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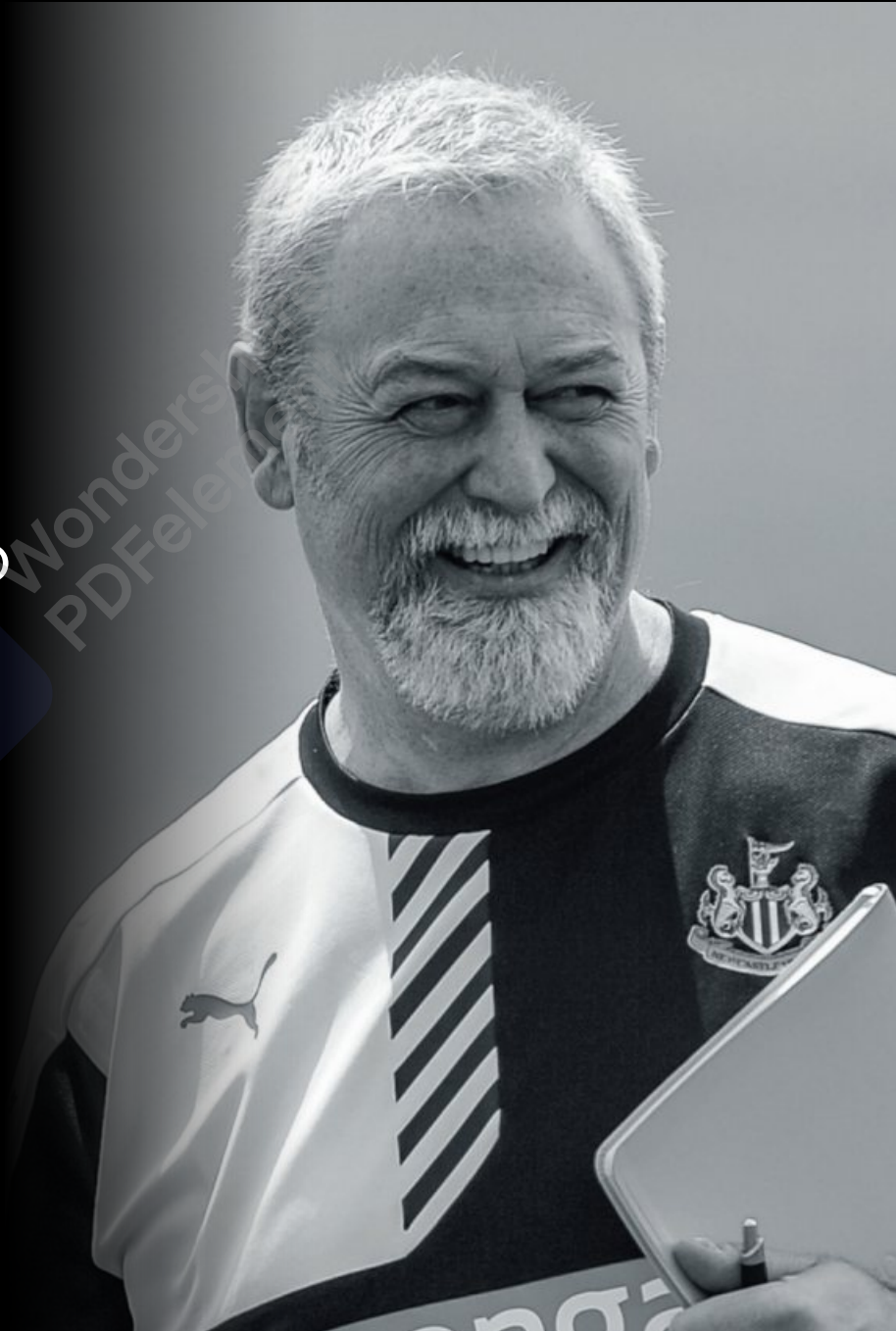
# INSIGHT

MARCH 2022

ISSUE 77

STEVE BLACK  
1957 - 2022

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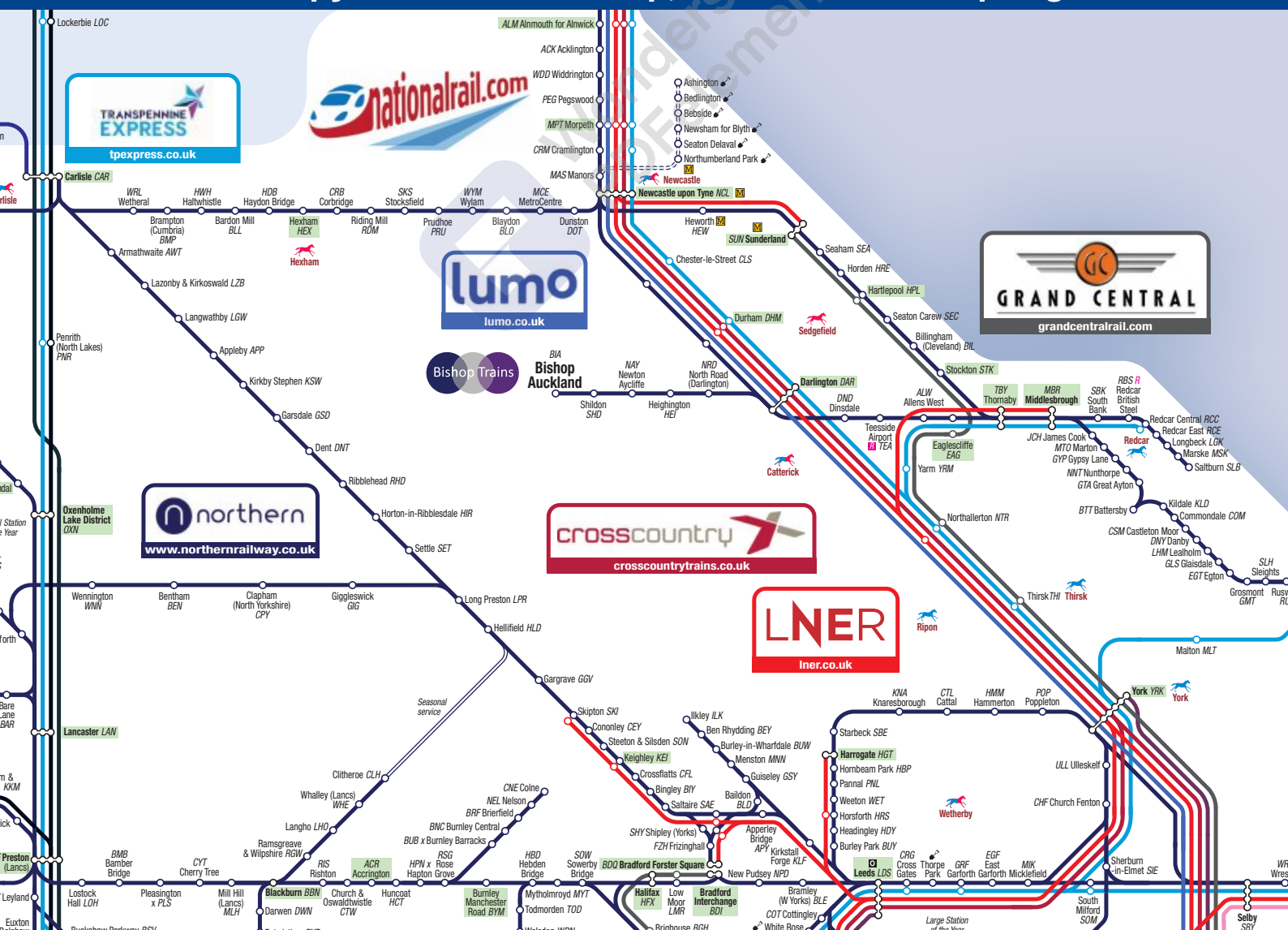
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Alex Nelson

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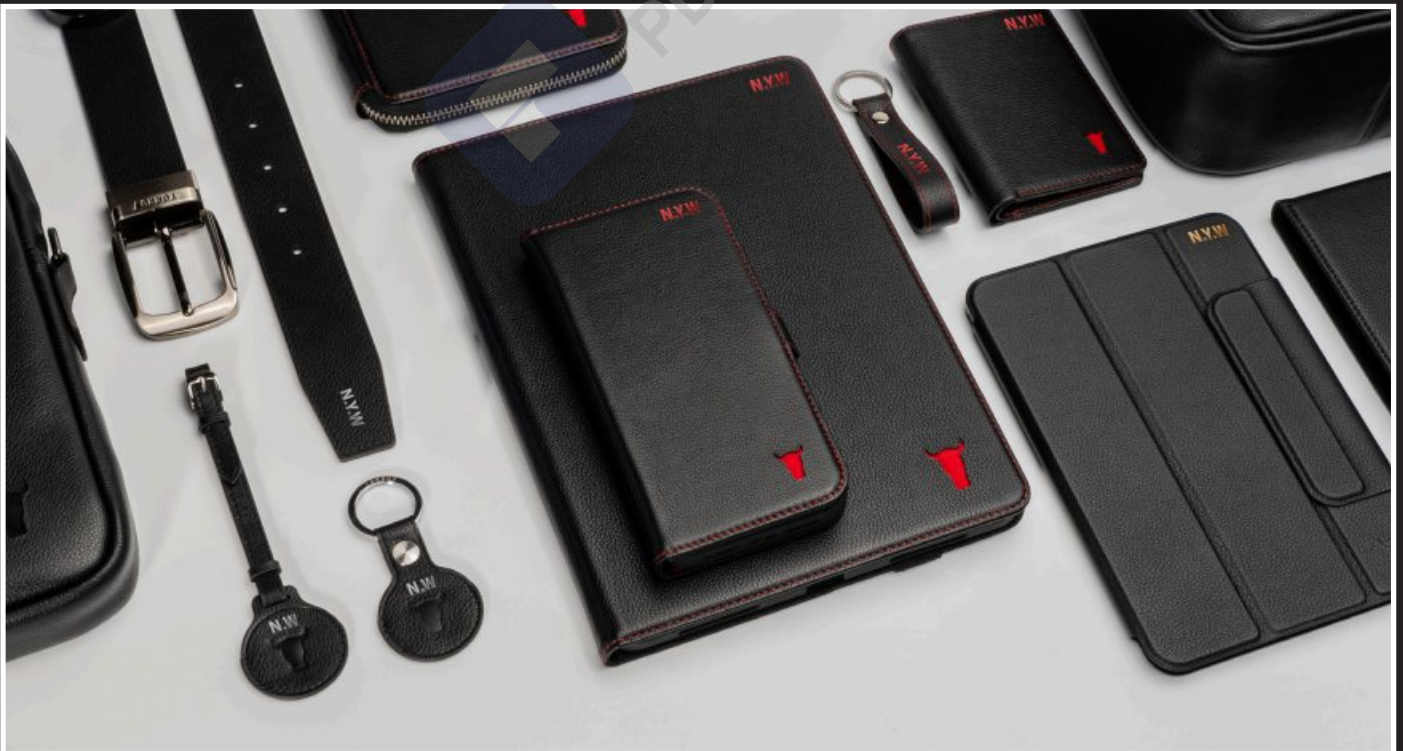


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# FOREWORD

## Welcome to the March edition of Northern Insight.

We start this month on a sombre note. Like so many, we were devastated at the sudden passing of Steve Black.

Steve was such a lovely, genuine man and I was thrilled when he became a regular columnist for the magazine in recent years.

We hope this months cover story is a fitting tribute to him.

Elsewhere, this issue is packed full of all the traditional features, insight and expert opinion with something for everyone to enjoy.

Huge thanks as ever to all of our loyal readers, clients, contributors and suppliers, without whom none of this would be possible.

Until next month...

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



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## COUPLAND LEATHER CUTS A PATH TO SUCCESS WITH EXPORT GROWTH



North East-based luxury leathersmith, Stuart Coupland has continued the exponential growth of Coupland Leather with a further 70 per cent growth in turnover in the last year, thanks in part to the company's growing popularity in the US, Dubai, Belgium, Hong Kong and Australia.

Formed at the beginning of the first Covid lockdown in 2020, Coupland Leather has repeatedly gone from strength to strength and through savvy investment, strategic marketing and building new partnerships, is set to continue this trend and in 2021-22, 15 per cent of the company's sales were attributed to overseas orders.

Stuart said: "2021 was an exciting year for us, seeing huge growth in brand awareness. We featured in 10 luxury magazines, I was invited as a guest on a number of podcasts and a British Chamber of Commerce webinar, and was interviewed by GoDaddy and BBC Look North on growing a small business during the lockdown.

"This year, our focus will be similar – we're attending some great events and expos, and I'm currently designing some new purses and handbags to add to our range."

Coupland Leather already has partnerships with Araminta Campbell, Teesside Airport (Rejoy), House of Zana, Alnwick Gardens, Master Debonair, and the Engravers Guild, as well as selling through its website. The company handcrafts all its leather products in house, from scratch. There are also several options for personalisation, from stamped initials, dates and names, to laser engraving and corporate debossing stamps.

For more information, see [couplandleather.co.uk](http://couplandleather.co.uk)

## NECS GEARS UP FOR GROWTH IN 2022

Nationwide professional commercial cleaning services company, NECS has enjoyed great success over the past 15 years and is gearing up for its next chapter with ambitious growth and recruitment plans.

Headquartered in the North East of England, NECS has seen its presence grow from one branch in Cramlington, Northumberland to six branches nationwide. In addition, its staff numbers have increased from 4 in 2006 to 250 by the end of last year which coincided with the company's 15-year anniversary. NECS's growth has also been driven by the surge in companies seeking to outsource cleaning services due to the Covid-19 pandemic and has resulted in client wins across the office, healthcare, manufacturing, construction, education and retail sectors.

Founded by Gary Breach in 2006, NECS delivers nationwide commercial cleaning, office cleaning, facilities management, and specialist cleaning services. In 2019 the company launched an app to make daily tasks and processes more automated and efficient.

Gary Breach, Managing Director at NECS, said: "The past 15 years has been quite a journey with some very notable milestones that I'm very proud of including NECS achieving a national company status!

"2022 has started strongly for us and we believe it will be our most successful year yet. We continue to see a surge in demand for professional cleaning services and plan on growing our turnover by 50% through our current customers as well as new contracts. In addition, we aim to grow our cleaning team by 100 people to ensure we continue to provide the best cleaning solutions for our customers' businesses, saving them time and money."

NECS is ISO 9001, ISO 14001, ISO 45001, Constructionline Level 2 and BICSc certified.

For more information on NECS, visit [www.necscleaning.co.uk](http://www.necscleaning.co.uk).





## NORTH EAST TRAINING PROVIDER OPENS NEW SUNDERLAND CENTRE



A long established North East training provider has swung open the doors to its third Sunderland facility, as it looks to help people get back into work.

Resources North East - a training provider that has bases across the region - has opened a new Washington centre, from which it will deliver security and health and social care courses to support people to gain the skills they need to access employment.

The new 2,000sq ft hub will also become Resources North East's new head office, with the company's management team and central office staff based out of Pennine House, which is close to the Galleries.

David Watson, managing director of the 32-year-old firm, which provides training in areas spanning construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, forklift driving, and security, chose to open its new Washington centre to expand its delivery capacity and tap into an underserved area.

He said: "We are a business that is very much focused on delivering a small range of courses that are aligned to the region's needs and that provide high-quality training focused on getting people ready for work, with the specific skills they need to flourish in their chosen industries."

Resources North East was set up in 1989 in Sunderland and now has facilities in Jarrow, Newcastle and Sunderland. The provider employs 48 people and delivers training to some 240 students at any one time.

## KEY PROJECT OPENING DOORS TO EMPLOYMENT FOR SOUTH TYNESIDE YOUNG PEOPLE

A South Tyneside charity is giving dozens of local young people a better chance of finding work with the help of new funding from Newcastle Building Society.

The South Tyneside Churches Key Project, which celebrates its 30th anniversary this year, runs a variety of projects and activities designed to prevent youth homelessness and support people in hardship right across the borough.

In order to increase its service users' chances of finding and keeping employment, the Key Project has now set up a new employability initiative offering practical advice and support to anyone needing help to find, get and keep a new job, as well as raising their aspirations for what they can achieve.



It's hoped that the scheme, which is being funded through a £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant, will eventually around 50 local young people – and it has already helped four of the early participants find new jobs and apprenticeships.

The funding is being provided through the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation, which offers grants to charities and community groups located in or around the communities served by the Society's branch network



## SUNDERLAND FIRM TO DOUBLE IN SIZE CREATING 160 NEW JOBS

A fast growing customer communications business is set to create 160 new jobs in Sunderland.

Paragon Customer Communications (PCC) is at the leading edge of customer communications and workplace solutions, with the business' Pallion based site offering outsourced mail processing. And the company is targeting double-digit headcount growth, having seen business boom over the last 12 months.

PCC has won a number of significant new contracts that mean it will be bolstering its number, creating a range of operational roles including team leaders, supervisors and operations staff as well IT and Account Management roles.

The company expects to employ 320 people at the Sunderland site by the end of 2022, having won a significant new client that will see it quickly scale to support its needs.

Steve Pollard, site director at PCC Sunderland, said: "We're thrilled to be expanding, having grown our client base considerably over the last few years."

"As many firms explore ways of improving efficiency and, actually, improving compliance when it comes to dealing with physical and email correspondence from their customers, we are growing our reputation as a trusted partner and a cost-effective solution to meet this need."

To find out more about the roles available at Paragon Customer Communications, visit. [www.paragon-cc.co.uk](http://www.paragon-cc.co.uk)

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## MANAGING METRICS

Metrics or Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) are a frequent topic of conversation for many, and even more so in the world of Sales, Marketing and Customer Service. Launched at the start of a new financial year with vigour and approached in a similar fashion to our New Year goals, although hopefully on a more consistent basis than our 'new year new me vibes'!



Jessica Williams

Many businesses use KPIs as a metric to chart success across the organization, often then further breaking these down to location and then on an individual level. The benefit of establishing metrics from the outset is two-fold according to the Federation of Small Businesses (FSB) – 'Metrics allow an organisation or line manager to track performance to ascertain who is performing well and who perhaps requires some additional training.' (FSB Online, 2020).

It is fair to say that most metrics including KPIs are used in this way, which whilst a fair use, in my mind creates a culture based on results rather than behaviour-based activity, which can - in my experience - be a more beneficial outlook for both individual and organisation. Driving purely results-based activity in our sales teams has been for many, the only metric used in time gone by, yet now as the world around us changes and customer experience becomes an ever-increasing metric, is it time for us to reassess?

When entering a new role or company, one thing I think we can all agree on is the need for a clear outline on expectations, again be

that organisationally and individually. Metrics are just that, but perhaps it's the terminology that is the blocker for most and therefore the area we need to address. Speaking to several sales individuals, all metrics seem to fall under direct sales activities from volume, level of appointments and conversations to timeframes and overall sales generated. My hesitance in taking this approach alone is the behaviours it can lead to with numbers being ruled more important than customer delivery and a transactional view being taken month on month.

It is often said that should the right behaviours in line with company values be displayed, the results will follow and that is true. However, we believe in incorporating a blend of the two. Sales as a profession is still regarded very differently in the UK to our European and US counterparts and as such our ambition to professionalise the industry through creating entry level criteria remains valid. One way to support and evolve this is in the way we manage and monitor our salespeople. To remove the focus on transactional month end targets and drive longer term business growth focusing on retention, market share and customer lifetime value will ultimately generate better results and more confident staff.

Establishing KPIs should be done in line with your organisations objectives but should cover a much wider remit than simply sales achieved. They should be simple to understand and whilst stretching – they should be achievable within the economic climate. Implementing these and then managing the delivery should be part of your overall organisation's training and development plan with regular one to ones and reviews. Consider an element of this to incorporate anonymous customer feedback, internal 360 and evidence of values-based behaviour along with an ESG plan. Our business philosophy is centered around Linda Moir's famous Virgin statement – 'Brilliant Basics, Magic Touches' which focuses on getting the basics right whilst adding value at every customer interaction.

Establishing and managing metrics is perhaps one of the most challenging aspects of the sales industry but one we should take the time to review frequently and take a more multi-faceted approach to in 2022.

**Jessica@JustWilliamsLtd.co.uk**  
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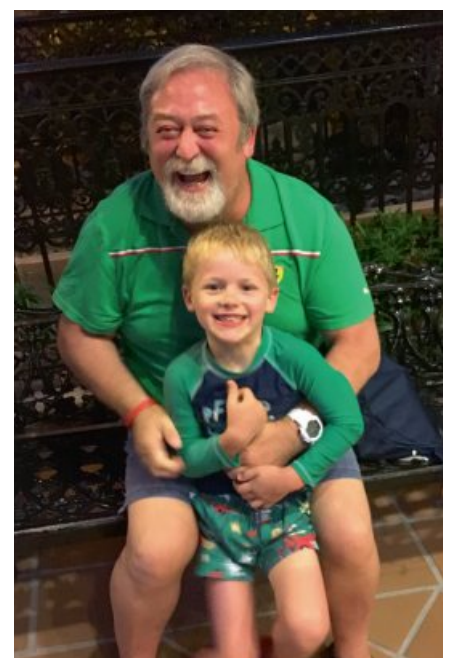
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## TRIBUTES CONTINUE TO POUR IN FOR STEVE BLACK, GONE TOO YOUNG AT 64

Steve Black, or simply 'Blackie', as he was universally known to all from childhood, has unfortunately passed away at the far too youthful age of 64.

Well known as an inspiration to many in life from his days on the doors to his exploits with the British Lions, it would appear Blackie has achieved one more moment of inspiration for us all in the huge outpouring of goodwill and positive emotion from thousands after his passing.

The sheer volume of messages from all and sundry across social media has been heart-warming for many to read and even those who knew little of the man before this sad news have been taken aback by the seemingly never ending updates to messages and comments pages across the world. It has simply been remarkable and is as likely to show a comment of thanks from a world cup winning rugby player, world class athlete or world record holder toward quite a lofty set goal, as it is the same from someone of no professional sporting focus and to help for no particular reason other than doing a good deed. It's obvious that Black had a rare desire just to continually help people and regularly found time, entirely altruistically, to do that for a multitude of people across many different walks of life. That may have been by helping them to focus on simply being a better person, or perhaps helping someone to cope with their stresses and worries a little more

effectively. The little things meant just as much to him as the big ones and his help went much further than solely seeking better performance in itself.

In an age of cancel culture, where we are all perhaps fatigued by the latest and greatest announcement of the past misbehaviour of a public figure, Blackie has provided us perhaps the pick-me-up we all needed by representing the exact opposite where more and more are coming out to say naught but positive things. Steve's showed what an uplifting legacy can be achieved by the simple act of helping someone else, relentlessly. Which it is clear he did, all of the time, for a lifetime. For those who knew him and his constant pursuit of excellence and the innate joy he took from helping others, there is no surprise in this.

"Dad was an absolute hero to Mark, Emma and I, a lifelong love to my Mam and the whole family just couldn't be more proud of him. He built a reservoir of goodwill like no other and always in his own inimitable way with a quick joke and beaming smile. We will miss him dearly" explains his son Stephen.

"The whole family have been hugely appreciative of the messages and tributes to Dad from so many people and please do continue to feel free to get in touch let us know if you've a story about Dad, however profound and moving or simply silly and ridiculous that story is perhaps likely to be. He's lived such a full life and we would greatly love to hear all the stories from everyone again" says Emma, his daughter.

When the time comes for all of us, there is no better or more accurate speaker for the dead than how we live on in the memories of others and in the emotions people take from their time with us during life. In this instance, it's wonderful to see how Steve has helped, influenced and positively affected so many lives during his own.

**For anyone who knew Steve wishing to contribute, please send any stories, messages and thoughts to [steve@steveblack.co.uk](mailto:steve@steveblack.co.uk)**



## LOWES FINANCIAL COMES TO MIDDLESBROUGH

In 1971 against a backdrop of Supermac debuting for Newcastle, Michael Caine shooting the now iconic Get Carter in the area and T-Rex storming the charts with their effervescent hit 'Get It On' a young, well intentioned and determined Ken Lowes rented a small office on Pilgrim Street in Newcastle with a view to providing independent financial advice with a difference.

People were living through 9.4% inflation<sup>1</sup>, £5,632 average house prices<sup>2</sup> and £2,000 a year average salaries<sup>3</sup> so finances being structured correctly made a big difference to how people experienced the years ahead. His objective was to build an independent service which prided itself on a personal approach to financial planning, enabling him to help people with their personal finances and allowing clients and their families to achieve their goals to build, protect and ultimately pass on their wealth. Lowes subsequently moved to Market Street in 1973 and then to Clayton Road, Jesmond in 1984 where his son, Ian Lowes, finally took over the reigns as Managing Director in 2002.

Ian went on to push the company further by continuing the growth of the business, which in 2016 led Lowes to move to a stunning larger office, Fernwood House, just a few doors down from their longstanding home, Holmwood House, on Clayton Road. Fast forward to today and from that little acorn a mighty oak has grown, Lowes is extremely proud to manage over £1bn of client assets and regularly achieve remarkable client satisfaction results, where over 96% of clients would rate their client service and investment advice as "good" or "very good"<sup>4</sup>.

For a thriving business with a 50-year longstanding history under their belt, the next chapter is cementing Lowes as the largest and best Independent Financial Advisory firm in the Northeast. With the kind support of Mayor Andy Preston, Lowes exciting next step is to join the Middlesbrough revolution and they have therefore, opened a new office in the prestigious Commerce House building on Exchange Square.

Sitting with Andy chatting in the understated elegance of the business lounge surroundings of Commerce House, Managing Director Ian says "Like most in the Northeast, we've been aware of the superb work the likes of Andy Preston and Ben Houchen have been doing for the Middlesbrough and wider Teesside area for years now and we're thrilled to have a truly superb office space in Middlesbrough that our longstanding clients can easily visit. Commerce House is on the doorstep of an impressive proposed £34m railway station redevelopment alongside the superb current improvements taking place in the public realm across Exchange Square and is fitting for a company looking to make its own contribution to the exciting changes taking place on Teesside."

Andy explains: "Not for many decades has Middlesbrough known a period of investment and construction like we're currently experiencing. We're bringing new energy, ambition and, most importantly, all kinds of jobs to the centre of our town."

"Our wonderful Centre Square developments has already attracted a number of national businesses including Teesside's first new bank for more than 100 years, Boho X will be the best offices for 100 miles around as part of my vision to make Middlesbrough the digital city, we've got direct London trains running to an enhanced railway station and two new secondary schools being built."

"It's absolutely brilliant to have an established financial company with Lowes' reputation and standing committing to Middlesbrough. These are exciting times and we look forward to working closely with Lowes in the years ahead."

Christine Huntingdon, Facilities Manager at Commerce House, said "We're honoured to have a firm of Lowes reputation and prominence move into the building and look forward to welcoming the Lowes team for many years to come. We've further exciting news coming soon so watch this space!"

**Say hello to Lowes to find out more about how Lowes unique investment approach and personal service can benefit your financial future, by visiting [Lowes.co.uk](http://Lowes.co.uk), calling 0191 281 8811 or emailing [Hello@Lowes.co.uk](mailto:Hello@Lowes.co.uk).**



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<sup>1</sup>Office National Statistics ([www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czbh/mm23](http://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/inflationandpriceindices/timeseries/czbh/mm23))

<sup>2</sup>ThisIsMoney.co.uk ([www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2462753/How-items-cost-risen-line-house-prices](http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2462753/How-items-cost-risen-line-house-prices))

<sup>3</sup>ThisIsMoney.co.uk ([www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2462753/How-items-cost-risen-line-house-prices](http://www.thisismoney.co.uk/money/mortgageshome/article-2462753/How-items-cost-risen-line-house-prices))

<sup>4</sup>2021 Lowes Biennial Client satisfaction survey





# LOWES



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## NEWCASTLE THUNDER: A NEW ERA FOR NORTHERN RUGBY LEAGUE

With a new full-time training set up, a number of Newcastle Thunder's 2022 squad have moved to make the North East their home.

21-year-old Brad Gallagher is one of those relishing life in the region having made the move from Bradford Bulls and West Yorkshire over the winter.

Setting up home in the heart of the city, the back row shares an apartment with team-mates Connor Bailey, Gideon Bofo, Josh Eaves, Jack Johnson and Pat Moran and has been making the most of the opportunities and experiences that this offers.

Speaking on the move Gallagher said: "It's been amazing really, I've never experienced anything like this before, moving away from home and living with your mates, who you also work with, it feels like a rare experience and I'm loving it.

"I can't fault the place, around the club, in the city, everyone is nice. The lads I'm with are all good lads and it's a great experience to be with five of your mates. JJ and Evo like to see themselves as the parents, they call me the kid. I think that's because when I first came up, I was a bit inexperienced at

cooking and cleaning. My mum and dad used to do a lot of that for me.

"I think I've gone up the list a bit though. Gidzz and Connor are more the kids than me now!"

Taking advantage of living in the very heart of the vibrant city, Gallagher has been quick to explore his new home and has enjoyed what he has experienced so far.

"I like my food and there are so many nice food and coffee places, I've been to St James' Park to watch Newcastle and have been along to watch the Falcons – they're all new experiences.

"I've also been to Tynemouth beach and Whitley Bay, there are so many nice places around it's amazing really. There is so much to do and it's all within 15 minutes of the flat."

With things good off the field, Gallagher is also relishing the day job as a full-time professional at a growing rugby league outfit. Thunder have set ambitious targets with the aim of working towards being promoted to rugby league's Betfred Super League, the sport's top division in the UK, and hopefully winning the title by the end of the 2030 season.

Choosing to be part of the drive to achieve those goals, the player is enjoying the atmosphere and says he has rediscovered the passion that made him chose rugby over football as a youngster at Kingston Park.

"I'm loving it really, it's everything I've ever wanted and I can't thank Freddy [head coach Eamon O' Carroll], Denis Betts and the other coaching staff enough for what they have done for me, because they have really helped me to kickstart my career.

"We might only be a couple of games in, but I feel like Thunder is the place to get back on track and because I'm here for the next two years, I've got that safety knowing that this is my home. I can make it my home and I know that we're all willing to work for each other.

"Everyone is straight up here; you can talk to anyone whenever you want and I like



that because it feels like everyone values each other for who they are. There's a sense of equality and it doesn't matter if you're the cleaner or the chairman, everyone is the same with each other. I feel that's quite rare."

With six games played in 2022 including the club's two pre-season friendlies, Thunder is already looking a solid outfit with plenty of scope left to develop.

"We're quite a fit side and I think that will show more as the season goes on. You can't display it as much on a muddy pitch, but at this time we are still in the ruck and the wrestle and I think if we can get it spot on and stay in attack more than defending, we will show what we can do.

"We've only played a few games together but I think there are combinations starting to show. There has been a bit of switching around and we are starting to learn how each other play when we get to a game scenario.

"We've shown well in parts how good our team is and what we can do at the right end of the field. We just need to be there more often and put the opposition under the pump rather than ourselves."

**Newcastle Thunder is hosting their first £5 fixture of the season on Monday 4th April at Kingston Park. Tickets are on sale now via [www.thunderrugby.co.uk](http://www.thunderrugby.co.uk).**



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## YEAR-END TAX PLANNING

It is time to start thinking about 5 April and your year-end tax planning. After two Budgets in 2021, there should be no spring Budget this year. However, the Chancellor is expected to make a statement to parliament on 23 March alongside the publication of the latest economic forecasts from the Office for Budget Responsibility.

Arguably, tax planning for the 2021/22 year-end matters more than in previous years because in 2022/23:

- The personal allowance and income tax bands (other than in Scotland) will be frozen, despite inflation expected by the Bank of England to be running at 6% by April 2022.
- The increases to National Insurance contributions (NICs) and dividend tax announced last September take effect.

### The to-review list

Tax year end checklists change subtly each year, as tax rules change. For 2021/22 the main items are:

### Pensions

5 April 2022 is the final date for taking advantage of any unused pension annual allowance (of up to £40,000) from 2018/19. The calculations involved can be complex, so it important to start this element of planning early. There is the potential to go back up to three previous years of underpaid contributions, but you do need advice.

### ISAs

With widespread income tax freezes and an increase of 1.25 percentage points in the tax rates on dividends, the value of the tax shelter provided by ISAs has grown. That probably explains why the Chancellor left the maximum contribution for 2022/23 at £20,000, the same level that has applied since 2017/18.

All types of ISA offer four valuable tax benefits:

- Interest earned on cash or fixed interest securities is free of UK income tax.
- Dividends are also free of UK income tax.
- Capital gains are free of UK capital gains tax (CGT).
- ISA income and gains do not have to be reported on your tax return.

As well as considering fresh ISA investment, you should review your existing ISAs.

### CGT

The year-end CGT exercise is considering whether and how to use any remaining CGT





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

annual exemption (£12,300, again frozen to 5 April 2026). In many instances, it will make sense to take maximum advantage of the exemption as it cannot be carried forward to next tax year so use it or lose it.

#### **Inheritance tax (IHT)**

You should consider using the three main IHT annual exemptions:

- 1. The Annual Exemption.** Each tax year you can give away £3,000 free of IHT. If you did not use all the exemption in 2020/21, you can carry forward the unused element to this year.
- 2. The Small Gifts Exemption.** You can give up to £250 outright per tax year free of IHT to as many people as you wish, so long as they do not receive any part of the £3,000 exemption.
- 3. The Normal Expenditure Exemption.** The normal expenditure exemption is potentially the most valuable of the yearly IHT exemptions and one which the OTS wanted to replace. Under the exemption, any gift – regardless of size – escapes IHT

provided that:

- a. You make it regularly;
- b. It is made from your income (including ISA income, but excluding investment bond and other capital withdrawals); and
- c. The sum gifted does not reduce your standard of living.

#### **Venture capital trusts (VCTs) and enterprise investment schemes (EISs)**

The lifetime and annual allowance constraints that apply to pensions have encouraged growing interest in VCTs and EISs as an alternative way to invest with tax relief. Subject to generous limits, both offer:

- income tax relief at 30% on fresh investment, regardless of your personal tax rate; and
- freedom from CGT on any profits.

VCT and EIS schemes are designed to attract investment in younger companies and are therefore classed as high risk.

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

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

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Kitty Ussher

## IN CONVERSATION WITH...

### KITTY USSHER

The IoD's Chief Economist

Kitty Ussher is chief economist for the Institute of Directors (IoD). Here she shares a little about her role and some insights into the UK's economic prospects for 2022.

#### Tell us a little about your role with the IoD

I'm the chief economist at the IoD, so my role is to provide insight to the 20,000 business leaders that make up our membership on the outlook for the UK macroeconomy, which they can use to help inform their business planning.

I also act as the organisation's external media spokesperson on matters to do

with the economy and wider business policy. And behind the scenes there's an important job to make sure that government understands how our members are feeling about their business environment, and how that is affected by the decisions of national policymakers. For example, I have a regular channel of dialogue with the Treasury who are very interested in the data we collect from our membership surveys.

#### What are the prospects for the UK economy right now?

At a high level, fairly positive at least compared to what we've just been through. There is still a sense of 'catching up' after the pandemic among both households and businesses and, combined with low unemployment and strong order books, this will keep demand in the economy.

Set against this is the more recent uncertainty from inflation, rising interest rates, difficulties in our relationship with the EU and supply shortages which may make some people hesitate to press go on spending. Taken together, at this point, I expect perhaps 3% growth in 2022.

#### What impact will the latest Levelling Up announcement have, especially for the North East?

There is a lot of detail – and aspirational language – in the new Levelling Up announcements, but its real potential is to provide a new geographic overlay to the usual development and implementation of policy combined with an explicit aim of reducing disparities between different parts of the country.

To the extent that the North East is an underperformer, that's therefore an opportunity. As the IoD's resident nerd I'm also particularly interested in a commitment buried deep within the White Paper to produce more information on government investment and impact by geographic area. Having visibility of this over time should start to change decision making if the government is serious about making a difference.

#### What do IoD members currently see as the key priorities at the moment?

Frictions in EU and international trade, skills shortages, the forthcoming national insurance rise and energy bills are all high up the list of priorities at the moment. They also want macroeconomic stability, a greater sense of vision and leadership from government as well as clearer guidance on what, in practical terms, smaller businesses need to do to help us meet our climate goals.

#### How is the IoD responding and working with government to influence policy?

We survey our members regularly so we can spot trends and concerns and then relay these directly in our weekly face-to-face meetings with government ministers and senior civil servants. We run public-facing campaigns in the media on issues that matter, such as launching a change.org petition against the forthcoming rise in national insurance that has now got 160,000 signatures! We also prioritise our internal policy development in the areas of greatest concern and then advocate potential solutions to government on their behalf.

**To find out more about IoD membership, 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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# CASCADERS TWO MILLION STEP CHARITY CHALLENGE

Eleven kind-hearted Cascaders are taking on a monumental challenge to walk two million steps in just 31 days to raise funds for charity.

Following last year's success of one million steps by the team, they have decided to double the effort to two million with the aim of doubling the charitable money raised.

Conceived by Head of Business Operations, Georgia Boddy, the team pledged in 2021 to walk a million steps together to raise £1,000. The team of ten are all set up on Stridekick which automatically counts every precious footstep they make this month.

Between them they are hoping to raise as much as possible through their Just Giving page, to donate to Smart Works Newcastle, a charity that helps unemployed women find the confidence they need to reach their full potential, secure employment and change the trajectory of their lives. Georgia said:

"Two million steps equates to 1000 miles over just 31 days so it is a good challenge but one we feel is achievable with hard work. As a team we focus on wellbeing, so this is a great way to build team spirit, help a good charity, and ensure our physical and mental health are being looked after."

The team will be taking walks together and in their own personal time to rack up the all-important steps, collecting donations on their Just Giving page.

Dr Emma Black, co-founder and CEO of Cascade said: "The commitment the team has made is the equivalent of walking to Madrid, the home of the Bank of Spain and Santander. It is no easy feat, but we are all committed to the challenge and Smart Works Newcastle is a great choice from Georgia as it is an important charity doing something I hold dear - giving a fair and equal chance for opportunity!"

As well as charity fundraising, 2022 for the Cascade team is all about wellbeing, investing in people, in knowledge and in the 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 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 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 Pirxx membership offering online healthcare access, lifestyle benefits, discounts and vouchers.

Dr Emma Black concluded: "Cascade Cash Management is on a mission to make savings simple, helping people to reach their savings goals faster, smarter and happier.

"The service has over 5,500 savings accounts on offer from Instant Access to five years. Cascade delivers the highest returns for savers and greatest possible depositor protection in the market. The team is passionate about savings and delivering the best possible outcomes administering funds on behalf of clients providing direct and independent access to providers to the tune of over £1bn so far."

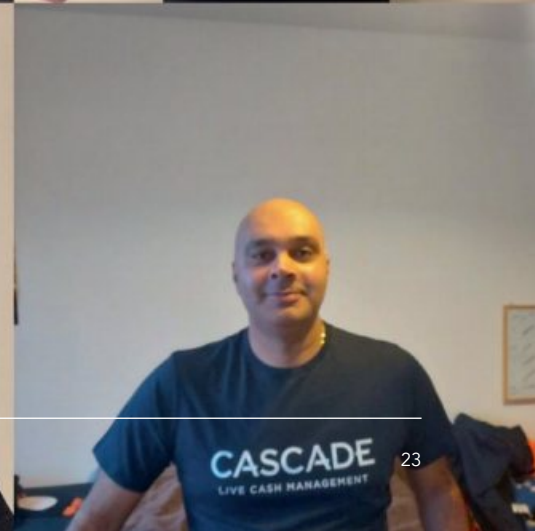
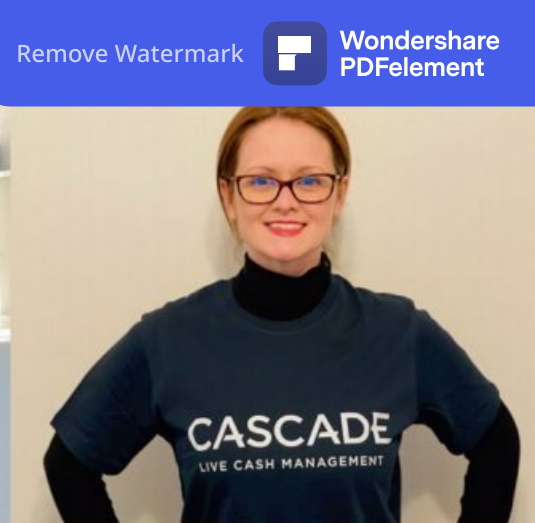
Partners including IFA's, solicitors, attorneys and accountants can self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients. Cascade has also won many awards over the last few years, including Dr Emma Black being named as Cash Management Woman of the Year by Lawyer International in the Legal 100 2021 Awards.

***There will be a full announcement later in the year on the full programme the Cascaders will be doing in the year to support charitable causes. In the meantime, you can donate and support the two million steps effort by visiting the company's Just Giving page on [www.justgiving.com/fundraising/cascadecashmanagement1](https://www.justgiving.com/fundraising/cascadecashmanagement1)***

“

**...the equivalent  
of walking to  
Madrid...**









Members of the RMT Technology team (from left) Paul Holborow, Izzath Sheriff, Daniel Allen, Paul Kirkup and Mike Hayes

## RMT TECHNOLOGY ADDS NEW RECRUITS TO HELP MEET GROWING CLIENT DEMAND

Specialist technology company RMT Technology has taken on two new engineers to help it meet increasing demand for its IT services.

Izzath Sheriff and Daniel Allen have joined RMT Technology's support team and are now providing remote support to the firm's clients.

Izzath and Daniel both bring a wide range of service desk, networking and Office 365 experience to their new roles, and are also involved with the delivery of project work relating to IT strategy, network infrastructure, information security and data management services that RMT Technology provides.

Led by directors Paul Holborow and Mike Hayes, RMT Technology is the sister company of RMT Accountants & Business Advisors and works primarily with SMEs across the north of England in identifying and implementing technology solutions which meet their specific business and operational needs.

The business has seen substantial growth

over the last two years as a result of the explosion in home working during the pandemic, and the related need for remote, secure access to technology services.

Paul Holborow says: "Our expert engineers are first responders for clients looking for support with a wide range of technology issues. It's normally the case that problems are solved during the initial call, which is a huge advantage to our clients.

"We've seen growing demand for our services over the last two years, with the current trend for remote support accelerating as a result of the widespread move to remote and home working.

"Daniel and Izzath have the skills and experience required to provide the help that our growing client base needs, and they're also getting involved with developing the data security, information management

and technology infrastructure issues that these clients need to address to keep their operations running smoothly.

"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.

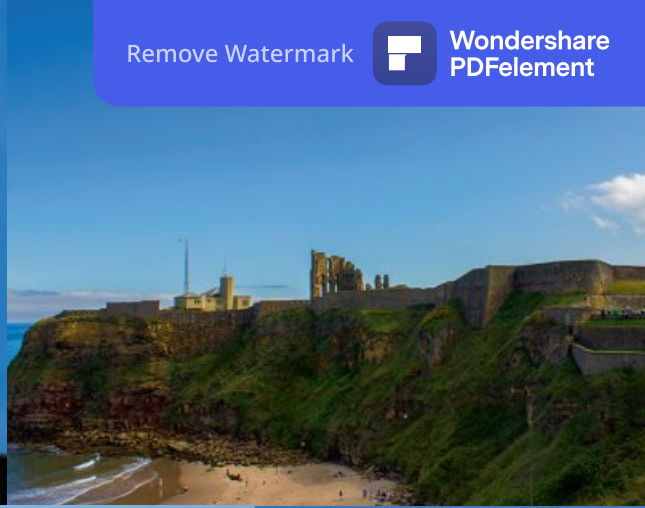
"We have a broad client base covering a wide range of sectors. The firm is growing by demonstrating the sort of operational and commercial benefits that businesses can gain by implementing the right sorts of technology solutions.

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

"Daniel and Izzath have strengthened what is already a highly-skilled, experienced and qualified team, and it's great to have them onboard."

**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)**





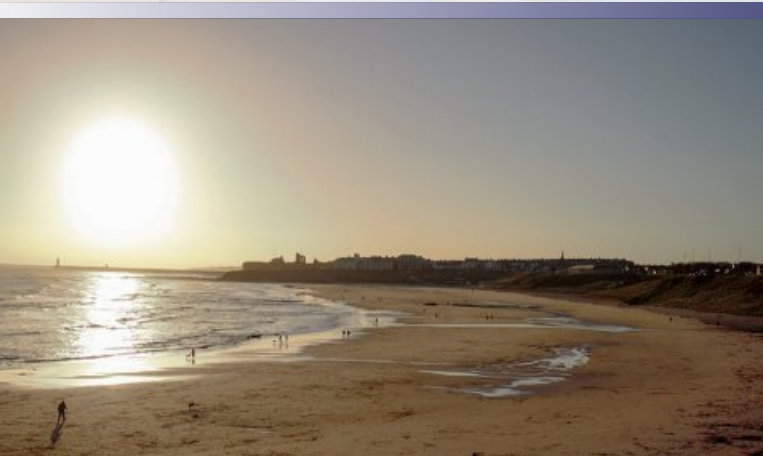
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## NEW HOMES TO BE BUILT IN COUNTY DURHAM FOLLOWING FW CAPITAL FOLLOW-ON INVESTMENT

New family homes will be built in County Durham, thanks to a £1m investment by FW Capital, which manages the North East Property Fund (NEPF).

