

NORTHERN

# INSIGHT

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AMMAR MIRZA CBE -  
TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

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# FOREWORD

Welcome to the April edition of Northern Insight.

Returning to our front cover this month is the inspirational serial entrepreneur and growth expert Ammar Mirza CBE, talking about a wide range of subjects including the new International Space Station at Airview Park.

Within a plethora of reviews we make a first visit to the sensational Khai Khai and find a venue which is certainly not your average curry house.

We also look at the second birthday of Grainger Market Delivery, the online shopping portal of the famous Newcastle City market which has delivered to over 40,000 customers across mainland UK as of last month.

Overall, another really strong edition with a little bit of everything. Settle back with a cup of coffee and enjoy.

Until next month...

*M.J. Grahamslaw*  
Michael Grahamslaw, Publisher  
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## HAY & KILNER ADVICE HELPS NORTHUMBERLAND WILDLIFE TRUST COMPLETE LANDMARK DRURIDGE BAY SITE ACQUISITION

Advice from Hay & Kilner Law Firm has helped Northumberland Wildlife Trust use a £2 million donation from The Reece Foundation to purchase a 327-hectare area of land in an iconic Northumberland location.

The Trust has acquired the site at West Chevington near Druridge Bay from regeneration specialist Harworth Group plc for use as the location for one of the most ambitious lowland rewilding projects in the north of England, which will be an integral part of the charity's fight against climate change.

The site, which is currently a mosaic of woodland, grassland and lower-quality arable land, sits atop a former opencast coalmine, and will showcase how nature can recover in this manufactured landscape to a large scale.

Hay & Kilner Law Firm has acted as an advisor to Northumberland Wildlife Trust for many years and involved specialists from its commercial property, commercial and rural teams with the West Chevington acquisition.

Nicola Tiffen, partner and head of the firm's commercial property department, says: "The industrial and agricultural history of this site, its considerable size and the many regulatory and conveyancing issues that came with it made this one of the most heavily-titled transactions with which we've ever dealt.

"The area's history meant that there were a range of restrictions that needed to be carefully considered, while tenancy arrangements and appropriate consents around issues that often went back decades needed to be carefully assessed and managed.

"Being able to keep the acquisition process moving forward despite its many complexities allowed the Trust to complete the purchase on schedule and will now enable it to begin to put its exciting plans for this landmark location into action."



## WATER FIRM LEADS THE WAY IN PROVIDING CARBON-NEUTRAL SUPPLIES

A North East water company is the first in the UK to become carbon neutral.

Water supplier Everflow Water, which is based in Teesside, has launched a new scheme and is providing 100 per cent carbon neutral water supplies to its customers in a bid to achieve net zero by 2040.

Chief executive Josh Gill said: "We're committed to doing everything we can to protect and secure the environment for future generations, and we've implemented a number of schemes and initiatives to ensure this.

"That includes taking measures to offset our whole supply chain, as well as our customers' supply chains, through buying carbon credits to offset all emissions produced in the process – from getting water from reservoirs, treating it and it going back into the sea.

"Closer to home, in a recent survey, our employees told us that they'd like to convert to electric vehicles, so we've enabled this by partnering with the Octopus employee electric vehicle scheme.

"We're also taking a good look at the areas of our business that generate the most emissions and following our new action plan to minimise our carbon footprint as we grow the business."

As well as offsetting the carbon that is used on its behalf, Everflow is also encouraging customers, partners and suppliers to do their bit.

The firm has submitted its data to environmental experts Earthly to calculate Everflow's carbon emissions for last year.

Environmental and regulatory affairs manager Clare Galland added: "As well as the work we do at Everflow, we're committed to offsetting the emissions from our own customers' supplies.

"We've done this by buying 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 from 2020 until the end of 2023.

"We use a lot of third parties for services such as meter reading, debt collection and changes of tenancy. Therefore, a further part of our commitment to achieving net zero by 2040 will focus on supporting our suppliers and partners to join us on our journey by reducing their own emissions.

"We've already worked with a large property management firm on a bespoke water-saving plan and we're keen to support more partners in this way."

For more information about Everflow, visit [www.everflowgroup.co.uk](http://www.everflowgroup.co.uk)

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## NATIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE AWARD FOR DAWSON & SANDERSON

Leading North East travel agency Dawson & Sanderson is celebrating after winning a coveted Platinum status in the annual Feefo 2021 Trusted Service awards.

The awards, created by customer insights technology company Feefo, are a showcase for those brands that go above and beyond. The Platinum tier is for companies that achieve the outstanding feat of winning a Feefo Gold award three years in succession.

Dawson & Sanderson joins this year's roll call with national travel companies like Jet2Holidays and TUI.

Chris Harrison, managing director at Dawson &



Sanderson, said: "This national award is fabulous news and a tribute to our staff who have worked tirelessly these last two years during the

pandemic. It is no mean feat to have excelled in the toughest of years to attain the highly coveted Platinum status.



## MALHOTRA GROUP MINDS

Leading North East care, leisure and property business, Malhotra Group plc, has chosen Tyneside and Northumberland MIND as its nominated charity for 2022.

Tyneside & Northumberland MIND offers one-to-one support, groups and counselling to those experiencing mental health problems.

Malhotra Group plc has initiated a programme of fund-raising activities among its staff and customers throughout the coming year.

And chief operating officer Atul Malhotra believes the benefits of the partnership will work both ways.

"We will, of course, aim to raise funds and awareness of Tyneside and Northumberland MIND and the excellent work and services they provide to our local community," he said.

"But we also hope to draw on their expertise to develop our understanding and awareness as a group of mental health and the sort of issues that affect everyone's life in some capacity."

Alex Wilson, CEO Tyneside and Northumberland MIND said the charity was "thrilled" to be the Malhotra Group's chosen charity for 2022.

"Having such a successful and recognisable business supporting us in our Charity of the Year Programme which both raises funds and raises mental health awareness is an exciting opportunity for us.



## ROLE PLAY AREA ROLLS INTO ROYAL QUAYS

The latest business to invest in the newly rebranded Royal Quays Independent and Outlet Centre in North Shields is all set to appeal to the young shoppers of tomorrow.

Amy Morris has opened the Acorn & Oak Play Café which is aimed at children up to six years old. Unlike the traditional soft play area, the café encourages children to play by using their imagination in a series of creative role play areas.

As well as "Oak Cottage", the children's safe play areas include a kitchen so that budding chefs can create dishes to impress their parents, "Mick's Bricks" construction area to practise banging and hammering, a medical centre to "train" the next batch of NHS professionals and a picnic area to entertain their friends.

Royal Quays Independent and Outlet Centre, manager Matt Dawson was delighted to welcome Amy and Acorn & Oak to the centre.

"Amy is the latest business to embrace our centre and I'm particularly pleased to see that her café is a great place for our young shoppers of tomorrow to learn through play and for parents to get a nice cup of coffee and home baked cakes while watching them," he said. "It's quite possible that some of the young people's play could encourage them to take on a career in building or retail thanks to the experiences they gained at Acorn & Oak. Royal Quays is developing a real positive community spirit catering for all ages and the centre is fast becoming a destination venue rather than just a shopping centre."





## HOW '2022' ARE YOUR SALES PRACTICES?

A momentous change has occurred in the world of sales over the last few years, perhaps the most significant since we stopped flicking through Yellow Pages, the internet was born, and we became accessible on emails and mobiles 24/7.

**The Pandemic forced us to change the way we work at a greater speed than any revolution ever could. We lost overnight the ability to call in to see our customers and prospects, to pick up the phone and to grab a coffee or attend an event.**

With the world working from home, we reverted to taking our networking and connections online to operate in a much more stagnant, transactional fashion with little time for rapport or developing relationships – we lost human contact. Life changed, companies did often but not always adapt a more empathetic approach to their sales and marketing teams with many taking the opportunity to furlough. Teams had to adapt, quickly.

Relationships with existing customers became even more essential, and for the first time for many, the focus tilted towards retention and account management over new business. For those who were not used to using the new go to technology and relied on face-to-face interactions and techniques – the last two years have been more than a challenge. But we have adapted, found new efficient ways of working, perhaps diversified our model, our offering, our client base, restructured, repriced or simply re-evaluated our future. Latest statistics from the ONS show there are over 1.3 million live jobs many of us are struggling to fill, whilst economic inactivity continues to rise to 21.3% - the highest rate seen and predominantly in the 50-64 age bracket.

So, it's fair to say the world right now is not the same nor ever will be post pandemic. Our customers have changed as have their needs and ours, our talent pool has changed as has our requirements. But have our skill sets, our processes or our strategy changed from a sales perspective?



Jessica Williams

Are you "so very 2019" or are you operating in the post pandemic (PP) era of 2022? A simple exercise to get your customer service, sales and marketing teams to conduct is a stop, start, continue chart based around customer engagement, retention and new business. We have adapted, often without realising so, but it is essential as we progress to a new era, we review changes we were forced to make and how effective/efficient they were before falling back into old habits as the world reopens.

STOP	START	CONTINUE

Over the last few months, we have been brought in to a number of organisation's, keen to ensure a continued focus on existing customers, retention and account management principles in general. An increase of retention or existing customer spend by just 5% could make a significant impact to your bottom line. We all know the cost to acquire is significantly greater than the cost to retain. So how are you adapting your approach? I do believe one of the greatest opportunities to be missed which offers the most significant returns and growth on a sustainable basis, lies within your existing customer base – so how do you plan to review and access it?

It's time, before we fall back into 2019 habits, to

review our processes, our procedures and our overall customer contact strategy, to really reflect on what the last two years has taught us in this field. To focus on retention, to review our day-to-day activities and to drive growth in a more sustainable cost-effective way with a revised skill set that enables our sales professionals to thrive in the new era.

This can come from a variety of ways, from reducing our travel and therefore our carbon footprint to creating a more omnichannel relationship with our customers - enabling a virtual based partnership. Perhaps a multilayered approach as opposed to a single source product or service (do not presume your customers are aware of all the solutions and or products you offer, 99% of the time they do not they are oblivious). The world that we operate has changed, is changing and we must adapt and keep up from both a skills and a service perspective.

**If you'd like to find out more about our online and inhouse training in all the areas discussed, contact**  
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## COVER STORY



Ammar Mirza CBE with His Excellency Tariq Wazir Counsel General of Pakistan

## TO INFINITY AND BEYOND

You certainly get a Buzz Lightyear feeling when you meet Ammar Mirza CBE, a serial entrepreneur and organisational growth expert with over 30 years of experience of helping people and places thrive. He greets me with enthusiasm and an infectious smile, a genuinely warm welcome that puts you at ease and makes you feel as though you have known him for ever.



Ammar Mirza CBE with Counsel General of India, Dr Shashank Vikram

I start by asking, “what do you do, Ammar?” His reply is that that is probably one of the most difficult questions for him to answer, that it would be easier to ask, “what don’t you do, Ammar?”

And looking at Ammar’s CV, you can see why he says this. From helping a generation in one of the most deprived areas in England - Walker, Newcastle - where he spent over 16 years as the Chair of Governors at Tyneview Primary School, to his position as Partnership Investment Specialist at Culture Bridge North East, to his weekly hour-long radio show on Spice FM, Ammar has become ubiquitous to life in the North East.

Indeed, in 2014, he was awarded a CBE for his services to business and the community in the North East. Overall, Ammar gives away next to 50% of his time to various voluntary and charitable causes and has arguably done more than any one else to help future generations realise their ambitions and raise their aspirations.

Asian Business Connexions (or ABC) is one of these. Ammar founded the social enterprise in 2009 to tackle inequalities, promote community cohesion and address the lack of access to existing business support programmes among the Asian community in the North East. Since then, ABC has grown to represent the entire Northern Powerhouse Region and is a lead member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for BAME Businesses.

“ABC has always sought to put inclusion and community at the top of the agenda,” Ammar tells me, “After the impact of COVID-19 on the North,





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Commissioner Bangladesh Ms.  
Saida Muna Tasneem, Ammar  
Mirza CBE, Lord Rami Ranger,  
Sharon Jandu

and particularly on the Asian population both personally and professionally where we realised that ethnic communities were more impacted than others, this is more important than ever."

Ammar is also Group Chair of the SME Centre of Excellence, through which he has supported over 12,000 companies through a range of world class Accelerator, Scale, Investor and Innovation programmes. An ever-growing network to start, survive and thrive. Perfect experience for his position as the Chair of the Business Growth Board and SME representative at the North East Local Enterprise Partnership, helping to lead the delivery of their strategic plans relating to business support, looking specifically at creating more and better jobs and creating the ideal environment for individuals and organisations to thrive.



Ammar and Anne Marie Trevelyan –  
Minister for International Trade

"I feel incredibly privileged," he says, "to have the opportunity to be one of the foremost ambassadors and advocates for the North East. I was born and brought up here and I've always been immensely passionate and proud to be a Geordie. I honestly think that the North East is the greatest region in the world. It's an incredibly dynamic region with so much potential. I was recently in London at the House of Lords for the Northern Asian Power List 2022 launch event. Whilst I truly love our region and there is no other place I would want to be, it hasn't always been rosy. Growing up, I saw first-hand so many injustices and inequality across all communities, so it was an incredibly rewarding feeling to be celebrating the significant and sustained contributions of the Asian community to the North in such an historic setting."



Sharon Jandu, Ammar Mirza CBE, Baroness Sayeeda Warsi, Lord Rami Ranger

"What is your favourite thing that you're involved with?" I asked him.

"Last year, I was flattered to be asked to become the Honorary Colonel for the 101 Royal Artillery Reserves regiment. Not only was it the first time that a civilian was asked to take the position in a 300 year history, but also the first time that the position was offered to a person of ethnic heritage. Of course, I said yes," he laughs. "It's been a wonderful experience so far. I've always been a huge advocate of the armed forces - and would encourage everyone to sign the Armed Forces Covenant - so being able to represent the regiment and be part of one of the most special communities in the world has been incredibly special."

When I asked what's next for him after seeming conquering the entire region, Ammar smiled and replied in true Buzz Lightyear fashion, "A Space Station, of course!"

The International Space Station at Airview Park is the first of its kind that will act as a launch pad for regional businesses wanting to setup globally, and as a soft landing for inward investment. The 10,200 sq. ft building will be a centre of excellence, aimed at helping regional SMEs to launch, scale and take advantage of the global trade and export opportunities offered through its neighbour, Newcastle International Airport.

Not only will the ISS provide digitally enabled, shared-workspace and office facilities, but it will serve as a showcase of North East based companies to international business communities including, Turkey, India, the Netherlands, Pakistan and the Middle East, all of whom agreements and relationships have been established with.

"Innovation, internationalisation and digital transformation are the key growth enablers for businesses," Ammar explains. "If we provide access to these and create overseas trade links for local businesses, we can help attract more inward investment opportunities, and ultimately, jobs for the area, showcasing the North East as the greatest region in the world!"

**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.**







Carole O'Neil

## IoD MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

The Institute of Directors (IoD) has lots to offer directors aspiring to be the best and to make a real difference in their communities. Here, the IoD Chartered Director of the Year for Yorkshire and North East Carole O'Neil tells us all about why membership matters to her.

### Tell us a bit about your role at Cundall.

I started as Human Resources Director about 14 years ago and since then the role has evolved to cover a range of wider operational management activities. I'm a partner in the business, and I'm one of six people elected by the wider partner group to run the business day to day in accordance with the wishes of the wider stakeholder equity partner group, as a member of our global management board. While still leading the global HR team, my role is now much more about driving strategy within the business and making sure that all of our operational systems, processes and people are aligned with that overall strategic agenda. A bit of a firefighter in chief if you like!

### You joined the IoD ten years ago. Why was membership important to you?

My role had gradually evolved from reporting to the board to being on the board. Then a mentor of mine had been through the IoD programme and recommended it highly to me. I looked at it and thought it would actually be really helpful in terms of broadening my theoretical understanding of some of the concepts that we're dealing with at board level, particularly around strategy and finance, but also around

some of the marketing elements and all of the other mechanisms that make a business work. I thought it would also help give more academic and theoretical context to my everyday activities. It was a great confidence boost where my knowledge and ability to engage in the conversations in a coherent, mature and informed way was concerned.

### So far you're the only female Chartered Director in the North East. How beneficial has the training been to your career and what would you say to others considering it?

I don't want to generalize but I think as women, we are probably more likely to suffer from imposter syndrome than some of our male counterparts. So, having the academic and professional qualifications to rely on gives me both internal confidence and external credibility. The IoD membership has also given me access to a really strong network of other female directors within the region and I've formed some great relationships with some of those leaders. It has been incredibly useful to have that network of people who I can go to for moral support, practical information or advice on how to handle new challenges.

### Tell us about why you were awarded Chartered Director of the Year for Yorkshire and North East in 2021.

I did my Chartered Director exam and interview in 2021, which included an in-depth grilling by a panel of directors from other businesses, and I came away from it unsure if I'd passed. I later found out I had, then thought nothing more of it for another year.

Then suddenly I was called to say congratulations, you've won this award. It was a huge and absolutely fantastic surprise. I was delighted. I understand that it was because I performed the best of all of the Chartered Director candidates in the North East in that particular period.

### My advice?

Just don't stop learning. Seek out those challenges, push yourself outside of your comfort zone, do things that feel like mountains and try and enjoy them while you're doing them.

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



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# GRAINGER MARKET DELIVERY - DELIVERING ABOVE AND BEYOND!

Grainger Market Delivery reaches another milestone this month as it marks the online shopping portal of the famous Newcastle City Market's second birthday. One of the most positive business stories to come out of the pandemic, Grainger Delivery has delivered to over 40,000 customers across not just our Northeast - but now across mainland UK as of last month.





It's a huge achievement for the small team of Grainger Market Traders who along with creative agency Niltoni 360° founded the online site and delivery service [www.GraingerDelivery.com](http://www.GraingerDelivery.com). Over 20 of the 186 year old market's traders supply fresh fruit and veg, locally sourced meats, cheese, breads, cakes, local beers and spirits as well as international products from Spain, Chinese Street food and organic, vegan whole-foods... an expansive range of over 2000 products that offer the opportunity to ditch the major supermarkets and get a 'one stop locally sourced weekly shop'.

The online store has developed a string of corporate clients too, from Universities in the region to facilities giant Sodexo to the regions NHS Trusts and even major Hotel Groups. Darren Phillips, one of the Grainger Delivery's founders and head of operations said "It's been a rollercoaster journey for everyone this last two years, we've transformed from an almost emergency service, to a fundamental part of what the Grainger Market offers for consumers who want to shop local and support small independent businesses".

John Phillips, who Chair's the Grainger Market Traders Federation has been fundamental in championing the service beyond its initial pandemic support to a sophisticated online shop said "with inflation and the cost of living rising so dramatically in recent months, with even further strains on the pockets of ordinary working people ahead; we have been lucky enough with our supply chains to keep prices as they were over a year ago. Shopping local is great support for the Market and the small businesses

who are based there but also the wider community who benefit from great quality products at inflation busting prices."

The Grainger Delivery online store offers fresh fruit, locally sourced meats, cheese, delicatessen, street foods, wines and locally produced Tyneside Firebrick beers; as well as bakery and confections from the market's baker French Oven.

Going forward, the store expanded to offer deliveries beyond the north east, to offer our fantastic produce to customers across mainland UK - and have also expanded their range of luxury Hampers, under their brand Phillips & Wilde - which is perfect for those special occasions.

Craig Wilde who heads up creative agency and co-founders Niltoni added "the project has been a labour of love for all involved, and as we move forward, we have more products and services coming on board for the year ahead such as Ready meals, expansion of 'Heat N Eat' Street food which offer exciting times for Grainger Market Delivery, our market traders and most of all our valued customers".

***This week the Grainger Delivery want to offer every reader free delivery on their weekly shop - spend £35 or more and get free delivery (worth £4.50). Use code INSIGHT22 at checkout!***

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David Fairlamb



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"The Versaclimber machines are unbelievable and in a short space of time our unique classes have become incredibly popular," says David. "Imagine climbing a wall where you need to push with your legs and pull with your arms to reach the top. That's what the Versaclimber does...and it burns calories at a seriously rapid rate; three times the rate of other aerobic machines because it requires energy from so many different parts of your body. We have built a VersaHub optimised for lighting and sound giving clients a unique and hugely motivational 30 minute class experience. It's also very gentle on hips, knees, ankles, shoulders and elbows therefore ideal if you are recovering from an injury. Put it this way, top sports people like Andy Murray use a Versaclimber as part of their rehabilitation."

David moved into new premises on the Tyne Tunnel Trading Estate just over a year ago. COVID-19 was rampant so it wasn't ideal timing. However, that didn't stop David. Okay he couldn't operate indoors...so...he operated by building his own online platform including indoor/outdoor workouts, motivational and nutrition talks to name a few. He also moved his massive Beach Bootcamp following to Zoom classes which he ran from his living room. Now back on the Beach, they are going stronger than ever having never missed a Saturday on Tynemouth Longsands Beach since he started in 2006. He even did them when we had those gales in February. The sessions are on a pay-as-you-go basis...they cost £5 when he first started 16 years ago and they're still £5 now!

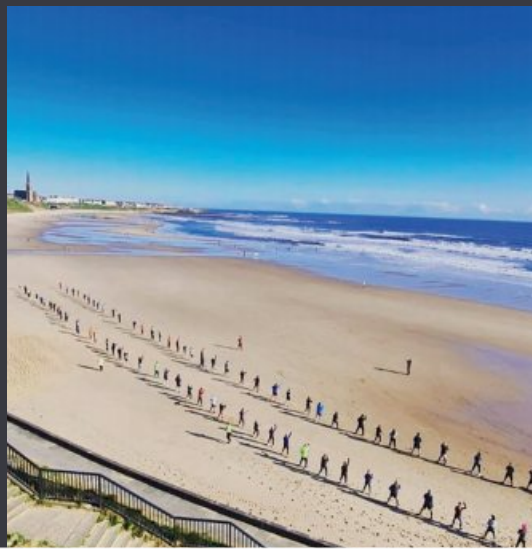
He's also continuing with his body transformation classes as well as personal training sessions at his new private gym.

"I think it's obvious that, since COVID, people are concentrating more on their fitness, both physical and mental. They're more aware of how they're feeling and that we really do need to look after ourselves. People are regaining their confidence, but it takes time."



Interested? You should be because David is an award-winning trainer who is so respected he's now written around 800 articles for local and national magazines and newspapers. He's a top trainer and we're lucky to have him in the North East.

**For more information go onto David's website, [www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk](http://www.davidfairlambfitness.co.uk) where you can find out how to get involved.**





Dean Richards

## STRENGTH COMES FROM WITHIN

Newcastle Falcons are building from within, showing long-term thinking as the flag-bearers for professional rugby in North-East England.

**Having played in England's top-flight for all but two of the last 25 seasons, the Falcons are committed to a homegrown core as they build for the future.**

Long renowned as one of English rugby's prime breeding grounds, director of rugby Dean Richards insists the flow of talent is as strong as ever.

"People from outside of this area might think the North East is purely a football hotbed, but having moved here just over 10 years ago I've been blown away by the passion for rugby in these parts," said the former England international, who won four Premiership titles and a pair of European Cups during his time in charge of Leicester Tigers.

"We are blessed with an incredible pool of playing talent from across Northumberland, Cumbria and

County Durham, and our academy coaches do an outstanding job of identifying and nurturing those players.

"We as the first-team coaches are the beneficiaries of that because we're getting to work with talented guys who know what the club and the region is all about, and I've always maintained that you get more from your local players. You have to have that as your core, and then of course you can add that sprinkling of stardust around it from overseas or elsewhere within the UK."

Actions speak louder than words, and Richards has lived up to his mantra, selecting more homegrown players than any other Premiership club on a consistent basis over the course of the campaign.

"I want at least half of our match-day 23 each to have come through our academy, and in most weeks this season we have beaten that figure," says Richards.

"Those guys aren't just in there for the numbers – they're all quality players, and the firm hope for us is that they're going to be here for years to come."

It is not just at club level where the fruits of the Falcons' academy are earning exposure, with a number making their international breakthrough.

West Cumbrian hooker Jamie Blamire has been a regular in England's squad over the past year, scoring four tries in his first two internationals and going on to play in the Six Nations as well as helping England to defeat world champions, South Africa.

Teessider Adam Radwan scored a hat-trick on

his England against Canada last summer, going on to score against Tonga during the autumn internationals, while West-Newcastle native Trevor Davison made his England debut in July. Senior academy product Sean Robinson trained with England during the summer only to be denied a full cap due to injury, while Ponteland's Callum Chick has also pushed through to make his England debut within the past year.

A club-record five players were named in England Under-20s' elite player squad for this season in the form of Louie Johnson, Mark Dormer, Iwan Stephens, Guy Pepper and Ollie Fletcher, while senior academy player Matt Deehan has been a regular for Scotland Under-20s.

Ben Douglas, Luke Coulston and Nathan Greenwood all made their debuts for England Under-18s within the last few months, having been part of a Falcons Under-18s side which was just one win away from topping its regular-season league – all signs which point towards a healthy future for the Falcons' senior side.

"It doesn't happen overnight, and there are wealthier clubs down south who will go round the world and buy a star-studded team off the shelf," says Richards.

"But that's not the path we want to go down. We want this club to be here in 10, 20 or 30 years, still as strong as ever and with a predominantly homegrown core. We've definitely got the talent within our region to do it, and it's an exciting time to be involved with Newcastle Falcons."

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



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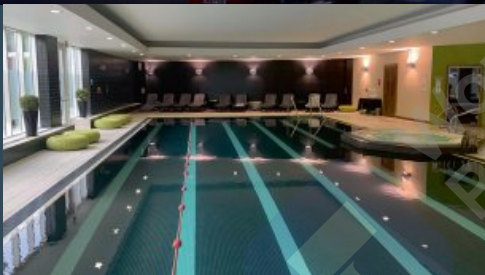
Lauren Crowther



# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## LAUREN CROWTHER

Director of Sales, Radisson Blu Durham



### Tell us about your current role?

Having worked for Radisson Hotel Group for the past five years as an Account Manager, I have recently moved to a new role at the Radisson Blu Durham as Director of Sales. We have such a great team at the hotel and I love being back on property. My new role consists of building strong client relationships with existing corporate clients who may have bedroom, meeting or event requirements and social events too. A large part of the role is finding new business which is something very important in the current climate. I am also working on the hotel's marketing initiatives and networking with local businesses.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

Over the past 11 years I have worked for International hotel brands starting my hospitality career as a sales graduate. My first role after the graduate programme was Sales Manager, for a new hotel in Aberdeen back in 2013. I was super proud when the team won "Best Select Service Hotel in Europe for 2013!"

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

Sustainability is high on the client's agenda especially after the COP26 Climate Change Conference last year, businesses really care about their carbon footprint.

Radisson Blu Durham offer Carbon Neutral Meetings where we automatically offset the carbon footprint of every single meeting or event taking place at our hotels worldwide at no cost to the client.

### What are you currently working on?

This year one of my focuses is promoting our meeting and event space for social events. We have a lovely restaurant, Collage, which has views of the Cathedral and River Wear so a perfect setting for a baby shower, afternoon tea, hen parties or birthdays. Our function space can seat up to 220 for larger events such as engagements, weddings and social gatherings.

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

We have a great team at the Radisson Blu Durham and I work with all departments throughout the hotel. I work more closely with our Revenue office who handle all enquiries from group rooms, meetings, events, weddings, social events and Christmas.

### What is the Radisson Durham's USP?

We are so lucky with the location of the hotel with stunning views of Durham Cathedral and the River Wear. We are only a 10 minute walk from Durham train station and have a large car park for visitors with over 120 spaces. We also have a large gym, 15m pool with steam/sauna and whirlpool. As well as a wonderful spa which offer treatments and spa days. Once the Milburngate site opens next door to the hotel, it will really make this side of the river a fantastic place in the city.

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

Have confidence, believe in yourself and trust your instincts.

### What has been your biggest challenge?

Returning to work after the pandemic was a big challenge, I had been on maternity prior to the lockdown and then furloughed so in total off for 20 months. So much had changed in the hospitality world and it did feel like starting a new job. After a while things did feel normal again and it's just so positive to see lots of enquiries coming through and businesses returning to travel.

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







# BUSINESS LUNCH

## OH MY, KHAI KHAI!

By Michael Grahamslaw

Admittedly, on a sun-soaked springtime Friday afternoon, your first thought for lunch may not be a curry. However, Khai Khai is not your average curry house.



**Since opening in December 2020 at the height of Tier 3 restrictions, the restaurant has bounced back emphatically, first with a roaring takeaway trade and now as a 'Victorian dining rooms' spotlighting retro Indian comfort food expertly prepared with fire and smoke.**

Set on Newcastle's Queen Street, the restaurant possesses a postcode of fine culinary reputation and occupies the former site of Vujon which was another firm Indian favourite.

Khai Khai recently won the award for the UK's Best Innovative Restaurant Concept at the British Curry Awards has drawn such acclaim it was even favoured by one Harrison Ford when filming the fifth Indiana Jones in the North East last Summer. To paraphrase his other most famous alias, we had a very good feeling about this. I therefore pitched up with my son Jack – another staunch Indian food aficionado- to see what all the fuss is about.

Khai Khai's raison d'être is to evoke the magic of India's culinary history, showcasing elemental cooking techniques and heritage dishes perfected in villages and culinary hotspots for centuries.

To achieve this, the restaurant uniquely employs a special 'Josper' oven, which prepares food over red-hot coals and burning wood – a traditional cooking method used in India.

Khai Khai describes its style of cooking as 'smoke play' – dishes are cooked over a natural flame: the oldest, most rudimentary form of cooking.

This emphasis on Indian heritage is also captured in the interior – a supremely stylish space with Indian wall murals, copper trinkets and crystal glassware. I was first to

arrive (we're spotting a pattern here) and noticed a bright and airy lunchtime buzz with the dining area absolutely packed. Of an evening meanwhile, the restaurant's bespoke mood lighting creates a backdrop which is more cosy and intimate.

Reflecting more modern tastes, Khai Khai also offers a cocktail menu which captures the cosmopolitan buzz of contemporary Newcastle. Many even are brewed to complement the smokiness which pervades the food offering. Whilst all this sounds marvellous, Jack and I are two unabashed guzzlers and swerved the cocktails in favour of two large cobras.

Starters arrived shortly thereafter. Jack chose a stunning Kolkata chilli chicken, a dish of Indo-Chinese origin, stir-fried with green peppers and burnt red chillies.

I chose the classic onion & samphire bhaji, done very well here, embellished with fennel and served with a chilli garlic dip. Indeed, upon arrival we each eyed each other's dishes enviously so decided to share the lot in a full-blown tapas style feast.

This continued into our main course where we both enjoyed the achari king prawns with pickling spices, fennel and dill and the chicken pepper roast with vivid pink peppercorns and caramelised onions.

Both dishes possessed that gorgeous, smoky char and were nicely complemented by a signature tandoori broccoli and a peshawari naan.

This had been a superb meal however we still had room for the Josper grilled pineapple with coconut ice cream which proved a winning palate cleanser.

Khai Khai's cooking techniques may be all 'smoke play' and mirrors, but I can assure you this restaurant is the real deal.

**For more information, visit [khaikhai.co.uk](http://khaikhai.co.uk) or to make a reservation, call 0191 261 4277**







“

...a supremely  
stylish space  
with Indian wall  
murals, copper  
trinkets and  
crystal glassware...





# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION



Stephen Waddington

## STEPHEN WADDINGTON

Managing Partner, Wadds Inc.

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

I'm a blow in. I grew up in the North West, studied in Manchester and then headed to London for work. My wife is from here and all the family love the North East.

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

There's access to great brainpower, skills and resources ranging from the North East Growth Hub to the universities. We're generally an optimistic and resilient crowd and it's inspiring to see the region continually reinvent itself.

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

We've got the city, coast, and countryside on our doorstep, with access to London, Europe, and beyond. There are lots of passionate sporting communities. My son's an avid rugby player so we spend a lot of time at rugby matches.

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

The bar at the Vermont Hotel or ABOVE up top. The views along the River Tyne are breath-taking and a must see for visitors to the city. Walking meetings along the river always provide a fresh perspective.

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

Eleven in Ponteland for a big date night. It's only a matter of time before it gets a Michelin Star. Hibou Blanc for a business lunch. The Pavilion in Shiremoor for a family pub dinner and similarly The Diner for takeaways.

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

We've just taken on an allotment. It's a work in progress and has great promise as a place to relax. We're out walking with our dogs on the Waggonways or coast every day. Otherwise, it's at the gym. Swimming really helps to clear my mind.

### Are the people really friendlier?

There's undoubtedly a strong community in the North East from allotments to sporting venues, and from the shops, markets and pubs, to university campuses. People are genuinely interested and make time to talk.

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

It's become an Instagram cliché but the view out to sea at sunrise from the bay at Cullercoats. It's

even better from a paddle board if you get out to sea. Please check the tides and wind speed before you go.

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

It needs more investment in education and skills to unlock its potential, despite the drive of its leaders and the ambition of its people. Levelling up needs to shift beyond a government slogan to meaningful cash.

“

**...It's inspiring to see the region continually reinvent itself...**

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

My wife and I have a houseboat office and home in a small community on the River Thames in London. It's home from home with big skies, river front and lots of space. I've travelled for work a lot and it's the only place I've ever worked in the world that comes close to the North East for a sense of place.

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





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# TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF CASH SAVINGS

April is stress awareness month and 61% of adults in the UK state that money is the factor that causes the most stress.

**That isn't just stress about where money is coming from, it is stress about where cash is safe, the return it is getting, and how to manage it.**

Cascade Cash Management is an independent and transparent service created to make savings simple. And here, Dr Ryan Dias, Cascade's Client Relationship Manager, talks through how fintech is fast becoming an industry with a purpose, amongst others, to help reduce stress. He said:

"Recently, Cascade have made our service and our advice more accessible. We have reduced our minimum deposit and are working on new products to help even more people access the best savings solutions.

"We also hold regular Full Flow and Rapid Networking events, designed to give our audience reassuring insights from a panel of guest experts, looking into a range of topics where money can cause emotional stress including divorce, leadership, business exits, inheritance and much more.

"The unique online Cascade platform generates enhanced cash returns and most attractively, includes every single bank and building society providing clients with the maximum protection they can obtain on deposits under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme through spreading cash across multiple banking licences via professional cash management. This means that customers don't have to worry about FSC limits of protection as with our system, every single penny is safe.

"The service has over 5,500 savings accounts on offer from Instant Access to 5 years and currently offers the best savings rates within the cash management space. The team of nine 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 £1 bn so far.

"In a nutshell, Cascade Cash Management is on a mission to make savings simple, helping people to reach their savings goals faster, smarter and happier on all levels. Be it for a house, a holiday, or setting up a business, we are focused on taking the stress out of it all and providing the best customer service possible.

"We also reduce stress for IFAs, solicitors, attorneys, accountants and other professionals, as we partner with them so they can have a better relationship with their clients, offering cash solutions as well as investments and pensions. These partners can self-brand the product for presentation to their own clients.

"We offer access to the best rates on daily basis and send regular bulletins to customers and partners, so no-one ever has to worry if their money is in good hands. In an uncertain time, when there is a certain hesitancy around the economy, Cascade is being recognised as the safe port.

"Finally, we are wholly invested in our team's wellbeing. As well as a monthly wellbeing newsletter with healthy eating, exercise and mental health advice, the team engage in peer group activities and training to ensure they feel valued, take part in healthy activity fundraising activities and have a mentor each to talk to in times of stress."

Stress Awareness Month runs every April and is co-ordinated by the Stress Management Society. Its purpose is to help people understand what stress, how it is caused and how it affects us. The focus is on raising awareness and supporting the reduction of stress through guides, insights, workshops and encouraging people to admit and talk about it before it becomes a major health issue.

**More information is available at [www.stress.org.uk/national-stress-awareness-month](http://www.stress.org.uk/national-stress-awareness-month) and you can get more information on Cascade at [www.cascade.co.uk](http://www.cascade.co.uk)**

“

**...In a nutshell,  
Cascade Cash  
Management is on  
a mission to make  
savings simple...**





Dr Ryan Dias





L-R: Janet Maxted of Cherry Parts,  
Julie Cuthbertson of RMT Accountants & Business  
Advisors and Mike Guellard of NEL Fund Managers.

## RMT ACCOUNTANTS' ADVICE SUPPORTING CHERRY PARTS' ONLINE GROWTH PLANS

Advice from RMT Accountants & Business Advisors is helping a family-owned fire safety firm work towards reaching new online markets.

**Cherry Parts has been successfully supplying fire protection equipment to trade customers from its North Tyneside base for more than two decades and currently turns over around £1m every year.**

But it is now looking to expand its customer base by setting up [www.mysafetyshop.co.uk](http://www.mysafetyshop.co.uk), a new webstore which will sell a comprehensive range of health and safety-related products to both businesses and the general public, such as

defibrillators and evacuation chairs, as well as a new line of a new line of own brand premium first aid kits.

As a longstanding client of RMT Accountants, the Cherry Parts management team was introduced to regional fund management firm NEL Fund Managers by RMT's corporate finance manager Julie Cuthbertson when it was looking at the different options available for securing the capital required to launch the new webstore.

They then worked with NEL to secure a £75,000 investment from the North East Small Loan Fund Supported by The European Regional Development Fund via the Recovery Loan Scheme, which will support the development and marketing of the new webstore and the recruitment of the personnel required to manage the new service.

A number of new jobs are expected to be created as the online business develops, while the management team is hoping that its turnover will quickly reach the same level as its existing operations.

Janet Maxted, managing director at Cherry Parts, says: "The business has been trading successfully since 1999, but the increasing recognition of the importance of and need for safety equipment across all workplace and domestic situations made us realise how much more we do could with it.

"Diversifying the product range opens up a whole new range of opportunities, while putting our own brand onto products for the first time is a landmark development that utilises the strong reputation we've built in our core market sector.

"Our success has always been based on good

communication, excellent product knowledge and the highest standards of customer service, and we'll be applying these principles just as much to our new operation.

"We think we can double our current turnover within a fairly short space of time through the new webstore and think we'll see more new jobs being created here as we grow.

"RMT's expert advice and guidance has been instrumental in many of the decisions we've made around our service developments and future growth strategy, while NEL's interest in us as people, as well as in our business performance, made the investment option they presented the right one for us to choose."

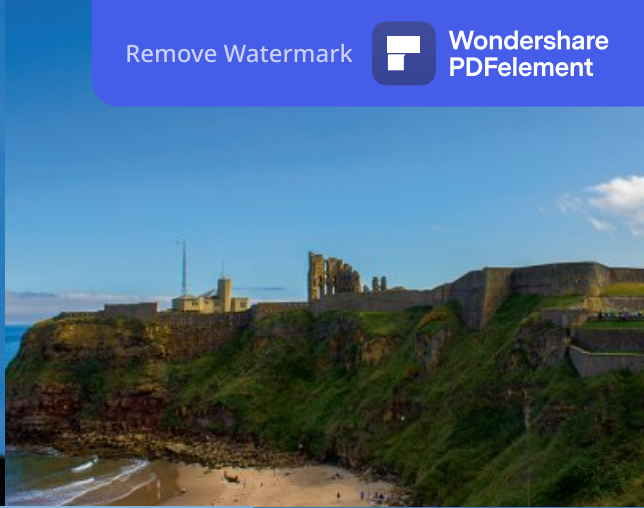
Julie Cuthbertson, who supported the Cherry Parts management team through the investment application, adds: "Janet and the team are building on an enviable reputation within their core area of expertise and now have every opportunity to take their business to the next level.

"It's been great to work with the team on the development and execution of their exciting plans for their new venture and to have helped them bring in the growth capital they need to put them into action."

RMT provides the full range of financial and business advisory services through its corporate finance, accountancy, specialist tax, medical & healthcare, and recovery & insolvency teams, and works with firms of all sizes both within and outside the North East.

**For further information, please visit [www.r-m-t.co.uk](http://www.r-m-t.co.uk) or call 0191 256 9500.**





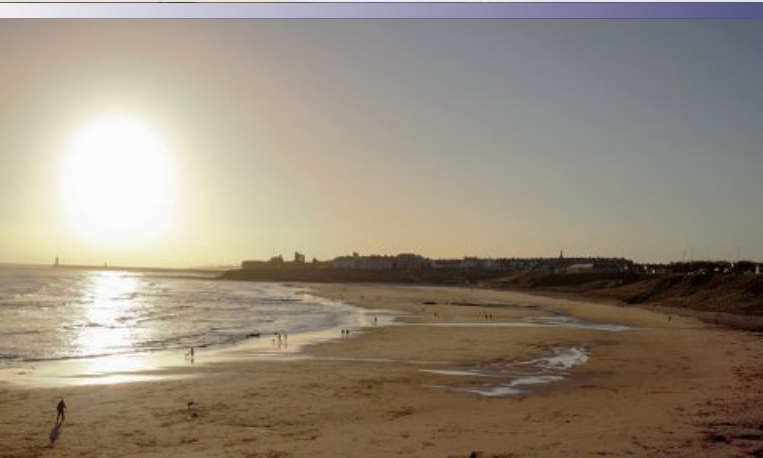
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## NEW VINYL PRESSING PLANT CREATES JOBS IN MIDDLESBROUGH FOLLOWING NPIF – FW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Middlesbrough-based vinyl pressing business Press On Vinyl is set to create as many as 46 new jobs to the region across the next three

years, thanks to a £350,000 investment from NPIF - FW Capital Debt Finance, managed by FW Capital and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF).

Opening a new state of the art pressing plant at Tees-Advance Manufacturing Park (TeesAMP) in June 2021, the business has been fitting out its operation ever since.

It pressed its first piece of vinyl at the end of January, and now plans to turn up the volume and be in full production by April. With two pressing machines operating, its team aims to

press as many as 50,000 records per month, focused on independent artists and labels, small-run releases, and local musicians.

The NPIF investment will be used to support working capital requirements through the start-up phase of the business and the deal was facilitated by Keith Charlton, FW Capital Deputy Fund Manager.

FW Capital Deputy Fund Manager Keith Charlton said: "Press On Vinyl is a new business with an impressive management team that will open at an opportune time for vinyl sales. Vinyl records are expected to outsell CDs as a musical format this year for the first time since 1987, creating huge demand at pressing plants. This has led to a strong pipeline of business for Press On Vinyl.

"We are delighted to have played a role in the creation of this new company, which will bring 46 jobs to Tees Valley and will hugely benefit the local economy."

David Todd, Press On Vinyl Commercial Director, said: "Due to the rise in demand for vinyl, pressing plants around the world are running at capacity, meaning smaller, independent artists are missing out. Our new business will prioritise local artists, which will make a huge difference to the Teesside music scene.

"This investment from FW Capital will support us as we launch this exciting new venture and create 46 jobs for the local economy. We are grateful to Keith and the NPIF - FW Capital team for the support."

## INVESTMENT OF £710,000 TO HELP REVOLUTIONISE ONLINE LEARNING

North East company sub-10 has received over £700K to help develop its intelligent learning platform using AI to change the way compliance training is delivered.

With £350,000 from the North East Innovation Fund, supported by the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), and managed by Northstar Ventures, plus additional funding from Angel investors, led by lead investor Dan Smyth with James Gasteen, who will take up an NED role on behalf of the group, bringing proven SaaS experience to the company, sub-10 will be able to grow the company and develop its innovative platform. Innovate UK has also given £210,000 of funding from the Innovation Funding Services Combined Investor Partnerships programme.

Co-founder and CEO Peter Stephenson, with 20 years' experience in Digital Game Development and Learning says, "Over the last three years sub-10 has designed and developed award-winning digital learning content for organisations such as Sage Plc, Northumbria Police and Your Move. We design each of our 10-minute or less learning units with one purpose and one learning objective, so the learning intention is clear. Each unit builds into a curriculum. We have proven that our unique sub-10 methodology increases learner engagement through our global training roll-outs. Our unique AI innovation will intelligently generate the appropriate personalised learning pathway through the content."

Co-Founder and COO Angela Ross, a multi-award-winning learning experience designer, adds: "We believe in learning. And all the things that learning can do to enhance individuals and organisations. We are excited to launch our first compliance product on our new sub-10 platform. It will be high-quality content delivered on our data-focused intelligent platform that



will allow companies of all sizes to access effective training and measure real impact on a cost-effective subscription basis. People can get a preview of the product via a free trial of our Safeguarding units at [sub-10.co.uk/safeguarding](https://sub-10.co.uk/safeguarding)

Northstar Ventures Investment Director Richard Charnley said, "Sub-10 has a clear aim to turn 'have to do learning' into 'want to do learning'. We are impressed with its track record of delivering bespoke solutions for the likes of Sage and Northumberland Police and the platform that's being developed to create a unique learning pathway. We are looking forward to seeing the new sub-10 compliance product launch at the end of April, with exciting new training for SME's. We are delighted to support them to be able to develop their products and market further."

Innovate UK's Bruce Colley said, "I am delighted that grant funding of £210K will help to support the development of sub-10's data driven AI pathway." He added that the validation provided by independent assessors along with the non-dilutive grant funding was intended to take some of the technology risk and therefore make the company even more attractive to investors.



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## FORMER PWC DEALMAKER JOINS UNW'S CORPORATE FINANCE TEAM

Newcastle-based chartered accountancy and business advisory firm UNW has announced the appointment of former PwC dealmaker Paul Mankin as Corporate Finance Partner to oversee its corporate finance advisory team.

**A multi award winner and former Insider North East Dealmaker of the Year, Paul brings over three decades worth of experience to the role, which will see him chair the firm's corporate finance business; helping to guide and build the team and further strengthen its position in the marketplace.**

Paul left PwC in December 2020 as Corporate Finance Partner responsible for the North East and Yorkshire after enjoying a highly successful 38 years at the firm, during which he advised on a number of high profile deals including the sale of Aesica Pharmaceuticals to Consort Medical plc and the disposal of Anson Limited to National

Oilwell Varco Inc.

During his career, Paul has built a strong reputation for advising clients on a range of corporate finance matters including acquisitions and disposals, finance raising, valuations and strategic reviews. Whilst his clients have primarily been privately owned, Paul has also worked extensively with the Private Equity community and with listed companies and the public sector.

UNW's Corporate Finance team has a significant track record both in the North East and nationally. Over the last two years, the UNW team has completed more than a dozen mergers & acquisitions advisory mandates across a range of

sectors, in addition to its market leading work on government grants and disposals in the dental sector.

Speaking of his motivations for joining the firm, Paul said: "UNW has a very strong brand that is differentiated locally, with an exceptional track record of going above and beyond for its clients and supporting the development of its people. The strength in depth of our corporate finance team means we have the capability to advise a broad and varied client base, and I'm looking forward to playing my part in its continued success by supporting the existing team and by recruiting further talent at all levels."

UNW Managing Partner Andrew Wilson said: "We are delighted that Paul has decided to join us having seen the fantastic opportunity that exists at UNW. His wealth of experience really is second to none and Paul's appointment is another indication of our continued commitment to building the best corporate finance business in the region. Paul is a well-respected figure in the North East and has a phenomenal track record of growing teams and developing talent and we can't wait for him to get started at UNW."

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

## SURGE MARKETING SOLUTIONS SECURE NEW TALENT FOLLOWING NPIF – FW CAPITAL INVESTMENT

Digital marketing agency Surge Marketing Solutions has secured a six-figure loan through NPIF – FW Capital Debt Finance, managed by FW Capital and part of the Northern Powerhouse Investment Fund (NPIF).

Founded in 2014, Middlesbrough-based Surge Marketing Solutions offers client services such as website development and design, search engine optimisation (SEO), content creation and digital marketing.

The six-figure NPIF investment will be used to create eight new roles, including a Chief Technical Officer, Technical SEO, Developer and Sales Executive who have already joined the team. The funding will help safeguard a further 16 jobs.

The deal was facilitated by Keith Charlton, FW Capital Deputy Fund Manager.

FW Capital Investment Executive Rachel Smith supported on the deal and said: "Led by an experienced and dynamic director, Surge has seen sustained growth year on year. The business has invested in infrastructure and personnel, laying foundations to take it from a regional agency to national. With our investment, they will be able to build upon this strategy, increasing their marketing spend and implementing the planned acquisition of new talent which includes bringing on board a highly experienced Chief Technical Officer. We are delighted to have been able to offer this investment."

David Porter, Surge Marketing Solutions Managing Director, said: "At Surge, we offer personal and innovative design, development and digital marketing services to clients in all sectors. Finding solutions that really work is what we do best and what we love most."

"This investment from FW Capital will support us as we continue to build



on our growth strategy and invest in new talent with the creation of eight exciting new roles." "The appointment of our CTO brings a whole new set of client problems we can now solve with software solutions. As well as E-commerce solutions, we are now able to develop software such as Mobile Apps, CRM's and ERP systems."

"We are grateful to FW Capital for the support and would certainly recommend them as a trusted and reliable funding partner."

Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen, said: "Surge is a brilliant local business helping to drive forward our ever-growing digital and professional services sectors. This latest funding is showing how our money is helping our companies create good-quality, well-paid jobs to help them thrive. In this case, it's given Surge the opportunity to make a national name for itself, in turn putting our region on the map even more."



## MERIT HEALTH LTD SECURES FW CAPITAL BACKING TO WIN £66M CONTRACT

The Cramlington-based firm received £2m from the Tees Valley Catalyst Fund (TVCF) to enable it to fulfil a new £66m contract. The investment is the largest amount available from the TVCF.

Merit Health, the specialist healthcare division of offsite construction specialist, Merit Holdings, was launched in October 2020 with a focus on delivering healthcare facilities quicker and more sustainably. The company's unique offsite manufacturing technology significantly reduces long-

established building construction timelines, without compromising quality.

The North East-based company has already completed a number of projects within the health and life sciences sector, including expansion of the Cell and Gene Therapy Catapult manufacturing centre in Stevenage, and a new sterile services facility for Northumbria Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.

FW Capital made the TVCF investment to allow Merit to fulfil its bond requirements for a contract to design, build and fit out a CAR-T Cell Manufacturing facility, also sited in Stevenage, this time for US organisation, Autolus, in association with developers, Reef Group.

The funding represents the second time FW Capital has supported Merit Holdings, following on from a previous TVCF investment in 2015. All in all, the funding has helped secure nearly 200 jobs at the business.

The deal was facilitated by FW Capital Investment Executives Alison Routledge and Jordan McGorrigan.

Allison Routledge, Investment Executive at FW Capital, said: "We are delighted to develop our long-term partnership with Merit Health by providing this investment."

"Merit is a successful and ambitious company that has a strong ESG strategy, delivering low carbon solutions to its clients and this fits with FW Capital's own strong environmental ethos. This significant investment has not only helped to secure a new contract to advance medical science but will also safeguard 70 jobs for the local area."

Matthew McGrady, Merit Health Finance Director, said: "Merit is at the forefront of transforming medicine production facilities, collaborating with life science clients to design and build the next generation of industrially innovative facilities for cell and gene manufacturing by using a highly integrated and environmentally friendly approach."

"We are very grateful to FW Capital for their ongoing support. This investment will allow us to further the ambition of the cell and gene therapy industry to bring innovative new medicines to patients as quickly as possible."



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## NOT ALL DEBT COMES FROM BANKS

For many business owners and managers, the moment they reach a point where they require additional cashflow, they immediately turn to their existing bank or another high street lender who automatically spring to mind.

