL to maintain the consistency of service, availability, and skills through the period, and we have a stronger organisation as a result.

So, I do become frustrated by all the organisations - local authorities included - who tell me its business as usual, but slower because staff are working from home. I simply do not follow the logic. I know of one authority whose staff could not make calls since working from home meant they did not have access to telephones!

In conclusion then, how do we solve this planning problem? We absolutely need the local authority planning services to be properly resourced as the first obvious point.

Perhaps the job is not sufficiently attractive or the rewards inadequate - both financially and mentally? I have noticed that as the number of planners drops, those that remain seem to be under more pressure, which only increases the very problem of staff retention.

Whilst I cannot comment on specific working conditions, how do we assist this endangered species? If we do not, will the system grind to a halt? I really do not want to see red squirrels disappear altogether.

**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)**



L-R Paul Fairlamb, Tom Whitehead,  
Kim Harrison and Jim Thompson

## youngsRPS MANAGEMENT TEAM EXPANDED AND STRENGTHENED BY SUCCESSFUL INTERNAL PROMOTIONS

Paul Fairlamb, Kim Harrison, James Thompson and Tom Whitehead, have all been promoted to the newly formed position of Associate Director at youngsRPS.

Established for over 140 years, we offer property solutions across the commercial, rural and residential agency markets. After recently opening our 6th office in Darlington we want to reach further and reinforce our market position.

Graeme Bruce, Managing Director said "It is an exciting time for youngsRPS. The growth we saw throughout 2021 continues to rise in all areas of the business. We want to build on the momentum gained by harnessing the skills and talents of our team. Paul, Kim, James and Tom have earned this promotion through hard work, dedication and delivering results. They have the right qualities and attributes that we value and will be central in achieving our ambitious growth plans over the coming years. The role of the new Associate Directors will be focused on continuing the excellent service we offer and expanding the results we aim to achieve for all our clients.

At youngsRPS, we fully believe in the importance of people, and we offer unrestricted opportunities for personal and professional development."

### Meet the Associate Directors

#### **Paul Fairlamb**

*Associate Director,  
Chartered Commercial Surveyor*

Paul joined youngsRPS in 2003. He is a highly experienced commercial property surveyor dealing with property management, sales and lettings, lease renewals and rent reviews, specializing in retail, industrial and office property.

#### **Kim Harrison**

*Associate Director,  
Head of Residential Property*

Kim is a qualified member of the National Association of Estate Agents (NAEA). She is an experienced estate agent having worked for youngsRPS for over 10 years, starting out as a sales negotiator before progressing to Head of Residential based in our Hexham office.

#### **James Thompson**

*Associate Director,  
Rural Chartered Surveyor*

Initially based in Hexham, 'Jim' transferred

to the Sedgefield office, quickly becoming an integral part of our Rural Team and spearheading expansion across his home county of Yorkshire. As the son of a Yorkshire farmer, he also maintains an involvement in the running of the family business.

#### **Tom Whitehead**

*Associate Director,  
Rural Chartered Surveyor*

Based in our Northallerton office, Tom has worked for several regional and national property specialists carrying out work across the North East and Yorkshire regions. He is a rural property valuation specialist encompassing renewables and diversification projects, as well as being a respected and experienced valuer for loan security purposes.

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# IN CONVERSATION WITH...



Kevin Rogers

## KEVIN ROGERS

Managing Director, Elanders UK and President of sales and marketing, Elanders Group.

### Tell us about your role at Elanders.

I have two main responsibilities, first of all I am Managing Director for all UK activities and, secondly, I am a member of the Elanders Group management team with the title of President of sales and marketing, Elanders Group.

My Managing Director responsibilities consist of profit and loss responsibility for four UK entities, company strategy and direction ensuring alignment with Elanders Group, leading and developing the UK team, cross-group collaboration and other important aspects related to people, operations, customers and sales & marketing.

The UK business is currently dominated by print and packaging services and this will always be an important part of our business. We have developed a new vision and strategy to grow our supply chain services through organic growth and acquisitions. We will transform the business to deliver an 'integrated' offer where both supply chain and print and packaging services combine to provide our clients with a value-added complete solution.

My group management responsibility is primarily focused on two areas. To introduce new global customers to the group and to support my colleagues around the world to expand into new regions and deliver effective solutions for existing customers. I do this by working together with my group senior management colleagues who are located in Asia, Europe and the Americas.

### What services does the organisation provide?

Elanders provides print and packaging and supply chain services, the group profile is 20% print and packaging and 80% supply chain.

We print mostly onto paper and card for books, magazines, manuals, posters, leaflets and many personalised printed products.

In supply chain we provide an end-to-end service for freight and logistics, customs clearance, warehousing, value-added services, fulfilment, distribution and returns. Where value added services are concerned, this is delivered in many ways such as custom configuration, light manufacturing, assembly, staging, customisation, kitting, labelling and even embroidery, in some cases.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

There are actually two achievements which stand out for me. Firstly, leading the UK team between 2011-2015 to increase sales and profit which secured the future of the UK business and continued investment. The second business and personal achievement was joining the group management team in 2015, which also meant I spent four years in Beijing, China, to take responsibility of the business there and, ultimately, resulted in divesting this part of the business, which was a positive outcome for Elanders Group.

### What challenges have you encountered?

There have been many challenges during my 34 years at the company but three things really stand out: Technology, developing the leadership team and managing change. Technology reducing headcount and leading to redundancies, in some cases has been a key issue. Change is a constant

challenge because if you don't change you die and change doesn't sit comfortably with everyone.

### How has the industry changed since you began your career?

The industry has changed completely from a very transactional type of business to solutions-based. In the past, print was produced in bulk and delivered once, this has changed hugely to much more of an on-demand, JIT, in-sequence and variable content type of solution. This has changed the demand for print and packaging to more mass customisation and more of a supply chain-led service, clients no longer want storage rooms full of out-of-date or obsolete material.

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

My heroes in the workplace are all of my colleagues who give their best everyday for our customers and the company. My personal hero is Muhammad Ali, who was funny, charismatic, hardworking, dedicated to his profession and never compromised on his values, even when challenging the US government by refusing to fight in the Vietnam war – what a legend and someone who I always take inspiration from.

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

I have a two-part mantra; "do the right thing and never stand still".

### How do you like to unwind?

I like to unwind by spending time with my wife and our two miniature Schnauzers – they go everywhere with us, exercising, reading and, especially, playing golf.

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



Jamie Arthur, managing director and founder of Property Webmasters, pictured at the front of his team.

Picture credit: Ian Horrocks

## PROPERTY WEBMASTERS, BUILDING ON THEIR FUTURE

North-East-based software and digital marketing company Property Webmasters is rolling out its innovative services across the region following enormous success in the UK and overseas.

The PropTech business has clients in 48 different countries and is proud to boast real estate giants such as Sotheby's and RE/MAX among its partners, while it has also established a strong reputation across Europe and beyond.

Having recently launched Robinsons Tees Valley's new website, it is a sign that Jamie Arthur's business has already caught the eye of those closer to home.

His Hartlepool-based firm proudly generates enquiries and leads for estate agents through its different solutions that are constantly researched and developed.

Luke Fleming, Marketing Manager, said: "We do this through performance-driven website solutions and innovative marketing campaigns specific to the property industry.

"Our websites are built with performance in mind. They are built to be the best in terms of speed, lead generation and also how they aesthetically look.

"If you are an estate agent, the first place a

potential customer will go is to your website. If that doesn't provide the best impression then it is unlikely that they will use you, so we look to make sure that doesn't happen."

Property Webmasters has vast combined experience in the areas required to help estate agents grow.

Jamie, Managing Director and founder, said: "What we want to do is help estate agents perform well online so they can focus on what they do best.

"We will let them focus on valuations, sales and attending appointments because our solutions are made to generate the leads to help them focus on just that.

"We have a team of dedicated software developers, marketers and designers to help estate agents to develop their online presence.

"Our strategies constantly change because we aim to stay on top of the trends, the digital industry is constantly evolving and changing. We have to keep up with that

to make sure we are at the forefront of the industry."

Property Webmasters, which boasts property portal Propuno as part of the group, has worked successfully in building up its client base abroad.

Following investment from Net Ventures last year, there has been a move to deliver its services in other areas.

Luke said: "We know we haven't been shouting about ourselves too much, but we are now looking to show just how powerful our solutions can be for clients within the UK. There is an over-reliance on property portals in the UK. We want to change that mindset and educate Estate Agents on how investing in their own brand can lead to better and more cost-effective results.

"We want more local exposure too, not only because we want to show clients across the region how our solutions would work well for them, but as a business we also want to attract the top talent within the region.

"We are looking to build our team and attract highly-skilled marketers, developers and designers due to client demand and our growth as a company. We want our workforce to have the same ambitions as us.

"We want to demonstrate to our clients in Dubai, Marbella, London and in the North-East how we can build relationships and maintain them with the work we do."

**For more information on what Property Webmasters can do for you then check out [www.propertywebmasters.com](http://www.propertywebmasters.com)**



## PR AGENCY SHARES ITS KNOWLEDGE WITH LIBRARY PARTNERSHIP

A North East PR agency has partnered with the British Library to offer expert advice to business owners in the region.

Harvey & Hugo, which is based in Darlington but works with clients across the UK, will be working with the British Library's national network of Business and IP Centres (BIPCs) at its regional hub in Stockton Central Library.

BIPCs offer free resources, training and events to anyone who is looking to start or grow their own business, and members of the Harvey & Hugo team will be on hand as

experts in residence.

Managing director Charlotte Nichols said: "I was delighted to be asked to be involved and I'm so proud that we're considered experts within the region."

"I've been aware of the work of the BIPC for a long time through the British Library in London; I was a member there, and used the services for business, as well as presenting a talk about PR and culture."

"Over the years I've used it both as a good business network and also for the helpful research tools it gives users access to."

"As experts in residence, we'll be answering questions and providing guidance for start-ups and business owners, as well as hosting webinars on our specialist subject – PR and marketing."



## MEDIAWORKS APPOINTED BY BERNICIA GROUP

One of the North East's largest and most successful housing providers, Bernicia Group, has appointed future-facing marketing specialists Mediaworks to transform its digital footprint.

Bernicia Group has set ambitious goals to invest £200m into new and existing homes over the next four years and ensure tenants

have more say than ever before in the strategic direction of the business.

Mediaworks will develop a suite of new websites for Bernicia Group, a housing association providing quality homes in the North East for more than 50 years, to help build even greater tenant engagement and deliver on their ambitious plans.

Bernicia Group is the latest in a list of renowned housing specialists that have selected Mediaworks as a partner for digital solutions, including Johnnie Johnson Housing, Home Group, Believe Housing and the Northern Housing Consortium.

Brett Jacobson, CEO and founder at Mediaworks, said: "The Bernicia Group understands that effective communication across all of its channels is intrinsically linked to offering outstanding customer experience."

"We're developing five distinct digital platforms that are tailored and optimised for each of their audiences to ensure their 60,000 customers will be able to access and utilise Bernicia Group's services in a far more straightforward and simple manner. Our partnership with Bernicia Group will futureproof their position as one of the country's leading housing providers."



## HORIZON WORKS BOLSTERS MARKETING TEAM WITH NEW DIGITAL MARKETING EXECUTIVE

North East-based B2B marketing agency Horizon Works has appointed a new staff member to support its creative, PR and digital offering.

Holly Farr has joined the company as a digital marketing executive and brings with her extensive skills in copywriting as well as experience in website and social media management.

Holly has a background in creative writing and recently graduated from the University of Sunderland with a postgraduate degree in Marketing.

She has experience in working on digital marketing for a range of charities and has joined Horizon Works to develop her B2B marketing career.

Horizon Works, based at Northumberland Business Park near Cramlington, Northumberland, offers marketing, strategy, PR, digital and creative services. It has seen an increased demand for its digital expertise, driven by businesses who wish to increase their visibility and connect with customers and prospects online.

Commenting on her appointment, Holly Farr said: "Joining Horizon Works has given me the opportunity to work in a B2B marketing environment and develop my digital marketing skills following my studies."

"I'm looking forward to building my marketing career with the Horizon Works' team and working on projects for our innovative clients."

Samantha Vassallo, founder and managing director of Horizon Works, said: "Holly is a brilliant addition to our team and her background in marketing and creative writing will further strengthen our marketing capabilities. Working within our team, Holly will have the opportunity to develop her skills and learn within a dynamic, creative environment."



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# ALL ABOUT THE HYPE

Claire Pickersgill, Hype That PR.

## How do you feel going into another business year?

I feel optimistic about going into a new business year, the start of 2022 has been very busy and Hype That PR hit January 2022 with a number of growth stories for clients which has been great to see, despite a very turbulent time.

It has been inspiring and reassuring to see that there are a high number of SMEs who have been able to adapt and redirect their business strategy, unfortunately this isn't the case for all with many elements out of their control. However, it is important that those that have seen growth and adaptability shine the spotlight on their successes as it's a great achievement.

I know a number of businesses I speak to at times feel slightly reluctant to shout about their success at a time when it's been so difficult for many industries, but if it's done in the right way it is key, as these growth stories encourage confidence, inspire new business start-ups, collaborations and further business growth in the region which is vital for getting back to business.

## What are you currently working on?

I'm fortunate to work across a number of industries so a number of projects are bubbling at the moment from books to electric tractors – variety is definitely the spice of life at the moment!

A number of my clients have transferred onto retainer so it's great to be working more closely with these businesses to announce new projects and join them on their growth trajectory. They all have so many exciting projects on the horizon so I look forward to announcing these soon!

## What was your proudest achievement last year?

Supporting a host of clients to continually raise their brand awareness and profile in a turbulent business market and working closely with them to become a key part of their business. As such I was delighted to join the team at The Office Rocks as their Head of PR following working with the team in 2021, it's great to be part of such an energetic high growth business in my home city of Sunderland.

At the last count my clients picked up



Claire Pickersgill

eight awards in 2021 between them from award-winning gins, to social impact awards through to hitting the top 50 bestsellers book list so it's been a delight to see their growth and for them to receive the recognition they deserve.

A very poignant moment of 2021 was when I returned to the Sunderland Empire to support and lead the re-opening PR campaign, this really was an awe-inspiring moment with amazing support and coverage across the region with astounding stats, the energy on opening night was immense and it's great to be back with the team part time in my B2B development role re-connecting with businesses across the region again.

## What will you do differently in 2022?

It's great to see the return of in person and networking events so I'm looking forward to more of these in 2022. However, the change in working patterns and options is something I'd actually like to maintain, like remote working at the gorgeous SIX Roker, plus the efficiency of virtual meetings when appropriate, although in-person is great for building rapport, virtual are very efficient for quick catch ups so these will continue to be part of 2022 for me.

## What are your personal aspirations and resolutions?

I need to find time to read more but work

and homelife is so busy these last few months and a luxury at the moment, so that's on my list! I started refreshing my Italian with virtual group sessions in lockdown with Durham based Italian with Anna, it's bitesize and manageable so I want to invest more time into this with the hope of putting to good use on a (belated) summer road trip to Italy – all being well.

Fitness has been so important to me throughout lockdown, like many and kept me motivated, I even miss a 6am bootcamp now if I can't make it so plan to keep on track with these with SR Functional Fitness.

## What social events are you most looking forward to?

I managed to snap up tickets to Diary of a CEO Live with Steven Bartlett, Social Chain founder and BBC's newest Dragon so I'm looking forward to catching his inspirational business podcast when it hits the stage.

Super excited for a very belated Birthday gift and the re-scheduled The Killers gig in Middlesbrough plus family time with the iconic film adaption of the magical Bedknobs and Broomsticks at Sunderland Empire this Easter.

## In three words, 2022 will be...

A new year!

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



## FURTHER EXPANSION AT NORTH TYNESIDE DESIGN AGENCY

North Shields-based Cargo Creative has taken on two new team members following increased demand for its creative design, web development and digital marketing services. The new hires come only three months after the company took on three other members of staff bringing its headcount to 11.

Owner, Paul Hart, said: "Since we grew the team in the summer, our digital marketing and SEO departments have grown

massively whether that is existing clients coming to us for additional services or new business coming in.

"We needed to support the current team and that meant adding new people to the mix and we are very excited to welcome a junior marketing executive, Jenna Dixon and front end developer, Nathan Lawson.

"Jenna is supporting our ever-growing digital marketing team, working across content and SEO. She is already settling in well and creating some amazing results for clients.

"We have admired Nathan's work for a while and are delighted that he's joined us. He brings with him over 10 years experience working across a range of clients and sectors, adding further strength and depth to our development team."

Cargo Creative is a digital, design, and online marketing agency working with businesses such as; Perspective Financial Group, Intelligence Fusion, Insight Healthcare & Mental Health Concern, Filtronic and Northern Powergrid.



Photo credit: MHG Photography

## A SWEET FUTURE FOR NORTH YORKSHIRE MARKETING FIRM

Northallerton-based marketing agency, Peachy Digital celebrated its second birthday last week with an open-house party, with food and drink sourced from its foodie clients and freshly made peach bellinis to tempt party-goers.

Unable to mark the occasion of its first birthday due to lockdown restrictions, the company welcomed clients, suppliers and local businesses to join them for a celebration at the Evolution Business Centre, where the company has held an office since April 2021.

Borne out of redundancy, Lizzie Selby set up Peachy Digital single-handedly in two days, right at the start of the coronavirus pandemic, and despite the challenges of uncertainty, has grown the business to its current three-strong team, achieving a 44 per cent increase in turnover in its second year.

"I wanted to do things differently", says Managing Director Lizzie, "to shake up the standard agency model and create something flexible and adjustable – something that would suit modern businesses and the bizarre times we've been living in.

"We don't tie clients in into fixed contracts or have endless terms and conditions, we operate how you would want an internal marketing department to – quite literally as an extension of your own team."

This accommodating model has stood the business in good stead, facilitating its growth from one solitary client, through word of mouth, to an impressive client base which includes the UK's number one pork pie brand Vale of Mowbray, national supplier of hose, hydraulics and PPE Caswells Group, industry-leading Managed Service Provider razorblue, and up-and-coming indie brewery, Salt Steel Brewing Co. With Lizzie's background in food and drink, Peachy Digital regularly works with foodie writer, Lee Majhen-Todd of Lee and the Sweet Life, who features the agency's clients' products in her blogs, recipes and social media content.