Local developer Bell Blue will use the funding to build five new homes on the site of a former equestrian centre in Hargill Road, Howden-le-Wear.

The four-bedroom detached properties are in an idyllic countryside location and will be finished using the highest quality materials. Bell Blue already has reservations on two of the five homes in the development.

Bell Blue Ltd is a property development business based in South West Durham, focused on small developments of three to 10 units.

This is the second time the NEPF has supported Bell Blue, following on from a £375,000 investment in 2019 which funded a successful small scheme in nearby Toft Hill.

FW Capital Investment Executive Tony Cullen said: "FW Capital aims to be a long-term funding partner building trusted relationships with the customers we work with so we are delighted to provide this follow-on investment.

"As with the previous Bell Blue development we supported in 2019, the design of these homes is of the highest quality and interest has been high, with two of the homes already reserved.

"The investment has provided jobs for local tradespeople, has benefitted the local economy and has provided a new development of modern family homes. We are delighted to have continued our relationship with Matt and the team and supported them with this project."

Matt Houghton, Bell Blue Director, said: "Having previously successfully completed our Toft Hill development in 2019 with the support of FW Capital, we turned to them again to help us with our latest scheme.

"This development is in a lovely location on the outskirts of the village of Howden-le-Wear, with views over the rolling hills and fields. Work on the site is progressing well, with a lot of interest already in the homes. We are grateful to FW Capital for their ongoing support and would highly recommend them as a trusted funding partner."

Andrew Moffat CBE, Chair of the Investment Board at the North East LEP, said: "Supporting local developers and communities is the prime goal of the North East Property Fund so to confirm a second round of funding for Bell Blue is a really positive development. We hope this encourages other developers to apply for their schemes too."

The North East Property Fund was established with the aim of supporting the development of small-scale property schemes and is backed by Santander and the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

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



## ONEGYM STRENGTHENS POSITION IN NORTH EAST FITNESS MARKET WITH LATEST NEL INVESTMENT

A strong relationship with the North East's most active business investor has helped a County Durham-headquartered gym business open its latest fitness facility – and to start making plans for where it goes next.

OneGym has used a £300,000 investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Supported By The European Regional Development Fund via the Recovery Loan Scheme to open a brand new fitness facility at Thinford Park near Spennymoor, close to the Durhamgate roundabout.

The new 24/7 gym is the sixth in the OneGym chain, sitting alongside branches in Bishop Auckland, Newton Aycliffe, Redcar, Thornaby and Stockton.

Each of the firm's previous gym openings have been backed by NEL investments, going back to 2012, and the company's management team is now working on plans to open two further gyms in North East locations before the end of this year.

Jonathan Luke, portfolio director at NEL Fund Managers, adds: "OneGym is firmly established as one of the leading names in the North East health and fitness market, and we're proud to have played a part in the team's continuing success.

"Having access to growth capital through different stages of their development is essential for ambitious North East firms and OneGym is continuing to show how to make great use of what's available in the region."



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# NATIONAL INSURANCE INCREASES IN APRIL 2022 – HAVE YOU CALCULATED THE IMPACT?



The UK government introduced the new Health and Social Care Levy in 2021, which will come into effect in April 2022. The new Levy, intended to help fund the NHS and health and social care, will be added to the National Insurance (NI) liability for employers and employees (as well as the self-employed) for the 2022/23 tax year, before becoming a separate tax in April 2023.

While the opportunities to mitigate the extra NI costs remain attractive, employers still need to ensure that they are aware of some of the pitfalls inherent in both schemes, such as Minimum Wage legislation, early termination charges, and employment law considerations.

## How can UNW help?

The specialists at UNW have unrivalled experience in helping employers understand the impact of tax and NI changes on their workforce costs and can help with the following:

- Considering the potential extra annual costs which accrue on the employer and employee following the increases;
- Evaluating any ideas to help mitigate the extra costs and assessing the potential savings and costs;
- Assistance and project managing the implementation of any salary sacrifice ideas;
- Communicating any changes to employees; and
- Ensuring that employers remain compliant with tax and NI legislation.

**If you would like more information about this, or any other employment tax related matters please contact:**

**Lee Muter, Employment Taxes Partner**  
E: [leemuter@unw.co.uk](mailto:leemuter@unw.co.uk)

**Paul Tucker,**  
**Employment Taxes Senior Manager**  
E: [paultucker@unw.co.uk](mailto:paultucker@unw.co.uk)

## What is the impact on employers?

The employer costs of NI on salaries, bonuses, and benefits in kind will increase by 1.25% from April 2022, meaning that the Class 1, Class 1A (benefits in kind) and Class 1B (PAYE Settlement Agreements) will all be impacted. In addition, an employee's take home pay will be reduced, with the additional 1.25% also being deducted from the gross salary of most workers.

## Are there any areas which are less affected?

There are two main benefits which have largely escaped the impact of the proposed increases:

- Employer pension contributions; and
- Provision of Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs) as company cars.

## Pension contributions

Most employers are now required to pay contributions into employees' pension schemes, and these employer

contributions continue to be exempt from NI contributions. However, employee contributions will typically be made from net pay after deduction of tax and NI (which will include the levy from April 2022).

## ULEV – Company Cars

As the benefit in kind value remains historically low until at least 2024/25, the provision of a ULEV, will remain NI efficient, especially compared with traditional diesel or petrol vehicles, which do not have the same government incentives.

## Salary sacrifice

Many employers have set up salary sacrifice schemes in respect of employee pension contributions to achieve NI savings for both themselves and their employees and some have schemes in place for ULEVs.

There is the potential to help mitigate the extra costs of the changes by implementing or maximising the benefits of salary sacrifice schemes.

## FULL-SERVICE CAPABILITIES ENABLE RGCF TO DELIVER A HAT-TRICK OF M&A TRANSACTIONS

RG Corporate Finance (RGCF) has demonstrated its capabilities as a leading full-service corporate finance boutique, having announced a hat-trick of transactions in the first three weeks of 2022.

The Newcastle based CF boutique announced that it advised on HW Global's acquisition of London based digital agency Osmii and eQS' acquisition of Challenge Consultancy, whilst also advising the shareholders of Bristol based eProcurement software business, Market Dojo on the sale of the business to overseas listed Esker, all within the first three weeks of the year.

In addition to RGCF acting as lead corporate finance adviser on each of these transactions, RGCF provided each of its clients with Transactional Tax advice, whilst also carrying out financial and tax due diligence on behalf of eQS and HW Global, enabling each of these transactions to be delivered in-house by RGCF in an efficient and timely manner.

eQS' acquisition of London based Challenge Consultancy was the fourth acquisition made by the North East based Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) specialist since its MBO and £20m debt raise in December 2020, which RGCF advised on.

Throughout this 13-month period RGCF has advised eQS and its management team on the development and execution of its buy-and-build strategy, leveraging RGCF's dedicated in-house research capabilities to identify and approach a number of off-market targets, which met the acquisition criteria set by the Board and which included Challenge Consultancy, a business that provides diversity, equality and inclusion training and consultancy services.

As well as acting as Corporate Finance lead adviser on this acquisition, as well as all of eQS' acquisitions to date, RGCF provided transactional tax advice and carried out financial and tax due diligence.

Carl Swansbury, Partner and Head of Corporate Finance at RGCF, who personally led on each of these three transactions, said: "These transactions highlight the level of M&A activity that we can expect to see continue throughout 2022 in certain sectors, such as Technology, Human Capital, Healthcare and Professional Services. They also demonstrate RGCF's expertise and ability in developing long-term strategic relationships with clients, with our ultimate focus being the creation and demonstrable improvement of shareholder, or equity value.



"Our full-service CF boutique of 22 talented and experienced CF professionals last year advised on a total of 42 M&A transactions, which included acquisitions, disposals, MBOs, MBIs and debt/equity fund raises across a range of geographies and sectors, including technology, human capital, manufacturing and engineering, healthcare and professional services.

"2022 represents another exciting year for RGCF, and M&A more generally. We have an exceptionally strong pipeline of M&A transactions for the coming months, which will lead to us advising on a range of high-profile deals that will enhance and help realise the scale-up ambitions of businesses and entrepreneurs in the North East and across the UK."

## GROWTH NARRATIVE TO THE FORE AS NEW MARKETING AGENCY SECURES SIX-FIGURE NORTH EAST FUND INVESTMENT

A newly-formed North East full service marketing agency is aiming to take on the biggest in the business with the help of a six-figure investment from the North East Growth Capital Fund Loan Fund supported by The European Regional Development Fund.

Newcastle-based communications agencies Different and Narrative Integrated Communications recently merged to form Different Narrative, which is now the region's largest end-to-end marketing services provider.

The newly-formed business has worked with regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers to secure a £250,000 investment via the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme, which will be used to enhance the range of marketing services it provides and to bring in further skilled people across different disciplines to deliver them.

As well as building its presence in sectors such as education, retail and residential property, Different Narrative is also working with an increasing number of tech businesses across the North East that have thrived during the pandemic and are now looking to grow quickly themselves.



The Different Narrative management team was advised by accountants RSM Newcastle and UNW, and law firms Womble Bond Dickinson and Jacksons Law Firm during the investment process.

Ben Quigley, Chairman of Different Narrative, says: "We've spent most of the pandemic period working on the detail and structure of the new company, which is already much more than the sum of its parts.

"The two firms offered a range of complementary skills, experience and expertise, had strong reputations within their respective markets and a similar ambition to keep growing, so bringing them together made sense all round."

David Thomas, investment director at NEL Fund Managers, says: "Narrative and Different have both performed extremely well over many years, and their joint venture has huge potential for becoming a nationally-recognised leader in their field.



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# SUCCESSION PLANNING FOR SMES

Steve Plaskitt, Partner at MHA Tait Walker gives his view on what owners of family businesses should consider when planning their succession.

Succession planning for SMEs is a much talked about subject.

It is well known that plenty of preparation is the key to proper succession planning as it allows time for a strategy to be developed and executed. Some say one to three years may be required.

The starting point is often a valuation of the company - an understanding of what drives that valuation and what could increase it.

A subsequent strategic review would allow issues to be identified and goals to be set in a business plan including the all important exit strategy. Such a plan may identify investments to be made, operations to be improved, new products to be launched, management to be recruited and incentivised to deliver higher profits, the profile of the business to be raised and eventually the valuation is maximised ready for your exit.

It sounds simple doesn't it?

But it misses two key factors that are often overlooked. And yet these are critical to making the succession plan achievable - and one of them is particular to only family businesses.

Firstly, keeping up your motivation, ambition and desire can get harder as you approach retirement age. We see this more and more for many business owners who have lived and led through the recent pandemic - some will recognise that the challenges they are facing now may appear harder to overcome and risks more apparent than at any previous time in their career. Finding the resilience to keep overcoming challenges can sometimes seem hard and you should allow yourself to feel that you can ask for help - from others in your family, in your company, outside of your business or your advisers.

With the right attitude and mindset you should be able to maintain and grow your desire, keeping attention to detail and surrounding yourself with reliable support to drive the right behaviours, encourage others and deliver your exit plan.



Steve Plaskitt

Secondly, and most importantly for family business, is how you can deliver your exit plan and still remain on friendly terms with other family members who may remain in the business.

This is where considerate and open communication is essential to make sure that issues around money, control and responsibility do not get in the way of family relationships.

It is not easy. You have to prioritise what you want to value the highest - is it your personal wealth, the ongoing legacy of your company or your family relationships? In rare circumstances, and with luck, you may be able to maximise all of them - but that requires good planning and execution.

I have seen this done in a few different ways:

● **Shareholder agreement:** which defines how each family member may retire, when and at what value for their shares. This is particularly useful for large family businesses which are now run by non-family directors and where the shareholdings are spread across many family members.

● **Partial exit:** which is where one director shareholder agrees to exit whereas the other family member remains to own the whole company. This is usually achieved by a Company Buy Back of Shares or by a Newco being set up to secure funding to facilitate the buy out. This normally requires plenty of planning to allow finance to be secured and

may require some diplomacy to ensure that the family relationships are not damaged during negotiations.

● **Full exit:** typically where all the family members agree it would be best to sell the business to a trade buyer. Again this can work if all of the family agree it is the right time to sell and none want to continue in business.

● **Delayed exit:** this may be a combination of a few different elements but would typically involve finding new management to run the business and for the retiring shareholder to reduce their influence and control over time.

Given there are different approaches to succession planning - taking corporate finance, legal and tax advice early is important to understand what would suit you best.

But first of all maybe you should invite your family round, so that you may all share your personal hopes and plans around the kitchen table before you start to formalise it around the boardroom table.

**Steve Plaskitt is Head of Corporate Finance at MHA Tait Walker and assist businesses with finance raising and growth. He has over twenty five years of experience in the North East market. For more information please call 0191 285 0321 or email [steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk](mailto:steve.plaskitt@taitwalker.co.uk)**





# IF YOU'VE EVER FELT THAT, "YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU'RE DOING WITH YOUR LIFE" – READ THIS

As a pre-filter for who should read this short story, that headline is really very poor. It's very poor because it filters out nobody. If you're a living, loving, thinking person, then – at one point or another – you will have felt that you don't know what you're doing with your life.

So, if and when it happens again, this might help.

The first thing to consider is that the feelings we are exploring when it appears that we don't know what we are doing with our lives come from uncertainty. And uncertainty is as much a part of life as certainty. In fact, without uncertainty there can be none of life's really good stuff. Curiosity. Ambition. Progression. Improvement. Upgrades. Adventure. All of these things are triggered by uncertainty. Uncertainty, and not knowing what we are doing with our lives, drives us forward.

Think about this. To know exactly what you are doing with your life requires a complete, big picture view and understanding. A precise plan that you develop and then live to the letter. This might sound good, but if you did somehow realise this seemingly marvellous scenario, it'd kill all spontaneity. Your 'gut' and the things it tells you to do based on what you feel – right now – as a result of any unique and unexpected encounter or experience would be redundant. And how boring would that be?

What I am suggesting – loud and proud – is that not knowing what you're doing with your life is better than knowing exactly what you are doing with your life. But if you are still not convinced – do these two things. Just to reinforce your masochistic credentials!

First, pop onto social media and take a look at all those people storytelling how they actually do know what they are doing with their lives. Second, be daft enough to think that what you are seeing and being told is a complete and unpolished version of their life. And there you go. You've reinforced what you want to believe, rather than what is actually true.

Remember, if social media lived on traditional, old-school tv, instead of the internet, it'd not be on a documentary channel. It'd be on a fictional drama channel. Yes, it looks nice. And it can be entertaining and fun. But it's almost never completely true.

## **Here's The Real Reason You Feel Like You Don't Know What You Are Doing With Your Life.**

The real reason you sometimes feel like you don't know what you are doing with your life is simple. It's because you are between two milestones. First, you are moving away from what you used to want, but no longer do. Second, you are moving towards the evolving outline of what you want next. You are changing. You are evolving. You are growing. And thank goodness for that.

All you have to do is focus more on your journey. Enjoy it. Instead of just craving the destination you have in your head, or worst still, craving the fictitious destination someone on social media is pretending that they have right now. Embrace your hunger. Learn to love the fact that you are restless, in a nice way though, not a desperate way. Life is good! And you are lucky that you can face or create opportunity and make decisions as-you-go.

Each morning, if you like, just ask yourself a simple question. Ask yourself what you want. And see how your answers evolve. See how your answers move with your mood. With your experience. And remind yourself when this happens that, if you did have everything planned out perfectly and permanently, there'd be no room for the newer you, with your new ideas and approaches. And what a terrible shame that would be.

So if today, tomorrow or next week, that feeling of not knowing what you are doing with your life washed over you once more – congratulations! Let's see where that feeling takes you next.

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



Darren Wingfield





“

**...We put a huge amount of time  
and effort into our clients...**



# WHO WILL DELIVER YOUR DEAL OF A LIFETIME?

WilliamsAli Corporate Finance are on your side

Business owners and directors will deal with a vast array of tasks and challenges over a lifetime of building a company. From buying and selling stock and services, to compliance and recruitment, and IT and finance – the list goes on. However, there are some transformational moments which only come along once in a business lifetime, and those moments tend to be the most important.

Whether taking on funding or investment to accelerate growth, or acquiring another business to expand, or planning, preparing, and completing the eventual sale of your business to fund a long and happy retirement, business owners need to draw upon outside help at key moments to ensure a successful outcome.

The key question facing every owner is: who do you trust to deliver?

In a market full of established general practice accountants, the last few years have seen the emergence of a new, highly specialised, independent, boutique firm of corporate finance advisers who are ticking all the boxes for business owners looking for experienced experts to trust with those key moments.

WilliamsAli Corporate Finance arrived in the market in 2019 and has since built one of the largest and most experienced teams of M&A specialists in the North East region, while completing a series of exceptional and high profile transactions.

The two founding partners Phil Williams and Abu Ali are the most active and visible advisers in the team, and this is immediately where the WilliamsAli proposition starts to be different. Clients consistently receive the best senior expertise and added value throughout their process, as opposed to some of the more traditional accountancy models where the figureheads are heavily outnumbered by junior resource.

When you are talking to WilliamsAli, you are talking to experts who've been there, seen it and done it. Abu and Phil have spent their life in business. They know precisely what a business owner is going through because they've been there themselves.

Abu is a chartered accountant who has a background in advising on company sales, management buyouts and fundraising. Phil, with over 20 years of accountancy under his belt, has worked as a finance director for a fast-growing energy firm which he successfully helped to sell to a PE-backed acquirer, and also spent several years as in-house head of corporate finance and M&A at a leading North East PLC.

"For any business owner who is looking to either exit the company or hand it on to another safe pair of hands, we can help because we've done it so many times before," says Phil Williams. "We put a huge amount of time and effort into our clients and, in doing so, we build incredibly close relationships. We understand that, as your advisers, we are going to be a reflection of you during a deal and we treat

that responsibility with great care. At the same time, we are serious negotiators who will never stop driving value."

"We're busier than ever," adds Abu Ali. "The pandemic caused initial uncertainty, but we kept speaking to our clients and once everyone had got used to a new way of doing business, we found that deals could still be done albeit with some delays. Business owners who wanted an exit strategy two years ago still want an exit strategy today. Those who wanted to find funding to take their business forward, still want funding – in some cases even more urgently than before."

The refreshing thing you discover when talking to Abu and Phil is their devotion to North East businesses. They also place a huge amount of pride in their independence. They are answerable to nobody but their clients, which creates a unique, singular focus on delivering outcomes with no distractions. Their niche positioning as M&A specialists focusing on a single, added-value service allows them to work seamlessly and collaboratively with the various other professionals in the region, including accountants, law firms and funders.

WilliamsAli is due to expand further in the spring, with the addition of a senior, director-level hire with vast corporate finance experience in roles as both an adviser and a finance director. With a busy year ahead, Phil and Abu are pleased to be further reinforcing the strength in depth of the team at just the right time.

Abu said: "We are currently talking to many business owners who are starting to think about their exit plans. They are looking around the market and asking themselves the question: "who do I want on my side?". It's incredibly pleasing to find that the answer is WilliamsAli Corporate Finance".

**If you'd like to talk to Abu Ali or Phil Williams, you can email them at [info@wacf.co.uk](mailto:info@wacf.co.uk) or call 0191 249 1736.**

**You'll also find additional details on their website: [www.williamsali.co.uk](http://www.williamsali.co.uk)**



# MY WEEKEND

## JACK SPOOR

Robson Laidler Accountants and Business Advisors

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

I try my utmost not to! Work life balance is something that comes up a lot with my coaching clients, where they are working long hours to service the demands of their business. In some cases when we divide their total earnings by the total hours worked, they are earning below minimum wage. That is before you start thinking of what other strategic tasks they could have been doing with their time.

It is something I totally appreciate and can relate to. When I was working from home during lockdown, I could easily find myself working 12-hour days and logging on at weekends, it was too convenient and there was also an expectation by some clients that you were always contactable. It took a bit of a toll on my mental health, and I needed to make some changes.

I now try to be an example to my clients by leaving my work at work. I have switched off email notifications on my mobile phone so nobody can reach me unless I want them to. Now the most I do is a bit of research on a Sunday night ahead of a Monday morning or some reading to aid my personal development.

### Are most weekends the same?

There are definite themes to my weekends, but they are rarely the same. There is often a walk of some kind involved. My wife is originally from the Lake District, so we often make weekend trips over there to see family and, weather permitting, walk the fells.

Food is also a big part of my weekend. Whether it is a pub lunch somewhere, home cooked food with family or friends or just a cosy night in with a takeaway, I am always thinking of my stomach!

That is not to say that every weekend is the same. I can be lounging on a boat moored off the Farne Islands one weekend and cycling the Coast to Coast the next.

If I am unlucky, my wife will collar me and get me to work on the growing to do list for around the house!

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

I hate to say it, but I do. I struggle to sleep at the best of times and even with my no work at home policy, I still on occasions fail to drift off for hours.

It is not always a terrible thing, as I often get my most creative thoughts at night. I have had many midnight epiphanies, which have caused sleepless nights due to pure excitement to get back to the office.

### What do you do at a weekend which you cannot fit in through the week?

Plenty of things! First and foremost, is to spend quality time with my wife. She is a nurse at the Freeman Hospital and works long hours during the week. She often comes home, eats, jumps in the shower then heads straight to bed and starts the cycle again. The weekend serves as a period for us to catch up and reconnect.

Secondly is to cook properly. My midweek cooking more resembles an episode of "Ready Steady Cook" where I just try and use up what is in the cupboards. However, the weekend is a chance to take some time to cook properly; bake some Sourdough, make a lasagne from scratch or a Sunday Roast with all the trimmings.

Thirdly is a chance to read and catch up on some podcasts, which pile up over the course of the week.

### Morning exercise or a recovery lie in?

I do find a morning jog to be rejuvenating but coaxing myself out into the cold purely on the promise of a potential endorphin rush at some point can be a tough ask.

If I have managed to drag myself around Jesmond Dene a couple of times, then I will treat myself to a bacon sandwich like all athletes do!

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

Both! A perfect weekend can consist of being cramped around a table in a loud and rambunctious pub with friends and a few beers. Equally I can be just as happy being sat at home with my better half pretending that I do not like watching Strictly.

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

I used to play sport 10 years ago where my weekends were organised around travelling around the North-East, from Berwick to Guisborough, playing Rugby. Several injuries in quick succession brought my playing career to an end in Icarus like fashion. Now I am content to volunteer at my local club and watch from the sidelines and age gracefully.

### Where do you like to eat out at a weekend?

So many wonderful places! It is another indication of how fantastic the North East is to live in. My parents live up the Tyne Valley where there are so many great foody pubs, like The Feathers on Hedley on the Hill, or the Duke of Wellington at Newton. On the Coast, we have some amazing fish eateries in truly stunning locations, like Riley's Fish Shack on King Edwards Bay or The Bait Shack up at Beadnell. If it is a special treat, like a birthday, my family's go-to is 21 on the Quayside.

However, if we are staying local then we often head to Lezzet at Four Lane Ends, which has some of the best Turkish food in the city.

### How important is the weekend to you?

I went to boarding school where weekends did not really exist, as we had school lessons on a Saturday morning followed by an afternoon of sport, then early morning Chapel on a Sunday before getting some free time. This gave me an appreciation for my time off in later life.

For me it provides that all important period of rest and reflection. It also gives me that complete freedom to do my own thing and exist outside of work. I always tell clients, just because we spend 5/7th of our time at work does not mean it should be 5/7th of our personality.

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

There are so many things, which deserve honourable mentions. The first coffee of the day on a sunny morning, the lazy brunches, the pub lunches, the bracing walks.

However, what I always enjoy, even since I was a child, is the feeling you get for the first 15 seconds of waking up when the initial blind panic of thinking you are late for something subsides and you realise it is a weekend. A feeling that cannot be topped.

### Of a weekend, you'll usually find me...

Doing exactly what I want to do, with the people I care most about. The more impulsive the better!

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[jspoor@robson-laidler.co.uk](mailto:jspoor@robson-laidler.co.uk)





“

...The weekend  
serves as a period for  
us to catch up and  
reconnect...



CCC-93



## MAVEN LEADS £410,000 INVESTMENT IN CRL FOODS FOLLOWING TRANSFORMATIONAL CONTRACT WINS

Innovative food and drink manufacturer secures further regional development funding to scale following strong sales activity and customer acquisition

The North East Development Capital Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund has led a £410,000 investment in Newcastle-based CRL Foods, a specialist food & beverage canning, sterilisation and pasteurisation business. The Fund originally invested last year to enable the business to expand its team, creating seven new jobs in Newcastle and increase its production capacity.

Today's funding package will allow the business to purchase new equipment and add additional production lines to its growing factory to service a number of transformational contract wins.

CRL Foods continues to provide differentiated thermal processing technologies to sterilise and pasteurise food and drink with the ability to heat and cool products at market leading speeds which eliminates over processing. The business supports several well-known global customers within the industry that supply both under their own brand and on a white label to most of the major supermarkets in the UK. Since Maven invested last year, the company has enjoyed strong growth

with a number of major contract wins. The management team also grown by the appointment of experienced financial specialist Rob Jones as Finance Director and Callum Ruffman as Operations Director, with a wealth of industry experience previously working for Lanchester Wines and Hike Coffee.

Whilst the international food and drinks markets are boosted by continued consumer changes towards convenience and healthy living, CRL is seeing strong demand following the reopening of the main coffee chains post pandemic and other major brands are seeking to move part of their supply chain back to the UK due to the current inflation in haulage costs. The business is also well positioned to deliver the pasteurisation process to USDA and FDA standards, exploiting its technologies to do this at a higher standard and a lower cost.

David Nixon, Investment Manager at Maven, said: "CRL Foods has enjoyed very strong growth in 2021 and secured a number of major contract wins, alongside its impressive customer base it supported when we first invested. Following new appointments to

the management team and strong sales activity throughout the year we are delighted to further support David and the rest of the CRL Foods team at an exciting time in the company's expansion."

David Lambert, CEO of CRL Foods, said: "Our decision to move to 100% aluminium cans, thereby replacing plastic as a fully sustainable way to eliminate packaging waste in a wide range of food and beverage applications in 2021, has enabled significant growth since the business was started in 2019. Our unique and patented brewing and retort processing methods have also made CRL Foods the first choice for RTD Coffee customers Worldwide, with 'Geordie Coffee' now being enjoyed from Singapore to Europe and the Middle East as well as the United States."

***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.***



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abroad



Investing in  
new products



Hiring a  
new team



Filling gaps in  
working capital

If your business is in need of funding to help unlock its growth potential, please contact Maven's local investment team on:

**E: [northeast-enquiries@mavencp.com](mailto:northeast-enquiries@mavencp.com) | T: 0191 731 8590 | [funds.mavencp.com/nedcf](https://funds.mavencp.com/nedcf)**

# PRESTIGE CAR FINANCE PROVIDES CUSTOMERS WITH A LICENCE TO THRILL



Allan Hetherington alongside 2016 Jaguar C-X75 Chassis 001, which featured in James Bond film, Spectre.

Allan Hetherington, prestige finance development director at Anglo Scottish Asset Finance, which has its headquarters in Durham, reveals the company can offer customers the James Bond experience, thanks to its specialist finance service on prestige cars ranging from £25,000 to in excess of £1 million.

Anglo Scottish provides a range of financial services across the UK, including asset finance, business loans, vendor and dealer finance, as well as personal vehicle solutions and vehicle sourcing.

An interesting fact, we undertook some research recently and found the biggest selling prestige car, for both males and females, within the £25,000 to £75,000 price range and £75,000 to £150,000 range, is the Range Rover Sport. No doubt, it's a brilliant car but there are so many wonderful prestige cars on the market.

Since launching our prestige car finance service in 2020, it has gone from strength-to-strength. So much so, we have doubled down on our focus and fine-tuned our offering in order to provide a highly specialist service.

We offer finance on a range of prestige vehicles, starting from those in the £25,000 to £75,000 price band, such as BMW, Audi and Range Rover, to the £75,000 to £150,000 price band and those in excess of £150,000 such as Lamborghini Huracan,

Porsche and Ferrari. In addition, we also offer finance and equity release on supercars like the Urus and LaFerrari.

Despite the pandemic, we have seen a huge uptick in the number of enquiries, referrals and recommendations regarding the service, whilst also increasing our relationships with major prestige car dealers throughout the UK. This has resulted in a 60% increase in enquiries year-on-year.

The expertise amongst our specialist prestige finance team, along with our customer-centric approach to business, means we are able to take the time to listen to what our customers are looking for and find the best solution via our vast panel of lenders.

Following an initial conversation with our expert team, and with the best finance deal in place, we work closely with the dealership and lender to make sure everything runs smoothly. Thanks to our streamlined processes, in most instances, for the straightforward cases our customers drive away with their new car within a few hours.

For more complex deals, we aim to have them driving away within 72 hours.

We are also able to offer classic car finance, for example, the car synonymous with James Bond, the Aston Martin. For customers looking to raise capital, we offer equity release on cars already owned outright or by re-financing their current agreements.

As a business, we like to keep up with trends and to monitor what interests our customers the most, as this is how we are able to continuously deliver exemplar service.

It is our priority to provide the best experience in the market and make life as simple as possible for our customers. In many ways, we moved in to this area of finance to ensure our existing clients on the asset side were receiving the best finance possible in this area, via our extensive panel of lenders.

**For more information**  
[www.angloscottishfinance.co.uk/  
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"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

accelerated business sales, corporate restructuring and terminal 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.*

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[greg@northpoint.co.uk](mailto:greg@northpoint.co.uk)

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Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the management team of Nigel Wright Group Holdings Limited on the secondary Management Buyout (MBO) of the business.

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**HW**  
GLOBAL TALENT PARTNER

Provision of Corporate Finance advice to HW Global on the acquisition of 60% of digital staffing business, Osmii Limited.

### eCommerce Agency

**F**

Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the shareholders of Fostr Limited on the sale of the business to IDHL Group backed by Bridgepoint Development Capital.

### Industrial Manufacturing

**KOMATSU**

Provision of Corporate Finance and Tax advice to the MBO team on their acquisition of Komatsu UK's conveyor operations, establishing a new business, SE-TEK Ltd.

### Industrial Pipe Systems Distributor

**@p c o**

Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the shareholders of epco Limited on the sale of the business to Mega Group Trade Holding B.V., backed by Nimbus.

### Technology Recruitment

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Provision of Corporate Finance advice to the management of Energize Group on their MBO of the business, in a deal funded by Caple.

### Industrial Services

**WESCOTT  
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Provision of Corporate Finance advice and tax due diligence to Wescott Industrial Services Limited, on its acquisition of scaffolding provider S.G.S. Ltd.

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CONSULTANCY

Provision of Corporate Finance advice to e-Quality Solutions Group on the acquisition of Challenge Consultancy Limited.



## HAY & KILNER LAW FIRM INVESTS IN BUILDING COMMERCIAL PROPERTY TEAM

North East law firm Hay & Kilner has made a major investment in its commercial property department by recruiting one of the region's leading lawyers in the field and the rest of his expert team John Morgan has joined the Newcastle-headquartered firm as a partner, with five members of the team from his previous firm following suit.

Jennifer Boynton and Rebecca Brown have taken associate and solicitor roles with Hay & Kilner respectively, while Charlotte Munroe and Inna Ratsebarska have been recruited as paralegals.

Lisa Day has also joined the firm as an executive PA, and is working to support the firm's management board as well as continuing to support John and the commercial property team. Hay & Kilner, which celebrated its 75th anniversary last year, is one of North East England's leading independent law firms and provides comprehensive legal advice across every aspect of the law to



businesses and individuals from both within and outside the region.

Nicola Tiffen, partner and head of the commercial property department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm, adds: "Being able to attract a team of this calibre says a great deal about the quality of the firm's offering and the opportunities we can provide for John and his team to achieve their ambitions."

"John is a highly-regarded and experienced practitioner with a deep commitment to the North East and we're extremely pleased to have him and his team on board."



## EXPANSION OF PRIVATE CLIENT TEAM AT MINCOFFS

Newcastle based law firm, Mincoffs Solicitors has appointed a solicitor to its Wills and Probate team and a new head of department has been promoted from within.

Associate Solicitor, Lydia McCaslin has been promoted to Head of Wills and Probate. Lydia has worked in Wills, Probate and Trusts since she qualified as a solicitor in 2005 and joined Mincoffs in 2018.

Janine Kennedy joins the Wills and

Probate team as an Associate Solicitor. Qualifying as a solicitor in 2005, she specialises in the areas of Wills, Probate, Court of Protection and Property Trusts.

Both are members of the Society of Trust and Estate Practitioners (STEP) and Solicitors for the Elderly. Speaking of the appointments Lydia commented: "It is an exciting start to the year for the team as I take on the head of department role and we welcome Janine who is already fitting in very well."

Janine added "I am excited to have joined such a highly regarded and well established team and I am looking forward to what the future holds."

## MHA TAIT WALKER WELCOMES NEW ASSOCIATE PARTNER

Leading accountancy and advisory firm MHA Tait Walker has strengthened its Partner Group by promoting Claire Hinshaw to Associate Partner.

Claire is a certified chartered accountant with more than 25 years of experience. She started her career and qualified with a national practice based in the North East before moving to PwC Newcastle. She joined MHA Tait Walker in 2016.

Claire is passionate about staff training and wellbeing and in her new role will work closely with the Partner's to continue to embed its importance across the firm.

Claire said: "I am delighted to join the Partner Group. Learning and development is key to everything we do as a firm and I will continue to drive change so we provide



the very best service to our clients, attract others and provide a first-class learning

environment for our teams to develop their careers.

"Business growth will also be a key area of focus, particularly across our audit clients, where we have continued to expand our client base year on year."

Andrew Moorby, Managing Partner said: "It's great to promote another partner within the firm. Claire is an excellent addition. Her experience, in-depth knowledge of the business and commitment to doing an excellent job for clients, exemplifies the qualities we look for in our Partner's and which we bring to our clients across a wide range of sectors."

MHA Tait Walker now has a total of 12 partners across its six offices. In total, the firm employs more than 170 people.



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# SOLICITOR OF THE MONTH

## JOHN MORGAN

Hay & Kilner Law Firm, Newcastle

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

I am partner in the specialist commercial property department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle.

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

I wanted to be a lawyer from around the age of 13. Initially, criminal law was where my ambitions lay, but my focus changed at university, and I felt that property law was a better fit for my way of thinking.

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

I took a law degree at Northumbria University and have since spent more than 15 years working in practice as a commercial property specialist with leading North East law firms, a period which has included several years spent leading my own departments.

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

When the credit crunch hit in 2008, I changed my specialism almost overnight and quickly became a property insolvency specialist. It was a very steep learning curve within an extremely difficult economic situation, but I relished the challenge and enjoyed the work that came my way.

Taking responsibility for managing my own team was also a big step up when it first happened. It changed the parameters of my role and gave me additional strategic management and business development dimensions to consider alongside the core function of being a lawyer. I was well supported through the transition by my firm and was quickly able to extend my skillset to meet the new requirements of my extended role.

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

Fiona Bruce – not the TV presenter, but the Christian lawyer and politician, who has shown through her work that lawyers can be humans too.

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

I feel the same way about legal fiction as my wife, who is a speech therapist, feels about medical fiction when characters do things incorrectly or in ways that simply wouldn't happen – fictional lawyers make me grumpy!

### What is your greatest strength?

Building relationships is absolutely key to my work, whether this is with clients, industry contacts or my colleagues, and my focus is always on being the sort of team player that helps everyone to reach their objectives.

### What is your biggest weakness?

I'm something of a worrier and will wake up in the night thinking about the work I've been doing and wondering what I might have done differently.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

Having moved here with my team at the start of the year, I view Hay & Kilner as my 'forever home' and want to help the practice realise the huge potential that exists here, both within my own department and right across the practice.

Working as part of a full-service firm means the comprehensive wider range of advice and support that property clients often require is right on hand, which will help us help them to achieve their personal and commercial goals.

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

Technology will become ever more central to the legal sector over the coming decade and the challenge for us as practitioners will be to make sure we keep up with progress. The human element of the work we do will remain central, but there will be opportunities to use technology to enhance it and we will need to be nimble to ensure we can take advantage of them.

### How do you like to unwind?

Spending time with my family is my priority, and spare time is quite a precious commodity as I have lots of activities that fill my hours away from the office, including leading a church group, singing in a worship choir and running a Boys' Brigade group. I also enjoy hillwalking whenever time allows.

[john.morgan@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:john.morgan@hay-kilner.co.uk)

0191 232 8345

[www.hay-kilner.co.uk](http://www.hay-kilner.co.uk)



“

**...fictional lawyers  
make me grumpy...**



# MUCKLE LLP TAKES TRAINEE SOLICITOR TALLY TO TEN



North East leading independent law firm for businesses Muckle LLP has continued its growth with the appointment of five new trainee solicitors, taking its current total to ten.

Consistently recognised as one of the best places to work in the North East, the forward-thinking law firm was keen to continue investing in its people and future talent throughout the pandemic. All 10 trainees are undertaking their solicitor training at Muckle, where they will spend six months in different practice areas.

Durham University law graduate, Carla Boaks had paralegal experience in property disputes before completing her LPC at Northumbria University. She has taken her first seat at Muckle in the Real Estate team.

Carla is joined in the Real Estate team by Northumbria University MLaw graduate Craig Harvey, who was attracted by the firm's friendly and supportive culture, strong commercial credentials and activities such as the Muckle Runners.

Daniel Montana has taken his first seat in the Employment team, where he is assisting with contracts and preparing for tribunals.

Newcastle University law graduate Eaden Hardcastle takes her first seat in the Corporate team, where she assists with transactional and company law matters.

Jaxson Hind joins Muckle's Corporate team where he assists in share and asset sales, private equity investments, corporate restructuring, company law and compliance issues.

The latest trainee solicitors join Georgia Sproat (third seat, Banking and Restructuring team), Kieran O'Donoghue (third seat, Commercial team), Olivia Tindle (third seat, Construction and Engineering team), Gillian Scribbins (fourth seat,

Dispute Resolution team) and Rachel Templeman (fourth seat, Real Estate Dispute Resolution team).

Jason Wainwright, Muckle managing partner, said: "It is more important than ever to invest in future talent and to support the growth of our business. We have pride in our people and they are at the heart of everything that we do. Our firm is frequently considered one of the best places to work in the North East. We're especially proud to have been reaccredited for Investors in People Gold Award, being ranked 2nd in the world for our class of business.

"Attracting, developing and supporting our trainees and looking after their health and wellbeing is very important to us. As our business continues to grow there is no shortage of tremendous work experiences for them. We're delighted to welcome them all to the Muckle family."

**For more information about joining the Muckle team visit [muckle-llp.com/careers](https://muckle-llp.com/careers)**



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muckle<sup>LLP</sup>  




Natalie Cavanagh

## SOLICITOR APPRENTICESHIPS WITH PGS LAW LLP

The firm recently moved premises into their new home as part of its expansion plan and the local council's 365 Regeneration Scheme.

The solicitors practice is now based at Law Court Chambers, 22 Denmark Centre on Fowler Street, and their move supports South Tyneside Council's regeneration of Waterloo Square and Fowler Street.

In November, they formed a new partnership with the University of Law to deliver their training for Solicitor Apprenticeships. They chose the University of Law because of the quality and flexibility of its programmes.

The University of Law delivers LLB Solicitor Apprenticeships for those starting post-A Level or L3 CILEX, and Solicitor

Graduate Apprenticeships for those starting post-degree. Apprenticeships offer employers and individuals a range of tailored options, all of which develop individuals' wider business skills as well as their legal and job-specific knowledge.

It is now possible for future lawyers to take an apprenticeship route all the way from leaving school to qualification as a solicitor, or to complete an apprenticeship programme after a first degree. This is a rigorous and structured programme of up to five and a half years, providing the opportunity for both new and existing staff at PGS Law to qualify as a solicitor

and gain an LLB qualification.

Natalie Cavanagh is their first participant. Having joined the business in 2019 as a Business Administration Apprentice, Natalie has worked in the Administration, Probate, and Family departments, which gave her a good foundation in all aspects of working life in a legal firm.

She started her Solicitor Apprenticeship course in January, and this will ultimately lead to her qualifying as a solicitor in 2028. In commenting on the course, Natalie said, "I am thrilled to be the first member of the firm to participate in the course with the University of Law, and I am excited to build upon the knowledge I have already gained from my time at PGS Law."

Hopefully, Natalie is the first of many at PGS Law who will take the apprenticeship route, and her experience of the course, as she progresses, will help all those that follow her.

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# UNVACCINATED EMPLOYEES AND OCCUPATIONAL SICK PAY

Nathan May is a Solicitor at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Nathan May considers the implications of changing an occupational sick pay policy for unvaccinated employees.



Nathan May

COVID-19 has required employers to balance the impact of the Pandemic on their employees alongside the impact on their business. Managing sickness absence and sick pay has been one key issue, as days lost not only due to illness, but also as a result of periods of self-isolation, will have significantly increased. The rules surrounding self-isolation are now less strict with "double-jabbed" employees not required to self-isolate unless they test positive or have symptoms. However, unvaccinated employees, who are a "close contact" of someone who tested positive for COVID-19, are still required to self-isolate.

Probably in response to this, notable businesses, such as IKEA and Morrisons, have decided to cut occupational sick pay for unvaccinated employees who have to self-isolate. How a company chooses to deal with this, will be a business sensitive decision that requires an analysis of the pros and cons.

## The terms of an Occupational Sick Pay (OSP) Policy

The first consideration should be to consult your OSP policy. For some employers, OSP will be a contractual entitlement, while for others, it will be discretionary. Considering the former, some policies may be drafted in such a way that "self-isolating" will not amount to "illness" and therefore not attract OSP. In such circumstances, the employee may only be able to claim SSP. However, during the height of the Pandemic, many employers either formally changed or

informally adopted practices where those who were self-isolating were paid full OSP, regardless of their vaccination status.

In such circumstances, it is arguable that an employee could bring a breach of contract and/or unlawful deductions from wages claim(s) should employers seek to unilaterally change the position and stop paying OSP to non-vaccinated employees who are required to self-isolate.

## Discrimination and withholding sick pay

Another consideration when looking at changing how OSP operates is to ensure that such change does not discriminate unvaccinated employees. A broad brush approach, where all unvaccinated employees are treated in the same manner, could be risky as some individuals will be medically exempt from being vaccinated or may have other valid reasons for not being vaccinated. Data also suggests there is vaccine hesitancy in certain ethnic groups and in women looking to conceive. Any failure to consider this could expose the organisation to claims of discrimination.

While employers may be able to justify such a policy as a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, the risk of such claims should not be ignored.

## Is it worth bringing in this change?

Aside from risks surrounding contract changes and discrimination, there is also the issue of how employers will gather

information about their employees' vaccination status. Clearly if operating a different OSP scheme for unvaccinated employees, it will require the gathering of data about all employees' vaccination status. This information would amount to special category data which attracts a higher degree of protection and can only be processed in limited circumstances.

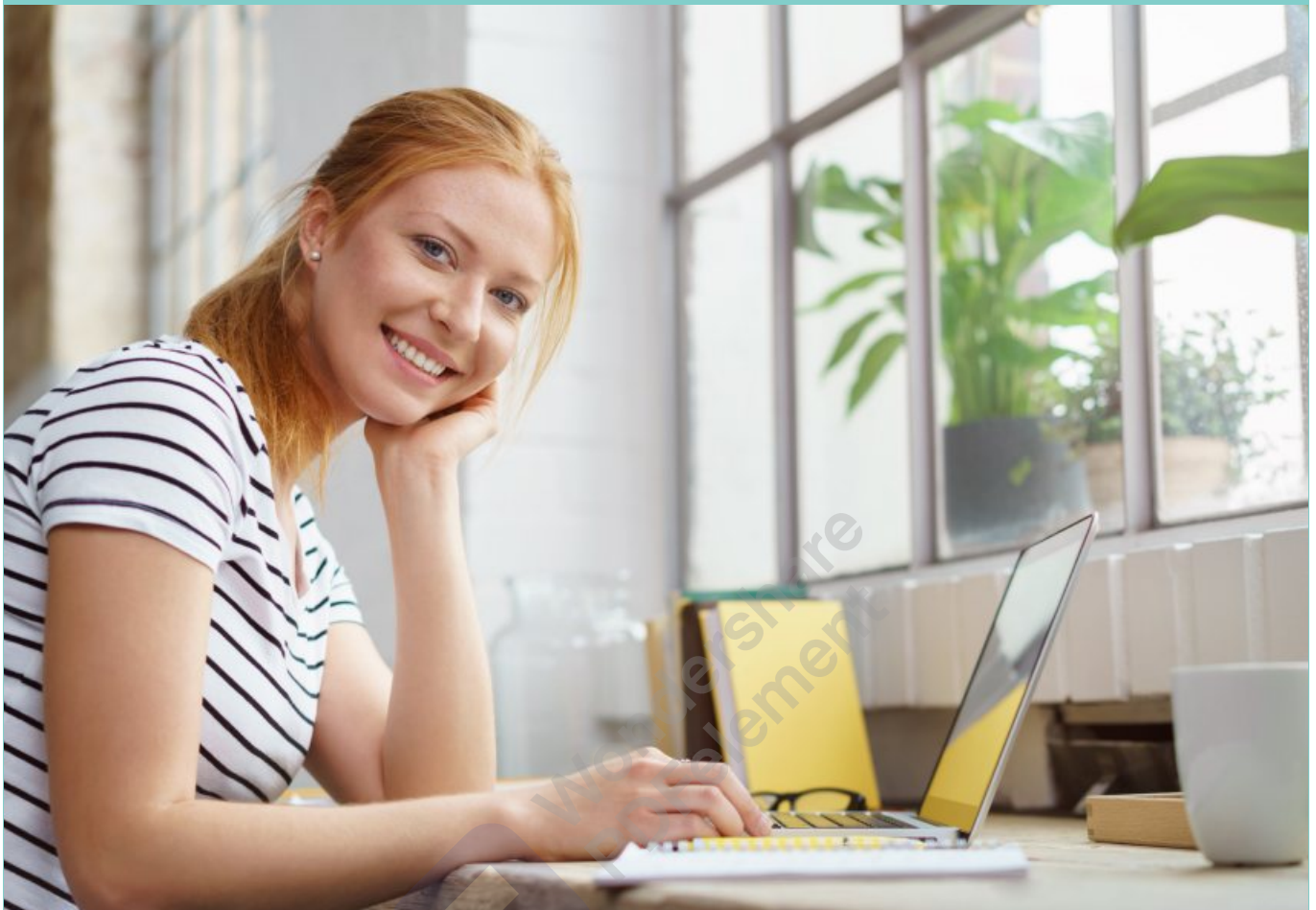
Before changing any OSP entitlements, it may also be important to consider if such a change may involuntarily risk discouraging unvaccinated employees from testing themselves or self-isolating if they cannot afford time off work on SSP. The impact this could have on the wellbeing of the workforce as a whole could be more costly than the potential OSP saving(s).