**For over a decade now however, a new capital outlet has quietly increased in prominence and now sits as the third largest private market option. Private debt is, as the name suggests, a debt like capital option which now sits behind Private Equity and Venture Capital in terms of the amount of capital raised and deployed. Almost \$200bn was raised by fund managers in the sector during 2021 – the second highest amount in the sector, with 2017 being the most active year according to funds raised.**

The explosion in the market is no surprise when you consider the low interest environment and the surge in M&A activity – with leveraged buyouts now back on-trend and non-bank lenders benefitting from slick decision making and execution processes which their “bank” counterparts lack. Whilst private debt naturally carries a cost premium due to the cost of their own funds, the deviation between their rates and that of the big banks has narrowed and private debt has become an incredibly attractive option.



Lee Humble,  
Corporate Finance, Associate Partner.

Alike the equity markets, dry powder exists – with an estimated 2.5 years of capital ready for deployment as we enter 2022, albeit this has reduced since 2018. Default rates too have remained notably low despite the headwinds caused by Covid19, although the curtailment of government support schemes will expectedly see these default rates nudge upward in the coming periods.

The capital available is skewed toward North America- with only one of the top ten funds sitting in the UK, and a large percentage of this capital resides in the upper ends of the market. Key for SMEs and OMBs however is that this capital has found itself in our end of the eco system, as seen with PE/VC capital, and the dry powder in the market should mean that this availability of credit remains – especially in an era where M&A activity continues to track at and above record levels. Debt allocated to distressed and special situations is a growing component

which the layperson could expect to be increasingly popular in a period of increased impairment and default.

What does this mean for us in the small/mid cap space? It means we have options, and for those businesses looking to recapitalise, grow and acquire you should be considering all options of credit ahead of the delivery of your business plans. Capital is available. Those with a track record, with a robust well-thought business plan and supporting collateral which conveys your plans on a balanced basis (with an eye on risk), have a great opportunity of raising capital. This should help facilitate your plans. Timely advice will no doubt assist – of which there are numerous advisors in the market more than willing to support.

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

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



Maven celebrates a busy year investing a total of £10 million in 18 dynamic, high growth businesses in the North East region in 2021.

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

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

Maven can support a variety of businesses

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

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

With one of the UK's fastest growing economies, a highly skilled workforce and home to four national centres of excellence, the region is experiencing

one of the highest growth rates in business start-ups in the UK. The North East is now considered a pioneer in the development of electric vehicle technology, a major centre for the renewable, offshore and subsea energy industries, and boasts a vibrant digital and tech sector.

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

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

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



# MAVEN

# FD Finance Durham

# Finance Durham Fund

Debt and equity funding available between **£150,000 and £2 million** for businesses in, or looking to relocate to, County Durham.

## How can Finance Durham help my business to grow?

A simple alternative to bank finance, the Finance Durham Fund is transforming the financial landscape for businesses across County Durham.

We can back companies of all sizes and across most sectors, which contribute to business growth and job creation within the County.



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Hiring a  
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marketing



Management  
buyouts

If your business is in need of finance to help unlock its growth potential, we may be able to help.

For more information please contact:

**info@financedurham.co.uk | T: 0191 731 8595 | [financedurham.co.uk](http://financedurham.co.uk)**



# Business Durham





“

**...it is important  
to build  
resilience into  
your model...**



# RESILIENCE IN THE RANKS IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD

Andrew Marsh, chair of Vistage for the North East and Northumberland, NED for numerous businesses and charities; and successful entrepreneur, spends his days helping business leaders achieve goals and find opportunity.

**In this article he focuses on resilience, and how not only to build it into a company's leadership but how to cascade it through the organisation for increased strength and shared vision.**

"Leaders today are facing world issue after world issue at the moment, but those who have the right attitude and approach are finding ways forward, ways to grow and even ways to facilitate and achieve positive results.

"To be one of these achievers, it is important to build resilience into your model, focusing on positive drivers and making sure you understand the what if scenarios. Otherwise, the working day becomes all risk registers and unpleasantness, no good for energy, morale or for fostering success.

"The Ukraine and Russia conflict is causing pressure on supply chains, fast on the heels of the impact of the pandemic. We are all aware of energy rates rising at a fast rate of knots, as utility companies across the UK collapse. And of course, interest rates inflating, which is good for savings but not for mortgages, loans and repayments, adding more pressure to the pot. The car market is under huge pressure with a shortage of new vehicles and used vehicle values being extremely inflated.

"Historically the typical solution to the weight of these challenges would be for a company to stockpile cash, cut costs, slow investments, and try to ride things out. But if that is the general response, then trade and any chance of prosperity will grind to a halt. Instead, we need to keep sensible amounts of contingency cash deposited in the right place, whilst still investing business, in people and in our future. Resilience takes a long-term view.

"Dr Emma Black, CEO and cofounder of Cascade Cash Management said: "It is sensible right now for a company to protect a percentage of their cash to ensure resilience and longevity. There are choices but you should look for those options offering the best returns and the most advanced depositor protection is the Cascade portal. The unique online platform generates enhanced cash returns and most attractively, includes every single bank and building society providing clients with the maximum protection they can obtain on deposits under the Financial Services Compensation Scheme through spreading cash across multiple banking licences via professional cash management. The service has over 5,500 savings accounts on offer from Instant Access to 5 years. In a nutshell, we are helping create resilience through our mission to make savings simple, helping people and businesses protect their cash and reach their savings goals faster, smarter and happier."

"Building resilience in your people is also important. One way to do this is to give them access to as many perspectives, insights, tools and options as possible. You can do this through peer groups. Vistage holds members sessions that inject and motivate resilience, help with recognition of opportunity and fine tune the skills needed to deal with conflict, whilst pushing through positive visions. Perfect for leaders, but what about the rest of the team? Vistage also looks after emerging leaders, with a new cohort starting very soon.

"The Experience Bank Group also runs peer groups for all levels with the latest, due to launch in Spring, being for those all-important key managers - mid career high potential individuals. Peter Neal, founder of the part philanthropic enterprise, said: "Peer groups are beginning to be the core to the success of many individual's careers and to the

employer's success who invest in them. Many suggest they are the future of management and leadership development as they involve working with like-minded people, effectively sharing knowledge, learning skills, finding solutions, and exploring ideas. In times where we are faced with challenges, to have a positive place for individuals to focus on optimism and the future really is critical."

"In times of uncertainty it has always been business services such as marketing that are the first to go when cutting budgets. But this, as many displayed through the pandemic, is a short-term view as without awareness your sales and positive reputation are likely to grind to a halt. Resilience and future strength through opportunity can only be achieved by being seen and by maximising constructive exposure. James Tenant from Converge supports this thinking:

"Our Converge platform is a leading content tool designed to break the mould of white noise and amplify key messages from users. It leverages content to bigger national and global audiences daily and is ideal for those wanting to expand news reach and announcements. Only launching last year, we have been inundated with agencies and companies wanting to prosper and willing to invest to be seen and heard. This is very positive as only by building a listening and watching business audience, can you further increase a company's market share."

"My last tip on building resilience and finding opportunity to move forward is, as well as making sure your company has the right people, make sure it is using the right technology which could save time, money and tick lot of boxes that currently are maybe not done to the best standard. A great example of this is the difference that GUARDIAN® from Plexus Innovation is making in addressing a whole host of business-critical issues for users. Ian Murray, Founder and Managing Director, said:

"GUARDIAN®'s IoT remote technology 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 brings big changes in the way organisations can significantly improve their business operations whilst reducing risks, costs, waste, and environmental impact. Its' different applications mean it is more agile than similar products, and can do so much more, for many more industries ensuring continuity, confidence, and resilience."

"To sum up, resilience equals the ability to go beyond adversity and for many, beyond survive to thrive. It is one of the most important qualities for a leadership team to have and to instil into the ranks from top to bottom and all the way back again. It is not always something that comes naturally, but it can be taught as long there is a vision of what the need and the result is."

***If you need help infiltrating resilience throughout your own working ethic or your company and its team, then do get in touch with Andrew on [andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk](mailto:andrew@marshbusinesstransformation.co.uk)***





Stuart Cottee

## DELOITTE COMMITTED TO TEES VALLEY

Stuart Cottee, practice senior partner at Deloitte in the North East explains how Deloitte has made a commitment to the Tees Valley and how the region has a once in a generation opportunity.

**Deloitte has had an office in Newcastle for many years and we've recently announced we're recruiting roles that will be based in Teesside. The firm has made this commitment following a conference we held last November in Middlesbrough which was attended by over 100 organisations, the aim of which was to get people talking about levelling up and economic growth in the Tees Valley.**

We know from having a base in the North East that the Tees Valley is rich in talent and has a proud history of its workers innovating, getting results and having an impact that spreads far beyond the region. We were so inspired by the opportunities discussed at the conference that we felt we needed to make our own contribution to economic growth in the Tees Valley.

Economic growth and levelling up is important to me personally - I was born and bred in County Durham, I've raised my six children in the North

East and I want my children and grandchildren to have equal career and education opportunities. I really want to see this region thrive - I think we have a once in a generation opportunity to make this happen.

I'm fortunate to work for an organisation that has the same values - levelling up is important to Deloitte and its regions business - over 50% of our people and partners are based outside London.

Tees Valley Mayor, Ben Houchen was a keynote speaker at our conference and he told delegates about his work on the regeneration of the region. Ben and his team are encouraging cleaner, safer and healthier industries of the future to make their base here.

Teesworks and the Teesside Freeport are also helping by pioneering low-carbon advances, plus the Darlington Economic Campus is bringing hundreds of top civil service jobs to the region. This is why the Tees Valley is attracting more big firms to the region. Ben said at our conference that "The Tees Valley is now at a moment of unprecedented opportunity."

### Recruitment drive

Deloitte will initially recruit for 25 roles in our tax business. Half the roles will be for technology professionals running a new digital platform that Deloitte is launching, CustomsClear, which automates the preparation and submission of customs declarations. The other roles will be for marketing professionals who will work with Deloitte teams across Europe. This is the first time Deloitte has recruited for roles specifically based in the Tees Valley.

Our new team in the Tees Valley will experience hybrid working, having access to an office to connect and collaborate but also being able to work from home in the way that suits them best. As a firm we are finding this hybrid model appeals

to professionals who might be returning to work, have family commitments or simply want a better work life balance. I also hope that these roles may encourage people who might have moved away from the area to relocate back here.

We asked Ben to comment on our recruitment drive in the Tees Valley and he said: "This new announcement from Deloitte is fantastic news and will see the firm join the growing number of companies making a commitment to Teesside."

"By recruiting directly across Teesside, Darlington and Hartlepool, this multinational firm is backing our region and its skilled workers. It's also another example of how people can stay local but go far, and don't need to leave their hometowns for big cities to secure good-quality, well-paid careers with prestigious organisations."

The pandemic has not changed the work we do but it has changed the way we work. A recent survey of our staff showed that 81% anticipate working from an office for up to two days a week as we return to the new normal. The research also revealed that 96% of our people want to have the freedom to choose how flexibly they will work in the future.

In addition, 86% of our staff ranked 'collaborating with team colleagues' and 'interacting with others' within their top three ways they envisage using the office. Following on from what our people have told us we have recently opened our first 'future of work' office in Newcastle and it is the first UK office specifically designed for the firm's new hybrid working model with sustainability at the core of the design.

**If you are interested in the new opportunities in Teesside they can be found at [www.deloitte.co.uk/careers](http://www.deloitte.co.uk/careers)**



# VIBRANT HUMAN CAPITAL SECTOR HIGHLIGHTS BROADER ECONOMIC ACTIVITY

**RG Corporate Finance remains highly active across the UK Mergers & Acquisitions (M&A) market, particularly in key sectors including, technology, human capital, manufacturing and engineering, healthcare and professional services.**

In his latest column, RGCF partner and head of corporate finance Carl Swansbury focuses on the human capital sector and how it reflects wider economic activity.

The UK M&A market is experiencing somewhat of a boom, with activity at the highest level since 2008. Deal volumes were 40% higher in 2021 compared with 2020, and there is no sign of a slowdown. Of course, some slowdown is expected in due course, as some of this activity reflects pent-up demand being released following the pandemic.

The human capital sector, which incorporates recruitment, training and skills-based businesses is no exception with the UK human capital sector seeing its strongest volume of M&A transactions

in more than 10 years, according to various market analysis, up over 10% in 2021 compared with 2020.

The sector is a great barometer of broader economic activity and health, so the current level of deal activity, on the back of a strongly performing sector, should be viewed very positively.

UK recruitment businesses continue to be attractive places for investment for both private investors and trade buyers. Overseas trade buyers continue to view the highly developed UK Human Capital sector as very attractive, notwithstanding any concerns following Brexit.

Most deals are either sales to trade, sales to private equity or sales to management in debt backed MBOs. There has been some Enterprise Ownership Trust activity, but it is not common as the sector does not necessarily represent a great fit for this type of deal.

RGCF's deal activity in the human capital sector reflects the buoyancy in the market, both in and out of the North East, with recent transactions including the MBOs of Nigel Wright Group and Energize Recruitment Group, HW Global's acquisition of Osmii and the sale of Instep UK Ltd to Scale Up Capital.

Particularly active sub sectors include technology software platforms and Ed Tech businesses in a world where online and remote working has become the norm. IT and healthcare recruitment specialists have seen lots of activity for obvious reasons, but there have been increases across the board including engineering, construction and industrial.

Disruption caused by the economic slowdown following the pandemic, led to an 18% decline in



Carl Swansbury

employment placement revenues to circa £13.4bn in 2020. However, by the end of 2021 they had recovered to £16.8bn, above pre-pandemic levels.

Government support has helped protect the economy and mitigated the negative impact of the pandemic. A period of economic recovery is leading to higher levels of business confidence and a swift recovery in job vacancies across multiple sectors, with the recruitment sector benefitting from the increased demand in placement opportunities as well as being a big beneficiary of wage inflation.

The outlook continues to be positive, with recruitment industry revenue expected to continue its strong recovery, forecasting revenues of £21bn+ within the next five years, a growth rate of circa 6% p.a., which is likely to result in there continuing to be a lot of M&A activity in the sector over the next 12-24 months.

[ryecroftglenton.com](http://ryecroftglenton.com)

# FASHION FIRM DRESSMEZEE BOUNCES BACK WITH METEORIC GROWTH FOLLOWING A BUSINESS SWITCH

**North East-based online retailer Dressmezee has bounced back from a pandemic pause in fashion shopping by seeing its revenue increase by 133% from last year, hitting £2million in turnover.**

The business, which was originally launched from the bedroom of 35-year-old entrepreneur Cristal Luo in 2015 has gone from strength to strength after moving to new 17,000 sq ft premises and doubling staff numbers to service its growing demand.

The fashion brand, that has been supported by business advisers at Robson Laidler, went through a rocky period in 2020 where refunds were outweighing sales due to the closure of party venues, restaurants and pubs. In direct response, the team at Dressmezee worked hard to pivot its business model from luxury dresses to loungewear to keep customers shopping.

Dressmezee founder Cristal Luo said: "Like all fashion industry businesses we felt the impact of Covid-19. As customers sought out cosy clothing to wear at home, we went through an eight-week period where our sales were in decline. We acted promptly and with the dedication of our team we adapted our offering from dresses to loungewear and pyjamas with a Dressmezee twist of sparkle, animal prints and glitz, which saw sales rocket once again.

"With turnover at a steady £980,000 for our 2020 year end, we initially set ourselves a cautious target



L-R: Dressmezee technical director Jonathan Ruddick, founder Cristal Luo, Robson Laidler business advisor Jack Spoor and Dressmezee general manager Sue Hart.

of reaching £1million for 2021, so are unbelievable excited to have smashed this, hitting £2million. It is only with the hard work and passion of our team that we have been able to achieve this.

"As the fashion industry recovers, our strong financial position is underpinning further investment in our staff and products. We are now setting our sights even higher and working on ambitious plans and look forward to showcasing our new collections in the summer."

Dressmezee has recently moved to a huge unit in West Chilton Industrial Estate to house all stock, admin offices and photography studios to style,

shoot and market the clothing on its social media platforms.

Over the past 12 months Dressmezee has also appointed an additional 11 members of staff, including a new buyer and marketing and design team who are responsible for a host of new advertising campaigns, which brings its total headcount to 24.

Cristal continued: "Robson Laidler has supported us not only with our accounts and financial reporting but with vision mapping exercises, forecasting, seeking out our sustainable competitive advantage and pulling this all together into a clear business plan with achievable targets and full accountability."

Robson Laidler business adviser Jack Spoor advised Dressmezee throughout the pandemic and has continued to support them with regular financial coaching and reporting.

Jack said: "Dressmezee are a dream client in that they work hard, listen and act upon our advice. After seeing the inevitable decline of sales during the first few months of the pandemic they quickly adapted their business model and have thrived and grown. It has been an incredible journey and a process we are proud to have supported them with. We look forward to supporting Dressmezee into the next financial year."

**Robson Laidler Accountants and Business Advisors**  
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**0191 281 8191**





## INVESTING IN VOLATILE TIMES: THE JOYS OF POUND COST AVERAGING

Currently there is a great deal of market volatility. In these circumstances investors must focus on the fact that they are investing for the longer term.

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Markets can fall quickly but can rise equally fast. A way of dealing with volatility is by utilising "Pound Cost Averaging."

### What is it?

Pound Cost Averaging is the concept of making regular contributions to your investments to smooth out market volatility.

By making regular contributions you naturally purchase fewer units of investments when prices are high and more units when prices are low.

Over the long-term, not only does this create a disciplined investment approach, but this strategy will help take advantage of volatile periods and potentially improve your returns.

### Timing the market

I always get pleasure buying something today at a cheaper price than yesterday! Who doesn't love a sale after all?

One of the greatest things about Pound Cost Averaging is that it removes the worry of making a lump sum investment right before a market decline.

Trying to time the market rarely pays off and often it's more luck than skill, so even seasoned investors avoid falling into this trap. Using Pound Cost Averaging you can be safe in the knowledge

that through volatile periods your money will be working to ensure you purchase units at a lower price with a long-term view.

### Rising Markets

Of course, there will be exceptions to this philosophy and there is no guarantee that Pound Cost Averaging will result in better outcomes than lump sum investing.

One of these exceptions is a consistently rising market where investing a lump sum from the outset will give you the lowest possible unit price and therefore generate the highest return.

However, the investment journey is rarely a smooth one and given no one knows for sure that markets will consistently rise over your investment journey, the Pound Cost Averaging method can be a useful tool to ensure you don't buy at the wrong time and are able to take advantage of market volatility.

### Example

The example opposite shows the Pound Cost Average method for two different customers over a volatile period.



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

Customer A invests £1,000 a month over the year whereas Customer B invests £12,000 in January. Across the year, the market falls and rises with the

unit price following the same trend.

By December, Customer A has been able to take advantage of falling prices and has purchased

over 1,000 more units and paid a lower average price than Customer B. This leaves Customer A with almost £2,000 more over the 1-year time frame.

Month	Unit Price	Customer A Contributions	Customer B Contributions
January	£2.00	£1,000	£12,000
February	£1.91	£1,000	-
March	£1.74	£1,000	-
April	£1.70	£1,000	-
May	£1.65	£1,000	-
June	£1.57	£1,000	-
July	£1.52	£1,000	-
August	£1.57	£1,000	-
September	£1.61	£1,000	-
October	£1.65	£1,000	-
November	£1.74	£1,000	-
December	£1.83	£1,000	-
Total Unit Purchased		7,077	6,000
Average Price Paid		£1.71	£2.00
Final Value		£12,923	£10,956

### Conclusion

Market volatility is a fact of life. We have seen much of it recently. There is no perfect way of dealing with it so feeding in money over a period is a sensible approach.

***If you would like more information, or would like to discuss your own position, then please do not hesitate to contact me or my colleagues, David Hughes and Denise Graham.***

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

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

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# IF YOU THOUGHT 'BINGE DRINKING' WAS BAD FOR YOU. WHAT ABOUT 'BINGE THINKING'?

Too much alcohol, especially binge drinking, can have negative impact on physical health, mental health, work performance, tolerance levels, anxiety levels and more.

**But what about binge thinking? Thinking about problems over and over instead of meeting them head on. Constantly evaluating your life instead of living it. Sitting there worrying, too afraid to act just in case the worst-case scenario you invented actually comes to pass. How might that impact your physical health, mental health, work performance, tolerance levels, anxiety levels and more?**

**Exactly!**

Binge thinking, or intense over-thinking, can be paralyzing. And worst of all, it can mean that reality becomes more about what you're thinking, than what you're doing. And in this so short life of ours, that's such a shame.

Here are six pointers that might just encourage you to live your life in the real world, rather than inside your head.

**1. Be Specific.** Especially when it comes to thinking about purpose. You probably know that purpose is important. Goodness knows there are enough people talking about it. But if you aren't specific when it comes to trying to work out your purpose, you've nowhere to go. Yes, you want to help the disadvantaged. Yes, you want to stick up for the bullied. Yes, you want to support the silenced to be heard. But what are you actually going to do? Be precise. And start small. Because if you don't, you may never start anything that really matters to you and anybody else – at all.

**2. Focus on the right place when goal setting.** If you are more in love with and obsessed by the fine detail of your goal, than you are with the processes you have to go through to achieve it, you're focussing in the wrong place. OK, so the prize looks great. But if you don't consider the effort and hard work and sacrifice along the way you'll just end up being frustrated. Love the goal. But – somehow – learn to love the process of getting there just as much.

**3. Compartmentalise.** Prioritise. And Say 'No'. If a desire to be fitter is something that feels trapped inside your mind – do this. If you want to go to the gym 3 times each week, 90 minutes each time, put that in your diary before anything else. Then think about what else is trapped inside your mind. Then put that in your diary too. Then compartmentalise your job - properly. Yes, create a small amount of daily 'slush' time in which you can be more reactive than proactive. But be proactive first. And say no more. Be more sensible with how you get ideas out of your head, and how you turn them into actual tasks in your real life. Because if you don't, the old familiar feelings of work never being completed, hours disappearing to who-knows-where, stress and tiredness, brain fuzz and forgetfulness, and feeling endlessly battered by urgent requests – they'll never, ever go.

**4. Don't bond with people over things you all don't like.** Look for things you all do like, instead. OK you've got to be honest with yourself with this one. Negative, whiney people attract other negative whiney people. And whilst we all like a good old moan sometimes, be careful. Focussing too much on the shortcomings of others paralyzes you. It saps your energy. And it almost always leads to, and actually supports, inaction.

**5. Stop being frightened.** Yes, this is definitely easier said than done. But remember, life is short. So see if you recognise any of this in yourself. If you tend to resist, avoid thinking about or talk yourself out of moving towards the things you want most, fear is getting in the way. You've convinced yourself you don't deserve the thing you want most, so you don't even try. And as a consequence, the thing you desire never sees the light of day. You keep it locked away in your head. Because you're scared you may never be able to achieve it. Or worse still (so you tell yourself) you may get it – then lose it again. In summary, there is in fact only one sure-fire way to never have the things you really want. And that's to never try.

**6. Stop thinking backwards.** One of the main reasons we live inside our heads instead of getting on with living our lives in the real world is because we are thinking backwards. Specifically, we think that once everything miraculously drops into place, life begins. When in actual fact, it is only when we start to live our lives that things drop into place.

Binge thinking, just like binge drinking, is nothing more than a place to hide.

And if you hate the hangover you get from a few hours of binge drinking, imagine the hangover you'll get from a lifetime of binge thinking.

Yuk!

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Darren Wingfield





"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.

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**Greg Whitehead**

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## SWINBURNE MADDISON ADVISES TECH START UP YAKKR ON SIX FIGURE PRE-SEED INVESTMENT

Durham City's leading law firm, Swinburne Maddison LLP (Swinburne Maddison) has provided legal advice to an exciting new tech start-up, Yakkr, in relation to a six-figure pre-seed investment.

Yakkr, an online platform, is all about connecting fans with their favourite celebrities, influencers and gamers in the pursuit of delivering premium gaming experiences.

The idea for Yakkr was conceived by two former Durham University graduates, Marcus Rowley and Rhys Birkinshaw, who studied Finance and Computer Science, respectively.

Swinburne Maddison was recommended to the two entrepreneurs by the Durham City Incubator (DCI). Alex Wilby, a Partner in Swinburne Maddison's corporate and commercial team advised them. With a strong commercial background and recent experience in the tech sector, Swinburne Maddison was well-suited to the task. He said: "I regularly act for fund managers and investors, so I have experience of what both parties require. To do the work well, you need to have the legal experience to know where to focus your time and attention to keep costs under control whilst adding value for your client."



Explaining the thinking behind Yakkr (slang for 'have a chat'), Marcus said: "With the growth in demand for digital experiences since the start of the pandemic, fans want to engage with their favourite celebrities, influencers and gamers. Yakkr allows this to happen."

The investment has been provided by Athena Venture Capital, backed by TwinklHive. The company is currently at pre-revenue stage and the funding will be used to fund the creation of the business and the Yakkr platform.



## MUCKLE LLP ADVISES NORTH EAST TECHNOLOGY COMPANY ASPIRE ON £85M GROWTH INVESTMENT DEAL

Former North East Company of the Year, Aspire Technology Solutions, has secured significant minority investment from mid-market private equity firm LDC, in a deal which values the business at £85m.

Experts from Muckle LLP's specialist Corporate and Banking teams provided legal advice to Aspire on the transaction. Philip Clare, Corporate Partner, led the deal, working with Corporate Associate Stuart Grieve, Corporate Solicitor Hayden Richards, and Partner and Head of Banking Louise Duffy.

Aspire, a longstanding Muckle LLP client, is one of the fastest growing IT managed service and cyber security providers in the UK. Launched 15 years ago by CEO, Chris Fraser, Aspire has offices in Gateshead, London and Stockton-upon-Tees, and the business employs more than 200 people.

## DELOITTE RECRUITS FOR NEW ROLES IN THE TEES VALLEY

The firm will initially recruit for 25 roles in its tax business. Half the roles will be for technology professionals running a new digital platform that Deloitte is launching, CustomsClear, which automates the preparation and submission of customs declarations. The other roles will be for marketing professionals who will work with Deloitte teams across Europe.

Stuart Cottee, practice senior partner at Deloitte in the North East, said: "This is the first time Deloitte has recruited for roles specifically based in the Tees Valley. We know that the area is rich in talent and has a proud history of its workers innovating,

getting results and having an impact that spreads far beyond the region.

"Last November we held a conference, attended by over 100 organisations, to discuss economic growth in the region. We were so inspired by the opportunities discussed that we felt we needed to make our own contribution to economic growth in the Tees Valley by recruiting, initially for 25 roles."

Tees Valley Mayor Ben Houchen said: "This new announcement from Deloitte is fantastic news and will see the firm join the growing number of companies making a commitment to Teesside. It's thanks to the likes of the Darlington Economic Campus, which will see hundreds of top civil service jobs come to the region, that we're attracting more and more big firms who understand the huge scope of opportunity here.



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## **TRINITY CHAMBERS MAIN SPONSORS OF THE NORTHERN LAW AWARDS 2022**

Leading Barristers Trinity Chambers based in Newcastle, Middlesbrough and Leeds will be the Main sponsorship Partners at this year's Northern Law Awards.





*L-R: Nicole Dixon, Sales Manager at Echo Events, Tim Harris  
MBE Trinity Chambers Director and Dorothy Inverarity,  
Director at Echo Events.*

**The Awards are a celebration of the exceptional legal talent in the region as well as recognition of successes in its burgeoning legal sector.**

**The 2020 and 2021 Awards were cancelled as a result of the Pandemic and therefore the 2022 Awards, which will take place on the evening of Thursday 23rd June at the Hilton Newcastle Gateshead, will cover work carried out between March 2020 and March 2022.**

Despite COVID19, the legal sector in the region has plenty of accomplishments and stories of resilience to recognise and shout about across a

range of different sized law firms, in house legal teams, academia and not for profit sectors.

As Main Partners, Trinity Chambers will be heavily involved in the run up to, during and following the Awards, including an introduction on the evening, as well as presenting Awards in several categories, including the Outstanding Achievement Award.

Commenting on the partnership with the Awards, Trinity Chambers Director Tim Harris MBE said: "Given the past couple of years we have had, the members and staff at Trinity welcomed the opportunity to take a central role in the

2022 Northern Law Awards and celebrate the remarkable talent, expertise and levels of service being delivered by the legal sector across the region and indeed beyond.

One of the positives from the pandemic has been the opening up of legal services across the Country through remote hearings and digital technology, this in turn has led to opportunities to explore the 'North-Shoring' of legal services to the region.

In addition to heralding the region's achievements, above all else, I think everyone is ready for a great evening out with industry colleagues."

In response to Trinity's sponsorship, Sales Manager at Echo Events, who organise the Awards, Nicole Dixon said: "We are delighted to welcome Trinity Chambers as the Main Partner of The Northern Law Awards 2022.

With this fantastic support within the North East from Trinity Chambers, we are excited to bring together the legal community once again to celebrate all the impressive achievements made since the 2019 Northern Law Awards."

Dorothy Inverarity, Director at Echo Events added: "We hope this is the beginning of a longstanding partnership, keeping the North East legal community at the forefront of the region's accolades for the future."

Headquartered at the historic Custom House on Newcastle's Quayside, Trinity Chambers has over 100 barristers supported by 25 staff working with clients across the North Eastern Circuit and across the UK.

As well as offering specialist legal advice and advocacy in the core areas of Business & Property, Employment, Personal Injury, Crime and Family law, Trinity also has specialist barristers covering Social Housing, Court of Protection, Judicial Review, Civil Liberties & Human Rights, Regulatory, Licensing, Agriculture, Inquests, Immigration, Planning and Education law.

Following Newcastle Civil & Family Courts and Tribunal Centre's relocation, Trinity opened dedicated premises at nearby Ridley Place, Newcastle. In Teesside, Trinity has recently moved to larger Chambers in Middlesbrough's Cleveland Business Centre. Reflective of its growth aspirations and in response to client demand, Trinity opened Chambers in Leeds in 2019.

Despite the challenges of the pandemic, Trinity has continued to attract new talent by extending its number of pupillages, as well as accepting tenancy applications from barristers joining from other chambers.

Trinity was a finalist at the Regional Set of the Year category of the Chambers UK Bar Awards 2021, as well as reaching the shortlist of the 'Chambers of the Year' category of the Yorkshire Legal Awards 2021. In recognition of its innovative and pragmatic response to the pandemic, Trinity reached the finals of the 'Best Pivot' category in The Investors in People Awards 2021. Trinity was again recognised as a Top Tier Set in Legal 500 2022 and received record numbers of listings in both the Legal 500 and Chambers & Partners 2022 directories.

**For more information visit  
[www.trinitychambers.co.uk](http://www.trinitychambers.co.uk)**



# WHAT THE COMMERCIAL RENT (CORONAVIRUS) BILL MEANS FOR COMMERCIAL LANDLORDS AND TENANTS

**The Commercial Rent (Coronavirus) Bill is important to both commercial landlords and tenants as it affects rent payments that built up due to the forced closure of businesses by the Government during the Covid lockdowns. This has been a real concern for tenants, but it has also been a worrying time for financially impacted commercial landlords.**

## Background

The Bill, due to come into force on 25 March 2022, is to be introduced following a pause on commercial landlords being able to evict tenants for non-payment of rent. This pause is likely to end when the new Bill comes into force. This has in turn affected commercial landlords' ability to deal with non-paying tenants by way of Commercial Rent Arrears Recovery (CRAR), namely seizing goods belonging to tenants; or winding up the tenant's business based on non-payment of rent.

The previous Coronavirus legislation has provided much needed breathing space for many commercial tenants who have struggled to trade during the pandemic or were forced to close due to Government guidance. To bridge the gap between the competing interests of commercial landlords and tenants, a new code of practice was issued on 9 November 2021 encouraging parties to negotiate and to try and reach an agreement. It is estimated that there could be at least £8 billion of commercial rent owing in the next quarter.

## Protected v Unprotected Rent

From 25 March 2022 commercial landlords will be able to go back to the usual ways of recovering any rent due in relation to 'unprotected' rent, but 'protected' rent will apply to tenants who were forced to close their businesses due to the Government's Covid legislation, such as those in the hospitality and leisure sectors. The Bill will protect these ring-fenced rents from the first lockdown on 21 March 2020 to the earlier of either the last day on which the rental property was affected by a closure requirement or 18 July 2021, when the hospitality sector and non-essential businesses could reopen. For non-essential retailers, the relevant date will be 21 April 2021.

If businesses are unsure as to whether their rent is protected or not, then it is important to get specialist advice.

## Arbitration Process

The Government's aim is to try and keep viable businesses afloat and protect the jobs connected to them. The landlords' financial position will also be considered, so it's going to be a balancing act. The Bill introduces a binding Arbitration process to try to resolve claims for rent arrears that have built up during the periods mentioned above. If landlords and tenants cannot reach an agreement about these arrears through negotiation, either side can apply for Arbitration. Arbitration is where a nominated expert, in this case probably an accountant or a surveyor, will look at all the evidence and decide on any unresolved issues.

If a dispute goes to Arbitration, each side will have to put forward proposals and provide evidence in support. It will also be possible to ask for an Arbitration hearing. The Arbitrator will have the power to make a binding decision, although there will be some options to appeal. The Arbitrator will have the power to write off arrears or defer payment for up to 24 months. In addition, any court proceedings issued



Charlie Lynn

after 10 November 2021 can be put on hold until the Arbitration has taken place.

It will only be possible to ask for an Arbitration for a six month period, starting from 25 March 2022. We would recommend that any affected landlord or tenant should get immediate expert legal advice due to the strict time limit.

## Who pays for the Arbitration?

A key point to note is that each party will pay its own costs of the Arbitration (including solicitors' fees), this may be an incentive for them to try and reach an agreement between themselves. Any Arbitration hearings will be held in public, and businesses are unlikely to want their finances to become public knowledge, so this might be another reason to try negotiations first. There are likely to be significant imbalances between large multinational companies and small high street businesses. Similarly, this will affect large professional landlords as well as small investor landlords, so there are understandable concerns about the process generally, proportionality and costs.

## Next Steps

Protected rents will only be ring-fenced for a six-month period and the process doesn't apply to licences of properties or tenancies at will, many tenants are often unaware of what sort of tenancy they have, so it is important to check. Whether you are a landlord or tenant, given the timescales and how new and untested the process is, it is important to consider getting specialist legal advice.

**To talk you through the implications and explore your options, contact Charlie Lynn, litigation solicitor at Sweeney Miller Law [charlie@sweeneymiller.co.uk](mailto:charlie@sweeneymiller.co.uk) call 0345 900 5401 or visit [www.sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://www.sweeneymiller.co.uk)**

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## FIZZ IN THE CITY RELAUNCH

Newcastle based Mincoffs Solicitors relaunched their Fizz in the City Ladies Networking event on Friday 11th March at Crowne Plaza Newcastle to coincide with International Women's Week. Attracting a fabulous turnout, the event also raised £300 for worthy charity Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter. It was fabulous to network face to face finally!

Look out for their next event in June in aid of The Chronicle Sunshine Fund

#fizzfriday #networking #charity











# THE WAY EMPLOYERS CARRY OUT RIGHT TO WORK CHECKS IS SET TO CHANGE FROM 6 APRIL



The Home Office has announced changes to how employers undertake right-to-work checks with effect from 6 April 2022.

**Currently, non-UK/Irish nationals who hold either biometric residence cards (BRC), biometric residence permits (BRP), or frontier worker permits (FWP) can demonstrate their right to work in the UK by either showing their physical cards or through the Home Office's online service.**

From 6 April, they will only be able to demonstrate their right to work through the online service. Employers will no longer be able to accept physical cards for the purposes of a right to work check.

#### Checks for British and Irish citizens

From 6 April 2022, legislation will be in force to enable employers to use Identity Service Providers

(IDSPs) to carry out right-to-work checks on their behalf, under a digital identity document validation technology (IDVT).

#### Consequences of non-compliance

There are severe sanctions if right to work checks are done incorrectly and your organisation employs illegal workers. These sanctions can apply to the organisation as a whole and individuals involved in the recruitment of illegal workers, whether this is done knowingly or negligently, and can include imprisonment and unlimited fines.

By undertaking right-to-work checks in line with prescribed guidance, before a prospective employee starts work with you, you ensure

your organisation has a statutory excuse against negligently employing an illegal worker. Employers should be amending policies and procedures to take account of the new changes, and ensuring that everyone involved in undertaking right to work checks has appropriate training in the new regime.

#### Understanding your options

The majority of skilled migrant workers expect to be sponsored by their employer to enable them to work in the UK. We can advise on all aspects of the sponsor licence application and support you through this process. With our help you can also understand whether any alternative options exist to enable you to employ your prospective employee without sponsorship.

**For more information and help in this area, please contact Amy Sergison on 0191 211 7995, [amy.sergison@muckle-llp.com](mailto:amy.sergison@muckle-llp.com)**

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# STAYING POWER

*Longevity in business is something to be admired. In a new series of features, we are celebrating some of the most accomplished professionals from across the North East business community. Aimed at major players with 20+ years' experience in their respective sectors, we provide a fascinating insight into what makes them tick and what we can learn from them.*

*This month we speak to...*

## SURBHI VEDHARA

Specialist Commercial Property Solicitor and  
Managing Partner at Sweeney Miller Law

In her role, Surbhi deals with all aspects of property law and management across the firm at its offices in Newcastle and Sunderland.

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

No, I didn't. I grew up in India and moved here around 20 years ago. At that time I had a business degree from India and I didn't really know what to do with it. There is a very strong legal tradition in my family - there are numerous lawyers and even a Judge. That background inspired me to go on to do law.

### What is your favourite aspect of the job?

Much of what I do in my role is develop the young people in the firm. This includes the numerous members of the Sweeney Miller family who come in at a junior level and work their way up. We take in law graduates as paralegals and ultimately as trainee solicitors as well as apprentices who join us often straight after finishing school. I really enjoy watching them grow from the day that they join to becoming fully-fledged solicitors or whatever they go on to become. That's the 'mother' in me - when you see a child taking small first steps and then watch them flourishing, that's what I really, really do enjoy. A clear example of this has been the development of my colleagues Jess Fenwick and Damien Todd who joined Sweeney Miller from University and are now equity partners, demonstrating that there are no 'glass ceilings' at the firm.

### What has been your career defining moment?

It was when I opened the Newcastle office. The move elevated us from being the largest firm in Sunderland to being a major player in the North East, particularly in the property industry. Opening a new office makes moving house look like a doddle! But like everything else, challenges bring opportunities. As the next chapter in the firm's growth ambitions, at the start of 2022 we relocated our Newcastle office to larger premises in Gosforth. This gives us more room to grow the team and be more accessible to our clients.

### How do you measure success?

For me it would be the impact that I've made on people including clients and colleagues. If I've impacted anybody in any small way, once I've gone and they miss me, then I think I've made my mark and I would regard that as 'success'. Everything else is peripheral - money and material things come and go and are transitional. It's what you make of your life while you're here that matters.

### What have been the biggest changes in the industry since you started?

The biggest change or challenge has been the rapid evolution of technology. In the 'olden days' you would write a letter to a solicitor or client, it would get there in three days, you could expect a response in about 10 days. Now with emails and platforms like Teams and Zoom, clients' expectations are understandably quite high. Clients want their solicitors to be available when they are, which is usually outside the traditional 9/5 model. As a progressive, client centred law firm, if you don't adapt to that, then you're behind the curve.

### How has your skillset developed accordingly?

As a firm, we have embraced different technologies - we have our own App for example, that gives people instant notifications, any time of the day when dealing with property transactions. New members of staff are trained to be fully up to speed on all aspects of technology so that it becomes embedded as part of our firm's culture. We also developed our own admin software during Covid which allowed us to provide dedicated admin support during the lockdowns over the last two years and continues to support the people working from home.

### Are you a risk taker by nature or more conservative?

I'm definitely not conservative, but I do take calculated risks. You can't get anywhere in life without taking certain risks. Equally, they don't have to be reckless risks. Having started out with a business degree, I always reflect on the business side rather than just the law. Coming from a family of entrepreneurs and running my own business both really help when building relationships with commercial clients. You understand the client journey and challenges more when you have a business yourself.

### To what would you attribute your success?

The standard answer would have to be hard work, however, most people work hard. So, for me, a lot of my success is down to the support of my friends, family and colleagues. I am fortunate enough to be surrounded by people who support me and my dreams and that positive energy pushes me to always better myself.

### What's your biggest weakness?

I would say sometimes I can impose very high standards on people around me - the same high standards that I would want my clients to expect.

### How do you remain motivated?

If you truly enjoy doing something, then it is far easier to keep motivated. Because I enjoy my work and developing colleagues so much, that keeps me on the right track and always motivated.

### Would you prefer to be liked or respected?

Definitely respected. I'm not here to be liked or to be popular. If you are respected, you may be liked and popular as an end result, but that shouldn't be the goal.

From offices in Newcastle and Sunderland, Surbhi and her colleagues at Sweeney Miller Law work with individuals and business clients across its key practice areas of conveyancing, commercial property, company and commercial, family law, dispute resolution, private client and landlord and tenant.

To find out more visit [www.sweeneymiller.co.uk](http://www.sweeneymiller.co.uk) or  
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Surbhi Vedhara



# ARE WE FINALLY BACK TO NORMAL? BUT DOES THIS MEAN BACK TO THE OFFICE FIVE DAYS A WEEK?

Paul Johnstone is a Partner at specialist employment law firm, Collingwood Legal. Paul considers factors relating to returning to the office full-time and hybrid methods of flexible working.

**COVID-19 has without a doubt caused disruption and changed the way we go about our lives, but perhaps most notably in the working patterns of UK workers. Before the pandemic, home working was slowly becoming more common. COVID-19 has rapidly accelerated this transition. In 2019 only 4.7% of workers worked from home. This increased tenfold, with the Office for National Statistics reporting in April 2020, 46.6% of workers worked from home or did some work at home, with 86% of them doing so as a result of the pandemic.**

This taste of home working for some has allowed greater flexibility with work and personal commitments. For many, they want to see home working remain in some form or another and for others, the return to the office has been a welcome relief. So, the question that is on many employers and employees' minds is, "what do we do next?" "Do the changes from the 24th February 2022 mean we all have to be back in the office full-time again?"

What will work for me and my organisation?

Today, most people would prefer a hybrid working model, with 85% of adults currently homeworking wanting a mix of home and office working going forward. It is likely that there will be no "back to normal," in the sense of a traditional mandatory 9-5 Monday to Friday office based working week as the concept of what is "normal" has now evolved to take into account the fact that many individuals and organisations have learned that home-based working (for some types of job) can be a very efficient, effective and profitable way of working.

According to an ONS report, when workers were asked about homeworking, individuals stated that work-life balance was the greatest positive that came out of this but there were greater challenges when it came to collaboration.

Will the workplace be safe?

If you are going back to the office whether full time or a few days a week/month, employers still have a statutory duty to ensure the health and safety of all workers, this includes ensuring the workplace is a COVID-secure environment and a risk-free place for individuals to attend. With the COVID restrictions now completely eased across England and the legal requirement to self-isolate where you test positive removed, it will be a matter for each organisation to assess the health risks COVID still presents to their workforce and their business and to take reasonable, appropriate and necessary steps to safeguard the health of its workers, especially the clinically vulnerable.

As a matter of general practice, employers need to conduct regular and thorough health and safety risk assessments, this should continue to involve ensuring you effectively manage the risk of COVID-19 in the workplace. The Government has provided guidance and advice on what practices to adopt to try to mitigate

these risks including, social distancing between workers, frequent cleaning of workspaces, greater ventilation and air conditioning, provision of any necessary PPE and providing lateral flow tests. With the Government now adopting a less restrictive approach to enforcement of mandatory requirements, employers must make their own judgements on how best to manage COVID risks in order to determine what arrangements are needed for their business and their workforce to ensure a safe working environment in whatever individual circumstances are applicable on a case by case basis.

The fact that Government guidance on specific obligations relating to COVID-19 are now being eased does not mean that the general law on Health and Safety is somehow undermined: it is not, and the general principles requiring an employer to take reasonable steps to ensure that each workplace is a safe working environment (and each individual being responsible for ensuring the health and safety of themselves and others) will always be relevant factors in demonstrating compliance with statutory and contractual obligations in this regard.

From a commercial point of view the availability of hybrid, flexible working is now very much a reality: the option of work-life balance incorporating a mix of home-working and office-based working and a significant reduction in daily commuting is likely to be a very high priority on the wish list of any potential new recruits.

Employers now have a lot of variable factors to consider as to what will now constitute the new "normal" from an operational perspective. Factors such as the recruitment and retention of skilled, talented and experienced people as well as the potential for increased profitability linked to the possibility of a reduction of significant financial overheads if there is a reduced need for expensive inner city office space are all now part of the new normal for many employers. It is unlikely that many organisations will be able to maintain an inflexible approach insisting on a traditional 9-5 office based working week without limiting their attractiveness to the pool of talent which now has many more flexible working options than the pre-COVID business world had to offer.

**Collingwood Legal is a specialist employment law firm and we provide bespoke training to organisations on all areas of employment law, including HR management skills, drafting workplace policies and handling flexible working requests.**  
[www.collingwoodlegal.com](http://www.collingwoodlegal.com)



*Paul Johnstone*





## WHY THE NORTH EAST IS THE ONLY PLACE THIS CONVEYANCING FIRM CALLS HOME

The North East has, for too long, been focused on its past. Now, it's time to look to the future, says Jo Grey of Grey-Smith Legal, who explains why she's chosen to expand her legal firm across the region.

**I'm North East born and bred; I studied law at both Teesside University and Northumbria University and I've always worked in the region.**

So it can be frustrating that, to many people, the North is still judged by what it is not (the South, mainly), rather than what it is.

The image is of a region stuck in its ways, focused on the past, reluctant to try new things. However, since we opened Grey-Smith Legal less than two years ago, our clients have been only too keen to try something new – so much so that we've recently opened a second branch to keep up with demand.

Our first office is in the quaint town of Skelton-in-Cleveland, a stone's throw from Saltburn-by-the-Sea, which could give any South Coast destination a run for its money. However, demand for our conveyancing, wills and lasting powers of attorney

services has meant we've already had to branch out into a second space.

In February, we opened our Spennymoor office at Enterprise House and we're now welcoming clients to this base. It's another excellent location for us and has fantastic connections to the A1, which not only allows easy access for our clients, but will also allow us to attract top talent from around the area too.

We are eager to continue building the Grey-Smith Legal team and we know that our office locations will have a big part to play in this; they need to be fresh, modern, and easily accessible.

However, this new office is just one part of our ambitious plans for further expansion across the North, and we have exciting plans for a new, larger office in the early part of 2023, which will give us space for rapid growth in 2023 and beyond.

Thanks to our growth and the fantastic reputation

we've built already, we're also looking to work with local estate agents. The North has some amazing properties, with prices a fraction of what they are in the South, so it's a really rewarding industry to be part of.

Of course, no discussion of the North East would be complete without mentioning its people. While I usually hate to generalise, it's always been my experience that the people of the region are loyal, hard-working and passionate – not to mention a friendly bunch!

Our whole team hails from this part of the world, and, as director, it's incredibly rewarding that not only are we creating really good jobs for people in the region, but, by extension, helping to keep talent here, where it belongs.

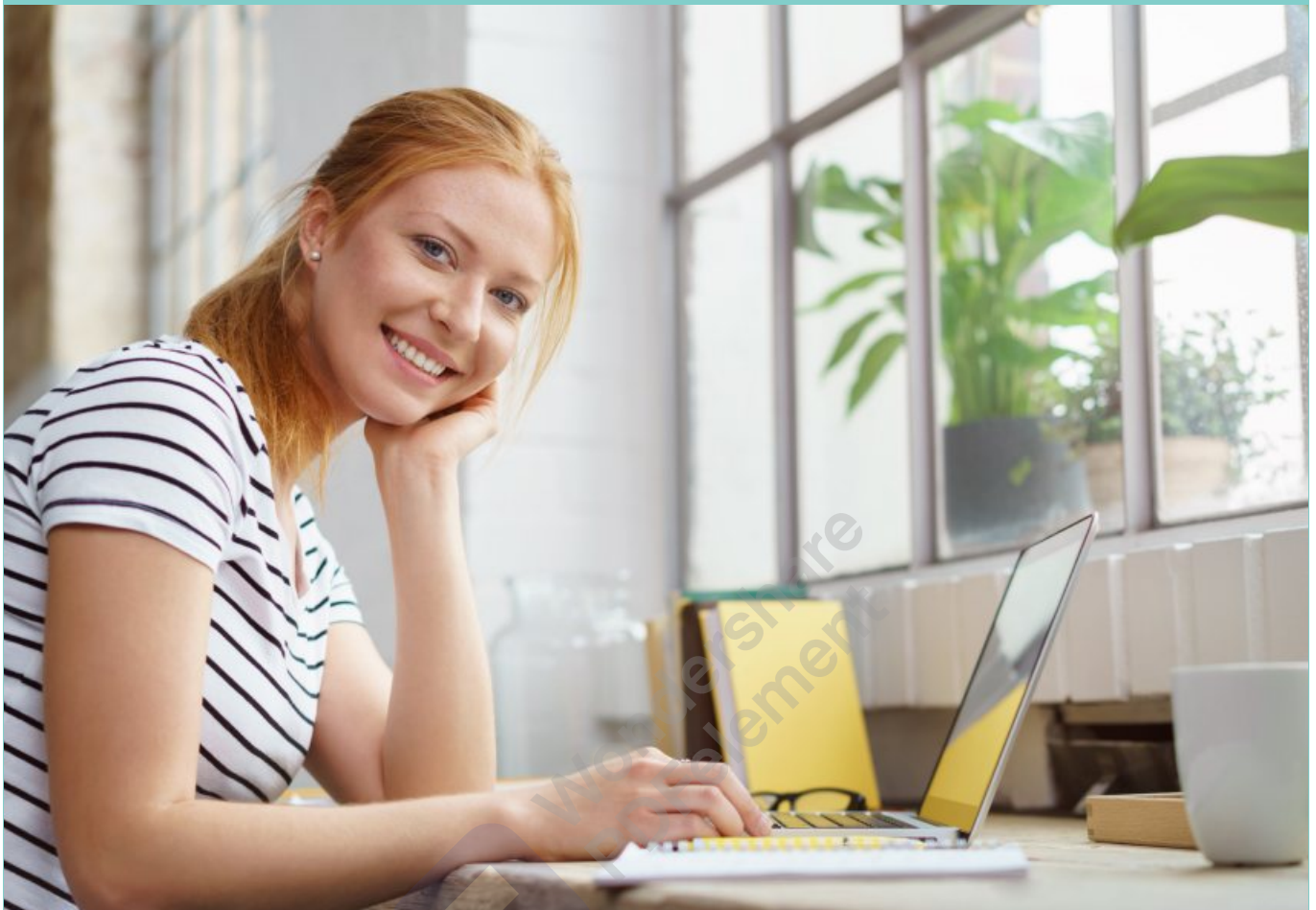
To really have pride in your area, you need to help it to flourish, and through the work we're doing, we're helping to do that, which is a really fulfilling feeling – and it's not just us. In recent years, the North East has flourished, and there are some really exciting businesses setting up and drawing attention to all we as a region have to offer.

Grey-Smith Legal is part of just one of those: it's a member of The SDDE Smith Group, a portfolio of North East-based businesses, all with a focus on real estate-related services, including interior design, construction, property management and conveyancing.

Together, we're putting the North East firmly on the map – where it belongs.

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“

**...Please look out  
for your neighbours  
and friends who  
live alone or who  
may be struggling to  
care for a relative...**

# HOW CAN WE HELP YOU AND YOUR FAMILY?

I am on a mission at the moment to find those folks who are falling through the cracks in society.