The company is proud to be able to give back to its local community, sponsoring two local football teams with a third agreement due to begin later this year, and its nominated charity this year is Darlington Veterans Community.



## MEDIAWORKS APPOINT NEW PEOPLE DIRECTOR TO DRIVE STAFF GROWTH PLANS

Mediaworks, one of the UK and Ireland's largest independent digital marketing agencies, has bolstered its senior team with the appointment of a new group people director.

Samantha Link joins the award-winning agency having held senior level HR positions at fellow tech and digital businesses, including global software giant Sage and Future50 leaders, Nomad Digital.

Brett Jacobson, founder and group CEO at Mediaworks said: "Samantha arrives with a wealth of experience. She's been instrumental in the successful development of high growth cultures within global businesses. We have a growing national and international client

base, so her experience developing cross border teams puts us in pole position as we continue our rapid growth trajectory.

"She has a platform to implement more positive changes that will get the best from our world-class colleagues. Our aim is to continue to attract, develop and retain the most skilled and ambitious talent throughout the group across the UK&I."

Mediaworks has doubled its headcount to just short of 200 staff in the last two years and is aiming to double it again in the next 24 months as it aims to service a meteoric rise in client demands.

Samantha added: "The pace of growth at Mediaworks is breathtaking. I'm really excited to be able to bring my experience of staff development and nurturing high-performance cultures in large scale, high-growth businesses to the table.

"Further developing the organisation's people-focused culture, and enhancing training and wellbeing programmes, presents a fantastic opportunity. I'm thrilled to be playing my part in putting our most important asset, our incredible people, at the centre of that successful growth."

Mediaworks, one of the UK and Ireland's largest independent digital marketing agencies, delivers a range of services across SEO, PPC, web dev, brand, content and digital PR. The growing agency has offices in Newcastle, Leeds, Edinburgh, Manchester, London and Dublin.

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**“That’ll do,”  
won’t do  
anymore.**





The pandemic has changed things that's for certain.  
Humans have re-evaluated their personal needs.  
Businesses have failed.  
While others have soared – innovating and rethinking  
their way to a better future at an extraordinary rate.  
But what about marketing?  
Have marketers reconsidered what consumers want  
or need from their brand in these new times?  
Or are they doing the same old same old, hoping that  
somehow the need for change passes them by?  
Frighteningly, lots are.  
Which in some way explains the proliferation of  
uninspiring, generic advertising that populates our TVs,  
billboards, social feeds and magazines.  
Fortunately, some marketers can see the future and  
are taking it on, fully, without fear of evolving.  
Understanding that the old ways, even if they've proved  
successful in the past, are no longer the best way  
forward now.  
They go out of their way to make their brand relevant  
and seek new ways to inspire their audiences.  
Because times have changed.  
Evolution is exciting and full of new possibilities.  
And 'that'll do', won't do anymore.

# MEDIA AND MARKETING MATTERS

In the latest in our popular series of features we talk to...

## HOLLY TAYLOR

Founder of HT Media Services

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

It's funny because I remember years ago when I was a lot younger about four or five there was always a running joke in the family that I should become a journalist when I was older. My Grandma used to say I had the face for telly, and that I was always nosy – something we all laugh about now. I was never without a book in my hand and loved writing poems and stories, so I think my interest was sparked from then really. My love of English grew throughout secondary school and then when I studied English and Journalism at University, that just really re-affirmed that a career in the media was for me.

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

After leaving school, I went to York University to study English Language and Linguistics, and then from there, I went on to study for a master's degree at Newcastle University in International Multimedia Journalism.

Just before graduating, my lecturer told me he had put me forward for a BBC broadcast journalist trainee scheme based at BBC Breakfast in Salford. It would be working across BBC Breakfast and North West Tonight. The interview was gruelling, but I got the job and moved to Manchester. After a year in Salford, I moved back home and worked at Look North before leaving to pursue a career in social media – an industry I was keen to break into.

Since leaving my role in social media four years ago, I have worked in PR for a local charity, and whilst there, I decided to start up HT Media Services which has gone from strength to strength.

### What have been the biggest challenges you have faced so far?

Journalism is a really cut-throat industry and with so few jobs and so much competition, especially within the broadcast sector, I found that the biggest challenge was trying to climb the ladder while there were so many other people with more experience going for that same role.

### What services do you provide?

At HT Media Services I offer a range of services all of which incorporate elements from each of my past roles.

I offer all aspects of copywriting from blogs and press releases to rewriting website copy. Businesses can also outsource their social media to me if they don't have the time or resources to manage it themselves.

I can also help with content creation and offer 1-1 curation sessions.

### What is your greatest strength?

I have always been a people person and I believe this has always been my greatest asset and strength, especially in the media industry.

### What has been your proudest achievement?

To date, I would say my proudest moment was the first time I presented the news on BBC 1. I don't think I have ever felt that nervous in my life, especially knowing it was live, but the reaction from colleagues, friends, and family was amazing.

Other than that, I would say finally getting HT Media Services up and running has also been a proud moment after so much deliberation about whether to do it or not.

### What are your future career aspirations?

I launched HT Media Services just three short months ago and can't believe the positive response I have had and the number of new clients I am now working with. My next focus is to grow my business while continuing to do meaningful work that I enjoy. I am also looking forward to going back to University in March to study for another master's degree in PR – it's going to be a busy but exciting year!

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“

...I presented the news on BBC 1. I don't think I have ever felt that nervous in my life...



## IN CONVERSATION WITH...



L-R: Lindsay Fletcher, Account Executive and Lizzie Selby, Managing Director at Peachy Digital

Photo credit: MHG Photography

## LIZZIE SELBY

Managing Director, Peachy Digital

**What were your career ambitions growing up?**

As with every young girl, I wanted to be about everything under the sun! I almost went to university to study Business Accounting & Finance (which for those who know me well, is highly amusing) but opted instead to just get out into the real world and get some experience. Marketing came about by happy accident and nearly 13 years later – here I am!

**Tell us about your current role.**

I founded the business and am the Managing Director. No two days are the same and that is just the way I like it – I can go from standing in a racing yard taking photos of jockeys, to helping plan new product development in food businesses, to interviewing famous chefs, and all sorts in between.

**What was the impetus for forming Peachy Digital?**

On being made redundant in January 2021 and finding very few job opportunities available that were local enough and would suit my family life, my previous employer encouraged me to just take a leap of faith.

**What is your proudest business achievement?**

I would struggle to choose just one! We have made it to two years, successfully at that and also during a global pandemic. Having our press release included in Delicious magazine

was a great coup, and seeing a client on live TV.

**What are you currently working on?**

We focus heavily on professional development and I've lined up a new programme of training for our team, and we're also in some exciting discussions with potential new clients. There is a massive campaign going live in February for one of our clients which could be a game changer for their business and being involved with that quite literally gives me butterflies every time I think about it!

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

Lindsay is our account executive and creates a lot of content, looks after day to day work with clients and brings a wealth of agricultural expertise to our team. We also have Chloe who works remotely 99 per cent of the time and is on a very flexible working pattern to suit her Fibromyalgia and the fact that she is also studying a Masters degree. She writes most of our blogs and press releases, and is a super star researcher too.

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

Don't take things personally! When you don't win a piece of business, or if a client wants changes to some work you thought was spot on, it can be hard not to feel like it's aimed at you personally. But while the business is like my baby, I have learned to see all of those things as a learning opportunity. No one wins 100 per cent of the time, but it's what you do with those times you don't win that set you up for success.

**What has been your biggest challenge?**

Most definitely running and growing a

business while home schooling! That was not just a challenge, it was mentally and emotionally draining. My children needed my support while also dealing with their own emotions over lockdown and so on, but our customers needed more from us than ever before because there was so much reliance on digital marketing.

**Who are your heroes outside of business?**

Outside of work, I adore Gordon Ramsay. He's an acquired taste for sure but he's come from a family with next to nothing to building a successful business empire, having his own family who are able to enjoy opportunities he never had, and I find him hilarious too. Plus, I probably own most if not all of his cook books.

**Where would you like to be in five years time?**

Still doing what I'm doing, still working with amazing clients, and hopefully in a position to have offered great opportunities to new people. My youngest constantly says she wants to work with me – in five years' time she'll be coming up 13 so maybe we'll be considering GCSE options to suit a future marketeer!

**How do you unwind outside of work?**

I can usually be found in the kitchen when I'm not at work. I have three dogs and love to be active, and my husband and I have four children between us so there is never a dull moment! If it's been a tough day, a soak in the bath with some acoustic music, a glass of rioja and some cheese (sorry, weird I know) are a sure fire way to chill me out and help me hit 'reset'.

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## REVENUE GROWTH SPECIALIST ANNOUNCES NEW MANAGEMENT TEAM AND TARGETS TRIPLE- DIGIT GROWTH

Gateshead-based revenue growth specialist Revolution has announced a new management structure as it accelerates growth plans by creating over 25 jobs and doubling turnover in the next 12 months.

Digital director Adam Blenkinsop is stepping up to become CEO, with founder Gill Burgess moving to the role of Strategic Board Advisor.

Having joined the business in 2008, Adam has been influential in developing Revolution's digital transformation offer and in his new role as CEO is responsible for the

overall running of the business and doubling revenue in 2022.

Revolution founder Gill, who started the business in 2003 will be supporting Adam and the senior team, as the company presses ahead with its growth plans.

Speaking of the change of structure, Gill said: "Over the last 19 years I've been delighted to see Revolution develop from a small marketing agency in Hexham to a leading provider of revenue-first growth strategies - and in the process help companies to grow faster and better.

Our succession plan has been in place for some time and this is simply the next phase in the Revolution journey. Such is the change of pace within the industry, Adam is perfectly poised to lead Revolution and take the company forward. I am delighted to be supporting Adam and our fantastic team throughout 2022 and beyond."

Adam Blenkinsop added: "Our success to date is testament to Gill's hard work and constant support for the team. We have exciting growth plans, including doubling revenue and onboarding 25 new hires in the next 12 months, so it's going to be another exciting year.

With a talented and energetic management team and our brilliant delivery teams, we're ready to fuel our growth ambitions."

To help Revolution achieve its growth targets, Adam Catlow, Josh Tulip and Chris Glancey have joined the senior leadership team. Adam Catlow moves to the role of Chief Technical Officer, Josh Tulip has been appointed as Chief Growth Officer and Chris Glancey has been promoted to the position of Chief Strategy Officer. Together, the Revolution leadership team provides strategic board-level support to high growth, large SMEs and Corporates.

The trio are responsible for the overall

success of the business and are charged with accelerating growth and expanding the company's presence across the UK.

Speaking of the growth plans, the CEO added: "Over the last 12 months, our teams in Newcastle and Manchester have achieved success following a number of significant new client wins. Our proposition of delivering revenue-first growth strategies has resonated with ambitious businesses and we are seeing fantastic results.

The impact of our work is underpinning our strategy and is central to our growth ambitions. Throughout the next 12 months, we are looking to create 15 new jobs in our Manchester office, another 10 in the North East as well as expanding in new territories. There is real opportunity to leverage our revenue-first approach and I am truly excited to see what the future holds."

The new changes come off the back of a bumper year for Revolution. January 2022 also sees the launch of its new brand - cementing its position as revenue growth specialists.

And despite the Covid-19 Pandemic, Revolution is continuing its growth trajectory following a successful 12 months. Throughout 2021, revenues increased by over 50% and seven new hires joined the team. This growth was accelerated by the acquisition of The Roundhouse Digital in January 2021.

"Our new brand more accurately reflects our key service offering and showcases how we operate on a day-to-day basis. The revenue-first approach reflects how we help companies grow faster and better through demand generation strategies as well as helping brands reduce friction and increase efficiencies through digital transformation," Adam Blenkinsop explained.

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

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# NEW CHAPTER FOR TWO OF THE NORTH EAST'S LEADING CREATIVE AGENCIES

The North East has always been a hotbed for marketing, advertising, PR and communications agencies. The breadth of experience, creativity, and sheer quality of the craft – and indeed graft – can be appreciated with an acknowledgment of the leading-brand clients and industry awards shared by the number of established and up-and-coming businesses across the region.

These names have attracted the top professionals in their fields, as well as enticing new graduates to stay in the North East and develop their careers here. The adage that agency success is only possible in London is becoming more and more outdated.

Of course the pandemic has been no friend to any SME, but many companies have used the recent time during lockdowns to stop and think – a luxury we don't always allow ourselves in business. Some have changed direction, others started to offer new services, but a couple have turned things on their heads completely.

And two of the most established North East agencies have done just that – Different Advertising, Design and Marketing and Narrative Integrated Communications have recently announced their merger to become Different Narrative – a move which will create the region's largest end-to-end marketing services provider.

An all-encompassing selection of services including advertising, branding, design, publishing, marketing, PR, social media and web design and development will establish Different Narrative as a leader in the creative sector. It will also bring together an unrivalled team of 30 highly experienced professionals. Combined clients will include Carpetright, Bovis Homes, Opportuni and Sunderland Council.

So why now? Ben Quigley, CEO of Different and Executive Chairman of Different Narrative, explained, "Our two agencies have been active in a similar space for a number of years now. We have had mutual admiration for each other's creative work throughout this time.

"Our services have been mainly complementary; we have similar ambition for growth and our teams' skill sets are a great pairing. It made complete sense to join forces and combine efforts.

"Clearly the pandemic has thrown up many obstacles for business, but it has also provided opportunities. Now we know an agency such as ours will be able to work for clients based anywhere – no matter how diverse and complex their marketing and media needs might be – from a North East base. There is also the opportunity for large, independent agencies like ourselves to move into the positions once taken by the big corporates", added Ben.

Kieron Goldsborough, founder of Narrative Integrated Communications and now CEO of Different Narrative, said, "We see a massive potential for an agency such as ours and believe the timing is right. In the North East alone, sectors such as digital have attracted incredible investment and start-ups are scaling up at remarkable rates. We plan to offer these types of businesses all the communications and brand attention they need in one place.

"It's a very significant time for us and we're really pleased with results so far – we're already ahead of our forecasted progress; our teams have done us proud by embracing the change and we are gearing up for ambitious growth. The next phase will be all about growing our client base and expanding our team.

"As Different Narrative, our whole approach will be underpinned by our pledge to deliver positive change for businesses who want to develop and grow. We want to become changemakers in our field, challenge the 'normal' way of doing things, create fresh thinking and be bold. Collaboration has never looked so good - it's going to be an exciting year!", added Kieron.

[www.differentnarrative.com](http://www.differentnarrative.com) [hello@differentnarrative.com](mailto:hello@differentnarrative.com)





L-R: Kieron Goldsborough and Ben Quigley

## ...WHAT WE LOVE ABOUT OUR BUSINESS...

*It's February – the month of love and Valentine's Day of course. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they love about their business.*



"I love many things about my job. I love the flexibility it brings so that I can spend time with my children and be there for those special moments at school. Something I missed out on previously. I also love how much I can help others, whether it's children reading my books or helping adults get unstuck and realise their potential, it all warms my heart and brings me joy."

*Eleanor Baggaley*  
[www.eleanorbaggaley.com](http://www.eleanorbaggaley.com)



"The thing that makes my job special is the smile you get when working with our amazing clients, from happy young people on holiday activities through to some of the elderly people who have recently used our tree services because of the storms! Winning the Northern Enterprise Awards for our Tree Work this month has also been very special for all of us!"

*Paul Kirkpatrick*  
[www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)



"What I love about MINT Business Club is short and sweet – it's freedom and our fantastic members!"

*Nicola Jayne,*  
*Little Mint Business Club*  
[www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk](http://www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk)



"With the boatload of Valentines Cards, Flowers and more importantly Chocolates that head my way at this time of year – what better way of capturing all of this, but on a Spreadsheet! However, reality soon hits, as I buy my own Ferrero Rocher (other such versions are available!), kid myself that I will make them last at least a week and think about how far I will need to jog, to burn off those extra calories! Those that know me, will know that the word "jog" fits into my lifestyle about as much as the word "salad" does – but it's good to have a dream! Again, if jogging and eating salad were to be part of my life I would account for it all on a Spreadsheet. Working at Leading Link in an agile, ever moving environment, where two days are never the same, I use spreadsheets a lot and need a certain level of planning, consistency and spreadsheet(ing) and that's what I love about my job."

*Chris Johnson Leading Link*  
[www.leadinglink.co.uk](http://www.leadinglink.co.uk)

"What I love about my job is the strange requests we get from our customers. As a property letting company, I was contacted by a hospital who said they were looking after one of my tenants. They said that they anticipated that he may be with them for some time and forwarded his request for me to attend his property and feed his pigeons daily! After making a few phone calls, the RSPCA looked after the bird's welfare leaving my tenant happy that his birds were being cared for."

*Nikki Middleton,*  
*Usworth Property Management*



"I love meeting new people, learning about their business and their experiences."

Dan Wilkinson

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

"When you work in the wedding and event industry as I do with Made to Treasure Stationery and Events, there's so many things to love about your business, after all weddings are all about love!

Creating a couple's wedding stationery is such an honour, it's often the first hint to guests of what's to come and is there as a memento long after the wedding too. After 20 years of making invitations at Made to Treasure we still love to work with happy couples. We love getting to know them and when you realise you're creating a lasting memory designed with the couple especially for them to show future generations too, well what's not to love about that!"

Working within Karen Goldfinch – Your Business Pilot I love the light bulb moment. When you're working with business owners, talking about their ideas, their struggles, or their dreams, you can see how passionate they are. I'm often talking to them when they realise they need help, possibly with their sales or marketing, or perhaps they need someone to look at their direction and keep them on track. It's not always easy to see things with fresh eyes, that's where I come in, and being able to turn that 'light bulb' on, it's the time you see someone falling back in love with their business and you know with some determination and work they're going to reach whatever heights they want to reach - I love that!

*Karen Goldfinch is Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum and owner of Karen Goldfinch – Your Business Pilot and Made to Treasure Stationery and Events*

[www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk](http://www.northtynesidebusinessforum.org.uk)

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# WHAT IS THE METAVERSE AND WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR MARKETING?