The imposition of such a policy may be justifiable in some specific sectors but it is worth considering whether there is a need to make such a differentiation, especially as the Government has announced that they are considering removing the requirement to self-isolate altogether, even for individuals who are COVID-19 positive.

**Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide expert advice to organisations on all areas of employment law, including COVID-19 queries. To find out more, contact Nathan May at [Nathan.May@collingwoodlegal.com](mailto:Nathan.May@collingwoodlegal.com), or call 0191 282 2872. [www.collingwoodlegal.com](http://www.collingwoodlegal.com)**



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Rebecca Cresswell, Head of Litigation and Family Department



# THE NEW 'NON-FAULT DIVORCE' – MAKE SURE YOU CONSIDER YOUR FINANCIAL POSITION!

The Divorce, Dissolution and Separation Act 2020 will change the way we deal with divorce and separation. You will no longer be required to raise your partner's conduct to obtain a divorce or separation such the most commonly used grounds of adultery (for opposite sex couples), unreasonable behaviour, or wait at least two years to prove that your marriage or civil partnership has irretrievably broken down.

The new "Non-Fault Divorce" is expected to come into force in both England and Wales on 6th April 2022 and will bring an end to the current standpoint. Some elements remain the same in that the condition that divorce is still based upon the irretrievable breakdown of a marriage. However, separating couples can decide to make a joint application where there is a general agreement that the relationship has broken down, or there can be a sole application where one of the parties may apply for the divorce.

We have spoken to a lot of clients who want to wait until April to start the divorce process so that it can be more amicable, but a lot of people do not know there shall be a minimum of 20 weeks between issuing the application and reaching Conditional divorce/separation, you will then still need to apply for the final stage of the divorce. The 20-week period gives the parties the opportunity to reflect upon their relationship and opens the possibility of reconciliation.

However, where assets are transferred or disposed of such as transferring a property to your spouse, this could give rise to capital gains tax (CGT) if the transfer takes place the tax year after separation. It is vital that you obtain advice before 5 April. If couples separate at the beginning of the tax year (on 6 April), they will still be able to transfer assets without any CGT liability up until the end of the tax year on the following 5 April. However, where a couple permanently separate at the end of the tax year there will be little time to transfer assets without paying CGT.

We find many couples separate and one party leaves the family home. This can create issues if the family home is later sold as part of the divorce. A potentially very valuable relief called "Principal Private Residence Relief" (PPR) can be available upon sale or transfer of a dwelling house which has been the owner's only or main residence.

However, if the departing spouse has not used the family home as their primary residence during the period since moving out, PPR may not apply in full to their share. Currently, the potential tax-payer is eligible for relief for a nine month period even if that house is no longer their main residence.

In November 2021, the Government reviewed the CGT position for separating couples and recommended that the "no gain/no loss" window on separation will be extended to the later of either: -

- A) The end of a tax year at least two years after the separation event, or
- B) Any reasonable time set for the transfer of assets in accordance with the financial agreement approved by a court.

This is unlikely to come into effect before the non-fault divorce, therefore it is important you obtain advice at this early stage and think carefully about your tax consequences of delaying the divorce.

At Sweeney Miller Law we urge you to seek independent legal advice on your individual circumstances as not all cases are dealt with the same.

*If you would like to arrange a free consultation, please contact us today on 0345 900 5401 or email [Rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:Rebecca@sweeneymiller.co.uk)*

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# WHY THE CONVEYANCING SECTOR MUST CONTINUE TO EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY IN 2022



Over the past decade, there are few industries that the digital revolution hasn't touched – and conveyancing is no exception.

Here, Jo Grey, legal director at Grey Smith Legal, talks about the impact that technology has had on the sector, and what's next for the industry.

Digital technology has accelerated and spearheaded growth across industries, and that includes ours.

In the olden days – just a few years ago, relatively speaking – the law in general, and conveyancing in particular, was a labour-intensive field, with the bulk of information still kept as paper copies.

This was time-consuming and unsustainable, leading to a poorer client experience overall and the potential for costly delays and mistakes.

However, over recent years, the power of technology has been harnessed across a number of aspects of the conveyancing profession, making the sector fully equipped for the demands of today's housing industry.

## Electronic signatures

One of the simplest yet most revolutionary advances has been the electronic signature, which negates the need for clients to trek to their solicitor's office to sign every last document.

With e-signatures, clients can sign each piece of documentation as and when it is available, as opposed to when they can next get time off – speeding up the entire house-buying process.

In 2020, no less an institution than the Land Registry signalled that they would start accepting digital signatures as well as wet-ink ones, prompted in part by the difficulties of obtaining real-life versions during repeated lockdowns.

However, it has also issued guidelines for their use, to guard against potential misuse and fraud – something that, unfortunately, digitalisation can sometimes make easier.

## Digital register

While the Land Registry has been digital, in some regards, since 1993, and has offered an online customer portal for nearly five years, later this year it will launch its first mandatory digital service.

From November, it will only accept digital applications for changes to existing Register Update applications (AP1s) – not scanned or PDF copies – in what it said would streamline the end-to-end conveyancing process.

In a blog announcing the change, the Land Registry's chief executive Simon Hayes wrote: "The pandemic has changed the way we work over the past 20 months, especially in the use of technology.

"With more of us working from home, the ability to access and work on documents online at all times has become even more critical for all of us, and the move towards paperless systems and processes has accelerated."

The portal, which has been live testing since April 2021, has already handled more than 100,000 applications submitted digitally and certain applications have seen a 25 per cent reduction in errors, which are checked automatically.

## Virtual onboarding

Conveyancing involves a lot of form-filling, much of the time with fairly standard information – something many clients, in these days of online life, find alienating.

Digital client onboarding for conveyancing matters could be the solution, something legal tech firm InfoTrack has started to offer.

Its eCOS platform uses a portal to connect law firms with their clients and digitally onboard them, thus condensing a process that used to take weeks into just a few hours. It also allows them to verify their clients' identity and funds securely, without the need to face-to-face interaction – something that has become increasingly important over the past couple of years.

The Land Registry has also launched its first Digital Identity Standard, which provides a secure way for firms to identify their clients digitally. The digital process reduces the risk of fraud, making transactions easier and faster, while also providing an example of best practice when it comes to adopting a digital-first outlook.

The trend for digital shows no sign of slowing down, and it is up to us as conveyancers to embrace it in order to continue to give all our clients the best service possible.

**For more information on Grey Smith Legal and its services, visit [grey-smithlegal.com](https://www.grey-smithlegal.com)**





# STRUCTURING JOINT VENTURES TO PROVIDE THE BEST CHANCE OF SUCCESS

By Ben Jackson, associate in the corporate & commercial department at Hay & Kilner Law Firm in Newcastle

One of the emerging corporate trends from the last couple of years has been the increase in the number of joint ventures that are being undertaken.

The imperative for this change is often about sharing the financial risks around a given project in what remains an uncertain economic situation, but there are also a range of benefits that can be derived from bringing together the different skills, knowledge and resources that the relevant parties can offer.

Many of these joint ventures have been around development sites, but they could equally apply to commercial property ventures or the creation of new businesses.

If you think a joint venture may be the best way forward for a particular project, the first consideration is identifying the best possible partner for what you have in mind.

You may already have contacts within your industry or wider business networks that you

think may be suitable, but taking the time to look at the track records of any other potential partners makes clear sense.

What can be equally important is the personal synergy between partners in a joint venture, as they are going to have to work closely over a significant period of time.

Finding out somewhere down the line that your chosen partner doesn't hold the same values or work ethic as you, or can't be trusted to fulfil their responsibilities, isn't going to help the chances of your enterprise being a success.

Once you've secured a partner (or partners), it's essential that you jointly agree who is going to have responsibility for which aspects of the project, what your objectives are, what success will look like and, perhaps most importantly, your exit route from the joint venture.

Agreeing this shared vision before work starts is the best way to prevent issues arising as the project progresses or nears completion, especially around identifying specific aspects of it that will need unanimous approval from all parties, such as the minimum value that any future offer to buy it from you needs to meet before it will be accepted.

Formalising this in a joint venture agreement removes any uncertainty and prevents situations arising that could potentially derail your plans.

Another key aspect is agreeing the corporate structure of the joint venture. While an agreement between two separate individuals or entities without a separate joint venture vehicle can work in some instances, our experience suggests that forming a limited company or limited liability partnership (LLP) brings benefits.

This includes the ability for the joint venture vehicle to enter into contracts in its own right, limiting the liability of the respective parties and formalising the distribution of funds on an exit.

Setting up a joint venture can significantly increase the chances of projects being successful, and by taking a planned, structured approach to doing so, you can maximise your chances of this being the case for your next venture.

***For advice on all aspects of forming, managing and exiting joint ventures, please contact Ben at [ben.jackson@hay-kilner.co.uk](mailto:ben.jackson@hay-kilner.co.uk)***



“  
...We are out of the blocks now  
and already building a solid  
reputation across the region...”

Craig Pratt and Sarah Wharrier

## CMYK NORTH EAST ON TRACK TO ACHIEVE A SEVEN FIGURE GROWTH

Newcastle based operation of national business technology provider CMYK is set to achieve some serious growth as they enter their second year operating across the region.

Northern Insight Magazine took a moment to catch up with Regional Sales Directors, Sarah Wharrier and Craig Pratt having recently finished their first year operating across the North East region. Having followed Craig and Sarah's journey since the launch of CMYK in Newcastle at the beginning on 2021, it's amazing to see the duo exceeding all expectations and firmly cementing CMYK as the go to provider for business technology across the North.





CMYK were delighted to round off 2021 celebrating with fellow industry leaders at the prestigious National PRINT IT Awards at the Royal Lancaster Hotel in London, where they received national recognition as 'Highly Commended' Reseller/Dealer of the Year. A huge achievement for the team at CMYK which further highlights they are committed to continuing to deliver exceptional service and value to their clients.

"We were delighted to receive this recognition, not only does it reflect the calibre of staff here at CMYK, but it also confirms the level of service clients can expect from us," says Sarah Wharrier. "Client testimonials form a large part of the awards process so it really is gratifying that so many businesses and individuals are prepared to praise us so highly for the exceptional service that we deliver."

As well as industry recognition, CMYK also had successes in other areas of the business by achieving 4 ISO accreditations during last year. Forming new partnerships and continuing to lead the way in sustainability with their Community Tree Planting Project.

"We are in a fantastic position looking ahead, we have built a solid footing for CMYK here in the North East. This footing will help to propel us forward as we continue to see substantial demand for our services with clients looking to partner with a dynamic, forward thinking business," adds Sarah. "The experience and skillset of our support functions has allowed us to capitalise on a fragmented market place. We are in the privileged position to offer clients one point of contact for all aspects of IT services, communications and document workflow to deliver the workplace of the future."

The last 12 months have been seriously busy for Craig and Sarah, and 2022 is all about building on this foundation and continuing to expand their growing client base across the North. It's safe to say they are definitely a business to watch.

Craig concluded by saying, "We are out of the blocks now and already building a solid reputation across the region as an ethical business technology provider, with expansion planned to ensure we meet the demand for our services. We are truly grateful to all our clients who have chosen to partner with us and we will continue to deliver on our promise to be a partner that adds value. We are extremely excited to see how this year plays out."

CMYK provides six core business offerings. These include; all aspects of Managed IT Services, Hardware and associated support, Managed Print & Integrated Scanning Services, Communications including both Hosted Telecoms and Mobile. They also provide business Connectivity, Cloud Services and Visitor Management Solutions.

CMYK...the business technology provider you can rely on and trust.

**For more information on how CMYK can support your business, you can reach them by calling 0191 389 7751 or emailing [c.pratt@cmky-digital.co.uk](mailto:c.pratt@cmky-digital.co.uk) or [s.wharrier@cmky-digital.co.uk](mailto:s.wharrier@cmky-digital.co.uk)**

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Launching a new operation in the middle of a global pandemic and uncertain financial times might have seemed like an ambitious plan at the time, but it's worked out perfectly. With demand for their services, the guidance and backing of the wider group leadership team has allowed Sarah and Craig, to find their feet and establish CMYK in what we now call the 'new normal'. After a hugely successful first year, coupled with the recent announcement of all restrictions being lifted and with several new staff appointments pending the sky is the absolute limit for CMYK.

In the space of 12 months, the firm has attracted new business from several of the North East's Top 200 firms with several large

projects still on-going. CMYK has also secured key business opportunities with some of the region's leading education, professional services and manufacturing organisations. Craig Pratt added "Based on current forecasts and on-going projects we are set to have an exceptional year, with seven figure growth completely achievable. Our focus during last year was to firmly put CMYK on the map and establish the CMYK brand across the region. Looking at the number of clients and names we've brought onboard in our journey so far confirms we've done a pretty good job at achieving this. However, the hard work continues! We know we still have a long road ahead and we are more focused than ever to continue to drive the business forward."



ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

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Ammar Mirza CBE

## JUST SAY NO

This was a hugely famous, catchy song from Grange Hill - a cult programme in the 1980s - with a very important message about saying no to drugs. The song went on to gain global recognition with the cast ending up at the American White House as part of a worldwide campaign with Nancy Reagan the First Lady.

Saying no to drugs must undoubtedly be a major challenge, especially for those that are sadly addicted or dependent, however in general life, the inability to say no can have painful consequences.

**As a serial entrepreneur and angel investor, probably one of the hardest things for me to do is say no.** God, I hate saying no. Yet it is critical to my own health and wealth to be able to say no, many more times than simply saying yes. Otherwise, I

would be overstretched, overworked and overwhelmed. Leading to burn out and being of no use to anyone.

We just need to look at the incredible impact of digital distractions to our daily lives, with work and home life being dictated by every ping on a computer, tablet or smart phone. **(Funny that the more I use the smart phone, the dumber I appear to become, even using it for simple calculations and spelling.)**

There are a number of times, within business, we should feel comfortable in saying no:

- **Bad ideas** – Sounds like a given, but I notice time and time again that who comes up with the idea can influence whether it is taken forward. **All ideas should be assessed on merit, effort to implement vs benefit realised.**
- **Good ideas** – Lots of organisations get easily distracted, stretched and then overcome. Assess each idea and align to the company's vision and goals. **Stick to the plan.**
- **Saying no to a client** – one of the most difficult things for any organisation to do, especially as they are fee paying. But one of the hardest lessons we learned, was that we cannot be everything to everyone, and changing our service offering to suit, **ended up costing us money and other customers.**

- **Saying no to a seller** – is it me or does everyone else get a gazillion asks to buy something on LinkedIn from someone who is going to transform our life. Whilst I genuinely believe it is a great platform for organisational growth, sadly, sellers don't always do their research and they offer me services that have no relevance or compete with our own.

**As a parent with persistent kids, saying no is one of the toughest things to do.** Of course, I want to see my children happy, and I love spoiling them -to the dismay of my wife. **In fact, the biggest buzz I get is to see others succeed and be happy.** However, I am not being fair on myself and those that I say yes to all of the time, if I later regret doing so or cannot deliver.

**For those of us that lived in the 1980's, in what now appear to be black and white days and are certainly prehistoric to my three and nine year-old children, we could all learn something from Zammo, Roland, Tucker and the gang, and just start saying no a little bit more. (Can't get the song out of my head now)**

**Ammar Mirza CBE is Chair & Founder of Asian Business Connexions, Chair of the NELEP Business Growth Board, Honorary Colonel of 101 Regiment RA and holds various positions across the public and private sectors.**





ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

## January ABCurry Club

### Road to Recovery Trust - George Street Social



### Road to Recovery Trust

"The Road to Recovery Trust hosted one of ABC's amazing Curry Clubs at our George Street Social Cafe. Those who attended were blown away with the warmth and welcome that was given by us. We have created a 'safe space' for anyone needing a place to go where they will not be judged or asked to leave.

Anyone on their recovery journey from addictions will receive nothing but love and care. Our cafe also offers a welcome to anyone just needing to chill or chat with colleagues or friends. We have lots of rooms for meetings, a creche (currently on certain days) and 3 projects that offer personal support, including a Psychotherapy Project, a Thriving in Recovery Project and a Wellbeing Project. You would be welcome anytime to George Street, Newcastle." - **Ranjana Bell MBE, Chair of the Road to Recovery Trust**

## Get Connected

The ABCurry Club's bring together the wider North East community to help you grow your network and gain valuable insights whilst enjoying some delicious curry.

Visit [www.abconnexions.org](http://www.abconnexions.org) to find out how you can get involved.

**ABC is a not-for-profit social enterprise that aims to connect, support and promote the Asian and wider community**

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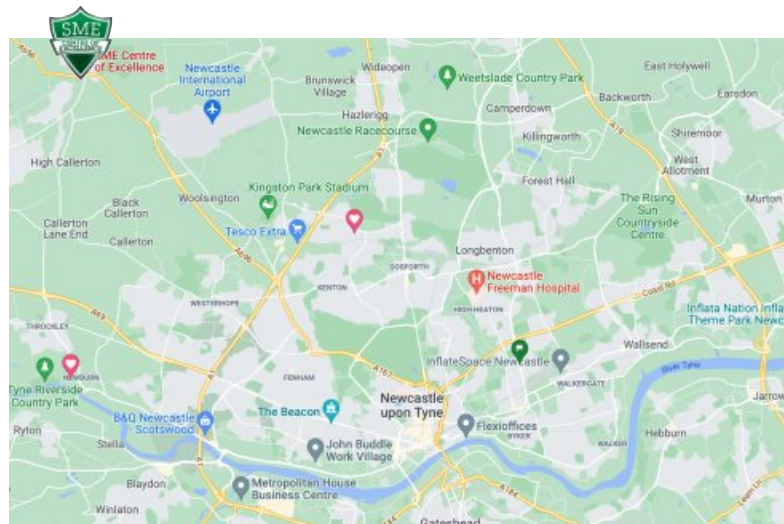
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# 3

# SSCL KICKSTARTING CAREERS



In September 2020, the Government launched the £2 billion landmark Kickstart scheme, to create thousands of new jobs for Britain's young people aged 16 - 24 at risk of long-term unemployment due to the pandemic.

SSCL is a values-based organisation. We have a strong commitment to social value, placing great emphasis on how our business activities can positively contribute to the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of our employees, local communities, and UK society in general.

It was this commitment which cemented our determination to support the Kickstart Scheme, having recently recruited 13,500 Department of Work and Pension (DWP) work coaches.

For SSCL, supporting this scheme allowed the company to give back to the young people in our local communities and offer more than just a six-month placement.

We wanted to offer a career path, with a broad range of qualifications and much needed experience, preparing each young person for the future.

Roles were advertised via regional Job Centres, supported by the SSCL HR team who attended job clubs to help potential candidates complete the application process. DWP Work Coaches also referred interested individuals who met the scheme's criteria.

In August 2021, SSCL recruited 10 young people from a range of backgrounds and experience onto a structured six-month programme of development. They joined

the business as Process Assistants split between SSCL Newcastle and SSCL York.

Each young person was allocated a trained mentor from within the business to support their development journey. Mentors helped them understand the business, its values, vision, and work practices, as well as setting milestones and objectives and preparing them for regular performance reviews.

The mentors were enthusiastic SSCL colleagues, keen to be involved, and volunteering their time to support and guide our Kickstart placements. Training was given to 20 volunteers - another wonderful example of how our people live our values.

What happened next?

At the start of 2022, feedback highlighted that all our placements had grown in confidence and ability through their experience of working in a corporate environment and the training they had received.

**Kickstart Scheme Placement: Kyle Cooper, Process Assistant, SSCL Government, said:** *"The Kickstart programme has been a game changer for me. It was lovely to be offered a chance in a hugely competitive job market (not an easy place for someone who was unemployed, with no work experience), and be offered a permanent role after the six-month kickstart period.*

*I have learned a great deal, not just how to be more effective and efficient in my overpayments role, but also developing my confidence and building relationships with the amazing people at SSCL. Everyone has been so welcoming and helpful, and I can honestly say that I love working here."*

Due to the success of the scheme and the hard work and commitment of each person, SSCL has now been able to offer all 10 placements a permanent role.

**Kerry Paylor, Head of HR, SSCL Government said:** *"Being involved in the Kickstart programme was the highlight of my year. It was great to get out of the house, visit the Job Centres and meet the potential placements face to face. Hearing their individual stories of employment and work experience; I knew that as a company SSCL had set up a special programme of support to help these young people be successful and gain confidence in their employability. The line manager support and the mentors that each placement received played a part in helping these young people to succeed. They have all worked hard and taken every opportunity to learn. I am so proud that they have all secured permanent roles in SSCL. I am hoping they go from strength to strength and continue to build a career with us."*

The Kickstart Scheme is a great example of businesses being able to support people, driving aspirations to succeed, and improving overall employability.

**To find out more about SSCL go to [sscl.com](https://sscl.com)**





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

## WHY NOW IS THE TIME TO INVEST IN AN ISO CERTIFICATION

Following a huge increase in demand for their services over the last twelve months, Sunderland based ISO consultancy, Compliant, are helping more and more businesses to gain UKAS accredited ISO certification.

Noticeably, with an increase in public sector opportunities, more businesses are looking to be included in tenders or apply to be on certain frameworks where a UKAS accredited ISO certification is now a standard requirement, this has led to an increase in enquiries and orders.

Sector specific standards such as ISO 27001 for Information Security are proving to be extremely popular with IT and recruitment industries with Compliant already securing several management systems in 2022.

As businesses start to recover from the pandemic, many are looking to invest and with many funding opportunities available, now is the time to gain these globally recognised standards. Businesses are also reaping the benefits of gaining ISO with Compliant as they improve employee performance, improve quality and customer service, increase efficiency and reduce costs.

Due to the increase in turnover and demand, the company have invested in bespoke ISO

management software to make their clients ISO journey as smooth and time efficient as possible.

Informative explainer videos have also recently been filmed which provide prospective clients with guidance and insights on the benefits of gaining ISO certifications, investment costs and timescales.

Digital marketing manager, Danielle Barry, commented, 'We are pleased with the continuing growth of the business over the last six months and excited for the year ahead, our strategy has included updating our brand, adding further features to our company website and now with the implementation of the management software, this has ensured we are a leading consultant in the industry. With our registered supplier status with local funding agencies such as NBSL, eligible businesses can access up to 40% funding from our costs which can be a fantastic opportunity.

Following regular questions from our clients on the benefits of gaining ISO, how long it can take and what costs are involved, we decided to produce a series of informative videos which are freely available on our website and YouTube channel. The videos, which are 2-3 minutes long feature our director, Mark Henderson, who himself is a BSI trained lead auditor, where he answers our frequently asked questions.

Many businesses are also taking the opportunity to access our monthly payment plan options which make gaining ISO an easier and more manageable investment, we look forward to growing the business further in 2022 and helping more businesses gain valuable ISO certifications.'

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





Tariq Albassam



# NE1 WORKING WITH PARTNERS TO PROVIDE A 5-STAR RETURN TO THE CITY

By Tariq Albassam, Director of Operations at NE1 Ltd

As Covid regulations ease NE1 is stepping up its efforts to make sure Newcastle is looking its best, ready to deliver a 5-star welcome for people returning to the city. Environmental cleanliness and getting the basics right have always been central to our remit. We know Newcastle can look great, but we are constantly striving to make it look even better and are focusing tremendous effort on the less glamorous parts of city centre management.

We have a small but dedicated Street Ranger and rapid-response Clean Team at NE1 who work tirelessly to keep the city looking its best, as well as providing an 'on the ground' presence to help Newcastle, its residents and visitors feel safe and secure. Our Clean Team are well known and respected by businesses and can be relied upon to be up cleaning the city before it comes to life each morning, plugging the gaps in Newcastle's street cleaning provision. Each year, the team removes almost 8,000 black binbags of litter from the city's streets and conducts over 5,000 rapid response call outs, whilst the Street Rangers, in their familiar blue jackets, provide a street patrol and report over 5,000 jobs to the Police and City Council.

The work of our Ranger and Clean Teams took on renewed vigour recently when we appointed two new contractors. When choosing who to run these services we made the conscious decision to keep the providers local. Both companies were selected for their expertise in their respective fields, ISIS in environmental services and Phoenix in security. The companies are as passionate about Newcastle as we are, and being smaller, local companies are adaptable and flexible with strong local knowledge and regional pride, which fits seamlessly with NE1 and our working practices, this benefits the city enormously.

Appointing these contractors has also freed us to focus on wider city centre issues and work more closely, in partnership with Northumbria Police and Newcastle City Council which is already having positive results.

We know it is difficult to get it right all of the time and change won't happen overnight, especially as we all operate within extremely tight budgets, but by working together we can make the most of our resources. We all have a part to play in resolving city centre issues and delivering improvements.

In addition to the 'on-the ground' presence, the NE1 Operations Team continues to work strategically to tackle on street problems and find solutions that can be rolled out across the city, a recent example of this is in waste management. The less than glamorous world of refuse collection and on-street bins is a recurring problem for businesses and the wider public in Newcastle. Large commercial bins on streets and in passageways is not just an unsightly eyesore, but also attract anti-social behaviour and can obstruct trading for surrounding businesses. Resolving the problem isn't always straightforward and often requires the cooperation of multiple businesses. We have had a number of notable successes in this area, all with major transformational results.

Starting with High Friars Lane near the Tyneside Cinema. We worked with local businesses to remove the bins from

the alley, relocating them to a secure store. This allowed the Tyneside to install a beautiful, fairy-lit overhead canopy covering the lane and the entrance to the cinema, as well as creating an outside dining area with tables and chairs replacing the unsightly bins.

Using our knowledge of what worked on High Friars Lane, we applied the same approach to High Bridge. The area was dogged by rubbish with at least 10 calls to NE1's Clean Team each week. Working with local businesses and the Council, we transformed the area, rationalising refuse collection and waste management cutting the number of bins enormously, from 47 down to 10. We negotiated with businesses to share the remaining bins and arranged a daily refuse collection. By encouraging businesses to share waste contracts, we cut costs, improved recycling and reduced the carbon footprint with fewer bin collections, and fewer bins meant storage could be arranged off the street.

We have achieved similar success again recently with Dean Street car park, one of the busiest in the city centre. The entrance to the car park used to be a major eyesore and waste management catastrophe, with overflowing bins and littering on the streets. Now the car park area has been cleared and lighting improved, we are even hoping to create an art installation to further revamp the area.

It takes time and patience to deliver these projects and requires a lot of skilful negotiation, but everyone benefits from improved waste management, with reduced business costs, increased recycling, and fewer bins on the streets.

We are trying to put together a long-term vision for the whole city which will, hopefully, shape the city's future waste management policy.

It is all too easy to underestimate and overlook the importance of getting the basics right believing that it is someone else's job. But it is everyone's job to keep the city tidy.

We want to encourage everyone to take pride in keeping the city clean and tidy, starting with the Great British Spring Clean 2022 from Friday 25 March to Sunday 10 April.

Let's roll up our sleeves to spruce up the city. We can't solve all the city's problems overnight, but we can work together to get the basics right. We hope that in 2022 we move one step closer to achieving this and encourage everyone to play their part.

**For details of the Great British Spring Clean please contact me at [tariq.albassam@newcastlene1ltd.com](mailto:tariq.albassam@newcastlene1ltd.com)  
[www.newcastlene1ltd.com](http://www.newcastlene1ltd.com)**

# TIME FOR A SALARY REVIEW?

Bryony Gibson, Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting, offers an insight into the recruitment market and the importance of knowing exactly how competitive your salary is.

At this time of the year, the most common question we get asked is whether we can support people with independent salary advice.

To be truthful, this is almost always on the minds of people looking for a new job but in February and March, as part of the annual planning cycle, the tables turn, and employers become very keen to understand how competitive they are.

While we would never breach the confidentiality of our clients and candidates, with over 20 years of experience working with public practices across the Northeast, we have the privilege of gaining extensive insight into average salaries across all levels of the industry. It's this broader picture that enables us to help firms determine whether or not they are paying the market rate.

## Market insight

Echoing our experience, the most recent KPMG and REC report on jobs found that easing pandemic restrictions have improved market confidence and given rise to a historically sharp uplift in recruitment activity.

With a scarcity of candidates, the knock-on effect is more upward pressure on starting rates of pay, which is now increasing at the third-fastest pace since records began, behind only October and November of last year.



Bryony Gibson

Couple this with sky-high household bills and rocketing inflation and it's easy to see why having an understanding of where your company's offer sits amongst your competitive set has never been so important. You simply cannot afford to get this wrong.

Specifically in the North-East, while we continue to see employees re-evaluating their work-life balance in the wake of Covid, there has also been a distinct rise in people searching for new roles purely for monetary reasons.

In a recent poll of business owners, 30% are planning no salary inflation rise for their teams this year, in contrast to 63% offering more than the standard 2%. However, with starting salaries rising between 10 and 15%, whether people are feeling underpaid and undervalued, want to work permanently from home, or have seen friends receive multiple job offers and move on to do the same role for more, people who are feeling the pinch are getting tired of it.

## What to consider

Right now, a standard inflationary increase applied to everyone in the business at the start of the new fiscal year is a good start, but it is only good enough if your salaries are on, or ahead of, market rate.

When speaking to our clients, we encourage them to set aside time to review salaries

quarterly. While it may sound like overkill, the market is changing at such speed, it will be time well spent.

In the world of accountancy, while professional qualifications have a benefit to your business, often practical experience is more valuable so, please, never base salaries on professional qualifications alone.

Of course, not everyone gets blinded by money. Each candidate is unique and there are more factors to consider but, if you are recruiting and think the person is right for you, we would urge you to offer your best salary first. This is not the time to scrimp and save and you don't want to be the one that falls at the last hurdle.

Regarding your existing team, making sure they know you value them is critical. When reviewing their salary, try asking yourself what life would be like if they were gone. Would they be easy to replace? Are they worth the top end of your salary range? If the answers are no and yes, it's probably a good time to up the ante as it's a competitive market out there.

The good news for business is that rising salaries won't keep increasing exponentially. And, when they do plateau, being in line with the market rate will make it much easier to not only recruit but is far less likely to upset anyone when a new team member joins on a higher salary.

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



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**BRYONY  
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CONSULTING**  
Jobs. Advice. Expertise.



# BRYONY GIBSON CONSULTING

## JOB OPPORTUNITIES...

### ACCOUNTANT

County Durham, c£30-45,000pa plus benefits, Office based

A small accountancy firm is looking to appoint a qualified (ACA/ACCA or by experience) Accountant as they enjoy new client engagements at the same time as forward plan for future retirement.

The firm place a strong emphasis upon building long lasting relationships with their clients, and as such are keen to attract an individual with the relevant technical experience. They are seeking a "people person" who enjoys developing relationships and engaging with clients.

As Accountant you will work with Sole Traders, Partnerships and in the main Limited companies all under the audit threshold from an array of sectors. Whilst the majority of clients use cloud based systems, some are still paper based, requiring the preparation of accounts from incomplete records. You will pick up the accounts from trial balance, with some involvement in bookkeeping and VAT, but predominantly the completion of more complex accounts in addition to review work for more junior members of the team. You will support the Manager deputising in their absence, so prior experience from the profession is required.

For those keen on progression the opportunity exists to work alongside the Partners supporting with client work and enhancing your technical knowledge. With succession planning in mind, for the right individual, future partnership is a consideration, but does not discount those comfortable at their existing level.

### OUTSOURCING MANAGER

Newcastle, £40-45,000pa plus benefits, Hybrid working

A prestigious accounting firm with a strong reputation are looking to appoint an Outsourcing Manager. With a preference to appoint a Management Accountant with leadership experience you will take accountability for the delivery of high quality management accounts to clients.

Your role will undertake staff management; monitoring workloads, quality of output, coaching, reviews and appraisals, team meetings, goal settings and the development of performance and procedures. You will also produce monthly management accounts and review your teams. More junior members will be involved in the transaction elements of accounting within outsourcing, for which you will also oversee. Furthermore, you will work with new clients, onboarding businesses and developing new relationships.

We are looking for a qualified Accountant (ACA/ACCA/CIMA) with strong technical and management skills. Motivated with a high standard of professionalism you will be organised, time conscious and an excellent communicator. A good working knowledge of accounting software would be beneficial, but most importantly is your ability to deliver meaningful management accounts.

To work effectively as a Manager, an office presence is required each week, with flexibility available. Applicants are welcomed from Practice and Industry.

### AUDIT ASSISTANT MANAGER

Newcastle, upto £42,000pa plus benefits, Hybrid working

A Newcastle audit firm is looking to appoint an Audit Assistant Manager to deliver high quality external audit services to a portfolio of varying sized clients, in a diverse range of sectors. The ability to understand the clients needs and the risks they face is at the heart of what they do and key to performing high quality audits.

Working direct with clients and internal stakeholders the opportunity presents a rewarding career path. Your day to day responsibilities will include audit planning for your team to regulatory standards; completing a variety of areas of audit work which includes the identification of issues, analysis of data, articulation of findings and the ability to draw informed conclusions; building meaningful relationships and demonstrating curiosity that will allow you to have insightful conversations and provide visible challenge during the Audit; delegation of work to others to allow for training; developing new insights and proposing innovative solutions to help

With rapid team expansion they would like to attract a qualified Chartered Accountant ACA/ACCA/ICAS or qualified by the equivalent audit experience. Current Audit Seniors will be considered too.

Part qualified applicants are also invited to apply provided they are time and exam qualified prior to start date. You must be able to demonstrate practical experience of IFRS and/or UK GAAP and international standards on auditing with strong organisational skills and the ability to undertake audits from start to finish.

### R&D TAX MANAGER

Newcastle, Upto £55,000pa, DOE, Hybrid working

Having achieved great success nationally helping clients to claim tax incentives for innovation and the creative sector, interest is welcomed from enthusiastic and skilled tax professionals with R&D experience to manage a portfolio of clients.

With previous exposure to managing client relationships along with the ability to develop new work you will be experienced in the technical aspects of R&D, able to lead a small team and provide training to junior members. You will be responsible for the management of workflow from initial engagement to planning and final delivery including technical and costing elements. Client support will focus around claiming corporation tax relief or credits for research & development, exploiting patents and producing creative content from video games through to TV programmes. You will advise on technical issues relating to R&D tax claims and other creative sector reliefs.

We are looking for a corporate tax specialist with practical experience in R&D, preferably CTA qualified, ATT to a minimum with good technical skills.

With plenty of progression, an attractive benefits package including bonus and flexible hours this presents as an excellent opportunity for corporate tax specialists seeking a niche.



Bethany Walker and  
Katie Molnar

# WHY YOUR INTERIOR DESIGN SHOULD REFLECT YOUR BRAND

Your brand encompasses everything your business stands for, from the way you communicate to the colours you use.

However, too many businesses still expect their employees to get their creative juices flowing in bland, identikit offices.

Bethany Walker, head of interior design at Styled, explains the importance of reflecting your brand in your interior design.

We've all heard of Google's infamous headquarters, in Mountain View, California, which are home to bowling alleys, Indian street food and sleep pods, among other mood-busting initiatives.

Then there's Airbnb's San Francisco base, which takes its inspiration from some of the iconic locations it hosts property in, and features vintage caravans, tents and an Egyptian-themed street café.

However, while most businesses don't have the space – or budget – for such large-scale operations, there are smaller ways in which

they can reflect their brand in their interior design.

## But why is it so important?

Well, think about it: pandemic notwithstanding, your staff will spend an average of eight hours a day at work. While they're there, you want them to live and breathe your brand, and the best way to inspire them is for them to feel, quite literally, immersed in it.

If you're a customer-facing business, there are also your clients to consider; the interior of your shop, restaurant or premises offers a valuable snapshot into your brand, allowing customers to see at a glance what you're offering – and if they want it.

You may not have space – or budget – for a slide, like Google, or a full-on village, like Microsoft, but there are plenty of ways to match your brand with your interior design.

## First impressions

To make sure your space reflects your brand, first you need to know what your brand is. Are you traditional, experienced, a safe pair of hands? Or maybe you're more forward-thinking, quirky, innovative?

There are so many ways to incorporate these elements into your spaces, from the colour you choose for the walls and floor to how you do, or don't, use accessories.

Different feels and finishes convey very different, almost subliminal messages; gold, clearly, is a signifier of wealth and success, while clean, white, minimalist spaces are often associated with innovation and forward-thinking.

On a smaller scale, for example, if you own a coffee shop and your brand is all about being cosy and relaxing, style your space with comfy chairs, muted lighting and soft music.

On the other hand, if your marketing firm is

all about being fast-paced and collaborative, make sure your office is brightly-lit and easy to move around in, with plenty of breakout areas for brainstorming.

Another key consideration at this point is your staff, who are, after all, a major part of your brand too. What do they want, how do they like to work and what do they need to do the best job they can?

## How to make it work

Of course, unless you're a huge business that owns your premises outright, it's going to be hard to make major changes, even down to painting the walls, so it's important that you work with what you've got.

Even if you inherit a plain white space, the conditions of which stipulate that you can't make any major changes, there's still plenty you can do.

Choose office chairs and decorations that match the colour of your logo, or highlight your eco-friendly ethos with plants and flowers – it all adds to the impression of your brand, and will look striking against a plain backdrop.

Pictures (or anything else you put on the wall) are also your friend here, as they are easy to move and remove, and can help you spell out your brand quickly and cheaply.

Office layout, too, is a relatively easy way to reflect your brand; are you going for an open-plan, collaborative working space, or do staff need space away from the rest of the team to focus?

Interior design doesn't need to cost a huge amount, but ultimately, it can have a huge impact on how both staff and clients feel about your brand.

**For more information about Styled and its interior design services for commercial and residential clients, visit [www.styledinteriordesign.co.uk](http://www.styledinteriordesign.co.uk)**



# THE RACE TO NET ZERO

As businesses and individuals, we all need to cut our carbon footprint, while the UK government has set a target of the country being carbon neutral by 2050 – called net zero.

It's a noble aim, but how can it be achieved in practice? Clare Galland, environmental and regulatory affairs manager at Everflow Water, the first carbon-neutral business water supplier in the UK, explains more.

Climate change affects us all, and particularly the water industry. Less predictable and more extreme weather is caused by carbon emissions from people and businesses using motor vehicles, heating, electricity and consuming more than we need. Without urgent action, this will lead to more heatwaves, droughts, water shortages, flooding and burst pipes for our customers.

All of this means that becoming carbon neutral is vital, and there are two elements to this. Cut your own emissions as much as possible, then offset those you can't avoid.

At Everflow, we're working on both elements, helping our business, our staff and our suppliers and partners to reduce their impact on the environment, while also taking external measures to neutralise the carbon that is unavoidable, including through our supply chain.

While water itself is seen as a renewable resource, the infrastructure around its use is actually quite carbon-heavy when you take elements such as treatment, distribution, and heating water into consideration.

## Carbon neutrality begins at home

Small changes can have a big impact, and we encourage all employees to do what they can, by thinking about the energy they use and cutting back where they can.

As part of this, we surveyed our employees to find out about their commuting habits and found that many of them were interested in converting to electric vehicles. We've listened to them and partnered with the Octopus employee electric vehicle salary sacrifice scheme, to help those interested access vehicles more affordably. We're also trying to buy refurbished electronics like laptops wherever we can.

As a fast-growing business, where and how we work is mostly in our control, and commuting is a key part of this. We're moving offices later this year and public transport, good cycling and walking links will all be considered when choosing where we move to.



Clare Galland

At the moment, we're renting space on an out-of-town business park, with access only by car, and no local shops where employees can buy lunch. While we're working with our landlord to encourage them to reduce emissions involved in running the business park, and more specifically on their water usage, our location and preference for face to face team working means that many of our employees have to use their cars.

## Customer care

As a customer-facing business, we also see it as our responsibility to help our customers to cut their carbon footprints.

We've recently appointed a new environmental services coordinator, who, as well as delivering our pilots of innovative efficiency products and services, will support us with roll out of a series of smart metering, water efficiency, and leak detection and repair products later this year.

We're on a mission to get our customers to save as much water as possible, which will incidentally reduce the carbon emissions associated with their water and wastewater services, and their water bills.

## When you can't cut, offset

As a water retailer, we don't actually supply the water ourselves and we know that our wholesalers have their own race to zero commitments - aiming for carbon neutrality by 2030 for all water supplies.

Until then, we're committed to offsetting the emissions from our own customers' volumetric water and wastewater supplies.

We've done this by buying 'buy to retire' (not tradeable) United Nations Clean Development Mechanism certified carbon credits from THG eco, which means that our customer contracts are fully carbon neutral from 2021 to 2023 inclusive, and our own business is carbon neutral since 2020 until end of 2023. These particular credits are supporting a renewable energy project in Hunan province, China. We bought credits for future years in advance, factoring in our own fast projected growth.

We've also just signed The Climate Pledge to achieve net zero by 2040, but we think we can achieve it in the next few years.

We use a lot of third parties for services such as meter reading, debt collection and changes of tenancy, and in 2020 these made up around 75 per cent of our own Scope 3 emissions. Therefore a further part of our commitment to achieving net zero by 2040 will focus on asking our suppliers and partners to reduce their own emissions, and show us their carbon reduction plans.

When the time comes to renewing or reviewing supplier contracts, we will require carbon reduction plans, and we'll include how well suppliers are performing on carbon emissions and reducing them in our scoring selection criteria.

Carbon neutrality is all of our business, and while continuously reducing your business's footprint is essential, offsetting is a valuable tool in the race to achieve net zero.

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



Michelle Rainbow

## NATIONAL CAREERS WEEK 2022 LAUNCHES IN THE NORTH EAST

This year's National Careers Week will be launched in Newcastle upon Tyne, in recognition of pioneering work carried out in North East England to raise the standard of careers guidance for children and young people.

Michelle Rainbow, Skills Director at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), explains how businesses, schools and colleges have worked together to pilot new ways of delivering careers guidance.

The North East LEP is delighted to be co-hosting the launch of this year's National Careers Week. This is the first time this event has been held in the North of England and is recognition of the outstanding work of our partners across the region.

This is a fantastic chance for careers leaders, educators and employers to share best practice and knowledge on improving careers guidance. We are honoured to be joined at this year's launch by representatives from HM Government — an excellent opportunity to show off the incredible work happening in careers guidance across the country.

National Careers Week celebrates the power of careers guidance to change lives. It transforms students' futures, from better attainment in school to social mobility, with broader horizons and raised aspirations.

Careers guidance is central to our strategic plan at the North East LEP and we are proud of the hard work of our team, developing innovative approaches with schools and colleges.

We also recognise that change takes time. There is no quick fix to establishing the support and opportunities young people need. Improvements are hard-won and incremental over the long term. And we still have a long way to go. So National Careers Week is an invaluable opportunity to learn from challenges and build on achievements.

This year's theme is "you". At the launch, our morning sessions will focus on how you — as careers leaders, business leaders, educators and parents — can support young people to make informed choices about their future.

Sessions will cover the importance of understanding the labour market and how careers leaders can integrate this into the curriculum. We will look at ways to build sustainable and meaningful employer engagement with schools and colleges.

There will be a session on opportunity awareness and how to help students understand the full range of pathways open to them and where they lead. And we will also hear from young people about their experiences starting careers and developing skills for today's economy and for the future.

Each day over the rest of the week we will take up one of these four themes and celebrate achievements here in the North East. Schools and colleges will host events alongside campaigns, videos and articles — offline and on social media.

***Find out more about how businesses, schools and colleges can raise the standard of careers guidance, and help young people in the North East understand the range of pathways on offer to them, at [www.NorthEastAmbition.co.uk](http://www.NorthEastAmbition.co.uk)***





## North East Growth Hub: More than just a website

“It was good to know we weren’t alone and there was somebody there the whole time who we could contact and ask questions.”

Abigail Nelson, co-founder of food innovation business XL Plant Based.

From peer networks to mentoring, the North East Growth Hub connects businesses to the support they need to grow.