**Pre covid was bad enough but being isolated and unable to seek help is far worse now. As regular readers will know, I spend a lot of time assisting older clients who simply have no one to support or help them. You may not even know what help is available to you.**

Such clients will typically have been only children who never married. Or who were divorced years ago and don't have siblings or children. Some of my clients have long term mental health problems such as schizophrenia, they can function on a day to day basis but cannot manage all of their affairs.

I am also particularly concerned about older members of the gay community. Especially those who were in the forces and had to spend their working lives hiding the fact that they were gay. This may mean that they were unable to marry, they may have avoided the gay community who would ordinarily have provided some support.

I have been trying to highlight the plight of this group of people to various organisations including SSAFA.

I have also noticed that in traditional religious families individuals have spent their lives hiding the fact that they are gay so as not to upset their parents or their religious community. Again they may remain unmarried and without children to help them as they get older.

Over the next few months Emmersons Solicitors will be holding free events to inform and offer help. In the meantime if you need help please don't hesitate to contact me.

## What Type of Help?

There are many things that we attend to on behalf of those who are struggling to manage their affairs. If we have a Lasting Power of Attorney in place then we can manage your money. In the first instance I would make sure that your home is insured. Many clients let this lapse without realising. I would check standing orders and direct debits to make sure that you are only paying out money when you need to do so. I regularly find that huge sums of money are being paid out to charities as one charity after another contacts the vulnerable to seek help. That is fine so long as you can afford to make such payments. And if you are paying to charities do you know how many you send money to and how much per month?

You may be struggling to cope with shopping, cleaning, washing and ironing etc. You may feel that you can't afford help. But if your finances were under control this may free up money so that you could pay someone to assist you. You may be entitled to state benefits such as Attendance Allowance. This can be worth circa £4,000 per year. Again, this money could be used to pay for someone to come in and support you even a couple of times a week. And it doesn't have to be fifteen minutes here and there. There are many private agencies, who are often cheaper than social services, who can offer you a minimum of an hour per visit.

Did you know that there are agencies who will take you out for the day. Do you fancy a trip to the Northumberland Coast or Durham

City. Do you want someone to take you to and from your cricket club, or to watch the football? Do you want someone to make meals for you? The choice is yours.

We can also help to sort out your home. Has it all become a bit too much. Have you started to hoard things so that your home is feeling too cluttered? We have a team that will come in and work with us and you to turn things around. We can arrange for a one off deep clean, the removal of items you no longer need or want and weekly cleaning.

We can also get all of your paperwork under control. This might include finding old savings policies that you have forgotten about. We found one recently for a client that was worth over £40,000! We can organise your bank accounts into one place and bring in a financial advisor to ensure that your money is in the correct place for you.

## What If You Need to go Into a Care Home?

This can be a huge decision and there will be a lot to think about.

I have looked after the homes of clients for years who have not wanted to sell. It is your decision as to when or if you sell a home that may have been the place of years of happy family memories.

I have dealt with council tax and council tax rebates. Water rates, which should not be paid when a house is empty. Gas and electricity, care home fees and spending money. Normal house insurance is not enough when a house is empty for more than thirty days. We deal with specialist insurers in order to protect our clients' property.

To sum up, we can step in and be you. We do all the work so that you don't have to worry about everything all of the time. If you feel that you are floundering and want a chat about how we can help then you can either email me at [je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk) or ring the office on 0191 2846989 and leave your name and telephone number so that I can return your call.

And can I ask, have you noticed a lonely neighbour, have you popped round to see if they are coping? They might have been more in the swing of things before covid but if their day centre closed down or the club they were a member of stopped having meetings then they may have declined quite rapidly in the intervening period. Please look out for your neighbours and friends who live alone or who may be struggling to care for a relative.

**If you would like to chat about any of the issues outlined here then please don't hesitate to contact me [je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk](mailto:je@emmersons-solicitors.co.uk)**



# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

## PAUL WHARTON

Associate director,  
Silverstone Building Consultancy

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

I am born and bred in the North East and originally from Whickham.

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

I think, as a businessperson and as a building surveyor, you have to be adaptable. In our profession you cross over various service lines and the role is always varied. No one day is ever the same. I also think working in the North East you build very strong connections. People are loyal if you do a good job. Many organisations also like to work with local businesses.

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

Most places are just a short commute and we are never too far from beaches or the countryside. From a professional point of view, we have a really diverse range of buildings due to redevelopment within Newcastle city centre, particularly over the last 20 years which blends traditional and modern concepts.

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

I do like a good burger so it has to be Lola Jeans or Meat:Stack.

### Are the people really friendlier?

We seem to be. As a region, we are naturally friendly and most people are always happy to stop for a chat. From a business perspective, building trust, being dependable and producing excellent work for clients, cultivates loyalty.

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

Grey Street. It boasts impressive architecture as you walk along the wide curving street linking the Quayside to the main shopping area of Newcastle. I really enjoy walking up and down this lively street on a daily basis.

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

I think there are positives and negatives wherever you live. In recent years there has been huge investment within the region in line with the government's levelling up agenda and, as a region, we have become more entrepreneurial and more ambitious.

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

I worked in Carlisle for three and a half years and have travelled across the UK and Europe with work but the North East is where I will always call home.

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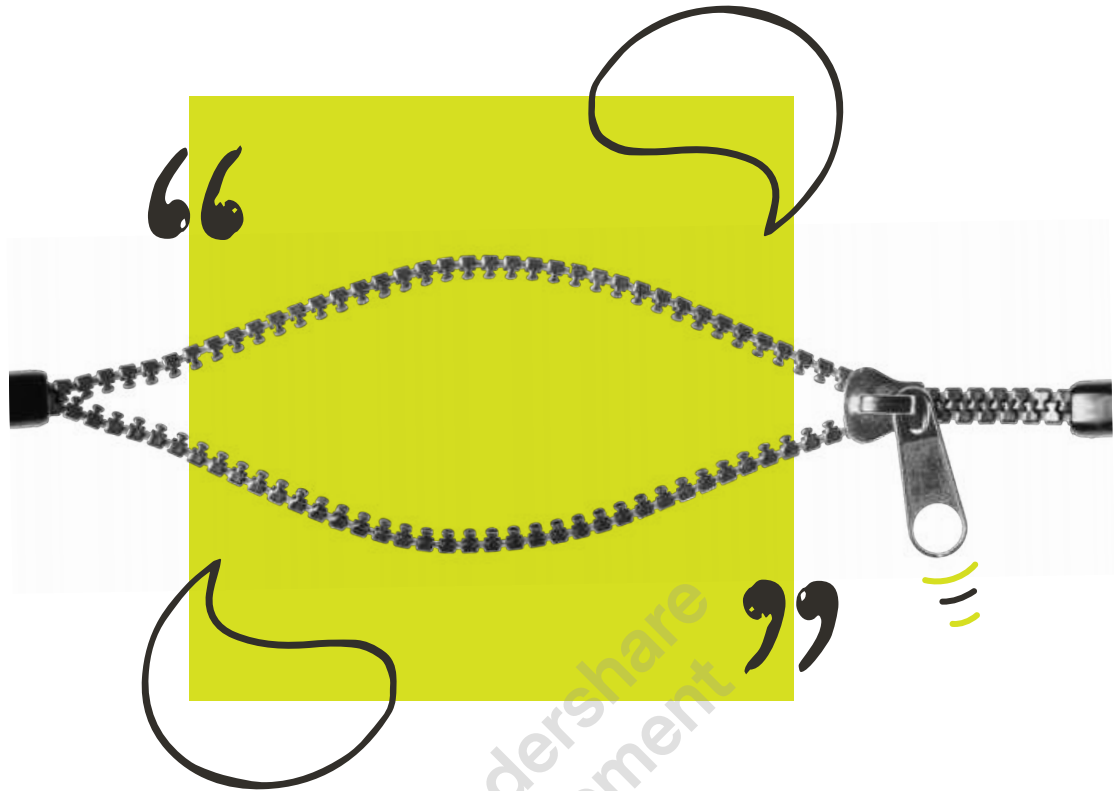
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Ammar Mirza CBE

## THE POWER OF 3

As an Asian child growing up in a high-on all-white community, all I wanted to do was to fit in. To do so, I not only had to stand-out to be noticed, but become outstanding.

Coming from a South Asian heritage & born in the incredible industrious north-east of England, I was naturally enterprising. But having to work three to four times as hard as others can take its toll. Even after all of the additional effort, I have regularly felt or been made to feel out of place. In fact, just last week I experienced conscious & unconscious bias as a consequence of my colour. Yet those that know me, know that I am a northerner - a true Geordie - first and foremost, and immensely proud of being so.

To help me get through the trials & tribulations of life & at times being the only ethnic in the room, I developed a methodology.

Communicate, Collaborate and Celebrate – the basis of any good relationship is effective communication; building on to finding a common

purpose through meaningful collaboration; & then ultimately to celebrate one another.

### The Power of 3.

Tuesday 15th March was a remarkable day, when I shared a room with incredible people, feeling part of something special. Hearing powerful stories of patience, perseverance & positivity from such inspirational fellow Asians. **Who all were determined to overcome immense challenges to succeed, with a constant & consistent desire to do more and better for the whole community.**

For the first time in a long time, I felt normal, somewhere that I could show off, and be proud of my Asian & Northern heritage. The Northern Asian Powerlist launched three years ago at the House of Lords – by the tremendous & tenacious Sharon Jandu - and once again, we were there, alongside celebrating International Women's Day. **The room was filled with passionate & proud people of all colour, coming together to champion diversity, inclusion & each other, all from the North of England.**

I loved hearing the stories of Lord Rami Ranger & catching up with Baroness Sayeeda Warsi who always makes me smile. Lord Karan Bilimoria shared the importance of community and how both Covid and the current war brought people together to support each other.

A highlight was seeing a top table of female leaders from across the globe representing their

countries. The High Commissioners of India, Sri Lanka & Bangladesh (all female) were joined by our very own special Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP - a foremost advocate & cheerleader of our North - championing & encouraging future female leaders from all backgrounds alongside leading global trade. **Delighted they are all supportive of the International Space Station at Airview Park, Newcastle Airport.**

It is very easy to get caught up in doom scrolling & going down to London to complain about what we don't have in the North. **But God it feels good to get down south and shout about how amazing we all are.**

For me a key takeaway is that it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from, there remains a place & a space for each & every one of us to achieve what we want, in our Great Britain.

Finally, don't wait until the iron is hot before you strike, keep striking the iron until becomes hot.

**PS As we were celebrating International Women's Day, the biggest inspiration remains my late mother & a big thank you to my wife who lets me do and be, what I want to be, being the most amazing wife & mother, whilst holding down an incredibly important job.**

**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.**



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ASIAN BUSINESS CONNEXIONS

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Meet and meaningfully connect with members of the Asian and wider communities. Attend sell-out events that provide insights and inspiration from a range of industry and community leaders. Be part of something special that values individuality and ensures inclusion.

### Support

Access a range of business and personal support programmes, as well as, recruitment support and advice through our Inclusion by Default campaign, to help organisations recruit ethnic minorities. Exclusive specialist roundtable events to address industry challenges.

### Promote

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

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

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## AWARD WINNERS LEAD FROM THE FRONTLINE

**At the recent North Tyneside Business Awards organised by the North Tyneside Business Forum, one engineering firm won two of the prestigious awards including winning the overall Business of the Year award.**

As the winner of the New Business Award and the Business of the Year Award, Frontline Integrity Ltd based at Cobalt Business Exchange are an independent consultancy with expertise in the management of pipeline cracking. The company offers a customised range of services for the oil, gas and mining industries. The firm started in early 2020 and has secured several large contracts with global corporations

Technical Director Brian Kerrigan said: "Receiving two awards is testament to the

hard work the whole team has put into the business since we set up during the first pandemic. We are a North Tyneside business working all over the globe and I'm very proud of where we are based and the work we do."

Karen Goldfinch, Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum, said: "We have a rich tradition and history of engineering know-how in North Tyneside and Frontline Integrity are now using their expertise to help their clients all over the world. The fact that this is a successful new business which was formed during a world wide pandemic can only be good news for their continuing growth and success."

The annual awards, celebrate the huge contribution that businesses make to the local economy and how they make North Tyneside a great place to live, work and visit. Sponsored by TEDCO, Equans and CAPITA with support from North Tyneside Council they demonstrate the diverse range of businesses in the borough.

## NEW RESIDENTIAL WORK CONTINUES TO DRIVE GROWTH FOR NEWCASTLE ENGINEERS RWO



**Newcastle engineers RWO has won major new work to support the development of dozens of new affordable homes in County Durham.**

The undisclosed deal sees the firm providing its civil and structural engineering services and expertise to affordable homes provider Karbon Homes, which is developing a mix of 107 new homes, including a single storey apartment block for residents over 55, on land at Roseberry College in Pelton, County Durham.

Planning, flood risk analysis, design expertise and local authority sewage adoption agreements are being provided by RWO as part of six-figure package of engineering support for a project that will feature 28 apartments and eight bungalows with associated open space and car parking. The multi-million-pound scheme comes as the Government continues to push for the delivery of new properties to meet the chronic housing shortage and arrest the decline in the affordability of home ownership. It also wants to relieve the pressure on the social rented sector, which has prompted the growth in private renting.

The work at Pelton also follows RWO continued strong growth in residential work across the North East with engineering services provided to support the development of new homes on Washington FC's former ground and an affordable housing project in Spennymoor. Elsewhere it works for Erris Homes in Leeds and Seagate Homes in Lincolnshire. Currently employing 30 people and targeting revenues in excess of £2.5m in the next six months, RWO is continuing to recruit for a number of engineering and technician roles to support new business and growth.

## KOMATSU UK TO HOST PRODUCT LAUNCH ADVICE EVENT

**Manufacturing and engineering firms can find out how to supercharge their product launches at a networking and advice session next month.**

Komatsu UK will be hosting a Marketing Lunch and Learn event at its site in Birtley UK on May 3.

Delivered by the Engineering and Manufacturing Network (EMN) and business to business marketing agency Horizon Works - an EMN affiliate partner - the session will include guidance on creating a strategy and launch plan, and advice on putting the building blocks in place for a successful product launch. It will also include examples of marketing tools and tactics to support a product launch.

Gemma Brotherton, Komatsu Way and PR Co-ordinator at Komatsu UK, will also give delegates an insight into the launch of the K100 quick boom



change system, which is used in demolition applications.

In addition, the Product Launches – Thinking Outside The Box event will feature a tour of the Komatsu UK factory.

The event is part of a series of monthly Lunch and Learn events delivered by EMN and Horizon Works, which were launched in December 2021 at Gestamp Tallent Ltd.

For more information visit: [cdemn.org.uk/events](https://cdemn.org.uk/events)

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## WHY IS THE ENERGY MARKET RISING? NINE FACTORS INFLUENCING ENERGY PRICES

By Latif Faiyaz, Head of Flexible Purchasing & Energy Strategy for Northern Gas and Power.

The volatility in the energy market has been compounded by the current military conflict in Ukraine.

In this latest article, Head of Flexible Purchasing and Energy Strategy at Northern Gas and Power, Latif Faiyaz, looks at nine factors driving up UK energy prices.

**Factor 1:** The conflict in Ukraine has affected energy prices in a few ways.

As the war escalates, there is a high possibility that gas pipelines will be damaged. This risk is increasing current energy prices.

The likelihood of European sanctions on Russian gas is fast becoming a possibility. As soon as this happens, the market will rise higher.

Since May 2021, Russia has been reducing gas supplies to Europe. This was seen as a bargaining tactic to have Europe approve the Nord Stream 2 (NS2) pipeline. Now amidst the war, gas volumes in the European market are likely to decrease. This is compounded by the decision to halt the certification of NS2 by the German Chancellor.

Finally, the UK has banned Russian LNG cargoes from UK terminals. Ofgem may also revoke

Russian-owned Gazprom Energy's supply licence. This could cause 20 percent of the UK commercial market to buy energy at the current high prices.

**Factor 2:** EU gas storage is currently at a historical low. Any prolonged cold weather will rapidly deplete storage reserves, increasing the price of gas due to its limited supply. There are also concerns that a prolonged shortage reduces gas storage levels for next winter.

**Factor 3:** The high demand for LNG in Asia has impacted global gas supplies, as countries such as China are willing to pay a higher premium. China's growing economy and harsher winters are influencing this. Furthermore, China's climate goal to achieve net zero by 2060 has led industries to look towards gas as an alternative energy source to coal.

**Factor 4:** Droughts in the Amazon rainforest impact the ability for Brazil and Argentina to use hydropower, the main source of electricity generation. As a result, they resorted to gas-fired

power plants to help meet domestic needs.

**Factor 5:** Outages on gas pipelines from the North Sea to the UK led to sharp price spikes, especially in the depths of winter.

Any outage reduces supply, amid an already-tight market. This has so far led to price increases of 10-30 percent.

**Factor 6:** Low wind generation has forced the UK to rely on coal and gas-fired generation. In turn, this increases gas demand and, consequently, the price of gas.

**Factor 7:** A September 2021 fire to the France-UK interconnector affected supply and prices. The UK will export electricity to France if French prices are higher. Conversely, the UK will import electricity from France if prices in the UK are higher than in France.

**Factor 8:** Nuclear plants are being phased out in the UK and Europe. The power generated by these plants is not being fully replaced. Phasing out nuclear forces the UK to rely on alternative sources of power generation.

**Factor 9:** Carbon prices have risen from £15, to £90/tonne in the span of 18 months. This is due to increasing participants in the carbon trading scheme and governments tightening countries' carbon commitments. The higher the price of carbon, the more demand there is for gas.

**If you have any questions about the energy market, your business energy contracts, or if you want to reduce energy costs, contact Northern Gas and Power on 03300300800**







# MAKING FORENSIC SCIENCE FUN FOR ALL

And learning what to do if the unexpected happens.



Quite a lot of you reading this will have done company 'team bonding' or 'team leadership' days. They go by a variety of names but you'll know what happens...everyone rolls-up at a venue, sometimes you're split into groups and then you're set a series of tasks. The general idea is that you solve something and try to beat the other groups.

But how about if you were asked to do something which actually had a bearing on real life and that the people who were hosting the event really did have practical experience in what you were doing.

That's what you'll get with CSI Training & Events.

Angela Davies and Dionne Watson have come up with various scenarios whereby you have to use all of the core skills needed by an investigator, to solve a crime.

And what you will be doing will be very realistic because both Angela and Dionne previously worked for Northumbria Police in the Scientific Support department as Crime Scene Investigators. Further, they continue to keep their skills up to date in the field, by working as Disaster Response Consultants, only recently responding to an incident in North Africa.

They also have a passion for education, especially the STEM subjects...Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, and they want to bring those subjects to life and motivate people.

"We work with people of all ages and abilities," says Angela. "We go to schools, colleges and universities as well as working with companies. We like to show those in education, how the STEM subjects they are being taught really do have an application in the real world, opening their minds up to a host of potential career opportunities.

Angela and Dionne have fine-tuned their CSI events for younger children. For example they will often use a set text or a fairy tale like Alice in Wonderland and then weave a plot into how a problem can be solved. Clever but effective because it makes the sessions fun for the children who don't realise that they are learning investigative scientific skills.

For companies looking for something a bit different, CSI offers a unique opportunity for delegates to become investigators for the day, working together as a team, to solve true to life crime scenarios.

"As well as fun, there's a serious side because our events can help you to develop key skills that are so useful back in the workplace," adds Dionne.

In addition to CSI, the pair are working hard in their digital sister company, Crime Scene Assist. We also want to make forensic awareness second nature for first responders and improve overall forensic standards. We do that through practical learning but also via our recently launched forensic awareness App, Crime Scene Assistant. It is, in effect, a digital training solution resource for First Responders and will improve overall Forensic Standards. The App is a scene aide memoir and learning tool, designed for anyone who has the potential to be the first in attendance at a crime scene."

In other words, for fun and practical learning log onto their website, [www.csitrainingandevents.com](http://www.csitrainingandevents.com)

For serious, real world learning and access to a quick reference tool, log onto [www.crimesceneassist.com](http://www.crimesceneassist.com). This will be particularly useful for current and previous police officers, firefighters, emergency medics, security personnel, fraud investigators, lawyers, customs officers and indeed anyone who is interested in crime scene investigation.

Oh, and if you're busy researching for qualifications or want to keep up to date with latest news, there's a free educational/ careers page on the CSI Training and Events website. You can download plenty of valuable information.

It doesn't matter whether you are a teacher and would like to help your pupils enjoy some practical scientific learning or a lecturer who wants to show students some real life scenarios, or a company boss who wants to give their team a fun day out where everyone will actually learn some seriously valuable skills and have a great time doing it...you'll find everything at CSI.

**For more information and for details of how you can get involved with CSI Training Events you can also contact Dionne and Angela via the above websites or by phoning,  
Angela: +44 (0) 7834321336,  
Dionne: +44 (0) 7432833855**







# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## ANTHONY METCALF

General Sales Manager, Allington's, Ashington

### How is business?

It's very positive, we've opened three new brands during covid, a bit challenging but it is picking up, definite turn in the signs of business recovery and hence why I got in touch with Jackie from JAM Prints & Marketing, to help us push social media a little bit more. It allows us to be recognised and be in touch with more people, to expand the reach.

### If you were buying a car, why go to Allington's?

Allington's is still a family-owned business, it's owned by two brothers Chris and Ray Allington, we've been trading since the 1940s, there's a lot of heritage, the google reviews are good and so is the focus. It's important people like us, it isn't a hard sale, it's relaxed and friendly.

### How much of the family are involved with the business?

In the business, there are two members, it was the fathers who passed away, but the two brothers run the business as well as Ray's daughter.

### What's your experience with car sales?

I've been with Chris and Ray since 1993, ever since they had the Vauxhall garage in Ashington. I've been with them for 30 years.

### What motivates Allington's?

We thrive on success, we like to sell lots of cars and provide fantastic customer service, we want people to come here because they like us, they like to do business with us. Customer service is close to our hearts, we want them to be more like friends. When you buy a car from us, you become part of the family, which is where our motto comes from.

It's somewhere you can come if there is a problem, we like customers to have 100% satisfaction, we're an open door.

### How has the current climate affected business?

Still a massive interest in cars, car supply is difficult in all of the franchises, used cars have never been as popular, however second hand car prices are going up, due to the higher demand.

### Most popular brand?

Due to the nine year partnership, it has to be KIA, we're known for that.

### How did the business become Allington's?

Previously we were Milburn Motor garages, it wasn't known as Allington's, Allington's came about in 2013 but after the sale of the Vauxhall garage, we weren't able to continue using that name.

### Plans for growth?

We have six acres of land, we can always expand, we have four showrooms with a massive workshop that we recently just built however long term, we are set up and of course, the option is there to expand.

**Allington's 01670 817 997**  
**[www.allingtons.co.uk](http://www.allingtons.co.uk)**

“

...It's important people like us, it isn't a hard sale, it's relaxed and friendly...







# UK PELLET COUNCIL ON GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAINS AND THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A 'HOME GROWN', DOMESTIC WOOD PELLETS PRODUCTION MARKET



Mark Lebus, Chair of the UK Pellet Council

The UK Pellet Council, its members and the UK biomass (for heat) industry has, like many other sectors, actioned immediate and alternative measures to restructure its global supply chain, working with overseas partners to help ensure a continuous supply of biomass wood pellets for UK customers.

## Wood pellets will no longer be sourced from Russia or imported from Russian producers.

Mark Lebus, Chair of the UK Pellet Council, explained, "Given the previous levels of Russian exports, this will of course have an impact on supply worldwide, not just to the UK but for other countries too who are all now competing for the same premium product from similar suppliers.

"With UK and international sanctions in place, we estimate that total European production may be reduced by some 12-15%, so there may be some short-term price rises due to the ongoing

situation and heightened competitiveness between countries. UK customers may have experienced the price per tonne, although most accept that this is still much lower than consumers using oil or gas-fuelled systems with current wood pellet costs in line with prices across Europe.

"However, it is important to say that we envisage any impact to be felt more so in the short-term while new supply chains and arrangements are put in place. This will mostly be over the next six weeks, and with heating demand from customers naturally falling as we head into the Spring and warmer months, new imports coming into the UK should ensure most end users see minimal disruption.

"What we must now seriously look at (and the UK Government must seriously consider going forward) is that we have a very real opportunity here and now to better support, strengthen and heavily invest in a 'home-grown' wood pellets production market which would not only see the UK becoming mostly self-sufficient for biomass wood fuel, and therefore less reliant on imports and energy price hikes, but also attract greater inward investment for new manufacturing plants, creating thousands of green jobs for rural areas.

"By growing and fortifying our own domestic production in line with sustainable forestry

management and DEFRA's own tree planting and new woodland creation ambitions, the UK Government could take huge strides forward in achieving net zero targets. Furthermore, if timber is to be further encouraged in future housing and construction, this whole process needs to be well managed as part of a circular economy, and with biomass being the waste product after the timber process, the biomass heat and wood pellets industry is the keystone that pulls all of this together.

"Long-term policy direction, signalled by government, could strongly encourage and deliver the kind of investment needed to develop strategic autonomy from world markets by quite literally, growing our own wood fuel supply. At present, the UK cannot provide the required volumes needed, and therefore we import on a considerable scale and become drawn into a growing energy crisis.

"Biomass for heating creates more jobs than any other renewable technology, especially for rural communities with hard-to-heat or off-grid homes, and with the boiler replacement scheme offering a £5,000 grant for new biomass installations from 1 April, the opportunity is right there in front of us so these conversations must be had."

[www.pelletcouncil.org.uk](http://www.pelletcouncil.org.uk)



## THE GREAT NORTH HOTEL MEANS BUSINESS

By Michael Grahamslaw

The Three Mile Inn has been a drinking institution in Gosforth for as long as I remember. The much-loved landmark has over the years played host to countless Friday night drinks, family meals, business meetings and – perhaps most boisterously – to the post-match revelry of a Newcastle Falcons fixture.

**With much residential property within touching distance, the complex acts as a hub for those who live nearby, not to mention as a pit-stop before or after a race day at Newcastle Racecourse.**

Now, the venue has a further lease of life following the opening of the Great North Hotel built on the existing land to accompany and improve its existing offering.

Adopting my old maxim “you don’t have to go far to have a good time”, I was delighted to visit recently with my wife Lisa for an overnight stay review.

What immediately impressed us was how much the Great North Hotel has to offer North East business folk.

Set on the Great North Road, the hotel is a

useful outpost for business meetings with easily accessibility to central Newcastle, Northumberland and the A1.

Not only does the 64 room leisure development offer luxury modern accommodation but also purpose-built conference suites with facilities for up to 80 delegates. Each space is fully air-conditioned and bathed in natural daylight with WiFi, dimmable lighting and barco connectivity bolstering its technological credentials.

We however were here for pleasure and in our short stay had plenty. Upon checking in, we received the friendliest of welcomes and were upgraded to a sumptuous junior suite. These are roomy, modern spaces designed with comfort and style in mind. They are also salubriously equipped with rainfall showers, luxury linen,

plasma TVs and tea & coffee making facilities.

The former favourite Scalini’s has also had a contemporary facelift and now operates as Pizza Dough Co. – a fun, New York style pizza restaurant serving stonebaked pizzas from its state-of-the-art pizza oven. Wash these down with a craft beer or a homemade cocktail.

For once, as a self-confessed pizzaholic, we swerved this, dining instead in the sleek, wood-panelled Three Mile Inn bar area. From a terrific, globe-trotting menu, Lisa kicked off with the courgette and lemon arancini whilst I opted for garlic and chilli king prawns. This was followed by chicken fillet with potato fondant and tenderstem broccoli for the health conscious Mrs G and a delicious salmon teriyaki for yours truly enlivened with fresh ginger and soy sauce.

Following a full eight hours sleep, I rose with the larks for a bracing jog around Gosforth Park whilst Lisa revelled in the extra peace and quiet. Those working away will also be delighted to learn that there’s also a cooked breakfast offering in full swing. Indeed, we enjoyed both the traditional Full English and more modern smashed avocado on toast in a cross-generation spanning start to the day.

Whether you’re an enterprising business traveller seeking comfort and luxury or simply looking for a new place to try locally, the revamped Great North Hotel has much to offer business and leisure customers alike.

**For more information, visit  
[www.greatnorthhotel.co.uk](http://www.greatnorthhotel.co.uk)**







# SSCL INVOLVES EMPLOYEES IN CHOOSING NEW COMPANY VISION AND VALUES



SSCL is a leader in critical business support services for the largest Government departments, Defence, Police and CITB across the UK.

**It provides digital solutions and innovative services including HR & Payroll, Finance, Procurement, Pensions Administration and Resourcing Services - enhancing the customer experience, enabling smarter public services.**

We employ more than 2,800 people who, with their in-depth client knowledge and our collaborative approach, sit at the heart of our business strategy. SSCL operates at size and scale across the UK Public Sector and has already delivered millions of pounds worth of savings - providing more funds for front line public services.

When we established in 2013, we set out our first vision statement and set of values.

Over the last nine years we've been on an amazing journey, growing the business and expanding the range of services for our clients as well as working our way through the challenges of the pandemic, always committed to supporting our clients.

At the heart of this success has been SSCL people from all parts of the organisation who have contributed to the creation of our unique

culture. Being a values-based organisation with a strong commitment to social value and customer experience our people understand how our business activities can positively contribute the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of not only SSCL and our employees, but our local communities and UK society.

## Our SSCL Values

As we completed the SSCL brand refresh in 2021 we wanted to revisit our Vision and Values for 2022 and beyond. We made sure we involved SSCL people in the process, fully engaging with colleagues from all parts of the business.

We asked people what they felt was important about working for SSCL, what made them proud and what new values would reflect who we are as an organisation both now and in the future.

## Colleague Involvement

SSCL offered all employees the opportunity to engage with Live Values Polling Events.

- 2948 individual pieces of online feedback were captured, giving us the mandate for change.
- 61% of all participants believed SSCL would benefit from refreshed set of values.

Information gathered facilitated employee workshops, resulting in a draft set of values.

## Introducing 'Living SSCL'

'Living SSCL' was launched in March, and incorporates our vision, values and behaviours.

## Our Vision

Empowering the UK public sector with digital solutions and innovative services to deliver better outcomes for UK citizens.

## Values

### Excellence:

We set the bar high to achieve long term success for colleagues and customers.

### Community:

We care about making a difference in our local and professional communities.

### Teamwork:

We are strongest when we work as a team.

### Respect:

We do the right thing in an honest, fair, and responsible way.

Living SSCL has involved so many of our colleagues who have debated and discussed through a collaborative approach. Contributors have come from across our business with different views and experiences. Being able to capture this input, test ideas, talk and share means that we have new values that our people can connect to as we take SSCL forward.

**Interested in finding out more about SSCL or want to join us?**

**Visit [careers.soprasteria.co.uk/uk/en](https://careers.soprasteria.co.uk/uk/en) or [www.sscl.com](https://www.sscl.com)**



DON'T BE A BUSY FOOL  
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Joanne Howe

## DON'T BE A BUSY FOOL!

As soon as you employ your first member of staff you will have a full range of responsibilities for their welfare and employment rights. At a minimum, you will need to comply with providing a contract of employment from day one and disciplinary and grievance procedures.

**It is only fair that both parties of the employment situation know what their expectations are from the first day at work.**

You've set up your business because you are good at what you do. It does not follow on that you as the business owner are an expert in employing people and the HR headaches that may follow. Don't be a busy fool thinking you have all the answers, you don't!

Having strong HR on hand will help you to achieve a few good business objectives:

- Raises staff morale as they feel more confident as the business has HR to help staff and managers and someone to go to.
- Business looks more professional.
- Reduces staff problems and time management resolving staffing issues.
- Reduces the need for disciplinary and grievance procedures, as some issues can be resolved by quick professional intervention.
- Helps to bring a holistic approach to managing staff issues.
- Manages staff issues in a consistent and timely manner.
- New staff are properly inducted so that they "hit the ground running".
- Manages staff in line with your vision and values.
- A zero tolerance on favouritism and bullying.
- Helps bring about necessary cultural change.

Most business owners have far too much to do, they need daily focus and excellent organisation skills to allow them more time to make the company a success.

At Howe Consultancy, we can develop bespoke mentoring programmes to bring about improvements in the areas your business needs. Our "Bad Ass Boss" programmes help bring clarity, boost confidence and build capability for business owners.

**For a free consultation, feel free to call 07921 256 981.  
[www.HoweConsultancy.co.uk](http://www.HoweConsultancy.co.uk)**



## HERITAGE GROUP CALLS ON COUNCIL TO SAVE LISTED BUILDING

A leading North East heritage group has slammed plans to “effectively demolish” an historic building at the heart of Newcastle city centre.

Newcastle City Council is currently considering proposals for a major development incorporating several multi-story office buildings on a site bounded by Pilgrim Street, New Bridge Street, John Dobson Street and Market Street.

But close study of the plans by the Northumberland and Newcastle Society (N&N) has revealed this will result in the almost total demolition of Grade II listed Carlol House.

Built between 1924-7 as the headquarters of the Newcastle Upon Tyne Electric Supply Company, the building is regarded as one of the finest examples of art deco architecture in the region.

But, under current plans, only parts of its facade will remain and Tim Wickens, chair of the N&N's Tyneside Committee, said: “The justification for this is apparently due to floor levels not matching up with the new build elements of the scheme.

“We believe this demolition is totally unnecessary and demonstrates a complete lack of respect for an important and listed heritage asset.”

For almost a century, the Northumberland & Newcastle Society has campaigned to preserve historic buildings and influence the planning of new ones and, as a general principle, supports sympathetic development of brownfield sites.

He added: “While the ambitions of the scheme overall are to be generally welcomed as they bring this neglected part of the city centre back



to life, the almost total loss of Carlol House is not acceptable.

“We see no reason why it can't be incorporated into the proposed scheme as it is an entirely serviceable and structurally sound building that was until recently beneficially occupied by the Newbridge Project.”

The National Planning Policy Framework 2021 gives clear guidance to local planning authorities in respect of the treatment of heritage assets.

And, in a submission to the Council, the

Northumberland and Newcastle Society said it “is fundamentally opposed to the grant of planning approval and Listed Building Consent for these applications unless they are substantially amended.”

The Society is currently lending its voice to a variety of issues from housing development and policy to speed limit policies in rural communities, windfarms and energy matters including fracking.

For more information about the Northumberland & Newcastle Society, or to join, visit [www.nandsociety.org.uk](http://www.nandsociety.org.uk)

## BUTCHER KATHRYN IS A CUT ABOVE WITH NATIONAL MEAT AWARD



When Charles Nicholson opened his butcher's shop in Whitley Bay during World War One, his goal of serving quality meat to his customers became a reality which has continued through four family generations

leading to a national retailing award for the latest family member to take over the reins.

Now, at the head of the 108-year-old business is Charles' great granddaughter Kathryn Meadows who jointly runs Nicholson's Butchers in the town's Park View with her semi-retired father.

Kathryn's passion for her family business started as a young girl when she helped in the shop with her grandad and father. As well as learning about the meat trade, she gained a good understanding of the shop's customers and the quality of food that they expected. After gaining a degree in food science and working for several large food manufacturing businesses, Kathryn returned to the family business around nine years ago to help her father with the management and running of the shop.

Wherever possible, every meat product is locally sourced and many of Nicholson's suppliers are the same farms and firms that Charles created relationships with when he started the business in 1914.

Her dedication to the retail side of the business has won Kathryn a prestigious national industry award. The Women in Meat Industry Awards are designed to recognise the vitally important contributions that women make to the meat sector. Kathryn was the winner of the 2021 Meat Businesswoman – Retailing.

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



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



## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE STATS OVER AT THE OFFICE ROCKS

Experts in engaging audiences and driving sales for ecommerce brands, Sunderland based content marketers The Office Rocks have hit a winning formula with social stats for their host of online communities hitting an all-time high this month.

**The Office Rocks have cultivated a number of online communities including the Bump, Baby & You brand which has now become a major player nationally and one of the largest digital communities in the mother and baby arena in the UK. With clients on the books including Tesco, Nike, Misguided and JoJo Maman Bébé to name but a few the community has continued to benefit from high growth stats across social channels with Instagram alone now reaching over 17.8 million in the last 30 days.**

With the founder and Managing Director, Laura Middleton at the helm, The Office Rocks creates and delivers successful and highly targeted marketing campaigns to ensure a brand's maximum exposure, traffic and sales. Bump, Baby & You is one of the online communities that Laura has created and grown over the years and the team attributes much of the continued success and growth to the development and nurturing of an active influencer network across the UK, alongside creating engaging content which parents want to interact with.

Social Media Executive, Simra Faisal, a Northumbria University graduate, has been running the Bump, Baby & You channels for the last year, building on the continuous growth of the community to in turn drive revenue for clients. Simra said: "I was initially employed to schedule

and manage social channels solely, but I've had the opportunity to get involved in the influencer side and this market has really helped grow the channels in particular Instagram."

The influencer network is a big market and the team work with high profile clients to put their brands in front of influencers and in turn customers through exciting campaigns such as the recent 'Play New Kids' campaign which was ran by Nike in their Nike Town, Oxford Street flagship store.

Simra added: "The role is so varied and I love working on the creative campaigns across a range of brands, I studied Fashion Design and Marketing at university so I'm able to utilise these skills and put a vibrant spin on the campaigns for clients.

The Office Rocks really is a highly energised and vibrant company to work for and there have been so many highlights over the year. If I had to pick a couple it would be attending the Nike Town Influencer event in London last year and working with key influencers to launch the new kids wear range from Misguided also!"



Simra Faisal,

The Office Rocks is the parent company behind the sale of e-commerce business WHAT ABOUT THIS (WAT) and has created and grown substantially over the last six years.

Laura Middleton, Managing Director, The Office Rocks said: "Bump, Baby & You is such a success story for The Office Rocks and the stats for this community alone speak volumes, with 15k new followers in the last 90 days alone and Instagram reach growing by 279%.

I'm thrilled with the continued high growth of this community over the last year, and in Simras very capable hands not only has she grown and nurtured the 100 strong influencer network, she has maintained this highly engaged and targeted platform impeccably to ensure all beneficiaries be that parents, clients or influencers are getting maximum impact and support."

**To find out more check out [www.theofficerocks.com](http://www.theofficerocks.com)**





## CITY HALL OFFICIALLY OPENED

**Sunderland's City Hall was recently opened.**

School children, dignitaries, city businesspeople and council staff were among the invited guests at City Hall for an event to celebrate the opening of this important new civic hub.

A choir of Sunderland schoolchildren from East Herrington Primary Academy and Fulwell Junior School performed for guests, and the Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Harry Trueman, carried out the traditional ribbon-cutting, as the 200,000 sq

ft space - that will be home to a range of resident support services - was declared open.

Legal & General's corporate affairs director, John Godfrey, was also present at the event, with the institutional investor having backed City Hall and two other Riverside Sunderland offices to the tune of £100m. Other guests included chief executive of Gentoo, Nigel Wilson, and Education Partnership North East leader Ellen Thinnesen, with both organisations set to take up space in the building alongside the Department for Work and Pensions.

Mayor of Sunderland, Councillor Trueman said: "Despite the challenges presented through a national pandemic over the past two years, we have not allowed this to halt our progress as a city and our resilience and determination is paying dividends with buildings such as these opening at Riverside Sunderland.

"A vital services point including housing, employment and benefits, City Hall is the city's shop window, with facilities for civic events and a marketing suite to entertain prospective investors. Its location, in the heart of the city centre, offers excellent access to all the main transport nodes with an array of high-quality retail and leisure facilities on its doorstep.



## LLOYDS BANKING GROUP APPOINTS NEW AMBASSADOR FOR THE NORTH

**Lloyds Banking Group has appointed Emily Cox as its new Group Ambassador for the North of England where she will lead on supporting social and economic prosperity.**

As the northern ambassador, Emily will work alongside a team of experts from across the bank to drive the Group's purpose of 'helping Britain prosper' at a regional level to support the businesses and communities they serve.

Through conversations with local politicians, business leaders, networks and charities, Emily will identify opportunities and deliver initiatives that will address the challenges facing the North to drive socio-economic growth.

Emily has identified her key areas of focus following the Group's announcement of its new strategic plan last month. These include supporting the region's transition to a low-carbon economy, the availability of affordable and sustainable housing, creating a more inclusive society and promoting regional development.

The new ambassador has lived and worked in the North East for the past 18 years. She also serves as the deputy chair of the Confederation of British Industry (CBI) for the North East Council, where she works with people from across the business community and champions inclusive growth and an inclusive economy.

Emily said: "Although we're starting to find our feet through recovery, businesses and communities are now having to navigate the cost-of-living crisis. While the region has its challenges, I'm excited to use this role to champion the opportunities available as we aim for a more positive year."

## SUNDERLAND'S THE BRIDGES BECOMES GEEKTASTIC



**A fast-growing chain which caters for fans of movies, tv shows and anime is to open its fourth store at Sunderland's the Bridges.**

Be More Geek - which offers a whole host of merchandise, collectables, costumes and homeware for superfans - opened its first store in Newcastle in 2018. And now the founders are bringing the popular brand to Wearside, taking up residence in a unit next to Smiggle and Bodycare.

The Sunderland launch follows on from stores in Middlesbrough and Gateshead MetroCentre which opened pre-pandemic, with the company managing to retain all its staff and staying operational, despite the challenges of the previous two years.

The company has enjoyed huge success on Tyneside. They are confident that success will also be replicated at the Bridges, where five new jobs have also been created.

Managing Director, James Gee, believes the success of Be More Geek is down to customer loyalty and brand awareness.

"We have also developed excellent relationships with a number of different suppliers, fine tuning our stock offering and concentrating on licenses that our customers love, such as horror, anime and Funko POPs to name a few."

The Sunderland store will also feature one of the company's signature murals from North East artist Creative Ginger, which are always a talking point and an immersive feature of the stores. James added that the company was "very excited to open our fourth store in Sunderland."

"The Bridges is a busy shopping centre and has a fantastic range of stores and it made complete sense logistically for the business to look at Sunderland given its proximity to our existing stores," he said.



## 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.

✉ [info@turpsfilm.co.uk](mailto:info@turpsfilm.co.uk) [turpsfilm.co.uk](http://turpsfilm.co.uk)



## OLD BUILDING, NEW LIFE

One of Sunderland's most historic buildings has been given a new lease of life – which is good news for anyone looking for an event or meeting place with a difference.

**When the great and the good of Wearside gathered to decide on the fate of the city more than 300 years ago, they would have no inkling that the space they occupied would still be serving the community centuries later.**

An impressive crest above the door at Holy Trinity Church in the East End of the city is a lasting reminder that this was once the centre of local life, Sunderland's first official council chamber.

Once the town centre and heart of the shipping industry, it was built in 1719 to cater for the needs of the local merchants who used the near-by port and for the people who lived in and around the newly formed Sunderland parish.

And now this Grade I listed building is back at the hub of city life once again, thanks to an ambitious £5.1m refurbishment programme courtesy of the National Lottery Heritage Fund grant.

On April 16 Holy Trinity, now renamed Seventeen Nineteen as a nod to the year it was built, will officially open its doors with a day of celebration.

Along with the stalls and musical performances including an evening show by celebrated local musicians The Lake Poets- exhibitions and children's rides, it will also be a great opportunity for visitors to witness at first hand a piece of city history that could so easily have been lost.

It has taken more than three years to get to this point, mainly through the involvement of the Churches Conservation Trust, the national charity which protects and preserves churches at risk.

Under CCT control, Holy Trinity has undergone a



monumental transformation, which will allow it to welcome a whole new audience.

The main space is already creating interest for everything from wedding receptions to business meetings, with a ready made stage area which will be the perfect place for musicians to perform.

Tracey Mienie, Centre Manager, can barely disguise her excitement about the fact that the end of a long process is finally here.

"This building is a huge and important part of the history of the city of Sunderland," she said.

"It has some incredible stories and connections from the past 300 years and the evidence of that is still clear to see, but at the same time it is now a modern and amazing space which we hope will be used for all kinds of events."

Every inch of the building has a story to tell and the savvy team at Seventeen Nineteen have capitalised on this. They have created a Marvellous Mystery Trail led by "George the mouse" – where families can tour the building, find 10 character mice who each have a story to tell about Sunderland and its legacy.

Community is at the heart of Seventeen Nineteen, which also hosts a number of arts and crafts workshops, along with working with a whole host of volunteers who have helped uncover its history.

One bunch of these volunteers have worked on a project bringing various aspects of Sunderland life from the past to life in a number of innovative ways and the results will be seen in an exhibition at the later in the year.

For Tracey getting more volunteers on board – and of course more bookings for the unique space – is high on the priority list.



Photos credit: Mike Veitch

"We have some amazing opportunities for people to become involved," she said.

"We need people who would be interested in being heritage detectives so looking into our past, to heritage gardeners to people who can help out by just being here to meet and guide guests around our amazing space."

An education programme is also under way, as are a number of exciting and innovative community arts projects, with plans for other exciting performances later in the year with the Old time Sailors and the Mark Harrison Band.

"We are doing everything we can to make Seventeen Nineteen at the heart of local life," said Tracey.

Seventeen Nineteen will open on April 16 with a day of activities, music and exhibitions from 10am until 4pm.

**Anyone wanting to find out more should follow the socials 17Nineteen or visit [www.visitchurches.org.uk/1719](http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/1719)**



# DRIVING FORWARD THE ECONOMY – BUDGET TAXIS



David Singh

It is no news that when the coronavirus pandemic began, most businesses were significantly impacted with many having to let go of staff - adding to the growing unemployment rate in the North East. Despite this, Newcastle taxi firm, Budget, during the midst of their own struggles, have made every effort to alleviate the unemployment issues faced by so many.

**Budget Taxis first made it their aim to help the people of the North East to secure jobs when they began their recruitment drive to take on 500 new drivers back in September 2021 after many had retired or left the company during the peak of the pandemic.**

Budget Taxis made sure to cover the cost of training and all the start-up expenses of new drivers - and even took care of obtaining the taxi license plates from the city council. It was with these expenses covered, that it would hopefully encourage more people to consider working for Budget.

Budget Taxis owner David Singh said: "We want to let people know there is light at the end of the tunnel, and that we're still hiring. It's been a tough two years, but if we can help lessen the burden of people wanting to become taxi drivers of the future, then, hopefully this small gesture will help."

Following the collapse of Energy Supplier Green Ltd causing over 180 employees to lose their jobs, David made further efforts, saying that Budget Taxis would be willing to take all of them on, as he urged anybody who has been made redundant or affected by the furlough scheme coming to an end, to apply.

Six months later and Budget Taxis have welcomed over 120 new employees from all walks of life, some having previously worked in warehouses or retailers, and others having being employed by energy companies that have struggled.

One of their new employee's is Simon Goodfellow who recently qualified as a driver for Budget Taxis after becoming fed up with his zero hour and temporary contract work in factories.

Simon has had no regrets over changing his career and as well as having his training and insurance expenses covered, the new job has seen him making up to £2000 a week.

Simon commented that: "It's definitely changed my life. Being your own boss, you can't beat it."

Even with the recruitment pledge from Budget Taxis being successful, the firm is still looking to hire around 500 more drivers to join the company with a particular interest in female applicants.

**For further information on becoming a driver for Budget Taxis – Text your name and number to 07566741675**



## FEELING FRISKY!

Since its inception, Frisk Radio has grown a unique following by proudly entertaining 1,500 listeners through their web, app and smart speaker platforms, and an estimated\* 4,000 listener's a week through their DAB frequency covering North & South Tyneside.

Listeners have tuned in day and night, from Andy and Steph's 'Rude Awakening' breakfast show making early morning weekdays that little bit more bearable with their none-stop banter. To the 'Cheeky Charva' anthems livening the North East's Saturday night by taking the listeners back to their youth with high-energy, old-skool classics.

With the collaboration of a range of DJs and presenters, a loyal audience has been created – a member of which was recently lucky enough to win two balcony tickets to watch the Brit Awards ceremony in London, along with £400 to go towards travel and accommodation after Frisk were selected to take part in the Brit Awards competition.

Frisk Radio's Stuart Landreth said: "We really want to thank each and every one of you who tuned in so far and have supported us since our creation - we couldn't have done it without you!"

A lot has happened at Frisk since the launch; Following recent events in Ukraine, Frisk are doing what they can to be involved and currently are working with Disaster Emergency Committee (DEC) and donating airtime to their Ukraine crisis appeal following the invasion of the country which has displaced millions.

By Frisk being involved in this way, it is hoped that with as many people as possible being reached the DEC will receive more donations of clothes, food, and water to help the people of Ukraine.

A radio station like Frisk was missing in the

North East; one that features a range of music genres that appeal to a wider audience. Frisk radio brings something unique to its listeners and even has an interactive Hot 30 dance music chart which allows them to control which songs stay at the top by liking their favorites.

Concluding Stuart Landreth said: "The feedback from listeners has been immense! The North East has long been overdue a station that mixes clubbing flashbacks with fresh new dance music, and this has been clearly reflected in our figures."

Following the hugely successful quarter year that Frisk has already seen, the expansion of Frisk Radio is being planned with an increase of the DAB transmission area and new transmitters due to be installed in Newcastle and Gateshead this summer.

With this expansion, Frisk are hoping to gain even more listeners so that they can continue to grow and bring the people of the North-East their unique mix of non-stop beats and banter.

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





## STANDARDS ARE EVERYTHING

A holiday is a chance to recharge your batteries and visit somewhere new. It's also, according to Dale Smith, managing director of holiday rental firm Host & Stay, a time to get away from it all – and that includes cleaning.

### He describes why housekeeping is so important when it comes to holiday accommodation – for guests and the local area.

I set up Host & Stay because, as a holiday home owner myself, I felt there had to be a better way – for both hosts and guests.

And one of the elements of guest service I'm most passionate about is housekeeping.

Housekeeping is one of those things that, when it's done well, you don't notice it, but when it's done badly, you most definitely do.

I'd hate for any of the guests who book through Host & Stay to have to spend their precious holiday time worrying about much, giving cups a rinse before they use them, or ending up with dusty hands from running them down the banister.

It's a fact that dirt is one of the most common

reasons for bad reviews left for holiday homes, which is why we have strict housekeeping standards for our team, making sure everyone knows what guests can expect from a Host and Stay property.

### A delicate operation

We manage more than 500 homes in the region and offer arrivals and departures on any day of the week, which means the 100-plus members of our housekeeping team are in action seven days a week.

To keep everything running according to plan, we use a dedicated property management software platform, which allows each team member to know exactly where they should be and when. It also keeps them up to date with any useful information they need to know about the property, such as where keys are kept and when bin day is.

This helps save valuable time and allows the team to plan their day the night before, ensuring maximum efficiency.

When it comes to the actual housekeeping, our staff are second to none, and love nothing more than making a property look as good as new.

To do this, they work to our exacting standards, and also run the cleaning operation on a strict timetable; one of their top tips is to set a 15-minute timer for each room, to focus the mind.

Every changeover day, our properties get cleaned thoroughly from top to bottom, finishing with the ultimate in relaxation – wherever you are – crisp, fresh bedding.

However, housekeeping is about more than 'just' cleaning, and our team are masters at making sure properties look comfortable and inviting for new guests. They'll straighten throws, open curtains and plump pillows – all tiny touches that have a



massive impact on the first impressions.

### Our clean team

We couldn't do any of the above without our dedicated housekeeping team, who make sure guest comfort is at the heart of everything they do.