There is one word in the world of marketing right now with the power to evoke strong emotions.

Whether you sit in the “bring it, I am ready to embrace this new generation of tech,” or “I will just bury my head in this pile of newspapers and book a quarter page while I am at it” camp, the metaverse is here, and it is ready to shake up our notion of creativity and targeted advertising.

Fear not, it is not as daunting as it may first appear.

What makes a metaverse a metaverse?

Influencer Marketing Hub does a great job breaking down the components: “a metaverse is always active, exists in real time, players have individual agency, it’s a self-contained and fully functioning universe and contains user-generated content.”

In summary, if you have dabbled with virtual reality (VR) or augmented reality (AR) you are already existing in the metaverse - which, according to XRToday, is expected to sign on a billion users and eventually earn over £1 trillion in revenues in the next ten years.

According to Influencer Marketing Hub, it is estimated that approximately 85 million users experienced AR or VR at least once a month in 2021 and whilst the gaming industry was the first to truly grasp and take advantage of the potential there is huge potential for early adopters from other sectors too.

For brands looking to target and engage Millennials and Gen-Z, the metaverse is a virtual playground like no other.

Take Vans. The Wall Street Journal reports that the skateboarding brand launched a virtual skatepark in Roblox that lets players try new tricks, and can earn points to redeem in the virtual store to customize their avatar.

Vans executive team says the online metaverse is the best place to build brand awareness among their core demographic of 13 to 35-year olds. The brand reveals their online park has seen upwards of 48 millions visitors to date.

In May 2021, Gucci opened the Gucci Garden on Roblox, a virtual experience to complement a real-world installation called the Gucci

Garden Archetypes, which took place in Florence, Italy. Vogue Business revealed that people could, “mingle with others exploring the space and can buy digital pieces created in collaboration with Roblox creator Rook Vanguard.” These two collaborations are two great examples of how brands can be much more creative in the digital space than in the real world.

According to Forbes, new non-gaming metaverses are starting to appear more regularly. Virtual conventions are now taking place in the metaverse. Attendees can go to a bunch of booths without leaving their office or home. The size of the audience grows exponentially when you move the experience online. Think about car shows and the potential reach if they moved to the metaverse. Put on some virtual reality glasses and “sit” in a car to experience and see it from the inside out.

Of course, as with any new technology there are pitfalls to be aware of. XR Today has reported that in the early years of the metaverse advertisers may struggle with:

- **Blurred branding boundaries** – Since the metaverse is decentralised, companies may not be able to exert control over ad spots. You may find an influencer sporting items from two competing companies simultaneously.

- **Replicating products in the real world**

– Prospective customers can engage in hyper-customisation in VR. But when brands fail to deliver a similar experience in the real world, product engagement could actually fall.

- **Content overwhelm** – Constant video pop-ups, indistinguishable sponsored content, and repetitive ads are all too common in the digital world. Inside the metaverse, they take on an even more intrusive dimension and could cause sensory overload.

- **Data privacy and ethical issues** – In the metaverse, brands can see a version of your identity in the form of a 3D avatar. But does the avatar denote explicit consent? Can advertisers, therefore, target ads based on someone’s appearance in VR? These issues are yet to be ironed out.

Because marketing in the metaverse is so new, the prices are still quite low to run a campaign. If you are a brand or business with an open mind and your target audience spends time on a metaverse, now is the time to give it a go. Keep in mind traditional metrics don’t apply in the metaverse, yet at least. Engagement is the most effective KPI as it stands and brands need to get creative in order to truly tap into the affinity interests of their target audience.

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Jennifer Anderson



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Nicola Halse

### Testimonials...

**"We love that Nicola just "gets it" and is happy to run with our marketing based on our initial brief and regular updates. We see her as part of our extended team and would recommend her services to any organisation."**  
*Claire Parry, Week2Week Serviced Apartments*

**"Nicola has helped take Compliant to the next level, her background knowledge and experience has been invaluable to the company"**  
*Mark Henderson, Compliant FM*

**"Nicola has been fantastic to work with, her first email campaign for us resulted in a conversion that is now a closed sale."**  
*Kieran Turnbull, Zenith Systems*



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# HORIZON WORKS STRENGTHENS ITS INDUSTRY SUPPORT – AND LOOKS TO THE FUTURE

Since its launch in 2010, North East-based B2B marketing agency Horizon Works has been active in the UK's industry networks and clusters. But throughout the Coronavirus pandemic, it strengthened its relationships with sector organisations and networks, both regionally and nationally.

Last year saw the company, which specialises in supporting innovators in complex industries, become even more deeply embedded into the manufacturing, engineering, energy and tech sectors.

And driven by the evolving needs of industry, Horizon Works launched new services and initiatives.

## **There's more to come in 2022.**

Here, Samantha Vassallo, managing director of Horizon Works, looks back on a busy 2021... and gives us a preview of the year ahead.

## **Horizon Works' highlights of 2021**

### **Delivering the Supply Chain North East (SCNE) Back to Business Basics Marketing for Automotive Programme**

Working with the North East Automotive Alliance (NEAA), we brought our marketing expertise to this SCNE initiative, which is designed to help companies promote, sell and distribute a product or service in the automotive sector.

Horizon Works helped more than 25 innovative companies to shape and improve their marketing activities.

Sustainable safety solutions specialist, Ekobox, electronics manufacturer Arian EMS and 3D printing specialist MakeItQuick were just some of the businesses that benefited from the programme's support.

Commenting on the programme, David Hunter, owner and manager of Ekobox, said: "The body of work Horizon Works have produced has been much more than we ever expected. It has allowed us to position the business in a new direction."

### **Becoming an EMN affiliate partner... and launching the Marketing Lunch and Learn Programme**

The Engineering and Manufacturing Network (EMN) is dedicated to supporting the growth of the North East's engineering and manufacturing industries.

And Horizon Works has been closely involved with EMN for a number of years.

We were a Silver Sponsor of the organisation's EMCON event in Newton Aycliffe in 2021 and 2019, and also delivered a number of webinars for EMN during lockdown.

Last year, however, we further cemented this relationship.

In November, we became an affiliate partner of EMN. This enables us to offer a wider range of marketing support to EMN members, including drop-in marketing surgeries and member offers.

And in December, at Gestamp's world class training facility in Newton Aycliffe, we launched a new programme of monthly Marketing Lunch and Learn events with EMN. The event was a great success, attracting business from across the manufacturing and engineering sectors.

## **Joining NOF**

NOF works to make connections between businesses in the energy sector... and it is playing a huge role in supporting the UK's renewable energy industry.

We were therefore delighted to become a NOF member in 2021. This enables us to offer additional support to clients working across renewables and places Horizon Works at the heart of this rapidly evolving sector.

Horizon Works also exhibited at NOF's Offshore Wind North East event in December, an expo and conference held at the Beacon Of Light.

Bringing together offshore wind farm operators, OEMs, ports, higher education bodies, suppliers and innovators, OWNE demonstrated the strength of North East England in offshore wind... and the part our region is playing in the UK's drive towards net zero.



L-R: Samantha Vassallo, managing director of Horizon Works, Paul Butler, chief executive of the North East Automotive Alliance and David Hunter, owner and manager of Ekobox.



L-R: Kaye Collins, Network Manager, EMN, Paul James, Head of Gestamp's Talent Academy, Samantha Vassallo, managing director of Horizon Works and Ben Gilhespy, Director of Operations at EMN.

### Getting back to face to face events...

With the pandemic forcing many conferences and exhibitions to be cancelled – or move online – it was exciting to see face to face events returning in 2021.

We'd certainly missed bumping into friends and catching over a cuppa or two – not to mention seeing new product innovations first-hand.

Our team exhibited at EMCON, the North East Automotive Expo, The North East of England Process Industry Cluster's Meet The Members event and Offshore Wind North East.

Old acquaintances were renewed, new connections were forged... and unsurprisingly, a lot of coffee was drunk!

### Expanding our capabilities

Animation is a growing part of the B2B marketing mix. And in 2021, we fully incorporated this into our offering by teaming up with an animation partner.

So, we've been busy delivering animations for Martel Instruments' VIDA data collection technology, metal decorating and coating machine manufacturer Crabtree and electrical safety equipment manufacturer Seaward.

And we're seeing increased demand for our work in this field.

### What we're excited about in 2022...

#### Working in partnership with Innovation SuperNetwork

Innovation SuperNetwork gives North East entrepreneurs, start-ups and scale-ups access to new market opportunities, finance and sector expertise – and Horizon Works

has supported the network as partner since 2020, alongside the likes of Innovate UK and the North East's universities.

We've provided advice to businesses engaged with Innovation SuperNetwork's initiatives and programmes, and will be continuing to offer this support in 2022.

We're also looking forward to the organisation's VentureFest North East England event on March 30 – one of the UK's leading innovation conferences.

#### Playing a key role in the Make UK Defence Competitive Advantage Programme

Horizon Works is a member of Make UK Defence and we were recently invited to be a marketing partner on the organisation's Competitive Advantage Programme (CAP). This brings together industry experts from across the UK to provide advice and services to members.

Through the CAP programme, we'll be helping Make UK Defence members to improve their marketing strategies and tactics, and providing tailored support to businesses targeting the defence sector.

#### Sharing knowledge and expertise

Throughout 2022, we'll be working with our network partners to bring Horizon Works' expertise to businesses.

With EMN, we'll be running regular Marketing Lunch and Learn events at manufacturing and engineering businesses across the North East. We'll be providing marketing advice and guidance, and attendees will be able to network and gain an insight into the marketing approaches employed by some of the region's most

prominent manufacturing and engineering companies.

We'll also be delivering workshops, webinars and consultation sessions through organisations including Make UK Defence, NEPIC, the NEAA and Innovation SuperNetwork.

#### Attending conferences and expos!

Horizon Works will be attending and exhibiting at a range of events – and you'll be able to meet us at conferences and expos across the North East!

We'll be at Wynyard Hall in June for NEPIC's Meet The Members 2022 conference and expo, and in September our team will be at the Beacon Of Light in Sunderland for the North East Automotive Expo, and the Xcel Centre in Newton Aycliffe for EMCON.

We're also excited to be returning to Offshore Wind North East in November.

#### Supporting more innovators

From life sciences game changers and emerging tech disruptors to global engineering giants, we'll be helping visionary businesses to market their products and services regionally, nationally and internationally during 2022.

It promises to be an exciting year!

***If you'd like to tap into our specialist expertise across strategy, marketing, public relations, design, brand, digital marketing and website design, why not get in touch?***

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Nichola Elgie

## SHOWCASING NORTH EAST TALENT

Veronica Swindale, MD of nesma, caught up with Nichola Elgie who won the Marketer of the Year award at the North East Marketing Awards. Nichola received this accolade due to the positive impact she has made on client campaigns with her strategic planning, creativity and innovative thinking.

### What does it mean to you to be recognised by such an award?

When my MD, Dan Appleby, said he was entering me for the North East Marketer of the Year Award, I was blown away. For me, my role is all about making things happen behind the scenes, being that person that rallies the team and someone clients and partners can rely on to help plan and deliver compelling campaigns they're proud to put their name to. To be recognised for playing a part in making many things happen, especially during such a tough time for the advertising industry, is one of my proudest moments.

### Have you received any other awards?

No (unless you can count the Bad Driver Award at the annual Drummond Central Away Day). But I'm chuffed to say that campaigns I've led have won several awards at regional and national ceremonies over the last three years, including Marketing Week Masters, The Drum, Prolific North and the North East Marketing Awards. 'Thank You', our regional Covid campaign and the Greggs and PlayStation partnership have been recent winners - both highlights of my career so far.

### We both have a keen interest in ensuring people have the right practical and professional skills to advance their careers. What do you think makes a person stand out, even when they are in their first job?

Having bags of enthusiasm, an interest, and a willingness to listen and learn makes a person stand out. These traits came from a place of passion for me personally, which gave me a good start. I loved all things marketing - my favourite adverts were the VW Polo Singing Dog advert by DDB and the Sony Bravia Play-Dough bunnies advert by Fallon London. And I wanted a piece of that.

But don't get me wrong, you must be able to channel that passion. Don't be that person who thinks they know everything (believe me, you don't. You never will.) Show initiative, do something before you're asked. Do some proactive research on a category and a client; make the teas for the pitch team working late and learn from the experienced and talented people around you.

**Are these skills something that is innate or can be taught?**

I believe it's both. You must be naturally curious, but your approach can be polished. I wanted (and tried) to be involved in absolutely everything, which sometimes meant I was overstepping. I've learnt how to get the best out of people and add value for my clients and colleagues without trying to do their job for them.

**And what is your advice on lifelong learning?**

Never stop wanting to learn more or be better. The marketing industry changes all the time, overnight in some instances, so knowing when to listen to the experts is an important skill. You have to be open to learning from everyone and everywhere and combine different learning formats and techniques. Someone told me that it's when you push yourself out of your comfort zone and feel uncomfortable is when you're learning. I really should remember who said that as it's stuck with me ever since and is something I tell my team today.

**Your career in advertising is a fascinating one. Can you take us through each stage of your career from Account Executive to Senior Account Director in nine years? What are the additional skills required by each role to merit the promotions?**

Account Executive is a task-based role. I was focused on supporting my Account Manager on client projects, general admin tasks, taking meeting minutes, nipping to the Post Office when needed, preparing for meetings - you name it. If I could make my Account Manager's day-to-day that bit easier, then it was my pleasure to do so.

I was promoted to Account Manager after just a year. That was a tough transition as I had to learn how to balance having more responsibility with still being the person those around me depended on. The Account Manager role requires more of an ability to plan - you have to know the detail, put a plan together, and deliver it, stepping away from someone who can deliver someone else's plan. It's when the stabilisers come off.

Finally, as Senior Account Director, my role is to shape the strategy with clients and colleagues and ultimately be a trusted advisor that both external and internal partners come to and rely on.

Moving from managing to leading is the most challenging move. You have to learn to let others build the plan and come up with the answers - but always be on hand to provide guidance and direction.

**As you move up the ladder, what management advice would you give regarding managing your team?**

My most significant piece of advice is to let people work things through themselves, even if it means they make mistakes. But not to the point where they fail, of course. As a manager, you have to help your team resolve issues but flying in with a cape to save the day isn't the answer. It's not good for you, and it's not good for them. It took me a long time to realise that doing something for someone because I thought it protected them doesn't help in the long run.

I know that when I made mistakes as an Account Exec, Manager and even today, the disappointment I would feel in myself was enough. It would have been easy to hide away and let someone else fix things - but being allowed to be part of the solution forced me to dust myself off, learn from it and make sure it didn't happen again.

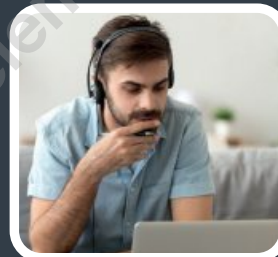
For me, it was those opportunities that helped me get to where I am today.

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Geoffrey Stanford

## RGS ACHIEVE HIGHEST POSSIBLE RATING IN ISI INSPECTION

Since I last wrote for Northern Insight shortly before Christmas (which already seems a long time ago) the RGS received its ISI inspection report.

The arrival of school inspectors gives any Head a degree of nervousness at the best of times and being inspected while still in the midst of a pandemic certainly was not ideal. However, the inspectors saw us 'as they found us' and we were delighted that they recognised the quality of what goes on at the RGS, awarding the highest possible rating – excellent – on all aspects inspected.

One should never underestimate the amount of hard work that has to go on, behind the scenes from unsung heroes, making sure that policies are up to date and carried out in practice. The compliance part of the inspection demonstrated that we are fully compliant, meeting all the required standards. Meanwhile, on the educational quality side of the inspection, the key findings were that the quality of pupils' academic and other achievements is excellent: pupils attain highly and make

excellent progress across the school; pupils' extracurricular achievements are a particular strength; pupils are highly self-motivated with strong leadership qualities; and that pupils are excellent insightful and thoughtful communicators. At the same time the inspectors also found that the quality of pupils' personal development is excellent: pupils are mature, resilient, self-confident and perceptive young people; pupils thoroughly enjoy school and learning in a highly supportive environment; pupils have a strong sense of community and responsibility towards others; and that pupils have a highly developed and sophisticated understanding of diversity.

I am delighted that we have been found fully compliant and, on the two measures of educational quality, both our pupils' achievement and their personal development, the school has been rated

as excellent. This inspection report is a tremendous recognition of the efforts of all our staff on behalf of our young people. It is also reassuring that inspectors acknowledge that we are already working on the areas they have identified for further development.

There are many wonderful paragraphs in the report that I could quote but I would like to pick out the one that I am most proud of that I think particularly captures the ethos of the school: "pupils have an inherent natural respect for diversity, demonstrating sophisticated understanding, with many commenting on how inclusive the school is. Pupils speak thoughtfully about respecting others, valuing diversity and differences in sexual identity. Pupils feel valued for themselves and know that they can express themselves without meeting a lack of acceptance. New entrants to the school are buoyed by realizing that, if you make a mistake, you will still be supported."

In short, this report is a tribute to the whole RGS community: the hard work of our teaching and support staff, the continuing support of parents and, most importantly, the energy and enthusiasm of our pupils. What better Christmas present to receive than such glowing validation of what the RGS stands for? Our New Year's resolution is to make the school even better!

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)

# nesma

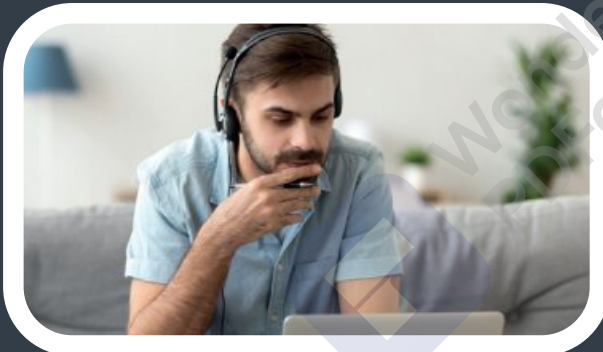
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# HIDDEN FIGURES

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School.