**Book an appointment with our Connectors**

0191 561 5468 • [info@northeastgrowthhub.co.uk](mailto:info@northeastgrowthhub.co.uk)



North East  
Growth Hub

[northeastgrowthhub.co.uk](https://northeastgrowthhub.co.uk)



Louise Kennedy



## SPOTLIGHT ON HYBRID WORKING WITH OCULUS HR

Sunderland based HR agency, Oculus HR provide innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs through their dedicated and holistic approach. This month, founder and Managing Director Louise Kennedy shines the spotlight on hybrid working and how to make it work.

### The future is Hybrid

The world of work has changed, and it looks very likely that the recent trend for hybrid working is here to stay, with more and more employees requesting a permanent and progressive change to traditional working practices.

Recent trends have shown that this new working landscape has become the norm across an array of industries, but what exactly is hybrid working and how can businesses ensure that they are balancing the needs of employees, alongside the growth and development of the business?

### What is Hybrid Working?

Hybrid working has changed the way we now work. Mixing different ways of working, this concept encompasses lots of working models including flexible working days, remote working, set days in the office and alternating shift patterns.

Hybrid working gives employees more control through more flexible work conditions and the ability to work from anywhere which in turn enhances the work life balance. Hybrid working has in recent months become a key tool in both retaining existing employees and also attracting new talent and also brings many cost savings to businesses.

A whole host of policies, strategies, software, systems and tools are available that can be utilised in all areas of the business to ensure that your workforce is happy, productive and heard during these uncertain times. However, implementing an effective Hybrid Working Strategy is not without its challenges.

### Making it work

When implementing a Hybrid Working Policy, a one size fits all approach won't work and employee consultation will be key. Employee views on working practices and approaches

can vary substantially and policies and procedures need to consider this.

It is crucial that any hybrid working implementation cultivates a productive workforce, whilst considering both business productivity, alongside the wellbeing of the workforce.

**Regular one to ones:** Conducting regular 121 meetings are crucial in any working environment, especially if face to face contact is limited and staff are working remotely. Frequent 121s should be encouraged, as they provide the opportunity for employees to raise any concerns, discuss their performance, outline goals and talk generally about how they are feeling at work.

**Ensuring that staff have the right equipment to carry out their job:** This is crucial for improving and increasing activity levels for better health and productivity whilst home working. Consider remote DSE Risk Assessments which have become a popular service for Oculus Health and Safety for homeworkers to ensure risks are assessed when working away from the office. Also review the best use of technology and how it can support new working practices and breakdown communication barriers.

**Nurture employees:** Regular communication channels will need to be open with mechanisms in place for open dialogue. Businesses will need to listen, engage, and empower employees and provide opportunities for growth and learning to improve performance when working remotely.

Hybrid working does come with many benefits but there are many challenges too, consultation will be of essence and businesses will need to look at improving and changing their current people strategies to ensure a cohesive and collaborative approach to the new norm of hybrid working.

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

“

...a one size fits  
all approach  
won't work...

# SPEED OF SERVICE FROM NORTH EAST COMPANY SUPPORTS THOUSANDS OF HOMES

Thousands of homes received support during the electricity outage caused by two storms thanks to the lightning quick service from a North East based company.

Storm Arwen, quickly followed by Storm Barra, saw winds peaking at 100 mph, causing devastation, and leaving 135,000 homes across the North without power. A leading energy network supplier worked around the clock to fix faults and to provide residents with support, turning to promotional product company Pro-Ad to help provide much needed hot water and light.

Having taken the emergency call at 5pm, Pro-Ad director Loren Nardini and his team had managed to supply enough products to support thousands of homes with battery torches, foil blankets, flasks, beanie hats, glow sticks, battery radios and hot drink bottles, all delivered the very next day.

A spokesperson from the energy supplier said: "Storm Arwen was one of the worst in living memory with two years' worth of faults reported in just 12 hours. The aftermath resulted in some homes unfortunately being off supply for several days. The fact we were able to provide hot water and torches as part of our welfare checks was really appreciated by our customers."

With 40 years of experience and product knowledge, Pro-Ad works with companies from a large spectrum of industries creating high impact campaigns that increase brand exposure and awareness. This includes many items that could help people without power. Loren said: "We pride ourselves on our great relationships with our clients making sure we are always flexible to meet their needs; some of them have been with us for the entirety of our journey!"

Loren Nardini

"So, when our client came to us to help make sure they could offer welfare to their customers, we prioritised their request,

"Within 24 hours of taking the call, we had arranged for thousands upon thousands of products delivered from Northumberland and across the rest of England, to the North of Scotland, including Aberdeen, Inverness and Perth. We were delighted to help in times of such hardship for residents and the workers trying to fix the damage."

Pro-Ad brings a fresh approach to finding the best promotional products and branded clothing, providing innovative and creative solutions that fit your campaign goals and your budget.

**More information on Pro-Ad and their services/products is available by visiting [www.proad.co.uk](http://www.proad.co.uk)**







## BLAINE'S THE BOSS

A well-known family business has had a change around in recent weeks, with the son of a father and son team taking on the reins to grow the business further and bring more digital offerings to clients.

Blaine Smith has been appointed to the role of company director and secretary of ATV Aerial and Satellite Company, whilst Dad Grant will work alongside him on day to day delivery of the outstanding service the team are so well known for.

ATV Aerial and Satellite Company Limited was set up 25 years ago by Grant Smith, a retired fire fighter. In more recent years, his son Blaine joined the company, while Grant's wife Jayne runs the office and bookings.

The move to put Blaine 'in charge' will allow for the customer care and expert service to continue from the existing team offering their core products of aerials, satellite dishes, TV wall hanging and set up, wifi boosters, CCTV and roof caging and crows, whilst

Blaine expands the company further to keep up with digital innovation. He said: "My Dad is still a company director, as is my Mum, and it is very much a family business but by me becoming a main decision maker, it allows them to relax a little more and for me to drive an exciting future for the business as digital technology becomes more and more clever.

"I am so excited at the opportunity, but equally delighted that my parents are staying by my side on the day-to-day jobs!"

ATV Aerial and Satellite Limited are based in Whitley Bay but offer their services to residential and commercial customers across the region. As well as looking after the needs of families in their homes, they can ensure cabling, aerials, satellite, and connectivity work in a host of properties including flats, offices, hotels and care homes.

Grant, who is well known for his ability to do high jobs safely without scaffolding, said: "There comes a time when the new generation have great ideas and a focus on the future. I love what we do and working together so although I shall be stepping back a little I will still be in the business every time. It is Blaine's turn to drive the company to it's next era and I shall enjoy being very much part of that, as shall his mum Jayne."

**More information on the service offered are available at [www.atvaerialandsatellitecompany.co.uk](http://www.atvaerialandsatellitecompany.co.uk)**



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Joanne Howe

## BAD ASS BOSS - BE THE BOSS, NOT BOSSY!

A manager should be bold, not afraid to stand up for what they believe to be true, but also maintain a level of compromise that will keep everyone in agreement, and preferably happy at work. Remember...happy staff work harder.

However, if that 'bold' demeanour is used to manage with an iron fist in the workplace then you may need to re-evaluate your approach to management and aim to have a culture that allows staff to be heard and offer improvements.

A survey by [www.aboutmoney.com](http://www.aboutmoney.com) found that a number of characteristics regularly came up in discussions about 'bad managers'. They revealed that bad managers:

- **Lack** the necessary communication skills to properly delegate jobs and implement change in the company.
- **Overuse** negative management methods and phrases and don't give praise or reward when it is earned.
- **Fail** to accept the blame when something is their fault yet accept the praise for other's work.

All these things may cause something

seemingly trivial to snowball into something bigger than it needs to be, so it's important that the problem is diffused as quickly as possible.

First off, listen to others. You really should be willing to take on suggestions and listen to issues and problems that may be arising. They may be small things to you, but they could be one of the most important things in the world to the staff involved so simply taking in the information is the first step.

There is nothing wrong with being assertive; honesty is the best policy after all, but draw the line and be fair at the same time. Don't belittle but don't make a mountain out of a molehill either. Remember 'praise in public' and 'reprimand in private'.

**Joanne Howe, MD @ Howe Consultancy**  
[www.howeconsultancy.co.uk](http://www.howeconsultancy.co.uk)  
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Andrew Marsh



# THE BOARD'S RESPONSIBILITY TO RISK

Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage for the North East and Northumberland, Chair and NED for numerous boards, businesses and charities; and successful entrepreneur in his own right, has committed to imparting his knowledge to help business leaders excel and have a solid view for the future.

Here, in his latest article, Andrew highlights different approaches to risk, and how a good board will focus on what pro-active opportunities can arise from risks.

"It's a bold statement to make but I believe in every risk, there is opportunity. In this article I am going to separate managing, mitigating, responding to and proactively being prepared for risk.

"A risk is a possible problem, but one that hasn't happened yet. An issue is a risk that has happened. The prior should be treated strategically, and the latter is an operational action to deal with. One of the main risks every organisation faces is single points of failure or capacity ... be that key staff leaving unexpectedly, illness, being let down by a supplier or lack of customers. Every company should have a robust succession plan, flexibility to back fill and pivot roles; and have a diverse approach to recruitment and how roles can be quickly created. They should also have a focus on what could cripple the organisation if it fails or isn't available, and proactively look for ways to avoid them.

"As well as being proactive to potential manpower, supply or customer issues, a good board should be aware of all potential risk within a regularly updated risk register, conducting regular war gaming and building actions into strategic plans so nothing is a surprise if it becomes an issue, unless it is something completely unprecedented in our lifetime, like a pandemic the size of which we have just experienced.

"Companies that have a good productive paranoia and constantly ask themselves "what if...?", are pro-active against risk instead of re-active. For example, those who took governance and operational security seriously were more organised to cope with the pandemic than they originally thought, as they had a plan in place for the operational team to trigger – it was a case the executives visiting their business continuity plan and activating their crisis management plan to deal with media interest if necessary.

"This highlighted a need that more and more senior leaders in operational roles should have the strong management of risks and handling them when they become issues built into their KPI's. But this mitigation of an issue means little other than survival unless you take it one step further as a board.

"It needs to be acknowledged that board risk is different to operational risk – yet far too many still focus on operational matters. A board type risk example is that the revenue streams are too reliant on one customer set, being an uncompetitive organisation in the marketplace or being aware of Government regulations that could change market opportunities and the company dynamic by reducing potential and margins.

"Risk is about asking questions about the sustainability of the company and not just reviewing details provided by the Executive. It's about thinking across different time horizons not just looking short term.

"Strong non-executive experienced professionals should take every risk and look strategically for avenues of opportunity. How to pivot, how to be more digital, how to launch new services, how to find new fiscal routes, how to improve governance, a restructure; and by looking at trends and emerging needs this team are suddenly able to create an exciting new future for the company. Risk Management is about value protection, but used properly it can deliver value creation by seeing a situation so it avoids issue before it occurs, or that means an issue can be handled easily, moving onto plan B.

"A great example of this is Cascade Cash Management. Cascade delivers the highest returns for savers and when the interest dropped below zero in the last two years, the team brought forward the importance of another offering – greater depositor protection. The team is passionate about savings and delivering the best possible outcomes administering funds on behalf of clients providing direct and independent access to providers to the tune of over £1bn so far.

"The CEO and co-founder, Dr Emma Black, also brought in a focus on how they could be a true business with purpose, and the team have now launch a number of options to help people reach their savings goals faster, smarter and happier. Cascade is expecting this year to be the first of similar companies to reach profitability they can re-invest for the good of their team, partners and customers.

"Within Vistage we work on mindset with business leaders, that encourages them to have the mentality of opportune approach. Someone who is glass half empty will focus on putting the issue right, someone glass half full will expect others to sort that while they work out how to move forward pro-actively.

"A lot of that pro-active approach is being able to stay calm, looking to the future and trusting others. A lot of it is having a pro-active approach to digital change and embracing in advance. One example of this, is around compliance. There are solutions out there that mitigate risk on collecting data, looking after people and health; and remove one vulnerability created by employees not performing properly.

"Initially technology equalled threat to the 'normal way' of doing things but when forecasting risk, innovation can divert disaster, and every day technology is proving its worth more and more. It can provide a solution you didn't know you needed, until you had it, so is a great way for boards to look beyond risk to potential.

"Plexus Innovation's GUARDIAN® is a superb example of this. GUARDIAN® function includes measurement of temperature, CO2, humidity and water system monitoring and control, enabling insight driven decisions, reliable compliance reporting and alerting to health risks or failing assets that otherwise may not be known about. It's a new way of doing things, but it is proving its validity and unerring performance every day, with executive and non-executive teams reaping the benefits across a range of industries as they averting risk with it in a number of challenging business areas including compliance, manpower, cost and environment.

"In conclusion, risk can be something that teams panic about. If dealt with inappropriately, the issue can be catastrophic. However, it is something every company faces and if dealt with right pro-actively, in advance, a multitude of positive opportunities can be sourced to allow organisations to thrive."

***If you need support in your approach to risk as a leader then get in touch with Andrew at [andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk](mailto:andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk) – he has a number of options on offer, including one on one mentoring and peer group support.***





## THE NORTH TYNESIDE BUSINESS AWARDS

Organised by the North Tyneside Business Forum to celebrate the huge contribution that businesses make to the local economy. The Awards are sponsored by TEDCO, Equans and CAPITA and supported by North Tyneside Council.

Category winners were: Frontline Integrity Ltd, Purple Chilli Ltd (Silent Disco 4U), Bash Academy, Happy Planet Creative Arts CIC with the "North Tyneside Business of the Year" award for 2021 going to Frontline Integrity Ltd.

The Heart of the Community Award which was nominated and voted for by the public went to Jillys Home Bakes.











## CHILDREN'S CANCER NORTH EXPANDS TEAM TO DRIVE AMBITIOUS NEW PLANS

Children's Cancer North has expanded its operations with the appointment of three new team members.

Maud Sterne has joined the charity as community and events fundraiser. Newcastle University graduate Maud previously worked as local networks administration assistant at Parkinson's UK.

Thamy Haque has been appointed

digital fundraising co-ordinator. Thamy, a graduate of Northumbria University, brings a wealth of experience. Her previous roles include communications officer for Newcastle University and marketing and communications officer at Newcastle Council for Voluntary Service (Newcastle CVS).

Emma Carson has been appointed as Children's Cancer North corporate partnerships co-ordinator. Newcastle University graduate Emma joins the charity from her previous role as marketing manager at a major manufacturing firm.

The new appointments have greatly improved Children's Cancer North's capacity to support families affected by childhood cancer at the Great North Children's Hospital in Newcastle.

## NEW £1.4M DENTIST TO OPEN AT THE KILLINGWORTH CENTRE

A new dentist practice recently opened at The Killingworth Centre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, after signing up for a unit.

{my}dentist has signed a 15-year lease for units 20 and 21 with national commercial property and investment company LCP, which manages the centre on behalf of Evolve Estates.

The practice has invested £1.4 million in the new unit, which includes all new dentistry equipment, surgeries and staff room, and created a further 10 jobs for dental nurses and receptionists.

Patients will benefit from a greater range of appointments and longer opening hours, including Saturday appointments, improved access with all surgeries located on the ground floor, and improved new waiting areas.

Andrew Barrett, retail director at LCP, said:



"We're pleased to welcome {my}dentist to the scheme as it increases the offer we have at this busy centre, not to mention provides jobs for local people."

Paul Mead, {my}dentist area development manager, said: "Our aim for the new practice was to provide our patients and teams with a modern and accessible practice that meets their needs now and in the future."

"With 10 surgeries we will have more appointments for our existing patients and beyond this, we know that accessing dental care in this region is difficult which is why we have introduced {my}options, an affordable way to access a dentist when you need one."



## DESIGNER'S WAR TOYS BRAND WORK REINFORCES COMBAT ZONE PHOTOGRAPHER'S CHARITY

A shared passion for the toy industry and a desire to help others has bonded together a Los Angeles based photographer, art director, and producer and the Managing Director of a design agency in Gateshead UK.

Jason Knights from Blue Kangaroo Design was introduced to LA based Brian McCarty at the beginning of lockdown by Dan Owen one of Netflix's creative directors. Dan recognised that the pair worked with several mutual clients as well as Netflix including Disney, Mattel, and Hasbro. He was also aware of the pioneering charitable work that Brian was doing and knew that Blue Kangaroo Design were looking to help a charitable cause appropriate to the entertainment character licensing and toy industry.

For more than a decade, Brian has been working alongside children who have been affected by war. Using art therapy and photography, he uses toys to safely represent children's views of war. The unique project entitled "War-Toys" allows boys and girls to become art directors for narrative photos of locally sourced toys.

As experts in the entertainment character licensing and toy industry, Blue Kangaroo Design donated their time to design the branding and packaging for the War Toys organisation.

"When I found out about the work Brian was doing with children all over the world I just wanted to help. I'm ex-military myself and can't imagine the horrors some of these children have suffered," said Jason.



## 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 TECHNOLOGY CAN HELP BUSINESSES DURING ENERGY CRISIS



Energy customers have been battling soaring energy prices for nearly a year.

On 3 February, UK energy regulator Ofgem announced a new energy price cap for average gas and electricity bills. However, despite the cap, British home energy prices are still set to rise by 54 percent. For the average household, this means an additional spend of £1,900 per year.

The volatility of the energy market is also affecting UK businesses. 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, leading to higher consumer prices.

To limit the impact of escalating energy costs, businesses need to take a measured approach to energy management.

Energy management is a process whereby a

business can effectively manage how much energy is being used and wasted - but you can't manage what you can't measure.

## Harness the power of big energy data

Energy management system (EMS) hardware and software can unlock big energy data, allowing businesses to monitor energy consumption down to per circuit level. This information can, in turn, help businesses reduce consumption and costs.

EMS solutions, such as **ClearVUE**, provide big energy data in real time. Instantly, anomalies and inefficiencies in energy profiles can be visualised. Businesses can act quickly to plan consumption patterns and proactively target energy efficiency improvements, simply by adjusting operational behaviours.

And those businesses who use an EMS solution can target, monitor, and reduce energy waste for both gas and electricity running through their sites, giving them total control.

Optimising energy usage not only reduces energy waste, but also a business' carbon footprint. Cutting emissions reduces

energy bills, improves cash flow, increases profitability and competitiveness, improves green credentials, and reduces exposure to future energy price rises.

The UK was the world's first major economy to pass laws to end its contribution to global warming by 2050. But reaching this target requires extensive, systematic changes for all businesses, with many lacking the time, resources or knowledge to fully manage their energy portfolio.

UK businesses are now compelled to report on sustainability through various procedures and guidelines. With energy management systems and plans in place, businesses are in a better position to monitor and report on their emissions - and achieve net zero faster.

If your business is ready to take control of its energy, visit our website **clearvue.business** or speak with a ClearVUE expert today at +44 (0)3 300 300 200.

*ClearVUE is the energy management and net zero consultancy company of Global Procurement Group.*

[www.clearvue.business](http://www.clearvue.business)



## GATESHEAD CHARITY'S HOT MEALS SERVICE STAYS ON THE MENU THANKS TO NEWCASTLE BUILDING SOCIETY GRANT

A food delivery service which reaches dozens of vulnerable households every week is set to continue after the Gateshead community charity behind it received new funding from Newcastle Building Society.

Bensham & Saltwell Alive set up its weekly hot meal delivery service in July 2020 to ensure vulnerable individuals, older people and families that were shielding during the first stages of the pandemic could still get the food they needed.

Despite the easing of lockdown restrictions, the project has continued to run to meet an enduring need across the local community, with meals being cooked and delivered by a team of volunteers to more than 50 households every week.

The project was due to be suspended as the funding that was used to set it up was about to run out, but now, a £3,000 Newcastle Building Society grant is enabling Bensham & Saltwell Alive to keep it going.

The funding is being provided through the Newcastle Building Society Community Fund at the Community Foundation, which offers grants to charities and community groups located in or around the communities served by the Society's branch network.

## MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES AT THE HUB OF VETERAN'S ORGANISATION



With many people experiencing the "January Blues" with bills from Christmas to pay, bad weather on the horizon and COVID restrictions, mental health issues are increasing throughout the region.

The effects of mental health and depression are often more prevalent for ex-service men and women, some who have PTSD and have spent much of their service lives where everything is organised within their tightly knitted communities. Now, a County Durham organisation for veterans is offering help and support to those in need from their base in

Newton Aycliffe.

The Veterans Community Hub was created to help all veterans and the local community access a range of services and training. It offers a range of classes as well as a place to meet others in a safe environment. Popular courses include cookery, pottery, furniture restoration, woodworking, vehicle renovation and art. In addition, as a service to the community, healthy, nutritious meals are cooked on site and delivered to families in the area needing extra support.

## FREEMASONS HELP YOUTH HOSTEL GET ON THEIR BIKES

From prisoners' chains to bike chains, a former police station and courthouse in Alnwick is building a cycle hub with help from Northumberland Freemasons.

Alnwick Youth Hostel is a Grade II listed building and has been converted into a 57 bed all en-suite Youth Hostel. It retains many of the original features from its time as a courtroom and house of correction including an exercise yard and prison bars on the original exterior wall. An outbuilding that probably stabled a police horse is being renovated to provide a secure area for visiting cyclists to keep their bicycles safe as well as offering a facility for route planning and communal meetings.

Bill Grisdale from Alnwick Youth Hostel was delighted with the £5000 donation.

Local Alnwick freemason Steve Whitting representing Northumberland Freemasons explained that each year, the Provincial Grand Lodge of Northumberland through the Richard Henry Holmes Masonic Benevolent Fund donates around £160,000 to local charities and good causes



including food banks to boost worthwhile and deserving projects throughout Northumberland, Newcastle and North Tyneside.

"We are delighted to help the Alnwick Youth Hostel with funding some of their building work which will provide a much-needed resource for visiting cyclists. As a keen cyclist myself averaging around 150 miles per week I can appreciate the need for somewhere to secure the bikes and also chat with other likeminded people."

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Dr. David Cliff

## MIRROR, MIRROR ON THE WALL...

It's been estimated the average person spends 11 days per decade simply looking at themselves in the mirror. Frequently however, I see people in business who rarely, if ever engage in any form of reflective practice in relation to their business or how they lead it.

The imperative of pragmatism in business can often drive people more to action over thought. This can result in everything from a "fail to launch" outcome through to the familiar "busy fools" phenomenon, wherein action lacks traction.

I find I have considerable resonance with the pragmatic mantra of "done – not perfect" as an antidote to procrastination, over analysis or perfectionism. However, a balance still needs to be achieved between getting things "over the line" and being truly thought out with fitness for purpose in mind.

Modern organisations must balance drives to be first past the post with ethics, values, desired cultures, staff retention, wellbeing, workforce planning and other considerations. Often rapid progress is mired by the unintended consequences of capricious actions that have not been fully thought through. The rapid, quick-fire decision-making, so prized in the era of "heroic" leaders, increasingly must now be subordinated to a more nuanced, subtle approach.

I still get quite surprised that even after Covid, there is an impetus to immediately get things back to "normal" without a reflection on where we truly are. For example, in what was tacitly described as the "new normal", more savvy firms are now re-considering the whole nature of hybrid working. It was a convenient means to an end during Covid, enabling economic activity to continue, but one must reflect on this becoming an ongoing working practice and many are already considering the deleterious effect of teams being split up, lost synergies, reduced communication and damage to esprit de corps. Whilst hybrid working may be "family friendly" and have many other merits, as with all phenomena there are pros and cons that need to be carefully weighed. Things created in crisis may create new paradigms but equally may be dismally unfit for the long haul.

We are creatures of reiteration and algorithm in our thinking. Consequently, matters of importance need to be carefully considered in ways that factor in different emotional,

environmental and situational factors so that we can come to durable decisions and workable courses of action. It's an imprecise science, but far better than some of the "shooting from the hip" we see daily with the gunslingers involved calling that leadership!

I rarely apologise for encouraging people into deeper reflective practice. Sure, it's great to write a strategy, analyse and work through a process or cement a team's working relationships. However, crucially time spent by business owners and leaders in their own personal reflection, looking at their direction, its impact on others, its impact on markets, society and wider outcomes bisects not only notions of effective leadership but those of common humanity.

Socrates said that an unexamined life is not worth living. He meant that the person who did not reflect upon her/his life fails to derive meaning or true purpose in existence, can be focused on self to the neglect of others and can lead to cycles of self-defeating effort.

At Gedanken we never lose sight of business pragmatism but equally we work with leaders and others to explore their highest, most reflective selves, calling upon them to see leadership as not only a concept but a personal path, something that impacts upon organisations and self in equal measure and looking at the inextricable links between the two. Complex stuff, but necessary for an effective and fulfilling leadership journey.

[www.gedanken.co.uk](http://www.gedanken.co.uk)  
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# PFF INVESTS IN THE FUTURE



Kenton Robbins, Managing Director at PFF Group.

Ahead of a tax on plastic being introduced in April, Washington based PFF Packaging Group is creating sustainable food packaging solutions which help their clients to achieve their sustainability goals and limit their exposure to the new tax.

PFF Group is one of the UK's largest independent food packaging manufacturers, supplying innovative packaging solutions to supermarkets and multi-national food manufacturers.

The company employs 150 staff across its North East and West Yorkshire sites.

Under the leadership of group managing director Kenton Robbins, PFF, a long term advocate of reducing single use plastic, drives engagement with consumers, industry and government about the use of plastic and how it can be reduced as he believes this is fundamental to the industry's future.

Sustainability is a core company value and PFF's championing of sustainable packaging solutions has seen the company invest heavily in technology and systems to support this.

Recent investments have included £200,000 in new transformer technology to reduce PFF's carbon emissions by 5%, as well as the launch of a ground-breaking, fully recyclable packaging product (IMPAC-T) which uses

less plastic than equivalent PET packaging and is suitable for all food applications.

Kenton said: "We place great importance on using resources efficiently and these latest investments demonstrate that we take our carbon reduction commitments and sustainability targets very seriously.

"The tax on packaging containing less than 30% recycled content comes into effect in April. Products under that threshold will be taxed at £200 per tonne. Together with our customers, we are keen to embrace net-zero targets and are working to reduce overall plastic in packaging by engineering some of it out of products.

"However, plastics continue to play a vital role in food packaging. Our objective is to produce packaging that delivers the most sustainable solution when accounting for whole life costs – from production to transportation emissions, food waste and recyclability."

PFF's commitment to the environment is recognised by Operation Clean Sweep - an

international initiative that aims to ensure that plastics do not end up in waterways – and by membership of the NEXTLOOP global initiative, helping deliver the world's first commercially available, recycled high-quality polypropylene (FGPP).

During the pandemic, PFF used its sector expertise to meet the increased global demand for PPE. A new health division was set up at PFF's Washington site with an investment of £2 million to produce 360m disposable polythene aprons for frontline NHS and healthcare workers.

Michael Gove MP praised the company as: 'savvy, smart businesspeople' who 'adapted their business models to help this country ... it (PFF) exemplifies the best of British'.

Such calculated risk taking is helping PFF to achieve its growth ambitions. As well as exploring further opportunities in healthcare, the company has just acquired Sedgefield-based Sirap UK, a leading producer and supplier of thermoformed rigid plastic food packaging to the British market.

The acquisition increases PFF's brand share of the UK thermoforming sector and creates the opportunity to manufacture a wider variety of products to a broader customer base, creating a new chapter for the business which Kenton is confident will deliver PFF's strategic ambitions.

[pff.uk.com](http://pff.uk.com)





## PLEXUS INNOVATION KEEPS AGE UK NORTHUMBERLAND'S STAFF AND VISITORS MONITORED

Age UK Northumberland is delighted to have committed to a pilot installation of CO2 monitors to measure the quality of air in the charity's headquarters in Ashington.

Supplied and fitted by Plexus Innovation to help keep the building monitored ensuring optimum air quality for staff and visitors, GUARDIAN® is a non-intrusive IoT remote technology system that supplies data 24/7, 365.

GUARDIAN® CO2 Node is wall fitted in a strategically chosen position to ensure that the readings give an overall understanding for the room, giving the opportunity to monitor in real time and make insight driven decisions on safety levels.

Within the Roundhouse headquarters, Age UK Northumberland has several high traffic areas ideal to be monitored to best effect. Monitors are now in place for the pilot, in the large training and event room, the studio where fitness classes are held and in the main office where the home care team operate from daily.

Anneka Johnson, Key Account Manager at Plexus Innovation fitted the hardware and explained the benefits of monitoring CO2:

"GUARDIAN®'s readings will show how effective the building's ventilation is, which is all important in the reduction of the spread of viruses.

"As more and more of us return to high traffic areas, taking extra precautions to reduce the transmission of things like Covid, is all important. As the Age UK Northumberland team do such critical work in the community, it is essential to them to reduce sickness, and also to prevent visitors to the building being potentially exposed too."

GUARDIAN® is the perfect enabler of infection control when used for environmental monitoring such as CO2, temperature and humidity. The real time collection of data allows the user to track and mitigate risk in high-risk areas such as office blocks, schools, gyms, and more.

Amy Whyte, CEO of Age UK Northumberland, said: "The increase of CO2 increases the risk of transmission of

viruses and we need our team to be healthy so we can look after older people in the community every day. To know we have a safer environment due to GUARDIAN® monitoring is very reassuring. We had looked at other versions, that sit on desks, but had heard reports that cause panic as they go off constantly due to the incorrect positioning. The unobtrusive GUARDIAN® nodes fit right in and quietly help keep us safe."

As GUARDIAN® is battery powered it can be discreetly positioned in an optimum position and offers a cost effective solution. Anneka explained more about the dangers of too much CO2:

"Too much CO2 in the environment indoors makes people sleepy and reduces our ability to perform. The more people there are in a space that isn't well enough ventilated, the more CO2 is produced and ultimately the aim is to always have a low count. By knowing when levels get high, it allows for educated understanding on when windows should be opened or air conditioning should be turned up."

GUARDIAN® also offers water system and refrigeration monitoring and control, enabling insight driven decisions, reliable compliance reporting and alerting to health risks or failing assets that otherwise may not be known about.

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David Taylor

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# THE QUEEN'S JUBILEE HOLIDAYS

Now the New Year is over it seems we are all starting to get excited for the celebrations and an additional bank holiday. But will your employees be getting the Queen's jubilee as a day off? The answer is this will depend on the wording of their contract. Let's unpick this to understand whether they can take advantage of any new bank holiday.

## Bank Holiday? ☒

Some contracts do not state the number of bank holidays. In that case, employers may be contractually required to grant employees an extra day.

For example, if the contract states, "your holiday entitlement is 25 days plus public holidays", then as bank holidays are included on top of the employee's annual leave allowance and the contract does not stipulate the exact number they are entitled to, the extra day becomes a contractual entitlement. This means the employee will be able to take and be paid for the extra bank holiday on 3rd June 2022.

## Bank Holiday? ☐

However, if their contract states how many bank holidays they are entitled to or the total number of days, including bank holidays, then there is no obligation on employers to grant an extra day of leave.

For example, the contract may state, "your holiday entitlement is 20 days per year,



plus eight bank holidays" or "your holiday entitlement is 33 days per year. This is inclusive of the normal public holidays. The Company recognises the following public holidays .....". In this situation, because bank holidays form part of the employee's set holiday entitlement, and because you have expressly provided the public holidays in question, the employee won't have a contractual right to the extra bank holiday in 2022.

## What are your options?

If you want to close the business for the day and your contracts do not allow employees the right to the extra bank holiday, then you have two options:

- Firstly, you can ask employees to use a day of their normal annual leave entitlement on 3 June so that they don't miss out on a day's pay. Do this sooner rather than later and it would be advisable to confirm this in writing.
- Or, you could decide to grant an extra day's paid leave as a discretionary gesture. After the events of 2020/21, and this being seen as the (hopefully) first summer of freedom since the pandemic, this could provide employers with the opportunity to show appreciation to their teams by granting the extra day to staff regardless.

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Nevil Tynemouth

## WHY DOES SO MUCH TRADITIONAL TRAINING FAIL, AND HOW CAN YOU AVOID THIS?

Working in my corporate career I was fortunate enough to take part in inspiring, engaging, rewarding and hugely successful training programmes as a delegate. I was also unfortunate experience training that was simply “done to me”.

It's key that if you want your team to grow, progress and get better at what they do then you need a training and development programme that works and keeps working.

At New Results we focus on avoiding “Amnesia Alley”. This is the journey that exists between training and being back at your desk doing your job. This sinkhole of learning appears to come into existence for a number of reasons: too little time, not enough engagement, not relevant to the role, not stretching enough, too stretching, and so on.

### What can you do to stop this happening for you and your team?

Here are some of the things we have learned and here is how you can approach this to make sure your training has a long-lasting effect. We think about the three key stages of the training and development programme: before it takes place, during the training itself and after the final training delivery. Here is what we do at each of those stages:

**Before** – We ask lots of questions, what do you want, and can you deliver it? What level, language and approach will work best for you? Who are your clients and what do they want from you? We make sure we fully understand your world and what you

are trying to achieve. We interview teams before we train them so we can capture their language and approach. These interviews allow us to understand individuals and teams overall strengths and development areas. The other subtle thing these interviews do is introduce trainer and individuals being trained much earlier, meaning that they know us, and we know them just a little before any training takes place. People who take part in these interviews know that they have had a voice and input to the training content and delivery style. This is critical because it means we have their buy in to the training before we start the first session.

**During** – Firstly at every session we check and ask “What are you looking to achieve?” We spend time flexing our style and approach in each training session, so everyone gets as much as possible. We make it a two-way discussion, so anyone on our training feels involved and engaged (not just talked at!). Our sessions are often a mix of new skills and recap of foundations. There is some gold dust in doing the basics and doing them extraordinarily well. We do a lot of group and individual work to mix up the medium and method to keep engagement as high as possible and to make sure everyone is getting their own specific questions answered.

**After** – We focus on effective follow up by looking at actions and feedback on when they have been done. We support leaders on following up on actions as a group and with individual members of their team. Lastly, and most importantly we either provide coaching or coaching training to help organisations take the new skills and approaches learned in training and embed them into people's day to day roles.

We always have a mindset that focuses on making training memorable, engaging and thought provoking. We carry this through to every part of our three-stage approach (before, during and after delivery), and we ask ourselves two really effective reflective questions at each part of the process:

1. What worked well and how do we repeat it?
2. What didn't work well and how do we improve it?

This simple piece of reflective practice means we are always looking to improve, develop and polish our development programmes. That way we get beyond the training that doesn't stick. We start programmes that people want to be on. We know they will take key learning back to their desks now and will have opportunities to use the learning immediately, and for a period of time after the training.

Training on its own doesn't work as well as you might hope. Having a real development programme that takes account of the before, during and after effects of training are key. Let's end the approach of training done to you and lets have lots of training that is engaging, stretching and impactful for today, tomorrow, next week, next month, next year and beyond.

**To contact Nevil email: [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)**



# MY WEEKEND

## JAMES PALMER

Mindset Coach and a trustee of the charity, Leading Link

Here he tells us how he spends his weekends...

### Do you ever have to work weekends?

I do, but generally I don't mind. I've a distant background in the Police which involved lots of anti-social hours and shifts. So, for me that "Friday night feeling" disappeared years ago. I think the secret is to enjoy what you're doing, if you can do that, it no longer feels like work. Aside from my main work I help people, at no cost, who are really struggling with their mental health. I encourage these people to contact me at any time until they're on the right path, which does happen over a weekend.

I also get time on a weekend to work on my own projects that I'm involved with. I'm presently working on a mental health book aimed at helping those who have served their community or country in uniform. Even a simple smile or conversation can make a huge difference to someone.

### Are most weekends the same?

You'd think the answer would be yes after all we are all creatures of habit. When I'm watching crime shows on the tv and they ask the question, 'where were you at on such and such time and date?'. I'm thinking, 'I wouldn't have a clue' but most people tend to do the same thing on the same night month after month. However, it doesn't appear to be true for me. Last weekend for instance a tree fell on a power line, some roof panels came loose on an outbuilding, the guttering blew off the house and the water main sprung a leak! I'm glad that doesn't happen every weekend!

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

Luckily not, after years of working with people's minds and their thinking, I've found many ways to easily switch off. It's a necessity of the job.

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

I'm quite balanced in my routine, so I tend to get things done, especially if it's something I enjoy doing. However sometimes I leave it until the weekend if they're out of my control such as watching Rugby or Newcastle Utd.



James Palmer

### Morning exercise or recovery lie in?

A bit of both, I'll definitely do some exercise on at least one of the days, but I like a recharge or a lie in especially if I was out late the night before.

### Prefer a big night out or a night in the house?

I love both! It's hard to beat a good night out with friends but family time is also important, I guess it's about ratios. One of the bad things about Covid was not being able to meet people face to face. I can see how this has impacted so many people, of all ages, including their mental health.

### Do you watch sport at the weekend?

I love sport, I used to play lots when I was younger, particularly football and rugby. I still enjoy watching both but find it impossible to sit still when watching on it the television. A lot of my clients are sports people, some have gone on to represent at international level. Once the mind is focussed, it's amazing what we can achieve, not just in performance but in injury recovery too. I'll support these clients when I can or catch a local rugby match. I'm really excited by what's happening at the Toon, it's going to be great to watch positive attacking football again.

### Where do you like to eat out at the weekend?

I got quite used to takeaways in the lockdowns, but it's been great to get back out again and rediscover local places. My

current favourites are the South Causey Inn and Bayberry Hollow in Tanfield.

### How important is the weekend to you?

Every day is important and is something to be grateful for, but there is something special about weekends. For me it brings closure to the week, I'm big on planning and the weekend is my-plan-do review time. I also like reading; I set a small amount of time aside to read every day, but I get to read more over the weekend. I've just read two amazing books. The first is about coping with grief following bereavement, it's called *Sixteen Days*, by Victoria Wilson-Crane. I found it useful in helping others. The second is *Becoming the GOAT* by Eleanor Baggaley, it's aimed at empowering young people to take control of their lives and become more confident being themselves. As a trustee of Leading Link, I'm a huge supporter of anything positive like this for children and young people.

### On a weekend you'll usually find me most happy...

A three-way tie, catching up with friends old and new, usually with a beer, or food, or both! Our son recently moved out and it's great when he comes to visit.

If we're on a long dog walk, we'll often stop to take in a view, and I really do appreciate that view and all that nature gives us.

James can be contacted via email at [james@new-thinking.net](mailto:james@new-thinking.net)

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## SIMON HANSON

Economic development and  
policy manager at North East  
Procurement Organisation (NEPO)

### Tell us about your role at NEPO

Whether it is economic growth, job creation, apprenticeships, or reducing emissions, there's no doubt procurement will be at the heart of delivering the region's ambitions. My role is to help achieve this through the work we do at NEPO. This includes embedding social value in all that we do, helping suppliers find and win more procurement opportunities and showcasing the fantastic work done across the region by both buyers and suppliers.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

Working with a superb team to have the opportunity to make a tangible difference right across the region. We all know the region isn't a problem to be solved but a solution to the challenges that are faced. At NEPO we can help deliver levelling-up and achieve net zero.

### What services does the organisation provide?

NEPO achieves benefits across the public sector through collaborative procurement.

NEPO undertakes high-value procurement in major strategic areas of spending such as construction, energy, facilities management, fleet, food, ICT and professional services, on behalf of North East local authorities. Our frameworks are also available for use by the wider public sector including, but not limited to, government departments and their agencies, non-departmental public bodies, NHS bodies, emergency services and educational establishments.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

Helping smaller businesses across the region achieve their ambitions and get the recognition they deserve. As Development Manager at the Federation of Small Business (FSB), we ensured that the massive role the 158,000 small businesses play was listened to locally, regionally and nationally.



Simon Hanson

A standout moment at the start of the pandemic was ensuring small businesses got the support and assistance they were entitled to. For many, it made a tangible difference to their survival.

### What challenges have you encountered?

Where there is challenge there is opportunity. There are still some outdated perceptions of what the North East is and what we do. From this, there is a huge opportunity for us to ensure the perceptions don't become a reality. At NEPO this means demonstrating how procurement is integral in delivering the region's ambitions.

### How has the industry changed since you began your career?

The region has become much more innovative, entrepreneurial, and ambitious. We only have to look at recent announcements from Britishvolt, Turntide Technologies, Envision and Nissan, alongside the net zero plans being developed in the Tees Valley by GE and BP. There are significant opportunities to build on this right across the region to secure

more investment, deliver more jobs and support more businesses.

There is increasing recognition of the role procurement plays in delivering tangible outcomes in communities across the region. The recent changes announced by Government will help us go further and faster in delivering our wider regional and national ambitions.

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

People do business with people. Irrespective of what sector, what community, or what size of organisation you are, it's all about people. Building trusted relationships that deliver shared ambitions and positive outcomes rather than transactional relationships.

### How do you like to unwind?

I enjoy running – whether on the road or the trail, it's great to get out and explore the region. I also love to watch the Pittsburgh Penguins and Pittsburgh Steelers.

[nepo.org](http://nepo.org)



# TALENT-HUNTING TEAM HAVE THE WORLD AT THEIR FEET

A North East talent and resourcing consultancy is putting down roots with a new office, little over a year after it first launched.

Talentheads was set up in October 2020 by experienced recruiter Sam Spoors, after her previous company fell victim at the very beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Since then, the firm has taken on some international clients and a further member of staff, as well as opening its first office in Morpeth, Northumberland.

Sam said: "Since launching in the pandemic, we've been working from home, but I felt the time was now right to put some roots down.

"In the past 12 months, we have seen an increase of over 360 per cent in our client base and we have grown our team to ensure the service, time and commitment these new clients gain is provided and sustained.

"We're committed to scaling, so we feel that having the space to share, engage, learn and support our clients as a team is paramount. An office also allows newer and

developing team members to hear the day-to-day goings on and to learn, contribute and challenge."

The newest member of the Talentheads team is Jimmy Summers-Irvine, who has joined as talent engagement advisor.

Sam added: "Jimmy offers the creativity needed to support our clients and partners to stand out from the crowd and engage with the right individuals to grow their businesses.

"Once Jimmy is settled and we continue to grow, we will definitely be looking at adding additional strength to the team to support our clients."

Sam attributes much of Talentheads' growth to its USP of being absorbed into companies as their internal recruitment, talent and resourcing teams, working with business owners on long-term, sustainable strategies to help them take control of the recruitment process.

Much of the firm's work comes from referrals from its existing partners, clients and network, and word has already spread internationally.

Sam said: "Our client Black & White Engineering is a fast-growing firm, and we have partnered with them as their



internal recruitment team – we're currently recruiting for more than 40 roles across their operations in Europe and the Middle East.

"We've also taken on a number of clients in the UK, including human and animal health marketing specialists IGNIFI and pharmaceutical innovators BSPG Laboratories.

"Over the next year we want to continue to grow, supporting new growing businesses in the North East and Yorkshire and adding to our talented and experienced in-house recruitment team."

**For more information on Talentheads and its range of services, visit [talentheads.co.uk](http://talentheads.co.uk)**

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## SPEEDFLEX BLADE BRINGS IT HOME

In a quiet corner of Jesmond over the past few years, there has been a constant stream of activity at Fleming Business Centre.

It was here that a fitness revolution was born, the first home of Speedflex, a unique work out system which comes with the added bonus that it didn't matter what size, age or sex you were, you could get a full body work out – with none of the next day muscle ache.

Speedflex studios started to spring up around the country, often finding a new home in leading gym chains such as Everyone Active and Bannatyne's.

The company was on course to become one of the UK's fastest growing HIIT training methods – and then Covid hit.

For CEO Paul Ferris, a business that relied on the actual physical presence of its clients

ie "bums on seats," was faced with a bit of a problem.

"Having to shut our doors during lockdown like so many fitness outlets meant it was a tough time," said Paul.

"Because when your business is built around people coming to you in person for training sessions then there's nowhere else to go."

Paul however is not a man to be defeated for long – and decided to use that downtime to look at a new version of the Speedflex machine, one that could be created for use at home.

"We had been thinking for a long time that we should look at a version that people could have at home," said Paul.

"But it wasn't until we had some free time during lockdown that we started to seriously work on it and came up with Speedflex Blade."

Speedflex was developed out of a piece of equipment created by an American orthopedic surgeon, who wanted a way that his patients could improve their fitness levels but without causing any of the pain or strain that usually goes with exercise.

It was fine tuned and adapted by Speedflex to its current incarnation and has now become hugely popular with everyone from celebrities such as Alan Shearer to people suffering from acute medical conditions.

Speedflex Blade has all of the attributes that the original studio machines have – the ability to work at your own pace doing

cardiovascular and resistance workouts without any next day pain.

And then they simply fold away neatly, to be brought out again for the next work out.

"We have worked really hard on creating a version that is perfect for anyone who wants to exercise at home," said Paul.

"The Speedflex Blade has all the same features plus a screen which is linked to wifi and gives the user access to a number of workout options with our top trainers, so it is like having someone helping you at home."

The at home version costs £2499 which includes delivery and with finance options available, plus a £30 month subscription fee to access the constantly updated video workouts.

"We are just rolling this out in the North East at first," said Paul.

"This is where Speedflex started so we are going to let people in this region have the first opportunity to buy the Speedflex Blade."