And because they're so integral to the success of Host & Stay, we offer them a pretty good deal, with an hourly rate of above the real living wage, plus the chance to top it up according to performance.

We also offer flexible working hours, paid holidays and travel time, and bonus and pension schemes.

Our housekeeping team also receive a discount on any of our holidays – so they can see just what an impact their hard work has on guests!

Aside from this, the other benefits include travelling around the beautiful North Yorkshire and Northumberland countryside and looking after some stunning homes – as well as the satisfaction of a job well done.

We hire our colleagues from the local area, a key aspect of our wider purpose and our drive to creating better places to live, work and stay across the North East.

**For more information about Host & Stay, or its current vacancies, visit [hostandstay.co.uk](https://hostandstay.co.uk)**

# WHY WORKPLACE DESIGN MATTERS

## The workplace

It's a place to work, to get your head down and to leave again, so the design's not important, right? Wrong, says Bethany Walker, head of interior design at Styled. The way you design your office has a huge impact on a range of factors, including your staff's wellbeing and productivity.

On average, we spend eight hours a day at work – that's a third of the day (if you include sleeping).

However, we take far less care and consideration when it comes to our office environments than we do with our homes. Too often, we see working spaces that are drab, cramped and simply uninspiring. But why?

Research has shown that employees regard their workplace as a symbol of whether they are valued by their employer or not; while a majority of millennials aged 18 - 34 feel an office aesthetic influences their impression of a company.

With all this data we have that directly correlates productivity and wellbeing with good design, how can employers expect the best from their employees if they are still faced with unengaging environments? Furthermore, what does poor design say about your brand?

Here are just some of the ways in which office design can have a measurable impact on your team, your clients, and your business.

## All work and no play

You want your office to be conducive to work. However, that doesn't have to mean white walls and sterile cubicles!

Whilst you don't want your team to be spending every minute of the day chatting, social interaction across the course of the day can help to boost creativity, morale and ultimately build team relationships.

Consider creating break-out areas where employees can spend time together away from their desks, for lunch, or for brainstorming. For a canteen area you might want to create a space where your staff feel relaxed, whereas a brainstorming area you might want to be more fun and creative.



Katie Molnar and Bethany Walker

However, equally important is to ensure there is access to quieter spaces for staff members who might need some time out or get away from any workplace distractions.

When it comes to layout, really take the time to understand how your staff work and how different departments interact. For example, sales and customer facing roles tend to make more phone calls, which can be disruptive to other staff, so think about where you place them.

The most important factor to consider is accessibility and inclusion for all your members of staff. Does anyone use a wheelchair or have limited mobility? Do you have any staff who require a quiet and private space to pray during the day?

Knowing and fully understanding the needs of each member of your team and how they will use a space is essential to a great design.

## Creating a good impression

In many industries, clients will visit your offices and so you need to consider them in your design too.

Despite what you might think, first impressions really do count! Take yourself through a guest's journey into your office. What are they first greeted with when they walk through the door?

Again, accessibility is an important factor to consider to ensure that your office is accessible for anyone who enters. Will there be somewhere for guests to sit when they arrive, or do you have a dedicated meeting space for them?

Does the office look neat and tidy? It doesn't need to be sterile – unless you work in a lab – but a cluttered, messy office won't give the best impression. Invest in quality storage, which will help with your team's productivity and organization, as well as making the place look more professional.

You can also make clever décor choices to help signal what your brand is all about by using colour theory, along with wall décor that contains your company ethos and values. This can really help your clients form a positive impression of your company.

## Pennies in your pocket

Office design not only impacts the people who work there; it can also have an impact on your bottom line.

Plenty of natural light is not only good for productivity and morale, but it also keeps your electricity bills down. Same goes for windows that open, which can allow fresh air to circulate as a natural cooling system – but make sure you've got blinds too for sunny days!

With more and more of us returning to the office after Covid, the environment you create can play a major part in how your staff feel and perform – so it needs to be right!

**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)**



## YOUNGER, AND MORE DIVERSE, GOVERNORS NEEDED FOR NORTH EAST SCHOOLS

Having a strong and effective board of governors in a school can make a real difference to the life chances of young people.

**That's why the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) has formed partnerships with national organisations and programmes, including Inspiring Governance, to support employees from North East businesses to become governors. The North East LEP's Neil Willis explains more.**

School governors are the single largest group of volunteers in the UK. Over a quarter of a million people help improve outcomes for children and young people by volunteering as part of a school's governing board. But we still need more governors – and a more diverse range of them – here in the North East.

Here at the North East LEP, 11 members of the team, including myself, are school governors. This has increased from two since we became the first LEP in the country to sign the School Governor Champion Charter, which supports staff members to become governors in local schools.

It's a rewarding role and, as well as giving back to their community, people can improve their own skillsets in things like leadership and project management, so it's an opportunity for personal and professional development too.

We recently commissioned some research from the National Governance Association, based on their 2021 Annual Governance Survey, into the

picture in the North East. Nearly two thirds of respondents in our region find it a challenge to fill their governor vacancies. What's more, 63% of governors who participated in the survey are aged 50 or over, and we'd love to see more young people taking on the role.

And of course we also want governing boards to reflect the communities they serve, so it was good to see that only 2.6% of respondents to the survey said their board didn't reflect the makeup of their local community at all – although I'd love to see this number reduce to zero.

Whilst the three core functions of governing boards are ensuring clarity of vision, ethos and strategic direction; holding executive leaders to account for the educational performance of the organisation and its pupils, and the effective and efficient performance management of staff; and overseeing the financial performance of the organisation and making sure its money is well spent, we recognise that governors can have a positive impact on careers education and guidance, and it's recommended that boards identify a governor with the responsibility for taking a strategic interest in the school's careers programme. It was encouraging to see that governors across the North East draw on their local employers and local employer partnerships,

such as the LEP or Chamber, when developing their careers education strategy.

In many cases, this is a great opportunity for representatives from local businesses, who can bring their sector knowledge to the role. For a business that supports their employees to volunteer on governing boards it can be a great way of connecting with the community and developing your team's professional skills.

While many individual volunteers and businesses are clearly involved with school governance in our region, it's something we can build on, and we can do that by supporting a wider range of people, with a wider range of skills and experience, to get involved with their schools in the region.

It's a myth that you need to know a lot about education to be a governor, and all sorts of skillsets are needed to make an effective governing body. There is a lot of support, professional development and training available to those who volunteer to ensure governing boards are effective in their core functions.

**Find out more about becoming a governor at [www.northeastambition.co.uk](http://www.northeastambition.co.uk), or email [neil.willis@nelep.co.uk](mailto:neil.willis@nelep.co.uk)**



Neil Willis



## AWAKENING THE FULL ENTREPRENEURIAL FORCE OF THE NORTH EAST

Colin Bell, the North East Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP)'s Business Growth Director, talks about plans to unlock the potential of businesses and entrepreneurs in the North East.

**Like most things in life there are pros and cons to returning to in-person working. I begin writing this sat in a railway shelter as my first train into Newcastle has been cancelled. While I'm welcoming the return to getting out and about with open arms, embracing the development of new connections, new partnerships and co-creation, I'm less enthusiastic about the cancelled trains and traffic jams – it's hybrid working all the way for me!**

The past few years have been a real rollercoaster and with soaring costs, changing global dynamics, changed working practices, evolved consumer behaviours and an overheated talent market, and these ups and downs and twists and turns are likely to continue for some time.

Working with the North East LEP's Business and Sector Growth Board, which is chaired by Ammar Mirza CBE and filled to the brim with committed and talented leaders, all passionate about unleashing the full potential of the North East, we have developed a plan to ride the rollercoaster and awaken the full entrepreneurial force of the North East. We want to tackle once and for all the challenges that have been holding us back.

The challenge is a big one. To level up as a region we need 25,200 additional businesses, to create at the very minimum 6,000 additional businesses

every single year, to raise productivity per worker by £2,900 and we need 3,800 additional exporters. To put this into context a levelled up North East would have 200,000+ more jobs and an additional £10billion of economic output!

None of these issues are new, they have been with us for decades, however to tackle them requires different and more radical thinking. To achieve this, the North East LEP's Business and Sector Growth Board is pulling together people from across the region to work on addressing these challenges and to inject new ideas and approaches.

The great news is that the North East is in a prime position to capitalise on the trends that have been accelerated by the pandemic and that are now fuelling global growth:

- The North East is one of only three areas in the UK to have a growing scaleup population.
- We've created more jobs in health and life sciences in two years than during the previous ten.
- We are at the forefront of the green industrial revolution, the heart of UK electric vehicle and next-generation battery manufacture.
- We are recognised as the UK's leading region in the development of the decarbonisation of heat and buildings, a capability that is being

strongly promoted by Government globally.

- We have one of the fastest growing digital sectors which is seeing a sustained influx of businesses choosing the North East as their new home and relocating to the region.
- We are home to the world's largest offshore wind farm and the epicentre of innovation in renewables.

I really could go on and on. There is so much to feel positive about and we can look to the future with great confidence.

Grasping the opportunity and turning momentum and confidence into performance is in our hands. The time to capitalise on change really is now. We need to harness the Government's ambitions to level up the North East, to develop a compelling plan of action and to pull together as a region to align our collective passion, resources, and energy towards shared endeavour, the achievement of a common goal and to do our bit to making the world a better place.

***If you're a business leader and want to make a real and measurable difference to the North East then get in touch – [colin.bell@nelep.co.uk](mailto:colin.bell@nelep.co.uk)***



# TALENTHEADS - NOT ANOTHER RECRUITMENT AGENCY

Do you have a recruitment department? No?  
Wrong...you do...and it's called Talentheads.



**If you are a business owner and you're reading this, you will probably have been in the situation where you need a new member of staff to either replace someone who's left the company or because you're growing and need some extra help.**

If you've gone to a traditional recruitment agency, you will have come to an agreement which generally means you pay out a load of cash and receive a blizzard of potential candidates which you then need to sift through.

Wouldn't it be handy if you could simply ask someone to go out and find a new member of staff...ask them to come up with a couple of alternatives...and then, once you make a decision, let them take care of everything.

Well that is precisely how Talentheads operate.

In other words...no...they're not just another recruitment agency. They're different.

"We don't charge placement fees; we work on a day rate model and we don't do long expensive contracts which is why we call ourselves the in-house recruitment strategists," says Talentheads Founder and Recruitment Director Sam Spoors. "We partner for the long term growth of any business we work with. Okay, we're not sitting in their building in an office along the corridor, but we operate in exactly the same manner. We're at the end of a telephone which of course means when things need to be done quickly there is a team at Talentheads that swings into action rather than a single recruitment person within a firm having to do everything. It's cost-effective...and it works."

Sam has spent a career working in the recruitment business. As happened to a lot of firms when COVID-19 really started to bite, her previous company didn't survive due to investors pulling funding. Consequently it was a case of looking around for another company to join or take the plunge and go it alone.

"I always wanted to do recruitment differently," adds Sam. "I was never happy with the merry-go-round which some firms operate whereby they have a hefty database of names and continually chase them either for finding candidates or trying to persuade folk to move from one job to another. Those practices have given recruitment a bad name. I knew there was a better way of doing the job and building a solid reputation as a company that got results quietly and efficiently."

May 2020 was when Sam decided to do recruitment her own way. By October she was up and running. Fast forward 18 months and Sam now has an experienced team around her.

"It was a busy time but hugely rewarding. A lot of clients I had previously built relationships with got in touch and asked me to work for them. In fact, I'm delighted to say that nearly all of the clients we currently have come from referrals. Our clients have become our ambassadors. We don't specialise in one particular employment area. Our recruitment model will fit retail, manufacturing, finance, marketing, engineering, IT, energy etc, and we find candidates at all levels from school leavers up to company managers and directors who work at board level.

We're adding new clients on a regular basis. The latest to arrive are Black & White Engineering who we help on a regional and international basis; re:heat who work in the renewable energy field; and Recite Me a hugely growing SaSS business

We're also helping firms adapt to the new workplace landscape. COVID-19 has brought about hybrid working which means employees are sometimes asked to mix office-based work with working from home. It also means firms are no longer bound by geographical limits for many roles when looking to fill vacancies. We're seeing candidates place more emphasis on the ethics of potential employers...they want to see how employers operate and whether they have a responsible attitude."

In other words, Sam Spoors and her team at Talentheads aren't just another recruitment agency. They work hand in hand with businesses to find the right people. It's not a numbers game for Talentheads...it's all about quality. They operate a different recruitment model which is far removed from traditional agencies.

Talentheads; definitely NOT just another recruitment agency.

So would you like Talentheads to become part of your team and work alongside you?

**The best idea is to have a chat with Sam. You can contact her by phone on 0191 300 8688 or email [hello@talentheads.co.uk](mailto:hello@talentheads.co.uk) You can also reach her and find out further details via the website [www.talentheads.co.uk](http://www.talentheads.co.uk)**





L-R: Jimmy Summers-Irvine, Talent Engagement Advisor  
Sam Spoor, Founder and Recruitment Director  
Lesley Gordon, Talent Partner  
Tamara Hastie-Thorpe, Talent Partner



## WORKPLACE TOXICITY TAKES MANY FORMS

Cultures that undermine autonomy, promote power for the few, favouritism, racism or misogyny, the list goes on.

**Email is a vital tool in increasing overall business efficiency, but as with all forms of communication, it needs to be a practiced discipline to ensure that its use does not become an artefact of toxicity within the organisation.**

Email use that supports toxic cultures can take numerous forms, for example:

- Overuse of carbon copying or BCC's, the former of which creates information overkill or superfluous contact, the latter of which embodies other agendas.
- Emails sent at ridiculous times of night, a practice subject to multiple interpretations by recipients including over dedication, over competitiveness, collusion with long hour's culture, an implied urgency and one upmanship by apparent diligence. Most know what Monday is like when the inbox is replete with emails sent over the weekend!
- Emails used to transfer responsibility/liability often involving detail that is both time-consuming yet still ambiguous.
- Emails best described as "covering one's rear end".
- Emails that are sent to everyone in Christendom with little regard to the relevancy, emphasising the over importance of the sender, or again shifting liability.

We did not evolve with email and in many ways, it is completely atypical of human communication. It occurs within different time-based processing to traditional forms of communication. Understanding is impacted by a mixture of the real-time email stream and perceptual priorities in the gaps that exist between. The greater immediacy of phone calls or face-to-face encounters removes these perceptual breaks but requires greater social skills and a commitment to dynamic, respectful and evolving relationships. Electronic text generally lacks these nuances, and



Dr. David Cliff

can feel instead like bland shifts of responsibility, creators of audit trails, or simply edicts without context. Emotions communicated within are often coded in a way that is often more a recipe for paranoia than real understanding.

In an increasingly technological world, often with multisite, multinational factors, email can be invaluable in ensuring communication occurs. But it only ensures a certain type of communication occurs and can neglect the relational spaces that exist between human beings that involve qualities that require careful attention. Within this I'm referring to the trust, greater mutual understanding, role identification and the clarification of the values both underpinning the relationship and the transaction at hand. When these are absent, communication becomes wooden, anodyne, relationships become unclear and easily subject to defensiveness over achieving real outcomes.

Superfluous, inefficient communication costs companies. The biggest commodity involved is time, but the biggest casualties are staff engagement and wellbeing. Unfortunately, many companies try to address this via engagement surveys. Issues of culture are time-consuming however, and to cut through this, surveys are conducted by means of, you have guessed it—email! It's like another sip of the same poison!

Whilst email use is always only a reflection of underlying organisational culture, which always needs detailed, careful attention, here are a few things that might help.

- Develop a culture of brief face-to-face problem-

solving meetings with clear agendas to deal with an issue that would otherwise fester on email.

- Encourage the greater use of telephones.
- Identifying clear roles and responsibilities by whatever communication is used and a clear establishment of who needs to know rather than simply copying everyone in for safety's sake.
- Implement policies on after hours emails, especially those that feature early morning intervention. These people might need to be referred to occupational health as arguably someone compelled to do an email in the early hours, instead of sleeping, has at best a problem with priorities and at worst an underlying mental health problem! Communication that regularly crosses international time zones may require particularly thoughtful measures.
- Recognise the role of additional forms of parallel electronic communication. The use of WhatsApp, messenger et cetera are often used parallel to email communication by some, often only adding to problems in the communication stream and creating complex audit trails.

As with all tools, we can use them skilfully or bludgeon people. Mastery of business communication involves thought, group consensus and policies that recognise that people are about people.

**[www.gedanken.co.uk](http://www.gedanken.co.uk)  
0191 3051122**

# ONYX HEALTH ANNOUNCES A “DOUBLE HATRICK” OF NEW APPOINTMENTS



Healthcare marketing communication specialists Onyx Health have expanded their rapidly growing communications and creative teams, with six new additions across multiple levels of the agency.

**The latest appointments come off the back of a year of record growth in 2021, which saw the Newcastle-based agency double their fee income and more than double their headcount to just under 30.**

The new starters include two new senior appointments of Alison Davies as Associate Director, and Sarah Walton as Account Director. Born and raised in Birmingham, Alison has worked with some of the biggest names in the communications business as Associate Director of Scientific Communications for Weber Shandwick and BSMG Worldwide. She has a wealth of expertise in medical communication and serves on various international advisory boards for

healthcare-related issues.

Sarah joins the team at Onyx Health from London based agency Dawson Walker Communications, where she worked for over 20 years, rising through the ranks to become PR and Events Director. She has previously helped deliver a global recruitment programme for Shell, as well as award-winning campaigns for Philip Morris International.

Onyx Health has also strengthened its design team with the appointment of Daniel Watts as a Senior Design Manager and Lynsey Carr as Senior Designer. Daniel has specialist expertise in motion graphics, video and animation production. He joins the team from Sunderland creative agency IGNIFI where he was a Senior Digital Designer. Lynsey brings a wealth of graphic design experience to the agency, having previously worked for software giants Sage UK and as a Senior Designer for some of Scotland's leading newspapers, including the Daily Record and The Herald.

The agency has also made two new junior appointments, Erica Wilhelmina as a Graduate Designer and Vanessa Neo as an Account Executive. Growing up in Indonesia, Erica studied at the BINUS Northumbria School of Design in Jakarta, before moving to the UK to study at Northumbria University for her final year. She previously worked as a social media and graphic

design intern for Guerilla Communications in the UK and Zalora in Indonesia. Vanessa is originally from Malaysia and moved to the UK to study Media, Culture, and Communication at Sunderland University. Prior to joining Onyx Health, she worked for Cake Stories as a Marketing Content Creator and as an Account Executive intern for McCann Worldgroup.

Commenting on the new appointments, Onyx Health's Managing director Karen Winterhalter said, "At Onyx Health, we have continued to grow our international client portfolio work in 2022. We have expanded our creative and communications teams to reflect our global focus as an agency. In the wake of the pandemic, a lot of communication activity has moved online and developing digital content that stands out in a crowded marketplace is essential for our clients."

"Using a fusion of science and creativity, we plan to turbocharge our creative brand offering with greater use of video and animation, alongside eye-catching visuals to develop innovative digital content that offers enhanced audience engagement. The new additions to the Onyx Health team will strengthen our existing expertise in these areas and ensure that we continue to innovate to stay ahead of the game."

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



## IT'S A NEW FINANCIAL YEAR, IS IT TIME FOR A NEW BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT APPROACH?

A change of financial year is often a time to reflect on performance and plan for the next financial year.

**You might be looking back at great revenue and profit for the last year or you might be looking at the missed targets and gaps in your revenue. Either way, going into your next financial year with a robust plan will help you maintain the great things and help you fill those gaps.**

In a previous article, I gave my two favourite reflective questions. What did I (or we) do well and how do I repeat this? What did I (or we) not do so well, and how do I improve? A new financial year is a great time to be brutally honest with these questions especially when it comes down to your business development and sales. You need to be constantly refining and improving your approach to keep you and your firm moving forward.

Apart from these two reflective questions, what else can you do right now to get fully geared up for the new financial year?

Here are the three simplest and most effective things you can do to really focus you and your team on identifying, engaging and winning new clients:

### **Identifying where your existing clients came from "Success leaves clues".**

Spend some time looking at your previous successes with clients. How did you find them, what was the very first contact point with them? As an example, initial contact points could be things like networking, referrals, an inbound enquiry, or a conference. Once you look at all

of the sources of your previous success you can reflect on whether you have stopped doing anything that helped you win clients. We all do it from time to time and this little exercise can help focus some of the things you might want to invest some time on this year. This work and research will help you decide which activities you might need to do more or and which activities you might want to reduce or stop.

### **Which clients do you need to let go of?**

It seems strange to be talking about letting go of clients to grow your revenues and improve your business development. This might feel counter intuitive, but please bear with me. Have you got one or two clients at the minute that you do a few (or lots) of additional work for outside of their normal fee-paying hours? Have you got a small client who constantly asks for more of your time than some of your biggest clients? Have you got a few clients who are stuck on a very old, very low price? Now is the time to offer them the opportunity to pay what you are really worth or find another firm. Think about it for a second, if you raise your prices (to reflect your real fees or hours worked for them) and they stay, then your revenue goes up, and if you raise your prices and they leave, it frees up your time to find a client who really does value what you do. You should be in a position where working with your clients is a partnership built on trust and both parties value each other.

### **Make like mother nature**

This is a simple piece about aligning your activity and results in a meaningful timeframe. We encourage to have a strategic plan for business development that you then break down into manageable and effective quarterly plans. Why quarterly plans? Because that timescale gives you enough time to have an impact and put in the hard work for business development but isn't such a long period that you will lose all of your opportunities for growth if the quarter doesn't go well. We have learned that this quarterly approach is one that works really well in professional service firms and one that helps you achieve your goals in a structured and planned way.

I love the work of Jim Rohn, and his ant philosophy. One of the things he talks about is "The ant thinks summer all winter and winter all summer". In essence focus on the good times when you are being challenged, and when times are good remember there may be challenges ahead. Take time to invest in a robust stretching, challenging and rewarding plan for you and your team for the next financial year.

I look forward to hearing about your successes in the coming year.

**To contact to discuss your own business development strategy, speak to Nevil, email him: [nevil@newresults.co.uk](mailto:nevil@newresults.co.uk), connect with him on LinkedIn or visit the website [www.newresults.co.uk](http://www.newresults.co.uk)**



Nevil Tynemouth

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# NEW FRONTIER: DURHAM WELCOMES SPACE CONFERENCE

The North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence welcomed businesses to learn more about the growing space industry in the North East at its conference in Durham.

**The New Frontier: North East Space Conference, which was held on 2nd March explored the current priorities for the space sector in a series of seminars and workshops. Topics discussed ranged from building a UK space economy and the future of integrated telecommunications, to evaluating space sustainability and how science and innovation can be a catalyst for economic prosperity.**

Businesses also heard from a host of speakers from within the space industry such as: Nik Smith, Lockheed Martin's Regional Director of UK & Europe; Kathie Bowden, skills and careers lead for the UK Space Agency; Tobias Lin who is National Space Strategy Policy Lead at the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy Space Directorate; Stuart Martin, CEO of the Satellite Applications Catapult; Prof Chris Newman professor of Space Law and Policy at Northumbria University, as well as other industry, public sector and academic representatives.

The conference took place the day after Lockheed Martin held its space skills and supply chain summit at which the company's supply chain



Speakers at the North East Space Conference lead by Stuart Martin CEO of the Satellite Applications Catapult.

representatives were looking to identify new partners and suppliers in the North East.

Last year, the Government launched its National Space Strategy, striving to build one of the most innovative and attractive space economies in the world. Now a vital part of the UK economy, worth over £16.4 billion per year, evidence shows that the space sector is also growing within the North East. The 'Size and Health of the UK Space Industry' report, also published in 2021, showed the number of space organisations in the region has increased by 50%, with income from the North East space sector totalled to £88 million.

Cllr Amanda Hopgood, Leader of Durham County Council said: "The conference was a great opportunity for businesses already in the space sector and those that are keen to get more involved to hear first-hand about the very latest developments and opportunities from experts in the sector.

"The North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence has played an important role in the growth of the region's space sector. Based at the North East Technology Park (NETPark) in Sedgefield the centre is led by Business Durham, the business support service of Durham County Council and strives to champion opportunities

in the region and connect businesses to provide new expertise into the industry.

John Bone, Chair of the North East Space Leadership Group and Chief Commercial Officer at RHEA Group said, "Since the creation of the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence in 2014, the North East region has grown from strength to strength, and is now home to over 50 space related organisations. International companies such as RHEA Group are locating offices within the developing business park. The region offers a wealth of expertise in space, and related industries, fuelled by the five prestigious universities bringing capabilities, technologies as well as budding entrepreneurs to help build a strong space ecosystem for the area. This space conference provides a unique platform for local and national organisations to hear how the region is part of the UK's space ambition, supported through the government's Levelling-up Agenda."

Nik Smith, Regional Director for UK and Europe, Lockheed Martin Space said: "With its strong manufacturing heritage, we're excited to see the pace of supply chain and skills development here in the North East as we look towards Lockheed Martin's growth strategy in the UK space sector"

## Space Leadership Group to drive the North East's growing space sector

At the conference details of the North East Space Leadership Group were also announced. The group has been formed to shape the vision, mission and strategy for the growing space sector in the region.

Made up of a diverse range of stakeholders, from senior figures within the industry to academics, public sector and government representatives, the group will support the development of the space cluster in the North East with a focus on nurturing business growth and employment opportunities.

The group will be chaired by John Bone and Business Durham, shall act as the secretary of the North East Space Leadership Group - which will meet on a quarterly basis.

**To find out more about the North East Satellite Applications Centre of Excellence visit [www.sa.catapult.org.uk/north-east](http://www.sa.catapult.org.uk/north-east)**



(L-R) Elaine Scott, Centre Manager for NESACoE, Paul Howell, MP for Sedgefield, Richard Gibbs, CEO at Filtronic, Sarah Slaven, Managing Director at Business Durham, Ralph Dinsley, Executive Director at NORSS (Northern Space and Security Ltd), Nafeesa Dadja, Head of Regional Growth at Satellite Applications Catapult, Colin Baldwin, Head of Local Growth Strategy at the UK Space Agency, Alan Welby, Innovation Director at North East Local Enterprise Partnership, and John Bone, Chair of NESACoE and Chief Commercial Officer of RHEA Group.

# YOUR EYE ON THE REGION

## CARL TELFORD

Procurement Specialist, NEPO.

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

I was born and raised in the North East. I grew up in Northumberland, moved to Newcastle as an adult and I've been here ever since. I think coming from the North East has had a huge impact on who I am and I definitely consider myself a proud northerner.

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

The North East is the best region to start and grow a business. We have seen an increase in the number of start-ups being created and established businesses thriving across a wide range of sectors. Alongside this, we've seen increased investment flowing into the region to support entrepreneurs and businesses being attracted into the region. It is an exciting time to be ambitious and grasp the huge opportunities that are available.

Part of our role at NEPO is to help regional businesses find opportunities and help them win more public sector contracts through NEPO Business Club, our programme of free training events. Over the next few years, we have ambitious plans to help regional suppliers win more national and international opportunities.

There's no doubting that we have the depth of talent in the North East to achieve this. We've worked with some great suppliers who have delivered superb outcomes across the region, creating jobs, starting apprenticeships and increasing local supply chain spend.

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

It's the diversity of experience that is available to you that really stands out as a huge benefit of living in the region.

You have access to fantastic cities and transport infrastructure and all the benefits that brings, while being only a few miles from beautiful woodland and countryside in one direction and all that the coast has to offer in the other.

I think we can often take it for granted that we have so much available to us just on our doorstep as it is part of our day to day lives but it really is a special aspect of living in the North East.

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

There are so many great places that it's hard to pick. I think eating out and dining in the North East has gone from strength to strength over the last decade.

That we now have four Michelin starred restaurants is amazing, but for me it's been extremely heartening to see smaller start-ups grow from relatively humble beginnings to great successes and to become a fixture of life in the North East. I think about Riley's Fish Shack becoming a genuine destination restaurant for top quality seafood in a picturesque location, of what Anna Hedworth at Cook House has done from the early days in a little corner of Ouseburn to having multiple celebrated restaurants, and the team at Scream for Pizza who transitioned their excellent food van into multiple successful ventures.

There are so many examples where local businesses and their staff have strived to offer their communities something different and it's wonderful to see that passion and ambition rewarded.

### Are the people really friendlier?

Absolutely. I don't like to play into stereotypes, even where they are positive, but I do think the people in the North East have a lot of time for others and are generally very welcoming in my experience.

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

I'm going to have to cheat with this question and give two answers. In terms of where I'd recommend visitors to go, I'm particularly fond

of Northumberland's coastline. Beautiful views and there is something about the coast that is just incredibly calming. You really can't go wrong wherever you find yourself.

As a second, slightly cheeky answer, I'd say any seat in the Classic screen at the Tyneside Cinema, with the right film, can offer the best view in the North East.

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

I think there are different challenges depending on the industry that you work in but certainly living in the North East still provides great opportunities and that is a situation that I'm certain will continue to improve.

I'm hopeful that the progress towards effective hybrid working models will democratise access to roles which have historically been restricted by location and that where people choose to live becomes less of a barrier to the opportunities that are available to them.

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

I've been fortunate that the North East has provided me all the opportunities I could hope for at this stage, both professionally and personally, but who knows what the future holds.

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



Carl Telford





FAIL  
THAT SUIT DOESN'T  
MEAN A THING



# NE1 CAN HOSTS 'DAY OF INSPIRATION' TO EXPLORE WHAT IT TAKES TO BE AN ENTREPRENEUR

NE1's NE1 CAN initiative provides career insights and inspiration to young people across Newcastle and the wider North East, as well as opportunities to bridge the gap between businesses and young people.

**Kerry McCabe, Business Network Manager at Newcastle NE1, reviews the success of NE1 CAN's latest event designed to put entrepreneurship and launching your own business on the careers curriculum.**

When I joined NE1 CAN over three years ago, I inherited a strong careers-led programme with great links to traditional industries. The programme provided fantastic insights and inspiration for young people around conventional jobs and careers, but there was little to no exposure to entrepreneurs in any industry.

This was true of careers services in most schools, colleges, and other educational institutions across the North East, with most young people never learning that setting up and running their own business is a realistic and viable career option, and even fewer were aware of the help and support that is available for start-up businesses.

Our NE1 CAN team was quick to address this by launching a series of events called Entrepreneurial Stories that were extremely well attended, and from the outset we knew there was scope to scale up with full day events to cater for larger numbers of young people. Our first Day of Inspiration was held in mid-March, supported by ten regional entrepreneurs from cross-sector businesses. These entrepreneurs gave up their time to share their own business journeys with young people, to inspire, and instil belief into young people that they too can achieve similar goals. A diverse range of the region's entrepreneurs and business owners came on board to demonstrate that starting a business is a viable and rewarding career path.

200 young people from across the North East attended the event, which was staged at Newcastle College, the first of its kind to be delivered in the region.

We wanted to ignite a spark in young people and encourage those who have a business idea, or who want to set up their own business, to believe that now is as good a time as any to take up the challenge. Signposting the help and support that's available for new business start-ups and highlighting that when they have no ties and commitments, going it alone involves less risk. From post-event feedback we know the audience went away inspired and filled with the confidence to consider setting up their own businesses.

The Day of Inspiration provided exposure at an integral time in young people's educational journeys, equipping them with the knowledge to help them make informed decisions about their options before they leave education and embark on their careers.

A varied line-up of speakers from across the North East's entrepreneurial community took part in the day-long event including Joanna Feeley, founder and CEO of trend forecasting company, Trend Bible, which works with global brands including Moonpig; Jimmy from Gingerinos Kitchen, a successful pizza parlour in the Ouseburn, graphic design artist James Dixon, Founder of Lines Behind, and Nagma Ebanks-Beni, Commercial Director at Prima Cheese alongside a start-up panel showcasing entrepreneurs at the start of their journeys.

Sectors covered as part of the event included service and product-based businesses, art, trend, manufacturing, distribution, coaching, sustainability, the rental market, beauty products, clothing and food, demonstrating that no matter what the idea, there is space for a business to grow here in the North East.

As well as being inspiring, the event scored highly on the GATSBY scale, the framework for good careers guidance for young people, by delivering 14 contacts with businesses across the day. The GATSBY career guidance suggests that from the age of 11, pupils should participate in at least one meaningful encounter with an employer every year to learn what work is like, or what it takes to be successful in a workplace.

Broadening young people's exposure to different jobs and careers is central to our NE1 CAN project. Getting businesses in front of young people to discuss their work, jobs, careers, and how they got there, helps demonstrate the breadth of opportunities available across a wide range of industry sectors here in Newcastle and the North East. These efforts help raise aspirations and ambitions, whilst enabling young people to make informed decisions about their own futures. Encouraging the next generation of entrepreneurs and business owners will have huge economic benefits not just for the individuals we inspire, but for the whole city and the wider region.

**NE1 CAN brings together cross-sector businesses, education and youth providers across the city and wider region to deliver a programme of engagement with forty events per annum providing careers insight and inspiration whilst raising ambitions in young people. Anyone interested in finding out more, or getting involved should contact [Kerry.mccabe@newcastle1ltd.com](mailto:Kerry.mccabe@newcastle1ltd.com)**

“

**...to ignite a spark in young people and encourage those who have a business idea...**



# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## BRYONY GIBSON

Director of Bryony Gibson Consulting.

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

As a child, I dreamed about becoming an Estate Agent after an enjoyable work experience, but I soon swapped glamorous houses for law and studied to become a Lawyer at University.

A life-changing event threw me off that course and, after a brief stint in retail, I fell into recruitment.

Looking back now, it's clear that each role has a common thread. I wanted to be in a job that focused on communication and helping people.

### Tell us about your current role?

Recruitment is fast-paced, very demanding, forever-changing, and it requires a lot of resilience and determination. But I love it.

I am an extremely hands-on person and offer what I hope is a very personal service. I like to be involved in every part of the process, which helps me to build strong relationships with my clients and customers.

My specialism is recruiting on behalf of accountancy practices, finding accounting professionals in the North East of England. My days can include anything from advertising, resourcing, interviewing, negotiating on behalf of clients and candidates, offering salary advice, or internal administration. There is always a lot to do, but it brings the variety that keeps it interesting.

### What is your proudest business achievement?

I don't take enough time to celebrate business achievements, it is something I should do more, but I guess being where I am today professionally is one of my biggest accomplishments.

I took a leap of faith to leave the security and benefits that come with a leadership role in a multi-national recruitment company, so to still be here almost ten years later successfully filling jobs is something of which I am proud.

Being a recruiter requires a certain type of character; to be resilient, tenacious, and not afraid of hard work. Running your own business can be



lonely, with a lack of downtime (the last two years has really emphasised this) so I am pleased with how far I have come.

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

In many ways, the art of good recruitment has not changed much at all. Recruiting the right people still comes down to the same core elements but we have seen positive progress across the industry.

A notable example is online job boards. People looking for a new job today have much greater access to information, and it proves to be a lot more cost-effective and economical to reach a wider audience with a vacancy.

The candidate experience has also changed. Employers no longer own the market and have to work much harder to attract talent. Equally applicants, don't have as many onerous application forms to complete and post. The entire process has become much more personal and relationship-focused, which is exactly where I can help.

### What are you currently working on?

At the moment I am very busy with vacancies, with both small and large accountancy firms. Demand is high across all specialisms, so we

have some fantastic opportunities in Insolvency, Corporate Finance, Tax, Audit, and Accounting.

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

The thing I try to remember, is to never lose sight of why you do what you do. For me, keeping customer service at the forefront each day keeps me focused and on track. Seeing the bigger picture even when you are stuck in the detail is important.

### How do you like to unwind outside of work?

I enjoy my daily walks with my Labrador, Buddy, it serves as a good start to the day or de-stress at the end.

My life is pretty full-on. My children both play a lot of sports, so that takes up the majority of evenings and weekends but when I do get some spare time, I enjoy running and am currently training for a half marathon.

What I don't do very well, which my husband will happily testify to, is doing nothing. I have an inbuilt desire to always feel like I am achieving something, unless I am in my happy place - a hot beach in the sun. That is the only time I switch off.

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

The continued adventures of...

# Ziggy!



*Hi everyone,*

*Well great news – my clever little sister Cally gave birth to seven puppies on 8th March – mother and offspring doing really well. There are five girls and two boys. I have not seen them yet as I have been on holiday with Auntie Lisa as Cousin Hana passed away recently, so I am keeping my daughter Maisie company, as well as keeping out of the way. Now I have just heard that Auntie Lisa is going to have one of the puppies so we will be able to keep in touch. No letters being answered this month due to the happy event. Should be home for next month's bulletin.*

*Please send me your building queries through facebook - @WDLne, website: wdlnortheast.co.uk or through my Dad's good pal Michael Grahamslaw at Northern Insight on mjgrahamslaw@outlook.com*



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be happy at work

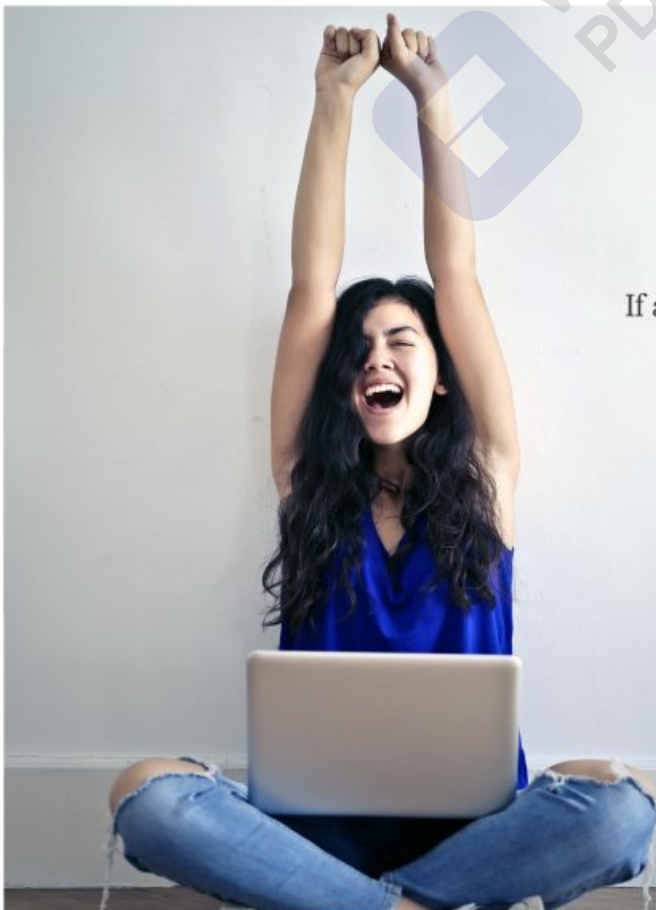
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## EVERFLOW: KEEP ON GROWING

Success isn't a finite notion. For most companies, there's no clear point when they've made it, and can sit back and enjoy the fruits of their labour.

**Instead, as Josh Gill, CEO of Teesside-based water supplier Everflow Water, points out, they need to always have an eye on growth.**

Growth has always been a key part of the Everflow brand. In 2021, we appeared at number three on the FT1000 list of the fastest-growing companies in Europe. We made it onto the list again this year. Since our inception in 2015, we've consistently been the fastest organically growing water supplier in the UK.

Since starting up, we've grown to have 136 employees across three offices and to have 112,787 Supply Point Identifiers (a reference number that tells us which water supply belongs to which business premises) on our books.

Revenue has grown too, nearly doubling in the two years between 2019 and 2021, from £49m to £78m.

So, that's a lot of growth – and it doesn't just happen by accident.

Sure, we've got a great product and a great service, which definitely helps. And while we did always expect to grow, truth be told we didn't necessarily expect to grow this much and this fast.

But we did have a strategy, which meant that when it did happen, we could capitalise on it, while also staying true to our original vision – to make utilities simple and create an environment people enjoyed working in.

### Growing the team

Like pretty much everyone, I've had jobs where I dreaded going to work, and so my vision for Everflow was ultimately to create a workplace people want to come to.

That means, when it comes to growth, we have a responsibility to employ people who will not only add value to the company but also to the people they work with.

And one thing I've learned over these past seven years of massive growth is that, just because it was your idea, it doesn't mean you can do everything yourself. In reality, the best way to grow is to bring in specialists in each area who can tell you what needs to be done, and become leaders in their own fields.

In fact, we've recently hired a dedicated growth specialist to continue the work we've done so far.

Craig Dallison has joined us from a 20-year career



Josh Gill

in marketing, and has big plans to help us keep on growing.

His remit will include growing both broker and direct sales, growing brand recognition in the markets that we choose to operate in, defining routes to market and launching the Everflow proposition in other utility markets.

### Growing the business

For real growth, you need to innovate, and offer the market something new, or a different way of working – and that's just what we did.

Everflow is not simply a water supplier; we have also developed and created our very own switching software, Eclipse, which was absolutely key to our growth as a retailer in the early days.

The business water retail market has not been open for competition very long, and so switching supplier has traditionally been quite uncommon. SMEs either didn't know they could switch, or didn't think it was worth it.

However, Eclipse increases switching across the board by making it simpler for brokers, and improving customer experience.

The software, which we launched onto the market in 2019, has allowed us to effectively scale up – operational employees per customer have been reduced from one per 400 to one per 2,205.

Following that launch, Eclipse is now being used by over 50 per cent of the market.

In fact, our phenomenal growth has been driven

by how easy we make the switching service for brokers – many of whom tell us that they wouldn't even sell water if it wasn't for our tech.

Ultimately, we've made it easy for SME customers to switch to us and engage with the market in a way in which other retailers haven't done, and that, fundamentally, is why we've been so successful.

### Planning ahead

In many ways, growth was already built into our success. Now we've proved that our systems can revolutionise the water market, particularly when it comes to business use, we can easily adapt them for other utilities too – and that's just what we plan to do.

And we'll also continue to work with our teams across the board to take advantage of the sheer breadth of innovation and creativity we have access to. Each and every team member's contribution is valued, and that's how we get our best results. We hold frequent innovation and brainstorming sessions, where everyone is encouraged to share their ideas – after all, the people on the ground are often the best placed to see what could be done better.

So, when it comes down to it, growth on a scale such as we have seen, comes down to a number of factors: a great idea, a good plan, the right team – and a little bit of luck.

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

# HOW CAN EMPLOYERS HELP WITH SOCIAL CONNECTION AT WORK?

A recent survey has revealed that 63% of us have found it to be more challenging in making friends at work due to remote working. So how can we encourage more connection that will support staff in creating valuable social connections and stop people feeling isolated?

Here are just some ideas but we would love to hear what your workplace has done.



**Regular team catch ups** – when we are in work we can drop over to someone's desk and just say 'hi'. When working remotely we need to think of ways to instigate informal interactions. One way is to allow time to for chats about non-work issues so the team can build relationships.

**Use your office space** – particularly now the UK has a strategy for living with Covid, remember to find occasions to bring people in to the office – this could be one day a work and build from there. Research is showing that physically being together is important for nurturing personal connections and allow people to connect more easily.

**Encourage acts of kindness** – we love this one! Getting the team together for a volunteering day can be a great way to get employees to interact. There are many local charities who would value your help so why not reach out and see if they can help you with ideas. Also, don't forget a simple 'thank you' is so powerful. Why not encourage peer-to-peer thank you notes?

**Celebrate** – think of reasons other than birthdays and holidays to create some fun. Host appreciation hours, coffee catch ups or try and arrange a team lunch. We have also just seen photos of an employer who asked their team to come in wearing clothes they would wear on a zoom call. The photos were hilarious with pictures of suit jackets, PJ bottoms and fluffy socks.

**Make time for fun** – why not start meetings by asking staff what's on their mind, to talk about what they are binge-watching on Netflix or Prime, talk about their pets and let's not forget arranging a virtual wine tasting with pizza session. We have also heard of employer's starting book clubs.

**Have a mentorship programme** – peer mentorship can be an effective initiative and can really help with onboarding. The relationship can be based on trust and therefore is often more personal. Employees are more likely to share their actual state of mind, concerns, etc. with their mentor than, for instance, with their manager.

All that said, don't forget that checking in on a one to one basis is still vital too.

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## BUSINESSES REAPING BENEFITS OF INNOVATIVE HR MASTERCLASSES

Sunderland based Oculus HR provide innovative and flexible HR solutions to SMEs regionally and nationally through their dedicated and holistic approach.

**The team have recently launched the HR Masterclasses concept which has gone from strength to strength in recent months providing tailored and bespoke HR sessions to businesses.**

The HR Masterclasses which are bitesize in nature are tailored to support employees in the workplace and enhance and improve the day-to-day skills necessary to help businesses and employees reach their goals. Topics range from Motivating for Performance, Equality and Diversity to Managing Conflict and Difficult Conversations and Emotional Intelligence and Self Awareness.

Each topic is strategically aligned to the businesses goals to reach critical objectives, and are ideal to support employees in new roles, alongside those who may need to top up their knowledge or equally as a general refresher.

Louise Kennedy, Managing Director at Oculus HR said, "We are delighted with the response to our HR Masterclasses, we are committed to making our training courses easier, enjoyable, and more effective by tailoring our training to suit specific business and individual needs.

We've seen demand come from businesses across the UK and we are dedicated to ensuring we develop skills which will make a lasting impact, whilst also boosting confidence and broadening career prospects to allow employees to succeed in their roles."

A host of businesses including Alliance Flooring and Distribution, Building Design Northern (BDN) and Ashford are reaping the benefits of



the bespoke HR Masterclasses. Oculus HR have been on hand to support Alliance Flooring and Distribution with training sessions around disciplinarys, absences and grievances, and BDN, the team behind the visionary Sheepfolds development have received sessions around performance management, and how the concept fits together with companies values and culture.

Ashford who are the UK's largest Orthodontic Laboratory, recently engaged the services of Oculus HR to deliver the informative HR Masterclasses sessions to Managers and Team Leaders. Ashford has recently celebrated its 20th year of continuous growth since its inception in 2001 and the team puts this success down to strong strategic planning, robust structure, and clear foresight for the future, as well as a totally committed and loyal workforce and management team.

Craig Stevens, Director at Ashford said, "Our business is growing, and we have been putting in place the infrastructure to enable us to grow quickly and safely. Part of this was engaging Oculus to provide some informative masterclass sessions to Managers and Team Leaders.

A series of six sessions beginning with emotional intelligence and running through treating staff well and fairly, including the things to do to intercept unacceptable behaviours, and how to deal with such events has set up the team to recognise their responsibilities and given them confidence in the ways of dealing with people, where previously they were uncertain at best."

"Our benefit as a business is better leadership and direction, clarity of performance expectations and acceptable behaviours and how to deal with issues should they arise, reducing our exposure to



under performance and generally having a clearer direction and happier staff."

Louise added, "Our training delivers so much more than just knowledge sharing, through our courses we encourage open communication in the workplace which in turn can increase employee engagement. All of our HR related training ensure employment law compliance as well as introducing best practice methods.

It has been great to work across so many different industries and deliver our HR Masterclasses on a bespoke basis to benefit the topical needs of each business."

**To find out more about HR Masterclasses  
contact the team at Oculus HR at  
[louise@oculus-hr.co.uk](mailto:louise@oculus-hr.co.uk) or visit  
[www.oculus-hr.co.uk](http://www.oculus-hr.co.uk)**

“

**...We've seen demand  
come from businesses  
across the UK and we are  
dedicated to ensuring  
we develop skills which  
will make a lasting impact...**



# REBRAND AND RELOCATION PROVIDES PLATFORM FOR SUBSTANTIAL GROWTH



L-R: The senior management team at NEPO. Simon Hanson, economic development and policy manager, Steven Sinclair, procurement & commercial director, Nicola Shelley, managing director, Joanne Peacock, procurement manager and Adam Smith, head of commercial & technology.

The North East Procurement Organisation, (NEPO) has signalled its ambitious growth plans, as it rebrands and relocates to the Northern Design Centre.

**The 35-strong team has moved from the Guildhall, Newcastle Quayside, and will adopt a hybrid working model. During the year NEPO will also recruit a number of senior procurement specialists to deliver on its ambitious 2025 vision.**

Established in 1976, NEPO develops and manages procurement solutions for the public sector in areas of high-spend and strategic importance, such as energy, construction, professional services and social care.

It works in partnership with 12 North East local authorities and delivers a portfolio worth over £700 million. From a private sector perspective, over 23,000 North East suppliers have registered on the NEPO Portal, 64% of which are SMEs.

NEPO's work over the past year has added value to its North East local authority members at a time when the public sector has faced significant challenge. For every pound invested in NEPO membership, it creates a return on investment (ROI) of £6. A big part of that ROI is the social value delivered through its procurement solutions.

The cornerstone of the 2025 vision will see NEPO work even more collaboratively with its stakeholders, strategic partners and suppliers, to meet the challenges and opportunities that the North East faces, by delivering progressive procurement outcomes through innovative and commercial solutions.

Nicola Shelley, managing director, NEPO, said: "Over the last five years NEPO has helped to deliver the ambitions of the North East. In every community, jobs have been created, apprenticeships have started and a vast range of local suppliers have won new contracts. Underpinning all of this, we also delivered a significant return on investment of £23 million.

"Going forward, we want to further our ambitions and that will see us working collaboratively with our stakeholders, strategic partners and suppliers. Our aim is to be

recognised as a national leader in procurement, the application of technology and in social value delivery.

"We will also provide the leadership needed to ensure that regional and local ambitions are achieved when it comes to the levelling up agenda. We will provide the flexibility needed to deliver the economic aspirations and ensure that value for money is achieved.

"As we develop, we must also attract and retain our loyal workforce to ensure that we have a mutually beneficial working environment and the correct people with the right skillset to drive us forward. We want to ensure that procurement is seen as a career route for individuals wanting to make a real difference.

"For all of these reasons we felt that now was the perfect time to rebrand, move to new offices and look to build on our current workforce with the recruitment of a number of additional procurement specialists. The move to our new office space was carefully considered and we felt that combined with a hybrid model, it would provide us with the ideal platform from which to build for the future."

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

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**POWERHOUSE**





# A WONDERFUL ADVERT FOR THE CITY

By Michael Grahamslaw

One of the more interesting items to land in my email inbox this month was a chance to review 5|Quarter, The Common Room's dedicated café bar in Central Newcastle.



**For those unfamiliar, the grade II\* listed The Common Room is a charity-funded heritage venue formerly known to many as the Mining Institute building which celebrates the North East's centuries of engineering, mining and other scientific innovation through its collections and archives.**

Thanks to a £5m National Lottery Heritage Fund grant towards this £9m project, £7m has been used to lovingly restore the building with a further near £2m contributing to running costs and inspiring the next generation of Northern innovations and engineers. Set on the corner of the city's Westgate Rd, The Common Room features a packed programme of events and with such close proximity to Newcastle Central Station, is a great advert for the city and region.

5|Quarter lies at the heart of The Common Room and is a stylish space to refuel after exploring the venue's many activities and archives. The café bar derives its name from a coal seam that ran through the Great Northern Coalfield and offers hot beverages, innovation cocktails, classic wines and locally sourced food. One thing also assured of course, is that warm Geordie welcome.

This certainly sounded quite the prospect. Both my wife Lisa and I, with ancestry inextricably attached to the mining and shipbuilding industries, have a keen interest in local history so were keen to learn more when we visited one Saturday afternoon – ever that most exciting time in the Geordie week.