11 February 2022 is International Day of Girls and Women in Science, a United Nations-designated day to celebrate the role of women and girls in STEM-Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

As a Head of the only girls' school in Durham, an institution that prides itself on its excellence in promoting STEM and STEAM- which includes the arts as well as the sciences- I feel conflicted about the day in itself. I am a massive supporter and advocate, whilst at the same time, I am sad that this it is still necessary to commemorate such a day because it indicative that the gender gap in science and technology still exists across the globe, and, to a lesser extent, even in the UK.

I have written before about the androcentric view of history that I received at school back in the 1980s and it was the same with science; the celebration of female scientists in school only stretched to a project on Marie Curie in primary school. Nowadays, thankfully, students learn about the women of Bletchley Park, whose decoding efforts helped break the Enigma Code, and females such as the brilliant Katherine Johnson, an American woman of colour who worked for NASA on the moon landings, and who become immortalised in the wonderful film *Hidden Figures*. Katherine Johnson's career at NASA saw her help launch the Apollo Lunar Module, the Space Shuttle and the Landsat satellite. She suffered not just blatant misogyny in her time, but also endemic racism, as is painfully depicted in the film.

Another favourite of mine is a woman whose contribution to science and technology was overshadowed for decades, or even denied, because of her fame as a Hollywood star of the Golden Age. Hedwig Kiesler, known as Hedy Lamarr, was born in Vienna in 1914 to a Jewish family who emigrated to the US before World War Two. By the start of the war, she was an established Hollywood actress, whose vast intellect and scientific genius were overlooked because she was pigeon-holed by her often-risqué roles. In 1940, she met the composer George Antheil, who became her scientific collaborator on a number of projects that sought to aid the Allied war efforts, including patenting a 'Secret Communication System' that was designed to stop the Nazis intercepting Allied radio transmissions. It was an ingenious idea that used a system of 'frequency hopping,' but it lacked military support at the time and she was given neither money nor recognition for this invention. However, in later years, she and Antheil were recognised for their brilliance and they were

awarded the Pioneer Award by the Electronic Frontier Company in 1997. Furthermore, in 2014, she was posthumously inducted into the National Inventors Wall of Fame because, by then, it was acknowledged that their system was actually a precursor to the wireless technology we all take for granted today, leading her to be dubbed the 'mother' of Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and GPS.

Pioneering women such as Katherine Johnson and Hedy Lamarr had a very difficult path to renown and recognition. Thank goodness, many inroads have been made for women, but there is still a long way to go before true gender-equality in the sciences and computing will be achieved. Still, it is a consolation that we have made massive progress since my own Physics teacher told me in 1984 that Physics was not for girls. I wish he could see the wonderful young women- and now not-so young women- whom I have come across in my career who have now trained as aeronautical engineers, computer analysts and nuclear physicists, amongst many other STEM professions!

**Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School. Call 0191 384 3226 or email [enquiries@dhsf.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsf.org.uk) to find out more or arrange a visit.**

“

**...many inroads  
have been made  
for women, but  
there is still a  
long way  
to go...**



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Saturday  
12 March**

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## HOW NEWCASTLE HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS PAVED THE WAY FOR JASMINE'S SUCCESS

Jasmine Summers, has been appointed to Newcastle High School for Girls' School Governing Board, and is a 26 year old who recently left a successful career in investment banking to explore her true passion - entrepreneurship. Originally from Northumberland, Jasmine says it was her education that made her who she is today.



Jasmine Summers

When Jasmine was eleven years' old her mum made a decision that would dramatically change her life – she successfully applied for a bursary for Jasmine to attend Newcastle High School for Girls (NHSG).

Jasmine joined NHSG in 2007 and has never looked back. 'It was a wholly encouraging environment. Being at an all-girls school meant that there wasn't as much distraction, and success and intelligence were celebrated. I was constantly reminded that I could be whoever – and whatever – I wanted to be. Ambition was encouraged, respected and supported.'

Jasmine excelled in maths and, following a Sixth Form Insight Day with a Japanese Investment Bank in London aged 16 (thanks to the Girls' Day School Trust network that NHSG is part of), she decided to apply to study economics at university with the aim of pursuing a career in investment banking. After graduating from Edinburgh University in 2019 having been supported by a scholarship throughout, Jasmine successfully

secured a position at a prestigious global investment bank based in Mayfair where she worked on numerous high profile transactions worth billions of pounds.

Jasmine said: 'Investment banking is hard work, and the learning curve is steep, but it's also incredibly rewarding. I found it thrilling reading about high profile transactions that I was working on in the press, and the exposure to such senior people (for example CEOs of FTSE 100 companies and Senior Government Advisors ) was fascinating. The world of mergers and acquisitions can be tough, but it's an exciting place to begin your career.'

With a couple of years investment banking experience and a healthy savings account, Jasmine has decided to take time out to travel – which will see her horse-riding in Mozambique and trekking across South and Central America - before making her next career move.

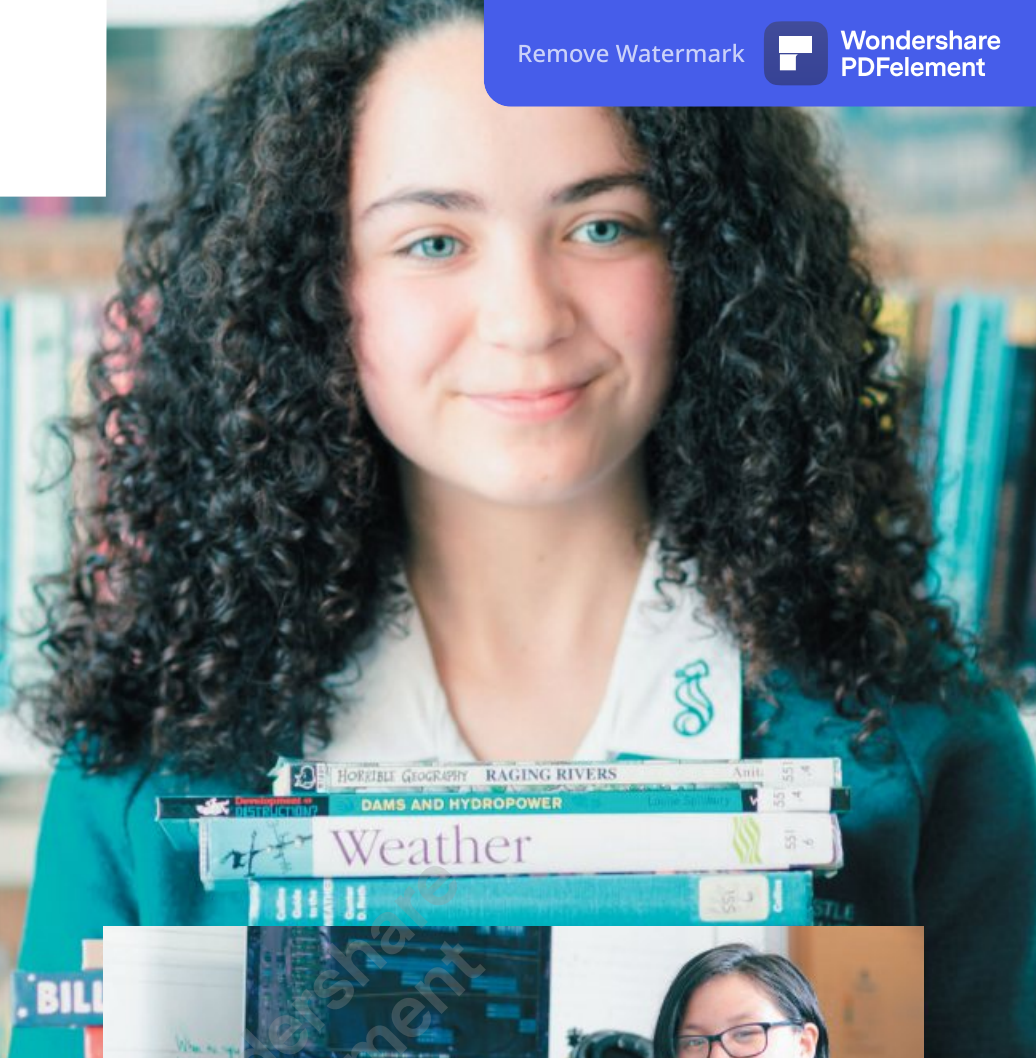
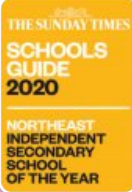
She added: "With two years investment banking experience under my belt and the skills I have gained, I am going to enjoy a few months of travel knowing I can hit the

ground running when I come back to the UK. I'm keen to explore entrepreneurial opportunities when I return, perhaps working in venture capital or at a start-up."

At 26, Jasmine is the youngest on NHSG's School Governing Board, something she decided to apply for in order to give back. "I'm especially keen to support the school in regards to its bursaries and scholarships programme. There are so many opportunities out there for people like me, who might not have had the means necessary to apply to a school like Newcastle High in the traditional way. Nobody's future should be limited by their childhood circumstances, and I am so incredibly grateful to my mum for the life-changing decision she made early on in my school career.

"I'd say to any young woman that, if you've a burning desire for success, you should absolutely look into bursaries or scholarships. Don't simply settle for what's in front of you – there are ways and means! And always remember that it's cool to be clever."

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# CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headteacher, Durham School.

The last two years have been a time of great change for Durham School. As well as dealing with the challenge of the pandemic, we have also successfully navigated a school merger; the newly formed Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation is a result of the coming together between Durham School and The Chorister School, the prep and choir school of Durham Cathedral.

Whilst mergers inevitably lead to some unsettlement for pupils, parents and staff, they provide an opportunity to look at not only the new institution but also the existing schools afresh. If you are, like me, embedded in the day to day life of a school, or indeed other institutions, you aren't always aware of how that school is perceived from the outside. In particular, if you know an institution really well, you may forget that others' perceptions may be different. This is something we became conscious of when thinking about the history of both schools, but particularly Durham School over recent years.

It was clear that, whilst those who are currently connected with the school understand it for what it is, there were still some members of the local community who thought of the school as it had been many years ago. Specifically, a surprisingly large number - well, surprising to us at least - still regarded us as a boys' school. Whilst for much of its history Durham School was indeed an all boys' school, the school has been co-educational for almost forty years, first started taking girls in the sixth form in 1985 and then at all ages in the late 90s. There are now over 250 girls who are part of the Foundation.

For those of us who work at the school now, it is hard to think of the school as having ever been any other way. But, for those who have not had some contact with the school for a time - and in the context of a school with



Kieran McLaughlin

600 years of history - this is a relatively new development. It was clear therefore that we had to address this particular misconception about Durham School and potentially the new Foundation. It was very clear to us that we had to emphasise that Durham School was for girls as well as for boys.

Articulating the issue in those terms actually provided the germ of an idea of how to tackle it. Luckily enough, we have a recent alumna of the school in our marketing department, and so she was very well placed to think through the most effective ways to emphasise our co-educational status. In addition, given that the message we needed to convey was that "Durham School is #ForGirls", it was really important to us that that message was conveyed by the girls themselves. Clearly, they needed to be front and centre of any marketing that was done. Happily, we were inundated with girls, and indeed female members of staff, who were only too willing to talk about how Durham

School was for them. You can watch the video at [www.dcsf.org.uk/dcsf/for-girls](http://www.dcsf.org.uk/dcsf/for-girls).

Did it work? Well, only time will tell; changing misconceptions is a slow process. But, we are hugely proud of the work that has been done not only because it has led to a good deal of contact from girls interested in joining us but also because it has resonated so much with our current pupils, parents and alumni. It's given us an opportunity not just to emphasise what the school does for current pupils; it has been great to hear from former female pupils how much the school set them up for the next stage of their lives.

So, if you are a girl who is thinking about the next stage of your education, you would be very welcome to visit us, safe in the knowledge that Durham School is For Girls.

**For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email [admissions@durhamschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@durhamschool.co.uk) or visit [www.durhamschool.co.uk](http://www.durhamschool.co.uk)**



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 or visit [www.dcsf.org.uk](http://www.dcsf.org.uk)

Open Morning  
 Saturday,  
 March 5, 2022



# PUPILS HOP, SKIP AND JUMP THEIR WAY TO WELLBEING

A project to improve the outdoor play areas at a primary school in Northumberland has had an unprecedented impact on the mental health and wellbeing of its pupils.

As schools across the country continue to struggle to find a balance between getting back to 'normal' and keeping Covid-19 infection rates down, staff at Bishop's Primary School in Ashington have been astonished to see pupils of all ages supporting their own relationship recovery through the power of play.

"Play has become a particularly important aspect of children's learning, especially since lockdown," said Clare Marriott, Headteacher at Bishop's Primary School – part of NCEA Trust.

"Our outdoor spaces were looking a little tired and in need of improvement so we decided that, instead of just repainting our original sports court markings, we would include some fun, interactive playground markings such as number caterpillars, hopscotches, mazes and trails and alphabet jumps to encourage children to play together and learn at the same time.

"While we anticipated that the pupils' response to the changes would be a positive one, we've been absolutely overwhelmed at what we've seen in just the few short weeks since the work was carried out.



Pupils at Bishop's Primary School enjoying their new interactive playground markings.

We've got children from different year groups playing together, we've got children supporting each other with the different games, we've even seen children encouraging their parents to have a go on the hopscotch at home time!"

The interactive playground markings were supplied and installed by Hampshire-based, Fun & Active Playgrounds. Jess Sparks, Marketing Manager, commented: "It was a pleasure to work with Bishop's Primary School and to be able to provide their pupils with extra opportunities for fun outdoor play and learning. We know how important it is for children to get their daily exercise, not just for their physical fitness but for their mental health too, and particularly during present times, so it's been great to be a part of this project to make their playtimes more active and engaging."

**To find out more about Bishop's Primary School, visit [www.bishops.ncea.org.uk](http://www.bishops.ncea.org.uk) or for more information about Fun & Active Playgrounds, visit [www.fun-play.co.uk](http://www.fun-play.co.uk)**

# DURHAM CATHEDRAL CELEBRATES MUSIC WITH DEPUTY HEAD CHORISTER'S WINNING COMPOSITION

Nicholas Howard, Deputy Head Chorister at Durham Cathedral has won the Junior Section of the national Choir Schools' Association David Willcocks Composition Competition.

Nicholas, aged 12 and in Year 8 at Durham School, part of the Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation, found out recently that he is the junior winner for his composition, 'Sing to the Lord a new song'.

The competition is in its 40th year and it has proved popular over the years with many choristers keen to try their hand at putting together



their own composition. Nicholas, from Cumbria, loves composing and wants to follow his passion and study it in the future, so the competition was the perfect opportunity for him to showcase his talent. Nicholas says, 'I worked on the piece all summer holiday and I was very excited to hear that I had won.'

As the seventh boy in his family to go to choir school, his musical passion started at a young age. He particularly likes Baroque music but his current favourite composer is Shostakovich. He is working towards grade 7 oboe and piano and aspires to play the baroque cornetto. Nicholas has dedicated his winning piece to the Durham Cathedral choir and the Master of the Choristers, Daniel Cook.

Mr Kieran McLaughlin, Principal of Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation said, "Nicholas winning the Willcocks Composition Competition is a brilliant achievement. Our Cathedral Choristers are among some of our most dedicated, hard-working and passionate pupils so it is great to see that Nicholas has been recognised for his composition talents".

With music being such an integral part of Durham Cathedral's history for nearly 1000 years, the 2021 Christmas appeal at the cathedral aimed to support more young people from the region to realise their potential by becoming part of the choir and experiencing a life-changing education within Durham Cathedral Schools Foundation.

Matthew Mills, Relationship and Development Manager at the cathedral says, "There are many young people around the region who have a passion for music, just like Nicholas, but unfortunately financial barriers often prevent them from fulfilling their musical ambitions."

The fundraising campaign has got off to a great start and one of the cathedral's generous supporters, a longstanding friend of the choral foundation, has offered to match the first £1500 raised through this appeal, £1 for £1.

Matthew continues, "With this campaign, we would like to take school fees away altogether for those pupils most in need of support. Proceeds from our appeal will provide means-tested bursaries, as well as funding the choir's outreach work, sharing the joy of music with communities across the region."

**To listen to Nicolas's winning composition, 'Sing to the Lord a new song', visit [www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkhwZEjnbQ&t=6s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkhwZEjnbQ&t=6s)**



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## NCFE'S NEW DIRECTOR OF APPRENTICESHIPS HITS THE GROUND RUNNING

It's fair to say NCFE's new Director of Apprenticeships, Suzanne Slater, has hit the ground running since she joined NCFE, educational charity and leader in vocational and technical learning, in October.



Suzanne Slater

Suzanne has only been in the job a matter of weeks and has already hosted a prize at the National Apprenticeship awards, had words with BBC's Dan Walker and taken on the task of managing NCFE's apprenticeship offer from start to finish - including end point assessments, functional skills and skills assessments.

She is keen to launch her ambitious plans around apprenticeships next year, but first, back to that tiff with Strictly's Dan Walker. Suzanne reveals: "I was thrilled to attend the National Apprenticeship awards not long after I started, and Dan Walker was hosting. He was doing a great job but whenever he referred to NCFE, he'd mistakenly call us NCFE. When I got up to present the award, I knew I had to set the record straight. He apologised profusely and admitted he was a big Notts County fan (NCFE), hence the confusion."

Suzanne is no stranger to making her presence felt and has won plaudits for her approach throughout the industry. Her appointment as NCFE's Director of Apprenticeships is a perfect fit for the former Gateshead College Assistant Principal. Coming from the Further Education sector, Suzanne worked hard to oversee many high-profile apprenticeship partnerships with industry heavyweights including Greggs, Virgin Money and UK Power Networks, a London and South East based electricity network operator who she supported to develop an apprenticeship

leadership academy.

"I've always taken the view that it's important to make sure the right apprenticeships are available for the learners and for businesses. I have worked in the commercial sector from a recruitment perspective then managed apprenticeship delivery within private training provider and FE environments, working very closely with employers be-spoking apprenticeship curriculum to meet theirs and industry needs. My new role for NCFE feels like a natural next step and is giving me a fantastic insight into the awarding side of the industry."