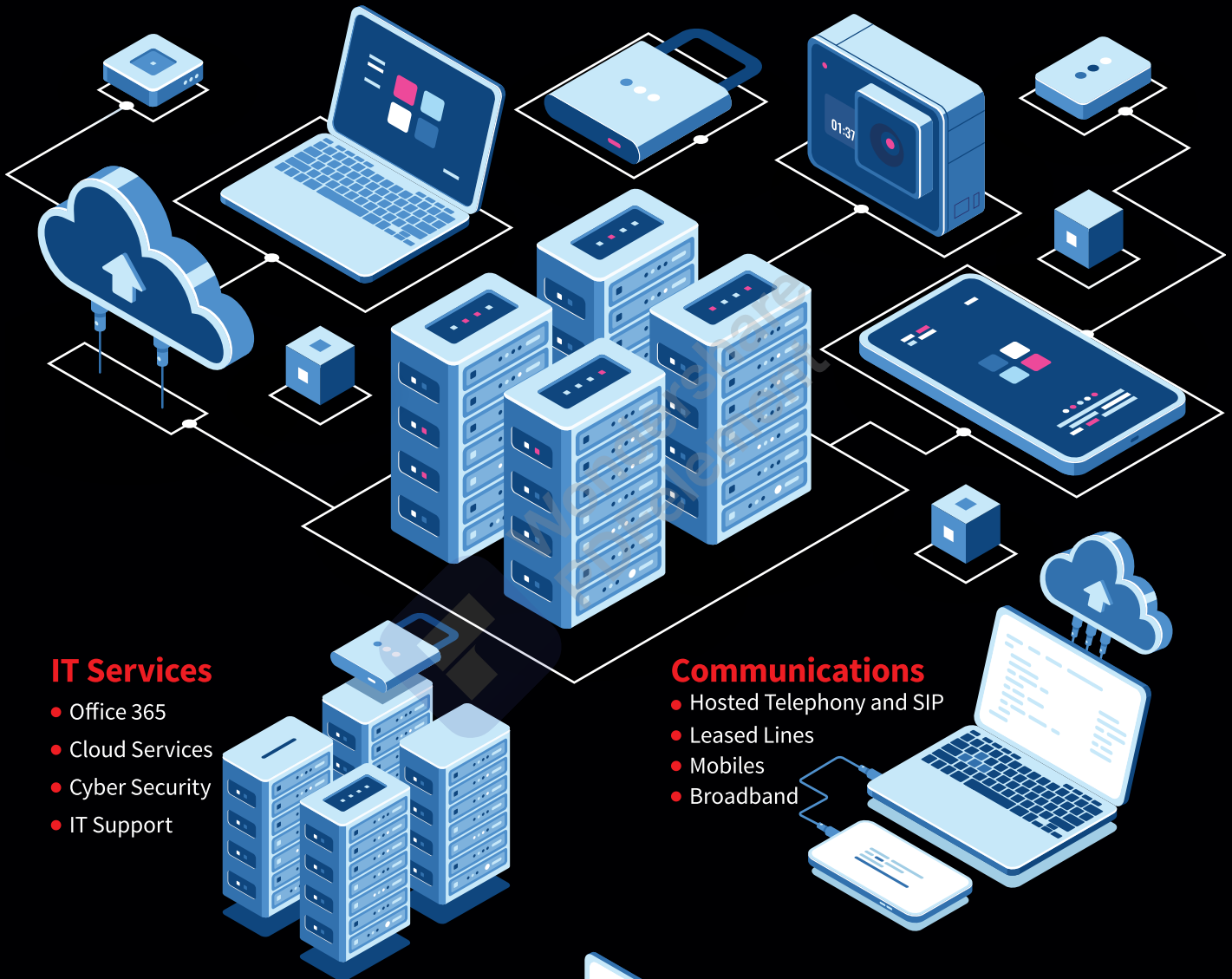
Speedflex studios are now open as usual, with the company now back on course with plans for the machine to be offered at Everyone Active sites across the UK and a whole host of other gym and fitness outlets.

**For further details about the Speedflex Blade or to book an appointment to see the equipment in action at the Jesmond studio visit [www.speedflex.com](http://www.speedflex.com)**





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## TEESSIDE FIRM LEADS DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONSTRUCTION SECTOR



A Teesside software consultancy firm has completed the design and build of a specialist solution for the construction industry.

Sapere Software, based in Stockton, designed and built a specialist software-as-a-service solution called CORE, which is set to revolutionise how construction projects are managed.

The solution is the brainchild of CORE's founder Paul Bass and aims to tackle inefficiencies in the construction industry by providing a single source of trusted data, which can then be shared with project management teams.

Paul said: "The project came about from my experience as a practising quantity surveyor

and discovering how the same issues of inefficiencies and problems could have been mitigated if the decision makers had access to real time data.

"In the construction sector, around 90 per cent of construction professionals say lack of coordination is the main reason projects run over budget or past deadlines.

"CORE cuts through all these challenges and help construction firms focus on delivering value in their projects to their clients. With CORE, project managers and decision makers will have access to real-time data onsite and in the board room, reducing the need for numerous meetings, reports, inaccurate spreadsheets and the time spent on email."

## SUCCESSFUL SAILS AWAY WITH NORWEGIAN GOVERNMENT ACCREDITATION

A North East technology business is sailing into Scandinavian waters after winning Norwegian Government approval for its state-of-the-art maritime tracking device.

Succorfish's SC2 Gen 2 iVMS system has been approved for use as an electronic reporting system on Norway's 550-strong fleet of fishing boats that are over 15 metres in length.

The North Tyneside-headquartered firm worked in partnership with Norwegian software developer Bytek Nordic to adapt the SC2 Gen 2 system to the country's specific offshore requirements, which include being able to pinpoint the precise location of vessels over a distance of more than 2,200 kilometres.

After Succorfish and Bytek completed several months of joint development work, a detailed, two-month long test was carried out in two different parts of Norwegian waters to ensure the system lived



up to expectations.

It has now won Government approval for use anywhere in its fishing waters, which stretch from Kristiansand at Norway's southern tip right up to Svalbard inside the Arctic Circle, as well as in UK, EU and other international waters.

And with new regulations set to be introduced in Norway later this year which will require vessels between 11m and 15m in length to carry the same technology, Succorfish is expecting to further expand its presence in the country's fishing industry.



## HUMAN BY LEIGHTON UNVEILS 'ESSENTIAL' EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING SOFTWARE

HR software company Human by Leighton has unveiled a new software as a service (SaaS) version of its employee onboarding platform aimed at helping small businesses digitise their onboarding processes.

CEO of Human by Leighton, James Bunting said: "Over the last two years we've seen Human customers make significant improvements to their onboarding processes

which has resulted in better employee experiences, reduced time to productivity and greater retention. Digitising the process has also saved our customers a significant amount of time and money."

"Talent scarcity and high turnover are among the biggest challenges organisations will face in 2022, so it's important to engage and retain employees from day one. A strong employee onboarding process can help you accomplish that, while also helping new hires become productive sooner."

Mr Bunting continued: "Our Essentials package means that all organisations, regardless of size, can deliver a good, compliant, affordable onboarding experience, whether they're engaging with one new starter or 1,000."

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# HARNESS YOUR EXISTING MICROSOFT TOOLS TO CHAMPION EMPLOYEE WELLBEING AND RETENTION

Recruitment firm, Randstad UK, found that 69% of their interviewees were feeling confident about moving to a new role in the next few months, with 24% planning a change within three to six months. This increase in movement has been credited to burn out and changing desires prompted by the Covid pandemic, such as a desire for remote or hybrid working. It is increasingly important for organisations to foster a culture that facilitates employee wellbeing, meaningful connections, and flexible and hybrid working. But where to start? Organisations are tasked with balancing an increasing desire for a working environment that isn't in-office 5-days a week with a need for the social engagement and friendly support that comes with colleague interaction and connected company culture.

The Microsoft 365 suite of productivity and security tools is utilised by many businesses. However, the communication and wellbeing tools within this suite can go underutilised. Microsoft offers three key tools helping organisations promote a connected, and supportive working environment: modern intranet tool, SharePoint, communication and collaboration hub, Teams, and employee experience platform, Project Viva.

## SharePoint

SharePoint is a mobile-friendly intranet solution that businesses can use to collaborate, share and search information. SharePoint helps your employees easily locate

the information, resources, and process they need, keeps them updated on the latest news and team members and encourages a strong culture with social and praise features. By making information and collaborators easy to access, SharePoint can help support an improved employee experience.

## Teams

Arguably the saviour of lockdown working, Microsoft Teams offers a central hub for collaboration, with chat and video tools, real-time collaboration and co-authoring, and built in Microsoft 365 applications. This allows organisations to support flexibility in working devices, locations, and styles. The importance of this is highlighted in the insight of project management experts, Team Stage, who stated that organisations offering remote or flexible working were seeing a 25% lower employee turnover than those that didn't.

## Project Viva

Experienced through Microsoft Teams, Project Viva is an employee experience platform, consisting of Viva Learning, Viva Insights, Viva Topics, and Viva Connections, that connects communications, knowledge, learning tools, resources, and insights. Microsoft 365 users will have received personalised emails from Viva with suggested weekly actions stemming from communications and documentation. Viva focuses on empowering individuals and supporting wellbeing for remote and in-office workers. Viva offers tools for the curation of learning tabs through a



Justin Short

management system in which content can be assigned and recommended, actionable wellbeing recommendations, such as marking time for focused work or tracking meeting effectiveness, visibility into work patterns, helping to identify contributions or risks to burnout, and much more. With wellbeing a top-priority for many employers and employees alike, Project Viva proves to be an invaluable tool.

As a Microsoft Gold Partner, Synergi is well-positioned to support organisations in the implementation and use of all the listed technologies in this article.

**To find out more, email enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk or call 0191 4770365. Visit the events area of teamsynergi.co.uk to register and claim your FREE seat at our latest event 'Synergi - The Technology Discovery Event Series'.**



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James Bunting



# TALKING TECH AND DIGITAL

## JAMES BUNTING

Chief Executive Officer, Leighton

### Did you always envisage a career in the world of Technology?

Yes, I think so. I'm of the age where computing was just being introduced when I was at school and my father thought that computers would replace all the jobs, so I was certainly encouraged to work in technology.

### What attracted you to your current role?

People. I was lucky enough to start my career at Leighton as my second role out of university. I got to work with some incredibly talented shareholders who taught me a great deal about business and gave me the opportunity to co-found Communicator. When I spoke to them 5 years ago about the CEO role at Leighton, whilst the role itself was exciting, it was really the chance to work with the shareholders and start learning again that attracted me.

### How important has Technology been during the Coronavirus pandemic?

As a software development business, we have always worked with disparate teams, across different locations. In other words, we have always had to use technology to build exceptional software solutions even pre-pandemic. What has been interesting to see though, is that the use of technology during the pandemic has levelled the playing field. The pandemic has ensured everyone is in the same boat. I think that more than anything has been an important change.

### What tips would you give to someone looking to work in the industry?

1. Whatever you decide to do, whatever role you take, which ever company you join, choose to work with people that inspire you, motivate you, and that you learn from. Choose people that make you the best version of yourself that you can be. That's without a doubt my number one tip in work (and life).
2. Technology might not be for you if you don't like change and constant learning. From my experience of working in technology, one of the few guarantees you can have is that things will change. Regular change isn't for everyone, so make sure you're comfortable with change, before choosing to work in technology. Because technology moves fast you also need to be comfortable with continuous learning. Not only do you need to know the skills that are required for your role today, but you need to be comfortable and dedicated to learning the skills that will be required in 6-12 months' time.
3. Don't be phased by the jargon. I've only worked in the technology sector so can't really say how it compares, but it always strikes me that there is a load of jargon. Don't worry about this and don't be put off about it. It's all stuff that can easily be learned. Google is your friend and asking lots of questions will help.

### Tell us the most exciting thing you're currently working on?

From a software perspective, I'm really excited about our new Human by Leighton product. It enables organisations to very easily deliver personalised employee onboarding experiences that quickly engage and upskill new starters while keeping the organisation compliant.

From a business perspective, we are about to launch a brand-new Amazon Web Services (AWS) software development team. This will enable us to further develop our specialist knowledge of AWS, deliver some best-in-class prototypes, upskill our team and further our partnership with Amazon.

### Tell us about your team

I've been at Leighton for almost five years now and my team is easily my greatest achievement in that time. We have a non-traditional structure at Leighton, so whilst I have the support of a traditional senior leadership team (people, operations, finance, technology), I also have the support of 11 of our consultants. Every one of whom is an expert in their field, but more importantly they all embody our culture. They are passionate, curious, nurturing, collaborative and open. This means that every day I am challenged, learning, trying new things and delivering alongside my colleagues.

### What's your fondest memory of a career in the industry?

I think I have to say meeting my wife. We worked together at Communicator and I knew from our very first meeting she was the lady for me.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

First and foremost, I want to continue to be as happy and supported as I am now.

I also know that the team at Leighton are absolutely going to become the North's leading AWS software development company and I really want to be a part of that journey.

I'd also like to work with the team to take 3 or 4 more new products to market as we have done with Human by Leighton.

### What piece of technology would you be lost without?

I probably shouldn't say this as the CEO of a software development business, but I've never been at the cutting edge of technological gadgets getting mobile phones, smart watches etc. only when they became mainstream. I don't even have a Facebook account yet. I like stuff that makes my life better and today, that has been my Tassimo coffee machine.

### Who are your heroes and mentors?

My dad is my hero. If I could be a fraction of the father to my children that he has been to me I'd be incredibly proud. He also taught me the value of hard work, and as an often-pessimistic person, the ability to think about what happens when things go wrong.

I've mentioned them already, but the shareholders at Leighton have been my mentors throughout my career. Chris Wilds has always supported, guided, challenged, and coached me on the softer skills of leadership. Gerard Callaghan and Steve Nelson inspire me to look at challenges in a different ways and Paul Callaghan is incredibly motivational. I think the fact that they are so different has probably been part of why together they have been successful.

### When not working, how do you like to relax?

I'm not sure relax is quite the right word, but when I'm not working, I love spending time with my wife and three youngish children. We were also one of those families who got a lockdown puppy, so I will admit that the early morning dog walk is a great way to set myself up for the day ahead.

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

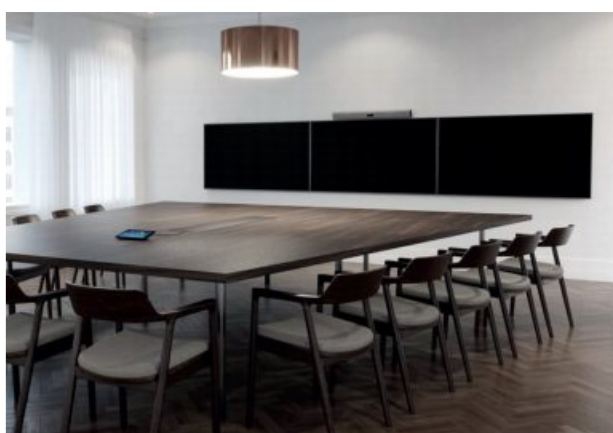


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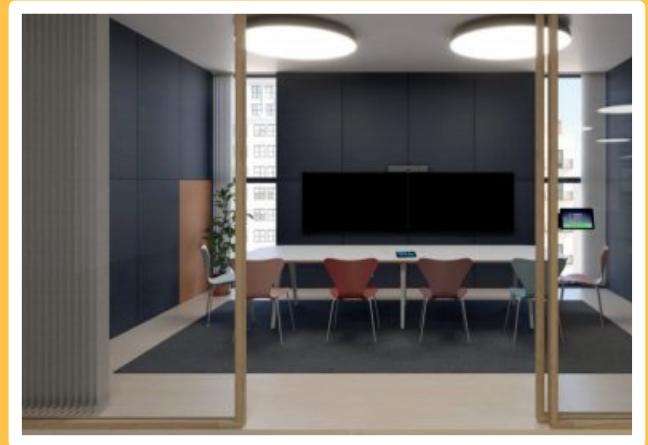


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## LAMBERT SMITH HAMPTON MOVE TO ADDERSTONE GROUP'S ST ANN'S QUAY

Newcastle-based property business Adderstone Group announce that Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH) will move into its Grade A office space, St Ann's Quay on Newcastle's Quayside.

LSH is one of the UK and Ireland's leading property consultancies with 32 offices and over 1,000 staff. It has serviced clients from across the region and provided support to other offices throughout the UK from its Grey Street Office since 2015.

Adderstone Group acquired St Ann's Quay, a mixed-use freehold comprising 32,000 sq ft office space, from an Irish investment trust in June 2021. The 10-storey building is the tallest structure on Newcastle's Quayside and was originally developed by Robertson Group as part of the Tyne and

Wear Development Corporation's Quayside regeneration. Following a comprehensive refurbishment, the office suites and their terraces to the lowest three floors now offer Grade A space with panoramic views of the Quayside. Other occupants include Knight Frank, Qubic Tax Limited and The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS).

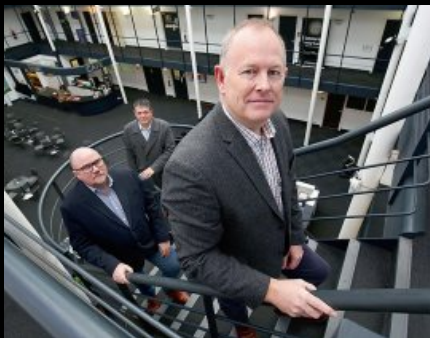
Ian Baggett, Founder CEO of Adderstone Group, said: "In terms of demand for office space in the North East, we are seeing a clear bifurcation. We have never known such strong demand for well-located, quality, energy-efficient space with access to open air. Outdated, inefficient stock increasingly faces obsolescence. This is a good thing for the region and the market in general. We are delighted to have secured such a prestigious firm as our latest tenant at St Ann's Quay."

Richard Wilson, Head of Office at Lambert Smith Hampton, said: "With the expiry of our Grey Street lease, we decided we wanted more than just an office, so our search was for somewhere our staff could be productive, creative and happy. We looked closely at our needs, recognising how our



working lives have evolved over 2020 and 2021. Having fine-tuned exactly what we wanted, we found the perfect space in Adderstone's St Ann's Quay. We are working closely with Adderstone on a gutsy, cool Cat A fit-out and the entire team at LSH is so excited about spending our working days with one of the best backdrops of any office in the UK".

There is one more suite remaining at St Ann's Quay. Contact 0191 269 9944 or [commercialestates@adderstonegroup.com](mailto:commercialestates@adderstonegroup.com) for enquiries.



## NEW TEESSIDE OFFICE FOR SUMMERS INMAN

Award-winning construction and property consultancy, Summers-Inman, is expanding its northern operations after new project wins in the Teesside area.

The firm, whose Head office is in Newcastle, already has established offices in Edinburgh, Leeds, Manchester, Leicester, Birmingham and London has just opened an office in Belasis Hall Technology Park in Teesside after a number of successful years of trading in the area.

Summers-Inman has already completed or is engaged in projects valued at more than £57m for Teesside University as part of its £300m campus masterplan. These include the first phase of the ground-breaking Net Zero building, the National Horizons Centre and the Cornell Quarter.



## HATRICK OF NEW LETTINGS

Expanding companies, including a national housebuilder, have created three new office lettings at Wynyard Business Park on Teesside – bringing it to 98% occupation.

National housebuilder Gleeson Homes is more than doubling its office space on the business park, as it signs a new lease for a 4,500 sq. ft. suite in Wynyard Park House.

Fast-growing Racz Group, which owns a large number of franchise outlets for brands including Domino's Pizza, Costa Coffee and Anytime Fitness, is expanding within Origin Hub, taking an additional 938 sq. ft. office suite. Water supplier to SMEs, Everflow, has signed a lease for an extra 1,814 sq. ft. of office space on the park to accommodate their expansion and take their overall occupation to 7,025 sq. ft.

Patrick Matheson from Knight Frank who struck the deals, alongside joint agent Tim Carter of Connect Property, said: "Wynyard Business Park remains the premium location to do business on Teesside. Its design, excellent position, grade A office space and on-site amenities create a fantastic environment for a business and their employees."

Asset manager at Northumberland Estates which owns the business park, Anthony Cape, comments: "We are delighted to see these tenants doing so well and choosing to stay at Wynyard as they expand."

"We are exploring some exciting opportunities at the moment, aimed at elevating the park even further."

Commercial property consultancy Knight Frank manages the lettings and also manages Wynyard Business Park.





# MAKING A DIFFERENCE TO REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

North East-based Hamilton Willis works for landowners and housebuilders, securing best value for both parties to feed the demand for more luxury and affordable housing.

We spoke to co-founder and director Aidan Hamilton about his role and future ambitions.

## Why did you start Hamilton Willis three years ago?

My colleague Calum Willis and I saw a market opportunity for someone with our PLC and SME house builder background. Our fresh approach and understanding of all aspects of the land acquisition and development process allows us to ensure landowners maximise the value of their assets. Similarly, we help developers source the right development opportunities to match their business requirements. Also, the chance to be my own boss; to do things my own way has long appealed. If you enjoy your work, you put total focus and energy into it. So, why not let it be for yourself?

## How do you differ to land agents and others in the property sector?

There are lots of really good agents and consultancies out there and we work well with them. However, they generally don't have our background. This means we can offer a one-stop-shop bespoke approach to individual projects. Having the insight and understanding of every aspect of the development process is invaluable when buying and selling land or seeking planning permission.

## What is your main offer to landowners and to builders?

It's us as individuals. We really understand the importance and value of what we do for our clients. They benefit from senior expertise and experience (no junior staff) and receive 100% involvement from us from the start of a project to conclusion. It's critical that landowners are properly communicated with and understand what is happening, and



Aidan Hamilton

that they trust the process we are helping with. We also speak the right language to house builders and developers, which smooths the curve when it comes to closing deals.

## What impact has the business made in the North East so far?

We have quite quickly become an established brand in our sector in a short period. For example, in 2021 alone we were involved in 13 contracted deals totalling more than 1750 units. This is a phenomenal achievement for a company of our size and reflects how far we have come in such a short time.

## What are your plans in the next 12 months?

We are committed to continued investment in the business and expanding our service offering both regionally and further afield. We will build on our successes to date, bringing in more senior experience to boost the team and improve client services. We also want to continue to have fun and work with great people and clients.

## How do you see things evolving in the next three years?

Despite media sensationalism, I'm hopeful that the water won't be too choppy in the post-Covid, post-Brexit landscape. We certainly continue to see positivity everywhere in the market. However, because as our offer isn't pigeon-holed, I don't think that we will need to evolve too much. We will just remain accomplished in our ability to deliver a diverse service.

## What are the biggest challenges facing Hamilton Willis?

We face the same issues as anyone working in our industry in the North-East, which is the availability of development land. We are as well placed to ride out any bumps in the road as anyone. There are several aspects to the business, so we should hopefully always be able to deliver for our clients.

## How do you relax away from work?

I don't. I have an 18-month-old little girl!

More at [www.hamiltonwillis.co.uk](http://www.hamiltonwillis.co.uk)





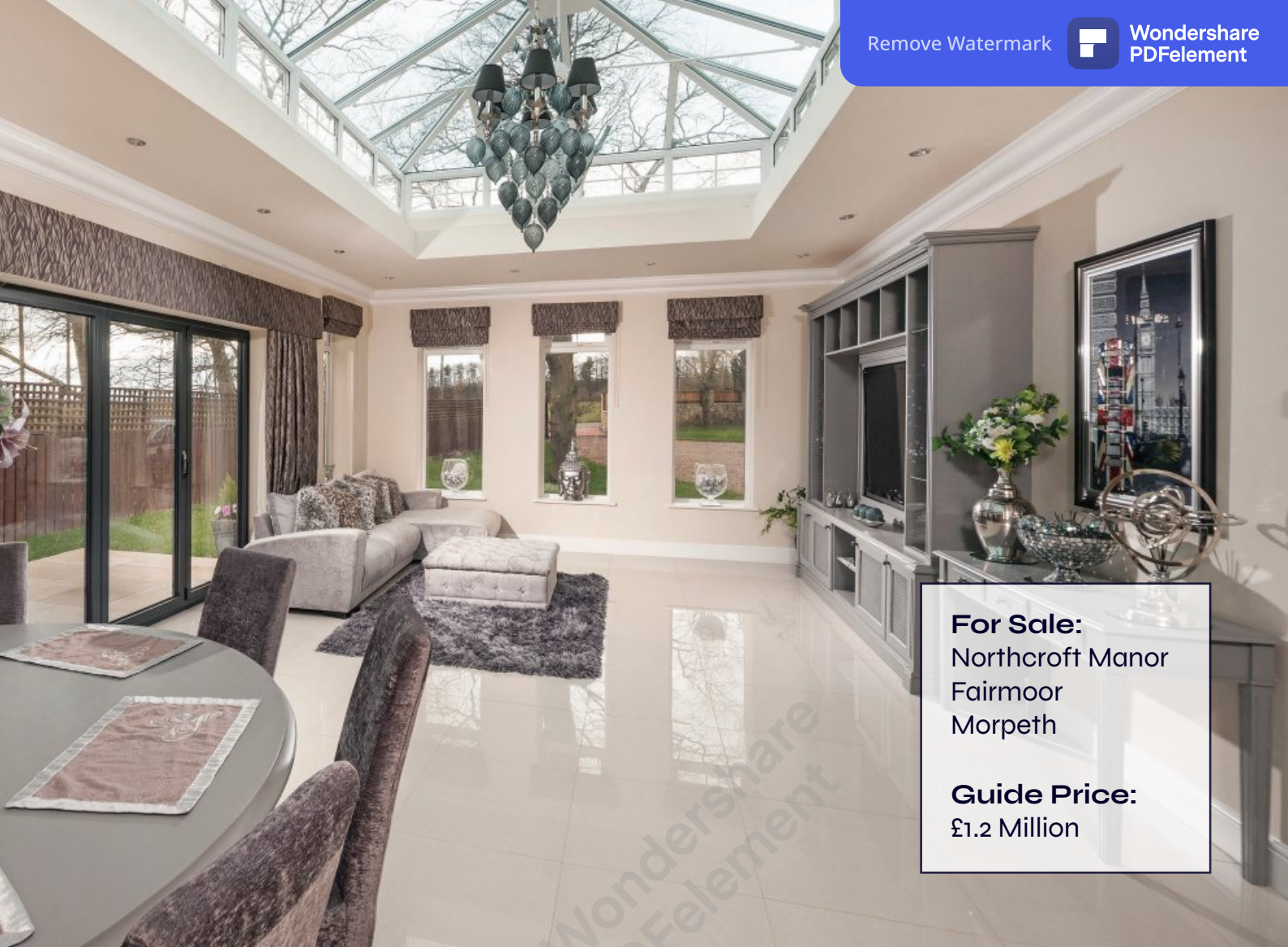
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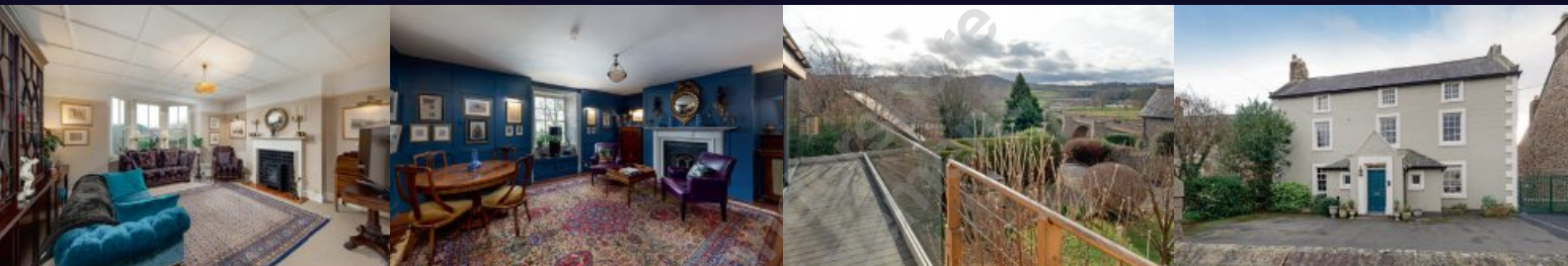
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Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 223 3500

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# SMART HOUSE - SMART HOME

There's no doubt that Covid has changed how we understand and appreciate our homes. We need houses that help us balance our personal and work lives like never before.

New developments need to represent the shift to what has become our 'new normal'; many of us working from home in a variety of capacities, video calling across the globe, requiring internet speeds that can handle multiple devices being used at once.

Outside space is at a premium, with many of us looking back through rose tinted glasses at all those family meet-ups, playdates and catch-ups with friends in our gardens, yards or balconies (in all weathers!).

Family entertaining space is in high demand, where many now relish in throwing dinner parties and socialising in our homes after being apart for so long.

If we are spending more time in our homes, they need to be designed smarter. They need to be slick, stylish and make us delight in our time spent in them. There is demand on how energy efficient they can be and how they can work for us to maximise our output. Smart home technology, electric car charging, green energy and high insulation are all points on current buyers' 'wishlists'.

This re-evaluation of 'home' should be seen as a chance to consider how we design dwellings for the future and enable a review of the specifications that we currently design to. Add in the need to search for a sustainable approach to building and living, and this becomes a huge opportunity to make design improvements, previously considered unfeasible, the 'new normal' and the way forward for residential developments.



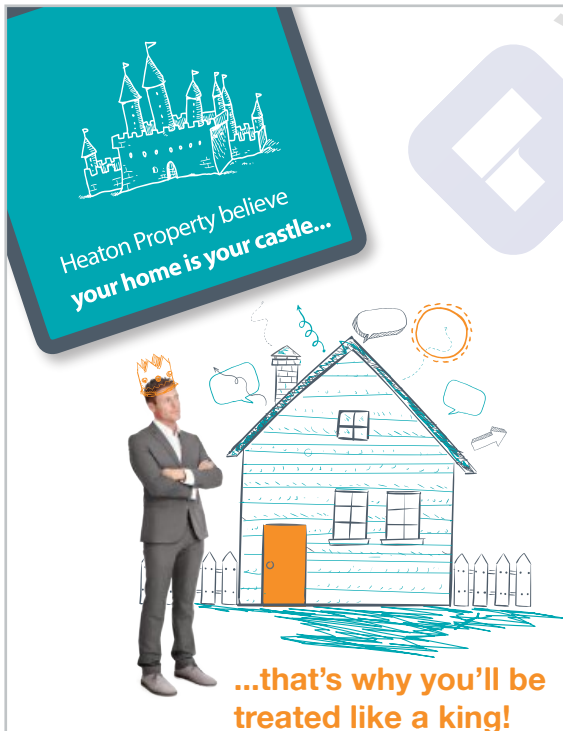
Amy Brice

Sanderson Young's new homes division arms developers with the market intel and local experience to consult on what features of new homes should be considered to meet such changing requirements and how to design specific schemes with the target purchaser in mind.

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Damiano Rea, Director, Heaton Property

## ELECTRIC CARS AND OLIVE GROVES

I have never been a climate change sceptic, nor have I been an eco-warrior. I have sat on the fence and listened to arguments from both sides. "We're doomed" vs "This is part of a millennial cycle". Both sides had rational. Both sides were buoyed by social media. But now I have jumped off the fence.

This is not the result of analysing scientific papers. I don't have the time. Nor was it the result of lobbying by Greta Thunberg or pensioners gluing themselves to roads. My change of view is the result of watching the six o'clock news.

Wildfires in Europe, the USA and Australia. Polar bears unable to hunt because the ice has vanished, catastrophic floods around the world and here in the UK, major storms with silly names (why they cannot give them sensible names like 'Storm Damiano' is beyond me). It is obvious, something big is happening and the bill is coming straight to our collective front door.

So, the bill marked URGENT – DO NOT IGNORE has landed. What can we do? What can I do? The 'we' is central Government and our local Council. Both outfits are great at soundbites, greenwash and virtue signalling. I am less than convinced by potential outcomes.

Government has a plan to replace efficient

condensing gas boilers with air-source heat pumps because they are carbon neutral. The only time they are carbon neutral is when they are switched off. They are expensive to install and run. Electricity is still far from being carbon neutral.

Our Councils are obsessed with creating cycle lanes nobody uses and trumpeting the benefits of public transport while presiding over a creaking public transport network. This subject could be a whole new rant (sorry, measured and balanced piece) so I will cite two examples. The Great North Road from Gosforth Park to Gosforth High Street and Askew Road in Gateshead.

Both were functioning four lane roads. Our Councils decided to go green and reduce them to two lane roads. To accommodate cyclists and walkers. Once easy flowing inner-city routes are reduced to long lines of crawling traffic, pumping out fumes. Win-win for virtue signalling Councils. Bad news for anyone living nearby or using Smog Highway.

I am fed up with it. So, I shall act. The catalyst was my 12-year-old daughter Alessia. I was asking if we should swap our company cars for electric. Alessia said "Dad. Why would you not?"

We now have four VW ID3 electric cars. They are quiet, comfortable and with a range well over 200 miles nobody is concerned about an embarrassing conk-out at the lights. Alessia says I should plant trees. OK. My father planted an olive grove in Italy which now returns decent olive oil.

I shall write to the Council seeking permission for an olive grove in Heaton Park. We must all do our bit. We must not leave the problem to our children.

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*Heaton Property is an award winning full-service estate agency from the North East set up in 2005. In September 2021 the company won gold in the 2021/2022 Best Estate Agent Guide.*



In the first of a new series of articles Rachel Johnson, Director of Ashdan Estates, asks...



Rachel Johnson with her father, John.

## WHAT IS YOUR LAND REALLY WORTH?

As experienced property developers will tell you, looking at land development opportunities comes with significant risk and therefore a stringent due diligence process is essential.

A big part of this process is establishing the feasibility of the development, and in particular what price can realistically be paid for the land, and how this may impact upon the project itself and how viable any potential scheme or land purchase actually is.



At Ashdan Estates, increasing our land development portfolio is a key part of our business strategy for 2022. However, with every piece of land offered for sale, the real question that should be asked is, how much is it really worth?

Firstly, the value of a piece of land is absolutely not determined by what the seller may ask for it, nor necessarily what their estate agent may tell them it is worth. The value of any piece of land is principally determined by two factors. The outcome of what can be done with it, and what people will pay for it. In the main, the answer to the first question determines what anyone will, or should, pay. This is where a Feasibility Analysis is required.

Contrary to what the seller may hope, the

value of the land is not the first consideration when undertaking such an exercise – it is the last!

What can be paid for the land is the amount remaining after the total value of the completed development has been established, and from that amount, the developer's profit, construction, and other costs such as legal fees, sales fees and interest on funding have been deducted.

When assessing the value of any piece of development land, it is essential that this process is followed in this order, otherwise a financial disaster may be looming for the inexperienced developer!

[www.ashdan-estates.com](http://www.ashdan-estates.com)

# NEW PLANS UNVEILED FOR 97-HOME EXTRA CARE DEVELOPMENT IN WASHINGTON



Proposal submitted by BH Planning & Design on behalf of Esh Construction to build the new homes on vacant land near the A182.

An application has been submitted to Sunderland City Council's planning department for a brand-new extra care development in Washington.

Proposed for vacant land off Moorway, east of the A182 Washington Highway, plans for the new neighbourhood include extra care apartments with communal facilities and bungalows. The new homes will allow local people with a range of care needs to live independently while benefitting from on-site care and support.

BH Planning & Design, a sister company of award-winning property firm Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents, submitted the planning application on behalf of clients Esh Construction. Director Mark Ketley said: "We are delighted to have submitted this planning application to Sunderland City Council on behalf of our clients, Esh Construction, for a much needed extra care development in Washington. The North East, especially Sunderland, is a hub of development and regeneration and we are proud to be playing a supporting role in projects which will shape the future built-environment of the city."

Councillor Graeme Miller, leader of Sunderland City Council, said: "Sunderland is working hard to deliver the range of properties residents need, and we know that – as people age – accessible homes with the right support wrapped around them enables our older people to live independently for longer.



"I'm thrilled to see this scheme move forward, part of a wider housing strategy that will see 7,000 new homes delivered by 2030."

The designs include an apartment building containing 84 one and two-bedroom apartments which will be spacious, wheelchair accessible and include fully fitted kitchens and shower rooms. A selection of two-bedroom bungalows will also be built on the site for those who are more independent but wish to take advantage of the on-site facilities.

Plans have been submitted by Esh Construction working in partnership with SP&Architects. Esh's Head of Land and Partnerships, Laura Devaney, said: "It is widely documented that our ageing society is causing a shortage of later life living options which means building new extra care housing – like the proposed development at Washington – is a high priority.

"Extra care schemes allow people to live in their own home and maintain their independence, while accessing on-site care should they need it. The communal living areas create a sense of community which can help combat the loneliness and social isolation that people often experience in later life."

Care and support will be available 24/7 and all homes will have state of the art electronic care call facilities. The on-site communal facilities feature a multi-functional social hub which includes a café, launderette and hair salon.

The proposal includes communal landscaped gardens, car parking for residents and visitors and a new public footpath from the northern perimeter of the site down to the vehicular entrance for the apartment building.

Solar photo voltaic panels will be installed on the apartment block and a contribution will be made to support general maintenance, habitat and wildlife improvements to the woodland area to the south of the site.

Devaney added: "A public consultation took place via leaflet drop to the local community with comments submitted via a designated website. The responses were widely positive with some notable interest in the new homes."

**To find out more about  
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## NEW NEIGHBOURS

As I write this, *The Chronicle* has published some information about average household incomes in different areas of the region. To be honest, there's few surprises, but I think that a look at history might be interesting – and more so I provide some personal thoughts about the future.

No matter what Henry Ford said ("history is bunk") – I think we can learn lessons from the past to shape our future better.

So in Newcastle, apparently the lowest income areas are Walker North and South, followed by Elswick and Benwell. At the top of the pile is South Gosforth, High Heaton and North Gosforth. No great surprises; Walker is dominated by local authority housing, and Elswick and Benwell are dominated by Tyneside flats as well as local authority housing. At the top of the pile, most of the housing stock is privately owned. The housing styles reflect the populations of the areas.

150 years ago though, Benwell was a very well regarded suburb. The big houses in Jesmond's 'Golden Triangle' are nothing compared to the grand houses of Benwell such as Condercum House, owned by John Frederick Weidner, the owner of Finlays tobacconists, and Oakfield, home of Christian John Reid – whose eponymous jewellers is still trading in Blackett Street. It has long been traditional for the better suburbs of most towns and cities to be to the west, though Jesmond (to the east) was starting to have an impact in the early years of the last century.

But what's all this got to do with commercial property? And what do I mean by learning from history?

Business, by and large, follows the consumer, not the other way around. True, there are world famous and nationally famous businesses that are 'destinations' – Selfridges, Harrods and the commodity and Stock Exchanges in London, and Fenwick in Newcastle – maybe even Reids the Jewellers. But by and large

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Phil Bowe

businesses, particularly in retail, will follow the demograph they aim to serve. In a microcosm they will often cluster, but the cluster is usually close to their market. It's one reason that town centres will (if the planners and road traffic planners can keep their ideas of banning cars) in my view survive and thrive.

And now to the lesson from history. If businesses have to move to the market, then they must look for good existing markets and potential new ones. So I'm going to make a bold prediction. The lowest income areas in Northumberland are Blyth Cowpen, Ashington Hirst and Blyth Isabella. Blyth has long been considered pretty poor, but already I know of two local property investors who are buying swathes of the town, both residential and commercial. And what two things are coming to South East Northumberland in the next few years? The British Volt factory is due to open in Blyth in 2028 and before that the rail line to Ashington is due to reopen to passenger traffic, with stations at Bedlington Station, Blyth Bebside, Newsham and Seaton Delaval as well as the connection at Northumberland

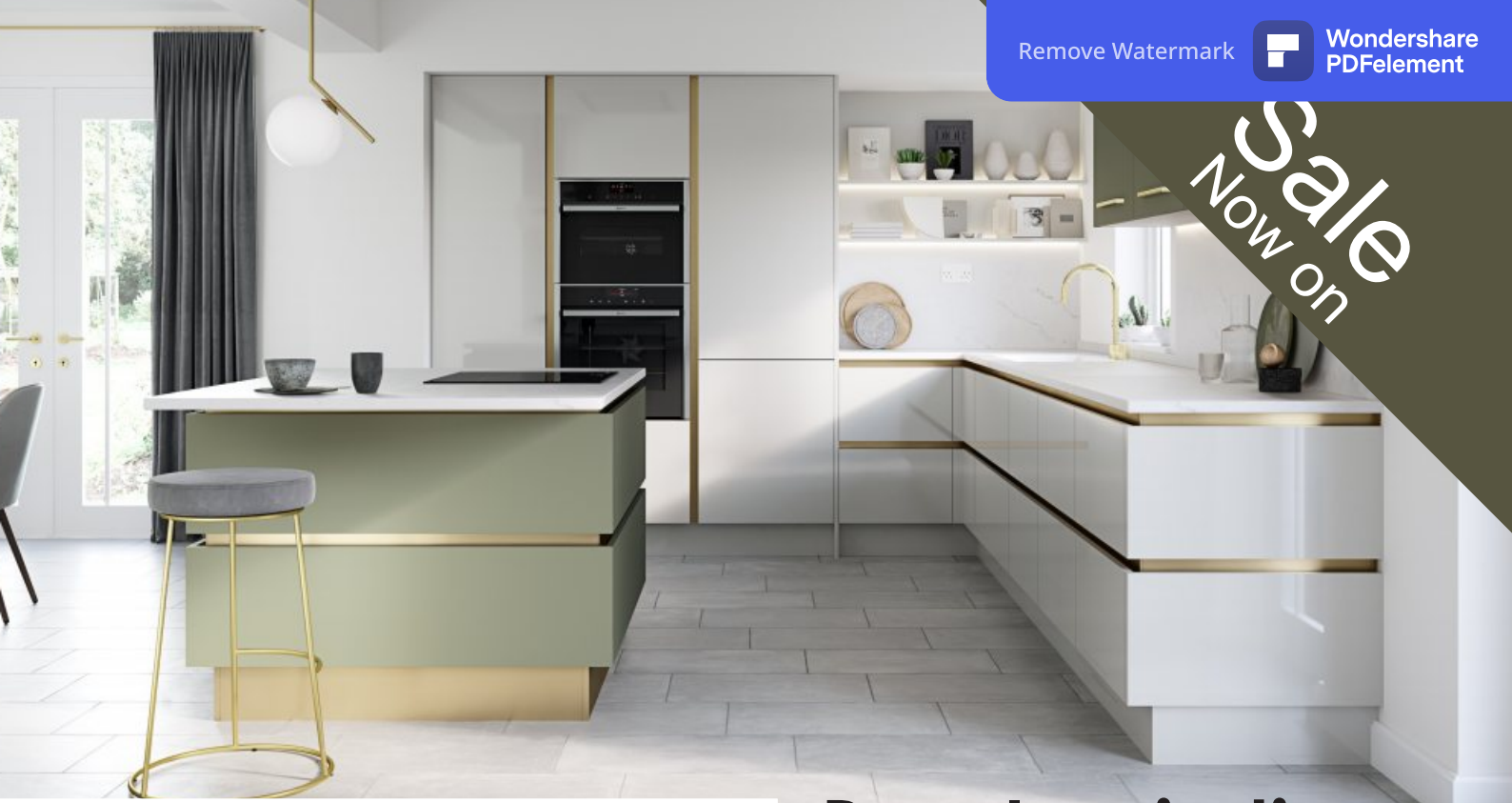
Park. This will I think make Blyth and all the settlements 'on the line' more attractive as commuting to Newcastle (still a major draw) will be easier, and the factory, creating 3,000 jobs, is certain to have a major positive impact on the local economy.

So businesses should in my view consider this area as 'ripe for the picking' – while prices are low, it's time to buy or rent land and buildings in the area ready for the future. I say this to occupiers and to property investors. I can't promise any immediate excitement, and I don't claim to have a crystal ball, but I do remember history that has repeated itself.

If I'm still writing in Northern Insight in 2028, I wonder if I'll be right? Only time will tell, but I think all the ingredients are there.

**If you disagree, tell me! I  
f you agree, tell me! I also write on  
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# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

## ROSS HAGGIE

Senior Building Surveyor,  
Silverstone Residential Surveys

### Tell us about your role at Silverstone Residential Surveys.

I work as a Senior Building Surveyor, undertaking the vast majority of the work generated by the business. This often involves helping clients through the process of moving home, advising on the cause and remediation of any ongoing issues, whether that be for their own home, a second home, rental properties and/or a larger portfolio.

### What do you enjoy most about your role?

I'd probably have to say the variety and flexibility. Two days are rarely the same, you get to go out and see lots of different places and buildings and spend a fairly equal amount of time out on site, in the office and working from home. The job is also very rewarding when helping clients through difficult and stressful times.

### What services does the organisation provide?

We cover any form of pre-acquisition survey (Homebuyers, Building Surveys, etc), in addition to specific defect inspections, schedules of condition, project management, contract administration, party wall matters, boundary disputes, measured surveys and reinstatement cost assessments. We work mainly throughout the North East and further afield across the UK.

### What's your proudest business achievement?

I would probably say watching the growth and development of the residential business over the last four years. The business was very much in its infancy when I joined and has managed to flourish and become established during a difficult period, in a tough and competitive market.

### What challenges have you encountered?

There are always challenges in business, but Covid-19 is about as big as it gets – I am sure many would agree. Having the industry effectively just stop and shut down for months on end was a pretty testing time, fortunately the construction industry recovered quickly and has been very buoyant ever since. Long may it continue!