Suffice to say, the building is fairly spectacular and dripping with character and history. Settling in, we were invited to try a couple of cocktails which play upon little motifs of Northern history. 'Like Granny

Used to Make' for instance, mixed rhubarb & ginger gin with Absolut vanilla vodka, apple juice, cranberry juice and fresh lemon. Lisa's 'Lamplight' cocktail meanwhile was spun up expertly with Absolut raspberry vodka, crème de cassis, Bristol syrup grenadine and lemonade. Figuratively and literally drinking in the history then one might say!

The food offering meanwhile comprises a sumptuous spread of brunch options, hot & cold sandwiches, soups, salads and dirty potato 'tots'. With so many of The Common Room's activities fun and educational, kids are also well looked after with a full kids menu in place.

For Lisa, it was to be the oak smoked salmon sandwich on brown bloomer with cream cheese and pickled cucumber. I meanwhile chose a steak ciabatta – cooked to the perfect pink – with caramelised onion, mustard mayo and rocket. Both were washed down with a glass of pinot grigio blush and excellent cab sauv respectively.

Signposted on the menu is a little further detail about The Common Room. Each purchase helps to preserve the site's collections and archives whilst also funding the numerous STEM activities available for young people. This certainly gets our vote.

For those looking to immerse themselves in North East heritage, 5|Quarter provides an alternative place to socialise, meet for drinks, a stop-off before train travel or to enjoy a cocktail before the theatre.

Great credit then must be given to the team behind this stunning resurrection of The Common Room. If, like me, you're a vocal champion of the North East, then this cultured, richly interesting new venue deserves our support.

**For more information, visit [thecommonroom.org.uk/5quarter](http://thecommonroom.org.uk/5quarter)**





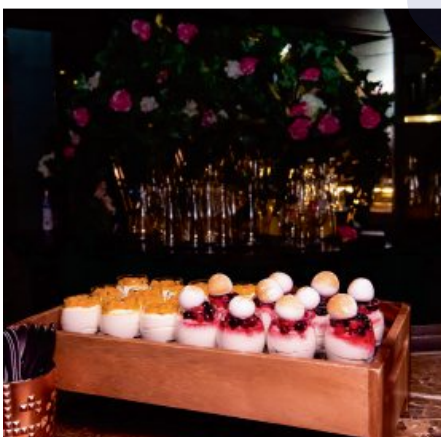






## MOJA LAUNCH PARTY

Award-winning local businesswoman  
Sophie Milliken has launched her  
new business, Moja.





# NEW BUSINESS MOJA CELEBRATED AT NORTH EAST LAUNCH PARTY

Moja recently celebrated their launch at a venue in Newcastle.

**There was strong support from the North East business community, with leaders from numerous different industries in attendance. Guests were greeted with personalised goody bags and had the chance to find out what Moja is all about.**

Moja is an agency with one simple mission: to let everyone in your industry know who you are. Moja recognise the importance of growing a thriving professional profile. It can lead to new connections, more opportunities and exciting experiences. But it takes time and consistency.

So, this is exactly where Moja comes in. Moja will listen to what you need and create a package to give you all the things that suit you, your industry and your ambitions. Moja will help you get known.

Celebrating the launch, Moja's founder and CEO, Sophie Milliken, said "Moja is all about supporting entrepreneurs and senior executives within

corporates to raise their profiles. We'll do it in a very individual way. We want to help people win awards. We want to help you to showcase what you're known for. It's getting on to relevant podcasts. It's getting you speaking engagements. It's helping you to apply for board positions. It's very much tailored to the individual – everyone is in a different place on their journey, and we will support all stages."

The guests had a taste of this at the launch. Included in their goody bag was a personalised magazine, with their face on the cover and their name as headline news!

Sophie's own story best illustrates the success that can be achieved by raising your profile. Through building a social media following, speaking engagements, winning awards, and taking on board positions, Sophie grew her network and

raised her profile. Writing a book brought an invitation to deliver a TEDx talk, which in turn created a whole new range of opportunities including a column in an industry magazine, further podcasts, and radio and TV appearances. All of this makes people feel they know you before you even meet them, which then makes it easier to do business.

After the success of the launch in Newcastle, Moja are planning to go national with launches in Manchester and London. Moja will also be delivering more events, webinars and workshops to support entrepreneurs and business leaders.

**Follow Moja on socials (@Moja\_Social) and at the hashtag #GetKnown to see all of the action from the launch. Explore Moja at: [thisismoja.com](http://thisismoja.com)**



## READY TO MEASURE YOUR MOJA?



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**MOJA**  
Get known.



## DIGITAL ACCELERATOR PROGRAMME LAUNCHED TO HELP SMES HARNESS POWER OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY

Gray Fox, the North East-based IT & business management consultancy, has introduced a 'Digital accelerator' toolkit for SMEs to highlight the role technology can play in their growth strategies.

As part of a three-day programme Gray Fox applies its unique diagnostic and strategy tools to identify critical areas of a business that can be enhanced through the use of digital solutions, which will improve operations, productivity and profitability.

The programme involves an alignment workshop, which helps owners understand how digital technologies can support the culture and business goals.

This is followed up with an appraisal of business' current digital footprint including data quality, cyber security, technology, and the overall governance and support of IT. Finally, Gray Fox work with the business to create the strategic plan and investment programme.

Alistair McLeod, CEO of Gray Fox, said: "SMEs are less digitally mature, often investing in technology in a piecemeal approach, as and when they need it. Businesses of all sizes use IT to some degree, but often their pace of growth outstrips their use of technology."



"This often leads to an outdated approach that will unwittingly hamper future growth where IT is seen as a requirement rather than being a tool to improve business. However, with a changed mindset and a business growth strategy that integrates digitalisation, SMEs can be more competitive and effective."

"Our digital diagnostic provides a holistic view of how IT and technology can be integral to success business growth."



## GATESHEAD'S ADVANTEX SUPPORTS FURNITURE COMPANY MOVE

Gateshead technology specialist Advantex has won a contract to supply a new package of technology, connectivity and cyber security solutions to a North East manufacturer and supplier of trade furniture.

The Follingsby Park-based firm has finalised the installation of new fibre optic cabling, network camera system, access control, a Cisco network and high-performance Wi-Fi services at the HLF Group's new 7,000 sq. ft. head and design centre in Blaydon.

The move, part of an undisclosed five figure contract, which includes technical support and assistance, will provide HLF Group with faster and more reliable and flexible business improvement technologies as the firm invests to accommodate growth on the back of a strong performance over the last 18 months.

New network cameras and access control systems will improve security and site wide management along with Cisco Meraki switching, which will provide easier access to new cloud services to improve network management and deliver operational efficiencies.

The HLF Group supplies a wide range of free-standing furniture to UK customers in the private rental, care and social housing sectors as well as owners and operators of holiday parks and student accommodation.

Rachel Conroy, the firm's managing director, said: "Advantex impressed with their service, knowledge and rapid grasp of our requirements as we look to expand our production capabilities and support growth. They have delivered a quality, cost-effective and robust solution that meets our current requirements and anticipated future needs."

## PERFECT IMAGE ACQUIRES TECHNIQUE LTD TO EXPAND UK REACH AND BROADEN IT MANAGED SERVICES PROPOSITION

Pixel Group, the parent company of the cloud centric IT services and data analytics specialist Perfect Image, have announced the acquisition of Technique Ltd, a Berkshire based IT Managed Services Provider (MSP). The addition of Technique further evidences the Group's accelerated growth strategy, following the acquisition of cybersecurity specialist Cyphra in 2021.

Greg Baker, the newly appointed General Manager of Technique, will work closely with the founders, who will remain in role and part of the management team to ensure the transaction is smooth and seamless for Technique's employees, customers and partners. Operating within the Pixel Group's group strategy, the acquisition will create a specialist MSP focused on providing secure end-to-end IT solutions to mid-market organisations and SMEs across the UK.

The acquisition will allow the group to establish a foothold in the South of England (Thatcham), to complement the existing operations in the North of England (Newcastle), Scotland (Glasgow) and Northern Ireland (Belfast), giving greater geographical reach, broader market penetration and increased sales momentum across the UK. Furthermore, the move provides significant cross-sell and up-sell opportunities to accelerate growth and drive new and incremental revenues across the Perfect Image, Cyphra and Technique customer bases.

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# HOW CYBER- ATTACKS ARE IMPACTING THE CYBER INSURANCE LANDSCAPE

The cyber threat landscape is continuously shifting and evolving. Ransomware attacks are making the news with increased regularity. With this considered the cyber insurance market has seen great change, with increasing premiums and reduced coverage. Cyber insurers, looking to minimise their risk, are seeking to insure those with a clear understanding of their deployed cybersecurity controls and solutions. Controls such as MFA (multi factor authentication) and anti-ransomware are becoming a must-have.

What is cyber insurance and what does it entail? Cyber insurance protects organisations from the financial and operational impacts of cybercrime. This means cyber insurance is vital for any organisation handling sensitive data or relying on computer systems to conduct business. Cyber insurance is not a protection from cybercrime and cyber threats, this comes from cyber security solutions, it is instead a protection from the financial impact of such attacks. First-party coverage usually encompasses cyber response, restoration, expense, and extortion and court attendance costs. Whereas third-party coverage usually addresses cyber, network security, and



Paul Burns

media liability. However, it is vital to ensure you understand both what your insurer requires from you and what your policy covers. Cyber security experts Sophos reported that only 64% of organisations surveyed had cyber insurance that covered Ransomware attacks.

Essentially it all comes down to building and knowing your cybersecurity solution. This is going to help you achieve three key benefits. Implementing a strong cybersecurity solution can help you:

- 1. Get insurance at a sensible cost.** With insurers increasing premiums, reducing cover, and carefully vetting prospective customers against the risk of dynamic cyber threats,

strong cybersecurity solutions will position you well.

**2. Reduce the likelihood of making a claim.** A strong cybersecurity solution minimises the risk and impact of an attack, lessening the chance you will have to make a substantial claim against your policy (which could raise future premiums!)

**3. Minimise the impact and cost of an attack.** With threats constantly evolving, organisations cannot 100% guarantee they will be able to prevent a cyber-attack. However, an effective cybersecurity solution can help minimise any impact. This reduces the scale of claim you might need to make with your cyber insurer.

'Cyber Hygiene' therefore is the emerging key topic for organisations to consider. Put simply these are the steps and practices organisations undertake regularly to ensure healthy and secure users, devices, networks, and data.

But where do you start when trying to implement cyber hygiene and an appropriate cyber security solution? This is where a managed services partner (MSP) is invaluable. An MSP is equipped with the latest knowledge in security practices and policies, can offer clarification on uncertain topics such as what security is embedded within your Microsoft 365 plan, and can support your achievement of the standards required for affordable cyber insurance.

Cyber security and insurance can be complex and may seem overwhelming. But, it doesn't have to be that way.

**Reach out to Synergi today by calling 0191 4770365 or emailing [enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@teamsynergi.co.uk)**



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## TALKING TECH AND DIGITAL

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

### DEAN DIXON

Director, The Unite Group

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

From the ages of about five to ten I actually wanted to be an Air Force pilot, but that was just kids fantasy stuff I think – In much the same way my five year old daughter wants to be a Unicorn when she grows up. After that I really didn't have any set plans on what I wanted to do. I was always into technology and computers as a hobby so it made sense to carry that over into my professional life.

#### Tell us about your current role?

My role is split between current client account management and bringing in new business opportunities as well as managing the business as a whole as part of the board. It's a challenge, no

doubt about it, but one I relish.

#### What is your proudest business achievement?

My proudest achievement is definitely the progression from starting the business on day one with no clients and no income and taking it forward in a few short years to where we are today. It's also very satisfying to be able to provide good well paid jobs and careers to the dedicated folks who work in the business as well.

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

Being in the technology sector means things are ever moving and ever changing. Cloud technologies are much more prominent now



## “ ...Integrity is crucial...”

all of the hats into the thriving business it is now. There was a great deal of burning the candle at both ends in the early days – it's definitely been worth it though.

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

I've never been one for heroes really – I tend to draw bits of inspiration from many people. Within business, I admire anyone who builds something from nothing, because I know how difficult it is to do that – If I had to single out one person though, I would say my grandad for his relentless work ethic and integrity over decades before he retired. Outside of business – definitely my wife Sarah. She is the glue that binds our family together and has an uncanny knack of pushing me outside of my comfort zone. The support she's given to me since I left my 'safe' job to start something from scratch has been amazing – couldn't have done it without her.

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

Not sure I get the chance to unwind too much! Outside of work I have my two daughters – Oliva, five and Gracie, nine – and my son Liam, 11. They keep me plenty busy with all of their clubs, friends and school work. Life can be pretty hectic most of the time. With that said, I do have a keen interest in cars and PCs so any spare time I do have is spent tinkering with those!

### **Favourite Book and Boxset**

*Favourite book:* *A Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy* – I read this when I was about 12 and loved it and it stuck with me since then. *Favourite boxset:* I've seen far too many but it would be either *The Sopranos* or *Breaking Bad* – I couldn't split the two.

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

than they were 10 years ago and that was further accelerated by the pandemic when suddenly everyone needed to work from home.

### **What are you currently working on?**

Right now we're full to the brim at our current offices and we're recruiting for additional engineers, so I'm on the hunt for new premises for us to move into. Finding the right building in the right location is a challenge, but we have a couple of options on the table so watch this space over the next couple of months.

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

I would say I work closest with my co-directors – Paul, Callum and Mike. It was Mike and I who started the IT side of the business back in 2016 and got us to the point where we merged with the communications business that Paul and Callum started back in 2010. Paul and I handle all of the new business opportunities and a good chunk of the account management duties. Mike

is our Technical Director – you could write what he can't do with SME IT systems on the back of a postage stamp. Callum is our Operations Director – he handles the day to day running of the engineers. Across the four of us, we have a great depth of experience and unique skillsets that we bring to the table. It really helps that we all get on great too.

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

Integrity is crucial – it permeates through the whole business. You need the respect of your clients and also the folks who work within the business – without that, I don't think you'd get very far.

### **What has been your biggest challenge?**

When Mike and I started, it was just the two of us and I think the biggest challenge was building the business from essentially a two man band wearing





# ARE YOU READY FOR HYBRID WORKING?

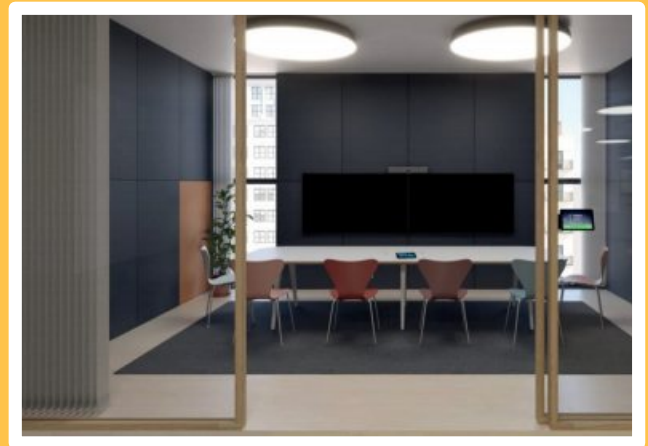
As we look to the future, we see our offices as places for collaboration between both in-person and remote meeting participants.

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## NORTH EAST DIGITAL AGENCY INVESTS IN NEW OFFICE IN EXPANSION PLAN

North East digital products agency NE6 has relocated to larger offices to cater for current and future expansion.

**The Newcastle consultancy – led by co-founders Steven Symonds and Steven Gibbons – has moved within the city into larger, bespoke offices in Siemens House, Carliol Square, Newcastle.**

The fast-growing agency is building its reputation both within and outside the North East as a leading digital products and applications design studio. Significant new work is being secured through its specialist skills in React technology.

The 10-strong agency, which recently celebrated its fourth anniversary, is currently recruiting for full-stack engineers to manage the growing client workload.

Director Steven Gibbons explained: "We have built a really strong team of skilled developers who are able to design and create a broad range of digital products. Our projects stretch from highly responsive websites and fairly simple apps to complex, data-driven platforms.

"We're in the process of negotiating some big digital projects that could transform the shape and size of NE6. It's an exciting time for the studio."

The company has built strong credentials in a range of sectors from property and the built environment, through to recruitment consultancies, biotech and vehicle leasing. Increasingly the agency is winning work around the UK.

Steven Symonds, NE6 director, said: "We're really proud of our North East roots and our work with companies like Sanderson Young and Northgate but we see our opportunity as national. We have the skills and talent to take on the best, whether that's in London, the south-east, Midlands, or Yorkshire. Technology has few boundaries and geography will not be a barrier to the growth of NE6."

NE6 recently designed, built and launched a game-changing salary sacrifice scheme to

incentivise access to electric vehicles (EVs) at affordable rates. Pink Car Leasing, a leading national vehicle car and van leasing company based in Leicester, recently launched its unique Pink Salary Exchange.

The company says its HMRC approved Pink Salary Exchange will give a welcome boost to the UK's emerging EV market, as well as helping fleet operators achieve net zero. One of the other big benefits of this new scheme is that information, along with an extensive range of EVs, are quickly accessible via a web-based platform created by NE6.

A rising number of companies and organisations are seeking ways to automate process, improve user experience and increase productivity.

There's rarely a week goes by at NE6 when they're not being called on to help a client or new prospect with a business problem.

Steven Gibbons added: "While we still design and build websites, we're becoming more of a digital solutions studio, creating products to help clients transform the way they do business and engage with their customers.

"Whatever the business sector, if a company or organisation is experiencing process inefficiencies, looking to expand in innovative ways or reduce costs via digital transformation then we will be able to help."

**For more details visit [www.ne6.studio](http://www.ne6.studio)**



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# LEADING TECH COMPANY ASPIRE SECURES GROWTH INVESTMENT FROM LDC IN £85M TRANSACTION

Former North East Company of the Year, Aspire Technology Solutions has secured significant minority investment from LDC, the UK's leading mid-market private equity firm, in a transaction which values the business at £85m.



**Aspire is one of the fastest growing IT managed service and cyber security providers in the UK and was launched 15 years ago by CEO, Chris Fraser. The company now has multiple offices in locations including Gateshead, London and Stockton-on-Tees, and employs more than 200 people.**

Aspire is currently delivering plans to create more than 150 North East jobs across its recently opened HQ, based on the site of the former iconic Baja Beach Club at Gateshead Quays, and a new base at Fusion Hive, a business and innovation centre based on Stockton's Northshore.

With a large network of UK customers, Aspire delivers leading technology solutions across a range of applications including cloud, connectivity, voice, technical support, and cyber security. Its full fibre network provides bandwidth speeds of up to 100 gigabits per second – some of the fastest connectivity speeds available in the UK.

The business has scaled rapidly with revenue rising to £30m in the last 12 months of trading, growing more than 48% over the past three years.

In addition to their suite of IT services and support, Aspire have also invested heavily in cloud and cyber security as part of their managed services offering.

Their new self-service, industry leading cloud platform, ensures customers benefit from all the efficiencies that transition to the cloud can offer, whilst keeping them at the cutting edge of innovation.

Meanwhile their own Security Operations Centre, set to launch in the coming months, will be equipped with next generation cyber security intelligence, proactive monitoring, and advanced threat detection.

LDC's partnership will support Aspire's management team, led by Chris Fraser, to pursue organic growth and acquisition opportunities. The management team is aiming to broaden the business' suite of services and expand further into markets across the UK.

Chris Fraser, CEO at Aspire Technology Solutions said: "Working with a leading investor that's right on our doorstep in the North East was really important to us. LDC has an extensive history of supporting businesses just like ours to grow.

"Gareth, Mike and Naomi at LDC are passionate about helping us to deliver on our vision to provide cutting edge technology to our clients. The investment marks a new chapter for Aspire which will enable us to move to the next level. It's such an exciting time."

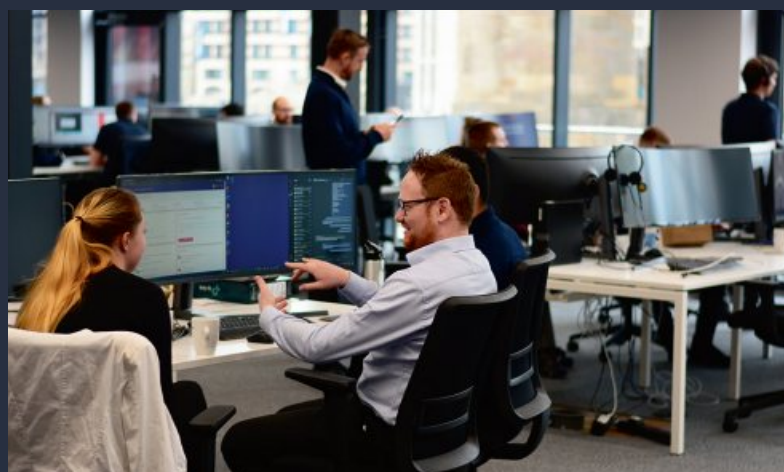
Gareth Marshall, Partner and Head of North East at LDC, said: "Aspire's growth, especially over the past three years, is a true testament to the ambition of Chris and his team. Together, they have created a market-leading tech business that the local community here in the North East is incredibly proud of.

"We can see a real opportunity to support the growth of Aspire across the UK and we're excited about working with the management team to deliver on this."

Aspire was advised by Clearwater International and Muckle (legal).

LDC was advised by PwC and Cavu (corporate finance), Womble Bond Dickinson (legal), KPMG (financial due diligence).

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







*Chris Fraser, CEO at Aspire Technology Solutions*



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## CONSTRUCTION BEGINS ON £29.5 MILLION STUDENT SCHEME NORTH OF LEEDS CITY CENTRE



Alumno Group (Alumno), purpose-built student accommodation specialist (PBSA), and Heitman LLC (Heitman), a global real estate investment management firm, have begun to regenerate a disused site in Whitelock Street, north of Leeds city centre, with the start of construction on its latest high-quality development to support the city's growing student population.

The development, valued at £29.5 million, has been designed by Durham-based architecture practice, Howarth Litchfield, which has worked with Alumno from pre-planning stage on proposals to demolish several vacant buildings on the site in preparation for its full re-development.

Built over six and seven storeys with a gross internal area of 11,840sqm, the 411-bed building with ground floor commercial and cultural uses, is of a substantially brick facing design and features storey height windows and deep reveals with feature brick detailing.

It will contain a mixture of cluster flats and studios, including ten accessible bedrooms, an entrance hub with communal space, offices, a meeting room, laundry and gym.

At ground floor level there is also flexible gallery and studio space which will be used to support local artists and will feature workshops, a kiln and exhibition area. It will be run by a local non-profit organisation.



## LEE IMPROVES HIS SKILLS WITH WOOL HOUSE DEVELOPER

The developer behind the luxury one and two-bedroom apartment scheme, The Wool House, on Gilesgate, has given 21-year-old Lee Baldwin a great opportunity to gain further career development skills by putting him through a certified course to become a tower crane driver and slinger banksman.

Lee, who lives in Longbenton, has worked as a scaffolder since leaving school and had worked on previous contracts with Darren Hall, the project manager on The Wool House site. When he was offered a job by Darren with a qualification at the end of it, he seized the opportunity.

Darren, who has worked in the construction industry all his life, acted as his supervisor and mentor for the short course. Both he and Lee attended a 3-day 'Construction Plant Training Programme' in compliance with employer responsibilities and the Health & Safety at Work Act 1974 and have successfully demonstrated satisfactory theory knowledge and competent practical operating skills in 'Pedestrian Operated Tower Crane Operator Slinger Signaller'.

Speaking about his new role, Lee said: "I have known Darren for a while and couldn't turn down the opportunity to join the team at Hexham and extend my skills. I am really enjoying the work.

## TILNEY SMITH & WILLIAMSON SIGNS DEAL WITH ADDERSTONE GROUP

Tilney Smith & Williamson, the leading wealth management and professional services group, has signed a deal with Adderstone Group for an expanded Newcastle office to help support its continued growth plans for the North East. The new office at St Ann's Quay, which boasts stunning views over the Tyne, will provide more than double the amount of space of its current Newcastle premises at nearby Quayside House.

Tilney Smith & Williamson, which announced earlier this month that it will re-brand to Evelyn Partners in the summer, has provided financial planning services to its clients, which include families, business owners, and charities, in Newcastle for over a decade. Last year the office established a new dedicated investment management team, headed up by experienced investment manager Matthew Burgess, to enable clients' investment portfolios to be managed by locally based specialists. In addition, the Newcastle office has recently been further boosted by a six-strong team joining the firm from Explore Wealth Management.



Adderstone Group acquired St Ann's Quay, a 10-storey mixed-use building, in 2021 and is currently redeveloping and improving the 32,000 sq. ft of existing office space. Tilney Smith & Williamson's suite will include first-class meeting areas for both clients and staff and provide a contemporary working environment for the 22 people it currently has based in the city as well as enabling it to keep pace with its ambitious expansion plans. Tilney Smith & Williamson will move into their new offices later this year.

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## DEVELOPMENT DEALS DRIVE GROWTH FOR NORTH EAST LAND SPECIALIST

Leading land development specialist Hamilton Willis is looking to expand its services after a strong third year performance.

**The company – led and co-founded by Aidan Hamilton and Calum Willis – works closely with landowners and regional and national housebuilders to provide a complete one-stop-shop, bespoke land development service.**

During the last 12 months, Hamilton Willis successfully completed deals on 13 sites across the North East, with planning permission to deliver more than 1,750 residential units. Six of these sites were unconditional transactions.

The Newcastle-based company, which sources, buys and sells land while also providing support with land promotion and planning and design services is now recruiting for an experienced planner to strengthen services already offered.

Hamilton Willis has a range of exciting development opportunities on the go and a potential pipeline of 5,000 units in 2022. While most of the work is centred around the North-East the company has projects in Edinburgh, Manchester, Bridgend, and Surrey.

Among the successful deals completed during 2021 was the negotiated disposal of 543 units in Stockton-on-Tees, to a national housebuilder; the assembly of a multi-owner site in Darlington with 180 units, and representing a landowner in a major unconditional land purchase in Sunderland – the disposal of 220 units to Barratt David Wilson Homes in Ryhope.

With backgrounds in senior management in regional housebuilders, both Aidan Hamilton and

Calum Willis are experienced in leading financial and contractual negotiations and navigating large multi-discipline teams of professionals through the development process.

Calum explained: "It's been an exciting but challenging three years. We've enjoyed a strong 2021, but the hard yards were put in the two years before. Even during the pandemic, we continued to invest in opportunities and develop relationships."

He said: "The housebuilding environment has enjoyed a buoyant period but there are challenges and risks ahead". He remains positive about the future though: "We will build on our successes to date, bringing more senior experience into our team to improve client services."

Aidan Hamilton, who comes from a rural community, explained that he understood the pressures on some landowners and that the company's success will be based on their ability to deliver deals that bring value to the landowner and the housebuilder.

"We really understand the pressure some landowners are under to produce meaningful income from their land, especially farmers.

The farming landscape in the UK has changed dramatically in recent years and left many facing reduced financial support and increasing costs. This leaves many generational farmers facing a stark reality when subsidy represents a high proportion of profit.

"We can review their land holdings to see if there is an opportunity for small, or large-scale development. Even the smallest of development schemes can bring a very good income and ease financial pressures while still keeping their farming interest alive. In some cases, the potential may be greater, and the financial rewards are life-changing for them and their families."

Aidan added: "Above all though, it's critical that landowners are effectively communicated with, understand what is happening, and that they trust the process we are helping with. Our business is based on trust and good relationships and doing the right thing for our clients. Everyone needs to be getting value from the deal or it falls down, landowners and developers alike. We'll just keep doing what we do well."

**For more information:**  
[www.hamiltonwillis.co.uk](http://www.hamiltonwillis.co.uk)



Calum Willis





Lindsay DeVenezia

## RICH IN ITALIAN FLAIR

Heaton Property is delighted to announce the appointment of Lindsay DeVenezia as senior property manager. Lindsay was born in the USA and moved to England from Jersey with her family, aged 14.

### **When Mum announced the move to Newcastle, Lindsay and her two brothers asked what Newcastle was.**

The family quickly settled, and Lindsay attended Whitley Bay High School then went on to the University of Sunderland where she took a degree in communications and design. Part time work in the hospitality sector as a student morphed into a full-time career until Covid struck. Lindsay says: "I loved working in hospitality because I love talking to people and a strong customer service ethic comes with the territory. But while I was employing my people skills, I felt I was not realising my full potential, especially in the digital space. So, I began to look for a new challenge and Heaton Property offered me the perfect fit. My mother is a realtor in New Jersey, so this feels like I am carrying on a family tradition. Also, having a boss who is also of Italian descent makes for some great banter in the office".

Lindsay will work with tenants and landlords to meet the requirements of both. She is also tasked with evolving the digital space increasingly vital to today's estate, lettings and block management sector. Lindsay is studying towards a National Federation of Property Professionals diploma and expects to qualify in the coming weeks.

Heaton Property managing director Damiano Rea says: "We can arrange training in specific property sector skills, but I think excellent interpersonal skills is something you are born with. A person can have all manner of property management qualifications but without warmth and empathy, they will not thrive in a customer facing role. So, Lindsay came to us from hospitality with the building blocks in place. Once that foundation is there, slotting in the technical skills is straightforward".

"It is great to have a 'digital native' on the team as we roll out new software and digital systems. As a digital invader I tend to plod away, one finger typing and becoming ever more frustrated. Lindsay will have a new system up and running in the time it takes me to figure out how to open the instruction manual".

"The fact that Lindsay, like me, is of Italian descent is a bonus. It means we can bicker about everything under the sun like true Italians. I sometimes take it easy on her as I am at a natural advantage. My family hales from Arpino in the Lazio region of Italy. This was the birthplace of the Roman statesman Cicero".

"Lindsay's family come from Venice where no famous statesman ever came from. Marco Polo was an explorer, Vivaldi a musician, Tintoretto a painter and Casanova was a very naughty boy. No statesmen, unlike Arpino which has loads. I win. At least until Lindsay reads this".

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

**0191 240 0665**

**[office@heatonproperty.com](mailto:office@heatonproperty.com)**

***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.***

“

**...having a boss  
who is also of  
Italian descent  
makes for some  
great banter in  
the office...**





# HIGH-END BUYER APPETITE

Last year saw the largest increase in house prices since before the financial crash in 2007. We have seen an unprecedented rise in buyers in desirable locations.

With an abundance of buyers with budgets in excess of £1M, these desirable residential markets are showing no signs of slowing down, especially with larger budget clients who are wishing to relocate back to their native North East. Even a global pandemic and interest rate rises are unlikely to dampen high-end buyer appetites for premium homes within the North East.



**Lindisfarne Road, Jesmond**  
Sold STC: £3.2 Million - 13% Over Asking  
Sold Off Market



**Princess Mary Court, Jesmond**  
Sold £1.2 Million  
Viewings: 7 | Sold in 1 Day

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**High View, Darras Hall**  
Sold STC: £1.3 Million  
Viewings: 17 | Sold in 20 Days



**Kenton House, Gosforth**  
Sold STC: £3,325,000  
Sold Off Market



**The Grove, Gosforth**  
Sold STC: £1.2 Million - 21% Over Asking  
Viewings: 24 | Sold in 11 Days



# INCREDIBLY STRONG CITY & SUBURB DEMAND

In the city and suburbs we are still seeing a great imbalance between the supply and demand of homes, driving up house prices to unseen levels.

The Gosforth and Jesmond markets still remain incredibly strong as we still have a huge supply of buyers who want to purchase homes within these incredibly desirable areas. Some of the factors of this demand include access to excellent local schooling, lovely green spaces, and overall quality of life with cafes, restaurants and transport links all just a short walk away.



**Briarfield Road, Gosforth**  
Sold STC: £465,000 - 11% Over Asking  
Viewings: 24 | Sold in 5 Days



**Kingsland, Jesmond**  
Sold STC: £665,000 - 10% Over Asking  
Views: 19 | Sold in 11 Days



**Greystoke Park, Gosforth**  
Sold STC: £795,000 - 2% Over Asking  
Views: 15 | Sold in 4 Days

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**Brackenpeth Mews, Great Park**  
Sold STC: £425,000 - 4% Over Asking  
Viewings: 13 | Sold in 9 Days



**Osborne Avenue, Jesmond**  
Sold STC: £420,000 - 7% Over Asking  
Viewings: 6 | Sold in 4 Days





# THERE HAS NEVER BEEN A BETTER TIME TO SELL

In 2022 Sanderson Young's Ponteland Office has started off as 2021 ended

We are still seeing exceptionally high demand for family homes in Ponteland village, Darras Hall, the Tyne Valley and the surrounding rural villages. The last 3 months have exceeded our expectations with fantastic sales at all price levels – we are conducting multiple viewings and receiving, in most cases, multiple offers on our properties, often achieving 5-10% over guide prices. There has never been a better time to sell.



**Field View, Medburn**  
Sold: £750,000 - 1.5% Over Asking  
Viewings: 27 | Sold in 9 Days



**Stable Cottage, Berwick Hill Road**  
Sold: £575,000 - 3% Over Asking  
Viewings: 18 | Sold in 18 Days

## YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE



PONTELAND OFFICE

**01661 823 951**

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



**Queensway, Darras Hall**  
Sold: £725,000  
Viewings: 32 | Sold in 18 Days



**Wylam Grange, Wylam**  
Sold: £225,000  
Viewings: 6 | Sold in 18 Days



**Errington Road, Darras Hall**  
Sold: £599,950 - 1% Over Asking  
Viewings: 21 | Sold in 22 Days



# SANDERSON YOUNG'S ALNWICK OFFICE SUCCESS

2022 has continued to be a positive sellers market for Sanderson Young Alnwick.

The demand from first time buyers, families, and those looking for second home investment, continues to be strong and we believe there will be further growth throughout the coming year. North Northumberland is a stunning part of Britain to realise your lifestyle dreams, whether you're retiring, families looking for new beginnings, or you wish to make a good investment for the years to come.



**The Granary, Benthall, Beadnell**  
Sold: £500,000 - 2% Over Asking  
Viewings: 10 | Sold in 19 Days



**Meadowlands, Alnwick**  
Sold: £525,000 - 27% Over Asking  
Viewings: 26 | Sold in 7 Days



**Captains Rest, Bamburgh**  
Sold: £325,000 - 12% Over Asking  
Views: 36 | Sold in 25 Days

## YOUR JOURNEY STARTS HERE



ALNWICK OFFICE

**01665 600 170**

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



**Cragside View, Morpeth**  
Sold: £350,000 - 5% Over Asking  
Viewings: 11 | Sold in 12 Days



**East Moor, Longhoughton**  
Sold: £475,000 - 12% Over Asking  
Viewings: 19 | Sold in 5 Days



# PROPERTY OF THE MONTH



## APPERLEY FARMHOUSE, STOCKSFIELD, NORTHUMBERLAND



### PRICE GUIDE £2.2 MILLION (IN EXCESS OF)

Apperley Farmhouse is a delightful and substantial, Grade II listed detached family home, that is thought to have been originally constructed in the early 1600s. This superb stone built residence is recorded as being originally occupied by the Boutflower family and during the 1930s the property underwent a major extension and remodelling by its then owner Lord Gort, who was the former Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Imperial General Staff, who reused architectural features sourced from central Newcastle and beyond. The property has managed to retain many of the 17th Century features, including original door surrounds, fireplaces, high beamed ceilings, leaded windows, quoins, moulded stonework, and the beautiful stone mullioned windows.

Contact rare! From Sanderson Young on 0191 223 3500 [ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk](mailto:ashleigh.sundin@sandersonyoung.co.uk) [www.sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://www.sandersonyoung.co.uk)







Penny Wright

## MOVING IN 2022? PLAN NOW

By Penny Wright, Sanderson Young

**If you have been closely watching the housing market in 2022, you will have seen the speed with which houses are instructed and quickly go under offer! The market is moving at such a pace, we as agents, never mind buyers, can barely keep up - with multiple buyers and multiple offers resulting in some amazing sales for our clients.**

That is fantastic news as a seller, however as a potential buyer it can prove both stressful and frustrating, continuously missing out on your dream home! There has never been a better time to sell, but the whole moving process is now, more than ever, about managing timescales for both the buyer and seller, with many difficult questions;

- *Do you put your house on the market before you find something, so you are in a good and strong proceedable position?*
- *Will your buyers be prepared to wait for you while you find your next home?*
- *Are you prepared to go into a rented property, while you continue your home search?*

In short, there is not a right answer – all we can do, as your agents, is guide you in each individual case. Our expert team of Valuers and Sales Negotiators can help you in the whole process, from arranging a market appraisal in the first instance, to getting everything prepared for marketing including photography and the EPC and floor plans – this way we are ready to 'click the button' as soon as you are ready! Every house move scenario is different, and this is where Sanderson Young can make a difference, guiding and supporting you at every stage.

Let Sanderson Young be part of your plan in 2022, both in selling your current home and finding your next home!!

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

## NORTH EAST PROCUREMENT CONSULTANCY GROWS ITS DESIGN AND CONSULTANCY SERVICES FRAMEWORK

**North East based Prosper has appointed 43 consultants to its multi-Lot Framework which provides Design and Consultancy Services across the North East, Cumbria and North Yorkshire.**

It will offer public sector organisations a compliant procurement route for their Design and Consultancy needs. The Framework is intended to provide for any size of project, from small discrete projects through to large-scale developments.

Rod Brasington, CEO of Prosper, said: "The Framework offers a wide range of services from Planning and Architect Services to Employers Agent and Clerk of Works, businesses can be supported in all areas of Design and Consultancy, with the option to make a Direct Award or undertake a further competition."



The Framework consists of 11 Lots which offer public sector organisations and landlords a wide variety of options and support, including:

- **Planning Consultants**
- **Architect Services**
- **Employers Agent**
- **Principal Designer**

Prosper will work with businesses in need of one of the services to define their exact requirements and provide bespoke support depending on their needs. This may include devising tender documentation and managing the tender process leaving the businesses to make the award decision.

The Framework will run for an initial period of 24 months with the option to extend by two 12-month periods. The tender was evaluated on a 30% price / 70% quality basis with a rigorous review process which ensured the appointment of high-quality consultancies. All consultants on the framework possess ISO 9001 accreditation and have passed robust financial assessments.

**For more information about Prosper and their available Frameworks by visiting their website, [www.prosper.uk.com](http://www.prosper.uk.com), or by contacting them at [info@prosper.uk.com](mailto:info@prosper.uk.com)**





# HISTORY AND 21ST CENTURY IN PERFECT HARMONY

Stunning 6-bedroom property for sale in Corbridge



**There are times when an opportunity comes along when you really can't believe that there's a chance to buy a piece of history in one of the North East's favourite locations.**

That's precisely what you'll find with The Radcliffe which is situated in a prime position within the delightful market town of Corbridge with wonderful views over the Tyne valley.

As you can see from the photos, it is a stunning property which has been meticulously developed and extended to produce a home with character and potential.

The Radcliffe has been loved by Karen Little and her family. When they bought the house it was a former guesthouse.

"We really have felt like the latest part in the history of this house," says Karen. "It is a Grade II listed property which has its roots back in 1760 when it was built using stone from nearby Dilston Hall which was owned by the Earl of Derwentwater, James Radcliffe. He was beheaded during the Civil War. Dilston Hall fell into disrepair."

Since those very early days, Karen's home has been extended on several occasions, principally in 1890 and again in 1919. Consequently the front of the house is of Georgian era while the south facing rear is Victorian. This gives the interior a wonderful variety of rooms. Those at the front have a cosy feel while those at the back have traditional Victorian high ceilings. The sun-bathed garden looks down onto the River Tyne and the historic Corbridge bridge.

"In recent years, the house was called The Riverside Hotel. When we moved in we decided to reclaim The Radcliffe name.

We've also continued with the development of the house so that we now have a contemporary one bedroom, self-contained annexe at the rear. We're also fortunate in that we have plenty of car parking space with ample room for five cars at the front and two at the rear."

Corbridge is steeped in history. Over a period of 350 years, Roman Corbridge evolved from a military centre into a thriving civilian community up until the 5th Century.

Corbridge remains a vibrant market town with everything you could possibly need in terms of facilities...shops, bakers, greengrocers, clothes shops, restaurants, pubs, hardware shops and medical facilities such as GP surgeries, opticians, dental practices, hearing clinic, physiotherapist, podiatrist, chiropractor...and there are excellent transport links with a regular bus and train service. The station is only a ten minute walk from the house.

In other words, The Radcliffe in the centre of Corbridge is a wonderful opportunity to own a stunning home in an enviable location within one of Northumberland's most prized market towns.

Offers in the region of £2,000,000.

***If you'd like more details, get in touch with Sanderson Young estate agents on 0191 223 3500 or log onto their website [sandersonyoung.co.uk](http://sandersonyoung.co.uk) Once you're onto their site, type Corbridge into the search bar and The Radcliffe will load. You can then scroll through a video and 22 photographs, some of which you see here.***











L-R: Robbie Kalbraier with Michael Mortimer of Hive Estates

## PROPERTY AGENCY ACQUIRES LETTINGS FIRM AS PART OF EXPANSION

Expanding North East estate agency Hive Estates has acquired a Newcastle lettings business as part of its ambitious plans for growth.

**Tyneside Lettings has been acquired by Hive Estates for an undisclosed six-figure sum. The team of four staff join Hive Estates and sister companies and director Robbie Kalbraier joins the board of Hive Estates as its chairman.**

His appointment strengthens the board, and he will help steer Hive Estates into further growth, advising on a property development and chartered construction background.

This deal adds more than 267 tenanted units to Hive's larger property portfolio, adding more quality managed properties to the business, extending the choice and offering to tenants.

Hive Estates MD Michael Mortimer said: "Now in our sixth year, this acquisition is a new milestone in our growth plans. We are passionate about delivering a better estate agency experience for tenants, landlords, house buyers and sellers. I joined this industry many years ago and quickly saw a desperate need for change so that we can move away from old fashioned, outdated traditions that don't serve anyone.

"We are passionate about transforming the local

landscape of estate agency and this portfolio of quality managed properties in Newcastle city centre, Jesmond and Heaton complements our already substantial portfolio.

"The addition to the business really shows we're a serious player around the city and we are already on the hunt for our next acquisition. We're also delighted Robbie agreed to join us as chairman which builds a strategic partnership between our two companies. We really value his experience and expertise and know he will play a vital role steering us going forwards. Robbie's construction company has already referred a development to us to sell, in Jesmond on Highbury which was a £1.5 million conversion of 3 stunning homes and we sold all of them for above asking within seven days. We created a unique marketing campaign around the site, with an open-house and bespoke brochure."

Robbie Kalbraier added: "I'm excited to be joining the board of Hive Estates at such an exciting time. The company is young, fresh and ambitious about providing something different in the market.

They take the traditional estate agency model but inject their own ideas with a unique spin and approach. Michael's vision and passion for a new breed of estate agency really drew me into wanting to do business with him, and I've already referred a client over to him. He didn't just help sell the development, but advised on the interiors too, which caused me a lot more work but in the end resulted in a better product for the market that the client and I were very proud of putting our name to."

When Michael set up Hive Estates in 2016, he had a clear aim of offering an alternative to his 'salesy' counterparts who, he says, over-promise, inflate valuations and under-deliver.

Based in Newcastle's suburb of Sandyford, Michael says the company's strong growth is down to several things: "It's our accurate house price valuations and gaining our customers 105% of the asking price on average, when the national average is 98%, according to GetAgent. We do this in market-leading time. And, because we use state-of-the-art videography and new, modern ways of marketing homes, including TikTok and Instagram.

"We don't lock house sellers into long unfair contracts and don't charge extortionate withdrawal fees either. My fabulous team work with them every step of their home moving journey. Above all, we care about making our customers happy. That's it. That's our special formula."

**More details about Hive Estates here:**  
[www.hiveestates.com](http://www.hiveestates.com)

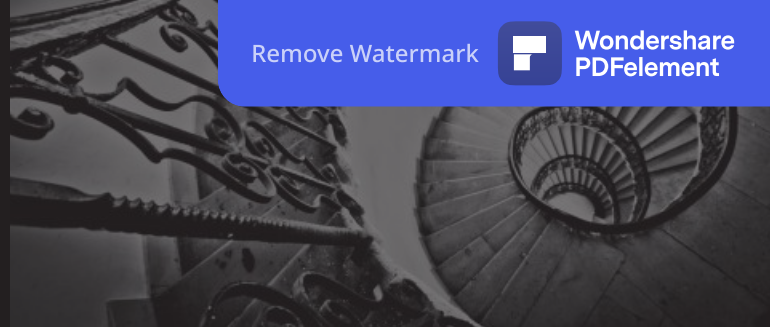
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Urban BASE was established in 2005, operating on a regional basis with offices in both Newcastle and Durham City. Urban BASE is an experienced residential estate agency specialising in the land and new homes sector.

Within our Land & New Homes department, we have had the pleasure in acting on a multitude of successful developments being located around the region.

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## RISHI SUNAK – FRIEND OR FOE?

As other contributors will know, Mike is always keen to press us for early copy of our articles. I regularly get gentle (and not so gentle) reminders from him about my articles being due and this month was no exception - I intentionally left it until after the Spring Statement by Rishi Sunak.

**So where do we start? Clearly the Chancellor has looked at business in general and particularly at people at the lower end of the income scale who are feeling most acutely the effects of increases in household costs.**

Increasing the National Insurance threshold from the planned £9,880 to £12,570 from July is going to save people something. But with the Employee contributions going up from 12% to 13.25%, the savings won't quite be what is 'advertised'. The real difference for somebody earning say £20,000 per annum will actually be £230 per year – not quite so generous, but a little help. The cut in fuel duty by 5p per litre for 12 months will also be a help for many. Even the driver of a small "city car" that does 40mpg will see fuel costs dropping from circa £1,895 to £1,838 over the year if they drive 10,000 miles. So theoretically, this person will have around £5.50 a week more in their pocket.

But one of the big bugbears for business, particularly those with substantial property portfolios to operate from, is the cost of business rates. Here Rishi Sunak has made an offer, which to the uninitiated might seem generous until it is analysed. From 1st April this year (i.e. a few days ago by the time you read this) eligible retail, hospitality and leisure properties will have a 50% saving in rates – but this is capped at £110,000. You may think a business with a Rateable Value of £110,000 is going to be quite large and therefore "they can afford it" but it is actually across a company's rates bill. So even a small business operating seven shops each with a Rateable Value of £30,000 will not see a saving of 50% but in fact around 26%. Again, it is a help but the headline figures don't quite show the truth for many.

What is hidden from so many people is the costs of business ownership and operation and I feel this is particularly relevant in the leisure and hospitality sector. I will be willing to wager that most people reading this don't realise how much fish we import from Russia – around 40% of our white fish has been coming from there - and how much sunflower oil produced comes from sunflowers grown in Russia and the Ukraine. Clearly at the moment that makes the Ukrainian war quite a concern (apart from the humanitarian issue) and putting an upward pressure on prices in the sector.

At the same time, the price of wholesale beef has gone from £7.62 in February 2019 to £10.05 in December 2019 but onward up to £21.00 per kilo by February this year. We still want a cheap fish and chips from Gills and a cheap steak from Sambuca.

I think we are going to have to brace ourselves for a change in our entertainment and leisure habits and be prepared to pay more or accept less on our plates. The hospitality sector was very badly (and in my view unfairly) hit by enforced closures during the covid crisis as I have said in previous articles. Whereas they're now able to trade almost "normally", there are still the extra costs of raw goods and the extra costs of operation brought on by an increase in wages, recent employers' National Insurance costs (employers haven't seen a cut that employees have other than to the threshold), and miscellaneous matters – most places still have hand sanitisation stations and constantly edgy about the threat of another lockdown or change in rules that might affect trade. I said in February "Back to work Boys and Girls!" - I know I talk constantly about the need for town centres to be varied and vibrant for the good of us all. We won't have large portions in restaurants and bars for the same money but I hope we still will be out there enjoying ourselves and keeping the whole circle of the economy going.

However, all this relies on individuals and central government working together. I still feel that there is a third group that needs to play their part

and who don't necessarily seem to be doing so. I'm going to – again – put some blame on local authorities. We need to make our town centres attractive to come to; and I will say that visually Newcastle does very well. But making parking expensive and difficult to access is not the way ahead. Yes we should be trying to reduce car use for the good of the environment but it's always said that the only way to stop a bad habit is to replace it with a good habit – so we need to make buses better to use. Do we need a cycle lane on each side of Gosforth High Street? How on earth do cars and buses readily access Gateshead town centre?

People will blame covid and people will blame the Ukrainian war and people will blame 'the government' (both local and national) for problems when they occur. But we must play our own parts and accept necessary changes in our lives. There's the fourth group...

**If you disagree, tell me! If you agree, tell me!  
I also write on my LinkedIn profile  
every Wednesday morning at about 8.30 –  
follow me at [linkedin.com/in/philipbowe](https://www.linkedin.com/in/philipbowe).  
[www.bivbowes.co.uk](http://www.bivbowes.co.uk) Tel: 0191 462 6 264**

# THE PROPERTY WEBMASTERS STORY AFTER REACHING ITS 15TH BIRTHDAY

"A dream come true," is how Jamie Arthur has described the positioning of Property Webmasters 15 years after its launch.

**The software and digital marketing company has firmly established itself on the international stage since it was founded on February 23, 2007.**

To celebrate its latest birthday, its Hartlepool-based Chief Executive Officer has reflected on the journey that has made Property Webmasters a leading PropTech firm delivering results for real estate agents across the world.

"Over the next three years it is a realistic target to want 3000-plus estate agents using our software, that would be an incredible achievement for the business," said Jamie, speaking from the White House office he owns in the heart of Hartlepool.

"We have a long way to go for that to happen, but it is there for the taking.

"That figure is a global figure, we are also looking to build our market share in the UK. When you think along those lines it makes you proud, of course it does.

"For a relatively small business in Hartlepool, a town many of our clients haven't even heard of, to be working with people in the Caribbean, Middle East, all over, for major companies such as Sotheby's, Christie's, Century21, Coldwell Banker...from our base, a Hartlepool born and bred company, does make you smile."

Property Webmasters has overseas employees but 90 per cent of its workforce hails from the town, Teesside or the North-East. There are now 25 employees, a far cry from where it all started.

Jamie said: "Although the business has been running for 15 years it has been through many changes during that time. The last six years have been pivotal. Six years ago there was only me, we have grown quite considerably in that period."

Jamie was a web designer, "let go" by his previous employer, when he set up Property Webmasters, originally in Middlesbrough, with a friend after realising there was a market for property portals online.

Chief executive officer and founder, Jamie Arthur.

Workflow was steady from the start and four years later his friend stepped aside, leaving Property Webmasters to join forces with a creative agency for five years. That, too, worked well until Jamie decided to go it alone in 2016.

He said: "I felt my ambition was growing and with that, I set out on my own. I had a baby daughter two weeks later, the palpitations were there, it was a stressful time but it was what I wanted to do.

"It was time to take the bull by the horns and go for it aged 36, get serious, in ever-changing markets having incredible belief in Property Webmasters was key.

"I was 36 and if I didn't take it by the horns, drag it and give it everything I had, I knew I would be 45 before I achieved anything in business. This is a really strong business now.

"Last year we received investment from Net Ventures and things have escalated from there once again.

"It has been an even steeper learning curve, with more accountability around now. 'Let's make this huge' is the message and the guys who invested in us are super ambitious."

Property Webmasters proudly generates enquiries and leads for estate agents through its different solutions that are constantly researched and developed in line with ever-changing technology.

It specialises in web solutions, providing marketing tools that catapult the business like

paid-for-campaigns through socials and Google, SEO improvements and newsletter marketing.

Jamie said: "For clients 15 years ago, the majority of estate agents didn't even have websites, they advertised in newspapers, there wasn't really an online presence to speak of, now it is everything.