Suzanne's career started in the business world working for BT, then Reed, and then as Regional Manager for Northern Skills Group - an expert provider of apprenticeships, part of Middlesbrough College. Continuing in the Further Education sector, she went on to become Assistant Principal for Gateshead College, before taking up the Director position at NCFE.

With a career that has been dedicated to helping people find work through apprenticeships schemes, it's no surprise that Suzanne, like NCFE's CEO David Gallagher, believes more vocational options should be made available at school and promoted in careers guidance, so that young people can make informed and empowered choices about their future.

"I've seen first-hand the transformation a

good quality apprenticeship can have on an individual. I've worked with people who didn't have a great learning experience at school, didn't enjoy being in the classroom who then suddenly came into their own in the workplace where they could contextualise their learning and put it into practice on a daily basis."

Never one to sit on the sidelines even in her personal life, Suzanne recently took up sailing after growing tired of watching her children and husband take to the waters. She said: "My other half can sail and so can the kids and I was sick of standing on the side rigging and launching boats without any of the fun. I have a dream of sailing around the Greek Islands once the kids are grown up. I've already achieved my RYA certificates, although after the recent cold and windy weather, I have decided that I'm definitely a 'fair weather' sailor!"

Sara Brown, Executive Director of Operations at NCFE, talking about Suzanne's recent appointment, said: "We are beyond delighted to have Suzanne on board. She shares our passion for vocational and technical education as a means to help everyone reach their true potential. Her vast experience speaks for itself and we're looking forward to seeing her make the job her own as she is set to play a pivotal role in shaping smarter learning solutions for the future."

[ncfe.org.uk](http://ncfe.org.uk)



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#CallingAllGirls



## BMW PLAYS THE GENERATION GAME

The car you're looking at here is arguably one of the most important cars ever produced by BMW. Bearing in mind that you won't be allowed to buy a petrol or diesel powered car after 2030 (hybrids will be axed in 2035) this BMW iX marks the start of a new generation of cars from the German manufacturer.

Of course, they've already dipped a toe in the water with the quirky i3, but other Beemers with electric power have always been conversions of a standard model.

Not so with the iX. This is a ground-up design.

We went on the iX launch and, first impressions, it's brilliant. We'll let you decide whether the styling works....or not.

Prices start at £69,905. You can choose from two trims...Sport and M Sport...and you can choose from two power plants called iX xDrive40 and iX xDrive50. We drove the latter because it's the fastest and the most expensive...naturally.

The iX xDrive50 produces 523bhp (the 40 is 322bhp) which gives you a 0-60 mph time of 4.6 seconds. Bearing in mind that the BMW iX is roughly the same size as its X5 stablemate, this is hugely impressive. All-wheel drive (there's a motor on each axle) keeps things in check

but you still get a bit of torque steer through the hexagonal steering wheel. Top speed is 124mph. The way the BMW iX rockets off the line is stunning. Don't forget, with a conventional engine you need to wait for revs to rise before reaching peak power. You need to go through the gears too. With electric cars you have 100 per cent power instantly...and just one gear...well...two if you count reverse.

BMW reckon you'll get up to 380 miles from a single charge. Okay, cold weather and heavy use of the right foot will make that drop, but you should still get close to 300 miles before you need to top-up. You'll reach an 80 per cent charge in 30 minutes if you use a rapid charger.

The ride is extremely smooth thanks to the adaptive air suspension system which is an option on the iX 40. Rear wheel steering also makes this hefty car feel agile because you really can hustle along country lanes. Having a battery slung under the floor also means there's a low centre of gravity.

Inside, the BMW iX is a techno work of art and the build quality is wonderful. This is a luxurious SUV. The 14.9-inch infotainment screen not only looks good, it works really well. There's 5G and Cloud connectivity. BMW has also stuck with its excellent rotary controller knob which is situated between the front seats. This allows you to type in sat nav directions for example without the need to dab at the screen. The instrument cluster is a 12-inch screen which allows you to personalise the info.

The seats are extremely comfortable and the boot will cope with family holiday clobber. There's also loads of legroom thanks to the flat floor (no exhaust or transmission tunnel).

Get ready for a wave of new electric SUVs over the next few years but, put it this way, they'll be going some to be better than the BMW iX.

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



# BENTLEY'S SUPER SUV



As SUVs go, the Bentley Bentayga is one of the biggest, fastest and most expensive.

It's arguably the most important car that Bentley currently build because it counts for almost half of all Bentley sales...and a large chunk of those sales are to buyers who're new to the Bentley brand.

And, because it's an SUV...which will probably be bought by owners of previous SUVs...it probably means that a decent proportion of those new buyers also come from a totally different demographic than would normally purchase a Bentley.

As a company, Bentley is flying. Sales in 2021 set a new record, showing an increase of 30 per cent when compared to 2020 which was also a record year.

When you first see a Bentley Bentayga, it looks intimidating. It's huge. First impressions would therefore suggest that it's going to be tricky to drive and feel cumbersome.

Nope. Wrong and wrong. Hop into the driving seat and there is a reverse Tardis effect. It actually feels smaller than you'd expect. This is largely due to the lack of swooping bonnet and tailgate. It makes the

Bentayga remarkably simple to place on the road and easy to drive in traffic.

Under the bonnet you can choose from a 543bhp 4.0 litre V8 petrol engine or a 443bhp 3.0 litre six-cylinder petrol hybrid. If you are lucky enough to use a Bentayga as a company car, then the hybrid makes sense. It will travel for around 25 miles on battery power only which means, assuming you have access to a charger at home and perhaps at work, you can slash your fuel bills.

We'd still go for the V8 though. It sounds fantastic and the 0-60 performance of 4.5 seconds is stunning bearing in mind this car tips the scales at close to 2.5 tonnes. Oh and if you were looking for the diesel Bentayga... forget it. The recent model update saw it dumped. There is also a 12-cylinder 6.0 litre version but we don't get it in the UK. Boo.

This is peerless motoring at its best. The Bentayga is also a serious 4x4 and will happily scramble across boggy fields and rutted lanes (mind the brambles...a paint touch up will cost a fortune).

We shan't list the standard equipment.... let's just say there's everything you're likely to ever need. The standard air suspension guarantees a smooth and unflustered ride. Handling is rock steady with everything sharpened by a clever anti-roll system.

The interior is a work of art. The model we tried was the special 4-seat luxury version which means those in the rear have similar seats to those in the front. However, you can go up to seven seats as an option. The school run will move onto another level! Seven seats aren't available in the hybrid model due to space needed for the battery.

If you intend driving to the Côte d'Azur, it's hard to think of a better way in which to travel. A true continental express that is equally happy trundling along towing a horse box or reversing a boat into a lake, or taking friends for a night in town.

Prices start at £155,000.

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



## BOYZLIFE TO PLAY BLYTH LIVE FESTIVAL

After a two year break due to COVID, Blyth beach will once again be transformed this summer into the County's largest, free family festival as "Blyth Live Festival" brings one of the hottest names in pop music to the town.

Funded by Blyth Town Council, The Blyth Live Festival on June 18th is headlined by long time pals Keith Duffy and Brian

McFadden who were previously members of '90s and '00s boybands Boyzone and Westlife. They have now combined their talents and hit records and united as Boyzlife.

With Boyzone, Keith Duffy enjoyed six UK number one singles and 16 single releases making the top five. Brian McFadden has enjoyed similar success, including 12 UK and Ireland number ones as a member of Westlife, and a record breaking seven top spots in a row.

The duo's top hits include Flying Without Wings, No Matter What and Love Me for a Reason.

The band have recently completed a sell-out UK tour and their upcoming Blyth Live Festival appearance is sure to attract a huge audience.

Cllr Adrian Cartie, Chair of Blyth Town Council's Community Development Committee said; "This is a major concert for the town as Keith and Brian have had a lot of chart success between them. Everyone will be able to sing their hearts out at Blyth beach.



## WHO DARES WINS STAR TO APPEAR AT TYNE THEATRE AND OPERA HOUSE

TV's most experienced, highest ranking and most decorated SAS leader and sniper comes to Tyne Theatre and Opera House with his show An Audience with Mark 'Billy' Billingham on Monday 28th February 2022.

Billy is a former SAS Sergeant Major Class 1 and Bodyguard to the Stars including Brad Pitt, Angelina Jolie, Russell Crowe, Sir Michael Caine, Tom Cruise and many others. Billy is also known for his role on SAS: Who Dares Wins, which sees ex-special forces soldiers put recruits through a recreation of the SAS selection process. The chief instructor of the show is Ant Middleton, who sold out his Tyne Theatre & PRESS RELEASE Opera House 'Audience with' show in 2018. This 'in conversation' event will be an evening of fascinating stories from Billy's time in the SAS and as a bodyguard, hosted and produced by endurance (running) world record breaker Mark Llewellyn.



## ANIMALS AND FRIENDS FAREWELL TOUR COMES TO PLAYHOUSE, WHITLEY BAY

The Animals were one of the most iconic Pop, Rhythm and Blues bands of the 1960's. They had over 20 Global Top Ten Hits, and remain a seminal rhythm and blues band who still command great respect.

Featuring two original Members, founding member John Steel on Drums and Mickey Gallagher, who replaced Alan Price in 1965 on keyboards they are now on their farewell tour and appear at the Playhouse, Whitley Bay on Sunday 13th March.

They gave us such huge hits such as "We Gotta Get Out Of This Place", "Don't Bring Me Down", "Baby, Let Me Take You Home", "Don't Let Me Be Misunderstood" and their multi million selling anthem....."House of the Rising Sun."

A night of nostalgia and great memories ahead. Not To Be Missed!!

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WITH SPECIAL GUEST **MAGGIE BELL**

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**HOUSE OF THE RISING SUN**

**SUNDAY 13 MARCH, 7.30PM**  
**WHITLEY BAY, Playhouse**

Box Office: [playhousewhitleybay.co.uk](http://playhousewhitleybay.co.uk)

# CULTURE CLUB

## MEL JACKSON

Mel Jackson is a professional stage manager and event organiser and has worked with some of the biggest names in the music industry. Mel has a passion for her local area and is now organising events for Blyth Town Council. Here she tells us about her taste in music, art, and culture.

### Who is your favourite author and why?

J.R.R Tolkien. I can't begin to think how many times I have read and re-read his books. The imagination, the painting of pictures through words is in equal measure, magical, scary, alarming, leaves you questioning and finding more with each reread.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

*Stand by Me* - Ben E King, *Why Worry?* - Dire Straits and *Dance Away* - Bryan Ferry.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

I don't watch many films at all, I am too restless and get bored easily, if I am watching a film at home, I tend to play Scrabble on my phone at the same time, so I don't nod-off, I've been known to have a quick 40 winks at the cinema.

### What are your top three films?

*Four Weddings and a Funeral* the only film that makes me laugh out loud.

*Downton Abbey* as I would've loved to live in those times, perhaps not as a Crawley, or any of the servants but somewhere in between.

*First Contact*, the Borg are so scary!

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

*Warning* by Jenny Joseph, I didn't wait to wear purple as Jenny warns the reader, I have always loved the colour, however the prophecy of aging disgracefully appealed from first reading, and I'm on my way.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

*Gavin and Stacey*. A quick escape that always raises a smile.

*Downton Abbey*, it's a fabulous peep into the complicated, privileged life of the aristocratical Crawley family and their servants.



Mel Jackson

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

I have been fortunate enough in my work to work with so many artists, bands, etc it is difficult to pick one, but if I have to it would be Bryan Ferry because his music captivated me many years ago. He is gorgeous and has a wicked sense of humour, plus and most importantly he is a gentleman. I remember the first time I worked with him, and I so hoped he would be nice as it's so sad when artists are rude and don't value the venue team. He walked in and thanked all the team for their hard work. His valuing of everyone from the load-in crew upwards is something I will always remember him for.

### What is your favourite venue?

It can't be anywhere other than Blyth Beach the venue of Northumberland Live, which I created eight years ago now known as Blyth Live. I am very proud of what myself and the team have achieved in bringing a festival to Blyth that is now on the map and attracts 1000's.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Drums, perhaps it's the tribal call, but they can also be played so calmly. However, I

don't like anyone playing them with brushes, they should be banned as drums are for banging.

### From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

It must be Billy Connolly, some do not recognise comedy as art, but the gift of standing there and having a full auditorium crying with laughter is an incredible talent. Observational comedy is everyday life but twisted a little, so we see it in a slightly different way. The genius of the telling of any story, so others live it through the re-telling is to be applauded and celebrated. I would without doubt be excited for his arrival, along with Pam his wife who is also a critically acclaimed comic and Doctor of Psychology.

Bryan Ferry would also be invited along with Paul Carrack and Alan Clark, Alan is the keyboard player in Dire Straits, who once came round to our house and asked, "what is that delicious smell?" He ended up staying and entertained us with many stories of how he became the man he is today.

**For more information about Blyth Live which will be held on June 18 or any other Blyth Town Council event check out [www.blythtowncouncil.org.uk](http://www.blythtowncouncil.org.uk)**



# TYNE THEATRE & OPERA HOUSE

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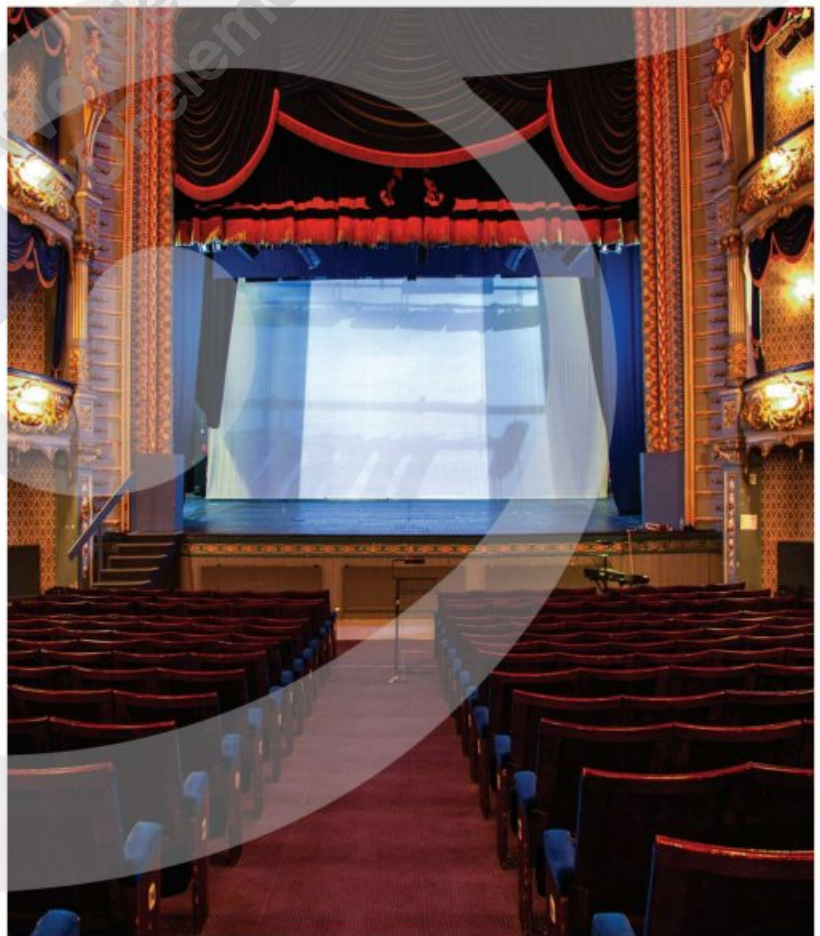
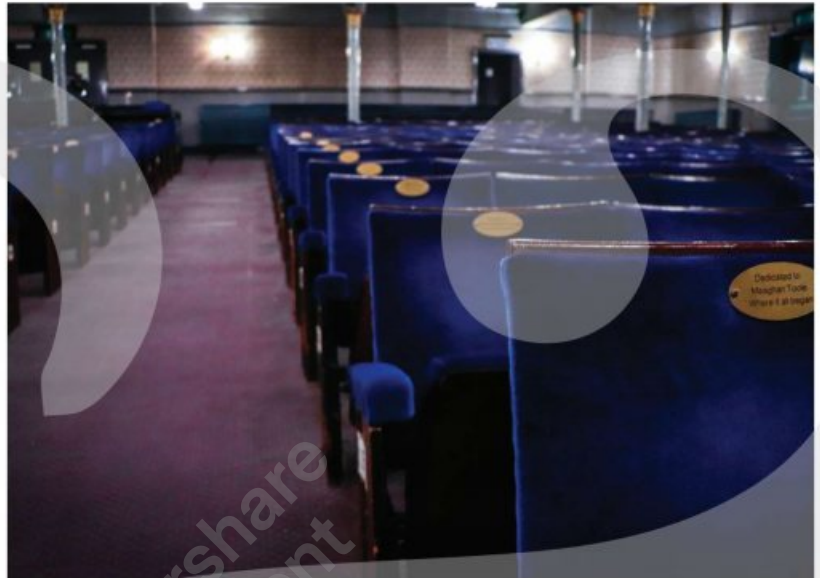
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# WHOOPS- A-DAISY!

We Started Another Business.



**Early in the pandemic, business owners and life partners Mychael and Lisa, and five-year-old daughter Izzy Willow, moved to the country.**

Life was busy. Mychael works as a writer. He runs a Brand Consultancy. And his and Lisa's Fashion Brand, Always Wear Red, is worn by customers around the world.