### How has the industry changed since you began your career?

My career began during the recession, so coming out the back of that, the industry has taken a long time to stabilise. It felt like things had only really just settled down before covid struck and rocked the boat again. The industry has had to become very resilient, but it is also very demanding with time constraints being passed on to those undertaking the work. I certainly feel it has had to become even more fast-paced and continually adapt to cope with ever-increasing demands.

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

Openness and honesty. Being clear, concise and communicating well are essential. Ensuring everyone is aware of the status quo is also key to gaining trust.

### How do you like to unwind?

You can't really beat a nice holiday, good food and drink. I've always had a passion for playing and watching sport, especially football; although you can't really 'unwind' as a Newcastle fan! I also like to decompress by walking the dog, going to the gym and running along the Quayside.

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



Ross Haggie





Erin Snowdon and Josh Sixsmith, Lettings Specialists at Living Spaces

## LIVING SPACES RETAINS TOP INDUSTRY AWARD

North East letting agent, Living Spaces, has struck gold by winning the British Property Award for Letting Agents in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre, for the second successive year.

The Grey Street-based agent performed outstandingly throughout the extensive judging period which focussed on customer service levels. They will now be shortlisted for a number of national awards.

This achievement is the latest in a string of successes in the British Property Awards – Gold Winners for 2020-21 Letting Agent and 2021 Estate Agent in Newcastle upon Tyne city centre.

The British Property Awards provide agents throughout the UK with an invaluable opportunity to compare the service that they

provide against the service provided by their local, regional and national competition.

Vikki Higginbottom, Business Manager at Living Spaces, said: "We are thrilled that our team's outstanding work has been recognised again with such a prestigious award. We are extremely proud to have maintained such high standards despite the many challenges during 2021.

"This award is a huge boost - well done to the team for continuing to go the extra mile and provide excellent customer service."

Living Spaces is the sales, lettings and management arm of Kingston Property Services, part of the Bernicia Group. Living Spaces and Kingston both make a significant contribution towards Bernicia's work helping North East communities through the Bernicia Foundation.

The British Property Awards is recognised as one of the most inclusive estate agency awards, on average judging over 90% of agents meeting the criteria at a local level. Its team mystery shops every agent against a set of 25 criteria to comprehensively judge customer service levels.

Robert McLean from The British Property Awards, added, "Our awards have been specifically designed to ensure that we have the most inclusive awards, removing any opportunity for bias or manipulation. Winning agents should be proud that their customer service levels provide a benchmark for their local, regional and national competition."

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





## youngsRPS PRESERVES PRINCIPAL PARTNERSHIP OF RETURNING LANDMARK NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY SHOW

youngsRPS, one of the North of England's leading independent RICS Rural and Commercial Surveyors, Land and Estate Agents and RTPI Planning and Development Consultants, are thrilled to announce its continued sponsorship of The Northumberland County Show.

This year's show returns after a (lockdown induced) two year hiatus and is to be held in the grounds of Byewell Hall, Stocksfield, on Bank Holiday Friday 3rd June.

youngsRPS, who first became Principal Partners back in 2014, have supported the show for many years. Continued support

of the North East's landmark countryside event for the eighth year is a clear reflection of the close links youngsRPS have to the agricultural community across the North of England and Scotland. With thousands of volunteers, competitors and traders, this one-day agricultural event welcomes over 26,000 visitors from across the NE region, Cumbria, Yorkshire, Scotland and further afield.

Charles Raine, Director of youngsRPS, comments: "The Northumberland Show is the jewel in the Country Shows calendar and this year proves to be even more momentous with it landing on Jubilee weekend. With the cancellation of both the 2020 and 2021 shows, we are all eager to return bigger and better than before. The return of the show is creating a real buzz across Northumberland, more so with it this year being on Bank Holiday Friday, what better way to kick off Jubilee weekend than celebrations with all of the family?"

The Northumberland County Show, run by Tynedale Agricultural Society, has been

held in various locations and under different names since the 1830's, and over its one-hundred-and-ninety-year history has only been cancelled a handful of times: during each world war and Foot and Mouth. Since 2013 the show has been held in the beautiful grounds and parkland surrounding Bywell Hall, nr Stocksfield the home of Lord and Lady Allendale and their family.

Charles continues: "Visitors to the show will join us in celebrating not only the return of the show but also the prime of the region's agricultural industry. It's an amazing day out for all the family to enjoy demonstrations, local food and drink, music, arts and crafts, shopping and much, much more.

We will of course be on site so do pop along to the youngsRPS marquee to meet the team and learn more about what we do and why we are so passionate about the North East!"

**For more information about youngsRPS and their services, please visit:**  
[www.youngsrps.com](http://www.youngsrps.com)





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## THE ENERGY CRISIS – A PERFECT STORM

By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield

I wrote in October about the problems of switching away from fossil fuels to more environmental solutions for our housing. I also noted the impending problems with future price increases to gas and electricity.

The country is now gripped in a perfect storm of rising energy bills, inflation, interest rates and impending national insurance increases.

I think the essential issues remain; that we need, more than ever, to be designing and building low energy buildings.

It sounds obvious doesn't it, so we must find immediate ways to unburden the nation from our utter reliance on gas supplies. There are huge, short-term issues for large sectors of society and how they heat their homes. Sadly, I don't have the mandate to solve it all!

I would encourage all politicians, councils and statutory bodies to look at how they can improve our housing stock in the short, medium and long term.

For short term measures, I would remove the green levy from bills. We need to separate these essential measures from the costings on energy, so that the public don't associate the long-term costs as a burden on current energy prices.

I would then extend the current incentives - Renewable Heat incentives (RHI – will cease to exist on March 21), re-introduce the feed-in tariffs (FIT) on PV panels, and in fact take this forward with a re-introduction of the failed Green Homes Grant of 2021.

The basic premise was a promising idea, offering £5k grants on a range of measures to improve house insulation, install air-source or ground-source heat pumps, biomass boilers and other measures. As ever it was rushed and failed, due to lack of approved contractors and approvals.

We need to incentivise every house in the country to improve its energy systems and insulation, but the average home can't afford this when they are paying larger energy bills and other cost of living increases. In fact, it will reverse the ability of people to improve their homes.

In the medium term, other incentives include better mortgage rates for houses with a higher EPC rating but let's follow America with tax breaks on houses with PV and home batteries. Our home countries offer different grants which seems irrational.

Longer term national improvements to building regulations must make sure

that new build, home extensions and all redevelopment work undertaken shows real, sustainable change to our building stock. It's said our homes in the UK are the worst insulated in northern Europe.

As a country and society, we need to really plan ahead on all our energy sources and work out the approach that encourages and assists homeowners to do the right thing. We all vote with our wallet, so the benefits must be obvious.

I have been amazed to see that heat pumps, home batteries and thermal efficiency have all become part of mainstream news. I hope that organisations like RIBA and RICS can advise the government on how to improve buildings and set better targets that will ultimately avoid the 2022 energy storm repeating again and again.

**Neil Turner, director, Howarth Litchfield can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [n.turner@hlpuk.com](mailto:n.turner@hlpuk.com) or [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**



# THE GREAT LANDLORDS' ENERGY-EFFICIENCY SCRAMBLE FOR EPC 'B'

Ian Tew, from Knight Frank, shares his expertise on how to win the race:

Since the government announced that all commercial properties need a minimum EPC 'B' rating by 2030, landlords up and down the land have been scratching their heads over where to start with upgrading their properties.

Doing nothing is not an option. From April next year, all buildings must be an E or better, even if there are no changes in tenancy. The standard is raised to a C rating in 2027, and a B in 2030. Properties not hitting the minimum ratings cannot be leased.

Landlords must start planning now as the road to energy efficiency can be a long and, sometimes complex one.

2030 may seem like a long way off but surveys to establish exactly how you can boost energy performance, managing tenancies to allow the work to be carried out and securing finance for the works, all takes time.

And, of course, if the figures for improvements versus rent levels don't stack-up then you need a viable exit strategy or an alternative use for your property.

## Not all EPC assessors are equal

The first step is to understand EPCs.

EPCs are determined by accredited assessors who use approved software to measure various aspects of a building's energy efficiency to get an end score, which translates to a grade. For example, a score of 0 – 25 is an A, while a score of 150 or more is a G.

It's beneficial to building owners to provide as many accurate metrics as they can, to assessors. Assessors can work on default values but defaults assume the worst so will almost certainly lead to a poorer final EPC rating.

The cost of an assessor can vary, depending on the building, but some cheaper assessors

save time by using default values, which will result in a worse score, so paying a bit more for an environmental/energy consultant to do a thorough job can pay dividends. Quality assessors can also run future iteration models to ensure that the cumulative benefit of any changes has the required effect.

## Fabric and services

EPCs are assessed through two main aspects – building fabric and building services.

Fabric is about the construction of a building, such as its structure, floors, internal and external walls, glazing and the roof.

Building services are things like the heating, cooling, lighting and power to the building.

## Biggest wins

After your EPC assessment, you'll probably find that the report tells you that the biggest gains you can make, are in your building services.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution. Typical works can range from minor interventions, such as lighting replacement or insulation upgrades to more substantive upgrades such as changing the energy source from gas to electric, replacing older inefficient plant with new, and installing energy metering and monitoring of the lighting and heating, ventilation and air conditioning systems.

Most people are aware these days that LED lighting is best for conserving energy but swapping out all your bulbs for LED may not get you maximum improvement. Having a full lighting plan drawn-up is often well worth the effort. A full design can highlight where

lighting is being overused.

Smart systems can be installed to ensure that lighting automatically dims in bright daylight and switches off when a space is empty.

Ventilation systems can also be upgraded to include demand-driven control.

Heating and cooling units can be changed to variable refrigerant flow (VRF) units. These can be configured to have room-specific temperature zones.

An effective way of improving an EPC rating is for a building to generate its own energy on site, through solar panels or wind turbines, for example.

## The big but

It is absolutely essential that any recommendations for improving the EPC fully take into account the specifics of the building. For example, solar panels are all well and good but if your roof doesn't have enough space for them or the roof structure can't support their weight, it's back to the drawing board.

## In summary

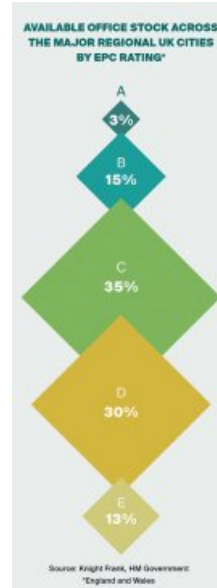
These are the main points to consider for attaining that golden EPC rating and reducing energy consumption and the associated carbon emissions.

Key to getting this right – first time - is getting the best advice and expertise to guide you. As well as that, choosing the right construction or fit-out partner who is knowledgeable in EPC ratings is crucial.

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



Ian Tew, Partner at Knight Frank's Newcastle office.



# BERNICIA'S £2 MILLION PLEDGE TO HELP LOCAL PEOPLE FIND WORK



Lewis Yates

Housing association, Bernicia, is pledging an extra £2m to help people into work as part of increased investment into North East communities.

A new employability team at Bernicia will work with schools, employers and support agencies to support and encourage people into sustainable employment.

The team will be helping people to develop their job ready skills and career aspirations. It will also help take pressure off employers by supporting their new recruits in the crucial early stages of their employment.

Partnerships with other delivery organisations will help tackle a wide range of issues, like helping those furthest from the

job market onto the jobs ladder.

Bernicia has a long history of successfully helping people into work. In addition to its award-winning Learning Hives and apprenticeship programmes, the housing association provides funding to a range of people and organisations through its Community Investment Fund and charitable Bernicia Foundation. This new £2m pledge is extra funding to provide even greater support to the North East.

The funding will be invested into communities over the next four years as part of several new commitments within Bernicia's 'Housing People, Helping People' corporate strategy.

The new strategy sets out how it will invest hundreds of millions of pounds into its existing 14,000 homes, alongside building hundreds of new properties to tackle the urgent need for quality affordable housing.

John Johnston, Bernicia Chief Executive, said: "We are pledging significant additional

resources to support our communities – building aspiration, increasing confidence, providing training, skills and job opportunities.

"Our employability programme will be focused on meeting those objectives by providing expert support and guidance, with the aim of helping new entrants to the workplace, or those returning to employment, to build a successful career and improve their own quality of life and help strengthen communities.

"Working with regional companies, we know the importance they attach to finding employees who are work ready, with the technical and softer life skills they need to build a successful career.

"As a major North East employer and social housing landlord, we recognise the skills capacity and influence we have to help change people's lives for the better."

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



The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy!



*Hi everyone...Great news! My little sister is pregnant and going to have six puppies - I am really excited even if Daddy is sending me away when it happens - spoilsport. Anyway Cousin Dexter is coming today for a week so looking forward to that. More news on puppies next month*

**Jay from Low Fell asks:**

**Q.** Following on from your recent articles about the damp problems created by cavity wall insulation, my query concerns houses such as my own, which is of Victorian solid wall construction.

When you say that the cavity prevents damp crossing to the inside, I presume this means that any water is dissipated by traveling down the inside of the external wall. In that case, where does any water go in a solid wall where there is no cavity? You would think that the internal walls would be covered in damp, but this is clearly not the case.

I am sure this would be of interest to the thousands of people who live in solid wall houses such as myself who have been following the cavity wall insulation story with interest but are not directly affected by it.

**A.** The usual way of describing the difference between solid brick walls and cavity walls is that the former acts like an overcoat, and the latter like a raincoat. So when a solid wall gets wet from incident rain, it absorbs it as an overcoat would, and then dries out afterwards by natural evaporation.

As you rightly observe, this generally works very well. Victorian houses had the added advantage of being built with lime mortar and lime plaster, which are soft, breathable materials, which allow this cycle of wetting and drying to take place without any notable or extreme dampness "events" taking place.

The outer leaf of a cavity wall, on the other hand, is supposed to repel the rainwater, meaning that the inner leaf always stays dry. But cavity walls are mostly built with cement mortar, which is hard and non-breathable. So when incident rainwater penetrates, rather than being absorbed, it tends to dribble down the inner face of the brick outer leaf.

This all worked perfectly well until a few years ago, when some bright spark had the idea of blowing absorbent fluffy material into the cavities. Contrary to the insulation manufacturers' claims, retro-fit cavity wall insulation can allow water to cross cavities, where it shows up as damp patches on the internal surfaces, resulting in mould growth and decorative damage. This is a potentially huge problem, with some three million UK homes possibly at risk.



*Please send me your building queries through facebook - @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)*





## JASON THOMPSON APPOINTED CREATIVE DIRECTOR AT THE BIGGER PICTURE AGENCY

After five years heading up all video content for the agency, Jason has been appointed Creative Director to help drive the business forward.

As a multi-disciplinary creative, he brings with him a wealth of experience across a range of practices and will be helping to extend current capabilities across live streaming, podcast production and cinematography. Jason says "Our clients will benefit from our joint skills and experience and have access to the wider range of services we offer. We're very much looking forward to bringing you the benefits of this change with our enhanced availability, reactivity and creativity all under the one roof".

## CULTURE DURHAM LAUNCHES NEW BRAND AND WEBSITE AHEAD OF UK CITY OF CULTURE 2025 BID

Culture Durham, a partnership of cultural organisations from across County Durham, has unveiled its new brand and website.

The partnership, which has been operating since 2009, works with cultural organisations and creative practitioners from across the county to help change lives for the better.

It has relaunched its website and brand identity in advance of submitting a bid for UK City of Culture 2025, along with its key partners Durham County Council and Durham University early next month.

County Durham was named as one of just eight locations to make it onto the longlist for the title of UK City of Culture 2025 and the Culture Durham partnership is now



Tony Harrington, Chair of Culture Durham

working on the next stage of the application process.

The partnership has developed real momentum in pulling the bid together and harnessed the creative energy of partners to demonstrate why County Durham should be crowned UK City of Culture 2025. Securing this prestigious title would not only bring huge social and economic benefits to the county, but it would also raise its profile as a leading cultural destination.



## AWARD-WINNING O AGENCY SPRINGS INTO 2022 WITH GREEN SHOOTS

Winner of the North East Agency of the Year O.agency has kicked off 2022 with the launch of its new service for businesses keen to communicate their green credentials, welcoming back Caroline Campbell who re-joins the agency as Sustainability lead.

Caroline joins O after six years of leading the PR and marketing for a Bristol-headquartered international environmental consultancy at the forefront of advising businesses and Governments on their sustainability strategies.

In her new role, Caroline will play a key role in developing the agency's own long term sustainability strategy, whilst supporting clients interested in taking their first steps towards adopting more sustainable business models and advising how businesses can best approach communicating their actions in this area to internal and external stakeholders.

Caroline is joined by several other recent new hires for the growing agency, after a successful 12 months of client wins and team growth. 2021 came to a suitably celebratory end with O winning the coveted award for Agency of the Year (under 20 employees) at the North East Marketing Awards in December.

Kari Owers, founder at O, said: "This award was due to our continued investment and innovation during the pandemic, but also a lot to do with our culture and passion for career development, so it is a pleasure to see Caroline return to work for us again after several years away building her career in sustainability."



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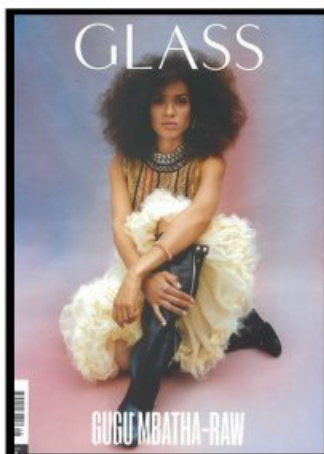
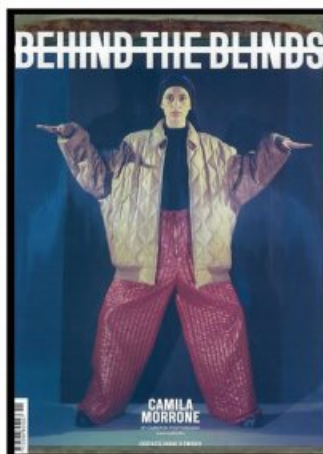
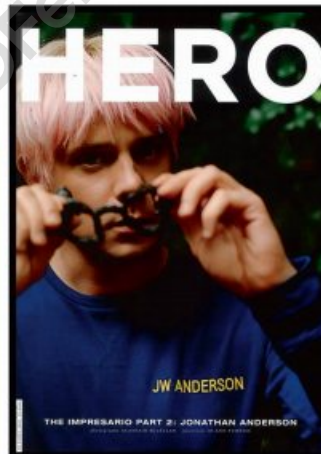
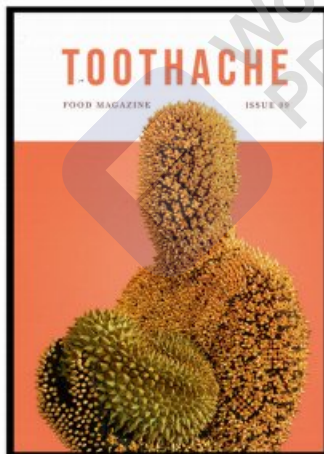
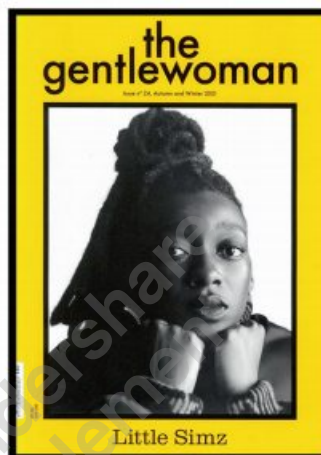


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## FINTECH DISRUPTOR WEAVR CASHES-IN WITH MEDIAWORKS TO DRIVE GROWTH



UK fintech start-up, Weavr, has joined forces with future-thinking digital agency Mediaworks to help drive its ambitious growth plans.

Weavr provide a simple and straightforward 'plug and play' platform to integrate embedded banking and payment solutions for businesses across a range of industries. Mediaworks will help drive wider brand awareness for Weavr through its content creation and Digital PR services.

Mediaworks is one of the UK's largest independent digital marketing agencies, and delivers an insight and data-driven Digital PR offering, which puts its clients' messaging at the centre of its target markets. Mediaworks has developed extensive experience in finance and fintech, and counts the likes of Metro Bank, First Direct and Signifyd among its client base.

Brett Jacobson, CEO and founder of Mediaworks, said: "The past 24 months has seen 10 years' worth of digital acceleration in the economy. Companies need to adapt their behaviours, and the need for the integration of smart, usable fintech into their business models has become paramount.

"From ordering taxis to tracking employment benefits, this is already a part of everyday life for millions. Building a strong fintech brand will accelerate their success in their target sectors. We're excited to be partnering an innovative business like Weavr, a clear disruptor in the financial world."

## PRINT FIRM'S CHARITY FUNDRAISING GETS OFF TO A FLYING START

A Teesside-based print and marketing company has been raising money for one of the region's best-known charities – with a little help from budding photographers.

At the end of last year, AlphaGraphics North East, which is based in Stockton, asked people across the region to submit photos for inclusion in its 2022 calendar, with all funds raised going toward the Great North Air Ambulance Service (GNAAS).

It was the first in a number of events the firm has planned to raise money for the charity this year, which also include taking part in the Great North Run and other endurance events, along with clothing donations.

AlphaGraphics North East director Sean Costigan said: "The air ambulance is an amazing charity that receives no government funding, so we wanted to play our part in supporting it – after all, any one of us could need its help.

"We have raised nearly £2,000 for the service since we started supporting them as our chosen charity in December 2020, and our photography competition has raised



awareness of its work and highlighted the beauty of the North East at the same time.

"Along with the rest of our plans for the coming year, we're confident we'll smash last year's fundraising total."

The 12 best submissions have now been chosen for inclusion in the calendar, with Jenn Brown's shot of Roseberry Topping being chosen as the ultimate winner. Jenn visited the AlphaGraphics factory to see the calendar be printed, where she was also presented with her prize of an Amazon gift voucher and a copy of the calendar by Sean.



## PR FIRM STRENGTHENS TEAM WITH NEW APPOINTMENT

Clothier Lacey & Co (CLC), one of the North East's longest-standing marketing and PR firms, has added Katie Moody to its team to further support its growth in Durham, Teesside and North Yorkshire.

Katie joins the business as an account manager from an independent beauty brand with several years of experience working in operations and project management for a construction training company. With a business degree from Durham University and broad experience across product marketing, PR, project management and business development, she has a strong skillset to support the management and growth of CLC's key clients.

Speaking of her new role, Katie said: "I'm really excited to be working with the talented team at CLC and gain insight from their PR experience which spans twenty years. It's a great opportunity to work alongside some well-respected regional and national businesses and I'm especially looking forward to supporting some of their key accounts in an exciting period of growth."

Managing director of Clothier Lacey, Philippa Clothier said: "I am delighted to welcome Katie to the team. She has such broad experience that she will add significant value to the business. We are heavily involved in the built environment, so Katie's experience is ideal. She has bags of enthusiasm, backed up with solid marketing and construction experience and we are really excited to have her on board."

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# MEDIA AND MARKETING MATTERS

In the latest in our popular series of features Michael Grahamslaw speaks to...

## DUNCAN McEWAN

Co-founder of Hedley McEwan

### Did You Always Envisage a Career in the Media Industry?

Not at all although I was always interested in design. I remember as a kid in Bellingham walking to school past a bright red convertible and being fascinated by the badge. I subsequently asked for a book on commercial vehicles for my birthday and wrote to all of the manufacturers so I could collect the badges.

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

I loved Art and did an A Level at Wallsend College as well as qualifications in Engineering Drawing. Like many I struggled to decide on which direction to take. I toyed with being a set designer for the theatre and a map drawer after writing to Ordnance Survey.

However, much to my father's disgust, I followed in his footsteps and joined the police force where I did surprisingly well. I was taken out of uniform and joined the CID and stayed for six years. I really did miss my natural vocation though. I kept my hand in designing posters for my mate's band and local shops. I also designed the North Tyneside Police magazine. This led me to meeting creative consultants John Watters and Peter Mallon, who were based on Jesmond Road. I started to go into their office on my day off and learn the ropes and according to Peter I was like a sponge with a real thirst for knowledge. I did some design concepts for the advertising agency Neil Forsyth Associates and one day Neil visited us with a bottle of champagne as he'd won the business! I subsequently quit the force took a salary cut and joined Neil's agency. I then moved to Robson Brown in 1986 where I stayed until 2011. Myself and Tom Hedley then formed Hedley McEwan after Robson Brown sadly went into administration.

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

With Robson Brown's demise we had to save the MetroCentre's Christmas campaign at very short notice. This was immensely satisfying and they went onto to be our first retained account after we successfully pitched for it. This was closely followed by Square One Law via Ian Gilthorpe.

The whole Covid period was obviously hugely challenging but our biggest test came when four of the shopping centres we worked with – Braehead, Trafford Centre, Eldon Square and the Metrocentre, centralised all of their marketing. This came hot on the heels of Tom's retirement and led to us sadly having to make some redundancies.

### What services do you provide?

Very much all channels to market including Advertising, Brand invention and reinvention, design, video content, television and video and social media.

### Tell us about your team?

We have a fantastic eight strong team headed up by our Managing Director Ruth Mattera who has worked with me for over 20 years and who is so creative and brilliant with clients, and Our Multi Media Director, Alan Cooke also remains from the original start up. Studio Manager Gareth Winter has now been with us for 10 years.

### What is your greatest strength?

I suppose the ability to imagine and make stuff up, and for a creative, I'm pretty good with clients too!

### What has been your proudest achievement?

I made a TV ad for Newcastle United which won a Gold TV Award. The idea came to me driving to work one day and seeing the whole skyline dominated by Churches and the clubs ground. I immediately knew how I wanted it to look and with the help of Director Ian Single we brought the "St.Nicholas, St.Matthews, St.Johns, St.James," places of worship concept to life.

I've also enjoyed being a mentor to schools and after one presentation at Joseph Swan College in Gateshead I met a lad called Shaun who loved what I did and was desperate to make it in the industry. He was crestfallen when he didn't make the grade on the creative side but subsequently became an Account Manager. Shaun now has his own very successful agency and I'm very proud that I played some part in his success.

### What are your remaining career aspirations?

I have spent my whole career mentoring people and trying to create big ideas and creative strategy. I feel the digital world deems this as unfashionable and as Sir John Hegarty said "we have become an industry of stalkers instead of an industry of seducers." I hope that Hedley McEwan can play a part in bringing great strategic brand ideas back.

### How do you like to unwind?

I've just written a screenplay for a film and I'm also finalising my first novel and first play. After that I have plans to write a serial drama for TV. I suppose it would be fair to say that there aren't enough hours in the day!

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





“  
...I was taken  
out of uniform  
and joined the  
CID and stayed  
for six years...





## RESPONSIBLE ~~MATCHMAKING~~ MARKETING?

Marketing and online dating have a lot more in common than you might think - they are both excellent ways to seek out and build personal relationships.

However, they are also subject to many of the same pitfalls! Here we're going to talk about responsible marketing, and how it can benefit your business to show potential clients that you are their perfect match.

Sustainability might be a social media buzzword, but customers will not trust your branding if you cannot back up your environmentally conscious credentials. 'Greenwashing', a term used to describe brands which claim to be eco-friendly but do not conduct their business according to these principles, is blatantly dishonest marketing. Imagine planning a date to a vegan restaurant that aligns with your ethical stance, only for the other person to turn up dressed in leather and fur - there would never be a second date! You should only make claims (particularly those that are ethical or lifestyle-based) that you can prove with your actions, or your reputation will suffer.

Data stewardship is also vitally important; as online threats become more complex and prolific, businesses must safeguard the personal data of their customers in order to maintain their trust. If your date wanted to livestream the entire meal, and then announced your card PIN to the whole restaurant as you paid the bill, you would be justifiably uncomfortable! The same is true of your marketing; cybersecurity should be a high priority, and your customers will want to know that you are not sharing their information with third parties.

The common theme across the principles of responsible marketing is building trust— a business can catfish you just as much as a date can! Customers are more likely to return if your marketing proves that you are reliable, caring, and honest.

***For more information on how you can be the perfect match for your target audience, and a 'peachy, not preachy' approach - get in touch on [info@peachydigital.co.uk](mailto:info@peachydigital.co.uk) or 01609 751676.***





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# TASTY FASHION, PARK BENCHES, TOOL BOXES, A CYCLE OF DISTRUST AND DIGITAL PILE ONS

Astute.Work's managing director and management and PR consultant Sarah Waddington CBE shares five things related to business, PR and marketing that she's found useful and you might too.

Here at Astute.Work, we regularly bookmark articles, apps, books, podcasts and academic research that help our thinking and practice. Here I've curated five from the last few weeks that piqued my interest because of their implications for the world of business communications.

## 1. Greggs and Primark

Anyone looking for creative inspiration need look no further than the new high street collaboration between Greggs and Primark. The announcement of the roll out of a limited-edition clothing range, coupled with a pop up boutique display in Soho, set Twitter on fire at the start of February with its offer of a 'new flavour of fashion for the very first time'. This was a clever campaign aimed directly at both companies' core target market with the knowledge it would hit the tabloids and go viral. We only have one question: does this mean we now have to call leggings 'Greggings'?

## 2. After Life

A second smart campaign will resonate with fans of Ricky Gervais' *After Life*. This superb link up between Netflix and CALM has seen 25 park benches placed around the UK to encourage people to sit down and gather their own thoughts or share them with others. It's a commendable piece of work at a time when society is increasingly fractured and charity Mind reports that one in four will experience a mental health problem each year in England. You can find one of the 25 park benches at Exhibition Park in Newcastle inscribed with the words 'Hope everything is ok'.



Sarah Waddington

## 3. New Twitter tool box

Twitter has published a list of recommended content scheduling, safety, and measurement tools. Buffer gets the thumbs up for scheduling; Moderate for management; Thread Reader for unrolling threads; and Followerwonk for analytics and bio searches. It's well worth a look if you're keen to know more about self-serve tools that can add functionality to your Twitter experience.

## 4. Cycle of distrust

The latest Edelman Trust Barometer is out. This well-regarded trust and credibility survey takes in 28 countries and more than 36,000 respondents. A key headline is that nearly one out of two respondents view government and media as divisive forces in society.

Similarly, there is a growing expectation among members of the public that businesses must provide greater leadership in addressing societal problems. At Astute.Work we only work with purposeful organisations focused on growing their social capital. If you'd like help with this, why not give us a call.

## 5. Digital pile-ons

If you or someone you know has form as a keyboard warrior, time for a rethink. Proposed online safety laws as part of the government's new online harms bill could see anyone involved with digital pile-ons or writing threatening social media posts landed with a jail sentence. If you're a company boss, it's worth revisiting organisational guidelines and reminding staff about the workplace policy you have in place.

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



# NORTHUMBERLAND CREATIVE AGENCY CELEBRATES GROWTH WITH NEW PREMISES

To celebrate a surge in growth, a Northumberland-based creative agency has moved from its office in Blyth to a new 1,900 sq.ft premises in Cramlington, trebling its capacity to cater for its growing team.

Canny Creative has taken on four new starters in as many months and has reached £450,000 turnover for the first time since its inception - largely due to its international client base.

Founded in 2015 by Tony Hardy and Adrienne Hughes, Canny Creative now boasts 10 team members ranging from brand specialists to content creators and thanks to its aggressive growth strategy has clients based in every continent.

Co-founder, Mr Hardy said of Canny Creative's growth: "When we started back in 2015 we had big ambitions and a clear goal to become an international branding agency. That may sound bold given that we were working from a small office in Blyth but we were confident we could get there.

"We have clients in every continent now which is something we are all incredibly proud of. Some are here in the North East such as DP Fasteners but the majority of our clients are in North America, Australia, and the Middle East.

"More and more of our clients were



The growing team at Canny Creative in Cramlington. (L-R) Jordan Rowe, Kris Cook, Dominic Lupton, Tony Hardy, Adrienne Hughes, Amy Johnson, William Hurst, Glen Millen, William Storer

Photo credit: Paul Stephenson

asking us for additional services such as videography so rather than outsource it, we hired more people. The new offices can comfortably fit around 25 people so we have future proofed the business from a capacity perspective."

Co-founder, Mrs Hughes added: "We have massive ambitions to grow the business even further. This year we will be looking to fill more roles, especially when it comes to video production and business development.

"The new office has a separate media room enabling us to create videos in a much more streamlined and effective way."

Looking to the future of Canny Creative, Mr

Hardy concluded: "Given the locations of our clients, it would be sensible to start to open offices overseas and place key people in them to grow our presence more in the likes of the USA, Canada, and Australia.

"It's an extremely exciting growth phase for us and we can't wait to see where we will be in the next five years."

Canny Creative is a creative agency operating primarily in the care, technology and FMCG sectors. It specialises in brand, web design and development, content marketing, and video production.

[www.canny-creative.com](http://www.canny-creative.com)

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## ...BUSINESS IS SPRINGING UP...

*It's March and Spring is almost here. With it comes the promise of better weather and exciting prospects. Highlights PR's Keith Newman asked some of his RADAR members to tell us what they have in store this Spring for their businesses.*



"It's World Book Day on 3rd March, so I am officially launching my latest book this month. Becoming the GOAT is a little bit different from my previous books, this one is a non-fiction book for teens, supporting them to be their greatest and covering stuff they need to know about life that is not taught in schools. It's been on presale the last few months, and everyone has enjoyed it so far.

As if that isn't enough excitement, I will be opening more resources to support authors on their journey to publishing their books, from getting started to getting over the line. If you have a book inside you then give me a shout."

**Eleanor Baggageley**  
[www.eleanorbaggaley.com](http://www.eleanorbaggaley.com)



"We are so excited as for the first time, Mint Business Club has their very own building. It's an old hotel in Consett and we've created a hub to share with several vibrant, exciting businesses. It's the ideal venue to use our hot desks or hold a meeting or simply just pop in for a coffee."

**Nicola Jayne Little Mint Business Club**  
[www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk](http://www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk)



"We are launching a new content plan service, allowing businesses to sign up for monthly affordable videography and photography services to market their business."

**Dan Wilkinson**, [www.thedwmedia.co.uk](http://www.thedwmedia.co.uk)



"Spring is in the air and House of Ruhr will be out and about at open air markets throughout the North East including Seaham and Bishop Auckland Food Festivals too. Being a very small batch German drinks company, we want to find 10 specialist shops and bars, who would have area exclusivity and be first to get the new range of our handcrafted spirits and liqueurs, created at our Ruhr Valley Distillery with heritage dating back to 18th century."

**Bryn Jones**, [www.houseofruhr.co.uk](http://www.houseofruhr.co.uk)

"We love spring time at Off the Grid Adventures, it's that exciting time of year when we can go back out camping and tree climbing again! We have lots of amazing new kit and challenges so if your school, group or family fancy something a little different, get in touch."

**Paul Kirkpatrick**  
[www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)



"March 8th is International Women's Day, and my customers can look forward to a series of talks focusing on Breaking the Bias. Imagine a world where difference is celebrated. Where we are free of bias, stereotypes, and discrimination. Follow "Be Kind. No Excuses" on You Tube or check out our social media channels."

**Rie Pearson, Author.**  
**Be Kind. No Excuses**







"We have been busy working on new branding and content which will be uploaded to our website over the coming months. We also have renewed focus on Employee Well-Being bringing an opportunity to support our clients (and their employees) in all aspects of their personal and work lives. For both employees and employers, working from anywhere is now a given within the work place. We create and defining policies to ensure that virtual collaboration, mentoring, and well-being are available for all.

Recruitment is also very high on our agenda. More and more companies are looking outside of the box for a one-stop recruitment solution that not only finds great candidates but supports their ongoing journey. We have recently brought on Shelley Regan to support this arm of our business and its proving to be a great partnership. If you need help with your HR, Legal, Recruitment or Well-being please feel free to get in touch with us on 0191 205 8020 or email [support@inspired-hr.co.uk](mailto:support@inspired-hr.co.uk)

**Nikki Masterman, Inspired HR**

"The North Tyneside Business Forum has just had its annual business awards which showcased the talent of businesses large and small in the borough. I'm looking forward to continuing working with these businesses and others to help bring even more success to North Tyneside."

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)  
[www.facebook.com/yourbusinesspilot](https://www.facebook.com/yourbusinesspilot)  
[www.facebook.com/madetotreasureevents](https://www.facebook.com/madetotreasureevents)  
[www.linkedin.com/in/karen-goldfinch](https://www.linkedin.com/in/karen-goldfinch)



"We are delighted to have recruited a talented young designer on our Kickstarter programme. Nicola Gray joins us and is already adding an exciting new dimension to our work."

**Peter Martin, Marfam Group**  
[www.marfam.group](http://www.marfam.group)

**Last month our RADAR members appeared on BBC TV, BBC Radio, Local TV and many magazines and newspapers. To find out more about the benefits of becoming a RADAR member, contact [keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk) or call Keith on 07814 397951**

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**Contact Keith Newman for more details.**

Visit him on his floating office

[keith@highlightspr.co.uk](mailto:keith@highlightspr.co.uk)

07814 397951

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





Veronica Swindale

## **nesma - ADAPTING TO CHANGE CAN BE GOOD FOR YOU AND YOUR BUSINESS**

As regular readers of Northern Insight will know, nesma is one of the country's leading study centres for anyone wanting to build and improve their skills in marketing, communication, public relations and digital marketing. Thousands of professionals have acquired qualifications and experience which has seen them either gain promotion with their employer and/or, as is very likely, improve their salary.





Veronica Swindale and Lucy Davidson, Client Relationship Manager, at the North East Marketing Awards 2022 with nesma tutors, students and alumni.

Put it this way...if you have an appropriate qualification in the field in which you are working then you are more likely to gain promotion. This especially applies to those students who have obtained a university degree but are then looking for a position within the marketing, PR or digital sector.

nesma will provide you with those key qualifications by helping you achieve accreditation in CIM (Chartered Institute of Marketing) and CIPR (Chartered Institute of Public Relations). They even offer shorter workshop-type courses called Know-How and Do which can either bring you up to date with latest trends or perhaps refresh and refocus your skills. Every course will count towards your CPD too.

The pandemic created opportunities as well as challenges. nesma MD Veronica Swindale said. "As with all companies, we had to change the way we operated and moved everything online. It's been hugely successful and has allowed us to broaden the geographical area we cover. We originally concentrated here in the North East region where we're based, but we are now providing courses to companies and individuals across the UK and beyond. We currently have clients in 12 European countries. Continuing to teach through the pandemic meant that we were able to give our students focus during uncertain times with the bonus of coming out with a qualification. They really valued our weekly

“

**...The pandemic created opportunities as well as challenges...**

get together and it gave us a great sense of purpose and drive.

Being focused online means we can now offer our students a choice, and so in the name of sustainability we alternate between online and face to face to enable us to continue to support the social interaction. This means we reduce the amount of travelling it requires to achieve a qualification. Along with improving our own sustainability, we now offer courses on how students and businesses can be more aware of the impact of climate change and how we all need to focus on resolving global warming."

So, just like with every other business, nesma is changing.

The number of courses and the topics nesma cover continues to expand. Along with sustainability they now offer courses to students who need to improve their leadership skills or perhaps they're looking to switch from traditional marketing, PR and communications to a more digital way of working. Some will also want to discover how to make full use of the various Microsoft packages which can help businesses be more efficient.

The best idea is to speak to Veronica and her team so that they can explain precisely what is on offer and how they can help you improve your workplace skills, your work-life balance and even your salary. You'll also find full details about the courses and qualifications on offer via their website, [www.nesma.co.uk](http://www.nesma.co.uk)

**You can contact nesma by email, [hello@nesma.co.uk](mailto:hello@nesma.co.uk) or speak to Lucy, the Client Relationship Manager on 07734 222 254**

# COMMUNICATION SKILLS ARE EVEN MORE IN DEMAND

Thoughts from Veronica Swindale, Managing Director of nesma, Chartered Marketer, FCIM, MCIPR Vice Chairman of CIM North East Regional Board - Education and Skills



Veronica Swindale

Reading O'Brien and Gallagher's recently published *Truth be Told* (Kogan Page, 2021) has reinforced the fact that authentic marketing and communications win in this purposeful age. Every organisation has a purpose, and its purpose and credentials must be communicated consistently and effectively to all stakeholders and across all platforms, internally and externally. This requires great skill, and therefore, significant opportunities exist for good communications managers.

As well as progressive qualifications, CIPR also recognises the need for specialist communications courses. These are great for those who want to develop their career in a specific direction or wish to enhance their discipline knowledge.

*Let's hear from some specialists who have studied our CIPR courses with us...*



“

I wanted a qualification in Internal Communications (IC), and a course from CIPR was a natural choice. I wanted to learn the theory and practice to help boost employee engagement through internal comms. While studying for the Specialist Diploma in Internal Communications, I got promoted, and I am now responsible for internal comms across the company. The course helped me transform theory into practice allowing me to launch an IC audit and realign the analytics to focus on outcomes rather than just outputs giving more relevance to the employee voice. I also established a global town hall for all employees to help strengthen our senior management communications.

## DANIELA MINIACE

*CIPR Specialist Diploma -  
Internal Communications*

*Group Organisation & Internal  
Comms Director at Prysmian Group*



“

When I changed roles, my manager suggested that the CIPR Foundation course would help with the stakeholder engagement part of my job. It's been good to apply the knowledge gained as part of the course to my everyday tasks, and I certainly look at situations and events from a different perspective now. I even got a call from one of the Directors to say that it's good to see that I'm "not standing still". Communications is a much bigger machine than I thought, and I find myself unravelling cogs and chains of human nature – it's a bit of an iceberg!

## ENID LOVELADY

*CIPR Foundation in Public Relations (L3).*

*Communications Officer,  
Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR)*





“

I feel much more confident about myself and my skills, having completed the CIPR postgraduate diploma in Digital Communications. So much of what I have learned with nesma can be applied in my current job, especially when thinking strategically and tactically. My employer can see I'm taking my career seriously. I've already applied my broader knowledge of digital communications to my current communications strategy. As I get involved in a fair amount of campaigning and lobbying, my new skills will definitely be put to good use!

#### LAURA DRIVER

*CIPR Specialist Diploma -  
Digital Communications*

*Communications and Marketing Officer  
for NRCPD (The National Registers  
of Communication Professionals working  
with Deaf and Deafblind People)*

These quotes are a great illustration of how rewarding communications roles can be. And don't overlook the detail. Remember to hone your copywriting and proofreading skills along the way. As for your next interview, they could be a deal-breaker.

Our CIPR and CIM lecturers collectively work at New College Durham, Manchester Metropolitan University, Newcastle University, Northumbria University and Sunderland University, as well as practitioners, giving us the very best in marketing and communications talent to help you succeed.

Accredited qualifications will provide you with the confidence and tools to advance your skills, knowledge and career. Please don't underestimate how practical these courses are! Our students are always buzzing to tell us how they have implemented what they have learned into their business as all assignments are work-based.

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## MHW GROWS BUILT ENVIRONMENT PORTFOLIO

Construction and housebuilding are in buoyant mood while also recognising there are economic challenges ahead.

PR and communications remain in demand across the sector. These, along with recruitment and training, are often key barometers of the wellbeing of the industry.

During this period of strong regional and national demand, leading business-to-business communications consultancy MHW PR has strengthened its position within the built environment sector.

The Newcastle-based PR consultancy recently started working with international project and cost management consultancy Stature London. MHW will be advising on messaging along with national, specialist media relations to promote the skills of the company along with its portfolio of successful projects.

Stature London recently moved to larger offices in Wilton Road, in the centre of London, near Victoria Station, to accommodate future growth and expansion. Most project work is based around London and the south of England, but the company has also undertaken work in France, Luxembourg and Romania.

Wayne Halton, director and founder at MHW, said: "It's an exciting time to get on board with Stature London. The ambitious company has enjoyed consistent year-on-year growth by having a clear vision and a dedication to customer care. My team and I look forward to playing a key role in helping take the firm to a new level, to help ensure sustained growth for the business."

Elsewhere, MHW was also recently appointed by land development consultancy Hamilton Willis to develop and implement a communications campaign to reach out to landowners and developers.



Wayne Halton

The specialist Gateshead-based company already works with many of the leading housebuilders across the north of England. Where possible the team – led by Aidan Hamilton and Calum Willis – aim to match land development opportunities with housebuilders, large and small.

With personal backgrounds in senior management in housebuilders, the two are experienced in leading financial and contractual negotiations and navigating large multi-discipline teams of professionals through the development process. The challenge is to constantly source new land opportunities.

And late last summer MHW secured a great account win when national planning and development consultancy Lichfields appointed MHW as its PR and communications partner. The PR consultancy was appointed after a five-way competitive tender, which included agencies from London.

Lichfields, a £22m consultancy founded in 1962, has a network of nine regional offices and is keen to build and maintain its profile across the UK. MHW is supporting Lichfields' in-house marketing team across an expanded brief that includes driving awareness, and interest in Lichfields brand, services and products.

Grant Swan, marketing director of Lichfields, explained: "MHW demonstrated a clear understanding of our business, our clients

and how to bring the two together. The huge ambition that we share across Lichfields provides us with a really exciting opportunity to share parts of our brand story that we haven't told before and we're looking forward to delivering some great initiatives with Wayne and his team."

Wayne Halton, of MHW, said: "We are delighted to be securing national business as well as regional. It's very satisfying to have been appointed by two strong businesses based in London - especially a UK planning consultancy that has such a strong brand and reputation across the built environment.