"We have to keep on top of our game. In the last 6 years we have had to factor in Brexit, pandemics, and all while operating in the international space with property, so we have had turbulent times in PropTech.

"We are still here, still growing and we are proud."

**For further information on what Property Webmasters can do for your business check out [www.propertywebmasters.com](http://www.propertywebmasters.com)**



The Property Webmasters team outside of its White House base.

Pictures by Ian Horrocks



## REVEALED: LAW FIRMS REMAIN IN LOVE WITH THE OFFICE

The latest legal sector commercial property take-up figures show law firms are firmly sticking by the office - hailing real estate as an important tool for supporting corporate brand, talent attraction, employee wellbeing and sustainability.

**A significant 1.5 million sq. ft. of space was leased by law companies across the 12 major UK office markets in 2021. This is a 67% increase on 2020, and above the five-year average.**

Newcastle saw legal office space taken in 2021 exceed the five-year average. Last year, 50,156 sq. ft. of office space was let to law firms in the city – which included 47,500 sq. ft. at The Spark, to Womble Bond Dickinson.

Break and expiry events, combined with changing operational realities that were accelerated by the pandemic, are the main catalysts for law firms lining-up new offices in the UK, according to research by Knight Frank.

### Corporate brand and image

One hundred percent of respondents to Knight Frank's law firm (Y)OUR SPACE survey stated that real estate is a key strategic device within their business - ranking 'corporate brand and image' top, in a range of strategic agenda items that real estate is best able to support.

A large proportion of deals were pre-lets, showing that law firms are prepared to act early to secure scarce, best-in-class space and demonstrating the sector's confidence in the future of the office.

Head of office agency at Knight Frank, Patrick Matheson, said: "Whilst there was a hiatus of office space taken by law firms at the height of the pandemic in 2020, demand has returned and law firms want premium, sustainable, quality spaces, in prominent locations.

"Whilst remote working had its successes and will remain an important part of a flexible working hybrid model, law firms cited difficulties in training and developing junior lawyers, building cultural ties and developing deeper client relationships in a fully remote working environment."



*The Spark office building, Newcastle*

### Mental health

For some legal professionals, working full-time from home led to a decline in their mental health. A survey of over 3,000 lawyers by Douglas Scott found that one-in-four felt that working at home five-days-a-week had a negative impact on their mental health.

### Future law offices

It probably comes as no surprise to hear that the law firm office is being reimagined, post-pandemic.

Looking at the drivers of leasing transactions in 2021, some common themes are apparent: sustainability, health and wellbeing, flight to quality, amenity-rich, highly connected, spaces designed with new ways of working in mind and centred around collaboration, innovation, client-centricity and learning and development.

### War for talent

Law firms are raising the bar on the employee workplace experience to win the war for talent.

Due to a skyrocketing demand for legal services, a highly competitive war for legal talent has begun. In response, law firms are transforming their real estate to deliver competitive advantage in this fiercest of battles.

Knight Frank's analysis of 2021 law firm leasing transactions over 5,000 sq. ft. found that 94% of deals were for space in Grade A or new buildings. This compares to 73% five years ago and clearly shows this flight to quality.

### Wellbeing agenda reigns

Furthermore, every one of the 2021 law firm leasing

transactions were to amenity rich environments, whether that be amenities within the building, or on the doorstep. The most common amenities were health and well-being related including active commuting facilities and outdoor terraces.

According to Knight Frank's survey, law firms intend to increase amenity provision going forward. 71% of law firm real estate leaders expect an increase in the range of amenities and services provided within their workplaces over the next three years.

Notably, the top three amenities are all wellbeing related, namely; the provision of cycle storage, healthy food and beverage offerings and facilities that support mental wellbeing such as sanctuary spaces and the provision of good quality outdoor space.

### ESG

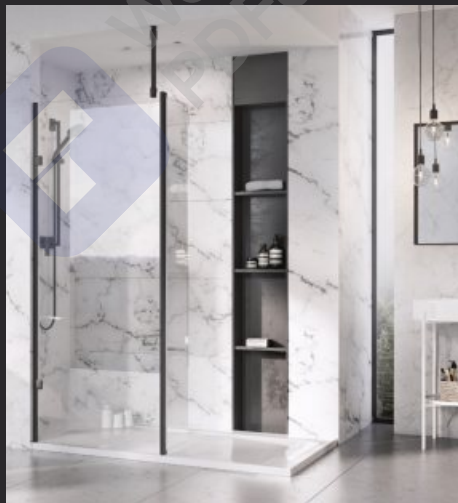
Some law firms are also recognising the growing connection between social and environmental responsibility and employee attraction and retention.

Research by Robert Half shows that nearly two in five (38%) employees would look for a new role if they thought their organisation was not doing enough on ESG. This is particularly pronounced amongst the younger, more mobile workforce. Almost half (47%) of 18-34-year-olds surveyed said they would look for a new role if they thought their employer was not committed to the cause.

**To see the full Legal Report go to:**  
**[knightfrank.com/legal-report](https://knightfrank.com/legal-report)**



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Neil Hart

## LEVELLING UP OR PAINTING OVER THE CRACKS?

By Neil Hart, group managing director, Bradley Hall Chartered Surveyors and Estate Agents.

The levelling up agenda remains conveniently vague but admittedly the '12 missions' outlined seem attractive. But objectively and realistically – will they work for our region?

**With little-to-no targets to decrease unemployment and child poverty, two very problematic issues for which the North East is worst in the UK, it begs the question of whether the true fundamental issues which continue to spiral within our communities are actually being addressed.**

Part of the Levelling Up plan included handing power and resources to local leaders. As it stands now do all of our local leaders have the capability to identify issues, create solutions and apply the desperately required changes we need to address the economic issues we are facing. Are they equipped to handle an unprecedented amount of responsibility and accountability?

On the face of it, it certainly seems as though the North is being left out in the cold yet again. 'Levelling up' our communities, or more accurately evenly 'levelling them out' and sharing the prosperity doesn't look like it's a priority. It's hard to trust a government which has continued to betray us so much over the past few years especially. The fact that the vast majority of areas which were awarded a share of the first £1bn of funding, 39 out of 45, went to conservative constituencies – including Rishi Sunak's affluent constituency of Richmond and Yorkshire – gives us just a hint of nepotism. As a mainly labour-led region I fear that if this continues our issues with worsen.

To be fair, the lack of funding for the region doesn't seem for a lack of trying. Bid writing projects are costing our local authorities a huge amount to submit, with many being unsuccessful. The Northern Echo revealed that Durham County Council spent the most out of any North East local authorities, totalling an eye-watering £163,575 – which actually proved to be money well spent as they were awarded £20m to go towards over

£30m of works. In total, over £300,000 was spent by councils in outsourcing bid-writing.

Based on a single person, taking into account rising living costs, and based on average rents of £578 in the region, plus average bills including council tax, gas and electric bills, TV licence, water, an average food spend of £175 per month, the average finance cost of a car and filling the tank totals £1,281. The average 'take-home' monthly wage for a North East production worker is £1,458.02, leaving approximately £177 disposable income per month – £2,124 per year.

A key part of the solution could be more skilled and well-paid jobs which will come from more investment in innovation and education. One of the factors which have been attributed to the productivity gap is huge difference between what local governments and universities spend on research and development across regions. London spends more than twice as much as the North East, with Scotland, East and the South East not far behind. The worrying part is that the latest plan announced in February 2022 promises to have only 200,000 more people a year completing high-quality skills training in England by 2030.

So, the question is – are we levelling up or just painting over the cracks? The tough reality of the above is that systemic challenges and issues have built up over generations, many of which will take decades to unravel and won't be resolved by creating low-paid job opportunities.

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



ARCHITECTS FOR:

STACK SEABURN

STACK NEWCASTLE







Rosie Spours

## WHAT DO THE EXPERTS SAY ABOUT THE PROPERTY MARKET?

After the eighth successive month of house price growth was reported by Halifax this week, Rosie Spours, Valuer and Branch Manager with youngsRPS Alnwick gives us a glimpse of what the experts say is happening in the property market nationally and how that compares closer to home. Here's what they say:

### Rightmove

"Strong demand and continuing low numbers of homes for sale set the housing market frenzy to continue into the start of 2022. The number of buyer enquiries is 15% higher than the same time last year. Homes available for sale per estate agent branch drops to a low of 12. As a result, competition among buyers is almost double what it was at this time last year. There are early signs that more property choice is on its way with the home valuation requests early in January up 44% on last year and up 48% on 2020. All the signs suggest prices are likely to continue to rise until more choice is available for buyers."

### RICS

"New buyer enquiries gain momentum at the start of the year. Stock remains tight, continuing to

underpin house price growth across the country. However, market appraisals increased for the first time since June 2021."

### Rosie YoungsRPS

On initial investigation, strong buyer demand and fewer homes for sale fuelled by the previous years' frenzied buyer activity sustain the robust sellers' market and rising house prices. A post-Christmas flurry indicated a more positive outlook for both buyers and sellers for 2022, however this was before the invasion of Ukraine and the predicted increased cost of living here in the UK as a result of the conflict. As we head into spring, which is traditionally a busy time of year for estate agents up and down the country, you should anticipate a steady flow of new homes coming on to the market but expect them to sell quickly.

The housing market nationally continues to defy economic conditions, with further research from Halifax stating average property prices rising by another 0.5% in February.

Demand for homes in the North East continues to grow with reports showing house prices have risen by roughly 5.9% over the last 12 months but the December increase in interest rates to 0.25% will no doubt stifle the rise in house prices. The great escape to the country continues alongside the relocation of HM Treasury to Darlington and looks set to do so for some time, fuelling demand for properties in the region.

We are expecting a closer balance between demand and supply in the months ahead and have seen a huge rise in requests for seller valuations from all six of our offices across the North East and Yorkshire, with homes for sale likely to follow.

***If you are thinking of buying or selling you can speak with any of our property experts at your local youngsRPS office. We have branches located on high streets across the North of England where our in-house experts can provide you with clear and impartial information to ensure you receive the best possible advice.***

***Alternatively visit [www.youngsrps.com](http://www.youngsrps.com)***

# HOW DO WE MEASURE DESIGN QUALITY? By Neil Turner, Howarth Litchfield



It is one of the hardest questions that should be asked of all designers – how do we measure quality?

**Over the years I have seen many attempts to try and formalise a system of assessing design quality, most recently in the mass housing sector.**

In my world, architects spend a minimum of seven years to graduate and fully qualify. Only then can they legally use the title 'architect'. It's a protected title and like doctors, recognises the time, skill and commitment required to achieve it. Architects then spend many years building up experience (in the real world) of projects, clients, legislation and contract law.

So why does the country produce so much mundane work alongside the good? We enjoy the television shows of *Grand Designs* for housing but need to expand this interest to all buildings. In this country we celebrate older buildings as good, simply for being old, yet many people are reticent (or even scared) about new, modern architecture.

We still see so many ordinary buildings on our high street, estates and business parks and yes, sadly, many will be drawn by architects, surveyors and those with titles like architectural designer (code for non-qualified person - so beware!)

It is easy to blame bad design on lack of budget, speed of requirements and the planning system. Yet even with the simplest project, a clever design solution or idea can turn an ordinary project into a wonderful piece of design.

The well-known American architect, Frank Gehry famously said: 'why employ an architect and then tell him what to draw?' That is an extreme view, but I understand the sentiment of the statement. We all need a client brief, an understanding of the project and an idea of the budget. My skill is to come up with ideas - solutions that meet the brief - even challenge and question the brief.

The architectural skill is to use combinations of materials that turn an ordinary building into a piece of architecture.

I have written recently on the planning system and the problems within it, and the pressure on the limited number of planners currently working (in the system). One aspect is the assessment of quality, or the lack of ability to assess design quality within the current system. The planning system is not at fault for lack of quality.

One really good idea is to have panels of experts who can assess design quality across architecture, landscape architecture, urban design or sculpture. This can assist in trying to gauge and assess quality. In the North East, one such group is the Northeast Design Review Panel. Developers, clients and planners can use this organisation to assess projects.

I would encourage local authorities, planners, and client groups to use this organisation. Yes, it costs money, but if your project is worthy then a report from a panel of experienced designers will/should go a long way to justifying your projects.

Awards are another way of assessing quality and we were delighted last week to win a National Civic Trust award for Neville Hall in Newcastle.

Ultimately, we need clients to have the conviction to challenge and set high standards of their designers. And we need architects to rise to the challenge, rather than look for excuses.

**Neil Turner, Director, can be contacted on 0191 3849470 or email [nturner@hlpuk.com](mailto:nturner@hlpuk.com) [www.howarthlitchfield.com](http://www.howarthlitchfield.com)**







## MEDIAWORKS GET TO GRIPS WITH CONTINENTAL TYRES' LANDMARK CELEBRATIONS

**One of the world's leading brands in the motor industry, Continental Tyres, has selected marketing specialists Mediaworks to transform its digital footprint.**

The aim of the partnership is to raise brand awareness and drive store visits to partnered retailers. Mediaworks will also be supporting Continental Tyres' 150-year anniversary campaign with a dedicated website and a suite of other digital and creative solutions celebrating the landmark.

Paul McVeigh, customer marketing manager at Continental Tyres, said: "We're really excited to be working with Mediaworks on our digital campaign to help raise awareness of our brand and increase sales. The main driver for us was the agency's expertise and experience, combined with the creativity and innovation of the teams."

"We wanted a partner who are passionate about their work and most importantly, have a clear understanding on our goals and how to achieve them."

Mediaworks is now one of UK and Ireland's largest independent digital agencies with almost 200 staff across six sites. Brett Jacobson, CEO and founder, said: "Continental Tyres is a world-renowned brand. Partnering them for such a prestigious moment in their rich history is a measure of the regard they have for our approach to developing creative, data-driven solutions."

Mediaworks is launching a campaign to celebrate the anniversary for Continental that will include digital and traditional advertising, a new website and supporting marketing materials.

Founded in 1871, Continental offer a wide range of premium products for cars, commercial and specialty vehicles. The German engineered business includes services for the tyre trade and fleet applications, as well as digital management systems for tyres.

## THE TV AGENCY CELEBRATES 10TH ANNIVERSARY WITH GLOBAL SUCCESS

**North East TV advertising specialists, The TV Agency marked 10 years in business recently by achieving exceptional success in the first quarter of the year, following the agency's expansion into several international markets late last year.**

The agency was established in 2012 by Managing Director Anthony O'Neill following his successful career of almost 10 years at the TV broadcasting giant, ITV. Continuing to go from strength to strength over the past decade, their 10th year is set to be the best yet for the Gateshead based team.

Reflecting on the past decade, MD of The TV Agency, Anthony O'Neill commented: "Looking back to this time 10 years ago, I could never have imagined where we are today and how much we've achieved. The industry and how we work has changed drastically over the last decade,

particularly how we've gone from working with predominantly bricks and mortar businesses to largely eCommerce companies who are realising, they need to build a recognisable brand to compete in today's market. TV advertising is also much more accountable and results orientated, due to the large amount of data that is now available.

"TV itself has also changed dramatically with the introduction of connected TV and Broadcaster Video-on-demand services meaning there's so much more to consider when planning a campaign now, but it's exciting and I'm looking forward to seeing what the future of TV is going to be."



## WOMEN'S CHARITY APPOINTS MARKETING PROFESSIONAL AND UNWRITTEN MD LISA EATON AS DEPUTY CHAIR

**Smart Works Newcastle, a charity that gives women the confidence they need to secure employment, has appointed North East marketing professional and creative agency owner, Lisa Eaton, as Deputy Chair.**

Lisa has been a member of the charity's board of trustees since 2021 and is now stepping

up to provide more strategic support to the organisation as it aims to double the number of women it helps back into employment. With over 20 years' industry experience, Lisa is a leading figure in the North East marketing sector, having founded the award-winning creative agency, Unwritten, and, most recently, launching a dynamic marketing academy, Fabric, that has attracted learners from all over the world.

Working closely with Smart Works Newcastle's Chair, Sophie Milliken, Managing Director of Moja, and its ambassador, Sara Davies MBE of Dragon's Den fame, Lisa is looking forward to the next phase of her association with the charity. She said: "Over the last six months I've seen first hand just what an incredible job Smart Works does for women in this region. Supporting women into work and helping them to build confidence and reach their full potential is something I am hugely passionate about."

"Confidence is one of the biggest barriers for women wanting to get into, or back into work, so seeing how Smart Works empowers women in this way and plays a role in their future success is incredibly rewarding."

"I'm taking on this new role at a time when we plan to double the number of women we support to over 720, which will involve dedicated stakeholder and referrer engagement to ensure that North East women are aware of the service we offer. Supporting brands and causes I believe in sits at the heart of what we do at Unwritten, so I'm keen to ensure we reach our ambitious plans and I can't wait to watch how the charity grows over the coming years."



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## GOLDRING TO SPEARHEAD MEDIAWORKS' NORTH WEST GROWTH

One of the UK and Ireland's largest independent digital marketing agencies, Mediaworks, has appointed Oliver Goldring as managing partner of its Manchester operation.

The agency's client base in the North West has grown rapidly and Oliver's appointment to head up operations there marks a concerted effort from Mediaworks to increase its physical footprint in Manchester and across the North West.

The hire follows the agency's recent client partnerships with various brands including Leisure Lakes Bikes - recently acquired by JD Sports - Johnnie Johnson Housing, and United Utilities. Mediaworks' statement of intent comes off the back of launching and growing successful operations in Leeds, Edinburgh and Dublin in the last 24 months. Its combined workforce across those three sites alone now nears 50.

Oliver arrives with a wealth of experience, not least in the housing sector, as well as in utilities, telecoms and recruitment. He was most recently director of communications, marketing and digital at Trafford Housing Trust. He also ran his own consultancy for eight years, advising c-suite and executive teams on corporate strategy in digital, customer experience, and marcomms. Most notably, he led on the hugely successful re-brand and international launch of Airswift, the Manchester-based global workforce solutions provider, following their \$1bn merger in 2016.

Brett Jacobson, CEO and founder of Mediaworks, said: "Having someone of Oliver's stature and experience steering our plans for expansion into the North West is a huge statement of ambition. His understanding of the housing and utilities sectors in particular is complementary to our own agency specialisms. That's a potent combination that will drive both regional and group growth."



## SUNDERLAND BUSINESS HAS SIGHTS SET ON SUNDERLAND GROWTH TRAJECTORY

Hype That PR, a Sunderland based PR agency which was born in the height of lockdown is celebrating a year of strong growth with a move into one of the city's most spectacular period properties, the Commissioners Building which is nestled in the heart of the city centre.

The PR agency which works with SME's to build brand profile and increase organic visibility via targeted PR campaigns has gone from strength to strength in recent months and the positive news of growth and investment across Sunderland has prompted the founder and Managing Director, Claire Pickersgill to relocate into the striking office space. Once a bustling hub of business activity for Sunderland and the former River Wear Commissioners Building, the office space recently reopened following a £3million restoration project.

Claire Pickersgill, Managing Director, Hype That PR said: "The Commissioners Building really is a gem of a building and the refurb and restoration has lovingly kept the character of this historic building. I'm delighted that I decided to set up base here, there really is a strong air of optimism in the business community about the growth and investment opportunities that are in the pipeline for Sunderland."

From the events and meetings, I've attended these aren't just dreams for Sunderland, they are solid investments with many hitting within 2022/2023, which cemented my decision to relocate to the city centre."

Comprising of 51 office suites, and a grand Commissioners Chamber and Boardroom facilities, the office space which is owned by Adavo Workspace is an important part of the regeneration of the city centre, aimed at attracting business to Sunderland.



## COLLABORATION CREATES NEW ROUTE TO EMPLOYMENT FOR AMBITIOUS MARKETERS

With major brands such as Google, Apple and Sky no longer requiring degree-level qualifications as part of their recruitment process, a new partnership has created an alternative route to employment for ambitious marketers.

It is widely accepted that academic study in a university setting doesn't suit everyone's learning preferences, however, beyond the apprenticeship model there have been very few options for those seeking impactful and alternative career pathways.

Open to those with or without university degrees, the partnership between Fabric Academy and Capital Placement provides an accredited, real-world training experience that can be completed within just 12-weeks.

Combining Fabric's flexible and practical approach to strategic marketing study and Capital Placement's career coaching expertise and global employer network, the new partnership provides accredited training and demonstrable real-world experience by pairing learners with suitable businesses.

Lisa Eaton, MD and founder, Fabric Academy, said: "Whether you're a learner who prefers non academic study, a graduate looking to gain work experience and practical skills or indeed somebody looking at a career change, the Fabric course offers something a little different."

"Not only are learners able to put marketing theory into practice and build a live marketing strategy for a real organisation, they are also being trained by the Fabric team who are all part of award-winning creative communications agency, Unwritten and active marketing practitioners. So both the training and the learner's outputs are practical, relevant in today's market and highly transferable."

The course will run three times per year, with a fast track summer programme also available, and registrations are now open for the April 2021 cohort which starts on 29th April. Visit the website: [capital-placement.com/fabric-academy](https://capital-placement.com/fabric-academy)



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

All the world's a stage,  
And all the men and women merely players;  
They have their exits and their entrances;  
And one man in his time plays many parts,  
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,  
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms,  
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel  
And shining morning face, creeping like snail  
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,  
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad  
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,  
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard,  
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,  
Seeking the bubble reputation  
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,  
In fair round belly with good capon lined,  
With eyes severe and beard of formalin,  
Full of wise saws and modern instances;  
And so he plays his part. The third shifts  
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,  
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,  
His youthful hose, well kept, a world too wide  
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,  
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes  
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,  
That ends this strange eventful history,  
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,  
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.

*William Shakespeare, As You Like It*

In every age of humankind,  
it's the different narratives that get noticed.



# MARKETING AND MEDIA MATTERS

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

## ANDREW YOUNG AND HARVEY TRENT

Co-Founders of The Pulse Rooms

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

**AY:** When I was at school, I was initially going to pursue a career in journalism. However, this evolved into a broader interest in marketing and communications.

**HT:** No, not at all. I have always been drawn to roles that enable me to engage with people, network and share ideas or strategies for business growth.

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

**AY:** My first full-time job post-university saw me working as a Communications Officer for a government housing organisation. This role provided a great foundation and the opportunity to experience the different elements of marketing communications. After two years, I left to take up a position with a small youth charity in South Africa. Initially, this was meant to be for six months but turned into a seven-year love affair with the African continent. Due to the size of the charity, I was responsible for overseeing every element of its marketing activities. I couldn't have asked for a better training ground, and this is where I started to branch out into creative strategy and design. After leaving the charity in 2016, I took the step to become a self-employed consultant. I worked with several different businesses across South Africa, America and Europe. It was through one of these projects that Harvey and I first met. Once we realised our shared vision for creating an agency that uses brand as a catalyst for growth, we launched The Pulse Rooms. Due to ongoing projects, we decided to relocate the business to the UK in 2019.

**HT:** Start-up and scale-up businesses have always intrigued me. This interest began during my time at university when I was given shares in a coffee bar and restaurant. However, the long hours

meant I suddenly became cut off from the rest of the world. This meant my opportunities to connect and network with people were limited. After studying Sports Science, I started my formal career in pharmaceuticals. This catapulted me into the sales and marketing environment. In the pharmaceutical sector, I had many wonderful experiences launching global brands. I also played a role in large-scale strategic marketing campaigns. Throughout my 15 year stint in the sector, I always felt I was pushing against a greater system by offering my creative and strategic inputs. The cogs would turn slowly and limit your ability to input on a ground level. Eventually, I moved out of this corporate environment to begin my journey working with start-ups and scale-ups. This process included launching several businesses myself. I have always focussed on strategic growth and marketing within these enterprises, and this is where I continue to offer my expertise in our growth agency.

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

**AY:** In some sectors, branding is still viewed as a nice to have, rather than essential to a business's long-term growth. This is particularly the case

with start-ups when finances are tight. We want to change that perception and help business owners to realise the importance of branding and how it can drive growth. That is why we use the phrase 'brand-led growth'.

**HT:** Marketing offers so much value to a business when approached and applied strategically. It has to be at the heart of the business strategy. To bridge the chasm between marketing and the organisation's strategic objectives is a challenge we endeavour to overcome daily.

### What services do you provide?

We deliver brand-led growth. This involves growing and scaling businesses by helping them identify and communicate their value.

### How did you adapt your business during the coronavirus crisis and support clients?

**AY:** One of our original goals within The Pulse Rooms was to help businesses launch across borders. When the world went into lockdown, we had to switch our focus and value proposition immediately.

**HT:** The pandemic had various effects on customer needs in different sectors. We helped





L-R: Andrew Young and Harvey Trent

our clients to adapt and redefine their value proposition to ensure they were still relevant in the marketplace.

#### What is your greatest strength?

**AY:** Building processes that enable our clients to feel comfortable as we take them on a creative journey.

**HT:** Engaging and connecting with people on a professional and personal level.

#### What is your biggest weakness?

**AY:** As someone who likes to have a clear plan and process, I often struggle to relinquish control and adapt when things change. In business, your day can quickly take a completely different direction.

**HT:** I'm naturally a big picture thinker, so I find that smaller administrative tasks can drop down the pecking order.

#### What has been your proudest achievement?

**AY:** My proudest achievement was winning the 'Brand Creation of the Year (Agency)' category at the North East Marketing Awards last year. That was for our work with CBK Adventures - an outdoor water-based activities business in

Cullercoats. The win was even more special as CBK is a stone's throw from where I grew up and currently live.

**HT:** I'll second Andrew on that one. As well as winning the award itself, it was so encouraging that the judges recognised how we approach brand development differently. We work to ensure that the brand impacts multiple areas of a business, ultimately driving sustainable growth.

#### What are your remaining career aspirations?

**AY:** To create opportunities for young people starting out in the creative industry and help them on their career path. I was fortunate in my early career to have people who were willing to take a chance on me and allow me to learn on the job.

**HT:** I would like to apply the skills acquired through business to one of my other passion areas - wilderness adventure therapy and outdoor experiential learning for children aged 7 to 13 years of age.

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

**AY:** I believe we'll see more emphasis being placed on brand as the differentiator. Already,

businesses are increasing their advertising budgets, particularly across digital channels, to cut through the noise and rise above the competition. A recent Guardian report found businesses that constantly refined and shared their brand value proposition grew by an average of 76% over 10 years.

**HT:** We are already seeing massive shifts in the use of digital technologies. These technologies are having a positive impact across so many sectors. However, I still see the opportunity for personalisation within our industry. Our responsibility will be to bring the 'persona' back to the fore within organisations. Ultimately, people are still at the core.

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## ...IT'S ALL IN THE NAME...

**In the world of PR, there are many "International Days" which make ideal angles for a good story. The National Name Yourself Day on April 9th each year proposes one day a year to reinvent our names. Keith Newman of Highlights PR asked some of his RADAR clients the story behind their business names.**



"The name Marfam is a combination of our surname MARTin and FAMILY as Marfam Group is a group of companies owned by members of our family. When the Covid pandemic hit some of the companies were affected so we created the group to provide support and stability for companies owned by our family members."

**Peter Martin**  
**Marfam Group**  
[www.marfam.group](http://www.marfam.group)



MINT is a brilliant North East term for everything that is, well, Mint! Our Business Club was named after our members: they are mint, their dreams and aspirations are mint, and the community is mint too! And now that we have our MINT Business Hub based in Consett, our offer for self-employed and small business owners is even more MINT!

**Nicola Jayne**  
**Little Mint Business Club**  
[www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk](http://www.mintbusinessclub.co.uk)



Werevamp Media Ltd is my company name.

A Werevamp is something almost never covered in horror but if memory serves me correct it appears in an old Scooby Doo episode where the werewolves and vampires that were fighting would merge creating a Werevamp: half vampire, half werewolf. That is the thinking behind Werevamp Media and, I needed a name that would be easy to find on google. My pen name, S Rob, is simply a shortening of my real name nothing more.

**S Rob**  
**Occultist Author** [www.srob.co.uk](http://www.srob.co.uk)



Bit boring really, but I was trying to think of a name and nothing, zero inspiration. My philosophy in life is, be kind, no excuses. It's helped me keep my cool on many challenging occasions. It's what I live by. When I had to make a decision about naming my book "Be Kind. No Excuses" was right there in front of me. And that's how it happened.

**Rie Pearson**  
**Author Be Kind. No Excuses**

Off The Grid Adventures as a brand name came about because of a need to get young people and adult people into the outdoors away from tablets, Play Stations, and mobile phones! We had this crazy idea that people should talk to each other and not just message or shout and scream via a Play Station. So, we set about trying to find local wild locations with no coverage or signal for our camping trips. The results were amazing and emotional wellbeing and behaviour dramatically improved for everyone involved. You don't always have to go far to find wild locations neither for a digital detox, if you're interested in going "Off the Grid" for a day, a night or longer get in touch with us!

**Paul Kirkpatrick**  
[www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk](http://www.offthegrid-adventures.co.uk)



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

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

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

**Karen Goldfinch is Chair of the North Tyneside Business Forum and owner of Karen Goldfinch – Your Business Pilot and Made to Treasure Stationery and Events**

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When I started Highlights PR around 15 years ago, I wanted a name that would tell people exactly what I do. As well as PR, one of my other passions is the River Tyne and there is a lighthouse in North Shields called Highlights. It's a perfect name as it's named after one of my favourite buildings and sums up what I do – I highlight people in the media.

**Keith Newman**  
[www.highlightspr.co.uk](http://www.highlightspr.co.uk)

**Last month our RADAR members appeared on TV News, 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**

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# MEET HOUDINI, THE CEO (CHIEF EXCITEMENT OFFICER) AT NEWCASTLE DOG & CAT SHELTER

## How long have you been at Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter?

I have been at Newcastle Dog and Cat Shelter since September 2016. I was rescued from a garden in Lemington where the homeowner found me when they returned from nightshift. How I got there still remains a mystery! I'm a permanent resident here at the shelter, ensuring that people who visit are delighted all the time and that there is plenty of mischief.

## What's the best thing about Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter?

The people! We have some great humans here who all really care about animals. We were really sad to miss out on all our visitors during lockdown and it's taken some time for us to readjust to seeing people again, so we are really excited to reopen the charity in April.

## What is the culture like?

We are all very happy here. Some of us are permanent residents but lots of us are just looking for our forever homes. We get fresh bedding and carpet off-cuts from people and lots of companies sponsor our homes to keep us warm throughout the year. There is an animal behaviourist too to work on our wellbeing and make sure we are ready to be rehomed.

## What's your biggest challenge?

The future is bright but it's always a challenge! We need to raise over £1m per year to make sure all my colleagues are fed, watered, rehabilitated and kept warm, so it's no mean feat. The recent spate of storms did some serious damage to our buildings, which already needed some repair- so we are always on the lookout for ways to increase donations. Luckily our humans have come up with some great initiatives to keep the funds coming in.

## What new projects are you working on?

We are working with food banks in the area to give them our surplus animal feed. So many homes in the North East are close to having to give their pets up because they simply can't afford to feed them. By giving food banks the pet food they need, we reduce the likelihood of pets being sent to us. As with all things, prevention is better than cure!



We are also about to launch a lottery which is our biggest project for this year. People can sign up for £2 per week, which is less than the cost of a cup of coffee. They are entered into a draw to win £10,000 every week, which is not to be sniffed at (pun intended)!

We can't wait to re-open to the public and to launch Bee Fest! We are now home to the Newcastle Bee Keepers Association, so we are going to run an event at our centre in Benton to teach people about the importance of bees to biodiversity, as well as having a fun time at the centre!

## How can people get involved?

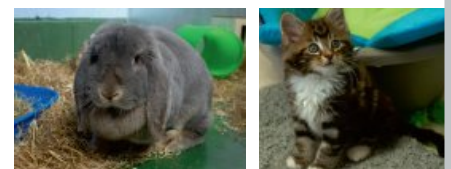
We have a corporate Shelter Heroes programme that companies can get involved in as a Bronze, Silver, Gold or Platinum member. We also still have seats left at our Paws and Prosecco black tie event in November which includes a doggy fashion show.

We are in the process of adapting our former café into a area available for team-building, with furry friend- cuddling break-out sessions included (great for wellbeing and mental health) and finally, of course people can get involved by following us, sharing our content on social media and some good old-fashioned volunteering and donations, no matter how big or small!

## Finally- what's the best piece of advice you have ever been given?

Your forever home is out there, you just need the right team to find them for you.

**To get involved with Newcastle Dog & Cat Shelter, please contact:**  
**Email: [info@dogandcatshelter.com](mailto:info@dogandcatshelter.com)**  
**Tel: 0191 215 0435**



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# VIDA CREATIVE REFLECT ON A SUCCESSFUL FIRST QUARTER

After virtually doubling turnover and team size, including the appointment of design director Chris Stephenson in 2021, bespoke website, marketing, and branding agency Vida Creative reflect on the first quarter of 2022.

Ouseburn based Vida Creative specialise in the creation of high impact websites, brands and creative campaigns for clients in various industries, including tech, events and charity.

This year so far, the Vida team has moved into an office space at the Toffee Factory to support with growth and are hard at work on several exciting new projects.

Active projects include a new website build for leading regional youth development charity NE Youth and an ongoing project with intelligent learning platform creators, sub-10. Earlier this month a full rebrand and new website went live for regional fitness experts, Momentum.

The team are also busy designing with Soccer Aid for UNICEF, having successfully supported with 2021's event.

Co-founder Ellen Hedley said, "2022 so far has been really rewarding for our agency, we have a fantastic team, who've remained resilient over the last few years, new clients and the opportunity to



Ellen Hedley and Chris Stephenson

work on some really amazing projects.

"We've settled into our own space and it feels like we're more creative and driven than ever. I'm very proud of our performance so far, time has flown by.

"Demand for our support has continued to increase thanks to our agency gaining more presence across the UK, recommendations, and our first award win. Last year we were delighted to win a culture award with theatre, drama and

creative learning charity Mortal Fools for our work together on the digital, children's mental health programme Melva.

"We're really looking forward to seeing some of our current branding, design and web projects out in the wild later this year."

**If you'd like to find out how Vida could support your business, please visit [vidacreative.co.uk](https://vidacreative.co.uk)**

Paul Fraser



• **The Northern Echo's former Chief Football Writer Paul Fraser aims to raise the profiles of clients**

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Lizzie Selby

# RISING STAR

## LIZZIE SELBY

Managing Director, Peachy Digital

### What were your career ambitions growing up?

I wanted to be everything under the sun! The common theme was a teacher, but when it came down to it I just didn't know and happened to fall into marketing by chance – it turned out to be my dream job.

### Tell us about your current role?

I am the founder and managing director of Peachy Digital, so I look after lots of operational things like invoicing, insurance and HR, but also work actively on client accounts – no two days are the same and that's one of the many things I love about it.

### What is the most challenging aspect of your job?

I would say keeping abreast of the constant changes – we need to really have our finger on the pulse and be ahead of updates to social media platforms, trends and so on to ensure that we keep our clients' marketing proactive rather than reactive. Having said that, we also love the ongoing research and study that this requires!

### What's your biggest weakness and how have you managed this?

I am terrible at saying 'no'. Outside of work I have a busy, blended family and from time to time my husband will remind me to switch off the laptop and just relax. I definitely over work myself, but only because I absolutely love what I do – I've been working on this, though and we now have dedicated 'tech free' time when I'll bake or do crafts with the children, get outside with them and so on.

### What are you currently working on?

We've just launched a campaign with Go Racing in Yorkshire and our client McIvors to find 'the Yorkshire Wonder Horse' – as a horse lover it's the dream project. We've also got some exciting product launches with Vale of Mowbray which have involved lots of taste tests – we love it.

### Tell us about your team?

Lindsay is from a marketing background and was able to hit the ground running – she looks after a number of client accounts and is a fantastic, creative writer. She's definitely an ideas person, too which is super helpful. We also have Chloe who works remotely and heads up content creation whilst studying her Masters degree in poetry and poetics. She's also been given an unconditional place on a PhD course – we're exceptionally proud of her!

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

Employ the right people and look after them. It's so true – I need my team to be able to do the work we do and do it well – I'm lucky to have two great people alongside me and they've helped us go from strength to strength.

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

In business, I really admire many people but one example I come back to time and time again is Gordon Ramsay. He came from an underprivileged background and has achieved great success, giving his family many opportunities he didn't have while growing up. Outside of business, Jennifer Lawrence – she's a brilliant model for women and young girls, championing 'real' bodies and independence.

### Where do you see yourself in five years time?

I would love to have grown the team further and be working with more businesses, too. We have an incredible client base and they are all brilliant to work with, so to do more of the same would be peachy!

### How do you like to unwind outside of work?

Cooking is my 'jam' – I absolutely love food and love being creative with it. Stick a few tunes on, pour a glass of red and just get lost in whipping up something tasty.

### Favourite Book and Bookset?

My favourite book of all time is *Rebecca*, by Daphne du Maurier – it grips me every time. As a set, the *Scarpetta* books by Patricia Cornwell as I love the twists and turns.

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

“

...cooking is  
my 'jam', I absolutely  
love food and love  
being creative with it...



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

NE Youth celebrated International Women's Day in style with a fundraising Bottomless Brunch and lots of female solidarity.

**Its been two years since they held their last in- person event so all the ladies were raring to go! Anna Foster from BBC Newcastle co hosted the event and interviewed Lindsey Southern, one of the charity's main youth workers to give a bit of insight about the work she, and her colleagues did over lockdown.**

The event was supported by Vibrant Thinking and David Gray Solicitors.

Lucy Mead, Partner at David Gray's commented: "David Gray are once again pleased to be able to sponsor this annual IWD event and support the women and young people of the North East. It is great to see people coming together once again for the collective good after a difficult couple of years."

Money raised will go towards workshops to support young girls and women across the North East. One of NE Youth's members- Bright Futures held a march on International Women's Day to reclaim the streets. Its almost one year since the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard and calls for more to be done to improve women's safety have been echoing strong since her death.

Bright Futures is a charity working to educate and empower young women wanted to do something positive on IWD so they organised a 'Girls Standing Up' march where women and girls came together in South Shield to say they fed up of still feeling scared.

Hannah Woodward, a youth worker from Bright Futures said: "There's a general consensus a lot of the girls feel scared of being in the community or feel nervous of being in the community. The whole idea for the march was the girls wanting to make a stand and reclaim their community space and reclaim their hometown and be proud to be female."

Kim McGuinness, Police and Crime Commissioner attended the march to encourage and support all the young girls and women who took part.



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# DIGITAL FIRM SETS £30,000 TARGET FOR TRIPLE CHARITY CHALLENGE

Staff at Darlington's White Digital are planning to raise £30,000 to donate to three charities over the next 12 months: County Durham and Darlington Foundation Trust (CDDFT) charity, COCO and Maia Mouse Foundation.

Managing director of the digital marketing agency Douglas Dinwiddie said: "We've picked three very different causes, but the organisations' values really resonate with our team - we can't wait to host fundraisers throughout the year to support the charities."

"CDDFT charity, for which we'll be participating in an 'It's A Knock-Out' competition, is focused very much on our local hospital and community teams, helping to provide medical equipment, services or training that would not be available to the NHS other than through charitable funding."

"I'm going to be trekking Machu Picchu to raise money for COCO, which provides sustainable sources of quality education to children living in poor and marginalised communities."

"Lastly, we're also going to be hosting a charity golf day for the Maia Mouse Foundation, which raises money to provide equipment and experiences for children with life-limiting illnesses, a cause very



L-R: Operations Manager Mike Dodgson, Managing Director Douglas Dinwiddie, Strategy Manager Kathy Barrett and Commercial Manager Charlie Butlin.

close to our Commercial Manager Charlie Butlin's heart."

The foundation was set up by Charlie's sister-in-law, Gemma Baum, and her husband Joe, after their daughter Maia was diagnosed with an extremely rare cancer at just six months old.

Between her diagnosis and her death at 11 months, Gemma and Joe filled Maia's life with trips and adventures and set up a foundation in her name to help other families in the same position.

Joe, a director at professional services firm Deloitte, said: "The Maia Mouse Foundation is available to all parents of children with life-limiting illnesses to support them financially, whether that's through paying for equipment or adaptations to their home, or to a trip of a lifetime."

"A company like White Digital reaching out really

helps to raise the profile of the charity. All the support the team have given us is amazing and has allowed the charity to build, grow and flourish."

Freya Clark, fundraising officer at COCO, said: "We are absolutely thrilled to be one of three chosen charities that White Digital will be fundraising for in 2022. We are incredibly grateful for their support."

Pat Chambers, charity development manager at CDDFT, said: "We're absolutely delighted that White Digital have chosen us as one of their charities for 2022. Their support is fabulous news and will help so many patients."

**To donate to any of the above events, visit [www.gofundme.com/f/maia-charity-golf-day](http://www.gofundme.com/f/maia-charity-golf-day), [www.gofundme.com/f/nhs-white-digital](http://www.gofundme.com/f/nhs-white-digital) or [www.gofundme.com/f/dougs-trek-to-machu-picchu](http://www.gofundme.com/f/dougs-trek-to-machu-picchu).**



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## WORKING SMARTER, NOT HARDER

This month, Veronica Swindale, MD of nesma, met with Kate Simpson, MBE, Executive Coach. Kate runs a coaching business in the North East aimed at helping manufacturing leaders to win at work by developing personal strategies to work smarter, not harder.



Veronica Swindale



Kate Simpson, from K8 Coaching & Consultancy

### What does working smarter mean in practice?

In my experience, very capable managers often get in their own way. This is particularly true when they are very busy, under pressure, or dealing with difficult external issues such as labour shortages.

We work on what I call the four elements of success. Firstly, how we look after ourselves: for example, how we manage to exercise, eat well, and spend time with the people who are important to us. Next, we work on what we need to do to clarify our jobs and clearly understand what we get measured on. Thirdly how we manage ourselves: this often includes things like controlling our email mountains, prioritising, and managing our time and energy. We can then concentrate on the fourth element, what do we need to do to become a high-performing leader leading a high-performing team.

We also often work on skills that I would call 'quick wins', such as planning, preparing, and becoming experts in our work.

### I know that you have recently completed an MA in Coaching at the University of Northumbria and that as part of that degree, you have done some detailed research into how we connect online. Can you tell me a little more about that?

My research looked at how coaches build rapport and how that changed when we moved online in 2020. To summarise my findings in one short phrase, I found that 'it is the same but different'.

Specifically, when working online, we still use the same essential skills to build rapport. We work to build the belief in our clients that our work is client-focused and will deliver results for them. You can distil these actions into four key activity groups: pre-coaching actions, nonverbal cues, verbal cues and managing the physical coaching environment.

The differences moving online could be categorised into several key themes. Namely adjusting our basic rapport building skills to accommodate the differences between face-

to-face and the online environment, managing technology, paying attention to coach and

client issues (such as breaks and start-up rituals) and being creative in replacing lost physical coaching tools.

**You were awarded the MBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List 2020. What was that for, and how did the pandemic impact it?**

The award was for voluntary service to the Armed Forces. I have been involved with the North of England Reserve Forces and Cadets Association since 2005. The NE-RFCA is the organisation that provides important links between our military forces and the local community. It raises awareness of the benefits to the country, employers, and individuals of both the Reserve and Cadet Forces.

My role as Vice-Chair, Engagement has included providing a civilian perspective on the significant work we do and contributing to our work over the years to influence individual, employer, and government approaches to reservists and cadets.

Being awarded the MBE was the experience of a lifetime. The pandemic delayed the announcements; the ceremonies were moved from Buckingham Palace to Windsor Castle and made more Covid friendly. The day I received my award was both very intense and a bit of a blur, with the highlights including being in the State Rooms in Windsor Castle, meeting Princess Anne and going to Eton for a glass of fizz to celebrate.



**What do you think have been the major benefits and drawbacks of everyone working online over the past two years?**

From a coaching perspective, my research found that the move online was far more straightforward than many expected.

Coaching online has proved to have its own advantages, which have included both the obvious benefits, such as reduced travel time, and the less obvious, such as the fact that, managed carefully, online coaching can be more confidential and intimate than traditional coaching.

Personally, though, I believe we gain from connecting with one another face to face, which is what we have lost, and will continue to lose, if we stay exclusively online.

**So, what should we aim to do differently moving forward?**

I firmly believe that our best future is hybrid. We need to find ways to take what we have learned about connecting electronically and combine it with the power of working together to get the best of both worlds.

**Reading this may have sparked your interest to look for personal development opportunities. You will find the CIM Marketing Leadership Programme is a postgraduate level course that encourages creative and strategic thinking to respond positively and innovatively to market challenges. It is suitable for senior marketers and managers, business owners and consultants.**

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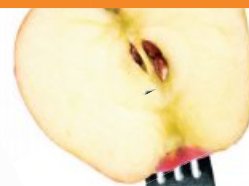


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the  
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brand name here)

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”

**#abitlikeshit**



## MONTANE INSPIRE LOCAL TALENT TO DESIGN SUSTAINABLY WITH UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Northumberland-based clothing brand, Montane, has worked in conjunction with Northumbria University to inspire fashion design students to develop a collection of products that focus on sustainability, up-cycling and regeneration in the fashion and textile industry.

Montane and Northumbria University built upon an ongoing relationship to develop a project brief for final year students with the aim of re-using and recycling offcuts from Montane items that had come to the end of their life. As part of the 'Think. Future. Design.' exhibition, students developed items free from commercial constraints and instead recycle garments and design with creative freedom, all while focusing on the importance of sustainability in fashion.

Students from the Northumbria Fashion Design and Marketing course took fabric, trims and insulation previously used for Montane jackets and backpacks, and created a range of items from cushions, through to accessories and clothing. The final projects were shown as part of London Graduate Fashion Week, with many fashion houses and sporting companies attending the event.



Montane's Senior Apparel Designer, Keith Cheung, commented: "Sustainability, renewal and upcycling has never been so prevalent in the industry. It has been fascinating working with the lecturers and students at Northumbria University and seeing the creative and innovative approach of the final year students. At Montane we focus on making sustainable choices when we design our products, and it is important that we encourage young designers to develop a similar mindset when creating new collections. As a testament to the design process, one final piece was even worn by a runner to complete the Montane Lakeland 100 race."

## SUNDERLAND COLLEGE'S NEW ESPORTS PARTNERSHIP TO DEVELOP FUTURE TALENT

Sunderland College has announced a unique new partnership with the British Esports Association (BEA), which will develop future talent and support Sunderland in becoming a global hub for esports.

The college and the national association will combine their expertise to offer young people and adults the opportunity to gain the skills, knowledge and qualifications to prepare for a career in the rapidly growing esports industry and be at the forefront of new developments.

The esports courses will be delivered at a new National Esports Performance Campus (NEPC) in Sunderland from this September.

The multi-million-pound arena, opposite the Stadium of Light at Riverside Sunderland, will become a centre of excellence, providing state-of-the-art facilities, training and investment that will support Sunderland, the North East and the UK to become globally-recognised and capable of attracting and developing the world's best esports talent.

Students will have access to dedicated esports



classrooms, performance rooms, streaming booths and an arena space. The new campus will also play host to regular esports events, community tournaments and summer camps and will also be used as a training base for the GB esports team.

Toni Rhodes, Principal of Sunderland College, said: "We are delighted to be working in partnership with the British Esports Association to ensure our students gain the best experience to prepare them for a career in this dynamic, growth sector."



## POPULAR HEAD OF TOP YORK SCHOOL TO RETIRE

The Head of one of York's top schools has announced his retirement in a letter to parents today.

Chris Jeffery, Head of Bootham School, told of his "very mixed feelings" at sharing the news that he would be retiring from teaching at the end of the 2022-23 academic year, which is also the school's bicentenary year.

He added "It has been a genuine privilege to have been trusted to lead Bootham since 2016 and to have seen it safely and successfully through some unforeseeable and particularly testing times".

Chair of Governors, David Stanton said "Chris Jeffery has been an outstanding Head of Bootham. It is fitting that his leadership should be acknowledged in our very latest inspection report with a rating of excellent for both pupils' achievement and personal development. The whole Bootham Community wish him all the very best for long and fruitful further endeavours when retirement from teaching eventually comes in August next year."

Mr Jeffery, who is a graduate of the University of York and worked as a singer and songwriter based at St Michael-le-Belfry Church in the city before going into teaching, will have been a Headteacher for more than 18½ years by the time he retires, having led The Grange School in Northwich, Cheshire before returning to York.

He concluded by thanking the parents "for all the support that I and the Bootham Community have received from so very many of you in my tenure here, and I look forward to the rest of my time at this wonderful school."

The Governors have now embarked on their preparations for the search for a new Head.



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**...We have created  
an environment  
where students are  
heard and its normal  
to be aspirational  
and successful. ...**

# "WE ARE NOT ON A JOURNEY TO OUTSTANDING, WE ARE ON A JOURNEY TO WORLD-CLASS"

How one principal is changing perceptions one student at a time.

**Sarah Holmes-Carne, Principal of Kenton School is standing proudly in front of a wall of alumni posters in the corridor next to her office. On the wall of fame there are human rights activists, Olympic athletes, lawyers, Oxford graduates, musicians and actors.**

"Aren't they amazing?!" she says enthusiastically. "I always tell my students, this isn't my school, it's theirs. I am just lucky enough to work here."

I didn't always want to be a teacher. I was a Forces child and I was unsettled until I went to secondary school in Middlesbrough. I was the first person in my family to go to university but when I got to Leicester University it was a real eye-opener for me. Everyone else was far more advanced than me and benefitted from a much more rounded education. I think that was a pivotal moment."

After university Sarah went into Geology but felt unfulfilled. It was only when she went back into higher education to do a Masters in Geology and Micropalaeontology and spent nine months at Pennsylvania State University as an Environmental Educator that the penny dropped.

"I was 25/26 at the time and I rang my Dad and just said I know what I want to do. I want to teach. I spent two years in secondary school with my old teachers, before moving to schools that had complex challenges, which is where I found my moral purpose. I am absolutely convinced (and have seen first-hand) that education is the key to social mobility."

Sarah took over the top job at Kenton School in 2016 after an eight-year stint as deputy head and she is determined to change perceptions.

"We are not on a journey to Ofsted outstanding. We are on a journey to world class", she says without hesitation.

"We need to equip our students with the skills to compete on a global scale and put the North East on the map. Our students have the talent, the personality and the work ethic to go far in any company and it's our job to instil in them the aspiration that they are world class- which they are."

So how is she going about achieving this?

"It hasn't been easy. I started the job in 2016 and was hit with an Ofsted report that threw up some concerns."

In addition to introducing a full and seamless curriculum and solid staff training, the school has also introduced a careers service which Sarah describes as 'really really amazing'. But most important perhaps is

the opportunity for students to shape their own school through democratic processes such as school council.

"The pride our students have in the school is, in my opinion, nothing short of amazing. We cast a vote about what uniform they wanted to wear. I was rooting for an overcoat with an embroidered logo and guess what they chose? A blazer like an independent school. They wanted to feel part of something."

And now she's tackling perceptions with a new student recruitment campaign aimed at raising awareness with parents in the area.

"The perception that some parents have of our school is wildly different from the experience of our students, which is what our new campaign is all about. Our students are really going places, from top tier universities, medical school and law school to far flung places like Dubai and South Carolina and they are successful on stage, screen and even in Westminster. They are our greatest advocates and we find that once someone comes here, more than likely their siblings and relatives follow."

We interviewed a cross-section of our students in Year 7 and Year 13 and the main words that came out of the interviews were 'support', 'family' and 'community'. That was probably my proudest moment. The only question I ever ask myself is 'would this be good enough for my children?' And if the answer is no, it's not good enough for Kenton."