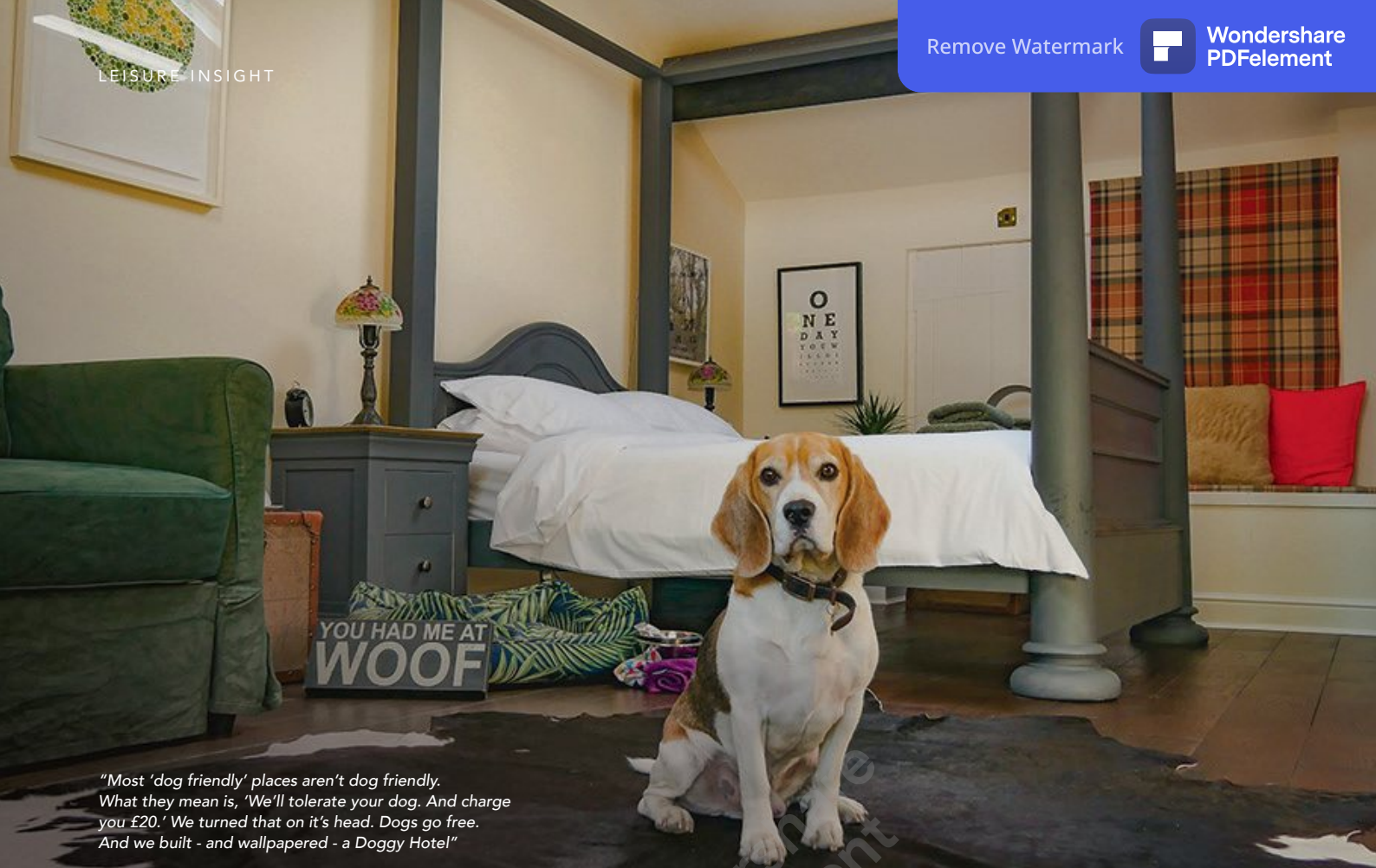
Lisa also runs a busy digital marketing brand, Angelfysh, that's entering its seventeenth year.



But what Mychael and Lisa discovered as they settled into Old Post Office in Northumberland's sleepy Bardon Mill Village changed everything.

In under a year, they were running yet another new business. Something neither of them had ever done before.

And its rapid growth and success, and how much they really enjoy doing it, has taken Mychael, Lisa – and Izobel – by surprise.



"Most 'dog friendly' places aren't dog friendly. What they mean is, 'We'll tolerate your dog. And charge you £20.' We turned that on it's head. Dogs go free. And we built - and wallpapered - a Doggy Hotel"

**As soon as Mychael and Lisa moved into Old Post Office, the potential to create two completely self-contained, self-catering holiday studios alongside the main house was clear.**

Mychael, a qualified furniture and interior designer and Lisa, an organised and a creative marketer, built the vision together. Two months later, refurbishment began.

### The Vision

"In a word, the vision is 'WOW!' explains Mychael. "You know when you see it. You feel it, too."

At the end of 2021, Old Post Office received 23 consecutive maximum 5-Star reviews from Airbnb. And Mychael and Lisa have been awarded a maximum three consecutive Airbnb Superhost Awards.



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**OUTDOOR PIZZA OVEN**  
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### Sustainability.

Both studios have strong sustainability credentials. Lisa explains the thinking.

"All consumables are planet-friendly. And whilst we cut and oiled a £500 solid oak kitchen surface, we're just as proud of a towel rail made from a £10 paint-splattered decorator's ladder from eBay. Both are beautiful. Both work."



### Downtime.

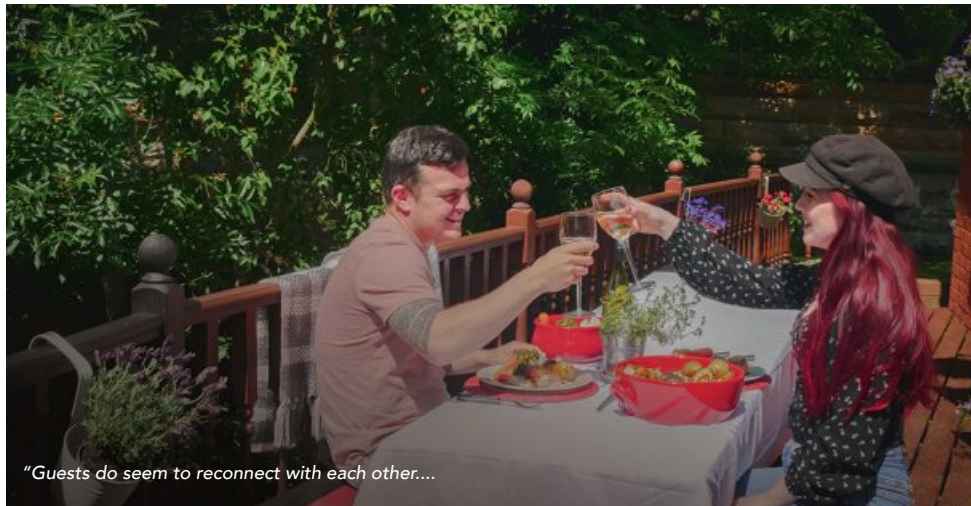
Mychael is fascinated by downtime, too.

"Downtime is not something to be shoehorned into life. Downtime is life. So when people spend their downtime at Old Post Office it is very flattering for us.

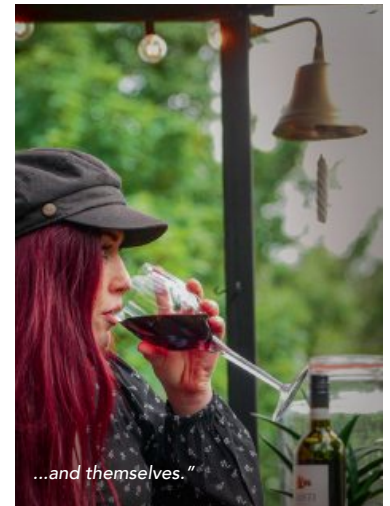
We rise to the challenge of raising expectations and making exceptional memories."

"One couple has booked three times in our first season. River View is their favourite. The Riverside Bar. It is pretty amazing actually"

River View Studio has a private Outside Bar and Riverside Dining for up to eight people.



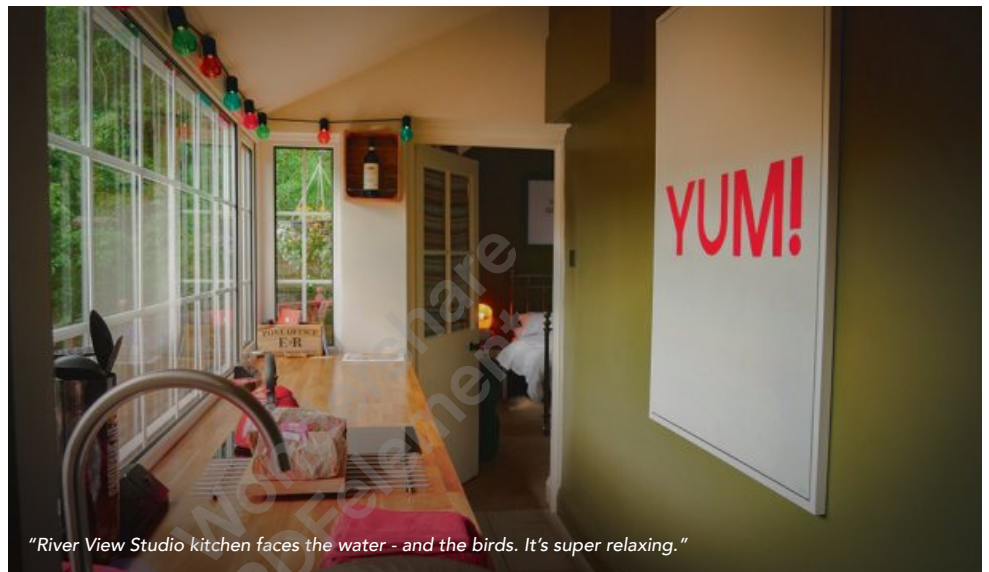
"Guests do seem to reconnect with each other...."



"...and themselves."



"Interior design should be surprising!"



"River View Studio kitchen faces the water - and the birds. It's super relaxing."

Old Post Office removes worry and risk from holidaying. People holiday less often right now, so it's important when they do invest in downtime – it's special.

And when guests do venture out from Old Post Office, they discover they are four miles from Northumberland's most photographed landmark – Sycamore Gap, and just two miles from Hadrian's Wall.

The most talked about features of Old Post office include the riverside bar and dining, making pizza outdoors, outdoor/ indoor living (bifold and sliding doors), four-poster bed, vinyl records and – of course – the doggy hotel.

Old Post Office is, as Mychael and Lisa are often heard saying, not a home from home. It's easy escapism. Surprisingly sumptuous. And very, very different.

Photography: @hannah\_goes\_exploring



Entire studios at Old Post Office, Bardon Mill are from £130 per night. Bookings are via Airbnb, Booking.com or direct via [www.oldpostoffice.co.uk](http://www.oldpostoffice.co.uk)

# OUT AND ABOUT - MUSSELBURGH



Musselburgh is a town of 21,000 on the east side of Edinburgh, beyond the city boundaries, and is the largest settlement in East Lothian.

To reach it from the North East, you have to travel into Edinburgh on the express train from Newcastle, and then take the local train towards North Berwick retracing your route to the first stop at Musselburgh, where the station is on the south side of town. As a result, fares to Musselburgh are slightly higher than for Edinburgh, even though it is a shorter distance. I started my overnight visit by walking through the housing estate to Newhailes, a National Trust for Scotland site where the café is open through the winter even those the main house is closed.

I had a walk through the grounds after a warming coffee and was surprised to find the house front door open, even though it was closed to the public. Before long I realised this was a dwelling place for Santa's grotto, it being a weekend in the month of December! It is normally noted as a Palladian house that played a prominent role in the Scottish Enlightenment, but it also has a superb childrens' play area called Weehailes which is a play village that would fire many an imagination, but is closed until April.

I made my first acquaintance with bus route 30 to ride into the town. There's a choice on Lothian Buses of a single for £1.80 or a Dayticket for £4.50. For three or more trips a day, the Dayticket is a good deal, especially I was planning an evening trip into Auld Reekie (Edinburgh) for the evening service at Old St. Paul's. I passed the Ravelston House Hotel where I was staying for the night, and should have got off to leave my overnight bag, but carried on to maximise the time I could spend at Prestongrange Museum. It supposedly closed at 1530, and I was worried I would not have time to look around, but fortuitously it is just the Visitor Centre and exhibition that closes then, and the site itself is open to wander around, which I did until nightfall.

For over 400 years Prestongrange was a focus of industry. A harbour, glass works, pottery, colliery and brickworks have all left their marks on the landscape including winding gear, a vast brick kiln and a Cornish beam engine. Cradled by woodland the site is now a haven for wildlife where you can explore these monumental relics of Scotland's industrial heritage.

I had left bus 26 at the signposted entrance which was a long walk to the Visitor Centre, but a quick exit by footpath to the main road had me delivered to a convenient bus stop and picked up in less than a minute. The Ravelston House was comfortable. Day two was on foot

around the town. First to Fisherrow, the harbour, and up the hill to Inveresk which is an NTS garden. I admired some of the architecture of Loretto, the independent school. Astonishingly (!) there was horseracing at the racecourse for the afternoon, a seven race card. But no winners that afternoon. After picking up my bag from the hotel there was still time to explore the Queen Margaret University campus adjacent to Musselburgh station and a brief period of relaxation in the first class lounge at Waverley station before my fast LNER express back to Newcastle.

alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk

www.nationalrail.com

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk)

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Dale Smith with a host.

## IT'S GREAT UP NORTH – WHY THE REGION EMBRACED THE STAYCATION

Since the pandemic, staycations have become big business, with travel restrictions meaning that more holidaymakers than ever chose to explore the British Isles.

And while many tourists still flock to the Southern beaches of Cornwall, Devon and Kent, plenty of visitors chose to put the North on the top of their list – a trend we must do all we can to encourage, according to Dale Smith, CEO of holiday rental group Host & Stay.

I may be biased, but I think the North is one of the most interesting destinations in the UK. We have it all: fascinating history, beautiful beaches and stunning scenery.

Even within those, there is so much variety; compare the wild, windswept beaches of Bamburgh to the chocolate box setting of Robin Hood's Bay, or the living history of an attraction such as Beamish to the evocative ruins of Hadrian's Wall.

And that's not to mention our cities; from the grandeur of Durham and the quaintness of York to the modern buzz of Newcastle, there really is something for everyone – and it looks like tourists agree.

Tourism is the fourth largest sector in the North and, as people have been opting more for domestic travel over the past 18 months, at Host & Stay, we've seen interest in our properties soar.

In fact, both North Yorkshire and the Yorkshire Dales were in the top ten most popular regions for Summer holidays in 2021, and

Northumberland was the ninth fastest growing area for holidaymakers.

It's great that increasing numbers of homegrown visitors are finally waking up to the beauty of the North, which is why we must capitalise on its popularity, as well as taking advantage of everything it can offer.

Because we know that tourism supports so much more than travel companies or holiday let owners: the whole region benefits from visitors.

When tourists stay in one of our managed holiday homes, they pour money back into the local economy through independent retailers, tourist attractions and the hospitality trade.

They visit our museums, buy our ice creams, eat in our cafes and spend in our shops – it all adds up. In fact, in a recent survey we found that on average, our guests spend £140 per guest per stay, which will equate to a £49m total spend in the local economy in 2022.

So, while the pandemic may have precipitated this influx of visitors to the region, we hope they liked what they saw so much, they come again soon.

The Northern holidaymaker has changed. Traditionally, the region has attracted visitors looking for something a little more rugged, a little more natural, such as walking in the Lake District.

However, in recent years, the region has demonstrated that it has so much more to offer, especially for those looking for something a little more cultured. Newcastle, for instance, is home to The Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and The Sage, with a wealth of fantastic shopping and a huge range of places to eat.

So, while camping is all well and good if you're into that sort of thing (and plenty of people are), many holidaymakers are looking for a little bit of luxury; perhaps using the money they're saving on air fares and hire cars to enjoy something a little special.

To do that, we need to focus on the types of accommodation available in the region, and also make it easier and more tempting for people to invest in a holiday let.

We set up Host & Stay in 2018 to provide holiday home owners with a more personalised approach, to help them achieve the best returns on their investments, whilst saving them as much time and hassle as we could. This was born from our own experience of not being able to find a holiday letting agent that truly offered that hands-free service.

We offer a full end-to-end service for property owners, from professional photography and staging, to marketing the listing globally, communicating with guests 24/7, and facilitating all housekeeping and maintenance – and the approach is paying off.

The growth we've seen since launching is phenomenal, which is great news for our property owners, but also the region as a whole.

I firmly believe that, as everybody becomes more aware of the environmental impact of travelling, along with the inconvenience, staycations are here to stay – and the North is firmly on the map.

[hostandstay.co.uk](https://hostandstay.co.uk)

# RISING STAR

## DANIELA SILVA

JAM Prints & Marketing Limited

Daniela Silva came to the UK in 2017, now working for marketing and prints company JAM, she reflects on her career progression throughout her time in the region.

Daniela grew up in the Alentejo region of Portugal, however, she took the chance to study in the UK and gained a place at Sunderland University.

### What happened when you finished your degree?

When I graduated the Covid-19 pandemic was at its worst, I had to go back to Portugal as I couldn't afford to stay in the UK without a job. During my final year at university, I had set up an Instagram account dedicated to reading, one of my biggest passions. The account became quite successful having over 6,000 followers at one point, and I became interested in jobs in social media.

I came back to the UK in 2021 to try and find a position and saw an advert for a photographer looking for a social media manager. I applied and was successful, through him I managed to gain other clients, another photographer, and a bridal shop. I loved social media management because it gave me the opportunity to use my creativity in creating posts and trying different ways to get audience engagement.

### Why did you decide to leave freelance and join JAM?

I was looking for something new because I wanted something more permanent and to be part of a team instead of working on my own. I saw the advert on LinkedIn and knew I wanted to go for it. Although I liked what I was doing I still felt very new to it and really

wanted the chance to learn from someone with more experience. I also love the fact that JAM is a full-service agency, so I can learn more about all areas of marketing, not just social media.

I went for the interview and had to complete a social media tasks, then I got the call that I'd got the job! I was really pleased because I knew I really wanted to work for JAM, their values and way of working really appealed to me. Jackie and Geeta were lovely and I knew I'd enjoy it there. I also love being known as a Jammy Dodger, the name given to all staff who join the team!

### What do you do now at JAM?

I cover social media management, so making sure posts are regularly going out for all of our clients, replying to any comments or messages on their social media and writing up of their strategies in line with their requirements. I look at the insights, what's doing well, and what we can change to get

more engagement. I also get to work in design which I love, it lets me get creative, I've been involved in designing hoodies, business cards, banners, invitations and menus for some of our clients already.

### How would you like to progress in the future?

I would love to expand my skills even further in the future, the industry is so unpredictable so there is always so much to learn. I'd also like to do more work in design, perhaps work on a few more projects that I can really get artistic with. I like to take courses whenever possible, to enhance my skillset, and am pleased that JAM are prepared to invest in their staff to do this.