"As a leading B2B PR consultancy in the North East, MHW has strong credentials in the built environment, from housebuilders, developers, property agents and professional service firms in the sector. Lichfields, Stature London and Hamilton Willis are the perfect clients to join our growing portfolio.

"Our next challenge is to secure an ambitious architecture practice with either an emerging or established national presence."

MHW currently works for North East housebuilder Homes by Carlton; modular steel-framed homes builder CorHaus, and regional housing and commercial developer Modo Bloc.

**More information about the MHW PR at [www.mhwpr.co.uk](http://www.mhwpr.co.uk)**



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**Delivering  
Brand-Led Growth**

\*Source: The Guardian

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## A NIGHT OF CELEBRATION FOR THE NORTH EAST MARKETING SECTOR!

The North East Marketing Awards celebrated the very best of the region's marketing sector at a glittering awards ceremony at the Civic Centre, Newcastle. Sponsored by Nigel Wright Recruitment, the event attracted over 300 marketing professionals from agencies and in-house teams across the North East.

Organised by Echo Events & Association Management, the evening celebrated a range of talented teams and individuals, with awards for Rising Star of the Year through to Marketing Director of the Year illustrating excellence at both ends of the career spectrum.

The first award of the night went to Kathryn Wharton from hedgehog lab for Rising Star of the Year. Marketer of the Year award went to Nichola Elgie, Drummond Central.

The Pulse Rooms won Brand Creation of the Year (Agency) for CBK Adventures and North Group with Brand Creation of the Year (In-House).

O.agency shone in our new category The Adaptability Award – Campaign for Flymo Garden Staycation they also brought home the Award for Agency of the Year (Under 20 employees)

Harvey & Hugo were over the moon to win The Adaptability Award - for Business. Cravens were ecstatic for the win Agency of the Year (Over 20 employees).

Drummond Central were thrilled to win the award for Campaign of the Year Agency – Budget over £50k for Greggs and Playstation UK – Launch Box, whilst Allies Group won the same award for under £50k for Sunderland Vibe.

The award for Product Launch of the Year went to Clearly Drinks for their innovative product Northumbria Spring. Michelle Gettins from iamproperty was delighted to win Marketing Director of the Year.

Castlegate & Wellington Shopping Centres walked away with Not for Profit Campaign of the Year Award.

The evening finished with another win for Barbour going to Paul Wilkinson for Outstanding Achievement Award for his significant contribution to the region.

**For a full list of winners and finalists as well as photos from the evening visit [www.northeastmarketingawards.co.uk](http://www.northeastmarketingawards.co.uk)**









# TURPS FILM JOIN SUNDERLAND CULTURE TO CELEBRATE SUNDERLAND SOCIAL PRESCRIPTION PARTNERSHIP



Sunderland Culture and regional film company Turps Film have linked up to capture the impact of an innovative social prescribing initiative.

Turps Film has been commissioned to document the work of the Sunderland Social Prescription Initiative (SSPP). The project will showcase the stories of Sunderland residents who have participated in SSPP activities, allowing them to tell their stories and explore the benefits of social prescribing.

Fundamentally, social prescribing involves helping patients to improve their health, wellbeing and social welfare by connecting them to community services which might be run by a council or a local charity.

It aims to address challenges faced by GPs of increasing pressure and stretched resources, while connecting individuals with their local communities to help them feel more empowered.

The SSPP initiative will explore and test

how people living in Sunderland can be helped to engage with a broader range of community activities to support their health and wellbeing.

A £50,000 grant from the Thriving Communities Fund has helped to establish the partnership between Sunderland Culture, Sunderland Carers Centre, Groundwork North East & Cumbria, Equal Arts and Sunderland GP Alliance.

The project aligns with the ambition of All Together Better, an alliance of health and social care providers, local commissioners and the voluntary sector, to create a single, integrated social prescribing service for the city.

Luke Holland, Founder and Managing Director of Turps Film, said "We are extremely proud to be working alongside Sunderland Culture on such a worthy cause. Their mission is to improve the lives of the people in Sunderland through culture and it's a huge honour for us to be a part of that mission.

"Turps Film was founded on strong northern values, and we strive to support the people of our region. We are committed to raising the profile of SSPP to promote the benefits of cultural and environmental activities. The initiative is incredibly timely with the latest mental health stats indicating that 1 in 6

people will have experienced mental health problems in the last week."

Sunderland Culture brings together the cultural programmes of Sunderland City Council, University of Sunderland and Music, Arts and Culture (MAC) Trust into an independent charity which delivers the programme in National Glass Centre and Northern Gallery for Contemporary Art, Sunderland Museum & Winter Gardens, Arts Centre Washington and The Fire Station, as well as communities around the city.

Rebecca Ball, Chief Executive of Sunderland Culture, explained: "The project will increase social connectivity and help Sunderland communities cope with the impact of Covid as part of a national initiative to embed social prescribing in communities and healthcare."

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





## BECOMING THE GOAT – AUTHOR HELPS OLDER KIDS EXCEL

Improving self confidence in young people is the subject of the latest book by Tyneside author, ex-teacher, education consultant and coach Eleanor Bagga.

Ryton based Eleanor's previous books all took inspiration from her three young children Maya, Oscar, and Ava – but this book is aimed at a slightly older audience.

The new book "Becoming the GOAT" helps teenagers to become the best version of themselves by providing stories and examples to help them understand personal, social, and emotional development. It also examines ways to overcome difficult obstacles in life which children may struggle with. The GOAT in the title isn't a loveable farm animal but an acronym for Greatest of All Time.

"Unlike my other books, this one is a non-fiction book for teens, supporting them to be the best they can be and covering stuff they need to know about life that is not taught in schools.

"As children, in school we're expected to conform, we're all expected to look the same, behave the same and achieve the same. But we're not the same. To excel beyond school, we must stand out, be ourselves and question the rules. We somehow expect students to simply switch between the two personas, almost overnight, to be successful in each environment. School does not always equip students for the real world in many cases.

"I've researched and written "Becoming the GOAT" to address the many aspects that are not taught in schools, the stuff teens need to know about life and about themselves so that they know where they're going, how to get there and to do it with confidence by being themselves."

## NCG COMPETITION FINALS SHINE SPOTLIGHT ON MICHELIN-STAR TALENT

Students and apprentices from Newcastle College showed off their talents recently as NCG, the national college group it is part of, hosted its NCG Skills competition finals during National Apprenticeship Week (NAW).

Sponsored by apprenticeship awarding body VTCT and end-point assessor NOCN, the competition gives students and apprentices the opportunity to display their skills, meet employers and have the potential to win a chance to be put forward for a place at the WorldSkills UK competition.

Winner in the kitchen was 19-year-old Anthony Reay from Hexham, who showed off the skills he has acquired as an apprentice at the Hexham-based Michelin star restaurant Hyem. The three finalists – including Anthony from Newcastle College and two learners from Carlisle College, competed to serve the best three course meal for Craig Harney, Managing Director of St Mary's Inn, Morpeth and Robby Scott, Managing Director of Newcastle-based Babuchos.

Scott Bullock, Principal at Newcastle College said: "The NCG Skills competition offers



a fantastic opportunity for our learners to showcase their talents within a range of industries including hair and beauty, plumbing and carpentry. The competition allows students to display their skills to industry specific judges, as well as their peers and tutors, which encourages them to train for success, builds their confidence and connections with potential future employers – providing both motivation and future opportunities. We're very grateful to the sponsors NOCN and VTCT and to our local employer judges, with whom we enjoy fantastic partnerships."



## NEW COLLEGE DURHAM APPOINTS NEW HEAD OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

New College Durham is delighted to announce the appointment of Lisa Waller as Head of Business Development – Sales & Growth.

Lisa joins the college with over 25 years' experience in business, training and education. Her impressive portfolio includes

a recent senior role in further education as Head of Business Development at Derwentside College.

Commenting on her new role, Lisa said: "I am really excited about leading the development of marketing and sales activities across the whole organisation. I will be building a new business development team that will support all curriculum areas of the college including apprenticeships, higher education, further education, adult learning and ESF funded provision. I will also be leading innovative employer led training academies that will support employers with their recruitment campaigns.

The facilities at New College Durham are first class and I am really looking forward to welcoming employers and partners to visit us to experience the scope and range of expertise across the college."

Deputy Principal Alison Maynard said: "We are delighted to welcome Lisa to her new role. With her experience in training and education combined with her ability to develop strong relationship with employers, we're confident she will be an excellent addition to our team."



## Calling all girls

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Girls 3-18 | [www.dhsfg.org.uk](http://www.dhsfg.org.uk) | [enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk)





Simone Niblock



# MARCH – COME IN HOW GLAD I AM I HOPED FOR YOU BEFORE

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School.

The American poet Emily Dickinson wrote these words to the arrival of the month of March. I must say that, as I write this in early February, huddled over the radiator, I am in accordance with Ms Dickinson: welcome March and goodbye to gloomy January and February.

Here's hoping that the month will herald not just Spring, but also a new phase of living with COVID- last time I will mention the acronym, honestly!

The month of March is an intriguing one from the perspective of festivals, feasts and adages. We have all heard the term 'Beware the Ides of March' from Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, but as a child I had no idea what Ides were: a monster, a skin (*hide* without the aitch) a mishearing of eyes? Now, of course, as an adult who has read *Julius Caesar* many times, I know that Ides refers to the middle of March and was infamously the date when Julius Caesar was assassinated in Rome in 44BC. Thanks to Wikipedia, I now also know that the Romans had three set points for their months- the Nones, the Ides and the Kalends, reflecting the lunar origins of the calendar months. Yet another set of facts that will set me up well for *University Challenge*, should the subject-matter ever emerge!

From a Christian point of view, this March sees the start of Lent. The day before Lent, commonly known as Pancake Day, is known in many countries as Shrove Tuesday, the term *Shrove* being the past tense of the verb to *Shrive* ie a day on which to confess one's sins. Personally, I have always loved the French title *Mardi Gras*, prosaically, translated into English as *Fat Tuesday*, the time traditionally when feasting took place before the fasting of Lent. Even more fascinatingly for me, it took me a while to realise that the word *Carnival* was a corruption of the term *Carne Vale*, 'farewell to meat', which in turn, was a folkloric corruption of the Late Latin expression *carne levare*, which means "remove meat".

Growing up in lugubrious Lancashire in the 1980s, the ostentation of the Carnival in Rio was impossibly glamorous, with my having no idea that it was historically linked to a religious festival: in the Middle Ages, Carnival was the time between the Epiphany and Lent, culminating in the feasting of Shrove Tuesday and then the meat-free austerity of Lent. I cannot remember any great celebrations on Shrove Tuesday, but Ash Wednesday was a momentous day and greeted with a solemnity that instilled a mixture of awe and dread as I received the Lenten ashes on my forehead.

The use of the symbolic ashes had its historical basis in Biblical times, with the ashes being used to represent grief. It then became part of the Christian tradition, and by the end of the first millennium, priests inscribed a

cross in ashes on the foreheads of penitents, a version of which is still in practice today. It is seen a *memento mori* and I still remember my visceral fear as the priest intoned: "Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return."

On a less sombre note, I always have loved the adage that says March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb. In my head I still have a picture of the lion as Aslan, and the lamb as Lamb Chop, the TV puppet: if you know who he is, you are giving away your age!

**Every day is an Open Day at Durham High School.**  
Call 0191 384 3226 or email [enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@dhsfg.org.uk)  
to find out more or arrange a visit.



# AN UNFAIR REMEDY?

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headteacher, Durham School

It has been a bumpy educational world over the past two years. Examinations have been cancelled, schools have moved online and pupils have had to coach with often extended periods of absence through either contracting Covid themselves or being a close contact. The effects of these impediments will be felt in the years to come, but already we are seeing some worrying signs in children of all ages as we slowly return to normality.

Some of the very youngest children are coming to school having spent little or no time in the company of their peers. Learning how to socialise, how to share and how to interact with others in the community has been a tall order for some, with teachers reporting highly stressed or very emotional youngsters in their classes.

For older children, effects have been twofold. They too are manifesting signs of stress in increased numbers and schools are reporting these to the mental health support services more frequently.

The second effect has been on the pupils' education itself. Whilst many schools worked hard during both lockdowns to provide online learning, a combination of lack of access to technology, an inability to attain a peaceful work environment and, most importantly, a lack of motivation in some pupils to work outside of school have all contributed to an adverse impact on youngsters' learning.

In order to combat this for examination groups, schools have been provided with advance information on what the examinations at GCSE and A-level will contain this year. In some cases, the content has been reduced and candidates have been directed away from revising certain areas of the specification. In other cases, pupils are provided with help such as formula sheets for maths and science, thereby reducing the amount of material for them to learn. This is a nice idea in theory, and no doubt it will



Kieran McLaughlin

have a reassuring on teachers and pupils who have had an disrupted experience.

However I am not sure that this measure will solve the problem as it intends. First of all, the assumption is that all pupils have suffered the same loss of learning over the past two years. This is clearly not the case: some pupils worked hard over lockdown and were supported with first-rate online learning. In other cases, online learning was patchy or non-existent and the pupils were not able to get online as quickly as others. A one-size-fits-all solution will therefore give an advantage to those already in a strong position, whilst not solving the problems for those who have been hit most.

This leads to the second problem. Those marking the exams won't know how much each individual candidate has suffered. All they can do is apply the mark scheme to what is on the page before them. We have already been told that this year grade boundaries are likely to be more generous than in 2019, the last year public examinations were taken. The combination of uneven experiences, well-intentioned

help and low grade boundaries will lead inevitably to a situation where grade inflation exists, and benefits those who are most advantaged to start with.

Given the negative publicity surrounding independent schools exam results last year (which took a partial and distorted analysis of the figures to draw some extremely dubious conclusions), we are in a situation where, through no fault of their own, pupils at independent schools are likely to gain better results comparatively again this year.

Many will, quite rightly, view this as unfair. However, this unfairness is generated by the attempted remedy rather than the problem. It looks like for the third year running, and probably not for the last year, the exam outcomes for pupils will be unfairly tainted by the mismanagement of those in charge of grades who have sadly bungled the job.

**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)**





BARNARD CASTLE SCHOOL

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Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> March 2022



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In vogue, Ted Allan, Imogen Mobley, Megan Sunley and Georgina Chapman parade their newspaper wears

## FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

Pupils have been exploring the five ways to wellbeing in an initiative designed to restore and bolster their mental health.

Barnard Castle Preparatory School introduced a series of wellbeing activities years ago before the start of the pandemic.

"COVID has certainly made the need to address wellbeing even more relevant as pupils' lives have been disrupted by regulations and restrictions, illness and upset to their routines," said Rebecca Robertson, who oversees the Prep School's pastoral care.

"They have proved to be incredibly resilient and have learnt so much from the

experience which will stand them in good stead for the future, I am sure."

Pupils took a week out of the normal curriculum to participate in a host of activities designed to promote their mental wellbeing.

*Move it Monday* started the week with a variety of physical activities including dance, while *Teamwork Tuesday* saw them design clothes from newspaper culminating in a catwalk fashion parade.

*We Like to Help Wednesday* tasked children to fill in a voucher promising to do something to help, which they gave to a loved one.

*Thoughtful Thursday* saw the whole school involved in mindfulness exercises including striking poses and controlled breathing, while the week ended with *Friendship Friday* when year groups mixed to find someone different to talk to and make new friends.

Mrs Robertson said: "The pandemic has had far reaching effects on everyone, the children, their families and even teachers. Spending a week focusing on mental



wellbeing has had a palpable impact on us all and helped restore a sense of confidence, happiness and tranquillity in our community."

[www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk](http://www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk)





## PLEASE SIR, CAN WE HAVE SOME MORE?

The full cast finally came together just as the curtain rose on a spectacular production of a Dickens classic tale of resilience.

Thirty eight young actors, from Year 7 to Upper Sixth, and nine professional musicians battled to stage the first performance before a live audience for two years at Barnard Castle School.

Four sell-out shows proved the community was more than ready to return to the stalls to watch, listen and participate in the Lionel Bart adaptation of *Oliver Twist*.

Planned originally for November last year, the production had to be delayed because of the challenges of COVID, lockdowns, changing legislation and mock exams.

Director of drama Scott Edwards said: "Oliver requires a highly-skilled and committed team to bring to the stage and putting the whole thing on has been an enormous theatrical undertaking.

"The past few weeks have seen huge swathes of time where we have not had our full cast due to illness and isolation, in fact the very first time they were all on stage was for the first performances.

"The cast and our student technical crew have had to demonstrate great resilience and flexibility, with understudies stepping in at the last moment on a daily basis and I am incredibly proud of them for all they have accomplished. The audience certainly seemed to enjoy the show."



Reviewing the situation, the popular musical *Oliver* finally hits the stage at Barnard Castle School

A two and a half hour show took the audience to the Dickensian streets of London for a humorous and tuneful account of orphan streets and his sometimes dark dealings with a gang of vagabonds and thieves.

The lead of *Oliver* went to Year 8 student Freddie Wootton, while the characterful Artful Dodger was played by Dan Newall, gang leader Fagin by Lois Falshaw, the murderous Bill Sikes by Izzy Yeadon and his long-suffering girlfriend Nancy was Anna Forbes.

Mr Bumble was Jack Roberts, Widow Corney Imogen Roff, Mr Brownlow was Jack Haslam and Mr and Mrs Sowerberry were played by Freddie Barrett and Lena Heil.

Bet was Rosalie Archer, Charlotte and Noah were Issey Hoy and Benjamin French, while Mrs Bedwin, Dr Grimwig and Old Sally were played by Arwen Jenkins, Emma Hardy and Lucy Natrass.

Fagin's gang comprised Henry Jenkinson, Freddie Whittaker, Libby Forsyth, Lola Yuill-Rostron and Bella Bland, all supported by a talented chorus line and back stage crew.

[www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk](http://www.barnardcastleschool.org.uk)

## WE'RE MORE THAN JUST A BUILDING

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster

Often visitors to the RGS are impressed by the buildings and facilities that we are lucky enough to benefit from but I often have to remind that it is the people (both staff and pupils) who make the place what it is.

At about this time of year all schools are involved in making admissions decisions and many parents will be all too familiar with the situation of wondering whether their child will be accepted to their school of choice. At the RGS we always have many more applications than we have places and the really tough thing is that we have to disappoint so many wonderful children. The degree of competition for places is particularly acute when it comes to bursary pupils. Across the school we already have more than eighty pupils on transformational bursaries. However, if we had sufficient funding then, purely on the academic merit of those who apply to us for bursaries, we would take twice as many deserving young people than we have been able to accept.

What many parents may not appreciate, however, is that this time of year is also the time for recruiting new staff. Typically, schools want to appoint staff before Easter in order for them to be able to start in time for the beginning of the new academic year in September. Whereas the number of pupils applying to come to the RGS is often more than three times the number of places, when it comes to applications to teach at the RGS, we often have fifty or more applying for each post advertised. Just as with admissions decisions for pupils, the recruitment of staff is so important for creating the future of the

school community. Indeed, two particular appointments we have recently made are for the Deputy Head (Academic) in charge of our teaching and learning programme, as well as the new role of Deputy Head (Co-curricular) in charge of our immense programme of activities outside the classroom, which signals the high priority we place on this aspect of life at RGS.

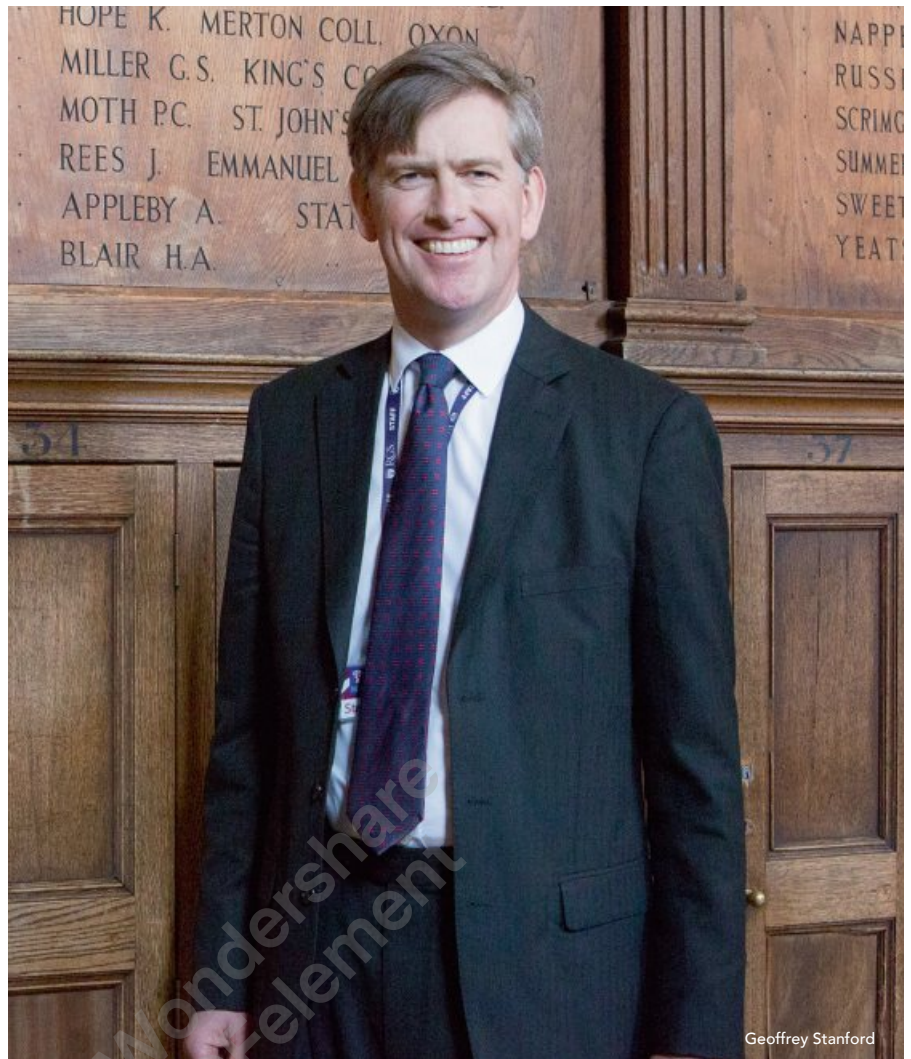
Andrew McBride will be joining us after Easter in the Deputy Head (Co-curricular) role, with responsibility for an impressive breadth of activities delivered by dedicated teaching and support staff. Our vision for our co-curriculum is that every student in the school should be encouraged to engage in activities that develop team and leadership skills, build confidence and allow them to have fun with contemporaries. Andrew is currently Deputy Principal at a large High School in New Zealand, but he grew up in the North East. He has a degree in Sport, Health and Exercise from Durham University and a Master's in Education from Northumbria. He also holds a consultancy role for FIFA for learning and innovation across the Oceania region and sits on the boards various non-profits.

Chris Quayle will be joining in September as Deputy Head (Academic). Chris is currently Head of Middle School at Ardingly College where, amongst other things, he has also served as Head of Geography

and won the TES award for STEM in 2020. Chris grew up in the North of England, completed both his degree and a Master's in Education at Durham, and has close family in Newcastle. He will inherit strong academic foundations as shown by the Sunday Times awarding RGS the accolade of 'North East Independent School of the Decade' in 2021, top North East Independent School in 2022 and the 'Excellent' outcome of our recent educational quality inspection from ISI.

We are immensely proud of both the academic achievements of our community and the quality of our co-curricular programme, which are testament to our students' commitment and teachers' dedication. Both Andrew and Chris will work closely together to deliver the all-round education that we want for our pupils. Both will be focussed on ensuring an appropriate balance between high performance and broad participation to perpetuate the inclusive community that I wrote about in this blog last month. There are so many adjectives that encompass what goes on at the RGS: energy, enthusiasm, kindness, and integrity to name a few. All of these attributes of the community are made possible by the staff and pupils we recruit, perpetuating the culture that we create and pass on for the next generation.

[www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.rgs.newcastle.sch.uk)



Geoffrey Stanford





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# APPRENTICESHIPS ARE THE ANSWER TO THE SKILLS SHORTAGE AND THE GREAT RESIGNATION

This year's National Apprenticeship Week brought with it lots to shout about. The latest government figures show apprenticeships are standing strong as the economy continues to recover post-Covid.

Apprenticeship starts are up over 40%, incentive payments for employers hiring apprentices rose to around 40,000 - over four times more than the year before - and apprenticeship redundancies have dropped from 220 to 10 for January this year.

Even with success rates dropping by nearly 13%, overall the picture for apprenticeships is a bright one for the year ahead - despite a gloomy economic forecast elsewhere.

We're living through a time of unprecedented change in our labour market. A four-day working week is currently being trialled, while working from home and hybrid working have all been positive by-products of the pandemic. But our economy post-Covid has been hit hard by skills shortages and the so-called Great Resignation.

Apprenticeships could be the answer to both of these critical predicaments, in fact, there may never have been a better time to be an apprentice or take one on.

## Skills shortage

The national skills shortage has made headline news. From the HGV driver crisis to recent DCMS figures showing that the UK is grappling with a gaping digital skills hole, there has never been a better time to become an apprentice. At NCFE, we develop smarter solutions through

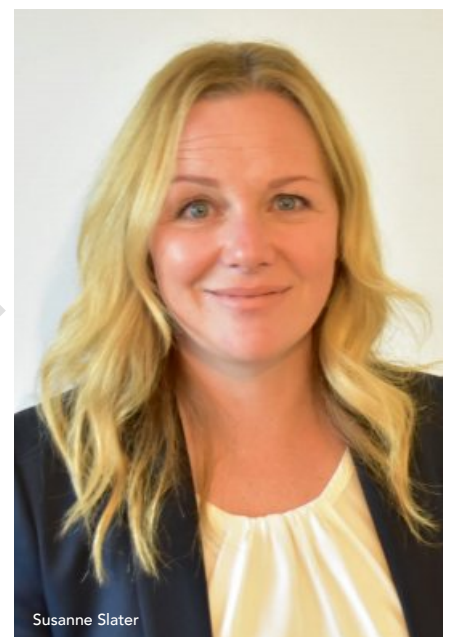
education that respond to skills shortages and empower our learners. Work is currently underway to develop a digitally focused apprenticeship offering, and we already specialise in Business, Care and Education, and Health apprenticeships - all key areas crying out for a skills injection.

## The Great Resignation

As if a pandemic and a skills shortage weren't enough, we're also in the midst of a Great Resignation. Coined in the US after record numbers of people began leaving their jobs, the trend has been felt across the globe and most recently in the UK. Businesses across the country have been hit by rising numbers of staff leaving their jobs. As the new year tends to bring about a renewed purpose and job-focus for many, employers are bracing themselves for staff shortages in 2022. Apprenticeships could prove to be the answer for both employers and for those looking for a career change.

Apprenticeships help employers develop skilled employees where they need them most in their workforce, adding value, productivity and output. Whether it is to address a skills gap or a labour shortage, apprenticeships are a tried and tested solution.

For those with itchy feet looking for a new



Susanne Slater

challenge, whatever their age or starting point; an apprenticeship could be the perfect fit. Our apprenticeships provide access to some careers that many would only think accessible via a degree, in areas where there is a growing workforce need and exciting opportunities for career progression. They range from Accountancy and Finance, Health and Social Care, Teaching, Leadership and Management to Digital. Not to mention our new Teaching apprenticeships we've recently launched with Tes that provide an innovative route into teaching and upskill Teaching Assistants.

At NCFE, we're proud to provide end-to-end apprenticeships so we'll be with our learners and providers from the beginning to the end of their journey. We develop apprenticeships in areas where there is a growing workforce need and exciting opportunities for career progression. Long-term investment in skills is the only way to get our workforce back on track and apprenticeships will play a key role in levelling up and reskilling our economy.

**For more information on our world-class apprenticeship offer, visit [www.ncfe.org.uk/apprenticeships/](http://www.ncfe.org.uk/apprenticeships/)**





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and know more about this 138-year old institution with a heritage in building generations.

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# STUDENTS IN AMSTERDAM

As the song goes, Tulips from Amsterdam, a North East school is set to join some Students from Amsterdam later this month.



Students at West Denton Primary School (WDPS) are preparing for a trip of a lifetime, along with their teachers to Theo Thijssenschool in Amsterdam, to build on the culture they have developed at the school and enhance their Life Skills Challenge Award learning experiences.

The Turing Scheme project will involve years 5 and 6 students visiting Amsterdam, observing and learning from world cultures and then drawing conclusions that may affect their own growth. The Turing Scheme is the UK government's scheme to provide funding for international opportunities in education across the world, by offering pupils life-changing experiences to study abroad, post-Brexit.

Mick MingStones, Head Teacher at WDPS told us why they wanted to be part of this project: "I wanted to give WDPS students the opportunity to compare their own lifestyles with those of Dutch counterparts. The ultimate aim is for them to draw their own conclusions which result in making positive choices in terms of their own habits and behaviours."

The hope is that the student ambassadors develop resilience and appreciate the importance of travel for learning from other cultures, as they strive to live out the WDPS Core Values throughout their own life journeys.

Their Dutch journey will commence on March 27th, as they cycle from the school to DFDS Seaways in North Shields, where they will set sail for Amsterdam for their four day excursion; the idea being they leave the smallest carbon footprint possible on their journey.

Alfie Ross, 11 told us what he is most looking forward to: "Going on the ferry, as I've never been on one before."

Josh Smith, 10: "I am looking forward to learning some of their language."

Omnia Rutherford, 10 told us: "I can't wait to see the views and am looking forward to cycling around Amsterdam."

Many Dutch people travel by bike and make healthy life choices daily which makes them the envy of Europe. They do not call themselves cyclists, they simply ride a bike as a matter of course.

Concluding what they want to get out of the project, Mick told us: "My dream is that the Life Manual becomes an online resource that is accessed by young people internationally and that this resource helps them to survive, prosper and thrive in life, especially if they are going through a tough time. I hope it gives them the life skills to cope when things get tough."

**West Denton Primary School**  
**0191 267 4211**  
**[www.westdenton.newcastle.sch.uk](http://www.westdenton.newcastle.sch.uk)**







“

...I hope it gives them the  
life skills to cope when  
things get tough...







# QUEEN ETHELBURGA'S COLLEGIATE - OFFERING OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND THE ORDINARY

Set in 220 acres of beautiful North Yorkshire countryside, QE welcomes children from three months to 19 years, with those wishing to board being able to do so from year 3.

At Queen Ethelburga's we provide a home away from home where children can enjoy their childhood, whilst also learning the principles of adulthood as they grow and thrive, says Head of Boarding, Lauren Blakeley.

Being a boarder at QE gives students opportunities beyond the ordinary and across the Collegiate, staff are committed to providing a safe and happy environment for its students. At the heart of boarding at QE, are three central characteristics: opportunity, individuality and a caring community.

Weekends are as busy on campus as during the week, with a wide range of sporting, creative and performing arts, cultural and outdoor activities on offer. Boarding houses also host a varied programme of activities, encouraging students to socialise and follow their individual interests. State-of-the-art sports facilities encourage students to maintain a healthy lifestyle and manage their own fitness with the support of gym staff, teachers and coaches.

Socials are held regularly, with students enjoying spending time with one another, whether it be a formal black-tie event with all its traditions and etiquette, a paint party or a cookery competition. We also run rewards weeks to celebrate success and effort and these are always very popular with the students voting to choose the rewards.

The boarding environment is crucial in supporting students' personal development and helping students grow in all aspects of their lives. Whether that is in academic studies, in the clubs that they choose, in the trips they attend or in the friends that they make; their experiences at QE will shape their life.

Lauren explains "With a large community of boarding students our task is to ensure that we create the same family atmosphere that smaller boarding schools have, whilst also celebrating the diverse community that harmoniously comes together at QE. We feel that we have something special within our school that comes from a combination

of innovation, commitment to celebrating childhood and a drive to give the students the best education both pastorally and academically to help them become the best and happiest adults they can be."

Students make their home from home in excellent boarding accommodation and facilities. Common rooms are provided for all boarders, so that students can get together and socialise. All boarding bedrooms are air-conditioned and have private en-suite bathrooms with a toilet and shower. QE's dedicated pastoral areas and staff are available throughout the day and well into the evening, and all students have access to the award-winning THRIVE@QE programme promoting and encouraging the very highest standards of student wellbeing. Students can meet a Peer Mentor or Buddy, chat to staff about homesickness or get help with anything they might need.

Boarding facilities in Sixth Form reflect those students are becoming independent adults, providing more private, personal and study space. Court Apartments meet this need with additional dedicated study space for each student, further office equipment and a lounge area for relaxation in each room.

QE has a community here unlike any other, a unique blend of cultures and nationalities, where friendships are formed that truly last a lifetime.

**For more information about studying and becoming a boarding student at QE, visit [qe.org](http://qe.org) and book your place on one of the next Whole School Open Days on Saturday 12 March or Saturday 14 May, or alternatively, book a private tour at your convenience.**

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



Lauren Blakeley

## NEW SENSORY SUITE PROVES HUGE HIT AT NORTHUMBERLAND PRIMARY SCHOOL

An investment into state-of-the-art sensory equipment is reaping rewards for children enrolled in the early years provision at a primary school in South East Northumberland.

Having seen the benefit of a sensory 'safe space' for its older pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), staff at William Leech C of E Primary School in Lynemouth – part of Northumberland Church of England Academy Trust, set about creating something similar for its youngest learners.

Often referred to as 'reset rooms', sensory rooms are used in two different ways; to provide a safe place for children to calm and regulate their behaviour when they become overwhelmed, or as a reward space for children where they can develop their sensory needs.

Amy Thompson, Headteacher at William Leech C of E Primary School, commented: "Children with SEND requirements can easily become dysregulated in classroom environments. Lights, sounds and too much activity can cause what we call 'sensory overload' which can result in children exhibiting behaviours which might be harmful to their wellbeing.

"Several children within our two-year old and nursery provisions have



sensory needs due to SEND, some of which are quite profound, so we knew that we had to do something to ensure that there was a safe space in school for them to go to should they become distressed, angry or upset. This is beneficial for the child displaying these behaviours and also allows the other children in the setting to continue with their learning.

"The new sensory suite has proved a huge success so far. We have already seen increased engagement with activities within the suite and in the main classroom following time spent in the sensory room. Over time, we hope to see a decrease in the amount of dysregulated behaviours in school altogether."

**For more information about William Leech C of E Primary School, visit [www.williamleech.ncea.org.uk](http://www.williamleech.ncea.org.uk)**

## NORTH EAST UNIVERSITY CENTRE AWARDED £2MILLION FROM THE OFS TO INVEST IN STEM GROWTH

A higher education centre in the North East has secured multi-million funding to invest in its STEM capabilities.

Newcastle College University Centre, part of national college group NCG, has been awarded £2million of funding from the Office for Students to invest into leading edge teaching facilities.

The funding will help supply facilities to STEM subjects of strategic importance including Energy, Engineering, Digital Technologies, and Aviation, enhancing employability and meeting local and regional skills needs.

Newcastle College University Centre is at the heart of meeting the skills needs of the region in the immediate term, while nurturing growth and innovation in STEM curriculum for future generations.

Establishing the Digital (R)evolution Centre will support regional growth through partnership and collaboration with the region's digital community of businesses

and entrepreneurs. Access to leading standard XR and VR equipment at the centre will prepare students to become digitally enabled and work towards Net Zero goals, ready to meet the skills and industry needs of the region and beyond.

Jon Ridley, Deputy Principal (Higher Education) at NCG, commented: "This investment in exceptional education demonstrates our commitment to enhancing the economic and social prosperity of the communities we serve in line with NCG's Strategy to 2030. We are committed to providing students with life-changing opportunities in higher technical education, providing access to train and study in great facilities, that are sector leading.

"Newcastle College University Centre graduates are the workforce of the future, with the confidence and capability to thrive in whichever career they choose. A skilled,



Jon Ridley,

capable, confident pipeline of talent is good news for the region and its economy."

"In essence, we aim for this funding to help build a sustainable and positive future for the talented people of the North East to leave education with the skills and knowledge to play a vital role in developing the North East economy."

**For more information about Newcastle College University Centre, NCG and its future goals, visit [www.ncl-coll.ac.uk](http://www.ncl-coll.ac.uk)**





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Michael Tippet





# FROM THE HEADTEACHER'S STUDY

In the return of these popular articles Northern Insight talks to...

## MICHAEL TIPPETT

Head, Newcastle High School for Girls

### What was your background prior to joining Newcastle High School for Girls?

I was Deputy Head at Central Newcastle High School, which later merged with Church High to form NHSG. Before being appointed to the senior leadership team I taught Classics – which is still a huge passion of mine. I also taught English in Greece after I graduated with my degree in Classics, and I was able to fully immerse myself in the culture of Modern Greece and spend time visiting a huge range of historical sites. These invaluable experiences early in my career made me realise that we can't exclusively rely on the classroom for all our learning.

### What have been your major achievements at the school?

When I took over as Head in 2018, I undertook to change the strategic direction of the school and position us as an academic school with exceptional pastoral care, and a school where we encourage each individual pupil to find her own identity and achieve her ambitions. As a result, our external academic results significantly improved and NHSG was named Sunday Times North East Independent School of the Year in 2020. We have continued on an upward trajectory since that time.

Leading and navigating the school through Covid is also something I am proud of, with parents content that we have continued to provide an exceptional education for their daughters.

### What positive changes have you seen and would like to see in the future in the education sector?

NHSG has always had a strong focus on pupil wellbeing and mental health, so when the pandemic brought additional concerns over pupil wellbeing we were well-equipped to genuinely prioritise this. The focus on pupil wellbeing nationally however has been much higher on the agenda during the pandemic and I hope this will remain there indefinitely as, when pupils are mentally healthy and happy, they are more likely to be engaged in their studies and all other aspects of school life.

The pandemic has also forced the sector to consider new ways of approaching external examinations. I do feel we lost something when we replaced modular A Levels a few years ago with high-stakes, final exams. The pandemic has prompted high-level discussions about examinations and I hope the idea of a more modular approach will be given due consideration.

### How much emphasis do you place on extra-curricular activities?

By working in teams in sports or getting involved in debating or drama, for example, we can create social and physical activity opportunities that really benefit our pupils' health and wellbeing, so our extensive co-curricular programme is integral to our provision. Co-curricular activities are also vitally important for the development of character and attributes such as leadership skills and perseverance.

### What major student achievements have happened in the past 12-18 months?

Navigating the Covid pandemic has been a massive achievement for all NHSG pupils. Their adaptability and resilience were hugely impressive; I have been inspired by the way all our pupils have overcome the challenges.

It's harder to pinpoint specific examples of notable achievements, when there have been so many, but last year we saw one incredibly talented pupil, Freya Young, named as best in the world for her A Level ICT result which was simply outstanding. Most recently we took to Northern Stage in February to present High School Musical. With 75 pupils in the cast, and an audience of over 1400, it was exactly the celebration we needed.

### What can prospective parents expect from Newcastle High School for Girls?

There's so much to say here. I'd say firstly we are a school that leads the way and we have demonstrated that we are more than well-equipped to deal with whatever the world throws at us.

Prospective parents can expect exceptional teaching and learning where each pupil is nurtured and challenged in equal measure to achieve the very best of which she is capable. Our curriculum, teaching and school facilities are also designed to meet the needs of girls. There is a tangibly unique atmosphere which arises from the all-girl ethos linked closely to our values of respect for the individual and celebration of diversity. NHSG is a vibrant and exciting place to be. In prioritising both academic achievement and pupil wellbeing, we have a recipe for success. Our approach not only benefits pupils' grades at school, but also their future careers, encouraging fulfilling lives and the confidence to go on to be whoever it is they want to be.

### What have you got coming up in 2022 and beyond?

School life is really getting back into full swing as the restrictions ease. A long delayed field trip to Iceland is going ahead this month. Our renowned annual Art and Design Fashion Show returns in April, and Junior School pupils are excitedly preparing their production of Wizard of Oz for June. We'll be celebrating International Women's Day in school and at the world's largest women's festival, Women of the World Festival in London. 2022 also marks 150 years of the GDST, a significant milestone.

### How do you relax away from the desk?

In pre-Covid times I would have said travel. Recently though, activities closer to home have become more important such as catching up with friends and family on walks along the Northumberland coast and cycling on the roads and cycle paths of the North East.

[newcastlehigh.gdst.net](http://newcastlehigh.gdst.net)



## FOOTLOOSE RETURNS

Back by popular demand Footloose the musical opens at Sunderland Empire on 6 June amid an extensive UK tour.

Lucy Munden will join the cast as Ariel alongside Oonagh Cox as Rusty. Previously announced cast includes Jake Quickenden as Willard and Darren Day as Reverend Moore with Anna Westlake (Lulu) Alex Fobbester (Bickle) Ben Barrow (Wes) Ben Mabberley (Jeter) Geri Allen (Ethel) Holly Ashton (Vi) Jess Barker (Wendi-Jo) Joshua Hawkins (Ren) Samantha Richards (Urleen) Tom Mussell (Chuck) and Daniel Miles and Lucy Ireland as off-stage swings.

City boy Ren thinks life is bad enough when he's forced to move to a rural backwater in America. But his world comes to a standstill when he arrives at Bomont to find dancing and rock music are banned. Based on the 1980s screen sensation which took the world by storm, Footloose The Musical sizzles with spirit, fun and the best Ticket information is available from the Ticket Centre on 0844 871 7615 or online at [www.ATGtickets.com/sunderland](http://www.ATGtickets.com/sunderland)\*



## RAG 'N' BONE MAN ANNOUNCES NEWCASTLE RACECOURSE SHOW

Following on from the release from his long-awaited second album 'Life By Misadventure', his first full-length since the ground-breaking and award winning 2017

debut 'Human', Rag'n'Bone Man is back and has announced a show at Newcastle Racecourse on Sunday 26th June 2022.

His 2017 landmark debut 'Human' was a phenomenal success; a 4x platinum album which shot to number 1 in the week of release in the UK, became the fastest-selling album by a male artist for the entire decade and earned him BRIT and Ivor Novello Awards.

If that's a hard act to follow, Rag'n'Bone Man tore up the rulebook and went to Nashville to write and record what would become 'Life By Misadventure', returning to the UK just before the pandemic first erupted. The bulk of the album was produced and recorded by Grammy Award-winning producer and multi-instrumentalist Mike Elizondo (Eminem, 50 Cent, Fiona Apple, Alanis Morissette) at his studio just outside Nashville.

'Life By Misadventure' is the perfect tonic for these times. An album of depth and soul, about growing up and moving forward and his Summer show in the region is one not to be missed.

## THE LINDISFARNE STORY

'Chapter Five: Fifty Years of Fog' - Billy Mitchell and Ray Laidlaw celebrate the anniversary of the band's pivotal LP "Fog on the Tyne"

The Lindisfarne Story is a celebration of the life, times and music of the North East of England's most beloved band, Lindisfarne. Founder member and drummer Ray Laidlaw and front man Billy Mitchell tell the remarkable story with a combination of rare video, unseen photographs, acoustic versions of their favourite Lindisfarne songs and a smattering of scurrilous gossip



March 25 South Shields Customs House, March 26 Hexham Queens Hall, March 27 Darlington Hippodrome, April 8 Alnwick Playhouse, April 9 Berwick Maltings, April 22 Whitley Bay Playhouse April 23 Durham Gala Theatre. [www.lindisfarnestory.co.uk](http://www.lindisfarnestory.co.uk)



## THEATRE COMPANY CHAIR BACK FOR ENCORE PERFORMANCE

The new Chair of an Amble based theatre company has had a baptism of fire thanks to a combination of COVID restrictions and the devastating effects of Storm Arwen. However, her wealth of experience in business and the arts is already having positive results and the company is looking forward to a bright future.

The Northumberland Theatre Company (NTC) based in Amble's Dovecote Centre is a self-funding professional small-scale touring theatre company which has firmly established itself as a part of the community. New Chair Sue Wilson CBE is no stranger to the company as she held the same position as Chair more than 25 years ago.

"This is a great theatre company and I'm delighted to be able to get involved once

again despite the effects of Covid and a terrible storm which has caused devastation to the building. We have a lot to do in very trying circumstances, but we have a great team, wonderful community support and a willingness to make things happen."

"We'd love to hear from any organisation in or around Amble who could perhaps offer us a meeting room for up to 10 people every couple of weeks so that we can hold staff meetings, script read throughs and planning sessions. We would also love to hear from potential new Trustees – particularly young people with skills we can use either in administration, education or on the creative side. It's a very challenging time for us but we know that there are good people out there who can help to bring back quality theatre to the town and beyond."

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# BARCELONA – A CITY OF DIVINE INSPIRATION

By Caroline Preston

New year, new travel plans and how better to start than an early January escape to one of the cultural heavyweights of the world, the Catalan capital city of Barcelona.

With a history dating back 2000 years and rebirth from dictatorship rule in the mid-1970s, Barcelona is a diverse and fascinating city and I've got just 36 hours to explore it...

This city is vast and so our digs had to be central, we settle on a stay in the El Raval district in the medieval quarter. Until recently this was more of a no-go area, but recent regeneration schemes have altered its economic characteristics and attracted new investment. Such investment includes the construction of hotel Barcelo Raval, a 4-star, modern hub of hospitality with magnificent 360-degree views from its hip rooftop terrace, just steps from all the cities amenities.