But she's not alone in her mission.

"We are part of a multi-academy trust and we are lucky to have a great support system. We have an exceptional board of trustees from within education and the private sector, allowing us to tap into know-how across a range of subjects. We welcomed a new CEO in 2021 whose experience spanning decades is already making a significant difference to our operational strategy."

Students get one chance at a world-class education and they have every right to demand that from us. We have created an environment where students are heard and it's normal to be aspirational and successful. And when I say we, I mean them. After all, it's their school."

[www.kenton.newcastle.sch.uk/goingplaces](http://www.kenton.newcastle.sch.uk/goingplaces)

## From Kenton to veterinary medicine

"You wouldn't believe the support I have had with preparing for interviews."  
Katherine - Year 13

Dedicated UCAS support and that extra pair of eyes. Just one of the reasons Kenton students are going places.

Find out more

## Doctor in the making

"The teachers made me feel at home. They always take the time to explain things."  
Mehrad - Year 7

Supporting their curiosity from day one. Just one of the reasons Kenton students are going places.

Find out more

## Lawyer in the making

"I love how well-structured it is. You go from one lesson straight into another, there is no waiting around."  
Adeeb - Year 7

Structure from day one. Just one of the reasons Kenton students are going places.

Find out more

## From Kenton to medical school

"Since moving to Kenton my grades have improved because I am not being distracted. Now I am applying to do medicine."  
Hafsa - Year 13

Taking the time to understand the individual. Just one of the reasons Kenton students are going places.

Click to find out more





# BOOKS ARE THE TREASURED WEALTH OF THE WORLD

By Simone Niblock, Headteacher, Durham High School.

On the way to Bamburgh during half term, my husband and I stopped off at Barter Books in Alnwick. As I gazed in rapture at the inviting rows of pre-loved books, and eyed up a limited edition of *The Waste Land*- a mere snip at £2,500 - it led me to think about how books have shaped my life and how many hours I must have spent over the years in bookshops and libraries, a habit that was formed from the age of about two, when I visited our local library for the first time.

**I was fortunate to have grown up about two hundred yards away from this library, and it was the perfect babysitter for my mother when she had her hair 'done' at the local hairdresser, as ladies of a certain era were wont to do.**

Moreover, just after half term, the School Librarian asked me to say what my favourite book was for a display for World Book Day. I started to say *Pride and Prejudice*, which is largely true, as it the book I have read the most times- at least 23 - and relied upon as the ultimate comfort book in times of illness or duress. However, after debating with her for a few minutes, I ultimately said the *Shorter OED*, which sounds pretentious but it's also mostly true: it was the volume that this working class child used constantly in order to extend her vocabulary - sometimes with qualified success. I then went on to think about other books that have been influential in my life, plus books I have not liked so much thus far:

**The book that made me a bibliophile - *Little Women*** by L M Alcott, because of the character of Jo March and her avowed love of reading and writing.

**The series of books that made me laugh the most- *All Creatures Great and Small*** by James Herriot- I will never forget Tricky Woo and Mrs Pumphrey.

**The scariest book I have ever read-** a toss-up here between *The Exorcist* by William Peter Blatty and *Dracula* by Bram Stoker but I will probably go with *Dracula*, as I think the visceral horror that I felt reading *The Exorcist* was probably a vestige of the film version, whereas I had not seen a screen version of *Dracula* that matched the fear of the novel. Definitely not one to have by your bed at night!

**The book that made me cry the most as a teenager - *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*** by Thomas Hardy. I studied this for A Level and taught it several times. I can still weep when I remember when Tess informs Angel Clare of her past life, and how he instantly rejects her.

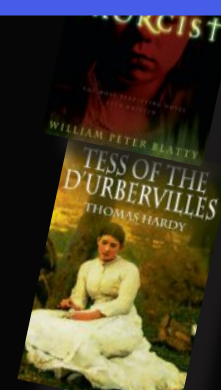
**The book I think is very over-rated - *Where the Crawdads Sing*** by Delia Owens- a literary sensation a few years ago, soon to be released as a film starring Daisy Edgar-Jones. Although I sympathised with the protagonist, I found the ending predictable, and the prose overly descriptive.

**The book I cannot finish - *The Fellowship of the Ring*** by JRR Tolkien and its sequels. As heretical as this may be for Tolkien devotees, I think that life is too short to try and attempt this again, after three abortive attempts over two decades!

**Best novel of the 21st century for me so far:** there are many contenders here, including *The Testaments* by Margaret Atwood, but possibly Bernadine Evaristo's *Girl, Woman, Other*. This is brilliantly evocative, provocative and a worthy joint winner of the 2019 Booker Prize with Atwood.

**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.**

“  
...it was the volume that this working class child used constantly...”







## HONESTLY, JUST BE HONEST

By Kieran McLaughlin,  
Headteacher, Durham School

We have all been shocked at the recent events in Ukraine and the devastating impact Putin's acts of aggression have had on people on both sides of the Russian-Ukraine border. These events provide a challenge for teachers, and parents, in helping children cope with what can be unsettling experiences for them even if they are far away from the events.

**Children react to world events in a huge variety of ways. Some are blissfully unaware of the news; their world is much more local and immediate, with friends and family vastly more real to them than distant figures or events on the television. Some children though, especially older or more mature ones, can surprise you with how much they do pick up from TV or the internet; even children of primary age can have a grasp of who political figures are, if not the subtleties of their political powers or beliefs.**

This war, especially with the associated threat of the use of nuclear weapons, has caused some anxiety or outright fear in youngsters. We as teachers and parents need to help them through that. This can be a challenge; children are amazingly perceptive to mood, and any anxiety or stress that we as adults feel can be transmitted unconsciously to our children. This can even be something as simple as our reactions when we are watching the news. As ever, the pernicious effect of social media can make this more difficult for us. Children can often run into reports of or, worse, hysterical reactions to the ongoing events in the most unlikely of places, and this can serve to stoke their fears more. Our job as parents is to keep a watchful eye on what children are doing and, as with many other aspects of internet use, making sure that avoid any inappropriate material.

The best way I believe to help youngsters, and I'm talking really about those below the teenage



Kieran McLaughlin

years, is to be as honest and as matter of fact as you can. Ask them about what they understand of the situation and how they feel about it. Once you can understand their fears, it becomes more straightforward to deal with them. Shocking and disturbing though the war is, we are still a long way from World War III and this important to stress to children. It is also important to emphasise that the strength of the reaction from the rest of the world, and the excellent work that the humanitarian agencies have done, are making a difference to the innocent people caught up in a war they didn't want. Ultimately, what they are looking for is reassurance and our presence, calmness and general sense of "adulthood" is invaluable in assuaging their fears.

With older children, the challenges can be different. Events such as these produce strong reactions in us all, and teenagers who are coming to terms with the world's problems can find them

hard to deal with. Anger, disbelief and horror are all natural emotions to feel when we see what is happening, and we as parents need to help our children talk through the feelings they may have. Once again, social media can be a breeding ground for hatred and intolerance, and it is a responsibility that falls on us to guide our pupils through this minefield. Radicalisation of online opinions is a real threat for our children and we need to guard against it.

Ultimately the message to our children is the same as the message for us all; we need to demonstrate to an even greater extent the hand of friendship across the continent.

**For further information about Durham School, or to arrange a visit, call 0191 731 9270, email [admissions@durhamschool.co.uk](mailto:admissions@durhamschool.co.uk) or visit [www.durhamschool.co.uk](http://www.durhamschool.co.uk)**



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# PUTTING TOGETHER THE JIGSAW - SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT

By Dan Howard, Director of  
Learning for Work, NCFE.

Skills and employment should go hand in hand. When making decisions on what steps need to be taken to boost employment, we should be looking at how this can be done in conjunction with plugging skills gaps and providing more options for learners and employers.

**However, the UK distinctly lacks a joint-up approach to skills and employment, and as a result the policy that's decided upon often doesn't translate on the ground. Detail such as exactly who needs to be targeted falls through the cracks and there aren't the structures in place to account for the various elements that make up the wider picture of UK employment.**

Part of the cause of this is how skills and employment policies are segmented in the UK. Skills primarily sit with the Department for Education (DfE), while employment is within the Department for Work and Pensions' (DWP) remit. As a result, there is sometimes a failure to identify joint issues and establish a way forward together.

Moreover, DWP puts a substantial focus on job centres, which sit at the heart of their solutions to unemployment. Job centres do a fantastic job of prioritising finding immediate employment but have less capacity to address root causes for unemployment and therefore provide more sustainable, long-term solutions. Although they offer information about training, training often can't be directly accessed through these centres. In contrast, it's interesting to note that the Australian model has 'Skills and Jobs Centres', which help those looking to enter the workforce, start training, re-skill, or for employers looking to meet their workforce needs.



For the UK, a similar two-pronged approach, which ensures people are being equipped with the essential and transferable skills they need to find fulfilling work, is needed. These skills give people options, and options provide the means to reach meaningful employment.

A first glance at recent headlines would suggest that the UK has made great strides in improving employment figures recently, indicating that we're on the right track. And these statistics are great to see. So, why is there an urgent need to address this problem?

These employment figures only tell half the story. Latest stats show the UK employment rate still remains lower than before the pandemic. Alongside this, the economic inactivity rate has increased, which refers to those not actively looking for employment.

Beyond that, there are a number of other issues that have arisen, some as a result of the pandemic. For a start, the disability employment gap has undoubtedly widened during the pandemic, putting disabled people at a greater disadvantage.

Meanwhile, the latest employment statistics show an upturn in NEET young people (those not in education, employment or training). If this trend continues, it will be a cause for serious concern. The Kickstart scheme is finishing soon, which supports a lot of young people into work. What provision will act as a replacement to tackle youth unemployment?

It's important to remember too that the data that comes out every month in terms of the labour market doesn't tell the full story, as it fails to account for those not in the system, or the future pipeline of learners who will soon be reaching the workforce.

How then do we address the inconsistencies

in skills and employment policy to tackle these ongoing challenges?

The Government's efforts to 'level up' the country include commitments to a nationwide skills boost. One of the twelve key 'Missions' in the Levelling Up White Paper outlines a goal that "by 2030, the number of people successfully completing high-quality skills training will have significantly increased in every area of the UK. In England, this will lead to 200,000 more people successfully completing high-quality skills training annually, driven by 80,000 more people completing courses in the lowest skilled areas."

This refreshed approach offers an opportunity to draw together skills and employment policy and ensure that the two are working together towards the same objectives. In the same vein, this culture of collaboration needs to be mirrored across the workings of both sector and political stakeholders. In order to bridge the gap between skills and employment, the Government needs to utilise the expertise of those in the sector - from employers to awarding organisations to training providers.

It's an exciting period in skills, as over the past few years we've seen an increased awareness of their importance and value. Now is the time to embed a skills-based approach to employment and education into policy, so that both employers and learners reap the full benefits.

NCFE was established over 170 years ago to tackle displacement in the labour market and today, we remain as true to that cause as ever - working with a network of collaborators to bring about change and shape smarter solutions so that every individual can ultimately fulfil their potential.

Read more on Learning for Work with NCFE.

[ncfe.org.uk](https://www.ncfe.org.uk)



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Geoffrey Stanford

## FOCUS ON PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

By Geoffrey Stanford, Headmaster

Some young people are highly engaged with current affairs while others rarely follow the news. However, few by now can be unaware of what is going on in Ukraine.

**The images of human suffering are deeply disturbing and the potential for escalation is highly concerning. While there has been conflict in Europe in living memory, not least in former Yugoslavia, the scale of this situation means people are understandably making comparisons with more significant events in history such as the annexation of Czechoslovakia.**

By the time this blog is published, the situation will have evolved substantially even if, as seems possible, it develops into a protracted and messy conflict. Even those not following the news will feel the economic impact of the war as economies are destabilised, supply chains are disrupted and inflation causes prices to rise.

So how should we explain to young people what is going on in the Ukraine? Even though this situation is in a different league, there are clear parallels with how one thinks about the actions of a playground bully and the starting point is to focus on principles and values. In a democratic world the use of force is an unacceptable negotiating strategy but some regimes will use violence to further their aims and appearing weak can encourage further violence. While there are better ways to deal with a playground bully than fighting them, countries can and should maintain defence forces for the protection of themselves and their allies. This was why the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction evolved during the Cold War. This was why the UK committed force to liberating the Falkland Islands and to freeing Kuwait in the first Gulf War. For similar reasons, British Forces have been involved in peace keeping missions in many areas of conflict around the world.

At this stage, there is not yet a parallel with the invasion of Poland and NATO countries are refusing to be drawn into the Ukrainian conflict so we have to admire the continuing resolve of the Ukrainians to defend their country. It is difficult to predict what the final outcome will be but the sanctions being applied on Russia by the UK and many other countries are already having significant impact to the detriment of ordinary people. In all of this, we must stress the importance of upholding and promoting the British values of tolerance, democracy and the rule of law both in working towards the resolution of this conflict and in setting a precedent for the future situations requiring international diplomacy.

Many students will quite rightly want to debate the issues that arise in the coming weeks and months, whether it be the historical significance in a History lesson, the economic consequences in an Economics class, the geopolitical implications in a Geography or Politics discussion and there are clearly ethical dimensions to consider in Philosophy too. Sometimes the joy of working in education is being able to take the opportunity to step away from the confines of the curriculum and the prescriptiveness of a scheme of work in order to facilitate these discussions. As with so many areas of education teachers will be able to challenge pupils to discern fact from fake news, to consider both sides of a question, to support arguments with evidence and to draw evaluative conclusions from weighing up the strength of the arguments in their analysis.

However, pupils must understand that the situation in Ukraine is no mere debating exercise about a hypothetical situation in some far removed country. The events unfolding have very real human consequences and there will be members of our community who have direct connections both in the Ukraine and in Russia. Perhaps the most important message we should communicate to our young people is that they can take meaningful action and, collectively, their individual efforts will make a significant difference. In spite of all the horrors of war, we can teach children about their social responsibility by engaging them in the humanitarian effort to support refugees and show them that they can have a positive impact in the world.

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## MIDDLE EAST EXPANSION FOR DURHAM SCHOOL

**600-year-old school adds third school to international portfolio.**

ONE of the oldest schools in England today announced it will be opening a new school in Dubai this August.

Durham School, founded in 1414 and re-founded in 1541 by King Henry VIII, will establish its new branch school in Dubai Investments Park (DIP), a 32 million square metres development in the Emirate with commercial, residential and educational zones.

When full, Durham School Dubai will educate more than 1,700 students and it is strategically located within the catchment area of the populous communities of Arabian Ranches, Damac Hills, Jumeirah Golf Estates, Jumeirah Village Circle, the Green Community, Motor City and Dubai Sports City.

Durham School Dubai is the latest educational institution in Durham School's expanding international portfolio. It follows the opening of Durham International School, Nairobi in January 2021 and Durham School for Girls, Doha in September 2019.

Mark Atkins has been appointed as the founding



L-R: Kieran McLaughlin with Mark Atkins.

Principal of the new school. Mr Atkins has an impressive 35-year pedigree working in schools and as well as experience in setting up and heading schools in Dubai, he has been involved in developing new schools in the Middle East, India, China, Malaysia and Europe.

Kieran McLaughlin, Headmaster of Durham School, said: "Following the successful opening of Durham schools in Qatar and Kenya, we are delighted to announce the opening of Durham School Dubai in August 2022.

"With its strategic location, excellent facilities, competitive fee levels, experienced leadership team led by Principal Mark Atkins and an uncompromising dedication to the quality of education, we are confident that Durham School



Dubai will quickly establish a strong reputation."

The DIP school property has been constructed to the highest standards with a world-class contemporary design, and features a dedicated Foundation Stage section, a primary and secondary classroom complex, with specialist science, art and IT labs, an acoustically designed music performance hall, a large auditorium, a multi-purpose sports hall and a 25-meter indoor swimming pool.

[www.dcsf.org.uk](http://www.dcsf.org.uk)

## NORTHUMBERLAND SECONDARY SCHOOL ANNOUNCES MAJOR NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH NATIONAL HOUSEBUILDER

Duke's Secondary School (part of NCEA Trust) has announced an exciting new partnership with UK housebuilding giant, Bellway.

**The partnership will see a range of opportunities become available to pupils throughout the school, including employer masterclasses, careers guidance and field visits.**

The partnership is multi-faceted. As well as supporting Duke's Secondary School to deliver the National Career Ready programme, it also forms part of a regional pilot project for Bellway to help introduce young people to the wide variety of career opportunities available in the construction sector, including apprenticeships. If successful in the North East, Bellway intends to roll out its school outreach programme across all 22 of its housebuilding divisions nationwide.

To celebrate the official launch of the project, a cohort of Year 12 students from Duke's Secondary School's Sixth Form provision took part in a Career Ready Masterclass on 'preparation for work experience'. The full-day visit included a tour around Bellway's North East headquarters in Woolsington and also one of its prestigious new build sites near Ponteland.

Danielle Towers, Head of Sixth Form and Careers Lead at Duke's Secondary School, commented: "We are honoured to be working alongside Bellway at



Pupils from Duke's Sixth Form on site at Bellway's new Ottermead development near Ponteland.

the cutting edge of its new school outreach programme.

"What our pupils have been most surprised by since we first established contact with Bellway is the scope of the career opportunities available, beyond traditional trades and construction. For many of them, it has been a real eye-opener into a sector which they might not otherwise have considered."

Laura Bell, Group HR & OD Manager at Bellway, added: "We are absolutely delighted to have the opportunity to partner with Duke's Secondary School. As we strive to help meet the need for more high-quality homes, it is vital that we continue to attract more people to the industry from a diverse range of backgrounds and that we offer them the support and training they need to succeed."

**For more information about Duke's Secondary School and Sixth Form, visit [www.dukes.ncea.org.uk](http://www.dukes.ncea.org.uk) or for more information about careers at Bellway, visit [www.bellwaycareers.co.uk](http://www.bellwaycareers.co.uk)**

# NEWCASTLE SCHOOL FOR BOYS SECURES OUTCOME OF EXCELLENT IN LATEST INSPECTION

Newcastle School for Boys, the Gosforth-based school educating boys aged 3 to 18, were delighted to receive their recent inspection report following a visit undertaken by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) at the School in late January.

The inspection contained two components: educational quality and focussed compliance.

The School were particularly delighted with the outcomes in the educational quality inspection which has awarded NSB the highest gradings, confirming that pupils' academic and other achievements and their personal development were each judged to be in the highest category: excellent.

They were also very pleased that the School met all the regulatory compliance standards as it did in 2017.

Key findings from the inspection identified that:

"Pupil's achievement is excellent as they make significant progress relative to their starting points including those with SEND and EAL."

"Pupils mix extremely well across all schools, being highly supportive of one another due to the strong community and family ethos feel of the school."

"Pupils demonstrate excellent levels of self-confidence, self-awareness, resilience and self-esteem."

Of the report Headmaster, Mr Tickner, said "It is a feature of the ISI inspection framework that it focusses on pupil outcomes, and I am particularly pleased that our pupils' achievements have been recognised in this way. During their visit, the inspection team were keen to understand pupils' experiences first-hand and many of them met and spoke with inspectors.

In achieving these outcomes, I would also like to acknowledge the hard work of our staff as well as the support of parents – including in completing and submitting questionnaires at short notice during the inspection.

Inspection week was a demanding one but offers only a snapshot. Inspection outcomes reflect hard work over a sustained period. We have worked particularly hard to secure the judgement of 'excellent' for our pupils' academic and other achievements.

We are certainly not resting on our laurels and will shortly be announcing the focusses of the School's continued development during the next five years."

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







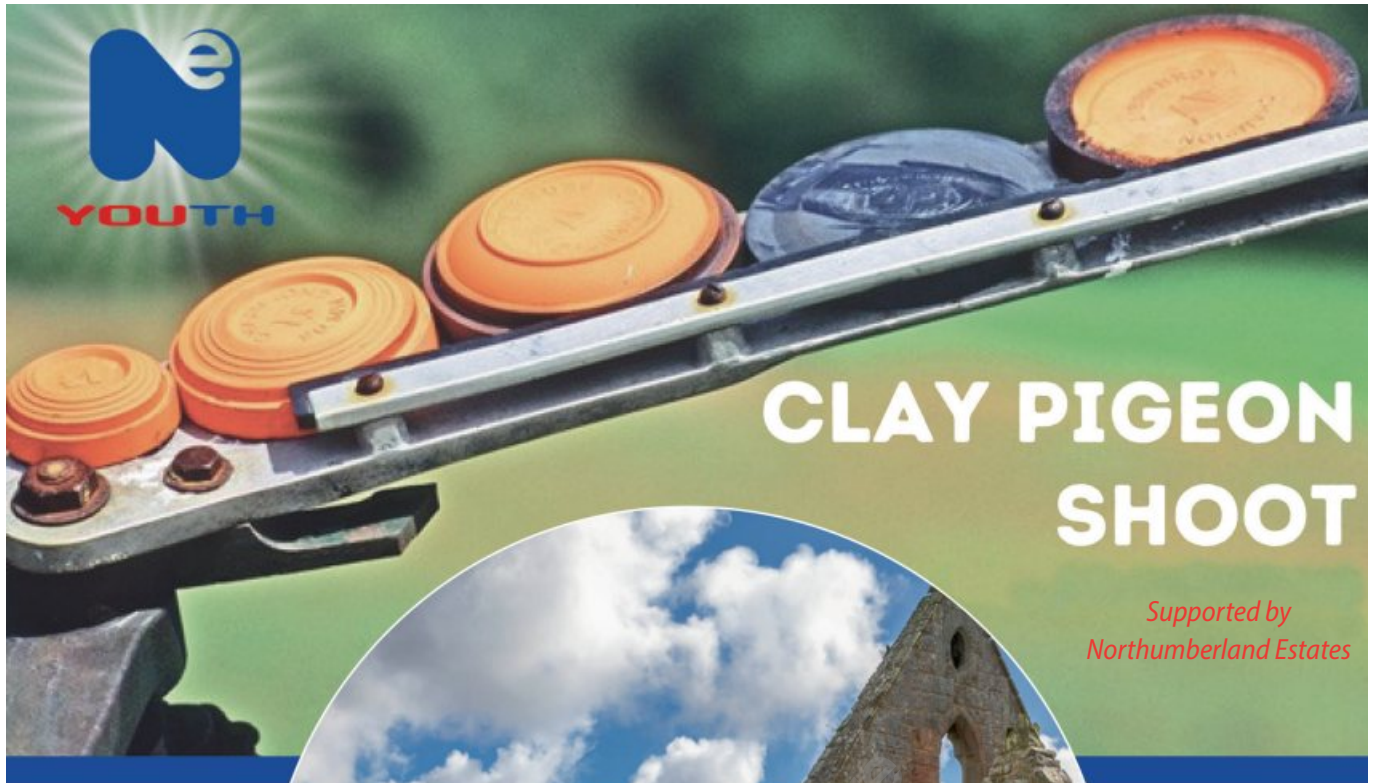

# TASTER WEEK

Monday 16th - Thursday 19th May

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**Come shake a tail feather with the UK's original, award-winning Tina Turner tribute aka Justine Riddoch and her talented cast.**

When Tina burst onto the scene, she won the hearts of music fans from the outset, creating a fearsome reputation for her live performances – and those never-ending legs!

Early hits River Deep – Mountain High, Proud Mary and Nutbush City Limits were just a taste of what was to come. We Don't Need Another Hero, Simply the Best, What's Love Got to Do With It, I Don't Wanna Lose You and When the Heartache is Over propelled her to stadium concert stardom.

Supported by her super-talented band and dazzling dancing girls in sequins, feathers and diamonds, Justine is the ULTIMATE Tina (a National Tribute Awards winner since 2013). She's got the looks, she's got the moves, she's got the legs, but most of all, she's got THE voice. Join an army of loyal fans for a truly authentic, fun-packed musical spectacular!

The show arrives at Blyth's Phoenix Theatre on Friday April 22nd.



## DODGY AND S CLUB ALLSTARS BRING IT ALL BACK TO BEDLINGTON

**Joint headliners Dodgy and S Club All Stars have been announced for this year's Gallagher Park Live Festival at Bedlington.**

Dodgy are best known for their hits "Staying Out for the Summer", "If You're Thinking of Me", and "Good Enough" which reached number four on the UK Singles Chart and is officially one of the most played tracks on UK radio in the last 20 years. The band had 12 Top Forty hits with more than

one million sales worldwide.

S Club Allstars are a mixture of past members of the multi award winning bands of S Club and S Club Juniors. With four UK number-one singles, one UK number-one album, and a string of hits throughout Europe as well as a top 10 hit on the US Hot 100, S Club were one of the most successful groups of the 2000's. Their major hits include Don't Stop Moving, Bring it all Back, Reach and S Club Party.

Funded by East Bedlington Parish Council with contributions from Choppington Parish Council, West Bedlington Town Council, and private donations, the Gallagher Park Live Festival on Saturday July 16 looks set to appeal to all ages and members of the family.

Parish Clerk Ron Thornton said: "We've all missed live performances because of the pandemic. The Parish Council are delighted to relaunch Gallagher Park Live so that the people of Bedlington can enjoy a free, fun, family day out with entertainment for everyone."

Organiser, Mel Jackson of Jigsaw Event Management said: "We promise everyone at Gallagher Park Live at Bedlington a great free day out for all the family."

## BAND WITH ENVIRONMENTAL CREDENTIALS GETS TO WORK WITH THE ANIMALS

**North Shields is fast becoming a musical hub for home grown talent with Radio One favourite L Devine and Brit Award winner Sam Fender storming the charts.**

Now however, a band from the town are heading Stateside after taking the local and national music scene by storm with their distinctive sound combining folk and rock taking its inspiration from nature, industry, and under-represented sections of society.

Hector Gannet is fronted by ex-Middens frontman Aaron Duff. The band's debut album Big Harcar, named after one of the Farne Islands off the east coast, was released in Oct 2020 with song subjects including the geographical and geological formation of Northumbria 'The Whin Sill', and the history of the area 'The Haven of St Aidan's'.

The band have also struck up a unique friendship with the widow of Tyneside music legend Hilton Valentine, the original guitarist in The Animals.

In 2019 Hilton posted on social media about his love for the Hector Gannet song "The Haven of St Aidan's", and when 'Big Harcar' came out in late 2020 he pledged to help the band. Sadly, his passing prevented that, but his widow Germaine was determined to follow Hilton's wish.

She has put them in contact with some of Hilton's professional contacts in the USA and the band will travel to America in April to take part in radio interviews, a video shoot, spend time in the recording studio and perform at a few live dates.



# Blagdon Gallery

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# LIVING ARCHIVE ENABLES GLOBAL CREATION OF SOUND AND MUSIC

A innovative cloud-based platform that enables users to showcase, collaborate and inspire is celebrating facilitating a client's ground breaking, world-first gathering, that encompassed 16 creatives across five different countries.

**Living Archives' client, Borneo Bengkel has brought musicians together from the United Kingdom, Indonesia and Malaysia to digitally collaborate remotely from different countries to create a stunning collection of sound, music and endangered languages to share with the world.**

Using the platform, which makes it easy to upload, organise, curate and exhibit digital multi-media content, Borneo Bengkel opened up entirely new channels of engagement to showcase the work, which they have called Soundbank, connecting with communities and stakeholders across the globe.

The creation which explores the theme "Divided By Lockdowns and Borders, Can We Still Connect Digitally Across Oceans Through Sound?" is now an online interactive exhibition on Living Archive, presenting words, songs and photographs from British, Malaysian and Indonesian collaborators.

The groundwork for the project was started last year when arts organisation Borneo Bengkel organised an online gathering. The collaborators shared their music and creative practice virtually and then uploaded, shared and remixed audio and visuals on Living Archive.

Soundbank, is now an established digital archive and play space of music, visuals and found sound. Living Archive owner Nick John Williams is delighted with the success of Soundbank and that the platform has enabled such an innovative collaboration.

He said: "I developed Living Archive during the pandemic from my base in the North East of England, as a solution to showcase, collaborate and inspire creativity, co-creation and participation across the cultural sector.

"Whether you are keen to promote the full extent of your activities, eager to showcase more of the creativity of participants and stakeholders, or simply need a collaborative hub for your projects, Living Archive makes it easy to tell the whole story of your organisation, the work you do, and the impact that you create.

"The innovative way that Borneo Bengkel have used the platform is to be commended as not only is it a truly engaging exhibition that everyone should visit, it is also a perfect example of the power of Living Archive to catalyse new ways of working. It will raise awareness of the incredible impact projects such as this have for both participants and audiences around the world.

Soundbank brings together musicians exploring folk music with a contemporary twist. The recordings include over five endangered indigenous languages such as Scottish Gaelic,

alongside Dusun and Kayan from Borneo. One of the contributors, Adrian Jo Milang, is a celebrated Bornean cultural practitioner working to revive traditional indigenous songs. He said:

"For many months I haven't been able to visit the community elders who I usually sing with. Taking part in this project, and sharing our music and recordings on the soundbank, gave me a chance to connect with others and see that the work I do is part of a much bigger story of indigenous representation, preserving endangered languages."

The curator of the project, Catriona Maddocks spent 10 years living in Borneo but has returned home to the North East recently. She said:

"The Soundbank project came from the realisation that even though we are so separated from each other, the digital world and Living Archive gives the means and opportunity to connect with people from distant places to create together. As both Borneo and the UK have a rich heritage in folk music, it was the perfect marriage, bringing people together to collaborate in an innovative way via this amazing platform."

Soundbank is supported by the British Council's Connections Through Culture grant. It can be viewed on [www.borneobengkel.com/soundbank](http://www.borneobengkel.com/soundbank).

**More information on Living Archive is available at [livingarchive.net](http://livingarchive.net)**







## EPIC NIGHT AT THE SUNDERLAND EMPIRE

By Holly Grahamslaw

With the multi-award-winning production of *Dreamgirls* taking to the stage at the Sunderland Empire in early March, I recently visited the venue with my family to sample its corporate box experience, and what a treat it was.

**Opening its doors over 100 years ago, the Sunderland Empire remains one of the North East's largest premier entertainment venues, boasting a capacity of 2,000. Despite refurbishment and expansion over the years, the Sunderland Empire maintains its traditional red and gold colour scheme and ornate décor, and welcomes touring musicals, operas, ballets and huge West End productions.**

Situated in the heart of Sunderland city centre, the easily accessible venue is surrounded by a range of restaurants, bars and pubs, which customers

can enjoy before or after their visit.

Operated by Ambassador Theatre Group, visitors to the Sunderland Empire can choose from a range of corporate experience packages, which include entry to the VIP Ambassador Lounge up to 90 minutes before the show and during the interval, an extensive drinks and snacks selection, excellent table service, house programmes and use of the private cloakroom and washroom facilities. What a treat!

Upon arrival, we were swiftly ushered to the sophisticated Ambassador Lounge and were instantly impressed by the venue's atmosphere. With plush velvet seating, ambient lighting and a cosy, intimate feel, the lounge oozed luxury and opulence in abundance. The venue also had its own red carpet, which really added to the VIP experience.

Feeling thirsty, we kicked off proceedings with some delicious glasses of rosé, although customers can enjoy various drinks, including Champagne if you are really pushing the boat out. In the lounge, we also noted the venue's excellent hospitality, with friendly, attentive staff who offered exceptional table service and were happy to accommodate to our needs.

We were then escorted to one of the four private Ambassador Boxes to enjoy the show. Offering prime positioning at the Dress Circle level, the Ambassador Box really enhanced the theatre experience, which was similarly furnished with a red carpet, glamorous décor and sophisticated seating. Accompanied by yet more rosé, we sat back to relax and watch the show of *Dreamgirls* unwind.

Featuring the classic songs 'And I am Telling You I'm Not Going', 'Listen' and 'One Night Only',

*Dreamgirls* premiered in the UK in the West End in 2016 after 35 successful years on Broadway. *Dreamgirls* tells the story of the Dreams - three talented young singers - and follows their musical journey through fame, fortune, friendship and the harsh realities of show business in the 1960s, a notable time of revolution within American music history.

Directed and choreographed by Olivier and Tony Award winner Casey Nicholaw, the show stars the brilliant Nicole Raquel Dennis as Effie White, a 2019 finalist on the Voice who impressed viewers with her performance of 'And I'm Telling You' with Jennifer Hudson, who similarly took on the iconic role of Effie in the 2006 motion picture adaptation of the show.

Watching the show, the enticing plot and iconic musical numbers had us reduced to both laughter and tears. We were also enamored by the actors' vocals, which I have to say were some of the most impressive I have ever seen on stage. Coupled with the luxurious ambience of the Ambassador Box, it is safe to say this was an unforgettable night.

Overall, the corporate box experience offered a fantastic evening of musical entertainment, excellent hospitality and sophisticated surroundings. Whilst it was great to do as a family, the experience also provides the opportunity for businesses to entertain clients, with a host of corporate packages available. If you are looking for a night to remember, the Sunderland Empire is really adding the edge to the theatre experience.

**For further information on booking your Corporate Hospitality Package please visit [www.atgtickets.com/theatre-packages/ambassador-lounge](http://www.atgtickets.com/theatre-packages/ambassador-lounge)**



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Joanne Johnson, Theatre Director.





# TYNE THEATRE & OPERA HOUSE – A THEATRE FOR EVERYONE

The Tyne Theatre & Opera House has been entertaining audiences from the North East and beyond for over 150 years, continuing to go from strength to strength as one of the region's most loved venues.



**Providing a wide selection of musicals, pantomimes, plays, comedy, performances from leading bands and solo artists, the venue also provides opportunities for up-and-coming entertainers to showcase their talents.**

"Since the Tyne Theatre & Opera House first opened its doors, it has continued to make live entertainment available for everyone," says Theatre Director, Joanne Johnson. "The Theatre was built in 1867 by industrialist & politician Joseph Cowen. It was a time when life was hard and when the warmth, light and escapism of the theatre answered a major need for the workers. The Theatre was built for these people, making the arts and entertainment accessible for all, not just the elite. We're proud to say that this remains our ethos today, providing a packed programme of events with something to appeal to everyone."

So, what's coming-up at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House? There's comedy from Jack Dee, Harry Hill, and Sara Pascoe; theatre productions including *Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em*, *Dead Lies*, and *Priscilla Queen of the Desert*; music from *The Unthanks*, Gilbert O'Sullivan, and Howard Jones; as well as family entertainment from *In the Night Garden* and Justin Live. Plus, this Christmas, Tyne Theatre Panto return to the stage with *Beauty & the Beast*. If there's nothing here that sparks your interest, we can guarantee there will be something in their varied programme that you'll love..

And if you'd like a peek behind the scenes of the Theatre, there are organised tours which take place every month, exploring areas of the theatre that are rarely seen by the public. The Theatre is a Grade 1 listed building and proudly retains many of its original features, including under-stage wooden machinery. The Theatre has also stayed true to how the Victorians produced sound effects with a wind machine and a fascinating wooden chute which, when you roll a large ball along it, creates a sound like thunder.

"The Theatre is an independent, not for profit venue," adds Joanne. "We're owned by the Preservation Trust and operated by its subsidiary company. We're not funded, and we receive no subsidies. All profits are reinvested into the Theatre, helping to restore and preserve the venue for future generations. We survive on our audience's support, whether that's sponsoring a seat, joining our Friends of the Theatre Club, buying drinks at the bar or making donations. Our main source of revenue, however, has and always will be, people coming along to the Theatre and buying a ticket to a show. Obviously, the COVID pandemic was very difficult for us because we had to close for 18 months, but now we're back on our feet and have a packed programme for the rest of the year."

Want to be the first to hear about upcoming shows, ticket offers and venue news at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House? Make sure you follow the Theatre via their social media channels, sign up to their Web Club mailing list, and spread the word!

**For a full list of What's On go to [www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk](http://www.tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk). Here, you can buy tickets, and find more information on how you can support this wonderful venue.**







# CULTURE CLUB



S Rob

## S ROB

Occultist Author

Prolific author S Rob has written and published more than 600 books about the occult. He is a world authority on magick and the paranormal. Here he shares his interests in the world of culture.

### Who is your favourite author and why?

Dianne Bondy because I use her book "Yoga for Everyone" a lot. It's a great book with alternative forms for every position should you find one difficult. The only thing is that I don't do the headstands because I was told by my yoga instructor that doing that is dangerous if you are alone. I often do one of her sequences in the morning.

### What would be your three Desert Island Discs?

Any Ray Charles record, my brother's music – (www.waynerobson.com), he has been played on various radio stations but also because on a desert island I would miss him. Finally, *Bird Lands* by Weather Report. My choices are influenced

from when I played keyboards because that influences you to listen to music more with wider tastes. I never seem to play much now and as a synthesizer is a band instrument it gets difficult over the years to take part because of my writing workload.

### Who is your favourite film star and why?

Sylvester Stallone simply because he became famous from a film that he wrote - *Rocky*. He also has an impressive record as a screen writer and director and owns a production company.

### What are your top three films?

*Big Trouble in Little China* sees the main character Jack Burton helping to get a friend's girlfriend back from a rich occultist. *Ghostbusters* is a fun movie with the main characters setting up a ghostbusting business and ending up saving the world. *Hellraiser 3* sees a mentally disabled child opening a doorway to Hell.

### Which poem left a lasting impression on you?

It was one from school about WW2 and it had the line "*and nobody was left for me*". It was about a person who did not speak up when the Nazis came for others and so when the Nazis went for them there was no one to save them. Life is like that, people keep their heads down until it affects them, when it is too late. Very appropriate now.

### What box sets have you enjoyed?

*Harry Potter* - I don't see Harry Potter as magick at all because it's so different. I view occultism in

films like other people do and not as real magick at all: although I believe that real magick exists. My books go into this in more detail. I'm also a big *Dr Who* fan too.

### Who is your favourite artist or performer?

Chris Walden who is also known as Saul Ravenscraft. We did a podcast and web series together. He is a person that transitioned from magician in the Paul Daniels sense to a performance artist. We have never met but I have seen his work through the show we did called *The World Magick Movement*.

### What is your favourite venue?

I very much prefer to be online.

### Which musical instrument do you particularly enjoy?

Keyboards.

### From the world of Arts and Culture who would be your ideal dinner party guests?

Saul Ravenscraft, The Rolling Stones, Banksy, and Tony Doc Shiels. Tony is one of the creators of bizarre magic or bizarrism. It's an art form that is still quite new (forming in the 1970's). Some of the workers of bizarre magick have used my books for inspiration making me indirectly a part of this art.

**You can find out more about S Rob and his work at [www.srob.co.uk](http://www.srob.co.uk)**

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## BOBBY DAVRO IN PANTO? OH YES HE IS!

He talks to Charlotte Hornby about his appearance as Scarecrow in the Wizard of Oz.

**You will be playing Scarecrow in this year's Wizard of Oz at the Tyne Theatre and Opera house, why are you looking forward to performing in pantomime this Easter?**

I love doing pantomime, it's great fun. It's nice that you can get out there to work with families and be family friendly. I love making the whole family laugh and having a fun time.

**What can audiences expect from your performance of the Scarecrow/what do you bring?**

It's very Worzel Gummidge. I have modelled the Scarecrow on Worzel Gummidge because he was one of my favourite characters. He was just great. It's a lovely pantomime for the family and that is the most important thing. It is for the adults as well. They always have a good time. It's like any good pantomime, full of innuendo that will entertain the adults without being offensive.

**Are you looking forward to working with the cast? (Who are you most looking forward to working with?)**

Yes, Stevi Ritchie. I did Big Brother with him, and he is a talented lad. I'm looking forward to it. Hollie Swain is a lovely singer. We've also got Lewis Denny, he is a Newcastle lad, a Geordie boy. He's very popular in Newcastle, he's coming along and he'll be playing the Lion which is another good part.

**How does this production differ from other productions?**

I think this is our fifth touring show of the Wizard of Oz. We like to change it around and that is exactly what we are doing today. Changing the script, writing new jokes in, so anyone coming to see the show again will be slightly different.



**What is your favourite moment in the show?**

I like it when Scarecrow comes out for the first time. He's such a daft character and the children in the audience always like his silly antics.

**What is it like interacting with the audience members during pantomime, rather than television acting?**

A pantomime is a specialised genre so it's about getting everyone to join in. Everyone knows the rules, "oh yes, it is," "oh no it isn't," "he's behind you" and all those kinds of elements that must be included in Panto.

**How was last year difficult for you when the pandemic closed theatres?**

Yes of course. We didn't have any work for 14 months; it was very tough. Fortunately, production offices like Enchanted had grants that managed to keep them ahead which gives a chance for the actors to be recast and given work because I hadn't worked for 14 months.

**What do you enjoy other than your career?**

I like doing stand-up. I'm a proper comedian and that is what I tend to do most of the year, then pantomime at Christmas and Easter.

**Why should everyone come and see the Wizard of Oz in panto?**

It's fun and it's a great show. Everyone has a really good time. Mum's and Dad's, Granny and Grampa! It's not the movie version of The Wizard of Oz, but it's based on the story of Dorothy going to The Emerald City and meeting the Wizard but with lots of panto fun and interaction added in. It is full of lovely songs and dancing too.

**Tell me something that you have never told another reporter before?**

I really have got straw for brains! Hahaha!... One final thing, I'm really looking forward to coming to Newcastle, Geordie's are class!

[tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk](http://tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk)

**Bobby Davro is performing at the Tyne Theatre & Opera House on Saturday 16th (3pm & 7pm) and Sunday 17th April (1pm & 5pm) 2022. Tickets are priced £20 adults, £18 children & concessions. Family ticket £71 (2+2 or 1+3). Groups 10+ £1 off each ticket, groups 20+ £2 off each ticket (Plus booking fees when booking online or over the booking hotline) Booking Line: 0844 2491 000. (calls will cost 7p per minute plus your telephone company's access charge). Office Line: 0191 243 1171. Email: [info@tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk](mailto:info@tynetheatreandoperahouse.uk)**





## THE LARGEST MUSIC FESTIVAL IN THE NORTH EAST

LooseFest, the largest music festival in the North East has officially announced it's 2022 festival dates. The event will take place on the weekend of Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st of July 2022 with up to 30,000 people expected to attend each day.

**Thanks to a ground-breaking partnership with The Freeman of Newcastle, this year will see LooseFest make history as the largest music festival ever to take place at its new home on Newcastle's Town Moor.**

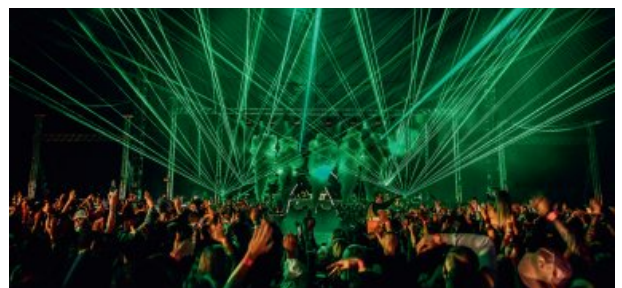
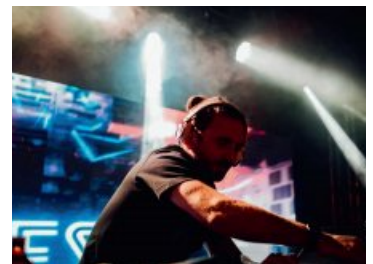
Dwarfing the scale of its 2021 site at Herrington Park in Sunderland, event organisers have vowed to utilise the inner-city green space to put Newcastle and the North East firmly on the UK festival map and offer a welcomed and sustainable boost to the local & wider economies.

The highly anticipated event released a packed phase one line-up to its social media followers on Sunday evening boasting a number of huge acts including the internationally renowned Black Eyed Peas, chart toppers Joel Corry, AJ Tracey and Clean Bandit - plus local legend Patrick Topping heading up an equally impressive tech house line-up with Jamie Jones, Lee Foss & many more.

Over 30,000 people have already signed up for a 24 hour discount pre-sale which will go live at 1pm on Friday 25th March and those wanting to secure tickets are encouraged to register their interest online now at [loosefest.com](http://loosefest.com)

One of the founding members of LooseFest, Simon Sykes said, "We are delighted to be working with some of the biggest brands and artists in the industry and have had an absolutely incredible response to our phase one line-up release this weekend! We've been inundated with messages of support from people right across the country, which we see as an important step towards our ultimate goal of putting the festival spotlight firmly back on the North East for many years to come. So watch this space, it's going to be an amazing weekend of entertainment this year - with multiple all-weather stages, huge festival production, a street food village, a carnival fun fair with a ferris wheel and much more to be announced".

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







## HOTEL LAUNCHES THE CASTLE PRIORITY CLUB

Guests at one of the North East's best loved venues can now drink, dine and stay for less, thanks to a new initiative.

600-year-old Lumley Castle Hotel, at Chester-le-Street, has launched the free-to-join Castle Priority Club.

And not only can members access special offers not available elsewhere, but they can also enjoy early bird invitations to a whole host of events held at the four-star venue throughout the year.

Those who sign up to the Castle Priority Club are sent a monthly newsletter detailing the hotel's latest news and promotions and can choose one of 10 vouchers for treats such as complimentary afternoon tea on arrival or a glass of Champagne before dinner.

There is even the option of a free upgrade on a stay in one of the hotel's 73 lavishly furnished and decorated bedrooms.

Other current offers include free early check-in or late check-out, three nights for the price of two in a courtyard room, a free glass of wine with dinner or Prosecco and chocolates in your room on arrival.

And, for corporate client or families looking to plan a celebration, there is also a voucher offering complimentary room hire for functions for up to 14 people.

The scheme is the brainchild of Lumley Castle's general manager Gordon Cartwright, who said its aim is to reward guests who make their booking directly with the hotel and not through third party booking sites.

"It's also about thanking customers for their loyalty and demonstrating the difference between price and value," said Gordon, a former hotel inspector for the AA, "and our customers are very loyal."

"Many of our guests are third or fourth generation visitors to the hotel and our customer satisfaction figures are among the highest I've ever seen, so we wanted to acknowledge that."

"The Castle Priority Club is our way of giving a little something back."

To join the Castle Priority Club visit [www.lumleycastle.com](http://www.lumleycastle.com)



## ANTHONY RAISES HIS 3000 GLASSES TO COVID RESCHEDULED BEER AND CIDER FESTIVAL

The Newcastle Beer and Cider Festival cancelled two years ago because of COVID will now go ahead and its organiser has 3000 half pint glasses to distribute - all with the 2020 date stamped on them. But Anthony McMullen isn't worried as branding for other postponed events such as the 2020 Olympics was used to good effect and became collector's items.

The huge stock of glasses has been stored in Anthony's home and he is looking forward to

giving away every single one to beer and cider lovers over the duration of the festival.

This year thousands of beer and cider lovers are set to descend on Newcastle from April 6 to 9, to sample some of the UK's finest - and possibly most weird and wonderful - craft beers and ciders. This year, 100 beers and 50 ciders from quirky tiny unique micro-breweries to established names will be on tap at the Northumbria University Students Union building for what's become the biggest showcase of its kind in the region.

"I've become a bit of a beer geek, and for me moderation is the key if you're going to really savour all the wonderful variation in British beers and ciders. I believe we really have the best brewers in the world in this country, and, even with all this excellent talent, the ales coming from the North East take some beating."

For more information, [www.nclbeerfest.uk](http://www.nclbeerfest.uk)



## NEW GIN FOR ROCKLIFFE HALL

Five-star luxury resort, Rockliffe Hall, is delighted to announce their first-ever Rockliffe Hall signature gin in collaboration with local urban distillery, Revelry Spirits, less than 10 miles from Rockliffe Hall.

The gin is expertly distilled, bottled and labelled at Revelry's working distillery, located on a small wynd off the cobbled high street in the historic market town of Yarm. The design of the bespoke label features a contemporary black line drawing of Rockliffe Hall's iconic Old Hall façade which dates to the 1800s and is positioned alongside Revelry's signature bold branding.

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*carehome.co.uk rating 9.9*

## Gosforth



*carehome.co.uk rating 9.4*

## Wallsend



*carehome.co.uk rating 9.9*

Our purpose-built Whitley Bay and Gosforth homes provide our happy residents with spacious, en-suite rooms, as well as gorgeous, landscaped gardens and a range of events and activities. Our kind and caring staff are there to help residents live fuller, more rewarding lives. Both homes are close to local transport links and shops.

This home has been specifically designed to enhance the lives of people living with dementia, with specially-trained staff seeing to our residents' specific needs. The home provides residents with lots of independence, features spacious grounds - including a special reminiscence area - and even has a hair salon, cafe, library and pub!

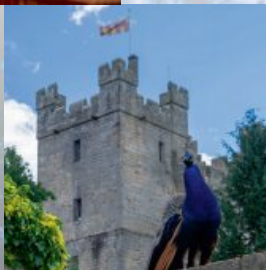
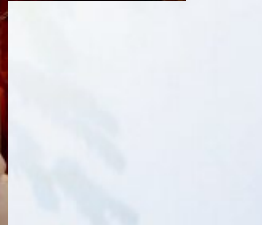
*"We laugh together, we comfort one another. It's absolutely amazing."* A Whitley Bay resident.

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Bob Arora

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## BOB ARORA

Owner and chef from Sachins Restaurant in Newcastle chats to us about the success of his venue in Forth Banks, Newcastle.

### How long have you owned Sachins now Bob?

The restaurant is 40 years old but I have personally owned it for 27 years. We watch generation after generation of families dine with us and they come back week in, week out!

### How did the pandemic affect your business?

It was an awful time for anyone in the hospitality industries and we suffered too. We adapted, which allowed us to launch our Heat and Eat menu, for curry lovers that just couldn't bear the thought of not enjoying their favourite meal but were not allowed to dine at the restaurant. This, to this day, is still a success. We offered a Covid-friendly take-away and delivery service, and, when we were finally allowed to welcome guests in an outdoor setting, we transferred our space outside of the restaurant into a street venue.

### Have the regular diners returned now?

Yes, in their droves and we welcomed them with open arms!

### What is so special about Sachins?

Our clientele is pretty special to be fair! They are loyal, which is what we're all about too. It's give and take in this industry and if you are consistent, by offering good value, excellent food and service, as well as being loyal, moral and ethical, then your customers will return.

### What does the future hold for Sachins?

More of the same, I hope. If it isn't broke, don't fix it and the fact that the North East curry foodies can't seem to get enough of our food, proves that for the last 40 plus years, we must be doing something right! That said, there has been an interest in our outdoor dining again for the spring and summer, which we're considering. As usual though, it will depend on our good old British weather, as that dictates this venture.

### Sachins restaurant

**Forth Banks, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 3SG**  
**0191 232 4660 0191 261 9035.**



*As spring approaches and spring lamb is very much the meat of choice, it's worth being reminded of the delicious foods that can be made easily from this meat. One of my favourite dishes are below, I hope you enjoy them as much as I do!*

### Punjabi Style Lamb Chops

#### Ingredients:

2kg rack of lamb, cut into chops  
10cm piece of ginger, peeled and roughly chopped  
6 garlic cloves • Juice 4 lemons • 2 tbsp garam masala  
1 tbsp paprika • 1/2 cup yoghurt • 1 tsp salt  
1 tbsp chilli powder • 1/4 cup cooking oil

#### Method:

1. In a processor, blend the ginger, garlic and vinegar to make a paste.
2. Take two tablespoons of this paste and add half the lemon juice (two lemons worth), salt, paprika and chilli powder, mix together and rub over the lamb. Allow to marinate in the fridge for 2-3 hours.
3. Mix together the yoghurt, garam masala, curry powder, chilli powder, oil and extra lemon juice.
4. Rub over the lamb and marinate in the fridge for at least three hours or preferably overnight. Grill or barbecue lamb to taste.