**JAM Prints & Marketing Limited**  
0191 917 0819  
[www.jamprintsmarketing.co.uk](http://www.jamprintsmarketing.co.uk)  
[admin@jamprintsmarketing.co.uk](mailto:admin@jamprintsmarketing.co.uk)



Daniela Silva



## ALL STACKED UP IN SUNDERLAND

An exciting leisure complex which opened its doors in Sunderland just over a year ago is celebrating being fully let and creating more than 200 jobs.

Despite opening during the pandemic, STACK Seaburn has become a huge hit with its mix of street food offerings, lifestyle businesses and entertainment, with more than 700,000 people having visited.

And now all of its 12 units have been filled by independent businesses, following a carefully curated procedure to ensure that the right mix of traders took up residence.

Gemma Dishman, marketing and special projects manager for the Danieli Group which owns STACK, said the emphasis has always been on attracting the right kind of operators.

"It was very important to us from the outset that we attracted businesses for the external units that would not offer traditional retail products which are, increasingly being

purchased online," said Gemma.

"Our focus has been on recruiting lifestyle businesses such as the barbershop and brow bar, or Woofs N Scruffs who complement their traditional retail offer of dog supplies with dog grooming and self-serve dog baths."

Gemma added that food has always been at the heart of the STACK operation, with Sunderland now boasting everything from Greek gyros to brownies, to up market kebabs provided by former MasterChef The Professionals contestant, Matei Baran.

The container village has also given new businesses a start, notably 19-year-old Laura Benson who has opened the brow bar, Arch.

Danieli Group CEO, Neil Winch, said he was delighted with the success at Sunderland, particularly the boost that the development had given to the local economy.

"STACK is a hub where independent businesses can prosper and we do everything we can to drive footfall to the venue to ensure they all have the opportunity for success," he said.



## PAINT THE TOWN LOBSTER-RED

An award winning North East venue has announced the return of its popular, annual fundraiser – with an exclusive performance from four American stars.

On Friday 13 May Hardwick Hall Hotel, at Sedgfield, County Durham, will once again play host to the Lobster Charity Ball.

And organisers have revealed that singers Ce Ce Peniston, Robin S, Crystal Waters and Julie McKnight will take to the stage to entertain the crowd – the first time the four have performed together in the UK.

Guests will be greeted with a welcome drink and canapés on arrival and enjoy a four course gourmet lobster surf and turf menu created by the award-winning chefs at the Rib Room Steakhouse and Grill, with complimentary beer, lager and wine all night.

The event, which takes place from 7pm to 12:30am, raises money for Daisy Chain, which supports families affected by autism.

Much loved performer Steve Walls will return to his role as compere and guests can also enjoy a menswear fashion show from Woven Durham.

Hardwick Hall Hotel is part of the Ramside Estates portfolio and owner, John Adamson, believes the evening will be one to remember.

"The Lobster Charity Ball is one of the highlights of our calendar and we're delighted to announce its return this year," said John.

"We are hoping to follow the success of previous years by raising a huge sum for Daisy Chain, which will help them continue the excellent work they carry out to support families in need.

"We're thrilled to welcome four incredible singers to the stage and their feel-good music is a perfect way to get our guests in the party spirit."

Tickets cost £150 per person plus VAT and can be booked by calling the hotel on 01749 620 253 or by emailing [events@hardwickhallhotel.co.uk](mailto:events@hardwickhallhotel.co.uk)



## FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD - NYMR LAUNCHES 2022 PULLMAN DINING EXPERIENCES

Looking for ideas to start filling up that new 2022 diary? Bookings are now being taken for The North Yorkshire Moors Railway's hugely popular Pullman Dining Experiences, which operates throughout the year, from early April until the end of October.

The NYMR's Pullman service is an unforgettable dining experience through the stunning North York Moors National Park. Departing from Grosmont Station, sit back and relax onboard one of the historic and luxurious Pullman Dining Carriages whilst you enjoy a delicious meal with friends and family.

With years of catering experience, the NYMR team prides itself on offering the highest quality of service and seasonal menus featuring the best locally sourced food and drink. Temptations across the menus include: slow cooked honey and mustard pork belly; rhubarb and ginger crumble tart; Eton Mess cheesecake; black pudding, apple and Wensleydale stack; roast topside of beef; mushroom risotto; salmon and chilli fishcakes; and cassoulet.

Pullman experiences can be booked online at [nymr.co.uk/pullman](http://nymr.co.uk/pullman) or by calling 01751 472508. Priority will be given to previous bookings delayed due to COVID

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Hardwick Hall Hotel, Sedgefield, Co Durham TS21 2EH | [www.hardwicklobsterfestival.co.uk](http://www.hardwicklobsterfestival.co.uk)



## THE ORANGEGRASS OF HOME

Orangegrass has been a stalwart restaurant in South Shields for years, serving up tasty Thai food to generations of families who love authentic, spicy and tasty food.

During the pandemic, they were one of the takeaways that stayed open and delivered food around the region, controlling our cravings for anything that we simply hadn't or couldn't cook ourselves.

Thankfully, now they are allowed to function as a restaurant again, the regulars, and a lot of new customers too have returned and you can see why. If the pandemic taught us anything, it's let's give things a go in the kitchen, but let's also leave it to the experts in certain circumstances, and I personally think Thai food is one of those instances.

Their fragrant food deliveries kept me and hubby going, by ordering at least two per month, as we craved our favourite Thai delicacies. We decided to go on Saturday, it was an impromptu decision, so we only just got in, as this place is very popular and it is very advisable to book.

The restaurant is so typically Thai, beautiful bright colours, tastefully decorated, and staff incredibly welcoming.

We ordered some Thai prawn crackers as soon as we were seated, which came with a tasty tamarind dip. These never disappoint me, as they are not as greasy as Chinese ones, so always enjoy them more. Hubby had a Thai lager and we shared a bottle of Viognier white wine. It's rare to see this wine on the menu in most establishments, so we were both pleasantly surprised.

Rich fancied the soup – Tom Kha Gai, which has delicious, melt-in-the-mouth chicken, mushrooms, lemongrass, kaffir lime leaves and lime juice. The tangy, sour and then

smooth coconut milk make this a real winner and we swapped dishes as I liked it so much. I ordered Neua Ping Cheung Mai, which is grilled, marinated beef with coriander shoots and garlic. Meat was seasoned really well and was very tender.

For main course I had to have the sizzling king prawns in oyster sauce, served with asparagus. I love the drama of a sizzling dish, so this was already entertaining me when it was brought to the table. Asparagus was still crunchy and the prawns fell out of their shells, they were cooked that well. Hubby went for a chef's special – Special Gai Yang, which was crispy chicken breast with a tangy kaffir lime sauce, chilli, coriander, lime leaf, lemongrass and Thai mixed herbs. This was exceptionally tasty and we also shared a portion of coconut rice. We're very much a sharing couple, so it was nice to have, in effect, four different dishes, at one meal. The portion sizes at Orangegrass are perfect, not over-facing, but you still go away satisfied.

Out of all of the Thai restaurants we go to, and there are a lot, as it's our favourite cuisine, Orangegrass, to us, is the best value for money. It honestly never disappoints, which is why people travel a long way to visit on a weekly basis.

Next time you get a craving for Thai food, you may want to consider this little gem, as it really is a pure taste of Thailand.

**Orangegrass Thai & Oriental Cuisine,  
3 Mount Terrace, South Shields, 0191 455  
8555 – [www.orangegrasssthai.co.uk](http://www.orangegrasssthai.co.uk)**





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# NEW APPOINTMENTS BOOST THE NORTHUMBERLAND ARMS TEAM



Adam Westgarth, head chef with Clair Potts, general manager.

Two new appointments have strengthened the team at a popular North East hotel, with decades of experience under their belts.

The Northumberland Arms at Felton is known for its varied food offering and six boutique bedrooms which attract visitors from across the region and beyond.

And the versatile venue recently welcomed two new team members, with Adam Westgarth stepping into the role of head chef, while Clair Potts has joined the hotel as its new general manager.

With a background in fine dining, award-winning chef Adam has been in the hospitality industry for more than two decades and has worked at many of the region's top hotels including Wynyard Hall, Otterburn Castle and Matfen Hall, along with Northcote near Blackburn.

Having worked up to Michelin star and four rosette levels, Adam is keen to bring these fine dining skills and flavours to The

Northumberland Arms, while staying true to the pub environment.

And the chef has wasted no time in building relationships with game keepers and suppliers in the region, to support North East businesses and place emphasis on locally sourced, seasonal ingredients in his menus.

"I've worked in a corporate environment in a hotel group for the last five years and while I gained some fantastic experience, I missed being hands on with the food and couldn't wait to get back in the kitchen," said Adam.

"The Northumberland Arms has huge potential and seemed like a great fit and I'm currently playing around with ingredients for upcoming special occasions and working on building the team."

General manager Clair has brought more than 25 years of experience to her new position, having started her career in hospitality when she was just 16.

With an extensive knowledge in all areas of the industry – having worked her way up from kitchen staff to managerial roles – she is looking forward to a new challenge at The Northumberland Arms.

And having been with the Sir John Fitzgerald

Group for almost her whole career, it was the chance to gain experience in a property with accommodation which encouraged her to take a leap into a new role.

"It seemed like a good time in my career to make a change and when the role at The Northumberland Arms came up, I couldn't say no," said Clair.

"I've really enjoyed getting stuck into work at the venue and we have some really fantastic plans in the pipeline for the coming months."

Stuart Young of the Northumberland Pub Company, which operates The Northumberland Arms, is delighted to welcome the pair to the team.

"Adam and Clair have a huge wealth of knowledge in their respective areas and I am confident they will be invaluable additions to The Northumberland Arms," he said.

"We have a really exciting year ahead of us and I have no doubt that both Adam and Clair will pull out all of the stops to deliver an amazing experience for our guests."

**For more information, visit**  
**[www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk)**



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## MAKE IT A DATE AT THE MUDDLER By Holly Grahamslaw

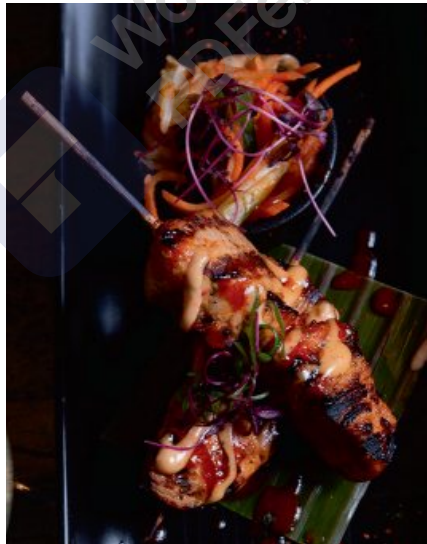
With my friend Aislinn's birthday just around the corner, I decided to treat her to a night of wining and dining at the Muddler.

This inviting restaurant offers an exquisite selection of Pan-Asian cuisine from its luxurious base in the heart of the city centre. Situated on Newcastle's Grey Street, the Muddler is in an ideal location, perfect for those who fancy a few drinks in the city before or after their meal.

Upon arrival, we were immediately impressed by the restaurant's stylish interior. Set against a backdrop of brown, black and gold, the restaurant exudes sophistication and luxury, whilst maintaining a friendly, relaxed atmosphere. The beautifully finished restaurant is complemented by a distinctive drinks & cocktails menu, which fuses various modern classics with Asian inflections.

We kicked off proceedings with a Pandan Espresso Martini, which blends the traditional favourite with the South Asian Pandan plant, as well as a Szechuan Peach Cooler, an innovative fusion of haku vodka, peach aperitif and Szechuan syrup. Both cocktails proved extremely delicious, and customers can also delight in other exclusives including the Braemle Gin Fizz and the Zen Garden.

In terms of food, the Muddler serves a range of Pan-Asian small plates, which can be ordered as a sharing selection or as part of a starter and main course approach. Small plates include classics such as dim sum, tempura, spring rolls and chargrilled robata, and offer great value with three available for only £15 from 12pm – 5pm Monday to Friday. Main dishes include favourites such as Pad Thai and Thai Green Curry, whilst customers



can also enjoy sashimi, maki and nigiri from the venue's extensive sushi menu.

Eager to try it all, we tucked into some tasty small plates to start. Here, we enjoyed the Japanese Prawn Tempura served with salad and dipping sauce, alongside the hand-rolled Duck Spring Rolls, embellished by a zingy hoisin sauce. We were also delighted by the Teriyaki Salmon, which I have to say was the stand-out dish of the night. Marinated in garlic, ginger, sake and coriander, the salmon was exquisite and was accompanied by a delicious side salad and teriyaki sauce. The starters offered both quality and quantity, with both mouth-

watering flavours and hearty-sized portions.

For mains, I devoured the Chicken Katsu Curry - breaded chicken breast, steamed rice and pickles enlivened by a thick, tangy Katsu sauce. Aislinn meanwhile tasted the juicy Massaman Beef Fillet. A chef's recommendation, the dish included beef skewers, massaman spiced puree, oyster mushrooms and crispy shallots. Providing a real depth of flavour, the mains were absolutely delicious, and paired nicely with a bottle of Pinot Grigio from the venue's expertly crafted wine list. Throughout our meal, we also noted the excellent service, with attentive staff who were happy to accommodate to our needs.

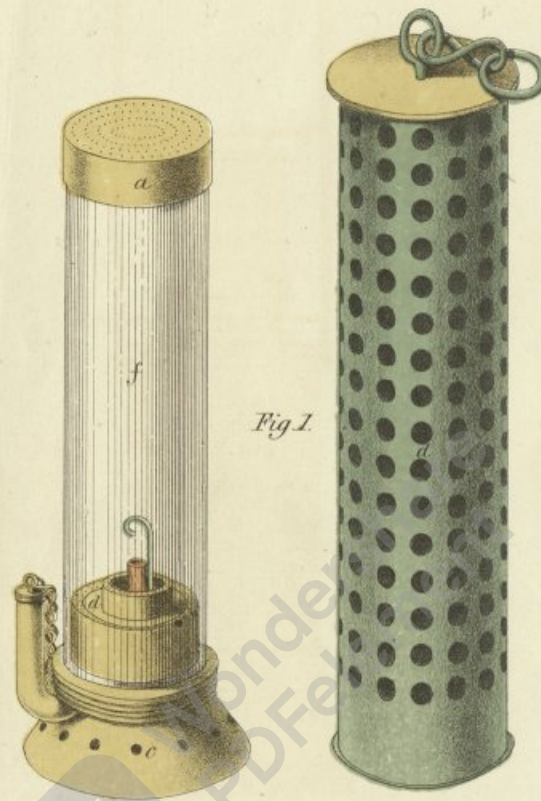
Feeling replete, we swerved desserts in favour of coffees and liqueurs. Whilst we were unadventurous with our usual Baileys', customers can enjoy a selection of Asian digestifs, including Hakushu Distillery Japanese whiskey, and Roku craft gin, in cherry blossom and yuzu citrus fruit flavours.

All in all, the Muddler provides delicious Pan-Asian fayre from its luxurious setting in the heart of Newcastle. With unique dishes, beautiful surrounds and impeccable service, the venue really has much to offer the region. We can't wait to return.

**The Muddler can be found at 69 Grey Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 6EF. For more information, visit their website at [www.themuddlernewcastle.co.uk](http://www.themuddlernewcastle.co.uk) or call 0191 222 0125.**

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# ENJOY MORE FOR LESS AT STACK SEABURN



STACK Seaburn, the vibrant leisure complex situated along Sunderland's coastline, was created to bring a new lease of life to the area of Roker. And since opening in September 2020, the bustling social hub has done just that – enticing customers down in their masses to enjoy an eclectic mix of world street food, retail units and beauty services by the seafront.

And now visitors to the site are set to enjoy more of what STACK has to offer for less throughout the months of February and March, as the venue gets ready to introduce its first loyalty scheme in the form of, #STACKFIVERFEST.

The aptly named initiative will give customers the chance to enjoy a range of selected £5 offers from all of STACK's existing traders for two special months, with many including their most popular menu items and services.

Playing host to a variety of dining outlets and street-food vendors that cover a range of culinary delights, customers can rest assured that their taste buds will be truly tickled during Fiver Fest with the likes of: Boogie Burger, Yolo Coffee & Kitchen, Big Fat Indian Kitchen and Acropolis getting behind the scheme.

Of course, STACK is more than just a venue for food and drink – renowned for its dog friendly atmosphere, it's only fitting that Woofs N' Scruffs delve into their vast list of grooming services to get behind the initiative with their own £5 offer, which will be complemented by the site's remaining retail and beauty service units: Laing's Barbershop, Games Cabin and more.

Fiver Fest will run from Tuesday 1 February – Thursday 31 March, where customers can pick up a loyalty card (from any of STACK's operating bars) on their first visit – collecting a stamp each time they purchase a £5 offer from any trader.

Once complete, visitors will then be able to redeem the card against a £5 drinks voucher\* for the consumption of alcohol/soft or hot drinks anytime throughout February and March\*\*.

And if an abundant of special offers hasn't already piqued enough interest, STACK will be giving customers the chance to enter into a special prize draw which will give them the chance to win a reserved table, bar tab and series of food vouchers to celebrate #STACKFIVERFEST by entering their details via their website.

STACK Seaburn continues to provide a fresh and exciting offer for its customers, ensuring that each visit is a new experience filled with daily live entertainment, variety and now the introduction of the anticipated Fiver Fest.

**For more information, please visit: [www.stackseaburn.com](http://www.stackseaburn.com)**

**\*Please note: drinks vouchers must not be used for the purchase of alcohol by anyone under the age of 18. STACK operates a challenge 25 policy – if you are lucky enough to look under 25 then you will be asked to show identification on entry and throughout the venue. \*\* T&Cs apply, free drink must be redeemed by 31 March 2022 – visit website for details [www.stackseaburn.com](http://www.stackseaburn.com)**

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# 'PASSIONE' AT PUNTO ITALIAN KITCHEN

By Zeno Meynell-Rea,  
Operations Director.