We arrive mid-afternoon, transport options from the cities' airport are plentiful but for quickness, we opted for a taxi. Greeted at the hotel with a chilled glass of sparkling wine (Cava) we stash our bags in our 10th-floor room with 'wow' views and head out...

Being food obsessed, we head straight for La Boqueria, the historic food market sitting right on Las Ramblas, the main boulevard running right through the city and tourist mecca. Operating since 1836, this market operates every day and with more than 200 traders it offers a vast choice of local and international gastronomic products.

But this place isn't just for tourists, in fact, many residents shop here for their everyday needs, from fresh fish and produce to the famous cured hams of Spain, it's all available here. But that's not all...in addition to shopping there's eating, and the markets pop-up restaurants offer gourmet experiences. Depending on when you visit the seats that surround each counter can be in demand. From tapas to seafood platters washed down with quality wines it's an experience not to be missed.

The first evening we check out some of the city's watering holes, Barcelona is big on beer and craft ale has really taken off. Do your research and you'll find all kinds of places, we liked rustic Olgod a small bar in El Raval with Viking flair, a huge craft beer selection and live DJ. Another interesting option is bar Two Schmucks, funky and nicer than it sounds but with a busy day ahead we retired for the evening.

Up and out the following day, we fill up with continental eats and good coffee and head off to for some divine inspiration. Barcelona has an incredible arts scene, with over 55 museums it's impossible to see even a portion of them in a short time.

There's so much creativity here, one stand out example being the legendary Catalan architect Antoni Gaudi, the creator of the famously unfinished temple known as La Sagrada Familia. Previously I'd only seen the exterior of this architectural marvel, but nothing could prepare me for the spectacle that's the interior, an experience I'll never forget.

The scale of this place is incredible with Gaudi's inspiration visible at every turn, it's not hard to see that this place was built for worship. No matter what your religious beliefs, every corner here just amazes and if that's not enough when the magnificent almost futuristic organ pipes burst into life the vibe is purely spiritual.

A short break and brisk walk later and we have just enough time for one more masterpiece by Antoni, the Palau Guell. Started in 1886 the palace was an early commission for Gaudi designed for tycoon Eusebi Güell, it's now a museum for everyone to appreciate.

Now meandering through streets back to El Raval we take in Barcelona old and new, we stop for cocktails in a historic Plaza, there's an abundance of places to eat and drink for all budgets here. Reaching our hotel we have just enough time for a quick refresh before heading out again, this time for dinner, our destination Bar Mono in the Gothic Quarter. According to Foodie Magazine, the people in charge here are the masters of tapas, playing with street food and more traditional dishes they've created a trendy but cosy environment, even the heated outdoor patio is cosy making a chilly January evening very enjoyable.

With wine in hand we rest our tired legs and reflect on a short but packed to the brim break and agree that we'll have to return at least two more times to see the rest of the city, like I need an excuse...

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



## Travel Notes

Caroline travelled with British Airways from Newcastle International via London Heathrow and stayed two nights at the Barcelo Raval in the El Raval District in January 2022.

# OUT AND ABOUT - BRAMPTON



I wrote an article on Brampton in Cumbria after my planned trip there was cancelled after the Tier 4 lockdown measures were introduced. My piece at the beginning of 2021 had to be illustrated with pictures by a local photographer.

Brampton can now be done easily as a day trip, as the journey is only 70 minutes from Newcastle, but is better as an overnight stay, especially when there are fine inns like the Howard Arms to support.

Originally Brampton Junction, the junction was removed in 1923 when the spur line to Brampton Town was closed. The branch was known as "the Dandy" and I started my exploration from Brampton station by following the old line towards the town. Under the Brampton bypass road there is a pedestrian tunnel too small to permit a train to pass through. I dropped off my bag at the Howard Arms as it was too early to check in, although they said they would put it in my room. I then walked east to the New Mills trout farm where I was hopeful of having lunch at "The Bite" which is the highest rated café in Brampton. Unfortunately, there was a chalk board at the entrance which claimed that the café was, simultaneously, closed for the day and also fully booked, which seemed something of an achievement. I carried out a one-way conversation with three friendly alpacas and retraced my steps to the road northeast to Lanercost Priory where a very pleasant café fed me with steak and cheese ciabatta. I explored the church which was created by reroofing the nave of the original monastery, whilst the central crossing, transepts and Quire were left as ruins, now in the care of English Heritage.

It was a good two miles walk to Lanercost from Brampton, pleasant enough but not really deserving of a return trip. I left Lanercost at 1445 reckoning that I could walk around the grounds of Naworth Castle and intercept a bus about 1530 on the 685 route from Newcastle to Carlisle. I had checked there was a stop there on the Stagecoach website. I got back to the stone bridge with two arches built about 1724 by four local masons which can still be crossed on foot. For vehicular traffic the bridge was replaced in 1962. Forking left up a steep hill I climbed up to find grassy fields surrounding the country seat of the Howard family and arrived at the A69 junction, five minutes before the hourly bus duly appeared. There was no actual stop sign but the bus driver was happy enough to pull into a road opening for me to get on. My hotel was near the bus stop and adjacent to a turf accountant and Saturday night ended with the Star Anise restaurant which I found on the Roam app.

After eggs benedict at breakfast and a service in the glorious Arts and Crafts church, St. Martins, designed by Philip Webb, I checked out of the hotel and walked via Brampton station to its nearest tourist attraction, Talkin Tarn. Down the road parallel to the railway, until meeting a footpath to the left and then over the fields surrounded by glorious English countryside in all directions. You enter the country Park surrounding a large lake by the back door, and the ladies in the tearoom kindly let me leave my case in the disabled persons lift, unused as the upstairs café was closed. It took 40 minutes to circumnavigate the lake on foot, and then back to the station for the 1506 train home.

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

For a copy of the UK rail map, extract below, visit [www.railmap.org.uk](http://www.railmap.org.uk)

Alex Nelson (Ticket Guru)

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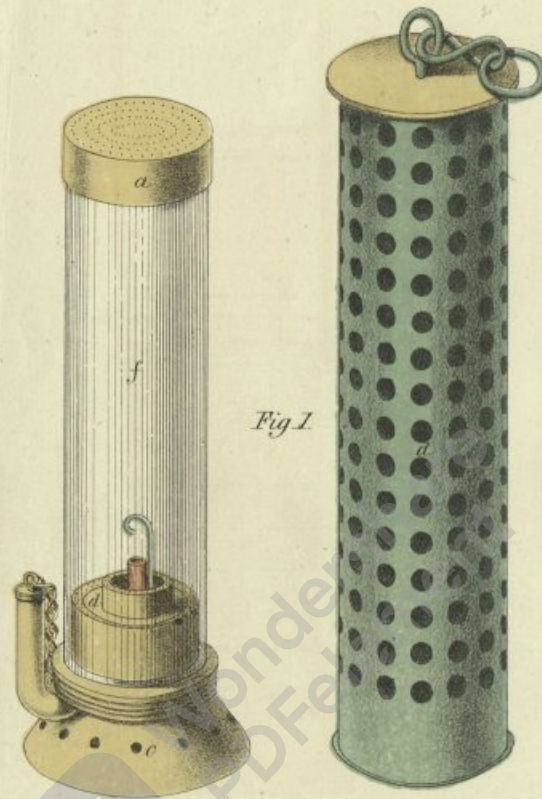
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## NEW KIT SUPPLIER FOR DURHAM CRICKET

Canterbury has today announced a multi-year partnership with Durham Cricket, which will see the brand become Durham's official kit supplier ahead of the 2022 season.

The partnership, formed between Canterbury, Durham Cricket and national kit supplier KitKing signifies Canterbury's return to elite domestic cricket in the UK and builds on the brand's successful long-term partnership with the New Zealand cricket team.

From this upcoming season, Canterbury will provide on-and-off pitch apparel across all formats of the game for the entire club, including its men's and women's team, junior pathway teams, visually impaired team, coaching staff and ground staff.

Following the launch of the partnership, Canterbury, Durham Cricket and KitKing have also revealed the first edition of the club's brand-new training and supporter kit for the 2022 season, ahead of the launch of the playing kits in the coming months.

Canterbury's latest move into cricket follows their long-standing relationship with World Test Championship winners and T20 & ODI World Cup finalists, New Zealand BLACKCAPS as well as the WHITE FERNS, having been the official kit supplier of New Zealand cricket since 2009.

Marcus North, Director of Cricket at Durham said "We are delighted to be partnering with Canterbury and working with KitKing. This is an important period for Durham Cricket as we look to continue our progression on the field and we were keen to ensure the team had the best training and playing apparel available. Canterbury have a great reputation and have demonstrated how supportive they are as a partner. The players love the new range and the initial feedback from supporters has been brilliant.



## SUNDERLAND CITY CENTRE IS SET FOR A SHOWSTOPPING ADDITION

With early plans for a large-scale arena and events space revealed for Riverside Sunderland.

Sunderland City Council has set out a game-changing vision for the site of the former Crowtree Leisure Centre, with plans for a massive leisure investment anchored by a new 10,000-capacity, multi-purpose arena, that will bring hundreds of thousands of visitors to the city every year.

As well as this large indoor arena, the multi-use leisure development will feature a food hall, restaurants, a hotel and studios, together forming a unique destination that will have something for everyone.



## IT TAKES TWO

Couples can tie the knot without any of the hassle of guestlist politics, thanks to an award-winning North East wedding venue.

Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa at County Durham is home to six event spaces and has the capacity to host up to 500 guests in its largest function room.

But the hotel has seen a surge in bookings for one package in particular – a luxury treehouse wedding where only the bride and groom are invited.

Ramside's Just the Two of Us offer is proving popular with would-be newlyweds planning an intimate celebration, with even the legal witnesses provided by the hotel.

The happy couple will say their vows in one of the hotel's stylish treehouses, which

are built on stilts and offering stunning views across the 18th fairway of The Prince Bishop's Golf Course.

And the pair can make the most of the view after the ceremony with cocktails on the wraparound balcony and a romantic candlelit dinner for two with a bottle of the Sommelier's choice of wine.

The celebration continues into the evening, with overnight accommodation in the treehouse where they said "I do" – which is also home to its own private hot tub – along with a bottle of Taittinger champagne and chocolates in the suite.

Then the following day, the pair can celebrate their first day as newlyweds by being pampered – with full access to the hotel's award-winning spa and a one hour treatment included.

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## A TASTE SENSATION AT SACHINS

By Daniela Silva

Well, although I have been in Newcastle and had heard many times of how good the food was at Sachins Punjabi restaurant on Forth Banks, I had never actually got around to trying it.

As my partner and I are originally from Portugal, curry houses are not something that are that popular over there, but after sampling Sachins, they certainly should be!

We booked, as it was recommended to us, and although it was Monday and we were booking for Friday, it was a good job we had, as it was already nearly full-booked for the weekend.

When we got there we were welcomed into the venue on the ground floor level, which then led up to a middle floor and then a winding staircase takes you to an upper level. The restaurants' main area overlooks the bar and it is very chic and has modern designs, the use of colours; just beautiful. Orange and autumnal colours are displayed all over the restaurant and bar and it is teamed with a classy grey décor.

A warm welcome awaited us from the front-of-house manager and we were seated very quickly. The menu is just right, not too many choices, but more than enough to tempt even the fussiest of eaters!

As I am not a lover of hot and spicy, neither is my partner, we both opted for the mildest curry on the menu, chicken korma and chose

mushroom pilau rice, tandoori roti naan along with a side of masala chips. Once we placed our orders, we waited for our drinks to arrive, which were an alcoholic version of the maharajah's mango cocktail and a mocktail version of it for me. These were very impressive indeed, deep in orange colour and seriously fruity and tasty. As a non-drinker, it was funny to see the effects of the alcoholic version on my partner, who said he felt squiffy with just a few sips!

The curry arrived and the portions are just right. Not too small, but not over-facing either. The curry was a real taste sensation and filled with soft, perfectly-cooked chicken breast. A creamy base which just oozed flavour. Having never had masala fries, these were a total winner in both me and my partners eyes. Crunchy on the outside, all the flavours of the coating coming through and incredible moreish. We also loved the mushroom pilau rice, it was light, fluffy and complemented the curry perfectly. Although there wasn't much room for the tandoori roti naan, we gave it a good go, as it was crunchy on the outside, from where it had been cooked in the tandoor, but soft in the middle, which allowed it to soak up all the sauce of the korma.

We really shouldn't have ordered dessert, but as we were so impressed with the rest of the food, we were curious to see if they did good puddings too. We decided to share double chocolate caramel fudge mountain, which is just as impressive as it sounds, I can tell you! Chocolatey, gooey caramel and fudge, what's not to like. My partner isn't much of a dessert person, thankfully, which meant more for me! It's a hard job, but somebody has to do it!

The whole night at Sachins was an eye-opener from two Portuguese guests, but it will definitely not be the last time we go. If you are reading this and thinking, we must give this place a try – ensure you book, as it is very popular.

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# MEET THE GM

## EMMA THOMPSON

General Manager, Hotel Indigo Newcastle

### Did you always envisage a career in the Hotel Industry?

Yes. I love hospitality and always have. Family holidays, meals out and evenings in a good bar are among my favourite things to do! Who wouldn't want to work in the industry that brings that level of joy to people? I believe that once you have entered the world of travel and tourism you have a career for life. There are so many different areas to experience and learn from and no two days are the same. I couldn't see myself doing anything else!

### Describe your career path thus far?

I began my hotel career at the Jury's Inn (which at the time was the biggest hotel in the city) as a receptionist. I worked there for nine years, across all departments including five years in finance. I gained so much of my operational knowledge from there and the team of people I worked with genuinely did become like family to me. It might sound like a cliché but that's what happens in hospitality! After my time at the Jury's Inn I got a job as Reception Manager at the County Hotel and was Operations Manager by the time I left.

The next step in my career took me to the Crowne Plaza Newcastle as Front Office Manager where I was part of the opening team. This was where I really fell in love with IHG. The structure of the company, their standards and the importance of delivering an exceptional quality of service is ultimately why I knew the role I am in today at Hotel Indigo Newcastle was right for me.

Upon leaving the Crowne Plaza I moved to Staybridge Suites Newcastle as Operations Manager for Cycas Hospitality. During my time at Staybridge Suites, I was seconded to Holiday Inn and Staybridge Suites London Stratford to give operational support to their new General Manager and my career as a GM with Cycas Hospitality has seen me manage various properties in London and Manchester before I found my way back up north to Hotel Indigo Newcastle!

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

Without a doubt the Covid-19 pandemic has been the biggest challenge I have faced. It was something none of us had ever experienced, we were all learning together and the impact it had on the hospitality industry was catastrophic. It introduced a never-before-seen recruitment crisis within the industry, and it has been exceptionally difficult to get staffing back up to pre-pandemic levels. Coming into a new property, during a turbulent time for the industry was a big challenge.

### What do you hope to bring to your new role?

I have always tried to lead from the front and be visible as a General Manager. I feel as though I have an approachable management style and often draw upon past experiences I have had with other General Managers to help navigate my current role. My aim is to provide structure and consistency for my new team and to make sure my management style is adapting in an ever-changing industry.

### Tell us about your team?

My team are brilliant, we have some truly fantastic characters! They are all incredibly hard working and deliver genuine Geordie hospitality! It has been a tough couple of years for everyone but particularly for those who work in hospitality. We have a lot of new starters, people who have never

worked in the industry before as well as those with years of experience and it has been great to see how our more experienced colleagues are really supporting and guiding the newer team members. I know before long, alongside the easing of all restrictions, we'll be operating like a well-oiled machine!

### What is Hotel Indigo's greatest asset?

There is something special about all Hotel Indigo's and all their individual neighbourhood stories but what makes ours particularly special is the team! I have a genuinely brilliant team and the hotel would not be what it is today without them. We are coming out of a difficult time and whilst the industry is slowly recovering, I can see the hotel exceeding standards every day. We have had some amazing feedback over the last few months and that is down to everyone who works here.

### What are you currently working on?

My main focus at the minute is getting the operational side of the hotel back to pre-pandemic normality or rather the 'new normal'. It is such an exciting opportunity for me and for the team and I'm thrilled to be a part of it. First and foremost, we are working on a big recruitment drive aiming to attract the best talent in the city to join our team. Before long we are hoping to have a full team of brilliant individuals who are passionate about providing exceptional service and excellent guest experiences.

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

A mantra that is always in the forefront of my mind is 'Lead from the front'. I believe that you won't get a better result so long as you're showing leadership. Being visible, active, supportive, expressing a clear vision and showing confidence and determination is key.

### Who are your Heroes and Mentors?

I don't have any heroes or mentors as such. I have however, been privileged enough to work with some amazing people over the years. One that springs to mind is John Wagner, the co-founder of Cycas Hospitality. He is up there with being one of the most inspirational leaders throughout my career and it is his approach to how important the team around you are that really resonates with me. He believed if you look after your employees, they look after your business. If you ask me, there isn't a truer statement.

### How do you like to unwind?

Because I spend all day in the city, I love nothing more than escaping to the countryside. Being surrounded by the amazing greenery Northumberland has to offer really helps me unwind and relax after a busy week. It also provides the perfect back drop for spending quality time with my kids and dogs!

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



## THE FRENCH CONNECTION

By Michael Gramslaw

What better way to beat the winter blues than with a little sprinkle of gallic magic?

For a number of years now, the French gem Bouchon has sat lay at the heart of Hexham, serving homespun French country cooking against Northumberland's own rustic setting.

The man at the helm is Greg Bureau, an expert in French cuisine, born in the Loire before honing his craft in a string of Michelin-starred restaurants throughout France and bringing his own brand of restaurant to the good people of the North East.

Bouchon possesses a loyal following and of an evening has a sumptuous a la carte menu (also available of a lunchtime) in full swing whilst also serving a concise, prix fixe menu – a great entry point to this inimitable style of cooking. Good value is available with two courses available for £21.00 and three

for £22.00. This proved just the job for my son Jack and I who visited on a bright and breezy Friday afternoon in January.

The bistrot looks right at home on a quaint, cobbled street, possessing a handsome stone exterior. Admittedly, it had been high on five years since our last visit, during which time the restaurant has enjoyed a comprehensive facelift. The moody red tones and swagged curtains of yesteryear have been superseded by a rich colour palette of browns, taupes and caramels which feels decidedly more modern. The venue has lost none of its charm however with art deco posters and trinkets creating an atmosphere unmistakably French.

Also revamped is an outdoor balcony area, perfect for corporate entertaining as the temperature bar grows higher and the nights get longer.

This really set the backdrop for what would be a really authentic experience. Think classics like French onion soup, crispy duck confit and chicken & truffle ballotine.

First up for however was the salmon confit for Jack and the black pudding beignets (a deep-fried pastry to you and me) for yours truly.

Following on, Jack sampled the roasted chicken breast with pomme puree, embellished by a flag of crispy bacon and

served with a melange of creamed leeks and sauteed greens.

I meanwhile tucked into the traditional steak frites, cooked to the perfect pink and set off exquisitely by an excellent bottle of Pinot Noir. A supplementary au poivre sauce was also a must for this true trencherman.

Not yet replete, we broke our new years resolutions for a divine mousse au chocolat with peanut brittle and roast pineapple accompanied by vanilla mascarpone and a slug of rum.

A pair of bracing espresso put the cherry on what had been a truly memorable meal before a brisk walk around Hexham's rolling hillsides burnt off any excess.

Throughout our meal Greg was a warm and convivial host. Many years ago, he traded the Loire Valley for the Tyne Valley - our region is all the better for it.

**For more information visit**  
**[www.bouchonbistrot.co.uk](http://www.bouchonbistrot.co.uk)** or  
**call 01434 609 943 to make a reservation.**



## fern

DINING ROOM &amp; BAR

## A Taste of Jesmond Dene House By Danny Parker & the team

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Our Focaccia with Lincolnshire Poacher Butter

Gigha Halibut 'Grenobloise'

King Scallop, Pork, Smoked Eel & Apple

*'Dish inspired by Kenny Atkinson 2014, House of Tides'*

Beef Wellington, Madeira Sauce, Confit Shallot

Hot Syrup Sponge with 'gold top milk' Vanilla Ice Cream

Peanut Butter & Chocolate Cookie

Pistachio Macaron

Executive Head Chef Danny Parker and the Jesmond Dene House team are bringing their diners 'A Taste of Jesmond Dene House' following on from the success of their MarsteChef: The Professionals Tasting Evening back in May 2021.

An evening of delicious food from a special tasting menu is promised that will be served in their restaurant Fern Dining Room & Bar, on Sunday 13th March 2022.

The night's tasting menu is described as; straightforward, flavoursome and classic, food cooked from the heart to warm the soul. No gimmicks, no fuss, just a night of indulgence.

Created by Head Chef Danny, a past finalist on Great British Menu and MasterChef: The Professionals; the seven course menu includes Lindisfarne oysters, king scallops and beef wellington.

Fern Dining Room & Bar is situated in Newcastle's only independent boutique hotel, nestled in glorious countryside and overlooking the wooded valley of Jesmond Dene, this grand building is only five minutes north of Newcastle City Centre.

Tickets are £90 per person by advanced purchase only, with full payment being required at the time of booking. Fern will be hosting seasonal tasting menu evenings throughout the year, keep a look-out in the press or on Jesmond Dene House social platforms for further details.

**More information at [www.jesmonddenehouse.co.uk](http://www.jesmonddenehouse.co.uk)**  
**Bookings can be made by emailing [events@jesmonddenehouse.co.uk](mailto:events@jesmonddenehouse.co.uk) or calling 0191 212 6060.**

## FOUR NEW TREEHOUSES AT RAMSIDE HALL

Four new treehouses – named after British birds – have nested in the grounds of a leading County Durham hotel.

Chaffinch, Robin, Pheasant and Magpie are the latest additions to the wealth of accommodation at Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa, on the outskirts of Durham city.

And the four have been built to complement the four-star hotel's four larger treehouses, which are sited nearby but raised on stilts among the trees.

Like their larger counterparts, Chaffinch, Robin, Pheasant and Magpie boast a range of luxuries, from saunas and hot tubs to spectacular, free-standing, copper baths.

Designed to sleep up to four people, the A frame triangular houses are pet friendly and built on two levels, with accommodation suitable for couples or small groups of friends or family.

Each features a bedroom with an ensuite on the upper level and a lounge, toilet and a shower and small kitchen on the lower level, along with a pull-out double bed and an outdoor deck with a hot tub.

Set in the woodland adjacent to the 18th fairway of The Prince Bishop's Golf Course, their glass frontages give guests unrivalled views over the fairway and green.



And a shuttle is also provided to and from the hotel at check-in, and for guests visiting the hotel's award-winning spa, golf course and restaurants.

John Adamson, owner of Ramside Hall Hotel, Golf and Spa, said the completion and launching of the new treehouses so soon into the year, "Really heralds a fresh new start after the upheaval caused by Covid.

"Working on these has kept us all optimistic," he said, "and now they are complete and ready to welcome their first guests."

Prices for the new treehouses start at £495 midweek.

**To book, or for further information, visit [www.ramsidehallhotel.co.uk](http://www.ramsidehallhotel.co.uk)**





# ENTREPRENEURS' FORUM ANNOUNCES 20K FUNDRAISING CHALLENGE

The Entrepreneurs' Forum aims to celebrate its 20th anniversary by raising £20,000 for a host of good causes.



Founded by Sir Peter Vardy and Lorna Moran OBE in 2002, the North East's largest entrepreneur membership organisation is inviting its members and partners to get involved.

Alongside a charity auction held during its Gala dinner in June, the Forum is encouraging its network to join in its Charity Challenge, a circumnavigation of Kielder Water on Saturday 2nd July 2022.

Participants can either hike the full 27-mile route around northern Europe's largest man-made lake or opt for a half distance trek.

Elaine Stroud, chief executive of the Entrepreneurs' Forum, said: "Many of our members have strong associations with charities and relish an adventure such as this that also allows them to raise money for good causes."

"We've organised this epic hike to give everyone the opportunity to test themselves physically and mentally in one of the region's most beautiful locations. We'll provide plenty of encouragement along the way and our members can choose to support whichever charity they wish."

"Collectively raising over £20,000 would be an incredible achievement and a great way of marking the Forum's birthday."

The target was announced at the organisation's Power of Philanthropy panel discussion on 17th February, involving Meenu Malhotra, of Newcastle-based property, leisure and care specialists, the Malhotra Group; Mark Easby, of Middlesbrough-headquartered brand agency Better, and Anne Reece of the Reece Foundation, which promotes engineering and manufacturing through education. The event examined the many ways that entrepreneurs can give back.

Mark Easby, who is also chair of the High Tide Foundation, which delivers life changing career programmes and work experiences to young people in Tees Valley, said: "We are passionate about helping the region we love be a better place to live, work and grow and this initiative by the Entrepreneurs' Forum allows its members to support the charity or community project of their choice – and to show that the business community can be a force for good."

Since it was founded, the Forum has raised more than £500,000 for a host of charities. The Forum's most recent fundraising effort included walking, running, and cycling 350 miles for Feeding Families, a North East charity which supports those experiencing food poverty.

This year it is supporting several charities including The Prince's Trust and Business Beats Cancer Newcastle.

For more information about the Forum's fundraising goal visit [www.entrepreneursforum.net/20-years](http://www.entrepreneursforum.net/20-years)

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## TOUR DE MOON

Newcastle is one of a handful of cities chosen to host an exciting four day intergalactic event this May. We met up with Tour De Moon creator, Dr Nelly Ben Hayoun.

Dr Nelly Ben Hayoun is the personification of the phrase "don't take no for an answer." In her own words, she calls her formidable technique of breaking down barriers and being continually persistent "hammering" – keeping going until you wear the subject down and they say yes.

It's a skill that she's honed and developed over the years – and one which has seen her become an internationally renowned creator of unique experiences.

And people across the North East will be able to witness that this May, when her Tour de Moon festival hits the region.

Nelly's ability to engage with the seemingly unobtainable has led to projects with no less than space organisation, NASA and collaborations with music icons such as Damon Albarn and The Prodigy.

And it's all done with endless charm, hiding a steely will that she will keep going until a negative turns into a positive.

Over the years, Nelly has built a reputation not just for thinking out of the box but thinking outside of a whole mountain of boxes, which is why her many accolades include being named one of the world's 50 top designers and also being listed as someone who was making "a significant impact on the world."

Among these many achievements is a fascination with space, which has been the driving force behind Tour de Moon.

The festival, which will also be staged in Leicester and Southampton, will bring together a number of different immersive experiences, all with the linking theme of the moon.



There'll be Moon Sports where a giant inflatable playground will allow young people to design games, Moon Cinema where participants can watch a series of short films developed by 18-25 years olds talents. Members of the public will be able to reconsider their relationship

with the moon and each other in these unique and original films involving STEAM (Science Technology Engineering Arts Mathematics) collaborations.

Also part of the programme will include Moon Bar Talks and even Moon Experiences, with the opportunity for a "trip" to the moon and consider life beyond earth.

Newcastle will also be one of 14 towns and cities to host Moon Convoy, a travelling festival which will see electric powered vehicles bringing a number of floats into the city, before setting up for a one night cosmic evening of entertainment.

For Nelly this ambitious and exciting project allows her to capitalise on her love for outer space.

"I've always been about how we can recreate experiences that the majority of us

can never really have," she said.

"How could I make a volcano explode in my lounge, how can I cause a sonic boom in my bathroom. How can I visit the moon if I'm not an astronaut?"

"These are the kind of experiences that I want to create for people."

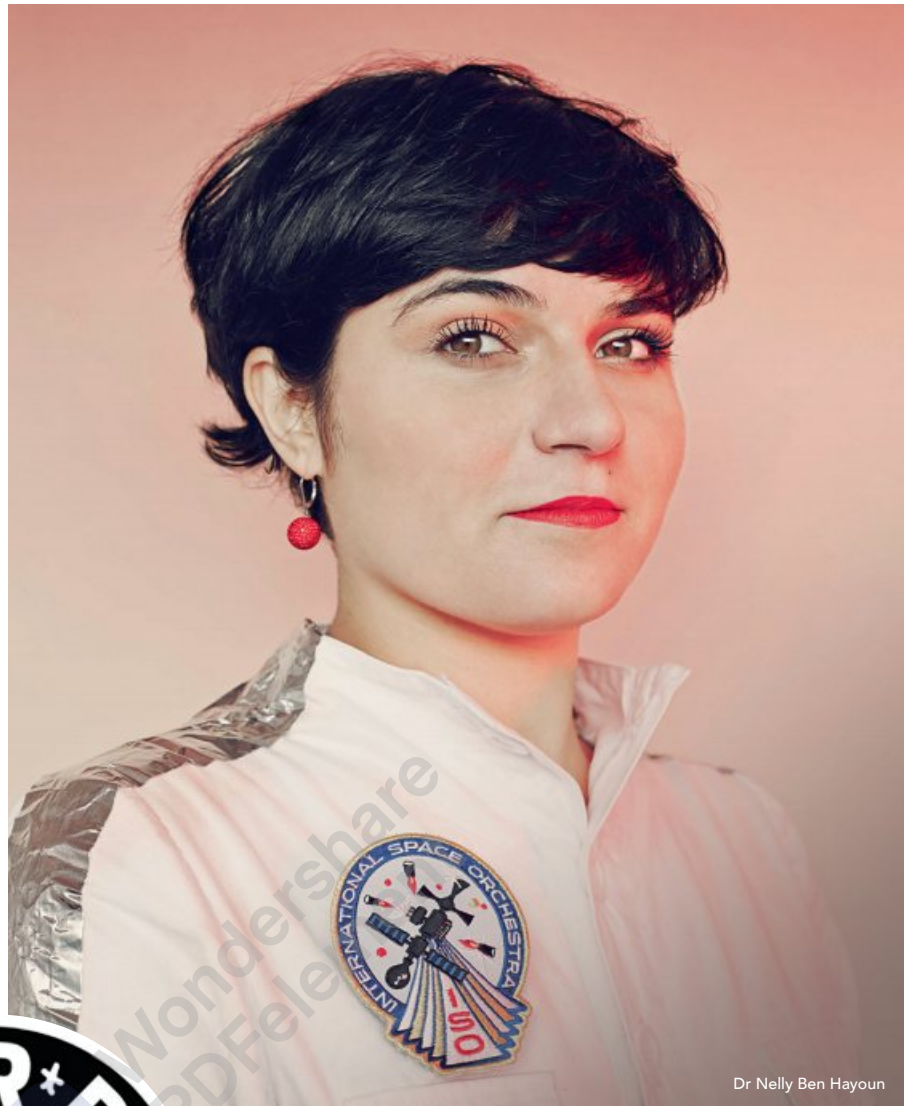
While this might sound impossible, one look at Nelly's track record shows that she is definitely the woman for the job.

From creating the first International Space Orchestra with NASA to establishing the University of the Underground in London and Amsterdam to being appointed director of experiences at the SETI (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence) Institute – Nelly's life is one of constant creativity.

And for people in the North East that's great news, with the chance to experience Tour de Moon when it arrives in the region from 27 – 30 May.

"This is an opportunity for people of all ages to take part in something really unique, to look at the moon and engage it in so many different way and just consider the possibilities," said Nelly.

**To find out more visit  
[www.tourdemoon.com](http://www.tourdemoon.com)**



Dr Nelly Ben Hayoun



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Michelle Jones

## WHAT A LOAD OF NONSENSE THIS START-UP JOURNEY IS!

I decided from the outset that I was going to pop my head above the parapet and share this journey, as Kind Currency and I developed.

There were many reasons why I felt it important to do so. One, was to challenge myself and to be accountable. Two, was to provide a true reflection of the start-up journey and entrepreneurship, without the sparkles (too many social media influencers making it all look like an overnight success). Three, and most importantly, was to grow a community based on integrity.

I began this journey in May 2020. Kind Currency was a mere thought back then, a glimmer of an idea. But I jumped in the deep end with both feet and no support aids. I first took part in Newcastle Start-up week, and I've continued to share the process. Initially I just spoke about the idea of Kind Currency. Then, I was presented with a community award and was advised to start sharing where had the idea come, and my personal story. So, I listened and in 2021, I truly challenged myself.

And I do it every month through this column. As you will tell, I'm no writer, and I'm no business expert. But I am trying.

It can be scary, and half the time I know I'm making no sense whatsoever, but that is ok.

Growing as a person and growing a business creates all kinds of nonsense, I am learning, but what emerges is progress.

I did expect the lows, naively I hadn't realised how awful that would be but I did expect them.

I didn't expect anyone to really listen. Let's just say my expectations were low overall.

What I didn't expect were the highs. But most importantly, I didn't expect the support.

### The support has been a thing of beauty

People, other businesspeople, want to support Kind Currency because they believe in it. And they believe in me.

Which is quite something, and I've come to realise this is fundamental to the development of any business, and the Founder especially when you want to create a significant social change and impact.

As I progressed into 2022 with the mission to take Kind Currency to the next stage of the start-up process (it's not an overnight success), the support grew.

I was delighted to be listed as one of the most inspiring female entrepreneurs of 2022 by Small Business Britain in January as part of their #ialso100 campaign. And then in February Northern Power Women named me in their Futures List for their 2022 Awards.



Both communities do incredible work to raise up individuals to impact equality, inclusion, and level up. Values that underpin my life and Kind Currency. And what is important is that this support provides me with the strength to progress with the next phase of the start-up journey and of course, pay it forward.

### Support is empowering

So, whilst I experience these incredible highs and I also face those darn awful lows, Kind Currency moves forward.

Because of support and with support.

And of course, a load of nonsense, mostly created by me, but that's ok.

Thank you to Northern Insight Magazine, Small Business Britain and Northern Power Women, I am truly grateful for your support.

**Michelle Jones,**  
**Founder of Kind Currency,**  
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# THE SECOND COMING

By Michael Grahamslaw

Admittedly, it wasn't my first stay at The Northumberland Arms. I first visited in November 2020 on the eve of Lockdown 2.0 and whilst hugely impressed, vowed to return when the venue was back to its bustling best.

The 5\* Inn sits at the heart of the Northumberland village of Felton and offers an alternative to larger hotels in the area.

Being an avowed lover of pubs, this was right up my street – combining the beloved feel of a proper countryside local with deluxe accommodation and award-winning dining. Easily accessible just off the A1, the venue is thereby perfect for a stylish gastro-getaway.

On a quiet Sunday in the bleak midwinter, I ventured up with my wife Lisa to sample the full Felton experience.

The handsome stone building offers luxury en-suite guest rooms overlooking the River Coquet and all furnished to that top class standard.

This is a venue rich in history, originally built in the 1820's by Hugh Percy, 3rd Duke of Northumberland as a coaching inn where his coach horses, family and visitors could take refreshment before journeying on to Alnwick Castle.

Today, the venue has been lovingly restored with a chic and rustic appeal and a classy gastro pub as its focal point.

Fortunately, hotel owner Stuart Young has pedigree in managing such a venture and is also behind the Blackbird Ponteland which has witnessed a real renaissance in recent years.

The hotel's individually-decorated guest rooms capture the spirit of Northumberland and are all tastefully appointed with tartan rugs, Bergere sofas, plush bedding and heavy drapes. Bathed in a countrified colour palette – all greens, browns, purples and mauve – ours was a haven of comfort and tranquillity with a beamed, vaulted ceiling adding real character.

Our 'New Moor Tower' guest suite was also equipped with a grand oval Victoria and Albert bath tub sitting comfortably in the middle of the bedroom with an adjacent walk-in shower also next door.

After a brisk unpack and change of dress, we headed down to the bar restaurant area for a late lunch in a venue which really comes into its own throughout the Winter months.

Many guests are active folk making the most of the area's many walks, hikes, cycle routes and other attractions available on the doorstep with the bar area a lovely place to kick back and bask in the afterglow of the day's outdoor pursuits.

Lisa and I applied similar endeavour to an excellent bottle of warming Malbec which we sipped on whilst tucking into a sharing plank of fresh sourdough with olives and whipped butter.

Next up, from The Northumberland Arms' dedicated Sunday Lunch Menu, came the wasabi salmon with sweet soy, wasabi aioli and pickled ginger, not to mention the chicken terrine with pickled celery and sourdough croutons.

Following on, we picked a cracking couple of Sunday roasts: the traditional roast topside of beef for yours truly and the lemon and thyme roast chicken for Lisa. All came served with



roast potatoes, creamed cabbage, swede mash, a selection of seasonal vegetables, a pillowy Yorkshire pudding and pan juices.

After lunch we spoke to owner Stuart Young who said that both venues had come out of lockdown in great shape and were busier than ever. We can certainly understand the hype.

The following morning, we were in for another sumptuous feast at the breakfast table. Smoked salmon & scrambled eggs and a superbly cooked Full English set us up nicely for the journey home.

My return to The Northumberland Arms had certainly been a long time coming, however I would highly recommend it for a country escape – be that for a springtime staycation or new year's resolution worth sticking to.

**For more information, visit**  
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## HOW THE TOURISM INDUSTRY CAN PLAY ITS PART IN THE WIDER LEVELLING UP CAMPAIGN

There has been much talk of levelling up over recent years, with the Conservative government making it a key part of their 2019 election manifesto.

And in early 2022, its levelling up plan for the regions was launched – to a mixed response – focusing on closing the gap between the richer and poorer areas of the country.

The whitepaper focused heavily on areas such as transport, education and services – but what, asks Dale Smith, of holiday accommodation firm Host & Stay, of tourism's role?

As a born and bred Northerner, I'm all for levelling up. For far too long now, power – and therefore finance and decision-making – has been concentrated in London and the South.

The government's levelling up agenda is most definitely something to be welcomed, even if all it does at this stage is start the conversation about regional inequalities.

But how can we, as a region, support our own levelling up agenda? Simple – by using what we already have.

Tourism is a massive industry in the North. The North Yorkshire coast has something for everyone, from the seaside splendour of Whitby or Scarborough to the picture perfect vistas of Robin Hood's Bay or Staithes.

Further north, we have a World Heritage Site in Durham Castle and Cathedral, while in North Yorkshire, Fountains Abbey is similarly designated.

And all this is not to mention the wilds of Northumberland, and the world-famous architecture of Newcastle, the region's most

famous city.

As a region, we have so much to offer, all of which plays its own part in levelling up.

### Central support

It notes: "The UK government has made a firm commitment to levelling up the country, which it is delivering across multiple policy portfolios. The tourism sector has an important part to play in this, given the distribution of tourism jobs and the relative importance of the visitor economy to many parts of the country."

It highlights the first round of the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund, which will focus on three infrastructure themes, "all of which are likely to have clear benefits for local visitor economies".

It continues: "These include transport developments like developing cycle paths and accessibility features, enabling residents and visitors better access to and travel within destinations; town centre regeneration, making places more attractive to visitors; and finally, maintaining and regenerating much-loved cultural and heritage institutions and visitor attractions, to protect and strengthen the local offer for visitors."

### Bringing in the money

Tourism is a huge money-spinner for the North, even more so over the past few years, when foreign travel has been difficult, to say the least.

As well as paying for accommodation,

tourists spend money in local shops, at local attractions and on local transport. And this money stays in the region, paying our wages and trickling throughout the economy.

Furthermore, tourism also creates jobs, relying on local people to welcome guests at museums, clean the holiday apartments and serve the food in the restaurants.

All of this adds up to create a vibrant, self-sustaining economy, where money coming into the region can be reinvested in the region – and all using the natural assets we have on our doorsteps.

### Regional pride

It can be easy to see the worst in our region, as we do with ourselves, and it would be a folly to suggest that it is untouched by deprivation.

The region is often known for its sense of working-class pride, having an illustrious industrial heritage behind it – but much of that is long gone.

If we can redirect that pride into enjoying what we can offer visitors, we can then begin to use that advantage to help level up within the region itself, working on the principle that if one area benefits, we all benefit.

One thing is for certain; when it comes to levelling up, the North has plenty to offer.

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## TAKE THE SMALL STEPS

Small everyday changes will improve your life. Your health, wellbeing, appearance and self confidence will benefit hugely by implementing positive changes that are repeated consistently.

Implementing these changes now should give you noticeable results by the middle of June 2022. A four month commitment for tangible results is not long - and you will thank yourself for doing these come the warmer weather.

A example of positive changes & new things to try:

- Just 15 press ups a day is a monster 1,680 over four months.
- Eating 200 calories less per day saves 22,400 calories - that's 7lbs of fat.
- One mile walk/run a day is 112 miles, that's just under nine Great North Runs.
- Reducing two digestive biscuits (or equivalent treat) down to 1 a day will save around 9,500 calories.
- 30 squats a day adds up to 3,360 in 16 weeks - imagine how strong your legs will feel.
- One minute plank a day to improve your stomach and core strength. That's one hour 12 minutes of the plank.
- Completing a set of 100 stairs every day is 11,200 stairs in total.
- Cutting alcohol consumption down by just half a glass a day will reduce your intake by 5,000 calories over four months.
- Reducing down from four slices of bread a day to two is a huge 224 less slices over four months.
- Full-sugar fizzy drinks in a 330ml can contain 10 teaspoons of sugar. The daily recommended limit for adults is seven per



David Fairlamb

day. If this is a daily habit and you cut it out, you'd be reducing your intake by a staggering 1,120 teaspoons of sugar over the four month period.

- 40 stomach crunches per day will total 4,480 in 16 weeks. If 40 is too many in one go try 4x10 or 2x20 - the main thing is keeping the consistency going. I recommend partnering these with the plank for muscle balance.
- Three cups of coffee per day with one sugar in each, amounts to 336 teaspoons of sugar and 6,720 calories over four months. Keep the coffee, but drop the sugar.

When you add small everyday changes over a week/month or in this case four months you begin to realise the huge positive changes you can make. Unfortunately, you can also see how easy it is to go the other way with little or no exercise and a massive excess of daily calories. Over months, years and decades these seemingly small but repetitive unhealthy habits add up which is why this country is in poor health with such high obesity rates.

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

## DAVID'S SUMMING UP

*Making small changes to your own daily habits and routines, over a four month period could bring significant positive changes to the way you look and feel.*



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Barry Speker

## THE LAST WORD

from **BARRY SPEKER...**

After medal successes in the last summer Olympics, the haul from the Beijing Winter Olympics was a disappointment.

Despite high hopes in various disciplines including snowboarding, slalom and bobsleigh the team managed only two successes: a gold for Eve Muirhead's women's curling team and silver for Bruce Mouat's men's curlers. That these medals were achieved, albeit in the last 24 hours of the Winter Olympics, came as an immense relief for the team and all involved.



Funding of £6.4m for the skeleton section and £9.5m for GB Snowsport (skiing and skateboard) and £5.25m for curling may be dwarfed by funding at the last Olympics - from National lottery and the Government the figures included £23m - athletics, £12m - boxing, £16m - canoeing, £24.5m - cycling, £12m - equestrian, 13.4m - gymnastics, £24m - rowing, £12.9m hockey and many millions more. The winter Olympians may feel very much the poor relations.

Could curling become a sport to inspire the nation? It dates back to 1511. Perhaps the provision of more curling facilities? Not to be confused with an increase in hair stylists, beauty facilities, curling tongs, wands and wavers.

It is of course the curling brush or broom which is used by the sweepers on the team. In the wake of the medal haul, supermarkets have reported a surge in brush sales.

There is a current tendency to regard all longstanding traditions with disdain and even opprobrium. In 2018 the Equality and Human Rights Commission warned that an increasing tendency of people to define themselves by identity (whether ethnicity, race, gender, class etc ) was undermining empathy and mutual respect in Britain.

Such gestured posturing is seen in the lamentable decision of the Marylebone Cricket Club (the MCC) to decree that this summer's futures between Eton and Harrow, and Oxford and Cambridge will be the last to be staged at Lords. The decision prolongs the 'Toffs v Toughs' mentality. The matches date back to 1805 and 1827 respectively.

It must be possible 'to extend playing opportunities' at Lord's without cancelling traditions loved by so many. It will not increase the reputation of the game (leaving aside the recent Test debacle and enquiries into racism in cricket) by removing an imagined blight from the historic fixtures. Replacing them with other matches will hardly express diversity. By all means include more women's matches or perhaps Roedean v Cheltenham Ladies College.

The national project of the Association of Jewish Refugees - 80 trees for 80 years - is to commemorate the arrival of refugees from nazi persecution and the contribution they made to the country. The planting of one such tree in Gosforth by Monica and Gerald Stern was to honour their late fathers George Loble and Freddy Stern who settled in the North East and created significant businesses with many jobs and enhanced life



of the North East. A very suitable memorial.

The Wordle daily puzzle game has become an international obsession. Not quite the Times crossword or even countdown, but it does encourage vocabularial exercise, challenging players to guess a five letter word in six moves. It was developed by the aptly named John Wordle to entertain his partner but was sold in January to the New York Times for an undisclosed seven figure sum.

This has raised again the argument about the use of US spellings, regarded as preferential by the NYT and supplying more five letter options - favor, labor, honor, rumor, humor'. Such versions have long been regarded by many with scorn as indicating an inability to spell.

This is despite the words center, color and gotten appearing in Shakespeare's First Folio.

Surprisingly Susie Dent, the Oxford educated lexicographer of Countdown, says it is high time we 'get over' our aversion to American spellings, suggesting that much of it was 'ours' to begin with as it was used by the Bard.

It may be that a less sympathetic stance should be taken to editorial policy of the NYT removing from Wordle words deemed to be offensive such as 'slave' and 'wench'. Next step a woke edition of the Oxford Dictionary?

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