# EXPLORING ENGLAND'S MOST DRAMATIC COASTLINE

By Michael Grahamslaw

Isn't it remarkable what the redemptive power of nature can do? One drive into the Northumberland countryside and the stresses of the working dissipate so suddenly.



**This was especially true of our recent stay at the idyllic Beadnell Towers, a lovely boutique hotel which lies at the heart of the coastal village.**

Still glowing from a recent refurbishment, this is a venue really moving from strength to strength with a new GM, Dale Messenger, and new Executive Head Chef, Paul Johnson, who we knew from his days at the exceptional Ship Inn Wylam.

A short drive away from the A1, this easily accessible hotel is popular with holidaymakers and is so acclaimed it was even included in the Sunday Times' 100 Best Places to Stay in 2019.

It's little wonder why with so much to do on the doorstep including miles of golden sand, historic ruins and yes, indeed, a golf course or two!

This sounded just the job for Lisa and I, so we packed an overnight bag and booked in for all Beadnell Towers has to offer. I'm so glad we did.

Checking in around 3 O'clock, we were shown to one of their tastefully appointed new coach house rooms. Uniquely, each room's name is inspired by local parlance. Ours, for instance, was christened the "Muckle House" – Geordie slang for "Big House" with others including "Hen Cree" (Hen House), Hyem and Craa's Nest. Little touches such as this bring a real sense of character to each of the 18 individually decorated rooms with a super kingsize bed, glittering chandeliers and two free-standing copper bathtubs bringing the style. Indeed, the Muckle House proved a real show stopper.

After freshening up, we adjourned for some pre-dinner looseners in the comfortable Hotspur Bar. Here there was a pleasing mix of residents and locals with many enjoying the 2 for 1 cocktail hour in full swing between 3pm and 4pm. This certainly worked up an appetite we ate early evening in the adjacent "Towers Kitchen" restaurant.

The Towers is a stylish space decked out in shades of chocolate and navy with nautical trinkets and an open-kitchen which creating a real sense of spectacle.

As opposed to a fixed offering, the restaurant's menu changes regularly to reflect the seasons and champions the best produce this wonderful county has to offer.

I enjoyed mussels in a stout and orange sauce and Lisa had broccoli and watercress soup with lovely crusty wholemeal bread to accompany.

For main course, I had dry aged sirloin on the bone, with wild mushrooms and cafe de Paris butter with thick cut chips. The more wellbeing conscious Lisa meanwhile continued her New Year health kick with a stunning cod loin served with potato dumplings, purple sprouting broccoli and seaweed & lime butter.

We lingered into the night over an excellent bottle of Merlot before collapsing into bed for a full eight hours sleep which always seems all the more restful after a day in the sea air.

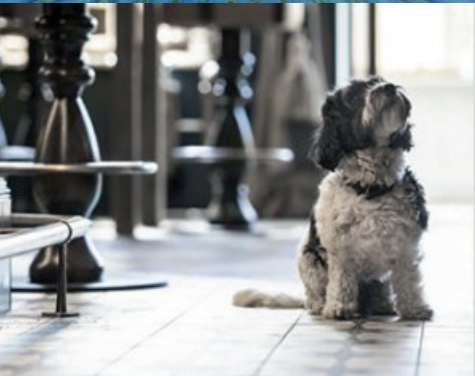
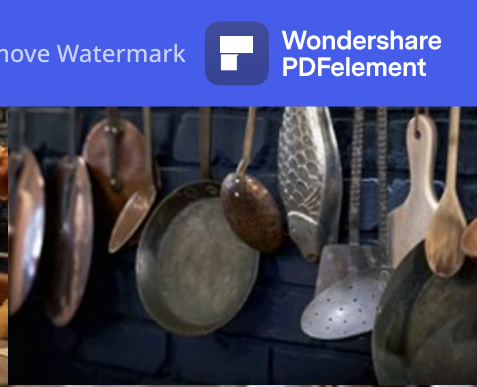
The following morning, we breakfasted regally smoked salmon and eggs before heading home with our mojo replenished and totally ready for whatever the working week could throw at us.

A short walk away from some of Britain's best beaches and spectacular castle's, the Northumbrian fishing village of Beadnell has the hotel to match the county's world class attractions.

**For more information,  
visit [www.beadnelltowers.co.uk](http://www.beadnelltowers.co.uk)**











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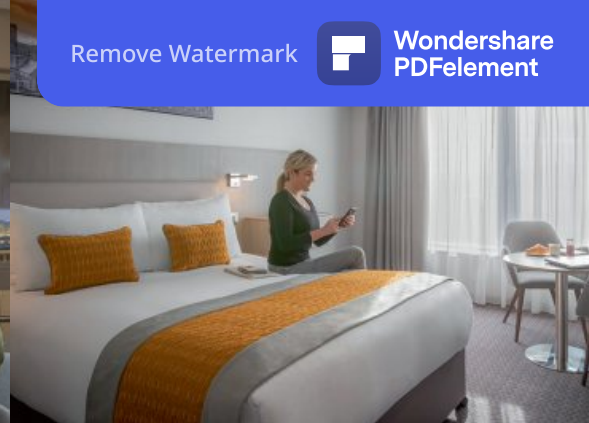
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# MALDRON HOTEL - LUXURY IN THE HEART OF NEWCASTLE

There's a new name appearing on the UK hotel scene...  
and it's making a big impact.



**Dalata Hotel Group is Ireland's largest hotel operator through its ownership of the Maldron and Clayton brands. Over the past few years, they have been expanding rapidly in the UK...and their first UK mainland Maldron hotel was Newcastle..**

The hotel is built on a site that used to be the Newgate Shopping Centre. Work began in 2016 and the Maldron Hotel Newcastle opened for business in December 2018. Since then, Dalata have opened Maldron hotels in Glasgow and most recently in Manchester. With existing Clayton hotels in Leeds, Cambridge, London, Birmingham, Cardiff and Manchester. The company has actually bucked the trend, while other firms were struggling during the COVID pandemic, Dalata expanded. They now have 47 hotels across Ireland and the UK and have taken over their first hotel in Germany. Overall the company has more than 10,000 bedrooms across the estate. Seven more hotels are in the pipeline, either currently under construction or with sites acquired across UK and Ireland.

Maldron Newcastle is a stunning hotel and leading from the front is General Manager Anna Wadcock.

"I'm proud to say that I was here from the building stage right through to welcoming our first guests," said Anna. "In one respect I've gone full circle because my first ever job in the hotel industry was when I was a student in Newcastle and needed a part time job. That job was here on the same site of the Maldron Hotel which was previously the Swallow Hotel (then Quality Hotel) which was once thriving as part of Newgate Shopping Centre. Sadly, the hotel and the shopping centre became very neglected and an eyesore. When the local council decided to redevelop the area, Dalata took the opportunity to establish this wonderful, four-star, luxury hotel."

The location is ideal...three minutes' walk from Newcastle Central Station, close to the Metro system which has a direct link to Newcastle airport, and with Eldon Square, the Theatre Royal, Tyne Theatre, museums and St. James's Park just on the door step. Brilliant.

There are 265 air conditioned en-suite bedrooms including deluxe and executive rooms. They all feature bespoke King Koil beds and a flat screen TV with Chromecast. There's also the Grain & Grill Restaurant bar and courtyard on the ground floor serving Vitality Breakfast, Red Bean Roastery Coffee and wonderful menus throughout the day and night.

There are three meeting rooms with 75-inch 4k resolution screens. The largest room can hold up to 80 people.

There's even a brand-new fitness centre just recently installed.

Has the Maldron Newcastle made an impact? You bet it has, so it was no surprise when it was given a Gold Award for New Tourism Business in the 2020 North East Tourism Awards, as well as being shortlisted for the Large Hotel of the Year in this



year's Awards. The company is also hugely committed to the community and sustainability achieving a Gold Level Award from Visit Britain Green Tourism.

"We're delighted with the way things have gone here at Maldron Hotel Newcastle. The feedback from guests has been terrific with seeing us placed in the top 5 hotels in the city on TripAdvisor. We're ideally based in the centre of Newcastle and are attracting visitors who are here on business or tourists who are using Newcastle as a base to explore the North East. But it's the service from the team that really bring the hotel to life. I have the pleasure of working with an amazing team who work hard to deliver fantastic service to our hundreds of guests everyday"

Another feather in the cap of the hotel...is that when Dalata opened their latest property, Maldron Hotel Manchester City, the General Manager was none other than Carl Davies, who was the Deputy General Manager for the Newcastle opening.

"I'm really pleased for Carl," adds Anna. "He's a big miss here in Newcastle but I'm delighted that he's now running his own hotel. So, if anyone is heading to Manchester, they'll find that, much like us in Newcastle, that the Maldron is situated in the centre of the city on Charles Street, near Oxford Road Train Station. There are 278 bedrooms, bar & restaurant and fantastic meeting rooms, not forgetting the great Dalata hospitality."



**For further details about Maldron Hotel Newcastle or Maldron Hotel Manchester, the best idea is to log onto their websites, [www.maldronhotelnewcastle.com](http://www.maldronhotelnewcastle.com) or [www.maldronhotelmanchestercitycentre.com](http://www.maldronhotelmanchestercitycentre.com)**





## STAKING A CLAIM

By Michael Grahamslaw

What a joy it is to behold the Newcastle leisure circuit in full swing. There's certainly no better sight than the non socially-distanced tucking into dishes, clinking glasses and catching up on the conversations Covid stopped short.

**This was especially true of a recent visit to Hotel Indigo's Marco Pierre White steakhouse on a packed Friday lunchtime in the heart of the city.**

The restaurant which is part of the eponymous chef's string of franchises, offers an ultra-modern dining experience and is a popular haunt for regional foodies not to mention for business lunches and special occasions. A number of three-tiered cake stands also populated the dining area which suggests it's a go-to venue for afternoon tea also.

When I pitched up with my son Jack, there was a palpable buzz about the restaurant, so we kicked off with a cocktail in the adjacent bar area to drink

in the atmosphere.

Dubbed as what Marco describes as "affordable glamour", the restaurant has a certain style with white linen table clothes, circular lampshades and green and brown backed chairs inkeeping with Hotel Indigo's boutique aesthetic. Some terrific photos of the man himself also brood over proceedings.

I'm sure he'd like what they've done with the place.

Admittedly, this wasn't my first visit to MPW Newcastle but it certainly seems this is a venue which tinkers with its offering. Whilst its signature steaks naturally make up the bulk of its menu, there's also burgers, pastas and curries in addition to some standout seafood and modern British dishes.

There's also an expansive wine selection from the light and fruity, through the spicy and peppery to the full-bodied big guns with something to be found for even the most discerning of palates.

Taking up position in our cosy, cream-leather booth, Jack and I settled on an excellent bottle of Malbec and kicked back for a gastronomic tour de force.

The first dishes to enter the fray was the crispy, devilled whitebait for I and the moules marienere for Jack. Both illustrating that this is a kitchen which very much knows how to handle seafood as well as meat.

Speaking of which, we followed up with a stunning couple of steaks yet deviated over our choice of cuts. I chose the Fillet Steak au Poivre with a fricassee of woodland mushrooms, toasted sourdough, buttered leaf spinach and peppercorn sauce. Jack meanwhile favoured the 10oz rib

eye, deeply flavoursome with nice marbling.

This was also paired with an au poivre sauce and supplemented by a side of buttered leaf spinach. Suffice to say, this was all set off exquisitely by the Malbec with that holy trinity of steak, sauce and wine all melting in majestically together.

This had been a superb meal and totally replete, we side-stepped dessert in favour of coffees. We did however file a mental note to come back and try the hot chocolate brownie with ice cream and the traditional bread & butter pudding next time. There will be a next time.

Marco's Geordie outpost continues to impress.

**For more information visit [www.mpwrestaurants.co.uk/](http://www.mpwrestaurants.co.uk/) or to make a reservation, call (0191) 300 9222**

# IN CONVERSATION WITH...

## SIMON BRUCE

Owner of PJ Events.

Now that events are allowed to go ahead, we talk to Simon to see how business is, following a pandemic.

### Is there anything new or exciting happening at PJ events this year?

"We recently won wedding DJ of the year for the fourth year running for North and West Yorkshire which was a great achievement for us!"

### Which areas do you cover to put on events?

"Even though we're North East based we can work around what a customer wants really. In the past we have put on events from Dumfries to London but normally the rule of thumb is North-East based."

### What is something that PJ events does differently to other events companies?

"So, on the DJ side of things we have a great selection of different DJs who can fit which whatever style you're going for. When it comes to your first dance, we have a unique package called 'dancing in the clouds' which is state of the art equipment that produces low level fog to give the illusion that you're dancing in the clouds which just amazes all of our guests. We have a range of photo booths, but we recently introduced the high-end 'X booth mirror' which comes with a range of effects even including company logos and brand names. We can provide a 'commander dancefloor' which is an interactive, light-up floor and we can put your company name on there too which is entertaining for the guests and gives your event that personal touch."



### How adaptable is PJ events to last minute requests do you cater to dates which aren't booked in advance?

"Well last week we got a call to arrange a surprise 40th birthday party from a customer who wanted something planning very last minute. We didn't have much time to get everything in but we made a go of it, and she was absolutely thrilled we could help her with such little notice. We had less than a week to arrange everything, but we organised the catering side of things and the other details in time for the party and our customer was over the moon. As we work with hotels such as Crown Plaza, Roker Hotel and Littlehaven, we often have to do things at short notice, but it's never a problem."

### What is something personal to you that's been achieved through PJ events?

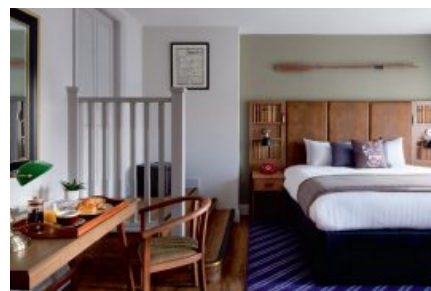
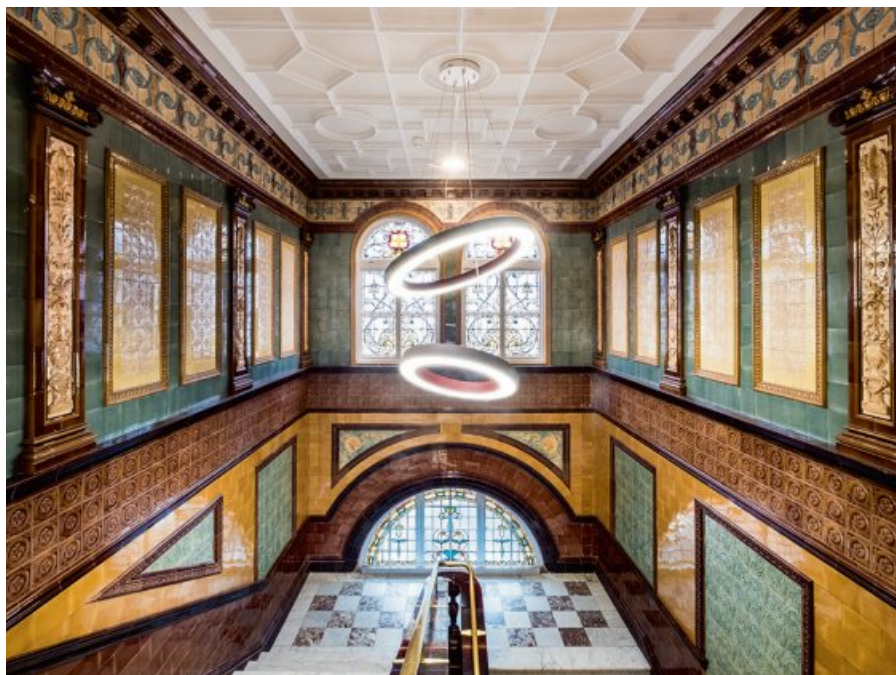
"So here at PJ events we do our best to give back to the community whichever way we can. Breast

cancer research is a charity which is quite close to our hearts so in the past we have raised money for them. We have also been directly involved with young carers which is quite personal to me so we do what we can to give back and have raised around four thousand pounds for them over the years which is one of our proudest achievements."

I have also put on many birthday parties free of charge in different parts of Newcastle, mostly for kids whose parents may not have the means to pay. Nobody deserves to go without and this something we try to ensure so adapting to people's budgets is something I personally try my best to do. More recently we put on a free Christmas do for the Jobcentreplus which they couldn't have been happier about. Providing a snow machine and other equipment after a last-minute drop out from another company."

**PJ Events – 0191 424 8031/07913 816 699**  
**[www.pjevents.co.uk](http://www.pjevents.co.uk)**





## HOTEL INDIGO DURHAM

By Michael Grahmslaw

A reconnaissance mission takes Michael Grahmslaw to the Cathedral City.

**At least a few points each year, I get an inkling to visit Durham. This usually co-insides with the warmer weather when the sleepy university city wakes up to welcome daytime revellers to its sun-scorched cobbled lanes and riverbank hostellers.**

In recent years, it has taken on even greater significance with my Daughter Holly studying there for university degree and set to graduate later this year. With this in mind, we checked in to Hotel Indigo Durham in the city's historic Old Elvet quarter with one eye on staying and dining there for the post-event celebrations.

Since opening in 2018 in the city's magnificent red-brick Old Shire Hall building, the hotel has moved from strength to strength combining the world class facilities of a large-chain hotel with boutique-esque style and attention to detail.

The hotel boasts 81 individually designed bedrooms, each taking inspiration from

Durham Cathedral and University. In addition, the hotel also features the celebrity endorsed, showstopping Marco Pierre White steakhouse which offers sumptuous steaks amidst the grandeur of Durham Council's old senate chamber.

We were met with the cheeriest of welcomes and with ample on-site parking, we were able to ditch the car before sampling all the Cathedral City has to offer. Before setting off, we visited the lovely in-house Tinderbox coffee shop which is ideal for a meeting and was palpably buzzing when we arrived. Set in the hotel's lobby, this stylish space is great for members of the local community to get together, enjoy free Wifi and try out a varied range of freshly brewed coffee.

This really started our engines and readied us for the retail therapy which ensued. We enjoyed a good couple of hours round the shops and clocked in well over the obligatory daily 10,000 steps.

After a quick change in our tastefully-appointed guest room, we kicked off with a couple of looseners in the mood lighting of the hotel's Rotunda Bar before heading in to the much-vaunted MPW bar & grill.

Following their unfortunate demise in the 70's, there's been a notable resurgence in steakhouses in recent times and Hotel Indigo obviously have their finger on the nation's culinary pulse by including such a prestigious one in-house. This sleek and sexy celebrity steakhouse takes gastronomy to a new level.

Marco Pierre White restaurants aim to be all about the experience; the buzz, the atmosphere and engaging the company of friends and family in sumptuous, comfortable surroundings. Well, they certainly proved the point very well indeed as we were shown to a highly prized corner booth.

Lisa kicked off with 'The Governor's' French onion soup, following up with the similarly gallic roast chicken a la forestiere with woodland mushrooms, fondant potato and Madeira roasting juices.

I meanwhile reverted to type, pairing the classic prawn cocktail a la russe with the posh 'surf n turf' fillet steak with garlic king prawns, bernaise sauce and toasted sourdough.

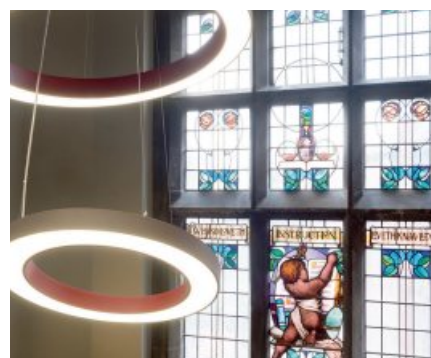
Naturally this was accompanied by a most agreeable bottle of pinot noir. Just for review purposes though, you must understand!

The following morning, I sweated out some of the excess with an hour's session in the on-site, state-of-the-art fitness suite before setting off after our freshly cooked Full English breakfast.

With deluxe accommodation, business facilities and destination restaurant-standard dining, Hotel Indigo would appear to tick all the boxes for Holly's graduation.

Round Two in July is set to be a corker. Howay the Grads !!

**For more information, visit [durham.hotelindigo.com](http://durham.hotelindigo.com)**







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Because it is a home, albeit quite a grand one, we're passionate about detail, as we know, often, it's the little things, that make a big difference.

Whether you visit Jesmond Dene House to meet a friend for coffee and a cake, or for an indulgent weekend away, we will look after you in exactly the same way. You are, after all, our guests, and we want you to feel comfortable.

The grounds are simply stunning in spring, as the flowers start to bloom and you can hear the tranquil waterfall from the Dene, making us the perfect location for an indulgent, yet affordable spring break.

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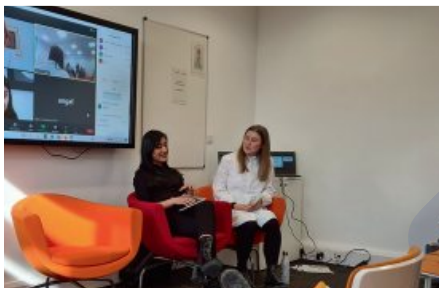




## INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY FESTIVAL – JUST WILLIAMS

Delegates from across Tees Valley joined Just Williams at Fusion Hive in Stockton for a day of events around Mindset, Mentoring and Professional Development as part of the week-long Tees Valley International Women's Day Festival. Speakers included Charly Young, CEO and Co-Founder of The Girls' Network, Zakiyya Kamran, Simon Clayton, Lt Col Andrew Black, Professor Mark Simpson, Jeni Smith, Mayira Thomas, Ashleigh Wright, Elise Lane, Erin Harper, Katy Turner, Marc Atkinson and Emma McDonald.

The week-long festival was hosted by Tees Valley Combined Authority, Teesside University, PD Ports, Darlington Building Society and Just Williams.





# THE CARBONARA MYTH

Zeno Meynell-Rea – Operations  
Director, Punto Italian Kitchen.



On the 6th of April, Italians celebrate National Carbonara Day, paying homage to unquestionably the most famous pasta dish to emerge from Italia.

**While there is some dispute as to the origins of the dish it is known that it originated in the Lazio region and the first documented mentioning of the word 'Carbonara' is believed to be in 1950 in the newspaper 'La Stampa' as a dish coveted by American GI's.**

It is unlikely that American GI's were responsible for its creation as claimed by some, usually American, scholars or that it was created by the secret society of Carbonari. The Italian Freemasons. Far more likely is that it evolved from the Neapolitan dish Cacio e Pepe, a pasta dish with cheese and pepper, via Lazio in the form of 'Pasta alla Gricia' where Guanciale (pork cheek bacon) was added. At this point someone thought "what this dish needs is an egg!". This evolution created the perfect quick and easy meal for 'Carbonari', charcoal men who would deliver coal from Umbria to Lazio and the most likely source of the name.

Irrespective of the origin, this simple and delicious dish is a firm favorite all over the world. The chefs at Punto prepare a very traditional version of Carbonara alla Romana as made by my nonna, the late Lidia Rea, which she would undoubtedly be delighted for me to share.

A few essentials are fresh pasta of a long strand type, such as spaghetti. Fresh eggs and guanciale (cheek bacon) or pancetta (belly bacon). I will mention that our butcher, Block & Bottle on Heaton Road, make their own exceptional guanciale. Finally, a plastic mixing bowl.

**And of course, if you haven't time you're always welcome to visit us on Heaton Road and we can do the cooking instead.**

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



## Carbonara alla Romana

Serves 2

### Ingredients

- 2 Large & Fresh Free Range Eggs
- 2 Large Egg Yolks
- 50g Grana Padano (Parmesan)
- 50g Pecorino Cheese or More Parmesan
- 80g Guanciale or Pancetta Diced Into 1cm Cubes
- 200g Fresh Spaghetti/Linguine/Fettuccine

### Method

Boil a pan of salted water, it should be 'as salty as the Mediterranean', the best ratio is 20g salt to 2 litres of water. It will look like a lot of salt but trust me, you will have perfect pasta!

While the water is boiling heat a non-stick pan until it's almost smoking then add the guanciale and cook down until nicely browned with crispy edges. The fat will render down but don't be tempted to get rid of any. Put the pan aside off the heat.

In a small bowl beat the eggs and

yolks and then beat in the Grana Padano & Pecorino to make a creamy paste.

Put your pasta into the boiling water and cook according to the packet instructions, preferably 'al-dente'. Keep a little starchy pasta water aside in a cup before draining the pasta and mixing with the cooked guanciale, be sure to coat the pasta well with the rendered oil then transfer to the plastic mixing bowl mentioned before. Plastic will keep the heat in the pasta unlike a ceramic or metal bowl.

Vigorously beat the egg and cheese mixture again with around 2 tablespoons of starchy pasta water then pour over the pasta and give everything a good stir, coating the pasta thoroughly. The heat from the pasta and guanciale will cook the egg. Finish with a good pinch of black pepper and serve in two warm (not hot) pasta bowls.

Feel free to finish with a sprinkle of parsley, unless you're a carbonara purist of course, in which case this can be omitted.

**Buon Appetito!**  
**Zeno**





# TOP REASONS TO VISIT STACK SEABURN THIS EASTER

We all love a good reason to visit STACK Seaburn and this Easter, we've rounded up 12 of our favourite things which make the site by the sea the perfect place for a day or evening out.

## 1. Stunning sea views and coastal walks

Where would we be without the sun, sand and sea? STACK Seaburn sits proudly along Sunderland's stunning coastline, where regeneration has been rife in recent years.

A sure hidden gem nestled in the north east, it's almost impossible to not fall in love with Seaburn's beautiful blue flag beaches and array of local businesses.

Whether you're walking the dog, visiting with friends or just getting up early to catch those incredible sunrises, Seaburn is a little taste of paradise in the heart of Wearside.

## 2. Furry friends are always welcome

Big, small, long-haired or short – STACK know the importance of owning a furry friend and are happy to accommodate well behaved pooches throughout their venue. They even have designated doggy water bowl filling stations so that your pup can stay well hydrated.

And if it's dog grooming or supplies you're after, then look no further - Woofs n Scruffs offer drop in self-service baths, situated within their bustling store full of dog food, treats and many other retail items. They really do have everything your dog needs under one Woof! [www.woofsnscruffs.com](http://www.woofsnscruffs.com)

## 3. Kids Corner

Give the kids something to get excited about over the Easter Holidays with STACK's amazing entertainment line up!

On Wednesday 13th and 20th April, the main stage will be set and waiting for Kids Corner – STACK's late morning entertainment show complete with character appearances, dance battles, colouring in and a whole lot of fun.

And it doesn't stop there, STACK will be welcoming special guest Magician Marvin to their site on 12th and 14th April to round up the little ones for some captivating magic performances and tricks around the plaza. [www.stackseaburn.com/whats-on](http://www.stackseaburn.com/whats-on)



## 4. It's always a 'Good Friday' with Downey's Fish & Chips

Is there anything better than crunchy, golden battered Fish & Chips on a visit to the coast?

STACK is home to Downey's, the renowned family business who have built up a reputation for serving the best Traditional Fish & Chips in the area. Whether you have yours with mushy peas or a pot of curry sauce on the side – make sure to get down early for your Good Friday fix!

## 5. Hunt for the perfect Easter egg

You can forget about your chocolate eggs this Easter, it's all about Cheesecake Easter Eggs from The Little Cakery By The Sea

Best be quick, this ultimate sweet treat is sure to sell out again this year! [littlecakerybythesea.co.uk](http://littlecakerybythesea.co.uk)

## 6. Around the world in 11 traders

If you're up for the challenge of eating your way across the globe, then you're in for a treat as STACK boasts an incredible mix of street food traders from all corners of the world.

Feeling hungry? Then sink your teeth into a Greek platter or gyros, before moving onto a thali tray of Indian favourites. Maybe you'd prefer a light

and fluffy bao bun paired with some fiesta filled fajitas?

Whatever takes your fancy, rest assured that it'll be served fresh, quick and to the highest of qualities! And with burgers, pizzas and duck loaded fries also on the menu – there's something for even the fussiest of eater to enjoy this Easter.

## 7. Daily live music and entertainment

STACK Seaburn has become renowned for its live music showcasing some of the best up and coming acts/bands daily.

Mix that in with a weekly Trivia Quiz and Sunday Bingo, and you have a well-rounded entertainment schedule that keeps customers coming back for more.

Did we forget to mention the North East's popular mass singalong event has made a home for itself at STACK Seaburn?

Head down each month as Kroud Karaoke takes over the main stage to bring you the best karaoke anthems and ballads that'll have you singing your heart out! Grab an inflatable mic and your gang for an unforgettable evening – Saturday 23 April 2022

And if that wasn't all, the site will also be showcasing a fantastic Easter bank holiday weekend of live music including headline acts: Emerald Thieves, Khalysis and C-Collective. [www.stackseaburn.com/whats-on](http://www.stackseaburn.com/whats-on)







### 8. Escape the real world with The Game Cabin

This colourful unit on the external side of STACK brings together a mix of XBOX, Playstation and VR gaming ready to see your little ones through the half term holidays.

Available as either "By the Hour Gaming" or for private parties for birthdays and special occasions, The Game Cabin is perfect for all gaming needs. [gamecabin.co.uk](http://gamecabin.co.uk)

### 9. Get your caffeine kick

For the early morning walkers, brunch lovers and coffee talkers – there's no better hang-out spot than YOLO Coffee & Kitchen.

Serving up traditional full English breakfasts alongside eggs benedict and indulgent waffles, they even have a variety of vegan and vegetarian options!

Of course they also sell an amazing range of coffees, frappes and hot teas, but the real show stopper comes in the form of their light and fluffy American style pancakes. Towering high and smothered in a choice of sauces and toppings. A little birdy told us they may also have a special Easter themed stack!

### 10. The place to get all primped and preened

Looking for a fresh cut or a little TLC? STACK is also home to a range of great businesses offering beauty services!



Arch Brows pride themselves on self-care and bespoke treatments – so if you're looking for luscious lashes or brow shaping, this is your go to. [www.instagram.com/\\_arch.browbar](https://www.instagram.com/_arch.browbar)

Not to forget Laings Barbershop – who specialise in all aspects of modern and traditional barbering. [laingsbarbershop.nearcut.com](http://laingsbarbershop.nearcut.com)

Find them both situated down the external side of the venue, opposite The Seaburn Inn.

### 11. Street food with a difference

The most recent of STACK's traders to open, #PoshStreetFood is headed up by Chef Matei Baran, who holds over 25 years of experience within his kitchen. His passion? Sourcing unique and high quality ingredients to make outstanding street food – and customers would certainly agree.

Serving from his own restaurant unit on the external side of STACK – Matei has created a fantastic menu of loaded fries, breakfasts and his famous posh kebabs.

Pop on by and see what all the fuss is about, you won't be disappointed. [poshstreetfood.co.uk](http://poshstreetfood.co.uk)

### 12. Healthy options

If all this talk of street food has knocked you into a food coma, maybe we can perk you back up with a little health kick?

Visit So Smooth Co. for a dose of goodness.



Their smoothies are blended using all-natural ingredients and contain zero additives or sugars. With most of their Super Smoothies containing most of your five a day, you'll be leaving with a sure spring in your step!

Whilst Healthy Thaim serve up a healthy twist on a variety of Thai classics including Pad Thai and salads.

[stackseaburn.com](http://stackseaburn.com)





## THE NORTHUMBERLAND PUB COMPANY STEPS INTO SPRING

Three North East venues share their plans for the changing seasons.

Spring is often associated with a time of new beginnings and the Northumberland Pub Company's venues have big plans to mark the start of the new season.





**With the long winter nights behind us as we move into the warmer weather, the teams at the Blackbird at Ponteland and The Northumberland Arms at Felton are looking forward to welcoming back outdoor diners with new dishes on the menus.**

And with sister business Kennedy and Rhind's foray into foodie events quickly building a strong reputation for evening dining alongside their impressive brunch selection, each of the three venues are entering the new season in their stride.

While the Blackbird's popular tipi is now open year-round for diners and drinkers to enjoy, it certainly comes to life in the spring and summer.

Open on one side, it allows visitors to make the most of the good weather but – because weather in the North East is always unpredictable – it also provides cover from any rain or wind that might be on the forecast.

When the venue made the decision to keep the tipi as a permanent fixture, they also went the extra mile to offer a fantastic al fresco food selection too.

This means that outdoor diners have a wide range of pizzas and street food to choose from – and the tipi is even home to its own bar.

Not only does separating indoors and outdoors mean better waiting times for food and drinks but it also means visitors can make the most of the spring and summer weather too, however fleeting it may be.

Speaking of food, the Blackbird prides itself on its popular seasonal menu with head chef Ralph Hellens making the most of locally sourced ingredients to create delicious dishes for diners to enjoy.

Pub classics like burgers and beer battered North Sea haddock and chips sit alongside main dishes including lamb rack cutlets, steaks, saffron and Jerusalem artichoke risotto and duck breast, with a new light bites menu also recently introduced.

And while the venue is a great place to visit for lunch or dinner, it is also known as a brilliant location for events.

With its charming Minstrel Gallery upstairs, home to a number of original features, and the huge tipi space outdoors, the team can accommodate large or intimate parties for every occasion.

Travelling further into the Northumberland countryside to the picturesque village of Felton, The Northumberland Arms is another venue which has won over visitors from across the region with its impressive food offering.

Michelin trained head chef Adam Westgarth heads up the kitchen team, bringing culinary flair to the menu without taking anything away from the charm of the pub environment.

Parmesan chicken, moules frites and even the Northumberland favourite truffled pan haggerty have made it onto the menu, along with a wide variety of small plates and light bites.

And as the warmer weather and lighter nights creep ever closer, there's no better time than now to plan a summer holiday.

The last few years have reminded holidaymakers of all of the joys of the UK break and it's not difficult to see why The Northumberland Arms has remained a popular destination.

With six boutique bedrooms offering stunning décor, luxury bathrooms and top brand toiletries, the most difficult decision is choosing which of the rooms to book.



Not only is the venue surrounded by Northumberland countryside – making it a great base for keen walkers – but many of the region's finest attractions are just a short drive away.

Guests can explore all that Alnwick Castle, Belsay Hall and Gardens, Northumberlandia and Northumberland Country Zoo have to offer, among others, before retiring to the venue for an evening tipple.

However, if the weather is fine then drinkers can also make the most of the outdoor spaces, which received huge investment during the pandemic.

With tables, seating and lighting to both the north and south of the building, guests can enjoy a stunning view of the River Coquet and a 16th century bridge.

And offering something a little different to the pub group's other two venues while keeping to the same high standards, is Jesmond artisan bakery, café and shop, Kennedy and Rhind.

Launched during the pandemic by North East chefs David Kennedy and Murray Rhind, it wasn't long before demand led to them opening a retail space alongside their Newcastle production kitchen.

The venue has quickly become a favourite with both Jesmond locals and visitors from further afield, as well as supplying a number of the region's businesses with their pies and loaves – all freshly made each morning.

Along with a delectable brunch and lunch offering, the pair have recently opened the café to evening guests with a number of themed nights.

Burn's Night, Valentine's Day and Mother's Day are just some of the occasions where the team have prepared special set menus, with a variety of wines, beers and cocktails on offer.

Stuart Young, of the Northumberland Pub Company, is looking forward to an exciting year for the three businesses.

"While the Blackbird, The Northumberland Arms and Kennedy and Rhind are all linked to the wider pub group, we work really hard to make sure each venue has its own strong identity," he said.

"We've had a fantastic few months settling into the new year and celebrating a number of special occasions with our customers and we can't wait to welcome drinkers and diners to enjoy all the venues have to offer during the spring and summer.

"And, of course, all three venues remain connected through providing the same, excellent standard of service across the board."

**For more information on the venues, visit**  
**[www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk](http://www.theblackbirdponteland.co.uk),**  
**[www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandarms-felton.co.uk) or**  
**[www.kennedyandrhind.co.uk](http://www.kennedyandrhind.co.uk)**







## KING OF THE CASTLE

By Jack Grahamslaw

A belated Valentine's Day getaway took us to Langley Castle in Northumberland. In a county renowned for its castle's, Langley offers up the chance to actually stay in one.

**Set one mile south of the A69, the 14th Century Castle offers the full medieval experience with deluxe guest rooms (many in full heraldic splendour) and a candlelit fine-dining.**

Many like me will have developed a renewed appreciation for the great outdoors during lockdown and with close proximity to Hadrian's Wall, Langley Castle offers a great location for an outdoorsy escape, not to mention showstopping romantic getaways and weddings.

I pitched up with my girlfriend Rosie for a journey back in time.

The hotel comprises 27 guest suites spanning both the castle-facing courtyard and the castle itself.

This venue really basks in its medieval history with seven foot thick stone walls, suits of armour, wrought-iron candelabras and a spiral staircase creating a real sense of atmosphere.

Arriving early, we'd been upgraded to the castle's sumptuous Josephine Suite resplendent with ruby red walls and heavy, pelmeted drapes. For now this would have to wait though as we ditched the bags and headed straight out.

There's certainly plenty to explore with large sections of Hadrian's Wall on the doorstep, not to mention the iconic Sycamore Gap, reportedly Northumberland's most photographed feature. Rosie, the region's other most jaw-dropping natural vista (I'm sure she'll edit this out anyway) was in her element and we enjoyed a sprawling afternoon ramble, capped off with a well-earned country pub pint.

For when the adventuring demands a break, one can kick back in the cosy embrace of Langley's guest rooms. The Josephine Suite – named after a former owner – proved a haven of comfort and luxury, boasting a canopied queen-size bed, jacuzzi bath tub, plasma screen TV and dedicated seating area.

Following a glass of fizz and good long soak in the tub, we changed for our evening meal. Murmurs of a much-vaunted 2AA Rosette restaurant set expectations high and we kicked

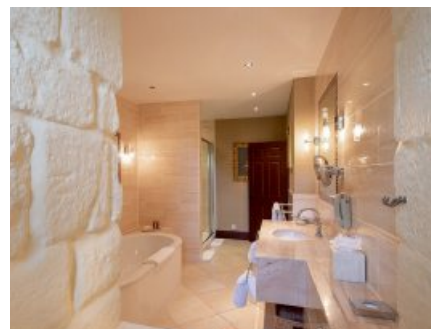
off with a livener in the hotel's drawing room. This was a lovely spot to unwind in the afterglow of our outdoor pursuits whilst surveying an impressive three course table d'hôte menu.

Adjourned to the low-beamed Josephine Restaurant, first up was the pan-seared scallops with confit chicken, Jerusalem artichoke and hazelnut. Rosie meanwhile enjoyed the vegetarian goat's cheese & beetroot vegetarian panna cotta with pickled root vegetables and candied walnuts. Both were complemented nicely with some fat hunks of homemade sourdough.

Following on, Rosie sampled more vegetarian goodness with the wild mushroom risotto with spinach & sweet pea and cep crumb. I opted for the pan-seared venison loin with mushroom wellington and root vegetable gratin.

The following morning we breakfasted regally on cooked-to-order eggs benedict, tea and toast and couldn't leave without a tour of the castle battlements. This departs daily after breakfast from the drawing room and encompasses the castle's many turrets and rooftop chapel, capping off what had been a memorable stay. "Fit for a queen?" I smiled whilst driving home. "You bet." was Rosie's response on a Valentine's job done right.

**For more information, visit [www.langleycastle.co.uk](http://www.langleycastle.co.uk)**



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## LOST FOR WORDS

I don't know what to say. I had so many thoughts about what to discuss with you this month. But as the world spins in a way that is difficult to process, I just can't find the right feeling or the right words.

**The poverty crisis. The climate crisis. The pandemic. The cost of living crisis. The fuel crisis. The wars; there are over 20 wars in the world presently, innocent lives being destroyed all over the world. And sadly Northern Insight mourns one of the family, the very kindest of men. Chatting to you about business and entrepreneurship, just doesn't feel respectful.**

It's hard isn't it when the world seems to be falling apart around you, but you are sipping wine at an event, pushing forward with business, laughing through meetings, keeping the flow going with brand and marketing and eagerly seeking the next opportunity. It's all a bit surreal; add in the celebrations and enjoying your life, and although you may be doing what you can to help, it makes many of us feel a bit disrespectful.

I've seen many a business post on LinkedIn and many a personal post on Facebook, with people trying to find the right tone, many voicing they feel guilty about living life whilst there is so much darkness.

But what I do feel is gratitude. Grateful that my family are safe. Grateful I can continue with my work. Grateful for warmth and food. Grateful for choices. Grateful I can help, in every context. And I'm grateful for being able to feel the joy in the present because that is all we have isn't it, this moment in time.

Two years ago, in the April edition I offered a free crisis management service as we entered the first lockdown. We all felt the fear. We feared how this unknown situation would affect our lives, our family and friends, our businesses, our



Michelle Jones

communities, and our health. I wrote the column in disbelief as our whole world shifted.

We pivoted in 2020 with kindness underpinning our every action.

And two years later I am grateful to see that kindness has once again come to the aid of the crisis situations that surround us.

We may be disheartened by our leaders but my word, when you witness the kindness and the challenge from the people, it provides hope.

And hope, more than anything, is what we need.

Every crisis has people working together to ensure we can reduce the impact of each dreadful situation, whether it's as a volunteer at the local food bank, a nurse comforting family in ICU, an activist for climate control, an influencer challenging the system, army personnel keeping the peace or being consciously neighbourly. Kindness matters and it makes a difference.

The kindness we give today protects tomorrow. And no act of kindness is ever too small.

And just as importantly, be kind to yourself.

Although we are surrounded by crisis, do feel joy with your loved ones, celebrate your success, get excited about business and personal plans, and feel the gratitude that blooms in the moment. For gratitude fuels kindness and kindness burns the flame of hope brightly.

That is respectful.

As a dear person once said, 'my pain is eased by your smile.'

Sending hope and kindness to all.

**Michelle Jones,  
Founder of Kind Currency,  
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# Prostate screening. Why wait?

## What do we mean by Prostate?

The prostate or prostate gland is part of the male reproductive system and sits just below the bladder. It is about the size of a walnut and wraps around the urethra.

## How would you know if you had an issue with your prostate?

Sometimes your prostate gland can increase in size, particularly as you get older. Some symptoms that may suggest an enlarged prostate include:

- ♦ Urinating more frequently and feeling like you need to get to the toilet quickly
- ♦ Urinating more slowly or feeling like you need to wait for the flow to start
- ♦ Feeling as if you haven't emptied your bladder
- ♦ Urine continuing to trickle after you have stopped.

## What should you do if you have any of these symptoms?

See your GP initially who can perform a number of tests, which will help determine if your prostate gland may be the cause. At this point, you may be referred to a Consultant Urologist.

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## OUT AND ABOUT - WOKING



I was first encouraged to visit Woking by train in order to echo Prince Andrew's famous visit to the Pizza Express on 10th March 2001. I made a reservation for 1400 to avoid the lunchtime rush, as I imagined, and travelled from London Waterloo on a non-stop train taking 24 minutes to Woking, some 23 miles south west of Central London.

I took a walk along the Basingstoke Canal first, with a continuous footpath on the north side, out to Brookwood. Once the biggest cemetery in the world, it is still the UK's largest. Established in the 1850s by the London Necropolis Company, coffins were brought from the capital by train. It has had a chequered history, and much of the land originally zoned for burials has been built over, but it still is worthy of a visit and in the hour I had I could only scratch the surface. Today, many nationalities and religions have plots there. There's the biggest Commonwealth War Grave, and the UK's first crematorium. Trains used to run on to the site to two stations in the grounds, and main line Brookwood Station still serves the cemetery.

Returning by train to Woking, I explored the town centre, with its connections to science fiction writer H.G. Wells (with whom I share a birthday) whose book "War of the Worlds" was set in Woking and London. Martians arrived on Horsell Common just north of the town in 1898 and I somehow managed to miss the striking martian tripod which rises above one of the intersections of the pedestrianised town. Perhaps it had gone off to wreak havoc somewhere else.

And so to Pizza Express, where there was only one other diner in the restaurant, and I had a sneaking suspicion that she was a member of staff. I enjoyed my meal in solitude overlooking the main road, and any plans to erect a blue plaque to record the Duke of York's visit have obviously been shelved. If Pizza Express were hoping to trade on the restaurant's notoriety, then they have failed and following the recent out-of-court settlement interest will surely wane.

Duly fortified, I headed underneath the railway bridge to the south side of the town which is primarily residential, and walked east to find another first for Woking, that is the first Mosque in the UK which was built in 1889. The Shah Jahan Mosque was quiet when I visited, and I took off my shoes to go inside the small building which has now been supplemented by additional provision nearby. It was good to feel the deep pile carpet beneath my feet: prayers while kneeling would not be a problem here.

Never being one to retrace my steps unless essential, I passed by the retail park and under the bridge where I found a bus shelter with a bus due,

saving a 15-minute walk into town. That gave more time before closing at the Lightbox, the local art gallery with a range of interesting displays and an informative local history section. Virtually next door, and also straddling the Basingstoke Canal where I started my day, is the home of the World Wildlife Fund UK, but their "Living Planet Centre" is still closed to the public, owing to COVID. Instead, I headed for the Cellar Magnifique for charcuterie and cheese and some pleasant chat with a few other diners and some fine wine before my train back to London.

So, thanks, Prince Andrew. I probably would not have visited Woking except for you, but it provided an enjoyable day out.

[alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk](mailto:alexnelson@dunelm.org.uk)

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# ON THE TEE BOX

## *Arcot Hall Golf Club*

### Location

Situated in Dudley, Cramlington, Arcot Hall Golf Club offers fantastically easy access from the A19 or the A189. Discreetly tucked away, this stunning mature woodland course is a hidden gem.

### History

The old hall has a long, and - occasionally scandalous - history and has endured war, relocation and even its own ghost! The 18-hole course comprises two loops of nine holes, with an inner and an outer circuit. Significant and continual improvement has been carried out over recent years to ensure players have the best playing experience possible.

### Membership

A variety of membership options are available to suit different golfers. Arcot offers every option available, including five, six and seven day membership and a range of corporate membership offers. A wonderful addition, which a lot of people may not be aware of, is that Arcot Golf Club enjoys reciprocal playing arrangements with both Eaglescliffe Golf Club and Bishop Auckland Golf Club, so Arcot members can play these two great courses, at no extra cost! All prices are available on application.

### Setting

Arcot Hall is a parkland course set in mature woodlands, with two loops of nine holes designed by James Braid. The course is 6329 yards long, par 70.

### Longest drive

The longest drive is required on the par four 14th to clear the dogleg giving you a view to the green.

### Toughest hole

The 12th, a 461 yard stroke 1 par four. Be aware of the fairway bunkers!

### Signature hole

Our 187 yard par three ninth is our signature hole, complete with a water hazard and bunkers.

### Course record

Amateur, Darren Smith 60 (-2) =58.  
Professional, Brian Rumney 64

### Competitions

Arcot Hall runs numerous competitive competitions throughout the year including a winter league and a Friday nine's competition.

### Prices

Summer: £40 midweek and £45 weekends.  
Winter: £20 midweek and £25 weekends



“

***Arcot Hall Golf Club is more than 100 years old, yet it still manages to remain one of Northumberland's best-kept secrets. Many golf enthusiasts in the North East may not even realise they have an amazing club right on their doorstep, but now the secret is well and truly out.***

***Club Manager***

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*The Northumberland Golf Club offers  
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The course, designed in golf's Golden Age by Harry Colt & James Braid is renowned for its beautiful presentation, firm fast greens and strategic bunkering. The club has also hosted many major championships over the years and recently the Open Championship Regional Qualifying.

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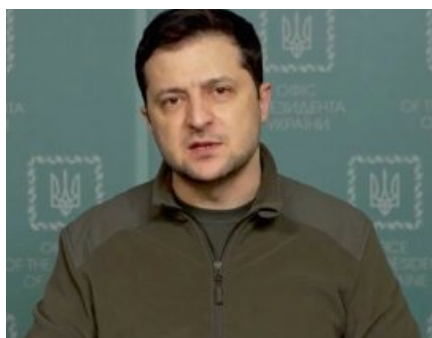
## THE LAST WORD

from **BARRY SPEKER...**

**The courage of the President of Ukraine and his people has inspired and united the West and the free world. However the reality that Russia's 'military operation' has not produced the capitulation and surrender Putin expected, has not resulted in any effective opposition in Russia to the invasion. This is due to the Russian population seeing only the state-controlled propaganda vetted by the Kremlin.**

This highlights the bravery of TV presenter Marina Ovsyannikova in her impromptu intervention on the studio floor of Russia's Channel One, to tell her country that there is indeed a war and an invasion and that the people are being fed lies. In her video she expressed shame to have been a part of the lying propaganda which had 'allowed the zombification of the Russian people'.

The broadcasts by President Zelensky to the House of Commons, the US Senate, the German



Bundestag and the Israeli Knesset were met with standing ovations. A powerful video from Arnold Schwarzenegger urged Russians to spread the truth and oppose President Putin's "illegal and senseless" war.

As Edmund Burke said "All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing".

The supply of ammunition, imposition of sanctions, provision of humanitarian aid and assistance and the acceptance of refugees are what should be expected but will they be enough to stop the continuing massacre of civilians and the destruction of a democratic country, other than by risking World War III?

Inflation is already rising to levels experienced only by those of a certain generation. The notional 'shopping basket' was invented in 1947 by the Office of National Statistics to calculate inflation. This year, for the first time, the ONS has removed men's suits from the basket as 'must haves'.

One cannot blame the statisticians. They are merely reflecting that the suit, as the uniform of the professional man, has fallen out of favour - much to my own personal chagrin, of course.

Various factors have contributed, such as tech moguls like Steve Jobs and Mark Zuckerberg giving company presentations in baseball caps, t-shirts and combat trousers. 'Dress down Fridays' and working from home have accentuated this lamentable trend. Business pictures show executives in open shirts, the suit being deemed an anachronism - perhaps reserved for weddings and funerals, if at all.

It is said that a suit improves a man's body image, hides a multitude of flaws and absolves men of the need to decide what to wear. Perhaps after a few years of open shirts, washed out jeans and designer trainers, the smart stylish suit will make its return. In the meantime the ONS has added to the basket anti-bacterial surface wipes, sports bras and hand weights for home exercise.

In the 1960s song Eve of Destruction, Barry McGuire sang "You can leave here for four days in space, But when you return it's the same old place".

Maybe not. What of the \$150billion international space station, that fine example of collaboration between the US, Russia, the EU (including the UK as a member of the European Space Agency), Japan and Canada?

Mark Vande Hei, a NASA crew member who has been on the station for a year, is expecting to return to earth in a few weeks time on a Soyuz rocket. Russia provides the propulsion to keep the station in space. It seems the cooperation agreement did not cover the possibility of the partners 'falling out'. The expectation was that all would comply with International Law.



Watch out for the new IMDb film 'ISS' a thriller set on the International Space Station, about what happens if America and Russia do fall out and send conflicting instructions to their astronauts. The plot may be overtaken by events.

A less galactic film just released is 'The Phantom of the Open' starring Mark Rylance. It is based on the true happenings of Maurice Flitcroft, a crane driver from Barrow in Furness who managed to qualify for the 1976 British Open Golf Championship and posted the highest ever score. Whilst golf is the back-drop, the film requires no knowledge of golf.

The antics and hoaxes of Flitcroft make for a hilarious movie including showing up the R and A and the golf establishment and golf clubs in a light which 'might' have changed between 1976 and 2022.

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