The recent Covid lockdowns were a challenge for us all. People found amazing ways to cope. My friends variously took up knitting, learned Latin, decided to breed Llamas, or simply descended into the sink of Netflix.

We decided to open an Italian restaurant.

When hospitality was in total lockdown and restaurants were going bump faster than nine-year-olds on a free trampoline. Well, banana bread did not strike me as much of a challenge.

Our first Punto Italian Kitchen is in a venue with family history. Way back when television was black and white, my parents opened the restaurant in Heaton. They called it "Out of Town" as it was the first restaurant in Newcastle to be 'out of town'. The family business did well, particularly since my brother Damiano, sister Lidia and I were waiting tables as children dressed as proper camerieri (Italian waiters). We were so cute; I do not like to look back at photographs. The years have caught up with us.

As we made our way in life, Arlecchino, as it was then known, continued to thrive. When our parents retired, they leased the restaurant to an independent operator. In 2021 the operator closed the business. We had an empty restaurant with few improvements since nineteen-canteen at a time when restaurants were closing left, right

and centre. We had a lightbulb moment and thought "Wouldn't it be great to get back into an industry on its knees".

So, it began. Major structural reform, new everything, everywhere, planning permission, building regulations and a relentless architect who really pushed the contractors abilities. I won't repeat her nickname in print. Then recruiting the best team in parallel with the building work. This was key. In Italy, the pizzaioli and camerieri are not servants. They are highly respected and the key to happiness.

In Italy, passion equates to happiness. Italians are passionate about all sorts. Maybe opera, fashion, football, Ferrari, or breeding Llamas but we are all united about one passion. Fresh, quality food. So, to call Punto an 'Italian restaurant' gave me a slight problem. Where my family comes from, in

the mountains of Lazio, two old ladies in the farmers market can spend an hour, nose to nose, debating the correct mix of herbs for a particular pasta dish. And they will be at it again next week.

So, I decided to base our venue on our family history. Fantastic meals at my grandparents' vineyard and farm in the mountains. Sourdough pizza and bread baked in a stone woodfired oven Grandad built with his own hands. Not because a wood fired oven or sourdough was the latest hip Italian restaurant must-have. Simply because with no electricity or gas, it was the only game in town. The freshest ingredients, fine cooking, and good company. It is not rocket science.

Now we have been open a few months. Five-star reviews on TripAdvisor with dozens and dozens 'Excellent' reviews. I have managed to avoid divorce. The days when my husband would ask "Why are you waking up at 4.00am screaming about fire safety regulations?" are in the past. Our general manager, Andrew, is well in his stride and our amazing team are doing what they love – making happy customers.

It has been a tortuous few months, refurbishing and opening Punto Italian Kitchen's first venue during a pandemic. Would I do it all again? Hell, yes! As Michael Schumacher once said, 'once something is a passion, the motivation is there.'

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Zeno Meynell-Rea



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# THERE ARE NO PROBLEMS, ONLY SOLUTIONS

Poverty and Climate Change are two of the most significant challenges we face as a society. Everyday we are provided with considerable facts and findings with an urgent need for us to act.

But admittedly many of us find it overwhelming.

My research found that people do want to make kinder lifestyle choices, they want to be more conscious, they want to be charitable and make a positive social impact. They want to level up society and they want to deliver business for good. They want to help others and they want to protect people and planet.

But the issues we face are colossal, making it overwhelming and confusing, creating a sensory overload proving difficult for folk to gain understanding of how they can help, leading many to believe they have barriers which prevent them from making a difference.

Throughout my life whenever I've faced challenges I've always adopted the mindset that there are no problems, only solutions. It helps me cope. And with an overwhelming need to help this situation we face and a belief that there are helpful solutions, a possibility emerged. Whilst trying to understand 'what is Kind Currency' when it was just the bones of an idea, I kept coming back to this state of mind.

How can we as a society help the fight against poverty and climate change without



it consuming us? How can I create an opportunity that provides an accessible solution to the problems we face?

There are only solutions!

And often the best solutions are quite simple.

Understanding an idea, growing it into a concept and developing a real accessible opportunity to bring to market needs time; giving solutions the time and space to evolve. Rushing into a problem often leads to creating further issues. So, I took it right back to basics and wrote:

**Poverty + Climate Change =  
The Solution + Opportunity**

This was a heading on what was to be a brainstorming activity but the moment I sat back and looked at the page, it all became clear.

Poverty together with Climate Change equal a solution and provide opportunities to reduce the impact of both challenges.

Using each problem as a solution for the other.

An opportunity to help us do our little bit to protect the planet through our consumerism and the way we do business. This solution then creates the opportunity to invest in disadvantaged individuals and communities enabling us to do our little bit to protect people. Reducing the poverty rate and the impact of climate change in one accessible resource; the Kind Currency community.

**Michelle Jones,  
Founder of Kind Currency,  
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## NORTHUMBERLAND PUB COMPANY RAISES A GLASS TO A SUCCESSFUL 2022

A new year is a time for new starts and with growing teams, extended hours and an exciting events programme on the horizon, three North East venues are showing no signs of stopping.

The Blackbird at Ponteland and The Northumberland Arms at Felton – which are operated by the Northumberland Pub Company – have built strong reputations for their delicious dishes, attention to detail and impeccable service.

Along with sister business Kennedy and Rhind, each venue has the same high standards when it comes to its food offering while remaining unique in its own right – something which the Northumberland Pub Company has worked hard to achieve.

And all three venues made sure to start 2022 on a high, with a whole host of traditional Scottish dishes and entertainment on the menus last month as part of their Burns Night celebrations.

While this was something of a first for artisan bakery Kennedy and Rhind in its plans to branch out to evening dining, it certainly won't be the last.

Having extended its opening hours to seven days a week and securing an alcohol license late last year, fans of the café and shop will be pleased to hear that there will be more themed nights on the horizon.

In fact, plans are already in place for their next event on Valentine's Day, with chef David Kennedy pulling out all the stops with

an impressive menu on offer to give couples a night to remember.

But diners don't have to rely on the venues' events calendars to have something to celebrate, with function spaces to suit birthdays, christenings, private dining and even weddings.

The Minstrel Gallery at the Blackbird has always been a favourite for special occasions thanks to its charming features and quirky décor, but the venue can also cater for larger events now that the outdoor tipi is here to stay year-round.

And for those envisioning their plans taking place a little further north, the Garden Room at The Northumberland Arms is a bright and airy space which can be transformed to suit every event.

While celebrating special occasions may be nothing new for The Northumberland Arms, a new chef in the kitchen is certainly putting his own spin on things.

Award winning Adam Westgarth has joined the team at the popular boutique hotel, with two decades of fine dining skills under his belt and an unbridled passion for flavour which is already proving popular with diners.

However Adam isn't the only new kid on

the block this year, with Clair Potts stepping into the role of general manager and further strengthening the team with a wealth of hospitality experience.

And there's never been a better time to visit the venue thanks to a special offer for those planning a February break, with dinner thrown in free of charge for bed and breakfast bookings.

Stuart Young, of the Northumberland Pub Company, believes all three venues will go from strength to strength this year.

"We may just be at the start of the year but there are some really exciting developments in the works which I'm sure will be very popular with our customers across the North East and beyond," he said.

"Although our venues are exploring new avenues this year, we'll still be delivering the same top quality service throughout – whether a customer is visiting us for a special occasion or just to enjoy a delicious Sunday roast."

**For more information on the venues, visit [www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk](http://www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk), [www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk) or [www.kennedyandrhind.co.uk](http://www.kennedyandrhind.co.uk)**



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## TWO NORTH EAST NHS GPs ARE HELPING TACKLE THE DIABETES CARE GAP

A County Durham-based medical duo is hoping to provide more support for type 2 diabetes sufferers and help ease the pressure on the NHS by introducing a personalised programme of support based on diet, lifestyle change and expert medical guidance.

The scale of the problem of diabetes in the UK remains unprecedented. Diabetes affects 4.9 million people in the UK, 90% of which have type 2 diabetes, while a further 850,000 people are currently living with type 2 diabetes but are yet to be diagnosed. An estimated £10 billion a year is being spent on fighting diabetes nearly 80% of which goes to treating complications.

Husband and wife team Dr Amanda Porch and Dr Paul Baker, who continue to practice as NHS GP's, have seen first-hand the strain that the NHS is currently under when treating type 2 diabetes.

The couple's new initiative, Diabetes Lifestyle Doctors, aims to become a one-stop-shop for sufferers of type 2 diabetes providing additional and more accessible support that the NHS is too overstretched to currently offer everyone.

People can participate in a 12-week lifestyle plan supported by trained professionals such as doctors, health and wellness coaches and dietitians, as well as access to recipes, video content and a community support network hosted on social media.

Dr Paul said: "I truly think the NHS does an exceptional job for the scale of the problem we're facing in this country. But, unfortunately, nearly all the resources have to be directed towards managing diabetes complications, of which there are many."



Dr Paul Baker and Dr Amanda Porch

"We know from research that intensive lifestyle intervention, particularly earlier on, around the time of diagnosis is a powerful tool for improving blood glucose levels, decreasing insulin resistance and weight, and reversing the root causes of type 2 diabetes."

"My Grandad had type 2 diabetes for quite a few years before he died. He always struggled to come to terms with the diagnosis and struggled with what to do and what not to do. I believe if everyone diagnosed had easy access to a diabetes focussed lifestyle programme, that we could change the trajectory of managing this condition for the benefit of our society."

Both Amanda and Paul feel that patients with diabetes receive excellent care and follow up from the NHS, a GP's inability to spend significant time with their patients during the initial NHS diagnosis creates a diabetes care gap; one they are looking to solve with Diabetes Lifestyle Doctors.

Dr Amanda said: "The limitation is lack

of time and demand on the system often meaning less frequent appointments than we would all like."

"It's hard having the knowledge and experience to help, but not being able to put it to full use for the benefit of patients," she added.

"It's a big diagnosis to give and a big turning point in someone's life. You want it to be done right and to give the right support to patients, but unfortunately there isn't the time resource to do that. That's where the idea for our programme was born.

"Our programme embodies the support and all the tools we wish we could give to our patients with prediabetes and type 2 diabetes. With the COVID-19 pandemic placing additional strain on the NHS in recent times, Dr Paul feels that this still may not be enough to tackle the problem. The time to tackle the diabetes care gap is now."

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## A LONG TERM FEEL GOOD FIX

The benefits of exercise are massive in so many areas and go way beyond big muscles and an improved cardio system. For those who take part in any workout you will know the post workout endorphins have a huge impact on your mental health immediately. But working out does more than a short term feel good fix it can help you beat stress in the long term too.

Stats from the 2018 Mental Health Foundation show that 74% of adults have felt so stressed at some point over the last year they felt overwhelmed. This is before the impact of the coronavirus, therefore you would assume these figures will have jumped up even higher over the past two years.

### How can exercise combat stress?

- Regular exercise is associated with levels of reduced tension, elevated mood, better sleep, and improved self esteem which all impact how you perceive and manage stress.
- Exercise stimulates serotonin, dopamine and oxytocin, all of which will have positive effects on the brain and make you feel happy and act as natural painkillers.

We should all make time for regular exercise to reduce stress, as well as use it as an instant happiness booster. While one off sessions have been linked with a reduction in stress, it's regular exercise that has shown to be the most beneficial at reducing stress levels.

Regular exercise helps lower adrenaline and cortisol, which are released from our adrenal glands. These have a negative effect on the body as well as our mind, including physical effects such as increasing the risk of high blood pressure or diabetes.

We also need to think about the social and psychological reasons why exercise is good for stress reduction. It's the perfect way

to spend time outdoors and around other people with similar interests and it's this interaction that gives you a real sense of community, positivity and self worth.

The good news is that any exercise for any length of time can help reduce stress, therefore pick something you enjoy and add it to your weekly lifestyle.

It is much more important to do something you enjoy, rather than just doing something that's been prescribed for you.

If you don't enjoy what you're doing, it is probably going to increase your stress levels rather than reduce them.

### MAKING TIME FOR EXERCISE

If you feel you are under a huge amount of pressure and are already finding it hard to cope, slotting in time for training might feel too much to take on. But, along with managing stress, it's about managing time. We can all find 15 to 30 minutes a few times a week to exercise, especially when you know how important it is for your wellbeing moving forward.

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



David Fairlamb

## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*Once exercise has become a habit, it should be easier to maintain the benefits, even during times of increased stress.*

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# RAISING AWARENESS OF WOMEN'S HEALTH THROUGH THE POWER OF FOOTBALL

By Alex Seward, Sales & Services Manager at Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital.

We recently joined forces with Gateshead Football Club in pledging our support to a nationwide initiative which highlights the sexist abuse towards female fans that continues to take place in football.

'Her Game Too' was formed in May 2021 by 12 female football fans who wanted to raise awareness of sexist abuse in the 'beautiful game' and to encourage fellow female fans to share their own experiences.

As the official healthcare partner of Gateshead Football Club, we were extremely proud when the club became the first professional football club to partner with Her Game Too. They are now working collaboratively to encourage other clubs to follow in their footsteps and take a stand against sexist abuse in football.

At Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital, we are committed to educating and advocating the importance of women's health at every stage of life. Through supporting Her Game Too, we hope to not only reinforce our stance that football should be a sport for all to enjoy, we also hope to raise awareness of women's health and its importance.

Good health will mean different things to different people. But with a busy life, juggling commitments with work, home, friends and family, it's sometimes difficult to look after yourself and stay healthy too.

Many conditions that affect women's health happen gradually and can sometimes go unnoticed. A problem may start as something minor, and before you know it you've learned to live with it, putting any concerns aside as you get on with your life. Also, you may not know that you can be treated.



Alex Seward

Our first joint campaign was to raise awareness of the signs and symptoms of breast cancer during breast cancer awareness month last October, using infographics that were shared across social media. This campaign was also backed by Gateshead Football Club through their website, highlighting how three seemingly unconnected organisations can join forces to deliver these important messages. We are planning a similar campaign to raise awareness of cervical cancer during March.

At our Newcastle Hospital in Jesmond, we offer comprehensive women's health services, where our experienced consultants pride themselves on helping women of all ages to overcome a wide range of health problems.

Whether you are suffering from an issue now or are concerned about your future health, we are here to reassure and support you in making the right choices at the right time for a long and happy life.

Amy Clement, co-founder of Her Game Too, says: "It's great to have a well-known healthcare provider like Nuffield Health

speaking out in support of our aim to make football safer for women and girls. At Her Game Too, we're working hard to create strong relationships with club trusts, sponsors and local communities to educate people on the importance of creating a welcoming environment for young girls and women. The more support we receive the sooner we can create a safer and more inclusive atmosphere for female fans today and for the next generation."

Through partnerships with local clubs like Gateshead Football Club and supporting important campaigns like Her Game Too, we're able to reach more people in our community to highlight the significance of looking after your health and work to fulfil our goal of building a healthier nation.

These organisations and their outreach activities benefit people of all ages and we support this ethos. At Nuffield Health Newcastle Hospital we are committed to helping to make people in our region fitter, healthier, happier and stronger.

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## THE LAST WORD FROM BARRY SPEKER...



Barry Speker

Whilst the English cricket team are licking their wounds at their embarrassing drubbing 4-0 in the Ashes Test series, there has been endless debate as to the reasons and the way forward. One solution is to select Novak Djokovic as a 'batter' (politically correct term). Why? Because it took the Australians two weeks to get him out.



Now there are reports of late night drinking sessions in Hobart (denied of course). In the first Test a wicket was lost on the first ball. In no single innings did they score 300, their worst performance since 1963. The drinking session went on until 6am. Such stamina would be useful during the match. The drinks were of course a work event.

There is irritation at hackneyed and platitudinous writing and expression which continues to plague the media and even moreso social media. Lake Superior State University in Michigan recently published a list of 'banished words', suggesting that various familiar and problematic phrases should be banned. Top of these was 'no worries', described as an abominable Australianism. This replaces the more formal 'you're welcome', 'it's a pleasure' or the much overused 'no problem'.

In shops or restaurant we are greeted with 'y'all right there?'

Listening to interviewees answering questions, no doubt having had inevitable media training, each reply is prefaced with 'So.....' as a pause for thought, and then 'At the end of the day', 'Now look....', 'The real question you should be asking is....', 'Well, basically, we are on a journey and the direction of travel is...'. Is this all getting worse?

Please excuse my own linguistic circumlocutions and the occasional hackneyed quote.

The recent incessant and bitter debate has awaited the report from the previously unheard of but now famous Sue Gray. On one side the moral and ethical flaws of partygate, disregard for the rules, inconsistent explanations, lack of transparency, inflation, the rising cost of living; and on the other, focus on the successful vaccine rollout, surviving the pandemic, saving the economy, getting Brexit done and jobs saved.

Will the electorate concentrate on the PM making the 'correct calls' on the big issues or



on who can claim the moral high ground or have insecurity about saving their seats?

History shows that in a crisis members of parliament can not be relied upon for loyalty to their leader - Wilson, Thatcher, Blair, May... However, Boris Johnson is renowned for overcoming catastrophies, mishaps, embarrassments and cockups, and for winning elections. Now is the time to see if the great survivor can swing it.

Doubts as to whether 'levelling up' has any real meaning are beginning to be dispelled locally by announcements such as the plans for a battery giga-factory in Blyth. Work will start within two months at Cambois on the site of the old Blyth Power Station. There will be 3,000 direct and 5,000 indirect jobs, with Britishvolt investing more than £3bn. The target is to produce over 300,000 electric vehicle lithium-ion car batteries a year by 2030. The plant could dwarf Nissan.

This is said to be evidence of the North East becoming one of the true hubs of a Green Industrial Revolution. This follows massive investment in Nissan and Envision AESC in Sunderland. Even the sceptics are having to celebrate such immense job creation.

How was it that an Islamist terrorist, who had twice been referred under the UK's Prevent counter-terror programme was able to gain easy access to the US last month to attack a synagogue in Texas? Would this not appear in standard checks? Fortunately the hostages taken at gunpoint were all able to escape unharmed.

What does this say about the £400m Prevent programme and the usually tough US Homeland security?

I can not close without referring to January 9th 2022 which was a Special 50th anniversary. Half a century! Five decades! A medal is clearly due - but not to me?

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